

The Hon. the SPEAKER: If my honourable friend speaks now, he will close the debate.

Hon. Mr. CRERAR: No, Mr. Speaker; he is speaking to my amendment.

Hon. Mr. TAYLOR: Honourable senators, as chairman of the Senate section of the joint committee during this past session, I would first like to pay my tribute to all who have spoken today in favour of the committee's report. I find that members who attended the committee's sittings most regularly, and are familiar with the evidence that was submitted, are wholeheartedly in agreement with the report. I wish to express my thanks to all those members who were so faithful, and who sincerely did their best to find out from Indians and other witnesses what revisions should be made to the act in order to improve the condition of the Indians and, incidentally, to help the Indians help themselves.

I also wish to pay tribute to the former chairman of the Senate section of the committee (Hon. Mr. Johnston), who has just spoken. It has been, I think, some thirty years since the last general revision of the Indian Act, and I feel, as he does, that a general revision is long overdue.

As the report will indicate, in the session of 1946 the committee heard evidence from departmental officials. After that session ended, members of the committee were constituted a commission to visit Indian reserves in the Maritimes and eastern Quebec, and to take evidence from the people themselves as to what revisions they felt should be made in the act. The commission's report was tabled in another place the other day, and some time afterwards the report that we are now considering was also tabled there.

I had not expected it would be necessary for me to speak on this report. As the members of the committee who attend its meetings and heard witnesses were unanimously in favour of the report, I thought it probably would be concurred in by the house without much debate. It will be noticed that most of the committee's recommendations are for administration changes. It is hoped to have a revision of the act next year, based on the evidence that we collected; in the meantime the administrative changes that we have recommended should prove of some benefit to the Indians.

I did not make a note of the points raised by various speakers this afternoon, but I recall that the honourable gentleman from Parkdale (Hon. Mr. Murdock) quoted a news-

paper report as to the prevalence of tuberculosis among Indians. I would point out that clause 25 of the report recommends:

That the project of building a central governmental hospital in northern Indian agencies, with nursing stations in far outlying districts be proceeded with at once.

The honourable gentleman from Queens referred to a question that is covered by the recommendation in clause 9:

That the administration of all aspects of Indian Affairs should be under one ministerial head.

The subject mentioned by the honourable senator for Parkdale (Hon. Mr. Murdock) comes under a different minister. The Indian Affairs Branch receives assistance in respect of health and welfare from the national Department of Health and Welfare. It is important that the administration of the Indian Act be under one ministerial head.

Concerning old age pensions to Indians, the committee recommended in its third report that the government seriously consider such a measure. I believe it was considered, but under the Old Age Pensions Act provision is made for a contribution by the provinces towards the benefit received by pensioners. The provinces claimed that the dominion should bear the full cost of old age pensions for Indians and that the provinces had no responsibility for it.

Sections 11 to 23 inclusive in the report are for the most part recommendations from the Civil Service Commission, and have to do with improvements in the method of making appointments and the speeding up of matters of administration.

With respect to concurrence, I may say that the report was presented to and concurred in by the other house.

The members of the committee spent a great deal of time in attendance at the 67 sittings of the committee during this session and after considering the evidence placed before them they have submitted these recommendations. Every member of the committee worked faithfully and was in entire accord with the report. The government will decide whether or not to accept the recommendations; but as chairman of the committee I feel that the report should be concurred in.

Hon. Mr. SINCLAIR: May I ask the honourable gentleman why the important matter referred to in section 8 of the recommendations was left in abeyance?

Hon. Mr. TAYLOR: This represents probably one of the most contentious questions placed before the committee.