

Soldier and the Land

Vice-President of Great War Veterans' Association Points to Need
of a New National Policy for Canada

The Canadian Council of Agriculture reproduces, in abridged form, the following article by Col. (Dr.) A. Mackenzie Forbes, of Montreal, Vice President on the National Executive of the G.W.V.A., which appeared in the April number of The Veteran.

A CAREFUL and broadminded examination of the Constitution of the Great War Veterans' Association will show that while this organization stands for many details of national policy which are specifically for the relief of the widows and children of fallen soldiers and those who, because of their physical injuries, have become the wards of the nation, the broad and general policy of the organization is to inculcate in its members loyalty to Canada and the Empire, and to render them unstinted service. The G.W.V.A. stands for Canada. Because the aim and object of this organization is for Canada, its officers, impelled not only by the dictates of their own consciences but by the strong desire of their constituents, have devoted much time and thought to those subjects of national importance which are at present being considered by the Government of Canada. Among the most important of these are the settlement of our agricultural lands and the pressing problem of the alien population of Canada. Local disorders directed against individuals and groups of aliens have always been deplored by the National Executive of the Great War Veterans' Association. Appealed to by the Government, this group of men has placed, and always will be ready to place its influence behind the efforts made by the local branches on behalf of law and order. But the two above mentioned vital points at issue remain of the utmost importance to the National Executive.

The world is in a state of transition and change. It is inevitable that Canada share in this change and all that it implies, but it is hoped that in Canada such change will come about slowly though surely. If I may interpret the aims and aspirations of the leaders of the returned soldiers' organization, I would say that they stand for a temperate and sane reconstruction of Canada on lines which will make this country a better and happier place for Canadians to live in.

LAND SETTLEMENT

The study of the problem of the development of our agricultural lands and the most important alien question has led our thinkers into the intricacies of national policy and political economy, and national policy may by some people be considered a subject beyond the ken of the members of the Great War Veterans' Association, but the problems of land settlement and the alien have been considered not selfishly, but only from a broad, national point of view. The question of the rehabilitation of our returned soldiers on our agricultural lands is not a matter of providing them with land or occupation. It is a question of settling on our farm lands those who have shown themselves to be among our best citizens, thus ensuring the future stability of British Institutions and our Canadian ideals of democracy.

An Order-in-Council dated Feb. 11, 1919, was passed under the provisions of the War Measures Act in order to assure that a scheme of land settlement should be available for returned men, and to enable them to settle in the rural parts of Canada and there cultivate the land. The advisability of passing this legislation by Order-in-Council was open to debate, but the National Executive of the G.W.V.A. urged the Government to do this in order that it might be made possible for our returning soldiers to begin their agricultural operations during the coming Spring. Indeed it was felt that this was a matter of urgency. Our men were coming back. Would they, a potential asset to Canada, become a real asset, or would they be permitted to return to Canada without any effort being made to assure their future as citizens in our Country?

The legislation enacted by this Order-in-Council has the approval of the returned soldiers as a class and especially of the Executive officers of the Great War Veterans' Association. They feel that it spells progress. They realize that few, if any, countries have ever passed a measure of so broad and progressive a character, and they realize that its scope may be made almost illimitable. They realize that such legislation, if taken advantage of, would lead many to our Canadian farms, and that through it there would be begun a policy of agricultural reconstruction which before all others would stabilize Canadian life.

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Agriculture is the fundamental industry of Canada! If we neglect our other industries Canada can never be a complete and self-sufficient country. Thus the Great War Veterans' Association stands for our factories and industries as it stands for agriculture, but it stands for agriculture in a peculiar way, because agriculture is the fundamental industry of Canada.

I have continually drawn attention to the fact that in order to get the full benefit of this legislation it is imperative that the returning soldiers be educated in the possibilities of the land. I have said that the returned soldier who may have left Canada as a citybred young man has no real idea of the possibilities of agriculture, and that if Canada is to avail herself of the great asset of the returning soldier, he must be impressed with the fact that on the land there awaits him a happy and a prosperous home. Again, I have preached that to assure the success of the soldier-farmer, he must receive an ample practical education. I believe that neither of these suggestions has been carried out. I believe that the Government of Canada to-day is rapidly losing the chance of availing itself of the great asset of the returned soldier: that they are losing the greatest opportunity that any Government has had to stabilize our Country, to settle our land, to increase production, and to promote happiness amongst our people."

SALVATION OF CANADA

"The president of the Montreal Chambre de Commerce, speaking of the enormous debt contracted by Canada in the war, a debt which in 1919 was \$1,363,000,000 as opposed to \$332,000,000 in 1914, says: "It is the surplus of the production of the farm which will save Canada."

What has been done towards assuring this surplus of agricultural production? What has been done towards encouraging farmers and Canada's national industry?

The census of Ontario in 1910 shows the rural population to have decreased by 54,184 in ten years. The same ten years show an increase of 400,000 in the urban population. Yet, on the labours of the countryman depend the whole strength and health, nay, the very existence of society. Those who go to the city like it at first; but city life is like the roll spoken of by the prophet, which was sweet in the mouth but bitter in the belly. The first generation are intoxicated by the new life, but in the third generation the cord is cut which connected them with Nature, the Great Mother, and life shrivels up, sundered from the source of life.

