

# Canada: Geographic Bridgehead

*J. W. Watson*

ONE of the main problems of the world to-day is to 'rethink' its geography. Countries are no longer isolated by distance, shielded by mountains or protected by oceans. Their frontiers no longer stop at the political boundary. England discovered that its frontier was not the English channel as Shakespeare had once put it, but the River Vistula, as Prime Minister Chamberlain said in 1939. The United States, too, has learned that the Atlantic and Pacific oceans together do not separate it from the problems of Europe and Asia.

Since natural barriers have been overcome, the geography of world relations is being—and should be—affected more by the factors of world geography which draw nations together, and keep them dependent upon each other, than by those factors, so important in an earlier age, which separate peoples.

It was not always so. Nations were, at one time, able to go their own ways without troubling themselves about others, or about what was happening in distant places. The natural divisions such as mountains or deserts, which, in most cases, lay between them, kept them more or less apart. They were also less dependent on each other economically. If struggles arose between them, there was not the tragic loss of life and complete disruption of affairs that would now be found. Indeed, during the 17th and 18th centuries, nations were out to obtain territory, gold,

slaves and markets without much consideration for their neighbours.

This atmosphere intensified, if anything, in the early 19th century, yet, at the same time, it gave birth to a growing consciousness that "mutual aid" was at least as useful to man as the "struggle for existence". Increasing respect was paid to the philosophy that "the greatest need of man is man." The concept of one world was beginning to take shape.

Unfortunately, the methods by which unity was obtained were all too often oppressive ones. A central power would arise which became dominant at the expense of subordinate peoples. These methods were gradually discredited in favor of achieving unity through free and equal association; that is to say, through such ideals as are represented in the British Commonwealth and the American union. Canada has played an important part in this great movement. In its history, its economics and in its geography, it has had an increasing influence on the achievement of harmony in the Western World, and will have a key position in the development of any larger unity that may yet arise. This is particularly so because its geography has brought it to a pivotal position in the strategic grouping of world powers and in the strategy of world peace.

Canada has much to offer. In the first place, it shows by its own development, how unity can be achieved without any sacrifice of diversity. This is the great need and at the same time the outstanding

problem of the world to-day. The Canadian experiment may prove to be of great value in bringing together regions and peoples with very dissimilar characteristics.

**F**EW countries have more marked natural and cultural divisions than Canada. The Appalachian Mountains, continuing north to the Gaspé Peninsula, tend to cut off the Maritime Provinces from the Central Provinces. These Provinces in their turn are cut off by a big tract of only sparsely settled upland, known as the Laurentian Shield, from the plains of the Prairies. Those plains are cut off for their part, from the Pacific coast by the Rocky Mountains.

It is not surprising to find, therefore, that the separate regions have developed separate interests. The economic interests of the Maritimes have, on occasion, been rather different from those of the Central Provinces or of the Prairies. And the fact that it has sometimes seemed easier to look to the United States, with which there is an easier and more direct geographical connection, has further complicated matters.

Canada, then, is a land of striking geographical differences. This was well expressed recently by Mr. Marc Boyer, Deputy Minister of Mines and Technical Surveys when he said: "Canada is a country of contrasts. Classed as a land of the New World, it possesses one of the most ancient geological structures—the Canadian Shield. It is a country of immense size, peopled by scarcely 14 million inhabitants; a country bathed by three oceans, closely flanked to the south by a giant nation, yet far off from aggression; a country of wheat and of gold; a country of lofty peaks and boundless plains; of intense cold and ardent heat; a country of the British Commonwealth where the language of Molière occurs side by side with that of Shakespeare; a country whose culture has grown out of the contribution of people from other countries who have freely chosen Canada as the land of their adoption; a country continuously evolving in trade, industry and the arts without sacrificing the traditions tying the past to the present".

These contrasts, have at times, exerted a certain strain on the nation. Nevertheless, Canada has found ties between its separate parts which have offset the basic divisions. It has emphasized the features in its geography which unite regions together and played down the ones which keep them apart. It has made the most of the fortuitous line of east-west waterways such as the Fraser, Saskatchewan, and Rainy Rivers, the Great Lakes, the St. Lawrence and the St. John Rivers, and by using them as the foundations for trans-Canada communications, has created a great and abiding bond of unity for the country.

