

\*\*\*\*\* *Natives and the North:*

Southern Canadians might well pause when they hear about Native land settlement proposals in the Northwest Territories. Indeed, it may be worth their while to reconsider

the entire question of "northern development". For it is becoming increasingly apparent that the "development" which has been imposed on Native northerners throughout Cana-

dian history has led to disease, alcoholism, high suicide and crime rates, poverty, and family and community breakdown.

The Native people's case seems clear cut. From the late eighteenth century until the end of the Second World War, the fur trade dominated the economy of the north, undermining the Native economy dependent upon hunting and fishing, and integrating it more and more with the Canadian industrial-based economy. The Native people then became dependent on the fur trade for the manufactured goods of the south, which in time became necessities. When the price of furs declined in the 30's and 40's, the native people faced disaster.

For the first time in decades, the federal government, faced with the shameful state of the aboriginal inhabitants, turned its attention northwards. In the 50's, it built schools, established housing programs, provided health care facilities and introduced welfare programs. Native northerners underwent a period of rapid change - from the nomadic way of life, based on hunting, fishing and trapping, to a town-based, boom-bust, wage-labour economy, all in the space of about a decade.

With the discovery of oil and gas at Prudhoe Bay in Alaska in 1968, a sudden new interest in the northern "potential" sprang up. Oil companies flocked north to carry out seismic explorations and drill wells on Native-occupied lands. The federal government began to play a more active role in

encouraging, supporting, and requesting oil and gas related activities - including the planning of a Mackenzie Valley gas (and possibly oil) pipeline. Suddenly, a serious threat was posed to the very soul of Native northerners - their land.

Until the 1960's, the Canadian north had largely been viewed as a great wasteland. During the years of the fur trade, the government had little interest in the north - the general public even less. Whatever development took place was left almost entirely in the hands of the fur trader, the missionary and the RCMP.

**Ottawa decides**

The wishes of the Native people were never considered seriously when development decisions were made. Instead, Ottawa bureaucrats were concerned with the resource potential of the area. Natural resource extraction has always dominated the economic, social and political changes that have taken place. What was best for resource development was best for the Native northerners - whether they liked it or not.

In strictly material terms, the standard of living has probably improved in the last 20 years. The quality of medical care, housing and education has shown a marked improvement. But the Native people have been forced into dependence upon southern institutions. Disease and malnutrition have subsided, but social disintegration - caused by the lack of independence -

*This essay is adapted from an article written by Carol Bailey in the Bulletin of the Canadian Association in Support of the Native Peoples.*

has accelerated tremendously. The rapid exploitation of northern oil and gas reserves will only serve to accentuate the already-developing trend. This would be especially true if the Mackenzie Valley pipeline is built. But what is the Native northerner offered in return? The government has promised jobs - mostly temporary, unskilled construction jobs - and very little else. Once again, the federal government has decided what is best for the Native northerner.

For the first time in the history of the north, however, the Native people have taken a stand. They are demanding the right to determine the kind of development that will take place on their own land. They want to see development, but a development that serves the needs of the people living in the north.

Southern Canadians have heard it all before. Most would agree that Native people have not benefited by northern development activities and policies. But aren't the needs of millions of Southern Canadians more important than the needs of a few thousand Native northerners?

Canadians need the north's energy reserves, the argument goes. Wouldn't revenues accruing from the sale of surplus reserves give the economy a shot in the arm? Wouldn't the

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