

Indian Act

Mr. VALLANCE: That is the thing we are trying to prevent. Why should the minister be given that power?

Mr. MURPHY: For the reasons I endeavoured to give to the committee a few minutes ago, when I pointed out why this amendment is being asked for; simply because there are many Indians in Canada to-day who should accept full responsibility of citizenship, and are not doing so because of the privileges they enjoy by being classed as Indians.

Mr. VALLANCE: Then may I suggest, in order to take care of that individual, why can we not state in the act that when an Indian reaches a certain position he then must automatically become enfranchised?

Mr. MURPHY: That is exactly what this board is provided to determine.

Mr. VALLANCE: This board may go into the Poundmaker reserve and take twenty or thirty or fifty Indians or take none at all. They can pick whom they like. You have a board consisting of two men who are officials of the department with the possibility, as my hon. friend from Vancouver Centre (Mr. Mackenzie) says, of three appointed by the department, to force this on the Indian.

Mr. MURPHY: Not three members from the department.

Mr. VALLANCE: No, but you are going to have two, and another nominated by the department if the band does not choose one. I have had so much to do with the Indians and the problems facing the Indians in the disposition of the moneys that the Indian rightly thinks belong to him that I cannot conceive of the Indians as I know them even suggesting to the minister that this amendment be placed in the act.

Mr. McGIBBON: I think probably some of us have a different viewpoint.

Mr. VALLANCE: You have different Indians, that is the trouble.

Mr. McGIBBON: That is just what I was going to say. The Indians in my riding I think are probably ninety-nine per cent capable of conducting their business or exercising the franchise or anything else that the ordinary citizen of the community is capable of doing. I have some reason to believe, from conversation with others, that there are certain bands in the west and on the Pacific coast who have not that high intelligence and activity.

Mr. VALLANCE: No, it is not lack of intelligence, they are just as intelligent as your eastern Indians.

[Mr. Murphy.]

Mr. McGIBBON: I say that that is what I have been informed. But some reference has been made by the ex-Minister of the Interior to the fact that they are wards of the government and have certain privileges. I think you have to go behind that a little. They exercise certain privileges because the government of the day is under certain obligations to them. We took the country from them, and the government pays them moneys in compensation, which moneys are doled out to the Indian at about \$5 a month, and in times like these they think it is not sufficient, and it is not. A family of five gets \$5 a month from the government, and we must remember that in times like these they are not given relief. They are wards of the Dominion government, and they are not given relief by the municipalities. As I endeavoured to point out the other day they are handicapped even when they go into the labour market. A year ago, when we were furnishing relief in the form of labour, the Indians could not get work because they are wards of the nation, and the other people in the community thought the Dominion government should look after them.

Mr. VALLANCE: Will this amendment to the act make it any easier for the Indians?

Mr. McGIBBON: I think so. I can only speak for my own district, but I think you will find that all the Indians in the constituency I represent will apply for enfranchisement right away.

Mr. NEILL: Why have they not done so before now?

Mr. McGIBBON: Perhaps it is a matter of education; perhaps they did not know they were entitled to do so. Really I cannot see any objection to the amendment. I think there should be an intelligence test, and I believe it should apply to others than Indians.

Mr. POWER: To members of parliament.

Mr. McGIBBON: Perhaps. The colour line should not be the line of distinction; that is my point. There should be an intelligence test, and if an Indian is sufficiently capable and intelligent why should he not be given the right to vote and why should he not be liable for any debts he may contract? Why not give him the full power of citizenship, as the Minister of Justice said; why not allow him to sell and buy things, even liquor if he wants it? I think this legislation is along the right line, and I believe it should pass.

Mr. VALLANCE: Is this another case of the iron heel?