

We are proposing some amendments to the Indian Act at the present session of Parliament, and last December I arranged a meeting with representative Indians from every part of Canada to discuss the changes we are considering.

On this occasion, the Indian representatives were not selected by the department; they were elected by the Councils of the Indian Bands.

These Band Councils are elected by the Indians themselves, and it was gratifying to all those who had been present at both Conferences to see what a great advance there had been between 1951 and 1955 in the capacity of the Indians to express themselves, to deal with the business before them, and to present the views of the Indians who had elected them.

There is no doubt that the great advance in local self-government on the Reserves, which was instituted by Mr. Harris in 1951, has already been amply vindicated.

The Indians, of course, will not have achieved the full citizenship to which the Prime Minister referred in 1949 until they have the right to vote in Federal elections.

At the present time, Indians who are veterans of either of the great wars, and their wives, have the right to vote, and any Indian may acquire the right to vote by renouncing his right to exemption from certain taxes on his personal property and on income earned on the Reserve.

A considerable number do waive this exemption every year.

I think most of us feel that, just as there should be no taxation without representation, so also there is something repugnant about the idea of representation without an equal obligation to bear the burdens of citizenship.

This is one of the problems that will have to be solved in the future.

Every year more and more Indians are leaving the reserves and the numbers will increase as the years go on.

There are Indians today engaged in many different occupations all over the country.

Some of these Indians, of course, are enfranchised, but many of them retain their Indian status and their freedom to go back to the protection of the reserve whenever they wish.

The status of these Indians who do not live on the reserve and who are not yet enfranchised is, in many ways, similar to the status of immigrants who have not yet become citizens, and we are doing all we can, all the time, to encourage these Indians to accept the full responsibilities of citizenship whenever they seem able to do so.

If our Indians are to have their rightful place in Canadian life, I am convinced that they must be encouraged to accept just as much responsibility as they seem able to bear, and that the more responsibility they can accept for their own affairs, both individually and as Bands, the happier they will be and the greater will be their contribution to our common Canadian life.