

Epilogue: Themes for the National Interest

Prime Minister Trudeau has said that Canada is a product of the providential encounter between the French and the English on this continent. Canada takes its identity from the evolution of that encounter. The contours of that meeting between the French and the English in North America define the political institutions of the nation, and constitute Canada's unique contribution to the search by man for a rational polity.

But there was an earlier encounter on this continent that made possible the very existence of the nation — between the Europeans and the indigenous peoples of the Americas. Here, in what is now Canada, it was an encounter first between the French and the native people, then between the English and the native people. It was an encounter which has ramified throughout our history, and the consequences of which are with us today. This encounter may be as important to us all, in the long sweep of history, as any other on this continent. And it is taking place in its most intense and contemporary form on our northern frontier.

It is for this reason that so many eyes are drawn to the North. As André Siegfried, the de Tocqueville of Canada, said:

Many countries — and they are to be envied — possess in one direction or another a window which opens out on to the infinite — on to the potential future. . . . The North is always there like a presence, it is the background of the picture, without which Canada would not be Canadian. [*Canada* p. 28-29]

It may be that, through this window, we shall discover something of the shape that our future relations with the native people of our country must assume.

The English and French are the inheritors of two great streams of western civilization. They hold far more in common than divides

them: they have similar linguistic and literary traditions and rivalry and commonality of interests that have caused their histories repeatedly to overlap. What is more, the industrial system is the foundation for the material well-being they both enjoy.

Now the industrial system beckons to the native people. But it does not merely beckon: it has intruded into their culture, economy and society, now pulling, now pushing them towards another, and in many ways an alien, way of life. In the North today, the native people are being urged to give up their life on the land; they are being told that their days and their lives should become partitioned like our own. We have often urged that their commitment to the industrial system be entire and complete. Native people have even been told that they cannot compromise: they must become industrial workers, or go naked back to the bush.

Yet many of them refuse. They say they have a past of their own; they see that complete dependence on the industrial system entails a future that has no place for the values they cherish. Their refusal to make the commitment asked of them is one of the points of recurring tension in the North today. They acknowledge the benefits we have brought to them. They say that they are, in some respects, more comfortable now than they were in the old days. The industrial system has provided many things that they value, such as rifles, radios, outboard motors and snowmobiles. But they know that, in the old days, the land was their own. Even in the days of the fur trade, they and the land were essential to it. Now they recognize they are not essential. If it is in the national interest, a pipeline can and will be built across their land. They fear that they will become strangers in their own land. The native people know that somehow they

must gain a measure of control over their lives and over the political institutions that shape their lives, and that they must do this before the industrial system overtakes and, it may be, overwhelms them. This is what their claims are about, and this is why they say their claims must be settled before a pipeline is built.

The native people know their land is important to us as a source of oil and gas and mineral wealth, but that its preservation is not essential to us. They know that above all else we have wanted to subdue the land and extract its resources. They recognize that we do not regard their hunting, trapping and fishing as essential, that it is something we often regard in a patronizing way. They say that we reject the things that are valuable to them in life: that we do so explicitly and implicitly.

We have sought to make over these people in our own image, but this pronounced, consistent and well-intentioned effort at assimilation has failed. The use of the bush and the barrens, and the values associated with them, have persisted. The native economy refuses to die. The Dene, Inuit and Metis survive, determined to be themselves. In the past their refusal to be assimilated has usually been passive, even covert. Today it is plain and unmistakable, a fact of northern life that must be understood.

The native people have had some hard things to say about the government, about the oil and gas industry and about the white man and his institutions. The allegation has been made that what the leaders of native organizations in Northern Canada are saying is not representative of the attitudes and thinking of northern native peoples. But this Inquiry not only has sought the views of the native organizations, but has obtained the views of the native people who live in every



settlement and village of the Mackenzie Valley and the Western Arctic. There the native people, speaking in their own villages, in their own languages and in their own way, expressed their real views. About that I am in no doubt.

It would be a mistake to think that the native people are being manipulated by sinister forces, unseen by them, yet discernible to us. It is demeaning and degrading to tell someone that he does not mean or does not know what he is saying, that someone has told him to say it. It would be wrong to dismiss what they have said because we would rather believe that they are not capable of expressing their own opinions.

It may be uncomfortable to have to listen, when we have never listened in the past. But we must listen now. If we do not understand what is in the minds of the native people, what their attitudes really are toward industrial development, we shall have no way of knowing what impact a pipeline and an energy corridor will have on the people of the North.

We all have different ideas of progress and our own definitions of the national interest. It is commonplace for people in Southern Canada to dismiss the notion that a few thousand native people have a right to stand in the way of industrial imperatives. But many of the Dene intend to do just that. Philip Blake told the Inquiry at Fort McPherson:

If your nation chooses ... to continue to try and destroy our nation, then I hope you will understand why we are willing to fight so that our nation can survive. It is our world.

We do not wish to push our world onto you. But we are willing to defend it for ourselves, our children, and our grandchildren. If your nation becomes so violent that it would tear up our land, destroy our society and our future, and occupy our homeland, by trying to

impose this pipeline against our will, then of course we will have no choice but to react with violence.

