



Canadian Legion  
of the  
British Empire Service League

Address of the Dominion President  
Brigadier W. W. Foster, D.S.O., V.D.

*Eighth Dominion Convention*

May 27th & 30th, 1940  
Montreal, Que.



THE CANADIAN LEGION OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE SERVICE  
LEAGUE

Dominion President's Address

MONTREAL, QUEBEC

May, 1940

TO THE DELEGATES OF THE EIGHTH DOMINION CONVENTION;  
GENTLEMEN:—

This, the Eighth Convention of our Organization, finds our Empire at war. Beside the veterans of the past a new generation has ranged itself in the fight for freedom, and it is not without emotion I realize that those who are assembled here represent the fighting forces of today, as well as those who in the same cause in former years trod the path to victory.

A few weeks ago I stood in front of that truly magnificent memorial on Vimy Ridge—one that is the source of pride to every true Canadian and of particular interest to the membership of the Legion, who had charge of its historic unveiling ceremonies. The day was not unlike that of April 9th twenty-three years ago, except for the stillness all around, and perhaps with our Country again at war it is possible to understand the significance of the lines carved above the altar in the Parliament Buildings of our Capital City, on which lies the Book of Remembrance containing the names of 60,000 Canadians who gave their lives for their Country . . .

"Over there among his peers a happy warrior sleeps," . . . in conjunction with the symbolic figure carved above all others on Canada's Memorial on Vimy Ridge, a figure symbolizing the passing of the torch, in words which have an added meaning today,

*Take up our quarrel with the foe:*

*To you from failing hands we throw*

*The torch; be yours to hold it high.*

*If ye break faith with us who die*

*We shall not sleep, though poppies grow*

*In Flanders Fields.*

It is therefore with this challenge in view that in the last address I shall make as your Dominion President, I would suggest that the key-note of all our activities as an organization can be summed up in the words, "Remembrance" and "Duty," both of which impose a greater obligation than ever before.

That there is throughout the Legion an abundance of enthusiasm is evident by the attendance at this gathering; but, upon its biennial conventions is placed the responsibility of carefully determining the plans to be followed, and electing officers to carry out, during the recess of the Convention, whatever policies may be adopted.

Therefore, whilst I realize you wish me to devote as much time as possible to the steps taken by your Executive in facing conditions brought about by the new war, it also becomes a duty to devote some consideration to the resolutions passed by the Convention at its last session in Fort William, two years ago, and report upon the steps taken to have them carried out by the Executive then elected to office.



With, however, so much new business of a pressing nature demanding attention, and in view of the fact I have had opportunities from time to time in practically every Province to report upon the progress made, I merely propose to give you the headings of the principal resolutions and refer you to a circular which will be distributed with a copy of this address, leaving to the circular and to the general secretary's report the detail of what has been accomplished.

The resolutions in the order in which they were dealt with at the Convention, and dealt with in these documents are:

- (1) The need for unity between ex-service men;
- (2) The development of national unity in Canada;
- (3) Improvements in pension legislation and treatment;
- (4) Assistance to the soldier settler;
- (5) Credit for overseas service when computing superannuation for civil servants;
- (6) Unemployment.

If you summarize the present position you will find there is abundant evidence of goodwill and co-operation between our ex-service men's organization in Canada, and that it was strikingly demonstrated during the visit of Their Majesties, as well as in events connected with the present emergency; indeed there is a closer approach to the ideal of unity presented by the late Field Marshal Earl Haig than ever before obtained; whilst unity of a national character is also much more clearly in evidence than at any time since the terms of Confederation were determined.

I have particularly singled out these two resolutions upon unity as upon them the future of our own Organization and Country so largely depends. In respect to the remainder, may I point out that with the exception of that portion of the resolution upon unemployment usually described as the "Provisional Economic Allowance," it is possible to say every resolution of the Convention was promptly dealt with through the proper channels, followed up, and finally became effective.

Of the steps taken, including three interviews with the Prime Minister and his colleagues, in addition to individual members of the Cabinet, the circulars issued upon unemployment legislation have given full particulars, and anyone reading them must be satisfied that your Executive did everything within its power to implement this particular section of the resolution on unemployment.

