

CHAPTER XIX.—CONSTRUCTION

CONSPECTUS

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The purpose of this Chapter is to co-ordinate such official statistics on the construction industry as are available and to give, so far as possible, a complete picture of construction from year to year. Official statistics, although constantly undergoing improvement, have many gaps and it is necessary to try to bridge these by presenting data from outside sources. For instance, Section 3 contains data from a private source on construction contracts awarded during specified years. These are in the nature of a forecast of the amount of construction work contemplated in a given year. It is usually some time after contracts are awarded that work actually starts and, in the case of contracts of large-scale undertakings, the work is seldom finished within one year. On the other hand, the official statistics of the Annual Census of Construction given in Section 4 cover work of all kinds actually completed in a given year.

Section 1.—The Government and the Construction Industry

Subsection 1.—Public Contracts

Since the establishment of the Department of Reconstruction and Supply in January, 1946, Government reconstruction programs, so far as they concern construction projects, are determined as to urgency and put into execution in order of importance. Also, each project is scored as to whether the available labour and materials required might be deterring any more necessary housing construction. Close liaison is carried on between the Department of Reconstruction and Supply and the Department of Public Works.

Subsection 2.—Government Aid to Civil Housing*

Canada's supply of adequate housing falls far short of actual needs. While this condition undoubtedly existed prior to the 1930's, it was not widely recognized. With the general depression of economic activity through the period 1929-36, residential construction fell to such a low level that already-existing overcrowding and obsolescence were further aggravated. The high vacancy rate in the depression years, particularly for apartment dwellings, was a product not of an over-supply of dwellings, but of enforced "doubling-up" of families whose incomes were not sufficient to provide separate living quarters.

The construction industry had not recovered from the slump of the early 1930's when war production began to drain off materials and labour required for housing construction. At the same time, increased personal income allowed many

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