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'A little more latitude': explorers, politicians, and Canadian Arctic policy during the Laurier era

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ABSTRACT. This article examines the evolution of Canadian Arctic policy during Sir Wilfrid Laurier's years as prime minister (1896–1911). Explorer Joseph Elzéar Bernier, who commanded three government expeditions in this period, vigorously promoted the idea that he himself had roused the sluggish government to action. He also alleged that Laurier had promised to sponsor a Canadian voyage to the North Pole, a promise that was later broken. However, archival documents show that neither of these claims is true. Instead, Laurier and other members of his government first showed their determination to assert Canada's northern sovereignty in 1897, a year before Bernier came on the scene. Although Bernier hoped that his first northern voyage might be turned towards the pole, there was no promise from Laurier. Subsequent policy developments were often haphazard due to interdepartmental conflicts and personality clashes, but by the end of the Laurier years a reasonably effective Arctic programme had been created. Though Bernier played an important part in carrying out the government's agenda, many of his actions (most notably his famous July 1909 sector claim) were aimed more at enhancing his own fame than at securing Canada's title to the Arctic. The article places Bernier's Arctic career in its proper context, and at the same time highlights the contributions of other men who lacked his flair for publicity. It thus provides a more accurate factual basis for future work on the period.

Introduction

Apart from the three official voyages to the Arctic archipelago made under the command of Joseph Elzéar Bernier, the actions taken by Sir Wilfrid Laurier's (Fig. 1) Liberal government to secure Canada's sovereignty in the far north are a relatively obscure subject. The government itself said and published remarkably little on its Arctic policies, while the unpublished material in official files is sparse and poorly organised. As a result, the period is known mainly through the accounts written or inspired by Bernier himself. Other northern explorers and administrators from the same era, including William Wakeham, A. P. Low, and J. D. Moodie, published only brief official reports (Wakeham 1898; Moodie 1905, 1906; Low 1906). Bernier, in contrast, gave many outspoken newspaper interviews during his career as a government employee, and after his retirement in 1925 he embarked on a publicity campaign intended to secure his place in history as the man who saved the Arctic for Canada.

Bernier's memoirs, published in 1939, outlined a dramatic tale. According to his own version of events, Bernier (Fig. 2) had long believed that Canada should assert its northern sovereignty. In pursuit of this aim, he planned a Canadian expedition to the North Pole. For many years the indifferent and dilatory government resisted his pleas, but in 1904 an official appropriation was finally secured. Bernier was dispatched to Germany to purchase the polar ship *Gauss* (later renamed *Arctic*). But just as he was loading the ship with five years' supplies, Bernier was crushed by the news that Prime Minister Laurier had decided to cancel his expedition. Instead, Bernier transported a group of Royal North West Mounted Police (RNWMP; before June 1904, the North West Mounted Police or NWMP) to the recently established post at Fullerton on the western shore of Hudson Bay, an errand that he regarded as trivial. In later years, he was assigned to patrol the Arctic archipelago. Making the best of the situation, Bernier enthusiastically took up this work. He was determined to place his country's northern sovereignty beyond doubt. On his own initiative, in July 1909 he formally proclaimed Canada's ownership of the entire archipelago up to the North Pole (Bernier 1939: 305–308, 343–344).

Bernier's biographers and other admirers have also promoted the view that he took far more interest in the Arctic than did the government, and that without him the islands might not now be Canadian. The title of a 1927 magazine article proclaimed that Bernier had 'added half a million square miles' to his nation's territory (Davies 1927). In 1964 two popular writers, T. C. Fairley and Charles Israel, claimed that it was Bernier who 'persuaded the government to act in a clearly defined manner' (Fairley and Israel 1964: 75). In 1978 Yolande Dorion-Robitaille insisted that Bernier's 1909 proclamation was 'the most important act affecting Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic', and she was filled with admiration when she considered how 'this simple but strong-willed sea captain ... exceeded the orders that were given him by a reluctant government ... and single-handedly established Canadian sovereignty' (Dorion-Robitaille 1978: 81, 83). More recently, Marjolaine Saint-Pierre has declared that Bernier was 'the principal architect of Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic' (Saint-Pierre 2009: 222). Saint-Pierre draws a distinctly negative picture of Laurier. She sees the prime minister as a cunning, refined, and rather effete politician, and in her view, these character traits kept him from appreciating the forthright Bernier's passionate sense of mission (Saint-Pierre 2009: 161, 174).

Fig. 1. Sir Wilfrid Laurier, *circa* 1897–1900. Photo by C.T. Desjardins. Library and Archives Canada, C-001968.

Fig. 2. Joseph Bernier planning his polar expedition, *circa* 1895. Library and Archives Canada, C-000647.

Academic historians have always been more restrained. Morris Zaslow, for example, wrote in his classic history of government administration in the north merely that Bernier's voyages 'did much to bring home the fact of Canadian sovereignty' in the archipelago. Indeed, Zaslow displayed a slight tendency to ridicule both Bernier and the government he served. He described Bernier's solemn proclamations of Canada's authority 'over empty Arctic islands' as a 'somewhat farcical program' fueled by resentment of Robert Peary, Otto Sverdrup, and other foreign explorers (Zaslow 1971: 268, 280, 261). However, Zaslow did not question Bernier's claim that the government had treated him poorly. William R. Morrison has ably chronicled the activities of the RNWMP in the far north during the Laurier years, but his work does not address the broader issues of the government's Arctic policy. In his brief account of the decision to send *Arctic* to Hudson Bay in 1904, he too accepts Bernier's version of events (Morrison 1985: 96).

As a result, there is a widespread belief that Bernier far outshone government officials in his concern for Canada's northern interests, and that Ottawa's sudden change of plan in 1904 deprived him of the promised opportunity to raise the Canadian flag at the pole itself (Steele 1935: 26; Fairley and Israel 1964: 63–70; Dorion-Robitaille 1978: 36; Grant 2002: 28; Saint-Pierre 2009: 177, 186, 190–92, 202–203). When attempting to explain the government's decision, Saint-Pierre repeats an allegation by Bernier's brother-in-law Esdras Terrien that the governor-general, Earl Grey, was to blame. According to Terrien, Bernier was deliberately stopped at Grey's behest so that 'a French Canadian should not be given the opportunity to attain the glory that had been sought in vain by the most celebrated British seamen' (in Saint-Pierre 2009: 192).

The archival evidence, though scanty and often difficult to piece together, tells a very different story. The Laurier government showed concern over Arctic issues from the time of its election in 1896 onward, and William Wakeham's expedition in 1897 was carefully instructed to assert Canada's sovereignty. For many years, politicians and civil servants had been worried by reports about American whalers in the far north, especially at Herschel Island in the western Arctic. At the same time, there were dramatic developments in the long-running Alaska boundary dispute. The Alaska case had made Canadian officials aware for the first time of the importance of effective occupation in international law, and by the end of 1902 it had become apparent to them that this factor would almost certainly ensure victory for the Americans. In a burst of resentful anti-American feeling, cabinet minister Clifford Sifton energetically promoted Canadian action in the far north. (Sifton, who served as minister of the interior and superintendent of Indian affairs from 1896 until 1905, was among the most powerful members of Laurier's cabinet).

Sifton's role in the development of Arctic policy was briefly sketched in the biography of him by D.J. Hall, published in 1985. More recently, Shelagh Grant has followed Hall in elevating Sifton to the status of an Arctic hero, while saying little about either Laurier or Bernier. Hall drew mainly on Sifton's private papers, from which he gained the impression that, while Sifton

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was in favour of strong action, Laurier 'had to be prodded several times . . . before anything was done.' Grant has done very little fresh archival research, relying instead on Hall's account and a few other secondary sources (Hall 1985: 126; Grant 2010: 181–183, 194–210). But previously untapped files at Library and Archives Canada indicate that the story was more complicated. It would, therefore, be a mistake to credit Sifton alone with the ensuing developments. He had many other concerns and responsibilities, and interdepartmental rivalries (some of them caused by his own imperious ways) obstructed his plans. After 1905, when he resigned from the cabinet, he played no role at all. Nevertheless, Sifton's anti-Americanism was an important catalyst. In 1903–1904 a police post was established at Herschel Island and an expedition under A.P. Low and J.D. Moodie was sent to Hudson Bay. Despite Bernier's later claims, these developments were entirely independent of his campaign for a North Pole expedition, and there is not the slightest evidence that his activities had any impact on Sifton or any other government official.

Laurier did not promise to sponsor a polar expedition in 1904. Instead, it was made clear to Bernier that the purchase of *Gauss* was intended to further continuing Canadian activities in the archipelago. However unwilling Bernier may have been to exchange his North Pole ambitions for the less dramatic role offered to him by the government, no deceit by Laurier was involved. Instead, it was Bernier who indulged in deception and bluff, apparently accepting Laurier's terms while in fact (as he wrote to one of his supporters) hoping to get 'a little more lattitude [sic]' from Ottawa so that he could ultimately realise his polar dream (Bernier 1904a).

Nor was the government's reluctance to make a formal sovereignty proclamation the result of indifference. Instead, by 1909 relations with the United States were on much firmer ground, thanks to diplomatic moves initiated by Earl Grey and the British ambassador in Washington, James Bryce. Though Laurier was sceptical at first, by 1909 the prime minister was an enthusiastic convert to the strategy promoted by Grey and Bryce. Their faith in the possibility of better relations was well justified. Not only did Canada and the US quickly settle most of their outstanding problems and sign several new agreements, but when Robert Peary reported his claim to the North Pole and the area around it, President William Howard Taft genially but firmly declined to countenance the idea that the far north was now American. The July 1909 sovereignty claim may have bolstered Bernier's ego, but it was not needed to protect Canada's Arctic from the Americans.

