

*Indian Act Amendment*

Why change it and thereby shift the responsibility, if all this is going to increase responsibility? That section was put in in 1924 to deal with a situation about which the minister must have knowledge. The Minister of the Interior knows that the condition of the Eskimos was very acute, there was starvation among them, and he must recall that situation. Some of the missionaries brought it to the attention of the minister. I, myself, recall going to the minister and calling it to his attention. That being the position, what minister is going to be responsible when this section is repealed?

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): The administration of the Northwest Territories is under the control of the Minister of the Interior, who at the moment happens to be also the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs.

Mr. BENNETT: The statute says he shall be until someone else is appointed.

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): If my hon. friend now is arguing that since in 1927 the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs was mentioned as the responsible minister, and that since now we are giving official control to the North West Territories branch the Minister of the Interior should be specifically mentioned, I have no objection.

Mr. BENNETT: The minister has grasped the point. Under our system of government there must be ministerial responsibility somewhere.

Mr. LAPOINTE: Then all my hon. friend desires is that in addition to this repeal there should be a section stating that the control is under the Minister of the Interior?

Mr. BENNETT: I believe that should be done.

Mr. LAPOINTE: I think there would be no objection to it.

Mr. BENNETT: The minister sees the point because, as the Solicitor General pointed out, the revised statutes did not come into force until February of 1928. That section now stands as the law, and of course the question of administration is very different from that of ministerial responsibility.

Now let us deal with the vital question involved, assuming that you repeal the statute. The Eskimos are nomads; they have no established communities in the sense in which the Indians were established when this country was discovered. Rightly or wrongly we think we have a better system than other countries have, because we have recognized the right of the aboriginal red man and his title, in

[Mr Bennett.]

part, to property in this country. When we made a treaty with the Indians we recognized them as distinct tribes; we enacted that they should have property rights in certain areas, and even yet we cannot part with those property rights without their consent, as the minister knows. For instance, if it is desirable for any purpose to secure 1,000 acres of land from a band of Indians, it requires a very great deal of effort and labour to bring about that result; they must be convened together in a certain way and they must have interpreters clearly to place before them what it is proposed to do.

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): My hon. friend must remember that the act does give the superintendent general power in certain cases.

Mr. BENNETT: That is so; there are provisions which vest an arbitrary power in the superintendent general, to a certain extent, but the whole theory of the act is that, as far as possible, the Indians should be treated as proprietors of their reserves.

Now we come to the Eskimos. They have no treaties with us; they have no established reserves, as the minister knows, and I think a few moments ago he used two words which describe the situation very well. He said they were nomadic tribes. How can we, having assumed it, divest ourselves of responsibility by endeavouring to treat them as settled persons in certain communities? At the moment the responsibility for providing the Eskimos with a living rests with us, and the minister recalls that at very great expense he sent an expedition to that northern country to provide them with food and medicine, if I remember correctly, when they were not really able to make a living for themselves. I think I can safely say that they are an uncivilized class of people; they hardly live in tribes and they have not developed any form of settled life.

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): They may be broken up a very great deal; one can scarcely say they are in tribes.

Mr. BENNETT: I was coming to that. When we speak of them as a tribe we must remember that they have no settled communities in which they live, and I am told by those who have visited that country that during their summer they have no settled residences at all. They have no settlements, in the meaning of the term as it was used by the early pioneers with respect to the Indians. These people are not civilized as we use the word civilization. Whether or not the Indians are civilized is not the question. These