

Because of the minute rate of hydrocarbon decomposition in frigid areas, the presence of any such oil must be regarded as permanent. The disastrous consequences which the presence would have upon the marine plankton, upon the process of oxygenation in Arctic North America, and upon other natural and vital processes of the biosphere, are incalculable in their extent.

Involved here, in short, are issues which even the more conservative of environmental scientists do not hesitate to describe as being of a magnitude which is capable of affecting the quality, and perhaps the continued existence, of human and animal life in vast regions of North America and elsewhere. These are issues of such immense importance that they demand prompt and effective action. But this huge area cannot be protected by Canada alone. Just as the Arctic environment is of benefit to many nations, so only, in the long run, will international controls be able effectively to protect it.

At the moment, there are some 20 major international agencies dealing with one or another aspect of environment protection. The United Nations is sponsoring a World Conference on the Human Environment, to be held in Stockholm in 1972. Canada is working energetically as a member of the preparatory committee for that conference and will press for the rapid introduction of a system of international environmental law to protect all vulnerable areas. But experience cautions us that we cannot sit back and assume that the present pace of development of international regulations is sufficient to prevent pollution from occurring at an early date in the Canadian Arctic. Nor need we rely on our own experience to come to such a conclusion. Mr. George Kennan, a distinguished American diplomat now a member of the faculty of Princeton University, referred to the activities of all these international agencies in an article in the current issue of Foreign Affairs. He wrote:

"...it is evident that present activities have not halted or reversed environmental deterioration. There is no reason to suppose, for example, that they will stop, or even reduce significantly at an early date, the massive spillage of oil into the high seas, now estimated at a million tons per annum and presumably steadily increasing. They will not assure the placing of reasonable limitations on the size of tankers, or the enforcement of proper rules for the operation of these and other great vessels on the oceans. They will not, as they now stand, give humanity in general any protection against the misuse and plundering of the seabed for selfish national purposes. They will not put a stop to the proliferation of oil-rigs in coastal and international waters, with all the dangers this presents for navigation and for the purity and ecological balance of the sea. They will not, except in a degree already recognized as quite unsatisfactory, protect the fish resources of the high seas from progressive destruction or depletion.... they will not assure that all uses of outer space, as well as of the polar extremities of the planet, are properly controlled in the interests of humanity as a whole."