

**A HISTORICAL AND LEGAL STUDY OF SOVEREIGNTY
IN THE CANADIAN NORTH: TERRESTRIAL
SOVEREIGNTY, 1870-1939**

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Danish Sovereignty, Greenland, and the Ellesmere Island Affair of 1914-21

After the hiatus of inactivity during and just after the First World War, Canadian activity in the North was resumed in circumstances of stress and concern somewhat comparable to those that had existed when the Canadian government first took genuine steps to bring these regions under control about the turn of the century. Now, the causes of worry were such problems as the ultimate fate of Danish Greenland; the apparent disinclination of Denmark to recognize Canadian sovereignty over Ellesmere Island; the international status of the so-called Sverdrup Islands, which had been discovered by this Norwegian explorer during his expedition of 1898–1902; the evident need for Canada to take at least some steps towards occupation and use of her claimed territories in the North generally; the exciting prospect of air travel and transport in and across the Arctic and all that this implied for Canada; and perhaps most important of all, the brooding, restless figure of the explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson, now an ambitious celebrity, and his determined agitation and planning for northern development (discussed in the previous chapter). The story of how Canadian authorities responded to and tried to solve these problems occupied centre stage through most of the following twenty years.

Danish Sovereignty over Greenland and Canadian Interests

The first major problem in the North to engage the attention of the Canadian government at this time was the question of what should happen to Greenland if Denmark should ever decide to dispose of it. The old Norse settlements in Greenland, which were established by Norwegian-Icelandic sea voyagers some years after their discovery of the island around 900 AD, were first independent, then fell under the sovereignty of the Norwegian Crown about 1260 AD, and then became subject to the union of Scandinavian states formalized by the Treaty of Kalmar in 1397. Contact with the Old World was gradually lost, and the settlements mysteriously disappeared in the early fifteenth century. Communications were re-established some years after the Columbian discovery of America; in 1721, the Norwegian pastor Hans Egede started a new colony, which soon was taken over by what was left of the Scandinavian union. By the Treaty of Kiel in 1814, the monarch of

Denmark-Norway was obliged to cede Norway to Sweden, but he managed to retain Greenland, along with Iceland and the Faeroe Islands.¹ During the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Denmark gradually extended its activity and control in Greenland and then, starting with a request to the United States in 1915, set about securing formal recognition of its title in the island from the interested states. There was some uncertainty, however, whether Denmark was asking for general acknowledgment of her sovereignty over all of Greenland or of her right to extend her sovereignty over all of it. This later became a major issue, especially in the dispute with Norway over Eastern Greenland (see chapter 13).²

When Denmark ceded the Danish West Indies in the Caribbean to the United States by a treaty on 4 August 1916, the treaty had appended to it an official declaration by American Secretary of State Robert Lansing to the effect that “the Government of the United States of America will not object to the Danish government extending their political and economic interests to the whole of Greenland.”³ In 1920, similar declarations, essentially unqualified, were made by the French and Japanese governments.⁴ In 1920, Great Britain also recognized Danish sovereignty over Greenland, but Britain’s recognition was qualified and was preceded by considerable negotiation.

On 3 December 1903, Governor General the Earl of Minto wrote to Colonial Secretary Alfred Lyttelton, enclosing a memorandum which Prime Minister Laurier had handed him that morning concerning “the proposal of the Dominion Government to purchase Greenland.” The memo stated that “it has long been apparent to those who have noted the trend of events in the United States that the most popular policy in the Republic is the extension of its territory” and, after citing certain evidence

to bear out the contention, went on: “It is obviously in the interest of the Empire that no additional territory should be acquired by the United States in or adjacent to the north half of the continent of North America.” Noting that an American attempt some years earlier to purchase the Danish West Indies had been frustrated when the Danish *Landstinget* (the upper house of its legislature) refused to confirm the agreement that had been made, and that American whalers and fishermen were active in the waters west of Greenland, the memo speculated that the United States might try to acquire Greenland. Canada was willing to purchase the island, however, and Laurier suggested that the British authorities ascertain confidentially whether the Danish government would agree to a British acquisition of Greenland for and at the expense of Canada.

At the instance of the Foreign Office, the matter was brought up in Copenhagen by Sir Edward Goschen, His Majesty’s Minister in Denmark, with negative results. Johan Henrik Deuntzer, the Danish Foreign Minister, who had told Goschen that “Denmark would never dream of selling that territory” in the autumn of 1903, now reiterated his former statement, adding that “even if the Government wanted to do so, it was certain that the country would not sanction such a sale.”⁵

In 1917, the question of Greenland was discussed by a subcommittee of the Imperial War Cabinet. John Douglas Hazen, Canada’s Minister of Marine and Fisheries, had presented a paper outlining and assessing the strategic importance of the island. The report of the subcommittee in April of that year stated:

1. That the position of Greenland makes the question of its territorial ownership a matter of great

importance to the British Empire as a whole and to Canada in particular.

2. It is extremely undesirable that Greenland should pass out of the hands of present owner into those of any other Power, even a friendly Power.
3. In the event of any possible sale or disposal of Danish territory in Greenland, we should have a prior claim to its acquisition, and at the first favourable opportunity an undertaking should be secured from Denmark to this effect.⁶

On 10 September 1919, Colonial Secretary Lord Milner sent a confidential telegram to Canadian Governor General the Duke of Devonshire, saying that the Danish government proposed to try to get general recognition of Danish sovereignty over all Greenland at the Paris peace conference. He asked for the Canadian ministers' view in the matter, adding that he inferred from the evidence that they recognized in practice Danish sovereignty over all Greenland.⁷ On 27 September, following consultations among Canadian government officials, Devonshire confirmed that Canada had no claim to any portion of Greenland. The Canadian government adhered to the April 1917 report of the subcommittee of the Imperial War Cabinet, however, and considered that recognition of Danish sovereignty throughout Greenland should be conditional on Denmark accepting the recommendations in the subcommittee report.⁸

On 28 January 1920, the Colonial Office sent word to the Duke of Devonshire that the British government was "in full agreement"

with the Canadian view but feared that there would be considerable difficulty in getting Denmark to make the desired commitment. Apart from that, Denmark would probably inform the United States and France, which had already committed to recognize Danish rights in Greenland, and this would put the British government in "a somewhat invidious position." The two states mentioned could be sounded out in advance, but this might have the unfortunate result of defeating Canadian wishes.⁹

Great Britain took the lead in opposing Denmark's wish to place the question of Greenland before the powers at the peace conference, on grounds that the delegates wanted to concentrate on matters arising directly out of the war and settle them as quickly as possible.¹⁰ On 16 March 1920, the Danish government sent a note to British Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon, saying that it had decided to submit the question to each of the principal powers separately. Accordingly, the Danes asked the British government for official recognition of Danish sovereignty over the whole of Greenland, which they said (apparently not recognizing the inconsistency) might be given in the same form that the American government used in Lansing's declaration of 4 August 1916.¹¹ Enclosed with the Danish note was a statement "showing the principles according to which the colony of Greenland is governed, which may prove of interest in dealing with the matter in question" – but which, whether intentionally or not, contained strong evidence that Denmark did not at the time consider that it had full sovereignty over all Greenland:

As already stated, since the beginning of the eighteenth century Denmark has founded colonies in Greenland. When it became known

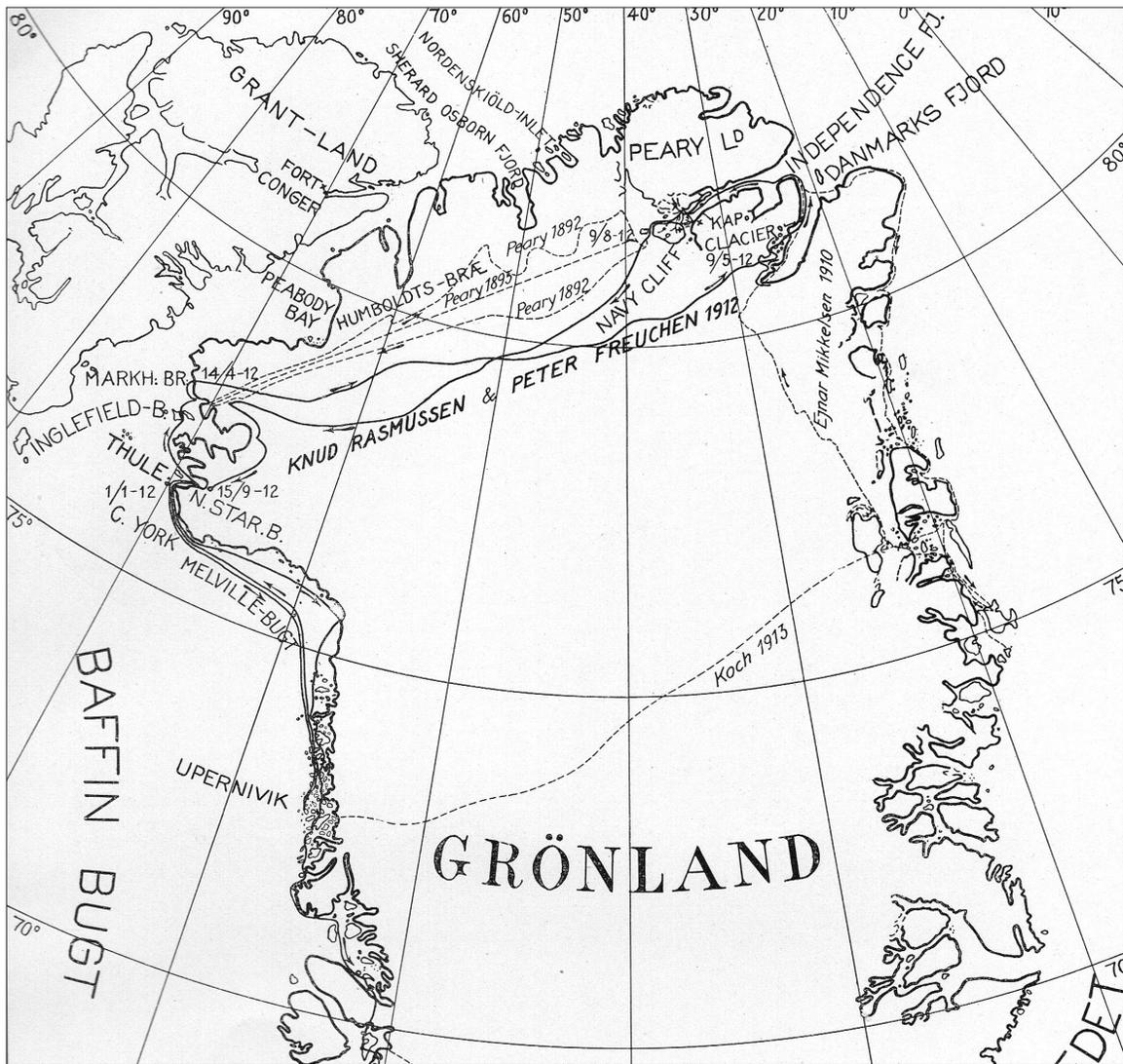


FIGURE 10-1: MAP OF GREENLAND SHOWING ROUTES OF THE VARIOUS EXPEDITIONS THAT HAD CROSSED THE GREENLAND ICE TO 1915. KNUD RASMUSSEN, "REPORT OF THE FIRST THULE EXPEDITION," *MEDDELSER OM GRÖNLAND* 51:8 (1915): 285–340.

that there were Esquimaux beyond the territories hitherto under administration, such as Cape York, Danish missionary and commercial enterprise was extended to those localities, which were also formally taken possession of on behalf of the Danish crown.

Danish explorers have visited practically the whole of uninhabited Greenland and made maps of the country, but no formal occupation of the whole of Greenland has actually taken place. In view of Danish sentiments in this matter, as well as the interests of the Esquimaux

population, it would be desirable if the Danish Government could extend its activity by proclaiming its sovereignty over the entire territory of Greenland.

On 19 May 1920, the Foreign Office sent a reply to Danish minister Erik Wilhelm Grevenkop-Castenskiold, saying that if the Danish government would grant the right of pre-emption to the British Empire in case Denmark should ever wish to dispose of Greenland, the British government would be willing at once to recognize officially Danish sovereignty over the island. The note added that the governments of France, Italy, Japan, and the United States were being informed of the British attitude.¹²

As might have been expected, American officials opposed this British proposition. On 8 June 1920, Ambassador John W. Davis wrote a note to Lord Curzon, informing him that the American government “is not disposed to recognize the existence in a third Government of a right of pre-emption to acquire this territory if the Danish government should desire to dispose of it and accordingly reserves for future consideration what position it may take in the event of a specific proposal for such a transfer.”¹³ Lord Milner sent a copy of this note to the Duke of Devonshire on 7 July, accompanied by a suggestion from Lord Curzon to adopt “a less formal procedure” by merely notifying the Danish government that “in the event of Denmark parting with the sovereignty over the territory, its acquisition by any third Power could not be recognized in view of its geographical proximity to the Dominion of Canada.”¹⁴

It soon became apparent that Denmark herself was no more inclined to recognize a British right of pre-emption than was the United States. On 20 July, Grevenkop-Castenskiold

sent a forthrightly worded note to Lord Curzon, insisting that Danish sovereignty over Greenland had never been questioned by any foreign power; that what Denmark really asked for was “formal recognition of an existing status sanctioned by prescriptive right”; that Denmark’s conviction about the matter had already been confirmed by recognition from France, Italy, and Japan; and that Great Britain’s wish for a right of pre-emption (the way such qualification made) could therefore not be granted.¹⁵ In these circumstances, Lord Milner wrote to the Duke of Devonshire on 5 August advising that Canada accept Lord Curzon’s suggestion,¹⁶ and Devonshire cabled Canada’s acceptance on 20 August.¹⁷

With the consent of Canada thus secured, the Foreign Office sent the following notice of official recognition to Grevenkop-Castenskiold on 6 September 1920:

With reference to your note No. 202/30/B. 2, concerning the official recognition by His Majesty’s Government of His Danish Majesty’s sovereignty over Greenland, which you were good enough to address to me on 20th July, I have the honour to inform you that His Majesty’s Government recognize His Danish Majesty’s sovereignty over Greenland, but in view of its geographical proximity to the Dominion of Canada, His Majesty’s Government must reserve their right to be consulted should the Danish Government at any time contemplate the alienation of this territory.¹⁸

Lord Curzon’s suggested reservation was not followed in precise terms. Where he had recommended notifying the Danish government

that in the event of the alienation of Greenland “its acquisition by any third Power could not be recognized” by Great Britain, the note of recognition adopted the stronger line that the British government “must reserve their right to be consulted” if Denmark contemplated such alienation.

The events summarized above brought to an end any lingering questions and doubts about Canadian recognition of Danish sovereignty in and throughout Greenland. Henceforth, Canada’s concern with Denmark in this region was to be directed primarily to securing similar recognition from Denmark of Canada’s rights in Ellesmere Island and also to watching, as an interested observer, the developing dispute between Denmark and Norway over Eastern Greenland.

Vilhjalmur Stefansson and the Ellesmere Island Affair of 1919–21

One of the most important factors, and perhaps the most important, in the revival of Canadian concern about the North after the First World War was the fear of Danish designs upon Ellesmere Island and perhaps other Arctic islands claimed by Canada. It is not easy to date the precise beginning of this alarm, but it is apparent that the figure of Vilhjalmur Stefansson, as well as his campaign for the protection of northern game animals and generally of Canada’s interests in the Arctic, looms large in the background. The commission to investigate the possibilities of raising large reindeer and musk-ox herds in the Canadian North, detailed in the previous chapter, is a case in point. Two members of the commission, James Harkin and Stefansson, became much involved in a rather

strange and consequence-laden affair, which started out as an attempt to stop the Greenland Inuit from killing excessive numbers of musk-ox on Ellesmere Island. On 11 July 1919, Harkin wrote the following letter to Deputy Minister of the Interior William W. Cory:

I would recommend that a letter along the lines indicated below be sent to the Danish Government from the Secretary of State for External Affairs. It is understood that Mr. Dagaard Fensen, Direktoren for Styrelson of Koloniere, 1 Gronland, Copenhagen Denmark, is the official of the Danish Government who deals with these matters.

