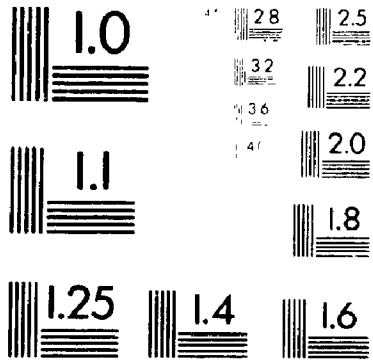


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# REINDEER FOR THE NORTH

A Preliminary Study of the Role of the Canadian Government  
1907-1960

by  
Gilles Séguin

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of  
Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
in Canadian Studies

Carleton University

OTTAWA, Ontario

January 16, 1989

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**REINDEER FOR THE NORTH**

A Preliminary Study of the Role of the Canadian Government  
1907-1960

submitted by Gilles Séguin  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis traces the Canadian government's involvement in reindeer herding from 1907 to 1960. The wide appeal of reindeer was a consequence of their potential as: (a) an alternative resource for northern Natives, (b) a means to sustain northern development by providing food, transportation and communication; and (c) a major livestock industry. Most of the government's financial support went towards an unsuccessful experiment to encourage the Inuit to adopt an intensive, symbiotic pattern of reindeer pastoralism. Although cast by the government in terms of native survival, the author maintains that reindeer were imported to serve Canadian interests, rather than the Inuit. The failure to effect the transition to reindeer pastoralism is explained in terms of the opposition between the respective relations of production of foraging and pastoralism.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## INTRODUCTION

The exploitation of *Rangifer tarandus*, better known as reindeer in Europe and Asia, and caribou in North America, under similar environmental conditions, gave rise to three forms of production---hunting, pastoralism and ranching.<sup>1</sup> Reindeer pastoralism, defined by "the conjunction of protective man-animal relations with the principle of divided access to animal means of production" to satisfy immediate domestic needs (Ingold 1980:3-4), is generally associated with the flamboyant Samek, or Lapps, but other European and Asian peoples---the Yukagirs, Evenks and Chukchi---are also part of that tradition (Graburn and Strong 1973). Less known, perhaps, but equally romantic in the popular imagination, was the attempt, beginning in 1891, to transform Alaskan Eskimo (some of whom were caribou hunters) into reindeer pastoralists. Almost forgotten today are Canada's more modest efforts in this century to follow suit. Indeed, few Canadians are aware that the federal government spent about 1.5 million dollars on reindeer husbandry between 1907 and 1960, and almost as much between 1961 and 1973 (Truede 1979:135).

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<sup>1</sup>. For more information on the morphology and behaviour of reindeer/caribou, and how the species was exploited by peoples inhabiting the circumpolar boreal forest and tundra regions, see Paine (1988), Burch (1972), Graburn and Strong (1973) and Ingold (1980).

The herding of imported "semi-domesticated" reindeer---the husbandry of the native wild caribou was considered infeasible---never did succeed as well in Canada as elsewhere. Nonetheless, for many years, government officials and certain individuals held high expectations of reindeer herding in the Canadian North. Originally conceived of as an alternative subsistence resource for northern Natives, reindeer were also touted for their potential to assist in development by providing food, transportation and communication. At the height of public interest in 1919, a royal commission inquired into the commercial potential of reindeer as a livestock industry. The wide appeal of reindeer led to their importation at St. Anthony's in Newfoundland, Lobster Bay and Anticosti Island in Quebec, Fort Smith in the Northwest Territories, Amadjuak Bay on Baffin Island and, finally, Kittigazuit, in the Mackenzie River Delta. These ventures, and others, were supported to a greater or lesser extent by the federal government.

The federal government's involvement in reindeer husbandry invites study as the forerunner to the massive social welfare investments that flowed north after the Second World War to incorporate Natives in the mainstream of Canadian life. Until then, a parsimonious government was largely satisfied with maintaining an official presence in the North to protect Canada's sovereignty, and with monitoring and

regulating northern development "along lines that are in the best public interest" and that of "the native population and the animal life of those districts."<sup>2</sup> In many ways, the government's interventionist stance in Inuit affairs, and especially the expenditure of some \$500,000 from public coffers on reindeer ventures before 1939, stands out as an anomaly to a general policy of economic *laissez-faire* and welfare avoidance (Smith 1963; Morrison 1985; Jenness 1964; Rea 1968).

Initially, the federal government was reluctant to involve itself directly in reindeer herding, opting instead to encourage philanthropic and commercial enterprises eager to repeat the successes reported in Alaska. But these failed one after the other, or clamoured for government participation. As more information about the North became available in the 1920s, senior civil servants in Ottawa became convinced that the government itself would have to introduce reindeer there to protect the country's economic interests. At the time, these consisted mainly of wildlife and Inuit man-power.

Wildlife was seen as a national resource while Inuit were needed to make northern development a reality. The decision

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<sup>2</sup>. Canada, Parliament, **Sessional Papers**, "Annual Report of the Department of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended March 31, 1920", p. 5.

in 1929 to introduce reindeer to the Northwest Territories was meant to radically change the lifestyle of the Inuit, both to reduce the exploitation of wildlife and to keep the Inuit reasonably self-sufficient until northern development could absorb them in the mainstream of Canadian life. Inuit, on the other hand, were more concerned with maintaining their way of life. Given the lack of mutual understanding and common goals, we should not be too surprised that the attempt to attract Inuit to reindeer herding failed.

We know today that the environment was not the limitation, since the experiment was, and still is, a biological success (Stager 1984). On the other hand, we also know that Inuit in Alaska managed to incorporate reindeer herding in their way of life (Olson 1969). Therefore, we can postulate that Inuit resistance to reindeer herding was "unrelated to the inherent nature of the innovation itself" but centered on the way in which its introduction was handled by the government (Spicer 1952:293). Indeed, the introduction of reindeer into the Northwest Territories is a classic example of externally directed change, or social engineering, which, although cast in terms of native survival, blatantly ignored Native aspirations, to protect and further Canadian interests.

This thesis, then, seeks to explain how and why the

government got involved in reindeer herding to the extent that it did. It also addresses the issue of why reindeer herding failed to establish itself in the North on the scale envisaged by civil servants. Archival sources provide the answers to the first topic while an anthropological perspective provides insights in relation to the second. Although there is an extensive body of literature on reindeer husbandry in Canada (Sims and Murtha 1983), and the Canadian Reindeer Project in particular, these issues have been only summarily covered, especially for the latter project. Existing studies consist of popular accounts of specific ventures (for example, Hedlin 1961), brief overviews (for example, Scotter 1970), progress reports on the Canadian Reindeer Project (for example, Hill 1968), some with extensive recommendations for future direction (for example, Hill 1967), and scientific studies on specialized topics such as herd dynamics (for example, Krebs 1961) and botanical surveys (for example, Cody 1963).

The first chapter examines the government's involvement with reindeer husbandry beginning in 1907 and provides the historical background to the decision in 1929 to purchase a large reindeer herd for the Northwest Territories. The second chapter looks at the evolution of the Canadian Reindeer Project to 1960, at which time the government gave up trying to attract Inuit to reindeer husbandry and set the

experiment on a commercial course. The final chapter searches for an answer to the failure of the original aim of this project in contradictions between the relations of production promoted by the government in reindeer herding and those which characterized the way of life of the Inuit.

The reader should note that the decision to end this account at 1960, rather than the present, is not arbitrary but based on two considerations. First, there was a real change of direction that year, which means that the period under study is in fact a distinct phase of reindeer husbandry in Canada. Second, the complete story simply cannot be told within the limits of an M.A. thesis. Until the sequel is written, interested readers can turn to Treude (1979) and Stager (1984) for brief accounts of reindeer herding under private enterprise and the Canadian Wildlife Service.

Finally, a word of caution. As the title of this thesis implies, this work is by no means the definitive study on the Canadian Reindeer Project. Much has been left out: for example, range management, husbandry techniques and marketing. Another limitation is the fact that no attempt was made to interview retired civil servants or to obtain the views of the Mackenzie Delta Inuit.

## 1. TWO DECADES OF FALSE STARTS.

"The reindeer is to the far north what the camel is to desert regions, the animal which God has provided and adapted for the peculiar, special conditions which exist [there]."

"...Within less than twenty-five years there will be at least 1,000,000 domestic reindeer in Alaska...In thirty-five years the number may reach nearly 10,000,000 head and Alaska will be shipping each year to the United States anywhere from 500,000 to 1,000,000 reindeer carcasses and thousands of tons of delicious hams and tongues. At no distant day... long reindeer trains...will roll into Seattle and our most western cities like the great cattle trains that now every hour thunder into the yards of Chicago. Before the end of the present century Alaska will be helping to feed the 200,000,000 men and women who will then be living within the present borders of the United States." (Grosvenor 1903:146-48)

These observations, made in 1903 by Gilbert Grosvenor in *The National Geographic Magazine*, hint in no uncertain terms at the far-ranging potential which some observers saw in Dr. Sheldon Jackson's experiment to introduce semi-domesticated reindeer from Siberia to Alaska. What began in 1891 purely as a philanthropic experiment to restore the Inuit to self-sufficiency, following the depletion of major sea mammals and the great herds of caribou, captured the imagination of Americans and inevitably gave rise to the belief that it would sustain northern development and extend the ranching frontier of America.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>. One can hardly overemphasize the public appeal of reindeer herding in America at the turn of the century. It generated so much interest that in 1911 the Superintendent

The potential of reindeer herding did not escape the missionary-medical doctor Wilfred T. Grenfell who sought, since 1893, through the Labrador Deep-Sea Mission, to improve the living conditions of the neglected residents of northern Newfoundland and Labrador. He dreamed of restocking Labrador, then nearly devoid of caribou, with herds of the highly versatile reindeer, primarily to secure badly needed fresh milk, but also to obtain meat, clothing and an alternative means of transportation (Grenfell et. al. 1909:251-271; Grenfell 1919:288-303; Grenfell 1932:188-200).

Grenfell's vision, however, extended beyond the boundaries of Newfoundland. Indeed, thoroughly convinced that the industry should be a part of "imperial policy" for northern Canada, he sought in 1907 to impress its importance on his friend and supporter the Governor-General of Canada Lord Grey:

**"For some years I have been carefully watching the experiments made in Alaska...The matter is now beyond all question the most successful animal experiment ever made. The few hundreds that were originally introduced now number**

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of Documents in Washington, D.C., reported that the project was "not only one of the most interesting episodes of Government work in this country, but it has been more minutely and interestingly described than any other official event" (National Archives of Canada (hereafter NAC), Records of the Northern Affairs Program, RG 85, vol. 612, file 2857, Superintendent of Documents to Robert Campbell, 20 June 1911). For a history of the Alaskan experiment, see Stern (1980).



fifteen thousand...

...If it had not been for these animals, the natives...would soon have been curiosities, whereas they now promise shortly to be an intelligent, English speaking, sturdy population of good American citizens, who will not only carry on this work, essential [?] for the whites to inhabit Alaska, but who will also attract whites to come and settle by making it possible for them to live there.

On the contrary, the Esquimaux and Indians of Labrador and of the Hudson Bay coast are rapidly decreasing. The Hudson Bay Company's treatment of them does not tend to prevent them from being blotted out, and the steady introduction of improved fire arms and traps is lessening the necessary supply of food for their support. Their own ignorant and wanton treatment of the deer, which are now their chief source of food supply, often leaves them in dire straits and starvation; while the great destruction of young seals by the Newfoundland steamers makes it impossible... for us to get the seal food that once we depended on so largely.

The introduction of [reindeer] would seem to me to be an important step in imperial policy. For I can conceive of no reason why...[the North] might not be settled, and the policing of Fullerton and Baffin's Land and North Chesterfield Inlet become at once more than matters of sentiment...".<sup>2</sup>

Lord Grey agreed with Grenfell, for he immediately sought to convince the Minister of the Interior Frank Oliver to introduce reindeer to northern Canada. For his part, Grenfell approached Sydney Fisher, Minister of Agriculture responsible for livestock. Both ministers proved to be interested, but Fisher took the initiative and, with the support of his cabinet colleagues, allocated \$5,000 for the introduction of Norwegian reindeer to that part of Quebec

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<sup>2</sup>. NAC, Lord Grey Papers, MG 27 II B2, vol. 26A, drawer 3, file 3, pp. 006889-92, photostats, Wilfrid Grenfell to Lord Grey, 8 February 1907.

then known as the Canadian Labrador on the condition that Grenfell take charge of the project. This he accepted and a memorandum of agreement was signed on 22 March, 1907.<sup>3</sup>

According to the agreement, it was "expedient and in the public interest to assist in, and encourage, the introduction of domesticated reindeer into the Canadian Labrador". In an unusual move, Grenfell was made agent, or trustee, of the government, while being held accountable for the expenditure of the money and for the management and disposal of the animals. He was only expected to "distribute the deer among the residents of the Canadian Labrador" as he saw fit.<sup>4</sup>

Having secured additional funding from the government of Newfoundland and the American public for his own purposes,

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<sup>3</sup>. For the relevant correspondence, as well as a copy of the agreement, see NAC, Records of Agriculture Canada, RG 17, vol. 1045, docket 188257.

<sup>4</sup>. This agreement is surprising in more ways than one. The purchase of the herd was financed by Canada, and, as far as I can tell, the country owned the animals until their disposal. Yet the government chose to retain very little control over the herd's management. Perhaps this was in line with the government's policy of leaving northern development to the Church and private enterprise (Rea 1968:58-59). No doubt, it was also a reflection on Grenfell's prominence and his powers of persuasion. Fisher admitted as much to Lord Grey: "...I am quite satisfied Dr. Grenfell himself will do everything he can...and I feel perfect confidence in making him...trustee for the expenditure of this money, and giving him practically carte-blanche in the management of it" (NAC, RG 17, vol. 1045, docket 188257, Sydney Fisher to Lord Grey, 25 March 1907).

Grenfell purchased 300 reindeer---150 for the Mission, 50 for the Anglo-Newfoundland Development Company, and 100 for Canada---at a cost of about \$15,300. They left Bugten, Altenfjord, Norway, in November, 1907. Initially, the destinations were to be respectively St. Anthony's on the northeast coast of Newfoundland, Lewis Port on the mid-eastern coast of Newfoundland, and Forteau on the border between Labrador and Quebec in the Straits of Belle Isle. Plans were changed, however, when Lloyd's of London indicated that it would not insure the ship if an attempt was made to cross the Straits of Belle Isle so late in the season. In fact, on account of sea ice, the ship barely made it to St. Anthony's, where the three herds and three Lapp families were landed.<sup>5</sup>

The Anglo-Newfoundland Development Company's herd was driven overland to Millertown (Harrington 1963:47-48), while the remaining animals were managed together near St. Anthony's until the Canadian herd could be removed to its final destination. The herd's progress dramatically surpassed expectations. It tripled in size to number about 820 animals by the spring of 1910. The staff consisted of 3 Lapp teachers, 3 herders, and 3 apprentices. As in Alaska, the

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<sup>5</sup>. NAC, Wilfred T. Grenfell Collection, MG 30 B116, microfilm, Wilfred Grenfell to Francis H. Wood, 12 August 1907 (NAC reel M-3724); and NAC, RG 17, vol. 1045, docket 188257, Wilfred Grenfell to Sydney Fisher, 21 December 1907 and 3 April 1908.

apprentices were paid partly in cash and partly in reindeer. Eventually they were to return to Labrador with herds of their own.

The value of reindeer as draft animals was demonstrated by putting 16 of them to work hauling logs---a good deer could pull as much as five dogs---while two pairs were used as sledge deer. On the other hand, the obvious value of reindeer as a source of meat forced Grenfell to seek protection from poaching by having the northeast tip of Newfoundland declared a "national deer reserve".<sup>6</sup>

Despite the poaching, enthusiasm ran high and Grenfell showed no hesitation concerning the project's potential. "I do not see", he wrote to the Deputy Minister of Agriculture, "why Canadian Labrador should not support at least one million of these beasts and export, if necessary, 250,000 a year, which would mean a very large meat supply from a section of the country that seems to offer no other possible return for labour."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>. These details are gleaned from letters scattered throughout the Grenfell Collection (NAC, MG 30 B116, microfilm reel M-3724). The letters were microfilmed in no apparent order and are consequently difficult to locate. Moreover, there is no finding aid. The most significant letters are : Wilfred Grenfell to Sir Edward, 17 March and 20 April 1910; and Wilfred Grenfell to A.W. McNeilly, 11 June 1910.

<sup>7</sup>. NAC, RG 17, vol. 1045, docket 188257, Wilfred Grenfell to George O'Halloran, 30 December 1909.

Lord Grey was equally enthusiastic. He stopped at St. Anthony's in 1910, to visit the herd, during his expedition to Hudson Bay. Although aware that Canada's herd was scheduled to be shipped that summer to Harrington in Quebec, he entertained more ambitious plans, apparently with the backing of Grenfell as the supplier of reindeer. The **Times of London** presumably paraphrased his views in an article dated 4 October 1910:

**"...The success achieved both by the Americans and by Dr. Grenfell has been such that the Canadian Government would now be fully justified in pushing forward the experiment on the big scale, starting a number of herds at different points throughout the north country, and giving the public an example by converting the police and postal teams throughout the north from dog to reindeer traction."**<sup>8</sup>

Given the limited presence of the government in the North, these were grandiose plans indeed. Undaunted, Lord Grey approached the Royal North West Mounted Police and the Hudson's Bay Company, while keeping Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier<sup>9</sup> and the Minister of the Interior Frank Oliver informed of his actions. Oliver's initial reaction is most interesting given his subsequent involvement with reindeer: "...So far as I can see", he wrote to Lord Grey, "there is

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<sup>8</sup>. See the file on Lord Grey's Hudson Bay Expedition in NAC, Records of the Department of External Affairs, RG 25, G-1, vol. 1107, file 1139.

<sup>9</sup>. NAC, Sir Wilfrid Laurier Papers, MG 26 G, Vol. 732, pp. 207014-27, Lord Grey to Wilfrid Laurier, 5 September 1910.

no inherent reason why the vast northern regions which occupy such a large part of...Canada should not be turned to valuable account in the way you suggest", but, he cautioned, "It may be that the pressure of necessity is not yet sufficiently great to cause the effort to be made..."<sup>10</sup> Lord Grey must have convinced him otherwise over the following months, for he reacted favorably to an offer of reindeer made by Grenfell in May 1911.<sup>11</sup>

Judging from available records, Oliver was interested in reindeer mainly as a means of transportation for northern Canada, an interest that he had voiced four years earlier when Lord Grey first approached him<sup>12</sup>, and perhaps as a food supply.<sup>13</sup> The reasons for his choice of Fort Smith, located

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10. NAC, MG 27, II B2, vol. 26A, drawer 3, file 5, p. 006935, photostat, Frank Oliver to Lord Grey, 6 December 1910.

11. NAC, RG 85, vol. 612, file 2857, Wilfred Grenfell to Frank Oliver, 13 May 1911.

12. NAC, RG 17, vol. 1054, docket 188257, Lord Grey to Sydney Fisher, 18 March 1907.

13. His only surviving comments are those contained in the cryptic instructions to Robert Campbell: "I had an idea of getting a few of these reindeer to take down to Fort Smith for the purpose of locating a range. Kindly report as to possibilities" (NAC, RG 85, vol. 612, file 2857, Frank Oliver to Robert Campbell, 18 May 1911). A clipping from the **Evening Journal** dated 6 June 1911 mentions that they would provide food, clothing and transportation for the "Indians who inhabit the barren wastes of the Canadian hinterland." Campbell's interpretation of the aims of the project are contained in his 1911-12 annual report: "It was considered that the deer would prove much more valuable than dogs for transportation purposes, and, as they...would themselves be

in the southwest corner of the Northwest Territories, as the site for this government venture remain unknown, but probably have to do with ease of access and logistics. He placed Robert Campbell, the Forestry Branch Superintendent, in charge of the project.

Campbell knew nothing of reindeer and admitted as much. Nor did he have immediate access to information on reindeer management. Although supportive of the idea in principle, he did not know if Fort Smith was an appropriate location. He cautioned that it might be better to send one of Grenfell's men to examine the area beforehand to ensure that the experiment would be a success.

Caution, however, was thrown to the wind. Oliver authorized the purchase of 50 reindeer from Grenfell for Fort Smith on 14 June, 1911. The deer were loaded on a government ship at St. Anthony's, Newfoundland, on October 7 and taken to Quebec. Three of Grenfell's herders accompanied the herd. The animals were transferred to railway cars for Athabaska Landing, north of Edmonton. The railway didn't quite make it there then, and so the deer were hauled the remaining 50 miles by wagon. On account of mishaps, only 41 reindeer

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of value for food, they would become not only a most useful adjunct to travel in such districts but would also be a source of wealth" (Canada, Parliament, **Sessional Papers**, "Report of the Director of Forestry", 1911-12, p.25).

boarded the scows for the journey down the Athabasca River. The onset of winter stranded the entire party some 17 miles from Fort Smith and 12 miles from Chippewyan. When navigation reopened in 1912, 31 reindeer finally made it to Fort Smith and were located nearby at Whitefish Lake.

In some quarters, the Fort Smith venture was interpreted as an open invitation to submit reindeer proposals to the government. The Yukon Diocesan Synod<sup>14</sup> was probably the first to do so, followed by an American by the name of Conrad Siem<sup>15</sup>, the Council of the Yukon Territory<sup>16</sup>, and

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14. A petition, dated 14 August 1911, by the Yukon Diocesan Synod, and supported by the Dawson Board of Trade, for the introduction of a herd of 500 reindeer to benefit the Indians of the Yukon Territory was sent to Frank Oliver. Deputy Minister William Cory forwarded it to the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs. The petition was bounced back and forth between them in a dispute over who should act on it. See NAC, Records of Indian Affairs, RG 10, vol. 4062, file 398746-1.

15. Conrad Siem, formerly a trader at Point Barrow, Alaska, was involved in the introduction of reindeer in Alaska. In fact, he claimed that Dr. Jackson had stolen the idea from him. He submitted a memorial on reindeer herding to Prime Minister Borden, apparently at his request, in 1913. See **Memorial On the Introduction of Domesticated Reindeer Into Canada** (New York: McConnell, [1913]), in NAC, RG 17, vol. 1045, docket 188257. In contrast to other promoters, he favored a commercial industry based on the use of Metis as herders. In his opinion, it would take generations to make a herder out of the Eskimo, whereas the "...the happy and quaint creoles of northern latitudes, combine in themselves all the elements to be resourceful and successful herdsmen. Accustomed to the silent solitudes, they are ill at ease to-day in the growing cities, in the harvest fields and in the turmoil of our usurping civilization. They are longing for a closer communication with nature on the wide snow-covered plains lit up by the bright moon, by myriads of stars and by the scintillating



finally Grenfell.<sup>17</sup> Naturally, when confronted by numerous propositions and, in addition, by an appeal for the protection of the native caribou,<sup>18</sup> government officials, especially within the Department of the Interior, attempted to establish a comprehensive policy to deal with the question.

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northern lights. Trained for centuries under the benign rule of the Hudson Bay Company, they are accustomed to a feudal system resembling patriarchy. They will make good and faithful herdmen, and their innate love of animals will give them highest cunning to improve the grade and the character of the reindeer..." (p. 27). No one, apparently, took him seriously. See NAC, RG 85, vol. 1136, file 270-1-2 (1) and Robert Borden Papers, MG 26 H, vol. 187, RLB 580.

16. Probably as a follow-up on the earlier petition by the Yukon Diocesan Synod, the Council repeatedly petitioned the government in 1913, 1914 and 1915 to introduce reindeer to the Yukon. The matter was always referred to the Commissioner of Dominion Parks James Harkin, who expressed himself in favor of continuing efforts to introduce reindeer in the North. He cautioned, however, that no action should be taken until an officer studied the Alaskan experiment on the ground. See NAC, RG 85, vol. 1136, file 270-1-2 (1).

17. Grenfell made three proposals to the government. In 1913, he sought financial support from the Department of Agriculture for a commercial venture in the Labrador, which involved Clarence Birdseye and a certain Mr. Hammond. It was rejected on the basis of more pressing needs in western Canada. In the Spring of 1914, Grenfell obtained \$500 from the Minister of the Interior to send two men to Hudson Bay, in the vicinity of Churchill, to determine the area's suitability for reindeer. Nothing came of this because of communication problems. Finally, late in 1914, Grenfell requested the government's support to transfer and maintain a herd of 250 reindeer on Canadian soil at Little Mecatina Island, near Harrington Harbour. See NAC, RG 17, vol. 1045, file 188257.