To the accomplishments which I have outlined can be added the steady increase in the number of branches and our general membership, whilst the financial statement presented to you indicates a splendid position and one in striking contrast to the difficulties experienced a few years ago.

I would, however, while speaking of its successes, remind you of the debt of gratitude we owe to those splendid comrades who, in the earlier days of our Organization's existence, working under heavier handicaps,

laid the foundation for the success obtained in later years. In particular may I mention my own predecessors in office,—

Lt.-General Sir Percy Lake, K.C.B., K.C.M.G.,  
General Sir Arthur Currie, G.C.M.G., K.C.B.,  
Major-General L. R. Lafleche, D.S.O.,  
Major J. S. Roper, M.C., K.C.,  
Brigadier-General Alex. Ross, K.C., C.M.G., D.S.O., A.D.C.,

and the obligation we are also under to our General Secretary, Mr. J. R. Bowler, who, assisted by his own staff and that of the Service Bureau has been unremitting in devotion to the duties pertaining to his office, and who is entitled to a very large share of the credit for the prestige and success which the Legion as an Organization now enjoys, both in Canada and overseas. In this connection it was recently one of my happy experiences to attend an Executive Meeting of the British Empire Service League, presided over by Field Marshal Lord Milne, and hear first-hand of the high esteem in which our Canadian Organization and its efficient Headquarters' staff is held.

During the past two years decisions have had to be made by your Executive on many grave matters not contemplated when the Convention was last in Session. At that time, meeting in Fort William, we all fervently hoped that war between civilized people had become impossible, and the Legion had given, and continued to give its support in Canada and through its parent body, the British Empire Service League, to every effort in the cause of peace. It was, however, only a few months after the convention adjourned that a crisis arose. At the time I was attending a Provincial Convention in Nova Scotia, and at once placed the resources of our entire Organization at the disposal of its Country, an act that was unanimously endorsed by your Executive and later all Legion branches throughout Canada.

The crisis of that date appeared to pass, but as we now know, the negotiations initiated by the British Prime Minister in order to obtain peace, were, as far as Germany was concerned, entered into with the spirit of treachery and bad faith which they have since displayed in their dealings with other countries. The Legion supported every effort in the cause of peace, but having in view a peace that would not surrender those ideals for which its comrades, both living and dead, have made such sacrifices, always asked that adequate measures for defence should be initiated.

It will also be recalled that, as a practical demonstration of effective help, a survey of ex-members of the Forces was made throughout Canada, and a plan prepared outlining the services they could render should a more serious state of affairs develop. Such a situation did occur, and the Legion was ready, over 70,000 having registered for service, giving immediate assurance of protection against sabotage, and setting an example which both the Government and Country generally gratefully acknowledged.

It may therefore be said the Legion implemented to the full its offer of November, 1938, and in doing so again justified its right to be considered the greatest national service organization in Canada.



When the proclamation was made that Canada was again at war, an event of which Mr. Anthony Eden, speaking to the first Canadian Division, said,—“There is no more significant event in history than the decision of its Parliament that Canada should take its place beside other parts of the Empire in the defence of freedom,” your Dominion Council convened, its first session being opened by the Governor-General, the late Lord Tweedsmuir, whose untimely demise we all so deeply deplore. For a three-day session your Council dealt with the situations existing and likely to arise, and subsequently a circular was issued, fully outlining their conclusions.

This, however, is an opportunity to discuss with you certain decisions upon which resolutions were presented to the Government, as they materially affect the future of the Legion, and you as its supreme authority should be absolutely satisfied upon the steps taken.

These resolutions were in brief,—

“THAT to give confidence to the public there should be an immediate declaration as to the use of those called to the Colours.”

“THAT whilst the Legion reiterates its belief in universal service, if the situation is to be met by volunteer enlistment, there must be proper safeguards as to the family, and personal future of the volunteer.”

“THAT the cost of living should be regulated, and that steps should be taken to impose equitable sacrifice upon wealth and industry,” and finally

“THAT the Legion should be given an opportunity to undertake War Services.”

