
Nunavut : Vision or Illusion?

In 1980 a special committee of the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly recommended that: "this Assembly declare its commitment in principle to a major division of the present Northwest Territories into an eastern and a western territory, subject to the expressed will, by public debate and by plebiscite, of the people of the Northwest Territories showing preference for the establishment of one or two new territories". Two years later a plebiscite was held on the question: "Do you think that the Northwest Territories should be divided?". Approximately 56 per cent of the total votes, favoured division of the Northwest Territories. The matter of division of the Northwest Territories was referred to the Constitutional Alliance of the Northwest Territories, composed of the Nunavut and Western Constitutional Forums.

On January 15, 1987, an agreement was reached between the Western Constitutional Forum and the Nunavut Constitutional Forum entitled "Boundary and Constitutional Agreement for the Implementation of Division of the Northwest Territories Between the Western Constitutional Forum and the Nunavut".

On March 12, 1987, the ninth Assembly approved a document entitled "Boundary and Constitutional Agreement for the Implementation of Division of the Northwest Territories Between the Western Constitutional Forum and the Nunavut Constitutional Forum". It also moved that the Assembly recommend to the Commissioner that a plebiscite be held on the question of the proposed boundary in May 1987. The Iqaluit agreement and the proposed boundary for division of the Northwest Territories was not ratified and the proposed plebiscite did not take place. The 11th Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories not having expressed its views on these matters; a motion was introduced by Peter Ernerk to affirm support for creation of a Nunavut territory. The following is a slightly edited transcription of a debate on October 31, 1989.

Peter Ernerk: I will not be speaking at length because the motion that has been made is very clear.

I would like it to be fully understood that a Nunavut government will be everybody's government. I would like to state that if there is the creation of a Nunavut government everyone will be able to come to live in Nunavut.

To the Inuit people, Nunavut is our future, because we have to think of the younger generation. That is why we have been wanting to create a Nunavut territory, because we would like to plan ahead for our younger generation. I think we have to be fully understood by the other people that as Inuit people we do not want to create two different things. We are not separatists. We want to be understood very clearly on that point. We have

never been separatists and we will never be separatists in the future.

Titus Alloo:oo: I believe, like my colleague, that it is time that we deal with the Nunavut territory since we have not had a position on this in this Assembly since our election. I believe that Nunavut is a dream; it is a dream of the Eastern Arctic people, the Inuit. It is a dream whose time has come to be realized.

Everyone here knows and everyone in the Northwest Territories knows that the government would be a public government in Nunavut, fundamentally rooted in our values, in Nunavut territory and in our traditions. A dream of ensuring Inuktitut as the main language in Nunavut territory and its use

in the school system. We dream of making laws and policy which truly reflect the needs and conditions of Nunavut territory. We feel we are the ones who should be determining our future, just as we are the ones who will be determining our future through the land claims as Inuit. However, it is not our intent to single handedly determine events in Nunavut. We will be including our friends who have helped us through our political evolution. We believe in partnership. The partnership is based on mutual respect and co-operation and this partnership is a key to our future events. It is our tradition that it is only through co-operation that we survive. We do not develop a government along racial lines. That mutual respect will be enhanced and the people who come into our Territories will be encouraged to learn our language and our culture and our values.

I believe that it is a dream we would like to achieve in the near future for it we stay as one territory, the government is so far away from our territories, it is difficult for the Nunavut caucus to foresee the desires of our constituents, because of so many complexities in our society in the NWT.

Ipeelee Kilabuk: The motion is very clear and very understandable. This has been known by the people of the NWT. Sometimes this has not been supported previously by the Legislative Assembly, but I am very happy about the fact that the 11th Assembly is now dealing with this issue. The people we represent have been asking questions about the plebiscite for division that was held. I am sure they will be happy about the motion if it is passed.

My constituents are in support of this and I will be in support of this myself. I would like you to be aware of the reason I stood up to this motion. I know this is not an easy task because the NWT is a very, very large territory and the negotiators have worked very hard on this issue. I know that it is very hard to work in the government and I am sure that the offices or the place where people work are not going to change right away and they will remain in the capital city for a while even though we have Nunavut. But they will be devolved eventually.

Hon. Michael Ballantyne: I, too, will support the motion. I want to put on the record my understanding of what this motion means.

My support of this motion is depended on certain principles being followed when Nunavut and the new western territory is created. Those principles are outlined in the boundary and constitutional agreement for the implementation of division of the Northwest Territories between the Western Constitutional Forum and the Nunavut Constitutional Forum, signed on January 15, commonly known as the Iqaluit Agreement.

