

## CANADA'S FUEL PROBLEM—SOME NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ASPECTS\*

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SO much has been said, drawn from seemingly authoritative sources, respecting the "unbounded extent of the natural resources of Canada," that it is little wonder the popular view is entertained that Canada's resources are practically unlimited, and perpetual prosperity only waits upon their fuller development. For Canadians, however, to hold and be governed by such a view is to live in a "fool's paradise."

Little more than a decade ago, a large majority of the people of the United States believed that the natural resources of their country were unbounded, and that there was hardly any limit to material progress based upon their development. Even in that country, however, there were many who did not share these views, and through their efforts special investigation was made respecting the actual conditions of the natural resources of the nation.

### Natural Resources are Exhaustible

No country possesses, within its own borders, more varied and extensive resources than the United States, yet it is now recognized that many of these are within measurable distance of exhaustion. This fact was so clearly demonstrated that prompt action by the trustees of the nation became imperative. So far as one can judge, natural resources from the 49th parallel to the Gulf of Mexico are better situated, geographically, and must always be more desirable than those from the 49th parallel to the Arctic ocean; thus, by reason of situation, Canada's usable natural resources are, in variety and extent, less than those of the United States.

Those who have observed the rapid disappearance of many of the natural resources of Canada and the present alarming rates at which some are being consumed, realize that the situation, as a whole, is one of great gravity. Consequently, true conservation in Canada is as great, if not a greater necessity than in the United States.

### Must Use and Conserve

It is true that some resources, such as minerals—perhaps more especially coal, oil, and gas—if used, must in time, necessarily become exhausted. On the other hand, such resources as the soil, plant growth, waterways and ground waters, may be conserved and transmitted to posterity unimpaired, or at least unabused, just as a good husbandman passes on his farm in an improved condition to that in which he received it. The policies advocated by the Commission of Conservation of Canada have aimed at passing on to succeeding generations in an improved condition the heritage of the natural resources of this country.

By intelligent and thrifty use, the natural resources of Canada may beneficently serve the needs of a large population. If, however, Canadians become really dependent upon necessary commodities supplied them by other countries, they must be prepared to accept the circumstances in which they may suddenly find themselves if the supply of such commodities is cut off. Such circumstances will be aggravated by any abuse of our assets.

### Coal Scarcity and Coercion

There is, apart from food, raiment and shelter, perhaps no single commodity which has been found so necessary as fuel—chiefly coal—for the maintenance of life and for the carrying on of commerce and transportation. Recently the public interest has been keenly aroused respecting the nation's fuel supply and increasing dependence upon hydro-electric energy. War conditions have driven home to Canadians as never before the tremendous gravity of their position with respect to fuel.

Countries like Norway and Sweden, Denmark, Holland and Switzerland—countries, indeed, which were neutral—were practically dependent upon the warring nations for coal, and found themselves seriously curtailed in obtaining this commodity. They were forced to recognize the momentous fact that the countries which possess coal are able, absolutely, to dictate the terms upon which coal will be supplied to others.

### Dependent Upon United States

Now, a very large portion of Canada—and for this one may hold in mind much of the populated territory extending, say, from Quebec to Winnipeg—has become increasingly dependent for its fuel supply upon the coal fields of the United States, and absolutely dependent upon that country for its annual supply of some 4,500,000 tons of anthracite.

In addition to the use of imported anthracite for heating and domestic purposes, large quantities of bituminous coal—some 10,000,000 to 14,000,000 tons—are also imported annually from the United States, largely for power purposes.

The known anthracite fields of the United States are within measurable distance of exhaustion. Doubtless, in the not distant future, the United States will feel compelled so to conserve this valuable commodity that the exportation of it may be largely restricted, if not entirely cut off. There are available many examples, arising out of the great European war conditions, where the United States has found it necessary to place stringent embargoes upon natural and manufactured products.

Now, if Canada is to be in a position to command special consideration under possible restricted trade conditions, she must realize the value of her own resources and have them strictly under national control in order that she may be enabled to deal on a basis of *quid pro quo*. When the commodities of commerce are exchanged there must, of course, be a substantial basis for barter. When Germany demanded gold from Switzerland, she offered to exchange coal. Suppose that the United States, in the conduct of her commerce, concluded that it was in the general interest of her citizens only to barter coal for certain commodities which she specially required, what desirable commodities has Canada to barter?

Nothing is further from the thought of the writer than to suggest that it is or that it would become the arbitrary desire of the United States to deprive Canada of the coal which at present is so necessary to life in Canada. It is important, however, to take cognizance of the fact that a nation, pressed by the demands of its own people, may be compelled, under certain conditions, to deprive other nations—in part at least—of even the necessities of life until the needs of its own citizens are met. No country can be expected to send out of its confines that which is essential to the very existence of its own people.

It is not the policy of Canada to embargo her exports. She must, however, conserve against the day of her own need such resources as are available for barter. It certainly is sound policy to insure that commodities of national importance should not be exported without an adequate *quid pro quo*.

Some portions of the United States are as badly in need of coal from Canada as portions of Canada are in need of coal from the United States. Between these two great countries there is an exchange of many natural and manufactured products, and the problems which from time to time arise in connection with such interchange can be satisfactorily solved and the whole situation reduced to a good working basis.

### Canada's Water-Power Heritage

Other than the products of her agricultural lands, mines, and forests, there are certain resources in Canada of unique and special value. Canada has an especially rich heritage in her water-powers, including her equity in international waters. To a large extent these water powers are still under the control of the people. This control is being zealously guarded so that as the country develops and sites come into the sphere of active economic importance they may be developed and used in the general public interest. Men

\*From the General Electric Review.