

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

DAWJ - 7
The Western Provinces
in the Middle North.

311 Alder Street East,
Dunnville,
Ontario.

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Executive Director,
Institute of Current World Affairs,
366 Madison Avenue,
New York, N.Y. 10017,
U.S.A.

Dear Mr. Nolte:

We soon leave for Cambridge and the Scott Polar Research Institute. My last look at Canada has been a tour of the four western provinces where the concept of a middle north is becoming increasingly important.

A population map of western Canada still shows that the majority of people lives within an hour's drive of the U.S. border. Almost three quarters of British Columbia's population is crowded into the narrow lower Fraser Valley and onto the southern tip of Vancouver Island. These people occupy some 4,000 square miles out of the total provincial area of 366,000 square miles. The prairie provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba have much the same pattern of settlement. Edmonton (pop: 400,000) is regarded as Canada's northern metropolis and yet it is considerably farther south than the geographical centre of Alberta.

Until ten years ago the northern two thirds of the western provinces were bush. As a matter of fact it was country which had already apparently seen its heyday. After 1790 when the fur trade in western Canada became big business, Fort Chipewyan on Athabasca Lake was the focal point of trade and commerce in the west. The trans-continental routes followed the rivers of the middle north. In the 1880's the new Canadian Pacific Railway pulled Canada south to the strip of land bordering the United States and now Chipewyan could be used as a period movie set. The only activity in the settlement is the inevitable, lone Chinese cafe. The place has been on nobody's route for eighty years. It is only in the last year that a proper all-weather airstrip has been installed at government expense. There are still no roads or railroads anywhere near the settlement.

You can still find at Fort "Chip" remnants of the kind of life which people have led in the northern parts of the provinces for generations: the Hudson's Bay post, the mission hospital, the RCMP barracks, the fish nets and fur traps, stacks of cordwood for winter heat and galvanized wash tubs hanging outside the summer kitchen.

This sort of existence, idyllic or stifling as it may be, is beginning to crumble. Canadians in the west may still prefer to pick up their television from south of the border but they are aware that the country north of them has suddenly become a place to make money.

The money is the most eye-catching facet of this new activity. The sums are large enough even in terms of the gross national product to demand attention. The new power complex on the Peace River in British Columbia is costing \$800 million. Industry is investing over half a billion dollars in the pulp and paper in the northern and central parts of the province around Prince George. There are as yet, no definitive estimates of reserves of new oil and gas fields in northern British Columbia and Alberta but the assumption now is that these finds will surpass the size of all of the producing petroleum deposits in the Canadian west. The Athabasca Tar Sands, near McMurray, Alberta, three hundred miles north-east of Edmonton, are in a class by themselves. They are known to contain six hundred billion barrels of oil. Only about half of this reserve may now be economic to exploit but, even so, these three hundred billion barrels equal the world's present proven supplies of oil. Two hundred and thirty-five million dollars has been invested in a new type of extraction plant at the Sands in the last two years.

There are no impressive figures from northern Saskatchewan. The uranium mines on Athabasca Lake have been there for over twenty years. A pulp mill at Prince Albert is now being built but this project will reach only the \$75,000,000 bracket.

