

Reviews

ARCTIC SMOKE & MIRRORS. Gerard Kenney. 1994. Prescott, Ontario: Voyageur Publishing. 144 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-921842-40-6. \$Can14.95.

This is a short but powerful book. It exposes an extraordinary story of pressure-group power and of history revised to serve financial purposes. It is an important corrective on an issue that has received only one-sided press coverage in Canada instead of the courageous investigative journalism it required.

The story starts in the early 1950s. Canada's 8000 Inuit across the Arctic were devastated by poor health and government indifference. Inuit culture had been transformed and undercut in the previous 50 years — largely self-sufficient hunters having been turned into trappers tied to the high-cost trading stores and dependent on the vagaries of the fur market. The government of Canada was just beginning to take its responsibilities towards the Inuit seriously after World War II, when 'Eskimoland' was struck by an economic calamity, as fur prices dropped by 600% during a six-year period. The situation, bad as it was, was even worse in northern Quebec — the 'hungry coast' — where 30% of the Inuit population of Canada faced periodic starvation. One of the steps decided on by the federal government to solve the problems of overpopulation, declining game resources, and a collapsed fur economy was to move people from areas of game scarcity and hunger to areas where small groups of families could hunt and obtain a 'living indefinitely.' Moving people in times of distress was not uncommon among both Inuit and non-Inuit in Canada.

Thus, in 1953, 10 Inuit families — 54 people — were moved to Resolute Bay on Cornwallis Island and Grise Fiord on Ellesmere Island in the high Arctic. Seven of the families came from Port Harrison (Inukjuak) in northern Quebec and three from Pond Inlet on Baffin Island (sent to help acclimatize the Port Harrison people to their new environment). People were promised that if they did not like the new world after two years, they would be returned to Port Harrison.

Unlike some other relocations, this one was regarded as a great success. Kenney shows how visitor after visitor — journalists, churchmen, academics, visiting government commissions — noted the success of the high Arctic relocation project. A 1966 study of Resolute Bay concluded that the Inuit there were 'amongst the most affluent natives in the Arctic.' They had avoided the problems of squatting and demoralisation so evident in other Arctic communities because of their stable economic base. Grise Fiord was repeatedly reported as being the most 'healthy community in the Arctic.' So enthusiastic were the new settlers about their communities that they requested relatives to join them. In fact, so many Inuit from northern

Quebec wanted to move that concern was expressed by government officials in the late 1950s at the possibility of serious overpopulation if migration continued, especially at Resolute Bay.

Kenney then shows how, in the early 1980s, a starkly different view of this history appeared. Children of the first settlers began claiming that the so-called 'Eden of the high north' had been anything but that. That the moves had been involuntary. That the Inuit had been moved to enhance Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic, not because of hunger and game depletion at Port Harrison. That they had been subjected to great pain and suffering by the relocations. That they had been subjected to unpaid labour, starvation, and lack of services in their new locations. Through their lobbyist organisation, the Makivik Corporation, they eventually demanded \$10 million compensation, which has since risen to \$27 million. So effective and unrelenting was the pressure put on by Makivik, and so uncritical and uninformed were the Canadian media that eventually their support of the new Inuit position led the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) to hold special hearings on the case of the so-called 'High north exiles.' Kenney explains how the Royal Commission, with a preconceived view of what happened, decided that the government of Canada had indeed been culpable and negligent in the 1953 moves and owed the Inuit an apology as well as compensation for the wrongs suffered.

Kenney, an engineer who made a major contribution to northern development as head of the Man in the North Task Force in 1969 — which laid the groundwork for the radio and television broadcasting system in the north — exposes how manipulative, one-sided, and hollow this entire process has been. Interestingly, Kenney started his research convinced of the Inuit case. Then, to his surprise, he uncovered evidence that contradicted almost all of the Makivik claims.

He is particularly effective in showing how contradictory are the claims made by the carefully selected Inuit group that Makivik presented to the RCAP at its hearings. Witnesses who some years earlier had stated that there had been much hunger at Port Harrison in 1953 now claimed blatantly that there had been no problems at the time. Other witnesses reported no problems at Port Harrison, despite welfare reports of the time showing concern about the desperate conditions in their camps. One witness stated that in Quebec they had had 'no worries or cares,' but was never asked by the Commission why they had then responded to their relatives' suggestions to move north for a better life. Indeed, as Kenney points out, the Royal Commissioners asked nary a critical question of the Inuit while giving them *carte blanche* to make any statements

they wished. No oaths were administered, and no examination or cross-examination of witnesses was permitted by the public servants who stood accused. However, any of the witnesses who stoutly disputed the Inuit claims, especially the public servants who had been involved in the moves, were subject to detailed, critical, and at times heavy-handed examination by the Commission. One witness, an RCMP officer who gave many years of outstanding service in the north and who was sent with the Inuit to Resolute Bay for their support and protection, was even given a grilling on his death bed by the Commission, but he was not allowed to face his Inuit accusers.

