

*The Territories*

Since 1967 a number of important changes have been made to the two territorial acts. I will now provide, as a reminder for the benefit of my colleagues, a brief description of what those amendments did to further the constitutional evolution of the two territories.

In June, 1970, amendments to the Yukon Act and Northwest Territories Act were passed by parliament which were in keeping with the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on the Development of Government in the Northwest Territories—the Carrothers Commission—and were designed to increase the local responsibility of the territorial governments and the councils, and to further the federal government's policy of constitutional development in the north.

Speaking on second reading of Bill C-212, an act to amend the Yukon Act, the Northwest Territories Act and the Territorial Lands Act, on May 13, 1970, the previous minister of Indian affairs and northern development, now President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Chrétien), described the purpose of the bill in the following way:

... it is aimed at promoting the constitutional development of both territories, in the sense that it will enable their residents to assume more responsibility in the day-to-day administration of their respective governments.

Essentially, because the amendments to both acts were passed, the life of each territorial council was increased from three to four years from the date of the return of the writs for a general election, subject to dissolution by the governor in council at an earlier date in consultation with the respective councils; the commissioners in council were authorized to prescribe the qualifications of persons who may vote or be elected in territorial council elections; the commissioners in council were empowered to legislate on matters concerning the administration of justice in the two territories; the requirements for the commissioners to seek the approval of the governor in council to lend or invest money from the territorial consolidated revenue fund were removed; the period of disallowance of territorial ordinances was reduced from two years to one year; and the commissioners in council were empowered to set the indemnities and allowances of the members of the two councils and the members of council committees.

● (1750)

Additional amendments to the Northwest Territories Act altered the size of the council from 12 to 14 members by increasing the elected membership from seven to ten and reducing the appointed councillors by one, from five to four. There was also a provision authorizing the commissioner in council to further reduce the number of appointed councillors, subject to the approval of the governor in council.

In the same speech on May 13, 1970, the minister further announced a major step to be taken in the constitutional development of the Yukon Territory, although it did not appear in the bill: the establishment of an executive committee. In June, 1970, he instructed Commissioner Smith to establish an executive committee comprising the commissioner, his two assistant commissioners, and two members of the council nominated by the council. The details were discussed by the council at a special session held in June and July. During debate the concept of the executive com-

mittee was endorsed by councillors who recognized its significance as an important step towards the development of an executive along provincial lines.

In 1972 the minister confirmed the government's policy when he announced before the Standing Committee on Indian Affairs and Northern Development that the federal government had adopted seven major objectives for northern Canada. One of those national objectives is "to further the evolution of government in the northern Territories". Although those objectives were stated in general terms, they were "comprehensive in scope and closely related to Canada's national goals and interests," to use the minister's words. Then one year later, in March 1973, the minister again addressed the Standing Committee on Indian Affairs and Northern Development and reported that:

Political development in the Northwest Territories has been one of our greatest concerns since the Carrothers Commission report in 1966 and, as I mentioned in my statement to this committee on March 28, 1972, one of our national objectives in northern development over the next ten years is to "further the evolution of government in both northern Territories". Of course, in this area much has already been achieved, both Territorial Councils are very aggressive in carrying out their responsibilities. Most of the provincial-type government services, with the exception of resource development, are now under the control of the Territorial governments and as in the past, my estimates provide for increased financial assistance to both the Yukon and Northwest Territories Governments.

Mr. Speaker, in light of what I have said before, and with all due respect to my colleague, the hon. member for the Yukon, I do not think the population of the northern territories has been considered as a second-class population, nor can I share the view that the population of the two territories has had to suffer in the past by reason of the so-called colonial status of the Territories. I would think that the hard times and the difficulties of life in the north are the result of climatic, geographic, economic and social circumstances rather than the political or constitutional arrangements. As a matter of fact, I would submit that the presence of the federal government has been a benefit rather than a handicap to the northern population. And although the government is working toward a situation of greater autonomy for the two territorial governments, it would be foolish to think that this can happen in one day. The present government's policy has been to try to balance the two notions of prudence and change; the outcome of this balance is called progressive evolution.

It is with this requirement in mind, Mr. Speaker, that in 1974 the minister introduced Bill C-9, a bill to amend the Yukon and the Northwest Territories Acts. The bill was enacted by parliament in April of the same year. I will deal first with the changes that affected the Yukon Act.

The size of the fully-elected council was increased from seven to 12. This measure was designed to reflect the increased population of the Yukon, its geographical diversity, and to allow for the formation of parties in the council. This change was given effect at the Yukon territorial general election on November 18, 1974, when Yukon voters elected a new council of 12 members to serve for the next four years.

Bill C-9 also provided for the council to increase or decrease its size in line with future changes in the Yukon's population. This will provide more flexibility especially in view of the significant population fluctuations which may occur as a result of changes in the largely resource based