

Problems of Northern Development

The North embraces a vast, sparsely settled area and presents special economic and physical characteristics, all of which suggest that a separate study of the area is required. The Council hopes by means of future studies to explore ways for effectively promoting development in the North in a manner that will enhance over-all national growth.

In the summer of 1966, members of the Economic Council, at the invitation of the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, visited several centres in the North. This hurried trip could not be expected to provide time for searching inquiries into conditions and prospects in such a far-flung and difficult frontier area. But the Council came away with certain distinct impressions:—

"It is apparent, first, that while it is customary to speak of the North as a vast single region of severe climate, empty distance, and harsh geography, it is in fact an area of very considerable diversity. It comprises a significant number of different regions, or sub-regions, marked by quite diverse geographic and climatic conditions, possessing varying potentials, facing differing problems, and entering into different stages of economic and social development. Any over-all policy for developing the North must necessarily take adequate account of this diversity, and selective programmes must be adapted to the particular needs and prospects of the varied subregions.

"A second distinct impression is that while the land is vast, virtually unpopulated, and forbidding in many aspects, it undoubtedly possesses significant resources. True, the importance of renewable resources of agricultural land and forests is very limited. But there is no question of the presence of rich and varied mineral resources, including iron, base metals, industrial minerals and fuels. A number of important deposits have already been successfully brought into production; others have been located and are being tested; and the probability is great that further exploration and investigation will continue to yield new and important finds. The whole process of discovery would be stepped up by increased research and the further development and application of new techniques for exploration.

"The longer-run development of the North depends essentially upon the success achieved in the economic exploitation and use of these mineral resources. In this regard it seems clear that some subregions are now approaching the stage of commercial utilization much more rapidly than others. This is generally true of the Yukon and parts of the Western Arctic, not only because more is known as to the existence and quality of resources in these places, but also because difficulties of access, transportation and climate are less formidable than in other areas.

"Even for the more favoured subregions of the North, however, there are two major obstacles to be overcome. The first is the problem of providing transportation and of undertaking the very large capital investments involved in the building of the transport facilities needed to move heavy, primary commodities over long distances to potential markets. The steady extension of such transport links, probably pushing up through the northern reaches of some of the provinces, may well be expected; but careful, long-run national planning will be essential to ensure the best use of available funds and to avoid potentially costly errors. The second problem is equally important. It will require imaginative approaches and special efforts to deal with the particular difficulties of living and working on a permanent basis under northern conditions. This is not just a matter of overcoming a relatively inhospitable climate and supplying the conventional amenities, but even more of providing the kinds of advanced services and the social environment which will help to alleviate a sense of isolation from the advantages of modern urban life. Unless these difficulties can be resolved, it is hard to see how the human resources and human skills necessary for productive development can be attracted and successfully held in the new communities of the North.

"Finally, no visitor to the North can help but be seized by the serious plight of the native people. Whatever the reasons, the impact of modern civilization upon the culture and way of life of the Eskimo and northern Indians has been sudden, drastic and disruptive. Their problem today is both difficult and urgent. The need to improve their economic and social condition, and at the same time to assure them of a rightful participation in the future development of the North, constitutes a pressing challenge to the people of Canada today."

Labour-Management Relations

The Act establishing the Council also directs it to "encourage maximum consultation and co-operation between labour and management", and to "foster and promote the maintenance of good human relations in industry" In carrying out this function, the Council has convened two national conferences on labour-management relations. The first, held at Ottawa in November 1964, dealt with the state of labour-management co-operation in