Drawing on many previously unused archival files, this article outlines the Laurier government's Arctic policies from 1896 until 1911. It highlights the roles played by Fred White (Fig. 3), George Dawson, Albert Peter Low, and John Douglas Moodie (Fig. 4), men who had far more influence than Bernier on the evolution of government policy and who, in their different ways, also pushed for 'a little more latitude'. Because there was no single minister or government department responsible either for the far north or for foreign policy, and because of the strong interdepartmental rivalries that characterised this period, the development of an Arctic policy regime was in many ways haphazard. To make matters worse, the Department of Marine and Fisheries, which was ultimately given sole responsibility for sovereignty matters in the archipelago, was plagued by corruption and scandals. As a result of these unfavourable circumstances, Laurier's strong wish that posts should be established on the northern islands was not fulfilled until many years after he had left office. The general lack of organisation gave Bernier the opportunity to exceed or ignore his orders on more than one occasion, confusing the picture for later generations. However, the archival record proves that despite such problems, there was strong and sustained government interest in the far north during the Laurier years, and that this interest led to many constructive actions.

Fig. 3. Fred White, 1910. Photo by William James Topley. Library and Archives Canada, PA-167437.

The Hudson Bay railway and the Wakeham expedition, 1896–1897

Laurier and the Liberals were elected on 23 June 1896, ending an 18-year period of Conservative rule. Among

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Fig. 4. J.D. Moodie, 1906. Photo by William James Topley. Library and Archives Canada, PA-214048.

the new government's first priorities was an expedition to Hudson Strait. The project of building a railway from Winnipeg to a port in Hudson Bay had long been a cherished dream in Manitoba, since the northern route could offer a quicker and cheaper way of shipping grain to Europe. During the election campaign, the Liberals' prospects in that province had been damaged by their lack of support for the proposed railway. Laurier quickly sought to remedy the problem. Soon after the new parliamentary session began, he announced that his government would 'consider it their duty, at an early date, to have the question of the navigability of Hudson's Bay and Straits exhaustively investigated' (quoted in Fleming 1978: 52). An expedition led by Lieutenant Andrew Robertson Gordon 12 years earlier, in 1884, had reported that the strait was navigable for only three months each summer, which meant that the construction of a railway would not be economically worth while. However, there were rumours both in 1884 and later that Sir John A. Macdonald's government, having recently sponsored the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, was firmly opposed to a rival northern route, and that political considerations had therefore influenced Gordon's report. Several Newfoundland sailing masters were also of the opinion that Gordon's estimate was much too low (McGrath 1903: 894).

Laurier's plan was therefore an important step forward for advocates of northern development, but the prime minister himself was worried about the cost of a new expedition. He accordingly suggested to the British government that a Royal Navy ship might be used for a joint British-Canadian voyage (see Strathcona 1896, 1897). However, officials in London showed little interest in the plan. Laurier therefore had no option but to ask the Department of Marine and Fisheries to take full responsibility for the expedition. A Newfoundland sealing vessel, *Diana*, was chartered, and the expedition sailed in the spring of 1897 under the command of William Wakeham, a department employee.

Adverse reports about the American whaling station at Herschel Island had been sent to several government departments over the years (see below), and the Department of Marine and Fisheries had also received complaints about American whalers in the eastern Arctic. As a result the minister, Sir Louis Davies, placed strong emphasis on sovereignty matters in his instructions to Wakeham. 'Rumours having reached this Department, more or less authenticated, that foreigners have been quietly establishing themselves and asserting more or less of sovereign powers on parts of the territory lying north of Hudson Bay Straits, it will be your duty to make a thorough investigation into the truth of these rumours,' Davies wrote. 'It [also] will be your duty firmly and openly to declare and uphold the jurisdiction in all these British territories you may visit of the Dominion of Canada, to plant the Flag as the open, notorious evidence to the natives and others of our claim to jurisdiction, and our determination to maintain and uphold it.' Davies recommended that the ship should carry 'proper fire-arms and ammunition' and perhaps 'a suitable small cannon of the most modern and approved kind.' However, he left the exact details to the commander's own judgement (Davies 1897).

Davies' fears about American activities were further roused by a letter from the distinguished geologist George Dawson, who sent him a clipping from the *New York Evening Post* 'which may interest you as showing the special and peculiar interest which Peary and Company appear to be taking in our Baffin Land.' Dawson continued: 'It seems a pity that the Home Govt. could not be got to send a Commissioned vessel up on the Hudson Strait work, or even to call in at the settled points on Baffin land &c. and return. The Danish Govt looks after their Greenland points thus every summer thus leaving no chance for any one to assume that there is a no-man's land to be adopted' (Dawson 1897a). A few weeks later Davies, who was then in London, forwarded Dawson's letter to the Colonial Office with the suggestion that Britain might want to take up the idea of a northern cruise.

The Admiralty was asked to look into the matter, but officials there concluded that sending a ship to raise the flag would be both expensive and quite possibly counterproductive, since such an act 'might be construed to indicate that the territories in question have not been considered British hitherto' (Macgregor 1897). This was an important point. Canada's claim to the Arctic rested on the transfer of sovereignty from Britain in 1880 (see Smith 1961). It was therefore essential to emphasise that Canadians were now actively affirming their ownership, not establishing it for the first time. Unfortunately, the

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1880 transfer did not specify the precise limits of the northern territory that had been given to Canada (see Cavell and Noakes 2010: 70–71). This vague wording was to perplex Canadian officials for many years.

Wakeham, meanwhile, had found that there were in fact no permanent American stations in Hudson Bay or Strait, though New England whaling ships regularly wintered at Roes Welcome and Repulse Bay. The stations at Kekerten and Blacklead Island (both located in Cumberland Sound on the coast of Baffin Island) had formerly been owned by American firms. However, these stations were now operated by Noble Brothers of Aberdeen (Wakeham 1904). Unfortunately, the agent at Kekerten 'was possessed of the idea that Baffin's land was under the jurisdiction of the Government of the United States. He had evidently come to hold this opinion because of the fact that United States citizens had for years been in undisturbed possession of sedentary whaling stations in Baffin's land'. Therefore, Wakeham 'deemed it my duty to openly and officially proclaim our sovereignty'. He raised the flag and made a formal declaration. When the London *Daily Mail* ridiculed this action on an island which it believed had been British since the days of Martin Frobisher, Wakeham observed defensively that he had merely been attempting to impress the fact of Canadian sovereignty on both the Inuit and the Scots. There was, he insisted, 'no attempt to attach or "take possession" of the territory over again – "*de novo*"' (Wakeham 1897).

Whalers, Inuit, and muskoxen, 1897–1902

Wakeham reported that Hudson Strait was navigable for just under four months a year. Though higher than Gordon's estimate, this number did not promise well for a northern shipping route. As a result, Laurier's interest in the far north lapsed for the time being. However, some individuals both in the civil service and among the general public continued to urge action, and it seems that such appeals did receive some attention from the prime minister. For example, he preserved a letter from Richard Frewen Dartnell, a private citizen who commended Wakeham's flag-raising and suggested that even more should be done. '[I]n these days,' Dartnell observed, 'nothing but effective occupation is good, and it is well to occupy places before they suddenly become burning questions. . . . Some day we shall find the Americans get hold of those Northern territories and then an awkward position will be raised' (Dartnell 1897).

George Dawson shared this opinion. He wrote to James Smart, the deputy minister of the interior, that sovereignty over the northern islands was a subject 'to which I have given some attention and in regard to which some further action is in my opinion still desirable. No part of the world is now so inaccessible as to allow of its being classed in advance as valueless and discoveries might at any time occur which would render the possession of a perfectly clear title to any or all of the islands referred to, essential' (Dawson 1897b). Smart replied that he would bring the letter to the attention of his minister, Sifton. The archival records are obscure on this point, but it appears that Dawson's concerns were a key factor in the production of a new order-in-council and map outlining Canada's northern borders. The boundary lines were placed on either side of the archipelago, as far north as the 85th parallel (see Canada, Privy Council Office 1897).

The order-in-council was passed on 18 December 1897. In February 1898 the long series of letters from Bernier and his supporters began. Bernier had dreamed of an expedition to the North Pole for nearly thirty years (Bernier 1939: 264–265, 289–91). At first his appeals contained nothing on sovereignty matters. Instead, he argued that the attainment of the pole would bring glory to Canada and to its leader. As Bernier rather naively wrote to Laurier, 'Je considère que le fruit est mûr et pret à être recueillé et quelle honneur pour vous d'avoir un de vos compatriotes pour vous rapporter ce fruit' (Bernier 1898). Bernier's demands, vague at first, were not clarified until two years later, when he requested money to build a ship similar to Fridtjof Nansen's *Fram*, in which he could drift across the polar basin from Siberia to Spitsbergen (Bernier 1900). When he received Bernier's initial request, James Smart immediately consulted Dawson on the matter. Dawson replied that, since its work would be done outside Canada's borders, Bernier's expedition could not help to further his own geological researches, and the cost was likely to be very high. Still, he thought that Bernier had a reasonable chance of success (Dawson 1898). Following this lukewarm recommendation, Bernier received polite but evasive replies from the prime minister and other government officials.

Clearly, Bernier's claim that he had alerted the indifferent government to the problem of northern sovereignty was concocted after the fact in order to enhance his reputation. In the years between 1897 and 1902, official interest in the Arctic was kept alive by a steady stream of apprehensive reports about the American whalers, who brought trade goods into Canada without paying duty and provided large amounts of liquor to the aboriginal population. These reports had begun many years earlier. The lieutenant-governor of Manitoba, John Schultz, took a particular interest in the matter. In 1891 and 1892 his complaints were considered by the cabinet, but the only result was a notice in the *Canada Gazette* warning foreign traders that all goods must be landed at a port of entry where there was a customs house (*Canada Gazette* 1891; Canada, Privy Council Office 1892). Needless to say, there were no such ports in the Arctic. Not satisfied with this outcome, in 1894 Schultz forwarded missionary reports about Herschel Island to the minister of the interior and the minister of trade and commerce (Schultz 1894a). In an exasperated letter to F. C. Gilchrist of the Department of Marine and Fisheries, Schultz recounted that 'as in the case of the wintering of Foreign whale ships at Marble Island in Hudson's Bay many years ago

to the entire destruction eventually of the more valuable whales in that inland sea, I also have called attention for the last five years to what appears to be a repetition of the same danger to our inshore Arctic waters off the mouth of the Mackenzie, as well as the violation of the Indian and Customs regulations' (Schultz 1894b).

