

Coal Problem of Canada Demands National Action

A Solution of a Vital National and International Question Outlined—Our Natural Resources Not Inexhaustible—Canada's Present Dependence Upon the United States for Coal—The Dominion Possesses Independent Fuel Resources Which Must Be Developed

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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 of United States Exhaustible

The President called for a conference of the governors, leading officials and experts of all the States of the Union. Addressing the conference on the 13th of May, 1908, the President stated:—

"This nation began with the belief that its landed possessions were limitless and capable of supporting all the people who might care to make our country their home; but already the limit of unsettled land is in sight, and, indeed, but little land fitted for agriculture now remains unoccupied save what can be reclaimed by irrigation and drainage. . . . We began with an unapproachable heritage of forests; more than half of the timber is gone. We began with coal fields more extensive than those of any other nation and with iron ores regarded as inexhaustible, and many experts now declare that the end of both iron and coal is in sight. . . . The enormous stores of minerals, oil and gas are largely gone. . . . Our natural waterways are not gone, but they have been so injured by neglect and by the division of responsibility and utter lack of system in dealing with them that there is less navigation on them now than there was fifty years ago. Finally, we began with soils of unexampled fertility, and we have so impoverished them by injudicious use and by failing to check erosion that their crop-producing power is diminishing instead of increasing. In a word, we have thoughtlessly, and to a large degree, unnecessarily, diminished the resources upon which not only our prosperity, but the prosperity of our children and our children's children must always depend."

Canada's Natural Resources Also 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 40th 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 greater, a necessity than in the United States.

On the 6th of December, 1917, at the annual meeting of the Bank of Montreal, its president, referring in hopeful

terms to Canada, said: "Our natural resources are unbounded and our credit is irreproachable."

Now, as a matter of fact, our resources are not unbounded, and our very credit is involved in the use we are making, and shall make, of the resources at our disposal. Many of these, as just stated, at present rates of depletion, and without proper methods of conservation being rigidly applied, are within measurable distance of exhaustion. By way of illustration: There was a time—and not so very long ago either—when the buffalo and the carrier pigeon existed in the United States and Canada in countless millions. To-day they are gone.

Resources Must Be Wisely Used and Conserved

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, plants, gr. w. h., waterways and ground waters, may be conserved and transmitted to posterity unimpaired, or at least unabsorbed, 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 for the maintenance of life and for the carrying on of commerce and transportation as fuel—chiefly coal. During the past few months the public interest has been keenly aroused respecting the nation's fuel supply and increasing dependence upon hydro-electric energy. The present war conditions are going to drive 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 are neutral—are practically dependent upon the warring nations for coal, and have found themselves seriously curtailed in obtaining this commodity. They have been 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.

Norway and Sweden are short of coal. Both Great Britain and Germany have released coal to these countries in exchange for food. Britain has required European neutral ships calling for coal to bring cargoes of foodstuffs or other desirable commodities. Holland must get its coal from Germany which consents to supply it only in return for large quantities of food, especially vegetables and meat raised on Dutch soil. Holland at present has open to her no other market in which to secure coal. From Switzerland, Germany demands cash at the rate of 40,000,000 francs monthly for nine months at five per cent. in return for a monthly delivery of 200,000 tons of coal; and within the last month it has been reported that Germany has liberated some hundreds of agents instrumental to secure control of the hydro-electric resources in Switzerland, so that, with these under their direction, and in control, also, of the coal supply, Germany would more completely dominate Switzerland. One of the chief factors