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THE NEW IMPORTANCE OF THE CANADIAN ARCTIC

An address by Mr. Hume Wrong, Canadian Ambassador to the United States, at a dinner of the Arctic Institute of North America, New York City, May 7, 1948.

Long experience has led me to the conclusion that members of my profession in time learn a little about a great many things, but have no opportunity of learning a lot about any one thing. Sooner or later through the years problems touching on nearly every human activity, interest or folly cross one's desk. One copes with each as best one can, and passes to the next. Thus it is certainly in no capacity as an expert that I speak to you about the Canadian Arctic. The bits and pieces of miscellaneous knowledge about Arctic problems which I have acquired during the course of years certainly cannot be put together into a coherent whole. I therefore of necessity leave it to the other speakers this evening to talk with authority and learning. I must content myself with some not profound or original general observations on the new importance of the Arctic to the people of North America.

When I refer to the new importance of the Arctic to North America I mean only in a secondary sense the importance of the Arctic in the defences of this continent. A good deal of over-dramatic interest in the Arctic has been stimulated by people who look at a polar projection of the Northern Hemisphere, and see how the shortest routes to and from most of the land mass of Europe and Asia run across the Arctic regions. It is true, of course, that the vast territories of the Arctic can now be crossed by powerful aircraft. Communication by air for civil and for military purposes could and should use far northern routes; and installations for air navigation, refueling and so on in Arctic and Sub-Arctic latitudes are required. It is conceivable that some time in the future fleets of bombers may be built which would make possible the delivery of heavy attacks across the Arctic Ocean, and we certainly must not blind ourselves to this possibility.

Yet the heavy emphasis so often placed on military activities in the Far North is in fact misplaced. While the new importance of the Arctic does arise in considerable measure from the development of aviation, that is because at last a speedy and flexible method of transportation is available, which makes accessible within a few hours regions that previously could be reached only after weeks of preparation, followed by arduous months of difficult movement over land or sea.

I repeat that we must not, of course, neglect what ought to be done in the field of defence. But we must also avoid interpreting all the activities of men in uniform in these latitudes as preparations for war. In the conditions of the Far North civil and military governmental activities are interlocking and complementary. Mr. Mackenzie King last year said in the House of Commons : "Canada's northern programme is primarily a civilian one, to which contributions are made by the armed forces". He added that this had been the pattern for a long time, illustrating by reference to the installation and operation of communication systems in the Northwest Territories many years ago by the Canadian Army, which has recently undertaken responsibility for administering the Alaska Highway. Mr. King also pointed out the value to all who live in the North of the results achieved at the small winter experimental station at Churchill on Hudson Bay controlled by the armed forces. He referred

as well to the photographic survey work done by the R.C.A.F. and to the administration of the air route from Edmonton to Alaska by this service, as further instances of military activities which are of great civilian importance.

One consequence of the terribly anxious state of the world today is that so many things become greatly distorted through concentration on the prospects of war. Thus a meteorological station in the Far North, manned by less than a dozen men in all, may be, and sometimes is, called an "air base", because it is equipped with an air strip to enable supplies to be flown in. A couple of years ago the Canadian Army sent a small expedition from Churchill on Hudson Bay to the shores of the Arctic Ocean in the depth of winter, in order to test the serviceability of winter equipment and the practicability of keeping the party supplied en route by air. This was given the resounding title of "Expedition Musk Ox", and its course of over 3,000 miles was followed rather intently by the press. Soon after the expedition was concluded a Soviet diplomat brought it up in conversation with me. He was clearly under the impression that it was an elaborate military manoeuvre, involving the movement of thousands of men across the frozen tundra. I doubt if I succeeded in convincing him that the total number in the force was in fact forty. It was not altogether his fault that he was misled by the reports which he had seen. As another illustration I should like to quote an extract from the "greetings" sent by Mr. Tim Buck, National Leader of the Labour Progressive Party in Canada, to the Comrades in the United States, which were printed last week on May Day in the New York Daily Worker :

> "With the treacherous connivance of the Mackenzie King Government the U.S. General Staff is planning to make Churchill on Hudson Bay, a gigantic base for aggressive air-borne war against the Soviet Union". (That is the small winter experimental establishment mentioned by Mr. King.) "Under the Truman-King Military Pact Canada's Arctic is becoming a military zone . . . . Clearly, the Truman-Marshall plans look towards taking over Canada and using her as a Finland or Belgium of World War III".

