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THE TREND IS TO THE NORTH

An address by the Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources, Mr. Jean Lesage, to the Canadian Club of Toronto, November 22, 1954.

One of the most pleasant parts of a Cabinet Minister's job is provided by the many and varied opportunities that he gets of meeting and addressing distinguished groups of Canadians. I am flattered by your invitation to this platform which is certainly one of the most renowned in Canada. I can assure you, Mr. President, that I am most grateful for, and honoured by, your invitation to be here today.

I know that many of my compatriots have spoken to you about the ethnic and cultural features of Canada and how, as Her Majesty the Queen Mother expressed it in Ottawa ten days ago, this country has achieved political unity through diversity. It seemed to me that it might be appropriate if I talked today about the development of our economic unity. The importance of directing our thoughts to this facet of the subject lies in the fact that our task is not yet completed. It is true that we and our ancestors have successfully transformed Canada from a collection of geographically isolated regions into a cohesive, strong and dynamic economic unit. Yet we must not forget that we have vast areas which are still virtually untouched. Our famous national motto, "A Mari Usque Ad Mare", and the aphorism carved above the doors of the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa, "The Wholesome Sea is at Her Gates, Her Gates Both East and West", are perhaps somewhat misleading. By concentrating our attention on only two of the oceans which wash our shores, the Atlantic and the Pacific, they cause us to forget our third maritime boundary, the Arctic Ocean.

It is only in recent years that Canadians have become actively conscious of the depth of Canada as well as of her breadth. Even so, it is still helpful to impress this fact more vividly on our minds by recalling certain geographical facts. The straight line distance across Canada from the east coast of Newfoundland to the west coast of Vancouver Island is about 3,500 miles. The distance from the American border to Edmonton, our most northerly large city is 300 miles. The distance from the American border to Coppermine, on Coronation Gulf, is about 1,300 miles, 1,000 miles north of Edmonton; but this northern settlement is still over 1,350 miles

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south of the northermost point of the Queen Elizabeth Islands. Some indication of the vastness, and at the same time the sparse population, of northern Canada is given when we remember that the Northwest Territories and the Yukon together represent about 40 per cent of the land and fresh water area of Canada but contain less than one-fifth of one per cent of the total Canadian population.

I am not suggesting, of course, that these northern regions will ever be populated to the same extent as the southern parts of Canada. Their geography certainly does not indicate this. What I do want to emphasize is that they have vast resources, resources of a type which will soon be most urgently required by the rest of the world. A rapid economic development, accompanied by a substantial increase in population, most surely lies ahead of these regions. Many factors will be important in determining the timing and the speed and the manner of this development, but one of the most important will undoubtedly be transportation.

However, I must not get ahead of myself and anticipate my conclusions. First I want to sketch briefly the part played by transportation in the development of Canada into a great nation, because in this case - as in most others - the past has important lessons to teach us.

Obviously, Canada has always been a vast country - vast not merely in terms of size but in terms of being sparsely populated with large distances between many of the settlements and with formidable natural barriers separating her various economic regions. This is the kind of vastness which presents serious problems of communication, administration and government. It is the kind of vastness which requires men of imagination, vision and faith to overcome.

At Confederation, Canada, economically was a series of disconnected units: the Maritime Provinces were separated by geography and by closed navigation during the winter months from the settled area in the St. Lawrence basin; the prairies were still to a great extent using Hudson Bay as a sea outlet; the Cordilleran regions were facing the Pacific without Canadian land communications with Eastern Canada.

The problems of continental distances were solved only with the advent of railroads. Rail transportation, aside from giving momentum to the economic development, had the outstanding social and political accomplishment of binding together the whole northern portion of the American continent. The building of the intercolonial railway was necessary to bring New Brunswick and Nova Scotia into the Union and the building of a railway to the Pacific Coast within ten years was one of the terms on which British Columbia agreed to enter.

