

ADDRESS ON PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYMENT FOR RETURNING SERVICE MEN AND READJUSTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT IN WAR INDUSTRIES.

Delivered as Presiding Officer at the Conference of Governors and Mayors with President Wilson, East Room, White House, Washington, Tuesday, March 4, 1919.

There are two questions for our consideration at the present time. One is the placing of returning soldiers in productive employment, and the other is the readjustment of those who have been engaged in war industries to the industries of peace. So far as we can discover, there is no very great difficulty as yet in Massachusetts in relation to returning soldiers. More than 90 per cent take care of themselves; and of the 10 per cent who apply for situations many are placed, the only difficulty being with those who have been engaged in building industries, unskilled and office help. The readjustment may be expected to be more difficult, but up to the present time there is no indication that it is working any very great hardship. This is indicated by the advertisements for help and situations wanted. One of the large Boston papers in 1918, for the months of January and February, had 20,723 advertisements for help, and in 1919 for the same period had 22,726. This is an increase of 10 per cent in the number of people who are seeking to employ labor. The number of situations wanted on one Sunday in February, 1918, was 1,115, and in 1919 was 1,050. This indicates a larger call for help and a less call for situations than one year ago. A New York paper shows that help-wanted advertisements in January, 1918, numbered 85,383, and in 1919, 101,086. In February, 1918, they numbered 92,588, and in 1919, 99,822. Our factories are running on short time, but are keeping in their em-

ployment substantially all of their people. The retail trade is extremely good, indicating no lack of money to buy what the people desire. The building trade is yet at a standstill. Massachusetts is planning to spend on building construction \$1,600,000, and on highway construction \$2,800,000, making a total of \$4,400,000. There is in addition to this other building under investigation to the amount of about a million and a half.

The question before us is what to do to start business generally on a peace basis. Of course the first thing to do is to make peace with those with whom we have been at war. Everything is waiting for that. There are other questions pending. One of the things that would be helpful is an immediate and generous settlement of all war claims, both formal and informal contracts. Hundreds of millions are tied up awaiting such settlements. The question of the price of food is one that is fundamental. This depends upon the price of wheat. It is my strong belief that the government should withdraw from any attempt at fixing prices, and let business operate according to the laws of supply and demand so far as domestic commerce is concerned. There ought to be protection from unreasonable foreign competition. If this were to apply to the wheat situation, the price of that food product would be lowered, the price of other cereals would be correspondingly lower, and the price of meat and poultry would go in the same direction. Not merely for the purpose of lowering prices should this be done, but in order that business may understand that all prices are on a natural and not an artificial basis. Until our business does understand this it cannot go forward. This is not to be viewed from a point of local prejudice but as a national question, the decision of which will work by action and reaction for the benefit of all the people of the Nation.

Just as soon as these fundamental difficulties are adjusted there is more likely to be a scarcity of labor than an oversupply of it. In the first place, we are to have in the army and navy nearly half a million men. Our casualty list will take at least 100,000 through death and disability. The

loss from the epidemic which has been raging in our country is not yet known, but runs into the hundreds of thousands. Before the war we had an immigration each year of from 1,200,000 to nearly 2,000,000. The last four years this has dropped down to a very small figure. There will be as a result of the war a great shortage of man power abroad. There was never so much work to be done in the world as at the present time. There was never so much money in America. Where there is power to purchase there will be a demand to be supplied. The only thing that is lacking is an organization of our industries to produce and to supply the market, and a conviction that prices and conditions are on a natural and not an artificial basis.

If the commerce and industry of the country is to conduct itself rather than to be conducted by the government, it is time for it to begin such operation at once. It is time for it to assert itself and to display that courage and enterprise which has been the basis of our wonderful development. It must be under government control or under its own control. It cannot have two masters. The sooner it asserts its independence, the sooner we shall start again on a normal basis for prosperity.

For further information see records in Department of the Interior and the Department of Labor, Washington, D. C.