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Municipal Councils and Dominion Public Works

The Minister of Finance in his budget speech made use of a statement which is worth while quoting in these columns for the reason that it indicates the trend of thought of the Federal authorities relating to the many petitions and delegations that come from all parts of the Dominion demanding public works of some kind in their respective localities. As most of these local petitions and delegations are either engineered or under the auspices of the municipal council, there is an impression at Ottawa that local authorities, in their eagerness to secure certain considerations in the form of public works, selfishly ignore the general effect of such considerations on the economic superstructure of the country as a whole.

Mr. Fielding says: "The country was now facing enormous obligations, which were understood in but a more or less hazy way by the man in the street. The average person had an idea that things were rather serious, but had not grasped the extent of the change. In provincial, municipal and local bodies, there were constantly increasing appropriations for this and that work which must be done. These municipal bodies frequently demanded works to be carried out by the Federal Government, and sent petitions and delegations to Ottawa by the carload to impress upon the Government the need of helping their particular plan. They all admitted that there was a great need for economy on the

part of the other fellow, but they could all produce some particular reason why their own proposals were in a more urgent class."

Now the Hon. Mr. Fielding knows local wants more than does the average Federal minister. He was not only for many years a provincial minister, coming in almost daily contact with municipal authorities, but he has been a journalist all his life, and as such knows the psychology of the community life, so that when he suggests that even they—the communities—should practice self-denial in the interests of the nation, he is justified in his rebuke.

Practically every city and town in Canada is desirous of as much autonomy as possible. The local authorities resent interference, from other public bodies, whether these bodies be federal or provincial, so that they cannot complain if they get rebuked when they as government units make certain demands on another government unit to carry out certain obligations outside their own province. Of course there are times when the local authorities must take up the cudgels on behalf of their respective communities, for instance when there is the danger of local rights being interfered with in Dominion legislation, but it does seem to us that before asking for government favors, every municipal council would do well to investigate the local wants sufficiently closely, so as to better warrant the demand for Dominion public works in any locality.