

The Social Status of the Worker and Housing

Nominally the problem between labor and employers is a question of hours and rates of pay. To my mind, there is something beyond that now. It is not only a question of hours and rates of pay, but of the actual status of men who are performing such a large portion of work of building up industries, and making themselves as strong an influence as the capitalists and employers. It is a question of what their social status is to be in the future. We may take it for granted beyond question that the working man of the future, the working man of to-day, must be permitted and enabled and assisted, he and his wife and children, to lead quite different existence to that of the past. They must not be confined to the narrow, sordid lives that circumstances have made hitherto. They must have the opportunity to enjoy the good things of life that those in higher positions have enjoyed.

In the above words Lord Shaughnessy—given at a banquet to employees of the C. P. R.—not only placed his finger on the sore spot of the social unrest that is growing in Canada, as in every other part of the civilized world, but showed the way out. The worker is no longer satisfied with the gray life that he and his family have had in the past—he demands some of the sunshine of life. And who can blame him? Since he has been able to earn more money because of the war and thus better able to give his family a taste of the sweets of existence within his own home he is beginning to realize that his surroundings are very squalid. The street he lives in is nasty; even his domicile with which he has been satisfied for so long has become an eyesore, and he wants something better. Again who can blame him? Rather such a desire for better things should be encouraged, for once the working man fully awakes to the squalidness of his surroundings and finds that he has not only been the victim of industrial warfare, but the tool of the land speculator and the jerry builder, both these parasites will have short shift. The town planner will then come into his own.

To our mind the best way of raising the social status of the working man and his family is to make it possible for him to secure a little home of his own. Workmen proprietors are among the most contented people in Canada and make the better citizens because of the added responsibility and opportunity of paying their taxes direct. This was illustrated in a visit we recently made to a small town made up entirely of workmen and their families, all of whom owned their own houses and gardens. The men worked at different vocations in the nearby city, but at home they were all public spirited citizens who took a keen interest in the education of their children and in civic affairs generally. The meetings of the local council, composed entirely of working men, are well attended by the citizens who follow very closely the deliberations of the council that are always of a high order. Home proprietorship surely gives a man a sense of security and responsibility that no advance in wages can give him.

In this phase of the new socialism, or democracy call it what one will, the municipal councils of Canada have a great responsibility. The Dominion government has put aside the sum of \$25,000,000 to loan to the Provincial governments who in turn are expected to reloan it to the municipalities for the purpose of building workmen's cottages and reselling same to the tenants. It was hoped that the pro-

vincial authorities would augment their quota of the loan by making provincial loans, but with the exception of Ontario they have simply passed legislation to legalize and give security for their respective proportions of the Federal loan. Ontario has added \$2,000,000 to its quota. The conditions being that the borrowing municipalities must add twenty-five per cent. out of local funds. This means that Ontario will have to spend on workmen's dwelling \$12,500,000. Had the other provinces increased their proportion at the same ratio the public fund for the building of cottages would have reached \$32,000,000. As it is the fund will reach \$27,250,000, enough to build 10,000 cottages out of over 50,000 required. We consider that the provincial authorities have, in their apathy towards the housing problem, lost a great opportunity to help solve the unrest among the workers. The meaning of a shortage of 50,000 dwellings is that in Canada 50,000 families have to double up with other families. Such a condition is not conducive to good health and contentment. It is this shortage that has given the landlords their opportunity to increase rents to almost impossible figures. The municipal councils have an opportunity to rectify this wasted opportunity to some extent by not only getting their full quota of the Dominion loan, but by encouraging responsible building societies by all the means in their power.

CIVIC PRIDE AND BEAUTY.

The first harbinger of spring received in this office was in the form of a little booklet on flowers and vegetables. The booklet, which was kindly sent in by Dr. Bennett, the genial president of the St. Thomas Horticultural Society, contains the programme for the coming season and the balance sheet for 1918. We were under the impression that horticultural societies were limited to wealthy people and consequently of little use to the community. The St. Thomas society has reversed this exclusiveness by having out of a population of 20,000 a membership of 2,000, or every other family in the community. The result is civic pride. St. Thomas has become famous as the "Flower City" and the photos of the public thoroughfares shown in the booklet bear out the title. Supposing the St. Thomas Horticultural Society was duplicated 890 times in as many urban centres of Canada, what would be the result? A beautiful urban Canada. While the citizens of our cities, towns and villages have every right to be proud of the stability of their surroundings, the aesthetic side, with few exceptions almost confined to Ontario, would seem to be sadly neglected. Every community should have its horticultural society and every horticultural society should be encouraged by the local authorities to take care of the beautification of the public thoroughfares. This is exactly what has been done in St. Thomas with the result that some very ugly spots have been turned into veritable paradises at very little cost. We congratulate the leaders of the St. Thomas Horticulture Society for their public spirit. Their society is an example to the rest of Canada.