

Who benefits from development?

by Carol Bailey
for Canadian University Press

Southern Canadians might well pause when they hear about Native land settlement proposals in the Northwest Territories. Indeed, it may be worth their while to reconsider the entire question of "northern development." For it is becoming increasingly apparent that the "development" which has been imposed on Native northerners throughout Canadian history has led to only disease, alcoholism, suicide and crime rates, poverty and family and community breakdown. And for those of us in the south, the development of the north has dubious benefits.

Until the 1960's, the Canadian north had largely been viewed as a great wasteland. During the years of the fur trade, the government had little interest in the north, and the general public had even less. Whatever development took place was left almost entirely in the hands of the fur trader, the missionary and the RCMP.

The wishes of the Native people were never considered seriously when development decisions were made. Instead, Ottawa bureaucrats were more concerned with the resource potential of the area. Natural resource extraction has always dominated the economic, social and political changes that have taken place. What was best for resource development was best for the Native northerners - whether they liked it or not.

In strictly material terms, the standard of living has probably improved in the last 20 years. The quality of medical care, housing and education has shown a marked improvement. But the Native people have been forced into dependence upon southern institutions. Disease and malnutrition have subsided, but social disintegration, caused by lack of independence, has accelerated tremendously.

For the first time in the history of the north, however, the Native people have taken a stand. They are demanding the right to determine the kind of development that will take place on their own land. They want to see development, but development that serves the needs of the people living in the north.

The southern Canadian has probably heard it all before. He might even agree that Native people have not benefited by northern development activities and policies. But aren't the needs of millions of Southern Canadians more important than the needs of a few thousand Native northerners?

Canadians need the north's energy reserves, the argument goes. Wouldn't revenues accruing from the sale of surplus reserves give the economy a shot in the arm? Wouldn't the construction projects associated with oil and gas exploration and transportation give Canadians badly-needed jobs?

Does Canada really need northern energy reserves - at least within the next decade?

Even if Canada doesn't really need the energy reserves in the north for a few years, wouldn't northern development activities still give a badly-needed boost to the Canadian economy? Not really.

"The Canadian government has gone out of its way to make Canada's non-renewable resources as attractive to foreign countries as can possibly be done with massive incentives and cheap exploration and extraction costs," according to author Richard Rohmer.

Not only will the Canadian economy receive little benefit from oil and gas-related activities in the north, it could be seriously damaged by them. If the MacKenzie Valley pipeline is financed largely by Canadian

funds (and that is highly unlikely), it will make capital scarce for other investments. If, on the other hand, the project is financed with foreign money, the influx of funds (particularly with the James Bay project being built at the same time) will drive up the value of the Canadian dollar. Canada's export goods will become expensive and uncompetitive in the foreign market, and imports will compete unfavorably with Canadian manufactured goods. Canada's manufacturing sector will be damaged and unemployment will increase.

Why then is the MacKenzie Valley pipeline going to be built at all? Canada has always been a supplier of raw materials to a mother country. First, she supplied furs, timber, and wheat to France and Britain. Now, she supplies timber products, minerals, and, most significantly, oil, gas and water resources to the US.

It is time all Canadians started asking themselves some serious questions about the form of development that has been decreed for Canada's north. Does it benefit all Canadians? Do Canadians really need the energy reserves, at least in the short term? Should Native northerners have more of a say in determining the type of development which takes place in their homeland?

Canada's north is no longer an isolated, remote "wasteland." The future of Canada will be shaped by decisions that are now being made in Ottawa. The Canadian public can no longer afford to leave such crucial decisions in the hands of corporate officials and a small "inner circle" of senior federal civil servants.

Now is the time for southern Canadians to take action. Now is the time to become informed about our precious northland. Now is the time to give utmost support to the Native organizations. In the end, the only one who can answer the question "who will fight for the north?" is you.

Dene Declaration

We the Dene of the N.W.T. insist on the right to be regarded by ourselves and the world as a nation.

Our struggle is for the recognition of the Dene Nation by the Government and people of Canada and the peoples and governments of the world.

As once Europe was the exclusive homeland of the European peoples, Africa the exclusive homeland of the African peoples, the New World, North and South America, was the exclusive homeland of Aboriginal peoples of the New World, the Amerindian and the Inuit.

The New World like other parts of the world has suffered the experience of colonialism and imperialism. Other peoples have occupied the land—often with force—and foreign governments have imposed themselves on our people. Ancient civilizations and ways of life have been destroyed.

Colonialism and imperialism is now dead or dying. Recent years have witnessed the birth of new nations or rebirth of old nations out of the ashes of colonialism.

As Europe is the place where you will find European countries with European governments for European peoples, now also you will find in Africa and Asia the existence of African and Asian countries with African

and Asian governments for the African and Asian peoples.

The African and Asian peoples—the peoples of the Third World—have fought for and won the right to self-determination, the right to recognition as distinct peoples and the recognition of themselves as nations.

But in the New World the native peoples have not fared so well. Even in countries in South America where the Native peoples are the vast majority of the population there is not one country which has an Amerindian government of the Amerindian peoples.

Nowhere in the New World have the Native peoples won the right to self-determination and the right to recognition by the world as a distinct people and as Nations.

While the Native people of Canada are a minority in their homeland, the Native people of the N.W.T., the Dene and the Inuit, are a majority of the population of the N.W.T.

The Dene find themselves as part of a country. That country is Canada. But the Government of Canada is not the government of the Dene. The Government of the N.W.T. is not the government of the Dene. These governments were not the choice of the Dene, they were imposed upon the Dene.

What we the Dene are struggling for is the recognition of the Dene Nation by the governments and peoples of the world.

And while there are realities we are forced to submit to, such as the existence of a country called Canada, we insist on the right to self-determination as a distinct people and the recognition of the Dene Nation.

We the Dene are part of the Fourth World. And as the peoples and Nations of the world have come to recognize the existence and rights of those peoples who make up the Third World the day must come and will come when the nations of the Fourth World will come to be recognized and respected. The challenge to the Dene and the world is to find the way for the recognition of the Dene Nation.

Our plea to the world is to help us in our struggle to find a place in the world community where we can exercise our right to self-determination as a distinct people and as a nation.

What we seek then is independence and self-determination within the country of Canada. This is what we mean when we call for a just land settlement for the Dene Nation.



Public meeting in Weldon Law Building

on Native Land Settlements Wednesday March 10 at 8 p.m. in room 115

Workshop on Native Land Claims in Nova Scotia

9:30 a.m., March 11 4th floor 1588 Barrington St.