In the following year, an American citizen named William Lindley reported to the customs department at Victoria, British Columbia, that he had recently visited Herschel Island and 'could tell you a strange story of selling the natives alcohol, buying furs from the hunters who are supposed to sell only to the H[udson's] B[ay] Co., a general corruption and degradation of the Indians, and all done by those who bitterly despise the British flag' (Lindley 1895). The letter was forwarded to Ottawa, resulting in an exchange between the minister of the interior, the superintendent of Indian affairs, and the customs department. In the end nothing was done, apparently because the potential customs revenues were not considered large enough to justify the high cost of a northern expedition. In 1896 Bishop William Bompas returned to the charge with more tales of natives corrupted by American influence. '[L]arge quantities of raw Spirits are traded with . . . both Esquimaux and Indian to the utter ruin of those races. . . . Deeds of furious violence are becoming common among the Natives from drunkenness,' he claimed (Bompas 1896). Efforts by the Department of Trade and Commerce to organise an expedition down the Mackenzie were frustrated by a lack of information about the area. As one civil servant reported, inquiries made to officers of the Hudson's Bay Company were 'always met, not with absolute repulsion, but, in a manner to indicate that they still adhere to their old policy of non-communicativeness with reference to the Region which they claim to be their special preserves'. In his view, the company men wanted to have the Americans excluded from their sphere, but at the same time they were fearful of a strong government presence in the region (Anon. 1896).

Any plans, however tentative, that might have existed in Ottawa were cut short by the 1896 election. It took some time for the Laurier government to recognise the problem, but finally in 1900 A. H. Grisbach of the NWMP was asked to investigate. 'I find that there is no doubt that a large trade is done not only by American whalers, but also, by ships regularly equipped for this trade,' he reported. Because they paid no duty, the Americans could offer better bargains than the Hudson's Bay Company. 'The trade properly belongs to Canada and the time has fully arrived when it should be looked after and if this were done it would soon pay all expenses to say nothing of upholding Canadian prestige,' Grisbach concluded (Grisbach 1900). From this point onwards the comptroller of the NWMP, Fred White, was strongly in favour of establishing a new police post at the mouth of the Mackenzie. In his view, such a move was the natural extension of police work in the Yukon.

White's plan was backed by Frank Oliver (the Liberal MP for the Provisional District of Alberta), who raised the matter several times in the House of Commons. When yet another complaint about the Americans, this one from an independent Canadian trader, reached the Department of the Interior, James Smart promptly forwarded it to Sifton. Sifton, who had just received a similar report from George Dawson, also decided that the time for action had come. He asked White to outline a plan (Sifton 1901). White replied:

> Our most northerly Police Post is at Fort Resolution, about 845 miles north of Edmonton, and from year to year we are pushing still further north. . . . I would like to send an officer by the H[udson's] B[ay Company] Steamers about the end of May next, with instructions to gather all the information he can . . . I have no doubt that in the early future we shall have Police scattered between the Yukon and the mouth of the Mackenzie River . . . and by degrees we shall also secure control of the trade in Mackenzie Bay. It is certainly desirable that Canada should assert her authority in the Arctic Ocean, but it is questionable whether the results would justify the expenditure, at present. (White 1901)

White, then, considered the northern islands part of Canada, but he wanted to see police authority firmly established on and near the mainland before any ventures were made into the archipelago.

However, nothing at all was done, perhaps because of a report from Inspector Charles Constantine in Whitehorse. 'I had a long talk with Captain M.A. Healy, late of the [American] revenue cutter "*Bear*" . . . who informed me that the whiskey traffic among the whalers had been practically stamped out, that only some two vessels carried any liquor, and they operated chiefly on the Siberian coasts. The whaling industry has fallen off considerably', he wrote (Constantine 1902). There matters rested until the autumn of 1902, when Sifton received a letter from J.A. Allan of the American Museum of Natural History. A whaling captain had informed Allan that 700 muskox hides were purchased at Repulse Bay that year. It therefore seemed that 'a few years more will practically suffice to exterminate the species in the northern Hudson Bay region, unless something is speedily done' (Allan 1902). Sifton requested White's opinion. Seizing the opportunity to forward his plan, White replied that the report 'emphasizes the urgency for the assertion of Canadian sovereignty over our far northern waters – not only those reached via Hudson's Bay Straits in the East, but also via Behring Straits in the West' (White 1902a). He recommended that Sifton seek the opinion of Robert Bell, the acting head of the Geological Survey since Dawson's death in March 1901. Bell (who had been the geologist on Wakeham's expedition) was equally keen to take action. 'I quite agree', he wrote,

> that it is very undesirable that the musk-ox should be threatened with extinction . . . I also think that these

> foreigners should not be allowed to demoralize the natives and to import trading goods without paying customs duties. ... Although our title to all these northern lands and islands is indisputable, this fact is not known to the great majority of people in the United States or even in Canada ... The smallest official enforcement of practical jurisdiction by the Dominion government would be the cheapest and most effective way to set at rest all misunderstanding on this matter. (Bell 1902)

Sifton immediately ordered Smart to hold a meeting with other senior officials, and it is clear that he was motivated as much by recent developments in the Alaska boundary dispute as by concern over the fate of the muskox.

The Alaska boundary dispute

The Alaska dispute began during the 1880s, when the province of British Columbia issued maps showing a very different boundary from the one marked on American charts. The need for a clear agreement on the boundary line soon became evident, and in 1893 a joint commission was appointed to gather topographical information. The dispute might have continued to be a low-key one, solved through conventional diplomatic channels, had it not been for the discovery of gold in the Yukon. To reach the Klondike gold fields, prospectors had to pass through American-held territory at the head of the Lynn Canal, where the boom towns of Dyea and Skagway quickly sprang up. From there, the men ascended either the Chilkoot Pass or the White Pass, at the top of which stood Mounted Police posts signifying the Canadian dedication to law and order. Not only did Dyea and Skagway appear lawless and violent to Canadian officials, but Canadian miners were forced to pay duty on their outfits as they passed through. After looking into the terms of the Anglo-Russian treaty of 1825, politicians in Ottawa decided that the Americans were not entitled to the head of the Lynn Canal at all. Sifton was an especially strong proponent of this view.

Canada's interpretation of the treaty was plausible enough in itself. However, what Sifton and the others stubbornly ignored was the simple fact that the territory at the heads of the various coastal inlets along the Alaska panhandle had been occupied by Russia between 1825 and 1867, when Alaska was sold to the US, and by the Americans since that time. Neither Britain nor Canada had ever protested against this state of affairs, not even when Dyea and Skagway were founded in 1897. Under international law, such a long period of uncontested occupation gave the US a firm title. In the years that followed, British officials repeatedly attempted to force the angry Canadians to accept this fact, but without success. Sifton and most of the other Canadian officials involved were blinded by their emotions. Laurier's election in 1896 had coincided with the onset of unprecedented economic prosperity in Canada. There was a new feeling of self-confident patriotism in the country. Most Canadians strongly resented any hint of annexationist talk from their American neighbours. Both countries were in a flag-waving mood, and in the late 1890s American advocates of their nation's 'manifest destiny' to own the entire continent became increasingly outspoken. Lacking the international experience to see that a humiliating diplomatic defeat lay in store for them, Sifton and his allies rejected any attempt at compromise in the Alaska dispute (Penlington 1972: 37–60; Hall 1985: 123–124).

Theodore Roosevelt, who became president of the United States after the assassination of William McKinley in 1901, was intensely irritated by Canada's stance. He called the Canadian claim 'outrageous and indefensible' and remarked presciently that Laurier and his ministers were 'likely to be in hot water with their constituents when they back down' (quoted in Penlington 1972: 64). Roosevelt insisted that the question should be decided by an even-numbered tribunal. Such an arrangement, with three American representatives and a British judge against two Canadians, made the outcome a foregone conclusion. The British, weary of Canada's intransigence, were happy enough to agree. During a trip to London in the summer and autumn of 1902, Laurier consented to the plan. Unlike Sifton, the prime minister had finally realised that an unfavourable outcome was inevitable, and he saw the tribunal as a face-saving device. In October he returned to Ottawa, informed the cabinet of what he had done, and immediately left for the southern US, pleading ill health (Penlington 1972: 63–66).

Sifton was furious, but there was nothing he could do. It was not possible for him and his fellow cabinet ministers to revolt against Laurier without bringing down the government. Written entreaties to the absent prime minister produced no result (Hall 1985: 113, 124). Laurier's decision must have finally brought home to Sifton the importance of effective occupation. It was, therefore, no coincidence that he was finally spurred into forcefully asserting Canada's northern sovereignty at the end of 1902. Much more now seemed to be at stake than customs revenues or illegal liquor sales. If the Americans were allowed to establish posts on Canadian islands without any protest from Canada, then the islands, like Dyea and Skagway, might become American territory forever. Ignoring the fact that Wakeham had found no permanent American establishments in the eastern Arctic, Sifton was determined that Hudson Bay should be included in a strong Canadian sovereignty programme.

Arctic plans, 1902–1903

The meeting requested by Sifton was held in Smart's office on 11 December 1902. In attendance were Smart, White, Bell, Deputy Minister François Gourdeau and Commander O.G.V. Spain from the Department of

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Marine and Fisheries, and John McDougald from the Department of Customs. As Smart reported to Sifton a few days later, they agreed that two commissioners should be appointed, one to administer the eastern Arctic and one for the western district. Two ship expeditions should be sent by the Department of Marine and Fisheries, one to Hudson Bay and one to the mouth of the Mackenzie. On board each ship there should be a customs officer to collect duty from any American traders they might meet, along with a geologist and a surveyor to assess the resources of the islands. Each party would return at the end of the season in order to make a report 'as to whether it would be desirable in the interests of the Government of Canada to make yearly expeditions' (Smart 1902). Significantly, there was no mention of participation by the police in these voyages. Instead, White proposed a new police post at Fort McPherson and overland patrols from there to the mouth of the Mackenzie (White 1902b).

