

AN APPROACH TO SOCIAL REPORTING IN THE CANADIAN NORTH. BY K. SCOTT WOOD. *Halifax, Nova Scotia: Institute of Public Affairs, Dalhousie University, 1974. 11 x 8½ inches, soft cover, 80 pages. \$3.75.*

At a time when there is growing scepticism about the use of traditional economic measurements in the North, the need for other criteria by which to measure values and progress appears to be urgent.

The desire to account for, and effectively monitor, social change is not a new phenomenon, especially in the United States and the United Kingdom where it received a lot of attention in the nineteen sixties. Government and industry are now taking more than just an academic interest in the subject as they grapple with an array of social and economic problems, ranging from high unemployment and inflation to rising public expectations and declining reserves of natural resources.

The present work, which was commissioned by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs of the Canadian government, is an attempt to create a framework of social indicators to formulate, and predict the consequences of, governmental policies and projects in the North, as well as to provide some measure of the social changes resulting from the effects of technological development.

In his introduction, Professor Wood observes with regard to social accounting:

"The use of aggregate economic indicators, such as Gross National Product (GNP), to assess the state of a nation or to evaluate social performance has, until recently, been virtually unchallenged by the general public, politicians and all but a few professional social scientists. The near equation of 'good' social performance with rising GNP, full employment, and stable prices, has given power to 'hard' economic data at the expense of 'soft' social data, i.e., social information which is often more difficult to handle quantitatively..."

Most of the study is taken up with a fairly detailed discussion of the definition of social indicators and their relationship to standard economic analyses, and the setting-up of a social-report model.

The many problems of selection, definition and collation of data, and the subjective interpretation of "man's functioning in the total northern environment" are presented in a manner calculated more to stimulate the readers' further interest than to provide definitive guidelines for a working model. (There is, by the way, an excellent collection of references for those interested in doing further background reading). This approach

by the author is due, no doubt, to the limitations of reporting space, as well as to the fairly restrictive nature of the project. However, mention is made of a more fundamental problem: any system of social accounting has to be related to well-defined goals which are generally accepted by society, and based on an adequate knowledge of how organized society operates. For want of a better alternative, Professor Wood has selected as the basis for his analysis *National Objectives for Canada in the North*, a rather philosophical statement of intentions endorsed by the Canadian government in 1972.

Without adequate knowledge of how northern society functions, and in the absence of much concrete evidence to support a particular development strategy, the vaguely-worded statement of objectives fails to suggest a method for setting up a social-report model likely to be accepted in the North as unbiased and objective, and which does not depend on the collection of a large amount of highly subjective social and economic data.

Indicative of the inherent problems is the suggestion that it is unlikely that a simple composite indicator of "social well-being" could be developed, analogous to the GNP in the economic sphere, because of the difficulty in reaching firm conclusions about what society, and northern society in particular, considers to be positive or negative values.

The difficulties of establishing generally-acceptable objectives are understandably greater in a cross-cultural environment which is undergoing tremendous social change. As the author points out, while the Economic Council of Canada has considered the problem in recent reports, a set of informative national social indicators which reflect on the condition of people, rather than institutions or the economy, has yet to be developed.

The study here reviewed is a valuable addition to the literature of a subject which has received too little attention in Canada. It is extremely timely as well, because there is constant reference in governmental policies and programmes to the need for greater attention to quality of life as northern society swerves awkwardly into a conserver or post-industrial economy. While recognizing that northern development must bend with the prevailing winds of change from the south, it may be appropriate to ask now whether there are other than southern standards by which to measure the options. It is clear, however, that there is a long way to go before satisfactory yardsticks of social change and a simple arithmetic for measuring personal satisfaction are developed.

Kenneth de la Barre