

External Affairs in Parliament

STATEMENTS OF GOVERNMENT POLICY

The purpose of this section is to provide a selection of statements on external affairs by Ministers of the Crown or by their parliamentary assistants. It is not designed to provide a complete coverage of debates on external affairs taking place during the month.

TWO references to the increasing strategic and economic importance of Canada's northland from the international view point were made by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons on December 8 in an address moving the second reading of a bill establishing the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources. After explaining that the primary duty of the new Department would be to administer the northern territories, the Prime Minister referred to Canadian sovereignty over the areas in question:

Now, it seemed to us that it was becoming increasingly apparent that it would be desirable to alter the situation and to create conditions in which it is clearly indicated that the Government and Parliament want further attention given to the development of our north country, and I may say that that was further impressed upon us by the fact that there have to be quite a number of non-Canadians going into that territory. We felt that it was very important to have the situation such that whenever they went there they realized they were in Canadian territory and in territory that was administered by Canadian authorities.

The present bill is designed to give more emphasis to the fact that the people of Canada are greatly interested in this northern territory and regard it as an important part of the territory subject to the sovereignty of the Canadian nation. The purpose of this bill is to further that objective . . .

Later in his address the Prime Minister referred to the strategic importance of Canada's northland with the following words:

There is another aspect which makes it necessary for us to give more attention to these northern territories and that is the fact that the Canadian northland lies between the two greatest powers in the world at the present time, namely, the United States of America and the U.S.S.R., and our own security is probably made more difficult to provide for by the fact that this northland of ours is between these two great world powers. There will, no doubt, have to be joint measures taken for the security of the North American continent. It is a continental problem that presents itself for solution by that mere fact of geology. I am not going to say any more about it than was said by the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Claxton), but all these joint undertakings are carried out under the principle which the President enunciated from the head of the table here only three or four weeks ago. They are implemented with full respect for the sovereignty of the country in which they are carried out.

We must leave no doubt about our active occupation and exercise of our sovereignty in these northern lands right up to the Pole. That is something which puts these lands in a somewhat different position from other parts of Canada. From other parts of Canada we get representations from the localities about the things that are required for their development. Here I think there must be someone having ministerial responsibility to take initiatives so we will not have to wait until there are representations from the so sparse population in the area as to what is required. It was for these reasons that it was held it would be desirable to have on the statute books a Department of Northern Affairs and to have representatives of the Department of Northern Affairs present in various parts of these territories and symbolic of the actuality of the exercise of Canadian sovereignty over them.