Journal of the Canadian Historical Association
Revue de la Société historique du Canada

"We who have wallowed in the mud of Flanders": First World War Veterans, Unemployment and the Development of Social Welfare in Canada, 1929-1939

Lara Campbell

Volume 11, Number 1, 2000

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/031134ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/031134ar

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0847-4478 (print)
1712-6274 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this article

Campbell, L. (2000). "We who have wallowed in the mud of Flanders": First World War Veterans, Unemployment and the Development of Social Welfare in Canada, 1929-1939. *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada, 11*(1), 125–149. https://doi.org/10.7202/031134ar

Article abstract

During the Great Depression, First World War veterans built on a history of post-war political activism to play an important role in the expansion of state-sponsored social welfare. Arguing that their wartime sacrifices had not been properly rewarded, veterans claimed that they were entitled to state protection from poverty and unemployment on the home front. The rhetoric of patriotism, courage, sacrifice, and duty created powerful demands for jobs, relief, and adequate pensions that should, veterans argued, be administered as a right of social citizenship and not a form of charity. At the local, provincial, and national political levels, veterans fought for compensation and recognition for their war service, and made their demands for jobs and social security a central part of emerging social policy.

"We who have wallowed in the mud of Flanders": First World War Veterans, Unemployment and the Development of Social Welfare in Canada, 1929-1939

LARA CAMPBELL

> The Great war was fought for Freedom and Democracy, as against control and power by Might through Wealth and Rank...we see little or no evidence of those principles for which we fought, our country being dominated and ruled by the power of wealth...the interests of money are held in higher esteem than Health, Employment or material welfare and life itself.[1]

The years of the Great Depression, from 1929 to 1939, witnessed the development of a new ideology of social welfare in Canada. While much research has been done on the consolidation of the welfare state, few historians have studied the role played by veterans and their political protests in the development of new notions of entitlement and the expansion of social welfare.[2] However, the rapid organization of veterans into a number of groups after the First World War, and their consolidation into the Royal Canadian Legion in 1925, marks them as a vocal, articulate, and politically aware constituency that developed during the post-war discontent. By the 1930s, veterans were engaged in political protest against the effects of unemployment and government policy on ex-servicemen. This protest was crucial to the development of government support for broader ideas of economic and social security, and the idea that social welfare was a right associated with the benefits of full citizenship. An analysis of the response of veterans to the Depression helps, in part, to explain why discussions of welfare state entitlement were so narrowly rooted in the language of contract, service, duty, and individual responsibility. Veterans' protests

I would like to thank Karen Dubinsky, Eric Wredenhagen, and the paper's anonymous readers for their helpful comments and encouragement. I would also like to acknowledge the funding received from Queen's University School of Graduate Studies and Research.

1 Report of the Ontario Provincial Command, The Canadian Legion of the British Empire Service League, Annual Convention, 1933.

2 The only political history of veterans' organizations is Desmond Morton and Glenn Wright, *Winning the Second Battle: Canadian Veterans and the Return to Civilian Life, 1915-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987). The authors argue that government policies for veterans "became the cradle of Canada's post-war welfare state." See pp. 222-224.

also illustrate the complex tensions that emerged as the unemployed challenged and defined the limits of need and entitlement.

While the development of welfare state policy is often studied from the perspective of political or intellectual history, the impact of organized protest and unorganized resistance throughout the 1930s must also be examined in order to fully understand the shifts in government policy and the eventual shape of various social programs.[3] The 1930s were characterized by a diversity of activism, such as the successful organizing of the Workers Unity League, the development of local organizations of the unemployed, the birth of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, and numerous local relief protests and hunger marches, the most famous being the relief camp protests and the On-to-Ottawa Trek in 1935. Various groups sustained a critique of government inaction on unemployment, ranging from increased government intervention in the economy to provide work or unemployment insurance, to demands for adequate relief, to proposals for a radical restructuring of the social and political order.[4] Some historians have acknowledged the influence of grassroots organizing and protest on state programs and policy. As American historian Linda Gordon has demonstrated, welfare recipients have resisted and fought back against welfare agencies and officials, and continually offered new definitions of their problems. Gordon argues that popular political activism of the 1930s, such as writing letters to politicians or participating in relief or eviction

3 See Michael Gauvreau and Nancy Christie, *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada, 1900-1940* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996); Dennis Guest, *The Emergence of Social Security in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985); Allan Moscovitch and J. Albert, *The Benevolent State: The Growth of Social Welfare in Canada* (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1987); Doug Owram, *The Government Generation: Canadian Intellectuals and the State* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986). For an analysis of the role of gender in welfare state development in Canada, see Margaret Jean Hillyard Little, *"No Car, No Radio, No Liquor Permit": The Moral Regulation of Single Mothers in Ontario, 1920-1997* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998); Patricia M. Evans and Gerda R. Wekerle, *Women and the Canadian Welfare State: Challenges and Change* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Jane Ursel, *Private Lives, Public Policy: 100 Years of State Intervention in the Family* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1992); Ruth Roach Pierson, "Gender and the Unemployment Insurance Debates in Canada," *Labour / Le travail* 25 (Spring 1990): 77-103.

4 See, for example, James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State*, 1914-1941 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983); Michiel Horn, *The League for Social Reconstruction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980); Joan Sangster, *Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920-1950* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989); Carmela Patrias, "Relief Strike: Immigrant Workers and the Great Depression in Crowland, Ontario, 1930-1935," in *A Nation of Immigrants: Women, Workers and Communities in Canadian History, 1840s-1960s*, eds. Franca Iacovetta and Robert Ventresca (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

protests, created a shift in public opinion that cohered around a belief in the entitlement of citizens to state-sponsored economic security.[5]

However, most citizens did not envision a universal welfare state or propose the full social entitlement of all citizens. Rather, the 1930s witnessed an uneasy co-existence between the burgeoning number of those who sought benefits on the basis of rights and entitlement, and older notions of charitable aid based on the distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor. Citizens who made claims to entitlement from the state were grappling with the tension between civil and social citizenship. In framing demands for aid in the language of civil citizenship, which used the economic discourse of "commercial exchange," and by linking demands to the classical liberal rights of freedom of exchange and private property, claimants could place their claims in the discourse of a politically powerful rhetoric.[6] However, while these demands helped to expand social welfare provision and government responsibility, they did not ultimately challenge the contract-based ideology of citizenship that based the reward of social provision on service. Arguments for entitlement were clothed in rights-based rhetoric to give them legitimacy, and this discourse was expressed in the language of citizenship and contract. To have certain rights as a citizen (and in the 1930s many of these rights revolved around access to jobs and a living wage and to a lesser extent, proper support during times of unemployment) an individual had to fulfill certain duties and expectations of citizenship. The more one could identify oneself as a true citizen of Canada, the greater the degree of entitlement to social and economic benefits.

---

5 Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890-1935* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994): 241-251. See also Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988); Craig Jenkins and Barbara G. Brents, "Social Protest, Hegemonic Competition, and Social Reform: A Political Struggle Interpretation of the Origins of the American Welfare State," *American Sociological Review*, 54 (December 1989): 891-909; Ann Shola Orloff, "Gender and the Social Rights of Citizenship: The Comparative Analysis of Gender Relations and Welfare" *American Sociological Review* 58 (1993): 305; Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York: Random House, 1971). In Canada, see Victor Howard, *"We Were the Salt of the Earth": The On-to-Ottawa Trek and the Regina Riot* (University of Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1985); Dominique Marshall, "The Language of Children's Rights, the Formation of the Welfare State, and the Democratic Experience of Poor Families in Quebec, 1940-55," *Canadian Historical Review* 78/3 (September 1997): 409-39; Shirley Tillotson, "Citizen Participation in the Welfare State: An Experiment," *Canadian Historical Review* 78/3 (September 1997): 409-39.

