

SERVICE NOT SELF : THE BRITISH LEGION, 1921-1939

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**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews**



1994

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Service Not Self
The British Legion 1921-1939

Ph.D. Thesis

Niall J. A. Barr

30th March 1994



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I, Niall Barr, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 97,235 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by men and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree

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ABSTRACT

The organisation of ex-service men into a mass membership movement was a new departure in British life. Four main groups came together in 1921 to form the British Legion. On its establishment, the leadership, who were predominantly high-ranking ex-officers, had high hopes of forming an extremely powerful and influential organisation. Due to a number of inherent flaws in the Legion's ideology, composition and character, the organisation never became a truly mass movement of all ex-service men. This work looks at the dynamics of the movement and provides insights into the motivations of its leaders and their impact upon the organisation. It provides a detailed account of the structure of the Legion and explores the strengths and weaknesses of the movement. The existence of a semi-autonomous Officer's Benevolent Department, a subordinate Women's Section, and an independent Legion in Scotland reveal the serious rifts within this superficially unified movement. The paradox of low officer involvement combined with an almost exclusively officer leadership contributed to low membership and other factors such as geography, unemployment and finance are considered in the discussion of Legion membership. Divisions between leaders and led on policy and methods are explored in an examination of Legion democracy. A full examination of the Legion's practical work and the attitudes which underpinned that activity confirms the Legion's position as a voluntary society with traditional charitable views. A detailed examination of the Legion's struggles over pension legislation gives an insight into Government attitudes towards ex-service men and also reveals the inherent weakness of the Legion's position when dealing with politicians. An analysis of the Legion's contacts with foreign ex-service men penetrates the Legion's rhetoric and reveals the real motivations and attitudes of the Legion leaders who developed and executed the Legion's foreign policy. Ultimately, this study provides important conclusions about the nature of the British ex-service movement.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY

AC	Annual Conference.
OHBL	Official History of the British Legion.
BESL	British Empire Services League.
BLJ	British Legion Journal
BLS	British Legion (Scotland).
CIAMAC	Conference Internationale des Associations Mutilés et Anciens Combattants
CIP	Comite Internationale Permanent.
FIDAC	Federation des Interallieés Des Anciens Combattants.
GSCLB	General Secretary's Circular Letters to the Branches.
OA	Officers' Association.
OBD	Officers' Benevolent Department.
NEC	National Executive Council.
SC	Special Circular in the General Secretary's Circular Letters to the Branches
UNC	Union Nationale des Combattants.
USF	United Services Fund.
Reichsvereinigung- Kriegsgefangener Frontkämpfer	German Prisoners of War Organisation Literally, 'Front-fighter', A German ex-service man with the distinction that it implies service at the front.
Kyffhauserbund	German ex-service organisation. A descendant of older associations of the Prussian Army, dating from the 1840s.
Reichsbanner	Literally, 'Flag of the Country'. A German Republican ex-service organisation linked to the Social Democratic Party.
Stalhelm	Literally, 'Steel Helmets'. A right wing ex-service organisation which was only open to Frontkämpfer.
British Legion	British Legion in England and Wales
Legion	" " " " " "
English Legion	" " " " " "
London Headquarters	" " " " " "
British Legion (Scotland)	British Legion in Scotland
Scottish Legion	" " " "

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people who deserve to be thanked for helping me in this endeavour. I was assisted greatly by many people in the research and the writing of this thesis, and just importantly, by the support of my friends and family.

In particular, I would like to thank Mr George McGilvery, who helped me greatly during my research at Legion headquarters. He always found me somewhere to work in a very busy office, and took the time out of his busy day to find me the records and materials I needed. His great knowledge of the Legion helped to guide me away from many misconceptions. His friendly encouragement was much appreciated and I would also like to thank all the staff at the Royal British Legion Headquarters for their help and interest in the project. My research was also made much easier by the staff at the National Library of Scotland, the British Library, the Public Record Office, the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Studies and St Andrews University Library. I am indebted to the Perth and Kinross Educational Trust, the Carnegie Trust and the Historial de la Grande Guerre for providing financial assistance - always, it seemed, just when it was needed the most.

I owe a great debt of gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Gerard de Groot, who has helped me navigate through many problems and misconceptions, sometimes firing a warning shot across my bows to keep me on course! Even when I was living in London, we maintained a lively correspondence and he never failed to give me the benefit of his knowledge. His advice and assistance at all stages of this work was invaluable, and in particular, his care and patience in reading the manuscript has been an example to me in clarity and thoroughness. Discussions with Dr Ian Beckett at Sandhurst and Dr Jay Winter at Cambridge were of great value in determining the final direction of this work.

There are many friends whom I would like to thank, and unfortunately I cannot mention them all. I must confine myself to Emma, Sophie and Carl, who kept me going during my time in London, and to Vince, Rachel, Disley and Catriona in St Andrews. A special thank you goes to Debi for allowing me to use her computer at a crucial stage in

my work. Bill Naphy threw amazing dinner parties, complete with great food and sparkling conversation, at Anstruther last year and his assured knowledge concerning the completion of doctoral theses calmed many of my fears. Corinna has been an important friend and colleague throughout the past four years and she has spent many hours with me drinking coffee and brainstorming to great effect. Her advice, care and patience has been valued greatly.

My family deserves a special mention. My grandparents have given me an innate sense of family history stretching back to before the Great War. Both of my sisters have always given great support to me. Hazel was able to give me much valuable advice from her doctoral days while Lorna introduced me to many cinematic experiences and unselfishly gave me a place to stay in Edinburgh. I will end these acknowledgements with the two most important people - my parents. Without their unfailing support, encouragement and love this work would never have got underway, let alone finished. I dedicate this thesis to them:

Tom and Yvonne Barr

INTRODUCTION

Many people expressed surprise when informed that my chosen subject was the British Legion. This attitude stems from the belief that the Legion was, and is, an insignificant organisation with little influence and no power whatsoever. Duff Cooper ably propounded this view of the Legion in 1938:

Our British Legion is simply a collection of middle aged and elderly men who have been at some time in one of the Services and who meet together occasionally with the laudable purpose of wearing their medals and drinking beer. They differ in hardly any respect from a collection of Conservative working men's clubs. They have no uniform ... and they have no organisation or officers.¹

This view of the Legion is entirely inaccurate. The British ex-service movement was, and is, much more than a collection of social clubs and drinking dens. The Legion was formed in 1921 out of a number of smaller, rival groups of veterans as a voluntary movement based around the ideal of comradeship and its major aim was to assist all ex-service men who were in distress. Far from being unorganised, the Legion maintained a highly efficient structure to co-ordinate its various functions. Although never encompassing more than ten per cent of the total number of ex-service men, the Legion was a multifaceted organisation with many interests and activities.

The Legion has been described as a movement with four distinct elements: 'a benevolent society, an Old Boys Association, a quasi-religious cult and a [political] pressure group of considerable vigour'². The Legion's main ideal of comradeship was sustained through social activities at branches and clubs, but Legion members also devoted a great deal of time and effort to practical schemes which assisted unemployed and disabled ex-service men. The Poppy Day Appeal raised the funds

¹ Duff Cooper, Admiralty, to Viscount Halifax, Foreign Office, 29 September 1938, Public Record Office, Kew, FO371.21783. This was a somewhat uncharitable attitude for a former biographer of Haig who had listed the foundation of the Legion as one of Haig's crowning achievements.

² Graham Wootton, *The Politics of Influence: British Ex-Servicemen, Cabinet Decisions and Cultural Change 1917-57*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963, p.65.

for these schemes and the rituals of Remembrance were taken very seriously by Legion members. The Legion also attempted to put pressure on Government to improve pensions legislation and develop large-scale employment projects. A more unusual and less well known facet of the Legion's activities was its cultivation of contacts with foreign ex-service men which gave the Legion a high national profile in the late thirties. It is this very diversity which made the Legion an important organisation allowing it to harness the energies of thousands of ex-service men who had served in the Great War. The creation, development and maintenance of a mass ex-service movement after the Great War was an important feature of inter-war life and is a subject well worthy of study. The aim of this thesis is to explore the true character and importance of this organisation within the context of British life between the wars through an examination of the Legion's leadership and membership and their impact on policies and events.

Perhaps because the British veteran seems to have readjusted to peacetime society quite smoothly, the role of the British ex-service movement, and its contribution to that readjustment has not received significant attention from historians. Eric J. Leed and George Mosse³ have concentrated almost exclusively on German veterans' experience which was one of disillusionment and violent political action. Their studies provide valuable material for comparison, but are not intended as a description of the British experience. By way of contrast, Antoine Prost, in his seminal work on French veterans, has shown that French ex-service associations were moderate supporters of the Republic and were well integrated in French society.⁴ In France, as in Britain, the majority of ex-service organisations represented integration, not disillusionment. There are similarities between the French and British experience but the differences are more striking. As a unified, national movement with no

³ Eric J Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War One*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

⁴ Antoine Prost, *In the Wake of War: Les Anciens Combattants and French Society 1914-1939*, C. 1992.

political affiliations, and a distinctively low percentage of the total ex-service community within its ranks, the Legion was unique within Europe.

A number of historians have studied Britain's ex-service movement in detail. Graham Wootton produced the first proper study⁵ which gave an admirable narrative history but, as an official historian, Wootton inevitably shied away from serious criticism. His second work⁶ explored the Legion's political tactics and described in detail the techniques of influence used by the Legion in its relationship with government. Wootton did not, however, have access to the full range of Government documents and this limited the scope of his work. Wootton credited the Legion with greater influence upon Government policy than was the case and was unable to explore the Government's view of the Legion. Much of his work, while setting the Legion's political efforts within the context of inter-war politics, does not reveal the motivations behind Legion policy or government attitudes towards the ex-service movement.

More recently, Charles Kimball has produced an important thesis on the British ex-service movement. Kimball argued that the Legion did not reflect disillusionment and was a social and charitable institution closely integrated within the patterns of British life.⁷ He was able to trace the origins of the Legion, and its early development, but many important events occurred during the 1930s which lay outside the scope of his thesis. As with previous historians, Kimball's work was hampered by a lack of government documents and personal papers which would have allowed an examination of the internal politics of the Legion. While this dissertation agrees with the broad conclusions of Kimball's work, there are many specific assertions which cannot be accepted. In particular, this thesis cannot agree with Kimball's conclusions about the Legion's foreign policy and its effect on the

⁵ Graham Wootton, *The Official History of the British Legion*, London: MacDonald and Evans, 1956, (hereafter referred to as OHBL).

⁶ Wootton, *The Politics of Influence*.

⁷ Charles Kimball, *The Ex-Service Movement in England and Wales 1916-1930*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Stanford University, 1990.

movement. Although much of the Legion's foreign policy was outside the scope of his thesis, Kimball stated that the Legion's development of foreign contacts in 1935 was due to a 'desire to expiate their jingoistic past'. He also suggested that contact with Nazi Germany signified a 'major shift in the Legion's political and ideological outlook' and that this was a 'newfound interest in international affairs'⁸. In fact, the Legion developed many international contacts from its inception, and the desire 'to shake hands' with the ex-enemy organisations, while controversial, had been a plank of Legion policy since at least 1923. The contacts developed after 1935 were simply a logical conclusion of long-stated policy because, for the first time, that policy fell on receptive ground in Germany.

The new approach of this dissertation is made possible by the use of important new sources. Every historian of the British Legion has to rely largely on the National Executive Council Minutes, the verbatim reports of the Annual Conferences, the monthly issues of the British Legion Journal and the General Secretaries monthly letters to the branches. These are important documents which chart most of the major developments of the Legion and can be used to construct a narrative history of Legion endeavours. Of their very nature, these documents can only provide an impression of the Legion as a national organisation. The view is exclusively of the national headquarters and cannot give an adequate history of the ordinary branches - the grass roots of the Legion. Care has to be exercised when using these documents because they present an exclusively positive impression of the Legion. It is therefore necessary to use other sources to gain a balanced picture.

Unfortunately, none of the Legion Chairmen's correspondence is available and the papers of the various Presidents of the Legion are also scarce. Earl Haig's correspondence concerning the Legion is, unsurprisingly, taciturn, with only a few snippets of information concerning the Legion. While Haig was kept informed of major developments, and certainly delivered many speeches on behalf of the Legion,

⁸ *ibid.*, p.282.

he was not involved in the day to day running of the organisation.⁹ Earl Jellicoe's presidency was brief with frequent bouts of illness, while General Sir Frederick Maurice, who is reputed to have accumulated a vast and interesting correspondence concerning the Legion, had all his papers destroyed after his death.¹⁰

One other prominent member of the Legion, General Sir Ian Hamilton, fortunately kept all of his voluminous Legion correspondence.¹¹ Part of Hamilton's popularity within the movement derived from the fact that he had had a long and distinguished military career. Just as importantly, Hamilton was an entertaining writer and speaker who worked extremely hard for the Legion. Hamilton first became involved in the ex-service movement during 1918 and 1919 with the Empire Services League Scheme and later maintained this connection as President 1921-1935, then Patron 1935-1947, of the Metropolitan Area, and as President of the British Legion (Scotland) 1932-1947. Hamilton, as an active and important member of the Legion hierarchy, carried on a large amount of correspondence with each successive National President and Chairman.

This is the only study to make extensive use of these documents which provide a clear internal view of many Legion events. The Hamilton papers can also be trusted to give an accurate account of these developments, even though there are few, if any, other personal sources which can be used to check the information. As one of the 'founding fathers' of the Legion, he occupied a position of trust with the national Legion leaders and consequently, the correspondence is open and frank, giving a unique insight into the attitudes and methods of many of the Legion leaders. Many of the letters which discuss controversial events or opinions were marked 'confidential please destroy'¹² by their authors, but Hamilton retained them and often

⁹ Haig corresponded chiefly with Colonel Crosfield but much of Haig's writing is limited to comments in the margins of Crosfield's letters. Haig Papers, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, here after referred to as Acc3155.

¹⁰ Maurice's only remaining correspondence deals with the Maurice debate of 1918 held at the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College London. There are no existing papers for the British Legion.

¹¹ Hamilton's correspondence fills 37 large boxes, while he delivered over 650 speeches for the Legion in the interwar period alone. Hamilton Papers, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College London, hereafter referred to as IH29/.

¹² See chapters three and four, in particular the correspondence concerning the selection of the Legion President, IH29/37/4, IH29/15; also that dealing with the Pensions Controversy in 1933, IH29/18; also Crosfield's attempts to find a challenger to Francks for Metropolitan Area Chairman IH25

added notes of his own to the letters. It is clear that Hamilton kept his correspondence for personal use only and was trusted not to reveal the controversial contents of many of his letters. Many of the leaders came to Hamilton, as a trusted member of the Legion, for advice and discussed their personal views of the Legion and its policies with him. Through the Hamilton papers it is possible to penetrate Legion propaganda and understand the personalities and personal views of many of the Legion leaders.

Without official government records it is very difficult to judge the true effect of Legion pressure upon the government. This study is the first to make extensive use of the Ministry of Pensions Files, the Premier's Papers, and the Foreign Office Files. These reveal a very different picture of the Legion in its negotiations with Government, a picture which does not agree with contemporary Legion rhetoric. The records of the most important Legion deputations, which show Legion leaders in the act of negotiation with government ministers, have also survived. The Legion claimed that it was able to exert effective pressure on government, and particularly the Ministry of Pensions. In reality, government was able to control the Legion and resisted all of its major policy campaigns. Through these papers we can accurately examine the way Legion leaders approached and discussed issues with government, but just as importantly, we can discover how government viewed the Legion.

The British Legion's controversial links with foreign ex-service men and, in particular, German National Socialist veterans after 1935, have also not been discussed fully in previous studies. This thesis does not attempt to give a full chronological discussion of the Legion's foreign policy but does provide a revealing analysis of Legion motivations in this area. Foreign office officials maintained a close watch on Legion activities and their records and correspondence give a fresh view of Legion foreign policy. Their detached viewpoint gives critical information about these contacts and allows us to develop a more objective perspective on this controversial area of foreign policy.

This dissertation breaks new ground in many areas. It is the first to explain the complex organisational structure of the Legion, without which a full understanding of the movement is impossible. It also examines the hidden hierarchies and conflicts which formed a crucial part of Legion organisation. The existence of semi-independent bodies within the Legion, such as the Officer's Benevolent Department and the Women's Section, are important to this discussion. Previous studies have confined themselves to an evaluation of the British Legion in England and Wales - and with good reason. The Legion in England and Wales was the most powerful, and its documents more extensive and readily available. The Legion in Ireland, while nominally integrated with London Headquarters after 1925, presents a very complex picture and raises many issues which are not relevant to a discussion of the movement on the mainland. The problems of sectarianism, civil war and nationalism were unique to Ireland and the Irish ex-service movement requires a study of its own. However, all previous studies have also shied away from even a brief examination of the independent organisation in Scotland, the British Legion (Scotland). This study explains the reasons for the existence of a separate Legion in Scotland and examines the relationship between the two British Legions. By examining the organisational rifts within the Legion we can explain why the British ex-service movement did not become fully unified even after the foundation of the Legion.

An exploration of Legion membership puts flesh onto the administrative bones. Regional differences and the problems of unemployment and deprivation help to explain the low numbers of veterans who participated in the Legion. It is also clear that Legion membership was defined by a clear set of aims, ideals and beliefs which were not attractive to all veterans. By examining both sides of the equation we can determine the character of the movement. At the same time, the ex-officer leadership had an enormous influence on the development of Britain's first mass ex-service movement. However, their methods were not always compatible with those

of the membership, and the gulf of understanding between the leaders and the led is an important theme which runs throughout this work.

An examination of the Legion's practical work, political pressure, and foreign contacts shows Legion aims and ideals in practice. Legion rhetoric promised a utopian vision of a 'Brighter Britain', where all ex-service ^{men} would gain employment, adequate pensions and decent housing through Legion action and through powerful pressure on government. Just as importantly, Legion leaders claimed that peace could be secured through ex-service co-operation. As might be expected, the actual result of these policies fell far short of the expectations. By charting Legion views and arguments on these issues over the twenty year period, this thesis demonstrates that Legion attitudes did not move forward but actually became more archaic over time. On a number of occasions, the leadership actually hindered the successful implementation of Legion policies. Through an examination of the motivations and methods of Legion leaders we can analyse their consequences for the movement as a whole.

Even in a work of this length it is impossible to explore every area of Legion activity. This study looks at the Legion from an essentially national viewpoint as the existing sources do not give a complete picture of the local organisation. The involvement of the Legion in the development and maintenance of the rituals of Remembrance is only briefly discussed. Even in the areas of practical work, politics and foreign policy, this thesis can only examine the most important and salient developments. Nevertheless, even with these omissions, this work provides an important and fresh view of the British Legion. The Legion is presented as a living organisation with the many different considerations, people and ideas which competed for influence within the movement. Closely integrated into society, the Legion played an important part in maintaining stability and social harmony during the interwar years, and eventually passed on its beliefs to a new generation of veterans. Through these themes this study will not only assess the character of the

British Legion, but also evaluate the importance and impact of the ex-service movement on British life and society during the inter-war years.

PROLOGUE:
'THE CREATION OF
EX-SERVICE ORGANISATIONS
IN THE BRITISH ISLES'

The creation of Ex-service Organisations in the British Isles on a National scale will always be intimately connected with the world's greatest tragedy - the sacrifice by death and maiming of the flower of our manhood.¹

Britain's first ex-service organisations established from 1917 to 1920, owed their existence to Britain's first mass modern war. It was the Great War which exposed a large proportion of the male population to the rigours of war and which provided the impetus for mass organisations of men who identified themselves, in at least some senses, as ex-service men. This prologue provides brief details of the early history of the British ex-service movement because it is important to understand the reasons for the creation of a unified veterans' organisation and the influences that shaped the eventual character of the British Legion.

Prior to the Great War, the position of the discharged veteran was precarious indeed. Due to society's prevailing attitude of suspicion and hostility towards the army and the soldier, there was no official help except for the odd campaign or disability pension and once a soldier was discharged, he ceased to be a concern of the state.² The position for army wives was even more precarious. Even when their husbands were on active service, the army officially ignored the plight of the army wife - and the soldier's widow. Due to the practice of maintaining only a small number of wives on the muster, wives or other dependents had no official status, and thus no means of support. It was not until the Boer War that soldiers widows became a charge upon the state and even then, disabled men's wives received no

¹ E.C. Heath, *The Position of the Legion*, British Legion Summer School, 1926.

² Wootton, *The Politics of Influence*, p.12.

consideration. It was only in August 1914 that responsibility for soldiers' wives and families was first accepted by the army authorities.³

Without any state provision, the old soldier could only look for help to a number of important charities; among them the Soldiers and Sailors Families Association, the Soldiers and Sailors Help Society and Lloyd's Patriotic Fund.⁴ These charities were organised and run by wealthy citizens in the time-honoured traditions of benevolent paternalism. Ex-service men themselves took little part in them. These voluntary efforts were patchy and unreliable and the low social status of veterans, lack of public concern and paucity of funds generally left ex-service men to their own devices or to the Poor Law.⁵ The Report of the Commission on the Poor Law in 1909 stated that

It is the men who have left the permanent situation afforded by the Army, and who, after more or less interval, have abandoned hope of getting employment of a permanent character, who furnish the largest contingent of the floating population of the casual wards.⁶

On the outbreak of war, enthusiasm and recruiting promises glossed over the problems which might occur when a man found himself discharged. Volunteers had been promised that they would be retrained, given adequate pensions if disabled, and that neither they nor their families would suffer as a result of their services. W.G. Clifford, an old soldier himself, asked prophetically in 1915:

It will be granted me that the old type of ex-soldier deserved better of his country than the fate which was too often his, and it will also be impressed on me that the men who have made up by far the greatest army the British Empire has ever seen will most assuredly never be subjected to the same treatment. May I ask why?⁷

In fact, the voluntary efforts of the main charities were placed under immense strain almost as soon as the first wounded soldiers returned home in September 1914.

³ *ibid.*, p.18.

⁴ *ibid.*, p.16.

⁵ *ibid.*, p.13.

⁶ W.G. Clifford, *The Ex-Soldier: By Himself: A Practical Study of the Past and Future of the Ex-Soldier with Special Reference to the Situation Created by the Great War*, London: Black 1916. p.3.

⁷ *ibid.*, p.15.

Although the Prince's Fund and myriad smaller charities raised considerable sums for ex-service men during 1914 and 1915, and a statutory committee of the Royal Patriotic Fund incorporated and expanded much of the work of the charities from November 1915,⁸ the voluntary system of provision could not cope with the unprecedented numbers of discharged and disabled men who returned to Britain during 1915 and 1916.

Discharged men found that there was little or no provision for re-training and little help for men with serious disabilities. Further, the scale of pensions was entirely inadequate particularly after the high inflation rates experienced in 1916. The lack of assistance on discharge, combined with meagre pensions, compared very badly with the grand gestures and promises made from recruiting platforms when these veterans had volunteered in 1914 and 1915.⁹ The growth of veterans associations owes a great deal to the sense of grievance felt by thousands of discharged soldiers during the war. The veterans of the Great War were very different from the 'old type of ex-soldier' who 'deserved better of his country'.¹⁰ Men from every background and class in society had joined the army during the war, who were used to organising collectively to overcome their problems and gain redress for their grievances. Unlike pre-war old soldiers who returned to civilian life in small numbers, and were quickly diluted amongst the civilian population, there were enough Great War veterans to organise informal local groups to discuss their grievances over discharge, pensions and employment prospects.¹¹ As Colonel Heath remarked at the 1926 Summer School: 'It will be realised that although before the War there had long existed societies for ex-service men of national or semi-national character, never before had there been any societies of ex-service men'. It is not surprising that the first national group, The National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers, cultivated links

⁸ Wootton, *The Politics of Influence*, p.31.

⁹ *ibid.*, p.19.

¹⁰ Clifford, *The Ex-Soldier*, p.17.

¹¹ OHBL p.2.

with the trade union and trades councils movement.¹² The first veterans who saw organisation and protest as a way of righting their injustices were predominantly working men accustomed to the traditions of the Labour movement. The majority of ex-service men were, after all, working men with many of the same interests and needs as workers in the mines and factories. During the summer and autumn of 1916, informal and disparate groups of ex-service men coalesced into a national organisation.¹³ Early in 1917, a Conference held in Blackburn established the National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers. Its main aims were a demand for employment training, better pensions and greater Government consideration for the problems of discharged men.¹⁴ However, the interests of the trade union movement and the new ex-service organisation did not always coincide. James Howell, the President of the National Association, touched upon these problems in a letter to Major Jellicorse, who was independently involved in ex-service affairs:

Horrors! I presented a programme on behalf of the discharged men in one of our constituencies this week, to the I.L.P. candidate: I was met with the information that he had as much sympathy for the "Conchie" as he had for the disabled men.¹⁵

While ex-service men had many similar interests with the Labour movement there were also significant differences. Left-wing elements within the Labour Party, like the I.L.P., believed in pacifism and had a great distrust of the military, which were incompatible with the attitudes held by the men who had volunteered to fight for their country. At the same time, many Labour activists could not understand the need for a separate veterans organisation and the mainstream trades councils wished to keep the National Association as an adjunct to its work.¹⁶ Although the Labour movement was not pacifist, ex-service men did not always make a distinction between the

¹² OHBL p.2.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ Wootton, *The Politics of Influence*, p.79.

¹⁵ Howell to Jellicorse, 15 December 1918, IH29/37/4.

¹⁶ Kimball, *T. Ex-Service Movement in England and Wales*, pp.26-27.

different sections of the movement and these misunderstandings continued on the establishment of the British Legion. Continued argument over the role of ex-service men in the Labour movement continued until early 1918 when the Association severed its links with the trade union movement.¹⁷

In January 1917, the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers was formed out of a number of London groups incensed at the Review of Exceptions Act.¹⁸ This Act was an attempt to comb out yet more manpower for the army by reviewing the one million men who had previously been passed unfit for service. However, the Act also made it possible for discharged, disabled men to be reviewed to discover whether they were still fit to fight.¹⁹ Not surprisingly, the provisions of this Act provoked a storm of protest from veterans across the country and the newly formed Federation's cry of 'Every man once before any man twice' gained a great deal of sympathy and popularity.²⁰ Although senior military officers were invited to its first demonstration and meeting at Trafalgar Square, none attended,²¹ and it was two radical Liberal M.P.s, James Hogge and William Pringle, who assumed the leadership of the organisation.²² The Federation owed a great deal of its early success to the zeal and inspiration of Hogge who, although not an ex-service man, became its Honorary President. With a politician as leader, the Federation was connected intimately with radical Liberal politics²³ and from its inception, Hogge and the Federation were well aware of the usefulness of political pressure and persuasion. The Federation's main aim was for statutory war pensions based on right, rather than the grace and favour of the existing Royal Warrant. The Federation strongly believed that ex-service men should not be left to the vagaries of charity but should be provided with statutory assistance from the

¹⁷ OHBL p.12.

¹⁸ Wootton, *The Politics of Influence*, pp. 59-60.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ Major H.Jellicorse, *The Ex-Service Officers and Men and the Organisations looking after their Welfare*, found in IH29/37/5.

²² OHBL p.2.

²³ Stephen R. Ward, *The British Veterans Ticket of 1918*, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. VIII No.1, November 1968.

Government and should have a say in that provision;²⁴ it demanded representation on Government committees dealing with ex-service questions of employment and pensions. The barring of officers, other than those who had risen from the ranks, from membership was also indicative of the Federation's rejection of the traditional treatment of ex-service men.

Both the Association and Federation and many other smaller, local associations had come into existence without any central control or prompting from the establishment. The Comrades of the Great War, on the other hand, was formed in direct response to the success of the Federation's campaign over the Review of Exceptions Act. The stridency of the Federation in its call for 'Justice Not Charity' alarmed many members of the establishment who confused its demand for justice with subversion and revolution.²⁵ The Comrades was established after Colonel Sir Norton Griffiths wrote a letter to *The Times* in 1917 with the prompting of Lord Derby, arguing for a new, conservative ex-service association which would form a buttress against bolshevism while Colonel Wilfrid Ashley, a Conservative M.P., had been working along similar lines.²⁶ From the outset, the Comrades were linked with the Conservative Party, and gained a great deal of financial support from many wealthy benefactors. Although the Comrades claimed to be a democratic organisation, its first Executive Committee was filled almost entirely by M.P.s and officers²⁷ and, unlike the other ex-service organisations, the Comrades had no objection to traditional forms of charitable activity. After the formation of a more egalitarian Council in 1918, the Comrades began to make notable progress, even converting some Federation branches to the Comrades en masse. Hogge portrayed the Comrades as an attempt to 'gas' ex-service men, with officers and members of the

²⁴ Wootton, *The Politics of Influence*, p.84

²⁵ OHBL p.3.

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ OHBL p.4.

establishment offering beer and buns in Comrades clubs as a means of silencing protest.²⁸

Given the characters of the three ex-service groups, and their different responses to the needs of ex-service men, there were numerous points of friction between them. In particular their differing political affiliations created a sense of rivalry, with the Comrades and Federation particularly suspicious of each other's motives. Although there were serious differences between the organisations, the friction and conflict between them can be exaggerated. In general, the various organisations simply got on with the important task of ex-service welfare. Thomas Lister, the second President of the Federation, later claimed that the Executive Committee did not

expend an average of 15 minutes per Executive Meeting (which generally lasted two days) in discussing rival organisations. There were too many other important problems to consider, and in a very large percentage of districts there only was one organisation because the organisations became localised and only in a certain number of places was there any real rivalry.²⁹

Far from the three organisations being truly national, each developed its main strength in a different part of the country. While the National Association's major strongholds were in East Lancashire, Yorkshire and South Wales, the Federation, although having branches all over the country, was concentrated mainly in and around London. The Comrades found their main source of support in the rural districts and provincial towns of the South East and South West.³⁰ Thus, competition only developed in some places where more than one organisation was present.

Indeed, the similarities between the various groups were perhaps more important than the differences. All the organisations were 'intensely loyal to the

²⁸ Wootton, *The Politics of Influence*, pp.85-86.

²⁹ Lister to Hamilton, 3 March 1930, IH29/12.

³⁰ E.C. Heath *The Position of the Legion*, Sumner School 1926.

Crown',³¹ although the Federation and Association combined that with a great distrust of Government and the authorities. All were based on fellow-feeling, or comradeship, and all were concerned with alleviating ex-service distress to some degree or another. Apart from the National Union of Ex-Service Men (N.U.X.) which was formed in 1919, none of the groups were Bolshevist or rejected the basic framework of parliamentary government or existing structures of society.³² Another aspect that characterised the organisations was the lack of control which the Executive Committees had over their branches. This lack of control led to incidents such as the Westminster Bridge riot in May 1919. This march to Parliament Square, when ex-service men were baton-charged by police, had been organised by the Woolwich branch but did not have the approval of Federation Headquarters.³³ Many of the disturbances caused by ex-service men in 1919 were the result of individual branch initiatives without the sanction or approval of Headquarters. In September 1919, the Federation Organiser's report of his visit to the Eastern Division commented that

there must be a stronger hand placed on the speakers of the Federation here. Their methods are not those which will tend to help, but in most cases lead the public to believe we are an extremist body. Too much of their time is taken up expounding Trade Union principles instead of sticking to Federation matters.³⁴

Much of the trouble between the organisations stemmed from local branches expounding policies which were not endorsed by Headquarters. Isolated incidents and local rivalries heightened the apparent differences between the organisations, when, below the surface, there were already movements towards unity.

Although unity was not achieved until 1921, the theoretical desirability of amalgamation was recognised by all the organisations as early as 1918. In the summer of 1918, Sir Edward Bethune, Major Jellicorse, and W.G. Clifford attempted

³¹ Lister to Hamilton, 3 March 1930, IH29/12.

³² OHBL p.10. The N.U.X. was excluded from the U.S.F. and refused to amalgamate with the other organisations in 1921 and, by 1922, had disappeared.

³³ Wootton, *The Politics of Influence*, p.125.

³⁴ Federation NEC Minutes, 21 September 1919.

to bring members of the Executive Committees of the three organisations together to discuss the possibility of amalgamation.³⁵ Eventually a meeting was held in the Central Hall Westminster, under the chairmanship of General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, on 30 July 1918 between 30 members of the various executives. The speeches made were amicable and favourable to amalgamation, although the divisive issues of officer and female membership and political affiliation were shelved for later discussion. However, Hogge's declaration that the Federation would run 20 candidates at the forthcoming General Election broke up the meeting.³⁶

Perhaps the most important failed attempt at amalgamation was the plan for an 'Empire Services League' which was produced in early 1919. A Consultative Committee was convened in October 1918 by the Board of Admiralty, Army Council and Air Ministry to consider the formation of a unified League of ex-service men and to decide upon the administration of the canteen profits. The Service canteens run during the war had accumulated profits of nearly £8 million and it was decided that this money should be given back to the men who had spent their money in the canteens.³⁷ The Committee was formed with General Sir Ian Hamilton, an appointee of the war office, as chairman, and equal numbers of officers and men as members. James Howell, the President of the National Association was very enthusiastic about the need for an amalgamated body of ex-service men. He wrote to Major Jellicorse, a member of the consultative committee, in November 1918:

The news of the formation of such a comprehensive committee is good and to know that such men as you and Clifford are pillars of that corporate body is indeed gratifying. I hope your labours will be crowned with success. God knows! There is need for success.³⁸

Howell, almost as much as the more conservative leaders of the Comrades, believed that ex-service grievances must be dealt with quickly to block the 'way to anarchy

³⁵ Jellicorse, *The Ex-Service Officers and Men and the Organisations looking after their Welfare*.

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ OHBL p.6.

³⁸ Howell to Jellicorse, 23 November 1918, IH29/37/4.

and Bolshevism'.³⁹ He also believed that the best way of having those grievances dealt with properly and fairly was through a large unified ex-service organisation. In a long letter to Jellicorse, Howell asked:

Will the new amalgamated body partake of the nature of a Trade Union? Prima facie, the question seems absurd but how is it going to be new otherwise without banging into the Scylla of a Charitable institution or the Charybidis of a Party-Political League of Khaki and Blue - and Petticoats...It certainly will have to be run on democratic lines...and...the success of the new organisation will depend upon the quality of its basis or foundation, ie Camaraderie. We know this: what more do we want? Something in common! Must that something in common stop at the alleviation of an Ex-service Man's Distress?...Must it hold itself responsible for finding only employment for the class to which we belong?...Is it going to give a beanfeast to the veterans?...Obviously then, we must start with an avowed aim and must operate within certain limits or boundaries.⁴⁰

Howell was groping towards the different elements that would find a place in the British Legion. There was general agreement among the consultative committee that any unified organisation of ex-service men must be founded on comradeship, with a democratic structure, and provide assistance for needy ex-service men, but it was much more difficult to decide the emphasis which should be placed on each area of interest. Each of the three ex-service associations was interviewed by the committee and their views recorded. Thomas Lister, the new President of the Federation, expressed his strong objections to any governmental interference and inquired whether 'the League would carry on if the three discharged ex-service men's organisations refused to come in?'.⁴¹ It became clear to each of the groups that, since this was a government-inspired scheme, there would be government control. Although the 'permanent organisation' was to be 'fully formed under the elective principle' and 'fully self-governing', the Executive Council would be established through the authority of the Board of Admiralty, the Army Council and the Air Ministry.⁴² Further, those three bodies could appoint one representative on the

³⁹ Howell to Jellicorse, 15 December 1918, IH29/37/4.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ Consultative Committee Meeting, Horse Guards 6 February 1919, IH29/37/4.

⁴² ESL Constitution, See Appendix C.

Central Council. More importantly, the Empire Services League was to 'co-ordinate the work of all Voluntary and Un-official bodies both inside the Services and outside of them which are working on behalf of those who have served'.⁴³ Clearly, the War Office was not prepared to lose control entirely of the Canteen profits and the scheme provided a means of subsuming the three rival and politicised organisations into a docile, government controlled movement. Not surprisingly, the Federation saw this as another attempt to 'gas' ex-service men, while Wilfrid Ashley, the President of the Comrades, was offended by the suggestion that politicians should have no place in the ex-service movement. In the atmosphere of early 1919, when soldiers were rioting over demobilisation, and most ex-service men harboured great suspicions of government intentions, it was unlikely that the three ex-service organisations would agree to lose their independence or accept any degree of governmental control over their affairs.⁴⁴ Without the support of the three membership organisations, the government-sponsored League had little hope of becoming reality and Winston Churchill, the Secretary of State for War, 'disbanded the committee at the numerous and united requests of all ex-service organisations'.⁴⁵

In its place, Churchill set up another committee, under General Lord Byng, which eventually did come to fruition as the United Services Fund. Byng insisted upon, and obtained, the concession that there should be no governmental interference with the Committee and instead the United Services Fund was entirely self governing with 75% of the places on the Executive Committee occupied by the three ex-service organisations.⁴⁶ The Committee consisted of 12 members, 9 from the three major associations, and 3 representatives of unorganised ex-service men. With an organisation of District and Area Committees, on which the three organisations were all represented, the United Services Fund set about administering the huge profits of the Canteen Fund to the general benefit of ex-service men, their wives, widows and

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ OHBL p.7.

⁴⁵ Lister to Hamilton, 3 March 1920 1479/12.

⁴⁶ OHBL p.13.

dependents.⁴⁷ It was not until 1934 that the Legion and U.S.F. were actually amalgamated. However, although the United Services Fund provided a fair and suitable means of disposing of this surplus, it was not a membership organisation, and did not advance the cause of unity between the various organisations. Although the Westminster Conference in 1918 and the Empire Services League scheme in 1919 had failed, the leaders of the three organisations did at least accept in theory that amalgamation would bring many advantages. Eventually, all that was needed was the right conditions and, more importantly, the right scheme to bring about unity.

With the alarming growth in ex-service poverty and unemployment during 1920, all three organisations had to deal with ex-service hardship and with problems of their own. There was a falling off in membership and a greater display of apathy towards the ex-service movement by the general public and by the veterans who were potential members.⁴⁸ The slump placed great financial pressure on the organisations, who lacked money both for their administrative needs, and for the demands of ex-service men in distress. By 1920, the differences between the three organisations were more muted than during the earlier years of their existence, and the similarities became more prominent. The complete failure of the Federation and Association to gain any seats in Parliament at the 1918 election cooled their enthusiasm for direct political representation. The Federation lost its explicit connection with the Liberal Party in 1919, when James Hogge had resigned his position as Honorary President and Treasurer to accept the post of Chief Whip of the Asquithian wing of the Liberal Party.⁴⁹ The Federation had also decided to remove another bone of contention with the Comrades at their May 1919 Conference by allowing all officers to join the organisation.⁵⁰ In the face of great ex-service hardship, the Federation also had to abandon its complete rejection of voluntary and charitable activities. Many Federation branches, often without the approval of Headquarters, began to set up

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ OHBL p. 16.

⁴⁹ Federation NEC Minutes

⁵⁰ OHBL p

soup kitchens and rest centres for homeless veterans or those tramping for work. They also began to adopt and actively seek the help of wealthy benefactors for branch efforts, and the appearance of many wealthy ex-officers as branch Presidents or Patrons was indicative of the change of mood and direction in the Federation.⁵¹ Meanwhile, the Comrades were beginning to concede that greater government efforts were necessary to alleviate distress.⁵² After severing its links with the trade union movement, the Association under James Howell, and later under Arthur Jackson, became more conservative and thus closer to the Comrades in outlook.⁵³

Ironically, it was the emergence of the Officer's Association, as the fourth major ex-service organisation which spurred the other three organisations towards unity. During August 1919, a meeting under the Chairmanship of Field Marshal Earl Haig planned an Officer's Association which would amalgamate the eleven voluntary societies working for ex-officers. After the meeting, Haig wrote to a friend, H. Baird, saying:

my ultimate aim is to form One Association to include all who have served in H.M.s service, regardless of their rank or present position. I hope that the meeting which was held at Cowley Street may be the beginning of the 'Ex-Officer branch' of that Great Association.⁵⁴

Haig had interested himself in the ex-service movement since joining the Comrades during the War, and had been represented at the 1919 Consultative Committee by his military secretary, General Ruggles-Brise.⁵⁵ It is clear that Haig wanted a unified organisation of all ex-service men which he would lead and he saw the amalgamation of ex-officers' associations as the first stage. But the new Officers' Association was not similar in character or function to the other three ex-service organisations. The Officer's Association took the form of a charity composed of wealthy benefactors who were interested in donating to help needy officers; it was not a membership

⁵¹ Kimball, *The Ex-Service Movement in England and Wales*, p.72.

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ OHBL p.12.

⁵⁴ Haig to Baird, 29 August 1919, Acc.3155. No.235.c.

rs, The Ex-Service Officers and Men c. 'rganisations looking after their Welfare.

organisation of the ex-officers themselves.⁵⁶ Consequently, its five branches were all based in London, with a network of voluntary helpers throughout the country. The Officers' Association was an amalgamation of fifteen smaller societies which collected funds to assist ex-officers and their families.⁵⁷ This rationalised the collection and distribution of funds for ex-officers through five separate committees which oversaw different areas of interest; Appeals, Employment, Housing, Families and Disablement.⁵⁸ As might be inferred from these categories, the Officers' Association reflected societal assumptions that officers should aspire to, and maintain, a solid middle class status. Ex-officers were expected to obtain highly paid employment, live in good accommodation and send their children to public school and university. Consequently, the amount which an ex-officer could expect to receive from the Officers' Association was substantial. On 30 January 1920, Haig, along with many other senior military figures, launched an appeal for the Officers' Association at a dinner in the Mansion House.⁵⁹ This appeal was extremely successful and gained donations from many wealthy people. During 1920 alone the Association received £637,000 in donations from the public and of this, £288,000 had been subscribed from four large companies.⁶⁰ However, the Officers' Association's great success in obtaining financial support pre-empted an appeal by the Comrades who were, by early 1920, desperately short of funds.⁶¹

By February 1920, the Comrades Grand Council had decided to support an initiative for amalgamation between the four main ex-service organisations and in May 1920, the Federation's Annual Conference also decided to support amalgamation. Once the various groups had decided to pursue negotiations, the new organisation was formed quickly. Nine months later, on 1 July 1921, the British Legion was officially established.⁶² The speed and urgency with which amalgamation

⁵⁶ Wootton, *The Politics of Influence*, p.105.

⁵⁷ General Sir Frederick Maurice, *The Benevolent Work of the Legion*, British Legion Summer School, 1926.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ OHBL p.14.

⁶⁰ Wootton, *The Politics of Influence*, p.106.

⁶¹ OHBL p.13.

⁶² OHBL p.17, 32.

occurred demonstrates the desire for unity amongst the executives of the various organisations, but also gives an indication of the serious nature of the problems which were facing the separate organisations. In July 1920 the Federation Executive issued invitations to all the major organisations for a Conference that August between 6 delegates from each association with their respective General Secretaries.⁶³

After the first Unity Conference, held at the Royal United Services Institute, on 7 August 1920, the drafting committee met on 21 August to decide the general principles of the new constitution. J. R. Griffin, then General Secretary of the Federation, and soon to become the Assistant General Secretary of the British Legion, was appointed to draft a constitution which he completed in little over a week.⁶⁴ This was approved by the drafting committee on 4 September and the second unity Conference held on 18 September then hammered out a more or less final copy.⁶⁵

'Rule 1 - Principles and Policy', contained in a few key paragraphs the main beliefs and ideals which set the character of the new organisation.⁶⁶ Rule 1 (A) stated that 'The Legion shall be democratic, non-sectarian and not affiliated to, or connected directly with, any political party or political organisations'.⁶⁷ This rule was an important provision which ensured that the Legion could fulfill its role as the spokesman for all ex-service men. It was also the answer to prevent organised ex-service men from banging into the 'Scylla of a Charitable institution or the Charybdis of a Party-Political League of Khaki and Blue'.⁶⁸ To embrace party politics would have led to factions within the Legion, or the break-up of the new organisation, but to ignore politics altogether would have relegated the Legion to solely a charitable role. The Legion adopted a political stance which, although repudiating party politics, gave enough room for manoeuvre on wider political issues. It ensured that

⁶³ OHBL p.17.

⁶⁴ OHBL p.20.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ See Appendix A.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ Hovell to *Legion*, 15 December 1918, III29/37/4.

the Legion could be broadly attractive by offering democracy without attaching the Legion to any particular political creed. Although the Legion was not connected to any political party, this did not limit the Legion in any wider political sense, and Rule 1(D) made this explicit:

There shall be nothing to prevent the Legion from adopting a definite policy on any question directly or indirectly affecting ex-service men and women nor from taking any constitutional action considered necessary in pursuance of such policy.⁶⁹

From the outset, the Legion leadership gave themselves the freedom to engage in pressure tactics which would influence the political process. This rule was a direct descendant of the Federation policies which had had success in exerting pressure on government - notably with pension increases in 1919.

Rule 1 (B) was taken directly from the Comrades' Constitution since each of the organisations agreed that comradeship should be, and was, the basis of their movement. The additional phrases were merely a restatement of a number of the principles of the Comrades in a clearer manner.⁷⁰ Rule 1(C) was an almost direct 'lift' from six of the principles of the American Legion.⁷¹ The Federation had wished to include the phrases 'To inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state and nation' and 'To combat the autocracy of both the classes and the masses' unchanged, but under pressure from both the Comrades and the Association, these became 'to inculcate a sense of loyalty to the Crown, Community and Nation' and 'to promote unity amongst all classes'.⁷² The inclusion of the Crown as the primary focus for ex-service men's loyalty accorded with the views of the Officers' Association and the Comrades while the inclusion of, 'the promotion of unity between all classes', perpetuated the Victorian and Edwardian ideals of social harmony and

⁶⁹ See Appendix A.

⁷⁰ See Appendix D.

⁷¹ See Appendix B.
see Appendix A.

order. Both provisos ensured that the new organisation would ultimately be supportive of the existing social order.⁷³

Once the draft constitution had been accepted, each of the associations informed their branches of the negotiations and held special conferences and meetings to authorise the constitution. The next Unity Conference not only accepted the draft constitution in principle, but set up a Provisional Unity Committee, composed of six members from each of the organisations to settle the arrangements for amalgamation.⁷⁴ During December 1920, this Provisional Unity Committee arranged the foundation of a Unity Relief Committee to administer a grant from the National Relief Fund and various other smaller bodies. This Fund provided a practical demonstration of the intention to amalgamate and Local Unity Relief Committees began to deal with distress amongst ex-service men in a more efficient manner than was possible with the separate competing organisations.⁷⁵ By the time the Unity Conference was held at the Queen's Hall in London on 14 and 15 May, most of the contentious issues had been resolved; as the Federation's Bulletin observed, 'amalgamation was a foregone conclusion'.⁷⁶ However, this conference, of 700 delegates, represented ex-service men from across the country who gave the memberships' views on amalgamation. The Conference considered and amended the Constitution, decided upon the name of the new organisation and elected the principal officers. There had been many suggestions for the new title, including the Warrior's Guild, and British Empire Services League, but the name 'British Legion' was unanimously adopted.⁷⁷ The Prince of Wales became Patron, and Earl Haig was elected President.⁷⁸ Thomas Lister, who had distinguished himself as Chairman at every Unity Conference, became the new Chairman, while George Crosfield, who had been the main negotiator for the Comrades, was elected Vice-Chairman. Thus

⁷³ OHBL p.9.

⁷⁴ OHBL p.20.

⁷⁵ OHBL p.30.

⁷⁶ OHBL p.28.

⁷⁷ Unity Conference Minutes 1921.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

there was a great deal of continuity between the Legion and the previous organisations and most of the members of the first National Executive Council of the Legion had gained their knowledge of ex-service affairs on the Councils of the Federation or Comrades.

With the conclusion of this last Unity Conference, 'the avowed aims'⁷⁹ of the new organisation had been set. The British Legion would operate within clearly defined 'limits or boundaries'.⁸⁰ The character of the British Legion was indeed a composite of each of the previous organisations. The new organisation would stand for the accepted order of British government, establishment and society. The potential for protest and demonstration was muted, but the Federation's aim of using political pressure to gain concessions was not entirely discarded. Ex-service men could now join a voluntary movement with the characteristics and potential of a 'charitable institution' and 'a trade union'⁸¹ which, combined with the many branches and clubs already in existence from the previous groups, was based on the ideal of comradeship.

It was not until 1 July 1921 that the British Legion officially came into existence but on the Sunday morning of 15 May, the last day of the Unity Conference, the delegates trooped from the Queens Hall and assembled at the Cenotaph. Four men laid a laurel wreath containing the four emblems of the separate organisations and with this symbolic gesture amalgamation was complete.⁸²

⁷⁹ Howell to Jellicorse, 15 December 1918, IH29/37/4.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ *ibid.*

⁸² OHBL p.29.

1

'UNITY OF ACTION ON THE FIELD OF PEACE':
THE ORGANIZATION OF THE BRITISH LEGION

On 3 April 1922, Earl Haig spoke to a large meeting in Birmingham on the advantages of a united veterans' organization:

It was unity of action, combined with the heroic devotion of officers and men, which finally achieved victory on the field of battle, and it is surely only by a like unity that we shall win victory on the field of peace. I think, therefore, that the leaders of the four great ex-service men's organizations which have come together throughout the country can point with legitimate pride to their successful efforts in promoting unity, and this united action on the part of ex-service men must inevitably foster and develop unity of action throughout the whole nation.¹

Unity of the British ex-service movement had been a constant theme of Haig's speeches since 1919, and with the formation of the British Legion in 1921, it appeared that Haig had been proved right. However, even after 1921, much of the vaunted unity of the British ex-service movement was only skin deep. Although the three main membership organizations (the Federation, Comrades and Association) did amalgamate to form the foundation for the British Legion, both the Officer's Benevolent Department and the Women's Section maintained a semi-autonomous existence. This chapter examines the organization and administrative structure of the Legion, but also looks at the divisions and rivalries within the movement, which caused tension and disruption quite at variance with Haig's idealistic picture.

During and after 1921, in places where the four original organizations were present, their branches amalgamated or were allocated in different districts and the old rivalries between the organizations did not seem to hamper the development of the new movement. Thomas Lister, now Chairman of the British Legion, remarked in August 1921 that:

¹ Haig, Speech at Birmingham, 3 April 1922, Acc.3155, No.235.c.

Only five weeks have elapsed since the opening of the headquarters of the Legion, and already the response has been worthy of the cause - 690 have been formed This result is a tribute to the solidarity of the new body and the loyalty of the old ex-service organisations throughout the country.²

By the end of 1921 1,478 branches had been formed although membership was only 18,000.³ However, during 1922 the growth was nearly two branches a day and the Legion grew from 1,500 branches in 1922 to over 5,000 in 1939.⁴ Although the aim of having a branch within three miles of every ex-service man's home was never attained,⁵ the continued growth of branches meant that, even by the end of 1922, the Legion was a truly national organization with branches all over the country.

Perhaps the greatest difference between the previous organizations and the Legion lay in the power and control of the National Executive Council and National Headquarters. While the earlier groups had national Executive Councils, and often regional groupings, they had not been able to exert much influence over the individual branches. The National Federation was criticised in Home Office Intelligence reports for being 'merely an aggregation of local branches' with no central organization or concrete policy'.⁶ With the formation of the Legion, the position became entirely different. Unity had been achieved through negotiations with the various controlling bodies of the Comrades, Federation and Association, and the strength of the Executive Council was vastly increased. The National Executive Council controlled the funds of the Legion, and was able to order the expulsion of individual members and even entire branches. From the National Executive Council and Headquarters Departments, authority ran to the 13 Area Councils which were the main administrative units. These had first been used by the Federation and covered a region; for example, the South Eastern Area encompassed the counties of Kent, Sussex, the Isle of Wight, Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire. It was then within the power of the Area Council to delegate certain responsibilities to a County or District

² British Legion Journal August 1921, p.27, hereafter referred to as BLJ.

³ OHBL p.36, British Legion Annual Report 1922, hereafter referred to as BLAR.

⁴ See Table 3.

⁵ BLAR 1923.

⁶ Report on Revolutionary Organisations in the United Kingdom, 21 ' ' AB24/80.

Committee which would co-ordinate and monitor Branch activity within the county boundary or city district.

However, the real strength of the ex-service movement lay at the grass roots level. The branch was the basic unit and mainspring of the Legion as acknowledged by the first Annual Report in 1922:

The life of the Legion lies in its Branches, and while Headquarters can exercise a controlling influence, the well being and the whole future of the Legion is largely in the hands of the Branches themselves.⁷

Every member of the Legion was firstly a member of his local branch and it was here that ex-service men went to meet their fellow members, to discuss problems and to deal with Legion work. It was also the branch that formed the first contact for the local ex-service community; much of the basic work of the Legion in employment, pensions and relief was carried out by the branches.

Much of the effort of the Legion hierarchy was devoted to the formation, development and control of new branches. The role of the Area Organising Secretary (a paid post) was defined as 'Organising Strong Branches on Sound lines'.⁸ Once a branch was formed, the role of the Area and County became one of supervision - by ensuring that the branch adhered to the Legion rules and constitution and executed all relief, employment and pension work properly. This control sometimes manifested itself with 'an appearance of ruthlessness'.⁹ Legion Headquarters continually stressed the need for control and respectability in branches. In 1925, after there had been considerable 'pruning' of 'unsatisfactory' branches, the Annual Report explained that:

Your Council, ever jealous of the good name of the Legion, sets more store on the possession of a fair number of branches commanding the respect of the entire community among whom they exist, rather than on having a vast number incapable of commanding such respect.¹⁰

⁷ BLAR 1922.

⁸ General Secretary's Circular Letters to the Branches, to Area Organisers, 21 April 1922, hereafter referred to as GSCLB.

⁹ BLAR 1925.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

This pruning had been achieved by the mass expulsion of branches which were not deemed fit to remain in the Legion. The majority of the branches which were closed down during 1924-25 came from the Metropolitan and North Eastern Areas - previous strongholds of the Federation and Association - which lost eleven and four branches respectively.¹¹ Many of the branches expelled had become moribund - branches in name only with no activity or live membership - while in others it was felt that the standard of behavior had brought discredit upon the Legion. Most of the branches were wound up due to the actions of disreputable clubs attached to the branch which broke licensing laws.

An exchange of letters between Thomas Jarvis, the secretary of the Millwall & Cubitt British Legion club, and General Sir Ian Hamilton in 1929, President of the Metropolitan Area, is revealing. Both the Branch and club in Millwall were in serious difficulties when Jarvis wrote to Hamilton:

Thank you very much for your assistance, we are at our lowest ebb... nobody at present is getting any pay... I myself would not like to see the old club finish for the sake of a little assistance...but now our backs are against the wall and we shall fight to keep open as long as the odds are not too great.¹²

Although Hamilton was sympathetic and had sent a donation, the Area Organising Secretary, H. Cheeseman was not impressed by Jarvis' plea. He wrote to Hamilton informing him that: 'I am arranging for my Standing Committee to visit the Branch. The best thing to be done in the case of the club is for it to close down. It is an absolute death trap'.¹³ Ultimately, the club was indeed closed down and the branch was completely re-organized. This is just one example of the control which Area Councils and Headquarters wielded over Legion branches. Legion branches were never allowed to be a mere aggregation of branches with no concrete policy; there

¹¹ See Table 3.

¹² Thomas Jarvis to Ian Hamilton, 23 January 1929, IH29/8.

¹³ H.E. Cheeseman to Ian Hamilton, 15 February 1929, IH29/8.

could be no argument over the Legion principles or objectives which were set by the National Executive Council.

However, although the rules and principles of the Legion were firmly maintained, the branches of the Legion still varied widely in size, membership and activity. Membership could vary from 90% of the local ex-service community to less than 1%, while the actual number of members could range from ten or twenty to over one thousand. Most Legion branches drew their membership from the ex-service men of a village or town, but there were also many branches which reflected a distinct group of interests or commemorated a particular unit which served during the war. These ranged from the British Serbian Units Branch with 18 members 'who met month after month with no other attraction than to meet each other'¹⁴ to the House of Commons Branch of 100 M.P.s and parliamentary staff, which was intended to marshal support for ex-service policies within the seat of government itself. The London City and the Birmingham 'Forward' Branches were 'composed of business men and the black-coated Brigade Generals'¹⁵ who were meant to use their influence in economic and employment matters. The Monash Memorial Branch was formed from Australians who remained in Britain after the war while the Fleet Street Branch contained journalists who often assisted with Legion publicity. These special interest branches were exclusive and tended to discriminate between ex-service men. For example, while the London City Branch was filled with stockbrokers, other ex-service men who worked in London joined the suburban branches in the areas where they lived. This situation drew protest at the first Legion Conference in 1922 when the Sheperd's Bush delegate claimed that the formation of branches in Government departments and House of Commons was: 'setting up in the Legion a distinct class system. They were creating class distinction, weakening local branches and tending to bring about demoralisation'.¹⁶ The real complaint was that many 'house' branches

¹⁴ Miss C.M. Marx to Ian Hamilton, 11 February 1930, IH29/12.

¹⁵ H.E. Cheeseman to Ian Hamilton, 21 July 1926, IH29/2.

¹⁶ Annual Conf Res. No. 24, hereafter referred to as AC.

set their subscription rates at a high level, thus discouraging poorer ex-service men from joining them. At the same time, house branches attracted wealthy Legion members away from local branches which needed their financial support. The motion was defeated and the next twenty years saw the proliferation of 'house' branches; such a situation was perhaps inevitable, but it did create serious distinctions between Legion branches. However, the vast majority of Legion branches remained connected solely to the communities where they were formed and these branches could become the focus for local ex-service activity. A good example of a thriving branch comes from a description of a meeting at Ashford, Kent in May 1927:

It was just an ordinary combined meeting of the Men's and Women's branches - held every quarter; that is, just ordinary for Ashford.... Some 500 to 600 present....First, Silent Tribute and Exhortation; Apologies, Minutes of the last meetings of Men's and Women's branches read by the respective secretaries, followed by quarterly reports from each. Then the appointed delegates reports on the Area Conference. Short Addresses were given by the Chairmen of the two sections, each summing up their respective branch activities. Then a half-hour address by Mr Wilce-Taylor from Headquarters on British Legion and United Services Fund Co-ordination and Aftercare of War Orphans. Follows quarter-hour interval for refreshments supplied by the Refreshment committee at moderate charges... Then a short sketch well played by local actors, and after that some community singing! Printed sheets, conductor, piano, and a leading singer - everything is done well at Ashford!¹⁷

This meeting at Ashford might have had more variety and entertainment than a typical branch meeting, but it does give a good impression of the type of activities which went on at a branch meeting. It is also important to note, that apart from the silent tribute and exhortation and the topics being discussed, the format used and the type of entertainment provided was exactly the same as might be found at a Church meeting, a Women's Institute, or a Working Man's club. Indeed, there was little to distinguish Legion organization and structure from many other voluntary movements in Britain.

¹⁷ *DT*, May 1927, p.228.

A branch was run by its members through elected Committees and officers which were decided at the Branch Annual General Meeting. This was open to all local members of the Legion as the forum where branch officers were elected, the previous year was reviewed and all members could have their say on the running and policy of the branch. The Legion organisation and structure certainly provided a democratic pyramid, running from Branch to National level. Every Branch held its General Meeting during the autumn, each County held its Conference during November and December, with Area Conferences in January to March, all building up to the Annual National Conference at Whitsuntide. All of these Conferences could be forums for the Branches and their delegates to air grievances, discuss issues, elect officials and attempt to change the policy of the Legion.

