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State, company, and community relations at the Polaris mine (Nunavut)
Les relations de l'État, de l'entreprise et de la communauté à la mine Polaris (Nunavut)

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Résumé de l'article

L'emploi des Inuit dans l'industrie minière a reçu très peu d'attention de la part des historiens bien que l'exploitation minière ait été présente dans l'Arctique depuis les années 1950. En utilisant la mine Polaris de la petite île Cornwallis (Nunavut) comme étude de cas, cet article se concentre sur la décision du gouvernement canadien de ne plus soutenir le développement minier dans les années 1970 et 1980, sur l'emploi des Inuit dans l'industrie minière et sur les difficultés des Inuit de Resolute Bay à obtenir un emploi chez Polaris. Avant Polaris, le gouvernement fédéral voyait dans les mines de l'Arctique, en particulier Rankin Inlet (1951-1962) et Nanisivik (1976-2002), un moyen de moderniser les Inuit. Cependant, puisque ces premières mines arctiques avaient échoué à répondre à cet objectif, l'État, désillusionné, hésitait à fournir un financement à la compagnie Cominco pour qu'elle exploite la mine Polaris en 1973. L'État n'a pas exigé que Cominco signe un accord formel pour l'emploi des Inuit, lui laissant la responsabilité de son propre programme de recrutement. Malheureusement pour les gens de Resolute Bay, Cominco n'envisageait pas l'embauche locale comme une priorité, et la compagnie a ignoré et marginalisé les Inuit de Resolute Bay qui voulaient travailler à la mine. Comme l'exploitation minière a été la plus grande industrie dans l'économie du nord canadien et qu'elle l'est actuellement de plus en plus avec de nouveaux projets de développement, il est important de comprendre la dynamique historique entre les compagnies minières, l'État et les communautés locales.

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Heather Green*

Résumé: Les relations de l'État, de l'entreprise et de la communauté à la mine Polaris (Nunavut)

L'emploi des Inuit dans l'industrie minière a reçu très peu d'attention de la part des historiens bien que l'exploitation minière ait été présente dans l'Arctique depuis les années 1950. En utilisant la mine Polaris de la petite île Cornwallis (Nunavut) comme étude de cas, cet article se concentre sur la décision du gouvernement canadien de ne plus soutenir le développement minier dans les années 1970 et 1980, sur l'emploi des Inuit dans l'industrie minière et sur les difficultés des Inuit de Resolute Bay à obtenir un emploi chez Polaris. Avant Polaris, le gouvernement fédéral voyait dans les mines de l'Arctique, en particulier Rankin Inlet (1951-1962) et Nanisivik (1976-2002), un moyen de moderniser les Inuit. Cependant, puisque ces premières mines arctiques avaient échoué à répondre à cet objectif, l'État, désillusionné, hésitait à fournir un financement à la compagnie Cominco pour qu'elle exploite la mine Polaris en 1973. L'État n'a pas exigé que Cominco signe un accord formel pour l'emploi des Inuit, lui laissant la responsabilité de son propre programme de recrutement. Malheureusement pour les gens de Resolute Bay, Cominco n'envisageait pas l'embauche locale comme une priorité, et la compagnie a ignoré et marginalisé les Inuit de Resolute Bay qui voulaient travailler à la mine. Comme l'exploitation minière a été la plus grande industrie dans l'économie du nord canadien et qu'elle l'est actuellement de plus en plus avec de nouveaux projets de développement, il est important de comprendre la dynamique historique entre les compagnies minières, l'État et les communautés locales.

Abstract: State, company, and community relations at the Polaris mine (Nunavut)

Inuit employment in the mining industry has received very little attention from historians, although mining has been in the Arctic since the 1950s. Using the Polaris mine (1982-2002) on Little Cornwallis Island, Nunavut, as a case study, this article focuses on the Canadian government's shift away from supporting mining developments in the late 1970s to early 1980s, on Inuit employment in the mining industry, and on the difficulties of Inuit from Resolute Bay in obtaining employment at Polaris. Previous to Polaris, the federal government saw Arctic mines, particularly Rankin Inlet (1951-1962) and Nanisivik (1976-2002), as a path to modernisation for the Inuit. However, as these earlier Arctic mines failed in this particular goal, the State became disillusioned and weary of providing financial support by the time Cominco began planning the Polaris mine in 1973. The federal government did not require Cominco to sign a formal agreement for Inuit employment, leaving the company responsible to develop its own hiring agenda. Unfortunately for the people of Resolute Bay, the company agenda did not include hiring

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locals as a priority, and bypassed and marginalised Resolute Bay Inuit who were keen on working at the mine. As mining has been the largest industry in the Canadian northern economy and is currently growing and beginning new development projects, it is important to understand the historical dynamics between mining companies, the State, and local communities.

Introduction

In the 1950s and 1960s the Canadian State was very interested and involved in the northern mining industry. It participated in negotiation with mining corporations and often heavily supported developments it believed would benefit the national economy or, if the mine seemed promising, would promote the government's modernisation agenda by integrating Aboriginal people into the wage-earning workforce (Lim 2013: 31). As late as 1976 with the opening of the Nanisivik mine, the Government of Canada continued to fund and endorse Arctic mines for their Inuit employment potential (ibid.: 56). During this same period, however, it seemed ambivalent about supporting the development of Cominco's Polaris (75˚N, 96˚W) lead-zinc mine on Little Cornwallis Island, Nunavut (Figures 1 and 2). Cominco's planning and development stretched from 1973 to 1982 when Polaris opened. Polaris was the third mine in the Eastern Arctic (after Rankin Inlet and Nanisivik) and the northernmost base metal mine worldwide at the time (Taylor 1985: 10). Resolute Bay, as the community nearest the Polaris operation (60 km away), was identified by its residents and by the company as the mine's partner town.

