

**ICE BLINK: NAVIGATING NORTHERN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY** Edited by Stephen Böcking and Brad Martin

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# 7

## Hope in the Barrenlands: Northern Development and Sustainability's Canadian History

*Tina Loo*

In the early months of 1950, documentary photographer Richard Harrington set off on his third trip to the Canadian Arctic in as many years. This time his destination was Churchill, the starting point for a journey along the west coast of Hudson Bay and into the Keewatin (now Kivalliq) region, or the “Barrenlands” (see Fig. 7.1). By the time he returned, he could no longer take pictures—his fingers had been frozen one too many times.<sup>1</sup> But Harrington was lucky: he would recover. Long before he got home, many of the people he had met were dead. His photographs had become a collective obituary.

More than records of the passing of a way of life, Harrington's images were meant to provoke a complacent public. Confronted with starvation among the Padleimiut, a group of Caribou, or inland Inuit, Harrington could do no more than bear witness to a tragedy. When death came, tea and tobacco were all he had to greet it.

February 11 [1950]: For the first time I realize how serious it is when caribou don't come. ... Dogs are dying everywhere.

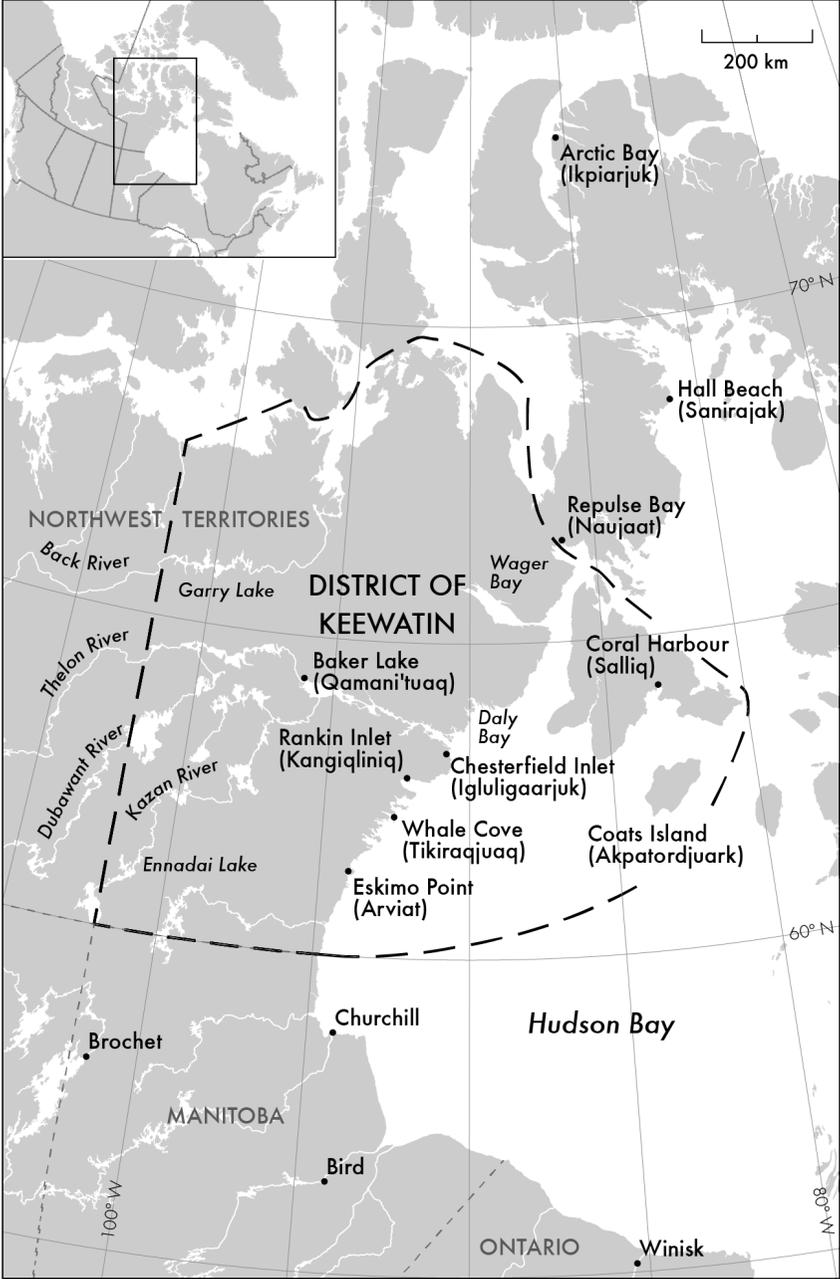


FIG. 7.1: Map of the Keewatin region by Eric Leinberger based on Doug Schweitzer, Keewatin Regional Dynamics: A Research Report (1971), 11.

Remaining dogs: skin & bones, shivering, listless. Since Eskimos must travel to obtain food & furs, it means they cannot move around anymore. ... By & by, no more tea, coal-oil, matches. Real hardships begin. ...

February 25: Left alone in a cold, iced-over igloo, Arnalukjuak sat hunched over, in threadbare clothing, her hair frosted over, saying nothing. I put some tobacco in her soapstone pipe, but she was too weak to suck on it. By next morning, she had died of cold & hunger. Her relatives sealed off the igloo.<sup>2</sup>

Two years later, when his photographs were published as *The Face of the Arctic*, Harrington gave public voice to what he had seen. Arnalukjuak was not named in his “portrait of famine,” but is identified only as a “starving Padleimiut.” Another of his subjects did not merit even this designation. The cold and lack of food had reduced her identity to a state of being. Beyond anonymity, she was neither Alaq, the name he recorded in his diary, nor a Padleimiut. Instead, she was “Near Death.” The next sentence turned that description into an indictment, aesthetics into politics: “Near Death. Note Government Identification Tag.”<sup>3</sup>

As other scholars have argued, knowledge is the key to statecraft, especially in the modern period.<sup>4</sup> People have to be visible, or “legible,” to the state in order to be subject to its power. In Canada, the census and system of Social Insurance Numbers are two commonplace techniques of tracking and control, and so too were the government tags Harrington referred to. With no standardized spellings of Inuit names and in the absence of surnames it was difficult for authorities to keep accurate trade accounts and police records. Implemented in 1941, the E-number (E for “Eskimo”) identification system was meant to distinguish Inuit by issuing each a unique number worn on a tag around the neck. It became especially important for the delivery of Family Allowances, the first of Canada’s universal social programs, established in 1944.<sup>5</sup> But as Richard Harrington made clear, legibility was no guarantee of social security.

Whereas Harrington chose to be a witness, his contemporary, Farley Mowat, assumed the job of prosecutor in the court of public opinion. The same year the public was shown *The Face of the Arctic*, Mowat published his first book. Also set in the Keewatin, *People of the Deer* (1952) was an

explicit condemnation of the Canadian government's deadly neglect of the north and its peoples.<sup>6</sup>

The work of both Harrington and Mowat came at a time when Canadians and their government were taking a more active interest in the north. As Matthew Farish and P. Whitney Lackenbauer's chapter in this volume discusses, that interest was sparked in part by the Cold War. The Atlantic Charter and Canada's commitment to social security also led to greater state intervention in the lives of all Canadians, including northerners. In addition to housing, hospitalization, unemployment, and care for the elderly in the form of universal old age pensions, the government also interpolated itself into areas as fundamental as people's diets, as Liza Piper shows in her chapter.<sup>7</sup> Despite the growth of the welfare state, its safety net did not adequately protect the Indigenous peoples of the region.<sup>8</sup> When thirty-three Inuit in the Keewatin died as a result of starvation in the winter of 1957–58, things changed—rapidly.<sup>9</sup> Famines did not happen in Canada, and people were certainly not supposed to die from a lack of food.

