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# The Returned Soldier Problem

.....BY.....

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PRESENTED TO

**Union of British Columbia Municipalities 13th Annual  
Meeting, Held at Duncan, B. C.**



October 10th, 1917

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## The Returned Soldier Problem

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Mr. President and Gentlemen.

The subject which I have chosen to bring to your attention is one worthy of the greatest consideration, and is receiving the attention of statesmen in the various countries engaged in this great war.

We must take time by the forelock in constructing measures which will satisfactorily meet the needs of the situation when demobilization of our civilian army takes place.

Already the necessity for such measures is brought home to us in dealing with the increasing number of men returning, and it is apparent that a discussion with a view to arriving at the best methods to deal with the problem of providing satisfactory employment for these men is urgent.

The first aim of all should be, and let it be fixed indelibly in your minds, that these men, who voluntarily gave up their civilian duties at the call of the Nation, must not suffer any loss by reason of their patriotism when they again return to civil life.

The man who has taken a fighting chance in the greatest war in history, to uphold the democratic ideals which you and I enjoy, must not be placed in the position of having to take a chance to ensure his own and his family's future welfare in the industrial market of the country he has served so well.

Thousands gave up their profession, trade, etc., absence from which has meant the loss of opportunity, personal advancement and gain; thousands of students were preparing for examinations which, once passed, would admit them into that sphere of life they aspired to. Gentlemen, we owe it to these men to make such provisions that no detrimental effect will be caused to their future by their readiness to spend their energies in fighting our battles.

Men will return who were only nearing the threshold of manhood when they went away, with no fixed calling, on whose behalf the greatest care will have to be exercised in providing employment. This is incumbent upon us, as the years spent in service were those which usually decides a man's future.

The care of the disabled soldier is receiving attention, and the work already done in fitting him to hold his own in the future is worthy of the highest commendation.

Vocational training at the hands of experts is achieving great results, and the extension of training along the lines already established will prove a boon to the men.

The difficulty of absorbing the large number of men into civil life has to be met by encouragement of new industries, development of our natural resources, and by training men to take the positions which will open up by such development.

The establishing of Technical Schools throughout the Dominion, where practical knowledge of the various trades closely related to our resources can be acquired, would help many men to assure their future. Practical knowledge received in the engineering shop, the mine, the blast furnace, etc., as established at Universities in older countries, has been the means of producing men who have been instrumental in promoting great industrial development, and consequently more employment.

The Dominion Government has created elaborate machinery at enormous expense to enable its armies to take their place in action under the most favorable conditions as far as equipment is concerned; no effort or money has been spared to do this, and we applaud the action taken by the Government; but is it too much to ask the government of the Dominion to provide the wherewithal to equip men on their return in such a manner as to place them beyond care or want.

The responsibility for providing men with opportunities which should enable them to live, at least, in the same degree of comfort as that which they enjoyed before enlistment rests with the

Dominion Government, and the national sense of honor should guide every act which is intended to solve this great question.

The Dominion Government should prepare plans without delay to meet the situation, and be also prepared to vote large amounts of money to aid productive works; I say productive advisedly, as a proposal to build a road across the continent with returned soldiers' labor while demobilization takes place has been mooted in many quarters. I am in favor of good roads and admit the advantages derived from them; but I cannot agree with such a proposal as a solution to the problem that has to be faced, it does not provide sufficient scope for the utilization of the mental and physical qualities of the men whom it is intended to serve temporarily. Surely this country possesses the resources to provide productive employment of a varied character to suit the respective abilities of the men to be benefitted. Produce from the stores of wealth practically untouched in the realms of the Dominion, and the prosperity which will naturally follow will make the road proposition a feasible one; but build it with roadmakers not with men who may or may not be fitted for the work. Our estimate of the soldier's worth and the merit of his achievements demands a wider sphere than that of roadmaking, and the welfare of the country also demands it.

Every position at the disposal of the governments and municipalities should be filled by returned soldiers, provided they are qualified; thus giving a lead to private corporations to follow. It has afforded me much pleasure to see the interest private firms have taken in returned men and hope that this interest will continue.

Though the responsibility rests with the Dominion Government, I am sure that the Provincial Governments and Municipal Councils will share the work involved in the administration of all measures tending to further the men's interests, as intimate knowledge of local conditions will favor just and direct dealing, and avoid tedious delays. It is to be hoped that the Dominion Government will make use of these channels.

Many positions, formerly occupied by men at the front, have been filled by women, and this phase of the question, if the men are not reinstated, will produce great hardship, as men who have followed a certain employment for years will have to commence over again in strange employment.

The number of men who will become settlers of the land is estimated at a low figure; but with sufficient inducements a large number may be absorbed in the farming industry.

Shipbuilding with its allied trades will be a source of employment for large numbers for years to come, and the training referred to earlier in my paper would prove valuable in this connection, as shipbuilders are scarce in this country.

The time to make provision is now; procrastination will bring suffering in its train, which would be a blot on the fair name of the country. The men did not delay when their services were required, their eagerness to be attested was evidenced in the first months of the world struggle, then why should we delay in doing what honor demands of us.

In the work of destruction billions have been spent ungrudgingly to save the world from tyranny, a tithe of that amount would provide all the employment needed if spent wisely in bonusing industries, inducing men to take up land under favorable conditions (community settlements for preference), fitting men to fill responsible positions, etc., and the people of Canada would stand behind such a movement.

Are we going to lag behind other nations in this great work? The spirit of our pioneers points the way to the present generation, let us follow it and become pioneers in finding the paths along which our gallant men shall tread amid plenty and security.

They have won undying fame; their deeds of valor have evoked the highest praises; Canada has found herself great through their sacrifices. We are proud to be Canadians, and our pride is enhanced when we read letters from our boys and

note how enthusiastically they boost the land they love; the glowing manner in which they speak of its advantages wherever they go and to whomsoever they meet; all of which should stir our blood into activity, break the apathetic attitude that besets us, make us willing and ready to bend our backs to the work that lies before us, so that the love of home and country exemplified by these brave men will not be dimmed, but strengthened by the realization on their return that we built wisely and well for their future welfare, and that our work shall be an example to be followed by other nations, standing as the greatest monument the world has ever witnessed in honor of fallen and living heroes; as the greatest tribute we can pay the men who have paid the supreme sacrifice is the service we can render their living comrades.

A. W. GRAY.

