

A Challenge to the British System: Why Canada Needs the Bering Strait Tunnel

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The relationship of Canada to its railways has always been an existential one; this was true in 1849, the great launching point for 19th-Century Canadian railroading, as it is true today. There are even parallels between the two eras, such as the resistance to change that confronted Canada's early patriots, as it confronts anyone today, who has a greater vision for Canada than the narrow strip and isolated patches of civilization, currently hugging the U.S. border. The future of Canada is the Northwest, with its untold resources and vast supplies of freshwater; it is one of the final terrestrial frontiers.

Canada is now faced with this era's existential choice: either develop or collapse. As these words are written, the international financial system is breaking apart in a series of banking crises, which are only a slight foretaste of what imminently approaches. In the meantime, the condition of the country's infrastructure grows increasingly wretched; our industries continue to disappear, our companies to be seized by thieving hedge and equity funds, while sovereignty seems no more than a quaint dream. Fortunately, however, Russia, taking up Lyndon LaRouche's visionary Eurasian Land-Bridge proposal of the early 1990s, has offered, both to the United States and Canada, to trilaterally build a Bering Strait Tunnel in order to connect the Americas with the entire Eurasian landmass. The tunnel is, in actuality, part of a Russian offer of a new relationship between the two great powers, to lead the reorganization of the global economy. A new strategic alliance is in the offing, and the basis for solving the economic crisis is now at hand. A great moment has found us: Shall we rise to meet it, or fall victim to our propensity for national littleness? The government of Canada has answered: It claims not to know of Russia's proposal. Thus it falls to the people to organize themselves and attain the objective, which their currently elected representatives are too cowardly or incompetent to dare.

Thomas Keefer, 'Prophet of Progress'

When nations take it upon themselves to consider such weighty questions—questions which will undoubtedly affect the entirety of the human race and its posterity, it seems proper to reflect upon the less obvious reasons—at least for the current generation—for this project's overwhelming importance. It would also be fitting to add to my own voice that of the man who, perhaps more than any other, was responsible

for Canada's first rapid expansion of railroads, an expansion that saved Canada from certain economic ruin beneath the yoke of British rule. The man was Thomas Coltrin Keefer, Canada's "Prophet of Progress."

Keefer was born in 1821, into a family of civil engineers, growing up immersed in the construction of one of the greatest infrastructure projects of the period, the Welland Canal, which circumvented the previously indomitable Niagara Falls. Keefer's father was the first president of the Welland Canal Company, and a close friend of the driving force behind the project, the man who was also the mentor of young Keefer, William Hamilton Merritt. At 17, Keefer left home and spent two years, 1838-40, working on the Erie Canal, the preeminent American engineering school of its day, digesting American System methods and philosophy. Keefer then spent the 1840s working on the Welland Canal, as well as on other engineering jobs, until 1849, when Merritt, who had just attained one of the top posts in Canada's colonial government, commissioned him to compose a pamphlet promoting railroad development in Canada, at a time when all of Canada had no more than 60 miles of railway. The pamphlet was entitled *Philosophy of Railroads*; and it was a direct attack, not only upon the domineering British System of free trade, but also that depraved and bestial conception of man so beloved of the British oligarchy, as well as their philosophers and economists.

The pamphlet's success was immediate and astonishing. In less than a year *Philosophy of Railroads* was in its third printing, had been reprinted in scores of Canadian newspapers, and was circulating throughout the United States as well. By 1853, there was also a French edition. One contemporary biographer claimed that Keefer contributed more than any other to the building of railroads in Canada, even though he himself would never actually supervise one's construction; rather, Keefer's power was located in his capacity to convey ideas, and to overcome the colonial axioms within the people themselves, which prevented the adoption of American System policies in Canada. As a direct result of his political intervention and the work of Merritt in passing crucial railroad legislation, over the course of the 1850s, Canada's patriotic circles would build several thousand miles of track, adopt American System protectionism, and lead an attempt during the U.S. Civil War to



Thomas Keefer's influential booklet *Philosophy of Railroads* was a direct attack on British free trade, in support of the American System of industrial development.

break Canada away from the British System.

