

*Canada Elections Act*

these Indians feel about the whole question. For us to pass this act would be a one-sided affair. I do not think we should enlarge their rights without consulting them, because although we may feel that to give them the franchise, or even to offer them the franchise, is a great compliment to them, there are some Indians who do not think it is a great compliment.

They look back over the last 100 years. They look back to the time when they were the local race of people, when they were numerous, when they were independent, when they were free. They outnumbered the white man. At one time there was no doubt at all but that they wished to rise and exert their rights as free human beings. They could have swept the white man from the plains. But they did not choose to do so, and the reason was because they expected honour. They have kept their treaties and they expect us to keep ours.

What faces the Indian today? His treaty is really gone; it has been destroyed by time and by circumstance. If we asked him to keep his treaty his position is still one-sided, because the nomadic way of life which we offered him in that great western land is gone forever. The game on which he lived has gone. The rivers and lakes which were full of fish are dried up or polluted. They can no longer throw a line in and live their nomadic way of life. We now ask this Indian to give up his nomadic way of life in order to vote. This may seem to us eminently fair and just, but in order to have the vote and to use it properly he must understand our ways. He is in no position to understand our ways because he has never had equality. He has never had equality of opportunity in any way, shape or form. When we took away his land—and we did take it away—we gave him reserves on which to live.

Many white people have thought that we stole the western land from the Indian when we gave him these reserves, but he chose the land on which he wanted to live. He chose sand hills because they are rich with game birds, and he chose the streams and edges of lakes because they were rich with fish. And he chose the few places where the buffalo were still left, but today they are gone. Now we offer him a free vote as a recompense for his giving up that great western land. He gave it up voluntarily, and I claim that when he gave it up he was our superior. He was our superior in his living in that country. He was our superior in numbers, superior in war, and in many respects he is superior in honour, because with very, very few exceptions the Indian has not broken his treaty.

He is still trying to adjust himself. It is true that he would, if you asked him, still

[Mr. Bigg.]

prefer the nomadic way of life. But, Mr. Speaker, in order to absorb him into our modern civilization, we have to offer him equality, and this will take time. If we ask him to vote he must abandon his rights. I do not think he must wait to abandon his rights. I think that we must get together with him and see whether he wants the vote, and then if he does, to offer him the vote but on his terms. We have had our way for 100 years, and it has not worked out for the Indian. Let us try it his way. I know that the Indian wants to become a good Canadian citizen, because whenever he sees the need to give what he can to Canada, he is willing to do so. We have recognized this, and when we are in a spot we allow him to vote.

It may be of interest to members of this house to know that, for their numbers, the North American Indian has produced more soldiers than any other race of people fighting under our flag. He has not only fought, but fought well. Many of them were decorated. True, few of them reached officer rank, but that of course was due to their lack of education and was certainly not because of the lack of any fighting quality. The Indian needs the right to vote in order to have full equality with us; but he must have it, as I say, on his own terms.

What do we mean when we say that we must wait for him to become as well educated as we are? What is education? The only education we are worried about is the education necessary to become a good citizen. The Indian has many of the qualities required for that purpose. He is industrious in his own way. Many men think the Indian is incapable of hard, concentrated work. These people have never worked with the Indian. The Indian is the equal physically of any man in Canada. He is able to endure long hours on the trail, and in the north country today even the mounted police, the finest of Canada's young white men, rely on the natives whenever they are out in weather that the white man cannot stand. Whenever they are in woods where there are no roads and no maps they rely on our red brethren.

**Mr. Speaker:** It being six o'clock the house will resume the business which was interrupted at five o'clock.

**TRANS-CANADA HIGHWAY ACT**

AMENDMENT TO INCREASE MAXIMUM EXPENDITURES TO THREE HUNDRED AND FIFTY MILLION DOLLARS

The house resumed consideration in committee of the following resolution—Mr. Green—Mr. Sevigny in the chair: