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REPATRIATION

Scheme of Organization for
the Dominion of Canada, as
Outlined by G. G. McGEER,
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REPATRIATION

Scheme of Organization for the Dominion of Canada.

By GERALD G. McGEER, M.L.A.

“The Returned Soldier Question,” “Return to civil life,” “Rehabilitation,” “Repatriation,” are common expressions today, but the problems that these terms now present are in a very large measure entirely new. For that reason there has been a marked diffidence shown by Canadian statesmen, politicians and public men in dealing with or assuming the responsibility of laying down a policy that will deal with and settle a situation the magnitude and complexity of which is only second to the great task of bringing the present world conflagration to a triumphant and victorious end.

While it is true that much individual effort and some governmental action has been directed towards the working out and settlement of some of the many phases of this great problem, yet it is unquestionably true that up to the present time, particularly in Canada, no comprehensive scheme of repatriation has yet been submitted.

It is first of all necessary to arrive at a clear conception of what we understand and mean when we use the word “repatriation.” Very many sincere and emphatic promises have been made to our troops and their dependents, but they are vague and indefinite to a degree.

It is necessary that these promises should set out what is contemplated and what is to be done. I would suggest that when we speak of repatriation, we understand it to mean an organized effort on the part of the community to reinstate in civil life all those of our troops who shall return capable of such reinstatement, and a sympathetic assistance to and care of all those who, having suffered from wounds or illness as a result of the war,

are no longer able to carry on their own maintenance as citizens in a free country.

The nation put forward an organized effort to enroll these men in the ranks of the fighting army; consequently there must be an equally organized effort to secure their return to that civil life which at the call of duty they temporarily abandoned.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE.

The Dominion and Provincial Governments have guaranteed the re-employment of all those public servants serving with the colors who are not permanently incapacitated from rendering civil service. The Governments have in a measure shown that it is the intention to give preference to returned men in respect of general employment; many private firms have given similar assurance to employees on active service, and that obligation should rest upon every employer of labor. But that alone is not sufficient.

It must be recognized that at the close of the war a period of readjustment is as inevitable as the following of night the day; many of our artisans and mechanics—in fact, the great host of men and women now engaged in war work such as the manufacture of war materials, including everything from rifle bullets to airplanes, embodying the worker in the forest, the mine, the shipyard and the factory—at the close of the war will find that that form of employment is no longer available. In consequence, a considerable period of time will be required to readjust the industrial situation, to re-apply the industrial energy of the day, directed as it is largely to manufacture of war supplies, equipment and accoutrements, to the work of manufacturing the commodities required for the maintenance of the civil population in a state of peace. Is there anyone who doubts that as a result many now occupied will be out of employment?

It is to the abridgement of that period of readjustment, aggravated as it will be by the demobilization of the hundreds of thousands of Canadian troops, that some thought and energy should be directed today. Certainly if this is not accomplished, the country will be precipitated into a condition of misery and

poverty, of trouble and strife that will shake the very foundations of civilized society, and organized government may be supplanted by revolutionary anarchism or misguided Bolshevism, where property and civil rights will be abandoned and the development of this great country forestalled for many generations.

It is clear that for the end in view, Federal and Provincial organization is immediately essential. Co-operation between all the Provincial Governments, with the work largely under the direction of the Federal Parliament, is necessary.

With a view to action on this important work, the following outline of an organization is humbly submitted:

CENTRAL EXECUTIVE.

Personnel—A Federal Repatriation Commission (answerable to Parliament in the same manner as the Railway Commission).

Suggested scope of function:

1. To supervise and co-ordinate the work in Canada.
2. To arrange with Provincial Governments to organize Provincial Councils.
3. To advise in the promotion of Federal public works and development of Federal lands and resources and employment in connection therewith.
4. To advise and assist in the financing of provincial undertakings, such as inter-provincial railways, highways and land settlement.

PROVINCIAL COUNCILS (In Each Province).

Personnel—A Provincial Repatriation Commission.