From reports that have been received here from Northern Canada, it is understood that as a result of the visits of Arctic explorers to Greenland and Ellesmere Land the Greenland Eskimos are now crossing to Ellesmere Land more frequently than in the past for the purpose of killing Musk ox. The Government of Canada has created a closed season for Musk ox throughout the Northwest Territories of Canada and the Arctic Archipelago. This was found necessary because of the great decrease in the number of these animals, even in remote districts. Three marked copies of the Northwest Game Act, which applies to Ellesmere land are enclosed.

This question was considered fully at a recent meeting of the Advisory Board on Wild Life Protection and it was decided at this meeting to approach the Danish Government and request their co-operation in

the protection of the Musk ox on Ellesmere Land. In all probability a great deal of good could be done by having the authorities in Greenland acquaint the Greenland Eskimos with the provisions of the Canadian Northwest Game Act.¹⁹

Cory responded by writing a letter on 23 July to Under Secretary of State for External Affairs Sir Joseph Pope, incorporating the substance of the above letter and making the same request. He also made the extraordinary suggestion that the Danish government should allow the Canadian government “to station such officers as may be necessary in Greenland for the purpose of protecting the Musk Ox of Ellesmere Land.”²⁰ Governor General the Duke of Devonshire sent the request to London in a dispatch on 31 July, which also formed the subject of notes that Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon sent to the Danish government on 27 August and 5 November. The Danish government conferred with the Administration of the Colonies in Greenland and then sent a reply to Curzon on 12 April 1920, which was transmitted to Ottawa on 26 April. Enclosed with the reply to Curzon was a statement by Knud Rasmussen, explorer and director of the Danish missionary and trade station at Thule, who had also been consulted by the Danish authorities.

Rasmussen’s statement, written at Copenhagen on 8 March, described Inuit traditional hunting of the muskox and reindeer (i.e., caribou) in both Ellesmere Island and northwestern Greenland, and the more destructive hunting with firearms by modern expeditions (mainly American) to the extent that the caribou in the region had been exterminated and the existence of the muskox was threatened. The muskox herds were so large that there was no immediate danger of extermination, however,



FIGURE 10-2: W. W. CORY, DEPUTY MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR AND COMMISSIONER OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES, 1919-1931. WILLIAM J. TOPLEY / LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA / PA-167436.

and since Inuit killed muskox mainly to obtain their hides as substitutes for the more desirable caribou hides, Rasmussen was already trying to remedy the situation by importing reindeer hides from northern Europe. His statement ended as follows:

As head of the Thule Station at Cape York I am convinced that it would be impossible without disastrous consequences to prohibit the hunting of the musk ox within the immemorial hunting areas of the esquimaux unless effective

counter-balancing measures as above indicated are previously introduced.

The havoc wrought by white men should also be made good by them. And it would be morally indefensible first to exterminate the reindeer and then to prohibit the hunting of the musk ox.

It is well known that the territory of the polar esquimaux falls within the region designated as “no Man’s land” and there is therefore no authority in the district except that which I exercise through my station – an authority which I have hitherto had no difficulty in maintaining chiefly because the polar esquimaux, when reasonably treated, adopt a very rational attitude toward all decisions which the station considers it advisable to take.

The musk ox hunts have hitherto only taken place in the months of March, April and May, during the remainder of the year these animals are practically speaking protected, and it is to be hoped that it will not be long before the station will be able to agree to their complete protection, but this will not be feasible for the reasons already given, before the quantity of hides needed by the population can be provided from elsewhere.

This plan should, it must be hoped, in consequence of the arrangements already made, be realized within a few years.

Fully conscious of the work which is ahead and of the responsibility I assume, I venture to close with the observation that, in order

to carry out the protective measures indicated in this statement, I shall need no assistance whatever from the Canadian government.²¹

The reply of the Danish government contained the following statement:

The Government therefore submitted the matter to the director of the above mentioned Thule station, Mr. Knud Rasmussen, who thereupon has handed to the Administration of the Colonies of Greenland a statement on the subject in which he comes to the conclusion that he will not need the assistance of the Canadian Government in order to carry out the protective measure indicated in his statement.

Having acquainted themselves with the statement in question my Government think that they can subscribe to what Mr. Rasmussen says therein and have instructed me to submit a copy of it to His Britannic Majesty’s Government.²²

Receipt of the Danish notes in Ottawa on 11 May 1920²³ caused a worried reaction on the part of Canadian authorities. By a rather strange coincidence, Harkin had written a memo to Cory one week earlier, noting that no reply from the Danish government had as yet been received and suggesting that a further letter be sent asking for one. His memo also alleged that Rasmussen had sent an expedition of Greenland Inuit to Axel Heiberg Island to kill muskox and to take furs.²⁴ Harkin immediately showed Rasmussen’s statement to Stefansson, who wrote a lengthy memorandum about it on 15 May, contradicting Rasmussen’s statement

that the danger of exterminating the muskox was not yet imminent and strongly suggesting that the Canadian government should assert “very definite authority” over all the lands to the west of Baffin Bay, Smith Sound, and Robeson Channel.²⁵ On 16 June, Harkin wrote a memorandum to Cory, which repeated and enlarged upon the substance of Stefansson’s memorandum, ending with the following recommendations:

It seems to me that Canada should in the first place take a very strong stand in regard to its exclusive ownership of and authority over Ellesmere land;

That the Danish Government should be advised that a continuance of the slaughter of musk ox in Ellesmere land by Greenland Eskimos cannot be tolerated because it inevitably will mean the early extermination of the musk ox;

That if Denmark will not immediately agree to entirely stop this slaughter Canada should establish a Mounted Police post in Ellesmere land for the purpose of stopping the slaughter and asserting Canadian authority.²⁶

Cory incorporated Harkin’s recommendations in a note to Sir Joseph Pope on 23 June and asked on behalf of his minister (Arthur Meighen) “to have an appropriate communication sent through the proper channels at once.”²⁷ This was done by means of a dispatch from Governor General the Duke of Devonshire to Colonial Secretary Lord Milner on 13 July, which repeated the recommendations and asked that the matter be brought to the attention of the Danish government.²⁸

A short time after this, on 6 September, Great Britain (with Canada’s approval) recognized Denmark’s sovereignty over Greenland. As noted above, Britain dropped her earlier demand for a right of pre-emption if Denmark should ever decide to dispose of Greenland, and claimed only the right to be consulted in this eventuality. Obviously, British recognition had been granted without getting any corresponding Danish recognition of Canada’s rights either over Ellesmere Island in particular or over the Arctic Archipelago in general, thus failing to ease Canadian worries.

In the meantime, Vilhjalmur Stefansson’s potent influence was felt behind the scenes. Stefansson did not believe in wasting time with little fish if he could get the big ones to bite, and at this time he was trying to hook Sir Robert Borden (who had just vacated the prime ministership). On 29 September 1920, Borden wrote a confidential letter to his successor Meighen, as follows:

Recently I have had some correspondence with Mr. V. Stefansson respecting the introduction to his account of the Arctic Expedition which he has requested me to write. From one of his letters dated 6th September I extract the following: –

“The recognition of the value of the islands north of Canada will come during the next fifty years as the recognition of the value of Alaska has come during the last fifty. It has therefore been for me excellent fortune that the chance fell to me to increase the land area of Canada by the addition of these islands.

“Should the country, upon a fair scrutiny of my work and an estimate

of the difficulties under which had [*sic*] to be done, consider me worthy of confidence, I should like to devote the next ten years, as I have the last fourteen, to increasing our knowledge of the northern half of our country and to the possible increase of its are [*sic*] by the discovery and exploration of further new lands.”²⁹

About a month later, on 3 November, Borden wrote another confidential letter to Meighen, again quoting extensively from another letter from Stefansson, who on this occasion was more specific about what he thought should be done:

In a recent letter from Mr. Stefansson reference is made to the importance of maintaining and strengthening the claims of Canada to which lands in the far North which in future years may have a much greater value than is apparent at present.

I extract from Mr. Stefansson’s letter the following: –

“The signs are continually multiplying that other countries are beginning to suspect there may be considerable economic value in even the remotest lands. Any that are hereafter discovered are sure to go to those who discover them, for with a clear realization of their value a discovery is likely to be followed by occupation.

It seems that there are many now in Ottawa who see clearly the importance of making good our claim

to Ellesmere Island and the other islands in the vicinity of Greenland. I want to urge the equal importance of an occupation of Wrangel Island and an exploration of the ocean to the north. Ellesmere Island is already valued enough by Denmark for her to question our title, but nobody has as yet taken any steps with regard to Wrangel Island. A quiet occupation by us now will probably not bring forth any protest for several years and by then our title will be clear, especially in view of the fact that it is originally a British discovery and that the only people who have occupied it for any length of time were the members of our expedition in 1914 (they were there six months).

There are two regions in which there seems reasonable prospect of the discovery of new land. One is to the north of Wrangel Island and for this work Wrangel Island should be used as a base. The other is to the northwest of Borden Island (First Land, discovered by us in 1915). For exploration in this quarter a base should be maintained in Melville Island. The domestication of the musk ox in Melville Island could well be undertaken in connection which [*sic*] such a scientific expedition and without greatly increasing the expense or complicating the program.”

I feel that a good deal of importance should be attached to these observations and that such steps as are reasonably necessary to attain the object suggested ought to be taken.³⁰

Stefansson wrote and spoke persistently in this vein during these months, for the most part to senior government officials or to influential private figures whose co-operation and support he wished to secure. Perhaps his most significant performance came before the Advisory Technical Board, created by the Department of the Interior in June to deal with technical issues (including Arctic sovereignty and related problems), in a special meeting on 1 October 1920.³¹ Evidently the meeting was called suddenly and as a matter of great urgency; the chairman of the board, Surveyor General Édouard-Gaston Deville, had received only verbal notification of it, and one of the principal members, Parks Commissioner James Harkin, knew nothing about it until three hours before it began.³² Stefansson had an opportunity to present his case to this influential group, and he made the most of the occasion. The minutes begin as follows:

Chairman – We have been told that you (Mr. Stefansson) were to speak to this Board so that the Board might report to the Minister.

Mr. Stefansson – Yes.

Chairman – Perhaps you might explain to the Board what you wish to say.

Mr. Stefansson – It starts with Mr. Harkin and myself, we are both members of the Reindeer and Muskox Commission.

I am not sure exactly how it started but I found that the Danes are planning a scientific expedition which is semi-commercial, to cover five years. Now that expedition was thought of years ago. It has been in the air that long. Mr. Rasmussen is to be at the head of it and he

was planning originally to come up through, I do not know exactly where – I heard about it eight or ten years ago. The plan then was to explore the mainland of north Greenland and the north coast of the mainland of Canada for purely scientific purposes, but they never got the funds for it and nothing seemed to happen but the country has been branching out in commercial development and they have a trading station on North Star Bay around 77° north latitude on the north coast of Greenland. They are being well supported. The Company is semi-commercial, semi-patriotic and philanthropic. Their aim is scientific as well as a commercial profit. Now they have announced the final expedition is going to cover a term of 5 years. They seem now to be going north to Lancaster Sound. I will name all these islands for you.... These are the islands north of Lancaster Sound. This is what Mr. Harkin and I took up with the Commission, that these people were going to kill a lot of our muskox. They are trying, I believe, to establish trading stations over there and colonize the country with Danish Eskimos from Greenland and that meant the killing of muskox both for food and sale purposes. So, Mr. Harkin here, really knows better than I – I think we sent a note over to them, the note was sent to the Secretary of External Affairs of Denmark, saying, that the muskox is an animal protected under the Game Laws and they must not kill them. Then, I believe a reply came back, which I heard

directly from Mr. Rasmussen, he wrote me in Danish, he said among other things, "There is no question of our breaking Canadian Game Laws because we are not coming into Canada but a part farther north. It is not under Canadian jurisdiction". I have heard since in his communication to you (Mr. Harkin) he referred to it as "No Man's Land."

Mr. Harkin – Yes, he did.

Mr. Stefansson – It amounts to the same thing. It struck me right away that anyone making claim to that country will get ahead of us. We have got a great deal of claim on it, but whether it will be recognized or not is another thing.³³

In his lengthy address, Stefansson summarized both British and foreign exploration in the Arctic islands, pointed out the vulnerability of the Sverdrup Islands (which had been discovered by Norwegians and were unoccupied by anyone), and, disagreeing with the concept of the sector principle, suggested that Canada might well claim the unoccupied Wrangel Island (see chapter 11) and any new islands which could be discovered. He also implied, erroneously, that there were no treaty provisions between the United States and Russia delimiting their territories or rights in that region.

In the discussion that followed, Harkin remarked that the main question was whether it was worthwhile for Canada to establish her sovereignty over these northern islands, and he expressed his own strong view that it was.³⁴ Finally Deville, as chairman, put into summary form the three main points upon which the board had to report. They were as follows:

1. Whether steps should be taken by the Government to secure Canadian title to those islands.
2. If the Board is of opinion that such steps should be taken, then what should these steps be.
3. Report as to the advisability of further exploration in those Northern Seas.³⁵

It was decided to refer these questions to a subcommittee of the board, which would investigate the whole matter and prepare a report upon it. Those selected for the subcommittee were Deville, Harkin, and four others from the Department of the Interior: Dr. Otto Klotz, Director of the Dominion Observatory and Chief Astronomer; Noel Ogilvie, Superintendent of the Geodetic Survey of Canada; F.C.C. Lynch, Superintendent of the Natural Resources Intelligence Branch; and J. J. McArthur, Commissioner of the International Boundary Survey.³⁶

It would appear on the evidence that this performance by Stefansson before the Advisory Technical Board, as well as the resultant appointment of a subcommittee to consider the issued he had raised, initiated the tangled skein of events that followed. In any case, a great flurry of activity behind the scenes went on without let-up for months.

The subcommittee submitted a brief preliminary report, with very little delay, on 13 October 1920, recommending "that the Government should take effectual steps immediately to firmly establish the Sovereignty of Canada with respect to the Northern Islands." It added that it was preparing to submit a specific recommendation as soon as possible "respecting the method of establishing such sovereignty."³⁷



FIGURE 10-3: J. B. HARKIN, 1937. YOUSUF KARSH / LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA / ACCESSION 1987-054 NO. 12326.

Evidently acting on this recommendation, the Advisory Technical Board sent Deputy Minister Cory a draft memorandum to council on 15 October, authorizing the Minister of the Interior to send an expedition to northern Canada and providing \$100,000 to meet preliminary expenses. It considered that the total cost might run to \$200,000 or \$250,000, but the \$100,000 would be sufficient to purchase or charter a ship and provide crew and supplies. On the same day, Cory composed a memorandum to Cabinet incorporating the board's recommendations, at the same time adding his strong advice that "further explorations be carried on." These recommendations must have been

considered premature: copies in the Canadian public archives contain notes on them, saying that the board's memo was sent back to it on 16 October "for further attention" and that Cory's memo was "not used."³⁸ Perhaps nonplussed for the moment, the Advisory Technical Board passed a resolution at its meeting on 20 October, authorizing its chairman to interview the Deputy Minister of the Interior regarding the proposed Arctic expedition.³⁹

In the meantime, a continuing effort was being made to obtain as much information as possible about the Arctic islands and to consider all available evidence to meet what some of the board members considered an emergency situation. A technical, non-political report on Ellesmere Island completed on 13 October by Compiler of Geological Information Wyatt Malcolm was circulated,⁴⁰ as was a larger, more detailed report on the Arctic islands generally that Malcolm completed on 6 November.⁴¹ W. F. King's 1905 *Report* on Canada's title to the archipelago became urgent reading, and a supplement was prepared summarizing the work of both Canadian and foreign expeditions in the Arctic during the years since King's document had appeared.⁴² A letter written by Knud Rasmussen to the Governor of Canada on 10 August 1920, and signed for in his absence by an otherwise unidentified man named Carlailloir (who also wrote an accompanying letter on 15 September 1920), seemed to cause great apprehension when it arrived in Canada. Rasmussen wrote the letter to say that he might not be able to accept an invitation to appear before the Reindeer-Muskox Commission, which had been holding hearings in Ottawa, but if unable to attend, he would share his views in writing. On the face of it, this was innocent enough, but he gave, without explanation, a sudden and unanticipated journey to northern Greenland as his reason for not getting to Ottawa. Some

Canadian officials saw this emergency voyage as cause for serious alarm.⁴³

On 21 October, Harkin wrote a confidential memorandum to Deputy Minister Cory on the subject of an urgent Canadian expedition to Ellesmere Island. He suggested three possible methods of getting there without waiting until next summer: (1) overland from Fullerton near the northwestern extremity of Hudson Bay (“difficult and hazardous.... In an emergency I think Stefansson could make it but I doubt if there is anyone else who could”); (2) by a staunch ship to Bylot Island and the rest of the way either over land and ice, or by plane, or in the ship as soon as navigation opened next summer (the plane trip could be undertaken if it “will not exceed 500 miles”); and (3) by zeppelin from Britain, dropping men and supplies by parachute (“the Imperial Government would expect a guarantee. For advice about the sea voyage into and through Baffin Bay reference should be made to Captain Bob Bartlett, who, although at present in New York.... Of course is a Newfoundlander, not an American”).⁴⁴

The following day, Harkin wrote a memo to Cory, evidently by prearrangement, suggesting three reliable sea captains as top possibilities for the position of ship commander if a northern expedition were dispatched. The three were Captain H. C. Pickels of Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia, who was considered the best choice, and the brothers Will and John Bartlett of Newfoundland, who were father and uncle, respectively, of the famous Captain Bob.⁴⁵ One day later, Cory wired Canadian government immigration agent W. H. Sullivan in New York, requesting that he contact Pickels immediately after his expected arrival there to ask him to come to Ottawa for consultation.⁴⁶ (To look ahead for a moment, Pickels arrived in Ottawa after a few days’ delay, and after senior officials had interviewed him and secured testimonials

about him, he was given a one-year contract on 16 December 1920 to command the *Arctic* on a northern expedition.⁴⁷)

The whole problem was discussed in detail at the seventeenth regular meeting of the Advisory Technical Board on 27 October. Deville brought instructions from the minister and the deputy minister that “immediate action if possible should be taken by the Board.” Klotz reported the substance of two letters, which he had recently received from Stefansson. After due deliberation, the board passed the following resolution proposed by Harkin and seconded by McArthur:

That in the opinion of the Technical Board immediate action should be taken in the matter of occupation and administration of Ellesmere Land for the purpose of definitely establishing Canadian sovereignty therein.

