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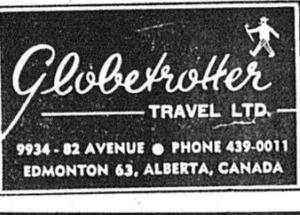
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FIRE and ice

by Jim Wolford
Department of Zoology
Research Assistant,
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In a Toronto debate last month, Eric Kierans said that we should stop selling our resources for nickels and dimes, and that we must get out of our anachronistic "roads to resources" philosophy of economic development (i.e. Canada will build the roads, and the U.S. can have the resources).

Activities of the petroleum industry in Canada's North have been frantic in the past several years, especially since the 1969 discovery of oil and gas in Alaska's Prudhoe Bay area. Consider the following facts:

1. Enormous amounts of land and sea -- Mackenzie Delta, Tuk Peninsula, Beaufort Sea, Arctic Islands, etc. -- are reserved by a variety of companies under permits for seismic blasting and/or drilling (see centerfold in *Oilweek*, Nov. 20/72). So far, there have been 5 discoveries of oil or gas on the mainland and 4 on the islands.

2. A consortium of petroleum and pipeline companies, Canadian Arctic Gas Study Limited, will soon file an application to build a large gas pipeline from Alaska and the Mackenzie Delta, up the Mackenzie Valley to Alberta, and on to the U.S.

3. The recently-formed Polar Gas Project consortium is well into a feasibility study for a gas pipeline from the Arctic Islands, along the coast of Hudson Bay, to eastern Canada and U.S.

4. Another consortium, Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Research Limited, just produced a glossy report which claims that a large oil pipeline from Alaska, along the Mackenzie Valley, is quite feasible.

The pace is a hectic one, and the objective is to find energy resources and then pipe them out to wherever they can be burned. The ultimate goal is the fast buck, a quick return on the large expenditures for northern exploration.

The responsibility for regulation of these activities is completely in the hands of the federal government. What are some of the things which they have done recently?

1. The government issued Guidelines for Northern Pipelines in 1970 (expanded in 1972). The guidelines were vague in many important respects, but it was clear that pipelines and a transportation corridor along the Mackenzie Valley were considered inevitable.

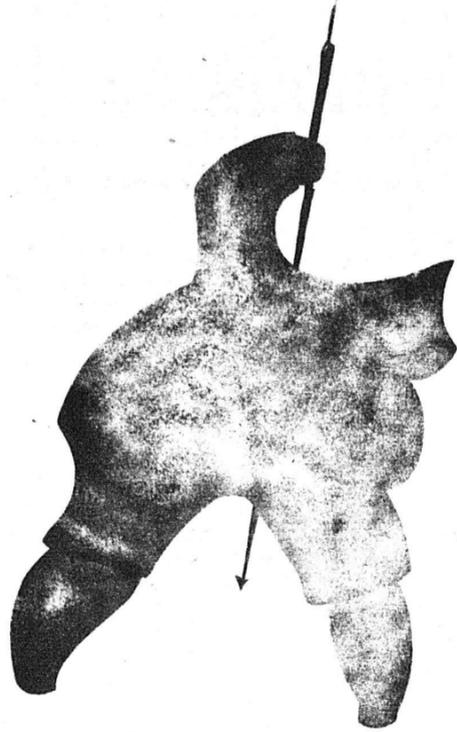
2. In 1971 during the U.S. pandemonium over the proposed trans-Alaska oil pipeline, Canada made it clear to the U.S. that both oil and gas lines could be built in the Mackenzie Valley.

3. Several conservationists were "consulted" in 1971 when the Territorial Land Use Regulations were being drafted, but the opinions of those consulted were completely ignored in the final Regulations.

4. In 1971 the government undertook a crash program of studies related to possible pipelines across the northern Yukon and along the Mackenzie Valley. The terms of reference, like those of the gas consortium, were to suggest how and where to build a pipeline, not *whether* it should be built. (The results of these government studies will be published in 2-3 months.)

5. In 1972 the government announced its intent to build the Mackenzie Highway from Fort Simpson to Inuvik. The sections which were begun at either end were environmental disasters, mainly because there were no engineering or environmental studies to guide them. This was a very poor example to set for the pipeline builders.

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It should be obvious that there has been a severe lack of planning and public involvement in decisions concerning northern development. Let us consider the Mackenzie Valley specifically. There are several crucial questions which apparently were never even asked, much less answered. For example, were the Mackenzie Valley settlements too isolated from civilization? If so, was a highway the best means for lessening their isolation? We have no evidence that any alternatives have been investigated. It seems likely that the road was to be primarily an inducement for the pipeline consortia.

The Mackenzie Valley Pipeline cannot be considered in isolation from other parts of a Mackenzie Transportation Corridor. Consider the potential impact of the proposed highway. At least two major considerations must be: (1) the route of the first corridor element, namely the highway, will at least partly determine the routes of other elements, such as pipelines; and (2) an all-weather road will not only open up much of the wilderness of the valley, but also will create unlimited access to the settlements. There will be benefits to the native people, but who has weighed these benefits against probable detriments? Perhaps it is ironic that the gas consortium was not paying much attention to the progress of the highway, even before the recent embarrassed slow-down of road construction.

Now, where do we stand on alternatives to pipelines? Needless to say,

the Canadian Arctic Gas group has gathered with obvious governmental encouragement. The Guidelines for Northern Pipelines do require the consortium to assess alternate routes, but there is no mention of alternate methods for transporting the gas. There also is nothing whatsoever about leaving the fossil fuels in the ground a period of time. Surely, if Mr. Côté's priorities of "people and environment first" are real, these choices should be made very carefully. But the site seems to have taken place.

With respect to the immediate pipeline itself, how much do we know? The answer is, "not very much". Use the details of the route and design are veiled in secrecy. We do know the estimated reserves of gas are 27 trillion cubic feet (Tcf) at Prudhoe Bay (with the oil) and perhaps 15 Tcf at the Mackenzie Delta. Proven reserves at the Delta are insufficient, at this time, to justify a pipeline. Therefore the consortium needs the Alaskan oil in order to build a pipeline and Alaskan oil must be produced under the conditions that the gas may be extracted from it (likewise the Alaskan oil produced by someone to remove the gas from their oil). Also we know that the pipeline will be 48 inches in diameter, with a capacity of 1.65 Tcf per year. The line will be buried, with the gas compressed and cooled to avoid thawing the permafrost soil. Most of the construction will be done in the winter and will require about three years.

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