Keefer would go on to play a leading role in the construction of water management systems in a number of cities, as well as to found the Canadian Society of Civil Engineering, serving as its first president. Moreover, he is the only Canadian to have also served as president of the American Society of Civil Engineers. In 1878, as his crowning achievement, Keefer was named the executive commissioner for Canada at the Paris Exhibition, assembling a greater show of domestically produced machine tools than any nation save Germany and the United States. He was one of the first Canadians to agitate for a continental railway; he also had an ecstatic vision for Canada's economic future when, in 1898, he spoke of a future of high-speed, electrified trains, running silently between clean, well-lighted cities.

'Philosophy of Railroads'

Now, to return to the issue at hand. As every true humanist and national patriot has understood, the issue of development is not merely one of balance sheets and cost-benefit analysis; nor is it simply about the expansion of trade and production; but rather, it is a question of the very nature of man: that we have the capacity not only to improve ourselves, but nature as well; that nations must be dedicated to the improvement of their people; that the Hobbesian nightmare of globalization is not inevitable; that we may forge instead that prescient vision of Franklin D. Roosevelt—a community of sovereign nation-states, working together for the welfare of all. For this reason, it is necessary to speak of the Bering

Strait Tunnel not simply as an infrastructure project, *but as an idea*, as a transformative process with profound economic, cultural, and moral implications. Keefer himself often referred to the railroad as “the iron civilizer”; or as one of his biographers, H.V. Nelles, wrote, “as a train of consequences as opposed to a simple line of track,” that “the aim of *Philosophy of Railroads* was to establish a direct linkage between the railroad and the noblest ideals of the age, and to illuminate the process through which steam technology would necessarily advance the material improvement and the moral perfection of man.”

Today, we may not speak of “steam technology,” but we surely speak of nuclear fission, thermonuclear fusion, and magnetic-levitation trains. These represent, as Lyndon LaRouche has repeatedly pointed out, the metaphorical fire of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, for the giving of which to humankind the immortal Prometheus is eternally punished by the oligarchic Zeus. As Keefer argues, and as the testament of history proves, great projects have the effect of elevating an otherwise backward population out of their often self-imposed cultural darkness, such as the “Sleepy Hollow” that

was early 19th-Century Canada (see below and *Appendix*). Speaking before the Montreal Mechanics Institute in 1853, he asked:

[I]s there not reason for belief that the regeneration of the dark corners of the Earth is to be accomplished . . . by a practical elevation of the people, to be brought about by a rapid development of commerce and the arts? Ignorance and prejudice will flee before advancing prosperity. Wherever a railway breaks in upon the gloom of a secluded district, new life and vigor are infused into the native torpor—the long desired market is obtained . . . the hitherto useless waterfall now turns the laboring wheel, now drives the merrier spindle, the cold and hungry are now clothed and nourished.

Keefer understood that without economic prosperity, peace and stability would be impossible: whether it was the development of North America then, or the prospects for peace today in the Middle East, the same principle applies. He observed that “the steamboat and the railroad . . . have diffused a degree of comfort and prosperity unprecedented in history. Every new manufacture, every new machine, every mile of railway built is not only of more practical benefit, but is a more efficient civilizer, a more speedy reformer, than years of declamation, agitation, or moral legislation.”

But what was it that Keefer and Merritt recognized in the culture that required their intervention? In *Philosophy of Railroads*, Keefer observes, of revolutionary projects and sys-

tems, that “their origin and maturity are the work of the well-informed few, whose foresight has been rewarded frequently before it has been acknowledged . . . who have contended with *the chilling influences of popular apathy, ignorance, and incredulity.*” Could Keefer not just as easily be speaking of the national malaise of today? The railway system of Canada was once a source of pride for Canadians—it was a demonstration of our command over nature. We had straddled the vast continental expanses with an iron belt of power; the railways were the sinews and the great commercial arteries of the nation. There was a time when Canada hummed with the excited energy of national expansion, there was nothing that could not be overcome; and yet today, beneath the tyranny of the Baby-Boomer generation’s anti-progress ideology, we no longer build, we no longer produce, we only desire to consume, at the expense of our future.

