

SHOULD BRITISH COLUMBIA CREATE A MINISTRY OF NORTHERN AFFAIRS?

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NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA IS very similar to the northern parts of many other Canadian provinces and, indeed, many other parts of what are known as the circumpolar north, such as northern Scandinavia and northern Russia.¹ It has a similar geology and climate, a similar dependence on the resource sector, and a similarly diverse population. However, in some respects the development of northern British Columbia has been out of step with the rest of the circumpolar north. This can be seen very clearly in the development of universities in these northern regions and in the development of bureaucratic agencies dealing with the north.

In the 1960s and 1970s universities were built in several places in the Canadian provincial north. However, no university was built in northern British Columbia. Among the universities built elsewhere in northern Canada were Laurentian University in Sudbury (1962), Lakehead University in Thunder Bay (1965), the University of Quebec in Chicoutimi (1970), and the University of Quebec in Abitibi-Temiscamingue (1975). This construction mirrored the similar development of universities in other parts of the circumpolar north at much the same time. In northern Finland the University of Oulu opened in 1965, in northern Sweden the University of Umea opened in 1963, in northern Norway the University of Tromso opened in 1972, and in the then northern USSR several universities opened in the sixties and seventies including Tyumen University, Syktvkar University and Kemerovo University.² Some people must have been thinking of the possibility of building a university in northern British Columbia

¹ See Terence Armstrong, George Rogers, and Graham Rowley, *The Circumpolar North* (London: Methuen, 1978) and Sam Hall, *The Fourth World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987).

² Geoffrey R. Weller, "Universities in the Circumpolar North: A Comparative Analysis" in P. Adams and D. Parker (eds.), *Canada's Subarctic Universities* (Ottawa: Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Studies, 1987), 3-17.

because maps of the city of Prince George dating to the early sixties show an area of land marked "university reserve," but there is no record of any serious pressure for a university at that time.

In the 1970s a proliferation of bureaucratic agencies were dealing with the Canadian provincial north. However, despite all of the activity elsewhere, British Columbia was the one province not to establish any kind of special agency for its northern region.³ Ministries of Northern Affairs were established in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario in 1972, 1974 and 1977 respectively. In 1979 the Department of Rural Development in Newfoundland was restructured to include a Northern Development Branch and the department was renamed "Rural, Agricultural and Northern Development." In 1977 Quebec established the Secrétariat des Activités Gouvernementales en Milieu Amérindien et Inuit (SAGMAI). In Alberta the Northern Alberta Development Corporation was instituted in 1973. This increased bureaucratic attention to an almost forgotten region of the country was also indicated in the formation of the Interprovincial Conference of Ministers Responsible for Northern Development. The first conference was held in Fort McMurray in 1978 and they have been held in different parts of the provincial north in most years since.⁴

In the late 1980s some people in northern British Columbia recognized the value of and need for a university in the region and began lobbying for one. They argued that a university was needed to overcome the significant barriers to access to education and to assist in the economic, social, and political development of the region.⁵ After much campaigning and lobbying, they finally succeeded when in 1990 legislation was passed creating the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC).⁶ The university opened with a new main campus in Prince George in the fall of 1994. However, there has yet to be any really serious pressure to establish a Ministry of Northern Affairs or a

³ Although no ministry or agency was created Mr. Alf Nunweiler was appointed Minister Without Portfolio with responsibility for the coordination of northern development by the New Democratic Party government of Premier Dave Barrett. However, his appointment only lasted from June 1974 until December 1975 when the government was defeated.

⁴ See Geoffrey R. Weller, "Ministries of Northern Affairs: A Comparative Analysis" in R. W. Wein, R. R. Riewe, and I. Methven (eds.), *Resource and Dynamics of the Boreal Zone* (Ottawa: Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Studies, 1983), 480-497, and Geoffrey R. Weller, "Managing Canada's North: The Case of the Provincial North" *Canadian Public Administration*, Vol. 27, No. 2, (Summer 1984), 197-209.

⁵ See The Implementation Planning Group, *A Degree Granting Institution for Northern British Columbia* (Prince George: Implementation Planning Group, 1989), 86p.

⁶ Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, *University of Northern British Columbia Act* Fourth Session, Thirty Fourth Parliament 39 Elizabeth II, 1990.

specialized bureaucratic agency to deal with northern British Columbia. There have been some rumblings but no serious lobbying.⁷

This paper raises the question of whether or not the time has come to establish a Ministry of Northern Affairs in British Columbia. It begins by looking at the nature of northern British Columbia and ways in which it is similar and different to other parts of the Canadian provincial north. This analysis might help to explain why British Columbia did not establish a ministry two decades ago when other provinces did so. The paper goes on to indicate why the current circumstances in the region and province might mean that it is a good idea now to at least consider the possibility of creating a Ministry of Northern Affairs. It then proceeds to discuss what type of new ministry would be the most logical to best serve the needs of the people of the region. This is followed by some suggestions concerning the policy initiatives a ministry might undertake and why these would be of advantage to the region. The paper then goes on to discuss the possible disadvantages of such a ministry and the problems that it might encounter. The paper concludes that, on balance, the creation of a Ministry of Northern Affairs would be of benefit to northern British Columbians and to the province as a whole.

