

Northwest Territories Advisory Commission

In summary, the announcement today is a major milestone in the inexorable march of the people of the north toward self government. All Canadians can take pleasure and rejoice in this announcement, but none more so than those of us who, by choice, want to make our contribution to the national life as residents of Canada's far north.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Frank Howard (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, not having had the advantage, as obviously the hon. Member for the Northwest Territories did, of an advance copy of the Minister's statement, it will not be possible for me to go into such great detail in commenting upon it. I should say that I am sure it seems strange to many people in Canada today to realize that there are still Canadian citizens being denied the full opportunity of exercising their franchise. The sooner we can wipe out that stigma of refusing people the right to vote, the better off we will all be.

For years the operation of the Northwest Territories as well as the Yukon has been controlled here in Ottawa. This, of course, has neither allowed for the correct or proper development of northern areas, nor for a true appreciation of the people in these territories and the north country, and the function of Government. It has not allowed these people to obtain complete political and economic freedom. If the Commission can assist in bringing about an attainment of political rights and freedoms, as well as economic rights, for the people of the north, it will have accomplished a great deal.

I know Professor Carrothers and have known him for some time. I know he believes in these freedoms and rights, and I think his choice as Chairman is excellent. He will bring to that Commission a brilliant mind and a tremendous ability to grasp the complexities of almost any situation. It is of paramount importance in respect of any Commission such as this to realize that it must take more than just time and more than just trouble, but that it must bend over backward in attempting to assess the full desires of the people themselves. In no way should there be any attempt to avoid giving attention to the opinions of the people who live in the north because, after all, it is their rights and problems with which we are dealing.

Very often in past years royal commissions, commissions of inquiry, committees of inquiry and the like have delved into aspects of life in Canada. The effectiveness of those commissions, and the fact that many Governments

[Mr. Rhéaume.]

in the past in dealing with other commissions have not seen fit to bring many of their recommendations into effect, does not lead me to expect too hopefully that there will be speed and dispatch on the part of the Government in dealing with the situation in the north. All we can do is hope that this will be one Commission of a different character than all the others in that it will act with speed; that it will consult with the people affected, and that the Government will not drag its feet in bringing into full force the rights and freedoms of the people in the north.

Mr. H. A. Olson (Medicine Hat): Mr. Speaker, we in this Party were not given the benefit of any advance notice of this announcement which has been made today. Nevertheless we welcome the announcement that has been made by the Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources, particularly because of that part of the terms of reference to the Commission which relates to human rights, and the right of people in the north to exercise their franchise and make their wishes known, as do people in other parts of Canada.

The expansion which should be taking place in the north—well over one third of the total area of Canada—is something that has demanded attention for a number of years, and for this reason we welcome the announcement made by the Minister today to the effect that there is to be another concerted effort to work out programs and policies which will bring to fruition the tremendous potential development of these natural resources in the north. We hope this Commission will operate somewhat differently than certain other inquiries have operated in the past, and that there will be something more than lip service given to the desirability of granting these people the right of determination and the right to develop the natural resources in that area.

In addition to all the other things this Advisory Commission will be looking into, I hope it will not overlook the very valid suggestion that some of this territory ought to be added to existing provinces. A number of suggestions have been made, I understand with the approval of some of the people in the north, to the effect that the boundaries of several of the provinces could be extended to include some of this territory. I also believe, Mr. Speaker, that this Advisory Commission should have included in its terms some refer-