The Prime Minister and his Colleagues arranged to receive the entire Dominion Council, and after discussing these resolutions, advised the same day:

1. The formation of training divisions, of which the first would go overseas as soon as required;
2. That the Legion should submit as soon as possible its detailed views upon general war services, pensions and re-establishment.
3. That the offer to undertake War Services would be referred to the Minister of Defence for sympathetic consideration.

Before its adjournment, your Executive having unanimously agreed that identification with the present war effort was essential to the future of the Legion as well as a paramount obligation, instructed your President to complete negotiations to that end.

The days that followed were ones of great anxiety. A change of Ministers had taken place, and certain offers of service made by other organizations had been accepted in principle by officials of the Department. As a result of negotiation and deliberation an exhaustive inquiry was made by the Honourable Mr. Rogers into the whole situation, and it was concluded that under modern conditions and with due regard to the need of the individual and the exacting nature of the task ahead, there was room for all organizations offering services, providing a proper plan of co-ordination was obtained.

The production of such a plan involved me personally in a very difficult decision, which I discussed with my closest friends in the Legion and members of the Council available, and that was, whether to accept the direction of the new Services which the Department of Defence intended to set up.

At the outbreak of war I had, in common with so many others, offered to serve, and naturally hoped to do so in a similar capacity to that of the last war. Those conversant with the situation, however, felt that it would be in the Legion's best interest for me to accept the Directorate of the Organization for the welfare of our comrades in Canada's Active Service Forces, and with assurance from other Organizations that they would welcome such an appointment, that decision was made. Today at any rate there is a great reward in knowing everything possible is being done for the wellbeing of our men, and the Legion is playing such a prominent part in that splendid service.

The formation of an Auxiliary to undertake War Services for the Legion was fully explained by circulars but, at this Convention a special Committee is sitting in order to give information which could not be fully broadcast at the time. It must be remembered that other organizations were already at work. The Executive had left a mandate to act quickly, and it was also necessary to avoid publicity until a definite understanding could be reached.

It was of course obvious that the Legion, as such, could not undertake a task which might jeopardize its finances and interfere with the normal work for which it was created. Therefore, after taking legal and other advice, a separate organization was set up as an auxiliary, arrangements made by which it could function without delay, and an immediate offer made to the Department, which was waiting to consider the various offers of services.

Might I take this opportunity of expressing deep gratitude to General Gunn and his colleagues who came to Ottawa and accepted the task of inaugurating the Canadian Legion War Services Inc. and so enabled the Legion to present a definite plan of operation.

Reports rendered by that Organization, functioning as an auxiliary to the Legion, will indicate the scope of the work undertaken, which, with the most gratifying success of the Campaign for funds, can be still further extended.

The part taken by the Legion in Canada was fairly well told during the Campaign. I would like though, to add a word as to the Services overseas where, due to existing conditions, an even greater need exists. In England, or wherever the troops may be, arrangements of every possible character have been made to meet the requirements in the field or on leave. With reference to the latter, one of the finest residential clubs in London is that operated by the Canadian Legion, which also co-operates in other arrangements for the spending of leave to the best advantage, through private hospitality, conducted tours, and those amenities which, due to the blackout, have become so necessary.



At the head office in London a Legion Representative assists in the co-ordination of all Services and the planning of arrangements which benefit Canada's Naval, Land and Air Forces.

With the Division, each of the voluntary organizations has supervisors who have the status of officers and an establishment of civilian helpers. The work is sub-divided, and that of the Legion is briefly the divisional organization of entertainment; the distribution of comforts; the operation of institutes, cinema, and travelling canteens; arrangements for leave and hospitality; and the Legion Personal Services; whilst in addition there is that outstanding feature of Educational work; and, with the removal of the Division to a front area theatre of war, there will be other canteens to operate.

The Educational scheme is worked out in conjunction with the Canadian Association for Adult Education, and is broad enough in scope to provide facilities for education which will better fit the recipient for the grim task ahead, as well as his future in the normal life of our Country. It excited a great deal of favourable comment in the Old Land, and its Director was asked to serve upon an Advisory Council of the War Office, which is considering a greatly enlarged educational programme for British troops. The first subject taken up by our men in England was that of French. Several thousand immediately enrolled, obtaining the dual advantage of this language both for service and upon their return to Canada.