THE NATURE OF THE REGION

Northern British Columbia, like so many of the other regions of the circumpolar north, covers a huge land mass which constitutes a large proportion of the political jurisdiction of which it is a part. Northern British Columbia is about as big as Germany and covers 68 per cent of the territory of the province. However, the population is very small in absolute numbers and as a percentage of the provincial total. The 301,000 people in the northern two thirds of the province and they constitute 10 per cent of the total provincial population. The population is also widely scattered, with the largest city being Prince George with a population of about 70,000. The rest of the communities are widely spread across the north with the next largest, Prince Rupert, having only approximately 16,000 residents. Like most other northern regions, northern British Columbia has a relatively high percentage of First Nations people. This is especially the case in the northwest where they constitute about a third of the population. The climate of

⁷ See "Northerners angry at being put at risk: seek new B.C. cabinet post" *Vancouver Sun*, 24 August 1993.

northern British Columbia, like that of most other northern regions, is relatively harsh but it is more varied than most.

The economy of northern British Columbia is also similar to other circumpolar economies in being heavily dependent on forestry, mineral extraction, power-generation, and tourism. Although the resource sector is quite varied across the region, the forest sector predominates throughout much of it. In the Prince George region seven out of ten jobs are either directly or indirectly reliant on the forest sector.⁸ There is a second economy of hunting, fishing, and trapping. As elsewhere around the circumpolar north, this second economy is strongly identified with the indigenous population. There is relatively little manufacturing or agriculture in northern British Columbia. The transportation links are typical of northern regions in that they are good from the north to the south, largely for the purpose of moving natural resources out of the region, and relatively poor for purposes of movement within the region.

The nature of the economy and society of northern British Columbia is quite different from that in the south, and the province is in many ways divided into two unequal worlds.⁹ The southern economy and society is much more diversified, much stronger, and growing rapidly. Moreover, social indicators, such as those for health¹⁰ and education, are poorer for the north than they are for the south. For example, the transition rate of high school graduates to university is 8 per cent in the north compared to 23 per cent for the greater Vancouver area.¹¹ While there are significant gaps between north and south in other similar regions, such as Scandinavia, these gaps are not as great as they are in northern British Columbia. This may well be because there have been significant efforts to diminish the differences that have been going on for decades whereas there has not been a similar effort in northern British Columbia.

Given all of these similarities with other northern regions and given that the region has a wide range of problems, one might ask why northern British Columbia seems to have been out of step with other

⁸ See British Columbia, *British Columbia Community Employment Dependencies* (A Background Paper for the Forest Resources Commission), Victoria: Planning and Statistics Division, Ministry of Finance and Corporate Relations, February 1992, p. 11.

⁹ See H. Craig Davis and Thomas A. Hutton, "The Two Economies of British Columbia" *BC Studies* No. 82, (Summer 1989), 3-15.

¹⁰ See British Columbia, *Closer to Home: The Report of the British Columbia Royal Commission on Health Care and Costs* (Victoria: The British Columbia Royal Commission on Health Care and Costs, 1991), B57-B64.

¹¹ British Columbia, *Link: 1990 Highlights* (Victoria: Ministry of Advanced Education Training and Technology, 1991), 8-9.

parts of the Canadian provincial north, and the entire circumpolar north, in terms of developments in the university and bureaucratic arenas. There are several possible reasons. One of these is that the development of northern British Columbia has been more recent than in some other parts of the Canadian provincial north. Several efforts to develop similar parts of northern Quebec and northern Ontario occurred in the early part of this century, and sizeable communities had developed in some areas by the mid-1960s.¹² In northern Ontario the Sudbury area had reached a population of 150,000 by the 1960s and the communities that amalgamated in 1971 to form the city of Thunder Bay had a combined total of about 110,000. In the mid-1960s most of the communities in northern British Columbia were very small with even what was to become the largest of them, Prince George, having a population in 1965 of only 25,000. The population of that city grew very rapidly in the rest of the sixties with the coming of three large pulp and paper mills, and then more slowly to its present population of just over 70,000. It should be noted that the pulp and paper industry started in northern Ontario as early as 1918, whereas the first mill was not built in northern British Columbia (the Skeena Cellulose mill) until 1959. However, the factor of population size cannot be the entire explanation; northern Saskatchewan, with a tiny population of about 30,000 in the mid-1960s, established a special northern ministry, although not a university.

Another possible part of the reason may well be that the sense of there being a "northern" region was less developed in northern British Columbia than in the northern parts of the other provinces.¹³ The northern areas of most of the other provinces are very similar in that the geology and climate is much the same across all of them. Essentially they are all located on the vast swath of territory known as the Canadian Shield. While mining may dominate in one community and forestry in another, there is an essential similarity across all of the regions. This is not the case in northern British Columbia. Not only is no part of the region on the Canadian Shield, but the region can clearly be divided into three sub-regions with some considerable differences among them. The northwest is different in that it is on a productive sea coast, as opposed to northern Ontario and Quebec

¹² See Morris Zaslow, *The Opening of the Canadian North 1870-1914* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), chapters 7 and 8.

¹³ One of the few definitions of northern British Columbia is to be found in the Act creating the University of Northern British Columbia. There the area is defined as the regions established in the College and Institute Act for the College of New Caledonia, Northern Lights College and Northwest College as well as the Cariboo Regional District.

being on a relatively unproductive sea coast (Hudson Bay). It also has a much higher percentage of First Nations peoples. The northeast is different in that a good part of it is an extension of the prairies, with extensive oil and gas reserves. The central interior is the least different, but even here the possibility of agriculture is greater than in most other parts of the Canadian provincial north. In the other provinces this essential similarity produced a common sense of being a "northerner" even if one were from, say, northeastern Ontario or northwestern Ontario. However, in northern British Columbia the terms "northerner" and "northern" were far less frequently applied; instead people referred to themselves (as many still do) as coming from the Peace region, the Central Interior or the Northwest. In short, there was very little consciousness of there being a region called northern British Columbia in the 1960s and 1970s.

