

Nanook on the Welfare

by B.W.B.

EVER since the first explorers probed the frozen North, the world has known the eskimo as a proud and self-reliant hunter and trapper; a short man who walked tall amid the icy challenge of life in the Arctic Circle. The film *Nanook of the North* immortalised him as a champion of rugged individualism in a world where such qualities were becoming depressingly rare.

And only just in time. In recent years the eskimo has faced a menace more potent than anything the arctic climate ever contrived: the programme of the Canadian Government to "modernise" him. In no more than two decades he has been forced to abandon his small family camps, his igloo and his tough individuality to take up an alien, conformist life in the new government settlements.

Hugh Brody's book* is the story of a vanishing race. The process of modernisation sent a proud and independent people reeling towards economic serfdom. The intrepid hunter has become the wage-labourer, often unemployed and in poverty. Self-reliance has given way to dependence on Government officials. Government-provided

housing and welfare handouts threaten to complete his demoralisation.

In the new settlements the activities of the Government welfare men follow the same process of arbitrary and patronising do-gooding that T. O. Evans wrote about in the January issue of *LAND & LIBERTY*.

Wrote Evans: "The essential feature of socialistic do-gooding is its total disregard of the wishes of the recipient . . . You would like a home? Certainly; . . . you can have one that we, who know what is best for you, will choose, and if it is at the top of a huge block of upended concrete, then be grateful and don't complain."

Observes Brody, of another world 4,000 miles away: Many whites are manipulative and authoritarian in their attitude towards eskimos. They believe they know what is best for them, and if the eskimos themselves are not enthusiastic about the good things Whites have to offer, that is attributed to the eskimos' misunderstanding or error. Eskimos are continuously being urged to be grateful for what Whites say eskimos need.

Tantalisingly, Mr. Brody leaves

until his last few pages the explanation of *why* the Canadian Government embarked on its programme of killing the eskimo by back-handed socialistic kindness. As the book title suggests, the root cause was land. The traditional lands of the eskimo are today "re-discovered" in a frenzy of activity redolent of the days of the American frontier. Huge reserves of lead, zinc, oil and gas lie beneath the Arctic surface. But to get at them the eskimo of the hunting grounds must be removed. And if, at the same time, he can be induced or manoeuvred into providing labour for these operations, then surely he can have no cause to complain?

But one who does complain is Hugh Brody. His compassion for the eskimos drips from his pen on virtually every page.

Yet he is under no illusion about the uniqueness of their plight. He regards their predicament as embodying "the destructive processes and social deformations that colonialism everywhere entails."

For the truth is that the forces destroying the eskimo in the twentieth century have been crushing primitive peoples—and many not so primitive—since civilisation be-

gan. Once separated from their lands their economic subjection becomes only a matter of time. Perhaps the underlying message of this book is that even beyond the tree-line, amid his blizzards and his ice-flows, the eskimo has not been safe.

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