

Northwest Territories Act

these matters by the report of the Carrothers commission.

Mr. Nielsen: The minister has made a valid point, Mr. Chairman, when he refers to asking the elected members of the council what they think about continuing the procedure whereby members are appointed to the Northwest Territories Council. This suggestion was made by the hon. member for Brandon-Souris. He suggested that the matter could be referred to a committee of the house and members of the council could be called. This suggestion was not accepted by the government, but we did not make an issue of that. We thought it would be a useful thing to do. The fact of the matter is that unless the minister can stand up and tell us that all four members of the elected council, representing as they do the views of Mackenzie but not Keewatin or Franklin, have informed him they want to continue this system, then I do not believe we can consider the hypothetical supposition the minister puts before us this afternoon.

The minister and the member for the Northwest Territories make two points with regard to the purported reasons for not amending this section of the bill. The member representing this constituency knows that there are well over a million and a quarter square miles for which there are seven elected members. These men are going to be asked to represent this vast territory. I do not believe the council should be composed of 12 members; I believe the number should be between 15 and 21 in order to have adequate representation. The situation that we and the people of the Northwest Territories are being asked to accept is to have seven elected members represent over a million and a quarter square miles. The five appointed members represent no one. They are appointed to the council but represent no electoral district. Under the legislation as it stands now or as it may be amended now, they still represent no electoral district. It would be compounding an undemocratic procedure if this were so.

We are left with a situation, therefore, in which seven elected members represent over a million and a quarter square miles. I am going to use a phrase that many in this house will understand. If I cannot appeal to their knowledge of the north, let me appeal to their own emotions in regard to their own jurisdictions. I refer to the phrase, "maître chez nous". This is the direction in which we in the north wish to bend our efforts. How can we have more say in our own affairs if

[Mr. Laing.]

we are going to have the government of Canada as some sort of "big daddy" legislature tell us who are going to sit as our representatives. The people who live there want to elect their own representatives and run their own affairs.

The fiscal controls are intact. The commissioner is an appointee of the government and has the power of veto over every measure that comes before council. If the council were wholly elected and did act irresponsibly, which I strongly suggest neither the minister nor the member for Northwest Territories believes would happen, the commissioner always has the power of veto. What earthly excuse, therefore, can remain?

The hon. member for Northwest Territories says that the life of the council expires in March of next year. This is true. However, does this prevent us from amending this section now to make provision for a wholly elected council? I do not believe so. You may either hold by-elections between now and the expiration of the life of the council or this provision for extra seats will be available in March of 1967. The argument is no more valid with respect to a wholly elected representative body than it would be for accepting the amendment in its present form. This amendment provides for three additional elected representatives who either have to take office as the result of by-elections before March, 1967, or when the election is called next year. This argument, therefore, has no substance.

The other argument that both the hon. member and the minister advanced was that we should await the report of the Carrothers commission. Before I deal with that, let me point out that I am sure the hon. member for Northwest Territories did not intend to leave the impression on members of this house that anyone on this side was suggesting the appointed members in the past have intimidated the elected members. No one has made that statement. No one has left that implication, least of all myself. They have served a useful purpose and made useful contributions not only in their capacity as appointed members of council but in the respective areas in which they have served in the public service, commercial or industrial life of the country.

However, this does not justify continuing the procedure of appointing members to what is supposed to be a representative democratic institution, a legislative body representing the people. How can it be representative of the people if the people have no say in who is