

Prince Edward Island

Sermons, but no solutions at Man and Resources Institute

When the Tory government took over in May, there was speculation about the future of the Institute of Man and Resources, and especially about its founder and Executive Director, Andrew Wells. Before the creation of the Institute Wells was the alter ego of Liberal premier Alex Campbell, and he even took leave from the Institute to run Campbell's last campaign. As a Liberal strategist and policy-maker, he made Tory enemies.

But those who had doubts about his future misunderstood both Wells and the new government. Under the terms of the Institute's incorporation, its head could not be bounced at a political whim. Moreover, in the months before the Tories came to power, Wells established solid relations with some of them. Not only that, Premier Angus MacLean is committed even more strongly than the Liberals were to the Institute's goals of developing alternate-energy sources and making the Island more self-reliant.

But if the Institute and its chief seem safe, it still has some distance to go to demonstrate that it has practical solutions to energy problems, and to establish its credibility with Islanders who face mounting fuel bills and the highest-priced electricity in Canada. Wells knows this. The Institute's annual report defensively notes, "It often seems that some of our public expects the Institute to offer virtually instant solutions to problems and difficulties which have been years in the making."

But Wells also admits that some of these high expectations were created by the fanfare that surrounded the Institute's birth. Islanders were led to believe their province had leapt into the forefront of alternate-energy research, and that solar heaters and windmills would soon cover the landscape.

Three years later, most people feel such solutions to high fuel and power bills are as far away as ever. The cynical suggest the Institute's chief accomplishment has been to increase its staff from two to 23, and its annual budget by 10 times to more than \$1 million (most of it coming from the federal government).

The Institute has also suffered from

the bad press the Ark has received. The Ark is the expensive experiment in self-contained living which opened in a blaze of publicity at Spry Point in September, 1976. It was separate from the Institute but Wells had had a big hand in bringing it to P.E.I. and the public closely identified the two.

In 18 months, the Ark was in deep trouble. The windmill—which was supposed to supply its electricity and even



Andrew Wells: Still top dog at Institute

feed a surplus into the Island energy grid—proved to be an expensive failure. The tropical fish in its aquaculture tanks failed to survive Island winters. Straggly plants took over the solar-heated greenhouse. Federal officials responsible for Ark funds complained about haphazard records and incomplete experiments. One problem was that the project had been left to what a federal report called "enthusiastic amateurs." They were unable to cope with either the scientific demands of Ark programs, or the flood of visitors the publicity had attracted.

In the spring of '78, the Ark was amalgamated with the Institute. Biologist Kenneth MacKay became project director, and a new staff moved in. Today, the Ark presents an impressive public face. Its fish tanks teem with trout and salmon. The greenhouse produces year-round vegetable crops, and there is a well-run program of public tours.

The Institute's other work is less noticeable. It involves long-range studies and the evaluation of alternate-energy techniques from away. Research Director Kirk Brown feels the single most important source of future Island energy may be the woodland that still covers 43% of the Island, and the Institute is evaluating wood-burning stoves and furnaces. It's also studying the social, economic and environmental effects of a full-scale wood-harvesting program. But aside from furnaces placed in Island homes for study purposes, the first visible result of these studies will be the installation this fall of a one-megawatt, wood-fired generator at a new education complex in western P.E.I.

If the Institute has produced few practical answers to the Island's energy problems, there's been no shortage of its pamphlets and speeches exhorting the public to reduce consumption of non-renewable resources and return to the thriftier ways of our ancestors. Wells makes no apology for this. He believes the whole western world must abandon a way of living based on cheap, abundant energy. His near-apocalyptic view of the future encompasses much more than the replacement of oil-heaters by wood-chip furnaces.

He sees the main role of the Institute as, first, the conversion of the public; and second, the provision of techniques to make the conversion a reality. Islanders may not have realized that when their government created the Institute they were giving a prophet his pulpit. Lower fuel bills are just going to have to wait a little while.

— Kennedy Wells