

the Annual Reports of the Superintendent of Education since 1926 has advocated the adoption of a larger unit of administration in education. The Provincial Government, realising the urgency of the matter, in 1938 appointed a Commission "to examine fully the various types of school administration, with a view to the adoption of a unit larger than the present sectional organisation prevailing throughout the province." That Commission reported in 1939. Their recommendations are definite and clear. Briefly, they recommended that the cities and towns continue as at present unless they wish to come into the larger unit; but that the rural and village sections throughout the whole province be regarded as a single unit for school finance. A uniform assessment of property and income would be made and a uniform school tax imposed, which would be supplemented by a provincial school equalisation fund. There would be a minimum salary scale paid to all teachers. The school sections would not be abolished but remain as an attendance unit with powers to supplement the minimum school program if they desired.

There is no doubt that the adoption of some such scheme would make the administration of education in the pro-

vince much more efficient and would abolish the present gross inequalities. It has won the approval of many provincial organisations, and the praise of many citizens. Those who still remain doubtful I would advise to read the Report of the Commission on the Larger School Unit and perhaps along with it the latest Report of the Superintendent of Education, both of which are obtainable from the King's Printer, Halifax. To those who still hesitate I would simply point out that if democracy means anything it means equality of opportunity for all children, and that under the present system our children don't have it. Long ago, in 1864, when Nova Scotia adopted a system of free schools, she adopted also the principle that rich and poor, high born and low born, those with children and those without, should pay their share according to their ability in the education of the new generation. This principle can only be carried into effect by the adoption of some such scheme as that outlined in the Report of the Commission on the Larger Unit.

We know the disease, we see its debilitating effects, we have the remedy to our hand. It remains, by legislation, to apply it.

Land Settlement in Nova Scotia

By EDITH C. BLAIR

THE need for rehabilitating thousands of soldiers at the end of the present conflict has prompted the many followers of the "back to the land" movement to advocate comprehensive land settlement programs. In times like ours when the big cities and industrial centres are bombed; food is scarce in many parts of the world and our belief in the blessings of city born civilisation shaken, life in the country and the peaceful occupation of the farmer seem to promise peace and

security. People are apt to overlook the realities and are deceived by a false romanticism which is not the proper basis for the hard tasks of the farmer. It may therefore be worthwhile to point out that on two similar occasions in the past, land settlement programs have been launched in Nova Scotia which have been rather unsuccessful and it may even be more important to examine the reasons which have been responsible for this lack of success.

Up to the first great war land settlement was treated in Canada as a problem of

EDITOR'S NOTE: Edith C. Blair, M.A., is research assistant at the Institute of Public Affairs.

colonization and the settlers admitted to this country were mainly Europeans with previous farming experience. The two ventures to be discussed in this article are of a very different character. They were aimed at a redistribution of people already within the country and they were not restricted to persons with an agricultural background. The first was the Soldiers' Settlement program initiated after the first World War, the second was land settlement as an unemployment relief measure started in 1932 in Nova Scotia.

Although Nova Scotia was not directly involved in the settlement of ex-soldiers on farms this first departure from the colonization principle is of timely interest. The program was administered by the dominion government under the Soldier Settlement Act, 1919, which provided for a maximum loan of \$8,000 to a settler (up to \$5,000 for land purchases, \$2,000 for stock and equipment and \$1,000 for buildings and permanent improvements). Loans were repayable over a period of 25 years with interest at 5 per cent. Up to 1934 loans aggregating \$117,000,000 had been made to 24,491 ex-soldiers, and at that date about half of this number had abandoned their farms. Soldier settlement was not regarded as a part of agricultural policy but rather as a means of redistributing surplus population and not enough attention was given to the ability of the industry to absorb the settlers or to the means of marketing their products. Fitting the scheme into a coordinated plan for land utilization or supplying agricultural products would not have been in keeping with the *laissez-faire* principles prevalent at that time.

Prices of land and equipment were at their peak when the program was inaugurated and this meant a heavy burden of debt for the settlers, further aggravated perhaps by the fact that "government money" was being spent. Some of the farms purchased had been abandoned for some time and the soil and buildings were in a run-down condition, necessitating further expenditures of both money

and labor before any returns could be expected. The choice of settlers too has often been criticized because some of the men placed on farms lacked the knowledge and experience required to operate them. Short courses of instruction were available for men with no experience in agriculture but there were no doubt some settlers who had inadequate knowledge and little practical training. Physical fitness was sometimes under-emphasized and men who were described by medical boards as capable of "light outdoor work" found the routine heavy labor of farming quite beyond their capacity. The social aspect of the new life in which the families were placed was sometimes overlooked and ex-service men, trained in working cooperatively and accustomed to companionship, often found themselves completely isolated either by distance and poor communications or by the unfriendliness of their neighbors.

With this experience still comparatively fresh in the minds of many people a second nation-wide land settlement program was undertaken during the depression. It was a relief measure and aimed primarily at getting the families of unemployed workers off the urban relief rolls and "back to the land" where they could be self-supporting. The ability of agriculture to provide additional workers with a reasonable income was a secondary consideration since a bare subsistence was the goal and, theoretically at least, the soil could provide that.

Under this settlement scheme the Federal government cooperated with the provinces in paying the costs and various arrangements were made with all provinces except Prince Edward Island. Nova Scotia passed an Act in 1932 establishing the Land Settlement Board which was empowered to make necessary regulations and carry on the administrative work. A sum slightly in excess of \$1 million was allocated by the Provincial Treasury for the purpose of buying farms, providing equipment and supervising the scheme, and the dominion contribution was in the form of a grant of \$200 per settler. The farms purchased by the

Board might not exceed \$3,000 in value and were to be sold at their purchase price to settlers on a long-term amortization basis with interest at the rate of 5 per cent and payments to be made in monthly instalments. Most of the farms purchased were vacant or unoperated and part of the purpose of the Act was to bring such land back under cultivation.