6 See Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, "Contract versus Charity: Why is there no social citizenship in the United States?" *Socialist Review* 22/3 (July-September, 1992), who argue that American social welfare policy is framed by the oppositional categories of charity, a gift to which the recipient has no right or claim, and contract, based on principles of civil exchange and patterns of male labour force participation. See also *Democracy and the Welfare State*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988): 3.

Further, in a society where full participation in state and society was predicated on employment and economic independence, the highest form of citizenship was gendered masculine, since entitlement to jobs was firmly entrenched as a masculine right. Furthermore, since front-line action, the most prestigious form of war service, was reserved for men, the veterans' call to economic justice, with its emphasis on duty and reciprocity, was deeply entwined with gendered notions of entitlement and citizenship.[7] Citizenship itself, of course, was already gendered; formal political rights, such as the right to vote, were still relatively new for women on the eve of the Great Depression. Citizenship was therefore measured by gender, ethnicity, class, marital status, age and degree of service to the state, leading to a complicated hierarchy of who was most deserving and entitled to jobs and aid.

Though the language of reciprocity, duty and contract was limiting, entitlement could still be expanded to mean more than market-based reciprocity. At the same time as citizens made demands using the language of entitlement, they claimed social rights of citizenship, such as economic security, the right to employment and a living wage, and a comfortable standard of living for their families, including aid that was not administered in a stigmatizing way. These demands pushed the limits of a definition of entitlement based on contractual exchange by insisting on the possibility of a relationship between citizens and the state that honoured more than individualistic, market-based wage-labour relationships. Unemployed men and women argued that unemployment and the need for relief was neither inherently stigmatizing nor an inevitable sign of individual failure. Arguments for entitlement to economic security could be based on fulfilling the gendered duties of either father and protector, or mother, homemaker and wife; upon upholding Canadian citizenship and patriotism based on British ethnicity and loyalty; and on duty and sacrifice for the state. These claims were attempts to de-commodify the understanding of entitlement by placing it, at least partially, outside the realm of the labour market.

Veterans were a crucial component in the growing and dynamic public debate over the extent of government responsibility for the support of its citizens. But as this paper will show, veterans' arguments for entitlement also excluded many citizens, and the tensions and conflicts between developing ideas of entitlement and older notions of charity would become encoded in future welfare policy.[8] By looking at a variety of sources, such as letters written by veterans directly to Ontario politicians during the 1930s, the records of veterans' organizations, and welfare case files, it is possible to examine the full contours of problems facing ex-servicemen in the Depression years, and how

7 See Pierson, "Gender and the Unemployment Insurance Debates"; Jonathan Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning and the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997).

8 Guest, *The Emergence of Social Security in Canada*; Michael Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in North America* (Basic Books, 1986).

they interacted with and attempted to influence government policy through protest, organization, and resistance.

Like most citizens who criticized government inaction during the Depression, veterans tended to emphasize traits of good character, honesty and sobriety. To be a good Canadian citizen was to be white, hardworking, respectable, married and raising a family. Good citizens, however, argued that in return for fulfilling these duties, the government had a reciprocal duty to support and maintain them, particularly in times of financial hardship. Veterans identified themselves as good citizens, but they alone had "wallowed in the mud of Flanders," and were therefore entitled to "a chance to make a few dollars and keep the Respectability of ourselves and our families."[9] In return for their wartime sacrifices, veterans believed the state had promised them "a new world of justice and goodwill" and a "future free of want," in "a country which thoroughly understood and thoroughly appreciated the magnitude of his sacrifice" made for Civilization, the Empire, Liberty, and the Home.[10] "I am a war veteran and twice wounded in action," wrote Arthur Knight, married with three children and unemployed since 1931, who was receiving what he felt was inadequate disability pension of $7 a month. "Now Sir I had the impression when I went to defend my country in 1915 that my country would take care of me and mine in the event of my being unable to do so."[11]

As the economic crisis deepened and unemployment increased, veterans became increasingly bitter over the perceived failure of the government and the public to reward them properly. They angrily pointed out that those who had stayed home had profited from "the blood and tears of the other." Arguing for "Equality of Sacrifice," they charged that while soldiers had fought for Canada's security, those at home had benefited from higher salaries and war bond investments.[12] Those who stayed home and grew affluent were "cynical" and "smirking patriots" who "counted their own blessings in the dividends transmuted from the blood of the victims."[13] Veterans pointed to their injuries and disabilities, the years of lost wages and promotions, privation for their families, and their return home to unemployment and poverty. "I would have been better to have never come back than to go through what I am going through now," said one veteran to Premier Henry.[14] As the Great Depression wore on,

9 Archives of Ontario, (AO), RG 3-8, Office of the Premier, (OTP), Henry Papers, MS 1759, file: Department of Public Works, East Block, Mr. F. Kelly to Henry, 24 May 1933.

10 *The Legionary* 8/12 (December 1933): 7, and 8/1 (August 1937): 2. See also Vance, *Death So Noble*, 90-107.

11 AO, RG 29-65, Box 8, #8051, letter from Arthur Knight to Ontario Canteen Fund (OCF), 14 November 1934.

12 *The Legionary* 8/5 (May 1933): 8.

13 "Veterans' Position," *The Legionary* 8/1 (August 1937): 2.

14 AO, RG 3-8, OTP, MS 1752, file: general correspondence, H. Vandervelde to Henry, 16 April 1932.

veterans pointed out that men who enlisted in 1914 had "enlisted at the wage rates for labour which prevailed in 1914, a rate which was maintained for the whole period of service...These men had no opportunity to take advantage of the high wages paid in some of the war industries at home."[15] Soldiers saw that their incomes, frozen at $1.10 per day through the war, made their poverty "the result of conscious public policy," and not of individual failure or lack of character.[16] Careers, education and training that were sacrificed or interrupted, and the physical and psychological "strain of war" were factors that made unemployment a war-related problem to veterans.[17] In addition, Legion leaders and members, as well as government commissions continually pointed out that most veterans were in their late 40s, so their age and physical condition made it difficult for them to work at manual labour.[18] *The Legionary* occasionally treated veterans' unemployment problems with sarcasm and humour. One cartoon in 1930 showed character Edward Jay Muggins proudly reading a job offer to his comrades: "the exceptional experience gained by you, during the great War, as an explosive expert has come to our notice, and after due deliberation, we...take great pleasure in offering you a position...you will be required to organize a special experimental department, with a view to perfecting a new explosive, for the purpose of blowing holes in doughnuts."[19]

Veterans felt a disconnection between their role as "heroes" during the war and the reality of the interwar years, when they struggled to re-integrate into society and deal with unemployment and disability.[20] Government propaganda and censorship meant that accounts of the warfront depicted men as "heroic and almost divine," and films and novels emphasized the romance, adventure and heroism of the soldiers' life on the war front.[21] At home, however, many bitterly maintained that their demands for greater recognition were inadequately recognized by the government. As one ex-servicemen lamented, "the Government as [sic] no more use for me now they got the best out of me I was one of the first to go when the country was in trouble now we are left with nothing only the relief we get."[22] Both ex-servicemen and their leaders in the Legion voiced criticisms of the failure of both the government and the general public to appreciate the moral value of their service, and to adequately reward them adequately for the sacrifices they had made. In a 1931 poem entitled "The

15 George L. Rosser, "A Knotty Problem," *The Legionary* 12/4 (November 1936): 25, 30.
16 Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, 223.
17 *The Legionary* 5/4 (September 1930).
18 See, for example, *The Legionary* 12/6 (January 1937): 13.
19 Ibid., 4/11 (April 1930): 21.
20 See Keshen, *Propaganda and Censorship*.
21 Ibid., 12.
22 AO, RG 3-8, OTP, Henry Papers, MS 1759, file: Department of Pubic Works, East Block, Thomas Frith to Henry, 31 August 1933.