18. See NAC, RG 85, vol. 665, file 3914, Vilhjalmur Stefansson to Clifford Sifton, 8 February 1914.

While the case for and against the importation of reindeer was debated by many individuals in several departments between 1913 and 1915, the views of two individuals, in particular, seem to have clearly influenced the climate of opinion. Confronting the issue of the protection of barren-ground caribou, Clifford Sifton, Chairman of the influential Committee on Conservation of Natural Resources, wrote to Deputy Minister William Cory expressing the opinion that "In view of the fact that we have our own native species of reindeer, it is not good policy to import European species while permitting the extermination of our native caribou."<sup>19</sup> For his part, the Chief of the Animal Division of Dominion Parks' Maxwell Graham, advocated the importation of large European or Siberian reindeer to sustain northern development primarily by providing a means of transportation. He also favored experiments in the domestication of the large native woodland caribou for the same reason. Graham repeatedly advised against the further acquisition of Norwegian reindeer which were, in his opinion, like the barren-ground caribou, too small for that purpose. He saw no point in importing limited numbers of European reindeer for food when a native equivalent, the barren-ground caribou, was apparently available in the millions. Unlike Sifton, Graham was not convinced that the

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<sup>19</sup>. *Ibid.*, Clifford Sifton to William Cory, 8 August 1914.

caribou was on the verge of extinction. Although he supported Sifton's recommendations for their protection as necessary and reasonable precautions, especially where native hunting was a significant factor, Graham argued that on the whole this resource was underutilized. He thought the government should exploit the herds as a source of meat for the greater benefit of all Canadians while the hair of the animal might be used in the manufacture of life jackets or flotation suits for sailors in the navy.<sup>20</sup>

Graham's views were widely circulated in government circles by Prime Minister Robert Borden in 1915 with predictable results on ongoing ventures.<sup>21</sup> Under pressure from his officials, the Minister of Agriculture Martin Burrell asked Grenfell to account for his failure to move the government's herd to Canadian soil. Unable to finance the transfer himself, and sensing the rapidly changing mood in Ottawa, Grenfell sought an interview with Prime Minister Borden. Borden agreed to meet him, but Grenfell had to postpone his

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<sup>20</sup>. See the numerous reports by Graham in *Ibid.*, file 3914 and *Ibid.*, vol. 1136, file 270-1-2 (1).

<sup>21</sup>. Herbert B. Ames, M.P., wrote to Borden 1 December 1914 enclosing Grenfell's appeal for the use of Little Mecatina Island. Responding to a request for his views, Minister of Interior Roche sent Graham's reactions and Harkin's comments to Borden. The latter had these memoranda distributed to all members of parliament because they opened up "possibilities of using Northern territory hitherto considered utterly worthless". Unfortunately, Borden did not specify what struck him the most. See *Ibid.*, vol. 1136, file 270-1-2 (1) and MG 26 H, vol. 187, file RLB 580.

visit to Ottawa for a tour of duty in France.<sup>22</sup> Burrell withheld the special annual grant of \$1,000 voted by Parliament since 1908 to assist Grenfell in the maintenance of the herd, officially on the basis of non-compliance with the terms of the 1907 agreement and more pressing needs elsewhere.<sup>23</sup> In all, some \$11,000 had been spent with nothing to show for it in Canada.

Ironically, despite a dismal record, the Fort Smith venture was allowed to endure somewhat longer. Harassment by flies apparently had reduced the herd to only two animals by the spring of 1914. Plans to capture caribou in order to build a new herd failed, and the blame was placed on Indian superstition. Campbell's suggestion that more reindeer be sent in was not supported by Graham, who aside from his bias against Norwegian reindeer, pointed out that the forested environment was totally inappropriate for such a venture.<sup>24</sup> Although only one deer was still alive in 1915, the order to wrap-up the project didn't come until 17 February, 1916.

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22. NAC, MG 26, H, vol. 187, RLB 580, Wilfred Grenfell to Robert Borden, 12 March 1915; W.L.Roche to R.L. Borden 26 April, 1915; and Robert Borden to Wilfred Grenfell, 28 April, 1915.

23. The Livestock Branch people were more interested in improving cattle for use in western Canada than supporting the introduction of reindeer to the sparsely populated North. See NAC, RG 17, vol. 1045, docket 188257, Martin Burrell to Herbert B. Ames, 5 May 1913.

24. NAC, RG 85, vol. 1136, file 270-1-2 (1), Maxwell Graham to James Harkin, 27 February 1914.

Deer and herder were removed from Hardisty Island, in Great Slave Lake, where they had taken refuge in 1914, only to be ship wrecked---without loss---on the way to Fort Resolution. There, the last surviving deer was killed by departmental order and barbecued by the herder and the crew of the S.S. **HOPE** on 1 July, Dominion Day, 1916. This misguided venture cost taxpayers some \$22,794.<sup>25</sup>

If reindeer were now out of favour as a source of food, Graham's suggestion that large specimens be imported to sustain northern development seems to have been disregarded for more pressing questions, one of which was the conservation of northern wildlife. Since the passage in 1894 of the Unorganized Territories Game Preservation Act, the government was committed to a policy of safeguarding game from abuse, both from Whites and native peoples. With conditions apparently rapidly deteriorating in certain parts of the North, government officials, the Dominion Entomologist Gordon Hewitt in particular, took steps to have the Act amended. The issue was finally taken up seriously by the interdepartmental Advisory Board on Wild Life Protection shortly after its creation late in 1916. The government's

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<sup>25</sup>. This experiment is well documented in *Ibid.*, vol. 612, files 2853-57; vol. 613, file 2858; and vol. 1136, file 270-1-2 (1). A summary account is given in the annual reports of the Director of Forestry published in the Sessional Papers between 1912 and 1915. See also Hedlin (1961) and Inglis (1969).

concern for the protection of threatened species is reflected in the new Northwest Game Act passed in 1917. But the act incorporated few of the recommendations made in 1914 by Sifton for the protection of the caribou (Foster 1978:170-177).

Judging from the correspondence, few government officials were convinced that the caribou was on the verge of extinction. Indeed, the new bill was barely law when the issue of exploiting caribou to reduce the meat shortage brought on by World War One was raised. It was widely believed that at least 30 million caribou roamed the "arctic prairies".<sup>26</sup> Despite his strong commitment to the conservation movement, even the Commissioner of Dominion Parks James Harkin was convinced that the idea had to be investigated:

"While no one knows exactly how many caribou there are in the north estimates vary from thirty to sixty millions. It is true they roam over a very large country and that transportation and other difficulties are serious. However, the world's food situation is rapidly becoming so serious that it seems imperative that careful investigations should be made to see whether the barren-land caribou should not be made available for the people of Canada as a food supply."<sup>27</sup>

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26. This estimate was put forward by the naturalist and author Ernest Thompson Seton following his expedition to the barren-lands in 1907. Contrary to popular opinion, he believed that "native destruction is less now than formerly and never did make any perceptible difference" (Seton 1911:261-262).

27. NAC, RG 85, vol. 665, file 3914, James Harkin to William Cory, 8 January 1918.

Harkin pursued the issue with the Food Controller and the Advisory Board on Wild Life Protection. Fortunately, labour, storage and transportation problems proved unsurmountable.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, other Advisory Board members pronounced themselves against the relaxation of games laws in general and, pointing to the uncertain status of the caribou in various parts of the North, questioned the myth of abundance. They ruled that such a scheme would be a costly step backwards in wildlife conservation. In fact, they favored reindeer husbandry as a solution to the food shortages (Foster 1978:163-164).

While the myth of wildlife superabundance was not laid to rest as a result of these discussions, at least as concerns the barren-ground caribou, there is no question that by 1918 reindeer were looked upon once more in government circles as a potential source of food---not only for natives, but also for Canadians and the World---in addition to a means of transportation in the North. This change of attitude largely explains the favourable reception accorded to the North American Reindeer Company in June 1918 by the Department of

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<sup>28</sup>. Harkin's efforts are documented in *Ibid.*, file 3914.

the Interior.<sup>29</sup> This American concern presented an enticing if somewhat ambitious proposal:

"The Company is willing to place a herd of at least 1500 head of Alaskan Reindeer for breeding purposes in Canada within 18 months in the district between Hudson Bay and Reindeer Lake, north of the Churchill river providing that the Canadian Government will grant it free grazing privileges for a period of thirty years.

This locality has been selected as the most logical point, being in close proximity to the Hudson Bay Railway, and therefore nearest to the market.

The Company does not ask any bonus or financial assistance...

The Company will follow the same general policy in the management of the herds as has proved so successful in Alaska.

With the approval of the United States Government, the Company proposes to bring in several families of Lapps who are now in charge of the Reindeer in Alaska, and who have proved so valuable in assisting in the education of the natives there.

The herds will be...driven along the regular route to Point Barrow; from there along the Arctic prairie near the coast and north of the mountains, past Herschel Island...to Fort Macpherson...during the latter part of the summer of 1919....From this point...the Mackenzie river will be crossed on the ice, and a winter drive made in a south-easterly direction past the east ends of Great Bear and Great Slave Lakes [and on] to Reindeer lake..."<sup>30</sup>

Harkin wrote to Deputy Minister William Cory in support of the application, using an argument he would repeat in similar circumstances: "The introduction of reindeer is of

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29. The relevant correspondence concerning this venture is found in NAC, RG 85, vol. 660, file 3751; vol. 661, file 3751; and vol. 1477, file 270-8-6.

30. *Ibid.*, vol. 660, file 3751, Frederick Lawrence to William Cory, 28 June 1918.



so much importance in connection with the development of the north country that if it is not undertaken by private enterprise it would sooner or later have to be undertaken by the Government."<sup>31</sup> Graham backed him up with a lengthy report which emphasized that Canada had "as many and perhaps more" reasons for introducing reindeer as the United States two decades earlier.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, although this was to be a commercial venture, the Company sweetened its application by offering to sell 300 live animals to the Reverend William Walton, of the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada, for his mission on the east coast of Hudson Bay.

Walton was at that time seeking the government's help to emulate Dr. Jackson's success at relieving destitution among the natives. Practically no caribou had been secured in the last 26 years by the 1600 Indians and Inuit located on the coast between East Main and Port Harrison. Hunting and trapping, combined with relief, barely met their needs. After years of living among them, Walton had concluded that such a lifestyle was making paupers of them. He believed that the only way to restore these people to self-sufficiency was through the introduction of reindeer. Indeed, it was the cornerstone of a larger plan to improve

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<sup>31</sup>. Ibid, James Harkin to William Cory, 4 July 1918.

<sup>32</sup>. Ibid, Report on application of North American Reindeer Co., 9 July, 1918, by Chief of the Animal Division, Maxwell Graham to J.B. Harkin, Commissioner, Dominion Parks.

their economy and social conditions. Convinced that such a venture would be successful only if undertaken by the government, he appealed to the Minister of the Interior Arthur Meighen and Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs Duncan Scott to assume full responsibility for the purchase and supervision of the 300 reindeer meant for his mission. Walton eventually succeeded in this, but elaborate planning for the development of a reindeer industry there was postponed until the arrival of the reindeer.<sup>33</sup>

The commercial exploitation of reindeer to relieve continuing anticipated meat shortages in Canada and elsewhere combined with an operation meant to benefit Hudson Bay natives seemed to be the answer to the exigencies of the moment. That is not to say that there were no apprehensions. Government officials were very much concerned about granting exclusive grazing rights to an American company and even

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<sup>33</sup>. Initially, Maxwell Graham proposed that reindeer from the Grenfell herd might be transferred to Walton's mission. As we shall see, that did not work out because of previous arrangements between Grenfell and Scott. The North American Reindeer Company's proposal was thus timely although fortuitous. Not much importance can be attached to the government's commitment to purchase the reindeer and look after them. As Scott pointed out, the Company's plans were "visionary" and the chances that the reindeer would be delivered "somewhat remote". See NAC, RG 10, vol. 6818, file 488-4-4 (1) and Anglican Church of Canada General Synod Archives, M.S.C.C., G.S. 75-103, series 3.2, box 57, Eskimo--Rev. W.G. Walton, 1918-27. Most of the relevant correspondence is embodied in a pamphlet by Spectator, *Life Conditions of the Native Races On the East Coast of Hudson's Bay*, [1921].

remotely appearing to endorse what was obviously an experimental venture. They especially feared being used for the stockjobbing of investors. The Minister sought and obtained the power to enter into contracts for the purpose of granting grazing leases<sup>34</sup> early on, but negotiations with the North American Reindeer Company were difficult and protracted. An agreement was not reached before February 1919.<sup>35</sup>

In the meantime, the explorer and ethnologist Vilhjalmur Stefansson had returned from the North, after spending 10 years above the arctic circle over a period of 13 years. His skills of persuasion and bold new ideas, combined with the perceived heroic nature of his contact with the land and its people, made him the foremost publicist and promoter of the North in his generation. Stefansson was obsessed with promoting interest in the Canadian North and he was willing to force the pace of northern development (Hunt 1986; Diubaldo 1978).

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34. NAC, P.C. 1830, 25 July 1918.

35. Government officials spent a lot of time seeking a means of controlling the activities of this company, or at least giving investors some means of redress should it not make a true attempt at introducing reindeer, but found no satisfactory solution. The government finally inserted a clause in the contract which stated that it assumed "no responsibility for the success or feasibility of the undertakings of the Company."

Indeed, he lost no time in promoting his own vision of a "polar Mediterranean" (Diubaldo 1978:127-160). He resumed a public campaign that he had begun in 1917 from Melville Island, in the Arctic Ocean, to exploit the musk ox commercially (Diubaldo 1978:134-144). In retrospect a most unlikely "gold mine", the muskox did have the advantages of being known, available and mobile while other resources---minerals, for example---were still largely inaccessible. Stefansson believed that it was the most valuable animal in the North for its meat alone, but it also produced milk and wool.<sup>36</sup> As he explained later, however, domesticating muskox was not an end in itself, but a means to an end. The venture would prove to the sceptics the commercial potential of the North and remove the prejudices that Stefansson believed prevented northern development:

"When I first realised what kind of country and climate we have in the Arctic I supposed that a publication of the facts in books, magazines and newspapers would of itself lead to a general appreciation of the possibilities and a fairly prompt developmental activity on the part of governments and large corporations. I found, however, that the classic ideas of the polar regions were so firmly entrenched and governments and corporations were so busy with the affairs they already had on hand that they did not find the time to look into new things. It was even more disappointing that the few who took the time to look the facts in the face did not seem to be able to incorporate them in their general thinking processes.

I now looked about me for some means of convincing the public. My eventual conclusion was that there is nothing so convincing to the modern mind as dividends. To bring a change of thought the dividends had to be of a special kind.

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<sup>36</sup>. Related correspondence and reports produced for the government are in NAC, RG 85, vol. 661, file 3767.

If they came from gold mines or whaling no enlightenment would result, for through ancient lore and modern fiction we are accustomed to thinking of whalers and prospectors as commercial heroes who wrest their winnings from a very ferocious environment. The money had to be made in the polar regions in some ordinary occupation that no-one could associate with eternal ice and silence. I at last hit upon the encouragement of the grazing industry. If you begin to turn the northern blue grass into steaks and to serve them in fashionable hotels to people whose income or the income of whose neighbors was partly derived from the animals that produced the steaks, you would have the most favourable conditions I could think of for inducing a change of minds about a large part of our little world."<sup>37</sup>

Ironically, over the winter of 1918-19, Stefansson came to realize that his muskox project would make better headway if it was associated with the more familiar reindeer. Somewhat reluctantly, he acknowledged that the reindeer had a role to play in relieving current and future food shortages. His emphasis slowly shifted towards a promotion of both animals with about equal vigour.<sup>38</sup>

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37. NAC, Parks Canada Records, RG 84, vol. 166, file U226-1, Vilhjalmur Stefansson to Robert White, 2 September 1923.

38. Stefansson acknowledged this change of heart in a letter to Harkin (NAC, RG 85, vol. 661, file 3767, Vilhjalmur Stefansson to James Harkin, 8 March 1919). In fact, according to Diubaldo (1978:141-42, 147-48), he was privately acting as agent for the Alaskan entrepreneur Jafet Lindeberg (the financial backer of Lomen Brothers) who was seeking a foothold in Canada. Lindeberg approached the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs Duncan C. Scott directly in 1919 with a proposal to drive a herd of 3500 to 4000 reindeer overland from the Seward Peninsula to the Mackenzie River at a cost of \$400 a head. Scott passed this on to the Advisory Board on Wild Life Protection which balked at the thought of spending \$1,400,000 to 1,600,000 on something that was not urgent (See NAC, RG 10, vol. 4062, file 398746-3).

The Minister of the Interior Arthur Meighen was sufficiently enthusiastic about Stefansson's ideas to invite him to address members of the Senate and House of Commons on the commercial possibilities of reindeer and muskox husbandry in Arctic Canada. The vision that Stefansson conjured up before this assembly on May 6, 1919 was to stir the imagination of many Canadians for years to come. His speech is worth quoting extensively to reproduce the logic and mass appeal of his arguments:

"The domestication of animals among our ancestors developed in the sub-tropical portion of Asia where the cow and the sheep and the horse were native. Through the conservatism which makes us prefer the foods we are used to, we have been engaged since then in the uphill task of pushing these animals north beyond their natural limits...We should not try to carry them farther north than they have already gone and we should adopt instead...some other animals that are equally good and that are suited by nature to a more northerly environment.

About twenty years ago the American Government introduced 1280 domestic reindeer into arctic Alaska...Their sole aim was to give a possibility of economic independence to the Eskimo...At the time, the prevailing opinion was that even this object would not be attained and few of those who expected the enterprise to succeed even dreamt of its present magnitude or the meaning it would have for Alaska today or for the world tomorrow. Under Eskimo care these herds have increased at the rate of doubling in three years.

...Arctic Alaska will in due time support over seven million reindeer, producing about as much meat per year as fourteen million sheep, or several times the present mutton production of...Canada. Most people who know reindeer meat are enthusiastic about it and consider it the best meat on earth...

...Canada has from one to two millions of square miles of territory equally rich in vegetation and in the main better located, so far as transportation conditions are

concerned...

From the West coast of Hudson Bay we shall in a year have a railway, and we already have the ocean route to Europe.

The meat and wool problems of the world are becoming more acute every day and for an obvious reason...You can raise more food to the square mile by cultivating cereals or orchards than by raising cattle or sheep...In the temperate and equatorial lands it is only the semi-arid regions that are in any sense permanent grazing land, and even into them the progress of dry farming and of irrigation are making continual inroads...[In] southern British Columbia and in Alberta, irrigation has already converted huge areas from herds to orchards and wheat fields. And this development is bound to continue, constantly lessening the meat and wool producing lands of the world.

It is curious that the whole world should be as densely ignorant as it is of the climate and resources of the north, but it is deplorable, if it is not pathetic, that Canadians should share in the same impression. Fifty years ago it would have been difficult to convince the ordinary inhabitant of Montreal or Toronto that Manitoba was a fit place to live in or could ever be of value. And it is interesting to find that today the people of Manitoba have toward to country just beyond them the same attitude which the east had towards Manitoba fifty years ago, and with a similar lack of justification...The same man who is willing to farm on Lake Winnipeg or to fish there...will be willing to conduct a ranch or a fishery on Great Slave Lake...The north has undoubted resources in the well-known departments of mines and fisheries and has in addition the greater resource of a million square miles of excellent grazing land. These things taken together mean that the northern half of our country is on the threshold of the same sort of steady development as that which has made our middle west one of the great food producing regions of the world.

...While reindeer are important in our future development, the domestication of the musk ox would be even more important...This animal is the only important one of which Canadians have a monopoly.

If we do it and do it on a large scale...we shall through these two animals within the next twenty-five years convert northern Canada, from a land of practically no value, to the great permanent wool, and milk and meat producing country of the western hemisphere...When the rest of the world has ceased to produce considerable quantities of meat and wool because of the greater profit to be obtained for cereals and

orchards, this belt of the world will attain an importance unrealized today..."<sup>39</sup>

That only three days later Meighen called for the formation of a royal commission to study the livestock potential of both animals clearly reveals the public appeal of Stefansson's ideas and is a tribute to his promotional abilities. The minister confided to his close friend J.S. McLean that Stefansson's speech had made "a pronounced impression" and invited him to sit on the Commission, explaining "The project in essence, is a business project. My idea is to have a report upon it by a body of business men in whose personnel an element of the imaginative will have a place."<sup>40</sup>

Although Meighen had the power to encourage the grazing industry by granting leases, he chose instead to have the question studied by a commission, apparently because the "whole matter involved so many considerations and appeared to be of such importance to a future policy of development...".<sup>41</sup> It was recognized that the introduction of reindeer and the domestication of the muskox, a protected

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<sup>39</sup>. NAC, RG 85, vol. 661, file 3767, press release, 6 May 1919.

<sup>40</sup>. NAC, Arthur Meighen Papers, MG 26, I, vol. 7, pp. 4122-4123, Arthur Meighen to J.S. McLean, 9 May 1919.

<sup>41</sup>. Canada, Parliament, **Sessional Papers**, "Report of the Commissioner of Dominion Parks", 1919-20, p. 13.



species since 1917, on the scale proposed by Stefansson would be a radical departure from the government's policy of protecting wildlife and would seriously intrude upon the natives' current lifestyle. It was implicitly understood that the caribou would be exploited in one way or another, and that the natives would have to adapt to the new grazing industries in order to survive.

The Privy Council approved the formation of the Royal Commission to Investigate the Possibilities of the Reindeer and Musk-Ox Industries in the Arctic and Sub-Arctic of Canada on 20 May 1919. Members of the Commission were: John Rutherford, Railway Commissioner, Chairman; James McLean, Manager of Harris Abattoir Company; James Harkin, Commissioner of Dominion Parks; and Vilhjalmur Stefansson, arctic explorer. The Commission was to make "...a thorough investigation of the subject from a business and national standpoint...".<sup>42</sup>

The Royal Commission held four public hearings in Ottawa between 24 January and 12 May, 1920. Stefansson, as the only member somewhat familiar with the reindeer industry and musk ox, played a key role in the selection of the 35 (White) witnesses who volunteered to be interviewed.

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<sup>42</sup>. NAC, P.C.1079, 20 May 1919. The report for the Privy Council was written jointly by Harkin and Stefansson, at Meighen's request.

Ironically, the Commission did not readily endorse Stefansson's convictions regarding the superiority of the muskox or the desirability of their commercial exploitation. In fact, the commissioners called for a survey of the remaining muskox, the prevention of any further slaughter of the animals, and the creation of a government station in one of the islands where they were found to establish a nucleus of domesticated muskox. They could be moved later to a more accessible point where "their development from a national economic standpoint" could be carried on. According to Harkin, the Commissioners had the southern portion of Ellesmere Island in mind for the station, and Southampton Island in Hudson Bay as the muskox's eventual destination.<sup>43</sup> That objective explains why the Commission had Southampton, Coats and Mansell islands in Hudson Bay set aside by order in council on 10 March, 1920.<sup>44</sup>

Although the commissioners recommended the establishment of several herds of reindeer in the North---the reverend Walton's district was mentioned in particular---they once more downplayed commercialization. Reindeer would first provide for the needs of the natives, then would sustain

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<sup>43</sup>. NAC, James Harkin Papers, MG 30, E169, vol. 1, James Harkin to J.D. Craig, 1 March 1922.

<sup>44</sup>. NAC, P.C. 522, 10 March 1920.

future resource exploitation, and finally would lay the foundation for a future commercial meat industry. Thus the locations chosen to introduce reindeer would reflect that order of priority and other factors such as available forage. Natives would be taught how to protect and handle the herds by competent Lapps so that they could eventually become herders and owners of reindeer as in Alaska.

Fearing that reindeer would be carried off by migratory caribou herds that roamed the mainland between Hudson Bay and the Alaska border, the commissioners advised against granting grazing leases before field studies had confirmed the feasibility of introducing reindeer there. Moreover, they recognized the value of the barren-ground caribou as a national asset in its own right and recommended that it be surveyed, protected and studied. They pointed out that in Alaska reindeer had been introduced into areas devoid of caribou. It was suggested that reindeer ventures should be located so as not to interfere with or seek to exploit the caribou herds.

Finally, in recognition that the industry was still at the experimental stage, the Commission recommended that the government not wait on private industry to take the initiative; much time would be lost if they failed "whereas the careful development by the government of several small

experimental herds...would largely remove the elements of doubt and uncertainty and so tend to encourage private enterprise and investment" (Rutherford, McLean and Harkin 1922:22). Curiously, the Commission would not recommend "any definite policy with regard to the granting of further grazing leases to persons desirous of securing such concessions" (Rutherford, McLean and Harkin 1922:37). Yet it supported Stefansson's application for a grazing lease to more than 100,000 square miles of southern Baffin Island.

