

The Senate

square miles of Canada from 1903—one member was charged with that responsibility—until 1949. One member represented the Yukon and Northwest Territories. In 1949 the electoral boundaries were readjusted and the Yukon and Northwest Territories had one member each.

To put a fair connotation on history, the Liberal Party had no difficulty electing a member for the Northwest Territories and the Yukon prior to 1949. Certainly my predecessor had that party affiliation until 1953. When the Northwest Territories subsequently became entitled to a member, it too was represented by a Liberal member. Indeed, until the advent of the election of the present hon. member for Northwest Territories it had been represented solidly by a member of the Liberal Party save and except for one intervention by a member of this party from 1963 to 1968.

Now that those matters are set straight, with regard to the argument that the party in power has difficulty electing people and must therefore appoint someone, I do not think that is a fair observation. It certainly is not accurate. The minister introducing the bill—

Mr. Barnett: May I ask the hon. member whether the Liberals will try to do better in the Yukon next time around?

Mr. Nielsen: As they say, Mr. Speaker, hope springs eternal. As another matter of historical observation, since 1903, some 71 years, we have had a representative in parliament. On the Yukon side, at any rate, the Liberal Party can claim possession to 13 of those 71 years. Therefore, they may have a little more difficulty because of the inbred spirit of independence, free enterprise and initiative that we in the Yukon give as our principal reason for being there.

Mr. Knight: The Senate represents initiative?

Mr. Nielsen: I know the hon. member to my left is expressing the views of the grey eminence of his party, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), when he puts down the Senate. This is where I think the hon. member for Northwest Territories has really been snowed by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre and others who share his views. For the representative of Canadians in the Northwest Territories to stand in his place and tell us that his constituents do not want to be represented in the whole of parliament is beyond my comprehension.

We have a system. Some of us believe the Senate should remain as it is. Some of us believe that it should be abolished. I know the position that the NDP adopted as a party stance, but it ill behoves the hon. member for Northwest Territories to say that as long as we are saddled with the concept of two Houses in a federal system, we do not want any part of that full entitlement which all Canadians have. That is absolutely beyond comprehension. I think the chickens will come home to roost regarding that statement and the hon. member's stance, come the next election.

[Mr. Nielsen.]

● (2030)

The minister has made a common error of lumping together the statistics of the two territories. He did not quote them separately. He lumped the economics together, too. That is the way the government treats them because it is unthinkable for those who live in ivory towers in Ottawa to accept anything less than standardization in this age to place everyone on a common, socialistic level. In other words, in spite of a history which goes back to 1896 and earlier, in spite of the growth of political institutions, in spite of independent economic growth, in spite of differing geographical considerations, the government insists on lumping together the two territories because, in its eyes, it is expedient to do so.

For example, the minister said the Indian and Inuit population of the two territories is higher, in relation to other inhabitants, than in the provinces. He might be close to being accurate had he referred only to the Northwest Territories, but his statement is far from accurate in the case of the Yukon. It would be truer to say that the ratio there is the same as it is in the provinces; or not very much higher, at the most. So I have very little sympathy with this argument which is constantly advanced by the government.

I turn now to another matter on which the minister might care to comment in his closing remarks. As I understand it the joint committee of the House and the Senate recommended that legislation be implemented to provide Senate representation for each of the territories. It is also my understanding—and this might well be inaccurate—that the BNA Act requires that representation in a province shall not fall below two members for each position in the Senate. I understand, too, that under the Interpretation Act the territories are interpreted as meaning provinces; they are included in the term "provinces". I am wondering whether constitutionally, if we pass this legislation, the government would be obliged to bring in a bill which would not only provide for increased membership in the Senate but also for increased membership in this chamber. This problem was raised during the sittings of the joint committee, but I thought the minister might cover the point in his closing remarks.

Before the present hon. member for Northwest Territories took his seat in this chamber, when that constituency was represented by Gene Rheaume, he and I vigorously asserted the need for two members in the House of Commons to represent the Northwest Territories. I am not advancing this view with respect to the Yukon, but I certainly do so with respect to the Northwest Territories where an extra seat is desperately needed. It is impossible to travel in the far north without appreciating the vastness of this land. Here is a constituency almost 1,300,000 square miles in extent. Do hon. members realize how long it would take to get around it? My own route takes me 26,000 linear miles and I estimate the hon. member for the Northwest Territories would have to travel between five and eight times that distance to visit the communities which I believe a member is obliged to visit at least once between elections.

I have heard arguments advanced in connection with possible changes to the Canada Elections Act and expense allowances made available to candidates. If anyone can