

Municipal Responsibility in Canada's Preparedness

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The other day huge demonstrations of citizens were held simultaneously in 1,000 British cities to pass a resolution—and only one—of determination to fight the Huns to a finish. The resolution was proposed in London by the Prime Minister of England and in Montreal, by the Prime Minister of Canada, and so on in every great city this democratic Empire expressed renewed confidence in its mission, giving new evidence to the world of the spirit, undivided, of a strong people, working to bring about the consummation of that standard of "playing the game," for which so much has been sacrificed.

Towards the successful pursuit of this war Canadian municipalities have done much and will do more before the end. But we also have a great deal more to do if this Dominion is not to be caught at a disadvantage when hostilities cease. The spirit of preparedness to meet the great peace begotten of victory, has already entered the minds of the leaders in different parts of the Empire, even in the Old Country, and though our Federal Government is doing good work to meet the problems that will beset this country it will be largely up to the local authorities to work out the details, for when this war is over things will not be as they were. New conditions will arise that will affect every citizen in Canada in his or her relations to the community. What the full effect of these new conditions on our national life will be is beyond our ken, but this we do know, that a new significance will be given to the word citizen, and if the great conflict will have taught us anything it will be in a fuller realization of the British conception of nationhood, for which our best manhood is now fighting so valiantly in Flanders. These splendid fellows are in their very sacrifice paying the price for the great privileges that we are enjoying in Canada—they are the men who are shouldering the burden of nationhood so that we might meet in peace to-day. And what a sacrifice — in the daily toll of casualties — only those who have their men at the front can fully understand it. But our boys now in the trenches, are thinking hard and those who come back will have something to say in the governing of this country, and rightly so, too, meaning that it will go hard with the men who have failed in their public stewardship. It is of our municipal stewardship that I would speak to you to-day.

The stewardship of local government, to my mind, is the most responsible at the present moment, for this reason:— That the councils, by the exigencies of their office, are in daily touch with the people and consequently have, or should have, the greatest influence in leading the citizens to realize their responsibility, and those of us in the municipal field who are not privileged to be on the firing line must make every effort to see that a good account is given in every urban and rural community of

that stewardship, not only in the proper collection and spending of the tax-payer's money, but in considering ways and means of preparing for the homecoming of Canada's returning heroes. In other words, it is up to the municipal councils to take the lead in preparing Canada for the proper placing of returned soldiers—both whole and wounded—for the re-employment of the great army of munition workers who will be thrown out of employment on the cessation of hostilities, and for the proper reception and selection of that vast immigration that will be a fact, in spite of what some public men would say to the contrary.

This is a big task and some might think it ridiculous that we should prepare for peace when we are still in the throes of the mighty struggle. Yet the war will cease on no uncertain terms and when that time comes we must be in a fit position to forge ahead, for let us remember that while this Empire went into the war for a principle; that principle means the right to our own people as well as to those for whom we took up the sword.

Some again will say that the suggestions I make are not municipal in character—that they are outside the responsibility of civic councils. To those who would advance this argument I would say again that the local fathers are the logical leaders in everything pertaining to the progress of the community. They certainly are made responsible when things go wrong, as instanced in the unemployment problem that faced this country at the beginning of the war, when the mayors met at Ottawa to try and bring about some scheme for the alleviation of the distress caused by that unemployment—but which was happily found unnecessary because of the new but temporary industry of munition making. But for twelve months things were very bad for the working men and women of this country, unemployment was general, and the councils had to bear the burden, and I can tell you this gentlemen, such conditions will come again, only worse, when this war is over, unless something is done now.

To Get Down to Something Concrete I Will Ask You for a Moment to Consider Our Responsibility as Municipal Councils to Returned Soldiers.

At a conference of the Federal and Provincial Governments, held some time back, a general plan was submitted and approved which embodied the creation of provincial committees to act in concert with the Military Hospitals Commission. The first report of this commission is now published and to those of us who at times doubt the efficacy of parliamentary commissions the report makes good reading for the reason that the recommendations are of a very tangible and practical nature. It allows for the special training of wounded soldiers,