Keefer’s answer, which is the central feature of *Philosophy of Railroads*, is to paint a comic miniature of Canadian society, as true today as it was in his time: a little town called “Sleepy Hollow,” where nothing happens and there are no railroads to trouble the residents with “the hideous screech of the steam whistle”; where the people believe they have “attained the limit of improvement. If they have no waterpower . . . it is clear to their minds that they were never destined for manufacturing; . . . it is still more evident, from their position, they are not to become a commercial people and build up large cities; they, therefore, jog along with evident self-satisfaction—the venerable churchyard is filling up with tombstones—and the quiet residents arrive at the conclusion that they are a particularly favored people in having escaped the rage for improvement.” Of course all this changes when the railway comes to town, though first the people suffer from terrible visions of “bloody skirmishes” with railway workers, of “plundered poultry yards and abducted pigs,” of children “‘drawn and quartered’ on the rail by the terrible locomotive,” while the railway engineers and surveyors “are met with curses both loud and deep.”

These terrible visions come to an end, however, when the townspeople begin to realize the manifest benefits that the railroad brings with it: The population is enriched and elevated, for while “our little hamlet [is] undergoing such a wonderful transformation, the moral influence of the iron civilizer upon the old inhabitants is bringing a rapid ‘change over the spirit of their dreams.’” The citizens become worldlier, wealthier, more educated; their politics take on a national scope. Progress, “that invisible power which has waged successful war with the material elements, will assuredly overcome the prejudices of mental weakness or the designs of mental tyrants. It calls for no co-operation, it waits for no convenient season, but with a restless, rushing, roaring assiduity, it keeps up a constant and unavoidable spirit of enquiry or comparison; and while ministering to the material wants, and appealing to the covetousness of the multitude, impels them to a more intimate union with their fellow men.”

Keefer playfully finds a way to outflank the culture’s axioms. The individual can look at the silliness of the townspeople and their response to the “terrible locomotive,” and chuckle at finding that same silliness in him or herself; but Keefer does more than that, for he is not just concerned with poking fun at the population—he wishes to uplift the reader to a nobler conception of human potential, and to establish a mission of national progress. There is an urgency to his tone, when, at the close of the pamphlet, he writes,

We are placed beside a restless, early-rising, “go-ahead” people—a people who are following the sun westward. . . . We cannot hold back . . . we must use what we have or lose what we already possess—capital, commerce, friends and children will abandon us for better furnished lands unless we at once arouse from our lethargy; we can no longer afford to loiter away our winter months, or slumber through the morning hours. . . . But when once the barriers of indifference, prejudice and ignorance are broken down, no physical or financial obstacle can withstand the determined perseverance of intelligent, self-controlled industry.

We submit the foregoing view of the railway system and our position to it, to the generous and patriotic consideration of every intelligent merchant, manufacturer, farmer, and mechanic—to every Canadian, native or adopted—and ask them: *Shall we have railroads in Canada?*

Oligarchical Strategy

There is another point of consideration in the case for the Bering Strait Tunnel and great projects in general: the geopolitical and strategic implications, which are understood much more clearly today than in Keefer’s time, thanks to the tireless work of Lyndon LaRouche, the kernel of which is human creativity—the great fear of every imperial or oligarchical system. In his recent paper “Man & the Skies Above” (*EIR*, June 1, 2007), LaRouche writes:

The great paradox which oligarchism represents, is that the ability of the human species to maintain a level of population above that of the great apes, depends absolutely on those creative powers unique to the human individual mind through which scientific and related discoveries produce the means for increase in both the potential size of population, and its life-expectancy. If the population were permitted to share, freely, the knowledge and freedom to employ such knowledge corresponding to presently knowable scientific and related skills, where would there be inequality on which the oligarchical systems depend?

