

Northwest Territories Act

people who live there, and intolerable to the people of southern Canada.

I think I shall say no more at this time, Mr. Speaker. If there are questions which hon. members wish to ask about the amendment, perhaps I could answer them as we proceed from section to section.

• (8:20 p.m.)

Mr. Erik Nielsen (Yukon): I like the minister's words, but I do not like the methods by which this bill seeks to achieve the laudable objectives which, he has explained, are the intention of the government.

When I speak of material objectives in the north I cannot help but contrast political philosophies. And when I speak of progress in our governmental institutions in the north I assure you, Mr. Speaker, and all hon. members, that I do so entirely without partisanship. I am sure the hon. member for the Northwest Territories (Mr. Orange) will join me in the sympathies I am about to express in this regard.

The government's objective of eventual self-government throughout the north is a laudable one. I will leave the Yukon apart for the moment, because we are discussing the Northwest Territories. But I suggest to the minister and to the government that the objective to which I have referred, however laudable, cannot be achieved by perpetuating a system of appointing members to a body which is supposed to be an elected body, representative of the people of the north.

This is not a continuation of the democratic evolution which has gone on in the Northwest Territories as a matter of history. It is a perpetuation of a colonial system of government. The situation which exists today and which existed under the previous government, whereby the majority of the members of the council were appointed by the governor in council that is, by the government of the federal power of the day, is an intolerable one. It is wrong.

Mr. Laing: We are correcting it.

Mr. Nielsen: It is wrong, whichever government does it. The minister says he and his friends are correcting the situation. But what this house is being asked to do is to alter a situation where there are five appointed members and four elected members in order to create a new one in which there will be a council composed of seven elected members and five appointed members.

As an argument for the continuance of the practice of appointing members, the minister has told us it is a good idea to expose men of commercial, industrial and academic interests to the north by having them serve on the Northwest Territories council, a body which meets half the time in Ottawa and half the time in the Northwest Territories. This is somehow supposed to be justification for appointing people from southern Canada. There is one exception—one which in itself is not consistent with the explanation the minister gave. I speak of Mr. Abraham Ogpik, an Eskimo, who is from the north.

The principle of appointing people to the council so that they may acquire some knowledge during their brief service and be in a position to disseminate it in southern Canada is, in my view, not a sound one. I say this regardless of which government may be in power, because I am dealing with the political development of the north. Then there is the argument that these people may help to provide the elected representative body of the Northwest Territories with some kind of expertise which is not otherwise available. This also is a wrong principle upon which to proceed. The minister knows as well as I do that this house, through its committees system, the provincial legislatures through their committees systems and, indeed, the Yukon legislative council through its system, can at any time call upon experts to assist them in developing thoughts, ideas and laws. There is, I submit, not one single reason or democratic excuse for perpetuating a colonialistic system of appointing members who are supposed to represent the people of the Northwest Territories when, in fact, those crown appointees, with one exception, come from everywhere else but the north.

Is that particular appointment proper? I do not know. I hope to have the pleasure of meeting the Eskimo member of the council some day and discussing the problems of the north with him. But is it right, under a democratic system such as ours, for any resident of the north to be appointed to a council rather than run for election as does every other representative of the people in any democratic institution? There is every reason to expect that should an Eskimo or an Indian run for election to the territorial council, he would have a chance of success. What is the excuse for this colonialistic idea of appointing people to be so-called representatives on what is supposed to be a democratic institution? This, sir, is simply paying lip