A further set of reasons that a Ministry of Northern Affairs was not created in the 1960s in British Columbia were political and bureaucratic. Successive governments decided that the creation of a ministry based on the rationale or logic of region rather than of function, industry, client group, or some other criterion was not appropriate. The government of Ontario long argued much the same way, as did the governments of some other provinces, but they eventually succumbed to the logic of region. Just why British Columbia did not is not clear.¹⁴

Another factor that may have had some effect is what appears to be a greater divide between the north and the south in British Columbia than in the other provinces with extensive northern regions. Of course, this is an impression that is difficult to quantify or illustrate. There may be several reasons for perceiving a greater gulf. One is the much greater climatic difference between north and south in British Columbia than exists in other provinces. Another is that northern British Columbia is more off the beaten path than some other parts of the Canadian provincial north, especially northern Ontario, which has to be traversed if one is travelling across the country by road or rail. Yet another reason is that the recent development of northern British Columbia relative to some of the other parts of the provincial north has created a kind of lag factor in southerners' understanding of northern British Columbia that doesn't appear to exist in relation to the other provincial northern regions. Many people in southern Brit-

¹⁴ The fact is often stated but not explained. See, for example, British Columbia, "Manpower Services in Northern British Columbia With Special Reference to the Transition from a Traditional to a Wage Economy." Paper presented at the Third Annual Interprovincial Conference of Ministers with Responsibility for Northern Development, Thomson, Manitoba, 9-11 September, 1980, p. 7.

ish Columbia still think that Prince George has the population that it had at the beginning of the 1960s and are surprised to hear that it now has four times that.

ADVANTAGES OF CREATING A MINISTRY OF NORTHERN AFFAIRS

The major reason for raising the idea of the creation of a Ministry of Northern Affairs in British Columbia is that it could be a useful vehicle for counteracting the trend in the province to a drift toward two increasingly distinct and markedly unequal economies. The southern economy is diversified, growing and healthy, whereas the economy of the north is narrowly resource-based, not very healthy, and facing the possibility of decline. The resource sector underpinnings of the northern economy clearly needs to be scrutinized and further developed, probably largely with value-added resource industries. There also needs to be some diversification away from the resource sector into other areas. In addition, there is the possibility of partially solving some of the large problems the south faces from large-scale growth by diverting some of the southern growth to selected sites in the north and interior. There is a clear possibility of killing two birds with one stone in this regard. A Ministry of Northern Affairs could be the needed bureaucratic tool to effect these changes if the political realm decides that they are necessary.

The northern ministries in other provinces have tackled the economic development field in a two-stage process. In the first stage, they emphasized infrastructure development as a means of promoting economic development. In most provinces this took the form of help with water supply and sewer systems as well as roads. Another major thrust was the delivery of incentive grants to the major industries already established in the north. The second stage emphasized job creation and the promotion of the type of economic development that would diversify or broaden the economic base of the regions. It also included a new awareness of the need to include native northerners in northern development and a new awareness of environmental and social problems in the north.¹⁵ In the case of Ontario the actions of the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines have had a significant cumulative beneficial effect on the nature of the region for which it is responsible. If a northern ministry were to be created in British

¹⁵ See Geoffrey R. Weller, "Provincial Ministries of Northern Affairs: A Comparative Analysis." *op. cit.*

Columbia it would undoubtedly have the same effect, although it would not be able to take a staged approach and would have to act in both areas at once and at the outset.

Another strong reason for creating a Ministry of Northern Affairs would be the existence of a bureaucratic instrument to help to correct the markedly unequal status between the north and south of the province in virtually all social policy areas. Educational statistics are much poorer for the north than they are for the south. The same can be said for health care status indicators. A concerted and coordinated effort is needed to try and correct this state of affairs; a bureaucratic vehicle for analysing the problems, analysing what it is best to do to correct them, and then carrying out agreed upon policies on a region-wide basis is essential.

A precondition for being able to do something about the problems and potentials of the north is knowing precisely what those problems are and what the range of options are that might be used to tackle them. Thus one of the more important reasons for having a Ministry of Northern Affairs would be to have an agency that would conduct appropriate research on the region. One of the big benefits that was derived from the creation of the Ministry of Northern Affairs in Ontario was the basic and specific region-wide data that it collected and the studies that it performed in a variety of policy areas. An added benefit was that the Ontario ministry became steadily more aware that the problems it faced had been faced elsewhere in Canada as well as in other nations, so it took an increasingly comparative view of the situation. British Columbia seems insular by comparison and there is little evidence in the literature and reports on the north or at conferences on the north that people are very aware of the developments in the northern regions of other provinces, let alone other nations.

