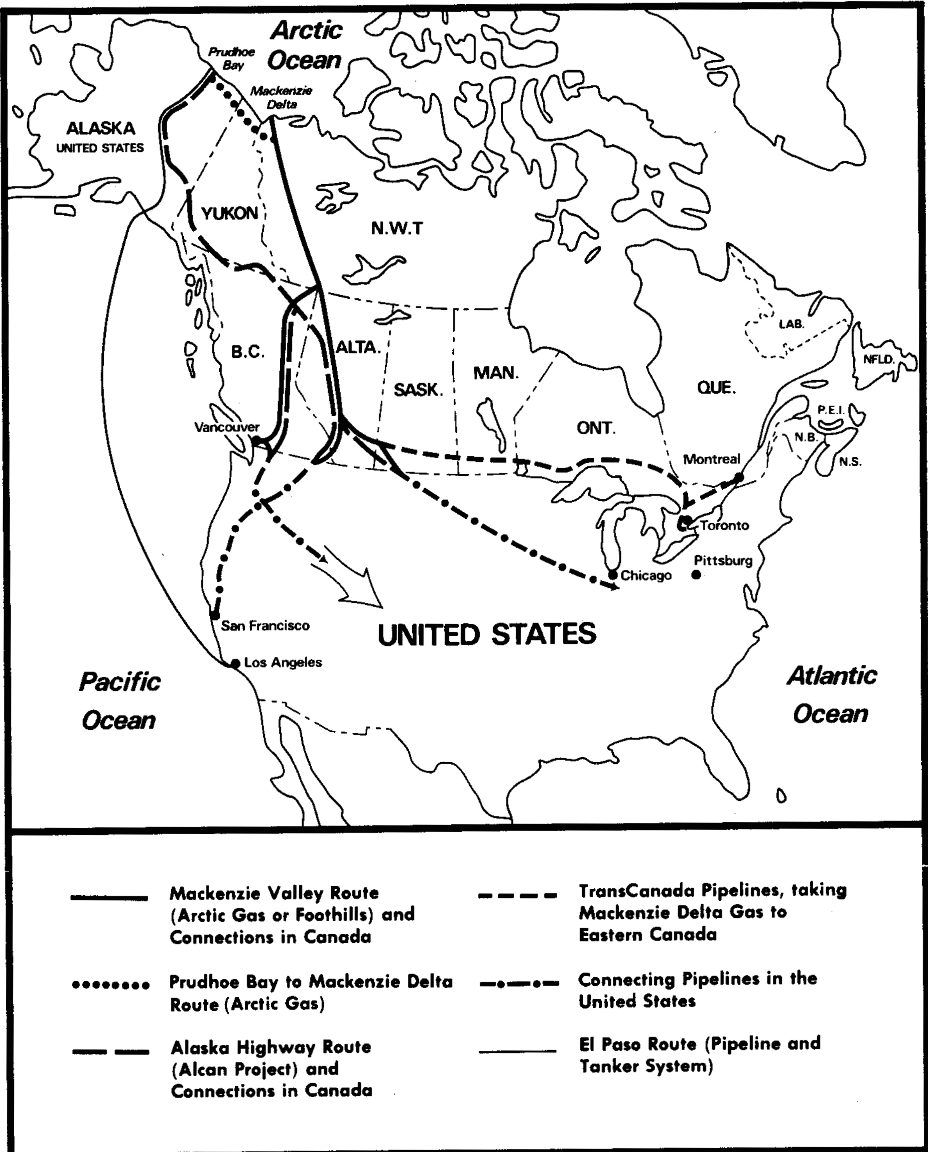

Map of pipeline routes proposed for the delivery of natural gas from Prudhoe Bay and the Mackenzie Delta to southern markets. *Reproduced by courtesy of J. A. Heginbottom, Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry.*

Northern Pipelines and Southern Assumptions

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Reports have recently been published of each of two commissions of inquiry set up by the Canadian government to investigate the likely consequences for the land and peoples of northern Canada affected by pipelines proposed for the delivery of Alaskan natural gas to American markets. Both reports are remarkably similar in the kind of picture they present of conditions north of the sixtieth parallel, and both reveal as much about southern assumptions concerning the Canadian North as they do about the processes of northern development.

