

Yukon and Northwest Territories

given the fiscal authority to legislate in those areas which are already administered by the territorial civil services, local government, social development, economic development, education, administration and so on.

The minister has described the amendments in this bill as important steps along the road to greater responsibility for both councils.

Mr. Nielsen: Hear, hear!

Miss MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): But really meaningful responsibility, Mr. Speaker? Not without fiscal responsibility. Can we really expect Canadian citizens north of 60 to be satisfied with anything else, that is anything less than fiscal responsibility? The minister said this afternoon that he consulted with both councils and, obviously, the bill we have before us today is his interpretation of what the councils want. But I cannot believe his interpretation of the wishes of the councils, if this bill is an indication of it; I cannot believe his interpretation is correct, or legitimate or perceptive.

Recently the Standing Committee on Indian Affairs and Northern Development was in the Yukon and heard a very eloquent and convincing presentation on this very subject made by a member of the council on behalf of the entire council. He said:

We are, quite simply, Mr. Chairman, sick and tired of living under a stultifying and suffocating colonial blanket. We demand the right to live and raise our families under laws that Yukoners make for Yukoners.

We demand the right to say how the tax dollar, which we contribute to on a greater level per capita than any other Canadian, will be spent in the Yukon. We refuse to let the government of Canada, through its bureaucracy, make those decisions that the people of the Yukon must suffer under. We demand the right of Yukoners to make our own mistakes.

The councillor was not asking for full provincial status, Mr. Speaker, and he made that point quite clear, but he was asking for the right of the councils to more responsibility so that they could prove to the rest of Canada their capability to handle provincial status when that time arrives. He went on to say:

So what we are saying is that in essence we would have all the legislative and administrative prerogatives, if those resolutions were followed—

And he was referring to certain resolutions passed by the Yukon Council.

—that would make us in essence the same, analogous to a provincial legislature, without the immediate control of natural resources, the reason being that we think we have to prove to the people of Canada and to the government of Canada that we are as capable of dealing with the resources of the province as any other area in Canada.

Not only did the committee accept the presentation of the council, but individual members in the committee spoke strongly in favour of it. Approval for that territorial view, one which is held by members of the Yukon Council and the Northwest Territories Council alike, approval was very succinctly expressed by the hon. member for Sherbrooke (Mr. Pelletier), who said:

Well you can be sure that you have at least one person in Quebec who would subscribe to your idea.

I know we in this party will look forward to the support of the member for Sherbrooke when we move amendments which will make his expressed support possible.

[Miss MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands).]

In this bill the minister has repealed section 46 of both acts dealing with lands for the purpose of deleting the word "territory or territories" as the entity to which administration and financial use of lands were formerly transferred and substituting, therefore, the word "commissioner". In other words the minister has taken away certain powers from what, under this section, had been an inoperative entity and handed them over to the commissioner, that is, to the minister's representative in the territories. I find this most difficult to comprehend. If the minister is really serious about providing, as he states, "important steps along the road to greater responsibility to both councils," why did he not delegate this responsibility to the commissioner in council, that is, to the elected representatives of the people. He has delegated more ultimate authority to himself, rather than to the people of the north. I hope that at committee stage this section can be amended so that the intent of the minister's statement for greater responsibility can be given effect, for we want to see action rather than empty rhetoric.

● (1540)

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the minister indicated today that he will take measures to strengthen the executive committee of the Yukon and to establish an executive committee in the Northwest Territories. The hon. member for Yukon pointed out to the minister well in advance of the setting up of the executive committee in the Yukon that such a committee would be an unworkable vehicle. Unfortunately, his predictions proved to be only too true. I know the hon. member for Yukon will wish to comment on this himself. Let me say this to the minister: The people of the Northwest Territories, having been exposed to the track record of the executive committee in the Yukon, want no part of any such political structure. They see it as divisive and ineffective, and I urge the minister to reconsider whatever action he proposes to take in this regard.

All the people north of 60 degrees are Canadian citizens, Mr. Speaker, not colonials. It is time Ottawa recognized that fact. The minister is fond of saying that he does not wish to be paternalistic. He has said so many times in this House. Let him prove his words by cutting out Ottawa's paternal attitude to our northern territories. The government in Ottawa stands accused by northerners of impeding progress rather than encouraging it. There are indicators of political progress in the north, such as the building up of a head of steam which can lead the people concerned to gain control over their own affairs, if this government will but recognize the fact and search for means as to how best to implement it. I hope that in committee the minister will be receptive to such innovative and progressive measures as we shall propose, measures which, I am sure, more adequately reflect the tone, temper and times of the north.

Mr. Wally Firth (Northwest Territories): Mr. Speaker, the bill before the House, the bill to amend the Yukon Act, the Northwest Territories Act and the Canada Elections Act, is an important bill and one in which I, certainly, as well as the people of the Northwest Territories are most interested. I am referring, of course, to Bill C-9. This bill I support. I support this bit of legislation, although it is only a small step forward to the political development of the Northwest Territories, the largest federal constituency in