

Unsound Distribution of Empire Population.

In that connection I think it is essential to remember that at this moment the full effect of any policy of economic co-operation and Empire-development is largely handicapped by the wholly unsound distribution of the population of the Empire. I am talking for the moment only of the area under consideration for this purpose—namely, the area suitable for white settlement. We have some seven million square miles or more of territory full of every resource, agricultural, mineral, power-supply, &c. Three-fourths of our population is concentrated, huddled together I might say, on less than one-fiftieth of that area.

The result is not one that makes for efficiency in development. In this country the congestion of population has reached a point where it directly clogs the efficiency of industrial production by all the social reactions, the toxins I might almost call them, which it has created in the body politic—the burden of taxation, the social problems, and so on, involved. On the other hand, in the Dominions the inadequacy of population adds to the cost of production. It means a tremendous overhead charge for railways carried hundreds of miles to deal with scanty bodies of producers. I need not labour the point, but there is at this moment from the point of view of efficiency and from the point of view of social welfare a thoroughly unsound distribution, and the more rapidly we can take measures to remedy that the better it will be. The more rapidly we can get population from here to the Dominions, the healthier the economic and revenue condition of this country, the better the state of our best markets. On the other hand, from the point of view of the Dominions, the more population they can get in, the more economical will be their whole system of development, the more justified their great railway schemes, the more possible the progress of economical means of development in every direction.

Passage Rates.

That is one thing. Now, take some of the practical obstacles to that, to a flow which we want to accelerate in any case, but which is at the present time being retarded. The greatest obstacle at the moment is the fact that you have widespread poverty in this country, consequent upon the war, and very high passage rates, so that hundreds of thousands of admirable settlers cannot get across and to a large extent are deteriorating for want of opportunity either of work here or of the kind of employment to which they could adapt themselves in the Dominions, in the main agricultural employment. Anything that gives direct assistance to bridge that gap, to get over that obstacle, is a very real help. As the Conference knows, immediately after the war the British Government gave free passages to ex-service men and their families. Now, they were carefully selected, and that is essential, but out of nearly ninety thousand who have gone the percentage of failures has been infinitesimal. But for those free passages they would not have gone. I have no doubt whatever that that expenditure by the British Government has been amply repaid. It has meant an addition to the resources of the Dominions, and has repaid us here both by the increase in our markets and by the diminution of what we should otherwise be spending on unemployment expenditure. So I do want to lay great stress, in this business of Empire settlement, on the form of assistance that in a sense covers every other form of assistance, to get over the cost of passages, because with a reasonable selection, if you can get the people across, they do find their openings, and they do create the new wealth which enables others to follow on after them.

Migration by Families.

More particularly I should like to lay stress on what I referred to just now in connection with the ex-service free passages, the desirability of making it possible for the man who has a family to go across, because, from the point of view of future citizenship, that is the most valuable element we can send to you. It is true from the point of view of the individual employer the single man is preferred, but from the point of view of development the man who goes with a family of growing children, the citizens, the creators of the wealth of the future, is the most welcome settler. I should like to draw attention to this fact: that New Zealand, in this respect, has agreed with us on assisted-passage schemes very substantially ahead of any other Dominion in the very liberal assistance they give to the man with a family—that is to say, that children up to a certain age go entirely free and the older sons and daughters at a very reduced rate. I think to-day a man with quite a large family can get to New Zealand on practically no more than it takes a man and his wife alone to go to Australia. I should like to press very strongly the importance of that. There are many other points which I do not think at this moment I need dwell on, the importance of extending in every way the principle, which I think Australia first introduced, of nomination; both individual nomination and nomination by responsible bodies, churches, Masonic lodges, rotary clubs, and so on. That method is especially helpful in the case of migration of women.

Importance of Housing.

Then there is another point which is of the greatest importance, and that is the question of housing. It is undoubtedly true that all over the Empire housing-accommodation for the farm labourer is often very inadequate. Now, unless you can provide housing-accommodation which is not only tolerable for the man but tolerable also for his wife, that man will not stay on the land for long, however good his intentions to begin with. If his wife finds conditions on the land intolerable she will worry him until he goes to the city. I always feel in this question of settlement we have paid far too little attention to the dominant factor, which is the woman. It is her interests, her well-being, the possibilities of her living decently, and bringing up her children which will in the long-run decide where the man is going.