A clergyman of my acquaintance used gently to refer to a certain notorious liar as a man possessing a constructive imagination. I shall not insult your intelligence by pausing to refute the use to which in this passage Mr. Buck put his destructive imagination.

I do not want, however, to leave the impression that it is only those who look to Moscow for guidance who indulge in such distortions and exaggerations. Scarcely a week passes without one or more examples of the same sort of defective judgment occurring in organs of every shade of opinion.

When I repeat the often-used phrase that the Arctic and Sub-Arctic have become the North American frontier, it will be evident to you that I am using the word "frontier" in the North American and not in the European sense. To any European a frontier means a boundary between two states dotted with customs offices and frontier guards, and responsible often nowadays for protracted arguments and unhappy delays for those who wish to cross it. If you were to ask a citizen of any European country what he understood by our expression "a frontiersman", his answer would deal with customs officers, gendarmes, and the like.

In this spacious continent the frontier has a grander meaning. It is the territory of the pioneer, who, for varied motives, is ready to leave behind him cities and towns and paved streets and movie theatres - the man who has been responsible for making both the United States and Canada extend from sea to sea. Frontiersmen are like Flecker's Pilgrims making the journey to Samarkand :

"We are the Pilgrims, master; we shall go
Always a little further; it may be
Beyond that last blue mountain barred with snow,
Across that angry or that glimmering sea."

In the continental United States and in the southern part of Canada we have just about run out of frontier, and thus it is that the Far North in Canada and Alaska is North America's last frontier. There is so much of it that it will be a very long time before we run out. Although much has been done to study its problems, an enormous amount remains still to be done.

It is not easy for the imagination to grasp the extent of the Canadian Arctic and Sub-Arctic. The land area of the North West Territories and the Yukon is about 1,460,000 square miles, very nearly equal to one half the area of the continental United States, and approximately two-fifths of the area of Canada. A good deal of this, of course, lies outside the Arctic proper, since the southern border of the North West Territories is the 60th parallel of latitude, some 400 miles to the south of the Arctic Circle. But the Arctic Circle is only a line on the map and not a boundary between different regions. The latitude at which a person passes from Sub-Arctic to Arctic conditions depends on the part of the world in which he is.

The great archipelago of the Arctic Islands includes Baffin Island which is larger than any state in the union except Texas, Victoria and Ellesmere Islands, each almost as large as Great Britain, and several others as big as the smaller countries of Europe. The coastline is immense. The shoreline of the Canadian mainland on the Arctic Ocean is nearly 6,000 miles long, and the shoreline of the Arctic islands is estimated at nearly 27,000 miles. These bald statistics indicate the huge extent of the task of science in applying throughout the Canadian Arctic modern methods of exploration and research.

A frequently noted paradox of our times is that too often it takes the impetus of a great war to start or to further developments which should be undertaken in the interests of peace and progress. In the northwest the war with Japan did more to open up the country, and to make easier the work of the scientists, than centuries of the fur trade and the search for precious metals. The construction of the air route to Alaska, followed by the building of the Alaska Highway and the establishment of a number of landing fields down the Mackenzie River, is serving to make accessible a huge area reaching well beyond the Arctic Circle. In the northeast the war with Germany similarly brought the construction of new air fields and aids to air navigation. Across the northern archipelago there have been dotted a number of weather stations which are adding greatly to our knowledge of those "masses of Arctic air moving south from Canada" which are often mentioned in the reports of the U.S. Weather Bureau at times when the temperature is unpleasantly frigid and our stocks of fuel oil are low. These wartime developments now have their peaceful uses. Their existence greatly facilitates the achievement of the programme of Arctic research prepared by the Arctic Institute.

Neither the Canadian Arctic nor its counterpart in the northern portion of Alaska is ever likely to have a large population. At present in the Canadian Northwest Territories there is probably on the average not much more than one person for every hundred square miles of territory, although the white population is said to have increased by 60% in a single recent year. The native population of Indians and Eskimos is little more than 10,000, nearly evenly divided between the two races. We know something, however, of the endowment in mineral resources of parts at least of the area - gold around Great Slave Lake and at other points, uranium at Great Bear Lake, oil at Norman Wells, copper in the region of the Coppermine River, and so on. Much has been discovered, enough to establish that a great deal more remains to be found.