Another good reason for broaching the idea of creating a Ministry of Northern Affairs is a political one. They have been used in other jurisdictions to stave off political discontent resulting from the differential conditions in, and treatment of, the north or as a means of getting much-needed votes in the north.¹⁶ Since political discontent seems to be mounting in northern British Columbia, it might be a useful political vehicle either for helping to ensure the survival of the current government or for gaining victory by a political party which hopes to form the government. Leo Bernier, Ontario's first Minister of Northern Affairs, made no bones about the fact that his ministry

¹⁶ See Geoffrey R. Weller, "Political Disaffection in the Canadian Provincial North" *Bulletin of Canadian Studies* (U.K.) Vol. IX, No. 1 (Spring 1985), 58-86.

was created to recapture some seats in the north for his Progressive Conservative Party at a time when the situation in the legislature was such that the northern seats could conceivably have determined the balance of power. Mr. Bernier also claims that he was successful in winning back a significant number of seats.¹⁷ Some years later the Liberals obtained power in Ontario. Although they had initially criticized the Ministry of Northern Affairs, they retained it and also used it to undertake initiatives in the north that they hoped would redound to their political credit.¹⁸ The same was later true of the New Democratic Party.

The creation of a Ministry of Northern Affairs would also have the political benefit of assuring northern residents that their interests were being expressed in the corridors of power in Victoria and that the government was trying to do something about the common and continuing accusation that the north has not been treated fairly in the past and is currently not being fairly treated. There is clearly a symbolism in the creation of government ministries, as can be seen from the changing titles and nature of their responsibilities over the years. A Ministry of the Environment symbolizes the concern for that policy area as does a Ministry of Women's Equality for women's issues. Thus a Ministry of Northern Affairs would symbolize a concern for the problems and potentials of the north. Of course, there has to be more than symbolism. Useful actions also have to be undertaken, and it could easily be argued that much needs to be undertaken in northern British Columbia. It is certainly the case that there have been fewer unified and politically visible attempts to investigate and solve the problems of northern British Columbia than has been the case with the other provincial norths. This may be because British Columbia resisted the creation of a northern ministry in the early seventies when the other provinces were creating them and has only made a few bureaucratic attempts to deal with the problems of regional economic development. Moreover it has not had the same concerted spending programmes as, say, Ontario has had to upgrade things like communications and transportation across the north. Whatever the truth of the matter, there is a fairly common perception among northerners in British Columbia that the line departments don't have the same unity of interest or response in delivering services to northern regions as they appear to have in the south. This was a

¹⁷ Interview with the Hon. Leo Bernier, 28th November 1978.

¹⁸ See Geoffrey R. Weller, "Politics and Policy in the North," in Graham White (ed.), *Government and Politics of Ontario* (Toronto: Nelson, 1990), 275-292.

common theme among delegates to a recent conference on northern economic development in Prince George.¹⁹

WHAT TYPE OF MINISTRY?

If British Columbia were to consider creating a Ministry of Northern Affairs, there are three Canadian organizational models for such a ministry that could be analysed for their applicability to British Columbia. The first is what could be called a limited ministry because it would only be responsible for certain specified policy areas affecting the north. The original Ministry of Northern Affairs in Manitoba was of this type, as its mandate was limited largely to two areas. The first was local government development in the more remote areas of the province. The second was the coordination of the federal-provincial agreements affecting the north, such as the Manitoba Northlands Agreement and the special Agriculture Rehabilitation and Development Act (ARDA) and the Nelson hydro-electric project.²⁰

The second could be called a full-service ministry because it would be responsible for virtually all provincial government services delivered in the region. The Department of Northern Saskatchewan was of this type. The arguments for a ministry of this sort are that it would evince a greater awareness of the total needs of the north and be able to develop a comprehensive and integrated set of programs to meet these needs. It would also be a single voice for the north both in the bureaucracy and in the cabinet and, therefore, would be likely to increase the awareness of the north and produce greater emphasis on solving its problems.²¹

The third type of ministry for which a model exists is that of the coordinating ministry. The Ministry of Northern Development and Mines in Ontario is of this type. Here the main role of the ministry is to coordinate the activities of the line ministries in the north and to deal with any federal-provincial matter that touches upon the north. The Ontario ministry does have some delivery capacity of its own in the area of transportation and mining, but its main role is that of

¹⁹ In February of 1994 the B.C. Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture and the federal Department of Indian and Northern Affairs co-sponsored a conference entitled *Sharing Northern Perspectives on Economic Development*.

²⁰ Manitoba, Department of Northern Affairs, "Responsibilities of the Minister of, Department of Northern Affairs, Renewable Resources and Transportation Services." A paper prepared for the meeting of Provincial Ministers responsible for Northern Development, Fort McMurray, Alberta, 27-29 September 1978.

²¹ Timothy Myers, *Five Years After: A Review of the Department of Northern Saskatchewan's First Five Years* (La Ronge: Department of Northern Saskatchewan, 1978).

coordination. It acts as the "lead" ministry in the north, that is, it is the first point of contact in all areas for northerners making enquiries about government services. It establishes overall priorities for the north and in addition to any persuasive powers it might have on line ministries it has "topping up" funds it can offer them to persuade them of the priority to be attached to northern needs.²²

The coordinating ministry model is probably the most appropriate for British Columbia. The limited ministry approach would not produce the overarching or comprehensive view of the north and its potentials and problems that would result in the type of results that are needed. On the other hand, the full-service ministry approach would be problematic for a variety of reasons. It would be a relatively small department with a vast range of responsibilities. Thus it would find it difficult to develop the functional expertise in each area that would be the equivalent of a line ministry covering the whole province. With such an arrangement it would also be difficult to maintain province-wide standards. In addition, it would become a "ministry of everything" in the north and there would be an inherent danger of it becoming the "empire of the north" within the bureaucracy and, thereby, much resented by the rest of the bureaucracy. This was the case with the Department of Northern Saskatchewan. Another good reason for suggesting that a coordinating ministry is the most appropriate is that it could be argued that practice has indicated that it is the most successful model, at least in the sense that it is the only one to have survived in reasonable shape through changes of government. As was previously noted, the Ontario ministry was established by the Conservatives and then retained by both Liberal and New Democratic governments. The other models of a northern ministry were closely identified with a particular political party and did not successfully survive party transitions in government.

