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NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

SESSIONAL PAPER NO. 1
(Second Session, 1965)

COMMISSIONER'S OPENING ADDRESS

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Members of the Council of the Northwest Territories:

I open this 30th Session of the Council of the Northwest Territories with the Deputy Commissioner's chair empty,--as it was when Council prorogued in February. At that time we hoped the sudden illness that struck Mr. W.G. Brown would be soon over and he with us again. Instead, the illness has been long. I am happy to report that he is now back to duty in the Department of Northern Affairs. I am most unhappy to report that because doctors forbid the travel involved, Mr. Brown has resigned his seat on this Council. He will, however, continue to be associated with the N.W.T. affairs. In his capacity as Chief of the Territorial Division, he heads the group of persons on whom your Commissioner relies to obtain performance of most of his executive functions.

I wish to record here that building good government in the north has been Mr. Brown's concern since he came to northern work at the end of the war nearly twenty years ago. He set up the Administration of the Mackenzie, served as Commissioner of the Yukon, and since 1957 has guided the federal interest in both Territories as Chief of the Territorial Division. Simultaneously, as Deputy Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, he has been a friend and colleague to us all, wise in counsel, strong in debate and warm in personality. I am glad that he will be in continuing association with our work but losing him as Deputy Commissioner is disappointing in the extreme.

The announcement by the Honourable Arthur Laing of setting up the Advisory Commission on Development of Government in the Northwest Territories will be greeted with applause by this Council and by all persons interested in Canada's north. It is for us by far the most important event this year, this decade and perhaps this generation. It is the first time Canada has embarked on any but the most limited study of the north. The Glassco Commission made valuable recommendations and comments on northern governmental administration, but they were limited to administration and were only incidental to the same consideration of federal machinery of government on a Canada-wide basis. The Gordon Commission on Canada's Economic Prospects had little time and fewer words for the north. The B and B Commission has held sances in two or three northern places and we await its finding with bated breath. Our own Carrothers Commission has no other thing to study but the Northwest Territories. This will be not their main but their only subject on which to report. Terms of reference are narrower than the "economic social and political" comprehensiveness that Council asked. But perhaps the word "government" means more than "political". "Development of government in the Northwest Territories" is probably intended to mean the philosophical concept of the democratic parliamentary institution; the electorate and how it is represented; responsibility of the legislators and to whom; the judiciary; the executive and how empowered and to whom and how answerable; the civil service; the governmental machinery for administering health services, education, social welfare, professional, trades, business and other licensing; municipal affairs; labour relations, policing; probation and corrections work. Finally, the economic and financial base on which the society stands must be essential to the structure of government. Perhaps the Commissioners will take this view. From its previous expressions, I know this Council will hope they do,--will hope they regard no thing or circumstance of the north as extraneous.

This legislative body and the executive that functions in gear with it are the central subjects for study by the Commission. They will no doubt end their report by recommending that the Commissioner and Council that now form the Government of the Northwest Territories be altered in form and function. Most people in the Northwest Territories have chances to propose. All Members of this Council have. The Commissioner has.

The new Commissioners have moved swiftly to plan their studies, public hearings, recording system, travel and other time-tables. They decided to start by attending part of this Session. I am gratified indeed to be able to announce this. The warmest welcome goes from this Council to the Chairman, Dean A.W.R. Carrothers and the two members, Professor Jern Beetz and Mayor John Parker.

I propose that Council refer to Committee of the Whole the task of preparing a Brief to the Advisory Commission on the Development of Government in the Northwest Territories. If Members desire to debate the subject, it will be placed on the Order Paper. It may, however, seem best to Council to use the opportunities of this Session chiefly for informal exchange of views, followed by a period of some two months when Members can round out the presentation they favour in the light of their own further study and of their canvass of constituents and advisers.

The Committee of the Whole could then meet in September and draw up, in final form, the points on which there is unanimous conviction. These can then be presented to the Commission.

Points which Members wish to recommend to the Commission but on which there is not unanimity should be left for each individual Member to present to the Commission. I assume that the Commission will wish to hear each of us as an individual witness as well as receive our collective Brief.

With the future shape of Territorial government actually up for this broad enquiry and with decision-making to result, - I shall dispense with any review of conditions and deal with no other theme in this Opening Address, except the business that will be placed on the Order Paper of the Session.

It has been Council's practice for summer sessions, to deal principally with legislative matters rather than budgetary business, that having been dealt with at the preceding winter session. There is usually, and this time is no exception, a supplementary Appropriations Ordinance. It is notable on three counts. It provides funds for the establishment of a Juvenile Detention Home for the Northwest Territories in Fort Smith; it provides funds to take advantage of new authority recently granted to the Commissioner-in-Council to make loans to individuals, (this authority was required to enable the Commissioner to make loans to co-operatives and funds are provided for this purpose in this Supplementary) and funds are provided for the completion of a trucked water and sewer system for Aklavik. A portion of the cost will be recoverable from the federal government. This is a reversal of the usual practice when the two Governments are involved in a common project and represents an initiative on Territorial account which Members have favoured.

There are several pieces of legislation I shall lay before you. One is an amendment to the Jury Ordinance which removes the prohibition against women serving on juries in criminal cases. An amendment to the Billiard Rooms and Bowling Alleys Ordinance removes the age limit for persons using Bowling Alleys. An amendment to the School Ordinance concerns compulsory attendance and truancy. The Fur Export Ordinance will be amended to increase the tax payable on some species of fur and decrease that paid on others. There is a very minor amendment to the Apprentice Training Ordinance.

The most important bill is one to establish the Public Service of the Northwest Territories. It is essential for the Territorial Government to have its own employees for reasons that are well known to you and have impelled Council to give approval to the principle of this move.

There are several sessional papers including annual reports. Others refer to such matters as river bank erosion at Aklavik, a paper by the medical authorities on the effects of overproof rum, the progress of the Apprentice Training Program, the Trappers' Assistance Program and the subsidization of electric power in the Northwest Territories.

I am also placing before Council some Recommendations. Most of these result from previous expressions of opinion by Council that certain things ought to be done. Included are recommendations regarding the provision of radio communication with trappers in the Anderson and Peel River areas, the question of local option liquor legislation, the establishment of a hunting area near Fort Smith, the establishment of smaller game zones, the hunting of muskox in the Queen Elizabeth Islands, and other matters.

A complete list of the legislation, Sessional Papers and Recommendations to Council has been prepared and distributed to members. It will be available also to visitors at the Session.

There are also three briefs to Council. One relates to the establishment of hostels in the Northwest Territories by the YM-YWCA, the proposed one to labour legislation and the other is entitled "Utopia in the Arctic."

I commend all these matters to your earnest consideration.