At the time, Cominco and the Polaris operation received much media attention, even internationally. *The New York Times* (Malcolm 1982) referred to Polaris as "a guiding star for the resource development of Canada's vast northern territories" and the Spartanburg, South Carolina *Herald-Journal* (Harrigan 1981), calling the High Arctic the "last frontier," referred to Cominco as an "industrial pioneer" and stated, "to open a mine in this remote region is an act of industrial daring and courage." Historical case studies are one way of examining past approaches to mineral development to understand and incorporate improved methods of local engagement and inclusion. This article focuses on the Canadian government's shift away from supporting mining developments in the late 1970s to early 1980s, on Inuit employment in the mining industry, and on the difficulties of Inuit from Resolute Bay in obtaining employment at Polaris. Although the archival records do not directly explain why, it is likely that Polaris offered the North fewer potential benefits than did contemporary mines such as Nanisivik and Rankin Inlet. For example, Cominco did not seek to stimulate the northern economy through Polaris, as most of the labour and infrastructure was imported and the ore product was exported. Furthermore, because Cominco intended to import most of the labour force, it seemed unlikely that the mine would provide local people with much employment. It thus seemed a poor candidate for aiding the modernisation agenda (ibid.: 153). As will be seen, data from interviews also suggest

that Polaris failed to employ a substantial amount of Inuit employees and thus left the community of Resolute Bay feeling overlooked in mining development and operation.

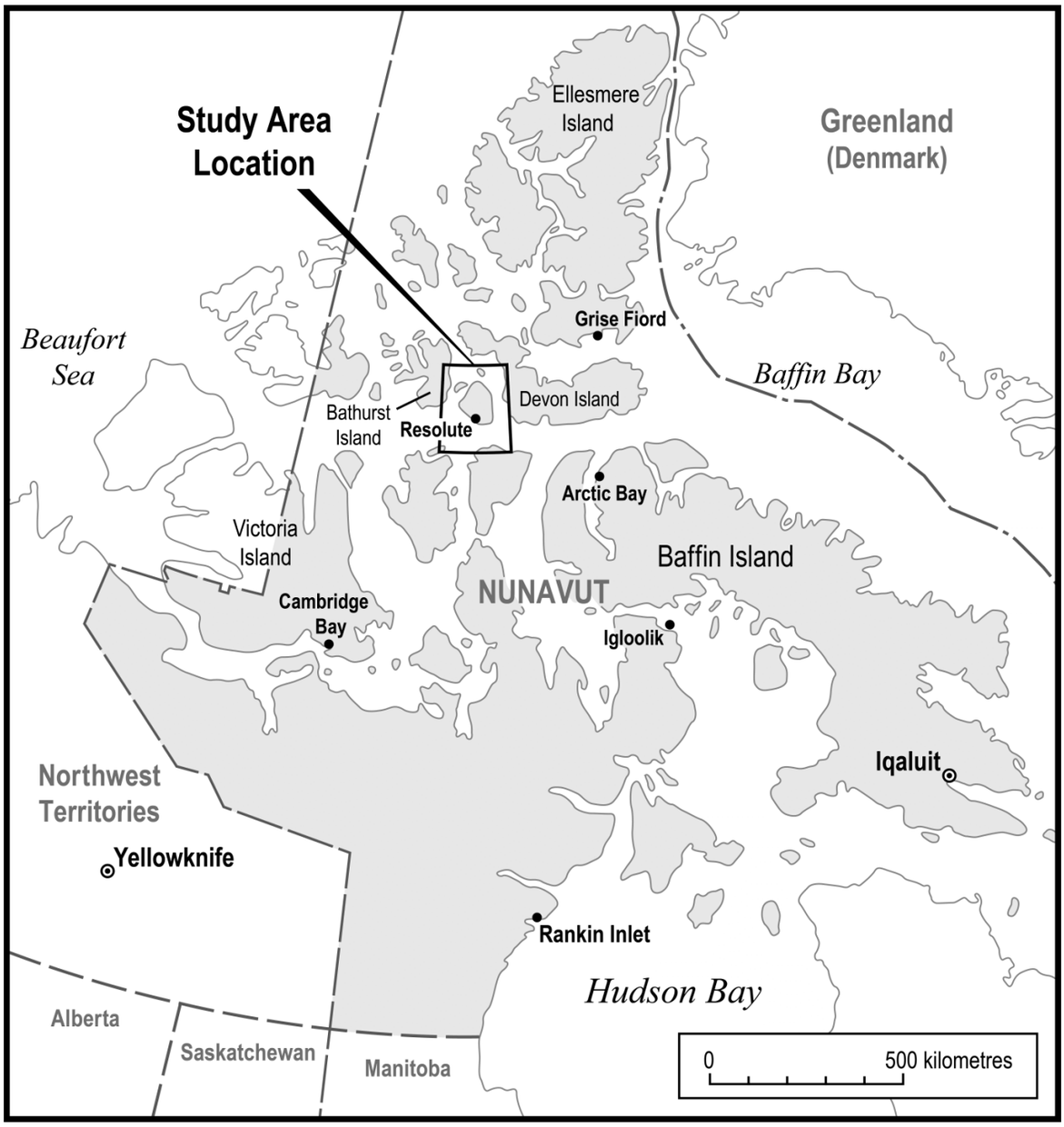
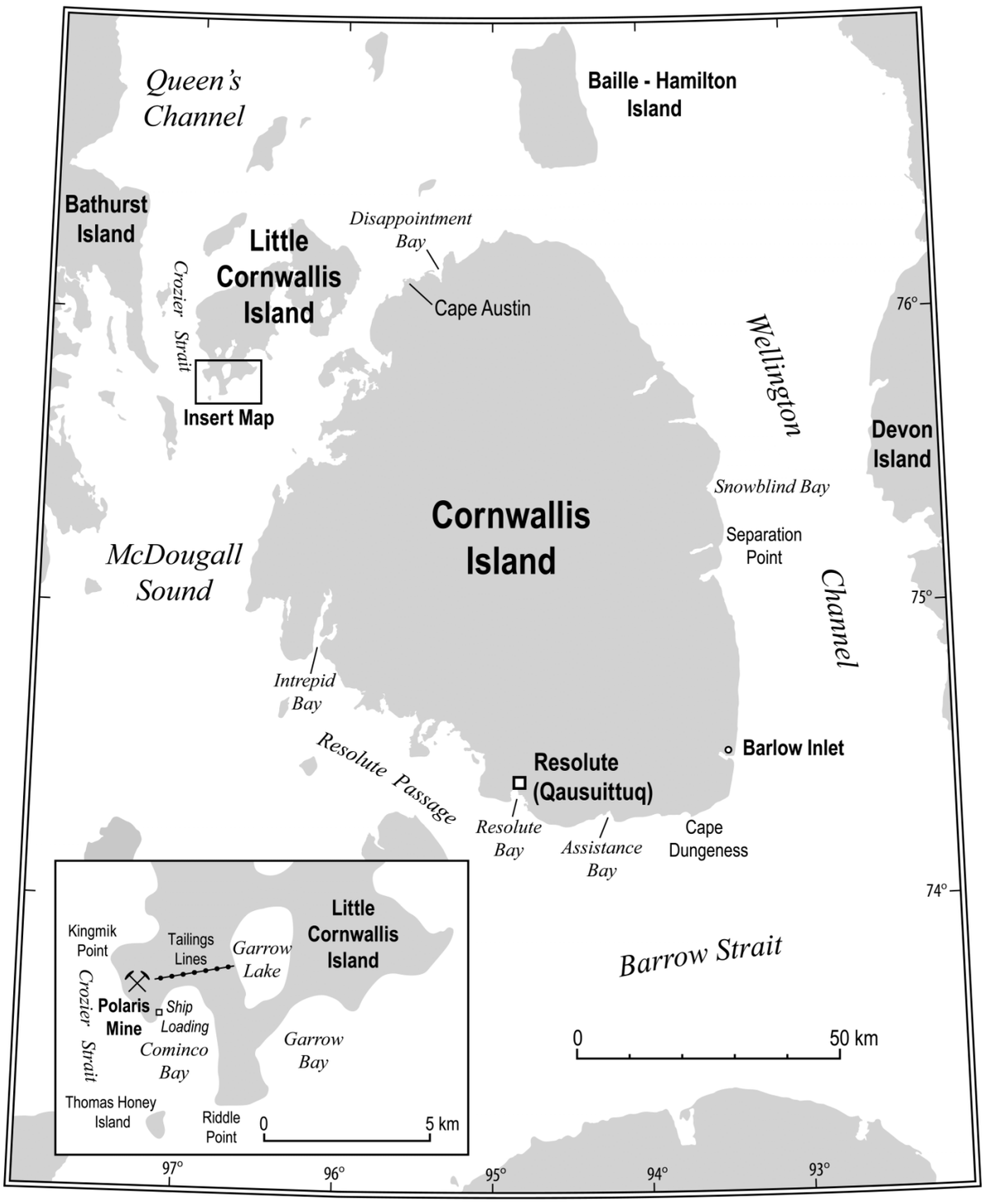