In many other ways Canada has achieved unity within the framework of physiographic divisions. It has found some common factor in each of its major regions and built upon that. I recall Professor Trotter's comment when we were discussing the subject. "Canada has this in common—the water and the wood." How true that is. Every summer, in every province, millions of Canadians return to the lake and the forest to renew that bond with nature which has become an essential need of their character. The Haligonian who betakes himself to the wooded shores of the Atlantic, the Torontonian who summers by the Muskoka Lakes, the Winnipegger who finds a refuge at Lake of the Woods, the dweller in Vancouver who seeks the forested slopes of the Pacific fiords—all have this common reaction to the Canadian scene.

**T**HUS by emphasizing the geographical features which bind people together and by discovering a common geography even in otherwise very different landscapes, Canada has shown the way to achieve unity in diversity. The Canadian experiment is worthwhile noticing and following. Recently I was privileged to attend a UNESCO Seminar on Geography which was held at MacDonald College. One of the things that struck me most, was how deeply the conference delegates were impressed by the way in which English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians got along, in spite of some of the differences in their background.



"In Europe," they said, "we have had five times as long as you have to settle our differences, yet they are as bad as ever." But if they were to stress their common geography, they might achieve some of that peace and unity for which they envy us.

For the Canadian experiment is essentially that which the United Nations must proceed with, albeit on a larger scale. We are doing here, as a people, what the world is now planning to do. We are trying to create a living synthesis out of the diverse elements of our land and people. Our citizens have very different origins; different religious, educational and legal outlooks; and different languages; but we recognize the common interests which do exist in our environment and, by stressing and relying upon them, find a common life. As a result, we are creating a geography of regional autonomy and overall unions, of a cherished diversity within an equitable unity, and the maximum compatible with mutual aid.

Our new alignment in the strategy of world power will now enable us to use the experience we have gained in bringing together and in holding together different regions and cultures, to assist in bringing the gaps between the nations and drawing and keeping them closer to each other.

During the last few decades, the course of world power has definitely been shifting to the North. The critical area in world politics would seem no longer to be the Mediterranean, but to be the North Atlantic. As long as the Middle East was the pivot of world strategy, between the continental and the maritime powers who clashed for its control, Canada did not have much influence. But to-day, Canada itself may well be regarded as in the centre of things, since the balance of world power now swings between the United States to the south of it, and the Soviet Union to the north.

This is a new situation in our geography. It thrusts us into the forefront of the world situation. The groupings of America, with its possessions in Alaska and the North Pacific, of Britain and of Russia around the North, together with occupied or satellite countries such as Japan, Germany and North Korea, has created a

new arrangement of powers with a new meaning for Canada. Most of these powers look in upon the oceans to which we look out; they face us across the Arctic, the North Atlantic and the North Pacific. It is a significant fact that in these three areas, which are undoubtedly the three most important strategic areas of the world, no nation has a greater frontage than Canada. We alone have a large frontage on each of the geographically strategic oceans of the world. Our Atlantic frontage is as great as that of any other Atlantic power; we march with the Soviet Union along the Arctic front; and we possess a key position, between continental America and Alaska, and opposite Japan, on the North Pacific front.

It is to our advantage to use our frontiers in such a way as to draw together the northern powers, if at all possible, into a growing unity. The late Rt. Hon. W. L. Mackenzie King saw this in terms of drawing together Britain and America. In this connection, he spoke of Canada as the 'linch-pin of Anglo American relations.' It is, indeed. And undoubtedly, our chief function will continue to be to act as the bridge between the United Kingdom and the United States.

The late Governor-General, Lord Tweedsmuir, thought that it was just along these lines that Canada could make its greatest contribution to world affairs. "Canada has a specific contribution of her own to make to civilization," he wrote. "I like to think of her, with her English and French peoples, as in the special degree the guardian of the great Mediterranean tradition which descends from Greece and Rome, through France and Britain, and which she has to mould to the uses of the new world." Although Lord Tweedsmuir was writing of moulding the European tradition to the New World, he also had it in mind that Canada could transmit the New World tradition to the Old, perhaps better than any other New World country.

**A**CTUALLY, Canada has played a leading part in the efforts of recent years to draw the nations of the North Atlantic together. Our Prime Minister, the Rt.

Hon. Louis St. Laurent, was one of the first statesmen to foresee the need of Atlantic unity and to prognosticate the Atlantic Pact. "There is no use deceiving ourselves," he said, when the pact was being discussed, "or mincing words. We know that the people of the North American continent, that the democracies of Western Europe, fear there may be an aggression . . . that would exclude the civilization under which our institutions have been established. We believe that the likely signatories of this North Atlantic pact have the potential strength, manpower, industrial know-how, material, the courage and desire to remain free men."

