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**Rights not Charity:
the Radical Roots of the British Legion**

Mike Hally

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Abstract

This thesis examines the creation of several ex-service organisations during and shortly after the First World War, the campaigns that preceded their formation, and the processes that led to the amalgamation of four of them into the British Legion in July 1921. Employing previously unutilised sources, it offers a new analysis of activities during the first two years of the war, a period that has not been addressed, to any significant extent, by previous scholarship in this context. Those activities were important as they led to the founding of the first two groups, the National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers ('the Association'), and the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers ('the Federation'). These new bodies were quite different from traditional service charities, in that they were democratic membership organisations, run by the members for mutual support, and to press for better government treatment of them and their dependants.

This thesis also re-examines the period from autumn 1916 to July 1921, which saw the growth of those two organisations, and the founding of two rival groups in particular, the Comrades of the Great War ('the Comrades'), and the Officers' Association. The whole process is also placed in the wider historical context of the development of what in recent years has become known as 'the Military Covenant', that is to say, the special obligation that has been observed to exist from the time of ancient Athens to the present day, for the state to support and care for those who take up arms on its behalf, and their dependants.

While previous scholars have addressed aspects of the development of these groups, and subsequent ones, from late 1916 to July 1921, there is much new information and analysis here, with more complete coverage of regional developments across the whole United Kingdom, and a number of their assumptions and conclusions are challenged. The major sources employed in this study for the whole period 1914-21 are trades council archives, the papers of James Myles Hogge, Sir Ian Hamilton, Wilfrid Ashley (Baron Mount Temple), Lord Davies of Llandinam, Viscount (Waldorf) Astor, and the records of the Comrades in Scotland and Northern Ireland, all of which have received little attention previously, in relation to this subject. The approach is not that of a military historian, concerned with the

prosecution of the war, but rather that of the social historian, examining the conditions of the millions of people who became service families for a few years, or veterans when their service was over, of the claims their organisations made on the British state, and the responses of the Government, Army, and Admiralty, to those demands. As such, it aims to contribute to the study of 'war and social change', as developed by historians such as, in particular, Arthur Marwick.

The main new findings are as follows:

- Trades councils' campaigns on behalf of service families, and ex-service men and women, from August 1914 to September 1916, were the foundation for their creation of the National Association.
- James Hogge's concurrent but independent campaign for the same groups, in Parliament, in the Press, and through individual casework, from August 1914 to spring 1917, was similarly the foundation for his creation of the National Federation.
- The two findings above, regarding trades councils, and James Hogge, are in contrast to previous studies that focus on the period after autumn 1916, thus overlooking the important roles their activities played in the founding of the first two organisations.
- The fundamental demand of the trades councils, Hogge, the Association, and the Federation, was that these people should be supported by the British state as of right, not by Royal Bounty, or by charity.
- Lord Derby, the War Secretary in 1917, is proven, with the help of newly discovered archive papers, to have been a prime mover in the creation of the Comrades, with the backing of the War Cabinet, and he largely succeeded in hiding his involvement from the public.
- Hamilton's scheme for an Empire Services League did not fail, as asserted by Graham Wootton, because of opposition from the Association and the Federation, but because Viscount Peel and Wilfrid Ashley (a leading member of the Comrades) conspired to remove essential democratic principles from the proposed constitution, thus rendering it unacceptable to those two organisations.

- The Federation did not abandon electoral politics after its disappointing results in the General Election of December 1918, as asserted by Stephen Ward, but continued its active involvement until the middle of 1920, when it dropped this, in order to facilitate amalgamation talks.
- The creation of the Welsh Legion of Ex-Service Men in early 1920, not previously recognised, was an important early demonstration of the benefits of amalgamation, and a significant early use in the UK of the name 'Legion', as a collective term for ex-service men and women.
- The failure of the Federation's long-awaited deputation to Prime Minister Lloyd George, in February 1920, along with plummeting membership and financial reserves during that year, and the earlier launch of Haig's Officers' Association, were major drivers towards the eventual amalgamation of the Association, the Federation, the Comrades, and the Officers' Association, as the British Legion.

Lay Summary

This thesis examines the responses of service men, women, and their families to the deprivations they suffered through mass enlistment in the UK's armed forces during the First World War, and in particular the creation of several ex-service organisations during and shortly after the war. It analyses the campaigns that preceded their formation, and the processes that led to the amalgamation of four of them into the British Legion in 1921. The Legion is often seen as a rather staid, conservative, organisation, rarely in the public eye except in the weeks leading up to Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday, and primarily then in the context of selling and wearing the Poppy. Yet it had strikingly radical roots, with its first two predecessor organisations, the National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers, and the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers, founded respectively by trades union councils across Great Britain, and by James Myles Hogge, a tireless campaigner, noted social reformer, and dissident Liberal MP for East Edinburgh.

This study uncovers and examines, for the first time in detail, the activities of trades councils and James Hogge over the first two years of the Great War, prior to their founding of the Association and the Federation, noted above. It goes on to reveal much more about the role played by those two organisations, and two further competing groups, the Comrades of the Great War, and the Officers' Association, over the next few years, until all four came together in the middle of 1921 to form the British Legion, thanks to the negotiating skills of the Federation chairman, Thomas Lister, and under the presidency of Earl Haig.

The first two groups, in particular, asserted strongly that support for service families, and for ex-service men and women, should be provided by the British state as a matter of right, not primarily by Royal Bounty, or by charitable donations from the public, as had previously been the case. Their efforts were successful to the extent that this was a major step in the development of what in recent decades has become known as 'the Military Covenant', that is the principle that those who risk their lives and health by serving in the armed forces of a

country, and their widows, orphans and other dependants, deserve, in turn, the full support of the state. The British Legion was founded on the same principle, although accepting the need for fundraising as well, as a pressure group, membership body, and welfare organisation, thereby setting a pattern for the way that veterans and their dependants have subsequently been treated by the British state, to the present day.

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Abbreviations

other than those such as MP, UK, which are in general use.

Acc.	Accession number
B. H. T.	Basil H. Thompson
BL	British Legion
BNA	British Newspaper Archive
C.P.	Cabinet Paper
Cd.	Command paper (1900–18)
Cmd.	Command paper (1919–56)
DSS / D.S.S.	Discharged Sailors and Soldiers
DTC	District Trades Council
FWW	First World War
HC	House of Commons
HL	House of Lords
ILP	Independent Labour Party
NADSS / N.A.D.S.S.	National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers
NEC	National Executive Committee
NFDDSS / N.F.D.D.S.S.	National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers (sometimes spelt 'Demobilized' at that time)
NLS	National Library of Scotland
OA	Officers' Association
PRC	Parliamentary Recruiting Committee
PRONI	Public Record Office of Northern Ireland
RBL	Royal British Legion
SSAFA	Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Families Association
SSFA	Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association
TC	Trades Council
TLC	Trades and Labour Council
TNA	The National Archives (of the UK)
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UDC	Union of Democratic Control
UTC	United Trades Council
WNC	War Emergency Workers' National Committee'

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis analyses the emergence and development of rival ex-service organisations in the United Kingdom, run largely by their members rather than as benevolent charities, during and shortly after the First World War. It goes on to re-examine the amalgamation of the four leading groups to create the British Legion in 1921. It aims to extend considerably what has previously been written about these predecessor organisations, revise much of it, and challenge some of the assertions and conclusions contained in those earlier works. It seeks to break new ground in revealing the historical origins of the first two groups over the period August 1914 to September 1916, in particular the previously under-examined roles of both trades councils,¹ and of James Myles Hogge MP,² in laying the foundations for, respectively, the National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers,³ and the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers.⁴ It also provides much new analysis of their development and that of subsequent groupings from late 1916 through to July 1921, when the British Legion was formally created. In doing so, it challenges earlier conclusions about a number of the key elements in that process.

Underlying this thesis is the concept, only officially codified in recent years, of ‘the Military Covenant’, that is to say the principle that a society owes a particular duty to those who serve in its armed forces, and to their dependants.⁵ It is a duty given practical expression in the form of support for their dependants, while the men and women are serving away from home, of the veterans themselves on leaving the forces, and of widows and orphans left

¹ Most commonly called trades councils, but some were also known as trades union councils, trades and labour councils, or trades union and labour councils, see chapter 2.

² Generally referred to, at the time, simply as James Hogge, but often since with the addition of his middle name, probably to avoid confusion with the Scottish poet James Hogg.

³ Interestingly, that first group, the ‘Association’ was not called a ‘Union’, despite its roots in the trades union movement. No record of the choice of name has been found, due to lack of an archive for Blackburn Trades Council, which founded the first association; possibly their members simply regarded ‘union’ as specifically for defined crafts and trades. The later National Union of Ex-Servicemen (NUX) was, as will be shown later, organised on traditional trade union lines and its propaganda equated ‘ex-service men and women’ with ‘workers’.

⁴ Hereafter generally referred to simply as the Association and the Federation. The phrase ‘discharged sailors and soldiers’ was in use before the war to refer to men who had served in the Army or Navy and then returned to civilian life. The term ‘discharged’ applied to all who left the armed forces, and did not imply unsatisfactory service.

⁵ Ministry of Defence, *Soldiering: The Military Covenant* (London, 2000).

behind if they die prematurely in, or as result of, service. It is a duty that can be demonstrated, in part at least, as far back as ancient Athens, and it is argued here that the ex-service organisations, and those who supported them, did much to develop it over the period 1914–21, in particular by shifting much of that obligation from pre-war charities, to the British state. This was a major change that the UK Government resisted by attempting to avoid creating a statutory right to war pensions, to load as much responsibility for supplementary allowances onto the voluntary sector as possible, and by aiming to abolish the Ministry of Pensions, only created in December 1916, soon after the war;⁶ resistance that in all three instances proved unsustainable. While ex-service charities have continued to support veterans and dependants ever since, the British State has become the primary, and statutory, provider of such support in the UK.

Scope of this study

The formation of the British Legion on 1 July 1921, and its subsequent history, have been well documented, so only events prior to that are covered in this study. Much less attention has been paid to the predecessor groups, so they are the primary focus here, in order to address the question of how and why it was that, during the Great War, ex-servicemen for the first time banded together, in significant numbers, to help themselves. The key research questions therefore start with the involvement of the trades councils, that is to say how and why those resolutely anti-war institutions got involved, from the early months of the war, in the problems of sailors' and soldiers' dependants, and the men themselves when discharged,⁷ and to such an extent that they eventually founded an organisation, the Association, devoted to their welfare. Similarly, there is the matter of how and why James Hogge who, concurrently with the trades councils, but as a radical Liberal MP and a passionate supporter of voluntary enlistment, took up the same issues to the extent that it became his defining cause during the war, and led in turn to his founding

⁶ The question of abolition was raised in 1922, after the period of this thesis, so is not discussed further. See appendix 30, in John Graham George Wootton, 'The Political Influence of Organised Ex-Service Men in England and Wales, 1917–57' (PhD thesis, London School of Economic and Political Science, 1960), 439-40.

⁷ 'Men' is correct when applied to the early months of the war. In later years, the discharged included both men and women.

the second organisation, the Federation. There is no dispute that ex-officers (other than those risen from the ranks) were initially excluded from full membership of the Association and the Federation, but the assertion that this was due to what Graham Wootton calls 'undoubtedly ... a strong anti-officer outlook',⁸ is too simplistic, and a more nuanced interpretation is sought here. Nor is there any dispute regarding the reasons for the establishment of the Comrades of the Great War, in reaction to the perceived radicalism of the Association and the Federation, but the question of how involved the British Government was in its creation is examined more thoroughly, as more definite evidence has been found in newly consulted archives. As previous accounts concentrate to a large extent on the way these organisations developed in England, this study asks how much they spread across Scotland, Wales and Ireland, and to what extent they simply mirrored developments in England, or were significant in their own way. There have been different interpretations of how amalgamation was eventually achieved, but an important question is why Ian Hamilton's 1918–19 scheme for an Empire Services League failed, and a new conclusion is presented here, along with evidence of its influence on later developments. Similarly, some accounts credit Earl Haig with the leading role in bringing about amalgamation, but that is also questioned, again leading to a different conclusion. Other aspects of that process are also re-evaluated, including the significance of the United Services Fund in getting the organisations to work together, the creation of the Officers' Association in changing perceptions of both public fund-raising and the possibility of unification, and in particular the role of falling membership and declining funds in driving together the Association, the Federation, and the Comrades, despite the mutual suspicion and hostility that had characterised the first couple of years of their existence.

Review of literature

There is only a small historiography that focuses specifically on this subject, although the wider context is rather better served. Several books have been published about the history of the British Legion, two of them derived from doctoral theses, but each devotes only a small proportion of its pages to the predecessor organisations, while several other

⁸ Graham Wootton, *The Official History of the British Legion* (London, 1956), 2.

dissertations provide rather more detail, though none of these studies examines the period from August 1914 to September 1916. Several publications have been of particular interest because they were written contemporaneously, above all *War Pensions: Past and Present*, by Edward Parry and Sir Alfred Codrington,⁹ respectively a senior judge and an ex-Army officer, who together set up and operated the first independent war pensions appeals tribunal. Their book, published in 1918, is an account of that work, which provides great insight into the attitudes of the military authorities towards discharged sailors and soldiers, attitudes that did much to stoke the sense of injustice that was so prevalent among the members of the Association and the Federation in particular. Also published in 1918 was *War Pensions and Allowances*, a useful factual reference written by James Hogge and T. H. Garside,¹⁰ while the following year Edward T. Devine and Lilian Brandt published *Disabled Soldiers and Sailors Pensions and Training*, a detailed narrative of war-time developments, whose chapter on Great Britain is a useful companion to Parry and Codrington's work.¹¹ Another contemporaneous account, *The Ex-Soldier: By Himself*, was written as early as 1916, by W. G. Clifford, a former regular soldier who went on to play an important role in efforts to amalgamate the various ex-service organisations.¹² A few years later, Sir Arthur Griffith Boscawen, who had been a Parliamentary Secretary to the first Minister of Pensions, published a memoir that included some revealing assessments of the often chaotic administration of war pensions during the war years.¹³

Hitherto, the two most comprehensive scholarly studies of these forerunner organisations are doctoral dissertations by Charles Kimball,¹⁴ and by Stephen R. Ward.¹⁵ Both accounts begin towards the end of 1916, with the creation by the trades council in Blackburn,

⁹ His Honour Judge Edward Abbott Parry and Lieut.-General Sir Alfred Edward Codrington, *War Pensions: Past and Present* (London, 1918).

¹⁰ James Myles Hogge and T. H. Garside, *War Pensions and Allowances* (London, 1918).

¹¹ Edward T. Devine and Lilian Brandt, *Disabled Soldiers and Sailors Pensions and Training* (New York, 1919), 27–29, 93–188.

¹² W. G. Clifford, *The Ex-Soldier: By Himself, A Practical Study of the Past and Future of the Ex-Soldier with Special Reference to the Situation Created by the Great War* (London, 1916).

¹³ Arthur Griffith-Boscawen, *Memories* (London, 1925). He did not hyphenate his surnames before the 1920s, so 'Griffith Boscawen' is generally used in this text.

¹⁴ Charles Kimball, 'The Ex-Service movement in England and Wales 1916-1930' (PhD dissertation, Stanford, 1996).

¹⁵ Stephen Ralph Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations of the First World War' (PhD dissertation, Cincinnati, 1969).

Lancashire, of the first Association, though neither explores when, why or how trades councils became so involved in veterans' welfare, which is a serious omission. Each also limits his analysis mainly to England, overlooking significant developments in Scotland, Wales and Ireland. Kimball's argument, which he makes well, is that in spite of the radical beginnings of several of these groups, they came together in an organisation – the British Legion – that was 'rooted in patterns of class and gender relations, forms of community hierarchy, and political ideologies whose origins antedated the war'.¹⁶ Thus, he asserts, it was not very different from long-established charities such as the Royal Patriotic Fund and the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association (SSFA, later SSAFA when 'Airmen' were included). However, his dissertation is necessarily limited by his concentration on the post-war years, and his dismissal of Scotland with the words 'over the course of the war, parallel but independent bodies were set up in ... Scotland',¹⁷ implying wrongly that these were of little consequence to the history, as this study will show. There might have appeared to be stronger grounds for excluding Ireland, where the war of Independence of 1919–21, and the Civil War that followed, created a 'collective national amnesia' about those citizens who had served in the British Army during 1914–18,¹⁸ reinforced by the paucity of archives on the subject. More recently the decades of 'The Troubles' fostered the false belief that only Unionists from 'Ulster' fought for the United Kingdom, while Nationalists in the rest of the island concentrated on fighting, figuratively and later literally, for 'Home Rule'. However, as chapters 5 and 6 show, the new ex-services organisations, the Federation in particular, spread throughout the whole of Ireland, during the war and for several years afterwards.

Stephen Ward, writing in 1969, more than a quarter of a century before Kimball, devotes his whole dissertation to these organisations, and it is thus more directly comparable to this thesis. His study is impressive for the large number of newspaper reports cited, from both the national and the regional press, and over the whole period from autumn 1916 to July 1921. However, it does mean that his account often appears to rely excessively on such sources, supplemented by a number of government Intelligence reports, and hence focuses

¹⁶ Kimball, 'The Ex-Service movement', iv–v.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁸ Elaine Byrne, 'The forgotten Irish soldiers who fought for Britain in the First World War', *The Manchester Guardian*, 4 April 2014.

on prominent men and newsworthy events. In particular, much of his thesis is a political analysis of the extent to which the most radical elements influenced, or at least attempted to influence, the main ex-service groups, the Labour Party and the Government. There is no awareness of the parts played by trades councils and James Hogge, in the two years up to the founding of the Association, and the Federation, respectively. While many of the trades council archives, and the James Hogge papers, utilised in this study, may have been unavailable to Ward, their activities were frequently reported in the national and regional press and, in the case of Hogge, in Hansard, so he could have included their activities had he chosen to do so. His dissertation also concentrates almost entirely on England, and on occasion conflates England with the UK so that, as with Kimball's study, it fails to consider the part played by branches in the rest of the UK. Still, this is a valuable resource that will be cited often in later chapters.

Trades councils had a central role in actively campaigning for the rights of returning soldiers and sailors and their dependants, from as early as 1914,¹⁹ yet there is almost no secondary literature devoted to them, other than a few local studies of individual branches.²⁰ Just one published account of their collective history covers the period of this study, written by Alan Clinton,²¹ who looks at their role in the establishment of FWW ex-service groups and concludes that 'the period of war did much to strengthen the position of Trades Councils as widely accepted spokesmen for the poor', a position that had been declining in importance for many years pre-war; 'by the end of the war' he writes 'virtually every Trades Council was associated with an ex-service organisation'.²² However, the authority of his work in this area is questionable: in the course of a one-page summary of the main groups that are

¹⁹ For example, Glasgow Trades Council minutes, 9 December 1914, item agreeing to a request from a member body 'to enable the ... Council's Relief of Distress Committee to deal with all cases of Soldiers and Sailors dependants, which might come under their notice'. Glasgow Trades Council records, Archives and Special Collections, Mitchell Library, Glasgow, S38. More examples in chapter 2.

²⁰ For example: A Delegate, *Short History of the London Trades Council* (London, undated edition), ch. IV, 50–61 'The War'. The author's true name is unknown; the date is reported as 1935 in G. S. Bain and G. B. Woolven, *A Bibliography of Industrial Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 1979), 107, ref 2737.

²¹ Alan Clinton, *The Trade Union Rank and File: Trades Councils in Britain, 1900–40* (Manchester, 1977).

²² Clinton, *Trades Councils in Britain*, 71, 74.

the subject of this study, he makes a number of factual errors, so his work will be cited with some caution, and backed up from primary sources wherever possible.²³

Of similar importance to the trades councils in this account, was James Myles Hogge, the MP for East Edinburgh, who also took up the cause of soldiers' dependants and then of the men themselves when discharged. Not much has been written in previous histories about him, with both Ward and Kimball each referring to him a number of times in their accounts of the development of the Federation, but making virtually no mention of his activities before 1917, thus leaving his involvement in the organisation largely unexplained. Even Ian Elder, writing an appreciation of Hogge in the *Journal of Liberal Democrat History*, devotes only a couple of brief paragraphs, in an essay of over 2,200 words,²⁴ to what was arguably the most important part of his life's work, campaigning for ex-service men and women, and founding the Federation. That is, however, more than Gordon Millar devoted to that work, just 18 words out of 1,450, in his account of Hogge's life in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*,²⁵ perhaps reflecting the lack of any previous detailed record of his war-time activities.

Histories of the British Legion ('Royal' only since 1925) generally devote some space to the predecessor organisations, and the first to do so was Graham Wootton, whose *Official History*, published in 1956, began with the formation of the Blackburn Association, although fewer than thirty pages are devoted to that and the other groups.²⁶ It is predominantly a narrative account,²⁷ which acknowledges that the 'Legion pioneers, Mr T. F. Lister and Colonel G. R. Crosfield', both 'read and criticised' his manuscript in their role as 'scrutineers' appointed by the Legion's National Executive Council,²⁸ along with the 'far-sightedness and

²³ Clinton, *Trades Councils in Britain*, 73–4.

²⁴ R. Ian Elder, 'J. M. Hogge: Backbench Maverick', *Journal of Liberal Democrat History* Iss. 30 (Spring 2001), 20–22, 32.

²⁵ Gordon F. Millar, 'Hogge, James Myles (1873–1928)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (hereafter *ODNB*), online version: 25 May 2006, accessed 15 February 2021, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/45599>.

²⁶ Wootton, *Official History*, 1–29.

²⁷ An opinion shared by Niall Barr, 'Service Not Self: The British Legion 1921–1939' (PhD thesis, St Andrews, 1994), 3.

²⁸ Wootton, *Official History*, ix.

cooperative spirit' of 13 named others.²⁹ However, by not considering the activities of trades councils, and of James Hogge, prior to the establishment of the Association and the Federation, he fails fully to address the origins of those organisations, which were 'fundamentally different from the voluntary societies' that pre-dated the war,³⁰ and that is a major omission. In addition, his account of events from 1916–17 through to unification in the middle of 1921, while authoritative and insightful in the main, does suffer from several weaknesses. First, its brevity means that, for example, in summarising General Sir Ian Hamilton's unsuccessful attempt to establish an Empire Services League, he wrongly concludes that this was due to the opposition of the Association and the Federation,³¹ when it was actually sabotaged by the machinations of Viscount Peel and Wilfrid Ashley, as set out here in chapter 5. Second, because his publisher had stipulated 'that only general references to sources could possibly be cited in a work of this length and character',³² it is not possible to check important, and sometimes questionable, statements that he makes without citing the evidence. Third, parts of his account appear to be based on interviews with surviving members of the Legion's predecessor organisations, such as Lister and J. R. Griffin, none of which are appended to the account or available in the archives, so that it is not possible to assess what was actually said, by people recalling events from some thirty-five years earlier.³³ Moreover, they were still part of the national leadership of the British Legion when Wootton was writing, and as he concedes 'the official historian is hardly free to develop objective "character sketches" of those who appear in his narrative'.³⁴

Wootton also published *The Politics of Influence*,³⁵ which is a much more thoroughly referenced account, based on his doctoral thesis,³⁶ in which he uses the history of the Legion to study the 'grossly neglected topic' of 'the influence of non-party (or pressure)

²⁹ Wootton, *Official History*, xi.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

³² *Ibid.*, x.

³³ *Ibid.*, ix: 'I have interviewed many Legionaries'.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, x.

³⁵ Graham Wootton, *The Politics of Influence: British Ex-Servicemen, Cabinet Decisions and Cultural Change (1917–57)* (London, 1963).

³⁶ John Graham George Wootton, 'The Political Influence of Organised Ex-Service Men in England and Wales, 1917–57' (PhD thesis, London School of Economic and Political Science, 1960).

groups in the formulation of public policy'.³⁷ In doing so, he provides rather more detail about the context in which these groups of ex-sailors and soldiers emerged, and some of the processes involved. However, the main thrust of his book is an analysis of the extent to which they, and more particularly the unified 'Legion', succeeded in influencing government policy over the years to 1957, so again it is largely devoted to the period from July 1921 onwards.

Wootton has been followed by several others, most notably Niall Barr, whose thesis on the British Legion's first 18 years,³⁸ was also published in book form,³⁹ although again the pre-1921 period accounts for only a small part of the whole.⁴⁰ It is similar to Wootton's accounts, with more than half the footnotes referencing his *Official History* and *Politics of Influence*, and that section is primarily a narrative, with his doctoral analysis being focused on the British Legion years. Brian Harding allocates still fewer pages in his more recent history,⁴¹ which similarly follows Wootton's account, as he acknowledges in his references, though the rest of his work, covering the Legion years from its formation to 2001, uses a much wider range of sources. Both Harding's and Wootton's studies were sponsored by the British Legion, while Antony Brown's *Red For Remembrance* was also closely linked to the organisation, indeed copyrighted by it.⁴² The latter was published in 1971 to mark the organisation's Golden Jubilee, and in it Brown, a journalist and ITN newscaster, 'sought to give an impression of the Legion's life rather than to write its history', and did not attempt to 'tread the same ground' as Wootton's *Official History*.⁴³ While his account is frustratingly sparing with references, and lacks a bibliography, it does provide some useful context not available elsewhere and will be cited on occasion. Most recently, Julie Summers' *We are the Legion*, published to mark its 100th anniversary, devotes only a few pages to the predecessor organisations, and doesn't add to previous accounts in that

³⁷ Wootton, *Politics of Influence*, vii.

³⁸ Niall Barr, 'Service Not Self: The British Legion 1921–1939' (PhD thesis, University of St Andrews, 1994).

³⁹ Niall Barr, *The Lion and the Poppy: British Veterans, Politics, and Society, 1921–1939* (Westport, Conn., 2005).

⁴⁰ Barr, 'Service Not Self', 10–27.

⁴¹ Brian Harding, *Keeping Faith: The History of The Royal British Legion* (London, 2001), 1–8.

⁴² Antony Brown, *Red For Remembrance: British Legion 1921–71* (London, 1971).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, xi.

respect.⁴⁴ None of these books presents a significant argument in respect of the organisations prior to the British Legion, in the way that both Kimball and Ward do in their doctoral dissertations.

There have been few journal articles, or chapters in edited collections, that have addressed these ex-service organisations specifically, although Ward followed his dissertation with several relevant articles, including an analysis of the ex-service candidates in the December 1918 General Election,⁴⁵ and an examination of how ex-service groups for a time attracted the covert attention of Basil Thomson's agents, through an exaggerated fear, in government, of their revolutionary potential.⁴⁶ However, Ward's works cited here need to be treated with some caution, as they contain some assertions that are either unsupported by references, or at variance with the sources cited; these are highlighted where appropriate in later chapters. A more recent edited collection, wholly devoted to British veterans' organisations, is a collection of essays edited by David Swift and Oliver Wilkinson,⁴⁷ with an opening chapter based on this thesis.

In addition to the literature that addresses the veterans' organisations directly, there is also a fairly substantial historiography regarding their primary concerns, namely war pensions, separation allowances, and related matters, with a number of historians devoting particular attention to women's experiences. The most relevant have been two journal articles by Eliza Riedi,⁴⁸ which together show how, she argues, the South African War 'triggered the decisive shift in public opinion towards full state support for servicemen's dependants which finally became policy in the Great War',⁴⁹ a process that runs through this thesis.

⁴⁴ Julie Summers, *We are the Legion: the Royal British Legion at 100* (London, 2021), 18–21.

⁴⁵ Stephen R. Ward, 'The British Veterans' Ticket of 1918', *Journal of British Studies* 8, no. 1 (November 1968): 155–69.

⁴⁶ Stephen R. Ward, 'Intelligence Surveillance of British Ex-Servicemen, 1918–1920', *Historical Journal* 16, no. 1 (March 1973): 177–88.

⁴⁷ David Swift and Oliver Wilkinson, eds., *Veterans of the First World War: Ex-Servicemen and Ex-Servicewomen in Post-war Britain and Ireland* (Abingdon, 2019).

⁴⁸ Eliza Riedi, 'Assisting Mrs Tommy Atkins: Gender, Class, Philanthropy, and the Domestic Impact of the South African War, 1899–1902', *Historical Journal* 60, no. 3 (2017): 745–69; Eliza Riedi, 'British Widows of the South African War and the Origins of War Widows' Pensions', *Twentieth Century British History* 29, no. 2 (2018): 169–98.

⁴⁹ Riedi, 'Assisting Mrs Tommy Atkins', 768.

Similarly, Susan Pedersen, in 'Gender, Welfare, and Citizenship during the Great War', shows the scale of that development, its extension to other dependants, and the breakdown of the British Army and Royal Navy's very restrictive pre-war approach to marriage in the ranks,⁵⁰ which became unsustainable with mass recruitment. Pamela Maclsaac's thesis 'British Military Dependents, Patriotism and Gender in The Great War' is valuable both for critically developing the work of Pedersen and others, and for setting out a thorough history of the development of separation allowances and widows' pensions during the war.⁵¹ She noted, writing in 1997, that 'the development of separation allowances and pensions for British servicemen's wives has not been studied as extensively as one might expect' and, more than two decades on, that arguably remains the case.⁵² Janis Lomas' writings on war widows have also proved useful sources.⁵³ In particular, she concludes that allowances and pensions reinforced both gender roles and class distinctions, with working-class women awarded small sums, and subject to morality checks, while officers' wives were treated more generously and respectfully,⁵⁴ which is not to say that ex-officers and their dependents did not also suffer. Overall, however, there is not a large body of secondary literature that addresses the history of war pensions, separation allowances and related matters, and a still smaller selection devoted to the ex-service organisations that emerged during and shortly after the First World War.

A more extensive historiography covers the experience of officers, and their war-time relationships with the men under their command. While very little of that deals directly with the ex-service organisations, it is relevant here because the absence of most ex-officers from the Association and the Federation, the involvement of some in the Comrades, and the eventual creation of a separate Officers' Association, were important

⁵⁰ Susan Pedersen, in 'Gender, Welfare, and Citizenship in Britain during the Great War', *American Historical Review* 95, no. 4 (October 1990): 983–1006.

⁵¹ Pamela Maclsaac, "'To Suffer and to Serve": British Military Dependents, Patriotism and Gender in The Great War' (PhD thesis, McMaster University, 1997).

⁵² *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵³ Janis Lomas, 'Soldiering On: War Widows in First World War Britain', in Janis Lomas and Maggie Andrews, eds., *The Home Front in Britain: Images, Myths and Forgotten Experiences Since 1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); "'Delicate duties": issues of class and respectability in government policy towards the wives and widows of British soldiers in the era of the great war', *Women's History Review* 9, no. 1 (2000): 123–47.

⁵⁴ Lomas, 'Soldiering On', 52.

factors in the divisions between the first three groups, and the eventual amalgamation of all four. In particular, what Wootton calls the 'anti-officer' attitude of the Federation,⁵⁵ implies that ordinary soldiers left the services so resentful of the traditional officer class, that they would not even admit them as members. Among many accounts of military life during the First World War, Denis Winter paints a particularly vivid picture based on the memoirs of some fifty serving soldiers and other sources,⁵⁶ giving clues as to why the 'ranks' may well have resented those officers who came from a privileged, usually public school, background. However, this seems at odds with other accounts of relations between officers and men during their military service, relationships that were often very good, and to some extent bridged the deep social class divide of the time. For example, John Lewis-Stempel in his book *Six Weeks* gives a quite different picture of young men, pitched into positions of great responsibility, who cared deeply for the men under their command and generally earned their loyalty and respect in return.⁵⁷ Indeed, some studies, such as Gary Sheffield's *Leadership in the Trenches*, suggest that officers from traditional upper-class backgrounds were often more highly regarded by 'rankers' than were those who rose from the ranks to become 'temporary gentlemen'.⁵⁸ He concludes that 'the ranker's view of the officer was largely determined by the way the officer behaved towards him ... they had to be both militarily efficient and also protective of their men',⁵⁹ those two factors being much more significant than whether a particular officer rose from the ranks or not. As regards the different perspectives of Winter and Lewis-Stempel, it may simply be that there were many examples of both dynamics, so that there is validity in both accounts. In any event, Martin Petter, writing about 'Temporary Gentlemen',⁶⁰ provides an insight into the

⁵⁵ Wootton, *Official History*, 2.

⁵⁶ Denis Winter, *Death's Men: Soldiers of the Great War* (London, 1978).

⁵⁷ John Lewis-Stempel, *Six Weeks: The Short and Gallant Life of the British Officer in the First World War* (London, 2010), e.g. 10, 167.

⁵⁸ Gary D. Sheffield, *Leadership in The Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (Basingstoke, 1999). From his research into diaries, letters and other primary material he found that rankers expressed 'genteel disgust at the loutish behaviour of some "temporary gentlemen"', 105, and cites more examples in ch. 7 'Officer-Men Relations: the Other Ranks' Perspective', 103–34.

⁵⁹ Sheffield, *Leadership in The Trenches*, 103.

⁶⁰ Martin Petter, "'Temporary Gentlemen'" In the Aftermath of the Great War: Rank, Status and the Ex-Officer Problem', *The Historical Journal* 37 Iss. 1 (1994): 127–52.

problems faced by ex-officers after the war, problems that particularly concerned Earl Haig, leading to his creation of the Officers' Association in early 1920.

Another possible explanation for the contradictory accounts above is that the assumed 'anti-officer' attitude of men in the Association and the Federation has been a misreading of the way they were constituted, and that they were formed for men who had served in the ranks rather than against officers. In other words, that this reflected the rigid social class structure of the times, both in British society as a whole and specifically in the armed services; the gulf between the working class and the middle and upper classes at that time can be difficult to wholly comprehend a century later. While many have argued that serving closely together in the services increased understanding between the classes, to an extent that endured after the war,⁶¹ it should not be assumed that most officers and men returned home with their class perceptions and assumptions stripped away. Indeed, that was far from the case, in the view of veterans like T. H. Proctor, writing in 1920:

The most precious of all [characteristics] was the army comradeship, the general fusion of classes. But I am afraid that this ... is rapidly passing away ... it is remarkable how quickly the heroes of the trenches have again become 'the lower classes'.⁶²

'Class' is of course a deceptively simple label, with a variety of definitions often allied to particular ideological or analytical stances. The analysis of advanced industrial societies, especially since the Second World War, requires complex, many-layered models to separate different strata within the more affluent and skilled sections of the working classes, and within the various professions and occupations of the middle classes. However, that is not necessary for this study, which uses the simple three-class model – working, middle and upper – as described by Bernard Waites in *A Class Society at War*.⁶³ It is noticeable that

⁶¹ E.g. Lewis-Stempel, *Six Weeks*, 312-14, claims that 'one of the less acknowledged truths of the war is that the rubbing of shoulder together in trench-land lessened class differences', with examples.

⁶² T. H. Proctor, 'The Motives of a Soldier', *International Journal of Ethics* 31, no. 1 (October 1920): 45.

⁶³ Bernard Waites, *A Class Society at War: England 1914-18* (Leamington Spa, 1987), 37-42, esp. 41.

trades council constitutions were written explicitly with reference to 'the Working Class',⁶⁴ and meeting minutes routinely recorded their activities in class terms. Issues of class were also fundamental to Victorian charities, set up and run by upper-class men and women to disburse help to 'deserving' members of the working classes who had simply fallen on hard times.⁶⁵ As noted above, the Association and the Federation were both run almost entirely by and for the ordinary soldier and sailor,⁶⁶ who in most cases came from a working-class background (and had in turn become in effect the 'working class' of the army or navy). Diaries, memoirs and studies of life in the British armed forces of that time, by Lewis-Stempel and many others, paint a very clear picture of the social gulf that was deliberately fostered and maintained between the ranks, the junior officers, and senior officers, so that even those promoted on merit from the ranks were re-classified – but only for the duration of the war – as 'temporary gentlemen'.⁶⁷ The class divide was vividly portrayed in R. C. Sherriff's 1929 play *Journey's End*,⁶⁸ about an infantry company where officers from a public school background mix with 2nd Lt. Trotter who has risen from the ranks. While Trotter, who drops his aitches and is described in most unflattering terms as short, fat, middle-aged and 'homely looking' with a 'red, fat and round' face,⁶⁹ may seem like a dramatic stereotype, all the characters are based on the playwright's own wartime experience, his grammar school education being deemed inadequate for a commission when he first enlisted.

A striking example of the gulf between officers and men can be seen by comparing Robert Graves' account of his time as an officer in the British Army,⁷⁰ with John Jackson's *Memoir*

⁶⁴ E.g. Aberdeen United Trades Council (UTC), *Annual Report 1915: Objects and Constitution* (Aberdeen: 1915), 2, University of Aberdeen, Special Collections, Acc. MS2270/2/24. Discussed further in chapter 2.

⁶⁵ The language of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' continued in use through the First World War, see e.g. Ingrid H. James, "'To Keep Me All My Life': Policy, provision and the experience of war widowhood, 1914–1925", PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1999, where she uses the word more than 40 times in the course of analysing both charitable and official decisions about supporting war widows.

⁶⁶ Notwithstanding Hogge's leading role as founder and first President of the Federation. His background was un-typical of both the wider leadership and the members.

⁶⁷ Lewis-Stempel, *Six Weeks*, 57–62.

⁶⁸ R C Sherriff, *Journey's End: A Play in Three Acts* (London, 1929).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁷⁰ Robert Graves, *Good-Bye to All That: An Autobiography* (London, 1929).

of a Tommy.⁷¹ While Graves was a front-line officer who spent much of the war with his men, maintaining and extending trench systems, carrying out night patrols and raids, and of course going 'over the top', his memoir is full of references to the society of fellow officers, while few rankers are named and no real fraternisation recorded. Private Jackson's account is almost a mirror image, with much detail about his comrades in the ranks and little social contact with officers. Hew Strachan, in his foreword to Private Jackson's memoir, comments that 'throughout his narrative, he bears testimony, both direct and indirect, to the fellow-feeling and mutual respect that existed between officers and other ranks'.⁷² His choice of the word 'between' rather than, say, 'among' is well-chosen and appropriate, and not just for grammatical reasons, for it signals the gap that continued to separate the two classes. That is not to say that every memoir recalls such a gap, for example Henry Lawson, an infantry subaltern and self-described 'foreigner from the south' (of England), recalled decades later being thrown together with the men of his company who were all from Oldham in Lancashire:

After the war there remained a close fellowship between us ... I corresponded regularly with the survivors, and still do so with the sole survivor still living. After I married I invited them to stay at my home and there we talked of the old days almost with nostalgia.⁷³

However, the weight of evidence suggests that in most cases there was an enduring social gap between the officers and men during their time in service. In summary, and this is explored further in later chapters, it will be argued that the exclusion of officers from the Association and the Federation had little to do with an 'anti-officer' attitude but was more of a reflection of the society in which they operated, strongly divided by class, and of a desire to run their own affairs, and not be dominated by the middle and upper classes. This was a desire that was to a considerable extent mirrored by ex-officers, who felt it was

⁷¹ John Jackson, *Private 12768, Memoir of a Tommy* (Stroud, 2005).

⁷² *Ibid.*, 8.

⁷³ Henry Lawson, *Vignettes of the Western Front: Reflections of an Infantry Subaltern in France and Belgium, 1917–18* (Oxford, 1979), 43.

necessary to launch their own Officers' Association,⁷⁴ despite the existence for more than two years of the Comrades, which had been open to officers from its inception.⁷⁵

These ex-service organisations emerged during a period when the role of the state in providing welfare benefits, such as pensions and unemployment pay, was changing quite rapidly in several countries across Europe, Germany in particular, but also in the UK. Much has been written about this process by authors such as Arthur Marwick who in *War and Social Change in the Twentieth Century* details 'some of the areas where one or other, or both, of the world wars played an important part in bringing about social change', a thesis he developed in many publications during his career.⁷⁶ The social change that is at the heart of this thesis, and is to an extent at least attributable to the ex-service organisations and those who supported them, was the shift, from charities to the British state, of much of the responsibility for supporting service families and ex-service men and women. This was accompanied by great changes in social attitudes to soldiers' wives and to ex-sailors and ex-soldiers, and to the mindset of those wives and veterans, as a consequence of both the campaigns of the new organisations, and of mass enlistment affecting so much of the UK population, directly or indirectly.

Support for Veterans and Dependants prior to the First World War

It is a contention of this thesis that it is not possible to properly understand or analyse the period it covers without some knowledge of the long history of support, or more often lack of support, for the dependants of serving sailors and soldiers, and for the men themselves after they left naval or military service.⁷⁷ Parry and Codrington, in their 1918 account of the first War Pensions Appeals Tribunal, wrote that 'there was not in existence any one book dealing with the subject; and that, in order to understand the system of War Pensions which obtains to-day, it was necessary to make a very considerable historical research'.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ See chapter 6.

⁷⁵ See chapter 4.

⁷⁶ Arthur Marwick. *War and Social Change in the Twentieth Century: A Comparative Study of Britain, France, Germany, Russia and the United States* (London, 1974), 213.

⁷⁷ It was almost invariably 'men', until the later years of the First World War.

⁷⁸ Parry and Codrington, *War Pensions*, vii.

They devoted one-third of their book to that history, and it remains the only complete overview in the historiography. While asserting that ‘All civilized nations have done something to provide for the disabled soldiers who fought their battles’,⁷⁹ this traditional verse, which they also quote, may well have been the more common experience of soldiers down the ages:

‘When troubles rise and War is nigh,
 ‘God and the Soldier’ is the cry;
 When War is o’er and trouble righted,
 God is forgotten and the soldier slighted.’⁸⁰

More recently, a ‘well-known Japanese General’ (un-named) is said to have stated that ‘the memory of a nation for its war heroes is limited to but six months’ duration’.⁸¹ Still, there are some good examples of states, rulers or nobles providing for the welfare of ex-soldiers, some dating back thousands of years.⁸² Athens, in the 6th century BCE, cared for soldiers’ orphaned children, honouring them publicly both as an obligation and to encourage others to serve, knowing their children would be cared for.⁸³ In the same way, in Britain in 1914–15, recruitment campaigns would emphasise the state’s support for dependants (below).⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Parry and Codrington, *War Pensions*, 1. Original spellings are retained within quotations as, in this case, ‘civilized’ rather than ‘civilised’.


⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 1. They describe this verse as ‘traditional’, and it appears to derive from the English poet Francis Quarles (1592–1644): Susan Ratcliffe, *Oxford Essential Quotations*, Oxford University Press, online edition 2017, accessed 19 October 2020, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780191843730.001.0001/q-oro-ed5-00008691>.

⁸¹ Quoted in Colonel E. C. Heath, D.S.O., General Secretary, ‘The British Legion: Its Origins, Objects and Some Attainments’, *Royal United Services Institution Journal* 70, iss. 480 (1925): 636. No reference.

⁸² Parry and Codrington, *War Pensions*, 1.

⁸³ Pascale Brillet-Dubois, ‘Astyanax and the Athenian War Orphans. Challenging War Ideology in Euripides’ Trojan Women’, Center for Hellenic Studies (Harvard: Harvard First Draft Classics, August 12, 2009) 9. Accessed online <https://archive.chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/displayPdf/544> (accessed 6 June 2021).

⁸⁴ See chapter 2.

G.  R.

SOLDIERS' SEPARATION ALLOWANCES

INCREASED RATES from MARCH 1, 1915

Increased Separation Allowances for the War are now given to the wives and children of married soldiers and to the dependants of unmarried men and widowers.

WIVES AND CHILDREN OF MARRIED MEN.

The New Weekly Rates are as follows :

	Privates and Corporals	Sergeant	Cpl.-Sergeant	Quarter-Master Sergeant	Wt. Officer (1st class)
Wife - - - - -	12s. 6d.	15s. 0d.	16s. 6d.	22s. 0d.	25s. 0d.
Wife and child - -	17s. 6d.	20s. 0d.	21s. 6d.	27s. 0d.	28s. 0d.
Wife and 2 children	21s. 0d.	23s. 6d.	25s. 0d.	30s. 6d.	31s. 6d.

With 2s. extra for each additional child.

These rates include the usual allotment of 2s. 6d. a week for privates and corporals, and 5s. 10d. for other ranks.

Adopted children are admitted. The ordinary limit of age for children is now 15, and the allowance is continued up to 21 in certain cases (for higher education, apprenticeship on a nominal wage, or physical or mental infirmity). Soldiers marrying AFTER enlistment are now eligible.

An extra 3s. 6d. a week is paid in the case of soldiers living in the London postal area at the time of enlistment if the families continue to live there.

Forms of Application for Separation Allowance can be filled in at the Recruiting Office.

MOTHERLESS CHILDREN.

5s. a week clear for each child.

OTHER DEPENDANTS OF UNMARRIED SOLDIERS AND WIDOWERS.

If a soldier who is unmarried or a widower (or one whose wife is not drawing separation allowance because she was living apart from him before the war) had any persons or persons (whether related or not), including children, actually dependent upon him before he enlisted, the Government will pay that dependant a weekly sum provided the soldier contributes a share (one third or less) of the amount. The intention is to allow to the dependant, within certain limits (see below), the same amount weekly that the soldier paid him or her before enlistment, less any portion that went to pay for his own keep.

As an example, if the soldier had paid 17s. 6d. a week in peace to his mother, and 7s. 6d. of this was needed for his own keep, the allowance admissible will be the remaining 10s. Towards this the soldier will contribute 5d. a day from his pay.

The amount the Government will pay to any one dependant of a soldier will not exceed the amount of separation allowance for a wife (see table above), but that limit will be raised if more persons than one were dependent on the same soldier.

To secure an allowance the soldier must complete Army Form D.1838 (which will be given to him at the Recruiting Office), and hand the completed form to his Commanding Officer within one month of enlistment.

NOTE.—As it is impossible to explain all the classes of cases on a poster, intending recruits can obtain fuller information from the two pamphlets for married and unmarried men, revised to 1st March, 1915, which they can get at any Post Office.

PUBLISHED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY RECRUITING COMMITTEE, LONDON. Printed No. 74. I.W.M.

Figure 1: Parliamentary Recruiting Committee poster, © IWM Art.IWM PST 11896.⁸⁵

Ex-legionnaires in the Roman Empire were given grants of land to support themselves,⁸⁶ and likewise, in the UK during and after the FWW, some veterans were given agricultural land in recognition of their service. Towards the end of the Middle Ages, Edward IV granted Royal Bounties to a small number of soldiers, who had been wounded or given special

⁸⁵ 'Soldiers' Separation Allowances', Parliamentary Recruiting Committee (PRC), poster no. 114, London 1915. Discussed further in chapter 2.

⁸⁶ J.C. Mann, *Legionary Recruitment and Veteran Settlement During the Principate* (London, 2018), 2.

service.⁸⁷ Remarkably, Parry and Codrington concluded that ‘exactly the same position obtains today [in 1918], and that an Army war pension is still a matter of Royal Bounty and not of legal right’.⁸⁸ This was fundamental to many of the problems that arose during the First World War, because both the military authorities and the British Government tried to sustain this principle, that war pensions and allowances were a purely discretionary act of the Crown rather than a legal right, and they resisted making them statutory, until such resistance became unsustainable.⁸⁹ There were short periods over the centuries when there was such a statutory right, first during the reign of Elizabeth I, although the purpose of that seems to have been primarily transferring the cost from the privy purse to general taxation.⁹⁰ In Cromwell’s time pensions were extended, on paper, to widows and children of deceased warriors, and some hospitals were built for veterans.⁹¹ In practice, however, Parry and Codrington concluded that ‘In spite of the many ordinances and regulations passed by Parliament to maintain hospitals and pay pensions the administration of them left much to be desired’, going on to say that ‘in all pension matters sympathetic and competent administration is more important than legislation’,⁹² a point no doubt as relevant to the situation they found in 1918, as that of 300 years earlier.

The next important step, around the end of the seventeenth century, was the foundation of the Chelsea, Greenwich and Kilmainham Hospitals, for the care of British ex-soldiers, ex-sailors, and Irish veterans respectively, each also administering pensions under the Royal Bounty.⁹³ Curiously, the Naval and Marine Pensions Act 1865 made those pensions statutory,⁹⁴ while leaving military ones discretionary, causing Parry and Codrington to note, rather acerbically, ‘it is characteristic of our constitution that Navy and Army Pensions should be granted under distinct systems and by different instruments’,⁹⁵ and that dichotomy persisted into the Great War. Government resistance to statutory pensions was

⁸⁷ Parry and Codrington, *War Pensions*, 2.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Naval war pensions were made statutory in 1865, and military ones in 1919, see chapter 5.

⁹⁰ Parry and Codrington, *War Pensions*, 2.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 5, 7–10.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 11–18, though not mentioning Kilmainham.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

reinforced by the experience of ‘Windham’s Act’ of 1806,⁹⁶ introduced by William Windham, the first War Secretary to sit in Cabinet, who, driven by the need to maintain recruitment during the Napoleonic Wars, restored the Elizabethan principle of the war pension as a legal right.⁹⁷ This costly measure survived barely a decade before it was replaced by a new one, which removed the words ‘legally entitled’, and restored complete control to the Chelsea Commissioners.⁹⁸ Parry and Codrington concluded that ‘there is [in 1918] no legal right to an army war pension’,⁹⁹ and no more recent scholarship has given any reason to question their conclusion, at that time.

While the British Government resisted the creation of statutory rights to war pensions and allowances, they welcomed the growth, during the nineteenth century particularly, of numerous service charities that served to reduce the pressure on government. Many were small and localised, or served a particular group, but two were national and of particular importance in the First World War. The first of these was the Royal Patriotic Fund, and Parry and Codrington rightly devote a whole chapter to the sorry history of this fund,¹⁰⁰ so only the briefest précis is given here. Established by the Government during the Crimean War, but funded by a generous public, not the Exchequer, it was supposed to support the widows and orphans of sailors and soldiers. Instead, over the rest of the century, it was beset by scandal, awarding only miserly allowances, while generously rewarding its incompetent staff, building schools without authority, running them appallingly, and much more. A series of internal, parliamentary and judge-led inquiries, and damning reports, made little difference until 1903 when, finally, Parliament passed the Patriotic Fund Reorganization Act, establishing the rather better-regulated Royal Patriotic Fund Corporation, which was the incarnation of the Fund that existed in 1914.

The other major charity in this context was the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Families Association, or SSFA, which seems to have performed its role of supporting dependants efficiently and

⁹⁶ Pensions, to Soldiers Act 1806, 46 Geo. III. c. 69, quoted in Parry and Codrington, *War Pensions*, 19.

⁹⁷ Parry and Codrington, *War Pensions*, 19–20.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 20–21.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 30–50.

without scandal. Set up by a Major James Gildea, on the departure of the Second Expeditionary Force to Egypt (1884–5),¹⁰¹ it too was funded by a generous public, moved by Gildea's appeal to 'remember the wives and children of those ordered on active service'.¹⁰² While women had accompanied armies for centuries, providing supplies, cooking, laundry, and other ancillary services, by the middle of the nineteenth century the British Army had both professionalised much of that work, and barred women from going overseas with the men.¹⁰³ Only a small proportion of those in the ranks were permitted to marry 'on the strength of the regiment',¹⁰⁴ and they continued to live in camp, earning a living for domestic services. Importantly, from 1871, they were given a 'separation allowance' while their men were abroad,¹⁰⁵ but for the much larger numbers married 'off the strength', there was no such support, other than the Poor Laws,¹⁰⁶ and this was the need that SSFA addressed. Its biggest test came during the South African War, which can be seen, in retrospect, as a smaller-scale rehearsal for the mass mobilisation of 1914–18, involving not only regular soldiers, but very large numbers of reservists, militia, yeomanry and other volunteers, resulting in what Eliza Riedi terms 'the removal ... of the main breadwinner from some 200,000 working-class families'.¹⁰⁷ SSFA's long-established policy was to maintain the household income at two-thirds of what it had been before the war, disregarding any money allotted by the soldier from his pay, and any earned by the wife, both exceptions designed to encourage the thrift and self-help that was at the heart of its charitable philosophy.¹⁰⁸ Figure 2, below, illustrates the numbers of wives, other dependent relatives, and children assisted from 1899 to 1901, and it can be seen that the second category comprised a significant proportion of the total. In its financial support for these groups, SSFA's approach would be adopted by the Government during the First World War, as will be explored in more detail in the next chapter.

¹⁰¹ 'The Nile Expedition', *The Times*, 28 August 1884, 10.

¹⁰² James Gildea, 'The Families of Soldiers and Sailors on Active Service', *The Times*, 23 February 1885, 12.

¹⁰³ Myna Trustram, *Women of the Regiment: Marriage and the Victorian army* (Cambridge University Press, 1984), 2–3.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 29–49. Officers were not subject to the same rules, although regimental expectations varied greatly (the welfare of officers and their dependants is explored in later chapters).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 86–7.

¹⁰⁷ Riedi, 'Assisting Mrs Tommy Atkins', 746.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 751, details Gildea's reasoning.

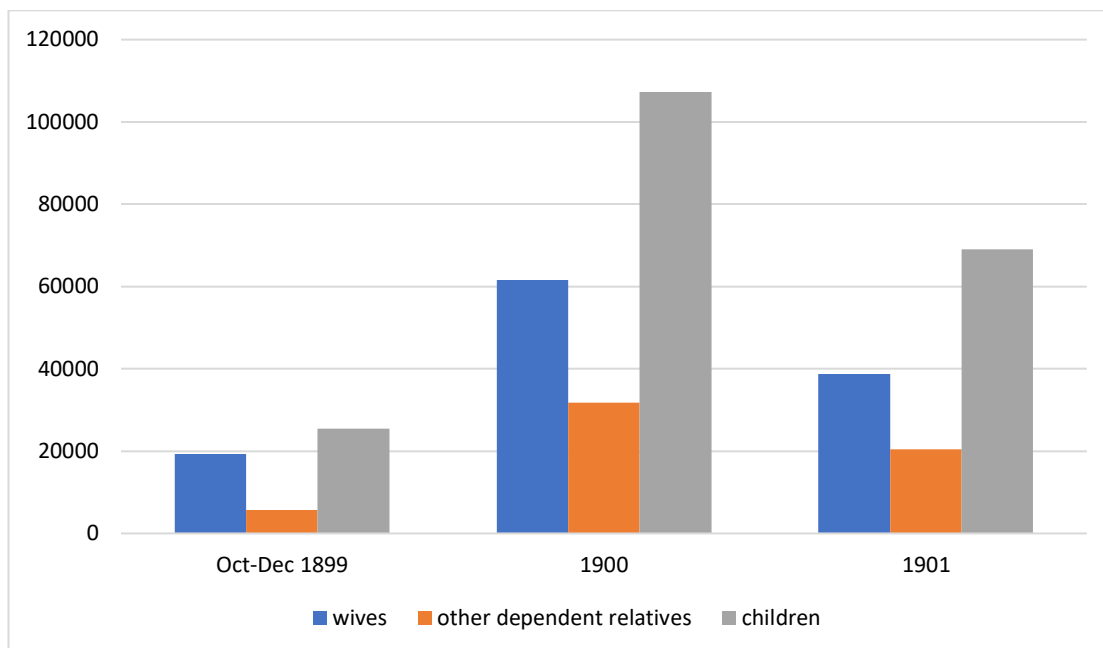


Figure 2: persons assisted by SSFA during the South African War 1899-1901.¹⁰⁹

The other major development during the South African War was the introduction in 1901 of pensions for the widows of rank-and-file soldiers.¹¹⁰ Commissioned officers' widows, and other dependants such as mothers and sisters, had long qualified for war pensions, but not those in the ranks, even if married on-the-strength.¹¹¹ This was not, however, the case for all widows since those of 'ordinary sailors and marines', killed or drowned in service, had since 1883 been entitled to a small pension from the Greenwich Hospital.¹¹² The South African War, because it drew in such large numbers of reserve soldiers in addition to the regulars, generated 'a novel public attitude ... that war widows were *entitled* to financial support and compensation',¹¹³ and this was introduced in 1901.¹¹⁴ Despite strong parliamentary support for including off-the-strength wives,¹¹⁵ they were excluded due to opposition from William Brodrick, the Secretary of State for War, although all widows of

¹⁰⁹ Bar graph generated from figures in Riedi, 'Assisting Mrs Tommy Atkins', 752, Table 1. 1902 is excluded due to incomplete data in that table.

¹¹⁰ HC Deb 29 March 1901 vol 92 c281. Statement by the Secretary of State for War, William St John Brodrick.

¹¹¹ Riedi, 'British Widows of the South African War', 172.

¹¹² Ibid., 172.

¹¹³ Ibid., 175. Original emphasis.

¹¹⁴ HC Deb 29 March 1901 vol 92 c277.

¹¹⁵ Ibid cc279–290.

reservists were included.¹¹⁶ For those who did qualify, the scale of war pensions varied from 5s a week for the widow of a private, plus 1s 6d per child, up to 10s a week for the widow of a quartermaster-sergeant, plus 2s per child, amounts described by SSFA's founder James Gildea, in a letter to *The Times* in 1901, as a 'beggarly pittance'.¹¹⁷ But nonetheless this established an important principle, namely that war widows were entitled to statutory support from the state. Taken together, SSFA's provision of separation allowances for all wives, and the Government's provision of war widows' pensions, were important forerunners of the support they would get during the First World War

Another important pre-war development was the introduction of three significant welfare schemes, namely the Workmen's Compensation Acts 1897 and 1906, the Old Age Pensions Act 1908, and the National Insurance Act 1911. While only the last covered sailors and soldiers, and the Workmen's Compensation Act of 1897 specifically excluded workplace injuries to military personnel,¹¹⁸ together they reflected a growing belief that the state had some duty towards its citizens' financial and medical well-being, beyond that provided by the much-criticised and resented Poor Laws.¹¹⁹ Indeed, during the First World War, arguments for improvements in state support for veterans would be made through direct comparison between these new civilian entitlements and the lesser provision for discharged sailors and soldiers.¹²⁰ The new old-age pension, although limited in scope and value, was a statutory right,¹²¹ unlike most war pensions at that time, and at first the schemes were administered by local committees, with pensions paid through post offices, which became the basis for distributing separation allowances and war pensions during the FWW.¹²² Another important development between the South African War and the First World War was the sweeping 'Haldane Reforms' of the British Army, but these were largely

¹¹⁶ HC Deb 29 March 1901 vol 92 cc281–283.

¹¹⁷ 'The Widows and Orphans of our Soldiers and Sailors', *The Times*, 1 October 1901, 11.

¹¹⁸ Workmen's Compensation Act 1897 c 37, s1.

¹¹⁹ This was particularly apparent among members of the Liberal Government elected in 1906, headed by Prime Minister Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman, until his death in 1908, then succeeded by H. H. Asquith. See for example, Chris Renwick, *Bread for All: The Origins of the Welfare State* (London: Allen Lane, 2017), 72–81.

¹²⁰ For example, Thomas Lister, campaigning during the 1918 General Election, see chapter 5.

¹²¹ Old Age Pensions Act 1908.

¹²² Pedersen, 'Gender, Welfare, and Citizenship', 992.

operational and did not address the long-running issues of dependants' allowances, war pensions and other support for veterans, widows and orphans. The position on all those matters changed scarcely at all between the end of the South African War and August 1914.

Methodology

The primary source for the parts of this thesis that address the involvement of trades councils has been local archives, which house their minutes, annual reports, and other records. Only a small minority of trades council records from that period have survived to the present day, of which eighteen have been located and consulted for this study, though not all of them provided material cited in these chapters.¹²³ Like many records of working-class activity, their future value as historical documents was not sufficiently recognised in the past to ensure their preservation, even when sternly inscribed 'this book must never be destroyed'.¹²⁴ However, their proceedings were in many places routinely covered by local newspapers, so those news reports have also been a valuable source. Trades council records have not been cited in previous studies of these veterans' groups.



Figure 3: locations of trades council records (sources listed in appendix 1 and bibliography)

¹²³ Listed in appendix 1, and bibliography. The records of Wolverhampton, Bilston and District Trades Council, and of Bristol Trades Council, consisted only of dedicated local histories.

¹²⁴ David Large and Robert Whitefield, *The Bristol Trades Council 1873–1973* (Bristol, 1973), 1, referring to that TC's first minute-book, which, despite the stern injunction on its cover, has apparently not survived.

As noted earlier, very little has been written about James Hogge's role in campaigning for better treatment of service families and veterans, prior to his founding of the Federation. Accordingly, the primary source for Hogge's activities, as described in this thesis, has been his papers in the National Library of Scotland (NLS),¹²⁵ not cited previously in the literature, local and national newspaper records, and Hansard. While the NLS papers have little in the way of personal letters, speeches, or diaries, they do include a comprehensive collection of his newspaper columns, and articles about his activities, which give some indication of just how much work he did on those issues over those years.

While previous studies addressing the origins of the British Legion have focussed on the period from the autumn of 1916 to the middle of 1921, none has exhausted the subject, and so a variety of new analyses of developments over that time are included here. In particular, much new information about the Comrades of the Great War has been found in the collected papers of Wilfrid Ashley, held at the University of Southampton,¹²⁶ and in the extensive archive of Lord Davies of Llandinam, deposited at the National Library of Wales.¹²⁷ These sources, rarely cited in the case of the Ashley papers, and not at all when it comes to the Davies archive, have been particularly valuable, as the only known complete set of *The Comrades Journal*, an important publication that has been regularly cited by others, can no longer be consulted, because the only surviving complete set has been 'misplaced' for many years in the British Library's Boston Spa depository. Also of some value have been the archives of the British Legion in London, Edinburgh and Belfast, all of which include some records from the predecessor organisations, in particular the minute books of the Scottish and the Northern Ireland Comrades. These records have shed new light on the extent of government involvement in the creation and development of the Comrades, and the financial and membership problems that eventually drove it to embrace amalgamation.

¹²⁵ J. M. Hogge Collection, in the Scottish Liberal Party & Scottish Liberal Democrats papers, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 11765.

¹²⁶ Papers of W. W. Ashley, first Baron Mount Temple, Broadlands Archives, University of Southampton Library, BR 70, 73–83, 88–89, 91.

¹²⁷ Papers of Lord Davies of Llandinam, National Library of Wales, GB 0210 LDDNAM.

A further important resource has been the papers of General Sir Ian Hamilton, lodged in the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives in Kings College, London.¹²⁸ Detailed examination of those papers has enabled a more positive assessment of his efforts to create an Empire Services League, efforts that previously have been mentioned only in passing, if at all. This thesis gives due prominence to his scheme that, while it was ultimately sabotaged by political opponents, prepared much of the ground for the United Services Fund, and was an important stepping-stone towards eventual amalgamation of the main organisations. In addition to the specific primary sources described above, much use is made of more familiar resources, including The National Archives of the UK, the Public Record of Northern Ireland, the British Library, the National Libraries of Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, the Parliamentary Archives, Hansard, the People's History Museum, city and county archives, and a large number of national, regional and local newspapers.

In conclusion, while there is some prior literature that addresses specifically the emergence of ex-service organisations during the period 1916–21, most of the other secondary literature provides overall context rather than detailed analysis, while the period 1914–16 is not covered at all. Hence most of the source material for this study is primary, including collections such as the Trades Union Congress Library, local trades council records, and databases such as Gale Primary Sources,¹²⁹ Welsh Newspapers,¹³⁰ and the British Newspaper Archive (BNA).¹³¹ It is recognised that the quality of scans in the latter resource is variable, often resulting in poor quality optical character recognition, and hence incomplete search results, while many newspapers in the British Library collection have yet to be scanned. Nonetheless, the ease of searching brought about by digitisation has revealed many contemporaneous records that would in the past have been rather difficult to track down in the physical records. As noted above, Ward was unusual in making extensive use of those records in his work in 1969, but many more have now been found through the online BNA and are cited in these chapters.

¹²⁸ Papers of General Sir Ian Hamilton, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Kings College London, GB0099 KCLMA Hamilton.

¹²⁹ Online: <https://www.gale.com/intl/primary-sources>.

¹³⁰ Welsh Newspapers, The National Library of Wales, <https://newspapers.library.wales/>. The quality of these scans and, consequently, the OCR and search functions, is much higher than the BNA.

¹³¹ Online: <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>.

Terminology

The phrase commonly used to describe these men and women, during this period was ‘ex-service men’, which was largely correct in the first year or two of the war, but became increasingly inaccurate as women were also discharged from their branches of the armed forces, often with similar needs in terms of medical care, disability training, employment support and so on. Accordingly, ‘ex-service men’ is used here only where it would have been correct in context, for example in referring to wounded soldiers discharged from the British Expeditionary Force in the early months of the war. Elsewhere ‘ex-service men and women’ is preferred, or the gender-neutral ‘veterans’, although that is not a word that was so widely used at the time. The more formal phrase ‘discharged sailors and soldiers’, commonly abbreviated to D.S.S. or DSS, was frequently employed in official publications and newspaper reports. That usage was the reason for the rather lengthy titles of the National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers, and the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers, often abbreviated in newspaper reports and official documents to N.A.D.S.S. and N.F.D.D.S.S. respectively. Spelling follows present day British English, except in direct quotations and titles where, for example, ‘organization’ is used instead of ‘organisation’, such spelling being common in British publications at the time, although now regarded as ‘American English’. Referencing generally follows the Chicago ‘short-title’ conventions, as set out in their online manual (17th edition),¹³² with some minor variations for reasons of space; for example, publishers’ names are generally omitted from footnotes, although they can all be found in the bibliography. Newspaper titles are those that appear on their front-page mastheads, including the definite article if part of the name, along with the place of publication where necessary to avoid ambiguity.¹³³ All references to government, parliamentary, military, and other official documents, are to UK institutions, unless otherwise noted, while Parliamentary debates are cited in the same form as used in Historic Hansard.¹³⁴

¹³² *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 17th ed. (Chicago, 2017), online edition: <https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>.

¹³³ For example, *The Daily Mail* (Hull).

¹³⁴ Online: <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/index.html>

Chapter 2: Trades Council support for sailors, soldiers and dependants 1914–17

Introduction

This chapter analyses the consequences for many wives, children and other dependants of the men who enlisted in large numbers for the British Army and the Royal Navy in August 1914, the Government's response to their welfare needs, and in particular the involvement of trades union councils in supporting many of those dependants, and campaigning for better allowances and other support from the state. The analysis covers the period from August 1914 to September 1916, when the trades council in Blackburn, Lancashire, set up the first Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers. Previous studies, such as those by Wootton, Barr, Kimball and Ward,¹ begin their accounts around the time of the creation of the Blackburn Association, and thus do not explain the involvement of trades councils, over the first two years of the war, in the founding of what some months later became the National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers ('the Association'). This analysis includes the response of the British Government and the military and naval authorities to the problems faced by those left behind when their menfolk enlisted, along with the extent to which they were reacting to the pressure exerted by trades councils and others, generally through their members of parliament and the print media.

Key questions addressed here are why trades councils got involved in matters that were not about wages and workplace conditions, and despite their members' deeply divided opinions about the war. Another major question is why the British Government brought in some improvements to state support for sailors' and soldiers' dependants, but not on a scale that might have kept them out of poverty. A further issue addressed here is the reason for trades councils around the UK, starting with Blackburn, setting up independent associations to continue their campaigns, instead of keeping them within their own organisations.

¹ Wootton, *Official History*; Barr, 'Service Not Self'; Kimball, 'The Ex-Service movement'; Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations'.

Separation Allowances and War Pensions after 4 August 1914

As set out in the introductory chapter, the situation that faced British soldiers, sailors and their families and other dependants, in August 1914, was not entirely unprecedented, even if the scale of recruitment was. Separation allowances had, since 1871, been paid to military wives married on the strength of the regiment when their husbands were away on active service, but not to off-the-strength wives, or naval wives. This created an anomaly when, as at the beginning of the First World War, large numbers of reservists were called up for overseas service, because *their* wives were all entitled to separation allowances. This was raised in the House of Commons on 10 August, less than a week after Britain's declaration of war, by Sir Worthington Laming Worthington Evans [sic] who asked if separation allowances and widows' and children's pensions would be 'granted as if they were married on the strength', to which Prime Minister Asquith replied simply 'the answer is in the affirmative'.² In September, these allowances were extended to naval wives,³ while the following month 'unmarried wives' of both sailors and soldiers also became entitled by Army Order to separation allowances 'as if the woman had been married and the children had been legitimate', provided there was evidence of dependence, in the absence of a formal marriage.⁴ Indeed, that principle went further, as the Order provided 'in the widest terms for allowances to such members of the soldier's family as were wholly or in part dependent upon his earnings at the time of mobilisation or enlistment'.⁵ Such an allowance was limited to a maximum related to the soldier's rank, and part of it was deducted from his pay. Should he die in service, there was a system of widows' pensions and discretionary payments for other dependants.

For those sailors and soldiers who survived and were discharged from service, collectively known as 'Discharged Sailors and Soldiers', there were war pensions, awarded for disability resulting from their service. The amounts again related to rank, with enhanced rates for

² HC Deb 10 August 1914 vol 65 c2261.

³ HC Deb 17 September 1914 vol 66 cc967–70

⁴ 'A New Army Order: Unmarried Wives of Soldiers', *Western Mail* (South Wales), 29 October 1914, 4, referring to an Order published the previous day.

