

Indian Act

Indians find that when they go to the river to get their annual supply of fish, the fish do not appear in the river. Clearly something has happened as a result of the white man's management of that river which has changed the conditions of life for the Indians beyond all possible estimation.

If something has not been done by His Majesty's government to recompense the Indians for the losses which they have sustained by reason of this commercializing of the fishing in that river then the Indians are suffering from a handicap which is very painful indeed, and can be ruinous. They have a claim against the government which ought to be investigated, and in consideration of which they should be compensated.

Conditions similar to that prevail in respect of, I would imagine, 60 per cent of the tribes throughout this country. In the reservation which I myself have the honour to represent, for example, when they signed their treaty in 1877—I believe it was treaty 7—it did not seem possible within the time that one could imagine that there ever would be a period when the Indians would not have limitless grazing land for their ponies and for their cattle. There were no fences in any direction; there was no settlement in any direction in the province of Alberta in 1877 where the Blood reservation now is.

The result was the Indians had limitless pasture. They could get all the wood they needed for their fires. There is not a plentiful supply of wood in that area, but there was enough for the Indians; where they could not get this wood from stream beds, rivers and creeks, they could go to the mountains. Now, what has happened? Mountain reserves have been made parts of forest reserves and parks, and the Indians have been fenced in in reserves so that they cannot get wood at all to supply their needs. A set of conditions has been built up as a result of that alone which has inflicted upon these Indians losses of tremendous extent. If we allow them to go on suffering from these disadvantages, without making any compensation or any investigation into the nature of their disabilities, we surely are not making for success in advancing our Indians.

Therefore I suggest there must be a claims commission similar to the one set up in the United States. If that claims commission is not provided for in the bill coming down, or in some bill soon to come down, I suggest to the minister in all earnestness, as one sincere Canadian to another, that he must look into that matter without any further delay.

There is another matter which I think must be talked about, namely, the matter of

[Mr. Blackmore.]

education. I am sure the minister has had much representation brought to his attention about Indian education. If the bill provides—

Mr. Harris (Grey-Bruce): I do not want to interrupt the hon. member, but the estimates of my department on Indian affairs have not yet been discussed. I wonder whether the hon. member would discuss education when they come up either later this week, or early next week. I realize that he wants to make a point that we should provide for the education of Indians, but I think that when he sees the bill he will find that it does that.

Mr. Blackmore: Very well, but it would not do any harm to outline it in a few minutes. I do not propose to talk very long, but I do wish to say just a word or two about the situation in respect of the Indians. I believe in preparing the minister for what I may or may not say in discussing the estimates, but it will do no harm to mention this question of education. We know very well that in a number of ways education on the Indian reservations has been taken care of largely by religious organizations. I have no complaint against religious organizations as such, but there are Indians who do not desire to have their children attend religious institutions in order to obtain education. On the reserve which I have the honour to represent there are two splendid schools, one Roman Catholic and the other Anglican. I believe they have been managed with the utmost proficiency in so far as the people controlling them have access to facilities; but there are many Indians on that reservation who do not desire that their children shall be under the religious influence of either of those organizations. And as Canadian citizens they surely have the right to have their children educated in a non-sectarian or secular school. Up to the present time there is no provision by which they can obtain that. That is a serious matter.

I wish to say only a word or two about it. If we are going to prepare the Indians to be the citizens of tomorrow in Canada, along with our own boys and girls, we simply must be positively sure that we are making full provision for the adequate education of the Indian boys and girls. That is the second point.

This is the third point, and I hope it is in the bill. We must make provision without further delay for adequate nutrition among the Indians on the reservations. This more properly comes under the direction of the Minister of National Health and Welfare. I am sure that he is giving it careful attention, but at the same time if the two fine young ministers co-operate and have the full support of the house and of the government on this program they will not have any more