

BANK OF MONTREAL

ANNUAL MEETING

Sir Vincent Meredith, Bart, President, and Sir Frederick Williams-Taylor, General Manager, Insist Strongly on Policy of Preparedness—Economy, Production and Immigration Should be its Principal Features—67% of the Male Staff of the Bank of Military Age Have Enlisted for Overseas Service

The Ninety-ninth annual meeting of the Bank of Montreal was held at the Head Office of the Bank of Montreal on Monday, December 4th. The addresses submitted by Sir Vincent Meredith Bart., President, and Sir Frederick Williams-Taylor, General Manager, dwelt especially with the policy of preparedness it was urgent the Dominion should adopt in order to be ready for the period of readjustment that must necessarily come at the close of the war. The principal features of the policy should be Economy, Production and Immigration.

Attention was also drawn to the temporary character of the present industrial activities in Canada and the necessity of recognizing same. Confidence was expressed in Canada's ability to solve the problems that might present themselves. Special reference was made to the large number of the staff of the Bank now serving with the Colors and the illustrious record they had made.

The President's Address.

Sir Vincent Meredith, Bart., President, in his address to shareholders, said:—

I hoped when I last had the pleasure of addressing you that before this annual meeting the end of the cruel and devastating war, which has convulsed Europe would be, if not reached, at least within measurable distance. In this expectation we have been disappointed. No one can fix the day of its termination, but I am sure I express your feelings when I say we hold an unshaken confidence of the ultimate victory of Britain and her Allies.

Canada, inspired by a deep-rooted loyalty to the Empire, has given and is still prepared to give freely her gallant youth and monetary means to the great cause, upon the success of which her liberties and national existence so greatly depend.

The year has again been one of considerable anxiety to all those engaged in financial affairs. Our profits have been curtailed by payments of Government taxes at home and abroad, which earnings on loans in Canada have been affected by reduced borrowings on the part of our customers. It is not, however, an unfavorable feature that the prosperity of large manufacturing industries and business in general has produced a curtailment of bank loans and converted borrowers into depositors. The low rates of interest on that portion of our reserves carried in New York have also been a contributing factor to diminished earnings compared with those antecedent to the war. But despite these disabilities, we have been able, after making what we believe to be full provision for bad and doubtful debts, to pay our usual dividends with the customary bonus and to carry a balance to credit of Profit and Loss Account. I trust, therefore, that under the circumstances you will consider the results of the banking year satisfactory.

Relations of United States and Allied Countries.

The wide ramifications of the business of the Bank make us necessarily deeply concerned with commercial conditions in other countries. In Great Britain, general trade has been spurred to great activity by the war's demands. There has been no lack of employment, wages have risen, money has been circulated freely, returning to the Banks in the form of increased deposits, and for the time being, at least, prosperity has prevailed, despite the displacement of labour by the war.

In the United States, also as a result of the war, there is an activity in business unexampled in its history. The shipments of gold to that country in payment of munitions, grain and other commodities have reached a sum in excess of \$700,000,000 since the outbreak of the war. This huge inflow of the precious metal, together with the fact that under the new Federal Reserve Act the proportion of reserves required to be carried by the Banks has been reduced, is causing concern to many financial men, who fear that it will bring about a period of inflation to be followed by a serious financial reaction.

At present these conditions are serving a useful purpose to the Allied Countries by causing a plethora of money, thereby enabling them to borrow at comparatively reasonable rates of interest. If the United States market will continue to look with favour on further Allied loans, any menace to the financial situation to that extent will be removed.

The recent action of the Federal Reserve Board in counselling caution in the investment of American Bank funds in Treasury Bills of Entente Powers it is thought may be intended as a warning to imprudent or inexperienced bankers. It is hoped, however, that it will not bring about a diminution in Allied borrowings in the United States, with the possibility of a check in the volume of trade with Europe.

The Allied loans so far issued in New York aggregate \$1,585,000,000, of which sum Great Britain has borrowed \$860,000,000, France \$570,000,000, Russia \$130,000,000, and Italy \$25,000,000.