Figure 1. Nunavut Territory, Canada. Map by Michael Fisher.



Map by Michael J. Fisher, *cartographer*

Figure 2. Cornwallis Island and Little Cornwallis Island, indicating Resolute Bay and the Polaris mine. Map by Michael Fisher.

Methods

This research was undertaken for my M.A. thesis in the Department of History at Memorial University of Newfoundland (Green 2012). It draws on both archival sources and oral history interviews with former Polaris miners and community members from Resolute Bay. There are several archival sources: the Royal British Columbia Museum Archives; Prince of Whales Northern Heritage Centre Archives; Wilfrid Laurier University Archives; and Library and Archives Canada. The oral history interviews were collected in Resolute Bay over a two-week period in May and June 2012. I interviewed nine residents, seven of whom were former Polaris workers and two community members. The aim was to understand Inuit experience, opinions, and memories of the Polaris mine. Many of those interviewed have also permitted the use of their names, but, for the sake of consistency, this article will identify interviewees by interview number. I attempted to contact Cominco officials to interview them but was declined permission.

The interviews ranged over many topics as I asked general questions about the Polaris mine and allowed the interviewees to speak freely of their experiences and memories. Most of the interviews contain information about working at Polaris, about the development process with stress on the consultation phase, and about current economic and environmental concerns of northern mining developments. Comparing it to written sources, I analysed the information gathered in interviews primarily as an authoritative voice on Inuit experience and to supplement the lack of written records after the 1982 period when the mine began operation and during the post-closure stage. I am aware that the information comes from a small, select group of interviewees and cannot necessarily be considered representative of all of Resolute Bay residents' opinions and experiences.

