

# Arctic exploration should halt for two years



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Last of a two part series

## GOVERNMENT BUSINESS ROLE

In theory the federal government, though Panarctic Oils Ltd., is in the Arctic to protect public interest. In fact, it is deeply involved in northern oil and gas exploration, and committed to exploiting these resources as quickly and efficiently as possible. It strongly supports moving gas to market because of its cash investment and because of the general impact a northern pipeline could have on Canada's economic development. A pipeline means the planned "transport corridor" is much more feasible; this in turn means greater North American access to Canada's northern natural and tourist resources. Four American gas distributing companies have even loaned Panarctic 75 million dollars for further exploration with the agreement that the payback be shipments of "surplus gas."

The Canadian government would like to play a business role in the project, but the oil companies involved are cool toward government involvement. It is said that possible government participation would strengthen resistance in some U.S. government circles to "entrusting major oil and gas arteries, essential to U.S. security, to another foreign power." The bulk of Arctic oil and gas supplies, whether from Canada or Alaska, are ultimately destined for U.S. markets anyway. Idealistically, the U.S.

companies shouldn't control the pipeline's financing, construction and operation, let alone the destiny of gas and oil.

The government claims that already "the major areas of ecological sensitivity have been identified." Critics of the government program claim that this is not good enough and that much more has to be known about the specific impact of pipelines on northern ecology and peoples.

The root of the environmental problem is the very vulnerable natural environment — the slow growth rate of vegetation and short growing season mean the wounds from heavy equipment and construction will take a long time to heal and may not heal at all. Modern man can easily cause rapid and irreparable devastation.

Certainly these critics have a well-taken point, especially when the government goes on to say: "Much useful information can be obtained during the next year even though an application might be under consideration" and that, data gathered in "the subsequent years will still be valuable, though the pipeline construction may have begun." In other words, there will be an overlapping of the research and decisions processes; the government will be approving pipeline construction when the results of its own research are incomplete.

Four weeks ago (in late June) the federal government issued a series of tentative regulations on the construction of northern pipelines. But in its usual

academic haze it failed to be specific in defining such terms as "good environment management," "adequate plans" to deal with oil leaks and spills, and "effective plans" for an environmental education program for companies. The closing guidelines insisted the companies become good corporate citizens of the North, and make "a conscious effort to contribute to the social and economic development of the territories." It is all too clear where government interests lie.

## FRAGILE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

In March of this year, the Environmental Protection Board issued a report which described Canada's level of ecological research in the Mackenzie Valley as "abysmally low." One scientist has written that "in the true Arctic there is not a species we know enough about and many that we have not studied at all." Furthermore, in 1970 the most extensive monitoring survey of its kind ever undertaken in the Arctic found subsidiary damage from northern oil exploration work to be 10 to 100 times greater than expected.

The worst condition for construction is in "detrimental" permafrost, which exists where soil is suspended in water and becomes solid ground only because the water is frozen. Anything that raises the temperature — the breaking up or removal of the insulating mosses, the penetration of moving water or structures built on top of it — will revert it to mud. When the tundra thaws in the summer the Arctic mosses and plants act as an insulating layer and protect the permafrost below.

Any pipeline faces the problem of leakage. A natural gas line, transporting gas at cool temperatures, does not pose the same threat to permafrost that a hot oil line would. The relatively intense heat of oil as it comes out of the ground (160-180 degrees F), if put through a buried pipeline, could melt the permafrost causing disastrous changes in the tundra. If the proposed Mackenzie oil line is above ground it will interfere with migrating animals, particularly caribou and birds. Their continuous movement is an adaptation to the tundra vegetation and slow growth cycle. The oil companies should be forced to take all possible steps to minimize damage to environment and wildlife, and to ensure continuing research and checks are carried out. The possible loss through environmental changes, if it must be put in economic terms, can be evaluated in terms of tourism, hunting and fishing.

Research into engineering, geophysical

and ecological aspects of such a venture have not reached the stage where this project can be encouraged.

## NORTHERNER'S WELFARE SACRIFICED

Jean Chrétien, Indian Affairs and northern development minister, sees the northern wealth as "part of the wealth of Canada that has to be used to build up a better society." He also sees the development of oil and gas resources as the SOLUTION to many northern problems. He says it will provide employment for the Yukon and NWT, touted to be the fastest-growing population group in Canada.

Groups of Indians in the Arctic have already spoken out against Ottawa giving approval of pipeline construction before aboriginal land claims are settled. Successful court action by the Indians could tie up the pipeline for years, costing the government millions of dollars.

One such group is the Old Crow band, consisting of about 200 Loucheux Indians, who have been living for centuries on the banks of the Porcupine River about 90 miles north of the Arctic Circle. Their area is one of the several routes now under consideration for the Yukon portion of the pipeline system.