The most fundamental principles that must be followed are found in part one, under matters of general concern and include the boundary. Another important principle for me is found in the official summary of the "Boundary and Constitutional Agreement Between the Western Constitutional Forum and the Nunavut Constitutional Forum". It outlines the following

process: "Before division may take place the claims boundary must be ratified by the aboriginal organizations concerned, the leaderships of the member organizations of the two forums and the Legislation Assembly must approve the agreement. The boundary must be ratified by an NWT-wide plebiscite and the residents of each jurisdiction must ratify their new constitution. This will be by plebiscite unless agreed to otherwise."

These are the principles that I have accepted in the past. I continue to be consistent with my principles. I have only one other concern, as I support this motion. It is that the federal government will pay the extra cost to each territory in creating two new Territories.

Ludy Pudluk: I have been dealing with this issue since 1982 and I was in support of the plebiscite. It has been seven years since the plebiscite was held. Even up until today I have not heard Nunavut residents saying that it is taking too long, please forget about it, I have never heard such a thing in the Nunavut area. They have been dealing with this issue up to today, although there are some issues that are not resolved with regard to the boundary. I am sure that the boundary issue could be ratified in the future because the alliances from the Nunavut and from the West have worked very hard with each other in trying to draw the boundary line. Up to today we will have to deal with this for our younger generation. Perhaps starting today we will have to think about our future because our future is our younger generation's time.

We do not dislike the people from the treeline but we have different cultures and different ways of life and we have to have different legislation, and it is now evident and that has been documented. We have to fix the future for our younger generation. The people in the western region have to start planning and do some work for their future.

Joe Arlooktoo: I too, am in support of the motion. Ever since the last plebiscite in 1982 I do not know how many people have changed their minds about the plebiscite. During the plebiscite it was evident that the Inuit people wanted division and the people I represent from Baffin South are still in support of the division. I would like to say that I am in support of the motion so that the people I represent will know where I stand. One of the concerns that I have is the division because there are not too many people who have knowledge about this. I think the people are not too aware of these things because I am concerned about that and that did not change my mind about the division after members of the Legislative Assembly have supported the motion, the people who are listening to us — I am sure that the public will have to be orientated more about division, land claims, and self-government. Therefore, everyone has to work toward this, not only the Assembly or the negotiators because I have to support this and the people in my constituency will have to support this too. After we deal with this division motion, the people would have to broaden their work and we have to help them out to teach them of what the issue is.

I would just like to reiterate that the Baffin South people are in support of the division. I have never met a person who opposed the division but we have to have a very good understanding as to why we need the division. The people who deal with this are aware of the issue but some people are kind of ignorant to the issue.

John Ningark: I am in full support of the motion myself. We are aboriginal people of the NWT. In the old days we did not have papers or pens and we had used the resources of the land. We had survived through the animals and through the plants. They used to walk out on the land just carrying whatever their equipment was and that is how we come to be today. They used to go hungry and they would die in the ocean and they would freeze in the cold winter months, but they never left the land although all these natural disasters happened to them. They were very patient. They have lived on the land even though they had this harsh environment and they had survived it. They could live with the ocean, the snow, the land, and later on, the Europeans came and the Inuit people taught them how to survive in the harsh environment; they had Inuit helpers and that is how they survived. The people from across the ocean, although we named some of the lakes and rivers in English names, but the Inuit people had lived in it and they had named it. The European people came to our land and stated that it is their land now and took over and named them English names, and the Inuit people it seems are trying to get their land back. All the Members of the Legislative Assembly, and I am sure they have the best knowledge of self-government, about unity. We also deal with issues of self-government in respect to these. I am in support of the motion.

Bruce McLaughlin: Over the previous two Assemblies, I have been consistent in my attitude toward division. I travelled around the Territories quite a bit involved in recreation before I was an MLA and when the division issue came up, my heart wanted me to be against division. When the plebiscite was held, I basically was neutral on the issue; I did not campaign on either side; I tried to explain the pros and cons of division to my constituents; and at that time, the majority of the people in the Territories wanted division. I have always said that even if the majority of the people in the West were against it, if an overwhelming majority, something like 80 per cent of the people in the East wanted it, I would not stand in the way of the Nunavut Territory being created. However, when you take a piece of land and divide it into two pieces of land, somewhere there has to be a boundary and people in the West, as well as people in the East, are concerned about where the boundary is going to be.

