

(reprinted with permission from Environment, March 1974)

London Report: Uneasy Bedmates

Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau of Canada once likened his country's situation to "sleeping with an elephant". Of late the US, in its role as pachydermatous bedfellow, has been even more thick-skinned than usual - or so it seems to Canadian sensibilities. While the US tries feverishly to soothe ruffled Arab feelings, there is little to indicate that any similar solicitude is to be extended to Canada, the US's most immediate supplier of essential resources. As the US appetite for Canadian resources intensifies, Canadians are growing increasingly restless. They have for many years felt culturally and economically crowded. But the naked voracity of current American designs on Canada's supplies of energy, land, and water may before long lead to a continental showdown of unparalleled bitterness.

It is, of course, probable that most Americans are utterly unaware of the contribution Canada makes to American prosperity, or of the controversial inroads now giving rise to so much Canadian hostility. A survey of some of the more contentious issues may help to clarify the situation.

Moving from west to east, the first US-Canada confrontation occurs far off the west coast of British Columbia. Here lies the route along which supertankers are to carry oil from the Alaskan North Slope, from the terminal at Valdez in Alaska to that at Cherry Point, in Washington state. The possibility - some would say the inevitability - of oil spillage fouling the Canadian coast is one for which US interests have exhibited little concern, less even than that exhibited for the problems created by the trans-Alaska pipeline itself. The Canadian call for a fund able to compensate for damages caused by spillage has been loudly rejected by US oil and shipping interests - although some spillage in the vicinity of Cherry Point has already occurred.

In British Columbia (BC), an example of American insensitivity that has aroused particularly intense reaction is the plan to build a dam on the US side of the border, which will result in the flooding of the fertile Skagit valley in central BC. Local opposition has been outspoken, but the plan is proceeding apace. In BC, as in other Canadian provinces, electric utility authorities are embroiled in plans for expansion of generating capacity, not primarily to meet Canadian requirements but rather to export electrical energy to the US. In BC this would involve either the construction of yet more dams, including the often-threatened damming of the Fraser River, or the introduction of nuclear power plants. Neither eventuality is entirely welcomed by the people of BC. Similarly, in Manitoba, a hotly contested scheme for massive river-diversion in the north of the province was a major election issue, leading to a change of provincial government. Now the plan has resurfaced, and its justification is to provide hydroelectric power for export to the midwestern US.

An injunction has recently been granted - and then overruled - calling for a halt to construction of the James Bay hydroelectric development in northern Quebec, perhaps the most controversial resource-exploitation scheme ever undertaken in Canada. The Indians and Eskimos of the region, supported by many other Canadians, oppose the scheme on numerous grounds, one of the most abrasive being the likelihood that the power generated would be for the use of consumers not in Quebec but in the northeastern US.

On the eastern Canadian seaboard a peculiarly egregious example of the syndrome is the recurring notion of building the world's largest power plant, 12,000 megawatts of light-water reactors, on Stoddart Island off the New Brunswick coast - of which the entire output would be carried by cable to New England.

And so it goes. It need hardly be added that American corporate investment in Canada, and American control of Canadian resource reserves, are more contentious now than they have ever been. As a final note it is worth pointing out that Richard Rohmer, a Canadian expert on Arctic development and resources, has just published a novel, widely excerpted and discussed, called *Ultimatum*. In the year 1980, the President of the US delivers to the Prime Minister of Canada an ultimatum declaring that, in view of the "energy crisis" in the US, the US is going to take control of Canadian energy resources - unilaterally. The book is a thinly fictional version of Rohmer's *The Arctic Imperative*, and its viewpoint is one that Americans would be well advised to note. Presumptuous as it may seem, Canadians are thinking seriously about kicking the American elephant out of bed.