

Launching of the Canadian Geophysical Union

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Launching of the Canadian Geophysical Union

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Scientists need to speak with authoritative and informed voices when society examines their basis of support and questions the relevance, social responsibility, and economic justification of scientific research. This need has been manifested through the formation and growth of SCITEC and the new signs of vigour in the Royal Society of Canada. The existing professional organizations are being strengthened by increasing their range of activities. Following this trend, Canadian geophysicists recently formed a new organization under the name of Canadian Geophysical Union (CGU).

Canada has a leading position in the science of geophysics, especially in the fields of mining, exploration geophysics and the airborne surveys. The professional societies catering to

the needs of several thousand geophysicists in Canada are the Canadian Society of Exploration Geophysicists (CSEG), the Geological Association of Canada (GAC), the Canadian Association of Physicists (CAP), and the Canadian Association of Petroleum Geologists (CAPG). The activities of academic researchers, the coordination of joint projects, and the maintenance of a national information network were centred in the discipline subcommittees that developed around the National Research Council of Canada (NRCC) Associate Committee for Geodesy and Geophysics (ACGG). Through NRCC and ACGG, Canadian geophysicists had a voice in the international affairs of the International Union of Geodesy and Geophysics (IUGG) and organized participation in major international projects such as IGY, UMP, IGP, etc. NRCC provided travel funds for semi-annual meetings and administrative services and gave a benevolent overview of geophysical activities. As a result of examination of the new role of NRCC, two years ago a notice was served to the geophysics community that the time had come to leave the warm and cosy nest at NRCC. As a result, CGU was formed as a joint division of GAC and CAP.

Under its first president, Professor J. T. Wilson, the CGU was inaugurated with a one-day scientific symposium held in Ottawa on February 22, 1974. The program consisted on contributions by H. L. Seigel ("Canadian mining geophysics is a Twenty Million Dollars per annum industry"), R. I. Walcott ("Due to isostatic rebound in the Hudson Bay lowlands, the land emerges at a rate of one Prince Edward Island per hundred years"), D. I. Gough ("Farrallon plate junctions could be

traced underneath the northwestern United States, as a cause of the heat flow and electro-magnetic induction anomalies"), A. Stevens ("Research in seismology in Canada could be strengthened by greater sharing of data held by individual research groups"), W. S. Fyfe ("Exciting new insights into the origin of mineral deposits are becoming available through the study of the geochemistry of oceanic crust formation"), L. W. Morley ("The ERTS imagery represents a new source of data which can be exploited through imaginative interpretation"), and F. K. North ("We must carefully consider all the factors before concluding that Canada has vast reserves of hydrocarbons").

The special feature of the meeting was a far-ranging panel discussion on "The Future of Geoscience in Canada" with five panelists. Active participation from the floor suggested that CGU is going to be a dynamic and energetic body. The topics aired included: (i) The need for more research in aurora, geodynamics, theoretical geophysics, and oceanography, especially ice (Jacobs); (ii) Problems of scientific organization in a large country with a small population; too many small grants so that every scientist builds up a mini-empire rather than contributing to larger joint projects; the encouraging emergence of earth science teaching in high schools (Russell); (iii) the precarious position of Canadian mining exploration geophysics because of its fragmentation and inability to do its own research; the need for an Industry – Government – University joint research centre of excellence; and the question, "What are the Government survey organizations going to do when the job of regional

geophysical mapping is largely completed?" (Garland); the existing procedures for evaluation of NRCC earth science grants applications (M. J. Keen); the requirement for development of an indigenous offshore technology base; the effects of 'Make or Buy' policy on government research laboratories; and the need for the establishment of a privately sponsored contract research institution (Pelletier); the role that CGU should play in pointing out to the Government the urgency of developing capital resources to generate income resources (Gough); the level of involvement with international projects and global science initiatives; and the usefulness of the Canadian Journal of Earth Sciences as the prime organ for publication of original results of Canadian science research (Whitham). Dr. W. Stewart of Marine Sciences Directorate, Victoria B.C., raised the question of a home for the Canadian physical oceanographers who have no natural affiliation with any organization in Canada. One of the panelists responded that this is a problem for the oceanographers who could be accommodated easily within a special division of CGU if they so desired.

Despite limited publicity and poor weather the meeting was well attended by over one hundred geophysicists from Newfoundland to British Columbia. CGU will have an important role to play in:

(i) establishing a scientific forum for discussion of advances in geophysical research; (ii) promoting cooperation, information exchange, and joint projects; (iii) providing a forum for forming policy proposals that require input from its qualified membership; and (iv) providing a national body through which Canada can participate in the work of international organizations. A scientific society for Canadian geophysicists is needed, and CGU can fulfill that need. There are important tasks and challenges for the new organization, and how well they are met will depend on the strength of the CGU membership. A membership drive is now underway, and for further information interested Geophysicists should contact Dr. G.

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