

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CANADIAN NORTH

Based on an alumni lecture delivered by Dr. H.L. Keenleyside, Deputy Minister of Mines and Resources, at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ont., on May 14, 1949.

For many years modern interest in polar areas was largely concentrated on the frozen regions of the Southern Hemisphere. The international race for the South Pole and its discovery by Amundsen, the dramatic exploits and death of Captain Scott and the quiet heroes who accompanied him, the development of commercial whaling in Antarctic seas, the establishment of Little America and the introduction of aircraft to the polar continent by Admiral Byrd, all attracted attention to the bottom of the world.

But there has been a sudden switch of interest. Today little is heard of the Antarctic while never, even in the early days of the search for a northwest passage to the riches of the Indies, has there been so great a concentration on the problems of the north polar regions.

It is not difficult to identify the reasons for this change. Canadians and other northern people are being forced by the bitter facts of international life to free their minds from the shackles imposed by the flat distortions of the Mercator map, and to realize that the political, economic and military powers of the modern world are grouped about the Arctic Sea. Above the equator is to be found every modern state of major influence in the world, including those two great national concentrations of strength and concept, the United States of America and the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics. These nations stretch their claims of national sovereignty to the shores of their respective continents and thence, in most cases, across the ice-bound waters to the northern pole.

Under the leadership of the United States and the Soviet Union the nations of the world are again denying the truth - though without altering the fact - that humanity is inextricably united in One World. This heresy has been revised at the very time that science has placed in our hands an unexampled power of destruction. But whether we choose peace or war, whether we exchange trade or bombs, whether we compete in destruction or cooperate in the extension of human knowledge and the control of nature - including that dubious natural character man himself - the basic international problems of this generation will be faced, as for the most part they have been created, by the peoples of the North.

What the Aegean Sea was to classical antiquity, what the Mediterranean was to the Roman world, what the Atlantic Ocean was to the expanding Europe of Renaissance days, the Arctic Ocean is becoming to the world of aircraft and atomic power.

Relating the simple facts of physical and human geography to the political fears and tensions of this chilled and nervous world, it is not surprising that political and military experts are to-day looking with increasing frequency and increasing disquiet at the short air routes across



49/22

the new narrow seas.

The revived interest in the Arctic, however, is not exclusively the result of the insanity that has brought the nations to the verge of a new, and perhaps a truly fatal, war. Increasing knowledge of the North has resulted in a new appreciation of the economic possibilities of that region. And the more admirable aspect of humanity's split personality is shown in a rapidly growing recognition of the social responsibility of those who enjoy a more favourable environment for the welfare of those of our common race who have been living in half-forgotten isolation beyond the horizon of the North.

If Canadians are to understand the significance of their own northern problems it is essential that they should know more than they commonly do about their Arctic and sub-Arctic regions. With the exception of Russia, Canada has the largest holding of Arctic territory. If we are to continue to retain this vast domain of land, sea and ice, we must prove that we are conscious of our stewardship.

The first need is knowledge.

II

Among Canadians who have had little opportunity to visit in the Arctic or to study northern conditions there are two contrasting points of view that are widely held.

Of these the first might be described as the romantic. To those whose knowledge of the North has been derived chiefly from the cinema or from the lighter forms of fiction - whether or not disguised as journalism - Northern Canada is usually visualized as a region in which the midnight sun is the insignia of summer, and where northern lights brighten every wintry day; where red-coated Mounted Policemen travel swiftly behind racing teams of hardy Malemites over spotless stretches of curving snow from one encampment of jolly and hospitable Eskimos to another; where life in igloo villages is a constant round of native dances, seal hunts and feasts of fish and blubber; where Hudson's Bay factors with Indian features and Scottish names keep the Union Jack flying over trading posts meticulously spruce, and where all the resources of the family or post are made available to welcome the unexpected stranger.

But others hold a contrary, a more dismal view of the North. To these the Arctic is a land of constant struggle and unremitting hardship; where in the Biblical phrase "the waters are hidden as with a stone and the face of the deep is frozen"; where darkness persists throughout the larger part of the year and unbearable cold is its invariable companion; where starvation is the common fate and disease indigenous to all; where every human resource is required to win the primary battle of survival and life is spent amid poverty, conflict, ignorance and filth; where, to adapt the words of Thomas Hobbes, the lot of man is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short".

Truth can be drawn from elements in each of these stereotypes. As a result of experience, research and invention it is now known that human life in the Arctic, while conditioned by difficulties and privations which are not commonly experienced in more settled and more temperate regions, is by no means an impossibility for men and women of normal constitution. Nor is it necessary entirely to abandon those social and intellectual activities which are the proper requirements of the educated man or woman.

