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Our Responsibility

The other day we had the opportunity of listening to a big brained and big hearted man who had served in the front trenches, had been decorated by his king, and sent across to this continent to preach the gospel of "carry on." To this man the "boys," not forgetting the women who ministered unto them, were not only the salt of the earth in physique and mentality but in broadness of soul and bigness in elimination of self. The speaker knew what of he spoke for he had gone through his hell in the trenches. As he was describing the mightiness and the awfulness of it all on the fields of Flanders—since the begining of 1917 Greater Britain has borne the brunt of the war in the actual fighting alone as the casualty lists sorrowfully show—and the magnificent sacrifices of the folk in the Old Country, the thoughts that passed through our mind were those of comparison. What real sacrifices had Canada made, outside our splendid men and women at the front and their families. And to particularize—what had the Municipal Councils, considering their opportunities, done to help on the great cause? And the conclusion that was forced upon us was, that either as individuals or as units we in Canada had a long way to go before we could say that we had reached the standard of self-denial and sacrifice that had been attained even by the civilian population across the water. Yet we are fighting the same enemies and for the same object—freedom to live in the best sense of the word.

This does not mean that there are no exceptions. There are many men and women in Canada to-day who are doing real patriotic work and others who are denying themselves to the extent of hurting; but they are few enough to make them exceptions. In Ottawa itself there are quite a number of Canadians of outstanding ability, who have placed their services at the disposal of the country for patriotic pay—little or none at all. There are the Food and

Fuel Boards, and the Registration Board, the executives of which are made up of the best brains, at a small cost to the country. There are the War and Reconstruction committees of the Cabinet whose secretaries are giving their services for fees that will hardly pay their rent. There is the Advisory Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, made up of the leaders in the industrial and scientific world who are not only giving their services free, but actually paying their own expenses to attend the sessions, which during the last year have been almost continuous. And there is not the slightest doubt but that every member of the present government, whatever his politics may be, is working as he has never done before so as to carry out his part in the great task of government during this time of stress. Then come the many voluntary associations scattered throughout the country, etc., etc.

But the great mass of the Canadian people have hardly been touched by the war—certainly not to the extent to term it a sacrifice—and the Municipal councils, with very few splendid exceptions, have as yet done little in the way of war work. The reason given for such national inactivity at this time on the part of the local authorities is usually the same—we have not been asked. Which is true so far as direct invitations not being given to do any specific work, and no doubt had the government sought the co-operation of the local councils from the first, instead of creating new machinery in local centres to carry out its war measures, much money and time would have been saved to the country. But there is much more war work to do yet, and there is still time for the government to realize, and appreciate, the help that the local councils can give. In the meantime there is always the responsibility on each council to see that the community does its local share towards winning the war. Every bushel of wheat conserved, every vacant lot cultivated helps to beat the Hun, and the local councils have it in their power to see that much food is conserved and many vacant lots cultivated.