That in that connection the Government should immediately ascertain whether it is practicable to send a boat into Baffin Bay this autumn.

That if reports in that connection are favourable a ship should be forthwith despatched to Baffin Bay with instructions to proceed to Bylot Island.

That as soon as Bylot Island is reached an aeroplane party should be sent to Ellesmere Land to start occupancy and administration.

That an overland party with the same object in view should also be sent from the ship at Bylot Island.

That the ship should proceed from Bylot Island as soon as ice conditions permit, to Ellesmere Land to extend and amplify the work

of occupation and administration started by the two preceding parties.

That if expert advice indicates that it is not possible for a boat to navigate Baffin Bay this autumn, the British Government should be asked to immediately transport a Canadian party to Ellesmere Land by airship.⁴⁸

Although the records of the meeting do not indicate any disagreement within the board, one important member of it obviously dissented strongly from the proposed course of action. On 29 October, Deville wrote a memo to Cory about the board's resolutions, containing the following:

I wish to dissociate myself from these resolutions. From the information to which I have had access, I am satisfied that the alleged intention of Knud Rasmussen or of the Danish Government to occupy Ellesmere island or to establish a trading post on it has never existed otherwise than in Mr. Sefanson's [*sic*] imagination. The wild schemes suggested for the immediate occupation of the island can only result, if they become known, in bringing ridicule over the Department.⁴⁹

On 28 October, Loring Christie, Legal Adviser to the Department of External Affairs, wrote a secret memorandum for the Prime Minister entitled "Exploration and Occupation of the Northern Arctic Islands." In the memo, Christie expressed fears akin to those of Harkin. He insisted that it had become "more urgent" for Canada to confirm her sovereignty over the Arctic islands because, according to information possessed by the Department of

the Interior, Denmark had gone beyond merely contemplating an expedition to occupy Ellesmere Island and had actually sent it. (In fact, it was reported to have already arrived there.) The only islands that might be in danger were those north of Lancaster Sound. The only threat appeared to be that from Denmark, since neither the United States nor Norway, which had both been more active in the region than Denmark, showed any intention of taking action. Christie recommended that a Canadian government expedition, which would be announced as a continuation of the Stefansson and Bernier expeditions, should be sent north as soon as possible to map known islands and discover new ones, establish customs and game regulations, and construct police posts. He also suggested that Stefansson should be engaged for the exploration work.⁵⁰

In spite of the Advisory Technical Board's recommendation for immediate action, no decision was taken to do anything in precipitous fashion. On 30 October, Cory sent a memo to Deville and Harkin informing them that he had discussed the question of Arctic sovereignty with the minister, and it had been decided that it would be inadvisable to attempt an expedition until navigation opened up in the spring. In the meantime, however, planning and preparation should continue.⁵¹

This decision was not acceptable to Harkin, who wrote back to Cory on 1 November saying that it was not certain that the Danes had started to occupy Ellesmere Island and that a British or Canadian expedition might still get there first. He therefore advised two things: to get the advice of a reliable ice captain about whether a ship could still be sent into Baffin Bay "this fall" and to ask the British government whether it would transport an expedition to Ellesmere Island by airship.⁵²

In the meantime, Stefansson continued to promote his projects by mail and through personal interviews. On 30 October, he sent a letter to Cory, saying that he was writing it at the request of Sir James Lougheed, whom he had interviewed two days earlier.⁵³ On 3 November, he wrote to Deville suggesting that he should find out from the Department of Marine how long it would take and how much it would cost to put the *Arctic* in seaworthy condition, since she was really “the logical vessel” for the projected northern expedition.⁵⁴ On the same day, he wrote a note to Harkin, asking him to send the names and addresses of all the members of the Advisory Technical Board to his secretary, Olive Rathburn, in New York;⁵⁵ and at about this time, he sent Deville a complimentary copy of an article he had recently published titled “The Region of Maximum Inaccessibility in the Arctic,” which located this region between Alaska and the North Pole.⁵⁶ Here, presumably, was where remaining unknown islands were most likely to be discovered. Deville answered Stefansson’s letter two days later, saying that the board had already come to the same conclusion about the *Arctic* and, if approval could be obtained, would refit and use her.⁵⁷ On the same day, Minister of Marine and Fisheries Charles Colquhoun Ballantyne wrote to Lougheed (the acting Prime Minister at the time) informing him that the *Arctic* could be made available next spring but that it would cost about \$35,000 to make her ready for sea service.

In the meantime, Captain Pickels had attended part of the 3 November meeting of the Advisory Technical Board by invitation. The discussion revealed the impracticability of starting a northern expedition at that time, and the members agreed that Harkin should draft a report on the subject of Arctic sovereignty.⁵⁸ Preparing this report must have caused Harkin

a good deal of mental anguish, judging by the number of preliminary drafts and versions, generally undated and unsigned, which have survived in various collections of documents in the archives.⁵⁹ One of these, prepared for the meeting of the Advisory Technical Board on 10 November, seems to represent the outcome of his effort.⁶⁰

In his report, Harkin summarized the background of events that had revived Canadian fears for the security of the northern islands and then proposed a course of action. He started from the premise that although Canadians had generally taken complete British sovereignty over the archipelago for granted, it might well be that under standard rules of international law there was room for grave doubts about it – and Denmark might already have undertaken to appropriate Ellesmere Island. Referring to Dr. King’s memo of 1905 as evidence that the problem was not new, he noted that the issue had arisen again when Canada protested to Denmark over the killing of muskox by Greenland Inuit on Ellesmere Island, and he summarized the correspondence and unsatisfactory response of the Danes. Citing Oppenheim’s *International Law* as authoritative on the acquisition of territory and the need for genuine occupation and administration, he observed that there was neither occupation nor administration of Ellesmere Island or the other islands of the archipelago. Concentrating specifically on Ellesmere, since this was the one where doubt as to British sovereignty had been raised, Harkin provided an overview of the history of the activity of white men there, which indicated that the British title to the island would be at best inchoate, resulting mainly from rights of discovery and acts of possession. Denmark apparently regarded Ellesmere Island as “No Man’s Land,” an aspect of the situation “first raised” by Stefansson, whose talk to the

Advisory Technical Board on 1 October 1920 Harkin quoted at length. There were peculiar features about Denmark's behaviour in the matter, such as Rasmussen's letter of 10 August 1920, saying that he was making a hasty trip to Greenland after he had accepted an invitation to testify before the Reindeer-Muskox Commission in Ottawa; the fact that his secretary had held the second letter until September 15 before mailing it; his secretary's statement that Rasmussen had taken all correspondence concerning the matter with him; and Denmark's evident recent attention to questions of international law, as shown by her performance in seeking general recognition of the sovereignty in Greenland.⁶¹ Digressing to discuss in detail matters such as the Monroe Doctrine and the wildlife and mineral resources of Ellesmere Island, Harkin returned to his main theme with a strong plea for action by Canada to establish its sovereignty beyond possibility of doubt. His recommendations were mainly reiterations of what had already been put forward by himself and others: establishment of Mounted Police posts in selected northern locations and extension of their patrols; a special expedition to the most northerly islands; permanent occupation, scientific investigation, and commercial exploitation where possible; establishment of post offices as symbols of sovereignty; and use of aircraft. The project of most immediate importance was to send a government expedition to northern waters as soon as possible the following year. For that purpose, he suggested the *Arctic* with Captain Pickels as skipper.⁶²

Harkin's papers include a copy of a letter of 17 November 1920 from Knud Rasmussen to H. G. Henderson of the Governor General's Office (erroneously described as the Secretary of State for External Affairs). In it, Rasmussen said that he had now returned from his journey to North Greenland and was ready to help

by giving information to the Reindeer-Muskox Commission. He would not be able to come to Ottawa in person, however, because he had responsibilities with a Danish commission discussing Greenland and, in June 1921, he would be starting a four-year expedition to the Central Inuit and the Arctic Archipelago. Nevertheless, he would send by mail detailed replies to any questions asked of him.⁶³

In the meantime, Stefansson's proposal regarding Wrangel Island had been under discussion (see chapter 11). Sir Joseph Pope, who at the suggestion of Lougheed had been attending some of the meetings of the Advisory Technical Board, indicated his disapproval with the idea in a memo to Prime Minister Meighen on 25 November. On the other hand, Pope strongly favoured action in the archipelago north of the Canadian mainland:

It [Wrangel Island] is far removed from the Dominion – in fact is not even in the western hemisphere, as the 180th meridian of longitude falls upon it. Essentially, it is an Asiatic island.... It was generally considered that any pretensions we might have to this island must be of a very unsubstantial character, and could only result in weakening our legitimate claims to the Arctic islands contiguous to our own territory, for if we can go so far afield as Wrangel to take possession of islands, unconnected with Canada, what is there to prevent the United States or any other power, laying claim to islands far from their shores but adjacent to our own.

Our claim to the islands north of the mainland of Canada rests upon quite a different footing, by reason of their geographical position and

contiguity.... I think the suggestion to send a Mounted Police force to occupy certain stations on Ellesmere [*sic*] Land and adjacent regions an excellent one, and one which should be no longer postponed. In the past our territorial claims have suffered not a little by inaction and delay, e.g., Alaska and Labrador.⁶⁴

Evidently feeling that there was need for a capable person who could give his undivided attention to the increasing complexities of the projected Arctic voyage, Cory wrote a memo to Commissioner of the International Boundary Survey James J. McArthur on 1 December, asking him to "have the services of Mr. J. D. Craig made available for special work in connection with the northern expedition."⁶⁵ The response must have come immediately, because on the same day Cory wrote to Craig asking that he proceed immediately upon the anticipated arrival of Captain Pickels to make the necessary arrangements with him, after consulting with Deville and Harkin.⁶⁶ On 4 December, Harkin wrote to Cory referring to the minister's instructions for the preparation of a memo to council about the northern islands and reiterating the legal and other questions that worried him. He suggested that these questions should be brought to the attention of Craig, since responsibility for the preparation of the memo "will now naturally devolve upon" him.⁶⁷

Concern about the secrecy aspect of the proposed expedition was aroused by a letter written to Harkin on 30 November by Dr. Rowland B. Orr, Director of the Ontario Provincial Museum, in which Orr said that he understood a scientific expedition was being sent to Baffin Bay next spring and asked for information about it.⁶⁸ Harkin replied promptly, saying in curt fashion that he knew of no information he

could give him.⁶⁹ He then sent a copy of Orr's letter to Cory, remarking: "I have repeatedly pointed out that in my opinion it is imperative that the utmost secrecy should be maintained with regard to this matter, and that at least from this moment on steps should be taken which will absolutely insure secrecy."⁷⁰ Cory advised (too late) that it would be well to delay replying to Orr, but Harkin might inquire where he got his information.⁷¹ When Cory sent Craig to see Harkin on the morning of 6 December about a safe name for the expedition, Harkin suggested that it should be called "The Reindeer Expedition" because many people in Canada and elsewhere knew about the plans for reindeer herds and "this name could be used effectively to camouflage the real purpose of the expedition." Any announcement should be delayed as long as possible, he urged, because if the Danes

are really now in occupation in Ellesmere Land, or intend to take action in that regard next Spring, even a Canadian announcement of the Reindeer Expedition would arouse suspicion on their part and would probably result in special efforts on their part. If they believe that Canada is still asleep they probably will not hurry.

The United States is undoubtedly in a position to put in claims with respect to Ellesmere Land and I imagine that a reindeer expedition would be a good camouflage insofar as they are concerned.⁷²

So far as can be divined from the documents, a lull ensued, and little of significance is recorded during the next four or five weeks. Stefansson was as anxious as ever to get involved in a northern expedition, however, and

on 8 January 1921, he wrote to Prime Minister Meighen in the following vein:

You know my anxiety that Canada shall continue the work of exploration in the North and my eagerness to help in that work. This exploration would be not only for the increase of knowledge but to make good Canadian claims to territories already discovered and to make Canadian any islands that may yet be found.

I have now been ten years in the service of the Government of Canada in exploratory work in the North. This has been without salary. As a result, I am not well off financially. I have now received an offer of wages for lecturing thirty-five weeks next summer and winter that are high from my point of view. I have signed a contract for this work which has a clause providing that it may be cancelled should I go North on a polar expedition the summer of 1921. For that reason it is important for me to know before the end of January whether the Government needs my services. If you think you do, I should consider it both an honor and a public duty to serve either in planning the expeditions or in actual command of them.

I shall hold myself in readiness until February 1st for this Government service and hope the Government can let me know before that time whether those services are wanted.⁷³

Meighen had a copy of this letter sent to Minister of the Interior Lougheed on 11 January for his consideration.⁷⁴ This was unnecessary: Stefansson had already written a similar letter to Sir James three days earlier.⁷⁵ Stefansson also wrote essentially the same letter to Sir Robert Borden,⁷⁶ at Borden's own request. Stefansson had evidently been in Ottawa a few days before, and Borden remarked, when sending a copy of the letter to Meighen, that "Stefansson's views as expressed to me seem to have a good deal of cogency, and at any convenient time, I shall be glad to discuss them with you."⁷⁷

As plans for the expedition proceeded, various officials offered advice to achieve different objectives. Dr. Klotz was interested in the possibilities for scientific research and wrote a memo to Craig on 10 January, noting the heavy representation of scientific personnel on earlier expeditions. Although exploration and scientific observation were "a side issue" in the present instance, Klotz noted, the opportunities offered "should be exploited to the fullest extent of the time available."⁷⁸ His memo provoked several others on the same subject. The same day, W. Stuart Edwards, Assistant Deputy Minister of the Department of Justice, made the following suggestions:

- (1) In any actual taking possession of the northern islands the settlements established should be at the mouths of the largest river systems, to establish claims to the drainage basins;
- (2) A large-scale map should be prepared showing all available data, and as much historical and other information as possible should be acquired;



FIGURE 10-5: JOHN DAVIDSON CRAIG ON BOARD THE CGS ARCTIC, 1922. J.D. CRAIG / LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA / PA-210045.