We who have experience can appreciate the meaning of such Services, and I can only repeat that through the good offices of the Canadian Legion and others, they provide facilities for mental and physical development which, with the comradeship of service, will broaden the character of those who are now serving and fit them for the future. It is a pleasing thought that in providing such an opportunity justice is done, and in addition the Country will presently gain the services of those who can assist both in the task of reconstruction and providing with leadership through which better conditions than heretofore will be brought into being.

We realize that for Canada and our Empire generally there is a very dark period ahead, but of one thing we are sure, and that is victory in a military sense. Such a victory, however, is not in itself sufficient. It must be accompanied by guaranteed security for the future, and we who have now participated in two world wars must be prepared to maintain our organization upon such a high standard that its voice may be listened to with respect during the difficult periods that will accompany the discussion of peace terms and demobilization.

We have every reason to be proud of the Legion's past record, its steadfast adherence to the principles of unity, comradeship and peace; of its action in the anxious days preceding the declaration of war, and now its acceptance of the challenge to the honour of our land.

A challenge which is a threat to everything that comes within the terms of Christian civilization, for the preservation of which our comrades have never hesitated to offer life itself.

The future hold infinitely greater scope for Legion activity. The problem of unity has been solved; perpetuating the Legion has been met by the Legion's participation in the present conflict, and the end of the war should see that one great organization visualized by leaders whose foresight created the British Empire Service League and our own Canadian Legion. What such an organization is capable of in the light of our Country's future is almost beyond conjecture, and I can only in a very humble way, if privileged to do so as one who has worked in the Legion's service since the day it was brought into existence, say, that its success will depend upon always keeping in view the objects of the Legion's existence, and by refusing to be diverted into issues of lesser moment which would lower the prestige the organization has now attained.

In conclusion I would like to acknowledge the great privilege it has been to serve with my colleagues upon successive Executive Councils, and express to them my deepest appreciation of that devotion to duty which has always marked the deliberations of Council, and has enabled me to present to you a picture of progress of which you may well be proud.

W. W. FOSTER,

*Dominion President.*

Ottawa, May, 1940.

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I have already acknowledged the splendid work of Mr. Alex. Walker as Acting Dominion President during my absence overseas, and I have much pleasure in bringing to the attention of the Convention Mr. Walker's report to me of his stewardship during that period:—

TO BRIGADIER W. W. FOSTER, D.S.O., V.D.,

Dominion President,

Canadian Legion, B.E.S.L.

Dear Brigadier Foster:

The following is a report of my stewardship as Acting Dominion President for the period 5th December 1939 to 30th March 1940, during your absence overseas.

#### SUB-EXECUTIVE COUNCIL MEETING

After receiving your letter of the 5th December, 1939, I immediately left for Ottawa and in the meantime authorized the General Secretary, Mr. J. R. Bowler, to call in members of the Sub-Executive Council and also the Immediate Past Dominion President, General Ross, whose presence I felt would be of much value to me, in view of the departure of so many Legion officers overseas. At this Meeting General Ross was named Acting Dominion Chairman and the appointment of Captain G. H. Rochester as Acting Dominion Honorary Treasurer confirmed.

As the date of the Meeting coincided with the 65th birthday of the Prime Minister, the congratulations of the Council were extended to him.



A message of sympathy was sent to Mrs. Wayland on the death of Col. Wayland, one of the representatives of the Canadian Legion on the Empire Council. In authorizing you to appoint a successor to Col. Wayland, the Council suggested the name of Col. Hamilton Gault.

### DOMINION CONVENTION

After consultation with the Quebec Provincial Command the dates of the 1940 Dominion Convention were settled. It was decided that the Convention, which had been awarded to Montreal, would be held from May 27th to 30th, the Dominion Council and certain Committees to meet in advance of these dates.

### CANADIAN LEGION WAR SERVICES

In connection with the activities of the Canadian Legion War Services, the members of Council felt that it was important that Branches be kept fully informed of the work accomplished by Canadian Legion War Services and that a series of progress reports be issued from which the general membership could secure knowledge as to the nature and extent of the programme in the various provinces. It was also felt that a special circular should be issued furnishing Branches with some idea as to the part they could take in War Services activities. One important suggestion was that Branches make a record of men enlisting from their districts with a view to keeping in touch with them while overseas and their dependents at home. The issue of special Associate Legion Membership cards to men enlisting in the C.A.S.F. and the waiving of capita tax on Legion members proceeding overseas were two other items dealt with.

