

*Unemployment*

government, by agreement with the provinces, undertook the care of single, homeless unemployed, since the work was sure to grow it was obviously necessary that there should be an organization sufficiently Canada-wide in scope to take care of the work. There was only one department of this government that could possibly undertake that work without the creation of new machinery. The Department of Public Works could not do the work; the Department of Labour could not do it; the Department of the Interior could do it only to the extent that they were interested in the national parks, and it was no considered desirable to give them powers outside their natural terrain. But all Canada is divided into military districts. In each district there is an officer commanding, who has at his side a deputy engineer officer, a supply officer and a medical officer. There, then, existed at that time a skeleton organization which could be augmented readily to carry out the work. The fact that we had to listen in this house many times to the charge that the government was militaristic in its aims and that it used military suasion in the camps, was merely another instance of any stick being good enough for an opposition to beat the government with.

One of the very first actions the government took on attaining office was to appoint a special committee of three to look into and report upon this question of relief camps. The first thing that committee did was to pay a visit to the United States and look into questions connected with the CCC camps in that country. It is not in the least surprising that their report showed that in no particular way was that problem comparable with the Canadian problem. It was not necessary to appoint a committee to find that out, for it is all in the files of the Department of National Defence, prepared not only by the officers of that department but also by the officers of social organizations all over Canada who for a year or two had been examining and reporting upon these matters on their own initiative. But I do want to direct attention to one or two statements made in that report. On the question of militarism I quote from page 2:

While the CCC camps are under the direct control of army reserve officers, who wear full military uniforms and demand military recognition from the men, it has been found that the transient type resents military administration. Very little trouble has been experienced from communists, but agitators are summarily dismissed from the camps.

And over the page the report states:

... no police authority is vested in the camp administrators.

[Mr. Stirling.]

Taking these two statements together it is evident that the problem which was being handled in this way in the United States could not possibly be handled in the same way in Canada. I remember, when the house was in committee last session, someone in the opposition making the definite statement that there existed a camp or camps in which uniform tunics had to be worn, salutes had to be given, rifles were for use for drill, and drill was carried on morning after morning. That was an absolute untruth from beginning to end.

One of the questions the committee was to look into particularly was the efforts that had been made by the government, through its superintendents, to provide the men in the camps with recreational opportunities. I am passing through this report rapidly merely because I want to put on record two or three particular matters. I direct attention to a paragraph on page 5 in which the committee reports:

Having in mind the camps visited during the past several weeks, the members of your committee wish to point out that with few, if any, exceptions a very definite effort has been made to meet the needs of men in relief camps for education and recreation.

Then I want to put on record the last paragraph but one, for in many ways it appears to me that had the Department of National Defence wanted to write a justification of what it had done and a description of how it had been done, they hardly could have done it in fairer language than is contained in this paragraph:

The Department of National Defence has built up an organization that has been fair to the men under its charge, and efficient in the administration of the various activities in the management of the camps. The work is being carried on in addition to the ordinary departmental duties, assisted by a small civilian staff, reflecting a decided saving to the exchequer. It should be pointed out that the staff officials of the Department of National Defence are by training eminently suited to the task of organization work of this character, and in this regard have rendered a distinct service during a most trying time. To brand the camps as military establishments is unfair. In our inspection not the slightest trace of the general conception of military discipline was in evidence. In fact, the officers of the Department of National Defence have leaned backwards in this regard. Not one man was seen in military uniform. Those in the service whose duties carried them into the camp wore civilian clothes. As far as we could observe, the administration is of a non-political character, a factor of vital importance in an undertaking requiring the utmost discretion if serious trouble is to be avoided.

I am very glad indeed to have this opportunity of paying in a few words public tribute to the officers of the Department of National Defence. They were given work to do that