

*Canada Elections Act*

of course, must be read and considered by hon. members in conjunction with the bill immediately preceding this one on the order paper, the bill to amend the Indian Act because there is reference in the Indian Act to the Canada Elections Act. However, the gist of the matter is contained in the elections act itself.

I might say at the outset that from reading past debates of the House of Commons I know there are a number of hon. members sitting on the government side of the house at this time who have promoted, espoused and endorsed the principle of this proposed legislation. They know who they are and what they have said on this subject and I will refrain from mentioning it at the moment.

For the life of me I can see no justifiable reason for the existence of the present restrictions that are placed against our native Indian people in their right to vote in federal elections. After all, practically every one of the problems affecting native Indians are dealt with by the federal government in this chamber. There are certain reasons that have been advanced in the past as to why the Indian people should have restrictions placed against them but these reasons prove invalid upon intelligent examination.

With your permission, Mr. Speaker, and with the consent of hon. members of the house I should like to make reference to some material contained in some detail in the bill and I do it only because it is necessary in pointing out the anomalous situation that exists. I would point out that certain native Indians can vote in federal elections at the present time and particularly those who served in the armed forces during world war I, world war II or who served in the Canadian forces subsequent to September 9, 1950, or a native Indian who is the wife of such a person. These people are allowed to have their names entered on the rolls when registration takes place without having to sign any waiver form as provided in the elections act and the Indian Act and as is the case with all of us here and most other people in Canada they are permitted to cast their ballot on election day in federal elections.

I have discussed the situation with a great many native Indians who live in the riding of Skeena and they pointed out the following anomalies. What happens in the case of a native Indian who for some physical reason was not able to join the armed forces? Of course there are some who fall into that category. They desired to participate in the wars but either because of age or some physical defect were unable to serve and consequently are now unable to vote in a federal election. I merely raise that one small point

to further illustrate the unreasonable situation that obtains under the legislation now in effect. As I mentioned earlier, elderly people might not have been able to join the armed forces because they were too old even though they might have been physically fit.

At the present time native Indians can vote in provincial elections in five provinces. In British Columbia they have been able to vote in provincial elections since 1949; in Manitoba, I understand, since 1954; in Ontario since 1953; and I understand that Nova Scotia has never placed restrictions against native Indians voting in provincial elections as is the case with Newfoundland ever since that province entered confederation.

When the native Indian people were first given the right to vote in provincial elections in British Columbia in 1949 there was at first a great reluctance on their part in participating in the so-called white man's government. They felt that by entering their names on voters' lists and by voting they would be depriving themselves of some of their hereditary or aboriginal rights which they have enjoyed over the years. That fear was overcome in a very short while and the election to the British Columbia legislature in 1949 of a full-blooded native Indian, Mr. Frank Calder, as a member of the C.C.F. party doubtless did much to dispel this fear. Following that the native Indian people found they had nothing to lose and nothing to fear through participating in elections and consequently in later elections they took a far more active part in the election of members of the provincial legislative assembly. I am sure that the same general feeling existed in the provinces of Manitoba and Ontario following the time when the Indian people were given the right to vote in provincial elections.

As a result of the vote being given to native Indians in provincial elections in British Columbia we have witnessed a vastly increased interest in native Indian affairs on the part of the provincial government. After all, these people can now participate in electing or defeating certain members of the legislative assembly and for political reasons if for no other more consideration must be and has been given to them following their being granted the right to vote.

Since the time that native Indians were given the vote in British Columbia in 1949 there has been a greater and more enlightened interest on the part of the general public in their affairs. I am sure the same situation would exist as far as the federal government is concerned. As I said earlier, practically all the problems of the Indian people come under the jurisdiction of the federal