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MOBILIZATION OF LABOR

AGAIN the perennial problem of properly mobilizing the nation's labor power has been brought to the fore. The outbreak of war found Canada faced with a serious situation, in which unemployment and the closing down of industries brought the country to the verge of an economic crisis. The same situation arose in the United States, giving the utmost concern to the authorities everywhere. For a time attention was centered upon the problem of finding work for the unemployed; but the sudden expansion of war work reversed the whole situation and submerged the problem, for the time being, of how best to co-ordinate the labor and industry of the nation.

It is a problem, however, that will not down. It has been extremely difficult since the outbreak of war to find the labor essential for carrying on fundamental war work, both in manufacturing and in agriculture. In the latter, the most difficult phase of the situation is the securing of labor for seeding and harvest. Agriculture, no doubt, is the outstanding example of a seasonal occupation; but there are also many seasonal trades which cause a surplus of labor to emerge at more or less regular intervals. This labor, in the past, has been largely wasted; and there has been also an extravagant waste of labor energy through under-employment, over-employment and the failure, in general, to adequately co-ordinate the labor and industry of the nation.

While the several provinces of the Dominion, and the individual States of the Republic, have had labor bureaux of one sort or another for the providing of men with jobs, and jobs with men, nevertheless, these vital functions have been but poorly performed. Ontario has made a splendid beginning; but the other Canadian provinces lag far in the rear, in the solution of this problem. The

truth seems to be that the efficient directing of the country's labor force can be accomplished only under federal authority. The United States has afforded sufficient example of the inefficiency of purely local administration of surplus labor.

A system of federal labor bureaux would effect many economies and cut down the expenses of administration, because directed by a single executive head. It is reasonable to expect that a superior personnel would be secured under the federal supervision of labor bureaux, since those employed therein could be brought under the scope of the Civil Service Act. Moreover, it is necessary to take the national view of the labor problem; to rise above local prejudices; to win the support of organized labor; and, above all, to swing the prestige of the federal government and parliament behind the whole scheme. But, whatever the best solution may be, it is of imperative importance that the problem be attacked now, to the end that our economic life shall not be dislocated at the close of the war.

RECONSTRUCTION IN UNITED KINGDOM

RECENTLY the British Labor Party gave to the world its programme of political and economic reconstruction after the war—a programme which, if carried into effect, is destined, according to the belief of Mr. Arthur Henderson and his confrères, to lay the foundations of a new social order. No doubt the labor parties and the Socialists of Europe expect peace to usher in full democratic control; but they are likely to be disappointed insofar as changes of a fundamental nature in diplomacy, politics and industry are to be accomplished overnight.

Specifically, the British Labor Party demands the enforcement of a minimum wage for all workers; the democratization of industry by giving labor a voice in its management; the shifting of taxes to large incomes and fortunes made during the war; and the appropriation of the surplus wealth of the nation for the common good. These are glittering phases. To what extent can they be translated from the realm of theory and speculation into the hard facts of everyday life?

At the conclusion of the war the United Kingdom will face a stupendous task in dealing with the demobilization of 8,000,000 workers, 5,000,000 of whom are at present engaged in military and naval service. To throw this vast labor force upon the country at a time when war orders have ceased, would effect economic paralysis. The British Labor Party has at least made one constructive proposal—that plans be immediately perfected for the carrying on of great national works, so that unemployment will not be permitted to develop, at least to any appreciable degree. The government of the United Kingdom has itself declared its intention of spending £300,000,000 sterling upon the building of cottages for the working class. Great power stations for the development and distribution of electrical energy may also be undertaken, as well as the extension of the nation's system of light railways and canals. It is obvious that, if national enterprises on a huge scale are started, the demand for materials from private industry will gradually result in the re-establishment of the normal trade and industry of peace.

We are not at all convinced that the war has demonstrated the superiority of State administration over private enterprise, or the capacity of uniformed masses of men to direct and control industry. As for a minimum wage, it is clear that labor cannot get more than it produces—and not even all that it produces; for otherwise