Historical context

As early as 1898, when gold mining came to the Yukon, mining has been the largest industry in Canada's northern economy, specifically for the Yukon, the Northwest Territories (NWT), and present-day Nunavut (Taylor 1985: 1). Activity expanded in the 1930s[1] and boomed in the 1950s and 1960s. The federal government heavily promoted development of the mining industry in those years, particularly with Prime Minister John Diefenbaker's "Road to Resources" and "Northern Vision" campaigns.[2] Northern mining offered not only the possibility of economic expansion but also a venue for Inuit modernisation.

During the 1940s and early 1950s, the federal government had "encouraged the Inuit to live off the land and follow a traditional way of life" (Gombay 2010: 83).

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1 Four mines opened in the Northwest Territories in the 1930s. They were Eldorado (1932-1940, 1944-1960), Con (1938-2003), Negus (1939-1952), and Giant (1948-2004) (Sandlos and Keeling 2012).

2 John Diefenbaker held office from 1957 to 1963.

Unfortunately, the Inuit engaged in a cash economy based on one commodity—white fox furs. After its decline in the 1940s and collapse in the 1950s, the Inuit were left destitute and the government had no choice but to intervene (Tester and Kulchyski 1994: 41). At that time, Inuit in the Arctic were experiencing economic crisis, severe poverty, and epidemics such as influenza, typhoid, and polio, with the result that "sustaining oneself through trapping was increasingly impossible" (ibid.: 44-48). To supplement their meagre earnings, the Canadian government offered direct relief and the Family Allowance. Total government relief for Inuit rose from $35,000 in 1945 to $266,000 in 1950 (McPherson 2003: 3). Because the government did not want to create dependent wards of the state, it had to decide the direction of its northern Aboriginal policy—whether Inuit should become part of mainstream society or remain separate.

Ultimately, the State decided that Inuit should be integrated into mainstream society, or "modernised," to reduce the cost of relief. The mining industry was a way for the State to encourage Inuit integration through wage-earning employment and to decrease Inuit dependency on the State (Boulter 2011). Mining companies seemed to agree that hiring Inuit workers was beneficial for business as well. In 1973, a Cominco consultant for the Polaris development wrote a report based on a socio-economic study, stating, "Since it appears that the Inuit are able to live and work in a wage-employment environment, the question then arises, are there sufficient reasons to justify hiring them for the Polaris operation?" (Barrett 1973: 11). To hire Inuit meant that companies had to make costly changes to their practices and objectives. At the same time, it was difficult to attract a southern workforce because of the Arctic climate and isolation, and companies hoped that local Inuit workers would offer a solution to staff turnover (ibid.: 20).

The federal government encouraged Inuit to work in mining. This encouragement was shown in socio-economic agreements that included employment goals, such as the Strathcona Agreement between the federal government and Mineral Resources International for the Nanisivik mine. The federal Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) believed that mining operations could bring benefits to the North through employment opportunities, particularly in areas where employment options were limited (Lim 2013: 36). According to the archival records consulted for this research, Aboriginal people were not paid less than non-Aboriginal people in the same positions. However, wages varied according to education and skill, and Aboriginal workers (both Inuit and non-Inuit) were usually employed in lower-paying unskilled positions (Cominco 1976; DIAND 1982).

Inuit in the NWT and present-day Nunavut were equally keen on getting wage-paying mining jobs; many had a desire to obtain employment and decision-making authority within the mining industry. The Rankin Inlet mine gave the federal government its first opportunity to implement its modernisation ideals. It was also one of the first opportunities, along with construction of the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line, for Inuit to engage in industrial wage-paying employment (Lim 2013: 31).

Before the 1960s, many mine companies made informal agreements with the government that they would hire Aboriginal workers; however, no specific numbers were set for how many Aboriginal employees companies should hire or what percentage of the mine's workforce should be Aboriginal (Coates 1991: 194). Not all hiring agreements were informal. The State heavily supported the development of the Nanisivik mine shortly before the time of the Polaris negotiations (1973-1980). Along with financial support of $21 million, the federal government signed the Strathcona Agreement with Mineral Resources International (MRI) to ensure Inuit employment. The Agreement stipulated that 60% of the Nanisivik workforce of 219 would be Inuit in the first three years of operation (Lim 2013: 36). The government believed that the Nanisivik mine would integrate Inuit into mainstream society through capital and wage work and would conversely decrease their dependency on government relief and their attachment to the hunting and trapping economy (Midgley 2012: 126). The State believed that mining employment was the first step to Inuit modernisation, and Nanisivik became a model for future mines, specifically Polaris.

All indications suggest that formal agreements on Aboriginal employment did not guarantee that a substantial percentage of a mine's workforce would be Aboriginal, although mining companies were expected to uphold these goals. It seems likely that further federal financial support may have been contingent on the success of employment quotas and modernisation aims. The Cominco-owned Pine Point mine, west of Fort Resolution in the Northwest Territories, at peak annual employment had 70 Aboriginal workers—only 17% of its total workforce (DIAND 1982). As late as 1978, the Aboriginal population accounted for only 5.3% of the workforce of all northern mining jobs (ibid.). S. Collymore from DIAND reported the government effort to bring Aboriginals into the wage-earning system as a "complete failure" (ibid.). By the time of the Polaris development, the State was less enthused about the possibility of Arctic mines as modernisation venues. Further, Polaris offered fewer possibilities for reaching such goals.

Planning a mine: Company-State relations at Polaris

While the Canadian government was eager for development in the North and thus allowed mining companies to negotiate favourable terms, a project had to meet certain requirements to receive government financial support. Following the Nanisivik operation, such requirements included the capability to increase economic development and employment in the North and to further the modernisation agenda (Clancy 1987: 452-458). As company-State negotiations make clear, the Polaris operation provided little for either goal.