Death by starvation was not the kind of publicity the newly established Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources had in mind for the region it had charge of, especially since its objective was, in the words of Minister Jean Lesage, “to give the Eskimos the same rights, privileges, opportunities, and responsibilities as all other Canadians, in short to enable them to share fully in the national life of Canada.”<sup>10</sup> Scandalized by what happened in the Keewatin, Prime Minister John Diefenbaker echoed the mandate of Northern Affairs in directing the civil service to act so that “no more Canadians will starve!”<sup>11</sup>

Once a predictable, if tragic, end for “primitive” peoples, in the late 1950s death from hunger was no longer tolerable for any of the country's citizens. The rhetoric of citizenship was prominent in the post-war period: Parliament passed legislation in 1947 making Canadian citizenship a legal reality, but what did that mean in the face of increased levels of immigration and a growing Indigenous population, which brought new challenges to the “unitary model” of belonging created by the Citizenship Act?<sup>12</sup> The universality implied by citizenship was also challenged by existing inequalities, particularly among regions. The starvation deaths in the central Arctic brought the issues of social and economic inequality into sharp focus, but north was also politically unequal. As territories

under the tutelage of Ottawa, it was a colony of Canada, a situation that would become increasingly untenable in the post-war period.<sup>13</sup>

The shift in the semantics of starvation and citizenship was matched by a shift in policy. For Ottawa, the question was not just about how to feed the inland Inuit or conserve the barren-ground caribou on which they depended. Instead, any new policy would have to grapple with the more fundamental and challenging issue of what we would now call “sustainable development”: how could the region be made a viable place that could support northerners into the future, allowing them to live modern lives with the same degree of social security enjoyed by other Canadians?

While the federal government tried to answer that question all over the north, the Keewatin region was a notable and early proving ground. The decade after the starvations saw a variety of initiatives undertaken in the Barrenlands to address the immiseration that Harrington and Mowat had brought to the public’s attention. These initiatives and the people who implemented them are my focus. Important themselves in understanding the history of Canada’s north, they also speak to a new and broadly shared desire among the old and new colonial powers of the world in the postwar period to elevate the condition of those deemed unfortunate and down-trodden. Motivated by humanitarianism and Cold War geopolitics, an encompassing “will to improve” led countries around the world to invest in “development.”<sup>14</sup>

As its critics argue, the word naturalized a process that was anything but natural. Development—“growth with change,” as the United Nations put it—was a normative concept; to governments in the West, improvement meant progressing through stages of economic, social, and cultural growth marked by the acquisition of liberal democratic values and an embrace of individualism and the market.<sup>15</sup> The “humane internationalism” that led Canada to intervene in development after the Second World War emerged from its own history, as well as its wealth and political culture of liberalism. As David R. Morrison notes, like the countries of the global south, Canada suffered from the problems of foreign investment and control and an economy oriented toward the export of natural resources. This experience situated it somewhat differently in taking up development, and perhaps in how its international development initiatives were received.<sup>16</sup>

During the United Nations’ “Development Decade” (1960–70), the Canadian state’s energies of improvement were focused inward as well as

outward, toward bettering the condition of those who lived in its “underdeveloped” regions, including the north. For Ottawa, improving the lot of northerners meant making sure the postwar resource boom Canada experienced was not limited to its southern reaches. Although previous governments had hardly ignored it, the Diefenbaker regime made the region a priority, claiming it would end the “absence of mind” that characterized northern administration prior to the Second World War.<sup>17</sup>

Announced in 1957, his “Northern Vision” was an aggressive plan to open Canada’s neglected frontier to development by building “Roads to Resources.” Highways and railways, as well as improved navigation on waterways, would lure venture capitalists anxious to exploit the oil, gas, and mineral resources north of sixty. In addition to infrastructure, the federal government provided loans to help finance the greater costs of building in the north, granted tax holidays to mining companies, and relaxed permitting conditions.<sup>18</sup> Both prior to Diefenbaker’s election and after his defeat, Ottawa also directed the attention of its public servants toward facilitating the operations of private enterprises like the North Rankin Nickel Mining Company, which established the northernmost base metal mine in the world in the Keewatin in 1953.<sup>19</sup> The investment corporations like it brought to bear on the north would, the government believed, allow residents to prevail over the limits of their environment: the cold, the distance, and the unpredictability of the animals on which they depended would all be overcome by capital and the global market for commodities.

But Ottawa also came to realize that developing the north required putting it on a more stable and enduring footing than mining allowed—and that necessitated being attentive to the exploitation of renewable resources and taking a more spatially differentiated approach to development. The “north” was a big place with big problems that could only be solved by taking its diversity seriously. With the closure of the North Rankin mine in the early 1960s, the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources did just that, undertaking a number of new regional and community development initiatives in the Keewatin.

A recognized part of Canada’s political and economic history, regional and community development is also an important, if unexplored, part of the history of sustainability, pre-dating both the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) and the United Nations Conference

on Environment and Development, also known as the Rio or Earth Summit (1992), widely acknowledged to mark the origins of sustainable development.<sup>20</sup> Sustainable development emerged from concerns about the global environmental impacts of industrialization. Although they worried about issues like water and air pollution, many people in the global south bridled at being told by the countries that had benefitted from industrial development that they would have to check their own—and forego the growth that came along with it. First popularized by *Our Common Future* (1987), a report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, the concept of “sustainable development” was meant to address just such concerns about the uneven distribution of the environmental, economic, and social costs and benefits of industrialization. It was “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. . . . Sustainable development requires meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to satisfy their aspirations for a better life.”<sup>21</sup>

The articulation of sustainable development was an important moment in the history of environmentalism. From the late nineteenth century to the Second World War, environmentalism was largely concerned with the impacts of economic growth, manifesting itself in both efforts to preserve wilderness areas from the ravages of industrial development and to conserve resources through expert, scientific management. According to Samuel P. Hays, as North Americans became more affluent, urban, and well educated in the second half of the twentieth century, public values about the environment changed. Post-war environmentalism was less about experts managing the conduct and effects of material production and more about “beauty, health, and permanence.” The environment became an amenity, consumed for aesthetic and health reasons, and a sensibility, a way of seeing the world more holistically, in ecological terms.<sup>22</sup>

By raising questions of fairness and justice, advocates of sustainable development further differentiated environmentalism by bringing people and questions of poverty and power to the forefront. Rather than balancing environment and economy, sustainability is measured by a “triple bottom line,” one that is not just attentive to the planet and profits—as had been the case for much of the twentieth century—but to people, as well, and specifically to questions of equity.<sup>23</sup>

Well before sustainability became part of the landscape of global environmental politics in the 1990s, however, bureaucrats working for Canada's federal government grappled with meeting that triple bottom line on the frozen ground of the north. Their efforts at regional and community development in the 1960s were aimed at putting northerners on the same footing as other Canadians by finding ways for them to remain in place, to live in an environment transformed by capitalism and colonialism.

Like those implemented internationally, the development schemes the Canadian state tried in the north were techniques of governance, imposing a disciplinary power on the Inuit in the name of overcoming colonialism and facilitating self-determination. They effected change by problematizing the region in particular ways—namely in terms of what its residents lacked. For the bureaucrats and fieldworkers at Northern Affairs, development was a matter of addressing questions of “capacity”—of the Inuit and their land—as well as raising northerners’ consciousness. Doing so brought new expertise to bear on the north, ushering in what Timothy Mitchell calls “the rule of experts.”<sup>24</sup>

If the development initiatives undertaken in the Barrenlands after the starvations are part of the history of sustainability, they are also chapters in a broader history of hope. It may seem jarring to discuss hope in conjunction with the state and its agents, and it is meant to. Hope is something historians tend to reserve for those who were the objects of power, not a force motivating those who exercised it. The dissonance helps historicize and complicate my subject in a way the “will to improve” does not, measuring how far we have travelled from a time when people believed that an activist state could and should improve the human condition.