Sifton had slightly different ideas. He wanted a ship expedition to Hudson Bay, organised by the Department of Marine and Fisheries, with a police officer on board who could act both as commissioner and as a customs officer. One or more posts should be established; these, presumably, would be staffed by the police. In the western Arctic, the expedition might be either overland or by ship. If it was sent by ship, the Department of Marine and Fisheries would provide the vessel, but the overall responsibility would rest with the police (Sifton 1902).

Even though White favoured the general plan to assert Canada's jurisdiction, these details did not meet with his approval. He wanted to work separately from other departments and to set his own agenda rather than follow Sifton's directions. White keenly resented the fact that Sifton, who theoretically had no authority whatever over the police, was able to interfere in so many of his decisions. As Lord Minto (who served as governor-general from 1898 until 1904) recorded, 'Fred White has assured me on more than one occasion most positively that the manipulation of the N.W.M.P. is absolutely in Sifton's hands ... and that he himself has almost despaired of being able to carry on the control of the Force. ... The Force is directly under the Prime Minister's control and legally Sifton has nothing to say to it whatever, but it has been allowed to drift under his influence' (Minto 1902).

The Marine and Fisheries portfolio had recently been given to Raymond Préfontaine, whose tenure as mayor of Montreal between 1898 and 1902 was plagued by scandals. Laurier himself was reluctant to make the appointment, but he yielded to pressure from Liberal supporters in Quebec (Brassard and Hamelin 1994: 844–845). Préfontaine was a shrewd and energetic but not especially scrupulous politician. Under his leadership the department became notorious for its slack and even corrupt practices. In 1909 the deputy minister, Gourdeau, would be forced into early retirement for having turned a blind eye to bribery and rakeoffs. The fastidious White did not look forward to joint ventures with such a department. Moreover, he regarded the establishment of posts on the northern islands as premature. As he later explained, 'I dreaded having any of our men landed away up in Baffin's Bay or Cumberland Sound' (White 1903e).

White therefore conducted a campaign of passive resistance against police participation in the Hudson Bay voyage. Sifton, meanwhile, was preoccupied with the Alaska dispute. 'I have not had time to give [the Hudson Bay expedition] any personal attention,' he told Smart on the eve of his departure for London, where he assisted with the preparation of Canada's case (Sifton 1903a). Sifton returned to Ottawa for a few months during the summer of 1903, but even then the decision-making process was muddled and slow. Sifton was still busy with preparations for the tribunal, which was to begin its hearings on 3 September. As a result, the Arctic planning was left to Marine and Fisheries. Not until A.P. Low was appointed leader of the expedition in July did a strong personality become involved.

Repeated efforts to find and charter a suitable ship for the western expedition in Vancouver or San Francisco failed (Perry 1903; Rithet 1903). Therefore, this part of the plan was deferred. 'Nothing has been done in connection with the proposed Fishery Service Patrol in McKenzie [sic] Bay, and, with the exception of the Customs, none of the Departments appear to realize that there is anything in the far north that is worth developing,' White complained in May 1903 (White 1903a). The police plan, in contrast, was carried out with efficiency. White sent Sergeant F.J. Fitzgerald to report on conditions at Herschel Island. Not only did Fitzgerald successfully complete this mission, but he returned to the island for the winter of 1903–1904. In Fitzgerald's opinion, the whalers' behaviour was not nearly so bad as the earlier rumours had indicated, yet it was bad enough to make official supervision desirable. But as long as there was no government ship in the area, the Americans could easily evade the police (Fitzgerald 1903a, 1903b). In November 1903 White proudly informed the prime minister that his department had 'exceeded expectations' by establishing a Canadian presence on Herschel Island. Still, it was 'impossible to take active measures ... until a suitable boat is supplied' (White 1903f). This lack of a vessel for the western Arctic, not Bernier's entreaties, eventually led the government to purchase *Gauss*.

The *Neptune* expedition, 1903–1904

A ship for the eastern expedition was far easier to procure. Early in 1903 Commander Spain (a former Royal Navy officer) travelled to St. Johns, Newfoundland and selected *Neptune* (Fig. 5) from the many strongly built vessels in the sealing and whaling fleets. As sailing master, he recommended Captain Samuel Bartlett (Spain 1903a). After Sifton's departure, White seems to have successfully convinced Marine and Fisheries officials that the expedition should not be commanded by a police officer. Instead, they turned to geologist A.P. Low as a potential leader. Like Robert Bell, Low had been a

Fig. 5. *Neptune* at Fullerton Harbour on Dominion Day (1 July) 1904. The American whaler *Era* can be seen in the background. Library and Archives Canada, Royal Canadian Mounted Police collection, C-001819.

member of the Wakeham expedition; he had also led geological expeditions to Labrador and to the shores of Hudson Bay. Bell enthusiastically supported the appointment, and Spain agreed that they 'could not possibly do better' (marginal note on Low 1903a). Almost casually, Gourdeau inquired whether White wanted to send any police officers along on the trip (Gourdeau 1903).

Smart, however, still expected Sifton's plan to be carried out. On being informed by Gourdeau that *Neptune* would soon arrive in Halifax for repairs and outfitting, he instructed White to submit a list of the police party. Their leader would be appointed commissioner. He would also be responsible for establishing a new post near the harbours where the American ships wintered (Smart 1903a). White replied with a list of objections:

> To make the Police, or a Commissioner, a fixture at any place on so long a line of coast, without facilities for moving about, would be simply hoisting a warning signal to illicit traders to give that particular point a wide berth. . . . I think the vessel should visit as many places as possible, and give everyone she meets to understand. . .that in future Hudson's Straits, Hudson's Bay and the waters north thereof will be regularly patrolled, revenue collected, and Canadian laws enforced. Then, on the return of the expedition, the reports of the officers will enable the Government to adopt a policy for the future. I also think that a Magistrate and Marine Police, members of the crew, would be sufficient for all purposes on this trip, in fact I doubt whether the vessel has accommodation for six Police in addition to the crew. (White 1903b)

A few days later, White and Sifton had a brief personal interview. White raised yet more objections, which he then recorded in a memorandum. There would be no timber in the north for building and fuel, and it was very late to purchase lumber in Halifax. The Americans in Hudson Bay had been carrying on their activities without Canadian interference for many years, and it was only reasonable that they should be given ample advance notice before the laws were enforced. Therefore, *Neptune*'s voyage should be considered merely as a preliminary foray. In a handwritten postscript, White added: 'the Territory & Islands may be worthless, except for a few skins – and to land Police at any isolated spot may call for another "relief" vessel to bring them home' (White 1903c). To the police commissioner in Regina, A. Bowen Perry, White confided that he was 'doing my utmost to represent that it is a duty quite foreign to anything the Police have hitherto been called upon to perform, and that a Magistrate . . . with three or four of the crew sworn in as Constables, ought to be able to do all that is required – and I hope that view will prevail' (White 1903d).

To White's great annoyance, his view did not prevail. On 28 July Sifton handed a memorandum to Smart, which Smart in turn forwarded to White and Gourdeau. Sifton wrote that immediate action by Canada was necessary to forestall 'unfounded and troublesome claims' by the US. Therefore, in 1904 a ship expedition must be sent to the western Arctic. As for the Hudson Bay voyage, Low, Bartlett, and the head of the police party would form 'a committee to jointly decide on what shall be done and where the permanent post shall be located'. The ship would winter in the north; two years' supplies should be taken even though a relief ship was to be sent up in 1904. The police officer would be given appointments as a magistrate and a customs collector (Sifton 1903b).

This memorandum formed the basis for the instructions given to Low and to Superintendent John Douglas Moodie, who was selected by White to lead the police party. At Low's suggestion, a cruise to Lancaster Sound and even farther north, perhaps as far as Kennedy Channel, was added (Low 1903b; Smart 1903b). It was not long before Low wanted even more changes to the programme. Low was an outspoken, strong-willed man, and he did not hesitate to criticise the arrangements made by senior officials. For one thing, he was irritated by the many patronage appointments to the expedition. 'The 2nd mate, Mr. Guay, sent on the recommendation of Mr. Talbot [Liberal MP for Bellechasse, Quebec], cannot speak English, has no experience of deep sea navigation, and knows nothing of work amongst the ice . . . If he must go with us, I will make him 3rd mate and will get a suitable 2nd mate from Newfoundland,' Low wrote briskly in his first report to Gourdeau (Low 1903c). After conversations with Captain Bartlett and another experienced Newfoundland skipper, Captain James Joy, Low had concluded that the plan to establish posts was ill-advised. Instead, he recommended that *Neptune* should be purchased rather than merely chartered, so that annual patrols could be carried out. 'In this manner,' he wrote, 'effective possession of these northern territories, would be taken . . . in a much cheaper and more practical way, than by the establishment of permanent settlements for officials, who would have to suffer great hardships, in a very inhospitable region' (Low 1903c). Both Spain and

Sifton approved the idea of purchasing *Neptune* (Spain 1903b), but the plan to establish a post near the American whalers, probably on the west coast of Hudson Bay, remained in place.

The expedition left Halifax on 23 August 1903. Despite frequent injunctions from Sifton that the voyage should receive no publicity, its purpose was widely known. Some newspaper and magazine articles suggested that the Canadians intended to expel all foreign whalers from Hudson Bay. Defiantly, one American journalist predicted that the whalers would fight back (McGrath 1903: 883). While he did not anticipate violence, Prime Minister Laurier feared that despite Canada's 'undoubted claim', the imposition of customs duties would 'be represented as a grievance by American whalers and traders at Washington' (Minto 1903a).

