

From Sea To Sea Canada Is United By Barrack-Like Airports

WINNIPEG, Feb. 5.—Without meaning to, the Federal Government has contributed to national unity. It has given almost all Canadians one thing in common: cheese-box airport terminals. In a dozen crowded waiting rooms across the country, Canadians utter complaints of a national character. Our airport terminals have given us bonds of mutual sympathy and understanding, and even a certain international status.

Who needs a Canadian flag when, in every country, the Canadian airport terminal is remembered all too distinctly by world travellers?

For a few moments last October, to be sure, I was afraid we'd lost this national grievance. As my train skimmed through Dorval on its way to Montreal, I caught sight of a brand-new terminal shining in the distance.

"Well, you finally made it," I said later that day, talking to a few friends in downtown Montreal.

"Come again?"

"Your new terminal at Dorval. What a beauty!"

"What a joke," they said.

With understandable pride, they described the empty corridors, the silent waiting

rooms, the eternal last-minute changes in plans and the bitter complaints of airline officials.

Dorval terminal, I believe, is still "due to open in the near future." The cause of national unity, for the moment, is secure.

Occasionally, Transport Minister George Hees heightens interest in the question by appearing at major centres of dissatisfaction throughout the country. Some months ago he arrived in Montreal to say everything was proceeding on schedule. This week he paid a flying visit to Winnipeg to promise a new airport terminal by 1964 "at the latest."

Winnipeggers were skeptical. When it comes to airport terminals, they don't easily surrender last place to anyone. They believe this city has the worst air terminal in Canada.

It's almost a matter of civic pride.

If misery loves company, Montrealers should be infatuated with a brief history of the local terminal.

Winnipeg today is probably the only Canadian city served by a temporary terminal con-

Europe and the United States.

In 1958, the total number of take-offs and landings was 206,868 — an increase of 362 percent since 1950.

But one cannot appreciate the glories of Winnipeg international airport merely by glancing at the building or

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sisting of a temporary main building flanked by two temporary additions. These makeshift buildings are primarily of wooden construction. In outward appearance, they resemble the type of Government structure one would expect to find anywhere in the Northwest Territories.

Four airlines, flying here from other parts of Canada, northern Manitoba and the United States, use this terminal on a scheduled basis. It is also used as a re-fueling stop by Scandinavian Air Services and Trans-World Airlines on their polar flights between

scanning statistics. The full impact is achieved only when one leaves an aircraft, threads his way between other aircraft clustering about the tiny building and enters the terminal.

It isn't as simple as it sounds. The very sight of the building, on more than one occasion, has overcome experienced air travellers.

Hollywood Actor David Niven, for instance, was observed closely by airline officials in 1958 as he stepped jauntily across the tarmac. As soon as he was close enough to recognize the terminal, he stopped.

"Oh, no!" gasped Mr. Niven. "I've been here before."

He hurried back to the plane.

Only a few months ago, Gary Cooper arrived here on his way from Russia to Hollywood. Mr. Cooper stepped into the terminal, stared and said:

"So this is Winnipeg."

Even years of familiarity with frontier architecture had failed to prepare Mr. Cooper for the experience.

He was staring at the tiny waiting room reserved for international passengers. Although SAS aircraft can carry up to 85 passengers, this room contains only 35 upholstered chairs and a few wooden benches. Without leaving the room, travellers fresh from Europe can find all the traditional delights of Canadian cuisine — a soft-drink vending machine and a six-foot counter serving coffee and sandwiches carried from another part of the building.

To help tourists while away the long hours, terminal officials have furnished the room with a picture of the Queen and four travel posters.

Domestic passengers have a larger waiting room in a recent shed-like addition to the main terminal. They also can enjoy the facilities of a lunch counter seating about 35 people.

During peak hours at the terminal, the lunch counter is a wonderful example of "togetherness" applied to the restaurant trade. Any Montrealer wishing to duplicate the experience merely has to try eating supper in a downtown bus at 5 p.m.

For more than 20 years, Winnipeggers have complained about inadequate airport facilities. In response, federal authorities have supplied a generous series of plans and programs, the opium of the air traveller.

In 1941, Winnipeg was promised a modest \$60,000 terminal. The new terminal was delayed because of wartime shortages but by 1946 Ottawa had conceived another plan. After another five years, former Transport Minister Lionel Chevrier arrived here to say the new terminal would be going up "perhaps before another five years."

From then on, progress was comparatively rapid. Only a year later, another plan for a \$1 million terminal appeared. It would be under construction by 1957, said federal authorities. In 1956, just before the deadline, Ottawa produced another plan and raised the ante to \$2 million. A year later, Winnipeg learned that a \$5

million terminal was "in the design stage."

Year after year, the invisible new terminal grew in size and splendor. As they crowded into the existing terminal, air travellers could look north to a magnificent vacant lot and contemplate its glories.

In 1958, Transport Minister Hees followed precedent by unveiling plans for a \$6 million terminal complete with aero-quays connected by tunnels to the main building. This was hailed as a "radical concept in airport design."

A year later, the radical concept was in the ashcan and architects were working on a new set of drawings. Mr. Hees released them this week when he dazzled Winnipeggers with the promise of a \$10 million terminal.

Tenders for the first stage of construction have been invited, said Mr. Hees, and excavation will begin "as soon as weather permits."

"But a terminal is not the same as an ordinary building," said the minister, in words that must have a familiar ring to Montreal ears.

"If new developments in terminal design crop up in the next few years, we'll change our plans accordingly."