

Yukon and Territorial Lands Acts

Why does the municipal council in Whitehorse and the municipal council in Dawson have greater powers, with respect to the spending of tax money raised by them, than the territorial council? Why is there this great reluctance to permit the members of the territorial council to introduce measures on the spending of tax money which they are expected to raise by the minister's edict? Why should the minister say to the commissioner, "Get the council to increase taxes" but to the council he says, "I am sorry; you cannot have any say in any measure that is introduced to council as to the way in which taxes will be spent". That is the situation. I would have expected to see, if the minister is not merely paying lip service to this business of increasing responsibility for the people in the territories, an amendment along those lines contained in the Yukon Act. It can be expected that such an amendment will be brought forward in the committee.

Again, the minister has attempted to leave the impression with the members of the House that the territorial government is somehow a different animal from the federal government. Nothing could be further from the truth. The truth is that the Commissioner of the Yukon, as is the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, is an appointed federal civil servant, appointed by the minister and taking orders from the minister and his officials in Ottawa. That is the truth of the matter. If the commissioner is told by the minister to hop, he will hop; if he is told to jump, he will jump; if he is told not to do something, he will not do it—but if he is told to do something, he will do it. This has to be the situation, because if the commissioner did not follow orders the minister would soon fire him.

Mr. Baldwin: He is like the Liberal backbenchers.

Mr. Nielsen: That is a good similarity. That is the truth of the matter. The same applies in the Northwest Territories. If there is to be modicum of progress toward responsible government, why not pass to the elected representatives some of the powers for which they have been asking for many years? The seven members of the council were invited by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) to come to Ottawa. They came here and sat for several hours with the Prime Minister and the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Chrétien). They left Ottawa greatly encouraged that real progress would be made

[Mr. Nielsen.]

toward some measure of responsible government. What do they have? They have a big, fat goose-egg. But they did not expect much more, having regard to the size of the goose.

The minister referred to the consultative committee. There is no such animal. What he was referring to was the advisory committee on finance. This was set up by way of an amendment to the Yukon Act. It is a committee composed of three members of the council, selected by the council, with whom the commissioner in the Yukon must confer when preparing the budget. That is all the advisory committee is. If the minister did not want to remove in its entirety the stifling effect of section 24, prohibiting any council member from introducing a money bill in administrative form, surely minimally he would have said it would not be by message of the commissioner that money bills would be introduced in the future, but it would be by the advice of the advisory committee on finance. The commissioner sits as a member on that committee. In that way the elected members on the council would be able to introduce money measures. The minister says that the Yukon has been allowed to progress toward autonomy. Nothing could be further from the truth. The minister should stop attempting to lead the members of this House into believing that the people of the Yukon are asking for provincial status. Nothing could be further from the truth.

This leads me to the second point I want to make by way of a point of order. I am sorry that the minister left his seat, but perhaps I might raise it with the Minister of Justice (Mr. Turner). The minister indicated in his remarks that he was going to instruct the commissioner to set up an executive committee which would be comprised of two members of the council to be selected by them, two executive assistant commissioners and the commissioner himself, making a total executive committee of five members. What struck me about that statement was the minister's assertion that he was going to instruct the commissioner to set up this committee. I am sure the Minister of Justice is aware that when the advisory committee on finance was set up it was done by amendment to the Yukon Act, and I doubt very much if there is power in the act to instruct the commissioner, or even for the commissioner acting on his own to set up a body such as this committee and clothe it with any powers at all.