

What Is Being Done to Relieve Present Unemployed Problem

A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PROVINCE INVESTIGATES CONDITIONS IN VANCOUVER—THE EFFECT OF THE WAR—THE EXTENT OF THE DISTRESS—HOW IT IS BEING MET AND SUGGESTIONS FOR ITS MORE EFFECTIVE RELIEF.

(By Sheridan Bickers.)

IN Vancouver and its suburban municipalities today there are, it is estimated, close upon fifteen thousand persons who need relief. These figures include the Asiatic population, but they do not include the constant stream of derelicts from other cities, who float in here attracted to the Terminal City by its reputed prosperity and rapid development. "What is being done, and what can be done?" are questions every resident and ratepayer must face and do their individual best to solve. The matter has become urgent; the need is desperate. That is the opinion of the city's relieving officer, the Rev. George Ireland, who, though but recently appointed to the arduous duties of his responsible position, is doing yeoman work in relieving, as far as possible, the most pressing cases of distress and in evolving order out of chaos in bringing together those who want work and those who want work.

With a view to helping the solution of the problems that face the city in the coming winter, and in the belief that the time for public action has arrived, a representative of the Province has been making an investigation into the whole problem of poor relief in Greater Vancouver, and in this article presents the first results of the enquiry.

It is no reflection on the social or industrial outlook of the city to say that the relief of the poor this winter has become a work of unprecedented difficulty. War inevitably involves industrial dislocation and severe individual economies. The struggle for existence, often severe in a young and growing country, becomes still more severe in a time like the present until relieved by mutual aid and some self-sacrifice on the part of those fortunate enough to have work, a home and some resources of their own. Under these circumstances it is the duty of every public-spirited citizen in Vancouver and district to do all he or she can to alleviate the sufferings and lift some of the burden from the backs of those who are unable to shoulder their own.

What Is Being Done.

With a view to determining the demand for work and the help already given, I had a three-hours' conference with Mr. Ireland at the office of the City's Employment and Relief Association in the old police station building.

"One hundred and twenty-two men have been given employment within the past two weeks," said Mr. Ireland, "and these men have cut over 900 cords of wood. Our rock-breaking work has been momentarily deferred until the City Council fixes the rate of payment for blasting, but this will not provide work for more than twenty more. The council has voted \$5000 to provide for this stone-breaking and wood-cutting work. This sum is, of course, quite inadequate for our needs. For the rest, we are relying entirely on public subscriptions. There is however, the sum of \$100,000 appropriated this winter for boulevard improving and street grading and paving work, but this can not be expended until the banks agree to advance money on our city bonds. Their refusal to do this, up to now, has entirely held up this work, and has aroused much feeling on the part of many, apart from those needing work, on what they regard as an unnecessary and unfair conservatism. If this money, however, becomes available it will do a great deal to help in supplying the desperate needs for relief work among our people.

This Week's Applicants.

"Since I started my work here this week," continued Mr. Ireland, "over 800 applicants for work came here between Monday and Thursday. On Monday we had 190 applicants for work. Then a report got around that there was some work going, and the following morning 297 men stormed this office to fill seventeen jobs. On Wednesday we had 140 men here and only eighteen jobs to give them. Today we have had over 200 already, with only eight jobs to fill. I am satisfied that if there was any work going we should have more than a thousand applicants here, as soon as the news was known. As it is, they blame us. "I have been greatly impressed with the character of the men who are coming here. I should say that nearly 95 per cent. of them are applying for relief for the first time. There is no doubt that an overwhelming majority are unaccustomed to the situation. The percentage of the habitual pauper

class is infinitesimal; that sort doesn't come here anyway. Investigation of the cases before us has," he continued, "only confirmed this opinion."

My own investigations for the Province tend to give confirmation to this view. Among the applicants I talked to outside the office awaiting Mr. Ireland's early morning arrival, were three or four whom I recognized as from builders and contractors, while many others were unmistakably of the clerk and artisan type. Unemployment seems worst, indeed, among the carpenters and joiners with the possible exception of men employed in the railway construction camps. One of the waiting applicants was a very respectable man of undoubted industry, who showed his pay cheques as a proof of his accustomed employment. He had six children at home, but little in the house, and was in a truly desperate condition. Inside the office these men did not whine like beggars; they pleaded for work like men, for they were sober, self-respecting citizens; desperate with anxiety, not for themselves, but for their families.

Recruiting for Food.