Arctic research has, of course, been going on for a very long time, but until recently its purpose was limited almost wholly to geographical exploration. It has passed through many phases. The original chief impulse, which lasted for well over two centuries, was the famous search for a Northwest Passage from Europe to the Far East. The map of the Canadian Arctic is dotted with the names of the early voyagers - Hudson, Frobisher, Davis and many others - who in their small ships struggled to fulfill the dream of a direct sailing route westward across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. The fur trade provided an economic basis for further exploration in the Northland by men of the Hudson's Bay Company around Hudson Bay and later in the interior, and by the discovery of the lake and river routes into the Far North by French and Scottish traders operating out of Montreal.

The first two white men to reach the Arctic coastline overland were Samuel Hearne of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1771 after a winter of wandering with the Indians, and Alexander Mackenzie of the Northwest Company, who descended the river that bears his name in 1789. It is indicative of the incentive behind the early travel that Mackenzie's name for that great river was "River Disappointment", because he found that it emptied into the Arctic and not into the Pacific Ocean.

Hearne and Mackenzie were not scientific explorers in the modern sense. Both, however, had learned one very valuable lesson in what I may call applied science; they used the Indian means of travel by canoe or by snowshoe, and they were able to live off the country. The first substantial land expedition to the Canadian Arctic which could be called scientifically equipped had not been taught this lesson. It nearly ended in disaster and suffered terrible privations. That was the journey by land undertaken in 1821-22 with a considerable company by Lieutenant John Franklin, who some 25 years later was to die with all his large party on his final ship-borne attempt to unravel the secrets of Arctic geography and to discover the Northwest Passage.

Strangely enough it was the disappearance of the Franklin expedition that gave the first real impetus to international scientific cooperation in the Arctic, beginning in 1848, just 100 years ago. In that year there began a search which lasted for ten years before satisfactory evidence was uncovered that every one of his 129 men had lost their lives. During that intensive search, three countries took part in it, Great Britain, the United States and France; 35 or 40 ships were involved; and five overland expeditions were undertaken. One result was that some 6,000 miles of new coastline were discovered in what are now the Canadian Arctic Islands.

Thirty or so years later, in 1882-83, the first Polar Year was instituted. It provided another example of early international scientific cooperation, in the course of which a world-wide chain of twelve northern stations was set up for observation purposes by the ten cooperating countries.

Men of many nations have taken part during three and a half centuries in pushing forward the limits of geographical knowledge in the North American Arctic - British and Americans, Danes, Norwegians and Russians, French and Canadians and others. Most of the modern Arctic expeditions have included men of different nationalities. That eminent veteran, a Governor of the Arctic Institute, Mr. Stefansson, may recall that in his expeditions in the Eastern islands of the Archipelago on behalf of the Canadian Government between 1913 and 1918 there were included citizens of France, Norway, Denmark, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand as well as of Canada. Another well-known contributor to our knowledge, especially of the anthropology of the Arctic, was Dr. Rasmussen, who led a Danish expedition in 1921-24 from Greenland along the shores of the Arctic Ocean to Alaska and Siberia in his studies of the Eskimos. I shall not weary you with reference to the many other expeditions of recent years.

A good deal has been said about collaboration between Canada and the United States in military matters in the Far North, but not many people know that collaboration has been going on for a considerable time in civil activities, such as the preservation of waterfowl and the introduction of reindeer into the Mackenzie delta. Mr. Keenleyside, as the deputy head of the Department responsible, among other duties, for the administration of the northern Canadian territories, can tell you with authority more about the plans and prospects for further development of this nature. These include arrangements of great interest to the Arctic Institute for the reception and accommodation of scientists at remote Arctic posts.

Such posts, over 20 in number, have been maintained for many years by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. They are to be found as far north as Ellesmere Island, within 750 miles of the North Pole, and patrols from them have made notable Arctic journeys. The establishment of new weather stations will in time provide other bases for scientific studies. There are also the trading posts of the northern trading companies; some of the remote posts of the Hudson's Bay Company have a longer history than many large cities far to the south. There are mission stations, and schools and hospitals. There are the new establishments constructed for military purposes during the war, sometimes by American forces with Canadian consent, sometimes by Canada. Some of these have served their purpose and are no longer occupied; some are maintained by skeleton staffs; some have been put to new uses, such as the investigation of magnetic phenomena and ionispheric research; some, including most of the weather stations, are retained to fill what are now largely civil needs for meteorological observation and for aids to air navigation, to meet which also a few new posts have been established since the war. All these establishments are, of course, under the full control of the Canadian Government, although the collaboration of the United States in construction and operation has continued in some instances.

