

The Effects of the War on Canadian Youth



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The Effects of the War on Canadian Youth — November 7, 1944

Everybody says that the future of a country is in its young people. They will be the people eventually to determine its shape, and by understanding them properly we can to a large extent predict what is going to happen in Canada. It is our job then to find out what they think and feel, what they hope and fear, before we have a chance to discover how we can all work together to create a better Canada. That is why we must look at the various influences which are forming these young people. For this reason, in the Citizens' Forum this year we are going to have a series of four discussions on A NEW GENERATION OF CITIZENS. It is out of these citizens that the future will be made.

We Have Almost Forgotten Peacetime

In this autumn of 1944 the clearest force that is affecting all young Canadians is the war. Since September 1939—that is for over five years—Canada has been at war, and either the direct or the indirect experience of war is colouring every aspect of our lives. Some of us think certain influences have been good, other influences disruptive. But whether for good or bad, what we cannot forget is that the war has been a great influence on Canadian youth. It has become part and parcel of their existence, and most of them can hardly remember the days when the headlines of our newspapers did not scream of battles, death and violence affecting hundreds of thousands. They ask how newspaper editors in peacetime could possibly have filled their papers with dull stories of mere motorcar accidents, movie stars, football, and, at best, an occasional bank robbery. It will take a long time until their demand for big events can again be satisfied by stories of these comparatively petty trivialities. The war has been such a potent factor in their lives that before we can gauge anything else about a NEW GENERATION OF CITIZENS, we must find out clearly what have been the effects of the war on Canadian youth.

The War Has Changed Those Who Fought In It

The first and most obvious effect of the war is that 765,000 are in the Armed Forces—734,000 men and 31,900 women. Of course, being in the Services has not affected all young Canadians in the same way. The lives of those who have stayed in camps in Canada have not been as drastically changed as those who have been away from home since 1939—first waiting in England, and later fighting in Italy or France. Whatever the range of experience, whether they fought in the Battles of Britain or Africa, whether they patrolled the Mediterranean or kept open the sea-lanes of the North Atlantic, whether they now take part in the occupation of Germany, or will fight in the jungles of the Fast East, whether they have been wounded on the beaches of Dieppe or have been taken prisoner at Hong-Kong, the experience of war is something that can never be forgotten by them or by us. Young men who have gone through and accomplished such things are not the same people as they were in the quiet days of 1939.

It Has Widened Their Horizon

Clearly, the effects of these experiences vary in intensity with different people. Two men who have gone through exactly the same things may react totally differently to them. But certain effects have been common to all. The war has widened the horizon of most young Canadians. For one thing, they learnt, through first-hand experience, a great deal of geography they would probably never have learnt otherwise. Some of them, of course, would even in peacetime have visited Britain, but who would have entered the port

of Murmansk? The more fortunate ones might have spent a week or two in France, but Arabia, Iraq, Ceylon, India—these would have remained romantic names of places only to be found in books. The war has revealed the world to them, it has lifted the curtain over parts of the earth which would have remained hidden in peace-time.

It Has Brought Together All Kinds of People

But that is not all. By joining up and fighting for Canada, they acquired a new feeling of 'belonging', a new idea of understanding other peoples, and even more so their fellow-Canadians. Since many of them in their training period travelled from one part of Canada to another, many Westerners got to know for the first time what the East was like, and the other way round. The war has done a lot to unify Canada, to fuse her many different groups. Canadians have seen for themselves the immense extent and diversity of their country. They also came in contact with other men and women of the United Nations, with other members of the British Commonwealth, with Americans, French, Chinese, Norwegian, Polish fighters—all people who would have remained mere imaginary characters in fiction, and whom they would have seen distorted and glamorized in movies, if it had not happened that the war had brought them all together and given them vast opportunities of 'discovering' each other.

