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Chas. C. Nixon, Superintending Editor
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Mary M. Murphy, Managing Editor
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EDITORIAL

January, 1918

What of Soldiers' Pensions?

By STEPHEN LEACOCK

FEW people realize the magnitude of the problem that will be before the country after the war in the form of the pensions' list.

The "Man on the Street," whoever that is, is generally regarded as the touchstone of public opinion and sentiment. If he were asked what ought to be done about the pensions, he would say without hesitation that he wanted wounded and disabled soldiers, and the dependents of those who have fallen, to enjoy a pension. He would want the pensions to be on a liberal scale with no niggardliness about it. He would be quite willing, more than willing, to pay for it. Send him the bill and let him hear no more about it. After which, being now for three years quite accustomed to problems of appalling magnitude, he would turn to consider something else.

If one were to tell him that the amount of the bill, already incurred, represents a charge upon our revenue of some eight million dollars a year, and that over sixteen hundred new pensions are being granted in each current month, he would be properly interested. It would serve him as a topic of conversation in his home or his club for several days: until such time as he began to forget whether one had said eight million or eighty million. After which he would fall back on the idea that the country will pay it anyhow, and would cease to talk about it. For, truth to say, the head of the "Man on the Street" has been of late so battered and dented with enormous figures of war debts, liberty loans, and colossal expenditures generally, that millions, even billions, leave little mark upon it.

The "Man on the Street" is, as usual, partly right and partly wrong. He is perfectly right, good fellow that he is, in feeling that the bill has got to be paid. His conscience tells him that the burden of the war, as far as it can be lifted with more dollars and cents, must rest upon the shoulders of all and not on the devoted few. But he is wrong when he thinks that the vast and intricate national problem involved can be dismissed as a mere matter of dollars and cents, as a mere addition to our annual budget with nothing more needed than to pay it.

We need not look far from home to find a country in which the pensions problem, in the hands of an easy-going, generous and opulent people, became one of the greatest difficulties of public life and an ever-flowing source of political jobbery and corruption. "We have paid in taxes," said the New York "Times" the other day in speaking of the pensions' problem, as it will affect the United States, "twice as much for pensions as we borrowed to wage the war, and we are still paying at a burdensome rate. The question as to how the nation shall safe-guard the future of its soldiers and sailors is second only to that regarding the finances of the war."

THE first truth to be realized is that the war has, in all matters of government, taken us into a new world. The old relation of the individual to the state is finished. A nation which calls its men to arms under compulsion of the law on the ground that the nation is and must be a unit for the sake of which the life of the individual must

be sacrificed, incurs a new set of responsibilities to match the new duties which it imposes. There are two sides to conscription. If the state forces men to fight for the common welfare, then the state must hold itself responsible for the welfare of the single man. We must have in future no such social irony as unemployment; with men willing to work, but standing idle in the market place: we must be done with pauperism, with sweated labor, with the half-starvation, the long hours, the crowded dwellings and the stunted lives of the great submerged mass of the lower grades of the population. The old creed of every man for himself has broken down. In place of it has come a new doctrine of social solidarity in which the welfare of each is the common cause of all.

Table I.
CASUALTIES.

	Sept. 30, 1916			March 31, 1917			August 31, 1917		
	Offrs.	Others	Total	Offrs.	Others	Total	Offrs.	Others	Total
Killed (in action)...	400	6,754	7,154	588	11,566	12,154	993	18,467	19,460
Killed (wounds)...	121	2,712	2,833	186	4,202	4,388	305	6,432	6,737
Killed (disease)....	27	574	601	50	1,037	1,089	72	1,400	1,472
Wounded.....	1,458	32,240	33,698	2,115	49,989	52,104	3,321	78,316	81,637
Prisoners.....	77	2,063	2,140	94	2,303	2,397	116	2,471	2,587
Presumed dead....	18	873	891	31	1,210	1,241	71	3,087	3,158
Missing.....	40	1,183	1,223	79	2,598	2,677	74	1,049	1,123
	2,141	46,399	48,540	3,143	72,905	76,048	4,952	111,222	116,174

Table II.
STATISTICS OF ENLISTMENT, OVERSEAS SERVICE AND PENSIONS.