### FINANCING WAR SERVICES

A report was presented as to the financial position with particular reference to the future operations of Canadian Legion War Services. The question of continuing and extending the existing arrangement with the Canadian Red Cross Society regarding the financing of Legion War Services or the advisability of conducting a national appeal for funds was discussed at length. General Ross submitted a resolution on the matter which was approved in principle. After due consideration it was agreed that General Ross, Senator White, Colonel Webb and myself should proceed to Toronto to discuss the matter with General Gunn and members of the Directorate of Canadian Legion War Services to explore the possibility of reaching adequate and permanent arrangements with the Canadian Red Cross Society or, failing that, to reach an understanding in respect to a special national appeal by the Legion for funds for War Services. After an all day session in Toronto, the decision was reached that a special public appeal should be launched by Canadian Legion War Services for the sum of \$500,000. I released an announcement to this effect to the Press on the 18th December and a circular was issued to all Branches. I asked General Ross to act as Campaign Chairman and Col. E. A. Olver of Toronto as Campaign Director. Their fine work, together with the loyalty and efforts of all Provincial Committees and individual Legion Branches and members in all parts of Canada, resulted in the appeal being a striking success. Without such loyal backing on the part

of the Legion as a whole, the Campaign could not have succeeded in the short time available.

### REPRESENTATIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT

Various matters relating to the C.A.S.F. were also discussed at the Council Meeting. Arising out of the discussion, it was agreed that a brief be prepared and presented to the Minister of the Department of National Defence dealing specifically with dependents' allowance problems, discharges and re-establishment. The brief stressed that numerous individual complaints had been received by the Legion concerning dependents' allowances, that many men had enlisted in the full confidence that their parents would be adequately provided for, that there were many instances in which injustices had occurred (particularly in the case of sons who were unemployed before enlistment) and that, while the Legion appreciated the difficulties of the situation and the good intentions of the Government, nevertheless it was felt that some remedy should be found to improve the situation and remove the present causes of dissatisfaction. It is gratifying to report that dependents' allowance regulations have since been widened. While the Legion does not claim that it was solely responsible for securing these changes, the memorandum undoubtedly had a bearing on the action taken.

This brief also included reference to Canadians serving with Imperial Forces and urged that provision be made that Canadians serving in Imperial units should be entitled to pension on the basis of the Canadian Pension Act.

It was also decided to submit to the Minister of Pensions and National Health a separate brief dealing with unemployment among ex-service men of the first Great War and referring to pensions, treatment and War Veterans' Allowances. In connection with unemployed veterans, three definite suggestions were advanced.

(a) That in localities where the Veterans' Assistance Commission is functioning there should be complete co-operation between that body and the Unemployment Services, so as to eliminate dissatisfaction and friction.

(b) That some form of organization be set up whereby the services of fit unemployed men might be used for duties in connection with camps, particularly having regard to the extensive programme outlined in connection with the Air Training Scheme,—the work to be performed to be of the nature of light fatigues. It was pointed out that, under proper conditions, men so employed could be built up physically and could have their morale restored and be available for profitable employment should the opportunity arise.

(c) The fact that the Government has not seen fit to implement the proposal contained in the Rattray Commission Report for an economic allowance to fit unemployed ex-service men of the last war, was again referred to. It was urged that the problem be reconsidered by the Government and that every effort be made to provide a solution which would be adequate in every respect.



An undertaking was given by the Minister that our representations would be brought to the attention of the Government. The Legion was later invited to meet the Cabinet.

### **PROPOSALS OF A LEGISLATIVE CHARACTER**

Following the dissolution of Parliament, it was agreed to place copies of a brief combining the various proposals of a legislative character affecting both ex-service men and the new soldiers, in the hands of the Government and the Leaders of all political parties. This was concurrently distributed to all Branches of the Legion and to the newspapers.