End of the Hero," Cecil E. Morgan of Brantford, Ontario captured the sense of disillusionment and bitterness felt by many veterans:

> I heard the drums, I saw the flags, the girls they marched between,
> The files of other fools like me enlisting in '14.
> They gave me jam and cigarettes, and mitts to warm my hands
> And shipped me off from Angleterre with hugs and cheers and bands.
>
> "We only ask you, Tommy dear, your poor old life to risk,
> To save the world for heroes and from William's mailed fist
> And, if you are not killed, old chap, a hero YOU will be,"
> The Country cried, "Your future you may safely leave to me."
>
> Then Armistice – I hurried home – Oh, how I thanked the Lord.
> What – ! – bother for a gangrened bone – I don't want no Board.
> What if it bothers later on? – They promised they would pay
> I'm worth a dozen deaduns yet and this – Armistice Day.
>
> But now, in 1931, my race is nearly run.
> They laugh – "A pension – Like your cheek. You left the war A.1."
> So where are those who sent me socks and called us heroes now?
> Oh, Country! – Now we're on the rocks – Home, keep your war time vow?
>
> For I, who fought the best I could, was nothing but a fool,
> When, fit and strong, I left my wife, and little kids at school.
> Believing politicians' words, I truly was a sap,
> I fought, I suffered, bled and now, I die – forgotten scrap.[23]

Most veterans' calls for government aid centred on entitlement to jobs and the right to earn a living on the grounds that they had earned that entitlement through their war service.[24] As with most criticisms of the unemployment crisis, veterans called for government intervention in the economy and the creation of full employment "at a living rate of wage." Veterans' arguments of sacrifice were woven together with the deeply entrenched belief in masculine entitlement to jobs. For men, the ability to be a breadwinner and to support a family was a powerful claim on the state for jobs at a living wage. "I myself am a returned man with four years of service for my country," argued an unemployed veteran. "It certainly does not make me feel very nice to think I helped to defend a country that will not help me in times when I and my family need

23 Cecil A. Morgan, "The End of the Hero," *The Legionary* 6/7 (December 1931): 5.

24 Report of the Ontario Provincial Command, 8th Annual Convention, 1934; *The Legionary* 10/3 (March 1935):4; 10/6 (June 1935): 8.

it badly."[25] F.J. Shaw demanded a job, arguing it was "unjust and unfair that I should have to appeal to charity organizations to procure the bare necessities of life for my wife and children."[26] When wartime sacrifice was combined with the manly duties of supporting a family, assertions of the right to jobs could create a powerful sense of entitlement among veterans. As the Dominion Legion President claimed in 1930: "No enfranchized [sic] loyal British subject and Canadian citizen has a greater right if as great to influence the prospect of this nation's future."[27] The Legion demanded enforcement of preferential hiring for ex-servicemen in the civil service, and encouraged local and provincial branches to remain vigilant over the number of veterans hired at public works projects.[28] Submissions by the Legion influenced the recommendations of the Hyndman report, initiated in the waning days of R.B. Bennett's power. Partially adopted by the King government in 1936, the report reserved jobs issuing radio licences for unemployed veterans and gave wage subsidies for veterans' job training.

By the early 1930s, the Legion had made unemployment the focus of its criticism and concern. In 1931, the Ontario Provincial Command decried the problem of veteran unemployment, calling for increased taxation of the wealthy and preferential hiring in government and industry. At the Ontario Provincial Convention in 1933, the Unemployment Committee demanded employment at fair wages, and generous social insurance for unemployment, old age and illness. At the 1934 Dominion Legion Convention, the Unemployment Committee condemned the effect of unemployment on families, and acknowledged the "branding of those compelled to accept relief as a class apart and outcast, and the perpetuation of conditions likely to create a permanent and dependent pauper class deprived of moral economic privileges and rights," as well as the "tendency of some employers to exploit the circumstances of the unemployed in offering inadequate wages for temporary employment."[29]

Legion leaders and members reflected the deeply entrenched tension between charity and entitlement as they argued for more generous pension rights, preferential hiring, and access to adequate relief. "I don't want charity I want a position," wrote J.W. Alfred Rowe of Windsor to Premier Henry, asserting that, "I feel with all my services to the Empire that I am deserving."[30] The

25 AO, RG 3 , Series 9, OTP, Hepburn Papers, #180, file: unemployment relief, William Kinsman to Henry, 17 December 1934.

26 AO, RG 3-8, OTP, Henry Papers, MS 1745, file: Returned Men, F.J. Shaw to Henry, August 1931.

27 *The Legionary* 5/2 (July 1930): 1.

28 See ibid., 9/3 (March 1934): 17-18.

29 Report of the Ontario Provincial Command, Annual Convention, 1931; Report of the Ontario Provincial Command, Annual Convention, 1933; *The Legionary* 9/4 (April 1934): 7.

30 AO, RG 3-8, OTP, Henry Papers, MS 1744, file: Positions, General, June 1931-January 1933, J.W. Alfred Rowe to Henry, 9 August 1931.

Legion leadership was reluctant to support a "war bonus," a monetary compensation proposed for all veterans for wartime service. In November 1933, Sir Arthur Currie claimed, "the great mass of returned men in Canada never had the thought that because they fought for their country they were entitled to preferred treatment by their county, in comparison with other citizens,"[31] yet the idea of a bonus for war service was obviously popular among veterans themselves. In January 1919, when the GWVA vets called for a $2000 bonus for war service, its membership increased from twenty to two hundred thousand members.[32] Legion leaders walked a fine line, however, expanding their definition of entitlement as the Depression continued, arguing for the special rights of "pre-aging" and "burnt-out" veterans, and emphasizing the war-related reasons that veterans suffered from unemployment. While insisting that veterans were not asking for special entitlement, and condemning the "bonus indolence," Legion leaders continually expanded their definition of entitlement, coming precariously close to arguments based on compensation for war service. "Every man who experienced the hardships of war is paying some penalty," argued Sir Arthur Currie in 1929.[33] The government should grant all unemployed ex-servicemen a well-paid pension, argued the Ottawa branch president, even if "in the majority of cases this would be a life pension."[34]

Veterans' demands privileged work and economic independence. Men like Thomas Frith of Pembroke, Ontario, did not believe that unemployment was caused by an individual moral failing. Rather, he considered it unfair that he had spent over three years at war and was nevertheless unemployed, while "men that never did anything for the Government can be holding down permanent jobs and the likes of me face poverty."[35] Yet, even as relief was characterized as a "degrading" form of "pauperism," veterans increasingly portrayed adequate relief as "a right" they had earned through war service.[36] Local branches became aware that many veterans who had small disability pensions were ineligible for municipal relief, which the Legion deemed "pathetic," since

31 Sir Arthur Currie, "The Great Sacrifice – What has it served?" *The Legionary* 8/12 (December 1933): 7-8.

32 Morton, "The Canadian Veterans' Heritage," 24.

33 *The Legionary* 4/7 (December 1929): 5.

34 Ibid., 12/4 (November 1936): 30. According to the 1937 report of the Veterans' Assistance Commission, opinion divided over supplementary assistance to municipal relief. Colonel J.G. Rattray, chair of the commission, repudiated any form of extra assistance, while Commissioners Lt.-Col. H.L. de Martigny and Robert Macnicol [sic] advised, "It is well known that there is considerable unrest amongst the unemployed ex-servicemen in Canada and this is evidenced by the propaganda for a war bonus, etc." Increased government aid would therefore "improve the morale of the veterans." *The Legionary* 12/9 (April 1937): 9.

35 AO, RG 3-8, OTP, Henry Papers, MS 1759, file: Department of Public Works, T. Frith to Henry, 9 October 1933.

36 *The Legionary* 10/6 (June 1935): 8, and 10/3 (March 1935): 1.

