

FDR's Post-War Plan: 'Northward to Asia'

by Marcia Merry Baker

Alexander Sergeyev, executive board member of RusHydro, in his "World Link" presentation on intercontinental rail corridors to the Arctic Energy Summit Technology Conference on Oct. 16, made a special point of showing a photograph of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Sergeyev stated, "Russians hold President Franklin Roosevelt in great esteem. He was the one who led the United States out of the Great Depression and led to victory in World War II." Sergeyev cited the "great construction" projects of the FDR era, including rail and the Hoover Dam. "In 1942, FDR gave the Army Corps engineers the task to study the feasibility of a railroad to connect Alaska, through Canada, with the lower states. I read the report. But it sat on the shelf for almost 60 years. So Russia today is actually implementing the Roosevelt view that allowed the U.S. to come out of the Depression!"

In fact, the development of Alaska as part of the world rail land-bridge, represents the fulfillment in very specific terms, of the vision of FDR, and his Vice President Henry Wallace during the 1940s. While FDR and Wallace were forced to pur-

sue air links between the Western Hemisphere and Russia, primarily from the standpoint of supplying urgently needed war materiel to the embattled Soviet Union during the war, Wallace put forward a much broader vision, which was endorsed by FDR. The 1943 ALCAN Highway, a 1,500-mile mega-project accomplishment of the Army Corps of Engineers, was just the beginning of what was intended.

The following are excerpts from a number of publications from 1944 written by Wallace, whom FDR sent to the Soviet Union and China in 1944, with an eye to the perspectives for the post-war world.

“Northward to Asia,” is the title of a map showing the Bering Strait and adjacent lands, making up “the North Pacific, a great post-war communications highway between America, Russia and Far East,” which appeared in the 1944 pamphlet, “Our Job in the Pacific” (published by the American Council, Institute of Pacific Relations). In it, Wallace wrote, “Easternmost Siberia and Alaska form the crown of the arch over the North Pacific. America’s interests here are bound up with those of Russia on one side and Canada on the other. Like the Canadian Northwest, Alaska needs and can maintain a much larger population than at present. This population is needed not only to develop local resources but to service the rail, motor and air routes which will link America and Asia.”

‘60 Million Jobs’

Wallace took up the question again in his 1945 book *60 Million Jobs*, in a chapter titled “New Frontiers Abroad; New Frontiers of Abundance.” The title refers to “the total of 60 million jobs as synonymous with the peacetime requirements of full employment” in the United States, engaged in rebuilding the U.S. and world economies. In Chapter III, Wallace wrote, “Our first big postwar job abroad, of course, is to help restore some sort of order in the devastated areas, and get farm and factory production running again.”

After reviewing different regions around the globe, he said, “But the biggest frontier of future development will be found with the new dawn in the northern Pacific and eastern Asia.

“After V-J Day—after our boys have landed back on home shores at Seattle or Portland, San Francisco or Los Angeles—then we shall think more and more of our West as the link with the East of Asia.... The East of Asia, both Chinese and Russian, is on the march in a way which is easy for any American to understand who sees these great areas at first hand for himself. The rapid agricultural and industrial development of these peoples means so very much to the peace and prosperity of the entire postwar world.

“Our Northwest was long held back by unfair freight rates and by failure to develop the power of its mighty rivers. But thanks to



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President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (right) and Vice President Henry Wallace (1940-1944), at a press conference. Wallace also served as Agriculture Secretary, 1933-40.

men like Roosevelt and Norris, McNary and Bone, the Northwest during the past ten years has rapidly expanded. This expansion must continue to the limit of its agricultural, industrial, and commercial potentialities. This includes Alaska, which has not yet begun to measure up to its possibilities. But this growth must be not merely in national terms, but also in terms of Asia. Vigorous two-way trade with Soviet Asia and China will greatly increase the population and prosperity of our Northwest and the whole of our people.

“All of this I knew in a theoretical way before going to Asia in 1944. After having seen something of the industry and agriculture of East Asia, I am more than ever convinced that we are entering upon what might be called the ‘Era of the Pacific....’ (Research by Robert L. Baker.)

Northward to Asia



Reproduced from Our Job in the Pacific (1944), by Henry A. Wallace, published by the American Council, Institute of Pacific Relations. Wallace, then Vice President, wrote this after his trip through Canada, Alaska, Russia, and China in the Spring of 1944. The original caption: “Polar air routes and Arctic economic development may make the North Pacific a great post-war communications highway between America, Russia and the Far East.”