Stefansson sensed that the Commission would not endorse his vision (Stefansson 1964:265; Diubaldo 1978:145). He resigned from the Commission on 12 March 1920, after applying for the lease on 8 March, explaining to Meighen that he had accomplished his purpose and that action was now the order of the day:

**"The attention of Canada has been fixed upon the northern prairies and their resources. That done, development is sure to come, and inside of fifty years the grasslands north of the treeline will be putting upon the world markets more meat than all Canada is producing today.**

**To bring that result about...I feel that on the Commission I cannot be of so much use to that end as I could outside of it...There are many who are capable of judging but apparently few who are willing to devote much of their time to awakening the interest of the people in that part of the country which, through ignorance, many Canadians suppose inaccessible and valueless. Especially is it important to get at least one sound company to demonstrate on a large scale the great opportunities for capital if invested in the North. To be free for such propaganda work as I consider**

**desirable I should like to resign from the commission..."<sup>45</sup>**

In fact, Stefansson had been privately seeking to raise capital for a reindeer venture since being named to the Commission, if not before. He met with little success, however, for most investors thought that "if there were any money in such a scheme the Hudson's Bay Company would have taken it up long ago."<sup>46</sup>

Resigned to the inevitable, Stefansson contacted the Hudson's Bay Company agent in New York in October 1919 and was invited to London, where he outlined his business proposal before the directors on 25 March, 1920.<sup>47</sup> Afterwards, Stefansson reported back to Harkin that the Company was willing to be involved "on substantially the terms we outlined before I left Ottawa", provided the Canadian government granted them an exclusive grazing lease. In return, if everything went well, they were ready to import 5000 to 10,000 head per year over several years. That, pointed out Stefansson, "...will make the industry of national importance within less than half the time it took

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<sup>45</sup>. NAC, RG 84, vol. 166, file U226-1, Viljalmur Stefansson to Arthur Meighen, 12 March 1920.

<sup>46</sup>. *Ibid.*, Viljalmur Stefansson to Robert White, 2 September 1923.

<sup>47</sup>. See NAC, RG 85, vol. 1477, file 270-8-1 (1), Hudson's Bay Reindeer Company, Report for 1921-1922.

the Americans to develop theirs to the same point." Equally important, the company was willing "...to be exceedingly liberal in their attitude to the Government in everything looking towards the encouragement of the industry among the Eskimo...". Finally, they would go ahead with "...the plan of domesticating and developing the musk ox without any subsidy from the Government...".<sup>48</sup>

Stefansson went on to explain why the Company required so little convincing:

"One reason why the people here in England are so eager to go ahead with this is that the country is still on food rations and everyone is acutely conscious of the food problems of the future. Another reason is that the reindeer industry in north Russia is attracting a great deal of interest in England, and the only thing that keeps people from going ahead with it in that country on a large scale is the present unsettled political condition."<sup>49</sup>

Earlier, the Hudson's Bay Company had founded a Hudson's Bay North Russia Company to exploit Russian fur and reindeer resources.

The project, Harkin wrote to Deputy Minister William Cory, would test

"the commercial possibilities of the reindeer industry in Northern Canada under auspices which would appear to guarantee success if success is possible... The Company proposes to subscribe the necessary capital from among its own members and not do any stock jobbing. With its existing

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48. Ibid., file 270-8-2 (1), Vilhjalmur Stefansson to James Harkin, 12 April 1920.

49. Ibid.

organization and its 250 years of experience in the North no institution should be in a more favourable position to handle a matter of this kind."

Harkin was increasingly concerned that if the commercial exploitation of reindeer was not taken on by private enterprise, the strength of "public opinion would force the Government to embark in experimental work." "While it seems to me that the Government will in any case probably find it desirable to establish small experimental herds in various portions of the North", he cautioned that "it would be very dangerous for the Government to embark in the reindeer business on a commercial scale. The opportunity of getting the Hudson Bay to take up the commercial side of the matter will relieve the Government of responsibility with regard to that feature of the reindeer proposition."<sup>50</sup> The Minister of the Interior was authorized to grant Stefansson a grazing lease on 29 May, 1920, on the basis of the industry's potential, his association with the Hudson's Bay Company, his northern expertise and past services.<sup>51</sup>

The final report of the Royal Commission, dated 1 April, 1921, was tabled by Prime Minister Meighen in the House of

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<sup>50</sup>. *Ibid.*, James Harkin to William Cory, 27 May 1920.

<sup>51</sup>. NAC, P.C. 1229, 29 May 1920. The lease was drawn up on 1 June and signed by Stefansson on 11 June. A copy is available in NAC, RG 85, vol. 1147, file 270-8-2.

Commons on 4 May, 1921.<sup>52</sup> Meighen indicated on 4 June, 1921, during question period, that the Commission's recommendations were being studied by the Minister of the Interior.<sup>53</sup> The issue was not, however, raised again in Parliament, perhaps because the report did not support Stefansson's contention that the North would soon become the major wool-, meat-, and milk-producing area of the Western Hemisphere.

Despite the lack of parliamentary attention, Harkin's approach to northern issues was very much informed by the findings and cautious recommendations of the Royal Commission. From his point of view, there was no longer any question that the caribou herds and the Inuit were threatened. Nor was there any doubt in his mind as to the solution to the problem:

**"Evidence is rapidly accumulating which shows that on account of the introduction of firearms in the north, the caribou, which is the main food supply for the natives of the North, is very rapidly diminishing. It is quite clear that in a comparatively few years the matter of food supply for the natives of the north will become a very serious one and it is felt that for the protection of the natives (and on the natives' labour largely depends the development of**

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52. Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, *Journals*, 4 May 1921, p. 262. This report contained 685 pages. Because there were many requests for copies from the media and the public, a 99 page report containing the recommendations and some appendices was printed in 3500 copies in 1922. The 586 pages of evidence were not printed. See NAC, RG 85, vol. 592, file 724.

53. Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, *Debates*, 4 June, 1921, p.4543.



the north) the Government will have to take steps to ensure a food supply. It seems quite clear that the best way of meeting the situation is to do as the Americans did in Alaska..."<sup>54</sup>

Harkin became the strongest partisan of government involvement in the reindeer industry, at least in its initial stages. He supported Stefansson's lease only by way of exception and his pro-government attitude carried over into his relations with the North American Reindeer Company and other concerns.<sup>55</sup> When the North American Reindeer Company, which had failed to introduce any reindeer into its concession, pressured the Department for an extension of its contract in 1921, Harkin advised Deputy Minister Cory against its renewal. He pointed to the Commission's stand on granting grazing leases on the mainland and he recommended that the order-in-council which gave the minister the authority to grant such leases be rescinded.<sup>56</sup> His main argument, however, was that the industry "would receive a black eye if the department encouraged people to spend money on reindeer development when there are so many problems such as that of absorption by wild animals; adequate protection

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<sup>54</sup>. NAC, MG 30, E169, vol.1, James Harkin to J.D. Craig, 1 March 1922.

<sup>55</sup>. Harkin did not support Stefansson's 1920 application for a lease in the Mackenzie valley (NAC, RG 35, vol. 1147, file 270-8-2 (1)) and another one by the Arctic Exchange and Publishing Company (NAC, MG 30, E169, vol.1, James Harkin to J.D. Craig, 1 March 1922).

<sup>56</sup>. It was rescinded by NAC, P.C. 1721, 27 May 1921.

of the wild caribou, etc., remain unsolved."<sup>57</sup> He insisted instead that the government establish "small experimental reindeer herds with a view to an intelligent and gradual development of the reindeer industry and the avoidance of mistakes which might seriously delay the development of the industry."<sup>58</sup>

Harkin's commitment to see the reindeer industry established on a sound basis while providing for the future of the natives found a natural outlet through the earlier acquisition of the Grenfell herd. Owing to labor shortages during the war, disease and sustained poaching by local residents, Grenfell's herd went from a high of about 1200 to only 93 reindeer by 1916. By then, the board of directors of the International Grenfell Association had concluded that this kind of venture required extensive government backing to succeed.<sup>59</sup> Since the government of Newfoundland showed no desire to help, Grenfell hoped that Canada would take over the herd for the benefit of the Inuit. He lobbied the government from France through his agent in Ottawa, Jose Muchado, who passed on his correspondence to the

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57. NAC, RG 85, vol. 661, file 3751, James Harkin to William Cory, 13 June 1921.

58. *Ibid.*, James Harkin to William Cory, 11 June 1921.

59. **Third Annual Report of the International Grenfell Association For the Year Ended 31 December 1916**, p. 3. In NAC, William Mackenzie King Papers, MG 26 J6, vol. 15, file 123.

Superintendent General of Indian Affairs Duncan Campbell Scott in November 1916.<sup>60</sup> Scott ordered some publications on reindeer herding in Alaska and asked the Inspector of Indian Agencies C.C. Parker for a report on the subject.<sup>61</sup> Meanwhile, Grenfell approached the Quebec government to secure a 10-year lease to some land between Lobster Bay and St. Augustine on the north shore of the St. Lawrence. In February 1917, he offered Scott about 100 deer and the lease to Lobster Bay.<sup>62</sup>

Scott accepted, with the full support of the Minister of the Interior, apparently to establish a new resource base for the Indians and for the possibilities the animal offered as a means of transportation.<sup>63</sup> That this offer was accepted is surprising given the apparent consensus of opinion that

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<sup>60</sup>. NAC, RG 10, vol. 4062, file 398746-1.

<sup>61</sup>. Parker initially suggested that the Department could do little because the Inuit were not their responsibility. This is rather curious since Scott later admitted that he was responsible for the Inuit: "A few years ago it was decided that this Department would assume whatever responsibility arose from the contact of these people with civilization. There is no Order in Council and no legislation on the subject, but Parliament provides us with funds to relieve destitution amongst them and to provide medical attendance..." (NAC, RG 85, vol. 791, file 6217, Duncan C. Scott to Arthur Meighen, 21 November 1918).

<sup>62</sup>. NAC, RG 10, vol. 4062, file 398746-1, Jose Muchado to Duncan C. Scott, 24 February 1917.

<sup>63</sup>. *Ibid.*, Duncan C. Scott to Arthur Meighen, 9 December 1918; also Duncan C. Scott to Herbert B. Ames, 4 May 1917 and Duncan C. Scott to Eug. Rouillard, 11 May 1917.

existed in the Department of the Interior at that time--- indeed throughout the government---on the utility of Norwegian reindeer. Perhaps the possibility of acquiring the herd at almost no cost to the government was simply too tempting. Ironically, it proved to be an embarrassment from the beginning.

Because of war conditions, the 126 reindeer left in the herd could not be moved to the new range until the fall of 1918. Scott tried to obtain Lapps to manage the herd, but to no avail. As early as 1 August, 1919, Scott wrote to Meighen that the experiment "...was rather forced upon us by the Grenfell Association."<sup>64</sup> By January 1920, he wanted to be relieved of the project, claiming that "...this undertaking is the cause of constantly increasing trouble and expense to the Department and I do not think that it comes within the proper scope of our work."<sup>65</sup> One wonders why he agreed to the transfer in the first place.

Scott suggested that the Animal Division of Dominion Parks take over the herd, but he threatened to look elsewhere if this overture fell through. In the end, the matter was referred to the Royal Commission, which recommended that the

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<sup>64</sup>. NAC, RG 85, vol. 1148, file 270-8-3 (1B), Duncan C. Scott to Arthur Meighen, 1 August 1919.

<sup>65</sup>. *Ibid.*, Duncan C. Scott to Arthur Meighen, 12 January 1920.

herd be placed under the Commissioner of Dominion Parks.<sup>66</sup> Harkin had refused in the past, but he felt he could hardly do so now despite a heavy workload. On the one hand, he was responsible for the administration of the North West Game Act and was a member of the Advisory Board on Wild Life Protection. On the other, his work on the Royal Commission convinced him that the time had arrived for the government to take steps to develop a reindeer industry to benefit northern natives.<sup>67</sup>

Harkin planned to ship the herd, or part of it, in the summer of 1921 to where he felt it was needed most---on the east coast of Hudson Bay.<sup>68</sup> The Reverend Mr. Walton had intensified his efforts to have reindeer introduced there, particularly since it had become evident that the North American Reindeer Company would be unable to carry out its plans.<sup>69</sup> In the meantime, from an administrative point of view, Lobster Bay was thought to be a much more convenient point than any in the Northwest Territories. As it turned

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66. *Ibid.*, John Rutherford to J.G. Mitchell, 12 May 1920.

67. *Ibid.*, James Harkin to William Cory, 14 June 1920.

68. *Ibid.*

69. See *Spectator, Life Conditions of the Natives Races On the East Coast of Hudson's Bay*, [1921] (Anglican Church of Canada General Synod Archives, M.S.C.C., C.S. 75-103, series 3-2, box 57, Eskimo-Rev. W.G. Walton, 1918-27). Walton was anxious that a firm commitment be taken before upcoming elections.

out, however, Lobster Bay was almost as inaccessible. Like Scott, Harkin was unable to recruit competent herders. The herd, which had showed no increase under previous management, slowly increased to about 179 animals by 1922 from 126 in 1918. But Harkin did not transfer the herd to Hudson Bay as planned, apparently because he decided to wait until it reached 200 animals.<sup>70</sup>

On 1 January 1922, jurisdiction over the herd and implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission passed on to the newly created Northwest Territories and Yukon Branch. Harkin tried to impress the importance of this responsibility on the Director O.S. Finnie:

"...The government should develop small nucleus herds of reindeer at various points in the North and train the natives to look after them in order that when the caribou has largely disappeared the natives will still have a source of supply for food and clothing. I do not think that the government can side-step its responsibility to the natives in this reindeer matter. It has already allowed traders to penetrate the Far North and permitted the introduction of firearms. Both of these facts are the main factors in the disappearance of the natives food supply, seal as well as caribou."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>. NAC, RG 85, vol. 1147, file 270-8-3 (1), Maxwell Graham to Oswald Finnie, 3 February 1922. Also, we know that by then Harkin believed that the introduction of reindeer to this area was the responsibility of Indian Affairs and the province of Quebec. See NAC, RG 10, vol. 6818, file 488-4-4 (1), James Harkin to William Cory, 3 December 1921 and NAC, RG 85, vol. 1147, file 270-8-3 (1), J.B. Harkin to R.A. Gibson, 13 September 1922.

<sup>71</sup>. NAC, RG 85, vol. 1136, file 270-1-2 (1), James Harkin to Oswald Finnie, 23 January 1922.

Maxwell Graham immediately recommended that a thorough investigation be made of conditions at Lobster Bay. Since the herd served no useful purpose there---the Indians were never seriously involved--he advocated sending the herd to Hudson Bay.<sup>72</sup>

In the meantime, however, Harkin forwarded to Finnie a proposal he received from the owner of Anticosti Island. Henri Menier, the eccentric multi-millionaire "Chocolate King of France", was intent on transforming the huge island into a natural paradise for sportsmen. Since the turn of the century he had introduced moose, buffalo, elk, beavers, rabbits, mink and even frogs (Mackay 1979). He renewed an offer he had made four years earlier to harbour the reindeer on the island and return eventually five times the number landed to the government.<sup>73</sup>

On learning of Menier's offer, Graham recommended that the reindeer be transferred to Anticosti. He argued that the cost of continuing this experiment was too high and that the

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<sup>72</sup>. *Ibid.*, Maxwell Graham to Oswald Finnie, 14 January and 18 January 1922.

<sup>73</sup>. *Ibid.*, extract from letter by Geo. Martin-Zede, 22 December 1921, forwarded by J.B. Harkin to Oswald Finnie, 23 January 1922. His original proposal is embodied in a telegram to Scott, dated 17 August 1918, in NAC, RG 10, vol. 4062, file 398746-1.

expense of shipping reindeer from Norway to Hudson Bay would not be much more than transporting them from Lobster Bay.<sup>74</sup> Even the Reverend Walton had indicated that he was not entirely favourable to their transfer to his district, considering them too few in number and too wild.<sup>75</sup>

Finnie decided to open discussions with the administrator of Anticosti Island. Two events during the summer definitely tipped the balance in favour of Menier. First, an inspection of the animals by Dr. Seymour Hadwen, formerly assistant pathologist in the Department of Agriculture and currently investigating reindeer diseases for the United States Biological Survey, revealed that the overall condition of the herd was poor on account of herding practices. He recommended that the government obtain a better class of reindeer from Alaska for the Northwest Territories.<sup>76</sup> Second, an official inquiry was held into the actions of the field officer responsible for the herd as a result of

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<sup>74</sup>. NAC, RG 85, vol. 1147, file 270-8-3 (1), Maxwell Graham to Oswald Finnie, 4 February 1922.

<sup>75</sup>. Walton argued that the overhead costs for transporting 500 to 700 reindeer from Europe would not be much more than shipping 160 reindeer from Lobster Bay and would provide results more quickly. See *Spectator, Life Conditions of the Native Races On the East Coast of Hudson's Bay*, [1921], p. 16 (Anglican Church of Canada General Synod Archives, M.S.C.C., G.S. 75-103, series 3-2, box 57, Eskimo-Rev. W.G. Walton, 1918-27).

<sup>76</sup>. See NAC, RG 85, vol. 1147, file 270-8-3 (1), Hadwen's report 26 June 1922.



charges laid against him, for illegally shooting fowl, by the Chief Federal Migratory Bird Officer for Ontario and Quebec. Although he was exonerated of all charges, the manager resigned nevertheless.<sup>77</sup>

These difficulties left officials in the Northwest Territories and Yukon Branch less than enthusiastic about the experiment. Harkin alone still opposed the transfer of the herd to Anticosti Island:

"The Department has a definite duty to perform in the matter of the development of reindeer herds for the natives of the Northwest Territories. I do not think that it can safely delay action in this connection. If it disposes of the present herd to the Anticosti people it will simply mean that it will have to purchase that many additional animals in northern Europe or Alaska or Siberia...I would suggest that the Department give [the Royal Commission's] recommendations careful consideration and decide on its general policy in that connection before it takes any further steps on the question of transferring the deer to Anticosti."<sup>78</sup>

But the question was out of Harkin's hands. At a meeting of Department officials in October or November 1922, the decision was made to accept Menier's offer.<sup>79</sup> The Minister of the Interior Charles Stewart approved the transfer of the herd to Anticosti Island about 15 December, 1922. Judging

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<sup>77</sup>. The investigation is documented in *Ibid.*, vol. 608, file 2623.

<sup>78</sup>. *Ibid.*, vol. 1147, file 270-8-3 (1), James Harkin to R.A. Gibson, 13 September 1922.

<sup>79</sup>. *Ibid.*, Oswald Finnie to William Cory, 11 December 1922. Harkin was not present.

from his correspondence with Prime Minister Mackenzie King, Stewart took a dim view of reindeer experiments:

"...I think you will agree that the acceptance of the offer of the owners of Anticosti Island to take over the herd will relieve the Federal Exchequer considerably.

These experiments in reindeer raising cost a lot of money and so far the results achieved have been very disappointing. The experiment on the Island of Anticosti will be conducted under the most favourable conditions at no expense to the Dominion Government and I would respectfully suggest that we would be well advised to defer the consideration of any further suggestions for the development of the reindeer industry until we see just what success attends the Anticosti venture.

Under our agreement with the owner of the Island of Anticosti we are to have returned to us a substantial number of reindeer from the natural increase of the herd, and I think that arrangements should be made for the disposal of these to organizations which are willing to go ahead with development. This would obviate the necessity of the Dominion Government undertaking further costly experiments."<sup>80</sup>

The Lobster Bay venture cost \$42,470.04. Although 145 reindeer were landed on 29 August, 1923, at Ellis Bay, Anticosti Island, nothing came of it. The herd increased to 190 by 1924 but declined rapidly afterwards. The cause was never ascertained, but disease and lack of forage were suspected. At last count . 1945, there were 8 or 9 reindeer left.<sup>81</sup>

The Baffin Island experiment was equally disastrous. As

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<sup>80</sup>. Ibid., Charles Stewart to William Mackenzie King, 15 February 1923.

<sup>81</sup>. See NAC, RG 84, vol. 2131, file U226, summary of history of Anticosti herd by O.H. Hewitt, 14 June 1947.

agreed with the Hudson's Bay Company, Stefansson transferred his lease on 6 November, 1920 to a subsidiary, the Hudson's Bay Reindeer Company Limited, incorporated on 28 September, 1920.<sup>82</sup> In return, he was granted a number of privileges including a directorship in the new company. His old friend S.T. Storkerson, whom he recommended for the position of resident manager, spent the month of August on Baffin Island. He reported that the flora in the area of Amadjuak Bay was most suitable for reindeer.<sup>83</sup> Acting on this report, and Stefansson's advice, the Company purchased 687 reindeer in Norway in May 1921, and secured the services of six Samek families. The NASCOPIE landed 556 live reindeer on Baffin Island on 1 November.

A year later, a most discouraging report reached company headquarters:

**"In spite of the endeavours of the herdsmen, the herd on landing commenced to scatter in all directions in search of food...the animals would take no notice of the dogs.**

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<sup>82</sup>. For the letters patent, see NAC, RG 85, vol. 1477, file 270-8-1 (1).

<sup>83</sup>. Hudson's Bay officials had a lot of faith in Stefansson. They never doubted Storkerson's glowing report, even though he was not a recognized authority in reindeer matters: **"Never before in any of the countries that I have travelled have I seen reindeer lichen in such profuse abundance on stoney ground...Grasses, mosses, reindeer lichens, and flowers are abundant all over the parts visited by me, so much so that I formed the personal opinion that Baffin Island as regards vegetation is better qualified as reindeer country than northern Norway where reindeer have been raised for centuries."** (quoted in Diubaldo 1978:153).

...no power on earth could have kept the reindeer together, and ...if it had been possible to do so, the herd would have starved.

Attempts were made to search for the lost animals. The Lapps started in pulkas, drawn by the draught deer, but these were so weak that they would lie down...Search parties were sent out on a larger scale, and small herds of 50 deer were taken with the parties as lures. They succeeded in bringing in a few of the stragglers, but at the same time others strayed from the main herd.

...the herd in September, 1922...numbered 180 animals, including calves.

Steps...were taken to look for better feedings grounds...in the districts which Mr. Storkerson had reported favourable, but they were unable to discover any better pasturage than that near the coast.

It is thought that Mr. Storkerson, not being conversant in the herding of reindeer, may have mistaken the Elk moss-which he would have seen in Norway - as being the moss suitable for reindeer. The caribou will live on it, but the reindeer will not..."<sup>84</sup>

Despite the bad news, the experiment was to continue "so that it might be apparent that every endeavour had been made to husband reindeer successfully in Baffin Island."<sup>85</sup> There was a further reduction in 1923, despite the birth of fawns, to 167 animals. But that was cause enough for renewed hopes, especially for Stefansson whose reputation as an expert on northern development was at stake. An eternal optimist, he wrote to a friend:

"...We are now going on, the Directors feeling as I do that we have established the point that the climate of Baffin

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<sup>84</sup>. Hudson's Bay Reindeer Company, Report for 1921-1922. See NAC, RG 85, vol. 1477, file 270-8-1 (1).

<sup>85</sup>. Ibid.

Island is at least moderately suited to reindeer and that the industry has a secure future. I think this will prove to be one of the turning points in the history of Canada. I see no reason now why we may not be able to build up in 20 years in Canada as great a reindeer industry as the Americans have built up in 30 years in Alaska".<sup>86</sup>

The herd apparently reached an equilibrium with the environment for in 1924 it numbered in the 160's again. By then the Samek had left and were replaced by Inuit. But bringing in more deer was out of the question until an expert examined the situation on the ground.<sup>87</sup> In 1925 the Company secured the services of W.T.Lopp, former Chief of the Alaska Division of the Department of Education, who had supervised the reindeer industry in Alaska for many years. Lopp's report, submitted in 1926, shattered the hopes of the shareholders, for he confirmed that the pasturage was insufficient to sustain a major industry.<sup>88</sup>

Plans to carry out further experiments in the Hudson Bay area were postponed when it became known that the Canadian government was planning to survey the vegetation in the western arctic with a view to introducing reindeer there.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>. NAC, RG 84, vol. 166, file U226-1, Vilhjalmur Stefansson to Robert White, 2 September 1923.

<sup>87</sup>. NAC, RG 85, vol. 1477, file 270-8-1 (1), Richard Peirson to Oswald Finnie, 24 June 1925.

<sup>88</sup>. *Ibid.*, vol. 759, file 4824, William T. Lopp to Charles Stewart, 23 April 1929.

