

Northwest Territories Act

indicate that although we in this group during the supper hour asked for a recorded vote, we are willing that no such recorded vote be now taken. We should simply like to protect our position which we think obtains under the rules, that under that circumstance a vote could now be taken, if we so desired, even though five members were not here at the present moment. We do have more than five members here, but we are willing, if the house gives unanimous consent, simply to resolve this issue on a voice vote and not have the members called in by the bell.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Does the house give unanimous consent to have this issue resolved by a voice vote, rather than calling the members in and having a standing vote taken?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Some hon. Members: On division.

Motion (Mr. Orlikow) negatived, on division.

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES ACT

AMENDMENTS RESPECTING ELECTED MEMBERS, INDEMNITY, ETC.

Hon. Arthur Laing (Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources) moved the second reading of Bill No. C-146, to amend the Northwest Territories Act.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the house ready for the question?

Mr. Nielsen: Surely, Mr. Speaker, the minister would like to make a statement on second reading.

Mr. Laing: Mr. Speaker, I do not think I will take a great deal of time in recounting again to the members of the house the very favourable economic conditions which are beginning to show themselves in the Northwest Territories, indeed in the entire north. However, I should like to put once more on record that this extremely vast area—I am now talking of the Northwest Territories alone—which comprises about 33 per cent of the land mass of Canada is beginning to demonstrate itself as an area of tremendous wealth. I am unhappy that more members of the House of Commons, indeed that all members of the House of Commons, have not had the opportunity of seeing the area, and in the year ahead I propose to endeavour to see that a representative group of members of the house do make this visit.

[Mr. Knowles.]

It is an extremely difficult, strange, challenging, yet beautiful area of Canada, particularly if you go there at the right time of the year. When I saw it first I came to the conclusion that if it had resources they lay underground, not on top. A great deal of the area has no vegetation of any kind on top of the rock or ice. However, we are now finding, probably in common with the Arctic area of the Soviet Union, that we have tremendous resources under the ground, resources of oil, gas, and minerals of various kinds. The challenge, of course, is that of distance and difficulty of communication, coupled with the fact that during seven months of the year adverse weather conditions and darkness contribute to a situation where most citizens would prefer to dwell in another part of Canada.

These are the drawbacks to this area, but we are now beginning to find that some of the deposits of metal being discovered are of such wealth that these difficulties can be overcome. This, however, inevitably leads to a spotty development. We have within the area settlements where the white man is there only because of the responsibilities he has to the indigenous people in matters of health. He is in other places only because of the responsibility we have in matters of defence with our allies. He is also to be found in the high Arctic islands, sometimes only to declare that they are part of Canada, that our sovereignty must be maintained.

The difficulty of communication between these points makes government within the territory very onerous indeed. We have substantially a western development along the Mackenzie which is growing very fast, particularly as a result of the extension of the Pine Point railway to Hay River. On the eastern side deliveries are made mostly out of Montreal by the high Arctic sea route. We are beginning to see that new methods of transport will be available in the future, largely by air. Indeed, we are finding that some of the goods taken in there now can be taken in competitively by larger aircraft, when costs are compared with river traffic and freight out of Montreal.

This places a very great burden upon the council of the Northwest Territories. So far it has resided, with a very small staff, substantially in Ottawa under a commissioner living in Ottawa. When I first went to the north I said that I would do my utmost to see that we get government in the territories as rapidly as we possibly can. At the moment we