[Work of the Committee on Emergency Construction]

today numbers of civilian construction men, inspectors . will carry out the military requirements. It is with this military organization that the Committee on Emergency Construction works hand and glove in its advisory and supplementary character. This Committee has not only been of enormous importance in advising the Quarter Master's Department in the planning of the cantonments but it is now doing a piece of magnificent work in advising as to the best way to put the task through. Of course, if the Quarter Master's Department was working in peace times, if it had at its hands, the full number of officers trained in construction, it would be quite unnecessary for it to go outside of its own ranks to get this work done. Our War Department has put through some magnificent pieces of construction work in recent years. The Panama Canal is a great example. The whole country has thrilled with pride at the way in which that great undertaking has been handled but Colonel Goethals had time for the Panama Canal. That whole undertaking cost that is, he spent each year there about million dollars. The building of these thirty-two cantonments will cost eighty-seven million dollars (?). That is almost twice as much as Colonel Goethals spent in one year, and this money must be spent in something like sixteen weeks.

If the Quarter Master's Department had the time, it would write out very fully specifications as to lumber, plumber supplies, roofing paper, cooking utensils, etc.; it would advertise for bids. It would examine and sort the bids; it would award the contracts and then carefully inspect every nail that went into the building as to the way it went in. This work would be done on what is called a "lump sum bid." The contractor would be paid once a month either 85 or 90% of the estimated amount of work performed the month before, and if anything was changed or if something was more was done than originally contracted for, there would be careful adjust-

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used. They have sent out to the leading architects and engineers of the country confidential questionnaires, asking them the names of contractors, the years they have known them, the percentage of work they have done for them, how large they had been, what their specialty was, whether they considered him able to handle economically contracts of $50,000, $100,000 and $500,000 in value. They have asked these engineers and architects to tell them about the largest pieces of work the particular contractor has put through, what his reputation for finishing the work on time was. They have asked him about his organization, whether he kept it up to pitch or not; about his plant, whether they thought him financially able to take a contract up to $50,000, $100,000 and $500,000. They have asked that these questions be answered fully and quickly.

Another set of questions that they have sent out is to the contractors themselves, asking them practically what their experience has been in handling various kinds of construction work; whether they know how to run accounts for laborers, how many men they have housed and fed in camps at various times. Then they have asked them to tell them all about their last three jobs, as well as to give them a complete list of all the jobs they have handled in the last two and a half years.

It is very fine to see how fully and frankly these lists of questions have been answered both by the architects and engineers and by contractors themselves. Somehow under the stress of our great necessity, an extraordinary desire to be frank, to put your cards on the table, not to play for advantage, but simply to get over into the government's hands the best that there is in the country, whether you have it or somebody else has it. All this fine thing comes out and has come out, one feels, in the great majority of answers to these questions.

Coming back to Washington to the Emergency Construction Committee, they

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have been put into the hands of one of the greatest judges of contracts in this kind of work that the men on the Committee knew of. He represents one of the great guarantee companies of the country and his business is to judge contracts, to say whether in his opinion his guarantee company would be willing to underwrite any one of the special contracts. His experience has been wide; the greatest concerns in the country have been accustomed to using him. That is why the Quarter Master's Department is today having the greatest advice available - whether the contractors offering to undertake different departments of the work of building the cantonments are so sound that this particular gentleman's fidelity and guarantee company would feel safe in going on their bond. It really does look as if you could not have very much better backing than that.

But there are other points about these contractors to be considered. He should, if possible, be in the district where the work is being done; that is, it would be very unwise to accept a contractor, however big and able and experienced, whose plant and force were in Nebraska to undertake to build one of General Wood's camps in the Southeast. Somebody whose forces are as near at hand as possible should be employed. He must be available and he must not be tied up by contracts which would prevent his going to work the moment that his contract was signed. He must be a man who could show too that he had the equipment and the labor to be in the field as soon as he was ordered. He should be available for the entire work, not for half of it, to avoid any loss of time. All of this shows how imperative it is if this work is to be done in sixteen weeks that the contractors who have the most experience and the larges t force should be the ones employed.

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To give a piece of work to men who are able to put on the job only a hundred men would be to build up difficulties, for one of the great difficulties in getting things done in a short time is duplication of authority. It would be very much better if the four or five thousand men that will handle this work could be under one great contracting head.

You and I, who are the public, must understand these things, for this vitally important first piece of war work is not going to be properly done unless we take the trouble to understand what it is all about, and to do our share, and it is up to us because the thing is so vitally important to the boys themselves. "I shall not complain of this government if my boy is killed in France and neither will his mother, but I shall hate this government if it lets him die of typhoid in the training camp." One of the great things of the public understanding of this is that the public may do its part in getting out of the way of the government in trying to put the work through. We must lean a new word - it is not so easy a word to learn as cantonment, if it is easier to pronounce - this word is Priority. On the illuminating chart, which points out the relations between military and civilian authority in this piece of construction, and which shows the variety of divisions which handle it, there is alongside Transportation Materials a little block Priority. It is one of the great things to which the Committee on Emergency Construction is giving a great deal of consideration. It means, of course, giving the right of way to the thing which is at the moment the most important to do. In this particular piece of work, if there is but one car, it must be given to water pipes before it is to flooring. If all the labor cannot be handled, the men who are to do the roofing must make way for the men who are to do the sewerage.