⁵ *Ibid.*

lasting disablement, but they also depended on good conduct while in service. Moreover, sailors' pensions were at the discretion of the Admiralty, while soldiers' pensions were administered by the Chelsea Commissioners on behalf of the Army Council. There was no automatic right of appeal against a refusal to grant an Army pension, or against the size of an award, as long as they remained non-statutory.⁶

On paper these pensions and allowances might seem reasonable, and recruiters could tell any man thinking of joining up, that he would receive army or navy pay and his wife would get a separation allowance, but in practice there were major problems. The infrastructure that had dispensed war pensions and separation allowances to a few tens of thousands of people prior to the war, was overwhelmed by the soaring demands caused by mass enlistment and high casualty rates. Before the end of 1914, British Army casualties reached 69,000 killed or wounded,⁷ while recruitment over the same period exceeded three-quarters of a million, of whom a substantial number were married men.⁸ Moreover the scales for wives' allowances were complicated, as can be seen below:

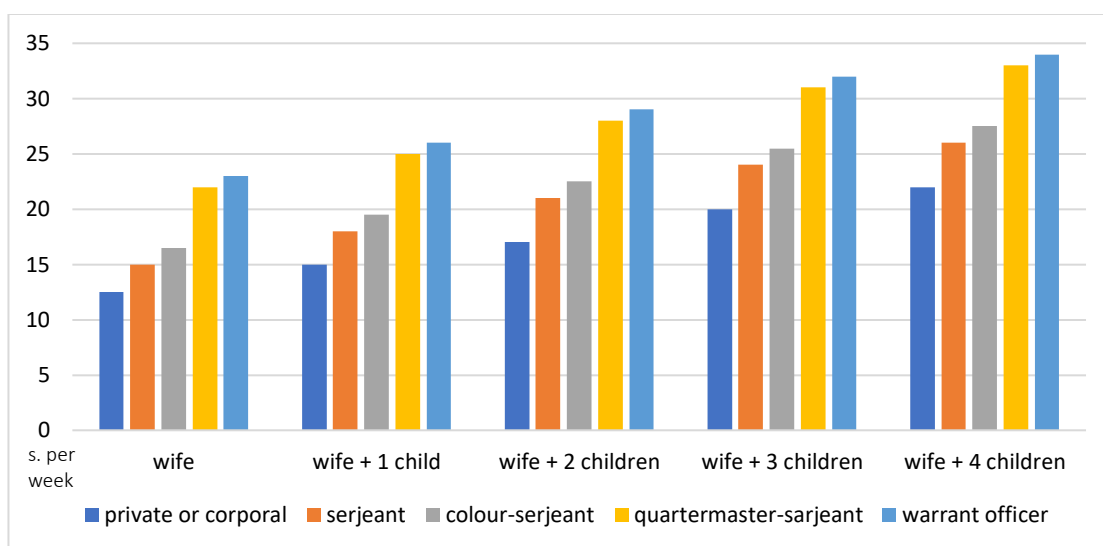


Figure 4: separation allowances for soldiers' wives from 1 October 1914, in shillings per week, by family size and husband's rank.⁹

⁶ Parry and Codrington. *War Pensions*, 19–29, esp. 21.

⁷ The War Office, *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War 1914–1920* (London, 1922), 253 – figures totalled from Table (iii).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 364–5 – figures totalled from Sections 2 and 2A.

⁹ *Increased Rates of Separation Allowance for the Wives and Children of Soldiers*, October 1914, Cd. 7623. Chart created from figures tabulated on second page.

For families with more than 4 children, there was an additional allowance of 2s per child, and such variations were only the start, for there were deductions of between 6s and 14s 'if in public quarters with fuel and light', an addition of 3s 6d a week 'issuable to London families', while the above figures included a 'compulsory allotment' from the soldier's pay of 3s 6d to 9s 4d a week depending on his rank, and more besides.¹⁰ In any case, a wife frequently did not know her husband's rank, where he was posted, or even if he was still in the UK, while the clerks administering payments struggled with the complexity of the system and the sheer workload involved. This was confirmed in Parliament, for example in November 1914, when Harold Baker, Financial Secretary to the War Office, said that clerks were working 28 hours a week overtime in addition to their normal 42-hour week, an average of 10 hours a day, 7 days a week.¹¹ The system for other dependants was, as noted above, even more complicated, mistakes were common, birth and marriage certificates were frequently lost, mis-spelt or illegible, and officers were slow to supply information about their men. Years later, Sir Arthur Griffith Boscawen, parliamentary secretary to the first Pensions Minister from December 1916, wrote of this period that

things were in a terrible mess. Disablement pensions were awarded by the Chelsea Commissioners ... who began the War with a staff of sixteen, I believe. They gradually got hopelessly into arrears (a penurious Treasury denying them sufficient help), files were lost, papers could not be connected, and poor fellows waited for weeks or months for their pensions.¹²

Even when allowances were processed efficiently, there were other problems, particularly the mismatch between industrial and military levels of pay. Prior to the war, sailors' and soldiers' pay was modest – 'a shilling a day' had long been the basic rate for a private.¹³ But

¹⁰ *Increased Rates of Separation Allowance for the Wives and Children of Soldiers*, October 1914, Cd. 7623.

¹¹ HC Deb 18 November 1914 vol 68 c418.

¹² Griffith-Boscawen, *Memories*, 196.

¹³ War Office Instruction 166 (1914), figures reproduced on The Long, Long Trail, website, accessed 6 January 2020, <https://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/soldiers/a-soldiers-life-1914-1918/british-army-rates-pay-1914/>.

even an unskilled industrial worker could expect much more than 7s a week in 1914, while skilled jobs and clerical work brought weekly wages of £2, £3, £4 or more.¹⁴ So a household previously enjoying a weekly income of, say, £3, a figure quoted by Prime Minister Asquith in the Commons,¹⁵ might now have a separation allowance of just a quarter of that, 15s a week.¹⁶ Thus, for many men, other than those in the lowest-paid jobs, joining up could leave their wives and families in severe poverty, and at risk of eviction. Trades councils were quick to react to this, as in Edinburgh, for example, where a meeting in early September passed a resolution calling on 'the Government to reconsider the maintenance allowance presently given to the dependants of those on military service, and strongly protests against the allowance of twopence per day for each child as being absolutely inadequate, and likely to have injurious effects upon the childhood of the nation'.¹⁷

Where separation allowances were inadequate or unavailable, dependant women, children and other relatives could only seek assistance from non-government organisations. These included major charities such as SSFA, the Royal Patriotic Fund Corporation, and a host of smaller ones, often very localised or linked to particular trades or professions, regimental associations, and so forth. For the most impoverished there were the Poor Laws, administered by the widely resented Boards of Guardians, in England, Wales and Ireland, and Parochial Boards in Scotland.¹⁸ What was needed was an additional allowance related to the man's earnings before he joined up, but that would be difficult, costly and slow to administer, or even to set up. It would also mean that men of the same rank, serving together, might have greatly differing sums paid to their families, although they were doing the same job and facing the same risks. That could be solved by paying much higher allowances to all service families, but the cost would obviously have been much greater

¹⁴ John Holford, *Reshaping Labour: Organisation, Work and Politics – Edinburgh in the Great War and After* (London, 1988), 29.

¹⁵ HC Deb 11 November 1914 vol 68 c31.

¹⁶ Assuming wife and one child, see figure 4 above.

¹⁷ Edinburgh and District Trades Council minutes, hereafter 'Edinburgh DTC minutes', 20 May 1914 – 6 June 1916, Special Conference of Trades Union Officials, 8 September 1914, National Library of Scotland, Acc.11177/16.

¹⁸ David Englander, *Poverty and Poor Law Reform in 19th Century Britain, 1834–1914* (London, 1998). Covers poor law in detail, in England, Scotland, and Wales, including anti-poor law 'riots and disturbances'.

and, as Susan Pedersen has noted, even at these low rates, which were ‘bordering on subsistence ... Britain's wartime allowance system was remarkable for its scale and scope. It cost the government almost half a billion pounds, or almost as much as the pay given to the soldiers themselves’.¹⁹ Moreover separation allowances alone could not provide for all the other dependents of a serving soldier, such as aging parents, disabled or unemployable siblings, and so on, unless they could prove his support prior to enlistment. This meant, and this was common, that where a parent or other relative had paid for his apprenticeship, on the understanding that he would support them when he had served his time, only for him to go into the Army, no allowance was due.²⁰

The Cold Hand of Charity

One answer to such difficult situations, where individuals or families fell outside the allowance system, yet clearly ‘deserved’ support, was SSFA and similar organisations, which had funds, mostly raised from the public, to give grants and allowances to relieve hardship.²¹ However, while this might forestall eviction and pay for a few necessities, it did not restore families to anything like the standard of living they had been used to. Besides it was ‘charity’, dispensed by middle- or upper-class visitors, who were not slow to pass judgement on the lifestyles of those over whom they had the power of granting or withholding assistance. For example, the Edinburgh and District Trades Council, meeting barely a month after the outbreak of war, resolved ‘that a protest be sent to the Soldiers and Sailors Families Associated [sic] against the treatment of [claimants by] their lady visitors when visiting the homes of the soldiers and sailors wives’.²² Such attitudes were well understood even in Parliament, where phrases such as ‘the cold hand of charity’ were often employed in debate.²³ Resentment at charity is reported frequently around that

¹⁹ Pedersen, ‘Gender, Welfare, and Citizenship’, 985.

²⁰ Raised repeatedly in Parliament, e.g. HC Deb 18 May 1915 vol 71 cc2250–88, especially Hogge at cc 2268–69.

²¹ See previous chapter and, for example, Paul Huddie, ‘Ex-servicemen and the Soldiers’, Sailors’ and Airmen’s Families Association, 1919–21’, in Swift and Wilkinson, eds., *Veterans of the First World War*, 34–47.

²² Edinburgh DTC minutes, 20 May 1914 – 6 June 1916, Special Conference of Trades Union Officials, 8 September 1914.

²³ For example: HC Deb 18 November 1914 vol 68 c518; HC Deb 26 July 1915 vol 73 c2111; and more.

time, through disparaging phrases such as ‘charity-mongers’ and the ‘charity taint’.²⁴ What the men, their wives and their dependants wanted were allowances that were a statutory right, funded by the state, rather than as acts of charity.

This situation was both a disincentive to recruitment,²⁵ and out of step with public expectations. By the early twentieth century, citizens of the more developed countries were, as noted in chapter 1, beginning to expect more support from their governments in time of need, including, in the UK, old-age pensions,²⁶ free school meals, and National Insurance.²⁷ Such benefits went well beyond longer-established forms of poor relief and, as Martin Pugh concludes, they ‘led the state into a position of responsibility from which no political party was subsequently able to remove it’.²⁸ They applied to large sections of the population, and were seen as a matter of right as a citizen rather than minimal support for the poorest alone. So it is perhaps not surprising that, when men volunteered in such large numbers for military and naval service in time of war,²⁹ they felt their dependants should be well cared for while they were away and that, when their service was over, the state owed them a continuing duty of care.

Trades Union Councils

Pensions and benefits were of course a major concern of the trade unions that had become increasingly effective and well organised during the nineteenth century. While their

²⁴ Alan Clinton, ‘Trade [sic] Councils During the First World War’, *International Review of Social History* 15, no. 2 (1970), 207.

²⁵ The letters columns of local and national newspapers made the point repeatedly. Often the writers were engaged in recruitment and constantly encountering responses such as ‘how can I leave my wife and little children to half-starve while I am away?’, as in ‘Married Men and Enlistment’, *The Times*, 7 September 1914, 4.

²⁶ Martin Pugh, ‘Working-class experience and State Social Welfare, 1908–1914: Old Age Pensions reconsidered’ *The Historical Journal* 45, no. 4 (2002), 775–96, details how popular reactions to the old age pension alone brought about a ‘profound change in perceptions of the British state as an all-powerful but benevolent force with, for all practical purposes, unending resources at its command’, 789.

²⁷ E. P. Hennock, *The Origin of the Welfare State in England and Germany, 1850–1914: Social Policies Compared* (Cambridge, 2008), 212–67.

²⁸ Martin Pugh, *State and Society: British Political and Social History 1870–1992* (London, 1997), 113.

²⁹ See William Joseph Reader, *At Duty’s Call: A Study In Obsolete Patriotism* (Manchester, 1988), for example.

primary objects had originally been to defend and improve their members' wages and conditions, along with the protection of skills, coping with welfare problems was also a significant concern. Some of this was met by trade unions' own provident funds and insurance schemes, but they also asserted the responsibility of the state and the society that benefited from the efforts of working people. One way they did this was by working together through trades councils, sometimes known as 'trades union councils', and by the twentieth century often as 'trades and labour councils'. They evolved from the medieval craft guilds, but trades councils, as collectives of trade union representatives, only began to appear in the 1860s, spreading quite rapidly in cities and towns across the British Isles.³⁰ The Constitution of Aberdeen United Trades Council, instituted in 1868, is typical of such bodies, with its objects including 'the advancement and protection of the rights of Labour, as also the well-being of the Working Class generally'.³¹ These spelt out six ways of achieving this including 'by petitioning Parliament on ... the rights and interests of the Working Class generally', and 'by co-operating with similar associations throughout the Kingdom ... in the interest of the Working Class'.³² The minutes and annual reports half a century later show that these objects still expressed the core activities of that council in 1914, and probably all others. Although their importance had been declining since the first Trades Union Congress in 1868,³³ the trades councils still played, argues Alan Clinton, a 'particularly conspicuous ... role ... in the important disputes' of 1912–14.³⁴ They remained numerous and active as war approached, by which time, he claims 'there were nearly 400 such in the British Isles' and during the war 'they were nearly always of greater importance locally than similar organisations devoted to purely electoral matters'.³⁵ As such, they provided a forum for debate and a source of resolutions that still commanded the attention of newspapers, businesses, and government.

³⁰ Clinton, *Trades Councils in Britain*, 8–9.

³¹ Aberdeen UTC, *Annual Report 1915*, 1.

³² *Ibid.*, 1.

³³ H. A. Clegg, A. Fox, A. F. Thompson, *A History of British Trade Unions since 1889* (Oxford, 1964), vol. 2, 41.

³⁴ Clinton, *Trades Councils in Britain*, 15.

³⁵ Clinton, 'Trade Councils During the First World War', 202.

Trades councils were also part of the country's trade union and labour movement that, prior to 4 August 1914, was largely opposed to British involvement in any European war. Indeed, many of their active members believed that, if war came, it would be a conflict between the ruling classes of European nations; by contrast, they held that the working classes of the UK, France, Germany, Russia, and other potential combatants shared a common interest in peace and the struggle for socialism. Typifying this belief was Wolverhampton Trades Council, which in 1913 passed a resolution in support of 'the International Committee or Bureau, composed of representatives of various countries, who ... in the event of war being declared ... the workers of the countries affected would be prepared to hinder it by a mutual and simultaneous stoppage of work'.³⁶ On 31 July, just a few days before war did break out, officials from the London Trades Council met 'three prominent trade unionists from Berlin' and two days later supported 'the monster demonstration of protest against war in Trafalgar Square'.³⁷ The front-page story on the workers' newspaper, the *Daily Herald*, that day was headlined 'Workers Must Stop the War!', and under the sub-heading 'The Greatest Crime of the Century', it exhorted readers to 'Rally in Thousands to Trafalgar Square' for 'Next Sunday's Great Protest'.³⁸ Pictures of the demonstration show an estimated crowd of 20,000 packed into Trafalgar Square,³⁹ being addressed by Keir Hardie who pronounced 'the German workman had no war with the French workman, and the French had no grievance against the Russian'.⁴⁰ To cheers, he went on to assert that 'the working classes could prevent this country from going to war'.⁴¹ The day after Britain declared war on Germany, the Labour Party, TUC, Cooperative Party, London Trades Council and a number of similar bodies formed the 'War Emergency Workers' National Committee' (WNC) at a conference in the House of Commons, to 'defend

³⁶ George J. Barnsby, *A History of Wolverhampton, Bilston and District Trades Council 1865–1990* (Wolverhampton, 1994), 26. See also, for example: John Mendelson, William Owen, Sidney Pollard, and Vernon M. Thornes, *The Sheffield Trades and Labour Council 1858–1958* (Sheffield, 1958), 66; *Blackpool Trades Council: Diamond Jubilee History Report and Directory* (Blackpool, 1951), 23. Preston Labour Party collection, Lancashire Archives, LAB/acc6750/box/3.

³⁷ London Trades Council minutes, Executive Meeting, 24 September 1914. Trades Union Congress Library, London Metropolitan University, Special Collections, JN 1129 LON, hereafter 'London TC minutes'.

³⁸ 'Workers Must Stop the War!', *Daily Herald*, 31 July 1914, 1.

³⁹ 'Britain Gets Ready for the Worst and Completes her Defences by Land and Sea', *The Daily Mirror*, 3 August 1914, 12.

⁴⁰ 'Socialists and the War', *Devon and Exeter Daily Gazette*, 3 August 1914, 9, col 3.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

the interests of organised working people.⁴² The same day, 5 August, trades councils, such as that in Aberdeen, were agreeing to send delegates to an anti-war demonstration organised by the British Socialist Party on the 8th of the month.⁴³ Even by the middle of August, two weeks into the war, London Trades Council was carrying 'by a large majority' resolutions like the one below, appealing to international working-class solidarity, and also positing a united Europe after the war:

the council expresses its horror at the present state of Europe, recognising that the war is a war of rulers and not of the peoples; expresses its fraternal greetings to the workers of all countries, and expresses the hope that they may be able to maintain their organisations in order that a closer bond of unity may be brought about under a United States of Europe.⁴⁴

Yet just six weeks later the same London Trades Council (TC) was agreeing, albeit by the narrow margin of five votes to three, to provide speakers for public meetings organised by the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee (PRC), in response to an appeal from Arthur Henderson MP, as secretary of the national Labour Party and a member of the PRC.⁴⁵ The same month, September 1914, a leading member of that trades council summed up the prevailing attitude among the membership, that the time to oppose the war was over and their main duty now was to fellow members: 'we must defend what we hold and see that justice is done to trade unionists in the forces and in civil life'.⁴⁶ That seems to have become a common view among trades councils.⁴⁷ Indeed, some actively supported recruiting, such as Edinburgh and District TC, which passed, by a large majority, a resolution urging 'all eligible young men, whose domestic circumstances make it possible, to join the army for the period of the war, and requests all Trade Unions to assist in securing recruits

⁴² Delegate, *London Trades Council*, 51. The full archive of the WNC is held at the People's History Museum, Manchester.

⁴³ Aberdeen UTC, Minute book: 1910-1917, 5 August 1914, University of Aberdeen, MS2270/3/1/10 and /11, hereafter 'Aberdeen UTC minutes'.

⁴⁴ London TC minutes, Delegate Meeting, 13 August 1914.

⁴⁵ London TC minutes, Executive Meeting, 24 September 1914, item 4.

⁴⁶ Delegate, *London Trades Council*, 52.

⁴⁷ Another example: Large and Whitfield, *Bristol Trades Council*, 14.

by every means in their power'.⁴⁸ Sheffield Trades and Labour Council (TLC), reversing its pre-war pacifism, 'voted by 28 to 5 against a motion to boycott the recruiting campaign of the three national parties'.⁴⁹ As George Barnsby, historian of Wolverhampton TC, expresses it, 'when war did break out all the European Socialist Parties except the Russian Bolsheviks repudiated these vows' [i.e. for a general strike] and hastened to join their own governments in support of the war.⁵⁰ Like so many others, Wolverhampton soon passed a resolution urging 'all young men who are free from family responsibilities' to consider enlisting.⁵¹ A similar picture emerges from the minutes of various other trades councils over those months; most members appear to have accepted that the country was at war, even to the extent of playing some part in recruitment campaigns.

The change of attitude shown by trades councils seems to have reflected majority opinion in the wider population. Although Britain's declaration of war on Germany was met with some criticism, the greater reaction was a surge of patriotic support on the streets, in the newspapers and in Parliament. Adrian Gregory, while questioning the extent to which such displays were representative of public opinion more widely, also concludes that 'The most striking development was the speed of conversion of the majority of pacifists to defencism' (the latter defined as seeing war as 'an evil which is acceptable as a lesser evil to protect oneself or one's vital interests').⁵² That observation appears to apply to many trades council members in August and September 1914, witnessing the rush of applicants, from their own communities, to join the armed forces in response to Lord Kitchener's call for a great New Army. The process is well documented by William Reader, who describes the voluntary enlistment of 2.5 million men in 16 months as 'one of the most remarkable mass movements of modern times' and it is difficult to disagree with that assessment,⁵³ at least over those early months. As Catriona Pennell puts it, while asserting that it 'is oversimplified and inadequate' to describe 'the reactions of over 40 million British and Irish

⁴⁸ Edinburgh DTC minutes, Special Conference of Trades Union Officials, 8 September 1914. No voting figures recorded, simply 'the motion was carried by a large majority'.

⁴⁹ Mendelson, Owen, Pollard, and Thornes, *Sheffield Trades and Labour Council*, 67.

⁵⁰ Barnsby, *Wolverhampton Trades Council*, 26.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁵² Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge, 2008) 37.

⁵³ Reader, *At Duty's Call*.

people to the outbreak of war in 1914 as either enthusiastic in the British case or disengaged in the Irish',⁵⁴ she does conclude that by the end of the year 'the populations of England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland had largely embraced the war'.⁵⁵ Similarly, the great majority of people in the British labour movement, in particular the leaderships of the Labour Party and the major trade unions, shifted rapidly from a position of principled opposition to any war, to whole-hearted support for the war effort.⁵⁶ As late as 30 July 1914, Labour MPs had publicly called on 'all labour organizations ... to oppose ... in the most effective way, any action which may involve us in war'.⁵⁷ Yet just over a week later, when the Labour leader, Ramsay MacDonald, wanted to oppose the first special grants for the war, he was comprehensively over-ruled and obliged to resign in favour of Arthur Henderson, who firmly supported the Government.⁵⁸ Labour MPs, the party leadership, and the TUC, all agreed to participate in the national recruiting campaign, and on 15 October issued a joint statement recognising that Britain 'was bound in honour as well as by treaty, to resist by arms the aggression of Germany', a sentiment that by then seemed to reflect wider public opinion.⁵⁹

None of this, however, meant that trades councils were any less concerned about 'the well-being of the Working Class generally', but many were now encouraging their members to enlist. Before August was out, all over the UK, they were debating the national Labour Party's call to 'ensure that Labour was properly represented on ... the Citizens' Committees which are being formed for the purpose of dealing with the distress caused by the war'.⁶⁰ Similarly, the WNC wrote to trades councils, drawing their attention to the Board of Trade fixing maximum food prices and urging them to watch that they were not exceeded in their areas.⁶¹ Many of those joining the armed forces were trade union members, including

⁵⁴ Catriona Pennell, *A United Kingdom: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2012), vii.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁵⁶ Examined in detail in J.H. Stewart Reid, *The Origins of the British Labour Party* (Minneapolis, 1955), particularly chapter 14, 'Labor and the War', 205–221.

⁵⁷ *The Labour Year Book* (London, 1916), 16.

⁵⁸ Reid, *Origins of the British Labour Party*, 208.

⁵⁹ *The Labour Year Book*, 20.

⁶⁰ Rawtenstall Trades & Labour Council, Minutes, 13 August 1914. Lancashire Archives, Preston, DDX 1628/ACC5708 (hereafter 'Rawtenstall TLC Minutes').

⁶¹ Aberdeen UTC Minutes, 19 August 1914.

some who had been active in their trades councils, while the rest were predominantly members of the working class, who trades councils were constitutionally obliged to advance and protect. Little wonder then that people turned to them for help when the state and established charities failed them; however ambivalent council members felt about the war, they did not lack sympathy when it came to those who were suffering its effects, whether directly through military service or indirectly through bereavement, soaring food prices, rent exploitation or other cause. In every trades council archive consulted (see bibliography and appendix 1), concerns about the consequences of war on 'the home front' were raised frequently from the latter part of 1914 through 1919 and beyond.⁶² Another problem reported often was that of men who gave up their jobs to enlist, only to be rejected at some point during the process, and then unable to get their old jobs back,⁶³ which was also, of course, of direct concern to trades councils.

The £1 a Week campaign

Meanwhile, trades councils were appointing their representatives to local 'War Relief Committees',⁶⁴ and just eight weeks after the outbreak of the war, Aberdeen United Trades Council passed a resolution stating that 'the only satisfactory way to repay the working classes for their sacrifices at this time is by the Government taking full responsibility for all dependants of those who offer themselves for service in the Army and Navy' and it went on to call on the Government to pay 'a minimum of £1 per week ... to each family of dependants'.⁶⁵ Nor was this the first call for £1 per week, the Liberal MP for Sunderland, Hamar Greenwood,⁶⁶ having made it in the Commons on 31 August, in respect of disabled

⁶² Typical examples, on rents: Aberdeen UTC Minutes, 14 April 1915, referencing Greenock Trades Council; 30 June 1915, referencing Clydebank Trades Council; 6, 15 and 20 October 1915; 29 March 1916. On food prices: 12 and 19 August 1914; 9 June 1915; 9 December 1917; 13 January 1918. Many similar items in other trades council records.

⁶³ Edinburgh DTC minutes, 22 Dec 14, contains several such reports, and there are more examples from other TCs.

⁶⁴ Rawtenstall TLC minutes, 13 August 1914.

⁶⁵ Aberdeen UTC Minutes, 30 September 1914.

⁶⁶ Hamar Greenwood was among the small number who regularly raised ex-service and dependants' issues in the House. He had worked hard in the recruitment campaign, raising his own battalion for the South Wales Borderers, and commanding it in France. Martin F. Seedorf, 'Greenwood,

ex-soldiers 'for as long as the disability lasts', while announcing his intention 'to keep pounding at the government' until it was conceded.⁶⁷ In trades council circles, it was 'probably first heard at a local conference run by the Poplar Trades Council on 2nd September 1914', according to Clinton,⁶⁸ and by mid-November 1914 a range of trades councils had passed similar resolutions.⁶⁹ That figure is very significant, for it was quoted widely in the labour movement at that time, as the minimum needed to house, feed and clothe a family. It was in the title of a detailed report on poverty and infant mortality in London, published in 1913 as *Round About a Pound a Week* by Maud Pember Reeves,⁷⁰ who argued that it was simply not possible to adequately provide for a whole family at under 18s a week.⁷¹ Nor was this the only example of influential and well-founded research that came to a similar conclusion, like Seebohm Rowntree's investigation into the living standards of the working classes in York, some 15 years earlier.⁷² Hence 'a pound a week' came to be regarded in labour and trade union circles as the minimum required to keep a family out of poverty, and it was also a conveniently round figure for a political campaign.

On 2 October 1914, the Labour MP George Barnes had a lengthy letter published in *The Daily Citizen* in which he asked:

what is the amount upon which we should ask a woman to live whose husband has been taken from her in fighting for the nation, and what is the amount which we should pay to a man who may come back from the war minus a leg or an arm?⁷³

Hamar, first Viscount Greenwood (1870–1948)', *ODNB*, online version: 21 May 2009, accessed 11 August 2017 <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33545>.

⁶⁷ HC Deb 31 August 1914 vol 66 cc538–9.

⁶⁸ Clinton, 'Trade Councils during the First World War', 211.

⁶⁹ For example: Aberdeen UTC minutes, 11 November 1914; Edinburgh DTC minutes, 13 October 1914. Most trades council minutes consulted record resolutions calling for a minimum of £1 per week for separation allowances, widows' pensions, or disablement pensions.

⁷⁰ Mrs. (Maud) Pember Reeves, *Round About a Pound a Week* (London, 1913).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, especially chapter 3, which begins 'How does a working man's wife bring up a family on 20s a week?', 21.

⁷² B. Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*, 4th ed. (London, 1902), 296. Concluded that a family of mother, father and three children required 21s. 8d, as the 'minimum weekly expenditure upon which physical efficiency can be maintained in York'.

⁷³ Mr. G. N. Barnes, M. P., 'Poor Pensions for Soldiers' Widows', *The Daily Citizen*, 2 October 1914, 2. He was an active trade unionist who became the first Minister of Pensions in December 1916

It was the fundamental question on war pensions and allowances, and he went on to announce that ten days earlier he had 'intimated to the powers that be' that he was 'going on strike' from recruiting meetings 'until "adequate" provision is made' for soldiers and their dependents.⁷⁴ His letter provoked a huge and supportive response in the newspaper's columns from MPs, trades unions, trades councils and others. The following day it was the subject of the lead editorial in the paper,⁷⁵ which a week later reported that 'opinion is crystallising towards ... an all-round guarantee by the Government ... of £1 a week in all cases where the breadwinner has been taken away temporarily or permanently', i.e. both separation allowances and widows' pensions, and it extended that to 'the mother dependent on every soldier killed' and 'every soldier permanently maimed by fighting'.⁷⁶ Within a few more days this demand became a *Citizen* campaign for the 'Soldier's Pound a Week',⁷⁷ featured almost every day and attracting widespread support from the trade union and labour movement, culminating on 7 November with '12 great Labour conferences' on the subject 'at London, Manchester, Leicester, Newcastle-on-Tyne, Norwich, Bristol, Cardiff, Liverpool, Leeds, Birmingham, Portsmouth and Plymouth'.⁷⁸ To take just one of these as an example, the Leeds conference was organised by that city's trades council, attracting another eleven trades councils along with a large number of other organisations, including some from outside the county, such as the Derbyshire Miners' Association.⁷⁹ The meeting was addressed by the veteran socialist Henry Hyndman, who proposed the main resolution, which called again for £1 a week for dependants, war pensioners, and serving soldiers, and was unanimously carried. The proceedings were

(see chapter 4). Alastair J. Reid, 'Barnes, George Nicoll (1859–1940)', *ODNB*, online version: 3 January 2008, accessed 4 January 2021, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30602>.

⁷⁴ Mr. G. N. Barnes, M. P., 'Poor Pensions for Soldiers' Widows', *The Daily Citizen*, 2 October 1914, 2.

⁷⁵ 'The State's Apathy', *The Daily Citizen*, 3 October 1914, 2.

⁷⁶ 'Nation's Duty to its Soldiers: No More Derelict Veterans: Provision for All Dependents: Labour's Call for £1 a Week All-round', *The Daily Citizen*, 6 October 1914, 3.

⁷⁷ 'Soldier's Pound a Week', *The Daily Citizen*, 10 October 1914, 2.

⁷⁸ '£1 a Week Pension Campaign: Labour's United Demand Throughout Britain: Straight Message from People to Parliament', *The Daily Citizen*, 9 November 1914, 1.

⁷⁹ Leeds Trades Council, Minute book 1914–1925, Executive Committee 27 October 1914, 39–42. West Yorkshire Archive Service, Leeds, Acc.1601/4 or WYL576, (hereafter 'Leeds TC minutes')

widely reported by northern newspapers,⁸⁰ and another resolution from the same conference carried the ominous threat that 'unless our proposals are acceded recruiting will be discouraged by all the organisations concerned'.⁸¹

CITIZEN, SATURDAY, OCTOBER 10, 1914

SOLDIER'S POUND A WEEK.

MR. G. B. SHAW'S STRAIGHT TALK TO WAR OFFICE.

£1 a week for the widow of every soldier killed.
 £1 a week for the mother dependent on every soldier killed.
 £1 a week for the wife of every soldier engaged in fighting.
 £1 a week for every soldier permanently maimed by fighting.

The demand cannot be much longer withheld. For years Tommy has rubbed along on his shilling a day. It has just been a case of
 "It's Tommy this and it's Tommy that, and it's Tommy go away.
 But it's thank you, Mr. Atkins, when the band begins to play."

The time has come for something more than thanks. Neither a maimed soldier nor his wife and children can live on thanks, and the workhouse must not house them.
 The campaign for the payment of something approaching a decent wage, though £1 a week falls far short of it, is enormously growing in strength. It has already got beyond the stage when the Government and its permanent officials can ignore it. Action must be taken and that quickly.

NOT ENOUGH.

First in interest among the many expressions of view given to "The Daily Citizen" yesterday was the following from Mr. G. Bernard Shaw:—

I do not agree with the last two items in your "pound-a-week" programme. If soldiers were taken on by the job like ordinary workers and had to provide for spells of unemployment when war was slack they would command at least £2 a week. Indeed, considering the standard of health and physical activity which they have to reach, and the age limit, their supply and demand price in the open market might easily rise above that figure—perhaps not up to that of a steel smelter, but still pretty high, as experts have calculated that in the retreat from Mons some of our men had to cover 25 miles in the day, occasionally at over five miles an hour, and to get their rest by stopping to fight.

Now, in all employments the permanence and security of State employment make men willing to serve for less than they would accept from private employers, who may sack them at any moment. Therefore, if we take it that the modern trench-digging, sharpshooting, open-order-taking, respectable, sober soldier, who expects and gets his afternoon tea even in the field, is worth at the very least £2 a week, we must knock 5s. off that for the advantage of State service and the soldier's good will towards his job—a good will that he can hardly feel when he is merely making profits for a commercial adventurer (often, by the way, a German). But you cannot reasonably put his fair wage below 25s. a week. Allow 10s. a week for his maintenance and you leave 25s. for

EMPLOYERS' VIEW.

Support for "Daily Citizen" Campaign.

The spirit in which some of the employing classes are taking up the campaign is shown by the following letter from Mr. Charles Harris, of the firm of Messrs. J. Harris and Co., Ltd., baby carriage manufacturers, of Hylmerle-road, London, S.E.:

"Your pound-a-week campaign deserves all support. Why not print leaflets drawing the attention of the public to the urgency of a speedy settlement on the lines of your article of yesterday? We would gladly put some on our shop-windows, and no doubt other shopkeepers would follow suit. We would also pay £20 towards the cost of the leaflets. Your paper is really great."

ABOLISH OUR DISGRACE.

Mr. H. Bell, of Newcastle-on-Tyne, writes:—
 "Your demand on behalf of the disabled soldiers and their dependents is only what could be expected by those who have followed the career of *The Daily Citizen* from its inception.
 "As you say, the sum of £1 per week errs on the side of moderation, but if this can be accomplished it will be much in advance of what has been given in the past to the poor fellows who have fought for their country. It will do away with the disgrace of England—its maimed soldiers sitting on the pavements and drawing with chalks to get a little with which to

Figure 5: example of the 'Soldier's Pound A Week' campaign.⁸²

Nor was this the only concern. Another was the position of apprentices, neatly summarised in a resolution from the Aberdeen UTC in December 1914, which drew attention to 'the disability and pecuniary loss which young men will suffer who break their apprenticeship to serve in H. M. Forces for the duration of the war', and called on the Government to 'subsidise these men on their return to civil duty ... until the period of apprenticeship

⁸⁰ On 9 November 1914: *The Leeds Mercury*, 4; *The Daily Mail* (Hull), 1, 5; *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 7; *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 2; and *The Burnley News*, 11 November 1914, 2.

⁸¹ Leeds TC minutes, Executive Committee 6 November 1914, 43.

⁸² 'Soldier's Pound a Week', *The Daily Citizen*, 10 October 1914, 2.

expires'.⁸³ This was not just one instance of concern, for it was raised repeatedly in successive meetings, and by other trades councils, although apparently without any positive response from the Government. Concerns over rising prices of food and rents were also minuted frequently, and these were matters impacting most working-class households, not only those with serving or ex-service members. However, the sustained £1-a-week campaign, and concern for disrupted apprenticeships, along with a variety of other single issues, such as the enlistment of 'medically unfit' men,⁸⁴ and the 'humiliating' monitoring by the police of wives in receipt of separation allowances,⁸⁵ are particularly significant, because they were specifically about the welfare of service and ex-service families.

The political response

These campaigns, conferences and resolutions mattered. Trades councils had evolved a very efficient system of communication, so if a resolution passed by one might be of interest to others, it would be quickly duplicated and posted around the country. Those that generated a lot of support would be sent to MPs, to relevant Ministers, and to the Prime Minister. There was little other indication of public opinion, except for daily newspapers and letters from constituents, so when the Government and MPs received hundreds of resolutions from trades councils on a particular subject, they took notice. MPs referenced them in debate, and it was certainly a factor in the decision on 18 November 1914 to set up a Select Committee 'to consider a scheme of Pensions and Grants for officers and men in the Naval and Military Services disabled by wounds or disease arising out of the present War, and for the widows, orphans, and dependants of officers and men who have lost their lives, and whether the existing scheme of separation allowances to wives, children and dependants should be amended; if so, in what way'.⁸⁶ By the day of that debate, MPs and ministers alike can have been in little doubt about the strength of feelings

⁸³ Aberdeen UTC minutes, 23 December 1914.

⁸⁴ For example, Hampstead Trades and Labour Council resolution. London TC minutes, 26 October 1916, item 13.

⁸⁵ For example, London TC minutes, 17 December 1914, item 5.

⁸⁶ HC Deb 18 November 1914 vol 68 c525.

on the matter, across the country, and it was one of the most important Parliamentary debates of the pensions and allowances issue during the war, not just for the establishment of the Select Committee, but also for the explicit recognition by many speakers of the hardships facing wives and other dependants. Indeed, Prime Minister Asquith had set out the problem in a Commons speech a week earlier, citing the precarious position of 'unmarried wives' and also, in some detail, the problem of 'how to deal fairly with the men who have left occupations varying in remuneration' (as noted above).⁸⁷ So it was unfortunate that no more urgent step, other than the appointment of a Select Committee, was taken to address these and other problems. In particular, during the debate, William Hayes Fisher highlighted the complexity of the system, saying that

At present part of the [pensions and allowances] question is considered by one body, part by another, and part by a third body, and consequently there is great perplexity and a certain amount of overlapping, necessitating sending for papers here and there. After a very great experience I say that these questions could be much more satisfactorily settled if we had one body under Government control.⁸⁸

Hayes Fisher's 'very great experience' had been as Chairman of the Royal Patriotic Fund Corporation for many years before entering Parliament, so he knew what he was talking about. Parry and Codrington, writing in 1918, commented on Hayes Fisher's proposal that it seemed

little short of marvellous that no attention was paid to such an obviously sensible proposition ... to deal with a problem that even in November 1914 was clearly bound to arise. But Mr. Fisher was told that his suggestion was too revolutionary and drastic ... and two years afterwards the whirligig of time brought him on to the Government Bench to bring forward a Bill to deal with the very subject that he had warned the Government not to neglect in the early months of the War.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ HC Deb 11 November 1914 vol 68 c31.

⁸⁸ *Ibid* c457.

⁸⁹ Parry and Codrington, *War Pensions*, 52.

An important factor in the Government's reluctance to adopt this course of action in 1914, was the spectre of the 'Grand Army of the Republic', the association of American Civil War veterans that had become very powerful during the nineteenth century.⁹⁰ Indeed, during the 18 November debate, Asquith referred specifically to:

what took place at the end of the Civil War in America, when an enormous addition was made to the permanent expenditure of the country by the grant of pensions, which I think not only educated American opinion now, but opinion without distinction of party regards as having involved great abuses and a considerable waste of public money. I wish that we should guard ourselves against any danger of that kind now.⁹¹

Another notable feature of that debate was the contribution of William Brace, trade unionist and Liberal MP for South Glamorganshire,⁹² who deployed his 'peerless oratory' to assert that 'organised labour expects considerably more than this 12s. 6d. per week ... for the maintenance of the family – while the husband is about the nation's business ... We say that we ought to have at least one pound a week for every home'.⁹³ This demonstrated how quickly the £1-a-week campaign had reached the floor of the House of Commons. However, this demand was not conceded, and the pace of proceedings in a Select Committee, and then on the floors of the Houses of Parliament, scarcely matched the rising toll of hardship resulting from inadequate allowances and overstretched administration. It does not seem to have been intended as a delaying tactic, for it was both a high-powered and a cross-party committee, with its six members comprising the Chancellor of the Exchequer, David Lloyd George, the Home Secretary, Reginald McKenna, the Leader of the (Conservative) Opposition, Andrew Bonar Law, the former leader of the Labour Party, George Barnes, the former Chancellor, Austen Chamberlain, and the Irish Nationalist MP, T.

⁹⁰ Stuart McConnell, *Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic 1865–1900* (North Carolina, 1992), 141–153, esp. 150–153.

⁹¹ HC Deb 18 November 1914 vol 68 c476.

⁹² John Williams, 'Brace, William (1865–1947)', *ODNB*, online version: 8 October 2020, accessed 30 December 2020, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/47328>.

⁹³ HC Deb 18 November 1914 vol 68 c485.

P. O'Connor.⁹⁴ The downside was the fact that this work was 'left to six of the busiest men in the house'.⁹⁵ Yet it did work quite quickly by parliamentary standards, meeting on eighteen days between 23 November 1914 and 1 February 1915, taking detailed evidence from twenty-one witnesses, including the War Office, the Admiralty and the Chelsea Hospital, SSFA and the Royal Patriotic Fund, representatives of several national women's organisations, Seebohm Rowntree, pensions and local government officers, and more.

The Select Committee's First Report

The Committee's first report, on 1 February 1915, made twenty-five specific recommendations, most being for increased payments, the remainder addressing other matters such as training schemes for widows. The 'lowest rate of Army Separation Allowance' (inclusive of the compulsory allotment from the man's pay, as noted above) would stay at 12s. 6d. a week, vetoing Barnes' proposal, in line with his campaign in *The Citizen*, that it should be £1 per week. However it did recommend that 'the allowance for the children should be altered to 5s. a week for the first child, 3s. 6d. for the second child, and 2s. a week for the third child' and each one thereafter.⁹⁶ This was a substantial improvement on the previous scale of 2s. 6d a week for each of the first three children, and 2s. a week for each additional child.⁹⁷ The recommended pension for a private soldier's widow was 10s. a week, rising to 12s. 6d. a week at age 35 and 15s. a week at age 45 (with higher rates for more senior ranks). Again, Barnes proposed a minimum of £1 a week, this time for the widow's pension, and again this was vetoed. The Committee did not set out its reasoning in the report, only the verbatim evidence and its recommendations, so there is no explanation for the rejection of £1 a week. However, it was clearly concerned about the overall cost of these allowances and pensions, and it is worth remembering that the '£1 a week' figure had come about as the minimum necessary for a *family* to live on, not an

⁹⁴ *Special Report and Second Special Report from the Select Committee on Naval and Military Services (Pensions and Grants)*, 14 April 1915, House of Commons, volume 4, paper 196, ii.

⁹⁵ HC Deb 18 May 1915 vol 71 c2268. The words were spoken by James Hogge, MP, who became the leading parliamentary advocate of the interests of service families, as detailed in the next chapter.

⁹⁶ *Special Report on Naval and Military Services*, iii.

⁹⁷ Navy and Army, *Allowances and Pensions in respect of Seamen, Marines, and Soldiers and their Wives, Widows and Dependants*, 9 November 1914, Cd.7662, 8.

individual, and on these new scales a typical 'wife and 2 children' would indeed receive £1 1s a week. There was another factor restraining the Government members of the Committee from more generous recommendations, and that was concern that they should not be high enough to deter the recipients from seeking work. This was expressed candidly in evidence to it, most clearly by Sir Charles Harris, Assistant Financial Secretary to the War Office, who said the wives

have before marriage been of a class accustomed to work, [and] should continue to work in order that the total working force of the nation may not be diminished; and I would not, therefore, personally have attempted to set up the ideal that no soldier's wife should do any work.⁹⁸

His proposition that such pressure to remain in, or re-join, the workforce applied only to women 'of a class accustomed to work' is interesting; the implication being that no such obligation applied to officers' wives, who would generally be of a higher class. In any event, the recommendations were promptly accepted by the Government and implemented from 1 March 1915, unsurprisingly given that the committee's members included the Chancellor and the Home Secretary. The new separation allowance rates were promptly publicised by the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee in one of its many posters (reproduced in chapter 1),⁹⁹ demonstrating that it was not just a sense of obligation driving the changes, for the Government had been told repeatedly that many men were hesitating to enlist, if that meant leaving their families destitute.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ *Special Report on Naval and Military Services*, 7, s52.

⁹⁹ 'Soldiers' Separation Allowances', Parliamentary Recruiting Committee (PRC), poster no. 114, London 1915.

¹⁰⁰ The point had also been made by a number of MPs during the 18 November debate, HC Deb 18 November 1914 vol 68 c444–525,

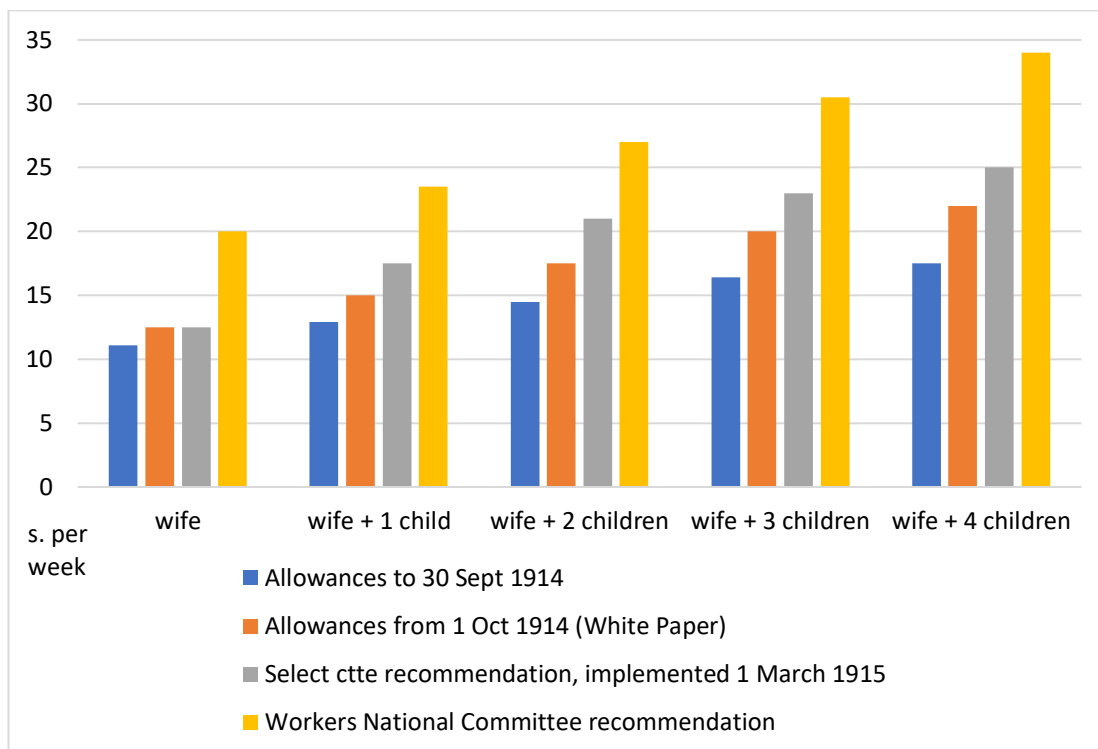


Figure 6: separation allowance rates and recommendations for wives and children of private soldiers, in shillings per week.¹⁰¹

It can be clearly seen from the chart above how the total allowance was increased substantially from 1 October 1914, compared to pre-war scales, and further increased significantly by the Select Committee recommendations, implemented from 1 March 1915. However, it fell well short of the Workers National Committee proposals, particularly as the Government scales included a compulsory allotment from the soldier, whereas the WNC argued the state should bear the whole cost of the allowances,¹⁰² and only the WNC figures met the call for a minimum of '£1 per week'.

The provisions for war widows' pensions, and for war-disabled pensions were rather more complicated than those for separation allowances, as they varied with the widow's age, and with the extent of disablement of sailor or soldier, degree of permanence, and so on. Some examples of war widows' pensions can be seen in the chart below.

¹⁰¹ The sources and calculations for this chart are detailed in appendix 2.

¹⁰² *Special Report on Naval and Military Services*, appendix 2, 174.

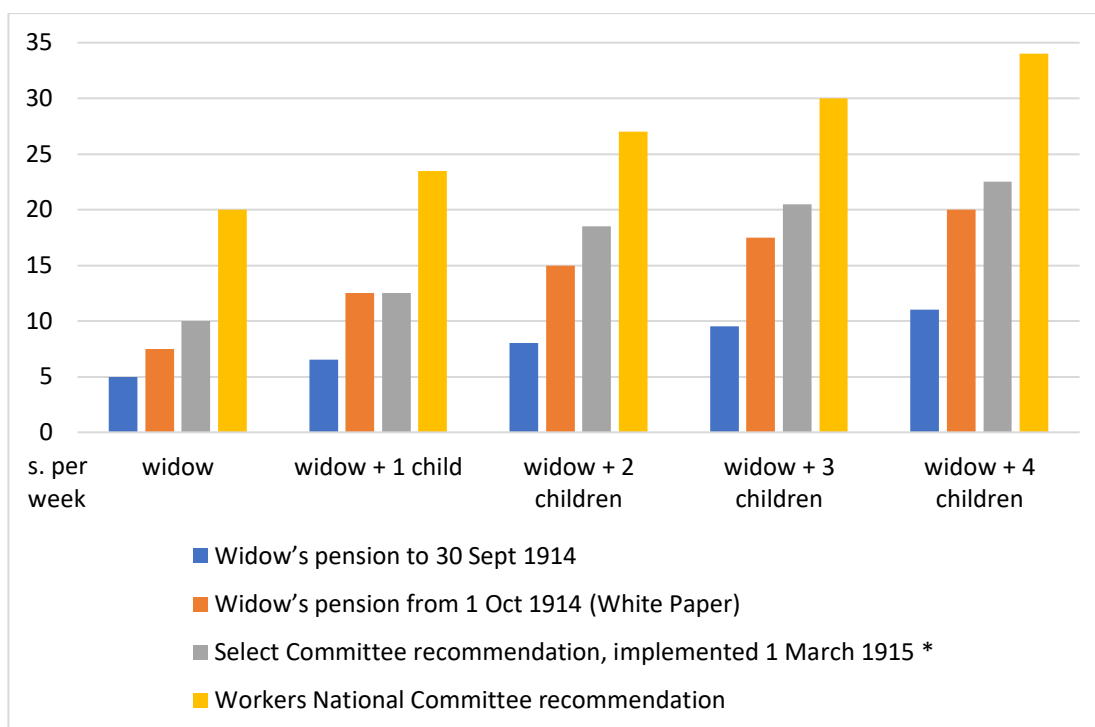


Figure 7: minimum war pension rates and recommendations for widows and children of private soldiers, in shillings per week.¹⁰³

Disablement pensions do not lend themselves to graphical representation. In essence, prior to the war, regular soldiers and sailors were entitled to a pension related to length of service, with a supplement if they were discharged with a disablement that affected their earning potential. The White Paper of November 1914 set out a minimum 14s a week for a totally disabled unmarried man, and 16s 6d a week for a married man, while for partial disablement, rates varied from 3s. 6d. to 17s. 6d a week, 'the amount being determined with regard to reduction of wage-earning capacity, number of dependants, and other circumstances'.¹⁰⁴ The Select Committee's First Special Report recommended 25s. a week for total disablement, with a proportionate reduction for partial disablement, to reflect the wages that 'the claimant may be deemed to be capable of earning ... but in no case less than 10s. 6d. a week for the loss of a limb or an eye'.¹⁰⁵ There would be an additional allowance of 2s. 6d. for each child, in the case of total disablement, reduced in the same

¹⁰³ The sources and calculations for this chart are detailed in appendix 2

¹⁰⁴ *Allowances and Pensions*, Cd. 7662, 4.

¹⁰⁵ *Special Report on Naval and Military Services*, iv, s16.

proportion for partial disablement. If disablement was not permanent, temporary allowances of the same amounts would be paid. The WNC expressed their submissions in slightly different form, but essentially they would have resulted in similar total amounts.¹⁰⁶ In all these cases, the figures above are the minimum for private soldiers and naval ratings, with higher rates for more senior ranks.

Trades council minutes show that separation allowances were their main concern from August 1914 through to mid-1916, and this probably reflects the scale of the problem, with the number of dependants rising rapidly through hundreds of thousands into the millions, while war pensioners were a much smaller number in those first two years. For example, by 14 April 1915, a total of just 2,977 sailors and soldiers had been discharged as disabled since the start of the war,¹⁰⁷ while the total number serving was about 2 million,¹⁰⁸ a large proportion of whom would have had wives or other dependants. Even by 15 February 1917, almost two years later, there were just 143,120 'Officers, Men and Nurses' receiving war pensions,¹⁰⁹ while the number of serving soldiers had reached over 3.5 million.¹¹⁰ However, it should also be noted that soldiers were being discharged with disabling injuries or disease as early as September 1914,¹¹¹ and hence trades council resolutions mention war disablement pensions with increasing frequency, alongside separation allowances, from soon after that date. For example, on 14 October 1914, Leeds Trades Council 'strongly' urged the Government to 'make a definite declaration of the amount of the pension ... to men permanently disabled, and expresses the opinion that the sum ought not to be less than £1 per week'.¹¹² That was just the first of numerous examples in the minutes of that trades council, and many others.

¹⁰⁶ *Special Report on Naval and Military Services*, appendix no. 3, 172–78.

¹⁰⁷ Local Government Board, *Disabled Sailors and Soldiers, 1915*, Cd. 7915, 2–3.

¹⁰⁸ The Army Council, *The General Annual Report on the British Army for the Year ending 20th September 1920*, 1922, Cmd. 1610, 20–21. Figure of '2 million' interpolated from totals for 1 October 1914 and 1 October 1915.

¹⁰⁹ Ministry of Pensions, 'Report for Period from November 24th to November 30th 1917', War Council (WC) paper G.T.2836, 30 November 1917, 142, The National Archives (TNA), CAB 24/34/36. Figure calculated from appendix I (233,485 minus 90,365).

¹¹⁰ *General Annual Report 1920*, Cmd. 1610, 20–21. Figure of '3.5 million' interpolated from totals for 1 October 1916 and 1 October 1917.

¹¹¹ Wootton, *Politics of Influence*, 19.

¹¹² Leeds TC minutes, Executive Committee, 14 October 1914, 37, and many subsequent references.

The Second Special Report

The Select Committee met another six times, to address three further questions. First, the level of publicly funded pensions for dependants other than wives and children. Second, supplementary allowances and pensions for ‘the better-to-do soldier ... whose absence ... left his home far worse off in proportion to the scale of his living than was the case in regard to the larger class of recruits’.¹¹³ Third, to ‘decide in a judicial capacity questions relating to forfeiture and claims to pensions and separation allowances which are in dispute between two or more claimants’.¹¹⁴ However, there was a curious interlude to their proceedings, namely the appearance of a further witness before the Committee, on 4 March 1915, some six weeks after all other oral and written evidence had been concluded. This was the Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson, and in his opening statement he said that he wanted to speak to ‘the social and moral difficulties’ of the Committee’s recommendations.¹¹⁵ It is clear, from the transcript of his remarks, that he objected strongly to the payment of separation allowances to ‘unmarried wives’, a phrase he particularly abhorred, on the same basis as married wives. It is a concern that runs right through the ten closely-typed pages of his remarks,¹¹⁶ where he contends for example that parents were having ‘difficulty in controlling wild girls ... owing to the belief that ... going wrong will not now be visited by all the penalties which it would have been before’.¹¹⁷ His evidence was in complete contrast to many resolutions by trades councils, which had called for unmarried wives to be supported in the same way as legally married ones,¹¹⁸ which was surely the most humane principle to adopt. It was fortunate for those dependants that the Archbishop’s representations seem to have had little influence on the Committee, and the phrase ‘unmarried wives’ had in any case been dropped from official guidance by that time,

¹¹³ HC Deb 06 July 1915 vol 73 c206, Reginald McKenna, Chancellor of the Exchequer.

¹¹⁴ *Special Report on Naval and Military Services*, vi.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 153–62.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 161.

¹¹⁸ For example, in a Leeds ‘£1 a Week Conference’, on 7 November 1914, the proposer of the main resolution ‘specially emphasised the claims of unmarried mothers and wives’. News cutting entitled ‘Only the Thin End: Mr. Hyndman’s optimism at 72’, un-dated, un-named newspaper, filed in Leeds TC minutes, Executive Committee, 6 November 1914, 43.

to be replaced by 'dependants of unmarried soldiers',¹¹⁹ which included women, siblings, parents and anyone who could prove some financial dependence that pre-dated enlistment.

To administer the schemes, the committee proposed the establishment of a Statutory Committee of the Royal Patriotic Fund Corporation, operating through 'local advisory bodies or committees' set up by every county, borough or district council that desired one,¹²⁰ to be enshrined in the Naval and Military War Pensions, etc., Bill. However, this was controversial, not least because the supplementary grants were to be financed out of voluntary contributions from the public.¹²¹ Some MPs, agreeing with trades council resolutions, wanted the Government to fund and administer pensions and allowances, rather than continue the strange mixture of Army pensions funded by Royal Warrant and administered by the Chelsea Hospital Commissioners, Navy pensions out of Admiralty funds, separation allowances by a mixture of military and naval clerks and SSFA (mainly from public funds) and now supplementary allowances to be determined by a committee of the Royal Patriotic Fund Corporation, from private donations.¹²² The Government however preferred these arrangements, continuing the centuries-old practice of minimising any direct statutory responsibility for pensions and allowances. And they had powerful friends in Parliament, who preferred the principle of charities administering such funds; indeed, a number of the most influential MPs were closer to those charities than to the ordinary soldier or his family.

Eventually the Bill was passed up to the House of Lords in late July, shortly before the summer recess.¹²³ As the war had been going for almost a year, voluntary enlistment had passed 1.5 million, food prices and rents were rising sharply, and fresh cases of hardship reported daily by newspapers, by trades councils, and by MPs, there was an

¹¹⁹ For example: 'Soldiers' Separation Allowances', PRC poster 114, q.v.

¹²⁰ *Special Report on Naval and Military Services*, vi.

¹²¹ HC Deb 06 July 1915 vol 73 cc212–338.

¹²² HC Deb 18 November 1914 vol 68 c457, Hayes-Fisher, MP for Fulham, and previously chairman of the Royal Patriotic Fund Corporation for 14 years. This point was repeated by him and others over the next 3 years.

¹²³ HL Deb 21 July 1915 vol 19 c546.

understandable sense of urgency among those most concerned. But the Lords were not to be hurried and, perhaps surprisingly, the majority sided with the more radical critics in the Commons. So they queried the nature of the proposed Statutory Committee,¹²⁴ asked where its funds would come from when the Royal Patriotic Fund had none,¹²⁵ and the National Relief Fund was barred from contributing any proceeds of its public fundraising,¹²⁶ suggested that a Pensions Board, along the lines of the Chelsea Hospital Board, might be more appropriate,¹²⁷ and in summary declared it a 'bad Bill'.¹²⁸ Lord St. Audries asked the embattled Marquess of Crewe who, as Lord President of the Council, had presented the Bill, 'If he were a wounded soldier or sailor, which would he rather have — an empty Bill in July with no money in it, or a well-thought-out Bill in September with public money in it?' a question that answered itself.¹²⁹ The Lords duly deferred consideration of the Bill until after their recess, returning to the matter in late September (below).

As a result of the attitudes expressed in both the Commons and Lords debates, which were widely reported, no minutes of any trades council consulted show anything other than severe criticism of the Bill around that time, a resolution from London TC being quite typical:

That this delegate meeting renews its emphatic protest against the Naval and Military Pensions Bill in its present form; that the council declares that all the funds required should be provided, not from Charity, but from public funds, that it is essential that the proposed statutory body should be under the direction of a Minister ... responsible for its administration to the House of Commons.¹³⁰

That resolution went on to make a series of further stipulations to increase local involvement and oversight, to build on existing old-age pensions committees, and to

¹²⁴ HL Deb 23 July 1915 vol 19 c612.

¹²⁵ Ibid c614.

¹²⁶ Ibid c613.

¹²⁷ Ibid c616.

¹²⁸ Ibid c618.

¹²⁹ Ibid c640.

¹³⁰ London TC minutes, Delegate Meeting, 16 September 1915.

separate medical care, training and employment of disabled soldiers, from the payment of allowances and pensions. Some of those matters were eventually incorporated into the Bill, though not the fundamental principle that all funds should come from the public purse rather than charity.

When the Lords returned from their recess, they debated the Bill at length and passed a series of fundamental amendments, which have been well detailed by Edward Devine and Lilian Brandt.¹³¹ In summary, the Lords:

- deleted reference to ‘the Royal Patriotic Fund Corporation’, leaving the ‘Statutory Committee’ as, in effect, a committee of the Houses of Parliament,
- increased the number of Crown appointees, deleting representatives of the Local Government Board and National Health Insurance Joint Committee,
- thoroughly overhauled all the provisions relating to the local committees and the functions of the central body,
- changed the short title from ‘Naval and Military War Pensions, etc., Bill, 1915’ to ‘War Pensions, Help to Disabled Men, etc., Bill’.

And to emphasise the transformation, they changed the title of the ‘Statutory Committee’ to the ‘War Allowances Board’.¹³² These changes to the Bill were so fundamental that when it returned to the Commons on 14 October, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Reginald McKenna, concluded that ‘the character of the Bill was entirely changed’ such that it now ‘sought to constitute a new Government authority to deal with pensions’.¹³³ This was certainly true, and unacceptable to the Government,¹³⁴ so that after further lengthy debate, the key Lords’ amendments were rejected, a decision they reluctantly accepted when the Bill returned.¹³⁵ It received Royal Assent on 10 November 1915, almost exactly a year after the Select Committee had been established. Yet this was only the start of the process, for now hundreds of local committees had to be set up all over the country, and even before that, detailed regulations were needed, to prescribe their formation,

¹³¹ Devine and Brandt, *Disabled Soldiers and Sailors*, 124–126.

¹³² HL Deb 06 October 1915 vol 19 cc983–84.

¹³³ HC Deb 14 October 1915 vol 74 cc1557–58.

¹³⁴ *Ibid* c1558.

¹³⁵ HL Deb 02 November 1915 vol 20 cc78–96.

membership and procedures.¹³⁶ Setting up this elaborate network was a considerable undertaking, so it was many more months before supplementary pensions, grants and allowances began to be disbursed as a consequence of the new Act.¹³⁷ They helped, a bit, but it did seem that throughout the war, the system lagged far behind the needs created by mass enlistment. The work of the parliamentary Select Committee was still not over, as it also addressed the question of officers' allowances and pensions. As this chapter is focused on trades councils and their concern with soldiers and sailors in the ranks, and as the Association they created did not at first accept officers as full members, their welfare will be considered later, primarily in chapters 5 and 6.

Employment of Veterans

Another matter that began to appear on trades council agendas was the difficulty many discharged men encountered in finding employment on their return to civil life. In May 1915, for example, Edinburgh DTC was asked by Sir John Cowan, a prominent businessman and former chairman of the city's Chamber of Commerce, to consider

the question of Employment for Ex-Soldiers, as the body dealing with this question was purely a Military one, who knew nothing about industrial life, and he suggested that committees might be formed in all the large cities in Scotland composed of representation of Employers of Labour and the Workers to watch over these men when they returned to civil life.¹³⁸

While there is no record of this being followed up at that time, it is an early indication of the likely need for new organisations to deal with some of the practical problems facing returning soldiers. Still, the main concern at the time continued to be allowances and pensions. In June 1915, again in a meeting of the Edinburgh DTC, a Mr Smithies 'raised the question of disabled soldiers returning from France, and receiving no pension, and it was

¹³⁶ *Report of the War Pensions, &c., Statutory Committee for the Year 1916, 1917*, Cd. 8750.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 6–7, describes 'Temporary Arrangements' up to 30 June 1916, with 'a considerable number' of local committees still not established even by that date.

¹³⁸ Edinburgh DTC minutes, 11 May 1915, 189–90.

agreed to remit the matter to the executive'.¹³⁹ This was followed up at subsequent meetings, with various actions endorsed such as (i) seeking representation on SSFA and the Soldiers' and Sailors' Help Society,¹⁴⁰ and (ii) calling on the authorities to ensure that when a soldier was discharged he would be assessed for pension by a civilian doctor as well as a military one.¹⁴¹ The implication is clearly that military doctors were inclined to take a more restrictive attitude when it came to assessing disablement, and this kind of entry is seen frequently in the minutes of various TCs through 1915 and 1916. Thus, it is apparent that trades councils were taking up a range of problems faced by discharged soldiers.

Also, in June 1915, there appears a remarkable entry in the London TC minute-book, which records a request from the Socialist National Defence Committee,¹⁴² to help arrange a public demonstration:

1. To demonstrate how utterly groundless are the assertions of the German-Austrian press that the British industrial masses are opposed to the national policy of carrying the war to a triumphant conclusion.
2. To refute the undue suspicion on the attitude of trade unionists during the war, which has been aroused by certain sections of the Press, and to emphasise the fact that in this crisis the trade unionists of the country are essential to the National safety ...¹⁴³

A handwritten addition to the above resolution indicates that the Secretary was instructed to make further enquiries about the possible success of such a demonstration and, while

¹³⁹ Edinburgh DTC minutes, 22 June 1915, 215.

¹⁴⁰ Founded in 1899, at the start of the South African War, to assist veterans, alongside SSFA for service families, and the Royal Patriotic Fund for widows and orphans, in 1948 it became the Forces Help Society and Lord Robert's Workshops, and in 1997 amalgamated with SSAFA. Julian Paget, *No Problem too Difficult* (Lymington, 1999), esp. 1, 12-19, 107-113; Commander J. H. Drummond, 'The Forces Umbrella', *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* 97, 1 February 1952, London, 426.

¹⁴¹ Edinburgh DTC minutes, 6 July 1915, 223.

¹⁴² A coalition of pro-war trade union leaders and like-minded members of the British Socialist Party, led by Henry Mayers Hyndman; the majority of the BSP opposed the war and expelled Hyndman and his supporters in April 1916. John Callaghan, *Socialism in Britain* (Oxford, 1990), 74.

¹⁴³ London TC minutes, Executive Meeting, 24 June 1915.

there is no record of it actually taking place, it appears that this trades council, the largest in the UK, was minded to support a demonstration in favour of 'carrying the war to a triumphant conclusion', which shows how far trade unions had departed from their once-widespread belief that the working classes of different countries would not take up arms against each other.

Response to Conscription

While most trades councils had resigned themselves to the reality of the war and even, in many cases, to play some part in recruiting drives, the growing clamour for conscription was another matter. By the autumn of 1915 the subject was creating a lot of debate, for example in the East Lancashire town of Rawtenstall where a letter from the British Socialist Party (BSP), asking the trades council to 'obtain a number of copies of leaflets re: Conscription' led to 'a long and interesting discussion ... and ultimately it was decided not to obtain a supply of leaflets'.¹⁴⁴ Since the BSP was firmly opposed to conscription, this suggests that the members of Rawtenstall Trades and Labour Council (TLC) were, at the very least, deeply divided over the issue. On the other hand, London TC, in its July 1915 meeting, unanimously passed a strongly worded resolution criticising the 'insidious efforts' of parts of the press to influence the Government to introduce conscription, believing

such policy to be entirely unnecessary, unjustified, and contrary to the sentiments and principles of the British people; it is subversive of the free and democratic character of their institutions, and involves a serious menace to the liberty and freedom of the Labour movement.¹⁴⁵

Resolutions, meetings and protests against conscription gathered pace during the latter half of the year, though trades councils remained divided. Many supported the Labour Joint Recruiting Committee's campaign in support of the 'Derby Scheme', where every man of military age, who was not already serving (or discharged), was required to say publicly

¹⁴⁴ Rawtenstall TLC Minutes, 9 October 1915.

¹⁴⁵ London TC minutes, Delegate Meeting, 8 July 1915

whether he would 'attest' to join the Forces. Their support for the Derby Scheme was based on a desire to bolster voluntary enlistment as a way of staving off conscription,¹⁴⁶ though the response was too low to delay it by more than a few months.

Consequently, Asquith presented the Military Service Bill, which would implement conscription, to the Commons in January 1916. This prompted further divisive debates within trades councils, for example in Edinburgh, where delegates voted to hear a speaker from the Anti-Conscription League, but then narrowly agreed to support the Bill.¹⁴⁷ The same month the WNC circulated trades councils, urging them to press their local authorities to set up pensions committees to implement the scheme enacted by the Naval and Military Pensions Act of November 1915 (above). This created a lot of debate: in Rawtenstall for example, some members opposed the scheme being run by a charity, and called for it to be taken under the control of a government department; others felt that there *should* be a local committee to 'safeguard the interests of our Warriors who returned wounded or broken in health'.¹⁴⁸ The discussion in Rawtenstall was adjourned without a decision and only the following month, following receipt of a further plea from the WNC, did the council decide to call for a local war pensions committee.¹⁴⁹ This was duly established by the Town Clerk and five members appointed to it from the trades council.¹⁵⁰

Soldiers and Sailors discharged because of disease

Even as local pensions committees were slowly forming, concern about another issue was spreading. In February 1916, London TC expressed its 'considerable alarm' about soldiers and sailors 'discharged from the services incapacitated by disease or any other disability contracted or accentuated as a result of their joining his Majesty's forces'.¹⁵¹ Many of these were denied a pension and, if left 'to the cold mercy of charitable institutions, as will

¹⁴⁶ For example: London TC minutes, 13 Oct 1915, and 21 Oct 1915.

¹⁴⁷ Edinburgh DTC minutes, 20 May 1914 – 6 June 1916, 18 January 1916. See also Keith Grieves, *The Politics of Manpower* (Manchester, 1988), ch. 2, 19–39.

¹⁴⁸ Rawtenstall TLC Minutes, January 1916 [no day recorded].

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, February 1916 [no day recorded].

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 13 July and 10 August 1916.

¹⁵¹ London TC minutes, February 1916 [no day recorded].

happen unless other provision is made, [this] would be a standing national disgrace'.¹⁵² It concluded 'we, therefore ... most emphatically request that the government shall grant pensions to such men in the same manner, and on the same scale, as would be granted if they had been incapacitated through being wounded'.¹⁵³ In March, Rawtenstall TLC passed a similar resolution adding the words 'in case of death, pensions & allowances to dependants' with copies to 'Prime Minister, Mr Harcourt and Kitchener'.¹⁵⁴ That this was indeed a serious problem can be seen from Parry and Codrington's history where they note that prior to 11 June 1916 'no pensions were granted to unfit men whose unfitness was attributable to or aggravated by service conditions'.¹⁵⁵ Even after the word 'aggravated' was added to the Royal Warrant on that date, there was a clear tendency on the part of the military authorities to start from the assumption that a soldier's disease or infirmity was due to a pre-existing condition, or negligence, or malingering. In fact, every one of the twenty-one cases that Parry and Codrington describe, to illustrate their experience of the War Pensions Tribunal in 1917, is about the refusal of a pension to a diseased ex-service man, and the Tribunal allowed all but one of those appeals, the implication being that these were typical of the 927 cases that came before them.¹⁵⁶ Similarly, Griffith Boscawen, would later write of his time in the Ministry of Pensions that, because of an assumption of 'malingering ... the general rule was to give the benefit of any doubt to the State rather to the man'.¹⁵⁷

While trades councils clearly engaged in a major way with the problems faced by families and other dependants of serving sailors and soldiers, with the men themselves after their discharge, and with the widows and orphans of those who would not return, this does not mean they had wholly embraced the war effort. Their reservations were not limited to conscription and, by 1916, they extended to growing support for peace talks with Germany. In June of that year, the 'Peace Negotiation Committee' of the Union of Democratic Control

¹⁵² London TC minutes, February 1916 [no day recorded].

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Rawtenstall TLC minutes, 9 March 1916. Lewis Harcourt was a Liberal MP and member of the war-time coalition Government led by Prime Minister Asquith; Harcourt had responsibility for pensions.

¹⁵⁵ Parry and Codrington, *War Pensions*, 92.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 87–157.

¹⁵⁷ Griffith-Boscawen, *Memories*, 196.