Neptune arrived at Fullerton Harbour, Hudson Bay, on 23 September. American whaling captain George Comer, who had wintered at Fullerton in 1895–1896, 1898–1899, and 1900–1901, was there once again. Without consulting Low or Bartlett, Moodie decided that Fullerton was obviously the spot for the post. '[A]lthough no formal council was called ... it was taken for granted that the Police would build where the whalers wintered,' he later explained (Moodie 1904). He immediately set about putting up a building, but was much perturbed when he found that the lumber purchased by Low in Halifax was inadequate. Low was equally indignant over Moodie's failure to consult him. It seems clear that Moodie felt he was simply following orders, while Low believed that his recommendation against any posts at all had made a strong impression on the authorities in Ottawa. Angrily, Low insisted that the approach to Fullerton was dangerous for ships and that there was, in fact, no good spot for a post anywhere on the west coast of Hudson Bay. He also informed Moodie that he had written a report recommending abandonment of the post (Low 1904a, 1904b).

Moodie, meanwhile, had come to believe that one post would not be enough. '[I]t will be impossible for the Police to visit each [whaling harbour] more than once a year, under present arrangements,' he observed in his report to White. 'At all these stations the natives congregate but, as we found this year, many of them are likely to be absent hunting when the govt Steamer arrives. Then the time in which the work must be done is so limited, that a day or at most two is all that can be given to each place'. Therefore, he had 'concluded that the only practical way of policing these Territories and getting in touch with the natives, is the establishment of small posts ... at each principal trading or whaling (which is the same thing) station.' Moodie recommended a line of such posts around Hudson Bay, as well as a few on Baffin Island. From Hudson Bay, the police could eventually establish overland lines of communication with Winnipeg, thus diminishing their reliance on seaborne transport (Moodie 1903a).

Captain Comer responded to the Canadian presence and to Moodie's occasional high-handedness with considerable resentment. He seems never to have considered defying Canadian authority, but he was convinced that he had been unfairly singled out as the first foreigner to be subjected to it. Moreover, he felt that, with only a few exceptions, the Canadians generally and the police in particular acted 'as though they thought they were a superior people' (Comer 1984: 22 December 1903). There were other reasons for Moodie's behaviour than the innately imperious personality attributed to him by some writers (for example, Ross, in Comer 1984: 106 n15; Osborne 2003: 55–56). Much of Moodie's stiffness was caused by insecurity. He was acutely aware that, by an oversight, he had not been given authority in the District of Keewatin, of which the west coast of Hudson Bay was a part. 'Anything I may do here therefore or anywhere on the west side of Hudson Bay is actually illegal', he pointed out to White. He asked both for an increase in his authority and for a new cap with an embroidered peak and badge. 'The more gold and uniform one can put on up here the better', he explained (Moodie 1903). Despite several clashes between Moodie and Comer, there was no open breach, thanks in large part to Low, who, as Comer recorded, always 'acted to me very gentlemanly' (Comer 1984: 21 December 1903).

In the spring of 1904, Moodie was surprised to learn about Low's plan for a cruise among the northern islands. As he pointed out to White, this part of Low's instructions had not been repeated in his own orders. Low insisted that asserting Canada's possession of the islands was the expedition's primary aim, but Moodie's orders focused on the establishment of a post in Hudson Bay (Moodie 1904). Low was evidently intent on making his visits to Ellesmere Island and Lancaster Sound the most dramatic part of the entire expedition. As he wrote to Gourdeau, even though his instructions did not specifically direct him to take formal possession of the islands, he intended to do so on both Ellesmere and North Devon (Low 1904c). Low warned Moodie that there might not be sufficient coal to return to Hudson Bay; therefore, in his opinion no one should be left at Fullerton. Moodie ignored this advice, believing that the post, once established, should never be left unoccupied. However, he decided that he himself would go with Low on the northern cruise.

Neptune headed first for Port Burwell, where Low and Moodie expected the relief ship to meet them. Relief had in fact been sent by the chartered sealer *Erik*. Along with coal and other supplies, *Erik* also brought unexpected news: the government had purchased its own Arctic ship, which would soon come north with reinforcements for the Fullerton post. Concerned that the new party was being sent up before his recommendations had been received, let alone acted on, and fearful that *Neptune* might be caught in the ice and forced to winter among the islands, Moodie decided to return south in *Erik*. Low

then proceeded northward, where he proclaimed Canadian sovereignty over Ellesmere, Devon, and Somerset Islands.

The purchase of *Gauss*, 1904

Despite the glaring lack of coordination between the different departments involved, there had been major developments in Ottawa since *Neptune* sailed. In the autumn of 1903 Spain had reported that Job Brothers, the owners of *Neptune*, would sell the ship for $96,000. In his opinion, the price was reasonable (Spain 1903c). However, this information evoked no response from Gourdeau or Préfontaine.

Then on 20 October the Alaska boundary tribunal delivered its decision. Canadians were soon convinced that they had been the victims of British treachery and Roosevelt's 'big stick' diplomacy. The overall boundary line was a reasonable compromise between the Canadian and American claims, but this fact went almost unnoticed among indignant Canadians, whose attention had always focused on the possession of Dyea and Skagway. Not only were the heads of the inlets given to the United States, but Canada lost out on another aspect of the case. Laurier had confidently expected that Canada would at least receive four disputed islands in Portland Channel, but two of them were awarded to US. Sifton returned to Ottawa determined to preserve the Arctic from a similar fate. He requested reports and recommendations from Canada's chief astronomer, W.F. King, who had done extensive work on the boundary issue, and Henry Ami of the Geological Survey. Both men shared Sifton's passionate resentment of the Alaska decision. Ami thought that the best strategy would be to request a formal declaration from the British parliament outlining Canada's Arctic boundaries. Such a document would rectify the problems caused by the vague wording of the 1880 transfer (Ami 1903a, 1903b, 1903c, 1903d, 1904, 1907a, 1907b; Fitzpatrick 1903, 1904a, 1904b, 1905). King, in contrast, favoured more government activity in the north (King 1905: 8, 24).

Laurier, too, was dismayed by the extent of Canada's defeat, and he expressed repeated fears about the 'grasping nature of [American] policy as regards territorial acquisition'. The prime minister was particularly worried about possible American ambitions in the far north, Newfoundland, and the Gulf of St Lawrence (Minto 1903a, 1903b, 1904). Lord Minto reassuringly remarked that there could be 'no manner of doubt' as to Canada's northern sovereignty, but Laurier was convinced that another ship must be sent to Hudson Bay and Baffin Island 'with the idea of planting flags indicating Canadian possession' (Minto 1904). Evidently, Laurier preferred King's low-profile, pragmatic approach over the appeal to Britain recommended by Ami. By early January 1904, the decision had been made to implement a continuing northern programme (White 1904a).

Laurier now took a strong personal interest in the matter. In 1902 and 1903 it had been Sifton who weighed the various options presented by men like Smart and White and made the final decisions, but in 1904 all plans were personally vetted by the prime minister. Laurier showed no interest in Ami's proposed strategy. He feared that a proclamation would 'simply arouse a storm at this juncture.' In his opinion, the best plan was for Canada to 'quietly assume jurisdiction in all directions'. A government cruiser could 'plant our flag at every point.' Only when there were 'men stationed everywhere' would it be time for a proclamation (Laurier 1903, Laurier 1905).

However, at the departmental level confusion still too often prevailed. Despite reminders from Spain, at the beginning of 1904 no arrangements had yet been made for the relief of *Neptune*, let alone for a new expedition. The idea of purchasing a ship had been approved, but there were complaints that the price asked for *Neptune* was much too high. At that juncture, Préfontaine received another letter in the long series of communications from Bernier. Despite repeated appeals over the years since 1898, Bernier had received not the slightest indication that Laurier would ever agree to build a polar ship for him. However, there was some encouragement from Préfontaine, and indeed the minister may have tipped Bernier off about Sifton's new interest in the Arctic early in 1903. From that point on, Bernier's letters began to emphasise the idea that his expedition could make a claim to the archipelago (Bernier 1903a, 1903b). However, since his favoured route to the pole began north of Siberia and ended near Spitsbergen, these pleas had no effect on the prime minister.

Therefore, Bernier had turned to the idea of buying a ship. He had surveyed all the polar vessels available in the United States, Britain, and Europe. The two best options, he thought, were *Fram* and *Gauss*. Fram was not for sale, but *Gauss*, built for Erich von Drygalski's 1901–1903 German Antarctic expedition, could be purchased from the German government for $75,000. This piece of information caught the attention of Marine and Fisheries officials, who promptly recommended the purchase of *Gauss*, not for Bernier's purposes but for their own (McElhinney 1904).

Initially, the plan was to have *Gauss* carry supplies to Hudson Bay in the summer of 1904. Then in the autumn the new ship could start on the long voyage around Cape Horn. In the spring of 1905, an expedition could leave British Columbia, pass through Bering Strait, and patrol the area around Herschel Island. Bernier, who was kept fully informed of these developments, was asked to negotiate the purchase and to act as commander of the ship on its first two northern voyages. Immediately, he attempted to combine the government's agenda with his own. In his mind, it would be ideal to follow the western Arctic patrol with an attempted drift from Siberia across the polar basin. As he wrote to his supporter Nazaire LeVasseur, 'This intended voyage to Hudson Bay and the

Mackenzie River district is only a preliminary step and I am now here at work to get from the Hon. the Minister of Marine & Fisheries a little more lattitude [sic] when at the Mackenzie River . . . I have not yet accepted the command of this coming expedition and will do so on the condition that more lattitude will be granted. . . . Time has fully matured and I must now strike!' (Bernier 1904a).

Despite Bernier's claim that he would accept the government's offer only on his own terms, no promise of an eventual polar expedition was made. Instead, his only formal request was that he be placed in sole command of the Mackenzie expedition, with authority to organise it as he saw fit. Spain thought the government should agree, and although there is no written proof that it did so, Bernier may have been assured in conversation that the command would indeed be his (Bernier 1904b and marginal note by Spain on English translation of the letter).

