

It's sometimes said that Family Allowances lead to improvident spending-habits on the part of the Eskimo, and the story is told in a recent newspaper article of one Eskimo who is supposed to have acquired 22 alarm clocks, all purchased out of the proceeds of Family Allowance payments. Such an incident could not happen, because since their inception Family Allowance payments have been made to Eskimos in kind and not in cash. They are made from a carefully selected list of items designed primarily to benefit the children. It could be true, of course, that an Eskimo, finding that as a result of Family Allowance payments he had a surplus of earned income, spent part of that surplus to buy 22 alarm clocks. I don't know if it's true that an Eskimo has had such an alarm-clock buying-spree, but if it is then he was spending his own money and is free to do with it what he chooses. Family Allowance money was certainly not directly involved.

I wish to assure you that all the Government officials who deal with the Eskimo are impressed with the importance of ensuring that payments of Family Allowances and of relief do not have the effect of encouraging indolence on the part of the Eskimo and reliance on government assistance. For example, steps are taken to curtail Family Allowance payments to families where the father is using these payments to avoid hunting. Other social security payments are likewise watched carefully. I think in general it's quite fair to say that this objective has been achieved.

It's sometimes suggested that Eskimo affairs are administered by "remote control", by officials sitting at desks in Ottawa and therefore out of touch with problems as they arise. The Federal Government is responsible for administering the area in which the vast majority of the Eskimos live, and it is logical, in the interests of economy and efficiency, that the centre of administration should be in Ottawa. But our officials make regular and frequent visits to the majority of Eskimo settlements, and I, myself, have made two visits to Eskimo settlements in the two years that I have been Minister of Resources and Development, one to the Eastern Arctic and one to the Coppermine area on Coronation Gulf. Both were extremely interesting and I obtained much first-hand and valuable information.

Recent Conferences

To help clarify and co-ordinate thinking on Eskimo problems I called a conference last summer of all organizations, government and private, that are concerned with the Eskimos. Represented at this conference, which lasted for two days, were the Departments of Resources and Development, Mines and Technical Surveys, National Health and Welfare, Transport, National Defence, and Public Works; the R.C.M.P., the Anglican missions, the Roman Catholic missions, the Hudson's Bay Company, and individuals with special knowledge of or interest in Eskimos. The meetings were "off the record". Frank and free discussion was encouraged. No decisions could result from a meeting of this nature, but a most useful interchange of views took place.

As a result of this conference a continuing committee was set up to study Eskimo problems and to recommend appropriate action where it was considered necessary.