"immigrants who only a few years ago were enemies of this country" were eligible for relief.[37] The Legion argued for more generous top-ups to relief given to veterans, and by 1932-33, 14,368 pensioners were in receipt of the extra "departmental relief" given by the Department of Pensions and National Health.[38] The author of the Hyndman report (commissioned in January 1935 by R.B. Bennett) listened to delegations representing ex-servicemen, and recommended that the term "relief" (which they felt was inappropriate for veterans) should be changed to "unemployment assistance." The Commission also recommended that veterans receive cash rather than vouchers, and that it be issued in an amount equal or higher to that given to the "civilian population."[39]

The intersection of the idea of masculine entitlement to employment with that of manly service and duty to the state provided a powerful argument for jobs and recognition. The idealized soldier had fulfilled his manly duty to protect his nation, home, and family by going to war. As Jeffrey Keshen points out, propaganda downplayed the atrocities of the war while celebrating male adventure, the "saintliness... of sacrifice," and the power and success of "Johnny Canuck's" incredible feats of valour, strength, and stoicism.[40] In wartime rhetoric, the masculine image of the boyish and youthful soldier was combined with the image of the soldier as the masculine icon of hardiness, mythic courage, and heroism; all of these images were linked further to the alleged Nordic strength of the Canadian nation. In the words of a war-era song: "Men from the mountain the rock and the river/Men from the forest the lake and the plain/strike for our flag and defend it forever."[41] Canadians and soldiers were "a hardy race of men...a race that is stalwart brave and free."[42]

On return from war, however, masculinity was threatened by disability and unemployment. By the 1930s, the very men previously upheld as the epitome of manhood had been neutered by age, disability, psychological stress, and unemployment. Ironically, veterans' organizations began, as the 1930s progressed, to portray ex-servicemen increasingly as "burnt-out," pre-aged, and unable to compete with younger, healthier men due to age and disability. By 1930, the Legion had successfully helped convince the government to implement the War Veterans' Allowance Act, which recognized that men who served overseas and who suffered no obvious disability on demobilization had still

37 Ibid., 10/4 (April 1935): 9.

38 Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, 218, 214.

39 National Archives of Canada (NAC), RG 27-3, vol.187, file 614.06:6, "Unemployment of Ex-Servicemen," 1935.

40 Keshen, *Propaganda and Censorship*, 17.

41 Ibid., "Canadian Battle Song, 1918."

42 "Canadians Never Budge" (1918), in "Songs of the Canadian Soldier: The Great War, 1914-1918," ed. Jean-Michel Viger (unpublished manuscript held at the library of the Dominion Command of the Royal Canadian Legion, Ottawa, Ontario).

experienced "premature aging" or "physical and mental deterioration."[43] President General Alex Ross claimed that veterans were unable to compete with "vigorous youth" and that "a man who served overseas, even though unscathed, suffered a marked depreciation in physical energy."[44] The images of lost youth, boyishness and innocence, portrayed side by side with images of men fulfilling the gendered expectations of citizenship by obeying the call to manly service, created a compelling picture of wounded ex-servicemen in crisis and in need of aid.

However, these images of masculinity were contradictory and not easily reconciled. Re-establishment propaganda proclaimed "Once a soldier always a man," yet pre-aged, wounded or disabled veterans were the very antithesis of the strong, healthy "boys" who initially went off to war.[45] Legion leaders emphasized a fractured manhood, while at the same time celebrating the manliness, duty and courage of former soldiers. "When MEN were needed to save our nation," claimed the Legion in 1934, "the boys responded to the call unselfishly, upholding the best traditions of our Empire...Promises of Freedom and Security have been broken or Forgotten."[46]

There is evidence that veterans themselves resisted fully embracing a discourse that emphasized their weakness, illness and disability, finding such characterizations of their position humiliating and frustrating. In response to hearing a political speech by a Legion leader that claimed that all veterans had been psychologically damaged by war, an anonymous soldier took offence, claiming that such assertions were distorted and that he was a "Front Line Survivor – and still NORMAL!!"[47] Similarly, an anonymous columnist challenged perceptions that he was not "normal," arguing that war service created men of great "character," "courage," virility" and "self-confidence," and that if veterans were unable to re-adapt to civilian life it was "by reason of the failure of many 'sub-normal' citizens to fulfill war promises." The column included the following poem:

43 *The Legionary* 4/10 (March 1930): 5. Under Prime Minister Mackenzie King, the WVA Act extended Old Age Pensions to "broken down or burned out" soldiers' usually at age 65, five years earlier than the OAP. However, the WVA Act was not administered like a pension but as an allowance. It was discretionary, administered by a three-member board, means-tested, and allowed a maximum of $40 per month for married men. See Guest, *The Emergence of Social Security in Canada*, 95.

44 "Re-establishment of Unemployed Veterans," *The Legionary* 9/6 (June 1934): 4.

45 Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, Military Hospitals Commission, poster reproduction.

46 AO, RG 3 Series 9, #180, OTP, Hepburn Papers, file: unemployment relief, Canadian Legion Unemployment Committee to Hepburn, December 1934.

47 *The Legionary* 6/11 (April 1932): 7.

NORMAL men, proud and strong
Rallied to the flag; marched along
Weak and old men forced to stay
With other men* of softer clay.
(*Eligibles)[48]

The discourse of wounded manhood, which was used to justify claims for increased aid, undermined the idea of a strong, healthy, and independent masculinity. Veterans saw themselves as deserving, full citizens, too proud to accept charity, but they also argued that it was not shameful to demand government aid after serving the state in war. Perhaps this is why calls for aid were so strongly clothed in the discourse of contract and entitlement, which has been long associated with independent manhood, and which helped to maintain images of masculine strength despite the untenable economic position of many veterans.[49]

Work, home and family were also closely linked to veterans' sense of masculinity and sacrifice, making it evident that they saw a close relationship between the prosperity and stability of the home and the security of the state. Osborne Dempster, an unemployed mason whose family was on relief in Toronto, sold his furniture to pay rent arrears and avoid eviction. "It will be a strong man patriotically who this winter will drown out the cries of his children for bread with the strains of the 'Maple Leaf Forever,'" he told Premier Henry. "My children are receiving less nourishment I than received while in a Soviet prison in Moscow."[50] In 1934, the Legion's Dominion Unemployment Committee criticized the "decreasing relief benefits with increasing living costs resulting in more general malnutrition and ill-health in the home of the unemployed," and the "insecurity of tenure of homes." The Committee also pointed out "the increasing determination of the unemployed to defend their homes by any available means against the social injustice of enforcing degrading and perilous poverty upon them."[51] Unemployed veterans continually linked the economic security of their families and homes to service in the war. Their role in the Great War was a crucial part of the organic relationship between citizen and state, and re-establishment and integration into civilian life, as Morton and Wright point out, was seen by veterans as an ongoing process, a governmental responsibility that had not ended in 1919.[52]

48 Ibid., 7.

49 Fraser and Gordon, "Contract versus Charity," 54-6.

50 AO, RG 3-8, OTP, Henry Papers, MS 1747, file: unemployment relief #3, Lieutenant Osborne Dempster to Henry, 8 October 1931.

51 *The Legionary* 9/4 (April 1934).

52 Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, 141.

The home itself was an important signifier of citizenship in the community. Ratepayers' organizations throughout the Depression, for example, used their status as homeowners and taxpayers to organize for aid, and veterans argued that they had gone to war to protect these very rights to private property and home-ownership. As one veteran complained to Premier Henry in 1931, house-owning men brought up families, paid taxes, and should therefore receive "our share in the relief works programmes," especially those who "have done our duties in every respect as Citizens, some seeing service in the War 1914-1918."[53] As one man reminded Premier Henry, "we thought that when two of our boys went overseas, that they went to protect our home."[54] In 1934, the Legion's Ontario Provincial Command claimed that the problem of evictions faced by veterans and their families was also linked to the war. Those in mortgage arrears, they argued, "would be in a position to pay their taxes today had they not been loyal to their country's call."[55] As veterans and their families continually pointed out, the past and future security of the Canadian nation rested on the willingness of young men and their families to send their youth to war. As one deserted woman who was arguing for a veterans' pension wrote: "at the same time after I have struggled to raise my boys up to manhood the Government would expect my boys to step out and do their do their share to protect the country should a war break out; that go [sic] to show how much respect the Government has for the citizens of the country."[56] Men and women both argued that economic security and the ability to support a home and family was expressly linked to loyalty to the state. One mother reminded Premier Henry: "If this country ever has to fight again it can call on my eight boys to protect it well you cannot expect them to protect homes they haven't got."[57]

Historians have documented the growth of a Canadian political and cultural nationalism in the interwar years, but few have looked at how national identity was formed at the popular level.[58] One of the enduring myths of the

53 AO, RG 3-8, OTP, Henry Papers, MS 1747, file: unemployment relief #3, C. Peterson to Henry, 15 September 1931.

54 Ibid., MS 1762, file: unemployment relief, homeowners, Mr. H.V.W. to Henry, 8 September 1933.

55 8th Provincial Convention, Ontario Command, 1934.