The development of Polaris began when Bankeno Mines originally discovered lead-zinc mineral deposits on Little Cornwallis Island in 1960 and staked the first claim (Taylor 1985: 124). Cominco bought the claims in 1964 and, upon further exploration, discovered the Polaris lead-zinc ore body in 1971. Formerly known as the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company of Canada, Vancouver-based Cominco Ltd. (now Teck

Cominco) was one of the largest Canadian natural resource companies with mine sites around the world (Sandlos and Keeling 2012: 13). Cominco owned and operated the Con mine in Yellowknife (1932-2003), Pine Point in the Northwest Territories (1964-1988), and Black Angel in Greenland (1973-1990) at the time they developed Polaris in Nunavut.

Planning of the Polaris mine began in 1973, when Cominco proposed the project to the federal government. Initial negotiations did not give the State much promise for stimulating the national or regional economy, as Cominco intended to do most of its servicing with Europe and ship most of its infrastructure and labour in from southern Canada. Cominco largely left it up to the government to take charge of Inuit training and hiring, and there was no mention of any potential modernisation benefits this mine could bring to the Arctic (Cominco 1973). In its original proposal, the company requested infrastructure assistance from the government to provide housing, recreational, and municipal services, and medical and educational services. Cominco also wanted a tax-free period for personal incomes (applicable to income earned at the mine by residents of particular regions) and income tax "zone allowances" because of the expenses due to an isolated location and harsh climate. It also asked the government to declare a "duty free zone" to reduce operating costs. Cominco recommended that the government provide facilities and resources for training of Inuit workers, as well as infrastructure capital, icebreaker services, ocean tariffs, marine insurance, and permission to ship extracted ore to Europe for processing (Cominco 1973). In its proposal, Cominco referred to its past expertise in northern mining, specifically its Pine Point operation, claiming that the present capital of the NWT evolved from what was once virtually a "Cominco company mining town" and that 50% of Aboriginal people in the region who had ever held a wage-paying job were employed by Cominco at some point (ibid.).

In the pre-development stage of Polaris, the key players in negotiations were Cominco and the federal government departments of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) and Energy, Mines, and Resources (DEMR). Although the State was reluctant to provide Cominco with funding, DIAND suggested that Cominco benefited the northern economy by stimulating spending, specifically by injecting money into the economy through Inuit employment (Taylor 1985: 123). Correspondence from Judd Buchanan (Minister of DIAND) to Fred Burnet (CEO of Cominco) in March of 1976 indicates that the federal government would not provide Cominco with its own icebreaker or tax exemptions, nor would it waive NWT royalties, or allow expenditure write-offs (DIAND n.d.). The government demanded that Cominco continue communicating with the residents of Resolute Bay and other communities, that it develop work schedules and transportation arrangements, and that Inuit have the chance to voice their opinions. Finally, the government demanded that Cominco give preference to Canadian services, materials, and equipment rather than European products and services (ibid.). In May of 1976, Fred Burnet wrote to Judd Buchanan, declaring that Cominco was disappointed with the conditions proposed by the government and therefore had decided not to proceed with development of the mine

(ibid.). Government officials expressed disappointment. Together, DIAND and DEMR launched an initiative in 1976 to reopen discussions with Cominco (ibid.).

It is difficult to know exactly how much support if any (financial or in services) Cominco received from the government, as the archival record is not clear. It appears that the government did not grant Cominco much in the way of financial support. Polaris did not have a formal agreement with the government like the Strathcona Agreement for the Nanisivik mine (Lim 2013: 36). Instead, Cominco signed a letter of understanding, an informal agreement, with DIAND in 1980, which did not include an employment quota for Inuit hiring. Dan McKinnon of Northern Resources and Economic Planning[3] stated that Nanisivik had a formal agreement with the federal government because it was granted $21 million for its development, indicating that the absence of a formal agreement kept Polaris from receiving such financial support (CARC 1979-1980). A memorandum of understanding was signed between Cominco and the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) in August 1981, but it did not include an Inuit employment quota at the mine even though the GNWT was concerned about the socio-economic implications (Graham 1982: v).

Although none of the documents consulted by the author specifically state why the federal government did not deem the Polaris project worthy of financial support, or one which required an Inuit hiring agreement, it is reasonable to assume that its proposal did not seem likely to stimulate the regional economy or further the modernisation agenda. Subtle hints throughout the archival record suggest that Cominco began development at a time when the State started to realise that the ideal of Arctic mining as a gateway to Inuit modernisation was not succeeding as expected. Correspondence between Cominco and the State indicate that the shortcomings of the Nanisivik mine were clear to both parties. Nanisivik had opened in 1976, six years before the opening of the Polaris mine. Within that first six years of operation, Nanisivik did not live up to its expectations. It failed to reach its 60% target of Inuit employees, as set out in the Strathcona Agreement; there were only 40 in the first three years and in 1979 only 10 (McPherson 2003: 92). Relief payments actually increased in the area (Lim 2013: 43-47).

Up to the time when Polaris opened, Nanisivik had failed to discourage Inuit from hunting and trapping by bringing industrial employment. In general, mining often brought social problems, which the State was then left to look after (Boulter 2011; Midgley 2012). Still, unlike the case with previous mines like those in Rankin Inlet and Nanisivik, paid work was not new to Resolute Bay. As early as 1958, Inuit from Resolute Bay were working as guides for expeditions and trips, working at the Canadian air force base that had opened in 1949, and working as store clerks (DIAND 1958).

