

Eskimos are wards of this nation, and being wards the question of who assumes trusteeship for them becomes important.

At present the trustee is the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs. That superintendent now proposes to divest himself of responsibility, saying that because the administration is vested with the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories it is going to be left with him, but that does not get away from the essential fact that the wardship continues. These people are wards of this nation, and when the other day I heard a discussion with regard to the Eskimo having a vote I knew that if my hon. friend the Minister of the Interior were not in this house, and if politics and such matters were forgotten, he would regard it as one of the hugest jokes he ever heard. These wards of the nation are scattered far and wide, over mount and stream and sea. They are here to-day and far away to-morrow, and I am sure the Minister of Justice must realize that such wards of the nation are not people who should be entrusted with the franchise, because they are not a part of our civilized country.

Mr. LAPOINTE: Surely this question should be discussed in connection with the Dominion Elections Act.

Mr. BENNETT: No doubt that is correct, but at the same time it arises here, because we are divesting ourselves of a wardship and we are not naming the responsible minister who will communicate to this house the conduct of his wardship. It is quite clear that the order in council transferring the administration of this matter to the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories covers the matter of administration, but it does not get away from the essential question of the responsibility for the wardship of these people.

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): I quite agree with my hon. friend. I do not care to discuss the question of the enfranchisement of the Eskimo; to be very frank, it never occurred to me that such a question would arise. There is no doubt that if distress arises among these people, to that extent they are wards of the Canadian government, and if we allowed famine or pestilence to run riot among them we would be called to account. They are not Indians as we know Indians, with chiefs and councils and all the paraphernalia which has been set up by the Indians for the management of their affairs. These people congregate in small family groups; no doubt they have leaders, but apparently in discussing matters of importance with our officials they all speak, each for himself.

Mr. BENNETT: They have no chiefs.

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): Not that I am aware of, as the Indians have, through whom they speak and do their business with the officials of the government. That is one reason for the difficulty in applying the Indian Act to the Eskimos. It is merely a matter of administration; we are seeking to take care of these people in times of distress, which fortunately are very infrequent, since they appear to be able to look after themselves fairly well. However, in the summer season, or even any other season of the year, they are liable to travel two or three hundred miles and locate themselves in another place; they have no particular habitations which they call their camping grounds or reserves.

Mr. GUTHRIE: Did I understand the minister to say that the Danish government had made some claim that these people were citizens of Denmark?

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): No; they have made some claim to territory there. Many years ago a Danish explorer conducted an expedition among the islands south of Melville island and explored some territory there. Some claim has been made to that territory. It is not a very serious matter, and we are attempting to adjust it.

Mr. GUTHRIE: You mean it was a claim for territory?

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): Yes.

Mr. GUTHRIE: Not with regard to the citizenship of the people?

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): No.

The CHAIRMAN: Shall section 1 carry?

Mr. BENNETT: I think another section should be substituted for this.

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): If that is necessary to meet the wishes of my hon. friend it will need to be done in an amendment to the Northwest Territories Act. This is merely designed to take it out of the Indian Act.

Mr. BENNETT: There must be some responsibility somewhere.

Mr. CANNON: If my hon. friend will allow me, chapter 103, which deals with the Department of the Interior, states in section 4 that the Minister of the Interior shall have the control and management of the affairs of the Northwest Territories and of the Yukon territory. I think that is wide enough to cover it.