56 AO, RG 3 Series 9, OTP, Hepburn Papers, #180, file: unemployment relief #2, Mrs. J.W. to Hepburn, 6 September 1934.

57 AO, RG 3-8, OTP, Henry Papers, MS 1744, file: Positions, general, Mrs. A.B. to Henry, 27 June 1931.

58 See, for example, Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English Canadian Historical Writing Since 1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986); John Herd Thompson and Allen Seager, *Canada: Decades of Discord, 1922-1939* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985): 158-192; Mary Vipond, "Nationalism and Nativism: The Native Sons of Canada in the 1930s," *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism* 9/1 (Spring 1982); Vipond, "The Nationalist Network: English Canada's Intellectuals and Artists in the 1920s," *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism* 7/1 (Spring 1980).

Great War, as Jonathan Vance has pointed out, is that of the birth of the independent Canadian nation in the victories of the battlefield.[59] "The freedom of the nation rests upon sacrifice," claimed the Canadian Legion; "The boys of Canada established the freedom of Canada."[60] Soldiers wrote "Canada's name high on the world's roll of honour," and won Canada "international prestige."[61] To give meaning to the losses of war, Vance argues, wartime victories were used as a tool to unify the divisions of class, region, ethnicity and race into an Anglo-Canadian national culture. As Vance claims, however, this myth of the war was not simply imposed on society as a means to preserve the status quo, but was shaped by veterans and the public out of a sense of grief and loss, as a way to ensure a loving and meaningful remembrance for those who had died as soldiers.[62]

Soldiers had served the Empire, fought for Britain, and helped to create a new Canada, and were therefore the embodiment of true Britishness, Canadian loyalty and civic patriotism. Earlier war propaganda had explicitly linked Britishness to Canadian soldiers, and emphasized the common interests of the Empire and Canada. In the words of one song, "So if you are white/You will join the fight/and rally round the/(come and enlist boys) guns." Canadian soldiers were also "old Britain's pledge upholding/The Empire's honor true/That's why our laddies are fighting/As British boys always do."[63] The war effort was strongly associated with both Britishness and whiteness, and an Anglo-Canadian nationalism that was closely entwined with British ethnic heritage. The recruitment of visible minorities for war service was severely restricted as Black, Native, Japanese, Chinese and East Indian Canadians were generally considered unfit for war service based partly on racial stereotypes and partly on the fear that they would demand full citizenship rights after enlistment.[64] Other factors that strengthened the association of the war with Britishness were the conscription crisis, restrictions on the rights of "enemy aliens," and the demographics of the CEF, the majority of whom were not Canadian born until after

59 See John Swettenham, *Canada and the First World War* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1969); Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House, 1993): 169; Desmond Morton and Jack Granatstein, *Marching to Armageddon: Canadians and the Great War, 1914-19* (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1989). See also the criticism by Vance, *Death so Noble*, 10-11.

60 *The Legionary* 4/8 (January 1930): 6.

61 Ibid., 4/7 (December 1929): 13.

62 Vance, *Death So Noble*, 227-56.

63 "The Call" (n.d.); "British Boys" (1916), in "Songs of the Canadian Soldier," ed. Viger, 107, 49.

64 James St.-G. J. Walker, "Race and Recruitment in WWI: Enlistment of Visible Minorities in the Canadian Expeditionary Force," in *Constructing Modern Canada: Readings in Post-Confederation History*, ed. Chad Gaffield (Toronto: Copp Clark Longman Ltd., 1994): 259-283.

the Military Services Act was implemented. The categories of whiteness and Britishness were often collapsed, so full citizenship rights and entitlement claims were associated with whiteness and an Anglo-Canadian background.[65] The code of Britishness, combined with veterans' rhetoric of sacrifice and duty, was a powerful way for veterans to set themselves apart as dedicated protectors of the country and of civilization. Claims to economic security, social insurance and full employment was, for white workers in the Depression, one way to protest against economic exploitation and government intransigence in dealing with poverty and unemployment.[66] For unemployed and poor veterans, the rhetoric of Britishness and national pride, so closely entwined with the duty of war service, was even more deeply connected to "pride of citizenship" and demands for entitlement.[67]

Veterans bolstered their arguments for preferential treatment by claiming a special link to the Canadian nation and loyalty to the traditions of the British Empire. They juxtaposed their patriotism with the threat of communism and "foreigners" allegedly stealing jobs. Wrote an unemployed veteran and Legion member from Fort Frances: "I have often wondered whether it might not be quite appropriate to emblazon a few foreign ensigns on the fly of the Union Jack, for it seems to me a foreigner has more privileges and is thought more of in our workshops than true British subjects who have fought for our good old flag."[68] Anti-alien sentiment ran high among Legion leaders and members, a tradition that extended back to the early years of the veteran movement. In 1918, for example, after several days of "anti-alien rhetoric" at the GWVA convention in Toronto, veterans and civilians led a series of attacks against the city's Greek restaurants.[69] In 1930, the Fort William branch of the Legion recommended that all non-naturalized participants in the local May Day Parade be deported, and the report of the 1931 Ontario Legion Unemployment Committee resolved that all un-naturalized aliens, or all those naturalized after July of 1931, be fired from government jobs and replaced by veterans.[70] In 1932, the Dominion Command protested the potential layoffs of nearly 600 veterans by the CNR in Winnipeg and in other locations across Canada. The Legion demanded that all un-naturalized persons be fired and that union seniority be determined by the date of naturalization. Dominion Legion chair A.E. Moore

65 Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House, 1993), 278. Canadian-born members of the CEF became a majority of 51.2% by November of 1918.

66 See David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991).

67 Ibid., 11.

68 *The Legionary* 13/6 (June 1938): 12.

69 Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, 82.

70 *Legion*, (January 1986): 17; Report of the Ontario Provincial Command, Annual Convention, 1931.

claimed that the foreign born had "stolen" seniority from veterans by securing jobs during the war years, and thereby established seniority that "rightfully belonged to men on active service." In addition, he concluded, some foreign-born workers were "avowed Communists."[71]

Connected closely with anti-immigrant sentiment and emphasis on British loyalty was a strong anti-Communism within the rank and leaders of the Legion. *The Legionary* proudly reported the work of local members in helping police "maintain law and order when threatened by subversive elements," and in upholding "British law and British institutions." Branch members could be sworn in as special constables to help suppress riots and "inflammatory demonstrations."[72] In Sudbury, in response to fear that "Reds" were trying to incite the population, especially the "alien-born," police swore in forty Legion members as a temporary police squad. By June 1932, the police had called on this squad over six times, twice engaging in "active combat...ending in the complete rout of the demonstrations."[73] In Windsor, the local veterans' branch unanimously endorsed a resolution that supported city council's decision to ban all "Red parades" or assemblies, claiming that such groups, "particularly if influenced by foreign quarters," were "contemptible and dangerous" and a threat to "human freedom."[74] The Oshawa branch protested against a Communist rally in a park, held in front of the war cenotaph, explaining that communists should be banned from the "Garden of the Unforgotten."[75] The Port Arthur branch, "determined to oust the "Red menace from their locality," sent a sixty-man delegation to city council with a proposal to end all "sinister Red activities." The delegation convinced the council to vote unanimously to implement a by-law restraining all parades and demonstrations, and to outlaw distribution of "communistic literature."[76]

Despite such conservative, anti-immigrant and anti-communist rhetoric, the economic alternatives suggested by some veterans indicate that there was some diversity of political opinion. Most veterans did not blindly uphold patriotism, loyalty and Britishness, but did appeal to these values to make powerful claims of entitlement to economic security. As Lieutenant W.J. Osborne Dempster pointed out in a letter to Premier Henry in October of 1931:

> I am no extremist or radical but conditions as they exist in Toronto today are very similar to those that existed in Petrograd in October 1917 making the bolshevik revolution possible...starvation breeds revolution...Would you Mr.

