

Canada Elections Act

increasing because over the years provincial governments have been moving slowly toward giving these people the right to vote.

There is a third group, formerly the largest of the three but now diminishing, who say that they are not interested one way or the other in whether or not they get the right to vote. They are not too interested in voting. I submit that every member of the house will agree that a great number of non-Indian people in Canada fall into that same category. They are not the least bit concerned about participating in public affairs or voting and are not too interested in what the government is doing.

I submit that the proposed legislation will deal with each one of these groups. With respect to those Indians who do not want to participate in voting the bill deals with them because they will be in the same position as anyone else eligible to vote in Canada today. If the person does not want to vote that is entirely up to him. He does not have to vote. The bill does not force the native Indians to cast a ballot. It does not even force them to be registered or anything of that kind. Therefore I submit that the objections of that group are met.

As to the second increasing group, which various provincial governments have recognized and more will in the future, the group of Indians who want the right to vote and have their say in our parliamentary affairs, the provisions of the bill will meet the wishes of these Indians also. It will give them the right to vote without detracting from what few hereditary or treaty rights they have at the moment.

With respect to the third group, those who are not concerned one way or the other, I submit that the bill meets their wishes too because they do not have to vote if they do not want to. They will be in the same position as other citizens of Canada who are not Indians.

I would urge strongly that the house consider the bill in a favourable light. I am not suggesting that the debate be curtailed. I realize that there are only 30 or 35 minutes left, but in view of the fact that we have a standing committee on privileges and elections and there is every possibility that the elections act will be referred to that committee for study, I suggest to hon. members that the bill should be given speedy second reading and immediately thereafter be referred to the standing committee on privileges and elections so that the subject matter may be dealt with and considered by that committee. Failing that, if the house is not desirous of expressing an opinion one way or another on this matter, I would be more than pleased if

[Mr. Howard.]

any hon. member would like to move that the bill be not read a second time but that the subject matter be referred to the standing committee on privileges and elections.

Apart from the hope that the bill will receive second reading and become part of the statutes of Canada, my sole desire is that the matter be studied carefully in the standing committee on privileges and elections where representatives of the native Indian people, provincial governments and any other interested individuals or groups can present their ideas with respect to this matter.

A great many other things could probably be said but I should like to leave the matter with that brief outline of my thoughts on it and my reference to the three groups into which these native Indians fall from the point of view of giving them the right to vote under the bill. I would urge that the debate not be continued until six o'clock but that the bill itself or the subject matter be referred to the standing committee on privileges and elections.

(Translation):

Mr. L. J. Pigeon (Joliette-L'Assomption-Montcalm): Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this bill is to provide that Indians, as defined in the Indian Act, shall be entitled to vote at federal elections without loss of any of their hereditary, treaty, aboriginal or other similar rights.

This bill would help Canadianize the Indians.

The Conservative government's policy is to grant Indians the full status of Canadian citizens, and by way of example, I need hardly refer to the appointment to the Senate by the Prime Minister of Canada (Mr. Diefenbaker) of the Hon. James Gladstone, the first Canadian Indian to sit in the parliament of Canada. Mr. Speaker, this action on the part of the Prime Minister proves his sympathy for the Indians, the first citizens of our country.

Legally, and sociologically also, our compatriots of Indian origin fall into two separate groups: the Indians recognized as such by the federal administration, and those who would be called elsewhere "detrilled" Indians.

The difference between the two groups does not lie primarily on how much pure Indian blood flows in their veins or in cultural tradition but depends on whether or not they have been registered on the federal record of Indians. That record was established a few years ago only, under the new Indian Act of 1951. It would be too long, Mr. Speaker, to refer or explain the provisions of the act. It must be taken for granted that only the