

*Indian Act Amendment*

Mr. NEILL: I quite agree with the last speaker. I would go a little further and take this section out altogether. Why should the minister have power to take somebody else's money—for that is what it really comes to—and apply it against the Indian's will to some object which the government believes for the good of the child? We made a deal with the Indians. I am speaking more particularly of British Columbia, where I was agent for ten years, and I am familiar with the workings of the Indian mind. We agreed to educate them, to take care of their sick and destitute, and to give them a certain amount of medical relief. That was the understood bargain. Then we gave them a life interest in certain reserves. It is a little doubtful what their ultimate destination is, but the reserves may be used by the Indians as long as they like. On occasion the Indian has to sign away a piece of his territory, and what does he get in return? A sum of money, say \$5,000. It is often necessary to get the Indian's consent, and now that he is becoming educated it is becoming more and more difficult to get him to sign away his land. Of that \$5,000, \$2,500 in cash goes to the members of the band, and the other \$2,500 is put into a fund which accumulates and draws interest, I think, at 3 per cent. Then this is what I object to. From time to time there are relief bills incurred by the Indian agent, and the Indian department takes that accumulated interest fund and uses it for paying those relief bills. If the Indians had not given their consent to their property being taken those relief bills would have been paid just the same and to the same extent. The Indian begins to find out these things and says: What is the use of signing away our land, because we get only half of what we sell it for anyway, and the rest goes into a fund out of which bills are paid that would have been paid by the government in any case. I had understood that this money was applied only to relief. It is applied now, I find, to maintaining the children. We made a bargain with the Indians, and we should live up to it, and not take this circuitous means of taking away a piece of his land. It is becoming increasingly difficult to get the Indians to sign. I could give the names and dates of cases.

Mr. BENNETT: Why change it at all? As the act now stands you can use the money for rebuilding the school or maintaining the children.

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): I could have saved myself a good deal of discussion if I had left the clause alone. The only reason for this amendment is that the officials of the

[Mr. Coote.]

department desired to have it in view of the fact that we are now assuming full responsibility for the building and equipping of the schools.

Mr. BENNETT: But you do not operate the school. You hand it over to somebody else, and since you do that, why deprive yourself of the discretion you now have in case you want to operate the school yourself? That is what I cannot understand.

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): Indian education is fairly well defined. It is given over to the churches which have been carrying on this work for generations. Our assistance is now to a large extent a matter of providing buildings and equipment, together with a per capita grant for each child, which goes equally to all the Christian churches engaged in this work. May I say in reply to my hon. friend from Comox-Alberni that it took no small sum of money to build and equip all these schools, and it is going to cost a lot of money in the future. If a child who is attending this school is in receipt of an annuity, and is provided with an education and clothing and transportation to and from home, surely it is not too much to ask that you have the authority to apply towards that service such portion of the annuity as that child would have in any case. My hon. friend (Mr. Neill) has in mind another matter, not education. He has in mind the disposition of interest on money derived from the sale of Indian lands—sales made sometimes against the advice, if I may put it that way, of the Indian council themselves.

Mr. NEILL: Yes.

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): Of course the Indian council never want to spend money on any object that might bring them some benefit unless they are going to see the benefit come directly to themselves. My hon. friend makes the statement that Indian debts could be paid under this section.

Mr. NEILL: No, not Indian debts; Indian department debts. You come along and take away the moneys they have accumulated in lieu of their land; that is just what you are taking. If you had confined the amendment to annuities I would not have had the same ground for complaint; but it says "annuities and interest moneys." "Interest moneys" would cover the case of a band that has two or three thousand dollars, on which interest has accumulated: you use the interest to pay relief bills which you are obligated under the law to pay in any case. It applies equally to schooling; the argument is the same.