- (3) The shortest distance from Ellesmere Island to Devon Island and to Greenland should be ascertained;
- (4) A comprehensive knowledge of past and present Danish and American activity in the Canadian islands and Greenland should be obtained quickly, that of the United States being particularly important because the

Century Atlas showed Ellesmere Island in the same colour as the United States and Alaska;

- (5) The cooperation of the Department of the Naval Service should be secured; and
- (6) The Secretary of State for the Colonies, the British Embassy in Washington, and the Department of Trade and Commerce should all be asked to provide all possible useful information.⁷⁹

On 14 January, Cory wrote a confidential note to Sir Joseph Pope, enclosing part of a New York dispatch of 3 January which had appeared in the *Montreal Gazette* that told of sixteen exploratory expeditions presently being planned or carried out around the world. He drew particular attention to three being prepared by Rasmussen, the Dane Lauge Koch, and American Donald B. MacMillan for different parts of the North American Arctic. Noting that Canada was “vitally interested,” Cory suggested that Pope communicate by cipher cablegram with the Home Office in London to find out what he could.⁸⁰ Pope threw cold water on the idea, however, expressing that “I really do not see what the Home Office has got to do with the subject” and suggesting instead a letter to the High Commissioner.⁸¹

On 11 January, Craig wrote a memo to Harkin, referring to “our conversation yesterday with Mr. Cory regarding Mr. Stefansson and the northern expedition” and asking him to draft a letter to Stefansson inquiring whether he would be willing to undertake an exploratory trip to Ellesmere Land. “You have met Mr. Stefansson and have discussed it with him,” he added, “and it would seem that you could

put the matter up to him in better shape than anyone else.”⁸² On 12 January, Roy Gibson as acting deputy minister wrote to Harkin making the same request and enclosing a copy of Stefansson’s letter of 8 January to Meighen.⁸³

The communiqués mentioned in the preceding paragraph seem to have been largely responsible for setting afoot the tangled skein of events that followed regarding this mysterious Stefansson expedition which did not materialize. The truth about this strange affair, in which he figured so largely, was denied to Stefansson; although he remained curious about it and sought the explanation in puzzlement and frustration until the end of his life, he evidently never learned the full story.

Harkin’s draft letter to Stefansson was evidently a struggle for him, judging by the pencilled notes in his papers. He also wired Stefansson at the Harvard Club in New York on 15 January, asking him when he could come to Ottawa to discuss matters.⁸⁴ Stefansson wired back promptly on 18 January from Petersburg, Virginia.

Your telegram January sixteenth forwarded stop am lecturing in South till early Feby cant get back New York before fifth or Ottawa before eighth Feby you know my ideas and plans please write me fully on that basis stop use my New York address.⁸⁵

On 21 January, Harkin sent Gibson his completed draft letter to Stefansson with the comment: “I think it is in a safe form.” The vital part of it went as follows:

I infer from your letters upon the subject that you have in mind that exploration work and other

work could be carried on under the one commander. It is not considered here that such would be practicable or desirable. The two purposes are entirely different in character and from their nature could not be satisfactorily carried out under the same leadership. The occasion however offers an excellent opportunity for providing for additional exploration in the region immediately to the north and the west of the better known islands. My wire was sent to ascertain whether you would undertake command of an exploration expedition into the area in question. My idea is that the ship provided for the other work could be used to transport your party to a suitable point from which the expedition could take its departure overland under your command. I wired you because I was anxious to go into the details with you personally in connection with this matter.

I notice that your Lecture Bureau contract provides that notice given prior to February 1st would relieve you for northern work. I know that so far as you are personally concerned you recognize that everything in connection with the expeditions is strictly confidential but it is imperative that you should also see that nothing is said to the lecture bureau which will enable it to indulge in publicity which might call attention to these expeditions. There is always a temptation for a lecture bureau to endeavour to get free publicity when opportunity offers and in writing to you upon this subject I take it for granted that you

will take all the necessary safeguards in that connection.

Having reproduced Stefansson's wire of 18 January in his letter, Harkin concluded by observing that, so far as the department was concerned, there was no reason why discussion of the matter should not be delayed until 8 February.⁸⁶ The main point that emerges from the letter is that Harkin and his colleagues had already decided that although Stefansson might be considered for an exploratory expedition, the "other work" – that relating to sovereignty – would not be entrusted to him if they could prevent it.

Stefansson replied by telegram on 2 February, from Atlanta, Georgia, saying in part: "Consider it both privilege and duty to accept command expedition to carry out purposes we have discussed and have at heart shall be glad to accept stop lecture managers know nothing our plans there will be no publicity."⁸⁷ He followed up this wire with a lengthy letter, written in New York on 7 February, in which he said that he expected to be in Ottawa no later than 14 February and in the meantime was setting down "a basis for discussion." Briefly paraphrased, the points he made were as follows:

- (1) it would be fortunate if the expedition were under the Department of the Interior, but it should be outfitted by Desbarats and his subordinates in the Naval Service;
- (2) the difficulties of the expedition should not be overestimated, and with proper methods its ends might be achieved with little effort;
- (3) it might be necessary to have different commanders in the field, but from Ottawa the work should be planned by someone who thoroughly understood polar conditions;
- (4) his acceptance of the command of the exploratory expedition was contingent upon satisfactory backing and support from the government;
- (5) there should be during the coming summer "a quiet, entirely unostentatious taking possession of Wrangel Island," which might be carried out by a Canadian fur trader (see chapter 11); and
- (6) there should be a public announcement that the Canadian government was continuing scientific exploration in the North, without mention of any political aims, so as to deter competing nations from entering the field.

He concluded with the caution to Harkin, rather ironic in the circumstances, to "remember that this letter is very confidential."⁸⁸

A further exchange of telegrams followed, with Stefansson saying that 14 February would suit him best to meet Harkin in Ottawa, Harkin saying that he was not sure he would be in Ottawa on that date, and Stefansson asking rather curtly, "If you are absent fourteenth when will you be back?"⁸⁹ By 17 February, however, Harkin reported to Cory that he had had several conferences with Stefansson; that they had framed a plan for an exploratory expedition to start the coming summer, which might cost a total of \$75,000 to \$100,000; and

that he recommended approval of the plan. He attached to his note a memo by Stefansson which set forth the plan in some detail. Briefly, five men were to go north on the *Arctic* in the summer of 1921, under the command of Fred Lambert of the Geodetic Survey, and establish a main base on Axel Heiberg Island. When the *Arctic* sailed north again in 1922 to take supplies to the police stations which by then would have been established, Stefansson would lead another party of five which would cross Ellesmere Island and join the first party, after which some members of the combined party would carry on extensive exploratory and scientific work north, west, and southwest of the Sverdrup Islands. Lambert would probably return south in 1924 and Stefansson himself probably the following year, perhaps by way of Alaska or Siberia. Harkin remarked in his note, "Of course it is to be distinctly understood that Mr. Stefansson will be in supreme command of the exploratory work of this expedition."⁹⁰

Evidently unaware of the true situation, or only faintly suspicious, Stefansson went ahead with plans for the expedition. On 25 February, he wrote two letters to Cory, one asking for permission to employ E. Lorne Knight (a member of his last expedition) and the other asking for a written commission stating his exact relationship with the Canadian government. On 28 February, he wrote to Harkin suggesting the employment of a young Cornell student named E. P. Wheeler, who like Knight was an American, and saying that although he agreed that the personnel of the expedition should be mainly Canadian, he "would certainly rather take a good man of any nationality whatever than an indifferent Canadian."⁹¹ Cory sent his two letters to Harkin on 1 March, saying, "By a copy of this memorandum I am asking Mr. Craig to call on you in order that something may be drafted."⁹²

About this time, the English explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton entered the scene, a development which Stefansson always blamed for the fact that his own expedition did not take place. The true circumstances, however, were somewhat different than Stefansson thought.

Shackleton had had an interview with Prime Minister Meighen in Montreal on 5 February and had asked for financial help from the Canadian government for an expedition he was planning for the Beaufort Sea region. At the same time, he intimated that he understood Stefansson was not interested in taking an active role in such work. The following day, Meighen wrote Sir James Lougheed, then Minister of the Interior, enclosing a memorandum by Shackleton and saying that he (Shackleton) sought an appointment with the minister on Tuesday next. Meighen added, "I told Sir Ernest that I did not understand Mr. Stefansson's attitude in the same way as he did and I was of the opinion Mr. Stefansson was anxious himself to take charge of such work in the North as the Government desired to have done."⁹³ The Department of the Interior looked into the matter promptly. By 7 February, J. D. Craig was writing at the beginning of a memo to Cory that, "in accordance with your memorandum of this date, I have had a conference with Dr. Deville and Mr. Harkin concerning the proposition of Sir Ernest Shackleton that the Dominion of Canada should contribute towards his proposed Beaufort Sea Expedition." Craig observed that it was impossible to tell from the information provided whether Shackleton would go to the intended region of activity by the west coast or the east coast, but if it were the first, he could not get there in 1921, and if it were the second, he would come into conflict with the department's plans for Stefansson. He thought that Shackleton's expedition might accomplish more from a scientific point of view

than Stefansson's, but Stefansson's would be used in connection with the sovereignty question and in any case was already arranged. Therefore, Craig advised that the department should not support Shackleton's expedition unless, perhaps, Shackleton succeeded in getting a large subscription in England and elsewhere.⁹⁴

On 14 February, Lougheed answered Meighen's note, saying that he had had an interview with Shackleton and told him that the government could not at the present time take the action he desired. He added that Shackleton had appeared to understand his explanation and had hinted that he might submit a more limited proposition later on.⁹⁵

The true situation respecting Stefansson is revealed quite clearly in a confidential memo Harkin wrote to Cory on 2 March, after they had met with Lougheed. After some preliminary remarks about the two proposed expeditions and about his fears of Danish and American designs, Harkin continued:

There is a grave probability that if any aid or recognition is given the Shackleton expedition either (or both) the United States and Denmark may receive advance information from Stefansson, the Canadian Arctic explorer, because Shackleton proposes to explore the identical region that Stefansson also proposes to explore. Stefansson was the first person to specifically call attention to the weakness of Canada's claim to the Northern Islands. No one is more familiar than he with the weakness of our case. He is aware of Canada's plans for remedying that weakness. He therefore is in a position to ruin the Canadian scheme by tipping off the facts to the United States,

or Denmark, or in fact any other country that might have ambitions to acquire new territory. Stefansson is a Canadian in the sense that he was born in Canada but that is all. It would therefore be unwise to bank on his Canadian loyalty too much. The Canadian expedition has been developed on the line of keeping him with us through self interest.

Stefansson wrote to both the Premier and Sir James Lougheed asking that he should be made commander of the Canadian expedition. For obvious reasons this was impossible. At the same time it was felt here that Stefansson's friendship must be retained and on the Minister's suggestion he was wired in January to come to Ottawa. It was felt that in the interests of Canada he must be kept enthusiastically with us at least until the *Arctic* got away next June and that to avoid further danger from him it was in Canada's best interests to get him away to the north as soon as possible where he would not be able to damage the Canadian cause. It being impossible to let him take command of the expedition our proposition to him was that he should go up on the *Arctic* as a passenger and then with a small party proceed over the land and the ice to the Beaufort Sea on a new exploration trip. It was felt this would effectually keep him out of the way during the danger period. He suggested a compromise, viz. – that a small advance party should go up on the *Arctic* this year to locate a base for him and that in 1922 he himself should proceed to the base and begin

his exploration. This naturally did not suit us as well as the original idea of his going up in 1921 but it was felt that it would meet our main purposes, viz. – to keep Stefansson silent. Accordingly I recommended it and the Minister approved. At this juncture Shackleton arrived. He of course knew nothing about the title difficulty as regards the north. Presumably he came to Canada for financial aid because he would not raise enough funds in England. His expectation probably is that if he could get recognition from Canada this would stimulate contributions in the Old Country. The purpose of his expedition is solely the securing of scientific information in the Beaufort Sea. So far as this information is concerned there is no pressing need of it. Delay of a few more years in that connection is of no significance to Canada. Therefore in view of Canada's financial position there are no substantial grounds for giving him aid. Equally from the scientific standpoint there is no pressing need of the proposed Stefansson exploration expedition. It has been recommended solely to conserve Canada's interests in the matter of the northern titles.

Both Stefansson and Shackleton propose going to the same area. It is so far unexplored. It cannot be ignored that if the Shackleton expedition is endorsed in any way Stefansson is practically certain to get up in arms. What the result will be is a matter of grave concern to the main issue, viz. – the definite completion

of Canadian sovereignty in the north. Even if that point can be safeguarded the situation would still be that Canada in a period of financial stress was financing two expeditions to the same region.

With the authority of the Minister I explained the whole situation to Shackleton. He expressed anxiety to safeguard Canada's interests but advanced the idea that he should be used in connection with the expedition. Finding that his first suggestion that the *Arctic* should be abandoned and his boat used instead was impracticable because his boat was too small for the purpose he suggested that the *Arctic* should establish the two northern police posts proposed and that his boat should establish the two more southerly posts and then proceed on its way towards Beaufort Sea. Apparently this was advanced to give the Government an excuse on which to justify assistance for his expedition. He expressed the opinion that in the short northern season the *Arctic* alone might not be able to establish all four posts this year. Captain Pickels who has been engaged as Master of the *Arctic* has been consulted on this point and contends that there is an ample season of open water to permit of the *Arctic* doing all the work this year.

It is inconceivable that any aid given to Shackleton can be kept so secret that it will not reach Stefansson's ears. What may then happen is left to your own judgment.

Insofar as I may have any responsibility in this matter I consider the

chance of putting Stefansson in the camp of our enemies is too great a one to be taken. If it is felt some aid must be given Shackleton then at least he should be told that there will be none until 1922. With all talk of the Shackleton expedition dropped we doubtless can keep Stefansson in line until the police posts are established. If it is then considered desirable to assist Shackleton in 1922 and at the same time carry out the arrangements with Stefansson that he too explore Beaufort Sea at least there will be no danger of imperiling the main question, that of the definite establishment of Canadian sovereignty in the north.⁹⁶

On the same day, Harkin wrote another confidential memo to Cory about a news item from Christiania (Oslo), published in the *Ottawa Evening Journal* of 1 March. The news item said that Shackleton was leaving on a new Arctic expedition in May or June, having purchased the Norwegian whaling boat *Foca I*. He would proceed via Hudson Bay, Baffin Bay, and Lancaster Sound to Axel Heiberg Island, and from there he would explore the islands “eastward to Parry Island [*sic*]”. The Canadian government had officially informed the *Journal* that it had no connection with the expedition, although Shackleton had approached the Prime Minister and other government officials for help, and thus the announcement from Christiania was “premature.” After repeating briefly his fears about Stefansson and generally the substance of the other memo, Harkin continued:

You are well aware that Stefansson is an exceedingly difficult man to handle. It seems to me that the

statement that “the announcement from Christiania is, to say the least, premature” is bound to arouse Stefansson. When he was here a week or two ago he manifested a good deal of nervousness about Shackleton and, therefore, I fear that the newspaper item referred to will aggravate him very much. It seems to me that at all costs we must guard against Stefansson being alienated. I feel quite sure that entirely apart from the Denmark danger Stefansson could very readily convince the United States to send an expedition to Ellesmere Land. That country has probably a better title at present to Ellesmere Land than Canada has. Moreover, the United States have been very anxious to carry on musk ox breeding in Alaska and their Biological Service have asked us to let them have musk ox from Ellesmere Land for that purpose. I feel that if the United States recognized the weakness of Canada’s title, as Stefansson knows it, they would not hesitate to try to establish occupation of Ellesmere Land in advance of Canada. Such a possibility suggests very serious and very dangerous complications.⁹⁷

Perhaps the most surprising thing about these remarkable communiqués is their revelation that, although Harkin and others clearly distrusted Stefansson, they were nevertheless willing to take Shackleton, virtually a stranger, into their confidence. A pencilled note on a letter written by Stefansson to Loughheed on 26 February, and sent on to Craig and Harkin, says, “Get him on phone and tell him to pay no

attention to reports re Shackleton.”⁹⁸ The note was unsigned, but it was evidently for Harkin, who must have complied. In a postscript to a letter to Harkin dated 5 March, Stefansson wrote, “Thanks awfully for phoning me last night – I appreciate the thoughtfulness very much.”⁹⁹ The “thoughtfulness” was obviously not quite what Stefansson imagined it to be.

