

Northwest Territories Act

legislation? That is what is suggested both in the argument of the minister and the argument of the member for Comox-Alberni.

There can be no price tag or restriction, fiscal or otherwise, on the right of the people who are supposed to be represented by a representative legislative body. Either the principle is a valid one or it is not.

What the legislation in effect does is to take away a power that is already there. It compounds an abortion of the principle of representative government. It compounds an error in the thinking of the government and, unfortunately, if the hon. member for Comox-Alberni sticks with his argument in this regard, it compounds the error in his thinking.

I say that because if you are going to accept, on the basis of the fiscal argument that the federal government spends more money in the Northwest Territories than it gets out of it, the principle that (a) the members of the legislative body must be appointed and (b), that they are not going to have the power to spend money which they derive from imposing taxes on themselves, as well as by other means such as federal grants, until such time as the appointee of the federal government introduces such legislation, then you have to impose the same kind of restriction on every provincial legislature in Canada with the exception of Ontario. That is what it would lead to logically.

Sir, argue as one might one cannot abrogate the fact that these amendments, including this which is one of the most important ones, are taking away from the elected representatives of the people the right to spend money derived by way of revenue from taxes which they impose upon themselves. That is what we would be doing if we accepted this amendment.

Mr. Schreyer: Would the hon. member permit a question at this point? According to the hon. member's argument, which I find very persuasive, it would follow that the Yukon and Northwest Territories were as eligible for self-government 5, 10 or 15 years ago as they are today. I would ask the hon. member if he would argue that point as well.

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Chairman, I have said from the outset of my participation in this debate, and I am going to continue in this course of conduct, that I am not going to be drawn into a partisan discussion, though I am not suggesting that this is the hon. member's intention. I speak as a northerner and I

[Mr. Nielsen.]

believe—I am sure this belief is held by all members of the committee—deeply and sincerely in the principles of representative government in a democratic institution. I am one who believes that it is wrong to allow the people who comprise an elected body to tax themselves and yet deny them the power to spend the money they raise thereby. That is really the only principle involved here.

I think they are more ready now than they were 10 or 15 years ago to take the necessary steps toward eventual autonomy. And I do not advocate autonomy overnight because it does take time to acquire the skills and experience which go hand in hand with efficient government. In my submission, though this is a personal view, you cannot expect to create a brand new autonomous legislature and to deal with the far reaching implications involved if these people are clothed with the authority to deal, for instance, with the resource of the Yukon River which has the potential to produce twice the hydroelectric output of the St. Lawrence Seaway. Until such time, Mr. Chairman, as that experience and skill are acquired, then we have to move in staged steps toward autonomy.

The point I am making with respect to this amendment is that if we adopt it we are not moving ahead but are moving backward. There is already provision in the existing legislation giving the Commissioner in Council the power to legislate with respect to the expenditure of funds. But this amendment takes that power away and makes it unlawful—they do not use the word "power" in the amendment—for the representatives of the people to legislate with regard to money matters until such time as the appointee of the government brings in that kind of legislation. That is what is wrong with this amendment. It is undemocratic. It is not representative. It hearkens back to the days of George III when people were taxed without representation. That is what is happening here. There is a complete lack of appreciation and a misconception of every fundamental principle of the democratic institution and way of life.

● (1:50 p.m.)

Mr. Barnett: Mr. Chairman, I do not particularly desire to launch into a debate with the hon. member for Yukon which might well endure for the rest of the afternoon. I still feel that my argument has validity and that he cannot have it both ways. He cannot have it that the council of the territories, in its