

*Territorial Lands Act*

pleased to note the co-operation of both the Official Opposition and the New Democratic Party in dealing with this legislation this afternoon. We are also dealing this afternoon with what might be described as a companion Bill, Bill C-45, which amends the Northern Canada Power Commission Act, which will allow for the transfer of certain assets of NCPC to the Yukon.

There is something of a friendly rivalry between the Northwest Territories and the Yukon Territory as they proceed along the road to provincial status. There is a certain amount of leap-frogging taking place. The Territories, for instance, can claim that it was first in taking the responsibility for imposing its own income tax. The Yukon can claim a first in terms of its adoption of a system of political parties in its legislature. This afternoon, both the territories will be able to claim a first. For the Northwest Territories it will be in the case of forestry. For Yukon it will be in the case of the responsibility for electric power and electric energy. I hope that they will catch up with each other in the near future.

● (1600)

I know that discussions have been ongoing since the fall of 1985 with respect to the transfer of responsibility for electrical energy in the Northwest Territories. When the former Minister announced, in the fall of 1985, that the federal Government was prepared to devolve this responsibility to the Territories, Yukon was out of the starting gates. It had its act together already.

The question may be a little more complex in the Northwest Territories. The nature of the assets is different. It got off to a slower start. But since the responsibility for negotiations at the territorial level has been given to the Hon. Tom Butters, the Minister of Finance there, I suspect that progress will be much more swift. I note with approval that negotiations between officials of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs and the territorial Governments are progressing.

To a casual observer Bill C-43 and Bill C-45 might seem to be technical amendments. Such a casual observer might ask: "This is so simple and so obvious. Why was it not done many, many years ago?" For someone who has devoted most of their adult life to the struggle for responsible Government in the Territories, these companion Bills this afternoon mark a major milestone. It is only a generation and a half ago that we had no vote in the Territories. We did not vote for Members of Parliament. Local government at the municipal level did not exist. There was not provincial or territorial government. The government of that day was in fact a federal public servant appointed by Ottawa who resided in Ottawa. Our laws were made by a committee of public servants in Ottawa. We had no say ourselves in what our laws were to be or how we were to be governed. We have come a long way since those days. We will not rest until we enjoy the same rights to provincial government as are enjoyed by southern Canadians.

In the last Trudeau Government the progress that was being made, and had been made up until that time, virtually came to

a halt. I can think of only one transfer that took place in that period of four-and-a-half years or so, and it was a very minor one in terms of dollars and numbers of people involved. It was a transfer of responsibility for mining inspection services.

With the new government in 1984 things really began to happen. Very major transfers are now under way. We have the issues for forestry, electrical power and energy with which we are dealing this afternoon, as well as the provincial-type health services, a very major transfer. If the previous Government was guilty of going too slow then what we are doing now is probably at a speed at which it is difficult for the territories themselves to keep up and to assimilate those things which we are prepared to devolve upon them. For myself, it is a nice position to be in.

The federal and the territorial Governments work together hand-in-glove and rapid and responsible progress is being made. Responsible government leading to provincial status is being achieved in the North. We have come a long way since the colonial days of 20 years ago. I compliment what I would call the Canadian political genius. It is something about which we do not hear very much. It is a genius that we have in this country for compromise, fair play and the orderly conduct of public affairs. All that has happened during this period has happened not only without one incident of violence, but without a single incident of an unlawful act being committed that I can think of. We have done that all through the political processes that we have in place in Canada. I think that that is something about which we can be proud. Canadians and Canadian politicians of all political stripes can be proud that we can make these changes in Canada and that we can do so in a peaceable and sensible manner.

I would just like to make a few remarks about the history of the forestry transfer. In the early 1970s, in the sixth Legislature of the Northwest Territories, at a time when it was not even a fully elected legislature, the forestry area was one which was identified as a provincial-type responsibility which ought to be taken over by the territorial Government. For many years there has been a continuing debate at the grass roots level, tinged with dissatisfaction that exists with the fire-fighting side of things rather than the forest management side. I refer to questions such as designated priority areas for fire-fighting, expenses involved and local involvement in the decisions with respect to forest fire-fighting. These are difficult problems to resolve. I do not think they can ever be resolved to everybody's satisfaction. But at least the decision ought to be made locally and not handed down from on high.

The Drury Report of 1979, published in 1980, the report of the special representative of Prime Minister's of the day on constitutional development in the North, recommended the two transfers with which we are dealing today. Mr. Drury did an excellent job. The actual start of negotiations for the transfer on forestry started in July of 1985. In September of that year an agreement in principle was arrived at. In December of 1986 a final transfer package was approved by the Government. Pretty good progress was made.