

just the kind of circumstances which have governed our actions quite as much as having our citizens appreciate his difficulties. That is the sort of approach and attitude which permits us to get together, and I should be surprised if, dealing with this question in that spirit, we could not work out a thoroughly satisfactory solution.

Interpretation of 1921 Resolution.

There is one point I ought to make quite clear, and that is the extent to which my hands are tied in dealing with this question. The resolution which was passed at this Conference two years ago in the minds of some present committed the Dominions to giving the franchise to the Indians. It was, they allege, in the nature of a general commitment. It is all-important that we should know whether that was the intention of the resolution or not. I think in the first place we should be very careful of resolutions that are introduced or passed, and I think, when once they are passed, we should do our utmost to see that any hopes to which they may give rise are not destroyed. In the House of Commons I asked my predecessor, Mr. Meighen, what his interpretation was of the resolution of 1921. I have before me the *Hansard* of the 29th June of this year, which contains the record, and with the permission of the Conference I shall read from it:—

“MR. MACKENZIE KING: May I ask my right honourable friend one question? The resolution of the Conference, or at least one clause of it, is as follows: ‘The Conference accordingly is of the opinion that in the interests of the solidarity of the British Commonwealth it is desirable that the rights of such Indians to citizenship should be recognized.’ The honourable member for George Etienne Cartier, Mr. Jacobs, has said that these words imply an undertaking on the part of this Parliament—or, rather, on the part of Canada—to see that the federal franchise is granted to the Indians in British Columbia. Is that correct or not?”

“MR. MEIGHEN: The words are English and the words are simple. I understand them fully, and if the Prime Minister does not I must leave him just where he is.

“MR. MACKENZIE KING: I think the House is entitled to an answer from my right honourable friend. He represented this country at the Imperial Conference. He knows better than any one else what interpretation he placed on these words. I ask him, seeing that he represented Canada at the Imperial Conference when that resolution was passed, whether he understood that Canada was giving an undertaking to the Indians in British Columbia to the effect that they should be entitled to the franchise.

“MR. MEIGHEN: No human being understood anything of the sort. The words are very plain and there is no misunderstanding them.”

I should be taken very seriously to task if, when I returned to Canada, it could be said that I had placed an interpretation on that resolution which the Prime Minister of Canada, who was present at the time it was passed, was unwilling to have placed upon it. I think Mr. Meighen has taken his attitude from the words “It is desirable that the rights of such Indians to citizenship should be recognized.” If that means we would all like to see it done, that we hope it may be done, I think I can agree with him in this expression of such a wish. On the other hand, as to its constituting an actual pledge, I am bound to take the interpretation which Mr. Meighen himself gives and places upon it. I should perhaps say that I presented that point of view to Mr. Sastri when he was in Canada, and my recollection is that Mr. Sastri did not maintain that the resolution constituted a pledge which obliged the Federal Government to give the franchise to resident Indians, but rather that it expressed what the Conference hoped would be done by the different Dominions as opportunity offered.

Mr. Sastri's Visit.

May I say just a word in regard to Mr. Sastri's visit? We were pleased to welcome Mr. Sastri to Canada, and we sought to give him the fullest opportunity to speak publicly wherever he wished to do so in the Dominion, to confer with any persons whom he might wish to meet, and we were glad to have him in conference with us in the Cabinet so that we could explain very fully all the considerations of which we had to take account. I think Mr. Sastri appreciated our situation the better in view of having seen conditions for himself and having talked with many persons in different parts of the Dominion.

Matter will be considered when Franchise Law revised.

I cannot do better, in setting forth our Government's attitude, than to read to the Conference and place on record the letter I wrote to Mr. Sastri just as he was leaving our Dominion. It is dated Ottawa, the 5th September, 1922, and is as follows:—

“The Right Hon. V. Srinivasa Sastri, Chateau Laurier, Ottawa.

“DEAR MR. SASTRI,—

“In reply to the representations made by you at the interview with my colleagues and myself on Friday of last week, and which were the subject of further conference between us yesterday, I desire to assure you that, at the earliest favourable moment, the Government will be pleased to invite the consideration of Parliament to your request that Natives of India resident in Canada be granted a Dominion parliamentary franchise on terms and conditions identical with those which govern the exercise of that right by Canadian citizens generally. The subject is necessarily one which Parliament alone can determine. It will be submitted to Parliament for consideration when the franchise law is under revision.

“In conveying to the Government of India an expression of the attitude of the Government of Canada in this matter, we hope that you will not fail to make it clear that at the present time, in eight of the nine provinces of which our Dominion is composed, the federal franchise is granted to Natives of India resident in Canada, on terms which are identical with those applicable generally to Canadian citizens.

“Yours sincerely,
“W. L. MACKENZIE KING.”