71 *The Legionary* 6/12 (May 1932): 7.
72 Ibid., 1/1 (April 1935): 20.
73 Ibid., 7/1 (June 1932): 26.
74 Ibid., 4/11 (April 1930): 26.
75 Ibid., 5/2 (August 1930): 26.
76 Ibid., 5/2 (August 1930): 29.

> Premier in the case of an emergency which may come expect, us, who bore the brunt in 1914 to 1918 and are now paying two fold for our loyalty today, to again man the breach [?][77]

Patriotism, loyalty and Britishness could therefore also be used to claim respectability and full citizenship, and to demand changes in the social and economic structure. For veterans, a commitment to the Canadian nation, rooted in the traditions of the Empire, was not simply a conservative means of preserving the status quo. Veterans called for an improvement of the economic conditions of loyal Canadian citizens in general, but particularly of the patriotic citizen-soldiers who had fought for their country and the Empire. Veterans denounced "Bolshevism" and expressed anti-immigrant sentiment, but they also denounced government inaction on unemployment, supported unemployment insurance, and fought for subsidized health care. Veterans embraced "British justice," and life under the "old old flag – the Union Jack," but this Britishness included the right to economic and social security.[78] In 1934, the Ontario Provincial Command went on record as "being favourable to the principle of state medicine,"[79] and the Unemployment Committee of the Dominion Legion recommended free medical treatment for all pensioners. In 1930, the East Hamilton branch petitioned both the federal and provincial governments and the Canadian Manufacturers Association for tripartite unemployment insurance. In 1938, the Dominion Command pressed the federal government for legislation for low-rent housing, and in 1939, the Legion claimed success in winning free hospital care for poor veterans.[80]

Some veterans voiced more radical solutions to the social and economic problems of the 1930s, indicating there was a range of political opinions within the veterans' movement. W.T. House from Toronto wrote to the editors of *The Legionary* condemning the profit system and suggesting "public ownership of factories, etc., and operation thereof to supply the wants of the people at cost... our medium of exchange – money – must also come under public ownership so that the people will have money to buy back all that is produced... Unemployment would be ended because everyone would become a full partner in the business of supplying his own wants."[81] In the early 1930s, delegates at the Ontario Convention made powerful demands for a more egalitarian social and economic order, linking the problems and poverty of the working class with

77 AO, RG 3-8, OTP, Henry Papers, MS 1747, file: unemployment relief #7, Lieutenant Dempster to Henry, 8 October 1931.

78 AO, RG 3-10, OTP, Hepburn Papers, #205, file: Resolutions, Progressive Veterans in Canada to Hepburn, 27 July 1936.

79 Report of the Ontario Command, 8th Provincial Convention, 1934.

80 *The Legionary* 9/4 (April 1934); *Legion* (January 1986): 17, 32, 34.

81 Ibid., 14/5 (December 1938): 19.

those of ex-servicemen. "The welfare of the ex-serviceman is identical with the welfare of the civilian worker," announced a unanimous resolution of 1933. "The Legion supports any movement which has for its goal the social and economic welfare of the producing classes as opposed to the accumulation of wealth by exploitation both of Natural and Human resources."[82] In 1931, the Unemployment Committee of the Ontario Command claimed that national wealth "was held in comparatively few hands," demanded that "monied people be asked to make the sacrifice in the present crisis that we, the war veterans were asked to make in 1914-1918," and suggested a more steeply-graded tax system that would reduce the tax burden on the "wage-earning population," which included "ex-servicemen and their families."[83] The 1933 Windsor "Manifesto" lamented the forgotten promises of "a State of Society that would bring to all men the blessedness of Peace, [and] security from want," and called for comprehensive employment and social insurance. Delegates strongly condemned a political and economic system based on inequality, arguing that a just state existed for "the care, the protection and the prosperity of all the citizens of our country without class distinction," and not to implement "class legislation" or uphold "a Government dominated by financial interests."[84]

The case files of the Soldiers Aid Commission, Ontario Canteen Fund (OCF), illustrate the tension between charity and entitlement in the 1930s. As a blend of public and private welfare, the OCF was established with money collected from overseas military canteens, and was attached to the Ontario Department of Public Welfare in 1931.[85] The Fund, headed by Major Lewis, was set up as a form of temporary emergency assistance for veterans in limited financial circumstances due to injury or illness, and was administered by a group of trustees who were war veterans. Case files can pose difficult questions for historians, particularly with the problem of how to find the voices of clients when the language was shaped by official rules and regulations, and by the summaries of administrators or investigators. But in taking the purpose and intent of case files into consideration, they reveal the complex web of interactions between veterans, their families and welfare bureaucracy, and illustrate how clients attempted to get financial aid for themselves and their families.[86] For example, in their applications for assistance, veterans used the language of supplicants, while in letters written directly to politicians or by veterans' organizations, demands were made more often on the basis of entitlement. Yet the

82 Report of the Ontario Provincial Command, Annual Convention, 1933.

83 Report of the Ontario Provincial Command, Annual Convention, 1931.

84 Report of the Ontario Provincial Command, Annual Convention, 1933.

85 William and Jeannette Raynsford, *Silent Casualites: Veterans' Families in the Aftermath of the Great War* (Madoc: Merribrae Press, 1986).

86 Franca Iacovetta and Wendy Mitchinson, *On the Case: Explorations in Social History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

language of the applications does not mean that those who wrote them were passive, or saw themselves as victims rather than agents. Rather, applicants for charity had to find a number of ways to convince the Ontario Canteen Fund they were worthy of, and entitled to aid.

In addition to raising questions about the agency of charity recipients, the files also illustrate the deep social, psychological, and medical problems faced by veterans and their families. By the 1930s, struggling with the effects of shell shock, gassing, or physical injuries, veterans were no longer healthy young men. The profound physical and psychological effects of the First World War were still serious problems through the Depression.

Many veterans complained of unspecified nervous ailments or chronic breathing problems. James Fedder of Toronto suffered from chronic bronchitis and "rapidity of heart," while Jack Bryant of Toronto received two grants for stomach trouble and bronchitis caused by "hardships endured in France," and for headaches and dizzy spells suffered from a shrapnel wound to the head.[87] Jason Downey struggled to make the OCF understand his difficulty keeping employment when he had poor nerves, shell shock and a chronic "nauseating feeling in my stomach through not being able to digest or keep a decent meal without vomitting [sic]" it back."[88] Walter Acker failed to convince the board that his unemployment resulted from what his doctor called a "hyperactive nervous system," and "extreme restlessness and sleeplessness which leaves him fatigued throughout the better part of the day."[89] The shortness of breath, emphysema, bronchitis, and chronic cough and sputum suffered by James Baker resulting from gas exposure did not convince the OCF that he was ill enough to warrant aid.[90] Some veterans were too psychologically or physically damaged to do the heavy labour typical of relief works, while others, who suffered stomach and digestion disorders, needed extra money for special diets.