If the capabilities for scientific and related discov-



The Canadian National Railway was created by bold thinkers of the 19th Century, who challenged the “Sleepy Hollow” backwardness of their compatriots. Today’s challenge is similarly grand: to develop the Northwest, and join with Russia and the United States to build the Bering Strait Tunnel.

eries, which advance the standard of life and power over adversities, make societies stronger, per capita and per square kilometer of territory, why hold back scientific and technological progress? Why insist on wildly hedonistic, irrational entertainments, rather than Classical culture which enhances the individual’s power to think, and sweetens the social relations with other persons? Simply, because the power which such means promote among the generality of the population would bring an end to the system of oligarchy.

The Pursuit of Happiness

Herein lies the fundamental issue of the Bering Strait project; just as World Wars I and II were organized by the British oligarchy to destroy Russia and continental Europe (documented extensively by *EIR*), now today these same British networks, typified by BAE Systems, and their lackey, U.S. Vice President Cheney, are driving for expanded war throughout Eurasia.

Thus, the struggle for Eurasian development and a new international financial system, free of oligarchical control, is the latest phase in this Promethean contest for the minds of humankind: the very question of whether the citizens of the world will have the opportunity to participate in scientific and technological progress, whether they will have the opportunity to develop themselves and make positive contributions to the advancement of civilization. These are the issues of statecraft that drive men such as LaRouche to make the breakthroughs in science and economy that he has made, and then organize the population to see them implemented; these are the issues that drove Keefer and his collaborators to mobilize Canada around *an idea of the future potential*, of what were

still a collection of impoverished British colonies, clinging to the verge of an awesome wilderness of 9 million square kilometers. For Keefer, as for LaRouche, the greatest gift that can be given a human being is access to his or her own immortality—something that globalization denies to the vast majority of human beings.

In the same 1853 speech, Keefer concluded with this idea of immortality, in the spirit of the “pursuit of happiness” clause of the U.S. Declaration of Independence:

I venture to believe that, as mechanics we may devote some moments to a consideration of the tendencies, the prospects, and the utility of the great enterprises, which give character to the age, and in the execution of which we are in a greater or lesser degree the agents—that this feeling of being useful in our day and generation will while away with a diminished degree of weariness the many hours of labor—that as you ply the busy hammer or wield the heavier sledge, some of you may dream that you are fast driving nails into the coffin of prejudice, of ignorance, of superstition and national animosities; that as you turn down the bearings or guide the unerring steel over all the 500 parts of a locomotive engine, fancy will picture you cutting deep, and smooth, and true, into obstacles which have so long separated one district, one family, one people, from another—and that you may exult in the reflection that those huge drivers will yet tread out the last smoldering embers of discord, that those swift revolving wheels—by practically annihilating time and space and by re-uniting the scattered members of many a happy family—will smooth the hitherto rug-

ged path, fill up the dividing gulf, break through the intervening ridge, overcome or elude the ups and downs of life's checkered journey, and speed the unwearied traveler upon his now rejoicing way.

It is this joyful Promethean impulse which has built Canada into one of the most prosperous nations in the world, not the British imperial legacy. That Canada even exists today is in spite of Britain. Though restrained by British philosophical dogmas, such as Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* or *Theory of the Moral Sentiments*, in which Smith claims that humans have no capacity to think beyond their sensual appetites, acting only in their immediate self-interest, and that the greater issues of the common good are to be left to the (hopefully) munificent designs of some unknowable deity—this nation has still managed to do many great things. The inspiration for those deeds came not from Britain, but from the U.S. republic and the republican tradition that found its beginnings in ancient Greece. *Prometheus, the fire-giver, the ennobler of mankind, is the only true identity of Canada's historical nation-builders.*

It is this same latent impulse, which the Bering Strait Tunnel calls upon today. Entire peoples await the enlightening force of nuclear power, the rushing sound of the maglev, and the sight of bounteous fields, laden with well-watered crops, where desert once had reigned. Canada has a great role to play in this dawning era, if it so chooses. Canada's mission and purpose is to be sought not only within the bounds of our own lands, but deep below the Arctic seas, across and beneath the Siberian steppe, and in the deserts of Asia and Africa. It begins with the Bering Strait. Thus, as Keefer once before, now again the Canadian LaRouche Youth Movement submits this treatise, to all manufacturers, farmers and people of commerce, Canadians born and newly landed, of all who would see a single nation, dignified and beneficent towards others, and we ask: *Canada, shall we build the Bering Strait Tunnel?*

Appendix

The Awakening of 'Sleepy Hollow'

This is an excerpt from T.C. Keefer's Philosophy of Railroads (1850).

