

Editorials

REGULATION OF PUBLIC EXPENDITURES.

Brantford's Board of Trade has appointed a national service committee, and that committee has forwarded to the Dominion government a number of recommendations, at least one of which appears to bear the germ of an excellent idea, viz., the organization of some central body through which the government, the provinces and the municipalities can co-operate in planning public works which will absorb a considerable number of returned heroes. This is decidedly a move in the right direction, and it is to be hoped not only that the Dominion and provincial governments will adopt the Brantford idea, but also that they will go much further and clothe the central body with authority to regulate all public work.

There are two reasons why some broad supervision should be exercised in regard to public works, not only after the war, but also during the remaining period of the war. First, the work should be spread so that in one place there will not be a shortage of labor and in another, acute depression owing to extensive unemployment. Former soldiers living in all parts of the country should be given somewhat uniform chance of employment without being required to leave their homes and relatives.

Second, and perhaps even much more important, the money resources of the lending nations and the bond-absorbing capacity of our own country should be conserved for the most necessary work; and an independent, impartial board should be the judge of the relative necessity.

In years past there has been little or no regulation of public works expenditures in Canada, probably because there was no need to regulate them. Money was generally most readily obtainable at low rates of interest. Any town or city that cared to obligate itself to levy a little higher tax rate for the next twenty, thirty or forty years could obtain large sums without effort, and dozens of bond houses would compete strenuously to buy the issue. Investment money that was accumulating throughout the world looked upon Canada with favor, and the bond dealers rarely failed to find a buyer for any Canadian municipals.

The war may materially change that situation for some years to come. It has changed it already; in fact, the change started even slightly before the declaration of war. Central regulation of public expenditure is necessary so long as these changed conditions continue. When money flows into Canada again without stint or effort, then regulation can cease, but that time may not arrive for several years to come, and meanwhile regulation is imperative. With Liberty Loans, Victory Loans, Domestic War Loans, etc., dredging the investment market almost to rock bottom, it is hard for municipalities to suck up enough to make it worth while keeping the pumps going.

A certain amount of money is still being invested in Canadian municipal issues, and a very generous amount, too, considering the many other imperative demands upon the money sources. Much work is being done with

foreign capital and the savings of our own people. But some constituted authority should see to it for years to come that every dollar of investment money raised in Canada or brought into Canada for other than war purposes is put to really useful and productive work.

For instance, no large city, however good its credit may be, should be allowed to drain the money market of millions to be spent on unnecessary power developments or elaborate boulevard schemes while some smaller town nearby, with more limited credit, is forced to be satisfied with an outrageously polluted water supply because it cannot raise the money to construct a proper waterworks system.

A nation-wide civilian and engineering organization is needed to handle the situation and pass upon all plans and O.K. all expenditure before any bonds can be sold. Such a council should comprise representatives of the Dominion government, the provinces, the municipalities, the rural districts, the capitalistic and laboring interests and the military authorities, and should be advised by the very best obtainable boards of engineering, chemical, legal and financial consultants.

CHOOSING ROAD MATERIALS.

"There are many inalienable rights of the individual with which neither friends nor enemies have any call to interfere," says a recent bulletin of the American Highway Association. "He may wed a wife with the brains of a dead haddock and we cannot say nay, nor may we use more than verbal advice to prevent his early demise by eating a foundation of hot mince pie and a wearing surface of sizzling Welsh rarebit. But when he takes advantage of the right he possesses in many places to select the kind of pavement laid in front of his property, everybody has justification for raising strong objection.

"The road is for the public use, and even when a considerable part of its improvement is paid by local assessment the community contributes the remainder of the cost, and, therefore, should have a voice in determining its nature."

The average taxpayer is not a road expert; the ability to drive an automobile over a slippery pavement without skidding does not make him one, although it may make him a helpful critic. It takes years of study and experience to develop a road expert. He must know not only the method of constructing various types of roads under different conditions, but also the economical advantages and comparative merits of all the different types.

Sooner or later, he will be employed on every important road undertaking, and the beginning of his service should be at the outset of the work, so that his knowledge may guide the selection of the type of construction. To wait until the contract is let is to throw away a very large part of the help that he can give. No engineer can be held responsible for the behavior of a road unless all the steps that are taken in originating and carrying on the whole enterprise have had his approval.