With the Polaris mine, Cominco likely wanted to avoid a repeat of the lack of consultation with Arctic Bay residents about interest in mining work at Nanisivik (Lim

3 Northern Resources and Economic Planning was a branch of DIAND.

2013: 38). Beginning in 1972, Cominco sent J.E. Barrett, a consultant, to some hamlets and communities to interview Inuit about their potential interest in working at Polaris (Barrett 1973, 1976) (Figure 3). Perhaps Cominco also wanted to avoid turning Polaris into a "government mine" with the State overseeing the operations and regulations, as it had at Nanisivik (Lim 2013: 32).

Figure 3. Unidentified people at community consultation prior to construction of the Polaris mine, Resolute Bay, April 1980. Source: NWT Archives/Terry Foster Fonds, N-2009-006: 0003.

Inuit employment at the Polaris mine

Employment data is limited in this study. There are very few government records about Polaris, and the company records are missing for the period after the mine opened in 1982[4] (Figures 4 and 5). The only available sources are the files that Cominco had created prior to operation and that indicated what it *planned* to do. Without any further records, there is no way of knowing whether it actually followed through on these plans. Because of a lack of Cominco employment records, analysis of Inuit employment is possible only through interviews with Inuit who worked at Polaris. More importantly, interviewee information allows for a deeper understanding of Inuit experience with mineral development than company statistics and records could have

4 With the exception of one statistic by Di Menna (2004) cited in Bowes-Lyons et al. (2009: 387), I have found no company documents with data on Polaris employees, i.e. where they came from, and how long they were at the mine.

provided if available. This section will thus present interviewee data from former Polaris workers and Resolute Bay residents.

Figure 4. Polaris mine, 1982. Photo by Philip Uvilluk. Source: NWT Archives/Dept. of Public Works and Services Fonds, G-1995-001: 1525.

Because the State provided little (or no) financial support, and did not require Cominco to sign a hiring agreement, the company was solely responsible for implementing Aboriginal hiring practices. In 1976, Cominco again sent Barrett and some company officials to seven communities that would likely supply Inuit employees (Barrett 1976).[5] Barrett's report indicated that the residents of the seven communities expressed no opposition to the mine. In fact, Inuit hoped to work at the mine, and those in Resolute Bay expected such employment.

Interviewees suggest that Resolute Bay residents looked forward to the opening of the mine because of the job opportunities that Cominco led them to believe would result (Interviewee 7). However, these opportunities materialised in very small numbers. One interviewee said that the promise of employment was soon broken, when the mine opened and "more and more people down south work more and they [Cominco] said they had enough workers right now" and hired very few Inuit (ibid.). She went on to argue that "the [Resolute Bay] people who were supposed […] to be working, […] that's what [Cominco] said in the beginning anyways, and then none of

5 These communities were Talurjuaq (Spence Bay), Kugaaruk (Pelly Bay), Uqsuqtuuq (Gjoa Haven), Iqaluktuuttiaq (Cambridge Bay), Ulukhaktok (Holman Island), Kugluktuk (Coppermine), and Qausuittuq (Resolute Bay).

them is working" (Interviewee 7). For some, this misunderstanding (or betrayal, depending on the source) is critical to the narrative of the Polaris mine (Interviewees 7 and 8).

Figure 5. Ore shed, Polaris mine, ca. 1990. Photo: LCI. Source: NWT Archives/Northwest Territories. Dept. of Public Works and Services Fonds, G-1995-001: 1517.

Out of 250 Polaris employees, fewer than 30 were Inuit during peak employment periods, making up less than 10% of the mine's total workforce (Di Menna in Bowes-Lyon et al. 2009: 387). According to the nine interviewees in Resolute Bay, only 10 people from Resolute Bay worked at Polaris over the 20 years of operation.[6] Although it did employ some Inuit, it is important to ask why the company employed such a low percentage. In *The Calgary Herald*, Hank Giegerich, Vice President of Cominco, stated that Cominco saw the value and benefit of hiring Inuit as they were accustomed to the harsh climate and provided a readily available workforce near the mine. However, Cominco had trouble in the past (referring to their Pine Point operation) with turnover of Aboriginal employees (Farquharson 1981). Indeed, in 1976, out of 92 Aboriginal employees at the Pine Point mine, 28 were reported absent without official leave (AWOL). In many cases, they never returned to work, leaving the mine recruitment officers to replace the AWOL men (Cominco 1976).

6 There might have been others, but people I spoke with all repeated the same number of 10 people (or less).

Another belief that stemmed from past experience was that Aboriginal workers would quit after being employed only a short time. In some cases, such short tenure resulted from "target labour," in which Aboriginal people would have a specific cash goal they were working to earn. After earning that amount, they would leave mine work. In most cases in the North, the target income was enough to purchase hunting and trapping equipment from company stores (Coates 1991: 72). According to the same 1976 Pine Point employment records, out of 92 Aboriginal employees at the mine, 39 had quit (Cominco 1976). The average tenure for Aboriginal employees was from one to three months, although some worked for a few years, the longest tenure in 1976 being eight years and nine months (ibid.).

From 1971 to 1973, during the beginning of Polaris planning, Cominco re-evaluated its Aboriginal employment rates at its Pine Point mine, noting how low Aboriginal participation had been. The company wanted to fix past mistakes and work on developing methods to attract more Aboriginal employees. Cominco wrote that the Pine Point training agreement was not as successful as hoped and that the goal of its Trainee Employment Advisory Committee, established in 1971, was to "enhance employment opportunities for the northern resident, to help create a stable and reliable workforce, to establish an effective communication group to identify and solve Aboriginal and other employment problems" (Cominco 1971).

