

## Build Roads --- and More Roads

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The author would prefer to be in a position to enforce the above caption as an order; but, lacking the mantle of authority, must be content with urging upon those who do possess power the necessity of much road construction.

There are two great national extravagancies in which civilization must no longer indulge. The first, needy idle men; the second, men not efficiently employed in production. We have always had, in times of international peace, more labor power than we have used; and that which was employed seldom reached any-

thing like reasonable productivity to the community, though it has frequently piled up swollen fortunes for the individuals who own those things necessary to industry.

We are going to build roads after the war; many of them. Oh yes we are; whether our dear old stick-in-the-muds think it advisable or not. We are also going to do very many other things on a stupendous scale that now seems impossible to the poor human phonograph whose one refrain is "Can't, Can't, Can't." We not only can; but, to be blunt, we must.

The first great national waste, needy idle men, will be upon us shortly after the close of the war. It will be remedied, not because as a community we are too kind-hearted to see human being suffer want in the midst of plenty, for we have often permitted that, but because the needy idle men will then be, for the first time, sufficiently intelligent to demand that this type of extravagance shall not go on at their expense; and, for the safety of our own sanctimonious home-staying hides, we will listen to them for fear of their righteous wrath.

The much greater danger to the community is from the second great national waste; for while we will be compelled to employ the needy idle men, no one may be kind enough to force us to use their labor power in the economical production of real community values. In fact, efficient production will be only relatively possible unless the preliminary work of planning and laying the foundation of organization is done now; it will be too late when the flood tide of labor power is upon us.

The building of wagon roads is only one of the many things that will require doing and that will be done after the war; yet, it is quite an important, in fact, the pioneer step in all territorial improvements, whether it is the opening of new lands or the further advancement of old settlements. The passing of a community from one phase of highway development to another always precedes a raising of its standard of community life; for not only do horses and wagons and motor vehicles carry their passengers and freight over the paved highways with ease, but the phenomenon of social thinking that has gradually raised our civilization to better levels must also find its means of ready circulation through the same medium.

Assuming that which is a foregone conclusion, that after the war we will enter upon a broad scheme of road building and improving, how shall we go about preparing for it? Shall we trust to luck, as usual, with the comforting knowledge that, oh, well, we will muddle through somehow;

or shall we, while there is less hurry and more time, lay definite plans now so that when we are called upon to expend human energy upon this important work it shall be utilized to the best possible advantage of the men who will be engaged therein and of the community of which they will be a part? Will we use this labor, or waste it?

Hundreds of millions of dollars are now being used for war purposes, to kill men. It will not be possible, after this war, to explain to the returned soldier that the reason why he may not produce the food, clothing, shelter, and other things that are necessary to give him the fullness of life is that there is no money left. Somehow or other the thought has gotten abroad that money is but the circulating medium by means of which these things are done; and that if money will not circulate voluntarily, it must be conscripted and made to function. Either by present taxation, or by those bond issues which are but deferred taxation, the medium of exchange must be made forthcoming. Men will no longer consent to suffer even inconvenience when they are willing to produce abundance.

The road plans of the Dominion, its Provinces, their Counties, Towns and Cities, should be worked out on a very comprehensive scale that shall leave as little as possible to chance. After the greatest care has been taken, even then there will be enough go wrong to engage the full attention of those in charge; and all plans should be sufficiently elastic to be susceptible of almost daily improvement, if need be, during the actual progress of the work. Every organization or individual in charge of public road matters should be prepared with definite plans for almost immediately starting work that would ordinarily require many years.

There should be a co-ordination of endeavor between the different political units and sub-divisions to the end that the after-the-war highway building offense shall be productive of suitable results. We may even need a General Staff in charge of highway work, who shall have authority to tell Alderman So-and-so where to get on and off and to see that he does as bid. Already having a food controller and a fuel controller, may we not also need a Dominion Public Works Controller to co-ordinate the work on our highways in a satisfactory manner. Is there any reason, for instance, why the City of Blank, situated between the Counties of Blank, having the Towns of Blank as its suburbs or close neighbors, and being the converging point of the Blank Provincial and Dominion highways, should not be the centre of one well organized road organization with equipment to do the work for all?

The reason we are now so largely a stuck-in-the-mud community is that to date we have never done more than nibble at our road work, with only an occasional locality taking a small bite. To be successfully attacked, this problem needs heroic treatment by men of broad vision. If it does not get such treatment, we shall be the losers. It is not always the highway departments that are to blame; for the policies of the heads of some are so much in advance of the public thought on the subject that they can not carry out these policies, and may only approach them with cautious, simple educational steps.

Now people do not want to go on having things done for them in a haphazard way, but each little community can not resolve itself into a group of road experts, nor can it afford to hire the most competent men even if it had arrived at the point where it recognized the necessity for having them. Something must be done along broad lines; and that something requires real political ability, foresight, and faithfulness to the public interest. Our present statesmen seem hardly to have glimpsed the necessities and the possibilities of the situation. May they see the light before dire necessity shall force their hands in a way that will produce much social waste.

To conclude, the author would urge that plans be made now, not after the war is over, for a trans-continental highway, inter-urban heavy traffic roads, city streets and county by-ways; and that the plans be made on a scale requiring general co-operation; not the present scheme of every community for itself by which none of us seem to get much of anywhere. I believe the Editor of the Canadian Municipal Journal has already made some proposals looking to this much desired end.

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