Kenney points out that the Royal Commission was deficient in another important respect. Prior to its 1993 hearings, three of the seven members had already decided, before hearing any counter-evidence, that the Inuit had been 'exiled' and the relocations had been a 'human catastrophe.' Little wonder then that its hearings turned out to be mere camouflage for what were in effect pre-determined findings.

Kenney is also essential reading in showing how different were the stories told by the Inuit in 1993, compared to what their elders were saying in the 1950s and 1960s. Drawing on letters sent by the Inuit to Ottawa during that time, he shows that the relocatees, despite difficulty and hardship, particularly in the first few years, were generally satisfied with their new homes. They had escaped destitution in Port Harrison, and within 12 years their lives had been transformed in material terms (such as living in three-bedroom houses with all the accoutrements of modern home technology) in a way they could not have dreamed of earlier while living the poverty-stricken, harsh life of 'Camp Eskimo' in 1953. Kenney also provides convincing evidence that the story of a forced move is an invention of the 1980s. He quotes, for instance, from a government report that was endorsed by, among others, the president and the legal counsel of the main Inuit interest group (the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada: ITC), which specifically acknowledged in 1976 that the Inuit who went north had 'volunteered.' Ten years later, the ITC had done a complete somersault. A \$10 million compensation claim clearly has a powerful effect.

At the same time, the book does not attempt to romanticise the high Arctic and the experiences there. There were difficulties, especially in the first year. At times, store supplies ran distressingly low. Resolute Bay in particular did not escape the ravages of tuberculosis, which was devastating all Inuit communities in the 1950s and 1960s. But Kenney does show that over the longer term the Inuit were far better off than they ever had been in Port Harrison and that, in fact, their lives improved year in and year out.

The astonishing behaviour of the Royal Commission was matched by the indifference of the Canadian media to this 'other side' of the story. Captivated by stories of suffering and pain on the part of a group that was seen as having been victimised and abused by mainstream society, the media lost all sense of critical curiosity, and without

any investigation accepted the story handed to them by a powerful pressure group. Here was drama, more than enough to entice a large audience, the main goal of so-called news. Moreover, it fit prevailing sympathies about 'people of colour' being abused by 'white male' public servants. Never mind that the latter were in fact some of the most dedicated, committed, and intelligent servants of the public Canada ever had. As Kenney notes, the story fed into the sense of collective guilt felt by most of the public about the many past injustices and terrible things that in fact had been done to the aboriginal people. The awful irony was that all this guilt and commitment to remedy the ills of the past was misplaced. This particular project was clearly one where a concerned government had done the right thing. (Magnus Gunther, Department of Political Studies, Peterborough, Ontario K9J 7BB, Canada.)

SCRIMSHAW: THE ART OF THE WHALER. Janet West and Arthur G. Credland (Editors). 1995. Cherry Burton: Hull City Museums and Art Galleries and Hutton Press. 96 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 1-872167-72-1. £8.95.

This book was published to accompany an exhibition entitled 'Time on their hands,' held in autumn 1995 at the Town Docks Museum in Hull, which was an important port in the Arctic whale fishery in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The exhibition was devoted mainly to scrimshaw work, but also included some Napoleonic prisoners-of-war work, and decorated shells engraved by C.H. Wood, shell engraver to Queen Victoria.

There have been a number of American books on scrimshaw, but this, so far as I know, is the first British book specifically devoted to the subject. The authors have both made significant contributions to the study of scrimshaw, and the book relates to the Hull Museum's large collection, together with important examples from other collections. It has 18 short chapters, 16 relating to various aspects of scrimshaw, one to scrimshaw and prisoner-of-art work, and one to the work of C.H. Wood. There are 91 illustrations throughout the text: 60 black-and-white and 31 colour plates. Examples of scrimshaw work are often difficult to photograph, and Peter Lawson is to be congratulated on the quality of his illustrations.

The first chapter is a short introduction to scrimshaw generally and the history of the Hull collection. A brief outline of whaling history and of the species of whales hunted at various times follows. The materials used in scrimshaw work are then described in separate chapters: baleen, sperm whale teeth, whale jaws, panbone from the sperm whale's lower jaw, and other whale bones. Here the use of the lower jaw bones of Greenland right whales, brought home to be placed in gardens as decorative arches, or over carriage drives, or as field gates, is described, together with the use of whale shoulder blades as signs for inns and shops, citing local examples. Chapters follow on walrus tusks and the tusk of the Arctic narwhal, known as the unicorn to whalers. The early history of narwhal tusks in Europe is noted. The tusk was regarded as the 'horn' of