It has since been recognized that to maintain this wider community of free men Canada can and must perform a very practical service. It can assist in the economic and social development of the wider unity of the free peoples. No one has better expressed this than Hon. L. B. Pearson, our Minister of External Affairs. Referring to the way in which Canada overcame the hazards of its own environment, Mr. Pearson says, "Just as we have learned slowly and painfully the dangers of great economic gulfs between various sections of our own country, now we must begin to learn the parallel lesson that it is dangerous to let such gulfs exist between various countries without doing anything to try to narrow them."

Canada is doing something to try to narrow them. Her citizens and her government alike, are interested in the problem. Indeed, Canada has taken a very prominent part in furthering such a policy, as the appointment of Canadians to permanent commissions of the United Nations Organization will show.

It is not only in the realm of cultural geography that Canada can help to bridge the Atlantic and bring western Europe and the Americas together. Canada can offer some very practical aid in the economic geography of wider unity. For Canadian resources and the Canadian economy help to complement the economic development both of western Europe and of America. Prior to the recent war, a trade balance was maintained by which we supplied food to Britain, Britain sup-

plied services to the United States, and the United States supplied consumer goods to Canada. This trade helped to establish what Professor Brebner had called "The Atlantic Triangle"—the triangle of power in the Atlantic world between Washington, Ottawa and London.

Although the dollar situation in the postwar world has upset this triangle of trade, it is possible that the upset is only temporary. In the meantime a new geography of trade is developing in which we are trying to pay for our exports of food and raw materials to Britain by an import of machinery and consumer goods from Britain; while we are paying for our imports of goods from the United States by our vastly increased exports of raw materials to that country.

**C**ANADA'S position with the United States is particularly promising. We are now selling nearly as much to them as we buy from them. This was not the case before the war. Then, two-thirds of our national imports came from the United States but only one-third of our exports went there. I remember explaining this ten years ago by saying that our environments were too similar to permit us to sell much to the United States because they had most of the products we possessed, and had more of them.

Although the first part of this statement is true (that they have most of what we have), the last half is no longer true, that they have more of them. The enormous industrial expansion which went on in the United States during the last war, on top of the rapid development of the preceding three decades, exhausted many of the raw materials and other resources of that country.

Recently, a notable expert, Professor Renner, writing about the United States of America, said, "After a mere 150 years of American existence, some 85% of our wild game is gone, 80% of our timber has been cut. About 67% of our visible petroleum reserves, 65% of our lead and zinc, 51% of our copper, 40% of our iron, and 35% of our anthracite have been used, (while at least) 10% of our cultivable land has been ruined beyond repair.



Yet 150 years represent only the lifetime of two men—but what a ruinous pair of lifetimes!”

Fortunately, the United States has become very conscious of these facts and is making notable efforts to conserve the resources which still remain. Also, by marvels of engineering, it is making low-grade ores available for production. Huge reserves of low-grade ore still exist and it is hoped they will give the United States a new lease on life.

Nevertheless, it still remains true that many resources are nearing exhaustion in the United States, while they have hardly been developed in Canada.

Indeed, we have not counted it worthwhile even to prospect for any minerals in the past, because we thought them so abundant in the United States we assumed there would be little or no market for them. Now it appears as though Canada might play a very important role in shoring-up the American economy by the export of these and other much needed minerals. Prospecting has increased rapidly, therefore, and it has shown new and greater supplies waiting to be developed.

To-day, Canada is in the strategic position where America already looks to her to supply a large part of American demands

for uranium, nickel, iron, lead, zinc, copper, titanium and asbestos, as well as for timber, pulp and paper, and several other raw materials. If Canada exploits these resources scientifically and economically, according to the more recent ideas of resource conservation, she should be able, for a long time to come, to contribute in a most important way to the strengthening of America and, indeed, of the Western World.

The Canadian people have overcome the geographical divisions of their country by stressing the common features in their geography. This is an example of how nations can achieve unity in the face of the gravest of divisions.

Canada should now use its geography to act as the bridge between Europe and the Americas. Actually, that position has an even wider significance, making Canada a pivot of world accord.

In such a position, there is a new significance to Canadian resources. Canada may, through a timely and wise development of its resources, achieve a new importance in supporting the West European and American economies. In this way it will strengthen the geographical ties which bind peoples together and contribute to world prosperity and world peace.

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Said Mr. Justice Cordoza of the United States Supreme Court, “The prophet and the martyr do not see the hooting throng. Their eyes are fixed on the eternities.”