

Yukon and Territorial Lands Acts

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, the minister was out of the chamber when I told the House that all members of the delegation met the Prime Minister and the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, but the matters that are the subject of amendments to the Yukon Act were not discussed with the members of the council. The only matter discussed was the instruction that the minister says he is going to give the commissioner to set up an executive committee. There was also mention of the administration of justice, and so on. But surely members of the council had a right to expect these matters to be discussed with them before this bill was placed before us. Now, of course, this means that the committee will have to be persuaded—although I do not think that will be difficult—to have members of the council travel to Ottawa in order to give evidence and to give their views on the bill.

The minister speaks of a task force that will study matters of conservation in the north. He spoke of its composition. On the task force will be five university conservationists, two departmental officials and three officials from oil companies. Mr. Speaker, there is a very active, vigorous knowledgeable Yukon Conservation Society that has been doing good work in the north. It is composed of people who live in the north, who know the north like the back of their hands so far as the Yukon is concerned. I did not hear the minister say that this association had been consulted or that any of these people would be asked to serve on this task force. Again we hear "The great white father knows best for you people up there. We are going to get experts to come up and tell you all about the land that you live in and what recommendations are best for your life in the future."

So far as the amendments to the Territorial Lands Act are concerned, I am afraid I cannot regard them as forward-looking. I can only regard them as more power to make more regulations, further to stifle development. In a land of 207,030 square miles, which is the area of the Yukon, trying to buy a 50-foot by 100-foot lot is like to trying to buy the Taj Mahal, and it would take just about as long. To buy a lot on which to build a home in areas outside municipalities, to buy acreage on which to develop a business, is an almost impossible task. Even when the bureaucrats deign to allow you to spend some money on such a purchase, it takes three to six months to get any action, by which time the building season is over and a good deal of commercial opportunity has been lost.

[Mr. Chrétien.]

● (4:10 p.m.)

Has there been, as the minister says, collaboration with the territorial governments in drawing up these amendments to the Territorial Lands Act? That is what he asked members of the House to believe. I am prepared to say now that the fact is there has not been one whit of consultation with members of the territorial council. When he says there has been consultation with the territorial government, he means that his officials in Ottawa have spoken with his officials in the territories. That is the extent of the consultation. The inference is left that the separate being, the territorial government, is something apart from the minister's function and that the people of the Yukon have been consulted. Nothing could be further from the truth, Mr. Speaker. One bureaucrat here spoke to another bureaucrat there and that is the sum and substance of it.

All in all, I am disappointed with what I see in the amendments contained in Bill C-212. It will be my intention to endeavour to persuade the committee to accept several amendments. One of these will be to increase the size of the council pursuant to the repeated requests of the territorial council. Another will be an amendment to clause 24 to give the members of the council the right to introduce money measures in their own legislative forum, and any consequent amendments with respect thereto that may be necessary.

Another amendment which I will try to persuade the committee to accept is one which will set up a proper executive committee and will pass to the individual members of that committee and the committee as a whole certain departmental responsibilities, particularly in the field of education—which should be in the hands of the elected representatives and not in the hands of the minister, as it is now—and any other similar amendment with concomitant fiscal powers.

I shall also endeavour to persuade the committee that the idea of having a majority of bureaucrats sitting on an executive committee where two members of the council, to use the words of the minister, are being asked to assess the bureaucrats in the administration of the territorial government is far from the proper concept of a democratic forum. The state is not the master. The people are, and should be, the master. The majority on any executive committee should be of the people, and if any assistance is required it should be required by the bureaucrats and not by the people.