Letters

Alaskan Gas and Human Rights

I am hardly encouraged by Luther J. Carter's observation, in his article "Alaskan gas: NEPA brings out a strong new pipeline applicant" (News and Comment, 3 June, p. 1068), that the U.S. government is acting in a less arbitrary way than it did with the trans-Alaska oil pipeline. The "Alcan" route, recommended by the environmental staff of the Federal Power Commission (FPC), has all the major drawbacks of the Arctic–Mackenzie Valley proposal. Approval of either route would show that economic and national self-interest prevail despite rhetoric to the contrary, specifically with regard to President Carter's principle that no Indian tribe will suffer as a result of energy development and his commitment to human rights.

The FPC, in recommending the two overland routes, did not hear one representative from a native organization, nor did it mention the native peoples' claims anywhere in its voluminous report. The Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) did hear representatives of the Denes (natives of the Mackenzie Valley) and the Yukons (natives of the Alcan area) testify that to build an overland route through their lands now could be nothing short of genocidal. In fact, the testimony revealed that, given the established infrastructure along the Alcan highway, the social impact could be even greater on the Yukon Indians than on the natives of the Mackenzie Valley.

The CEQ hearings also showed that aspects of British Columbia Supreme Court Justice Thomas J. Berger's findings in the Mackenzie Valley pipeline inquiry hold for the Alcan route as well. Not only questions of protection of the environment are involved, but, more important, the future of Northern peoples. The pipeline would not provide meaningful or ongoing employment to native people but, rather, would undermine their economy, allowing them no choice other than the industrial system and no control over entering or leaving it. Berger claimed that, to keep environmental im-

pacts to an acceptable level, construction and operations should proceed only under careful planning and strict regulation. He concluded (and Project North, a Canadian interchurch project on Northern development concurs) that this can result only after a settlement of native claims and a sufficient time lapse to allow for the establishment of new institutions and programs to ensure implementation of those claims.

In allowing Northern development to be a matter of self-determination, respectful of local values and culture, the Canadian and U.S. governments have perhaps a last major opportunity to reverse their traditions of colonialization. Were such a just settlement reached, the pipeline, when built, could be a monument to real cooperation and human development, not another testimony to the power of heedless development and exploitation.

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Science's News Writers

I hope you get a sackful of mail in angry response to the remarkable letter from R. Grantham (10 June, p.1154). The choppy rhythm of the correspondent's prose, and his awkward use of the passive voice, lead me to think that it may be a joke; I will proceed as though I have fallen for it.

Science's news writers are remarkably concise and they are not obscurantists but clairists. (Their windedness is, incidentally, assessed by the number of words they use in total and not by the number of sentences into which their prose is divided!) The reporting in your journal is such a distinguished combination of density, grace, and comprehensibility that I have used it for teaching examples. The only obscure thing about the *Science* news staff is how you can hold on to such uniformly talented people in a world

desperate for good writers who can cope with a complex world.

I am pleased to add Grantham's letter to my small collection of examples. It not only illustrates the common fallacy that "the only things that count are what can be counted" but also offers an unusual demonstration of prose crippled in the name of better writing.

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Credit for New Ideas

Publication in established journals has long been the chief avenue by which scientists receive credit for their research accomplishments. However, several separate developments in recent years underscore the fact that this system falls short when it comes to credit for new ideas. These new developments include (i) court rulings under the Freedom of Information Act making publicly funded research proposals public property; (ii) an ever-increasing volume of manuscripts, resulting in delays in publication at most journals; (iii) increasing concern on the part of scientists that "peer panel" review of grant applications provides an opportunity for plagiarism of ideas; and (iv) project plans that are deliberately vague or based on ideas already researched by the scientist and that offer little of real meaning to scientists, administrators, or policy-makers.

I believe the time has come for crediting ideas. A documentation system, the Smithsonian Science Information Exchange (SSIE), is readily accessible to the scientific community. Entry of a project statement in SSIE would constitute publication. Date of entry would establish priority, as with date of acceptance or publication in scientific journals.

The proposed concept is somewhat similar to the patent system for inventions. However, the judicial process involved in patent granting would not be necessary, for scientists who fail to give appropriate credit to others soon find there is virtue in following the accepted standards of the scientific community.

Credit to the idea-originator would not mean that the idea has more merit than the research itself. Some ideas could be shot down without doing any research, which would save valuable resources. In other cases, only research could demonstrate whether an idea could hold up under rigorous testing. If a different person does the research, that person