<sup>89</sup>. *Ibid.*

In March, 1927, the Company officially advised Deputy Minister William Cory that the experiment had failed.<sup>90</sup> More than \$200,000 were reportedly lost in the venture (Stefansson 1964:268).

Meanwhile, in Ottawa, the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission had bogged down over jurisdictional disputes between the Department of Indian Affairs and the Northwest Territories and Yukon Branch.<sup>91</sup> Once the decision to transfer the Lobster Bay herd to Anticosti Island was taken, Finnie chose to leave the issue of introducing reindeer to the east coast of Hudson Bay to the Department of Indian Affairs, which was responsible for the natives there, and the province of Quebec. But the matter was not as clear-cut for the Northwest Territories. Finnie, whose branch carried out extensive functions there, including the administration of the North West Game Act, thought that the care of the Inuit was a natural extension of his responsibilities. On the other hand, Scott's

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<sup>90</sup>. *Ibid.*, vol. 1477, file 270-8-1 (1), H.R. Charlewood to William Cory, 18 March 1927.

<sup>91</sup>. Despite the minister's reluctance to have anything to do with reindeer, some preliminary steps were taken in 1923 to survey the islands in Hudson Bay set aside for reindeer herding on the recommendation of the Royal Commission. Nothing came of this, as far as I know, probably on account of the jurisdictional dispute. See *Ibid.*, vol. 1137, file 270-1-2 (3A) and Canada, Parliament, **Sessional Papers**, "Annual Report of the Department of the Interior For the Fiscal Year Ended March 31, 1924".

department had been considered the custodian of the Inuit on an informal basis since the 1880's.<sup>92</sup> After some indecision on the minister's part, the question was settled in Scott's favour on 19 July 1924 by an amendment to the Indian Act. Matters affecting the Inuit were to be referred to Scott while Finnie would handle wildlife and other responsibilities.<sup>93</sup> This arrangement annoyed Finnie.

Scott had to rely on Finnie's close cooperation to carry out his mandate, since he had no infrastructure in the Arctic. This encouraged Finnie to continue lobbying Deputy Minister William Cory to have the Inuit placed directly under his branch. Meanwhile, he did his best to help the Inuit without infringing upon Scott's duties. In response to more alarming reports concerning the status of the barren-ground caribou in the Mackenzie District, he sent W.H.B. Hoare to the central arctic to carry out an extended study of the situation.<sup>94</sup> He also convinced Dr. Knud Rasmussen, who had recently completed an historic overland trek from Greenland to Alaska, to come to Ottawa to present first-hand

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<sup>92</sup>. See the annual reports of the department and NAC, RG 85, vol. 791, file 6217.

<sup>93</sup>. This internal dispute is well documented in NAC, RG 85, vol. 1127, file 250-1-1 (1A). It is interesting to note that the Minister of the Interior ruled in favour of Finnie in November 1923, but changed his mind later.

<sup>94</sup>. Finnie acted on a resolution of the Advisory Board On Wild Life Protection. See *Ibid.*, vol. 145, file 400-6 (1), minutes, 22 February 1924.

information on conditions throughout the Arctic. In fact, the question of introducing reindeer to the Northwest Territories and other matters affecting the Inuit were held in abeyance for some months in anticipation of his visit.<sup>95</sup>

Concurrently, two individuals, angered by what they perceived as neglect of the Inuit by traders and government alike, independently resorted to the public forum to prod the government to action. A mining engineer and trader by the name of Henry Toke Munn presented arguments for the preservation of the Inuit on economic, humanitarian and political grounds.<sup>96</sup> The Reverend William Walton, now retired in Toronto, renewed with vigour the campaign begun eight years before to convince the government to introduce reindeer on the east coast of Hudson Bay to replace the extinct caribou. Numerous newspaper articles, letters, personal visits and exposure in the House of Commons effectively sensitized the public and politicians of both parties to the condition of the natives in his district.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>. See *Ibid.*, vol. 584, file 573 (1); vol. 1127, file 250-1-1 (1A); and vol. 1149, file 270-8-5 (1).

<sup>96</sup>. See, for example, "The Passing Eskimo", *National Life*, March 1924 and "Why Not Reindeer For Our Arctic Prairies?", *Toronto Star Weekly*, 27 June 1925. Memorials and correspondence with government officials can be found in NAC, RG 85, vol. 1127, file 250-1-1 (1A) and vol 1135, file 270-1-1 (1).

<sup>97</sup>. Walton's campaign in Ottawa is well documented in NAC, RG 85, vol. 1149, file 270-8-5 (1). See also Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, *Debates*, 26 June 1925, pp.



Now that the issue of the future of the Inuit was a matter of some public debate, it is not surprising that high expectations surrounded Rasmussen's visit to Ottawa in April 1925. Interviewed by members of the Advisory Board On Wild Life Protection, Rasmussen reported that there were about 5,248 Inuit in the North. He argued that their future should be assured if development was to occur. On the topic of reindeer, he thought they would have to be introduced to supplement or replace caribou entirely in some areas, and he favoured introducing them where caribou were absent. Munn had recently indicated that the Lomen Reindeer and Trading Corporation of Nome, Alaska, was willing to drive 2,000 reindeer overland to the Mackenzie Delta. Rasmussen thought that the plan could succeed.<sup>98</sup>

Rasmussen's views clearly impressed Finnie, for only a week after his visit, he noted: "...[Dr. Rasmussen] strongly recommended that the transplanting of [reindeer] to the Northern shores of the Mackenzie district should meet with the same success as in Alaska. It seems if we are to do anything to preserve the Eskimo and also to conserve the wild life, the introduction of reindeer will be the

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5025-5027.

<sup>98</sup>. *Ibid.*, vol. 145, file 400-6 (1), Minutes of the Advisory Board on Wild Life Protection, 29 and 30 April, 1 and 5 May 1925.

solution."<sup>99</sup> Fortuitously, on the same day, Finnie received a letter from Leonard Baldwin, New York agent for Lomen, which confirmed what had been reported by Munn.<sup>100</sup> This initial contact was followed-up by several exchanges of correspondence, and meetings between Deputy Minister William Cory and Baldwin, and with Dr. Nelson, head of the United States Biological Survey in Washington.

The Minister of the Interior Charles Stewart himself had a change of heart following Rasmussen's visit. He admitted that reindeer could be the answer to a number of problems in the North.<sup>101</sup> Because of the contradictory nature of the evidence at hand concerning local conditions in the Mackenzie District, and the lack of information on grazing possibilities, it was decided that nothing should be done until an investigator was sent in the field. A botanist was to be selected for the task because it was clear by now that the success of reindeer husbandry depended on available forage.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>. *Ibid.*, vol. 1135, file 270-1-1 (1), Oswald Finnie to Thomas Mulvey, 12 May 1925.

<sup>100</sup>. *Ibid.*, vol. 1149, file 270-8-5 (1), Leonard Baldwin to Oswald Finnie, 12 May 1925.

<sup>101</sup>. See Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, *Debates*, 26 June 1925, p. 5026.

<sup>102</sup>. For the relevant correspondence, see NAC, RG 85, vol. 1135, file 270-1-1 (1).

The search for a suitable Canadian candidate began in earnest in the spring of 1926, to no avail. By sheer coincidence, a young Danish botanist specializing in arctic botany had gone through Ottawa earlier and was now in the United States trying to mount an expedition to Baffin Island. A. Erling Porsild was an ideal candidate. A native of Greenland, he was accustomed to life in the North, he spoke Inuktitut and could handle dog teams. Moreover, his brother, Robert T. Porsild, a biologist, was also available. Since two men were required on account of the hardships to be faced, both were hired.<sup>103</sup>

The Porsild brothers left Ottawa for Alaska on 19 May, 1926, on a journey that would take 30 months and cover approximately 15,000 miles. Their mission, as emphasized by Finnie, was in the national interest:

"The object of your investigation will be to ascertain the suitability of the northern part of the Mackenzie District for the maintenance of reindeer. It is felt that the Eskimo cannot survive in our northern country unless there is abundance of caribou or reindeer for food and clothing, and without the Eskimo those areas will be of little value. We desire, therefore, to learn as much as possible of this country, with the object if your report is favourable, of purchasing herds in Alaska and driving them across country to whatever areas in the Mackenzie District may be selected by you.

This work...is one of extreme importance to Canada, and to the Eskimo people, and I am sure with your knowledge and experience of the North, you will be able to carry it on with satisfaction to this Department and with credit to

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103. Ibid.

yourselves."<sup>104</sup>

Understandably, these developments were not entirely to Reverend Mr. Walton's liking. It is ironic that while everyone freely admitted that the area of greatest need was actually the east coast of Hudson Bay, government officials were unwilling to introduce reindeer there. Initially, Finnie was reluctant to have anything to do with the question since the area was outside his jurisdiction. The transfer of Inuit matters from the Department of Indian Affairs to the Northwest Territories and Yukon Branch in 1927 did not, however, resolve the political stalemate. By then, the Federal government and the provincial government of Quebec were wrangling over whom had responsibility for these Inuit.<sup>105</sup>

The Porsild brothers had been only a few months in the field when newspapers began to carry stories about the Dominion Reindeer Company Limited of Vancouver. This concern planned to transfer a herd of 5,000 reindeer from Alaska to somewhere near Great Slave Lake to take advantage of a

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104. *Ibid.*, Oswald Finnie to the Porsild brothers, 19 May 1926.

105. The Deputy Minister of Justice W. Stuart Edwards insisted that Inuit residing outside the Northwest Territories were the responsibility of the provinces (NAC, RG 85, vol. 1149, file 270-8-5 (1), W. Stuart Edwards to William Cory, 4 January 1928). The issue actually raged on for years. See Diubaldo (1981).

longer transportation season to send meat to market.<sup>106</sup>

Sometime in the spring of 1927, the President of the company, Thomas Howard, met with Stewart and Cory seeking information on how to obtain a grazing lease in the Northwest Territories. They explained to Howard that the government was not in a position to formulate a policy on reindeer husbandry in the Northwest Territories, nor could they recommend a suitable range until the Porsild brothers completed their investigation. On the other hand, they indicated that if the Company chose to apply for a lease, the application would be given full consideration. Despite the warning concerning the lack of information about grazing possibilities, Cory suggested that the west coast of Hudson Bay might be the best area for their purposes, at least from the point of view of transportation and access to markets.

Earlier, as we know, the Royal Commission had recommended against reindeer herds on the mainland of the Northwest Territories; and the North American Reindeer Company in 1921 had not been able to renew its lease to the same area that was now proposed to the Dominion Reindeer Company. The government's position in 1927 was thus clearly a contradiction. Nevertheless, this decision was consistent

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<sup>106</sup>. Relevant correspondence concerning this company is in NAC, RG 85, vol. 772, file 5445.

with the government's *laissez-faire* philosophy towards development in the North. Because it relied on private enterprise to develop the North, it would not discourage a *bona fide* private venture as long as it did not reduce the natives to wards of the government. Also, it was hoped that the Company's scheme would meet Walton's insistent demands for reindeer.<sup>107</sup> Finally, the Royal Commissioners' fears were taken into account to some extent: as we shall see, the nature of the contract which followed differed substantially from the one secured by the North American Reindeer Company.

Howard applied on 21 March, 1928 for a grazing lease and permission to move a herd of 2,000 reindeer overland across the Yukon and the Northwest Territories to the west coast of Hudson Bay. While Finnie showed an obvious lack of enthusiasm about the project, Howard insisted and the Minister finally agreed to reserve approximately 40 square miles of land in the southeast corner of the Keewatin district for three years. That would allow the Company to make a survey of the area and introduce 25% of the herd to demonstrate the feasibility of the project. Once the Department was satisfied that local conditions were suitable, the minister would consider issuing a grazing lease to the Dominion Reindeer Company. Obviously, this

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<sup>107</sup>. Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, *Debates*, 6 June 1928, pp.3822-23.

agreement was much more in the nature of an experiment than a concession.

It is difficult to establish if Howard was truly motivated to attempt the venture, but it is clear that instead of investigating field conditions first, as the Department expected, he went about raising funds on the strength of his understanding with the government, which more often than not was misrepresented. An R.C.M.P. investigation revealed that salesmen covered the prairie provinces selling thousands of shares using a gadget to lure customers who were short of savings: having paid 10% in cash, clients were allowed to pay up the balance in installments by means of a clock which was wound up everyday by depositing 25 cents. At one point, Howard claimed to have at least 2,000 shareholders. When he was told to stop selling in Canada, he moved his sales campaign to the United States.

Fortunately for other unsuspecting customers, Howard's campaign was set back when **The Financial News of Western Canada**, based in Vancouver, exposed the stock-selling scheme on 15 April, 1929. **Saturday Night** also investigated the Company and ran a humorous feature on 7 September, 1929, entitled "Better Stick to Santa Claus". Predictably, there was a collective sigh of relief in the Department of the Interior when the agreement lapsed in 1931.

It is likely that this controversy convinced the government that it alone could or should carry the burden of introducing reindeer in the Northwest Territories. Moreover, there was a new sense of urgency about the issue. Hoare's investigations in the central Arctic between 1924 and 1926 laid the myth of caribou superabundance to rest and suggested that the era of subsistence living for the Inuit was rapidly coming to an end. According to Hoare, there were likely less than three million barren-ground caribou left on the mainland, a far cry from Seton's (1911:261-262) earlier estimate of 30 million or more. Hoare made a number of recommendations to protect the rapidly diminishing caribou. Recognizing that it would take time to rebuild the herds, if it wasn't too late already, he pressed for the introduction of reindeer in the western Arctic "on a small experimental scale so that an industry may develop against the time of need" (Hoare [1927]:41-43).

The return of the Porsild team to Ottawa on 26 October, 1928, was somewhat of an anticlimax. As expected, they reported that the coastal area between the Alaska-Yukon border and Cape Bathurst to the east could sustain reindeer--at least 250,000. Another 300,000 would thrive north and east of Great Bear Lake (Porsild 1929). Acting upon this favourable report, the Government of Canada contracted on 8



May, 1929, with the Lomen Reindeer Company for the delivery of 3,000 reindeer to the east side of the Mackenzie River Delta.<sup>108</sup>

A statement forwarded by the Minister of the Interior Charles Stewart to the Privy Council dated 18 April, 1929, justified the purchase in the following terms:

"Since the advent of the white man along the Arctic coast of the Mackenzie District, the natives have become more and more dependent upon him for a living. The white man brought with him firearms and ammunition which he distributed liberally among the natives in exchange for furs. As a result, the toll on the herds of caribou and other forms of wild life was great...There was a shortage of food and clothing and a further dependence upon the white man for these commodities. This had a detrimental effect upon the life and well being of the Eskimo and was a factor in seriously reducing them in numbers. Where, in years gone by, there had been four or five thousand Eskimos, there are today less than two thousand.

We have now in the Mackenzie District a condition similar to that in which Alaska found itself thirty years ago. Reindeer is an important factor in supplying both food and clothing as well as transportation for the natives and the United States Government determined to introduce reindeer as a means of assisting and improving the condition of the natives. They secured 1200 or 1300 animals, mainly from Siberia and as an indication of the success which followed, there are now nearly a million. The Eskimo of Alaska now have plenty to eat and wear and are reported to be a happy and contented people.

It is considered that the introduction of reindeer into the Mackenzie District is essential if the Eskimos are to be preserved and protected..."<sup>109</sup>

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108. For a copy of the contract see NAC, RG 85, vol. 1135, file 270-1-1 (1A). Reindeer were to be paid for only on delivery.

109. NAC, Records of the Privy Council, RG 2, vol. 1438, P.C. 745, "Statement regarding introduction of reindeer into the Mackenzie District of the North West

The introduction of reindeer to the Northwest Territories was consistent with the government's policy of helping northern Natives "meet the change caused by the depletion of wild life without becoming dependent upon external support".<sup>110</sup> But it is ironic and misleading that this policy was couched in terms of native survival and self-sufficiency. While the concern expressed for the welfare of the Inuit was real enough,<sup>111</sup> humanitarianism should not be confused with the political will to preserve the

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Territories", 18 April, 1929.

110. Canada, Parliament, **Sessional Papers**, "Annual Report of the Department of the Interior For the Year Ended March 31, 1927", p. 9.

111. The government conceded that it had a moral obligation to help the Inuit. Usually this was implicit, with some exceptions (for example, Canada, Parliament, **Sessional Papers**, "Annual Report For the Department of the Interior For the Year Ended March 31, 1929", p. 8). The Anglican Church was much more vocal about the matter: "It is assumed that if the [natives] have any just claims for consideration in regard to food, clothing, health, unemployment, administration of justice and education, those claims fall upon the whole of Canadian citizens through their government...They are fellow Canadians living within our own Dominion. They are engaged in an honorable but uncertain and unremunerative occupation. They are ministering to the comfort and luxury of more fortunate citizens while they, themselves, hunger and freeze and die without care. The call of humanity and of patriotism bids us...to come to their relief..." (Spectator, **Life Conditions of the Native Races On the East Coast of Hudson's Bay**, [1921]:1, Anglican Church of Canada General Synod Archives, M.S.C.C., G.S., 75-103, series 3-2, box 57, Eskimo-Rev. W.G. Walton, 1918-27).

independence and cultural distinctiveness of a people.<sup>112</sup> Indeed, in light of the government's history of paternalism and assimilationism towards Native peoples (Tobias 1983; Stanley 1983; Titley 1986), and its ethnocentric approach to wildlife conservation (Gottesman 1983:73-86), such claims are suspect at the best of times.

On the one hand, reindeer would "broaden the basis of subsistence of the natives and thereby conserve the game resources."<sup>113</sup> Since national parks had become a major source of revenue, and the conservation movement had gained in strength, wildlife came to be viewed as a resource of national importance (Foster 1978). Rightly or wrongly, Inuit were widely held responsible for the depletion of game in the Arctic since the introduction of rifles. One official of the Department concluded that the "greatest menace to wild life is the Eskimo", and proposed that "the basic remedy...would be to lead the natives into a civilized form of supporting themselves".<sup>114</sup> Similar sentiments are echoed

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112. Sovereignty was at issue here. As Deputy Minister William Cory commented at a meeting of the Northwest Territories Council, 10 December 1931, "it would be difficult to justify setting aside one-third of Canadian Territory for the exclusive benefit of the Natives...".

113. **Canada's Reindeer Herd** (Ottawa: Northwest Territories Administration, 1938), p. 8.

114. "Conservation of Wild Life in Those Parts of Northern Canada Inhabited by the Eskimo", by L.T. Burwash, [1925], in NAC, RG 85, vol. 757, file 4746.

in the published literature (Rutherford, McLean and Harkin 1922; Finnie 1931; Porsild 1935), the minutes of the Advisory Board On Wild Life Protection, and the minutes of the Northwest Territories Council. But Gottesman (1983), in a critical assessment of the rhetoric, has linked the rise of restrictions on traditional native economic activities to the ethnocentric "liberal-capitalist" ideology of the North American wildlife conservation movement.

The other major concern of the government was labour for northern development. Despite Stefansson's (1921) claims to the contrary, few people thought the Arctic was a "friendly" place for Whites. "The Eskimo", wrote one observer, "is the main asset of this country and by his disappearance from it will leave a large tract of barren land totally unproductive, as no other race of people would be able [to] thrive and make the natural resources of this area a means of benefit and profit to the larger business interests of the Dominion."<sup>115</sup> There was widespread support for the use of Inuit as substitutes for White labour in the North,

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<sup>115</sup>. NAC, RG 85, vol. 863, file 8276 (1), J.E.F. Wright to the Officer Commanding, Ottawa, 31 July, 1921. In 1924, Deputy Minister William Cory indicated that the Department would have to adopt a more paternalistic policy towards the Inuit on this account (NAC, RG 85, vol 1127, file 250-1-1 (1A), W.W. Cory to O. Finnie, 9 October 1924). Finnie wrote that the preservation of Inuit labour was the *raison d'etre* of the government's efforts in the Northwest Territories (Canada, Parliament, *Sessional Papers*, "Annual Report of the Department of the Interior for the Year Ended March 31, 1929", p.8).

although there were no immediate plans for development.

The introduction of reindeer would thus protect valuable wildlife and ensure the reproduction of a potentially useful manpower. Moreover, until northern development became a reality, reindeer herding, as the counterpart of agriculture and ranching elsewhere, would be an effective means to transmit the economic habits of the dominant society to the Inuit:

**"The change from a nomadic life, where each day is occupied by whatever work suggests itself, to a life that will, to a great extent, be one of fixed routine with certain necessary work that must be done in season, will develop in the native the rudiments of a systematic organized mode of living. When he becomes the owner of a herd of reindeer he will automatically become a producer and not simply a harvester and as his herd increases will be called upon to undertake the responsibilities of the ordinary business man."<sup>116</sup>**

Like the Canadian Indian policy of the day (Titley 1986), the ultimate aim of the reindeer project was the assimilation of the Inuit.

From the foregoing account, it is clear that the federal government's involvement in reindeer husbandry had a long and checkered history prior to 1929. Although the idea originated outside of government circles, it came to be championed by senior civil servants seeking a means to preserve the human and animal resources of the North. As is

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<sup>116</sup>. NAC, RG 85, vol. 1135, file 270-1-1 (2A), "Policy Regarding Reindeer", by Oswald Finnie, 7 July 1931.

often the case with speculative ventures, expectations of success far outstripped actual accomplishments. This did not augur well for the Canadian Reindeer Project, but the government was confident for it had purposely sought to avoid past mistakes by taking advantage of Alaskan expertise.

Although not assured by any means,<sup>117</sup> the transformation of the Inuit from hunter to herder did seem possible and appropriate. Unlike the Indian, who was characterized as having "...a very low mentality, and seems a dour, discontented fellow with no ambition to better his condition either materially or intellectually...", the Inuit was generally seen in a much more favorable light:

**"Intellectually, the Eskimo is capable of as high development as the average white man, as has been proven by experiments in education, both in Greenland and Alaska...Eskimos are provident, skillful in all their occupations, exceptionally industrious and keenly alert to grasp any opportunity that will improve their living conditions..."**

**...The Eskimos can be developed from wards into affluent and intelligent citizens, capable of managing the minor affairs of their own districts; and are destined, under the right direction, to become a most valuable asset to the country."<sup>118</sup>**

Indeed, officials hoped that the Inuit would soon take over

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<sup>117</sup>. Witnesses before the Royal Commission presented conflicting evidence on the likelihood of Natives becoming efficient herders (Rutherford et. al. 1922: 33-35).

<sup>118</sup>. NAC, RG 85, vol. 1127, file 250-1-1 (1A), W.H.B. Hoare to Oswald Finnie, 10 May 1927. See also Morrison (1985:142-161).

the reindeer because the intention was not to create a government industry. In the next chapter, we shall examine the extent of their success.

help greatly in making the Eskimo reindeer-minded. The experiment would entail very little risk...with the wholehearted cooperation of those in charge of the main herd...The worst that could happen would be that the herd eventually might return to the main herd..."<sup>20</sup> Although this step was considered by many officials a radical departure from the cautious approach of the past, the field staff conceded that Rufus would be sufficiently trained by the fall of 1938. The Interdepartmental Committee approved the plan 25 October, 1937.<sup>21</sup>

Charlie Rufus, who had joined the apprenticeship program in March 1936, and his father Rufus Kalealuk, owner of a schooner, were loaned 950 reindeer in December 1938. In his early thirties, Rufus understood and spoke English. He was married and had a family of six children, the two eldest being boys. The Rufus-Kalealuk herd was driven 240 km overland just west of Anderson River.<sup>22</sup>

The administration adopted the idea of a partnership---a native herder and a native hunter-trapper with a schooner---

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<sup>20</sup>. *Ibid.*, A.E. Porsild to Roy Gibson, 29 June 1937 and related correspondence in NAC, RG 85, vol. 841, file 7591 (1).

<sup>21</sup>. NAC, RG 85, vol. 837, file 7525 (1), Minutes of the Interdepartmental Reindeer Committee, 25 October 1937, and related correspondence over the summer of 1937.

<sup>22</sup>. The progress of this venture is documented in *Ibid.*, vol. 1145, file 270-7-2 (1) and (1A).



once they had received the appropriate training and assistance. In the meantime, the herd would remain in the hands of the government and be managed by appointed officials.<sup>4</sup> With a view to expand the industry to the east of the Mackenzie Delta by creating a number of herds, the slaughter of reindeer was to be restricted to surplus stock (mature steers, old and barren females) to maximize the growth of the herd. Inuit were to be trained in intensive herding techniques and other husbandry practices by Samek (Lapp) herders while serving 3-year apprenticeships. The question of subsequent ownership of reindeer was put off until qualified native herders became available.

