

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

By Hon. Donald Taylor, M.L.A.
Speaker of the Yukon Legislative Assembly

Significant progress is being made in the Parliamentary evolution of Yukon. The Legislative Assembly has increased its membership from twelve to sixteen seats. Following a November 1978 election, Yukon residents returned for a four-year term, eleven Conservatives, two Liberals, one New Democrat and two Independents to the Legislature and for the first time in its history, the House formally divided itself along traditional political lines.

In prior years, elections were conducted by and under Federal authority. This election differed in that Yukon took the opportunity of putting its new electoral legislation to the test. Its success was largely due to the experience and efforts of W.H. (Bill) McDonald, former Clerk of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, who played a major role in its development and administration.

In anticipation of a political party system the former House and its officers embarked upon an intensive research programme designed to accommodate this change in concert with parliamentary practices in other jurisdictions across Canada. For example, a detailed review of Standing Orders and an examination of the committee system was undertaken, the results of which were referred to the

newly constituted Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges. A Members' Services Board was instituted to assist the Speaker on matters of Assembly organization concurrent with the recent full separation of the Executive and Legislative Assembly offices.

This preliminary activity, combined with the new and important Constitutional considerations, has served to alter the parliamentary structure of the Assembly. Some of these changes are worthy of note.

Following the election of a majority to the House, the Government Party Leader assumed his duties and appointed portfolio responsibilities to his personally selected ministers. The Yukon Cabinet now consists of five elected ministers who sit on the Executive Committee with a Federally appointed Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner. As a result of some Constitutional advances, the role of the Commissioner has been formally re-defined in such a way as to bind the Commissioner to the advice of the Executive Committee, except in certain defined areas of Federal interest. Consequently the Commissioner now only attends the House as Lieutenant-Governor in order to present the Throne Speech and to give Royal Assent to Bills. The Ministers are responsible to the House for Government

activities to the same degree as their provincial counterparts.

As in most other jurisdictions, the Speaker no longer takes part in debates before the Assembly. He is, however, permitted to participate in the business of Committee of the Whole, but rarely exercises this prerogative. No appeal is allowed from the Speaker's rulings except by substantive motion in the routine manner. Times of sittings of the House have been altered in such a way as to provide members with free mornings, and accordingly the House sits in afternoon and evening sessions four days a week.

Provision has been made for private

members' days and, to enable private members to fulfill their duties, funds have been allocated for research purposes.

Standing committees on Rules, Elections and Privileges and on Statutory Instruments have been retained. As well, serious consideration is now being given to the establishment of a Public Accounts Committee.

The Yukon Legislative Assembly, one of Canada's youngest legislatures, is making great progress in developing as a parliamentary institution and in a manner compatible with jurisdictions throughout the Commonwealth.



Yukon Legislative Assembly in session.

NOTE: A list of Members and House Officers appeared in our March 1979 issue.