

The Building Industries Conference

THE conference of the Association of Canadian Building and Construction Industries at Ottawa, February 2, 3 and 4, was altogether a representative meeting having an important bearing on the interests of the industry. It succeeded in bringing representative contractors, builders and supply men together from various parts of Canada for a frank discussion of the objects of the association and the consideration of certain changes to the constitution and by-laws leading to the establishing of the association on a permanent organized and workable basis.

The meeting dealt with various questions affecting the industry—business relations, labor, standardization, unit prices, and straight contract and cost plus work, and as to how certain conditions which arise could best be met.

During the conference those in attendance had the opportunity of listening to a very ably presented address by the Hon. Mr. Rowell, President of the Privy Council, on the recent Washington Conference in reference to the eight-hour day.

Another speaker was Senator Robertson, Minister of Labor, who referred to what the Government has done in co-operation with the provinces, in establishing employment offices throughout the country which had provided positions for 226,000 men and women, including a very large number of returned soldiers. He felt that an association such as the Canadian Building and Construction Industries, if permanently organized, could be made a beneficial factor in establishing relations between employers and labor.

President's Address

In his address President Anglin reviewed the accomplishments of the association since its formation at the first conference which was held in Ottawa about fifteen months back. In the meantime a general secretary had been appointed, and a meeting of the National Council held at Toronto with good results. Considerable had also been accomplished in the organizing of contractors' bodies throughout the country. The association had been recognized as the representative body in the industry by the Federal Government. Six of its members sat at the National Industrial Conference at Ottawa last fall and worthily upheld the interests of the industry the association represented. Besides this other activities have been carried on both in committee and through personal efforts.

Proceeding Mr. Anglin stated that the conference should represent the spontaneous expression of the opinions and experience of those who had gathered together, and not be conducted along the set lines of the first conference.

The chief objects, as he conceived them, for having any Canadian association whatsoever were (1) to reduce the difficulties that surround those engaged in the industry—contractors, supply men, and all; (2) to improve the practices current among them; (3) to fix standards which could be fairly and uniformly applied throughout the country; (4) to facilitate the movement and employment of labor, and, finally, (5) if possible, to work out some sort of a plan which would help in the production of building materials, and bring it up to the great need which exists at the present time.

Business, Mr. Anglin said, outside of the industry, has in the past treated contractors more or less as a joke, and finance, as represented by the banks, has put us almost at the bottom of the ladder. The successful contractors ultimately failed unless they retired at an opportune time, and it was up to the contractors themselves to so improve conditions that this sort of thing would not continue.

"In the first place it should be the duty of all engaged in the industry to help the honest, straightforward and legitimate contractor and material man, and to make it difficult for the unsound firm lacking either in experience or strong financial conditions to engage in the business. Make the industry, if possible, one that will be entered into by worthy men and worthy men alone. Certainly we cannot accomplish this end by the usual underhand and so-called cut-throat practices in the past; certainly not by the free-for-all, or every-man-for-himself, disorganized industry, which has prevailed hitherto.

"To attain the end desired it is necessary to increase efficiency, to lower costs and, if possible, to establish for our industry regular and steady earnings. After all, we must always look to that end if we are to be successful. We can no longer localize our organizations. The operations of all the larger general contractors, trade contractors, supply houses and building material manufacturing concerns cover many cities and towns, several provinces and, in some instances, the whole Dominion. Provincialism, therefore, is not the basis for our organization, as I see it. . . . If organization has any value to the broadminded business man, it must be Dominion-wide, it must be centralized and efficient, and it must be properly founded and sufficiently financed.

Asking if it was worth while to endeavor to accomplish this, and as to what would be the real benefits and unseen advantages of such an organization, Mr. Anglin maintained that in the first place "the fraternity that one has with his