But framing development as a history of hope is also meant to nationalize and globalize the region's past. Like much regional history in Canada, the history of the north is not integrated especially well into other narratives. Situating the Barrenlands in a history of hope is meant to help overcome the exceptionalism that can characterize studies of place. What happened in the north was part of the history of postwar Canada and the emergence of welfare liberalism. Born of the belief in the power of the redistributive state to make the conditions for a good life, the development initiatives I discuss were efforts to put northerners on a more equal footing with other Canadians when it became apparent that the universal social programs successive governments had implemented had not done

so. More broadly, what happened in the Keewatin was part of a moment in international history when a range of peoples living in different places came to be perceived similarly: they were deemed by the state as in need of improvement. Hope effected change around the world. Hope was power.

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In the aftermath of the killing winter of 1957–58, the starvation survivors were relocated to settlements on the west coast of Hudson Bay where a new future awaited them. It was not one located on the land, but was to be found instead in permanent settlements. There, new expertise could be brought to bear on improving the condition of Inuit, like that possessed by Walter Rudnicki.

Charged by the Department of Northern Affairs and National Development with interviewing the starvation survivors, Rudnicki arrived in Eskimo Point (Arviat) in March 1958. It was a telling choice: Rudnicki was not the usual northern hand, a man with connections to the Hudson's Bay Company, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, or the Christian churches. Instead, he was a professional social worker. Specializing in psychiatric social work, Rudnicki was especially interested in mental illness among recent immigrants and had worked with them in Vancouver before joining the civil service.<sup>25</sup> This was someone whose chosen career involved working across cultures, and with vulnerable people—both things he would continue to do as chief of the Welfare Section of the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources.

At Eskimo Point, Rudnicki put his professional training to work, administering the Thematic Apperception Test in a modified form to the starvation survivors. One of the most commonly used psychological tests, it involves showing participants a series of provocative yet ambiguous drawings about which they are asked to tell a story. Psychologists believe that the stories participants tell reflect their state of mind—their sense of self and the world.

Instead of using the usual set of standard pictures, Rudnicki, a talented sketch artist, created his own depicting some of the events leading to the starvation. He reported that there was no evidence of “mental pathology,” and, insofar as he had reason for concern, it lay in the attitudes the survivors had toward non-Inuit. In pictures where there were only

Inuit present, the starvation survivors perceived the people to be happy and helping each other. But when white men were depicted, the response was different: "...the general reaction seemed to be that the Eskimos were unhappy, sad, or frightened. ... White men were not differentiated, that is, police, northern service officer, etc. All were regarded as 'big bosses' and seemed to be equally viewed with fear and suspicion."<sup>26</sup>

What Rudnicki identified was a psychology of colonialism created by regular interactions with Hudson's Bay Company traders, missionaries, and members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police at small and scattered settlements across the north. After the war, those interactions had increased for certain groups and individuals who were drawn into construction work along the DEW Line. For Rudnicki, overcoming the fears borne of their encounters with colonial power would be the key to rehabilitating the survivors.

More broadly, grappling with this legacy of colonialism by rebuilding capacity would have to be a central part of any northern development policy. While trained social workers were important, doing so in the north also required other kinds of experts, people who knew something about the Inuit. As the Deputy Minister of Northern Affairs and National Development observed, "one of the greatest difficulties facing those responsible for the health, welfare, and education of the natives of northern Canada is a lack of basic information on their social and cultural patterns."<sup>27</sup> Thus, in Canada, as in other parts of the world at the time, anthropology as well as social work came to be implicated in development, influencing the design of initiatives in the north and shaping the state's understanding of what development was.<sup>28</sup> While anthropology wielded its influence through the Northern Coordination and Research Centre (NCRC), established by Northern Affairs in 1954 to support and coordinate scholarly research about the north, in Keewatin it also made an impact through the more informal interventions of Ottawa's agent in the field.<sup>29</sup>

In the Barrenlands, Northern Affairs' man on the ground was an amateur anthropologist hired to do social work. Almost immediately after Rudnicki visited Eskimo Point in 1958, the Department appointed a new welfare officer to the region whose responsibilities included overseeing the rehabilitation of the starvation survivors and attending to the welfare needs of the growing Inuit population of Rankin Inlet, where he was based. Staffordshire-born Robert G. Williamson arrived in the Keewatin

community just as the ink had finished drying on his undergraduate anthropology degree.<sup>30</sup>

Although his diploma was new, Williamson was not—to fieldwork or the Canadian north. He immigrated to Canada as a young man and made his way to the western Arctic, working on the Mackenzie River barges. While wintering at Fort Simpson he recorded Dene folklore, and later published his findings in the scholarly journal *Anthropologica*. After a year-and-a-half in the western Arctic, he moved to take a job with the Eastern Arctic Patrol. He became fluent in Inuktitut and continued his ethnological investigations around Pangnirtung and Cumberland Sound. In 1954 he moved to Ottawa, and while working there enrolled at Carleton University, where he earned an undergraduate degree in 1957. He later went on to earn a doctorate in anthropology at Uppsala, Sweden, in 1974, and to have an academic career at the University of Saskatchewan—after having done a great many other things, including a stint in the civil service with Northern Affairs.<sup>31</sup>

Looking back, Williamson considered himself both an exemplar and a proponent of applied anthropology, a sub-discipline committed to applying the methods of anthropology to the solution of practical problems. His undergraduate education coincided with the field's emergence in the post-war years, when hope reigned supreme about the prospects for a new world order in which all nations would enjoy the benefits of democracy and modernity. Anthropologists, no less than economists, became implicated in this global project of transformative change. As James Ferguson points out, “as experts on ‘backwards’ peoples, anthropologists were well placed to play a role in any project for the advancement of such peoples.”<sup>32</sup> Funding and positions opened up in government and non-governmental organizations for anthropologists willing to use their skills in the service of what became known simply as “development.”

Williamson's early career with Northern Affairs provided him with the opportunity not just to see social change, but also to intervene in it as a welfare officer, using some of the tools of anthropology. What he saw and did would form the basis of his doctoral dissertation, a study of socio-cultural change in the Keewatin. As a field of study and a form of practice, applied anthropology was controversial, particularly by the time Williamson undertook his graduate studies. Its detractors considered it “second rate, both intellectually and morally”—a form of neo-colonialism. Its

practitioners shot back that their critics were “irrelevant, both theoretically and politically.”<sup>33</sup> If Williamson were aware of these debates, he likely would have dismissed them: for him there was no contradiction between intellectual rigour and political engagement. After his undergraduate degree, he leapt at the chance to leave “the quiet contemplative corridors of the National Museum” for a post with the federal government in the north. “There was so much to be done that one could not sit, eyes cast to the ceiling, finger-tips together, thinking only abstractly,” he recalled. “One had to respond to one’s responsibility to make use of one’s knowledge.”<sup>34</sup>

Once on the ground, the amateur anthropologist got to work. Although part of his time was spent with the starvation survivors, he devoted a good portion of his energies to helping manage the Inuit working at the recently established North Rankin Nickel Mine, and in that sense assisted with the economic development of the region. Like the starvation survivors, the Inuit miners and their families were also relocatees, drawn from the Keewatin’s coastal communities by the company and the federal government as a labour force.

