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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 touch-
stone 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 de-
pendents 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
dinted 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 crowd-
ed dwellings and the stunted lives of the great sub-
merged 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		
Number of Persons (soldiers or de- pendents) 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 obliga-
tion 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 com-
plete 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 cal-
culation to show that our national obligation for pen-
sions 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, fortun-
ately 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.