We must learn how to make cheerful readjustment of our own private

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undertakings. In the vicinity of all of these camps, it probably will be necessary that labor be released from buildings already under construction in order that the work may go on more rapidly in the camps. That freight, even perishable freight, be sidetracked or better still not sent out in order that the tracks may be free for materials that are needed in the camps.

One very great service that every man and woman can render at this time is that of trying to understand this problem of cantonment building, and to help it by suggestion rather than by efforts to find something to criticise in it. We cannot be too much concerned at this first piece of wwar work to be carried out, so that we can be proud of it . We should be proud that the best brains of the country should be willing to give themselves without money and stint of time to help the government to put it through. We should be proud that we have a government that boldly and generously has broken down all precedence and called these civilian brains to its help. We should be proud that we have a congress that has had the wisdom to furnish such a council as that of National Defense. It is up to the public now to back this undertaking, and that there is no doubt at all that the country will be understanding and sympathetic if the facts are put before it. That is why all of us should be trying to spread the knowledge of what this problem means. Understand the problem and then keep the tracks clear at whatever sacrifice it may be put through.

A very great service will be rendered if the contractors who do not get jobs will cheerfully agree. Washington, of course, is full of them today. They come for the most part with something more than the idea of making money out of a government job in mind. There is many a one who is offering to give his services. There is many a one who would be glad to take it and if in the end he lost on it to cheerfully pocket the loss but

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they cannot all have it. The only consideration in awarding the contracts is size and efficiency of contractor's organization and experience in putting over big jobs and his availability. Many contractors of greatest usefulness on small jobs will have to be refused. It is entirely human to be sore when you do not get what you want, particularly when you know there is a fine desire to be really servicable, perhaps at your own expense behind your bit. It is entirely human when you have been refused under these circumstances to complain, perhaps to complain to your congressman, to stir up your local newspapers to jump on those to whom contracts have been awarded. To look for mistakes and to feel a certain satisfaction when you find them. At the present moment the only true patriotism is that which takes its medicine quietly whether that medicine be the ration which Mr. Hoover proposes to put us on, the draft of our boy, or the failure to get a contract on which we have set our heart.

There is another point of criticism which, no doubt, plenty of people will be inclined to seize upon, that is, the percentage that is allowed on the contract - 7%. There will be many to say - but is it? Let us see why the Committee on Emergency Construction advises the Quarter Master's Department to allow 7%. It is a very pretty and sound piece of argument. Let us suppose it is agreed that only the ~~change~~large and experienced concerns should be employed. Generally speaking, the efficiency and reputation of these great organizations keep them so busy that they are really overtaxed. If they are going to take these government jobs, they must disarrange the work they have on hand, displace men and equipment. There will be loss for them in this. The overhead expenses of these great concerns is very large. The Committee on Emergency Construction says that the lowest overhead expense that they have found in investigating contractors proper for this concern is that of a company which does about thirty million dollars worth

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of work in a year. Its overhead is exactly 2% and it has been making above this the last two years, about 6%. Overhead charges run as high in some cases as five and a half percent and the Committee think they average about three and a half percent. Suppose it is three and a half, you will see that at 7%, the contractor will net not 7% but three and a half percent on his work; that is, for every million dollars worth of work he will get $35,000, and this is much less than the government is paying the shipbuilders, the gunmakers and many other manufactories which it is at present employing.

But somebody comes along, here are these people who are willing to take less. Here was a small contractor who said he would be glad to do it without any profit. It should not be the policy of the government of the United States in this great war to allow any man to work without a reasonable profit where it can be helped. No business should be unduly crippled. There will be loss enough in the tremendous and constant readjustments that all of us must make in our material lives as the war goes on. We cannot and ought not to say "business as usual" but we can and ought to say "business shall not be crippled." Just as we ought to fight the hateful thing that is called war profits, so we ought to fight loss at any point where it can be avoided. The men who carry out the contracts on these cantonments ought to make a reasonable profit for the sake of the rest of the country, the stability of things in general. It is in understanding all of this, getting into our minds the essentials of the great problem, absorbing them sympathetically, and then trying to make the public inclined to criticism and pettishness understand it all. It seems to be the big public duty of the American public in this affair of building in sixteen weeks sixteen cities for our 500,000 boys, and so building them that no boy when he arrives may lack any one of the underlying essentials for health.

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