Having recruited and trained Inuit, the mine’s operators were flummoxed when some employees withdrew after three or four days, or dropped their pickaxes, picked up their rifles, and headed off to sea or to the floe edge when a whale or a group of seals was sighted.<sup>35</sup> Without enough shift workers, operations ground to an expensive and annoying halt. Despite “their natural quickness to learn” the technical aspects of the work, the Inuit persisted in this seemingly undisciplined behaviour.<sup>36</sup> It was the company that changed its practices, and according to Williamson, it did so on his advice.<sup>37</sup>

For Williamson, the key to solving North Rankin’s labour problem lay in re-creating the pattern of “cultural commuting” he had first seen in the western Arctic. The Indigenous people of the Mackenzie River and Delta seemed to experience the least social disruption when they were able to shuttle back and forth between life on the land and life in trading posts—between their old lives and their new ones.<sup>38</sup>

Although the physical distance between social worlds had collapsed in Rankin, he still hoped to create a space that would act in the same way, as a buffer. He did so not by physically removing the Inuit from the settlement, but by suggesting how the work regime at the mine might be reconfigured. Specifically, Williamson convinced management to train more men than

they would employ at any one time and to redefine what a “shift” was. Indeed, doing the first allowed for the second. Instead of particular individuals, a shift came to consist simply of certain number of people. An Inuit “straw boss” would have the responsibility of ensuring there was the necessary number of men to fill each one.

In essence, Williamson convinced the mine to work with cultural difference and to treat Inuit labour as a collective endeavour. While his innovation did not win him many friends in North Rankin’s accounting department, his proposed restructuring freed individual Inuit to hunt or mine as they wished and could negotiate with the group. Modified for an industrial setting, Williamson’s cultural commuting was a structure of practice that combined the new time-work discipline governed by the clock with an older pattern of work, one that was sensitive to and shaped by environment and opportunity.

Despite the apparently successful adaptation on the part of both the Inuit and North Rankin’s management to mining in the Canadian north, operations wound down in 1962, the victim of falling commodity prices. The news, when it came, was not a surprise; the threat of closure seemed to hang over its operations almost as soon as they started.<sup>39</sup> With 520 people, or about thirty per cent of Keewatin’s population, dependent on the mine, its shutdown provoked Northern Affairs to declare a “state of emergency.”<sup>40</sup>

Again the anthropological ambulance responded to the call, with Robert Williamson at the wheel. Just as he had helped facilitate the transition to industrial employment in Rankin, he intervened again to ease the disruption associated with its end. The year before the mine closed, Williamson conducted a survey of fifty-nine men who worked in the mine to ascertain what they wanted to do. Some told Williamson they would happily go back to hunting. But most, he reported, wanted to pursue wage work, concerned about whether the hunt could sustain their families reliably. That said, they were quite specific about the conditions under which they would labour: for at least one man, “work in white man’s land [was] not a happy thought.” Another told Williamson he “would go elsewhere in Esk[imo] country to work, but not to the white man’s land.” A third made a distinction between the kinds of mining work he wanted to do, noting “outside work happiest. Underground work worst, especially as no extra pay. V. frightening.”<sup>41</sup> In sum, most wanted to continue to work for wages, in Rankin if possible, or at other mines in the north. Only a few wished

to go back to their home communities, or to other ones where they could hunt and fish.<sup>42</sup>

To meet the wishes of those who wanted to work for wages, as well as to capitalize on a trained labour force and diminish a potentially crippling welfare bill, Williamson made the case for relocating Rankin's Inuit with his superiors—but he did so with an anthropologist's sensitivity to context. Only those most likely to succeed in their new jobs would be moved, and then only to other mines in the north. To identify the most promising candidates, Williamson assessed each family's "adaptation potential": he constructed genealogies, believing that relocation would only be successful if a miner's family went with him to a new job, and he noted whether husbands and wives were competent in English. While facility in the language contributed greatly to an Inuit family's potential to adapt, Williamson also recorded whether they possessed things like stoves, fridges, washing machines, radios, and record players. For the anthropologist, these consumer goods were another indicator of a family's acculturation.<sup>43</sup>

With Williamson's recommendations in mind, Northern Affairs worked with various companies through the 1960s to send Rankin miners and their families to Tungsten and Yellowknife in the Northwest Territories, to Lynn Lake in Manitoba, and to Asbestos Hill, in Arctic Quebec. While the numbers of Inuit relocated were never large—three to twelve families—the amount of attention directed at them was great, speaking perhaps to the importance the Department attached to their success or failure and to the reach of the state.<sup>44</sup> Williamson's insights about the need to take culture seriously in crafting employment policy and practice circulated well beyond the central Arctic. The Department repeated them in advising companies thinking of operating in the north, particularly as resource extraction sped up in the 1970s.<sup>45</sup>

The results of the government's selective, anthropologically informed relocation of Inuit for industrial employment were mixed. Although there was rarely a problem with the quality of the work the miners performed, there were signs of "mal-adjustment," including absenteeism, drunkenness, and a high turnover of labourers, all familiar problems in resource extractive communities. More worrying to Northern Affairs officials was the situation outside the workplace. Charged by the Northern Co-ordination and Research Centre with assessing the relocation initiative, anthropologist David Stevenson reported that alcohol abuse among Inuit

women, neglect of children, and indifference to maintaining functional households were, to different degrees, common among the relocatees. Moreover, insufficient housing, a lack of familiarity with managing daily expenses, and an inability to comprehend the informal social rules governing white society made adjustment all the more difficult. For many Inuit, relocation was a fundamentally alienating experience.

When people talked about their alienation, they made no distinction between the social and the environmental. Yellowknife felt more “remote” than Rankin when distance was measured in terms of exotic presences and gaping absences—when spiders and heat replaced family and kin. For one Rankin man, the trees around Yellowknife signalled his separation, preventing him from seeing very far. “It’s just like looking at the floor under you.”<sup>46</sup> Asked why they repeatedly went on alcoholic binges, two Inuit women living in Hay River told David Stevenson it was “because I have no place in this land.”<sup>47</sup>

Encompassing the social and environmental, “place” was not something that could be factored easily into the calculus of adaptive capacity and incorporated into development planning. While Williamson was right to think relocation was a family matter and those who were more acculturated would have fewer problems, successful adaptation hinged on a variety of factors, some of which, like attachment to place, could not be measured.

Equally importantly, success depended on considerations that lay outside the boundaries of his analysis. For Northern Affairs, development was a matter of addressing a deficiency in the Inuit. The focus was squarely on improving them, rather than the communities they were joining. For all their sensitivity to culture, neither Stevenson nor Williamson turned their attention to ascertaining the kinds of social settings that would facilitate improvement best. Their concern was almost exclusively on the capacity of the Inuit to adapt, not on the ability of the receiving community to incorporate new members. Yes, better housing would help, and yes, the negative attitudes of the business people and landlords in Yellowknife were an obstacle to successful relocation and the development of a mobile labour force. But beyond acknowledging the existence of racism and its corrosive effects on the project of improvement, neither the experts engaged by Northern Affairs nor its own officers chose to tackle it, perhaps

recognizing it couldn't easily be addressed, while Inuit capacity could—or so they thought.