The first of the two commissions to be appointed was that under the chairmanship of Mr. Justice Thomas Berger. It was concerned with the proposal of Canadian Arctic Gas Ltd. to construct a pipeline along the Mackenzie Valley. Its hearings, which began in Aklavik, N.W.T. in April 1975 and ended in Yellowknife, N.W.T. in November 1975, were also held in ten cities in southern Canada. All settlements that would be affected by the proposal were visited. The first volume of the report of the Berger commission[2], published in May 1977, received considerable publicity and two impressions of it were quickly sold out. The second volume of the report[3] has just appeared.

The other commission, of which Mr. Kenneth Lysyk was appointed chairman, was concerned with the proposal of the Alcan group of companies to construct a pipeline across the southern Yukon along the route of the Alaska Highway. Its hearings lasted from April till August 1977, and its report[4] was published in the latter month with less publicity than the earlier report had received.

The building of a pipeline through northern Canada is not treated as a simple technical problem in either of the two reports. The emphasis is rather on the probable social, economic and political impacts of the undertakings. Boomers describe the pipeline as "a thread across a football field", whereas native spokesmen compare it to "a slash across the Mona Lisa." The emotional atmosphere surrounding the work of the Berger commission — it was treated as a "media event" — is one reason why its report misrepresents many northern dilemmas. Northerners had no say in its establishment, nor in the choice of Mr. Berger as its chairman. Like so many of the products of initiative by the Ottawa decision-makers concerning the North, the Berger commission was set up to solve a problem that they had failed to tackle. Twenty-three years after the creation of the Department of Northern Affairs, and a couple of decades after the riches of the North began

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[2]Berger, T. R. *Northern Frontier, Northern Homeland. The Report of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry: Volume One*. Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1977.

[3]Berger, T. R. *Northern Frontier, Northern Homeland. The Report of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry: Volume Two.* Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1977.

[4]Lysyk, M. K., Bohmer, E. E. and Phelps, W. L. *Alaska Highway Pipeline Inquiry*. Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1977.

to be the subject of public discussion, the Canadian government has yet to establish a firm policy on northern development. Mr. Lysyk, like Mr. Berger before him, was an appointee of the Canadian government. His commission was however augmented by Mr. Wendell R. Phelps, nominated by the Yukon Territorial Council and Mrs. Edith E. Bohmer, nominated by the Council for Yukon Natives.

The Berger report adds very little to the knowledge of anyone who has been north of the sixtieth parallel, or who has kept in touch with recent events there; but it will probably baffle and confuse many southern Canadians or Americans as they try to make sense of the northern development process. The Lysyk report is a sensible document that tries to come to grips with the real problems arising out of pipeline construction.

One perceives in retrospect an unseemly panic on the part of the Canadian government in establishing the Lysyk commission when it became apparent that the Berger commission was going to recommend a delay in the construction of any pipeline down the Mackenzie Valley. It now looks as if the government has, in bypassing the Mackenzie Valley route, achieved its main aim of assuring the U.S. government, by September 1977, that it had found some way of delivering Alaskan gas to southern markets.

In the course of his commission's inquiry, Mr. Berger became a folk hero in Canada to some people, and a villain to others. The conduct of the inquiry served to polarize people both in northern and southern Canada at a time when many were looking for some common ground for a rational discussion of the costs and benefits of northern and national development. Both the commissions are opposed to the construction of a pipeline at any time across the coastal plain of the Yukon Territory, and both also recommend that the Canadian government settle native land claims as soon as possible. The Berger commission suggests a ten-year moratorium on the construction of a pipeline down the Mackenzie Valley; the Lysyk commission recommends that pipeline construction across the Yukon should not start until after August 1981.

Construction of the Yukon pipeline has been approved, and the Territory is already starting to boom. Subject to the passing of enabling legislation, actual construction is expected to begin in 1981 and, when it is complete, two hundred permanent jobs will have been created. Many skilled northerners will probably move from the Northwest Territories to the Yukon, where economic activity is at present slowing down. The Berger commission seems to believe that the future of the Mackenzie Valley can be based on a native economy; the implications of this view are not however clearly spelled out in its report.

