



CANADA
DEPUTY MINISTER
OF
CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

345099

OTTAWA, June 13, 1960.

MEMORANDUM TO MR. H.B.M. BEST

In accordance with your verbal suggestion, we are enclosing a draft of material that could be included in a reply to the letter of May 31st to the Prime Minister from a member of the British Columbia Progressive Conservative Association.


H. M. Jones,
Acting Deputy Minister.

Prior to the passing of the recent legislation Indians living off reserves were entitled to vote at federal elections on the same basis as non-Indians. However, those living on reserves could only secure the right to vote if they signed a waiver of the exemption from taxation of their personal property on reserves to which they are entitled under Section 86 of the Indian Act. In introducing the legislation to give all Indians the right to vote at federal elections on the same basis as non-Indians the Government was influenced by three factors, the first, that the existing law had found little acceptance among the Indians, the second, that it had frequently been described by them as discriminatory, and third, that more and more frequently in recent years Indians and Indian organizations had made known to the Government their desire to receive the federal franchise free from the existing restrictions.

There was no intention that the legislation should in any way affect the treaty or other rights of the Indians nor does it do so. I made this quite plain when announcing this proposed legislation to the House of Commons and I hope it will be helpful to you and to the Indians of your area if I repeat the assurance given at that time, namely, that existing rights and treaties traditional or otherwise possessed by the Indians will not in any way be abrogated or diminished in consequence of their having the right to vote.

I am concerned that the Indians of your area should understand that far from taking away existing rights from them, Parliament's intention in passing the legislation was to confer an additional right on them, the right to vote without restrictions. It would be most helpful if in explaining the matter you would point out that this legislation does not compel any Indian to vote. It merely extends to him the right to decide whether he will vote or refrain from voting and his rights will not be jeopardized regardless of the course of action he follows.