ANTARCTICA FOR SALE?!

HALT! WHO GOES THERE?

Antarctica is under assault from commercial interests.

Leading the charge are the fishing and tourist industries. Behind them come various infantry battalions: the logistics and other service industries (operating both in the Antarctic and in departure states), the entertainment industry (everything from visitor centers through to popular adventure films), water industry (“Antarctic Perrier” anyone?) and bioprospecting. Bringing up the rear are various representatives from the minerals industry – regrouping after their earlier defeat.

These developments affect Antarctica in various ways. Plainly, commercial interests have dramatically increased the number of people and the range and intensity of activities in Antarctica. This has raised the absolute level of human impact in the region. It has altered the pattern and intensity – and possibly the type - of impacts. Is the current management regime up to regulating these activities? Clearly not.

It appears that commercial activities are also beginning to alter the priorities of the states in which these industries are located. Antarctic policy now often means maximizing access and minimizing “obstacles” to commercial entities.

Money talks. The environment, and the traditional focus on globally significant science – even geopolitical considerations like not making the Antarctic an area of dispute - seem increasingly secondary considerations to states and their corporate foot-soldiers who see Antarctic resource exploitation as a new battleground ready to be taken.

In the face of a fragile political modus vivendi, and a thin and internally inconsistent legal regime, this is clearly not a happy situation.

Pirate Fishing – Out of Control

The largest commercial industry operating in the Antarctic region is the toothfish fishery. The CCAMLR Secretariat Report contains numerous references to the appallingly high proportion of toothfish caught illegally in this fishery. CCAMLR itself admits not even having the true number. The Antarctic Treaty Parties must take more political responsibility for this problem. A problem that is driving this valuable species to commercial extinction, while killing hundreds of thousands of albatrosses and petrels. Leaving this solely in the hands of CCAMLR, which manifestly lacks the necessary tools and power to stop these fishing pirates, undermines the credibility of the Antarctic Treaty System as a whole.
Penguin rushed to hospital in freak ice accident

Pablo is not a happy penguin. Looking for a suitable restaurant for lunch close to the ATCM, Pablo slipped on a piece of ice (thought to have been a sample of the Vostok ice-core) and injured his flipper. His Argentinian cousin (Paulina), who also happens to be a lawyer (though trained in the UK), has suggested that he sues the ATCM once it is given legal personality in Argentina. Adele Penguin, a French relative (and also a lawyer), wonders what assets the ATCM has that Pablo would receive if he won the case – litigious lawyers or cumulative commissioners perhaps? Unfortunately, according to Pablo’s Chilean nephew twice removed (and a diplomat), there are none. He thinks Pablo should just stop talking about this whole law suit thing and focus on the real reason for his visit to Poland: stocking up on that delicious local brew Z browka, guaranteed to keep you warm through even the coldest Summer!

Pablo hasn’t figured out whether to stay in Warsaw, or go visit his cousin Ja in Krakow this weekend, right now both are even, perhaps he should flip a coin. Any ideas?

Deceptive Notes:

Pablo Goes Cruising

After a pleasant breakfast and a lecture or two about educational matters, we land on a Deception Island beach. Being inside a volcano is a fascinating experience; unfortunately there are not enough penguins.

Through the steam one can just see a group of half-naked people sitting in plastic chairs, having just had a ceremonial dip into the steaming waters of Port Foster.

These are not natives, just other Expeditions that got there in an earlier turn.