



Bulletin

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INDIAN ACT TALKS BEGIN

Prospective changes in Canada's Indian Act were considered on July 25 at Yellowknife, capital of the North West Territories, when the first of 19 consultation meetings began between representatives of the Federal Government and the Indian people.

Following is the opening statement by the Director of Policy and Planning, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Mr. C.I. Fairholm:

We are here to find out what you believe should be in a new law to replace the present Indian Act. Such an Act must provide for those things found only in Indian communities which no other law can cover. You may want it to include some other things where you think conditions require special provisions.

Only a special Act can cover such matters as lands set aside for Indians, membership in Indian bands — how it is gained and how it may be given up — it must deal with how your band councils are chosen and how they work at the business of your people.

You are here to speak on behalf of your people. We are here to listen. We are not here to defend what has gone before or to argue with you about what you want. Our job is to explain what the present Act says and how it works, to suggest possibilities when you are not happy about the present Act, but are not certain of what would take its place and be better for your people.

Our basic job is to help you make the talks productive and to answer your questions. Over the years since 1951, many Indian people have been consulted about the shortcomings of the present Act. There have been many talks about what should take its place. The Government has reviewed the matter and has asked us to consult with you before they

make any further decisions.

We have been told that the Government wants a law which will allow the various bands to choose for themselves how much of their own business they want to do. You will want to make sure that the law allows the Indian people to choose their chiefs and councilors in the best way and that the powers of the people, the council and the government are properly set out.

Things are not the same everywhere for the Indian people any more than they are for other Canadians. There may be things which will work in your own community which will not work in other places. For this reason, we will be asking you to suggest what you want, but not to try to stop other, different communities from getting what they believe they must have. The law must allow for all.

DIFFICULTY OF LEGAL LANGUAGE

When Parliament has passed a law it is written in legal language. It cannot be written in plain and simple words because the courts have interpreted many words and phrases, when used in law-making, many times. These words and phrases then have come to have special meaning in a courtroom. That is how courts work.

It is not easy to understand exactly what is meant by the legal language used. But if a law is to work at all, it must be exact. It must mean the same to everyone who reads it. That is what courts are for.