

### EXISTING CONDITIONS IN THE BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRIES.

There appears to be some doubt in the minds of many of the citizens of Canada as to the unanimous findings of the National Industrial Conference for the Building and Construction Industries which recently met at Ottawa. To correct any misunderstanding that might exist we have decided to publish in this and following issues the various reports and recommendations which were unanimously adopted at the conference. We are taking them in the order in which they appeared on the agenda and following is the report on "Existing Conditions in Our Industry."

**Shortage of Dwelling, Commercial and Public Buildings.**  
Your Committee has been asked to discuss the subject "Conditions in Our Industry"—under the headings (a) Shortage of dwelling, commercial and public buildings, (b) Seasonal nature of the industry and possible methods of regulation. We have been requested by the Conference to jointly consider the many points arising out of these subjects and to report our findings as follows:

From reports of contracts awarded, which undoubtedly form the most accurate basis for any general survey of the condition of the industry in the country generally, we find that for the first three months of the year—January, February and March—the total of contracts awarded is \$37,000,000, approximately; that for the corresponding period last year the total was \$55,000,000, approximately, thus showing a decline of roughly 33 per cent. The contracts awarded for the first month—January—totalled approximately \$11,000,000, in March this year only \$10,000,000 in work was let. A shrinkage of 50 per cent. The shrinkage must be due to either one of two reasons—either buildings are not required or building is costing too much. We have made a fairly careful study of the first suggested reason, i. e. are the buildings required, in the rather limited time at our disposal, and we find as follows:

This is a growing country. It requires in connection with that normal growth a corresponding normal growth of buildings. The only figures that can form a basis, or by which we can examine this normal development, are the building permits issued in 35 leading Canadian cities. If we go back to the year 1910, and trace the increase up to 1914—to the commencement of the great war—this normal increase is quite clearly defined. The McLean Daily Reports—Building Review—have, after a thorough study, worked out a chart which develops graphically the normal increase of building during those years and continued the same percentages of normal increases during the war period and up to this year. This chart is developed by using the monthly averages and their increases up to the war, and theoretically the increase up to the present Canadian Committee feels that since the growth of the country has continued fairly consistently year by year, such a chart cannot be said to be unreasonable or to distort the situation to any great extent.

This chart shows a very great falling off in building of all kinds during the war—greater falling off in actual volume of work than is indicated by the money total of the war let, because, as we know, the costs of building increased over that period quite substantially. The difference between the normal requirements of the country up to date, and actually required to bring the situation to normal.

Your Committee has arrived at

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what it believes to be a fair estimate of what this means to the industry and we think that while it may be based on more or less theoretical figures it is nevertheless reasonable.

This country is short of buildings and public works at the present day. Including dwellings and works of all kinds, the staggering total of \$750,000,000.

We can dimly, then from our minds, any further doubt as to the reason of the stagnation and attribute it absolutely to the high cost of building and the disinclination of the public to build at present prices.

What can be done to remedy the situation and revive the industry. In the opinion of this Committee, it will undoubtedly improve if a lower level can be reached and that level stabilized so as to avoid the consequences of a demoralized or falling market.

The conclusions arrived at as to the shortage of dwellings are confirmed by the following observations prepared by Mr. Adams of the Town Planning Commission.

Figures can be obtained showing that there is a considerable shortage of houses throughout Canada, but in this matter, as in so many others, figures are only useful in so far as they support general observations and knowledge of the conditions to which they apply. For instance, it may be said there is a shortage of houses in Montreal, Toronto, and Ottawa, but the evidence does not exist in the form that there are any families actually unable to obtain shelter. When houses are too plentiful we can count the number of vacant dwellings. When they are scarce it would require an elaborate census to discover how many families were actually in want of dwellings. When scarcity is the result, as at the present time, of increased cost of building, the scarcity of capital, the difficulty of ascertaining the actual needs of the community is further increased. Many families would double up or go into small apartments for economic reasons and even if houses were available they might not be able to purchase or rent them. Another factor is that houses are now occupied by some of the very poor which would not be permitted to be inhabited if it were practical to carry out the health laws.

The needs of the community, therefore, in the matter of additional housing accommodation may be summarized under three heads, viz.:

(1) Houses required for families at present living in apartments or rooms, who could afford to pay for and would prefer houses if they were available.  
(2) Houses required for those living in insanitary dwellings which cannot be condemned because of the lack of alternative accommodation.  
(3) Houses required to accommodate immigrants, who are at present crowded into small tenements.

It is obvious that all these classes of need should be met as far as practical. As soon as building costs fall there will be a third class needing housing accommodation, viz. those who are at present doubled up with other families or relatives, but who are unable to do so.

