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The Returned Soldier Problem

Mayor Gray of New Westminster in a stirring address before the Convention of the Union of British Columbia Municipalities—the report of which appears in this issue of the Journal — took up the problem of the Returned Soldiers. “The first aim of all” said Mayor Gray “should be, and let it be fixed indelibly in our minds, that these men, who voluntarily gave up their civilian duties at the call of the nation, must not suffer any loss by reason of their patriotism when they again return to civil life.”..... Frankly we in Canada cannot pat ourselves on the back for the way in which we have treated those of our soldiers who have already returned wounded and battle weary..... We as a nation made great promises to those who left these shores to fight for us, but these promises as yet have been badly kept..... Everyone of the boys went away under a halo of glory; too many of them who have come back have been made to feel their dependence on the charity of those who had not sufficient spirit to go themselves. It is true that the Military Hospitals Commission is doing good work in giving a vocational training to the men who cannot follow their former employment, but such benefits are limited. . . The great bulk of the returned soldiers, with families, had to secure employment of some kind as quickly as possible so as to better enable their families to get out of that state of respectable semi-starvation, caused by the increased cost of the necessities of life on a meagre income, which had been their lot while the bread winner was in khaki. . . . But the irony of it all is that very few of the men have the same earning capacity as previous to their going to war, meaning that even with the pension the income of the average family of the returned men is less than what it was. To illustrate: a motor mechanic before joining the army in 1914 was earning \$120 per month. He was sent to Flanders where he lost

a leg and part of his fingers. In due time he returned to Canada and was discharged with a pension of \$24 per month. He could no longer follow his former employment and he now does clerical work for \$60 per month, making a total income of \$84. That is, the income to his family has been reduced by \$36., and this on an increased cost in living. We wish we could record this as an exceptional case, but in our enquiries we have not come across a single case of a workman soldier where his income, including pension, is equal to what it was before joining the ranks.

We had occasion some time back to take up the pension question in these columns, when our criticism was taken exception to by the Pension Board as not being fair, particularly in view of the fact that the amount of the pensions was limited by parliament. Thus the responsibility of inadequately compensating those who have gone through a “hell” for us rests entirely with the nation’s representatives. And they have failed.

If we as a nation have not lived up to our responsibility and promise to those who have already returned wounded and broken, how are we going to live up to our larger responsibility of doing our duty to the whole Canadian army when it returns home? When this war ceases with hard won victory on our side it will be because of the splendid valour of our troops. What then will be their recompense? What preparation is being made to ensure their making the living wage for their families they have the right to expect? And the war may end at any time. These are questions that apply to every Canadian citizen and affects every community and on the way questions are answered depends our success in being prepared for the boys when they come home.