DAWJ #5
Yukon: IV
No Dust on us.

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January 25, 1967

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Dear Mr. Nolte:

When I first went west to Vancouver I made the trip on the Canadian Pacific Railway. That was in 1953. You could still cross the mountains on the back of an open observation car and take on a good layer of C.P.R. soot. The magnificent mountain engines laboured up the grades under blasting pillars of solid jet smoke. The pulse of the steam in their huge cylinders shook the loose rock off the sheer walls of the Kicking Horse Pass and the whistles were sound enough to blank out the brain and quite as splendid to the ear as the scenery was to the eye.

The slick diesel trains today are a poor substitute. The passengers sit in those hermetically sealed dome cars that glide through the landscape like so many mobile casseroles. Any impression of the out-of-doors is filtered through the white wall of piped music. The sound of the klaxon is inaudible.

Lady MacDonald would not be enthused. She was the wife of the great Sir John A., Canada's first Prime Minister. When the first official tour went through the Rockies the open air observation car was too tame for her. She sat outside on the front of the spacious cow-catcher well forward of the smoke stack where she could appreciate the scenery and work up an appetite for the Winnipeg Gold Eye which became a tradition on CPR #1 from Montreal.

This grand progress from east to west did not end at Vancouver. There was more to come. The night boat to Victoria was the climax. This packet service from the mainland to Vancouver Island was enshrined as an Article of the British North America Act and was one of the conditions of British Columbia joining Confederation.

We are celebrating the centennial of that Confederation this year and the country is now brim-filled with centennial projects. In Yukon we are going to climb a series of unconquered peaks in the name of our hundredth birthday. In one small Manitoba town they burned all the out-houses on New Year's Eve. In Toronto they are going to blow up an old ferry off the water front. It remains to be seen what will be blown up in Quebec during the year.

The C.P.R. might be persuaded to resurrect the old rolling stock and steam engines of Number 1 for their centennial project and thereby give Canadians a chance to savour once again the epic journey from Calgary to Vancouver. But nothing, I am sure, would persuade them or the C.N.R. to have another crack at refloating the old marine service to Victoria. By 1953, when I first stood on the Pacific, the night boats had become an elegant, costly failure.

It's a pity. The trip on the Princesses was the next best thing to a China cruise. There were finger bowls, stringed ensembles, silver, and stewards in white starched livery. The staterooms might be small but they had all the proper nautical gadgets which came from Clydeside. Oversized switches, hooks, huge life-jackets, mahogany, polished brass and a console of faucets in the bathroom were all worthy of P & O to India in its posh days. After 1939 each Princess carried a six pounder as a patriotic concession to the war effort but nothing inside was touched.

The original Princesses were replaced but the high quality and low efficiency remained. Perhaps John Galsworthy would have approved but post-war passengers did not. By then it was 45 minutes flying time across the Strait of Georgia between Vancouver and Victoria but the ships were still taking seven hours, not counting the time for loading and unloading. And the most telling statistic showed up in the ships' specifications. They could nicely cope with 1,100 passengers on each run but only 50 automobiles could be stowed below.

In 1958 the service, such as it was, came to a disastrous halt when the seamen went on strike. The congestion of tourists and commuters in sedate Victoria became so acute that the provincial government had to take a hand in arranging food and accommodation.

This dispute was settled but British Columbia was left with a political issue. In 1959, Premier Bennett announced that the provincial government would start its own ferry service. It was not a popular decision. The taxpayers were cynical and the press indignant. The Vancouver Sun demanded to know where the new service would fit into the picture. The C.P.R. was losing $300,000 a year and the Black Ball Ferries had just refused a government offer to take over the entire service despite a promise to build new wharves and approaches at government expense. Private enterprise wouldn't bite.

In March of 1959 the government placed an order for $6 million for two new ferries. It was the start of Bennett's navy. The Princesses had their last run that year. By 1962 the province had bought out the last private competitor. In 1965 the Premier made a speech when his 23rd ship was launched. The B.C. Ferry Authority (he said) was now the largest in the world. It was also, in his opinion, "the best operated, and the most prosperous"; a modest appraisal for Mr. Bennett but one which was probably not far off the mark.

By 1960 the new ferries had cut into the airline business. Air Canada admitted that their Vancouver-Victoria runs had lost 50% of

their passengers. Local residents in the Gulf Islands were petitioning Victoria to take over the ferry routes to their out ports. In one summer month in that year the new government ferries carried over 25,000 vehicles and 80,000 passengers for a net profit of $50,000. In the first six months of 1966 a million people made the trip. Last summer 12,000 passengers and 3,500 vehicles used the ferries every day.