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cannot afford to pay present prices for rents.  
It is stated that there have been 11,111 houses built in Canada during 1920, and during the same year about 75,000 couples were married. This leaves a shortage of about 59,000 houses to meet the ordinary needs of the country.

During 1920 there came into the country 117,133 immigrants. It is not possible to estimate how many of these would need houses, but assuming that 50 per cent. required dwellings and that three persons comprised the average family, the need in this connection would be about 20,000 houses, thus making a total shortage for the whole country of 79,000 for 1920 alone.

Mr. J. A. Ellis estimates the shortage in Ontario at 20,000. The above, however, is without regard to the number of houses short prior to 1920 or the number of houses occupied which should be condemned because they are unfit for habitation. It may be assumed that another 75,000 houses will be required this year over and above what will be erected in the way of private enterprise. It would seem, therefore, that we could do with 154,000 houses.

The situation now becomes so serious that it is evident that the Government, Federal, Provincial and Municipal, shall accept a greater share of responsibility for the matter, and immediately put into operation some machinery for providing the necessary funds to assist in the payment of many men unemployed necessary to house the people of this country. It is also to be hoped that the Government, both Federal and Provincial, will see their way to proceed with the construction of many of the large public buildings for which sites have been secured and plans prepared for several years.

**Seasonal Nature of the Industry and Possible Methods of Regulation.**  
This condition is to some extent necessary owing to our variable climate, but much can be done to relieve the present situation, and thereby minimize periodic unemployment of many men employed in our industry. This periodic unemployment has greatly accentuated existing conditions owing to the fact that at the season when unemployed men are able to earn money, after a period of idleness, they are faced with a practical shut-down of all kinds so that it may be said to be carried on during those periods of the year, when private operations are at a minimum.

Little more for outside work, but we believe that this additional cost would be balanced by the lower prices of such building materials as lumber and etc., which are made indoors and doors, structural steel, cut stone, which manufacturers would probably be prepared to take at lower rates to carry their overhead through slack months.  
Signed for labor — S. J. Nott, J. R. Ellis, Ben Simmons, W. Reeves, C. Lewis, John W. Bruce.  
Signed for employers — J. M. Piggott, E. S. Mattice, C. H. Whitlock, A. Marion, Geo. J. Rogers, E. G. Brousseau.

**Wage Theories**  
By Matthew Wolf in The American Engineer  
There have been six main reasons presented thus far to the law of wages governing wages. They are substantially as follows:  
The wage fund theory, suggested by Adam Smith and developed by his followers, as originally stated is that wages, like everything else, are governed by supply and demand, and in the aggregate depend on the proportion of laborers to the capital available for employing labor, this

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capital being denominated a "wage fund."  
This wage fund theory naturally leads to and did historically lead to the German socialist theory of the iron law of wages. According to this theory, wages under competition can never be higher than that which will just support the laborer, and enable him to renew his kind. The German socialists claimed that under the intense struggle to live, the laborer could not be sufficiently educated, and that the only way was to stop competition and introduce socialism which would lead to education rather than depend on education to lead to socialism.  
But now a new theory arose. The theory that production furnishes the true measure of wages. The theory argues that the wage-fund theory and its corollary are wholly false and that wages depend upon the productivity of labor. Wages, it says, are not dependent on capital, because men without capital can and often do employ labor, provided they can know that the laborers employ will produce enough value to enable them to pay the laborer out of the product and have a balance for the employer. Again the employer may borrow capital, and out of the product of labor he can pay for the capital borrowed, the laborer himself, and leave a profit for himself.  
But some critics urge, wages do not necessarily rise and fall with production, but are often lowest when production is highest because a so-called overproduction discharges laborers and materially lowers their income. Hence a new theory, that wages depend upon the standard of living. This theory argues that wages depend upon what the working man considers

the lowest level upon which he can live. Competition it argues, can reduce wages to the lowest limit he will work for, because he will then starve rather than work, or so strenuously organize a strike that wages will have to rise.  
Again other critics say that wages do not so much depend on the standard of living as the standard of living depends on the wages men can secure. Another theory is therefore presented, namely Henry George's theory of wages. Wages cannot be lower, he says, than men can get by working for themselves without paying rent, because men prefer to work for themselves, and will only work for an employer provided he will pay more than they get by working for themselves.  
We come now to the last general theory which has been propounded, the theory that wages depend, as in any other case of value, on the marginal or fiscal value of the laborer. This theory is rather a way of looking at things than the statement of a definite law. It simply states that

today all that economists can say, Trade-unions on the other hand is not so much concerned in propounding theories. It actually and constantly raises wages. Legens the conditions of work and that far has not been greatly concerned by what theory or combination of theories these ends have been obtained.

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