It is revealing that rather than employ Alaskan Inuit to care for the herd and instruct Canadian Inuit in reindeer husbandry, three Samek families were brought over from Europe in 1931.<sup>5</sup> Porsild considered the Alaskans good herders, but he repeatedly indicated that "the experience of all [white] reindeer owners in Alaska points to the fact that only a very few Eskimos have the managing ability

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4. The idea of parcelling out the reindeer to the Inuit on their arrival was dismissed by Committee members. They feared that the "killer instinct" in the Inuit would take over and that the animals would be dispatched within six months.

5. The minister of the Department of the Interior approved this arrangement 5 June, 1931. See NAC, RG 85, vol. 1135, file 270-1-1 (2A), H.H. Rowatt to O.S. Finnie, 5 June 1931.

required to handle a herd independently. What is worse is that few natives can be depended upon to stay on a contract any longer than they feel inclined."<sup>6</sup> That was a remarkably negative assessment of a venture almost 40 years old, particularly since some 2,500 Inuit were reported to own reindeer in 59 herds ranging from a few hundred to 30,000 animals.<sup>7</sup>

In fact, it appears that most knowledgeable observers, when questioned closely, predicted that the Mackenzie Delta Inuit would be largely uninterested in herding. Commenting on their prosperity, they concluded that no progress would be made until the Depression started to make inroads in the fur markets.<sup>8</sup> Even Inuit immigrants with first hand experience with reindeer in Alaska were reported to be unwilling to try their hand at it again. After reviewing the issue, one government official questioned whether any Inuit would ever

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<sup>6</sup>. *Ibid.*, file 270-1-1 (2), A.E. Porsild to Oswald Finnie, 20 February 1930. See also *Ibid.*, vol. 822, file 7128 (1). Ironically, Lapps were considered almost as primitive as the Inuit. It was never the intention to entrust them with complete responsibility for the project. See, for example, the minutes of the Interdepartmental Reindeer Committee, 26 April 1934.

<sup>7</sup>. These data were obtained from the **Annual Report of the Governor of Alaska For the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1932**, in NAC, Records of the Canadian Wildlife Service, RG 109, vol. 26, file W.L.T. 200 (1).

<sup>8</sup>. Porsild made that point as early as 1928. It was confirmed by Diamond Jenness, John A. McDougal, Dr. J.A. Urghart and Father Fallaize. See the minutes of the Interdepartmental Reindeer Committee.

make satisfactory herders since "the experience in Alaska has been that the average Eskimo cannot readily adapt himself to this routine work."<sup>9</sup> Despite these doubts, however, the herd was here to stay. Moreover, not all observers were so pessimistic about the potential of the Inuit.<sup>10</sup>

Porsild had no difficulty convincing Committee members that "the progress and development of this new industry will be slow and it will take some years before the natives will realize the unquestionable advantages of the reindeer owner over the hunter and trapper".<sup>11</sup> He recommended that the herd be

"given time to establish itself on the new range, and, that at least during the first few years, the experiment be conducted more or less along the lines of an "object lesson" for the natives. By taking advantage of the local market in the delta for the surplus of meat and skins from the herd, the reindeer herd should as far as possible be made self-supporting. This quickly would give the natives an understanding of the economic value of a reindeer herd, not only as a producer of meat and skins for the use of the owner, but also as a source of income, more regular and dependable than that of the hunter or trapper."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>. NAC, RG 85, vol. 822, file 7128 (1), J. Lorne Turner to Roy A. Gibson, 12 March 1935.

<sup>10</sup>. R.M. Anderson and Seymour Hadwen, for example.

<sup>11</sup>. See NAC, RG 85, vol. 837, file 7525 (1), Minutes of 16 December 1932, letter, A.E. Porsild to H.E. Hume, 23 November 1932.

<sup>12</sup>. Ibid.

Drawing on American experience, Committee members concluded that recruiting graduates from the Church-run Eskimo Residential Schools would be wise. Archdeacon of the Arctic A.L. Fleming summarized the advantages of this approach: "These lads having been educated up to a sufficient standard for their needs, and having learned godly self-control to some extent, will provide the best possible material for herders of the reindeer, and will largely guarantee the future development of this most important industry. They will grow up "reindeer-minded"...".<sup>13</sup> Clearly, it was recognized that the chances of success would increase in direct proportion to the level of acculturation already present in the individuals selected.

Following a five-year epic journey across Alaska and the Yukon Territory, 2370 reindeer arrived at Kittigazuit on the east bank of the Mackenzie Delta, on 6 March, 1935.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>. NAC, RG 85, vol. 841, file 7591 (1), A.L. Fleming to H.H. Rowatt, 2 January 1932. This approach would complement the acculturation process very nicely indeed by isolating the children from the influence of their parents for that much longer.

<sup>14</sup>. The hardships of the journey are described somewhat romantically in Lomen (1954:247-273) and Miller (1935). Porsild (1936) has probably given us the most factual account. In addition, this adventure inspired countless newspaper and magazine articles, including a novel by Evans (1935; n.d.). **Reindeer Trek** became a best-seller and was published in the United States, France, Germany (several editions, over 125,000 copies sold), Holland, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Norway, Switzerland, Austria, Australia and Yugoslavia (NAC, RG 109, file W.L.T. 200 (1), Allen Roy Evans, 3 March 1958).

Although the herd reached the Delta in March 1933, another two years elapsed before conditions were ideal to cross to the east side on the ice. The delays had given the Lands, Northwest Territories and Yukon Branch ample time to set up a field organization to handle the herd. A 6,600 square mile grazing reserve---three times the size of Prince Edward Island or slightly smaller than Lake Ontario---was created in 1933 as provided for in the Reindeer Protection Ordinance.<sup>15</sup> A summer base was located near Kittigazuit on the arctic coast while a more substantial station was established some 60 miles south on the east branch of the Mackenzie river. The staff was to consist of a superintendent, an assistant superintendent, six herders and as many apprentices as required. In fact, in addition to the three Sameks from Europe, three of the Alaskan Inuit who had accompanied the herd agreed to remain behind, and Porsild hired two local Inuit as apprentices.

Only a year after the arrival of the herd, management was caught in a classic "catch-22". Fiscal restraint restricted the number of staff which could be hired while the requirements of herding meant that the field officer would not take on sixteen-year old boys from the Eskimo residential schools who did not assume full responsibilities

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<sup>15</sup>. NAC, P.C. 2554, 14 December 1933. The range was increased to 18,000 square miles---an area larger than Denmark---by P.C. 1188, 29 February 1952.

immediately. As mentioned, there were only two Inuit apprentices and both were in their early thirties, married and with children. The director of the Lands, Parks and Forests Branch Roy A. Gibson was annoyed at the apparent lack of cooperation by the field officers: "As I see it we are trying to interest the Eskimos in the herd and the only way we can do it is by taking on Eskimo youth who have been in the schools at Aklavik and who can be selected as promising apprentices."<sup>16</sup> The field supervisor Dr. J.A. Urquhart pointed out that he needed one herder for every 1,000 reindeer; since the herd had increased to 4,500 animals, and with only 2 experienced Samek herders on hand (one Samek had left and the Alaskan Inuit quit) and 3 adult apprentices to train, it was impossible to be further burdened by youngsters. "At the moment", he wrote, "instead of casual youngsters who might in a few years make good men, our pressing need is actual trained herders of an adult age and upon whom responsibility must even at the moment be placed...".<sup>17</sup> The difficulty, from Gibson's point of view, was that "adult Eskimo who have made a good living from trapping will not remain with us on wages when the fur season is good."<sup>18</sup>

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16. NAC, RG 85, vol. 841, file 7591 (1), Roy A. Gibson to A.L. Cumming, 5 February 1937.

17. *Ibid.*, J.A. Urquhart to Roy A. Gibson, 22 May 1937.

18. *Ibid.*, Roy Gibson to A.L. Cumming, 27 September 1937.

Since only the Samek herders could be depended upon for the immediate future, the Interdepartmental Reindeer Committee supported Dr. Urquhart's policy of training adult men. As a long-term solution, the Committee recommended that a second pasturing site be selected during the summer of 1937 in anticipation of moving 1,000 reindeer there in 1938 to relieve the pressure of work on the staff of Reindeer Station. Because the Mackenzie Delta Inuit were not enthusiastic about herding and, anyway, would be unwilling to go beyond familiar territory, it was resolved that two Inuit from the eastern arctic be recruited immediately for training to accompany the new herd the following summer.<sup>19</sup>

While the Committee had in mind the establishment of a second government-run herd farther east, Gibson rejected this option because of the costs. Intent on forcing the pace of the experiment, he asked Porsild if an Inuit apprentice could not be induced to manage a herd on his own. Porsild responded enthusiastically, suggesting that Charlie Rufus might succeed, and emphasized that the experiment "...would give us valuable information about the ability of our Eskimos in handling such matters and if successful would

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<sup>19</sup>. *Ibid.*, vol. 837, file 7525 (1), Minutes of the Interdepartmental Reindeer Committee, 17 June 1937. Diamond Jenness had recommended that natives from the Coppermine area be hired from the onset.

help greatly in making the Eskimo reindeer-minded. The experiment would entail very little risk...with the wholehearted cooperation of those in charge of the main herd...The worst that could happen would be that the herd eventually might return to the main herd..."<sup>20</sup> Although this step was considered by many officials a radical departure from the cautious approach of the past, the field staff conceded that Rufus would be sufficiently trained by the fall of 1938. The Interdepartmental Committee approved the plan 25 October, 1937.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>. NAC, RG 85, vol. 837, file 7525 (1), Minutes of the Interdepartmental Reindeer Committee, 25 October 1937, and related correspondence over the summer of 1937.

<sup>22</sup>. The progress of this venture is documented in *Ibid.*, vol. 1145, file 270-7-2 (1) and (1A).



because of the advantages it was perceived to have over other options. Aside from the fact that native practice seemed to suggest that partnerships were a fundamental component of their way of life, the logistics of moving families and supplies in and out of the field were greatly simplified if a schooner was available. Moreover, a native with a schooner was likely a man of "good standing" and his interest in the enterprise would give it stability.<sup>23</sup>

A herd under native management remained subject to departmental supervision and the following conditions:

1. Once the herd increased sufficiently to support the natives, the government would reclaim reindeer equal in number and composition to the loan. The remaining animals would become the property of the managers;
2. Ownership of the reindeer would remain with the government until the loan was repaid;
3. A departmental officer would stay with and supervise the management of the native herd until after the first round-up;

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<sup>23</sup>. See *Ibid.*, vol. 837, file 7525 (1), minutes of the Interdepartmental Reindeer Committee, 23 March 1938.

4. The government could inspect the herd after its representative was recalled;
5. Native managers would report twice a year on the condition of the herd following the departure of the government representative;
6. Native reindeer were to be marked to distinguish them from other reindeer;
7. Native managers could kill defective animals and other reindeer for food and clothing for themselves only;<sup>24</sup>
8. Trapping, hunting and fishing were allowed providing these activities did not interfere with herding;
9. The government could reclaim the herd if it was mishandled before it was privately owned;<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>. The Inuit manager could not dispose of reindeer--- by sale or gift---until the herd was his property. The Committee thought "it was not desirable to give them the idea that they could sell meat for profit". See NAC, RG 85, vol. 837, file 7525 (1), Minutes of the Interdepartmental Reindeer Committee, 28 October 1938.

<sup>25</sup>. "Mishandling" was never defined but it is clear that it centered on the management approach. Many of the members of the Committee wanted to reserve the right to reclaim the herd even after the original loan had been returned, to avoid the kinds of problems encountered by the Americans in Alaska when Inuit owners let their herds run wild. But Porsild objected on the basis that it would hardly be fair to reclaim a herd because of a difference of opinion

10. The government would provide one herder's rations for one year together with the necessary equipment for herding; and finally,

11. Native managers were to afford every opportunity for young natives to experience the herding of reindeer.<sup>26</sup>

The government was obviously seeking to control the direction that reindeer husbandry would take in the North. The model officials originally had in mind was not the capitalist market-oriented livestock industry but a form of subsistence pastoralism---an intensive, symbiotic pattern of husbandry combined with a limited consumption of animals for domestic requirements.

The implementation of this model without regard to the needs or desires of the Inuit managers was a source of immediate tension in the field. Inuit managers objected to the restriction against selling reindeer products. The clause had to be interpreted more liberally when the authorities in Ottawa realized that trapping was not a reliable means to

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regarding husbandry methods. "The methods adopted by a native", he noted, "might not be approved by a white man but the native might be doing good work according to his standards." **Ibid.**

<sup>26</sup>. NAC, RG 85, vol. 1145, file 270-7-2 (1), agreement between the Crown and native managers, 12 December 1938.

obtain cash when herding was a full-time occupation. Inuit had to sell reindeer according to their need for commodities.<sup>27</sup> Ironically, just when native managers were starting to obtain a good income from their herds, paternalistic officials sought to extend their influence over them by establishing trust accounts for reindeer sales controlled by the field superintendent. Thus, even personal expenditures became subject to government approval.<sup>28</sup>

Another example will illustrate the government's aversion to letting the native managers handle their affairs as they saw fit. Rufus was discouraged from inviting his relatives join him because officials feared that the native ideology of sharing would bankrupt him without attracting new converts

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<sup>27</sup>. See *Ibid.*, vol. 837, file 7525 (1), minutes of the Interdepartmental Reindeer Committee, 28 October 1938, 12 September 1939 and 26 September 1939. Rufus was allowed to sell up to 20 carcasses in 1939. During the winter of 1941-42, this restriction was abolished as officials finally agreed that there were no reasons why the native managers should not make as much money as they could from the sale of surplus reindeer products. See NAC, RG 85, volume 1146, file 270-7-2 (1A), T. Clifford to Mr. Cumming, 28 January 1942.

<sup>28</sup>. This practice was started in 1943 after the relief operation for Aklavik (discussed elsewhere in the text). Deductions from the accounts required the approval of the Superintendent and had to be "in the interests of the natives and the reindeer industry". One can only wonder how native managers interpreted this interference in their affairs. See NAC, RG 85, vol. 1143, file 270-6 (3), R. A. Gibson to J.A. Parsons, 14 July 1943 and previous correspondence.

to the industry.<sup>29</sup> This refusal is interesting given that the administration knew that native herds in Alaska were run on a co-operative basis. Moreover, some Mackenzie Delta Inuit had indicated that they would only take up herding part-time as a communal project in order to continue "...to hunt, trap and visit as they have for generations."<sup>30</sup>

To sum up so far: there is no question that reindeer herding was to be carried out on the government's terms, with little input from the Inuit themselves, even if, ironically, it was intended to be an industry which the Natives were to develop. Officials, especially in Ottawa, objected to Inuit practices that were antipathetic to their own values, and remained unaware of the contradictions underlying their patronizing policy.

The Rufus-Kalealuk herd was watched with a mixture of optimism and anxiety. The future of the experiment rested with the record of this first initiative. "If successful," one official noted, "the way is paved for unlimited expansion eastward from the present Reserve. The Anderson

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<sup>29</sup>. *Ibid.*, vol. 837, file 7525 (1), minutes of the Interdepartmental Reindeer Committee, 27 February 1939 and vol. 1145, 270-7-2 (1), R.A. Gibson to J.A. Parsons, 2 March 1939. The government also tried to discourage the ideology of sharing in other contexts (for example, Asch 1977:54).

<sup>30</sup>. NAC, RG 85, vol. 841, file 7591 (1), Report by M. Meikle following inspection of Reindeer Station, July 1937.

River area...is but a stepping-stone to the Coronation Gulf-Great Bear Lake area. Once the reindeer are established in that area further moves eastward will lead to the northwest Hudson Bay region, and thence to Baffin Island."<sup>31</sup> In fact, the Rufus-Kalealuk herd did well, with over 1500 reindeer counted at round-up in 1940. In addition to the departmental supervisor, Rufus had four Inuit helpers.

Such apparent success and the rapid development of the main herd encouraged the administration to launch a second native venture. In December 1940, Peter Kaglik, the first Inuit to have joined the apprenticeship program in 1935, formed a partnership with Amos Tama, owner of a schooner. They borrowed about 825 reindeer and drove them to the east side of Anderson River. The conditions of the loan were identical to the Rufus agreement.<sup>32</sup>

A year later, the creation of a third native venture was approved. It was to be located near Lettie Harbour, using Cape Parry as a summer range. Plans fell through, however, when the field officer was unable to locate a native with a schooner willing to accompany the trained herder selected to manage the herd. It became apparent that the industry would

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<sup>31</sup>. *Ibid.*, D. L. McKeand to Roy Gibson, 14 June 1938.

<sup>32</sup>. The progress of this herd is documented in *Ibid.*, vol. 1146, file 270-7-2 (1B).

have to dispense with schooners if expansion was to continue at the same rate. In spite of renewed efforts during the winter of 1941-42, when R.C.M.P. officers interviewed the majority of natives who owned schooners, none could be interested. The police summarized the situation as follows: "...Only the most prosperous and successful native trappers own schooners and they can make a much better livelihood at trapping, etc., than would be possible at the present time in the Reindeer Industry."<sup>33</sup>

The idea of cooperative or community herding was raised at this time as a way out of the difficulties now faced by the government. Qualified herders could be attached to established native ventures as the herds increased sufficiently to permit management through joint ownership; or employees working for native managers could assume responsibility for the government's share of the herd as they became proficient herders. With several native managers associated with one large herd, there would be ample manpower at all times to handle both herding and traditional economic activities. As a whole, the group would have access to a cash income and a reliable source of meat and fur clothing. This approach did not, however, appeal as much to

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<sup>33</sup>. See *Ibid.*, vol. 1145, file 270-7-1 (1), D.J. Martin to RCMP Commissioner, 6 November 1941, and related correspondence; and vol. 841, file 7591 (1), L. Weston to RCMP Commissioner, 6 March 1942.

officials in Ottawa as the establishment of separate herds managed by limited partnerships. They may have feared that communal ownership would undermine their control over the industry. Also, from the point of view of the American Reindeer Service, cooperative ownership in Alaska had proved a dismal failure and was being actively discouraged.<sup>34</sup>

Since the experience with Mackenzie Delta Inuit had shown that steady herding did not appeal to the majority of them,<sup>35</sup> and those in training showed little interest in assuming the management of herds located farther east than Anderson River, officials concluded that the extension of the industry to the Coppermine-Great Bear Lake area should be deferred until natives from that area were trained.<sup>36</sup> Given the goal of the industry, not only did it make sense

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<sup>34</sup>. NAC, RG 85, vol. 1145, file 270-7-1 (1), R.A. Gibson to Mr. Cumming, 24 January 1942 and subsequent correspondence. The idea was raised again periodically but it wasn't tried until 1956, and then only in a last ditch attempt to save two of the native herds. For a discussion of the failure of cooperative herding in Alaska, see Olson (1970).

<sup>35</sup>. See NAC, RG 85, vol. 841, file 7591 (1), J.A. Parsons to Roy Gibson, 1 September 1940 and 21 October 1941. See also Parsons' annual reports, vol. 1133, file 270-1.

<sup>36</sup>. The movement of native herds to eastern points was not the only approach considered as a means to expand the industry. Since the Reindeer Reserve could sustain many herds, and the area had once sustained a much larger population, Porsild suggested that eastern natives could be brought in permanently. Another possibility was to establish additional government herds at selected locations throughout the North. See NAC, RG 85, vol. 841, file 7591 (1), Reindeer Policy, 30 January, 1941.



to train eastern Arctic natives, preferably young boys, but it became essential if any progress was to be made. As one official concluded:

**"We are...feeling the effects of past policy which restricted the number of apprentices to barely sufficient to assist in the necessary herding work. There has been no appropriation purely for training purposes with the result that deer are now available and there is a shortage of trained natives. With the number of deer increasing rapidly there should be plenty of apprentices in training either with the main herd or with native herds. Since they cannot be obtained locally it seems necessary to intensify the effort to obtain them from points east of the reserve."<sup>37</sup>**

For one reason or another, however, this approach was not implemented until the summer of 1941 when two adults were brought over. Despite the addition of five more in 1942, there were still not enough natives in training to meet the potential for expansion.

The rate of reproduction of the main herd became a problem which was shortly compounded by the success of the Rufus-Kalealuk venture. In fact, the government was unable to accept the return of their loan in 1941 because Reindeer Station staff could barely handle the main herd. Attempts to reduce the surplus in reindeer by encouraging experienced Alaskan Inuit now living in the Mackenzie Delta area to take out herds failed. As a result, the policy of maximizing the growth of the herds had to be reassessed. This situation was embarrassing for the project had been set up to distribute

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<sup>37</sup>. NAC, RG 85, vol. 841, file 7591 (1), T. Clifford to A.L. Cumming, 24 January 1942.

reindeer among the Inuit. The culling of a few hundred unproductive reindeer a year was expected, but the reduction of the reproductive stock certainly was not.

Reluctantly, the government became involved in the marketing of reindeer products. Native managers (and potential ones) were complaining about the marketing situation. As mentioned previously, they expected their herds to provide them with a modest cash income because it could not be obtained easily or reliably otherwise when herding. Although they were allowed to sell or barter reindeer products with other natives, unfortunately, this did not work out well in practice because their herds were too isolated.<sup>38</sup> As a result, officials agreed that if the native managers could not sell enough reindeer locally to meet their needs, they should drive some to Reindeer Station and obtain credit for the animals delivered.<sup>39</sup>

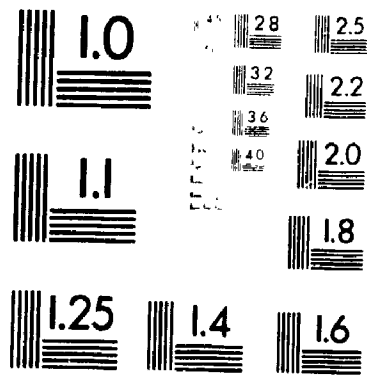
This approach was inspired by the success of a previous undertaking. In February 1942, as part of a relief operation for residents of Aklavik, 305 reindeer from the Rufus-

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<sup>38</sup>. See NAC, RG 85, vol. 1133, file 270-1 (4), C.H.D. Clarke, **Report on Development of Reindeer Industry--- Mackenzie District, 1942** and R.A. Gibson to Mr. Cumming, 5 October 1942: also vol. 1143, file 270-6 (2A).

<sup>39</sup>. See **Ibid.**, vol. 1143, file 270-6 (3), Recommendations of the branch reindeer committee, 19 January 1944 and vol. 1146, file 270-7-2 (1A), R.A. Gibson to J.A. Parsons, 28 January 1944.

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had and revenue was not great enough to hire more. The high price of fur caused the owner and herders to devote too much time to trapping. A large meat sales fund, created the previous season, caused a little swelled-headness and neglect of work...".<sup>42</sup> The collapse of the Kaglik-Tama partnership during the winter of 1941-42 must have been a factor in the decline of that herd.

The Calla accident and the reluctance of trained herders to accept herds of their own put an end to eastward expansion. Even eastern natives were not inclined to return home after their training. As the supervisor of Reindeer Station noted, "They have tasted of the fleshpots, are polluted with wants and needs, via T.Eaton, and etc., that they did not know existed, and that are entirely incompatible with the life a reindeer husbandman will have to live."<sup>43</sup>

On reviewing the progress of the experiment, the director of the Lands, Parks and Forests Branch Roy A. Gibson felt it was time to seek "a fresh outlook to the whole business...Some of our lines of thought in regard to

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<sup>42</sup>. See *Ibid.*, vol. 1133, file 270-1 (5), Annual Report 1944-45. The sales fund referred to was the result of the Aklavik relief operation.

<sup>43</sup>. See NAC, RG 85, vol. 1133, file 270-1 (5), E. Hogan to R.A. Gibson, 25 January 1945.

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43. See NAC, RG 85, vol. 1133, file 270-1 (5), E. Hogan to R.A. Gibson, 25 January 1945.

reindeer may be in a rut. The industry is static..."<sup>44</sup> The Branch sought to profit from recent Alaskan experience. The services of J. Sidney Rood, formerly General Reindeer Supervisor in Alaska, were secured in 1946 to examine the operation.

Rood underscored the fact that reindeer herding embodied many concepts that were foreign to the Inuit. He maintained that too little had been done to make reindeer herding attractive to them. He argued that it was premature to give up until an educational campaign had been tried.<sup>45</sup>

J.P.Richards, who accompanied Rood to interview Inuit in camps as far east as Warren Point, forwarded unique observations in a separate report.<sup>46</sup> He revealed that few Whites in the Mackenzie Delta, including project staff, really believed that the venture would succeed. This lack of sympathy for the goals of the project was compounded by a

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<sup>44</sup>. *Ibid.*, vol. 1134, file 270-1 (5A), R.A. Gibson to Mr. Cumming, 5 July 1946.

