

such a political structure, a question arises as to how Indian First Nations might relate to Parliament. A few countries provide for special representation of indigenous peoples or dependent territories in their national legislatures, so as to ensure that those peoples or territories have an acknowledged voice in the national debate.

In New Zealand, which has a parliamentary system similar to Canada's, the Maori people elect four representatives to Parliament through direct elections in which only Maoris may be candidates and only Maoris may vote. For this purpose the country has been divided arbitrarily into four constituencies. The Maori Members of Parliament participate with full rights. The system was devised in the 1860s as a temporary measure in anticipation that the Maori people would be assimilated. Maoris today constitute about 10 per cent of the population, and a few Maori representatives are usually elected by the normal electoral process as well.

The United States has a different system. There is no federal representation for Indian peoples, but some dependent territories—Guam and Puerto Rico for instance—each have the right to a delegate in Congress, although their powers are restricted in that they cannot vote in the House of Representatives. The District of Columbia is similarly represented in the House. In practice, since the congressional committee system is strong, these special members—who have the right to vote in committee—carry more weight than appearances would suggest. At the state level, Maine makes provision for the representation of Indian people in its legislature.

A few witnesses expressed support for special representation for Indian peoples in the House of Commons:

We definitely need representation in the House of Commons. . . . They should be elected by native people across the country. . . . so that the rights that. . . we acquire down the road are guaranteed. We are such a small minority in the Canadian political process today. (Central Interior Tribal Councils, Special 18:35)

Most of those who expressed opinions, however, were sceptical of the value of special representation:

We looked at the model of guaranteed seats which was available to the Maori people. . . . That model was not successful. . . . Those guaranteed seats were then swallowed up by the rest of the voting members and they did not have any direct consent over what was to happen. (Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians, Special 16:28)

The research paper prepared for the Committee on the government of aboriginal peoples (see Appendix F) concluded that the New Zealand model has a number of problems: the Maoris are under-represented in Parliament; the elected representatives exercise little power; and the system has weakened traditional Maori governmental structures.

56. The Committee believes that the best way to promote Indian rights is through Indian self-government and not by special representation for First Nations in Parliament. Nevertheless, the situation of Indian peoples will change with self-government, and special representation in Parliament might in future offer benefits that cannot now be anticipated.