

Canada stretching from James Bay in the south to the North Pole, and from the Richardson Mountains in the west to Cape Chidley in the east, near Port Burwell. It encompasses 1,350,000 square miles.

While the election of the territorial council and the provision whereby the council will select a Speaker can be considered as a small gain, the fact that the commissioner of the Northwest Territories is still all-powerful and that this bill does nothing to change that remains one of the major problems in this area. The provision for the formation of an executive committee is a step forward; having these elected members responsible for various government departments is basically a good and sound idea.

Although this measure will make for pretty good reading and will look good on paper, is it really a positive step forward? Is it not true that the real stress lies not with the fully elected council, but with the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories and the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Chrétien)? That situation should be changed, and changed soon.

Where else in Canada does an appointed civil servant decide which departments elected representatives will control? Does an Ottawa civil servant, in particular a deputy minister, decide who shall become the minister of a department? I should hope not. Although the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories said that no departments have officially been declared as having been set aside for elected members to run, he did say, "To begin with they will probably get a couple of easy ones." Who is this appointed civil servant to make such condescending statements to the people of my constituency? Perhaps the Commissioner is afraid that the elected people may, just may, show up some of the shortcomings of his administration. So, they must be put in charge of less important departments.

In a statement to CBC Radio News two weeks ago, the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories said, in referring to the executive committee idea, "The whole objective here is to give them responsibility and give them the feeling that they are, in fact, running it." That shows a very, very bad attitude, I must say. One would assume from such a statement that although the elected representatives of the people of the Northwest Territories are given the feeling that they are running their government, they are still, in fact, not running it. That government will still be under the thumb of the Commissioner and the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. I suggest that there is a big difference between feeling that you are running a government and actually running it. Treat adults like children, and they will act like children. It becomes very obvious that the colonial status of the Northwest Territories is to continue. That, as I have said publicly many times before, is not a healthy situation to be in, politically.

If we look at the idea of the executive committee, with department heads to be chosen from elected representatives, it would appear that all these department heads will be in a dangerous position. The elected people will be responsible to those who elected them, but the Commissioner and his staff will be in the position to undermine the elected representative, if they should so choose. For example, if the Commissioner and his staff decide they do

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not like a certain person in charge of a department, they could have that person removed by seeing to it that the department concerned does not produce to its full capability. That is not to say that this happens now. On the other hand, if that were to happen, the government could turn round and say, "We told you so," or, "This person cannot run the department." Then, what would happen? In the next election the representative would be out on his ear. This kind of situation simply is not good enough for the people of the Northwest Territories.

Where else in a democracy, Mr. Speaker, does a middle level appointed civil servant have absolute power over elected representatives of the people? Where else in the free world does the civil servant have the right to say to another group of people, "Thou shalt not drink; thou shalt not even buy liquor or beer." That is what the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories told the people of Pond Inlet just a few weeks ago. Where else in Canada does an appointed civil servant have his own private "Air Force One" standing by, ready to fly on short notice? Mr. Speaker, I often wonder how much that aircraft is costing the taxpayer. I also wonder if this is a legal operation. Where else in a democracy does a civil servant have the power to prorogue a parliamentary session, as happened last year at a territorial council sitting at Yellowknife? Mr. Speaker, there is simply too much power invested in one man when he is not a representative of the people; I repeat, not a representative of the people.

• (1550)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Firth: He is responsible for the people of the Northwest Territories in the worst possible paternalistic sense, but not responsible to the people. There is really no such thing, in the true sense of the word, as government of the Northwest Territories, with or without elected representatives, with or without a Speaker and with or without the executive. It is simply a colonial administration. I truly hope, Mr. Speaker, that the people of the Northwest Territories elected in the future will try to do something to change this situation, and change it soon. Also, I hope that hon. members of this House will do something to help make this change possible.

One solution to this problem that should be considered, and considered seriously, is to have an elected person replace the commissioner, something like the mayor and town council system. The head of the administration would then be answerable to the fully-elected body. This council would be answerable to the people and have the power to fire, if need be, the head of the administration. In this way, at least, the man at the top would be responsible to the people of the Northwest Territories.

Until the present position of commissioner comes under the influence of the electorate, the stigma of colonialism will continue. This does not mean that we are asking for, or are ready for, full provincial status, but it would be a big step forward in the development of self-government for the Northwest Territories. It would mean that the entire administration of the north would be responsible to the people they are supposed to serve. Through the elected body they could finally get rid of the title "commissioner" with its connotations of paternalism, colonialism and a