

Under the heading "Programs" the handbook says the following:

The Department of Local Government is responsible for political development at the local level;—

Further on this manual, which is for the employees of the Northwest Territories, and related specifically to the issue of local government, states:

Encourages the development of political and social awareness and administrative capability enabling the people of the N.W.T. to achieve local self-government.

I want to emphasize that that policy is in existence, and that was the issue I was raising in the House on that particular day when questioning the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Allmand).

Following a recent visit to the north it is my impression that the department of local government has not fulfilled its mandate and that there is a growing alienation and suspicion directed toward the central government regarding this issue. I readily admit that in theory the department of local government has developed a philosophy which should accelerate the development of local autonomy but for the most part it has been counterproductive where it has been implemented. In effect, the government pays lip service to local political development and in many ways works against it. I have considerable correspondence which would substantiate that observation. There is a general absence of local fiscal responsibility, which works against the development of local autonomy in the north. Surely it must be apparent that local government will evolve into a northern form of local government, but it must suit the needs of the people in those northern communities.

Finally, the evolution of local autonomy implies the development of a proper balance of decision making capability between all levels of government, and that balance does not exist in the north at the present time. If we are to see a positive impact on the life of the local population, local government is needed. It must be there to meet the needs of the people at the grassroots level, and it is absolutely essential in this context.

Mr. Marcel Roy (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, the development of local government in the Northwest Territories has long been recognized as a valuable objective within the general context of northern development.

In January, 1965, the commissioner issued a policy statement outlining the educational, political and administrative importance of local government. Essentially the policy called for the decentralization of government activity so that wherever possible local community services could be supplied by democratically elected community institutions. This was reinforced by the report of the Advisory Commission on the Development of Government in the Northwest Territories issued in 1966, which recommended a continuing and intensified program for the development of local government as crucial to the economic, social and political development of the north.

Adjournment Debate

When the seat of government for the Northwest Territories was moved from Ottawa to Yellowknife in 1967, a department of local government was established and a new, simplified method of local incorporation was provided under the hamlet ordinance. In addition, settlement councils were formed in virtually all unincorporated NWT communities so that direct participation by residents in local matters became possible. It is encouraging to note that indigenous natives now constitute the overwhelming majority of local council membership. The approximate figure is 75 per cent over-all and 90 per cent if one eliminates several of the larger population centres.

In its initial phase the territorial government's development program concentrated on raising the level of political awareness at the community level. The rapid increase in the number of local councils, however, created an urgent need for programs to be developed which would better prepare local people for an effective role in their councils. This resulted in a change in emphasis in the development program from political awareness to legal and administrative functions and the practical mechanics of local government. This change in emphasis was not accepted by a group in the department of local government, who resigned their positions when the territorial government's policy was reaffirmed to them.

● (1810)

I would like to comment briefly on what I understand were the objectives and concerns of that group, since they are the key to the basic issue. The members felt they had a responsibility to work with communities to bring about self-determination in the form of new structures and mechanisms of government. This implied a rejection of the existing constitutional forms of government, both territorial and local.

Neither the government of the Northwest Territories nor the federal government would deny the rights of any segment of the population to work towards objectives which they believe desirable, and that would include those seeking basic constitutional development.

TRANSPORT—RAIL LINE ABANDONMENT RECOMMENDED BY
HALL COMMISSION—INQUIRY AS TO FORM OF APPEAL
AVAILABLE

Mr. Craig Stewart (Marquette): Mr. Speaker, as reported in *Hansard* of June 2, at page 6212, I asked the following question concerning the Hall Commission report:

Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transport. Since certain areas of western Canada will be severely affected by the Hall Commission's proposals for rail abandonment, particularly region 4 area of western Manitoba, and since it is proposed to close some of those lines as early as December 31, 1977, can the minister say what form of appeal is available to those communities which feel the report deals unfairly with their areas?

In his reply, the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) stated that he was surprised that I would ask such a question. He said he understood from other members of his party that the Official Opposition gave practically unanimous support to the recommendations of the Hall Commission. He then went on to say that the usual channels of appeal were open to these communities through the Canadian Transport Commission.