The Intercolonial Railway played a role of the utmost importance as an economic and political link. Nevertheless the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway was the more spectacular feat because the promoters had the courage to dare the distances and the ruggedness of the major portion of a practically empty continent. The Intercolonial had to traverse only a relatively short

distance of undeveloped country between settled areas. The C.P.R. on the other hand had first to bridge the 700 miles of uninhabited, and inhospitable territory of the Canadian Shield. This was an area which seemed barren, and it was only when it was attacked and scarred by the railroad builders that it gave any hint of the tremendous wealth which lies locked inside it. Then the railroad had to cross the prairies, and while in Canada there were then no hostile Indians to plague the construction gangs as they had done in the United States, this phase of construction presented immense problems of what today we call logistics. Finally came the task of running steel through the Kicking Horse Pass and across the other ranges of the Cordilleras, a feat far more difficult than that which had faced railway builders South of the border.

I think that today there is a temptation for us who sit at our desks or travel across the continent in the comfort of a modern railway car to take the existence of the C.P.R. and the C.N.R. too much for granted and to forget the foresight and the unquenchable courage which alone made possible their conception and creation. Some idea of the problems involved in building these railways was given to me by a conversation I had with an engineer concerned in the construction of the railroad from Seven Islands to the iron ore mines at Knob Lake. He described the immense obstacles which this railroad had had to overcome and then pointed out that they were none of them as great as many which were faced in building the transcontinental lines, and that in those days the construction engineers had none of the modern power driven machinery nor even modern explosives to assist them.

The physical difficulties were accompanied by equally important financial difficulties. As Professor Lower has pointed out in "Colony to Nation", if Canada had been a populous and wealthy country, the feat of constructing the C.P.R., while great, would not have been superhuman. The United States had just completed the Union Pacific Railroad to San Francisco, but it was a country of 40 million people and even for it the Union Pacific was a notable piece of construction. Canada, he goes on to say, was a little country of 4 millions with only revenues of less than \$20 million and a credit standing in London that had to depend on Imperial guarantees for reasonable rates of interest.

The order of magnitude of the financial effort required to build the Canadian railroad system may be more vividly perceived when considering the tremendous investment involved in relation with the Canadian National income for that period. In 1870, the Gross National Product of Canada was \$481 million - and in 1900, it was slightly over one billion dollars as compared with \$24 billion in 1953. It is in that perspective also that we have to appraise the Federal Government contribution, which by 1914 had reached a total of approximately \$600 million, without taking into account the land grants of 31.8 million acres.

The completion of these railroads was indeed a miracle of physical and moral courage, of foresight and singleness of purpose on the part of the statesmen,

the financiers and the engineers who were concerned. Here indeed were men with unlimited vision and the faith to back it up with their reputations and their wealth. The challenge of the task to be done was met with boundless energy and resources - and the Canadian Pacific was built - and the Atlantic was linked with the Pacific - and the prairies were populated - and the Dominion of Canada was effectively extended from sea to sea.

The chain reaction of improvements in transportation and communication hastened the development of trade, the creation of increased wealth and the lowering of costs of production; wheat production and the emergence of industrial urban centers involved a mass immigration policy in which the railways took a very active part.

Other transcontinental ventures are the Trans-Canada Highway which is now in the building, and the planned Trans-Canada Pipeline. I would particularly like to emphasize the importance of the Trans-Canada Pipeline, because I feel that many of those who have advocated the transportation of natural gas from western to eastern Canada by the way of the United States have overlooked many features, including the important stimulus to Canadian manufacturing developments in the mineral and wood pulp industries which a supply of gas will produce in Northern Ontario.

We have, as I said, successfully welded Canada into a great economic unit from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Many factors, of course, played an important part in this, but there is little doubt that the dominating role was played by transportation facilities, and particularly by the fact that they were provided at the time when they were most critically needed.

I might go on to describe the vital role played by civil aviation as a means of rapid transportation, - to point out the useful function filled by Trans-Canada Air Lines, Canadian Pacific Air Lines and the great number of small so-called "bush pilot" organizations, - all of which have made a substantial contribution to improve transportation over the "magnificent distances" of Canada; - to speculate on the useful function of a deepened St. Lawrence Seaway; but these undertakings are present in your minds.

Canada may have appeared as a man made and artificial political entity, to many observers in the past. If there was some truth in this statement, it is gradually becoming inaccurate and even false, as developments are being pushed north, thus giving more and more depth to the country.

Recently a British traveller and writer has made the following analogy about our country; "Canada is a seed bed, resting on the United States border. Its soil is the line of settlement from the Gulf of St. Lawrence along the railways westward to the Fraser River in British Columbia, and its most recent growth, the new enterprises, climb upwards, like the tendrils from the awakening seeds, along the lines of the rivers and the lakes towards the polar seas."

