

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 the competent governmental authority in provinces and colonies, even before Confederation, prohibiting the sale to, and use of, intoxicants by Indians in order to protect them from exploitation by unscrupulous traders and individuals who might take advantage of them in economic matters. This was especially true 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.

Provision is now made under the Indian Act for three stages of development. The first is one of total prohibition, as in the past. The second provides for the consumption of alcoholic beverages in public places and is brought into effect on the request of the province concerned and with the concurrence of the Governor in Council. This stage is now in effect in the provinces of British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Nova Scotia and in the Yukon and Northwest Territories. The third stage, permitting Indians to purchase intoxicants in the same manner as other citizens in accordance with the laws of the province may be proclaimed by the Governor in Council at the request of the province concerned. This was proclaimed for the Province of Ontario on November 6, 1958, for the Northwest Territories on November 18, 1959, for Saskatchewan on July 1, 1960, and for Manitoba on July 13, 1960. Provision is also made in the Act for Indians residing in a province where the third stage is in effect to hold a community referendum at the request of the band council concerned. In the event that the majority are in favour, the Governor in Council may issue a proclamation permitting the possession of intoxicants on the reserve in question. Where the third stage is not in effect in a province, referendums may still be held but only if the province concerned does not object to the band council's request for a referendum within 60 days after it has been notified of the request. Should the band obtain the right of on-reserve possession following the referendum, its members would, in so far as the Indian Act is concerned, also have the right to purchase and possess intoxicants off reserves in accordance with the laws of the province. A number of bands in British Columbia have obtained the right of possession both on and off their reserves until the latter procedure.

SELF-GOVERNMENT

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 Act for self-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 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 superintendents. They may make by-laws with regard to various matters of a local nature on the reserves and also exercise control over the expenditure and management of their funds and property. Formerly only males had the right to vote in elections, but under the new Indian Act the right to vote has been extended to include women also. Indian women are taking a keen interest in band affairs and a number have been elected to office.