In the Harkin Papers there is a pencilled memorandum, obviously in Stefansson’s handwriting, recording details of a conversation between Stefansson and Harkin in the Chateau Laurier on 11 March. Among the miscellany of details are a list of supplies and equipment needed for the planned expedition, Stefansson’s lecture itinerary for the rest of March and part of April (which would take him from Michigan to Florida), and notes about a letter that Stefansson was going to write to colleges and universities about personnel for the expedition.¹⁰⁰ On the same day Stefansson drafted this memorandum, which he sent to Dean Reginald Brock of the University of British Columbia; the presidents of the Universities of Toronto, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta; and the principal of McGill University. In the letter, he expressed his preference for young Canadian college graduates, since the expedition was to be “a Canadian enterprise,” and he cautioned that the matter was confidential “in so far that I should not like to get any mention of the undertaking into the public press.”¹⁰¹

On 14 March, Stefansson wrote the following note to Sir James Lougheed. He used his New York stationery, but, according to his lecture itinerary, he would have been at Saginaw, Michigan:

I have refused a \$60,000.[00] a year lecture contract for 1922–23 to take charge of the work of northern

exploration which Mr. Cory tells me is definitely decided on.

To Mr. Cory’s inquiry (through Mr. Harkin) I have said I prefer to do this work for the Government without salary.

Rather than receive any pay, no matter how great, for mere ordinary work, I prefer to carry on the work of exploration, because I feel I am helping to build the foundation for Canada’s greatness. I am proud to have a part in that work, and thank you for the part you have had in its inception.¹⁰²

In the meantime, while Stefansson proceeded with his lecture tour, memos continued to fly back and forth in Ottawa. Harkin wrote one to Cory on 15 March which, after referring to his earlier one of 17 February about Stefansson’s proposed expedition, continued as follows:

You returned this memorandum to me marked A.O.K., B.O.M.” I accordingly have proceeded with arrangements in that connection with Mr. Stefansson. The first definite commitment in this matter was made on Saturday. Mr. Stefansson, as you know, wants a man named Knight, who formerly worked with him in the far North, engaged as the practical man though not the Commander of this advance party. On Saturday I found that it was unavoidable to tell Mr. Stefansson to close arrangements with Mr. Knight in that connection. Particularly since the advent of Shackleton I fear there has been more or less of a feeling that once Canada’s Police posts have been

definitely established by the Arctic expedition there might be a movement to drop the Stefansson expedition of 1922. As you know I am convinced that so far as any results to be expected from either the Stefansson or the Shackleton expeditions are concerned there is no need whatever to-day of these expeditions, having in mind Canada's financial position. The Stefansson expedition as proposed really has nothing whatever to do with scientific or other results that may be obtained. The position has simply been that Stefansson being thoroughly familiar with the weakness of Canada's case with respect to the North and it not being possible to really look upon him as a real Canadian this expedition idea was developed with a view to providing a positive assurance by this sop to Stefansson's pride and selfishness that there would be no chance of his tipping off the actual situation concerning the north to either Denmark or the United States.

I do not think the proposed Stefansson expedition could be carried out for less than one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000). It is quite a price but I do not think it is too high a one to pay for the assurance that it gives us. Of course I do not know whether this Stefansson expedition has been considered in Council but from the activities with respect to Shackleton I fear there might later on be opposition in Council to seeing the Stefansson expedition through.

It is quite true that insofar as the north is concerned once our police posts are established we will have nothing to fear from Stefansson insofar as the eastern frontier of the Arctic Archipelago is concerned.

I may say that up to date I am convinced that Stefansson is playing the game absolutely loyally to Canada. In this connection it must always be kept in mind that we owe him a debt of gratitude as the man who actually brought the weakness of Canada's case to the Government's attention.

I have before me a memorandum with respect to the organization and equipment of Stefansson's advance party and estimates concerning cost with respect to his main party of 1922 and feel that we must proceed immediately with the arrangements concerning the advance party. As it appears to me that Stefansson is acting in good faith in this matter I feel that I am in a very delicate position when I realize the possibilities of there being attempts to make Canada withdraw from final steps in connection with the expedition. Throughout, practically all the negotiations with Stefansson have been left to me. I therefore feel a keen personal responsibility in connection with the matter of the complete arrangements being fully carried out. Despite the fact that I see no need of this expedition from a scientific standpoint I nevertheless consider that Canada's good faith must be maintained with regard to it.

Under the circumstances recited I feel that as a go between with respect to Stefansson it is my duty to bring this situation clearly to your attention.¹⁰³

Harkin followed up this memo to Cory with two others of rather similar import, dated 21 March and 22 March. In his memo of 21 March, which was written after he and Cory had seen the minister, he referred to Stefansson's letter of 14 March to Lougheed and said that it would be very difficult to answer. He had gathered from Lougheed that he was not in favour of asking council to finance Stefansson's expedition. Harkin said this was "a complete change of policy." If this meant that the 1922 expedition to Beaufort Sea (to be led by Stefansson) was to be cancelled, then there would be no point in sending an advance party to Axel Heiberg in 1921. Harkin repeated his opinion that the price of the expedition was not too much to pay in order to assure Stefansson's loyalty, although on the other side there was the feeling against paying "hush money." He concluded, "Personally I think it will be far better in the end to definitely decide one way or the other and advise Stefansson rather than go on as at present."¹⁰⁴

Much of the memo of 22 March went over ground previously covered. He felt strongly that Stefansson's course would be decided "entirely on personal and selfish grounds." Factors that would help to hold him were his ambition to become the "Reindeer King" of Canada, his expectation of additional reindeer leases in the North, and his personal interest in the official reports of his last expedition. If the entry of Shackleton caused Stefansson to think he was being put aside, however, he might go to Denmark or the United States. There was not much

real danger in the first possibility, but there might be in the second:

So far as the United States is concerned official Washington might be considered as unlikely to do anything hostile towards Canada but there would be the greatest danger if Stefansson went to the Hearst outfit. His claims as to the importance of the North Islands both as regards submarines and aircraft would give the Hearst people great material to work with. And it is quite possible they might force official Washington to take action....

There is no doubt that purely as a matter of newspaper enterprise the Hearst people would finance an expedition themselves. It would be great newspaper work for them to have Stefansson in a race with Shackleton.

Harkin repeated his view that if Canada turned Stefansson down it was "obviously taking chances" and that the issue called for "the most careful consideration." Perhaps some alternative could be found:

If it is definitely decided to turn down the Stefansson expedition the question arises as to whether it is desirable to take any other steps to prevent the possibility of his going over to our enemies. There are a number of items that might be considered: he might be asked to visit Scandinavia and Finland for the purpose of making investigations re. reindeer industry; It might be arranged that the Hudson Bay Company send a boat

to Wrangel Island and Stefansson go along to investigate and report; he might be asked to make a trip across the Barren Lands to study caribou conditions in relation to the reindeer industry; or he might be asked to be a Government candidate at the next election in an Icelandic constituency.

Stefansson's letter to the Minister, it seems to me, was written for the purpose of putting something definite on record, in other words, to overcome the difficulty arising from our negotiating with him re. the expedition but refusing to put anything in writing. Unanswered or evaded it is virtually an admission that we have contracted with him to lead an expedition; and his case is strengthened by the statement that he is sacrificing a \$60,000 lecture contract to undertake the expedition.¹⁰⁵

The deep distrust of Stefansson revealed in these memos fits rather oddly with the admitted conviction that up to date he "is playing the game absolutely loyally to Canada." The memos also suggest that Harkin was undergoing mental conflict regarding the ethics of his own role. The alternative proposals he had in mind for Stefansson are interesting, and it is quite likely that in favourable circumstances some of them might have attracted him.

On 23 March, a memo to Lougheed was drafted under Cory's signature, which was obviously prompted by the memos from Harkin and was intended primarily to clarify whether the minister was opposed to only the Stefansson phase of the proposed exploratory expedition or to both phases of it. The memo said in part:

You made a remark that you would not take this matter to Council. My impression from your remark was that you had in mind only the second part of the expedition, viz. – the trip in 1922 by Stefansson himself. Mr. Harkin got the impression that your remark included the advance party as well.

You will remember that early in February you agreed to this advance party being sent up with a view to guaranteeing Stefansson remaining loyal to us until we had succeeded in establishing our police posts in the North.

The memo noted that if the advance party were still to be sent out in 1921 there would be a great deal of preparatory work to do in a very short time, and asked that "on receipt of this letter" the minister should advise "definitely" as to his views in the matter. However, most of the memo is crossed out and the words "not sent" are pencilled on it, so evidently the matter was dropped for the time being or taken up with Lougheed in some other way.¹⁰⁶

In spite of these efforts to bring about a decision in the matter, no quick decision was made, and Stefansson's frequent communiqués to Ottawa continued to receive evasive and negative answers. He wired Harkin from Cleveland on 23 March, asking for news.¹⁰⁷ Harkin replied the same day, saying that there was "nothing doing" regarding either Lambert or Alcock, whom Stefansson had suggested for the 1921 Axel Heiberg party, and that he was trying to find a suitable man.¹⁰⁸ Stefansson wired back promptly on 24 March, from Bloomington, Indiana, suggesting Elmer Ekblaw who had been botanist with MacMillan's 1913–17 expedition.¹⁰⁹ Harkin, again replying

the same day, said that only a Canadian could be considered.¹¹⁰ Stefansson sent another wire, also on 24 March, dealing with several matters but emphasizing that the man chosen should be accustomed to outdoor winter life.¹¹¹ Harkin wrote a brief letter on 26 March, saying that Stefansson's letter of 14 March to Loughheed had been referred to him because the minister was out of the city. Although the minister would appreciate the "high ground" Stefansson was taking, Harkin advised Stefansson not to turn down the lecture tour because the "unsettled conditions" in Canada might change plans for the expedition.¹¹² Already, however, Stefansson had hired E. Lorne Knight, a member of his last expedition whom he had been authorized to employ; Knight wrote to Harkin on 27 March saying that Stefansson had accepted him and that he desired instructions.¹¹³

Harkin wrote a lengthy memo to Cory on 7 April, summarizing the situation as it then existed. He said little about the complications involving Stefansson, however, and the memo was mainly a review of the legal situation as he saw it. To a large extent it simply repeated arguments that had already been made many times by both Harkin and Stefansson, and it suggests that there actually was a good deal of affinity in the thinking of the two.¹¹⁴

Stefansson sent another urgent wire on 11 April, this time from Galveston, Texas, saying in part, "Referring your letter it is now too late to retain lecture contracts they were cancelled months ago I assume absolute good faith on part officials now in power and am willing to take chances on change of administration." He asked Harkin to wire a summary of the situation to Beeville, Texas.¹¹⁵ Harkin sent the wire on to Cory as usual, with the usual request for advice about a reply.¹¹⁶ There is little documentary evidence that his repeated requests of this kind attracted any helpful response, and it may

well be that Cory, lacking a definite Cabinet decision to guide him, was feeling as frustrated over the whole affair as Harkin obviously was.

This pattern of events continued for several more weeks, with Stefansson becoming increasingly anxious and Harkin increasingly embarrassed over his inability to send a definite reply. On 12 April, Knight wrote another letter to Harkin, this time from his home in Oregon, saying that he had had no reply to his letter of 27 March and again asking for instructions.¹¹⁷ Harkin sent this letter to Cory, again asking for advice about an answer and noting that it had been found necessary to approve the hiring of Knight.¹¹⁸ Stefansson wired from New Braunfels, Texas, on 18 April to say that he had had no replies from the Canadian university presidents to whom he had written and no reply from Harkin to his telegram of 11 April.¹¹⁹ Harkin sent the wire on to Cory, saying that he was still without instructions but thought it "important that a message of some kind should go to Mr. Stefansson."¹²⁰ On 20 April, Cory returned the communiqués he had received from Harkin, with a memo saying only, "So far we have not received the decision of Council."¹²¹ Stefansson sent two wires from Phoenix, Arizona, on 24 April, one to Cory saying that he had received no replies from Harkin¹²² and the other to Harkin saying that he now had answers from the university presidents and that from Toronto strongly recommended Allan, the son of Professor Crawford of that university.¹²³ Harkin again sent the wire he had received to Cory.¹²⁴ Another wire from Stefansson on 3 May announced that he had now heard from all the university presidents and recommended several of the candidates they had named, Crawford being mentioned as one of the two best.¹²⁵ Harkin sent it on to Cory with the usual request for instructions, suggesting strongly that "the cards should be laid on the table."¹²⁶

Stefansson's next wire, from Los Angeles on 11 May, said that the time had now arrived for Knight to report to Ottawa according to the arrangement made and that he had resigned the position he had held more than a month ago.¹²⁷ Harkin's note to Cory accompanying the wire observed rather bluntly that it was now almost the middle of May and the situation was still "all up in the air."¹²⁸ Knight wrote a letter to Harkin from McMinnville, Oregon, on 12 May, saying that he was without funds and had not felt free to take another job; he had written twice already and did not wish to become "a nuisance," but nevertheless he would appreciate some information.¹²⁹

A memo dated 13 May, unsigned but obviously written by Harkin, explained the situation up to that date and strongly recommended that an immediate decision be reached regarding both the northern expedition and the role of Stefansson in it. For the most part, the memo went over ground covered many times before, but it emphasized that the program approved by council "was being carried out without a hitch" until Shackleton appeared on the scene and that although Stefansson was considered "unsuitable" for the command, there was "every evidence" that he had "preserved absolute confidence in connection with this subject." The memo took the view that the *Arctic* should be sent north on a more limited and less expensive trip than that originally planned; but regarding Stefansson, even though to eliminate him at such a late date would seem to him to be "an act of bad faith on the part of the Government," the only advice was to decide promptly one way or the other.¹³⁰

Stefansson sent a wire to Harkin from Lindsey, California, on 17 May, asking him to read the editorial page of the American magazine *World's Work* for May.¹³¹ The editorial, dealing with a proposal that the US Navy

send a scientific expedition to the Arctic with a view to claiming lands where oil was discovered, formed a subject for discussion in a typical Harkin-to-Cory memo about a week later. Stefansson had written regarding the proposal: "I can beat them [the Americans] to it if Canada wants me to."¹³²

By this time the decision respecting the northern expedition had been taken, and Stefansson's fate was sealed. Stefansson remained unaware of what had happened, and he wired Harkin anxiously on 29 May from Eureka, California:

Am in very embarrassing situation Knight and various men in Canadian universities whom I approached according our agreement are writing and wiring me stop you should know it is safe to let me know facts even if Shackleton or others have been selected but I must have some word from you stop I have sent in no expense account and shall not but I expect some courtesy you have always shown in our dealings reply Fort-Bragg till Tuesday morning Lakeport Thursday Sebastopol Saturday.¹³³

A short note from Cory on 18 May informed Harkin that the expedition was cancelled. The note began as follows: "I herewith return the memoranda relating to the Arctic Expedition. This whole matter has been called off." Little else was said, except that Cory was asking Craig to prepare a memorandum to show the minister's position clearly and that Craig would consult Harkin.¹³⁴

Harkin sent Stefansson the basic news of the cancellation on 30 May in a wire which said only, "Re. your wire twenty-ninth entire

expedition abandoned. Am writing.”¹³⁵ His following letter gave little additional detail, however, and the curt, uninformative tone must have carried quite a sting:

Doubtless you have received my wire of even date advising you that the entire expedition has been abandoned.

I may say that for some time there had been a great deal of uncertainty. Things were in such condition that it was quite impossible for me to send any satisfactory reply to your several previous messages. Through all the period of uncertainty I personally thought that in the end the decision would be favourable. However as already advised such is not the case.¹³⁶

Stefansson thus received word of the elimination of the expedition upon which he had built such high hopes. It does not appear that Harkin sent him any further information or explanation, or that he asked for any.

