

THE MAYORS AND THE UNEMPLOYMENT QUESTION

The mayors in session at Ottawa have been well advised to make another call on the premier and ask for the appointment of a commission to go into the unemployment question and to co-operate with the municipal and provincial authorities in affording relief. It is only by treating the problem on a nation-wide basis that much can be accomplished. The more an isolated community attempts the heavier will be the burdens placed upon it, as experience has clearly shown.

It is work, not charity, that should be supplied, as Sir Robert Borden pointed out in his reply to the mayors. But the only field in which at present there is plenty of room for more labor is in that of agriculture. The whole hope of improving the situation is, therefore, in directing surplus urban labor to the country.

We have had many half-baked proposals made for helping men to get on the land. The trouble with most of them is that unless those aided already know something of farming or were able to adapt themselves to it their condition would soon be worse than ever.

During the past year or so there has hardly been a mail that hasn't brought to The Journal office some suggestions along this line. The reports of the visits of the mayors and of Dr. Tory to Ottawa are responsible for one, from which the following is an extract:

On all sides we hear the "back to the land" cry, and many willing, industrious, honest and capable men have taken up the idea. But there are plenty of such men left who are only killing time at present, simply because they have not sufficient funds to commence work on a farm of their own. All along the railroads to the north and west are homesteads within reasonable distance of the small towns that dot the railroad map simply waiting for the willing settler to commence work.

Why not Dr. Tory and the mayors of the different Canadian cities co-operate at Ottawa in this matter? If the federal government would arrange credit to each settler to the extent of, say five hundred dollars, appoint inspectors to inspect the progress each man is making every three months, adopt certain regulations for each case and have the inspectors enforce them, there is no reason why the government would stand a chance of losing any money. It does not take so much work to make improved homesteads. The interest on the loan

of credit would be small and the principal could be spread over a term of fifteen years.

This looks very beautiful. But it would cost an immense amount of money to put into force and no one who knows anything of the many pitfalls that the inexperienced man who attempts farming is almost certain to fall into can be expected to grow enthusiastic over it.

Rather than advance the money to those who know nothing of farming it would be much better to aid the men who are already on the land and know how to work it to advantage. This aid could be given to them not only in order that they might increase the production of the country but that they might give employment to city out-of-works and start them out on their rural career.

It cannot be disputed that the proper way to make the break from the city to the country is through the ranks of the hired men. Anyone who starts out to be a landed proprietor all at once is almost certain to come a cropper.

Even without government aid there is reason to believe that the opportunities of employment along this line have been by no means exhausted. The *Nor'West Farmer* in a recent issue, calling attention to the seriousness of the unemployment situation in western cities, had this to say, and too much importance cannot be attached to it:

It is of very little use at such a time as this to find fault with anybody, but these two observations may be passed; namely, that in the first place, the cities should, in the months of February and March, have more actively sought the co-operation of the farmers of these provinces in the matter of engaging the people who, sooner or later, must be dealt with and furnished with labor of some sort, and, in the next place, that it is pretty safe guessing that of the unemployed in our cities today there is scarcely a man who really sought work in March out in the country, at the farmer's doorway, where, for a perfect certainty, it was to be found. Of farm labor it is always true that he who really seeks shall find.

This failure to throw on to the farm labor market, in the early spring, the full weight of unemployed which, sooner or later, must very largely be absorbed in agriculture, is to be regretted for reasons that any farmer can at once see. In the first place, it leads to a scale of wages which is not exactly in line with the true situation in the labor market. Also, it is much easier for a farmer to find work for an extra man all season if at seeding time he plans to grow crops that will furnish the extra employment.

But although we are certain that the country will have less trouble with the man who takes to the farm through the "hired man" avenue than with the one who comes back to the land via any other route, and while we also believe that in the end this man will "make good" where others fail, still we are now at a point where, in our judgment, the Dominion government should take a hand and work out a solution.

It is obvious from this that for the present season arrangements for helping men to the land should have been made some months ago. As temporary measures the clearing of scrub land and bringing it under the plough by gangs of men under qualified supervision might help in the work of immediate relief, while their labor would be of economic value.

But as a permanent policy it ought to be quite clear that the proper thing to do is to enlist the active co-operation of the established farmer and have the transition made through the extension of his operations. Direct money aid should be for the purpose of allowing these to be carried on upon a larger scale.

Those city men who would not be willing to serve in the beginning under a farmer would stand a poor chance of being any use in the country under any conditions.