Veterans groups complained of unfairness in medical exams for pension purposes, particularly on the question of whether illness or injury was "attributable" to war service. Other veterans found that a fund set up to help in times of medical distress was ill-equipped meet the demand of chronic medical problems that made it difficult to hold down a job of any kind. The medical profession and the state had yet to fully understand the physical and psychological consequences of trench warfare, poison gas, and the toll of constant fear and anxiety that emerged after service on the war front.[91] The Ontario Canteen Fund was intended to give assistance only to veterans whose financial problems were

87 AO, RG 29-65, S.A.C., O.C.F., Box 2, #2978; Box 6, #1918.

88 AO, RG 29-65, S.A.C., O.C.F., Box 6, #7799.

89 AO, RG 29-65, S.A.C., O.C.F., Box 18, #15 756, letter of Dr. E.I. Morton, 6 December 1938.

90 AO, RG 29-65, S.A.C., O.C.F., Box 14, #12 301, letter of Dr. H.J. Edward, 7 March 1937.

91 Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 122-131; 228-250.

related to a documented illness, so many applicants were rejected because their problems were deemed unemployment-related rather than illness-related. Walter Collins, age fifty-five, was rejected twice because the board deemed his problems were due to unemployment rather than true illness. Despite a doctor's note on his behalf outlining his problems of "gastric neuroses" (which included stomach pains, vomiting after every meal, and insomnia) he was informed that he was fully capable of earning his "own living."[92]

These kinds of conflicts over access to the Fund provide evidence that veterans were not quiescent or passive, but attempted to manoeuvre around the Fund's rules and requirements. Many did not give up after being rejected, but continually wrote to ask for help, disregarding the explanations for their ineligibility.[93] Others wrote to make clear their sense of entitlement and their frustration with administrators. When Walter Collins' application in September of 1930 was rejected because his "difficulties are the result of unemployment," his wife took matters into her own hands by visiting the OCF office, where she personally asked the Fund to reconsider the application because their landlord was threatening to evict them. Several weeks later, they were given a $25 grant.[94] Emily Knight of Verona personally took her husband Arthur's application to the home of the local investigator, asking for "assistance to clothe the children, suitably for school [sic]."[95]

Those who refused to accept rejection often ultimately won small grants. Jason Downey, after being rejected for assistance despite his doctor's testimony concerning his poor health due "to shock of the nervous system as the result of active service in the world war," penned his own letter of request, resulting in a $12 grant. "Perhaps," he argued to Lewis, "you have never suffered from gastritis or neurosis caused by being blown up with a shell. That may be the reason for not considering it very serious."[96] David Cooper of Toronto, unemployed, with "cardiac hypertrophy and arterio-sclerosis," applied for assistance more than eight times; he never gave up despite being told several times that he was ineligible. Needing money for rent, gas, electricity bills and food for his wife and two children, while facing eviction in July of 1932, he managed to receive a total of eight grants before he was cut off in August of 1935.[97] Victor Platov of Toronto, a Russian-born Canadian veteran, injured at

92 AO, RG 29-65, Soldiers Aid Commission, Ontario Canteen Fund, Box 2, #2935. In accordance with the rules of the Freedom of Information Act agreement signed with the Archives of Ontario, identifying information and file numbers have been changed to protect privacy.

93 Some historians have argued that making claims itself is a political act. See Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled*, 247.

94 AO, RG 29-65, S.A.C., O.C.F., Box 2, #2935.

95 AO, RG 29-65, S.A.C., O.C.F., Box 8, #8051, letter to Major Lewis from Bella Boulder, 12 September 1933.

96 AO, RG 29-65, S.A.C., O.C.F., Box 6, #7799.

97 AO, RG 29-65, S.A.C., O.C.F., Box 4, #3540.

work, was given a grant of $12 after his teenaged daughter Martha wrote a letter in June of 1934 explaining that their rent was in arrears and they owed money for grocery and butcher bills. "How I tried to stand for this country with full faith," wrote Platov, who applied twelve more times between 1934 and 1939 despite five rejections that claimed he had been helped too often and that his problems were actually unemployment, rather than illness, related.[98] John Nicholson, despite two rejections, finally received four grants after repeatedly explaining that he was unable to work due to illness and that his children needed food. He finally enlisted a local sergeant to write a letter documenting his financial position and his "worthy" status as a husband and father. He continued to ask for money even after receiving a five per-cent pension "which does not enable me to do much for my children."[99] When Fred Granby of Ottawa was denied aid in April of 1932, after explaining that he was unemployed and his wife ill in a mental hospital, he had his lawyer, a relative, write to demand an explanation.[100]

Applicants also enlisted their doctors to convince the board that their injuries or illnesses rendered them unable to work. Doctors were overwhelmingly supportive, writing notes that claimed men could not work, either temporarily or permanently, because of various illnesses. After rejecting Geoff Blackwood, the OCF contacted Christie Street Hospital to ask if his "persistent" claims that he was too ill to work were valid. According to Dr. Clark, his neuritis made it temporarily impossible for him to work.[101] Doctors wrote of their patients' inability to work or do hard labour due to bronchitis, asthma, shortness of breath, and emphysema.[102] Many doctors supported their patients' claims that they could not work due to "nervous conditions," gastric ulcers or gastritis, the need for a special diet, nervous disability or nervousness, insomnia, and "gastric distress."[103] The case of Arthur Knight, a forty three-year-old veteran with three children, provides one example of the relationship between doctor and veteran in the attempt to procure financial aid. Initially rejected for help because he was in receipt of a pension, Knight argued that $7 was not enough to support his family, particularly when he was not well enough to do heavy labour. In his second application, he emphasized his medical problems,

98 AO, RG 29-65, S.A.C., O.C.F., Box 10, #9046, letter from Victor Platov to Major Lewis, 28 April 1937.

99 AO, RG 29-65, S.A.C., O.C.F., Box 2, #2197, letter from Sgt. Trembly to Major Lewis, 6 May 1931 and letter to OCF from Nicholson, 30 November 1934.

100 AO, RG 29-65, S.A.C., O.C.F., Box 6, #5463.

101 AO, RG 29-65, S.A.C., O.C.F., Box 8, #7875, letter from OCF to Dr. Clark, 15 August 1933, and response, 18 August 1933.

102 See records of, for example, AO, RG 29-65, S.A.C., O.C.F., Box 2, #2978; Box 9, #846; Box 9, #1938; Box 6, #6814; Box 14, #12 391.

103 See records in AO, RG 29-65, S.A.C., O.C.F., Box 2, #2064; Box 9, #776; Box 6, #5799; Box 6, #5684; Box 10, #9527.

rather than his unemployment and material debts, claiming that he had suffered gunshot wounds while in France. His doctor, M.E. Harris, included a letter explaining that in his opinion, Knight was a "badly wrecked veteran, a positive service casualty," with "nerve injuries," "tremors and shaking," and "a type of melancholy which is aggravated by privation." Similarly, his wife was ill because of a nervous breakdown which he attributed to "worry and privation" over her family's situation. They received a grant of $25.[104]

An examination of the reasons for assistance that applicants listed on their forms shows that though the fund was for intended for illness-related unemployment, applicants attempted to use it as a form of emergency relief for rent or mortgage arrears, and for food, clothing and utilities bills. As Chester Black of Cookstown wrote, "I hear these funds are being used for the relief to help the return men [sic] who are in need."[105] Despite many rejections, Charles A. Duncan continually demanded help, and claimed that "this money in question belongs to return men [sic] and if was properly used should be divided equally between them."[106] Almost all the veterans who applied for aid were unemployed, and many had been out of work for months or even years. Indeed, it is difficult to decipher the basis on which the OCF determined the difference between unemployment and illness-related problems, since it often made decisions that seemed arbitrary. Sometimes, grants were given in cases where problems were clearly related to unemployment. Mrs. Lake of Toronto was ill with boils on her head and neck, due, her doctor said, to "malnourishment and undernourishment." Her husband was unemployed, owed three months' rent, $100 in grocery and bakers' bills, and they had a family of six children who needed clothes, boots, fuel and medicine. They received a grant of $20.[107] Harry Davis received six grants after complaining of burns on his hand and a stomach ulcer, and the need to pay for rent and electricity bills in arrears.[108] Herbert McKay of Toronto received a grant of $30 after he claimed that his wife was pregnant, and he needed money for medical bills and for rent, gas, and electricity arrears.[109]