The economic strength and the financial stability of Canada are greatly enhanced with every new northern

development. By becoming more compact through our northern expansion and with increased population, trade and industry may be favoured with lower rates of transport, thus lowering production costs, which, in turn, will place Canadian products in a better position to compete on the world trade markets.

With Newfoundland entering Confederation, with the present northern developments in the provinces and with the future expansions of our Canadian north land, Canada is reaching its natural geographical boundaries. It is no longer this "thin red line" extending from coast to coast, but an economic unit based on the dynamic strength of the whole northern portion of the continent.

In our times, northern expansion has taken place in all the Canadian provinces at a constantly accelerated pace. Just to mention a few:

- The Knob Lake iron ore in northern Quebec, which is just entering into production. The greatest single factor in this industrial development has been the construction of a railway of three hundred and sixty miles long in such a rugged country that Jacques Cartier called it "Terre de Cain", "The Land of Cain";

- The opening up of the Abitibi Kirkland Lake area, in northern Ontario and Quebec, which took place at the closing of the prosperity decade prior to the "dirty-thirties" of the depression years. - The present Lynn Lake mining developments - Uranium City on Lake Athabaska - the oil fields in northern Alberta. - The Kitimat hydro-electric power installation.

Now that Canada has attained nationhood and a feeling of maturity, it would appear to be appropriate for Canadians to give serious thought to the economic development and political integration of our northern heritage beyond the provinces, the Yukon and the Northwest Territories, the last frontier in America.

Let us for a moment look ahead: let us look at the problem of drawing northern Canada into effective economic unity with the southern part of the country. Many factors will of course play an important role in this development. One of them will be the extent to which merchantable wealth can be discovered in these regions, just as the success of the east-west unification of Canada depended upon the existence of immensely valuable natural resources, including the fertile land of the prairies. That these vast stores of wealth do exist in northern Canada is already proven. One has only to consider that the eastern and central mainland portions of the Northwest Territories, and much of the Arctic Islands, consist of the Canadian Shield, that the Mackenzie Basin is an extension of the Great Central Plain, and that the eastern portion of the Northwest Territories and most of the Yukon Territory lie astride the Cordilleras and their flanks. The Canadian Shield and the Cordilleras are two of the world's great metal bearing regions, and the Central Plains are one of the great oil bearing regions; hence the Northwest Territories and the Yukon are one of the great untapped sources of mineral wealth remaining in the world. That the demand for these resources will be urgent, and will increase at an accelerating rate, few can doubt who have studied the Paley Report.

The key to the exploitation of these resources - as anyone who has participated in their development will tell you, and I am sure that there are a number of such people here today - lies in the provision of adequate transportation facilities. The first transportation routes in northern Canada were, as in the rest of the country, the great river systems - the Mackenzie and the Yukon. The Klondike gold rush of 1898 caused the White Pass and Yukon Railway - a narrow gauge road - to be built from Skagway in Alaska, across the Coast Range to Whitehorse, in the Yukon. Apart from this railroad, which is only 110 miles long, and a few local roads around Dawson and Mayo, the rivers and packhorse trains across the mountains remained the only means of surface communication in the Yukon until the construction of the Alaska Highway and the Canol Road during the war, and the building of a road from Whitehorse to Mayo, and later to Dawson, by the federal government after the war.

In the Northwest Territories the Mackenzie River System was the only means of surface transportation into and through the Mackenzie District, apart from tractor trains during the winter, until the Mackenzie Highway was built from the Peace River District to Great Slave Lake after the war. There is still no railroad into the Northwest Territories.

The development of the aircraft, of course, has been of tremendous assistance in developing northern Canada - but even so it provides by no means a complete solution to the problem. The airplane has done wonders in opening up the country, particularly for prospectors, and it will continue to play a dominating role in this field. In the Northwest Territories, because of the plethora of lakes in the Precambrian Shield, planes can take prospectors into remote areas, provision them, and even bring in such equipment as drills. In the Yukon the prospector is less fortunate, because lakes in the Cordilleras are few and far between. Once the resources have been proved and production is planned, however, whether the property lies in the Shield or in the Cordilleras, surface transportation becomes essential both for moving heavy equipment into the area and for moving out the product - unless it be gold, which can profitably be carried by air.