A POSSIBLE MINISTRY ACTION PLAN

A northern ministry in British Columbia would need to operate on a great many fronts in order to assist in stemming the growing gulf between the north and the south. It would need to develop an overall regional plan, with sub-plans by economic sector and social issue area, and it would need to coordinate its own efforts and those of the line provincial and line federal ministries in order to implement that plan.

²² See Ontario, *Brief to the Royal Commission on the Northern Environment* (Toronto: Ministry of Northern Affairs, 1979).

It would also need to expand awareness of the north in the south and within the north itself, as well as create a general awareness that lessons might be learned from similar regions elsewhere in Canada and around the circumpolar north. It would need to create or promote the creation of investment funds, tax credit arrangements, special loan systems and a "buy north" program. It would also be a good idea if it located its operations in the north and promoted a broader government decentralization programme. A northern ministry would also need to promote economic expansion and diversification by means of infrastructure development, the further development of the resource sector, and diversification away from the resource sector by promoting other industries and tourism. It would also need to have the associated role of helping both boom and bust communities. A Ministry of Northern Affairs would also be well advised to help enhance the human resource capacity of the region and to help stem, and try to reverse, the "brain drain" to the south. The rest of this section makes suggestions concerning some specific initiatives that might be undertaken. While each initiative might be undertaken by a line ministry, the creation of a specific Ministry of Northern Affairs would ensure that such initiatives were done with the north specifically in mind and within the context of an overall knowledge of, and plan for, northern British Columbia.

The major priority of a Ministry of Northern Affairs would be to develop an overall plan or strategy for northern development.²³ A broad overall regional economic plan would need to be developed with much input from regional groups and communities and would have to bear in mind the possibility of diverting some of the anticipated southern growth to selected parts of the north. A number of sectoral economic plans, sub-regional plans and plans for the tackling of the major social problems identified in the region would need to feed the creation of an overall plan. At the moment there is no overall plan, no firm sub-regional or sectoral plans, and certainly no plan for diverting southern growth northward.

A role for a Ministry of Northern Affairs that would be equally as important as the production of a plan for northern development would be that of coordinating the work of the various ministries and agencies in an attempt to ensure a measure of success in the application of that plan. At the moment there is not a high level of coordina-

²³ See, for example, Ontario Ministry of Northern Development and Mines, *Strategic Priorities for Northern Ontario 1986-1996* (Sudbury: Ministry of Northern Development and Mines, October 1986).

tion between the various provincial ministries that have operations in the north. A Ministry of Northern Affairs would need to have the ability to exert influence on other provincial government ministries dealing with the north. The stick could be used by mandating such a role or the carrot could be used and the ministry given discretionary funds to be granted to other ministries only if what they do with those funds fits in with the plans of the Ministry of Northern Affairs. At the very least more coordination in the delivery of programs would be achieved if the Deputy Minister of a Ministry of Northern Affairs chaired an interministerial committee consisting of the northern regional directors of line ministries operating in northern British Columbia. While there is little coordination among provincial ministries in the north, there is even less between the provincial and the federal ministries and between the two of them and the First Nations communities. Coordination, of course, is difficult to achieve if there is no common set of objectives (i.e., a plan) for the north that would spark the need for coordination in the first place. Thus a Ministry of Northern Affairs would be well advised to have as its primary task attempting to get the federal government and the First Nations communities to devise and enter into a jointly agreed upon program for northern British Columbia development.

Another task of a Ministry of Northern Affairs would be to expand awareness of the north both in the south and in the north. This would most appropriately be regarded as a communications role, although it is really considerably more than this. Most northerners complain that there is an insufficient consciousness of the north in the south. However, most northerners are loath to admit that there is also some ignorance of the north among northerners themselves, along with an associated belief that there are few or no lessons to be learned from the experience of similar regions elsewhere. One way of making those who live in the south more conscious of the north would be to have a Ministry of Northern Affairs build or sponsor a B.C. North pavilion beside Science World in Vancouver, similar to the Ontario North Now pavilion at Ontario Place in Toronto. It might also prompt residents and tourists alike to venture north. In the north it would also probably be a good idea to inform people about the north, while also celebrating the north, by having a Ministry of Northern Affairs build a Science North pavilion in Prince George, along the lines of the Teknikens Hus (House of Technology) in Lulea in northern Sweden or Science North in Sudbury. This would not only inform northerners of the achievements of northerners but serve as a tourist destination

point — thereby also informing southerners while, in addition, directly helping in the economic development of the region. Luleå's Teknikens Hus is the biggest tourist attraction in northern Sweden, and Sudbury's Science North is the biggest tourist attraction in northern Ontario.²⁴ A British Columbia Ministry of Northern Affairs might also sponsor the creation of something like a Maritime Centre in Prince Rupert and an Energy Centre in the northeast to do the same thing for the northwest and the northeast.²⁵ All of these centres might usefully be associated with the academic activities of the newly created University of Northern British Columbia and be located on its premises. The Teknikens Hus in Luleå is located on the campus of the University of Luleå.

