

A National Highway as a National Monument of Peace

BY THE EDITOR.

In 1917 this Journal urged the building of a Transcontinental Highway across Canada as a memorial to our soldiers, and to-day—two years afterwards—with peace in sight we are more impressed than ever of the value of such a road. It has been well said that the splendid roads of France were one of the means of beating the Germans and across the line the excellent State roads enabled our American Allies to transport many hundreds of thousands of tons of foodstuffs and other necessities to Europe when their railways broke down. We do not care about repeating ourselves, but in view of the increased interest now being taken in a national highway and for the benefit of our new readers, though not we hope at the expense of our old friends, we republish the following taken from our issue of May, 1917:

This present war has made the people of Canada realize, as they have never before, the great distances of their own great country. In the transportation of our soldiers from the West to the East, before their crossing of the Atlantic to the seat of war the imagination has been fired of those of us who have been left behind to know something more of those hinter lands which could produce such splendid specimens of manhood as those we see in our Eastern railway yards and at the posts of embarkation. Our imagination goes beyond the railroad, but alas, we cannot get there for we have no roads to take us; we cannot get into personal touch with our far distance neighbors and kin, or they with us of the East. It is true that the great transcontinental railways have lessened the distances — from a fortnight to a day — and the telegraph and the telephone have annihilated distance altogether, thus making these great inventions real factors in welding a nation together. Yet good roads have always been and must remain the true arteries by which the people traverse the country. To take to the road means something more than walking or riding so many miles, it means the feeling of independence inborn in each one of us. Probably there are no more efficient means of keeping the people on the land than good roads; certainly that country is best off that has plenty of permanent highways, as illustrated in the contented spirit of the people. As a local investment too good roads have always paid in bringing outlying districts nearer to the railroads and to each other, and why not a national highway invested in by the nation.

In our March issue (1916) we urged the building of a NATIONAL HIGHWAY across Canada to serve as a great peace monument and a practical demonstration of our gratefulness to those who had sacrificed their lives for us on the fields of Flanders. At that time we might have been a little too previous, though we were not the first by many years to suggest a national highway, but public thought like events moves rapidly these days and in again taking up the subject with the idea of bringing it to a logical conclusion we have with us a number of national and provincial unions and associations, including the Union of Canadian Municipalities and the Dominion Good Roads Association. These societies through their conventions have done much in bringing home to the citizens of Canada the value of permanent roads, particularly to the farmers, as a means of business and social intercourse, and also as an impetus to a large and profitable tourist traffic. The provincial governments, realizing the wishes of the people, have spent millions of dollars during the last decade on the roads, and not one government has lost a vote because of the outlay.

In many of the urban municipalities are to be seen miles and miles of streets equal to any on this continent, and they have been the gainers in more contented populations and in increased values of surrounding properties. Indeed all the urban centres, during the last five years, have had sufficient pride in their thoroughfares to make them worth while, though they have a long way to go yet before perfection is reached. And since the provincial gov-

ernments have encouraged the rural municipalities, by paying a large part of the cost, great improvements have been made throughout Canada in local highways. All of which means that the Dominion is well served by many networks of local, county and provincial thoroughfares, but as yet there is no connecting link between the different systems so that for economic reasons alone a trunk road is very necessary.

This great trunk road should be built from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

Such a highway would be a great work, worthy of Canada, worthy of her splendid army sent across the seas and worthy of her sons and daughters who have made the supreme sacrifice. So that it would in deed and in fact be a monument to those who will have made it possible for us to have that which we term liberty, the whole of the road should be built by returned soldiers under military discipline — but with civilian pay. At the end of the long Peninsular and Napoleonic wars the British army, instead of being disbanded and so thrust on an already impoverished country, was utilized in building many of England's famous roads. By the time the roads were complete, national and local conditions had become normal and the country better fitted to assimilate the soldiers to civilian life; and the same procedure should take place in Canada.

We would even suggest that such a transcontinental road should take the place of the many monuments of stone that have already been mooted, which while excellent as showing a sense of gratitude, are not serviceable and too often are monstrosities and eyesores. Instead then of such memorials mile stones could be placed along the great national road with proper memorial tablets so that those who pass along on its surface in the future will know that the people of Canada in the twentieth century knew how to honor their brave dead.

Such a national highway must be built strong enough to last, with proper maintenance, for all time. That is, it must be what is termed a permanent road, built of Canadian material. It must be permanent enough to be almost fool proof and under sharp inspection invincible to the machinations of the "grafter."

To take the control out of party politics a permanent commission of twelve men should be appointed as under: three selected by the Federal Government, two of whom should be engineers, and one each selected by the Provincial Governments, preferably the deputy minister of roads, as in Ontario and Quebec, and the commissioner of highways in the other provinces. And this commission should have the selection of the route.

This brings up the question of cost and the problem of raising of the money. To build sufficient length of new roadway and to repair old roadways so as to have a continuous highway of eighteen or twenty feet between Vancouver and Halifax, and including Vancouver Island, will take about 3,500 miles of new road, or its equal, and the cost would be about \$20,000 a mile, or \$70,000,000. Such a huge sum would be unthinkable three years ago but the Canadian people have shown since then what they can do in raising money when given the incentive, and such an incentive is now before us in the great coast to coast highway. How the money should be raised might be along the following lines:

Half of the sum required (\$35,000,000) by the Federal government, by a bond issue.

This would mean that every citizen in Canada would have a share in the road.

Quarter of the sum required (\$17,500,000) by the Provincial governments and those municipalities through which the road would run, in proportion to the mileage and cost, as per the decision of the Commission.

As a great trunk road will give direct benefit to those municipalities along the route which it would run they should be more than eager to share in the extra tax.

Balance of the sum (\$17,000,000) to be raised by public subscriptions.

This is a large sum to raise by public subscriptions but given the right kind of publicity the appeal would be more than met. The Patriotic and Red Cross Funds have set the example in appealing to the public.