(UDC)¹⁵⁸ circulated TCs with a request that they call on the Government to ‘take the earliest opportunity of discussing peace terms with Germany with the object of bringing about a just and lasting peace’.¹⁵⁹ After much discussion, Rawtenstall TLC passed the UDC resolution but declined a further request to collect signatures on a peace petition. From spring of 1916 onwards, resolutions calling for peace talks appear with increasing frequency in the minutes of various trades councils.¹⁶⁰

The first Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers

However, far from the opening of any peace negotiations, instead came news of the huge losses in the prolonged and disastrous Somme offensive. The deaths and serious injuries were felt particularly strongly in Lancashire, home of a number of ‘Pals’ battalions, and long a stronghold of trade unionism. So it is perhaps not surprising that Blackburn Trades Council, which had been particularly active in pursuing both individual cases and campaigning on the general issue, decided that passing resolutions was not enough, and in September took a step that would prove to be momentous. Strongly supported by a Labour local councillor, James Frankland,¹⁶¹ it arranged a meeting with the intention of ‘forming an association of discharged soldiers and sailors who had been wounded or otherwise incapacitated during the war’,¹⁶² for mutual support and to press their case on government. The secretary of the new group was a Sergeant-Major Miller,¹⁶³ who had gone with the Old Contemptibles to France, where he was captured, sent back to England in a prisoner exchange, denied a pension and reduced to begging ‘at street corners’ to

¹⁵⁸ The UDC was ‘The most important body working for a peace short of military victory’, according to Marvin Swartz, ‘The Union of Democratic Control in British Politics During World War I’, PhD dissertation (Yale, 1969), summary page.

¹⁵⁹ Rawtenstall TLC Minutes, 13 June 1916.

¹⁶⁰ For example: Glasgow Trades Council, Minutes, 31 May 1916. Archives and Special Collections, Mitchell Library, S38 (hereafter Glasgow TC Minutes).

¹⁶¹ David Englander, ‘When this bloody war is over: ex-servicemens [sic] organizations in 1918’, *History Today*, March 1987, 13–16. Frankland’s role is also described in Leeds TC minutes, 19 August 1917, 219.

¹⁶² London TC minutes, Executive Committee, 28 September 1916, item 4.

¹⁶³ Leeds TC minutes, Executive Committee, 19 August 1917, 219 (minuting a visit from Frankland and Miller).

support himself.¹⁶⁴ Impoverished and infirm ex-soldiers like Miller were a daily sight on streets in Blackburn, and this was a factor in the efforts of Cllr. Frankland and others on their behalf. The inaugural meeting on 13 September 1916 was open to all ex-service persons in the locality and appears to have been well attended, though no figures are recorded.¹⁶⁵ The primary object of the 'Blackburn Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers', as recorded in letters to other TCs, was 'that it shall be of material service to men who have been wounded or otherwise incapacitated during the War, by giving them assistance in obtaining employment, pensions, sickness benefit, etc'.¹⁶⁶ Stephen Ward claims there was 'something suspicious about the Association', noting that it was founded in a town whose MP was the pacifist and ILP member, Philip Snowden, although conceding that 'Snowden's autobiography and biographies made no mention of it'.¹⁶⁷ Ward goes on to cite Major Harold Jellicorse as writing that Snowden 'funded the organization',¹⁶⁸ but Jellicorse cited no evidence, and his history is questionable where it concerns the origins of the Association. In particular, he wrongly conflated the creation of the National Association, which occurred at the end of March 1917 (see below), with the founding of the Blackburn Association, seven months earlier.¹⁶⁹ No contemporaneous records have been found to link Snowden with the Blackburn Association, nor is there any evidence that it needed any funding, at least in its early days, other than petty cash for postage stamps and the like.

There is no record of when this significant step, the creation of an association to be run by and for discharged sailors and soldiers, was first discussed in the trades council or in the

¹⁶⁴ 'Discharged Soldiers' Association', *Cambrian News*, 9 May 1919, 5.

¹⁶⁵ *Northern Daily Telegraph*, 14 September 1916, referenced in Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 20.

¹⁶⁶ Rawtenstall TLC Minutes, 12 October 1916, quotes from the Blackburn letter. No archive of Blackburn Trades Council has been found, so the only records of its initiative are those found in the archives of other TCs, and in newspaper reports.

¹⁶⁷ Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 22.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁶⁹ Major H Jellicorse, 'The History of the Ex-Service Man Movement', CHAR 16/9, folios 90–98, <http://www.churchillarchive.com/explore/catalogue?showDetailsId=CHAR%2016#detail>, article in *The Ex-Service Man*, 5–19 July 1919, 3–18 (accessed 10/3/19). Ward's quote does not appear in that document, rather Jellicorse wrote that the Association 'was started under the auspices of Mr. Philip Snowden'. However, Jellicorse's 'History' appears to have been produced in several versions, which may explain the disparity.

town, as the Blackburn TC minutes from that period have apparently not survived. However, the records of other trades councils show that within days of the 13 September meeting, they started circulating a letter across the UK, suggesting that every trades council form a similar association in its area. The earliest reference is in Scotland, where Dundee Trades Council considered the Blackburn letter on 20 September, the local paper reporting their discussion.¹⁷⁰ No immediate action was recorded by the paper (again those TC minutes are lost) but less than two months later, on 10 November, the UK's third association was formed in the town.¹⁷¹ No record has been found of the second branch, but this is a significant report, showing both that Scotland was involved early on, and that the Blackburn organisers were thinking in terms of a national network of branches from the start. It was a similar story in Edinburgh, where the TC resolved at first to take no action,¹⁷² but following further letters from Blackburn, formed a DSS Association on 9 January 1917.¹⁷³ Not that all trades councils responded positively: Glasgow was one that decided to let the issue 'lie on the table',¹⁷⁴ perhaps unsurprisingly in view of the extent of pacifist views in the Clydeside labour movement.¹⁷⁵

Rawtenstall TLC archive has one of the earliest references to the Blackburn initiative, in its minutes of 12 October 1916, though its initial reaction was that such an association would be unlikely to succeed 'owing to the small and scattered nature of the district';¹⁷⁶ Rawtenstall was and is a small village in the sparsely populated Rossendale valley, so that reasoning was probably genuine. Certainly it remained sympathetic to the plight of the DSS, and the minutes of the December meeting that year show it liaising with West Lancashire and Bolton trades councils over a proposed scale for military pensions, and

¹⁷⁰ *The Courier* (Dundee), 21 Sept 1916, 4, col 1. A number of other TC minutes have similar entries around the same date.

¹⁷¹ 'Discharged Sailors and Soldiers Form an Association', *The Courier* (Dundee), 11 Nov 1916, 4, col 3.

¹⁷² Edinburgh DTC minutes, 26 September 1916.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 2 Jan 1917.

¹⁷⁴ Glasgow TC minutes, Executive Committee, 21 November 1916. The committee felt such an organisation would 'undermine unions' and sailors & soldiers should instead join a relevant union on discharge.

¹⁷⁵ Kenny MacAskill, *Glasgow 1919: the Rise of Red Clydeside* (London, 2019), 38–45. Online edition, downloaded 2/12/2019.

¹⁷⁶ Rawtenstall TLC Minutes, 12 October 1916.

demanding that 'sick money received under the Insurance Act should not be deducted from a Soldier's pension, but should be in addition thereto'.¹⁷⁷ At some point a local 'Discharged Sailors and Soldiers Association' was set up in Rawtenstall, with or without the active assistance of the trades council, for in September 1917 its application to affiliate to the Rawtenstall TLC was unanimously approved.¹⁷⁸

The London Trades Council's Executive Committee meeting on 28 September 1916 also referred to the Blackburn letter, and was similarly lukewarm, concluding that 'it was unwise that any further associations should be set up ... this was a matter which could be undertaken by the present Labour organisations, and advise no action be taken'.¹⁷⁹ This was not to say that the TC was in any way unconcerned about the issue, for a fortnight later, on 12 October, the same trades council passed an 'urgent' resolution that is worth quoting in full, because it perfectly summarises the many problems with the pensions and allowances systems more than two years after the war began, and it conveys something of the exasperation of those who were campaigning for improvements:

this meeting ... deplores the continued chaos in matters affecting pensions and other allowances in respect of military and naval service, resulting in many thousands of the dependants ... and of the soldiers and sailors themselves receiving no assistance for many weeks, entailing unnecessary hardship; records the fact that the public sentiment of this Country is that those who have made sacrifices, whether directly or indirectly for the Country's cause should receive the most generous assistance that the Country can provide; and is of the opinion that the problem demands that the Government should at once create the Ministry of Pensions, responsible to the House of Commons, in which should rest the whole control of Army and Navy pensions and allowances, that the Chelsea Commissioners should be abolished, that the War Pensions Statutory Committee should become a department under the Ministry of Pensions, and that on the death ... or upon the discharge of a soldier or sailor the War Office or the Admiralty should at once forward to the Ministry of

¹⁷⁷ Rawtenstall TLC Minutes, 14 December 1916.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, September 1917 [no day recorded].

¹⁷⁹ London TC minutes, 28 September 1916.

Pensions all the relative papers in each case, which shall henceforth be dealt with solely by the Ministry of Pensions, either direct or as the case may be, through the Statutory Committee.¹⁸⁰

As was the norm for resolutions of this type it was sent to ‘the Prime Minister; the Labour Party; and the Right Honourable Arthur Henderson’, who was then Leader of the Labour Party and Paymaster-General, which post included chairmanship of the Chelsea Commissioners.¹⁸¹ The reference to ‘the Ministry of Pensions’ was premature, but Henderson had promised to reform pensions administration some weeks earlier.¹⁸² A few days later the Trades Union Congress, meeting in Birmingham, called for ‘one central department ... responsible for soldiers’ and sailors’ pensions ... having at its head someone directly responsible to Parliament’,¹⁸³ in other words a Ministry. By mid-October, the same day as the London TC resolution quoted above, correspondents were being briefed that a Cabinet Committee had indeed decided to create a Pensions Board with a Minister at its head, noting ‘the pressure being put upon the Government is very strong’ including ‘over sixty M.P.’s have handed in resolutions in identical terms, urging the creation of a Pensions Ministry’.¹⁸⁴ That process is further described in the next chapter, but is noted here as an illustration of how a coordinated campaign of resolutions by trades councils, MPs and unions, could have a powerful effect on the Government.

Towards a National Association

Blackburn TC’s initiative in circulating other trades councils was very effective, albeit that not every one of them responded positively. Local associations of DSS sprung up rapidly, particularly across northern England, probably due to the confluence of both active trades councils and ‘Pals’ battalions, as can be seen in the maps below.

¹⁸⁰ London TC minutes, Delegate Meeting, 12 October 1916.

¹⁸¹ ‘Our London Letter: Mr Henderson and the Penny’, *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 1 September 1916, 2.

¹⁸² ‘Pension Reforms Promised’, *The Courier* (Dundee), 4 September 1916, 2.

¹⁸³ ‘Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Pensions’, *Evening Telegraph and Post* (Dundee), 6 September 1916, 2.

¹⁸⁴ ‘London Letter: Proposed Minister for Pensions’, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 13 October 1916, 5.

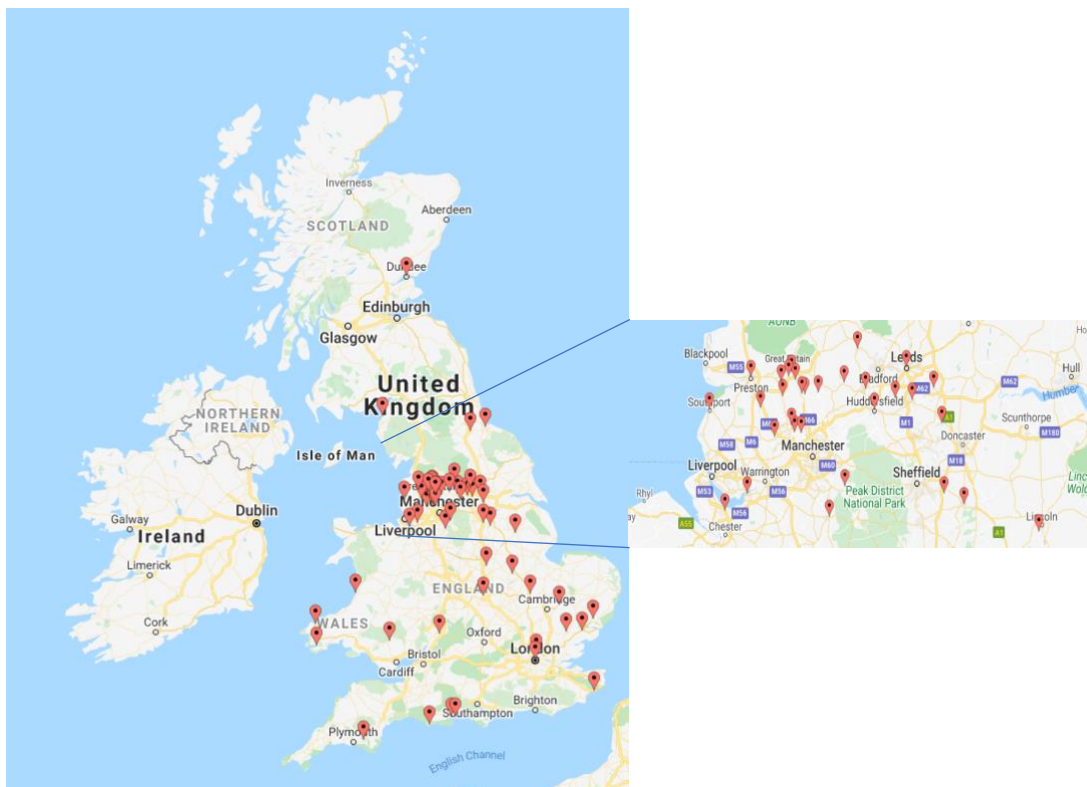


Figure 8: locations of 55 branches of the National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers at the time of their 2nd Annual Conference, March 1918.¹⁸⁵

The strength of the Association in emerging from the established trades council network was also a weakness, however, because branches tended to emerge only where trade union membership was strong, as can be seen from these maps.¹⁸⁶ Moreover, the meagre income of trades councils at that time meant the new associations were not well-funded.

By this time, late 1916 and early 1917, the great majority of serving men were volunteers or conscripts, rather than the regulars who had made up the first British Expeditionary Force. The earlier practice of recruiting battalions of men who all came from the same area,

¹⁸⁵ National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers, 'Report of the Second Annual Conference', 30 March to 1 April 1918. Trades Union Congress (TUC) Library, London Metropolitan University, Special Collections, UB363 (filed with National Union of Ex-service Men pamphlets, but not part of the NUX). While the Association claimed many more branches by that time, no full list has been found. These 55 branches are those named in the conference proceedings, out of a total claimed to be 129 branches, and represent the best surviving guide to their geographical distribution across the UK at that time.

¹⁸⁶ Large and Whitfield, in *The Bristol Trades Council*, 3, assert that 'nearly half the entire union membership of the UK in 1889 was to be found in the six counties north of the Humber and Mersey' and there's no indication that situation had changed significantly by 1914–18.

meant that groups of discharged soldiers now returning home were likely to know each other and may well have served together. Combined with their pre-war experience, which in many cases would have included union membership and, in some instances, active participation, this must have been fertile ground for setting up the new associations. What is particularly significant, is that they were established and run by ex-soldiers for their own benefit, albeit with some initial assistance from local trades councils. This distinguishes them from the large Victorian ex-service organisations and the myriad smaller ones, which were generally run by ‘the great and the good’ as charitable works. The new organisations were explicitly not charities, and they were not looking for ‘handouts’. They wanted what they perceived as just reward for serving their country – adequate pensions, proper jobs, decent housing, help for the disabled, proper health care, and assistance for widows and dependants. They were in large degree what would now be called ‘pressure groups’,¹⁸⁷ campaigning for rights rather than seeking charity, though they also provided practical support to their members, in particular by assisting with pension claims, advocating for them at tribunals, and so on. By the spring of 1917, Blackburn Trades Council was trying to join up the various local groups, and this led to a conference in the town, on 31 March, of ‘trades and labour councils and discharged soldiers’ and sailors’ associations from various parts of Lancashire, Yorkshire, Cheshire, and Westmorland’, reflecting their concentration, at that time, in the north of England.¹⁸⁸ The representatives decided to form what *The Manchester Guardian* report called a ‘federation’, but it is clear that this was in fact the founding of the National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers,¹⁸⁹ and not to be confused with the National Federation, whose creation is the subject of the next chapter.

¹⁸⁷ For a discussion of the term, as originally defined in 1908, and employed more widely since the 1950s, and specifically in the context of ex-service organisations, see Wootton, *The Politics of Influence*, vii–viii.

¹⁸⁸ ‘Help for Discharged Soldiers. New Federation to Secure Just Treatment’, *The Manchester Guardian*, 2 April 1917, 8.

¹⁸⁹ Rawtenstall TLC Minutes, 8 March 1917, records that ‘Mr Foster Ingham was appointed to attend a meeting at Blackburn on Mar 31st, Re: Discharged Soldiers’ Association’.

Conclusions

Thus, by early 1917, following more than two years of active campaigning on behalf of sailors, soldiers and their dependants, trades councils across the UK had brought into being a National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers, led by the trades council in a small East Lancashire town. Their activism had started in the first months of the war, involvement that might seem surprising at first, given their opposition, shared by much of the wider labour movement, to any involvement by Britain in a European war. However, trades councils had long taken up issues that affected the working class in general, not just their members, so that, when families in their communities began to suffer drastic loss of income due to men joining the forces, it became an issue for them. They repeatedly passed resolutions calling for improved separation allowances, widows' and disablement war pensions, support for discharged men, and more besides. They sent these to the Prime Minister, other ministers, and their MPs, at a time when there was little alternative evidence of public opinion, other than the print media, so the contents of a Minister's or MP's postbag did have some influence on government policy.

The British Government responded to these needs from the first weeks of the war. Indeed, its first action, the extension of separation allowances to all sailors' and soldiers' wives, cannot be ascribed to popular pressure, coming as it did within weeks of Britain's entry into the war. However, from that point on, right through to the creation of the Pensions Ministry in December 1916, and beyond, its provision for the dependants of sailors and soldiers, and for the men themselves following discharge, lagged behind the needs. The scales of allowances and pensions, already barely at subsistence level when introduced, failed to keep pace with rising costs of living, complex rules deprived many of their due benefits, and over-stretched the relatively small and under-trained administration, while dependants in un-typical family relationships received no state support at all. The problem was particularly acute for families of men whose pre-enlistment earnings had been £2, £3, or £4 a week, or more, and whose separation allowance was very much less than that. Discretionary supplementary allowances, when they finally began to be introduced in late 1915, helped to an extent, but rarely restored those families to their full pre-war household

income. While well-established service charities, particularly the Royal Patriotic Fund Corporation and the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association, assisted in the distribution of supplementary allowances, and sometimes added to them from funds they raised from the public, their involvement was deeply resented by working-class recipients and by some MPs, speaking on their behalf. Trades councils were critical of the use of funds raised by public appeal, and by the use of charities to distribute payments, arguing that soldiers and sailors were serving their country at its time of greatest need and so it was the state's duty to support their families while they served, and the men themselves after discharge. But it was an argument that both the British Government and the military and naval authorities continued to reject, maintaining through the first two years of the war, their long-established practise of minimising payments to dependants and veterans, while expecting charities to provide support and, in particular, to avoid putting any such payments onto a statutory basis.

By the autumn of 1916, Blackburn Trades Council had come to realise that the problems needed to be addressed by an association dedicated to the needs of discharged sailors and soldiers, so it set one up, and encouraged other trades councils to do the same. Many did so, and within months they joined forces to become the National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers, which might in time have become the single voice for ex-service men and women, had it not been for an extraordinary miscalculation by the War Ministry. In its desperation to rebuild the Army on the Western Front in 1917, it introduced legislation to review the fitness of men exempted from conscription, including those who had already served and been discharged because of wounds or sickness, with a view to compulsory re-enlistment. But before looking at that episode, the next chapter will set out the story of the Edinburgh East MP whose lone campaign, for the DSS and their dependants, paralleled that of the trades councils over the same period, and in due course would result in the creation of the second organisation.

Chapter 3: James Myles Hogge and the Founding of the Federation

Introduction

The involvement of trades councils in the welfare of sailors' and soldiers' families over the first two years of the First World War, culminating in the formation of the National Association for Discharged Sailors and Soldiers, was not the only example of large scale, non-governmental, and non-charitable, support for these people. This chapter examines the concurrent activities of James Myles Hogge, the Liberal Member of Parliament for East Edinburgh, who, almost single-handedly, took up thousands of individual cases and campaigned relentlessly, in the Commons and through local and national media, for improvements in support for dependent families and veterans.¹ There was widespread sympathy for the men, women and children involved, and many other people tried to help, but Hogge's efforts were exceptional and led to the founding of the second group, the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers.



Figure 9: James Myles Hogge MP
© National Portrait Gallery, London

The Federation was one of the four major organisations that united in July 1921 to form the British Legion and, like the Association, previous accounts of its formation generally begin with its founding in the spring of 1917, thus lacking any detailed explanation of why it was that Hogge took on this leading role, or any account of his campaigning activities from the outbreak of war, two and a half years earlier. Graham Wootton makes no mention of

¹ Much of this account is sourced from the J M Hogge Collection in the Scottish Liberal Party & Scottish Liberal Democrats papers, Acc. 11765, National Library of Scotland, Manuscripts Division, Edinburgh, hereafter 'Hogge papers'. The Hogge collection consists largely of press cuttings, leaflets etc., collected by Hogge, but with few personal papers.

Hogge prior to 1917, in either his *Official History* or *The Politics of Influence*,² and subsequent authors have followed a similar path. Antony Brown refers to both Hogge and the Federation, but no earlier than March 1919,³ while Brian Harding's more recent history names only the Federation.⁴ Neither Charles Kimball nor Niall Barr, in their doctoral theses, make any mention of Hogge before early 1917.⁵ Even the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, in an otherwise quite detailed entry, says merely that 'Hogge was president of the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized [sic] Sailors and Soldiers from 1919 to 1920'.⁶ Only Stephen Ward's dissertation gives any account of Hogge in earlier years, although even that amounts to just one and a half pages, and does not convey the extent of his campaigning for the welfare of ex-sailors and soldiers and their families, both as a group and by taking up a vast number of individual cases.⁷ Ward does however recognise the importance of his contribution, concluding that 'James Hogge changed the course of the veterans' movement. Schooled in hard realities of welfare, he began directing the movement toward Parliament, the source of power ... Parliament, he knew, must be made aware of ex-servicemen's conditions through direct and indirect pressure'.⁸ Thus, the key question, not previously addressed in the literature, is how and why James Hogge took up this cause, and went on to set up a national organisation to advance the interests of those he campaigned for. This chapter will first look at Hogge's early life, to see why he developed such a strong social conscience, and then examine his activities during the war, inside and outside Parliament.

Early life, education and social work

Hogge was born in Edinburgh on 19 April 1873 and educated at the Normal and Sessional School that had been set up by The Free Church of Scotland, following its creation during the 'Disruption' of 1843. From there he went to the University of Edinburgh where, says

² Wootton, *Official History*, 2; *The Politics of Influence*, 287 (index).

³ Brown, *Red For Remembrance*, 9.

⁴ Harding, *Keeping Faith*, 2.

⁵ Kimball, 'The Ex-Service movement', 32; Barr, 'Service Not Self', 14.

⁶ Millar, 'Hogge, James Myles', *ODNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/45599>, q.v.

⁷ Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 24–25.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

Ian Elder,⁹ 'his dynamic energy was displayed as President of the Liberal Club, Senior President of the Students' Representative Council, editor of *The Student* and joint editor of the *Scottish Students' Song Book*.¹⁰ With such diverse interests, it is little wonder that he struggled to decide on a career, first entering teacher training at Moray House School of Education, then transferring to the United Presbyterian Theological and New College, which was part of 'one of the two large Presbyterian Churches outside the Established Church ... almost as strong numerically as the Free Church'.¹¹ It was particularly strong in urban areas, with 'a missionary character',¹² which seems to have influenced the young Hogge, as he combined his studies with practical social work in the most deprived parts of the district. On completing his theological qualifications, he became assistant minister at College Street United Free Church in Edinburgh, but still had not found his vocation.¹³ Instead, he realised that he was drawn more to social work than to the other duties of a minister, and so he left that post and moved to York, to work with the Rowntree family on social issues. These included the perceived evils of gambling and drinking – he would in time become secretary of the National Anti-Gambling League and publish at least two books on the subject.¹⁴ During his years in York he travelled widely on the Continent, researching both licensing systems and labour relations, and he became a prominent city councillor.¹⁵

He also found time in October 1900, still in his mid-twenties, to become a founder member of the Young Scots Society, which was formed partly 'in the depths of the Boer War, in order to help promote the anti-war argument',¹⁶ and more generally to promote the

⁹ Elder, 'J. M. Hogge', 20.

¹⁰ A. G. Abbie, James Myles Hogge, William Bain Griffiths Minto, and John Scouler Thomson (eds). *The British Students' Song Book, Etc.*, (London, Glasgow, 1912).

¹¹ J. H. S. (John) Burleigh, *A Church History of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1983), 363.

¹² Nigel M. de S. Cameron, 'United Presbyterian Church', *Dictionary of Scottish Church history & theology* (Edinburgh, 1993), 839..

¹³ A friend, George Swanson, recalled after his death that he first met him 'while he was still hesitating between the Church and social service as his life's work'. 'The Late Mr. James Myles Hogge', *The Scotsman*, 30 October 1928, 7.

¹⁴ James Myles Hogge, *Betting and Gambling* (Edinburgh, 1904); *The Facts of Gambling* (London, 1907).

¹⁵ The details in this and the previous paragraph are largely sourced from Elder, 'J. M. Hogge', 20–22, 32.

¹⁶ I. G. C. Hutchinson, *Scottish Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke, 2001), 10.

'fundamental principles of Liberalism' to young men in particular.¹⁷ In practice the Young Scots campaigned particularly on social issues such as poverty and land reform, for Free Trade, and for Scottish Home Rule,¹⁸ and at its peak claimed to have some 10,000 members.¹⁹ In 1910 Hogge stood for Parliament for the first time, narrowly losing to a Labour Party candidate in the Glasgow constituency of Camlachie. Two years later he was more successful, winning East Edinburgh in a by-election where he had the support of both William G. C. Gladstone (MP for Kilmarnock, and grandson of the four-time Liberal Prime Minister, William Ewart Gladstone) and David Lloyd George, who said 'we want more men in that House possessing your deep sympathy for social reform and your knowledge of social questions'.²⁰ He was on the radical wing of the Liberal Party, alongside men such as J. A. Hobson, Arnold Rowntree and Hamar Greenwood, believing that many social evils could only be cured by dealing with their economic roots. He was suspicious of militarism and colonialism and so, like Lloyd George, he opposed the Boer War (indeed, the YSS was seen as pro-Boer),²¹ but betrayed no serious doubts about the rightness of Britain declaring war on Germany. In that, he was not merely swimming with the tide of public opinion, for he was never afraid of being out of step with the majority. As an example of that (one among many) he opposed the appointment of the national hero, Lord Kitchener, as Secretary of State for War, a role he believed should be held by a civilian (although he would have been happy to see Kitchener made commander-in-chief of the armed forces).²²

¹⁷ R. Ian Elder, 'The Young Scots Society: A lost Liberal legion', *Journal of Liberal Democrat History*, issue 36, Autumn 2002, 13; see also James Kennedy, *Liberal Nationalisms: Empire, State, and Civil Society in Scotland and Quebec* (McGill-Queens University Press, 2013), for more about both Hogge and the YSS.

¹⁸ The movement for 'Home Rule' was not separatist. Rather what Hogge and others wanted was for Scotland to run its own affairs, but within the British Empire: similarly for Ireland and other Empire countries around the World. This aim was encapsulated in the slogan 'Home Rule all round, and the British Empire round all' – see 'East Edinburgh Contest', *The Times*, 30 January 1912, 8.

¹⁹ Elder, 'The Young Scots Society', 13.

²⁰ Lloyd George to Hogge, telegram, 31 January 1912, Hogge papers, Acc. 11765 78.

²¹ Kennedy, *Liberal Nationalisms*, 86–87.

²² Again, much of this and the previous paragraph is sourced from Elder 'J. M. Hogge', 20–22, 32.

Response to outbreak of war

Thus, when war broke out in August 1914, Hogge had, at the age of forty-one, a strong background of concern for, and active involvement in, social and political issues. He remained deeply religious, at a time when 'Presbyterianism remained the wellspring of national life and many Scots held their politics to be merely a secular version of it'.²³ So, while he was forging a career in politics, his concern for social issues remained firm, and rooted in his religious faith. He also demonstrated a tremendous capacity for work in relation to his beliefs and concerns, and indeed in his *Who's Who* entry he described 'work' as his main recreation.²⁴ Thus, when new social problems became apparent in the first few months of the war, he was drawn to that cause, and 'as in other projects ... drove headlong into his work with enthusiasm, originality, and tremendous energy'.²⁵ He worked tirelessly on behalf of wives, widows and other dependents, and then the men too when they started returning home, wounded, diseased or mentally broken. This probably reflected not only his social concerns, but also a sense of obligation towards those he had so passionately encouraged to enlist, for within weeks of the outbreak of war, he had started speaking at recruiting meetings. His only son was among the first to enlist, and when Sir George McCrae began an energetic campaign to raise four battalions from the population in and around Edinburgh, Hogge threw himself into it 'covering almost as many miles as McCrae'.²⁶ A fellow Liberal, McCrae had from 1899 to 1909 represented the East Edinburgh constituency that was now Hogge's seat, and it appears they were close colleagues. When McCrae held his first major recruiting meeting, Hogge was there to second a resolution calling for 'Edinburgh Citizens' to help find recruits for McCrae's battalions,²⁷ and in speaking he referred to his 'only son now serving with the Royal Artillery', thus giving him 'the right to urge young men to join the Army'.²⁸ But he also believed that the country had a duty to those same young men, and he would refer later, in Parliament and in writing, to

²³ Michael Fry, *Patronage and Principle, A Political History of Modern Scotland* (Aberdeen, 1987), 94.

²⁴ 'Hogge, James Myles', *Who's Who & Who Was Who* (London, 1920–2016) online edition, 1 December 2007, accessed 10 August 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ww/9780199540884.013.U197977>.

²⁵ Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 24.

²⁶ Jack Alexander, *McCrae's Battalion: the Story of the 16th Royal Scots* (Edinburgh, 2003) 83.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁸ 'Edinburgh's Rally', *Edinburgh Evening News*, 28 November 1914, 3.

those recruiting meetings, arguing that men had flocked to volunteer in their country's time of need, but the Government was not fulfilling its side of the bargain.²⁹ Like the many active trades councils, Hogge both took up individual cases and campaigned on the general issues of war pensions and allowances. But while he was dismayed at what he saw as the Government's inadequate response to the plight of many service families, it did not diminish his support for recruitment. For example, at the Annual General Meeting of the East Edinburgh Liberal Association in December 1914, the Secretary, R. M. Robertson, paid tribute to 'the excellent effects of Mr. Hogge's persuasive powers in connection with the raising of Sir George McCrae's Battalion'.³⁰

The local paper, the *Edinburgh Evening News*, under its campaigning editor Walter McPhail, would prove to be an important platform for his efforts to help servicemen and their families.³¹ Just two weeks into the war, its editorial described Hogge as someone 'to whom social reform is very dear' and as 'one of those eager personalities, always eager to be up and doing' and of whom 'there is no keener student of social problems and unemployment issues', and it went on to recommend that his 'counsel should be sought [by the Government] without delay'.³² Two weeks later, on 31 August, Hogge stood up in the House of Commons to claim that 'public opinion expects that, at any rate, a minimum ought to be paid to married men, not less than £1 a week for their dependents, and that would be the best stimulus to recruiting that we could possibly have'.³³ He was speaking a few minutes after Hamar Greenwood had made the same call, in respect of disabled soldiers, the first parliamentary reference to what would become the '£1-a-week' campaign.³⁴ While the Government had acted quite promptly on separation allowances,

²⁹ E.g. HC Deb 02 February 1915 vol 69 cc12–32, where Hogge highlights 'a great deal of discontent amongst young men who have joined the Colours ... in view of what has been repeated on public platforms with regard to what they will get from the Government'.

³⁰ 'Mr Hogge and Lord Kitchener', *Edinburgh Evening News*, 12 December 1914, 4, col. 3.

³¹ McPhail was a journalist for 60 years, including 56 on the *Edinburgh Evening News*, where he rose to the post of managing editor. 'Obituary', *The Birmingham Post*, 30 August 1941, 4. After his death, the Chairman of the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh paid tribute to 'the sum of £50,000 raised through Mr McPhail for the extension fund', so he does appear to have been someone who took on multiple causes. 'Royal Infirmary', *The Scotsman*, 9 September 1941, 2.

³² 'Comments on Current Topics', *Edinburgh Evening News*, 18 August 1914, 4, col. 4.

³³ HC Deb 31 August 1914 vol 66 cc542–43.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, cc537–38.

Hogge and a number of other MPs quickly realised, just as trades council activists were finding, that these measures provided little support for dependants left to fend for themselves when their menfolk enlisted. Many were impoverished as a result, and the Government, the Army, the Admiralty and armed forces charities all seemed incapable of responding either promptly enough, or on sufficient scale, to meet the unprecedented demand.

In his speech on 31 August, Hogge urged the Government, which at that time was led by his own party, not to let cost affect their decision, arguing ‘this war we are waging is not only for ourselves but for posterity ... and why these charges cannot be carried as part of the National Debt, I do not know’.³⁵ In response, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty, Dr Thomas Macnamara (also a Liberal MP), did not respond to the point about the National Debt, merely setting out the scale of separation allowances,³⁶ which would amount to a minimum of 11s. 1d. a week for the wife of a private with no children, at a time when her husband, if a skilled worker, might have been earning several times that before enlisting. It was a cause that might have been tailor-made for Hogge. On 7 November, in a regular column in the *Edinburgh Evening News*, entitled ‘The Talk of the Town’, he wrote that ‘recruits must know what they are going to ... that all payments will be prompt, and ... their future assured. Every payment in arrear in a stair in Edinburgh is an advertisement of caution to those thinking of enlisting.’³⁷ That night’s editorial echoed his concerns, asserting that ‘In the few months of the war there have been errors of omission which have caused much suffering and hardship ... The public simply revolt at any idea that soldiers are not being well looked after, and that their dependents are or may be in penury’, going on to recall ominously that ‘In 1855 Parliament, by 305 votes to 148, dismissed the Aberdeen Ministry “of all the talents” for neglect of the soldiers in the Crimea. The public conscience is much more tender now than it was in those days.’³⁸ There is no record of any response from the Government through the newspaper, although the matter was shortly to be addressed in Parliament.

³⁵ HC Deb 31 August 1914 vol 66 c542.

³⁶ Ibid cc543–44.

³⁷ ‘The Talk of the Town’.

³⁸ ‘Parliament’s Duty’, *Edinburgh Evening News*, 7 November 1914, 4.

Five days later, Hogge spoke at length in the House of Commons (for more than thirty-five minutes according to the rather tetchy Deputy Speaker) on the dilatory payments of separation allowances, claiming 'I have never known a case paid up until one approaches the War Office ... The celerity with which payments are made when ... it is suggested that there might be a discussion about it in Parliament is really remarkable'.³⁹ A week later, on 18 November, as described in the previous chapter, Parliament debated the issue and voted to set up a Select Committee on war pensions and allowances. Hogge did not speak in that session, most probably because he was simply not called, for his was certainly no passing interest. The following month, addressing the Edinburgh Liberal Association's annual meeting, he again 'attributed the fall-off in recruiting ... to the dilatoriness in the payment of allowances' saying that he 'had talked in the House of Commons on that and other matters, but had got no satisfaction'.⁴⁰ He also raised 'the question of pensions to be given to the relatives of those who fell at the front', for example widows who were only 'getting the separation allowances continued for 26 weeks, but men going to the front ought to know what the nation was prepared to do for their dependants. (Applause)'.⁴¹ That applause is significant, for he was addressing a Liberal Association while criticising the Liberal Government, suggesting that there was considerable support for his views amongst an audience that would be generally supportive of government policy.⁴²

Cross-party support for Hogge in Parliament

It should not be thought that Hogge was the sailors', soldiers' and families' only champion in Parliament. A number of others regularly joined him in promoting their cause and raising particular cases. As early as the end of August 1914, Liberal MP Hamar Greenwood set out his concerns in terms worth quoting in full:

³⁹ HC Deb 12 November 1914 vol.68 c152.

⁴⁰ 'Mr Hogge and Lord Kitchener', *Edinburgh Evening News*, 12 Dec 1914, 4, col.3.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

I should like to ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the friendly millionaires who support him who is really responsible for our unrivalled trade being almost unaffected, as they are boasting to-night: Does the Government fancy that it is responsible or do the millionaires think that they are responsible? The fact is, the great security of our continued trade is due to about 2 per cent. of the manhood of this nation who are prepared, at the rate of 6s. 8d. per week, to risk their lives on the battlefields of Europe.⁴³

Greenwood went on:

I would urge the Chancellor of the Exchequer to forsake the callous indifference of this and preceding English Governments in their treatment of the soldiers who keep 98 per cent. of the manhood of the country snug, safe, and prosperous ... increase the allowances to the wives and children left behind and the pensions, too, of the widows and children, who will number thousands upon thousands before this horrible war is over. Let him also increase the pensions to broken down soldiers who come back from the firing lines.⁴⁴

His words really summarised the concerns that were to be pursued increasingly inside and outside Parliament for the duration of the war, and long after it. Greenwood had a special interest, for in August 1914 he had joined the recruiting department of the War Office, where he quickly made a favourable impression through his 'ability for making quick decisions',⁴⁵ a skill that seems to have been in short supply and, as noted above, he was one of the first to call for war pensions of a minimum of £1 a week. Others too, not only from the Liberal party, spoke regularly on the subject, often raising their own experience of helping constituents, serving on local pension committees, and so on. But what distinguishes Hogge from his fellow concerned MPs, is the amount of work he did outside Parliament, and his subsequent founding of the second national organisation of ex-service men.

⁴³ HC Deb 31 August 1914 vol.66 cc536–37.

⁴⁴ Ibid c537.

⁴⁵ Seedorf, 'Greenwood, Hamar', *ODNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33545>, q.v.

Notwithstanding his extra-parliamentary activity, Hogge also, from the autumn of 1914 onwards, spoke frequently in Parliament, despite Government restrictions on parliamentary debate that severely restricted backbench MPs during the war.⁴⁶ He spoke most often to criticise his own government's handling of war pensions and dependents' allowances, sometimes to criticise other aspects of its action or inactions, rarely to praise, and his interventions during 1915 demonstrated growing expertise in the fine detail of the increasingly complicated arrangements governing pensions and allowances. For example, in March, in the case of partially disabled soldiers, he objected to a proposal to consolidate the five shillings a week disablement benefit, which they were each due under the National Insurance Act, into their twenty-five shillings a week military disablement pension. His argument was that 'if we insist on the national insurance scheme paying that 5s., we shall retain to the House the right to criticise the pensions from year to year. If we allow it to be taken out by this Bill, we shall enable the Cabinet to get rid of a responsibility of which they have no right to divest themselves'.⁴⁷ Of course it was the sort of responsibility the Cabinet was all too eager to off-load, and he lost that particular point, but it was only one of many that he, and some of his colleagues, continued to press on the more junior members of the Government tasked to defend such policies. In May, another MP, William Bridgeman (Conservative), raised the case of a woman who had been left 'in destitution' because her husband had died since their son joined up, and she was now dependent on him, but no separation allowance was payable in that situation.⁴⁸ When Bridgeman pointed out that if the son had 'shirked his duty' and stayed at home, he would now be supporting his mother, the Under-Secretary of State for War, Harold Baker (Liberal) stonewalled repeatedly, saying that he could not 'go beyond the recommendation of the Select Committee'.⁴⁹ Hogge stood up and asked simply 'Is it the policy of the Government to take advantage of that man's patriotism?'.⁵⁰ Baker declined to respond and simply moved on to another question,

⁴⁶ For example, HC Deb 3 February 1915 vol.69 cc44–92, in particular Hogge's intervention, cc64–69.

⁴⁷ HC Deb 4 March 1915 vol.70 cc1109–10.

⁴⁸ HC Deb 4 May 1915 vol 71 cc957–60.

⁴⁹ Ibid c960.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

but the sense of outrage and frustration felt by Hogge and his fellow MPs, in raising such cases, is apparent even in Hansard's deadpan accounts.

Later the same month, Hogge secured a full day for the Commons to discuss the Second Report of the Select Committee,⁵¹ which had recommended a 'statutory committee of the Royal Patriotic Fund Corporation' to administer supplementary grants to dependants.⁵² He again raised the plight of mothers widowed after their sons had joined up, arguing that it was 'extraordinarily hard. There is a double sacrifice. I do wish the Government would look into this point a little more sympathetically than they have done up to the present moment.'⁵³ He went on to raise a series of other concerns, illustrating large groups of people severely disadvantaged by war service but unable to claim support for various reasons. Although the Select Committee appointed the previous November had held extensive hearings, Hogge pointed out that only one Member of the House of Commons, other than Government Ministers, had been invited to give evidence. As Hogge declared:

there are a great many men in the country with great experience in the administration of old age pensions and the Poor Law who have never been given an opportunity of putting their views before the Committee ... if we had got proper opportunities at those times, we should not require to take these opportunities of expressing our views.⁵⁴

While this might have been interpreted as 'sour grapes' on the part of Hogge since he was not appointed to the committee, or even called as a witness, there is no evidence that was the case, and indeed, six months earlier he had written in a newspaper column, in the week that the committee was first established, that 'the private Member of the House is, as usual, in everything connected with this war, left entirely out in the cold'.⁵⁵ On both occasions it appears he was simply expressing the indisputable fact that the Select

⁵¹ *Special Report on Naval and Military Services*, HC paper 196, q.v.

⁵² HC Deb 18 May 1915 vol.71 cc2250–88. Also see more detailed discussion in previous chapter.

⁵³ *Ibid* c2268.

⁵⁴ *Ibid* cc2271–72.

⁵⁵ 'The Week in Parliament: (by a Scottish MP)' [i.e. Hogge], *Edinburgh Evening News*, 23 November 1914, 4.

Committee was rather dominated by Government Ministers and appointees, and that this had quickly become the pattern since the war began.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty, Dr Thomas Macnamara, wound up this later debate by admitting:

in days gone by it has often been a reproach levelled at the Governments of the day, whether Liberal or Tory ... that in this country we did not make due provision for those who fight our battles, and for those whom they may leave behind if they sacrifice their lives on our behalf.⁵⁶

That was certainly the case, and a 'reproach' that dated back centuries, as the history shows. However, Macnamara went on to make a somewhat sweeping claim for the rather modest reforms that his Government had made to date:

Such a reproach is no longer possible as a result of the provisions now made; and the crippled old soldier, with his row of medals, sweeping the crossing for a copper; the shattered veteran of bygone fights spending his declining years in the workhouse; the widow and orphans of the fighting man seeking the charity of the sympathetic are sad spectacles that ought not in future to be any longer possible because of these provisions.⁵⁷

These were fine aspirations, but like so many political promises of 'never again!', they were not matched by the reality. It is apparent from the contributions of Hogge and others that they were unconvinced by Macnamara, and it would be many years before anything like his vision came to pass, and only then after a series of improvements to the 'provisions' that the latter lauded in his closing speech. In the intervening period, impoverished and wounded veterans would indeed gather on street corners, while, in the weeks following Macnamara's bold assertions, there were repeated questions about when a Bill would be

⁵⁶ HC Deb 18 May 1915 vol.71 c2287.

⁵⁷ Ibid c2287.

introduced to give effect to the Select Committee's recommendations. It was eventually read to the House on 30 June 1915 and this time Hogge was the first to be called, reflecting the prominence he had now attained on these issues. He reiterated some of the concerns raised in previous debates, but most of all he urged that 'the sooner we get some body set up and at work the better ... the country wants to be satisfied as soon as possible that the Government is looking after the interests of the relatives of our men who have been killed at the front.'⁵⁸ Others also urged the rapid establishment of the new committee but, as noted previously, the Bill only finally received Royal Assent in November 1915, almost exactly a year after the Select Committee had been set up. By that time Hogge's work outside Parliament on these issues seems to have been taking up much more of his time than speaking in the House; indeed it must have been close to a full-time occupation. His newspaper articles inevitably created yet more work, and Ian Elder found that 'by 1916 he was receiving 500 letters a week and as, in contrast to many MPs, he lacked private means and received only £400 as a yearly salary, he had to ask for stamped addressed envelopes.'⁵⁹ This indicated the extent to which he was devoting not only his time and energies, but also his finances, to the work.

Civil Liabilities relief

From February 1916, Hogge and several fellow MPs began to raise the question of the civil liabilities, such as rent or mortgage payments, incurred by men who had enlisted. William Pringle, for example, claimed that 'in every country where compulsory service exists ... there is provision made for a moratorium to be given to the men brought compulsorily to the Colours', except in the United Kingdom.⁶⁰ The issue was first inserted into a debate on a Government motion, proposed by Asquith as Prime Minister, that 'until the House otherwise determines ... no Public Bills other than Government Bills be introduced', which would have meant MPs could not introduce private members' bills.⁶¹ After a series of strong objections from Hogge and others, this was amended to apply only 'until the thirty-

⁵⁸ HC Deb 18 May 1915 vol.71 cc1839–40

⁵⁹ Elder, 'Hogge: Backbench Maverick', 21.

⁶⁰ HC Deb 16 February 1916 vol.80 c71.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 65.

first day of March',⁶² limiting the moratorium to a more reasonable six weeks. No action was taken on civil liabilities that day, but the point was made and pressure maintained until Asquith was obliged to outline a scheme to the Lords during the Secret Session on 25 April 1916.⁶³ It was presented in more detail on 17 May, by William Hayes Fisher, Conservative MP, former Vice-President of the Royal Patriotic Fund Corporation, and newly appointed Parliamentary Secretary to the Local Government Board. In that latter role, he explained the new scheme would give financial assistance to men who joined up during the war (going back to August 1914) where 'serious hardship would be caused to them on account of their inability to meet their financial obligations by reason of their undertaking military service'.⁶⁴ Assistance would be limited to £104 per annum, with local Commissioners investigating each claim and reporting to a central Civil Liabilities Committee, which would decide how much to award. Hogge asked Hayes Fisher a series of pointed questions and he clearly displayed a depth of knowledge on the issue. Indeed, around this time he wrote an advisory pamphlet on 'Pensions, Allowances and Civil Liabilities', published by the *Daily Mail*.⁶⁵

In fact, by June the *Edinburgh Evening News* was opining that 'the average Scottish member of Parliament is a flabby personage' and that they should take lessons in 'Hibernian persistence' from 'the member for East Edinburgh', in pursuing 'the pensions question'.⁶⁶ By this time the paper had become an important platform for Hogge, strongly supported by editor Walter McPhail. Together they set up a Pensions Bureau which 'investigated individual cases of hardship and made recommendations for review',⁶⁷ while Hogge also started a regular advice column on war pensions and allowances, often followed by a series of cryptic responses to individual correspondents. The latter eventually appeared on their

⁶² HC Deb 16 February 1916 vol.80 c76.

⁶³ HC Deb 25 April 1916 vol 21 cc811–18 ('The Secret Session' - actual proceedings not recorded).

⁶⁴ HC Deb 17 May 1916 vol 82 cc1527–30.

⁶⁵ Ward, *British Veterans' Organizations*, 24. Ward also credits Hogge with sponsoring the 'Civil Liabilities Act' in 1915, though that is questionable, as neither Hansard nor the National Archives database of UK legislation has any record of such an Act, and the Civil Liabilities Committee appears to have only come into being in April–May the following year, 1916.

⁶⁶ 'Comments on Current Topics', *Edinburgh Evening News*, 10 June 1916, 4, col. 3.

⁶⁷ Elder, *Backbench Maverick*, 21–22.

own under the heading 'Mr Hogge's Pension Replies', rather in the manner of small ads.⁶⁸ By August his postbag had doubled again, to 1,000 letters a week written on behalf of claimants,⁶⁹ and a couple of examples show how involved he would become in individual cases. For example, a man wounded in '24 separate parts of the body' including the loss of a kneecap, two toes, one eye (and the other damaged) and more, was allocated only a three-quarter pension, until Hogge raised the case in the Commons.⁷⁰ In another case, a miner from Fife, medically discharged after a year's service, was awarded 'the munificent sum of 4s 8d a week. It took me nearly three months to get this man 20s a week for himself and 2s for his little girl. Is it not monstrous that such a thing should be possible nowadays?'.⁷¹ Moreover, it is clear from Hogge's articles and speeches that these were far from isolated cases.

The impacts of conscription, and the Somme, and the creation of ex-service organisations

The issue of war pensions and dependents' allowances had become one of considerable public interest and national and local activity by 1916. It was given added impetus by the introduction of conscription (in England, Scotland and Wales), for it could no longer be argued that men had enlisted voluntarily, knowing what to expect (though that argument was itself questionable). Added to this, of course, was the impact on the British public, and particularly service families, of the scale of death and disability resulting from the Somme offensive. With over 19,000 men killed on the first day alone, and twice that number wounded,⁷² there were many more widows across the nation, along with a flood of disabled or diseased men returning home. The latter were now sufficiently numerous in their communities that they began to gather together for mutual support and, as Stephen Ward found, 'Local groups sprouted up throughout Britain in 1916 for a variety of reasons.'⁷³ These included the Calverley Ex-Service Men's and Dependents' Association in Yorkshire, where it persuaded its fellow citizens that money raised for a memorial would be

⁶⁸ E.g. 'Mr Hogge's Pension Replies', *Edinburgh Evening News*, 14 April 1917, 4.

⁶⁹ Un-named author, 'Striving for Justice for the Wounded', *People's Journal*, 25 August 1916.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ 'Striving for Justice for the Wounded', *People's Journal*.

⁷² William Philpott, *Bloody Victory: the Sacrifice on the Somme* (London, 2010), 207.

⁷³ Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 20.

better spent on 'the living rather than the dead'; in other words supporting dependants and widows.⁷⁴ This group also assisted individuals make representations to the local war pensions committee, and it was a similar story with the Poplar Discharged Soldiers' Club, formed in September 1916.⁷⁵ Around the same time, as described in the previous chapter, two years of activity among trades councils culminated in the formation of the Blackburn Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers.

At the national level, 1916 also saw the creation in December of the Ministry of Pensions, one of the first acts of the new Coalition Government headed by Lloyd George as Prime Minister. The groundwork for the new Ministry had begun months earlier, with Arthur Henderson's appointment as Paymaster-General, and hence Chairman of the Chelsea Hospital Commissioners, his promise of pensions reform, and a concerted campaign by MPs, trades unions, and trades councils, for a Pensions Ministry.⁷⁶ Indeed, as noted previously, Hayes Fisher, MP, a former Chairman of the Royal Patriotic Fund Corporation, had two years earlier, during the debate that set up the Select Committee on Naval and Military Services (Pensions and Grants), called for 'one body under Government control', citing the muddle and complexity of the existing system, but his well-argued request had gone unheeded.⁷⁷ Finally, on 14 November 1916, Henderson presented the 'Board of Pensions Bill' to Parliament, proposing a new body for 'the consolidation of pensions administration and the simplification of procedure under a new Government Department, namely, the Board of Pensions'.⁷⁸ It had a troubled passage through its second reading and committee stages, emerging with so many 'very extensive amendments', most proposed by the Government to meet its many critics, that when it returned on 30 November, re-titled the 'Ministry of Pensions Bill', it was tantamount to a new one.⁷⁹ The fundamental difference was that where the proposed Board would have consisted of a representative of each of four departments that dealt with war pensions, the Ministry would be a new department that would 'unify the administration of ... pensions, grants, and allowances' in a

⁷⁴ Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 20.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ See chapter 2.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ HC Deb 14 November 1916 vol 87 cc641–710.

⁷⁹ HC Deb 30 November 1916 vol 88 c532–609.

much more comprehensive manner than originally proposed, by a transfer of powers from those same departments.⁸⁰ On 31 December, the Bill duly became the Ministry of Pensions Act, 1916, with its first Minister being George Barnes, Labour MP for Glasgow Blackfriars and Hutchesontown, and one of the original members of that Select Committee. Hogge was offered an under-secretaryship in the new ministry but turned it down, reportedly declaring at a public meeting that 'He would not have taken any office in this Administration'.⁸¹ Stephen Ward claims that 'Hogge evidently thought that he deserved to become Minister of Pensions and refused the offer',⁸² but his reference for that assertion confirms only that he declined the 'subordinate position',⁸³ not that he did so because thought he should have been the Minister, although Ward is surely right in saying that there was 'little doubt that Hogge was the most qualified among MPs',⁸⁴ on the subject of pensions. It is worth noting that during his previous five years in Parliament, he had never taken the party whip, and indeed had previously turned down an under-secretaryship, offered to him by Asquith, and he was particularly critical of the way the new Coalition Government had come about.⁸⁵ Hogge claimed that 'the public very frequently made the mistake of thinking that men went into public life for what they could get out of it' but, on the contrary, he had 'turned down a job with £1200 attached to it [the pensions under-secretaryship]';⁸⁶ a moral stance that seems consistent with his approach to public life. A few months later, in June 1917, he was also quoted as saying 'he had no desire to belong to the present Government as he thought he could do a great deal more for the soldier and sailor outside it'.⁸⁷ What is more, while correspondence from Matthew Nathan, secretary to the Ministry of Pensions, to Prime Minister Lloyd George, recognised Hogge's 'obvious ability', it also conveyed the 'dismay' of both him and his Minister, George Barnes, at the possibility of 'handing over the department to a new Minister [Hogge] whose widely

⁸⁰ HC Deb 30 November 1916 vol 88 c539.

⁸¹ 'Mr Hogge Explains – the Under-Secretaryship Question', *Edinburgh Evening News*, 16 December 1916, 5, col.5.

⁸² Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 25.

⁸³ 'The Late J. M. Hogge: An Appreciation', *Edinburgh Evening News*, 29 October 1928, 6.

⁸⁴ Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 25.

⁸⁵ 'Mr Hogge Explains', *Edinburgh Evening News*,

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ 'Parliament's Meanest Act. The Calling-up of Discharged Men', *The Manchester Guardian*, 4 June 1917, 7.

publicised pledges may lead to ... life pensions on the part of all men who have served in the war at home or abroad'.⁸⁸ This would have been a major expansion of entitlement to war pensions, beyond those discharged with disability or disease, which, wrote Nathan, would be 'a very big matter'.⁸⁹ That was a mis-representation of Hogge's position, and he had repeatedly said so in parliamentary debate,⁹⁰ but the point is that Nathan, and presumably Barnes, apparently believed it to be the case. While this refers to the situation in May 1917, when George Barnes was stepping down as Minister, it is clear that Hogge was not seen by officials as a suitable candidate for the post. Indeed, it seems that both they and Hogge were agreed on one thing, namely that he was better outside the Government than in it, albeit for different reasons.

It may also have been that Hogge just did not believe the new ministry had sufficient powers and resources to implement the kind of deal on pensions that he felt veterans and their families deserved. Certainly, he noted in a speech in Edinburgh on 15 December 1916, when the new ministry was being established, that 'now that he had secured with others a unified system of machinery, they must go further and equip it with the raw material'.⁹¹ To that end he proposed a set of 'Ten Commandments' for the new government. As well as reflecting how Hogge's religious faith infused his politics, the Commandments neatly summed up his and his supporters' main demands, namely: a decent minimum pension 'below which no one will fall'; support for any man enlisted as fit but discharged as unfit, including 'consumptives' (TB); application of new warrants to pre-war regulars; support for mothers deprived of their dead sons' earnings; care, training, and employment for disabled men; more generous support for 'motherless children and orphans'; and continuation of the Civil Liabilities Committee to rehabilitate men when discharged.⁹²

⁸⁸ Matthew Nathan, Ministry of Pensions, to David Lloyd George, 26 May 1917, 3rd page, Lloyd George Papers, Parliamentary Archives, LG/F/4/2/5.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ For example, HC Deb 20 March 1917 vol 92 c643–48, where Hogge proposes an amendment that would give disabled ex-service men the statutory right to a war pension and, c658, rejects an attempt to misrepresent his position.

⁹¹ 'Pensions Commandments. Mr. Hogge's Reform Suggestions.' *The Times*, December 16, 1916, 5.

⁹² The ten points have been merged into eight for this summary.

Founding a national organisation

Whatever Hogge's reasons for staying out of the Government, there is no dispute about what he did next, which was to set up an organisation whose primary object was 'to remedy the inequalities and injustices in the grant and administration of pensions'.⁹³ This was 'the Naval and Military War Pensions and Welfare League', formed on 15 January 1917, with co-founder T. H. Garside, of whose earlier life there is little record, but who would work closely with Hogge over the next few years, for example in publishing the guide *War Pensions and Allowances* in 1918.⁹⁴ They launched the League by circular to the local and national press, in which Hogge said that his experience had 'convinced him that it is necessary to organize a new association to deal with the present circumstances and those which will arise more acutely on demobilization'.⁹⁵ The report in *The Daily Mirror* is particularly interesting for its comment that 'There are few, if any, men in the country who know more about the vast and complicated business of pensions than Mr. Hogge, and, as everything he takes up, he takes up thoroughly, there is every prospect of the new association being successfully launched'; and it concludes by describing him as 'fresh-complexioned, with a genial manner, a keen sense of humour and a Scottish accent', a rare personal description of the man.⁹⁶ The following week he visited Blackburn and spoke to its Association, the one set up by the local trades council.⁹⁷ By this time, a number of similar groups had been set up by other trades councils; they had not yet coalesced into a national association, though Hogge's presence suggests they were achieving some prominence on the national stage. He told them about his League, explained its aims and methods, and reported that 'it had been criticized on the ground that it would be a great danger to the State'.⁹⁸ He disagreed of course, arguing instead, says Ward, that 'If Parliament was impressed by pressure and power it would react more quickly to make pensions more nearly adequate to meet the needs of the ex-servicemen, and pressure was the keynote of

⁹³ 'War pensions and Welfare: Mr. Hogge's New League', *The Times*, 16 January 1917, 5.

⁹⁴ Hogge and Garside, *War Pensions and Allowances*, q.v.

⁹⁵ 'War pensions and Welfare', *The Times*, 16 January 1917, 5.

⁹⁶ 'To-day's Gossip: M.P.'s New Move', *The Daily Mirror*, 17 January 1917, 10.

⁹⁷ See previous chapter.

⁹⁸ 'Separation Allowances', *The Times*, 22 January 1917, 5.

his league's operation'. As a summation of Hogge's position, in both his parliamentary and extra-parliamentary activities, that was undoubtedly correct.⁹⁹

The Review of Exceptions Bill

The same month as Hogge launched his new league, the Government began taking steps towards a new Act that would have unforeseen and far-reaching effects. War Cabinet minutes of the time show the constant concern about low rates of recruitment, and in December the Secretary of State for War, Lord Derby, had 'put it on record that, in order to maintain the drafts ... it would soon become necessary to introduce an amending Military Service Bill'.¹⁰⁰ The following month Neville Chamberlain, as Director of National Service, raised the prospect of cancelling exemptions from military service for men aged eighteen to twenty-one,¹⁰¹ a step the War Cabinet endorsed, excepting only men in 'occupations ... of vital national importance'.¹⁰² The reasoning was that, even with conscription, too few recruits were being drafted, as so many were exempted by reasons such as their physical health, occupation, or domestic responsibilities. The following month, the War Cabinet went further, instructing the Home Secretary to draft 'a Bill providing for the review ... of all Tribunal exemptions held by men of 31 years and under',¹⁰³ with a view to conscripting them if their exemptions no longer stood up to scrutiny. In March, the pressure on the Cabinet increased when the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Sir William Robertson, 'reported upon the bad outlook in regard to drafts, and urged the importance of pressing forward the amendments to the Military Service Acts'.¹⁰⁴ The Military Service (Review of Exceptions) Bill was duly presented to the Commons the same month, introducing powers 'to cancel by successive age groups all existing exemptions whether granted by government Departments, by Tribunals, or under the Military Service Acts'.¹⁰⁵ The problem was that this would include men who had previously enlisted, often as enthusiastic volunteers, and been discharged because of serious wounds or disease

⁹⁹ Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 26.

¹⁰⁰ WC 11, 19 December 1916, 2, minute 1 (f), TNA, CAB 23/1/11.

¹⁰¹ WC 39, 19 January 1917, 4, par. 2, TNA, CAB 23/1/39.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 2, minute 1, TNA, CAB 23/1/39.

¹⁰³ WC 55, 5 February 1917, 2, minute 4, TNA, CAB 23/1/55.

¹⁰⁴ WC 99, 19 March 1917, 3, minute 3, TNA, CAB 23/2/17.

¹⁰⁵ WC 55, 5 February 1917, 4, appendix I, par 5, TNA, CAB 23/1/55.

contracted in service, so the proposal provoked outrage amongst ex-servicemen. On the Bill's presentation, the ever-vigilant Hogge, assisted by another campaigner for veterans' welfare, William Pringle (also a Scottish Liberal,¹⁰⁶ 'Young Scot', and close friend for many years), proposed an amendment to give all disabled ex-servicemen a statutory right to a pension.¹⁰⁷ Hogge made a powerful speech explaining the reasoning behind it, which he summed up in one sentence, asserting that 'I believe that this is a just War, and I am prepared to do anything to see it through, but I want to look in the face the men whom we ask to take up this responsibility'.¹⁰⁸ He and Pringle had some support from former Prime Minister Asquith,¹⁰⁹ amongst others; however, in return for a Government offer to consider setting up an Appeal Court for ex-soldiers denied a pension, they withdrew the amendment,¹¹⁰ and the Bill went into Committee,¹¹¹ followed by its third reading,¹¹² and it received the Royal Assent on 5 April.¹¹³

Stephen Ward claims that 'Those men disabled by war wounds ... were exempted from review. The bill was only concerned with those who were rejected by medical teams in the early part of the war when requirements were higher than was felt necessary in 1917'.¹¹⁴ But he cites no evidence for those claims, and they are incorrect. On the contrary, the Bill in its first draft specifically empowered the Army Council to 'require any man ... who has left or been discharged from the naval or military service of the Crown in consequence of disablement or ill-health' to report for re-examination,¹¹⁵ and this clause remained in the final version of the Bill when it became the Military Service (Review of Exceptions) Act. Indeed, an amendment during the third reading *would* have exempted 'any officer or man who has left or been discharged from the naval or military service of the Crown in consequence of disablement ... certified ... to be the result of wounds (including injury from

¹⁰⁶ Marc Brodie, 'Pringle, William Mather Rutherford (1874–1928)', *ODNB*, online version: 3 January 2008, accessed 28 January 2021, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35614>.

¹⁰⁷ HC Deb 20 March 1917 vol 92 cc636–715.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid* c647.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid* cc657–58.

¹¹⁰ HC Deb 20 March 1917 vol 92 c712.

¹¹¹ HC Deb 02 April 1917 vol 92 cc977–1043.

¹¹² HC Deb 03 April 1917 vol 92 cc1139–1211.

¹¹³ HC Deb 05 April 1917 vol 92 c1485.

¹¹⁴ Ward, 'British Veteran's Organizations', 30.

¹¹⁵ Military Service (Review of Exceptions) Bill, 23 March 1917, 7 Geo. 5, c.12, 1—(1)(b).

poisonous gas) received in battle or in any engagement with the enemy'.¹¹⁶ Yet this was rejected by the House, by 151 votes to 46.¹¹⁷ So there can be no doubt, contrary to Ward's assertion, that the Government fully intended that discharged soldiers and sailors would be recalled for re-examination and, potentially therefore, for re-enlistment.

The reaction was swift and, perhaps surprisingly in war-time, very public, with the increasingly militant Poplar Discharged Soldiers' Club organising a meeting open to all ex-servicemen in London's Victoria Park, just a few days later, on 8 April,¹¹⁸ where they passed a resolution condemning the Act as unjust and ill-conceived.¹¹⁹ More demonstrations followed, with one assembling in East London and marching to Trafalgar Square, which was not just a convenient venue for a mass meeting, but a mighty symbolic one as well. Facing banners in the crowd with slogans like 'comb them out of funk-holes and the discharged men will go again',¹²⁰ James Hogge and William Pringle made speeches, with Hogge presenting a man who 'had fought in France and lost one arm', but who had been ordered 'to rejoin the Colours', with a note to 'Bring your artificial eye with you'.¹²¹ That would have had a particular resonance among many in the crowd who would have been aware of government-appointed experts who before the war testified to Workmen's Compensation Tribunals that 'a man can see as well with one eye as with two'.¹²² Ward claims that 'later investigation revealed that tribunals were over-zealous in recalling even combat veterans who had lost limbs',¹²³ but it is debatable whether the tribunals were 'over-zealous', given the clear wording of the Act. Moreover, there can be no doubt that such cases were common, and they fuelled the outrage expressed in those meetings and demonstrations. Yet it is important to note that the veterans' central message was one of protest 'against

¹¹⁶ HC Deb 03 April 1917 vol 92 c1171.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid* c1184–85.

¹¹⁸ *The Hackney and Kingsland Gazette*, 11 April 1917, referenced in Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 30, fn 29 (no page number or headline, original not found). Like several of the ex-services groups around this time, the reported name varied from one source to another, with no definitive original record. For example, 'The Disabled and Rejected', *The Times*, 14 May 1917, 5, called this group the 'Poplar Sailors' and Soldiers' Club'.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*.

¹²⁰ 'Recall of Discharged Men', *The Times*, 23 April 1917, 5.

¹²¹ *Ibid*.

¹²² HC Deb 18 November 1914 vol 68 c467. The quote is from George Barnes.

¹²³ Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 32.

being recalled to the colours when medically fit men are still being retained in Government offices and workshops'.¹²⁴ So, despite all they had endured, they were not refusing to re-enlist, just demanding that those who had never served were called up first, an attitude that became enshrined in the slogan 'every man once before any man twice'.¹²⁵

Founding the Federation

Early in April, the same month that the Act was passed, Hogge and Pringle met with F. A. Rumsey, from the Poplar Discharged Soldiers' Club, and decided to form the Federation, with the three of them respectively President, Vice-President and General Secretary. For once this was not announced in the columns of *The Times*, and no other record has been found of the exact date it was formed, either in other newspapers or archives.¹²⁶ One question which arises out of this sequence of events is why Hogge did not throw his influence behind the now-National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers, to campaign against the controversial Act. Ward plausibly suggests that 'The answer was linked, perhaps, to Hogge's personality and political awareness ... he recognized the Review of Exceptions Act as a focal point to which thousands of ex-servicemen throughout the country might rally'.¹²⁷ The Association would also have been seen by the Liberal Hogge as closely linked to the Labour Party and the trade union movement,¹²⁸ because that is where it was born and its branches, though quite numerous by this time, were concentrated in more traditional working-class areas of northern England, Scotland and the Midlands (see maps in chapters 2 and 5). While these were also the home regions of many soldiers, many

¹²⁴ 'Recall of Discharged Men', *The Times*.

¹²⁵ For example: William Pringle, HC Deb 21 June 1917 vol 94 cc2004–5; 'Discharged Soldiers' Protest. Suspension of Review of Exceptions Act Demanded', *Cambridge Daily News*, 25 June 1917, 3.

¹²⁶ 'The Disabled and Rejected: Protest Meeting', *The Times*, 14 May 1917, 5, reports that the Federation was formed six weeks earlier, ie around the beginning of April. Contemporaneous accounts often call it just the 'National Federation of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers' but the fuller title was used from the start, though little if any 'demobilisation' had taken place by then. Hogge had spoken about the future challenges of mass demobilisation post-war, so he may simply have been planning ahead in choosing that title.

¹²⁷ Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 33.

¹²⁸ Even in later life, while strongly tempted to defect to 'the ranks of Labour ... the break with Liberalism was difficult', and he remained a Liberal to his dying day. Right Hon. Wm. Graham, M.P., 'Tribute from a Colleague', *Edinburgh Evening News*, 29 October 1928, 6.

others came from more affluent areas and from skilled or clerical jobs that set them apart from coalminers, steelworkers, dockers and the like. There was no strict demarcation, but Hogge's Federation seems to have appealed more to the former, given its membership in less industrialised areas, compared to the Association. Fairly quickly, what had been the London headquarters of Hogge's League became the head office of the Federation, while League branches around the country became Federation members, thus contributing to the rapid establishment of the new body.¹²⁹ Membership was open to all who had served in the British armed forces, other than officers, unless they had risen from the ranks. Charles Kimball contends that this policy was 'the work of the organization's more ideologically doctrinaire elements' to stop it 'falling under the influence of senior officers from middle and upper-class backgrounds, who ... might use their prestige to temper the enthusiasm of working-class members for activities that challenged government policies too openly'.¹³⁰ Kimball, however, offers no evidence for this class-based analysis, and contemporaneous accounts suggest their reasons were practical, rather than ideological or doctrinaire. For example, at a meeting called to set up a branch in Liverpool, one of the leading members, Sergeant-Major G. W. Blythe, explained that 'we refuse membership to soldiers and sailors of a higher rank than warrant officer' because 'The officer, by rank and influence, is strong enough to fight for himself. Our movement must be democratic, and the presence of an officer in our ranks would have obvious disadvantages'.¹³¹ That seems plausible, given that those sailors and soldiers had been following orders for several years, and now wished to run their own organisation.

The creation of these first two national veterans' groups, the Association and the Federation, came at a time, the spring of 1917, when the British Government was keeping a nervous eye both on events in Russia, and on those sections of the British left that might seek to emulate aspects of the February Revolution. When reports began to appear at the beginning of May in British newspapers, about the establishment of a 600-strong 'Soldiers'

¹²⁹ Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 34.

¹³⁰ Kimball, 'The ex-service movement', 34.

¹³¹ 'Federation of Soldiers and Sailors', *Liverpool Echo*, 7 May 1917, 3.

and Workmen's Council' in Petrograd,¹³² this prompted sections of the British trade union and labour movement to attempt similar actions in the UK.¹³³ These went far beyond what the Federation and the Association were calling for, and there is no record of either national body, nor any of their branches, getting involved. On the contrary, they were suspicious of events in Russia, which came in the context of an international socialist anti-war movement that was working towards the Third Zimmerwald (Stockholm) Conference later in the year,¹³⁴ to which Federation members would in due course express fierce opposition.¹³⁵ However, while mostly not supporting the radicalism represented by Soldiers' and Workmen's Councils, or the Zimmerwald movement, discharged veterans were united in their opposition to those clauses in the Review of Exceptions Act that might send them back to the trenches before those who had never served, and they expressed that very publicly. Indeed, the Federation, led by Hogge and Pringle, went so far as to advise members to refuse to comply with the Act, something that Ward argues 'in wartime bordered on treason',¹³⁶ though there is no evidence that the Cabinet viewed it as such. Still, there was so much turmoil around this time that some historians, such as James Hinton, have suggested that the UK came close to revolution at this point.¹³⁷ Others, like Gerard De Groot, have utterly dismissed that proposition, arguing that 'Far from bringing Britain close to revolution, the Great War merely confirmed the unrevolutionary character of the British worker'.¹³⁸ On balance, De Groot's conclusion is the more convincing, given the British state's long established ability to give dissenters just enough ground to fend off any serious uprising.