Let us take a case of which Canada (we are proud and sad to say) presents more than one instance. A well cultivated district, in which all the lands are occupied (perhaps by the second generation) with or without waterpower, but situated twenty to fifty miles from the chief towns upon our great highway, the St. Lawrence, and without navigable water

communication with it. The occupants are all thriving and independent farmers, the water power is employed only to an extent to meet their local wants, and the village is limited to the few mechanics, and the one store required for this rural district. The barter of the shopkeeper is restricted by the consumption of his customers, and he becomes the sole forwarder of the surplus product of the district. There is no stimulus for increased production—there are less facilities for it: the redundant population have all been accustomed to agriculture, and as the field for this is unrestricted, they move Westward to prevent a subdivision of the homesteads, and to become greater landowners than their fathers. There exists the well known scarcity of laborers for the harvest, because there is no employment for them during the remainder of the year; and they have not yet been led by necessity to that subdivision of labor and that variety of employment which are the results of an increasing and more confined population. Each farmer has his comfortable house, his well-stored barn, variety of stock, his meadows and his woodland; he cultivates only as much as he finds convenient, and his slight surplus is exchanged for his modest wants. Distance, the expense of transportation, and the absence of that energy which debt or contract with busier men should produce, have prevented any efforts to supply the commercial towns on the part of the contented denizens of our "Sleepy Hollow." To themselves, to the superficial observer, their district has attained the limit of improvement. If they have no water power, or one limited to the supply of the needful grist or saw mill, it is clear to their minds that they were never destined for manufacturing people; and if they have abundant water power, their local market would not support one manufactory, while land carriage, want of people, money, and more than all *information*, precludes the idea of their manufacturing for a distant market. It is still more evident, from their position, they are not to become a commercial people and build up large cities; they, therefore, jog along with evident self-satisfaction—the venerable churchyard is slowly filling up with tombstones—and the quiet residents arrive at the conclusion that they are a peculiarly favored people in having escaped the rage for improvement. They are grateful that their farms have not been disfigured by canals or railroads, or the spirits of their sires troubled with the hideous screech of the steam whistle.

We will now suppose (we would we could more than suppose), that two of our cities should be moved to unite by the iron bond of a Railway, which in its course will traverse the district just described. Excitement prevails in the "Hollow"; sleep has deserted her peculiar people—the livelong night is passed in mutual contemplation of farms "cut up" or covered over—visions of bloody skirmishes between "Far downs" and Corkonians—of rifled gardens and orchards, of plundered poultry yards and abducted pigs. The probable mother of a possible child bewails her future offspring

“drawn and quartered” on the rail by the terrible locomotive, and a whole hecatomb of cattle, pigs and sheep, are devoted by imagination to this insatiate Juggernaut. The Engineers who come to spy out the land are met with curses both loud and deep—the laws of property are discussed—the delinquent Member for the County denounced—until a handsome Rodman, by well-timed admiration of Eliza Ann, the rural spokesman’s daughter, succeeds in obtaining comfortable quarters for his party, with board, lodging, and washing, at 12s. 6d. per week. The work has commenced; the farmer is offered better prices for his hay and grain than he ever before received—even milk and vegetables—things he never dreamed of selling—are now sought for; his teams, instead of eating up his substance as formerly in winter, are constantly employed, and his sons are profitably engaged in “getting out timber” for the contractors; he grows a much larger quantity of oats and potatoes than before—and when the workmen have left, he finds to his astonishment that his old friend the storekeeper is prepared to take all he can spare, to send by the Railroad “down to town.”

