

FOREWORD

The frontispiece of this issue is a photograph of P. G. Law, who is Director of the Antarctic Division of the Australian Department of External Affairs. In 1947, when a lecturer in physics at Melbourne University, he was appointed Senior Scientific Officer of the Australian National Antarctic Research Expedition (A.N.A.R.E.) to draw up and organize its scientific programme. In 1949 he became Leader, and, in the same year, was appointed to his present post. He has made ten voyages to sub-Antarctic and Antarctic regions, including one as Australian Observer with the Norwegian-British-Swedish Antarctic Expedition in 1950. In A.N.A.R.E. he has built up a solid and valuable scientific organization, and has been responsible, more than anyone except Sir Douglas Mawson, for awakening and sustaining the Australian Government's interest in its Antarctic possessions.

In January 1956 J. M. Wordie resigned from his position as Chairman of the Committee of Management of the Scott Polar Research Institute. He had been Chairman for nineteen years, and was one of the original members of the Committee when it was set up in 1926. The Institute is very conscious of the debt of gratitude it owes to him for his advice and interest. He is, however, to remain a member of the Committee. He is succeeded by J. A. Steers, Professor of Geography at Cambridge University.

The series of reconnaissance flights carried out by the U.S. "Operation Deepfreeze 1" during the 1955-56 season are pointers to a new era in Antarctica. From New Zealand to Antarctica, and then from an airstrip on the sea ice in McMurdo Sound, four-engined Skymasters have made non-stop flights towards each quarter of the coast of the continent and back; these included flights to points on the Weddell Sea, the Knox Coast and Dronning Maud Land, in addition to an elaborate programme of cross-flights. They are not the longest polar flights on record, though they are considerably longer than any previous Antarctic ones; their importance lies not so much in their achievement, which was considerable, as in what it represents. They mark the end of the isolation of Antarctica and emphasize the political necessity for agreed solutions of the difficult questions of sovereignty there. Recent technical advances in aviation and icebreaker construction, coupled with willingness in several countries to expend very large sums of money on Antarctic investigations, has suddenly accelerated the work of exploration. The era of competing territorial claims, official indifference and amateur exploration is giving way to a concentrated effort by governments to strengthen claims and to assess potential resources.

Intensification of Soviet activity in the Antarctic is naturally causing many to wonder about motives and intentions. Apart from Bellingshausen's great voyage of 1819-21, Russia remained aloof from Antarctic affairs until 1939. In that year the Soviet Government sent a Note to the Norwegian Government in which the Norwegian claim to Peter I Øy was disputed, and the

U.S.S.R. "reserved its opinion as to the national status of territories discovered by Russians". Soviet moves since the war have taken three main forms: first, whaling in the Southern Ocean, started in 1946; second, propaganda and diplomatic activity to establish a basis for participation in any political settlement; and third, participation in the International Geophysical Year, with land stations on the Antarctic continent. The second development started in 1946 with attempts to discredit the work of other nations and to represent Antarctica as another cause of imperialist competition. By 1949 the emphasis had changed towards a concentrated effort to provide a legal basis for Soviet rights based on priority of discovery. In June 1950 the Soviet Government sent identical Notes to all the nations with Antarctic claims indicating that they could not agree that the future regime of the Antarctic should be decided without Soviet participation; nor could they recognize any solution reached in their absence. Polemics against Western activities were muted from 1953 onwards. Once more the emphasis changed; the press began to advocate international scientific co-operation in the Antarctic. By 1955 the political and legal arguments had almost disappeared and were replaced by reports of Soviet plans and preparations for the International Geophysical Year. The most spectacular part of the Soviet programme is the plan to establish two 9000-nautical-mile air routes from Moscow to the Antarctic—one via Africa and the other via Singapore and Australia. The plan is for this service to provide the chief support for their three stations in the Antarctic.

These are major events for Antarctica, and their significance is, of course, much wider. It remains to be seen whether all these activities can contribute to a solution of the political future of the continent, or whether they will make international agreement still more difficult.

Recent Antarctic activity has underlined once again the lack of British ships suitable for polar work. Of the countries taking part in the Antarctic phase of the International Geophysical Year, by far the best equipped are the United States, with eight fine icebreakers built since 1943, and the Soviet Union, with two new icebreakers and two building, to say nothing of fifteen or more of pre-war design. Yet of the seven countries with territorial claims, only Argentina possesses an icebreaker. Surely, if this country is to continue to play a leading part in Antarctic affairs, she must not continue to spurn the freedom of action that only an icebreaker can provide.

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