

the Sverdrup Islands (see doc. 179).²² The whole process culminated with Bernier's famous declaration of sovereignty over the entire Canadian sector, made on Melville Island in July 1909 (see doc. 191). Although evidence on these matters is virtually non-existent, it appears that Bernier learned about the sector theory from White and, ignoring the Prime Minister's preference for putting occupation first, went forward with the 1909 proclamation on his own initiative.

It is clear that the Department of Marine and Fisheries was quite unable to control Bernier. However, Laurier was less displeased with the 1909 declaration than would have been the case if Robert Peary had not claimed to have reached the Pole in April 1909. Peary reported that he had taken possession of the Pole and the region around it for the United States; how far south this claim was meant to extend was not clear. In response, the Prime Minister publicly commended Bernier's action,²³ and he answered a British inquiry with the statement that Canada claimed all the land between the Canada-United States border and the Pole (doc. 193). Soon, however, it became clear that the US had no intention of backing Peary's claim. When Peary informed President William Howard Taft that the Pole was at his disposal, Taft replied: "I do not know what I could do with it."²⁴ Later the US ambassador in London, Whitelaw Reid, stated in a speech that Canada was free to occupy the archipelago.²⁵

Laurier therefore drew back from his endorsement of Bernier's proclamation, and even Senator Poirier conceded that flag-raising without occupation counted for nothing under international law.²⁶ In 1910 Laurier appointed lawyer and former Conservative cabinet minister James Colebrooke Patterson to investigate sovereignty issues.²⁷ While awaiting his report, the government did not seem inclined to do anything other than continue its northern ship patrols. Bernier's orders for his 1910-1911 voyage contained no explicit reference whatever to sovereignty matters, but he was instructed to extend his patrol as far westward among the islands as possible.²⁸

In 1909 James White resigned from his position as Chief Geographer, choosing instead to devote his energies to the cause of wildlife conservation. Without White

²² This claim was essentially a sector claim, since it extended from the spot where Bernier's men landed on the south coast of Ellesmere Island to the North Pole.

²³ See Laurier's comments in Bernier, "Canadian Rights in the Arctic," in G.H. Brown, ed., *Addresses Delivered before the Canadian Club of Ottawa* (Ottawa: Mortimer Press, 1909), pp. 191-192.

²⁴ Peary to Taft, 8 September 1909, and Taft to Peary, same date, LC, Taft Papers, series 5. Taft's telegram was released to the press; see "Taft Has Faith in Peary," *New York Times*, 9 September 1909, p. 2.

²⁵ "American Thanksgiving Day," *The Times* (London), 26 November 1909, p. 14.

²⁶ On 1 February 1910 Poirier made a speech on the Arctic without once mentioning the sector theory. See Canada, *Senate Debates*, 11th Parliament, 2nd session, pp. 179-184.

²⁷ Order-in-Council 1910-1170, 6 June 1910, LAC, RG 2, vol. 995.

²⁸ Alexander Johnston, instructions to J.E. Bernier, 5 July 1910, in W.W. Stumbles, comp., *Report on the Dominion Government Expedition to the Northern Waters and Arctic Archipelago of the D.G.S. "Arctic" in 1910* [Ottawa: King's Printer, 1911].