

## Championing the Democratic Intellect

A recent scholar in residence at the Arctic Institute, Gavin Renwick of Napier University, Edinburgh, has introduced us to the *Edinburgh Review*, “Scotland’s foremost intellectual and literary magazine” and a champion of the debate on Democratic Intellectualism. In Issue 90, summer 1993, the complete volume addresses the philosophical basis of the Scottish vision of civil society, which is predicated on the notion that:

a science-based society can maintain the intellectual standards necessary to material progress only by bridging the gap between the expert few and the lay majority and by thus making it possible for each party to keep the other up to scratch by mutual criticism. (G. Davie; cited in Alexander, 1993:19)

Renwick (pers. comm. 1997), Davie (1993), and his colleague Murdo Macdonald (1993) champion in their writings and professional lives the long-standing Scottish tradition of academic generalism, trust in lay scholars, and the simultaneous practice of both technical and practical competence. Above all, the Scots have struggled to emphasize philosophical breadth as a tool of intellectual inquiry and have pioneered in the field of interdisciplinary research. In doing so, Davie (1993:68) asserts that the Scots, alone in Great Britain, have continued to assert a set of values that were derived from Scotland’s “ancient connections with continental intellectuality”—the stuff of Socrates and Aristotle, and their unique recombination of metaphysics, classical literature and mathematics.

Here at the Arctic Institute, these values are seen in the emphasis that our ASTIS bibliographic database gives to the practical application of knowledge, as described in government and industry grey literature, and to the indigenous knowledge of northern peoples. The multidisciplinary nature of the journal *Arctic* also encourages holistic thinking about northern issues. We can see in these core values the roots of our chosen community development tools: participatory action research (PAR), co-management regime development, Northern Planning and Development Studies (NPDS) offered as a minor in the Faculty of General Studies, environmental mediation, and participatory strategic planning (or road mapping). It is our epiphany to recognize why these community development tools are also so welcome in many Canadian Aboriginal communities, as evidenced by the large call for the professional services of the Arctic Institute research associates. This is especially true for PAR projects initiated by communities with continuing strong bush economy sectors and by those communities with Metis roots. Inherent in this realization are the Scots blood in many Metis marriages and the old and venerable tradition of sharing wisdom and experience in the bush economy. Simply put, when the Scots met the First Nations through the medium of the fur trade, both parties realized that they had much in common. This commonality encompassed generalism, appreciation for lay scholarship, and the simultaneous practice of technical and practical competence on the land. And this core of interdisciplinarity soon found expression in the intermarriage of intellectual traditions, individuals, and families. Elmer Ghostkeeper, a recently elected Fellow of the Arctic Institute, himself a Canadian Metis, calls the socioeconomic system born of this intermarriage “Metisism” and its practical expression in business “partnershiping.” I think that these terms are both evidence of the Democratic Intellect active in the New World and rooted in the Old.

The challenge now before us as citizens is to continue championing the Democratic Intellect, especially in settings such as academia and corporations where the arguments of specialization, hierarchies, and elites still find appeal and adherents. As George Davie reminds us:

For the Scottish thinkers, this technologicico-scientific ‘rationalisation’ of life is not merely repellent from a moral point of view, because of its tolerating or even encouraging the intellectual backwardness of the masses but at the same time is also inherently an unstable basis of the material progress it seeks to sustain .... (G. Davie; cited in Alexander, 1993:19)

Surely a humane and rich civil society can exist only in the context of Democratic Intellectualism, with its ancient traditions of balance, egalitarianism, and philosophical breadth.

### REFERENCES

- ALEXANDER, D. 1993. Introduction. *Edinburgh Review* 90 (Summer):13–20.  
 DAVIE, G. 1993. The importance of the ordinary MA. *Edinburgh Review* 90 (Summer):61–69.  
 MACDONALD, M. 1993. The democratic intellect in context. *Edinburgh Review* 90 (Summer):59–60.

Mike Robinson  
 Executive Director  
 Arctic Institute of North America  
 The University of Calgary