

Land Settlement in Canada

The development of the land resources of Canada, and the skill and constructive ability which have been applied to the building up of the population and industries of the country during the past twenty years, combine to make one of the most remarkable achievements in the modern history of nations. The enormous increase in population and the settlement of the Western provinces between the years 1891 and 1914 were the result of a combination of circumstances, among which two of the most important were the development of the transportation system of the country and the skillful organization of the Canadian governments. This has to be recognized no matter to what extent it may now be found that the absence of proper planning and a more scientific organization of settlement might have secured a greater measure of success in connection with the development that has taken place.

The defects in the system of land settlement in Canada have only become evident or, at least, pronounced in recent years. Even in the United States, where a similar system has been in operation for a much longer period of time, it is only lately that the people have begun to recognize the fact that a scientific plan of development prepared in advance of settlement is essential to enable a sound, economic structure to be built up.

Whatever may be said as to the success of the system of land settlement in Canada up to a certain point, the time has come to abandon careless methods of placing people on the land without proper organization and careful planning. If the farmer is to be kept on the land he must have the kind of organization and facilities provided for him to enable him to make profitable use of the land.

In other words, the farmer requires a stronger tie than what is provided by the "magic of property" to keep him on the land. He requires the facilities and means to live as well as to exist; the enjoyment of better social conditions for his wife and family as well as for himself; the use of capital at a reasonable rate of interest, and the satisfaction that the facilities for distributing his products and for utilizing the natural resources of the country are not controlled to the disadvantage of his class. We have relied too much on the magnet of ownership to attract the laboring farmer to the soil of Canada, and too little on the more enduring magnets of social amenities and efficient organization of the actual development of the land.

To keep the farmers on the land when they get there has become a greater problem than that of first attracting them to the land. They are said to be leaving the land in thousands at the present time, and we are told that millions of acres of land, which had been occupied at one time, are now deserted, and that the present system of land settlement is productive of much poverty and degradation. Whether these statements are exaggerated or not, the fact that they are made by responsible people indicates a state of affairs that demands a remedy. Why do men now hesitate to go on the land in the first place, and find it uncongenial to stay in the second place? Why do women stay away, with the injurious consequences to rural life which is caused by their absence? The three outstanding reasons are:

First, the numerous ills caused by the holding of large areas of the best and most accessible land by speculators, and the want of proper plans for the economic use and development of the land.

Second, the compelling social attractions and the educational facilities of the cities and towns, and,

Third, the lack of ready money and of adequate return for the labor of the farmer, because of want of co-operation, rural credit and of facilities for distribution of his products.

To secure any real improvement in rural life and conditions we must try to bring tracts of land held for speculative purposes into use, prepare development schemes of the land in advance of settlement, try to take part, at least, of the social and educational facilities of the cities into the rural areas, and, simultaneously, provide the co-operative financial and distributive conveniences that are necessary to give the farmer a larger share of the profits of production.—Thomas Adams, in Rural Planning and Development, published by Commission of Conservation.

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