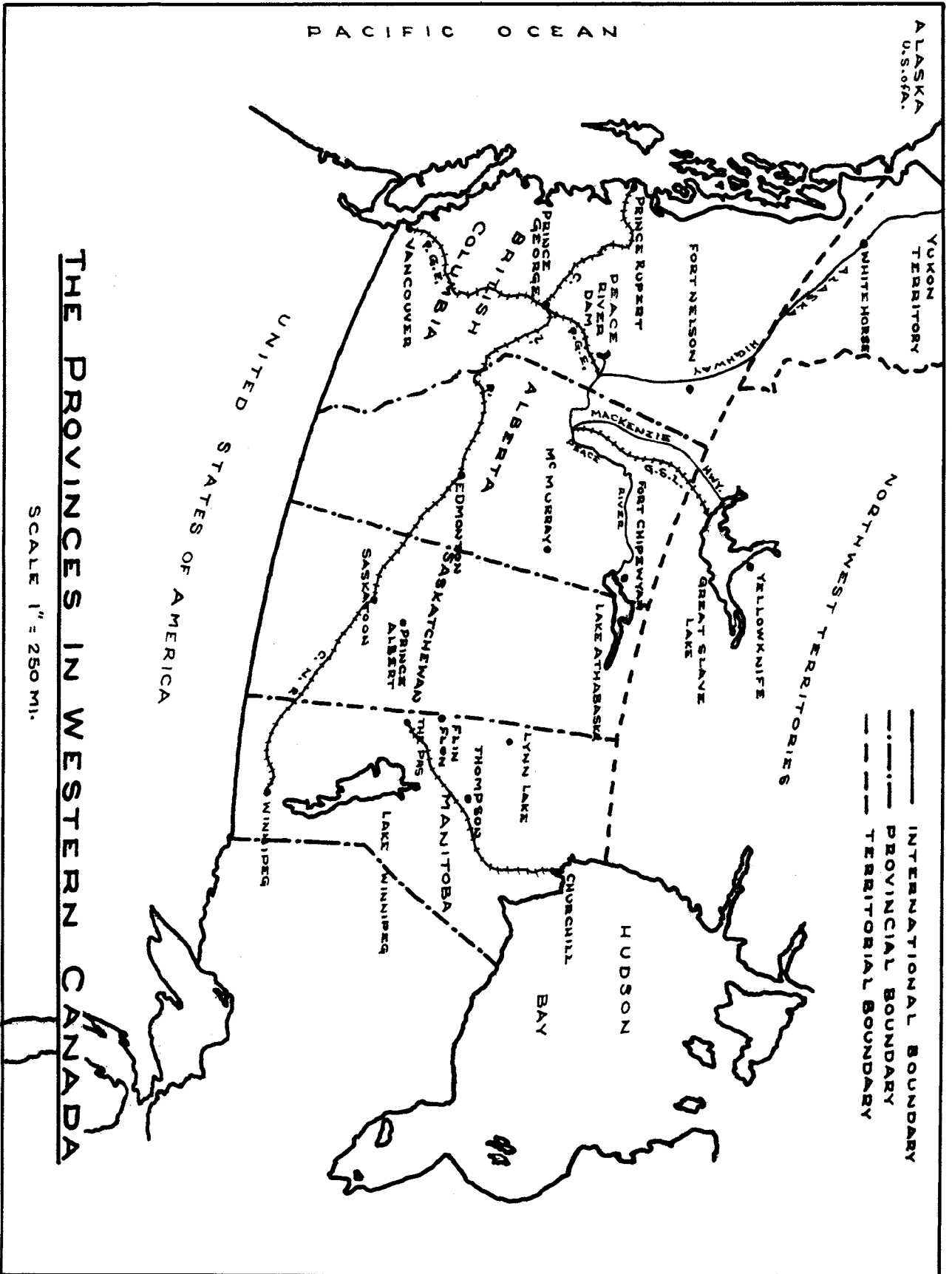
In Manitoba there is now a \$100,000,000 forest industry underway at The Pas and a \$325,000,000 power plant on the Nelson River near Hudson Bay. At Thompson, International Nickel has spent \$150,000,000 on its mine since 1960, and now plans a \$100,000,000 expansion.

But what does it all mean? Why are these developments taking place? Are there any lessons or clues for the future? During the next few weeks I am going to write a series of newsletters on the western Provinces with these questions in mind. Here, without the detail, are some of my tentative conclusions.

TRANSPORTATION

:Transportation may not be the key to the development of the middle north but it certainly decides the tempo at which development will take place. The provinces with a legacy of northern railroads or former military highways now clearly have the lead. And the economic justification at the time for these links to the northern interior was either nil or spurious.

:Both highways and railroads are necessary for the development of this hinterland but each seems to have a precise role. Have these separate roles been



THE PROVINCES IN WESTERN CANADA

SCALE 1" = 250 MI.

defined or clearly understood ? Which should come first and in what circumstances ? There are, as yet, no clear answers here from governments.

:It is still immensely difficult to justify the extension of roads and railways into the middle north. This is basically a political feat which politicians are loath to engage in, which civil servants find hard to justify, and which taxpayers scoff at. But it may be the shrewdest investment in the future.

ENERGY

:The second significant factor in the development of this provincial hinterland may be the relatively slow pace at which competitive atomic power has evolved. Governments have gone north in a search for energy to supply booming southern markets.

RESOURCES

:The search for minerals is still a primitive, time-consuming process. Our ignorance of the detailed geology of the middle north is colossal. While government general surveys may have their place, detailed exploration by private enterprise seems more to the point.

:The tempo of mineral exploitation by private enterprise in the hinterland can be speeded up by government incentives.

:Renewable resources - particularly timber - have an important role in the development of the provincial frontiers and can supply a stable element in planning settlements and services.

:Agriculture and ranching are also, in places, still a part of northern development. Governments are still giving either open or tacit support to new homesteaders. Do the politicians know what the consequences of this policy will be ?

