

A National System of Labor Bureaus

For four years Miss Wileman has been pounding at the door of Canadian common sense to gain admission with her system of national labour bureaus. She has met with many rebuffs, which is strange when we boast of the progressive virility of our people, and when it is considered that the system has been successfully tried out in Great Britain (with 430 exchanges), in Australia, New Zealand, and in France; in fact, in all the progressive countries of the world. The excuse given out at first was that there was no need—everybody was so busy that there would be no work for the bureaus, but this hollow mockery of pretense was extinguished in the memorial of mayors to the government last May, which partially reads as follows:

There are in the Provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta and west of the Great Lakes in Ontario no less than 33,000 unemployed, and conditions in the cities of the older portions of Canada are not much better.

The fact is Canada has no machinery of any kind for the distribution of labour and immigration. We know that some of the provinces have bureaus of a kind, but they are so wrapped up in official red tape as to be effete, and the immigration authorities seem to confine their energies to the placing of farm laborers and domestic servants only, totally ignoring the greater body of immigrants, who are not fitted by their training to go on the land. It is true that the authorities have not encouraged this class of immigrants, but we have to remember that the industrial worker is with us because of Canada—right or wrong—determining to become a manufacturing country. And frankly we fail to see that she, considering her vast natural opportunities, has made a mistake in creating industries other than farming. Since the opening out of the country's vast resources and the harnessing of its water powers have laid before the people their great opportunity in the manufacturing field, industrial Canada is even dominating agricultural Canada, and this in face of the slogan that Canada is essentially an agricultural country. It is history repeating itself, for taking the example of the United States or even Great Britain, the basic wealth of which is agriculture, as in Canada, their wonderful growth and progress date from the utilization of their mineral resources, and from that to manufacturing, was but a step. Canada has already reached the manufacturing stage, which though still in its infancy is of sufficient importance to be a large factor in the progress of the country, so that the question of the industrial worker is a very pertinent one. No discouragement on the part of the authorities is going to stop him from coming to Canada, and anything of a penal nature would be suicidal.

But even with the agricultural worker the immigration authorities seemed to have failed, in spite of the assurance of the assistant superintendent of immigration that they can place every agriculturist in a job, as the following extracts taken from the memorial, already mentioned, show—

While we have received a large number of immigrants from Europe, presumably with the object of settling our vast area of unused land, the end anticipated has largely failed, and the man who was a farmer in Europe and came to us to farm, has become a city dweller and a consumer. . . . That 25,000 of the unemployed (33,000) in the west-

ern section of the country are immigrants of the agricultural countries of Europe.

That 65 per cent of the immigrants brought into Western Canada by the Dominion Government during the last three years have not taken up land.

That the Province of Saskatchewan during the three years 1912 to 1914 inclusive, received 51,041 immigrants from the agricultural countries of Europe and during the same period only 16,310 homesteads were taken by peoples of these nationalities.

A careful survey of the unemployed in Winnipeg showed that 70.2 per cent of the destitute citizens of foreign birth of that city were owners of land before their departure for Canada, and that 16.8 per cent were farm laborers, making a total of 87 per cent agriculturalists.

The municipal bureau where it exists, is too limited in its present form for much usefulness, and while we believe the suggested Provincial system of labour exchanges as recommended by the Ontario Commission on Unemployment will be a step in the direction of solving the problem of unemployment, as far as the Province of Ontario is concerned, the chain will be but short. It seems to us that the time has come for Canada to open the door to the opportunity afforded by Miss Wileman and her scheme. At least let us test her wares. As we understand it, the scheme in short is that a labour Bureau be placed in every community throughout the Dominion with a central bureau at Ottawa, under the care of a Commission of about three, with executive powers like the present Railway Commission and which in reality will be the clearing and training house for the Dominion, and that as far as possible the present machinery of the municipalities be used. The expenses to be borne by and under the control of the Federal Government. The scheme would seem to be in keeping with the following recommendation of the mayors memorial.

That the Government establish a system of industrial exchanges throughout the country whereby men can be assisted in moving from a locality where no demand for labor exists to one where some means of employment may be obtained.

The strength of the idea to our mind is in its simplicity and its commonsense. We recognize that the suggested bureau will not create employment, but it will eliminate for all time, (because there will be no charge), those hold-ups, termed employment agencies, which are located usually in the foreign quarter of Canada's principal cities, and which make a practice of bleeding the immigrant of his last dollar. The chain system is especially valuable in a country of long distances, where employment is always a serious problem to the man belonging to a specialized and consequently limited trade. A very important point claimed in favour of a national labour bureau is the comparative ease with which the employable and unemployable are separated, to the benefit of the one and the detriment of the other.

Canada by her immigration policy of the last fifteen years was supposed to assume the responsibility of caring for her immigrants. This, we have shown, she has failed to do, as the dumping of the majority of them in the cities denote. This will be enhanced ten-fold after the war. How are the authorities going to solve the problem? The National Labour Bureau can at least be tried,