The Berger report has an abstract, pontifical tone to it, whereas the Lysyk report sounds as if its compilers were really trying to determine every possible way in which a pipeline could either benefit or harm the Yukon and its residents. It is possible that the proposed Yukon pipeline could serve to create a solid revenue base for the Territory and so decrease its dependence on the federal government. In the Lysyk report, an attempt is made to indicate some common ground where white people and Indians might work together to alleviate the undesirable effects the pipeline would have on different communities:

> We are strongly of the view that every community must be encouraged to

> identify and broaden the area of its residents common interests while fostering cultural diversity. (p. xii)

The commissioners believe that something could be done to mitigate the damage that would be suffered by the Yukon environment — by setting up a heritage fund of 200 million dollars.

Little of the testimony presented at the two inquiries was objective. It was rather an amalgam of hopes, fears and phobias. These inquiries did reveal though that something has gone wrong in the North. People brought up in communities which have known machines for several hundred years have encountered others whose lives have been paced for thousands of years by the land and the seasons. The Berger commission never took into account the basic assumptions and values of those who set the pace of change in the North; its report therefore contains no explanation of why things are as they are in northern Canada. Modern society creates a large number of roles, a great deal of social flexibility, and a heightened awareness of individual freedom; in traditional societies, roles were circumscribed by custom, and social organizations were small and relatively simple.

An atmosphere of guilt hangs heavily over the Berger report. Again and again, the claim is made in it that southern Canadians and white northerners have undervalued the indigenous cultures of the North; and in order to support it the report writers seem to have felt the need to present a romantic vision of traditional Indian society. Why do they act so? The answer to this question lies less in the realities of northern life than in the philosophical basis of Canadian society. Industrial man has eaten of the tree of knowledge, discovered science, and known sin. Redemption may be achieved in one of two ways: retreat to the wilderness to find or to preserve a lost Eden, or service to the poor and the oppressed. When the middle classes became secularized and lost their religious faith, they took up and prosecuted the social gospel with an evangelical fervour which has been the basis of modern state socialism. The secular missionaries attempt to save those they consider to be disadvantaged. The Canadian government's approach to the development of the North has always had a curious nineteenth-century tone to it, being compounded of both economic boosterism and a quest for personal redemption.

The Berger commission appears to have selected testimony from the native people in such a way as to make it appear as if white outsiders are to blame for all the evils of the North. For example, there are complaints by trappers and hunters that wildlife is scarce in certain areas. Surely however the scarcity is related to the considerable increase in the population of the North which has resulted from improved health care? The testimony of anthropologists is used by the commission to support the romantic view of traditional native life; the evidence of one anthropologist, Charles Hobart, who endeavoured to show that wage employment will not destroy the native peoples of the North, is however discounted.

Louise Frost, a 21-year-old girl from Old Crow, in addressing a representative of the Berger commission, claims: "... so, to put it bluntly, the process of the white man is destroying the Indian way of life." (p. 36). In both reports, Old Crow is treated like Shangri-la, and its residents are described as living in harmony with the land as well as with each other. These residents claim that the pipeline will

create social dislocation. In *Vunta Kutchin Social Change* (Ottawa: Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, Northern Co-ordination and Research Centre, 1963), Asen Balikci presented a very different picture of Old Crow. He showed that marital instability was widespread, but the people had managed to combine a high level of modern technology (rifles, outboard motors, nets) with their traditional way of life, and were heavily dependent on welfare payments and pensions. On page 152 of the Berger report, a photograph of Old Crow shows a huge pile of tin cans.

In attempting to present a positive image of the traditional native way of life, the Berger commission ended up by being counterproductive. The native peoples are portrayed as losers; their testimony is marked by nostalgic memories of a lost past, and by bitterness, fear and anger. Evidence is however available — for example, in pp. 47-61 of *The Dene Nation: The Colony Within,* edited by M. Watkins (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977) — that native peoples in the Canadian North can keep a balance between old and new ways of life, and retain their sense of pride and integrity. Of this fact there is little mention in the Berger report. Instead the Greenland experience is cited to show the "right way" to do things. However, the discussion (pp. 187-91) is limited to the situation at Thule-Qanak, which the report admits is atypical.

It is refreshing to read the testimony before the Berger commission of Abe Okpik, who describes how harsh the old life on the land was, but who concludes: "Although all these things that we strive and struggle with, we like this land." (pp. 108-9). There is a lot of loose talk about the freedom of life in the bush, and about the theft of resources by white outsiders. The principal churches in Canada allied themselves with the native peoples to oppose the Mackenzie Valley pipeline, although they were part of the institutional structure out of which arose the society which exists in the North today.

