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**NORTHWEST TERRITORIES-SOVIET NORTHERN RELATIONS
STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE DENNIS PATTERSON
AND THE HONOURABLE GORDON WRAY**

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Introduction

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As we are aware, the foreign north is beginning to have an increasing influence on the Canadian north because of the industrial developments taking place in these circumpolar regions with resultant atmospheric and oceanic pollution; the political changes occurring in Alaska, Greenland and Scandinavia, including movements toward native self-government; and the actions of international native organizations such as the Inuit Circumpolar Conference. Canadian northern activities and expertise are also being recognized by other polar and nonpolar nations, particularly our accumulation of knowledge and experience dealing with the political development of native people, the protection of the environment, and the application of cold-regions science and technology.

As a result of these developments a Special Joint Committee of the Senate and of the House of Commons stated in 1986 that "the Arctic region is rapidly becoming an area of international attention. Canada's huge stake in this region requires the development of a coherent arctic policy, an essential element of which must be a northern dimension for Canadian foreign policy."¹

¹ Senator Jean-Maurice Simard and Tom Hockin, M.P., Joint Chairmen, Independence and Internationalism; Report of the Special Joint Committee of the Senate and of the House of Commons on Canada's International Relations.

The Committee also argued that it was essential for Canada to collaborate bilaterally or multilaterally with all northern states.² The Right Honourable Joe Clark, Secretary of State for External Affairs responded by noting the importance of promoting enhanced Circumpolar cooperation as an important part of an "integrated and comprehensive northern policy".³ Furthermore, in the section dealing with A Northern Dimension for Canadian Foreign Policy, Mr. Clark agreed with the majority of the Committee's recommendations which dealt primarily with an expansion of cooperative arrangements with all northern countries.⁴

As a consequence of these reports, current developments taking place in the foreign north, the direct involvement of the Government of the Northwest Territories in the Canada/USSR Arctic Science Exchange Programme, and the fact that the Soviet Union and Canada are the two largest nations with significant territories north of the Arctic circle and face common problems,

Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1986. p. 127.

2 Ibid p. 130.

3 Right Honourable Joe Clark. Canada's International Relations: Response of the Government of Canada to the Report of the Special Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons. Ottawa, Queen's Printer, 1986. pp 31-33.

4 Ibid pp. 85-87.



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we decided to visit the Soviet north to examine first hand the results of Soviet northern policy.

During the two weeks spent in the Soviet Union, we had the opportunity to see and learn about the social, economic, cultural and educational development of native people together with current construction techniques in small and large towns. In all, we travelled approximately 17,000 kilometers in the Soviet Union of which 4,000 kilometers were in Yakutiya. We had the opportunity to visit cities and settlements and wherever we went Soviet hospitality was overwhelming. Various types of developments throughout Yakutiya showed vast amounts of activity and investment. We met with the indigenous population, especially the Yakuty, Iveny, Evenki and Yukagiry who lived in communities where an emphasis was placed on native languages, culture and traditional pursuits. The visit showed differences in the Soviet approach to development and construction of communities, but there were also many striking similarities. More important, this visit underlined that the prospects for dialogue, contacts and cooperation between Canada and the Soviet Union, particularly with Yakutiya, were good. There was also the promise for greater cultural, technical and economic cooperation including potential commercial opportunities, and it was obvious that we could learn from each other's experience.

We are producing a report which examines in detail our discussions and meetings with Soviet officials, specialists and indigenous groups. Our prime purpose in this section will be to record our general impressions dealing with education and culture, northern construction, traditional activities, the possibility of joint economic ventures, the importance of the Canada/USSR Arctic Science Exchange Programme and our conclusions and recommendations for developing useful and meaningful exchanges between both countries.

Education and Culture

In the field of education and culture, we were particularly impressed with the effort placed on day care centres; the preservation of culture and language; the development of pride and self confidence among Soviet native children; the award system for teachers and students; the teaching of second and third languages; teacher training and evaluation and availability of small community museums to reinforce the cultural identity of native people. Although the short visit precluded us from making a thorough evaluation, it certainly confirmed these sectors for future specialist exchanges.

