

operating at Pine Point. We have the tungsten mines near the Yukon-Northwest Territories border. We have Imperial Oil, which has been operating for many years at Norman Wells. We have gas being syphoned out of the ground at Pointed Mountain. We have other mines near the Great Bear Lake area. We have all kind of natural resources, renewable and non-renewable. We have the fishing and fur industries. Our people pay income tax; some pay business taxes. I am quite convinced that we are capable of paying our own way.

● (1740)

I do not think one can put a price tag on democracy and say that you can have democracy only if you have the cash with which to pay for it. I think democracy is a basic human right which most Canadians enjoy. I do not see why we should tolerate the continuance of a colonial-type government in the north. After all, the north is one of the most important parts of Canada. In future many important decisions will need to be made about the north, decisions about which northern peoples should have the most to say.

I do not say we should instal in the north a carbon copy of any provincial government. That point was raised earlier and ought to be debated further. The question ought to be considered in northern terms and decided by northern people, whose wishes ought to be respected.

I will not take any more of the time of the House. This is an important motion and I do not wish to talk it out. I suggest that we put the motion to a vote. I conclude my remarks in the hope that this extremely important motion will be put to a vote now.

Mr. Joseph-Philippe Guay (St. Boniface): Mr. Speaker, I am happy for this opportunity to rise and talk on the motion presently before the House. Indeed it is my view that the motion, first introduced in 1974 by the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen), presents a special interest since it deals with a question debated at length both in the north and in this House over a number of years.

While reading over the debates of February 3, 1975, when the hon. gentleman introduced this motion requesting the application of principles of constitutional and democratic government in the two territories, I noted that the hon. member referred to some discussions which had previously taken place during the deliberations of the Standing Committee on Indian Affairs and Northern Development which on that occasion took place in Whitehorse. In particular the hon. member for Yukon quoted the hon. member for Sherbrooke (Mr. Pelletier). I raise this point as it concerns what the hon. member for Northwest Territories (Mr. Firth) said a few moments ago.

As I said, the hon. member for Yukon quoted the words of the hon. member for Sherbrooke, who had expressed sympathy for northern residents' aspirations. The hon. member went on to remind the House that a standing committee motion calling for territorial government reform and the introduction of appropriate amendments to the Yukon Act had been adopted unanimously.

Mr. Nielsen: By the committee.

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): Mr. Speaker, I see no contradiction in what the hon. member for Yukon says. He tried

The Territories

to present a certain matter as constituting a difference of opinion between members of the Liberal caucus and the government.

In my opinion the hon. member's motion calls on the federal government to commit itself to a policy which is already being implemented, and which began to be implemented some years ago.

Mr. Nielsen: Rubbish!

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): In my view the fact that the standing committee motion was adopted unanimously confirms that the present government's policy has received the agreement of all parties. However, although we may all agree on the principle of constitutional development for the two territories, we may differ on the methods of arriving at the same objective.

While the hon. member for Yukon is in a hurry and appears, at least in theory, to be favouring a rather "go-go" approach leading to a sudden change, not to say a break in the continuity of the evolutionary approach, the present government has opted for a more progressive approach which will permit it to avoid the drawbacks inevitably linked to rapid change. I shall have the opportunity to develop this point later, if time permits.

For the time being I wish to concentrate on the achievements of the government in recent years regarding the constitutional development of territorial government. I said a few moments ago that the government adopted a progressive approach. Because of that the government has been accused of being colonial and paternalistic, for example, by various theorists who dream about great principles but forget about the practical aspects, the vital needs of the population concerned. We must not forget these. On the other hand it is false to say that the progressive approach we have taken has been the equivalent of maintaining the status quo. To suggest that the situation has not changed extensively in the last ten years is unfair.

I remind my colleagues in this House that only ten years ago there was no territorial government of the Northwest Territories as we know it today.

Mr. Firth: There is still no adequate government.

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): At that time the Commissioner was operating from Ottawa, with the assistance of a handful of civil servants. Only in 1967 was he transferred to Yellowknife, when the government acted on the recommendation of the Carrothers Commission which, by the way, saw most of its recommendations put into practice by 1970.

Mr. Nielsen: Who wrote that?

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): The hon. member asks who wrote this. I wrote it since the hon. member spoke. It is easy to follow the hon. member, because he tends to repeat the same thing. At the same time, it is only fair to put the facts straight, to let people know what the government has done and what it intends to do, instead of trying to make some drastic change which would not be to the advantage of the people the hon. member represents.