However, there were practical obstacles in the way of Legion democracy. The main problem was lack of finance. Democracy can be expensive, and many branches simply could not afford to send a delegate to the Area and Annual Conferences. This is borne out in the numbers of delegates who attended Conference in the period. At no time were there more than 1,206 delegates at any Annual Conference.¹⁸ This was not apathy or any direct desire by the leadership to limit the representation of the branches but based entirely on financial considerations. The Whitley bay delegate put the problem very clearly at the 1923 Conference:

'In the North Eastern Area there were 187 Branches but he believed that of these branches only eight had sent delegates. The reason for the absence of the others was a question of finance, pure and simple. Out of these eight delegates, three had paid their own expenses; one had his expenses paid by the Area. That left four branches that could afford to send delegates to the Conference.'¹⁹

Since another Delegate estimated his personal expenses, in coming to and staying in London for the Conference, at five pounds, it is not surprising that many Branches

¹⁸ See Table 7.

¹⁹ AC 1923, Selection of Location . Conference.

could not afford to send a delegate.²⁰ This could alter the character of the Conference and its decisions. The first seven conferences were held in London which made it comparatively easy for a London branch to send a delegate; the outlook of these early conferences was acknowledged to be mainly Metropolitan. However, the same applied when the Conference moved to Scarborough, Cardiff, Weston-super-Mare and Buxton. Local Branches, notwithstanding the fares pooling system, were more likely to attend and so bring a local character and perhaps bias to the Conference. Thus the Annual Conference was not representative of the entire Legion, in the way that a County or Area Conference could be of its constituency. However, the geographical spread of Legion delegates at Conference was sufficient to provide a representative *sample* of the whole movement; a rough sort of democratic representation was obtained at the Annual Conference.²¹ However, even with a reasonably representative Annual Conference, there were other pitfalls for Legion democracy. The Conference was referred to as the 'Parliament of the Legion', the supreme authority and decision-making body. In practice, the Conference, meeting as it did only once a year, could not exercise full control or authority over Legion affairs, principles and policy. Ultimately, the day-to-day running of the Legion, and implementation of policy fell to the National Executive Council. In fact, the National Executive was in a position of almost unassailable strength. As the Rules of the Legion detailed, 'All powers of the Legion shall be vested in and exercisable by the National Council except ... those ... expressly required to be exercised by the Legion in Conference.' Further, the Council appointed all paid staff and officials (except those appointed by Area or Branch committees) and all the funds of the Legion, both from affiliation fees and the Poppy Appeal, were ultimately controlled by the National Executive Council.²¹ The National Executive Council was composed of a higher than normal number of officers, and its personnel did not

²⁰ *ibid*, Brighouse Delegate.

²¹ Rule 6(f) *poit.* British Legion Royal Charter of Incorporation and Schedule of Rules, 1925.

change frequently - the Areas continued to nominate the same people every year. This meant that even when the Council failed to implement resolutions passed by Conference, there was little that Conference, apart from expressing its displeasure, could do.

A good example of this occurred at the 1929 Conference, when a Resolution was tabled:

expressing profound dissatisfaction with the inaction of the Council in failing to comply with the provisions of Resolution No.111 of the National Conference, 1928, and urges the Council to take such action without delay'.²²

Resolution No.111 of the 1928 Conference, had called for a National Demonstration on the Seven Years Time Limit and Pensions Policy. The East Midland Area Delegate protested:

against the efforts of the National Executive Council to mould the policy of the Legion...The Assistant General Secretary, speaking at Leicester on January 16th, said "The National Executive Council will never agree to a National Demonstration". That means that, though we decide on a policy, it is to be over-ruled by the men on the National Executive Council ... if they are not prepared to carry out the policy dictated by the Branches...they have no right to sit where they are. If they cannot carry out our policy, there are others who are willing to come forward to do it.²³

The Chairman of the Legion was able to deflect this criticism by saying 'we felt that it was better to "demonstrate" - which means to prove clearly - by deputations and by our leaflet policy...than by tub-thumping in Hyde Park or gesticulating round the Lions in Trafalgar Square'.²⁴ With the pressure thus released no more action was taken by either side. Clearly, Branch delegates, even when in effect censuring the Council, were reluctant to actually suggest that the Council be removed. In the event, the National Executive Council was never seriously challenged throughout the twenty years. Thus as Graham Wootton has remarked, ex-service men liked 'to talk

²² AC 1929, Res. No.138.

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ *ibid.*

radical and act whig'.²⁵ Some Legion delegates did suggest that there should be a greater turn-over in the Council. The Home Counties Delegate at the 1931 Conference, moved that all NEC representatives, after three years service, should have to stand down for at least a year. The resolution 'aimed at importing a continuous strain of new blood into the Executive, with a view to keeping the older ones, who were liable to stagnate, up to their job. If they wanted a young and energetic Executive, they must continuously change it'.²⁶ That the problem existed is certain; Council members were bound to lack fresh views and ideas after years on the Council. However, this problem was never recognised and addressed by the Conference; the 1931 Resolution fell. This lack of 'new blood' and the consequent stagnation did mean that the Council and National Officers could seriously fail to judge the temper of the Legion as a whole. This could and did lead to serious rifts between the Leadership and membership over policy; later chapters will detail the actual events and consequences of this. Many Branches were often dissatisfied with the action taken by the Executive as lacking 'push and shove'. A good example of this occurred in 1927 when the Woodgreen and Southgate Branch:

resolved to pursue a policy of strenuous attack on the National Executive and High Administration because:-

- (1) Of the negative and ineffectual conduct of general affairs.
- (2) The continued failure to formulate and fight a strong NATIONAL PROGRAMME.

Principally, however, this branch is out to remove the Executive and Administration as now constituted, at any rate by the forthcoming Conference. It is considered difficult to distinguish those of our leaders who are of REAL and HONEST PURPOSE, and that the only real and effective remedy to the present comatose conditions is to put NEW BLOOD AT HEADQUARTERS. Men who will take office pledged to 'GET ON OR GET OUT'.²⁷

The Woodgreen and Southgate Branch was articulating impatience with the lack of real progress made by the Executive, but this 'strenuous attack' was easily defeated by

²⁵ Wootton, *The Politics of Influence*, p.70.

²⁶ AC 1931, Alteration to the Royal Charter, Clause 14.

²⁷ Woodgreen and Southgate Branch Circular, 14 February 1926, IH29/3.

the Northern District of the Metropolitan Area which did not support it. Many similar resolutions were brought into Conference along the lines that more action needed to be taken, but as Lister remarked in the 1927 address, such resolutions did not of themselves guarantee actual effective action which could only really originate at the Branch level.²⁸

It was at the Conferences that Legion delegates had the opportunity to elect the Honorary officials who ran much of the Legion administration. The officers elected followed the same general pattern and fulfilled similar roles at each level, although the responsibilities grew with each post. The main Legion officials were President, Vice-Presidents, Chairman, Vice-Chairman, and Honorary Treasurer. Legion pre-occupation with respectability and prestige continued with the selection of branch officers. In the guidelines for branch formation prospective members were warned that 'Great care must be taken in the election of branch officers as the success of the branch depends entirely upon it's leadership'.²⁹ Not every branch followed such advice, but, in general, a branch President was a respected member of the local community who could use his influence for the benefit of the branch. Local worthies and ex-officers predominated amongst Branch Presidents. This process was accentuated at the higher levels of the Legion. The County Patron and President was frequently held by a local noble or senior military figure; the post was often held by the Lord Lieutenant of the County. In Oxfordshire the first President was the Duke of Marlborough while in Somerset Admiral Bethel was followed by the Duke of Somerset.³⁰ Area Presidencies were held by similar people with perhaps more glowing records in the Great War or previous conflicts. The South Eastern Area Presidency was held by Major-General Rt. Hon. J.E.B. Seely until 1930 and subsequently by Brigadier-General E.J. Phipps Hornby, while General Sir Ian Hamilton held the Metropolitan Area Presidency from 1921 until 1935 when he

²⁸ AC 1927, Discussion of Annual Report.

²⁹ Official Handbooks of the County Organisation 1933.

³⁰ Somerset Coun' Annual Report and Accounts 1934, IH29/20.

became Patron.³¹ The post of National President was held by Field Marshal Earl Haig, Admiral Earl Jellicoe and subsequently by General Sir Frederick Maurice 'whose vast knowledge of Legion affairs marked him out as a particularly suitable successor to those two great figures of the War'.³² This concentration of members of the military and social elite amongst the Presidents of the Legion was a striking feature of the organization. Although the Legion's practical work was the cornerstone of its activity, much of this was accomplished by an entirely voluntary membership. It was the President's role to create interest and enthusiasm for ex-service issues - both for Legion members and non-members. One of the responses of Legion Organisers like H.E. Cheeseman of the Metropolitan Area was to use popular and well known figures like General Sir Ian Hamilton to draw attention to the Legion's work. He remarked that 'experience has already taught me that it is very difficult to arouse enthusiasm unless someone of influence, like yourself, can give us a lead'.³³ Thus the role of a Legion President at any level of the organization was to make key-note speeches, address large meetings, inspect Legion parades and reviews and generally help to keep the Legion in the fore-front of the public mind. When Sir Ian and Lady Hamilton held a Ball for the Metropolitan Area in 1928, Cheeseman felt that he had done 'more in four hours than the Area Council could have done in sending representatives to all the Branches'.³⁴ This reinforces the importance of social functions to the Legion's work. As a voluntary group the Legion had to keep its members happy and interested in the serious side of its work, mainly through social functions. Personalities and 'eminent men' like Hamilton were well-suited to enhancing this social dimension of the Legion. Cheeseman felt that Hamilton 'should be asked to attend functions where your splendid personality and immense popularity does a great deal of good by getting outside people to take an interest in the local

³¹ South Eastern Area Annual Report and Accounts, 1929-1931.

³² BLAR 1932.

³³ H.E. Cheeseman to Ian Hamilton, 29 March 1926, IH29/1.

³⁴ H.E. Cheeseman to Ian Hamilton, 11 May 1927, IH29/4.

affairs of the Branch'.³⁵ There was a division of work between the President and the Chairman which Hamilton recognised:

I like the Chairman's idea that he is to take the 'serious' meetings and prefers frivolous people like myself to go to shows such as this garden party. I'm sure I don't mind, but I confess I have sometimes felt that my magnificent powers of oratory were somewhat wasted on half a dozen little boys and girls and a policeman, which is the usual audience at a garden party opening!³⁶

Many of the eminent men of the Legion, Haig and Hamilton included, did not involve themselves directly in Legion administration but played a major role in popularising the Legion. However, at every level they added a layer of prestige and social status to the Legion which was generally welcomed by Legion members. In Sunbury-on-Thames, the Branch President was a local prominent figure, Sir George Higgins, who was not an ex-service man. At first he refused to accept the post, but 'as one of the oldest residents, who had shown his interest in the Legion,' the Legion members pressed him to accept.³⁷ In fact, this patronage of clubs and branches had a long precedent, even within the Working Man's Movement, for the prestige and financial assistance which could be gained. Thus, many of the leaders of the Legion were essentially figureheads and not intimately involved in the practical work of the Legion. In fact, many of the men elected to the position of President did little more than lend their names to the organization. When General Sir Ian Hamilton found that he was criss-crossing the country attending Legion functions he complained to Colonel Heath, the General Secretary, that:

It seems to me that I am having more and more put on my shoulders, though not by you I do wish some of the other (national) Vice-Presidents would take a hand now and then, but, as far as I can see they don't very much help.³⁸

³⁵ H.E. Cheeseman to Ian Hamilton, 12 July 1927, IH29/4.

³⁶ Ian Hamilton to H.E. Cheeseman, 8 July 1927, IH29/4.

³⁷ Sunbury-on-Thames Branch History.

³⁸ Ian Hamilton to E.C. Heath, 23 April 1926, IH29/1.

Men like Haig and Hamilton became extremely popular within the Legion, not only because they were well-known public figures, but because they were among the few high-ranking officers who took an active and personal interest in the ex-service movement.

While the Presidents were involved in their 'frivolous' role, Legion Chairmen and committees were debating and dealing with major issues concerning ex-service men. Colonel Crosfield called the Chairmen and Secretaries the 'The Platoon Leaders'.³⁹ At the higher levels these were augmented by the paid organizing staff. Thus the main influence on Legion policy was exerted by the 'working parties' of Chairmen, Secretaries and Committee members.

Every level of the Legion relied on a General Committee or Council to run its general affairs and decide upon important matters. The Branch General Committee was formed from the Honorary Officers and seven to fifteen members of the branch who were willing to be fully involved in the Branch's activities. Its job was to 'hold Branch meetings regularly ... Commence punctually and be businesslike'⁴⁰ while ensuring that the sub-committees dealing with Employment, Relief, Finance, Entertainment, and Poppy Day functioned correctly without any overlapping of responsibility. This pattern of General Committee and sub-committees which executed detailed work was repeated throughout the Legion hierarchy. At Branch level these committees were more concerned with the practicalities of ex-service needs and problems than Legion policy.

Above Branch level, the structure utilised varied considerably from Area to Area. Area Councils could delegate some administration and work to County Committees but not every Area Council decided to implement this option immediately. Thus the County Committee was not necessarily an integral part of the organization and it took a number of years for this system of administration to

³⁹ AC 1922, Col. Crosfield, Vice-Chairman's Address.

⁴⁰ South Eastern Area Annual Report and Accounts 1931.

spread. By 1933, six of the Areas had implemented County Committees although it was never introduced into Ireland. The territory covered by a County Council depended on the traditional boundary of the area although some committees were bi-county as in the case of Leicestershire and Rutland (Rutland, the smallest county in England being too small to form a Committee on its own). The number of branches in a county could vary greatly depending on the size and population of the County. Thus a large prosperous county like Kent in 1937 had 132 branches compared with 23 in Pembrokeshire.⁴¹ The County Committee was formed from the elected Honorary officers and a number of representatives from the branches - generally between ten and twenty. Its role was to control and supervise the branches, ensuring that each branch operated properly and did not overlap its activities with any other. The County Committee also had an important function as an information gatherer, as noted in the 1934 Somerset County Report:

The work undertaken in this County along the lines and conviction expressed by the Somerset Branches proves that the only means of the Legion becoming strong in development, purpose and service is by a virile County department responsible for all Legion work within its borders. By collections of data, opinions and experiences of County Committees, Headquarters can obtain valuable information to assist them in the carrying out of Legion's policy as well as being more directly in touch with the convictions of the Branches which are the primary units of this democratic organisation.⁴²

Since an Area might contain between 100 and 600 branches it was impossible for Area officers to maintain a close personal watch on every branch. Even before the general adoption of the County system, and in the initial stages of growth when there were fewer branches in each Area, it was recognised that 'it is quite impossible and much too expensive for any one man (the Area Organiser) to visit every village and every Parish throughout the length and breadth of the Area'.⁴³ A County Committee could assist with these tasks and County officials were expected to visit the branches

⁴¹ See County Handbooks 1937.

⁴² Somerset County Annual Report and Accounts 1934, IH29/20.

⁴³ GSCLB, to the Area Organisers. 21 April 1922.

in their district regularly and inform and inspire the members and officers. This ensured a common standard and co-ordination between branches but also provided encouragement and assistance to the branches in their work. However, Legion members did not favour the County system because it made administrative tasks easier, but because it harnessed the 'County spirit'. At the 1922 Annual Conference, a resolution called for the abolition of Area Councils and their replacement with County Committees. The Great Malvern delegate explained that

Area work was too remote. There was not enough humanity in it... he contended that sentiment was stronger than business. It took them to the front - it took them through the war and one of the things which the War Office did not dare touch in recasting the Army, or attempt to tamper with, was the pride which was taken in the County name.⁴⁴

Although this resolution was not passed, the arguments were rehearsed constantly in many other similar resolutions. Use of the 'county name' clearly meant more to ex-service men than the system of Area administration and was an important way of harnessing loyalty, enthusiasm - and members. Legion membership and numbers of branches grew much faster in those Areas which had first established the County system. By 1933 Somerset, which had established a County committee in 1921, contained 128 branches while Nottinghamshire, which organized its county committee in 1930, could claim only 64 branches.⁴⁵ Although Leicestershire and Rutland had established a County Committee comparatively late, membership had doubled by 1933 since the formation of the County in 1931.⁴⁶

Although the Area Council did not inspire the same loyalty or enthusiasm amongst Legion members, it fulfilled many other important administrative functions. The 1933 Annual Report, while marking the progress of the County system, argued that it was essential to 'realise that the whole of the executive functions in an area ... are in the hands of the Area Councils and cannot be delegated

⁴⁴ AC 1922, Discussion of Annual Report.

⁴⁵ See County Handbooks 1933.

⁴⁶ Leicester and Rutland County Handbook 1933.

to County Committees'.⁴⁷ The Area retained full responsibility for all Legion activities within the Area and so monitored both the branches and the County Committees. The Area Council translated National policy into action through directives for use within the Area and the paid Area staff did much of the organising and administrative work in co-operation with the Counties and the Branches. In practice this meant informing the branches of new initiatives and helping them to implement them as well as gathering information from the branches and the Counties to pass on to Headquarters. Much of the important work on pensions, employment and relief was carried out by the Area, which was reflected in the larger paid staff at the Area level.

However, it was at the National Headquarters in London that the detailed formulation of Legion policy was undertaken by the 26 members of the National Executive Council under the guidance of the National Chairman. The Council met every three months to discuss Legion affairs and was the final arbiter of Legion policy between Annual Conferences.⁴⁸ Topics of national importance, such as foreign policy, were completely in the hands of the National Executive Council which also had the power to expel branches and to confirm, modify or reject the actions of a branch County or Area. Much of the work of the Council actually took place in a wide ranging number of sub-committees which ^{were} appointed to overlook one particular area of policy. The members of the sub-committees were drawn from the National Executive Council and thus their outlook tended to be accepted by the full council. The most important and permanent sub-committees were the General Purposes Committee, the Employment Committee, the Central Relief Committee, the Standing Orders Committee, the Finance Committee, the Appeals Committee and the Pensions and Disablement Committee.⁴⁹ However, other sub-committees covered the full range of Legion work, being created or disbanded on an ad-hoc basis.

⁴⁷ BLAR 1933.

⁴⁸ Rule 6(F) Royal Charter.

⁴⁹ NEC Minutes 1921-1939.

Although the policy, and most of the practical work of the Legion was undertaken by voluntary members, there was also a substantial number of paid employees working for the British Legion who could not hold an elected position or vote on Legion policy. Paid officials dealt with the administration and correspondence at National and Area level, while a wealthy branch or County Committee might employ a secretary and most clubs employed a steward to manage its business. These paid employees co-operated with the National, Area, County and Branch sub-committees and thus formed a pyramid structure from the National Employment, Relief, Appeals and Pensions Departments through the Area administration down to Branch sub-committees of ordinary branch members. The most important paid post in the Legion was General Secretary held by Colonel E.C. Heath from 1921 until 1940. It was his duty to correspond with the branches, deal with the administration at Headquarters and review and report on every aspect of Legion work to the National Executive Council. He was helped in this task by the Assisting and Organising Secretary, J.R. Griffin, who held the post until 1940 and then took over from Heath. The General Secretary's Department, the Secretariat, worked on all the correspondence and paperwork necessary at Headquarters. The other Headquarters Departments of Employment, Pensions and Appeals work, were run by specialist professionals like A.G. Webb who worked at the Pensions Department throughout the inter-war years and developed considerable expertise on Pensions matters.⁵⁰ At Area level, the Legion initially employed a rather large and unwieldy system of separate posts, consisting of an Area Secretary, an Area Organiser, an Area Appeals Organiser, and in four Areas an Employment Officer, each with their own office staff. This large staff was probably helpful, if expensive, during the initial stages of Legion growth but in 1923 this was investigated and revised.⁵¹ The reform combined all the separate posts and responsibilities into one;

⁵⁰ OHBL p.282.

⁵¹ BLAR 1923.

that of Area Organising Secretary. This was a Headquarters appointment which gave the National Executive Council greater control over the Area administration, by ensuring the quality of Area staff. This was a very responsible post which demanded a great deal of work and commitment, as a letter by H.E. Cheeseman, the Metropolitan Area Secretary in 1929, shows:

Five nights out of seven nearly every week since I became the Organising Secretary, I have not reached home until late at night. It has just been work. It has been expensive in meals, in being sociable with Branch Secretaries and Members and meeting people, helpful directly or indirectly to the Legion.⁵²

The Area Secretary was the linchpin of the Area organisation and administration who had to look after all aspects of Legion work, and conduct the correspondence for the Area. There were also a number of people who worked at Area level, but who were not necessarily attached directly to the Area. These included the Pensions Appellant Representatives who worked at the Pensions Appeal Courts, and the inspectors who monitored the conduct and business of British Legion clubs.⁵³

Paid officials required salaries and administration cost money. Finance was crucial to the operation of the Legion, and determined the growth of the organization throughout the twenties and thirties. The basis of the Legion's administrative finance was the affiliation fee, paid by every member on a yearly basis. This amounted to one shilling sixpence and was collected by the branches and then sent to Headquarters.⁵⁴ The money was then expended in national administration costs and one third was returned to the Areas for regional work. Branch Funds were dependent on club subscriptions and each person who joined a branch paid an entrance fee of one shilling as well as a yearly subscription which had to be at least 2/6 a year.⁵⁵ The amount of subscription was set by the branch as was the number of payments; it might be paid in weekly, monthly or yearly installments.

⁵² H.E. Cheeseman to Ian Hamilton, 19 November 1929, IH29/10.

⁵³ British Legion Handbook for the Branches 1932.

⁵⁴ BLAR 1922-39.

⁵⁵ Rule 2(E) Ro.

County finances were a subject of much controversy. Since the establishment of these committees was in the hands of the Area Councils the counties were not assured of finance and certainly did not receive top priority for any available funds. Prior to 1933 the Counties had to depend largely on fundraising events, occasional grants from the Area and donations from the branches. Thus there were no regular and definite arrangements for County administration finance, and the extent of County activity really depended on the willingness of the Area and its branches to support it. In 1933, after a review of County and Area administration, the Counties were allowed to retain one third of the affiliation fees from its branches.⁵⁶

Initially, the Areas were dependent on a proportion of the affiliation fees collected in the Area, but combined with the other reforms in Area administration, this was supplemented, after 1923, by a system of block grants from HQ which regularized Area finance and administration.⁵⁷ Area fund raising events also raised much cash for projects and relief work within the Area. These fund raising events were essential for all levels of the Legion as a letter from General Edward Bethune, the Metropolitan Area Chairman, to Hamilton in 1928 reveals:

I must have some money somehow to carry on as we are doing at present and I am writing to ask you whether your fertile brain can suggest any means whereby we could get £300 or £400 for our own domestic use.

I have thought of many things but they do not seem to be quite feasible and a direct appeal to individuals is rather against our agreement with the National Executive Council, so we are rather in a cleft stick. To pay the wages this week, we shall have to draw on our Reserve which is not very great, so if you can help us with any ideas I should be most grateful.⁵⁸

This illustrates the problem of Legion finance at every level. The affiliation fees paid for much basic administration and expenses, but Legion commitments and

⁵⁶ BLAR 1933.

⁵⁷ NEC Minutes, 9 June 1923.

⁵⁸ Bethune to Ian Hamilton, 20 March 1928

expenditure often exceeded income. The Poppy Day Appeal was the only direct approach the Legion could make to the public and the income from that was exclusively earmarked for relief, not Legion administration. Thus, the Legion's general needs could only be met through fundraising events. With most branches, Counties and Areas holding fetes, garden parties, raffles and dinners, it is not surprising that Robert Graves observed that the British Legion fete had become a permanent feature of British life.⁵⁹ If, as in Bethune's case the planned fair, fete and ball did not materialise, the cash left for everyday expenses could be very small. This cash flow problem could affect every level of the Legion and often hampered the administrative work of the Legion.

//A letter concerning the early history of the Metropolitan Area Council (1921-1925) is revealing in this respect. In February 1935 Arthur Francks, a former Metropolitan Area Chairman wrote to Hamilton:

In these early days the Area was dependent solely on its proportion of affiliation fees, and funds were none too plentiful, and in order to make both ends meet I had to take the dual position of Chairman of the Area and of the Finance Committee, and managed the Area on a total income rather less than is now paid in salary to Captain Birrell.⁶⁰

In these circumstances, the Legion organization could not deal with all the work that was expected of it. The financial position of the Legion improved throughout the period which allowed it to engage in projects of greater scope and value. For example, by 1935, the Metropolitan Area was spending £2,500 a year on Employment bureaux whereas in 1921 a grant of £150 had established the first bureaux in London.⁶¹

Lack of finance was not the only weakness within the Legion's structure. Like most organizations dealing with considerable sums of money, the Legion swam in a vast amount of paperwork. The amount of administration required

⁵⁹ Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Weekend: A Social History of Great Britain 1918-1939*, London: Faber and Faber, 1940, p.371.

⁶⁰ Arthur Francks to Ian Hamilton, 18 February 1935, IH29/20.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

by the various levels in the Legion often discouraged men from taking on the voluntary post of Branch secretary⁶² while the number of entries for the Annual Haig Cup for the best branch was generally very small - perhaps due to the large and detailed form which had to be completed.⁶³ Voluminous paperwork was an inevitable result of the extensive activities of the Legion, but during its early development the organization also suffered from a clumsy administrative system at Area level, and from complicated procedures for the payment of affiliation fees. As Major Jellicorse observed, 'the Branch has to write to Headquarters to purchase the affiliation stamps. If the Branch fails to do this, the Area is notified and it notifies the County which then notifies the Branch'.⁶⁴ This system hampered Legion growth, as the complications not only confused branch secretaries who were unsure where to send affiliation fee monies and did not ensure prompt payment of affiliation fees. Although this problem was largely surmounted in 1927, with the introduction of a simplified system, it is clear that the three levels of Legion organization may have been well suited to the control and supervision of Branches but was less suitable for efficient administration.

This was most obvious in the difficulties which the Legion encountered in the large urban areas of England. While the Branch, County and Area system suited rural areas, by acting as a cement between distant branches, it did not work well in an urban environment. Branches were found to be more difficult to establish while the County unit was replaced by District committees which could not harness the essentially rural and traditional 'county spirit'. In Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool and London, the Legion had numerous problems in establishing a strong and efficient organization. Haig wrote to Colonel Crosfield in 1921:

You know of the troubles at Manchester and Birmingham. We must expect that sort of thing at the start - after a year or two there will be

⁶² Major Jellicorse, Notes on the British Legion, n.d., IH29/37/4.

⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

ample money to go round. In the meantime the branches must be helped and encouraged.⁶⁵

Haig may have been optimistic but the problems did not disappear so readily. In 1925, the Metropolitan Area Council was dismissed and the Area was run by Headquarters for a year in order to build 'an improved and strengthened organisation capable, it is hoped, of maintaining the best traditions of the Legion in the Metropolis'.⁶⁶ In Liverpool, due to the lack of success in Appeals and severe financial problems, after 1926 special arrangements had to be made concerning Poppy Day, whereby the collection was organised by the Lord Mayor and 2% of the gross sum collected was retained for administrative purposes.⁶⁷ The situation was similar in Manchester during 1929 when an "Organisation Office" had to be set up and £1000 loaned to Mr Wilce-Taylor for 're-organising the Legion in Manchester'.⁶⁸ These are all symptoms of the difficulties the Legion had in Britain's larger cities. This was a serious weakness given the importance of these cities and the Legion's inability to develop an adequate organization in urban areas definitely affected the extent and character of the movement.

One other direct consequence of Legion organization was the growth of rivalry between competing Areas, Counties and branches. Although the rivalries between the old organizations disappeared rapidly in 1921, these were quickly replaced by other forms of competition which were tacitly encouraged. It was argued that County Councils produced a 'friendly rivalry' for the 'benefit of the organisation'⁶⁹ which was a throwback to the system of Regimental loyalty and rivalry which formed an integral part of the British Army. The constant paper battle over the boundary between the South Eastern and the Metropolitan Areas is a good example of the time and effort which could be wasted on competition between Legion units. The Metropolitan Area covered all the territory in a fifteen mile radius

⁶⁵ Haig to Crosfield, 9 October 1921, Acc.3155, No.H/227.e.

⁶⁶ BLAR 1925.

⁶⁷ NEC Minutes, 13 March 1926.

⁶⁸ NEC Minutes, 22 June 1929.

⁶⁹ Eastern Area Annual Report 1931.

from Charing Cross. The South Eastern Area covered Sussex, Hampshire, Surrey, Berkshire, the Isle of Wight and Kent but the boundaries meant that large areas of Surrey, Middlesex and Kent were contained in the Metropolitan Area.⁷⁰ In 1923 it was settled by the National Executive Council that the Areas would remain as defined in the Royal Charter, although branches in certain buffer districts on the hinterland of London could choose which Area they wished to join. Once they had decided, the decision was final and branches which were formed subsequently had to join the appropriate Area Council.⁷¹ Under the Chairmanship of Colonel Grantham, who retained the post from 1921 until 1937, the South Eastern Area continually pressed for a revision of the boundary between the two Areas. The matter came to a head in 1934 when the Surbiton Branch, with Grantham's involvement and approval, attempted to change the terms of the Legion's Charter at the Annual Conference by resolutions which would limit the Metropolitan Area to the County and City of London and pass control of almost 80 branches over to the South Eastern and Home Counties Areas.⁷² Admiral Sir Henry Bruce, the Chairman of the Metropolitan Area, wrote to Col. John Brown, the National Chairman in February 1934:

There is no doubt that this is a concerted attack on my Area and as such we must be prepared to counter it, as the South Eastern Area has challenged us on the floor of the National Conference at Whitsuntide.⁷³

During the time between the Area Conferences in February and the Annual Conference in May much of the Metropolitan Area Council's efforts were directed at mobilizing Fleet Street in their defence and organizing a large contingent of delegates for the Annual Conference. The tension between the leaders of the two Areas grew to the extent that Bruce referred to the South Eastern Area as 'the enemy'.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ NEC Minutes, 15 July 1923.

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² AC 1934, Amendments to Royal Charter, Clauses 19 and 32.

⁷³ Sir Henry Bruce to John Brown, 28 February 1934, IH29/19.

⁷⁴ Sir Henry Bruce to Ian Hamilton, March 1934, IH29/19.

The South Eastern Area leadership wished to redraw the boundaries of the Areas to take account of 'County spirit'. The Surbiton delegate at the Annual Conference in Weston-Super-Mare explained that the:

resolution had been drawn up for the benefit of men in the Regiment under his command during the War, who, although members of a Surrey Regiment, found that their Branches - actually located in Surrey - were not in that County for Legion purposes.⁷⁵

This situation had occurred due to the large expansion of the London suburbs during the inter-war period. But the resolution was not merely a reflection of county sentiment, because the acquisition of 80 branches represented a considerable aggrandisement of administrative power. The Organising Secretary of the Metropolitan Area, W. Birrell, wrote to General Sir Ian Hamilton in March 1934:

They (the buffer state Branches) have expressed...the opinion that their interests undoubtedly lie in the Metropolis, although living in suburban districts - in some cases created by the London County Council. Their members although living outside the confines of the L.C.C. boundary, in most cases make their living in London, and as such cannot be compared to members of rural Branches coming under County jurisdiction.⁷⁶

The outer suburbs like Croydon, Wimbledon, East Ham and Walthamstow, were new settlements filled with commuters who worked in London. Thus, the Legion branches in these places were comparatively wealthy and would be a valuable asset to the South Eastern Area. Surprisingly, Legion Headquarters did not intervene in the dispute between the two Areas. Just before the National Conference in 1934, General Sir Ian Hamilton mentioned to Mr Turner of the Somerset County Committee that:

I was confident that those who drive our destinies from 26 Eccleston Square would, in their own good time, take me into their confidence and inform me at least whether they themselves had been taking any hand in this affair; or if not that, at least what sort of a line they are about to take at the Conference. The oracles, however, have been dumb. Not a word or hint has been dropped to me as President of the Metro. Area which has

⁷⁵ AC 1934, Amendments to Royal Charter, Clauses 19 and 32.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

been publicly criticised, dismembered in anticipation and large pieces of its flesh and blood handed out to other Areas.⁷⁷

It is likely that it was too divisive an issue to take any declared line and one which was best left to the decision of the Annual Conference, although Hamilton was convinced that 'Maurice, Brown, Heath and the rest of them were behind this stunt of Grantham's'.⁷⁸ It is possible that Headquarters thought that the Metropolitan Area was 'something of a nuisance to the Legion, and always up against Haig House on every occasion, should therefore be "downed"'.⁷⁹ Certainly, the National Executive Council and the National Officers did not hesitate to become involved in most disputes within the Legion, which was the proper role of the Council and the National Officers, and the failure to do so in this instance does suggest a tacit agreement with the resolutions of the South Eastern Area, while not publicly involving the National controlling body in the controversy.

Ultimately, as with any important Legion controversy, the decision lay with the Branch delegates at the Annual Conference. The Metropolitan delegate from Shoreditch, who spoke against the motion, 'shattered the arguments entirely' and

upon the call for "those against", up went a thousand hands, amidst tremendous enthusiasm. Cries of "Up the Met", cheers and laughter held the Conference for a nearly a minute, and the Chairman formally declared the motion lost".⁸⁰

After this excitement at the Conference, Bruce was able to say that the Legion and the two Areas were 'back to normal'.⁸¹ However, the 'Area stir' does demonstrate that rivalry and competition remained an important feature of the ex-service movement even after amalgamation. Legion members could display a localism and respect for historic boundaries quite at odds with the notions of unity and universal comradeship. The Legion was a national organization, but with a stubbornly local outlook.

⁷⁷ Ian Hamilton to Mr Turner, 20 April 1934, IH29/20.

⁷⁸ Ian Hamilton to Sir Henry Bruce, 12 February 1934, IH29/20.

⁷⁹ Sir Henry Bruce to Capt. Ian Fraser, 17 February 1934, IH29/20.

⁸⁰ BLJ June 1934, Metropolitan Area Supplement, found in IH29/20.

⁸¹ Sir Henry Bruce to Ian Hamilton, 8 June 1934, IH29/20.

However, there were also serious national divisions which belied the outward image of unity. The most unfortunate division was the continued existence of the Officer's Association. In July 1921, just after the Legion had been formally established, General Sir Frederick Maurice considered that 'in amalgamations of this kind each of the bodies has to give up something, often a great deal, for the general good'.⁸² Although the Comrades, Federation and Association did subsume their identities, membership and structure within the new organization, the Officers' Association applied for, and gained, a Royal Charter which guaranteed its separate existence. The need for a Royal Charter to safeguard the funds subscribed specifically for officers, had been discussed soon after the Association had been founded.⁸³ But it was not until November 1920 that the draft of the Petition and proposed Charter were discussed by the Association's Grand Council. At this stage the amalgamation negotiations were well advanced, but the Officers' Association did not inform the other societies of their proposed Charter.⁸⁴ Ultimately, the Royal Charter was granted to the Officers' Association on 30 June 1921 - one day before the official formation of the British Legion.⁸⁵ Thus, other than surrendering its Appeals Department, which became the nucleus for the British Legion Appeals Department, the Officers' Association did not sacrifice anything in the amalgamation process. Instead, the Officers' Association simply became known as the Officers' Benevolent Department of the British Legion, although the old title was still used frequently. With its guaranteed existence, the Officers' Association could enjoy the benefits of being under the umbrella of the British Legion without actually altering its structure, its governing council or its work.

Not surprisingly, the manner in which the Officers' Association had dealt with the amalgamation negotiations aroused suspicion amongst many rank-and-file Legion members and relations between the Legion proper and the Officers'

⁸² BLJ July 1921, p.10.

⁸³ OHBL p.22.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p.23.

Benevolent Department were not always cordial. The Officer's Benevolent Department perpetuated the class and rank distinctions of the O.A. in the British Legion, and maintained assumptions about the position of ex-officers. Since these men and their families were expected to be middle class with higher aspirations than ordinary ex-service men, the aims of the Officers Benevolent Department were notably wider and the assistance more generous than Legion relief. The general policy of the Officers' Benevolent Department was to :

promote the well-being of all who have held His Majesty's Commission, and their dependants, and especially of those who were disabled during the late War; to relieve distress from causes arising out of the war so far as funds permit, and, wherever possible, to make the recipient of relief independent by giving him or her a fresh start in life.⁸⁶

In attempting to achieve these broad, generous aims the Officer's Benevolent Department used a centralised structure of paid officials based in London, which was quite different from the decentralised voluntary system adopted by the Legion. The first 'Branch' of the Department dealt with all applications for business grants, loans and training, while Branch Number Two operated as an Employment Bureaux and processed applications for relief from Officers. The 'Families Branch' was concerned with distress arising out of family circumstances for wives, widows, orphans and dependents.⁸⁷ These three functions duplicated the Legion's work for other ranks, but an ex-officer could also obtain other benefits through three other branches of the Department. A disabled officer or an officer's widow could obtain assistance to buy or maintain a home. Advice was given on pensions and gratuities as well as free legal and financial advice. Further, through the Families Branch and the Avenel St. George Scholarships, over 1,000 officers' children received assistance with school fees.⁸⁸ The Department paid school fees to ensure 'that the war children themselves do not suffer because of their father's service, and to bring them up as good

⁸⁶ BLAR 1922.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ BLAR 1922-1939.

citizens'.⁸⁹ But, unlike the U.S.F. which selected candidates through merit, the assumption was that an officer's children should receive a high-quality, private education simply for reasons of status. Through all of the Branches of the Department, ex-officers could receive considerable financial assistance far beyond that provided through the normal channels of Legion relief. In 1933, General Sir Ian Hamilton interested himself in the case of one man, but was informed that:

this ex-officer during the past two years has been assisted by the Officer's Association in Scotland to the extent of £323.2.8 which sum does not include £145 gained by London Headquarters; a total of £468.2.8.⁹⁰

Given that the most a rank-and-file member of the Legion could expect to receive from a Local Benevolent Committee was a grant of £5,(and only in special circumstances) there was a great gulf in the assistance which officers and the rank-and-file could expect to receive. In Business Loans, an officer could receive up to £250 while the ranker could receive a maximum of £25.⁹¹ The Grimsby Delegate at the 1933 Annual Conference pointed out the absurdity of such distinctions:

two Skippers (of the Grimsby fishing fleet) held exactly the same position but were differently classed because one held a commission. The Officers' Fund was in such a position that they could hand out to one Skipper £10, £15 or £20 without opposition...but the other Skipper...had to apply to the Relief Fund.⁹²

The decisions made by the Officers' Benevolent Department were often completely arbitrary; the rank held by a soldier during the Great War was no guide to the amount of assistance he required - or deserved.

While the Legion Relief regulations were made consciously tight due to the large calls made upon its funds, there was no corresponding attempt by the Officers' Benevolent Department to restrict its expenditure to fit its income. At the inception of the Legion, the Officers' Benevolent Department had been the wealthier

⁸⁹ BLAR 1932.

⁹⁰ S.D. Crookshank to Ian Hamilton, 20 December 1933, IH29/19.

⁹¹ BLAR 1922.

⁹² AC 1933, Res. No. 108.

of the partners,⁹³ and the Officer's Association had dispensed with its Appeals Branch when it merged with the Legion. In return, the Officer's Benevolent Department received 5% of the Poppy Day receipts or £50,000, whichever was less.⁹⁴ Even with large capital reserves which brought in substantial income, by the late twenties the Officers' Benevolent Department was spending that capital to maintain the type of assistance it could offer.⁹⁵

As might be expected, the privileged position of officers within a theoretically equal organisation did provoke anger amongst ordinary ex-service men. The Lambeth Delegate at the 1922 Conference complained that :

the officers although in the minority, got a lot more than did the Tommies. He was sure the Field Marshal did not want that sort of thing to come about, and he asked them to consider seriously whether this fund should not now come under the National Executive of the Legion. Either the officers were in the British Legion or they were not. They wanted to know where they stood.⁹⁶

The ambiguous situation created a great deal of friction between the Officers' Benevolent Department and Legion members. Branches were particularly annoyed by the tendency of officers to join the St George's Hanover Square Branch (which was the O.B.D. branch) in London, which starved local branches of valuable funds and members.

In May 1925, the National Executive Council passed a resolution that: 'the time has arrived that steps should be taken to abolish all means indicating that the Officers' Benevolent Department of the British Legion is a distinct organisation.'⁹⁷

The action arose because since the Legion was about to receive its own Royal Charter, it appeared logical to demand the surrender of the separate O.A. Charter.⁹⁸ Due to its separate charter, the O.B.D. was governed by its own Council and did not have any members elected by the Legion. This resolution was an attempt to end the

⁹³ OHBL p.22.

⁹⁴ OHBL p.33.

⁹⁵ BLAR 1934.

⁹⁶ AC 1922, Discussion of the Annual Report.

⁹⁷ NEC Minutes, 30 May 1925.

⁹⁸ OHBL p.96.

divisions in the movement and place the Department under the control of the National Executive Council. However, the committee appointed to investigate the question discovered that the 'whole matter bristled with difficulties when they came down to details'.⁹⁹ Since the original O.A. Charter did not contain a clause allowing for the surrender of the Charter, there was no legal way, short of an Act of Parliament, that the O.A. could surrender its charter.¹⁰⁰ At the same time, the sub-committee of the National Executive Council had worked out a scheme whereby the Legion and O.A. could operate under one Charter. Unfortunately, the leaders of the O.A., excepting Maurice, were not prepared to compromise on the issue because they believed the negotiations were really an attempt to 'collar' their funds for Legion use.¹⁰¹

This left the Legion with little option but to break completely with the O.B.D. or accept its version of compromise. Ultimately, only cosmetic changes were made to the arrangements between the Legion and the O.B.D. The title 'Officers' Association' was only to be used on legal and financial documents, and further National Executive Council representatives were to be appointed onto the Officers' Executive Committee.¹⁰² At the same time, 'the actual disbursement of money' was to remain firmly in 'the hands of the Officers' Department'.¹⁰³

At the 1926 Annual Conference the East Anglian Area framed a resolution which called for the Officers' Association, United Services Fund and British Legion to be formed into 'one body, thereby reducing the expense of maintaining three separate Headquarters'.¹⁰⁴ The Swansea delegate argued that

the administration of all Funds, including the Officers' Association, should be direct through the Branches of the Legion, in order that Branches might

⁹⁹ AC 1926, Res. No. 83.

¹⁰⁰ OHBL p.96.

¹⁰¹ OHBL p.97.

¹⁰² NEC Minutes, 13 March 1926.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ AC 1926, Res. No. 83.

feel they were doing the right thing and that the granting of assistance was not left to any individual concern.¹⁰⁵

This would have been a logical and sensible development of the principle of unity which the Legion espoused. More importantly, it would have erased the unfair and arbitrary divisions between Legion and O.B.D. relief. Eventually, the Legion and United Services Funds were amalgamated in 1934, but the Officers' Benevolent Department remained a separate and divisive element in the Legion's organization.

The existence of a separate Women's Section also divided the Legion, but along gender rather than class lines. The Women's Section was firmly under the control of the National Executive Council but maintained its own parallel structure of National Council, Areas and branches. It was decided at the Unity Conference in 1921 not to allow ex-service women to join the Legion and to form a Women's' Auxiliary Section instead, but at the 1922 Conference this decision was revoked. Colonel Crosfield argued at the 1922 Conference that:

they had no right logically to exclude ex-service women from full membership. Last year he was against it because he thought it would mean admitting them into their clubs and he did not think that would be good for the movement. He understood now they did not wish to enter into their club-life but merely wished to have the privilege of full membership at the branches.¹⁰⁶

Crosfield was airing a common view; there was still strong prejudice against women being present in pubs or clubs where alcoholic drink was consumed. Thus, ex-service women could become full members and involve themselves in all aspects of Legion work - but they could not take part fully in the social side of Legion membership which was still reserved exclusively for men. The ambivalent position of ex-service women in the Legion could lead to awkward conflicts; in 1925 the Oxford Branch refused to admit an ex-service woman on the grounds that the Branch and Club,

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ AC 1922, Res. No. 43.

being on the same premises, were inseparable. The National Executive Council had to reprimand the Branch for directly violating the Constitution.¹⁰⁷

Although ex-service women could join the Legion as full members, the Women's Section continued to develop albeit with a much broader membership than the Legion branches themselves. Since there had been relatively few women in the Armed Forces during the Great War,¹⁰⁸ membership of the Women's Section was open not only to ex-service women, but to the wives, widows, daughters and female dependents of past or present members of the Forces.¹⁰⁹ This allowed the Section a viable membership, but also meant that it was not an exclusively ex-service organization. The aims of the Section were also wide and expansive as described in the 1933 County Handbooks:

The Women's Section of the British Legion is the "other half" of the British Legion. It is an energetic body of women, banded together to secure in all directions the welfare of the women and children whose menfolk served their country, and more especially of those who have been disabled or died, and also to further in every possible way the interests of ex-service men.

Every endeavour is made by the Women's Section to assist the Legion branches in the social side of their work by money-raising activities, managing refreshment booths at social functions, organizing bazaars, treats for the widows and orphans etc. Poppy Day collections can be increased by using all members available for this work. On questions of Relief, Pensions and Welfare, the Women's Section can take an active part by making widows and orphans their special care.¹¹⁰

The Section's work fitted within the charitable and voluntary role which women had fulfilled since Victorian times. Hospital visiting, caring for orphans and raising funds through bazaars and refreshments were all socially acceptable roles for women to undertake. The volunteers who collected for Poppy Day were almost exclusively women, if not necessarily members of the Section. There were a number of other important and valuable schemes which the Section were involved in, such as the

¹⁰⁷ NEC Minutes, 30 May 1925.

¹⁰⁸ Roughly 100,000 women had served in the armed forces. See A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.38.

¹⁰⁹ Rule 7 (D), Royal Charter.

¹¹⁰ County Handl

National Wardrobe Scheme, the Children's Holiday Scheme and the Central Sales Agency which made valuable contributions to the relief work of the Legion.¹¹¹ Within the Legion there were clearly defined areas which were considered legitimate activities for males and others for females - which corresponded to gender roles in the rest of society.

At the outset, the Women's Section did not grow as rapidly as the British Legion itself mainly due to a lack of established branches and a paucity of funds. Unlike the Legion proper, the Women's Section could not rely on Poppy Day commission or grants from Headquarters and this hampered the growth of the Section.¹¹² Additionally, there was a great deal of confusion amongst Legion branches as to the Section's position in the movement. In February 1925, the General Secretary of the Legion acknowledged that:

misapprehension as to eligibility for membership of the Section and the scope of its activities, has in the past been a cause of reluctance on the part of some Legion branches to assist in the formation of the new units.¹¹³

Many branches hesitated to establish a Section because they believed that only ex-service women could join, or that, once formed, 'the women would dictate to the men'. In Oxfordshire, all appeals and letters from Headquarters on the subject of establishing Women's Section branches were ignored until 1928, when Viscount Hampden (the Area President) asked all delegates at the Area Conference to 'break down existing prejudices' and get the Women's Section underway in the County.¹¹⁴ However, it was emphasised that Section branches should be opened in towns and not in villages where the W.I. was firmly established.¹¹⁵ The Women's Section duplicated the work of the W.I. and in these circumstances it was difficult to run a new organization in competition with firmly established women's societies.

¹¹¹ BLAR 1922-1939

¹¹² Lady Edward Spencer Churchill, *The Women's Section of the Legion*, British Legion Summer School, 1926.

¹¹³ GSCLB, February 1925.

¹¹⁴ F.R.L. Goadby, *The British Legion Oxfordshire: The First Forty Years*, Maidstone: British Legion, 1961, p.6.

There was also a highly developed sense of prejudice against women in the early ex-service movement which continued into the British Legion. The Federation and Association had both been angered by the Government and Municipal authorities employing female clerks rather than returned ex-service men and they mounted numerous demonstrations and framed resolutions protesting at the situation. At a Federation demonstration in Hyde Park in June 1919, 'any woman driver who passed was greeted with shouts of "pull her off" by angry unemployed ex-service men.¹¹⁶ At the 1922 Legion Conference a resolution was passed which demanded that the Government should 'discharge forthwith... temporary female staff...and replace them by ex-service men'.¹¹⁷ The Birmingham delegate claimed that young women were working in the civil service who 'had no earthly need whatever to take the bread out of the mouths of ...poor unfortunate comrades who...could not get enough to live on'.¹¹⁸ Such attitudes died hard amongst ex-service men and there was strong prejudice in favour of maintaining the Legion as an exclusively ex-service and male preserve. At the same time, many branches welcomed the involvement of the Women's Section and developed a harmonious and successful relationship. The Swansea delegate at the 1925 Annual Conference said that the Section was :

one of the Legion's greatest assets, and he deplored the fact that many Branches would not co-operate with the women. The women raised far more money on Poppy Day than the men, and they were willing to undertake all investigations in connection with the Relief Committees.¹¹⁹

The Section appeared able to harness the enthusiasm of its members and was involved in a great deal of useful practical work. Even so, its growth was slow but steady; from small beginnings in 1922 with 6,560 members in 126 branches, by 1930 the Section had 107,580 members in 1,147 branches. Although the Section's work expanded greatly during the 1930s, with much greater efforts being made for

¹¹⁶ Report on Revolutionary Organisations in the United Kingdom, 4 June 1919, CAB24/81.

¹¹⁷ AC 1922, Res. No. 9.

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹¹⁹ AC 1925, Res. No. 141.

Children's Holidays and projects assisting depressed areas,¹²⁰ membership reached a peak in 1930 and did not grow considerably subsequently so that by 1939 there were 127,120 members in 1,790 branches.¹²¹ This lack of growth may be explained by a number of conflicts which appeared on the floor of the Legion Conference.

Many of these arguments developed over the role of the Section within the ex-service movement and some of the views of the Section rankled with Legion members. In 1926, Lady Edward Spencer Churchill, the Section Chairman, said that:

In the manner of giving a helping hand to the Legion there is no end to the useful activities which are constantly going on. It was said in 1914 that women were the finest recruiting sergeants in the country. It is still as true where recruiting for the Legion is concerned.¹²²

In fact, ex-service men preferred a clearly defined boundary between their activities and the Section's. The growing involvement of the Section in Relief work through consultative committees with Legion branches drew a protest resolution at the 1928 Annual Conference. Resolution 70, while recognising the valuable work of the Women's Section protested against the introduction of the Section to the 'higher councils of the Legion', reasoning that the 'Women's Section cannot possibly have the same ties of comradeship which made the Legion possible'.¹²³ The Calverley delegate argued that:

The Conference should realise what the position would be if members of the Women's Section gained a position on Area Executive Councils. It would result in people sitting in their higher councils who were not elected by ex-service men. A girl born in 1917...could vote in the election of a delegate, whereas a vote was refused to the son of an ex-service man.¹²⁴

Ultimately, although Legion members appreciated the practical work of the Section, they were not prepared to allow non-service people any say in the running of the movement. Although the Chairman assured the delegates that there were no plans

¹²⁰ OHBL

¹²¹ OHBL

¹²² Lady Edward Spencer Churchill, *The Women's Section of the Legion*, Summer School, 1926.

¹²³ AC 1928, Res. No. 70.

¹²⁴ *ibid.*

for Women's Section delegates to sit on Area Councils or the National Executive Council, the resolution was passed by the Conference. Similar resolutions were passed at a number of the Conferences (notably in 1931) and it would appear that ex-service men agreed generally with a delegate at the 1928 Conference who remarked that 'So long as they kept to themselves and left the men to themselves, the Yorkshire Area had no objection' (to the Women's Section).¹²⁵ Clearly defined boundaries were erected between the Legion branches and the Section which maintained the Section in the subordinate position, and this probably dampened the enthusiasm of many female volunteers.

The divisions between the Legion proper and the Women's Section, were, as we have seen, only some of the distinctions found in the British Legion. The Officers' Benevolent Department maintained arbitrary and explicit boundaries of class and status within the Legion, while the Women's Section divided the movement between male and female, service and non-service. Even within the main membership of the Legion there were the 'house' branches which distinguished between members on the basis of occupation and past experience. And the rivalry between different branches, Counties and Areas was not always friendly and beneficial to the movement but could cause great tension between different units. Nevertheless, compared to ex-service movements on the continent, the British Legion did form a broad church which could encompass the activities and interests of all ex-service men. Both the French and German ex-service societies were fragmented into many different organizations with no common co-ordination. In France, the societies tended to represent particular groups of ex-service men; from groups which represented disabled veterans like the Association Generale des Mutilés de la guerre or the Union Federale, to those representing discharged ex-service men such as the Federation Maginot, or the more politically orientated Union Nationale des Combattants.¹²⁶ In

¹²⁵ *ibid.*

¹²⁶ Joigne Prost, *In the Wake of War*, pp.30-34.

Germany, the movement was sharply divided by political rivalries into the Stahlhelm on the right and the Reichsbanner on the left.¹²⁷

In contrast, there was never any dissent or protest which threatened to destroy the consensus and framework of the Legion established in 1921. Much of the explanation for this lies in the control and vigilance exercised by the National Executive Council which was powerful enough to discipline or expel any member of a branch foolish enough to challenge its authority. The Legion can thus be characterized as a body with a powerful national organization which imposed a national policy on branches which maintained a strongly parochial outlook. The unity of purpose which amalgamation and a single organization gave the British ex-service movement was certainly beneficial. It prevented a number of ex-service associations continually competing and wasting effort through disunity. However, the British Legion could not be described as a wholly unified movement, nor could it ever foster unity throughout the whole nation in the way which Haig had dreamed. Instead the British Legion was a reflection of the divisions of class, status, gender and geography which existed throughout British society.

¹²⁷ James M. Diehl, *Paramilitary Politics in Weimar Germany*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977, pp.293-295.

'The Most Happy And Cordial Relations Continue to Exist':

The British Legion (Scotland).

In 1927 *The Scotsman* described the new Scottish National War Memorial at Edinburgh Castle as:

Small, but of dignified proportions, embellished both inside and out by the work of distinguished artists, harmonious in conception and detail, the Memorial is an expression of a sincere and reverential spirit, earnestly striving to reflect in stone and in glass the emotions of pity and fear, of devotion and sacrifice, of courage and pride evoked by the experience of the Great War.¹

The Memorial had long been the subject of controversy, but *The Scotsman* argued that it 'encloses the soul of the nation as it lived through those terrible years'² of the Great War. *The Scotsman* clearly believed that the time, effort and money spent had been worth it, and indeed the memorial still has the power to impress and move the visitor. The opening ceremony on 14 July 1927 was equally emotive:

Deeply impressive, and conducted with the solemn dignity befitting the occasion, the ceremony in Crown Court will live long in the memory of those who were privileged to take part or to be spectators ... Seldom can a more distinguished company have trodden this historic ground, flanked by the Banqueting Hall and other buildings with imperishable memories of Scotland's Kings and Queens ... This remarkable mingling of Royalty, nobility, and distinguished naval, military and air force chiefs emphasised the historic aspects of the occasion.³

The King, Queen, and Prince of Wales were present, along with the Lord Lyon of Arms, Heralds, much of the Scottish nobility, Lord Provosts from every major town and city, commanders of the Navy, Army and Air Force and colour parties from every Scottish regiment. If the memorial itself was meant to encapsulate the soul of the Scottish nation during the war, then the use of traditional symbolism, the

¹ *The Scotsman*, 14 July 1927, p.8.

² *ibid.*

³ *The Scotsman*, 15 July 1927, p.9.

dignitaries and the presence of many military standards and colours, emphasised the fact that the whole Scottish nation was represented at the simple, but impressive opening ceremony. However, there was one element missing from the proceedings. Every Scottish regiment was represented by its colour party and by a senior officer who deposited that Regiment's Roll of Honour in an elaborate casket at the centre of the Memorial. But as a monument to Scotland's most recent conflict, the representatives of those who had fought and returned home were conspicuous by their absence. The Scotsman mentioned that:

not the least interesting part of the visit was the tour with Their Majesties, accompanied by the Prince of Wales and the Princess Mary, made on foot round the northern side of the Memorial, where various companies of ex-Service men and others stood in position.⁴

Situated north of the Memorial building, the ex-service men were unable to see the ceremonies, and were denied an active part in the proceedings. This may have been due to the cramped nature of the site in front of the War Memorial, but was also indicative of the attitudes adopted by the Scottish Legion towards the Memorial. For while the British Legion in England was an avid supporter of all such ceremonies, and formed an integral part of the Remembrance ritual each year at the Cenotaph, the same was not true of the British Legion (Scotland). In 1923, the National Executive of the British Legion (Scotland) complained:

that the expenditure at a time like this of so large a sum (£150,000) in mere "dead stone and lime", which can confer no benefit on the living or on the dependents of the Dead service man savours of ingratitude.⁵

This expressed a common ex-service sentiment - 'honour the dead, but serve the living'. However beautiful the monument might be, it could not put food into the stomachs of unemployed ex-service men or their families. This more radical appreciation of the worth of memorials is a good example of the differences between the two Legions of British ex-service men.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ NEC BLS, 4. 3.

The existence of an independent, and distinctive British Legion in Scotland has received little or no attention. The use of the same name suggests that the two organisations ran in parallel with the same aims, objects, principles and structure. However, this can be misleading as there were distinct differences between the British Legion and the British Legion (Scotland). Although the official line of the London Headquarters was always that 'the most happy and cordial relations continue to exist'⁶ between the two organisations, there were periods when relations were characterised more by suspicion and frustration than cordiality. These negative feelings were generally produced during the intense attempts to amalgamate the two organisations during the inter-war years. By examining these separate, but similar organisations, we can hope to assess the differences between the two associations, and attempt to understand why one of the major aims of the Legion, that of unity, was never completely achieved.

The identical use of the term 'British Legion' by the two organisations, the British Legion and the British Legion (Scotland), represents more than a simple confusion. It is an indication of the duality which formed, and forms, part of the Scottish identity since the Union of Parliaments in 1707. An obvious and, for our purposes, important example can be found within the British Army. Scottish regiments have jealously maintained their distinctive uniforms, character and traditions, many of which date from before the Union. However, this has not precluded a pride and loyalty in the wider traditions of the British Army. John Buchan's foreword to the Scottish section in the British Legion Pilgrimage to the Battlefields of 1928 gives a good example of this attitude:

Scotland is today passing through a difficult time. There is a danger of our losing through apathy much of that tradition which has given us in the past our character and our power. The motto of a famous Scottish regiment, 'Scotland for ever!' might well be the watchword which we should bring back with us from the Battlefields; for it is on a sturdy local patriotism

alone that there can be built up the wider patriotism of Britain, the British Empire, and Western civilization.⁷

Buchan was not only arguing for the necessity of an organisation like the British Legion (Scotland), which through its belief in service, loyalty and tradition could help Scotland through its difficulties, but the reference to a famous Scottish military exploit had strong resonances, particularly to those men who had fought in the latest of Britain's wars. This ability to adopt a dual identity and purpose informed much of the character of the British Legion (Scotland). It also formed the stumbling block for many of the basic misunderstandings over the amalgamation negotiations between the two Legions.

Although it is now unclear exactly when Scottish ex-service organisations were first established, by November 1918 the Federation, Comrades and Association all had branches in Scotland. At the meeting of the Scottish National Committee of the Comrades, Captain E.B.B. Towse V.C., Chairman of the Headquarters Committee in London, announced that 'from now onwards Scotland would have complete control of its own affairs'.⁸ This was laid down in the Comrades constitution as, once formed, each National Headquarters 'shall...deal as may be necessary or expedient with all matters affecting the welfare of Comrades in its own Country'.⁹ Thus, very early in the history of the ex-service movement, Scotland gained autonomy.