That concern came home to me when I was up in the Kitikmeot while I was Minister of Social Services. At a regional meeting, members started talking about if Holman Island is going to be in the West and maybe Coppermine and Cambridge Bay because there were little fractious arguments going on in those communities at the time — what will happen

to our region? It is not just the land some people in the West are worried it. I think where that boundary line is, is important. When we agreed to the Iqaluit Agreement, part of that was, there would be a plebiscite and part of the plebiscite would be a map with a line on it so that when you voted in favour of the creation of two territories, you would know which land was going to be on which side of the line.

So I stick with the commitment that since the majority of the people in the Territories were in favour of division and a vast majority of the people in the East are in favour of the creation of a new territory, I am in favour of the creation of a new territory. But it is subject to a plebiscite being held across the Territories and part of the plebiscite has to have a map of the Territories with a line drawn on it so people know exactly what they are voting for.

I will not be supporting the motion because I do not think it provides security of a plebiscite that everybody can vote on. I cannot vote in favour of the motion because it does not specifically say where the boundary lines are going to be.

Bruce McLaughlin

Gordon Wray: The motion is deliberately worded so that this House is not committed to any process, is not committed to whatever conditions were created in the past, or what conditions will be created in the future. It was worded so that Nunavut could take place one year from now, 20 years from now, 50 years from now. It was deliberately done that way. The mover of the motion is simply asking that this House reaffirms the support for Nunavut, without any conditions. That is all it wants to do, because we know that if we try and put conditions in this motion we will be here for the next six or seven days; so when I hear the Member for Yellowknife North and the Member for Pine Point attempting to interpret the motion and put their conditions on the motion, then I react, because this motion does not commit us to any preconditions or future conditions. It simply affirms the support for Nunavut. That is all it does.

Dennis Patterson: As the MLA for Iqaluit, I am very pleased to address this motion. My constituents spoke very clearly about their belief in Nunavut in 1982 when they voted on the question: "Do you think that the Northwest Territories should be divided?" Seventy-two per cent of them turned out, 80 per cent of them voted yes to the question. I may note that my constituency then and now is composed of roughly equal numbers of Inuit and non-Inuit, with the Inuit being in a slight majority.

I ran on a platform of the creation of Nunavut when I ran for election to this Legislative Assembly 10 long years ago. I still believe in Nunavut. For our people, it is a way of life, it is a way of thinking, it is a vision, it is our hope. Nunavut for us is self-government, self determination, a greater measure of control over our lives.

We also know that Nunavut will not magically end our problems or challenges. It will not be any easier to govern, and in many ways will undoubtedly be harder. We know that we have the challenges of developing our economy, which is largely undeveloped compared to the western part of the Territories. The potential is there in our land and resources, industries like tourism, but it is yet undeveloped. We still lack basic infrastructure, we still lack control of the levers required to develop these resources. We have the challenge of costs, particularly in the current climate. I did not know it was going to cost money to establish Nunavut; I was reminded of that by my colleague from Yellowknife. Let us not be too daunted by the question of costs. One study showed that the estimated cost in 1982-83 dollars of establishing Nunavut at \$296 million, would amount, according to my calculations, to well under one per cent of the present federal budget. One day's expenditure with estimated annual incremental costs of implementing Nunavut in 1982-83 dollars of around \$108 million would, again according to my calculations, correspond to about eight hours worth of expenditures for the federal government. These are challenges we must overcome, but they are not impossible. The other challenge is the settlement of a land claims boundary as a basis for a political boundary. We have gone nowhere in resolving that question for three long years. We have the challenge of training a bureaucracy so that it will be our own people rather than imported transient public servants.

My constituents are getting frustrated. They lash out at Yellowknife, they complain about centralization, they complain about a remote, ignorant, distant bureaucracy but they are not really angry at the good citizens of Yellowknife or the good MLAs of Yellowknife ... or even the good bureaucrats of Yellowknife, or even our government. They are saying, I think, what the special committee on unity observed in its report to this Legislature in 1981: "The Government of the Northwest Territories was set up and evolved without the full understanding and consent of the indigenous people. Now that they do understand, full consent is denied. Loyalty and commitment, hence the very stability of a jurisdiction rely upon consent. A government must pay for imposition with continual dissatisfaction, tension and significant dissent." We in the Northwest Territories encounter them every day, and I can tell you all about that as well as anybody.

My constituents, and man, many people in Nunavut, are saying what a former colleague of ours from Kitikmeot, Mr. Kane Tologanak, once states, I thought very simply: "We want to pick up our blocks and go home. We want a government closer to home." We want a government more reflective of the

unique region we represent, which is a distinct area with climate, ecology, history and culture in common. Some of our people are concerned that Nunavut is on the back burner, or no longer an issue, that it is being lost sight of with the challenges that we all face in the day to day problems of running a jurisdiction of this massive size.