As children springing from the loins of diseased parents manifest at an early age their progenitors' defects in their constitution, so Canada and the States, though in their national childhood, seem already threatened with the same disease from which classic Italy perished, and the ravages of which to-day made Great Britain seem to the acute diagnoser of political health to be like fruit—ruddy without, but eaten away within, and rotten at the core.

No nation can be regarded as unhealthy when a virile peasantry, contented with rural employments—however discontented with other things—exists on its soil.

The disease which has attacked our great populations here is a discontent with rural life. Nothing which has been done hitherto seems able to promote content. It is true, indeed, that science has gone out into the fields, but the labours of the chemist, the bacteriologist, and the mechanical engineer are not enough to ensure health. What is required is the art of the political thinker, the imagination which creates a social order, and adjusts it to human needs.

It may seem a grotesque juxtaposition of things essentially different in character, to talk of national idealism and then of farming, but it is not so. They are inseparable. The national idealism which will not go out into the fields and deal with the fortunes of the working farmers is false idealism.

I do not believe it to be possible that our Government, responsible as it is for the sanest and most progressive land settlement scheme which the world has seen, will allow this greatest of all opportunities to obtain settlers for our agricultural lands to slip by. If the Government fails to secure for Canada this, the greatest potential asset that has been offered to our country since Confederation, nay, in all time, they will have neglected to secure for Canada the greatest bulwark against political heresy that it is possible to erect, they will have failed in their duty to the Dominion.

I cannot believe that our Government has deliberately failed in the organization of a plan to carry out more fully the Order-in-Council of the 11th February, 1919, for soldier settlement, but a great fear possesses me. The magnitude of the scheme as passed by that Order-in-Council can only be counted in billions. Is the Government afraid that our soldiers will not succeed as farmers? Yet sixty per cent. of the population of Canada are farmers and agriculture is Canada's national industry!

If, before the war, farmers had exercised the habit of keeping careful accounts, if they had taken into account all interest charges, wages and other expenditures, would it be found that under pre-war conditions farming was a paying industry for Canadians? Yet agriculture is of more importance to the Nation than any other

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industry, and, as already observed, on the labours of the countryman depend the whole strength and health, nay, the very existence of society.

"THERE IS SOMETHING ROTTEN"

"There is something rotten in the State of Denmark" But, whatever the wrong, it is not in agriculture. There, the children are brought up to be farmers. There, agriculture has been highly developed to a state of great perfection, and there, the Danish Government has realized that agriculture is the fundamental industry of the Nation, and Denmark's national policy is based on this important fact.

There is something rotten in the State of Canada! Can it be that the wrong lies in the fact that our governments have not realized that agriculture is the basic industry of Canada? Is Canada's one time National Policy based on an erroneous foundation? Agriculture is of more importance to the Nation than any other industry. Have our governments realized that national wealth, happiness and moral strength depend on it?

In Canada in normal times most things which the Canadian farmer buys are purchased at the world's dearest retail prices and most of the things he sells are disposed of for less than the world's cheapest wholesale prices.

The channel from the grower to the consumer has, either through indifference or design, been made needlessly costly and complicated. Brokers, warehousemen, wholesalers and retailers are linked together by common interest in letting nothing interfere with the toll they levy on the farmer. Those farm products which have to go through various steps to reach the consumer have in recent years been largely controlled by combinations which have erected dams in the current flowing from the country to the cities. These dams give the power to manipulate prices that are becoming more and more a source of anxiety to the nation and of political unrest on the part of the farmers of this country. To distribute milk costs as much as the farmer obtains for producing it. Nothing gives the farmer more anxiety than the power to control prices possessed by the milling and meat-packing combines.

The average cost of distributing and selling farm products is greater than the sum paid the farmer for growing them, and this is due largely to inefficient chaotic methods and equipment which are half a century behind the times and one of the greatest menaces to rural progress.

Agriculture will never be in a satisfactory condition if the farmer is relegated to the position of a manual worker on his land; if he is denied the right of a manufacturer to buy the raw materials of his industry on trade terms: if other people are to deal with his raw materials, his milk, cream, fruit, vegetables, live stock, grain, and other produce; and if these capitalist middle agencies are to manufacture the farmers' raw material into butter, bacon, or whatever else, are to do all the marketing and export, paying farmers what they please on the one hand, and charging the public as much as they can on the other hand. The existence of these middle agencies is responsible for a large proportion of the increased cost of living, which is the most acute domestic problem of modern industrial communities. They have too much power over the farmer and are too expensive a luxury for the consumer. We must bear in mind what is too often forgotten, that farmers are manufacturers, and as such are entitled to buy the raw materials for their industry at wholesale prices.