While the Welsh organisations participated in the English Unity Conferences, Scotland maintained an independent stance which resulted in two British Legions; one covering England and Wales (and after 1925 both Northern and Southern Ireland) and one covering Scotland. Both Legions had almost a parallel history for at roughly the same time as amalgamation negotiations were gathering pace in England, the two Scottish organisations also began to consider unity. Although the negotiations began as early as 28 August 1919, little was achieved until after an

⁷ *A Souvenir of the Battlefields Pilgrimage*, 1928, p.106.

⁸ Executive Committee of the Comrades, (Scotland), 26 November 1918.

⁹ Constitution of the Comrades . . . Great War, n.d.

amalgamation Conference on 31 August 1920 between the Comrades and Scottish Federation, when it was agreed that 'the principle of amalgamation was agreed to as being in the best interests of all ex-service men'.¹⁰ The same ideas motivated the Scottish Conference as the English one, as it was decided that the 'new body should be strictly non-party political, should embrace all ranks ... and membership to be confined strictly to ex-service men'.¹¹ In common with the organisational arrangements which had obtained previously, Scotland was to have 'full control of its own local affairs'.¹²

But even though both Legions operated under similar rules and constitutions and held to the same beliefs and ideals, there were major differences between the two organisations. Many of the distinctions were superficial, but others were deep differences in approach, attitude and practice. The greatest difference lay in scale. The Legion with its Headquarters in London controlled the movement throughout England and Wales, and, after 1925, in Ireland as well. In terms of size, as well as finance, it was by far the greater of the two Legions. In fact, the size of the British Legion (Scotland) compared unfavourably with that of the smallest English Area. In 1926 the Scottish Legion could muster 181 branches,¹³ which was roughly similar to the number in the North Eastern Area in England. Its membership was also very much smaller; in 1935 there were 15,800 Scottish Legionaries in 303 branches,¹⁴ but the North Eastern Area in England could claim 18,105 members in 214 branches.¹⁵ While the British Legion in England and Wales in 1938 represented (at the very lowest estimate) 6.7% of the total ex-service community, the Scottish Legion comprised only 2.2% of the total Scottish ex-service community.¹⁶ At the 1935

¹⁰ Executive Committee of the Comrades, (Scotland), 8 September 1920.

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ BLAR 1926

¹⁴ BLS Annual Report 1935.

¹⁵ BLAR 1935.

¹⁶ Total from England and Wales who served in British Forces during the Great War = 5,286,054. Total membership of the BL in 1935 calculated from affiliation fee receipts = 357,687. Percentage of total ex-service community = 6.76%. Total from Scotland who served in British Forces during the Great War = 688,416. Total membership of the BLS in 1935, taken from BLS Annual Report = 15,800. Percentage of total ex-service community = 2.29%. Service statistics taken from Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, 1965.

Conference, the Scottish President General Sir Ian Hamilton remarked that 'We must double our strength before we can talk eloquently'.¹⁷ This very low membership strength was certainly influenced by many of the same factors which are discussed in Chapter Three but there were further reasons. Hamilton went on:

Here, the Earl Haig Fund goes on its old way, ie. entirely independent of the British Legion. Here too, we have the United Services Fund Trustees going on the same as ever. Where do we come in except for show purposes? We have no real power because we have no money.¹⁸

The financial position of the Scottish Legion was much more precarious than that of the English one. This was because the structure of benevolent work in England and Scotland was very different. On the formation of the British Legion in England, the Officers' Association relinquished its independence and became the semi-autonomous Officers' Benevolent Department. The Officer's Association also handed over the administration and organisation of the Earl Haig Fund to the Legion's National Executive Council, in return for five per cent of the proceeds from the Earl Haig Fund Appeal, namely Poppy Day, and one third of all bequests and donations given to the British Legion.¹⁹ In Scotland, the Officers' Association maintained its separate identity and continued to organise the Earl Haig Fund Appeal. The Officers' Association was also responsible for the collection and distribution of the Poppy Day money, of which one third was retained for officers, and two thirds was allocated for other ranks. Thus, the British Legion (Scotland) decided early in January 1921 that it 'had no use...for a relief committee, having no relief Fund to administer'.²⁰ Unlike the English Legion, the Scottish Legion had no part to play in Poppy Day other than providing voluntary help - it received no commission from the proceeds, and made no decisions concerning the Fund.

While the English National Executive Council had a great deal of power and influence because it held the purse strings of the Poppy Appeal through the Central

¹⁷ AC BLS 1935, Hamilton's Presidential Address.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ See Chapter Four.

²⁰ Minutes of the Joint Meetings, OA (Scotland), Comrades and National Federation, 29 January 1921.

Relief Committee, the Scottish Legion was always hampered by severe financial difficulties. In 1924 the Scottish Legion offered to pay £5 5s as an affiliation fee to the British Empire Services League in place of £30 which was demanded. Since the secretary of B.E.S.L. refused this, the treasurer stated 'that the present financial position of the Legion could not allow of this fee being paid'.²¹ Eventually a compromise of £10 was agreed on, but this episode highlights the financial weakness of the Scottish Legion, dependent as it was only on membership fees and without any commission from Poppy Day to bolster its bank account. This also hampered all negotiations for a Scottish Journal which eventually did run, but never very successfully. With such a small membership, and few capital reserves, it was difficult to make the magazine a financial success. In contrast, the British Legion in England was able to publish the Legion Journal at a considerable loss every year during the twenties, and the Journal only began to make a profit in the thirties.²² Such extravagance was not open to the British Legion (Scotland) which certainly affected the strength of the movement in Scotland. The Scottish Legion could not afford to appoint paid Area Organisers to 'establish new branches on sound lines',²³ nor could it afford to spend money on large recruitment campaigns like the 'Big Push' of 1922 which raised public consciousness and the membership of the Legion in England. Without the benefit of strong finances, the growth of the Legion in Scotland was always hesitant and patchy, dependent as it was on local interest and involvement at branch level.

The organisation of the Legion in Scotland appeared to be very similar to that of England, but the ways in which the structure operated were different. At the head of the movement was the National Executive Council, followed by regional areas, and then the local branches. The National Executive Council did not have the same character or influence as the English Council. While the British Legion elected solid

²¹ NEC BLS 16 February 1924.

²² See Chapter Three.

²³ GSCLB April 1922.

middle class ex-officers to the national post of Chairman, the Scottish Legion consistently elected nobility. During the inter-war years, the post of chairman of the British Legion (Scotland) was filled by Sir William Dick-Cunningham, Lord Glentanar, the Earl of Haddington, and Lt.Col the Earl of Airlie.²⁴ Paradoxically, these 'noblemen and gentlemen of position in the land'²⁵ were supported by a more egalitarian National Executive Council. Unlike the English National Executive Council, which over the period contained roughly 40%-50% ex-officer membership,²⁶ the Scottish Council had, on average 27% ex-officer representation - and in one year contained no ex-officers at all.²⁷ Thus a patrician leadership was balanced by a populist Council.

While the National Executive in England operated as the sole decision making body in the Legion, with the Annual Conference subordinate to its views, the situation was different in Scotland. The National Executive Council did not view itself as the final decision making body, but instead referred major decisions to the Annual Conference. This difference in practice had a number of roots. There may well have been a genuine desire to make the Scottish Legion as democratic as possible, but another, equally important factor lay in the power of the Scottish Branches. The Scottish Executive did not have the power of the Poppy Day commission with which to persuade or coerce branches. The Legion in Scotland depended almost entirely on the goodwill and enthusiasm of the branches for its success. If the Scottish Executive had attempted to ignore the wishes of the branches, which the English Executive was able to do on a number of occasions, the Scottish leadership might well have found itself without any members to lead.

Thus, the leadership of the Scottish Executive was based more on persuasion and consensus than the English council. There were many questions which the

²⁴ BLS, AC Reports 1921-1939.

²⁵ Report by the Co-operation Committee for Submission to the National Executive Council of the British Legion (Scotland), 29 March 1930, p.29.

²⁶ See Chapter Three.

²⁷ BLS AC Reports 1921-1939.

leadership felt were 'most important' and 'required full consideration by the National Executive Council and the members of the organisation'.²⁸ Special Conferences on specific issues were held on many important subjects; Groups in 1924, the Means Test in 1934, International Co-operation in 1937.²⁹ The referendum was also a frequently used tool to divine membership views on any subject. What is more, the views expressed at these Conferences and through the referenda were taken seriously. In general, the Scottish National Executive did not act against the views expressed by the majority of the membership. In Scotland, such methods were taken seriously, while in England, special conferences, and referenda were never even suggested as viable means of divining the views of the membership. It might be argued that this type of democratic participation was only feasible in a small unit like the British Legion (Scotland) but it does demonstrate a difference in attitude between the Scottish and English leaderships.

Thus, there were great differences between the two Legions in the matters of finance, membership and the power of leadership. These differences in attitude and practice had a major effect on the protracted negotiations for unity which took place in the twenties and early thirties. Since the main motivation for the formation of the British Legion had been unity of purpose so that all organised ex-service men could speak with one voice, the London National Executive Council believed that the logical extension of this policy should result in one British Legion covering the whole of the British Isles. This found expression in the National Constructive Programme of 1921 which desired:

To make the British Legion truly National by drawing into or affiliating with it all existing ex-service men's and women's associations, benevolent funds, clubs etc.³⁰

This did not contain a specific reference to the separate organisations in Ireland and Scotland, but this 'domestic object' informed all future relations between the British

²⁸ NEC BLS, Emergency Committee, 26 April 1927.

²⁹ BLS AC Reports 1921-1939.

³⁰ NEC BL 1 July 1921

Legion and the British Legion (Scotland). From June 1921, the National Executive Council in London pressed for unity between the two Legions. An offer from London, made in November 1921, suggesting that Scotland should constitute herself as two Areas of the British Legion was refused politely since the Scottish Unity Conference had already been held that year, and any change would require alterations in the newly adopted Constitution of the British Legion (Scotland).³¹ These excuses were obviously made quickly because no one in Scotland wished to contemplate such complicated negotiations so soon after the formation of the Scottish Legion.

At the 1922 Annual Conference the question of amalgamation was again discussed by the British Legion Scotland. It was decided by 62 votes to 5 'not to lose the status and individuality of the British Legion (Scotland)', and argued that 'co-operation of the British Legion of all Countries was already secured in the Empire Services League'.³² This point caused a great deal of misunderstanding between the London and Edinburgh Headquarters of the two Legions. Although the British Legion (Scotland) recognised the Legion in England as the 'parent body' and often asked for help and advice from London, Scottish Legionaries were content enough with co-operation, and did not see the necessity for amalgamation. At the same time, the leaders in London believed that amalgamation was essential for the future strength of the Legion. A united body of all ex-service men within the British Isles was envisaged - one which paid all of its affiliation fees to London. It was argued that:

if the Legion is to obtain the necessary reforms from government and from public and other bodies for the benefit of ex-service men...it is essential that...the Legion must speak with the voice of the united ex-service men of the Kingdom.³³

Not only would this give a united Legion greater financial strength but greater membership from all the nations of the United Kingdom. Since Legion leaders

³¹ NEC BLS 18 November 1921.

³² AC BLS 3 June 1922.

³³ BLAR 1923.

equated political influence with membership figures, it was seen as vital to bring all ex-service groups together under one head. The 1925 British Legion (Scotland) Conference in Kirkcaldy produced a typical example of the misunderstanding which frequently occurred between the two Legions. The British Legion (Scotland) Journal mentioned that:

It is some years since we had the pleasure of having a representative at our conference from the British Legion parent body and Colonel Heath, the General Secretary received a most hearty welcome.³⁴

This acknowledged the British Legion as the parent body, and was appreciative of Heath's uplifting speech on the growth of the Legion and the spread of branches throughout the world, but no mention was made in the Journal or the Conference minutes of Heath's offer which was:

conveyed to the ex-service men of Scotland on behalf of your Council an intimation that, should they at any time determine to apply to become an Area of the Legion, their request would receive the most sympathetic consideration.³⁵

Heath's purpose, in line with the National Executive's views, was to stimulate discussion on the amalgamation question. In mentioning the growth and strength of the Legion, Heath hoped to encourage Scotland to become an integral part of the organisation based in London. In this he signally failed, and while he believed that his intimation had reached 'the ex-service men of Scotland'³⁶ it is clear that his offer was not even heard in the Conference Hall. Scottish Legionaries believed that they were already included in the Legion's wider work through the British Empire Services League. On many occasions, the leaders of the two Legions were talking at cross purposes.

Even Earl Haig, who had consistently preached for the unity of all ex-service men since 1920, was unable to bring understanding between the two organisations.

³⁴ BLS Journal July 1925, p.5.

³⁵ BLAR 1925.

³⁶ *ibid.*

As President of both organisations, he was uniquely placed to influence the situation. In 1921, Haig thought that 'the trouble has been due to a lack of a definite policy at London Headquarters. Scotland are ready to follow a definite policy expressed by the Executives in London'.³⁷ The events of the next few years proved that the Scottish Legion did not understand the motives or necessity for amalgamation, and were not willing to follow the London Executive on this issue. By 1926 Haig had altered his views due to these disappointments. Although he still felt that amalgamation would be an 'excellent thing' he felt that:

London Headquarters has not been able to show any solid advantage which would be gained by Scotland if they did amalgamate with England. Indeed there are disadvantages, so I don't blame Scotland for running her own show.³⁸

Haig understood that Scotland would not respond favourably to vague offers of amalgamation which gave her no real benefit, but he was unable to develop any ideas of his own. He simply reiterated that any new proposal for amalgamation 'must have some definite proposals to put forward'.³⁹ This was exactly what the London Executive then endeavoured to do, and concrete ideas were formulated which J.R. Griffin, the Assistant Secretary, placed before the Scottish Executive at a meeting on 2nd April 1927.⁴⁰ He detailed eleven points which amounted to the incorporation of British Legion (Scotland) as an Area of the British Legion. Thus, the affiliation fees would be altered in line with English practice, and Scottish representatives would be sent to the London National Executive Council and Annual Conference. In addition, a grant of £800 would be made to cover administration costs. However, the most important provision in the proposals was the undertaking that 'Benevolent work in Scotland' was 'to remain as at present'.⁴¹ This was because the British Legion (Scotland) could not undertake to unify the benevolent funds in Scotland and

³⁷ Haig to Crosfield, 9 October 1921, Acc.3155, No.227.e.

³⁸ Haig to Crosfield, 28 June 1926, Acc.3155, No.227.d.

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ See Appendix H.

⁴¹ *ibid.*

England, as it had no control over them. However, the ambivalent position of the Officers' Association in England, as a semi-independent branch of the British Legion, conflicted with the completely separate existence of the Officers' Association in Scotland. These legal and financial difficulties proved a major stumbling block for unity, but the real reasons lay deeper.

On 26 April 1927, the Emergency Committee of the British Legion Scotland decided that it was 'not favourably impressed with the proposals submitted by Mr Griffin',⁴² and the matter would no doubt have been shelved by the British Legion (Scotland) but for the intervention of Earl Haig at the 1927 Annual Conference held in Dundee. Although Haig attended the British Legion Conference every year in his capacity as President, he only attended the Scottish Conference twice, in 1926 and 1927.⁴³ Haig had much more contact with London Headquarters than with Edinburgh, and this might explain his inability to persuade the Scottish Legion to amalgamate. At the same time, Scottish Legionaries held Haig in as much, possibly more, awe than the English members and this heightened the impact of his long speech in 1927 which argued for unity:

No man can be more jealous than I for the rights and liberties of Scotland and of Scottish institutions, or more proud of that lofty spirit of independence which has kept Scotland in the forefront of the nations in every field of human endeavour; but I am also a strong believer in combining the efforts of all who are seeking to advance the same ideal and working for a common cause.I still hope that the time will come when there will be in these islands one truly representative body able to speak in the name of all the ex-service men of Great Britain, and with the weight and influence of all British Ex-service men to back its word.⁴⁴

In effect, Haig was asking the British Legion (Scotland) to subordinate its 'lofty spirit of independence' for the greater good of all British ex-service men. This did have a major impact on the Scottish delegates but not entirely the effect that Haig desired. It is clear that Haig's speech came as something of a surprise for Lord Glentanar, the

⁴² NEC BLS, Emergency Committee, 26 April 1927.

⁴³ BL AC Reports 1921-1927, BLS AC Reports, 1921-1927.

⁴⁴ AC BLS Haig's Presidential Address, 1927.

Scottish Chairman, because it had been decided at the National Executive Council meeting held just prior to the Conference, that the question of amalgamation should be fully discussed by the Council and Branches *after* the Conference. Thus, Glentnar could only prevaricate while mentioning that 'It is my hope, and I am sure the hope of every delegate present here to-day, that we may be in the closest possible co-operation with the Legion as a parent body'.⁴⁵ He went on to say that he hoped to call a special Conference to deal with the matter once it had been fully discussed by the Council. However, Glentnar had not used the words unity or amalgamation, but co-operation. Once again, misunderstanding had taken place over the message of the speaker. Acknowledgement of the British Legion as parent body and the necessity for co-operation was clearly not all that Haig wanted.

However, Haig's speech did make the British Legion (Scotland) reconsider its position. In November 1927 the amalgamation sub-committee's report stated that:

The sense of loyalty and gratitude, which we have for our President, makes it imperative that the Legion in Scotland should give immediate and sympathetic consideration to Lord Haig's wishes.⁴⁶

Although the Scottish Legion had already considered and rejected the option of amalgamation, Haig's wishes could not be ignored by the Scottish Legion leaders. Thus, Griffin's proposals were considered again and different conclusions agreed upon. It was decided by the sub-committee for amalgamation that the British Legion would have to agree to certain additions to its Royal Charter before the Scottish Legion could refer the matter to the branches. These additions were mainly to define more exactly the position of the British Legion (Scotland), but the most important provision was for an addition to Clause 43:

That all benevolent funds in Scotland remain apart from the British Legion and continue to be administered as at present by their Trustees, and

⁴⁵ AC BLS 1927.

⁴⁶ NEC BLS 1 November 1927.

excluded from the powers covered by Clauses 33 and 39 of this Royal Charter.⁴⁷

This was to ensure the legal independence of all benevolent funds in Scotland from any terms of amalgamation. And although all of the other provisions were easily accepted by the British Legion, the addition to Clause 43 became problematic. When Glentanar informed the British Legion of the Scottish Legion's terms, Colonel Heath replied:

With regard to the...addition to Clause 43, the Chairman feels that while it may be possible to get this through the National Executive Council, it is not going to be easy to obtain the necessary two-thirds majority for the amendment to the Charter when the matter comes before the Annual Conference at Whitsuntide. He wonders whether it would not be possible to meet your Executive's view by placing this particular item in your Bye-Laws.⁴⁸

While the Scottish Legion saw the protection of Scottish benevolent funds as vital to any amalgamation, the British Legion leaders were unwilling to test the matter through a vote at the Annual Conference. The Scottish leaders then broke off the negotiations due to the 'reluctance of the English Legion Headquarters to alter their Charter or even to consult the whole members of the English Legion in conference'.⁴⁹

It was at this frosty point in the negotiations that Haig died, leaving an important letter concerning the issue unsigned. Colonel Crosfield, the British Legion Chairman, had given Haig a draft letter to sign which recommended amalgamation without additions to the Charter. Crosfield justified this to Haig because the 'National Executive Council are prepared to give the necessary undertaking that these arrangements shall continue and shall not be interfered with',⁵⁰ and further, that:

it might create quite a wrong impression if the British Legion in Scotland, in order to become more closely allied and identified with the British Legion, insisted on amendments to the British Legion Charter.⁵¹

⁴⁷ NEC BLS, Sub-Committee, 30 September 1927.

⁴⁸ E.C. Heath to Lord Glentanar, 9 December 1927.

⁴⁹ Report by the Co-operation Committee, p.10.

⁵⁰ p.12.

⁵¹ *ibid.*

Crosfield was reluctant to test the opinion of the membership at the Annual Conference because he thought that the addition to the Charter might be resisted by English representatives who felt that Scotland was being given special treatment. He was not prepared to risk failure for such important proposals. More importantly, while the Scottish Legion would not act without the approval of their branches, Crosfield, who had been given complete freedom of action on the matter by the National Executive Council,⁵² felt such a vote was unnecessary when the National Executive Council were prepared to give their word on the matter. This difference in procedure between the two Legions could only heighten the misunderstanding between them.

The Scottish Legion leaders were concerned by the draft letter which had been left unsigned by Haig. Since there was no way of knowing whether Haig would have signed the draft letter in its original form the leaders sought legal advice on the matter. Legal Counsel advised them not to amalgamate without the additions to the Charter to safeguard the position of the Scottish benevolent funds. In reprising the situation for counsel, the Scottish leaders also revealed their real doubts concerning amalgamation.⁵³ They feared that:

if amalgamation does take place, the English Legion may ultimately claim the right in future to issue the Earl Haig Appeal throughout the whole of the United Kingdom, to administer from London the whole of the Poppy Day money collected in Scotland, and to receive from that Fund commission on the total collection for their own purposes.⁵³

There had already been a number of minor quarrels over benevolent funds which had caused a certain amount of suspicion between the two Legions. The Earl Haig Fund in London collected large sums throughout the colonies for the Poppy Appeal, but none of the money ever found its way to Scotland.⁵⁴ If the British Legion (Scotland) amalgamated with the British Legion, it left the Scottish Officers' Association and the

⁵² NEC 1928.

⁵³ Report by the Co-operation Committee, p.18.

⁵⁴ *ibid*, p.28.

Scottish Earl Haig Fund in a precarious legal position. The only way of guaranteeing their separate existence seemed to be through a legal addition to the Charter. Further, the Scottish leaders feared that, although the National Executive Council in London might pledge sincerely to maintain the separate Scottish benevolent funds:

the English Legion, at their Annual Conference, can always, it is thought, overturn any agreement made by their Executive Council and might quite likely do so whenever they thought it would benefit their funds.⁵⁵

These fears were based on an imperfect knowledge of the British Legion; it was highly unlikely that the membership of the British Legion would overturn such an agreement without the express approval of the National Executive Council. However, the National Executive Council in London did nothing to educate the Scottish leaders or properly reassure them.

It is also clear that many members of the Scottish National Executive were against amalgamation for reasons other than legal impediments. In the very long and comprehensive report on amalgamation prepared for the Executive Council in 1928, Colonel Blair, one of the committee members, mentioned that:

there were many other reasons against amalgamation which the Committee had agreed upon, but which they purposely did not include in the report so as to avoid all controversy.⁵⁶

It is unknown whether any members of the National Executive Council were also members of the fledgling Scottish National Party, but clearly, matters of 'sentiment' and national pride played a large part in their deliberations. If amalgamation took place, the British Legion (Scotland), an independent organisation, would surrender that right and be reduced:

to the level of an ordinary area to be called the 'Scottish Area', putting the whole of Scotland which is a nation by itself, on the same basis as an English County or English Area with only two representatives on the

⁵⁵ *ibid.* n.18.

LS 28 July 1928.

National Executive Council. This proposal alone is contrary to Scottish sentiment or, if preferred, Scottish pride.⁵⁷

Thus, they could not surmount the difficulties of national pride and Scottish desire for independence and distinctiveness, no matter what benefits amalgamation might have provided. The Scottish leaders' fears that Scottish representation on the National Executive Council could be reduced still further were phantoms, but it shows that they were not prepared to take the risk of amalgamation. The report warned that similar amalgamations 'have not proved successful, but on the contrary a source of friction, involving in some cases a secession from the main body and the institution of a separate body for Scotland'.⁵⁸ Finally, the report suggested that the happiest, and safest solution was for the two Legions 'to retain their separate entities', and continue to work in 'loyal co-operation'.⁵⁹

Eventually, after all these avenues had been explored without success, the Scottish leaders decided to consult the branches through a referendum in September 1928. This gave an unequivocal result - 26 branches were in favour of amalgamation, but 132 voted against.⁶⁰ In view of the result, the Scottish Council agreed to drop the question of amalgamation while continuing to explore means of greater co-operation with London Headquarters. This information was forwarded to London, and it is clear that the English National Executive lost patience with the problem. In March 1929 the Chairman was asked to inform the Scottish Legion that:

since the organisation in Scotland had no right to use the name of the British Legion, this Council requested that steps be taken to cease using the title "British Legion".⁶¹

Instead of finding ways to work together, the London Executive was attempting to coerce the Scottish Legion into amalgamation. Much to the chagrin of the London Executive, the Scottish Legion had also secured the right to use the term 'British

⁵⁷ Report by the Co-operation Committee, p.29.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p.31.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ NEC BLS 17 October 1928.

⁶¹ NEC March 1929.

Legion' and the letter had little effect other than to sour relations between the two Legions. At the 1930 Annual Conference of the British Legion (Scotland), Lord Haddington, the Chairman, remarked that:

the English Executive were apparently prepared to make amendments to their Charter to give effect to certain recommendations made by Lord Bridgeman's Committee, though not prepared to do the same in connection with the amalgamation question.⁶²

It appeared to the Scottish leaders that, when an issue was important enough, the English Executive were prepared to alter their Charter; the fact that they had not done so over amalgamation could only be taken as proof that the English Executive had not explored every avenue. As might be imagined, relations between the two Legions at this time were far from cordial. By 1932, frustration amongst the English membership at the lack of progress became apparent when Liverpool moved three motions at the Annual Conference which would, in General Sir Ian Hamilton's words, 'have broken up the movement in Scotland in three minutes'.⁶³ The resolution recorded the keenest disappointment with the British Legion (Scotland) and its 'failure to respond to the leadership ... of the Prince of Wales ... and ... Earl Haig'. Further, the National Executive Council was urged:

to secure either the same measure of control of the Branches and Institutions in Scotland as exists in England, Ireland and Wales, and throughout the remainder of the Empire, or take steps to point out to each individual unit in Scotland that their use of the title of the British Legion is illegal.⁶⁴

This resolution had the same motive as the abortive letter in 1929, but this time was to be debated on the open floor of the Annual Conference. The resolution also reflected the attitudes of many of the Legion leaders concerning the position of the British Legion (Scotland) because it had been discussed 'at great length with various members of the National Executive Council',⁶⁵ including Mr Lister and Colonel

⁶² AC BLS 1930.

⁶³ AC BL 1932, Res. No. 132.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ Capt. Smith, *ibid.*, 12 May 1932, IH29/16.

Crosfield. The Prestwich delegate in moving the resolution remarked that 'it was up to the Legion to tell Scotland they should come in, that the Legion wanted them in, and that if they did not come in they should get out'.⁶⁶ This was an expression of the frustration felt at the ambivalent position of the British Legion (Scotland), as an organisation claiming the same beliefs, objects and ideals, but resolutely refusing to join with the larger 'parent' body.

However, frustration was not enough to pass the resolution, and instead a conciliatory motion which expressed:

the earnest hope that the work initiated by Lord Haig shall be brought to fruition by the unity of the Legion in Scotland with the British Legion and further, trusts that in the meantime the closest possible relationship will be fostered between the two bodies.⁶⁷

was passed. This was nothing more, or less, than the type of platitude which had caused misunderstandings between the Legions since 1921. The Scottish Legion could maintain its position by claiming that a cordial relationship with the parent body was sufficient, while the resolution did not really forward matters for the English Legion. This resolution marked the end of any serious attempts to amalgamate the two Legions, and in truth the negotiations had run out of steam by 1929.

One of the major criticisms of both Legion leaderships must be that one of their basic aims - that of unity amongst all British ex-service men - was never achieved. In 1929 the British Legion Annual Report stated that:

The Council considers it urgently necessary in the interests of the ex-Service community as a whole that the ex-service men throughout England, Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland the Irish Free State, should speak with one voice.⁶⁸

The greatest barrier to full unity proved to be the addition of a paragraph to Clause 43 of the Legion's Royal Charter. If complete unity was so urgently required, the London Executive's refusal to even attempt a Conference vote reveals a stunning lack

⁶⁶ AC BL 1932, Res. No. 132.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ AR 1929.

of vision. Poor negotiation skills and an inability to understand the other Legion's point of view also characterised the negotiations. At the same time, the Scottish Legion did not concede that unity of purpose and action on political issues, benevolent work, foreign policy and myriad other ex-service issues would be of major benefit to all British ex-service men.

Closer co-operation between the two Legions only developed in 1938 and 1939. This time, the impetus came from the British Legion (Scotland) which realised that it was losing out from some of the important decisions being made in London. The real costs of disunity were made apparent by the failed campaign over prematurely aged ex-service men. By 1936, both Legions were aware of the problem of 'burnt-out' veterans who were suffering from the effects of their service, but did not have war pensions. Both Legions passed resolutions on the issue at their 1936 Annual Conferences, but while in England the matter was entrusted to the personal attention of the Chairman, the scope of the Scottish Legion's resolution was much wider. The Scottish resolution stated that the Legion should:

petition the government to set up a commission of enquiry into the present condition of all ex-service men who fought in the late war and also their dependents who are suffering from physical and financial stress due to the lack of pension and employment, with a view to recommending such measures of relief as the condition demands.⁶⁹

This resolution demanded a complete review of the pensions warrant which had operated since 1919. The British Legion (Scotland) had never surrendered the belief that the pensions warrant was inadequate and this resolution was an attempt to force the Government to review the condition of all ex-service men, not just those prematurely aged who needed immediate assistance. Not surprisingly, the Ministry of Pensions found no difficulty in refusing these demands and replied that the 'Resolution does not indicate the special grounds of information which would be necessary to justify the Government in instituting a general inquiry at this date'.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ AC BLS 1936.

⁷⁰ Ministry of Pensions to BLS, 14 September 1936, PIN15/722.

This type of resolution did not cause any alarm amongst Ministry Officials; it was very easily deflected and there was certainly no intention to accede to the demand for a special inquiry. In common with other Scottish attempts at political pressure, the resolution was allowed to stand alone without any other immediate action being taken.

However, the Legion's National Executive also decided that this was too important an issue to ignore and began to 'to formulate special instances of hardship and to obtain evidence from Branches throughout Scotland in support of this Resolution'.⁷¹ These investigations were two-fold. The Council considered that there was justification for an enquiry into the general condition of ex-service men who served overseas, as compared with those of non-service men of a similar age, and secondly, in all cases where a pension had been granted due to War Service to enquire whether the condition had worsened.⁷²

During 1938, when both Legions had completed their enquiries, pressure built up for a joint Deputation to the Prime Minister on the subject. But although the two Legions were pressing for ostensibly the same object, their approach to the question was entirely different. Fetherston-Godley during a telephone conversation with a Ministry of Pensions Official, J.H.L. Ludgate, made it clear that:

the Legion...has no fault to find with the War Pensions system, which they regard as satisfactory and that they do not propose to make any recommendation that it should be altered.⁷³

By 1938, this had become the official line of the British Legion in England, but the British Legion (Scotland) had never accepted the system of pensions as was made clear in Lord Airlie's preamble to the Scottish report:

It is submitted ... that the existing regulations which were framed within a few years of the cessation of hostilities are inadequate to cover the conditions under which many men find themselves at the present time.⁷⁴

⁷¹ NEC BLS 3 October 1936.

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ Ministry of Pensions PIN15/722.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

This was almost the complete opposite to the position of the British Legion in England. While the British Legion (Scotland) wanted a complete overhaul of the pensions administration, the English Legion was merely arguing for consideration for a special group of ex-service men; those who had been prematurely aged by their service. This also meant that the two Legions could not agree on how to mount the deputation to the Prime Minister. On 4 February 1938, the Prime Minister's private secretary, in his briefing for Chamberlain, seized upon the disunity:

I submit that the fact that they have personal differences inside their own ranks, so far from affording any reason why you should see them separately, only strengthens the case for a joint deputation. They must compose their own differences before attempting to approach the Head of Government, and they must be ready to present a more or less common front.⁷⁵

In the event, the deputation on 8 March 1938 was little short of a disaster. Both Legions were easily played off one against the other, and no concessions were made by Chamberlain. After the deputation, the Scottish questionnaire Committee reviewed the situation, remarking that:

there was need for the closest co-operation with the British Legion England ... had preliminary meetings taken place before the joint deputation to the Prime Minister ... the case of the ex-service men might have been more strongly placed before him.⁷⁶

Thus it was only when the real costs of disunity were made plain by the deputation in March 1938 that the negotiations for co-operation were successful. The importance of co-operation was emphasized still further when the British Legion (Scotland) very 'nearly missed the boat that never sailed'.⁷⁷ When London Headquarters volunteered the services of the Legion for a Czechoslovakian Police Force during the Munich crisis, the Scottish Legion was almost overlooked, and Scottish representation was limited to 20 members out of a force of 1000 volunteers.

⁷⁵ Prime Minister's Briefing for the 1938 Deputation, 4 February 1938, PREM1/285.

⁷⁶ NEC BLS 14 October 1938.

⁷⁷ AC BLS 1939, Hamilton's Presidential Address.

It was characteristic of both Legions that a personal friendship eventually brought about the co-operation where official negotiation had failed. When Fetherston-Godley became national chairman in 1935, he informed Hamilton that:

I wrote to Airlie the other day to see if we could do something about bringing the Legion in Scotland and England nearer together ... there is no reason that I can see why something cannot be done, and as I was at Sandhurst with Airlie, perhaps we can do something where the official mind has failed.⁷⁸

The plans for co-operation, which were finally adopted in 1939, owed more to the friendship between Airlie and Fetherston-Godley than formal meetings and negotiations. Under the proposals, all national matters such as foreign policy and negotiations with government were to be handled by the London Executive but all 'domestic affairs' were to remain separate. Mutual representatives on each Executive Council and at each Annual Conference ensured that full contact took place between the Legions.⁷⁹ The plans worked well, and the two Legions learned to co-operate during the Second World War.

The failure of earlier negotiations meant that both Legions suffered the consequences of disunity for twenty years. Their appeals and relief work was not co-ordinated, and in deputations to Government departments, neither Legion could speak for all British ex-service men and the lack of communication between the Legions could only exacerbate the problem. But the poor bargaining skills and lack of flexibility which were demonstrated during the course of the unity negotiations affected more than just the relations between the two Legions. As we shall see, these defects also hampered the British Legion's work in many other areas and particularly in its negotiations with Government.

However, disunity affected the British Legion (Scotland) more severely. While a British Legion branch in an English village might form a social centre for village life, the Legion in Scotland was rarely able to make such an impact on

⁷⁸ Fetherston-Godley to Hamilton, 21 January 1935, IH29/20.

⁷⁹ See Appendix I.

people's lives. This was due to its financial weakness, but also because, without a Relief Fund, it had no practical role to undertake in the wider ex-service population. With only two per cent of Scottish ex-service men within its ranks, the traditions and spirit of the Scottish Legion were always more intimate, and carried less weight with the rest of the community. By maintaining its independence, the British Legion (Scotland) reinforced conceptions of Scottish distinctiveness and independence, but it also closed itself off from a more powerful and active ex-service movement across the border.

3

**'OURS IS A BROTHERHOOD WHERE RANK
IS NAUGHT AND SERVICE EVERYTHING':
THE MEMBERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP**

Voluntary organizations exist only when there are members to control and motivate. The Legion was no exception and it is through a discussion of membership and leadership that we can hope to understand the character and motivations of the British ex-service movement. We must first examine the nature of Legion membership. The shared goals of the movement tell us much about the character of the Legion - and the type of ex-service man who would be attracted to join the organization. The influence of the Legion leadership is also very important as the officer-dominated hierarchy of the Legion determined many elements of the Legion's make-up. Following on from a discussion of the Legion's membership, we must examine the reasons for the comparatively low numbers of veterans in the Legion. As a voluntary movement, the Legion could never achieve the same numbers as a compulsory institution like the Armed Forces but compared with continental ex-service groups, the British Legion was a small organization. Antoine Prost has estimated that French associations 'represented between 2,700,000 and 3,100,000 organized veterans, or almost one out of every two survivors'.¹ In Germany, both the Stahlhelm and Reichsbanner boasted membership figures in excess of one million.² In contrast, the Legion never amounted to more than ten per cent of the total ex-service community. The reasons for low membership are bound up in external factors but also with the nature of the organization itself.

The British Legion grew steadily from 1922 when there were 116,433 members until 1938 when there were 409,011.³ The continued growth of the

¹ Prost, *In the Wake of War*, p.44.

² Diehl, *Paramilitary Politics in Weimar Germany*, pp.293-295.

³ See Table 4.

Legion, until a second war intervened, proved that the Legion was a live movement.

As General Sir Ian Hamilton remarked in 1933 on his eightieth birthday:

We ex-service warriors who used to be so gay and larky are now becoming venerable beings who die by the dozen every day - just as leaves drop off from an aged oak in winter. And yet - here comes the miracle which will puzzle the historians - the British Legionaries who draw their recruits from the fast-diminishing ex-service men increase like the leaves of a sapling in the spring!⁴

The Legion not only replaced members who 'faded away' or lapsed in their membership, but continued to attract new members. While membership may have decreased in 1926 after the General Strike,⁵ the only period of stagnation on a national scale occurred in 1930 and 1932 with the onset of the Depression.⁶

There are detailed statistics which give a clear indication of the strength and regional distribution of Legion membership. These figures are based on the affiliation fee receipts which give the total financial strength of the Legion in any one year. In fact, this is the lowest estimate and actual membership would have been considerably higher. Each member of the Legion had to pay an annual affiliation fee of 1/6, but a member who became ill or unemployed could be excused payment with the agreement of his branch.⁷ Although many members continued to pay their fees if unemployed or ill, (or their branch paid for them) there were thousands of members who did not appear in the statistics. Somerset in 1934 had a financial membership amounting to 12,374 while membership returns reached 14,382.⁸ The financial membership of the Legion reached a high point in 1938 with 409,011 paying members but the Legion claimed an estimated membership total of 560,000.⁹

The membership figures also give clear evidence of great regional differences in the distribution of Legion strength. Membership was much higher in the South and

⁴ BLJ, May 1933, p.172.

⁵ See Tables 4 and 5. Figures for 1926 are inexact because the Legion financial year was moved from December to September, thus the figures only show details for nine months of that year.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Rule 4 - Funds (B), Royal Charter.

⁸ Report of the Somerset County Committee, year ending 30 September 1934 n.17; found in , IH29/20.

⁹ BLJ May 1939, p.390.

West of the Country and correspondingly weaker in the North and Wales.¹⁰ The statistics also reveal that, notwithstanding the overall growth of the organization, the regional distribution of membership remained relatively constant throughout the period.¹¹ Thus, the South Eastern Area, which was always the largest unit, contained 14.43% of the total membership in 1922 and 15.41% in 1935; an average of 15.84%. The South West contained, on average, 11.38% of the total membership, while in contrast, the North East and North West comprised 4.75% and 9.55% respectively.¹² These figures provide striking evidence that the Legion drew its main strength from the villages and market towns of rural England. Within Somerset, a predominantly rural area with a strong County organization, it was calculated in 1934 that 37% of all ex-service men in the County were financial members of the Legion.¹³ Indeed many village branches could boast that all ex-service men from the local community were members of the Legion. Forest Town attained this ambition after the 1922 'Big Push' recruitment campaign when '72 new members were enrolled'.¹⁴ High rural membership may be explained by the ability of the Legion to become well integrated into village life. At Trumpington the President, Mr G.R.C. Foster, a local worthy, presented the Branch with its standard in 1924 and held the annual Legion fete on his grounds. At Sunbury-on-Thames, the local vicar, the Rev. C.E. Thomas was Honorary Chaplain and served on the benevolent committee. At Ambergate, a town with strong railway connections, the President, Henry Kiddy, was a former Midland Railway accountant who was also the local choirmaster.¹⁵ These examples are typical of the manner in which the Legion was woven into the fabric of traditional rural life.

The situation was very different in urban areas. England's great cities, although containing large numbers of ex-service men, had small Legion memberships.

¹⁰ See Table 6.

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ Report of the Somerset County Committee 1934, p.3.

¹⁴ BLJ, June 1922, p.270.

¹⁵ Information from the histories of Trumpington,

and Sunbury-on-Thames branches.

At the 1924 Annual Conference, the Newcastle delegate remarked that 'of the 30,000 men and 5,000 officers in Newcastle only, about 600 men and about 50 officers were Legion members'.¹⁶ This was a very small percentage membership - 2% and 1% respectively. The Bristol delegate at the 1927 Annual Conference complained that his city was:

practically the 'Black Hole' of the Legion, 48,000 men entered the forces from Bristol, but their Legion membership was not a thousand. It was a disgrace to a big provincial city that they had not a greater membership.¹⁷

Legion membership in Bristol only amounted to 2% of the total ex-service community. As these examples show, while the national average was roughly 10%, Legion membership in cities was often no more than 2% of the total ex-service community. Legion members recognized that:

the greatest weakness was to be found in the large towns, and their problem was different from that of country Branches. There were all sorts of counter-attractions and people could hide themselves for years.¹⁸

Urban areas contained a more mobile population with a weaker community identity than rural villages. There were also none of the traditional structures of hierarchy which could be utilized to provide the Legion with extra funds and publicity. Whereas in a rural area a Legion branch could become a real focus for community life, in the cities there were already many different organizations and leisure activities based around working identities that provided 'counter-attractions' to the Legion.

It is revealing that the large new housing schemes built by the London County Council on the outskirts of London in the twenties and thirties provided a fertile ground for Legion branches. In places like Becontree and Dagenham, there were large communities of 30,000 and more, but without the normal social amenities or traditional structures of British life. These areas were too far from the centre of London for the city to provide a 'counter-attraction' to the Legion. In Becontree the

¹⁶ AC 1924, Res. No.124.

¹⁷ AC 1927, Rule No.4 (B).

¹⁸ AC 1931, Res. No. 46.

L.C.C. actually left a plot of ground for an ex-service club and let the ground to the Legion at a nominal rent. In 1933 the Branch raised the funds for a headquarters building through voluntary effort on the part of the members since Becontree had no 'Big Noise to come down handsomely' with a large donation. By 1935 the Branch was very successful and helped to provide a social focus for an area of 35,000 people which had few other amenities.¹⁹ The Legion was able to work more effectively where the local branch could harness local support and provide a social focus for the area.

In 1922 Corporal Claude Brown gave a comprehensive answer to the question 'Why am I a member of the Legion?':

Because, in the first place, I desire to perpetuate that wonderful spirit of comradeship forged in the service and especially on the battlefield, where ALL men were real chums and gave real service, friendship, shared joys and sorrows, work and play, and even their rations. I realised before hostilities ceased that Peace no less than War would want winning. I want to help all I can those chums who suffered so much with me. I want to help my fallen comrades widows and their orphans in their sad plight.... I want to help all those partially and totally disabled chums who nobody seems to want and whose present position appears so hopeless. All this and more can be done through the British Legion if all ex-service men will join. What baffles me is why any decent thinking comrade stands outside leaving the others to fight the cause.²⁰

Brown was expounding a profoundly collective ethic. Legion members saw themselves as a band of comrades who were working to help less fortunate ex-service men and care for the widows and orphans of the Fallen. Legion members were greatly concerned by the issues of housing, training, pensions and employment because many of them were working men who had faced these problems themselves.

There was also a strong commitment to the disabled ex-service man perhaps due to the large numbers of disabled veterans contained in the membership. Disabled veterans probably had a better realization of the problems which could confront ex-service men than many able-bodied veterans. One delegate at the 1923 Conference

¹⁹ BLJ, April 1935, p.439.

²⁰ BLJ, April

remarked that 'they had got to admit that seventy five per cent of the members of the Legion were disabled men'.²¹ This followed the same pattern found in French organizations. Antoine Prost has estimated that in the French movement 'almost all recipients of a war-pension belonged to a club, although six non-pensioned veterans out of ten remained outside the movement'.²² Many prominent Legion leaders were also severely disabled; Colonel Crosfield had lost a leg at St Eloi, Major J.B.B. Cohen lost both legs at Loos, Douglas Pielou and Harry Caulfield both suffered from severe internal injuries, while Captain Appleby was blind.²³ The problems of disability formed an important part of Legion identity, and helps to explain the great emphasis which was placed on pensions work.

Although the practical efforts of relief work, pensions appeals and committee meetings were crucial aspects of the Legion, social functions and entertainment were also important. It was stressed in the 1933 County Handbooks that :

Besides the benevolent work and the finding of employment, there should be an attempt to draw members to the Branch by the Social work which is carried on there. Sports should not be forgotten, and friendly matches should be played with local branches. At the present time, competitions in such games as billiards, air-gun, whist and cribbage, are run by the County and Area sports committees. In these branches are invited to compete. It is the social side of our work which holds the members together.²⁴

Many people joined the Legion branch and club to make new friends or meet old ones, but most importantly, people would only join and remain a member if they felt comfortable with the other members. The emphasis placed on sporting and social events was an echo of the sporting events which were encouraged by the Army, but they were also a reflection of the interests of the members. These games and competitions were popular pastimes for most of the British population and Legion members were no exception. As with any voluntary organization, social events were

²¹ AC 1923, Res. No. 19.

²² Prost, *In the Wake of War*, p.45.

²³ Details taken from the Provisional Agendas of the Annual Conferences, N.E.C. Nominations, 1923-1939.
²⁴ Staffordshire County Handbook 1933, p2.

very important in maintaining interest in the more important and serious tasks which were accomplished.

Legion members also displayed pride in the achievements of the British Army during the Great War - and in what the Legion accomplished for veterans afterwards. The emphasis on military symbols and trappings suggests that the British Legion was attractive to men who had found some meaning and purpose out of soldiering. There was great desire within the Legion to maintain martial pride, to remember old campaigns and battles and retain the military trappings of parades, rallies and reviews. It is safe to assume that men who had hated the army would have few fond recollections to recount and no wish to march again on parade. The most important and powerful Legion symbol was the Standard which was carried at the head of every Branch parade. The South Eastern Area Annual Report for 1931 described the standard with:

The Colours of Old Gold and Oxford Blue with the Union Jack in the Corner; the latter reminding us of our duty to the Crown. The Old Gold reminds us of those who served under Fire and the Oxford Blue reminds us of those who served in the Air, on or under the Water. The Legion standard is an indispensable item of Branch equipment and should be carried by a selected Member of the Branch and an escort should be provided for all Parades or Ceremonies in which the Legion participates (in the same way as the Old Regimental Colours so dearly prized) and which are the visible symbols of our organization.²⁵

The importance of military symbols to Legion members was underlined by the long controversy concerning medals within the letters page of the Legion Journal.²⁶ There were many ex-service men who, although they volunteered, were never sent abroad. Those who fought in India or Ireland were not issued with any medals as this too was considered 'Home Service'. Many members believed that it was 'a great shame that the men who in 1914-15 voluntarily gave up all to serve their country were not rewarded with at least a volunteers' medal'.²⁷ Members felt deeply about medals or

²⁵ Report of the South Eastern Area Annual Conference 1931, p7.

²⁶ See Letters Page of BLJ, 1932-1936

²⁷ BLJ, January 1933, p.246.

their lack of them and this could cause embarrassment on parade. An ex-regular officer who had volunteered in 1914, but not served overseas, complained that he was asked:

why I did not wear my medals by men who, to my knowledge, were called up, as conscripts, right at the end of the war, and who, having been sent to France and never been in the firing line, wore medals. Since then I have ceased to attend all parades and rallies where it was directed that medals and decorations should or must be worn. I am quite certain that there are many men who will not join the Legion owing to this medal business.²⁸

The possession of medals formed a visible distinction between members who had seen service overseas and those who had not. In fact, many divisions existed between Legion members. Although Legion membership was open to all ex-service men, the Legion was filled predominantly by Great War veterans. Most members drew their sense of identity from their service in the Great War, even to the exclusion of other ex-service men. Funds were available for all ex-service men, but Poppy Day money was reserved exclusively for Great War veterans. Many Legion branches did not open their doors to post-war ex-service men and even pre-war ex-service men were sometimes made unwelcome. As one member put it: 'I myself belonged to a branch who resolutely refused to allow post-war men to join keeping it a close preserve for those who served in the Great War'.²⁹ We can thus characterize Legion membership as a small but active number of ex-service men with a belief in collective action and pride in the achievements and sacrifices of the Great War. Members of the Legion often described themselves as the 'cream of the ex-service community'³⁰ - a view which contrasted with the need to build a mass voluntary movement and implied that members set an example to other veterans. In 1925, Haig claimed that:

I believe, indeed I know, that the influence of the British Legion has worked powerfully in the past, not only for the fair and just claims of ex-

²⁸ BLJ, September 1933, p.88.

²⁹ BLJ, August 1922, p.56.

³⁰ BLJ, March 1917, p.317.

service men and their dependents but for the general good of the country. Its influence has been a steady influence in times when dire distress and bitter sense of grievance have well nigh broken the hearts of disillusioned men.³¹

The Legion was proud to claim that it formed a body of men of all ranks who stood for the good of the country. But within the Legion itself, it was believed that the ex-officer gave strong and stable leadership. The Legion had a highly developed hierarchy of leadership which had great influence on the character and development of the British ex-service movement. Legion leadership was not based on democratic and egalitarian lines and instead reflected traditional divisions of rank and class.

Haig believed that it was essential that the officer should play a major role in the Legion. In 1919, during the formation of the Officers' Association, he argued that:

any attempt now to start a special 'Ex-Officer's Association' would be harmful, first because it would withdraw the real leaders from the ex-service men and secondly because such action at once divides Officers and men into two Camps.³²

Haig saw the ex-officer as the 'real leader' of the ex-service movement who would look after the welfare of ex-service men and guide them away from the 'pernicious doctrines' of socialism towards harmonious class relations.³³ In 1922, Haig argued of the ex-officer that:

If he is out to do his duty as a comrade, he will seek election at the Legion club for...it may very likely be the means of putting him into a position to help less fortunate comrades and unless he goes amongst them from time to time, he is bound to get out of touch and be ignorant of how they are faring.³⁴

The type of officer which Haig had in mind was the traditional officer and gentleman; the ex-regular, financially-independent and socially-confident, public-school educated man who had the time, money and energy to work for the Legion. These men were

³¹ Haig, Usher Hall Edinburgh, 11 November 1925, Acc.3155. No.235b.

³² Earl Haig to H. Baird, 29 August 1919, Acc.3155. No.235.c

³³ AC 1923, Abertillery Delegate, Discussion of Annual Report.
³⁴ Haig, Northampton, March 1922, Acc.3155. No. 5.c.

assumed to know that their duty was to help and encourage less able, less fortunate ex-service men. The myth that ex-officers were somehow better suited to succeed in civilian life and thus lead ex-service men was perpetuated by most Legion leaders. The high-ranking ex-regular officers who called for greater officer participation had spent a lifetime in the Forces, and for men like Earl Haig, General Sir Ian Hamilton, General Bethune or Admiral R.S. Cuming, concepts of duty, honour and noblesse oblige came naturally.

In reality, there was a low level of officer participation in the movement which conflicted with these assumptions. L.H. Duniam-Jones expressed a common sentiment in 1926:

The ex-officer class especially takes very little interest in the Legion, and speaking as one of them, I do feel that they are not fulfilling their moral obligation to the rank and file, to leave them to fight their battles alone.³⁵

While bemoaning the lack of officers, Duniam-Jones was still supporting the mistaken assumption that officers should lead in the ex-service movement. The problem of low officer involvement remained throughout the period; even in 1936 the Sussex County Chairman lamented that:

In Sussex alone there must be hundreds, if not thousands, of ex-officers who take no part in this work, who are not even nominally members; and yet nearly all of these non-members are the first to value the comradeship which unites all ex-service men.³⁶

The lack of response from the majority of ex-officers had a number of different causes. The assumptions about the role of ex-officers in the Legion did not take account of the fact that the nature of the British Officer Corps had changed dramatically during the course of the Great War. The British Officer Corps before the Great War was composed of 12,738 regular officers, with 2,557 in the Special Reserve and 3,202 in the Reserve of Officers.³⁷ However, the pressures of Britain's

³⁵ L.H. Duniam-Jones to Ian Hamilton, 9 September 1926, IH29/2.

³⁶ Sussex Daily News, 31 December 1936, PRO, PIN15/722.

³⁷ Ian Beckett and Keith Simpson, *A Nation in Arms: A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983, p.64.

first modern war saw mass commissioning; in all 229,316 combatant commissions were granted to men from the ranks.³⁸ While many of these combatant commissions were given to soldiers with proven battle skills who made very good combat officers, they lacked the social status of the pre-war regular officer.

The leaders of the Legion were trying to enlist the traditional type of officer who had social influence and could assist the Legion in its work. It was not generally recognised that the vast majority of ex-officers were no longer in this privileged position. General Sir Ian Hamilton considered that the officers recruited from the ranks were 'not officers at all, they are just like the men themselves, rankers, only they happen to have been promoted and given titles which makes their position more difficult'.³⁹

The 'temporary gentlemen' very often did not have the same social confidence and set of social beliefs as their regular predecessors. More importantly, many officers found themselves in financial difficulties after the Great War. During the Great War there had been little provision for discharged officers as it was assumed by the authorities that officers had the requisite skills and reserves of money to succeed in civilian life. By the same reasoning, officers were not entitled to the unemployment donation after the war, but many officers did not have the resources to merge back successfully into civilian life and even some regular officers had lived a pre-war life of 'shabby gentility' which was often totally dislocated by disablement or unemployment.⁴⁰ In 1921 the Officer's Benevolent Department (O.B.D.) assisted 24,221 cases of officers and their families in distress but the number who had applied for help was 50,550.⁴¹ In the 1921 Annual Report it was stated that 'There can be little doubt but that if employment could be found in an adequate degree the calls upon the Department would be more than halved'.⁴² Thus, the O.B.D. assisted the

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ Ian Hamilton to Admiral Sir Henry Bruce, 23 February 1931, IH29/14.

⁴⁰ Beckett, *A Nation in Arms*, p.67.

⁴¹ O.B.D., Annual Report 1922.

⁴² *ibid.*

same number of officers as were present in the pre-war army, and yet many more had applied for help. Many ex-officers were unable to help less fortunate ex-service men, because they found themselves in a similar situation.

There were other reasons for the lack of officer involvement in the British Legion. Firstly, the officers and men in the British Army during the Great War were often drawn from different parts of the country. As John Keegan has described:

throughout the industrial North, the West Midlands, South Wales and Lowland Scotland there existed populous and productive communities almost wholly without a professional stratum and so without an officer class.⁴³

Many ordinary soldiers came from the mining and industrial areas of the North, while most of the officers came from the 'South, the West and ... half a dozen major cities'.⁴⁴ When these men returned to their homes in the North, there was a natural dearth of officers in the district who could get involved in the Legion.

It might be expected, given the low participation rate of ex-officers, that the Legion was dominated by ordinary ex-service men both in membership and leadership. But in spite of the real and perceived lack of ex-officers in the movement, there was a concentration of ex-officers in the leadership of the British Legion. While the majority of ex-officers did not involve themselves in the Legion, those who did had a disproportionate effect and influence. Of the five National Chairmen of the Legion 1921-1939, only the first, Thomas Lister, was not an officer. The ex-service movement and its development owed a great deal to his skilled handling of the complex unity negotiations and the first difficult years of Legion development.⁴⁵ After Lister, there followed Colonel George Crosfield, Colonel John Brown and Major Fetherston-Godley. All of these men had similar backgrounds and all had a long connection with the army. Crosfield had served as a captain in the Boer War, Brown had joined the Volunteers in 1903, while Fetherston-Godley had joined the

⁴³ John Keegan, *The Face of Battle: A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo and the Somme*, London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1988, p.196.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ OHBL, p24, 106.

R.A.S.C. in 1910 and had not left the army until 1925.⁴⁶ The General Secretary, Colonel E.C. Heath, was in command of the 3rd Sherwood Foresters on the eve of the Great War and the South Eastern Area Chairman, Colonel Grantham, was a long serving officer and had retired prior to the Great War when he was 'dug-out' for service again.⁴⁷ In common with many of the officers involved in the Legion, the National Chairmen of the Legion were long-serving ex-regulars to whom the army and its traditions were a way of life. This may have been a major reason for their involvement in the Legion. While serving, they had drawn their sense, meaning and identity from the Army, and it was possible to continue this in the British Legion.

Notwithstanding their army careers, all of the Legion's National Chairmen were drawn from the middle class. Colonel John Brown explained his resignation as Chairman in 1933: 'I was obliged to give up the Chairmanship as it has become a full time job and the necessity to earn my own living compels me in these difficult times to give more time to my business'.⁴⁸ Lister was an insurance underwriter, Crosfield the deputy-chairman of a family firm in Warrington, Brown was an architect while Fetherston-Godley was independently wealthy.⁴⁹ Arthur Francks, the first Metropolitan Area Chairman, and subsequently a long serving member of the National Executive Council, was a London lawyer although he had served in the ranks.⁵⁰ Clearly many of the important posts of the Legion at national and Area level were only suitable for business men or retired ex-service men who had the time to devote to the work.

The National Executive Council also contained a high proportion of ex-officers. The twenty-six representatives (once Ireland had been incorporated) were elected by the Area Conferences and then approved by the National Conference. Over the period 1923 to 1939 nearly half the representatives held the rank of Captain

⁴⁶ Details taken from the Provisional Agendas of the Annual Conferences, N.E.C. Nominations, 1923-1939

⁴⁷ BLJ, May 1934, p.56.

⁴⁸ John Brown to Ian Hamilton, 24 December 1933, IH29/19.

⁴⁹ Details taken from *Who Was Who?*, 1940-1972.

⁵⁰ Arthur Francks to Ian Hamilton, 18 February 1935, IH29/20

or above and, on average, each member served for over five years, although some served for as many as sixteen years.⁵¹ The concentration of officers in positions of responsibility continued at every level of the Legion. In the South Eastern Area over the period 1929-32, the Area President, the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman, the Organizing Secretary and the Employment Secretary (both paid posts) were all held by officers of the rank Captain or above. In the Area Council 10 out of the 18 representatives held the rank of Captain or above, while every vice-president for the four Counties was a high-ranking officer.⁵² The situation remained similar at Branch level. An examination of five Branches⁵³ reveal that it was common practice to elect ex-officers to the main posts of responsibility. In many rural branches, the presence of officers was integral to the operation of the branch. At Sunbury-on-Thames, the branch was not established until a retired regular officer moved to the village and called a meeting of local ex-service men.⁵⁴ It is clear that officer participation in the Legion leadership was much higher than the simple proportion of officers to men might have warranted.

The influence of officers had a number of important and far-reaching consequences for the movement. Many ex-officers brought the same method of leadership and command to the Legion they had utilized during the war. The hierarchy of Legion leaders was very similar to the rank structure of the Armed Forces and the position held by a retired officer in the Legion often depended on his military rank. In 1929, General Sir Ian Hamilton suggested that Lord Jellicoe might replace him as Metropolitan Area President. H.E. Cheeseman, the Organizing Secretary replied that 'I don't think Lord Jellicoe would relish serving in a subordinate position to the Field Marshal'.⁵⁵ Jellicoe, who had been Admiral of the Fleet and a nominal equal of Haig, was not prepared to accept an 'inferior' position. Just as the

⁵¹ See Table 13.

⁵² Annual Report of the South Eastern Area Council, 1929-1931.

⁵³ These are the Newark, Sunbury-on-Thames, Trumpington, Hatfield Heath, and Ambergate Branches. Additional evidence can be found in the 'News from the Branches' section of the BLJ.

