



Worldwide economic difficulties, or a stalemate in international negotiations over Antarctica's future, could lead to the abandonment of the continent by man.

water. Their participation in Antarctic science could be paid for, perhaps, by the royalty from Antarctic minerals development—the treaty power's title to “mankind” mentioned earlier.

### **If Nothing Happens...**

Conflict in the world, a global depression, or some stalemate in Antarctic diplomacy could shut the continent down for a time, as has happened before. The Norwegian Arctic explorer Fridtjof Nansen wrote that polar exploration occurs in the “slackness” of various ages, when countries have the leisure and wealth to sponsor faraway adventures and dream about polar mysteries. A prolonged world crisis could stall the current momentum in Antarctica's political evolution.

Then, all but the richest treaty powers would close down their stations. For years, their activities would wane in twilight like the long Antarctic evening when the autumn sun, casting long shadows on the violet ice, sinks slowly in a blue-gray sky, and birds fly to their winter nesting places. A few, vitally interested nations would maintain their stations, nestled on the fringes of the continent like the hardy emperor penguins who sit all winter, huddled in sleepy masses over their eggs.<sup>54</sup> As happened when the British occupied Deception Island during World War II, there would be volunteers for this lonely vigil, drawn by Antarctica's mystery. Their thoughts might echo the lines from Robert Browning's “Prospice,” the

epitaph for Shackleton's dead companions in McMurdo:

Things done for gain are nought  
But great things done endure. . . .

Let me pay in a minute Life's glad  
arrears of pain, darkness & cold.<sup>55</sup>

Years, perhaps a decade, would pass, marked only by the regular return of the sun and the icebreakers to give staring winter eyes a chance to look on civilization. The years would tick by, resembling lines on a calendar marking the passing of the dead Antarctic winter. As Bond and Siegfried portrayed it: "Only dull rhythms of day and night mark the passing weeks, although the skies are sometimes bizarre with streaking auroras. When the wind is still the frozen sea lies flat and peaceful about the birds, gleaming under the moon, and even reflecting the stars which have colour in the hard winter sky."<sup>56</sup> Antarctica—never high on the priorities of nations—would sink into oblivion for a time.

But if the world stays somewhat prosperous, somewhat concerned about the disposition of the planet's resources, nations will go on toying with the dream of Antarctic resource riches. The international community could try—and succeed—in taking over the region's governance, or the treaty system could remain in place, even after 1991. Since real income from Antarctic resource exploitation, especially that from minerals, seems slight at present, the continent's value will be then—as it has been in history—mainly symbolic.

It was a symbol to the sponsors of Capt. James Cook, who sent him to find the gold and jewels of the legendary *terra australis incognita*. It was a symbol to Robert Falcon Scott and his party in their race for the South Pole, in which they were beaten by the Norwegians and paid "life's glad arrears of pain, darkness and cold." For years, it remained a symbol of national exploration and conquest. To the participants in the IGY and the treaty that grew out of it, Antarctica symbolized how well nations can get along with each other, given enough common understandings and dangers. In the future, Antarctica could symbolize something else—how wisely and peacefully humans can decide the fate of the Earth's seventh continent, which was the last to be discovered and will be the last to be exploited.