<sup>45</sup>. Rood's report and related correspondence are available in NAC, RG 85, vol. 248, file 40-6-2 (1). See also NAC, RG 85, vol. 1254, file 450-2 (2), minutes of the Interdepartmental Committee on Northern Agriculture, 15 January 1947. Despite Rood's experience, Gibson found his recommendations of limited use at best.

<sup>46</sup>. This report is important because, as far as I can determine, this was the first time government officials went out of their way to ask the Inuit for feedback on the project.

lack of understanding among the Inuit who still wondered, after 10 years of operation, why reindeer had been introduced in their midst. Game and fish were abundant, they said, and their way of life was more pleasant and remunerative. Commenting on the relative ease of making a living from subsistence hunting and trapping in the area, Richards concluded that the project would not meet with much success as long as fur prices remained adequate. Most of the current herders, he observed, were apparently marginal hunters and trappers at best. He recommended reducing the size of the government herd, until local economic conditions warranted otherwise, while making a concerted effort to induce young Inuit to take up reindeer herding.<sup>47</sup>

Both Rood and Richards indicated that a training school for youngsters was the best, and perhaps the only, means of obtaining results. But practical and financial considerations continued to prevent the realization of this option. Since education in the Northwest Territories was left to the Missions, government officials hoped that they would somehow interest the Inuit in reindeer husbandry.<sup>48</sup>

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47. NAC, RG 85, vol. 1134, file 270-1 (5A), Report by Col. J.P. Richards, 22 August 1946 and J.P. Richards to Mr. Cumming, 20 November 1946.

48. It was a totally ineffectual policy. See, for example, *Ibid.*, vol. 841, file 7591 (1), T. Clifford to A.L. Cumming, 23 October 1941 and Roy Gibson to Rev. J. Trocellier, 5 February 1942.

Although they eventually admitted that this policy was getting them nowhere,<sup>49</sup> they did little to rectify the situation. The best that was achieved was a two-week summer school at round-up, started in 1947 and attended by residential school boys whose parents lived too far from Aklavik to return home for the summer.

Despite the dreary outlook, officials in Ottawa felt that not everything possible had been done "to present the reindeer business in a proper light to the people we are seeking to interest in this means of livelihood".<sup>50</sup> Acting on Rood's recommendations, efforts to promote reindeer herding locally were increased and, as mentioned, a summer school was organized. In addition, some measures were introduced to improve the living conditions of the apprentices. Finally, since field leadership had been considered to be a major problem for some time, Gibson sought to hire a competent and energetic supervisor with experience in husbandry.<sup>51</sup>

Despite these efforts, however, the principal difficulty

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49. *Ibid.*, T. Clifford to A.L. Cumming, 3 May 1945.

50. NAC, RG 85, vol. 841, file 7591 (2), T. Clifford to A.L. Cumming, 18 September 1946.

51. L.B. Post was hired in November 1947. See *Ibid.*, vol. 1134, file 270-1 (6), R.A. Gibson to L.B. Post, 17 November 1947.



remained unresolved. "There are today", wrote A.E. Porsild following an inspection of Reindeer Station in 1947, "no native-owned reindeer herds and none of the many boys trained in reindeer work are...showing a desire to acquire herds of their own". Porsild blamed the Branch for having "failed to convince them that reindeer raising is as profitable and sound economically as trapping for fur."<sup>52</sup>

With persistence a breakthrough was made towards the establishment of a third native venture in 1948. On 9 December, about 878 reindeer were loaned to Otto Binder and Jimmy Nahogaloak. Employed at the main herd since 1942, these Eskimo had been promoted to the status of herder. Both were about 26 years of age and recently married. The Binder-Nahogaloak herd was established east of Upper Eskimo Lakes, a location where the seasonal ranges were all within 24 km of the main winter camp.<sup>53</sup>

Under the terms of agreement with the government, the native managers were not required to repay the original loan. Instead, the government claimed 10% of the yearly increment

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<sup>52</sup>. NAC, Records of the Canadian Wildlife Service, RG 109, vol. 491, file 111, A.E. Porsild, "Report On the Reindeer and the Mackenzie Delta Reindeer Grazing Reserve. Notes On the Condition of Reindeer Herd, Pasture and Progress of Reindeer Experiment, July-August, 1947", p.4.

<sup>53</sup>. The progress of this venture is well documented in NAC, RG 85, vol. 1145, file 270-7-1 (1-2), vol. 1073, file 270-7-1 (3) and vol. 2073, file 270-7-1 (1).

to draw upon when conditions were favorable to form new herds. This was a major departure from previous agreements and proved not to be to the liking of the native managers. They preferred to own the increase brought about by their management by returning the original loan. A new agreement was signed on 1 September 1949 based on the old form.

Binder and Nahogaloak benefited to a larger extent than their predecessors from government assistance. Rations, equipment and transportation were provided for the first year, and if necessary during the second and third years. Transportation difficulties were solved by supplying a motorized canoe, although it remained the property of the government until bought by the managers. In addition, the government paid the wages of at least two herding assistants, and supplied them with rations and equipment for a period of two years or more.

A fourth native venture was launched on 7 February 1950 when Wallace Lucas and Peter Rufus, the latter a son of the deceased Charlie Rufus, were loaned about 1099 reindeer. The herd was located about 64 km southeast of Tuktoyaktuk, near Eskimo Lakes.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>. The progress of this venture is documented in *Ibid.*, vol. 1147, file 270-7-2 (4), vol. 1237, file 270-7-2 (5) and vol. 1477, file 270-7-2 (6).

The first major internal review of the project was initiated late in 1950, largely in response to budgetary cuts and the constant growth of the main herd. It was judged to have become too large to be efficiently managed with available staff and resources. Options considered ranged from a major expansion of the industry to the complete disposal of all assets. While admitting that the majority of Inuit were not interested in reindeer herding, for economic and socio-cultural reasons, the recognition that, (a) reindeer were a major source of food for the district, and would continue to be so given reports of diminishing stocks of caribou and other wildlife in the Lower Mackenzie Valley; and (b) the registration of trapping areas and the growth of the native population was leading to underemployment and increasing relief; and finally (c) the existence of two natives herds, and the potential for more, might confirm reindeer herding as a viable alternative lifestyle for the Inuit, led Deputy Minister H.A. Young to approve a policy of moderate development. In short, it was recognized that while funding for the project could not be justified on the basis of its success in attracting Inuit to reindeer husbandry, its sudden termination would have a drastic impact on the local economy, game conservation and employment prospects for natives without registered trapping areas.

Under this policy, native managers were given additional

assistance. The general agreement was modified requiring the return of only 50% of the original loan after three years of successful management. The government assumed the responsibility for marketing reindeer products so that all native managers were on the same footing regardless of the distance to markets. In practice, this meant that the government handled the transportation of the carcasses and regulated the sale of meat at a uniform wholesale price with a restricted mark-up in the retail price. Effective in 1952, no further donations were made to the district missions on the grounds that the industry should be self-sufficient. The reindeer reserve was increased in size to 21,000 square miles to make it easier to enforce the ban on hunting reindeer and to provide additional range. Finally, substantial efforts were to be made to reduce the main herd to 2,000 animals by 1954 by encouraging herders to become managers of their own herds. Herders without the necessary skills to become managers would be encouraged to leave or take employment with native herds.<sup>55</sup>

The field officers found themselves under a lot of pressure to perform and they delivered. A fifth native venture was established on 17 February 1952, under the management of Guy Omilogituk and Jimmy Komiak. About 825 reindeer were driven

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<sup>55</sup>. See NAC, Records of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, RG 22, vol. 248, file 40-6-2 (2), "Memorandum for file", 12 April 1951, and preceding documents.

to a location 24 km east of the Lucas-Rufus herd near Tuktoyaktuk.<sup>56</sup> This success was partly overshadowed by the breakup of the Binder-Nahogaloak partnership on 14 January 1952 and the complete surrender of the herd by Binder following a discouraging round-up tally. Despite plans for the creation of another native venture, the fate of this partnership, combined with the reported "loss" of 1,763 reindeer from the main herd, led the official responsible for the project to comment:

"My impression is that we have been attempting to conduct this operation on a restrained scale, which has, to a considerable extent, prevented adequate supervision of the industry as a whole, and assistance to and control of the native herds in a manner required to accomplish what we have in mind.

I am not satisfied...that we have either obtained the proper or most effective personnel for the industry, nor that the herders of the native herds will be completely satisfactory. I can find nothing to indicate that there is assurance from any quarter that the natives themselves in any sufficient numbers have shown a genuine desire to take up herding as an occupation, and I am somewhat reluctant to accept the fact that we can persuade them to accept the rugged and hard life of a herder under present conditions. I believe that much more study should be made of this aspect of the reindeer industry, to determine whether or not we are proceeding under a false assumption that this industry can be handed over to the natives.

It appears to me to be quite obvious that after the years in which this industry has been fostered and nurtured by the Government, with such little results to show, that there may be something fundamentally wrong with our thinking and planning."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>. The progress of this herd is documented in NAC, RG 85, vol. 1237, file 270-7-3 (1) and vol. 1477, file 270-7-3 (2).

<sup>57</sup>. NAC, RG 22, vol.248, file 40-6-2 (2), W.G. Brown to The Director, 31 October 1952.

Deputy Minister Young may have been of the same mind--- despite the launching of a sixth native venture on 1 February 1953, when Donald Pingo and Adam Imakhu. took over the remaining reindeer from the Binder-Nahogaloak herd in addition to some 950 animals from the main herd, thereby bringing the number of existing native herds to three.<sup>58</sup> Young personally inspected Reindeer Station in the summer of 1953 and announced that he wanted the Inuit to assume complete control of the industry by February 1955. His goal was to limit government involvement in the industry to supervision and the rendering of assistance to native managers.<sup>59</sup> Consequently, the Superintendent made plans to establish one native herd in February 1954 and to create another in 1955 with the remaining stock.

Plans to dispose of the main herd were abandoned, however, when R.G. Robertson became Deputy Minister of the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources early in 1954. Officials in the Northern Administration and Lands Branch were taken aback by Young's radical approach, feeling that a

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<sup>58</sup>. The progress of this herd is documented in NAC, RG 85, vol. 1237, file 270-7-1 (4), vol. 1281, file 270-7-1 (5-6) and vol. 2073, file 270-7-1 (1).

<sup>59</sup>. NAC, RG 22, vol. 323, file 40-6-2 (3), H.A. Young to F.J.G. Cunningham, 20 July 1953.

government herd had not yet outlived its usefulness.<sup>60</sup> Instead, a seventh native venture was established on 1 March 1954 under the management of Joseph Avingiak and Bob Panatoloak, who had, respectively, six and eight years of training behind them. The herd of 1302 reindeer was driven to a location near Urquhart Lakes.<sup>61</sup> This was to be the last of the native units created, however. A review of the experiment in the spring of 1955 led officials to conclude that the establishment of additional herds should be deferred until the impact of new employment opportunities on the Dew line and in Inuvik could be assessed.<sup>62</sup>

Officials in Ottawa no longer had any illusions about the progress of the experiment. F.J.G. Cunningham, Director of Northern Administration and Lands Branch, admitted before the House of Commons' Special Committee on Estimates that "We have more reindeer available and have had for twenty years, than we have Eskimos whom we can induce to enter into that rather dull life...Our difficulty is a psychological and social one. The herder's life is so different from the traditional Eskimo life, that it is difficult to persuade

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<sup>60</sup>. *Ibid.*, "Reindeer Policy: Advisability of Continuing to Operate a Government Reindeer Herd", 20 January 1954.

<sup>61</sup>. The progress of this venture is documented in file 270-7-4, Native Herd #4, 1953-1964, at the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs.

<sup>62</sup>. See NAC, RG 22, vol. 323, file 40-6-2 (3), F.J.G. Cunningham to the Deputy Minister, 8 June 1955.

the Eskimo to take up that way of life."<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, as Robertson explained to Minister Lesage, it was too early to give up entirely:

**"We are bound to have failures in trying out new schemes for Eskimo improvement, and I think that there is no ground to regret having gone into this...We cannot now forecast with certainty the effect of the present changes in the north. Increased Eskimo employment and reduced self-sufficiency may improve the market for reindeer meat greatly. On the other hand, new economic opportunities may make it impossible to keep Eskimos in herding. We should...go on as at present until the situation becomes clearer."**<sup>64</sup>

After the round-up figures for 1955 were in, showing that all herds were declining, the Co-ordinator of the Advisory Committee on Northern Development Graham Rowley provided the following assessment: "It seems obvious that there is something seriously wrong with the reindeer herding experiment...and that we have no idea where the real problem lies. The main herd seems little better than the others and it is very doubtful therefore whether the solution could be found within the local organization."<sup>65</sup> He recommended that a thorough external investigation be made by a Scandinavian expert. Instead, Robertson favored the creation of a Reindeer Advisory Committee to counsel the Director of

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<sup>63</sup>. **Special Committee On Estimates. Proceedings No. 18.** (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1955), minutes of proceeding, 28 March 1955, p.548.

<sup>64</sup>. NAC, RG 22, vol. 323, file 40-6-2 (3), footnote to Cunningham's memorandum to the Deputy Minister, 8 June 1955.

<sup>65</sup>. NAC, RG 109, vol. 26, file W.L.T. 200 (1), Graham Rowley to R.G. Robertson (?), 16 November 1955.



Northern Administration and Lands Branch on reindeer matters. The Committee first met on 29 February 1956 and established a sub-committee to submit recommendations at the next meeting.

1956 was hardly a good year in the history of the reindeer project. After managing the Omilogituk-Komiak herd alone since 31 August 1954, Komiak returned it to the Branch on 26 April 1956. The Lucas-Rufus partnership, which had fared exceptionally well---in March 1954 the managers complied with the terms of their contract by returning 478 reindeer to the government, thus becoming the first native reindeer owners in Canada---fell apart. So did the Pingo-Imakhuk partnership. Both herds, which had been united in January 1956 to pool manpower and resources, were managed by Lucas and Imakhuk for another year. In all, one native manager and 7 herders left the industry that year, partly on account of the availability of well-paid construction work on the Dew Line.<sup>66</sup>

The Reindeer Advisory Committee met in the fall of 1956 to find solutions to the problems that plagued the industry. Once again, not much came of this. Although the sub-

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<sup>66</sup>. A incentive bonus was instituted in 1957 in an attempt to retain herders in the reindeer project. See NAC, RG 22, vol.483, file 40-6-2 (4), D.M. Watters to R.G. Robertson, 20 March 1957.

committee created earlier had recommended that the project be either discontinued or turned over to Sameks, the Committee as a whole agreed with the minister that it should continue on the same lines as before until a major review could be initiated in the spring of 1957.<sup>67</sup>

Sensing that the review would probably mean the discontinuation of the experiment, Rowley convinced Deputy Minister Robertson to seek expert advice before making a final decision.<sup>68</sup> With the minister's support, he invited Dr. Ethel Lindgren-Utsi, a sociologist and anthropologist who had worked among the reindeer herding Tungus in North Manchuria and studied reindeer problems in Alaska, Asia and Scandinavia, and her husband Mikel Utsi, a prominent reindeer owner in Sweden, to make a thorough independent review of the industry, from animal husbandry to Inuit involvement. They spent a few weeks at Reindeer Station in March and April 1957, and submitted some preliminary recommendations on herd management before they left, promising to submit a more detailed report later.<sup>69</sup>

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67. *Ibid.*, minutes of the Advisory Reindeer Committee, 26 October, 1956.

68. *Ibid.*, Graham Rowley to Deputy Minister, 28 January 1957.

69. The Utsis did not receive an honorarium for this service, although most of their expenses were paid for by the government.

Following receipt of a part of the Utsis report, Deputy Minister Robertson initiated the anticipated review of the project by creating a small policy committee which answered to him. After two meetings, the committee recommended against the creation of additional native herds until the potential of reindeer herding in the commercial sense had been clearly demonstrated. Major changes were obviously anticipated, but final decisions would await the main Utsi report.<sup>70</sup> In fact, however, the procrastination of the Utsis basically left the administration paralysed, although some action was taken towards implementing their preliminary recommendations.<sup>71</sup> A year elapsed before the policy committee met again, only to cover the same ground. The consensus of opinion by then was clearly towards reorganizing the industry on a strictly commercial basis.<sup>72</sup> This is reflected in the decision to discontinue employing

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70. See NAC, RG 22, vol.483, file 40-6-2 (4), Notes on Reindeer Committee Meeting, 24 September 1957; and file 40-6-2 (5), Interim Report---Reindeer Committee, 25 October 1957.

71. Aside from the fact that they had other obligations, the Utsis were reluctant to send in their final recommendations because they felt they were not welcome. As one might expect, not all officials had been pleased to see them. Their correspondence with Rowley confirmed, once more, that many key officials no longer believed in the goals of the project but some were apparently reluctant to voice their opinions openly. The Utsis themselves recognized that the experiment was not a success in large part because the Inuit did not appear interested, and they wondered why "Eskimo psychology" had not been investigated before.

72. See NAC, RG 22, vol.483, file 40-6-2 (5), Minutes of Policy Committee, 26 August, 1958.

Inuit on an apprenticeship basis in order to place them on the same footing as other government salaried employees.<sup>73</sup>

The future of the reindeer project was finally tackled seriously at a meeting on 11 March, 1959. Admitting that the experiment had not met its original aims, but recognizing that abandoning it would entail a loss of about 1.25 million dollars, the committee recommended that the project be turned over to the Canadian Wildlife Service for a period of five years. The Service would attempt to introduce modern husbandry practices and establish a sound economic base for the industry. Concurrently, however, John J. Teal, Director of the Institute of Northern Agricultural Research in Vermont, showed interest in managing the project on a commercial basis. Deputy Minister Robertson indicated that this alternative should be investigated before turning the project over to the Canadian Wildlife Service.<sup>74</sup>

Teal visited Reindeer Station in the summer of 1959 and met with government officials in Ottawa. Reluctant to sell the operation in its present state, officials invited him to

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<sup>73</sup>. See NAC, RG 85, vol. 2071, file 270-3 (2), T.G. Douglas to L.B. Post, 4 September 1958 and subsequent correspondence.

<sup>74</sup>. See NAC, RG 22, PARC Box 8, file 40-6-2 (6), Minutes of meeting to discuss the administration of Reindeer Station, 11 March, 1959 and, B.G. Sivertz to R.G. Robertson, 18 March, 1959.

submit a management proposal for a five-year period.<sup>75</sup> The following spring, Deputy Minister Robertson invited the Utsis to submit their long awaited report because a decision on the future of the project was forthcoming.<sup>76</sup> This last appeal was little more than a formality, however, because the options had already been narrowed down and only the Minister's and Treasury Board's approval were missing.<sup>77</sup> As Robertson explained to the Minister, operating costs were escalating and yet the original objective of the experiment was unlikely to be reached; the only native venture still running was the Avingiak-Panatoloak herd and it would be allowed to continue until it collapsed. Slaughtering the main herd was unacceptable politically, nor did it make economic sense. This was an option of last resort and would be considered only after private industry had been given a reasonable chance to turn the operation around. A successful commercial operation might be sold to the highest bidder, thus avoiding the government a lot of embarrassment. The Minister agreed and authority to enter into a five-year

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75. See *Ibid.*, R.A.J. Phillips to F.J.G. Cunningham, 2 September 1959.

76. See *Ibid.*, R.G. Robertson to Dr. E.J. Lindgren-Utsi, 10 May 1960.

77. Although their final recommendations would certainly be of some use, officials were much more concerned with having something substantial---beyond scattered preliminary recommendations---to show for the public funds which had been spent. The Utsis final report was submitted to Robertson on 9 August, 1960, too late to affect the course of events.

management agreement with Teal and his partner A. Oeming, Director of the Alberta Game Farm, was granted by Treasury Board, 7 July 1960.<sup>78</sup>

The government, after 25 years of lackluster administration, gave up hope of establishing reindeer pastoralism among the Inuit and turned its attention to disposing of its large assets in the least controversial manner. The gamble taken in 1929 became a classic bureaucratic and political nightmare. The project went nowhere, yet it could not be terminated easily. As the years passed, the original goals of the project---the protection of wildlife and the reproduction of Inuit man-power---were forgotten or became irrelevant as more knowledge was gained about the North. Officials were replaced and the departments involved pursued new plans which did not accord reindeer herding the importance it had in the past.

There was one constant throughout the period, however. The transition to reindeer herding was treated mainly as a **technical** problem. Herd dynamics, reindeer diseases, the local vegetation and markets for products were repeatedly investigated while the central players in the experiment,

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<sup>78</sup>. See NAC, RG 22, PARC Box 8, file 40-6-2 (6), R.G. Robertson to G.G.E. Steele, 27 May 1960; R.G. Robertson to the Minister, 16 June 1960 and, G.G.E. Steele to R.G. Robertson, 15 July 1960.

the Inuit, were largely ignored. Not surprisingly, officials never really understood why herding failed to appeal to the Inuit. Everyone had an opinion, of course, but most views lacked in critical insight and the matter was not seriously looked into.

We can wonder, in retrospect, about such a significant oversight. While there is no simple answer, it seems plausible that this omission was due in part to the particular worldview shared by officials. In my opinion, the ethnocentric paternalism which informed officials in their relations with natives in this period blinded them to the importance and meaning of Inuit relations of production. Rather than working with the natives, officials followed the widely accepted practice of imposing what they judged to be in the best interests of the natives upon them with little concern for the worldview of the people themselves. The seeds of failure were thus present from the start.

As we shall see in the next chapter, the transition to pastoralism was complicated because the respective relations of production of foraging and pastoralism are diametrically opposed in some important respects.

### 3. Blueprint for Failure

The rejection of reindeer husbandry by the Mackenzie Delta Inuit has not been adequately explained, either in the records of the project or in the published literature. Three interpretations deserve attention: (a) the dynamics of herd management were not properly mastered, (b) reindeer herding was uneconomic, and (c) reindeer herding was too foreign to the Inuit's cultural heritage. The fact that most observers (for example, Treude 1979) lump these explanations together suggests an analytical evasion and reflects on the difficulties of coming to terms with the failure of socioeconomic experiments in a cross-cultural context.

I have difficulties with all three explanations. The first attributes too much importance to technique, the second is inappropriate in the cultural context under study, while the third is too vague to provide much insight. I shall argue instead that the chief obstacle to change in this instance was the government itself. By refusing to accommodate the experiment to Inuit principles of ownership, distribution and consumption of resources, and the organization of work, officials unknowingly alienated the Inuit. It is instructive that in Alaska, where the introduction of reindeer herding was equally handicapped, a small but important number of Inuit successfully maintained herds. Significantly, they did



not use the best husbandry techniques nor did they achieve a level of production considered economic by our standards (Olson 1969; Stern 1980).<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, they carried on adequately, largely on their own terms.

The starting point for this chapter, then, is that the decision by the Inuit to reject reindeer herding was firmly rooted in distinctive relations of production. In the last 15 years, to protect what they regard as their land and way of life, Inuit have repeatedly emphasized that their culture is still the vital force in their lives, despite the inroads of measures aimed at incorporating them into the mainstream of Canadian life. They insist that although they have borrowed from us, as a group they have not and do not wish to assimilate. Indeed, the continuing vitality of an Inuit culture---a subculture for some (Smith 1975:51-52)---cannot be denied (Brody 1987, 1975; Berger 1985, 1977; Milton Freeman Research Limited 1976).

Cultural autonomy for natives peoples since contact is obviously a question of degree. It is also true, however,

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<sup>1</sup>. This just goes to prove that market rationality is not the only standard of production. To try and explain the failure of the reindeer project in terms of capitalist economics (for example, Schneider 1974:181-182), in a cultural context where production decisions were not based on the maximization of profit, provides little insight. In fact, as many scholars (for example, Cox 1984) have warned, the use of analogy and the projection of "western" models of behaviour can be misleading.

that scholars (for example, Jenness 1918) have presented a distorted picture of native societies by typecasting them as "rigid and incapable of responding to change", implying that the natives were essentially powerless figures "swept along by the tide of European expansion without any real hope of channeling its direction or of influencing the character of the contact situation" (Ray 1978:17, 8). I can only agree with Ray (1978:17, 10) that, to correct this image, we must treat natives "as equals with their own cultures and sets of values" who were "innovative, dynamic and responsive people" with "their own clearly defined sets of objectives and conventions".