1. A chairman appointed by Federal Government.
2. Four members appointed by Provincial Government.
3. Representatives of municipal, commercial and industrial interests and returned soldiers' organizations. The total number of members not to exceed ten.

Suggested scope of functions:

1. To extract from the military records all those who will take their discharge in the province, obtaining the following information:

- (a) Name ;
 - (b) Age ;
 - (c) Calling and other qualifications ;
 - (d) Whether married or single ;
 - (e) Number of dependents ;
 - (f) Financial position ;
 - (g) Desire as to employment ;
 - (h) Desire as to future educational or technical training.
2. To obtain particulars respecting employers of labor as follows :
- (a) Name ;
 - (b) Nature of employment ;
 - (c) 1—Number of employees ;
2—Number of aliens (enemy) employed ;
3—Number of employees serving colors ;
4—Names and particulars of such employees ;
 - (d) If willing and able to reinstate on return ;
 - (c) Contemplate exclusion of work with possibility of other employment.
3. To classify the men under their respective avocations.
4. To ascertain Crown and other lands available for agricultural, horticultural and settlement purposes.
5. To prepare particulars of public and municipal works available for employment.
6. To advise and assist in the establishment of public and municipal works and land settlement schemes.
7. To establish Government employment bureaus.
8. To arrange for securing employment for returned soldiers whose injuries or illness prevent them following their former occupation.
9. To assist dependents of soldiers who have been killed or permanently disabled.
10. To provide training, either agricultural, technical or educational, of returned men.
11. To assist in the completion of training, either technical

or educational, temporarily abandoned at the call of the colors by men at the date of enlistment.

12. To assist in the providing of homes for returned men who are prepared to return to former avocations.

PROVISION TO OVERCOME PHYSICAL DISABILITY.

In the cases of soldiers suffering permanent partial disability, it will be found that the incapacity may be diminished or removed by artificial expedients. Restoration in such cases will probably be a matter of skill and expense. Many a man who has lost an arm or a leg or, as has already been proven, both legs or arms, may be provided artificially with substitutes, and he can be trained for some useful and satisfactory avocation.

It is highly desirable to appoint a committee of experts to deal with this vital branch of the general scheme of repatriation, and it would be necessary for the Federal Commission to make recommendations to Parliament with that end in view.

The scheme of organization as here submitted may seem too elaborate and the amount of money necessary to carry it into effect too appalling. Such a scheme is already in effect and working in Australia. The amount of money required to carry out only one branch of repatriation in that country, namely, land settlement, is estimated at \$300,000,000. In Canada, where there are large areas of Crown lands available for settlement, the cost should be substantially less; but whatever the cost will be, every dollar expended in establishing a greater agricultural community, if properly expended, will prove a sound and safe investment for the country. When it is recognized that land settlement will take care of not more than 10 per cent. of the returned men, it is obvious that the other features of a scheme of repatriation are absolutely essential.

Repatriation should not be a mere money-scattering proposition; money will be required and in very large amounts, and unless the organization dealing with this great problem is a sound and complete one, with its work well laid out and proper-

ly followed, it will be impossible to prevent great waste, both of time, money and energy. But in looking at the great amount of money necessary, we should also look at the economic loss bound to obtain by the idleness of great numbers of men. For instance, if a half million men remain idle for only one week, it represents a loss in wages alone of \$9,000,000; and this based on a three-dollar-per-day wage, which at this time is far below the minimum wage of the average worker. If the idleness continues for six months, the loss is \$225,000,000 in wages alone.

It is also well to remember in assuming this heavy financial responsibility, that while the country is helping its soldiers, it is helping itself, and that is the proper point from which it should be viewed.

Already we hear on every hand the bitter complaint of the returned man—not so much, I am inclined to think, for himself, but in the face of the grim realization of that condition of affairs that is bound to obtain at the close of the war, when hundreds of thousands of his comrades shall find themselves in the position that he finds himself today.

If he complains, who is there to say that he has not just and proper cause? And he will have that cause of complaint until some proper scheme of repatriation is adopted and put into effect.