⁵⁴ Sunbury-on-Thames Branch History.

⁵⁵ H.E. Cheeseman to Ian Hamilton, 14 September 1927, IH29/4.

Legion's hierarchy was not determined by the approval of the membership, so the egalitarian approach of democracy enshrined in the Legion charter was often overlooked by leaders more used to having orders instantly obeyed than having to compromise and persuade men to accept their position. Colonel Crosfield, while Vice-Chairman, developed a dislike for Arthur Francks, the Metropolitan Area Chairman. He wrote to Haig in 1923 lamenting:

the great detriment that Francks is to the Metropolitan Area....I think Lister does appreciate the harm that Francks is doing to the movement but he does not see how he can oppose the delegates if they persist in electing Francks as Chairman. The trouble is that Francks is a terrifically hard worker. He goes round to the branches night after night, tells them what the Legion is doing and what he is doing, and the majority of the branches are, I fear, disposed to vote for him.⁵⁶

Crosfield did not understand that such problems were part and parcel of a democratic organization. Francks had served in the rank-and-file during the war and Crosfield clearly did not agree with Francks' values or methods. He may have been a great detriment to the Legion in London in Crosfield's view, but the branches which Francks worked for obviously did not think so. Crosfield's response was 'to get the right man elected' in Francks' stead; General Bethune took the post of Chairman in 1925.⁵⁷ In 1930, Bethune had to resign due to ill-health, and Francks decided to stand for Chairman again. He went to see Crosfield, now Legion Chairman, and asked if anyone else was standing. Crosfield replied that 'there might be and said also if there should be I knew Francks would take it in a friendly spirit and fight a sporting contest'.⁵⁸ In fact, it was Crosfield who was not prepared to fight a fair election. He decided to support Admiral Sir Henry Bruce for the Chair, and Crosfield 'took the liberty of writing to him yesterday to sound him as to whether he would care to be nominated'.⁵⁹ Bruce had not been nominated by any Metropolitan branch and Francks was the logical candidate. Furthermore, canvassing for any candidate was

⁵⁶ Colonel Crosfield to Earl Haig, 1 February 1923, Haig Papers, Acc.3155, H227.f.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, BL Annual Report 1925.

⁵⁸ Colonel Crosfield to Ian Hamilton, 1 February 1930, IH29/12.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

strictly against Legion rules.⁶⁰ Crosfield's actions were a clear example of a Legion leader flouting the democratic rules of the organization.

Another example of conflicting views of democracy occurred in 1934 when Admiral Sir Henry Bruce, now Metropolitan Area Chairman, published a letter in the *Evening Standard* criticizing the National Executive Council's suppression of Legion Journal attacks on the Ministry of Pensions. The President, General Sir Frederick Maurice, wrote to Bruce saying:

I may remind you that I got through an increased grant for the Metropolitan Area...It seems to me to be a poor return that you should lead an attack upon the Headquarters of the Legion...surely ordinary loyalty requires that some enquiry should be made as to the reasons for a leader's action before condemning him.⁶¹

Maurice saw his role of President as commanding the same sort of loyalty and support to a superior officer which the Army had maintained during the War. Bruce was 'surprised at the tone of your letter ... we are a democratic association ruled ... by our Branches. As Chairman of an Area, it is my duty to carry out their resolutions and as such I do'.⁶² Maurice could not understand Bruce's support of resolutions passed at the Metropolitan Area Conference. Clearly, traditional concepts of patronage and loyalty were more important to many Legion leaders than the ideas of consensus and majority rule.

The method of selection for National President was another example of leaders contravening the democratic charter of the Legion. All National posts were supposed to be elected at the Annual Conference each year, but in practice, the President was chosen by the Royal Patron, the Prince of Wales. Earl Haig was indeed elected President at the Unity Conference in 1921, and then re-elected unopposed each subsequent year until his death in January 1928. This left a gap of a few months until the Conference in June but, instead of testing the delegates' opinion

⁶⁰ Rule 5 (B) 'No canvassing shall be permitted at the election of officers', Royal Charter.

⁶¹ Sir Frederick Maurice to Sir Henry Bruce, 31 May 1933, IH29/18.

⁶² Sir Henry Bruce to Sir Frederick Maurice, 1 June 1933, IH29/18

in an open election, Earl Jellicoe was co-opted as President by the National Executive Council in March 1928. On the 2nd of February 1928, Colonel Crosfield was :

sent for by H.R.H. the Prince of Wales to discuss the question of a successor to Lord Haig as President of the British Legion. The Prince had stated that he thought it was the turn of a sailor and that he thought the position ought to be given to Lord Jellicoe.⁶³

Colonel Crosfield felt that 'the men would...if asked wish to put' General Sir Ian Hamilton into the post.⁶⁴ Crosfield then delegated General Sir Frederick Maurice, an old friend of Hamilton's to sound him out on the question; Hamilton stood down. Thus when the decision went to the National Executive Council, and subsequently the Area Conferences, the delegates were not likely to reject the only candidate. Throughout February Hamilton received nominations from Branches who wished him to be President but were too late to affect the issue. Thus, the major decision had been taken by the Prince of Wales, and executed by Colonel Crosfield leaving no room for discussion by the Branches.

The situation re-occurred when Lord Jellicoe, who had been a popular and effective President, had to stand down due to ill-health in 1931. The Prince of Wales now selected General Sir Frederick Maurice as President, and again, General Sir Ian Hamilton, although having substantial claims to the post, stood down. This time however, Hamilton, although feeling that Maurice would make a 'first class President and under whom I would be proud and happy to serve' thought it 'might be dangerous if a second time any ground should be given for the supposition that the Presidency of the Legion was a Court appointment'.⁶⁵ However, although Hamilton had a 'long talk' with the Prince of Wales there was no open election at the Annual Conference. On this occasion there was dissent from Legion branches. Admiral Sir Henry Bruce, the Chairman of the Metropolitan Area feared that :

⁶³ Colonel Crosfield to Ian Hamilton, 2 February 1928, IH29/37/4.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ Ian Hamilton to Sir Frederick Maurice, 14 December 1931; to Colonel Crosfield, 17 December 1931; to T.F. Lister, 14 December 1931; IH29/15.

the nomination of General Sir Frederick Maurice to take Jellicoe's place will not go down well in the Area. They seem to take exception to the way its been ...engineered from Haig House as rather barring and locking the door to any other nominations being brought forward at the National Conference at Whitsuntide especially as the Prince of Wales name has been brought into 'THE ARENA' and there are already some very strong resolutions being talked of in the air.⁶⁶

Maurice's nomination was accepted and he became President. When Maurice was attacked by Lloyd George in 1936, Bruce reminded the National Chairman, Fetherston-Godley that 'the Metropolitan Area were not in favour of his election. His reply to that was that they were "not the only one"'.⁶⁷ For many Legion members there was always a question mark over Maurice's authority due to the manner of his election. Some of the Legion leaders, and certainly the Prince of Wales, did not consider it necessary to pay more than lip service to democracy. Their outlook and actions belonged more to the age of Victorian patronage and noblesse oblige than to a period of mass democracy.

The ex-officer leadership had a major influence on the character and actions of the Legion. The leadership decided, through the National Executive Council, which policies would be adopted and pursued. It is also clear that the leadership of the Legion did not always hold to the avowed policy of democracy. The Branches' influence on policy, through the Annual Conference, was often limited by the action actually taken by the National Executive Council. On occasion there were serious differences in thought, action and approach between the leadership and membership of the Legion. However, these defects were not always recognized by the members of the Legion. To be sure, many of the above examples of undemocratic behavior were never made public, and the membership were not always aware of the decisions or attitudes of their leaders. But we can also explain the rank-and-file's acceptance of a strong and hierarchical leadership through an examination of the shared goals of the movement.

⁶⁶ Sir Henry Bruce to Ian Hamilton, 20 January 1932, IH29/15.

⁶⁷ Sir Henry Bruce to Ian Hamilton, 25 July 1936, IH29/21.

Although members might argue over how best to accomplish the aims of the movement, there was a very strong consensus on the most important elements of Legion policy. For the majority of Legion members practical work, comradeship and entertainment in their local branch were of greater importance than any faults in the movement. The Legion conception of democracy was also open to interpretation. At the 1939 Annual Conference, Fetherston-Godley stated that: 'The essence of democracy is that you elect certain people to lead you, and you loyally support them while they do so. If you are dissatisfied, you remove them at the next election'.⁶⁸ This view of democracy eliminated the principle of membership participation in policy decisions while emphasizing the role of the leader. In effect, it harked back to the relationship between officer and men within the armed forces.

In 1932, military regulations were altered so that miniature medals could be worn on Parade unless Royalty were present. General Sir Ian Hamilton questioned the decision:

How about the Legionaries? ...the rank and file attach some weight to the turn out of their officers. One of the most common remarks of the men to an inspecting officer when chatting in a friendly manner after a function is, "We think it so very nice of you to have put on all your medals and things just as we do when you come to see us!"⁶⁹

On Legion parades, members wore lounge suits with their medals but the reviewing General wore full uniform. Many Legion members were proud to be reviewed by retired officers with whom they had served and paid great attention to the details of uniform and medals. Legion members with their fondness for military symbolism often believed that duty and loyalty were more important than democracy. The popularity of the National officers within the Legion proved that the Legion membership were fully prepared to support strong leadership, even at the expense of proper participation in the movement.

⁶⁸ AC 1939, Res. No.2.

⁶⁹ Ian Hamilton to Colonel Crosfield, 4 May 1932, IH29/15.

Furthermore, any criticism of the Legion provoked a strong protective reaction from its members which obscured many of the flaws inherent in the movement. In 1929, when a minor Legion official embezzled £400 from the Metropolitan Area, the Sunday Express mounted a sustained attack on the administration and accounts of the Legion. Most of the Sunday Express criticisms were unfounded. It was not true that 'the administration of the Legion is almost as secretive as the Secret Service'⁷⁰ as Legion accounts were published and readily available. However, like many voluntary societies handling large amounts of cash, the Legion did have a minor problem with dishonest officials and members. Under continued pressure from the Sunday Express, the Legion commissioned Lord Bridgeman to chair a committee which mounted a full investigation into Legion affairs. During the proceedings Bridgeman spoke to General Sir Ian Hamilton and admitted that 'on the main subject he said he was rather worried about it all...he wished to goodness Lord Jellicoe had not asked him to take up this business'.⁷¹ Nevertheless, the Bridgeman Report supported the Legion while making some recommendations for improved efficiency. This also allowed the Legion to shelve the general problem of petty fraud which had precipitated the attack in the first place. The Annual Report for 1930 remarked that:

The immediate reaction to anything in the nature of an attack against a great organization from outside sources is to link together more closely than ever before its individual units and component parts.⁷²

The subsequent Annual Conference had a number of resolutions of support for the National Executive Council; Legion members 'rallied round the flag'. In 1934 a similar incident occurred over the dismissal of the Legion Journal editor. The editor was convinced that he had been unfairly dismissed and began to criticize the Legion severely. He suggested that the Legion was losing membership, and also made false

⁷⁰ *Sunday Express*, 5 January 1930.

⁷¹ Ian Hamilton to Colonel Crosfield, 13 February 1930, IH29/12.

⁷² BLAR 1930.

allegations against the Chairman, John Brown.⁷³ On this occasion the criticisms were extreme and unfounded and the Legion membership refused to accept them. However, the comments of the Witham Delegate, in moving a resolution which expressed confidence in the National Executive Council, are revealing. He said:

In his branch they were 100 per cent loyal to the N.E.C. and 100 per cent loyal to John Brown...He hoped the passing of the resolution would put an end to the diabolical, unfair, scandalous and un-British criticism of the Legion, which was being run democratically by the rank and file.⁷⁴

Any criticism, whether correct or not, was likely to be dubbed 'un-British' by Legion members and they closed ranks on any occasion when the organization was questioned or criticized by outsiders. This was an understandable reaction, but it also ensured that some valid criticisms of the Legion were ignored. Although the members who proudly marched on Legion parades did not question the ideals of the movement which they represented, the thousands of ex-service men outside the organization clearly did.

The methods and attitudes displayed by the ex-officer leadership did not appeal to all ex-service men. Many areas, particularly the large urban areas like London and Birmingham which held substantial numbers of ex-service men, maintained an anti-officer outlook. Prior to the formation of the Legion, the Federation, which had its main strongholds in London and other cities, had not allowed officers - other than those commissioned from the ranks - to join the organization.⁷⁵ It was as late as 1929 that H.E. Cheeseman, the Organizing Secretary of the Metropolitan Area could write that the Chairman, General Bethune, had 'broken down the barrier which existed in many parts of London between ex-officers and other ranks'.⁷⁶ The effect of the anti-officer outlook was demonstrated by the membership of the Metropolitan Area Council. In 1929, the President and Chairman were both officers, as were the two paid posts of Administrative Agent and

⁷³ AC 1934, Maurice's Presidential Speech.

⁷⁴ AC 1934, Res. No. 2.

⁷⁵ OHBL, p.2.

⁷⁶ H.E. Cheeseman to Ian Hamilton, 1 March 1929, IH29/18.

Assistant Organizing Secretary, but fifteen out of the sixteen Council representatives were rank-and-file members.⁷⁷ There was a definite feeling among many ordinary ex-service men that they should organize their own movement without the interference of the officers who had led them during the war. This undoubtedly lowered the membership of the Legion as ex-service men with these feelings would not wish to join an organization which had such an officer-dominated leadership.

The values and beliefs of the ex-officer leadership did not necessarily coincide with those of many ordinary ex-service men. One of the main preoccupations of Legion leaders was to construct a movement which would offer 'unwavering opposition to the Bolshies'.⁷⁸ In 1922 Earl Haig wrote that:

Subversive tendencies are still at work, short cuts to anarchy are still the fool's talk of unstable intellectuals. There is all the greater need for men of all ranks who are determined by steady, patient and self-sacrificing work to bring comfort to the sore-stricken nations, to stand stoutly together. A rallying ground for such men is offered by the Legion. It appeals to all who have worn the King's uniform, and who, therefore, realise the nobility of service, to enrol themselves to win the peace, even as they won the war.⁷⁹

Haig firmly believed that the Legion should form a body of men from every rank and class who stood for the good of all. This was a conservative, reactionary creed which stood against all of the social changes which had taken place during the war. His use of military metaphors and images of men rallying together against unstable intellectuals and anarchists may have appealed to the Legion membership, but it is unlikely that they appealed to all ex-service men. While Haig and other Legion leaders propounded an anti-socialist and anti-Labour theme in speeches to British Legion audiences, these did not match the beliefs of many ordinary ex-service men who developed a deep suspicion of Legion motives - it was characterized by the

⁷⁷ Metropolitan Area Council, 4 December 1929, IH29/11.

⁷⁸ AC 1923, Earl Haig's Presidential Address.

⁷⁹ BLS AC, 1926, Haig's Presidential Address.

Daily Herald as 'Haig's White Guard'⁸⁰ which would give assistance to the authorities in any civil disturbance. In 1927, Colonel Crosfield had to warn Haig that:

a great number of our members are supporters of the Labour Party and...they are little suspicious of Empire, Imperialism etc ... Then too if one rubs in the word duty without making it quite clear that the duty falls on all, rich and poor alike...the person ... turns round and says 'Oh yes! This is Haig's White Guard!'⁸¹

At the 1924 Annual Conference, the East Anglia Area moved a resolution that this

Conference views with alarm the increasing tendency of the general public to dub the Legion as an organization with a motive for keeping ex-service men together with a view to their use in cases of national emergency.⁸²

The delegate explained that when the Legion in East Anglia had invited a Union to take part in the Remembrance Day Service, the Union secretary had refused, saying 'You are nothing more or less than Haig's White Guards'.⁸³ The delegate was clearly disturbed that union officials might believe there was a conflict between Legion membership and trade union affiliations. Members of the Legion were able to reconcile these different identities; other ex-service men were not.

There were other, more practical, reasons for low Legion membership. In 1926 H.E. Cheeseman explained that:

A difficulty which every branch encounters is getting the majority of the ex-service men of a district sufficiently interested in the Legion to become members. It is not so much antipathy towards the Organization, as sheer apathy.⁸⁴

Some ex-service men may have disliked their time in the Forces and did not wish to spend their free time involved in an organization like the Legion. But apathy and involvement in other interests does not necessarily suggest a rejection of Legion ideals and beliefs, simply that many ex-service men had other concerns. The experience of one post-war ex-service man is illuminating - John Mark Smith joined

⁸⁰ OHBL, p.66.

⁸¹ Crosfield to Haig, 9 November 1927, Acc.No.3155 No.227.b.

⁸² AC 1924, Res. No.118.

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ H.E. Cheeseman, *Area Organisation*, Summ 926.

the army at the age of 15, and, after serving for nine years, left in 1932. After this, his time was spent looking for employment and working extremely long and tiring hours in the catering trade. Although he served throughout the Second World War, it was not until his retirement in 1973 that he became involved in Legion work, for which he gained a certificate of merit.⁸⁵ For many ordinary ex-service men, the concerns of work and family probably filled most of what little spare time was available.

One underlying problem which certainly affected Legion membership was the trade depression and resulting unemployment in many communities in England and Wales. The decline of Britain's main staple heavy industries of steel, mining and shipbuilding during the inter-war years meant that the industrial towns of the North of England and Wales were badly affected by unemployment.⁸⁶ When we examine Legion membership figures with the only available figures for ex-service unemployment in 1936, we find a direct correlation between low Legion membership and high unemployment in different regions.⁸⁷ In the South of the Country, there were 181,387 financial members of the Legion and only 93,863 unemployed ex-service men. Thus, for every unemployed ex-service man there were two members of the Legion. In the North there were 74,363 Legion members but 177,975 unemployed ex-service men; for every Legion member there were two unemployed ex-service men. Yet Northern industrial towns like Darlington and Newcastle were areas with large numbers of potential recruits for the Legion. During the war, the main sources of manpower had come from London, Scotland, and the industrial and mining districts of Britain and the rural areas of the Country had supplied a lower percentage of men to the Army.⁸⁸ Thus, large-scale unemployment did have a major effect on the membership and success of the British Legion.

⁸⁵ John Mark Smith, *The Extraordinary Life of a War Veteran*, London: Cortney, 1986, p.85.

⁸⁶ S.V. Ward, *The Geography of Inter-war Britain: The State and Uneven Development*, London: Routledge, 1988, p.1,14.

⁸⁷ See Table 9.

⁸⁸ John Keegan, *The Face of Battle*, p.196., J.M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, London: Macmillan, 1983, p.34, 38.

Unemployment could and did lower the membership of the Legion - not because unemployed ex-service men were prevented from joining the Legion but because the economic impact on the whole locality could be severe. Legion Branches depended on their local ex-service community and the general public for support, volunteers, members and funds. In a comparatively prosperous provincial town like Oxford there were lower levels of unemployment than in the industrial areas of the North - due to the large Morris car works at Cowley, and the various light engineering concerns which sprang up in Oxfordshire during the 1920s and 1930s. Given this more favourable economic situation, Legion members had the spare money to pay their affiliation fees and to drink in a club bar. When fund raising events took place, the local population had spare money to spend at the regularly organized Legion events like the summer fete, the annual dinner dance or the dug-out night. In Oxfordshire both Branch and the County fetes became very important sources of income for the Branches and the County Relief Fund which assisted cases of hardship outside the remit of the National funds.⁸⁹

Furthermore, in a prosperous area, the Legion was more likely to enlist the help of a wealthy benefactor; the 'Big Noise' who could be expected to 'come down handsomely'.⁹⁰ The experience of Solihull is revealing in this respect. The secretary, Mr Ludlow, wrote to General Sir Ian Hamilton in 1930:

Yesterday I unveiled a very charming memorial tablet in the Billiard room to Mrs Grenville the donor of the Club House and furniture, she was present and we had a great function.....we should awfully like Mrs Grenville to extend the Club for us, she can well afford it and only wants egging on!!!⁹¹

Having found a wealthy patron, the Solihull branch continued to 'butter her up' and in due course the extension was paid for. In Solihull there were 250 paying members, with all the 'activities of the club...extraordinarily well attended, Rifle Shooting,

⁸⁹ F.R.L. Goadby, *British Legion Oxfordshire: The First Forty Years*, Maidstone: British Legion Press, p.28.

⁹⁰ BLJ, April 1935, p.439.

⁹¹ Mr Ludlow to General Sir Ian Hamilton, 21 December 1930, IH29/13.

Public Whist Drives, Dancing etc'.⁹² A successful Branch with a club recruited members because the social functions and events made it a popular and attractive organization. If a branch was popular then more members joined, and consequently the branch had more funds to spend on the objects of the Legion, thereby keeping the branch attractive to its members. A branch with a strong financial position could also utilize its large branch funds for local assistance of hardship cases and thus present an active social and welfare organization to the local ex-service community.

In an area with high unemployment, a branch could be starved of funds and unable to fulfill its objectives, thus making it an unattractive proposition for most ex-service men. In 1934 the replies from several branches to the Journal fund, set up to help poor branches attend the Annual Conference, reveal the problems which could be encountered:

'Over 75 per cent of our members are permanently unemployed.'

'We have 46 members who have been unemployed for a considerable period yet we pay our affiliation fees regularly to Headquarters.'

'The Branch is a struggling one. We would be able to find the money for the railway fare, but not for the maintenance of the delegate whilst absent.'

⁹³

Many of the branches in depressed areas simply did not have the funds to build branch premises or to organise local relief funds, and the members and the public did not have the money to spend on fundraising events or in a clubhouse. This is demonstrated by the figures for Poppy Day 1927-28.⁹⁴ The North East Area contributed only 2.3% of the total for Poppy Day, although there were many ex-service men and people in the area - the problem was simply a lack of spare money. A Wales Area delegate explained at the 1928 Conference that 'Last year in the Rhonda Valley they collected £414, the whole amount in coppers'⁹⁵; many people had

⁹² *ibid.*

⁹³ BLJ, May 1934, p.378.

⁹⁴ See Table 8.

⁹⁵ 1928, Res. No.8.

given money, but the amount collected remained small. Thus, branches in the depressed areas were often reduced to being centres for relief without the many and varied activities which other more prosperous Legion branches could pursue. Again, this was unlikely to make the local Legion branch attractive to prospective members or popular with existing ones - it was more difficult to see the relief given out as a comradely gesture of goodwill when it was all the branch could offer. This could breed resentment as in 1932 when a man from Barrow in Furness wrote to Sir Ian Hamilton saying: 'It is no good going to the British Legion, there is a lot of poverty amongst ex-service men here, but I never knew of one case who has got anything from them'.⁹⁶ In fact, the local relief committee had disbursed £325 during the year. But obviously, this was not nearly enough to relieve all the distress in one of the most depressed areas of Britain, particularly since the Legion relief committees were mainly dependent on the amount of money collected in their own areas during Poppy Day.⁹⁷ Unemployment and poverty blighted many areas of Britain during the inter-war years and low Legion membership was only one symptom of its overall impact.

However, the Legion still attempted to reach the mass of ex-service men through widespread recruitment campaigns, which were of variable effectiveness. There were at least six major recruiting campaigns; the 1922 'Big Push', 1923, 1924, the 1925 'Comradeship Campaign', the 1927 'Members Membership Movement, with the member as the magnet' and the 1931 tenth anniversary celebrations.⁹⁸ The first and most memorable of the Legion campaigns was the 1922 'Big Push', from 31 March to 8 April 1922, which took its name from the Somme offensive of 1916. The aim was to increase membership and to form new branches in districts where the old ex-service organizations had not yet joined the Legion or where no Legion Branch had yet been established. As with all the membership campaigns, the main efforts were to be made at branch level; this meant that the effort and success of the

⁹⁶ John Watson to Ian Hamilton, 11 February 1931, IH29/14.

⁹⁷ This is discussed in Chapter Four.

⁹⁸ GSCLB, 1922, 1923, 1924, 1927, 1931.

campaign could vary greatly from district to district. The recommendations for the membership campaign were fully carried out in Darlestone, Lancashire, where:

many letters, detailing the aims of the Legion, were sent out to employers, tradesmen, clergy, and members of civic bodies. All ex-service men were post-carded to attend the various Committee rooms; recruiting agents were given special rosettes so that all ex-service men could easily identify them for the purpose of receiving enlightenment on the movement; a series of indoor and outdoor meetings were held; a house to house canvass of all ex-service men was made; every factory and every shop showed a Legion poster; and in practically every street posters were displayed on the hoardings and the walls.⁹⁹

Such intensive efforts could bring impressive results; Darlestone gained 460 new members. In Hull 'the great public meeting under the auspices of the Hull Branch of the British Legion at the City Hall rivalled in enthusiasm the war time meetings'.¹⁰⁰ However, the Legion was to learn that there could be a big difference between expectations and reality. It was hoped that the week 'should show an increase of one million new members',¹⁰¹ but instead increased membership by under five per cent - only 23,340 new members joined up.¹⁰²

In later membership campaigns a very different approach was adopted. It was realized that 'Monster Demonstrations' were 'expensive' and 'attended by people who are ineligible for membership'¹⁰³. Thus:

by far the greatest factor with regard to the increase of membership is the personal appeal, the drawing in of others by personal influence rather than relying on the intense but evaporating enthusiasm created by mass meetings.¹⁰⁴

Such personal influence was dependent entirely on local conditions and a dedicated membership who were prepared to spend large amounts of time canvassing ex-service men in the area. Indicative of the change of approach was the provision of

⁹⁹ BLJ, June 1922, p.270.

¹⁰⁰ BLJ, December 1922, p.134.

¹⁰¹ GSCLB, SC, Membership Campaign, 31 March 1922.

¹⁰² GSCLB, SC, Membership Campaign, 31 March 1922.

¹⁰³ GSCLB, SC, Membership Campaign, February 1927.

¹⁰⁴ GSCLP SC Autumn Campaign, 1923.

gold, silver and bronze medals as an incentive for the best canvasser in each Area.¹⁰⁵ The techniques involved using old membership and relief returns to target lapsed members and people who had received Legion assistance. 'Flying squads' of Legion recruiters with transport (either cars or bicycles) became common as a means of reaching outlying rural districts. In Oxfordshire, the efforts of the Banbury Branch extended over a ten mile radius with a flying squad of 20 members which managed to establish six new branches in 1930.¹⁰⁶ These efforts did result in a growth of Legion membership every year, but Legion publicity could not persuade most ex-service men to join the movement.

The underlying factors of unemployment and the difficulties of organization in urban areas could only be compounded by unfavourable perceptions of the British Legion. Much of the explanation for low Legion membership must lie with the predominance of ex-officers in the leadership and the anti-socialist outlook they sponsored - both of which alienated many ex-service men. At no time did Legion leaders recognise that their views or beliefs might be unattractive to many ex-service men. At Northampton in 1922 Earl Haig saw the membership problem in a simplistic manner:

Private Jones will say to himself, there is Major Smith who was my boss in the army, he will want to be my boss in the Legion. Major Smith on his side will say to himself, Private Jones saw quite enough of me in the trenches, and won't want to see me hanging about his club. And so these good and true men drift apart for the rest of their lives through want...of realising that ours is a brotherhood where rank is naught and service everything, and that no ex-officer can get elected to a position of responsibility in the Legion unless he is prepared to give service and enthusiastic service.¹⁰⁷

Not only was Haig's description of the Legion inaccurate, but his analysis of British society was mistaken. In 1920s Britain, there were still large gulfs of understanding between officers and men, who did not necessarily wish to share in each other's social

¹⁰⁵ GSCLB, SC, Membership Campaign, February 1927.

¹⁰⁶ Goadby, *British Legion Oxfordshire*, p.29.

¹⁰⁷ Earl Haig Northampton, March 1922, Acc.31'5. No.235.c.

activities. Furthermore, the Legion could not ever be the idealistic organization which Haig wanted. Matters of class, status and rank were just as important within the Legion as in ordinary society, and while many soldiers had experienced comradeship in the trenches, their feelings did not generally extend even to men outside their own unit, let alone to staff officers. Legion membership was conceived round the idea of a universal comradeship but, as we have seen, distinctions of service, medals and rank were erected between veterans of different wars. Haig believed that his message appealed to all ex-service men but, in truth, it appealed only to those who still accepted the traditional tenets of loyalty, duty and deference to social superiors. It may be said that the leaders of the Legion simply did not know how to develop a mass movement based around the ideas of full democratic participation and the voluntary principle.

In 1927, Thomas Lister remarked:

I think that the secret of Legion success has been the fact that we have attracted to it men who, outside of their daily occupations, are determined to place the Legion first in their thoughts, and who really and genuinely want to do service in peace, just as they did service in the war.¹⁰⁸

The development of a 'Legion spirit' ensured that the Legion grew into a national organization. Too many ex-service men lay outside Legion ranks to characterize this Legion spirit as a collective veterans' mentality born out of the experience of the Great War. The Legion character was a unique blend of local community spirit, pride in the Armed Forces and benevolent work as found in the myriad voluntary societies and institutions which characterized British life. The differences between the working class membership and officer class leadership were frequently masked by the common ideals which united the organisation but the large gulf of understanding between them had serious consequences for the development of the British ex-service movement. We shall examine these consequences through the specific examples of practical work, politics and foreign policy.

¹⁰⁸ AC 1925, T.F. Lister, Chairman's Address.

NOT FOR DOLES AND DEPRESSION DID WE FIGHT:
THE PRACTICAL WORK OF THE BRITISH LEGION

For the majority of the general public, the purpose of the British Legion lay with the symbolic red Flanders Poppy; to collect and utilize funds for the benefit of ex-service men facing hardship. Indeed, most members of the Legion also saw benevolent work as its most important purpose. Admiral Sir Henry Bruce remarked in June 1933 that 'I joined the Legion to do my best for the Ex-Service man, especially the disabled one, which I take it, is after all, our one and only object'.¹ Certainly, the British Legion's benevolent work was its most visible and extensive purpose. During the inter-war years the scope and extent of Legion benevolent activities increased year by year, and the Legion became an acknowledged charity of great proportions.

One of the major objectives of this study is to assess the impact of the Legion's relief work. This must include an evaluation of the actual methods adopted, but an examination of the Legion's expenditure of funds is not sufficient to determine the full significance of the Legion's benevolent role. Members' opinions concerning relief work must also be discussed to gain a full picture of the Legion's benevolent activities. In particular, any perceived changes in attitudes towards ex-service men, both nationally and within the Legion, are very important. Charles Kimball has argued that the war, and later the ex-service movement, failed to change the pre-war patterns of social relationships established between veterans, the state and British society² and it is crucial to understand why this change failed to take place.

Many of the aims for Legion practical work were couched in vague rhetorical terms. In Haig's 'Appeal to All Ex-Service Men' in June 1921 he wrote:

¹ Admiral Sir Henry Bruce to General Sir Frederick Maurice, 1 June, IH29/18.

² Kimball, *The Ex-Service Movement in England and Wales*, Abstract.

Not for doles and depression did we fight, but for progress and prosperity. The interest of the whole is the interest of each one of us. The better world and the brighter Britain we envisaged as the outcome of the Great War have not materialised. Several million men combined and fought shoulder to shoulder to win victory - the same men must now organise and play their part in winning the peace.³

The general message was that ex-service men should attempt to create a brighter Britain through their own efforts and the image of millions of ex-service men marching shoulder to shoulder to win the peace was inspiring. The real aim of the Legion was to draw ex-service men together through good works - loyalty to comrades being the key motivation, rather than any belief in social justice. Over the period, the Legion took on the character of a major charity rather than a body advocating justice from the Government.

However, Government provision for ex-service men was also a vital plank of Legion policy. Although Legion benevolent work was important, it could not hope to deal with the great amount of unemployment, poverty and deprivation in inter-war Britain. In the Legion National Constructive Programme of 1921, there were eight major objects, of which five directly mentioned the need to secure Government assistance, and the other three indirectly implied such assistance.⁴ The objects were all concerned to 're-establish ex-service men and women in civilian occupations'⁵ through training and job creation. The Legion also wished 'to educate public opinion to the view that the maintenance and the welfare of ex-service men, women and dependents is a national duty'.⁶ This did not demand maintenance for all citizens and made a distinction between ex-service men in distress and other poor citizens. Veterans were to be given assistance because of their service in war: 'because he has been willing to die for his country he must be given a fair 'fighting chance' in life as we live it'.⁷

³ BLJ July 1921, p.7.

⁴ See Appendix E.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Objects 4(D), Royal Charter.

⁷ Clifford, *The Ex-Soldier*, p.5.

These objects were also intended to ensure that there was no return to the bad old days of destitute ex-service men driven to the workhouse. In Legion propaganda the immediate post-war situation appeared to be very similar to pre-war days when veterans were left to starve by a 'grateful nation'. Legion articles portrayed ex-service men and their families forced into the workhouse due to unemployment with thousands of veterans tramping the country looking for work.⁸ In fact, the scale of Government assistance was a major break from the past and represented a tacit acceptance of responsibility for ex-service welfare. Millions of ex-service men, widows and dependents were compensated for injuries, disabilities and widowhood on an unprecedented scale by the Ministry of Pensions. Ex-service men received the out-of-work donation for 39 weeks after demobilization and the 1920 Unemployment Insurance Act, extended this benefit permanently, while a series of Acts in 1921 and 1922 increased the rates and extended the period during which benefits could be drawn. Government Training Schemes for disabled and unskilled ex-service men were established to assist them in finding work. At the same time, such assistance was not sufficient; the Government Training schemes for ex-service men did not provide useful skills or training while the extended unemployment benefit was only available for 2 blocks of 16 weeks each - which were separated by periods when no benefit could be drawn. Even in the thirties, 'the social services left many gaps where people crouched unprotected'⁹ and the role of the Legion through its benevolent work was to plug these gaps in Government assistance.

One of the most pressing issues facing ex-service men and the nation at large during the inter-war years was unemployment. In the editorial of the first issue of the Legion Journal in June 1921, the facts of mass unemployment were clear:

On January 1st this year there were 20,000 disabled men unemployed, and 270,000 non-disabled discharged men in a like condition. To-day there are 23,000 disabled men unemployed and 449,374 non-disabled discharged

⁸ BLJ February 1922, p.174.

⁹ C.L. Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars 1918-1940*, London: Methuen, p.495.

men. The total on the day which sees the British Legion take the field is therefore nearly double the total of six short months ago.¹⁰

Many men who had gone to fight found that their position at work had been filled or removed, others found their businesses ruined or their skills and training out-of date. When the process of retrenchment began in 1921, such men were often the first to be laid off. Many young men had joined the Army straight from school or left apprenticeships and had thus missed the chance to train and gain a skill. Consequently there were roughly 300,000 unskilled ex-service men throughout the inter-war period.¹¹ These men, in particular, found it difficult to secure permanent employment. For Haig, the problem of mass ex-service unemployment meant:

the fact that they gave four years or more, it may be, of their manhood to the dangerous and arduous service of their country has not been permitted to counter balance in the eyes of their fellow country men, the loss of industrial efficiency which the sacrifice of those years entailed.

Such an attitude on the part of their fellow country men appears to me to have the effect...of turning war service into a permanent disqualification for civil employment. I can conceive of nothing more unjust.¹²

In fact, it was difficult, in the absence of any official statistics after 1921, to prove that ex-service unemployment was proportionally higher than the rest of the insured workforce and the Ministry of Labour always played down the importance of ex-service unemployment. The Legion laid the blame for mass ex-service unemployment on the attitude of their 'fellow country men', but of course, there were economic forces at work outwith the control of employers, trade unionists and the Government. As W.G. Clifford stated in 1916:

With the best heart and intentions in the world an employer dare not manufacture artificial openings for appreciable numbers of unsuitable men, simply because they have fought for their country.¹³

¹⁰ BLJ July 1921, p.12.

¹¹ GSCLB, Leaflet, Do You Know?, 1923.

¹² Haig, Speech at the Usher Hall, Edinburgh, 11 November 1925, Acc.3155 No.235.b.

¹³ Clifford, *The Ex-Soldier*, p.17.

The harsh economic conditions of the inter-war years soon outweighed the 'sentiment' for the men who had saved the country during the Great War and there were always a large number of ex-service men contained in the 'intractable million' unemployed.¹⁴ It was estimated in 1929 that one quarter of those receiving Poor Law relief were ex-service men.¹⁵

Given the limited nature of Legion funds, the main aim was to alleviate distress and to assist ex-service men back into jobs, whether through job creation schemes or Government training programmes. The disabled were a special case, with their injuries being directly related to their war service. The King's National Roll had been instituted in 1920 as a voluntary system whereby employers undertook to employ a small percentage of disabled men in their workforce. It was hoped that this would solve the problem of unemployed disabled men, but without compulsion it proved impossible to absorb all disabled men into industry. The Legion's aim of a compulsory system was never adopted by Government, despite the introduction of numerous Bills sponsored by the Legion for this purpose. With the failure of the legislative approach, the Legion attempted to ensure that the King's National Roll worked as efficiently as possible, as well as developing schemes for the employment of disabled ex-service men.

The British Legion 'Manifesto On Unemployment' of 1923 attempted to influence the Government into creating work for the 'intractable million' through large employment schemes funded by a National Work Loan.¹⁶ The manifesto also gave a clear indication of Legion attitudes towards unemployment. The Manifesto argued that mass unemployment constituted a terrible waste of the country's resources, but also that the dole was degrading and demoralising: 'Doles of a charitable or even official character only act as an opiate giving temporary ease, leaving the social body

¹⁴ For more information on the 'intractable million' see Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars*; Stephen V. Ward, *The Geography of Interwar Britain: The State and Uneven Development*, London: Routledge, 1988; David Vincent, *Poor Citizens: The State and the Poor in Twentieth Century Britain*, London: Longmans, 1991.

¹⁵ Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, p.104.

¹⁶ GSCLB, *British Legion Manifesto on Unemployment*, 1923.

weakened and enfeebled without touching the real source of the trouble'.¹⁷ This was a classic statement of traditional attitudes towards unemployment and the position of the unemployed. Although the Legion's National Constructive Programme had demanded work or maintenance, by 1923 the Legion believed that 'In work and work alone, lies the healing of the people, and the folly which permits thousands of men to deteriorate, through long continued idleness.... must cease'¹⁸. The Legion aim of full employment through construction and projects of national importance was not based on a desire to recast society, or to redistribute income on an egalitarian or socialist model, but to provide stability and security for the existing social structure. The Legion wished the 'organisation of the unemployed for useful productive work and not their organisation for disruptive purposes'.¹⁹ This was a clear reference to the National Unemployed Workers Movement (N.U.W.M.) which organized numerous Hunger Marches to London and whose members expressed their frustration by skirmishing with police outside Labour Exchanges.²⁰ Legion relief and work schemes were designed to wean unemployed ex-service men away from Bolshevism and the violent tactics of the N.U.W.M. by allaying discontent and assisting in 'the healing of the people'²¹ but not to stimulate any far reaching social programme.

It must be stressed that the Legion, as a benevolent organisation catering for ex-service men, was only one of many; an article in the Legion Journal counted as many as 500 funds for ex-service men.²² However, most of these were small, specialized funds and the Legion was one of the largest, standing beside the United Services Fund (U.S.F.)²³ which had been established in 1919 to distribute the £8 million profit of the Expeditionary Forces Canteens amongst the men who had used the Canteens. This included all Army, Airforce and Royal Naval Division personnel; the Navy took its share of the money and set up its own fund. Due to the difficulty in

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ See Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, p.61.

²¹ GSCLB, *Manifesto on Unemployment*, 1923.

²² BLJ August 1936, p.343.

²³ See prologue for more information on the U.S.F.

finding an equitable way of spending the money, over £2 million was spent in a 'local welfare' scheme, which gave each area a certain amount of money per ex-service man. Most of this money was spent on building ex-service men's clubs or War memorials. However, the majority of U.S.F. funds were spent on providing care and education for the orphans of ex-service men and women, assistance for short term illnesses, and specialized care for ill or disabled ex-service men.²⁴ One of the secondary aims of the Legion's practical work was to ensure co-ordination between the Legion and the U.S.F. and the other benevolent funds to minimize overlapping. In 1927, closer links were forged between the Legion and U.S.F., and by 1934 amalgamation of their local committees and administration was achieved.²⁵

In providing any assistance to ex-service men and their dependents, the Legion was limited to the income it received through its Appeal work. The Unity Relief Fund, when first set up in December 1920, obtained a grant of £150,000 from the Prince of Wales Fund which was earmarked for schemes of employment, and £22,000 was granted by the Officers' Association for general relief. Smaller donations from the other three ex-service organisations, and the proceeds from Warriors Day (all the money from theatre and cinema shows donated to the Relief Fund)²⁶ also helped to establish the Relief Fund, but it was not until the first Poppy Day in November 1921, that the Legion gained a means of regular funding. This event, which began almost by accident, soon became the Legion's main source of income. The Flanders Poppy was an almost universal symbol of the Great War throughout the Allied Countries, and the first artificial ones were manufactured by women in the devastated areas of France and Belgium for sale in America. A Madame Guerin approached the British Legion in October 1921 and asked whether they would buy poppies from her organisation for sale on 11 November. After investigation, a few million were purchased, and demand far outstripped supply. Many of the poppies

²⁴ United Services Fund Annual Reports, 1921-34, and British Legion and United Services Fund Benevolent Department Relief Guide 1927.

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ BLAR 1921.

worn on the day were produced at Legion H.Q. from pink blotting paper.²⁷ The success of the first Poppy Day prompted the Legion to establish its own source of supply by employing badly disabled men to manufacture the poppies. The factory was first housed on the Old Kent Road in London and initially employed forty men which by 1922 produced a large proportion of the poppies for Poppy Day. The growth in demand for poppies meant that more men could be taken on so that by 1926, when the Factory moved to a better site at Richmond in Surrey, over 200 disabled men were employed manufacturing 25 million poppies each year.²⁸ Much of the work was repetitive and uninteresting, but the Factory gave severely disabled men a secure job and housing. In 1928 the Legion Annual Report could say:

it can be claimed without exaggeration that the Legion Poppy Factory is the largest employer of disabled labour in the world, and that no other concern of a similar nature can claim that every man employed, from the manager downwards, is a disabled ex-service man.²⁹

This statement worked very much to the advantage of the Legion as the 'public know by now that the Poppies they buy are all manufactured by badly disabled ex-servicemen, who but for this would be unemployed'.³⁰ By purchasing a Poppy the public were not only remembering the dead, but also helping the living.

Poppy Day was essentially a local collection and depended almost entirely on voluntary work. At the beginning of every Autumn, the President of the Legion sent out a letter to every Lord Mayor, Chairman of District Council and the clergy asking for their support. A Local Poppy Day Committee was set up to co-ordinate the effort, with the main organizing influence being that of the Poppy Day Organizer, while the Lord Mayor was invariably invited to act as the Committee's Chairman. This was seen as desirable since 'not only does the active participation of the civic head give due importance to the effort, but it inspires confidence, and his influence

²⁷ OHBL, p.39-40.

²⁸ BLAR 1926.

²⁹ BLAR 1928.

³⁰ BLAR 1924.

can be of particular value'.³¹ Just as with the formation of branches, the Legion utilized local dignitaries - and the services of local newspapers and bank managers - to gain prestige and assistance. The Committee organized transport and advertising and recruited volunteer collectors. Much of the work for Poppy Day was undertaken by women - often drawn from the local Women's Section if one was in existence.

In 1923, the Legion Annual Report stated that 'great credit is due to the thousands of ladies who, regardless of the weather, sold Flanders Poppies from early morning until, in many cases, well on in the evening'.³² On Armistice Day, Poppies were sold in street and house-to-house collections and churches supported the appeal by making collections during services on the Sunday before Armistice Day. The majority of the money was gained through the street and church collections, but wreath sales, hunt caps, liner and overseas collections also made significant contributions.³³ Through its organisation and the support of many thousands of voluntary workers, the sale of Poppies on Armistice Day became an established and successful part of the ritual of Remembrance. Even as early as 1923, the Headquarters Appeals Department took on 100 voluntary clerks in October to help pack and despatch the 23 million Poppies which were sold that year.³⁴ The amount collected increased dramatically in the twenties, and with the exception of 1931 and 1932, the income in the thirties also showed a steady increase.³⁵

The Legion explained this success in terms of the national debt owed to ex-service men through their sacrifice in the Great War:

In the first place, the British public, when effectively reminded, have not forgotten what they owe to ex-service men, and being so reminded, and being satisfied that the need is urgent and that the funds are wisely and economically administered, they give generously.³⁶

³¹ W.G. Willcox, *The Appeals Work of the Legion*, British Legion Summer School, 1926.

³² BLAR 1923.

³³ Poppy Day interim Reports, IH29/12,13,14.

³⁴ BLAR 1923.

³⁵ BLAR 1921-34

³⁶ AC 192. 'Confidential Speech.

The argument that the Poppy was a stimulus to remind the public that the 'maintenance and welfare of ex-service men...is a national duty' was a retreat from the previously held belief that such maintenance was a Government responsibility. The Legion gained large sums from Poppy Day but stressed that it was not simply a means of winning funds. Captain Willcox, the Appeals Organizer, claimed that:

Poppy Day is not a flag day. A cynic might define a flag day as a day upon which one either buys an emblem in self-defence, or one to be spent in dodging flag sellers....the public look for poppies on November 11th and complain if they find any difficulty in buying the emblem they want.³⁷

The Red Flanders Poppy became a symbol synonymous with Armistice Day, Remembrance and their spiritual connections with sacrifice and the Fallen. These symbols were taken very seriously indeed. Each Armistice Day, the Legion placed a wreath of Poppies on the Cenotaph with the inscription 'The Legion of the Living Salutes the Legion of the Dead - We Will Not Break Faith with Ye'.³⁸

However, the dual function of Poppy Day as part of the ritual of Remembrance and for the collection of Legion benevolent funds brought tensions within the Legion as to the real purpose of the collection. The Newcastle Delegate at the 1925 Conference remarked that they had:

five separate Poppy Days last year near Newcastle. It was a disgrace....Any other day did not appeal to them but was just like any ordinary flag day. The Poppy Day was too sacred to be hawked about on any other day.³⁹

These problems arose because many districts faced practical problems in holding the collection on Armistice Day. Many rural and industrial areas could only obtain women volunteers on a Saturday. Others were concerned about the loss of income if Poppy Day were held on a week-day when workers had less money than on a Friday or Saturday (after pay-day). However, this need to collect money when practicable conflicted with the desire to enshrine the symbolism of the Poppy and link it with

³⁷ W.G. Willcox, Summer School 1926.

³⁸ BJJ December 1921, p.126.
(1925, Res. No. 109.)

Armistice Day. Ultimately, the Conference in 1926 passed a resolution demanding strict observance of Poppy Day with some consideration for districts with special needs. The phenomenon of ragged collections did decrease but was never fully eradicated.⁴⁰

Although Poppy Day was the largest and most important Legion Appeal, constant efforts were made to supplement this income through other Appeals. The Remembrance League was established to encourage annual subscriptions to Legion funds. Its initial title of the 300th Remembrance League, the idea being that the person should give 1/300th of their annual salary, was dropped after suspicions that Income tax inspectors would be able to calculate the total income of the generous donor. This League was reasonably successful, garnering £43,000 by 1926; but a Gratitude League for wage earners to donate weekly or monthly amounts was a conspicuous failure. Two other Annual Appeals, on 4 August, commemorating the outbreak of War, and one at Christmas could never match the symbolic importance of Poppy Day and thus declined in importance. Money was also raised through newspaper competitions, film screenings and charity concerts - the most notable being in 1925 when Paderewski, the famous concert pianist, donated all the income from his British tour.⁴¹ All of these Appeals were nationally organized, but the Areas, Counties and Branches also launched local appeals and fundraising events which established special relief funds to deal with particular needs not covered by the national funds. The local funds varied and covered many areas of relief from dental treatment to pensions for prematurely aged ex-service men. The fundraising methods included Sports Matches, Whist Drives, Concerts, Tea Parties, Raffles, Jumble Sales and the Summer Fetes.⁴² These events could become regular features of local life and bring in funds annually for local Legion benevolent work. Some Branches became rather too enthusiastic for National Headquarters' liking; it was discovered

⁴⁰ ACs 1925-28, Res Nos. 109 (1925), No. 50-51 (1926), No.6 (1927), No.8 (1928).

⁴¹ BLAR 1921-25.

⁴² W.G. Willcox, *Summer St* ... 26.

that 'occasionally Branches organise street processions and parade with the Legion standard, and on these occasions use collecting boxes ... during the procession'.⁴³ Branches were emphatically instructed that such collections would not maintain the prestige of the organisation. Again, the tension between the desire to collect funds and the need to preserve the respectability of the organisation could cause discord between Branches and National Headquarters.

All National Appeals money was sent to the National Headquarters. Once counted, the money was passed onto the Central Relief Committee which decided on its use. The general policy of the British Legion in relief work was four-fold, and was aimed mainly at combating unemployment and its effects. The Central Relief Committee made grants to the Local Relief Committee for the relief of hardship due to unemployment, loans to individual ex-service men to help establish them in business, loans and grants to promote or maintain larger employment schemes, and grants to other organisations which assisted or employed ex-service men. However, the majority of the money collected on Poppy Day went back to the districts which had collected it. After 1923, the Local Relief Committees received 85% gross of the money collected, with 5% going to the Officer's Benevolent Department, and 10% going to the general funds to assist in general administration. 85% gross amounted to over 50% net, which meant there was little direct redistribution between areas, apart from on a voluntary basis.⁴⁴ In the 1922 instructions it was:

hoped that districts in which there may be little distress will agree to waive their claim in part or altogether in favour of poorer districts which have little chance of collecting the money required for their needs.⁴⁵

It need hardly be said that a more centralized administration for the Relief Funds would have enabled the Legion to direct the money to those areas which most needed assistance. However, the voluntary principle, of 'Service not Self' was integral to all Legion work, and indeed was essential in harnessing the energies of the many

⁴³ GSCLB, October 1930.

⁴⁴ GSCLB, Remuneration for Poppy Day, October 1923.

⁴⁵ GSCLB, Department Letter, August 1922.

thousands of people involved. This not only reduced administration costs to very low levels, (4.73%),⁴⁶ but without a local voluntary system, the Legion would not have been able to collect the money in the first place. Thus the Legion was shackled to a fairly traditional approach to the distribution of its funds, which were considered to be held in trust for the subscribing public, and not Legion property.

The Local Committees for distributing Relief were in place even before the official formation of the Legion. By 1922 there were 968 while by 1930 there were over 3,000 Legion Local Relief Committees covering the entire country.⁴⁷ Just as with the Poppy Day Appeal the Committee was not entirely composed of Legion members. The Local Benevolent Committee was a sub-committee of the Branch, with elected Branch members, together with representatives from the U.S.F., other benevolent societies, Poppy Day workers, and the local branch of the Women's Section.⁴⁸ With the other groups' participation, the Legion ensured local support for the Committee while maintaining an overall Legion majority. Just as there were controls on who could be elected to the Committee, there were tight regulations on how the money could be spent. This was to limit the total expenditure to a figure which the Legion could afford. As General Maurice explained at the 1926 Summer School:

When they urge us to launch out into this or that new form of relief, branches must remember that in order to be fair to everybody, we have to consider the probability of having to multiply each local estimate 2,000 times, and the expenditure of so large a sum as £200,000 a year only means an average per branch of £100 a year.⁴⁹

The controls limited the decisions of the Local Committees to fairly minor individual expenditures, and larger sums were referred for approval to the Area or National level. The major role of the Local Relief Committees was to co-ordinate the Legion and U.S.F. funds, and to distribute relief to ex-service men suffering distress due to

⁴⁶ Bridgeman Committee Report, p.18.

⁴⁷ BLAR 1921-30.

⁴⁸ British Legion and United Services Fund Benevolent Department Relief Guide 1927.
General Sir Frederick Maurice, *The Benevolent. Work of the Legion*, British Legion Summer School 1926.

unemployment. Normally, the Local Relief Committee dealt only with temporary distress due to unemployment or short-term illness, and assistance came in the form of vouchers for food or clothing which could be redeemed at selected local shops. Assistance could be granted for a maximum period of sixteen weeks in the year, but no more than eight weeks continuously.⁵⁰ This paralleled the government regulations concerning unemployment benefit and was intended to fill the gaps between the statutory provision. In providing this assistance the Legion felt it was important 'to ensure that neither tradesmen upon whom relief vouchers will be issued nor persons likely themselves to require assistance from the funds are appointed to the Committee'.⁵¹ Although fairly tight control was exercised on the local committees, mistakes and abuse did occur. Legion members might give trade to their own business or embezzle funds, and while some Committees operated in a sympathetic manner, others might be more harsh and unbending in their distribution of relief. One secretary of an I.L.P. branch (and not wholly sympathetic towards the British Legion) wrote to General Sir Ian Hamilton complaining that:

Late President of Local Branch had a Grocery Store for which vouchers for distressed Ex-Service men were made out to "Freydale Stores" I witnessed voucher?

Mrs West "widow" put through 3rd degree treatment by Committee for Relief Fund Relieving Officers being present she receiving 15/- per week herself and 4 children from the Parish: Shame to the British Legion?⁵²

Faults such as these were bound to creep into a decentralized system, but a local branch could quickly exhaust its fund of goodwill amongst the ex-service community if these problems became common. The Legion Area and National Organizers maintained vigilance, and did not hesitate to deal with serious problems in court. With the exception of the Sunday Express attacks in 1929,⁵³ the Legion managed to keep such problems localized and out of national attention.

⁵⁰ BL and USF Relief Guide 1927.

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² A.F. Towner to Ian Hamilton, 10 February 1930, IH29/12.

⁵³ See Chapter Three.

It must be stressed that, with such a large organisation, there were many different views and opinions which varied greatly from locality to locality. Legion attitudes displayed could be ambivalent, with traditional, reactionary and progressive opinions co-existing in a sometimes uneasy alliance. The ideal of the Legion, and its image of a 'Brighter Britain' was for *all* ex-service men to be given work and prosperity as a reward for the sacrifices during the Great War. The ideals of the Legion were expansive and all-encompassing, but the reality was different.

Within the Legion there developed a certain tension between the desirability to help all ex-service men, and the limited nature of Legion funds. Very quickly, a distinction came to be made between the 'waster' or 'scoundrel' and the deserving ex-service man - the man who had fallen on hard times and needed some assistance through no fault of his own. In 1922 Thomas Lister argued at the 1922 Conference that 'The Legion had enabled men who had *demonstrated their worth* to stand on their own two feet and look at life with a brighter vision'.⁵⁴ The concepts of self-help and comradely assistance, rather than charity, were always stressed by the Legion. The belief that the Legion should only be helping deserving ex-service men was probably in the minds of the founders at the inception of the Legion. General Sir Ian Hamilton remarked to W. Birrell, the Metropolitan Area Secretary that:

We must not regret the time and trouble taken up by this dirty rotter, because, after all, this is just the kind of case I can quote to show how our energies and time are taken up, not so much by good men in distress, as by shirkers of the sort who would swallow a gold mine and be none the better for it.⁵⁵

The desire to help 'good men in distress' while discouraging the 'shirker' became common, and although this was a traditional attitude, it can also be explained with reference to the situation in the twenties. In the early years of the organisation, the Legion was an easy target for men who posed as ex-service men or who made fraudulent claims. From 1922 until 1932, the General Secretary's Circular contained

⁵⁴ AC 1922, T.F. Lister, Chairman's Address.

⁵⁵ Hamilton: J. Birrell, 5 February 1926, IH29/1.

over a page each month of 'Warnings to Branches' of men who had extracted cash or clothes from Branches fraudulently.⁵⁶ By 1924, the situation was so serious that Legion branches were instructed to cease giving assistance to ex-service men on the road who were passing through looking for work. Ex-service men had to apply to their own districts for relief and could receive rail tickets to travel to a prospective job.⁵⁷ However, this policy harked back not only to Victorian times but to the Elizabethan Poor Law of 1572 - another era of rising population and increasing vagrancy.⁵⁸ This hardening of attitude combined with the tension of distributing limited funds brought a logical extension to the idea of the 'deserving ex-service man'. By 1924, the Legion was dispensing a large amount of money in relief to over 400,000 ex-service men a year, of whom eighty to ninety per cent were not members of the Legion.⁵⁹ This led to some understandable resentment among members that 'it was hard for loyal men who could ill-afford to give time and money to the movement, to feel that men who cared nothing for the Legion should benefit'.⁶⁰ This sense that members should receive some special consideration did not derive solely from the grievance that Legion members were working hard for other ex-service men's benefit - after all that was part of the creed of the Legion. Instead, the logic was that all *deserving* ex-service men believed in self-help, self-respect and desired comradely assistance to tide over a difficult period and not to rely on charity from others. If the Legion represented the 'cream of the ex-service community'⁶¹ then all deserving ex-service men would be members; by extension all those outside the Legion were undeserving. Thus, 'if an ex-service man would not protect himself and his wife and children during his distress, it was not the duty of the Legion to nurse him',⁶² as it could be argued that he should have sufficient sense to 'protect himself' by joining the Legion. This argument was never adopted by the Conference, and the Legion's

⁵⁶ GSCLB 1922-1932.

⁵⁷ GSCLB, August 1924.

⁵⁸ E. Royle, *Modern Britain: A Social History 1750-1985*, Edward Arnold, London, 1987, p.172.

⁵⁹ BLAR 1924.

⁶⁰ AC 1925, Res. No. 118.

⁶¹ BLJ March 1937, p.317.

⁶² AC 1925, Res. No. 118.

official policy was maintained as assisting all ex-service men but this attitude could make a great difference to the type of help which an ex-service man received.

Colonel Crosfield, Chairman of the Legion, remarked at the 1929 Conference:

Personally, I think we do not want to help the sponger and I believe in discrimination. If you have a fellow who shows no gratitude for help and comes back time and again, turn him down every time. We have a limited amount of money and we cannot help everybody, but only those who are most deserving.⁶³

The most disturbing aspect of such an attitude within the Legion, was that the discrimination was not part of official Legion policy, but operated on an informal, almost personal basis. In some minds at least, the 'deserving ex-service man' had changed from being 'those less fortunate than yourselves' and 'all ex-service men' to either members of the Legion, or to someone who knew how to display old-fashioned gratitude towards what can only be described as old-fashioned charity. The problems of relief work placed the greatest strains on the organisation and attitudes towards relief certainly coloured Legion opinions on all aspects of its practical work.

However, Legion relief had only been intended as emergency assistance until the long hoped for prosperity returned and the real intention of the Legion, as expressed in its 1923 Manifesto on Unemployment, was to create work. Initially, the Legion had two main strategies for providing work; small business loans, and loans for larger employment schemes. An ex-service man wishing to start up in business could receive up to £25 from the Legion in an interest free loan. However, each candidate was examined very carefully; there was a limited amount of funds devoted to this purpose and many applicants were not deemed suitable. For example, in 1921, there were 8,250 applications, but only 950 loans granted.⁶⁴ This caused widespread local resentment at the scheme during the early twenties. The Southampton Delegate at the 1923 Conference complained that:

⁶³ AC 1929, Res. No. 11.

⁶⁴ BLAR 1921.