In the meantime, while the negotiations with Stefansson were running their course, other important events relating to the expedition were taking place – particularly negotiations with Shackleton.¹³⁷ On 15 April 1921, Shackleton (while in Ottawa) put his case directly to Meighen in a lengthy letter, accompanied by a curriculum vitae, a list of the scientific staff who would accompany him, and a copy of Stefansson’s letter. He emphasized that he had already secured \$125,000 of the \$250,000 he needed and would ask the Canadian government for only \$100,000. The expedition would be Canadian and for the benefit of Canada, and he pledged to co-operate fully to establish the proposed posts in the North. Even if Stefansson

did want to go north, he said, “the shores and the seas are wide, and there is room for all.”¹³⁸

On 6 April, Loughheed directed Harkin to prepare a financial statement of the *Arctic* expedition. He submitted an approximate estimate the following day, and he also made a comparative financial statement of the *Arctic* and the Shackleton expeditions, which he presented to the minister on or before 23 April. His figures are difficult to follow, but he apparently concluded that if only one police post was established, the *Arctic* expedition would cost \$50,000, while the Shackleton expedition would cost \$20,000 plus whatever grant it received. Additional money had already been committed to the *Arctic*, however, and since this money could not be recovered, he seemed to favour the *Arctic* expedition.¹³⁹

Shackleton, like Stefansson, had been doing his best to win the support of influential people who could help him. Three men who seem to have been inclined to support his project were Loring Christie, legal adviser to the Department of External Affairs; John Bassett of the Ottawa office of the *Montreal Gazette*; and Sir John Eaton of the T. Eaton Company. On 9 April, while still in Ottawa, Shackleton sent a handwritten note to Christie saying that he could “carry and place” the one (police) station proposed and that his expedition would be “entirely featured as Canadian.”¹⁴⁰ On 11 April, he wired Bassett from New York, asking him to tell Christie that he could relieve the northern party next year “without equipping the ship they proposed to use.”¹⁴¹ He referred, of course, to the *Arctic*.¹⁴² When he had arrived back in England and inspected his ship, however, Shackleton was obliged to cable Bassett saying that he found it impossible to accommodate the proposed party because of their large requirements in coal, stores, and “huts.” He presented three alternative requests to Bassett: (1)

to try to obtain \$50,000 from the government without any stipulation to carry their party, (2) to obtain \$100,000 from the government, in which case he would carry the party on a vessel he would charter himself, or the “most attractive,” or (3) to get the government to give him \$100,000 or less, provisions already purchased, and magistrate powers, in which case he would make his base and winter on the Ellesmere Island coast and renew the party yearly at cost.¹⁴³

On 3 May, Shackleton sent a further cable to Bassett, evidently in response to a communiqué he had received, saying, “Yes I will undertake this year government Ellesmere proposition and leave main expedition until next year.” He went on to detail the difficulties the delay put him in, including his debt to supporters who had provided him with a ship and wanted some action, and his withdrawal “long since” of members of his staff from other occupations.¹⁴⁴ Bassett sent a copy of this cable to Meighen, saying that he would “respectfully suggest that the Government give Shackleton some definite reply as he is anxiously waiting.” He added that Sir John Eaton was willing to contribute \$100,000 to the expedition.¹⁴⁵ Thus, at this stage, the Stefansson and Shackleton expeditions were in comparable positions.

This correspondence came to Cory’s attention, and on 4 May he sent copies of it to Harkin, asking if he knew what proposition had been made to Shackleton. He asked also if Harkin knew about a communication supposed to have been sent to the department about work by the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) in this connection.¹⁴⁶ Harkin replied in detail on 6 May, saying that he knew nothing about any proposition to Shackleton and, surprisingly, that he had consulted with Christie about it, and Christie said he knew nothing about it either. Christie had expressed the opinion that Bassett had cabled a proposition to Shackleton

“on his own responsibility.” Harkin knew nothing, either, about any proposition to the HBC involving the question of sovereignty, although he knew from contacts with company officers that they planned to extend their posts northwards. This would constitute occupation, but for sovereignty purposes official government action would have to follow.¹⁴⁷

In his eagerness and anxiety for a favourable decision, Shackleton attempted to put pressure upon Meighen, and in so doing he probably helped to cook his own goose. On 6 May, he sent Meighen the following cable from London:

Respectfully urge action and confirmation government support stop it is vital for me to know immediately stop I have fallen in with every line indicated at various interviews with members of council stop during first visit I was told government would support me if I would get adequate outside help stop on receiving this help I returned to Canada the government then suggested that as a reason for their assistance I should carry and place their station thus saving the larger cost of equipping and running the *Arctic* stop I agreed to this and have been holding my ship for final ratification for I realized I could not equip for my long expedition and at the same time carry the large amount of stores and coal which commissioner north west police considered necessary stop therefore I concentrated on helping government plan stop I was given to understand whole matter would come up before council on April eleventh stop time passed stop hearing

nothing I took the step of holding myself ready to carry out promise to government and to postpone my main expedition until next year having obtained the approval of donors of ship on this side and my Canadian supporters stop in justifiable [*sic*] hope of government support I have taken my principal experienced staff from other occupations and with my ship have been awaiting your decision stop I propose immediately you cable to make necessary accommodation alterations commission ship proceed Canada stop my position is growing equivocal in this country due to delay stop please cable government's definite support and amount bearing in mind the government Arctic expedition would have cost approximately quarter of a million dollars stop urgently awaiting your action.¹⁴⁸

Meighen's chilly answering cable on 9 May shows clearly that he was in no mood to be badgered into any decision other than one of the government's own choosing. A copy of it in his papers reads as follows:

Referring your cablegram sixth. Government has made no definite commitment whatever as regards your proposed Expedition and promise of consideration was upon conditions that at no time to date have been complied with Stop Furthermore Government was advised recently on your behalf that you could not go on with your expedition this year Stop Our arrangements now do

not admit of assistance your expedition this year.¹⁴⁹

Not willing to accept rejection, Shackleton protested strongly in another cable on 12 May.

Keen disappointment adverse decision stop cannot see where I failed to comply with conditions which were firstly reasonable outside help stop secondly scientific personnel to be largely Canadian stop thirdly to carry and lay government station stop the first two conditions were settled before I sailed for England in April stop regarding the third I have held my ship awaiting confirmation of government and that is why the main expedition was postponed stop my message being I would hold main expedition over so as to comply with government plan stop earnestly beg your reconsideration and allow me lay your station stop failing this please cable me definite promise of support next year and meanwhile I will carry on general scientific work as main part of staff is engaged and ship is ready.¹⁵⁰

Meighen's curt response on 16 May must have ended Shackleton's hopes: "My cable May ninth states our position. Stop. Cannot give any definite promise for next year."¹⁵¹

In the concluding scene of this strange drama, there is one feature which seems to stand out clearly. Meighen's cable telling Shackleton the government would give no assistance to his expedition in 1921 was dated 9 May. On the other hand, Cory's note to Harkin saying that the whole matter, including Stefansson's part in it, had been called off was dated

18 May, and it may be assumed that this message was sent without delay. There seems to be no document recording the Cabinet's decision or decisions, but the evidence indicates that Shackleton's expedition had been rejected eight or nine days before the final adverse verdict was pronounced upon Stefansson's.

Neither of the two explorers permitted himself to accept his failure with the Canadian government as a final defeat. Almost immediately, each was planning his next large project, Stefansson the occupation of Wrangel Island and Shackleton the expedition to the Antarctic which resulted in his death early in 1922. In both cases, the change of plans was made with hardly a moment's delay. Shackleton, having received Meighen's final rejection on 16 May, sent a cable the same day to Dr. Alexander Hepburne Macklin, a colleague who was then in Canada, telling him to return immediately to England and prepare for an Antarctic voyage.¹⁵²

While the involved question of the Arctic expeditions was under consideration, officials also looked into Canada's legal position respecting its sovereignty over the northern islands. Not long after being appointed to take charge of planning the proposed expedition, J. D. Craig was asked to make a weekly progress report to the Minister of the Interior. In the first of these reports, dated 4 January 1921, he said, *inter alia*:

The question of Canada's title to the northern islands is also being looked into from the viewpoint of International law, and an effort is being made to get a memorandum on this point from someone, possibly in the Department of Justice or the Department of External Affairs, whose opinion will carry some weight and

so be of practical use as a guide in issuing our instructions.¹⁵³

In his second report, dated 13 January, Craig was able to say that the Deputy Minister of Justice had already forwarded a preliminary memorandum on the Canadian title.¹⁵⁴ The Hon. J. C. Patterson, appointed under Order in Council PC No. 1170 in 1910 to investigate the same subjects, had not made a report, but arrangements were under way to have Loring Christie (then in London) to investigate there.¹⁵⁵

On 17 January, Craig sent Harkin a detailed list of questions that Christie might be asked to investigate in London.¹⁵⁶ A few changes were made, and the revised list, together with some key documents and papers, was sent to Gibson¹⁵⁷ and then to Deputy Minister Cory¹⁵⁸ on 19 January for transmittal to Christie. In the meantime, a cable was sent to Christie, who had gone to Geneva, to inform him of the work that awaited him in London. Among the key documents and papers were copies of Dr. King's memorandum of 1905, Christie's own memorandum of 28 October 1920, and Harkin's memorandum of 25 November 1920. The questions on the revised list were as follows:

Re Dr. King's memorandum.

1. Precisely what did Great Britain in 1880 consider as "British territory in North American not already included in the Dominion of Canada"?
2. Was the Imperial Order in Council of 1880 intentionally indefinite and, if so, why?
3. What does "adjacent" mean?

4. Is there any reason to differ from Dr. King's interpretation of the intention of the parties to the transfer of 1880?

Re. Mr. Harkin's memorandum.

5. Can Canada of itself, that is without specific instructions from the Imperial Government, take any effective action regarding the sovereignty of lands which may be regarded by other nations as outside of Canada?
6. Were the Low and Bernier expeditions, in this respect, authorized in a form in compliance with the principles of International Law?
7. Is it possible that it might be necessary to repeat all the formal acts carried out by them?
8. What is the situation in regard to Axel Heiberg and the Rignes [*sic*] Islands? Does Norway hold an inchoate title for them?
9. Can Canada take any action looking towards the establishment of a full sovereignty here without specific official endorsement of such action by the Imperial Government?
10. Has Denmark taken any steps to establish sovereignty on Ellesmere Land, or elsewhere? This may be covered by the inquiry being made through Sir Joseph Pope or through Colonel Perry who is referring the matter to Scotland Yard. In this connection

see Mr. Harkin's memorandum, page "A" and copy of Rasmussen's letter, paragraph #3. It is very important that information on this subject should be secured and it would seem desirable to make an attempt to ascertain through the British diplomatic representative at Copenhagen, the real object of the Rasmussen expedition.

11. If Denmark has taken any such steps, what are the views of the Imperial authorities in regard to these acts?
12. What steps should be taken by Canada in such an event and how will the Imperial authorities regard the steps that will undoubtedly be taken by Canada to counteract any official action of Denmark along the lines of occupation and administration?

Re. Mr. Christie's memorandum.

13. Are permanent posts necessary for the establishment of effective occupation in the Arctic Zone?

Re. The despatch in the Montreal Gazette.

14. Is there any official knowledge of the United States Expedition and its object?¹⁵⁹

The plans for Christie's investigation in London were nullified by his return to Canada at the end of January, without having received information prior to his departure from Europe

about what was expected of him.¹⁶⁰ In a conversation with Craig, Dominion Archivist Arthur Doughty had already suggested that Christie should get in touch with Henry Percival Biggar, the London representative of the Dominion Archives, to obtain help. On the same occasion, Craig took up with Doughty the question of getting a member of the archives' staff in Ottawa to look into the problem of Canada's title to the Arctic islands, and Doughty replied that although all personnel trained for this sort of research were at the time fully occupied with the Labrador boundary controversy, he nevertheless expected someone to undertake the work shortly.¹⁶¹ The outcome of negotiations was that Christie undertook to prepare another memo on the subject; Hensley R. Holmden, who was associate archivist in charge of the Maps Division, was engaged to examine historical aspects of the problem from archival and other materials, and arrangements were made to get certain information from London.¹⁶²

Christie prepared his report without delay and had it ready by 17 February.¹⁶³ He promptly withdrew it the same day and then submitted a revised version in two separate parts, the first on 17 February and the second on 28 February.¹⁶⁴ The essential change was that a section at the end of the first version strongly condemning the proposal to occupy Wrangel Island was separated and became the substance of the second part of the revised version. Christie had obviously changed his mind. The part of the revised version dated 17 February gives evidence of hasty and rather superficial preparation, and has little of concrete importance in it other than the following advice: first, Canada should take a very firm stand in asserting sovereignty over the northern islands; second, of the three foreign states to be considered, namely the United States, Norway, and Denmark, neither the United States nor Norway had ever shown

any serious intention of occupying any of the islands; and third, so far as Denmark was concerned, on every ground Canada should "proceed without hesitation." "If he [Rasmussen] or any of his party is encountered he should be clearly told what our position is, informed of our laws, and requested to conform to them."

The background of the writing of Holmden's memo is also rather confused. In acknowledging receipt of Christie's memo of 17 February, Craig asked him for his opinion about the best way to get the information from London that it had been hoped he would obtain himself before returning to Canada.¹⁶⁵ In his reply on 25 February, Christie referred to the fourteen questions in Craig's memo of 19 January, which had been sent to him in London, and expressed the opinion that the first four should be investigated by the Dominion Archives' representative in London, while the remainder could be handled elsewhere.¹⁶⁶ Craig passed this advice on to Cory on 26 February, suggesting that the first four questions be submitted to Doughty;¹⁶⁷ and Cory complied on 3 March, asking that Doughty have the four questions investigated by his London representative.¹⁶⁸ Holmden, who did the work, carried on his investigation in the Dominion Archives and in the Governor General's secretary's office, and in doing so, he endeavoured mainly to answer five questions which Craig had submitted to Doughty on 21 January.¹⁶⁹ These five questions were, however, identical to the first five on the list in Craig's memo of 19 January. Holmden had a preliminary draft of his "Memo re The Arctic Islands" ready on 14 April 1921¹⁷⁰ and followed it with a larger, more complete version on 26 April.¹⁷¹ He subsequently added some missing documents after they arrived from England.¹⁷²

Holmden based his answers to Craig's five questions mostly upon Colonial Office documents dealing with the transfer of 1880, which

he apparently found either in the archives or in the office of the Governor General's secretary. Briefly summarized, his answers were:

1. In 1880 Britain considered as "British territory in North America not already included in the Dominion of Canada" all unannexed territories and islands, but found it impossible to state precisely what these possessions were.
2. The Imperial order in council of 1880 was beyond doubt intentionally indefinite, because those handling the transfer "could not define, that which in their own minds was indefinite."
3. The word "adjacent" was evidently used regularly to mean "appertaining to" or "of right belonging to" and was applied to islands "lying within, or washed by territorial waters."
4. There would not appear to be any major reason to dissent from Dr. King's interpretation of the intention of the parties in 1880, although Dr. King did not have access to all the correspondence and thus was not completely informed.
5. Canada could evidently do a great deal independently to assert her sovereignty over these northern lands, by establishing patrols, making settlements of Eskimos,

exploiting mines, and maintaining law and order.¹⁷³

Holmden went on to discuss other questions relating to the transfer of 1880 and subsequent matters, including the speeches in the House of Commons on Hudson Bay by David Mills and Charles Hibbert Tupper on 28 May 1894, the sector speech of Senator Poirier on 20 February 1907, and the patrol voyages of Wakeham, Low, and Bernier. He ended with several long lists of relevant maps.