The right of an individual to subsistence should not be subject to the good will of any other individual. Yet in Canada to-day our fundamental and national industry has been limited and dwarfed by a policy which benefits the few to the detriment of the many. It is rational statesmanship to co-ordinate the wheels of industry. No country as an agricultural country can be complete in itself. There are two main currents of economic energy—the agricultural and the urban. These must be made to flow so that their action will not defeat each other. If agriculture is neglected in any country the rural population pours into the towns. Rural labour has no traditions of trade unionism, and takes any work at any price. There are fewer people engaged in producing food and its cost rises."

NEW POLICY NEEDED

"In the life of the child there are transitions. At first it is fed at its mother's breast. In time it is strong enough to feed itself. So with the building of a nation. Development must be slow yet sure. For forty years or more the manufacturing industries of Canada have been developed to the detriment of agricultural Canada. And although no Canadian would suggest that the day of Protection is over, it is time that the East go to the West and the West come to the East to formulate a new National Policy which will be for the farmer as well as for the manufacturer.

The old National Policy has created industries, many of them hardly indigenous to Canada. It has created an aristocracy of money instead of that aristocracy of character and intellect which we hope will finally lead us. It is responsible for much poverty as well as for the creation of much wealth. May we trust that it's day is past and gone! We want neither rich nor poor. We want happy and contented Canadians.

I believe in moderate protection for the development of infant industries. I believe that protection against the unfair competition of a lower standard of civilization is justified. I do not disbelieve in protection for revenue, but surely after forty years of protection our factories and workshops can hardly be considered infants, and our indigenous industries to require excessive protection.

I think that it was Sir George Etienne Cartier who many years ago said that if Canada was to prosper it must be made a place cheaper to live in than the United States. Is Canada a cheap place to live in to-day?

The history of the numerical development of the population of Canada has been a tragedy. Let us analyse this:

The population in 1901 was 5,200,000. The normal increase in ten years would be approximately 1,100,000—total 6,300,000. Immigration from 1901 to 1911 was 2,000,000. The population in 1911 should have been 8,300,000. The actual population in 1911 was 7,100,000. The deficit was 1,200,000.

In ten years, in spite of immigration, we show a real deficit, although an apparent increase. What has happened? Where has our population disappeared? Our Canadians have been emigrating to the United States.

I will not quote statistics, because as you know there are three kinds of lies, —lies, d—lies and statistics.

2. Prince Edward Islander tells me that although the population of Prince Edward Island to-day is only 94,000 there are 100,000 Prince Edward Islanders living in the States. A French Canadian tells me that 1,500,000 French-Canadians are living in the States. A Nova Scotian tells me that there are 100,000 Nova Scotians resident in Boston.

Let us consider the population of Canada from another viewpoint.

There are more than 100,000 foreigners in Montreal and a large proportion in Toronto and Hamilton. I am told that 40% of the population of Saskatchewan is alien. It is said that there are approximately the same proportion of aliens in Manitoba. I understand that there is a slightly smaller proportion of aliens in the Province of Alberta.

It is evident that the alien under our old National Policy has been supplanting the Canadian. Canada has not been, broadly, a "cheap enough" country for the Canadian to live in. Its opportunities have not been attractive enough for our Canadians, but, instead, we have attracted cheap labour for our factories in the form of the alien. A Westerner tells me that if the present rate of increase of alien population continues, in twenty years the alien will own Canada. This is possibly an exaggeration, but undoubtedly we Canadians are becoming slaves to outsiders. Quantity, not quality, has been Canada's immigration policy! And we cannot blame this on our governments, because the doctrine of the importance of immigration and yet more immigration has been the very pap on which Canadians have been nourished. Thus even those who ought to be thinkers still speak as if Canada's prosperity depended, not on our own Canadians, not on the crops, but only on immigration.

CANADA'S PROSPERITY

Canada's prosperity depends on her own Canadian people and on Canadian soil.

How can we make the countryside in Canada a place from which nobody would willingly emigrate? That is the question. First, farming must be made a paying proposition. Second, we must aspire to create the rural community. The creation of a rural civilization is the greatest need of our time. Our countryman must without undue journeying be able to satisfy to the full his economic, social, intellectual and spiritual needs, and there is no reason why as intense, intellectual, and progressive a life should not be possible in the country as in the towns. Man does not live by cash alone, but by every gift of fellowship and brotherly feeling society offers him. It is one of the illusions of modern materialistic thought to suppose that as high a quality of life is not possible in a village as in a great city, and it ought to be one of the aims of rural reformers to dissipate this fallacy, and to show that it is possible—not indeed to concentrate wealth in country communities as in the cities—but that it is possible to bring comfort enough to satisfy any reasonable person and to create a society where there will be intellectual life and human interests. One happy invention after another will come to lighten the labour of life. There will be, of course, a village hall with a library and gymnasium, where the boys and girls will be made straight, athletic and graceful. In the evenings when the work of the day is done, if we went into the village hall we would find a dance going on or perhaps a concert.

Our aristocracy must be that of character and intellect. Money must not be all.

Agriculture is of more importance to the nation than manufactures. At least nine-tenths of the population of Great Britain belong to the wage earning class and many in Canada also. These are the people whom we ought to help, and for them and especially for their children, the new National Policy offers the first opportunity of relief."