Other applicants found it more difficult to convince the OCF that they were eligible for aid. John Nicholson of Hamilton was turned down a number of times because his troubles were deemed related to unemployment rather than illness. He needed rent, fuel and food money, as he was ineligible for relief

104 AO, RG 29-65, S.A.C., O.C.F., Box 8, #8051, letter of Dr. M.E. Harris to Major Lewis, 29 November 1934.

105 AO, RG 29-65, S.A.C., O.C.F., Box 6, #5148, letter from Chester Black to OCF, March 1932.

106 AO, RG 29-65, S.A.C., O.C.F., Box 14, #2341, letter from Charles A. Duncan to OCF, 2 August 1937.

107 AO, RG 29-65, S.A.C., O.C.F., Box 6, #6814.

108 AO, RG 29-65, S.A.C., O.C.F., Box 2, #2945.

109 AO, RG 29-65, S.A.C., O.C.F., Box 2, #2217.

because he could not meet the residence requirements.[110] Cecil Wilson of Hamilton, who suffered from a stomach problem, found his wife facing eviction while he was in the hospital. When his application was rejected, he refused to accept the verdict. "You said," he wrote, "you could not find any condition for any help from you" but he felt his need for rent and food money was more than enough reason for help. His wife later wrote, insisting that she needed rent money to avoid eviction; she was given a grant of $10.[111] Edna Barber, wife of Horace, found it difficult to convince the OCF that they, a farming family in rural Ontario, needed financial help because of her husband's chronic gastritis. On relief, with nine children, she argued after her first rejection that they deserved financial aid for their children's education and for proper food for her husband's special diet. "Our children are bright enough to do something worthwhile," she wrote. "I only wish I had known it was 'only lies' they told my husband 20 years ago – 'Nothing will be too good for you' – and that's exactly what he's had so far – Nothing!...Neither Bill, Ginny or the other 3 girls have decent clothes right now, but they have an ailing Dad who served 26 months in France for *OUR Country* [sic]." Two months after receiving her letter, the OCF granted her family $15.[112]

Though ex-servicemen developed what was a partial and often restrictive outlook, particularly regarding gender roles, race and ethnicity, veterans in the Depression attempted to uphold the dignity of the unemployed, and demanded the right to full economic security even when on relief. Veterans lobbied for and won a number of concessions from the national government. Though the response was piecemeal and success was uneven, Ottawa gradually began to acknowledge that support for veteran re-establishment was an ongoing responsibility of the federal government. The Depression years saw a gradual loosening of eligibility requirements surrounding pensions, and the establishment of, and continual amendments to, War Veterans' Allowances. Persistent criticisms over lack of adequate relief and unemployment won "unemployment assistance" for veterans: cash-based payments that attempted to make up the difference between municipal relief and pensions. Hiring preference in government public works and the civil service, plus expanded job training were other examples of government responses to veteran unemployment.[113] But veterans, like the unemployed in general, never won a cohesive plan to fight unemployment, let alone gain more expansive social insurance. Veterans and their organizations waged constant political battles over eligibility for pensions, and over whether preference on public works and in the civil service was being honoured. The

110 AO, RG 29-65, S.A.C., O.C.F., Box 2, #2197.
111 AO, RG 29-65, S.A.C., O.C.F., Box 14, #3028.
112 AO, RG 29-65, S.A.C., O.C.F., Box 14, #2520.
113 See *The Legionary*, 1929-39, and Morton and Wright, pp. 209-220.

long and often tedious process of political negotiation between veterans, their leaders and the state illustrates the extent to which they were treated as political participants and not entirely as supplicants by the government. However, the more radical and progressive of the veterans' demands emerged mainly from provincial and local branches, and were eventually overtaken by the formal political process centred in Ottawa. Veterans and their families also had some hard-won local success in gaining recognition from welfare administrators and doctors. By continually applying for assistance for material needs, refusing to accept rejection, enlisting doctors to support their applications, and occasionally, expressing their anger and disappointment with the OCF in person or by letter, veterans and their dependents clearly did not view themselves as passive recipients of aid. Rather, they attempted to force administrators to take their problems seriously and, at times, won recognition for their definition of problems as medically and economically intertwined.[114]

Veterans claimed the highest level of citizenship in the 1930s, arguing that they had made crucial sacrifices for Canada and the British Empire, and had acted with courage, honour and a sense of duty. In return, they believed they deserved adequate recognition and compensation by the state, in the form of access to employment, adequate relief, and the right to preferential treatment above other unemployed workers making competing claims on the state. Employing the language of contract, veterans used the ideas of reciprocity, service and duty to argue for compensation and government intervention in the economy and the provision of social welfare. These arguments were an important component in the development of welfare provision based on regulated and measurable standards of eligibility. As Canadian historians have pointed out, in the years following the Great War, veterans organized and pressed for a variety of programs and policies based not on charity but on a sense of "moral entitlement" to state support.[115] By 1917, the newly formed Great War Veterans' Association (GWVA) supported more generous pensions for the war disabled, the right to appeal pension decisions, the conscription of wealth and the nationalization of all war industries, increased taxation, free hospital care for veterans and their dependents, proper medical care for the mentally ill, and price controls.[116] Veterans challenged inadequate retraining courses, pushed for more generous pension benefits and aid to widows and the disabled, and insisted on preferential hiring in government jobs.

Although veterans won a degree of recognition and forced some changes in government policy, there is little information on what happened to veterans

114 See files of the Soldiers Aid Commission. See also Gordon, *Heroes of their Own Lives.*

115 Morton, "The Canadian Veterans' Heritage from the Great War," in *The Veterans Charter and Post-World War II Canada*, eds. Peter Neary and J.L Granatstein (Montreal: McGill-Queens' University Press, 1998): 23.

116 Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, 71, 79-80.

themselves in the years of the Great Depression.[117] Desmond Morton argues that veterans tried to forget economic hardship through commemoration, and that their history "ends in disappointment, sickness, and death."[118] However, veterans of the First World War did not mysteriously disappear with the onset of the Depression, despite a very real penchant for commemoration and memorialization.[119] Rather, veterans were a vocal, lively and articulate political force in the 1930s who adapted to changing economic conditions, became increasingly concerned with the impact of unemployment, and whose rhetoric linked wartime service with the problems of unemployment and the inadequacy of relief.

The complex tensions within the veterans' critique of unemployment, and the rhetoric of reciprocity, duty, contract and entitlement were never fully resolved.[120]

The extent of state responsibility for veterans' welfare, the role of veterans and their families in the postwar national fabric, and the degree to which duty and sacrifice for the national community were recognized, were topics that played an important role in the gradual formation of welfare state policy. In their position as supplicants seeking charitable aid, as members of veterans' organizations, and as individual citizens protesting government policies, veterans in the Depression were active, articulate and politically involved citizens who played a crucial role in the demand for social change in welfare reform.

117 See Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*; Jeffrey A. Keshen, *Propaganda and Censorship*; Neary and Granatstein, *The Veterans Charter*.

118 Morton, "The Canadian Veterans' Heritage," 28.

119 In particular, the massive organizing drive required for the 1936 Vimy pilgrimage. See also Jonathan Vance, "'Today they were alive again': The Canadian Corps Reunion of 1934," *Ontario History*, LXXXVII/4 (December 1995): 327-344, and Vance, *Death So Noble*.

120 See Theda Skocpol, "Delivering for Young Families: The Resonance of the GI Bill," *The American Prospect* 27/28 (Sept.-Oct. 1996): 66-72, who argues that the mix of conservatism, patriotism and economic critiques in the American Legion was also a powerful grassroots proponent of welfare state expansion.