

Supply—Northern Affairs

they felt they did not have sufficient fish. The tragedy of the food cache burning down destroyed the safety factor as the report pointed out and in effect its loss was the main contributory cause of the death of these 16 Eskimos.

I should like to point out something which I am sure the hon. member for Mackenzie River must know concerning the customs of these people. These people in the Keewatin district are caribou hunters. Their whole life is associated with the caribou. The northern service officers have been attempting to have them diversify and widen their efforts and rely more on fish. Stories are told in the department about officials having gone among the Eskimos with fishing equipment such as nets. After teaching the Eskimos how to use them the Eskimos used the nets as long as officials of the department were with them. But the instinct of these people is not to sit beside a hole in the ice. Their instinct is to go out and hunt caribou. They usually range between 200 and 300 miles from their bases when hunting. It would be almost impossible for any group to keep in touch with them.

In recent years because of the activity of this and other departments of government and construction groups in the area, all of whom have been very good about supplying food to the Eskimos, the Eskimos have come more and more to rely on the free food that is provided. That is the reason why they have limited their activities to within 40 or 50 miles of a camp. And, of course, this very thing destroys their ability to find food.

No one here would want to make this into a partisan issue between parties or groups because, as I think the record will show, in the last number of years the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources has been moving as rapidly as the members of this house would vote them supply to get certain things done. I could quote the figures on what has been happening over the years, but I should like to point out to the hon. member for Mackenzie River that I have never taken credit away from anyone who did anything; I have never tried to pretend that the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources did nothing before I became the minister. These are assumptions made mostly by those with guilty consciences.

I am going to ask the hon. member, when he attacks this department for doing nothing, who is he really attacking? He is really attacking the previous incumbent of this office because the caribou decline was first reported as a result of a survey by the wild life service of the department in 1952-53; but no one credited the report at the time. This

[Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle).]

report was further checked in 1954 and 1955. Let me remind the hon. member that in 1954 there was not one single northern service officer any place in the area. In 1955, after this report had been made in 1952, 1953, there was not one single northern service officer in the whole district of Keewatin, but there was one in Churchill. In 1956, which is four years after this report, there was one northern service officer in Churchill, one in Baker Lake, plus eight R.C.M.P. officers in all of Keewatin. This was three years after the caribou decline was thoroughly established. I ask the hon. member, in all fairness, who was in power then?

Mr. Hardie: And I ask the minister how many caribou more northern service officers are going to bring back?

Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle): Mr. Chairman, the depth of the hon. member's wisdom in this case is well demonstrated. The northern service officers do not bring back caribou but what they are there for is to try to look after the Eskimo, to help them adapt to the new conditions. All I am saying here is that I am not going to be a party to making a political issue out of the unfortunate things that have happened to those Eskimo.

I think that what the hon. member did on Saturday was sufficient to bring them to the attention of the country, as they have been brought to the attention of the country by our department over the last few years. The department has done everything that it can think of. I asked the hon. member before recess what he suggested. One suggestion he made on Saturday we agreed with, namely that we should have to begin moving them into those settlements, and we are starting that. He said nothing beyond that. The assumption that was made—

Mr. Hardie: Provide them with an opportunity to work.

Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle): That is it.

Mr. Hardie: To make a living.

Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle): That is it, but we are trying to move them in the only way we can do that. But beyond that, all this business that was brought to light here this afternoon and the inferences that were made were that we deliberately just took a thousand pounds of food and made those people exist on one ounce and something a day; that statement was absolutely unfair to the men out in the field and to the men here in Ottawa in this department.

Mr. Hardie: It was nothing of the sort.

Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle): I am sure that if the previous incumbent of this position