What are the facts about Northern Canada?

The Arctic and sub-Arctic regions of this country can be defined roughly as consisting of the Yukon Territory, the Northwest Territories including the Arctic Islands and their waters, the northern half of Quebec and

Labrador, and that segment of the ice-capped polar sea that is caught within the Canadian sector.

In superficial area this territory includes some $1\frac{1}{2}$ million square miles. It is divisible into four main sections; the Yukon Highlands, the Mackenzie Valley, the northern portions of the Canadian Shield and the Arctic Islands. Of these the most important in its potential contribution to the national economy is that great mass of ancient and weathered rock which, in the mineral zones of Ontario and Quebec, has added so immensely to Canadian wealth through its contributions of gold, silver, nickel, and other products of the mine. At Yellowknife the great Shield has already provided a basis for the largest settlement in the Canadian North. The barren and inhospitable surface of the Shield provides at once the greatest physical handicap to the development of settled communities and the greatest promise of riches upon which such communities can be established.

The climate of this area varies from the extreme winter temperatures of certain localities in the Yukon and in the northernmost islands to conditions that are quite as equable - if that is the term - as those of such cities as Winnipeg and Ottawa.

Within this region there live to-day some 8500 Eskimos and 6000 Indians. For the most part they are to be found in nomadic or semi-nomadic groups with a cultural position that is a remarkable combination of neolithic and modern life. Here also are more than 14,000 men and women of the white race - if the ethnologists will forgive the employment of this inaccurate but useful term - most of them comparatively recent adventures in the North.

So much for the area, population and climate. But what is the prospect of developing resources in Northern Canada adequate to sustain a considerable population - to make a significant contribution to the economic welfare of Canada?

In a free and democratic country it is impossible to disregard the human element, in the planning of national projects, because of a desire to force the rapid development of a region that may or may not be able to provide a sound base for industry and population. In other words, Russia can employ its people as expendable factors in the gamble on northern development; Canada cannot. The U.S.S.R. has been able, through the use of compulsory labour, to establish a northern sea route along its Arctic shores and to build cities within the Arctic Circle. Canada will not use the same methods and it is possible that similar developments in this country will be long postponed.

This does not mean, however, that the Canadian North will forever remain a land of desolation, devoid of human activity. There is in the world to-day a constant and increasing demand for the kind of mineral wealth that is unquestionably to be found in the northern as well as in the southern reaches of the pre-Cambrian Shield. It may well be that a slower development, based on a recognition of human rights and carried out with some regard to normal principles of economic practice, may in the end prove to be the most effective method of development. This does not mean that we should not study the Russian experience or fail to learn from Russian results. But no gamble on the possibility of quick profits from the North is worth the sacrifice of the liberties of our people.

From the days of Henry Hudson to the end of the First World War the economy of the North was based on fur, and the welfare of the inhabitants rose and fell with the supply and price of beaver, white fox, mink, marten and muskrat. In some areas of the North the age of fur still persists but elsewhere new foundations for the life of the region are being discovered.

Agriculture is a possibility in some parts of the Yukon and in the Mackenzie watershed, but it is likely that developments in this field will be confined to production for local use. There are few places on the

continent that can produce better vegetables or berries than are to be found under the long summer sun of the Mackenzie Valley or in the garden plots of Dawson and Whitehorse, but grain crops can be more economically produced in the prairies to the south. The raising of cattle is likewise an expensive and doubtful project except for certain local and special needs.

In some parts of the North there are timber resources which it will one day be economic to exploit but, in general, this must wait, except for the satisfaction of local needs, on increased prices or a great reduction in the costs of transportation.

The possibility of fisheries on such a scale as to provide a new national asset is not to be disregarded. Already supplies of whitefish, lake trout and the succulent goldeye are being taken in commercial operations from the great northern lakes. Game fish also are found in numbers to satisfy the most ardent followers of Izaak Walton.

Attention should likewise be given to the possibility of further developing local handicraft industries in leather, wood, bone and other materials among the native population. The social as well as the economic values of such activities are of particular importance.

