

Canada Elections Act

in Yukon which had not had the franchise until the byelection in that riding on December 16 last. They did not know what went on here. They did not know what our purpose was. Yet because all Indian people in Yukon are entitled to vote, certainly the people of Old Crow should not have been left out. That is the basis on which we proceeded. While I am sure these people appreciated the privilege of becoming, in a sense, first-class citizens, in common with other Canadians, they still wonder.

If I may I should like to refer to some literature I have received in the mail within the last day or two. Perhaps other hon. members have received the same literature. I should like to direct hon. members' attention to two very fine publications concerning this whole problem of Indian acculturation prepared by the Oblate Fathers in Canada. One from which I should like to quote is entitled "Residential Education for Indian Acculturation". In keeping with the hon. member's remarks concerning the first step in this direction, the publication on page 47, where it is discussing American acculturation, sets forth the following:

What was taken away from the American Indians was not only the land, but a way of life which for centuries, had met their needs and satisfied their wants. No wonder that the Indian hearts were broken for generation after generation. As John Collier notes, "their community and family life was completely disrupted, their traditions were suppressed, in a word, everything that penetrates and affects the deepest spiritual strata of Indian culture".

If the house will bear with me, I should like to read one other quotation from this fine work:

Oppression and bullying to which the Indians have been subjected have wrecked their personalities and characters. This tragic story of Indian community life was summed up in the following way by an old chief of the Digger Indians from California: "In the beginning, God gave to every people a cup, a cup of clay, and from this cup they drank their life. They all dipped in the water, but their cups were different. Our cup is broken now. It has passed away."

This is from a people whose problems, I suggest, are quite similar to the problems of the Indian people here.

I therefore say that the passage of this bill is not a means of accomplishing the objective which is being attempted by the hon. member for Skeena and his group. The passage of this bill is not by any stretch of the imagination even the minutest step towards accomplishing any cultural, educational or other advancement of the Indian people. That problem is much more deep-rooted than that and it will not be solved by a simple amendment which will allow the Indian people to vote.

Before I conclude my remarks on the bill I might just mention that it was indeed gratifying to me—and I say this because of my sympathy with the objective which is intended to be accomplished by the hon. member for Skeena who introduced the bill—that the Indian people of Canada have at least now, for the first time in history, achieved representation in the sense that they now have a voice in the other place. This situation indeed is unique and it sets a precedent which undoubtedly will be carried on for all time to come.

With these few suggestions and these observations concerning the technical defects of the bill as it has been presented, I conclude my remarks. However, before I sit down I wish to re-emphasize that I for one am in full sympathy with the right of the Indian people to vote. I think it is their right to vote and that they should have it. I am sorry that I cannot agree with the hon. member for Skeena. I do not think that his proposed bill accomplishes that objective because it runs directly contra to circumstances which can arise and raise a conflict with the provisions of the present Indian Act. Certainly further amendments would have to be made to that act in order to cover all situations. It would be my recommendation that a study be made along that line.

Mr. D. M. Fisher (Port Arthur): I must object, Mr. Speaker, to what I think is rather specious reasoning on the part of the hon. member who just spoke. If the appointment of an Indian senator is giving the Indians some form of representation, is it not logical, with the relative powers of this place and the other place, that they should be given a chance to speak in this forum through their electoral vote? It seems fairly obvious to me.

The other point I wished to make was with respect to the generalization in his observations on the Yukon to the effect that the cultural advance spoken of by the hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Howard) did not apply. One can generalize like that when speaking for the Yukon if one happens to come from there, but I would like to point out, as a member from another part of our country which has a considerable number of Indians, that we have seen a very great deal of interest on the part of Indians in the question of voting. I would just like to conclude by giving a few figures which might appeal to the self-interest of the gentleman in the government party.

Mr. Nielsen: Would the hon. member permit me to make an explanation apropos of his remarks?