

# EARTH

# and eagles

## LAND EXPORTS

"Alberta does not have the non-resident and non-Canadian land ownership problem that certain other provinces have."

That is the conclusion of the "Koziak Committee" in their interim report on foreign ownership of land which was released last October.

But at the same time as they drew this conclusion, the committee decried the lack of necessary information and called for a "monitoring" of land sales.

Unable to examine all the records of land sales that have already been completed, the committee considered 840 of the 1081 "active files" recording transactions which are not yet finalized. From this they concluded that in the past 12 years, 803 acres have been acquired by residents of the U.S.A.

This figure does not include land which has already been paid for or that which is owned by foreigners who live in Alberta. (Citizenship was inferred from the buyer's address.) More significantly, it does not include the 45% of Alberta which is privately owned.

So, despite their conclusion, the committee supported "Bill 107" which, if passed, would prohibit the sale or re-sale of Crown lands to foreigners; both individuals and corporations.

At the same time, they recommended that the Bill not be considered by the legislature until it was decided whether the province's right to dispose of Crown land was affected by the property rights of foreigners guaranteed by the Canada Citizenship Act.

In other provinces the problems are more urgent, according to the following excerpts from a report by the Halifax chapter of the Committee for an Independent Canada.

## Some Statistics

*Comprehensive statistical information is scarce, but to give an idea of the magnitude of the problem, some isolated statistics are listed below. Most of these examples are taken from the Maritime provinces, but it is precisely in these provinces, with relatively small land areas, that the problem is felt most acutely. (The loss of one acre in Nova Scotia is equivalent to the loss of 20 acres in Ontario, or one acre in Prince Edward Island equivalent to the loss of 116 acres in Alberta.)*

1. Along the historic Bras d'Or lakes in Cape Breton Island only 45% of the owners are permanent residents. Eleven percent of the total number of owners are Americans who hold 16% of the total acreage (average lot size 113 acres) which account for 18% of the total assessed value.

2. In Prince Edward Island, 12% of the entire coast surrounding the Island is now in the hands of non-residents and, of the coast which has recreational potential, 33% is owned by non-residents. Projections based on current rates of land purchase show that, in 1984, 45% of P.E.I. will be owned by non-residents.

3. In Ontario, along the Lake Erie shore from Fort Erie to Port Colborne (23 miles) almost none of the land is public, and 85% of the private land is American-held.

4. In British Columbia, one American alone owns close to 60,000 acres of waterfront property in the vicinity of Prince George.

## NON RESIDENT OWNERS

### Absentee Landlords

Private NRO's of farms who contract out the farm labour to the local population, often the previous owner of the farm. This NRO uses the farm as a summer home, but it is not his principal place of residence. Premier Alex Campbell is faced with many of this type of NRO in P.E.I. and describes the situation as a drift back to the system of absentee landlords.



# the great land grab

## Corporate Ownership

Corporate NRO's of farmland are becoming more common in the Canadian agricultural industry. So far, corporate ownership, as part of a vertically integrated system of agricultural production and marketing, is more or less conducted by multinational corporations usually thought of as being in the agro-business. But if the trend in the U.S.A. develops here, we can expect other giant corporations such as Boeing, Coca Cola, Dow Chemical, Goodyear, Tenneco and Union Carbide to become involved in the competition for good agricultural land. With their vast capital resources they are capable of consuming vast acreages of land.

## Weekenders

Private individuals who have no motive other than temporary seclusion from the outside world constitute a third type of NRO. The impact of this type of NRO is examined in Section IV.

## Corporate Vacationers

The fourth type of NRO is the corporate vacationer. By this is meant the corporation which buys large tracts of land, often including in a single block some seacoast, farms, lakes, rivers, and wilderness, to be used exclusively as a holiday park for their own employees. The sinister implication is that this practice reflects, in microcosm, the larger general American attitude towards Canada, namely, that we exist as a giant piece of recreation land. Canadians must have some other purpose in the international community of nations beyond being park attendants.

