

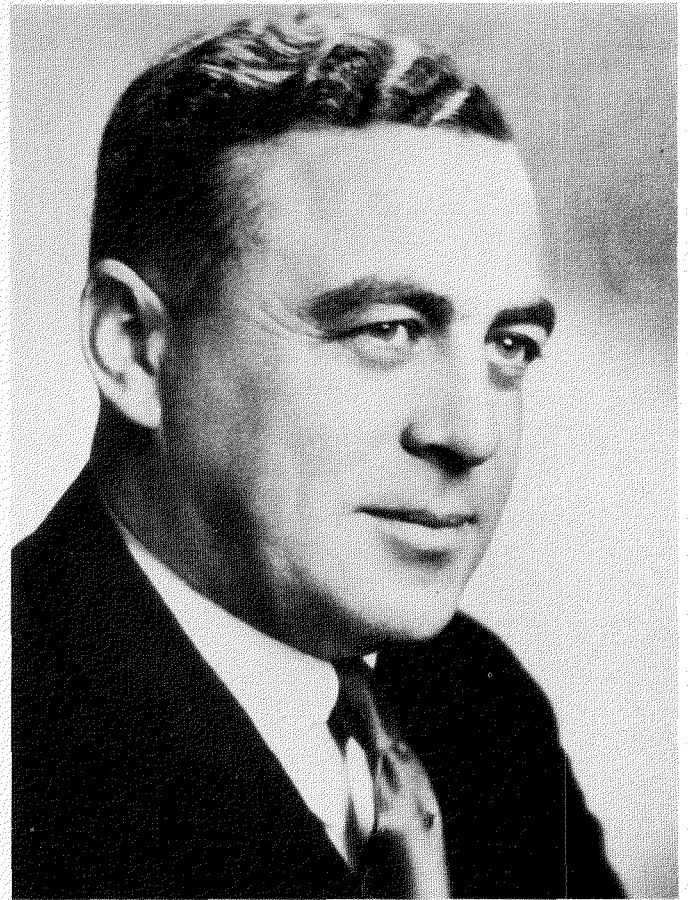
Hugh Llewellyn Keenleyside Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, 1947-1950

In March 1947, Hugh Keenleyside was recalled from his posting as Ambassador to Mexico and appointed Commissioner of the Northwest Territories and Deputy Minister of Mines and Resources, positions he held until October 1950. His credentials were unusual and his tenure short, but within three and a half years, the former diplomat transformed the somewhat laissez-faire style of northern government into one of active intervention supported by major financial investment.

For the most part, historians have ignored Keenleyside's role as a social and economic reformer, focusing instead on his diplomatic career. Similarly, the degree of policy change occurring in the late 1940s has gone unnoticed, for the most part, owing to arctic security regulations at the height of the Cold War and to the emphasis placed on a rhetorical comment by Prime Minister St. Laurent in 1953, when he announced the creation of a "new" Ministry of Northern Affairs and National Resources to correct what he claimed had been "a fit of absence of mind" in governing the northern territories. Yet in spite of its new name, new minister, and new deputy minister, the structure and policies were remarkably similar to those of the old Department of Resources and Development set out by Keenleyside in 1950. And while the federal government had indeed abandoned its "benign neglect" of former years, that change had effectively taken place in the late forties.

Hugh Keenleyside was born in Toronto in July 1898, the elder son of a devout Methodist father with a leftist political orientation and an equally devout Baptist mother. The next year the family moved to Vancouver, where Hugh and his younger sister and brother were raised and educated. His studies at the University of British Columbia were temporarily interrupted when he served in the army during World War I, but he returned to complete his undergraduate degree in 1920 and went on for his master's and doctoral degrees at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. His thesis provided the basis for his highly acclaimed history of Canadian-American relations, *Canada and the United States*. After several years teaching at American colleges and his alma mater in British Columbia, he wrote the civil service exams for the Canadian Department of External Affairs. There were two successful candidates in 1928: Lester B. Pearson and Hugh L. Keenleyside. Based on the same exams, Kenneth Kirkwood and Norman Robertson received subsequent appointments.

Keenleyside moved quickly through the ranks, which included a six-year assignment as first secretary to the Canadian Legation in Japan, and in 1941 he was appointed Assistant Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs. Throughout World War II, he was actively involved in Canadian and American affairs and numerous related wartime agencies, such as membership on the Joint Economic Committees and as Canadian Secretary and later Acting Chairman of the Permanent Joint Board on Defence. Following the death of Under-Secretary O.D. Skelton in 1941, he replaced him as the



member for External Affairs on the Northwest Territories Council. It was this post, coupled with the issue of arctic sovereignty in connection with the American defence projects, that inspired his initial interest in the future of the northern territories. Keenleyside's demands for extensive social, political, and economic reforms, first in 1943 and again the following year, took the commissioner and his council members quite by surprise. Up to that point, government policy had been to effect "peace, order, and good government" with the maximum show of sovereign control, the minimum of manpower, and the minimum of expense. The fact that a member of the diplomatic corps should take them to task for their exceptional record of frugality was not taken kindly by the traditionally conservative members of the council.