It Has Given Them New Loyalties

Apart from having generally 'widened their horizon,' this conflict has imposed on our youth many new loyalties. Not only loyalty to their country at large (although no doubt there has been a great upsurge of patriotism) but loyalties to smaller units, to their regiment, to their tank, to their corvette. While many of them have a deep-seated suspicion of big words and big ideas, there is not a member of the Canadian forces who has not formed new allegiances, new ties which will remain unbroken, because they are intimate and human.

Many Got the Chance to Prove Themselves

Many Canadians who either came straight from the schools, or who have never had a job since the depression, have found in the Services the first real chance to prove themselves in a real way. Many of them who never had the opportunity to obtain a decent education in civilian life got one in the Forces, and many acquired skills, especially technical skills, which may be of great use in civilian life after the war.

But Not All the Effects of War on Soldiers are Good

On the other hand, the interruption of four, five years of ordinary life has in some cases not been able to outbalance the positive effects of the war. True, there were new experiences, new ideas, new loyalties, but the fact that young men and women were torn away from their families, their jobs, their schools,



raises very serious problems. The normal life of an ordinary Canadian was suddenly taken up into the turmoil, excitement and discipline of war. Many who were just starting out to make their way in life had to go to defend their country.

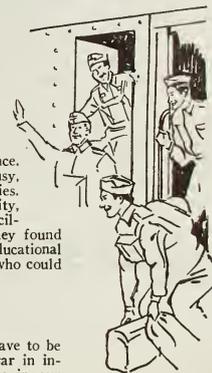
The Lives of Young People Outside the Forces Have Also Changed

The effect of the war on Canadian youth cannot be limited, however, to those in the Armed Forces. It has profoundly affected young Canadians in every branch of civilian life. The general tension grips them all: everybody has Victory to look forward to. The suicide rate went down, and the intensity of life generally went up. Everybody has discovered his own importance, everybody is playing a part, everybody has suddenly become obviously useful. This can be seen everywhere: in the farm commandos from the towns who have gone out in the summer to help cut the labour shortage in the country; thousands of boys and girls have taken part in salvage drives by making door-to-door canvasses and carrying the bundles to school. Under the direction of teachers, many students have taken care of Victory Gardens in school grounds and at home. First Aid, A.R.P., air cadets, war charities, Victory Loan Campaigns, Red Cross work and a thousand other activities have given our civilian youth a new direction and a purpose.

All this must be looked at in the light of the last ten years of peace. Many of our young people still carry vivid memories of the depression, of the drought, the bread-lines and the nation-wide period of unemployment. The building up of a terrific war-machine (Canada is now the fourth largest industrial power of the United Nations) has eliminated unemployment. Now nobody has to be afraid of being jobless. The rapid expansion of industry means that hundreds of thousands of Canadians work in new ways and in new occupations. Our civilian youth also has learnt new skills, and has learnt to form new allegiances, to plants and workshops and to trade unions, the membership of which has increased tremendously since the war.

The War Has Also Bad Effects on Civilian Youth

On the other side of the picture, the effects of the war on civilian youth have in some cases been bad. The term 'juvenile delinquency' has been over-emphasized and exaggerated in many of our papers. But still in parts of Canada, and especially in the cities, it does exist. War, with its tales of heroism, is an exciting time, and many young people have looked in the wrong ways for excitement. Children with fathers overseas have missed their help and guidance. Parents working on night-shift, tired and busy, have not paid enough attention to their families. Often it has been the fault of the community, which has not produced sufficient recreational facilities to meet the needs of youth. Naturally they found recreation in the wrong places. Often the educational facilities have been gravely deficient, and those who could have helped boys and girls have been overseas.



We Must Have Full Employment

What then will be the problems that will have to be met by young Canadians returning from the war in industry and on the farms? What part can we in our communities play to help to make this change forward to civilian life easier?

