

It must be realized, he said, that Canada, in common with all the other Allies, has assumed a heavy responsibility in the war.

The war brought unequalled opportunities. Some have been able to maintain their normal business, others have had their business greatly increased because their trades were more nearly related to war essentials or on account of some exceptional opportunities. In the case of builders or contractors, generally speaking the past four years has been rather a trying period. This notably applies to builders and architects throughout the country.

There was a period of readjustment when the war broke out. Then the policy of the Government had been to continue existing works—not to close down quickly, but to go ahead for a time with such public works as were under way, and the program was even supplemented for six months or a year so as to bridge over a trying period in order to avoid unemployment until war work should be organized.

Then, continued Sir Thomas, we were faced with the enormous expenses of the war. The result was, and properly, that we had to discontinue our program of works projects in mind before the outbreak of the war, improvements that would have been made had the war not occurred, were not gone on with.

We have now come to a critical period of dislocation and reconstruction. The same problems face us as at the outbreak of war. The great volume of war business came suddenly to an end. There may be considerable unemployment. We are considering ways to meet this. One way is to obtain big orders from France and Belgium. We are bending every effort to obtain a large amount of business of that kind, and have every hope that plans in this direction will be carried out O.K.

Domestic Reconstruction

Then there is domestic reconstruction. The railways are run down and many industrial plants of all kinds are suffering from lack of repair. Between the business we hope to get from overseas and the domestic reconstruction, a very considerable amount of labor will be absorbed.

Also there will be a steady and increased demand for agricultural products.

In all cities and towns throughout the country building operations of a private character have been delayed.

Coming to the larger question of the Government proceeding with public works that have been postponed, Mr. Carvell has spoken to you of this. In our opinion it would be desirable to proceed with works of immediately productive character. We must have a complete national plant such as ports, harbors, canals and other national undertakings, and we might help by proceeding with these when their utility is not in doubt, also with buildings that are of actual benefit to their communities.

Housing is one of the most important of the present problems. Last week we had here a conference of the prime ministers and other ministers of the various provinces, and the housing question was one that was brought forward. It was considered very desirable to promote housing and avoid slums, but we have seen some of the difficulties in taking up housing throughout Canada as a national undertaking. This is a matter for the municipalities and provincial governments, who can deal with it more effectively than can the Dominion Government, but if these bodies require any financial assistance we will be glad to advance it. The municipal governments are under the provincial governments and not the Dominion Government. This subject is an important one from a

social standpoint as well as from the standpoint of building industries.

Regarding the use of Canadian materials, Sir Thomas explained that the Government had always been sympathetic with this idea, not only for the reasons outlined, but for financial considerations, such as rate of exchange, etc. Speaking as Minister of Finance, he stated that from the financial standpoint this request by the Conference was economically along sound lines.

Minister of Public Works Replies

Following Sir Thomas White, Hon. Frank Carvell addressed the members of the conference, stating that although it was important that money be conserved during the war, it is now equally important that money be spent in reasonably useful projects. As much labor as possible should be provided for, even if it were to cost more to some extent.

Making a direct reply to the first request presented by the conference regarding the use of Canadian materials in government work, he said that he had always adhered to this in the past and he had no intention to depart from same, but that some peculiar conditions arise. There is nothing in my department that gives me more trouble, said Mr. Carvell, than Canadian marble and stone. The difference between their cost and the cost of the American materials is greater than the difference ought to be. Then there are certain materials that we cannot get in Canada. For the Parliament Buildings, for instance, we were compelled to deviate from our rule because we could not get the material required in Canada.

Regarding specifications for dry-docks, I don't think that the gentlemen who drew up this request could have understood the modus operandi of the Dry-Dock Act. I think they must have been thinking of government dry-docks. It is impossible to carry out the suggestion, as the docks which receive the subsidies are private docks and the subsidies are fixed amounts per annum. In connection with the government docks we do prepare plans and specifications and call for tenders in the manner suggested.

The housing problem is receiving the attention of the provincial governments and there will no doubt be work in this field which will employ an immense amount of labor.

All public works should be let by contract and by public tender. On only two occasions have we deviated from this principle and that was when time was so very essential. At Dartmouth and at North Sydney we were constructing works for the American government for a naval aerial service and the work had to be done so rapidly that there was no time to prepare plans and specifications and to call for tenders. This work, however, has now been discontinued to a great extent. We do not escape criticism altogether, however, by this method of letting contracts. In one city I am being severely criticized at present because we are not making more speed with the carrying out of certain work which was let by contract and public tender.

We are very glad to see that your conference has settled all distinctions between east and west by electing vice-presidents from each province. Canada can work out its destiny only by there being no east and no west, but only one united Canada working for the best interests of all concerned.

Minister of Railways and Canals Speaks

The last speaker representing the government was the Hon. J. D. Reid, who said that during the last four years the railways had been allowed to run down and a