HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

QUESTION

TIMETABLES AND FUNCTIONS
TO BE TRANSFERRED

SPEECH

Wednesday, 14 September 1977

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Mr SPEAKER (NaN.NaN pm) -Order! I should remind the honourable gentleman that the hearing of that challenge in the High Court has been completed but the decision has not been given. I ask him to restrain himself from comment as to the substance of the matter.

Mr LIONEL BOWEN (—) (NaN.NaN pm) -I appreciate what you say, Mr Speaker. You will have noticed that the Minister interjected and said: 'It has good government'. I am talking about the machinations that went on. Obviously consultation would have prevented any challenge to the fact that these people in the Northern Territory can have territorial representation in the Senate. I make no other comment.

Mr SPEAKER (NaN.NaN pm) -The honourable gentleman may proceed with the rest of his speech.

Mr LIONEL BOWEN (—) (NaN.NaN pm) -I wish to make another point about consultation. The Government parties should look at the question of territorial representation in the light of our Constitution. The Western Australian Government is challenging the right of Territory representation in this House. The honourable member for the Northern Territory (Mr Calder) is under that cloud. I would have thought that the political parties backing the Government would have had enough influence with the governments of their political persuasion that I have mentioned to prevent that sort of challenge. Is the Government trying to say to the people of the Northern Territory that it really is interested in them? The Labor Party has always said so and it has paid the penalty politically at the ballot box on many occasions as a result of being misrepresented. I am happy to see that, as a result of the recent election, the Australian Labor Party now has a substantial representation in the Northern Territory. It has that representation for that very reason.

Mr Adermann (—) (NaN.NaN pm) -The Labor Party has six members.

Mr LIONEL BOWEN (—) (NaN.NaN pm) -The Minister should not despise the fact that it has six members. The number will build up and we will have a majority. The issue is what is to be done about the concern of the people in the Northern Territory for their needs. We need more consultation and consideration, not the confrontation that we have had in the past. What about the financial burdens the people in the Northern Territory will suffer if they are to be given what they need, what they want and what we in the Opposition would readily give them? They want autonomy in the sense of decision-making but they should not suffer the burden of having to pay all the costs of administration because of their limited resources.

It is for those reasons that I am making these comments. I do not want the Minister to think that we applaud his statement merely because it was made in the House and contained some good points. The underlying fact is that these people will have imposed on them the burden of raising their own taxes. On page 5 of the Minister's statement, he said that there will be consultation with the people of the Northern Territory about income tax payments just as there is with the States. There is a limited number of taxpayers in the Northern Territory and they have poor financial resources. Yet the Government dares to suggest that it is going to consult with them about income tax sharing arrangements, whether it should be 33.6 per cent or anything else. That is just a mere figment of the imagination when we come to consider what resources are needed. We want to build up the Northern Territory. We want to give the people there the ultimate in facilities. The whole concept of Labour administration has been to look at where the needs are. Whether it be in the area of health, transport or education, the national Government has even had to supplement State governments. Is it any wonder that the Federal Government will have to give substantial aid, magnificent aid, to people in these far flung areas who face this problem of distance? The people of the Northern Territory are doing a splendid job in administering that area.

Mr SPEAKER (NaN.NaN pm) -Order! The honourable member's time has expired. (Extension of time granted).

Mr LIONEL BOWEN (—) (NaN.NaN pm) -I thank the Minister and the House. I shall be brief. I make the point, as it has been emphasised to me, that we are very concerned because there has not been proper consultation. We ask that the Minister to look at the questions he has raised in this statement and consult...
with all people in the Northern Territory rather than just the few executive members, whoever they are. That is not good enough.

There is a worry that the facilities in respect of education and health, which are included in the transfer of the functions outlined in the statement, are not as good as they should be. They are run down. There is a shortage of staff and facilities. For the Territory to take them over in that run down condition is not fair and reasonable. The Territorians are asking that the Government should build them up before it hands them over. It is for those reasons that we want to see the Government actively involved in helping the Territory in its administration. We want to see the Territory autonomous but we want it achieved on a uniform basis. We emphasise that. We are not at all married to the suggestion that because there are State boundaries nobody need worry about what goes on within those boundaries. Far from it. The Constitution of this nation has to lead to one nation and one people. Everybody should have a fair and reasonable chance of getting out of life everything to which he is entitled as an Australian. Our efforts in communication have been magnificent in this regard because there is no distinction between people on the basis of where they live. The facilities are provided. The new technologies of television and satellite communication are available and we should be utilising them to benefit these people.

It is wrong to suggest that this will become just a fiscal operation and that because the Territory has asked for autonomy it will have to pay the penalty. I ask the Minister again to look at the fine points in his statement and to look at what the Territorians are going to say. They should have been consulted, particularly as there is a new Legislative Assembly there. It is for those reasons that the Opposition, whilst welcoming the statement, is very concerned about the type of taxation that will be levied on people in the Territory and about their inability to bear it, because it could lead to a run down in existing facilities.

Debate (on motion by Mr Calder) adjourned.