Business Conditions in Canada.

As a result of the phenomenal crop of a year ago, coupled with vast expenditures by the Allied Governments in this country for munitions and by our own Government for requirements in connection with the war, high wages are being paid for all classes of labor, and trade conditions at the moment in Canada are buoyant in nearly all lines of business. The few exceptions will, generally speaking, be found in industries concerned with the production and sale of luxuries.

Owing to unusual adverse climatic conditions and decreased acreage, the yield of wheat this season will probably not exceed in quantity in the North-West one-half of last year's bountiful crop and will fall somewhat below the average in the older provinces; but the farmers will be largely compensated for the diminished yield by the high prices being paid for grain and all other farm products. Estimates this season are, as is usual, conflicting, but those believed to be most reliable give a wheat crop for the three North-West Provinces of 160,000,000 to 175,000,000 bushels, and for all Canada 185,000,000 to 200,000,000 bushels, and it is not improbable it may exceed these figures. Were it not for the fact that our shipments of grain to Great Britain will probably be curtailed by a shortage of ocean tonnage, the results might be looked upon as not unfavorable on the whole.

In this connection I may add that the past season has been very propitious for the dairy trade, the production of cheese and butter exceeding all previous records and marketed at unprecedentedly high prices.

The sudden reversal in the position of Canada from a debtor to a creditor nation, as respects foreign trade, has been very remarkable. In the seven months of the fiscal year to October 31st the excess of imports over domestic exports of merchandise was, as recently as 1913, no less than \$145,000,000 and in the like period of 1914 the adverse balance of trade amounted to \$60,000,000. Then the gap began rapidly to close. The production of munitions of war of every description, together with the bountiful harvest of last year, carried the exports to an unprecedentedly high figure. In the seven months to October 31st, 1915, the value of domestic exports exceeded imports by \$73,300,000 and in the corresponding period of this year the excess of exports over imports has reached the large sum of \$160,000,000.

Nor has this reversal of the balance of trade been accomplished by contraction of imports; in the present year the value of imports has outstripped all previous records. The change has been effected entirely by shipments abroad of the huge crop of 1915, and the large output of war supplies, the exports of agricultural products in the seven months period to October 31st having risen from \$75,500,000 in 1914 to \$233,500,000.

It is scarcely necessary to add that this striking change in foreign trade balance has greatly ameliorated the financial situation and is at once a cause and reflex of the existing commercial activities of the country.

Success of Domestic Loans.

In a little more than a year, Canada has issued two Domestic Loans amounting to \$200,000,000 and the Canadian Government has borrowed in New York \$95,000,000. The success of our internal loans is a matter of pride and congratulation. It is due largely to the spirit of loyalty of our people and a determination to do all within them to bring the war to an early and successful conclusion.

So far, a depletion of Bank deposits in consequence of these contributions has not taken place; in fact, they show month by month a gratifying increase. It must not be forgotten, however, that these increases are only partially due to the savings of our people. They may be accounted for to a very considerable extent by the husbanding of resources by our large corporations, a prudent and wise precaution in view of the uncertain conditions which now prevail and will continue to exist during the continuance of the war.

The Minister of Finance, to whom the country owes much for his wise and far-seeing administration of our financial affairs, will doubtless keep in view these conditions when making further calls on our resources, which of necessity he must do from time to time.

The net debt of Canada on October 31st last was \$696,000,000, an increase within the year of upwards of \$200,000,000. The war expenditure has now reached \$23,000,000 a month and is increasing. Ere long the public debt of Canada will reach a billion dollars and involve an interest charge of not less than \$45,000,000 annually. While it is true that through adventitious circumstances public revenue has increased during the last year or two, no dependence can be placed on the continuance of this buoyancy,

so that we will have to face a heavy interest charge on account of public debt, and a resulting taxation.