A Ministry of Northern Affairs might also promote communication about the north both in the north and in the south by helping to promote the development of a newspaper covering the whole north, something like *Northern Ontario Business*.²⁶ Another important communications role for a Ministry of Northern Affairs would be to sponsor conferences on northern topics, such as the conference of economic development officers from across the north that was recently held in Prince George. It would also be important for a Ministry of Northern Affairs to carefully study the experiences and approaches used in other northern regions around the world. This is partly because many of them have a longer history and greater variety of experience than is the case in northern British Columbia — it never makes sense to reinvent the wheel. That having been said, the ministry would naturally have to ensure that the lessons learned from elsewhere were adapted to the specific circumstances of northern British Columbia.²⁷

Another very significant role of a Ministry of Northern Affairs would be to stimulate activity in the manufacturing and small business sectors in the north. One of the most important ways in which it could do this would be to create and oversee the operations of a Northern Investment Fund that might consist of both public and private sector monetary contributions. One of the constant complaints of economic development officers from all over northern British Columbia is the

²⁴ See Anne Marie Israelsson, *A House of Technology in Prince George: A Feasibility Study* (Luleå: Teknikens Hus, 1992).

²⁵ The University of Northern British Columbia is investigating the possibility of establishing a Maritime Studies Institute in Prince Rupert and an Energy Institute somewhere in the northeast.

²⁶ *Northern Ontario Business* is published monthly by Laurentian Publishing Ltd of Sudbury.

²⁷ The work of groups such as the Centre for Regional Science Research (CERUM) at the University of Umeå in northern Sweden might be particularly useful.

lack of financing for worthy initiatives. The fund could be created by assigning a proportion of the tax revenues accrued from the resources extracted from the region and by persuading major banks and other private investors to contribute as well. The operations of such a major investment fund could be augmented by various other financial measures. One of these might be the provision of tax credits for certain actions, such as investing in the shares of northern-based manufacturing businesses, or to compensate for certain higher costs, such as incremental telecommunications, travel, energy, and transportation costs. Another possibility might be to make products manufactured in the north sales tax-exempt. Another type of initiative that might be undertaken by a Ministry of Northern Affairs to support northern business is a "buy north" campaign. This might help to prevent the "leakage" of much economic activity from the north to the south, something also seen as important by the region's economic development officers and something much complained about by them.

It would be a very good idea for a Ministry of Northern Affairs to locate its headquarters in the north and to promote all other provincial ministries to decentralize their decision-making processes upon the north as much as is feasible. This does not mean only those functions that relate to the north. It should also involve some province-wide functions that could be more readily decentralized. Northern residents are clearly irritated by the fact that much decision-making is made in distant Victoria and (so the accusation goes) by those who are not very familiar with the north and have little understanding or sympathy for its opportunities or problems.²⁸ Provincial government decentralization on a significant scale, including both northern related agencies or units and more general ones, could help create stable population bases that would, in turn, help to overcome the problem of static or declining populations and create the conditions for possible future growth. No doubt the headquarters operation of the northern ministry itself would be located in Prince George, since it is by far the largest centre in the north, with sub-regional headquarters established in the northwest and the northeast.

One of the major roles of a Ministry of Northern Affairs would be to promote economic expansion and diversification in the north. There is a need to ensure that the existing bases of the regional economy are preserved or expanded. However, in order to remain competitive, the northern economy needs further modernisation and

²⁸ This was a common sentiment among the northern economic development officers referred to earlier.

competitive strategies, and these are likely to result in further decreases in employment in the resource sector. Thus, there is also the need to try to move away from the heavy dependence of many communities on a single resource, normally forestry. A Ministry of Northern Affairs would need to promote economic policies across a wide range of areas. It would need to promote infrastructure development across the region. This would include the building or upgrading of roads, airports, and water systems and sewer systems. It would also include the building of a modern information highway across the north. No region can afford to be cut off in terms of such a communications link in the modern era. In fact, not being connected with an information highway will soon be the functional equivalent of not having a paved road to a community. Attention would also need to be paid to what might be called "quality of life" infrastructural developments such as cultural, athletic and recreation facilities. These are important as they are needed to attract and retain a trained labour force. In addition, the ministry would doubtless become involved in the promotion of value-added industry in areas related to the forest sector. It would also undoubtedly wish to become involved in developing the tourist industry in the region, for it has considerable potential. There is a need for such things as destination point attractions in the north, such as the Teknikens Hus and other suggestions made earlier, and there is a need to promote tours of the region, as well as many other tourism opportunities that currently do not exist in the north.

Despite all the initiatives mentioned above there will no doubt continue to be northern communities that have to adjust to either rapid growth (boom) or rapid decline (bust) and even disappearance, as in the case of Cassiar. A Ministry of Northern Affairs could play a major role in assisting community adjustment in both circumstances. In the case of declining communities the ministry could develop protocols with resource companies, dealing with such matters as adequate notice of developments, personal adjustment packages for employees, relocation assistance, and the creation of community adjustment funds to be used by the municipalities to develop, if appropriate, new employment opportunities. It might also be used to provide transitional social services and to maintain necessary municipal infrastructure during the adjustment period.

