

THIS TIME OF THE YEAR, HUNDREDS OF INNU (Naskapi-Montagnais Indians) are doing what they know and love best. They are scattered throughout Labrador's vast interior, hunting and fishing, as they have done for thousands of years. At a military co-ordination centre in Goose Bay, there is frustration. The Innu won't tell the Canadian Armed Forces where they are, so they risk being over-flown by low flying jets.

The Department of National Defence (DND) is trying to avoid more confrontation with the Innu, who have drawn international attention by their

caribou. Innu hunters now use Skidoos to bring provisions into the camp to make their families more comfortable.

The former commander at Goose Bay, Colonel John David, says it is an unrealistic way of life for the Innu to hold on to: "For the old people, it's important to return to the bush," he says, "but it can't be kept up for the young people, it's just not economically feasible anymore."

"It's not for the military to decide whether our way of life is economically feasible," says Peter Penashue, a young Innu leader.

The Chief of Sheshatshit, Daniel Ashini, told the Environmental Assessment Panel studying the effects of flight and weapons training in Labrador:

We may be interested in integrating aspects of your culture into our own...some of us may want to take up wage employment in the renewable resource sector, but many of us will want to continue to hunt, trap, fish and gather as a primary occupation, permitting us to pass on to future generations the great wealth of knowledge about the animals and the land that is our heritage.

Another expert on Innu culture, José Mailhot, spoke at the same hearings:

They [the Innu] hold, with reason, a conviction that if the possibility of going to the bush no longer exists, they will be nothing but a diminished and conquered people. We will have dispossessed them of everything, and they will have nothing to pass on to future generations.

The Innu see the government subsidies for their transportation into the bush as compensation for the development that has already taken place on their lands; lands which have never been ceded by treaty or land claims agreement. Those developments include construction of the Goose Bay airport by the Americans during World War II, iron ore mining at Schefferville and Labrador City, logging operations associated with the Labrador Linerboard Mill, and the development of Churchill Falls Hydro in the late 1950s.

The development of Churchill Falls was a bitter experience for the Innu who traditionally camped and hunted in the area now known as the Smallwood Reservoir (a man-made lake created by water diversion from the falls). These families lost canoes, traps, and hunting equipment because they were not warned about the flooding. As compensation, they were given houses, which were little more than shacks built for about \$2,000. Those that still stand give the village a slum-like appearance.

INNU VILLAGES ARE POOR AND MOST INHABITANTS ARE on welfare. They are plagued with social problems common to most native communities in this country; alcoholism, domestic violence, and suicide. Innu health has suffered for other reasons. There is obesity and disease because of the change in diet since the Innu became sedentary, and vegetables and fruit from the south are too expensive for most Innu families. It is because the Federal government recognizes the benefit life in the bush has on Innu mental and

opposition to military activity in Labrador. Last year Innu representatives spoke before the United Nations Human Rights Commission. They told the Commission that NATO countries are conducting flight training on Innu territory without Innu consent, that this is a violation of their human rights, and threatens their cultural survival. And further, the Innu believe activities associated with a planned NATO tactical fighter weapons training centre will have disastrous consequences for them.

Many Innu families have been traumatized by the low flying jets and say they may not go back to the country. The Innu are worried about damage to the environment, about what pollution from jet exhaust may do to aquatic life and how noise will affect the migrating habits of waterfowl and caribou. They fear that the cornerstone of their culture, their hunting and trapping life in the bush, will be destroyed by military activity.

THERE ARE TEN THOUSAND INNU ON THE QUEBEC Labrador peninsula living in eleven villages along Quebec's northeast coast and in two settlements on the Newfoundland side of the Labrador border. Canada's last nomads, the Innu of Davis Inlet, a village in Northern Labrador, moved from tents to houses for the first time in 1967. However, according to Laval University anthropologist Paul Charest, it is Innu life in the bush that is most at risk:

If the level of military activity increases considerably after the promotion of Goose Bay as an official NATO base, we can expect the very foundations of the Montagnais [Innu] culture, their life in the bush, to be irreversibly compromised.

Proponents of military expansion in Labrador say Innu life in the bush today is little more than a holiday at taxpayers' expense. Aircraft fly Innu families into the country, twice a year, at government cost. In the past, the Innu travelled these long distances on foot, moving camp as they followed the migrating

THIS LABRADOR BUSINESS ...

What do the Innu want?

Many Native people feel they are without real power and believe the cards are stacked against them. "We can't fight NATO; we'll be wiped off the map."

BY MARIE WADDEN