Few men in the city know J. H. McVety better than Mr. J. H. McVety, the president of the Trades and Labor Council. He told me that a number of those who had enlisted in the second contingent had told him they were enlisting because they were starving, and these men's families admitted that this was why they had urged their husbands and sons to go. After seeing those who frequent the city employment and relief offices day by day I am inclined to believe that, while true patriotism was the prime reason, other factors may have determined the decision of many to give their lives abroad for the sake of those at home. There is no question but that a large percentage of those benefited by the war relief fund are better off than those demanding work day by day in our own city.

I understand that the war relief fund has about \$60,000 to its credit now at the banks, while the monthly subscriptions alone amount to \$4000 a month. This is as splendid as the relief which is being given to the families of our boys at the front, but what can we do for those who have to face the terrors of destitution at home?

Several of the leading manufacturers have set a splendid example in public spirit by donations that it is hoped, will be increased as the need is made public. First of these was the well known lumberman, Mr. John Hanbury, who came in with a big cash contribution. The Wallace Fisheries have already donated forty kegs of herring, while a very large quantity of rice has been given by the Imperial Rice Company—two very useful contributions. Another generous gift was that of a quantity of woolen sweaters, caps and mufflers from the Vancouver Knitting Company. Any further gifts of groceries, shirts, socks, old suits and dresses, or children's clothes will be particularly welcomed by Mr. Ireland, if sent to his relief office, on Railway street. A big bundle of clothing has been received through Mrs. Johnson from the Thimble Club, Port Alberni.

Work and Wages.

Mr. Ireland is approaching the railway companies and some of the big contractors in the hope of inducing them to send to the city employment office for employees, where they can be supplied with the best of all kinds of workmen. It is to be hoped that Mr. Ireland will extend his appeal to include all large employers of labor. For the men at city work are being paid at the half time trade union rate of \$3 a day, working six weeks a month, while on other work it is proposed to pay not less than \$2 a day for married, and \$1 a day for single men. The rate of payment for wood cutting seems high, as much as \$1.50 a cord, being paid at first, which has lately been increased to \$1.65 a cord. This is far in excess of the standard price for such work in the country districts. All over Vancouver Island, for instance, in the Shawnigan and Cowichan districts at least, the usual rate is \$1.10 to \$1.25 a cord, and \$1.10 a rick, including felling the trees and stacking. If the present city rate was reduced to this figure (\$1.10), three men could be thus profitably employed for every two now at work. This would find work at adequate wages for fifty more men in every hundred.

The work of investigating the claims and of administering relief is considerably complicated by the practice of many generously-disposed residents and business houses to give money or soup tickets to mendicants who call on them for help. Mr. Ireland told me that he would like to placard the business districts with notices, saying "Don't give charity; send money for work." Soup tickets and indiscriminate gifts could at best palliate but could never supply even in individual needs, while they benefited the class of those who prefer to beg at the expense of those who work.

At the city relief office, the claims are at once investigated, the genuine needy are given soup tickets and other help, and the others are given over to the police. In consequence, not many of the mendicant class are to be found at the city's office. Meanwhile these regular mendicants—the driftwood and floaters from other cities—continue to visit the business men and residents in other parts of the city. The money given them would provide work and bring relief to many genuinely needy and deserving families in the first place, and in the second to single men.

Another difficulty in the financial side of the question is that as soon as the government or city make any grant, however small, public interest is killed and voluntary subscriptions stop. The Relief Association needs not \$500, but many more thousands to relieve the distress of the coming winter, and find those needing relief employment and that will be of benefit to the city as well as themselves. Much overlapping and unnecessary expenditure in maintaining offices, clerical and nursing staffs, is occasioned by the subsidizing of semi-public and private employment and relief agencies. The city relief office should be the clearing-house for all employment and poor relief in the city. Its work can then be decentralized as much as may be expedient, but there will be no waste in the cost of administration, no wandering to and fro by those seeking work, and no overlapping in the supply of workers.

Feeling that this view of unemployment in the city would be of little use without some constructive purpose, I would submit the following

further suggestions for the consideration of those responsible for the administration of poor relief in the city. In the first place, a strongly worded letter should be sent out, signed by the mayor and the city relieving officer, to all local manufacturers, contractors, builders and principal merchants, asking them to co-operate with the city's officials by advising Mr. Ireland (the relief officer) of all vacancies or openings that may occur from time to time—whether regular or temporary work. This could be checked up daily, and suitable men sent on at once whose cases had been investigated and found worthy of help. A complete directory of work and workers wanted would then be available, and the merchants, manufacturers and contractors would be spared the trouble of having to interview applicants at all hours when there was no work to offer them.

