

SOLDIER SETTLEMENTS.

The irresponsible and extravagant statements made by the Leader of the Opposition in discussing this matter before you are quite in keeping with the reckless disregard of facts which characterizes his speeches throughout the country. Of one thing only can you be sure—that is, that whatever the Government has done has been wrongly done according to Mr. Bowser. He has not made a single practicable or helpful suggestion since the grave problem of soldiers' civil reestablishment confronted the people and Governments of Canada. Everything, so far as the Province is concerned, has been of a fault-finding nature. He has conducted an ill-advised campaign of criticism well calculated to excite unrest, dissatisfaction, and disagreement among these men instead of encouraging and assisting them to face their problems.

No greater problem—apart from war problems—was ever faced by the nations of the world than the problem of the rehabilitation of their returned soldiers. Great Britain and every Overseas Dominion have engaged the thought and sympathy of their best men in its solution. Nearly every Province of Canada has had to face new and strenuous conditions evolving out of the war. Every Province has had to share this responsibility and British Columbia has had more than its share of the burden. No Province faced the problems more earnestly, sympathetically, patriotically, or successfully than British Columbia. Let me go into this matter carefully and see whether there is any justification, or even excuse, for the tirade of abuse and misrepresentation heaped upon this Government by Mr. Bowser.

Very early in 1918—as soon as there began to be a prospect of a definite conclusion of the war—Premier Oliver urged upon the Ottawa Government the holding of a conference of Provincial Premiers to discuss the approaching problem of civil reestablishment and agree upon a uniform plan of concerted action. Such a conference was held in Ottawa in September, 1918, and the legislation already passed by the British Columbia Government formed a basis for negotiations. A policy was agreed upon, and the chief feature of that policy was the recognition and pronouncement, made by the Dominion Government, that the problem of rehabilitation was a Dominion problem. The Federal Government, while asking the co-operation of the Provinces, specifically conditioned that the Provinces do nothing to interfere with or duplicate the policies of the Federal authorities. They assumed—and quite properly assumed—full responsibility in the premises. In the meantime the Provincial Government set aside lands for soldier settlements; they continued to reinstate men in their old positions and filled every vacancy in Government employment with returned men who possessed qualifications for such positions. They created new departments and officered them with returned men.

Then came the "Asia Committee," a body of several hundred first-class men who sailed direct from England to British Columbia. These men organized on shipboard during their passage out and on their arrival presented a scheme of land settlement to the Provincial Government. The chief feature of this scheme was a plan for "community" settlement.