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Canada's Valuable Nickel Industry

NICKEL Can Be Economically Refined in Ontario—The Province Can Compete Successfully With Any Other Country—Government Ownership Not Recommended—Canada Has Advantages But Not a Monopoly—Summary of Royal Commissioner's Report.

THE suggestion has been made in certain quarters that government ownership will solve many of the questions which have been raised in connection with the Canadian nickel deposits. The Royal Ontario Nickel Commission, appointed in September, 1915, by the Ontario government, to investigate the resources, industries and capacities of that province in connection with nickel and its ores, have presented an extensive report. The commissioners point out that to expropriate the deposits and plants of the Sudbury nickel area would probably cost not less than \$100,000,000, a sum approximately equal to the total paid-up capital of all the chartered banks in Canada. They add: "There is no certainty that large profits can be made every year from the nickel industry. The present activity is in part due to well-understood causes, which it is to be hoped will never recur. In the past the output has had to be curtailed at times. If the price of nickel should fall profits will naturally decrease. The nickel industry is to a considerable extent dependent for its success on the highly trained and specialized technical men who superintend it, who command salaries far beyond those which are paid in the government service to the most highly placed employees. Besides, nickel is not a necessity of life, nor an article of universal consumption or use, and the nickel business is in no way comparable to those connected with the operation of public utilities where government ownership may be beneficial or expedient. In short, there does not seem to be any good reason why the people of Ontario should be asked to adventure so large a sum of money as would be required for the purchase of the nickel deposits and plants."

After references to the various countries they visited, including United States, Great Britain, France, Norway, Cuba, Australia and New Caledonia, and to numerous mines, works, plants, smelters, etc., on this side of the Atlantic and on the other, and also to their interviews and conversations with Mr. Bonar Law, then secretary of state for the colonies, and other British government officials, the commissioners go on to say:—

"The two questions that have been uppermost in the numerous discussions that have taken place concerning Ontario's nickel industry during the last twenty-five years, are (1) Can nickel be economically refined in Ontario and (2) Are the nickel deposits of Ontario of such

a character that this province can compete successfully as a nickel producer with any other country. It will be seen that the commissioners have no hesitation in answering both of these questions in the affirmative."

The opening chapter of the report deals with the agitation which has gone on from the beginning of the industry in favor of the refining of nickel in Ontario, the various steps which governments or parliaments have from time to time taken to realize this desire, and the negotiations with the Imperial government for the same purpose are summarized. The famous offer of the Ontario government to the British authorities in 1891, to give the latter a substantial, if not a controlling interest in the nickel mines of the province, if they would agree to establish refining plants and make nickel-steel here, is recalled. Doubt is cast, not upon the good faith of the offer, but upon the possibility of implementing it, if it included only the nickel deposits at that time remaining in the possession of the Crown. It is stated that most of the great deposits now being worked had already been parted with before the date of the offer. Nevertheless, the report says that the action of the government was a notable one, arguing remarkable insight into the future, and "had the offer been met with an equal degree of imagination on the part of Great Britain, it is not easy to say what the results would have been. Even with the deposits found since 1891 a good deal of nickel could have been obtained, and it could always have been possible to purchase privately owned properties."

At the beginning of the enquiry it was asserted by the companies interested that nickel could not be economically refined in Ontario. The commissioners, therefore, naturally express gratification at the assured prospect of the erection in Ontario of two large plants for the refining of nickel.

One is now being constructed by the International Nickel Company of Canada, Limited, at Port Colborne. The company has obtained a site of 400 acres on which 2,000 men are now at work, and is erecting a plant whose initial output will be on the basis of 15,000,000 lbs. of nickel per annum, and provision is made for doubling or quadrupling this capacity. The matte to be refined here will come from the smelters of the Canadian Copper Company at Copper Cliff, and for the treatment of which there will be required bituminous coal, coke, fuel oil, nitre-cake,