

Supply—Citizenship and Immigration

Mr. Diefenbaker: The minister was kind enough to refer me to the proceedings before the committee, and I wish to make one reference to it. The evidence indicates the degree to which the examination has been conducted. In British Columbia there were 44 cases submitted to commissioners; in Alberta, 44; in Saskatchewan, 240; in Manitoba, 21; in Ontario, 52; in Quebec, 25, and there have been no commissions in New Brunswick, the Yukon or the Northwest Territories.

I think the hon. member for Calgary North has raised an important matter; there is uncertainty.

Mr. Pickersgill: Oh, quite.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I referred to those citizens as wards. In common with other members of this house, including the Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture, I have been honoured by being made a chief in an Indian tribe. When one has had this experience one naturally feels an unusual interest in the welfare of the Indian people as the result of having been honoured in that way.

There is an uncertainty. When I called them wards I did so because that is the word they use to describe themselves, fearful that if they call themselves citizens they will lose their treaty rights. Therefore when they speak of themselves they invariably use the word "wards" in consequence of treaty relationships between Queen Victoria and preceding monarchs and themselves.

I join with the hon. member for Calgary North; and I am certain that the minister, with his realization of the difficulties confronting the Indians, will do everything he can to bring about early decisions so that uncertainty and suspense will not increase the degree of dissension within the bands. I know of cases today where Indians are bitterly antagonistic toward their closest relatives because of the evidence that has been given. Naturally it is to the interest of each of them to challenge the rights of the others and thereby reduce the numbers entitled to the band funds.

When there is an incentive such as that which brings a benefit to the person giving the evidence it always operates as a detriment to the credibility of the individual who will benefit in consequence of the evidence he gives. You cannot challenge the evidence when someone says, "My grandmother tells me that his grandmother was involved with some person." It is unchallengeable. There is nothing on which you can cross-examine. Generally those who are alleged to have made these statements are long since deceased; but the effect of statements like

that cannot be conducive to equanimity among the bands nor to friendliness and co-operation.

I thank the minister for his assurance that the matter is receiving the serious consideration of the department.

Mr. McCullough (Moose Mountain): Mr. Chairman, I am very happy that the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration refers to the Indians as the first citizens of this country. I think that is indicative of a splendid approach to the problems of the Indians in this country. I do not for an instant pose as an authority concerning Indian affairs in Canada, but for the last 20 years I have lived within a short distance of an Indian reserve, namely the White Bear reserve. Therefore I am quite familiar with the customs of some of the Indians in Canada.

Mr. Pickersgill: I wonder if the hon. member would permit me to interject at this point. The leader of the house announced last night that my estimates would be taken up later today, after the supplementary estimates were completed. I wonder if it would be more appropriate to have a general discussion on Indian affairs when we are considering my estimates rather than at this time, when we are discussing departmental administration and the supplementary vote for telephones.

Mr. McCullough (Moose Mountain): In view of what the minister has said I am entirely willing to make my remarks brief. I just want to say that neither the former minister nor the present minister should take too much credit. It is perhaps quite true that what is proposed will be satisfactory and a credit to the Canadian people, but I wish to say that as far as I am concerned I do hope greater attention and justice will be given to the first citizens of this country. I do not think anyone in this house can be too complacent to date about our attitude or our policies in relation to our Indians. That is my observation, at least.

I might also say that I just returned from the west, and I do not think the Indians on my own reservation of White Bear are receiving quite the consideration that should be given them. I got in touch with the minister's department, and Colonel Jones there has been very receptive toward my ideas. I am quite agreeable to have the matter stand at this time, but I wish to point out that I think we should make a new approach to this problem so that with the increased Indian population, which will pose a serious problem concerning their integration and their acceptance into the various segments of our society, we can assure these people that we recognize