

*Northwest Territories*

than it does, possibly, the privately held views of Mr. Drury before he undertook this exercise.

● (1710)

I think there are many comparisons between the Durham report of 1837 and the Drury report of 1979. Both of them were compiled by eminent statesmen with many years of political and administrative experience. Both gentlemen used competent staffs. They went out of their way to hire competent people and put them to work. Just as the Durham report was the landmark document of the middle of the nineteenth century as far as Canada was concerned, I think the Drury report will be the landmark document, as far as constitutional issues in the Northwest Territories are concerned, in the third quarter of the twentieth century.

The present constitutional state in the Northwest Territories leaves much to be desired. It is somewhat comparable with the state in the old Northwest Territories around 1895. The old Northwest Territories, which comprised that part which remains today and also what are the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan, received, prior to provincial status in 1905, responsible government in 1897. This is what we in the Northwest Territories would like to achieve within the next two, three or four years. I think it has to be that close if people there are not going to lose faith altogether in the government here in Ottawa.

When the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan were withdrawn in 1905, we went back to the constitutional dark ages in what is presently the Northwest Territories, and since that time we have been evolving. Of late, within the last ten years, that rate of evolution has accelerated, and we who live in that part of the country want, as I said, to be able to look forward to responsible government within the next two or three years. We would like to be able to look forward to provincial status either for the whole of the existing territories or for parts thereof within a reasonable period of time; let us say ten to 12 years. In the old situation it took from 1897 to 1905—that period from responsible government to full provincial status—and I think we should aim at that same time frame today.

I have made some general observations with respect to this report. Now let us look at some of the recommendations which have been made and some of the questions Mr. Drury has addressed. Of course this will have to be a very cursory overview. First he has looked at the question of division of the territories. As hon. members are probably aware, geographically and demographically the area is pretty well divided into two. The western area, which is not dissimilar from northern Alberta, has a developed infrastructure and is much more financially self-sufficient than the eastern area and the High Arctic part. The question of whether those two should remain together or whether they should be separated has been a matter of debate for at least the last 15 years of which I know.

This is one of the few areas in the report where I take exception to the recommendations of Mr. Drury in that he feels that for the time being division should not take place. I know many people who would take exception to that view. However, Mr. Drury does not say that the combination should last forever. He thinks that the ultimate choice should be made by the people who live there, and proposes institutions such as a constituent assembly to make these decisions.

He addressed himself to the sticky problem of land claims. Every new minister of Indian affairs and northern development who comes along says that he will settle these things within six months. At least the last five ministers have said that, but I am afraid that the problem is a little more difficult than they originally anticipated.

Mr. Drury has laid down a few principles. He thinks that the agreements in principle are mainly a matter between the federal government and the claimant groups, whereas the implementation of these agreements and principles is primarily a matter between the government of the territories and the claimants themselves. Mr. Drury would take exception to the overriding collective nature of some of the settlements which have been proposed.

Mr. Drury made some valid observations about government in the territories as it exists today. He said, and I quote, "The present system hides real authority and diffuses responsibility," and I think that that is a very valid observation. People do not really know where to go to get things done. Authority is partly here in Ottawa, partly somewhere in Yellowknife and partly somewhere else, and one can never nail down the person who is ultimately responsible or who has ultimate authority.

The perception of government in the territories leaves a little to be desired because of the paternalism which has existed. The idea of government amongst many people who live there is one of delivering of services, welfare services, educational services, etc., but not the alternative or the other part of government, the decision-making or the deciding of policies to be followed. At present I am afraid that that is not really there, and this is due in part to another observation made by Mr. Drury that what we have is a strong administration, both federal and territorial, and a rather weak political system, so we must strengthen the political arm of government in the territories, and I think this indeed is taking place.

Mr. Drury addressed himself to municipal affairs. He proposed, for instance, that minimum municipal powers be placed in a new Northwest Territories act of this Parliament of Canada. He takes as his example for this what is going on in Switzerland. A proposal was made by the Swiss commission of experts in 1977. He makes a recommendation, which makes eminent sense, regarding the ownership of land within a municipality, and that land which is not presently privately held should be transferred to the ownership of the municipality.