In short, I believe the Inuit were quite capable of shaping the direction of change. The transformation of their society was as much the product of conscious adaptation as it was the result of outsider designs. This point of view is in harmony with some basic tenets of the literature on culture change, namely:

(1) Societies are, to a lesser or greater degree, in a constant state of change. Flexibility, and the ability to borrow and adapt ideas and material objects from others, enhances survival (Linton 1963a; Spicer 1952).

(2) Societies tend to be selective, however. New ways of

doing things are subject to a test of compatibility with existing means and relations of production, or simply, the mode of production (Lee 1981).

(3) Extensive contact between societies can greatly accelerate culture change (Linton 1963b). The impact of contact depends largely on whether directed (coercive) or non-directed change is involved (Spicer 1961).

Historically, ethnocentric paternalism has misled "western" societies into assuming that other peoples would readily assimilate because the progression from "primitive" to "modern" was taken for granted. Initial optimism invariably led to exasperation when some societies inexplicably clung to their way of life. This scenario is a familiar one in the North American context and needs no further elaboration here. The point is that "western" societies have not always wanted to recognize that other ways of life can be equally rewarding.

Informed by a neo-Marxist approach, Richard Lee (1981) has shown just how difficult the shift from one way of life to another can be in his discussion of the !Kung San Bushmen's voluntary attempts to go from foraging to farming. The transition was hampered by significant and subtle contradictions between both lifestyles. Most Bushmen failed

to resolve the contradictions, not because they were inherently unsurmountable, but for lack of sufficient reasons to do so. In the absence of a strong stimulus to change, why abandon a familiar and fulfilling lifestyle?

The same line of argument can be applied to the experiment under study. Indeed, a neo-Marxist approach provides insights into the dynamics of culture change that may explain the Inuit's rejection of reindeer husbandry.

A part of Marx's legacy is his materialist conception of history which is summed up in this famous passage:

"In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite...relations of production [which] correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production...The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life...At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come in conflict with the existing relations of production...From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into their fetters. Then occurs a period of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed... In broad outline we can designate the Asiatic, the ancient, the feudal, and the modern bourgeois methods of production as so many epochs in the progress of the economic formation of society."  
(reproduced in Bottomore and Goode 1983:49-50)

Marx's view of history gives the economic system a predominant influence in determining the structure of societies, identifies social evolution with internal contradictions and conflicts within the mode of production, and presents a historical sequence of types of societies,

from the simple to the complex, in terms of changes in production.<sup>2</sup>

Marx's historical sequence of modes of production has been the source of much debate and controversy. A scheme which evolved primarily from the need to explain the origins and development of industrial capitalism in Europe, the availability of new historical and ethnographic data has led neo-Marxists to formulate additional modes of production for pre-capitalist societies in particular and to redefine their historical relationships to each other. A confusing proliferation of models and modes of production is the result, but this ongoing debate is outside the subject of this thesis.

What concerns us is whether the central concept of mode of production---specifically the importance assigned to relations and forces of production as the focus of social change---can be used to achieve a better understanding of the Inuit and thereby suggest a plausible explanation for their resistance to reindeer herding. Although Marx's inconsistent use of terminology and metaphor presents difficulties of interpretation (Legros, Hunderfund and Shapiro 1979), the

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<sup>2</sup>. See Z.A. Jordan, **The Evolution of Dialectical Materialism: A Philosophical and Sociological Analysis** (Toronto: Macmillan, 1967) for an interesting discussion of the materialist conception of history.

definition of a mode of production as "an articulated combination of relations and forces of production structured by the dominance of relations of production" (Hindess and Hirst 1975:9) is widely accepted by neo-Marxists. Forces of production are the material and intellectual means by which people feed, clothe and shelter themselves. Hunting, for example, is a force of production incorporating a particular technology, skills and knowledge, the exploitation of a specific component of the environment, and direct human labour. The ownership of the means of production, the organization of work, and the principles for the distribution and consumption of products are the relations of production. They define how people gain access to resources and how they consume them. Because these "rules" of property relations structure social relations, they are said to dominate a particular mode of production. Neo-Marxists emphasize, however, that the articulation between relations and forces of production is a dynamic one and, that in the last instance, forces of production, which are never static, but develop and evolve, shape relations of production. Contradictions between emerging forces of production and established relations of production may lead to a redefinition of the mode of production, especially when the survival of a society is at stake (Lee 1981; Ingold 1980:7-9).

What is most significant for our purposes is that relations of production are inherently resistant to major changes. It is through them, after all, that human objectives are defined and a mode of production is reproduced from generation to generation. People will not accept radical changes in their forces of production if it involves difficult and painful changes in their relations of production unless forced to do so by circumstances. The tendency will be to reject a new means of production unless its relations of production are compatible with existing relations of production. This explains why societies (for example, the Pawnees (White 1983:147-48) ) are known to have migrated to reproduce their way of life rather than stay in their homeland and adopt a new mode of production. It also explains, in part, why North American Natives have not readily assimilated in mainstream society.

Given the importance of relations of production in social evolution, it is not unreasonable to suggest that there were too many contradictions to resolve between reindeer husbandry as promoted by the government and the relations of production of the Inuit such as they were during the period under study. They rejected herding because they accurately perceived that the very essence of their way of life was at stake. From their point of view, herding involved much more than a technical transition. Before discussing these contradictions,

we must examine the mode of production of the Inuit when the reindeer were introduced. How they responded to new opportunities following contact with mercantile capitalism also has a bearing on the topic under discussion.

### **From pre-contact foraging to post-contact foraging**

Using available ethnographic data, McGhee (1974) and Smith (1984) have provided the best overviews of pre-contact Mackenzie Delta area Inuit, which should be collectively referred to as Tchiglit (Smith 1984:357). Remarkably, population estimates range from 2,000 to 4,000 individuals. The resources at hand were obviously exceptional (see the list of animal and plant species utilized by the Tchiglit in Smith 1984:354) for such figures are larger than the total estimated Inuit population living between the Mackenzie Delta and Hudson Bay<sup>3</sup>. They were divided into at least five named territorial groups, located between Demarcation Point west of the Alaska-Yukon boundary and Cape Bathurst to the east, each with a slightly different economic adaptation according to available resources. Most conspicuous was their coastal and riverine orientation. Inland, the Mackenzie Delta was largely unoccupied. In fact, it was a no-man's land, only

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<sup>3</sup>. See, for example, the census figures provided by Rasmussen in 1924, in NAC, RG 85, vol. 829, file 7282 (1).



sporadically visited by the Inuit and the Kutchin Indians to the south.

The Kittegaryumiut are the best known and the most populous of the Tchiglit. Subsistence was based on beluga and fish, but included caribou, small game and waterfowl. From mid-July to early September, 800 to 1,000 Inuit converged on the village of Kittigaruit, at the mouth of the east channel of the Mackenzie river, for the communal beluga hunt and fishing. Most of the fall, the Inuit hunted caribou inland and caught fish in the East Channel and Eskimo Lakes regions. With the onset of winter, they moved from tents to semi-subterranean houses---an average of six families per house---scattered singly or in small groups among fishing stations on the lower river and sea coast. In December, they congregated again in Kittigaruit for ceremonial activities. The remainder of the winter was spent living in igloos on the river or sea ice to fish and hunt. They moved to the delta in the spring to hunt waterfowl and mammals. Their technology naturally reflected a strong orientation towards marine and land mammal hunting. Umiaks and kayaks were extensively used.

Multi-family groups appear to have formed the residential unit for most of the year, with larger congregations occurring at specific times in the seasonal cycle. The household probably served as "the main production and

consumption unit, with ownership of capital goods such as tents, boats, equipment, and stores of food and supplies being family-based or in the hands of an individual" (McGhee 1974:15). As elsewhere, production was likely on the basis of sex and focused on the needs of the household. Some activities, such as whaling, weir fishing, caribou drives, and floe-edge sealing, required more cooperative labour than others.

The way of life of the Tchiglit prior to sustained contact with White men was clearly based on a variant of what Lee (1981) has called a foraging mode of production. They exploited nature largely as it was found by gathering, fishing and hunting. What they could not manufacture themselves or obtain locally, they secured through trade with their neighbors (Stefansson 1909; Krech III 1979). A list of the core features that presumably characterized their relations of production would include collective ownership of the land and its resources; the right of reciprocal access to the resources of others through marriage ties, visiting, and co-production; little emphasis on accumulation of goods; a tendency towards generalized sharing of resources; general access to the resources and the knowledge for making essential tools; and individual ownership of at least some tools (Lee and Leacock 1982:8-9). Central to this mode of production was the emphasis on generalized sharing, which has

been reported in foraging societies all over the world (Sahlins 1972:231-275). Ingold (1980:148) maintains that generalized sharing is an inherent property of the foraging mode of production.

What happened to this mode of production when relations were established with merchant capitalists in the mid-1850s? A review of writings on the fur trade reveals (Peterson and Anfinson 1984) that the answer to this question depends on the theoretical assumptions that are made regarding the nature of this contact. The most influential model in the North American fur trade context, first proposed by Murphy and Steward (1956), predicts that a foraging economy inevitably comes to be dominated by nuclear families, who claim delimited territorial rights to marketable furs, and engage exclusively in production for trade.<sup>4</sup> This transformation is said to originate from an insatiable desire for trade goods. More recently, McCormack (1984) has suggested that the influence of traders on native social relations of production is just as important as the desire for trade goods in explaining the involvement of Natives in the fur trade.

This model, which postulates the total breakdown of the

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<sup>4</sup>. This, of course, is the ideal form of production favored by the traders themselves and emulated to some extent by White trappers.

foraging mode of production, can be criticized from several angles. Only two points need to be made here. First, Tanner (1979) has shown that as recently as 1969 the Mistassini Cree kept fur trapping subordinate to the demands of subsistence production, rather than the other way around. Trapping was processed through foraging relations of production and was geared towards fulfilling specific and limited domestic needs. Feit (1982:378-389) has provided collaborative evidence for other Eastern Cree bands while Asch (1982:355-362; 1977:47-55) has done the same for the Dene. Second, the influence of traders on native relations of production has been exaggerated. Recent studies (Fisher 1977; Morantz 1980; Francis and Morantz 1983; White 1984; Ray and Freeman 1978; Thistle 1986) have in fact argued that the relationship between natives and traders is more properly described as symbiotic. Natives were able to retain a large measure of control over the direction of the relationship. While traders may have sought to influence the economic behaviour of the natives, they rarely had the upper hand. In the Mackenzie Delta area, where trading was carried out in a highly competitive situation, the traders exerted minimal influence over the Inuit.<sup>5</sup> White trappers are also unlikely to have

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<sup>5</sup>. There were, for example, seven traders in the Mackenzie Delta in 1930 (NAC, RG 85, vol. 829, file 7282 (1), Inspector A.N. Eames to the Officer Commanding, Edmonton, 4 June 1930). For more information on fur traders in the Mackenzie Delta, see Usher (1971b) and Wolforth (1971).

seriously influenced them.<sup>6</sup> In conclusion, trapping should be seen as a supporting activity for more valued subsistence pursuits. Its adoption as a force of production by no means entailed the disintegration of foraging relations of production.<sup>7</sup> It is this perspective that informs my review of the post-contact Inuit way of life in the Mackenzie Delta area.

Traditional Tchiglit societies had probably ceased to exist as operating systems shortly after the turn of the century, as had occurred in Alaska somewhat earlier (Burch 1975), as a

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6. They were, for the most part, isolated specialists engaged in an intensive trapping effort for profit and they largely avoided natives. In 1930, for example, only 8 out of 36 White trappers had married into native families in the Mackenzie Delta. (See NAC, RG 85, vol. 829, file 7282 (1), Inspector A.N. Eames to the Officer Commanding, Edmonton, 4 June 1930.) It is significant that Jarvenpa (1977) concluded that White trappers did not become models for the Chipewyan because their behaviour was in direct contradiction to native social relations of production and their concept of a good life. No native would voluntarily isolate himself and attempt to escape "personal dependency" (Meillassoux 1972:95). The Chipewyan looked upon these loners "with a mixture of amusement, suspicion and fear" and as "one step removed from humanity" because they divorced themselves "from the familiar ties of marriage, family and community" (Jarvenpa 1977: 175, 182). In fact, White trappers came to personify a much feared traditional feral-like creature labelled "bushman" in English. Smith (1975:64) found that the "bushman" concept was operative in Mackenzie Delta area Inuit, but it's not clear that White trappers personified it, or that it was even part of the traditional lore. Nonetheless, we should recognize that White trappers were "living an anachronistic frontier existence divorced from the mainstream of their own culture" (Jarvenpa 1980:56) and that of their native neighbors.

7. See Asch (1982) and Tanner (1979) for further discussion on this point.

result of depopulation,<sup>8</sup> the influx of---and interaction with---strangers from all over Alaska,<sup>9</sup> involvement in the fur trade,<sup>10</sup> the spread of Christianity<sup>11</sup> and the enforcement of Canadian laws by the police.<sup>12</sup> The Inuit adapted their

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8. Stefansson (1909:190), a trained ethnographer who lived among the Tchiglit at Shingle Point and Eskimo Lakes in 1906 and 1907, reports that devastating epidemics between 1865 and 1902 reduced the Tchiglit to about 200 individuals by 1908. Smith (1984:348) believes the dispersal of the Tchiglit along the North Alaska coast after 1889 also contributed to the population decline in the Mackenzie Delta area.

9. A number of Interior North Alaska Inuit migrated to the middle and upper Mackenzie Delta in the last decades of the century, increasingly so after 1896, and by 1908 they were rapidly approaching the Tchiglit in number (Stefansson 1909:190; Krech III:113). A second wave of Inuit migrants, this time from widely scattered points on the coast and inland Alaska, followed between 1915 and 1923 (Usher 1971:25; Smith 1975:8). As a result of these migrations, out of a total population figure of somewhere between 400 to 500 Inuit in the 1920s, the Tchiglit were reported to be outnumbered three to one (See NAC, RG 85, vol. 764, file 5066 (1), W.H.B. Hoare to Oswald Finnie, 16 December 1926).

10. Direct and sustained trading with white men began to modify traditional trading patterns in the 1850s and by 1861 all Tchiglit groups were drawn seasonally into the Mackenzie Delta to trade, to a greater or lesser extent, with one of the Hudson's Bay Company posts---Fort Anderson, Fort Good Hope, or Fort McPherson (Wolforth 1971:25-29). The presence of American whalers in the area, between 1889 and 1914, when as many as 170 ships are estimated to have wintered east of Point Barrow, tended to refocus Tchiglit trading at Herschel Island and on the coast (Wolforth 1971:38-41). Finally, the decline of commercial whaling redirected most of the Inuit trade towards Fort McPherson and the new trading post at Aklavik (Wolforth 1971:43-47).

11. Missionary activity, which began in 1857, increased in importance when the Anglicans established permanent missions at Herschel Island and Kittigazuit in 1895, Aklavik in 1919 and Shingle Point in 1920 (Wolforth 1971:34-36).

12. For a discussion of this dimension of contact, see Morrison (1985).

foraging mode of production, partly by choice and partly by the force of circumstances, to the new and occasionally dramatic conditions. A distinctive way of life, based on hunting, fishing and trapping emerged which was neither entirely traditional nor entirely dictated by traders, missionaries and policemen. Post-contact foraging is best seen as a synthesis of the old and the new, where adjustments were greater in forces of production and lesser in relations of production.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, the ready acceptance of the material trappings of Western culture has obscured significant continuities with the past.

In post-contact foraging, furs were trapped in the course of a subsistence cycle firmly rooted in hunting and fishing and which differed from the pre-contact cycle only in details, not goals.<sup>14</sup> As elsewhere, trapping was the means to obtain foreign technology which supplemented, in part, traditional implements, and, in part, rendered the need for traditional

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13. I am not as convinced as McCormack (1984) that the outcome was a whole-scale transformation of the foraging mode of production, particularly in light of post-contact relations of production. I refer to the new lifestyle as post-contact foraging to indicate that there is continuity with the past in spite of their participation in a "mixed economy" (Cox 1985). Moreover, it seems to me that the main characteristic of the new way of life was still foraging, that is, living off the land rather than trying to manipulate its output, irrespective of the means of production.

14. See Brody's (1987:203-205) comments on the relationship between trapping and hunting.

technology obsolete.<sup>15</sup> Like their Indian neighbors (Cohen 1962:75), many Inuit may not have enjoyed trapping, but it was the only way they could realistically obtain trade goods. Hence, the adoption of some "western" technology and staples implicated most Inuit in a symbiotic relationship with traders. A commitment to this new relation of production does not, however, imply that the goals of the native economy had changed. As Sahlins (1971:30-31; 1972:82-86) has pointed out, the exchange of goods, even at a higher surplus level than traditionally, does not transform a subsistence economy into a system of capitalist profit-oriented production. Despite the eagerness to modernize their technology,<sup>16</sup> for the majority of Inuit<sup>17</sup> "the exchange, and the production for it" remained "oriented to livelihood, not to profits" (Sahlins 1972:83). To use Sahlins's (1972:83) terminology, the focus of production was still firmly embedded in use-value. That is, the sale of furs was geared to meet immediate domestic needs and not the reproduction of capital.<sup>18</sup>

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15. See Sonnenfeld (1960) for a discussion of the impact of new technology on Inuit self-sufficiency. We should also heed Townsend's (1975:21-32) warning that the volume of trade is a questionable index of acculturation.

16. The Mackenzie Delta area Inuit are not unique in this respect. The Makah (Whitner 1984), for example, also sought to adapt sophisticated White technology to traditional activities.

17. With the possible exception of Usher's (1971) "trapping elite".

18. See Ingold (1980:228-235) for more discussion on this point.



Inuit engaged in post-contact foraging also retained their autonomy over the organization of work. In the Mackenzie Delta itself, occupied mainly by so-called acculturated Alaskan Inuit, the unit of production consisted of a residential group of three to five related families<sup>19</sup> for most of the year or an estimated 15 to 25 or more individuals.<sup>20</sup> This group was also the unit of consumption. Generalized sharing was still prevalent and surpluses were not hoarded.<sup>21</sup> As in earlier times, work was divided along sex lines and kinship and cannot be characterized as entirely individualistic or entirely communal. Some activities could be done alone while others required a degree of cooperation

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19. NAC, RG 85, vol. 790, file 6133, draft of a speech aired over the radio, 27 January 1935, by Dr. J.A. Urquhart. The observations of this medical doctor, stationed in Aklavik since 1929, are reliable since he knew the Inuit quite well and toured their camps by dog team in winter. Moreover, the number of families in a residential group is confirmed by the Oblate missionaries in a questionnaire dated 30 August 1935. See Archives Deschatelets, HPK 2033.N82R98.

20. Based on an average drawn from figures provided by police inspector A.N. Eames for the Mackenzie Delta proper in RG 18, Records of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, PARC box 56, file TA-500-8-1-20, A.N. Eames to Officer Commanding, Edmonton, 4 June 1930.

21. Jaundiced comments about the "improvidence" of Inuit in this respect (and gambling) are too numerous to list individually. See, for example, the files entitled "Conditions among Eskimos" in NAC, RG 18. One should note that not everything was subject to generalized sharing. Unlike subsistence products, cash and purchased produce and luxury goods were not always shared (Riches 1975).

beyond the immediate family. Caribou<sup>22</sup> and beluga hunting<sup>23</sup> are obvious instances of cooperative focus.

That some Inuit were more committed to trapping than others cannot be interpreted as evidence of an emerging entrepreneurial class. Indeed, it would be highly unusual not to find some indication of differential emphasis and success in economic activities. Nuligak (1966:148), in his autobiography, observed that "Inuit are not all alike". Moreover, it is well known that in foraging societies all households at one time or another invariably failed to produce enough to sustain themselves if only on account of a variable ratio of effective workers to dependents (Sahlins 1972:69-74, 87-130). This real vulnerability is more than sufficient to explain the tendency of households in a position to do so to produce above their own needs. In other words, evidence of the accumulation of surpluses by individual households does not suggest a departure from foraging relations of production if these surpluses are shared.

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22. B.H. Segre reported that caribou were hunted in the Richardson mountains in parties of 5 to 10 Inuit in NAC, RG 85, vol. 1069, file 251-1 (1), B.H. Segre to Oswald Finnie, 17 January 1925.

23. Beluga hunting is probably the cooperative activity that has changed the least since contact. See Flyger (1965) and Bruemmer (1987).

Access to resources was also controlled through native relations of production. Although some families favored specific geographic areas, and camps took on an air of permanency with the building of log cabins, both land and game were held in common. No one had exclusive rights to any part of the land. The travels of Nuligak (1966) clearly indicate that the Inuit had access to resources over the entire Mackenzie Delta area. The introduction of registered trapping areas was delayed until 1949 in part on this account. Even then, it largely formalized the existing patterns of land use. In fact, this development probably did not reflect the wishes of the Inuit. From reading some of the government files on the subject, I got the impression that the natives were more concerned with controlling the influx of outsiders to the Mackenzie Delta than with obtaining individual rights to resources. At any rate, the system was largely abandoned in 1957 at their request.

Living on the land was the norm rather than the exception during the period under study. The camps were periodically abandoned by the Inuit---at Christmas, Easter, before and after the whaling season in July and early September---to visit Aklavik for religious events, to sell furs and purchase commodities and staples, to socialize and visit with children left in the care of the residential schools. Aklavik was, as a result, usually without a significant adult Native

population for most of the year.<sup>24</sup>

By all accounts, post-contact foraging was a successful way of life in the Mackenzie Delta area for the first half of the century. The incomes generated primarily by trapping fox and muskrat brought the Inuit a degree of material prosperity that was the envy of many southern observers, particularly before the depression of the 1930s. Destitution was largely unknown<sup>25</sup>. At a time when the national mean annual wage in the manufacturing industries was under \$1,000, many earned several thousand dollars (Usher 1971a:figure 3.12). Whaleboats, which had replaced the traditional umiaks by World War One, were in turn replaced by motorized single masted "schooners" of 35 to 45 feet in length valued at between \$2,000 and \$7,000 each in the 1920s. Usher (1971a:34-35) reports that nearly half of the Inuit families owned schooners at any one time, which is an indication that wealth was well distributed. Their buying power also introduced many luxury items to their material culture in addition to

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24. The journals of the Roman Catholic Mission at Aklavik provide ample evidence of this visiting pattern. It broke down during the 1950's, however, as more and more Inuit established themselves in Aklavik, and later Inuvik. See *Codex historicus*, Aklavik (W 446.M62F 30-38), Archives Deschatelets, Ottawa.

25. This point was emphasized by both the district medical health officer (NAC, RG 85, vol. 829, file 7282 (1), Dr. J.A. Urquhart to H.E. Hume, 29 September 1932) and by the police (NAC, Records of the Northern Affairs Program, RG 85, vol. 1086, file 401-9 (1), Inspector A.N. Eames to Officer Commanding, Edmonton, 7 November 1932).

imported foods, such as gramophones, radio sets and sewing machines.<sup>26</sup>

Even the depression of the 1930s was not as severe a setback here as elsewhere in the Arctic, given the diversity of resources on which to fall back, particularly the ubiquitous muskrat. As Wolforth (1971:62) points out, usually "the [trapping] returns from good years were sufficient to carry most people over the bad years given the existence of a sharing ethic which led to the redistribution of material resources to the benefit of the temporarily disadvantaged as well as of the disabled, aged and infirm."

The reproduction of this way of life was not seriously threatened until after the Second World War when rising prices for commodities and declining returns for furs made it increasingly difficult for the Inuit to live off the land. Although the implementation of registered trapping areas in 1949 mitigated the effects of overcrowding in the Delta, brought on by migrations and a natural increase in the local population, the end of the fur trade as the main source of cash in their livelihood was postponed by only a few years.

A recession set in during the 1950s that forced the Inuit off

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<sup>26</sup>. The surprising prosperity of the Mackenzie Delta Inuit was commented upon by Stefansson (1909:196-97), Rasmussen (1969:293-300), and many of their contemporaries.

the land and into the settlements. While there is a tendency to interpret that migration as a rejection of the former way of life, in fact it was simply no longer possible for the Inuit to renew from the sale of furs alone the hunting and trapping equipment necessary to the maintenance of their lifestyle. The addition of statutory payments such as old age pensions and family allowances helped, but eventually these had to be augmented by wage employment in the settlements and increasingly by social assistance. By 1960, most of the Mackenzie Inuit lived in the settlements and could afford to hunt and trap furs only in conjunction with wage employment (Usher 1976 and 1980; Clairmont 1963; Smith 1967; Ferguson 1961; Wolforth 1971).

