

Yukon and Northwest Territories

Mr. Nielsen: And women, yes. We have one woman on the council of the Yukon territory now, and I believe there is also one on the council of the Northwest Territories.

Miss MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Yes, there is.

Mr. Nielsen: Yes, there is one now I am informed by my colleague. My point is that there are people there who are capable of exercising the same kind of legislative function we exercise in this chamber. Indeed, there may be some who are better able to perform that function who live in the north. The minister is saying that he and the government of Canada know best; they are the great white fathers and therefore they are going to tell the people what is best for them because they really do not know themselves. He is saying, we have only lived there for a quarter of a century or so, so we cannot be expected to know what is best, but the people some 4,000 miles away are better able to decide what is best for the north. That is what the minister is saying.

I am glad to see that the hon. member for Sherbrooke (Mr. Pelletier) is in the chamber because I had the distinct pleasure of serving with him on the standing committee when that committee visited the Yukon territory last December. To my amazement, the hon. member for Sherbrooke was one of the most vociferous proponents for the immediate granting of fully responsible government to the Yukon, and he was applauded for taking that view. This bill will certainly face no difficulty on second reading, as I will be the last speaker from this side and the same restriction is being imposed through self-discipline in the New Democratic Party. We might even get second reading of this legislation by five o'clock. In any event, I do not expect to have any difficulty in listing that hon. member's support at this stage, but when it comes to amendments in the committee I will look forward to the same kind of vigorous support, and I hope that hon. member will try to get on the committee again.

Mr. Pelletier (Sherbrooke): I am.

Mr. Nielsen: The hon. member says he is a member of that committee, and I think we had better quickly record that fact. I am glad to know that and hope we can count on his support when we are discussing these amendments again.

Let me read from page 29:6 of the proceedings of that committee on December 12. At that time a motion had been put which adopted in detail all of the proposals put forward by the council of the Yukon territory, and I say in detail because they cover most of pages 29:5 and 29:6. Toward the end of the page we find these words:

After debate on the said motion, the question being put, it was agreed to unanimously.

Apart from the hon. member for Kamloops-Cariboo (Mr. Marchand), who was called away on urgent parliamentary business, all the members of the committee were present, including seven members of the Liberal party supporting the government. I, therefore, look forward to that same kind of support. Incidentally, this proceeding was reported to the House before we rose for the recess last session, so it was a recommendation to the government. I know the

[Mr. Nielsen.]

minister has a very high regard for committee reports and listens to their suggestions very carefully.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I understand the hon. member for York West is rising on a question of privilege.

Mr. Fleming: Mr. Speaker, I, too, was away for personal reasons for about 25 minutes during which time that vote was taken. Just to clear the record, I wanted to indicate I was not there when unanimous approval was given. To the best of my knowledge, that was a vote taken on a Friday night.

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for York West for that explanation. I am sure had he been there he would have gone along with his colleagues. I am sure he is just as strong a proponent of the democratic form of government in our country as are all of us, and I am sure it is just as difficult for him to understand why the government does not go the whole way in this process. He heard the very appealing briefs by Yukoners for governmental reform when he was there, although the minister continues to disregard this, and he heard also those same people say they did not want provincial status now but want the changes to stop short of that, since surely in the fulness of time that will come about.

Let me quote for a moment from the words of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), because he, too, believes in this concept, or at least I am told that he does. I sometimes have my doubts, but his words certainly suggest this. Let me quote this excerpt from the opening speech of the Prime Minister at the constitutional conference held in Ottawa, the second meeting, on February 10, 1969, as follows:

The federal government insists that a charter of human rights should be an integral part of the Constitution, because it believes that those rights are equally important for all Canadians.

He did not say all Canadians south of the 60th parallel, he said "all Canadians". He went on to state:

Whether he be from Churchill, Trois Rivieres, Kamloops, Medicine Hat, Richibucto, or Port aux Basques, the Canadian citizen must be assured everywhere of the free exercise of his basic rights.

We call upon all Canadians south of the 60th parallel to recognize that, as a basic right, we have the right to govern ourselves. We are not being given that right by this legislation. When the Prime Minister was speaking about the same basic rights for all Canadians he went on to say:

And why should this not be so? Are those not values common to all, and in which we all believe? Of course. And so, I ask you, gentlemen, why do we hesitate? Why are we reluctant to joint together in guaranteeing to the citizen, whom we all serve and represent, his most essential rights?

That is a very noble sentiment, but I wonder how many members realize that the two northern territories were not only not represented at that conference but not represented at any federal-provincial conference, so that the only input to these conferences from the north comes from the minister or from persons sitting in this chamber on the treasury benches, or from observers whose lips are sealed because they are prevented from giving the northern point of view. That is what the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) referred to as basic rights. I shall not be much longer.