But the real development of the North will depend upon the discovery and development of mineral resources. The Yukon, having lain quiescent for nearly two generations, is experiencing a revival of mining. With cheap power in prospect and easier means of access being developed, the Trail of '98 may again become a road to achievement. But any development that now takes place will lack the ephemeral quality of the first gold rush. Yellowknife, the most exciting town on the continent, is only awaiting the return of a reasonable price for gold as compared with other commodities, or a reduction in the costs of transportation, to develop into a city of many thousands. On the Labrador boundary, between Quebec and Newfoundland, there are iron deposits of exceptional quality and of an extent that must be measured in scores of miles. \$200,000,000 are being spent on their exploitation. Base metals on the shores of Great Slave Lake, copper in many places throughout the Territories, oil in the Mackenzie Valley, all give promise of spectacular and perhaps permanent development. Most significant, of all are the established radium and uranium deposits at Great Bear Lake, deposits which alone would have made Canada one of the most important of countries in the new atomic age.

III

Apart from the discovery of resources, the fundamental problem of northern development is the problem of transportation. The whole history of the Canadian North can be divided into two periods - before and after the aeroplane. Except for certain difficulties resulting from the cold and from the "break-up" and "freeze-up" conditions that exist briefly in spring and fall, the northern mainland of Canada is a country ideally suited for service by air. Distances are enormous, the surface of rock, water and muskeg in summer, of snow and pressure-ridged ice in winter, makes surface travel slow and arduous. All this can be overcome by air travel. It is true that great difficulties must be overcome in establishing landing fields of a size to carry the largest commercial and military planes. But for the small plane equipped with pontoons in the summer and skis in winter, the Great Shield provides ideal conditions. There are few spots in the whole region in which it would not be possible for a plane, flying at five thousand feet, to find a safe landing - according to the season - on water or on ice. Recognizing this fact and aware of the mineral potentialities of the Shield, the early bush pilots of Canada made a fabulous record that placed this country in the forefront of commercial aviation. As a result of the work done in the northern bush and on isolated mail routes by such men as Dickins, May, Berry, Brintnell

and Becker, Canada was for many years the first country in the world in the quantity of freight carried by air.

To-day, scheduled airlines run from Edmonton into the Yukon and beyond, and from the same booming centre of air transport to Yellowknife and to the towns of the Mackenzie Valley as far north as Aklavik. In addition, aircraft owned by individuals, corporations or governments are readily available at many posts in the Canadian North, and nowhere in that great expanse is there a spot that cannot be reached within a few hours flying. Yet it was less than a generation ago that even the simplest trip into our northern lands involved weeks of preparation and months of back-straining toil.

Other forms of Arctic transport are being slowly but stubbornly developed. The Alaska Highway, constructed as a war measure, now joins together the airports of the northwest staging route and provides permanent land access to Alaska. The Atlin district, famous in the history of gold, is being linked to Whitehorse by road, and from legendary Dawson City and the Klondike another road is working south to Whitehorse, tying in on the way the mineral areas in the Mayo district. North from Alberta a highway now stretches over the tundra to Hay River, with a winter road providing ground access to Yellowknife. In addition, scientific study and experiment are pushing forward the development of more and more efficient types of snow-mobiles - machines that will eventually supersede the Husky and the Samoyede as the motor car has supplanted the horse and mule.

By sea small vessels sailing out of Aklavik and Tuktoyaktuk service the weather stations and other scientific and trading posts that are spreading rapidly across the Arctic islands.

In 1950 a new vessel, constructed by the Government, will take the place of the wrecked NASCOPIE in carrying scientists, doctors, missionaries and administrators every year into the most isolated and barren areas of the eastern Arctic.

If the base metal discoveries on Great Slave Lake develop as is now expected, a railway will within a few years reach the shores of that inland sea.

But the air will always remain the chief means of transport in the Canadian North.

IV

It is the progress made in air travel and the recognition that the shortest routes between the major modern concentrations of human activity and power pass over Arctic lands and waters that have caused most of the dramatic and headline attention that has been focussed on the North in recent years.

During the war it is known that Canada and the United States worked together in the development of northern air supply routes, both to the United Kingdom and to Siberian Russia. The northwest staging route, the development of which was started by Canada before the war and completely paid for by this country, was the line along which thousands of air-craft were sent to reinforce the Russian front. Similarly, from the central and eastern parts of the continent bombing and fighting machines were flown to embattled Britain by way of Labrador and Greenland. To-day these routes are for the most part still available for commercial travel. In addition, post-war planes can fly directly and non-stop across the roof of the world from Nanking to Ottawa or from Vancouver to Moscow. In the event of another war the bombers will cross the icecaps, not the open seas.

That Canada and the United States are co-operating in providing for continental defences along the northern reaches of our land is, of course, well-known. The Permanent Joint Board on Defence, established by Prime Minister Mackenzie King and President Roosevelt at Ogdensburg in 1940, has since that time, both in war, and in the post-war period that we cannot yet call peace, been responsible for advising the governments of these two allied nations on common problems of defence in the North as well as on their ocean frontiers. Just what steps have been, or are being taken, as a result of recommendations from the Board are, of course, matters that cannot be made the subject of public discussion.