### **PROPOSED DOMINION PRESIDENTS' CONFERENCE**

In the midst of compiling the brief and while making preparations for the Dominion Convention, an invitation was received from Colonel Reynolds of the Canadian Corps Association in respect to the summoning of a Dominion Presidents' Conference. I consulted all members of the Dominion Executive Council, at the same time expressing my opinion that owing to the danger of becoming involved in resolutions which might be regarded as political, I did not feel that the Legion should attend such a meeting. I am glad to report that all members of the Council agreed with this decision.

### **APPOINTMENT OF COLONEL MACINTYRE**

In January Colonel Webb resigned as General Manager of Canadian Legion War Services on being assigned to special duties with the R.C.A.F. Colonel D. E. Macintyre, D.S.O., M.C., was named Assistant General Manager in charge of administration and later was appointed General Manager by the Directors.

### **DEATH OF LORD TWEEDSMUIR**

In common with all other citizens, ex-service men were shocked at the untimely death of the Governor General, Lord Tweedsmuir, who was also Grand Patron of the Canadian Legion. Condolences were extended to Lady Tweedsmuir on behalf of the entire Legion, while the following special message was issued to the Canadian Press:

"With profound regret which approaches the depths of a great personal sorrow the members of the Canadian Legion of the British Empire Service League have learned of the tragic death of His Excellency Lord Tweedsmuir, Governor General and Commander-in-Chief of the Dominion of Canada. The sense of loss to war veterans is particularly poignant for Lord Tweedsmuir was himself an ex-service man having served with distinction in both the South African and the Great War. His deep and sincere interest in the post war problems of his old comrades in arms was demonstrated on innumerable occasions and we search in vain for words to adequately express our feeling of gratitude for the inspiration and encouragement he gave us as Grand Patron of the Canadian Legion.

"His busy pen is still, his voice is silent but his spirit lives on. May it inspire to redoubled efforts all who share our illustrious comrades vision of Canada's future and the part to be taken by the men both of the last and the present war who, like him, were not found wanting in the hour of their Country's and Empire's trial. In the name of the Canadian Legion I tender to Lady Tweedsmuir and her children the heartfelt sympathy of all our members from sea to sea."

### **SPECIAL DOMINION CONVENTION COMMITTEES**

Regarding the Dominion Convention, apart from the standing Committees called for by the Constitution, I felt that the following Special Committees should also be set up:

(a) A Committee on Canadian Legion War Services.

This Committee will operate in much the same way as the Ways and Means Committee and will be designed to investigate thoroughly the whole financial set-up in order that our Members may be assured that this Fund is being properly administered. It will, of course, also be charged with the responsibility of investigating the activities undertaken and making any recommendations as to future policy, for the guidance and information of the Directors of Canadian Legion War Services. This Committee will consist of a Chairman, to be nominated by Dominion Command, and a Member from each Command, together with a Member representing each section.

(b) A Committee on Unemployment.

Our members will doubtless desire to review the question of unemployment among veterans of the last war. The present situation that several thousand ex-service men are still unemployed should be dealt with and it is of the utmost importance that this matter be kept before the Government.

(c) A Committee on Rehabilitation to deal with the problems of rehabilitation of men of the present war and how the Legion can best assist members of the C.A.S.F.

The above Committees will meet in advance of the Convention.

### **DOMINION EXECUTIVE COUNCIL MEETING**

In connection with the Dominion Executive Council, I arranged that an official notice be sent to all members notifying them of the Council Meeting to be held in Montreal on Saturday, May 25th.

### **CONCLUSION**

My term as Acting Dominion President has been a very happy one. This was made possible through the friendly and encouraging advice from members of the Dominion Executive Council and others and also because of the very fine co-operation from the General Secretary, Mr. J. R. Bowler, and the members of his staff. One would be lacking in appreciation and duty if reference were not also made to the special assistance



received from General Ross and to the splendid work carried out by Col. Olver in connection with the national campaign. It has been my pleasure to attend several meetings of the Directors of Canadian Legion War Services and I would say that the Legion is indeed fortunate to have such splendid men as General Gunn and his directors carrying out this important feature of our work.

All of which is respectfully submitted.

ALEX. WALKER,  
Acting Dominion President,  
Canadian Legion of the B.E.S.L.

Calgary, Alberta, April 12th, 1940.