

Government Orders

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to address Bill C-68 at this very critical stage. I must say that recent results which have occurred in Yukon have perhaps in some respects made the processing of this bill less critical than it was a few months ago.

I want to begin by saying that the legislation capsulized in Bill C-68 amends the Yukon Placer Mining Act and the Yukon Quartz Mining Act. It is to be retroactive to February 13, 1990.

We understand the reasons for this retroactivity. While we normally are concerned about retroactive legislation, perhaps I will take a moment or two to explain the necessity for it in this case.

Before I do, I simply want to say that the amendments we will be looking at regarding these two mining acts will ensure that withdrawn lands, including lands identified as being of interest to Yukon Indians, will not be open for the location of new mining claims. The changes will firmly establish the Crown's right to prohibit disposition of mineral rights on Yukon lands which are required for a purpose that the government believes to be in the public interest. As I say, just to emphasize, those will also be lands under claim by Yukon Indians.

Our first concern was with whether or not it is such comprehensive and broad sweeping legislation that it would be of concern to miners in Yukon. My leader, who represents Yukon has had extensive and intensive consultations with the mining community generally in Yukon and the placer miners specifically regarding this legislation.

I must say that their comfort factor has to do more with the certainty that they have in terms of filing claims in the knowledge that certain lands are excluded and certain other lands are not. That precision is appreciated by the placer miners and the mining community generally. If we have rules that everyone understands, then it is just a matter of getting on and following them.

In the original press release from the minister he stated that he proposes to bring forward these changes to ensure that the mining industry clearly knows which areas are open for staking and exploration and recommends that people intending to stake mining claims in the Yukon should first contact the mining recorders

office to determine the status of the lands in which they are interested.

Again, I think it is fair to say that that particular initiative lends a certain exactness to the process and is appreciated by the miners generally.

I also want to say that consultations with the Yukon territorial government indicates that it also supports this bill for the reasons that I have just stated, as well as others. The Council of Yukon Indians, while generally in support of this legislation, have some concerns. We are aware that it has recommended at least three specific amendments to the legislation that ought to be considered. We will be pursuing those in committee.

Perhaps I should say at this point that while there has been some question as to whether or not we should move expeditiously with this legislation and move through all stages, perhaps even in one day, the feeling is that that ought not occur for two reasons. The first has to do with the information that has now been made public regarding the concerns that the Yukon Indians have regarding the legislation. Obviously, they have to be considered in detail.

Also, our concern that this legislation ought to go to a legislative committee for some examination flows out of a concern that my hon. friend from Skeena has.

• (1040)

In June, 1984 we passed expeditiously a number of amendments to the same legislation, based on the comments of the bureaucracy, which assured us that there were no real problems, that all aspects had been considered and that it was all very straightforward.

Lo and behold, all of us will recall the nightmare experienced by John Turner. I do not mean the Leader of the Liberal Party, but another John Turner who was victimized by an earlier piece of legislation which made revisions to a mining act and with respect to which, again, the member for Skeena had received government assurances at the time of the vote that there would be no outstanding claims.

To simply set aside that possibility from occurring again, we are asking that this matter go to a legislative committee, not for an extensive set of hearings, but at least to provide an opportunity for those people who want to make representations. I assume that representa-