One point in connection with this defence collaboration should, however, be repeatedly emphasized. In spite of charges made in other parts of the world and echoed in some circles in Canada, the principle of Canadian sovereignty over our own land and waters has not been placed in danger. Canada has more than paid her way in the contributions that she has made to the common problems of joint defence. Wherever military or semi-military establishments are set up on Canadian soil, they are under Canadian control. Whenever service exercises are undertaken on the lands or seas of this country, the final authority under which they are conducted is the authority of the Canadian people, expressed through our parliamentary institutions.

As international collaboration develops, it is possible that Canada may join with other nations in the relinquishment of an increasing measure of national sovereignty to some international authority. But this country has not surrendered and will not surrender the control of its territory or of its activities to any foreign state - no matter how friendly our relations may be. We have not gained independence from London in order to relinquish it to Washington.

V

There has, however, been an altogether unhealthy emphasis placed on the military significance of recent developments in the Canadian North. It is undoubtedly true that Canada is doing whatever is necessary to provide for the exigencies of defence in that area, but far more significant for the long-term history of humanity on this continent is the work that is being done by the scientists, explorers, administrators, educators, missionaries, doctors and social workers who have been carrying the benefits, and occasionally and inadvertently the detriments, of our national way of life into the endless reaches of the North. These are the men and women who are working on our last frontier. It is they who will bring this harsh, stubborn and silent land into effective contact with the rest of Canada. It is through their intelligence and goodwill that the progress of our northern peoples toward integral union with other Canadians will be amicably effected. Here the old tradition that demanded extermination of forcible subjection of the native inhabitants by the conquering power is being translated into terms and practices less abhorrent to the humane and Christian spirit. Amalgamation is inevitable, ruthless coercion is not.

Because little is known of the work that is being done by pioneer Canadians in Arctic regions, and because these pioneers will need others to assist and succeed them, it is worth placing briefly on record some of the important and stirring human events that are taking place beyond our northern horizon.

Fundamental in any record of developmental activities in the North is the work of our scientists and technicians. At the scientific research stations at Churchill and Baker Lake some of the most competent Canadian specialists are struggling with basic research problems in entomology, the mechanics of snow and ice, nutrition, archeology, protection against cold, and many similar or related subjects. Weather stations have been established at strategic locations throughout the whole area and meteorological knowledge is rapidly expanding. Experts from the Dominion

Observatory are working in the fields of geophysics and terrestrial magnetism. Geologists, topographers and geographers are exploring and recording the outer semblance and the hidden secrets of this stark and solemn land.

There is nothing exclusive about this scientific programme. Indeed, nothing would give us greater satisfaction than to be able to co-ordinate our studies with those of other countries with similar problems to solve. Some progress in this direction has already been made in the exchange of knowledge and experience, particularly with the Danish administration of Greenland and with the scientists of the United States. In dealing with the North we would like in the words of L.B. Pearson, our Minister of External Affairs, to place the Canadian accent on "resources and research not on strategy and politics".

In the North, as elsewhere, it is the human problem that is of the first importance. Scientific knowledge is significant only insofar as it contributes to human welfare.

I have said that it is inevitable that the Eskimos and northern Indians will eventually be brought into the Canadian community. In spite of the fact that in some respects they are only a short distance in habit removed from the Stone Age, it would now appear that the transition will not be as difficult nor as prolonged an operation as was once expected. The Eskimos, in particular, have shown an extraordinary facility in adaptation. Not only do they readily appropriate such modern tools as the Peterhead boat and the magazine rifle but they have shown themselves to be remarkable adept in learning to handle even such complicated mechanisms as the modern aircraft engine. (It is worth noting that during the war Russian Eskimos were among the most proficient aeroplane mechanics in the hard-pressed air force of our one-time ally). Eskimos and Indians alike are adopting the clothing of civilization, although this is not invariably either an aesthetic nor a practical advantage. They are turning even too rapidly to dependence on the food and technical equipment of the white trader. Nor have the customs associated with tobacco, alcohol, games of chance and even the radio been an unmingled blessing. It has sometimes been suggested that the Eskimos were the happiest people in the world until the advance of civilization brought them white flour, snuff, measles and radio commercials.

