

FINANCIAL TIMES

A Journal of Finance, Commerce, Insurance, Real Estate, Timber and Mining

Vol. IV. No. 10

VANCOUVER, MAY 19, 1917

SINGLE COPY 10c
THE YEAR \$2.00

Wooden Shipbuilding and British Columbia

If the Energy and Enterprise of the Business Interests Are Put Forth, a Flourishing Shipbuilding Industry Will Be Established In This Province.

That British Columbia should engage in a very much more extensive programme of shipbuilding is a necessity, if this Province is to obtain its share of the war business to which its position entitles it. In a previous issue we discussed the problem of building steel ships, both as a war industry and after-war industry, and the conditions that were necessary to make it a permanent industry. Since writing that article changes have occurred. Not only has the price of steel risen to new high record prices, but its delivery has become more and more uncertain. This is not an insuperable difficulty, since a rise in the price of steel plate simply means a rise in the price of steel ships per ton on contract. But the United States has since entered the war, and as the first step in waging war she has embarked on a large scheme of shipbuilding, part steel in private yards and for private contract, and also on a huge scale of wooden shipbuilding. The consequence is that the United States regards steel and wooden ships as war business, and therefore she will reserve for herself the needed ship plate or for Allied ships building in her yards. In view further of the very large expansion that must take place among the steel plants of the United States for the manufacture of munitions, there will be of necessity a limited supply of ship plate. In view of these conditions the solution the United States has adopted is the wooden vessel of steam propulsion.

Along with the Pacific Northwest of the United States, the building of this class of vessel is capable of almost illimitable expansion in British Columbia. Shortly after the United States announced its wooden ship policy, the Dominion Government announced an appropriation of ten million dollars for the building of ships in Canada, the preference being for steel, but wooden ships were not precluded. In this connection, Mr. R. P. Butchart and Captain J. W. Troup were called to Ottawa to discuss the matter of shipbuilding on the Pacific Coast. During the week these gentlemen returned to the Coast and in a carefully prepared statement made the following announcement:—

“Mr. R. P. Butchart and Captain J. W. Troup, director and assistant director, respectively, for the Imperial Munitions Board for British Columbia, have returned from Ottawa, where they have been consulting with the Board in regard to the construction of wooden steamships on the Coast.

“The Board has decided upon the building in Canada of a standard type of vessel, 250 feet long, 43 feet 6 inches beam and 25 feet deep, with a deadweight capacity of about 2,800 tons on a draft of 21 feet. The vessels are to be built very strongly with box girder stelsons. They have a deep tank forward for water ballast. They are to be propelled by steam with triple expansion engines of about 950 indicated horsepower. The matter of geared turbines from England is being considered for some of the ships. The vessels are to be built of Douglas fir to Lloyd’s requirements for A1 classification.

“The authorities are in favor of concentrating on steel shipbuilding in Canada rather than on wooden ships, it being considered preferable to build boats of steel construction.

“Mr. Butchart and Captain Troup have, however, placed the facilities of British Columbia before the Board, and as soon as they have an opportunity of lining up the situation in British Columbia they will report to the Board as to the building that could be undertaken here. The programme that has so far been outlined is not very extensive. It remains to be seen what facilities and what inducements British Columbia can offer to the authorities.”

It will be perceived that not much is promised but that the Imperial Munitions Board are of an open mind and if the facilities available and those that can be made available are such as to give confidence to a successful prosecution of shipbuilding whether steel or wooden then there will be little doubt that orders sufficient to keep plants now operating and that can be erected in a reasonably short time will be kept working to capacity.

For the building of wooden ships we have in British Columbia timber eminently suitable for construction, the lumber mills favorably located and capable of handling the demand and most desirable sites. Labor can be easily secured in the circumstances and since all ships are practically to be of one design not a very high order of ship

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