

*Northwest Territories Act*

have a beautiful little town called Fort Smith, which some of the people in the north now call the capital. It is about a mile and a half to two miles north of the Alberta border. Spring comes a little earlier there than in most parts of the Northwest Territories. Up until the present time there was no access at all to Fort Smith, except by air or by water down the Slave river. We are now building a highway to Pine Point, the famous mineral area, which highway incidentally will be completed this year.

The government which preceded the present one decided to build the railway on the west side of Alberta, and I am rather of the opinion that what has happened since has confirmed the wisdom of building it on that side. However, in view of the wealth of the area, particularly in tar sands, metals and that sort of thing, as well as in forest reserves, it would not surprise me if in the years immediately ahead another railway is built on the east side of Alberta going up toward Pine Point, and probably intersecting the Pine Point railway.

To return to the difficulties of the council, for a good many years pressures have been exerted by the relatively small number of people who live in the territories to improve and increase the amount of authority they need to run their own affairs. I think it is a very good sign that this demand is made, and it would be depressing if that drive were not present. That is one of the characteristics of the old Northwest Territories from which developed the provinces we have in Canada today. There is a ferment in the area at the present time, and it is a very healthy ferment. As a result of that, on May 11 last year I announced in the house that we were setting up a commission of inquiry to look into the future of government in the Northwest Territories.

● (8:10 p.m.)

That commission was comprised of Dean A. W. R. Carrothers, professor and dean of law at the University of Western Ontario, who was the chairman of the commission, Mr. John H. Parker, Mayor of Yellowknife, and Jean Beetz, professor of constitutional law, at the University of Montreal.

We found that we had appointed a remarkably competent group of men. They have been through the territories twice—in some places three times—and they have elected to go in the dead of winter, to see what it was

like living in those communities in that season. They proceeded up there in February of this year.

I want to remind the house of the terms of reference we gave that commission. We asked them to pay special attention, first to the views of residents of the Northwest Territories, and to the views of other Canadians with northern experience. Second, we asked them to pay attention to the nature of the federal responsibility for the territories, and third, to look into the question of the consideration of the political development of the territories contingent on the size, nature and distribution of population, and its ability to pay a significant share of the costs involved having regard to the present and prospective level of social and economic development. Next, we asked them to study existing forms of government as defined by the Northwest Territories Act and the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources Act, and to pay attention to previous proposals affecting constitutional structure.

I am certain, Mr. Speaker, bearing in mind that this commission of inquiry is going to bring in its report to us by September, and probably earlier, by August, it may surprise some hon. members that we are at this time introducing any amendments whatsoever to the Northwest Territories Act. We feel that we must, in one or two respects, move on in a manner that will not affect the full report which we expect to get. It should indicate where we can move next with respect to government, in that particular territory.

For a long time there had been repeated complaints in the house that some of those who lived in the Northwest Territories were denied the right to elect members to their territorial council. Indeed, this was so. Many of those persons had no opportunity to vote, principally because they lived in little, widely scattered settlements, and the territorial council, and indeed the government, thought it inconceivable to be able to provide them with ballots. It was that simple. I refer to areas such as the upper Arctic, the eastern Arctic and the Keewatin district which could not send representatives to the territorial council.

We think, and indeed the territorial council thinks that this should be changed. We have made a commitment that changes would be made, that there will be three additional seats. This will result in increasing the numbers of the territorial council from 9 to 12. It will also have the result of giving, for the