

# MINISTER OUTLINES TASK OF REPATRIATION

## WORK OF CO-ORDINATING FABRIC OF REHABILITATION DESCRIBED BY CHAIRMAN

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form, everywhere you hear the question asked as to whether the Government or Governments in this country have made the necessary plans and preparations to take hold and take charge of these new problems that stare us in the face. And that is the question I propose to discuss with you to-day for a short time.

### REALIZE TREMENDOUS JOB.

I suppose, Mr. President, it would be entirely out of place for me to talk politics to a gathering of this kind, but I intend to say one or two words on the side, and I trust I shall not trespass on the rules of your club. There is a good deal of questioning to-day also with reference to what is going to take place at Ottawa. There are rumours floating through the country to the effect that there is a good deal of dissension at Ottawa, that within Cabinet circles conditions have arisen that would seem to indicate that there will shortly be a breaking up, leading possibly shortly to a general election in this country. Well, now, I want to tell you, and I think you have a right to know, I think the people of Canada have a right to know, that so far as I can see and so far as my judgment leads me to see there is not the slightest indication at Ottawa that there is to be anything in the nature of a smash at any time. We have taken up our new task as we took up the old. We realize the dangers and the difficulties that confront our nation. We realize that we have a tremendous job on our hands, and I think I can say there is not one single member in that Government who does not believe that it would be criminal during the next few months in Canada to force a general election upon our people. No! There is too much at stake. The problems, the immediate problems which this nation has to face are too important to play politics just now. I say they are too important, and I wish to assure you that so far as the Government is concerned there is not the slightest tendency in that direction at the present time. We propose to continue until our men are home; that is, provided the Parliament will let us. You can understand the Government must continue to have the confidence of the majority of Parliament. But so far as the members themselves are concerned, they propose to carry on. In my judgment, there should be no election in this country until our soldiers are back. Surely if any men have ever earned the right to exercise their full rights of citizenship it is these men who have carried on over there during these last three or four years. It would not be fair to have any appeal to the people of this country until these men are back and until they have the opportunity to take part in the election, and make themselves thoroughly acquainted with the situation here in Canada in order that they might have their share in establishing here whatever Government we think advisable to carry on the nation's affairs.

### "RECONSTRUCTION" MEANS MUCH.

Just a word or two with reference to that term which was bandied about so much, the word "reconstruction." It implies a great deal. It implies more in other countries than it does in our own. The term reconstruction is a big one to-day. It conveys the idea of there being a smash, a breaking down, a destruction of things both physical and otherwise. We have not had very much of that thing in Canada. We have been fortunate enough to be out of the war area. Reconstruction, as applied to countries like Belgium, Northern France, Serbia, Rumania, and other European countries is a very different thing from what it is in Canada and while Canada to-day is an entirely different Canada in many

respects from what it was four years ago we have our reconstruction problems, and to boil the thing down to a nutshell I think I can perhaps express it best in this way. Our people as a result of this war are thinking in a different way to-day from what they did four years ago. There is more independence of thought in Canada. Our people's hearts and souls in this country have been touched as they were never touched before. I want you to take that home. It is something that our people in this country must take home. You know there are many people who have the idea we are going to get back to the old lackadaisical ways shortly, that we are simply going to assume our old conditions. That is not true. It is not true, I say. No! I say our people have at last wakened up to the idea that they must take an interest in the public affairs of the country. You know previously our people took an interest in public affairs immediately prior to an election and you know I can say something else just as true—even at election time a very large number of people did not use their judgment or their reason at all. They simply followed their ideals of party politics. The people of Canada are not in that humor to-day. There are a good many people, a good many good people, who have a very different notion. There are many who think that all they have to do is to beat the big drum around and their faithful followers will all follow in line as usual. It cannot be done. It won't be done. The people of this country intend something else and you mark my word that when the time comes when the people of this country have an opportunity of deciding as to the class of government they shall have in this country, what kind of policy will be put in force, the people are going to use their heads and think and they are going to act as they think as they never did before.

There are some reconstruction problems we have in Canada that are long past due. Our country has been more or less stagnant, so far as policy is concerned. We have not been progressive in our national policy, we have been lagging behind the times and our reconstruction work in this country is going to consist very largely of putting into operation policies of various kinds that will tend toward the development of this country and tend towards bettering the conditions of our people. These, mainly, are our reconstruction problems, problems that must be taken hold of, grappled with, and put into operation just as soon as possible. Many people wonder if anything very serious in the way of an upheaval is going to take place in Canada. I say frankly I don't. I don't. We are going to have no earthquake. We are going to have no Bolshevism except in little spots. The great majority of our people are solid and sane and we are going to get through this condition that we face with a minimum of trouble, with very much less trouble, I think, than they will in many other countries in the world. Now by that I don't mean to say that we won't have unrest and that we won't have disturbances. I do not mean that at all. What I mean is this, that in my opinion the people of Canada are so constituted from every standpoint that that sort of thing, Bolshevism, cannot grow and develop in this country to any extent. But you business men must play your part in preventing this growth and spread. You must do that. You have your share. You must play your part in this problem. Unless the central government and other governments and our various organizations, and our business men and the people of this country do their share towards dealing with the problems we have on hand then there may be danger of our

having worse than unrest and we will have serious disturbances in this Canada of ours.

