

Taking the homestead blocks and co-operative settlements of South Australia together, I was as surprised as pleased at their extent and the promise they gave. Though not all very recent, or all the work of the Kingston Government, they owe much to that Ministry collectively, and to members of it individually. From the untiring courtesy shown me by Mr. Kingston, Dr. Cockburn, and their colleagues, I am sure that any officer whom we sent over to inspect the blocks and collective settlements would be actively helped by them in his work.

I have tried to give you some idea of how successful that work seems to me to have been in coping with the "unemployed" difficulty, and in helping poor and often unskilled people to make homes for themselves on the land. I cannot too earnestly urge upon you how strongly I feel that we can learn from South Australia in this matter, just as I dare say they can learn from us in other respects relating to land and settlement.

As head of the Labour Department I can only look enviously at a colony where the yearly call is not made on a Labour Bureau to find work again and again for the same men, and where the same complaints and distress do not arise in each succeeding winter. If neither you nor the Minister of Lands can spare the time to visit South Australia and Victoria, I have the honour to suggest that some experienced officer—say, Mr. March—should without delay visit the Adelaide settlements, and the Koo-wee-rup Swamp in Victoria. If one of the Public Works officers could examine the system in force at the last-mentioned work, it would be all the better. I feel sure that the result would be information that would materially aid us in our endeavour to cope with the greatest difficulty we have had to struggle against during our term of office.

In urging upon you that we should now take a fresh departure, and push on the work of village settlement even faster than in recent years, I would point out that we have now the Land for Settlements Act on the statute-book. Moreover, the finance of last session provided us with money. Unless we set to work to settle labourers on the soil on something like a large scale, I do not see how we are to hope for anything like finality in dealing with the unemployed. They will simply take what work we have to give and clamour for more. Even the settlement of Cheviot, splendid success though it has been from every other point of view, has left the "unemployed" difficulty in Christchurch only partially reduced. It has helped Canterbury to get through two bad winters. But in a month or two we shall have to face the same difficulty. What do we mean to do? Any immediate and large extension of the public-works policy I regard as financially out of the question. Even if it were not, it would be only a stop-gap. The aim and end of our labour policy—our co-operative system, Bureau, and liberal land-laws—should be the placing of all competent surplus labour on the land.

If South Australia, with not much more than half our population, and a dry climate, has put twelve thousand human beings on small allotments and co-operative settlements, surely such an achievement is well worth our study, and, so far as possible, our prompt imitation.

W. P. REEVES.

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