

THE EVENING TIMES AND STAR, ST. JOHN, N. B., WEDNESDAY, APRIL 6, 1921

TRANSPORTATION COSTS PROBLEM FOR BUSINESS

Wage Factor Important in Regard to Commodity Prices

Building Situation—Material Prices Slowly Subsiding—Business as a Whole Continues Along Restricted Lines

(Financial Post.)
The startling and almost appalling figures in the statement of the affairs of the national railways have given rise to very serious thoughts in the industrial and commercial community. The minister puts the year's deficit at about \$70,000,000, but J. L. Payne, former railway statistician for the government, figures up a total of nearly \$140,000,000, taking into consideration all charges, and it is being pointed out by other students of the situation that preliminary figures already indicate a much more serious situation ahead.
In no country in the world is efficient transportation more necessary for national development and prosperity than in Canada. The problem is a two-fold one—something must be done at the same time to reduce transportation costs. There are many suggestions. To shoulder the debt and reduce the burden of fixed charges is one. To arrange for operation by the efficient C. P. R. under close government control is another. No matter what course is taken there appears to be an urgent necessity for the reduction of transportation charges if Canadian farmers and Canadian farmers are to be able to market their goods in competition with the rest of the world in the period of keen business warfare which now seems inevitable. This would

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seem to involve a readjustment of wage schedules over the whole continent to overcome the unhealthy conditions created by the McAdoo award. The extent to which this situation has been aggravated in Canada under government operation is a point upon which there is considerable uneasiness.
Wages Must Come Down.
A thorough readjustment of commodity prices and wages is a necessary prelude to a resumption of healthy activity in business. While price deflation has proceeded far in many lines the resistance to the return to normal price levels displayed by a large percentage of the wholesale and retail trade is one of the important factors delaying the return to normal.
Then again the unwillingness of labor to accept lower wages is one of the serious problems that must be solved. Wages in many lines contribute too largely to the cost of production and until wages are down commodity prices cannot be permanently reduced. Employers and workers who are unwilling to face present conditions frankly are retarding the resumption of normal business, and are working against their own interests. Prevailing wage scales are an absolute deterrent to the lowered costs which must be established before the prices of coal and steel and other basic commodities can be lowered and freight rates altered. One of the most significant news items of the week respecting this situation emanates from Chicago, to the effect that the Chicago packers have taken the initiative in ordering a reduction in the wages of employees. This will have an important bearing on the cost of living and the company will be enabled to offer its food commodities at a materially

reduced price as a result of the saving in wages.
Building Proceeds Slowly.
The situation in the building trades may be taken as fairly indicating conditions generally. At the present time building is proceeding slowly. The high costs of materials and wages have up to the present drastically curtailed operations. Millions of dollars' worth of building has been held up to await the return of normal conditions. The high costs of labor have up to the present been one of the most serious factors in inflating the costs of all construction. The situation in this respect is beginning to show improvement. While the individual workers and the labor unions have so far successfully resisted any cut in wages, the efficiency of labor has increased very considerably. Illustrating the improvement a prominent contractor stated this week that whereas last year his workers laid on an average about 440 bricks a day, the average had now been increased to more than 1,100. With this higher efficiency not only in this branch of operations but, it may be concluded, in every line of operation, it is evident that the way is being prepared for a considerable decline in building costs. That there has been distinct improvement already is evident from the statement of another builder who declared that last fall he estimated the cost of a certain piece of work at \$30,000, but this spring he was willing to undertake the same contract for \$20,000.
A price comparison table on sixty-seven staple lines of hardware, using 100 as an index number representing the price prevailing a year ago, reveals the fact that the average price on January 1 of this year showed an increase of 10 1/2 per cent. prevailing January, 1920. A comparison of the prices of these commodities at March 1 last with those prevailing a year ago, reveals a decline of 31 per cent. The present index being 64.94, while present prices show an average decrease of 3 1/2 per cent. since the beginning of the year.
In many retail lines the near approach of Easter is said to be stimulating trade. In fact to such an extent has this been the case in the clothing trade that stocks are being liquidated, and whole sale buying on a fairly large scale is developing.
Prepare for Revival in Business.
While business on the whole continues along restricted lines, manufacturers are making preparations for the revival which is confidently looked for, and, with a view to meeting the strenuous competition that will no doubt be an outstanding feature of business for some years to come, are looking to the foreign markets.