In 1944, the seasoned diplomat found himself at a crossroads in terms of his career path. In his memoirs, Keenleyside admitted to the fact that his political views were "pretty well to the left" and that he entertained "radical views" in such matters as social justice and freedom of opportunity. Moreover, his idealism and intense urge to reform were continually thwarted in the protocol-bound confines of diplomacy, yet he was not prepared to move into the political arena unless a "coalition of the CCF and Liberals" would provide

the stage for a "truly liberal or socialist government." Although he had been offered several tempting opportunities in the private sector, including the positions of university president and executive director of an international organization, he still believed he could contribute more by attempting to reform the system from within government.

In the fall of 1946, a seemingly golden opportunity presented itself when Charles Camsell, then Commissioner of the Northwest Territories Council and Deputy Minister of Mines and Resources, announced his wish to retire. Now an ambassador, but dissatisfied with his inability "to produce tangible and measurable results," Keenleyside casually let it be known that he might be interested in the position. Nevertheless, he was genuinely surprised when he received a cable in January stating that the prime minister had requested his release from the foreign service, as soon as feasibly possible, to assume the dual posts vacated by the retiring Camsell. He was also informed that the decision was based on the crucial importance of northern resources, presumably uranium, and the need to put the department responsible "on the soundest and most efficient basis." Significantly, the appointment also coincided with the public announcement of the postwar mutual defence agreement with the United States. To Keenleyside, the position offered the opportunity to reform an outmoded system of northern government and lay the basis for future economic development and social justice for all. The goals of state and those of the individual would ultimately collide.

Just prior to Keenleyside's appointment, the membership of the Northwest Territories Council was altered by adding representatives from the RCAF and the legal division of External Affairs to meet the exigencies of the new defence agreement. Noting its increased importance, the new commissioner announced that "the responsibility of being in charge of the Council was not to be taken lightly." For the next three years, he remained true to his words. Meetings were now held monthly, rather than periodically; the minutes were detailed and lengthy; and for the first time in history, the press were invited to an "open session." There was also a concerted effort to have administrative matters handled by the department, allowing the council to remain primarily an advisory and legislative body. Numerous ordinances were passed and the Northwest Territories Act was revised to bring the territorial judicial system into line with that of the provinces. Policy changes were introduced, approved, and in many cases implemented, especially those related to education and welfare.

Keenleyside's first mandate was to reorganize the department in the interests of "efficiency and expediency." Initially, there were a number of minor structural changes, including division of the administration into separate Yukon, Arctic, and Mackenzie districts and the addition of two new sections to the department's Indian Affairs Branch: welfare and education. A more complete overhaul came in 1950 when two departments were made into three. Northern Affairs was elevated to a full branch within the new Department of Resources and Development. Mines and Indian Affairs was reassigned to other portfolios.

Educational reforms were also a high priority. Within months, a special education committee was set up by the council to investigate means of improving quality and acces-

sibility, especially for the indigenous population. New policies were approved beginning in November 1947 allowing for construction of government-owned day schools; higher standards of curriculum and teachers' qualifications; scholarships and financial assistance for promising students; the introduction of new programs, such as manual training, adult education, and the welfare teacher; the intent to gradually replace residential schools with day schools; and approval in principle for full government control over the mission schools pending revision of the Indian Act. Indian Affairs was responsible only for Treaty Indians, whereas Metis, Inuit and non-natives fell under the jurisdiction of the territorial government. By 1950, there were ten new government schools, another operated by the Yellowknife School District, and one jointly operated in conjunction with Eldorado Mining at Port Radium. In addition, Indian Affairs built eight new secular schools with some financial assistance from the territorial government.

Similarly, the new ministry of National Health and Welfare assumed responsibility for Indians, but it fell to the Northwest Territories Council to provide welfare assistance and medical services for the Inuit, Metis, and indigent whites. Still, health services were closely coordinated and sometimes shared. Tuberculosis surveys continued and active patients were sent to the new Charles Camsell Hospital in Edmonton. Five new territorial nursing stations were built, and in 1950 the medical services offered by the Eastern Arctic Patrol were significantly upgraded with the launching of the new government-owned ship, the *C.D. Howe*. On two occasions, Inuit old-age allowances were increased, but as in the case of family allowances, the payment was most often in the form of food or clothing.

Overall, progress in social reforms was impressive. During the first year of Keenleyside's administration, Indian Affairs expenditures for education in the Northwest Territories had increased by 575% and for welfare, 176%, compared to the Indian Affairs national average of 42% and 49% respectively. Equally impressive although less, northern administration costs more than doubled from March 1947 to March 1950 to reach approximately \$4.5 million.

