

Canada Elections Act

Mr. Fisher: Would you mind waiting until I finish mine? The government party is known as the party of free enterprise. You may wonder why I should bring this point into discussion but you will appreciate that free enterprise represents a point of view of life which accepts the belief that people act in their own self-interest. I think perhaps the overriding consideration is that this gives the dynamic of life to society. I would, however, like to suggest that this is not so because I have some figures with respect to the Ontario elections in 1955, in which province the Indian has a vote, which may condition the approach of some of the gentlemen in the government party to this piece of legislation. At Lansdowne House in the electoral district of Port Arthur almost all the population with the exception of about ten people are Indians. They voted, I would like the house to know, and the Liberals got three votes, the communists got three votes and the Conservative candidate got 132 votes—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Fisher: The C.C.F. got zero.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Fisher: On the Pic R. Indian reserve the Liberal candidate got six votes, the communist candidate no votes, the Conservative candidate got 35 votes and I am glad to say there was a little C.C.F. strength there and we got 13 votes. At Long Lac reserve the Liberals got seven votes, the communists two, the Conservatives 74 and the C.C.F. seven votes.

These are just typical districts in the Port Arthur area and I am advancing these figures in an attempt to appeal to the self-interest of the members of the government party. If this amendment is passed, look at the treasure house of votes, potentially at least, in northern Ontario. I think this is something which merits consideration and, having in mind the very high ratio of Indians who vote, I think we may take it that they have indicated a considerable interest in political matters. Surely this belies the argument of the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) that the vote has very little effect.

I understand in the last election on March 31 that there were over 40 Indians lined up and desirous of voting at one of the polling booths in my constituency, and that they were very disappointed that they were not allowed to vote. They apparently took a very much more strict view of the elections act on that occasion and I suppose I was rather disappointed myself that they could not, for it was the C.C.F. who managed to get them all down there.

[Mr. Nielsen.]

The fact of the matter is that the Indians are interested in the vote and I think the members of the government party should support this bill in their own self-interest. This may seem a callous and cold argument but it seems to me that it is one which should appeal to the members of the party of free enterprise.

Mr. Nielsen: By way of explanation, Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend obviously misinterpreted my remark when I referred to the representation of Indian people in the other place. I want to make quite certain that all members realize that I take the stand of being in favour of representation in this house for the Indian people. It is only right and proper that they should have such representation.

I am only saying that the bill as it now stands is bound to come in conflict with provisions of the Indian Act, and I have pointed out one set of circumstances where that possibility might arise. Therefore I do not think the hon. member could have understood my remarks. I say again, and I believe this, that the Indian people have the right to representation in this house, and the only way they will get that representation is by having the right to exercise their franchise at the polls, but this bill will not accomplish this end.

Mr. A. R. Smith (Calgary South): Mr. Speaker, I intend to enter this debate for only a very few moments in order to express what is perhaps not a new thought but one point seems to have been overlooked in considering the entire aspect of this matter when the objections of the hon. members of the C.C.F. group have been answered by other hon. members.

I think it is usual that we begin a discussion of this nature by complimenting the mover of the bill and then proceeding to spend some 60 minutes in telling him what is wrong with it. This, of course, is the democratic process at its best. I am also delighted that the Indians have shown such a high sense of understanding of our political future by giving such great support to this party and so little support to members of the C.C.F. group in the election campaign.

It has been suggested that this bill and the similar bill which has been put forward to provide a right to a very fine group of our citizens constitute a step towards integration and that a privilege is being given to this group which has only been enjoyed by them in a few sections of Canada, while it has been refused them in other parts of the country as a result of circumstances which are well known to us.