The Soviet emphasis on awards and recognition for teachers and students who perform well in education was of particular interest to us. In Canada we always seem to be preoccupied with problems

and the continuous need to underline our failings which often results in insufficient time spent on rewarding excellence. The Soviet procedure of awards is more positive and one that can be adopted immediately by the Northwest Territories.

The Soviet approach of ensuring school/community/industry interaction was most appealing. Students are involved from an early age with projects which are community oriented. In addition to involving students in community activities, the student's school day is structured to include a compulsory period of extracurricular activity focussing on culture and art which helps to preserve and to express the culture of the aboriginal people. The success of this programme was reflected in the poise, self confidence and pride of the Soviet native children whom we met. It certainly demonstrated to us the need to incorporate into our own school system the teaching of drum dancing, throat singing, legends, costume making, and music of and from our student's elders. At the present time our cultural instruction is focussed on the artifacts of native people, that is to say, the making of hunting tools and sleds which does not contribute to the enhancement of culture as we witnessed it in the Soviet system.

On the Soviet side, there was interest in the Canadian approach of integrating children with special needs into the regular school system wherever possible. There was also a great

fascination as to what we were doing with computers and the desire to see first hand our use of computers, including computer programmes in native languages and the teaching of certain subjects; the use of electronic mail system in the Department of Education; the instant communications network for distribution of directives and correspondence; the use of video tapes; resource centres and how they serve local schools. At the conclusion of our visit, we agreed that an exchange of teachers and students could be of benefit to both countries.

Northern Construction

Wherever we travelled within Yakutiya there was great activity in the construction of industrial and residential complexes. Specifically, the visit demonstrated that in matters dealing with construction and municipal services, we could learn from the Soviet experience and expertise in the research and design of foundations and pilings in permafrost and the construction of sewage and water treatment plants for northern towns. The Soviet Union could benefit from the Canadian experience in the use of light weight materials, quality control in the construction of buildings, small settlements and northern highways and roads.

The general appearance of Soviet dwellings, servicing facilities, industrial plants and factories, and of roads show their difficulty of maintaining high standards in northern conditions.

In an attempt to speed up construction to meet the demands, quality has generally suffered in the Soviet north and undoubtedly, in the long run, additional amounts of time, money and labour will be required to remedy this situation. Compared to construction in the Northwest Territories, Yakutiya leads in the quantity of construction of the various housing and industrial projects, but not in quality.

In future exchanges dealing with the construction of settlements and buildings, information and specialists should be exchanged in such specific areas as:

- principles of planning and building of northern communities;
- principles of planning and engineering services for residential and public buildings, including energy conservation;
- construction of pile foundations in permafrost;
- stability of heat-emitting structures in permafrost; and
- design and operation of water and sewage treatment facilities.

In the field of transportation, the Canadian side could study the feasibility of testing Soviet hydrofoils and hovercrafts in the north, while the Soviets could learn from our experience in the design and construction of northern roads.

Traditional Activities

Although we had the opportunity to visit only one small community based on the renewable resource sector, in this particular case reindeer herding, it was apparent that the Soviet government is placing a significant emphasis on the renewable resource economy. At the village of Andryushkino, the entire economy was based on reindeer herding which in turn provided a good salary and full employment to the members of the community. Moreover, the educational system ensured that the school children were taught courses in reindeer herding from the earliest grade. This procedure guaranteed a good knowledge base on the importance of reindeer herding for all students, whether they became reindeer herders or went on to other occupations and professions. Emphasis was noticeable in the fields of reindeer herding, hunting (marine and land), trapping and fur farming since the renewable resource sector is seen to play an important role in the overall Soviet economy. It was recognized that the indigenous people were unsurpassed experts on the taiga and tundra.

In light of Soviet success, in developing the traditional pursuits of their native people, this sector will be a prime area for future exchanges since promoting the renewable resource sector in the Northwest Territories is a key part of our economic strategy.

During the next few years "we plan to find new ways to enhance the vitality of traditional harvesting activities and lifestyles which contribute so much to our cultural, economic, and social life."⁵

Joint Economic Ventures

In discussions with our Soviet colleagues we were convinced that some type of economic cooperation between both countries was not only feasible but necessary. It was clear that there was a repository of expertise in both countries which had remained untapped and if nothing was done, then we would continuously be re-inventing the wheel.