It is obvious, therefore, that if Canada is to escape the disability of being made a dear country to live in, the strictest economy in Government expenditures will have to be practised and all demands for public aid involving new burdens be held severely in check.

Policy Canada Should Follow.

There are three objects to which every effort must be bent:

Economy—that we may be enabled to provide the Government with funds to do our part to win the war and to make provision for taxes which we shall undoubtedly be called upon to pay.

Production—that we may increase our exports and furnish more plentifully our home markets; and above all

Immigration—which will bring about increased production so necessary to our well-being) to be promoted at all times and under all circumstances, more particularly of settlers who seek the land.

The Railway situation in Canada has been a matter of some anxiety to those connected with financial affairs. The Dominion Government has, as you are aware, appointed a Commission of capable and experienced men to thoroughly investigate the situation in respect of the newer transcontinental railways, and while I cannot, of course, anticipate the findings and recommendations of this Commission, I may be allowed to express the hope that neither Government ownership nor Government operation will ensue, either of which, I am convinced, would prove detrimental to the best interest of Canada.

And now, as my remarks draw to a close, I am tempted, contrary to my usual practice and unrestrained by the old adage, "Never prophesy unless you know," to look into the future. The thoughts of many men are turned towards the problems that will confront us after the war. Government Commissions are dealing with them; the press devotes much space to their discussion; international conferences have met, but our first, obvious and imperative duty is to WIN THE WAR.

When that is done, new conditions will unquestionably supervene. It seems probable that for some months to come, orders for munitions and war supplies will continue to keep our industrial plants actively employed.

Outlook for Post Bellum Period.

A temporary check in business generally may be looked for when peace is in sight, but I do not anticipate that any lengthened cessation of our commercial and industrial activities will immediately ensue. The period of reconstruction will probably not be accomplished for several months, and during this time Europe should provide a market for all we can produce, and new markets, perhaps, will be opened to us which we have never yet been able to reach.

These countries, however, will be "beating their swords into plough-shares," straining their energies to the conversion of munition plants into factories for the production of goods for both home and foreign trade in the effort to regain their former markets, to liquidate foreign debts and to recover the gold of which by necessity they may have been temporarily deprived.

When the rehabilitation has been effected, we in Canada must be prepared to meet in our own markets the keen competition of foreign goods. To cope successfully with the competition, expenditures on capital account should be avoided as far as possible, and resources conserved. Efficiency, efficiency, efficiency must be our watchword, conjoined with economy in all walks of life.

With regard to immigration, I do not share the optimistic views of many of our friends as to the immediate outlook. That in time we will receive a large influx of new settlers there is no doubt, but for a period we shall be at a disadvantage owing to a deficiency of tonnage to carry them to our shores from Europe, and it is not improbable that Continental nations will, for the purpose of self-preservation, place an embargo on all emigration. Great Britain, for similar reasons, though she may not take such drastic measures in regard to her daughter nations, will no doubt discourage intending emigrants from leaving her shores. This I say without for a moment meaning that efforts to secure immigration should be in any way relaxed.

Canada is bearing up magnificently under the strain of this world-wide war, and her sacrifices will be amply repaid by the engendering of a spirit of self-reliance, and she will emerge, a comparatively little known country, to take her rightful position in the affairs of the nations.

The future, as I have said, is beset with new problems and is not entirely free from financial anxieties, but by a young people possessing great national spirit, a territorial Empire and unrivalled natural resources, the future can be looked forward to with hope and confidence.

THE GENERAL MANAGER'S ADDRESS.

Sir Frederick Williams-Taylor, the General Manager of the Bank, then made his annual address, as follows:

Gentlemen:—In this, the twenty-ninth month of the war, it is my duty to present for your approval the ninety-ninth annual statement of the Bank of Montreal.

Also it is my combined duty and privilege to explain the chief changes in the balance sheet now before you. First, however, let me comment briefly upon the factors that bear most importantly upon the future course of our affairs and that have influenced our banking position in the year under review.

The outstanding business feature in Canada is an industrial condition more abnormal in character than