The best thing they could throw against the Legion was the Small Loans Department. Southampton had sent up nearly 100 cases and had only got two...They did not get any reason why the cases were turned down. The only reason they ever got was that the references were unsatisfactory.⁶⁵

Although the Local Committee made recommendations, only the Central Relief Committee examined the two confidential references with each application. This meant that many applications were turned down without the Local Committee understanding the reason why. Eventually, this situation was accepted by most Local Committees and, as Legion case-work shows, these loans could make a significant contribution to an individual's prosperity:

An ex-service man in Hertfordshire received a loan of £20 to enable him to purchase the necessary tools in connection with his proposed business as a cabinet maker, upholsterer etc. A steady trade has resulted, and he is now repaying regularly in addition to supporting his wife and six children.⁶⁶

The Legion also claimed that the amount received in repayments indicated that most of the recipients remained successful, but increasing pressure was brought to bear on men who declined to repay the money. With only 800 to 1,000 loans issued a year, the system meant the difference between unemployment and prosperity for many individual ex-service men, but it left the major problem of unemployment untouched. The unwillingness of the Legion to invest in individual ex-service men through the small business loans must be contrasted unfavourably with the initial eagerness to invest heavily in a few large companies.

At the inception of the Legion, it had been hoped that large loans made to companies set up to employ ex-service men might provide the answer to large-scale unemployment. These schemes were established collectively by ex-service men and ranged from ship-breaking, house-building, painting and decorating, to boot-repairing and toy-making.⁶⁷ Unfortunately, this led the Legion to invest heavily in many unviable schemes. In consequence, the Legion lost considerable amounts of money -

⁶⁵ AC 1923, Discussion of the Annual Report, p.34.

⁶⁶ BLAR 1928.

⁶⁷ GSCLB, *The British Legion Unity Relief Fund*, January 1922.

£5,500 due to the failure of a ship-breaking scheme at Ramsgate, £8,801 due to the failure of a house-building company among others.⁶⁸ General Maurice admitted the problem in 1926 when he said that:

The Employment schemes were entered upon with considerable hopes that we would be able through them to provide employment for a really considerable number of men. Experience has, however, taught us that it requires real business capacity, considerable skill and much patience to launch a successful business these days.⁶⁹

These large schemes depended entirely on the general economic situation and, in the difficult years of the early twenties, the chances of success were obviously limited. It was naive of Legion leaders to imagine anything else but it has to be remembered that Legion leaders and members were ex-service men; few of them were experienced business men. In 1929 they argued:

that more schemes could have been started that year had it been possible to secure the interest of business gentlemen in various parts of the country to advise, promote, and if possible, attend to the management of schemes of employment for ex-service men.⁷⁰

However, the Legion did learn from its mistakes; most importantly, it learnt that good will and intentions backed up with money did not guarantee success. Having lost large sums of money through investing in many failed companies during the 1920s, such large business loans became very infrequent in the 1930s.

Subsequently, although the Legion was much more cautious in developing large employment schemes, a number of important successes were recorded. Of these, the most successful were based around the growing motor car industry. Through the initiative of General Bethune, the Metropolitan Area chairman, a London taxi-driving school was set up in 1927 to teach driving and to train drivers to pass the rigorous 'knowledge' test. The rationale behind this was that:

it was better to spend £50 in making a man into a London taxi-cab driver than to give him a dozen food vouchers during the year. Result: 100

⁶⁸ Bridgeman Committee Report, p.37.

⁶⁹ Maurice, British Legion Summer School 1926.

⁷⁰ BLAR 1929.

Legionaires are now driving cabs who, when they came to us were unemployed, some were almost unemployable, emaciated, and almost without any heart to go on.⁷¹

The factor which convinced a 'very dubious committee' was that the men were learning a skill which would make them employable. By 1938, 816 men had passed out to become taxi-drivers, while 366 found other driving jobs.⁷² This was an inventive scheme which gave some men a chance of employment, but was relatively small scale and could not absorb large numbers of unemployed men.

Another idea which became a minor success was the Car Park Attendants Scheme which the British Legion Scotland began in Glasgow in 1927. This was soon adopted elsewhere since its advantages were described as:

a means of absorbing some of our disabled ex-service men into permanent employment, without in any way competing with those in existing businesses, breaking fresh ground in a practical and lucrative way that would render their services practically indispensable, doing work which benefits all and injures none.⁷³

The local branch or Area organized the scheme by forming a limited company which then employed disabled ex-service men as car park attendants. The men were supplied with a uniform, and had to ensure that the 'cars were properly parked, guarded and their contents cared for'. No statutory charge could be made for the service, making the payment of 6d a day or 2s a week entirely voluntary, but as might be expected, most motorists did pay for the service. The scheme exploited the growth in motor traffic, by providing a service in which few other businesses had become involved but this meant the Legion could only provide low paid work with little chance of improvement. No training was necessary; the men were disabled or aged veterans who had found difficulty gaining any other employment. The wages for the men were quite low; the superintendent received £2 10s while the attendants earned 30s a week, although there were weekly bonuses and all insurances were paid.

⁷¹ H.E. Cheeseman to Hamilton, 1 March 1929, IH29/8.

⁷² BLJ May 1939, p.391.

⁷³ BLJ November 1928, p.126.

The scheme became quite successful; by 1936 it operated in over 50 towns and cities and employed 345 ex-service men.⁷⁴ For the Legion as an organisation it had a number of advantages; it enabled the uniformed attendants to represent the Legion as an efficient organisation of public utility which could gain the Legion support amongst the local Council and police.

The British Legion Village at Preston Hall, Maidstone, Kent was perhaps the flagship of the Legion's work for the disabled. From its inception, the Legion had been acutely interested in the fate of tubercular ex-service men and had followed up every new technique which seemed to offer hope for these men. In particular, they had followed the developments at Papworth Hall, where Dr Varrier Jones had established a settlement whereby men with TB were given sanatorium treatment and then given occupational therapy to test their 'economic and physical resistance to the disease'.⁷⁵ When the Legion took over the management of the Preston Hall sanatorium in 1925, the help of Dr Varrier Jones was enlisted in developing the settlement on the lines of Papworth. At Preston Hall, once the men had become well enough, they were given a job (light at first) in the various Preston Hall industries. The full range of activities were described in 1927 by Colonel Crosfield:

The population of the British Legion village, Aylesford, is now 506, which number includes 147 patients in the Sanatorium. The industries there are - Portable Appliances (Huts, Poultry and Pig Houses, Garages, Summer Houses etc.), Printing and the making of fibre and leather trunks, suitcases etc. Over 80 cottages are occupied by the settlers and their families and 25 are in the course of erection. The settlement has its own Village Stores, Post Office, Hall, its branch of both Sections of the Legion, and its troop of Boy Scouts and Girl Guides. Moreover negotiations are in progress for the establishment of a village school.⁷⁶

For the residents in the Village, the British Legion became less of a voluntary organisation and more a way of life. The industries also provided the useful function of providing men with jobs which allowed them to earn a living, something which

⁷⁴ BLJ March 1936, p.375.

⁷⁵ GSCLB, June 1927.

⁷⁶ G.R. Crosfield to Hamilton, 20 October 192

would not have been possible on the open market. This was a progressive scheme which made a decided impact on the problems of tubercular ex-service men.

The Legion's developments for disabled men were continued in Wales, at the Cambrian Wool Factory, and through support for many other industries employing disabled men. Further, the Legion used modern marketing techniques to expand these businesses. A Central Sales Agency was opened in London to market all the products and elicit orders from the public. As might be expected, Legion branches were particularly targeted; by the thirties the printing department at Preston Hall was printing for the majority of Legion branches. These attempts and developments were admirable, but could not deal with the entire problem of disabled ex-service men. Even by 1925 there was a waiting list of 300 for the Poppy Factory and no man with a disability of less than 70% could be considered⁷⁷ and in 1936, despite Legion efforts, there were still 33,497 disabled men unemployed.⁷⁸

One Legion policy which harked back to previous Government undertakings, and gained legitimacy from ideas of Empire and colonization, was overseas migration. The Murray Committee in 1915 had recommended that Government should assume responsibility for the settlement of ex-service men on the land, both in a 'Home Colonisation' programme of small holdings, and Imperial settlement. By 1923, nearly 19,000 ex-service men were settled on small-holdings in Britain, but only 3,000 had been assisted overseas.⁷⁹ With the unsettled situation in the early twenties, successful overseas migration had seemed unlikely, but by 1926 many Legion leaders saw emigration as the answer to unemployment. Crosfield believed that 'in emigration lies the solution of dealing with our over population'⁸⁰ which would, at one and the same time, maintain the flow of British people to the colonies. The Legion policy of emigration, which was developed from 1926 onwards, owed

⁷⁷ BLAR 1925.

⁷⁸ Ministry of Pensions, Disabled Ex-Service Men on live Register, 6 April 1936, PIN15/722.

⁷⁹ E.K. Federowich *Foredoomed to Failure: The Resettlement of British Ex-Service Men in the Dominions, 1914-1930*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, London 1991

⁸⁰ G.R. Crosfield to Hamilton, 1 February 1929, IH29/8.

more to the beliefs and opinions of the Imperially-minded Legion leaders than to any major ground swell of membership opinion. However, there was some clamour for emigration, as demonstrated in a resolution at the 1925 Conference, which demanded a wider scheme of emigration to enable men of lower medical standard and higher age to travel overseas. The delegates were reminded by Major Gilbert Cohen, who had spent 12 years in Australia, that 'CIII men could not do the work of AI men...to make good a man wanted good health and a mighty big heart.'⁸¹ Such problems were overlooked in the general policy as articulated by Haig at the 1926 Annual Conference:

We have no desire to force out of the Homeland those who have fought for King and Country. What we do want to say to them is this, - "Here is a sound scheme of settlement. We want the vacant lands of our Empire peopled with settlers of our own flesh and blood". Those great dominions cannot remain British, with British ideals, unless their vast vacant spaces are peopled by settlers from the Mother land, of British blood and British ideals, and love of liberty and justice. We think that for many of our comrades there are better prospects, for them and their families overseas, and if any of them wish to go we will give them an early opportunity of realising their desires.⁸²

For Haig and many of the Legion leaders, it was important that the Empire remained 'British'. This meant sending settlers to the less well-populated areas of Canada, Australia and New Zealand - but not to Africa. In some respects, the Legion policy on emigration sat uneasily with other Legion beliefs concerning the sacrifice of ex-service men during the Great War in defence of their country. It could not appear that the Legion was forcing, or aggressively advertising this scheme on ex-service men, hence the careful phrasing used by Haig on this occasion. From 1926, grants and loans of up to £25 per family were available to assist with the cost of passage, but only where definite employment abroad was assured. Until 1929, a substantial number of people were helped with their passage to the Dominions; at its peak during

⁸¹ AC 1925, p. 74.

⁸² AC 1926, p. 10. Confidential Speech.

1928-29 3,473 people were assisted to emigrate.⁸³ However, this type of scheme was operated by many other societies, and could really only assist those who already had a future in the Dominions. The Legion's experimental work on emigration began when it organized a training scheme to instruct unemployed men and their families in the farming skills they would need in Canada. Crosfield felt that there would not be any:

disinclination to emigrate provided confidence was established in the Emigration Authorities and provided the families knew that they were going to be restored physically, mentally and morally before they went overseas and were going to be given such a grounding that they would be of value when they arrived at the other end'.⁸⁴

This was a new departure because the Legion took families from urban areas and trained for them for a 'new life in Canada'.⁸⁵ The underlying idea was that the scheme might be replicated on a much larger scale with greater Government assistance. It was expected that 'given a scheme which fulfills all these conditions there would be no...reason why at least half a million of our people should not emigrate to other parts of our Empire.'⁸⁶ The actual Legion experiments were more modest. In 1927, the Legion scheme involved 21 families who were trained at Government expense at the Government Training Centre of Brandon. Out of these 21 families, 15 were successful.⁸⁷ Following this, the Legion in 1929 set up at its Training Centre at Wenvoe Grange a similar scheme, this time funded only by the Legion. Roughly fifty families were successful through the scheme,⁸⁸ but from 1930 onwards, the economic situation in the Dominions became very difficult, and Legion work on emigration dropped to almost nothing. Government assistance was not secured for further large scale emigration. In fact, the difficulties of successful emigration had been glossed over by the Legion. The small number of families on their schemes were carefully

⁸³ BLAR 1929.

⁸⁴ G.R. Crosfield to Hamilton, 1 January 1929, IH29/8.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ J.R. Griffin, *Unemployment*, British Legion Summer School 1926.

⁸⁷ BT,AR 1928.

AR 1931.

selected out of a large number of applicants; large scale training and emigration would have proved much more complex and much less successful. Assisted emigration was more an ideologically driven policy, than a considered appraisal based on the real needs of the unemployed in Britain's depressed areas.

During the twenties, the greatest criticism that could be levelled at Legion work was the preponderance of money expended on relief work when employment creation was the major plank of Legion policy. In 1930, the Bridgeman Committee, established to investigate fully all Legion activities, recommended that a greater proportion of the funds should be devoted to 'real constructive work and the provision of employment'.⁸⁹ There were a number of difficulties confronting the Legion in attempting to achieve these goals. The Bridgeman Committee recognised that 'To refuse aid to any man in difficulties is at no time easy, and when the application is made by one who possesses the special claims of an ex-service man it becomes infinitely more difficult'.⁹⁰ The large expansion of Legion relief work had been entirely unplanned; the real growth in Legion income and in ex-service hardship had forced the hands of the Central Relief Committee. With the failure of large employment schemes in the early twenties, and the continued trade depression, it was difficult to find productive avenues for investment. Crosfield explained that 'in the ordinary employment scheme the ratio of capital employed to men employed is generally so high that the number of individuals who can be helped bears too small a ratio to the vast number who need help'.⁹¹ In a situation where perhaps £100 would need to be spent to employ one man on a solid scheme, it was felt that relief work gave assistance to a greater number of ex-service men.

The Legion also tried to circumvent the problems of large employment schemes by establishing Employment Bureaux. In 1922, Earl Haig, defended the early Employment Committees:

⁸⁹ Bridgeman Committee Report, p.27.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ BLJ June 1930, p.301.

You may say that this is mere duplication of the work of the Labour Exchanges. To a certain extent that may be true, but have the Labour Exchanges been altogether a success? Have they not suffered in too many instances from the worst features of bureaucracy? Have they not lacked the personal touch of sympathy which means so much, especially to the man who, having fought for his country, feels that he has a right to be allowed to work for that country?⁹²

Once again, the moral dimension of service in the Great War was used to maintain the rights of ex-service men in the face of mass unemployment. The Legion's organisation relied heavily on the Local Branch committee to register all local unemployed ex-service men and with active personal canvassing of local employers and foremen, the branch could select a suitable candidate for any available job. Another role for local employment committees was to ensure that the privilege of 75% preference for ex-service men was maintained on all local Government employment schemes while also 'checking the unauthorized and improper admission of aliens into this country'.⁹³ Local Legion branches often exerted considerable pressure through publicity campaigns and deputations on employers, labour exchanges and municipal authorities to reject female and foreign labour.

It was soon realized that Branch Committees alone would not be sufficient to tackle the problem of finding men work, and in 1922 the first Area Employment Bureaux was established in London because 'the branches have been ... handicapped in obtaining employment ... by reason of the fact that there has been no co-operation with an authority which could pass on enquiries to the respective branches'.⁹⁴ Area and County Employment Committees were able to pass information between branches, and place men who were willing to move out of a locality. By combining the efforts of a number of Branches, these committees could also start larger employment schemes, such as the Hairdressing Training Centre established by the Oxfordshire County Committee in 1928.⁹⁵

⁹² Haig, Speech in Birmingham, 3 April 1922, Acc.3155 No.235.b.

⁹³ GSCLB, Branch Employment Committees, April 1928.

⁹⁴ GSCLB, Proposed Scheme for Area Employment Bureaux, January 1922.

⁹⁵ Gcadby, *Legion Oxfordshire*, p.6.

However, the moral claims of all ex-service men for employment were diluted in the Legion employment finding operations. Legion Headquarters suggested that 'Publicity should be given to the fact that all ex-service men may apply for Employment through the Branch, though naturally preference would be given to members, other things being equal'.⁹⁶ More importantly, the Employment Committees were selective in their approach as 'any unsuitable or unreliable man recommended for employment will react adversely against the Branch and the Legion'.⁹⁷ Thus, the Legion attempted to provide a *service* to employers with the assurance that the Legion could supply reliable, honest men for jobs. This was the message of a 1935 leaflet:

To all Employers of Labour
EMPLOYEES who give conscientious and loyal service are valuable assets to any BUSINESS.
The BRITISH LEGION specialises in providing MEN of this type for all kinds of work.
The LEGION has Branches all over the country from which suitable EX-SERVICE MEN are provided at short notice.

THE LEGION'S MOTTO
IS
SERVICE NOT SELF.⁹⁸

This was an astute piece of advertising; it reinforced the connection that ex-service men who joined the Legion and adopted its motto were loyal, honest and good workers and that the Legion was able to provide an efficient service. But at the same time by implying that only Legion members were the type of ex-service men who would give 'conscientious and loyal service' it made a distinction between Legion members and other ex-service men in their claims for employment.

Given the depressed economic conditions, the actual impact of the Legion Employment Committees could never be vast, but in the 1930s, when given priority

⁹⁶ GSCLB, Handbook for the Use of Branches, August 1932.

⁹⁷ GSCLB, August 1930.

GSCLB, Leaflet, January 1935.

over other practical work, they did place more ex-service men in jobs than otherwise would have been the case. Obviously, the Employment Committees did not create jobs, but simply assisted ex-service men to find and obtain the jobs that were around. In the first year of full operation during 1930, the Legion filled 10,262 vacancies, while in 1934 48,364 vacancies were filled.⁹⁹ The figures rose steadily so that in 1938 the Legion could claim to have filled 225,588 over the last five years.¹⁰⁰ However, many of the jobs found by the Legion were for temporary or casual posts. In 1936, out of 49,745 vacancies filled, 14,740 were permanent with 22,118 temporary and 12,887 casual jobs.¹⁰¹ The Legion Employment Bureaux thus did nothing to solve the problem of the unskilled ex-service man. Despite the great efforts and hard work expended by Legion Employment Committees in the thirties, it was impossible to make a major impact on the numbers of unemployed ex-service men.

After the 1934 Government Act which highlighted the problem, the Legion turned its attention to helping the 'Special Areas'.¹⁰² West Cumberland, industrial Scotland, Tyne-Tees, South Wales and industrial Lancashire were all badly hit by the decline of Britain's heavy industries. With very high unemployment among the local population, these areas collected small amounts of money on Poppy Day, and yet needed proportionately more to assist the large numbers of people facing hardship. The Legion began to operate a scheme of 'adoption' based on a previous example; after the Great War certain British towns had adopted French and Belgian towns in the devastated areas of France and Flanders, sending gifts of cash and clothing.¹⁰³ The Legion scheme consisted of wealthier areas in Britain adopting the distressed North-Eastern, North Western and Wales Areas. Cash was sent to pay for employment schemes, clothing and bedding was distributed to needy families, and

⁹⁹ BLAR 1930-1934.

¹⁰⁰ BLJ May 1939, p.391.

¹⁰¹ BLAR 1936.

¹⁰² C.L. Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars*, p.465.

¹⁰³ BLJ March 1937, p.318.

assistance given in individual cases of distress. This scheme allowed large re-distributions of resources; in 1937 the North Eastern Area received £2,783 and several hundred bales of clothing. The Melksham Branch alone provided enough clothing for the needs of eight towns in Wales during 1937.¹⁰⁴ The Women's section played a very important role in this work, particularly through its 'Wardrobe Scheme' which sent thousands of items of clothing to poor districts in the North. The adoption scheme was only necessary due to the inability of normal Legion channels to distribute resources effectively and while the government response was relatively sophisticated, taking the form of incentives for business to relocate to the special areas, Legion assistance was simple and remedial charity.

Having examined every major Legion effort, we must estimate the actual effect of the Legion's work. As early as 1923 Haig claimed that 'the lot of the ex-service men of all ranks, thanks to the efforts of the Legion is very much better than it would have been had so many of our old comrades not united to form the British Legion'.¹⁰⁵ The Legion and U.S.F. were large-scale organisations compared to any other ex-service charity which had gone before. By 1926, the Legion Relief Departments and U.S.F. were spending nearly £1,000,000 year and Maurice could claim that 'there is no other single organisation in the country which does benevolent work on anything like so large a scale'.¹⁰⁶ For over 400,000 people every year, Legion relief vouchers for food and clothing provided welcome additional assistance to Government provision.¹⁰⁷ The figures for employment are not impressive individually, but taken together, Legion business loans, employment and training schemes, and the Employment Bureaux did find jobs for thousands of people. The greatest Legion work was for the disabled ex-service man, which was of great benefit to the lives of many individuals. Even so, Legion expenditure was minuscule compared to the budget of the Ministry of Pensions. In 1928, this Government

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ AC 1923, Haig's Presidential Address.

¹⁰⁶ General Sir Frederick Maurice, *The Relief Work of the Legion*, British Legion Summer School 1926.

¹⁰⁷ BLAR 1921-1939.

Department spent £59,000,000 to the benefit of 1,500,000 people.¹⁰⁸ Ultimately, the work can only be judged on its benefit to the individual, for Legion efforts alleviated some of the hardship, provided some employment, and thus made a difference to many lives, but could not address the underlying problems of mass unemployment and poverty.

Legion attitudes to the poor and unemployed reveal a serious dichotomy between the aims and reality of Legion benevolent work. The most important and expansive aim of the Legion to build a brighter Britain, where ex-service men 'should have their just rights and demand their dues'¹⁰⁹ was not fulfilled. Even within the Legion, traditional attitudes towards ex-service men were not eradicated and given the ambiguity present in Legion attitudes it is perhaps unsurprising that the basic relationship between ex-service man, the state and society was not considerably altered. However, whatever faults and omissions were present within the Legion, Poppy Day was the most effective and vivid means of reminding the public about the needs of ex-service men. Ironically, Legion attitudes became progressively more archaic as time went on. The Legion adopted traditional charitable attitudes by making the distinction between deserving and undeserving poor. Even the Legion's most expansive aim of justice and maintenance for ex-service men depended on their service in war as a justification for their special treatment. By the 1930s, the development of the 'middle way' in political thought laid the foundations for much more progressive attitudes to the poor. Thinkers like J.M. Keynes, David Lloyd George and even Harold MacMillan were advocating a comprehensive welfare state which would make provision for all citizens, regardless of their condition or previous service.¹¹⁰ The Legion played no part in these developments and instead, its opinions remained shackled to a traditional charitable approach which became increasingly out of date as time went on.

¹⁰⁸ BLAR 1928.

¹⁰⁹ AC 1923, Rule 3(4).

¹¹⁰ Paul Addison, *The*

1945: British Politics and the Second World War, London: Quartet, 1982, pp.35-44.

'THE LEGION IS AN UNREASONABLE BODY':
NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE MINISTRY OF PENSIONS

On 23 November 1918, James Howell, President of the National Association, wrote:

We discharged men are placed in the same category as demagogues who spout against the short-comings of the Government - and such a condition, though distasteful, has to go on, until the Government trusts the men who fought for it.¹

At the time, ex-service protests borne out of pension, employment and demobilization grievances caused serious alarm amongst the Government. Ex-service organisations, notably the National Federation, were placed under Special Branch surveillance.² Clearly in 1918 and 1919, the Government did not trust the returned soldiers of the Great War. Although by 1921, with the formation of the Legion, much of the tension between ex-service men and the Government had been de-fused with higher pension rates, the history of the British Legion's involvement in politics is largely concerned with the balance of trust and understanding between ex-service men and the Government. The importance of the Legion's political activities lie in the fact that, as one of the first mass movements, the Legion developed its political stance in the first years of mass franchise. By examining the Legion's political efforts we can gain an insight into the nature of British politics in the years after universal franchise.

Charles Kimball has argued that the Legion's political effectiveness was hampered by its ex-officer leadership. He argued that:

neither government recalcitrance nor public indifference deserve the lion's share of the blame for the failure of the Legion's lobbying endeavours over the years. Equally important was the way in which the organisations ex-

¹ James Howell to Major Jellicorse, 23 November 1918, IH29/37/4.

² Stephen Ward, *Intelligence Surveillance of British Ex-Service Men, 1918-1920*, *The Historical Journal* (1973) pp.179-188.

officer leadership shied away from any form of protest or pressure tactic that could be construed as committing the Legion to a wider challenge to the legitimacy of the government in power.³

Kimball suggests that the leadership of the Legion failed to exert significant pressure on the government due to their establishment and conservative character. Thus, these 'self imposed strictures'⁴ limited the effectiveness of the Legion's political pressure tactics. However, Kimball was unable to show directly the consequences of Legion leadership motivations and the reasons behind the ineffectiveness of the Legion's pressure tactics has yet to be described. Why were the Legion's techniques of influence unsuccessful on the issues which were considered most important? Why was the Government able to resist Legion pressure, and often neutralise Legion activity? Which issues caused rifts within the Legion over these political events? These are the main problems for anyone examining the Legion's political activities. We must discover the nature of the Legion's 'self-imposed strictures' and evaluate their impact on the dynamics of the movement - the rifts between leadership and membership. With the benefit of hitherto unresearched material, this chapter hopes to contribute a deeper understanding of Legion political motivations and give further important detail to the lengthy negotiations between the Legion and Government.

When established in 1921, the Legion became the sole ex-service organisation claiming to represent all British ex-service men. Considering the wide range of needs and problems of ex-service men, particularly on the questions of pensions and employment, it was inevitable that the Legion would involve itself in negotiations with the Government on many of the most pressing ex-service issues. The matters which were of 'vital interest to the Legion' covered many subjects from employment and housing to tubercular ex-service men, but the most important issue for the Legion and its membership concerned War disability and pensions. The relationship between Government and the Legion is a complex one and for the purposes of this

³ Kimball, *The Ex-Service Movement in England and Wales*, p.225.

⁴ *ibid.*

study it is best to concentrate on the most important negotiations which concern the Legion and the Ministry of Pensions. By examining in detail the relations between the Legion and the Ministry of Pensions, we can discover the impact not only of the 'self-imposed strictures' of the Legion, but also the position of the Ministry of Pensions.

The flaws and injustices in the Pensions Warrants were the main cause of dispute between the Government and the Legion, and this tension also caused divisions within the Legion itself. The numbers of men disabled in the Great War was vast and it is estimated that almost one-quarter of those who served, roughly 1.2 million men, were entitled to disability pensions.⁵ With large numbers of disabled veterans in its ranks, war pensions remained a crucial issue for the Legion. War Pensions were also a major concern of the post-war Governments. Once government had accepted its responsibility to compensate the disabled soldier, which occurred in 1917 with the 'Barnes Warrant', war pensions became a major burden on state finances due to the numbers of men, women and children involved. The Pension system was often modified in minor ways but the Pension Acts of 1919 and 1921 formed the basis of the post-war settlement for disabled men, widows and orphans.

The amount of compensation for a disabled man was based on his physical condition in comparison with a healthy man, and the disability was then assessed in degrees of 10%; from 20 to 100%. For example, men who had lost both legs, eyes or arms, or suffering from T.B. received 100% pension. However, the onus of proof lay with the applicant who had to prove to the Ministry that the disability was either attributable to or aggravated by his service during the war. Many disabled ex-service men were denied war pensions because it was impossible to *prove* that their disability was attributable to war service. A more progressive section of the Pensions settlement was the existence of an independent Appeals Tribunal established in 1919. Any claimant who was dissatisfied with the Ministry decision on entitlement or

⁵ Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, p.273.

degree of disability for men, widows or dependants could appeal through these tribunals which helped to ensure the equity of the pensions system. Under the 1919 Warrant, pensioners had to attend Medical Boards every six months where their condition, and rate of pension were reassessed. This led to a great deal of anxiety amongst pensioners, who were never sure of their status; their pension might be increased, reduced or removed at any of the frequent medical boards. The earlier ex-service organisations, notably the Federation and the Comrades pressed the Government for a stabilisation of pensions, so that pensioners would not have to attend constant medical boards and the basis of their pensions would be permanently settled.

These pleas, combined with Government interests, resulted in the 1921 Pension Warrant which contained a number of controversial features. There were two aspects of this Act, final awards and the seven years time limit, which later caused much dissatisfaction to pensioners and a real sense of grievance amongst Legion members. At the time the Bill passed rapidly through Parliament without much dissent. It was assumed that the Bill was in the interests of the pensioners themselves, and the Warrant was considered an advance on any previous legislation. However, Government considerations played as much a part in the formulation of the Act as the pleas of the ex-service organisations. The major motivation was to reduce Government liability for Great War Pensions. The expenditure on war pensions had become a major component in Government expenditure; in 1919 Local War Pensions Committees had spent £9,748,400, but in 1920 this figure had risen to £21,188,500.⁶ It was clear to Treasury Officials that the system of Pensions was costing the country a vast sum of money, and the 1921 Pensions Warrant was an attempt to limit, if not to reduce, the liability. Under this Act, the powers of the Local War Pensions Committees were reduced and administration was centralised on London, with greater powers given to the permanent officials of the Ministry's secretariat. The

⁶ *ibid.* b, *War Pensions*, British Legion Summer School, 1926.

second main provision was for a system of final awards to stabilise pensions. Looking back at the system from the perspective of 1926, A.G. Webb, the Legion's pensions expert, wrote that for the majority of pensioners 'the scheme has merely acted as a means whereby the Government have finally disposed of their liability with regard to pensions and allowances'.⁷

Medical Boards were asked to assess a pensioner's disability and whether the injury or illness had stabilised so that the condition would become no better or worse. In these cases a Final Award was made. If the disability was assessed at 20% or over, a weekly pension was granted for life, but if the disability was assessed at under 20%, a gratuity spread over a maximum of 156 weeks was granted, after which no further payment was made. For pensioners with over 20% disability the scheme was satisfactory, but for the majority of pensioners with less than 20% disability it represented a small payment for a permanent disability. Between 1 January 1922 and 11 December 1923, 371,428 Final Awards were made, but of these only 136,080 received permanent pensions while 235,338 pensioners received Final Awards.⁸ Legion leaders complained that doctors were 'asked to do something which it was impossible for them to do ... They were asked to forecast for all time what the degree of incapacity would be'.⁹ It was clear that the Ministry of Pensions was wiping off thousands of pensioners from its books, sometimes with little regard to the actual condition of the pensioner's disability.

The 1921 Pensions Warrant also introduced a seven years time limit in which claims to a pension could be considered. This regulation applied equally to disabled men and to widows. The first claim for pension had to be made within seven years from the date of discharge (or 1 August 1921 whichever was earlier) otherwise the claim would be ruled out of time and not considered. If a man had a dormant wound or condition which reappeared seven years after his discharge, he was not entitled to

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ AC 1925, Lister, Chairman's Address.

pension. In widows' cases the time limit operated in a particularly harsh manner, as explained by A.G. Webb:

At present if her husband dies one day after the seven years he leaves his wife pensionless. Picture the feelings of a mother watching her invalid husband's bedside on the last day of the seventh year. Imagine the feelings of the dying man! The thing would be ridiculous - if it were not tragic.¹⁰

The unbending nature of the rule produced a terrible situation and a great deal of hardship for many widows. Again, from a Government and treasury point of view, this was a way of limiting the Government's liability by ensuring that no new pension claims would appear after 1928. Initially, the Legion campaigned only for the removal of the widow's pensions time limit, but after 1924, when there were changes in procedure for widow's pensions which removed most of the injustice caused by the time limit, it began a campaign for the removal of all time limits. Both the operation of final awards and the seven years time limit became the source of major grievances for the ex-service community.

Although the 1921 Pensions Warrant had passed quickly through the House of Commons, the Legion soon looked on this fact with suspicion. In 1922 A.G. Webb remarked:

how very significant it was that the 1921 Act was passed at the time when the Legion came into being. Whether by accident or by design I know not, but in view of the far-reaching effects of this Act, rushed through the House, I am inclined to the opinion that it was no accident that the Ministry caught the ex-service men just at the transformation period.¹¹

This typified the early Legion response to the Act, and demonstrates the mistrust felt by the Legion towards the motives of the Ministry of Pensions. George Coppard's experience may give some impression of how many ordinary ex-service men were treated by the Ministry. Coppard had been severely wounded by a machine gun bullet at the battle of Cambrai which severed the artery in his left leg - and nearly cost

¹⁰ BLJ January 1923, p. 167.

¹¹ BLJ August 1922, p. 5.

him his life. After the war his case was reviewed by a Local War Pensions Committee:

My leg had shrunk a bit and I was given pension of twenty-five shillings per week for six months. The pension dropped to nine shillings a week for a year and then ceased altogether. At my last medical board in 1920, one of the members, repeating my replies to questions, drawled, 'Says femoral artery has been severed'.¹²

George Coppard did not understand the complex Pensions regulations or the reasons why his pension had been stopped, but he did know that he had been seriously wounded during his service. Similarly, Frank Richards who had been gassed during the war wrote 'I have never been the same man as what I was before. Indeed no man has been treated with greater contempt than what I was.'¹³ A.G. Webb knew the sense of grievance which could develop among disabled men who felt that they had a right to pension:

These disabled men have a very distinct distrust of the Ministry and all its ways. They rarely feel satisfied with the rulings given by any of the Ministry officials, with the result that a disabled man goes away disgruntled, nurses his grievances (which does not improve with keeping) and airs it to all and sundry.¹⁴

For ordinary ex-service men, as well as for Legion officials, pension issues became and remained the most important grievance between the Legion and Government. Relations between the Legion and the Ministry of Pensions reached a very low ebb in the period 1923-25 and much of Legion literature reflects this. Legion officials argued that the Ministry was economising at the expense of the disabled men:

Many years experience of pensions problems has almost driven me to the conclusion that it is easier for a rich man to get into Heaven than for a poor man to ascertain his pension rights single-handed. And it isn't only the complexity of problems he has to tackle. There is an even bigger bogey - the officialness and the Treasury point of view that places parsimony before humanity.¹⁵

¹² George Coppard, *With a Machine Gun to Cambrai*, London: Papermac, 1980, p.134.

¹³ Frank Richards, *Old Soldiers Never Die*, London: Faber, 1933, p.167.

¹⁴ BLJ March 1923, p.215.

¹⁵ BJ ~ January 1923, p.167.

Attitudes like these were prevalent, and largely motivated the constant Legion campaigns on the pension issues of final awards and the seven years time limit. On pension issues, the Legion was quite prepared to use strong language and campaign vigorously for the repeal of these regulations.

While it was believed that action could and should be taken for the needs of ex-service men and their dependants, there was no scope for political action which would radically alter the political balance between ex-service men and Parliament. The Legion was there to protect and advocate ex-service rights within the existing framework of Parliament and Constitutional Monarchy. This attitude was clear in Rule 1 (C) which was 'to inculcate a sense of loyalty to the Crown Community State and Nation, to promote unity amongst all classes'.¹⁶ Given this sense of loyalty to the institutions and establishment of the British 'State and Nation', the British Legion could not and would not have attempted a radical revision of politics. To this extent, Kimball's criticism of the refusal of the Legion leadership to challenge the 'legitimacy of the Government in power' cannot be supported. The Legion's Rules and Charter were not conceived in this light; a challenge to the constitution and legitimacy of the Government was unthinkable. As T.F. Lister remarked at the 1927 Conference:

I think you may take it that whatever form our policy takes, one thing which will be omitted, and that will be active propoganda upon matters which are the subject of acute political difference.¹⁷

The Legion was not the organisation to stir up political passions. At the same time, this clearly limited the Legion's political scope to a very narrow spectrum, and this was bound to limit the Legion's political effectiveness.

Given that the Legion would not use party politics as a means of influence, there remained the problem of how best to enact its policy. In the first editorial of the Legion Journal, members were exhorted to 'Determine to make the Legion's policy grip'.¹⁸ To a very large extent that could only be achieved by gaining some

¹⁶ British Legion Royal Charter and Rules 1925, Rule 1 (C).

¹⁷ AC 1927, T.F. Lister, Chairman's Address.

¹⁸ ELJ July 1921, p.12.

sort of purchase on Parliament and the Government of the day. The success of the Constructive Programme of the Legion,¹⁹ depended heavily on influencing National Government and Local Authorities. After the discussion of 'Domestic', 'National' and 'Imperial' Objects, it was stated that 'the aforesaid objects to be carried out by co-operating with Government, Employers and Trade Unions and bringing the necessary pressure to bear by Constitutional methods'.²⁰ The mission of the Legion was clear from the outset; it was essential to influence 'the powers that be'.

The Legion attempted to achieve influence through many indirect methods: attempting to build a strong membership, influencing public opinion through speeches, rallies, and myriad Branch events. In combination with the indirect approach, the Legion could draw on the expertise of the leaders of the earlier ex-service organisations in the deployment of direct techniques of influence, which ranged from the deputation to a Government Department to petitions and questionnaires.

The Legion's commitment to constitutional methods of change and influence led to a great enthusiasm for representation on all kinds of Government and Local Committees. It was believed that with large scale representation on many committees, the Legion could make the voice of the ex-service man heard, above all the other competing interests and influences. However, the Legion was much more circumspect when it came to direct political representation at the national level. The National Federation had attempted to gain direct political representation for ex-service men, by sponsoring sixteen candidates at the 1918 General Election. The complete failure of this attempt meant that no other ex-service group contemplated similar action again.²¹ Within British politics the creation of a new ex-service political grouping was not a possibility after 1918. Given the strength of the existing

¹⁹ See Appendix E.

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ Wootton, *The Politics of Influence*, p.133.

political system, it is unlikely whether such a party would have been successful and the Legion was certainly not the organisation to attempt such a move.

The clearest indication of the Legion's political approach was given before the 1922 General Election, when the General Secretary issued detailed instructions to the branches informing them of the correct behaviour to adopt during the campaign. The instructions stressed the non-party nature of the Legion:

the Legion is in no way whatever associated with any particular political party, or with any party political organisation. For this reason the Legion at the forthcoming General Election will not be supporting any particular party, although members in their INDIVIDUAL capacity and WITHOUT committing their branch may be doing so.²²

This made it clear that the Legion in its corporate capacity would not engage in party politics. However, some individual members did cross this fine line. A speaker on a political platform, wearing a Legion badge next to his coloured rosette was obviously associating the two and his audience would do the same.²³ Indeed, although the guidelines made the corporate non-party stance of the Legion clear, the same was not true for individual branches. Legion branches were supplied with questionnaires for candidates which outlined the main Legion policies, and invited the candidate to reply in writing to the branch.²⁴ These replies were then to be 'published to all members of the branch who will then be entirely free to decide for themselves how they propose to vote'.²⁵ This was certainly well within the Rules of the Legion - its members had a legitimate right to discover the views of each candidate on ex-service issues. However, the instructions went further for it was decided that:

it is within the power of a local branch of the Legion, after having considered at a General Meeting of the Branch the replies received from all the candidates for Election in the Constituency, to decide to take action if they so desire in support of, or in opposition to, any particular candidate,

²² GSCLB, SC re. The General Election, October 1922.

²³ Kimball, *The Ex-Service Movement in England and Wales*, p.187.

²⁴ See Appendix G.

²⁵ GSCLB, SC, October 1922.

but this should NOT be done unless one or more of the candidates is distinctly unfavourable.²⁶

This was a very important proviso; although the Legion as a national organisation was not going to declare for one party or another, individual branches were allowed to support one candidate if the others had given unfavourable replies to the questionnaire. This did allow Legion branches to engage in local party politics albeit in a limited sense. The intention was clear; candidates might gain support if they were favourable to ex-service policies and lose support if they were not. Conversely, candidates would not be criticised because of their wider political beliefs or party but solely on the grounds of their views on ex-service issues. Clearly, the Legion leadership was sailing fairly close to the wind on this issue, and many branches subsequently complained that the instructions had embroiled them in unintended political controversy. Nevertheless, it was this fine line between ex-service issues and wider political issues which gave the Legion's policy campaigns in the twenties an impression of vigour and success.

A good example of this lies in the final message delivered by the General Secretary before the 1922 Election. There was a feeling of enthusiasm for the electoral process and an inflated opinion of the Legion's ability to influence the election in his exhortation:

The Welfare of Ex-Service Men, Widows and Dependents hangs on the sort of Parliament we return as the result of this Election.

Let us see to it that we get a Parliament which shall be unanimous in support of the just claims of all ranks of the Ex-Service Community.

THE LEGION HAS NOW THE OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE THE PARLIAMENT THAT IT WANTS. DON'T LOSE THIS WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITY.²⁷

The enthusiasm was understandable. Not only was 1922 the first general Election since the formation of the Legion, but it was probably the first truly representative election under the new reforms of mass franchise. Many of the soldiers who had

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ *ibid.*

been unable to vote in 1918, voted in 1922 as ex-service men. The Legion also had a wide programme of policies designed to redeem some of the war-time pledges and alleviate the hard situation of many ex-service men. Such enthusiasm was allowed to obscure the hard facts that the Legion, of itself, could not create the Parliament that it wanted. In an era of mass franchise there were many interests and forces at work in producing the new Parliament of which the Legion was but one.

However, this fact was not recognised by Legion leadership or membership. In January 1923, two months after the election, the General Secretary informed the branches that:

a very large number of the Members of the Present House of Commons are greatly in favour of the Legion programme, and are in fact pledged to help the cause of ex-service men in many matters which are of vital interest to the Legion.²⁸

The Legion branches and leadership believed that when a prospective candidate signed his name with a favourable reply to the questionnaire this was a pledge to vote in favour of such policies in the House of Commons. Since Legion Headquarters had collected over 460 favourable replies to the questionnaire from successful candidates it was naively assumed that a large measure of success for the Legion's programme of policies could be achieved through Parliamentary legislation.

Having built up these false hopes, the disillusionment with reality was all the harder. On a number of occasions in this first Parliament, the inflated hopes were proved unfounded and ex-service men developed a great sense of grievance and bewilderment when Legion proposals and Bills were voted down in the House of Commons by Members of Parliament who had seemed favourable to Legion policies. Perhaps the most important of these occurred in 1923 over the vote for the budget of the Ministry of Pensions.

On 27 April 1923 the Minister of Pensions informed the Legion that no concession on the seven years time limit for widows could be contemplated. The

²⁸ CSCLB, SC, British Legion Policy Campaign, January

General Secretary wrote to the 400 MPs who had favoured the abolition of the time limit and told them that they would have an early opportunity of honouring their questionnaire pledge.²⁹ On 5 June Mr J.I. Macpherson, the MP for Inverness, and a former Minister of Pensions, moved a reduction of £100 in the budget of the Ministry. This was essentially a vote of no confidence in the policy of the Ministry, and in the ensuing debate, the Minister, Major G.C. Tryon, and his policies came under considerable attack. However, the debate did not follow Legion lines or Legion arguments; Members of Parliament had their own interests and motivations.³⁰ The Legion's two self-appointed spokesmen, Major J.B.B. Cohen, and Mr D.P. Pielou, threatened to vote against the Government, but ultimately voted with their Party when a select committee was promised to look into the seven years time limit for widows. Time and again and on a number of issues Legion measures were voted down by Members of Parliament who had seemed favourable to those policies at election time.

A revealing exchange took place at the 1925 Conference when a delegate asked:

would it not be better to ask all Members of Parliament who signed the questionnaire to honour their signature?

THE CHAIRMAN: Do you seriously think we have not done all this already?

DERBY: Then we have no redress against them for refusing to honour their signature?³¹

Legion members did not recognise that there was no realistic way in which the Members who had signed the Legion questionnaire could be mobilised to vote against their Party. At the same Conference, Swansea moved that the N.E.C. should find out the reasons why 'ex-service men fail to obtain justice in their demands when made in the House of Commons', when the 'majority of Members of Parliament sign the Legion Manifesto upon seeking election and pledge their support'. He 'could not

²⁹ OHBL, p.62.

³⁰ See the Debate in the House of Commons, Hansard, 5 June 1923.

³¹ AC 1925, Motion of Urgency.

understand why ex-service Members of Parliament did not firmly stand together and walk out of the House of Commons when ex-service men did not get a square deal'.³² Ex-service men were bewildered and angry because they did not understand the political process. Members of Parliament did not conceive their ultimate loyalty to the British Legion, or to ex-service men but to Parliament and, in particular, to their Party.

For the Legion leaders, who were actually negotiating with Ministers, there was little alternative but to continue using the questionnaire as the principal means of influence. The Legion had to be seen to be doing something, and there was still hope that these methods might have an impact. The Legion was accepted by the Ministry of Pensions as an interest group which deserved representation. At every level, from the local War Pensions Committees to the Central Advisory Committee, the Legion could make its views known to the Ministry. It might be assumed that the Legion was bargaining from a position of some authority, even strength. However, in discussions at the various Pension Committees, it became clear to Legion representatives that the major policy decisions of the Ministry were not going to be altered through the consultation process. Although the Legion with its knowledge of conditions countrywide could be of value to the Ministry, both in framing new legislation and regulations, the Minister and his advisors had the final say in every decision. Mentioning the 'dead wall' which faced the Legion in its attempts to alter Pensions policy, J.M. Hogge remarked that 'they don't buy new records at the Pensions Ministry, they repeat old ones'.³³

By 1925, it was clear that this strategy, and the constant use of deputations to the Ministry of Pensions, was not having the desired effect; the time limit and the operation of final awards were still on the statute books. Thus in May 1925 the Legion decided on an unusual course of action to influence Parliament. The General

³² *ibid.*

³³ BLJ April 1926, 1

Secretary wrote to the branches giving the National Executive Council's decision to raise a National Petition. The letter explained that:

Discussions at the Government Standing Joint Committee, Central Advisory Committee, Ministry of Pensions Area Advisory Councils, deputations to the Pensions Minister, and even discussions in the House of Commons itself have failed to secure any redress. The National Executive Council have, therefore, decided as a last resource, to organise a National Public Petition to Parliament.³⁴

The National Public Petition really was a last resort because it was highly unlikely that Parliament would be swayed by such an archaic form of representation and supplication when more modern and direct means of influence had already failed. An emergency motion was raised at the 1925 Conference, desiring to halt the Petition, arguing that if it failed it might do great harm to the Legion's cause. A Swansea delegate warned that:

All the petitions in the world would not help them to get their demand satisfied. Somebody would stagger into the House of Commons with the Petition and there it would be allowed to die.³⁵

The Petition was presented by Major Cohen to the Speaker of the House (he did not stagger, but only brought the first paper - the large bundles were brought in by others) but although the Legion's petition of 825,000 signatures was the largest since the Chartist petition of 1848, it had little direct effect on Government policy. It is true that Major Tryon, the Pensions Minister, in a case of 'remarkable coincidence',³⁶ announced the temporary stabilisation of pension rates until 1929. This was a large, if indirect concession. Soon after the Petition was presented, the Minister of Pensions announced further concessions; there would be a correction of errors scheme for the final awards procedure and special warrant pensions would be awarded to men who applied outside the seven years time limit. Both of these procedures depended on the discretion of the Minister and his advisors and there was

³⁴ GSCLB, SC - National Public Petition, May 1925.

³⁵ AC 1925 Motion of Urgency.

³⁶ ver 1925, p.75.

no statutory right of appeal. This did not satisfy the Legion, as the Independent Appeals Tribunal had often overturned Ministry decisions. Legion records showed that from 1921 to 1925, over 62 per cent of appeals were successful. It was argued by the Legion that:

while this is a very potent argument in favour of the establishment and retention of the Independent Courts, it also shows that without the retention of the Independent Courts, ex-Service men would not have a fair deal if the final decision lay with the Ministry.³⁷

All of the concessions announced by the Minister of Pensions were alterations in procedure rather than changes in legislation, and thus an independent appeal could not be granted. At the same time, the Ministry was not prepared to draft new legislation, because it would have been a tacit admission that large errors had been made.

After the failure of the National Petition, the Legion cast about for more effective means of influence. As early as 1923 T.F. Lister had suggested at the Annual Conference that the real influence lay at branch level:

When you are a big national organisation your strength and power do not rest upon the activity of some people you are pleased to call 'Headquarters' - your power and influence depend upon the strength and determination of the individual branches throughout the country.³⁸

The implied message was that Legion Headquarters could not be successful without the co-operation of every Legion branch - and that this help had not always been forthcoming. Indeed, this was a wider problem of considerable difficulty. Although the General Secretary's Monthly Circulars kept the branches informed of developments, it was often difficult for branches to maintain contact with Headquarters, let alone mount a local campaign against Government policies. At the 1925 Conference, Major J.B.B. Cohen advised the branches that:

Members of Parliament as individuals paid comparatively little attention to communications they received from organisations, but if deputations from

³⁷ BLJ April 1923, p.240.

³⁸ AC 1923, T.F. Lister, Chairman's Address

Branches to local Members were organised, it was possible to make the life of their own Member extremely unpleasant ... Worry your own Member of Parliament in your own constituency...If you worry them hard enough, you will get the things that you want done.³⁹

This advice implied that most of the national effort made by the Legion did not have a great deal of impact. However, a Legion branch might well be able to harass the local MP, but when the issue was national, with national consequences, the MP would be unlikely to change his voting patterns in the House of Commons. The logical extension of deputations and polite local pressure was to mobilise ex-service opinion both nationally and locally against M.P.s who had voted against their signatures.

By June 1926, the Legion had attempted most constitutional methods to change Governmental policy on training for the disabled, compulsory employment of the disabled, the seven years time limit and final awards, widows and orphans pensions, and a National Work scheme. None of the pressure of questionnaires, National Petitions, Private Member's Bills or publicity had brought much in the way of tangible results on these questions. A delegate explained at the 1926 Conference:

It was known that candidates for Parliament exploited the ex-service man on every possible occasion. The men were a long suffering community, but the limit of their endurance had been reached. They must show candidates that they could not play fast and loose with the Legion. Men who obeyed the 'party' call in the House were a disgrace to the cause they professed to represent and traitors of the very deepest degree.⁴⁰

Clearly, this subject evoked strong passions within the Legion. Ex-service men who conceived their loyalty to the Legion and to one another could not understand the realities of British politics. At the 1926 Annual Conference, two Resolutions, numbers 33 and 34, demonstrated anger and frustration at Legion defeats in Parliament, while Resolution 125 proposed changes to the political stance of the Legion. Resolution 33 'viewed with disgust and misgiving the continual breaking of promises given by Members of Parliament' and demanded that Members of

³⁹ AC 1925, Motion of Efficiency.

⁴⁰ AC 1926, Res. No. 33.

Parliament should fulfill their pledges.⁴¹ Similarly, Resolution 34 protested against the House of Commons Branch of the Legion which had 'with few exceptions voted against the revision of government measures affecting ex-service men'.⁴² Even the Legion branch of MPs could not 'stand together' and make common cause on the floor of the House of Commons. The House of Commons Branch contained over 150 members of Parliament, but was never able, or indeed designed to marshal MPs in opposition to the Party whips and the amendment which demanded the expulsion of the branch was not carried. Major Cohen, one of the MPs with Legion interests, who voted against his party on certain ex-service issues, tried to explain the realities of Parliament to the Legion Conference on this resolution:

The House of Commons was the centre of all political life and it was difficult, when the Whips were on, to get Members to vote as they wanted to. He personally was not elected to Parliament by the British Legion. Members were elected by their separate divisions and pledged themselves to support a certain Party. He always considered that his primary duty was to those who elected him. They were not members of the British Legion...Could they be asked to support the British Legion, which was only one section of the public - an important section if they liked - and turn down the Government, and so be false to what they stood for at the General Election?⁴³

Cohen defended Parliamentary Government by arguing that the Legion was only one pressure group, one interest out of many. However, at the 1926 Conference, the Legion came very close to adopting a more aggressive political stance which might have allowed it to exert more effective pressure on M.P.s. In the discussion over Resolution 33 the Swansea delegate argued that 'if Members failed to support their promises, the Legion should vote solidly against them at the elections'.⁴⁴ Resolution Number 125, proposed by Southbourne suggested exactly that:

This Conference resolves that in view of the reply given to the deputation of the Council by the existing Minister of Pensions with regard to the Seven Year's Time Limit, and having regard to the existing unsatisfactory

⁴¹ AC 1926, Res. No. 33.

⁴² AC 1926, Res. No. 34.

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ , Res. No. 33.

working of the Pensions Administration, we amend the Constitution and Rules of the Legion so that definite steps may be taken to use the whole force of the Legion in a constitutional manner to oppose every Parliamentary Candidate who has voted against the Pensions policy of the Legion.⁴⁵

In effect, this resolution would have meant the organisation of the Legion to ensure that its members 'voted solidly against ... Members who failed to support their promises'.⁴⁶ It would have allowed the Legion to become a political bloc which was prepared to mobilise support against any candidate who failed to support Legion policies. Instead of the Legion being able to mobilise only local or national support for their policies, this resolution would have allowed the 'whole force' of the Legion being used at election time. This was the final sanction which the Legion could apply to induce MPs to honour their pledges. However, the resolution was not framed or voted on by people who understood political realities or who knew how to mobilize opinion at election time. The resolution sounded impressive but it is unlikely that the Legion could have exerted a powerful pressure against Parliamentary candidates when so many Legion members held differing political viewpoints. However, the Southbourne resolution of itself did not change the Legion's political stance. The only way to amend the Constitution and Rules was to have an amendment passed with a two thirds majority at a following Annual Conference, which then had to be accepted by the Privy Council. The difficulties inherent in this procedure made it highly unlikely that the Legion would ever actually adopt this militant stance. It is revealing that the Legion leadership saw little danger in Resolution 125. When *The Times* wrote a scathing attack on this resolution, on 4 August 1926, T.F. Lister replied in a letter that 'the resolution will have no effect upon the fundamental non-party character of the Legion'.⁴⁷ The Legion, he continued, would not affiliate to any political party or use its funds for party political purposes. The intention of the resolution to use the whole force of the Legion at elections would be ignored and 'if

⁴⁵ AC 1926, Res. No. 125.

⁴⁶ AC 1926, Res. No. 33.

⁴⁷ *The Times*, 6 August 1926, Letter by T. F. Lister.

anyone is foolish enough to suggest anything of the kind as a serious proposition to the next, or any Annual Conference, the verdict will be sufficiently emphatic to discourage any repetition of the attempt'.⁴⁸ Soon after, Lister wrote to General Sir Ian Hamilton that Resolution 125 had caused in high places:

some perturbation on the subject of our non-party attitude ... This resolution was of academic interest ... I pointed out the unwisdom of the resolution at the time, but it was really in the nature of a demonstration against the Government for not doing certain things, and was not intended, and will not be treated as a serious suggestion to amend the Royal Charter. I think all the people who were very upset at the time are now reassured, and of course, if they had known as much as I know of the Legion it would never have caused alarm.⁴⁹

The leadership of the Legion did not take seriously one of the most important resolutions of the Legion Conference and did not implement the wishes of the membership.. Lister saw the Resolution solely as a protest and was not prepared to treat it as a demand to change the Royal Charter. There were good reasons for this attitude. Many Legion branches subsequently complained about the resolution (even though most of them had not been present at the Conference to vote upon it) and there would have been serious repercussions for the Legion had the spirit of the resolution been adopted by the leadership. It was not simply a matter of a conservative leadership holding a radical membership in check because the Government, and particularly the Minister of Pensions, began an immediate counter-attack.

The Minister of Pensions, Major G.C. Tryon, realised that the Privy Council would not agree to such a major change of the Legion constitution, but he believed there was evidence that the Legion had already taken 'concerted action in the sense of the resolution' by attacking MPs in their constituencies, with 'leading members of the Legion making speeches against Government policy on pensions'.⁵⁰ In reality, the Legion was simply following its interest in pensions policy with no greater political

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Lister to Hamilton, n.d., IH29/2.

⁵⁰ Memorandum by Minister of Pensions, Major Tryon, n.d. PIN15/3630.

motive involved, and this shows a great misunderstanding between the Legion and the Ministry. Tryon argued that the Royal Patronage of the Legion was used:

in the press as arguments to induce or compel the Government to depart from a definite decision of policy. If that decision is maintained, as I presume it will be, and if the intentions of the Legion are carried out as can hardly be doubted, the Prince of Wales will be placed in the position of supporting as Patron an agitation directed against His Majesty's Government and their supporters and the Crown itself can hardly fail to be gravely embarrassed.⁵¹

Most of Tryon's argument rested on supposition rather than fact. Although two newspapers, *The Times* and Lansbury's *Labour Weekly*, had used the Prince's name in connection with the Legion's policy, the Legion itself had never used the name of the Prince of Wales in their campaign against the time limits. However, Tryon was concerned enough to organise a cabinet committee to discuss the implications of the constitutional question, but more importantly the 'steps to be taken to deal with the political campaign which has been launched by the British Legion against the Government in the Constituencies'.⁵² Tryon's real concern was not over the technical and somewhat hypothetical constitutional issue. Rather, it was that the Legion's campaign of 'worrying M.P.s in their own constituencies'⁵³ might actually be effective. Tryon, an ex-service man himself, knew how to handle politically naive soldiers and he used the constitutional issue as a lever to limit the effectiveness of the Legion campaign. The Cabinet Committee wrote to Earl Haig, urging him 'in the interests of the British Legion, to invite those responsible to exercise restraint'.⁵⁴ Lionel Halsey, the Prince of Wales' Secretary, who had been involved in the discussions, wrote to Tryon that Haig's reply made it clear that:

there can be and will be no change in the constitution of the British Legion...and he is convinced that the strength of the organisation is heartily opposed to political action which can never take place.⁵⁵

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ AC 1925, Motion of Urgency.

⁵⁴ Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet, 9 June 1926, PIN15/3630.

⁵⁵ Admiral Halsey to Major Tryon, 12 August 1926, PIN15/3630.

Tryon had thus made sure that the leaders of the Legion would exercise restraint in their campaign. Haig would never have countenanced a change in the political stance of the Legion and Tryon had ensured that the Legion would not be able to concentrate effective political force by drawing their attention away from the real issues in their campaign over pensions. Unsurprisingly, the Cabinet Committee decided that 'on no account' should a fresh Parliamentary Committee be set up to examine Pensions administration.⁵⁶

Not for a moment did it occur to Tryon, or anyone else in Government, that Legion protest and campaigns in the constituencies might be the legitimate action of a democratic pressure group, perfectly entitled to press M.P.s to support Legion policies. Tryon's suspicion that the Legion attacks were politically motivated merely increased his determination to neutralise the Legion. Tryon was solely concerned with protecting Government policy against attack and ensuring that it remained as it stood. As Charles Kimball has pointed out, British inter-war politics displayed the resilience of the Victorian and Edwardian polity, and this example demonstrates these attitudes in action.⁵⁷ It was very difficult in such circumstances for the Legion to make its policy 'grip'.

After the somewhat dramatic events of 1926, and the failure of the Legion to adopt a more aggressive political stance, there was much debate on how to proceed with the abolition of the seven years time limit. The Legion leadership turned its attention away from the problem of pensions administration while maintaining an interest in the situation. At a deputation to the Ministry of Pensions to discuss the effects of gas poisoning on 27 June 1928, Colonel Crosfield, the Legion Chairman, remarked that:

he hoped the omission from the subjects to be discussed of the questions of Time Limits and Final Awards would not be regarded as an implication that the British Legion were satisfied about either of these matters. They had not been dropped, and the British Legion intended to ask that another

⁵⁶ Conclusions of Cabinet Meeting, 9 June 1926, PIN15/3630.

