

CARPENTRY TRAINING CENTRE

A Year's Course that is No Rest Cure for Weary Soldiers

A KORERO Report

Problem I.—There is an acute shortage of houses, largely because of the lack of skilled tradesmen to build them.

Problem II.—There are large numbers of ex-servicemen keen to learn a skilled trade, and to settle down to civilian life anew as craftsmen.

This is the story of how the Rehabilitation Department, in co-operation with the Housing Department and the State Advances Corporation, is attempting to solve these two problems by setting up Carpentry Training Centres.

There is something peculiarly apt in the absorption of ex-servicemen into the building industry, for the discharged soldier seems to feel an urge to build, to do something practical and constructive. Perhaps this is a reaction against the unproductiveness of Army life; at all events, the men who are going through the training centres seem to be attacking the work with a promising keenness and zest.

The course lasts twelve months, divided into three periods of four months each, and during this twelve months the trainee has to learn almost as much as the average apprentice learns in five years. Actually, the course is designed to cover the instruction necessary for erecting State houses, and includes all the most difficult and most called for trade processes. A full five years' apprenticeship should cover the whole of a tradesman's requirements, although serious omissions are often made, particularly in trade drawing and the "paper and pencil" side of the trade. Some of the men have some experience, some have been "bush carpenters" and amateur "handy-men," others know little or nothing about woodwork, but no man suffers for lack of previous knowledge. Effort, perseverance, and enthusiasm are demanded, and not in vain: this scheme was not intended for a rest cure for weary soldiers, but to give ex-servicemen a chance to rehabilitate themselves.

During training each man is paid £5 5s. a week for the first eight months, and thereafter £5 7s. 6d. a week. A basic kit of tools supplied by the Department is paid off by the trainee by small weekly instalments out of his wages over the first period of his training.

Did some one ask, "Where is the money coming from?" The scheme appears to be generous, but it is not such a drain on the taxpayer as might be expected, for almost at once the trainee takes his place in the production line. Almost all the articles made in the workshop as exercises are fittings or joinery for State houses and are bought by the Housing Construction Department. Furthermore, all the work done by trainees in the field is on Government houses, each class actually building eight houses. This has a double effect, in that it makes the scheme partly pay for itself, and it gives the men pride in their work and encourages care and accuracy from the beginning. "There's no mucking about," as one ex-soldier put it, "we're getting on to the job right from the beginning."

At the beginning of his course the trainee may sometimes feel bewildered at the amount and complexity of the work to be covered, but he soon finds that with application and a reasonable amount of hard work it can be mastered. Though far from easy, the work is interesting and varied, and the instructors, all practical men drawn from the building trades and thoroughly conversant with every branch of their work, are helpful and considerate.

The first task is to learn the use and care of tools. No tradesman can work with blunt tools or with tools that do not cut true, so the trainee begins by learning to care for his tools and to use them to advantage.

From this he goes to the making of a few simple objects—a ceiling access hatch, for example, and a saw-stool for his own use. Before he begins work on these he must make his own drawings