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had enormously increased during and since the war. Such, it appears, is

not the case. In 1911 the total population within the walls was 2,888,110. According to the first count and estimates this year's figures are still below the 3,000,000 mark. The house shortage is officially explained, is much more due to the taking over of private houses for business purposes than to an increase in the population. In the suburbs the increase in population is proportionately much greater than in the city itself, and the suburbs now have about 1,200,000 people.
Queen—Have you ever kissed a girl?
Oswald—Is that an invitation or are you gathering statistics?—Cornell Widow.

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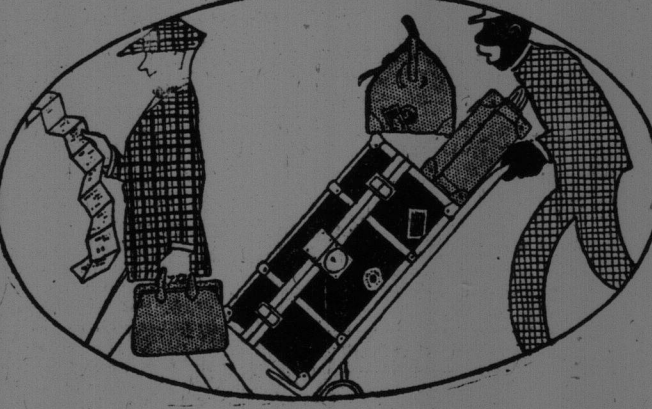
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\$20 FOR A DRINK.
Good Liquor, But Costly—Case Up in New York Court.
(New York Times.)
Whiskey is now selling at \$20 a drink on Twenty-third street. The old green goods, game had "come on" this saloonkeeper, to whom the Volstead act seems to have given an opportunity for "easy money." What was entered as a "disorderly conduct case" brought to light another of prohibition's jokes in the Night Court recently. The testimony ran somewhat as follows:
"Your honor," said the plaintiff, a woman, "this evening this young man repeatedly banged on the door of my rooming house and inquired for a Mr. O'Connor. I told him twice that there was no such person stopping in my house, but he again started to break down my door after I had closed it. He seemed to be intoxicated."
When the defendant was asked if he had anything to say for himself, he made the following disclosure, to the surprise of the court.
"Yes, judge, I have something to say, if you'll hear me," he began. "I went into a saloon on Twenty-third street this evening, and asked for cream soda. Can't expect anything better nowadays, you know. The bartender asked, 'Do you want something better?' 'Sure!' I said, 'if you have it.' He replied: 'I'll cost you seventy-five cents more.' I don't care if it costs me \$2 more, if it's good!" I replied. Then he took me up and said he had something exceptionally good, but it would cost me \$2. I said: 'All right, let's have it.' 'You'll get it,' he replied, and I got it—yes, with extras. I planned a twenty-dollar bill on the bar and he gave me some whiskey, moonshine, or whatever it was. Anyway, it tasted good, but it wasn't worth what it cost me. After a few minutes' wait I asked for my change, and the bartender seemed to have forgotten what denomination I had given him, but said, 'You'll get it. Oh, yes! Come with me across the street to my house and I'll give you your change.' 'I did so and when he opened the door of this woman's house he pushed me and slammed it in my face. I guess he left by the back door. That's the last I saw of my twenty-dollar bill. I don't think the drink was worth it, and I want my \$18. Well, I seemed to have gotten it, all right—in the neck."
With a warning to leave the woman alone and go look for his \$18, he left the court.
PARIS UNDER 3,000,000.
Population Has Not Increased as Believed.
Paris, April 5.—According to estimates based on census figures taken at the beginning of the present month, the number of people in Paris is less than was believed. From the shortage of houses it had been deduced that the pop-

MUTT AND JEFF—SPIVIS LEARNS SOMETHING ABOUT THE LITTLE FELLOW'S PAST By "BUD" FISHER

