

Northwest Territories Act

May I say one more thing, Mr. Chairman. Reference has been made to the activities of the Carrothers commission. I have been interested in reading press reports concerning the work of the commission. They have indicated that the members of the commission in their travels throughout the Northwest Territories have not been receiving representations so much with respect to the structure of government in the north but rather complaints from individual citizens who feel that they have not been adequately represented in the legislative council of the territorial government. Indeed, it seemed to me that the commission members had assumed the role of travelling ombudsmen. This fact alone I think should persuade the government that the time has come to recognize this strong demand, a demand that has increased very much in recent years, for genuine, democratic, representative government.

We shall vote on the amendment put forward by the hon. member for Yukon. I trust that all members of the house who are concerned with advancing the principle of democratic government will be persuaded to vote in favour of the amendment.

Mr. Baldwin: Mr. Chairman, may I make some brief comments before the committee expresses its view on this issue. I listened with interest to the hon. member for Skeena posing a question to the minister. If the minister had felt able to rise and say definitely and unequivocally that within a specified period of time legislation providing completely and without any equivocation for absolute self-government would be introduced and that the council would be composed entirely of elected members, I would have been inclined to accept that.

I think the minister has conceived a genuine affection for the north. Anybody who has had anything to do with this extraordinary and unique country has felt its pull and tug. I know that the hon. member for Brandon-Souris, the hon. member for Qu'Appelle and the hon. member for Calgary North, all of whom at some time have held the portfolio respecting the territories, have felt this pull and tug. I think that this fact brings a degree of non-partisanship and objectivity to this debate. This is what the hon. member for Yukon said and I am sure it is in the mind of the hon. member for Northwest Territories just as it is in my own mind.

Because the minister could not say what I hoped he would say, I am apprehensive about

the delay which may take place. In our experience some of the minister's colleagues, who possibly do not have the same objectivity in this and in other matters, have caused delays to take place. Our experience has been that the period between the creative gestation, when a rather weak and watery gleam appears in the eye of one of his colleagues, and the faltering legislation that appears on the floor of the house is very long indeed. The period of gestation might be three, four or even five years.

Mr. Nielsen: It is the old story.

Mr. Baldwin: For this reason I cannot accept as valid the explanation that this matter should await the report of the Carrothers commission.

I should say also, as I think has been said by the hon. members for Yukon and Skeena, that the principle of representative self-government is so firmly and permanently embedded in our philosophical beliefs about government that we cannot question it. As I see it, a vote at this time against the amendment proposed by the hon. member for Yukon will constitute in effect an expression of opinion by the person casting that vote that he does not feel there should be the right of self-government. In effect it would be a vote against the kind of government we have in this country and which I hope we will continue to have for many years.

I do not know the terms of reference of the Carrothers commission. I admit to being in default there. However, I cannot conceive of their being any set of circumstances which would persuade me, and I hope most members of this house, to accept a report containing a provision, recommendation or suggestion that there should not be completely representative self-government. Any such recommendation ought to be divorced from the terms of reference and from the view which the government will adopt.

● (12:40 p.m.)

I cannot accept not having the report as a valid reason for not proceeding at this time and I am therefore impelled to support the amendment put forward by the hon. member for Yukon. I ask all hon. members to bear in mind in their consideration of this question the principle of completely democratic self-government. A vote against this amendment is a vote against this principle.

Mr. Laing: Before we proceed to the vote I should like to correct certain statements which have been made. I want to tell the