First of all, we must not separate the problems of youth from general problems affecting every aspect of Canadian life. No adjustment or rehabilitation will be possible except in the framework of an all-round healthy society. There is no possibility of a fine generation of new citizens unless we can gear our country to full production and employment, even after the prosperity due to the war begins to show signs of disappearing. We must see to it that, after the war, young people, whether from the armed forces or among civilians, find that they never again have to face the mass unemployment of the 1930's and that they can find a productive livelihood in their particular line of work. Employment is clearly the first essential for any new generation of citizens, and it is not a concern for youth alone. It is a concern for all Canadians, farmers, businessmen, labour and professional people. In the four weeks after Christmas, we shall discuss these problems under the title of **JOBS FOR SOLDIERS AND CIVILIANS**.

But Employment is Not Everything

But material prosperity alone will not be enough to accomplish the adjustment of young Canadians to a fuller peacetime life. The mental adjustment of service personnel to civilian life after demobilization will be a difficult job: anybody who came out of the last war will remember that. And in this every civilian has a part to play. General Brock Chisholm, Director of Medical Services for the Canadian Army, has written:

"It is important that Canadians do their utmost to understand how important it is for ex-servicemen to feel that they are among friends. They must be given important work, so that they will feel of use to the country, and not a drug on the market."

After the last war many returned men went through a period of acute frustration. We must see to it that this will not happen again: it is a big job to which every one of us can contribute. What can we now do, before the end of the war?

What We Can Do To Help

It is clearly our job to discuss matters freely, and to know about the various rehabilitation schemes which are being planned by the Dominion, Provincial and Municipal governments of our country. We must find out in what ways we can help to make these plans, and we must see to it that they will work. Without assistance and constant criticism from citizens there is little chance that any of them will succeed. The planning authorities need our cooperation. Let us give it to them freely.

In the next three weeks we are going to discuss further this question of a new generation of citizens. We will try to analyze the roles of three important institutions in shaping young Canadians: the school, the home, and the church. They have played vital parts in moulding young Canadians in the past. Since the war has wielded such an immense influence on our young people they must face new problems at the present and in the future.

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This bulletin was prepared in cooperation with the Canadian Youth Commission, a widely representative private body organized in 1943 to investigate the problems of young people between the ages of 15 and 24, and to plan for their future.

MORE INFORMATION

Future for Fighters, E. A. Corbett. (Canadian Affairs Series). Available War-time Information Board, Ottawa.

Discharged, Robert England, 1943. (Macmillan, \$5.00). A commentary on civil re-establishment of veterans in Canada. Discusses measures already adopted by the government for ex-service men, what ex-service organizations have done, and suggests rehabilitation policies for the future. The author is a veteran of the last war.

The Unarmed Forces, D. M. Young. Behind the Headlines Series. No. 7. Available at 198 College St., Toronto, 10 cents. Excellent discussion of labour's position in wartime Canada, written by a union man.

Proceedings of the 1943 Parliamentary Committee on Reconstruction and Re-establishment. Hearings before the House of Commons Committee. Available from King's Printer, Ottawa.

British White Paper on Demobilisation.

Youth Looks Ahead, R. E. G. Davis. Available at Canadian Youth Commission, 3 Willcocks Street, Toronto.

The Road Back, E. M. Remarque.

REPORT QUESTIONS

1. To what extent do you think that wartime conditions have affected young people both among the Armed Forces and among civilians?
2. Do you think that official government plans for rehabilitation are adequate? If not, what improvements and changes would you suggest.
3. What work is being done in your community to help returned servicemen and women to adjust themselves back to civilian life? What more could be done?

FURTHER QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. There has been much discussion in the press, over the radio and in the movies of juvenile delinquency. How true do you think these reports are? If they are true, what are the best ways of coping with this delinquency?
2. Since most members of our armed services have lived through stimulating times in the last years, how can we find in our society the same kind of interest and excitement in peacetime?
3. The Dominion Government has passed the Veterans Land Act for the purpose of enabling returned men to settle on the land. Under the terms of this Act what chance do you think a returned man has of making a decent living in the rural communities?
4. What part do you think the veterans' organizations are going to play in our postwar society?

Next Citizen Forum . . . What is the Responsibility of Our Schools?

