

*Northwest Territories*

The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Munro) within three or four days of taking office showed clearly his commitment to this particular issue. One of the first press releases or public statements the minister issued dealt with this very subject. It reflected his particular priority for the issue and the concern of the people of the Northwest Territories. He said then that he was anxious to get on with the job and that he would not tolerate any undue delay on this particular subject. Having said that he would not tolerate any undue delay or procrastination, I am sure the hon. member for Western Arctic would not want to see the government rush into something and lock the people of the Northwest Territories into a mechanism which time will prove may not serve them very well.

I should like to say just a word or two about background. Most of us will know that by the late 1970s the territorial government in Yellowknife had been in place for a decade or so. With the support of elected territorial councillors, it was pressing for evolution of responsible government along the traditional Canadian provincial pattern. On the other hand, native associations have sought through their land claims to establish unique political jurisdictions and processes aimed at protecting their positions in northern society.

Large-scale resource development projects were imminent. This placed increasing pressure on native associations, the territorial government and the federal government to find a means of settling land claims and charting a course for future constitutional development. Against that particular background, in August, 1977, the federal government appointed the Hon. C. M. Drury as special representative to the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) to consult with the residents of the Northwest Territories about modifications and improvements to existing government institutions in the north, and to seek a consensus on future constitutional development which could then be co-ordinated with the land claims process I have already mentioned.

One point needs to be reiterated. For approximately two years Mr. Drury canvassed opinion in the Northwest Territories by travelling extensively throughout the Northwest Territories and meeting with various groups of individuals. After all that process had been gone through and after the findings had been recorded, one key factor still stands out, the one I alluded to at the beginning, and that is the lack of consensus on the substance and the terms of the change required. Surely, that alone is argument enough not to delay unduly but to proceed with caution, and that is what the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development gave notice he intended to do on March 7. I shall not take up the time of the House unduly because the hon. member for Western Arctic has done a good job in providing hon. members with some of the cardinal principles involved.

● (1730)

I wish to turn to consider the government's intentions as far as the Drury report is concerned. As I said, it covered a wide range of proposals. Some were of a purely administrative

nature. Others would involve quite sizeable shifts of responsibility both within the federal government and from the federal government to the territorial government. Local government is also involved. Because of the complexity of many of these proposals the government has not yet concluded its deliberations on this matter and is not prepared to make any definite announcement of action at this time. Indeed, in my view, it would be presumptuous of the government to decide hastily on questions of such vital interest to residents of the Northwest Territories and to us all. The territories has its own legislative assembly and we are anxious to have the views of that body on many of Mr. Drury's recommendations. Right now, we would have to reach decisions without hearing the views of that body. Surely, it is illogical to suggest we ought to give greater jurisdiction to a group of people without asking them to offer considered opinions as to the kind of government they want. Hopefully, the views we are seeking will be articulated in the session of the legislative assembly scheduled for Frobisher Bay in October. In particular, the government is anxious to have the report of the Unity Committee established by the legislative committee to review, among other things, the proposal that the territories be divided, and that a new territory of Nunavut be established which would include, basically, that part of the territories lying north of the tree line. This question is of great importance to all territorial residents and, indeed, to all Canadians, and it must be studied carefully.

The federal government is moving with all due haste, in concert with NWT residents and institutions, to determine the direction in which constitutional development should be going in the Northwest Territories. No clear consensus has been made manifest. There are very real differences of opinion held between segments of the territories' diverse population. The government wishes to reconcile these divergent views, insofar as this is possible, before determining upon an appropriate course of action. Complicating the situation to some degree, as you know, Mr. Speaker, are the land claims negotiations being held or to be held soon, with the major native associations in the territories. Senator Davie Stewart has been appointed to conduct these negotiations with COPE. The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development will announce very soon the appointment of a negotiator for the claims by Inuit Tapirisat. All of these balls are in play, and all impinge one upon the other.

I repeat that the government is moving as quickly as possible to determine appropriate responses to Mr. Drury's recommendations. The issues are as important as they are complex, and the greater good will not be served by moving precipitously. There is no disagreement that a greater degree of responsible government should be provided to the Northwest Territories. This objective is entirely consistent with the government's policies.

The problem is one of timing and one of degree—one of endeavouring to satisfy the aspirations of as many residents of the territories as possible. This takes time. Surely, residents of the Northwest Territories cannot criticize the government for ensuring that any changes ultimately made will have the