In surface transportation lies the principal difficulty of northern development. Water transportation is slow and limited to a short season, and thus involves the costly storage of large inventories. Winter transportation by tractor train is feasible but very costly. Air transportation is, of course, feasible during both winter and summer, but except where landing strips are available for wheeled aircraft, it is interrupted during the freeze-up and break-up.

Railroads and roads are expensive both to construct and maintain, and the terrain sometimes makes long detours necessary. Economies can sometimes be achieved by crossing rivers by ferries in summer and ice bridges in winter, but this means a substantial period during the freeze-up and the break-up when the road is unusable. However, costly though they may be, roads are required even for a relatively small development and railroads will be essential before the full potential of the region can even be remotely approached.

Perhaps the greatest single development that could occur to speed the development of the north would be the construction of railway lines to open up the area. We have seen that railways are and always have been a decisive factor to the development in Canada. Can we hope for railway lines to and in the north? I am of the opinion that sooner or later railway lines will reach into the Canadian northland and I believe it will be sooner than later.

I am not, I can assure you, urging a spree of railroad building in northern Canada. I am merely placing the situation before you and trying to show what problems we have ahead of us. The solution of these problems when the appropriate time comes will, in my opinion, best be achieved by joining the initiative of private enterprise with planned government assistance, in much the same way that the construction of the trans-continental railways was accomplished.

An indication that the government is alive to the importance of the development of northern Canada was given just about a year ago, when the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources Bill was introduced in the House of Commons. In moving the Second Reading of that Bill the Prime Minister pointed out that its purpose was to emphasize the fact that the people of Canada are greatly interested in the northern regions and regard them as an important part of the area which is subject to the sovereignty of the Canadian nation. One of the responsibilities given to my Department by this new legislation, which received Royal Assent on December 16, 1953, is to promote measures for the further economic and political development of the Northwest Territories and Yukon Territory, and to foster, through scientific investigation and technology, knowledge of the Canadian north and of the means of dealing with conditions related to its further development.

I wish to express the fervent hope that all of us who are concerned with the problems of northern Canada -- workers and technicians, scientists and engineers, business executives and financiers, and government officials -- will, when the occasion arises, show the same degree of vision, the same courage and far-sighted wisdom and the same determination to back our judgments with our wealth and our reputations as did our predecessors in the great days of the early development of Canada. There are some who say that the spirit of adventure is well-nigh dead in this country, that it has been killed by the urge for security. With these people I profoundly disagree. There is abundant evidence in our postwar economic progress, at almost any point where you care to look, that Canadians still retain the courage and the sense of adventure of their forefathers. And if there is one single fact that is calculated to keep this spirit alive, it is the call of our Northern frontier.

May I conclude by quoting from a speech which Sir Wilfrid Laurier made in the House of Commons, in 1904.

"To those who urge upon us the policy of tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, to those who tell us, wait, wait, wait; to those who advise us to pause, to consider, to reflect, to calculate

and to inquire, our answer is: No, this is not a time for deliberation, this is a time for action. The flood-tide is upon us that leads on to fortune; if we let it pass, the voyage of our national life, bright as it is today, will be bound in shallows. We cannot wait because time does not wait; we cannot wait, because in these days of wonderful development, time lost is doubly lost; we cannot wait, because at this moment there is a transformation going on in the conditions of our national life which it would be a folly to ignore and a crime to overlook; such is our duty; it is immediate and imperative. It is not of tomorrow but of this day, of this hour and of this minute".

It was of the Canadian west that Sir Wilfrid Laurier spoke. There were those who, in 1904, could not see the vision of the west, who looked only on the empty spaces and huddled comfortably where life was old, and well established. Today the empty spaces of the west are filled with Canadians who have extracted from her soil, and from beneath her soil, the wealth that is Canada's heritage.

Someone has said that a nation remains great only while it has a frontier to conquer. Canada has always had its frontier. In 1900 it lay to the west. The west was conquered and another frontier remains. Today it stretches to our north. There are those who see our north only as the land of empty spaces, but I am confident that you here present will see in the north the sort of vision that Laurier saw in the west.

I am confident that Canadians will respond to it as they have responded before, and the wealth of the earth there, too, will be yielded up to them. Then, ladies and gentlemen, Canada's heritage will have seen its real fulfilment.

S/A