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Architecture, Building, Engineering and Industries

CHAS. E. WHEELER - Editor

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Editorial Comment

Tendering Difficulties Now that the Municipal and Government authorities are getting down to bed-rock of practice on the housing problem they are realising why private investors will have nothing to do with it. A bold scheme of the Wellington City Council is hung up because tenders cannot be obtained for the work. Builders are busy, but terribly handicapped by shortage of labour, and they cannot undertake contracts with a penalty clause to add to their troubles in the way of uncertain prices. Quotations on some important lines, instead of being reduced, appear to be hardening, so that tendering is one of arts beyond the compass of mortal man just at present. The Wellington City Council might be able to do better if it is prepared to shoulder some of the risk itself. A contract might be subject to a scale of prices laid down at the time, and be subject to revision on production of invoices showing increases during the currency of the work. We understand that the Labour Department has done better with its tenders for two hundred buildings in various parts of the country, and that even in Wellington it secured tenders for some of the houses required. Whether the prices will come within the limit fixed by Statute is another matter, and that may yet hold up the work. The country has to face the acceptance of the principle that reversion to pre-war conditions is hopelessly out of the question. Even the salaries of Members of Parliament are going up. Twenty houses for railwaymen are to be built by the Railway Department, which has its staff capable of doing the work. It is more than likely that the Government will have to extend the staff of the Workers' Dwellings branch of the Labour Department, so as to undertake much of the building programme itself, or at the most, call for tenders for "labour only." But all these shifts and schemes are limited by the available labour, which is the scarcest and dearest commodity in the market. Immigration of artisans as well as farmers is being urged, and the Government is keen to do something, though hampered by the very high passage rates from England. These will never come down to pre-war level, and consequently the problem of cost is serious.