

Indian Act

than just barely enough support to enable them to discharge the responsibilities they assumed when they undertook to see that the Indians of Canada shall be properly nourished. If the Indians are not properly nourished then they develop all sorts of deficiencies. Men now are nutrition conscious. We all know how important it is that we should be well nourished. What chance has the ordinary Indian to be well nourished when it is almost impossible for him to obtain enough food in Canada to keep body and soul together? The result of all this is that a very carefully designed provision must be made as to nutrition if the Indians of tomorrow are to be able to discharge their responsibilities as citizens.

Such measures as old age pensions, and all that sort of thing, should be provided the Indians. Some sort of provision must be made for adequate nutrition.

I have just one more thing to say. I trust that this bill is making provision for what might be called the rehabilitation and establishment of the Indians economically. We are having a hard enough time in our generation, we, the ordinary ones of us. We find it hard enough to fit into the life around us and to make a living; yet we have been admirably prepared as compared with the preparation given to the Indian. We are admirably equipped in both body and mind, as compared with the Indian who has been undernourished all his life. What chance has an Indian when we find it difficult to compete? What chance has he to compete and establish himself so that he can make adequate provision for his family?

I do not propose to go into the details of this matter, but we must take it into consideration and we must have results right away so that the Indians can establish themselves economically, so that they can use their reserves to the best advantage, and take part in the economic life of the community surrounding their reserves.

I trust that these provisions may be made in the act. I shall watch with great care to see whether they are or not; and if they are not, then the minister must naturally expect to give an accounting to me when he brings his estimates before us.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I do not propose to discuss the resolution for the simple reason that it gives no indication as to the nature of the bill to be introduced to amend the Indian Act. However I should like to make two suggestions to the minister.

Certainly nothing more important than these amendments to the Indian Act could have been introduced to the House of Commons, affecting as they do the rights, opportunities and

privileges of the Indian population in our country. The minister will know, as I do, having on a number of occasions acted as counsel for the Indians—believing that one should assist them at all times, and doing it in a spirit of assistance and for no other consideration—that the Indians as a whole are suspicious of any legislation that will be introduced without their receiving at least an opportunity to examine, consider and recommend.

My suggestions to the minister are made with a view to removing many of the objections now being voiced in the Indian reserves across the country. These are objections in the nature of fear that full consideration of their hopes and aspirations will not be reflected in the legislation to be introduced. They have the fear that in too many cases the recommendations and suggestions will be the result of consideration by Indian agents and the officials rather than by the body of Indians as a whole.

After all, the Indian Act has been on the statute books for about seventy years, and it does require revamping, changing, and the removal of obsolete sections and sections which have no regard for present-day world conditions, sections which do not recognize what the Indian says is the right of all people today who during the years have been wards of the government. They say they have the right to a degree of self-determination which through the years they have been denied.

In that spirit I place these two suggestions before the minister, and I do so after having met with many of the Indian chieftains in western Canada, and also with the outstanding leaders of the Indians on the prairies. My first suggestion is that as soon as this resolution is passed by the House of Commons the bill should be printed, and that it should be distributed not only to Indian agents and Indian officials but also to the Indian chieftains and head men in the various reserves across the country. If the minister goes no further than to distribute copies to the officials, then in my submission he will not be removing one strong ground for objection which has found its way into the minds of many of the young Indians who today are asking for full consideration of their rights, and an opportunity to achieve their ambition and aspirations.

When I say that, I mean that all they need is opportunity. I could point to one family that appeared as delegates at a meeting of the Saskatchewan Indians held at Saskatoon some weeks ago. One of these Indians named Eli Wuttunee—and I give his name because I think it should be given—pointed out what happened in his own family when a brother of his decided that in order to give his sons and daughters an opportunity for education,