

Canada Elections Act

government. There are certain hon. members of the House of Commons today and certain others in the past who have drawn attention to these problems, expressed the grievances and indicated interest in the welfare of native Indians, but I rather suspect that in some cases it was done in a half-hearted fashion and that only half-hearted attention was paid by parliament to the problems of the native Indian population. If we desire the native Indian people to be brought up to the same level of existence, culturally and economically, as the rest of Canada, we can take the first step in that direction by granting them the universal right to vote in Canada, which every other citizen in the nation has.

I do not want to discuss this matter much more other than to point out, as I said earlier, that a number of members in the house, many of whom are now on the other side and in the cabinet, notably the Prime Minister (Mr. Diefenbaker) himself, have promoted the principle of this bill over many years. Committees of the house have been set up and one in particular in 1951 recommended that native Indians be given the right to vote in federal elections.

I do not think I need to give any more reasons to convince hon. members that Indians should have the right to vote in federal elections, because I am sure that we are all of the same mind that this discrimination, this restriction, should not exist. It is the last remaining restriction placed against members of a race or of a national origin so far as voting in federal elections is concerned. I notice that in other bills and in other motions that have been before the house considerable discussion has taken place and it is right that it should. I do urge the government to indicate its desire to accept this particular bill and take the first step toward bringing our native Indian peoples in Canada up to a decent educational, cultural and economic standard.

Mr. John Charlton (Brant-Haldimand): Mr. Speaker, having the honour and the privilege of representing the most highly populated Indian reservation in Canada I feel that I should make some rather short remarks on this bill. On many previous occasions I have spoken on this matter in the house and suggested that Indians should have a vote with no strings attached. As the first citizens of this land they, more than anyone else, should have that right and privilege. They have fought loyally in two world wars in the last century. Previous to that they were allies

[Mr. Howard.]

of the crown and they have endeared themselves to their white brothers living anywhere near them and have, by their actions, earned the right to vote as anyone else would vote in this country.

Strangely enough, Mr. Speaker, there are those on the Six Nations Indian reservation, and quite justifiably so, who are suspicious of their white brothers. They have good reason for being suspicious of some of the actions which have been taken in the past few years. I could go on for some time and relate some of the things that have happened to make those people suspicious of our actions toward them.

On the Six Nations Indian reservation there is what is known as the elected council and the hereditary council. It is more than unfortunate that when the elected council took over the government of the Indian reservation there it was actually brought about at gun point. That, Mr. Speaker, was enough to make those people suspicious of our actions. Many of them feel that by voting they would lose many of their rights as loyal citizens of the crown. Many of them believe that they are apart from Canada and are a separate colony under the British crown and therefore are not subject to the laws of Canada or of the province. I say that some of them feel that way, probably a minority, but enough of them have that feeling to make it difficult for others to exercise their franchise freely.

As I said before, a large percentage of the Indians fought in both the first and second world wars. Those Indian veterans had the right to vote previous to 1950 or 1951, I believe, and in that year their wives were also given the right to vote. Ordinarily, the vote is very small on that reservation. It is true that over 6,000 people are registered on the reservation but all of those 6,000 people do not live on the reservation. The total vote in the last several federal elections has been very small in view of the fact that they believe they would be jeopardizing their position as Indians by voting in either provincial or federal elections. Some of them will not even vote for their elected council. They do not agree with the elected council; therefore, they do not want to go out and vote.

The province of Ontario has given all Indians the right to vote, but the vote is very small in provincial elections. If those people could be assured that they would lose none of their rights they probably would take part in elections. In view of historic events it is not easy to assure them. But as generations pass and the younger generations come along we find they are not taking the same stand as their parents along some of these lines. They are taking more interest in