

The Scandal of Kapuskasing

Anything that effects the welfare of the returned soldier should be a matter of concern to all good citizens. The province owes a deep debt of gratitude to the hundreds of thousands of her sons who valiantly and gloriously assisted in preventing the Hun from destroying civilization. That debt is so great that it never can be adequately repaid, but it is the unanimous opinion of all classes of the people that everything humanly possible, and in a spirit of just generosity, should be done to restore these brave men to civil life, happiness and comfort. Obviously the Government of the province should lead the way because of its power and authority, and because the welfare of the people is the special function of Governments. The manifest duty in this respect, of the Hearst Government, was undoubted, but from the evidence before us its performance of that duty is so deplorable as to amount to a scandal of grave character, which should arouse the just indignation and censure of all right-thinking and humane people.

We refer particularly to the Soldiers' farming colony at Kapuskasing. A few years ago the Government promulgated a land settlement scheme for returned soldiers and sailors which on paper looked reasonably attractive. A farm colony on the community basis was to be founded at Kapuskasing in Northern Ontario. Returned men, physically fit for the life, were first to be trained by the Government in farming operations, and were afterwards to be located on lots of eighty acres each, ten acres of which would be cleared at the Government's expense, the returned men doing the work and being paid for it. While being trained, the men were to be given maintenance allowances for themselves and families, and while clearing operations were going on and until a suitable house for each man and his family was erected, the men were to be provided with suitable living quarters. Roads were to be built at the Government's expense and school accommodation and medical and religious services provided. A pulp mill was to be erected so as to provide work for the men in winter. Suitable barns were to be erected and a stock of horses, cattle, sheep and swine maintained. It was also promised that in each centre there would be a number of horses and a complete outfit of heavier farm implements, for common use, upon easy terms. An advance of \$500 was to be made to each settler to assist him generally in improving his location, which advance was to be repayable in twenty years with interest at 6 per cent. after the first three years. After the settler had performed settlement duties for five years he would be entitled to a patent for his eighty acres.

When making these promises the Government declared its belief that any returned man entering into the scheme with a determination to succeed, would have no great difficulty in establishing a comfortable home for himself in Northern Ontario.

Performances Contrasted With Promises.

It has been said that Hades is paved with promises and good intentions. If you substitute the Kapuskasing Government Colony for Hades, the statement would be correct.

Look at the facts and judge for yourself.

Up to March, 1919, when a Government return was forced down, no less a sum than a half a million dollars (499,509, to be exact) was spent in developing (1) the Colony, and only seventy-seven returned soldiers were located in it, nearly all of whom are dissatisfied with their conditions. 134 returned men tried the scheme, 111 of whom got disgusted with their treatment and quit. The strong likelihood is that through maladministration, failure to keep promises, and lack of sympathetic consideration of the settlers, the whole scheme will become an absolute failure with a huge loss to the province.

We have taken pains to investigate the conditions on the ground and this is a condensed statement of what we ascertained:

(1) Although the Government expressly promised the settlers free medical services, no such service has been provided. The only medical man available is a Dominion Government official who is a Military doctor at the German Internment camp in the neighborhood, and this doctor charges the returned soldiers and their families for his services.

(2) Although there are three distinct parts of the Colony.

(a) Kapuskasing.

(b) Kitigan—5 miles distance from Kapuskasing.

(c) Harty—14 miles distant from Kapuskasing.

There is only one school, which is located at Kapuskasing. The children of families of Kitigan have to travel to and from the school at Kapuskasing in a bus. In the winter

the children suffer from the cold

as driver last winter, stated that if he had not taken some of the children off at his home (about mid-distance) to thaw out the ice from their little boots and allow them to warm themselves at the fire whilst he collected the other children going to school, they would have frozen in the bus. Another man, who has acted as driver, declared that he had had to deprive the horses of their blankets in order to keep the children from freezing.

Although the Government kitchen is just outside the school house at Kapuskasing, nothing is offered the children who come from Kitigan, and these children leave their homes between 7 and 8 in the morning and have nothing but a cold lunch until they reach home about 6 in the evening.

There is no school at Harty, and at present there are thirteen children growing up there in ignorance. It is impossible to reach the place except by a ten mile walk over the railway ties and a further 4 mile tramp into the bush.

(3) The returned men were definitely promised by the Government free housing accommodation in a community house until their own homes were erected, but instead of getting this accommodation free, they have been charged fifty cents a day for rent.

(4) About two acres of ground were set aside for a cemetery, one-half to be for the Protestants and one-half for the Catholics. A priest came over from Hearst and consecrated the ground for the Catholics. A little Catholic girl died and was buried in the Catholic plot. The inconsiderate officials of the Government ploughed up the sacred ground to within two feet of the child's grave.

(5) The pulp mill which was promised and which would enable the men to dispose of the pulp wood on their lots thereby giving them much needed revenue and providing them also with employment in the winter months, has not been erected and no steps have been taken towards its erection. The result is that the men face the coming winter with practically no work in prospect, which is a most serious and alarming condition for them. The superintendent of the Colony has been repeatedly asked by the settlers what are the prospects of work for the winter and his reply invariably is, none at all.

(6) Foreigners have been engaged in clearing the land in the Colony and their work has cost the Government as high as \$300 an acre.

(7) No provision has been made by the Government for religious instruction, and it is a matter of deep concern to the mothers at the settlement.

(8) The instruction in farming given to the men was of the most meagre character and was practically of little value to them. Some of the men were not given any instruction at all.

(9) It was provided that a colony farm would be maintained at Kapuskasing. This was in midsummer, 1917. There is no farm there yet. A stock of horses, cattle, sheep and swine were to be maintained. There are a few horses for teaming but the rest of the promises were empty.

(10) It was promised that there would be an outfit of the heavier farm implements, but although 1,000 acres have been cleared the only implement in the Colony is a mower.

(11) The returned men and their families are compelled to purchase the necessaries of life at the Government store. No competition is allowed. It was expressly stated and understood that the settlers would be supplied at cost and that no profit would be made by the Government, but there is evidence that substantial profits are being made.

(12) A laundry equipped at an expense to the Province of over \$1,000, which was understood to be for the benefit of the women of the settlement, has not been allowed to be used by these women.

(13) There is no communication with Harty—10 miles away—except over the railroad ties. There is not even telephone communication in case of sickness, and there are several women there and 13 children. The Superintendent refuses to put in the telephone. In the event of illness someone would have to walk ten miles down the tracks and back.

There is no store there and supplies have to be purchased at Kapuskasing and either carried up the tracks or held until a local train passes through twice a week at inconvenient hours. There is no school or dormitory. There is no road between the two settlements and men whose families are in Kapuskasing have to walk from 20 to 25 miles week-ends in order to visit them. These men were discharged from the army as physically unfit.

What are you going to do about it? Can you support a Government which permits such callous and cold-blooded treatment of men who are entitled to our best care and attention?

Do you propose to plant our returned heroes in a wilderness and leave them practically to shift for themselves?—(Adv.)