:Resource administration for the middle north is reasonably good. Air photos, topographic maps, lease, claim and licence records are well maintained. Legislation, particularly for the exploitation of minerals and petroleum, has generally kept pace with evolving theory and philosophy.

:Resource planning tends to be old-fashioned. Mines, minerals, petroleum, wildlife, energy, technical surveys, water, manpower, fish, timber, agriculture, parks, communication, welfare, education, housing and commercial development are divided into distinct bureaucratic compartments in a system designed during the dying days of laissez faire when governments were confined to performing housekeeping chores. The effectiveness of this nineteenth century approach is doubtful in these days when big government has the responsibility of ensuring that the whole range of natural and human resources will be used effectively on behalf of society.

SOCIAL PROBLEMS

:For governments, the north even in the midst of this new investment, is often mainly a social problem; an overpopulated, high welfare cost region with a scattered, poorly educated society. The old sequence of settlement in western Canada was the trader, the missionary, the flag and the farmer. Now the welfare cheque comes fifth in line. What will be number six? There is no answer to that yet.

:The tens of thousands of Indians and Metis in the middle north are once again finding their feet. They are about to upset many political applecarts.

:For the incoming workers and settlers the middle north turns out to be the frontier of boredom. Too many people get fed up quickly and leave even the most modern planned resource communities. Higher wages are evidently not the answer. We study the north to find the causes of this dissatisfaction. But the answers may be in the type of people who come up from the south, and not in what the north does to them. They may be unhappy anywhere.

:Social research in the north may supply some valuable clues about what is wrong in the south.

GOVERNMENTS

:There are supposedly different political philosophies in the western provinces about the extent to which governments should become involved in the development of the middle north. These philosophies appear however, to be a product of geography rather than of any strongly held textbook theories. Where resources

are easy to get at and where industry can see itself making a profit, governments stand aside. Where social problems predominate and where industry is leary of failure, governments have become involved in incentives, subsidies and even ownership. Their shortrun objectives are to provide employment and cut down welfare costs in the middle north.

:Whatever the political and economic ingredients in any particular development project, large amounts of public funds are eventually used nowadays in one way or another. The taxpayer is financing a good deal of this middle north activity. Will this investment pay off or would the money have been better spent in the south? That is the question no one is prepared to answer.

FUTURE

:For some Canadians the north is still the stuff of dreams. One newsworthy plan now stresses the role of the middle north as the place to breed a healthy Canadian highlander free from American contamination. (See Postscript)

:Another plan called "The Canada North Development Corridor" envisages a new east-west railway from Yukon to Newfoundland, a latter-day northern edition of the Canadian Pacific to Vancouver and the old Grand Trunk Northern to Prince Rupert. There is little to suggest now that the movement of goods and people in the middle north will be anything but straight north and south.

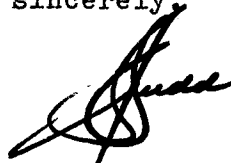
:One clear result of the provinces' thrust north will be an increase in their wealth, population and political power at a time when Canadian federal institutions are under serious attack and when the influence of Ottawa is on the wane. If the provinces begin to favour a greater degree of government planning in order to protect their burgeoning economies then Ottawa may find itself in demand again. This is a job the provinces cannot do by themselves.

:This growing resource-centred economy with its uncertainties and problems may produce a generation of executives and employees in Canada who will be in favour of a larger degree, not only of government control in planning, but of international economic planning as well. You cannot make a living today out of newsprint, copper, water power or petroleum without realizing how

little of your economic fate you effectively control. So perhaps this middle north will, after all, produce attitudes which will influence policies and politics in Canada.

The immediate importance of what you can see in the western provinces is this. The hinterland of the middle north runs hundreds of miles deep and it has virtually the same geography and climate all the way to the southern fringes of the tundra. What is going on now from Prince Rupert to The Pas is only the beginning. The middle north is going to be with us for a long time.

Yours sincerely,



David A. W. Judd

P.S. Perhaps I dismiss that point on page 6 about Canadian identity too casually ! I came across this quotation yesterday in a well-known newspaper. The Canadian speaking is Glenn Gould, pianist of international repute.

"I prefer the cold. Cold days to warm, overcast to clear and foul weather to good weather... The north has been the filter for my thoughts. Some of my clearest, sharpest thinking has been done there...."

"The north has also been a filter in my writing because it is very easy to assume an oracle-like position.... There is something Delphian about the Northwest Territories - the idea of its symbolic stance in relation to the rest of North America...."

Igloos for Artists! DJ.

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