However, for a time it seemed that the entire plan might be cancelled. Spain arranged for an experienced marine engineer to inspect *Gauss* at Bremerhaven. Bernier had stated that the ship had a speed of 7 knots an hour; the engineer believed it was capable of only 4 knots. In fact, *Gauss* never reached a speed of 7 knots on the Antarctic expedition (Drygalski 1989: 53–54, 59). Bernier insisted that 4 knots would be sufficient, but Spain was not convinced. '[I]f she has only power enough to go four knots in open water, she will be fairly helpless in ice,' he wrote. Before a final decision could be made to buy *Gauss*, it would be necessary to carry out a more detailed inspection and to hold speed trials. This would be expensive and time-consuming; therefore, Spain thought it would be better to charter a relief ship and purchase *Neptune* for further Arctic work (Spain 1904a).

Gourdeau and Préfontaine endorsed Spain's views as far as *Gauss* was concerned; however, they were still reluctant to pay the high price asked for *Neptune*. Their indecisiveness exasperated White. 'If any definite plan has been made with regard to the route to be travelled or the work to be performed by the "Neptune", the "Gauss" or any other boat, it would be an advantage to me to know the details,' he wrote tartly on 25 April (White 1904b). By that time, Marine and Fisheries officials had decided to buy *Gauss* after all. The German consul had suggested to them that they should pay only $70,000; if it turned out that the ship was indeed incapable of going 7 knots, the additional $5,000 need never be paid. On this understanding, the money was advanced (Gourdeau 1904a). Initially, the German officials in Bremerhaven refused to release the ship without full payment. Préfontaine then heard that the British polar ship *Discovery* was for sale. The Germans were firmly told that, given this attractive new option, Canada would rather back out of the deal than pay the full price. As a result, *Gauss* was handed over to Bernier on 2 May. (The Germans later denied that their consul had authority to reduce the price; after much correspondence, Ottawa paid the remaining $5,000 even though the ship's maximum speed was in fact well below 7 knots).

Spain was soon resigned to the decision. He considered the question of a new name for *Gauss*, in keeping with the fact that the ship's 'primary duty' would be 'to show the Canadian flag, and establish British sovereignty in the far North.' He suggested either *Arctic* or *Ensign*, with a preference for the former, which was accordingly adopted (Spain 1904b). After an ominously slow voyage across the Atlantic, *Arctic* arrived in Quebec on 14 June.

Préfontaine, Gourdeau, Spain, and White then held an inconclusive meeting. Préfontaine asked White to write a memorandum; White brusquely replied that he 'had already written several' and could do no more until he received full information about the government's new policy on the north. Privately he recorded that, based on his experience to date of joint ventures with the Department of Marine and Fisheries, 'I would like the Police to be relieved of this duty in north-eastern waters, because I feel sure that whilst a lot of responsibility will be thrown on the Police officers, we shall have very little to say about the movements of the vessel, and general jurisdiction' (White 1904c). He suggested that supervision of the eastern Arctic was 'more important and urgent' than patrols in the west. Therefore, *Arctic* should be sent to Hudson Bay rather than to the mouth of the Mackenzie. A whaler could be chartered for the western voyage. Laurier agreed with this plan, but he ignored White's pleas that the police should be 'released from this Hudson's Bay duty' (White 1904c, 1904d).

It would be some time before *Arctic* was ready to sail. Therefore, *Erik* was chartered to transport coal and other supplies to the rendezvous with *Neptune*. *Arctic* would then go north in August or September and take *Neptune*'s place. An inspector and ten constables would be sent to assist Moodie in establishing new posts. Glumly, White wrote to Moodie that he did not know exactly what instructions would be given to the police for the coming year, since 'nothing has yet been definitely approved'. However, 'one thing is quite settled, and that is, that our Force is to take charge of the preservation of law and order in that extended District' (White 1904e). At the end of July, Laurier requested a $200,000 appropriation from Parliament. The money, he explained, would enable the police 'to patrol the waters, to find suitable locations for posts, to establish those posts and to assert the jurisdiction of Canada' (Canada, House of Commons 1904: 7969). This was the appropriation which Bernier would later claim had been intended to finance his North Pole expedition.

The police had been given no choice but to work with the Department of Marine and Fisheries. However, White was determined to do so only on his own terms. He may also have feared a clash between Moodie and Bernier, since the latter was still determined to make the expedition serve his own purposes. Immediately after his arrival in Quebec, Bernier had announced that the new

expedition would combine sovereignty concerns with an attempt on the pole (*Boston Evening Transcript* 1904; *Toronto Star* 1904a). On 11 July Préfontaine issued a statement to the press, informing reporters that in fact the sole purpose was to patrol Hudson Bay 'and protect Canadian rights' (*Toronto Star* 1904b). A few weeks later, Gourdeau told Spain that the minister no longer wanted Bernier to command the expedition. Spain broke the news to Bernier during a personal interview on 30 July (Gourdeau 1904b and marginal note by Spain). Unfortunately, he made no record of Bernier's response. As subsequent events showed, Bernier was privately determined not to accept a diminished role.

White had independently come to the same conclusion as Préfontaine. He suggested 'that if Mr. Low returns by the "Neptune", and no one is sent to take his place, the public interests will be best served by a clear understanding that the "Arctic" is a Police Boat under the command of the Captain so far as the navigation of the vessel is concerned, but in all other respects to be subject to the requirements of the Officer in command of the Mounted Police.' In addition, White wanted a written statement to the effect that the ship's patrols must extend no farther north than Kennedy Channel (White 1904f).

Laurier agreed to these terms, and on 1 August White drew up a set of draft instructions (White 1904g). Smart reported that Low would in fact remain in the north for another season. The idea that a committee of three (Moodie, Low, and Bernier) should jointly discuss major decisions was therefore briefly considered (Smart 1904a, 1904b). Then on 7 August came a telegram from Moodie at St. Johns. The planning was put on hold until his full report was received. When he arrived in Ottawa, Moodie was well pleased with the government's decision to establish more posts. However, there were disturbing reports from Quebec that the purchase of supplies for *Arctic* had turned into a fiasco of patronage, graft, and general extravagance. So much had been ordered that, so the rumour went, *Arctic* could not possibly hold it all; instead, the crates were simply brought on board, then lowered over the other side into boats belonging to local Liberals (Canada, House of Commons 1908: 4033). Laurier sent White and Moodie to investigate.

To their shock, they found that with the collusion of J.U. Gregory, the Department of Marine and Fisheries agent in Quebec, Bernier had purchased enough supplies to last five or six years. Gregory was no stranger to questionable practices: for years he had been taking a 5% rakeoff on all contracts (Cassels 1909: 15–20). 'The real trouble', White informed Laurier, 'is that, instead of the boat being equipped for Police patrol work, it has been stocked for an expedition of unlimited length to the Polar regions' (White 1904h). Bernier was indeed bent on turning the northern patrol into the fulfilment of his personal dream. Moreover, Low's report (received in Ottawa on 11 August) made it clear that he did not expect or wish to remain in the Arctic (Low 1904c). Together, Low and Moodie would have been able to control Bernier; but without Low, the expedition was likely to turn into a prolonged battle of wills between Bernier and Moodie. Any idea of including Bernier in a joint decision-making process was therefore dropped. White also took the precaution of telling the press about the limits set on *Arctic*'s cruise (*The Globe* 1904).

The official instructions gave Moodie sole command of the expedition, while Bernier was merely the navigating officer. Moodie was authorised to establish posts at Cape Wolstenholme on the Ungava Peninsula and at Cumberland Sound on Baffin Island (White 1904i; Gourdeau 1904c). When Bernier received his copy of the instructions on 14 September, he immediately made a public threat to resign. 'I want to be in command of my own ship,' he angrily told reporters (*Toronto Star* 1904c). According to press stories, Bernier feared that Moodie would use his authority to thwart the North Pole plan (*Saint John Daily Sun* 1904). As the *Toronto Star* observed, until he realised that Moodie would be in sole command Bernier had evidently pictured himself 'snapping his fingers at the rules laid down for him' (*Toronto Star* 1904d).

It was already very late in the season, and any further delay could mean that the expedition would have to be put off until 1905. Both Gourdeau and Préfontaine hurried to Quebec. They persuaded Bernier to change his mind; however, it is evident that he demanded a *quid pro quo*. In a farewell speech to the crew, Préfontaine remarked that when the ship returned, Bernier would 'perhaps be in a position to realize the dream of his life - a trip towards the north pole' (*Toronto Star* 1904e). This vaguely worded statement, made under duress, was the 'promise' that Bernier later reproached the government for having broken. Whether Préfontaine made it with or without Laurier's approval will probably never be known.

Amendment to the Fisheries Act and Bernier's voyage to the archipelago, 1906–1907

Arctic's first northern voyage accomplished nothing. The ship spent the winter of 1904–1905 at Fullerton, but there was no cruise in the archipelago and no new posts were established. Declaring that the windlass required repairs which could be made only at Quebec, Bernier returned south in the autumn of 1905. From the Strait of Belle Isle he sent a cable to Préfontaine: 'Beg grant of Arctic for North Pole expedition speed for Arctic voyage fast enough, only slight repairs needed. Could leave Montreal this fall for Pacific Coast' (in Dorion-Robitaille 1978: 50). As soon as he arrived in Quebec, Bernier began a public campaign against Moodie, who, he claimed, was 'an impossible man to work with.' According to Bernier, the voyage had been intended merely as a preparation for his North Pole trip. The main purpose was to build supply caches for the polar venture; however, since the

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government had failed to provide all the necessary supplies and material, there was 'absolutely no use in our remaining longer.' Bernier now wanted Préfontaine 'to keep the promise he made me, and give me this boat'. If the government refused, Bernier would 'go elsewhere.' He concluded: 'I am working for the realization of the great ideal of my life, for the good of science and of the world, and I will get there yet' (*Montreal Star* 1905). There was no response from the government. A few weeks later, Bernier repeated his appeal to Préfontaine, adding: 'I remember your kind words when we left Quebec and I know you are a man of your word' (Bernier 1905). The minister would only say that there was 'lots of time to discuss the question during the winter' (*The Gazette* 1906).