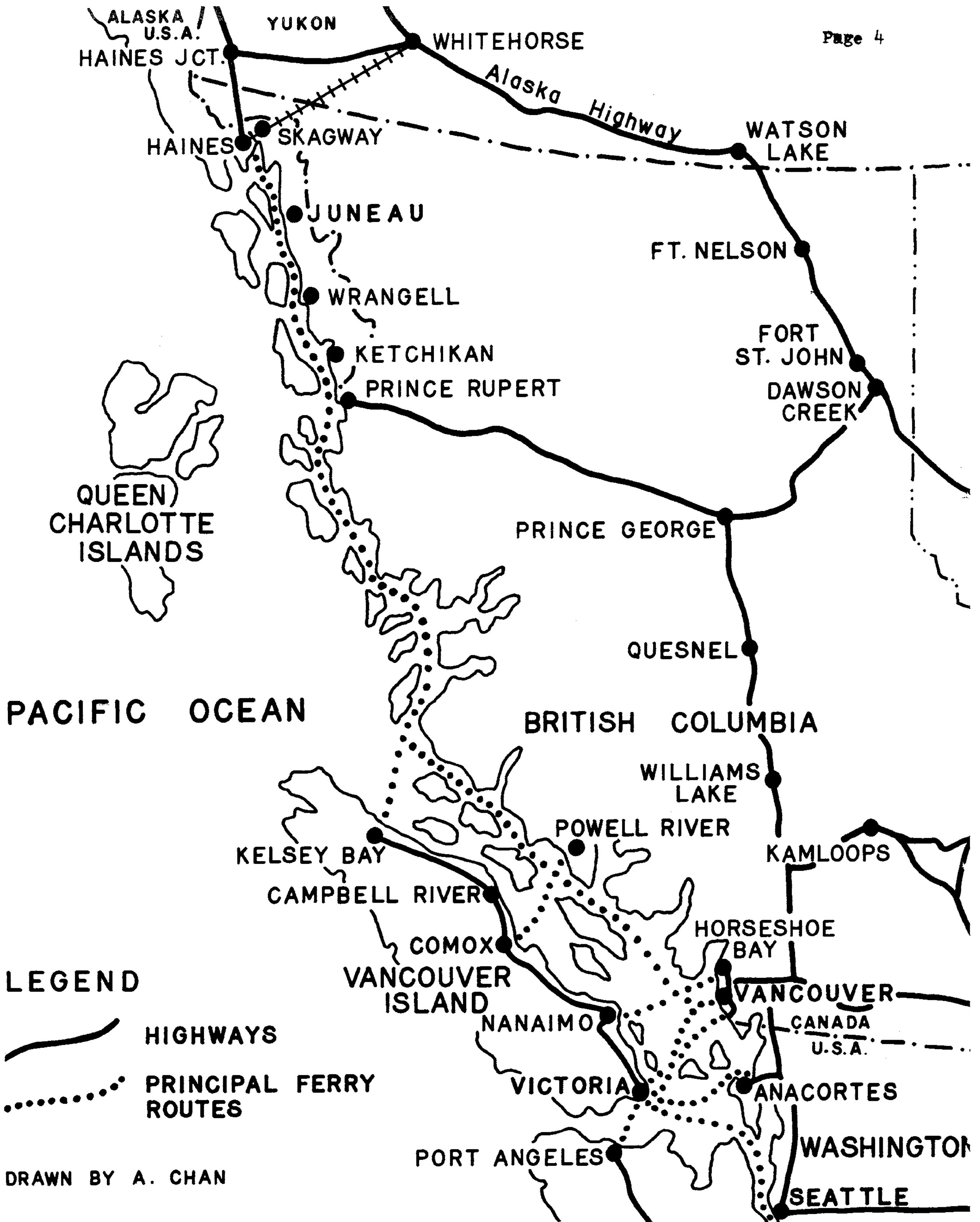
I doubt that any provincial politician has claimed so far that this startling success was due to the economic doctrines of Social Credit, - as Premier Bennett's party is called. It probably began as an audacious political decision which was later backed up by some sound planning and up-to-date engineering, all of these factors happily coinciding with the affluence and new travelling habits of North Americans.

The new ferries all followed the specifications laid out by the Provincial government in 1959. The big ones can carry 600 passengers and 110 cars at speeds up to 18 knots. The fare is $5.00 for vehicle and $2.00 per passenger. The main route between Vancouver and Victoria was shortened to an hour and forty minutes by building roads and new terminals at the points on mainland and on the island closest to each other. The pedestrian can board a bus in downtown Victoria or Vancouver and arrive in either city three hours later. Truckers now use the route for inter-city cargo.

