

Canada Elections Act

the council of the reservation. In fact, the Indians are relieved of only certain taxation. Many people say that Indians do not pay taxes at all. That is not true. It is only while they are working on the reservation that they are not subject to land taxes. When they work off the reservation they pay the same taxes as any other person does. They pay the gasoline tax; they pay income tax on money earned off the reservation. Many of them are very highly skilled workmen and make very good wages in the steel construction industry.

As I said on many previous occasions in the house, I have fought for the Indians to have the right to vote. I agree with that if we can only educate them to use their franchise. That can be brought about only if they are assured, and we keep on assuring them, that they will not lose any of their privileges in doing so.

I do not think any people in Canada are more entitled to vote than the Indians. There have been many difficulties but they are trying to do the best they can to become citizens of the country. Although they feel they have been wronged in many ways, they take a great share in the activities of the community about them. They have a very good agricultural society and fair, a wonderful fairgrounds and a very nice building which they use as a community hall. Certainly in most cases they live as we do, so I think it is perfectly justifiable that they should be given the franchise.

They maintain their arts and crafts. They have a school system on the reservation that is second to none in any municipality in Canada. They have a school bus system and the children there have advantages that many children throughout the rest of Canada do not enjoy. They attend high schools in the surrounding districts, either at Brantford or Hagersville. Many of these Indians are professional people, doctors, lawyers, dentists and so on. I have no hesitation in supporting the bill and I say again that in my opinion the Indians should be given the vote.

Right Hon. J. G. Gardiner (Melville): Mr. Speaker, in listening to the discussion on the bill I am reminded of a number of facts which I think might be brought to the attention of the house. It has already been suggested by the first speaker, the hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Howard), that certain Indians have the vote now in so far as federal elections are concerned and others in different provinces have the vote provincially.

The one matter that brings me to my feet at the moment is the fact that the last time

I took part in a debate on this subject followed an occasion when my own election had been protested. I only had a majority of 28 when we got through making the count and involved in that 28 were the votes of the wives of Indians who had served overseas. At that time the wives of Indians who had served overseas did not have the right to vote, but I think a good number of them had been going to the polls right across the country and certainly in our area.

May I say before going further that all or part of at least six Indian reservations are within my constituency. They are found along the Qu'Appelle river and in other sections and one or two of them are divided into what might be called two or three reserves. We have a considerable number of them. On this particular occasion the wives of these returned men came to the polls along with their husbands and as no one at the booths thought it the proper thing to do to protest they all voted. It stands to reason that they did not all vote for me. They probably cast as many votes for one candidate as another or at least split their votes.

When it came to the matter of counting the votes in connection with the protest no party would raise that question. They simply said that the votes had been polled and they were not going to protest the right of these people to vote. As a result, on the first occasion that it became possible to do so I rose in the house and proposed that the wives of all returned men be given the right to vote in view of the fact that the officials at the polls, no matter who they were or to what party they belonged, would not protest their right to vote when they came to the polls with their husbands who had served overseas. I proposed that we should follow what had been the practice and make it the law and it was made the law at that time.

I want to follow what has been said by the previous speaker in referring to the well known reserve in his constituency from which many very well educated Canadians have come over a long period of time. I remember when I was a boy the head of the foresters' lodge used to go throughout the province of Ontario speaking and everyone who belonged to the Independent Order of Foresters was very proud of the fact that the head of their order, Oronhyatekha, was a full blooded Indian. He was one of the finest speakers in the province of Ontario in those days.

As I said, in my own constituency there are five or six reserves partly or wholly within the constituency. Public meetings