Bernier need not have troubled to make it plain that he did not wish to work with Moodie again, for White and Moodie were equally determined not to work with him. In January 1905 White and Gourdeau had submitted a joint memorandum to Laurier in which they recommended that police activities should be limited to land (Gourdeau 1905). All patrols or exploration carried out in the archipelago would be the sole responsibility of the Department of Marine and Fisheries. A fisheries officer could be authorised to deal with any problems caused by foreign whalers. White hoped that the police would soon have their own ships for use in Hudson Bay and the western Arctic. Even if this proved difficult, he preferred to 'lose a year [rather] than to be drawn into a second edition of divided responsibility as in the case of the "Arctic"' (White 1905). As it turned out, the police were unable to acquire a vessel. Therefore, the only new post established in Hudson Bay during the Laurier years was at Churchill. For communication and supplies, the Churchill and Fullerton posts relied on overland travel and the Hudson's Bay Company ships (Morrison 1985: 120–121).

The prime minister approved the joint proposal, but if Préfontaine had any intention of using his new authority to back a polar voyage by Bernier, he soon realised that Laurier would never permit him to do so. The exasperated Laurier even considered changing *Arctic*'s name to *Lafontaine* (his wife's maiden name), which would dispel the idea that the ship was destined for a polar voyage (Canada, Privy Council Office 1905). Préfontaine's death from a heart attack in December 1905 put an end to whatever hopes Bernier may have had that the minister would ultimately help him to realise his polar dream. The new minister, Louis-Philippe Brodeur, was far more concerned with reforming the administration of the department than with gaining glory for Canada at the North Pole. Bernier attempted to win the support of Earl Grey, but without success (Dorion-Robitaille 1978: 51). Perhaps Grey's refusal to act as Bernier's patron was the origin of Esdras Terrien's belief that the new governor-general had deliberately blocked the polar plan (see Introduction, above).

Laurier and Brodeur decided to assert Canada's authority over Hudson Bay and the archipelago by an amendment to the Fisheries Act. Unfortunately, there seems to be almost no documentation on the background to this important decision. A long memorandum written by Brodeur for transmission to the Colonial Office says nothing about the genesis of the idea (Brodeur 1907). The amendment (passed in July 1906) declared that all of Hudson Bay, not just the waters within three miles of the shore, was under Canada's jurisdiction. Foreign whalers would have to pay a $50 annual fee to operate either in the bay or in Canadian territorial waters farther north. This course was certainly not without its dangers. British officials, who were not consulted beforehand, later warned that if Washington were to challenge Canada's claim to Hudson Bay as territorial waters, an arbitral tribunal would probably support the American position (Crewe 1908). Laurier must have been well aware of this possibility even without the British warning. Nevertheless, he decided to proceed. On *Arctic*'s next voyage, Bernier's main task would be to collect the licence fees, thus implicitly affirming Canadian sovereignty over both the bay and the archipelago.

But before the new expedition sailed, the Conservative leader, Robert Borden, demanded an inquiry into the expenses incurred for *Arctic*'s 1904–1905 voyage. In particular, he wanted to know why it had been necessary to spend such a huge amount of money on supplies. The auditor-general's report for 1904–1905 gave full details of the items purchased and their cost (Canada, Auditor-General 1906: 193–199). Not knowing that Bernier had bought enough to stock a North Pole expedition, the Conservatives were appalled. In particular, they questioned the need for large quantities of luxury items such as cigars, champagne, port, and brandy. All the supplies had been purchased without tender from Liberal supporters. In many cases, the merchants took the opportunity to charge inflated prices. For example, Bernier paid $1.34 per pound for a brand of tobacco that usually sold for 67¢ wholesale and 75¢ retail (Canada, House of Commons 1906: 6390). When called to testify, he placed the blame on Spain and Gregory (*The Gazette* 1906). White and Moodie were also called. Both men perjured themselves rather than embarrass the government. Gregory frankly admitted that, as the patronage system demanded, the goods had been purchased only from Liberals. He then pointed out that he had learned this system under the Conservatives. It was an effective response, since patronage was indeed an accepted practice by both parties (*Toronto Star* 1906; on patronage in Canadian politics at this time, see Stewart 1980). In the end, the Conservatives could not prove that any actual corruption was involved.

Despite this favourable outcome, it was clear that taxpayers' money had been carelessly spent. The government could have saved itself from considerable embarrassment by throwing Bernier to the wolves. Instead, the fact that he had ordered five years' supplies without authorisation was successfully concealed. Most likely, this decision was taken because Laurier now needed Bernier to enforce the new law on northern whaling. Bernier

seems to have learned an important lesson from the *Arctic* inquiry: even though the government might never willingly back his polar plans, it could be forced by circumstances to accept and to tacitly sanction whatever he did when in its employ, even if he had far exceeded his instructions. Bernier continued to suggest through the press that after he carried out his mission in the archipelago, he would be given *Arctic* for a polar drift. For example, his American friend B.S. Osbon wrote in *The New York Times* that the 1906 voyage was intended mainly to establish wireless stations so that Bernier could relay news from the pole (Osbon 1906). However, Bernier had another plan as well, which may have been inspired by Low's proclamations on Ellesmere Island and elsewhere.

The inquiry ended on 22 June 1906. The next day Gourdeau sent Bernier his orders for the new expedition. He was to patrol the waters of Lancaster Sound and claim any new lands he might discover for Canada (Gourdeau 1906a). However, the instructions had to be revised after the Fisheries Act amendment received royal assent on 13 July. In a letter to Gourdeau, Bernier suggested new wording. He wanted to take possession of 'all lands and islands' on his way and, in particular, to claim Banks and Albert Lands, which had not yet been visited by a Canadian expedition. Gourdeau obligingly accepted these suggestions. The main focus of the expedition was thus implicitly shifted from patrolling the waters to raising the flag on land (Bernier 1906, Gourdeau 1906b).

Normally, the prime minister initialed such documents on the first page to show his approval. The first page of this particular letter is missing from the copy in the Department of Marine and Fisheries file on the expedition, so it is impossible to know whether Laurier or someone else signed off on it. In some of his previous remarks on the subject Laurier had certainly spoken of raising the flag at various points across the Arctic. However, by this he apparently meant establishing posts as concrete proof of Canada's jurisdiction. He must have realised it could be dangerous to give the impression that the northern islands had not been Canadian even before his government began to act. (This danger had been pointed out by Ami in 1903; see Ami 1903a; Fitzpatrick 1903). Laurier never suggested, even in secret correspondence, that Canada might not already have a title to the archipelago. Instead, his main concern was always to ensure that the existing claim was not allowed to lapse through neglect and apparent abandonment. When the plan to establish posts on the islands had to be dropped due to the conflicts between the police and the marine department, the Fisheries Act amendment was substituted as a means of demonstrating Canada's authority. If Bernier successfully enforced the new law, then flag-raisings and proclamations would be superfluous at best. At worst, they could damage Canada's cause by giving the impression that Ottawa regarded the 1880 transfer as invalid.

Nevertheless, by 1906 Bernier had apparently made up his mind that if he could not go to the pole with government backing, he would claim the archipelago as far north as the pole. By putting the broadest possible construction on the directive to claim all the lands and islands on his way, he could argue (although not very plausibly) that he was following orders. During the 1906–1907 voyage, Bernier carried out individual flag-raising ceremonies on a number of islands. Then on 12 August 1907 he landed on the southern shore of Ellesmere Island, at a spot to which he gave the patriotic name of King Edward VII Point. There he proclaimed Canada's ownership of Ellesmere 'and all adjacent islands … as far as ninety degrees north' (Bernier 1907).

Exactly how Bernier himself saw the relation between his sovereignty assertions and British rights gained by discovery is a difficult question to answer. He always referred to his British predecessors with great respect as the fathers of Canadian sovereignty (see Cavell 2006: 20–22, 2007: 17), and he did not appear to realise that his proclamations implicitly denied the validity of the 1880 transfer. The best answer seems to be that Bernier took an emotional rather than a logical view of the matter, and that he therefore saw no contradiction in emphasising both British rights and his own supposed role as the man who added the Arctic to Canada. As he declared to the Empire Club of Canada in 1909, 'I wanted to have the honour … of reaching the islands and giving them to Canada … They were ours; they were given to us by Britain on the 1st of September, 1880. We have annexed them' (Bernier 1909b: 70).

While Bernier was in the north, his ally Senator Pascal Poirier attempted to smooth the way for acceptance of a broad Canadian claim. In February 1907 he called for Canada formally to extend its northern boundary as far as the pole. Bernier, he said, believed that 'a country whose possession to-day goes up to the Arctic regions, will have a right, or should have a right, or has a right to all the lands that are to be found in the waters between a line extending from its eastern extremity north, and another line extending from the western extremity north' (Canada, Senate 1907: 271). However, the other senators refused to adopt (or even to vote on) the motion proposed by Poirier. Speaking on behalf of the government, Richard Cartwright assured Poirier that the authorities were well informed about Arctic issues, and that the collection of customs duties and whaling licence fees were 'acts of dominion' that should prove 'sufficient to maintain our just rights'. Cartwright referred to certain 'negotiations' that were then under way, and he suggested that while they were in progress, it would not be good policy 'to formally proclaim any special limitation' (Canada, Senate 1907: 274).

