

Legion grew from Winnipeg unity meeting

Before World War I, the armed services in Canada were represented by regimental associations, scattered units of various types and one Dominion organization: The Army and Navy Veterans of Canada. Membership to these groups was limited and most restricted to large urban centres. Their activities were largely devoted to discussion of service, national functions and assisting needy comrades in distress.

Canada was unprepared for the holocaust of the Great War; it was also unprepared for rehabilitation problems which arose when peace finally came. Some idea of the immensity of the problem is indicated by the fact that more than 600,000 men had seen service; nearly 60,000 were killed in action; 138,000 were wounded, and some 130,000 men were discharged medically unfit as a result of their service.

What the government suffered from most was lack of experience when dealing with these problems. Veterans, on whose advice it depended, lacked organization.

The obvious result was confusion and a lack of facilities to handle the multitude

of problems. The government had to start from scratch with regard to war pension administration. The world-economic dilemma made matters worse.

An unemployed veteran, returning to his homeland, noticed wealth and prosperity around him which had arisen during the war as a result of increased industrialization and specialization, drastically stepped up to meet the demands of the war machine. The veteran returned to Canada, his heart full of glory, but his belly empty. Little was being accomplished on his behalf and he was bitter.

Under such complicated conditions some 14 or 15 national veterans' groups sprang up between 1917 and 1925. They had no united voice, no united effort. Attempts were made to co-ordinate their activities but each group's objectives seemed different from the next and thus they appeared to work at cross purposes.

Unity was the only hope that the veterans had in order that their needs be fulfilled.

In 1925 the Dominion Veterans Alliance came into existence, spurred by the plea of one man in particular - Field Marshal

Earl Haig of Bemersyde, Commander in Chief of the British Armies. Having had experience with the growing pains of the British Legion, he was invited as guest speaker at a convention of all veterans' organizations in Ottawa. In November 1925, all organizations met in Winnipeg for a "Unity Conference".

The inspiration and dedication of men such as Earl Haig and General Sir Richard Turner bore fruit. The Legion was born and by July 1926 it was self-supporting.

Considerable time had been spent on the preparation of a Constitution and it is interesting to note that it was so well prepared that few changes have been found necessary to this day.

From its inception, the Legion quite naturally concerned itself primarily with the battle for adequate pensions and other benefits for war veterans and the dependents of those who had lost their lives as the result of war. Beneficial changes were effected but the Depression of the 1930s created a whole host of new problems.

The Legion was continuously involved both in local endeavours and national undertakings in efforts to improve the desperate conditions of veterans in most of Canada. A significant development in this period was the introduction of the War Veterans Allowance Act in 1930. This benefited those prematurely aged by their war experiences but who were not,

in most instances, eligible for war disability pensions.

With the advent of World War II, the legion was revitalized by the demands made upon it and the influx of new members. The effort during and immediately after the war was prodigious. Canadian Legion War Services provided amenities such as entertainment, canteens, etc., for the serving men, both home and abroad, including the battlefronts. Canadian Legion Education Services provided correspondence courses and tutors to prepare the serving men for their return to civilian life.

Concurrently with these programs, the Legions was involved in a substantial way in the promoting of the most comprehensive rehabilitation program offered by any government to its men returning from war - the Veterans Charter.

The many Acts that made up this Charter covered practically every aspect of the ex-service person's life - education, medical treatment, employment, land settlement, vocational training, as well as the more conventional benefits such as disability pensions (compensation). The University Training Program provided an opportunity for thousands of returning veterans to gain professional status, and we believe had a marked impact on all aspects of Canadian life in the ensuing years.

With the adoption of the Veterans Charter, the Legion's task was far from

complete, however. In the succeeding years improved benefits were sought, especially in regard to disability and death pensions, and War Veterans Allowances. During the 1950s an investigating committee - the Woods Committee - studied in great depth the Pension Act and the operations of the Pension Commission.

The Royal Canadian Legion, together with other veterans' organizations, made many comprehensive presentations to this Committee, seeking a whole variety of improvements in the legislation. In March 1971 a completely new Pension Act came into force.

Through a further study undertaken jointly by the veterans' organizations and the government, a satisfactory new basis for upgrading pension rates was introduced in July 1973. This took into account the relationship of war pensions to public service salaries, as well as the previously adopted indexing use the Consumer Price Index.

Following the efforts made by the Legion after the war, it sought new themes and new objectives. It did not forget its responsibilities to the veterans; it simply expanded its endeavours to encompass community leadership. In particular, the involvement with the development in youth leadership has and will continue to reap rich rewards in Canada's future.

Memorials, helping needy among Legion projects

The purposes and objects of the Legion shall be:

- (a) to constitute an association of those who have served or are serving in Her Majesty's armed forces or any auxiliary force and of others who support the purposes and objects of the Legion, which association shall be democratic and non-sectarian, and shall not be affiliated to or connected directly or indirectly with any political party or organization;
- (b) to bring about the unity of all who have served;
- (c) to further among them the spirit of comradeship and mutual help and the close and kindly ties of active service;
- (d) to pass on to their families and descendants the traditions for which they stand;
- (e) to perpetuate the memory and deeds of the fallen and of those who die in the future;
- (f) to promote and care for memorials to their valour and sacrifice, to provide suitable burial, to keep an annual memorial day, to preserve the records and memories of their service and to see that such services shall not be forgotten by the nation;
- (g) to ensure that proper attention shall be paid to the welfare of all who have served and the welfare of their dependents and to see to the maintenance and comfort of those who require special treatment, particularly the disabled, sick, aged and needy, and to promote the welfare of their dependents;

- (h) to educate public opinion regarding national duties to the dead, the disabled, sick, aged and needy, and to promote the welfare of their dependents;
- (i) to foster loyalty among the public and education in the principles of patriotism, duty and unstinted public service;
- (j) to strive for peace, goodwill and friendship among all nations, at the same time advocating the maintenance by Canada of adequate and sufficient forces on land, sea and in the air for the defence of our country and for the discharge of those obligations which rest upon us by virtue of our partnership in the Commonwealth;
- (k) to support suitable undertakings for the training, employment and settlement of ex-servicemen and women, and the education of their children;
- (l) to preserve their statutory, acquired and legitimate rights, and those of their dependents and, in so doing, to offer the Legion's co-operation to those officially charged with the responsibility of administering such rights by federal or other governments;
- (m) to assist comrades now serving, especially in connection with their return to civil life, and to safeguard the interests of those dependents whilst they are in service;
- (n) to assist ex-servicemen to secure not less than the recognized standard rates of wages;



"Sub-Executive Committee"

The Royal Canadian Legion Sub-Executive Committee is composed of (left to right): F.G. Hannington - Dominion Secretary & NOT a member of S. Exec., G. Garceau - Dominion Vice-President, R.L. Ford - Dominion Chairman, P.G. Watkins - Dominion Vice-Chairman, F. Williams - Dominion

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