

ALBERTA ENGINEERS DISCUSS ENGINEER'S STATUS AND PROPOSED LEGISLATION

PROPOSED legislation defining the status of the engineer, and the appointment of engineers to government commissions and offices, were the principal subjects discussed at a general meeting of the Alberta Division of the Canadian Society of Civil Engineers, held in Edmonton during the afternoon and evening of April 27th.

F. H. Peters opened the discussion on the former subject. He reviewed the steps which had been taken in the Calgary and Edmonton branches in the discussion of this subject up to the present time. He stated that it now appears that it will not be possible to secure Dominion legislation, and in view of that condition it is desirable to secure a provincial act which could be accepted by all the provinces, and afterwards if necessary, affirmed by the Dominion Government, thus providing a uniform law all over the Dominion.

A. G. Dalzell, of Vancouver, described the feeling of the British Columbia members of the society. He stated that when the matter was presented to the Vancouver Branch, some of the members claimed that legislation had been tried in two provinces and had been a failure. Objection had also been made on the ground that legislation meant a "closed shop," and the matter was further complicated because just at that time a certain group of engineers in British Columbia were asking for provincial legislation which had some objectionable features and which could not receive the support of the society. He believed, however, that legislation along the lines suggested by the Calgary Branch was now receiving favorable consideration. The entire question was fully discussed by a number of the members, the result being the appointment of a committee consisting of F. H. Peters, W. Muir Edwards and S. G. Porter to study the entire question, to draft a scheme of incorporation of engineers by provincial authority, and to report to the summer meeting at Saskatoon.

Sam. G. Porter, secretary of the Alberta Division of the society, opened the discussion on the appointment of engineers on government commissions. He called attention to the importance of the engineer's work in bringing about the necessary readjustment of social conditions due to the war and to the engineer's claim for greater recognition in appointment to positions of public service. He also outlined the efforts that the Alberta Division had been making to advance the interests of the society in this respect.

Abstract of Speech by Sam. G. Porter

"In the 'Literary Digest' for March 30th, 1918," said Mr. Porter, "an article appeared which described some of the unfortunate conditions which have arisen in the United States, and which that paper attributed to the employment of financial men instead of engineers in the direction of the production and transportation of war materials. As a result, says the article, a great deal of energy and enthusiasm and patriotic effort have been expended without, however, having them properly co-ordinated, and now they find that there is an enormous congestion of materials in some lines, far in excess of requirements or shipping facilities, and a corresponding shortage in others. It claims, however, that the ability of the engineer to organize and direct war production with a proper regard for the necessary sequence and co-ordination of the various processes, is being recognized and that the engineer is

coming into his own. Let us hope that it is true; true not only in the United States, but also in Canada.

"It may be that engineers are largely to blame for conditions that now exist. Possibly they do not take the interest in public and political matters they should take; that they do not make themselves so well known as their importance in the community would justify. Is that the reason that among the four men considered by President Wilson for the important position of United States Railway Dictator, no engineer's name appeared? Is that the reason that for such offices as Minister of Public Works, or the head of a commission to report on the reconstruction of a destroyed city, or a commission to control the expenditure of public money on public utilities, our government seldom even gives thought to the idea of appointing engineers? Has not the engineer in this war demonstrated beyond dispute the importance of his profession and his right to proper recognition, not only in the prosecution of the war but also in other government and public service?

More Sound Development, Less Exploitation

"I think we all realize that in the social readjustment which will follow the war—which in fact is in progress even now—the business of the world is going to be handled on a more scientific basis than before, with labor having more voice and capital less dictatorial power, with the engineer and other scientists directing their efforts and adjusting their differences. Governments are often slow to recognize changed conditions, even where the changes are radical, and it becomes one of our duties both to ourselves and to our government, to interpret these social changes and insist that they be met in a businesslike way.

"Another condition which must be recognized is that the government is assuming more and more the control and operation of the resources and utilities of the country. It should, therefore, have the best business and technical ability of the country in charge of them instead of permitting professional politicians to blunder the job. Let us have more sound development and less exploitation.

"In insisting that the government should appoint engineers to public commissions and offices, we should insist also that they be good engineers, properly qualified for the work they are called upon to do; otherwise the end in view will be defeated and both the interest of the public and the prestige of the profession will suffer. It should be remembered that the duties of an engineer, particularly in public service, are often of a judicial character as well as technical, requiring sound judgment based on thorough training and experience. Engineers on their part should be prepared to assume these responsibilities, while the government on its part should provide remuneration adequate for such service.

"This phase of the question dovetails into the question of legislation for engineers. There is need of intelligent regulations to define a certain minimum standard in order to eliminate incompetents, create a high standard of service and inspire public confidence. The public is entitled to a knowledge of the fitness and capability of the engineers it employs. By having a compulsory registry, the government would be furnished with complete information relative to the special ability of every engineer in the country."

J. L. Cote, M.P.P., was asked to speak on the Civil Service Act in Alberta. He explained that an act had been passed by the provincial legislature providing for the appointment of an efficiency officer, but that the officer had not yet been named.