Nunavut is fundamental to us. I would even say it is sacred. Let us work together to settle the claims boundary as a basis for a political boundary; settle the land claims to prepare for the challenges I have outlined, of implementing division, and to achieve our goal.

Dennis Patterson MLA

Tony Whitford: A year ago I was elected by the good people of Yellowknife South and one of the things that came had come up during the campaign, was the division of the NWT. I know the motion is not for division, it is to support a concept of Nunavut. This topic had come up at these meetings and my opinion was sought. The people of Yellowknife South at the time told me that they did not support division of the NWT at this time.

Now that does not mean I am not supporting the motion. What it does is, it expressed a point of view of the people who live out of the area that we will be calling Nunavut, the Eastern Arctic, it is a point of view of people who perhaps seldom travel to that area of the NWT. I have been across the North and I have seen the difference of culture and language, the ways of life of the people there, and when I look to the West and see the differences we have here and how these differences, over the years, have become homogenized I admire the desire of the people in the Eastern Arctic to maintain their tradition and their culture, their language, their customs. And the people of Yellowknife South are saying, yes you can, but not at this time. Perhaps not for this year or five years or 10 years from now, but yes, some day.

Maybe what we have to look at, although I do support this motion and probably will be voting in favour of it, is that I am afraid that it will be misinterpreted into division. If I can be assured that division is not going to be an immediate step to the creation of the Nunavut territory, then I would be much more in support of it.

At this point in time I do not want to see, until a lot of facts have become known, where this boundary will be, what will happen to the Beaufort, because if we continue to receive the majority of our finances from Ottawa and we have to divide this amount of money into two to, we will end up with two

"have-nots", and we will probably be worse off than we are presently.

The high side of supporting this is that it will recognize, by this government, the uniqueness and ensure a certain amount of preservation of the language, the customs and expectation and desires of the Inuit people for that.

On the down side, it is going to be expensive. We do not know all of the facts yet. I certainly do not and the good people of Yellowknife South do not. The down side again is that it will weaken the position of the western native peoples. They are going to become a minority in the West and I would rather not see that until a point in time where the native peoples, the Dene and the Métis, can have a certain amount of assurance that their ways of life, that their customs and languages are recognized.

Although I support the concept and the desire of the East for the creation of a Nunavut Territory, I do so only on the assurance that, or the expectation or the hope or desire on my part, that division will not be hastily entered without all of the facts being known.

John Pollard: I will be supporting the motion. There has definitely been a sustained will on the part of the people from the East to have their own territory, to have their own homeland and I support that. This came up in my election campaign in 1987 and I said at that time that if those people wished to divide, they wished to have their own homeland then I will support that. I do not believe in holding people against their will.

I have no problem with supporting the motion but I do not want it to appear that I am going to write a blank cheque. Inasmuch as Mr. Wray has said that there is no need for terms and conditions I really feel that, as a politician from the West and as a representative from Hay River, I would not be doing justice to my constituency or to the western part of the Territories if I did not say that I have some concerns about where the boundary is going to be. I have some concerns about

how it is going to affect us financially. I have some concerns about everybody in the Northwest Territories knowing absolutely in no uncertain terms the ramifications of division to everybody up here. I would rather see the federal government pay for the formation of Nunavut and the ultimate division of the Northwest Territories. I think we would be less than responsible if we had two have-not territories. I think Mr. Whitford mentioned that.

The two main issues facing the Northwest Territories right now are the settlement of land claims in the East and the land claims in the West and I, for one, want to see those claims settled as soon as possible. From those land claim settlements there is going to spring constitutional development, there is going to spring the ultimate division of the Northwest Territories so I would say that in supporting this motion there has to be a number of things take place in the next little while in order to make this thing go ahead quickly. The East will always have my support in this matter.

Brian Lewis: Although I come from Yellowknife and represent the centre part of that city, the business district, I feel very strongly that people live by their dreams and their visions. I will not spend a long time developing what we mean by dreams and visions but I know that this vision has been around for a very long time. The people have dreamed about having their homeland one day. Since that feeling is not on the back burner it will never go away and since they very last piece of work that I did before leaving this government, as a public servant, was to develop for the Commissioner, a position that I thought should be taken on the whole issue of the creation of Nunavut. The last words of that document were, "that Nunavut was inevitable one of these days." For that reason I will be supporting the motion. 📌