¹³² 'Reorganising Russia – New Soldiers' and Workmen's Council', *The Manchester Guardian*, 1 May 1917, 7.

¹³³ 'Soldiers' and Workmen's Committees', WC 200, 31 July 1917, 2, minute 1, TNA, CAB 23/3/48.

¹³⁴ For context see, for example, R. Craig Nation, 'Petrograd and Stockholm', chapter in *War on War: Lenin, the Zimmerwald Left, and the Origins of Communist Internationalism* (Durham, North Carolina, 1989), in particular 172, accessed online 25 May 2020, eISBN 978-0-8223-8156-3.

¹³⁵ 'The Stockholm Conference: Views of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers', *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 23 August 1917, 3. Explored further below.

¹³⁶ Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 35.

¹³⁷ James Hinton, *Labour and Socialism: A History of the British Labour Movement 1867–1974* (Brighton, 1983), 107.

¹³⁸ Gerard De Groot, *Back in Blighty: the British at home in World War One* (London, 2014), 156.

Meanwhile there were indications that the Government was feeling the more conventional pressure from MPs and others, to the extent that it slowly relaxed certain restrictions on war pensions and allowances. For example, Hogge learned in April 1917 that pensions or gratuities would henceforward be issued to parents of soldiers killed in service, 'without regard to the separation allowances being paid on the living sons', where previously this had been denied.¹³⁹ Resentment at the Review of Exemptions Act had also prompted the formation of a number of other groups opposed to it, in addition to the Federation. These were mostly small and localised, and Hogge realised they would be more effective if collected into a single body. Towards the end of May he wrote to *The Manchester Guardian* to urge 'It is vital that discharged men should concentrate their energy', going on to reference his own group, the Federation, which was headquartered in London, 'another with Blackburn as its headquarters' (a reference to the Association) and a third 'being inaugurated with Liverpool as its headquarters'.¹⁴⁰ In that letter he asked such men to write to him with a view to bringing everyone together; and he must have had a good response, for early the following month he announced his intention to form an 'amalgamated union of discharged and demobilised men', composed of:

all the organisations that have sprung up to protect discharged soldiers' interests – such as the Pensions and Welfare League started by Mr. Hogge, the Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors [sic], and the various societies (there is one in Manchester) which were created to oppose the hated Review of Exceptions Act.¹⁴¹

That report went on to say that 'The movement will be started by a demonstration in Hyde Park on June 24'.¹⁴² It is interesting to note that the 'London Correspondent' responsible for the above article described Hogge as someone 'who has fought for pensioned soldiers so persistently in Parliament' and concluded 'This is an interesting development, and in the hands of a man so active and courageous as Mr. Hogge is likely to come to something

¹³⁹ 'Pensions for Soldiers' Parents', *The Times*, 23 April 1917, 5.

¹⁴⁰ 'An Association of the Discharged', *The Manchester Guardian*, 24 May 1917, 6.

¹⁴¹ 'Our London Correspondence: An Organisation for Returned Fighters', *The Manchester Guardian*, 5 June 1917, 4.

¹⁴² *ibid.*

real'.¹⁴³ Clearly it was not just Hogge's own local paper, the *Edinburgh Evening News*, that held him in high regard.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, there is evidence throughout the period that he was widely acknowledged and respected as the leading campaigner for veterans' pensions and allowances, even by those who took a different approach and disapproved of his constant criticism of government. Probably the most striking of these was Wilfrid Ashley who, both on his own account and as Chairman of the Comrades' Executive Committee, disagreed frequently and vigorously with Hogge, but later stood up for him when he was viciously attacked during a heated debate in Parliament, declaring that Hogge was 'one of the first men in the House of Commons who took up the cudgels on behalf of discharged sailors and soldiers'.¹⁴⁵

The Government climbdown on the Review of Exceptions Act

Hogge's demonstration duly took place on 24 June,¹⁴⁶ but the Government had begun to back down several days earlier. On 20 June the War Cabinet discussed 'the forthcoming debate on the administration of recruiting', during which discussion it was claimed that 'several alleged cases of abuse of their powers by the Military Authorities' had either 'been investigated and proved groundless' or 'were still under investigation'.¹⁴⁷ Notwithstanding that dismissive assertion, it was decided to 'make a concession with regard to men who had served abroad during the period of the war, and been discharged on medical grounds: such men being in future granted their discharge'.¹⁴⁸ The wording is somewhat convoluted, but the meaning is clear, and it was a significant concession that essentially met the central demand of Hogge, Pringle and the Federation. However, it was not immediately publicised and so it did not save the 'Military Authorities' from a savaging in the Commons the following day, 21 June. William Pringle opened that debate, recalling that when the Review

¹⁴³ 'Our London Correspondence: An Organisation for Returned Fighters', *The Manchester Guardian*, 5 June 1917, 4.

¹⁴⁴ As set out in previous chapter.

¹⁴⁵ HC Deb 28 May 1919 vol 116 c1286. Later than the period covered in this chapter, but it clearly reflected Ashley's long-held opinion. That debate is considered in the next chapter.

¹⁴⁶ The demonstration was duly held in Hyde Park, London. 'Re-Examination Scandals', *The Manchester Guardian*, 25 June 1917, 5.

¹⁴⁷ WC 166, 20 June 1917, 2, minute 1, TNA, CAB 23/3/14.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

of Exceptions Bill had been presented to the House just before Easter, 'it was received with an amount of repugnance such as has seldom occurred in relation to any Bill which has been introduced during the course of the War. Even the sponsors of the Bill did not conceal their dislike for it'.¹⁴⁹ He went on to recall that 'The Chancellor of the Exchequer [Bonar Law] ... described it as a hateful measure' and that, because 'These feelings were shared in every quarter of the House ... assurances were given that if the re-examination were carried out it would be carried out with exceptional care and exceptional kindness'.¹⁵⁰ Instead, he asserted, 'these re-examinations have been carried out in a harsh, in a cruel, in an unfair, and in a wasteful way', and that 'the administration in the War Office' had 'called upon the halt, the lame, the blind, the mute, the mad, aye, and even the dead, to appear before these examining boards'.¹⁵¹ He detailed numerous cases, including no less than 200 men summoned to Richmond Recruiting Office, who 'were the most miscellaneous assortment of wrecks of humanity that could possibly have been got together. There were cripples and hunchbacks ... men who were blind, and men who were suffering from every manner of ailment that can afflict frail humanity'.¹⁵² He described medical certificates 'systematically ignored and often torn up in their faces' by the recruiting officers,¹⁵³ claiming that from 'every area of the country you have universal and unequivocal testimony that the authorities are acting with wanton cruelty'.¹⁵⁴ There was much more in this vein, strongly supported by other members, including Winston Churchill, who were not generally critics of the War Office.

It fell to Sir James Macpherson, Under-Secretary of State for War, to respond and, after repeated interruptions from the floor of the House, he was able to announce that 'The Government ... is now prepared to say that ... every soldier who was disabled by wounds or discharged from sickness or ill-health abroad will be excepted under this Act'.¹⁵⁵ Such was the ill temper of the House that day, that the announcement did not have the immediately

¹⁴⁹ HC Deb 21 June 1917 vol 94 c1997.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid* c1997–98.

¹⁵² *Ibid* c1998.

¹⁵³ *Ibid* c1999.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid* c2003.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid* c2016.

mollifying effect that might have been anticipated. However his next announcement had more impact, as he revealed that he was ‘authorised to say that we are quite willing and quite ready to appoint a small Parliamentary Committee ... to examine into the working of this Act’.¹⁵⁶ It was an offer that, when published the following day, ‘satisfied the critics’ and was interpreted as ‘a warning to all medical examiners to do their work honestly and carefully’.¹⁵⁷ It was quickly followed by an instruction to local recruiting offices that ‘no discharged man who has served overseas is to be compulsorily posted for service under the Act’ and allowing for any discharged man already re-enlisted to be re-discharged.¹⁵⁸ The offer was also enough for former Prime Minister Asquith, during that same debate, to feel ‘dispensed from saying some of the things which otherwise I should have felt it my duty to say’, though he continued to set out, at some length, a range of criticisms of the reviewing process, the tribunals, and the appeal system.¹⁵⁹ Others, too, not just the usual critics like Pringle and Hogge, joined the attack on Macpherson. The Liberal MP Sir Godfrey Baring, in another lengthy diatribe against the War Office, concluded by asserting that:

I am glad to think that a candidate is going to be ... adopted for the Abercromby Division of Liverpool to fight that constituency on this question and bring it before the public mind. Unless we have concessions from the War Office I hope that the candidate will receive very good and substantial support from the electors of Liverpool.¹⁶⁰

This referred to an opportunity that the Federation had seized upon, to open another front in its campaign, with the announcement of a by-election to be held on the 28th of the same month, June, in Abercromby. Lord Stanley, eldest son of the War Secretary Lord Derby, stood for the Conservatives, while their partners in the Coalition Government, the Liberal Party, agreed not to stand against him. Stanley’s election should thus have been a

¹⁵⁶ HC Deb 21 June 1917 vol 94 c2022.

¹⁵⁷ ‘Our London Correspondence: the Government Give Way’, *The Manchester Guardian*, 22 June 1917, 4.

¹⁵⁸ ‘Discharged Soldiers: No Compulsion to Serve Again’, *The Manchester Guardian*, 25 June 1917, 6. The article refers to Nottingham Recruiting Office but, given its reference to ‘official information’, this appears to have been national guidance.

¹⁵⁹ HC Deb 21 June 1917 vol 94 c2023–31.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid* c2011.

formality but, just seven days before the polls opened, the same day as the rancorous debate in the Commons, the Federation announced it would put up its own candidate. The new candidate was a local man and discharged private soldier by the name of Frank Bulkeley Hughes, who had joined up on the outbreak of war, along with his five brothers,¹⁶¹ and naturally his manifesto echoed the aims of the Federation. Stanley was also an ex-soldier, but as he had been a captain in the Grenadier Guards, straight from Eton and Oxford,¹⁶² he was not the kind of ex-service candidate the Federation would have supported, or even welcomed into its membership at that time. The leading local Conservative, Archibald Salvidge, who had persuaded Stanley to stand for the seat, recorded ruefully in his diary that, by his action, he had 'brought round the Stanley family the full force of the present discontents ... Derby is now far from happy about the election. He says the opposition of the discharged soldiers is more than I realise'.¹⁶³ Despite this, the combined forces of the Conservative and Liberal parties, locally and nationally, supported by much of the press, gave their candidate a formidable advantage. He also had support from a surprising quarter, namely Sergeant-Major Blythe, who had been a founding member of the Federation's branch in Liverpool (above), but who criticised the decision to run a candidate against Stanley, receiving the unanimous public support of the Coventry branch for his stance.¹⁶⁴ Still, the effect of Hughes' candidacy was apparent from the start of the campaign, as Lord Stanley's supporters took to promoting him as 'Captain Stanley', claiming that as 'a soldier' he was 'well qualified to look after the interests of soldiers and sailors'.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ 'A Soldier's Candidate at Liverpool', *The Manchester Guardian*, 21 June 1917, 4; 'The Abercromby Division: Mr Hogge and Discharged Men's Candidate', *The Manchester Guardian*, 22 June 1917, 6; 'Liverpool Election: Ex-Soldier to fight War Minister's Son', *The Manchester Guardian*, 23 June 1917, 7.

¹⁶² Jason Tames, 'Stanley, Edward Montagu Cavendish, Lord Stanley (1894–1938)', *ODNB*, online version: 3 January 2008, accessed 24 March 2020, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/39507>.

¹⁶³ Stanley Salvidge, *Salvidge of Liverpool* (London, 1934), 158–59.

¹⁶⁴ 'Liverpool Election. Lord Stanley's Strong Support', *The Daily Telegraph*, 26 June 1917, 6.

¹⁶⁵ 'Election Issues at Liverpool', *The Times*, 25 June 1917, 3.

The significance of the Abercromby by-election

In describing this campaign, Ward notes the concession made in the War Cabinet of 20 June and asserts that ‘Six days later and two days before the Abercromby poll, the War Cabinet went further. Bonar Law noted that a question would be asked that day in the House of Commons about a Committee of Inquiry on the Review of Exceptions Act’.¹⁶⁶ Ward’s conclusion is that ‘veterans ... learned an important lesson at Liverpool — politicians were vulnerable in elections. Pressure at the polls could bring more concessions in the future, especially if politicians faced ex-service candidates’.¹⁶⁷ But, in concluding that the Abercromby campaign pushed the Government into conceding the Committee of Inquiry, Ward fails to note that this was first promised during the 21 June debate, as noted above. Nor does he cite the parliamentary debate of 26 June, which established the Select Committee ‘in accordance with, the pledge given by the Government last Thursday’ (emphasis added), that is to say on 21 June.¹⁶⁸ Ward is probably correct in asserting that ‘Adoption of these measures quenched the fire of the Federation campaign’ in Abercromby, but those measures were in train before Hughes’ campaign got underway, so there is no reason to think that the by-election campaign was the primary motivating factor in the Government’s decision. Rather it was the growing evidence that ‘the authorities are acting with wanton cruelty’,¹⁶⁹ described in extensive and shocking detail during the 21 June debate, that obliged it to announce both the concession on discharged sailors and soldiers who had served abroad, and the Committee of Inquiry. That debate extended to over 50,000 words in Hansard, almost all of which were devoted to the ‘wanton cruelty’ of the way the Review of Exceptions Act was being administered,¹⁷⁰ with just eighty-five words referencing Hughes’ candidacy,¹⁷¹ which had only been announced that same day.¹⁷² However, the Abercromby campaign may well have strengthened the Government’s resolve to implement those measures in full; and to emphasise their significance,

¹⁶⁶ Ward, ‘British Veterans’ Organizations’, 40.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 42.

¹⁶⁸ HC Deb 26 June 1917 vol 95 c217.

¹⁶⁹ HC Deb 21 June 1917 vol 94 c2003.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid cc1996-2114.

¹⁷¹ Ibid c2011.

¹⁷² ‘A Soldier’s Candidate at Liverpool’, *The Manchester Guardian*, 21 June 1917, 4.

Macpherson, the Under-Secretary for War who had been mauled in that debate, was despatched to the constituency a few days later. There he held a public meeting promoting the Select Committee inquiry, listening to the complaints of hundreds of discharged soldiers, and even countermanding one particularly hard case on the spot.¹⁷³ This all undermined Frank Hughes' position and he lost heavily on polling day.¹⁷⁴ However, from a wider perspective, this was no defeat for the Federation for, by its formation, its public demonstrations, its speeches in Parliament, and its part in the by-election, it had extracted the concession that ex-soldiers had been demanding for months – not the full repeal of the Act, but withdrawal of the provision they detested. Moreover, its opposition was bolstered by the Committee's subsequent report, which largely vindicated the Federation's criticisms.¹⁷⁵

The whole episode illustrates how the British Government, faced with the prospect of serious unrest, could give just enough ground to calm the situation without resorting, even in wartime, to the forcible suppression of both public protests and discharged soldiers' organisations. It also strengthened the Federation, particularly in the Liverpool area, where another 'Federation of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers' had apparently, and confusingly, been founded independently of James Hogge's London-headquartered 'National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Sailors and Soldiers'.¹⁷⁶ Kimball describes the Liverpool association as the origin of the Federation, while crediting Hogge only with the founding of the 'Pensions and Welfare League'.¹⁷⁷ This is incorrect, as can be seen from the sequence of events, sourced from contemporaneous records, set out earlier in this chapter, and below. To recap, Hogge, Pringle and Rumsey had created the 'Federation of Discharged

¹⁷³ 'Liverpool By-election: Shyness of the Soldier's Candidate', *The Manchester Guardian*, 27 June 1917, 10.

¹⁷⁴ Stanley: 2,224; Hughes: 794. 'Abercromby Result, Return of Lord Stanley, a Record Majority', *Liverpool Post & Mercury*, 29 June 1917, 5.

¹⁷⁵ *Select Committee on the Military Service (Review of Exceptions) Act*, 1917, Cd. 8617, xii.

¹⁷⁶ Kimball, 'Ex-Service movement', 33.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 31, claims that 'Still another body, billing itself as the National Federation of Discharged Soldiers and Sailors, was in the process of forming in the north-west; it had its headquarters in Liverpool, and a presence in Manchester and Salford', citing articles from *The Manchester Guardian* of 23 and 30 April 1917, but those references do not support his claim.

and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers' by early April 1917,¹⁷⁸ while the Liverpool 'Federation' was formed the following month, in the context of the national grouping,¹⁷⁹ although it does seem to have operated independently for a couple of months.¹⁸⁰ Hogge's promised conference took place at the London Palladium on the weekend of 28–29 July, with reportedly 'nearly 200 delegates from all parts of the country' attending, primarily from over '100 branches of the three existing organizations' (the Naval and Military War Pensions and Welfare League, the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers, and the National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers) and, it was claimed, 'aggregate membership of something like 100,000'.¹⁸¹ At the conference he proclaimed the formation of 'the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Sailors and Soldiers', which seems to have been a re-announcement, as he had been using the same name for several months,¹⁸² though it now included, he claimed, all three groups in one unified body. That announcement seems to have been premature, for the Association continued as a separate group, and not as part of the Federation.¹⁸³

Conclusions

Like the formation of the Association, the creation of the Federation was a very significant development. Had the Association been more politically and socially inclusive, and its membership more evenly distributed across the UK, it might have been the natural home

¹⁷⁸ 'The Disabled and Rejected: Protest Meeting', *The Times*, 14 May 1917, 5, reported that 'the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Sailors and Soldiers', headquartered in Hackney, London, had been formed six weeks earlier, ie around the end of March or beginning of April.

¹⁷⁹ 'Discharged Service Men', *Liverpool Echo*, 4 May 1917, 5, refers to a meeting to be held the following day 'on behalf of the National Federation of Discharged Soldiers and Sailors. This is the first mention of such a federation in Liverpool, and appears to be the founding meeting. 'Federation of Soldiers and Sailors', *Liverpool Echo*, 7 May 1917, reports the meeting and confirms that it was about forming in Liverpool a branch of the Federation that already had 'branches in London, Birmingham, Manchester, and other cities'.

¹⁸⁰ Hogge himself wrote in late May that he knew of a 'federation ... being inaugurated with Liverpool as its headquarters', implying a separate body, rather than a branch of his own Federation. 'An Association of the Discharged', *The Manchester Guardian*, 24 May 1917, 6.

¹⁸¹ 'Discharged Sailors and Soldiers', *The Times*, 30 July 1917, 3; 'Silver Badge Men: Strong Federation Formed', *Daily Mail*, 30 July 1917, 3.

¹⁸² 'The Disabled and Rejected: Protest Meeting', *The Times*, May 14, 1917, 5, as above.

¹⁸³ No explanation for this failure to fully amalgamate at that time, following the 28–29 July conference, was published either then or later.

for dissenters to the new Military Service (Review of Exceptions) Act, and perhaps become the single voice of the ex-service man and woman. Instead, the ex-service movement was split from the start, in what appears to have been an unintended consequence of their quite different roots, while further rival organisations would emerge over the next few years. This meant that by May 1917 the Government was faced with two national organisations of discharged sailors and soldiers, campaigning through local and national newspapers on a growing list of concerns, in particular the widely resented new Act, with one group supported by the trades council network, and the other by a small but dedicated band of dissident MPs, nineteen of whom had voted against the Act;¹⁸⁴ and it was also only too well aware that disgruntled soldiers had played a significant part in the February Revolution in Russia. The criticism was so sustained and effective that the Government was forced to back down on the most controversial aspect of the new Act, that is to say the recall of some who had already served, for possible conscription back into the armed forces, and to grant a Select Committee inquiry into the whole episode. This was sufficient to stave off defeat in the Abercromby by-election, at the hands of an organisation just a few months old. All this dissenting activity led to the founding of the third major veterans' organisation, the Comrades of the Great War, a much more conservative grouping that was supported and initially led by prominent members of the political and military Establishment, and which is examined in the next chapter.

The primary focus of this chapter has been on James Myles Hogge, and it can be seen that his career prior to August 1914 made him almost the ideal figure to pursue the issue of war pensions and allowances. His longstanding concern with social problems and his commitment to try and do something about them, combined with a genial manner and an exceptional capacity for work, founded on a strong religious faith, meant that he was very well equipped to take up the problems of service families and ex-service men and women. He might have been more effective if he had found a role in government, but his unwavering support of veterans and families, and strong commitment to their cause, meant others were preferred for high office. He forged an effective partnership with his local paper, the *Edinburgh Evening News*, which allowed him to reach and help thousands,

¹⁸⁴ Named in HC Deb 03 April 1917 vol 92 c1211.

maybe tens of thousands, of sailors' and soldiers' dependants, and the veterans themselves when discharged. The workload brought about by dealing with some 1,000 letters a week meant that he had to set up a small team in an office in London to handle the cases. As an active parliamentarian he worked with other concerned MPs, and he made full use of the practical cases of hardship that came his way, using them in debate and in his articles to illustrate the shortcomings of the nation's system of service pensions and allowances. He was not just critical however; rather he constantly offered the Government solutions to the problems he raised. What he lacked, though, was effective support from his colleagues in Parliament, with debates on war pensions and allowances rarely attended by more than a few dozen MPs, and often many fewer than that.¹⁸⁵ This probably helps to explain why he kept up such a constant campaign outside Parliament, culminating in the formation of the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers. Meanwhile, ministers were privately aware of the problems, certainly by the end of 1916 and probably much earlier. For example, Sir Arthur Griffith Boscawen, Parliamentary Secretary in the new Pensions Ministry, wrote in his memoirs that 'The whole question of disablement pensions and separation allowances was in a chaotic state, and the gravest dissatisfaction existed in the country'.¹⁸⁶

However, it appears that the Government was, understandably, both preoccupied with the immediate challenges of pursuing the war, and fearful of the potential cost of supporting more generously millions of dependants, and of granting substantial pensions to veterans after their service, possibly for decades to come. It had the historical example of 'Windham's Act' of 1806, under which every soldier discharged through invalidity became legally entitled to a pension, only for the Act to be repealed twenty years later as unaffordable.¹⁸⁷ It also feared the emergence of a strong veterans' organisation. For example, the Grand Army of the Republic, formed in the United States after the American Civil War, was often cited in Parliament as a warning because of the costs of the pensions it extracted from the US Treasury for many years, and the political power it exercised.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 3, 116.

¹⁸⁶ Griffith-Boscawen, *Memories*, 196. See also chapter 2.

¹⁸⁷ See chapter 1 for more detail.

¹⁸⁸ See chapter 2 for more detail.

James Myles Hogge's campaign did not end with his founding of the Federation; if anything he became more active still as its President, alongside his other roles. Nor did the Government sit back in the face of the dissent spreading among discharged sailors and soldiers and their dependants. The stage was set for the creation of a more supportive counterweight, the Comrades of the Great War, and several years of often quite vicious infighting between the various groups, before the first faltering steps towards a modicum of cooperation, which was to lead eventually to unity.

Chapter 4: The Comrades of the Great War

Introduction

This chapter examines the creation of the Comrades of the Great War following the emergence, during the first half of 1917, of two major national organisations of discharged sailors and soldiers: the Association, and the Federation. Their links to trades councils, and to radical members of the Liberal Party, concerned the British Government, many MPs, the military authorities, and some national newspaper proprietors, as did their increasing willingness to mount public protests, in the centre of London, while the nation was at war. The year 1917 also saw the ‘February Revolution’ in Russia, with mutinous soldiers returning from the Eastern Front playing a central role and, rather closer to home, mutinies in the French Army in May and June the same year.¹ The Russian revolutionaries attracted the open support of British trades unions, trades councils, and left-wing organisations in general,² with Sheffield Trades and Labour Council being typical in ‘congratulating the Russian people on their Revolution’ and declaring its own ‘willingness to enter peace negotiations in order to avoid further bloodshed’.³ These events followed peace proposals from Germany, albeit unsuccessful ones, and mediation efforts by the American president, Woodrow Wilson,⁴ which the Allies rejected, but that many in the British trade union and labour movement supported, along with other left-leaning individuals, and even some on the right, most famously Lord Lansdowne.⁵ The British Government was determined to continue the war until Germany surrendered, rather than allowing it to just call a halt, with

¹ Following the ‘Nivelle’ offensive, see Jay Winter and Blaine Baggett, *1914–18: The Great War and the Shaping of the 20th Century* (London, 1996), 229–41.

² For example, see Clinton, *Trades Councils in Britain*, 76–77. Most trades council minutes consulted from this period record support for the Russian revolution.

³ Mendelson, Owen, Pollard, and Thornes, *Sheffield Trades and Labour Council*, 68. While this trades council had founded the Sheffield branch of the National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers, there is no evidence that the latter supported such resolutions.

⁴ John Milton Cooper, *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography* (New York, 2009), 362–76.

⁵ Laurence Martin, *Peace Without Victory: Woodrow Wilson and the British Liberals* (New Haven, 1958), in particular, for Lansdowne, 35 and 167–69; Lord Lansdowne, ‘Coordination of Allies’ War Aims’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 29 November 1917, 5–6; Keith Grieves, ‘A Future Too Awful to Contemplate: Lord Lansdowne, War Aims, and Peace Advocacy in England in 1917’, 127–48, in Justin Quinn Olmstead, ed, *Reconsidering Peace and Patriotism during the First World War* (Cham: 2017).

the possibility in the future 'of civilization again being menaced from the same quarter;⁶ but it could become impossible for Britain to fight on if popular support for doing so was seriously undermined.

The Government responded by quietly supporting the creation of a third grouping, more aligned to its politics, the Comrades of the Great War, as a way of limiting the spread of dissatisfaction amongst veterans, service families, and widows and orphans. The focus here is on the creation of the Comrades, and its growth during 1917 and 1918, using newly discovered archives to show more definitively than in previous accounts that the Government, including the Secretary of State for War, was directly involved in the process, while avoiding public identification with it. As noted in chapter 1, Graham Wootton, Brian Harding, and Niall Barr are all primarily concerned with the British Legion and accordingly devote only a small part of their work to the period prior to July 1921. Wootton covers the formation and development of the Comrades, but without much detail, devoting fewer than four pages to this period.⁷ He credits Lord Derby with being the driving force, but without citing convincing evidence, or offering much analysis, in what is, as Barr described it, a 'narrative account'.⁸ Harding and Barr provide similar accounts, of just a page or two each, neither adding significantly to Wootton's work.⁹ Charles Kimball's dissertation has a more comprehensive account, comprising half of his first chapter,¹⁰ so there is some overlap here. But, like Wootton, he does not provide convincing evidence of Derby's role. Meanwhile, Stephen Ward goes into much greater detail than Kimball, particularly regarding the machinations of some of the people involved in establishing the Comrades,¹¹ while making a number of assertions that are not supported by contemporaneous records, in particular the extent of Government fear of, and surveillance of, the Association and Federation in 1917.¹² Accordingly, there is much new material in this chapter, particularly about the formation of the Comrades, and in the strength and quantity of evidence

⁶ Most famously expressed in the 'knock-out' interview. Roy W. Howard, "'Never Again!': Battle-cry of the Allies: No Time for Peace Talk', *The Times*, 29 September 1916.

⁷ Wootton, *Official History*, 3–5.

⁸ Barr, 'Service Not Self', 3.

⁹ Harding, *Keeping Faith*, 3; Barr, 'Service Not Self', 15–16.

¹⁰ Kimball, 'The Ex-Service movement'.

¹¹ Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 36.

¹² *Ibid.*, 82–86.

revealing its links with the British Government, through Lord Derby in particular. Some of these authors used records of the Comrades that included, in particular, Executive Committee minutes from 1917 to 1921, archived by the Royal British Legion, and *The Comrades Journal*, which was published each month from November 1918 to June 1921, with the only surviving complete set lodged at the British Library.¹³ Both those archives have been lost,¹⁴ but they have been partly offset by an extensive collection of documents relating to the Comrades found in the course of this research, and not referenced in any of the above works. These documents are in the papers of Lord Davies of Llandinam, in the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth,¹⁵ and they include most of the general and executive committee minutes, along with much internal correspondence, all of which sheds fresh light on the origin and development of the Comrades. Relevant documents have also been found among the papers of Wilfrid Ashley, Conservative MP and founding member of the Comrades, held in the Broadlands Archives in the University of Southampton, and they are cited here for the first time in this context.¹⁶ The chapter also benefits from the greater ease of finding a range of contemporaneous accounts, primarily from local newspapers, than was the case when Ward was writing (1969), all of which results in a broader and deeper analysis of the two years under examination here. The key contribution of this chapter to the historiography is the evidence of Derby's involvement in the creation of the Comrades, his continuing role in its development, and his efforts to avoid being publicly linked with it, in order to maintain the fiction that it was independent of the Government.

Background to the founding of the Comrades

The first half of 1917 had seen the creation of the Association and the Federation as national organisations of discharged sailors and soldiers, with growing influence on national politics. The Federation's participation in the Abercromby by-election campaign was not the only one in 1917 where prominent figures were challenged by dissident representatives

¹³ Comrades of the Great War, *The Comrades' journal, for all ex-service men* (London, 1918–21).

¹⁴ See appendix 1.

¹⁵ Lord Davies of Llandinam papers, National Library of Wales, GB 0210 LDDNAM, hereafter 'Davies papers'.

¹⁶ Papers of W. W. Ashley, first Baron Mount Temple, Broadlands Archives, University of Southampton Library, in particular BR 70, 73–83, 88–89, 91. Hereafter 'Ashley papers'.

of ex-service groups. Another was in Dundee, where Winston Churchill sought re-election as the city's Liberal MP, following service with the Army in France, and his appointment on 17 July as Minister of Munitions. Again it should have been a formality, as the local Unionists chose not to oppose him. However, the 'Discharged Soldiers' and Sailors' Association' in Dundee, the third branch set up in the UK in response to Blackburn Trades Council's initiative the previous autumn, had other ideas.¹⁷ It was an active, radical and well-supported group, and pledged its support to the prominent local councillor and pacifist Edwin Scrymgeour, standing as the 'Prohibitionist and Labour' candidate; Scrymgeour had opposed Churchill at every parliamentary election since 1908 and would eventually topple him in 1922.¹⁸ The by-election took place within weeks of the Abercromby one, and the end result was similar, with Churchill winning comfortably,¹⁹ but the fact that such a challenge even occurred was another example of the politicisation of ex-sailors and soldiers, and the spread of anti-war sentiment among some of them, even to the extent of supporting a pacifist candidate.

However, the extent of any opposition amongst ex-service men to the continuation of the war should not be exaggerated. In particular there is no evidence, either during 1917 or in later years, for Stephen Ward's claim that the Government 'feared and misinterpreted many actions taken by ex-servicemen', a claim that Ward does not support with any references.²⁰ On the contrary, it is rather striking that, while the War Cabinet regularly discussed the Russian (February) Revolution and received a series of detailed reports about it,²¹ including the prominent roles played by soldiers and sailors in those events, it did not

¹⁷ 'Mr Churchill to be Opposed', *The Courier* (Dundee), 24 July 1917, 2.

¹⁸ John Kemp, 'Scrymgeour, Edwin (1866–1947)', *ODNB*, online version: 6 January 2011, accessed 9 August 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/61325>.

¹⁹ For Churchill: 7,302; Scrymgeour: 2,036. 'Churchill Returned for Dundee', *The Courier* (Dundee), 31 July 1917, 3.

²⁰ Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 82–83. While ex-service organisations did attract some attention in subsequent years, as part of surveillance by Basil Thomson's directorate, those reports do not suggest 'fear and misinterpretation' by government. This is discussed in more depth below, and in chapter 5. No reference to either the organisations or their leaders has been found in the Security Service KV files that survive in the National Archives.

²¹ For example: WC 99, 19 March 1917, items 9–12, TNA, CAB 23/2/17; WC 100, 21 March 1917, items 15–17, TNA, CAB 23/2/18; Major J. F. Neilson, 'Report on the Russian Revolution', WC paper G.T.525, 31 March 1917, 1–7, TNA, CAB 24/11/25; George Bury, 'The Russian Revolution',

over-react to ex-soldiers' unrest at home, even their public demonstrations in the centre of London. Rather, it took a conciliatory approach, spelled out in a rare reference to 'Labour Grievances and Seditious' in a War Cabinet minute of 6 April 1917, when the Prime Minister reported 'indications from several sources of a very considerable and highly-organised labour movement, with seditious tendencies, which was developing in many industrial centres ... there appeared to be genuine and legitimate grievances, but there was a danger of these being exploited by violent anarchists'.²² No War Cabinet records contain any comparable reference to 'seditious tendencies' amongst veterans, as distinct from 'the labour movement', and in any case the Cabinet's response to the PM's somewhat alarming report was simply to decide 'As soon as further evidence was forthcoming the Government should endeavour to remove the grievances without delay, in order, as far as possible, to forestall trouble'.²³ Indeed Ward, having conjured up the spectre of a fearful Government, concedes that 'the veterans themselves remained loyal to King and Country and exhibited it clearly'.²⁴ To the extent that the aims of the Association and the Federation were certainly radical, and could be characterised as 'socialist', they were of the evolutionary kind, in the tradition of Edouard Bernstein, never revolutionary or Marxist.²⁵ Charles Kimball similarly claims that 'Federation members generally supported a continuation of the war effort to the end, and showed little tolerance for anti-war activists, striking munitions workers, or any individual or institution associated with the political culture of the radical left', though also without providing references.²⁶ In fact, there is good evidence he could have cited, for example in August 1917, when the British Labour Party was preparing to send representatives to the Stockholm Peace Conference.²⁷ In response, the Federation's national organiser, Charles Derry, sent a telegram to King George V, declaring 'Quarter of a

WC Memorandum G.T.383, 5 April 1917, TNA, CAB 24/9/87; Major C. Thornhill, 'Effects of Russian Revolution', WC paper G.T.890, 5 May 1917, 1–5, TNA, CAB 24/14/90.

²² 'Labour Grievances and Seditious', WC 115, 6 April 1917, item 9, TNA, CAB 23/2/33. No accompanying paper.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 82–83.

²⁵ Geraldine Lievesley, 'Bernstein, Eduard (1850–1932)', in Garrett W Brown, Iain McLean, and Alistair McMillan, *A Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics and International Relations*, 4 ed. (Oxford University Press, 2018), online version: 2018, accessed 1 March 2021, eISBN: 9780191749568.

²⁶ Kimball, 'Ex-Service movement', 35.

²⁷ Hildamarie Meynell, 'The Stockholm Conference Of 1917', *International Review of Social History*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1960), 202–25.

million discharged soldiers and sailors protest strongly against sending British delegates to Stockholm. Men very angry. Have we fought and bled for nothing?’²⁸ If the King replied, his response has not been found, but some took matters into their own hands. Public meetings calling for peace negotiations were regularly and violently broken up by those usually described in news reports as ‘soldiers’,²⁹ sometimes more specifically as ‘discharged soldiers’ or ‘ex-soldiers’, and on occasion as members of the Federation or Association.³⁰ In summary, there is abundant evidence that the two groups, and most of their members, while radical in their demands, were neither revolutionary nor sympathetic to pacifism, nor did the British Government generally fear or misinterpret their actions, or over-react to public demonstrations of dissatisfaction and dissent.

Another example of the Government’s conciliatory approach, was its decision around this time to form a Pensions Tribunal ‘entirely independent of the Ministry, to which every man who was refused a pension could appeal to have the facts finally decided on whether or not his disability was attributable to or aggravated by military service during the present war’.³¹ Its remit was rather narrow, with no power to hear an appeal on the *amount* of a pension award, nor could it hear appeals from widows or other dependants of deceased soldiers. The Tribunal met for the first time on 14 July 1917,³² less than a month after the War Cabinet had conceded that discharged men who had served overseas should not be subject to the Review of Exceptions process. Two appointees were Judge Edward Parry, who presided, and Lieutenant-General Sir Alfred Codrington, and together they wrote a detailed

²⁸ ‘The Stockholm Conference: Views of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers’, *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 23 August 1917, 3.

²⁹ For example, news reports mentioning ‘soldiers’ as responsible: ‘Soldiers Take Possession of a Peace Meeting: Mr. Ramsay MacDonald and his Chairman Marched Out’, *The Yorkshire Evening Post*, 10 January 1917, 3; ‘Soldiers’ Arguments: Two Years’ Service Men settle with Mr. Ponsonby’, *The Daily Mail* (Hull), 1; ‘Free Fights at Swansea: Peace Delegates Called Upon to Join the Colours’, *Nottingham Evening Post*, 30 July 1917, 2; ‘Pacifists’ Warm Time’, *Taunton Courier*, 8 May 1918, 6;

³⁰ ‘Mr. Ramsay Macdonald Disappears: Pacifists’ Meeting Broken Up’, *The Londonderry Sentinel*, 9 July 1918, 4, specifically mentions ‘discharged soldiers’ as part of the ‘intervening crowd’ that ‘indulged in a free fight’ with the speakers; ‘London Stone and Bottle Riot: Ramsay Macdonald Attacked and Injured: Discharged Men’s Anger’, *Sunday Pictorial* (Sunday edition of *The Daily Mirror*), 1 September 1918, 2.

³¹ Parry and Codrington, *War Pensions*, 74.

³² ‘Lieutenant Parry: A fine Record of Service’, *Manchester Evening News*, 14 July 1917, 3, col. 3.

and revealing account of their time on the panel.³³ They credited its creation to James Hogge and Andrew Bonar Law, speaking during the second reading of the Military Service (Review of Exceptions) Bill on 29 March 1917.³⁴ Hogge had opposed the second reading ‘until the Government is prepared to accept full responsibility in regard to providing pensions for such men as ... are ... discharged from Service owing to disability not caused by their own wilful misconduct.’³⁵ His amendment fell, but Bonar Law, overseeing the Bill’s parliamentary progress, agreed in principle, noting that the Royal Warrant already provided for such pensions for any discharged soldier if ‘his ill-health is due to service in the army or ... his previous ill-health has been aggravated by it’.³⁶ The problem, observed Parry and Codrington, was that there was convincing evidence that this principle ‘was not always recognised in pension administration’, and Bonar Law conceded during the debate that there was a case for an independent Tribunal.³⁷

From its beginnings in July 1917, it proved to be a great improvement on previous practice, as far as the appellants were concerned, upholding about two thirds of the 927 appeals heard in its first year of operation,³⁸ and publishing its decisions, with reasons, as guidance for military authorities and local war pensions committees. It was assisted by a new Warrant earlier in the year, in March, which set out a more liberal interpretation of ‘attributable to, or aggravated by, service in the present war’, leading to 5,000 rejected cases being retrospectively approved by the Pensions Ministry, even before the Tribunal began work.³⁹ Its influence went well beyond those 927 cases as, a few months after it began sitting, local war pensions committees were instructed to set up sub-committees to investigate appeals, with the aim of resolving many cases without recourse to the Tribunal.⁴⁰ The twenty-one case studies included in Parry and Codrington’s book reveal an

³³ Parry and Codrington, *War Pensions*.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 71–72.

³⁵ ‘Serious Shortage of Soldiers’, *The Manchester Guardian*, 30 March 1917, 6, reporting the previous day’s debate, which is missing from Historic Hansard, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/sittings/1917/mar/index.html> (accessed 19 April 2021).

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Parry and Codrington, *War Pensions*, 73.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 87, for the total number of 927 appeals; ‘Military Column: Pensions Appeal Tribunal’, *The Lichfield Mercury*, 1 February 1918, 3, for proportion of appeals allowed.

³⁹ ‘14,000 Gratuities to Unfit Fighters’, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 23 August 1917, 4.

⁴⁰ ‘Work of the Pensions Appeal Tribunal’, *The Times*, 3 December 1917, 6.

almost unbroken pattern of unfairness by military authorities, who repeatedly and wrongly ascribed veterans' injuries and disease entirely to pre-service medical conditions, or to the fault of the individual. To take just one example, a soldier who lost a leg in an explosion, in camp near Arras, was deemed to have caused his own injury through negligence, though there was no evidence or court of inquiry to support such a conclusion. Instead, as the Tribunal concluded, 'some one has [simply] decided that the man's unfitness is not attributable to military service',⁴¹ so it unanimously overturned that decision, as it did in many other cases. The paucity of source material for the Association and the Federation in 1917–18 means no evidence has been found to show how they viewed the Tribunal, but it must surely have been positive, given the appellants' high success rate, and its influence on local committee deliberations. When Parry and Codrington's work was wound up after a year, it was to be replaced by a more permanent independent appeals system that did much to quell the unrest over war pension decisions.

The founding of the Comrades of the Great War

The most significant official response to the growing unrest during the first half of 1917 was not any overt suppression of the Association or the Federation; rather it was discreet governmental support for the creation of a third national organisation for discharged sailors and soldiers, intended to appeal strongly to working-class patriotism, and led by prominent figures who could be relied on not to cause too much trouble. The idea was first mooted in public by Lieutenant-Colonel Sir John Norton Griffiths, in one very brief paragraph in *The Daily Mirror* of 19 July, declaring that he had 'formulated a scheme by which those who have fought in the war shall join together for mutual advantage and protection during and after demobilisation'.⁴² Two days later the *Daily Mail* reported more

⁴¹ Parry and Codrington, *War Pensions*, 144.

⁴² 'News items: A Fellowship of Fighters', *The Daily Mirror*, 19 July 1917, 11. Lieutenant-Colonel Sir John Norton Griffiths D.S.O, was the Conservative MP for Wednesbury (Staffs), a civil engineer, and founder of the Royal Engineers tunnelling companies that laid huge mines under German trenches on the Western Front. Richard Davenport-Hines, 'Griffiths, Sir John Norton-, first baronet (1871–1930)' *ODNB*, online version: 3 January 2008, accessed 25 May 2020, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35260>. He was generally styled in reports and documents as 'Norton Griffiths' without a hyphen, and never just as 'Griffiths'. Contrary to the *ODNB* entry, he did not hyphenate his surnames until later in life.

details, saying that Norton Griffiths claimed to ‘remember a worthy N.C.O. suggesting [such an organisation] to me when discussing the idea before the Battle of Loos’ (25 September – 8 October 1915), and that the NCO had proposed calling it ‘Veterans of the Grand Army’.⁴³ Even if he had genuinely discussed the idea almost two years earlier, and this was not just an ‘origin myth’, there is no evidence that he did anything about it until prompted by the activities of the Association and the Federation. His ‘V.G.A. Association’ had similar aims in terms of supporting veterans, widows and orphans, while the address given for its office was that of his home in Westminster.⁴⁴ A letter in the archives of Wilfrid Ashley, dated 29 March 1916, shows that he, Harry Brittain and one other, by the name of Blum, registered ‘the title and first general rules of the “Grand Army of the Empire”’ at the British Museum, with the three of them as founders, adding ‘There is no particular hurry now for any further action for the moment as no one else can “pinch” the name’.⁴⁵ Indeed they seem to have been in no hurry at all, as there is no further record of that organisation, nor of any involvement by Harry Brittain in the Comrades.

Somewhat confusingly, just two days after Norton Griffiths’ announcement of the ‘Veterans of the Grand Army’, another letter to national newspapers announced ‘The Comrades of the Great War’, stating that ‘following on the proposals recently submitted to the public by Colonel Sir John Norton Griffiths, K.C.B. ... a definite scheme has now been evolved’.⁴⁶ It was signed by six powerful and influential men, Hedworth Meux,⁴⁷ W. W. Ashley, David

⁴³ ‘Grand Army Veterans: Comrades’ Association Scheme by Col. Norton Griffiths’, *Daily Mail*, 19 July 1917, 5.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Brittain to Ashley, 29 March 1916, Ashley papers, BR 70/29. Harry Brittain appears to have been based at the American Officers Club, see BR 70/32. Nothing more has been found about either Brittain or Blum.

⁴⁶ ‘Comrades of the Great War’, *Daily Mail*, 23 July 1917, 2; ‘Comrades of the Great War’, *The Times*, 23 July 1917, 9; and others.

⁴⁷ Sir Hedworth Meux was a former Admiral who had been responsible for protecting the BEF’s links across the Channel, and on his retirement became Unionist MP for Portsmouth, in February 1916, though ‘he was not really interested in parliamentary work, and retired at the 1918 general election’. V. W. Baddeley, ‘Meux, Sir Hedworth (1856–1929)’, revised Roger T. Stearn, *ODNB*, online version: 24 May 2008, accessed 11 August 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35004>.

Davies,⁴⁸ Hamar Greenwood, J. Norton Griffiths, and Albert Smith,⁴⁹ all of them ‘Service members of the House of Commons’, two of them Conservative, two Liberal, one Unionist and one Labour.⁵⁰ The latter, Smith, was a former textile worker and trade union official, but no radical, having been invalided out of the Royal Lancashire Regiment in 1915, only to voluntarily return to the army in 1917,⁵¹ an action that suggests he had little sympathy for those who had joined the Federation. Despite Norton Griffiths’ name among the signatories, there was no mention of ‘The Veterans of the Grand Army’, while the confusion was further heightened by another article in *The Times* the next day, repeating his claim to have had the idea for the ‘V.G.A. Association’ almost two years earlier, while making no mention of ‘The Comrades of the Great War’.⁵² Obstinacy and disagreement over the name for the new organisation is a likely explanation for these contradictory announcements, for Norton Griffiths was a combative man with ‘the strength of a prize-fighter and the temperament of a guerrilla leader.’⁵³ It has been claimed that his “patriotism was violent and vulgar – admirers nicknamed him “Empire Jack” ... public meetings were often rowdy, and he was fined for striking a heckler’.⁵⁴ The name ‘Veterans of the Grand Army’ had echoes of America’s Grand Army of the Republic, and it was a rather curious choice given the political Establishment’s dread of a veterans’ group as powerful as the American one emerging in the UK.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, while it was Norton Griffiths’ preferred name, he was up against an equally strong-willed rival for leadership of the new organisation. Wilfrid Ashley was MP for Blackpool, and another Lieutenant-Colonel, who had served in the King’s Liverpool Regiment in France in 1914, and been PPS to the Financial Secretary to the War

⁴⁸ David Davies, Liberal MP, was a former major in France with 14th Royal Welch Fusiliers, and then PPS to Lloyd George, but had just been sacked (in June). Kenneth O. Morgan, ‘Davies, David, first Baron Davies (1880–1944)’, *ODNB*, online version: 3 January 2008, accessed 11 Aug 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32737>.

⁴⁹ ‘Comrades of The Great War.’ *The Times*, 23 Aug. 1917, 9.

⁵⁰ Ibid; ‘Comrades of the Great War’, *Daily Mail*, 23 July 1917, 2; and others.

⁵¹ Michael Stenton and Stephen Lees, *Who’s Who of British Members of Parliament: Volume III* (Sussex, 1979), 332.

⁵² ‘Soldiers’ Associations: Veterans of the Grand Army’, *The Times*, 24 July 1917, 9.

⁵³ Richard Davenport-Hines, ‘Griffiths, Sir John Norton-, first baronet (1871–1930)’, *ODNB*, online version: 3 January 2008, accessed 15 June 2020, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35260>

⁵⁴ Ibid; ‘Election Black Eye: M.P. to Pay Damages and Costs’, *Daily Mail*, 7 January 1919, 3.

⁵⁵ See chapter 2.

Office since 1915.⁵⁶ Fervently opposed to socialism, he would in later years become Chairman of the Anti-Socialist and Anti-Communist Union. According to Graham Wootton, Norton Griffiths was the 'prime mover', while Ashley had 'it seems, been working independently of Sir John Norton Griffiths, but with the same end in view'.⁵⁷ This is confirmed in a letter from another of the founding members, Major David Davies MP, to the Secretary of State for War, Lord Derby, dated 16 August, a week before the contrasting letters in the newspapers. Davies writes 'I am sure you will agree that it will never do to have two organisations for one and the same object, and N.G.'s [Norton Griffiths] show must be roped in, in some way'.⁵⁸

There can be no doubt that the proposal to form the Comrades had 'Derby's unofficial blessing and support', at least as early as 1 August 1917, when he 'presided over a Conference of interested people at Derby House ... at which a Constitution was discussed';⁵⁹ and his name appears a number of times in correspondence contained in the archives of both Ashley,⁶⁰ and Davies.⁶¹ Indeed, Derby may well have been the prime mover, certainly within the Government, while taking great care to keep his name out of the public record at the time. A few days before the 1 August meeting, he submitted a Secret memorandum to the War Cabinet that, while on the subject 'Formation of Soldiers' and Sailors' Committees',⁶² and thus concerned with serving soldiers, made remarks that can reasonably be assumed to indicate his attitude to discharged soldiers as well. He stated that 'the Army of today is by no means as highly disciplined as ... before the war, and ... it is probable that the movement to encourage soldiers to take part in political questions will be

⁵⁶ E. J. Feuchtwanger, 'Ashley, Wilfrid William, Baron Mount Temple (1867–1939)', *ODNB*, online version: 3 January 2008, accessed 11 August 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30471>.

⁵⁷ Wootton, *Official History*, 3. He does not reference these assessments.

⁵⁸ Davies to Derby, 16 August 1917, Ashley papers, BR 70/32.

⁵⁹ Wootton, *Official History*, 3. He did not reference these assertions, but the Ashley and Davies archives now provide the evidence.

⁶⁰ Ashley papers, in particular BR 70, 73–83, 88–89, 91.

⁶¹ Davies papers, C5/6–10 (note that is the National Library of Wales preferred citation, see appendix 1).

⁶² Otherwise known as Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, but not covered in detail in this thesis, as not involving discharged soldiers in significant numbers. See, for example, Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 45–48.

fanned by certain political factions for their own ends'.⁶³ On the day of the meeting, 1 August, Derby took the proposal to the Army Council for its approval, arguing that it 'would serve the useful purpose of countering the activities of ... other associations amongst soldiers and ex-soldiers which avowedly have ... an organized opposition to authority', thus making explicit both that he saw it as a counter-force to the Association and the Federation, and that he regarded soldiers and ex-soldiers in the same light.⁶⁴ The Army Council was not persuaded that day, and did not consider the matter again,⁶⁵ but Derby and his colleagues pressed on, and on 15 August they were joined by three other MPs, including Anderson Montague Barlow,⁶⁶ at a conference in the War Office.⁶⁷ This became the inaugural committee meeting, where they appear to have settled on the name 'the Comrades of the Great War', though no minutes have been found.

A week later Norton Griffiths told Davies about 'a long discussion yesterday resulting in Lord Derby submitting to the War Cabinet the draft of a most excellent word painted [sic] letter to all the Lord Lieutenants, etc'.⁶⁸ The official minute confirms that Derby had indeed, in his role as Secretary of State for War, reported the proposed 'Association for Helping Soldiers After the War' to the War Cabinet on 22 August, commenting:

The idea was that the scheme should be run on Masonic lines, with lodges, much after the pattern of the Posts of the Veterans of the Grand Army in the United States. To do this it would be necessary for him to get into touch with, and correspond with, various

⁶³ Secretary of State for War, 'Formation of Soldiers' and Sailors' Committees', WC Memorandum G.T.1522, 26 July 1917, TNA, CAB 24/21/22. Not, however, minuted at any WC meeting around this time.

⁶⁴ Minutes of the Proceedings of, and Précis prepared for, the Army Council, for the year 1917, minutes 1 August 1917, 35–36, and précis 878, 85, TNA, WO 163/22.

⁶⁵ At least, not in their subsequent meetings that year. Minutes of the Army Council 1917, 20 August 1917 – 5 December 1917, 36–53.

⁶⁶ He is hereafter referred to as 'Montague Barlow', wherever the surname alone is required, never just 'Barlow', as is done incorrectly in some previous studies. This is in the same style as Lloyd George, Norton Griffiths et al. Both Montague Barlow and Norton Griffiths hyphenated their surnames in later life, but not during this period.

⁶⁷ Wootton, *Official History*, 4. This conference is referenced in the minutes as the first 'Founders and Promoters' meeting, on 15, 17 and 20 August. The date, 15 August, is also the first time that 'Comrades of the Great War' appears in Wilfrid Ashley's 1917 diary, beside the entry '3.45 Derby Conference. WO.' Ashley papers, BR 89/12.

⁶⁸ 'Comrades of the Great War', Norton Griffiths to Davies, 23 August 1917. Davies papers, A9/3.

officials, such as the Lord Lieutenants of counties, the chairmen of Territorial Associations, the chairmen of municipal corporations, mayors, &c. for which he asked the authority of the War Cabinet.⁶⁹

It is somewhat surprising to see the reference to 'the Veterans of the Grand Army in the United States', a title that does not appear in any other record and appears to be a garbled reference to the Grand Army of the Republic, which the British Government did not want to see replicated in the UK. It was a concern echoed by Hamar Greenwood, who wrote to Ashley that he was 'brought up in the aftermath of the Civil War in America, and saw the Veterans there become the decisive factor in American history for nearly a generation'.⁷⁰ Nonetheless, the authority requested by Derby was duly granted and this is important, for it shows how he took a leading role in setting up the Comrades, with the authority of the War Cabinet, while being careful to avoid publicly linking it to the Government. Accordingly, when he did write to all the Lords Lieutenant and other officials, he used his private address rather than that of the War Office,⁷¹ although given his position as Secretary of State for War, the distinction can have been of little consequence to the recipients. Norton Griffiths promptly circulated that letter to other public figures, with a covering letter that clumsily highlighted Derby's involvement.⁷² This caused the latter to write angrily to Ashley that fundraising appeals had been sent out using his name, 'in a way which makes my position ... extremely difficult ... I have only one alternative, and that is to repudiate these letters and requests'.⁷³ This shows the lengths that Derby was willing to go to avoid his involvement becoming public knowledge. A week earlier, on 23 August, the day after that War Cabinet meeting, the six founding MPs had re-announced the 'Comrades of the Great War' in further letters to *The Times*, and other national and regional

⁶⁹ WC 222, 22 August 1917, 4, minute 13, TNA, CAB 23/3/70. Note that the name 'Veterans of the Grand Army', quoted here, was the initial name for the Comrades, not the name of the American organisation of Civil War veterans (which was 'the Grand Army of the Republic').

⁷⁰ Greenwood to Ashley, 10 August 1917, Ashley papers, BR81/6.

⁷¹ Derby to Lords Lieutenant, Derby House, Stratford Place, W.1: form letter attached to Norton Griffiths' letter to Astor, 30 August 1917, Waldorf Astor papers, University of Reading Archives, MS 1066 1/6781917, hereafter 'Astor papers'.

⁷² Norton Griffiths to Astor, 30 August 1917, Astor papers, MS 1066 1/6781917.

⁷³ Secretary of State for War to Ashley, 6 September 1917, Ashley papers, BR81/4.

newspapers.⁷⁴ They declared that it would be ‘wholly non-political and democratic in character’, despite being founded and led by six MPs; this does not seem to have been regarded as contradictory by the founders, and indeed they promoted it as such, throughout its existence.⁷⁵ Their claim to be ‘wholly non-political’ was obviously aimed at the Association and the Federation, while asserting that it would be ‘democratic in character’, when it clearly was not, gave ammunition to its critics, who were quick to respond. Reaction from the first two organisations was immediate, with James Hogge’s own Letter to the Editor, Geoffrey Dawson, published in the following day’s *Times*,⁷⁶ and in other newspapers. In it, he pointed out that ‘over a hundred similar organisations have been in existence for months’ and that the ‘large majority of these’ had amalgamated into his own Federation, which he claimed was ‘already over a quarter of a million strong, and growing daily’.⁷⁷ Hogge concluded by suggesting that ‘In the circumstances it might be worth while for the promoters of the new organization to satisfy themselves that there is a necessity for another society before proceeding with their plan’.⁷⁸ Hogge clearly doubted that there was any such need, but his protests were to no avail.

It soon became apparent, too, that it would not be very democratic, at least at the start, as the two lieutenant-colonels had quite different views of the new grouping. Norton Griffiths conceived it as an organisation of ex-soldiers and sailors, led by ex-officers,⁷⁹ with just the tacit support of MPs and other luminaries; but Ashley saw it as an organisation that would be run directly by MPs.⁸⁰ Ashley’s view prevailed at first, perhaps because he was better at garnering the support of colleagues than the pugilistic Norton Griffiths, of whom Davies wrote ‘I will do everything that I can to exert a steadying influence, and I think that other Members of the Committee will do the same’.⁸¹ An example of that approach is seen in the minutes of the second ‘Founders and Promoters’ meeting in September, when it passed an effusive vote of thanks to Norton Griffiths for ‘his splendid services to the Nation and to His

⁷⁴ ‘Comrades of the Great War’, *The Times*, 23 August 1917, 9.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ ‘Comrades of the Great War’, *The Times*, 24 August 1917, 9.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Kimball, ‘Ex-Service movement’, 39.

⁸⁰ Wootton, *Official History*, 3–4.

⁸¹ Davies to Ashley, 31 August 1917, Ashley papers, BR 70–32.

Majesty's Forces' in promoting the new organisation.⁸² Following Ashley's preference, the first Executive Committee comprised the 'Founders and Promoters', that is the six MPs, all current or former army and navy officers, who had signed the launch letter, and one non-MP, Captain Donald Simson,⁸³ who had defected from a senior role in the Federation.⁸⁴ They created a General Committee, which was the Executive plus additional members to 'bring its numbers up to about fifteen ... to include at least three non-commissioned officers and privates and one seaman'.⁸⁵ That meant that as many as twelve out of the fifteen, some four-fifths of the General Committee, could be officers, so such a body was not in any way reflective of the make-up of the Army, and indeed it was almost a mirror-image of the Association's and Federation's domination by rankers. Moreover, Norton Griffiths and Ashley 'undertook to visit the War Office and consult the A.G.'s Department on the possible discharged men who might be invited to join the General Committee'; so they were taking no chances when it came to the choice of rankers.⁸⁶ On the other hand, and perhaps responding to Hogge's criticism, when they added nine men to the General Committee the following month, seven of them were NCOs or below.⁸⁷ And in November they ordered that 'the General Secretary should endeavour to secure the addition of two privates'.⁸⁸ Thus, they were clearly concerned to create at least the appearance of a General Committee drawn from all ranks, though it is noticeable that the Executive Committee continued to be comprised entirely of officers, and to make most of the decisions.

In the wake of Hogge's critical response to the announcement of the Comrades in August, a meeting of Federation members in London the following month called for 'the unification of all organizations of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers — whose aims and objects are for one great purpose of assisting and protecting the interests of the discharged men, his

⁸² 'Minutes of a meeting of the Founders and Promoters of the Comrades of the Great War', 11–14 September 1917, 8, item 23, Davies papers, C5/6–10.

⁸³ 'Comrades of the Great War. Executive Committee', 13 September 1917, Davies papers, C5/6–10.

⁸⁴ Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 80. Note that Ward generally mis-spells Simson as 'Simpson'.

⁸⁵ 'Minutes of the Founders and Promoters', 11–14 September 1917, 2, item 6.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Comrades of the Great War, Executive Committee minutes, 22 October 1917, 1, item 6, Davies papers, C5/6–10.

⁸⁸ Comrades of the Great War, Executive Committee minutes, 17 November 1917, 2, Davies papers, C5/6–10.

dependents, and the dependents of fallen comrades'.⁸⁹ It went on to pledge 'not to say or do anything that will prejudice any opportunity of honest and sincere amalgamation of those bodies'.⁹⁰ It is unclear whether that pledge was addressed to all the ex-service organisations, including the Comrades, or rather excluding, and in opposition to, that organisation. The latter interpretation seems the most likely, given the strength of ill-feeling that had been expressed over the previous two weeks, and the probability that the supporters of the resolution did not view the Comrades as having the 'aims and objects' set out in the text. In any event, the Comrades did not surface again in the national press until the middle of November, when there was an announcement, again in newspapers such as *The Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail*, of the organisation's official 'Inauguration'.⁹¹ This was to be at the Mansion House in London, 'a venue from which Britain's ruling elite traditionally launched appeals for worthy causes', as Kimball puts it.⁹² The venue was another indication of the degree of official support, as was the list of speakers and attendees, with General Smuts, recently recalled from leading British troops in East Africa to join the War Cabinet,⁹³ due to give the formal address. Ashley had earlier asked Derby to issue the invitation to Smuts, but Derby had replied firmly 'I am afraid I could not ask General Smuts to address a meeting. That would at once make it even more official ... as it would be a member of the War Cabinet approving'.⁹⁴ This again showed his determination to avoid any hint of government involvement.

The launch revived the controversies that had greeted the first public announcement of the Comrades, becoming the subject of a sharp exchange in the House of Commons, just the day beforehand. Noel Pemberton Billing, independent MP for Hertford, veteran of the

⁸⁹ Federation, Memorandum, 6 September 1917. Quoted in Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 89 (location of original document unknown).

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ 'A meeting is to be held at the Mansion House ...' (no headline), *The Daily Telegraph*, 13 November 1917, 9, foot of col. 5; 'Inauguration of "The Comrades"', *Daily Mail*, 13 November 1917, 3.

⁹² Kimball, 'Ex-Service movement', 40.

⁹³ Shula Marks, 'Smuts, Jan Christiaan (1870–1950)', *ODNB*, online version: 6 January 2011, accessed 16 August 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36171>.

⁹⁴ Derby to Ashley, 10 October 1917, from Derby House, Stratford Place, W.1., Ashley papers, BR81/4.

South African War, founder of the Supermarine aircraft company,⁹⁵ and a consistent critic of the Government on many issues, put a characteristically blunt question to Bonar Law, standing in for the Prime Minister. He asked ‘whether the Government are interested, financially or otherwise, in the formation and/or organisation of the movement known as the “Comrades of the Great War”; and whether he is prepared to state that the Government have no intention of utilising this organisation for any direct or indirect political purpose?’.⁹⁶ Bonar Law’s answers were ‘negative’ and ‘affirmative’ respectively,⁹⁷ and indeed nothing has been found in his papers to suggest he had any involvement in government support for the Comrades,⁹⁸ which was largely Derby’s work. Hogge followed up with a question about a statement attributed to the Comrades that ‘members of the forces in the field can become honorary members’, asking if that was true, and if so were they ‘entitled to become members of other organisations?’, to which Bonar Law could only say that he had not seen the statement.⁹⁹ However, this hostile questioning does not seem to have deterred members of the Government from openly attending the launch the next day. It was a lavish event, featuring numerous prominent members of the aristocracy and the political and military Establishment, and presided over by the Lord Mayor of London, C. A. Hanson MP. Guests included the first Minister of Pensions, George Barnes MP,¹⁰⁰ along with Lord French, the Duke of Westminster, and all the eminent signatories of the August 23 letter. Also significant was the presence of the newspaper magnates Lord Beaverbrook (*Daily Express*)¹⁰¹ and Lord Rothermere (*Daily Mail* and *The Daily Mirror*).¹⁰² A notable

⁹⁵ G. R. Searle, ‘Billing, Noel Pemberton (1881–1948)’, *ODNB*, online version: 17 September 2015, accessed 3 June 2020, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37192>. Pemberton Billing was another man with a double surname, which was not hyphenated at that time.

⁹⁶ HC Deb 12 November 1917 vol 99 c32.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Parliamentary Archives, BL/ series.

⁹⁹ HC Deb 12 November 1917 vol 99 c32.

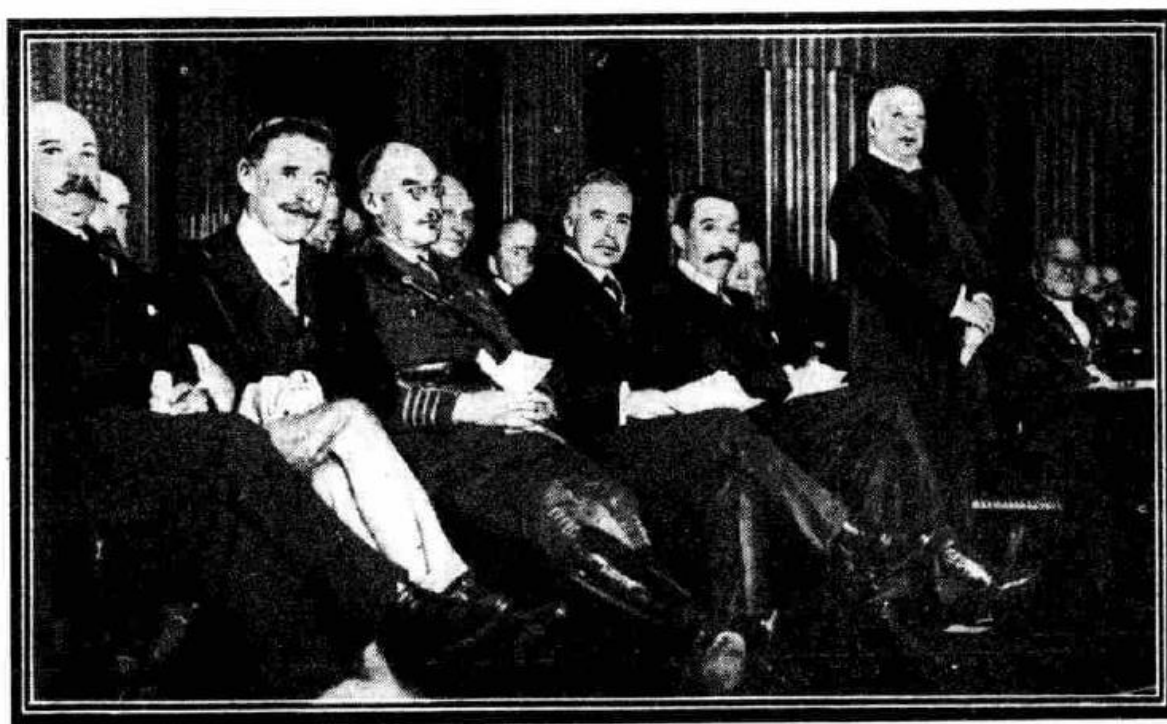
¹⁰⁰ He had served from the creation of the Ministry, in December 1916, until August 1917, when he was promoted to the War Cabinet, as a Minister Without Portfolio. Alastair J. Reid, ‘Barnes, George Nicoll (1859–1940)’, *ODNB*, online version: 3 January 2008, accessed 14 August 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30602>.

¹⁰¹ D. George Boyce, ‘Aitken, William Maxwell, first Baron Beaverbrook (1879–1964)’, *ODNB*, online version: 6 January 2011, accessed 14 August 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30358>.

¹⁰² D. George Boyce, ‘Harmsworth, Harold Sidney, first Viscount Rothermere (1868–1940)’, *ODNB*, online version: 6 January 2011, accessed 14 August 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33718>.

absentee was star guest General Smuts, who had just been posted at short notice to the Italian Front, so his speech was delivered by the Lord Mayor. In it, Smuts described the Comrades as 'a society to perpetuate the glorious spirit of comradeship which has carried them through so many months and years of stress and storm'.¹⁰³ Lord Beresford replied by describing it as 'a national patriotic organization founded upon strictly democratic principles and for the single purpose of promoting the interest of those gallant men who by land and sea have defended the cause of human liberty during the greatest crisis in our history'.¹⁰⁴

"BOLOS AT THE MANSION HOUSE"—DISORDER AT A MEETING.



Lord Beresford "having," in his own words, "got rid of the Bolos," continues his remarks at the Mansion House yesterday. His speech, delivered at the inaugural meeting of the Comrades of the Great War movement, was subjected to interruptions and there was considerable disorder.

Figure 10: Launch of the Comrades of the Great War.¹⁰⁵

Such fine words did not go down well with everyone present, as Beresford's speech was interrupted by boing, cries of 'Bosh! It's a government scheme', 'Why don't you shoot

¹⁰³ 'Comrades of the Great War: New Organization', *The Times*, 14 November 1917, 3.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *The Daily Mirror*, 14 November 1917, 5.

that traitor?’ and cheers for the National Federation. When he tried to assert that ‘The object of the society is ...’ his sentence was completed by a shout from the floor ‘... to conscript wounded soldiers’, to which he responded by calling on the police ‘to look after these men’, who were duly escorted out.¹⁰⁶ *The Times* described them as “silver badge” men who apparently belonged to the National Federation of Discharged Soldiers, and resented the formation of what they regarded as a rival organization’.¹⁰⁷ After they were ‘shepherded out by policemen’, the Lord Mayor claimed that ‘this just shows the appalling manner in which German money can even find its way into this country’, reflecting the Cabinet’s obsession with ‘German funding’ of dissident groups.¹⁰⁸ It was not a comment calculated to calm the situation.¹⁰⁹

More positively, it was reported that the trustees, Lord French,¹¹⁰ Lord Beresford, and Colonel John Ward MP, had already raised £50,000 towards their target of £1 million (sums that equate respectively to around £3.5 million and £70 million today).¹¹¹ However, that ambitious target soon disappeared from the organisation’s publicity, and from such internal documents as survive. Instead, the first Annual Report, dated 31 December 1918, shows total income from the organisation’s inception fourteen months earlier amounted to just £59,800.¹¹² What is more, over half of that sum had been ‘subscribed or guaranteed’ at the time of the launch in November 1917, in the form of ‘gifts’ of £5,000 each from five men,

¹⁰⁶ ‘Comrades of the Great War’, *The Times*, 14 November 1917, 3.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. For more about the Silver Badge Party, see next chapter: ‘Ex-service groups and the 1918 General Election’.

¹⁰⁸ This suspicion that dissident groups were being funded by ‘German money’ is examined further below.

¹⁰⁹ ‘Comrades of the Great War’, *The Times*, 14 November 1917, 3.

¹¹⁰ Possibly a surprising choice, given his poor record on the Western Front, at Loos in particular, but he had remained popular because his ‘old-style high visibility at the front ... generated much affection among ordinary soldiers’. Ian F. W. Beckett, ‘French, John Denton Pinkstone, first earl of Ypres (1852–1925)’, *ODNB*, online version: 17 September 2015, accessed 1 June 2020, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33272>.

¹¹¹ ‘Inauguration of ‘The Comrades’’, *The Times*, 13 November 1917, 3. Conversions calculated on the Bank of England Inflation Calculator, accessed 15/6/20, <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator>.