Development in the north has changed the lives of the native people in major ways — almost always for the worse. Most skilled jobs have always gone to white men from the south, and the natives have been left to scramble for the remaining menial tasks. When asked in early July why northern natives at the communities of Arctic Red River and Fort McPherson had not been hired for work on the delta end of the Mackenzie highway, Chrétien replied that "there is some discrepancy between what I have stated as (hiring) policy and what is actually happening." Hiring priority has been promised to native peoples, but it is unlikely that the present hiring and training policy will change for their benefit once construction begins on the pipeline.

The permanent employment opportunities after the pipeline is completed is expected to be small. Bud Orange (Liberal MP-NWT), and a pipeline enthusiast, expects only about 400 jobs. There are 20,000 Indians and Eskimos in the NWT. Where does that leave the argument of the oil consortium that the pipeline is going to a permanent bonanza for the native peoples?

All over the Arctic the lives and livelihoods of the native peoples are being drastically changed by white man's economic development and profit motive, as well as Ottawa's colonial domination.

The federal government has not been able to stop the destruction of native culture — nor has it tried very hard. The 1970 annual report of Panarctic Oils stated: "The inherent survival skills of the Eskimos are no longer a major attribute... In order to become an effective worker, the northern resident must develop a skill required by the job rather than depend on his native expertise for employment." Crude logic rests in that statement: hunting skill will not be of much use in a land already despoiled.

Time and again the federal government has expressed the conviction "that the needs of the people of the north are more important than resource development, and the maintenance of ecological balance is essential." That's a fine conviction and those are reassuring words, but it's action, not words, which count. From its actions it is apparent the government has decided that the welfare of native northerners and the northern environment are to be sacrificed in favour of large-scale economic development for the benefit of southern Canadians and foreign corporations.

## CURTAIN RESOURCE EXPLORATION AND EXTRACTION

A group from University of Toronto's Pollution Probe, after examining the evidence and the situation, argues that "man is rushing headlong and thoughtlessly toward the exploitation of the Arctic. Damage inflicted in the name of progress today could prove tragically irreparable tomorrow."

The group's background statement on the Arctic is both caustic and critical. At times it leads to over-simplification, but it is not irresponsible; rather it is worthy of attention. They concluded that:

"At present there is too little meaningful ecological research of the fragile Arctic environment and no urgent demand for any of its non-renewable resources. Therefore, a freeze should be placed on all new Arctic oil and gas extraction, and transportation (including pipelines and tankers) and northern exploration activities should be scaled down. These restraints should remain in effect for at least two years and until Canadians have enough knowledge to make a decision on the future of the Arctic."

The little that is known about Arctic development suggests very clearly that Prime Minister Trudeau's plan of northern development should be stopped at once. The government should not be anxious to develop energy resources that will not be used domestically but by the U.S. The American economy may be on

the verge of energy starvation, but Canadians need not talk about "con-

tinental energy development." This would only further increase Canadian-U.S. interdependence. Besides, if we continue to increase our exports, we will create a Canadian energy crisis similar to that in the States.

The whole northern resources development may be absolutely pointless anyway. Petroleum men urge hurried development because in another 20 years the harnessing of nuclear and solar energy may make oil worthless as an energy source. Although these types of energy may not be cheap, or sufficiently abundant, the huge markets for oil won't be available then.

The government's northern pipeline and transportation system, subordinated to traditional resource exploitation interests, will serve to link the Arctic to the United States. It will create little or no supporting industries: most of the heavy equipment will be imported from the United States.

This system will also create few permanent jobs, probably destroying as many jobs in the north as it will create. Its effect on the Northern environment is uncharted, and the billions of dollars would be better spent on decent housing, education and better health care.

Clearly, the question of benefits to Canadians needs re-examination other than by the government. If not, collusion between the federal government, big business and the U.S. government will leave the people of Canada the biggest losers in Canadian history.

Pollution Probe's recommendations further argue this two year period would allow time to:

- Further develop new techniques or modify existing ones for exploration and extraction of non-renewable resources with minimal damage to the environment;
- Test the feasibility of various proposed techniques to transport new resources from the Arctic. We must guard against expediency dictating the transporting of resources before the technology is available to ensure that they can be moved safely;
- Conduct research into the effects of Arctic oil spills on land and at sea, and develop techniques for satisfactorily cleaning up such spills.
- Develop stand-by facilities, equipment, and staff necessary to ensure adequate clean-up in case of accidental oil spills.
- Study the feasibility of off-shore drilling in the Arctic and the precautions required for its safe conduct.
- Train the Indians and Eskimos in the skills used in all phases of explorations and development so that the native people can play a significant role in helping to develop the North.
- Set aside adequate parks and scientific reserves for the future.
- Negotiate fair taxes and royalties on resource production.
- Study ways of ensuring effective Canadian control of all activities in our Arctic.
- Implement effective land use planning practices common in the south but almost unheard of in the Arctic.

