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The World War and Business in British Columbia

Some of the Probabilities that May Arise in This Province on the Coming of Peace—Effect on Our Basic Industries.

The manifest angling of the Central Empires for peace and the persistent peace talk one hears upon the street, evidently the wish being father to the thought, leads into the realm of discussion just what are the prospects of peace and what is apt to be its effect upon British Columbia industry.

Many people are acting on the presumption that peace, like war, will come as a thief in the night. If it is to be admitted that as much as the Allies can hope for is for the war to end in a draw, then it is to be expected that peace may come suddenly. But such an end is not entertained in the camps of the four Allies. They see only victory ahead and the end of militarism in Europe. So far as the British Empire, France and Russia are concerned, this end will be persisted in until a decisive victory is won; and for this purpose enormous preparations, extending over two years, are being carried out. While in the expressed opinion of Army officers and strategists the war may end sooner, they are counting on contingencies of checks to their efforts and a stubborn and determined opposition. A survey of the "war map," as the German Chancellor called it, will show that the Allies have much to accomplish before they can safely contemplate peace. It will be seen that peace cannot come suddenly. Each of the Allies will have to fight hard and persistently to bear down the strength of Germany, which, while suffering great losses in man-power, is still vigorous and skillful, and abundantly supplied with ammunition.

Space cannot permit to undermine the idea of a sudden peace; but we think that if one will take into consideration as complete a survey of conditions in Europe as the information available will permit, he must arrive at a conclusion that the coming of peace will have many heralds which may be easily observable. This does not necessarily mean that peace may be for a long time yet delayed, or that the war cannot end for a period of two years, but that the furious fighting that will be maintained from this onward will test the quality of the resistance that must be encountered to

obtain a victorious peace. General Petain, the hero of Verdun, characterizes the problem of the war as not in capturing trenches, land, or forts, or even in defending them from attack, but in "killing Germans." This is the end of the war, the depletion of the man-power of the enemy to the point that resistance in offense or defense is no longer effectual.

The adjustment of business in Canada in general, and in British Columbia in particular, has been for several months complete. It is to be expected that so long as the war lasts, the same impetus to trade will be evident. Upon Canada, in a business way, will devolve the duty and responsibility of supplying Britain with all the products of her fields and workshops that she is capable of. This has, of course, produced a tremendous stimulus to Canada's industrial output and agricultural development; and when, at the conclusion of war, these stimuli are withdrawn, it is natural to expect that considerable unsettlement will result. How long, taking the Dominion as a whole, it will take to readjust business to peace conditions is highly conjectural, but that it will be severe in many cases is certain.

There is a common idea held in business circles in British Columbia that this Province will suffer less economically from the coming of peace than any of the other Provinces of the Dominion. The basis of this is not always clear, and yet it seems to be founded on fairly reasonable assumptions. The general idea prevalent is that because British Columbia has suffered reaction prior to the outbreak of war, and has suffered more since its outbreak, the coming of peace must bring better times in the very nature of the case. The argument sometimes heard is that business is so bad, it could not be worse; and therefore it must get better. But this statement contains wrong premises and wrong conclusions.

The outbreak of war in 1914 produced three serious consequences: loss of population, either soldiers going overseas or citizens going elsewhere in search of work; paralysis to lumber business, and paralysis to mining industry. With these were involved severe checks on general trade and industry. For the remainder of the year, and during the first half of 1915, these conditions continued. Then followed

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