

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA.**Canada's Attitude of Good Will.**

Mr. Mackenzie King: I would like to say that I think Canada fully appreciates the magnitude and seriousness of the problem with which the Government of India and the Government of Britain are confronted in dealing with any question affecting the status of Indians, and that our attitude from the beginning has been, and at present is, one of being exceedingly anxious to be helpful in the solution of any problem that may arise. His Highness the Maharajah, in speaking last week, referred to the manner in which we had recently taken up by conference some questions respecting immigration with Japan, and he said that, in his opinion, any of these questions of status and political rights respecting resident Indians could be best settled by adopting a similar method. He referred particularly to an attitude of good will being more important than anything else in the solution of these difficult questions. I think the Maharajah is entirely right. Attitude in these matters is all-important. So far as the Canadian attitude is concerned, it gives me pleasure to say that we are most anxious to deal with this whole question in a spirit of mutual understanding and good will.

Recent History of Indian Immigration Question.

I have in my hand a report* that I made to the Government of Canada in 1908. It relates to immigration to Canada from the Orient, and immigration from India in particular. It was the result of a visit which, at the instance of the Government of the day in Canada, I paid to England to confer with the Secretary of State for India in regard to the question of immigration from India to Canada. If I may be permitted, I would like to read the concluding paragraph of this report, because it sets out the attitude at that time—fifteen years ago—which we took towards questions affecting our fellow British citizens from India:—

“Nothing could be more unfortunate or misleading than that the impression should go forth that Canada, in seeking to regulate a matter of domestic concern, is not deeply sensible of the obligations which citizenship within the Empire entails. It is a recognition of this obligation which has caused her to adopt a course which, by removing the possibilities of injustice and friction, is best calculated to strengthen the bonds of association with the several parts, and to promote the greater harmony of the whole. In this, as was to be expected, Canada has had not only the sympathy and understanding, but the hearty co-operation of the authorities in Great Britain and India as well.”

I should say, perhaps, that, after conferring with the Secretary of State for India in London at that time in regard to this question, I subsequently, at the instance of the Canadian Government, went to India to take up with the authorities there the question of the migration of Indians to Canada, with a view of seeing whether we could not work out a solution which would avoid anything in the nature of legislation which might be misunderstood or regarded as invidious in India, and I am happy to say that we were able, as a result of conferences, to come to an understanding between the two Governments which was as satisfactory to the Government of India as it was to the Government of Canada. If it was possible to do that in regard to the difficult question of immigration, I think it ought to be possible for us similarly to effect a satisfactory solution with respect to any of these other questions that may arise, and it is from that point of view that I hope my colleagues from India will feel that the Canadian Government is approaching this particular subject.

Position of Indians domiciled in Canada.

Lord Peel in his remarks said, I think, very rightly, that what the Indians felt more than anything else was that the disabilities under which their countrymen live appear as a brand of social inferiority. The extent to which that is true depends very largely upon the nature of the disabilities and the circumstances which account for any that may exist.

No Disabilities in Eight Provinces ; some Political Disability in One.

May I say at once in regard to Canada that in eight of the provinces out of nine which comprise the Dominion I am not aware of any legal or political disability under which any Indian resident in Canada suffers, and with respect to the ninth province I am not aware of any legal disability of any kind ; I am only aware of a political disability in the matter of the exercise of the franchise in that one province, and that not as regards all Indians, because, as respects all provinces, including British Columbia, the one exception I have mentioned, the Federal law relating to the franchise sets it down that any Indian who served with His Majesty's Forces—Military, Naval, or Air—is entitled to the franchise. I mention this as evidence of the fact that our citizens appreciate the services that India has rendered the Empire and desire to acknowledge them wherever possible.

History of Canadian Franchise.

May I say a word as to the way our franchise has been developed ? The Dominion is the result of the bringing together of a number of provinces, and the party to which I belong—the Liberal party in Canada—has taken a position that, wherever it was possible to recognize the wishes of a province in matters pertaining to the franchise, regard to such should be had. For that reason our Federal Franchise Act for many years recognized for Federal purposes only the franchise prevailing in the province. We had not a separate franchise for the Dominion. We took, for the Dominion, the provincial franchise as it existed, with the result that in some provinces some classes had the right to vote who had not the right to vote in others—not on account of race, but owing solely to the fact that for their own reasons certain of the provinces had thought it well to limit the franchise in certain particulars. The late Government, which represented an opposite view in some particulars, changed

* See Canadian Sessional Paper No. 36A of 1908.