

Natural Resources

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Resources Question Awaits Settlement

With the next session of Parliament only about three months away the negotiations between the Dominion and the Prairie Provinces should be resumed without much delay if legislation is going to be passed next year confirming the prospective settlements between the Dominion and the respective Western provinces, whose cases are not exactly the same. The resources question has been dragging on for years and a definite settlement cannot be arranged too soon. Last February Mr. King wrote the Western premiers expressing a desire to have the matter cleared up and finally disposed of. The suggestion from the new government at Ottawa was a very welcome one though there was still much uncertainty as to what attitude the Dominion government would take. Manitoba was ready to present its case which was the result of a thorough and exhaustive study of the subject in its historical and constitutional aspects, and the central feature of which was the claim that Manitoba should be recognized as the rightful owner of all her lands and other natural resources when the province was erected in 1871 and that she has, therefore, a right to compensation for all lands alienated by the Dominion government—due allowance being made, of course, for payments by the Dominion in lieu of lands and for the expense to the Dominion government of administering the resources in Manitoba.

Behind this case, as prepared by the Norris government, all parties in the province were united and negotiations were entered into at Ottawa, as a result of which it was announced that there had been an agreement on principle and that Manitoba would be put on the same footing as the Eastern provinces in regard to natural resources. It was taken for granted that this was not a diplomatic statement by the Dominion government evading the clear issue raised in the presentation of Manitoba's claim. It has been, and is, assumed that the Dominion government admits the right of this province to be compensated for lands that have been alienated and the proceeds applied to Dominion purposes. The detailed manner of working out this settlement on principle remains as a further subject for negotiation.

With Saskatchewan and Alberta the situation is more complicated, since they were made provinces only in 1905 after much of their resources had already been alienated. They are claiming compensation for such resources as well as for those alienated since 1905. These provinces, it is understood, have been asked to state their position in regard to certain features of the situation, and Alberta, at least, has not yet replied.

Mr. King has shown a disposition to consider Western sentiment and Western claims. While he may have accepted the principle on which Manitoba's case is based, it is quite likely that some opposition will be raised to it in Parliament and it will be necessary for the government to take a strong stand. The issue is regarded by the Western provinces as one of vital importance. They have been waiting for years to recover their natural resources but they do not merely want the remnant of their resources and to let the matter end there. They want a just settlement based on their full constitutional rights—the same rights as the Eastern provinces have enjoyed since their original establishment.

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