One of the major issues identified by northern British Columbia's economic development officers is that of the insufficient availability of human resource capacity at various levels of education in the north. A major component of this issue was the leakage of skilled people at all

levels from the north. There is a "brain drain" that all agree needs to be stopped and, if possible, reversed. The creation of the University of Northern British Columbia is one development that should help considerably in this area. The availability of degree-completion opportunities in the north will increase the number of northerners attending university (currently the figure is only about one-third of that for the Vancouver area), will help attract and retain more highly skilled employees, and generally help enhance the skill base of the local labour force. This should, in turn, provide one of the necessary preconditions for employment growth and diversification. The effect will take a few years to take hold, but the experience with other northern universities built several decades ago indicates that it will have a marked positive effect.²⁹ This positive effect can be speeded up and enhanced if the university offers regionally relevant programming and is given the resources to help in the economic, social, and cultural development of the region. If government, in the form of a Ministry of Northern Affairs, and the private sector regarded the university as an important player and catalyst for development, it could be extremely useful not just in stemming the brain drain but in positively enhancing development initiatives. The university has plans to try and establish regionally relevant chairs (such as in regional economic development, entrepreneurial studies, community health care, First Nations studies and the like), to establish industry incubator facilities to promote economic diversification, and to conduct regionally relevant research sponsored by government, regional industry and groups, foundations and others.³⁰ If the university could undertake these initiatives in the context of an overall general plan for northern development and with the cooperation of a Ministry of Northern Affairs working in conjunction with the private sector, its ability to effect development would be much enhanced. The three northern colleges would also be assisted in their endeavours if they could work in the context of a coherent plan for northern development. One of them, logically the College of New Caledonia, might usefully be developed as a northern equivalent of British Columbia Institute of Technology so that northerners would have a nearly full range of

²⁹ See Uno Varjo and Marja-Leena Hultunen, *The Founding of the University of Oulu and Its Effect on Regional Development* (Oulu: University of Oulu, 1977) (Acta Universitatis Ouluensis, Series A. Scientiae Rerum Naturalium No. 50, Geographica No. 4) and Jan-Erik Lane, *Creating the University of Norrland: Goals Strategies and Outcomes* (Umea: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1983).

³⁰ See University of Northern British Columbia, *Academic Plan* (Prince George: University of Northern British Columbia, October 1991).

educational opportunities available to them without having to leave the north. All of the post-secondary institutions should also work with the northern schools to promote such things as science education in the north. A Ministry of Northern Affairs might be a useful catalyst for such initiatives, as was the case with the Ministry of Northern Affairs in Ontario which supports residential science summer schools for High School students at Lakehead and Laurentian universities. All segments of the educational sector might also be encouraged by such a ministry to focus on community leadership development and the training of economic development specialists. Both of these areas have been identified by the economic development officers from across the north as ones that are much needed.

POTENTIAL DISADVANTAGES AND DANGERS

A new Ministry of Northern Affairs might have some difficulty developing new ideas and approaches at the outset, as a significant proportion of its personnel would almost certainly be carry-overs from the northern related units of a variety of line Ministries. This would almost inevitably mean that there would be a carry-over of previous thinking and attitudes towards the north and northerners. This was the case with the case with Ontario Ministry of Northern Affairs, the DNS and SAGMAI when they were formed in the 1970s. It was also the case with these agencies that they had difficulty getting a coherent operation underway because the many and varied backgrounds of their new staff were the source of a great deal of internal conflict. Thus if British Columbia did create a new northern ministry a great deal of attention would have to be paid to developing a clear and coherent mission and a unified sense of purpose among the staff.

Developing a sense of unity of purpose among the staff might be difficult to accomplish because of the number of significant issues that would have to be tackled. Northern ministries and agencies have nearly all experienced internal differences of view on the relative importance of "hard" and "soft" services. Sometimes the conflict was characterized as being between the "sewer and water" types and the "social development" types, with latter occasionally being referred to as "left-wing, rabble-rousing academics."³¹ Another dichotomy that might well become internalized in a new northern ministry, depend-

³¹ This was particularly noticeable in Saskatchewan in the days of the DNS when the "sewer and water boys" were located in Prince Albert and the "social animators" were located in La Ronge.

ing on the roles it is given, is that between the role of promoting economic development and that of protecting the environment. The north is full of issues where this dichotomy would be placed in stark relief. A third area where conflict might become internalized is in the attitude taken towards the role of First Nations in whatever policy areas the new ministry ends up being responsible for. Relations between First Nations peoples and others are currently strained in northern British Columbia on a wide range of issues, and it would be difficult to prevent the stresses from being internalized, especially if the new ministry hired, as it should, a significant number of staff with a First Nations background.

One of the major difficulties that a newly formed northern ministry would face would be rivalry with, and attacks from, the line ministries. In the seventies many of the line ministries in Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan resisted the creation of the new northern agencies and clearly resented them when they were formed. In part this was because their very creation implied that the line ministries hadn't previously been properly dealing with the north. It was also, in part, because they didn't like to see another bureaucratic entity come into existence that had a strong and special claim on resources. Where coordination was involved it was also partly because the line ministries didn't want the extra work involved and the annoyance of another department scrutinizing their work and suggesting changes.

Another difficulty that a new northern ministry would face would be determining where to locate its operations. The experience of the northern ministries in the other provinces would indicate that there are two aspects to this problem and that neither is easily resolved. The first aspect is the need to decide whether or not the key civil servants would be located in the north and close to the people they would be serving, or in Victoria and close to the corridors of power. The dilemma is clearly that of deciding how to balance the need to create credibility in the north by having a physical presence there with the need to maintain a strong presence in the provincial capital so as not to be isolated from the centre of political and bureaucratic decision-making. In Saskatchewan it was initially decided to locate the DNS in the north, and a new northern "capital" was built in La Ronge. However, senior civil servants had to spend a great deal of time in Regina and a unit had to be stationed there. In Ontario the MNS was initially headquartered in Toronto but otherwise quite decentralized. However, this approach was changed after some years and a large new headquarters building was constructed in Sudbury.