His long memo, running to a total of sixty-four pages, is one of the most important works on the subject which has ever been written, especially in its treatment of the official correspondence leading to the transfer of 1880.¹⁷⁴ Unfortunately the memo was never published, and for years about the only work in print on the above-mentioned official correspondence was the partial treatment of it by Albert E. Millward, which was on a much smaller scale.¹⁷⁵ The anxieties of the post-First World War years respecting the security of the northern territories led to the writing of several such memos which never found their way into print, including Wyatt Malcolm's memo of 6 November 1920, Harkin's memo of November 1920, and Christie's memos of 28 October 1920 and 17 February 1921. Holmden's memo was the ablest and had the most fundamental significance.¹⁷⁶

Besides the political and legal questions bearing upon Canada's position in the northern islands, there was also the practical problem of getting a ship ready to carry out the expedition that had been proposed. This task fell under the direct supervision of J. D. Craig, who was given this responsibility by appointment on 1 December 1920.¹⁷⁷ Almost immediately after the appointment of Pickels as captain of the *Arctic* on 16 December, he and Craig made a trip to Quebec to inspect the ship on 21 December.¹⁷⁸

Pickels remained to make a more detailed examination, and on 5 January, he reported to Craig that it would cost almost \$60,000 to repair, outfit, and supply the *Arctic* for a six months' northern cruise. With the addition of wages and incidentals, he estimated the total cost at \$82,615.¹⁷⁹ Craig, in turn, urged the government to allot \$85,000 to cover costs.¹⁸⁰ Since the expedition was to be the responsibility of the Department of the Interior, it was necessary to transfer the *Arctic* to this department from the Department of Marine and Fisheries.¹⁸¹ Later, an additional \$70,000 was placed in the main estimates, and this sum was retained (in case of emergency), even after the expedition had been cancelled. The designation "Reindeer Expedition," which had been adopted for the expedition for camouflage purposes, was dropped, and in the estimates the \$70,000 appeared under the heading "Northwest Territories Explorations."¹⁸²

With the financial arrangements in place, preparations for the expedition proceeded steadily – although the entry of Shackleton upon the scene soon cast a shadow of uncertainty over its future. There were various suggestions about what might be accomplished by the expedition, especially in scientific work, but Craig took the view that such activities were not the primary purpose of the expedition and that there would be little time for them anyhow.¹⁸³ Lougheed concurred with this view and was reported by Cory to agree thoroughly "that this is not a scientific expedition, but one undertaken primarily for the establishment of police posts and the maintenance of British Sovereignty in the Northern Islands."¹⁸⁴ It was then decided to take only a photographer and a cartographer, and other technical and scientific personnel were ruled out.¹⁸⁵ The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP, the new name given to the RNWMP in 1920) enjoyed a favoured position,

and arrangements were made to provide extra space and supplies for them.¹⁸⁶ In spite of the efforts of Craig, Pickels, and others to speed preparation, there remained considerable doubt whether the old *Arctic* could be made ready in time for the voyage, and on 4 May, Pickels wrote an angry note to Craig, complaining of lack of co-operation and effort on the part of the Department of Marine and Fisheries personnel who were supposed to be working on the ship.¹⁸⁷ These difficulties were smoothed over, and Pickels wrote notes to Craig on 18 May and 20 May, reporting that the work was "progressing nicely," *Arctic* had been taken out of dock, and the final phases of outfitting were under way.¹⁸⁸

On 20 May, Craig wrote Pickels a brief note informing him that the expedition had been cancelled and added his own resigned comment: "There is no use trying to write what I think about it."¹⁸⁹ He enclosed a copy of a memorandum from Cory, advising that the *Arctic* should be kept in good condition in case a northern expedition should become necessary at a later date.¹⁹⁰ For a time the fate of the *Arctic* was in doubt, especially since the Department of Marine and Fisheries was asking that she be returned to them so that she could be used again as a lightship.¹⁹¹ Cory's wish prevailed, however, and the Department of the Interior decided to retain the ship temporarily and kept it in a state of near readiness in case an emergency demanded a northern expedition at short notice.¹⁹² Captain Pickels, bitterly disappointed as might be expected, reported that the *Arctic* was "in splendid order" and if wanted could be made completely ready for sailing in two weeks.¹⁹³ One cause of concern was a rumoured American expedition to the Arctic later that summer under Donald B. MacMillan, although it was also reported that

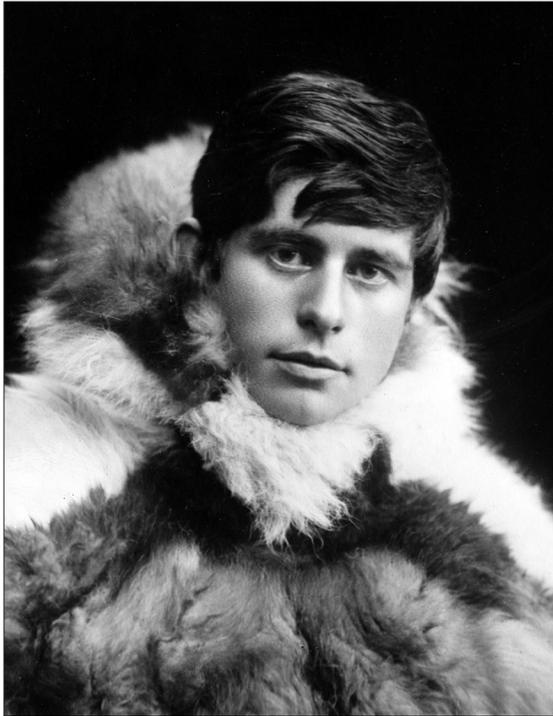


FIGURE 10-4: KNUD RASMUSSEN. *LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, GEORGE GRANTHAM BAIN COLLECTION.*

the expedition had only scientific objectives (see chapter 14).¹⁹⁴

While all these preparations had been going on, the responsible Canadian authorities kept their eyes on the Danes and tried to discover what they (and particularly Knud Rasmussen) were doing. On 1 April 1921, Harkin wrote a memo to Cory, suggesting that a code cable should be sent to Sir George Perley in London to ask him to try to get a written application from Rasmussen that would constitute recognition of Canadian sovereignty in any of the northern islands he might visit.¹⁹⁵ About a week later, newspapers carried announcements of Rasmussen's projected expedition to the North American Arctic. Although details were scanty, one report said that the Danish

government would contribute 100,000 kroner to support it.¹⁹⁶ On 4 April, Cory cabled the High Commissioner's office in London, and on 25 April, the Governor General cabled Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill about Rasmussen and his expedition. The High Commissioner's office replied to Cory on 28 April, and Churchill replied to the Duke of Devonshire on 29 April, both referring to an interview Rasmussen had had with Sir Henry Lambert at the Colonial Office on 15 or 16 March, in which Rasmussen had indicated no propensity to challenge Canadian authority. Although the British had yet to receive a memorandum of application requested of Rasmussen, both Churchill and Lambert reported that the Dane had "used no language contesting Canada's unrestricted dominion over Ellesmere Land."¹⁹⁷ On 30 April, Ambassador C. M. Marling at Copenhagen reported to Lord Curzon that although the Danish government was contributing 100,000 kroner to the expedition, it was nevertheless purely scientific, and Rasmussen had no official status.¹⁹⁸ Canadian suspicions were not completely put at rest, however, and on 12 May, Craig wrote a memo to Cory, saying that since the Danish government was supporting Rasmussen's expedition and since the requested memorandum had not been received, both he and Harkin felt that the matter could not be overlooked.¹⁹⁹

On 26 May, after the northern expedition had been cancelled, Harkin wrote a long memo to Cory, reviewing the entire situation and urging that the *Arctic* be used for some kind of a northern patrol expedition, even if no police posts were established. In the memo, he went into detail about the Danish aspect and, in so doing, revealed his extraordinary and almost morbid suspicion and fear of the supposed Danish threat:

When Rasmussen was in London, Sir Ernest Shackleton had an interview with him. One of the early suspicious circumstances in connection with Rasmussen was his sudden decision not to come to America last Summer and his departure for Greenland and the delay of a month by his Secretary in the mailing of his letter to the Musk Ox Commission announcing this change of plans. Shackleton asked Rasmussen why he had so suddenly gone north last Summer and Rasmussen replied that he had gone to investigate the murder of a Greenland Eskimo by one of the McMillan [*sic*] expedition. This was obviously an untruth and an evasion because the murder took place in 1914 and Rasmussen has been up in Greenland practically every year since and so had had ample opportunity to investigate the murder. Moreover the murder took place in Axel Heiberg Land which lies in the Arctic to the westward of Ellesmere Land where Denmark has no jurisdiction.

It seems pretty clearly established that Rasmussen's proposed expedition to the Canadian islands is a scientific one. However it was he who contended that these islands were "No Man's Land" and if he arrived at Bylot Island about August 15th as expected he will have personal evidence that Canada is not administering the north islands. Should Denmark wish to raise the question later on his evidence will be available. It seems unfortunate that this should be the case.

The *Kock* [*sic*] (Danish) expedition left Denmark last year and its departure synchronized with Rasmussen's sudden departure for Greenland last Summer. The announced purpose of this expedition is to make a circular trip in north Greenland. The Colonial Office reports the following from the Royal Geographical Society:

"The Danish State has lent them a ship and the Chairman of his committee is a former rear-admiral of the Danish Navy – the State bears part of the expenses."

This is an expedition that could easily be used for invading the northern islands if the Danish Government has such in mind. If Denmark has any ulterior motives the Rasmussen expedition and Rasmussen proposals re. Conservation of musk ox may only be a blind to distract attention from the *Koch* expedition and give Denmark time to establish occupation in the north. It must be kept in mind that according to the Colonial Office Rasmussen has no official status in Denmark. All in all the attitude of Denmark seems to continue to be suspicious.²⁰⁰

Suspicion of Rasmussen was such that on 20 May the Winnipeg office of the HBC cabled the London office, to which he had applied for supplies and transportation during his stay in the North, advising that he should be given no help whatsoever. Harkin advised Cory on 30 May, and Cory agreed that Rasmussen should not be prevented from making his trip so long as Canadian officials were on hand to make him observe Canadian laws.²⁰¹ When Edward

Fitzgerald of the Winnipeg office of the HBC learned that Rasmussen had satisfied the British Foreign Office that the expedition was purely scientific, evidently by presenting them with a plan of it, he wired Sir James Lougheed on 4 June asking permission to give Rasmussen any needed assistance.²⁰² Lougheed replied by wire on 8 June granting the requested permission, provided that Rasmussen accepted Canadian sovereignty.²⁰³

Rasmussen and the Danish government had become aware, if they were not already, of the extent of the distrust with which Canadian officials regarded their activities in the High Arctic of North America, and they were anxious to demonstrate that this distrust was needless. It is also evident that there was much less worry over the matter in London than in Ottawa. A series of communiqués in early June, starting with the above-mentioned Rasmussen plan presented on 4 June, would appear to have removed all cause for Canadian suspicion, at least insofar as official statements could serve this end. At the same time, unless there is much more to this strange affair than has been revealed, they provide a sort of dénouement to the involved and mysterious business which has formed the subject of the preceding pages.

On 8 June, Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill sent Governor General the Duke of Devonshire a cypher cable, a paraphrase of which read in part:

Regarding Rasmussen and apprehension that Danish Government may be disposed to question Canadian Sovereignty over Ellesmere Land, a report has been received from His Majesty's Minister at Copenhagen that such a step would be directly against policy of friendship which Danish Cabinet has

declared towards the British Empire, and your Ministers may, in his opinion, rest assured that any such action is not the intention of the Danish Cabinet.²⁰⁴

This was followed a day later by a "Clear the Line-Urgent" cable, in which Churchill informed the Governor General that the Danish minister had submitted a memorandum "containing definite guarantee by Government of Denmark that expedition has no political or mercantile aims but is of entirely scientific character and that no acquisition of territory whatsoever is contemplated in regions in question."²⁰⁵ On 10 June, Churchill wrote a short note²⁰⁶ to accompany a copy of the Danish memorandum, which he sent to inform the Canadian government. The Danish memorandum, dated 8 June, is certainly the key document of the closing stages of the drama and is worth reproducing in full:

The Government of the Dominion of Canada having apparently entertained some misconception with regard to a Danish scientific expedition which under the leadership of Mr. Knud Rasmussen is about to leave Denmark for the Arctic regions of Canada, the Danish Minister has the honour by order of the King's Government to transmit the following statement to His Britannic Majesty's Government with the request that it may be telegraphed immediately to the Canadian Government.

The entire committee of the Knud Rasmussen polar expedition, with the exception of professor Bogild and professor Jensen, now absent on leave, has submitted the following

signed statement to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

1. The expedition was planned in 1909 by Knud Rasmussen and the late Dr. Stensby [*sic*], professor of geography at the University of Copenhagen;
2. The plan was set forth in 1910 in the Danish scientific journal "Geografisk Tidsskrift";
3. The expedition has a purely scientific character and is unconnected with any political or commercial objects whatever; its chief aim is ethnographical exploration and, in addition, general researches in the interest of natural history.

His Majesty the King has accorded his patronage to the expedition after having received from the committee a detailed explanation of the project in conformity with the foregoing statement.

His Danish Majesty's Government therefore guarantees that the expedition has no political or mercantile aims but is of entirely scientific character and that no acquisition of territory whatsoever is contemplated in the regions in question.

The Danish Minister begs to add that Mr. Knud Rasmussen's expedition is to leave Copenhagen for Greenland, their starting point, on the 16th instant wherefore it would be much appreciated if the consent of the Government of Canada to the landing and further progress of the expedition might be obtained as

soon as possible and communicated to this Legation.²⁰⁷

Word of the Danish assurance was telegraphed by Lougheed to Fitzgerald on 10 June, and Fitzgerald cabled the London office of the HBC the next day, advising them that the Canadian government agreed that the company might furnish assistance to Rasmussen's expedition, so long as he did not dispute Canadian sovereignty in the northern islands.²⁰⁸ On 13 June, Fitzgerald informed Lougheed by telegraph that London had cabled back, saying "everything satisfactorily settled Rasmussen expresses many thanks."²⁰⁹ On 21 June, W. L. Griffith at the Office of the High Commissioner in London wrote a letter to Sir Joseph Pope, saying that although he had at first thought that Rasmussen's neglect to furnish a memorandum might have been calculated, in the light of later events he had concluded that he "was bona fide throughout, and ... a man of great intelligence, capacity, and good character."²¹⁰

Nevertheless, suspicion of Rasmussen died hard, at least in some quarters. On 4 January 1922, after the expedition had begun, Harkin wrote a memo to Cory, saying he thought it "at least a matter of bad taste" that Rasmussen should give the name "Danish Island" to an island at the mouth of Lyon Inlet, Melville Peninsula, and advising that the government should "keep a close eye on this expedition."²¹¹ Oswald Sterling Finnie sent a copy of this memo to Commissioner Aylesworth Bowen Perry of the RCMP on 23 January, asking that if possible he should arrange for observation of the expedition.²¹² As it proceeded other complaints were raised: that it had flown the Danish flag,²¹³ that it had interfered with the trade of others,²¹⁴ that it had carried on trading itself,²¹⁵ and that no licences had been issued to it in 1922.²¹⁶ Most of these complaints were cleared up in

one way or another: when asked, Rasmussen readily agreed to fly a Union Jack over his Danish flag,²¹⁷ the charge that the expedition had engaged in trading activities was repeatedly denied,²¹⁸ Rasmussen had asked permission in August 1922 to kill one male muskox for scientific purpose,²¹⁹ and he had been granted a hunting and trapping licence for that year.²²⁰

By April 1925, matters had changed to such an extent that it was Rasmussen who was doing the complaining. Reports about the coming MacMillan expedition indicated that it would receive more favourable treatment than had been extended to him. In a letter to Finnie he wrote:

All this makes me assume that any new land discovered by him or his expedition will be taken in possession for the U.S.A. If that is so I feel justified in asking how Canada can grant any such right while it was made an absolute condition to me, that I should sign a statement in which I declared that under no circumstances would take possession of any area in behalf of my country Denmark or any other country.

I did sign this statement in London by the High Commission before I left.... I will, as a son of a small nation feel extremely sorry if any explorer from any other country would be given any right which was not given me.²²¹

A handwritten note by Finnie on the original of Rasmussen's letter says that he discussed the matter with him while he was in Ottawa between 27 April and 6 May,²²² and it may safely be assumed that the Canadian officials emphasized that they were a good deal more worried

about MacMillan than Rasmussen was. The Danish explorer made a favourable impression during his visit to Ottawa, in the course of which, thanks to his intimate knowledge of Inuit and the circumstances in which they lived, he was able to answer the many questions put to him by the Canadian officials. He also reiterated his and Denmark's acknowledgment of Canadian sovereignty over Ellesmere Island in a letter written to O. D. Skelton while still in Ottawa.²²³ Over the following years, Rasmussen maintained contacts with people in Ottawa who were concerned with the Arctic, notably O. S. Finnie, and made himself a much respected figure there, enjoying this new status without serious interruption until his premature death in 1933.

The foregoing pages have attempted to document the story of this extraordinary affair, insofar as it can be gleaned from surviving government files and other materials. On at least two key matters probably more could be said: the supposed Danish challenge that touched off the whole business and the cancellation of the *Arctic* expedition in 1921.