⁵⁷ Kimball, *The Ex-Service Movement in England and Wales*, p.230.

deputation might be received at a later date, when further information in regard to these questions was available.⁵⁸

By this time the Legion had run out of steam on these issues and Crosfield's protestations would not fool Tryon. Almost every form of pressure had been exerted and there was little more the Legion could do to press the Government to change its position. At the 1927 Annual Conference Lister talked of the Government's 'definite decision' on time limits and final awards:

I cannot help regretting that ... but if you are a practical people, you will not do very much good simply by hammering at a door which is locked against you for the time being, but you will find other means of entering the citadel which seems to be closed.⁵⁹

After 1925, the Legion tried to try to find a new way of unlocking the door to the Ministry of Pensions. Part of that response came from the Branches, who wished the Legion to fight Parliamentary candidates at election time, or who wished the Legion to mount national demonstrations to gain public support for Legion policies. One Branch even suggested that 'Demonstrations should be held in Hyde Park, with Earl Haig denouncing the Prime Minister because of the Pensions scandal'.⁶⁰ Many outspoken delegates at the Annual Conferences accused the N.E.C. of a lack of determination on the matter. The Allentown Delegate at the 1927 Conference, when Resolution 125 of 1926 was removed, said:

He listened to members of the N.E.C. when they told the Legion how to deal with various Governments, and if their reports were read they appeared to be rods of iron, but in reality they were nothing but the proverbial painted laths.⁶¹

Without the sanction of political action, the Legion had to fall back onto the same methods of influence; discussions in committee, deputations and delegations - methods which had been tried and failed. This was all part of a misunderstanding between the leadership and the membership of the Legion. Although the leaders

⁵⁸ British Legion Deputation to the Minister of Pensions, 27 June 1928, PIN15/2465.

⁵⁹ AC 1927, T.F. Lister, Chairman's Address.

⁶⁰ AC 1925, Res. No. 45.

⁶¹ AC 1927, Res. No. 84.

would engage in activities to influence Parliament and its Ministers, they would not go much further. The image of Earl Haig in Hyde Park denouncing the Prime Minister is a fine one; suffice to say it would never have become reality. Not only would Earl Haig have refused to take part, but any major public demonstration by the Legion would have been fiercely attacked by the government. Instead of these rather dramatic gestures, the Legion leadership preferred to marshal their forces again, using similar pressure to make the Government relent. But instead of the earlier approach that the seven years time limit should be abolished on the grounds of principle and right, the Legion under the Chairmanship of Colonel Crosfield attempted to make use of the number of cases of hardship caused by the Time Limits.

In 1928, Crosfield at the Annual Conference stated that 'we are going to have a thorough comb-out to find out the extent of the sufferings under the seven years time limit and the final awards'.⁶² At the 1929 Annual Conference, he repeated the need for hard cases;

Once again may I ask Branches - you may be getting rather tired of this; still I have got to do it - to let us have examples of hard cases. We have a certain number and we have some very good examples at Headquarters, but we should like to have more. We are satisfied they do exist in greater numbers up and down the country than we have at Headquarters, and we do want branches to let us have them.⁶³

One problem by 1929 was that, although the Legion maintained a policy of the abolition of the time limit, the injustice of its operation had been limited. Crosfield was able to boast at the 1928 Conference that:

Because of that work and the pressure brought to bear by the Legion - and the Legion only - the seven years time limit has been considerably modified...As a result of our action, 5,400 widows now get pensions who otherwise would have been debarred...With regard to Final Awards, here again, owing to the pressure of the Legion, the Ministry of Pensions have looked into the whole question again.⁶⁴

⁶² AC 1928, Colonel Crosfield, Chairman's Address.

⁶³ AC 1929, Colonel Crosfield, Chairman's Address.

⁶⁴ AC 1928, Colonel Crosfield, Chairman's Address.

Legion work in pension committees, rather than the more glamorous and public approach, had made some difference to the administration of pensions. Minor alterations in procedure did not require fresh legislation but closed the largest loopholes which had caused the greatest injustices. After 1924, the seven years time limit for widows pensions was ignored and after 1927 disability cases were being examined after the time limit which made the Legion search for hard cases more difficult. Legion pressure had forced the Ministry to remove some of the discontent, making it more difficult for the Legion to mount an effective campaign which would gain full public support. However, these minor changes had not made any difference to the basic equity of the situation - all cases outside of the seven years limit were considered outside of the Great War Pensions warrant. Cases produced after the time limit were granted pensions only at the discretion of the Minister and there was no statutory procedure or chance of appeal. A Southbourne Delegate at the 1929 Conference remarked that 'right did not depend on cases, although cases could be put forward...The fact that certain men had got justice should not be used as a weapon against others who had not'.⁶⁵ The Legion membership was determined to continue to press for the complete abolition of the time limit, so that all ex-service men might have consideration under the Great War Pensions warrant. It was unfortunate that minor Legion successes in altering the operation of the Pensions Ministry had diminished the chances of the total removal of the seven years time limit.

However, the Legion scented an opportunity for change when the second minority Labour administration gained office in 1929. The Labour Minister of Pensions, F.O. Roberts, had introduced a Private Members Bill for the abolition of the seven years time limit in 1923, and had briefly held office at the Ministry of Pensions in 1924. Further, he had made election pledges during the 1929 campaign that 'The limit of seven years which has meant so much injustice to ex-service men

⁶⁵ AC 1929, Res. No. 137.

will be removed so that cases may still be considered'.⁶⁶ The Legion assumed that this was an undertaking to abolish the time limit and accordingly lost little time in pressing Roberts to fulfill the election pledge. A large deputation was sent to meet with Roberts on 27 June 1929. The Legion report on the deputation in the August issue of the Journal was optimistic:

Experience has taught that it is impossible to count on anything as a result of a deputation, for very often a favourable reception has led to nothing more tangible; nevertheless, one came away from the Ministry with a feeling that there had been throughout the whole discussion a most favourable atmosphere; that the Minister was not unmindful of the opinions he had expressed in the past (when a private Member) on the subjects raised and that one might look for an early introduction of some of those reforms for which the Legion had been working during the past few years.⁶⁷

In fact, this deputation, just like most of the others, achieved very little directly. The Minister took a very long time to reply to the deputation, and when he did, the answer was unfavourable. His reply to a question in the House of Commons, in December 1929, suggested that there would be a new procedure for all cases. No case would be rejected *solely* due to the time limit, but there was to be no independent appeal after the seven years limit because the award of a special sanction pension still lay at the sole discretion of the Minister and his advisers.⁶⁸ This reply produced consternation amongst Legion members. In the Special Circular sent out concerning the Minister's decision, the Legion leadership came to this conclusion:

The Legion is still faced with the fact that Section 5 of the 1921 War Pensions Act, imposing as it does a time limit of seven years from date of discharge, within which first claims for pension can be submitted has not been abolished....in the scheme announced by the Government, the Ministry will have the last word on questions of entitlement and assessment, and the claimants will have no statutory right of appeal to an independent body.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Notes of Legion Arguments sent to Minister of Pensions, 28 June 1929, PIN15/482.

⁶⁷ BLJ August 1929, p.35.

⁶⁸ Legion Arguments, 28 June 1929, PIN15/482.

⁶⁹ GSCLB, SC Great War Pensions, December 1929.

Given the fact that the Independent Appeals Tribunal had reversed thousands of Ministry decisions, and that the Ministry had acted harshly in numerous cases, it was not surprising that the Legion was disappointed. This sense of disappointment, combined with the fact that Roberts and the Labour Government had promised the 'removal of the time limit so that all cases can be considered', maintained Legion resolve to press the case. The N.E.C. instructed Branches to:

arrange for a Deputation to their local Member of Parliament in order to discuss the matter. The Member should be asked definitely whether he or she will support in the House of Commons a demand for the deletion of Section 5 from the 1921 War Pensions Act.⁷⁰

This was simply the employment of methods which had been used before but, unlike the earlier questionnaires, this was the first attempt to co-ordinate a national campaign through consistent local pressure on M.P.s at constituency level. Unlike the previous Conservative administration, the Labour Government did not have a large majority in the House of Commons which could be used to shrug off any serious Legion complaints. If the Legion could mount a well-organised campaign in the constituencies, it could threaten the hold of the Government on power and this was a scenario which was bound to frighten a minority administration. Roberts had decided to issue a leaflet from Party Headquarters to all its M.P.s warning them of the Legion's proposed action but he was advised by C.F. Adair Hore, his principal Assistant Secretary, that:

This action on the part of the Legion is a definite intervention in political matters, although their Charter expressly excludes political action on their part...It is intolerable that direct political action should be taken by a body which is under Royal Patronage.⁷¹

Thus, the Legion's organisation at branch level which put pressure on individual M.P.s was seen as a breach of constitutional practice. The Prince of Wales, the Legion's Royal Patron could not be associated with an organisation making a direct

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ Minute Sheet, Statement as to the C... Position and Proposed Action, 21 Decen... 1949, PIN15/3631.

attack on the policy of His Majesty's Government. Adair Hore pointed out that the issue had occurred previously over the Legion's Resolution No. 125 in 1926. The Government, through its Civil Servants, used the precedent of a different incident to silence the Legion. Adair Hore went on:

What has happened at the present time is clear. Lord Jellicoe has been ill for some time, and no doubt has been unable to attend to Legion business. Colonel Crosfield, the General Secretary, has chosen the moment to embark on this political campaign without the knowledge of his chief.⁷²

This reveals a large gap in understanding between the Ministry officials and the Legion. Not only did Adair Hore mistake the role of Colonel Crosfield as General Secretary, rather than Chairman, but he was ignorant of the purely figurehead position of Jellicoe. It was ludicrous to paint Crosfield as a political radical who had been held in check by Jellicoe. Crosfield was acting on the wishes, and after full discussion, with the National Executive Council. This campaign was not the brainchild of any one man, but a reflection of genuine feeling across the country, as the Legion picked it up at Area, County and Branch level. Finally, Adair Hore was adamant:

In my judgement, this canvassing of Members with a view to obtaining pledges which can be used against them subsequently by a body which enjoys Royal Patronage should be stopped without delay.⁷³

For the Labour Government, any such canvass could have serious implications for its position in Parliament; for the Ministry of Pensions, a successful Legion campaign could upset the post-war pensions warrant which had been in place for a number of years. For Whitehall and the Government, this seemingly political action by a body with Royal Patronage was simply quite unacceptable. It was this last point which gave the Ministry, and the Government a real lever on the Legion's actions.

Thus, when Jellicoe and Crosfield were called on to see the Minister for a 'frank conversation' which 'seemed the best method of dealing with the matter',⁷⁴

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ *ibid.*

Roberts was actually accusing the Legion leaders of unconstitutional action, and threatening them with the removal of the Legion's Royal Patronage. Both Jellicoe and Crosfield denied that there had been any breach of Constitutional practice, and further, argued that without some action on the seven years time limit or some other concession, the Legion might break up. Jellicoe argued:

There was, in fact, the strongest possible protest against the attitude of the Government, and unless the Legion could announce that strong action was being taken their extremists would break away and join the Labour League of Ex-service men. If this should happen the Government might experience considerably more trouble than they were experiencing now.⁷⁵

The Labour League of Ex-service men was a communist party attempt to form a radical ex-service movement, but its challenge was limited, and its impact local and short-lived.⁷⁶ It was very revealing that the Legion leaders should use this kind of threat as a reason for Government action. Firstly, it demonstrates that Legion leaders actually believed that there were political extremists present in the Legion which they felt they had to control. In fact, Legion branches were simply venting their justifiable grievances over pensions and it is highly unlikely that any political extremists would have joined the Legion in the first place. In effect, the Legion threat was an admission of weakness because the Legion leaders themselves would 'experience considerably more trouble than they were experiencing now' before the Government ever did. Further, if the Government could withstand Legion pressure, it was not likely to bow before a radical group like the Labour League of Ex-service men which had no direct establishment links. Instead of threatening Roberts with a strong and effective Legion campaign, the Legion leaders were pleading with him to act on their behalf. Roberts, on the other hand, had no qualms about threatening the Legion. He said 'that at the moment he could not see how the matter would ultimately be divorced from Party politics'.⁷⁷ He pressed the constitutional point and although he:

⁷⁴ Draft of the Meeting between the Minister of Pensions and Lord Jellicoe and Colonel Crosfield, 22 January 1930, PIN15/3631.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁷⁶ Graham Wootton, *The Politics of Influence*, p.116-117

⁷⁷ Meeting between the Minister of Pensions and Lord Jellicoe and Colonel Crosfield, 22 January 1930, PIN15/3631.

made it clear that he did not, and could not, object to the criticism by the British Legion of the policy which the Government had decided to pursue, but as a Minister of the Crown he could not overlook the potentiality that the present campaign might develop into action which would affect the conditions of their Royal Patronage.⁷⁸

His seemingly conciliatory language did not disguise the barb contained within; if the Legion continued with a fully blown attack on the seven years time limit, Roberts and the Labour Government would remove the Legion's Royal Patronage. This was the true weak spot of the Legion leadership. Although Jellicoe and Crosfield made a spirited defence of their campaign and the reasons which made it necessary, when Patronage was mentioned they both:

reiterated the desire of the British Legion to take no action which could be possibly interpreted as an embarrassment to their Patron. Colonel Crosfield ... suggested that the situation could be eased and the circular "called off" if the Minister would make certain concessions.⁷⁹

This meeting, more than any other, reveals the Legion leaders as political innocents who were completely out of their depth when faced by a competent and manipulative politician. Crosfield made no attempt to call Robert's bluff or make a counter-threat to force a concession from the Minister. Instead, Crosfield and Jellicoe capitulated in the face of Robert's threats. For the establishment leaders of the Legion, the loss of Royal Patronage was unthinkable. The loss of prestige and the embarrassment which such an action would cause would have been a serious blow to the Legion, but one from which it would eventually have recovered. What the Legion leaders failed to appreciate was that the removal of the Legion's Royal Patronage would have produced a great deal of unwanted controversy for the Labour Government as well. Robert's threat was probably an empty one, but the Legion leaders took it seriously. Faced with a determined (or desperate Government) the Legion leaders lacked the conviction or the political sophistication to press their point.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*
⁷⁹ *ibid.*

When the campaign did go ahead in 1929-30, it was not pressed with sufficient vigour for any significant results. The canvassing of M.P.s was disappointing with 77 favourable, 66 unfavourable and 43 non-committal replies.⁸⁰ The Members with favourable replies were invited to a meeting of the House of Commons Branch of the Legion. This meeting set up a committee which decided to ask for an extension of the time limit to 17 years, rather than ask for an abolition of the time limit. This was not, and never had been, part of Legion policy. When writing a report of the meeting Roberts mentioned that he 'formed the impression that when the deputation saw me that they were themselves not too sanguine of success'.⁸¹ In 1931, Major Cohen introduced a Bill to remove the time limit which was not afforded a second reading. In 1932, Mr Smedley Crooke's attempt to introduce a similar Bill was ruled as out of order.

Once the Government had established this weak spot in the Legion's armour, it had no hesitation in using the constitutional position of the Prince of Wales as a powerful lever with the Legion. Although the Legion leadership was aware of the problem they failed to inform the membership and, not surprisingly, this caused a great deal of misunderstanding within the movement. As far as the Legion leadership was concerned after 1929, the issue of the seven years time limit was always going to be more trouble than it was worth because any sustained campaign by the Legion would bring a sharp rebuke from the Government. However, the periodic re-appearance of rank-and-file grievance over the issue was a reflection of the lack of real communication between different levels in the Legion organisation.

Although by 1930 claims for pensions were a fraction of the flood just after the war, and the time limit was never the sole reason for the rejection of a claim, it appeared to ordinary Legion members that very little had changed. Men who applied after the time limit still had their cases examined by the Ministry which either

⁸⁰ BLJ June 1930, p 241

⁸¹ F.O. Roberts, Minister for Pensions to P. Snowden, Chancellor of the Exchequer, 19 June 1930, PIN15/482.

accepted or rejected the claim without any explanation or chance of appeal. Unsurprisingly, for ordinary Legion members and Local War Pensions Committee the effect appeared to be the same - injustice and closed administration which could not be influenced by ordinary evidence or experience.

This was very frustrating for Legion members working on Local War Pension Committees or Branch Pension Committees, and the situation caused a breach between the leadership and membership in 1933-34. Before the 1933 Annual Conference, Admiral Sir Henry Bruce, the Chairman of the Metropolitan Area, wrote to General Sir Ian Hamilton explaining that 'most of this bother could have been avoided. But nothing could have prevented a strong disunion on Pension matters at the forthcoming national Conference so many are wound up'.⁸² He felt the problem had begun at a dinner given by the Metropolitan Area for the Minister of Pensions on 12 December 1932 when:

General Sir Frederick Maurice made an unfortunate speech that must have given the Minister an entirely erroneous conception as to the feelings of the branches on pensions work. He must have led him to think that all was very well and that nowadays there was little doing re Pensions work, in fact more routine work than heretofore and further that the Legion had more to do in turning its attention to benevolent work. So much did this stagger one of my Council that he unwittingly began to whistle.⁸³

Maurice had not reflected the concerns of the branches to the Minister of Pensions because he was being conciliatory to the previous speech at the dinner which had been given by Tryon himself. Tryon had suggested that the British Pensions system was sounder and the pensioner more secure than in any other Country. He remarked in his speech that:

I believe that the war pensioner is in a safer position and that the pension system is sounder here than in any other country ... At the present time there is hardly a country outside Great Britain in which there is not a demand for the reduction of war pensions ... In this country there is no suggestion of a reduction of war pensions, and this fact, in face of the

⁸² Bruce to Hamilton, 1 June 1933, IH29/18.

⁸³ *As told to* Sir Henry Bruce, *The Ministry of Pensions Controversy*, n.d., found in IH29/18.

severe financial crisis which we have suffered, is the best evidence that the pension system is sound.⁸⁴

Tryon's speech gave all the credit for the stability and fairness of the system to the Ministry of Pensions and to himself. It was true that most other countries had had to reduce their pension rates; Franklin Roosevelt had just reduced veterans' pensions in the United States, and most European countries had reduced their more generous rates. But this did not prove that the British pensions system was equitable and simply demonstrated that Britain had been more parsimonious in the past. Tryon also pushed the role of the Legion to the sidelines; he suggested the major reasons for the stability of the British pensions system was the scheme itself, the agreement of all political parties, and the fact that the Legion had never 'pressed demands without forethought of their consequences'.⁸⁵ However, the complacent position of the Minister, backed up by the Legion President, did not match the mood of the Legion branches, nor that of the Editor of the Legion Journal. In January 1933, Tryon's speech was published in the Legion Journal, but in February, the Editorial warned that next month the 'story of the Legion's long-drawn struggle with the Ministry of Pensions' would be told: 'The roseate survey of War Pensions by Major Tryon, the Minister, reflects no credit on the Ministry itself. It is at best a record of rights wrung, only after the bitterest struggles, from an unwilling hand'.⁸⁶

Tryon had been trying to reflect credit on himself and his Ministry, but this conflicted with the Legion creed that concessions and improvements in pensions procedure had only been achieved through Legion efforts. The Editor, C.E. Carroll, was strident in tone but his statements were essentially similar to many articles written by the Legion's pensions expert A.G. Webb, in the earlier days of 1922-25. Carroll wanted to build up the Legion Journal by popularising its subject matter; one of his methods was a moral attack and crusade against the Ministry of Pensions. This was a large and easy target since many ex-service men did not feel that the Ministry

⁸⁴ BLJ 1933, p.243.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ BLJ February 1933, p.56.

had done its best for them. In the April 1933 issue of the Journal, Carroll mounted a serious attack on the Ministry of Pensions. The title of the article was 'The Ministry of Pensions - Has it fulfilled its trust?' The answer was an unequivocal "No":

We know of war-shattered wrecks driven to desperation by the red-tape of the Ministry of Pensions. We know of long, disheartening fights waged by men in whose cause we believe. We know of the pain, the destitution, the sordid sickening horror of these things. And, with that knowledge, we have no hesitation in affirming, and we believe that the whole ex-service community of this country is of one mind with us in this, that the Ministry of Pensions had failed signally to fulfill its trust.⁸⁷

These were indeed strong words which struck a chord with many ordinary ex-service men, as shown by the large numbers of letters supporting the articles and editor in subsequent months. However, a general attack on the Pensions Ministry and the basis of the British Pensions settlement was bound to provoke a reaction from Tryon, who had always been concerned to maintain a good image. He summoned the Legion leaders to the Ministry on 25 April - and called them to account. General Sir Frederick Maurice explained to General Sir Ian Hamilton:

I was ... informed that if these attacks were continued in the same form and in the same manner the question of the Constitutional position of the Prince of Wales would be raised, and if that was done the Prince would be compelled to sever his connection with the Legion. I rang up Headquarters and found that an article on the same lines as that in the April number was in print for the May number and I thereupon ordered it to be cancelled and reported what I had done to the National Chairman.⁸⁸

Once again, Tryon had utilised the question of Royal Patronage to silence troublesome attacks on his Ministry. He also forced the Legion leaders to recant the opinions contained in the articles at the Women's Section Annual Conference on the 17 to 18 May 1933. Tryon foreshadowed this in Parliament on 3 May when he made a short speech claiming that the article was untrue and that 'the Legion leaders know

⁸⁷ BLJ April 1933, p.338.

⁸⁸ Maurice to Hamilton 2 June 1933, IH29/18.

it is untrue'.⁸⁹ No further articles of this nature were allowed to be published, and the Legion editor was placed under closer scrutiny by the Legion's Journal Committee.

This episode demonstrates the true nature of the relationship between the Legion, the Pensions Ministry and the Government. In 1925-26, the Government was genuinely concerned that the Legion might engage in party politics and political manoeuvring. In 1929, the Ministry of Pensions was concerned that a Legion canvassing campaign might be effective enough to force a reversal of Government policy, which might have had serious repercussions on the position of the minority Labour Government. In 1933, the Minister of Pensions was angered by a bout of adverse publicity in the Legion Journal. The reasons for Government threats over the Royal Patronage of the Legion became less important on each occasion, yet just as effective in dealing with the Legion leadership. By 1933, it was clear that the Legion had been effectively neutralised by Government pressure, to the extent that the Legion was not even able to criticise Government policy.

Part of the explanation for this neutralisation lies in the changing leadership of the Legion during these years. The prestige and experience of the early leadership of Earl Haig and T.F. Lister may well have made the Government more disposed to listen to the Legion. It was also due to the novelty of the situation: the government was unused to dealing with mass pressure groups formed of voters. By 1933, the Legion and the Ministry of Pensions were very well acquainted with each other, and while the Legion could not make much headway with its policies, the Ministry had learnt how to control the Legion. Just as importantly, leaders like General Sir Frederick Maurice and Major Fetherston-Godley held very different opinions to those expressed by the early leaders of the Legion.

Initially the Legion and its leaders did have a determination to make its policies 'grip'. Although they eventually found no means of achieving their goals,

⁸⁹ Haig, *ibid.*, 3 May 1933.

they did maintain their resolve even after many disappointments. This early attitude was characterised by Thomas Lister at the 1924 Annual Conference:

He understood there was a growing apprehension among members of Parliament about questionnaires and that a movement to form a Trade Union of Members of Parliament to abolish altogether these questionnaires would receive the hearty support of the House of Commons. They were not going to subscribe to that particular Trade Union but they were going to subscribe to a Trade Union to see to it that M.P.s kept their written promises.⁹⁰

This was a naive attitude, but it involved a determination to affect the political process. By 1933, the attitude of Legion leaders was entirely different. Maurice made an astonishing speech at the Bedfordshire County Rally at Ampthill Park in September 1934. Although Tryon had forced a climb-down on the part of the Legion in 1933, there was still a great deal of rank-and-file grievance over Legion pensions policy. Maurice addressed himself to the problem:

I want to tell you this: that behind those attacks...are the same people who desire to turn the Legion into a body of agitators to put pressure on the Government for our particular and special advantage as ex-Service men ... You have had your County Colour presented to you to-day, and you have heard again that which you well knew before, that it stands for loyalty to our King and our Country and to the communities in which we live. We intend to stick to that, and if anybody asks our policy this is our answer: We are not going to become at any body's instigation a body of agitators to set out to rob the public treasury for our own advantage.⁹¹

This was the gut reaction of a soldier who did not wish to be involved with politics. Yet the whole point behind the Legion's Rule 1 (D) was that the Legion *should* put pressure on the government to cater for the needs and problems of ex-service men. Legion leaders had constantly stressed the special claims of ex-service men for Government assistance and maintenance and the entire *raison d'être* for a political pressure group is to exert influence on the political process for the group's benefit. Maurice did not understand the importance of politics and by falling back on the

⁹⁰ AC 1924, T.F. Lister, Chairman's Speech.

⁹¹ BLJ September 1934, p.97.

concepts of loyalty and duty he turned the whole of the Legion's policy and principles on its head.

The consequences of Maurice's attitude are clearly demonstrated in the Legion's campaign over prematurely aged ex-service men which began in 1936 and culminated in 1938. This campaign arose because thousands of men had slipped through the inadequate pensions net. The Legion had long recognised the problem of ex-service men who, although they could not prove that their disability or infirmity was caused by or attributable to war service, were prematurely aged and unfit for work. Their position was made worse because these men could not receive unemployment assistance as they could not declare themselves fit for work. The only other recourse was to the Public Assistance Committee - the last vestige of the poor law. The Prince of Wales Pension Fund had been set up to grant pensions of 10s a week to ex-service men and women in this predicament. By 1936, it was clear that further action would be necessary to deal with the problem. The issue was first raised by the Chairman, Major Fetherston-Godley, in a Journal article in May 1936. Other countries, such as France, Canada, New Zealand and Australia did have pensions specifically for men in this situation which led Fetherston-Godley to remark: 'A great country like our own, which is admittedly beginning to solve its economic difficulties, should not have to learn from her colonies and dominions how to treat men disabled in fighting her battles'.⁹² Three solutions appeared possible to Fetherston-Godley: the introduction of a separate State Pension scheme for such cases, an amendment of the Contributory Pensions Act enabling prematurely aged ex-service men to receive a pension of 10s a week before the age of 65, or a Government grant to the Prince of Wales Pension Fund. At the 1936 Annual Conference, five resolutions covering these alternatives were withdrawn when Fetherston-Godley suggested that a Legion special committee should be set up to inquire into the matter.

⁹² BLJ May 1936, p.446.

The special committee laboured over the issue and it was not until late 1937 that its findings were published. The committee was convinced that there were a number of men prematurely aged due to their war service, although it was not possible to give clear medical evidence that the infirmity was caused by the war service. However, the Committee estimated that there were at least 95,000 ex-service men in need who were unable to work through ill-health or incapacity. Ultimately, the real problem was that such men had to apply to the Public Assistance Committees:

There is undoubtedly a very strong feeling among the ex-service community...that men who served their country in its hour of need should not in their own hour of need have to seek help from Public Assistance Committees.⁹³

Legion arguments which were used to support this campaign were essentially different to those of earlier endeavours. While Legion agitation over the time limits and final awards had been based on principle - that all ex-service men should have the benefit of the same rights when applying for pension regardless of when the claim was submitted - the campaign over prematurely aged ex-service men was grounded on much older conceptions of ex-service men and their role. This attitude was revealed by Maurice when he spoke at a Legion rally in August 1938. His view articulated the attitudes at the root of the Legion claims on war worn ex-service men:

What I believe to be our aim is that we shall see to it that the man who has done good service ... and who is broken in health and incapable of earning a livelihood, shall not have to go to the Public Assistance Committee for relief.⁹⁴

Maurice continued with the example of the Prince of Wales Pension Fund: 'We have not experienced any difficulty in deciding what is good war service, nor what degree of incapacity, nor what degree of need entitles a man to a Prince of Wales Pension'.⁹⁵ Maurice's arguments did not rest on principle, or on statistical fact, but on the much

⁹³ Report of Special Committee established to examine the problem of prematurely aged ex-service men, GSCLB, June 1938,

⁹⁴ BLJ August 1938, p.42.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

older idea of the campaign pension, which was occasionally granted to small numbers of veterans in need who had a good service record. This was an entirely different approach from that of the Dominions or France, who granted pensions to prematurely aged ex-service men on the basis of *right* because all ex-service men in this predicament deserved such treatment. The Legion's was a less compelling argument, and less likely to succeed. When a Legion deputation saw the Premier, Neville Chamberlain, it was arguments such as these which were used to advance the Legion's case. Not surprisingly, the Prime Minister, under the advice of the Government Actuary, did not accede to the demand for a government inquiry. Chamberlain was assured that no concrete evidence could be found to support Legion claim's that there was a large proportion of ex-service men suffering from the effects of their war service. This effectively ended the progress of this Legion policy which was soon submerged in the events leading up to the Second World War. Differences in the personality and experience of the Legion leadership made a large impact on the nature and success of Legion policy. In common with its relief work, Legion attitudes moved away from assisting all ex-service men as a matter of right to assisting some ex-service men on the basis of good service and worth.

The Legion's involvement in the consultation process of the Ministry of Pensions ironed out many of the minor flaws in Pension legislation and contributed to the smooth working of the British pension system. However, on any major policy, such as the seven years time limit which would have required new or altered legislation for success, the Legion made little headway. As we have seen, this was due to many factors and not simply the 'self-imposed strictures' of the Legion leadership. Previous studies have assumed that the Legion was always exerting pressure on the Government when often that position was exactly the reverse. When misunderstandings developed over Legion motivations, the Government was quick to threaten powerful sanctions which neutralised Legion pressure. Although the British Government learnt how to cope with the ex-service movement, it never learned to

trust fully the soldiers who had fought for it. Indeed, British politicians displayed great intolerance for legitimate Legion pressure. In 1938 the Minister of Pensions complained to the Prime Minister that he would have to reply quickly to a Legion letter: 'This is, of course, grossly unreasonable, but the Legion are in many ways an unreasonable body and it may perhaps be a good thing to forestall criticism on their part, however unjust it may be'.⁹⁶ Time and again, politicians showed a contempt for the democratic process and no regard for the legitimate claims of the Legion. In this situation, it is unsurprising that most Legion aims for the reform of British pensions policy were unfulfilled.

At the same time, the Legion leaders never understood the British political process. Legion leaders invariably blamed their lack of success on low Legion membership. At Swansea in 1922, Haig exhorted that 'We must not be content until we can count our actual financial membership not by hundreds of thousands but by millions if we are to successfully accomplish the great task in front of us'.⁹⁷ Haig's vision was of a huge ex-service movement which by its size would be able to wield considerable power and demand large concessions from Government. But faced with politicians who consistently refused Legion demands for an equitable pensions system, tactical sophistication and cunning were more important than sheer numbers. As soldiers more used to obeying orders from politicians than extracting concessions from them, Legion leaders were particularly unsuited to controlling a political pressure group. Time after time, Legion leaders displayed a complete ignorance of political reality and were unable to press home their demands because they did not learn the proper tactics to deal with politicians. Legion leaders cannot be criticised for failing to mount 'a wider challenge to the legitimacy of the government in power'⁹⁸ but they can be criticised for political naiveté and an inability to negotiate effectively with government on issues which were important to thousands of ex-

⁹⁶ Mr Ramsbotham, Minister of Pensions, to Mr Chamberlain, Prime Minister, 3 June 1938, PREM1/285,

⁹⁷ Haig, Speech at Swansea, 3 July 1922, Acc.3155 No.725 ~

⁹⁸ Kimball, *The Ex-Service Movement in England and*

service men. Their political naiveté had great repercussions and it meant that many ex-service men did not receive justice for their service and sacrifice in the Great War. Their naiveté also had serious implications for Legion contacts with foreign ex-service men which will be discussed in the next chapter.

'A MIGHTY INFLUENCE FOR PEACE':
THE LEGION'S FOREIGN POLICY

The decision of the National Executive Council on 20 September 1941 that 'the activities of F.I.D.A.C. having been suspended on the outbreak of the War, from the point of view of the British Legion, F.I.D.A.C. no longer exists'¹ formed a sad epilogue to one of the most unusual yet important elements in Legion policy during the inter-war years. The Legion's membership of the 'Federation Inter-Alliee Des Anciens Combattants' (F.I.D.A.C.) had been one of the earliest expressions of the Legion's desire to support all 'direct efforts for peace' by developing contacts with fellow ex-service men 'throughout the Empire and our Allied countries'.² The development of this policy led to Legion contact with ex-service men from different nations, both former Allies and former enemies. The main motivation for these meetings was the belief that ex-service men had a special role to play in bringing understanding and good will between nations. Although Legion leaders were determined that there should be no repetition of the Great War, and were convinced that ex-service men could act as a mighty influence for peace, the events of 1939 proved that although their beliefs were sincere, ex-service men were not able to prevent war between nations.

By 1941, most of Britain's former Allies had been conquered by Germany, and the Legion's policy on peace lay in ruins. After the Second World War, the Legion did not attempt to renew similar contact with ex-service men of other nations and instead developed pilgrimages to war cemeteries around the world.³ Contact with foreign ex-service men was maintained, but in a different sphere. The inter-war period is unique in the history of the British ex-service movement, for it was only

¹ NEC Minutes, 20 September 1941.

² See Appendix E.

³ OHBL, p.293.

time the Legion attempted to influence relations between Britain and other countries. Despite the huge amount of publicity which these efforts attracted during the inter-war years, the policy has left little trace in historical research.

This study of the Legion's foreign relations will not provide a narrative history of events because the Legion's contacts were too numerous and diverse to allow an exhaustive coverage.⁴ There is a thematic division of the subject because Legion interests in foreign policy changed significantly in 1935. From 1921 until 1935 the Legion's main activities were based around contact with Allied ex-service men through membership of F.I.D.A.C., while from 1935 until 1939 the Legion, although still a member of F.I.D.A.C., adopted a unilateral policy to develop relations with ex-enemy ex-service men. This study analyses the more important events of the Legion's foreign policy in an attempt to penetrate the surface of the Legion's beliefs and rhetoric and thus glimpse the real motivations and attitudes of the small number of Legion leaders who developed and executed the Legion's foreign policy. The personal and private views of Colonel George Crosfield, Colonel John Brown, Major Francis Fetherston-Godley, General Sir Frederick Maurice and General Sir Ian Hamilton became translated into the public policy of the British Legion. This was the only area of Legion policy where a handful of men were given the scope and free rein to decide on all policy matters and thus the influence of these men was exaggerated both within the Legion and with foreign ex-service leaders.

Before we begin to analyse the Legion's foreign relations, we must examine the commonly held beliefs which motivated the policy. With the benefit of hindsight, the Legion's contact with foreign ex-service men seems a mistaken policy which did not have a realistic chance of success. However, an attempt must be made to understand the mentality of the Legion leaders, and the British public as a whole after the Great War. That conflict had brought millions of ordinary men face to face with the realities of modern war, while almost every family had experienced the loss of a

⁴ A brief chronology of most Legion endeavours is provided in Appendix J.

husband, brother, uncle or cousin. The true horrors of war, and the mind-numbing shock of endless casualty lists brought an immense reaction against violence and conflict during the inter-war years. The Great War had been called the 'War to end all Wars' and most people in Britain desperately wanted to believe that war could somehow be outlawed. The idea that ex-service men were specially marked out to play an important role in maintaining peace surfaced soon after the Armistice. A good example of this attitude can be found in C.E. Montague's book, 'Disenchantment'. He argued that after the terrible experience of 1914 to 1918 war must never be allowed to happen again:

There is only one thing for it: There must still be five or six million ex-soldiers. They are the most determined peace party that ever existed in Britain. Let them clap the only darbies they have - the Covenant of the League of Nations - on to the wrists of all future poets, romancers, and sages. The future is said to be only the past entered by another door. We must beware in good time of those boys and fiery elderly men, piping in Thessaly.⁵

He saw ex-service men as the most determined peace party in the nation because they had experienced war first hand. This was a faint echo of the belief that civilians had no idea what the Front had been like; only those who had seen combat knew the truth. In these arguments the ex-service man was still seen as set apart from the rest of the population with a special mission to assist the cause of peace. Instead of laying the blame for the Great War on the diplomats, politicians and Governments, the public war fever which had developed so suddenly in 1914 was considered to be the true cause of war. The argument ran that if ex-service men could educate public opinion, and particularly the next generation, in the horrors of war, then the danger of war fever might be avoided in the future. This belief was ably expressed in 1929 by Sir Ian Hamilton in a letter to Erich Maria Remarque. Hamilton felt that the British Legion:

⁵ C.E. Montague, *Disenchantment*, 122, p.228.

must strive for some high ideal, the highest being peace: for this, ex-service men could do with far better grace than professed pacifists: especially they could work wonders for the cause of peace by holding out the hand of friendship to ex-enemy associations of soldiers. For all the people of the world would then say to one another: 'Surely, if these soldiers who threw bombs at one another can shake hands, we, who never struck or were stricken in our own persons can also afford to be friends'.⁶

Efforts towards peace were seen as the most admirable and highest ideal within the Legion credo. Although fighting for pension rights and benevolent work were considered important, Legion leaders constantly desired to lift Legion activity beyond the mundane considerations of food vouchers and clothing allowances. Their work for peace provided a satisfactory higher goal.

However, a desire for peace did not alter ex-service men's distaste for pacifists and conscientious objectors. As Hamilton explained, ex-service men were 'once-bitten-twice-shy men',⁷ who, although strongly in favour of peace, were not diametrically opposed to war. The Legion programme of 1921 supported 'all direct efforts for peace...while taking care that the Defence of the Empire is adequately provided for'.⁸ Enthusiasm for peace did not preclude support for Empire defence. And although the Legion cultivated a dislike for future conflict, this did not diminish its pride in the exploits of the British Army during the Great War. Unlike other peace groups in Britain and many French veterans' associations, the Legion still maintained great enthusiasm for the military trappings of standards, parades, medals and other martial paraphernalia. Conscientious objectors were not allowed to join the Legion even if they had served during the war and decided subsequently to renounce violence. In 1932, at the newly formed branch of Stotfold in Bedfordshire, the Rev. W. Smith was informed (after the matter had been taken up with the Legion's legal advisors) that although he had served on the Western Front, since he had become a conscientious objector he was no longer eligible for Legion membership.⁹ Legion

⁶ General Sir Ian Hamilton to Erich Maria Remarque, Penguin Book of First World War Prose, p.609.

⁷ *Radio Times*, 3 June 1927, Article by General Sir Ian Hamilton, IH29/7.

⁸ See Appendix E.

⁹ *The Times*, British Legion and an Ex-Service Pacifist, 10 September 1932.

opinion on this matter was no doubt based on the resentment felt by soldiers during the war towards objectors who had 'shirked' their duty to fight but the continuance of these feelings into peace time contrasted with Legion belief in peace and goodwill. The contradictions inherent in the Legion's stance did not worry Legion leaders, indeed they argued that the Legion's position was of great benefit to the organisations which they supported, in particular the League of Nations. In 1926, Thomas Lister, while Chairman of the Legion, argued in a broadcast entitled 'The League and the Legion' that:

Nothing but harm is done to the cause of the League by associating it with what are known as pacifists. The members of the Legion cannot be so styled. Peace is a noble objective, but it must be founded on honour and justice.¹⁰

Lister's point was that League members must, in the last resort, be willing to fight to prevent an aggressive war of conquest. Since pacifists would not sanction a war of any sort they could not be relied upon to defend the League of Nations or its principles. Lister's equation of Legion members as supporters of a just and honourable peace was at the basis of Legion support for the League of Nations. Although the Legion was affiliated to the League of Nations Union, many other supporters of that organisation saw the Legion as anathema. A good example of the friction between the Legion and members of the League of Nations Union was described by one correspondent to the Legion Journal in 1933. An ex-sapper recounted his experience at the Legion Parade to the Cenotaph on Whit-Sunday:

I was accosted by a sour-faced person with a League of Nations Union badge, who said: 'Aren't you ashamed of yourself, a man of your years, swanking up militarism with those medals and trying to corrupt these innocent boys and girls to murder one another when they grow up?'.¹¹

Just as the Legion saw pacifists as incompatible with the true objects of the League of Nations, many other supporters of the League of Nations saw the Legion as a

¹⁰ BLJ December 1926, p.144.

¹¹ BLJ February 1924, p.238.

militaristic organisation totally unsuited to promote the cause of peace. Thus, the Legion's foreign policy was essentially unilateral, stressing the role of ex-service men rather than providing a collective strategy incorporating all supporters of peace.

During the twenties, the Legion set much store by the international organisation of ex-service men through its affiliation to F.I.D.A.C. This organisation of Allied ex-service men was founded in 1920 by Charles Bertrand, the President of the French veterans Union Nationale des Combatants (U.N.C.), which the Legion joined in 1921. At the 1922 Legion Annual Conference Bertrand made a powerful impression describing the necessity for F.I.D.A.C.:

he came to confirm the common brotherhood sealed by their blood on the field of battle. Amongst comrades they must be loyal and when Governments disagreed it was for ex-service men to love one another all the better. Their French comrades would never forget the magnificent effort made by their British comrades in saving France. They could never forget the hours of suffering and glory that they had lived together. They could never forget the 700,000 English comrades who slept in French soil together with French comrades, and if they, the living, should break asunder the dead would rise up and curse them.¹²

Bertrand invoked a multitude of powerful images, symbols and emotions in his attempt to link the ex-service men of Britain and France. The most important belief was that all who had fought in the Great War had shared in 'The Brotherhood of the Trenches'. This concept connected with the Legion mentality on a number of different levels. It was one facet of the comradeship and fellowship said to be at the root of the Legion itself, and the F.I.D.A.C. version was used to invoke unity across the barriers of politics and language. In Bertrand's speech, the brotherhood of British and French ex-service men was a spiritual link which had to be maintained no matter what disagreements occurred between Governments. Bertrand was a practised speaker and his compelling rhetoric lay at the heart of F.I.D.A.C. This Federation of Allied ex-service men was conceived to cement and develop the bonds created on the battlefield in an attempt to maintain friendship and understanding between Allied

¹² AC 1922, Speech by Charles Bertrand.

countries. This, of course, had much political significance, which was not lost on Bertrand, a member of the French House of Deputies. The member nations of F.I.D.A.C., namely France, Belgium, Britain, the United States, Rumania, Yugoslavia, Italy, Portugal and Czechoslovakia were to maintain contact while membership of F.I.D.A.C. was 'closed for all time to any association in the countries which bore arms against the allied nations'.¹³ Thus F.I.D.A.C. ran on a parallel course with French foreign policy in the early 1920s, which excluded Germany and attempted to construct a new 'cordon sanitaire' with the Little Entente. The Legion viewed F.I.D.A.C. as a useful way of comparing notes on practical matters such as pensions, disablement and industry, while also forming 'a very strong factor towards ensuring peace in the world'.¹⁴ F.I.D.A.C.'s main contribution to peace, according to the British Legion, was through its efforts to:

Keep alive your old-time comradeship and by presenting a solid phalanx of ex-service men who are no dreamers but stern realists render futile the aspirations of war schemers wherever they exist.¹⁵

This message was directed principally to former enemies like Germany, who were believed to harbour the desire for a war of revenge. The image of solidarity was utilised mainly as a defence of the Entente, but it was recognised that F.I.D.A.C. should also do more to further peace.

Legion leaders felt that their organisation had a particularly important role to play within F.I.D.A.C. because the Legion was the only ex-service organisation in both the British Empire Service League, which linked all ex-service organisations in the Empire, and F.I.D.A.C. As Colonel Heath explained at the 1926 Summer School the Legion:

forms...the keystone of an arch which, rising out of and above the devastation and destruction of war, is built up of the ex-service organisations of the Empire on the one side, and of the Allies on the other, and supports above it the great highway of peace, leading on to that more

¹³ G.R. Crosfield, *F.I.D.A.C.*, British Legion Summer School, 1926.

¹⁴ BLAR, 1922, p.25.

¹⁵ Crosfield, *F.I.D.A.C.*, Summer School, 1926.

glorious future for which men died, to the betterment of the world and the prosperity and happiness of mankind.¹⁶

Such hyperbole illustrates the type of rhetoric constantly deployed by the Legion on behalf of its foreign policy. The image of the Legion, as the most important ex-service organisation in the world, working for peace so that those who died in the Great War would not have died in vain was a stirring idea. Although F.I.D.A.C. had been conceived as an organisation to develop Allied contacts while resolutely shutting out ex-enemy organisations, Legion leaders realised that for any lasting peace in Europe, the former enemies had to be accepted back into the fold of civilised nations. Earl Haig, although not given to many pronouncements on this subject, did argue the point at the 1925 Annual Conference:

Now, here is a question in which the Legion can exercise an enormous power for doing good, if we set to work to convince our Allies that the only way to secure the peace of the World is by agreement, by co-operation and by mutual goodwill. And what a proud boast it will be for the British Legion to say that it took a leading part in putting an end for all time to war between civilised nations!¹⁷

It was believed that British ex-service men found it easier to let bygones be bygones, mainly because British territory had not been occupied during the war. While British civilians had enjoyed relative security, the same was not true for many other Allied nations; large areas of France and Belgium had been occupied and devastated, and their veterans found it much more difficult to extend the hand of friendship to German ex-service men. Thus the Legion saw its role as a peace maker, for not only could British ex-service men more readily forgive and forget, but they could persuade their Allied comrades to adopt this approach.

The Annual Congress of F.I.D.A.C. was seen as the best opportunity to influence Allied ex-service men in favour of the Legion's views. In November 1926, the editorial of the Legion Journal declared that:

¹⁶ E.C. Heath, *The Position of the Legion*, Summer School, 1926.

¹⁷ AC 1926, Earl Haig Presidential Address.

there can be little doubt that the annual meeting of such men representing powerful ex-service organisations in the various Allied countries, and the very friendly feeling which is engendered between them, is in itself a valuable asset to the cause of peace.¹⁸

Ten delegates from the member nations of France, Belgium, Britain, United States, Romania, Yugoslavia, Poland, Portugal, Czechoslovakia and Italy met together to decide on resolutions, ranging from high-minded motions concerning peace, to more practical matters such as pensions and disablement. The Congresses were lavish affairs. On their arrival at the 1923 Brussels Congress, the delegates were received by a Military Guard of Honour and during the visit the 'attention, courtesy and hospitality... was immense'.¹⁹ There were dinners, receptions and special tours of Antwerp, Spa and Ypres, the cost being defrayed from a fund of 60,000 francs collected by the newspaper, 'Le Soir'.²⁰ In the sumptuous atmosphere of F.I.D.A.C. Congresses, it was easy to foster friendly relations between the delegates. However, F.I.D.A.C. representatives considered their Conferences bonded all Allied ex-service men, not just the 80 or so delegates present. Marcel Heraud of the French U.N.C. expressed this at the 1927 Annual Conference of the Legion when he said that:

it is not only my friendship that I bring you, but rather that of six million comrades all united in F.I.D.A.C. It means the friendship of the Americans, the Belgians, the French, the Italians, the Poles, the Roumanians, the Czecho-slovaks and of the Jugo-slavs, all of whom will never forget their comradeship in arms with you, and who have authorised me to greet you in their name.²¹

This vision glossed over many imperfections in Allied relations both during and after the war, and ignored the shortcomings within F.I.D.A.C. itself. During the war, British military leaders like Haig had barely concealed their disdain and contempt of their French and Italian counterparts, and most ordinary soldiers had fought as part of a huge national army with very little knowledge or contact with other Allied soldiers.

¹⁸ BLJ November 1926, p.12.

¹⁹ *Report of the 4th Annual Conference of the Inter-Allied Federation of Ex-Service Men*, 12 September 1923, p.1., found in GSCLB, 1923.

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ AC 1927, Speech by Marcel Heraud, President of U.N.C.

In practice, Allied comradeship was more a theoretical than a practical link, and although F.I.D.A.C. leaders claimed to represent millions of ex-service men they could really only speak for themselves. The personal relations between eighty F.I.D.A.C. delegates were generally cordial but this could not ensure good relations between Allied ex-service men or their respective countries.

This was clearly demonstrated by the heated discussions at the 1923 F.I.D.A.C. Congress held in Brussels. Despite the lavish preparations, the Conference began in a very tense atmosphere due to the recent French occupation of the Ruhr and the determination of the French and Belgian delegates that the question of German reparations should be discussed. Colonel Crosfield explained in the Legion Journal that the National Executive Council had decided:

that the place of the Legion in this momentous matter was on the side of the British Government, our attitude being to maintain the Entente and get out of Germany all that she is able to pay without ruining her, and to have the amount settled by the earliest possible moment so as to restore international trade.²²

Legion leaders were, like the British Government, anxious that Germany should pay reparations, but not stripped of all her assets by the French occupation. The large amount of unemployment in Britain was largely blamed on the dislocation of trade which the Ruhr crisis had only exacerbated. This view conflicted sharply with that of the Belgian and French delegates who fully supported the actions of their Governments in occupying the Ruhr and attempting to gain the full amount of reparations from Germany. The discussions at the Congress were accompanied 'by a feeling, intense and very real, of, if not actual antagonism, at least a very acute suspicion and mistrust'²³ and at one point it appeared that no general agreement would be reached. Legion delegates dilated 'on the awful problem of our unemployed ex-service men and the vital necessity of restoring International trade so

²² BLJ October 1923, p.111.

²³ *ibid.*

far as these men were concerned',²⁴ while the French argued that without the full sum of reparations, their public finances would be ruined. Eventually, a compromise resolution was passed, which seemed to accommodate both points of view, but did not resolve the underlying differences of opinion. Point One stated that the Ruhr dispute should not 'under any circumstances, diminish the deep friendship which should unite these three countries' and Point three 'protested with indignation against any systematic campaign designed to divide Belgium, France and England'.²⁵

However, the Congress had demonstrated very clearly that ex-service men were just as susceptible to propaganda and conflicts of national interests as any other section of society. The much vaunted spirit of Allied comradeship only worked in times of harmony and evaporated quickly when national interests were threatened. In common with the League of Nations, F.I.D.A.C., was dominated by the interests of Britain and France. The discussions of the Peace Committee had revolved entirely around the question of reparations leaving little or no time for discussion on matters which concerned the Eastern European delegates. F.I.D.A.C. attempted to represent Allied comradeship but the interests of Britain, France and Belgium dominated its debates.

For all the lavish programmes at F.I.D.A.C. Conferences, and the great publicity given to them, the ordinary membership of the Legion were little affected by the deliberations of F.I.D.A.C. The British Legion delegates were chosen by the National Executive Council, who invariably picked from their own number and a few prominent Legionaries. Although Legion members were informed of the progress of F.I.D.A.C. through reports in the Legion Journal, there were very few resolutions concerning F.I.D.A.C. or foreign relations at the Legion's Annual Conferences, mainly due to a lack of information and interest in a subject which had no direct bearing on branch activities. The Branches and Area Councils were rarely, if ever,

²⁴ Report of 4th FIDAC Conference. 17 September 1923, p.2.

²⁵ *ibid.*

consulted about decisions concerning F.I.D.A.C. and foreign policy. Colonel Crosfield explained the reasons for this at the 1925 Annual Conference:

The Executive was only too anxious to keep in the closest touch with the Area Councils on these matters but the difficulty was often one of time...The difficulty was that decisions had to be taken on inter-allied matters and there was often no time to refer questions back to the Area Councils.²⁶

Decisions often did have to be taken quickly on foreign matters, but the Executive did not seek a general endorsement of its policy at Conference, and contented itself each year with platitudes concerning the importance of peace. This situation left the Legion's foreign policy in the hands of only a few men, of whom the most important was Colonel Crosfield, who had interested himself in F.I.D.A.C. from its inception. In 1925 he became the F.I.D.A.C. President for a year, and afterwards his position as the Legion's 'foreign secretary' was unshakeable.²⁷ He travelled all over Europe meeting with Heads of State, ex-service leaders and was bestowed with honours and attention particularly in Eastern Europe. His attitudes and opinions formed the basis of the Legion's foreign policy throughout the 1920s.

The essentially personal nature of the Legion's foreign policy was confirmed by the development of contacts with ex-service men from former enemy countries. Major Brunel Cohen first mooted the idea of making contact with ex-enemy ex-service men after the 1922 F.I.D.A.C. Conference in New Orleans, but it was another Legion leader who first gave it widespread publicity.²⁸ General Sir Ian Hamilton travelled across Britain early in 1923, giving lectures to British Legion members on the theme 'The Friends of England'. Hamilton believed that British adherence to French policy and the Entente was destructive, as it involved Britain's compliance in events such as the Ruhr occupation. Instead, he argued that Britain should 'come right away from the worn-out patched-up old Entente and by organising in its place a

²⁶ AC 1925, Res. No. 45.

²⁷ OHBL, p.173.

²⁸ *ibid.* p.72.

real, instead of a sham, League of Nations of Europe'.²⁹ Such views obviously influenced him in his belief that British and American ex-service men could:

if only we realised our power - we two English speaking Legions - we could give the League of Nations a lead and impose immediate reconciliation on the human race. All we had to do was to hold out a hand to the 2 1/2 million ex-enemy war veterans.³⁰

These were themes which Hamilton returned to constantly. Like most Legion leaders, he overestimated the influence and importance of ex-service organisations. The American Legion was involved in F.I.D.A.C., and had not abandoned those links with Europe, but this did not mean that the United States Government was going to follow its lead and join the League of Nations. Further, the idea of 'holding out the hand of camaraderie to the millions of ex-enemy war veterans' was admirable but barbed with difficulties given French and Belgian attitudes towards Germany. Hamilton's views were given great publicity at the time, and provoked much discussion, but his position in the Legion only qualified him to speak as an individual. Although he was President of the Metropolitan Area, he was not a member of the National Executive Council and held no national post other than Vice-President, which was a purely honorary title. Thus he could not speak for the Legion as a whole, and indeed could not depend on the support of the Metropolitan Area where anger over his statements culminated in a demand for his resignation. The National Chairman was right to ignore these demands as there was nothing to prevent Hamilton from making his individual views known.³¹ The problem was, as the Leyton delegate argued at the 1925 Annual Conference, that:

statements from such a source would be accepted as the opinion of the Legion. His Branch considered that before statements of that character were made, the whole of the Legion should have the opportunity of

²⁹ General Sir Ian Hamilton, *The Friends of England: Lectures to Members of the British Legion*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1923, p.75.

³⁰ *Legionary*, February 1923, p.161.

³¹ *Legionary*, November 1932, p.153.

studying the question. In other words, there should be no hole and corner method of settling the policy of the Legion.³²

His point was that a disclaimer should have been sent to the press, disassociating the Legion from Hamilton's views, and that the whole question should be debated by the Legion in Conference. Such views did not preclude contact with German ex-service men, but simply insisted that the issue must be explored and decided upon by the entire Legion. Colonel Crosfield, on behalf of the National Executive Council, replied that:

the Council...had not thought it wise to remain in the dark as to what was going on in ex-service men's organisations in ex-enemy countries...They would, however, pursue their enquiries with a view to the possibility, if the results were satisfactory, of co-operating with ex-enemy organisations in the cause of peace.³³

This followed the line which had been adopted by the Council since Cohen's speech in 1922, but Crosfield simply assumed that this was an acceptable policy without ever testing it by a Conference vote. Crosfield's preoccupations, not Hamilton's, became the basis of Legion policy but without the benefit of any real discussion among the Legion as a whole.

Many difficulties were encountered by Crosfield in pursuing the goal of contact with German and Austrian ex-service men which revealed the huge gap between Legion rhetoric and reality. Many attempts were made by Legion representatives to change the 'I' in F.I.D.A.C. from 'Interalliee' to 'International' and to promote meetings between ex-service men on an international basis, but progress towards this goal was made only once the international situation had altered.³⁴ After the Locarno honeymoon and the Geneva protocol, relations between France and Germany improved sufficiently for ex-service men to begin contact. Thus at the 1926 F.I.D.A.C. Conference a resolution, moved by the British Legion, was passed urging

³² AC 1925, Res. No. 45.

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ OHBL, p.118.

that an international Conference should be held between members of F.I.D.A.C. and ex-enemy organisations which were sincerely working for peace.

Even then, negotiations did not progress smoothly because the situation had been complicated by the formation of the Conference Internationale des Associations Mutilés et Anciens Combattants (C.I.A.M.A.C.), an international organisation of ex-service men from many countries, including the former Allies and enemies. F.I.D.A.C. was not impressed by this organisation, as invitations to C.I.A.M.A.C.'s founding meeting had been sent to all ex-service organisations within each country, and this included many left-wing organisations which offended the mainly right-wing members of F.I.D.A.C. Thus the majority of F.I.D.A.C. members refused to take part in the international conference organized by C.I.A.M.A.C. on 30 November 1926 at Geneva for dialogue between the former enemies.³⁵

The German and Austrian organisations when invited to a F.I.D.A.C. Conference not unnaturally declined, as they had only just returned from the Geneva Conference. Finally, after further negotiation with C.I.A.M.A.C., it was in July 1927 that the F.I.D.A.C. Conference between ex-enemies was held in Luxembourg. There was a great deal of excitement and publicity in the Legion Journal about the event and one editorial on the Conference was particularly gushing. It portrayed a utopian vision of the ex-service meeting:

And how we should, many of us, like to meet with our opposite number in the various battles and other incidents of the war - to talk over the effects of a bombardment, the incidents of a raid, the results of a patrol. By means such as this might we arrive at peace. For it is not the politicians who will bring peace on earth, nor the scientists, nor the professors! It is the simple soldiers -those who went through the muck and slime and the mud: beastliness of battle: who endured the shelling and the sniping, the toll and burden of the War. The hope of the world lies in the getting together of the men who fought, and there also, is the road to peace. And this is what has been attempted at Luxembourg.³⁶

³⁵ *ibid.*, p.120.

³⁶ BLJ August 1927, p.20.

It is difficult to understand how ex-service leaders could hold such views considering the difficulties before the Luxembourg Conference. It is yet more difficult to comprehend in the light of the meeting itself.

For the Luxembourg Conference of 27 July 1927 was not simply a social gathering of ex-service men from many countries, it was a formal meeting where veterans attempted to frame and pass resolutions much in the manner of the League of Nations. The purpose of the meeting was to discover 'the best means of collaboration in the interests of world peace',³⁷ and in this sense, it was a political meeting where much wider issues than 'the results of a patrol' could be discussed. To this end, 15 delegates were permitted from each country attending, with one vote per nation. All decisions had to be adopted unanimously. The first disappointment faced by the Conference was the lack of German representation. Only four German organisations, including the Reichsbanner, the Young German Order and two Prisoner of War Associations accepted the invitation along with Austrian ex-service groups.³⁸ Thus, the meeting was not representative of German ex-service organisations as the Stahlhelm and Officer's Association, which were among the most powerful ex-service groups in Germany, had refused to attend. Once the Conference was under way, the F.I.D.A.C. delegates framed a preliminary resolution stating that all ex-service associations were loyal to their own countries, were free from party politics, desired to work for the promotion of peace and goodwill, and 'affirmed their respect of existing treaties and their intention of executing all international agreements concluded since the war'.³⁹ This initial resolution had been passed when an Alsatian delegate, who read and spoke both French and German, pointed out that the German translation had altered the sense of the resolution by omitting the words 'respect for existing treaties'.⁴⁰ Crosfield reported to Earl Haig that:

³⁷ G.R. Crosfield to S.S. for Foreign Affairs, 3 December 1926, FO371/11858.

³⁸ BLJ July 1927, p.17.

³⁹ Crosfield to S.S., 3 December 1926, FO371/11858.

