

Yukon and N.W.T. Government

work toward a meeting of minds on the matter.

Mr. Gordon Ritchie (Dauphin): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to speak in support of the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) on behalf of those thousands of Canadians who appear to have been relegated to second-class citizenship by the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Chrétien) and his department. The thing that interests me most about the government's attitude to the Territory and people of the Yukon is that it reflects exactly the indulgent and patronizing stance that has for years characterized the permanent officials of the department.

Apparently the frontier of the just society lies along the line 60 degrees latitude. The people of the Yukon will have to be content with whatever benefits slop over from the south. I see that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) has now been forced to intervene between the minister and his northern wards; the Prime Minister has graciously made it known that he will give audience to his Yukon subjects if they will journey to Ottawa and wait upon him.

The whole performance of the Prime Minister, the Minister of Northern Affairs and the officials of his department is incredible in this day and age. The recent appearance of the minister in the Yukon and Northwest Territories hardly fits this era of Canadian national development. His speeches up there and his reaction to the very reasonable proposals of the people of the Yukon indicate that he is a mere puppet of his permanent officials. He has apparently been so thoroughly brain-washed by the bureaucrats that he now reflects perfectly the status quo that pervades his department's offices in Ottawa.

After all, what tremendous concessions were the people of the Yukon seeking? According to the resolution unanimously adopted by the council last January, all that was sought was an increased measure of autonomy, a little touch of representative and responsible government and some say in how the taxes paid in the Yukon might be applied to Yukon problems. This resolution was forwarded to Ottawa. They received no answer until the minister's arrogant and inept performance of November 12. Is democracy no longer a desirable thing? Is individual freedom and responsibility foreign to the new order of the so-called just society?

The council of the Yukon—at least its token group of elected members—asked for

an increase of membership from 7 to 15, and that the council be re-named the Yukon Legislative Assembly.

• (3:40 p.m.)

They wanted the present Advisory Committee on Finance to be changed to a five-man executive council with full executive powers in the fields of education, health and welfare, natural resources including land, public works, justice and correction, revenue and finance, forestry, fisheries, industry and labour. They wanted all Crown lands to be held for the Crown in the right of the Yukon Territory. They also asked that the Yukon be allowed to play a full part in interprovincial and federal-provincial conferences and discussions, and be permitted to determine when the Yukon should be granted full provincial status.

In this day and age, and in light of the development and tremendous potential of the Yukon, I can see nothing but good sense and sound reason in this proposal. But the reaction of the minister and his department was arrogant, insulting and stupid. It was arrogant because it displayed narrow preconception and stubborn inflexibility. It was insulting because it was delivered almost ten months late.

Mr. Nielsen: It was a year and ten months late.

Mr. Ritchie: I stand corrected. It was patronizing in its terms and derogatory in its inference that Yukon residents were incapable of adult responsibility. It was stupid because it created trouble where trouble should have been, and could have been, avoided. Now the Prime Minister has been forced to jump in and try to bail his fumbling minister out of the sinking departmental boat.

The minister, without any attempt at serious discussion, took his packet of carefully prepared speeches to the Territories and spread out his trade goods to catch the eye of the natives. Those trade goods were cheap and shoddy. They consisted of an offer to let the members of the Yukon Council serve one additional year, four years instead of three; to set their own indemnities and allowances and—this was a great concession to democracy—to allow one of their number to sit on a committee with the three permanent officials of government charged with running the territory. In a particularly matter-of-fact manner the minister turned down any thought of a move toward self-government “for the foreseeable future”.