

What of the Morrow?

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So far as is publicly known our governments, federal, provincial and municipal are doing very little in preparation for the morrow when peace will once more prevail and our ordinary civil affairs will gradually resume their routine in our normal daily activities.

These are abnormal days when everything has to be more or less set aside for the prosecution of the war. Our first duty is to win the war, because failure in the struggle will render all our project of less value. This predication will be agreed to by all thinking people. Democracy must win in this war or democratic principles and institutions are in grave danger of being throttled until they are some day re-established by our descendants.

But, whilst we may be obsessed by the titanic struggle for the ideals which constitute the fundamental basis of democracy, we must, nevertheless, give a thought to the duties and responsibilities which devolve upon those who are not privileged to carry arms by considering how we may play our part in the fulfilment of the obligations to uphold democratic ideals at home not only for ourselves but also for those who are valiantly fighting our battles in Europe and elsewhere.

It would be out of place to discuss this subject from various viewpoints in your columns, since the Canadian Municipal Journal is devoted to municipal affairs. Consequently consideration will be confined to two points in relation to civic matters. The first point is our objection to maintain democratic municipal government, to develop its powers and to promote its efficiency. In many respects Canadian towns and cities have not suffered by the withdrawal of men and plant to the battlefields as is the case in Britain, France, etc. Consequently the city administration has not been disturbed nor has the maintenance of the public works been upset in this country, like elsewhere, for which we should be thankful. As we have less disturbing influences at work here, we should find the present time a suitable one for a thoughtful consideration of the various problems which have to be solved. Now is the time to take stock of the deficiencies and imperfections of the laws governing municipal affairs and to devise methods or seek new powers which will tend to eliminate them. Later on we shall be immersed in troubles of other kinds, to which reference will be made. Civic government is always in the melting pot. It is never complete or perfect. It must always be in the process of development so as to adequately cope with new conditions which perpetually arise. Now is the time when persons, who are interested in public welfare—and this should include all ratepayers—may do their bit in promoting better government and advancing movements for the common good.

The other point is our obligation to organize municipal works so that employment made be found for those who may need it in the days to come. Even now, munition works are less busy and the number of employees are reduced, which fact means shrunken pay-rolls and diminished circulation. When the war is over—and it may collapse at any moment—the supply of munitions will no longer be required. There can scarcely be any doubt that we and our Allies will cease making all kinds of munitions as soon as possible, for the stock on hand will suffice for many years under peace conditions. The government will certainly stop the expenditure of money on war and incidental operations with such a suddenness that it will occur like an explosive shock to the employers and the employees. This is usual in ordinary war and is practically certain in this extraordinary war. More than this, the governments will make a strenuous effort to be relieved from the financial burden of supporting huge armies as expeditiously as possible after the declaration of peace. The debts incurred during this war have already reached such a colossal magnitude that every Minister of Finance will be eager to close the accounts. And, moreover, the taxpayer will be even more delegated with the prospect of putting an end to the stupendous expenditure because he is fully aware of the fact that it is he who has to pay the piper, although he did not call for the tunes.

If these anticipations are fulfilled, it is evident that the factories will have to seek elsewhere for orders to take the place of munitions; workers will be seeking employment which will not be so plentiful nor so lucrative; soldiers will be returning home to resume their civil occupations at the time when Canada will be doing her best to

rearrange her internal affairs. That is not the time to plan or to organize. We shall then be immersed in troubles with less power of doing the proper thing for others. If inadequate preparations are now made the prospects will be gloomy. We like to believe that all will be well and if they are, we shall truly have cause to be thankful. The aftermaths of other wars were not tinted in optimistic colors mainly because sufficient provision had not been made for the men returning from the wars. The Russian-Japanese, Spanish-American, British-Boer Wars, each had their aftermaths of troubles of more or less severity.

If preparations are to be made for the morrow it is time now to organize. It will take some months to set our affairs in order.

There will undoubtedly be a great demand for materials and manufactured goods, not only for the devastated areas in Europe and elsewhere, but also for all parts of the civilized world. It must be remembered that the civilized world has been thrown into commercial chaos for three years, and this has held over every kind of enterprise, to a more or less degree. It will be probable that Canada will participate in the business of supplying some of these materials and manufactured goods, and it is to be hoped that her share will be considerable. Still, even with a large share of the business, it will not furnish work for the many men and women seeking employment, for the reason that their experience and training will not be suitable.

Under an autocratic form of government much pre-arrangement might be made to meet the anticipated conditions, but that possibility has been largely obliterated by the enormity of the task and the impoverished exchequers. If the problems confronting Britain and her allies are serious, those facing the Central Powers are staggering. Our form of government, however, is democratic and preparation therefore devolves on all citizens. The federal and provincial governments of Canada may be able to do something to adjust the labor question after the war, but it will inevitably be inadequate. The hope of the morrow must be with the municipalities, because they are numerous, they have a greater variety of opportunities, and the work of organization will be more distributed—if they will only consider their plans in time. "Forewarned is forearmed" is excellent in principle and productive of good, but neglect of opportunities with the resulting calamity are conditions we do not care to contemplate.

What then can the municipalities do to prepare for the morrow which is certain to arrive? Practically every one of them has some work in view. The monetary market has been unfavorable for municipal purposes and has caused many municipalities to defer the consideration of new enterprises. The financial stringency may continue, but that is an unsatisfactory reason for not preparing. Time is necessary for the investigation of schemes and to obtain the best results. Inadequate consideration or development of public undertakings is wrong and yet this is often the case. No surprise need be expressed concerning the manner engineers and others sometimes prepare schemes, because the Councils allow the matter to be held over from meeting to meeting, eventually to allow insufficient time for the scheme to be properly arranged.

The soldiers returning home at the conclusion of the war will naturally expect much from the democracy for which they have given their best and in thousands of cases—their comrades have given—their lives. The soldiers were promised many things on return. Shall they be disappointed? Shall democracy redeem its promise or shall it ignobly fail? It may be declared, with some amount of truth, that the federal and provincial governments are too partisan in character for fulfilment of their obligations. But as a rule municipal authorities are not so characterized. Even if Councils cannot devise plans to fully meet the exigencies of the situation during the period of reconstruction of the commercial and social fabric of our land, they can at least help to ameliorate the lot of many who may otherwise have to experience the chagrin of an empty larder after serving so well on our behalf on the firing lines in Europe.