### BRINGING MEN HOME.

But as your president intimated I have come here mainly for the purpose of discussing with you the work of a new committee that was created at Ottawa very shortly after the armistice was signed. I refer to what is called the "Repatriation and Unemployment Committee of the Privy Council." Let me state briefly what the immediate problem is that confronts us. We raised an army of something like 450,000 men, over that. Many of these have been brought home. It is estimated that we now have overseas some 250,000 men and that in addition to that we have some 2,600 munition workers who went across to Great Britain to help in factories there. And besides that it is estimated we have 50,000 dependents in Great Britain, that is soldiers' wives and their families. We have brought home somewhere in the neighbourhood of 22,000 dependents. Our boys over there have been marrying so rapidly and the children have been coming so quickly that according to the best estimates there are now 50,000 dependents, making a total of 300,000 Canadians to be brought home and it is calculated that we cannot bring more than 30,000 a month. A good many of our people are inclined to complain at that. Our various departments, and particularly the Militia Department at Ottawa, are simply deluged with requests to bring people home. Everybody wants to come home first or else want their relatives to come home first. This is simply impossible. The rate at which our people will come back, soldiers and dependents, is determined largely by two factors, the shipping factor and the railroad factor. In so far as shipping is concerned there is a possibility that we may be able to bring our people home at a rate exceeding 30,000 a month, but in so far as our railways are concerned the whole question has been gone thoroughly into and we know as a matter of fact that it is impossible, utterly impossible, for our railways in Canada, with the facilities they have at their disposal, to handle more than 30,000 a month. That simply means that while there will be discontent and all sorts of grumbling and kicking and everything of that kind, that it will be ten months at least before we are able to get people home. Well, of course, the bringing of these people home is only a small thing. Arrangements have been pretty well completed in so far as that is concerned. Arrangements have been made to handle these people as expeditiously as possible. If I had time I might go into the details but I shall not take up your time with that end of the discussion. Simply let me assure you of this, that in so far as making arrangements in the old country and gathering these people together, putting them on ships, carrying them over on the ships, landing at the harbours, caring for them in the harbours, and carrying them to their homes, every detail is being carefully worked out. There is still cause for complaint. Things happen that should not happen. You must remember that there are a great many people dealing with this problem but I wish to assure you of this, that in so far as all the details of transportation are concerned every possible thing is being watched day by day and studied out and improved and we hope the full machinery will be in full operation and that there will be very little cause for complaint in the future.

### REPATRIATION IS BIG END.

Well, now, as I say, that is only a small thing, a small end of the work of bringing our people home. The big end of it has to do with what we are going to do with these people when we do bring them home. I refer particularly to our returned soldier, and he must be repatriated. What does that word mean in essence? It means that we must use every effort to put every one of these soldiers back into our civil life, put them back in such a way that they will be useful citizens, that the conditions in which the individual soldier lives will be at least equal to, if not better, than they ever were before. That is our problem and it is not a slight problem.

People ask, is the Government ready? Many have an idea that nothing has been done, that chaos exists at Ottawa, that we are totally unprepared, that we have not given any thought or attention to that problem. Well, that is entirely erroneous. I say it is entirely erroneous. As a matter of fact the Government, in its various departments and its chief officials have given a great deal of time and attention and thought and study to the various problems that surround that question, and a good deal of progress has been made. I will give you some indications.

The problem is not new. We have been at war for four years. The problem has been on our books for some time. We have brought home and cared for and placed back in the nation a good many thousands of men, so that it is only a continuation of the work that we have been doing previously, simply on a large scale. What has been done in that direction? In the first place, so far as demobilization is concerned, while our men were coming back in small numbers—very little difficulty was experienced. The Department of Militia had carefully worked out all the plans for the demobilization of the army after the war had ended. The matter had been gone into. Officials went over there, the very best officials went over to Europe, to Great Britain, and sat down with the best Government officials there and went into this whole problem exhaustively and worked it out in all its details. Then the armistice came and the question arose as to the demobilization, and all our plans were upset overnight. We had to scrap to a very large extent all the plans that had been made, and then they had to be scrapped because the boys in the army would not come home in the way it was decided they should come home. I am not going into the story. I don't blame them at all. But the result of it was we had to get busy, and it was no easy job, and devise some other ways and means of undertaking this plan. Plans are practically completed. General Mewburn gave me the assurance that all the details of the new plan are practically worked out and that everything will be in operation very shortly, and I am sure successfully as well. But I merely mention that to show you that in connection with this problem we have on our hands, no matter how carefully you may plan and prepare, all your work may be scrapped overnight because new conditions arise that may make your work impossible. I have found that out time and again, not only in connection with this, but other problems, both war work and peace work. We have very little to guide us. We have not had any experience in the way of demobilization. You have got to face experiences as they arise from day to day, and you never know from what quarter some condition may arise that will upset your whole plan. In normal times it is very easy to carry on the work of the Government, because there is precedent to guide you, but in times like these it is all new, and you have to use the best brains you have in order to meet the various situations as they arise. Well, that was one problem that was dealt with.

### SOLDIERS' SETTLEMENT.

Here is another, and that is the question that has arisen in this country of ours and that is the question of Soldiers' Settlement. You know it is very strange the idea that many people have with regard to that and kindred problems. Why it is just as easy as rolling off a log. Every man on the street has a solution; every man on the street could solve a problem like that or any other difficult problem much more quickly than that darned old government at Ottawa. The government at Ottawa apparently is dead and doing nothing, and doesn't know how to do anything, but if you only gave him a chance, he says, I would fix it up very quickly. Well, let me tell you there is no more difficult problem in a sense than that question of Soldiers' Settlement. It is a tremendous task and

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