The second aspect is the need to somehow deal with the sometimes intense inter-community rivalry that exists among the communities of northern British Columbia. Any community of any size will want part of the action. All of the communities will resent Prince George becoming the main centre in the north, even though it should logically be so for geographic, population, and communications reasons. In addition, there would no doubt be rivalry within two of the three sub-regions as to which of the two major towns in each (Terrace and Prince Rupert in the northwest and Dawson Creek and Fort St. John in the northeast) would become the sub-regional centres for the new ministry. The Ontario Ministry of Northern Affairs ran into locational problems of this sort when it was created. The new ministry initially located its sub-regional centres in Kenora and Sault Ste. Marie, and this upset the major cities in each sub-region, Thunder Bay and Sudbury.

If it was decided to create a Ministry of Northern Affairs several potential problems relating to personnel matters would have to be guarded against. One of these would be that one would have to be careful to prevent the line ministries using the new ministry as a bureaucratic "dumping ground." Experience from the creation of the northern ministries in the other provinces in the seventies indicates that the ministries losing parts of their roles to the new agency would try to get rid of people they didn't want any more or who weren't particularly productive. Clearly if such a dumping were to occur it would make it very difficult for the new ministry to establish credibility within the provincial bureaucracy.

Yet another personnel difficulty would be getting established staff to move north from Victoria if the ministry were headquartered in the north, as it logically should be. Even if various provisions and inducements are offered, experience suggests that they may have little effect. This was certainly the case when the Ontario government placed the headquarters of the Ministry of Northern Affairs in Sudbury and also when it tried to send other units of the civil service to various northern centres, including Thunder Bay, North Bay, and Sault Ste. Marie.

Another personnel difficulty a new northern ministry would probably face would be the acquisition of good new staff, especially in its early years. Many people would not be attracted by a relatively unglamorous, relatively low priority ministry, working for which would involve a lot of travel in poor conditions and a certain remoteness from the centres of power, education, and culture. However, these days some people might be motivated to move north by the

possibility of living an alternative life style to that found in the larger centres. This may be an increasingly powerful motivating force as some of the amenities of larger centres, such as access to university education, are now a possibility in the north.

It is worth noting here that a motivating force that attracted a lot of bright young civil servants to serve in some of the northern ministries that were established in the 1970s probably does not exist now, at least not to anything like the same degree. This is the motivating force of ideology. The Department of Northern Saskatchewan (DNS) was perhaps the classic example of the advantages and dangers of ideology as a motivating force. The opportunity to put certain conflict and community development theories into practice had the advantage of attracting a lot of well-qualified and highly motivated individuals to the DNS in its early years. The difficulty was that they were somewhat divorced from the community they were busy "empowering" and resentful of those community members when they became empowered, since they often were the focus of the ire of the newly empowered individuals. Yet another potential personnel-related problem would be that of hiring sufficient First Nations individuals to make the new ministry representative of the population make-up of northern British Columbia. A reasonable representativeness would be necessary for the ministry to acquire a proper credibility in the north. Special efforts would have to be made to obtain appropriate First Nations representation. The northern ministries created in the seventies did not pay sufficient attention to this when they were first established, and they never did acquire great legitimacy and credibility with the First Nations peoples that they served.

CONCLUSIONS

It is becoming clear that British Columbia has developed into a province with two distinct economies and societies. One of these, the southern, is strong but faces the problems of massive population growth. The other, the northern, while once rapidly growing, has become static at best and faces numerous problems including the beginnings of population decline.³² The northern economy began to encounter serious problems with the coming of the 1980s. It became clear then that world economic conditions were changing such that

³² See British Columbia Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, *The Structure of the British Columbia Economy: A Land Use Perspective* (Victoria: Planning and Statistics Division, Ministry of Finance and Corporate Relations, March 1991), 42.

resource-rich regions were becoming markedly disadvantaged. The terms of trade were moving against many of the natural resource industries, especially as many large sources were being developed in third world nations. In addition, the nature of the world economy was moving away from those industries that required large-scale resource exploitation. Moreover, the resource sector itself was becoming rapidly more capital intensive and technologically sophisticated, resulting in fewer jobs requiring higher skills.

With the prolonged relative stagnation in the northern economy, the gap between the north and the south in British Columbia became increasingly evident. In part this was reflected in the halting of population growth in the north. In 1941 northern British Columbia had 5.7 per cent of the provincial population. By 1980 that had grown to 10 per cent but since then it has remained static and recently parts of the north are beginning to experience significant population decline. The gap between north and south is also clearly reflected in the poorer health-care, educational, and other social indicators referred to earlier.

There needs to be a search for new policies to try and correct or at least mitigate the negative effects of the north/south divide in British Columbia. Northern British Columbia has more potential for balanced economic and social development than the other provincial northern regions, yet less has been done to realize this potential than is the case with the other regions. Moreover, northern British Columbia could be used to help relieve some of the population growth pressure faced by the south, and yet the potential benefits of linking of the two sets of issues seem not to have been recognized by government. In short, there needs to be a search for new policies to try and counteract the growing north/south divide. Perhaps the creation of a Ministry of Northern Affairs would spark the search for these new policies and also provide the vehicle for putting them into effect.