While the possibility of industrial employment animated development policy through the 1960s and beyond, Northern Affairs also recognized that it could not be the sole basis for improving the condition of the region and its peoples. Its own research arm was telling it as much. Even as Robert Williamson worked with North Rankin's management, some professional anthropologists questioned whether industrial employment could ever be the basis of a stable and healthy society. In their report for the Northern Coordination and Research Centre, Robert and Lois Dailey argued that just because the Inuit at Rankin had been integrated into the wage economy did not mean they had achieved equality. Far from it: they were paid less than white men for similar work, and they were subjected to blatant discrimination. In 1958, Rankin was a segregated community, with Inuit and Qallunaat (Inuktitut for "non-Inuit") sleeping and eating in different facilities and using the one rec room on different days. To the Daileys, each Inuk on the mine's payroll was being "trained to be a labourer—not a citizen."<sup>48</sup> What had been achieved at Rankin was the creation of a workforce, not a community. It was no model for the future.

Four years later, things had not improved. Like the Daileys, Jean Malaurie's work was supported by the NCRC, and, like the Daileys, he too worried about the corrosive effects of industrialization. The adventurer's views were shaped by his relationship with an Igloolik man who worked as a labourer in the North Rankin Nickel Mine and—unusually—kept a diary. While for Malaurie the mere act of keeping a diary was a sign of the Inuk's distress, he found its contents even more disturbing. As the hunter became an alienated wage labourer, there was a slow but inevitable closing of his "diaphragm of expression" until "the man of before is replaced not by a new man but by a void pure and simple." Suffocation and annihilation—that was the effect of "deculturation."<sup>49</sup>

Perhaps with these warnings in mind, and with little prospect of enough new mining activity to support the region through industrial wage labour in any case, the bureaucrats at Northern Affairs struggled with how to make the Barrenlands viable. While there were discussions about relocating the entire population to southern Canada, Ottawa chose instead to try to make the region and its communities "self-generating."<sup>50</sup>

While “sustainable development” was not a term the federal government used to describe what its officials were doing, the initiatives they undertook in the north bore many of its hallmarks. First and foremost, they were informed by a respect for environmental limits, albeit one born in part of a concern for the economic bottom line. In the aftermath of the starvations, Northern Affairs and the Canadian Wildlife Service implemented a number of conservation measures designed to curb and regulate the use of barren-ground caribou. These ranged from providing emergency food caches, conservation education, and community freezers to prevent meat from being wasted, to supervising hunts to forestall the “wanton slaughter” of animals.<sup>51</sup> These measures represented a change in conservation policy. Whereas wildlife management in the first half of the twentieth century was about maintaining a food supply for northerners—like the one Andrew Stuhl talks about in his chapter in this volume—in the wake of the starvations, the emphasis shifted to a “more rigid preservationist philosophy.”<sup>52</sup> Such an approach was not effective in stopping the decline of the caribou. Not surprisingly, Ottawa concluded what Inuit had known for generations, that northerners could only sustain themselves if there were enough renewable resources to do so.

In the absence of caribou, Ottawa encouraged Indigenous people to get their protein elsewhere, particularly from fish and marine mammals. Helping them to do so effectively required in-depth and systematic censuses of a region’s natural and human resources. To that end, Donald Snowden, chief of Northern Affairs’ Industrial Division, directed his department’s planners to conduct area economic surveys across the north, enumerating each region’s marine and terrestrial resources, as well as its human population. The *Keewatin Mainland Economic Survey* (1963) identified areas where there was a “mal-distribution” of population and resources, and made the case for relocation where the number of people exceeded the capacity of the land to support them.<sup>53</sup> As the Brundtland Report put it more than twenty years later, “sustainable development can only be pursued if demographic developments are in harmony with the changing productive potential of the ecosystem.”<sup>54</sup>

Identified as one of the communities with more people than resources, Rankin Inlet became the site of what one civil servant jokingly called the Department’s “Back to the Land with Joy” program. In 1964, Northern Affairs engineered the removal of fifty-four Inuit, approximately ten

percent of Rankin's population, relocating them to Daly Bay, more than 150 kilometres north.<sup>55</sup> Making their case for relocation, the survey's authors argued that unless Inuit moved to other "areas of opportunity" in Keewatin many of them would have "no hope at all for social and economic advancement."<sup>56</sup> The approach Northern Affairs took to putting the region on a sustainable footing was not dissimilar to the management techniques their counterparts in the Canadian Wildlife Service used: Inuit could be herded like bison or caribou to better ranges.

In fact, the logic of sustainable development in the Keewatin rested on the same powerful and flawed idea that animated scientific resource management, namely "carrying capacity." Originally developed in the mid-nineteenth century by engineers to designate the payload a vessel was designed to transport, carrying capacity emerged in the twentieth century as one of the central concepts of population biology, used to understand the relationship between population and habitat. Taken up by range and game managers in the first half of the twentieth century, and later by ecologists, it was used to describe, and, more importantly, to prescribe the number of organisms that could be supported in a given environment without degrading it or themselves. The power of carrying capacity lay in its calculability and its promise of certainty.<sup>57</sup>

What made the initiatives undertaken in the Keewatin instances of sustainable development rather than conservation was the explicit agenda of equity, social change, and empowerment that came with them. While advocates of both conservation and sustainability argued that people needed to live within limits, proponents of sustainable development parted company with conservationists in their insistence that environmental problems could not be addressed separately from the social context in which they occurred: addressing human poverty and injustice was crucial to addressing environmental degradation.<sup>58</sup> In addition, unlike progressivist conservation, sustainable development required the active participation of ordinary people, as well as the intervention of "experts." In other words, the process through which sustainable development was to be achieved also distinguished it from conservation.

While these aspects of sustainable development gained formal expression in the late 1980s and early 1990s with the Brundtland Commission and the Earth Summit, they were also in evidence in the development initiatives undertaken by the Department of Northern Affairs and National

Development. Its pioneering efforts in the Keewatin in the 1960s were consistent with the federal government's growing emphasis on "regional economic development," even if they were at odds with the conservation policies that agencies more directly involved in resource management, like the Canadian Wildlife Service, continued to pursue.<sup>59</sup>

The focus on region emerged from a recognition in the discipline of economics that development required a spatially differentiated approach. Informed by neo-classical approaches, the thinking about development had not fully acknowledged the friction of distance, geography, and climate, and how it shaped growth. The work of French economist François Perroux did just that: his "growth pole" theory influenced the postwar development policies of governments around the world, including Canada's. Although it was one of the most regionalized of the world's industrialized nations, it was not until the middle of the twentieth century that Canadian economic policy began to be conceived of in a framework other than a national one. In the 1960s, Ottawa initiated a number of regionally differentiated development initiatives that targeted particular sectors and geographic areas, and that were eventually extended across the country under the auspices of the new federal Department of Regional Economic Expansion, established in 1969.<sup>60</sup>

At the same time, the federal government recognized that regional inequality meant social inequality. Disparities among regions affected the delivery of public services, not just economic development. To make good on the promise of universality, the government introduced federal equalization payments in 1957. A recommendation of the Royal Commission on Canada's Economic Prospects, equalization payments were meant to reduce disparities between regions by ensuring that all provinces had the ability, if they chose, to provide comparable services at comparable tax rates. In doing so, transfer payments entrenched the idea of social security as spatial justice. As Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau put it a decade later, "every Canadian has the right to a good life whatever the province or community he lives in."<sup>61</sup>

Informed by these shifts in economic thinking, Northern Affairs' approach to development was also premised on the belief that northerners had a central role to play in determining their own futures and that of their region. Its job was to position them to do so. As important as attending to the carrying capacity of the land was, putting the region on

an ongoing, viable footing was also a matter of building human capacity: people needed to be taught organized resource harvesting, to think regionally, and to govern themselves. In the Keewatin, sustainable regional development involved facilitating social change and empowerment: it was an exercise in social engineering.

