

Northwest Territories Act

We are not suggesting to the government or the minister that we should be given self-government; we are not suggesting that we should have autonomy; but we do say, for heavens sake, let us do away with this colonialism approach to government in the north and give us more say in our affairs—not all at once, but gradually. The principle in this bill is not a principle that should be followed in an attempt to do that.

As far as the Carrothers commission is concerned, for all the good intentions behind the establishment of it, for all the good principles and concepts involved indeed for all the good work that that commission is likely to do, is it following a reasonable principle? We are being asked to establish a committee to determine in effect whether or not democratic procedures should exist in the north. I can understand the reasoning behind economic study, but I cannot understand the reasoning behind a study to determine whether or not there should be a fully elected body of people to represent the north. Such a principle is a wrong principle. I cast no slurs on the commission in making that observation, but we are being asked to proceed on the basis of a wrong principle.

Any suggestion that we should determine whether or not there should be democratic procedure and machinery in the north, to determine whether or not it is a good or a bad idea to give the people at the local level more say in their own affairs, is a wrong principle. I suggest it is a ruse—an unintentional ruse, perhaps, but none the less a ruse. We must either accept the principle that it is desirable to create and maintain democratic institutions, or that it is not. This bill does not do that, and does not even move in that direction.

I do not intend to introduce any amendment at the resolution stage, nor does my party. We intend to leave this duty to the hon. member for the Northwest Territories, the minister and the government which he supports. We do implore the government and that hon. member to direct their attention to the real desires and requirements of those people they are supposed to be representing.

Mr. Frank Howard (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, I am one of those so-called southern Canadians who admittedly has not set foot in the Northwest Territories and consequently does not know about personal experiences and situations there from first hand knowledge. I do not know of conditions or concepts there, but as has always been the case in this

[Mr. Nielsen.]

house, I am one who feels that he votes reluctantly on matters concerning the Northwest Territories.

For the most part, being an outsider and not knowing about conditions and concepts, I think it is presumptuous for us to run full tilt into legislation which affects such a large group of people who are, and in fact have been for many years, living in a communal state. These people are governed by laws made mainly without their consent and without their knowledge. It may be harsh to refer to this area as one which exists in a communal state, but that is the fact. Practically every phase of life in the Northwest Territories falls within the jurisdiction of a group here in Ottawa, many thousands of miles removed from the scene. They have an absentee type of government.

We are being asked to deal with fundamental questions of civil and property rights, freedoms and liberties and a whole range of social and educational matters. These things in any other province of Canada are matters of concern and jurisdiction of local governments. Over the years the only freedoms and rights that have been extended to the people of the Territories have been those extended by this government in Ottawa. Almost inevitably their rights and freedoms have been determined by outsiders.

I may be an outsider or a southern Canadian by the standards of the people who live in northern Canada, but I believe I understand the basic rights and freedoms of people to the point that I can appreciate what should and should not be done. From the point of view of making laws, it is wrong for a governing body to extend to certain groups of people the freedoms and rights that the governing body deems correct. That is the reverse of a true democratic process.

These people should determine their own freedoms and rights, because these things should not be given by the grace of others. That has not been the case so far as the Northwest Territories is concerned. The bill before us represents an extremely minor, timid and gentle step toward a recognition of the fundamental rights of those people who should run their own affairs. Up to now they have been the subject of extreme paternalism without progress. These people are much like the children of a parent who refuses to accept the fact that they have grown up, a parent who continues to exert parental discipline after his children have become adults.