¹¹² ‘Comrades of the Great War: First Annual Report: For the year ending 31 December, 1918’, 18–21, Davies papers, C5/6–10.

including Davies and Norton Griffiths, and one of £10,000.¹¹³ That income had been spent as shown below:

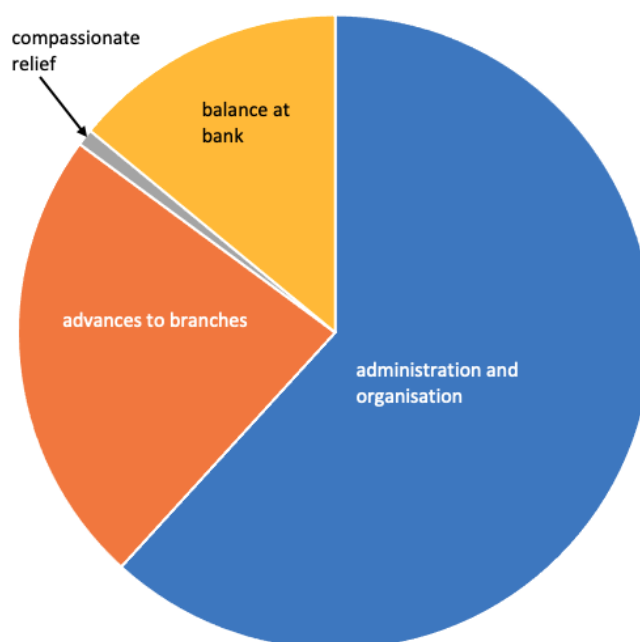


Figure 11: Comrades' expenditure in 1917 and 1918.¹¹⁴

That is to say, some £37,000 had been spent on administration and organisation, about £14,000 in 'advances to Branches' (primarily to lease buildings and to open clubs), and just over £500 on 'compassionate allowances' and 'relief to wounded men passing through London', leaving some £8,400 in the bank.¹¹⁵ The tiny proportion spent on compassionate allowances and relief is striking. However, that does not imply that the Comrades were failing to support their members, for their primary objective was the creation of local posts and branches, which would support them in obtaining pensions and other benefits, as well as providing a network of clubs for mutual support, leisure and entertainment ('posts' were branches with under 100 members).¹¹⁶ Nonetheless, the failure to achieve their original million-pound goal, or even get anywhere near it, severely restricted their ability to provide

¹¹³ 'Comrades of the Great War', *The Times*, 14 November 1917, 3.

¹¹⁴ 'Comrades First Annual Report', 18–21, Davies papers, C5/6–10. The accounts show more detail but, for clarity here, the figures have been summed under these headings.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ 'Comrades of the Great War: Constitution and Objects', 6, undated, Royal British Legion of Northern Ireland, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, hereafter 'RBL PRONI', D4555.

much in the way of charitable support to members and their families, where state support was inadequate.

Rivals' response to the formal launch of the Comrades

There might have been more hecklers at the Mansion House event, but for the fact that the Federation was holding its first National Executive Council (NEC) meeting in Birmingham the same weekend. The delegates debated a possible union with the Association, and a closer alliance with the Labour Party,¹¹⁷ which by this time was also attracting some disaffected Liberals.¹¹⁸ Neither proposal was adopted, with the NEC merely recommending all members join a trade union, but such debates showed, says Ward, that 'The Federation, which had shown imagination, verve, and independence in its beginning, now sought friends and alliances to stop the Comrades'.¹¹⁹ James Hogge was particularly scathing, describing in a major article in *The Herald* the creation of the Comrades as an attempt to 'gas' the ex-service man, a highly provocative term when poison gas had caused such death, fear and lasting disability among veterans.¹²⁰ Hogge also made much of the fact that five of the Comrades' six founding MPs had voted for the Review of Exceptions Act, including the controversial re-examination of discharged men, and furthermore that, while all six claimed to have done military service, 'only one of them had done any real service in this war ... the others had been at home and mainly in Whitehall'.¹²¹ These would have been powerful points in the minds of many of the men who both organisations were aiming to recruit. By contrast the Association, writes Ward, 'seemed less concerned than the Federation' as evidenced by debates at its first annual conference the previous month, which followed a first year that 'had been a limited success having little money to spend and less hope of rivalling the Federation and now the Comrades. It was neither an innovating organization like the Federation, nor did it have the Comrades' money and

¹¹⁷ Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 58, citing minutes of the National Executive Council of the Federation, 13–14 November 1917, which can no longer be found.

¹¹⁸ See for example, Swartz, 'The Union of Democratic Control', 96.

¹¹⁹ Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 58.

¹²⁰ J. M. Hogge, M.P., 'Comrades of the Great War', *The Herald* (London, not Glasgow), 1 December 1917, 16.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

influence'.¹²² That conference was dominated by a lively debate over an NEC motion to open negotiations with the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress 'to take up the work of the Association'.¹²³ Critical voices from the floor pointed out that the trade union and labour movement had not always been supportive of discharged soldiers, and had sometimes opposed their employment. So, despite the Association's roots in trades councils, the motion was heavily defeated, although the members did agree to retain six Labour representatives on the NEC until its next conference six months later.¹²⁴

The Comrades claimed an early success when the Government introduced legislation that required each local war pensions committee, of which there were now around 2,000, to include representatives of discharged men,¹²⁵ specifically 'two discharged soldiers, and a woman, who must be the widow or the dependant of a man in the Naval or Military Forces who has died from causes arising out of his services during the present war'.¹²⁶ The Federation and the Association had long demanded this, but it was only granted after the launch of the Comrades at the Mansion House. While not explicitly stated in the records, the implication is that the Government only introduced this requirement once local committees would have the option of co-opting members of the Comrades, rather than the other organisations. Towards the end of 1917, within weeks of its launch, the organisation opened its first club, at Addlestone near Weybridge, comprising 'A large residence ... acquired and furnished by Major Gordon Watney (who also presented £5,000 to the headquarters fund)', with the opening ceremony performed by Lady Norton Griffiths, accompanied by her husband and other prominent individuals.¹²⁷ The same article reported that the national executive committee had 'acquired No. 8, Grosvenor Crescent, S.W.1, to house the various departments created during their campaign', while they also

¹²² 'Report of the First Annual Conference (Association)', October 1917. Cited in Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 59, but can no longer be found. A list of 'Resolutions adopted' (only, i.e. no minutes) can be found in the Astor papers, attached to letter from Dornan to Astor, 26 December 1918, MS 1066 1/6781917.

¹²³ *Northern Daily Telegraph*, 6 October 1917. Cited in Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 59.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ 'Minutes of Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Comrades of the Great War', 17 November 1917, 1–2, Davies papers, C5/6–10.

¹²⁶ Naval and Military War Pensions, Etc. (Local Committees) Bill, HL Deb 22 Nov 1917 vol 26 cc1129–30, the Lord Privy Seal (the Earl of Crawford) speaking.

¹²⁷ 'Comrades of the Great War: Formal Opening of the First Club', *The Times*, December 10, 1917, 5.

moved rapidly to expand overseas, with a 'South American Post' formed in December 1917.¹²⁸ Unsurprisingly, the leaders of the Federation were not impressed by the Comrades' drive to open clubs around the UK and beyond. Hogge described their £1 million target as 'a bribe ... [to be] spent on clubs, buns and billiards'.¹²⁹ His longstanding and passionate commitment to temperance may have played a part in that opinion. Graham Wootton vividly describes the situation at the end of 1917 as 'three rival groups of ex-service men, all with party political connections, glaring at each other with suspicion, envy and bitterness, and struggling with each other for the mastery of the ex-service movement'.¹³⁰ That is perhaps an exaggeration, as there was rivalry rather than animosity between the Association and the Federation; but both groups openly scorned and detested the Comrades, which they saw as a tool of the Establishment, intended to blunt the impact of their organisations.

Teething problems for the Comrades

The year 1918 did not start well for the Comrades, whose founders would surely have been confident of the success of their new organisation, despite the determined opposition of the 'rival groups'. It had a lot of influential political, military and newspaper support, and money in the bank. It had the huge advantage of operating freely among the troops in France, where it was enthusiastically promoted by Captain Beachcroft Towse V.C., a charismatic man, blinded in the Boer War, who had since worked tirelessly for wounded soldiers.¹³¹ It had poached some notable figures, such as the Federation's former candidate at the Abercromby by-election, Frank Hughes, its first national organiser, Charles Derry,¹³² and, as noted above, Captain Donald Simson, who was now on the Comrades' Executive. It was hampered, however, by its unrepresentative leadership and lack of internal

¹²⁸ 'Comrades of the Great War', *The Times*, December 31, 1917, 10.

¹²⁹ Hogge, 'Comrades', *The Herald*.

¹³⁰ Wootton, *Official History*, 5.

¹³¹ Basil Curtis, 'Towse, Sir (Ernest) Beachcroft Beckwith (1864–1948)', revised Roger T. Stearn, *ODNB*, online version: 6 January 2011, accessed 16 August 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36544>.

¹³² Hogge, 'Comrades', *The Herald*.

democracy, factors that rivals continued to highlight effectively.¹³³ Wootton claims that in response to this problem ‘Lord Derby ... brought Captain Towse, V.C. from France’, but cites no evidence.¹³⁴ On the contrary, the Davies papers shows that Towse was a member of the Comrades’ Executive Committee as early as 22 October 1917,¹³⁵ almost a month before the launch meeting, and was chairing its Appeals Committee earlier still, in mid-September.¹³⁶ Indeed, it was Towse himself, by then the Chairman of the General Committee, who highlighted its lack of impact and organisational weakness, in a very critical letter, dated 15 January 1918 and covering three foolscap pages, to the Chairman of the Executive Committee (Ashley).¹³⁷ In it, he wrote that ‘the Comrades of the Great War is not so well known as it should be ... None but the rank under [above?] that of Non-Commissioned Officer appear to take much interest in the Movement ... and the discharged man still seems to be suspicious of our Executive Committee’ and more besides.¹³⁸ He went on to make seven recommendations, most importantly that ‘several Petty Officers or Non-Commissioned Officers and men be elected, as soon as possible, to the Executive Committee’, along with suggestions for expanding the branches, developing the movement in Scotland and Wales, ‘more strenuous efforts ... to collect Big Money for the Central Fund’, and so on.¹³⁹ He concluded, ominously, that ‘if we view this enormous undertaking in any by [but?] a large-minded way, we are doomed to failure, and the men who are looking to us for assistance, to disappointment’.¹⁴⁰ These were strong criticisms, and his letter was placed on the agenda for the Executive Committee meeting of 30 January.¹⁴¹ But those minutes are incomplete so, on the basis of Wootton’s assertion that ‘Under Captain Towse’s leadership the Comrades flourished’, it appears that his recommendations were

¹³³ Hogge, ‘Comrades’, *The Herald*, among several examples.

¹³⁴ Wootton, *History*, 4.

¹³⁵ Comrades of the Great War, Executive Committee minutes, 22 October 1917, Davies papers, C5/6–10. Towse is shown as ‘present’ at most subsequent executive committee meetings.

¹³⁶ Minutes of the Appeals Committee of the Comrades of the Great War, 9 September 1917, Davies papers, C5/6–10.

¹³⁷ ‘Report of Captain Towse’, 15 January 1918, Davies papers, C5/6–10.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ Document titled: ‘The following important matters will be considered at the Meeting of the Executive Committee on Wednesday Next the 30th, inst.’, Davies papers, C5/6–10.

acted on, and the Comrades soon became a formidable third force,¹⁴² despite what Brian Harding rightly labels its continuing ‘paternalistic overtones’.¹⁴³

During 1918, each of the three organisations followed its own agenda, competing for members and sometimes persuading whole branches of a rival organisation to come over to them.¹⁴⁴ This exacerbated the already frosty relations between the groups, and these clashes frequently found their way into Parliament and the press. For example, in March 1918, *The Times* reported a row between Hogge and another MP, the Hon. Edward Wood, who objected to a circular issued by the Harrogate branch of the Federation,¹⁴⁵ which included that statement that

This federation ... has no connexion whatsoever with a concern called ‘Comrades of the Great War,’ which is a society promoted by six members of Parliament, each of whom, with one exception, supported in the House of Commons a Bill for the conscription of wounded men. (The ‘exception’ was absent from the House.)¹⁴⁶

While factually correct, that illustrates the hostile attitude of the Federation to the Comrades, while Wood’s objection was that it ‘endeavour[ed] to throw discredit on a kindred society to your own, and to impugn the genuineness of its desire to forward the interests of discharged soldiers’.¹⁴⁷ Hogge replied that he had ‘approached all six founders of the Comrades on the point [of cooperation] before they went ahead’ but that instead ‘certain members of the Comrades had been detailed to injure the Federation’, claiming that the minutes of the Comrades’ executive meetings provided proof, apparently a

¹⁴² Wootton, *Official History*, 5.

¹⁴³ Harding, *Keeping Faith*, 3.

¹⁴⁴ For example, a Comrades branch in Sheffield went over to the Federation in or around October 1918, according to a Home Office Directorate of Intelligence report: ‘Fortnightly Report on Pacifism and Revolutionary Organizations in the United Kingdom, and Morale in France and Italy’, WC paper G.T.6201, 4 November 1918, 3, TNA, CAB 24/69/1 (un-named author, probably Basil Thomson). Various other instances through 1918 and later.

¹⁴⁵ ‘Care of Ex-Soldiers: the Case for Common Action’, *The Times*, 20 March 1918, 3. Describing it as correspondence ‘we have received’, *The Times* did not specify who supplied it.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

reference to a claim by Horatio Bottomley, of whom more below.¹⁴⁸ At local level too, the rivalry sometimes became very public, as for example in Hull, where a meeting of the Comrades was ‘interrupted by a strong hostile party ... [led by] the Northern organiser of the National Federation of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers ... and members of that organisation [who] heckled the speakers from the floor of the hall’.¹⁴⁹ It would not have helped the temper of the meeting that it was chaired by Captain Simson, the high-profile defector from the Federation.

The Federation and Horatio Bottomley

The public animosity was fuelled by support for the Federation from a strange and unexpected quarter, namely Horatio Bottomley, described by Stephen Ward as ‘one of the great demagogues of his time’ and an ‘opportunist extraordinaire’; rather extreme descriptions, but justified.¹⁵⁰ He was the notorious editor and publisher of *John Bull*, a weekly working-class paper that had since 1915 carried his column ‘Tommy & Jack’ (ie soldier and sailor), which printed complaints from serving and discharged sailors and soldiers.¹⁵¹ So popular was *John Bull* that, in a week when a major fire delayed its publication, the delay was widely reported in the national and local press.¹⁵² At the beginning of 1918, he started attacking the Comrades in every issue, accusing their founders of having voted for the Review of Exceptions Act,¹⁵³ and inducing the Federation to supply him with damaging gossip from their branches,¹⁵⁴ while the London branch

¹⁴⁸ Most executive committee minutes from the period of the first meeting in September 1917, to March 1918, have been found in the Davies papers, and no evidence to support Hogge’s claim has been found in them. It seems likely that Hogge was paraphrasing an earlier, similar claim by Horatio Bottomley, in his paper *John Bull*, described in Ward, ‘British Veterans’ Organizations’, 63.

¹⁴⁹ ‘Comrades of the Great War: Heckling at Hull Meeting’, *The Daily Mail* (Hull), 11 January 1918, 2.

¹⁵⁰ Ward, ‘British Veterans’ Organizations’, 23, 62.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁵² For example, “‘John Bull’”, *The Daily Mail* (Hull), 31 January 1918, 4, col. 5.

¹⁵³ No copy of the *John Bull* article of 19 January 1918 (cited in Ward, ‘British Veterans’ Organizations’, 63) has been found, but the Comrades’ letter in response sets out Bottomley’s three main charges: letter to ‘The Editor, “John Bull”, Long Acre, W.C.’, dated 4 February 1918, Davies papers, C5/6–10.

¹⁵⁴ Federation, Swansea branch minutes, January 16, 1918, quoted in Ward, ‘British Veterans’ Organizations’, 74, original not found.

elected him honorary Vice-President.¹⁵⁵ In February he said that he had seen the Comrades' internal minutes, a claim supported by the minutes of a special meeting of their Executive called to discuss the *John Bull* article, where it was resolved that the General Secretary take action 'to prevent the leakage of information from the Headquarters office'.¹⁵⁶ Bottomley stated that what he had seen showed the Comrades had instructed Donald Simson to target the Federation by directing his activities 'exclusively to those towns in which he had been the means of bringing over to the Comrades the members of the Federation'.¹⁵⁷ The Comrades rejected this and other charges in a response that was first sent to *John Bull*,¹⁵⁸ which, in typical fashion for the paper, printed only selected extracts.¹⁵⁹ Bottomley was not deterred from further attacks, choosing instead to approach the Federation's NEC with an offer of support, which he formalised in March.¹⁶⁰ This comprised weekly publicity for the Federation and an annual contribution of £2,000 (a substantial sum then, equivalent to well over £100,000 today)¹⁶¹ in return for a role in running the Federation. The NEC agreed, made him an honorary patron, elected one of his associates, a Mr Elias, as co-honorary treasurer (with James Hogge) and set up a consultative committee that included civilians. Bottomley in turn allied his 'Blue & Khaki League', supposedly formed the previous year, with the Federation, though there is little evidence it ever existed other than on the pages of *John Bull*.¹⁶² However, he and Hogge quickly fell out over their diametrically opposed views about how the war should be fought,

¹⁵⁵ Federation, London branch minutes, January 16, 1918, quoted in Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 64, original not found.

¹⁵⁶ Comrades of the Great War, Special Meeting of the Executive Committee, 1 February 1918, 1, Davies papers, C5/6–10. No source of the 'leakage' was ever identified, in these or subsequent minutes.

¹⁵⁷ *John Bull*, 2 February 1918, quoted in Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 63–64. The words Bottomley claim to have seen do not appear in any surviving minutes, but some are missing. Certainly, Simson is minuted as reporting from places such as Hull, Sheffield, and Luton, all of which had defections from the Federation to the Comrades: Comrades of the Great War, Executive Committee minutes, 19 December 1917, 3–4, 7, 8, Davies papers, C5/6–10.

¹⁵⁸ Letter to 'The Editor, "John Bull", Long Acre, W.C.' (copy), dated 4 February 1918, Davies papers, C5/6–10.

¹⁵⁹ For example, reported in 'Comrades of the Great War', *Gloucester Journal*, 2 March 1918, 3: 'an elegant and lucid reply ... had been forwarded to the editor [of "John Bull"] who only published extracts'.

¹⁶⁰ Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 65.

¹⁶¹ £116,000 in 2020: Bank of England Inflation Calculator, accessed 4 March 202, <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator/>.

¹⁶² Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 66.

and by June the arrangement collapsed, with publicity in Bottomley's paper coming to an end, and his first contribution of £250 returned. This was a bizarre episode, given that Bottomley was politically so far to the right of Hogge, and that the Federation had only a few months earlier, in November 1917, seriously considered an alliance with the Labour Party (above). It certainly suggests that its need for money and publicity, in the face of the much better-resourced Comrades, over-rode the NEC's judgement, although it may also be that Hogge's influence over the Federation was declining, as other members of the leadership, more sympathetic to the working-class patriotism exploited by Bottomley in *John Bull*, gained in confidence and experience.

The Association's slower growth

The Association maintained a lower profile over this period, until the spring of 1918 when it held its second 'Annual Conference', just six months after the first.¹⁶³ While generating less publicity than the other two organisations, it could report growth from seventy-nine branches in October 1917, to 129 at the end of March 1918, mostly in 'Divisions' covering Lancashire and Cheshire, Yorkshire, Southern Counties, South Wales, and Cumberland and Westmoreland. Figure 8 above (in chapter 2), shows how geographically concentrated was its membership, a fact acknowledged by the General Secretary, James Miller, who admitted 'As yet we have a great amount of unbroken ground to cover'.¹⁶⁴ Miller described the Comrades harshly as 'brought into being by the present Secretary of State for War and which has plenty of wealth at their command and mean to use it to ensure a Division between the Discharged men'.¹⁶⁵ Tellingly, the Association's balance sheet revealed income and expenditure of just £208 for the half-year up to the Conference,¹⁶⁶ a tiny fraction of what the Comrades could draw on. Miller went on to repeat the charge that the Comrades' Executive Committee comprised 'Men who voted in every Division during the passing of the Review of Exceptions Act ... that you, as Discharged Men, should go back

¹⁶³ National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers, 'Report of the Second Annual Conference', 30 and 31 March and 1 April 1918, TUC Library, UB363.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 23–24.

again although you had been honourably discharged once'.¹⁶⁷ Significantly, representatives of both the Trade Union Conference Parliamentary Committee and the Labour Party Executive then addressed the conference, urging it to appoint two members to a Joint Committee of the TUC and Labour, which would tackle 'such grievances as the Employers taking into consideration a man's pension when employing Discharged men', a statement 'greeted with loud cheers'.¹⁶⁸ Despite the cheering, there was some opposition to forming such political links, but the delegates voted 79 to 28 in favour of the move.¹⁶⁹

Despite Miller's harsh words for the Comrades in the Annual Report, the Association generally showed rather less open animosity towards them than did the Federation, reflecting perhaps its weaker resources, and maybe also the lack, amongst its leadership, of any MPs to cross swords with those of the Comrades in Parliament, in government departments, and in the press. Within a few weeks of the conference, still in April 1918, the Comrades' Colonel George Crosfield met informally with Miller, and they agreed to set up a meeting of both groups for a 'preliminary discussion' on the future of their two organisations,¹⁷⁰ but no report of such a meeting taking place has been found.

During 1918, all three groups, the Association, the Federation, and the Comrades, began to shift the emphasis of their activities, probably in response to their members' needs and demands, although there are few surviving internal records from that year to inform that assessment. Government efforts to meet their criticisms were probably a factor, for pensions and separation allowances were being administered rather more efficiently, thanks to the creation of the Pensions Ministry at the end of 1916. So too the growing effectiveness of local war pensions committees (though there were still many problems and complaints), and the efforts of Parry and Codrington's Pensions Appeals Tribunal. There was also a genuine effort to overhaul the pensions service. The scale of that task was revealed towards the end of 1917, when the Minister, John Hodge, stated that 'an average

¹⁶⁷ 'Second Annual Conference', 5–6.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 6–7.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ Comrades of the Great War, Executive Committee minutes, 24 April 1918, 1., Davies papers, C5/6–10.

of 33,000 letters, etc., are dispatched every day, and that out of a staff of over 4,500 ... less than 2 per cent had any previous Civil Service experience'.¹⁷¹ At the same time, other matters were becoming more important to all the ex-service groups, including food prices, housing, rehabilitation, and re-training for returning personnel, especially those whose wounds or disease meant they could not simply resume their pre-war occupations. Branch minutes of all three organisations often mention support given to individual members, dependants and widows, both as direct financial grants,¹⁷² and more frequently, by assisting them to take their cases to local war pensions committees.¹⁷³ Thus all three organisations developed their aims and activities during the year, with a growing emphasis on practical support for returning sailors and soldiers, and much activity at local levels.

State support versus charity

Both the Association and the Federation continued to assert their fundamental belief that it was the duty of the state to support former sailors, soldiers and their dependants by the direct provision of pensions, allowances, health care, housing, jobs and whatever else was needed to restore them to the standard of living they would have enjoyed had they not served. Moreover, they contended, and this was crucial, that all this should be a matter of right, not charity, although that did not prevent local branches of both organisations holding flag days and other fund-raising events, to the extent that many were required to register under the War Charities Act 1916.¹⁷⁴ The Government, by contrast, although obliged to become gradually more generous over the previous three years, wanted to continue minimising its financial commitments to veterans and their dependants, and to leave as much as possible to charities. An interesting illustration of this is the War Office information film 'Broken in the Wars' released in 1918, an eight-minute silent film with the

¹⁷¹ HC Deb 12 Nov 1917 vol 99 cc22–24.

¹⁷² For example, Federation, Swansea branch minutes, 30 January 1918. Quoted in Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 74 (minutes no longer available).

¹⁷³ For example, the Lincoln branch of the Association, reported in the *Lincoln Leader*, 6 July 1918. Quoted in Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 75–76 (publication not available).

¹⁷⁴ Approximately 151 branches of the Federation, 68 of the Comrades, and 46 of the Association. Charity Commission (author), *War Charities Act, 1916: Charities Entered in the Combined Register of Charities Registered in England and Wales under the Act up to 31st December, 1918* (London, 1919).

key dialogue shown as full-screen 'intertitles', which gave the words great impact.¹⁷⁵ It depicts a fictional character, Joe, who leaves the Army after two years' service, disabled and on crutches, and with no money to restart his pre-war business as a cobbler. His wife appeals for help to a local philanthropist, Lady Dorothea Hamlyn, who explains that the Minister for Pensions, John Hodge,¹⁷⁶ has a 'scheme for providing money to enable wounded soldiers to return to set up in business on their own account [which] is progressing well, he hopes to raise three million pounds in the near future'.¹⁷⁷ This is 'the King's Fund for Disabled Officers and Men', a registered charity.¹⁷⁸ She arranges a meeting between the fictional couple and the real John Hodge, who listens closely and exclaims 'Here is clearly a case where something can be done', to which Lady Dorothea responds 'But surely the State ought to provide for cases of this sort?'.¹⁷⁹ Hodge replies firmly that 'It's no State duty to find capital to start people in business', and Joe's wife responds 'We don't want no charity', but Hodge explains with a benevolent smile 'This is no charity, my dear. It is just the mere gratitude of old fogies for the men who have given Everything [sic] for us.'¹⁸⁰ The couple leave and Hodge then turns direct to the camera (below), and thus to the cinema audience, and appeals to the public to donate the three million pounds needed to make the scheme work, an appeal that surely demonstrates it was indeed charity. As an indication of Government policy, in line with the Comrades' embrace of public appeals, and in opposition to the Association's and the Federation's rejection of charity, it could hardly have been clearer, while the means of delivering it, by a short newsreel as part of cinema programmes that were seen by millions, could scarcely have been more effective. It was not just getting the information to veterans who might benefit from the scheme, it was also

¹⁷⁵ 'Broken in the Wars', BFI screenonline, director Cecil Hepworth, <https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-broken-in-the-wars-1918-online>, accessed 2 June 2020.

¹⁷⁶ Hodge was at that time the long-serving Labour MP for South-East Lancashire, and had been Minister of Labour in the Lloyd George Coalition Government, until becoming Pensions Minister in August 1917. Cameron Hazlehurst and Sally Whitehead with Christine Woodland, eds, *A Guide to the Papers of British Cabinet Ministers 1900–1964* (Cambridge University Press for Royal Historical Society, 1996), 190.

¹⁷⁷ 'Broken in the Wars', 03:50.

¹⁷⁸ Simon Baker, 'Broken in the Wars (1918)', BFI screenonline, notes, <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/1187140/index.html>, accessed 2 June 2020.

¹⁷⁹ 'Broken in the Wars', 05:51.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 06:12–07:15.

sending a message to much larger numbers of people who would not benefit directly, but would be reassured that the Government was doing all it could to help people like 'Joe'.



Figure 12: scene from the War Office Information film 'Broken in the Wars', with the real-life Pensions Minister, John Hodge, and the fictional philanthropist, Lady Dorothea. Credit: BFI screenonline.¹⁸¹

Growth across the UK

Although there was not a great deal of geographical overlap, sometimes there were local clashes as the three organisations grew; for example the *Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph* reported, in October 1917, a call for these two Welsh towns to set up branches of the Association, just as nearby Pembroke Dock and Fishguard had done, with both of them achieving representation on their local war pensions committees.¹⁸² A couple of months later the same paper reported a meeting in Milford Haven, where a representative

¹⁸¹ 'Broken in the Wars', 07:00–07:15.

¹⁸² 'Discharged Soldiers and Sailors: Formation of Local Associations Suggested', *Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph*, 31 October 1917, 1.

of the Comrades urged veterans to join his organisation, and a committee was elected to form a local branch.¹⁸³ At the end of January 1918, a quite lengthy article sub-titled 'Growing Movement in Pembrokeshire' described how local branches of the Association had formed a County body.¹⁸⁴ The same meeting passed a resolution supporting the amalgamation of the National Association with the National Federation, with specific reference to James Hogge as 'the ex-service man's best friend'; but there were no such warm words for the Comrades, accused instead of 'endeavouring to seduce members from their allegiance to their Association'.¹⁸⁵ Many similar reports appeared in other local papers in various parts of the UK throughout 1917–18. By the spring of 1918, the Federation was claiming between 300 and 400 branches across the UK,¹⁸⁶ with its greatest concentration in London and the South-East, although that very rough estimate for the total number suggests a rather inefficient national organisation, or a somewhat ill-defined affiliation procedure. The Association numbered just 129 branches around that time,¹⁸⁷ against the Comrades' 329 (inclusive of 'posts'),¹⁸⁸ the former located particularly in country towns and villages. The latter maintained steady growth of new posts and branches, as shown below (figure 13), along with a growing number of 'Ivy Leaf' social clubs,¹⁸⁹ numbering 135 by November 1918. The gap in the curves reflects a lack of data for those months, but the overall trend is clear - from a total of about 200 in late February 1918, to over 750 by the end of December, and the rate of growth increased to August 1919 (no data found beyond that date).

¹⁸³ 'Discharged Soldiers and Sailors: Meeting at Milford Haven', *Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph*, 26 December 1917, 3.

¹⁸⁴ 'Discharged Soldiers and Sailors: Formation of County Association', *Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph*, 30 January 1918, 4.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ 'Today's Meetings', *Northampton Daily Echo*, 25 May 1918, 3. Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 70, quotes a figure of '500' from this same reference, but that figure does not appear in the article.

¹⁸⁷ National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers, 'Report of the Second Annual Conference', TUC Library, UB363.

¹⁸⁸ 'News in Brief', *The Times*, 15 May 1918, 3.

¹⁸⁹ The name simply reflected the organisation's chosen emblem, according to Kimball, 'Ex-Service movement', 43. Ivy Leaf clubs still exist, separately from the British Legion, for example Maidenhead Ivy Leaf Club 'founded in June 1918', website <http://www.maidenheadivyleafclub.co.uk/> accessed 13 December 2017.

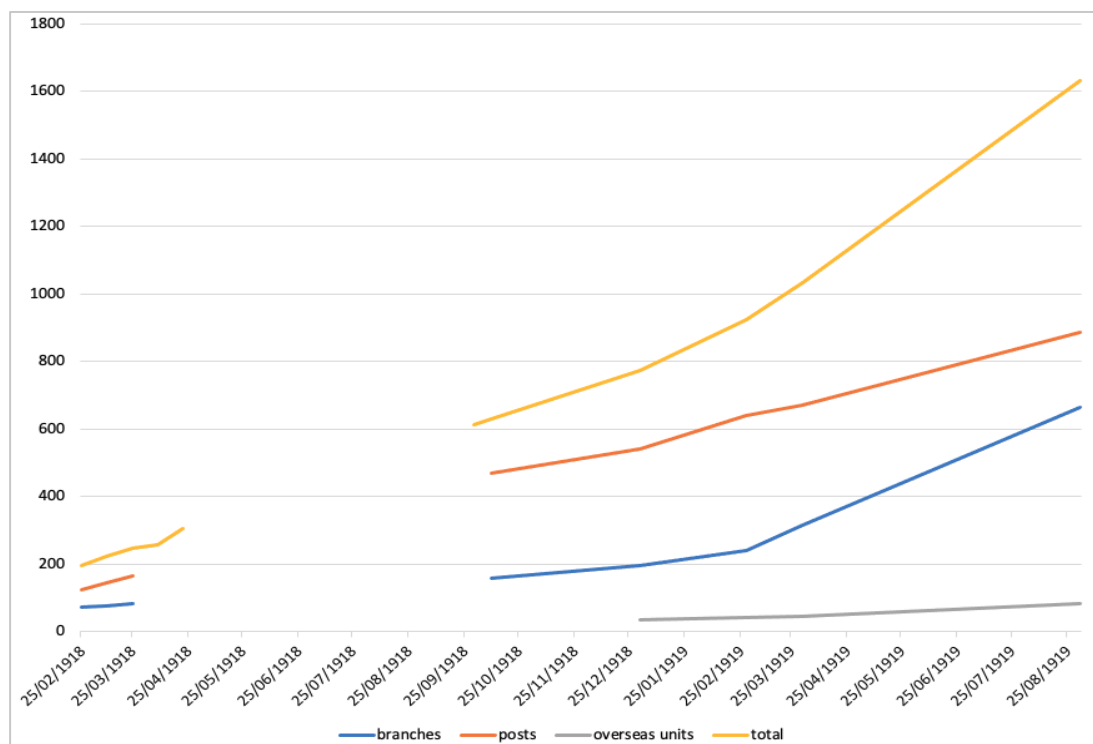


Figure 13: Comrades of the Great War growth from February 1918 to August 1919
(see appendix 2 for data sources and calculation)

A long-running point of dispute between the three organisations was the exclusion of officers, other than those who had risen from the ranks, by the Association and the Federation, whereas the Comrades admitted all ranks. The reasons for the Association's attitude were rarely set out in any detail, but a letter in *The Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph*, from the local branch secretary, D. Emrys Hughes, explained it well.¹⁹⁰ Hughes asked if it was 'likely, for example, that an ex-officer with a grievance would seek assistance from an Association which consisted chiefly of N.C.O.'s and men, who are, naturally, greatly in the majority? I hardly think so. On the other hand, the "rankers" would, from force of habit, be reticent in the presence of men who had held commissioned rank'.¹⁹¹ He added that the Association 'encourage the fraternizing of officers and men as comrades by admitting ex-officers as associate members', who were only excluded from

¹⁹⁰ D. Emrys Hughes, 'Discharged Soldiers and the "Comrades" Movement: to the Editor of the "Telegraph"', *The Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph*, 2 January 1918, 4.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

the 'business' side of the organisation.¹⁹² Given that the Association appears, by that account, not to have completely excluded ex-officers from membership, the rationale seems reasonable, and not based on any lingering resentment among the men towards their former officers. The division also mirrored the gulf in their civilian lives between the working and the managerial classes, in what was then a strongly class-divided society.

Another matter of long-standing concern to all the organisations was the number of ex-soldiers ending up in Poor Law workhouses because of inadequate pensions. It had been raised repeatedly over the years in the press, as for example in September 1917 in *Llais Llafur* (Labour Voice), the Welsh socialist weekly. The Association's country organiser, Evan E. Rees, asserted that discharged men had been found in workhouses as early as 1915 and that 'in London there are over 200 cases to-day'. He demanded that 'the scandal of pauperising soldiers and sailors should immediately cease'.¹⁹³ However, in Parliament, the Government stuck to its Treasury-driven line that 'It is not contemplated to issue a minimum pension sufficient for the support of a discharged soldier without any reference to the extent of his disability',¹⁹⁴ despite repeated demands for precisely that, in order that no ex-soldier or sailor should end up in the workhouse. Nor could the Government plead ignorance, for its own reports had revealed discharged men so desperate for proper treatment for their wounds that some had even 'attempted by desperate methods to get back to the army in order that they might secure attention', according to War Cabinet minutes.¹⁹⁵ Colonel Hamar Greenwood, one of the founders of the Comrades, the most loyal of the three organisations, asserted in a Commons debate that 'our Army ... is the worst-paid and worst-pensioned Army in the English-speaking world'.¹⁹⁶ He predicted that, after the war, between 5 and 6 million soldiers and sailors would return to the Mother Country 'with many grievances, most of them justifiable'.¹⁹⁷ Another of those grievances was the treatment of war orphans. At the beginning of August 1918, Sir Arthur Fell MP

¹⁹² Hughes, 'Discharged Soldiers and the "Comrades" Movement'.

¹⁹³ Evan E. Rees, 'National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers', *Llais Llafur*, 8 September 1917, 8.

¹⁹⁴ HC Deb 25 April 1917 vol 92 cc2379–80.

¹⁹⁵ 'Treatment of Invalided Soldiers from the Army', WC 437, 28 June 1918, minute 17, TNA, CAB 23/6/59.

¹⁹⁶ HC Deb 10 July 1918 vol 108 cc364–65.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

asked the Pensions Minister, John Hodge, whether his Department had any homes where five orphaned children of a deceased soldier could be looked after, in the absence of any other relatives.¹⁹⁸ Hodge replied that he had no powers to provide for such cases, but he would seek them in the next Parliament. A week later it was reported that war-orphaned children had been found in a workhouse, and that was too much for the London branch of the Federation, which sent a stern resolution to the NEC stating that 'it is the duty of the state to provide suitable homes and not allow them to be left at the mercy of charity and workhouses'.¹⁹⁹ This resolution quickly went round the country.²⁰⁰ The situation was indefensible, and the new Naval and Military Pensions Bill that Hodge presented in the autumn of 1918, did indeed include provision for the care of war orphans outside the workhouse,²⁰¹ some 2,500 years after Athens had made similar arrangements for its younger citizens.

The dispute over ex-service groups' involvement in politics

In July 1918 a significant resolution was debated in Parliament, proposed by the Conservative MP, and Comrades' founder-member, Anderson Montague Barlow, who was concerned about the growing influence of the ex-service groups in politics, and in particular their political links.²⁰² He proposed that 'in the interests alike of the State' and of veterans, dependants, widows and orphans, 'it is essential that all questions relating to pensions and allowances should be kept free from party politics and the influence of party organisations'.²⁰³ Among his arguments was the one by then familiar to his fellow MPs, what he called 'the American experience', in other words that of the Grand Army of the Republic. Hodge of course took an entirely opposite view, proposing an amendment that

¹⁹⁸ HC Deb 7 August 1918 vol 109 cc1392–93. Hodge had just replaced George Barnes as Pensions Minister.

¹⁹⁹ Federation, London branch, Minutes, August 14, 1918. Quoted in Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 76 (original no longer available).

²⁰⁰ For example, 'Morpeth Discharged Men's Association', *The Morpeth Herald*, 30 August 1918, 5.

²⁰¹ HC Deb 22 October 1918 vol 110 cc608–86.

²⁰² HC Deb 10 July 1918 vol 108 cc333–401.

²⁰³ *Ibid* c333.

... it is essential all political parties use their influence and power to secure not only an adequate scale of pensions, but the prompt and efficient administration of the same, and that all attempts to render to those who have made great sacrifices for their country such information and guidance as will enable them to claim and receive ... their full and just rights should receive the warm approval of the House.²⁰⁴

The debate went on for many hours but, when it came to the division, Hogge's amendment was lost by 132 votes to just 34, and Montague Barlow's resolution carried without a further division. Hogge's long-time collaborator, William Pringle, had concluded the debate with the scathing assertion that

This House ... is a moribund, senile, unrepresentative Assembly ... It will only be adding to the deep discredit into which it has fallen with the great body of the people of this country if it passes this fatuous, futile, and canting Resolution.²⁰⁵

Given that there was no prospect that pensions and allowances would 'be kept free from party politics and the influence of party organisations', and indeed the debate had demonstrated that fact, it would be hard to dispute Pringle's conclusion. He, along with Hogge and a number of other MPs, though rarely more than a handful, had over the four years of the war repeatedly raised the problems facing dependants, veterans, widows and orphans. But the response of the Government and military and naval authorities had been slow, inefficient, frequently mean-spirited, almost never on a scale commensurate with their needs, and of a piece with its attitude on these issues over previous centuries. Little wonder then, that so many embraced the politically aligned organisations that had emerged to press their case. Moreover, the mover of this resolution, Montague Barlow, was a founder-member of the Comrades,²⁰⁶ an organisation that relentlessly claimed to be 'non-political', while founded and run by a group of serving MPs. It is possible to make some sense of that stance by interpreting their definition of 'non-political' as 'not aligned with radical or left-wing politics', or else that they believed that although elected to

²⁰⁴ HC Deb 10 July 1918 vol 108 c346.

²⁰⁵ Ibid cc398–99.

²⁰⁶ Wootton, *Official History*, 4.

Parliament as members of political parties, they were not acting in a party-political manner. The latter interpretation is supported to some extent by a short but intriguing hand-written letter from 'D', understood to be Lord Derby,²⁰⁷ to David Davies, in September 1917, in the early weeks of forming the Comrades, and two months before its formal launch. 'D' wrote that he and Davies were 'in real agreement ... that ... the efficient conduct of the War ... has suffered as much from the working of the old party system as from any other cause ... and we have cut off from party to show our bonafides'.²⁰⁸ This rather implies that Derby felt that he, as War Secretary in a Coalition Government, and those MPs leading the Comrades, could launch a 'non-political' organisation to support 'the efficient conduct of the War', despite their obvious party-political links. Nonetheless, other documents indicate that other senior members recognised the difficulty of maintaining their claim to be non-political. For example, Davies wrote a strikingly thoughtful paper, for internal discussion, on 'Future Policy'. In it, he stated that both the Federation and the Comrades 'are non-party or non-partisan so far as their relationship with the old and recognised parties in the State are concerned', but 'are both political in the sense that they are both prepared to take political action ... in the interest of discharged men [and] ... Both have members of Parliament on their Executive Committee ... It will therefore appear to ordinary outsiders that essentially there is no great difference either in the constitution or the objects of these two organisations'.²⁰⁹ Likewise, a letter from Norton Griffiths includes the candid statement that 'I am certain, under existing conditions the Organisation is doomed to failure, for there is a firm belief That the Comrades has behind it political motives. ... untrue ... but the Executive is practically all Members of Parliament'.²¹⁰ Thus, there can be no doubt that at least some of the Comrades' leading members, including Davies and Norton Griffiths, realised that their claim to be non-political was unsustainable, and that the work of all three organisations was necessarily political, for none of them were traditional service charities, and all used the political process in furtherance of their aims.

²⁰⁷ 'D' to 'D.D.' (David Davies), 8 September 1917, Davies papers, C5/6–10. While it has not been possible to establish D's identity beyond doubt, there are other examples of Derby signing himself as 'D' when writing to a close colleague, the content appears to fit him, and there is no other likely candidate.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ Seven-page document entitled 'Confidential: Comrades of the Great War: Future Policy', March 1918, 1–2. Davies papers C5/6–10 (more than one version of this paper appears in the archive).

²¹⁰ Norton Griffiths to Davies re 'Future Policy', 18 March 1918, 1, Davies papers, C5/6–10.

Government surveillance

At the root of this sensitivity about how ‘political’ the various veterans’ organisations were, was the suspicion that they might be used in some way by pacifist, revolutionary or dissident sections of the labour movement. While, as noted above, Ward’s claim that the Government ‘feared and misinterpreted’ the actions of the Association and the Federation is not supported by references in his thesis or by other evidence, it is true that the Federation was included in a few of Basil Thomson’s ‘Fortnightly Report[s] on Pacifist and Revolutionary Organisations in the United Kingdom’ from October 1918 onwards.²¹¹ However, not too much should be read into that for, as will be shown below, such references gave little cause for alarm. These reports arose out of a War Cabinet paper by Sir Edward Carson a year earlier, 3 October 1917, when he called for ‘fuller information as to the nature of the pacifist propaganda which is being carried on throughout the country, and the identity of those who take part in it’.²¹² He noted that it was ‘intertwined with the whole question of labour unrest’, that information was coming from six different government ministries and departments, and that only one of these provided regular reports.²¹³ He recommended the Home Office compile a single weekly report from all those sources, otherwise ‘it will be exceedingly difficult to counteract pacifist propaganda effectively’.²¹⁴ A week later the Minister of Labour, George Roberts, submitted a paper, agreeing in principle but pointing out that the weekly report on industrial unrest, prepared by his ministry since a War Cabinet directive of 15 May 1917, already compiled information from all those sources, and it would only be necessary to have it ‘extended to cover pacifist propaganda’.²¹⁵ Neither of these two reports mentions veterans, except in one curious reference by Roberts, where he contrasts a list of pacifist bodies and publications, such as the Woman’s Suffrage Federation and *The Herald*, to

²¹¹ Basil Thomson had been, since 1913, the Head of CID at Scotland Yard, and from 1916 provided the Ministry of Munitions with regular intelligence reports on industrial unrest. Noel Rutherford, ‘Thomson, Sir Basil Home (1861–1939)’, *ODNB*, online version: 3 January 2008, accessed 29 June 2020, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36499>.

²¹² WC paper G-157, 3 October 1917, 1, TNA, CAB 24/4/7.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ WC paper G.T.2274, 10 October 1917, 1–2, TNA, CAB 24/28/74.

... the National Federation of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers (not to be confused with Mr. Hogge's federation of a similar name) ... which was originally started by Sgt.-Major Blythe and obtained considerable support especially in the Midlands and South Wales, is against the Government, and is consequently hostile to its war policy.²¹⁶

This is striking in two ways. Most significant is the phrase 'not to be confused with 'Hogge's federation', which implies the Federation was not seen as either pacifist or opposed to Government policy on the war, and indeed it would have been strange if it had been lumped in with organisations that were assertively pacifist. Moreover, while the Federation had opposed the Review of Exceptions Act as it applied to discharged soldiers, that stance was not based on pacifism. It was supported across the Commons, and it was vindicated by the subsequent Select Committee inquiry.²¹⁷ Also interesting is the claim that there was another organisation with a similar name to the Federation, but led by a Sgt.-Major Blythe and opposed to continuing the war. This seems to have been a complete failure of intelligence, for not only was Blythe part of Hogge's Federation, he was more supportive of Government war policy than Hogge, having publicly opposed the Federation's challenge to Lord Stanley in the Abercromby by-election of July 1917.²¹⁸ Moreover, Blythe would also, admittedly at a later date, challenge Philip Snowden MP, Ramsay Macdonald MP, or 'any other I.L.P. member of Parliament [to] resign your seats and give us discharged men a chance to contest your re-election. Let your constituents ... show by their votes whether we shall have peace with Germany as a whole, or fight on until militarism is broken up for ever'.²¹⁹ Roberts' comments thus, unwittingly, bolstered the case for better informed reports to the War Cabinet. The next report, by Home Secretary Sir George Cave, was more formal and more thorough than Roberts' paper. It addressed the question of 'support given to these organizations by German money', while admitting that the attached seven-page report by Basil Thomson, as Assistant Commissioner of Police, was 'inconclusive' on

²¹⁶ WC paper G.T.2274, 10 October 1917, 1-2.

²¹⁷ Discussed in the previous chapter.

²¹⁸ 'Liverpool Election: Lord Stanley's Strong Support', *The Daily Telegraph*, 26 June 1917, 6.

²¹⁹ 'Mr. Philip Snowden, M.P., Challenged by Ex-Soldier to Resign and Contest his Seat', *The Western Times* (Exeter), 26 June 1917, 4.

the matter, and it recommended that Thomson should lead an examination of 'the books and documents of these organizations ... and the source of their income traced home if possible'.²²⁰ Thomson had previously recorded his scepticism in his diary, noting that the War Cabinet 'Being persuaded that German money is supporting the societies ... want to be assured that the police are doing something. I feel certain that there is no German money, their expenditure being covered by the subscriptions they receive from cranks'.²²¹ Sure enough, he reported a few weeks later, the books seized by the police from 'the principal pacifist societies' showed in each case 'no evidence of Enemy influence or financial support' or similar.²²² No ex-service organisation was raided as part of this investigation, but there was continuing Cabinet concern at the activities of pacifists and Thomson was obliged to submit fortnightly reports, variously titled 'Pacifism',²²³ then 'Pacifist Revolutionary Propaganda',²²⁴ before settling on 'Fortnightly report on Pacifism and Revolutionary Organisations in the United Kingdom'.²²⁵

While many of these reports are not in The National Archives, enough have been found to conclude that neither the Association nor the Federation attracted much attention. On the contrary, a report in July 1918 copied a telegram from the Poplar branch of the Federation, addressed to the War Cabinet, that was anything but pacifist, demanding that 'the strikers and shirkers of the munitions factories' suffer 'the same action ... as would be applied to their brothers who are fighting and suffering in the trenches ... if they refused to do their duty'.²²⁶ In those of Thomson's reports that survive in the archives, there is no mention of 'discharged soldiers' until October 1918, and even that reference is just an observation that the ILP in Sheffield was working on the 'discontent' of 'discharged soldiers ... because their pensions are affected if they work excess overtime'; and a claim that 'Pacifists in Glasgow are hoping to capture the Glasgow Federation of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers for the Independent Labour Party ... working upon the agitation about house rents and the

²²⁰ WC paper G-173, 13 November 1917, 1, TNA, CAB 24/4/23.

²²¹ Basil Thomson, *The Scene Changes* (London, 1939), 392.

²²² WC paper G.T.2980, 13 December 1917, TNA, CAB 24/35/80.

²²³ WC paper G.T.3424, 22 January 1918, TNA, CAB 24/40/24.

²²⁴ WC paper G.T.3674, 20 February 1918, TNA, CAB 24/42/72.

²²⁵ For example, WC paper G.T.5407, 12 August 1918, TNA, CAB 24/61/7.

²²⁶ WC copy of telegram, G.T.5242, 27 July 1918, TNA, CAB 24/59/42.

dissatisfaction regarding the allowance for soldiers' dependants', was hardly the stuff of impending revolution.²²⁷ The Sheffield correspondent popped up again a few weeks later, claiming that "'The Comrades of the Great War", who have hitherto been singularly free from extravagances, are said not to have decided to join up with the Discharged Sailors' and Soldiers' Federation, under the Presidency of Mr. Hogge, M.P.' and were inclining towards the ILP.²²⁸ No concern was expressed at this alleged and rather improbable development, and indeed the whole report opened with the words 'During the past fortnight, Pacifism has been at its lowest ebb.'²²⁹ In short, there is no evidence that either the Association or the Federation came to the attention of the intelligence services during 1917, or most of the following year, and even when they did towards the end of 1918, it was only in a minor way. What is more, even in reporting on avowedly revolutionary groups, Basil Thomson showed a healthy scepticism towards their fiery language, dismissing talk at one meeting, for example, of 'arms and bombs being secretly stored' as 'no cause for alarm ... for such talk is the stock in trade of these extremists when they get together'.²³⁰ And that was at a time, in the spring of 1919, of considerable civil and military unrest, when he could quite reasonably have found such talk alarming.

Conclusions

The British Government was not nearly as alarmed by the formation of the Association and the Federation as has been claimed in earlier studies, Stephen Ward's in particular. War Cabinet papers show some concern at reports of 'sedition' in parts of the labour movement, but that did not include the emerging Association and Federation, and in any case the response was mild, concentrating on identifying and tackling genuine reasons for unrest, rather than adopting more oppressive measures. While the Association grew out of trades councils, it did not embrace the pacifism of some of those bodies, and members of both it and the Federation opposed pacifist meetings, vigorously and sometimes violently.

²²⁷ WC paper G.T.5923, 7 October 1918, TNA, CAB 24/66/23, 2.

²²⁸ WC paper G.T.6201, 4 November 1918, TNA, CAB 24/69/1, 2, (un-named author, probably Basil Thomson).

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

²³⁰ WC paper G.T.6976, 10 March 1919, TNA, CAB 24/76/77, 2, referring to the Sailors', Soldiers' and Airmen's Union.

Accordingly, the two organisations only attracted brief, occasional, and unconcerned references in intelligence reports to the War Cabinet, and those only towards the end of 1918.

What did concern the Government, and the Establishment more generally, was the emergence of such ex-service organisations as a focus for unrest over the scale and administration of support for veterans and dependants. The creation of the Comrades of the Great War was a clever move in response, and this chapter has shown, more definitively than in previous accounts, with the use of newly discovered archives, how this was achieved through Derby's active promotion of it at Army Council and Cabinet level, and by direct appeals to influential figures such as county Lord Lieutenants. Meanwhile, he took steps to conceal his involvement from the public. It has further shown how Captain Towse was involved in the Comrades from the beginning, and indeed was the prime mover in addressing its early weaknesses, not merely someone who was brought in at a later date to be its public face. As Towse realised, it was a mistake to have only MPs and serving or ex-officers running it, and this was addressed fairly rapidly when it became apparent that it was a problem, with a somewhat more democratic structure in its place. Crucially, it appealed to many veterans who found its overt patriotism, conservative approach and deference to wealthy patrons more to their liking than the radical policies of either the Association or the Federation, even to the extent of some of the latter's branches going over in their entirety to the Comrades. By dividing the ex-service 'movement', if it could even be called that, it blunted their political power and dissipated much of their energies. It should also be recognised that the Comrades were not just a spanner in the works of the other two groups, for increasingly they began to provide similar support and services to their members, giving financial assistance to the neediest, publishing a range of advice, and assisting with appearances at Local Pensions Committees, along with its growing network of popular social clubs.

On the other hand, as the Armistice approached, the Federation had no reason to feel defeated, despite the unwelcome competition from the Comrades. Membership was rising, millions more sailors and soldiers – potential new members – would be demobilised

in the coming months, and they had high hopes of their candidates winning seats in Parliament, elected by a grateful nation. The Association was in less good health, never as numerous, well-funded or geographically widespread as either the Federation of the Comrades, but nonetheless firmly rooted in several parts of the country. All three organisations could look forward to the post-war period, not just because the fighting was finally coming to an end, but also as potentially full of opportunities for both growth in membership, and progress on their key object of promoting the cause of the welfare of discharged sailors and soldiers and their dependants.

Chapter 5: The challenge of peace

Introduction

This chapter analyses how each of the three main ex-service organisations in the UK, the Association, the Federation, and the Comrades, responded to the first semi-official attempt to encourage unity, to the cessation of hostilities and the General Election 1918, and to the prolonged transition to peace over the following year. It examines the creation of several significant new groups, the Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Union, the National Union of Ex-Service Men, and the International Union of Ex-Service Men. It also seeks to analyse and relate the various attempts at unification, some more determined than others, from the first unity conference in July 1918 through to the launch of the United Services Fund (USF) in the autumn of the following year. This was an important period in the development of these groups, a year and a quarter in which they moved away from the political allegiances and differences that had caused the breakdown of that first meeting, towards a more constructive relationship that was the basis for jointly managing the USF. That in turn laid the foundation for their progression over the ensuing eighteen months towards full amalgamation, a process that will be considered in the next chapter.

The activities of these groups over this period, July 1918 to autumn 1919, have been described to some extent in published histories of the British Legion by several authors including, in particular, Graham Wootton, Brian Harding and Niall Barr,¹ though not in the detail presented and analysed here. Each devotes just a few pages to this period, as in each case their primary focus is on the later creation of the British Legion, from mid-1921 onwards. Charles Kimball's dissertation includes rather more material, but again not in the detail provided here, and with little or no reference to such important matters as the Smith-Dorrien conference, the Empire Services League scheme, and Haig's testimony to the Select Committee on Pensions.² Stephen Ward, in his doctoral dissertation and journal

¹ Wootton, *Official History* and *The Politics of Influence*; Harding, *Keeping Faith*; Barr, 'Service Not Self'.

² Kimball, 'The Ex-Service Movement in England and Wales, 1916–1930'.

article,³ looks in rather greater depth at the period. This chapter builds on his scholarship, making use of additional source material that was either not available when he was writing (in 1969) or was simply not referenced in those works, while also challenging some of his conclusions.

A key argument in this chapter is that the attempts at unification during this period were neither isolated nor wholly unsuccessful; rather that they were linked by some continuity in the people involved, and that each brought eventual unity a step closer by improving relationships between the main organisations, and by government, military authorities and the veterans' leaders learning lessons each time. That is not to say that there was anything inevitable about this process, only that it was assisted by these efforts, and by more of a consensus among the three main groups over this period. Among the new elements here is a more thorough analysis of General Sir Ian Hamilton's efforts in 1918–19 to create an Empire Services League, which would have brought all the ex-service organisations together.⁴ This was, it is argued, an initiative unjustly disregarded or dismissed in previous accounts,⁵ and it will be shown that Hamilton's scheme, while not implemented, nonetheless prepared the ground for the successful launch of the United Services Fund by General Sir Julian Byng.

The three organisations also grew in size over the period covered in this chapter, evolving along more similar lines, and that too began to favour closer cooperation. So that process is also analysed here. The other major event during 1919 was the appointment of a parliamentary Select Committee on Pensions, which heard detailed evidence over several months and from many witnesses, including officials of the Association, the Federation and the Comrades, about the many problems and alleged injustices encountered by ex-service men, women, and dependants. It will be shown how its conclusions largely endorsed this testimony, leading the Committee to recommend substantial increases in pensions and

³ Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations'; Ward, 'The British Veterans' Ticket'.

⁴ This account is drawn primarily from an analysis of the extensive papers of General Sir Ian Hamilton, in the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Kings College London (hereafter 'LHMA, Hamilton'), ref. GB0099 KCLMA Hamilton, particularly 11/1/1–5. See also appendix 1.

⁵ Wootton, *Official History*, 6–7; Barr, 'Service Not Self', 18–20; Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 91–93; Harding, *Keeping Faith*. 4.

allowances, and numerous improvements in official guidance, administration and appeals. These changes both improved the lives of veterans and their dependants, and took some of the steam out of the organisations' campaigns.

The first semi-official attempt at unification

In the middle of 1918, the first serious attempt at bringing together the various groups began, driven by a man whose role in the process has been rather underestimated in past accounts. This was Major Harold Jellicorse, 'a fine old Regular officer of the Royal Sussex Regiment',⁶ who had, he claimed, spoken at 'over 25 meetings of discharged men' during 1917–18 'in order to explain the Acts and Royal Warrants to them, of which they were profoundly ignorant'.⁷ He concluded that much of the 'discontent then prevailing' was down to ignorance of the regulations and 'the inefficiency of the Local Pensions Committees'.⁸ So he approached James Hogge, offering to 'go round some of the branches [of the Federation] in London' to deliver his talks and, and he 'at once accepted my offer, not even asking what my politics were and gave me a free hand',⁹ which is an interesting insight into Hogge's character. At these Federation meetings Jellicorse 'discovered a most bitter feeling among the men ... against the Comrades, as they thought [it] was being run by ex-officers with money behind them, to wipe them out of existence'.¹⁰ Accordingly, he threw himself into a sustained effort to see if he could persuade them to 'sink their differences' and work together.¹¹ He first contacted W. G. Clifford,¹² to represent the ex-service rank and file who were not members of any existing organisation, and Lieutenant-

⁶ Wootton, *Official History*, 6.

⁷ Major H. Jellicorse, 'A history of the Ex-Service Officers and Men problem', memorandum attached to letter dated 14th March 1919, 2nd page, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/5/2. Hereafter Jellicorse, 'A history', LHMA.

⁸ Jellicorse, 'A history', LHMA, 2nd page.

⁹ Jellicorse, 'The History', CHAR 16/9, 3.

¹⁰ Jellicorse, 'A history', LHMA, 2nd page.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Little record remains of W. G. Clifford, 'an ex-gunner who had turned to authorship and journalism' according to Wootton, *Official History*, 6. He wrote *The British Army* (London, 1915), and *The Ex-Soldier: By Himself* (London, 1916), and in later years several other books, all about angling.

General Sir Edward Bethune, a serving officer and a former member of the Comrades,¹³ to try and get the three national organisations together to meet and discuss unification. They duly met on 30 July 1918, under the chairmanship of General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, with Hogge speaking for the Federation, James Howell for the Association, and Hamar Greenwood for the Comrades. They were all, wrote Jellicorse later, perhaps surprisingly, 'favourable to unite and the speeches were of a most amicable and satisfactory character', until Hogge set out the Federation's intention to get involved in parliamentary elections.¹⁴ This ran directly counter to the Comrades' professed non-political ethos (despite their profoundly political origins and continuing leadership), while the Association's James Howell was also opposed to any 'Party-Political League of Khaki and Blue'.¹⁵ There were also differences over the place of ex-officers and women in any united body,¹⁶ but they agreed to set up a joint executive, under Jellicorse as neutral chairman, in the hope of reconciling these differences. However, that executive never met, sunk by the Federation's confirmation a few weeks later of its intention to run candidates in the forthcoming general election.¹⁷

The failure of that Conference to find enough common ground was not really surprising, despite the 'amicable' speeches from the leaders. The Federation had grown rapidly, and had high hopes of the election that would follow the end of the war, with millions of newly-enfranchised serving or ex-soldiers and sailors, who would surely be inclined to vote for their fellow veterans who should, they believed, be rankers or risen from the ranks, rather than officers from a privileged background. For example, Albert Shakesby, during his campaign as a Federation candidate in Hull (analysed below), observed that 'Whenever Mr. Hogg [sic] got up to speak in the House of Commons on the pensions and allowances, majors, colonels, generals, and those who had proposed to be the Tommy's champion got

¹³ Bethune had 'left, not approving of the political element on it', according to Jellicorse, 'The History', 13, CHAR 16/9, folio 95.

¹⁴ Jellicorse, 'A history', LHMA, appendix 1.

¹⁵ Barr, 'Service not Self', 19, quoting Howell to Jellicorse, 15 December 1918, a later date but indicative of Howell's attitude.

¹⁶ Jellicorse, 'A history', LHMA, appendix 1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

up and went out of the House'.¹⁸ He went on to claim that, while there had been many serving and former officers among the 1914–18 MPs, not one had served in the ranks and had to live on a war pension after discharge.¹⁹ These were fundamental differences with the Comrades' approach, and there was no compelling reason for the two groups to set aside such basic disagreements while both continued to expand, and looked forward to the opportunities and challenges of mass demobilisation.

General Sir Ian Hamilton's League

While the failure of Smith-Dorrien's July 1918 conference was a setback, the authorities were not ready to give up their attempts to foster unity, particularly as the end of the war was approaching, with the prospect of millions of disgruntled demobilised men and women joining these disruptive groups. Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig lobbied strongly for 'some large scheme for promoting comradeship, and for benefiting members of the Army and their families';²⁰ and accordingly the War Office, supported by the Admiralty and the Air Ministry, launched a project aimed at drawing together all the veterans' organisations, across the British Empire, into a single new body.²¹ A major incentive to participate was that they would have the multi-million pound profits of the wartime service canteens to spend on veterans' relief.²² The project was led by General Sir Ian Hamilton, whose long and distinguished military career was over following the failure of the Gallipoli campaign that he had commanded.²³ But he retained the respect of many,²⁴ including Viscount Milner, then Secretary of State for War, who appointed him to the role.²⁵ It was no sinecure and Hamilton did not treat it as such, for it is clear from the extensive records that

¹⁸ 'South-West Hull. Ex-sergeant Shakesby's Appeal', *The Daily Mail* (Hull), 12 December 1918, 6.

¹⁹ 'Shakesby's Appeal'.

²⁰ General Sir Ian Hamilton, 'Confidential' briefing on history of the Empire Services League, 14 March 1919, LHMA, 11/1/3. The quotation is Hamilton's summary of Haig's 'strong representations'.

²¹ 'Confidential' notice of Conference, 31 October 1918, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/1.

²² Explained further below.

²³ George H. Cassar, 'Hamilton, Sir Ian Standish Monteith', *ODNB*, online version: 6 January 2011, accessed 4 March 2019, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33668>.

²⁴ Hamilton was to become one of the most popular and long-serving leaders of the British Legion, as detailed in over 100 mentions in Barr, 'Service Not Self'.

²⁵ Colin Newbury, 'Milner, Alfred, Viscount Milner', *ODNB*, online version: 4 October 2008, accessed 2 October 2018, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35037>.

he threw himself into the work.²⁶ Importantly, too, his Hon. Secretary was the same Major Jellicorse who had convened the July conference, and he and Hamilton worked very closely together throughout this process, along with Major-General G. F. Ellison, for many years a highly-regarded member of Hamilton's staff.²⁷

They convened a meeting on 5 November 1918, involving the Admiralty, the War Office and the Air Ministry, who each sent an officer, one 'other rank', and a member of their women's branch.²⁸ They were joined by representatives of the overseas forces of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, plus one officer and one other rank nominated by each of the commanders of the Grand Fleet, the British Armies in France, the Forces in Great Britain, and those in India. This became known as the Consultative Committee, and its diversity in terms of ranks, services, countries and genders was clearly intentional. In particular, the inclusion of women was significant, for the three existing groups were run by and for men, with barely a mention in their publications of the W.R.N.S., Q.M.A.A.C and W.R.A.F.²⁹ Indeed Hamilton insisted that the objects of the new body should refer to 'all who have served', phrasing he chose deliberately to include women, 'instead of the usual terms [sic] "ex-service men"'.³⁰ The equal representation of 'other ranks' is also striking, showing his determination that this would not be another Comrades of the Great War, dominated by senior politicians and high-ranking officers. Also at that first meeting, Hamilton declared explicitly that the aim was 'to try and rope in ... two, three or four or more ... Associations of Discharged Soldiers ... who have, some of them, taken on a political bias', arguing also that 'the discharged soldiers would be very much stronger if they held together instead of being split into various Associations some of whom are bitterly

²⁶ Three volumes of letters, memo, minutes and briefings about the League, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/1, /3 and /5.

²⁷ A. J. A. Morris, 'Ellison, Sir Gerald Francis (1861–1947)', *ODNB*, online version: 4 October 2007, accessed 9 October 2018, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/53791>.

²⁸ 'Report of a Conference held at the Horse Guards on Tuesday, 5th November, 1918', LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/1.

²⁹ The inclusion of a regular column 'For Our Womenfolk', comprising domestic and fashion notes, in the Association's magazine is indicative of the gendered assumptions in that organisation, e.g. *The Bayonet*, National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers, vol. 1, no. 1, September 1920 (London), 5.

³⁰ 'Report of a Conference', 1st page.

antagonistic to one another.³¹ It is important to note Hamilton's concerns about party politics and being stronger together, for these were the motivations at the root of each attempt at amalgamation that was to follow, with government and military authorities, in most cases, wanting to see a single, non-party political voice representing veterans' interests.³²

There followed a flurry of correspondence with a large range of ex-service organisations, with the Consultative Committee using the working title 'the United Services' Committee for Ex-Service Officers & Men'. Other titles were debated and discussed. 'Officers & Men', and several variations of 'Brothers in Arms' and 'Brotherhood', were unacceptable in excluding women, while 'Royal and Imperial Services League' also proved problematic for Hamilton,³³ who realised that whenever 'Canadians, New Zealanders, Australians, South Africans ... talk of "imperials" ... they mean the regular British troops. They regard themselves as "overseas" or Dominion or Commonwealth – anything but "Imperial"!'³⁴ In due course, the 'Dominions Committee' settled the matter by recommending 'The Empire Services League', and this was the title that stuck.³⁵

Meanwhile, Hamilton and Jellicorse corresponded extensively over the next few months with a wide range of organisations, prominent figures such as county Lord Lieutenants, the press, and each other, doing their best to reconcile conflicting advice, self-interested positions and sometimes trenchant criticism. They got strong support from Howell, President of the Association, who wrote to Jellicorse that 'the formation of such a comprehensive committee is good, and to know that such men as you and Clifford are pillars of that corporate body is indeed gratifying. I hope your labours will be crowned with success', and much more in that vein.³⁶ Not long afterwards, Hamilton wrote to Jellicorse

³¹ 'Report of a Conference', 1st, 2nd pages.

³² Though not everyone in government wished to see this. Discussed further in section 'Strikes, Demonstrations and Riots' below.

³³ 'Minutes of Proceedings. Meeting of Consultative Committee', 21 November 1918', 2nd page, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/1.

³⁴ Hamilton to Jellicorse (copy), 22 November 1918, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/1.

³⁵ 'Statement as to the Origin and Organisation of the Service League', 25 January 1919, item (5), 2, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/3.

³⁶ Howell to Jellicorse, 23 November 1918, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/1.

to say that it was 'no use for us to rope in existing Associations as they stand unless we hallmark them definitely with some of our special characteristics', adding that 'if they are affiliated to us they should democratize by having equal numbers of soldiers and non-coms all through'.³⁷ That emphasis on democracy reflected one of the main principles that he had adopted in organising the 5 November conference. But he also wrote 'as to the politics; if they come in they must drop everything of that sort'.³⁸ Given the affiliations of all three main groups, this was to prove a major hurdle.

Ex-service groups and the 1918 General Election

While Hamilton's committees beavered away,³⁹ there was much discussion and often heated debate among veterans, a flavour of which can be seen in the pages of *The Ex-Service Man*, an 'Independent Journal for those who have served', edited by Jellicorse and Clifford. In December 1918, it carried a detailed report of Hamilton's conference on 5 November, along with a full-page statement by Jellicorse headed 'Conference and Consultative Committee in the Interests of those who have served', detailed and thoughtful letters from readers, and opinion columns such as 'Do we want a Political Party of Ex-Service Men? No!' by Clifford.⁴⁰ That was a live issue, for the General Election had been called for 14 December, with the Federation expected to put up candidates, Hogge arguing that 'a small, resolute band at Westminster' was 'absolutely essential' to achieving its aims after the war.⁴¹ When Prime Minister David Lloyd George announced the election date during a meeting in the Central Hall, Westminster,⁴² he said that he 'would like to see for

³⁷ Hamilton to Jellicorse (copy), 20 December 1918, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/1.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ In addition to the Consultative Committee, Hamilton established an Overseas Committee, headed by Admiral Lord Jellicoe, and six sub-committees, for ex-officers, employment, financial assistance (men), financial assistance (women and children), social clubs, and sports. 'Minutes of Proceedings. Meeting of Consultative Committee', 21 November 1918', 1st and 3rd pages, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/1.

⁴⁰ *The Ex-Service Man*, 1, no. 7, 4 December 1918, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/1.

⁴¹ J. M. Hogge, 'My Advice to the Discharged Men,' *The Ex-Service Man* 1, no. 2 (25 September 1918), 22.

⁴² This became known as the 'Coupon' election, see for example Trevor Wilson, 'The Coupon and the British General Election of 1918', *The Journal of Modern History* 36, no. 1 (March 1964), 28–42.

the next four and a half years ... the three parties [govern] together'.⁴³ He was met with a cry from the audience 'what about the ex-soldiers?' to which he coolly replied 'Ah! He surely is in, he is not a separate party; you will find that in this election'.⁴⁴ But he was only partly right for although some 189 MPs in the new Parliament would indeed be both ex-soldiers and members of 'the three parties',⁴⁵ that did not apply to the heckler, one E. Miles Taylor, a Federation member preparing to stand for a London constituency on an ex-service ticket.⁴⁶ He was joined by about thirty other candidates running under the ex-service banner,⁴⁷ mostly with Federation backing,⁴⁸ and seeking the votes of a grateful population. This was, after all, another 'khaki election', held in the immediate aftermath of a major war, and not only was it expected that would greatly influence voters, but the franchise in the UK had almost tripled to over 21 million people by the Representation of the People Act 1918,⁴⁹ giving 74% of the adult population the vote, while the Act also, for the first time, entitled soldiers and sailors to cast absentee ballots while deployed away from home.⁵⁰ The latter, however, still comprised only about 18% of the enlarged electorate and,⁵¹ as noted below, their turnout was low, due to incomplete distribution of absentee ballot papers and election material.