⁴⁰ ... August 1927, p.35.

it was quite clear that they wanted to wriggle out of the Versailles Treaty, and although we pointed out that nobody had any objection to that being modified by constitutional methods they wriggled for six hours.⁴¹

This initial resolution took up all of the time allotted for the Conference. After six hours of argument and discussion, the German delegates were browbeaten into accepting the original resolution but the Conference had signally failed in its purpose because there had been no constructive discussion on how ex-service men could promote peace and goodwill. Brigadier Spears, a Legion representative at the meeting concluded that 'the Conference was a success after all...It was extraordinarily satisfactory to succeed when failure had appeared inevitable'⁴² but this could hardly have been further from the truth. Ex-service men were not immune to matters of national interest, and instead of veterans from all countries being able to discuss the war in a friendly manner, the Conference demonstrated the depth of mistrust, suspicion and grievance which was still felt between the ex-service men who had fought each other.

A further International Conference, held in 1928, did little to further relations between F.I.D.A.C. members and the ex-enemy nations. Although seven German organisations were represented, they were all minor associations, and neither the Reichsbanner nor the Stahlhelm sent delegates. After this disappointing meeting there were no more formal contacts between F.I.D.A.C. and ex-enemy organisations; F.I.D.A.C. felt the next Conference should be organised by the Germans and Austrians, and not surprisingly they declined to do so.

Legion and F.I.D.A.C. rhetoric had promised a utopian vision for international ex-service contacts but the reality had shown that ex-service men did not have a special role to play in the promotion of peace. They were as vulnerable to propaganda and prejudice as any other body of civilians, and could not offer any realistic alternatives to the work of diplomats and Governments. Nevertheless,

⁴¹ Crosfield to Haig, 13 July 1927, Acc.3155/227b.

⁴² BLJ August 1927, p.35.

Legion leaders continued to utilise the same type of rhetoric even after the disappointments of the 1927 and 1928 Conferences. Policy statements produced by the Legion still claimed that ex-service co-operation could promote peace. In the May 1935 policy statement, published just before greater contact with German and Austrian ex-service men was made, it was stated that:

The British Legion has never lost hope that steps may be taken towards bringing all ex-Service men of the world together in some permanent organisation. It is the sincere hope of the Legion that it may be possible for all ex-Service men, whatever side they fought on during the Great War, to meet together on the same basis with the sole object of promoting a better understanding and increasing peace and stability in the world.⁴³

This was very similar to the type of rhetoric used by the Legion in the 1920s, but from 1935 onwards the actions expressed in its name were different to those of the 1920s. Legion contact with ex-service men from former enemy countries became spectacular but suffered from the same problems and limitations as previous attempts. And although the basis of Legion rhetoric remained unchanged, Legion attitudes underwent important alterations in the early thirties which assisted its leaders in their independent approach to German ex-service men in 1935. During the twenties Legion leaders had been convinced of the need to maintain Allied ex-service fellowship in order to support the Entente and Anglo-French relations. In the early thirties the lavish F.I.D.A.C. Conferences came to be seen as expensive luxuries by the Legion which was economising in the face of Britain's trade depression. Further, it had become clear that the F.I.D.A.C. Conferences accomplished little other than volumes of resolutions and hot air. A Foreign Office official at the 1932 Lisbon Conference of F.I.D.A.C. commented that 'The Congress...aroused little interest' but that:

the presence of the British delegates was useful in preventing ill-advised resolutions from reaching maturity. The absence of a British delegation would... have been undesirable.⁴⁴

⁴³ BL Policy Statement 1935.

⁴⁴ Frederick Adair. to Sir John Simon, 22 September 1932, FO371/16502.

Clearly, Legion leaders had discussed with the Foreign Office their intention to part company with F.I.D.A.C., which had become a possibility by 1932. British delegates to F.I.D.A.C. Congresses had tired of preventing ill-advised resolutions, while nothing of real value was discussed or implemented.

Although the Legion's interest in F.I.D.A.C. was fading, there were few constructive avenues to further its programme for international ex-service co-operation. The Legion was now willing to make an approach to German and Austrian ex-service men independent of F.I.D.A.C., but there were still important obstacles to overcome. This was due to the Legion's aversion to controversy and its unwillingness to become embroiled in German politics. German ex-service groups were violently polarised along political lines which was inimical to the Legion's leaders. Colonel John Brown, the Legion Chairman, explained the problem to the 1932 Conference:

We cannot interfere with the political views of any country in its home affairs...I have been invited on a number of occasions to attend conferences of ex-enemy ex-service men. I should like to go, but I dare not go at the moment. If I went to the Steelhelms Conference, who are of the right, there would be an outcry from the remainder of Germany that Great Britain was supporting the 'Right' political party's views. If I went to the Reichbanner Conference there would be an outcry that the British nation was supporting the 'Left' views in Germany. That would be a fatal position to put the British Legion into.⁴⁵

Brown's solution was to urge German ex-service men to 'get closer together'⁴⁶ or, in other words, shed their political differences and join in one unified non-political organisation like the British Legion. This misunderstood the nature of German politics and ex-service groups. Just as the British Legion supported the State, Crown, Community and Nation by its espousal of values which the Legion considered had been fought for during the Great War, so German ex-service men were ranged around the beliefs and values which they considered the war had been

⁴⁵ AC 1932, Res. No.22,
⁴⁶ *ibid.*

fought over. The Reichsbanner, as a supporter of the Weimar Republic felt it had to fight, often literally, to defend the values of democracy, while the Stahlhelm fought for the restitution of German dignity and power through the comradeship of the Frontkämpfer. Political aims such as these were incompatible with the Legion's approach and so the only contact with German ex-service men during the last years of the Weimar Republic remained 'friendly and personal negotiations' which were completely unofficial. When Hitler came to power in 1933, he quickly began to neutralise any potential source of opposition or dissent which included the myriad ex-service organisations. While the Reichsbanner seems to have dissolved with the Republic, the Stahlhelm took longer to disappear and great pressure was placed on its leaders and members to disband. By 1935, most German ex-service men had either dropped out of the ex-service movement or joined national socialist organisations; a few traditional groups like the Kyffhauserbund were tolerated once National Socialist leaders were in place. All ex-service groups had to be affiliated to the national socialist union of ex-service men, which precluded any dissent or protest. Foreign Office Officials in 1935 understood the situation when Orme Sargent wrote that:

The truth, of course, is - as the representatives of the British Legion will discover for themselves when they visit Germany - that there exists in Germany no non-political non-party organisation of ex-service men corresponding to the British Legion. The bodies with which the British Legion will have to co-operate are purely Nazi organisations with the usual strong political bias.⁴⁷

This appraisal of the German ex-service movement was accurate, but Legion leaders did not recognise that German ex-service men were still politically motivated. Legion leaders made the mistake of assuming that the new regime had purged the German ex-service movement of its political significance. It is not surprising that the Legion leaders made such blunders. Political activity had always been a notorious blind-spot for Legion leaders and it was easier to assume that the Germans had followed their example of developing a unified and non-political movement. More importantly, the

⁴⁷ O.S. Sargent, 17 June 1935, FO371/18882.

political nature of German ex-service men was easily glossed over when Legion leaders realised that Hitler and other Nazi leaders used a similar language and rhetoric.

Hitler's use of the image of the Frontkämpfer was a well established part of his rhetoric. At the same time, the images of martial splendour and military efficiency were integral to the Nazi party with its mass rallies, parades and uniforms. Many of the leaders of the Nazi Party had fought during the Great War; Hitler and Hess had served as infantrymen, while Goering had taken over command of Jasta 11 on Baron Richthofen's death. Hess, the deputy of the Nazi Party, gave an important speech at Königsberg which resulted in a measure of rapprochement between French and German ex-service men in 1934. This speech, which was a typical example of national socialist rhetoric, used many devices in an attempt to connect the Nazi regime with ex-service men and peace. Hess's speech began by painting the Nazi leaders as ordinary men with Frontkämpfer qualities:

Our German nation has the good fortune to be led at the present time...by men who transfer the virtues developed in war to the guidance of the State...who evolve the New Reich from the spirit animating the trenches.⁴⁸

The virtues which Hess claimed for the Nazi leaders were comradeship, plain speaking and a desire for peace, law and order. Such rhetoric also drew the distinction between the New Reich of Nazi Germany, where 'the common destiny' of the German people towered above the individualistic and the corrupt Weimar Republic.⁴⁹ Hess's use of Frontkämpfer rhetoric mirrored Legion leaders' statements on the same subject. He argued that:

the front line fighters are beyond all others best adapted and most competent to build up the links of mutual understanding and rapprochement uniting nation with nation...We front line fighters do not wish that once again an incompetent diplomacy shall cause us to stumble

⁴⁸ Rudolf Hess, *To the Front Line Fighters of the World War*, speech at Königsberg 1934, published by the Fichte Association, Hamburg, IH29/20.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

into an abyss of destruction, in which the front line fighters are once more the sufferers.⁵⁰

This suggested that the ex-service leaders of Germany were not only sincere and genuine in their desire for peace, but were specially suited to guide Germany and the world away from 'incompetent diplomacy' towards understanding and peace. Hess also used the Frontkämpfer motif for a very different purpose. The image was stretched to include fierce patriotism for the New Germany and a warlike determination to defend the Fatherland:

Let them dare to attack us! Let them dare to march into the New Germany! Then the world shall become acquainted with the spirit animating the new Germany! It would fight as scarcely any nation has ever fought for its freedom.⁵¹

Needless to say, the 'enemy' which wished to attack new Germany remained nameless: a mere rhetorical device used to emphasise the virtues of the new Germany. Hess's speech showed that Frontkämpfer rhetoric had strong resonances in Germany, and could be turned to many uses - to legitimise the new leaders of Germany, instill patriotism and exhort obedience, as well as sending a multitude of mixed and confused messages to other nations.

The German cult of the Frontkämpfer and its particular significance to Hitler and his colleagues helps to explain why they endeavoured to develop good relations with British ex-service men. Not only did this give a great deal of good publicity in Germany by demonstrating that the German ex-service man was respected by his former opponents but because the ex-service movement was very important to the German Government, it was assumed that the British Legion was more representative of the British Government than was the case. Equally, it helps to explain why Legion leaders, and in particular Fetherston-Godley became enthusiastic about contacts with German ex-service men. Here were leaders of a former enemy nation, who seemed to

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ *ibid.*

speak the same language and displayed the same opinions and attitudes as themselves.

Major Francis Fetherston-Godley, the Legion Chairman from June 1934, made it clear that he wanted the Legion to develop a higher national profile. He believed that:

It cannot be too widely known that the Legion is not solely a benevolent organisation...Benevolent work, though definitely forming part of the Legion's duty, is a routine obligation rather than an objective, and it is the desire of the movement and its Council that more attention should be directed towards the national aspect of the Legion's activities.⁵²

Fetherston-Godley was not the type of man to be satisfied with the more mundane accolades which the Legion might acquire in the course of its benevolent work. He wanted to give the Legion a much higher profile to increase its 'prestige and dignity' and he believed that a highly publicised approach to German ex-service men was the best way of achieving that aim.

Colonel Heath, the General Secretary of the Legion, wrote to the Foreign Office in June 1935, informing them of a planned visit by German ex-service men to Brighton, and mentioned 'that several attempts had recently been made to get into touch with the British Legion, one of them apparently having taken the form of a message direct from Herr Hitler'.⁵³ The Foreign Office decided that the Brighton visit was unlikely to harbour 'any sinister propaganda purpose', and allowed it to go ahead, but warned Heath about the difficulties of 'indulging in this kind of political activity with Germany'.⁵⁴ By June 1935, such warnings came too late. The German authorities were alive to the possibilities of using ex-service men as a means to improve relations between Germany and Britain, and Hess had already had some success with meetings between German and French ex-service associations.⁵⁵

⁵² BLJ May 1935, p.472.

⁵³ W. Crosswell, 4 June 1935, FO371/18882

⁵⁴ R Wigram, 11 June 1935, FO371/18882.

⁵⁵ OHBL, p.171.

Ribbentrop's invitation to the British Legion for a delegation of ex-service men to visit Germany in July 1935 was quickly accepted by the Legion Chairman and President. At the 1935 Annual Conference in June, Maurice skillfully prepared the delegates for the news by mentioning that he felt the time had come for the Legion to 'go further' in developing friendly relations with ex-service men in Germany, Austria and Bulgaria. He continued that:

Such a step does not commit us to the endorsement of the policy of any particular country, any more than membership of F.I.D.A.C. commits us to the endorsement of French policy... the army has recently resumed the pre-war practice of the exchange of Officers with the German Army. I see no reason why we should not follow with these distinguished examples.⁵⁶

Maurice was able to argue that there was some precedent for contact with German ex-service men while being careful to distance himself from German domestic and foreign policy. Resolution Number 52 was in the spirit of the proposed action, as it suggested inviting a 'fraternal delegate...from ex-enemy countries to the Legion Annual Conference'⁵⁷ and Fetherston-Godley took the opportunity of mentioning the proposed delegation and undertaking to invite a German representative to next year's Conference. The Swansea delegate who had moved the original resolution was quite happy to withdraw the motion and 'leave the matter entirely in your (Fetherston-Godley's) hands'.⁵⁸ The mood of the 1935 Conference was clearly in favour of increased contact with German ex-service men, but there was no actual resolution passed endorsing the visit to Germany. It was characteristic of Legion foreign policy that the whole issue was dependent upon the personal action of the National Chairman.

However, on the last day of the Conference, Fetherston-Godley asked the Patron, the Prince of Wales, to make a statement endorsing this new policy of contact

⁵⁶ AC 1935, Maurice's Presidential Address.

⁵⁷ AC 1935, Res. No. 52.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

with German ex-service men. The Prince agreed, and his short comment on the subject gained the approval of the whole Conference:

There is one point which your President, when I was speaking to him the other day, brought up, and which commended itself to me, and that was that a deputation might go or a visit be paid by representative members of the Legion to Germany at some future time. I feel that there could be no more suitable body or organisation to stretch forth the hand of friendship to the Germans than we ex-service men, who fought them in the Great War and have now forgotten about all that.⁵⁹

This speech was the final endorsement of an unguarded and friendly approach to German ex-service men which General Sir Ian Hamilton had been supporting since 1923. The Prince obviously thought that he was merely backing up what had become the (unofficial) policy of the Legion, and giving it a veneer of higher authority and respectability, because he began the speech by saying that 'after your three days session, I can promise you I am not going to bring up any conundrums or controversial matters' - but ironically, he plunged himself into a very difficult situation.⁶⁰ His endorsement of the Legion delegation created a great deal of interest in Germany as the Prince received telegrams from Marshal Goering and other German leaders congratulating him on his speech. The speech pleased neither the British Government, nor his father who delivered a stinging rebuke that the Royal Family must not make public announcements on foreign policy.⁶¹ Although the Foreign Office claimed that his comments were 'spontaneous and impromptu', it is not surprising that German leaders gained the impression that the British Legion delegation had the full backing of the British Government. Consequently, the Legion delegation gained international publicity which transformed the visit from a fact-finding and exploratory mission into a full scale propaganda stunt.

Although the Legion delegation to Germany received by far the most coverage, a second party visited the other ex-enemy countries of Austria and

⁵⁹ Address by Prince of Wales to the Annual Conference, 11 June 1935, IH29/21.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ OHBL, p.178.

Hungary, as well as Czechoslovakia. These visits were a marked change in the emphasis of Legion policy. For the first time, British ex-service men were going to meet their ex-enemies on a formal basis, independent of F.I.D.A.C.. Fetherston-Godley's statement to the Press before he left for Berlin gave his hopes and intentions for the visit. He believed that:

There is only one thing in common internationally which has borne the test of time and human nature and that is the link of the brotherhood of arms...It is this link that the British Legion intends to use in their attempt to set up some genuine basis of friendship between all nations...The visits of the Legion to ex-enemy countries is intended solely to try to consolidate the unstable sand and form a foundation for international diplomacy. If by such action we can achieve a firm foundation of mutual good will and amity for the future we shall have achieved our object.⁶²

Fetherston-Godley's ambitions for the Legion were clear - in years to come the Legion would be seen as the peacemaker, the organisation which had made normal relations with Britain's former enemies possible and brought stability to Europe. Fetherston-Godley was arguing that the Legion initiative could supplant diplomacy, since Government endeavours were unable to deliver the basic necessity of goodwill. Although the delegation 'emphasised the fact that we in no sense represented the British Nation but were there with a view to establishing friendly contact between ex-Service men of our respective Nations',⁶³ it was not possible to prevent the Germans from drawing the wider conclusion that the Legion delegation did represent the British Government. The national nature of the Legion, the speech of the Prince of Wales and the fact that the Anglo-German naval agreement had just been signed, was bound to give the Germans the impression that the delegation did represent the British Government's desire to improve relations.

The Legion's visit to Germany accumulated a great deal of publicity in every European country. The delegation, consisting of Major Fetherston-Godley, Colonel Crosfield, Colonel Murray, Captain Hawkes R.N., and Mr Clive, arrived in Germany

⁶² BLJ August 1935, p.49.

⁶³ Report of British Legion Delegation on Recent Visit to German L... e Men in Germany, 7 August 1935, FO371/1 82.

on 14 July 1935.⁶⁴ They were met by a number of representatives representing the National Socialist War Victim's Association, the Stahlhelm, and the Kyffhauserbund. The visit, which lasted for a week, was packed with engagements, functions and speeches. In the course of this flying visit, the delegation met Hitler, Hess and Goering, laid wreaths on a number of Memorials to British Prisoners of War who had died in Germany, and met many of the leaders of German ex-service associations. A very full report was given to the Foreign Office after the visit, while a concise version, containing only favourable information, was published for Legion consumption. The delegation claimed that:

One of our greatest difficulties was to avoid political propaganda being given to us disguised under ex-service matters and undoubtedly this was attempted, though we hope, and believe, it was detected by us wherever it occurred.⁶⁵

In fact, the whole visit was so short and packed with events and meetings that it would have been impossible to avoid all such propaganda. A Foreign Office official warned before the visit that Nazi propaganda was 'deliberate and carefully thought out' and 'just as insidious and, in some ways more dangerous than any communist propaganda'.⁶⁶ For although the Legion delegation did detect, and avoid, such blatant coups as placing a wreath on the Party Memorial, the entire visit was important and valuable political propaganda for the German authorities.

The deputation had been much impressed by Hitler's Germany, an effect which the authorities had been anxious to achieve. Hitler, in his welcome to the deputation at the Chancellory, said he hoped that they would get 'a first hand personal and un-biased impression of the New Germany',⁶⁷ by which he meant that they should receive and accept the image of Germany which had been prepared for them. Their whirlwind tour took them to many notable centres, such as the disabled men's settlement at Britz, Dr Gebhardt's training establishment for men with

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ *D. Wigram*, 14 June 1935, FO371/18882.

⁶⁷ *Speech by Hitler to the British Legion Delegation*, 15 July 1935, IH29/21.

amputated limbs, where the men were 'brown as a berry and bursting with rude health and muscular activity',⁶⁸ notwithstanding their amputations. The party also visited Dachau, a concentration camp. They left the 'camp with a feeling of depression, caused in part by the thought of the full meaning of solitary confinement in a dark cell, but perhaps more by the glimpse into the low types of humanity which an inspection of the inmates afforded'.⁶⁹ Ironically, the prisoners were S.S. Guards in disguise.⁷⁰ However, Crosfield, who wrote this section of the Foreign Office report, felt that in considering the conditions it was important to remember that:

the subversive forces are by no means quiescent, also that those who are now in charge of these camps are well aware from bitter personal experience of the conditions obtaining in the days before the Party came to power.⁷¹

Crosfield's account reveals an uncritical admiration for recent developments in Germany, and approval for the strong methods of law and order which he thought were being undertaken in Germany.

Although the Legion delegation may have been anxious to avoid direct propaganda, the British Ambassador in Berlin was correct to state that 'The visit seems, from the German point of view, to have been a distinct success'.⁷² The propaganda effect of the visit was just as important within Germany as on the delegation itself. This was the first official visit of British ex-service men to Germany, with the blessing of the Prince of Wales, and it was easy for German leaders and newspapers to argue that the visit demonstrated the honour the New Germany had won abroad, while also proving that the German Frontkämpfer were respected even by their former enemies.

The report of Colonel Ashwanden, the Vice-Chairman, and Major Brunel Cohen, the Honorary Treasurer, on their visit to Czechoslovakia, Austria and

⁶⁸ Report of Delegation, 7 August 1935, FO371/18882.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ OHBL p.185.

⁷¹ Report of Delegation, 7 August 1935, FO371/18882.

⁷² Mr Newton to Foreign Office, 2 August 1935, FO371/18882.

Hungary, reveals much about their attitude to these countries. The visit to Czechoslovakia was of a different nature to the other two countries, as the Czech Legion had insisted that the Legion delegation visit Prague during the celebrations to mark the 20th anniversary of the Czechoslovakian Republic.⁷³ Although there was a mass demonstration of 30,000 Czech ex-service men, Ashwanden and Cohen seem not to have been impressed. Instead, they remarked that the huge body of veterans were:

all in the uniforms of the various countries with whom they served - or rather to whom they deserted - during the War. The vast majority wore Russian and Italian uniforms.⁷⁴

Although a cursory comment, the meaning and attitudes contained in this statement were very serious. Instead of looking upon the Czech veterans as Allied comrades in arms who were members of F.I.D.A.C., Ashwanden and Cohen saw them as deserters from the Austro-Hungarian Army. Clearly, Ashwanden and Cohen did not have much sympathy with the Czech ex-service men or the Czech Republic.

Their perception of Hungarian veterans was altogether different as the two leaders recorded that 'Hungary was much more vociferous and enthusiastic in their welcome'.⁷⁵ Their entire trip, including 'taxes and odd meals' was paid for by the Hungarian War Veterans Union. However, what really impressed the Legion visitors was not the generosity of the Hungarians, but their ex-service organisation. They commented that the War Veterans Union was 'not a political one, and indeed... not very different from the Legion'.⁷⁶ They appear to have been glad to find a like-minded ex-service organisation but they were particularly complimentary about the bearing of the Hungarian veterans who always wore:

uniform and they are exceedingly well drilled and well disciplined in the old German way. Saluting, etc., is carried out as punctiliously as in any crack

⁷³ GSCLB, September 1935, Report of the visit of Col. Ashwanden and Maj. Brunel Cohen to Czechoslovakia, Austria and Hungary, July 1935.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁷⁶ BLJ August 1935, p. 52.

regiment. It is really an army and could be used as such without much training provided arms were available.⁷⁷

As ex-officers, Ashwanden and Cohen were likely to be receptive to this type of organization, but their favourable response also reveals that they were susceptible, like most Legion leaders, to image rather than substance, to propaganda not facts. So impressed were the Legion visitors that they accepted the Hungarians' biased version of Eastern European politics. In their report Ashwanden and Cohen supported the Hungarians' patriotism and desire for a revision of the Treaty of Trianon because the Hungarians:

feel severely the fact that many of their people are living under the rule of peoples whom they consider vastly inferior to themselves, especially Roumanians and Serbs. They regard the Czechs as traitors and do not attempt to conceal their hatred and contempt of them.⁷⁸

It could well be that the Hungarians influenced Ashwanden and Cohen's view of the Czechs and it is ironic that they could describe the War Veterans Union as non-political when it sponsored views such as these. Just as the German visit had demonstrated, Ashwanden and Cohen's visit to Hungary showed that Legion leaders were not prepared for such propaganda, but worse, could not recognise when a biased version of events was foisted upon them.

The first visit of German ex-service men to Britain in June 1935, just before the Legion delegation left for Germany, gave another clear example of how British ex-service men were, often unwittingly, used as a propaganda tool by the German authorities. The visit of the German ex-Prisoners of War Association to Brighton was the result of a long and cordial correspondence between a German, whose son had died as a prisoner of war, and the Brighton Branch secretary.⁷⁹ A German party came over to pay their respects and to thank the Brighton Branch for tending the graves. This visit and the small ceremonies attached to it, should have been a simple demonstration of gratitude and friendship between former enemies. The Legion

⁷⁷ Report of Ashwanden and Cohen, GSCLB, September 1935.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ August 1935, p.53.

believed, as Captain S.T. McCabe of the Sussex Council of the Legion remarked, that 'daily during their stay the friendship which we and they had anticipated grew stronger. They left with genuinely heartfelt appreciation of our welcome and entertainment'.⁸⁰ Former enemies meeting in friendship and good will was exactly what the Legion wanted to achieve in its contacts with German ex-service men and the Brighton branch was given an enthusiastic welcome on its return visit to Germany in 1936. However, the German propaganda machine produced a version of events completely at variance to the purpose of the visit and the report published in the *Volkischer Beobachter* of 22 June displayed the ugly side of the new German regime. It was reported that:

the decision of the Jewish members of the British Legion to absent themselves from all meetings at which the Germans were present was...heartily welcomed...In England the company of Jews is almost as little valued as in Germany...But this Jewish hate was typically foolish for the English had seen that the Jews were not "fair", with the result that still greater sympathy had been aroused for the German ex-service men.⁸¹

It is not known whether this reflected the views of the German ex-service men actually on the trip but the association to which they belonged was the official National Socialist organisation; they used the Nazi salute in the ceremony at the graves of their comrades.⁸²

Although it is doubtful that Legion leaders ever read the *Volkischer Beobachter* version of the Brighton visit, they did come under increasing criticism within Britain over their contact with German ex-service men. The German authorities persecution of the Jewish community lead to an interesting controversy within the Legion. Major Cohen visited Austria and Hungary in 1935, but as the Legion's Treasurer, he had been invited to visit Germany. Cohen later explained that the idea of visiting Germany 'stuck in my gizzard and after much thought I decided

⁸⁰ *ibid*, p.54.

⁸¹ *Volkischer Beobachter*, 22 June 1935, found in letter from Sir E. Phipps to Foreign Office, FO371/18882.

⁸² BLJ August 1935, p.53.

that it was impossible for me to shake Hitler by the hand'.⁸³ However, as a leading member of Britain's Jewish community, he was greatly criticized for his endorsement of the Legion's foreign policy. He answered the calls from Jewish newspapers for his resignation from the British Legion with a long statement which included the following:

My reason for not doing so is this: the object that I keep before me as being the most vital in the world today is that there should be no war between nations. Persecution of a minority may bring great troubles in its train for that minority, but a universal war would not help it; it would merely mean the useless sacrifice of millions of lives.⁸⁴

Although Cohen did express reservations about the relations with German ex-service men because he recognised that they were 'so much more representative of their Government than we are of ours',⁸⁵ his justification mirrored the official line of other Legion leaders and the National Executive Council. At its root this was the age old argument that the end justifies the means. The Jewish community in Britain wished the British Legion to break off relations with German ex-service men in protest for the persecution of German Jews and other minorities. For Legion leaders, to cease contact with German ex-service men was to admit defeat. Defeat meant worsening relations between Britain and Germany which would ultimately lead to a terrifying and destructive war. Thus, the pursuit of peace through better relations with German ex-service men was too important to be shelved, no matter how offensive German domestic policies were to the British public. In the 1938 Legion Annual Report it was stated that:

the Legion cannot either approve or condone the practices of brutality and use of force that are unfortunately so prevalent in certain quarters of the World to-day. The Legion's link is with the ex-service men, and beyond that it cannot, and will not go.⁸⁶

⁸³ Sir J.B.B. Cohen, *Count Your Blessings*, London: Heineman, 1965, p.106.

⁸⁴ *ibid.* p.107.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ BLAR 1938, p.

This was simply a translation of the traditional nostrum that the Legion must not involve itself in politics. Just as the Legion refused to involve itself in British party politics, claiming that its loyalty to the crown and the state took 'precedence over every other consideration',⁸⁷ so the Legion could claim that its involvement with German ex-service men did not commit the Legion to an endorsement of German domestic policies. This argument was not helpful or realistic because cordial relations with German ex-service men did commit the Legion to the support of the National Socialist regime, if only because German veterans were representative of their Government. Although the Legion leaders might consciously distance themselves from the unpleasant side of Germany in their efforts to build better relations, the public and the press could not make such a convenient distinction.

Legion leaders argued that they could not concern themselves with German domestic policy but Fetherston-Godley did make an attempt in 1935 to influence the German authorities. On 18 August 1935, just a month after the deputation's visit to Germany, he wrote a letter to Ribbentrop which stated that while there was still a real desire among British ex-service men to foster amicable relations, 'these religious matters' were 'giving your antagonists in this country the only handle which they can really use to your disadvantage'.⁸⁸ The tone of the letter was apologist for the 'deep rooted feeling of sentimentalism' in the 'psychology of England'⁸⁹ and was not directly critical of German domestic policy. However, he went on to warn that:

if events in Germany do not very soon become more tranquil as regards the Protestants, the Catholics and the Jews, I am certain that the move for mutual friendship, which started so auspiciously, is doomed to failure, and the Legion will have to make a public statement that it is impossible to carry on with the negotiations.⁹⁰

This was an important threat,^{which} if carried out, would have ruined all the propaganda advantage gained by Germany. At the same time, Fetherston-Godley had made it

⁸⁷ BLJ March 1936, p.365.

⁸⁸ Fetherston-Godley to Ribbentrop, 18 August 1935, FO371/18882.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

clear that this threat was not his personal opinion but had been forced upon him by Legion members who were becoming aware of the persecution in Germany.

Significantly, a special emissary was sent by Ribbentrop to discuss any suggestions which the Legion might make 'to allay the feelings of resentment in this Country',⁹¹ (meaning Britain) because 'Herr Hitler and those around him... would do all that they could to prevent any breaking off of the negotiations which have so auspiciously started'.⁹² This shows the importance which Hitler attached to ex-service relations. The emissary did not come to Britain to discuss any changes in German policy, but to find means of allaying British objections and suspicion. The Legion leaders, instead of breaking off contact, accepted the offer of the emissary to attend the next Party Congress on 16 September when Hitler would 'deal freely with the religious question'.⁹³ None of this answered Legion objections to the persecution of German minorities, but simply enmeshed the Legion further in its relations with national socialist Germany. Fetherston-Godley later remarked that:

To signify our disapproval of Germany's domestic policy we could ignore Germany, but in that case what could the Legion or anybody else do that would be effective. We could threaten (although it is not within our province) but Germany would know, as we know, that we could not carry out our threats.⁹⁴

In fact, his actions demonstrated that the Legion could not even threaten Germany to cease the persecution of the Jews. Having begun the relationship with Germany in such a fanfare of publicity, it would have been extremely damaging and embarrassing for the Legion to break off contact with German ex-service men. Legion leaders had been flattered by the attention paid to them by the German authorities, dazzled by the display of Nazi pomp and circumstance; to break off relations may not have meant war, but it certainly would have resulted in the destruction of the authority and prestige of the Legion leaders. Maintaining contact with German ex-service men was

⁹¹ Col. Ashwanden to Sir Robert Vansittart, 30 August 1935, FO371/18882.

⁹² *ibid.*

⁹³ *ibid.*

⁹⁴ BLJ April 1936, p.409.

much more appealing to them than dropping what had become the flagship of Legion policy.

As such, the foreign policy was extended considerably during the next few years. At the 1936 Annual Conference, a resolution was passed endorsing the Legion policy on ex-enemy countries, thus finally making the policy collective and not solely the property of a few Legion leaders.⁹⁵ Indicative of this change was the greatly increased participation by branches in the Legion's foreign policy. Thatcham and Swansea branches entertained German visitors while members of the Heybridge Branch visited Frankfurt and toured the Rhine area.⁹⁶ In June 1936, the Earl of Harrowby entertained a large number of foreign ex-service leaders from Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Romania and the United States to a 'Great War Adversaries House Party' at his country House in Staffordshire.⁹⁷ This cosmopolitan flavour was continued at the Annual Conference at Buxton when representatives from six nations addressed the delegates.⁹⁸

The Legion's foreign policy gained momentum in 1937 when 1,700 excursions were made by Legion representatives all over Europe.⁹⁹ However, it was during 1938 that the Legion's foreign policy reached a dramatic climax, when the Legion played a minor part in the negotiations during the Munich crisis. The crisis concerning Czechoslovakia developed after German troops annexed Austria in March 1938. Hitler then turned his attention to Czechoslovakia and its three million Sudeten Germans living on the border with Germany. With Austria annexed, Czechoslovakia was surrounded by Germany on three sides which left it in a very dangerous strategic position. It was this situation which Hitler chose to exploit in his demands that the territory occupied by the Sudeten Germans should be transferred to

⁹⁵ AC 1936, Motion of Urgency.

⁹⁶ BLJ September 1936, p.87.

⁹⁷ BLJ June 1936, p.485.

⁹⁸ These were: Count Van der Burch, President of F.I.D.A.C. (Belgium), General Sir Prince Schonburg-Hartenstein (Austria), Lt-Gen V. Vasoff (Bulgaria), Count Takach Tolvay (Hungary), General Weygand (France), H.R.H. The Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (Germany).

⁹⁹ BLAR 1937, p.8.

Germany. As might be expected these developments elicited no response or change of direction from the Legion which argued that such matters were outside of its province or relations with German ex-service men. However, the Legion did become involved in the tension leading up to the Munich crisis because in August 1938 a Metropolitan Area party of Legionaries, led by General Sir Ian Hamilton, visited Germany.

The correspondence between Hamilton and Fetherston-Godley before the departure of the party is particularly revealing in understanding the subsequent actions of the Legion leaders. In July, Fetherston-Godley was called in for a 'long and disturbing' interview at the Foreign Office. Fetherston-Godley was told that the Germans 'intend to partition Czechoslovakia and as the Czechs will fight, it would mean universal conflagration'. The Foreign Office instructed Fetherston-Godley to ensure that the Metropolitan party did not say anything 'likely to encourage the Germans in the view that they could do as they liked, as it might have disastrous repercussion at the moment'.¹⁰⁰ It is clear that the Foreign Office had given Fetherston-Godley such a full briefing because they felt the Metropolitan area visit could have a serious influence on the situation. Since German leaders had put so much emphasis on ex-service contacts and obviously believed the Legion to be more representative of the British Government than was actually the case, it was important not to allow the trip to be manipulated by German propaganda, or for any encouragement to be given to the German regime. Fetherston-Godley thought that Hamilton 'could do so much good if you told them that while we are out for peace, we are not yet a decadent nation, and will not stand for aggression at any price'.¹⁰¹ In his reply to Fetherston-Godley, Hamilton played down the danger and gave no indication that he was prepared to take the Foreign Office's advice.¹⁰² Such attitudes were not surprising for an officer who had a great regard for Germany, and who had

¹⁰⁰ Fetherston-Godley to Hamilton, 22 July 1938, IH29/24.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

¹⁰² Hamilton to Fetherston-Godley, 25 July 1938, IH29/24.

cultivated good relations with many German leaders, but Fetherston-Godley's reply to Hamilton was astonishing.

Although he wrote that the 'F.O. are right this time; Crosfield has just returned from Prague and corroborates the danger of the situation', he went on to reveal that:

I agree with you and always have about the Germans. Our Foreign Policy always fills me with amazement, and one would think that being conspicuous for failure, some change would be made. My own view is that I cannot see for the life of me what we have to do with the Czechs at all; but I suppose we must back up the powers-that-be unless worse befalls us.¹⁰³

This letter is crucial to understanding the Legion's foreign policy after 1935, which had been developed and promoted by Fetherston-Godley. In many respects this letter explains why Fetherston-Godley had persisted in developing relations with German ex-service men, and had been willing to deflect or ignore criticism directed at the Legion's foreign policy. Like Hamilton, he believed in developing cordial relations with Germany, if necessary at the expense of German minorities or the weaker Eastern European countries. He obviously had reservations about the Foreign Office, and considered British diplomacy to be a failure. In this context, his development of the Legion's foreign policy, with the aim of developing better relations between Britain and Germany, which would 'form a foundation for international diplomacy'¹⁰⁴ can be seen not as a support for existing British foreign policy but as an attempt to direct it into different channels. His reluctant attitude of support for the official policy in a time of crisis was dangerous in the tense period before Munich.

When the Metropolitan Area party actually visited Germany, the German authorities pulled out all the stops on their propaganda machine. Although this was an informal holiday trip, and not an official Legion delegation, it received more

¹⁰³ Fetherston-Godley to Hamilton, 26 July 1938, IH29/24.

¹⁰⁴ BLJ August 1935, p.49.

attention than any previous Legion visit. The leader of the party, Mr Kelley, Vice-Chairman of the Metropolitan Area, who had served as a private during the war, said:

The friendliness and generosity we received the whole time we were in Germany surpassed all our expectations. Officials, the military, and German leaders, laid themselves out to do us every possible honour, particularly myself as leader of the party. On many occasions and at various ceremonies, I was given privileges and paid honours which are usually only accorded to German people of the highest rank.¹⁰⁵

Customs officers waved the party through barriers, lavish meals were laid on for the party at every opportunity, and enthusiastic crowds met the Legionaries wherever they went. One of the more important honours was a salute given to the party at Godesberg. As the ship containing the Legion party sailed down the Rhine, the German flag was hauled down and a 21 gun salute was fired in their honour.¹⁰⁶ But these compliments were not spontaneous gestures in honour of the British ex-service men. Although the Legion Journal claimed that the reception of the party was a 'demonstration of Germany's respect and regard for Britain's ex-service men'¹⁰⁷ the real reason was to emit 'sentimental smoke clouds'¹⁰⁸ to cover German intentions over Czechoslovakia. A clue lay in General Sir Ian Hamilton's message of encouragement for Metropolitan Area members to participate in the trip. He said:

For a statesman, a Diplomat, a Pressman, or indeed any civilian, a sail up the Rhine and walk down the Unter den Linden would just be an ordinary jaunt; for US it becomes an historic occasion.¹⁰⁹

By giving ordinary ex-service men the welcome and honours only normally paid to statesmen, the German authorities overwhelmed the Metropolitan party, which went back to Britain with glowing reports about Germany, its friendliness and desire for peace. While a statesman or diplomat might have been unmoved by what were

¹⁰⁵ BLJ September 1938, p.82.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid*, p.83.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*, p.82.

¹⁰⁸ J.V. Penrose, 18 January 1934, FO371/17755. A similar situation had occurred when Hamilton visited Germany in 1934.

¹⁰⁹ BLJ, July 1938, Metropolitan Area Supplement.

artificial demonstrations, ordinary ex-service men were bound to be affected and carry back an artificial impression of Germany and its intentions.

The presence of General Sir Ian Hamilton gave the visit more prestige but his behaviour on the visit did not give the Germans the impression desired by the Foreign Office. In Berlin the Legionaries laid wreaths on the memorial for the German war dead, a ceremony attended by many prominent German leaders and a strong party of the Reichkriegerbund. Hamilton remarked that:

it was a strange sight... to see our little party drawn up facing a really magnificent Guard of two companies of Reinhard's ex-service men in uniform and with the Guards band on their flank. Our men, many of them disabled, looked smaller. After inspecting the German guard I asked permission to say a few words when I said I was specially enthused by their splendid bearing when I reflected that they had come as friends of England.¹¹⁰

The image of a small number of British ex-service men, in civilian clothes with empty sleeves, ranged against the martial splendour of a large body of uniformed German ex-service men is compelling. Hamilton's enthusiasm for the German guard because they were 'friends of England' was exactly the message which the German authorities wished the German crowd to receive. It was a message of image, not substance, of symbolism comparing Britain and Germany. The British ex-service men seemed weaker, smaller, not willing or able to defend themselves against the might of Germany and only wishing peace. The symbolism would not be lost on the German audience as it suggested that Britain was decadent, and willing to keep quiet over German aggression in Czechoslovakia. At the end of the tour Hamilton was whisked away to Berchtesgarden for a four hour interview with Hitler who clearly thought he was dealing with the Legion National President. After staying overnight in the mountain hideaway, Hamilton returned to Britain, in Hitler's personal plane, where he told reporters that 'Hitler is strongly for peace. It is up to the rest of Europe to give up its pinpricks against Germany'.¹¹¹ The visit of the Metropolitan party and General

¹¹⁰ Hamilton to Fetherston-Godlev. 9 August 1938, IH29/24.

¹¹¹ BLJ September 1938, p.81.

Sir Ian Hamilton to Germany in August 1938 had exactly the opposite effect to that desired by the British Foreign Office and may have given the German authorities and people a dangerous impression about British intentions during a critical period of tension.

While it would be wrong to assume that this visit had any great influence on the wider issues and events of the Czechoslovakian crisis, it is the best example of the harm which could be done by Legion contacts with Germany. Legion leaders did not have the correct experience or outlook to recognise propaganda and prevent manipulation and during the Munich crisis, the British Legion became a willing pawn in the diplomatic manoeuvrings between the British and German Governments.

Legion leaders were aware of the serious international tension concerning Czechoslovakia which led to the Munich crisis of September 1938. They were informed of most of the diplomatic developments by the Foreign Office, even if, like Fetherston-Godley, they were doubtful about the direction of British Foreign policy. Thus, the decisions which led to the development of the British Legion Volunteer Police Force for Czechoslovakia were not made in a vacuum. The intervention of the Legion President, General Sir Frederick Maurice, at the height of the crisis on 26 September when he flew to Berlin to offer Hitler the services of 10,000 British Legion volunteers to supervise the transfer of territory from Czechoslovakia to Germany was based on an idea which had taken time to develop.

The genesis of the Legion Police Force can be traced back to early September 1938, when Maurice wrote to the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, pledging the Legion's support in any national emergency:

The present international tension is causing every member of the British Legion great anxiety. In these circumstances, in the event of a National Emergency arising, which God forbid, the Legion would place the whole of its resources, energies and influence unreservedly at the disposal of His Majesty's Government, as representing the State, in such way as its activities could be most usefully employed.¹¹²

¹¹² Maurice to : 6 September 1938, PREM1/268.

The Legion was always anxious to be seen to be supporting the State, and ideas for a Legion Defence Force and utilising the Legion as a unit for the purposes of National Defence had already been mooted. The letter was indicative of the attitude of the Legion President and Chairman; as ex-service men and as officers, they felt the need to affirm their loyalty to the state and, in effect, to re-enlist in whatever capacity was required. The Prime Minister's reply was also indicative of a state of mind:

It is my earnest hope that such an emergency will not arise but, if it should, I know that the country can rely on the members of the British Legion to play their part as they played it in the critical years of 1914 to 1918.¹¹³

Chamberlain was aware, and annoyed by the fact, that the Legion was eager to publish the letters, which is probably why he fell back on a stock platitude about ex-service men and their part in the Great War.¹¹⁴ Although he had to appear sympathetic, the Prime Minister had no intention of using the British Legion for national defence or any other purpose. But although this was just a form of acceptable words for Chamberlain it formed a central part of the Legion's belief. Legion leaders loved such publicity because they believed that the Legion should be given a major role in any national crisis. Sir Frederick's wish for the Legion to play an important part in a national emergency became father to the thought of a British Legion police force in Czechoslovakia.

The wider diplomatic situation is too complex to give in any detail here, but it is important to trace some of the developments which led to the Legion's involvement in the crisis. In August 1938, while the Metropolitan party was in Germany, Lord Runciman was despatched by the British Government to Prague with instructions to act as an independent mediator between the German and Czechoslovakian Governments.¹¹⁵ He recommended, in his report to the Cabinet of 16 September, that the Sudeten Germans should be given the right of self-determination in areas where they were in the majority. This meant holding a plebiscite with an international

¹¹³ Chamberlain to Maurice, 9 September 1938, PREM1/268.

¹¹⁴ Personal Secretary to Chamberlain, 8 September 1938, PREM1/268.

¹¹⁵ Rhodes James, *The British Revolution. A History of British Politics 1880-1939*, London: Methuen, 1978, p. 596.

force keeping order during the voting and the transfer of territory. On 21 September, a memorandum by the British General Staff estimated that up to nine infantry brigades or three divisions would be required, but the whole operation would be 'dependent on the goodwill and co-operation of the German and Czechoslovakian Governments'.¹¹⁶ At best Britain could find one infantry division, and contingents would have to be found from other, neutral, countries.¹¹⁷

Given this situation, it is not surprising that the Anglo-French proposals of 19 September dispensed with the idea of a plebiscite and 'suggested' the cession of a larger area of territory to Germany - all areas with over fifty per cent German inhabitants.¹¹⁸ The British and French Governments forced these proposals on the Czech Government by warning that if they were refused, Czechoslovakia would be left to fight alone. Chamberlain took these terms to Hitler at Godesberg (where one month before the British Legion party had been so flattered by the 21 gun salute) but was shocked to find that Hitler's demands had been raised to all those areas occupied primarily by Germans - and all Czechs had to be evacuated by 28 September.¹¹⁹ Hitler also suggested a plebiscite held by an international commission in certain disputed areas. It was after Chamberlain flew back from Germany on the 24 of September that the British Legion became involved in the chain of events.

The version given by Sir Frederick Maurice, to the assembled Police Force on 8 October 1938, is that Fetherston-Godley was approached by the Foreign Office on 24 September for 5,000 men 'at very short notice, to be followed by a further 5,000' for service as 'neutral observers on the frontier of Czechoslovakia'. This was to 'prevent collisions' and ensure that 'any plans agreed upon by the respective Governments were carried out with a minimum of friction'.¹²⁰ It now seems clear that the plan was General Sir Frederick Maurice's own, and had been formulated with

¹¹⁶ Memorandum by the General Staff, International Control of a Possible Plebiscite, 21 September 1938, FO371/21782.

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹¹⁸ James, *The British Revolution*, p.596.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*

¹²⁰ BLJ November 1938, p.155.

little or no prompting from the Foreign Office. He approached the Foreign Office on the 24 or 25 of September, offering the Government the services of ten or twenty thousand Legion members to ensure that the transfer of territory suggested in the Anglo-French proposals would be supervised and carried out peacefully. That it was Maurice's own idea is mentioned variously by Halifax, Chamberlain and Hitler,¹²¹ and confirmed by a message from Lord Halifax to Mr Hadow, an official at the Foreign Office, at 10.55 am on 25 September:

The PM is quite willing that Mr Hadow should tell the head of the British Legion that the approach, of which Mr Hadow spoke to Lord Halifax this morning, might be made at once to Hitler and the PM would welcome it if Hitler was also willing to accept it.¹²²

This note proves that the idea originated with General Sir Frederick Maurice. He had contacted the Foreign Office with the proposal through Mr Hadow who had informed Lord Halifax, and eventually the Prime Minister. In a very short space of time, both had given their assent to the plan.

In examining the scheme, it becomes clear that Maurice's original intention was to facilitate the smooth operation of the British and French proposals of 19 September. The Legion plan mentions that:

these disciplined ex-service men would be distributed throughout the area proposed by the British and French Governments....they will be able above all to play an important part in countering untrue propaganda and protecting the population during the period preceeding the transfer of the above territories.¹²³

The importance of the idea, and the reason for its attractiveness to the British Government was that the large areas to be transferred from Czechoslovakia to Germany would be in the hands of British neutral observers, and not given immediately to German troops. More importantly, it would take time to place the Legion Police Force in Czechoslovakia, and with the British Government desperately

¹²¹ Hitler to Chamberlain, 26 September 1938, FO371/21782.

¹²² Mr Hadow to Lord Halifax, 25 September 1938, PREM1/268.

¹²³ See Appendix K.

trying to avert war, any delay might give a valuable breathing space for diplomatic negotiations. The plan was considered and adopted very quickly, probably in a matter of hours during 25 September, and thus the suitability of the Legion for such an important endeavour, or the real implications of the plan were given scant attention.

But for Maurice and other Legion leaders, the Legion plan for a Volunteer Police Force in Czechoslovakia was the glorious culmination of the Legion's foreign policy. The last paragraph of the details handed to Hitler reveals the Legion's motivations in the matter:

As ex-soldiers ourselves, we address ourselves to you, Herr Fuhrer, principally as head of the ex-service men of Germany, and request your agreement to what would alone enable us to put before the World a matchless example of co-operation between the ex-service men of both countries in the promotion of peace and important plans based thereon.¹²⁴

Maurice was attempting to draw on the fund of goodwill which he believed had been built up by contact with German ex-service men. It is also significant that the plan addressed Hitler as an ex-service man, not as a statesman or diplomat. The whole idea fitted perfectly into the Legion's rhetoric and belief. Here was a chance for the plain speaking, goodwill and comradeship of the ex-service man or Frontkämpfer to bring about peace and understanding. This example of ex-service men co-operation in a practical and important project would be broadcast to the world finally proving the worth of ex-service men in their efforts for peace. It would raise the name of the British Legion to new heights, while giving a chance for the Legion to play an important national role by loyally serving the British Government in its hour of need.

On the same day that the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary had approved the scheme, General Sir Frederick Maurice made arrangements to fly to Berlin that night to present the plan to Hitler in person. It was important that the plan was seen as a personal initiative by Maurice, and not connected with the British Government,

¹²⁴ *ibid.*

so that it did not become entangled in the diplomatic negotiations. On his arrival in Berlin at 10.45 pm, Maurice met an Attache on behalf of Herr Ribbentrop who 'told him it would be quite impossible for him to see the Fuhrer' the next day.¹²⁵ Maurice replied that if he could not see Hitler he would return to London on the next plane. It was only because the plan was presented to the German authorities as solely from the British Legion that Maurice was able to see Hitler.

The next day at the interview, Hitler was in a very difficult mood, as he evidently thought that the plan was a 'try-on of the Prime Minister's to cause delay'.¹²⁶ It was only when Maurice reiterated that he:

had no mission at all from the Prime Minister and was not discussing the negotiations in any way. He had come only on behalf of his proposition to use German and British Legion men for policing during the plebiscite.¹²⁷

This is the final proof that the plan was Sir Frederick Maurice's, and also that had the British Government been involved, or sent the plan through normal diplomatic channels it would have been ignored. However, the diplomatic advantage which the British Government may have gained through use of the plan was scotched during the interview. Hitler insisted that:

he welcomed the proposals in principle, but was determined that the whole of the organs of government in the Sudeten area up to the Green line must be in his hands by October 1st, and said that there would be no time to give effect to the Legion plan in the area up to the Green line up to that date.¹²⁸

Thus the basic intention of the Legion plan, which was to provide neutral observers in the area to be transferred under the Anglo-French proposals was refused by Hitler; these areas would be occupied by German troops immediately. Hitler quickly swung the balance of advantage round to his side by stating that:

He cordially welcomed the proposal that the British Legion should provide an adequate body of neutral observers in the areas proposed by Plebiscite,

¹²⁵ E.M. Watson, 26 September 1938, FO371/21782.

¹²⁶ *ibid.*

¹²⁷ *ibid.*

¹²⁸ Maurice to Chamberlain, 26 September 1938, FO371/21782.

whose tasks it would be to ensure that the Plebiscite was carried out fairly and without any military pressure from Germany.¹²⁹

Yet it was this element of the plan which must have been quickly sketched in on 25 September so that the Legion plan accommodated the Godesberg memorandum and its proposals for a plebiscite. It was also this element of the plan which the British Legion was not capable of carrying out effectively. The British General Staff may have over-estimated the number of troops required and the difficulties involved in a plebiscite, but it is clear that the British Legion would have been hard stretched to be equal to the task. This was the disadvantage of Maurice's personal interview with Hitler; he could not negotiate, he could not bargain, all he could do was agree with whatever version of the plan Hitler decided to accept.

Although the plan had been deflected from its original purpose, it was this modified scheme which went ahead. Hitler made his acceptance public in a speech at the Sports Palace Berlin on 27 September:

I was prepared to withdraw the troops during the plebiscite and have today declared my readiness to invite the British Legion to enter these areas during this period to maintain law and order.¹³⁰

Almost immediately Maurice returned from Germany, Legion headquarters began to organise the force. There was a frenzy of activity to work out the details of uniforms, transport arrangements, billeting and organisation. Whatever the merits or demerits of the plan, the response from ordinary Legion members was astonishing - over 17,000 members volunteered. As Maurice described:

Mind you, not one of those men who volunteered had the faintest idea of the terms on which they were going to serve. They rushed to volunteer first, and were content to find out afterwards what the conditions were.¹³¹

This was, for the Legion leaders, the embodiment of Legion spirit - men volunteering, as they might have done in 1914, for hazardous service overseas. It also shows the great desire among British Legion members, and the general population, for peace.

¹²⁹ *ibid.*

¹³⁰ Adolf Hitler, Speech at the Sports Palace Berlin, 27 September 1938, FO371/21782.

¹³¹ BLJ November 1938, p.156.

While the British Legion was confident of its usefulness and convinced that it would and could carry out any mission required of it, the same confidence was not held by the British Government, its envoys in Germany and Czechoslovakia, or the officials of the Foreign Office. Reservations about the plan began almost as soon as Hitler had announced his acceptance of the Legion's offer. A telegram on 29 September, from the Foreign Office to the British delegation in Munich, expressed real doubts about the role of the Legion force. The ministers at the Foreign Office asked for the delegation's views on how the Legion force could be used while they also mentioned the change in the plan that had occurred after Maurice had seen Hitler:

You will recollect that Hitler's suggestion in his speech of 27th September was that the Legion should occupy plebiscite areas during plebiscite period to maintain law and order, whereas proposal in our plan is that the Legion should at once proceed to territory to be ceded to stay there until it is transferred to Germany, but Legion certainly could not undertake obligation to maintain law and order...it is difficult to see how the Legionaries are going to make themselves useful. Indeed they might, owing to the indefinite nature of their functions and their uncertain discipline, easily involve themselves and us in local incidents.¹³²

The British Government was left in the very difficult position of having had the Legion's offer accepted by Hitler, which meant that the plan could not be ignored or shelved. At the same time, the role of the Force was undefined and it was unlikely that the Legion could maintain law and order in areas restive and angry at the settlement. Both Duff Cooper, the Secretary of State for War, and Halifax expressed reservations about the plan, while Mr Newton, the British Ambassador in Prague, pleaded that the Force should either be armed or disbanded.¹³³ Even Fetherston-Godley announced that the original plan had 'grave disadvantages' mainly because 'there are certain to be at least a few unsuitable elements in such a force'.¹³⁴ But he was adamant that the Legion must be allowed to go to Czechoslovakia:

¹³² Telegram to British Delegation at Munich, 29 September 1938, FO371/21783.

¹³³ Duff Cooper to Lord Halifax, 29 September 1938; Halifax to Cooper, 29 September 1938; Newton to Foreign Office, 5 October 1938; FO371/21783.

¹³⁴ Fetherston-Godley to Halifax, 2 October 1938, FO371/21783.

If other nations send bodies of ex-service men, it is essential that the Legion takes part, or we lose both nationally and in the ex-service community all the prestige and leadership we have gained by the work of the last few years.¹³⁵

Fetherston-Godley's motivations are clear. The British Legion Police Force was the culmination of the Foreign policy, and would give the Legion great publicity and a position of leadership among the international ex-service community, but it would be disastrous if the Legion's plan should end in failure. Fetherston-Godley was more interested in the Legion's prestige and standing than he was in the practicality, or danger of the mission to be accomplished.

On 6 October, O.S. Sargent at the Foreign Office showed that he was very concerned about these problems. He suggested 'even at the eleventh hour' that Legion involvement in Czechoslovakia should be prevented. He felt that 'from the outset we have been rushed into accepting this idea without ever thinking out its dangerous implications'.¹³⁶ The plan had been conceived and accepted very quickly and this had not given time to consider the difficulties inherent in sending unarmed ex-service men into a very difficult and dangerous situation. He continued:

I feel we are playing with fire in sending out these unarmed and undisciplined men to a district where feelings are likely to become more and more strained and embittered as the date of the plebiscite approaches.

If plebiscites have to take place it is surely in our interest to take every possible measure in our power to see that law and order is maintained, and our experience of plebiscites shows that this can only be done by regular troops in large numbers. On the other hand, it is in Hitler's interest that law and order should not be maintained, so that he may have a pretext for sending German troops into the plebiscite areas before the plebiscite and keeping them there indefinitely. It would be intolerable if attacks on isolated members of the British Legion enabled Hitler to claim that he had to send German troops in order to rescue the British Legion from Czech 'atrocities'.¹³⁷

Under the original plan to supervise the transfer of territory in the Anglo-French proposals of 19 September, the Legion volunteers might have served a useful

¹³⁵ *ibid.*

¹³⁶ O.S. Sargent, Suggestion to Cancel Despatch of British Legion to Czechoslovakia 6 October, FO371/21783.

¹³⁷ *ibid.*

purpose. But after the plan was changed through Hitler's intervention, the dangers outweighed the advantages of the scheme. The Saar plebiscite had passed off peacefully in 1935, but there had been a large number of armed and disciplined troops present and had the Legion force gone to Czechoslovakia they might have found conditions much more difficult. The plebiscite would have been hurriedly organized and although the Legion volunteers would no doubt have acted in a disciplined manner, they did not have the training or experience to deal with disturbances. It is quite likely that had they been sent, German forces would have organised 'partisan' activity in order to give Hitler a pretext to send German troops to 'save' the British Legion Volunteers. Sargent had divined Hitler's true purpose and it is not surprising that from 2nd October, the British delegation at Munich argued against the use of plebiscites in Czechoslovakia.¹³⁸ Hitler's insistence that the only forces to be used to police the plebiscites should be 'international bodies', meaning ex-service men,¹³⁹ made his intentions plain; he hoped to use plebiscites to increase the amount of territory transferred to Germany by both fair means and foul. Eventually, Hitler's desire to use plebiscites in this manner became apparent to Neville Henderson, the British Ambassador, on 11 October, who insisted to the German representative that: 'I personally would never agree to plebiscites being held for such a purpose and would if it were suggested withdraw from the International Commission pending instructions from my Government'.¹⁴⁰ This finally sealed the fate of any plebiscites in Czechoslovakia.

Meanwhile, the British Legion had hurriedly organised a force of 1,200 in little over 55 hours.¹⁴¹ Uniforms and ash sticks were provided for all members who assembled at Olympia on 8 October. It was kept in readiness due to uncertainty and the long negotiations taking place at the International Commission held in Munich, and although the force embarked on two ships, the SS *Naldera* and *Dunera*,

¹³⁸ Foreign Office to Sir Neville Henderson, 2 October 1938; Henderson to Foreign Office, 6 October 1938; FO371/21783.

¹³⁹ W.I. Mallet to GS, BL, 4 October 1938, FO371/21783.

¹⁴⁰ Henderson to Foreign Office, 11 October 1938, FO371/21783

¹⁴¹ BLJ November 1938, p.156.

at Tilbury Docks on 12 October, it did not sail further than Southend.¹⁴² They were moored there until on 14 October the Force was informed that they would not be required in Czechoslovakia. On 15 October, the force was quickly dispersed.¹⁴³

Although the Force was not used, the Legion leaders hailed the event as a great triumph. Fetherston-Godley remarked at the 1939 Conference that:

The whole Press, with one exception, supported the formation of the Force, and they had got an advertisement for the Legion which could not be bought for £100,000. That was all he need say about a Force which had a very long name and a very short life.¹⁴⁴

The Legion had gained kudos and prestige out of the event but use of the Legion force may have had serious repercussions. The Legion leaders had forced the pace, taken all the decisions, and finally might have placed Legion members in a very difficult and dangerous situation. The idea of a Legion Police Force in Czechoslovakia began as a plan to give a minor advantage to the British Government in difficult negotiations but quickly became a pawn manipulated by Hitler which caused embarrassment and anxiety for the British Government. The leadership of General Sir Frederick Maurice and Major Fetherston-Godley took the Legion into water well beyond its depth. While the police plan sought a practical role for ex-service men in the international crisis and demonstrated a sincere desire for peace, it also showed that the Legion leaders were prepared to go to almost any lengths to build Legion prestige through publicity. No one in the Legion seems to have considered the dangers and problems which the Police Force might have faced nor the irony of actively assisting in the dismemberment of a former Allied nation, whose ex-service men were members of F.I.D.A.C. and the brotherhood of Allied ex-service men. However, almost as soon as the Force had dispersed, Fetherston-Godley despatched a letter to Area, County and Branch Chairmen, in which he justified his

¹⁴² Board of Trade to Foreign Office, 11 October 1938; Foreign Office to Board of Trade, 13 October 1938, FO371/21783.