For instance, Northern Affairs did not move Inuit from Rankin Inlet to Daly Bay so they could subsist from the land as they always had. Instead, they were moved to participate in an “organized” char fishery and work in the cannery it had built. What made the resource harvesting conducted there and at other Keewatin communities “organized” was the scale at which it occurred. Under the direction of the Department’s field officers, Inuit were taught to hunt and fish more intensively, producing enough not just to feed themselves, but other communities in the region, as well as supply commercial markets.

The federal government believed that canned char, whale, and seal might, if properly processed, packaged, and promoted, find a lucrative market outside the region. With that in mind, when the Inuit working with Northern Affairs officer Max Budgell caught a hundred whales off Eskimo Point in 1961, the Department sent its specialty foods officer to investigate what might be done with them. A German who spent some time in a Canadian internment camp during the Second World War, Erich Hofmann had “a positively wild interest in preserving food” to the extent that his colleagues believed that “no living thing is safe from him.”<sup>62</sup> With his experience processing traditional or “country” foods (the term Inuit and Indigenous peoples give to foods harvested from the land) in Wood Buffalo National Park and the Mackenzie Delta, Hofmann went to the Keewatin in 1962, working with Inuit women at Whale Cove to make muktuk sausage.

By the next year, Hofmann was convinced that his program “could not only help the Eskimo achieve a degree of self-sufficiency through preservation of foods for local use, but in areas of surplus could also generate income by means of export to southern markets.” He set about proving it at Daly Bay and Rankin Inlet. By 1965, flash-frozen, smoked, and canned char and herring were making their way south, some of them ending up as samples in Donald Snowden’s briefcase (Fig. 7.2). As Edith Iglauer recalls, the head of the Industrial Division was so committed to the project that he went from restaurant to restaurant in Montreal flogging “his” canned



FIG. 7.2: The results of “organized resource harvesting.” Library and Archives Canada, Donald Snowden Fonds, MG 31 D163, vol. 14, file 34.

goods.<sup>63</sup> When the decade closed, more than one hundred thousand tins of seven different kinds of country food were being produced yearly. Inuit consumed half of this, and Canadian Arctic Producers, a non-profit marketing company, distributed the other half.<sup>64</sup>

From the perspective of Northern Affairs, organized resource harvesting addressed one of the central challenges of sustainable development in Keewatin and the Arctic generally: the problem of capital.<sup>65</sup> The outward flow of capital from the north stifled its development. The challenge was to find ways of keeping it circulating within the region, among its communities. If Whale Cove could supply Eskimo Point or Baker Lake with fish, and those communities could supply other products, capital would remain in the region and be available for local investment—in more Peterhead boats or nets or traps, which would allow for greater or more efficient returns and potentially increased exchanges among communities. A regional economy would be born.

As important as forging economic connections among Keewatin’s settlements was, Northern Affairs also recognized that regional development depended on a “regional consciousness”—a collective sense of belonging among Inuit that extended beyond the bounds of any one of the communities in the Barrenlands. “The people of Keewatin today can be described aptly as ‘different-place-miut,’” observed planner D. M. Brack in 1962. “Adjacent houses for example in Rankin are occupied by families

who may not know each other's names, and in other parts of Keewatin there are many instances of group cohesion inhibiting full community action and consciousness. ... If regional planning is to be really effective as a medium of social development then the people themselves must become region conscious."<sup>66</sup>

Through its use of communications technology, Northern Affairs tried to facilitate a sense of cohesion among the Inuit of Keewatin, one that would overcome the fragmentation caused by starvation, relocation, distance, and linguistic and cultural difference. Radio could connect people and communities, especially when broadcasts were in Inuktitut. Again, Robert Williamson played a role: having pushed Northern Affairs to publish a magazine wholly in Inuktitut in 1959, he remained committed to the idea that language played a central role in creating community cohesion. As a private citizen living and working in Rankin Inlet, he wrote and produced two Inuktitut-language programs that ran weekly on CBC North from 1962 to 1964.<sup>67</sup>

Equally importantly, Williamson supported Rankin Inlet as the site of the Department of Communications Northern Pilot Project, which would test the "comminterphone" (Fig. 7.3). Developed by Bell Northern Research Laboratories, the "community interaction telephone" was their answer to "a growing concern for the communications needs of the social, cultural, and political groupings which characterize Northern Canada." It combined the features of a party line with those of radio: by dialing in, up to four callers could participate in a conversation with a radio host that was broadcast over a low-power AM transmitter in a five-mile radius.<sup>68</sup>

Comminterphone service was initiated in 1971, and within a year had become a popular source of local information. Although it had not become a vehicle for discussing community issues or for consensus building, both communications researcher Gordon Wensley and Robert Williamson argued that the comminterphone had created "a sense of involvement in what is going on around the settlement, an association—even if passive—with the events and feelings of the day." Over time, they believed "living in an atmosphere of overheard activity would appear to add to the ambiance of community feeling amongst a collection of migrants heretofore somewhat fragmented and semi-isolated."<sup>69</sup>

In part, the mixed results of the comminterphone experiment spoke to the internal dynamics of the settlements in Keewatin that D. M. Brack

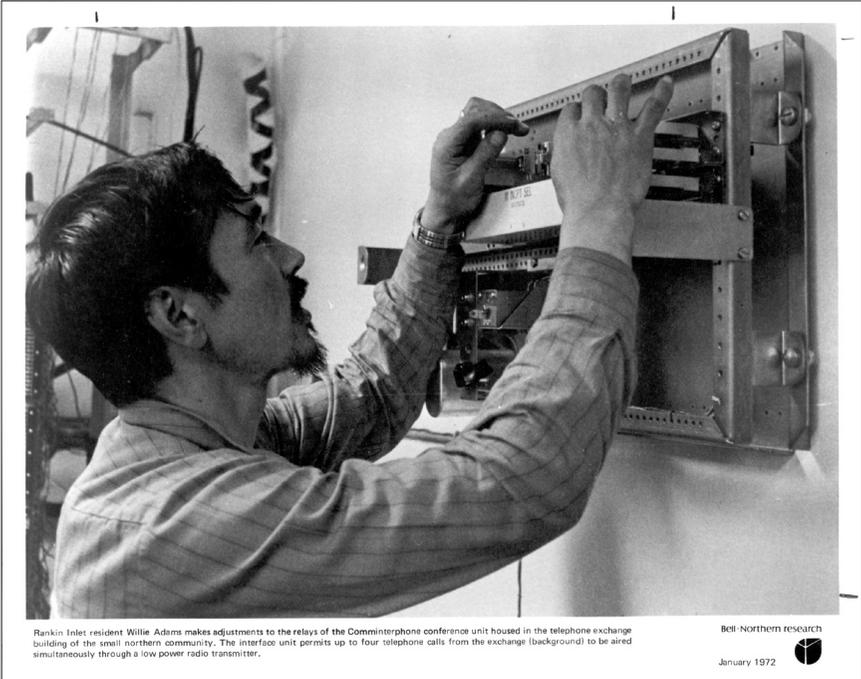


FIG. 7.3: Willie Adams at work on the “comminterphone” in Rankin Inlet, January 1972. University of Saskatchewan, University Archives and Special Collections, Institute for Northern Studies Fonds, INS-808.

had hinted at. Building social connections among settlements might have been crucial to sustaining the region, but there also was work to be done building relationships within them, among the “different-place-miut.” For that reason, the federal government’s development initiatives also focused on the community, as well as the region.