I hope we do not have to do that. For it is not the way we would choose. However, if we are forced to blow up the pipeline ... I hope you will not only look on the violence of Indian action, but also on the violence of your own nation which would force us to take such a course.

We will never initiate violence. But if your nation threatens by its own violent action to destroy our nation, you will have given us no choice. Please do not force us into this position. For we would all lose too much. [C1085ff.]

Chief Fred Greenland said to the Inquiry at Aklavik:

It's clear to me what the native people are saying today. They're discussing not their future but the future of their children and grandchildren, and if the government continues to refuse or neglect [us] ... I think the natives would just stop their effort and discussions and the opportunities for a peaceful settlement would be lost. We must choose wisely and carefully because there will be a future generation of Canadians who will live with the results. [C3863]

Frank T'Seleie, then Chief at Fort Good Hope, also spoke of the future generations, of the children yet unborn. He told the Inquiry:

It is for this unborn child, Mr. Berger, that my nation will stop the pipeline. It is so that this unborn child can know the freedom of this land that I am willing to lay down my life. [C1778ff.]

Chief Jim Antoine of Fort Simpson:

... every time we try to do something, within the system ... it doesn't seem to work for us, as Indian people. We tried it, we tried to use it, it doesn't work for us. ... We're going to keep on trying to use the system until we get frustrated enough that we're going to try changing it. I think that's where it's directed, that's where it's going. I would stand with my brother from Good Hope that he would lay

down his life for what he believes in, and I feel the same way. There's a lot of us young people who feel the same way. [C2625]

Raymond Yakaleya, speaking at Norman Wells:

Our backs are turned to the corners. This is our last stand.

I ask each and every one of you in this room what would you do if you were in our shoes? How would you feel if you had these conditions on you? I ask you one more time, let us negotiate, there's still time, but don't force us, because this time we have nothing to lose. When I ask for the lives of my people, am I asking you for too much? [C2177]

I have given the most anxious consideration to whether or not I should make any reference in this report to these statements. It may be said that merely reciting them would be to invite a violent reaction to the pipeline, if it were built without a just settlement of native claims. Yet these statements were not lightly made. No one who heard them could doubt that they were said in earnest. So I have concluded that they cannot be ignored. They illustrate the depth of feeling among the native people.

I want to emphasize that my recommendation that the construction of a Mackenzie Valley pipeline should be postponed until native claims are settled is not dependent upon this evidence. That recommendation is based upon the social and economic impact of a pipeline, and upon the impact it would have on native claims. I would be remiss in my duty, however, if I did not remind the Government of Canada that these things were said. I do not want anyone to think I am predicting an insurrection. But I am saying there is a real possibility of civil disobedience and civil disorder that — if they did occur — might well render orderly political evolution of the North impossible, and could poison relations between the Government of

Nahanni Butte Inquiry hearing. (N. Cooper)

Fort Simpson Chief Jim Antoine at Trout Lake with Judge Berger. (News of the North)

NWT Inuit leader Sam Raddi presenting land claims proposal to federal cabinet, Ottawa, 1976. (ITC-T. Grant)

Rick Hardy, President of NWT Metis Association (Native Press)



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Canada and the native people for many years to come.

We ought not to be surprised that native people should express themselves so strongly. Julius Nyerere, President of Tanzania, said at a meeting commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the United Nations on October 15, 1970:

A man can change his religion if he wishes; he can accept a different political belief — or in both cases give the appearance of doing so — if this would relieve him of intolerable circumstances. But no man can change his colour or his race. And if he suffers because of it, he must either become less than a man, or he must fight. And for good or evil, mankind has been so created that many will refuse to acquiesce in their own degradation: they will destroy peace rather than suffer under it. [p. 4, no. 42]

It has been said that the native people have not articulated their claims, that they are taking too long over it. Yet, when you realize that we have tried to suppress systematically their own institutions, traditions and aspirations, why should we expect them to develop a blueprint for the future in haste?

It has also been suggested that the native people would not be able to manage their own affairs. In fact, they have brought before this Inquiry their own scheme for self-government and for the economic development of the North. And it would be wrong to dismiss this scheme out of hand. They have offered a first, not a final, draft. But it is founded on their own past and their own experience, on their own preferences and aspirations; they wish to see it realized in a future that is of their fashioning. The modernization of the native economy, the development of the renewable resource sector, constitutes as rational a program for the

development of the North as we have so far been able to devise.

All that has been said in this report should make it plain that the great agency of change in the North is the presence of industrial man. He and his technology, armed with immense political and administrative power and prepared to transform the social and natural landscape in the interests of a particular kind of society and economy, have a way of soon becoming pervasive. It is not just a question of a seismic trail being cleared across their hunting grounds, or of a drilling rig outside their village that troubles the native people. It is the knowledge that they could be overwhelmed by economic and political strength, and that the resources of their land — indeed the land itself — could be taken from them.

In each native village there is a network of social relationships established over many generations. If there were a pipeline, would all those threads linking family to family, and generation to generation, be snapped?

The native people are raising profound questions. They are challenging the economic religion of our time, the belief in an ever-expanding cycle of growth and consumption. It is a faith shared equally by capitalist and communist.