The real problem facing the Northwest Territories and Yukon Administrations in connection with the transition of the native peoples from this nomadic, hunting and essentially neolithic existence to a modern life consonant in most of its forms with that of the more settled parts of Canada is the necessity of controlling the change in such a way that the native peoples will not lose their natural virtues in acquiring the forms and advantages of modern life. The change must be gradual and voluntary. It must be conditioned by a recognition of the values that were developed in the more primitive forms of society. Its inevitability must not be accepted as justification for compulsion or for an unnecessary fracturing of native codes, customs and ideals. The suggestion that conventional Canadian marriage forms should be demanded of all Eskimos, for example, would, if imposed at this time, simply result in antagonizing the majority of those concerned and in creating unnecessarily a whole generation of illegitimate children.

These things are recognized by those who are charged with the official responsibility for the welfare of the native populations of Northern Canada.

First among the steps that are being taken to meet the needs of our Eskimo and Indian compatriots in the Northwest Territories and the Yukon is the provision of a more adequate medical service. Conditions among the northern nomads have always been harsh; the death rate has been high, particularly at birth; and the incidence of disease has been far beyond

that experienced under more normal modern conditions. To the physical and mental problems which were inherent in native life, the white man has added new perils. Diseases against which the majority of Canadians have, over generations, developed a considerable power of resistance, find the northern natives without any comparable defence. Even the common cold, of which the average Eskimo is free in ordinary circumstances, strikes down whole communities following the visits of the annual Arctic patrols. In order to meet these new and old problems the Government is establishing or subsidizing small hospitals and nursing stations at many points throughout the North. Larger hospitals with facilities for long-term treatment, particularly of tuberculosis, have been set up near the northern railheads. Complete X-ray examination of the whole of the native and white population of the North is under way, and vigorous efforts are being made to isolate those who are found to be suffering from tuberculosis.

With the attempts that are being made to provide for the health of our northern compatriots goes the development of an educational system that has no counterpart in previous Canadian history. Permanent schools are being established in most of even the smaller communities, and teachers to develop the school as the vital centre of the community as a whole. It is used for meetings, for games, for social events, for health clinics, for the organization and activities of clubs, as well as for more conventional forms of instruction. Each school is provided with moving picture and film strip projectors, with a radio receiving set and with a gramophone. School programmes are broadcast regularly to the Mackenzie Valley area, and efforts are being made to duplicate this service in other parts of the North. In this activity members of the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals, working voluntarily, have made a most valuable contribution. Circulating film libraries are carried on a regular schedule from school to school, and records are supplied as part of the basic equipment of each of these community centres. The teachers who undertake this work are being enlisted as regular civil servants and work throughout the year (except for the normal three weeks' leave) instead of following the customary 9½ months schedule of the Canadian public schools. The successful welfare teacher is the symbol of the new day in the Canadian North.

In dealing with the more nomadic groups, particularly in the Eastern Arctic, still other educational techniques must be developed and many experiments are in progress or under contemplation. Travelling schools, seasonal schools, combinations of teaching and nursing centres, and other innovations are being tried in order to meet the unique conditions of this area and of these people.

Canadian social services, such as Old Age Pensions, special assistance to the blind, and Family Allowances have all been carried into the Arctic Circle. Often it is found to be impracticable to pay such allowances in cash, and in such cases the recipients are permitted to take the payment in kind. Thus, on occasion, the Family Allowances of an Eskimo group may be consolidated for the purchase of traps or a boat, or some other articles which can reasonably be expected to provide additional food or clothing for the children or the handicapped. The essence of the whole programme is flexibility - the effort to adapt the methods to the essential purpose.

VI

The North has been referred to as the frontier. But the frontier is more than a geographical area; it is a way of life, a habit of mind. As such, it plays a most significant role in the national life. The influence of the frontier on the intellectual, social, economic and political history of the United States has been a major theme in the historical records of that country. But the frontier in the United States disappeared about the year 1890.

The climax has not yet occurred in Canada. But whereas the frontier in American territory was a phenomenon of the West and its last

stand in that country was staged in the mountain states, in Canada the frontier has persisted longest in the North. Here indeed is a true frontier and one that will never be fully conquered.

This is a matter of vital importance to the future of Canada. The virtues peculiar to frontier conditions - social and political democracy, independence and self-reliance, freedom in co-operation, hospitality and social responsibility - are virtues of particular importance in national life.

Perhaps it is here that the greatest contribution will be made by the Canadian North. Much as that area may contribute to the economic life of the country, this contribution may be of less significance than the fact that here will be a permanent source of energy from which Canada will draw strength in the never-ending fight to guard and maintain the personal and human rights of our people. As long as the frontier remains there will be Canadians who will never succumb to the dogmas of the totalitarian or the power of domestic tyranny. The frontier is a bastion of freedom and the North is a permanent frontier.

S/A