

# Churchill, Manitoba and the dangers of privatization



Home to Canada's only arctic deep-water port, Churchill is a small northern community on the shore of Hudson Bay. Churchill is home to about 850 people. Due to its geography, the community is inaccessible by road and dependent on connections by rail, water, and air.

The geographic location of Churchill makes it an ideal spot for a northern port, since it provides access to the North Atlantic. Churchill used to be a major hub for grain shipping as well. The

Port of Churchill once shipped thousands of kilos of grain all over the world.

The Port was conceived as "a great nation-building enterprise", a more direct route to Europe, and a strategic gateway for Canada's claim to the Arctic.

However, instead of investing in this community and strategic Arctic port, the Canadian government has failed this town, its citizens, and all of Canada by allowing private corporations to take over, with disastrous results.



# History of the Port of Churchill

1931

The Port of Churchill is opened and starts shipping grain. The rail line was built to connect Churchill to the other ports in Canada. The port and railway are owned by the government of Canada.

1935

The Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) is established as the sole buyer and seller of Prairie wheat and barley destined for export from Canada or for human consumption in Canada.

1997

The federal government sells the port to OmniTRAX, an American corporation, for \$1 as an addition to the sale of the Hudson Bay Rail Line. It is the only strategic Canadian port sold.

2012

The Conservative government of Stephen Harper dissolves the Canadian Wheat Board and creates a voluntary marketing organization. As a result, grain shipments through Churchill significantly decline.

2015

The now-private CWB is sold to Global Grain Group, a joint venture of Saudi and American companies.

June 2016

**OmniTRAX shuts down the port,** putting workers out of work with only 2 weeks' notice. The port employed about 10% of the town's population.

July 2016

**OmniTRAX cuts rail service to Churchill in half**

Sept 2016

**Port of Churchill officially closes**

June 2017

**Severe spring flooding washes out the railway tracks and forces the closure of the only rail line into Churchill.** OmniTRAX and the federal government argue over who should fix the track while the people of Churchill are cut off from land travel.

Winter 2018-19

**Residents of Churchill face severe hardship** as supplies get low, food costs soar, and there is a shortage of propane to heat homes.

May 2018

A tentative deal is struck to bring ownership of the Port of Churchill and the rail line back to the community. Two groups representing northern communities and First Nations — One North and Mississippi Rail LP — join forces with Fairfax Financial Holdings and have an agreement in principle to buy the assets from OmniTRAX.

Sept 2018

Two years after the closure of the port, the sale of the railway and port are finalized. The new owner is Arctic Gateway Group, a private-public partnership comprising Mississippi Rail Limited Partnership, Fairfax Financial Holdings & AGT Limited Partnership. Repairs to the railway begin, with \$117 million in funding from the federal government.

Oct 2018

The railway is finally reopened, and shipments of supplies can get to Churchill once again.

Nov 2018

Work begins on restoring the port, which is expected to re-open in summer 2019.