

physical health that the bush programme, as the air transport into the country is known, is subsidized.

But life in the bush has become intolerable, the Innu claim, since the war planes came. While there has been low level flight training in Labrador since the 1970s, the flights were less frequent than they are now. The number of flights will rise steeply if the NATO centre is established, and even if the NATO centre goes to Turkey, the Canadian government has committed itself, through bilateral agreements, to dramatically increasing the number of aircraft training in Labrador.

The Innu say it will be impossible to escape the noise and startle effect of an aircraft travelling seven hundred kilometres an hour passing overhead, just thirty metres above the ground. And they don't believe the jets can avoid them, even if the military air controllers know where their camps are. The possibility that the Innu might give up going into the bush altogether worries Father Jim Roche, an Oblate priest who has lived with the Sheshatshit Innu for the last four years: "There's already a big problem with alcohol among the Innu and a further erosion of their culture will exacerbate it. We're talking about the physical and mental health of a lot of people."

"They're just using this issue to force settlement of their land claims," says Major David McCabe, of DND's air operations and training directorate. He is partly right; the Innu want their indigenous rights to this area recognized, but they're not willing to sell out those rights, especially if doing so compromises their relationship with the land that has sustained their culture. Peter Penashue says the day a land claims deal is signed will be one of the saddest days for his people. "The land claims process does little more than legitimize the theft of native land."

BECAUSE OF THE SUPPORT THEY HAVE RECEIVED outside of Labrador the Innu have become a political force to be reckoned with. "Without the Innu, there would have been no environmental assessment," says Robert Ferrari, an employee of Lavalin, the company preparing DND's report. The multi-million dollar study has been looking at the effects of low-level flying on animals and people in Labrador. The independent panel, set up by the Federal Environmental Assessment Review Office will hold public hearings on the proposed increase in flight and weapons training early in 1989. While the Innu have refused to co-operate with Lavalin researchers because the study is being conducted for DND, they will participate in the public hearings. However, they

have little faith that the project will be halted because of their objection to it.

Many of the Innu want the low-level flights to be totally abolished, and want no more talk of a NATO centre for the region. Others, who say there must be compromise, ask that a just land claims agreement be reached before there is any more expansion in flight training. Even with an agreement, however, most Innu feel they cannot share the land with the planned NATO weapons training centre.

"We are interested in negotiating political rights that will give us meaningful jurisdiction over the lands under our control," says Chief Ashini. "But it will be impossible for us to exercise such political rights if significant portions of this territory have been taken from us for military expansion."

FLIGHT TRAINING OVER INNU LAND IN LABRADOR raises disturbing new legal questions for aboriginal title claims. "Who owns the airspace a hundred feet above the ground?" asks Lavalin's Ferrari, who will address this issue in his study. The Innu argue that what happens in the air, whether it is air-to-air combat, low-level flying, or practice bombing, will affect the environment on the ground. They are not sure how a Canadian court of law would decide on this matter, and in any event, will not be reassured if the study establishes that low-level flying has little adverse effect on caribou and other animals.

"They won't know for at least ten years how the flying will effect these creatures, and then it may be too late," says Innu hunter Ben Andrew. "Our findings won't be conclusive," says Ferrari, "we'll have to recommend on-going studies." DND and its environmental experts say the caribou don't seem overly bothered by the noise.

Can the NATO centre and low-level flying carry on without threatening Innu health, and way of life? The Indians certainly don't think so; DND believes otherwise. While he was commander, Colonel David tried to foster good relations with the Innu at Sheshatshit, attending community events and hiring two Innu to work as base firefighters. The Innu view this with some suspicion, and fear the military is trying to divide and mislead the community with promises that cannot be kept.

DND's efforts to appease the Innu have largely failed because they have come too late. The climate of fear and distrust that now exists between the Innu and the white supporters of military expansion in Labrador may never be broken. Its legacy will be bitterness and perhaps a more rapid deterioration of Innu society. "We're a dying breed," says Peter

Penashue. "We can't fight NATO; we'll be wiped off the map."

IS IT SIMPLY A QUESTION OF SACRIFICING AN indigenous culture for the sake of national security? The Newfoundland government has never hidden its wish for the Innu to be integrated as quickly as possible into the mainstream of Newfoundland life. The most powerful provincial administrator in Labrador is John McGrath, the assistant deputy minister for agriculture, rural and northern development. He says there is no commitment from his government to help the Innu preserve their language or culture. "Cultures and languages disappear all the time," he says, citing his loss of his own ancestral language as an example.



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Goose Bay businessmen, needed by continuous Innu opposition to something they wholeheartedly endorse, ask what the Innu have done with the land to make it their own. The Innu have not built on it or made any money from its resources. The Innu respond that they have simply taken from the land what was needed, and in return, obeyed and respected nature's "masters." The Innu have always perceived themselves as caretakers of their homeland, which they call Nitassinan.

A 1985 issue of the *Royal Air Force News* paid a great compliment to Innu stewardship of Labrador: "The real beauty of this place is that quite simply the land is just as God left it." Nitassinan will never be the same, the Innu say, once the war games start. □