

STATEMENT URGING PUBLIC BUILDING AND COURAGE IN BUSINESS ACTIVITY.

January 13, 1919.

Men entrusted with the grave responsibility of managing the business affairs of Massachusetts are now called on to decide whether they will continue as usual their activities as far as possible or wait to see if there is a decline in prices. No doubt there will be a decline in some directions. The public question is how best to proceed now for the general welfare. It seems clear that a gradual decline would be preferable to a perpendicular fall in prices. It should be remembered that prices of labor and materials are all relative. When once adjusted the amount is not of great importance. There are two things to do. One is to wait. The other is to go on with business activity. If everybody waits there no doubt will be a perpendicular fall with attending want, distress and calamity. If people will go ahead with business, while there may be a gradual decline, it can be borne with the least inconvenience. It is my strong belief that this is the line of duty. There have been high wages, but also large profits in the past months. I realize that business is and ought to be conducted for profit. Still there is not only the duty but the expediency of keeping the working force, the organization, in dull times. We have all worked together to win the war. Let us all work together to enjoy the blessings of peace. The working people of Massachusetts, her most valuable possession, must be considered and they must be maintained.

Instead of being the sport of chance, Massachusetts ought to be the master of destiny. Instead of waiting, we should act. Government has released raw materials, labor and transportation. There is plenty of money which makes

a demand for merchandise. There ought to be no lack of a disposition to act, no lack of enterprise.

The question is where to begin. A committee working with our Board of Labor and Industries suggests the revival of building.

This industry has been at a standstill for the past two years. It is in its nature basic. A contract for any kind of building at once makes the opportunity for other contracts for steel, cement, bricks, lumber, plumbing, steam heating, electrical equipment and all other materials required in construction. This would mean the employment of large numbers of people in various factories manufacturing these materials.

In this the various agencies of government ought to take the lead. It is therefore urged that all the departments in the Commonwealth, counties, cities and towns should start the foundations at least for schoolhouses, hospitals, libraries, police and fire department headquarters, bridges and other public buildings. There are many of these operations partially completed and many others for which plans have been drawn and money appropriated. If public construction begins, private construction will soon follow as the increase in population requires more housing facilities. I am advised by competent builders that labor costs in this industry do not vary materially from what they have been in the past few years.

Public sentiment ought to urge on Congress immediate action in adjusting war contracts and paying the contractors and others money due them so that this capital may be utilized in carrying on private enterprises. The amount so due is estimated at almost two billions of dollars. There is also much construction work on the railroads of New England which the roads themselves and the national government should be urged to begin at once. It will be of great help to industry to have the tax bill now pending before Congress acted upon. Of course shipping to South America, the far East and Africa would be helpful.

The material resources of the community must be used for the benefit of the people of the community. Such use

is the only thing that gives them value and the only warrant for their existence. Unless this is done by private enterprise it will have to be done through the taxing power and otherwise for the purpose of relieving the suffering caused by unemployment. Every facility is at hand for an era of great prosperity. What is needed is the courage to act. In the exhibition of that courage the government agencies must take the lead.