⁴³ 'Coalition Appeal. Premier's Speech. National Organisation for Peace', *The Manchester Guardian* 18 November 1918, 7.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Richard Carr, *Veteran MPs and Conservative Politics in the Aftermath of the Great War* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2013), 50.

⁴⁶ *Islington Daily Gazette*, 25 November 1918, referenced in Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 95.

⁴⁷ There is no precise figure, due to incomplete and conflicting records. Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 113, in a detailed account of ex-service candidates' campaigns for the December 1918 General Election, says there were '29 definite and 2 probable candidates running on the ex-service ticket'.

⁴⁸ F. W. S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Statistics 1918–1970*, 2nd ed. (London, 1971), 2, lists only five Federation candidates. However, Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 302–4, found 28, apparently from his extensive local newspaper research, and a further four labelled as Association, one Silver Badge, and one 'Airman and Fighting Services'.

⁴⁹ Neil Johnston, 'The History of the Parliamentary Franchise', House of Commons Library Research Paper 13/14, 1 March 2013, 44. Prior to the 1918 Act, men were only included on the electoral register if they owned property, a restriction that excluded about three quarters of adult (ie over 21) men, while no women had a vote.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 44.

⁵¹ Calculated from 'General Summary', *Parliamentary and Local Government Electors (United Kingdom): Return to an Address of the Honourable The House of Commons, dated 16 October, 1918*, House of Commons 1918, volume 19, paper 138, 23.

A complicating factor was the earlier emergence of another group, the Silver Badge Party, 'to be run entirely by and for ex-Service Men and Officers and with the object of fighting every seat at the next General Election'.⁵² This wildly ambitious plan was announced in the classified ads of local newspapers in early July 1918, under the somewhat xenophobic headline 'Britain for the British', by a Lieutenant Corse-Scott, of Verwood, Dorset.⁵³ The party name referred to the Silver War Badge (right), issued from September 1916 onwards to soldiers 'honourably discharged ... because of wounds or sickness', who might otherwise be 'mistaken for those who had never joined up'.⁵⁴ There are few records of the Silver Badge Party, with one contemporaneous source describing it as 'organised by ex-officers' with 'a very violent programme and ... directly political'.⁵⁵ Its original four-point platform called for the 'Winding up of all Boche Banks and Businesses', the 'Internment of all Enemy Aliens', a 'Single Tax on Land Values, and Acquisition of Land for Settlement by ex-Service Men', and 'Just Pensions for all who are entitled to them';⁵⁶ a programme that combined virulent anti-German sentiments with the two issues of war pensions and land-for-veterans, all in the context of the election expected to take place soon after the end of the war. Before the election, its 'political programme' expanded to fifteen points of which, tellingly, the first was to 'adopt the twenty-four points of the Federation programme',⁵⁷ although this seems to have been purely supportive, rather than indicating any formal connection, as none of the thirteen officials listed were named in Federation literature.⁵⁸



Figure 14: the 'Silver Badge'
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⁵² 'Britain for the British', *The Western Morning News* (Plymouth), 2 July 1918, 1.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Geoff Bridger, *The Great War Handbook* (Barnsley, 2013) 69.

⁵⁵ Jellicorse, 'History of Ex-Service Mens' [sic] Movement', November 1918, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/1. This is a brief 1-page summary, not to be confused with his more extensive history, of March 1919, in the same archive and referenced above, which does not, however, mention the Silver Badge Party.

⁵⁶ 'Britain for the British'.

⁵⁷ The Federation's 'twenty-four points' at that time were all service-related issues: Ward, 'The British Veterans' Ticket of 1918', 160.

⁵⁸ 'The Silver Badge Party. The Bulwark Against Bolshevism', leaflet, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/5/1.

While the Silver Badge Party attracted some members and a certain amount of publicity, it does not appear to have been comparable to the Association, Federation or Comrades in terms of numbers, organisation or activity. Indeed, the relationship with the first two seems to have been somewhat complicated with, for example, the Lincoln branch of the Association deciding to form a branch of the Silver Badge Party under its own auspices ‘for the sole purpose of running a candidate in ... the forthcoming General Election’.⁵⁹ By contrast, one A. W. Leonard was adopted in Twickenham as ‘the prospective candidate of ... the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Soldiers and Sailors, which for political purposes has been dubbed “The Silver Badge Party”’.⁶⁰ In Glastonbury a local branch was founded independently of any existing organisation to support ‘President Wilson’s scheme for a League of Nations, “After German autocracy and militarism have been utterly and finally exterminated”’.⁶¹ So it appears that while the Silver Badge Party had an independent existence, it also served as a flag of convenience for some branches of the Association and Federation to run candidates in the election. Even with that boost to its numbers, it came nowhere near to ‘fighting every seat’; on the contrary only one of the thirty or so candidates standing primarily as ex-service men, did so in the name of the Silver Badge Party; most ran for election under the banner of the Federation, a few under the Association.⁶²

For all the groups thinking of running candidates in the election, a major deterrent was the deposit of £150, which would be forfeited if the candidate polled fewer than 12.5% of valid votes cast.⁶³ That was equivalent to about a year’s wages for a skilled man, and for the Federation, or the Silver Badge Party, to run candidates in all 707 constituencies would have meant depositing over £100,000 (equal to over £6 million today).⁶⁴ This was far more

⁵⁹ ‘Silver Badge Party: Branch formed at Lincoln’, *Lincolnshire Echo*, 30 Sept 1918, 3.

⁶⁰ ‘The General Election’, *Middlesex Chronicle*, 19 Oct 1918, 6.

⁶¹ The Scribbler, ‘Week by Week’, *The Central Somerset Gazette*, 4 October 1918, 4, col. 5, item 7.

⁶² Ward, ‘British Veterans’ Organizations’, 113, 302–4.

⁶³ Manuel Álvarez-Rivera, ‘Election Resources on the Internet: Parliamentary Elections in the United Kingdom - Elections to the House of Commons’, accessed 4 August 2020, <http://electionresources.org/uk/>.

⁶⁴ Bank of England Inflation Calculator, accessed 3 August 2020, <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator>.

than they could afford to lose, even if they had been able to raise it, while other election expenses were generally greater still than a lost deposit.⁶⁵ Still, for those candidates who could afford to stand, their optimism was understandable, but the nation's gratitude did not extend to returning a block of their members to the House of Commons; just one was successful, and most lost their deposits.⁶⁶ Stephen Ward argues this experience was 'a financial and moral setback' for the Federation, which it surely was, but he goes on to assert that 'the time had come for them, as well as the Comrades and Association, to lay politics aside and begin a campaign of pressure'.⁶⁷ This, in an otherwise thorough analysis of the General Election, was a strange conclusion that is not borne out by the evidence. The Federation was *born* as 'a campaign of pressure', so it did not need to 'begin' one now, and it had not noticeably eased that pressure during its election campaign. Indeed, it used that campaign to pressure some candidates from the major parties to commit to the ex-service programme, in ways they would not otherwise have done.⁶⁸ Even more significantly, the fact that the Federation did not 'lay politics aside' following the election, is conclusively demonstrated by articles in its fortnightly journal. *The (D.S.S.) Bulletin* regularly reported members campaigning in local elections under the Federation banner, often successfully and until at least the middle of 1920,⁶⁹ while occasionally running advice columns headed, for example, 'Representation on Local Bodies. How to obtain it'.⁷⁰ A front-page cartoon in one edition (below) showed a well-dressed 'Federation Councillor' booting out 'Mr. Messitup' with the words 'Tell your friends we're coming to Westminster

⁶⁵ 'General Election. The Cost to Hull Candidates', *The Daily Mail* (Hull), 14 February 1919, 8, shows expenses varying from £277 0s 2½d to £700 1s 2d. with Albert Shakesby, whose campaign is covered below, spending £690 15s 1d.

⁶⁶ Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 120.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁶⁸ Some examples are in Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 117, in particular the campaigns of Thomas Lister, of which more below, and also Arthur Brooksbank, both of whom lost but obliged their winning opponents to champion the ex-service cause.

⁶⁹ Many local or municipal election results are recorded in *The Bulletin: The Official Organ of the Federation of Discharged & Demobilised Sailors & Soldiers*, hereafter '*The Bulletin*', from no. 4, 24 April 1919 to vol. 2, no. 31, 13 May 1920. Note that early issues were not given a volume number, and it was re-titled *The D.S.S. Bulletin* from no. 11, 'D.S.S.' being a widely-used abbreviation for 'Discharged Sailors and Soldiers'.

⁷⁰ *The Bulletin*, no 4, 24 April 1919, 2.

soon', so there can be no doubt that they continued to harbour political ambitions, long after the disappointment of the 1918 General Election results.⁷¹



Figure 15: Political cartoon in the Federation's 'D.S.S. Bulletin'.⁷²

Where Ward is generally on firmer ground, is in his analysis of why veterans did so badly in the General Election.⁷³ First, 'the impossibility of sustaining a one-plank platform [ex-service issues] over a period of three weeks',⁷⁴ and their inability to handle other

⁷¹ *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, no. 19, 27 November 1919, 1.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 120–32.

⁷⁴ *Yorkshire Observer*, 2 December 1918, quoted in Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 120.

questions.⁷⁵ Second, their opponents claimed they too wanted ‘to make Britain a “land fit for heroes to live in”,⁷⁶ which must have been particularly aggravating when so few MPs had turned up for pension debates during the war.⁷⁷ Third, Ward claims there was limited coverage in, and still less support from, newspapers, national and local,⁷⁸ although a review for this study comes to a different conclusion (below). Fourth, contends Ward, there was ‘the lack of organization and the divisions within the ranks of the movement’, with the Comrades’ and the Association’s leaders opposing any involvement in electoral politics, while some of their branches put up their own candidates or supported others. Even the Federation was undermined by internal disagreements.⁷⁹ Furthermore, ex-service candidates could not even count on significant votes from those still in uniform, largely because of the Government’s failure to provide them all with absentee ballots, and information about the candidates’ campaigns.⁸⁰ These problems had been foreseen as soon as the short timescale to Election Day was announced;⁸¹ Gavin Freeman describes press coverage that was ‘dominated by how soldiers were voting “blindfold” in the general election because it was being rushed and they were abroad’.⁸² Consequently, while such voters made up about one-fifth of the constituency vote, Ward concluded that their turnout ‘judging from local accounts ... was only 20–30 percent’ of that proportion, which, if correct, goes some way to explain the historically low turnout of 57.2% overall.

Finally, Ward suggests that the electorate’s near-total rejection of candidates standing on a veteran’s ticket ‘could be considered as another example of the British attitude against soldiers mixing in politics’; although that is questionable, for there is no indication of reluctance to vote for ex-service candidates standing for the established political parties,

⁷⁵ Ward, ‘British Veterans’ Organizations’, 120.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁷⁷ For example, ‘at the last pension debate, he [Thomas Lister] recalled, only 50 of 670 M. P.s had been present’, Ward, ‘British Veterans’ Organizations’, 116, citing the *Ashton Herald*, 23 November, 1918. This was untypical only in the sense that war-time pension debates had frequently attracted even fewer than 50 MPs.

⁷⁸ Ward, ‘British Veterans’ Organizations’, 122.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁸¹ For example, one of many: ‘Disfranchising the Fighting Men’, *Evening Despatch* (Birmingham), 15 November 1918, 1.

⁸² Gavin Freeman, ‘The Liberal Party and the Impact of the 1918 Reform Act’, *Parliamentary History* 37, iss. 1 (February 2018): 52.

only that being an ex-service man was not, of itself, sufficient to attract enough votes to win seats. Nor is there any evidence that ex-service candidates were marginalised by their local newspapers. Looking at a sample of such reports in various constituencies, journalists generally reported factually on the meetings and speeches of all the candidates and their supporters. This was a time when local newspapers were typically broadsheets, aspiring to be papers of record and closer in appearance to nationals such as *The Times*, rather than the tabloids of their day, such as *The Daily Mirror*. For example, see the page below, from *The Daily Mail* in Hull.

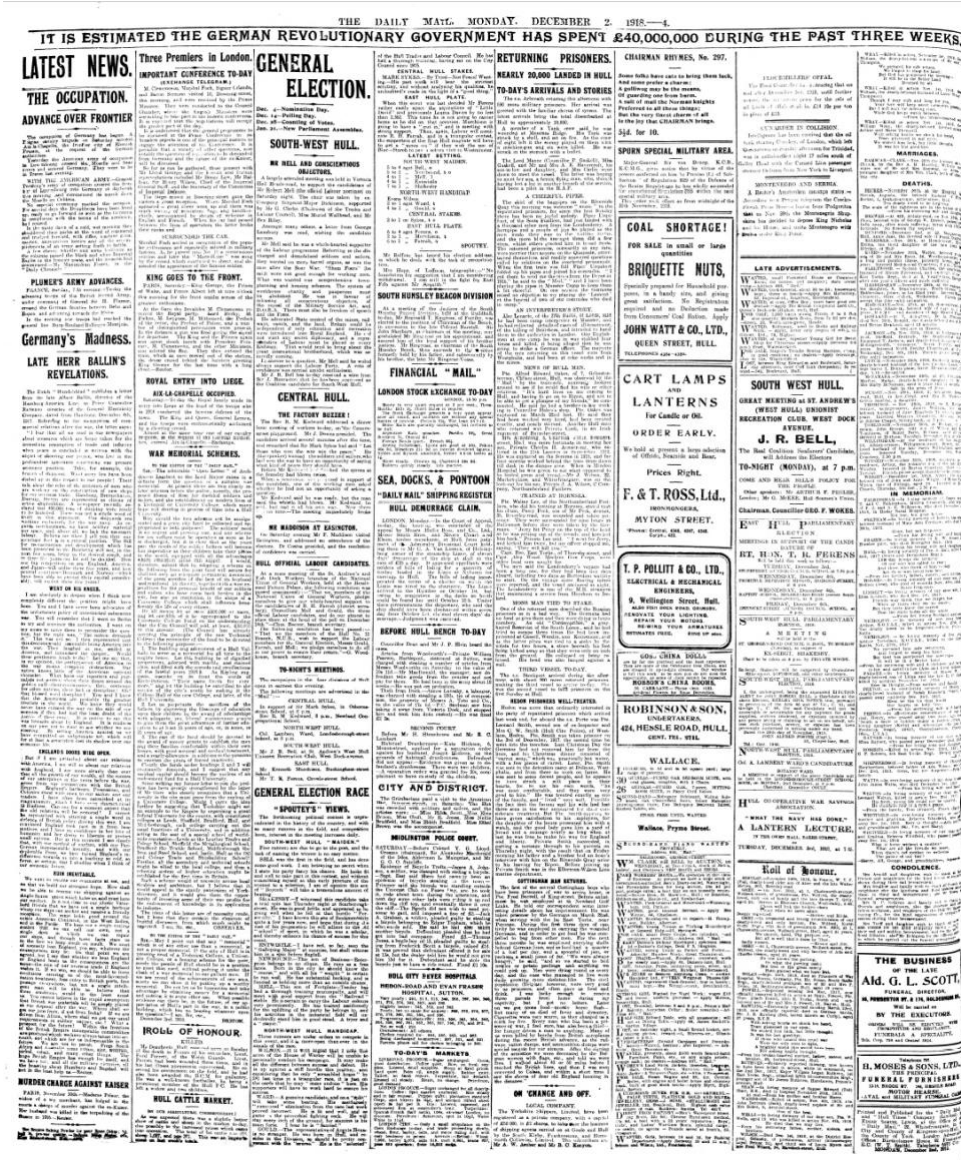


Figure 16: a typical page from *The Daily Mail* in Hull, dated 2 December 1918, p.4.

The newspaper's coverage of discharged soldiers' candidatures can be illustrated by taking one such campaign as a case study. Albert Edward Shakesby was an ex-sergeant in the Royal Army Medical Corps,⁸³ who had enlisted at the age of forty-seven, by declaring that he was only thirty-five,⁸⁴ had served in Egypt and France, and was now supporting a wife and two children on a war pension of just 19s 6d a week.⁸⁵ He was selected by the Federation in Yorkshire as their candidate in Kingston-Upon-Hull South-West division,⁸⁶ an area with a substantial population of discharged and demobilised sailors and soldiers. No precise figures have been found for that group, but a further 27% of the registered electorate were recorded as serving 'naval and military' voters, so Shakesby had reason to be confident.⁸⁷ Coverage of his campaign seems to have been as fair and as comprehensive as the other four candidates, including advance notice of public meetings and substantial reports of their proceedings. For example, one article, sub-headed 'an enthusiastic meeting', occupied a whole broadsheet column on page two, going into considerable detail about Shakesby's policies, points made, and the reactions of the large audience that 'was many times during the evening roused to a pitch of enthusiasm ... by the candidate'.⁸⁸ His impact as a public speaker no doubt derived, in part at least, from his experience as an evangelical preacher.⁸⁹ An intriguing aspect of the Hull *Daily Mail's* coverage was a regular column by a pseudonymous humourist, 'Spoutey', treating the campaign as if it was a horse race, with odds changing daily and commentaries such as 'Shakesby has improved wonderfully these last two days in his preparation. He seems to thrive on hard work, and the further the distance the better he "stays"'.⁹⁰ Overall, there is no indication that he was sidelined in local coverage, but there are other clues to his eventual poor showing, when he

⁸³ Forces War Records, accessed 4 August 2020, <https://www.forces-war-records.co.uk/records/19661968/serjeant-albert-edward-shakesby-royal-army-medical-corps/>.

⁸⁴ Mr. Shakesby at St. George's Road. An enthusiastic meeting.', *The Daily Mail* (Hull), 4 December 1918, 2

⁸⁵ 'Wives and Dependants of South-West Hull', *The Daily Mail* (Hull), 13 December 1918, 10.

⁸⁶ 'South-west Hull Division', *The Daily Mail* (Hull), 11 November 1918, 2.

⁸⁷ *Parliamentary and Local Government Electors*, HC paper 138, 6, q.v.

⁸⁸ 'Mr. Shakesby at St. George's Road. An enthusiastic meeting.', *The Daily Mail* (Hull), 4 December 1918, 2.

⁸⁹ *The Yorkshire Post*, 19 November 1918, 6, col. 3 (untitled, paragraph beginning 'Mr. Percy Newbold ...').

⁹⁰ 'General Election Race. Latest from the Course.' *The Daily Mail* (Hull), 5 December 1918, 5.

finished fourth in the field of five, while the winner was both a Coalition Liberal man and a serving officer, Major Cyril Entwistle.⁹¹ Meeting reports, such as that cited above, show that Shakesby's audience was usually composed largely of 'Silver Badge men', rather than attracting a wider section of the constituency,⁹² although he did try to broaden his appeal, for example by addressing a meeting of the Hull Women Citizens' Association.⁹³ The overall impression from the coverage of his campaign, and others like him, is that it was fair and balanced, but that it was difficult for an independent from a small new party to win against a candidate from an established party holding the prized Coalition 'Coupon', whose members were to dominate the new House of Commons.⁹⁴

While the Federation did not win a seat, its campaign did bring two major gains that would be of great benefit to its members in the future. The first was the emergence of its Chairman, Thomas Lister, as an impressive performer on the public stage. With Hogge winding down his role as the public face of the Federation (he would resign as Hon. President soon after the election, on becoming Joint Whip for the Asquithian 'Independent Liberal Party' in the Commons),⁹⁵ it was important that the organisation had a leader capable of making as much of an impact as Hogge had done. The election campaign both established Lister beyond the Federation itself, and must also have given him valuable experience, for he was its candidate in the Ashton-under-Lyne constituency, against the sitting Conservative Unionist MP, Sir Albert Stanley, one of the most senior politicians in the country and a formidable figure with a service record.⁹⁶ Lister, by contrast, was a former insurance clerk who had served as a lance bombardier on the Western Front, where he was

⁹¹ Major Cyril F. Entwistle (Coalition Liberal) 6,724, Mr J. R. Bell (Coalition Labour) 5,005, Mr R. Mell (Labour, I.L.P.) 3,121, Mr. Albert E. Shakesby (D.S. and S. F.) 695, Mr P. S. Newbound (Independent) 650. 'South-West Hull. The "Galloping Major" with 1,719 Majority', *The Daily Mail* (Hull), 28 December 1918, 1.

⁹² 'Mr. Shakesby at St. George's Road. An enthusiastic meeting', *The Daily Mail* (Hull), 4 December 1918, 2.

⁹³ 'Women and the S.W. Hull Candidates', *The Daily Mail* (Hull), 7 December 1918, 1.

⁹⁴ Of 707 seats in the new Commons, 523 were part of the Coalition (including 50 non-Coupon Conservatives). Freeman, 'The Liberal Party and the Impact of the 1918 Reform Act', 49.

⁹⁵ 'Mr. J. M. Hogge', *The Bulletin*, no. 1, 13 March 1919, 1; Elder, 'J. M. Hogge', q.v., 22.

⁹⁶ Theo Barker, 'Stanley, Albert Henry, Baron Ashfield (1861–1947)', *ODNB*, online version: 6 January 2011, accessed 9 October 2018, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36241>.

seriously wounded and discharged.⁹⁷ Stanley had the Coalition Ticket but his candidacy was undermined by the Ashton Liberal Association's refusal to endorse him, announcing publicly it was 'leaving the Liberal voters to act as they think best';⁹⁸ in effect favouring Lister, a former chairman of the Lancashire and Cheshire Young Liberals. He proved an impressive public speaker, with a *Times* Special Correspondent warning that Stanley 'has an opponent whose strength must not be underrated'.⁹⁹ Like all the Federation candidates, one of his central demands was that 'the man who was disabled in war' should have a legal right to a disablement pension, just as a workman had a right to compensation for an industrial injury.¹⁰⁰ As an example of his style, he was reported as declaring at one meeting that he was 'not hostile to the Coalition programme' and he only objected to 'the Chief Whip becoming a sergeant-major, so that on the command "Right wheel," we go into one lobby, and on the words "Left wheel," we go into another'.¹⁰¹ This demonstrated both an aptitude for crafting a telling political simile, and sympathy with local Liberals who objected to the national machine telling them to vote for the Coalition. On the eve of the election, Lord Beaverbrook, a former holder of the seat, made a high-profile visit in support of Stanley, crucially proclaiming that he was 'perfectly sure that the Government ... will give a statutory right to every sailor and soldier disabled in this war to his pension', and that there would be the same right of appeal as that enjoyed by injured workmen, just as Lister had demanded.¹⁰² This was seen as 'tantamount to a Government pledge', bringing huge cheers from the crowd, and undercutting Lister's central message.¹⁰³ Stanley retained his seat by a majority of almost 3,000, not an overwhelming victory on a turnout of 68% of the 25,000 electorate, but Lister was comfortably second.¹⁰⁴ Yet not only had Lister's campaign pressured Beaverbrook into delivering what appeared to be a Government-sanctioned pledge but, notes Ward, Stanley 'became a champion of the soldiers' cause and even conceded the necessity of statutory right of pension, a position he would not have taken

⁹⁷ Niall Barr, 'Lister, Sir (Thomas) Frederick (1886/7-1966)', *ODNB*, online version: 22 September 2011, accessed 23 October 2018, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/101060>.

⁹⁸ 'Northern Fights', *The Times*, 6 December 1918, 6.

⁹⁹ Wootton, *Politics of Influence*, 204.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ 'Northern Fights', *The Times*, 6 December 1918, 6.

¹⁰² Wootton, *Politics of Influence*, 206.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 206.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 206.

had Lister not opposed him'.¹⁰⁵ As noted above, a number of other ex-service candidates' opponents had made similar commitments, and the Federation was to hold them to that over the next few months, so that even if they did not win, their mere presence had been effective. This was another major gain that it took from the General Election campaign of December 1918.

Ernest Thurtle was another who gained prominence through the election, as an active trade unionist who had joined up and risen through the ranks to lieutenant. He contested the London constituency of Bethnal Green South-West for the Federation, as a political novice, supported by an inexperienced but enthusiastic team, under the slogan 'Tommy's man is your man'.¹⁰⁶ He was up against two lieutenant-colonels,¹⁰⁷ also claiming to speak for the ex-service man, but he attracted positive press coverage for his 'aggressive campaign'.¹⁰⁸ Like Lister, he came second to the Coalition Unionist candidate, but became a major figure in the Federation, and entered the Commons in 1923, the start of a long political career that included ministerial office, and a leading role in abolishing 'the Army death penalty for cowardice and desertion'.¹⁰⁹ Meanwhile, the Federation learned the lesson of having gone to the electorate with such a narrow programme, based on veterans' issues alone, so that by the time it started to publish its fortnightly *Bulletin*, in March 1919, it had developed a comprehensive political manifesto, more of which below.

Hamilton's Empire Services League takes shape

By early January 1919, Hamilton's scheme was taking shape in more detail, shown for example in Jellicorse's response to an enquiry that 'steps have been taken to enlist the sympathies and cooperation of the existing societies ... and the method contemplated is that of affiliation to the imperial services league which will be of a nonpolitical and

¹⁰⁵ Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 117.

¹⁰⁶ Ernest Thurtle, *Time's Winged Chariot* (London, 1945), 59.

¹⁰⁷ 'Many things in few lines', *Sunderland Daily Echo*, 7 December 1918, 6.

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Ward, 'The British Veterans' Ticket', 162-3, but not referenced.

¹⁰⁹ Thurtle, *Time's Winged Chariot*, 70, 171, 110.

nonsectarian character'.¹¹⁰ Millions of pounds of excess canteen profits would be used to run the Central Council and county branches, and 'for grants by the latter in furthering the objects of the league'.¹¹¹ News of this money was already general knowledge and it was just the latest episode in a saga that, in the treatment of serving soldiers since the Crimean War,¹¹² rather echoed the muddled way in which their families had been dealt with during the years of the Great War. The net result was that a 'non-profit' service had somehow accumulated a surplus of around £8 million (equivalent to over £400 million now, a century later).¹¹³ There had been much debate about what should be done with it.¹¹⁴ The funds would be disbursed on behalf of the new League by the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association (SSFA),¹¹⁵ and the Soldiers' and Sailors' Help Society, as the 'only two societies which are completely organised all over the United Kingdom'.¹¹⁶ Jellicorse anticipated criticism of these societies, given the veterans' resentment at paternalistic charities, and the fact that the canteen profits were not the proceeds of charity but were, in their minds, rightfully theirs to decide what to do with. So the briefing stated that

Each society would have to agree that a substantial number, and where possible at least 50% of ranks other than commissioned rank, be appointed to serve on all their committees, thus carrying out the principle adopted by the authorities in forming the League, in the first instance.¹¹⁷

This was perhaps the most important principle of the whole scheme. Hamilton and Jellicorse realised that the Association and the Federation would only participate if it was

¹¹⁰ Capt. Pullen, Admiralty Committee on Mercantile Marine, letter to Jellicorse, 11 January 1919. Quotations are from attached typed notes headed 'Chatham Letter: Remarks', LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/3.

¹¹¹ 'Chatham Letter: Remarks', LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/3.

¹¹² Harry Miller, *Service to the Services: The Story of NAAFI* (London: Newman Neame, 1971), 14–20.

¹¹³ Bank of England Inflation Calculator, accessed 7 August 2018, <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator>.

¹¹⁴ Miller, *Service to the Services*, 27–28.

¹¹⁵ Note that this did not become SSAFA, the Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Families Association, until 1919: SSAFA website, Our History, accessed 15 May 2018, <http://www.ssafa.org.uk/about-us/our-history>.

¹¹⁶ 'Scheme of Organization', attached to 'Statement as to the Origin and Organisation of the Service League', 25 January 1919, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/3.

¹¹⁷ 'Scheme of Organization'.

genuinely democratic in character. This did not suit Haig, who was 'bitterly disappointed that the scheme of League [sic] has not been built upon the old Regimental Associations or Aid Societies', citing their work during the war years and asserting that 'There is no doubt that men would appreciate assistance far more from the funds of their old Units than from a charitable organisation'.¹¹⁸ While he correctly recognised the men's antipathy to charity, using the regimental associations was no answer, as Jellicorse wrote a few months later, explaining that 'owing to the fact that so few of them [Regimental Associations] had any proper organizations and also that ... men from every county had been posted ... to ... Units not connected with the County in which they lived, it was considered impossible to do this'.¹¹⁹ Arguably it was an example of pre-war thinking, with Haig failing to recognise, as Jellicorse did, that mass war-time enlistment had permanently changed the links between men and local regiments.

By contrast, the Association, the Federation, and the Comrades were more positive about the proposed scheme. Each sent a deputation to a central sub-committee appointed by Hamilton to interview them, and each put some pointed questions after making their initial statements;¹²⁰ the gist of these being concerns about the proposed league's internal democracy, its autonomy from government, politicians and the Army Council, and its freedom to pursue any issues affecting ex-sailors and soldiers. The Comrades struck a rather discordant note, with Captain Simson claiming that 'in his opinion there was really only one Organization in being viz., the Comrades'.¹²¹ This reinforced Jellicorse's judgement that 'Like Colonel Ashley he has been and is a great stumbling block to union among the men'.¹²² Fortunately, perhaps because his attitude was by that time well known, his claim does not appear to have been too disruptive. Indeed, the meeting closed with a proposal, from the Association's James Howell, that there should be a joint meeting of the three organisations, adding that his colleagues 'were of the opinion that if they sat round a table

¹¹⁸ Haig to Jellicorse, 27 January 2018, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/3.

¹¹⁹ Jellicorse, 'A History', LHMA.

¹²⁰ 'Meeting of Sub-Committee Appointed to Meet Representatives of the Three Large Discharged Men's Organizations, held at Horse Guards, Whitehall on 6th February, 1919', LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/3.

¹²¹ 'Meeting of Sub-Committee', 2nd page.

¹²² Jellicorse, 'The History', 11, CHAR 16/9, folio 94.

Unity might soon be a fact'.¹²³ There was one stipulation from the Association, that 'no politicians should be present at the joint meetings, as they consider that the failure of the Smith-Dorrien conference [mid-1918, above] was due to politicians being present at it'; this was probably a reference to Hogge in particular.¹²⁴ Reporting back to the full Consultative Committee, Hamilton noted that he had been 'very much impressed with the questions asked and statements made and felt that each deputation had at heart the welfare of the Ex-Service man'.¹²⁵ Within a fortnight they had agreed the constitution.¹²⁶ On 25 February 1919 Hamilton sent the committee's full report to his three sponsoring authorities, the Board of Admiralty, the Army Council, and the Air Council.¹²⁷ Letters sent the same day, inviting Towse, Lister and Howell to serve on the Central Council of the new League, included the line 'the authorities concerned ... have decided to go ahead with the formation of the League',¹²⁸ showing that Hamilton believed approval of his scheme was assured. Indeed, another letter the same day to Winston Churchill, by now the Secretary of State for War, enclosed a rather lengthy but also exuberant speech for Churchill to launch the League.¹²⁹ However, there is no record of that speech ever being delivered.¹³⁰ Instead there is growing evidence of Hamilton, Jellicorse and Ellison's frustration at the subsequent lack of response from Churchill. Three weeks later Ellison wrote to Hamilton expressing his concern at the delay and observing that 'What really would be interesting would be to know what S of S. [Secretary of State – Churchill] has in his mind, and whence he is deriving his ideas'.¹³¹ Churchill's 'ideas' are suggested a little more directly in Hamilton's blunt reply that 'If Winston and that pompous ass, Peel, put their money on this new edition of the

¹²³ 'Meeting of Sub-Committee', 3rd page.

¹²⁴ Jellicorse, 'A History', 3rd page.

¹²⁵ 'Minutes of Proceedings: Meeting of the Consultative Committee held in The Library, Horse Guards, Whitehall, on Thursday, February 13th, 1919', LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/3.

¹²⁶ 'Minutes of Proceedings: Last Meeting of the Consultative Committee held at Horse Guards, Whitehall, on Friday, February 21st, 1919', LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/3.

¹²⁷ Hamilton to 'the Board of Admiralty, Army Council and Air Council' (copy), 25 February 1919, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/3.

¹²⁸ Ellison to Towse (copy), 25 February 1919, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/3. Similar letters to Howell and Lister.

¹²⁹ Copy letter to Churchill, sender apparently Hamilton but not named, 25 February 1919, enclosing draft speech (7 pages), LHMA 11/1/3.

¹³⁰ No record, that is to say, in the Hamilton papers, footnoted above, or the Churchill Archives, <https://www.chu.cam.ac.uk/archives/> (searched January 2019), or national newspaper databases including *The Times*, *The Guardian* and *Gale's Primary Sources*.

¹³¹ Ellison to Hamilton, 13 March 1919, LHMA 11/1/3.

Primrose League, the Comrades, they will jolly well live to regret it'.¹³² What is particularly striking about Hamilton's private comments is both his contempt for the Comrades, and the implication that Churchill was delaying the formation of the League because he preferred to have the Comrades of the Great War in its place. Hamilton replied to Ellison the following day to say that 'the thing [the League] may fall through – the great man himself may fail (as he often does) at the last moment'.¹³³ It is probably also significant that it was Churchill's predecessor as War Secretary, Viscount Milner, who had appointed Hamilton to try and establish an Empire Services League, and there is nothing in either the Hamilton papers or the Churchill Archives to suggest that 'the great man' was ever committed to the idea.

Other correspondence addressed to Hamilton confirms the suspicion that there was lobbying against the proposed League, and in favour of giving the canteen funds to the regimental associations. For example, a Major Barclay warned Hamilton on 21 March 1919 that he was 'afraid that the case of the regimental associations may be too strongly advocated to the Army Council', adding that 'if the new League is to work through the regimental associations, which are not democratic, I am sure it will not be well received by ex-service men'.¹³⁴ Another letter the same day, from Lieutenant General Bethune, a member of the Consultative Committee's Employment Sub-committee,¹³⁵ reported that 'unfortunately it appears that Churchill has put all the things back for a fresh enquiry by a Sub-Committee of which Willie Peel is Chairman';¹³⁶ the same Peel who Hamilton regarded as 'that pompous ass'. Bethune's information is particularly interesting, for he was (as noted above) a former member of the Comrades, and he appears to have remained well informed about their activities. He went on say that 'Ashley has got hold of Peel and told him that the Comrades of the Great War are ... wonderful fellows', explaining that the Comrades 'are especially angry at the clause which we made so much of, excluding M.P.'s

¹³² Hamilton to Ellison (copy), 13 March 1919, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/5. For Peel, see Alex May, 'Peel, William Robert Wellesley, first Earl Peel (1867–1937)', *ODNB*, online version: 6 January 2011, accessed 9 October 2018, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35453>.

¹³³ Hamilton to Ellison (copy), 14 March 1919, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/5.

¹³⁴ Barclay to Hamilton, 21 March 1919, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/5.

¹³⁵ 'Minutes of Proceedings, Meeting of Consultative Committee', 21 November 1918, 3rd page, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/1.

¹³⁶ Bethune to Hamilton, 21 March 1919, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/5.

from the Council'.¹³⁷ Wilfrid Ashley was a lieutenant-colonel, a long-serving MP, one of the founders of the Comrades, and a man of 'pronounced right-wing, pro-imperialist, anti-socialist and anti-Bolshevik views'.¹³⁸ Jellicorse, who had been making such great efforts to bring about unity since his setting up of the Smith-Dorrien conference in mid-1918, had little time for Ashley, who he held 'largely responsible for the fatal blunder of forming the first [Comrades'] Executive Committee entirely of ex-officers', and who had been 'to a great extent, the cause of the ill-feeling that has arisen among the organisation', and 'certainly he has done no good to the cause as a whole'.¹³⁹ Ashley's anger at the clause excluding MPs was strikingly hypocritical, in view of the Comrades' repeated objections ever since it was founded, to the political links of the other ex-service organisations, which by this time they had largely severed in any case. However, this could also be interpreted as not so much hypocritical, but rather as an attitude of mind that saw leadership of any such national organisation as being the prerogative of men like Ashley, born and bred to lead such bodies. Similarly, many MPs and senior military men had long promoted ex-service charities governed from above by prominent men and women, in preference to organisations run more democratically by veterans themselves.

Towards the end of March, Dame Kathleen Furse, Director of the Women's Royal Naval Service (and one of the two Admiralty representatives on the Consultative Committee), wrote to Hamilton to express her concerns at the Army Council 'reconsidering the whole question', and how she had told her own brother-in-law, who was a member of that council 'exactly what I thought of them, considering the amount of trouble your Committee had taken'.¹⁴⁰ Hamilton's exasperation was clear in his reply, which endorsed her concerns, adding that he regarded Peel as 'infinitely removed from all democratic sympathy' and prophesied that if the delays continued 'we shall have your ex-service women turning into Bolsheviks'.¹⁴¹ A few days later, he wrote to Bethune to say that

¹³⁷ Bethune to Hamilton, 21 March 1919, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/5.

¹³⁸ Feuchtwanger, 'Ashley, Wilfrid William', *ODNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30471>, q.v.

¹³⁹ Jellicorse, 'The History', 10, CHAR 16/9, folios 94.

¹⁴⁰ Furse to Hamilton, 22 March 1919, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/5.

¹⁴¹ Hamilton to Furse (copy), 25 March 1919, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/5.

I think the War Office are behaving about our Report exactly as the Peace Conference are behaving at Paris and I think the results will be the same, i.e. pretty bad ... most of the men are dead set against the regimental associations, that's the honest truth and there is no getting away from it. They regard them as aristocratic, officer-run shows and you might as well hope to make a 'strong Poland' as a strong League built upon regimental associations.¹⁴²

By early April, Hamilton privately conceded that 'the War Office and Government have no present intention of carrying any further the recommendations of the Consultative Committee'.¹⁴³ The central problem was undoubtedly the self-government principle, which, in the view of Bethune, was 'one of our fundamental ideas'.¹⁴⁴ He opined that 'I do not think that the men would accept any scheme which did not give them self-government on their committees and in their Clubs', and went on to say that 'there will be trouble if they try and boss the League from the top, and the scheme is such a good one that it ought to go through'.¹⁴⁵ And trouble there was; indeed it had already started. The Federation in its first *Bulletin*, of 13 March 1919, had reported positively on the 'Proposed Government League (ex-service men)',¹⁴⁶ but just nine days later its representatives attended a conference at the War Office, presided over by Peel, and attended by the Comrades, but apparently without the involvement or even the knowledge of Hamilton or his colleagues. The Federation reported angrily in its second *Bulletin* that it was 'not prepared to admit that the Admiralty, War Office, the Air Force or the Government had any right to interfere with an ex-Service men's organisation', going on to say that 'after having made millions out of ex-Service men, through canteen and other funds, the money was being used to attack their organisation'.¹⁴⁷ It reported that 'it was fairly clear that the Under Secretary of State for War [Peel] seemed inclined to recommend the Government to drop any idea of organising discharged and demobilised men', and as a result 'the question of the disposal of

¹⁴² Hamilton to Bethune (copy), 26 March 1919, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/5.

¹⁴³ Hamilton to Mr. Fox, Secretary to the Committee (copy), 9 April 1919, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/5.

¹⁴⁴ Bethune to Hamilton, 14 April 1919, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/5.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *The Bulletin*, no. 1, 13 March 1919, 2.

¹⁴⁷ *The Bulletin*, no. 2, 27 March 1919, 2.

the profits remained'.¹⁴⁸ There is plenty of evidence that Wilfrid Ashley exercised the most influence over both Peel and Churchill, when it came to opposing the recommendations of the Consultative Committee. For example, Captain Henry H. C. Baird, who had become the editor of *The Ex-Service Man* journal, wrote to Hamilton in early April, by which time Hamilton knew his scheme was not going to be implemented, that 'I dined with the latter [Ashley, of the Comrades] a few days ago at the House of Commons, and quite see that he has no intention of giving way'.¹⁴⁹ By 'giving way' he meant conceding the principle of a fully democratic organisation, with Ashley instead wanting the Comrades to run the League, or at the very least, for it to be run by MPs and other senior political and military figures. That his opposition was critical became increasingly clear as the months passed, and in August Hamilton wrote to Baird that Ashley 'has been the enemy and it is a humiliating thought that one with so little brains should have been in a position owing to wealth, etc., etc., to work so much harm.'¹⁵⁰

To conclude, it is apparent that Wootton's verdict, that the scheme failed because of opposition from the Association and the Federation,¹⁵¹ is not justified by a more detailed analysis of the attempt to establish an 'Empire Services League'. Hamilton worked hard, assisted by Jellicorse and others, to formulate a scheme acceptable to all three groups, and was so confident of it that he wrote a speech for Churchill, as War Secretary, to announce its creation. Instead, Churchill passed it to a sub-committee, chaired by Peel and strongly influenced by Ashley, to the point that, contrary to the Comrades' earlier support for Hamilton, it recommended an amended constitution that diluted the democratic element and required the ex-service groups to surrender their independence for a degree of government control. This, not surprisingly, they were unwilling to countenance.

¹⁴⁸ *The Bulletin*, no. 2, 27 March 1919, 2.

¹⁴⁹ Baird to Hamilton, 11 April 1919, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/5.

¹⁵⁰ Hamilton to Baird (copy), 14 August 1919, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/5.

¹⁵¹ Wootton, *Official History*, 7.

Strikes, Demonstrations and Riots

Churchill's reluctance to engage with Hamilton's scheme is the more surprising, even allowing for the negative lobbying from Ashley, Peel and others, when seen in the context of sustained unrest amongst both serving and discharged soldiers in the first half of 1919. No document in the Churchill Archive gives any direct evidence that would shed light on his attitude, though a history of the organisations included there, and written by Jellicorse, opines that 'the men are being kept apart by them [the politicians] as they are afraid that if combined together in one big organisation, it would become too powerful'.¹⁵² Certainly, as noted in previous chapters,¹⁵³ many in government were fearful of the creation of a British equivalent of America's Grand Army of the Republic.¹⁵⁴ It might simply be that Churchill was too distracted by the huge task of re-organising the Army for peace-time, along with his concern for military operations in Russia, and of course the Paris conference, to have much time for Hamilton's scheme, and he just left it to Peel and his colleagues to decide. Meanwhile, several months later, in July, *The Bulletin* was reporting that the formation of the Empire Services League was 'said to be receiving the consideration of Mr. Winston Churchill personally ... for the past three months, without any steps having been taken in regard to the administration of the Army Canteen Funds'.¹⁵⁵ However it was also noted that the Federation 'has secured representation on the Central Funds Committee', the body overseeing the money, in the interim.¹⁵⁶

The extent of unrest amongst serving and discharged soldiers was not surprising given that the first few months of 1919 were times of considerable uncertainty, for the Armistice had been a ceasefire, not a permanent end to hostilities and, until a treaty was signed, an uneasy state of 'phoney peace' existed. Conscription remained in force and millions of men stayed in uniform, though most were eager for immediate demobilisation and the long-awaited return to homes and families. Unwisely, the military authorities initially prioritised

¹⁵² Jellicorse, 'The History', 4–5, Churchill Archive (CHAR) 16/9, folio 91.

¹⁵³ In particular, chapter 4.

¹⁵⁴ See chapter 3.

¹⁵⁵ 'Empire Services League', *The Bulletin*, no. 8, 19 July 1919, 4.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

the release of servicemen with jobs to go to, particularly those, as Churchill put it, ‘which will most quickly restart our industries’.¹⁵⁷ Yet these were often the same men who had served the shortest time, while those who had served the longest felt *they* should be given the priority. This caused much unrest, which has been thoroughly documented by Andrew Rothstein in *The Soldiers’ Strikes of 1919*,¹⁵⁸ a slim and apparently rather neglected volume in this context, containing meticulous accounts of soldiers’ revolts and demonstrations at bases across the UK that year, particularly throughout January.¹⁵⁹ He found strike reports from thirty-five locations across England, Scotland, Ulster and Wales,¹⁶⁰ typically involving all the soldiers on a base, anywhere from a few hundred to 20,000,¹⁶¹ who refused to parade or obey orders, frequently marching instead into an adjacent town or even the centre of London. The influential Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir Henry Wilson, wrote in his diary of his fear ‘that the unrest would ... encourage Bolshevism throughout Britain’.¹⁶² But while these soldiers were, in common parlance, ‘bolshie’, very few were actually Bolsheviks.¹⁶³ The primary complaint common to every strike and demonstration was the slow pace of demobilisation, along with resentment at doing civilian jobs for army pay, marching and drilling for no purpose, attending church parades on Sundays, and so on. Just as important were concerns they might be sent to Russia; indeed they objected so vigorously to this possibility that the Army Council hurriedly announced it would revert to pre-war recruiting after 13 January, meaning that ‘no more combatant troops of the

¹⁵⁷ Winston S. Churchill: memorandum ‘The Armies of Occupation’, 19 January 1919, War Office; reproduced in Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill, Volume IV Companion*. Part 1, Documents January 1917–June 1919 (London, 1977) 463–67.

¹⁵⁸ Andrew Rothstein, *The Soldiers’ Strikes of 1919* (London, 1980).

¹⁵⁹ David Burke, ‘Rothstein, Andrew (1898–1994)’, *ODNB*, online version: 11 October 2018, accessed 22 October 2018, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/55655>. As a dedicated communist and defender of Stalin all his life, Rothstein’s impartiality could be questioned. However, the strikes he described are copiously referenced and the sources readily confirmed.

¹⁶⁰ Rothstein, *The Soldiers’ Strikes*, 37–81.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 72–73, estimates ‘about 20,000 men in all were out’ across 13 camps in the Calais area on 12 and 13 January 1919. They set up ‘the Calais Area Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Association’ to coordinate their strikes.

¹⁶² Major General Sir C. E. Callwell, *Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson BART., GCB., D.S.O., his Life and Diaries* (London: Cassell, 1927), vol. ii, 161–62.

¹⁶³ A conclusion echoed by William Butler, ‘The British Soldier is no Bolshevik’: The British Army, Discipline, and the Demobilization Strikes of 1919’, *Twentieth Century British History* 30, no. 3, 13 December 2018, 321–46.

present Army will be used for any purpose outside the Western theatre of operations'.¹⁶⁴ At the War Cabinet on 10 January, Churchill's first day as Secretary of State for War, he could only plead with his colleagues to be allowed to send volunteers to Russia, prompting Lord Curzon to comment that it was 'most unlikely' there would be any.¹⁶⁵

While these men were not yet ex-soldiers, they still have a place in this account, because it is clear from Rothstein that most now regarded themselves as 'citizens in khaki', whose war was over, who wanted to return to civilian life as early as possible, and who 'felt entitled to use civilian methods', as he puts it.¹⁶⁶ Certainly many of those who went on to join one of the ex-service organisations following demobilisation, would have been aware of these strikes and the potential power of collective action against unfair treatment. Indeed, some had already joined one of the groups as, although full membership was not permitted under army regulations, the Comrades were officially allowed to recruit serving soldiers as 'honorary' members,¹⁶⁷ and that precedent made it impractical to enforce a ban on membership of political groups. Demobilisation provided a surge of potential members for veterans' organisations, and by this time, the beginning of 1919, the Federation was the strongest, with branches across the United Kingdom, including Ireland, where the Comrades were also active.¹⁶⁸ *The Bulletin* regularly reported on activities in Ireland, including in particular a 'Successful Conference' of 'over 100 branches' in the Mansion House, Dublin, on 9 and 10 August, hailed as 'the Dawn of a New Era', although their guest speaker, the UK General Secretary, F. W. Jackson, admitted that 'he had found the position of the ex-service man in Ireland from reports received was deplorable'.¹⁶⁹ He cited especially 'the attitude of employers' in failing to 'assist in the restoration to civil life of the ex-Service men by providing them with employment'.¹⁷⁰ More positively, for much of that year and well into the following one, it was claimed that 'the ex-service men in Ireland know no border-line in the Federation, and a man from the ... North is as welcome as a man

¹⁶⁴ 'London Letter: Recruiting for the Army', *The Western Daily Press* (Bristol), 10 January 1919, 5.

¹⁶⁵ WC 515, 10 January 1919, 2–4, minutes 4–5, TNA, CAB 23/9/2.

¹⁶⁶ Rothstein, *Soldiers' Strikes*, 59.

¹⁶⁷ B. H. T., 'Fortnightly Report', 10 March 1919, 1, TNA, CAB 24/76/77, q.v.

¹⁶⁸ The Association may too have had a presence in Ireland, for trades councils were also established across the country, but no evidence of such has been found to date.

¹⁶⁹ 'Irish Federation Page', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, no. 13, 28 August 1919, 2.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

from Cork or Dublin'.¹⁷¹ But it is undoubtedly also the case that they experienced some hostility from supporters of the Republican cause.¹⁷²

The Federation's political programme

With the easing of wartime restrictions on paper and printing, the Federation started publishing *The Bulletin*,¹⁷³ reflecting its superior resources over the Association, which could not afford anything comparable until near the end of the following year.¹⁷⁴ The launch edition in March 1919 reported that James Hogge was standing down as President and Treasurer, with Thomas Lister becoming the organisation's Chairman.¹⁷⁵ The second issue proposed a remarkable political 'General Programme' for the country, categorised under fourteen headings. Under 'international' it called for a League of Free Nations, the universal abolition of conscription, and an end to secret 'Treaties, Arrangements and Commitments'.¹⁷⁶ Constitutional demands included the replacement of the House of Lords by an elected chamber, universal adult suffrage (for men and women) with proportional representation and 'local autonomy' for England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales.¹⁷⁷ It continued with demands for a 'system of National Insurance, banishing destitution and want from the cradle to the grave', equal pay for women, public ownership of all land, a national 'Public Medical and Nursing System', and free education for all.¹⁷⁸ This comprehensive and wide-ranging programme was clearly a response to the Federation's disappointing General Election results, and an attempt to establish a full programme,

¹⁷¹ 'Irish News', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, no. 16, 9 October 1919, 10.

¹⁷² Paul Taylor, *Heroes or Traitors?: Experiences of Southern Irish Soldiers Returning from the Great War 1919–1939* (Liverpool University Press, 2015), particularly comments on the Comrades, 24, 61, 99, and on the Irish Federation of DSS, 24, 96–97, 99, 103, 112.

¹⁷³ *The Bulletin*, no. 1, 13 March 1919.

¹⁷⁴ *The Bayonet*, vol. 1, no. 1, September 1920, more of which in the next chapter.

¹⁷⁵ 'Mr J. M. Hogge, M.P.' and 'International Executive', *The Bulletin*, no. 1, 13 March 1919, 1. The first article made it clear that Hogge resigned not because of any dispute with the Federation, but because his appointment as Joint Chief Whip of the Asquithian Liberals 'made it essential in the interests of the Federation, that he should cease to hold any official position', and announced that 'he has been elected an honorary member for life'. The second article announced Lister's election.

¹⁷⁶ 'A National Federation General Programme?', *The Bulletin*, no. 2, 27 March 1919, 3.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

beyond ex-service issues, upon which the organisation could campaign. It showed clear political aspirations, yet it must be understood as a *radical* manifesto, not a *revolutionary* one, and most of its provisions aimed at a fairer society, as a way of implementing Lloyd George's famous promise to 'make Britain a fit country for heroes to live in'.¹⁷⁹ In fact the Federation was fiercely anti-Bolshevist, and for months every issue carried a lurid advertisement for its propaganda film entitled 'Bolshevism'.¹⁸⁰

In May, the Federation became the first ex-service organisation invited to meet 'the service members of the House of Commons', with Lister briefing them on the problems facing veterans,¹⁸¹ and the same month it presented its evidence to the Select Committee on Pensions (of which, more below). In June it held its second annual conference, on a much larger scale than the previous year and, from the account in *The Bulletin*, it was a confident and lively affair, including speeches from ex-President Hogge and his wife that were both humorous and well received.¹⁸² If Hogge had tended to appear as a dour presbyterian, constantly harping on about war pensions and separation allowances, on this occasion he was 'Jimmy', the genial Scot with an effective line in self-deprecation. For example, he opened by remarking that he 'had come down to Manchester to make a little more out of the discharged soldiers', a sly reference to the false accusations in the Commons that he had campaigned for them in order to enrich himself.¹⁸³ The laughter that greeted his remark showed that the audience well understood, and sympathised.¹⁸⁴

The emergence of more radical veterans' groups

While the three main ex-service organisations were the most prominent during 1919, there

¹⁷⁹ George Campbell Gosling, 'Lloyd George's Ministry Men', World War 1 Centenary, University of Oxford, accessed 4 June 2018, <http://ww1centenary.oucs.ox.ac.uk/body-and-mind/lloyd-georges-ministry-men/>.

¹⁸⁰ For example, 'A Master Stroke Against Bolshevism', *The D.S.S Bulletin*, no. 13, 28 August 1919, 15; 'Advert for the film "Bolshevism"', in *Ibid.*, 16. No surviving copy of this film has been found.

¹⁸¹ 'The Federation Chairman addresses the Service Members at the House of Commons', *The Bulletin*, no. 6, 22 May 1919, 15.

¹⁸² 'Mr. and Mrs. J. M. Hogge in Merry Vein', *The Bulletin*, no. 8, 19 June 1919, 2.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

were several attempts to set up more radical groups for veterans, and even for serving soldiers and sailors. Their appearance in the first half of the year was against a backdrop of serious industrial unrest, such as the strikes on Clydeside in support of a forty-hour week,¹⁸⁵ and consequent deployment of the British Army in Glasgow,¹⁸⁶ along with the rising violence in Ireland,¹⁸⁷ the soldiers' strikes discussed above, and of course revolutionary events abroad. So there was particular concern in government at the emergence of the Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Union (SSAU),¹⁸⁸ formed early in the year by *The Herald* newspaper and others 'to sow further insubordination among army men ... [and] to undermine Britain's involvement in the Russian Civil War', according to Basil Thomson.¹⁸⁹ Serving men and women were prohibited from joining unions, but some did so and the SSAU was sufficiently emboldened to encourage anyone who had enlisted under the Derby Scheme, and had not been demobilised by 11 May, to discharge themselves that day. This was on the basis that their contract of enlistment stated 'You may be retained after the termination of hostilities until your service can be spared, but in no case shall this retention exceed six months';¹⁹⁰ and 11 May was six months after the Armistice. It was too much for the Government to ignore, and the union's offices were raided by CID officers on 8 May, while army commands were 'notified and steps taken to meet any great outbreak that might occur'.¹⁹¹ No 'great outbreak' occurred and, as Ward concluded, 'Quick action by the Directorate of Intelligence and the government crippled the union's plan'.¹⁹² The SSAU subsequently disappeared.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁵ Frequently mentioned in Cabinet Papers, for example: B.H.T., 'Fortnightly Report', 10 March 1919, 2, TNA, CAB 24/76/77.

¹⁸⁶ Gordon J. Barclay, "'Duties In Aid of the Civil Power": The Deployment of the Army to Glasgow, 31 January to 17 February 1919', *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies* 38.2 (2018): 261–92.

¹⁸⁷ Frequent subject of Cabinet Papers, for example, Lord French, 'The State of Ireland', WC paper G.T.7277, 15 May 1919, 1–2, TNA, CAB 24/79/77.

¹⁸⁸ B.H.T., 'Fortnightly Report', 10 March 1919, 1–2, TNA, CAB 24/76/77.

¹⁸⁹ Ward, 'Intelligence Surveillance', 185.

¹⁹⁰ 'What the Derby Men Signed', *The Daily Herald*, 9 May 1919, 5.

¹⁹¹ WC 564, 8 May 8 1919, 6 (last par), TNA, CAB 23/10/12; B.H.T. (Basil H. Thomson), 'Report on Revolutionary Organisations in the United Kingdom', WC paper G.T.7254, 14 May 1919, 1, TNA, CAB 24/79/54.

¹⁹² Ward, 'Intelligence Surveillance of British Ex-Servicemen', 185.

¹⁹³ B. H. T. (Basil H. Thomson), 'Report on Revolutionary Organizations in the United Kingdom', C.P.70, 6 November 1919, 9, describes the SSAU as 'now moribund', TNA, CAB 24/92/71.

A further major veterans' group, the National Union of Ex-Service Men (NUX), was also founded in early 1919, by left-wing elements in the labour movement,¹⁹⁴ based explicitly on the idea that veterans were 'not only ex-Service men, but workers too'.¹⁹⁵ It claimed to be 'a large and powerful body of men',¹⁹⁶ and intelligence reports credited it with having 'grown from one branch of 50 members to well over 100 branches with a membership of nearly 100,000' at its height.¹⁹⁷ It denounced the other ex-service organisations in the strongest terms,¹⁹⁸ appealing in particular to men who had been active trade unionists before their war service. A still more radical group, the International Union of Ex-Service Men (IUX) had been 'founded in Glasgow in 1918 by a secession of members of the N.F.D.S.S.' [ie the Federation], according to a Cabinet report,¹⁹⁹ and was openly, in its own words, 'an out and out revolutionary socialist organization. It stands alone among ex-service organizations in this country in its determination to fight for the overthrow of the capitalist system, and to work for the world-wide establishment of a socialist commonwealth based upon soviets'.²⁰⁰ It is easy to see how that might have alarmed the government of the day, particularly as regards its formation while the country was still at war. However, with a peak membership of only around 7,000 across ten branches,²⁰¹ it plays only a minor part in this history, and never figured to the extent that, for a while, the NUX did. There are very few references to it in Cabinet papers, the most extensive of which comprises just four and a half lines in a sixteen-page report, and there is no evidence that it was of much concern to the Government.²⁰²

Meantime, the Federation concentrated on lobbying government, sending deputations repeatedly to various departments, in particular the Ministries of Pensions and of Labour. It tried to see the Minister of Labour, Sir Robert Horne, on 13 and 14 May 1919, to register

¹⁹⁴ Wootton, *Official History*, 10.

¹⁹⁵ National Union of Ex-Service Men (NUX), *Your Choice*, 2, TUC Library, UB363.

¹⁹⁶ NUX, *Your Choice*, 2.

¹⁹⁷ R. S. Horne, Intelligence Division, Ministry of Labour, 'The Labour Situation: Report from the Ministry of Labour for the week ending 12th November, 1919', C.P.113, 406, TNA, CAB 24/93/14.

¹⁹⁸ NUX, *Your Choice*.

¹⁹⁹ 'The Labour Situation', C.P.113, 406.

²⁰⁰ Jan Cox, National Secretary, 'The International Union of Ex-Service Men', *Workers' Dreadnought* (Glasgow), Vol 6, no. 41, 3 January 1920, 1591.

²⁰¹ 'The Labour Situation', C.P.113, 406.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

its concern at the continuing unemployment of hundreds of thousands of veterans, particularly those disabled through war wounds.²⁰³ While unemployed ex-service men and women had some support from the 'Out of Work donation' scheme, which was much more generous than National Insurance Act rates,²⁰⁴ they wanted jobs, not temporary benefits. As a leading advocate in the Scottish bar, knighted by Lloyd George in 1918, and Conservative MP for the then rather genteel constituency of Glasgow Hillhead,²⁰⁵ Horne may not have been the ideal person to address their dissatisfaction with what they regarded as a lack of action on the part of the Ministry. Indeed, he declined to see them, delegating the task instead to an official, J. P. Barlow, who was not the person making the decisions, and could only assure them that 'any point he could not deal with would be referred to the Minister'.²⁰⁶ Accordingly the Federation called for demonstrations across the UK, to take place on 26 May, when its representatives were due to attend the Ministry of Labour once more,²⁰⁷ but they would again be snubbed by the Minister.²⁰⁸ The Federation suggested that each branch should take various actions in support, including sending deputations to local mayors, submitting resolutions to their MPs, the Prime Minister, the leader of the Opposition and the Minister of Labour, and organising demonstrations of 'ONLY ex-service men, actually unemployed', wearing Federation or regimental badges.²⁰⁹ Most of these passed off peacefully, but not so the one in Hyde Park, London, where a large body of angry demonstrators broke away, marching over to Westminster, to clash violently with police who blocked their path, and 'many persons' on

²⁰³ *The Bulletin*, no. 6, 22 May 1919, 8–12.

²⁰⁴ 29s a week for men, 24s for women, plus allowances for dependants, compared with the basic 7s a week national insurance rate. See 'Insurance Introduced', The National Archives online, accessed 4 September 2020, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/themes/insurance-introduced.htm>.

²⁰⁵ Philip Williamson, 'Horne, Robert Stevenson, Viscount Horne of Slamannan (1871–1940)', *ODNB*, online version: 6 January 2011, accessed 8 August 2020, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33991>.

²⁰⁶ 'Conferences at the Ministry of Labour', *The Bulletin*, no. 6, 22 May 1919, 8–12.

²⁰⁷ 'Ex-Service Men's Demands', *The Times*, 27 May 1919, 7. The Federation did eventually succeed in getting an audience with the Minister, on 15 June: 'Conference with Ministry of Labour', *The Bulletin*, no. 9, 3 July 1919, 4.

²⁰⁸ The Federation deputation was received by Mr. G. J. Wardle, Parliamentary Secretary: 'Conference at the Ministry of Labour', *The Bulletin*, no. 7, 5 June 1919, 2–8.

²⁰⁹ 'Unemployment. National Demonstration', *The Bulletin*, no. 5, 6 May 1919, 8.

both sides were injured, with some needing hospital treatment.²¹⁰ While *The Times* reported that the demonstrators started the trouble when ‘the police were assailed by wood-blocks, and the horses of the mounted men were tripped up by scaffold poles’ (all materials found where the road was conveniently ‘under repair’),²¹¹ the men blamed the police, claiming they ‘had been struck down by [their] batons’ and criticising ‘Slanderous reports against the Federation ... in sections of the press’.²¹² Whoever started the trouble, MPs were disturbed by such scenes so close to Parliament and some criticised the Federation’s leadership in a debate two days later,²¹³ though Basil Thomson, by now the Director of Intelligence, was more circumspect, reporting that they were ‘level-headed men’, but warning also that ‘if the leaders ever become fire-brands, the Federation may be a serious menace to public peace’.²¹⁴ Lister was no doubt regarded as one of those ‘level-headed men’ and for the next edition of *The Bulletin* he wrote a front-page leader that called ‘a few people who are urging the ex-Service men to resort to violent means ... wrong-headed’.²¹⁵ He concluded that ‘justice can only be achieved by Constitutional means’, which is probably as far as he could go in publicly rebuking a substantial number of his own members.²¹⁶

The debate in the Commons to discuss the violence was notable for some vicious attacks on James Hogge, though he no longer held an official position in the Federation. For example Charles Stanton, the MP for Aberdare, repeatedly interrupted Hogge’s opening speech, claiming ‘You have been well paid for your interest’ in the discharged men, only to be rebuked by the Speaker and threatened by Hogge that ‘if the hon. Gentleman cares to say that outside, he will have a writ for libel served upon him within twelve hours’.²¹⁷ But others added to the abuse until the Comrades’ Wilfrid Ashley stood up to say how much he regretted such attacks because, though they ‘frequently disagreed in the past on matters of

²¹⁰ ‘Parliament Square Riot’, *The Times*, 27 May 1919, 12.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² ‘Debate on the Report’, *The Bulletin*, no. 8, 19 June 1919, 6.

²¹³ HC Deb 28 May 1919 vol 116 cc1265–1334.

²¹⁴ B.H.T. (Basil Thomson), ‘Directorate of Intelligence: Report on Revolutionary Organisations in the United Kingdom’, WC paper G.T.7218, 7 May 1919, 6, TNA, CAB 24/79/18.

²¹⁵ T. F. Lister, ‘Federationists Shun Bolshevism’, *The Bulletin*, no 7, 5 June 1919, 1.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ HC Deb 28 May 1919 vol 116 cc1270–71.

military policy and matters of political importance ... the hon. Member for East Edinburgh was one of the first men in the House of Commons who took up the cudgels on behalf of discharged sailors and soldiers ... when they were not so much in the limelight'.²¹⁸ In assessing the attacks on Hogge and the Federation, it is worth noting that while over 160 MPs gathered to debate the riotous events outside the House that day, typically fewer than fifty had bothered to turn up during the war years to discuss separation allowances, army pensions and the like, and sometimes the house was 'practically empty' for such debates.²¹⁹

While the Westminster 'riot' was an isolated incident in the capital, and one that the Federation itself described, rather defensively, as 'a spontaneous move by the men' and 'an unfortunate conflict with the police',²²⁰ it presaged more widespread dissent and disruption two months later. The Government had, after much debate, decided to mark the signing of the Treaty of Versailles with a huge 'Peace Day' parade in London on 19 July and with other celebrations across the country, but not all veterans felt they had much to celebrate. In Manchester, for example, one ex-soldier wrote to the local evening paper, deriding the notion of 'Peace Day' when he and his comrades could not find work with employers who preferred to recruit those who had stayed at home and kept their skills up to date.²²¹ As a result some veterans simply refused to take part, while others were more disruptive. The worst unrest occurred in Luton, where a meeting called to protest against the very idea of a 'Peace Day' turned into a riot that led to the burning of the town hall, the hospitalisation of every fireman on duty, and the imposition of martial law for three days.²²² However, the general public perception of the day's events, other than these isolated incidents, was overwhelmingly positive, particularly towards the images of the most senior military and political figures paying homage to the ordinary soldier, as represented by the temporary Cenotaph,²²³ which, as a result, was in due course made permanent.²²⁴ A few months later, on the first anniversary of the Armistice, ex-service men of all ranks, and prominent

²¹⁸ HC Deb 28 May 1919 vol 116 c1286.

²¹⁹ Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 3, 116.

²²⁰ 'Unemployment Demonstration', *The Bulletin*, no. 7, 5 June 1919, 9.

²²¹ 'Editor's Letters: Peace Day', *Manchester Evening News*, 10 July 1919, 2, col.6.

²²² Dave Craddock, *Where They Burnt the Town Hall Down: Luton, the First World War and the Peace Day Riots of July 1919* (Dunstable: The Book Castle, 1999).

²²³ For example, 'At the Cenotaph: The Salute to the Dead', *The Times*, 21 July 1919, 15.

²²⁴ WC 602, 30 July 1919, 4, minute 2, TNA, CAB 23/11/16.

government officials, assembled at the Cenotaph to lay wreaths and observe two minutes' silence. The Federation reported that 'We paid our tribute without ostentatious ceremony', probably a reference back to the scale of the Peace Day events.²²⁵

Veteran unrest did not, however, subside much in the immediate aftermath of the largely positive response to Peace Day. A couple of days later, Jellicorse wrote to Hamilton expressing concern that 'the Federation ... has become more & more political & has now put its cards on the table'.²²⁶ This referred to the latest issue of *The Bulletin*, which had just re-published the radical twenty-one-point 'General Programme' for the country, first seen in its second issue in March.²²⁷ Hamilton in turn wrote to Churchill, drawing his attention to the same article, calling it 'a complete programme for political agitation' and urging him to 'weld the whole of them together on a non-political basis as my Committee suggested'.²²⁸ There is no record of a written reply from Churchill, though the letter may have been a factor in his active support for the launch of the United Services Fund soon afterwards (below), in contrast to his earlier lack of interest in the Empire Services League. Hamilton and Jellicorse had not given up their efforts to establish the League, or something like it, while Captain Baird, in his role as editor of *The Ex-Service Man*, had regularly highlighted veterans' problems in the pages of his journal. Earlier in the month he had gone a step further with a 'Preliminary Notice' announcing the formation of the 'Imperial Ex-Services Association' at a meeting on 15 July,²²⁹ which was chaired by Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice (of the May 1918 'Maurice Debate' fame).²³⁰ The name was reminiscent of Hamilton's stillborn Empire Services League, but that was intended to embrace all ranks, while Baird's announcement described the new organisation as 'an ex-Officer Association', with four of its five aims exclusively concerning 'ex-officers and their dependants'.²³¹

²²⁵ 'Our Tribute to the Dead', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, no. 19, 27 November 1919, 4.

²²⁶ Jellicorse to Hamilton, 21 July 1919, LCMA, Hamilton: 11/1/5.

²²⁷ 'Our General Programme', *The Bulletin*, no. 10, 17 July 1919, 3.

²²⁸ Hamilton to Churchill, 22 July 1919, CHAR 16/9, folio 79 of 144..

²²⁹ The Imperial Ex-Service Association, 'Preliminary Notice', LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/5. Undated, but apparently enclosed with a letter from Baird to Hamilton, on 'The Ex-Service Man' headed paper, dated 25 July 1919.

²³⁰ John Gooch, 'The Maurice Debate 1918', *Journal of Contemporary History* 3, no. 4, '1918-19: From War to Peace' (October 1968), 211-28.

²³¹ The Imperial Ex-Service Association, 'Preliminary Notice', LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/5.

Significantly, though, the fifth aim was ‘to assist in every way possible the organisation of a Central Association for all ex-service men of all ranks’, so it does appear that its ultimate aim was more inclusive.²³² A covering letter to that Notice, from Baird to Hamilton, dated two weeks later, reported ‘a very successful meeting yesterday ... On our new leaflet we are publishing the names of the Council and Provisional Committee’.²³³ It went on to ask Hamilton to add his name, and stated that Generals Codrington and Bethune had already accepted.²³⁴ While this was an interesting example of an attempt to set up an association for ex-officers, coming as it did from a close associate of Hamilton, it does not seem to have established a significant presence, and it was eventually absorbed by Haig’s ‘Officers Association’ the following February, a few days after the launch of that organisation.²³⁵

Despite the Government’s slow progress on ex-service issues, and the continuing failure to establish Hamilton’s League or something like it, there were fewer and smaller public demonstrations by disgruntled veterans during the second half of the year. This was partly because of another important development in July, when Haig appeared before a House of Commons Select Committee to deliver what the Federation called a ‘Fearless Attack on Pension Scales and Administration’; an action that led it to hail him as its new champion.²³⁶ He had already taken up the ex-service cause as his main post-war activity: just a week after the Armistice he had refused to accept a peerage until, as he put it, ‘the P. M. has fixed allowances for Disabled Officers and men as well as “batta” [gratuities] for all ranks of the Armies under my orders’.²³⁷ He continued this refusal for several months, resisting all pressure and in particular rejecting General Sir Henry Wilson (acting for Lloyd George) for ‘repeatedly arguing that the disabled were well looked after by the charities’, which was not true; and in any event ‘Haig [was] persistently countering that “Officers and their wives

²³² The Imperial Ex-Service Association, ‘Preliminary Notice’, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/5.

²³³ Baird to Hamilton, 30 July 1919, LHMA, Hamilton: 11/1/5.

²³⁴ Ibid. General Codrington was co-author of *War Pensions*, frequently cited in the previous chapter. Bethune was much involved in Hamilton’s efforts to establish an Empire Services League, as noted previously.

²³⁵ As described in the next chapter.

²³⁶ ‘Hats Off to Sir Douglas’, *The Bulletin*, no. 10, 17 July 1919, 1.

²³⁷ Sir Douglas Haig, ‘Haig’s autograph diary of the Great War’, 19 November 1918, NLS, Acc.3155, No.96–7. ‘Batta’ was the word for a soldier’s bonus in British India.