The negotiations referred to by Cartwright had begun a month earlier, when American secretary of state Elihu Root visited Ottawa. The visit was the culmination of years of effort by Earl Grey in Ottawa and James Bryce in Washington. As Alvin Glueck has observed, in the absence of a Canadian department of external affairs Grey and Bryce took on the functions of Laurier's

foreign minister and under-secretary (Glueck 1968: 82). From that point on, relations between the two countries improved dramatically. When Bernier returned south and made his report in October 1907, Laurier saw no reason to sanction his sweeping claim. There are no records to show exactly how the prime minister responded to the news, but a small 'x' beside the relevant passage in Bernier's report and the absence of any reference to this incident in his published narrative are sufficiently revealing.

Bernier was allowed to publicise his other flag-raisings, with mixed results. *The Gazette* of Montreal accepted his claim that he had annexed the islands, but *The Globe* of Toronto carefully stated that the flag had been planted 'to prove the sovereignty of the Dominion' (*The Gazette* 1907; *The Globe* 1907). A humourous editorial in the *Toronto Star* ridiculed the entire business. 'When the [*Arctic*] is seen in the offing, bearing down on an island, the island feels at once that it cannot get away from such a relentless pursuer as Captain Bernier,' it declared (*Toronto Star* 1907). In Parliament, the Conservatives posed awkward questions. 'Were these islands British possessions before? ... Was there any doubt that they were British territory? What does [Bernier] mean by taking possession of them? What is the process, what is the result, what does it all mean?' demanded one exasperated MP. 'I do not think we should try to convey the idea that these northern lands do not belong to us,' agreed another (Canada, House of Commons 1908: 4158, 4175). These remarks, made during an exceptionally long and bitter debate on the problems still plaguing the Department of Marine and Fisheries, can only have reinforced Laurier's belief that there was no need for a general proclamation.

Moreover, the prime minister had good reason to be satisfied with the results of the new whaling regulation. Despite his North Pole obsession, Bernier had been admirably diligent in tracking the whalers and informing them about the new law (see Bernier 1908). There had been no challenge to the Canadian claims either from the US government or from American whalers. In 1904 the British ambassador in Washington had reported that American politicians showed no interest whatever in the *Neptune* expedition (Lyttelton 1904). Nor did the Fisheries Act amendment evoke any official response, despite the fact that leading American legal experts vehemently opposed Canada's claim to all of Hudson Bay as territorial waters (for example, see Balch 1913).

George Comer was now the only American operating in Hudson Bay, and he showed no disposition to make complaints in Washington. But rather ironically, while Comer repeatedly expressed his willingness to obey all Canadian laws (Comer 1906a, 1906b), there was some opposition from two Scottish firms. Both Crawford Noble of Aberdeen and Robert Kinnes of Dundee initially questioned their obligation to pay the fee (see Gillies 1908; Kinnes 1908a, 1908b). Kinnes was especially persistent. He claimed that he had 'a vested right in this particular trade as it has been carried on by the Company I represent ... long before your Government took any interest in, or laid any claim to that locality' (Kinnes 1908b). The acting deputy minister of marine and fisheries, George Desbarats (who had replaced Gourdeau after Laurier finally consented to a judicial inquiry into the department's practices), replied firmly that it was 'not clear how your operations there could effect [sic] the right of the Government to take active measures at any time it chose for the organization of this remote district, and the fact that this was not done before was due to a lack of means at the disposal of the Government, as well as a want of formulated policy in this regard' (Desbarats 1908). Both companies paid the fees.

The government's aims, then, were well on their way to being fulfilled without either posts or proclamations. More posts would certainly have been highly desirable, but by 1907 the sovereignty issue had lost much of its urgency because relations with the United States were far more cordial and co-operative. It was plain that the Americans now preferred quiet, productive negotiations over the 'big stick'. There was certainly no reason to publicise Bernier's claim, still less to encourage a repetition of the performance. Circumstances had not favoured Bernier this time. Nevertheless, he was determined to try again.

The 1909 claim

On 1 July 1909 Bernier carried out a carefully planned ceremony on Melville Island. He raised the Canadian and British flags side by side and claimed the triangular sector 'from 60 degrees west longitude to 141 degrees west longitude, and as far north as 90 degrees north latitude' on behalf of Canada (Bernier 1910: 192). To ensure that the government could not ignore his action this time, he erected a tablet recording the event.

Bernier's claim included northwestern Greenland in the Canadian sector. This fact made it even less likely that Laurier would accept what he had done. However, other circumstances worked in Bernier's favour. In September 1909 the claims of both Frederick Cook and Robert Peary to have reached the North Pole caused an uproar in the press. Dramatically, Peary reported that he had 'nailed the Stars and Stripes to the Pole', thus making it and the surrounding area American (in Herbert 1989: 282). This announcement naturally caused uneasiness in both Ottawa and London, even though the American government showed no inclination to support Peary's unauthorised claim. When the new president, William Howard Taft, received a telegram in which the explorer stated that the pole was at his disposal, he promptly replied: 'I do not know exactly what I could do with it' (*New York Times* 1909a). Significantly, Taft's message was released to the press.

Despite these reassuring words from Washington, some British politicians remained worried. On 10 September the colonial secretary, Lord Crewe, informed Earl Grey that a question about Canada's northern boundary would be asked in the British House of Commons.

Under the circumstances, Laurier was finally willing to make a public claim. Canadian files provide no details about the discussions in Ottawa, but it is certainly possible that the prime minister felt able to make such a statement precisely because he knew Taft would not contest it. Crewe was told that Canada laid claim to 'all lands intervening between the American border and the North Pole' (Pope 1909). This message was repeated in the British parliament on 15 September.

Bernier arrived in Quebec on 5 October. The story of his proclamation was released a few days later, and on 16 October the overjoyed captain recounted his actions to the Canadian Club of Ottawa, with Laurier in attendance (see Bernier 1909a). Though some US newspapers responded with indignation (for example, see *The New York Times* 1909b) there was no formal protest from Washington or any other foreign capital. However, the Americans made their position known through a discreet statement by the ambassador in London, Whitelaw Reid. Both he and the Canadian high commissioner, Lord Strathcona, were invited to a Thanksgiving Day dinner given by American residents in London. The theme of the event was North American friendship. Reid made a short speech in which he told Strathcona that any country claiming the Arctic would first have to establish effective occupation. As far as he was concerned, Canadians were welcome 'to go there at once, establish that effective occupation, declare and maintain their sovereignty, and then make the most of it' (*The Times* (London) 1909).

The message was clear: while the Americans had no wish to back Peary's claim, neither would they recognise a Canadian title based on words alone. Accordingly, Laurier's government never officially sanctioned the sector theory. Instead, Ottawa used Bernier's act as a convenient way to counter the publicity surrounding Peary's exploit. The entire matter was then allowed to fade into the background. Bernier himself desperately attempted to stay in the limelight: during a visit to New York he grandly announced that his next voyage would involve a formal 'division of the polar sea'. Bluntly, Laurier retorted that the captain should 'keep to his own deck' (Canada, House of Commons 1910: 2711–2712). When Senator Poirier attempted to defend Bernier, his colleagues from both parties joined in criticising the explorer's indiscreet and unauthorised press interviews (Canada, Senate 1910: 184–85). Bernier may have been embittered by these public rebukes. During his 1910–1911 voyage, he seemed intent mainly on lining his own pockets. He traded the ship's excess stores for furs, which he was later able to sell at an enormous profit (Saint-Pierre 2009: 240–248).

Shortly after Bernier returned from this voyage, the Liberals were defeated in the October 1911 federal election. The new prime minister, Borden, showed no interest in Bernier. Instead, he turned to the charismatic Vilhjalmur Stefansson to uphold Canada's northern sovereignty. However, Bernier had already received a grant of land on Baffin Island. After his departure from government service he built a trading post in his new domain, to which he gave the name 'Berniera'.

Conclusion

'Despite his equivocations Laurier had allowed Captain Bernier to establish Canada's northern frontier by annexing all the islands of the Arctic Archipelago,' writes Marjolaine Saint-Pierre in her summary of the Laurier years (Saint-Pierre 2009: 250). Clearly, this common view requires substantial revision, as does Morris Zaslow's gibe about the Laurier government's 'slightly farcical' Arctic programme (see introduction, above). Laurier's government was neither indifferent nor incompetent in northern matters. He and his ministers felt no doubt about either Canada's right to the Arctic or their responsibility to uphold it. They recognised the need for effective occupation, but no posts were established on the islands due to a lack of knowledge about the north, the absence of a government department with primary responsibility for it, and the poor administration of the Department of Marine and Fisheries. Despite these major obstacles, Canada's sovereignty over the archipelago was asserted through the enforcement of customs and whaling regulations. Bernier's true achievement was that he participated as an important subordinate in a reasonably effective northern sovereignty programme.

Credit for this programme is due not only to Laurier, Sifton, and Bernier, but to other politicians and civil servants whose papers lie buried in obscure files. Record-keeping in all the departments involved in Arctic matters was remarkably poor during the Laurier years, posing a problem for later governments as well as for historians. Indeed, it is remarkable how few lessons the politicians and civil servants of the 1920s were able to draw from the pre-World War I period. Unaware of how much had been done by their predecessors, these men came to doubt whether Canada had a valid title to the archipelago at all (see Cavell and Noakes 2009, 2010). The Laurier government's failure to organise an effective publicity campaign around its activities must also be held to blame for this confusion. The problem was further compounded by Bernier's flair for publicity. While he spent his retirement writing and speaking about his supposed achievements, other men either remained silent about their northern activities by choice or were unable to speak. The strong-minded and energetic Low, for example, was struck down by cerebral meningitis in 1906 and never recovered his mental faculties (Zaslow 1975: 263). As a result, by the 1950s the *Neptune* expedition was all but forgotten (see Herridge 1956). Though parts of Low's and Moodie's stories were recovered by historians in the 1970s and later (see Zaslow 1971; Ross 1975, 1976; Morrison 1985), the broader narrative of Laurier's Arctic policy remained elusive. When the various fragments are pieced together, they show that his government's northern programme was substantial and successful enough to deserve a place in the history of Canada's foreign policy.

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