Instead of an agreement with the government, Cominco had planned to launch a recruitment program to attract Inuit workers to the Polaris mine. The method and structure of this recruitment process is not clear, but Cominco also developed a training program to attract Inuit workers called Operation Katak, this word meaning the arched doorway of an igloo. Operation Katak had two phases. The first one was during the year before start-up. This phase was to ensure that Inuit had "an equal chance at the training opportunities an operating mine provides" (Cominco n.d.). The second phase took place during operation to insure that the workplace was supportive of Inuit needs. Through this recruitment process, Cominco intended to employ 30 Inuit in "general hire" (unskilled) positions. General hire workers needed no formal education and did not necessarily have to speak English. Cominco stated that "the purpose of the General Hire will be to introduce Inuit to the work environment, and to assist in the 'culture shock' of adapting to a new, strange, crazy and demanding environment" (ibid.).

The percentage of Inuit workers was clearly low at the mine, but the interviewees differed on the reason. Some believed that Inuit did not want to work there, whereas others believed that Cominco simply did not hire Inuit. Some of the interviewees stated, with some resentment, that many people from the community wanted to work at the mine but were subjected to a urine test. Traces of drugs and alcohol were found in many urine samples from Resolute Bay residents, thus preventing them from gaining employment at the mine. One interviewee considered this practice unfair because, she believed, white workers did not have to submit a urine sample (Interviewee 7).

In 2001, one year before closure, Bill Throp, superintendent of personnel at Polaris, attributed the low numbers of Inuit employees to Inuit reluctance to embrace

the mining industry (George 2001). Ten years earlier, in reference to Cominco's Pine Point operation, Hank Giegerich, Vice President of Cominco, had pointed to various problems: separation from family; alcohol abuse; and employees disappearing from work to hunt (Farquharson 1981). Many interviewees gave similar reasons why Inuit may have avoided working at the mine. They said that more people from Resolute Bay did not work there mainly because they did not want to be separated from family and home. One interviewee reported that he quit after working three or four summers "because of leaving the family, it was [...] kinda hard staying away from the kids" and he believed that was a reason why others may not have tried working at the mine after it had been opened for a decade or more (Interviewee 5). Another interviewee reminisced about discrimination experienced on the job and segregation in the accommodation facilities, stating, "It wasn't equal over there." Such practices may have deterred some Inuit from working at the mine (Interviewee 8).

Polaris seemed to have avoided the problems that Pine Point experienced with workers going AWOL for hunting. Interviewees agreed that Cominco was reasonable in recognising Inuit employees' need to hunt (Interviewee 9). Cominco aimed to grant Inuit employees a choice between a "southern" work schedule of twelve weeks on and three weeks off or an "Inuit" work schedule of six weeks on and four weeks off (Outcrop Ltd. 1980: ii). With this flexibility, the company did not have trouble at Polaris with employees unexpectedly leaving. Most of those employed at the mine, with the exception of Interviewee 5 quoted above, did not quit their jobs. Instead, many were laid off over time. One former worker was employed for the full 20 years of mine operation and was the only Inuk employee still employed at the time of closure (Interviewee 4).

Resolute Bay interviewees suggested that Inuit employees were valued if they were unskilled workers; otherwise, they were seen as taking jobs away from other (non-Aboriginal or southern) workers (Interviewees 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, and 9). Inuit workers had positions that required less skill and education and thus paid lower wages. The employees from Resolute Bay seemed pleased with their earnings. One former worker stated: "It was awesome! I was making big bucks!" although the same interviewee also mentioned discrimination. It was difficult to get the better jobs (skilled positions) at Polaris because "Cominco had a set crew of 250 people that were miners. [...] The jobs we [Inuit] were getting were harder to break into that group" (Interviewee 8). Former workers from Resolute Bay recalled that most of the miners came from southern Canada, with a large population from Springdale, Newfoundland, and many from Alberta and Manitoba. There were also non-Inuit Aboriginal people working at the mine. The majority reported were Dene from Dettah and Inuit from other areas of the Northwest Territories (Interviewees 3, 5, 6, 8, and 9).

Those from Resolute Bay did a variety of jobs. Most were general labourers (all started out in this position with the exception of one who was hired as a guide in the development stage), mill workers (who reportedly had the worst jobs due to the dust and ash from the mill), surface crew, heavy equipment operators, polar bear monitors, and housekeepers for accommodations (many of the women workers). One of two

women from Resolute Bay eventually had the opportunity to do surface crew work, which she reportedly enjoyed much more than housekeeping (Interviewee 3). Additionally, Cominco stated that it agreed to train some Inuit for skilled positions and management staff. However, employees from Resolute Bay did not recall any Inuit management while there and very few who worked in skilled potions, although they did state that it was possible to move out of the general labourer position over time to surface crew, heavy machine operator, and mill worker (Interviewees 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9.)

Cominco's Vice President Hank Giegerich mentioned "that the training to be given related to the mine would enable people to go elsewhere for work if they desired" (Barrett 1976: 22). Responses to training were mixed in Resolute Bay. Some said that the skills they learned at the mine were not transferable because they were specific to a certain job, such as mill work. Others said that the skills were indeed useful for other employment opportunities, especially for those workers who had been heavy machine operators. Such people were better able to gain employment in their own communities. Overall, employment and training were a disappointment to those Resolute Bay residents we interviewed. They believed that it would have been better if the community had been involved in planning, to ensure training for Inuit workers so they could attain higher-paying, and longer-lasting positions. One interviewee strongly believed that the proportion of Inuit employment would have been much higher if the company had been accountable to the community and included the community in the decision-making process, passionately stating:

> [Having a nearby mine] was good but it would have been better if we talked to them [Cominco] more and worked with them more by communicating [with] each other. But we leave them alone; we were so Inuk... Inuit way is leave things alone. Live down here, let the people live up there, on top of you. Don't harass and ask around. If they ask you then, 'Ok, thank you'" (Interviewee 7).

