

More Co-operation Wanted

We have been watching very keenly the working out of the Repatriation scheme so far as it affects the municipal councils and taking into consideration that it is an entirely new departure for the federal authorities to seek the co-operation of local authorities from whom they have kept aloof since the North America Act came into force, the experiment has not been unsuccessful, rather we would say that with a little more time and perseverance it will be proved that in matters touching the welfare of the citizens generally and as communities a closer union between the Dominion and Local Governments cannot help but be of tremendous benefit to the nation. It is largely a question of establishing confidence between the two governing units.

At the present moment the Dominion Government has on its hands the second biggest job that any government in Canada has every had—the re-establishment of 600,000 men in civilian life at a time when unemployment is general because of the closing down of munition works. Such a job requires not only the best brains of the country, but the loyal co-operation of every organization. We believe that the Dominion government, through its various commissions and committees is doing yeoman service to repatriate our returning soldiers, but it must be remembered that even the government's power is limited, and that the most it can do in many instances is to advise—though let it be said that that advice is based on much study by experts.

To illustrate, the Dominion Government has no control over municipal affairs, and yet the repatriation of our soldiers is almost as much a community as a national question. Indeed, in many respects it is more so. Which means that the closest co-operation is necessary if the nation is to do its duty to the men. One of the difficulties that well wishers of our men has to contend against is that certain politicians, pretending to see danger to the autonomy of the provinces would deliberately try to make capital of such co-operation for their political ends. All we need say is that there is no danger to this precious provincial autonomy, but if there was we would still say that it is the bounden duty of the municipal councils to co-operate as closely as possible with the Dominion authorities in their repatriation schemes. It is true they have made mistakes, but at least the different soldiers committees have done and are doing something, which is better than the cheap destructive criticism that these politicians mentioned above make a practice of airing from time to time.

Canada is governed by three separate units—Federal, Provincial and Municipal—each one having its own part to play, though some Provincial authorities are under the foolish impression that municipal councils are mere instruments of their own. At times it is necessary in the interests of the nation that the three units should co-operate for a common purpose. This is the time.

The Bell Telephone Inquiry

The Bell Telephone inquiry is still unfinished, in fact, it is likely to be prolonged because of the new evidence that the City of Toronto will place before the Railroad Commission. For the benefit of our readers, particularly those in the West who have no private interests controlling their telephones, we will state the case briefly. In the latter part of last year the Bell Telephone Company operating in Ontario and Quebec, sent a notice to its customers that on account of the increased cost of operating expenses it would raise its rates by about 20%. The Union of Canadian Municipalities through its honorary secretary, Mr. W. D. Lighthall, K.C., immediately took up the issue and got into communication with the councils of the leading municipalities affected. The City Commissioners of Montreal instructed their council, Mr. W. H. Butler, K.C., to take the case up. Likewise did the City of Toronto instruct Mr. I. L. Fairty, K.C., and the City of Ottawa, Mr. P. Proctor, K.C. Mr. Lighthall represented the Union. At the first hearing the Commissioners after hearing the objections of counsel for the different municipalities granted an adjournment to allow the municipalities to engage an expert to examine the books, etc., of the company. This expert, Mr. H. Hagenah, primarily engaged by the City of Montreal, after an investigation presented his report to Mr. Butler, counsel for that city, who instead of discussing the contents with his colleagues, immediately handed the report over to the Commission. The report, which on the whole was favorable to the Bell Telephone Company, was at

once contested by the other counsel, particularly Mr. Fairty for Toronto, who demanded a further adjournment to enable him to engage another expert, also to have an opportunity to examine Mr. Hagenah personally that gentleman not being well enough to attend the inquiry. The request was granted. Since then the municipalities have secured reports from other experts that are contradictory to Mr. Hagenah's report and these will be presented to the Commission at the next sitting.

When the Bell Telephone Company made its demand for increased rates the war was on, and no doubt had the war kept on there might have been some reason for the increase in rates. But the war is now over and the materials and labor that enter largely into the costs of operating its system are already coming down to normal figures, which before the war allowed a fair dividend on the company's capital; consequently there is no reason for the Railway Commission to grant its request, and we believe the Commissioners will see it in that light. While we fully recognize that even public service corporations should have a fair return on the capital invested it should also be understood that the very franchise under which they operate is a guarantee that the investment is a safe one, in comparison to capital invested in industrial companies, consequently the dividends should be less. It is certain that dividends on such a safe investment as a franchise should not be increased at the expense of the citizens who gave the franchise; which would exactly be the case if the company wins its case.