

Supply—Health and Welfare

Mr. Harrison: Mr. Chairman, I should like to take a little of the time of the committee to discuss a matter which I think lends itself as a subject of some interest to members in all parts of the house; a subject, too, that, when they find what is being done in some parts of Canada, may cause them a little surprise and some of them may be a little appalled.

In the central part of my riding I have an area that was settled in the early days of the settlement of the west, and I am not talking of the settlement that occurred with the advent of the railways, but with the advent of the fur trade and the settlement from Hudson Bay. The Churchill river system, which is a tremendous system of large lakes, occupies the central part of my riding, and it is about that area that I wish to speak for the next few minutes. The area was settled mostly by people of Scots descent, brought in by the Hudson Bay Company, and a little later by French people who were employees of Revilon Freres, a fur-trading firm in that area at that time.

Those people mixed with the native population to give us what is known as our Metis population, or our half-breeds. The mentality of those people has not changed much with the admixture of British and French blood. Their mentality is still the Indian mentality. About 15 months ago family allowances began to be cut off from these people, and they have been progressively cut off since that time. A few people were affected initially. Later more and more were affected, and pretty well the whole area now is cut off from family allowances.

Hon. members will be surprised, I think, even as members of parliament, to learn that in the Family Allowances Act we have a means test, and it is a means test of this kind. You must provide for your child amenities of one kind or another to the amount of \$5 a month or you do not get family allowances. Well, of course, that is no difficulty as far as people are concerned whose children are at home. It is taken for granted by the department that the \$5 is paid as long as the child is at home, but the difficulty begins the moment the child is sent either to a boarding school or to some institution. Ordinarily it is not necessary to do that, but in this area the vocation of the people demands that this be done practically 100 per cent.

What is their vocation? Well, their vocation is trapping and fishing. It must be recalled that their mentality is still that of the Indian, and therefore they are naturally nomadic, anyway. It was only with the advent of family allowances that any great

interest was taken in education there by the Indians themselves, although with the coming of the missions—and the Oblate order came into that area about 160 years ago and settled mainly in places like Iles a la Crosse and Portage la Loche and others—there has been some interest in education. They have done a marvellous job but they ran into the natural resistance of those Indians or half-breeds to education.

Family allowances changed that a great deal. It gave them an incentive to go to school, and the missions were able to persuade them to go to school and get some education. Family allowances and the health department that our minister so ably heads have done other things for that country that had quite an impact on it. Over a period of years we have got rid of the scourge of tuberculosis amongst the Indian population, and now instead of a vanishing race we have a great multiplying race.

This brings problems, mainly the problem that the old life of fishing and hunting will not fill the bill. It will not provide sustenance for the increasing number of people in that area. Therefore we have to seek new channels of employment for those people up there. They must assimilate more with the white race and follow the white man's pursuits. The first step in that is education. And so this matter of the cutting off of family allowances, though it is not education itself, is an adjunct that is necessary, and has proved beneficial.

For the first four or five years that we had family allowances in this country these people were paid. You would naturally wonder why they are not paid today. During the period when they were paid we had this very beneficial effect. The missions were increasingly able to get those people to go to school. The heads of those missions tell that sometimes it took four or five years of pleading and argument on the part of the priests, who for a period of, as I say, over 160 years have tried to bring this situation about, to get them to go to school. I wish to pay a tribute to those missionaries who have spent their lives in that country in order to help the half-breeds and the Indian population. They have been willing to spend their lives there, and I think we should be willing to spend the family allowances and make them payable to all our people.

I brought up the question as to why they were being discontinued. They were discontinued on the retirement of the regional director of family allowances a year and a half or so ago, when a new one was brought in. I made inquiries about this gentleman, and the minister has been kind enough to have him come down and talk with me. I have also talked with other officials in this