## Speculators

Land speculators, both amateur and professional, constitute the last type of NRO. These people are guilty of allowing land to lie idle, just waiting for the day that it can be subdivided and sold

at a large profit. There are many land speculation companies such as Natural Retreats in Nova Scotia, Bark Lake Estates in Quebec and Canadian Estate Lands in Ontario. They cater almost exclusively to American buyers and lure them on with slogans such as, "Don't wait and buy, buy and wait," or "Speculators, we guarantee profit or money refunded." The end result of such concentrated, restricted selling has to be the creation of American colonial enclaves within Canada's borders.

## SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

### Cultural Imperialism

Many of the social implications of widespread ownership of Canadian lands by non-residents are undesirable and will ultimately affect the quality of life for all Canadians. We will briefly examine some of these effects.

In rural areas the situation may develop whereby agricultural or recreational lands suddenly become alienated. In most rural areas there are traditional understandings concerning the general availability and use of such lands. In many cases the title to the land is both unclear and socially unimportant because local customs have transcended strict legal patterns of use.

It is interesting to note that this difference between customary and written understanding is one of the distinctions which can be made between, for example, the political structures of Great Britain and the U.S.A., respectively.

Therefore, when a non-resident acquires a piece of land in a community where these traditions have prevailed, his strict adherence to the written agreement completely upsets the established local patterns. There are cases in Canada where NRO's have used barbed wire, watchdogs and firearms to enforce their own cultural definition of property on the local populace.

Canadian culture is thus immediately undermined on two counts: local customs are ignored or violated; and a new and foreign, cultural attitude relating to the place of ownership is inserted into the fabric of community life.

The existence of the NRO also has an effect on the continued viability of rural communities. Because the principal reason of the private NRO for buying land is to escape temporarily from the rigours of industrial city life, he has, in all probability, little desire to interact with, or assimilate into, the local culture.

This usually means that he is unwilling to support or participate in local events, to cooperate in rationalization of certain agricultural operations, or even to exchange ideas with his neighbours.

Coupled with these considerations is also the fundamental factor of limited cultural miscibility between urban and rural people. Thus, in one respect, the injection of the NRO into the community is like a drug which renders that part of the community inert.

Therefore, if the rising land values and higher taxes have not already induced other local people to sell, often this factor of social decay, brought on by the disappearance of vital members of the community, will force abandonment.

There is another subtle cultural effect which is felt in communities with large proportions of NRO's. A general failing of any tourist is that he tends to travel abroad immersed in his own cultural traditions and finds difficulty in adjusting to new situations.

The enterprising American has overcome the need to adapt in unfamiliar environments by paving the way in advance with Hertz, Hiltons and hamburgers. What is the family trailer or Winnebago, if not the most complete cultural container ever built?

To lessen their own cultural shock even further, they begin to demand that local stores stock American food, cigarettes, magazines, etc. (The New York Times is on the local newsstand, so it must be summer.) The local population finds that familiar items have, at least temporarily, disappeared from the shelves and have little choice but to buy what is available. This result, whereby American cultural traditions and life styles begin to be imposed on the community, can only be described by the emotive term "cultural imperialism".

## The Future

In addition to these local effects of NRO's, there is a much wider implication. Some countries have recently begun to examine the real and illusory benefits of the continued trend to urban growth. A second look is now being taken at the national benefits of having viable communities of town and village proportions.

If, in the future, Canada decides in some way to reverse the urbanization trend, it will encounter problems in making available enough full-time accommodation and land in rural areas dominated by part-time NRO's. Even the task of locating tracts of land, suitable for either summer or winter recreation for urban dwellers, will be next to impossible, for the simple reason that the NRO sought out precisely that kind of land first.

Therefore, the right of the private individual to sell to a non-resident should be challenged in view of the long-range national interest.

The very existence of NRO's will tend to disrupt established cultural patterns, dilute the vitality of communities, impose a style of life produced by a different national experience and constitute a barrier to flexibility in future Canadian social patterns. These undesirable factors tend to erode faith in our own goal of a bilingual and multicultural society and the creation of a truly independent Canada.