

Supply—Health and Welfare

department over the past few months, but all with the same result. They tell us it has to be fixed here in this place, and that is what I contended from the outset. They were cut off by the new administrator, who hewed to the letter of the act as far as these people who send their children to boarding school are concerned, and those who send their children to places where they can board and go to a day school.

As I have told you, that is a necessity in that part of the country because the people are nomadic. They live anywhere from 50 to 150 miles away from schools, and it is essential for their children to be in a central spot or they will receive no education at all. Family allowance was cut off, on the basis that the parents are not paying \$5 a month to the institution concerned, and therefore they are not qualified for family allowance.

Mr. Gillis: How many were affected?

Mr. Harrison: In Ile a la Crosse about 130 were affected at that school. I inquired at Easter when I went through and learned that 20 of them had left school in order to get the family allowance. That may seem a rather odd thing, particularly when we remember the spirit in which the Family Allowances Act was passed. I was not a member of this house in the days of Mackenzie King when this legislation was framed, but if I correctly understood the intent of Mr. King it was to bring a better standard of living, particularly in terms of education, to people in the lower income group. If I am wrong in that I would like to be corrected. In practice the opposite is the case. The new administrator wishes to hew to the letter of the act, and he wrote to the parents of some children as follows:

... as soon as your child returns home let us know so we can reinstate him . . .

—on the family allowance. Instead of insisting as we always have that children go to school in order to obtain the family allowance, in this area they are insisting that the children stay away in order to obtain it.

I checked with Father Bourbonnais, the priest who is the principal at the mission at Ile a la Crosse and I learned that 20 children had already left school in order to obtain the family allowance. Father Bourbonnais contemplates that more will be leaving. In the mimeographed booklet which is published there, by the children, about three or four times a year, Father Bourbonnais makes a plea to the parents to send the children back after the summer recess. I would like to read a portion of this to you:

After holidays well spent come back in September. Come numerous to prepare your future. "Education is key to the Indian problem" declared

[Mr. Harrison.]

some Indian chiefs to the Honourable Jack Pickersgill, federal Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. The Metis and Indians have the same problem. The population is increasing in the north and is going to keep on increasing. Only a small number of the native population in the next generation will make their living by hunting, trapping and fishing. The others will have to learn new ways to earn their living, such as mining, lumbering, working in mills and doing office work; or become nurses or teachers. All this means preparation—by attending school regularly and learning as much as possible.

Presently there is the problem about taking pupils in residence, on account of the family allowances regulations.

The parents are responsible for their children and must contribute for their education. Unfortunately some misunderstanding has been going on for some time, and children who should be at school are not attending presently.

Our Right Reverend Bishop Paul Dumouchel, O.M.I.,—

—who has been in Ottawa, I might say, on three or four occasions in connection with this matter—

—along with the provincial and federal government officials, are doing their best to solve the problem, and we hope their efforts will be crowned with success.

I hope they will, too, because some of these people have been without the family allowance for 15 months on the ground that the institution charges only \$2.50 a month and they are ordered to pay \$5 per pupil. I think the people at the mission know more about what the people in that area can pay than the officials of the department of my hon. friend the minister. The Oblate fathers have been there for 160 years, and if they do not know the situation which obtains there I would venture to suggest that no one knows. I know this area intimately myself, and I know a great many of these people personally. I go in there once or twice a year and meet the people and listen to their problems. There is not the remotest possibility of their being able to pay that sum.

Many hon. members have been talking about the possibility of increasing the family allowances. Before we begin to do that I think we should first pay it on the basis we now have it, because an increase is not going to mean anything to the people up there. Even an increase of 50 per cent would be of no value, because an increase of 50 per cent of nothing still equals nothing. Even if you triple it, it is still nothing.

One runs into some extremely difficult situations and it is interesting to review some of them, though I do not want to bore hon. members by speaking at too great length.

Mr. Blackmore: You will not bore us; go ahead.

Mr. Harrison: I want to place some cases on the record because a desperate situation