

minister to a question of mine on February 14 last, which appears on page 118 of *Hansard*.

What has happened is this. Commissioners have investigated. Evidence has been taken that consisted of hearsay, gossip and tittle-tattle. From that evidence—and I use the word “evidence” in the sense of testimony—decisions are to be made on the qualifications for membership in the several bands, and also to determine whether or not an individual is an Indian. This is a matter that does not concern members of the House of Commons from the point of view of having any interest in the votes of these people. They are the wards of Canada, and their happiness rests upon the department and the members of this house.

Since the minister has been in charge of this department he has taken a lively interest in it and in raising the standards of those whom he serves as custodian of their rights and privileges, and also as their protector. They have no members in the house to speak for them. There are 160,000 of these first citizens of Canada, and I have often thought that one of the finest gestures this government could make would be to appoint a full-blooded Indian to the Senate of Canada in order that the views of the Indians might be expressed and Indians in general would have an opportunity of having a spokesman in the parliament of this country. They have not that now.

The Chairman: Order. I am in some difficulty at the present moment. As hon. members can see from the details this item deals merely with travelling expenses, telephones and telegrams under the heading “departmental administration”. I fully realize that in recent years the custom has grown up that on the first item of a department in the main estimates a general debate is allowed. I do not think we have ever extended that privilege so far as to allow a general debate on an item of this kind in the supplementary estimates. I understood the hon. member was merely going to ask the minister a question, and I allowed it. I am wondering whether I should allow the debate to get out of order.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I was just explaining the seriousness of the responsibility that rests on hon. members because of the fact that Indians are wards. Under the heading of “administration” these commissions have been sitting and they have caused a degree of ill feeling. I doubt whether the minister and his department have any realization of the feeling of frustration that exists among the Indians, when each feels that he is indeed the enemy of his brother if he challenges the right of that brother to be a member of that band. At this time I should like the minister

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to place before the committee information with respect to what has been done by these commissions, and also to give a word of hope to the people in those bands. Only in extreme cases when there is evidence to support the gossip and tittle-tattle should the registrar act and deny his rights to the individual whose fathers and forefathers have resided on the reserve. Yet today we find these rights being challenged, and this has caused a tremendous amount of ill feeling.

In the 50 years I have lived in the west on a number of occasions I have resided close to Indian reservations. I have never known the Indians to be aroused as they are now because each is in the position of having his ancestry looked into and testimony such as this may be given: “I remember my grandmother told my mother once and my mother told me that A is not altogether of Indian blood.” The result is that you have proceedings under way which are causing confusion and dissension and unhappiness.

I should like the minister to say a word of reassurance to the Indians in this country whose ancestors have lived on these reserves ever since they were in existence. They should be told that only evidence will be accepted to bastardize those who are living there and deny them the rights which their ancestors had.

Mr. Pickersgill: Mr. Chairman, if I may have the indulgence of the committee I should like to express appreciation to the member for giving me notice of his intention to ask this question because of a particular reason he had at this particular time. I should like also to express my appreciation of the altogether unwarranted compliment he paid me because of the interest I have been showing in Indians. As a matter of fact it is the hon. gentleman now leading the house, who is asking to have these estimates voted, who is deserving of praise in that regard. I think the Minister of Finance, when he was minister of this department, did more to help the Indians than any minister has done since confederation. If I can do half as well I shall be very happy.

My predecessor faced two most difficult problems. One of them was the problem of Indian estates. I think it must be stated quite frankly that these are not in a very satisfactory condition. Part of the reason they are in anything but a satisfactory state is that over the years disputes and differences have arisen as to who were really members of these Indians bands.

When the act was consolidated and re-enacted a year or two ago I was not a member of the house. Provision was then placed