

had been named as the new Commissioner of the NWT in 1919. Despite some experience in the Yukon, he knew little of the North, and no advisory council had yet been appointed to assist him.

The alleged Danish threat and Stefansson's Wrangel Island plan were therefore referred to the Advisory Technical Board (ATB), a committee composed of the heads of the various branches within the Department of the Interior. Its mandate was to examine the more technical questions that came before the department, such as the purchase of specialized scientific equipment.³¹ There were some officials with Arctic interests on the Board, most notably the chair, Édouard Deville, who had worked with Dawson to create the 1897 boundaries. At a special ATB meeting on 1 October 1920 (doc. 222), Stefansson presented his arguments and challenged the validity of the western sector line, only to meet with scepticism from Deville and others. However, Harkin energetically championed Stefansson's cause, and by December 1920 the ATB had been sidelined.

In the spring of 1921, Christie initiated inquiries about the supposed Danish threat through diplomatic channels. The response, along with other documents received from London in May 1921, convinced Meighen and his ministers that there was no Danish plan (see doc. 252n). In June Rasmussen and the Danish minister in London, Henrik Grevenkop-Castenskiold, provided written assurances that the planned Danish expedition to the Canadian Arctic was purely scientific in its aims (docs 256, 261).

By the time Stefansson renewed his Wrangel campaign in March 1922, there had been a major change in Canada's northern administration. The discovery of oil near Fort Norman in 1920 had provided the impetus for the appointment of a Northwest Territories Council (NWTC) and for the creation of a Northwest Territories Branch – after 1923, called the Northwest Territories and Yukon Branch (NWTYB) – within the Department of the Interior. The NWTC met seldom and did little until the late 1920s, but the new branch, under the leadership of Oswald Sterling Finnie (fig. 21), quickly became a force to be reckoned with. Finnie spent most of 1921 in the NWT, but in January 1922 he took up the sovereignty issue (doc. 267). Along with John Davidson Craig (fig. 22), he pushed strongly for the revival of the plan to establish police posts on the northern islands. Joseph Bernier was hired once again, but only as captain of the patrol ship, a position he held until 1925. Command of the 1922 and 1923 patrols was given to Craig; his successors were other officials from the Department of the Interior.

As for Wrangel Island, Finnie and Craig saw little merit in Stefansson's proposals. They believed that claims to territory outside the sector would only imperil Canada's sovereignty over its own northern islands. As Craig wrote, "If Canada can go a thousand miles outside her boundary and claim Wrangell Island, the United States can apparently, with equally strong justification, go and claim one or more of our Northern islands" (doc. 276). Craig and Finnie reasoned that

³¹ See LAC, RG 88, vol. 222, file 17290.