And now some of the “city folks” come out and take up a water privilege, or erect steam power, and commence manufacturing. Iron is bought, cut into nails, screws and hinges. Cotton is spun and wove, and all the variety of manufactures introduced, because here motive power, rents and food are cheaper, and labor more easily controlled than in the cities, while transportation and distance have by the Railroad been reduced to a minimum. A town has been built and peopled by the operatives—land rises rapidly in value—the neglected swamp is cleared and the timber is converted into all sorts of wooden “notions”—tons of vegetables, grains, or grasses, are grown where none grew before—the patient click of the loom, the rushing of the shuttle, the busy hum of the spindle, the thundering of the trip-hammer, and the roaring of steam, are mingled in one continuous sound of active industry. While the physical features of our little hamlet are undergoing such a wonderful transformation, the moral influence of the “iron civilizer” upon the old inhabitants is bringing a rapid “change over the spirit of their dreams.” The young men and the maidens, the old men and the matrons, daily collect around the cars: they wonder where so many well-dressed and rich-looking people come from and are going to, &c.—what queer machines those are which they see passing backwards and forwards. They have perhaps an old neighbor whose son had long since wandered off, and now they see him returned, a first class passenger with all the prestige of broadcloth, gold chains, rings, gloves, and a traveled reputation: the damsels rapidly impress upon “the mind’s eye” the shapes of bonnets, visites, &c., of that superior class of beings who are flying (like angels) over the country, and *drink in*, with wide-mouthed admiration, the transcendent splendor and indescribable beauty of “that ’ere shawl.” All are interested, all are benefited, *cuique suum*. Is he a farmer? He has a practical illustration of the superior cheapness of transporta-

tion by increasing the load, notwithstanding the great cost of the cuttings, embankments, tunnels, bridges, engines, cars, and stations, carrying his produce for less sum than his personal expenses and the feeding of his horses would amount to. Is he a blacksmith? He determines his son shall no longer shoe horses, but build engines. Is he a carpenter? He is proud of his occupation as he surveys the new bridge built over the old creek. Even the village tailor gathers “a wrinkle,” as he criticizes the latest effort of Buckmaster or Gibb, whilst the unconscious advertiser is swallowing his coffee. Thus curiosity and emulation are excited and the results are discernable in a general predilection for improved “modes.” A spirit is engendered which is not confined to dress or equipage, but is rapidly extended to agriculture, roads, and instructive societies, and finally exerts its most powerful influence where it is most needed—in the improved character it gives to the exercise of the franchise. This right is now enjoyed by too large a class, whose chief contact with public affairs has been limited to an occasional chat with ambitious retailers of dry goods, groceries, hardware, and political mysteries—or to a semi-annual sitting in a jury box, unconsciously absorbing all the virtuous indignation of some *nisi prius* wrangler, whose “familiar face” is shortly after presented to them at the hustings, generously proffering to defend or advocate anything for four dollars per diem and a prospective Judgeship. He is opposed, perhaps, by the public-spirited shopkeeper, who, with mortgages, long credits, tea and tobacco—aided by a “last call” to all doubtful supporters—incites the noble yeomanry to assert their rights as “free and independent electors.” If the “natives” can overcome these prejudices of local associations, or if the lawyer’s “collections” and “notes” are sufficiently diffuse, ten change to one the greatest talker is elected, and an improved judicature, instead of an improved country, is the result.

Nothing would be a more powerful antidote to this state of primitive, but not innocuous simplicity, than the transit of Railways through our agricultural districts. The civilizing tendency of the locomotive is one of the modern anomalies, which however inexplicable it may appear to some, is yet so fortunately patent to all, that it is admitted as readily as the action of steam, though the substance be invisible and its secret ways be unknown to man. Poverty, indifference, the bigotry or jealousy of religious denominations, local dissensions or political demagoguism may stifle or neutralize the influence of the best intended efforts of an educational system; but that invisible power which has waged successful war with the material elements, will assuredly overcome the prejudices of mental weakness or the designs of mental tyrants. It calls for no co-operation, it waits for no convenient season, but with restless, rushing, roaring assiduity, it keeps up a constant and unavoidable spirit of enquiry or comparison; and while ministering to the material wants, and appealing to the covetousness of the multitude, it unconsciously, irresistibly, impels them to a more intimate union with their fellow men.