

*Yukon and Northwest Territories*

tories Act is to establish a fully elected territorial council by replacing the four appointed members with four elected members. It is also proposed to increase the size of the council to 15 members, all elected. The council has advised me that this will ensure balanced representation in the territories. The appointed members of the Northwest Territories Council have, over the years, contributed greatly of their time and experience to the work of the council, and we are grateful to them. However, the course of northern development which I have already described persuades me that there are capable northern residents now who can and should represent the people of the north in the operation of their government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, in accordance with the institution of a fully elective board, I suggest that one of the members act as chairman and that he sit in the chair instead of the commissioner during the sittings of the council.

The present provisions have met a practical need, but it now seems more appropriate to adopt the practice used in other legislative bodies which follow the British parliamentary tradition.

For similar reasons, we must redefine the quorum of the Council for voting purposes. Moreover, I intend increasing further the authority of the Territorial Council by agreeing with the Northwest Territories Commissioner that two elected members of the council be appointed to the Territorial Executive Council.

Each member of the executive council will be responsible for managing one or more departments of the territorial government. Hon. members will note that we do not plan to interfere with the freedom of that important executive committee through rigid legislative measures. On the contrary, we want it to grow and mature within the unwritten constitution of the Territories much as the cabinet and political parties developed in England, and the legislative bodies, federal and provincial, did in Canada. The BNA Act does not allude to the cabinet; similarly, the executive committees of the two Territories are not mentioned in the Yukon Act or the Northwest Territories Act.

As we know, Mr. Speaker, tradition and usage are as important as written law in the formulation of efficient government practices.

Mr. Speaker, the other amendments proposed are the logical result of the institution of a council that is elected exclusively; they are necessary to clarify some present provisions of the act, but they do not alter its purpose. Those amendments are explained in the bill.

I want to underline the fact that basically those amendments are an important step in the progress of the evolution of the governments of the Territories, and that this new step corresponds to the wishes of the councillors. To my mind, those amendments go much further than most would think in the process of handing to the peoples of the Territories control of their administration.

For instance, the councils have as much power and latitude in the study of their estimates as any legislative body in Canada, and its members have similar power to those of the provincial members to influence the orientation of the planned expenditures or to change them. Indeed the two constituent statutes of the Territories

[Mr. Chrétien.]

provide that the Commissioner must administer the Territories according to the instructions given if necessary by the Governor in Council or myself which is, in my opinion, advisable at that stage of the constitutional development of the Territories; however, that discretionary power is very seldom used.

● (1520)

In fact, Mr. Speaker, during my last visit in the Yukon, some advisers took me to task for not intervening often enough in the administration of the affairs of the Yukon and I answered that I would rather follow the present system than interfering as I saw fit, unless a serious situation would require an intervention of the federal government.

In Yukon, the two advisers who are members of the executive committee play a very important role, not only in reviewing estimates but also in explaining them to their council colleagues. As I already stated, it is understood that the Northwest Territories will have a similar system which will provide the elected members and through them, the people of the Territories, a greater control over their administration and a more realistic participation in their financial affairs.

Some advisers questioned the relevance of the provisions concerning the appropriation of public funds contained both in the Yukon Act and the Northwest Territories Act. Here is this provision:

It is not lawful for the Council to adopt or pass any vote, resolution, address or bill for the appropriation of any part of the public revenue of the Territories, or of any tax or impost, to any purpose that has not been first recommended to the Council by message of the Commissioner in the session in which such vote, resolution, address or bill is proposed.

Mr. Speaker, hon. members are aware that this principle is expressed in almost identical terms in the British North America Act. This principle applies to both Parliament and provincial legislative assemblies.

[*English*]

I have consistently tried to ensure that the Territorial Councils have as much authority and autonomy as possible. I believe both councils have considerably more power than they are given credit for, and I believe that these amendments significantly increase their responsibilities.

In conclusion, I want to say I am hopeful that the increases in the number of elected members will encourage more native people to seek to participate in the government of the territories. The evolution of territorial government is taking place in the context of important developments in the affairs of native northerners. We have seen remarkable growth in the native associations, and in the capabilities of their leaders. Currently, we are dealing with the difficult problems of native land claims. I hope these amendments will encourage the native people and all northerners to take an active role in territorial affairs. In this connection I should mention Bill C-11, which my colleague, the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen), introduced. It proposes to amend the British North America Act to provide for one senator for each territory.

These are exciting times in Canada's north, with great potential for both economic development and social