The movement to the settlements also corresponded with a policy of northern resource development that was explicitly meant to incorporate the Inuit in the industrial economy of Canada. Substantial investments in health care and educational facilities transformed the nature and the impact of government policy on native life (Jenness 1964). For the first time in their history, the Mackenzie Inuit were caught in a web of relationships that could truly undermine their relations of production. To draw an ethnographic parallel with the Dene, "western" style education interfered directly in the normal enculturation process, wage labour reduced the amount of time available for subsistence activities, and

welfare relieved the community of its responsibility to share (Asch 1977:55-58).

There is no question that the coercive influences exerted on the lives of the Mackenzie Delta Inuit in the settlements were of a different nature from those that affected them in camp life. It is also true, however, that most individuals displayed only a weak commitment to living in the settlements. Their cultural dependence on the land and its resources remained "unarticulated by Eskimos and unsuspected by whites" (Usher 1976:4) until exposed before the Berger Inquiry. Traditional activities continued to be pursued, albeit to a lesser extent than previously, with funds obtained through a combination of welfare, statutory payments and wage work. While changing economic circumstances propelled the Inuit into the settlements, allegiance to the land remained crucial to the well being of most of them.

We have seen that despite the dramatic changes of the post-contact era, Inuit living in the Mackenzie Delta area continued to think and behave much like their ancestors. There is no evidence to suggest that they abandoned the essence of foraging relations of production, despite their reliance on a "mixed economy", during the period under study.

### **From post-contact foraging to reindeer herding**

There is no question in my mind, based on the writings of Lee (1981) and Ingold (1980), that the shift from foraging to pastoralism involves qualitative transformations in the relations of production. Significantly, production based on common access to the means of production and the sharing of the fruits of labour is diametrically opposed to production based on divided access to the means of production and the hoarding of the fruits of labour. These alternative approaches to production cannot, in normal circumstances, co-exist within the same society. The established relations of production will usually impede the full expression of the other. The fact that in Alaska the relations of production usually associated with reindeer pastoralism have not gained much ground (Olson 1969) lends support to my argument. It remains for us to examine in greater detail the spheres of potential conflict between the relations of production of the Inuit and those promoted by the government in reindeer herding.

### **The organization of work in reindeer herding**

Government officials viewed reindeer herding mainly as a full-time and lifelong specialized occupation. The rigid scheduling of work activities and the long-term commitments



inherent to the apprenticeship program contrasted with the relative freedom of the way of life of the Inuit. Many apprentices resented not being able to pack up at a moment's notice to go hunting---particularly during the spring muskrat season---or visiting. The lack of flexibility in this respect was a major obstacle to recruitment. One should note that in Alaska, where reindeer herding never became the sole means of living, native managers scheduled herding activities to minimize conflicts with other valued pursuits (Stern 1981:56-58, 298-301).

Becoming an apprentice and herder was not unlike accepting full-time wage work: both tended to offend the Inuit's conception of self-determination and self-reliance. "To allow another to specify when, where, and how one will perform an act", writes Smith (1975:60), "is to surrender a degree of one's valued autonomy". Being bound by promises, agreements or contracts was "antithetical to maintenance of control over one's own actions and affairs" (Smith 1975:60).

The leadership structure in the apprenticeship program, where a clear hierarchy of authority was explicit, no doubt required adjustments by the Inuit. Inuit gained considerable autonomy from an early age and any attempt by someone to impose himself on others was considered an aggressive act. Leadership was traditionally situational and dissolved after

the completion of a task. In the apprenticeship program, Inuit were expected to respond to direct orders and the delegation of tasks by the Superintendent and the chief herder. Complying meant giving up a degree of individual autonomy which was likely a source of some embarrassment. Although the nature of existing records does not permit a clear-cut statement in this respect, we can assume, based on Inuit behaviour in the 1960s (Smith 1975:54-69), that this feature of the apprenticeship program was a source of some tension.

Becoming a full-fledged herder and herd manager were probably also sources of anxiety because of the implied authority that came with the jobs. Such uneasiness made Inuit "reluctant to exercise authority over others and just as reluctant to accept it" (Smith 1975:57). Moreover, natives given leadership roles by Whites were "considered with suspicion and even dislike by other Native people" (Smith 1975:68). Again, how Inuit reconciled their herder status---a role clearly attributed to them by Whites---with Native non-authoritarian values is unclear. There is, however, some evidence that they had difficulties in this respect. In 1958, for example, when a replacement for the position of Chief herder was sought, none of the experienced herders wanted the job, my impression being that they did not wish to assume such a position of authority. Native managers definitely

found it difficult to manage their herds on White terms. Stanley Mason, the field supervisor attached to the native herds prior to 1944, observed that Charlie Rufus avoided his management responsibilities so long as he was around--- meaning that he left him to assume the dreaded non-Native behaviour patterns. Whenever natives managers sought to assume employer-employee relationships with their apprentices, they experienced great difficulty in recruiting and retaining native help. Apprentices often complained that native managers were "too bossy", presumably by native standards.<sup>27</sup>

Learning the skills of husbandry was another area of potential conflict. As Smith (1975:58) points out, Inuit were "not specifically "taught" how to do things (at least in the sense of a superordinate/subordinate teacher-student relationship)...The emphasis is on self-reliant learning, rather than upon teaching." To what extent the Superintendent and the Samek herders were sensitive to this style of learning and to what extent they tolerated idiosyncratic approaches to husbandry is not known.

Government officials made no effort to use reindeer to

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<sup>27</sup>. This is particularly clear in the case of the Kaglik-Tama herd, but it is also true of the other native herds to a greater or lesser extent. See the files relating to native herds in NAC, RG 85, listed previously.

strengthen existing kinship-based relationships. Indeed, Inuit involved in the reindeer project were mainly unrelated strangers, a fact that probably complicated interaction among them to some extent and seems to have led to the breakup of at least a few of the native partnerships. Significantly, the most successful native partnership, the Rufus-Kalealuk venture, was based on a father-son relationship and most of the "employees" were related to the family. Part of the success of the American experiment in the early years can be attributed to the fact that reindeer were "incorporated into existing social and political relationships among the Native villagers" (Olson 1969:27). Although this was by no means the result of inspired management on the part of officials, it certainly worked to everyone's advantage.

Working as herders meant accepting a degree of social isolation unknown to other Inuit, a factor that was eventually recognized as an obstacle to recruitment:

"The reindeer staff are a small group of people who work together and live together, with very little outside contact, so it is probably quite natural that some of the Eskimos, who are a very sociable people, should become so tired of the monotony of their job and the loneliness of their life that they quit...herding...for other occupations which are more insecure, but offer more variety and social life."<sup>28</sup>

In short, the organization of work in reindeer herding was a

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<sup>28</sup>. NAC, RG 109, vol. 490, file 92, Annual Report 1957-58, p.2.

deterrent for many Inuit. Certainly, they were aware that herding was remarkably inflexible by their standards and based on foreign concepts. Statistics show that only a minority of Inuit were willing to surrender their autonomy of action to gain access to a steady supply of reindeer products. Although the number of available positions was always limited due to financial restraint, suitable candidates were difficult to secure most of the time. About 66 Canadian Inuit found work as herders, with the government herd or Native herds, between 1935 and 1960. The average stay on the job was slightly over 3 years, but some 16 Inuit remained with reindeer herding for over 10 years.<sup>29</sup>

#### **Ownership of reindeer**

The idea of concentrating hundreds of large animals, normally not the property of anyone in particular until brought down, and then subject to generalized sharing, in the hands of an individual, was alien to Inuit relations of production. Even today, the wild counterpart of the reindeer, the caribou, is considered to be a collective resource. Unfortunately, no one

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<sup>29</sup>. Treude (1979:132) claims that 120 Inuit received some training as herders before 1953. I have not been able to confirm that this is the case. Indeed, if we exclude those who only showed up to give a hand at roundup, the actual figure is half that given by him up to 1960. Information available on these Inuit is rather limited, which makes it impossible to draw much by way of meaningful conclusions.

paid any attention to this obstacle in the transition to reindeer herding, even in Alaska.

Ingold (1980) has argued that in Europe the step from foraging to reindeer pastoralism was a social and ecological transformation that could not have occurred through the direct appropriation of wild reindeer precisely because these animals were a resource held in common. He postulated, instead, that domesticated specimens were acquired through trade, from equestrian pastoralists moving north into the taiga. Since domestic animals fall under the category of personal property, and unlike hunted animals, are free from sharing obligations when killed, the reproductive increase from a small domestic stock used mainly for transportation could form the basis of pastoral herds under a situation of regional scarcity of wild reindeer (Ingold 1980: 144-200). Unfortunately, this scenario hardly applies to the North American context, for reindeer, although introduced by outsiders, were not incorporated into Inuit households as domestic animals prior to a theoretical emergence of pastoral relations of production. We are left to ponder how Inuit might entertain different property concepts in relation to reindeer and caribou which were, for all practical purposes, indistinguishable (Paine 1988:31).

The answer may be that the Inuit did not recognize the

concept of individual ownership of reindeer, although they may have paid lip service to the idea when questioned by White persons (Stern 1980: 474), and expressed their displeasure at the personal appropriation of such wealth only indirectly.<sup>30</sup> The force of the law, and the perception that reindeer were government property, gave the herds a measure of protection, but "poaching" occurred nevertheless, albeit discreetly for fear of arrest, and probably with the knowledge and tacit consent of the herders.<sup>31</sup> In Alaska, "poaching" was a secondary means for the distribution of reindeer products. Olson (1969:119) has suggested that "poaching" is an inappropriate definition for the practice since the Inuit did not see it in that light. Native "owners" did not as a rule protest the right of anyone to kill reindeer when in need.

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<sup>30</sup>. In 1950, for example, Tuktoyaktuk Inuit complained that reindeer were destroying muskrat "pushups". Since the damage caused by reindeer was blown out of proportion to its actual impact, it is more likely that this grievance was an indirect expression of their displeasure at reindeer ownership. It should be noted that reindeer products, whether from the government or Native herds, were sold to the missions and the Hudson's Bay Company. This meant that Inuit, like everyone else, had to purchase reindeer meat from the stores. Because of the economic conditions at the time, few could afford it, leaving them to do without. See NAC, RG 85, vol. 1134, file 270-1 (8).

<sup>31</sup>. It wasn't until 1949 that the government took notice of the extent of poaching. One Inuit was sentenced to six months imprisonment, but others were not tried because the government did not wish to undermine local support (as if they had any!) for the industry. See NAC, RG 85, vol. 1281, file 270-5-5 (2), and in particular, the report of Inspector J.A. Peacock to the Director, Northwest Territories and Yukon Administration, 25 October 1949.

### **Consumption and distribution of reindeer products**

Government officials were too intransigent in their approach to patterns of consumption and distribution of reindeer products. To them, the only acceptable means of distributing reindeer products were through sales and barter. By consciously seeking to undermine anything that remotely resembled the practice of generalized sharing---because it offended their concept of self-reliance---government officials unknowingly handicapped the Inuit managers.

Inuit managers were expected to maximize the growth of their herds while being parsimonious with the consumption of reindeer products. This typical pastoral orientation to production (see Ingold 1980:201-228) was promoted in the absence of a real understanding of Inuit relations of production which emphasized undivided access and the sharing of resources. Indeed, it stands in sharp contrast to the functional approach adopted by Alaskan Inuit managers. There, as recently as 1969, production objectives sought to reconcile what are generally considered to be mutually exclusive goals:

**"Reindeer are simultaneously a source of village subsistence and owner income. The degree to which a herd of reindeer generate profit for the owner depends primarily upon the degree to which the owner is committed to the use of his herd for village consumption. The native owner must try to maintain a precarious balance between personal and community**



benefits. He is socially and genetically related to most of the village population and cannot, without risking censure, economically out-distance his village fellows too greatly. The desire to increase income from operations...is greatly inhibited by the owner's economic and social responsibilities to his home village" (Olson 1969:86)

Olson (1969:86-87) reported that in 1968 the annual slaughter was a village-wide event at which the reindeer owner was obliged to feed participants and their dog teams, the result being that the number of reindeer consumed frequently equalled the number of carcasses sent to retail outlets. An owner's standing in his community was largely determined by his generosity at this event (Olson 1969:117-18). It provided "the forum for most owners to display the generosity that must attend positions of economic importance" (Olson 1969:96).

I feel that a similar approach would have been adopted by Inuit managers in Canada, had they been at liberty to do so, because their personal prestige could in no way be divorced from generosity. "In the Arctic", Olson (1969:4) writes, "...there exists no wealth unassociated with an appropriately generous nature. The person who possesses wealth beyond his own needs and develops a miserly reputation is without kin---an "orphan". Among the Eskimo, the terms for "orphan" and "poor" are the same. To be without kin in the Arctic calls for emotional strength few possess." It was impossible to maintain a herd of reindeer without the cooperation of others, and that could be secured only on Native terms.

Unfortunately, Canadian officials would not have tolerated the level of sharing evident in Alaska, even for herds under private ownership.<sup>32</sup> They kept a firm hand on the evolution of the industry and built in regulatory measures which sought to direct Inuit management along a definite course.<sup>33</sup>

In Alaska, the pleasures of reindeer ownership were realized mainly during the processing and distribution of reindeer products at the annual slaughter. According to Olson (1969:84), a holiday atmosphere surrounded this occasion; as few as 20 reindeer were slaughtered per day. Under Canadian conditions, the annual slaughter was much more regimented and the pace of work was set by government officials.<sup>34</sup> It was not a public event, at least not on a scale comparable to Alaska, although up to 25 Inuit families from the immediate

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32. One Alaska Inuit owner, presumably in 1968, slaughtered 306 reindeer from his 1,000 strong herd, but marketed only 183, the remaining 123 being distributed to participants (Olson 1969:86-87). In Canada, during the 1950's, rarely more than 100 reindeer were slaughtered from a herd of comparable size. Between 30 and 50 reindeer would be consumed by a Native unit over one year.

33. The reader is directed to the terms of agreement which native managers signed and NAC, P.C. 1954-1921, 8 December 1954, "Regulations for the Management and Protection of Reindeer in the Northwest Territories". Although these regulations were meant to encourage the industry, they were also framed with a specific model of husbandry in mind which was hardly sympathetic to Inuit production goals.

34. In the 1950's, they averaged over 50 reindeer per day at the government herd. They were up to 300 per day by 1980 (Stager 1984:133).

area attended to watch and help when the slaughter was held at Reindeer Station. Payments were made for services rendered, but the accounting was precise. Because the crucial decisions concerning the number of animals to be slaughtered and how they were to be disposed of were made by attending officials, Native managers missed out on the best opportunity to secure prestige from their peers.

Thus, reindeer herding in the Mackenzie Delta provided few rewards to native managers beyond an assured supply of reindeer products. The inability to generate prestige on Native terms, through the distribution of reindeer products, hardly made reindeer herding an attractive proposition. In fact, it probably created an embarrassing dilemma for native managers. Unable to operate strictly on pastoral terms without alienating other Inuit, and largely without a forum for redistributing reindeer products except at arms' length, through retail outlets, they found themselves in an awkward position. Since there was so little to be gained by herding reindeer, it is not surprising that only 14 Inuit were willing to take on a herd of their own and that all eventually gave up.

In retrospect, it is clear that the potential for reinforcing Inuit goals through reindeer herding completely escaped government officials. They showed little desire to experiment

and adapt reindeer herding to Inuit relations of production. As a result, reindeer herding remained at odds with too many aspects of the way of life of the Inuit.

#### 4.0 A VISION IN RETROSPECT

Reindeer herding attracted sufficient public attention in Canada, during the first two decades of this century, largely through the personal efforts of Grenfell and Stefansson, to secure federal support. While most of the popular enthusiasm was reserved for the economic and commercial potential of reindeer, both as a livestock industry and a means to sustain northern development, in the end the federal government mustered its considerable resources to introduce reindeer in the Northwest Territories purportedly as an instrument for the betterment of the native peoples.

We have seen that reindeer, from the point of view of some senior civil servants, such as Harkin and Finnie, could rescue northern natives when diseases, wildlife depletion and an economic dependence on the fur trade were perceived as real threats to their self-sufficiency and survival. Although it is true that these officials were sincerely concerned for the welfare of the Inuit, it is also true that the introduction of reindeer served to further Canada's ideology of wildlife conservation, its perceived need for man-power in the North and, in the long run, its assimilationist policy towards Native peoples.

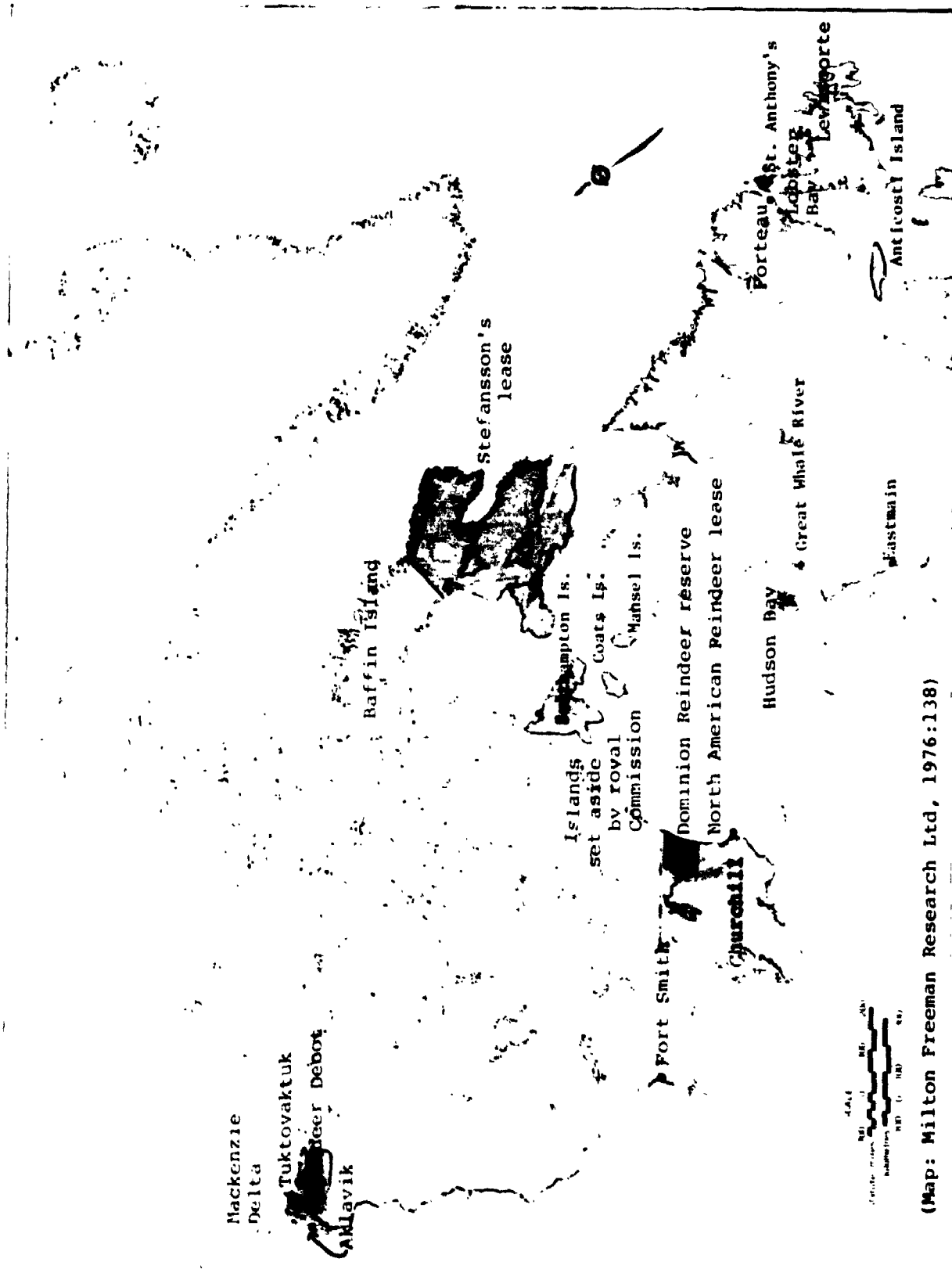
We have also seen that the property relations of reindeer

pastoralism threatened the very essence of a way of life based on sharing and common access to resources. Given the absence of significant environmental pressures to modify their mode of production, and the reluctance of the government to let the Inuit experiment with reindeer herding on their own terms, it is no wonder that the majority did not share the government's enthusiasm for pastoralism.

With the benefit of hindsight, we can see how the introduction of reindeer was conceptually flawed. Reindeer herding in the Northwest Territories was never seriously meant to be a Native industry, since the formal controls over it remained entirely vested in a bureaucracy with little understanding of, or sympathy with, the Inuit way of life.

# Appendix A

Reindeer grazing leases, reserves and areas mentioned in text.

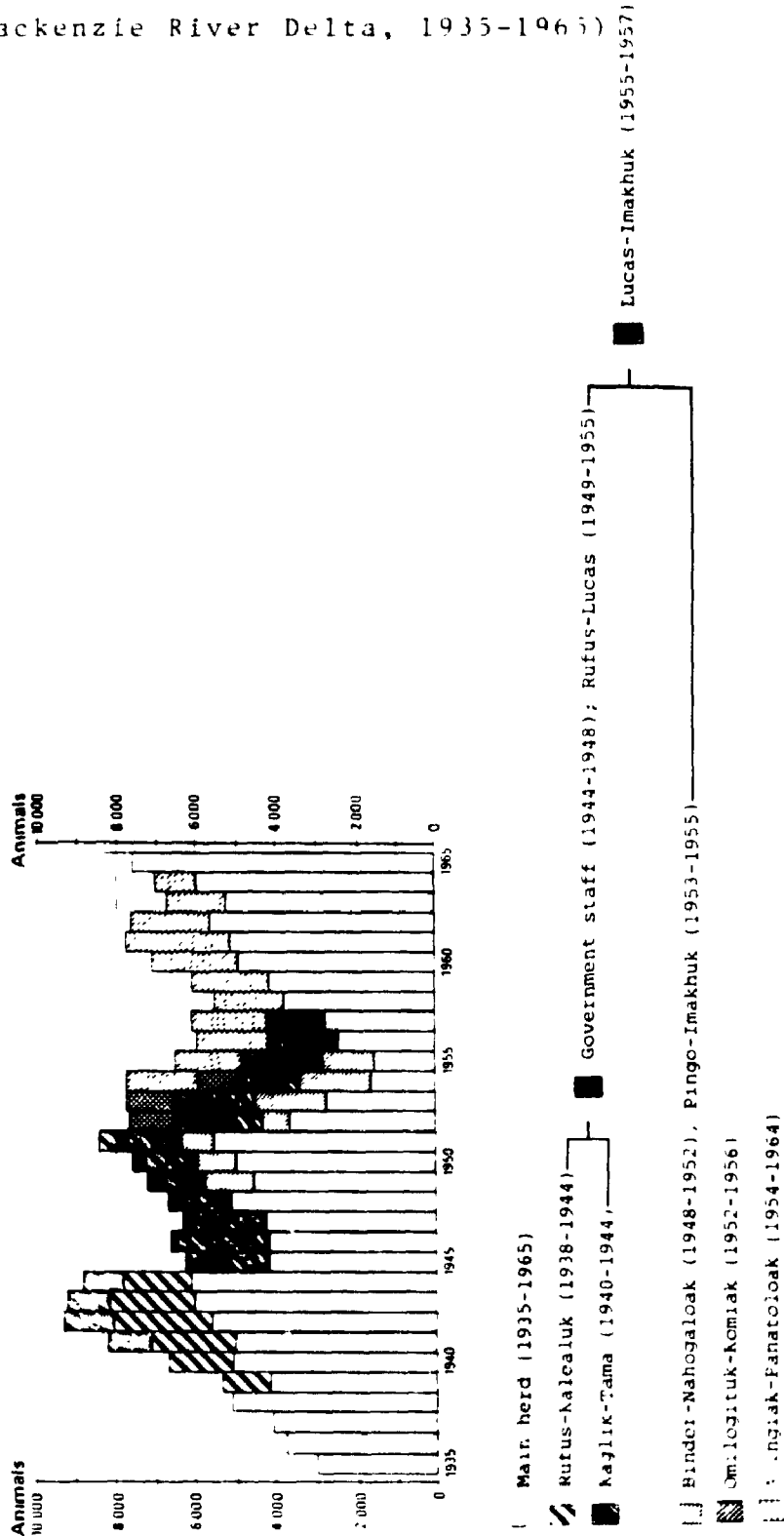


(Map: Milton Freeman Research Ltd, 1976:138)

## Appendix B

### Reindeer herd tallies, Canadian Reindeer Project.

(Mackenzie River Delta, 1935-1965)



(Bar graph: Treude 1979:125)



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