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NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

SESSIONAL PAPER NO. 1
(First Session, 1966)

COMMISSIONER'S OPENING ADDRESS

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Members of the Council of the Northwest Territories:

Only a few years ago the far North of Canada was little known and little valued. A great change has taken place. The change has occurred in the years since the war. It has come about because it has become possible to set up, even in the high arctic, living arrangements that afford security to life, amenities for family life, and facilities for industrial operations. Until 20 years ago, northern settlements had been isolated, except for summer visits of ships and river craft. Air traffic was unreliable and costly, and radio communications were sketchy. Life in the northland was a pioneering venture not unlike life on the western plains before railroads were built.

Speculation on what would be revealed if the ice-cap melted off Greenland contemplates the probability of many islands in place of the one large one. What an interesting parallel to what took place in Canada some ten thousand years ago. When the glaciers retreated from Northern Canada, many islands were revealed. There were laid bare extensive areas of Pre-Cambrian rock. In places there were sediments deposited in tropical conditions and extending to 40,000 feet in thickness. High mountains appeared, and thousands upon thousands of lakes. All this in a post-glacial thermal regime that ruled out human life and activities except on the most meagre and tenuous scale, i. e., a density of one person for each 40 square miles on the average, and, north of latitude 70, only evidences of attempts at human habitation that did not continue.

There are two ways in which people may dwell in the Canadian northland. The one is to live as did the aboriginal inhabitants. This livelihood requires the full time of the entire family. As this kind of existence must be in balance with all the other animals, the number of people who can live in that way is not only limited but is subject to fluctuation. In any case, it is a world apart from the 20th century industrial civilization of the North American continent.

The second way for people to dwell in the Canadian northland is to take north the trappings of civilization, - houses, heat, store food, clothing, furniture, water supply, medical facilities, schools, electricity, radio communications, air transportation, motor vehicles, books, music, cameras, movies, clubs, churches.

The second way has become possible in the past two decades with the advances in technological development in a number of fields. Foremost among these is the development of aircraft and the means of flying them reliably. Though this factor is termed foremost, there are many others that come together to strengthen the main factor. For example, aerial photography has become the method of surveying the country. It is difficult to say how many years might have elapsed before the topography was recorded with any approach to the accuracy and completeness required for safe air travel. Islands before unknown were revealed during the photographic surveys of the late 1940's. Not just small islands, - one of them turned out to be 400 square miles. The map revisions amended coastlines, located lakes, rivers, mountains and established correct latitude and longitude for the entire country. For the first time the prerequisite for an inventory of the northland came into existence, namely maps. Previously, we had not known what lands were there, let alone how to find our way around. Another factor facilitating air transportation in the North was improved instruments developed during and since the war. The greater reliability of very many items of equipment makes the business of northern flying different in a way that adds up to new and acceptable levels of safety and reliability.

Technological advances sometimes come in the form of a breakthrough that places a new tool in the hands of man. More often they come in the form of refinements to known procedures. Advances so made are not less important -- in fact they offer the continuing prospect of improvements that are tantamount to invention of new principles.

Let us look at some of the recent advances. Most of them come not as breakthroughs, but at an unspectacular pace, piecemeal and virtually unheralded. Though each separate thing is soon taken for granted, the cumulative effect is profound change.

I refer to snowmobiles and telephones, roads, secondary and vocational schooling, northern youngsters in university (we have 45 of them this year), health services, trains running to the Great Slave country, oil prospectors numbering hundreds, mining development in the eastern arctic, tourists, housing, a dollar economy, radios and world news.

Are these advances to continue? Of course they are. I predict with confidence continued rise in levels of northern Canada industrial activity, scientific work, standards of living, positive good health, population, the arts, recreation, - and the continued rise in levels of education upon which depends productivity and capability to do all the other things.

I say this because the main stream that is Canada runs so strongly. In spite of setbacks from time to time, there is being built in Canada a society with potential for the best the world has ever seen. I am among those who believe that these high purposes will be realized, - in fact, they are being realized by constant improvements in the quality of life for all Canadians. Since about 1950, each year has seen the north brought in and made more and more a part of our vigorous nation. There can be no doubt whatever that this trend will continue.

The growth and changes of which I have spoken call for growth and changes in this legislature and this executive. I trust that you legislators will make known to the Carrothers Commission the changes you believe should be made in the form and machinery of government in the Northwest Territories.

In addition to the views you express in that way, which, speaking generally, will relate to matters requiring action by the federal government, there are many changes which can be made by yourselves as a legislative body. Procedures in this chamber are governed by Council Rules and custom. We have altered these from time to time. Council should be ready to consider further changes whenever a good and worthwhile result is to be obtained thereby.

Changes in departments of the federal government having responsibilities in Northern Canada, and certain new federal policies announced in outline, would seem to have important and beneficial effects in the north. Your Commissioner is not yet in a position to give an assessment of what these effects mean to the Government of the Northwest Territories and what moves are called for so that maximum advantage may result. Some weeks or months will elapse before that is possible. I shall speak on the subject at the July session.

Nine Bills will be presented to Council during this session. They include Supplementary Appropriations to finish out the current fiscal year and the Main Appropriations for 1966-67. The wording of the Appropriations Bill is changed from the standard form used in the past so that the Explanatory Notes are included as part of the Bill. This will give greater clarity of intent regarding each item and will also permit the Commissioner to transfer funds between allotments more readily in response to the changes in money needs as they materialize compared to what was provided by forecast estimates.

A Game Ordinance Amendment will authorize your Commissioner to make regulations regarding the trapping of beaver.

The interest rate on Territorial First Mortgages must be, under present policy, 1% higher than the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation rate. An amendment to the Low Cost Housing Ordinance will increase this interest rate from 7 to 7 3/4% because of the recent increase in the C. M. H. C. rate.

The existing limitations on the total amount of Second Mortgages to be granted, and on the period in which these mortgages may be granted, will be removed by an amendment to the Northwest Territories Housing Ordinance.

The Territorial Hospital Insurance Ordinance will be amended to include statutory conditions respecting the sale, transfer, or alteration of hospitals receiving government grants.

Another Bill provides for the grant of telephone franchises at Coppermine and Tuktoyaktuk.

A Sessional Paper on Representations to the Carrothers Commission is the most important item of our work.

Seventeen other Sessional Papers will be introduced, including the Annual Report of the Territorial Hospital Insurance Services for 1964. Among the remainder, the more important deal with such subjects as: The Canada Assistance Plan, The Northwest Territories Corrections Program, The Library System, The Subsidization of Electric Power, a proposed Medicare Plan for the Northwest Territories, and other papers.

Fifteen Recommendations to Council will also be presented. Principally, these are the result of investigations carried out by the Administration at the request of Council. They include: Extension of the Community Centre Grants Program, a Home Improvement Loan Plan for the Territories, Encouragement of Settlement in the Northwest Territories, Care for the Aged, Radio Communication in the Anderson and Peel Rivers area, a Youth Club Program, and other subjects.

A Reference for Advice regarding User Rights for the Fort Simpson Water and Sewer System will also be introduced during the session.

Any person may obtain a copy of any Sessional Paper by asking the Secretariat.

Members of the Council of the Northwest Territories, the work with which we are entrusted is an honour and a high responsibility. Let us turn to it now, with the best attention of which we are capable.