

the relief ship, only a post at Churchill was established during this expedition (see doc. 155n).

While the expedition was in the North, Frederick White and the Deputy Minister of Marine and Fisheries, François Gourdeau, came to an agreement (doc. 149) whereby responsibilities were formally divided between the newly-renamed Royal North-West Mounted Police (RNWMP) and the Marine department. It provided that action would be taken by the Police alone on land and by Marine and Fisheries alone on water.

Later that year, the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan were created from the more southerly part of the NWT. The remainder, along with the District of Keewatin and the territories transferred in 1880, was still called the NWT, but with the abolition of the elected territorial assembly in Regina, the new NWT had no self-government, or indeed any administration at all except that provided by the RNWMP. Frederick White was therefore appointed Commissioner, and he initially had high hopes of being “able to carry out our own plans” (doc. 158). But in his role as Commissioner, White was subject to the orders of the new Minister of the Interior, Frank Oliver, who often disagreed with his proposals. In general, White found the government reluctant to support the development of an administrative structure.²¹ The provinces of Ontario, Quebec, and Manitoba were all set on northward expansion (they attained their present northern limits in 1912), and it may well have seemed to Laurier that federal administrative efforts in territories that would sooner or later fall under provincial jurisdiction were a waste of time.

The Department of Marine and Fisheries, meanwhile, proceeded with northern ship patrols under Bernier’s command. In July 1906 the Fisheries Act was amended to provide for the collection of whaling licences in Hudson Bay (all of which was declared to be Canadian territorial waters) and in the archipelago. Unfortunately, almost no documents on the evolution of this new policy were found. However, there is abundant material on its consequences in British files. Canada’s unexpected declaration of sovereignty over Hudson Bay sparked many lively exchanges between the Colonial Office and the Foreign Office. The FO, fearing an American protest, urged disallowance of the new legislation, while the CO defended Canada’s action. In the end there was no protest, and the amendment was not disallowed.

In terms of Canada’s legal case, the enforcement of the new whaling regulations was by far the most important achievement of Bernier’s expeditions. However, Bernier himself did not see it that way. Even though no other nation had ever contested the 1880 transfer, Bernier pushed for authority to make fresh sovereignty proclamations on the islands discovered by British explorers, and he succeeded in having the orders for his 1906-1907 voyage changed to suit this agenda (see docs 159, 160, 165; fig. 16). He also made an unauthorized claim to

²¹ White’s frustrations are documented in his NWT letterbooks, LAC, RG 18, vol. 879.