

*Canada Elections Act*

will be afforded thoroughly to discuss and study this particular question.

The right to vote of our native Indian population, as I have said on other occasions, is to me one of the most important steps that we can take to afford the Indian people the opportunity of playing the fullest possible role that they can in Canadian affairs and in our society. There are a number of provinces in Canada which give the native Indian people the right to vote in provincial elections. The province from which I come, namely British Columbia, has had such a provision since 1949. There are other provinces, namely Ontario, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and New Brunswick, which also give their native Indian people the right to vote in provincial elections.

I know that there is some fear—completely unfounded, I may say—in the minds of native Indian people that by voting in elections they will lose some of their treaty rights, some of their hereditary rights or aboriginal rights. In its amendment this bill seeks to protect those rights and not to interfere with them if the native Indian person either registers to vote or in fact votes at a dominion election. I may say that the experience we had in British Columbia prior to 1949 indicated that these same fears and these same misunderstandings existed in the minds of the native Indian people in British Columbia. In the provincial election of 1949, which was the first year they were given the right to vote there, they were very reluctant to participate in voting for what they classified as the white man's government. I would say that the past experience they have had with the activities of those of us in years past who are not Indians indicated that there was some basis for the fears that they had. They felt that by voting or participating in elections they would lose some of the things, small as they are, that are in their favour.

But, following the election of 1949, they discovered that this was not so; that they lost none of the rights that they had, few as they might be. One of the major contributing factors to overcoming this misunderstanding and this fear which existed in their minds was the fact that in the 1949 provincial election one of their people, namely Mr. Frank Calder, was elected under the C.C.F. banner in Atlin, a constituency in northern British Columbia. That, coupled with the fact that those who did vote did not lose anything led the Indian people to believe that they had nothing to lose and everything to gain by participating in voting.

Following that we found in British Columbia that because these people, our first

citizens in the country, were voters, candidates and political parties paid more attention to the problems, to the needs, to the desires and the rights of the native Indian people for no other reason than the political one, namely that here was a group of voters and therefore we should pay attention; we should understand their problems and try to deal with them. Accordingly, since 1949 there has been by political parties, by the governments of British Columbia, by individual candidates and by the population as a whole more and more an understanding of the problems of our native Indian people and more opportunity to deal effectively with them. I submit that the same thing is true in Ontario where, following the report of a legislative committee in that province, native Indian people were given the right to vote. The same needs existed, but there is now more desire on the part of the government, on the part of political parties, on the part of candidates, to deal with the problems of Indians and to deal with them at least effectively and systematically.

The same thing will be true throughout the dominion if we will only undertake to give them what is justly theirs, the opportunity to vote in dominion elections. I do not wish to reflect on any member of the house but I am sure that once that takes place every member of the house, if he has not already done so, will undertake to pay more attention to and study the problems of the native Indian people and we will then be able to legislate effectively on their behalf for the betterment of conditions under which they live and for their advancement so that they will have the opportunity to play the fullest possible role they can in our society.

I should like to refer for a moment to the objections we hear as to why it is not possible to give these people the right that is justly theirs of voting in dominion elections. I believe these objections have relation to three categories of Indians. First, there is a group of Indians who say that they want nothing to do with the white man's government, that they have their own government and recognize no other and that they do not want the opportunity to vote or even to be placed on the voters' list. They want to have absolutely nothing to do with the House of Commons or with participation in electing governments or members of parliament.

There is a second group who say they would like to be able to vote but do not want to lose what few treaty rights they have at the moment. This group has been