

other Canadian citizens, Indians may sue and be sued and may enter freely into contractual obligations in ordinary business transactions. Their property on a reserve is exempt from taxation, and such property, except on a suit by another Indian, is also exempt from seizure.

Indians may vote at federal elections on the same basis as other citizens. With regard to provincial elections, the Indians are governed by the electoral laws of the various provinces.

Liquor has presented a special problem. From an early period it was thought necessary to control the liquor traffic with Indians and special legislation was passed by authorities prohibiting the sale of intoxicants to, and their use by, the Indian people. These laws were to protect them from exploitation by unscrupulous traders and individuals who might take advantage of them in economic matters, especially during the early fur-trading period.

Total prohibition of the use of any kind of intoxicant by Indians except for medicinal purposes is the significant feature of the liquor provisions of Indian legislation passed by the Parliament of Canada, which was consolidated in the Indian Act of 1876 and continued with minor changes until 1951, when legislation was broadened to allow the Indian people to decide their own course of action on this matter on a provincial and individual reserve basis.

Band management

The original political organization of the Indians varied considerably from tribe to tribe. It was usually very simple, involving only the recognition of a chief and headmen or councillors, either hereditary or chosen for their prowess or ability. As early as 1869, provision was made in the Indian legislation for local government on reserves in accordance with democratic principles. This provision has been broadened from time to time to meet the needs of Indian communities.

The Indians now elect band councils consisting of a chief and councillors who correspond to the local elective officers in rural municipalities. However, Indian bands who wish to adhere to their tribal system of choosing chiefs and councillors may continue to do so and those chosen exercise the same powers as an elected council. The councils are concerned with local conditions affecting members of the band and work closely with the representatives of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. They may make by-laws with regard to various matters of a local nature concerning the reserves and also have certain responsibilities with regard to the management of band funds, the surrender or lease of reserve lands, land allotment and band membership. Management of welfare assistance, community planning, economic development, school administration and other local programs