In discussions with state planning authorities and local officials, joint ventures appeared possible. From the Canadian perspective northern Canadian businesspeople could help the Soviets tap the potential of the Soviet North by building and

⁵ Government of the Northwest Territories, Direction for the 1990s February, 1981.

operating jointly tourist facilities for the specialized foreign tourist market. Other possibilities included the construction of plants and factories to produce prefab building materials such as panels, drywall, insulated windows, and doors. The Soviet success in producing small northern tanneries together with a good inventory of leather products was of particular interest to us. The serial production of the Soviet designed small water supply and sewage treatment plants in Canada with possible sales throughout the circumpolar north, including the Soviet north, could also be a viable venture. In the end, we agreed to draw up a list of perspective endeavours which would be discussed with our respective governments. We agreed that as a first step any economic cooperation should take place between the Russian Federated Soviet Socialist Republic, whether it be the Yakut ASSR or any other northern region and the Government of the Northwest Territories.

Canada-USSR Arctic Science Exchange Programme

The success of our visit to the Soviet Union was in part due to our direct involvement with the Canada-USSR Arctic Science Programme. This scientific cooperation between both countries began in 1984 and has included a programme of scientific research, exchanges of specialists and information under four themes: geoscience and arctic petroleum; northern environment; northern construction and ethnography, and education. Two of the

four Canadian Committee Chairs are held by two senior officials from our government, Mr. Joe Handley, Deputy Minister of Education (education and ethnography) and Mr. Larry Elkin, Deputy Minister of Public Works and Highways (northern construction).

During the last four years the Canadian side has accrued many benefits from this exchange, some of which are: the development of closer personal ties between specialists and good working relationships; access to information which had not been available previously; first hand knowledge of the situation in northern areas, particularly the state of the art of Soviet northern technology; possible commercial spin-offs, especially in the area of northern construction and the involvement of specialists from aboriginal groups on both sides in this exchange programme.

A trust has been built up between both sides and contributed significantly to better and broader Canadian-Soviet relations. As a result, it is essential to build upon this success and expand this programme into an agreement on cooperation in the Arctic between both countries.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Government of the Northwest Territories is playing an increasingly important role and is quickly becoming a full participant in the circumpolar world as we seek to establish a

political, social, and economic presence in the North. Common circumpolar links include education, language development, wildlife and renewable resource development, mining and fossil fuel development and the development of new markets.

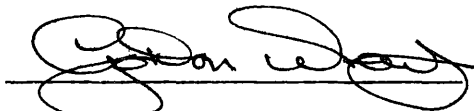
Participation in circumpolar activities to date has shown that there are direct political, social, and economic benefits to be realized through better coordinated efforts and as a result of our visit we make the following recommendations:

1. A circumpolar secretariat will be established within our government as soon as possible to strengthen and coordinate our involvement in the circumpolar regions.
2. The present bilateral Canada-USSR Arctic Science Programme should be actively supported by our government. Moreover, the federal government should be encouraged to expand this programme into an Agreement between both countries. This agreement on cooperation in the Arctic which, in addition to the present scientific exchanges, should also include programmes dealing with development of renewable and non-renewable resources; cultural relations and contacts between native people; academic and student exchanges, protection of the environment and the health and medical welfare of native people.

3. Immediate expansion of contacts with the Soviet Union and Greenland in the areas of traditional harvesting activities and exchanges of cultural groups, artists, art and artifact exhibits.

4. A workshop with participants from the northern business community, territorial, and federal governments be held in the near future to discuss possible northern economic ventures with the Soviet Union.

In conclusion, we would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank our Soviet hosts for their cordial hospitality and for a most interesting and useful visit. We have no doubt that as a result of this trip a period of closer relations will develop between the Northwest Territories and Yakutiya. Both regions are polar territories which have a repository of northern expertise and share a common interest in community development, environment, economic development, trade, and northern technology. Increased northern cooperation between our territories will also be extremely beneficial to both countries since there is much that can be learned from each other.



Gordon Wray,
Minister of Public Works
and Highways.



Dennis Patterson,
Government Leader.