¹⁴³ Foreign Office to GS, BL, 14 October 1938, FO371/21783.

¹⁴⁴ AC 1939, Res. No.2.

actions concerning the Czechoslovakian crisis but also announced an important change in the Legion's foreign policy. Fetherston-Godley now felt that:

the time has arrived for complete National Unity, and, with the considerable interest and influence at our disposal, to show Great Britain and the World that the British Legion stands for 'Moral re-armament' and for the attainment of world-peace, security and liberty.¹⁴⁵

This changed the Legion's focus from the ideal of peace to the service of the state. He further explained that this had 'always been one of our major principles ... the welfare of the state is our objective'.¹⁴⁶ With war clouds gathering in the aftermath of the Munich crisis, this meant channelling Legion efforts into National Defence, not visits to foreign countries. This was a very fast change in policy and outlook, but it was remarkably easy for Legion leaders to justify to the membership. Maurice, at the 1939 Conference, stated that:

We have done our honest best to promote peace. We were the first to hold out the hand of friendship to the German ex-service men and, in spite of the present situation, I do not believe those efforts of ours have been in vain.¹⁴⁷

The leadership could argue that the Legion had made every effort to develop peace and friendship and could not be blamed for the failure of those efforts. Attention could then be turned away from foreign policy towards the Legion's role in national defence plans. Apart from a high profile visit to Paris in August 1939 in an attempt to mend some fences between French and British ex-service men, the Legion's foreign policy had effectively ended with Fetherston-Godley's letter in October 1938.

When we consider the Legion's foreign policy one striking fact which emerges is the power and influence of the Legion leadership. In the twenties, Legion interest in foreign affairs had been nursed along principally by Colonel Crosfield and in 1935, the Legion President and Chairman pulled the Legion's attention away from the issues of employment and pensions towards contact with foreign ex-service men. With the

¹⁴⁵ GSCLB, October 1938, Fetherston-Godley to Chairmen of Areas, Counties, Districts and Branches.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ AC 1939, Maurice's P. address.

exception of one issue (prematurely aged ex-service men) every other concern and policy of the Legion was flung into shadow by the flurry of activity and glare of publicity surrounding the Legion's foreign policy. Yet, after the drama of the Munich crisis, the foreign policy lost its prominence just as quickly. This was due to the dominance of the Legion leadership who had sole control over foreign policy. While other Legion policies allowed discussion and debate from every section of the membership, the foreign policy emphasised the problems with Legion democracy. The responsibility for Legion policy lay not with the membership, but with the national officers and National Executive Council who often implemented policies without testing the opinion of the members.

The influence of Legion leaders gave them the power to change emphasis, to construct high ideals for the Legion at will, and to change the focus and rhetoric for those ideals extremely quickly. Initially, the Legion boasted of its contacts with Allied ex-service men through F.I.D.A.C., and when that interest waned it was replaced by a focus on the Disarmament Conferences which was in turn supplanted by contact with ex-enemy ex-service men. The ultimate change in direction was away from foreign contacts and towards national defence. This might be seen as an accommodation to the foreign policy of the Government of the day with Legion foreign policy matching at every stage the policy adopted by government.¹⁴⁸ In fact the agenda for the Legion's foreign relations went far beyond the service of the state. Under Fetherston-Godley's leadership Legion foreign policy can be seen as an attempt to push British foreign policy into a new direction, and not simply as a support for the existing beliefs. Far from the Legion's foreign policy simply representing a desire to support Government policy, it was an attempt to inflate Legion prestige and standing. Legion leaders did not see their independent approach to German ex-service men as an admission of weakness but rather as an example of respect for British influence and power. However, so great was the gap between

¹⁴⁸ Woo.

tics of Influence, p.119.

Legion rhetoric and reality that Legion leaders were not making decisions in a fully informed atmosphere. We cannot doubt the sincerity of the Legion leader's desire and efforts for peace, but they proved themselves to be more concerned with image than with substance. Their desire for publicity, and their susceptibility to right wing images in Germany which alternately flattered and impressed them made them easy prey for German propaganda.

The Legion claimed to be able to develop understanding between nations. This unique attempt to bring 'peace in our time' demonstrated the power of the Legion leadership upon the organisation but also the difficulties inherent in such an approach. Legion leaders did develop cordial relations with other ex-service leaders over cups of tea and glasses of beer, but this had no wider influence on diplomacy or Government action. The Legion leadership could not deliver what they promised to the membership. The dominance of Legion leaders could only be justified if the power and influence of leadership was exercised responsibly. In reality, the leadership's pursuit of a misguided foreign policy did not bring about peace and understanding but it did fatally compromise the democracy and integrity of the movement.

CONCLUSION

Through an analysis of the main aims of the Legion, and the way those objects were translated into practice by the leadership of the organisation, this study has revealed the main characteristics of the British Legion. The Legion was a collection of many individual branches, each with their own fiercely local outlook, which were cemented together by a powerful administrative structure culminating in the National Executive Council. It was defined by its conservative ideology but also by class, military rank and service, and by geography. Legion beliefs were an admixture of reactionary and progressive attitudes which reflected the prevailing values of the early post-war period. The Legion was composed mainly of men who had great pride in their service during the Great War and who believed in comradeship, and collective action as the solution to the problems of ex-service men. Its membership was predominantly working class and concentrated in the South of the country. Both the conservative ideals which the Legion espoused and practical factors such as unemployment and urban problems contributed to the low percentage of ex-service membership contained within the organisation. However, the Legion did continue to grow during the interwar period, which proved that it was a vigorous movement. These elements determined the character of the Legion, and had far-reaching effects on the capabilities and power of the organisation. Local rivalries, class and gender based distinctions meant that full unity was never achieved in the British ex-service movement, and poor negotiation skills, tradition, and national pride ensured that there was a similar, but independent Legion in Scotland. These divisions did contribute to a lack of cohesion with consequences that were all too clearly displayed in the Legion campaign over prematurely aged ex-service men in 1938.

All of these factors affected the character of the Legion, but the impact of the officer-dominated leadership was yet greater. The position of the National Executive

Council was unassailable, and much of Legion policy was shaped by the few national officers. The motivations, attitudes and values of the leadership were different to those of the membership and often incompatible with the demands of a mass, democratic movement. Their prime motivations were power, prestige and publicity which conflicted with the collective and more direct methods of the membership. Legion leaders were also preoccupied with the need to control extremists within the movement - without realising that, although there were unruly ex-service men within the Legion who demanded greater action on the part of the N.E.C., the Legion did not contain left wing political activists or any other type of extremists. These conflicting aims and preoccupations often hampered the Legion in its benevolent and political aims.

The Legion leaders main aim was to found an organisation based around comradeship which endeavoured to assist its members and fellow ex-service men in distress, and this was achieved. But the Legion's aims went much further than the mundane considerations of everyday social life and practical help. Legion leaders looked beyond these objects to political influence, national reconstruction, and most controversially, relations with foreign ex-service men. It was also in these areas that the Legion found itself out of its depth and unable to achieve its high-minded aims. In attempting to create a 'Brighter Britain' through collective action, the Legion was struggling with huge problems which ex-service men alone could not hope to solve. Trade depression, unemployment, poverty and deprivation defeated the efforts of every interwar government, and in this context it is unsurprising that the Legion attempts fell far short of bringing prosperity to all ex-service men. At the same time, Legion relief work gave practical assistance to many ex-service men, and, whatever else the Legion failed to achieve, Poppy Day stamped the needs of ex-service men firmly onto the British public's consciousness. But the Legion's achievements concerning practical work remained fixed in the tradition of local voluntary societies and Legion attitudes developed to match this trend.

Legion leaders promised that their strong and influential organisation could gain large political concessions. In reality, Legion leaders were revealed as painted laths, not iron rods.¹ Poor negotiating skills and political innocence let the movement down time after time. The leaders, military men trained to obey orders unquestioningly, were easily confused, frightened and manipulated by politicians. Indeed the whole movement was politically naive and unable to deal with Parliament effectively. The greatest achievements of the Legion in political negotiation were defensive when public indignation could be effectively harnessed. Progressive action, which might have gained greater justice for ex-service men, was ruled out by the character of the Legion but also by the nature of the British political system. Although this was the era of mass franchise, the institutions of government displayed a grim tenacity in maintaining their traditional privileges and power.

Foreign policy was a mistaken avenue for Legion activities. This is not to say that ex-service men from many nations meeting together in goodwill and fellowship was wrong, but in attempting to supplement, or even supplant, the work of diplomats, Legion leaders were playing with fire. The events of 1935-1939 reveal that ex-service men did not have a special role to play in bringing peace and that they were naive to think so. Again, the Legion was struggling with events and forces well beyond its scope. The Legion's foreign policy also shows the less attractive side of Legion leadership; their hunger for publicity and recognition was given priority over more sensible policies. Their lightning ability to change their views on the subject only revealed the contradictions and confusion inherent in their policy. At the same time, the willingness of the Legion membership to support their leaders in this policy confirms our conclusions about the veterans who joined the movement. They were men who were accustomed to following strong leaders without question and lack of dissent or discussion on the Legion's foreign policy meant that unwise decisions were made in a vacuum.

¹ AC 1927, Res.No. 84, See Chapter Five.

None of these policies, or their consequences, moved the Legion away from its roots. In fact, the Legion's conduct of its practical work, political negotiation and foreign relations conclusively proves that the movement was composed of veterans from the generation of the Great War whose attitudes continued to reflect the values and concerns of the early twenties. The basic objects, ideals and principles of the Legion were fixed in the aftermath of the Great War, and they were supported by men who developed their consciousness during that era. Ultimately, the Legion did not question its role as a charitable organisation, nor did it seek to alter radically the British political system or society. Although its foreign policy was an attempt to influence events and support the cause of peace, when war clouds gathered once again, Legion members firmly declared their patriotism, loyalty and duty to the State and Crown, just as they had done during the Great War.

The Legion's 'spirit' was an internal dynamic which was constantly rehearsed through speeches, committee meetings, Parades, Remembrance services and social functions. Legion members were always reminded what the Legion stood for, what its members should believe and what kind of an example they should set to other ex-service men. The Legion's 'spirit' reflected both the strengths and weaknesses of the British army and the British military system. Rivalry and competition can lead to destructive and wasteful bickering, but can also lead to enthusiasm and increased effort for the cause. Comradeship can lead to exclusiveness but also brings fellowship, and concern for others. Loyalty can bring blind obedience but can also produce solidarity and strength. Given the constant rehearsal of Legion beliefs and ideals it is unsurprising that the Legion developed its own internal dynamic, but also that it became increasingly out of date. Legion attitudes remained firmly in place, but while they were a mixture of reactionary and progressive ideals in the early twenties, by the late thirties, they had become archaic. The Legion remained fixed while society's values and attitudes progressed.

Much of this dissertation appears to be a study of failure. The organisation did not live up to the claims made by its leaders in their speeches. The British Legion did not develop into a mass movement of millions of ex-service men as its founders had wished. The Legion was not able to deal with the problems of mass unemployment or assist every ex-service man in distress. Nor was the Legion ever able to extract major concessions from the Government on important pension issues. Most spectacularly, Legion contacts with German National Socialist veterans did not bring about peace and instead proved an embarrassment for the British Government. However, this is to compare reality with the highly inflated, hypothetical aims of Legion leaders and it is unlikely that any body would ever have been able to achieve these goals. On a more modest scale, the Legion achieved a great deal during the inter-war years. The ritual of Poppy Day did raise public consciousness about ex-service men's needs, albeit in a traditional way. The Legion also provided a sense of purpose and fellowship for thousands of its members, as well as entertainment and a social focus for many communities. Legion relief work did not provide a solution to Britain's economic depression, but did assist some of its casualties. Public pressure on government did not give ex-service men justice from the government, but Legion work in committees did modify pensions procedure and removed the worst injustices. When the Legion remained true to its roots as a voluntary society in the mold of Victorian and Edwardian friendly societies, it achieved more than in areas which were out of this scope and depth.

Given the failures and disappointments in many of the Legion's policies it might seem remarkable that the British Legion continued to grow and attract new members. However, the policies which the ex-officer leadership pursued were not essential to the core beliefs of the Legion members. The ex-officer leadership did not create the Legion, nor did they form its membership. The Legion survived and grew because thousands of ex-service men believed in its principle ideal of comradeship.

The most important strength of the Legion proved to be its ability to accept the veterans of another war into its ranks.

Debates concerning the future of the Legion and the passing of its ideals onto a younger generation had begun almost as soon as the Legion was founded. In 1939, the Legion and its members recognised that a new generation of ex-service men would eventually supplant the Great War veterans. Captain C. H. Madden, Chairman of the Sussex County Council, recognised the important issues:

This period of war will make or kill the British Legion ... If our membership is going to fade away, and if those who have done so much in the past are going to hold back now, if, in short, we are going to rest on our laurels and leave it to the few to try and uphold the fame of the Legion - then with the coming of the new generation of ex-Service men will come a new organisation to care for them and theirs ... And the Legion will be passed by, as a body of old fogies, a body obsessed with the cares of themselves and their own generation, and with none of the breadth of view and of purpose which the new age will demand.²

By 1939, Legion members recognised that they were old and that their attitudes and views - but not their ideals - were out of date. At the same time, they were determined that the Legion should continue. In 1939, the Poppy Day collection was made on behalf of all ex-service men of *all* wars for the first time,³ and important decisions about the future shape of the Legion were postponed until Second World War veterans could have their say. During the war, Legion work continued and managed to secure greater pensions successes than at any time during the previous twenty years.⁴ Legion membership reached an all time high of 1,234,835 in 1948.⁵ The Legion could not offer a new world, and could not fulfill all of its high aims and ideals, but it did eventually bridge the gap between old and new and thus ensured that its central ideal of comradeship would continue.

² *Sussex Daily News*, 27 September 1939, found in GSCLB September 1939.

³ OHBL p.257.

⁴ OHBL p.262. The 1939 Pensions Warrant was actually *worse* than the 1919 and 1921 Warrants, with lower rates of compensation and many other flaws. Legion pressure did, this time, gain justice by righting such anomalies.

⁵ OHBL p.305.

Table 1 Officers of the British Legion 1921-1939

Patrons:		
	H.R.H. Prince of Wales	1921-1937
	H.R.H. King George VI	1937-1952
Presidents:		
	Field Marshal Earl Haig	1921-1928
	Admiral Earl Jellicoe	1928-1932
	Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice	1932-1946
Chairmen:		
	Mr Thomas F. Lister	1921-1927
	Lt-Col. George Crosfield	1927-1930
	Col. John Brown	1930-1934
	Major Francis W. C. Fetherston-Godley	1934-1940
Treasurer:		
	Major J.B. Brunel Cohen	1921-1940
Secretary:		
	Col. Edward C. Heath	1921-1940
Assistant Secretary:		
	Mr John R. Griffin	1921-1940

Table 2 Geographical Extent of the Legion Areas:

East Anglia	Cambridge, Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex
East Midlands	Lincoln, Rutland, Northampton, Nottingham, Leicester, Derby
West Midlands	Stafford, Warwick, Shropshire, Worcester, Hereford, Gloucester.
Home Counties	Bedford, Hertford, Middlesex, Buckingham, Oxford, Huntingdon
Metropolitan	15 Mile Radius from Charing Cross.
South Eastern	Kent, Sussex, Isle of Wight, Surrey, Hampshire, Berkshire
South Western	Devon, Cornwall, Somerset, Dorset, Wiltshire
North Eastern	Northumberland, Durham
North Western	Cheshire, Cumberland, Isle of Man, Westmorland, Lancashire
Wales	Wales including Monmouth.
Yorkshire	Yorkshire
Southern Ireland	Ireland
Northern Ireland	Northern Ireland
Overseas	Paris, Rhineland, Hong Kong, Brazil, Gibraltar, New York etc.

Table 3 British Legion Branches 1922-1939

AREA	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935
E. Anglia	169	185	203	208	211	209	238	278	312	335	346	366	371	370
E. Midlands	174	186	202	211	231	250	233	258	264	278	299	315	337	356
H. Counties	89	109	120	132	141	162	179	214	245	263	274	284	289	289
Metropolitan	133	131	125	114	114	122	122	125	129	134	130	138	144	149
N. East	174	176	165	159	153	159	173	189	189	193	203	208	212	214
N. West	197	191	205	211	220	227	239	241	245	253	274	271	275	273
S. East	272	298	326	342	349	367	393	415	444	464	493	507	518	521
S. West	288	290	291	316	338	361	371	406	433	458	475	483	486	491
Wales	199	214	231	238	246	240	256	271	283	297	305	314	321	320
W. Midlands	217	234	246	282	287	321	357	368	391	429	457	491	502	521
Yorkshire	160	169	189	225	249	285	307	321	342	359	361	367	376	385
N. Ireland	-	50	55	61	64	69	74	72	74	75	74	76	77	78
S. Ireland	-	-	118	127	133	126	121	121	129	123	119	120	113	106
Overseas	17	24	26	35	37	41	45	50	52	54	55	54	54	57
TOTAL	2089	2257	2502	2661	2773	2939	3108	3329	3532	3715	3865	3994	4075	4130
AREA	1936	AREA	1937	AREA	1938	AREA	1939							
Eastern	676	Eastern	684	700	Eastern	709	709							
E. Midlands	369	Midlands	920	948	Midlands	957	957							
Metropolitan	155	Metropolitan	164	170	Metropolitan	174	174							
N. East	216	N. East	219	213	Northern	605	605							
N. West	278	N. West	300	307	N. West	309	309							
S. East	530	Southern	1040	1049	Southern	1071	1071							
S. West	493	Wales	337	337	Wales	339	339							
Wales	330	Wales	337	337	Wales	339	339							
W. Midlands	536	Yorkshire	382	396	Yorkshire	396	396							
Yorkshire	377	N. Ireland	79	77	N. Ireland	77	77							
N. Ireland	76	S. Ireland	108	105	S. Ireland	104	104							
S. Ireland	107	Overseas	72	65	Overseas	67	67							
Overseas	64	TOTAL	4305	4367	TOTAL	4412	4412							
TOTAL	4207													

All Figures taken from the British Legion Annual Reports, 1921-1939.

Table 4 British Legion Membership 1922-1939

AREA	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935
E. Anglia	8975	9923	10777	12750	11002	14969	17205	25129	26653	28534	26771	27829	28461	30007
E. Midlands	8229	11650	10286	13837	9545	15494	16633	26164	23630	24146	24864	25966	28678	28831
H. Counties	4050	4701	5378	7700	6514	10700	11884	22301	20105	21508	21773	21604	22638	22961
Metropolitan	18404	20663	19525	19376	14507	18134	20796	23757	23009	22789	23429	23737	24071	26679
N. East	7923	7361	7719	9183	6010	8418	9068	13088	12321	12539	13983	14997	17098	18105
N. West	12727	15789	16108	19953	14373	19428	20693	29286	26352	26228	27148	27942	27835	28858
S. East	16801	21879	22932	28005	22788	33378	34833	50543	48962	48667	51222	52733	53603	55103
S. West	11649	16711	16989	19018	15366	24012	24050	36138	34848	36946	36656	37863	39903	40415
Wales	6298	9538	12156	14593	10757	15028	17726	24566	22519	24849	23880	28117	30480	30689
W. Midlands	9944	9178	9848	12562	8843	15671	17344	26854	27919	27437	27879	32505	33993	38725
Yorkshire	9293	10762	11501	17517	13259	17725	19270	23920	21708	21230	20681	21049	23883	24272
N. Ireland	-	-	-	560	3415	3296	3177	3940	4046	3738	3193	4473	5116	4522
S. Ireland	-	-	-	2850	3129	4047	3906	4285	4283	4037	3942	2876	3517	3594
Overseas	2140	1403	1799	2288	2185	2535	2512	2549	2772	8618	4711	5031	4150	4926
TOTAL	116433	139558	145018	180193	141691	202834	219097	312520	299127	311265	310132	326721	343425	357687
AREA	1936	AREA	1937	1938	AREA	1939								
Eastern	55637	Eastern	59146	60217	Eastern	56825								
E. Midlands	31745	Midlands	75631	81821	Midlands	78910								
Metropolitan	26386	Metropolitan	29671	29934	Metropolitan	30036								
East	18876	N. East	17559	17540	Northern	47259								
West	29392	N. West	33931	35970	N. West	35838								
East	57561	Southern	102296	105826	Southern	101710								
S. West	41803	Wales	32132	33635	Wales	33872								
Wales	32983	Yorkshire	27894	29957										
W. Midlands	41552	N. Ireland	5312	5277	N. Ireland	5080								
Yorkshire	26095	S. Ireland	3594	3651	S. Ireland	3208								
N. Ireland	4950	Overseas	4968	5183	Overseas	6562								
S. Ireland	3836	TOTAL	392135	409011	TOTAL	399300								
Overseas	4826													
TOTAL	375642													

All Figures calculated from the affiliation fee receipts found in the British Legion Annual Accounts, 1921-1939.

Table 5 Yearly Increases in British Legion Membership 1922-1935.

AREA	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934
	-1923	-1924	-1925	-1926	-1927	-1928	-1929	-1930	-1931	-1932	-1933	-1934	-1935
E. Anglia	949	854	1973	-1748	3967	2236	7924	1524	1881	-1763	1058	633	1546
E. Midlands	3421	-1364	3552	-4293	5949	1140	9530	-2533	516	718	1102	2712	153
H. Counties	652	677	2322	-1187	4186	1184	10417	-2196	1403	265	-169	1034	323
Metropolitan	2259	-1138	-149	-4869	3627	2662	2960	-748	-220	640	307	334	2608
N. East	-562	358	1464	-3173	2408	649	4021	-768	218	1444	1014	2100	1007
N. West	3062	319	3845	-5580	5055	1265	8593	-2934	-124	920	794	-107	1023
S. East	5078	1053	5073	-5217	10590	1456	15710	-1582	-295	2555	1511	870	1500
S. West	5061	279	2029	-3653	8646	38	12088	-1290	2098	-290	1207	2040	512
Wales	3240	2618	2437	-3836	4271	2698	6840	-2047	2330	-969	4237	2363	209
W. Midlands	-767	670	2714	-3720	6828	1673	9510	1065	-482	442	4626	1488	4732
Yorkshire	1469	739	6016	-4258	4466	1545	4651	-2213	-477	-549	368	2834	389
N. Ireland	-	-	560	2855	-120	-118	763	106	-308	-545	1280	644	-594
S. Ireland	-	-	2850	279	918	-141	379	-2	-246	-96	-1066	641	77
Overseas	-736	396	489	-103	349	-23	37	223	5846	-3906	320	-881	776
TOTAL	23125	5460	35175	-38502	61142	16263	93423	-13393	12139	-1134	16589	16704	14262

Table 6 Percentage Membership of the British Legion in Each Area 1922-1935.

AREA	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	Average
E. Anglia	7.71	7.11	7.43	7.08	7.76	7.38	7.85	8.04	8.91	9.17	8.63	8.52	8.29	8.39
E. Midlands	7.07	8.35	7.09	7.68	6.74	7.64	7.59	8.37	7.90	7.76	8.02	7.95	8.35	8.06
H. Counties	3.48	3.37	3.71	4.27	4.60	5.28	5.42	7.14	6.72	6.91	7.02	6.61	6.59	6.42
Metropolitan	15.81	14.81	13.46	10.75	10.24	8.94	9.49	7.60	7.69	7.32	7.55	7.27	7.01	7.46
N. East	6.80	5.27	5.32	5.10	4.24	4.15	4.14	4.19	4.12	4.03	4.51	4.59	4.98	5.06
N. West	10.93	11.31	11.11	11.07	10.14	9.58	9.44	9.37	8.81	8.43	8.75	8.55	8.11	8.07
S. East	14.43	15.68	15.81	15.54	16.08	16.46	15.90	16.17	16.37	15.64	16.52	16.14	15.61	15.41
S. West	10.01	11.97	11.72	10.55	10.84	11.84	10.98	11.56	11.65	11.87	11.82	11.59	11.62	11.30
Wales	5.41	6.83	8.38	8.10	7.59	7.41	8.09	7.86	7.53	7.98	7.70	8.61	8.88	8.58
W. Midlands	8.54	6.58	6.79	6.97	6.24	7.73	7.92	8.59	9.33	8.81	8.99	9.95	9.90	10.83
Yorkshire	7.98	7.71	7.93	9.72	9.36	8.74	8.79	7.65	7.26	6.82	6.67	6.44	6.95	6.79
Ireland	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.31	2.41	1.62	1.45	1.26	1.35	1.20	1.03	1.37	1.49	1.26
Ireland	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.58	2.21	2.00	1.78	1.37	1.43	1.30	1.27	0.88	1.02	1.00
Overseas	1.84	1.01	1.24	1.27	1.54	1.25	1.15	0.82	0.93	2.77	1.52	1.54	1.21	1.38

Table 7 Annual Conference Representation 1921-1939

<u>Year</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Area</u> <u>Delegates</u>	<u>Branch</u> <u>Delegates</u>	<u>Registered</u> <u>Branches</u>	<u>Percentage</u> <u>Representation</u>
1921	London	--	718	1478	48.6
1922	London	11	340	1728	19.7
1923	London	9	656	2488	26.4
1924	London	10	428	2703	15.8
1925	London	13	505	2662	19.0
1926	London	13	572	2774	20.6
1927	London	13	605	2940	20.6
1928	Scarborough	13	584	3109	18.8
1929	London	13	759	3330	22.8
1930	Cardiff	34	626	3532	17.7
1931	London	45	820	3715	22.1
1932	Portsmouth	44	801	3865	20.7
1933	London	13	922	3994	23.1
1934	Weston-S-Mare	55	1206	4075	29.6
1935	London	45	929	4130	22.5
1936	Buxton	--	805	4207	19.1
1937	London	40	874	4305	20.3
1938	Newcastle	45	838	4367	19.2
1939	London	51	911	4412	20.6

Table 8 Membership and Poppy Day Comparison for 1927-1928.

AREA	Member- ship in <u>1927</u>	Collection in 1927 (£)	% Member- ship 1927	% of Collect in 1927	Member- ship in <u>1928</u>	Collection in 1928 (£)	% Member- ship 1928	% of Collect in 1928
E. Anglia	14969	24657	7.4	6.8	17205	29338	7.9	7.3
E. Midlands	15494	18890	7.6	5.2	16633	21779	7.6	5.4
H. Counties	10700	15741	5.3	4.3	11884	17675	5.4	4.4
Metropolitan	18134	75165	8.9	20.6	20796	85441	9.5	21.2
N. East	8418	8308	4.2	2.3	9068	9549	4.1	2.4
N. West	19428	45644	9.6	12.5	20693	50985	9.4	12.6
S. East	33378	59339	16.5	16.3	34833	64821	15.9	16.1
S. West	24012	23215	11.8	6.4	24050	23816	11.0	5.9
Wales	15028	12594	7.4	3.5	17726	12812	8.1	3.2
W. Midlands	15671	38557	7.7	10.6	17344	43803	7.9	10.9
Yorkshire	17725	26962	8.7	7.4	19270	29757	8.8	7.4
N. Ireland	3296	6692	1.6	1.8	3177	5005	1.5	1.2
S. Ireland	4047	8641	2.0	2.4	3906	8685	1.8	2.2
Overseas	2535		1.2		2512		1.1	
TOTAL	202834	364405	100	100	219097	403466		100

Figures Calculated from Affiliation Fee Receipts found in British Legion Annual Accounts, and from 1927-1928 Interim Poppy Day Reports, found in IH29/8.

Table 9 Comparison Between British Legion Members and the Number of Unemployed Ex-Service Men in the Regions During April 1936.

<u>Area</u>	<u>B.L. Members in 1936</u>	<u>Unemployed Ex-Service men in 1936</u>
Eastern	55637	-
Metropolitan	26386	-
Yorkshire	26095	-
South East	57561	65142
South West	41803	28721
Midlands	73297	42984
North East	18876	89875
North West	29392	88100
Wales	32983	38782
Total	375642	410689

Alternatively Expressed:

<u>Areas</u>	<u>B.L. Members in 1936</u>	<u>Unemployed Ex-Service men in 1936</u>	<u>Ratio: members/unemployed</u>
South	181387	93863	1.932
Midlands	73297	42984	1.705
North	74363	177975	0.417
Wales	32983	38782	0.850
Total	375642	410689	0.914

South = S.E., S.W., Met., Eastern Areas.

North = N.E., N.W., Yorks Areas.

British Legion figures taken from the Affiliation fee receipts, found in the Annual Accounts, 1936.

Unemployment figures for April 1936, found in PIN15/722.

Table 10 Poppy Day Receipts (Gross) 1921-1939

1921	£106,000	1931	£501,082
1922	£158,307	1932	£483,298
1923	£203,364	1933	£511,853
1924	£272,426	1934	£505,628
1925	£338,560	1935	£527,302
1926	£360,256	1936	£544,301
1927	£442,326	1937	£553,103
1928	£503,348	1938	£578,188
1929	£518,489	1939	£595,887
1930	£524,650		

Table 11 British Legion Expenditure 1923-1932.

	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933
Relief	78197	103431	155378	133444	208825	268390	264173	223033	25817	257689	237839
Small Business											
Loans	20784	14253	18495	8841	13545	17907	19911	16485	16497	14782	17498
Migration	-	-	-	5307	11842	12527	18605	7327	1595	717	723
Employment											
Schemes	17408	2044	3588	1500	1550	19207	12085	8755	7842	6295	7051
Area Housing											
Scheme	-	-	-	-	75000	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	116389	119728	177411	149092	310762	321317	318042	257292	284351	278483	275427

Figures taken from the British Legion Annual Reports 1923-1933.

Table 12 British Legion Placements in Employment 1921-1939

Type	1921	1922	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939
Disabled	-	-	186	136	-	-	-	3744	4764	4767	4238	4014	4037	3170
Dependants	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2785	3192	3029	2669	2018
Permanent	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12089	14818	14740	14201	13488	12138
Temporary	-	-	200	499	-	-	-	-	23650	23649	22118	27204	22282	15882
Total	561	1935	1089	1262	10262	17291	26149	38811	45617	50304	49745	41405	35770	28020

There are no exact figures for 1923-1927. Figures taken from the British Legion Annual Reports 1921-1939.

**Table 13 National Executive Council Nominations 1923-1930
From The Provisional Agendas of the Annual Conferences**

AREA	1923-24	1924-1925	1925-1926	1926-1927	1927-1928	1928-1929	1929-1930	1930-1931
E. Anglia	<i>Capt A.E.H. Lee</i> <i>Mr W. Lees</i>	<i>Capt A.E.H. Lee</i> <i>Mr W. Lees</i>	<i>Capt AEH Lee</i> <i>Mr W. Lees</i>	<i>Capt A Dixon</i> <i>Mr W. Lees</i>	- <i>Mr W. Lees</i>	<i>Col Hancock</i> <i>Mr W. Lees</i>	<i>Col Hancock</i> <i>Maj J Harter</i>	<i>Col Hancock</i> <i>Maj J Harter</i>
E. Midland	<i>Col J. Brown</i> <i>Co S.A. Barber</i>	<i>Col J. Brown</i> <i>Co S.A. Barber</i>	<i>Col J. Brown</i> <i>Co S.A. Barber</i>	<i>Col J. Brown</i> <i>Co S.A. Barber</i>	<i>Col J. Brown</i> <i>Co S.A. Barber</i>	<i>Mr H Baggaley</i> <i>Co G Lewis</i>	<i>Mr H Baggaley</i> <i>Co G Lewis</i>	<i>Mr H Baggaley</i> <i>Mr SE Perry</i>
H. Counties	<i>Mr CE Griffin</i> <i>Maj Visc Stopford</i>	<i>Lt-Col AN Tucker</i> <i>Maj Visc Stopford</i>	<i>Lt-Col AN Tucker</i> <i>Maj Visc Stopford</i>	<i>Lt-Col AN Tucker</i> <i>Mr J. Hewitt</i>	<i>Lt-Col AN Tucker</i> <i>Mr J. Hewitt</i>	<i>Lt-Col AN Tucker</i> <i>Mr J. Hewitt</i>	<i>Lt-Col Naylor</i> <i>Mr J. Hewitt</i>	<i>Lt-Col Naylor</i> <i>Mr J. Hewitt</i>
Metropolitan	<i>Mr A.H. Francks</i>	<i>Mr A.H. Francks</i> <i>Maj RH Royle</i>	-	<i>Mr AH Francks</i> <i>Mr E Peace</i>	<i>Mr AH Francks</i> <i>Mr JJ Cunningham</i>	<i>Mr AH Francks</i> <i>Mr JJ Cunningham</i>	<i>Mr AH Francks</i> <i>Mr JJ Cunningham</i>	<i>Mr AH Francks</i> <i>Mr JJ Cunningham</i>
J. East	<i>Capt W. Appleby</i> <i>Capt JE Rogerson</i>	<i>Capt W. Appleby</i> <i>Mr H Caulfield</i>	<i>Capt W. Appleby</i> <i>Mr H Caulfield</i>	<i>Capt W. Appleby</i> <i>Mr H Caulfield</i>	<i>Capt W. Appleby</i> <i>Capt EWH Hurst</i>			
N. West	- <i>Mr A Jackson</i>	<i>Lt-Col GR Croxford</i> <i>Mr A Jackson</i>	<i>Maj C St J Broadbent</i> <i>Mr A Jackson</i>	<i>Maj C St J Broadbent</i> <i>Mr A Jackson</i>	<i>Maj C St J Broadbent</i> <i>Mr A Jackson</i>	<i>Maj C St J Broadbent</i> <i>Mr A Jackson</i>	<i>Maj C St J Broadbent</i> <i>Mr A Jackson</i>	<i>Maj C St J Broadbent</i> <i>Mr A Jackson</i>
S. East	<i>Lt-Com F Paget-Hett</i> <i>Mr A Shaw</i>	<i>Lt-Com F Paget-Hett</i> <i>Mr A Shaw</i>	<i>Lt-Com F Paget-Hett</i> <i>Mr AH Shaw</i>	<i>Lt-Com F Paget-Hett</i> <i>Mr AH Shaw</i>	<i>Lt-Com F Paget-Hett</i> <i>Mr AH Shaw</i>	<i>Lt-Col Waithman</i> <i>Capt AH Shaw</i>	<i>Lt-Col Waithman</i> <i>Capt AH Shaw</i>	<i>Lt-Col Waithman</i> <i>Capt AH Shaw</i>
S. West	<i>Maj Cely Trevilian</i> <i>Mr RF Goldsack</i>	<i>Dr C Spencer Palmer</i> <i>Mr HE Giles</i>	<i>Dr C Spencer Palmer</i> <i>Capt S Warne</i>	<i>Dr C Spencer Palmer</i> <i>Capt S Warne</i>	<i>Dr C Spencer Palmer</i> <i>Capt S Warne</i>			
Wales	<i>Mr H Calderwood</i> <i>Mr NM Price</i>	<i>Mr H Calderwood</i> <i>Mr NM Price</i>	<i>Mr H Calderwood</i> <i>Mr NM Price</i>	<i>Mr H Calderwood</i> <i>Mr NM Price</i>	<i>Mr H Calderwood</i> <i>Mr NM Price</i>	<i>Mr H Calderwood</i> <i>Mr NM Price</i>	<i>Mr H Calderwood</i> <i>Mr HD Griffiths</i>	<i>Mr H Calderwood</i> <i>Mr HD Griffiths</i>
W. Midland	<i>Mr DP Pielou</i> <i>Maj Parker-Leighton</i>	<i>Mr DP Pielou</i> <i>Maj Parker-Leighton</i>	<i>Mr DP Pielou</i> <i>Maj Parker-Leighton</i>	<i>Mr DP Pielou</i> <i>Maj Parker-Leighton</i>	<i>Mr J Smedley Crooke</i> <i>Maj Parker-Leighton</i>	<i>Mr J Smedley Crooke</i> <i>Maj Parker-Leighton</i>	-	<i>Mr J Smedley Crooke</i> <i>Mj Fetherston-Godley</i>
Yorkshire	<i>Mr CH Parker</i> <i>Capt T Woodhead</i>	<i>Mr CH Parker</i> <i>Capt T Woodhead</i>	<i>Mr CH Parker</i> <i>Capt T Woodhead</i>	<i>Mr CH Parker</i> <i>Capt T Woodhead</i>	<i>Mr CH Parker</i> <i>Capt T Woodhead</i>	<i>Mr CH Parker</i> <i>Capt T Woodhead</i>	<i>Mr CH Parker</i> <i>Mr CR Parker</i>	<i>Mr CH Parker</i> <i>Mr JR Thornton</i>
S. Ireland	-	-	<i>M-Gen Sir WB Hickie</i> <i>Mr WP Walker</i>	<i>M-Gen Sir WB Hickie</i> <i>Mr AP Connolly</i>	<i>Mr MI Nolan</i> <i>Mr AP Connolly</i>	<i>Mr MI Nolan</i> <i>Mr AP Connolly</i>	<i>Mr AP Connolly</i>	<i>Captain W Redmond</i> <i>Mr AP Connolly</i>
N. Ireland	-	-	<i>Col RG Barry</i> <i>Capt LJ Bennet</i>	<i>Mr J Davis</i> <i>Capt LJ Bennet</i>	<i>Mr WA Wilson</i> <i>Capt LJ Bennet</i>	<i>Mr WA Wilson</i> <i>Capt LJ Bennet</i>	<i>Mr WA Wilson</i> <i>Capt LJ Bennet</i>	<i>Colonel PJ Woods</i> <i>Capt LJ Bennet</i>

Names in italics show members in their first year on the Council. Underlined names show returning members.

Appendix A: British Legion Principles and Policy

(A) The Legion shall be democratic non-sectarian and not affiliated to or connected directly with any political party or political organisations.

(B) The Legion shall be created to inaugurate and maintain in a strong stimulating united and democratic comradeship all those who have served in His Majesty's Navy Army Air Force or any Auxiliary Forces so that neither their efforts nor their interests shall be forgotten that their welfare and that of the dependants of the fallen shall be secured to them in respect of the difficulties caused in their lives as a result of their services.

(C) The Legion shall exist to perpetuate in civil life of the Empire and the World the principles for which the Nation stands to inculcate a sense of loyalty to the Crown Community and Nation to promote unity amongst all classes to make right the master of might to secure peace and goodwill on earth to safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of justice freedom and democracy and to consecrate our comradeship by our devotion to mutual service and helpfulness.

(D) There shall be nothing to prevent the Legion from adopting a definite policy on any question directly or indirectly affecting ex-service men and women nor from taking any constitutional action considered necessary in pursuance of such policy provided that the policy and proposed action have been considered and endorsed by a majority of the Area Conferences after due notice to the branches of the Legion and also providing that such policy or action is strictly in accordance with the principles laid down above and with the objects of the Legion as set out in the Charter of the Legion. Nothing in this Rule shall prevent Branches from exercising full local autonomy or from adopting and declaring a definite policy or taking any action considered necessary in pursuance of it upon local matters always providing that such action is constitutional and in accordance with the aims, objects and programme of the Legion. The decision as to what are or are not local matters shall rest with the National Executive Council.

Appendix B: The Constitution of the American Legion:

- 1 To uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America.
- 2 To maintain law and order
- 3 To foster and perpetuate a 100 per cent Americanism.
- 4 To preserve the memories and incidents of our association in the Great War.
- 5 To inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state and nation.
- 6 To combat the autocracy of both the classes and the masses.
- 7 To make right the master of might.
- 8 To promote peace and good will on earth.
- 9 To safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of justice, freedom, and democracy.
- 10 To consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness.

Appendix C: Objects of the Empire Services League:

- (A) To foster the spirit of Comradeship and mutual help among ALL who have served or are serving.
- (B) To watch over and safeguard their interests.
- (C) To work in close conjunction with the various Government departments on all matters cognate to, but outside the sphere of state action.
- (D) To establish local information and advisory Agencies dealing with employment, assistance and other benefits.
- (E) To co-ordinate the work of all voluntary and un-official bodies both inside the Services and outside of them which are working on behalf of those who have served.
- (F) To establish for the benefit of subscribing members self- supporting clubs for social and recreative purposes.
- (G) To ensure the Non-Political, Non-Sectarian, and democratic nature of the League.

Appendix D: The Constitution of the Comrades of the Great War:

The Organisation shall be created to inaugurate and maintain in a strong, stimulating, united and democratic comradeship all those who have served in any capacity in the Sea, Land and Air Forces during the Great War, so that neither their efforts nor their interests shall be forgotten or neglected.

The movement shall be wholly non-Party in character, aims and administration, and shall concern itself only with the welfare of Comrades and their dependents, and the dependents of those who have fallen.

- 1 To perpetuate the memory and story of the gallant men and women who died for their country.
- 2 To perpetuate the spirit of comradeship, patriotism, and devotion which has characterised the Naval and Military Forces of the Empire, and to foster these qualities in the rising generation.
- 3 To watch and safeguard the interests of the Forces and to take such steps as are necessary to protect them now and after demobilisation.
- 4 To press the claims of discharged sailors and soldiers to State and public employment; to enlist the co-operation of employers for the same object; and to support undertakings for the suitable training and employment of disabled men.
- 5 To secure adequate pensions for discharged sailors and soldiers.
- 6 To impress upon Parliament the need for an appropriate scale of pensions for men discharged on account of ill-health or from incapacity arising from service.
- 7 To help discharged men to prepare their necessary papers, and to see that their pensions and allowances are in order.
- 8 To promote the welfare of the women and children left by those who have fallen.
- 9 To see that all monies raised and contributed from any source for the welfare of sailors and soldiers are utilised for that purpose and not diverted to other objects.

Appendix E: NATIONAL CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAMME 1921

Imperial Objects

1. To institute throughout the Empire a National Day of Commemoration for those who fell in the Great War, and to press upon the Governments concerned the desirability of instituting such a day as a General Holiday.
2. To co-operate and federate with ex-service organisations of a character similar to the British Legion throughout the Empire and our Allied Countries, and to encourage the interchange of visits and ideas between the members of the British Legion and such organisations.
3. To support actively all direct efforts for peace, primarily the League of Nations, while taking care that the defence of the Empire is adequately provided for.

National Objects

- 1 To secure that the Government, Municipal, and Local Authorities, and other employers of labour shall give a preference in employment to ex-service men and women seeking employment and, in particular, that women who replaced men in employment, owing to war pressure and are not dependants of ex-service men or actual breadwinners, shall be replaced in such employment by ex-service men or ex-service women.
2. To take active steps to obtain the co-operation of the Government, public and private employers, and of the Trade Unions in securing the fullest possible facilities for the training of ex-service men and women, and, when trained, their admission to the different organisations of skilled labour.
3. To support and encourage by financial and other means suitable undertakings by ex-service men and women conducted on business lines and for that purpose, and generally in order to help to re-establish ex-service men and women in civilian occupations, to secure Government assistance and voluntary aid, and to extend the principle of co-partnership in all such undertakings, and further to take action to prevent the exploitation of the employment of ex-service men in firms which have for their apparent object the benefit only of ex-service men
4. To urge upon the Government and the community the necessity of providing for ex-service men and women, genuinely anxious and unable to obtain employment, reasonable maintenance until such time as they are absorbed into industry.
5. To emphasise the importance of the King's Roll, and to insist that, in the allotment of contracts by the Government and Local Authorities, preference may be given to firms whose names are on the Roll. To undertake a Publicity Campaign to compel all private employers and public companies who should be on the King's Roll, but are not, to take immediate steps to qualify for admission to that Roll.
6. To secure the removal of the severely incapacitated or disabled ex-service men or women from the ordinary competitive market by the scientific and compulsory distribution of the severely incapacitated or disabled ex-service men and women amongst the industries of the country.
7. To obtain special preference for all seriously disabled ex-service men and women as regards travelling and admission to places of recreation and entertainment.
8. To guard jealously the right to Pension of disabled and incapacitated ex-service men, and of the widows and dependants of ex-service men; to endeavour to remedy

injustices and abolish anomalies.

Domestic Objects

1. To make the British Legion truly National by drawing into or affiliating with it all existing ex-service men's and ex-service women's associations, benevolent funds, clubs, etc.
2. In co-operation with the United Services' Fund to provide in convenient centres for all Branches, facilities for social intercourse, recreation, and recreational education, acquiring, where not already in existence, permanent halls, clubs premises, or meeting rooms for the use of members.
3. To make the existence of the British Legion more widely known, by arranging for periodical groups rallies of members of all Branches of the British Legion in convenient centres.

Appendix F: THE BRITISH LEGION - WHAT IT HAS DONE

- 1 Advocated and obtained in innumerable instances preference of employment for ex-service men.
- 2 Procured the concession that on Relief Schemes financed by the Government Unemployment Grants Committee at least 75% of the men employed shall be ex-service men.
- 3 Obtained employment for no fewer than 10,000 men.
- 4 By financing its employment schemes has found employment for a further 3,500 men.
- 5 Assisted 400,000 ex-service men, widows and dependents with pension difficulties.
- 6 Registered 65% successes in pensions cases taken before the Appeals Tribunal.
- 7 Assisted 720,000 ex-service men of all ranks through it Relief Fund.
- 8 Established 3,500 ex-service men in their own businesses.
- 9 Obtained representation on all Government Committees dealing with questions affecting ex-service men.
- 10 Obtained many concessions from the Pensions Ministry to the advantage of the 1,900,000 beneficiaries.

ORGANISE! ORGANISE!

**JOIN THE LEGION TO-DAY
and so help all those who
are less fortunate than yourself.**

Appendix G: Questions to Parliamentary Candidates 26 October 1922

1 Would you support the policy of the Legion that in Government and Municipal employment and in all schemes for employment financed or controlled by the National or Local Authorities, ex- service men should be given preference?

2 Are you prepared to support the finding of the Select Committee of the House of Commons that, if the voluntary scheme to secure employment for disabled men does not succeed by May 1923, legislation introducing a compulsory scheme for the allocation of disabled men to industry should be passed?

3 Are you in favour of the rates of pensions being permanently fixed, and will you strenuously oppose any attempt to reduce the present standard rate of pensions?

4 Would you support the claim of the Legion that all ex-service men and women whose disability as a result of service is certified as rendering them unable to obtain employment in the open market shall be entitled to and receive the full disability pension?

5 Will you support the claim of the Legion that upon all Committees set up to deal with questions affecting the direct welfare of ex-service men, eg. pensions, employment, emigration or resettlement, the Legion shall have the right of direct representation?

6 Are you in sympathy with the League of Nations and will you support all steps taken in the direction of securing permanent peace?

7 Do you support the Legion's policy that 11th November should be instituted as a National Day of Commemoration and as a National Holiday?

8 In order to check the high death-rate of tubercular ex-service men who, having been temporarily cured in sanatoria, relapse owing to the prejudicial surroundings of slum existence, will you support the erection of village settlements for tubercular ex-service men on the lines of the Inter-Departmental Committee Report of 1919?

9 If elected will you co-operate with the local Branch of the British Legion in redressing injustice to ex-service men, widows and dependents and raise any reasonable questions proposed by them in Parliament?

10 Are you in favour of the abolition of the seven year time limit in connection with widow's pensions and in favour of the right being given to a widow to put forward a claim to pension whenever her husband's death may occur, and to receive such pension if the death is due to or aggravated by War Service?

11 Are you in favour of ex-service men, who have served in H.M. Forces and have been discharged suffering from mental trouble, being stigmatised pauper lunatics? If not, will you do all in your power to prevent the Ministry of Pensions transferring these cases to the care of the Local Boards of Guardians?

12 Will you support the Legion's claim that the Minister of Pensions and his staff shall be ex-service men?

13 Will you support the continuance of a separate Ministry of Pensions, there being still 870,000 disabled men, 168,000 widows, and 1,740,000 other dependents in receipt of pensions and allowances?

Appendix H: Amalgamation Proposals Between Scotland and England 1927.

National Executive Council Meeting 2nd April 1927

A letter was read from Mr Griffin asking the National Executive Council's permission to address the Council on the question of amalgamation with the British Legion. It was unanimously agreed to hear Mr Griffin before proceeding with the ordinary business.

Mr Griffin then put forward the following points which the British Legion were prepared to offer to the British Legion Scotland on amalgamation.

- 1 Benevolent work in Scotland to remain as at present.
- 2 General Organisation in Scotland to remain as at present.
- 3 The Annual Conference for Scotland to elect two representatives to the Executive Council which meets in London.
- 4 The expenses of such Representatives to be borne by the general funds of the British Legion.
- 5 The Scottish national Executive Council to become the Scottish Council.
- 6 The affiliation fees paid by branches to be reduced from 2/- to 1/6 and payable direct to London.
- 7 Of the 1/6 so paid, 6d to be returned to the Scottish Office.
- 8 The National Executive Council in London to make a grant of between £700 and £800 to the Scottish Council for administration in Scotland.
- 9 Branches in Scotland to be eligible for representation at the Annual Conference held at Whitsuntide each year and to come under the arrangements for the pooling of fares.
- 10 The Executive Council to be responsible for literature needed by Scottish Branches thereby bearing cost of the same.
- 11 The Executive Council to be responsible for the distribution of Badges to the Scottish branches thereby being responsible for the financial obligations in this matter.

Appendix I: Co-operation With England 1938

Co-Operation with England

It is recognised that the British Legion in England and the British Legion (Scotland) both exist for the same purpose, and it is considered that it would be to their mutual advantage and would strengthen their mutual interests if there was a recognised policy of co-operation or affiliation in regard to all National and International questions.

Such questions would include:

- 1) Negotiations with HM Government on questions of National importance (as for example national Service Schemes as exemplified by the situation which arose in connection with the Volunteer Forces for Czechoslovakia)
- 2) Negotiations with HM Government Departments on questions affecting ex-service men, such as Pensions, Employment, national Insurance, etc.

3) The promotion of friendship and goodwill between ex-service men of all Nations so as to advance the cause of peace by bringing about a better understanding between nations.

In order to give effect to this scheme the following interchange of representatives has been provisionally agreed as between the two National Executive Councils, for submission to their respective Annual Conference, for approval.

1) Representation from Scotland to England

a) Two representatives from the NEC (Scotland) to the NEC, London, with full powers of membership.

b) One rep from the NEC (Scotland) to each Committee in London dealing with National Service, Pensions, Employment, International Goodwill, and any other question which is mutual to the two organisations. The Scottish member in each case to have full powers of membership.

c) A representation, with full powers of voting, etc, to the Annual Conference in England, up to a maximum of 36.

2) Representation from England to Scotland

a) Two Reps to the NEC with full powers of membership

b) One rep to any Committee corresponding to those in London on which Scottish representatives may sit.

c) A representation with voting powers to the Annual Conference in Scotland, up to a maximum of 9.

Domestic Affairs

The British Legion in England and the British Legion (Scotland) shall continue, as at present, to have complete independence and control over their own domestic affairs.

This includes all matters of organisation, Administration and Finance, and the British Legion (Scotland) and the British legion in England, shall have the right, if so desired, to approach government Departments independently in reference to any question which is applicable only to the individual country concerned.

In regard to all questions of mutual interest to ex-service men as a whole, the channel of communication shall be through the HQ of the British Legion in London. All matters affecting Scotland, apart from matters of mutual interest as above, and all questions affecting individuals will continue to be dealt with from the HQ of the British Legion (Scotland) in Edinburgh.

Appendix J: Chronology of Legion Foreign Policy

1920

FIDAC founded by Charles Bertrand - HQ in Paris.

1921

Legion joins FIDAC, supports League of Nations.

1922

Brunel Cohen at FIDAC Conference in New Orleans, suggests bringing in ex-enemy organisations.

October 1922 First Meeting at the International Labour Organisation of French, German and British ex-service men to discuss disablement.

1923

Reparations quarrel at Brussels FIDAC Conference.

Hamilton suggests holding out the hand of friendship to ex-enemies - Metropolitan Area Council protests.

1924

Legion attempts to have ex-enemy organisations admitted to FIDAC. Refused, but resolution passed recommending every member to make its own investigations into the matter.

1925

Rome FIDAC Conference, Crosfield and Haig impressed by Mussolini. Easter 1925, Crosfield visits Austrian ex-service men.

1926

Warsaw FIDAC Conference, Resolution adopted to make contact with ex-enemies.

30 September first meeting of CIAMAC. (Conference Internationale des Associations des Mutilés et des Anciens Combattants)

1927

Brief FIDAC Conference,

9 July First International Conference at Luxembourg. Reichsbanner present but not the Stahlhelm. Unsatisfactory due to wrangle over the wording of a resolution on 'respect for Treaties'.

1928

10-11 September Second International Conference. No large German organisations present, only the Young German Order and the Prisoner of War Association and Austria.

1933

19 March 10,000 ex-service men from all parts of the world paraded at Geneva - except the Germans (due to the crisis caused by Hitler's accession to power)

1934

Col John Brown visits Nazi Party Rally.

Hamilton receives the Drums of the Gordon Highlanders from Hindenburg.

1935

Ribbentrop approaches Legion with invitation for a delegation to visit Germany. Prince of Wales speech. First delegations sent to Germany, Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia.

1936

Buxton Conference has French, German, Austrian and Yugoslavian

representatives.

Further visits - one to Hungary, CZ Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. In August, the Thatcham branch entertained three German representatives for a week.

In October a German delegation visits Britain. In June the Heybridge Branch go to Frankfurt and Berlin.

6 November Comite Internationale Permanent (C.I.P.) established in Rome.

Germans visit Swansea.

1937

18 February C.I.P. meeting in Berlin.

12-16 April Delegation in Italy.

May 1937 B.E.S.L. begins to participate in CIP.

27 June Crosfield and Thatcham Branch visit Kyffhauserbund at Kassel in Germany.

1 July Delegation to Rumania, Hungary, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. In Prague, Legion influence brought about the first meeting between the Czechoslovakian and Sudeten German ex-service organisations. 1,700 excursions made by Legion representatives in 1937.

August Germans visit Isle of Wight, and Maldon.

22 November Italians visit London - high profile visit with Government involvement.

1938

11 March German troops invade Austria.

18 May Second C.I.P. Congress held in London. decided to hold a peace day on 9 October 1938.

August Metropolitan Area visit to Germany, Hamilton meets Hitler.

15 September Chamberlain flies to Berchtesgaden.

22 September Chamberlain flies to Godesberg. 800 Germans visit London.

23 September Godesberg Memorandum.

24 September Idea of Legion Police Force first mooted

25 September PM's agreement to Legion proposal. Maurice flies to Berlin.

26 September Maurice meets Hitler.

27 September Fleet is mobilised. Chamberlain's radio broadcast.

28 September Chamberlain announces in House of Commons that Hitler had agreed to meet in a four power Conference at Munich.

29 September Conference met at Munich (until 30 September)

1 October Second meeting of the International Commission in Berlin.

6 October British Legion Volunteer Police Force assembled at Olympia.

12 October Force embarks on two troopships at Tilbury and sails to Southend.

14 October Force sails back from Southend.

15 October Force dispersed

November Small delegation visits Paris.

1939

14 March German troops occupy Prague.

25 March Chairman breaks Legion contact with the CIP after having been invited to a CIP Executive meeting in the Black Forest by the Duke of Saxe Coburg (the CIP President).

August 1,100 Legion members visit Paris

Appendix K: British Legion Plan for Police Force in Czechoslovakia

The plan was handed to Hitler, at 10. am on 26 September 1938, during the interview between Maurice and Hitler (who insisted on being alone with Maurice except for the translator, Herr Schmidt) in Berlin.

With the consent of the Prime Minister, who welcomes the idea, I am laying before you, Herr Fuhrer, a plan for participation by the British legion in the maintenance and consolidation of the peace of Europe in the following manner:-

1 The British Legion will offer to His Majesty's Govt. 10,000 picked ex-service men of the Legion who would be prepared within 48 hours to be sent to the Sudeten frontier-districts of Czechoslovakia.

2 Under the orders of their own Commanders these disciplined ex-service men would be distributed throughout the area proposed by the British and French governments and further, if the Czechoslovak Govt. consent, in the Plebiscite areas proposed by the German Government, to act as observers in the neighbourhood of all Police and Gendarmerie posts.

3 Unarmed and without any uniforms except for their Legion armbands and badges, they will be able above all to play an important part in counter-acting untrue propaganda and protecting the population during the period preceding the transfer of the above territories.

4 They will place themselves at the disposal of both governments in order to facilitate without incidents the transfer of such territories as is agreed to by the Czechoslovak Govt.

5 After 1st October or such date as may be agreed upon between the German and Czechoslovak Governments for transfer of the above territories, the entire Corps of Legion observers - reinforced if necessary to 20,000 men - will be transferred to the Plebiscite areas in order there to prepare and watch over the carrying out in an orderly fashion, of a Plebiscite to enable the population to vote without exercise of undue pressure.

In this manner Britain would provide the body suggested in the German Memorandum for supervision of the Plebiscite.

6 The transfer of the territories and entry of German troops, officials etc - in such territories as may declare themselves by the above voting to be in favour of incorporation with Germany - will take place only after the Plebiscite has taken place: which will be as soon as possible.

7 On completion of the Plebiscite the Legion-Observers will return to England.

As ex-soldiers ourselves, we address ourselves to you, Herr Fuhrer, principally as head of the ex-service men of Germany, and request your agreement to what would alone enable us to put before the World a matchless example of cooperation between the ex-service men of both countries in the promotion of peace and of important plans based thereon.

Immediately I have received your consent thereto I shall return to England in order to ensure the consent of the Czechoslovak Govt. and, with the powerful support of His Majesty's Govt. to set the above plan in motion.

For the execution, once the necessary consent of the respective Governments has been obtained, of the plan in all its detail, we should welcome the cooperation of

the German Railways and other departments, since our time is short.

Appendix L: Organisation of the British Legion Volunteer Police Force

Force Commander:

Major Sir Francis Fetherston-Godley

Personal Assistant:

Mr A. McKechnie

Chief of Staff:

Brigadier General E.R. Fitzpatrick

Personal Assistant:

Capt. S.W. Slatter

Officer I/C Intelligence

Col G.R. Crosfield

Officer I/C Administration:

Lt-Col. W. Wilberforce

O.C. No. 1 Division:

Lt-Gen Sir J.W. O'Dowda

2nd In Command:

Col. Ballantyne-Dykes

Adjutant:

Col. A. Lowther

Quartermaster:

Col. C.L. Samuelson

O.C. No. 2 Division:

Col C.M. Harris

2nd In Command:

Capt. the Hon. B. Mitford

Adjutant:

Lt-Col. F.L. Gore

Quartermaster:

Capt. C. Gordon Larking

Administration Staff:

Officer I/C Transport:

Col A.M. Wilson

Assistant:

Capt. J. Lowsley-Williams

Camp Commandant:

Lt-Col A.D. Murray

R.S.M.:

R.S.M. Hill

Officer I/C Ordnance & Stores:

Lt-Col. F. Kirby

P.M.O.:

Col. W. Benson CB.DSO.

Chaplain:

The Rt Rev. The Bishop of Truro

Assistant:

The Rev. T.H. Parsons

Officer I/C Pay Duties:

Col. E.W. Grant

Officer I/C Catering:

Mr Byford.

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