

*Indian Act*

on his own ground. In the constituency of my friend from Comox-Alberni there is a very remarkable old gentleman whom I should hope some day the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration might have a chance to meet. He is a chief of a tribe of one of the islands off Vancouver island, and now very nearly 90 years of age. He became chief of that tribe at the age of 18 and decided that the condition of his people in the face of new invasion of white people, with their new culture, was such that he had to take very drastic steps to preserve any sort of life for his people and he proceeded almost to force them to adapt themselves to the white man's way of life. He made them tear down their long communal houses and build individual dwellings. He encouraged and aided them and got provincial government help for them to start in the logging business and the fishing business in a commercial way. At the present time the village in which this old chief lives with his people is one of the best kept settlements on the coast of British Columbia, with its own electric light plant and water system and with its own well kept, well painted and well furnished houses. I mention this because this is a sample of what the native people of the coast of British Columbia are capable of doing when given the right encouragement and the right help.

Among Indians now in my part of the country there is a growing demand for decent educational opportunities. They feel—and, I think, quite rightly—that former governments in Canada rather sold them down the river in the easy way in which they allotted the various Indian tribes to the various religious denominations and told these churches to go ahead and educate them in their own way and the best way they could—and it was a very bad way in which they did it. The Indians now are beginning to revolt against that idea. I was particularly pleased two years ago when I heard the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration announce the policy of his department to encourage native Indian children to go to existing public schools wherever possible and, where not possible, to build for them secular schools under the Indian affairs branch.

I take a certain pride in the fact that for a number of years I was a member of the school board on Vancouver island which was one of the first school boards, if not the first, in British Columbia to admit Indian children to the schools without any question whatever. The results of that policy were completely evident in a few years because from that school have gone several young Indians, not only through high school but on to the University of British Columbia.

[Mr. Cameron (Nanaimo).]

So that is one of our first matters, to ensure that they have proper educational facilities.

I am always very impatient when I hear people say, "You cannot educate Indians" or "You can educate them to about the age of ten, and that's all." Such people reveal complete and total ignorance of the capacity of these people. I believe that we should regard this problem of assimilating the Indian population into our own society, not only from their point of view but from our own point of view too, because I am convinced that these people have a great deal to contribute to the culture of Canada. Anyone who has seen the paintings of George Klutesi and Judith Phyllis Morgan, both of them native coast Indians, will realize that these people have a tremendous talent and gift for the visual arts.

Recently, of course, they also won considerable fame on Vancouver island by the production of an Indian opera which was based on their old folklore and on their old dances. I have often regretted that they were not able to raise the funds that they had hoped to raise to send that company on tour throughout Canada. I think it would have been very helpful to other Indians in other parts of Canada to have seen what it is possible for the native population to accomplish.

This afternoon the hon. member for Yukon spoke of the liquor question in connection with the Indian population. I want to endorse what he said in that regard. We have a great many strange myths and folklores that hang over our minds. One of these myths is that Indians, as soon as they have a drink of beer, become wild, unmanageable savages who will slit every white person's throat. Admittedly there are many Indians who become quite unruly when they are drinking,—and I have seen them—just as unruly as Scotsmen, Irishmen, Swedes, French-Canadians or any other ethnic group you like to mention, and no more so. On the other hand, there are plenty of Indians who take it in moderation. There are even some of them who are not particularly interested in it at all. But certainly, if we are going to hope to have these people assume their rightful position in our society, they must be allowed to run the risks of modern civilization as well as to have the privileges and the advantages. One of the risks of modern civilization is the problem of learning how to handle alcoholic beverages. I therefore hope that, among other things, the government will take steps towards changing the status of Indians in that regard.

A few days ago when I was speaking to my constituent of whom mention has been made several times here today—I refer to Dr. Kelly