

CANADIAN NATIVES WORRIED

By LOIS KEATING

The time seems to whiz by—each month I have good intentions of writing more frequently, and at less length — and then, before I know it, a great deal of time has gone by and there's lots and lots of news.

The first weekend in February, C.O.P.E. (the Committee for Original Peoples Entitlement) held a board of directors meeting in the small settlement of Paulatuk, about 300 miles east of Inuvik on Darnley Bay. James Wah-Shee, president of the Indian Brotherhood of the N.W.T. and Tagak Curley, president of the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, also attended the meeting.

The major item of concern discussed at the meeting was the proposed offshore drilling for oil and gas in the Beaufort Sea. They are particularly concerned that oil spills or well blowouts might have a very serious effect on the environment.

Dr. Douglas Pimlott, of the Canadian Arctic Resources Committee, who is presently working with COPE as a resource person, has written a report about the present situation in regard to offshore drilling.

He says that offshore drilling is an important new method used in northern oil exploration, and that not enough is yet known about it and the effects it might have on the environment.

The government has said it will conduct a one-year research program to study environmental conditions that might be affected. Dr. Pimlott does not feel that a year is enough, or that the federal government is aware of some of the dangers that could occur.

He says that environmental conditions in the Arctic change so much from year to year that he feels that a three-year program would be the minimum time required to get a reasonable understanding of what could be done to handle and lessen the effect of any oil spills.

COPE says that some of the places where drilling will be done first are right in the area where the Tuk people usually hunt. Other proposed drilling areas are close to the coast, which would affect seals, white whales and waterfowl hunted by the people of Holman Island, Paulatuk, Sachs Harbour and Tuktoyaktuk.

Since the COPE meeting, the government has announced that a two-year study will take place and that drilling will not be allowed before the summer of 1976.

James Wah-Shee, president

of the Indian Brotherhood of the N.W.T. has been traveling in the Delta to discuss land claims with the people in the settlements.

The Game Department has been taking hunters out in planes to spot caribou, and subsequently taking them out to hunt for meat for people in the communities.

Tagak Curley, president of the Inuit Tapirisat, is resigning his position, so that he can spend more time personally with young people. A replacement for Mr. Curley has not yet been named.

In February, the Arctic Institute of North America held a conference/workshop in Inuvik on Building in Northern Communities. The delegates divided into four groups to talk about housing design, utilities, finance and community planning. Each group made recommendations, and hopefully some of the suggestions will be put into effect and will help to improve the housing situation in the north.

At the Canadian Radio-Television Commission hearings in Toronto in February, Wally Firth, member of Parliament for the N.W.T. presented a brief from COPE regarding northern broadcasting over the CBC. Sam Raddi, president of COPE and James Arvaluk, representing the Inuit Tapirisat, also spoke at the hearings in regard to possible improvements in northern programming.

In early March the Inuvik Area Hunters and Trappers Association went on a caribou hunt to obtain meat for local residents. The hunt was quite successful and some of the meat was given to the residents of the Senior Citizens Home in Inuvik, and the rest was sold locally through the Territorial Game Department.

The Indian Brotherhood of the N.W.T. has been training 18 Native people as fieldworkers. They will be working as community development workers and as land researchers.

The land researchers will be going into the communities to make sure that the proper information is available, and to see that all the people in the settlements are involved in making the decisions.

The community development workers will help each community get organized to prepare for when the land settlement comes.

A small group of Inuit people met in Ottawa recently to talk about beginning negotiations for the settlement of land claims in Eskimo territory.

The group consisted of Tagak Curley, president of the Inuit Tapirisat; Sam Raddi, president of COPE; Peter Thrasher, COPE land claims spokesman for the Western Arctic; Peter Cumming, legal advisor to the Inuit Tapirisat, and Jean Chretien, minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

More discussions will follow, and at this point, the meetings will be quite informal, not committing either side to definite positions.