	Sept. 30, 1916	March 31, 1917	August 31, 1917
Number of Men Enlisted C.E.F.....	160,160	407,302	431,455
Number of Men Overseas.....	229,692	297,000	330,482
Casualties to date: killed and missing	8,377	14,851	20,583
Casualties to date: wounded, etc....	33,698	52,104	81,637

	Number of Pensions		
	Sept. 30, 1916	March 31, 1917	August 31, 1917
Number of Persons (soldiers or dependents) on Pension list.....	3,427	8,442	14,943
	not obtainable	14,022	23,374

We shall be compelled when the war is over to set our house in order. And the first and most obvious obligation of our new social life will be found in dealing with the returned soldiers, in finding employment for those able to work, and in finding maintenance for those who bear upon them the wounds and mutilation of war, and in supporting at the common charge the dependents of those who have fallen.

This is what is meant in its wider sense by the pensions' problem. But a part of it—it may prove ultimately to be the larger part of it—may stand over for the present. The time has not yet come to deal with the problem of finding work for the army that will return to us after the signing of peace. Large though that problem is, it is premature to discuss it. Too much discussion of what is to be done after the war merely helps to blind us to the fact that the war must first be won and that the nearest and most urgent obligation of the nation is to win it.

But the other part of the question—the matter of dealing with pensions for the wounded and the bereft has begun already, and began with the first year of the war. The accompanying tables of figures will show more plainly than words the exact extent to which we are already pledged.

Converted into terms of money to be paid, these figures are equivalent to saying that under the scale of payment at present in force, the annual expenditure as

incurred up to September 30th, 1916, amounted to \$700,000. By April, 1917, it had reached \$2,750,000. On the first of September last it stood at \$4,600,000; while an estimate recently presented to the Parliament of Canada places the cost of pensions for the current year at eight million dollars. The appalling increase in these figures speaks for itself. But even with this the end is by no means in sight. If the overseas force supplied by Canada is increased, as is expected, to half a million men, if further and further drafts are sent from training camps in England, the number of casualties per month, and therewith the number of new pensions incurred can easily increase to double the present amount. There is but little hope of the war reaching its end before the autumn of 1918. Many of our best military men tell us that we must be prepared for at least two years more of war. Under the conditions of modern warfare even conquest—in the case of a highly organized enemy operating on the defensive on ground of their own choosing, is cruelly slow. In the Civil War in America the cause of the South was doomed, to all intents and purposes, in the summer of 1864. Yet the war was protracted for another nine months and the losses of the Northern armies in this last phase of the war were greater than ever before. The Boer War in one sense was ended when Pretoria fell in 1900, and when the civil government of the Transvaal as such was extinguished. To complete the conquest two years more were needed. Yet the Boers were but a handful, and even the armies of the Southern Confederacy (its whole white population five million souls,) were a mere nothing compared to the colossal armies to be faced to-day.

TAKING all these things into account, it requires no great calculation to show that our national obligation for pensions after the war may easily run to \$25,000,000 a year. If this obligation is to be met fairly and squarely, we must give anxious thought to the system that we are to establish for dealing with it.

Till the outbreak of the present war we knew, fortunately for ourselves, but little of the pensions' problem from actual experience. There have been pensions, it is true, in Canada for two hundred years past (even under the old Grand Regime), but they were insignificant in amount and involved no national problem.

But with the year 1918 upon us, we have a serious outlook—a gigantic burden to shoulder. The pensions' problem is a new feature in our national life. It demands not merely public money, but public attention. We can only deal with it in an effective and satisfactory way if we can form a wide-spread and sound public opinion in regard to the nature of the obligation and the way in which it can best be met. An easy indifference may lead us here into a quagmire of jobbery and speculation. The pensions may become the mere plaything of party, the sport of politics and a source of political corruption for generations to come. It rests with Canadians to face the issue squarely and effect a result that will not be a blot upon the records of Canadian legislation in the generations to come.