The ships are designed for a crew of twelve. Federal regulation requires twenty-six crew aboard with lifeboat certificates. British Columbia made the fourteen extra hands into stewards and expanded the restaurant facilities on board. The food and service are the only old standards which haven't been tampered with.

This B.C. experiment grew into a new concept of communications for the Pacific north-west, Alaska and Yukon included. In 1960 Alaska issued bonds for $23 million to build two state ferries to open up a marine highway from Haines, Alaska south along the Panhandle to Prince Rupert in Canada. British Columbia agreed to inaugurate a service from the north end of Vancouver Island at Kelsey Bay to Prince Rupert to run in conjunction with Alaska ships. This had been the old inland passage to Alaska and Yukon in the years after the Gold Rush and the only feasible way in and out of the Pacific northwest. After World War II the airlines took over the passengers, and much of the car traffic and heavy freight to both Alaska and Yukon switched to the new Alaska Highway. For the past two decades it has been virtually impossible to go by sea from the northwest to the south during the winter. The only regular convenient maritime service was on the summer cruise ships.

By May of 1966 the new inland passage was in business and we decided to give it a try. We left Whitehorse on August 17th and drove the 250 miles down over the mountains into Haines, Alaska. Haines is a small place, the kind of town where the annual strawberry festival is still the highlight of the year. We were too late for that event but, nonetheless, Haines was jammed with people. During the week before we left Whitehorse the radio had been full of announcements about the glut



MARINE HIGHWAY PACIFIC NORTHWEST

of traffic on the ferries. The evening of our arrival in Haines there were almost two boatloads of backlogged tourists waiting for space. The Alaska Ferries carry 500 passengers and 108 cars. In Juneau and points south on that evening there were two more boatloads of excess passengers. We had made our reservations four months before. Praise be.

The quay that night at Haines was chock-a-block with American nomads. Huge aluminum caravans, top heavy campers, mobile tents, squat trailers, Volkswagen bugs with pretentious bulging roof racks, - a complete catalogue of mobile homes lined the dock. We lacked only a second-hand hearse to make the show complete. I suppose I should have taken a count of the number of vehicles, people, licence plates, et al but I was much too intrigued looking at the multitude of wheeled contraptions and observing the habits of the species who travelled in them. It was a long wait - the queques were formed up four hours before departure time. Ann and I spent most of those four hours trying to subdue Timothy into a coma. When we boarded at midnight he was still in full voice.

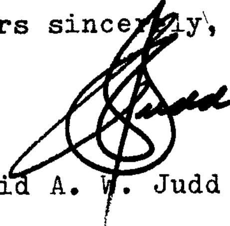
Thirty hours later we were in Prince Rupert, four hundred and fifty miles down the coast. We then transferred to one of the new B.C. ferries. Nineteen more hours at sea, another three hundred and fifty miles and we reached Kelsey Bay on Vancouver Island. We were thirty minutes ahead of schedule. Radar has made navigation on the inland passage not only safe but fast. Despite thick intermittent fogs and drifting ice from the Panhandle glaciers neither ship we were on had to reduce speed. The old manoeuvre of "dead slow ahead" doesn't seem to be in the seamanship manuals anymore.

This new version of the inland passage is going to be important for the Pacific northwest. For one thing it will mean more tourists for Alaska and Yukon. Last summer brought a 32% increase in visitors to Yukon. This summer will show something of the same order of growth. It will also help bring our produce closer to market. The sea is what makes the north western portion of the Middle North in North America the next likely spot for large scale development. By 1968 there will be three mines in Yukon shipping out ore and concentrates through Skagway to Vancouver and direct to Japan. There are more projects like this on the drawing boards and they are all predicated on sea transport to the markets of the west coast or the Pacific. You can expect that British Columbia and Yukon will take up the fight again about the Alaskan Panhandle, which cuts off all of north western Canada from direct access to the sea. What's going to happen, for instance, when Canada wants to sell the products of its Middle North to China ? There is little chance now that this trade could be carried on through Panhandle ports. So "fifty-four forty or fight" comes up to date in the twentieth century.

For us however, the most telling remark about the inland passage came from our host in Vancouver. As we came up his driveway he

looked at the car with a critical glance. I thought we had a flat tire. Not so. As we got out he said: "It's the first Yukon car I've seen without Alaska Highway dust on it."

Yours sincerely,



David A. W. Judd

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