

Technically, of course, the Canadian Indians were already citizens of Canada.

But they are citizens with a difference.

The Indians have privileges which other Canadians do not have, and other citizens have privileges and responsibilities which are not shared by the Indians.

No sensible person wants to change that situation by any form of pressure or coercion.

But, since the Department of Citizenship and Immigration was established in 1950, we have been trying to make our common Canadian citizenship so much more attractive to the Indians than their special status that they will be encouraged to seek enfranchisement.

I think perhaps I should pause here to explain just what the enfranchisement of an Indian means, because I know there are many well-informed people who are somewhat confused by the term.

Enfranchisement does not mean just giving the vote to Indians.

It means changing their legal status from the status of Indians under the Indian Act to the status of ordinary citizens in all respects.

Under the present Indian Act, it is possible for an Indian to retain his status as an Indian and to secure the vote in Federal elections.

It is also open to him to apply for full enfranchisement, and when he does so the Superintendent General has the responsibility of deciding whether that particular Indian is sufficiently advanced to look after himself and his family without the protection and the assistance afforded under the Indian Act.

In the six years since the Department of Citizenship and Immigration was established, well over 4,000 Indians have been enfranchised, either as individuals or as family groups.

There is also provision in the Indian Act for the enfranchisement of whole Bands of Indians.

Up to now, no band has been enfranchised as such, but at the present time applications for enfranchisement from two complete Bands, the Metlakatla Band in British Columbia and the Michel Band in Alberta are receiving active consideration.

Indeed I do not believe that any Canadian should be fully satisfied with our Indian policy until the day comes when all the Indians from coast to coast and from the American border to the Arctic have been integrated with the rest of the population and the Indian Affairs Branch and the office I now hold become merely a part of our history.

But enfranchisement cannot be forced.