

# Americans increase Arctic awareness



photo courtesy Boreal Institute for Northern Studies

Town of Inuvik with DEW line station in the background.

by Brad Johnson

A former Commissioner of the Northwest Territories thinks that a good deal of interest is finally developing in the Arctic as the "global top of the world."

Gordon Robertson spoke last Thursday in Humanities Centre.

Robertson, Commissioner from 1953 to 1963 and presently Fellow in Residence of the Institute for Research in Public Policy, gave a lecture entitled "Canada and the Arctic World" to about 30 students in the Canadian Studies course on the North.

In the 33 years since assuming the job of Commissioner, Robertson said, "there have been numerous changes (in the North)." There are now available health services, housing, education for all children, and employment.

However, our awareness of the North up until now has been very narrow. "We have been very lim-

ited in our vision," he said.

In fact it wasn't until June of 1986, when Joe Clark brought out a white paper on foreign policy, that sovereignty, defense, commerce, and circumpolar cooperation were even seriously mentioned by the government with respect to the North.

It was partly the two voyages of U.S. ships through the Arctic archipelago, "which jolted Canadian public opinion, I think, for the first time," he said.

Another reason for this new awareness of the North is superpower rivalry, as "the Arctic is the place where the Soviet Union and the United States face each other."

Also, each of the Arctic countries has specific national interests there.

In the past, "We haven't tended to look at the far North and the Arctic in global terms."

"The Arctic Ocean is really almost a lake," Robertson said, in that it is in effect closed to other oceans and the northern countries share its shoreline.

Environmentally, there are "questions which must be seen in a global way."

On the subject of the Inuit, who are native to all of the Northern countries, Robertson said there are a lot of difficult problems.

"It's not going to be easy," Robertson said, to provide the economic viability and still protect their culture."

He said an Inuit circumpolar conference was held in 1977 at Barrow, Alaska with Inuit from all polar countries, except the U.S.S.R. participating.

Native self-government, in the sense of being another level of government in Canada, would enable us to establish our sovereignty there, he said. Unlike any other group in Canada, they actively use these waters.

Robertson's lecture was hosted by Gurston Dacks, Chairman of the Canadian Studies Committee of the Faculty of Arts.

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