As a strategy, “community development” relocated change. Rather than being animated by outside investment or connections to markets, it proceeded on the assumption that the transformation of the north would begin from the inside out, grounded in the human resources in each of its settlements. As community development workers, the job of Northern Affairs’ officers in the field was to help people identify their collective wants and the means to achieve them. Stated simply, community development was “the process of helping people to help themselves.”<sup>70</sup>

In outlining its approach, Northern Affairs drew on models being used internationally. According to Welfare Division chief F. J. Neville, the Department was inspired by the 1964 “War on Poverty” waged by the government of the United States in its inner cities and rural areas, and by the development work being undertaken in the global south by a number of industrialized nations of the world.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, the language of its policy directive on community development was taken from a 1957 United Nations report discussing its work in under-developed countries.<sup>72</sup> But the books and reports in the Northern Affairs library suggest the intellectual genealogy of its community development initiatives stretched back further and was entangled with empire: in addition to a variety of studies by the United Nations, there were works dealing with community development in Fiji, Ghana, Jamaica, and South and Southeast Asia carried out by governmental and non-governmental organizations, including the British Colonial Office and Christian missions.<sup>73</sup>

The influence of Christianity was particularly visible in the main instrument of community development in the north and elsewhere: the cooperative. As institutions organized for the mutual benefit of their members, cooperatives have roots going back to medieval Europe—but the cooperative movement is of more recent vintage. Originating in mid-nineteenth-century England and Europe, it was a reaction to industrialization and the economic hardships it visited on urban workers and small farmers. The cooperative movement came to Canada in the early twentieth century as part of the broad culture of reform initiated in part by the middle-class members of its Christian churches.<sup>74</sup> As locally owned businesses, cooperatives kept capital in communities through profit-sharing with their members, took direction from their membership in how business was conducted, and ensured fair prices. In establishing them in the north, Industrial Division chief Donald Snowden drew from international examples, but also on the work of Fathers Moses Coady and Jimmy Tompkins and the Antigonish Movement in Nova Scotia to alleviate rural poverty in the 1930s and ’40s.<sup>75</sup> Taken up globally, their program of social reform, centred on adult education oriented toward cooperative action, drew from the ideas of liberal Catholicism, as well as papal encyclicals dating to the late nineteenth century, and enjoyed broad support from clergy of all denominations.<sup>76</sup> For one development officer in the Northwest Territories,

the philosophy of cooperation was “simple and easy to understand. It is found in the Sermon on the Mount and in the Golden Rule.”<sup>77</sup>

To their promoters, co-ops were instruments of social, as well as economic, development. They built capacity by schooling Inuit in the processes of formal democracy and self-government, as well as the workings of the market. As Northern Affairs’ Supervisor of Cooperatives put it in 1960, “the practice of democracy in the economic sphere ... set an example for democracy in the larger sphere.”<sup>78</sup> Gordon Robertson agreed. The Deputy Minister considered co-ops to be an “incubator from which political leaders emerged”; during his time in office, he observed how Inuit men moved from being directors of their community’s cooperative to the most prominent members of its “Eskimo Council.”<sup>79</sup>

In essence, using cooperatives to develop northern communities was a political project. It involved nothing less than creating civil society from the ground up, helping Inuit to govern their own lives, convincing them “that their world does not begin and end with Government action or its lack.”<sup>80</sup> To Northern Affairs, “community development and self-determination are inseparable.”<sup>81</sup>

From their start in Arctic Quebec in 1959, co-ops sprang up quickly. Just five years later, nearly twenty per cent of Canada’s Inuit were members of one of nineteen such institutions across the north.<sup>82</sup> By 1970, northern co-ops handled over \$2.5 million dollars in sales of goods and services yearly, returning close to \$1.25 million dollars to members in the form of salaries, purchases from members, and patronage dividends.<sup>83</sup> Ten years later, in 1980, sales amounted to an astonishing \$27 million dollars, and payouts \$9.1 million dollars.<sup>84</sup>

While it might be easy to see co-ops simply as instruments of assimilation, the intentions of Northern Affairs in promoting them as part of community development in the north were more complex. Co-ops were vehicles for capital accumulation *and* redistribution; they were meant to discipline the Inuit to Western forms of democracy *and* teach them how to subvert power. For Alexander Laidlaw, Coady’s colleague at St. Francis Xavier University and head of the Co-operative Union of Canada, the latter aspect of cooperatives was especially significant, given how large the state had come to loom in people’s lives in the mid-twentieth century. “Welfare measures are being pushed farther and faster all the time in all parts of the world—and rightly so,” he wrote in *North* magazine

in 1963. “But in order to prevent domination by government bodies and the official mind, citizens must be strongly organized to do things for themselves. ... Cooperatives are proving to be one of the most effective agencies in this role.”<sup>85</sup>

Those working in Northern Affairs shared Laidlaw’s concerns about the need to counter domination by government bodies. Not only were the Inuit unfamiliar with formal participatory democracy, but cross-cultural differences regarding communication and the impact of colonialism also left them unlikely to challenge authority. There was no better example of the disastrous consequences of such miscommunication than what happened in the winter of 1957–58. Misunderstanding over whether they had agreed to be resettled to Henik Lake and their knowledge of the resources of the area had contributed to the deaths of eight of the thirty-three Inuit who died of starvation that winter. Privately, senior bureaucrats in Northern Affairs felt that “their decision to move ... was probably because they regarded it as a command of the white man.”<sup>86</sup>

Although officials could exercise more care in interpreting Inuit responses, the long-term solution was to end Inuit diffidence. That was why co-ops were so valuable: as Donald Snowden told Edith Iglauer of the *New Yorker*, “I don’t believe that the government is infallible, and the co-ops make it possible for the Eskimos to give us hell.”<sup>87</sup> And they did. The Inuit interviewed about their participation argued co-ops gave them “a way to regain some of the control [over our lives] we previously had.” Others went further, pointing out their long-term political consequences; according to former Inuit politician Thomas Suluk, co-ops were “underground governments” that provided the foundation for a “pan Inuit solidarity that had no historic precedent.”<sup>88</sup>

Although the emphasis was principally on Inuit to change, there was some sense that development also required changes in Qallunaat. Specifically, it required the active engagement of civil society and not just government. In praising the establishment and growth of cooperatives in the north, Alexander Laidlaw criticized the cooperative movement he led for not extending assistance to the Inuit. Not only did its disinterest run counter to the ethic of cooperation, but it also invited the kind of excessive government intrusion into the civil sphere that he worried about.<sup>89</sup>

As well, development called on those in government charged with overseeing and facilitating it to change—to begin to decolonize themselves.

Walter Rudnicki spoke to this realization when he clashed with his colleagues in the Industrial Division, taking issue with their paternalistic reluctance to give Inuit control over government funds. In his view, their hesitancy stemmed from “the well known, well worn and outdated thesis that ‘them folks ain’t ready yet for responsibility.’”<sup>90</sup> His arguments resonated. In setting up the first co-ops, Donald Snowden took pains to check his own tendencies to tell Inuit what to do. He sometimes seemed to work as hard at convincing himself that he and his colleagues had not become the great white fathers of yore as he did persuading the Inuit they were their own bosses. “It is important that we should all understand what happens in a co-op,” he told a gathering of Inuit at Frobisher (Iqaluit) in 1963. “I’m not sure whether the Eskimos do things because the white man thinks they should or because they want them themselves?”<sup>91</sup>

The sentiments and self-consciousness expressed by Laidlaw, Rudnicki, and Snowden speak to the nature of the hope that animated the development project. As the environmentalist Bill McKibben points out, hope is a word whose meaning has been debased. It now seems to mean “wishing”—wanting something that might not happen. But “real hope implies a real willingness to change,” and to be changed.<sup>92</sup> That more robust meaning of hope was visible in the efforts of Northern Affairs in the 1960s to build the capacity for Inuit to talk back, govern themselves, and in so doing put limits on the very state that cultivated that capacity in them. The political project of sustainable development in the north complicates our notion of the “will to improve” that underpinned the “development decade.”