... will not, and should not be asked to, accept *Charity*'''.²³⁸ Eventually the Government relented and gave Haig sufficient assurances, along with a grant adequate to maintain the lifestyle appropriate to an Earl, for him to accept the peerage.²³⁹ He had also, over the same period, resisted a formal role in any one of the three main ex-service groups until they agreed to unify,²⁴⁰ believing that was essential both for the country and for the veterans.

The Select Committee's role was to 'to enquire and report upon the past method of Administering the Pensions Acts and Warrants, and what steps, if any, are necessary for the removal and prevention of legitimate grievances'.²⁴¹ It was chaired by Sir Anderson Montague Barlow, whose involvement in ex-service affairs was noted in the previous chapter, and it included Major Cyril Entwistle, MP for Hull South-West, where he had defeated Albert Shakesby, q.v.; his presence indicating that he had indeed taken on board the issues of ex-service pensions and allowances. The committee had met several times a week since April, thirty-six times in all, hearing 'a large amount of evidence' from the Minister of Pensions, senior representatives of the Ministry of Labour, the War Office, the Boards of Agriculture and of Education, Local War Pensions Committees, the Association, the Federation, the Comrades, the Silver Badge Party,²⁴² and of course MPs such as James Hogge.²⁴³ However, it was Haig's appearance that had the greatest public impact, and not only with members of the Federation.²⁴⁴ Thomas Lister was the most influential witness from the ex-service organisations, cited six times in the Committee's First Report,

²³⁸ Gerard J. De Groot, *Douglas Haig 1861–1928* (London, 1988), 398, quoting from Haig to Sir Henry Wilson (un-dated).

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 397–400.

²⁴⁰ John Charteris, *Field-Marshal Earl Haig* (London, 1929), 371.

²⁴¹ *First and second special reports from the Select Committee on Pensions together with the proceedings of the committee and minutes of evidence and appendices*, House of Commons, 1919, volume 6, papers 149, 247, ii.

²⁴² This was to be the last significant appearance in ex-service affairs of the Silver Badge Party (SBP). It was ignominiously wound up in December 1919, when Sir Alfred Mond won damages of £5,000 for libels contained in xenophobic and anti-semitic posters displayed in the party's head office windows in London. The case was widely and luridly reported, for example, '£5,000 for Sir A. Mond', *The Daily Mail* (Hull), 6 December 1919, 1; 'Spring Gardens Posters', *The Westminster Gazette*, 26 March 1919, 7; 'Mond Libel Trial', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 5 December 1919, 4.

²⁴³ *First and Second Special Reports*, iii.

²⁴⁴ For example: "'Wretched Pittances'": Sir D. Haig's Criticism of War Pensions: Disgrace to a Civilised State: Call for Immediate Reform', *Manchester Guardian*, 2 July 1919, 9.

compared with no references to the Comrades' and Association's witnesses, and indeed topped only by seven citations for the Pensions Minister.

Faced with such a weight of evidence, the Select Committee's First Report, in August 1919, endorsed nearly all the grievances laid before it. In particular it criticised 'Serious and long-continued delays', recommended that war pensions should become a statutory right for soldiers and airmen, as had long been the case for sailors, and proposed many detailed improvements to the administration of pensions and allowances, such as greater staffing levels, and substantial increases to the amounts paid out.²⁴⁵ Thus, taking the example of men with 100% disablement, it proposed that the pension for a single man should rise from 33s. to 40s. a week, while a married man with three children should get £3 9s 6d, up from £2 12s a week.²⁴⁶ Reading this report, one is struck by how much of the evidence was not new, and had been highlighted many times by the ex-service groups and their champions, such as Hogge, Pringle, and Hayes Fisher, as far back as the first months of the war; and how the remedies had also been repeatedly proposed by those same critics, but ignored or denied by government, anxious always to limit the cost to public funds. It took this powerful Select Committee, reporting at a time when the Versailles Treaty had just been signed, and Peace Day celebrated, when political and public opinion was sensitive to the ex-service cause, to move the Government to take effective action. The committee achieved this by bringing together all the evidence, along with a series of clear and unambiguous recommendations, published in a form that made an unanswerable case. All the major ex-service groups welcomed the report, the Comrades being typical in reporting that 'Taken as a whole, the recommendations of the Select Committee have been accepted without reservation' and that 'the increased rates ... are ... what those most interested consider a just and fair scale of pensions and allowances'.²⁴⁷ It also helped that Worthington Evans had replaced Hodge as Pensions Minister earlier in the year. He had 'earned the deepest respect and the sincerest thanks of the disabled ex-Service men', according to a front-page

²⁴⁵ *First and Second Special Reports*, HC papers 149, 247, iii-x; 'Great Success of the Federation: All our Recommendations Adopted', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, no. 11, 3 July 1919, 1.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, viii. The new rates were confirmed in *The Bulletin*, No 13, 28 August 1919, 7; and *The Comrades' Journal*, vol. 1, no. 11, 19 September 1919, 19.

²⁴⁷ 'The New War Pensions Increases', *The Comrades Journal*, vol. 1 – no. 11, September 1919, 4.

leading article in *The Bulletin*, which went on to praise his hard work and to credit him with being 'largely responsible for improved Pensions and for concessions obtained, which have been advocated by the Federation for a long time past – the Statutory Right to Pension and an Independent Body for Appeal'.²⁴⁸ Meanwhile, the Committee's second report, in December 1919, proposed similar improvements in officers' pensions, dependants' allowances, and provision for their widows and children.²⁴⁹

These developments took place against a backdrop of widespread dissatisfaction over housing, inflation, particularly food prices, and unemployment, and such issues were raised by the Federation in almost every edition of *The (D.S.S.) Bulletin* throughout the year, with demands for government to do more to assist veterans and their dependants.²⁵⁰ In practice there was little more that the Government was willing to do, given the state of the economy and its aversion to increasing taxes,²⁵¹ beyond implementing the Select Committee's recommendations, which it did fairly promptly.²⁵² This probably contributed to the reduction in unrest among veterans and their organisations over the latter half of 1919.

The United Services Fund

The year 1919 had seen other changes that brought the three main organisations closer together. The Association had broken with the trade union movement, while the Federation, no longer with a prominent Liberal MP at its head, had decisively rejected forming links with the Labour Party, and now welcomed all officers, and women, into its membership.²⁵³ Thus, three important points of difference between the three main groups

²⁴⁸ 'Our Business Pensions Minister', *The Bulletin*, no. 12, 14 August 1919, 1.

²⁴⁹ *First and Second Special Reports*, HC papers 149, 247, xi–xxvii.

²⁵⁰ *The Bulletin*, no. 1, 13 March 1919, to *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, vol. 1, no. 21, 25 December 1919.

²⁵¹ The UK Government's opposition to increasing the 'burden' of taxation would be most clearly spelled out by the Prime Minister to a Deputation from the Federation on 6 February 1920, discussed in the next chapter. 'The Premier's Reply', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, vol. 1, no. 25, 19 February 1920, 13.

²⁵² 'New Pension Warrant for the Disabled and their Dependants', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, vol. 1, no. 22, 8 January 1920, 4.

²⁵³ 'The Afternoon's Session', *The Bulletin*, no. 8, 19 July 1919, 7–8 (officers), 11 (women).

had been eliminated: they no longer had any formal trade union or party-political links (other than the role of Wilfrid Ashley MP in the Comrades); they did not discriminate against ex-commissioned officers; and they all accepted women members. Moreover, there were various examples of amalgamation at local level, and contacts at national level, even if full national unity was not yet in prospect. A report earlier in the year, in *The Ex-Service Man*, implied that the Federation had already amalgamated with the Comrades, something that was vigorously denied in the pages of *The Bulletin*, as not having 'any foundation in fact'.²⁵⁴ But, given the excellent connections of *The Ex-Service Man's* editor, Henry Baird, it seems likely that, despite the denial, some informal talks had indeed taken place. Around the same time a discreet approach by the Association to the Comrades, about possible amalgamation, broke down acrimoniously.²⁵⁵ Yet it is significant that it happened at all, after eighteen months of sustained animosity. At local level, the Gloucester branch of the Association had 'thrown in their lot with the Comrades', according to local newspaper reports in July, contributing to a growth in membership for that branch, from under 800 in March, to over 2,200.²⁵⁶ That was almost certainly related to national negotiations, for Comrades branches around the UK were informed in July 1919, by their 'Central H.Q.' in London, of a 'proposed amalgamation' of the Comrades and the Association.²⁵⁷ The Scottish National Committee of the Comrades responded by formally recording its support for amalgamation,²⁵⁸ its Chairman also reporting that representatives of all three groups had met to discuss 'Trades Union Difficulties', which were not spelt out, but it is significant that such a joint meeting took place at all.²⁵⁹ However, the following month, it was reported that the proposed amalgamation between the Comrades and the

²⁵⁴ 'Amalgamation Denied', *The Bulletin*, no. 4, 24 April 1919, 2.

²⁵⁵ 'United Services Fund: Conference between the National Federation of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers, the Comrades of the Great War and the Association', 25 October 1919, 6, Royal British Legion archive, London. Refers to a resolution by the Association's Executive, in July 1919, that 'owing to a breach of faith by the Comrades of the Great War ... negotiations for amalgamation with that body be broken off'.

²⁵⁶ 'Comrades of the Great War. Annual Meeting', *Cheltenham Chronicle and Gloucestershire Graphic*, 5 July 1919, 5, col. 3. 'The Gloucester Comrades. Annual Meeting', *Gloucester Journal*, 5 July 1919, 3.

²⁵⁷ 'Minutes of Exec. Committee of Comrades of the Great War prior to Amalgamation into British Legion 26/11/1918 to 15/12/1920', hereafter 'Scottish Comrades Minute Book', or 'SCMB', 9 July 1919, 70. Royal British Legion (Scotland) headquarters, Edinburgh.

²⁵⁸ SCMB, 9 July 1919, 74.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

Association 'had not yet been ratified, owing to the dilatoriness of the National Association Executive ... but that a meeting of the two Executives was shortly to take place'.²⁶⁰ A few weeks later, the *Daily Mail* reported that the Association had 'decided to take fresh steps to bring about an amalgamation', with the Federation as well as the Comrades, and was calling for 'an early meeting ... to draft a constitution on non-party, non-sectarian, and democratic lines',²⁶¹ although there is no evidence that such a meeting actually happened. Nonetheless, occasional local newspaper reports suggested that relations were improving, in places at least. For example when the Association branch in Dover held a 'smoking concert', to which they invited the local Federation and Comrades, their guest 'representatives received an ovation', while several speeches reflected 'the good feeling and friendship that existed between the three organisations'.²⁶²

Clearly the level of hostility in 1917, memorably described by Graham Wootton as 'three rival groups ... glaring at each other with suspicion, envy and bitterness',²⁶³ had declined considerably since then; and that is evidenced by Lister's later recollection that they did not 'expend an average of 15 minutes per Executive Meeting (which generally lasted two days) in discussing rival organisations. There were too many other important problems to consider ... and only in a certain number of places was there any real rivalry'.²⁶⁴ Yet relationships had not improved to the point where the various attempts at finding common ground could wholly overcome those feelings. What was needed was a third party to bring the groups together once more, somebody ready to learn from, and to resist, the ministerial meddling that had undermined the earlier plan for an Empire Services League. That person was to be General Sir Julian Byng, the British officer who had led the Canadian Corps in the capture of Vimy Ridge,²⁶⁵ and a man respected by all the British veterans'

²⁶⁰ SCMB, 27 August 1919, 84.

²⁶¹ 'The Soldiers' Societies', *The Daily Mail*, 26 September 1919, 5, col. 4.

²⁶² 'National Association of Discharged Sailors & Soldiers', *Dover Express and East Kent News*, 26 December 1919, 8, col. 5.

²⁶³ Wootton, *Official History*, 5.

²⁶⁴ Lister to Hamilton, 3 March 1920, LHMA, quoted in Barr, 'Service Not Self', 16, and referenced IH/29/12 (current catalogue number unknown).

²⁶⁵ Cyril Falls, 'Byng, Julian Hedworth George, Viscount Byng of Vimy (1862–1935)', revised Jeffery Williams, *ODNB*, online version: 6 January 2011, accessed 6 June 2018, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32227>.

organisations. He was appointed by the Government to chair a 'central authority ... to organise the disposal of the Army and Royal Air Force Canteen profits', with representatives of 'the principal voluntary organisations' (the Comrades, the Federation, the Association, SSFA and the Soldiers' and Sailors' Help Society) on both the central body and the county committees.²⁶⁶ This was reported to the War Cabinet on 1 July, by Churchill, who stated that it would not be called 'The Empire Services League', but rather 'the "United Services Fund" (not requiring membership as intended in the case of the League)' in order to 'do away with any suspicion that the funds are to be used for any other than purely philanthropic or benefit purposes'.²⁶⁷ His memorandum included a full list of proposed appointments to a Central Council, which would oversee the new Fund, and that was notable for both the inclusion of representatives of the Association, Federation and Comrades, and the exclusion of serving politicians.²⁶⁸ Early the following month, Byng gave an interview to *The Times*, in which he asserted that he had only accepted the chairmanship of the Fund on two conditions, the first of which was that it 'should be absolutely free from Government control', and consequently he had resigned his army commission 'in order to be free'.²⁶⁹ His second condition was that 'in all their doings there must be complete publicity. The money belonged to the ex-Service officers and men, and they wished those men to know what was being done with the money'.²⁷⁰ His appreciation of how the War Office had undermined Hamilton's plan was also shown in his assertion that the Executive Committee would have equal numbers of officers and rankers. Lastly, he made a plea for amalgamation, asserting that 'a great number of associations which are already doing a great work in helping ex-Service men ... are rival organizations ... cutting each others' throats'.²⁷¹ This was a good point, as such infighting was undoubtedly wasteful of their time and resources, while government could play them off against each

²⁶⁶ 'Result of Deputation which Waited on the Financial Secretary of the War Office. Disposal of Canteen Profits', *The Bulletin*, no. 13, 28 August 1919, 14. SSFA did not become SSAFA until later in the year.

²⁶⁷ Secretary of State of War, 'Disposal of Canteen Profits', WC memorandum G.T.7595, 1 July 1919, 1–2, TNA, CAB 24/82/95.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 3–4.

²⁶⁹ 'Services' Canteen Money: General Byng's Plans: Commission resigned to be free', *The Times*, 8 August 1919, 8.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

other; and the British Legion's growth after its formation in July 1921 (next chapter) suggests that Byng was right. However, he was not going to make amalgamation a condition of taking part. This approach went down well with the Federation, which in its next *D.S.S. Bulletin* headlined its report approvingly with 'no Government control' and 'no effort to amalgamate existing organisations'.²⁷² Clearly Byng had gained the trust of the Federation, in spite of having been a patron of the Comrades, a position he resigned on taking up his new post with the United Services Fund (USF).²⁷³ The Comrades were also supportive, with the Scottish executive recording a meeting with Byng in which he had given them more details of his proposals, including the formation of a Scottish committee of the USF to include members of the Comrades and the Federation, though significantly not the Association, which still had little presence in Scotland.²⁷⁴ He was also recorded as announcing that the Fund would 'start clubs but he would not assist any existing Club, so long as it restricted its membership to ... any particular Association, but only if it admitted all Service Men'.²⁷⁵ This added further to the pressure on the three organisations to work together if they wanted to benefit from the Fund.

However, it was not until several months later, in October, that Byng gathered together representatives of the Association, the Comrades and the Federation for a conference in Whitehall. The verbatim account reveals the lingering animosity between the groups, as well as his great tact in keeping negotiations going.²⁷⁶ What is also revealed by that account was the conciliatory skills of the Federation's Thomas Lister, who consistently looked for common ground between the three organisations.²⁷⁷ Clearly both Byng, and the War Office in appointing him, had learned from the collapse of the Empire Services League proposal earlier in the year, for this was to be the democratic organisation, free from government and military control, that Hamilton had so fervently advocated. Indeed Churchill, as War Secretary, answering questions from MPs about the new Fund, was at

²⁷² *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, no. 13, 28 August 1919, 1.

²⁷³ 'General Sir J. Byng', *The Comrades' Journal*, vol. 1, no. 11, September 1919, 13.

²⁷⁴ SCMB, 27 August 1919, 86.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁶ 'United Services Fund: Conference between the National Federation of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers, the Comrades of the Great War and the Association', 25 October 1919, Royal British Legion archive, London.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 85–87.

pains to stress that 'a very strong desire ... has been expressed by the ex-soldiers to be free from War Office control altogether', and accordingly it was to become 'a body administered under Royal Charter'.²⁷⁸ Given that Churchill had never brought Hamilton's scheme to the House, it was significant that he now chose to speak in favour of the proposed USF. In fact he pulled rank on his own Financial Secretary, H. W. Forster, to do so, for the question had been put down for the latter to answer.²⁷⁹ It was not to be the Empire-wide league, embracing every conceivable ex-service organisation willing to take part; but, as argued above, that was never the primary purpose of that scheme anyway. It had been meant as a way of bringing the three main ex-service groups together and that was what the USF achieved under Byng and, with their independence thus guaranteed, they agreed to cooperate in its management, albeit still as separate bodies for the time being. This is not to say that amalgamation was imminent, the Federation being particularly strident in deriding the 'Amalgamation Bogey' in an editorial in November 1919, which concluded that 'It is utterly impossible to bring about one organization for all ex-Service men, because ... tomorrow would spring up another new one ... So far, rivalry has obtained more for the ex-Service man than could be possible by any other means'.²⁸⁰ This was a debatable claim, but one that illustrates how jealously the Federation continued to guard its independence. Nor does it appear to have been a veiled attack on the USF, for the same publication reported positively and in detail on General Byng's October conference, and the decision to work together.²⁸¹

The development of the Federation, the Comrades and the Association during 1919

The picture that emerges from the Federation's *Bulletin* in 1919 is one of an organisation enjoying the most successful period of what would be a four-year existence. This included rising membership, a growing number of branches around the UK, including Ireland, substantial success in assisting members with pensions and allowances, winning local council seats, its deputations regularly received by government ministries, a growing range

²⁷⁸ HC Deb 25 November 1919 vol 121 cc1611–12.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid* c1611.

²⁸⁰ 'Amalgamation Bogey. Danger Revealed. Straight Talk to the Demobbed', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, no. 18, 6 November 1919, 6.

²⁸¹ 'United Services' Fund. Important Decisions', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, no. 18, 6 November 1919, 4.

of social activities for members and their families, enterprises such as 'Veterans' Commerce Ltd',²⁸² a well-received fortnightly journal,²⁸³ and even advertising for members on cinema screens.²⁸⁴ Its decision to open membership to ex-commissioned officers was working well, with favourable references to them in *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, whether as branch officials,²⁸⁵ or as visiting guests.²⁸⁶ It could even report occasional successes in poaching whole branches of the Comrades, for example in Uxbridge, following a mass meeting addressed by representatives of both organisations.²⁸⁷ Its very success, however, contained the seeds of its decline, as improved conditions for ex-service men, women and dependants, in terms of pensions, allowances, employment, and training, all reduced the incentive for them to join the organisation that had helped bring about those improvements.

That is not to say that Federation members were completely satisfied with the progress achieved up to that point; far from it. At the end of September, they held a 'mass demonstration' in protest at the level of war gratuities, the scale of unemployment among discharged men, and the size of training allowances.²⁸⁸ This, unfortunately for them, coincided with a national railwaymen's strike, but it was claimed that 'In spite of the setbacks ... the attendance was enormous', with a 'huge procession' marching from the Thames Embankment along a traditional protest route that included Cockspur Street, Pall Mall, Piccadilly, and finished in Hyde Park.²⁸⁹ This was all part of the Federation's sustained campaign to achieve an audience with the Prime Minister, and to focus his attention on its demands, instead of always dealing with Ministers or more junior officials.²⁹⁰ The following

²⁸² 'Veterans' Commerce, Limited. Great New Federation Project', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, no. 19, 27 November 1919, 7.

²⁸³ Reduced to monthly from September 1920.

²⁸⁴ 'The Cinema Scheme', *The Bulletin*, no. 13, 28 August 1919, 3.

²⁸⁵ 'Gen. Fielding becomes Vice-President of Holborn Branch', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, no. 20, 11 December 1919, 5.

²⁸⁶ 'Guard of Honour for Lord Allenby', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, no. 20, 11 December 1919, 8.

²⁸⁷ 'Fed Up with Politics and Tittle Tattle. "Comrades" come over to the Federation', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, no. 20, 11 December 1919, 5.

²⁸⁸ 'Question of War Gratuities, Unemployment and training allowances. Federation Mass Demonstration', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, no. 16, 9 October 1919, 8.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁰ For example, Lister 'urging upon the Premier the importance of giving the matter his own immediate attention', in a telegram following 'the great London demonstration' of 26 May,

month, it published on the front page 'Our General Programme, article 2, International',²⁹¹ which was almost as radical as its national proposals, first published back in March.²⁹²

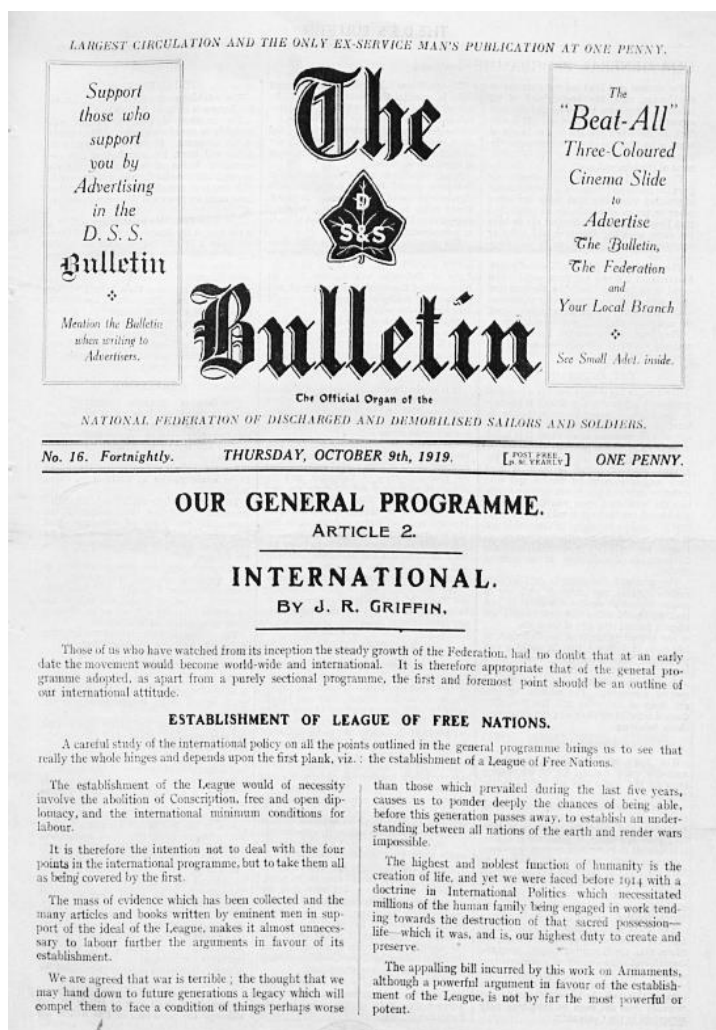


Figure 17: front page of *The D.S.S. Bulletin*. 9 October 1919, presenting its 'International Programme'

Continued across four more inside pages, in addition to support for a 'League of Free Nations', it called for reduction in armaments, limitations on arms trading, 'the Prevention of War', an International Police Force, help for 'Less Advanced Nations', and more,

above. 'The Chairman and Unemployment Question. Strong Representation to Mr. Lloyd George', *The Bulletin*, no. 7, 5 June 1919, 1.

²⁹¹ 'Our General Programme. Article 2. International', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, no. 16, 9 October 1919, 1–3, 6–7.

²⁹² 'A National Federation General Programme?', *The Bulletin*, no. 2, 27 March 1919, 3.

including the 'registration of any treaties of obligation entered by a Member State',²⁹³ which was particularly significant given the repeated demands during and after the war, from various quarters, for the abolition of secret treaties.²⁹⁴ Reflecting this international perspective, the Federation had by the middle of 1919 established overseas branches in France, Belgium, Italy, Canada, and South Africa.²⁹⁵

It is not possible to analyse the progress of the other two main groups during 1919, in the same detail as the Federation, due to the paucity of contemporaneous material that survives in the archives. While the Comrades also started publishing their own regular bulletin, *The Comrades Journal*, from as early as November 1918, few editions of it are known to have survived, including just two from 1919.²⁹⁶ The Wilfrid Ashley papers at the University of Southampton,²⁹⁷ and the Lord Davies of Llandinam papers in the National Library of Wales,²⁹⁸ both provide a great deal of useful information about the creation and development of the Comrades in 1917 and 1918, but their records from 1919 are rather less plentiful, with Davies in particular winding down his activity during the year. The overall number of branches, posts, and overseas units, is shown in graphical form in the previous chapter (Figure 13, also in appendix 2), demonstrating steady growth through 1919. While reliable membership totals have not been found, they did report that Manchester was their largest branch, 'over 10,000 strong, closely followed by Liverpool, Sheffield, Cardiff, Belfast, etc'.²⁹⁹ Documents dating from February to early May 1919 reveal a range of activities,³⁰⁰ including branch meetings, clubs opening, social events, and

²⁹³ 'Our General Programme. International'.

²⁹⁴ Long pursued, of course, by the UDC, see for example Swartz, 'The Union of Democratic Control', esp. 192–95, 203–4. But also, by this period, a more mainstream concern, as evidenced by its inclusion in articles 18 and 19 of the draft Covenant of the League of Nations: 'The Covenant', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, online edition, accessed 26 August 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/League-of-Nations/The-Covenant>.

²⁹⁵ 'Belgian and French Federations Established', *The Bulletin*, no. 9, 3 July 1919, 8.

²⁹⁶ See appendix 1.

²⁹⁷ See appendix 1.

²⁹⁸ See appendix 1.

²⁹⁹ Miles Taylor, Organisation Dept, to Capt. Williams, 7 May 1919, 1. Davies papers, C5/6–10.

³⁰⁰ 'What the Comrades are Doing. Headquarters Progress Report no. 21. From 25th January, to 28th February, 1919'; 'What the Comrades are Doing. Headquarters Progress Report no. 22. From 1st March, to 31st March, 1919'; Taylor to Williams, 7 May 1919. All in Davies papers, C5/6–10.

the formation of 'String Bands, Football Teams, Cricket Teams, Choirs and Fishing Clubs'.³⁰¹ On the welfare side, they provided assistance with pension claims, legal and medical advice, ran their own employment service, and an Information Bureau through *The People* newspaper (similar to James Hogge's long-running columns in *The Edinburgh Evening News*),³⁰² which they reported had dealt with over 50,000 enquiries by early May.³⁰³ A novel initiative by their County of London Division, in which they posted recruiters at demobilisation Dispersal Centres, saw them enrol 'during the last two months over 20,000 Comrades ... all walking away with a badge proudly fastened in their coat'.³⁰⁴ There was also a great deal of parliamentary activity, as a number of MPs were still members, along with deputations to government ministers and other officials, much like the Federation. The Comrades, too, produced a film, not about the dangers of Bolshevism, but instead promoting the virtues of 'Comradeship', which was the title of the film.³⁰⁵ This both publicised the organisation, and raised funds through a commercial film company that returned 60% of the gross proceeds to the Comrades. Again like the Federation, it opened branches overseas, including South Africa, Rhodesia and the Philippines, while linking up with existing ex-service groups in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and East Africa. Closer to home, it claimed that in Ireland 'ours is about the only Organisation ... where "God Save the King" may sound without a shindy ... Home Rulers and Nationalists sit cheek by jowl on the Committees'.³⁰⁶ The organisation continued to be run largely by ex-officers, so that the Grand Council elected in February 1919 comprised a colonel, two majors, two captains, a chief petty officer, and a commander, with just three men from the ranks: a corporal, a bombardier and a sergeant-trumpeter.³⁰⁷ However, the preponderance of MPs on this Council was sharply reduced, with only Wilfrid Ashley remaining. His was a highly significant presence, though, for it is apparent from the correspondence, in both his and the Davies papers,³⁰⁸ that in practice he remained one of the leaders, if not the leader,

³⁰¹ Taylor to Williams, 7 May 1919, 1.

³⁰² See chapter 3.

³⁰³ Taylor to Williams, 7 May 1919, 1.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ 'What the Comrades are Doing ... no. 21', 3. No copy of the film seems to have survived.

³⁰⁶ Taylor to Williams, 7 May 1919, 1.

³⁰⁷ 'What the Comrades are Doing ... no. 21', 2.

³⁰⁸ For example, 'What the Comrades are Doing ... no. 22', has numerous mentions of Ashley, both in Parliament and directly with Government depts and other authorities.

although Captain Towse continued as the elected Chairman.³⁰⁹ As well as the variety of routine activities outlined above, the Comrades were major participants in the evidence-gathering sessions of the Select Committee on Pensions, and in the meetings that established the United Services Fund.

It is even more difficult to assess the development of the Association, for still less primary source material has survived. Although the first of the three main organisations to be created, and initially backed by much of the trades council movement, it clearly lacked the numbers, financial resources, parliamentary representation, and geographical coverage of the Federation and the Comrades. It did not start publishing its own journal, *The Bayonet*, until late in 1920,³¹⁰ and very few relevant documents have been found in the TUC Library,³¹¹ online databases, or local archives. Only sporadic newspaper reports give some clue as to its activities in 1919. In June, *The Times* reported briefly the evidence of its Chairman, James Howell, Secretary, W. Ainsworth, and Executive member, J. M. King, to the Select Committee on Pensions.³¹² The most striking points in that report are that Howell claimed a total national membership of 'from 40,000 to 50,000 ex-service men', which compares unfavourably with the Comrades' membership of over 10,000 in a single branch (Manchester, above), and also that all three men were said to be from 'the headquarters at Blackburn', indicative of its continuing concentration in the north-west of England.³¹³ Nevertheless, the same month, the Association joined the Federation and the Comrades in a meeting at the Ministry of Labour, about the employment of ex-soldiers, so it continued to command a place on the national stage.³¹⁴

Reliable figures of the numbers of branches and members cannot be found for all three organisations, with even the Comrades' records apparently overstating the number of active branches, particularly in Scotland and Ireland, as will be shown in the next chapter. However, an estimation of their relative strengths can be made by comparing the number

³⁰⁹ 'What the Comrades are Doing ... no. 21', 2.

³¹⁰ *The Bayonet* (London, England : 1920).

³¹¹ TUC Library, London Metropolitan University, Special Collections.

³¹² 'Shirking Pensions Responsibilities. Higher Rates for Pensions', *The Times*, 21 June 1919, 21.

³¹³ *Ibid.*

³¹⁴ 'Employment of Ex-Soldiers', *Daily Mail*, 26 June 1919, 6.

of branches each registered under the War Charities Act 1916. Unfortunately, only the registers for England and Wales appear to have survived,³¹⁵ but the picture they reveal is interesting, as can be seen from the maps on the following pages,³¹⁶ which plot the locations of the branches registered up to March 1919:

³¹⁵ Charity Commission, *War Charities Act, 1916: Index of Charities Registered under the Act (classified according to their Objects) to March 1919* (London, 1919), hereafter 'War Charities Register 1919'.

³¹⁶ For practical reasons, the base maps do not accurately portray the 1919 roads network.



Figure 18: map of Association branches in England and Wales, March 1919.³¹⁷

³¹⁷ *War Charities Register 1919*.



Figure 19: map of Comrades' branches and posts in England and Wales, March 1919.³¹⁸

³¹⁸ *War Charities Register 1919*.



Figure 20: map of Federation branches in England and Wales, March 1919.³¹⁹

³¹⁹ *War Charities Register 1919*.

The maps above give only an approximation of the relative strengths and geographical coverage of the three groups, because not all branches would have registered under the War Charities Act (which required the registration of all organisations raising funds from the public for war-related activity). However, given that many held fund-raising flag days, smoking concerts, dances and the like, it is a reasonable assumption that the registrations show the most active branches in each organisation. Thus, it can be seen how the Association was the least numerous, with sixty-one branches, concentrated in Lancashire, West Yorkshire and South Wales, while the Federation was far more abundant, its 177 branches spread across Lancashire, Yorkshire, North-East England, South Wales and London. The Comrades were somewhere in between, with 123 branches and posts, more scattered across England and Wales, often in more rural locations.

Conclusions

The year following the Armistice was a crucial period in the development of all three main organisations, and of several more radical, even revolutionary, ex-service groups that came and, in most cases, went as quickly as they had emerged. The first opportunity for the Association, the Federation, and the Comrades, along with the newly formed Silver Badge Party, to make an impact was the General Election in December 1918. The Comrades did not put up any candidates under that name, claiming to be non-political while numbering several MPs amongst its leadership, and pursuing the Comrades' programme in Parliament, and through government contacts. The Association played almost no part in the election, hampered by its limited geographical base and lack of finance. A few candidates ran with Silver Badge Party support, though on nothing like the scale originally proposed, of 'fighting every seat'. It was the Federation, whose declared intention to take an active part in the election had sunk the Smith-Dorrien conference, which played by far the biggest part, responsible for most of the thirty or so candidates who ran under an ex-service banner. While none was successful, it was not the case, as Stephen Ward asserted, that this put an end to the Federation's political aspirations, for it continued to run candidates in local elections, many successfully, well into 1920, and it developed ambitious 'General Programmes' for both the UK and internationally, all with the explicit aim of eventually

getting representatives into Parliament. Nor was that the only consequence of its 1918 electioneering, for it pressured many candidates from other parties to support the ex-service cause, and helped turn both Thomas Lister and Ernest Thurtle into national figures.

The main attempts at bringing the major groups together - the Smith-Dorrien conference, the Empire Services League, the Imperial Ex-Services Association, and the United Services Fund - were not, as previously characterised in the literature, isolated episodes. Rather they were part of a sustained, albeit rather uncoordinated, effort at amalgamation by senior military men such as General Sir Ian Hamilton, Major Harold Jellicorse, Captain Henry Baird and General Sir Julian Byng, which eventually bore fruit to the extent that the groups agreed to work together to make the United Services Fund a success in its primary mission; namely the distribution of millions of pounds of excess canteen profits for the benefit of ex-service men and women. The rejection of Hamilton's proposal for an Empire Services League was not, as Graham Wootton asserted, because 'both the Federation and the Association ... opposed the suggested Constitution'.³²⁰ It was due to Wilfrid Ashley's scheming, based on his opposition to democratic control by veterans, to Viscount Peel's removal of the democratic structure that was fundamental to ex-service acceptance of the suggested Constitution, and to Winston Churchill's lack of engagement with the proposal.

The year 1919 started with widespread strikes and demonstrations by soldiers demanding rapid demobilisation, and there were incidents of riotous behaviour by both serving and discharged soldiers. These included disturbances at Calais in January, the Westminster demonstration on 26 May, and assorted incidents on Peace Day, particularly the burning down of Luton Town Hall. Nevertheless, there was a steady reduction during the year in the overall level of unrest. This appears to have been due to significant improvements to pensions and allowances, the provision of training and jobs for many disabled veterans, support for other unemployed veterans through the 'Out of Work donation', and general improvements in the administration of ex-service affairs. Many of these gains followed the evidence of the Association, the Federation, the Comrades, and others, particularly Haig, to the Commons Select Committee on Pensions. That committee's report generally supported

³²⁰ Wootton, *Official History*, 7.

their complaints and proposed numerous improvements as a result, changes which the British Government largely implemented.

Of the three main groups, both the Federation and the Comrades grew strongly throughout 1919, as evidenced by such of their publications and internal documents as have survived, along with newspaper reports and references in government and other official records. The Association appears to have had a more difficult year, hampered by its meagre financial resources, and unable to expand significantly outside its northern England heartland. Yet it continued to exert influence on the political process through appearances before Hamilton's Empire Services League committee, the Select Committee on Pensions, and so on. Although by the end of 1919 there was less civil unrest amongst veterans, and a variety of improvements had been made to pensions, allowances, training and other issues of concern, some serious problems remained. The position of many ex-officers was causing concern, while a significant number of other ex-service men, women and dependants were still without adequate support. Some had returned home only to find their jobs had not been kept open for them as promised, while housing shortages, rising rents and inflation in general, remained problematic. These concerns were the starting point for the founding of the Officers' Association in particular, and more generally for a growing willingness to explore the possibility of amalgamation, developments that will be considered in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: The road to unity

Introduction

By the autumn of 1919, the three main ex-service organisations, the Association, the Federation, and the Comrades, had begun to work together to the extent that they held occasional joint meetings with trade unions and with government departments. In particular, they all became involved in managing the United Services Fund, set up by Lord Byng to distribute the profits of the war-time canteens. While there had been some discussion between the Association and the Comrades about the possibility of amalgamation, those talks had broken down acrimoniously and there was no apparent prospect of unity, beyond their involvement in the USF. That was to change over the following year, leading to eventual unification as the British Legion on 1 July 1921. This chapter will analyse the factors that facilitated the gradual coming together of the three groups, despite very different origins and significant incompatibilities, along with a new fourth group, the Officers' Association.

As we have seen, some alignment had already taken place. The Association had split from the trades council movement and rejected formal links with political parties, and was now run entirely by veterans. Similarly, the Federation, two of whose three founders were Liberal MPs Hogge and Pringle, had broken its links with the Liberal Party and was also now run wholly by ex-service men and women, under the skilled leadership of Thomas Lister,¹ although continuing to recognise Hogge as an honorary life member, and a popular one. The Comrades remained more closely aligned to political parties, while simultaneously decrying any political activities by the other groups, but it had also evolved a more democratic structure than in its original incarnation. All three now admitted women members and, at least in principle, welcomed ex-officers, whether directly commissioned or risen from the ranks. However, discharged officers, particularly those who were not

¹ Note that, while many years later (in 1961) he was knighted as Sir (Thomas) Frederick Lister, in earlier years he was known as Thomas or Tom to his friends and colleagues, e.g. G. R. Crosfield, 'Silver Jubilee Memories', *British Legion Journal*, vol. XXVI, February 1946, 33, although almost invariably referred to, in print, as T. F. Lister.

from a working-class background, tended not to join any of these three groups in significant numbers, even though many were suffering financially and needed the assistance of an organisation dedicated to their welfare. Jellicorse noted how the three main groups had become divided by social class, citing 'places where the employers, their sons and men of the clerk class are going into the Comrades, while the man who works more with his hands is joining the Federation and the Association'.² None of them apparently attracted many ex-officers. Importantly, many of the latter did not have the wealthy background of the traditional professional pre-war British Army or Royal Navy commissioned officer; they were not entitled to all the benefits of discharged rankers; and they could, in the worst cases, be seen cranking barrel-organs or selling matches on the streets.³ Sir Douglas Haig (Earl Haig from October 1919)⁴ was especially concerned about their situation. This chapter will show the dramatic change in attitudes brought about by Haig's initiative in setting up the dedicated Officers' Association, with its successful public appeal for funds, along with falling membership and financial troubles among the existing three groups, and the Federation's disillusionment with lobbying the British Government. These events persuaded almost everyone concerned that unification was the only option if there was to be an effective body to represent and assist veterans over the long term.

As noted in the first chapter, previous accounts of these ex-service organisations focus primarily on their activities in England, omitting parallel and sometimes distinctive developments in Ireland, Scotland and Wales. That probably explains their omission of one of the most important events in the unification process, namely how Welsh branches of the Federation and the Comrades led the way by amalgamating first as 'The Welsh National Federation of Comrades' at the end of 1919, and then re-forming as 'The Welsh Legion of Ex-Service Men' in May 1920 (see below). This was significant both in the very fact of amalgamation, when the national bodies were just beginning to discuss it, and in the use of the name 'Legion', a year before the creation of the British Legion.

² Jellicorse, 'The History', 12, CHAR 16/9, folio 95.

³ Martin Petter, "'Temporary Gentlemen' in the Aftermath of the Great War: Rank, Status and the Ex-Officer Problem', *The Historical Journal* 37, 1 (1994), 127–52 (esp. 127–29).

⁴ *The London Gazette*, 21 October 1919, iss. 31610, p. 12889.

A key argument in this chapter is that it was not just the creation of the Officers' Association (OA) in January 1920 that was the turning-point in the various efforts to amalgamate the main ex-service groups, as asserted by some earlier writers. Brian Harding, for example, argues that its creation 'set in train the events which would lead to unity',⁵ whereas it was only one of a number of factors, and unification was by no means certain to follow. Stephen Ward, by contrast, while acknowledging the place of the Officers' Association in the process, contends that 'loss of membership was perhaps the major cause for amalgamation'.⁶ This account provides some support for that conclusion, supported by new evidence of the parlous state of the three groups by the middle of 1920, which also, importantly, put them all in serious financial difficulty. However, another important factor, not previously identified, was the experience of the Federation's leadership in finally being granted its long-awaited deputation to the Prime Minister, only to find that, while largely conceding the justice of its claims, he asserted that the country could not afford to do any more.⁷ This was an argument that left the leadership no way forward, as it was unable to prove otherwise. That, combined with the success of the OA's high-profile fund-raising appeal, along with other factors that will be described in more detail below, meant that Federation leaders, Thomas Lister in particular, finally began to look positively on the idea of unification, and go on to make it a priority. The experience of working together in managing the USF, also helped foster a more positive attitude in all three organisations. In summary, this chapter will show how during this period, from the creation of the Officers' Association in early 1920, through to the foundation of the British Legion in July 1921, the Federation, the Association, and the Comrades all suffered setbacks that threatened their long-term existence, leaving them with amalgamation as the only realistic alternative if ex-service men and women were to continue to have any national organisation to assist them and represent their interests.

⁵ Harding, *Keeping Faith*, 6.

⁶ Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 285.

⁷ 'Proceedings of Federation Deputation', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, vol. 1, no. 25, 19 February 1920, 13.

Wales shows the way

While it is correct to think of the Federation as covering the whole of the United Kingdom, it is also important to note that there was a national executive committee for each of the four home nations, with an 'international committee' overseeing them, and each country having a certain amount of autonomy.⁸ Nowhere was this clearer than in Wales, where it proved rather problematic. The Federation's *Bulletin* reported in May 1919 that 'The Welsh Federation has been re-organised and splendid progress is now being made'.⁹ But two months later, *The Bulletin* went on to explain that 'A difficulty had arisen' in that 'The North Wales Branches wished to form themselves into a separate organisation called the North Wales Federation'.¹⁰ This reflected the historical tensions between north and south Wales. Lister, as Chairman, and F. W. Jackson,¹¹ as Secretary, were actioned to arrange a conference of the Welsh Federation and the northern dissidents,¹² but there is no subsequent record of any such meeting and the North Wales branches maintained the schism, without ever being recognised as a separate Federation. The split was evidenced conclusively in *The D.S.S. Bulletin* of March 1920, which bemoaned the lack of 'the spirit of solidarity' in North Wales 'that is so much a fact in the large industrial districts of South Wales and England'.¹³ That reference was the last mention of any Welsh Federation in *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, implying that such branches as remained ceased to play a role in the UK Federation as a whole.

However, these local difficulties were overshadowed by a more significant rift between the Welsh Federation and the London headquarters. This was such that Captain Henry Williams, President of the 'Welsh National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers', felt able to assert that, despite its title, it was 'not a part of Mr. J. M.

⁸ In the absence of any record of the Foundation's constitution, it is not possible to be more precise about the relationships.

⁹ 'International News', *The Bulletin*, no. 5, 8 May 1919, 3.

¹⁰ 'International News. Welsh Federation', *The Bulletin*, no. 9, 3 July 1919, 2.

¹¹ Known only as 'F. W. Jackson'.

¹² 'International News. Welsh Federation', *The Bulletin*, no. 9, 3 July 1919, 2.

¹³ 'International News. Welsh Federation', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, no. 26, 4 March 1920, 11. (It had become *The D.S.S. Bulletin* from 25 September 1919).

Hogge's original English Federation'.¹⁴ Williams was writing in December 1919, and there can be no doubt that the Welsh Federation was still part of the UK body, because just a few weeks later, both he, as President, and Mr. T. Harris, as Secretary, were listed among the UK Federation's deputation to the Prime Minister.¹⁵ But what makes that letter particularly interesting, in this context, is that Williams was writing to Major David Davies, a founding member of the Comrades, about 'the proposed amalgamation of the Welsh National Federation ... with the Comrades of the Great War', discussion of which he said had begun 'some time ago'.¹⁶ He went on to say that 'You will be glad to learn that this is nearly an accomplished fact at least as far as Wales is concerned'.¹⁷ He was not exaggerating, for shortly afterwards (there is no precise date) they amalgamated as 'The Welsh National Federation of Comrades', a name that neatly embraced elements of both parent organisations.¹⁸ Williams' letter went on to report that 'the preliminary negotiations have been agreed to by the London Headquarters of the Comrades', making it abundantly clear that the Comrades as a whole, not just those in Wales, were fully involved in the scheme.¹⁹

Some time during the second quarter of 1920, the Welsh National Federation of Comrades changed its name to 'the Welsh Legion of Ex-Service Men',²⁰ a striking precursor of 'the British Legion', more than a year before that body came into existence. Records of this organisation are few, and no references have been found in UK national newspapers under either name, which may explain its near-total absence from previous histories.²¹ Nevertheless, evidence of the existence of the Welsh Legion of Ex-Service Men comes from a few local newspaper reports between August 1920 and April 1921, from which the following can be deduced. The organisation was formed prior to 12 August 1920, the date

¹⁴ Williams to Davies, 11 December 1919, Davies papers, C5/6–10.

¹⁵ 'National Demonstration Postponed: Premier to Receive Federation Deputation', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, vol. 1, no. 22, 8 January 1920, 4.

¹⁶ Williams to Davies, 11 December 1919, Davies papers, C5/6–10.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Used for example, in letter from Davies to John Pritchard Esq., Welsh National Federation of Comrades (copy), 8 July 1920, Davies papers, C5/6–10.

¹⁹ Williams to Davies, 11 December 1919, Davies papers, C5/6–10.

²⁰ 'Earl Haig in Cardiff', *South Wales Daily News*, 16 August 1920, Officers' Association Foundation Press Cuttings 1920–1921, hereafter 'OA Press Cuttings', 76, LHMA. Bound volume, with numbered pages, containing over 300 cuttings from about 125 publications, indexed by title (no accession number or similar).

²¹ Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 282, has just a passing reference.

of the earliest reference,²² by the amalgamation of the Welsh branches of the Federation (possibly excluding those in North Wales) and the Comrades.²³ This newspaper report, entitled 'Earl Haig's Visit – to Unite Ex-Service Men', referred to an occasion 'three months ago, when, immediately following a joint conference at Shrewsbury, the field-marshal accepted the presidency of the amalgamated bodies in Wales, now known as "The Welsh Legion of Ex-Service Men"'.²⁴ Thus, the foundation of the Welsh Legion can be placed in May 1920, and Haig's acceptance of its presidency was very significant, for he had long refused a senior post in any of the three main groups until they agreed to unite in a single body.²⁵ Indeed, on his visit to Cardiff to address the Welsh Legion, he 'congratulated Wales upon the fine example [it] had set to all ex-service societies by uniting on [sic] one great organisation'.²⁶ He went on to say that he hoped 'the whole country – ay, the Empire – will follow ... and that soon there will be one organisation [for] all who have served their country in any capacity or rank'.²⁷ That this amalgamation in Wales was completed without the approval of the Federation's International Executive Committee is clear from the absence of any mention of either organisation in *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, which is otherwise a comprehensive and detailed record of its activities from March 1919 through to April 1921.²⁸ Whatever the precise relationship of the Federation in Wales to the Federation in England, Ireland and Scotland, it seems fair to conclude that branches of the Comrades and the Federation in Wales led the way in amalgamating during the first half of 1920, and did so under a name which pre-dated 'the British Legion' by about a year. While internal documents from the three groups, such as committee minutes, might have shed more light on these relationships, and this process, few have survived and none of those that have throw any light on this issue.²⁹

²² Captain J. Arthur Jones, 'Earl Haig's Visit – to Unite Ex-Service Men', *Western Mail* (South Wales), 12 August 1920.

²³ Captain J. Arthur Jones, 'Fight For Unity: Cardiff Comrades and the Legion', *Western Mail* (South Wales), 8 January 1921. This later article explains that amalgamation in Wales involved only the Comrades and the Federation, and not the Association or NUX.

²⁴ Jones, 'Earl Haig's Visit'.

²⁵ Charteris, *Earl Haig*, 371.

²⁶ 'Earl Haig in Cardiff', *South Wales Daily News*, 16 August 1920.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ It is likely that further issues were published in May and June 1921, prior to the first issue of 'The British Legion' journal in July 1921, but no trace has been found of them, if they existed.

²⁹ See appendix 1.

From Ex-Officers on street corners to the creation of the Officers' Association

However much the Federation's leadership may have disapproved of the moves in Wales, it seems likely to have been a factor in its slow change of attitude, during 1920, towards the principle of amalgamation. Another element was the creation of the Officers' Association. Contemporary accounts testify to the impoverished state many ex-officers were reduced to, after discharge from active service. While entitled to more generous gratuities than lower ranks, officers did not get the 'Out of Work Donation' that supported those discharged from the ranks, neither did they all enjoy the wealthy backgrounds that had been the norm in the old Regular Army. Furthermore, their military service as officers did not necessarily help them find civilian employment. Their conditions were brought to public notice in a major way for the first time in July 1919, with Haig's dramatic evidence to the Parliamentary Select Committee on Pensions.³⁰ He stated that in February 1917 he had personally written to the Army Council about 'the state of poverty ... to which many of our invalided wounded officers are reduced ... which, if allowed to continue, will constitute a scandal of the greatest magnitude'.³¹ However, claimed Haig, 'Nothing ... has been done and the result is that, on discharge, officers are in many cases left penniless'.³² His full account of the treatment of disabled ex-officers was detailed and scathing, peppered with words like 'scandalous', 'wretched pittance', 'hardship', and 'inhuman',³³ illustrated by over 100 distressing case files from the Disabled Officers' Fund, which had been started by Lady Haig and 'some other ladies' four years earlier.³⁴ His evidence was received by the Select Committee with obvious sympathy and concern at the details he supplied, and when the Chairman, Sir Anderson Montague Barlow,³⁵ concluded the hearing with the words 'your evidence has been of the greatest possible assistance to us' that was no mere pleasantry,³⁶ as he was one of only around a dozen witnesses, out of more than fifty in total, whose

³⁰ See also the previous chapter.

³¹ Quoted in John Kiszely, 'Douglas Haig and Veterans', *The RUSI Journal*, 155:1, 10 March 2010, 86.

³² *First and Second Special Reports*, 364, Q.8409.

³³ *Ibid.*, 365, Q.8454, 367, Q.8483.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 362, Q.8390–94.

³⁵ Montague Barlow was a founder member of the Comrades, see chapters 4 and 5, though this does not seem to have been treated as a conflict of interest with his role as Chairman.

³⁶ *First and Second Special Reports*, 368, Q.8519.

evidence was cited specifically in the committee's First Special Report.³⁷ This was an influential committee of sixteen members, including one Major and three Captains, most with a record of substantial interest in ex-service affairs.

Haig's views on those who had served under him did not always reflect those of the Association or Federation. He had, for example, wanted to have the ringleaders of the striking soldiers in Calais, in January 1919, shot as mutineers; that was a stance too extreme even for War Secretary Winston Churchill.³⁸ However, he and the leaders of the ex-service groups were agreed on the fundamental principle that, as he had written to his wife as early as July 1918, 'it is a mistake to ask the public to subscribe to help Disabled Officers when it is the duty of the State to do so. The voluntary funds should be in addition to State aid' (original underlining).³⁹ While many in the British Government, and in Parliament, wanted charities to shoulder the burden, Haig did not agree, as he made clear in his evidence to the Select Committee. His testimony was reproduced at length in newspapers across the UK,⁴⁰ and soon afterwards, on 26 August 1919, representatives of between forty and fifty small societies, which had emerged somewhat haphazardly to assist ex-officers, met in Westminster, to discuss working more closely together.⁴¹ They appointed a committee, to be chaired by Haig, and took 'a great deal of evidence' from fifteen of the larger organisations, culminating two months later in a detailed report back to the various societies.⁴² This recognised that their work had saved 'many hundreds of Officers and their dependants ... from suffering and hardship', but also that better co-ordination was needed to reduce overlapping, save expense and promote efficiency, as 'great hardship is now inflicted upon many claimants for help, by the uncertainty as to which particular

³⁷ *First and Second Special Reports*, iii–ix; witnesses' names, xxviii–xxxv.

³⁸ Rothstein, *The Soldiers' Strikes*, 70.

³⁹ Haig to Lady Haig, 30 July 1918, Haig Papers, NLS, Acc.3155 151.

⁴⁰ For example, 'Sir Douglas Haig's Startling Disclosures: Officers in Poverty : Better Allowances Needed', *The Daily Mail* (Hull), 1 July 1919, ; 'Select Committee on Pensions', *The Scotsman*, 2 July 1919, 5; 'Sir D. Haig on Pensions', *The Londonderry Sentinel*, 3 July 1919, 4; 'Scandalous Pay for Heroes: Sir Douglas Haig on Pensions: Peace & Poverty, Grave Indictment of War Office', *Sheffield Independent*, 2 July 1919, 5, col 1, and numerous others.

⁴¹ 'Report by Committee on Officers' Help Societies', October 1919, 2, LHMA, Officers' Association (not catalogued at time of inspection). The numbers 40 and 50 come from Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 286, though no source is given.

⁴² 'Report on Officers' Help Societies', 1st page (un-numbered).

organization they should apply to'.⁴³ This was surely no exaggeration with so many involved, each with a limited remit and modest resources. The report recommended they divide themselves into four groups,⁴⁴ covering Housing, Employment, Families, and Unfit Officers, each supervised by a 'Group Committee', under one overall 'Central Committee of Control'.⁴⁵ It recommended that 'each Society should continue to manage its own affairs as at present ... under its present name', which rather implies that they did not want to amalgamate, although the report did suggest that it was 'desirable to have a brief title for the whole organization'.⁴⁶ By October, Haig was able to declare that if the recommendations met with their 'general approval', he would 'take steps at once' to form the Association, and arrange for the appointment of a Chairman, Officers, and Group committee members.⁴⁷ While no record has been found of the societies' responses, they must have been generally favourable, for early in January 1920, he wrote to thirty-four senior figures, including many lords, knights, dukes and business leaders, inviting them to join what was now called 'the Central Council of the Officers' Association' and attend its public launch at the end of the month.⁴⁸ That was also the last month of his tenure as Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, a post that was being abolished. It marked the end of his career in the British Army and freed him to devote his remaining years to the welfare of ex-soldiers.⁴⁹

Accordingly, on 30 January 1920, Haig, along with Lord Beatty and Sir Hugh Trenchard, representing the three armed services, addressed a public meeting at the Mansion House in London to inaugurate the unified Officers' Association. His speech highlighted '20,000 ex-officers [who] were out of employment through no fault of their own' and '33,000 ... incapacitated who were trying to eke out an existence in many cases with a wife and

⁴³ 'Report on Officers' Help Societies', 1st & 2nd pages.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 4th page. A number of societies were not included because of lack of information, or 'because the officer question formed only a small portion of their activities'.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 2nd page.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 2nd & 3rd pages.

⁴⁷ Haig, covering letter to participating groups, October 1919 (copy, not fully dated). LHMA, Officers' Association.

⁴⁸ Haig to potential members of the Central Council (copy), 6 January 1920, LHMA Officers' Association. A list of 'Names suggested for council of Officers' Association' is also in the file.

⁴⁹ De Groot, *Douglas Haig*, 402–3.

children on an average pension of £70 a year'.⁵⁰ He added that while they were presently only assisting ex-officers, 'they intended to lend a helping hand to the men as well'.⁵¹ The OA was to be run by an executive committee under Sir Arthur Lawley as chairman and Major-General Sir Harold Ruggles-Brise as secretary,⁵² and the first task was a major public appeal for funds. A few days later, Captain Baird's Imperial Ex-Services Association gave up its attempt to establish its own organisation,⁵³ and announced it would merge with the Officers' Association,⁵⁴ although in practice it might be more accurate to say that the latter 'absorbed' the former, whose name disappeared with the 'merger'. The launch of the OA, six months after Haig's damning evidence to the Select Committee on Pensions, and following his efforts to coordinate the work of dozens of small ex-officers' associations, was the logical conclusion to his activities, while his stated desire to extend its work 'to the men' showed that his ultimate aim was still the creation of a single, unified, organisation for all ex-service men and women, regardless of rank, as he had stated after the Westminster meeting in August 1919.⁵⁵

The Officers' Association, its launch and its impact

While there had been almost no publicity for Baird's Imperial Ex-Services Association, or the many other small officers' societies, during the months in which they had been discussing amalgamation, this changed dramatically with the launch of the Officers' Association. A popular tabloid, *The Daily Graphic*, featured a full-page portrait of Haig on its cover, and on the next page carried 'Earl Haig's message to the Nation' (below).⁵⁶ It is a striking public appeal, quite different from any earlier newspaper coverage of the Association, Federation

⁵⁰ 'Beggared Officers', *The Daily Graphic*, 31 January 1920, 2–3.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ruggles-Brise had become one of Haig's closest advisers as Military Secretary at GHQ of the BEF in March 1918, during the German Spring Offensive. He retired from the Army on 10 March 1920 to, again like Haig, devote the rest of his life to soldiers' welfare. 'Obituary: Major-General Sir H. G. Ruggles-Brise', *The Times*, 27 June 1927, 19.

⁵³ See chapter 5.

⁵⁴ 'One Organisation for All Ranks', *The Manchester Guardian*, 7 February 1920, 10.

⁵⁵ Haig to Baird, 29 August 1919, Acc.3155. No.235.c. Referenced in Barr, 'Service Not Self', 22.

⁵⁶ *The Daily Graphic*, 31 January 1920, 1–3.

or Comrades, all of which had eschewed public fundraising, and it is typical of the way the launch of the Officers' Association was reported, all of it featuring Earl Haig's leading role.

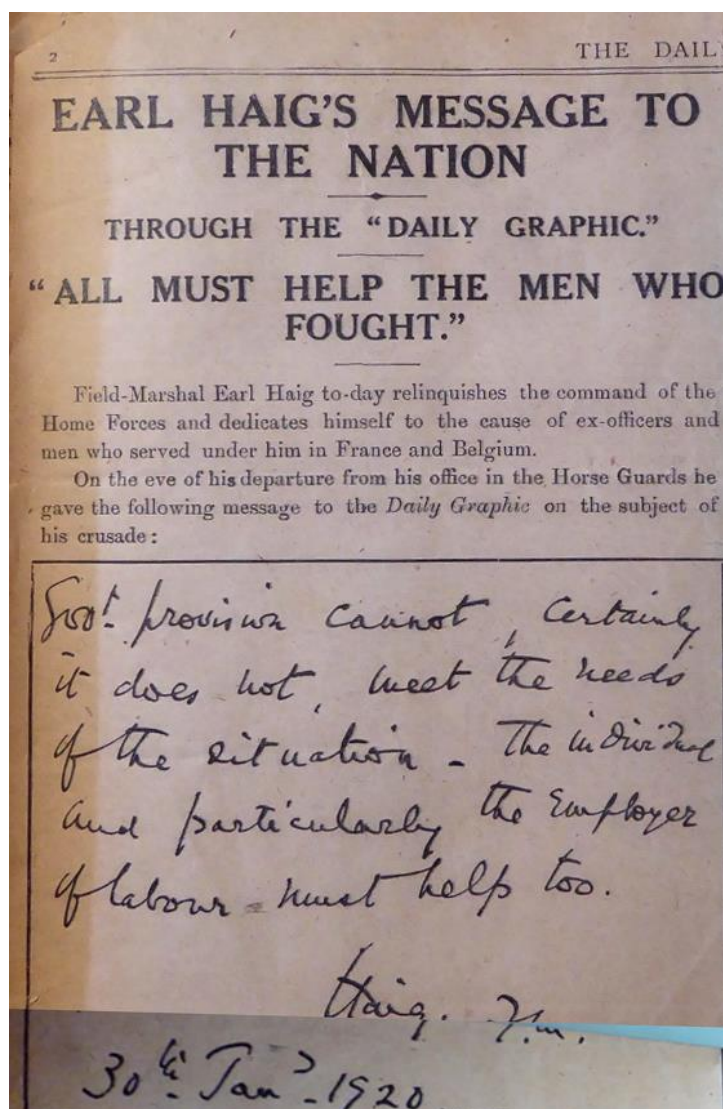


Figure 21: launch publicity for the Officers' Association, *The Daily Graphic*, 31 January 1920, 2.

Indeed, so widespread was the coverage that it seems almost every national, regional and local newspaper in the UK featured it, and this was the best possible launch for the accompanying public appeal.⁵⁷ Moreover, the coverage was overwhelmingly positive, with even the *Daily Herald* reporting the launch without any reservations,⁵⁸ while niche journals

⁵⁷ OA Press Cuttings, LHMA.

⁵⁸ 'Campaign for Officers. To Relieve Distress', *Daily Herald*, 31 January 1920, 2.

such as *The Wine & Spirit Trade Record*, also reported it in some detail.⁵⁹ The launch publicity included moving examples of the poor conditions that some ex-officers were in, citing Haig's figures of tens of thousands incapable of work or unemployed. Ex-officers could not even claim the 'Out of Work Donation' available to ex-rankers,⁶⁰ due to the historical distinction between officers and men. This reflected the class structure before the war, when officers were much better compensated than rankers, and generally came from a wealthy background. But, as the Select Committee reported, the gap between the two groups narrowed considerably during the war because of 'the necessity of lifting the [pay of] lower ranks to a more reasonable level, and the fact that in this war officers were drawn from all classes of the community'.⁶¹ This challenged the perception that ex-officers had no need of financial support, and Haig was keen to dispel any lingering belief that they had private wealth, noting that 'the majority of the ex-officers now in need of assistance obtained their commissions from the ranks'.⁶² In so doing, they lost any entitlement to ex-rankers' benefits. The strength of Haig's public criticism of his Government's treatment of ex-officers may seem surprising, given his long service to the country during the war, but his loyalty to those officers was also very strong, and he had long criticised their treatment. By contrast, his relationship with the Prime Minister had been very strained for much of the same period,⁶³ while Lloyd George himself had shown little interest in the problems of ex-officers, or ex-service men and women in general.⁶⁴

The new organisation maintained an impressive public profile, with, for example, a full-page feature in *The Daily Telegraph* on 14 April 1920 (below).⁶⁵ Throughout the year, the OA maintained this high profile, through fundraising events, often with royal patronage,

⁵⁹ 'Help for Ex-officers', *The Wine & Spirit Trade Record*, 12 February 1920', OA Press Cuttings, 15, LHMA.

⁶⁰ *First and Second Special Reports*, HC papers 149, 247, p. xiv, par. 16.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² 'Beggared Officers', *Daily Graphic*.

⁶³ See, e.g., De Groot, *Douglas Haig*, 396–99.

⁶⁴ E.g., Brunel Cohen, *Count your Blessings* (London, 1956), 66: 'L. G. had never got on with the soldiers and the relations between him and Sir Douglas Haig ... were strained almost to breaking point'.

⁶⁵ 'Honour Your Bond', *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 April 1920, no page number.

letters to newspaper editors, and further stories of hard cases.⁶⁶ Editorials in papers such as *The Sunday Times* and *The Observer* claimed that ‘we do forget’, arguing that ‘too many came through the war too easily ... the nation’s memory is very short and her hide very thick’.⁶⁷

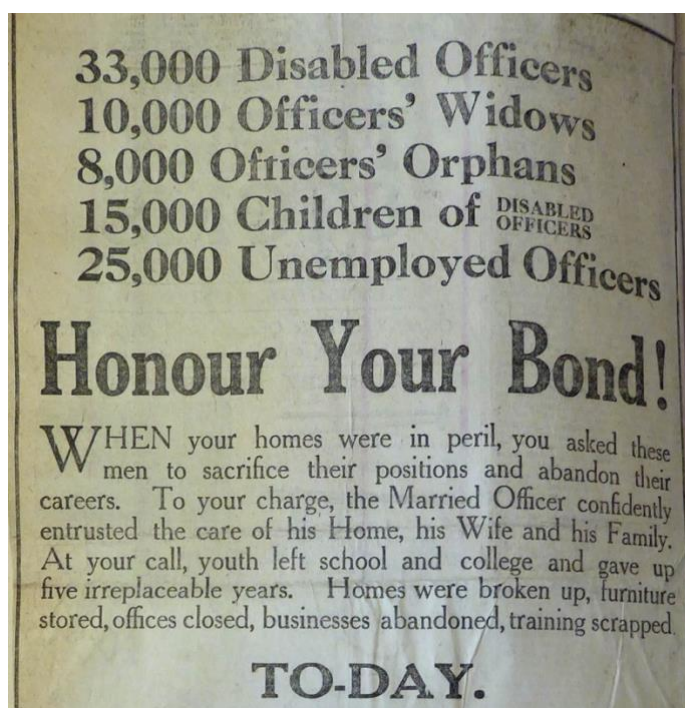


Figure 22: newspaper fund-raising appeal for the Officers' Association.⁶⁸

Nor was it just the highbrow newspapers that displayed concern for officers, with tabloids such as *The Globe*,⁶⁹ the *Sunday Pictorial*,⁷⁰ and regional and local titles like the *South Wales Daily News*,⁷¹ and the *Edinburgh Evening News*,⁷² all reporting on Haig's campaign throughout the year. Not all coverage was wholly sympathetic. For example, a columnist

⁶⁶ For example, 'Helping the Officers' Association', *Yorkshire Observer*, 26 July 1920, no page number, OA Press Cuttings, 55, LHMA, pictures the King and Queen meeting disabled officers at an OA-organised fete in the Botanic Gardens, London.

⁶⁷ 'The Ex-Service Man's Claims', *The Sunday Times*, 15 August 1920, no page number, OA Press Cuttings, 69, LHMA; 'We Do Forget', *The Observer*, 15 August 1920, 8.

⁶⁸ 'Honour Your Bond', *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 April 1920, no page number.

⁶⁹ 'Nation's "Broken Pledges". Haig Doubts Whether Britain's Word is Still Her Bond', *The Globe*, 17 November 1920, OA Press Cuttings, 119, LHMA.

⁷⁰ Horatio Bottomley, M.P., 'Wanted: 200,000 Jobs', *Sunday Pictorial*, 15 August 1920, OA Press Cuttings, 72, LHMA.

⁷¹ 'Earl Haig in Cardiff', *South Wales Daily News*, 16 August 1920, OA Press Cuttings, 76, LHMA.

⁷² 'The Debt of Honour', *Edinburgh Evening News*, 12 August 1920, OA Press Cuttings, 56, LHMA.

in, significantly perhaps, an Irish newspaper, *The Daily Express* (Dublin), reported Haig's appeal quite even-handedly, but then asserted 'the question which many people are asking is: What has the State done?'; it went on to describe one of Haig's needy cases but qualified this by suggesting that 'Surely the address of the people from whom he should seek [help] is the War Office, Whitehall?'.⁷³ It was a good question. Lloyd George wrote publicly to Haig, expressing 'my greatest sympathy' for 'your stirring appeal'.⁷⁴ However, he coupled that support with his repeated assertion that 'there are obvious limits to the scope of Government action';⁷⁵ an argument to which that Dublin columnist might well have responded by questioning whether those limits had been reached. Despite such occasional dissenters, the result of all the sustained appeals to the public's conscience was that in its first ten months, the OA raised over £1 million, equivalent to over £50 million today,⁷⁶ two-thirds of it from other bodies such as Lloyds, the Prince of Wales Fund and the Red Cross, with the remainder donated by the general public.⁷⁷ This was in stark contrast to the other three main organisations. The Association and the Federation had from the start vigorously opposed 'the cold hand of charity', believing that ex-service men, women and dependants were owed full state support as of right. The Comrades had adopted a different stance, announcing at their launch meeting in 1917 a target of raising £1 million from the public to fund their ambitious programme; although, as noted in chapter 4, they failed to build on their initial success in attracting the first £100,000 from wealthy donors. The Comrades were about to repeat that appeal in early 1920, but the OA launch and attendant widespread publicity 'cut the ground from under their feet', according to George Crosfield, albeit writing more than 25 years later.⁷⁸ Certainly the Comrades' funds were running low and, as explored further below, did not recover during the year. Haig, whom Towse had made a life member of the Comrades two years earlier,⁷⁹ took the opportunity presented

⁷³ 'The State and Ex-Service Men', *The Daily Express* (Dublin), 12 August 1920, OA Press Cuttings, 58, LHMA. Not related to the British *Daily Express*.

⁷⁴ 'The Debt of Honour', *The Times*, 14 August 1920, 11.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Bank of England Inflation Calculator, <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator>, accessed 3 August 2020.

⁷⁷ 'The Officers' Association, Meeting of the Grand Council, held at the Royal United Services Institution, Whitehall, on November 10th, 1920', LHMA, Officers Association.

⁷⁸ G. R. Crosfield, 'Silver Jubilee Memories', *British Legion Journal*, vol. XXVI, February 1946, 33-34. Crosfield was a leading member of the Comrades, and first Vice-Chairman of the British Legion.

⁷⁹ 'Sir D. Haig and the "Comrades"', *The Times*, 29 March 1918, 7.

by the successful launch of his Officers' Association, combined with the Comrades' precarious finances, to obtain a pledge from the leadership to support amalgamation.⁸⁰

An important feature of the OA, not usually made clear in earlier accounts,⁸¹ is that it was quite different from the Association, the Federation, the Comrades and the NUX, which were (or in the case of the Comrades had become) democratic membership organisations, run by those who benefited from their work. The OA was not primarily a membership organisation; rather it was firstly an umbrella group for numerous small officers' help societies, and secondly it was more like a traditional charity, run by prominent socialites, raising money from the public and institutions, and dispensing support to needy individuals through its constituent societies.⁸² It did have individual members, but these included 'all who are interested or concerned in the ex-Officer problem'.⁸³ They were not members in the sense of the other three groups, which were primarily collectives of men and women who had served in the British armed forces, or their widows.⁸⁴

The Federation's response to the success of the Officers' Association

The public profile of the OA and its successful fund-raising did not benefit only ex-officers; it also prompted other groups to re-assess their aversion to charity, the Federation in particular. Its leaders had placed much store in building the strongest possible case for better pensions, more training, improved allowances, proper housing and more, and in putting this case directly through a deputation to the Prime Minister. As early as May 1919, the front page of *The Bulletin* had printed an optimistic message from Thomas Lister, where he stated that following 'the great London demonstration' and the ensuing House of Commons debate, he had wired the Prime Minister 'urging upon [him] the importance of

⁸⁰ *The Comrades Journal*, vol. II, April 1920, 2, referenced in Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 288 (source no longer available).