At first the primary consideration in selecting settlers was that they be unemployed; other qualifications were that they be between 21 and 50 years of age and head of a household dependent upon them, and ex-employees of the coal mining, manufacturing or transportation industry. Most of the early settlers were unemployed coal miners and by far the majority were placed on farms in the mining counties, Cape Breton, Pictou and Cumberland. Many had no experience in farming and their wives had no knowledge of rural life. They were perhaps lured by the cash grant provided by the dominion government. By 1934 the high percentage of abandonments convinced the Board that further regulations regarding eligibility of applicants would have to be made. The upper age limit was reduced to forty-one years and only applicants with "enough experience to be capable of operating a farm properly" were considered. It was also provided that they have "sufficient capital to furnish adequate stock and equipment with which to operate a farm" and that they be able to provide security equal to one-third of the amount of the loan. These changes, after only two years of operation, indicated that a coal miner could not qualify as a farm operator simply by being on relief.

In the nine years of its operation the Land Settlement Board has made loans to 644 settlers, of whom 324 have abandoned their farms. Of those remaining on the land there are 44 whose loans are completely paid off, and 211 whose instalments are in arrears. This is scarcely the record of a successful land settlement program.

In 1938, the Nova Scotia Economic

Council reviewed the results of the program and came to the conclusion that:

"Further expenditure of public money to stimulate the "return to the land" of inexperienced urban persons now on relief in the hope of making them self-supporting on farms is not justified at the present time.

Encouragement and aid should be given rather to farmers' sons and other workers now engaged in agriculture who would like to start farming themselves and who have some capital with which to begin".

This conclusion was based on general considerations with regard to the economic position of persons already on farms, the availability of land suitable for agriculture, as well as the methods employed in the land settlement program itself.

Some of the farms purchased by the Land Settlement Board in Nova Scotia had been abandoned for some years and both soil and buildings had deteriorated seriously. This fact, plus poor market facilities and the prevailing prices for farm products made the farms submarginal for agriculture and investigation showed that they should have been allowed to revert to forest. The Economic Council therefore recommended that farms to be purchased by the Board should be more carefully inspected and that any program of land settlement be based on knowledge of the type and quality of the soil. This information will be available for future settlement programs as a result of extensive surveys being made by the Economic Survey Committee of the Provincial Government.

It was the experience of the Land Settlement Board that many of the urban workers had no interest in agriculture and no liking for rural life. Their wives, accustomed to urban conveniences, entertainment, and social life had no knowledge of the duties they must perform, and no taste for life in a rural community. As mentioned above the Economic Council concluded that only members of a farm family or farm workers should be assisted in buying farms. Both men and their wives should be given special short courses at the Agricultural College and if they had no experience in farming should serve an apprenticeship on a

farm before being given the task of operating one themselves. In this way the incapable or disinterested applicants would be weeded out without an expensive experiment. It was also considered essential that the settlers be able to provide a down payment on the farms and a part at least of the necessary livestock and equipment. The investment of their own money would give the settlers a greater sense of responsibility and increase their efforts to succeed.

Assuming that the settlers have been well trained and the land carefully chosen farming will be a new undertaking for them and in most cases guidance will be needed in the early stages at least. A competent supervisor, trained in the technical problems of agriculture and with a good knowledge of farm and home management and rural sociology can solve many problems which are insurmountable for the settlers themselves. Encouragement, as well as information and supervision, are needed by the settler if he is to make the best use of his land, balance his budget and fit himself into the life of the community. These considerations led the Economic Council to recommend that general supervision of the program be placed in the hands of a well-qualified, specially trained man.

Land settlement, if it is to be undertaken on more than a small and experimental scale, needs to be fitted in with a general agricultural policy and due regard must be given to the relative economic position of the industry. In Canada farm workers will be content with a low standard of living only so long as urban employment offers no better prospects. In recent years the use of more and better machinery and more scientific methods has reduced the number of workers who can profitably be employed in agriculture. As a result the surplus population from the farms in Nova Scotia has moved to urban areas or emigrated out of the province. The following table summarizes this trend from 1911 to 1931.

THE POPULATION OF NOVA SCOTIA

	1911	1921	1931
Total.....	492,338	523,837	512,846
Urban.....	186,128	227,038	231,654
Rural.....	306,210	296,799	281,192
Per cent rural.....	62.2	56.7	54.8

The number of persons gainfully occupied in agriculture decreased from 49,246 in 1921 to 44,032 in 1931—some 5,000 persons, either farmers, members of a farmer's family working on the farm or hired farm laborers, gave up the occupation and sought their livelihoods elsewhere. This trend may have been stopped, or even reversed, during the depression when other industries were also in a depressed state and offered no alternative employment for the excess farm population, but that is no proof that wholesale land settlement was the solution for the problem of unemployment in 1932.

In the last few years the land settlement program in Nova Scotia has been on a more modest scale with more careful supervision; the attempts to transplant urban unemployed have been abandoned. The results already indicate that it is both possible and practical to assist a limited number of carefully selected families who, both men and women, wish to make farming their occupation and have experience, ability and initiative. It will further contribute to the success of the program if the settlers are encouraged to use modern methods in cultivation and in marketing their products and if the efforts for revitalizing rural culture and improving community life which have been undertaken so successfully by various groups in the province, are being strengthened. Financial assistance by the government, as borne out by past experience, need not be over-generous but loans should be made on a long-term, easy payment basis and adequate provision should be made for stock and equipment essential to the successful operation of the farms. Assistance in the form of advice and supervision is equally important.