The Berger commission presents a dualistic vision of the North. On the one hand, the native peoples are portrayed as sharing resources, respecting their elders, and practising democracy; whereas the white people are characterized as being greedy, callous and aggressive. On the other hand, it is made to appear in the report as if alcoholism is strictly a native problem; there is even a picture (p. 155) of a native woman, head in hand, behind a beer-laden table to help get the message across. In the Lysyk report, it is stated that one out of every nineteen Yukoners is an alcoholic. A belief exists that one of the effects of the construction of a pipeline will be to intensify the drinking problems of northerners. But is not drinking, among both native and white people, in some way the result of boredom and other similar factors? It seems to be implied in the Berger report that the only option open to the native peoples in adapting to change is to go out and get drunk. Instead, therefore, of strengthening the sense of native pride and identity, the report serves to undermine it.

The epilogue of the Berger report, "Themes for the national interest", is a lament for lost opportunities. The claim is made:

> "We have sought to make over these people (i.e. the native people) in our own image, but this pronounced, consistent and well-intentioned effort at assimilation has failed." (p. 197)

Quite obviously, political separation by the native peoples is not an option for the North. So what is left?

In the Lysyk report, Mr. Clyde Blackjack states:

> "I don't want to be rich and get carried away. I'm not going to live forever for that money." (p. 91)

The commissioners of the Lysyk report recognize that the aspirations of natives and of white people in the Yukon territory are different, but they make reference to "Yukoners" and examine means whereby different individuals can in separate ways contribute their ideas and skills to the resolution of particular development problems. For example, at Pelly Crossing, Mr. Silverfox raised the question of underground peat-moss fires (p. 139). When the developers proposing to construct the pipeline showed themselves to be unaware of these, the commissioners noted the possibility that local people might have a lot of knowledge that would be useful in lessening the impact of pipeline construction and its associated developments. The thinking implicit in the Lysyk report seems to be: The pipeline will be built; once it is in place there will not be too many problems; the construction phase will be marked by a boom; Yukoners have lived through booms before — and survived; the developers have provided some guarantees, but have failed to take many things into account; Yukoners, by working together, can absorb the impact of pipeline construction, especially if they get good information; there will be costs and problems, but one must try to find out what Yukoners can do to meet this new challenge.

The Lysyk report is optimistic, but not naively so. It is infused with the idea that the people of the North can be participants, and not victims, in the development process. The commissioners suggest that construction of the proposed pipeline be deferred, and that a planning and regulatory agency be set up to monitor it — a body which should be independent both of government and developers.

The search for a middle ground has become vital in the North, as people there and in southern Canada are increasingly presented with a dualistic vision of it — of developers against conservationists, boomers against romantics. The crisis of identity of the young people of the North, who will be the losers in any confrontation, comes through in the testimony of Roy Fabian of Hay River to the Berger commission:

> "For myself, I find it very hard to identify with anybody, because I have nobody to turn to. My people don't accept me any more, because I got an education, and the white people won't accept me because I am not the right colour . . . I can't really identify with anybody and I'm lost. I'm just a sort of person hanging in the middle of two cultures and doesn't know which way to go." (p. 92)

This cry transcends the categories of white and native, and echoes across Canada and throughout the world where many young people are caught between a rural past and an industrial future; between concepts of community and of individualism. Is it possible to help these lost young people to establish a sense of identity and to learn the strengths of both worlds? The Berger report seems to imply that it is possible, but is imprecise on how it can be done.

These reports taken together serve to confirm that the problems of northern development do not start beyond the sixtieth parallel, but begin in the minds of white people from the South because of their assumptions. It is going to be hard for such people, who have chased Gold, God and Glory to the ends of the earth, to accept that the quest for redemption ends in their own minds, in the values they hold, in the assumptions they make and in the concepts they have formed.

The Berger and Lysyk reports may become the foundation stones for a new ethic of northern development. Both come to the same basic conclusion: it is necessary to approach the North and its inhabitants in a qualitatively different way in the future. Both reports fail to deal with the most important question in the North today: the development of some sort of moral and ethical basis for action there. To do this will require close scrutiny and understanding of the motives and assumptions of decision-makers in southern Canada. Their territory is less known, and more perilous, than the Canadian North has ever been.