

PECKFORD EXPLAINS OIL STANCE

By John Cairns

Newfoundland Premier Brian Peckford visited Charlotte-town briefly last Monday. He was in town to address the UPEI Businessman's Dinner in the evening, and in the afternoon he spoke to Island media at a press conference in the Kelley Building. Mr Peckford's Island visit was the beginning of a campaign to publically explain Newfoundland's stance on resource development. Not surprisingly, resource development was the leading topic of the press conference.

Premier Peckford declared that Newfoundland, on the threshold of possible oil wealth, is not as resource greedy as many people feel. He admitted that the province's policy of provincial resource ownership is strong, but he does not feel it will hurt Canada. On the contrary, he argued, Confederation will be enhanced along with Newfoundland. As Newfoundlanders get jobs in the oil industry the Canadian unemployment rate will fall, and so will unemployment insurance payments.

Above all, Mr. Peckford stressed that local resource ownership is vital if regional disparity is ever to end. "There is no way," he declared, "that a Canadian province like Newfoundland can get out of the financial strait jacket it is in without resource ownership. You can't truly benefit from something you don't own."

Newfoundland does expect

the new federal government to challenge the province's resource policy, but Peckford is prepared to fight even to the Supreme Court. From the province's point of view, however, that might be dangerous. The federal court would probably favor the central government and a strong federalism in any decision.

Mr. Peckford did not deny that Newfoundland has a poor record in resource management. He did say that energy findings will be handled differently. The province has begun various development regulations, and the premier challenges anyone to find better ones anywhere. They are strict, and the oil companies objected at first. They even left temporarily, but they soon got hungry, and came submissively back.

Questions have arisen regarding the location of Newfoundland's oil. Some deposits are outside Canada's two hundred mile Canadian offshore limit, and the wealth may have to be shared with other nations, especially developing ones. Premier Peckford does not oppose the principle of sharing with the needy, but he intends to claim any resources inside the Canadian continental shelf which extends as far as six hundred miles. He justifies his intention saying that charity begins at home, and that Newfoundland, as Canada's most underdeveloped province, deserves foremost attention.

Peckford warns that his province's energy findings may not be as great as

commonly anticipated. If the wealth is there, however, he knows how to use it. The first priority will be to repay Newfoundland's provincial debt, the highest in Canada. The fisheries are also in line for some upgrading with hundreds of thousands of dollars needed for new trawlers alone.

their own fishermen would bear the brunt of any mistake.

As the press conference drew to its end, Premier Peckford assured his listeners that Newfoundland will act in the interests of conservation. The province intends to control the valve on its



Premier Peckford at press Conference in Kelley Building

Equally needy is the Newfoundland forest industry, a resource which has been dreadfully raped and plundered. Programs of reforestation and campaigns against the spruce bud worm will be given top priority. The final goal is to bring the province's social services up to more acceptable national levels.

In light of the uncertain extent of his province's oil industry, Peckford warns that the fisheries must remain Newfoundland's primary concern. Thus, it concerns the premier that energy development may threaten the fisheries. An oil spill amid fishing waters would prove disastrous, and the possibility has fish processors worried. Peckford's comment is that this danger makes it even more imperative for the province to own and control its own resources. Outside interests operating on the basis of international oil supplies and demands might tend to be careless. Newfoundlanders, on the other hand, would exercise utmost caution knowing that

new resource, and it will not squander it. The pressures of international energy shortages will be great, but Peckford promises to keep his eye on the long term benefits of a continuing fuel supply.

The premier downplayed the possibility that energy costs in Atlantic Canada might soon fall because of Newfoundland oil. The best to be hoped for is a price stabilization. Mr. Peckford didn't say that rising energy costs were good, but he did mention that it was the rising value of oil that had encouraged Newfoundland exploration in the first place.

Newfoundland is Canada's youngest province, it has been the poorest one, and it is probably the one least experienced in big business. Its future success depends on its ability to adapt to its unexpected affluence. Many a fool and his money have been soon parted. Let's hope that Newfoundland does not become a part of this long tradition.

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