Canada, with her great reaches of northern territory, has full responsibility for the control of her northland, but that carries with it a heavy responsibility to the rest of the world, and especially to her near neighbours, for seeing that the secrets are revealed, the puzzles solved, essential things done. The Canadian Government has welcomed, and continues to welcome, responsible scientific investigation in the Canadian Arctic. It requires the fulfilment of certain conditions before licenses will be issued to scientists who wish to enter this area. They must respect the game laws, since game provides the means of livelihood of the native population. They must submit a full report of the results attained. They must satisfy the authorities that they are properly equipped and backed, so that they will not become stranded and perhaps have to be rescued at great risk and expense. They must not remove archeological specimens from Canada without specific permission. They must in general comply with Canadian laws and respect Canadian sovereignty. No one can maintain that these are hampering conditions.

There is so much to be done that skilled collaborators from other countries are necessary for its achievement. Collaboration from all Arctic powers and from others who are interested will be cordially received; but there is at present, I am sorry to say, no chance of full collaboration on reciprocal terms by the country with the most extensive Arctic territories of all, the Soviet Union.

Even in what gave the start to Arctic studies, the exploration of the Arctic geography of our speck in the universe that we call the world, there remain wide gaps in our knowledge. Scientific interest in the Arctic, however, has broadened from its original geographic basis. Arctic research is now becoming a commonly used term. There is not any specific branch of knowledge that could be called Arctic science. Arctic research means the application of the various specialized sciences

to the conditions and environment of the Arctic regions. Until fairly recently the problems of communication and transportation only permitted in a limited degree the fundamental study of Arctic conditions on the spot. Much of the research had to be done elsewhere in laboratories in which Arctic conditions were simulated. With the great advances of the last decade, it has become possible at last to take science to the Arctic and to establish laboratories, observation stations and so on in the actual area. This major advance is proving of the first importance in solving the problems on which the development of the Arctic must depend.

Anyone who has examined the bulletin issued a couple of years ago by the Arctic Institute, under the title "A Programme of Desirable Scientific Investigations in Arctic North America", cannot fail to be impressed by the scope and variety of the work to be accomplished, ranging all the way from mapping and description, through meteorology, geology, biology, agronomy, and other large branches of science, to the anthropology and archeology of the native inhabitants. In all these sciences not a great deal more than a beginning has been made. In all of them there is room for the sort of unofficial international planning and encouragement that is provided by the Arctic Institute.

Let me illustrate by referring to a plan for this coming summer. It is supposed that the present Eskimo is a descendant of hardy nomads who wandered east from Asia as far as Greenland. A logical way of proving this is to trace the route followed along the Arctic coast and through the Arctic Islands. With this in mind the National Museum of Canada has invited two outstanding authorities, one from the United States and the other from Denmark, to work in the Canadian Arctic Islands with a Canadian archeologist in an effort to link up the traces of the migration in Alaska with those in Greenland. The American authority is here tonight. He is presiding over this dinner in the person of Dr. H.B. Collins, the Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Arctic Institute.

To say, as some do, that interest in the Canadian Arctic has until recently been dormant for many years is an exaggeration. It is true that for a long period interest was mainly kept alive by explorers and fur traders and missionaries, and that it is now much more widely diffused. The development of far northern air-routes, the new consciousness that we have neighbours to the north, however remote they may be across the polar seas, the search for fresh sources of minerals essential to our civilization, the knowledge that our weather is determined by Arctic conditions, the desire to promote the welfare of the sparse native inhabitants - all these and other motives are combining with the zeal of the scientists to expand the limits of human knowledge by detailed research in Arctic conditions. The Arctic Institute of North America has taken in hand a task of such magnitude that it can count on attaining the venerable age of the Royal Society in Great Britain, now entering upon its fourth century, or of the American Philosophical Society, now in its third century, before it will have any difficulty in finding useful projects for study and research.

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