For Snowden and his colleagues at Northern Affairs, development was very much “the management of a promise”—the promise in all humans to be who they were and could be.<sup>93</sup> It was a promise contained in Jean Lesage’s assertion that the Inuit would share fully in the national life of Canada, and in the Daileys’ use of the word “citizen.” Given the state’s reluctance to undertake a wholesale relocation of Inuit to southern Canada, it was also a promise that had to be fulfilled in place.

But was it? In the early 1970s, Doug Schweitzer, a researcher at the University of Saskatchewan, assessed the results of a decade of development initiatives in the region, measuring the distribution of income by source. The figures suggested that the Keewatin crisis had been averted: the destitution caused by the closure of the North Rankin Nickel Mine

and the decline of caribou had not created a population entirely on the dole. In fact, although welfare transfers tripled over the decade, they contributed only a small portion of individual incomes, falling from a high of about thirty-five percent after the mine closed to seven percent in 1969. Instead of welfare, organized resource harvesting and handicrafts contributed a significant, if fluctuating, amount of revenue. Perhaps most surprisingly, wages made up the largest proportion of per-capita incomes in the Keewatin: by 1969, three-quarters of the people in Keewatin could claim a wage income from their labours, one that averaged \$600 yearly.<sup>94</sup>

While Schweitzer's figures suggest the Keewatin was a development success story, the narrative of change is somewhat more complex. Although the wages that supported three-quarters of the Keewatin's residents came in part from the employment northern cooperatives offered, most were drawn from government coffers—principally from the budgets of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Department of National Health, and the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources.

Ironically, the state's regional and community development initiatives had initiated a new kind of dependency, even as they strove to build capacity. For better or worse, government had become the main source of revenue and the motor of growth for the region. Insofar as the Keewatin was on a more sustainable footing at the end of the 1960s than it was at the beginning, this was so because of the transfusion of government money in the form of wages. Sustainability was a matter of public subsidy, and as such it was a political choice, reflecting the triumph of Keynesian economics and a belief that the state should take an active role in development. The growth of the Canadian state was reflected in increasing public expenditures and the size of the public sector in the post-war years: public expenditures more than doubled in the 1960s, and the public sector grew from just below twenty percent of GDP in 1960 to approximately thirty percent in 1970.<sup>95</sup>

In many ways, this is not surprising; the state was the only institution capable of meeting the challenges posed by distance and the market. But even its interventions were no guarantee of success. Two years after Inuit from Rankin Inlet were moved to Daly Bay to work in the char fishery and cannery, they had to be moved back to Rankin. While operations there continued through the 1960s, they too were eventually wound down. The failure was not due primarily to problems with the workforce or even the

resource. Instead, organized resource harvesting failed because of the geography of capitalism; whatever its nutritional value, arctic char wasn't worth enough on the market to collapse the distance between an arctic cannery and Canadian dinner tables.<sup>96</sup> Albeit unequally, these structural forces entrapped both the Inuit and the civil servants whose job it was to develop the north. In the 1960s, the agents of the liberal welfare state could often only wish for the kind of transformative power history sometimes ascribes to them.

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Writing in 1970, Liverpool-born Jim Lotz, who worked for Northern Affairs during its early days and later became a specialist in community development, reflected on what he had learned—not just about bureaucracy, but about the country he had chosen to make home. “The further north we go in Canada,” he mused, “the more national we become.”<sup>97</sup> The north was where people would encounter those things that were truly national in scale, and which defined the country: boreal forest, shield, and Indigenous peoples.

But Lotz did more than reiterate a truism—that “the north is Canada.” He wanted to make a point about the history of the region and country, underscoring how entangled they were, and not just with each other, but with the world. “The further north we go in Canada, the more national we become, and yet, strangely, the more international the problems tend to be,” he wrote. “The north awakens our own humanity and makes us consider the humanity of others.” For Lotz, working in Canada's north called on people to act with an understanding of how the region and its peoples were shaped by larger forces and to think across geographic scales and cultures—in short, to be citizens of the world.

The Barrenlands in the 1960s are a case in point. In dealing with the Keewatin, the federal government brought new people, new ideas, and a new optimism to bear on achieving social security. Even as they lived through it, some in Northern Affairs had a sense that theirs were unusual times—and fortunate ones. “Whenever I get angry with this country, disturbed by its hibernation, worried by its gentle ways, angry at its vacillations, frustrated by its indecision, and ALL READY TO LEAVE one thing always brings me back to my senses,” Donald Snowden confessed. “That in

this nation, at this time, there is a genuine interest in our north, and most of all in its people. And I say thanks to those I will never know who foot the bills, not so much because they keep me alive, but because they are willing to spend their money to make it possible for others of this country to learn to come through a time of confusion and change.”<sup>98</sup>

These were the Department’s “freewheeling, ‘elastic-band-off-the-bundle’ days,” when everything seemed possible, including bureaucrats changing the world.<sup>99</sup> Informed by international debates, alive to the challenges of working cross-culturally, and armed with the insights of social work and anthropology, civil servants approached the problem of the north as one of development, of exploiting its mineral resources and its renewable ones. Aimed at the scale of region and community, the latter efforts at sustainable development were meant to help Inuit live within environmental limits and govern their own lives in a world transformed by colonialism and the market. A few in Northern Affairs, like Snowden and Walter Rudnicki, were aware of some of the contradictions inherent in what they were doing, of the fine line between facilitating change and imposing it. Yet they still felt compelled to act—however imperfectly—hopeful, if not always entirely convinced, that they were doing the right thing.

For Northern Affairs, putting the Keewatin on a sustainable footing was an issue of “capacity”—that of the land and its peoples. Sustainability was largely a technical matter, one requiring expertise to unleash what was already there, to realize the potential of the land and its peoples, lest it be wasted. As such, sustainable development was a moral project, but one oddly beyond politics. Its apolitical character was what ultimately limited its effectiveness, preventing a recognition of the larger forces that posed a fundamental challenge to the ongoing viability of the north and the efforts to develop it. If sustainability’s Canadian history has any lessons for us, it is that its achievement is a matter of structure as well as agency, of engaging capitalism as well as capacity, and confronting the liberal assumptions embedded in it.

## Notes

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- 2 Richard Harrington, *Padlei Diary, 1950: An Account of the Padleimiut Eskimo in the Keewatin District West of Hudson Bay during the Early Months of 1950*, ed. Edmund Carpenter (New York: Rock Foundation, 2000), 28, 66.
- 3 Richard Harrington, *The Face of the Arctic: A Cameraman’s Story in Words and Pictures of Five Journeys into the Far North* (New York: Abelard Schuman, 1952), 261, 237.
- 4 James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 2.
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- 6 Farley Mowat, *People of the Deer* (Boston: Little Brown, 1952).
- 7 Alvin Finkel, *Social Policy and Practice in Canada: A History* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), ch. 7–11.
- 8 For an overview of the welfare measures that were undertaken for the Inuit, see David Damas, *Arctic Migrants, Arctic Villagers: The Transformation of Inuit Settlement in the Central Arctic* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), ch. 5.
- 9 For a discussion of the starvations, see Frank James Tester and Peter Kulchyski, *Tammarniit (Mistakes): Inuit Relocation in the Eastern Arctic, 1939–63* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994), ch. 5–7. They are also covered more briefly and in a different interpretive frame in Damas, *Arctic Migrants, Arctic Villagers*, 87, 91–92.
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