To look at the second matter first, the most striking feature about the cancellation of the expedition is that no authoritative or detailed explanation for it has ever been made public. Stefansson was anxious to discover the truth about it, and he remained uneasy and dissatisfied with the partial explanation given him for the rest of his life. He made public his own interpretation of this partial explanation, and although there is obviously much truth in what he says, it is equally obvious that it does not tell the whole story. In his narration, the basic issue was the question of who should command the expedition, with Shackleton becoming his principal rival. The dispute eventually involved (and had to be settled by) the entire Cabinet, with half supporting him and the other half

supporting Shackleton. Although not fully informed about the details of the dispute, he had “no reason to doubt what a Cabinet member told me: that, in effect, the two factions said to each other that if they could not agree they might as well do nothing.”²²⁴

This is correct up to a point, but the impression given is inaccurate in some respects, and the affair was much more involved than this would imply. First, Shackleton’s expedition was eliminated by Prime Minister Meighen’s cable on 9 May 1921, and so Shackleton had ceased to be an active rival when the decision was taken on or about 18 May to cancel the expedition of the *Arctic* to Ellesmere Island.²²⁵ Second, Stefansson was not going to be the overall commander of the *Arctic* expedition anyway, and he knew it, as he had been so informed by Harkin in late January 1921.²²⁶ Craig had been placed in charge of preparing the expedition on 1 December 1920,²²⁷ and he was expedition commander when the *Arctic* finally sailed in 1922. Third, according to Stefansson’s own plan agreed upon with Harkin in February 1921, Stefansson himself would not go north in 1921 but would go with a small exploratory party in 1922 and join an advance party which would have established a base on Axel Heiberg Island.²²⁸ Fourth, and rather sad to relate because it went far beyond any suspicions that Stefansson may have had at the time, influential figures who Stefansson thought were for him really had been against him all along (or had turned against him). Harkin, for example, whose thinking on many subjects was akin to Stefansson’s, was anxious to send a sovereignty expedition north, but he was determined that Stefansson should not command it. Harkin wanted Stefansson to go north with the expedition, but only to get him away so that, as Harkin saw it, he would be unable to harm Canadian interests. This deep suspicion of Stefansson, so

evident in Harkin, was also apparent among many senior officials with responsibilities connected to the expedition, and undoubtedly was relevant in its cancellation. Nevertheless, the evidence shows that Stefansson was not guilty of deceiving the Canadian government as to his real intentions, and he was quite sincere in his expressed wish to continue serving Canada in the North. Even Harkin admitted that he was “convinced that Stefansson is playing the game absolutely loyally to Canada”²²⁹ and that there was “every evidence” that he had “preserved absolute confidence in connection with this subject.”²³⁰ Both Stefansson and his biographer suggest strongly that “the Anderson faction” (his detractors following the Canadian Arctic Expedition) had a good deal to do with the cancellation of the expedition,²³¹ but there is little direct evidence of this, at least in government records.

Certain documents in departmental and other archival files throw additional light on the cancellation and related matters. Harkin wrote a memo for Cory on 13 May 1921, a few days before the cancellation, for the minister to use in Cabinet deliberations. In it Harkin summarized the situation to date, his comments revealing an attitude that placed most of the blame for complicating matters upon Shackleton. For example:

The programme approved by Council in the Autumn of 1920 was being carried out without a hitch until the early part of March when Sir Ernest Shackleton seeking aid for an exploration trip into the Beaufort Sea approached the Canadian Government... In this connection the question was also raised as to the amount of expenditure involved in the original Arctic scheme.

So many questions concerning Shackleton and concerning the question of economy have been raised since the early part of March that to date the whole question of the Northern expedition has been largely up in the air.²³²

When Cory informed Craig on 18 May that the expedition had been cancelled, he added the request that Craig consult with Harkin and prepare a “historical statement” of the action the department had taken throughout the affair so that “the Minister’s record on the subject may be clear.”²³³ This statement went through several drafts before Lougheed received and signed it on 15 June. The final page reads as follows:

The outfitting of the ship and preparations generally for the expedition proceeded satisfactorily until about the middle of February when Sir Ernest Shackleton, seeking aid for an exploratory trip into the northern regions, and more particularly Beaufort Sea, approached the Government with a request for a substantial grant. Being informed of the expedition already arranged for and its purposes, and being advised that for reasons of economy it was impossible for the Government to support two expeditions, he made a counter proposition that was considered favourably by some Members of the Government, although I did not approve of it, thinking that the arrangements already entered upon by the Government were much more satisfactory.

The matter came up for consideration from time to time until

finally Council was doubtful if the expedition should be proceeded with this year. Finally on May 18th last I indicated to Council that, owing to the preparations which we had made, the ship or the expedition would be ready to sail about the first of June, [and] it was absolutely necessary that a decision should be arrived at as to whether we should not carry out our original plan.

Council declared against the expedition being proceeded with during the present year.²³⁴

This revealing statement gives additional information about the matter, notably Lougheed’s attitude. As might be expected, it discloses no details about the division of opinion within Cabinet.

In his long memo to Cory on 26 May, Harkin commented, “It is assumed that the abandonment of the Arctic expedition is not the result of any doubt as to the worth-whileness of the Northern Islands but due to a feeling that there is no danger of any challenge of Canadian sovereignty.” He also detailed his fears of Danish or American occupation.²³⁵ The forthright Danish denial of any designs upon Ellesmere or any other Canadian Arctic island in early June brought about a change in the Canadian view of the sovereignty problem and of the function of any government expedition which might be sent north. In a letter to Cory on 29 June 1921, dealing with a Danish proposal to protect muskox on Ellesmere Island, Harkin remarked that even though the program appeared adequate and even though Denmark was admitting British sovereignty there, it nevertheless “does not seem to me to be good policy for Canada to be dependent upon the actions of a foreign country for the observance

of Canadian law upon Canadian territory.”²³⁶ In a long memo written on 16 February 1922, Craig said that, even though the Danish admission was “somewhat reassuring ... it did not dispose of the existing doubt as to the validity of Canada’s title, and in fact the incident emphasized the weakness of Canada’s case.”²³⁷ These comments reflect the continuing feeling that, even though the Danes evidently no longer posed a serious threat, Canada needed to take positive action.

Finnie brought up the matter in a memo of 18 January 1922. “I think we are all agreed that the proper course to insure sovereignty over the various Islands in the Arctic is to have Government officials stationed, permanently, on the larger Islands,” he wrote. “Just as soon as the Minister returns this matter will be revived.” Finnie added that if the minister would not approve sending out the *Arctic*, an alternative might be to accept the offer of a trader to establish a trading station on the south coast of Ellesmere Island, and to appoint him a government agent.²³⁸ Harkin replied on 25 January, indicating his strong agreement that action should be taken. “On account of the solution of the Danish question there is perhaps not now the same necessity for rushing action,” he added. “Nevertheless the fact remains that Canada has not established its sovereignty in the Northern islands.” He firmly advocated that government officers should take action, rather than traders holding delegated powers.²³⁹

In a memo to Cory on 31 January, Finnie put forward the alternative propositions of sending out the *Arctic* to establish posts on the northern islands or contracting the HBC to perform the same duties. He indicated his preference for the first alternative and suggested that it should be made an annual patrol.²⁴⁰ Cory requested that Finnie, in consultation with Craig and Harkin, prepare a detailed memorandum on the subject

for the minister.²⁴¹ The response was a ten-page document, written mainly by Craig,²⁴² which in revised form became the memorandum of 16 February.²⁴³ After a lengthy résumé of the entire background of the case, Craig presented the following three basic alternatives: first, to do nothing further; second, to commission officers of trading companies to perform the desired duties; or third, to establish an annual government patrol and set up RCMP posts on the islands. The officials expressed clear preference for the third alternative which “would, in a short time, certainly establish Canada’s title beyond any doubt.” They strongly recommended sending out the first such patrol expedition in 1922. By this time, fear of what Denmark might do – which still figured prominently in the thinking of officials at the time of the cancellation – had been replaced by concern for the future status of the Arctic islands if Canada continued to do nothing.

On the other key matter, the real or supposed Danish challenge, other archival sources may contain further explanatory detail.²⁴⁴ What remains unclear can be summarized in this way. Because of several Danish statements – a letter written by Rasmussen on 8 March 1920, in an official communication from the Danish government to the British government on 12 April 1920, and in a letter from Rasmussen to Stefansson on 11 May 1920, as reported by Stefansson in his talk to the Advisory Technical Board on 1 October 1920 – Canadian authorities got the impression that both Rasmussen and the Danish government denied Canadian sovereignty over Ellesmere Island and intended to establish their own sovereignty there. They clung to this suspicious view thereafter, and they felt that subsequent Danish behaviour gave it substance. When Canadian suspicions threatened to create difficulties for them in this region, however, the Danes took steps to

remove them, and in June 1921, they categorically denied any intention of challenging Canadian sovereignty or attempting to acquire new territory themselves in the archipelago claimed by Canada. If one can take all this at face value, it amounts to a categorical Danish denial of Canadian sovereignty in 1920 and a categorical denial of any intention to interfere with it in 1921. But is this the whole story, and is it entirely correct? There are at least two possibilities of additional complications.

The first of these, put in blunt terms, is that the Danish denial of Canadian sovereignty in 1920 was genuine, but the Danish denial of any intention to interfere with Canadian sovereignty in 1921 was not genuine. This would imply that, even after the undertaking in 1921, the Danes still cherished hopes that in some way they could establish a foothold in the Canadian archipelago and, presumably, only gave up these hopes when it became obvious they could not do so. All the available evidence is against this possibility, and in all probability it can be discounted.

The other, more interesting possibility is that the Danish guarantee in 1921 was perfectly straightforward and genuine, but the suspected Danish challenge in 1920 was grossly exaggerated, if indeed it existed at all. This would suggest that Canadian authorities permitted themselves to become obsessed with a morbid, neurotic, unreasoning fear, which had little basis in reality and which caused them to see, figuratively, burglars under every bed, even though there were none. Dr. Édouard-Gaston Deville said his colleagues were being misled in this way when he refused to associate himself with the resolution of the Advisory Technical Board on 27 October 1920.²⁴⁵

If Denmark had no acquisitive inclinations in Ellesmere Island in 1920, it seems likely that there was a parallel between this situation and

that involving the developing Danish-Norwegian dispute over Eastern Greenland, which might offer at least a partial explanation of Danish behaviour. In the Eastern Greenland dispute, Denmark attempted to draw a distinction between the possession of sovereignty and the exercise of sovereignty, and held that even though she had not in earlier years exercised sovereignty throughout all parts of Greenland, she possessed this sovereignty nonetheless.²⁴⁶ Thus certain activities by other states or by private individuals in areas where she was not actively exercising her own jurisdiction might be unobjectionable, but they would become objectionable if they constituted a direct challenge to her ultimate sovereignty. In the somewhat similar Ellesmere Island situation, but with the roles changed so that Canada occupied Denmark's position and Denmark found herself in Norway's, a consistent Danish attitude would have held that certain Danish activities (such as killing muskox) in regions where Canada was not asserting her own jurisdiction were unobjectionable, even though ultimate sovereignty in the region was Canadian.

In connection with Canadian fears of the supposed Danish threat, and indeed with Canadian handling of the whole affair, the woeful lack of knowledge of international law amongst responsible government personnel in Ottawa stands out clearly. Stefansson, who was largely responsible for initiating Canadian worries, had only an elementary knowledge of international law. What is surprising, however, is that most of the senior people he had to deal with in Ottawa had even less, and they showed a distinct tendency to take his pronouncements at face value and defer to his opinions. The rather naïve performances of Legal Adviser Christie in his memo of 28 October 1920 and of Assistant Deputy Minister of Justice Edwards in his memo of 10 January 1921, as well as the

disinclination of the Department of Justice to commit itself on the matter, are obvious examples. Harkin emphasized this general weakness in international law in a couple of memos to Craig early in 1922. In the first, written on 7 February in reply to Craig's proposal to try to secure authoritative opinion from the Department of Justice, Harkin said:

I quite agree with you that it is desirable that there should be an authoritative statement from the Justice Department regarding the question of sovereignty. My recollection of the situation last year when we had this matter up personally with the Department of Justice is that that Department had not had any special occasion to specialize on International Law. You will remember that we largely looked the matter up ourselves in consultation with Sir Joseph Pope and Mr. L. C. Christie.²⁴⁷

In the second, dated 13 February and commenting on Craig's long draft memo of 11 February about the northern expedition, Harkin wrote in similar vein:

I am also inclined to think that there should be a section inserted explaining the application of International Law, so far as we could get it, to situations such as exist in the north. I think you may take it for granted that the Minister, like nearly everyone else in Canada, is practically unfamiliar with International Law.²⁴⁸

What effect a sophisticated knowledge of international law in appropriate circles in Ottawa

would have had upon the handling of this matter is indiscernible, but it is at least safe to say that the course of events would not have been the same.

Once the excitement had died down, a blanket of silence fell over this strange affair, and the inside story of it has never been made public. It is almost as if those who participated in it had conspired to consign it as inconspicuously as possible to the graveyard. It is difficult, for example, to find in Canadian sources any published acknowledgement of or comment on the official Danish denial in 1921 of any predatory intentions towards Ellesmere Island, and yet one would have thought that this important news would have been made public property at an early stage. The conspicuous exception among the leading participants to the generally observed silence was Stefansson, who wanted the story to be made public, feeling that on balance it would help his reputation rather than hurt it. In this he was probably correct. Yet even Stefansson said little publicly and did not divulge many inside details about which he was in a better position to speak than anyone else. He believed that Harkin retained the real story and that Harkin's refusal to release his information maintained the veil of secrecy. For example, Stefansson suggested in his autobiography:

I never knew why Harkin was brought in, but I do know that he came to be the best-informed man in Ottawa, or anywhere, on both overt and secret matters connected with our plans. I was told that the only files our project ever had were in either Harkin's private apartment in Ottawa or his office....

The one man who knew all sides of the official Canadian government

position, or at least a great deal more than I did, was James Harkin. At first I felt sure that he would eventually release his information, but the last time I saw him his position still was that Borden had trusted him to keep certain matters secret. He had not been released from that pledge during Borden's lifetime. With the Prime Minister's death, Harkin felt, the secret became inviolate.²⁴⁹

It is unsurprising, given the circumstances, that negotiations and preparations for the expedition were hushed up as much as possible and that they proceeded in a sort of cloak-and-dagger atmosphere, replete with suspected spies, traitors, predators, invaders, and villains. But why was this secrecy maintained, especially after Denmark had made it clear that she had no designs on the Canadian archipelago? Several possible answers may be suggested, all of them speculative, each containing probably a modicum of truth, but some more than others.

First, fear about what Denmark might do in the archipelago was gradually replaced by concern over what Canada herself ought to do – hence the decision to institute regular patrol voyages and establish RCMP posts to establish a tangible form of Canadian sovereignty. It may well have been thought that this effort would proceed more efficiently, and with less opposition, with minimal publicity of what had already happened and particularly to the Danish commitments of June 1921.

Second, the affair was handled mainly by senior civil servants and senior cabinet officials. Civil servants are normally, by virtue of their calling, unable to speak freely and openly; Cabinet ministers are not likely to do so, in a muddled and unsatisfactory affair such as this one, if it can be avoided. There seems to have

been a marked and understandable reluctance on the part of both elements to draw any unnecessary publicity to the affair.

Third, there may have been an accidental or circumstantial aspect, in that even if the affair was not deliberately withheld from public view, it gradually receded into the background regardless. Nobody was given the responsibility of telling the full story in detail, and those who could have done so gradually passed from the scene.

Fourth, even though certain issues which had occupied the centre of the stage in 1920, 1921, and 1922 had apparently been settled, they were so bound up with others that remained (or were likely to arise) that continued silence seemed advisable. One need think only of Wrangel Island, the Sverdrup Islands, and the expeditions of MacMillan (the subjects of subsequent chapters) to appreciate the likelihood of this attitude and the weight it would have.

Fifth, there may have been an aftermath of feeling among senior officials that they had botched the whole affair and that silence would spare them the embarrassment that would result if their ineptness were publicized. That is to say, they had made a big issue out of what had turned out to be a very small one, and then they had mishandled it by overreacting to presumed threats posed by Stefansson, Danes, and Americans. Regarding Stefansson in particular, senior officials in the civil service had been determined that they would not follow his lead, yet in some respects they had done so, naïvely if only temporarily, and had, as they saw it afterwards, been led down the garden path. So far as the political leaders were concerned, any inhibition of this sort would attach itself mainly to the Meighen administration, which gave up office in December 1921. This might help to account for the silence until that time.

Mackenzie King's administration, taking office immediately afterwards, presumably was not subject to such inhibitions, at least at the outset. In such circumstances, it is known for an incoming administration to point to the failings of its predecessor with considerable relish. There seems to be little evidence of this, however, which in turn suggests that the King government either found itself in accord with Arctic policy as developed during the preceding Conservative years or, if it disagreed, chose to remain discreetly silent.

Whatever the reason or reasons for the deep silence, the records of the projected expedition

of 1921 were left to gather dust in government files. Thus the Canadian public remained in almost total ignorance of this extraordinary affair, even though it embodies what is in many ways the key story concerning Canada's Arctic territories in the immediate years after the First World War. More than that, it established certain broad lines of policy and basic patterns of thought and behaviour respecting the North, which became almost self-perpetuating, and thus it went a long way to determining the kind of administration the Canadian government applied to its northern territories for years to come.