The giving of relief in the form of wages removes all stigma of "pauperism," so repugnant to the self-respecting and self-reliant people of the West. Money thus received restores the recipients' falling faith in themselves. It benefits, instead of draining, the resources of the city. It is money well spent, well given and well earned. Its effect must inevitably be reflected as much on the moral as on the industrial aspect of our civic life.

Utilizing Waste Areas.

I am glad to see that a start has been made to do something in employing persons needing relief in the cultivation of waste lots. This experiment has already been made in Detroit, Philadelphia, and as near as Victoria, with conspicuous success. Owners of vacant city and suburban lots should surely be glad to lend the use of their property for such a purpose. The value of the property is thereby enhanced without cost to the owner. The city is beautified and benefited correspondingly, and the unemployed are thus occupied in healthy work in the open air. The gain is threefold, and the cost to the owner is "nil."

"Keep One Family" Fund.

A large number of residents in this city are well to do; a very large number are "comfortably off." Among them are many kindly and charitably disposed people, who gladly give freely of their services and private means to charity whenever a direct appeal to them is made. The apparent lack of interest and sympathy on the part of many more arises solely from the fact that they do not know how things really are with the poor in the city. Some men doubt the existence of any poor in this ever-growing seaport. But they have only to be told the truth, and shown the truth, to respond! How many residents are there in Vancouver who would willingly make some sacrifice, if they knew that a weekly donation of three to five dollars would keep one family in food and necessities for a week? Can not a number of our leading women be got together to raise funds for the poor and the deserving unemployed of our own city? Five dollars a week would keep a family, three dollars would help a home, and even one dollar a week would fill one heart with new hope and one hungry body with new life. Vancouver's citizens have, I am sure, only to know the need of the city's poor to relieve it! Who will give a small weekly or monthly contribution to a "Keep One Family" fund?

Business men can not employ assistants unless they are doing good trade. Vancouver is really far better off than any of her sister cities in the west. Industries and business are coming in way more than ever as the result of Washington and Oregon going "dry." There is no ground for pessimism to the man who can look ahead and keep his head in the present day of anxiety through the uncertainties of the war. Yet every one seems to be shutting down on expenditure. Even those in receipt of the same income as last year are spending very little. There is no excuse for this short-sighted idea of scare-economy. Living is cheaper—a good deal cheaper in many respects—than it was last year. These persons are in receipt of the same income as before. The shortening of credit has given many of them an increased cash balance at the bank. There is no reason why they should not live and spend on the necessities and comforts of life the same amount as last year. They do not have to economize in food, clothing or comforts. Buy all you can and you will soon find Vancouver on a firmer basis than before. Do what you can today to help the unemployed.

ASKS PROTECTION FOR ALIEN ENEMIES

New Yorker Appeals to Secretary Bryan in Protest of Canadian Rulings.

New York, Nov. 14.—Arthur von Briesen of this city has written to the secretary of state, William J. Bryan, regarding the condition of unemployed Germans and Austrians in Canada. He says that from letters he has received from Canada he knows that there are a large number of German and Austrian subjects in that country who are at the present time looked upon as public enemies, and that many of them are now in great need and are suffering from lack of food and also from lack of employment, as it is regarded as reasonable to employ any one belonging to those nationalities. "During the preceding years Canada has sought German immigrants, mainly for her agricultural development," Briesen writes. "Many came in good faith and obtained satisfactory employment. Some even acquired little farms and other property. Now their position is very difficult and to an extent, I believe, fraught with danger. "As the United States has undertaken to protect the citizens or subjects of Germany and of Austria who may be in England or in her possessions, its consulates might perhaps be called upon, if you approve, to extend such protection as may be lawful and proper to these people."

STREET NAMED "SYDNEY"

Toronto Changes the Name of Wilhelm Avenue.

Toronto, Nov. 14.—"Wilhelm," as identified with the Kaiser, is not considered a suitable name for a Toronto street. Yesterday a citizen took down the nameplate on Wilhelm avenue from the street corner and presented it to the street-naming committee, together with an emphatic protest. The committee recognized the validity of the objection and promptly changed the name of the street to Sydney avenue, in honor of the Australian cruiser which disposed of the German warship Emden.

Into the inside of a new handbag for women is built a coin holder that separates its contents by denominations for easy access.

Up"

A "Step

awaits the individual whose physical and mental powers fit him to grasp opportunities.

Right food plays a big part.

Grape-Nuts

—made of prime wheat and malted barley, contains in correct proportions the elements necessary for building strong bodies and keen brains.

This delicious food is long baked—easily digested and nourishing.

A daily ration of Grape-Nuts along with other food is good for ambitious folks.

"There's a Reason"

Canadian Postum Cereal Co. Limited, Windsor, Ont.