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Canada Must Have Mothers' Pensions

As a Record of Service Rendered and a Safeguard for the Nation of To-morrow

AN EDITORIAL



In the whole Dominion of Canada there is only one province that has Legislated to any measurable degree in favor of mothers. That province is Manitoba.

In June, 1916, the Winnipeg Mothers' Allowances Committee was responsible for the passing of a bill providing for mothers' pensions.

Mothers' Pensions! What more vital consideration is there for any Government in any country at this particular time? In Canada especially—a young country, where the youth of the nation counts for so much—is there any law that would be more conducive to future solidity than one which, in affecting mothers, directly benefits children?

Is it a fact that the other provinces in the Dominion are utterly ignorant of the importance of such a measure, or are they merely uninterested? In either case, the indictment is a grievous one.

The people of the province of Manitoba realized the principle that the future of the nation depends upon the proper training of the child, and as this training can be most efficiently given through the family unit, that the conservation of national unity depends upon the conservation of the home.

SINCE the establishment of the Winnipeg Mothers' Allowances Committee in 1916, \$10,855.45 has been expended by the province and the city through the Provincial Commission in recognition of this principle and the Winnipeg Committee has at the present time fifty-one mothers trying to create capable, conscientious citizens out of their one hundred and eighty-one children. Their monthly wages through the Commission amount to \$2,089.00.

The Act is carried out as simply as possible. The mother comes herself to the office and tells of her need. The purpose of the Act—to conserve the home, that is in danger of being disrupted, because of the death of the bread-winner, is carefully explained. Emphasis is laid upon the fact that the allowance is a salary granted her by the city and province, in return for which she must undertake to perform the task of rearing her children, and if she fails in the proper upbringing of her children, by not providing for their physical, mental and moral welfare, the payments must cease.

The general public is beginning to realize that the allowance granted to mothers under the Act is a salary for service rendered, and not a charity;

that primarily it is a children's act, not a mothers' Act. Reports and investigations show that many mothers are applying who would otherwise rather starve than take charity.

IS it not so, that what has proven necessary and successful in the province of Manitoba would work out similarly in every other province of the Dominion?

Is there any special reason why Manitoba mothers should continue to take precedence over those in every other section of the Dominion? None—save that the Government officials there are more energetic, enterprising, nay, we should say, more considerate. Canada's manhood is being sorely depleted on the battlefronts. What is being done at home to insure the filling of that void in national citizenship?

Rather, what is NOT being done?

THE hope of a nation lies in its children.

The warriors of to-day were the children of yesterday, and the children of to-day will be—that is the all important question—what will they be? Will they represent a unit of strength, or will they evolve into an aggregation of weaklings?

The answer is ours to give; the remedy is ours to effect,—for a remedy it must be! Never before has the conservation of child-life been so vital and never before has there been so great a danger of its neglect.

THERE HAS BEEN IN CANADA PRACTICALLY NO LEGISLATION TO ASSIST MOTHERS IN REARING THE NATION OF TO-MORROW.

Instead, the mothers throughout the length and breadth of the Dominion have been forced into the ranks of labor—forced through dire necessity, in so many instances, through the death of the family bread-winner.

This is not confined to military cases. For them, at least there are the Patriotic and Government allowances.

But what of the widow who is left destitute—left with three, four, five children to support and neither the where-withal nor the strength to accomplish it? What of her?

There is but one course open to her,—she must work or accept the charity of the community, or indeed, both: This, the thanks, the appreciation of her country, of her country, Government, for her having given to the nation just so many more desirable citizens!

AND the children themselves—have you ever stopped to consider them? Grant, there are orphan asylums and

private institutions. Grant, there are Children's Aid Societies and church funds. But is there not also that inherent measure of pride, of self-respect within every individual, especially a mother, that makes her shrink from the acceptance of charity. Rather than place their children in such institutions, a countless multitude of widows have been known to attempt playing the double role of bread-winner and home-maker. And it is disastrous.

The children become poorly cared for—in fact, not cared for at all. Their health,—in jeopardy under best conditions, becomes then a negative consideration. They bring themselves up, without mother's care, advice, and all the other essentials that go to create the stability of the country's youth. They become weaklings, incompetent, a drag upon humanity, and a scourge to themselves.

There is only one remedy for this—the establishment of Mothers' Pensions, or the Bill might better be known as Widows' Pensions.

WHY must Canada follow? Why can she not act now—help to lead the way. In Australia they have gone even farther in this matter. Five years ago, a measure was brought into existence there without much publicity, following no agitation—simply because an enterprising and sensible Government saw the wisdom of it.

The Australian Maternity Allowance is a free gift of the nation to those to whom it is ever in debt—the mothers of its children.

Judge Henry Neil—"Father of the Mothers' Pensions' Scheme" makes plain its workings thus:

"To every woman who gives birth to a child, either in Australia or on board a ship proceeding from one port to another in the territories of the Commonwealth, a sum of £5 is paid by the Commonwealth Treasury. Most State grants are loaded with many 'buts.' The maternity allowance has only those which are needed to safeguard it from imposition. It asks for no contribution from the recipient, either before or after the event.

"Simply it is laid down that it shall be payable only to women who are inhabitants of Australia or intend to settle in that favored country. And the allowance is naturally made only in respect of a child born alive, or certified as 'viable'—i.e., capable of sustaining life. But the essential point of the scheme is that the money is paid to the mother. Simple means are provided for conveying the money to her.

"The Act of the Federal Parliament which initiated the grant, was introduced in 1912 by the Prime Minister, the Right Hon. Andrew Fisher, now the High Commissioner of his country in London.

"In the first year of its operation, 1913, 83,475 claims were paid, amounting to £417,375. In 1914, 134,998 claims, amounting to £674,990. In 1915, 138,855 claims, amounting to £694,275; in 1916, 131,943 claims, amounting to £650,715. The cost of administration amounts to something like 1½ per cent. The allowance is available to all classes in Australia. It is administered at a minimum of expense, and with a maximum of facility."

Judge Neill has led the way. He has blazed the trail. He should have followers—many of them. In every country of the civilized world the measure is a necessity.

EVEN our enemy is not behind in devoting attention to this question. Germany is making preparation for a strong nation of to-morrow—if indeed there will be a nation at all, at the termination of the present cataclysm!! There, work relating to child welfare has been followed up with full recognition of its importance for a country at war. Infant mortality figures show that the death rate of babies whose mothers worked out was 227.5, while that of mothers who remained at home with their babies was 91.7 per thousand births.

And what of Canada?

We are concerned with saving food, and yet we are allowing children—the rarest of assets,—to go to waste.

Who will "father" the measure in Canada?

Is it not possible to arouse sentiment to the extent of showing the other eight provinces the necessity of following Manitoba's example?

Why will not woman's organizations and the press insist upon it as they have insisted upon and won other measures of importance? The press could indeed do much. We—Everywoman's World—will be glad to "mother the Act." The widows, the mothers of the Dominion of Canada, may count upon us.

What do you want done about getting Mothers' Pensions in your province?

Think it over.

Then ACT.

Mothers' Pensions, Canada needs, and Mothers' Pensions Canada must have.