Regardless of the reason, Polaris failed to bring employment to local residents. In February of 1990, *The Northern Miner* reported:

> Northern mines do not hire Native workers out of altruism or because governments insist they do; hiring northerners makes economic sense. For Polaris, successful Native recruitment meant lower transportation costs and a workforce inured to Arctic isolation and bitter, 8-month winters. But Polaris had a problem experienced by neither Nanisivik nor Rankin Inlet [...]. There were plenty of applicants, but far too many worked just one rotation and just never returned. Polaris tried to solve the problem by allowing Inuit and Dene workers a shorter rotation (six in, four out) than that offered to non-Natives. But few Natives took advantage of that scheme because they quickly discovered it meant less pay. As far as government and the public were concerned, Polaris was quickly added to the list of failures as a Native employer (Watt 1990).

Not surprisingly, Resolute Bay residents gained very little economic benefit from the mine, although the community had been interested from the outset (Bowes-Lyon et al. 2009: 371). It is unclear exactly how many Inuit from Resolute Bay applied to work at

the mine and were rejected; interviewees mentioned many names of community members who had applied, but there are no official counts of the ratio of all applicants to successful ones. Resolute Bay Inuit clearly wanted to be involved and had an interest in working there. Over time, as fewer people from the community were employed at the mine, Resolute Bay began to lose interest in the mine and only those working there really knew anything about the operation. As one interviewee stated, "It [the mine] didn't really have much of an impact [on the community] because Resolute Bay wasn't really benefiting anything" (Interviewee 3). Despite the situation at Polaris, interviewees remain optimistic about future mining activity, stating that the young people of Resolute Bay would greatly benefit from the chance to work at another mine and thus gain experience, training, and skills (Interviewees 5,7, and 9). One interviewee stated that mineral development had fortunately changed since the time of the Polaris mine, citing the current Mary River development as an example of the positive benefits that the signing of the NLCA had brought to Nunavut (Interviewee 3). People have learned that development of non-renewable resources cannot benefit Arctic communities unless they are actively involved in the planning and development, and unless the mining industry offers equal participation and fair employment.

Fortunately, Inuit hiring in mining operations has increased since the signing of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NLCA) in 1993. Upon signing the NLCA, Nunavut not only secured self-determination but also gained much headway in mineral rights. The territory now holds significant authority: ownership and use of land and resources; the right to participate in decision making on resource use and management; and the right to employment, participation, and compensation in economic ventures such as mining activity (Eetoolook 2000: 1-2). James Eetoolook, the first Vice-President of Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., argued: "Inuit were once on the outside of the mining industry looking in. The signing of the Agreement changed all that. Now, for many reasons, we feel we can be considered part of the mining industry and that we are no longer on the outside" (ibid.: 2).

Conclusion

As this case study suggests, by the time Cominco began its mining development, the State had lost interest in becoming a partner. Cominco was left to develop its own employment agenda, which happened to marginalise Resolute Bay's involvement with the mine. There has been so little work by historians specifically about Inuit employment issues that it is difficult to state exactly why the Canadian government lost interest in Polaris, although archival records suggest that the disillusionment came from realisation that the mine was failing to deliver on the imagined benefits of bringing modernisation to the Arctic. After the federal government had taken over responsibility for Inuit welfare in the wake of World War II, the ensuing decades made it clear that Aboriginal people, both Inuit and non-Inuit, were not abandoning older practices, were reluctant to move away from land-based economies, and often were not working in the labour force exclusively.

With no formal employment agreement between Cominco and the government, there was no regulation of Inuit employment. Without regulation, Cominco could recruit its labour force as it pleased. In many ways, Polaris was no different from previous mines. Nanisivik had acted as a model. Although Nanisivik had gained financial government support and had a specific Inuit employment agreement with the government, it failed to fulfill this goal. On the other hand, despite their usual failure to honour formal and informal employment agreements, these other mining companies still had a degree of responsibility and accountability because of their relationship with the government and possible loss of future financial support. This factor did not influence Cominco during the Polaris operation.

Unfortunately, without an agreement with the government, Cominco could quite plainly overlook potential Inuit employees from Resolute Bay. Records are not clear as to why the company hired so few Inuit employees, although reports subtly suggest that local hiring in this unique fly-in/fly-out mine tended to increase labour costs, as the company had to fly in both Inuit and non-Inuit workers. Furthermore, Cominco would have had to incur extra training costs, as opposed to employing southern workers with mining experience. Interviews in Resolute Bay demonstrate that discrimination may have played a role in Cominco's hiring practises, while a few interviewees and company archival records attribute the low percentage of Inuit workers to Inuit disinterest in mining. Whatever the reasons for not hiring locals, Resolute Bay Inuit desired to work at Polaris and were all but bypassed because the State had no wish to require, regulate, and monitor Inuit employment at the mine, and because Cominco was indifferent to these issues. According to interviewees, the mining development process failed to include Inuit in the decision-making process and in consideration for employment.

However, the interviewees remained optimistic about future natural resource activity, stating that another mine would be of great benefit to the young people of Resolute Bay by providing them with experience, training, and skills. Certainly, with the signing of the NLCA the process of mineral extraction has come a long way since the 1970s and 1980s in forming responsible relationships of accountability and improved understanding between local communities, companies, and the federal government.

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Archival sources

Note:
LAC = Library and Archives Canada
PWNHCA = Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre Archives
RBCMA = Royal British Columbia Museum Archives
WLUA = Wilfrid Laurier University Archives

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