Dr. Ian McTaggart-Cowan has said:

Is the only way to improve the lot of a country's citizens the way of industrialization, whether it be the western way or the forced march of the USSR? . . .

Almost inevitably, diversity is sacrificed to a spurious efficiency. The loss of diversity is not merely a matter for sentimental regret. It is a direct reduction in the number of opportunities open to future generations.

As we look toward the end of the twentieth century . . . we see . . . this diversity threatened by dominant societies pursuing goals that, though they have produced a rich material

culture, are already eroding the sources of their original stimulus. [In an address to the Pacific Science Congress, August 26, 1975]

The native people take an historical point of view. They argue that their own culture should not be discarded, that it has served them well for many years, and that the industrial system of the white man may not, here in the North, serve them as well for anything like so long a time. They do not wish to set themselves up as a living folk museum, nor do they wish to be the objects of mere sentimentality. Rather, with the guarantees that can be provided only by a settlement of their claims, and with the strengthening of their own economy, they wish to ensure that their cultures can continue to grow and change — in directions they choose for themselves.

Here on our last frontier we have a chance to protect the environment and to deal justly with some of the native people of Canada. If we postpone the pipeline, there will be an opportunity for the native people of the North to build a future for themselves. But if we build the pipeline now, there is every reason to believe that the history of the northern native people will proceed along the same lamentable course as that of native people in so many other places.

Now it has been said that, without the industry's drive to build a pipeline, there is unlikely to be a settlement of native claims. Why should this be so? The Government of Canada has an obligation to settle these claims, pipeline or no pipeline: a solemn assurance has been given. Postponement of pipeline construction will be no reason to turn away from the other issues that confront us in the North.

A settlement of native claims that does no more than extinguish the native interest in land will get us nowhere so far as the social



The Ramparts along the Mackenzie River. (R. Fumoleau)

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and economic advancement of the native people are concerned. Those social and economic gains will follow from the achievement of a sense of collective pride and initiative by the Dene, Inuit and Metis, and not simply from a clearing away of legal complications to enable industrial development to proceed.

If the pipeline is not built now, an orderly program of exploration can still proceed in the Mackenzie Delta and the Beaufort Sea. And, even if the oil and gas industry withdraws from its exploration activities because of a decision to postpone the pipeline, the Government of Canada has the means to ensure the continuation of exploratory drilling if it were held to be in the national interest. Postponement of the pipeline would mean that, if continued drilling in the Mackenzie Delta and the Beaufort Sea reveals sufficient reserves, Canada can proceed to build a pipeline at a time of its own choosing, along a route of its own choice, by means it has decided upon, and with the cooperation of the native people of the North.

Let me make it clear that if we decide to postpone the pipeline, we shall not be renouncing our northern energy supplies. They will still be there. No one is going to take them away. In years to come, it will still be available as fuel or as industrial feedstocks.

We have never had to determine what is the most intelligent use to make of our

resources. We have never had to consider restraint. Will we continue, driven by technology and egregious patterns of consumption, to deplete our energy resources wherever and whenever we find them? Upon this question depends the future of northern native people and their environment.

Maurice Strong, Chairman of Petro Canada, has written:

Man's very skills, the very technical success with which he overspreads the earth, makes him the most dangerous of all creatures.

One critical aspect of man's use of planetary resources is the way in which he is burning up more and more of the world's energy....

We can no longer afford to plan on the basis of past and current trends in consumption. If we assume that a decent standard of life for the world's peoples inevitably requires increasing per capita use of energy, we shall be planning for an energy starved world, or an ecological disaster, or both. Rather than searching endlessly for new energy sources, we must contribute to its wiser use....

At present, we are far from this ideal. We have recklessly assumed that no matter how wasteful our lifestyle, we shall somehow find the energy to support it....

In the last 15 years, world use of energy has doubled. North America now uses about five times as much energy as is consumed in the whole of Asia, and per capita consumption is about 24 times higher. The United States each year wastes more fossil fuel than is used by two-thirds of the world's population. [*Edmonton Journal*, September 22, 1976]

If we build the pipeline, it will seem

strange, years from now, that we refused to do justice to the native people merely to continue to provide ourselves with a range of consumer goods and comforts without even asking Canadians to consider an alternative. Such a course is not necessary, nor is it acceptable.

I have said that, under the present conditions, the pipeline, if it were built now, would do enormous damage to the social fabric in the North, would bring only limited economic benefits, and would stand in the way of a just settlement of native claims. It would exacerbate tension. It would leave a legacy of bitterness throughout a region in which the native people have protested, with virtual unanimity, against the pipeline. For a time, some of them may be co-opted. But in the end, the Dene, Inuit and Metis will follow those of their leaders who refuse to turn their backs on their own history, who insist that they must be true to themselves, and who articulate the values that lie at the heart of the native identity.

No pipeline should be built now. Time is needed to settle native claims, set up new institutions and establish a truly diversified economy in the North. This, I suggest, is the course northern development should take.

We have the opportunity to make a new departure, to open a new chapter in the history of the indigenous peoples of the Americas. We must not reject the opportunity that is now before us.