

Family Allowances Act

Mr. ABBOTT: I think that is correct, but that section was put in particularly in view of these numerous local agents of the board.

Mr. DIEFENBAKER: I think that covers my objection completely, and I want to thank the minister for agreeing to the amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

Section as amended agreed to.

Preamble agreed to.

Title agreed to.

Bill reported, on division.

FAMILY ALLOWANCES ACT

AMENDMENT RESPECTING SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND POWERS TO MAKE REGULATIONS

Hon. J. J. McCANN (Acting Minister of National Health and Welfare) moved the second reading of bill No. 308, to amend the Family Allowances Act, 1944.

Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and the house went into committee thereon, Mr. Macdonald (Brantford City) in the chair.

On section 1—Proviso.

Mr. FLEMING: Mr. Chairman, I think the first part of the proposed amendment, subsection 2 of section 4, is clear in its intent. With regard to the proposed new subsection (2a), I should like to ask the acting minister a question or two. It will be observed that the effect of subsection (2a) is to take care of cases where a child is not regularly attending school in accordance with the laws of the province or, in the case of the territories, an educational authority prescribed by regulation; that is, attending school or taking training equivalent to that which he would receive if he attended school. Then, at the conclusion of paragraph (2a) is this proviso:

Provided that where information as to school attendance or equivalent training, as may be requested, is not furnished by the competent educational authority of the province, the governor in council may prescribe the manner in which such information may be obtained.

I should like to ask the acting minister whether any such cases have occurred and whether there has been any difficulty in establishing school attendance on the part of children eligible for family allowances in accordance with the laws of the province of residence.

Mr. McCANN: I might say the department is getting cooperation from every province and there have not been cases of complaint. The main purpose of the amendment to

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

section 4, subsection 2, is to deal with the question of school attendance. At the present time the act provides that the allowance shall cease to be payable with the payment for the month when the child, being above the age of six years and physically fit to attend school, fails to attend school or receive equivalent training as prescribed in the regulations.

On the face of it, this clause as originally drafted might be interpreted to mean that a child over six years of age had to attend school until he was sixteen in order to receive family allowances, even though the laws of the province in which he resided did not provide for compulsory school attendance between the ages of six and sixteen. The fact is that hardly any of the provinces provide for compulsory school attendance at an age as early as six. In most provinces the age for commencing school is fixed at six, but the age for compulsory commencement of school is seven or even eight. That means that children are allowed to go to school at six, but in some provinces they are not compelled to go to school until they are either seven or eight years of age.

In many provinces also the school leaving age is not fixed as late as sixteen. In some provinces it is fixed as early as fourteen or fifteen, and in some provinces there are other provisions to the effect that if a child reaches a certain standing in his school grade, for example, grade nine standing, he is not required to attend school any longer. Other provinces again, in some cases, set the school leaving age at fourteen or fifteen or sixteen, but require a child who attains this age in the middle of a school year to complete the school year before leaving school. Most provinces have developed systems of work permits and other devices under which they legally excuse children from school attendance under certain circumstances, for example, to go to work, to help on the farm, to help at home, et cetera.

All these factors have influenced us in reaching the conclusion that it is not practical to insist in any federal law on compulsory school attendance between the ages of six and sixteen without adjusting our provision regarding school attendance to the circumstances prevailing in the different provinces whose responsibility it is to prescribe the ages for compulsory school attendance.

Exception has been taken to this insistence in federal legislation on school attendance between the ages of six and sixteen as a condition of the receipt of family allowances.