Keenleyside's interest in economic development led to numerous research studies conducted within or on behalf of his own department, and often in collaboration with other agencies: hydrographic surveys and geodetic studies, water power assessments, geological surveys, topographical mapping, numerous welfare and education studies, soil surveys, agricultural experiments, and study into the potential of commercial fisheries. As Chairman of the Advisory Council on Arctic Research, he also called upon Canadian universities to expand their field studies into the polar regions. The distinct departure from the former *laissez-faire* approach to economic development began in 1948 with the creation of the Northwest Territories Power Commission to coordinate and control energy supplies. In addition to local roads, access highways were constructed to link mining areas to the existing transportation system. Communities benefited as well, as in the case of over \$2.5 million invested in developing the Yellowknife townsite. In 1948, legislative authority for the Northwest Game Act was transferred to the N.W.T. Council and new regulations were instituted in an attempt to protect native "ancestral hunting grounds" from encroachment by

outsiders. When fur prices fell dramatically in 1949, there was a concerted effort to seek a more diversified economic base for the native population, and in 1950 the Canadian Handicraft Guild was contacted to aid in the development of an Inuit craft industry.

Since many studies and projects were shared by other departments, the newly appointed commissioner suggested that a coordinating committee be set up to facilitate cooperation. Responding with unusual speed, in January 1948 Cabinet approved the creation of an Advisory Committee on Northern Development with Keenleyside as chairman. Although the mandate referred to both "civilian and military undertakings," Keenleyside expressly noted to Lester Pearson that he hoped to focus northern policy on "resources and research, not on strategy and politics."

Yet in spite of the many social reforms, there were surprisingly few constitutional changes towards more representative government. The commissioner's reticence was grounded in his disgust over the segregation policies of the Yellowknife hospital and the residents' more general complaints about the preferential treatment given to the Indians. Although he approved a partially elected Trustee Board where Indians were allowed to vote, he stoutly resisted demands for a partially elected council until the federal government agreed to enfranchise the Inuit. In many respects, Keenleyside's views of the indigenous peoples were far ahead of public opinion. Education and social welfare were important, he maintained, but he also cautioned that adaptation to the modern world must be voluntary and gradual, that "its inevitability must not be accepted as justification for compulsion or unnecessary fracturing of native codes, customs and ideals." In his opinion, "integration" did not mean inevitable assimilation or absorption.

In January 1950, a new minister was appointed to head the new Department of Resources and Development. The Hon. Robert Winters first queried his deputy about the possibility that he, the minister, might assume the position of commissioner, and at the same time requested a full report on why the Northwest Territories had not been granted "a more democratic form of government." To the first, Keenleyside replied it would be unconstitutional unless there were a major revision of the statutes approved by Parliament. To the second issue, he reasserted his belief that the interests of the indigenous people would not be duly represented until they were fully enfranchised and submitted his proposed plan of constitutional development, pending changes in the Elections Act to enfranchise the Inuit. He also recommended that at least one council meeting a year be held in the Mackenzie District. Understandably concerned that budget restrictions were likely forthcoming owing to the escalating Cold War, Keenleyside nevertheless left for Bolivia, as planned, to head the first United Nations Mission of Technical Assistance.

When he returned in September 1950, he was faced with a bleak state of affairs. After the Soviet's successful atomic bomb test in the fall of 1949 and the outbreak of the Korean War the next June, many politicians feared that a nuclear World War III might be inevitable. Criticizing Keenleyside for his administrative techniques and the disbursement of territorial funds, his minister advised that budgeted expenses to cover the planned expansion of socio-economic programs would be cut to cover anticipated costs of new

defence measures. And while his plan for a partially elected council would soon be implemented, there was no provision to enfranchise the Inuit. Keenleyside's response was his resignation, noting his decision to accept the offer of Director General for the United Nations Technical Assistance Programme.

Keenleyside retired from the United Nations at the age of 60 and returned to British Columbia to assume the chairmanship of the B.C. Power Commission, and later the co-chairmanship of the B.C. Hydro and Power Authority until 1969. For his contribution to public service, he was awarded the Haldane Medal in 1959 by the Royal Institute of Public Administration and was the recipient of the first Vanier award presented by the Institute of Public Administration of Canada in 1962. Seven years later he was made a Companion of the Order of Canada. In 1982 he was awarded the Pearson Peace Medal by the United Nations Association for his service to the world organization. Keenleyside has also given leadership to a number of institutions of higher learning: as Chancellor of Notre Dame University; Trustee of Clark University; Senator of the University of British Columbia; and Vice-Chairman of the Board of Governors of Carleton University. He was also a Director of the Resources for the Future Conference. Today, at the age of 91, he still resides in his home in Victoria, British Columbia.

Hugh Keenleyside's accomplishments as Commissioner of the Northwest Territories cannot be fully understood without recognizing that he had failed to meet his own expectations and ambitious objectives. Yet regardless of resistance and criticism from his more conservative colleagues and political masters, the determined reformer dramatically changed the direction of government policies to end the period of "benign neglect" and mark the beginning of heavy financial investment and government intervention into almost every aspect of northern affairs. Ironically, perhaps the most perceptive tribute to the diplomat cum commissioner appeared in the *Yellowknife News of the North*, which declared Keenleyside to be "devoted to the cause of making the world a better place in which to live, and anyone who goes forth in this day and age to fight what he sees as evil is regarded as a gallant Don Quixote, though he may actually be a Sir Galahad." More importantly, his vision of the northern frontier was one where freedom and democracy would ultimately prevail and where Euro-Canadian newcomers did not possess the right to rule a non-voting native majority.

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