

Supply—Northern Affairs

Mr. Dinsdale: The question raised by the hon. member for Port Arthur is not a new one. This point has been discussed at the two recent meetings of the territorial council itself. The precedent for the appointment goes back to 1905, I understand. Since that year it has been the practice to appoint a high level civil servant to the post of commissioner of the Northwest Territories. On the other hand, in the Yukon Territory which until recently to a certain extent was in a more advanced state of development, the commissioner has not necessarily been a high ranking civil servant. As to possible future developments, I think recommendations will be forthcoming from the council itself in this respect. As I indicated the other day it is the desire of the government that these territories, both the Northwest Territories and the Yukon, should move toward independent status as quickly as the economic and social situation permits.

There is even some suggestion that a separate territory be established in the Northwest Territories area. If and when this suggestion is followed, the commissioner appointed could perhaps be an individual completely outside the high level civil service category.

Progress has been made along this line through the provision of a council for the Northwest Territories which is partly elective and partly appointive. I am sure as progress continues the situation to which the hon. member has made reference will be resolved, and we shall move toward a greater position of independence in the territories.

Mr. Fisher: I should like to ask the minister whether the Glassco commission has a task force operating in the department looking at this particular aspect; that is the dual role of the deputy minister?

Mr. Dinsdale: The terms of reference to the Glassco commission do not necessarily include that subject matter to which the member has referred. Whether that commission will request the opportunity of looking at this situation is something to be decided in the future, but at the moment this is not a term of reference.

Mr. Fisher: I should like to put it to the minister, and the committee, that the onus of the extra responsibility in no way diminishes the attention and concern that the deputy minister can give to his departmental function as distinct from his other duties.

Mr. Dinsdale: Mr. Chairman, I am sure the hon. member will agree that the over-all responsibility of the deputy minister of the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources necessitates his vital interest in the

activities of the north and, while this constitutes extra work—his doubling in the capacity of the commissioner—at the same time it allows him to present his knowledgeable viewpoint regarding the peculiar problems of the Northwest Territories. In the past, during the underdeveloped period, this viewpoint has been very useful.

Mr. Fisher: Mr. Chairman, I did not have that point in mind. I was thinking of the difficulties involved as a result of one individual helping to develop policy, making up estimates and recommending expenditures in certain areas of the northern administration, while at the same time putting on another hat of responsibility in the spending of this money. I was wondering about the possibility of there being a certain amount of conflict and a certain amount of overlap which is perhaps not ideal.

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Chairman, I should like to say a word on this subject. The hon. member for Port Arthur is probably aware of the fact that the history of the political development in the Yukon has followed almost the same course as that being followed now in the Northwest Territories. In 1901 the elected portion of the council in the Yukon numbered 5, and the appointed portion also numbered 5. At that time the commissioner was appointed by the minister. As a result of the amendment to the Yukon Act the elected members to that council now number 7, which is now the entire council, and it sits without any appointees whatsoever. The commissioner of the Yukon Territory is still appointed by the minister.

The point I am trying to bring to the attention of the hon. member for Port Arthur is that I have no reason to believe that the people of the Mackenzie river area would feel otherwise than did those people of the Yukon Territory, and that any move toward additional representation, control or autonomy on behalf of those people, should be initiated by themselves and not by this house.

There is a move afoot in the Yukon now for increased representation. Certain representations were made when the act was amended regarding an increase in the size of the council. Representations were also made, through the council, for an advisory committee, in respect of financial matters, which would sit with the commissioner of the territory to consider the budget and other fiscal problems. This is as it was desired by the people of the Yukon, and I am certain that the people of the Mackenzie river area would not wish anything different in regard to their situation. I am sure when they are ready to accept greater responsibility and desire a greater number of representatives on the Northwest