

## Guest Editorial: A Fitting Agenda for *Arctic's* Next Forty Years

We still read accounts of the history of the Arctic as if it were, like the Antarctic, uninhabited and its exploration nothing more than a challenge to Western courage, endurance, and technology, the disposition of its people and resources no more than another chapter in the history of nation-states.

*Arctic's* first 40 years have witnessed the federal government's discovery of the North, the advent of schools in the Native villages of the Arctic and sub-Arctic, together with the development of a curriculum based on the middle class aspirations of metropolitan Canada, the establishment of political and governmental bureaucracy, the search for oil and gas in the Beaufort Sea and the Arctic Islands, and — always — dreams of wealth.

Undoubtedly, Canada's achievements in the North are in many ways unsurpassed: the exploration and mapping of the Arctic by land and sea, the dotting of the landscape with fur trading posts, the discovery of uranium on the shores of Great Bear Lake in the 1930s, the extraction of iron ore in the Arctic Islands in the 1980s. Today Canadian engineers lead the world in the development of technology for the recovery of oil and gas in arctic waters. But for many this is the whole story. It is as if the Inuit on the tundra and the Indians of the northern forest did not exist.

These past 40 years have brought change and disruption to the indigenous peoples of the North. What seemed to us the weakness of indigenous cultures led us to believe they had no place in the Arctic of the future. Are the Native peoples merely a curious cultural backdrop to the activities of industrial man, or are they the peoples for whom the North was made? Is their value system, their subsistence economy, an irrelevance? We had no trouble answering such questions.

In the North we followed policies designed to replicate life as we know it in the metropolitan centers of North America. The Native people would have to change. The attack on Native culture — on their means of self-identification and self-sufficiency — came from every quarter. Yesterday it was the churches, then the government, then industry; today others, such as animal rights groups, have taken their place, seeking to force Western values on Native life ways.

What is remarkable is that despite the attempts to separate Native people from their language, history, and culture, their determination to retain their distinctive identity has sustained them. The onslaught against Native values did not succeed.

What has happened in the North should make us less certain about adopting the priorities of bureaucratic and economic advance. We believed that our own values, industry, and technology would best serve the North. This belief, practiced on northern peoples, is now being practiced on the northern environment. But the Arctic is vulnerable. The old stories of the

taming of the frontier, of the triumph of Western technology, cannot be repeated there without immense danger.

Our experience in the temperate zone does not hold good in the Arctic. The Arctic and sub-Arctic lie beyond the reach of agricultural advance, in many ways beyond the reach of industrial advance.

We are not alone in having to come to terms with these issues. The ambitions of all of the circumpolar powers — Canada, the U.S., the Soviet Union, the Scandinavian countries — converge in the Arctic. Their activities, now and in the future, threaten the arctic environment. Offshore drilling in arctic waters, diversion of arctic rivers, accumulation of arctic haze can offer enormous risks to arctic marine life and weather systems.

Judgements about these questions are not merely scientific and technical. They require, at the end of the day, value judgements. It is impossible — indeed, it is undesirable — to try to lift scientific and technological decisions out of their social and environmental context, to try to disentangle them from the web of moral and ethical considerations that provide the means of truly understanding the impact they will have.

A concept of collective stewardship must be developed if we are to ensure the protection of the arctic environment. The Reagan administration's determination to open up the calving grounds of the Porcupine caribou herd along the arctic coast of Alaska to oil and gas exploration and production threatens the future of a herd that is an international environmental resource and threatens as well the future of Inuit and Dene villages on both sides of the international boundary. The pursuit of one nation's goals can cause social and environmental havoc.

Let's not permit the debate about the Arctic to be cast in terms of sovereignty, of national ambition. We should not allow the sterile goals of the nation-state to define the future of the Arctic. National sovereignty is a limited and limiting concept. Sovereignty is a national issue, stewardship an international issue. Beyond sovereignty comes the concept of stewardship by all of the circumpolar powers over the circumpolar basin. In the Arctic an attempt ought even to be made to transcend the particularities of the Cold War.

It is in the Arctic that the survival of the Native subsistence economy is essential; it is there that the place of Native peoples within our polities will be determined; it is there that our commitment to environmental goals and international cooperation will be tested: a fitting agenda for *Arctic's* next 40 years.

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