

Alberta and the Resources

The negotiations between the three prairie provinces and the dominion with regard to the control of natural resources are to be resumed next week. Strong hopes are entertained that this time they will result in a settlement. When the matter was taken up earlier in the year, parliament was in session, and a general election was impending in Manitoba. The consequence was that it was found impossible for all parties to the discussion to give the close and continuous attention to it that is required if definite progress was to be made. The circumstances under which the question is now once again approached are much more favorable to a solution.

Whether the dominion can come to an agreement with the other provinces or not, there is no apparent reason why terms should not be made between it and Alberta. Last spring it was made clearer than ever that our position is very different from that of Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

We have resources within our boundaries which are much more productive of revenue than are theirs. In the year ending March 31, 1921, the dominion collected in Alberta on account of coal, petroleum and other minerals the sum of \$1,015,521, while the total collections in the other two provinces under this head amounted to \$105,592. At present, it should be kept in mind, we are receiving a subsidy of but \$562,500 from the dominion on account of the retention by it of our resources. The subsidy continues at that figure till we have a population of 800,000.

With such a large revenue already being derived by the federal authorities, and with such great possibilities of development in prospect, it is obviously imperative that whatever the attitude of Manitoba and Saskatchewan, Alberta should obtain control of its natural wealth. Once large fresh discoveries were made—it is the opening up of new oil fields that we have particularly in mind—stronger opposition to the transfer might conceivably arise in other parts of the dominion which would make it more difficult to bring this about.

Not only does Alberta stand to gain very much in the way of revenue by the transfer, but development would undoubtedly be hastened if the control were in Edmonton instead of at Ottawa. We have had reason to complain of many of the policies that the federal authorities have adopted. Such mistakes as they have made have been for the most part due to the fact that they were a long way off and did not understand conditions here. What of right belongs to us should be administered by our own government.

There would have been a settlement long ago but for the difficulty of determining what should be allowed to the provinces as compensation for resources already alienated. There has been no disposition in Alberta to support the extreme claims which have been made in this connection by Manitoba. Neither the government nor the people of Alberta are inclined to hold out for compensation for lands that have been alienated for homestead purposes.

It is recognized that if from the first the province had controlled its lands, it would in all likelihood have used them to promote settlement by the giving of free homesteads, just as the dominion has done. Accordingly it is not reasonable to expect the dominion to compensate us for these at so much per acre.

Premier Greenfield last spring put the Alberta case on a clear and fair basis when he declared that we were ready "to take over control of unalienated resources and to waive claims for subsidy for lands under the Alberta act, providing a satisfactory indemnity was arranged for such of the resources as had been used for purely federal purposes."

It can hardly be denied that we are entitled to this. It makes no difference whether such alienation took place prior to or after the establishment of the province. To make this distinction is simply to confuse the issue and to weaken our position.

Most of the alienations for which we have the strongest claim to be compensated took place before 1905. When autonomy was granted, land within the province had been granted for railway construction outside of its boundaries to the extent of 6,440,000 acres. This was unquestionably to serve a purely federal purpose and we should be compensated for it.

If the Alberta ministers, when they arrive in Ottawa next week, maintain the position that they assumed last spring and do not allow themselves to be misled by the representatives of the other provinces into associating themselves with claims which go beyond the statement of Mr. Greenfield just quoted, they ought to be able to bring back a settlement.

It would be taking too great a chance altogether with our future for them to pass up an opportunity to make this simply because Manitoba and Saskatchewan are not ready to accept terms similar to ours. Each province must have regard to its own interests and act in accordance with these.

Alberta wants only what it is clearly entitled to and there is every indication that, if the present opportunity is taken advantage of properly, its hope of long years will soon be realized.