⁸¹ Wootton, *Official History*, 14, is an exception.

⁸² 'Formation and Object of the Officers' Association', 2, Officers' Association, LHMA.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁸⁴ The Federation admitted widows: 'The "Coming-Together" Conference', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 41, November 1920, 161. The Comrades admitted 'Associates', with no specific reference to widows: 'Constitution and Objects', 4, 12, undated, RBL PRONI, D4555. No evidence has been found regarding the policy of the Association.

giving the matter his own immediate attention'.⁸⁵ He was confident that 'within a few days the Federation will be able to announce the Prime Minister has taken in hand personally the problem of the unemployed ex-Service man'.⁸⁶ His confidence was unfounded as Lloyd George simply delegated the matter to the Labour Minister, Robert Horne, who replied that the PM's 'urgent duty in connection with the Peace Negotiations ... in Paris' prevented him from receiving Federation representatives.⁸⁷ The days turned into weeks, then months, while the Federation added other issues in addition to unemployment to its agenda, including re-training for disabled veterans, housing, and medical care. *The D.S.S. Bulletin* regularly reported on the Federation's activities,⁸⁸ finally announcing that the long-awaited meeting with the Prime Minister would take place on 19 January 1920,⁸⁹ only to have to report a further delay, the deputation finally being received on 6 February.⁹⁰ This was a major event in the four-year history of the Federation, the only time when its leaders were able to present their members' case in detail to the Prime Minister and senior Ministers, so it is worth examining in some detail.

As Chairman of the Federation, Lister made the opening address, in which he set out the major issues: shortage of training places for disabled ex-service men, the failure of employers to meet the disabled recruitment targets set out in the King's Proclamation, the general level of unemployment among ex-service men, the meagre rate of War Gratuities for ex-rankers compared to ex-officers, the refusal to update pre-war army pensions to current rates, lack of grants for visits to War Graves, problems around war pensions and their administration, the plight of ex-service men in asylums, and more. In conclusion, anticipating that the response was likely to be that the nation could not afford any improvements, Lister stated:

⁸⁵ T.F. Lister, 'The Chairman and Unemployment Question – Strong Representation to Mr. Lloyd George', *The Bulletin*, no. 7, 5 Jun 1919, 1.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ 'Chairman's Opening Speech', *The Bulletin*, no. 8, 19 Jun 1919, 3.

⁸⁸ 'Premier Urged to Receive Deputation', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, no. 17, 23 October 1919, 6; 'Premier refuses to receive Federation Deputation', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, vol. 1, no. 21, Christmas Number December 1919, 6;

⁸⁹ 'National Demonstration Postponed: Premier to Receive Federation Deputation', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, vol. 1, no. 22, 8 January 1920, 4.

⁹⁰ 'Deputation to the Prime Minister: Date Deferred', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, vol. 1, no. 23, 22 January 1920, 4.

May I say that ... If the submissions are just in themselves, the argument that they involve financial expenditure should not be put forward until such time as men who have profited by the war ... have a very special duty levied upon the fortunes which they accumulated during ... the war.⁹¹

His anticipation was justified, for Lloyd George's response to the matter of raising pre-war pensions was:

I am not going to tell you it is not fair; I am not going to tell you it is not just, and I am certainly not going to tell you that if we could afford it we would not do it. We certainly should, but we cannot.⁹²

His response to all the other issues that would have incurred substantial expenditure was similar: generally conceding the Federation's claims were just and fair, but claiming the country could not afford to spend more than it was already doing. The country was, after all, on the brink of 'one of the most severe, if short-lived' recessions (1920-21) 'in British economic history'.⁹³ Despite the financial pressures, the Government might have met at least some of the Federation's demands. But it was more than a year after the end of the war, well outside the 'six months' that 'well-known Japanese General' (quoted in chapter 1) had stipulated as the duration of 'the memory of a nation for its war heroes'. So perhaps too much time had passed for the 'heroes' to press their claims. Lister of course disputed Lloyd George's assertion, but it was a clever response on the latter's part, for by accepting the arguments but claiming the country could not afford them, he left the Federation nowhere to go in the absence of any widespread popular or parliamentary support for its position.⁹⁴ This appears to have been a turning-point in the Federation's strategy. It did

⁹¹ 'Proceedings of Federation Deputation', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, vol. 1, no. 25, 19 February 1920, 13.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Peter Dewey, *War and Progress: Britain 1914–1945* (Abingdon, 2014), 74. Accessed online, 26 October 2021.

⁹⁴ The Prime Minister's response to the deputation was raised sporadically in Parliament over subsequent months, by Hogge and other sympathisers, but to little avail. For example, HC Deb 19 April 1920 vol 128 cc27–29, HC Deb 23 June 1920 vol 130 cc2297–98.

not abandon or even wind down its political campaign; on the contrary it resolved 'to advise all ex-Service men to vote against the Government at all by-elections'.⁹⁵ Neither did it stop mounting large demonstrations,⁹⁶ nor immediately turn to public fund-raising. However, the representations to the Prime Minister, on which so much of the Federation's hopes had been placed, had been rejected in early February, barely a week after the high-profile launch of the Officers' Association and its well-publicised appeal. It is thus unlikely to be a coincidence that, from this time on, the Federation began to consider amalgamation seriously, with the implication that charitable funds might become part of future support for its members, alongside government allowances. It was already the case that many branches held public fund-raising events,⁹⁷ so opposition to 'charity' was not as deeply rooted among its members as it was in the leadership. Besides, those branches that were raising money from the public had been obliged to register under the War Charities Act 1916,⁹⁸ despite their dislike of the term.

The Federation embraces amalgamation

Doubts about the idea of amalgamation frequently appeared in *The D.S.S. Bulletin*,⁹⁹ primarily because of its members' long-running suspicions about the Comrades, which they still saw as having been created, in Hogge's memorable phrase, to 'gas the ex-service man'.¹⁰⁰ However, by the time of the Federation's annual conference in May 1920, all hope of major improvements through lobbying the Prime Minister had been dashed, its semi-detached branches in most of Wales had amalgamated with the Comrades there, and the arrival of the Officers' Association had shown the potential for fund-raising from the public. So there was growing support from branches for unification and a resolution was drawn up

⁹⁵ 'Oppose the Government', *Middlesex County Times*, 14 February 1920, 6, col.3.

⁹⁶ J. M. Hogge, M.P., 'The Protest Demonstration. At Hyde Park', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 30, 29 April 1920, 27; 'Press Comments on the Demonstration', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 30, 29 April 1920, 36.

⁹⁷ Numerous examples from *The D.S.S. Bulletin* and newspapers, the earliest record being *The Daily Mail*, Hull, 28 February 1918, 2, col. 5: reference to both the Comrades and the Federation applying to hold a flag-day.

⁹⁸ As detailed in chapter 4.

⁹⁹ For example, one of many, 'Amalgamation Bogey: Danger Revealed', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, no. 18, 6 November 1919, 6.

¹⁰⁰ J. M. Hogge, M.P., 'Comrades of the Great War', *The Herald*, 1 December 1917, 16.

that recommended 'efforts should be made to bring about the amalgamation of all existing ex-Service men's organisations'.¹⁰¹ This led to a fractious debate during which some speakers demanded that 'it must be recognised that the N.F.D.D.S.S is the premier organisation, and ... should insist upon the amalgamation of the other organisations to itself'.¹⁰² This was hardly likely to appeal to those other organisations, and would have been a stumbling-block if accepted. Others claimed that 'experience went to show that where Comrades of the Great War had come over to the Federation, they had proved most reactionary'.¹⁰³ Such sentiments were not a promising basis for amalgamation talks. However, the resolution was passed narrowly by the delegates (88–79) and more convincingly by a card vote (40,699–26,848, being the total numbers of members represented by each delegate).¹⁰⁴ The National Executive of the Federation duly called a conference of the Comrades, the Association, the OA and the NUX, for 7 August 1920 at the Royal United Services Institution.¹⁰⁵ This Federation initiative proved to be the key step on the road to unity. Lister made a conciliatory speech in which he invited the other three groups to amalgamate under a new constitution, provided it was 'democratic, free to elect whom it chooses, to make its own Rules, to do what it conceives best in the interests of ex-Service men, and be responsible to ex-Service men'.¹⁰⁶ It would be non-party, but not non-political for 'they are bound to concern themselves ... with what are in reality political questions'.¹⁰⁷ After some debate, the Association, the Federation, the Comrades and the OA resolved to form a drafting committee, while the NUX abstained as it could not accept the 'non-party political' principle.¹⁰⁸ It would only amalgamate if all the groups agreed that removal of the problems faced by ex-service men and their dependants 'could only be secured by a [national] policy based upon the common ownership of land and capital'.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, either mis-reading or not caring about the non-political stance of the other groups,

¹⁰¹ 'The Annual Conference', *The D.S.S Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 33, 10 June 1920, 67.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁰⁵ 'National Executive – Amalgamation', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 37, 5 August 1920, 111.

¹⁰⁶ 'Amalgamation Conference – Drafting Committee Set Up', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 38, 19 August 1920, 122, 132.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ 'From General Head-Quarters', *The Bayonet*, vol. 1, no. 1, September 1920, 4, col. 1.

the NUX then attempted to push through an 'urgent' resolution that 'dealt with the Russo-Polish War',¹¹⁰ and in doing so, in the words of the Association's General Secretary, 'revealed the true aims of this party political organisation ... whose extreme views found no favour with the other delegates'.¹¹¹

The drafting committee got to work at once, and needed just two meetings to agree a first draft for presentation to a further conference on 18 September 1920.¹¹² The speed of drafting indicates the extent to which the leadership of all four groups had come to realise that unity was essential, and Lister reported back to Federation members that 'the committee had agreed upon principles and machinery which in every respect was absolutely democratic in character and made the way for a great combined body of ex-Service men in this country'.¹¹³ The minutes of the Comrades in Scotland show that this process was also happening at local level, for two months earlier they had unanimously accepted an invitation from the Federation in Scotland to discuss amalgamation.¹¹⁴ This had taken place on 31 August, presided over by Towse from the Comrades' UK HQ, where they all agreed that they should amalgamate in a new, non-party political, organisation for all ranks including officers.¹¹⁵ Significantly, in the light of later events, when the British Legion (Scotland) would pre-empt the English body and assert its independence (below), that meeting also stipulated 'Scotland to have full control of its own local affairs'.¹¹⁶ It resolved to 'consider the Draft Constitution of the proposed new Organization in England to see if it could be satisfactorily applied to Scotland',¹¹⁷ thereby confirming that these discussions were taking place across the UK.

¹¹⁰ No further details have been found of this resolution, but evidently the other groups regarded it as too political for the kind of unified organisation they were working towards.

¹¹¹ 'From General Head-Quarters', *The Bayonet*, vol. 1, no. 1, September 1920, 3, cols. 2–3. The General Secretary is not named in that issue, but is named as Donald M. King in issue no. 3, November 1920, 1.

¹¹² 'Amalgamation – the Drafting Committee meets', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 39, 16 September 1920, 134.

¹¹³ 'Mr. T. F. Lister on Unemployment and Amalgamation', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 39, 16 September 1920, 139.

¹¹⁴ SCMB, 158, 14 July 1920.

¹¹⁵ SCMB, 160–62, 8 September 1920.

¹¹⁶ SCMB, 162, 8 September 1920.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

In October, the Federation's *D.S.S. Bulletin* announced a 'Special Conference' to be held on 13 and 14 November in Leicester.¹¹⁸

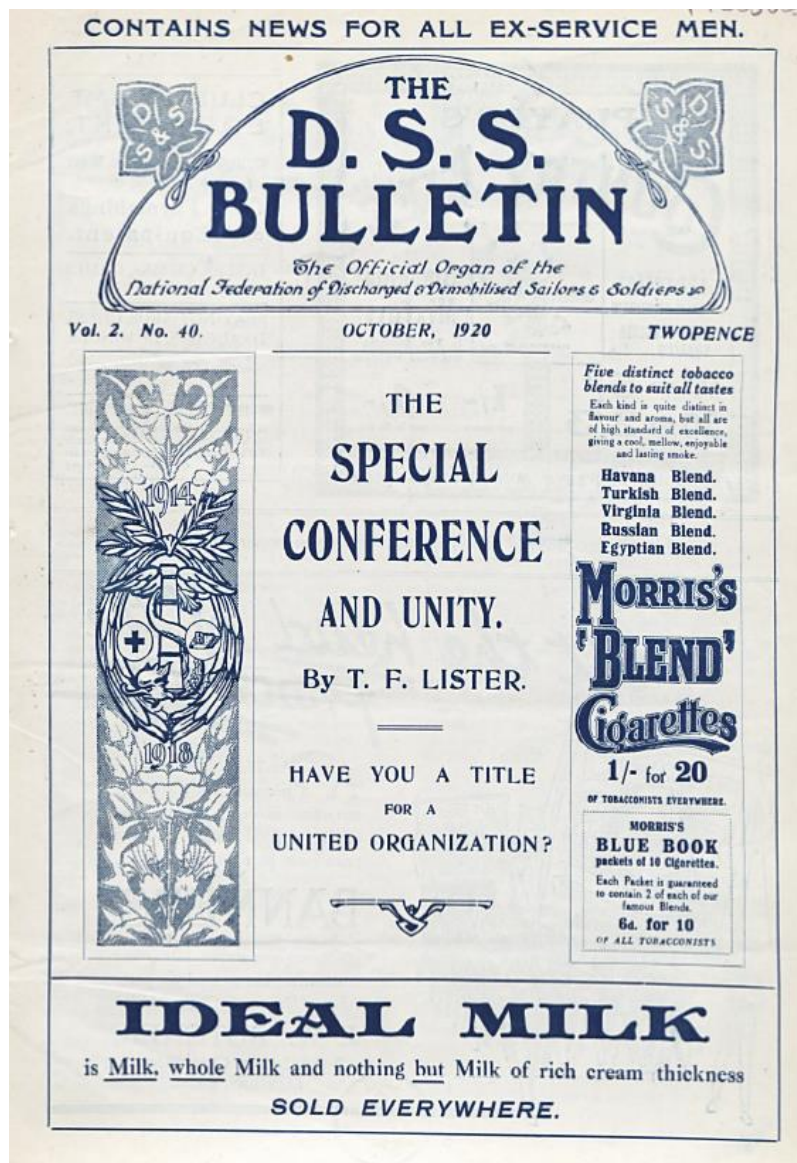


Figure 23: Federation report of its Special Unity Conference.¹¹⁹

Inside, Lister explained the Federation proposal in detail, acknowledging that 'Attempts to amalgamate the ex-Service Men's Societies in the past [i.e. prior to its annual conference in May] had failed', but paying tribute to the other groups and noting that in drafting the

¹¹⁸ *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 40, October 1920, cover and 146.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, cover.

constitution 'not one of them sought for any sectional advantage, or ... privileges'.¹²⁰ He concluded by asking 'Has anyone thought of a title which is short, arresting, and really suitable for the new organisation? Wales and Scotland have been thinking without any good result yet!'.¹²¹ The latter comment is curious, given that the 'Welsh Legion' had been in existence for six months by that time, but no mention of it ever appeared in any issue of *The D.S.S. Bulletin*. Equally interesting is that the *Bulletin* changed with that issue from a fortnightly to a monthly publication, without publicising the fact and, as there is no indication of lack of material to report, this was probably another indication of dwindling finances. That aside, the *Bulletin's* coverage of the forthcoming conference suggests the ground had been well prepared, an impression confirmed in a speech by Haig to the OA, a few days beforehand, in which he announced 'I have, as you know, urged with all the force at my command that Officers and Men should work together in one united body for the benefit of their comrades in need ... [and] there is now every prospect of that unity being achieved'.¹²² The Federation's leadership must have been very confident that the constitution would be approved, for the Special Conference began with a procession through the city, led by the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Earl Haig and the band of the Leicester branch, past cheering crowds. The description reads like a victory parade as 'Service and ex-Service men stood to attention and saluted; others cheered, and women and children waved handkerchiefs and Union Jacks, Earl Haig continually acknowledging all these greetings as he rode by'.¹²³ This was followed in the evening by a 'Grand Dinner' with Haig as 'Honoured Guest'.¹²⁴ During the debate most speeches were wholly in favour of amalgamation, while Ernest Thurtle spoke for the few dissidents,¹²⁵ reminding delegates that 'the Comrades started ... [as] a combination of money-bags, profiteers and people who ... spent money like water ... to smash the Federation', but he found little support in the hall.¹²⁶ At one point 'Mr. J. M. Hogge, M.P., arrived and took a seat on the platform, being

¹²⁰ *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 40, October 1920, 147.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹²² 'Extract of the Earl Haig's speech to the Grand Council of the Officers' Association, held at the Royal United Services Institution, Whitehall, on November 10th, 1920', LHMA, Officers Association.

¹²³ 'The "Coming-Together" Conference', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 41, November 1920, 157.

¹²⁴ 'Conference Dinner', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 41, November 1920, 165.

¹²⁵ 'The "Coming-Together" Conference', 159.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

greeted with hearty cheers and the singing of “He’s a golly good fellow”’, evidence of the esteem in which he was still held some eighteen months after giving up the presidency of the organisation,¹²⁷ reinforced by his continuing promotion of their cause in Parliament,¹²⁸ and support for their demonstrations.¹²⁹ The unity resolution was duly put to the vote and carried overwhelmingly, with just seven branches, out of probably more than 160, dissenting.¹³⁰

The conference then moved on to debate the proposed constitution in detail. There was still opposition to including fund-raising as an aim, with one speaker objecting that ‘this continual cadging had ... recoiled on the ex-Service man’, but he was out-voted by ‘a big majority’.¹³¹ Another item was unequal terms of membership for men and women, where the latter had been required to have longer service to qualify. A representative from Wood Green, London, argued this meant they ‘admitted men who had been only seven days in the army, while many women had done years of war service’, and that his branch ‘had 250 widows who ... occupied the place of those who were unable to come back’.¹³² His points struck home and ‘it was unanimously decided to accept women on the same terms as men’.¹³³ Many other matters were settled without apparent rancour or serious dissent, and the delegates then moved on to choosing a title for the new organisation, from a list of forty-nine suggestions. The two most popular proved to be ‘the United Services’ League’ and ‘the British Legion’, probably echoing the successful establishment of the United Services Fund, and the creation of the Welsh Legion, respectively. Support for ‘the British Legion’ may also have been boosted by a speaker from the American Legion, Mr. D. H.

¹²⁷ The “Coming-Together” Conference’, 159.

¹²⁸ He continued to raise ex-service issues in Parliament until at least October 1920. For example, see ‘Under the Clock’, *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, vol. 1, no. 22, October 1920, 2.

¹²⁹ For example, J. M. Hogge, M.P., ‘The Protest Demonstration. At Hyde Park’, *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 30, 29 April 1920, 27.

¹³⁰ ‘The “Coming-Together” Conference’, 159. The total number of branches present is not recorded but, as noted above, at least 167 attended, and voted at, their Annual Conference earlier in the year. There is no indication of the seven dissenting branches forming any kind of organised opposition, or identifiable group.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 161.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 161.

Gillette, who gave an upbeat account of his organisation's activities since its foundation in July the previous year.¹³⁴

The Association's approach to the prospect of amalgamation

The Association had been the most positive about amalgamation ever since the first attempt at unity in the middle of 1918,¹³⁵ including support for the Empire Services League proposal, until that scheme was altered by the War Office.¹³⁶ As noted in the previous chapter, it had discussed a merger with the Comrades during 1919, a move that broke down acrimoniously, and had attempted a few months later, in September, to set up a meeting of all three organisations to discuss the subject, apparently without success.¹³⁷ It seems there was no progress, other than in Wales, until the spring of 1920, when the Federation too began to realise that amalgamation was becoming essential. However, it is not possible to analyse the Association's efforts and activities in the same depth as those of the Federation, for little of its documentation survives and it did not start a journal for its members until September 1920, citing shortage of funds for not doing so earlier. This was *The Bayonet*, with the launch issue reporting positively and at length on working with the Comrades, and about the Association's work in general, and on progress towards amalgamation in particular.¹³⁸ By the following month it was asserting that 'The differences between the Comrades, the Federation, and the Association are being consigned to ... a forgotten past.'¹³⁹ In November its coverage verged on hyperbole, the front page headline proclaiming 'The Hour of Destiny' and reporting that 'The Draft Constitution of the great united organisation of ex-Service Men is now in the hands of the Branches with the strongest possible recommendation ... for approval'.¹⁴⁰ The Association too, asked for suggestions for a title, while recommending 'the British Legion of Ex-Service Men, a name

¹³⁴ 'The "Coming-Together" Conference', 159.

¹³⁵ The Smith-Dorrien Conference, detailed in chapter 4.

¹³⁶ As detailed in previous chapter.

¹³⁷ Also detailed in previous chapter.

¹³⁸ 'General Head-Quarters', *The Bayonet*, vol. 1, no. 1, September 1920, 3.

¹³⁹ A.W. James Howell (Ex-President, National Association), 'What's In a Name?', *The Bayonet*, vol. 1, no. 2, October 1920, 4.

¹⁴⁰ 'The Hour of Destiny', *The Bayonet*, vol. 1, no. 3, November 1920, 1.

emanating from Mr. A. W. J. Howell'.¹⁴¹ He was one of the Association's first Presidents and a resident Welshman who was surely aware of the Welsh Legion of Ex-Service Men. The Association could not afford an event on the same scale as the Federation's lavish Special Conference, but its 'National Conference of Divisions' took place in Birmingham on 20–21 November 1920.¹⁴² A resolution in favour of amalgamation 'was unanimously passed amid loud cheering and applause ... nor was a dissenting voice heard during ... the whole Conference'.¹⁴³ Note that it has not been possible to assess the Comrades' attitude to amalgamation in the same detail as the Federation and the Association, above, because of the lack of national (UK) records in the archives.¹⁴⁴

It is worth noting that, by the latter part of 1920, all three organisations were, according to Stephen Ward, 'having a most difficult time surviving the rigors of lost membership, apathy, lack of money, and finding new causes that would capture the imagination and spirit of the members'.¹⁴⁵ He gives no figures for these declining funds and membership, and little detail can be found in surviving records, but the minutes of the Comrades in Scotland and in Northern Ireland both illustrate the problem, and those records are analysed later in this chapter. This was undoubtedly a powerful driver towards putting aside their differences, most of all for the Association, as the smallest and poorest. Its journal lasted only five months, ceasing publication in January 1921 with an editorial diatribe against 'deplorable apathy ... manifested by an insignificant circulation when compared with the membership ... our Branch news is no credit to the magazine ... to receive on an average 19 reports from 250 Branches is, to say the least, discouraging'.¹⁴⁶ Nor was it just the members who were largely inactive: a letter in one issue asked why they did not publish articles by 'our Leaders', other than the General Secretary, to which the Editor replied, rather acerbically, 'I

¹⁴¹ 'The Hour of Destiny', *The Bayonet*, vol. 1, no. 3, November 1920, 1.

¹⁴² Association branches were organised into a number of regional divisions across Great Britain, with none in Ireland. Its 'Report of the Second Annual Conference', 30 March – 1 April 1918, TUC Library, UB363, listed six divisions and there is no later record.

¹⁴³ 'From General Head-Quarters – Amalgamation', *The Bayonet*, vol. 1, no. 4, December 1920, 3.

¹⁴⁴ As noted earlier, the full set of the Comrades Journal has been lost within the British Library, while the Ashley and Davies papers contain very little of relevance beyond 1919.

¹⁴⁵ Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 283.

¹⁴⁶ *The Bayonet*, vol. 1, no. 5, January 1921, 1.

wish our Leaders would make more use of these columns'.¹⁴⁷ Altogether, the tone of *The Bayonet* is of an organisation struggling to survive, with probably many of its claimed 250 Branches existing in name only.

Problems in Ireland

By the latter half of 1920, branches of the organisations in Ireland were in even more trouble than those in England, with declining membership perhaps the least of their worries. War-time recruitment to the British Army in Ireland had never been enforced through conscription, so veterans were seen as having chosen to serve in the armed forces of a country that was increasingly at odds with much of the population of southern and central Ireland.¹⁴⁸ Thus, while, as noted in the previous chapter, the Irish Federation and the Comrades had grown alongside their British counterparts, and even flourished for a while, over the following year hostility to veterans became more intense and widespread. At the beginning of 1920, the Irish Federation was part of the UK deputation to the Prime Minister on 6 February, and it submitted a separate 'Special Memorandum', dealing with similar issues to the main submission, but with particular reference to Ireland.¹⁴⁹ Tellingly, the Irish memorandum concluded with the rather desperate plea that 'the Irish ex-Service man has no friends capable of helping him in his own country, and he looks to the Government for that assistance which they justly consider their right'.¹⁵⁰ There were some 210,000 ex-service men in Ireland,¹⁵¹ and in principle the British Government was under the same obligations to them as applied in the rest of the UK. In practice, the extent of unrest in the country made it difficult to meet these obligations, as, for example, when it came to 'land settlements' for ex-soldiers, which (as discussed below) proved impossible to apply in Ireland.¹⁵² If Lloyd George addressed their plea, his response is not recorded in the

¹⁴⁷ *The Bayonet*, vol. 1, no. 5, January 1921, 2.

¹⁴⁸ John Borgonovo, 'Revolution, ex-servicemen and the Cork Branch of the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers, 1918–21', in Swift and Wilkinson, eds., *Veterans of the First World War*, esp. 94–96.

¹⁴⁹ 'Special Memorandum to the Premier: Submitted by the Irish Delegates', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, vol. 1, no. 26, 4 March 1920, 8–9.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁵¹ Borgonovo, 'Revolution, ex-servicemen and the Cork Branch', 82.

¹⁵² See section 'Squatters, land-raiders and affluent organ-grinders', below.

Federation's otherwise very detailed account, and there is no mention of Ireland in the written reply sent by his office three months later.¹⁵³

The gloomy situation that the Irish branches were in by the middle of 1920 is evidenced by the near-total absence of any branch reports in *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, after July, where they had previously featured regularly. John Borgonovo, who has studied the Cork branch of the Federation in fine detail, states that by 1920 Irish veterans across the country were 'in the unenviable position of seeking assistance from a government [British] that was besieged by their countrymen'.¹⁵⁴ Worse still was the behaviour of the 'Black and Tans', whose 'violence against republicans and collective punishment of entire communities only outraged the public and diluted the local value of Irish veterans' war service'.¹⁵⁵ The situation was further complicated by the divided loyalties of Irish ex-service men, many of whom were sympathetic to the republican cause, with quite a number becoming active members of the Irish Republican Army.¹⁵⁶ The Federation did manage to hold its annual conference in Dublin on 14–15 August,¹⁵⁷ by which time it claimed to have eighty branches across Ireland,¹⁵⁸ but this was a downbeat affair. For example, the *Weekly Irish Times* reported that, in discussing the Irish Land (Provisions for Soldiers and Sailors) Act, 'it was the feeling of the Conference that the [British] Government had no intention of putting the measure into effect "under the cloak of the political conditions in Ireland"'.¹⁵⁹ Another debate concluded with the passing of a resolution that

if the G.O.C. [General Officer Commanding] cannot undertake to remedy the undisciplined manner in which the soldiers and police are at present acting, we call

¹⁵³ 'Irish Ex-Service Men: Prime Minister's Reply to Memorandum', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 34, 24 June 1920, 75.

¹⁵⁴ Borgonovo, 'Revolution, Ex-Servicemen and the Cork Branch', 94.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Steven O'Connor, 'It's up to you now to fight for your own country': Ireland's Great War veterans in the War of Independence, 1919–21', in Swift and Wilkinson, eds., *Veterans of the First World War*, 104–13.

¹⁵⁷ 'Irish Annual Conference', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 36, 22 July 1920, 108.

¹⁵⁸ Borgonovo, 'Revolution, Ex-Servicemen and the Cork Branch', 95.

¹⁵⁹ 'Discharged Soldiers' Federation: Annual Conference in Dublin', *Weekly Irish Times*, 21 August 1920, 2.

upon the members of the Federation to form themselves into sections of volunteers to protect the lives of ex-service men and the community at large ...¹⁶⁰

This implied the formation of militias or paramilitary groups. The Irish Federation was also rather at odds with the English, Welsh, and Scottish Federations in deciding to ballot every branch with a view to adopting a political policy, because of the ‘force of circumstances’ in the country, and at the same time ‘deferring consideration of the question of amalgamation with other ex-service men’s organisations’.¹⁶¹ This explicit deviation from the Federation on the other side of the Irish Sea helps explain the much-reduced coverage of Irish branches in *The D.S.S. Bulletin* from mid-1920 onwards. Meanwhile, in Ireland, as Borgonovo details, both the Federation and the Comrades became increasingly irrelevant at national level through 1920–21.¹⁶² This was another factor in the weakening of both organisations, in terms of members, financial resources, and political influence, particularly when viewed alongside the rather dysfunctional branches in Wales.

There were particular problems in the north of Ireland, where the main organisation was the Comrades. The minutes of its meetings reveal a difficult relationship between their ‘North Irish Headquarters’ (N.I. HQ) in Belfast, and the corresponding ‘South Irish Headquarters’ in Dublin.¹⁶³ Much of this was because the London headquarters did not want a fragmented structure in Ireland, with a separate ‘North Irish Area’;¹⁶⁴ but the Comrades in the North clearly believed, with some justification, that the Dublin headquarters favoured the branches in central and southern Ireland. Problems are minuted as early as January 1919, with the appointment of a deputation to Dublin to protest against accusations made by those in the Comrades’ South Irish HQ ‘concerning the political opinions of this organisation’.¹⁶⁵ Indeed, examples of the hostility between the

¹⁶⁰ ‘Discharged Soldiers’ Federation’, *Weekly Irish Times*.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² Borgonovo, ‘Revolution, Ex-Servicemen and the Cork Branch’, 97–98.

¹⁶³ Comrades of the Great War Minute Book, RBL PRONI, D4555. Hereafter ‘NICMB’; note that many of the minutes referenced here are to be found at the back of that book. The minutes nearly always use the phrase ‘North Irish’, and refer only very occasionally to ‘the North of Ireland’, never ‘Northern Ireland’, during this period and up to September 1922 at least.

¹⁶⁴ NICMB, 18 July 1919, Special Meeting re ‘forming a National Headquarters for Ireland in Dublin’.

¹⁶⁵ NICMB, 27 January 1919, item 8.

two headquarters appear frequently up to and beyond the creation of the British Legion in July 1921, by which time Ireland was, in any event, politically partitioned.¹⁶⁶ The USF did not begin operation until early in 1920, but as early as February of that year the N.I. HQ wrote to the Fund's Management Committee, requesting that 'Ireland be divided into two areas'.¹⁶⁷ That was not agreed, and in May the HQ wrote to Byng to protest 'the actions of the Irish Area Committee [in Dublin] in not conforming to the rules of the U.S. Fund';¹⁶⁸ just the first of many minuted complaints. The fundamental problem was that the USF, like the Comrades, was reluctant to create a separate committee for the North, even as partition became more firmly established.¹⁶⁹

The Comrades in the north were also suffering severe financial and organisational pressures, evidenced regularly in their minutes. For example, their paid organiser was dismissed in April 1919 when it was revealed that he had been claiming travel expenses both from the branches that he visited, and from the HQ.¹⁷⁰ The following month the Secretary and the Assistant Secretary both resigned, for reasons that were not minuted.¹⁷¹ The chaotic organisation of its Posts and Branches was eventually revealed in October 1921, when another new Secretary reported he had attempted to contact '100 Branches and Posts on the lists but up to date had been able to get replies from about 35'.¹⁷² His report to the Annual Conference a few months later confirmed that the remainder were no longer in existence,¹⁷³ an astonishing reflection on their administration when they were supposed to be paying affiliation fees,¹⁷⁴ and it helps explain their long-running financial problems. These problems were first revealed in minutes of 25 May 1920, where it transpired that members of the N.I. Executive Committee had been unaware that their HQ had long carried an overdraft, which the bank was now pressing them to repay. In answer

¹⁶⁶ The Government of Ireland Act, 1920, implemented 3 May 1921.

¹⁶⁷ NICMB, 17 February 1920, item 11.

¹⁶⁸ NICMB, 25 May 1920, item 8 (2).

¹⁶⁹ The most complete account of their long-running dissatisfaction with the United Services Fund can be found in the NICMB, 'Minutes of the Annual Conference', 20 January 1922, 1–2.

¹⁷⁰ NICMB, 7 April 1919, item 5.

¹⁷¹ NICMB, 6 May 1919, items 3, 4.

¹⁷² NICMB, 28 October 1921, item 9.

¹⁷³ NICMB, 'Minutes of the Annual Conference', 20 January 1922, 2.

¹⁷⁴ NICMB, 6 May 1919, item 11.

to one member's question about how the debt had been incurred, the Chairman 'explained that in the early days of the movement, certain people had told them to go ahead, prove that you can manage an organisation and the money will be alright. On the strength of this promise an Organiser had been engaged, and considerable expense incurred'.¹⁷⁵ This is an illuminating response, that is likely to have had its roots in the confident expectation, when the Comrades was launched, that it could raise £1 million from the public, in what turned out to be a more than fifteen-fold over-estimate.¹⁷⁶ Various suggestions for raising funds in the North Irish area were made at the meeting, but none appear to have been actioned, and 'Finance' remained a serious problem, resulting a few months later in a request to 'Commandants of counties' to raise £50 each for the HQ, a request that eventually yielded a grand total of £35 from just one county.¹⁷⁷ The total debt was not minuted until October the following year, when it was revealed to be £569,¹⁷⁸ well above the authorised limit of £500, and rising.¹⁷⁹ Only a highly successful public sweepstake, in late 1921, finally cleared the overdraft and put them back in the black.¹⁸⁰

The development of the Irish Federation and Comrades branches from 1917 through to 1921, took place during a time of great political upheaval and tensions across Ireland. The context was thus different to mainland Britain. Borgonovo's work is particularly relevant in placing the activities of one large branch of the Federation in this wider context.¹⁸¹ So too is that of Steven O'Connor in describing veterans' activities in the War of Independence, some as members of the 'Black and Tans', and others in paramilitary groups,¹⁸² while even those who tried to stay uninvolved could not escape the hostility aimed increasingly at

¹⁷⁵ 'Finance', NICMB, 25 May 1920, item 2.

¹⁷⁶ Detailed in chapter 4.

¹⁷⁷ NICMB, 18 August 1920, item 6, originated the appeal. NICMB, 25 November 1920 (un-numbered item), reported the receipt of £35 from Tyrone.

¹⁷⁸ NICMB, 21 October 1921, item 10.

¹⁷⁹ NICMB, 28 October 1921, item 8, by which date the overdraft had risen to £686.

¹⁸⁰ NICMB, 2 December 1921, 5. Gross takings of £8,500 paid the organisers, cleared the overdraft, and contributed 'not less than £2,500' to what was now, provisionally, the British Legion in N.I.

¹⁸¹ Borgonovo, 'Revolution, ex-servicemen and the Cork Branch'; O'Connor, 'Ireland's Great War Veterans in the War of Independence.'

¹⁸² O'Connor, 'Ireland's Great War veterans', 82.

those who had served in the British Army,¹⁸³ particularly as they had done so voluntarily.¹⁸⁴ While both organisations claimed optimistically, in the words of the Federation in 1919, that ‘the ex-service men in Ireland know no border-line’,¹⁸⁵ in reality they could not escape the wider divisions in Irish society that intensified through 1920–21, making organisation difficult, and the application of British Government schemes impossible. Indeed, these divisions were reflected in long-running suspicion and hostility between the Comrades in the north and the south, exacerbated by poor administration and consequent serious financial problems.

Problems in Scotland

The minute book of the Comrades in Scotland presents a similar picture to that in the minutes of the North Irish HQ, with an optimistic beginning, steadily rising numbers of Branches and Posts, but then organisational problems within the national headquarters and beyond, and initially sound finances turning into long-running debts. In December 1918 the Scottish National Committee reported a total cash balance of £2,775,¹⁸⁶ but this dwindled steadily, as can be seen in the graph below, until in July 1920 the organisation went into the red, with debts of some £1,300, ‘and practically nothing coming in from the Levy [on branches] or any other source’.¹⁸⁷ Some months before that, in October 1919, with just £162 in the bank, it had ‘dispensed with ... the Appeals Organiser, two other Organisers, and two of the Edinburgh office staff’.¹⁸⁸ In July 1920, all the remaining staff were dismissed, with the temporary exception of the General Secretary, whose resignation was post-dated to the beginning of October.¹⁸⁹ In December, a member of the Executive Committee raised the question of financial support from London, claiming that ‘while serving in France, numerous subscriptions were collected on behalf of the Comrades from

¹⁸³ As noted above: ‘the Irish ex-Service man has no friends ... in his own country’, *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, vol. 1, no. 26, 4 March 1920, 9.

¹⁸⁴ Borgonovo, ‘Revolution, ex-servicemen and the Cork Branch’, 85.

¹⁸⁵ ‘Irish News’, *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, no. 16, 9 October 1919, 10.

¹⁸⁶ ‘Financial Report’, SCMB, 6 December 1918, 14.

¹⁸⁷ ‘Chairman’s Report’, SCMB, Exec ctte, 14 July 1920, 152 (incorrectly recorded as 1919, corrected in pencil to 1920), 152.

¹⁸⁸ SCMB, 29 October 1919, 90.

¹⁸⁹ ‘Chairman’s Report’, SCMB, 13 July 1920, 152.

Scottish Regiments'. It was said that all of it went to the London HQ, which did not share it with Scotland.¹⁹⁰ This was not mere hearsay, for the informant had been a member of a Scottish unit in the Royal Engineers in France, where the Officers' Mess alone had collected £200.¹⁹¹ If correct, this suggests that the London HQ was also short of funds, and it will have reinforced the Scots' determination to keep 'full control of its own local affairs', as noted above, when amalgamation was implemented.¹⁹²

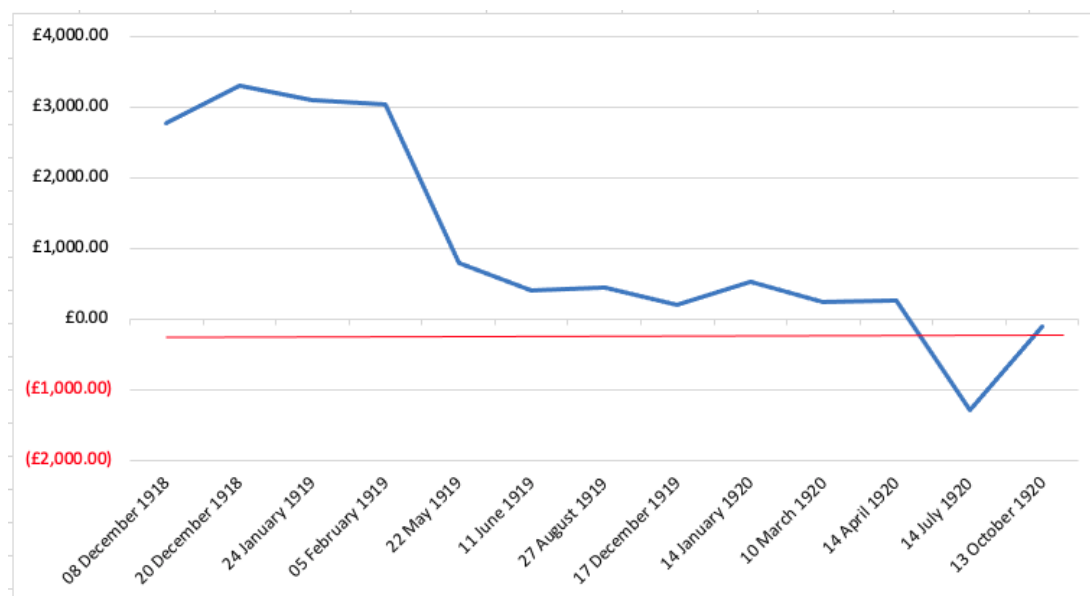


Figure 24: Comrades of the Great War in Scotland – cash in hand and at bank
(See appendix 2 for data sources and calculations)

In the meantime, the number of branches and posts reported by the Secretary rose steadily from December 1918 through to October 1920 (see figure 25 below), when it was decided to stop registering new ones in view of the imminent amalgamation.¹⁹³ However, those numbers are probably misleading for, just as with the North Irish Comrades, it appears many were inactive, if indeed they ever actually got off the ground. For example, in October 1919, the Secretary reported that he could not provide accurate membership numbers, 'Owing to the difficulty of obtaining regular returns from the Branches and

¹⁹⁰ SCMB, 15 December 1920, 176.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² SCMB, 8 September 1920, 162.

¹⁹³ SCMB, 13 October 1920, 170.

Posts'.¹⁹⁴ Almost a year later, efforts to collect the levy from a total of 321 Branches and Posts, a levy that was supposed to help fund the Scottish HQ, by then in serious financial difficulties, evoked a response from only 109 of them, about one-third of the total.¹⁹⁵ Shortly after that, a consultation on the vital subject of amalgamation into a new body, produced only a few more responses, 126 in all,¹⁹⁶ so it is reasonable to conclude that, by that time, a majority of the branches and posts in Scotland existed in name only.¹⁹⁷

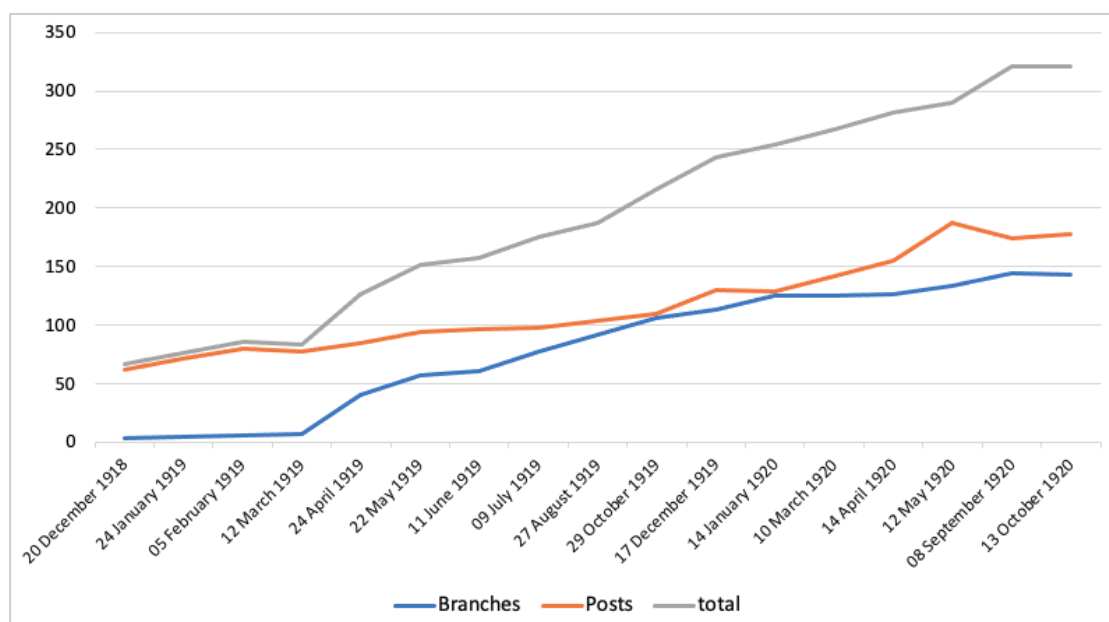


Figure 25: Comrades of the Great War in Scotland – growth of Branches and Posts, 1918–1920
(See appendix 2 for data sources and calculations)

The Comrades in Scotland also experienced continuing organisational problems. Its first Appeals Organiser, a key figure whose job was to raise funds from the public, was dismissed in February 1919, only a few months after the creation of the Scottish headquarters, for reasons that were not minuted beyond mention of his 'conduct'.¹⁹⁸ Periodically, there are references to Glasgow, which imply ongoing problems in that area, as well as some tension with the HQ in Edinburgh. In particular, a public appeal that took many months to organise

¹⁹⁴ SCMB, 29 October 1919, 90.

¹⁹⁵ SCMB, 8 September 1920, 160.

¹⁹⁶ SCMB, 24 November 1920, 174.

¹⁹⁷ While the situation in England and Wales may have been similar, no evidence has been found to shed light on it.

¹⁹⁸ SCMB, 5 February 1919, 34.

in the Glasgow area, and which the Scottish National Executive Committee hoped would give its finances a much needed boost, was eventually recorded as 'failed', though that minute was subsequently amended to 'had not met with the success anticipated'.¹⁹⁹ A further hint that all was not well with some branches occurs in a minute where the Chairman highlighted the fact that new bylaws, proposed by the London HQ, included one to give Divisions (national and regional) 'full powers to expel undesirable members from the Association'.²⁰⁰ What is perhaps most striking, though, is that from the time of the meeting in July 1920, where the Chairman confronted the committee with the dire state of their finances, almost no activity was recorded other than discussion of those financial problems, along with the growing prospect of amalgamation.

Together, the minutes of the meetings of the Comrades in Scotland and Ireland offer rare, detailed insights into their operation at regional and national levels, for no other minute-books, from England, Wales or the over-arching 'international' committee, are known to have survived. The picture that emerges from both sets of minutes is of organisations that lacked the managerial skills to survive falling membership and dwindling finances, exacerbated by tensions between major population centres, Belfast and Dublin in the case of Ireland and, to a lesser but still significant extent, Edinburgh and Glasgow in the case of Scotland. While some of the problems were particular to the political situation in the two countries, their financial and structural weaknesses may well have been typical of an organisation that grew rapidly, with unfounded expectations of future income, based on mass membership and public support.

Land-raiders, squatters, and affluent organ-grinders

While the veterans' organisations grappled with dwindling finances, falling numbers and inactive branches, some members were becoming all too active, in ways that did not suit the leadership. A major issue, particularly in Scotland, was the question of land for veterans, a principle that, as noted in chapter 1, went back to Roman times at least. In the

¹⁹⁹ SCMB, 14 July 1920, 152.

²⁰⁰ SCMB, 10 March 1920, 126.

context of the First World War, there was a strong belief amongst some veterans that, as Iain Robertson puts it, 'fighting for the land entitled an individual to hold a share in that land'; and indeed that the country had made a 'promise of land in return for war service'.²⁰¹ No contemporaneous written record of such promises survives but,²⁰² as Robertson points out, what mattered was that they 'appear to have believed that it had been made'.²⁰³ Ewen Cameron confirms that 'There was a widespread feeling that those who had volunteered in the 1914 to 1916 period had been, *implicitly*, at least "promised" land in return for their service' (emphasis added).²⁰⁴ Indeed, in his study of 'Military Recruiting in the Scottish Highlands' in the late eighteenth century, Andrew Mackillop found that 'The concept of land in return for military service was well understood by the population'.²⁰⁵ That belief among First World War veterans had been bolstered by the Sailors and Soldiers (Gifts for Land Settlement) Act 1916, which empowered the government to establish and administer 'colonies for soldiers'. Expectations were further raised by various rhetorical statements made by politicians later in the war, and in particular a prominent commitment in the Coalition Government's manifesto for the 1918 General Election, that it would require 'public authorities ... to acquire land ... for men who have served in the war, either

²⁰¹ Iain J. M. Robertson, *Landscapes of Protest in the Scottish Highlands after 1914: The Later Highland Land Wars* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), 129.

²⁰² Leah Leneman, *Fit for Heroes? Land Settlement in Scotland after World War I* (Aberdeen University Press, 1989), 20 note 1: 212, says only that 'this is mentioned again and again after the war' (emphasis added). Leneman's statement is referenced in turn by Peter Robert Chambers, 'For Want of Land' (PhD thesis, Aberdeen, 2013), 28, fn 135. Comments in FWW literature about 'the promises made on the recruiting platforms' rarely lead to a contemporaneous source, if referenced at all. Similarly Leneman, 205, asserts that 'Chapter 2 made clear that as early as 1915 legislation was being prepared to fulfil that pledge' (i.e. of land for war service), but her own Chapter 2, 20, says the motivation behind that legislation was 'no question of having to satisfy any kind of land hunger, but a desire to encourage a large rural population', because of the unfitness of urban recruits, and the country's need to 'produce as much of its own food as possible'.

²⁰³ Robertson, *Landscapes of Protest*, 128.

²⁰⁴ Ewen A. Cameron, 'Freshness, Freedom, and Peace? Land Settlement In Scotland After The Great War', *Northern Scotland*, 11.2 (2020): 168; Ewen A. Cameron and Iain J. M. Robertson, 'Fighting and Bleeding for the Land: the Great War and the Scottish Highlands', in *Scotland and the Great War*, ed. by Catriona M. M. Macdonald and Elaine W. McFarland (East Linton: Tuckwell, 1999), 93–94, concede that 'the promise does appear to have been made', but the sources are an assertion by Leneman, *Fit For Heroes*, 205, and recollections from later years, rather than any contemporaneous evidence.

²⁰⁵ Andrew Mackillop, 'Military Recruiting in the Scottish Highlands 1739–1815: the Political, Social and Economic Context' (PhD thesis, Glasgow, 1995), 166.

for ... allotments, or small holdings'.²⁰⁶ But a progress report three years after the 1916 Act showed that only seven estates had been acquired by the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries, and only a small (unspecified) number of ex-soldiers settled on them;²⁰⁷ far short of expectations. So, early in 1919, the Government published proposals for a further land settlement bill, proposals roundly criticised by the Federation for suggesting that little suitable land was available, and that smallholdings would only go to 'men who have had experience' and 'some capital', and so on.²⁰⁸ After several months of debate inside and outside Parliament, the Land Settlement (Facilities) Act 1919 was enacted 'to make further provision for the acquisition of land for ... small holdings, reclamation, and drainage ... and otherwise to facilitate land settlement' in England and Wales, followed by a similar Land Settlement (Scotland) Act 1919 a few months later.²⁰⁹ The latter did not only apply to ex-service men, but it did have a clause that gave them preferential treatment for a period of two years.²¹⁰

Almost immediately the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries started advertising in the Federation's *D.S.S. Bulletin*, declaring that under the new act 'Ex-Service Men who desire to settle on the land in their own native County may obtain a holding of not more than 50 acres in England or Wales' but still stipulating they must have 'the necessary agricultural experience' and some capital.²¹¹ However, the key word there is 'may' obtain a holding, for the Act granted no rights; it simply empowered County Councils to buy and rent out farms and smallholdings, and make loans for half the cost of stock, seeds, and so forth, while the entitlement only applied to the ex-service man's 'own native County'. Another advertisement from the same Board of Agriculture and Fisheries advertised a series of eleven 'Guides for Smallholders', including 'pig keeping', 'dairy farming', 'the smallholder's horse', 'soils and manures', and more.²¹² These advertisements became a regular feature in

²⁰⁶ 'The Coalition Manifesto', *The Times*, 22 November 1918, 9, sub-heading 'Land for Soldiers'.

²⁰⁷ 'Ex-Service Land Settlement', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, no. 11, 14 August 1919, 11.

²⁰⁸ 'Discharged Men and the Land', *The Bulletin*, no. 3, 10 April 1919, 1.

²⁰⁹ Leneman, *Fit for Heroes*, 23.

²¹⁰ Ewen A. Cameron, *Land for the People? The British Government and the Scottish Highlands, c.1880–1925* (East Lothian, 1996), 167.

²¹¹ 'Land Settlement in England and Wales under the County Councils', *The Bulletin*, no. 13, 28 August 1919, 11.

²¹² 'Notice to Ex-Service Men', *The Bulletin*, no. 13, 28 August 1919, 3.

The D.S.S. Bulletin from August 1919 through to March 1920, by which time the scheme appeared to be well underway, with monthly reports to Parliament, which were also usually summarised in its pages. By July 1920, it was reported that 6,642 ex-service men had been settled on land under the Acts, since 1 January, with an average holding of 15.1 acres,²¹³ although about another 30,000 were approved and awaiting land, or awaiting interview.²¹⁴ These numbers were, however, small in comparison to the millions demobilised, and the hundreds of thousands of veterans still out of work. A similar scheme was also progressing in Ireland, though the Irish Federation had to stipulate that because of the political situation there 'the resettlement of ex-Service men on isolated tracts of land would not be advisable [and] ... the men should be resettled in colonies' for mutual support and protection.²¹⁵ A few months later it reported gloomily that, while it believed some 40,000 Irish ex-British Army soldiers wanted to settle on the land, schemes had only been approved to accommodate 554 men, and they were only at the planning stage.²¹⁶

There was comparatively little unrest over the land settlement schemes in England and Wales. However, the situation was very different in the Scottish Highlands, as Ian Robertson, Ewen Cameron, and Leah Leneman have all examined in detail.²¹⁷ It is not proposed to set out the history of the Scottish 'land-raids' in the same depth here, but rather to focus on ex-servicemen's actions. Friction between crofters and landowners in the Highlands dates back to the infamous Clearances, and there were successive attempts to address this. They included in particular the Crofters Holdings (Scotland) Act, 1886, which established the land court known as the Crofters' Commission,²¹⁸ and the Small Landholders (Scotland) Act 1911.²¹⁹ Where these proved ineffective, men who wanted to establish new smallholdings or expand existing ones simply occupied the land concerned.

²¹³ 'Under Big Ben: Land Settlements', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, vol. 1, no. 36, 22 July 1920, 99.

²¹⁴ 'Under Big Ben: Land Settlements', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, vol. 1, no. 34, 24 June 1920, 75. Waiting figures are taken from this report, as they were not printed in issue 36, above.

²¹⁵ 'Special Memorandum to the Premier: Submitted by the Irish Delegates', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, vol. 1, no. 26, 4 March 1920, 8.

²¹⁶ 'The Irish Federation's Reply to the Prime Minister', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 34, 24 June 1920, 74.

²¹⁷ Robertson, *Landscapes of Protest*; Cameron, *Land for the People?*; Leneman, *Fit for Heroes*.

²¹⁸ Cameron, *Land for the People?*, ch.2, 41–61.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, ch.7, 145–65.

These land-raids pre-dated the war,²²⁰ but military service seems to have given a harder edge to such actions. For example, crofters on the island of Berneray, in the Outer Hebrides, had prior to the war conducted a long, peaceful and unsuccessful campaign to regain possession of the nearby Torogay Islands; but as Robertson concludes ‘War Service appears to have utterly changed their attitude and they now felt that ... “We shall not be any worse off in Prison than the Trenches of Flanders”.’²²¹ This seems to have been typical, with veterans who had been trained to fight, now unafraid of authority and willing to use force to claim what they believed they had earned by that service. Moreover, it was not only members of the Association who conducted land-raids, but also branches of the Comrades, ironically founded originally ‘by a group of Conservative M.P.s worried about possible subversion’.²²² While many of these incidents were not widely publicised, some did attract adverse coverage in the UK national press and were occasionally cited in Parliament.²²³ It is also worth noting that, while the principle of settling veterans on agricultural land had ancient roots, and the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries relentlessly advertised its programme in *The D.S.S. Bulletin* through 1919–20, its importance should not be over-stated, for only a tiny proportion of discharged sailors and soldiers ever benefited from these schemes. Several million men and women were demobilised, but across the whole of Great Britain only about 24,000 were settled on the land, against original estimates of 750,000.²²⁴

It was not just land-raids in Scotland that threatened to alienate public support for the Association, Federation and Comrades. In Southampton, for example, on Armistice Night 1920, a group of ex-service men took over several houses which, they claimed, had long stood empty. Following long and careful planning, Southampton Association members

²²⁰ Cameron, *Land for the People*, esp. 56, 63–67, 92, 93, 99, 110–12, 118.

²²¹ Robertson, *Landscapes of Protest*, 128.

²²² *Ibid.*, 136. Note that he refers to ‘The Association of Die-hard Soldiers and Sailors’, where the adjective should be ‘Discharged’ not ‘Die-hard’, a misprint that presumably arose from an erroneous or poorly-scanned newspaper cutting (no reference cited by Robertson).

²²³ For example, HL Deb 05 August 1920 vol 41 cc834–42, ‘Land Seizures in Scotland’; ‘Scottish Land Seizures: Ex-service Men’s Threat to Farmer’, *The Times*, 9 August 1920, 10.

²²⁴ Carol A. Lockwood, ‘From Soldier to Peasant? The Land Settlement Scheme in East Sussex, 1919–1939’, *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, vol. 30, no. 3 (Autumn, 1998), 444; Leneman, *Fit for Heroes*, 38, finds a total of just 2,331 ‘New Holdings’ in Scotland from 1919–27.

'commandeered' six homes and installed ten local families, publicising their actions, and undertaking to 'pay the proper rent and rates, and look after the property'.²²⁵ Five of the landlords involved, 'impressed no doubt by the sympathy of the Press and public for us', agreed to let the families stay as tenants for six months.²²⁶ However, the other landlord went to the High Court, where a judge who 'talked to us like a father' saw no option but to order the two families concerned to 'vacate the house in a fortnight in a clean condition' and awarded costs against the Association.²²⁷ It is significant that eviction was not immediate and that the local Mayor was reported to be 'now determined to push on the building of more houses'.²²⁸

Even the Officers' Association had to deal with damaging publicity around this time, with a spate of newspaper articles claiming that impoverished ex-officers playing the barrel-organ for money were actually making much more than if they had taken jobs that, it was said, were offered to them. It started in November 1920, with the *Daily Mail* reporting a case in Manchester where two ex-officers were charged with 'obstructing traffic ... by playing a barrel organ' while wearing 'black masks. People sympathised so much that £5 was given in two hours'.²²⁹ Most of the ex-officer organ-grinders wore masks as 'That alone sends up the receipts 50 per cent, and the spectacle of a neatly groomed man in an officer's tunic grinding banal music from a barrel-organ is certainly a poignant one'.²³⁰ Such cases prompted the Officers' Association to investigate, at first to offer assistance, but when job offers were refused because they could not 'offer them a job at which they can earn as much money',²³¹ they reported their suspicions to Scotland Yard. It investigated a number of men, two in particular who were found living in a hotel when not working the streets.²³² Their appearance in court was reported luridly in *The Star* of 10 January 1921 under the

²²⁵ 'Houses Commandeered by Ex-Service Men: What really happened at Southampton', *The Bayonet*, vol. 1, no. 4, December 1920, 8.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ 'Masked Barrel Organists', *Daily Mail*, 30 November 1920, 9.

²³⁰ 'Barrel-organ opulence: Ex-officers Said to be Earning £20 a Week: Imposing on Public Sympathy', *The Evening Telegraph* (Dundee), 12 January 1921, 10.

²³¹ 'Revelations in West-end', *The Star*, 10 January 1921. Publication name and date hand-written beside cutting in OA Press Cuttings, 135, LHMA.

²³² 'Not Deserving: Barrel-Organ Hoaxes by Ex-Officers', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 20 January 1921, 5.

headline 'Revelations in West-End' with sub-headings 'Handsome Income of Ex Officers', 'Credulous Women' and 'Masked "Victims" who used Taxicabs'.²³³ It was alleged in court that many ex-officers were 'earning as much as £20 a week', and this at a time when a good wage for a skilled man was £4 or £5 a week.²³⁴ Detectives who had followed one of the men, Edward Durrant, claimed to have seen

the ex-officer setting off in the morning in a taxicab to collect his organ. After having taken anything up to £4 in a couple of hours in the West-end, he will perhaps turn the organ over to a genuinely destitute man, hired at 5s. a day to take the instrument to and from the garage.²³⁵

Other reports claimed the two men had been seen to go 'into a public-house, and had ten whiskies and sodas before they undertook their day's work'.²³⁶ Major-General Ruggles-Brise, secretary of the OA, testified that whenever such cases came to their attention 'we have tried to find them employment' but that 'Some of them have told us that they could earn more with an organ, and have declined our help'.²³⁷ A 'staff officer' of the OA, probably Ruggles-Brise, was quoted in another newspaper as admitting 'I do not know a genuine case of an ex-officer who is in such a position that he must resort to a barrel-organ or starve'.²³⁸ Durrant was duly sentenced to one month in prison for begging and obstruction.²³⁹ Yet more such accounts followed. A few days later the *Daily Mail*, which seemed, then as now, to favour such stories, raised the estimate of earnings to 'as much as £10 a day', and even quoted one ex-officer as bragging 'I don't want your job ... I am earning more than £100 a week at this game'.²⁴⁰ Given that Haig and others had for two years been portraying many ex-officers as so impoverished that they did indeed have to resort to begging or starve, this will not have helped the OA's public fund-raising. But its

²³³ 'Revelations in West-end'.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ 'Barrel-organ Fortunes', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 20 January 1921, 6.

²³⁷ '£100 a week from Barrel Organ: Ex-officers who prefer Charity to Work', *Daily Mail*, 11 January 1921, 5.

²³⁸ 'Revelations in West-end'.

²³⁹ 'Ex-officer and a Barrel-organ: £8 a week in the West End', *Daily Mail*, 10 January 1921, 10.

²⁴⁰ '£100 a week from Barrel Organ'.

role in investigating and condemning such behaviour, rather than excusing it, may have limited any reputational damage.²⁴¹

Unity at last, and some disunity

All these problems simply added to the pressure on the four organisations to complete the amalgamation, and further impetus came from the deteriorating economy from what Wootton characterises as ‘the peak of the boom in autumn 1920’.²⁴² Suffice to say here that unemployment exceeded 500,000 in November 1920, and almost doubled over the next two months, and those figures were undoubtedly under-estimates, when one takes into account short-time working, the unregistered unemployed, and so forth.²⁴³ With ex-service men accounting for half or more of them, increasing the pressure on the groups’ relief funds, and employment and other services, the situation was becoming increasingly urgent.²⁴⁴

What might have undermined support for amalgamation, or even derailed it completely at this late stage, was a series of reports in the left-wing *Daily Herald*, which had acquired a cache of ‘Documents of a confidential nature’ from the Officers’ Association. These claimed to ‘make it plain that the so-called “British Legion” of Ex-Service Men is to be controlled and “run” by the Ex-Officers’ Association’.²⁴⁵ They named Haig, quoting his reported concern at “the danger of the revolutionary ideas” which, he says, are prevalent among the societies, and the necessity for getting the men back “under their old leaders””.²⁴⁶ This quotation came from a speech to the Grand Council of the OA on 10 November 1920, at which Haig believed his remarks would not be made public.²⁴⁷ There was more such material in the *Herald* article, also extracted from Haig's private speeches within the OA, which must have concerned those in the Association and the Federation who had always been suspicious of

²⁴¹ No information has been found to assess the impact of these stories on public support.

²⁴² Wootton, *Official History*, 30.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁴⁵ ‘Earl Haig and Ex-Servicemen: Revelations of Secret Documents of Ex-Officers’ Association’, *Daily Herald*, 14 January 1921, 1.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

ex-officers taking control of their organisations. The following day the *Herald* printed more revelations, quoting documents that compared the proposed British Legion with the American Legion, and went on to list 'the reactionary and anti-social programme and practice of the latter body'.²⁴⁸ A third and final article, which was, like the first two, spread across two columns on the front page, revealed secret discussions between Lord Byng and the OA about its access to a share of the United Services Fund. It also made reference to 'the little arrangement made between the Officers' Association and the Ministry of Labour', whereby a representative of the former would be seconded to the latter, a useful privilege not accorded to the much more numerous rank and file veterans.²⁴⁹ Yet, there is no evidence that this had much impact. Probably it was too late in the process, the organisations were too far along the road to amalgamation; and besides, those in the Association and the Federation who might have been most concerned about the *Herald's* revelations may well have suspected both Haig and the OA of harbouring such attitudes anyway, and discounted them.²⁵⁰

Indeed, all the preparatory work had been done so well by the time around 850 delegates from all four groups met for a Unity Conference on Saturday and Sunday 14–15 May 1921, at the Queens Hall, London, that unification was assured.²⁵¹ It was confirmed that the new body would be called the British Legion, and that title had already been used publicly at some veterans' events for several months at least.²⁵² The delegates included 550 from the Comrades, 240 from the Federation, with just fifty representing the Association, and seventeen the Officers' Association.²⁵³ While they claimed a total membership of 'over one million ex-Officers and men' according to one report,²⁵⁴ and an 'expected ... membership

²⁴⁸ 'Ex-Officers and Ex-Servicemen: More Revelations of Amazing Financial Proposals', *Daily Herald*, 15 January 1921, 1.

²⁴⁹ 'The British Legion and Byng Millions: Further Revelations from Secrets of Ex-Officers' Association', *The Daily Herald*, 17 January 1921, 1.

²⁵⁰ Nothing has been found in their records to clarify this point.

²⁵¹ 'British Legion. Great Conference of Ex-Fighting Men. United Organization', *The Western Morning News* (Plymouth), 17 May 1921, 2. This was the most detailed newspaper report of the conference.

²⁵² 'Warriors Day: Our Debt to the Warriors', *The Times*, 19 January 1921, 10, Haig quoted as saying 'Many people did not know what the British Legion ... was now trying to do'.

²⁵³ 'British Legion', *Western Morning News*, 17 May 1921, 2.

²⁵⁴ 'The British Legion. Ex-Service Amalgamation', *The Evening News* (Portsmouth), 17 May 1921, 2.

approaching 3,000,000' in other reports,²⁵⁵ these were wild exaggerations. By contrast, Wootton found that the Legion's paid-up membership numbered just 18,000 at the end of 1921 and, given that the Comrades, the Federation and the Association had all, as detailed above, been suffering a prolonged decline in numbers and finance, his assessment appears much more plausible, even allowing for additional members exempted from fees through sickness, old age, and so on.²⁵⁶ On the Sunday morning, a delegation attended the Cenotaph in Whitehall, already by then the symbol of remembrance of their fallen comrades, and in a simple ceremony, sealed their agreement to amalgamate,²⁵⁷ before marching on to the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey.²⁵⁸ On their return, the conference resumed with consideration of the Constitution, which was proposed, symbolically perhaps, by a 'ranker', one Arthur Jackson, and seconded by the retired general, Sir Frederick Maurice, and approved with 'a burst of enthusiasm'.²⁵⁹ Delegates then elected the Legion's first Patron, the Prince of Wales, and its first national officers: Earl Haig as President, the Federation's Thomas Lister as Chairman, Colonel George Crosfield (from the Comrades) as Vice-Chairman, and Major Brunel Cohen MP (also the Comrades) as Treasurer.²⁶⁰ The role of President would be largely symbolic, though Haig would play 'a major role in popularising the Legion' over his remaining years.²⁶¹ One name conspicuous by its absence from that list was Wilfrid Ashley, who had played such a major role in the Comrades in its first two years, had sabotaged the Empire Services League, and resisted amalgamation, refused to accept it even now and resigned from the Grand Council.²⁶² The absence of anyone from the Association in the key offices is also notable, and reflects its smaller size and influence compared to the Comrades and the Federation. The Association *was*, however, represented on the new National Executive Committee.²⁶³ Yet, for all the excitement and apparent success of that weekend's events, it soon became

²⁵⁵ 'British Legion, *Western Morning News*, 17 May 1921, 2; '2,000,000 Ex-Service Men', *The Times*, 16 May 1921, 6, reported a 'computed ... membership of between two and three millions'.

²⁵⁶ Wootton, *Official History*, 304.

²⁵⁷ Harding, *Keeping Faith*, 8.

²⁵⁸ 'British Legion', *Western Morning News*, 17 May 1921, 2.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁶¹ Barr, 'Service Not Self', 40.

²⁶² *Comrades Journal*, vol. III, May, 1921, 6–7, quoted in Ward, 'British Veterans' Organizations', 291 (source document no longer available).

²⁶³ Wootton, *Official History*, 29.

clear that the new body was not going to be as unified as the Unity Conference had made it appear.

In Ireland, the Cork branch of the Federation 'continued to function under adverse conditions' as the War of Independence intensified, and it even managed to assemble '1,500 members for a memorial mass on St. Patrick's Day in March 1921',²⁶⁴ while also raising funds for a new meeting hall in the city. But its political influence was negligible, and it 'watched from the sidelines as the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed' in December 1921, leading to the creation of the Irish Free State the following year, with Northern Ireland remaining in the United Kingdom.²⁶⁵ Mirroring developments in the rest of the UK, the Federation had agreed to amalgamate with the Comrades to create the similar sounding, but quite separate, Legion of Irish Ex-servicemen, although even that was not a full merger, for the Cork Federation refused to be part of it. It re-named itself the Cork Independent Ex-servicemen's Club and before long, predictably, a Cork branch of the new Legion of Irish Ex-servicemen was established in opposition to the independent 'Club'.²⁶⁶ Partition in 1921, combined with the Civil War in the south, meant that all-Ireland meetings became impractical, and besides that there were continuing differences between north and south over allegiance to the British state, epitomised by the desire of the Comrades in both parts of the country to be part of 'the British Legion', a name that Federation members in the south adamantly opposed, hence the eventual compromise as 'the Legion of Irish Ex-servicemen'. The N.I. HQ actually started using the title 'British Legion, North Irish Headquarters' as early as the middle of June 1921,²⁶⁷ weeks before the formal creation of the British Legion on 1 July, and it appears this was a deliberate move to pre-empt discussions in the Provisional Unity Committee for Ireland, where other titles were to be considered.²⁶⁸ It was not a move supported by the British Legion in London, which wrote to the N.I. HQ in September that year to indicate that it was still not recognised as the

²⁶⁴ Borgonovo, 'Revolution, Ex-Servicemen and the Cork Branch', 97.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid. Again this paragraph is a summary of his more detailed account.

²⁶⁷ NICMB, 14 June 1921.

²⁶⁸ NICMB, 2 September 1921, item 5, refers to 'the last meeting of the Provisional Unity Committee ... characterised as a "bear garden"', because of 'the attitude of the National Federation of D. & D. S. & S.'

headquarters of a separate area.²⁶⁹ It was well into the following year, 1922, before the situation was resolved, with the North Irish agreeing to become an independent British Legion, along the lines of Scotland (below) with a very similar Constitution, a move that, by that time, simply reflected the political reality of a divided Ireland.²⁷⁰ Three years later, the Legion of Irish Ex-servicemen in the south did affiliate to the British Legion, but without changing its name, while in Cork the Legion and the Club operated in parallel for another generation in reasonable harmony, often participating in the same public events.²⁷¹

Unification in Wales, where branches of the Federation and the Comrades were already amalgamated into the Welsh Legion, was much more straightforward; just a matter of bringing in the few Association branches, and affiliating to the British Legion. Scotland was another matter. The Federation's Scottish branches were very protective of their independence, as were those of the Association and the Comrades. As moves towards amalgamation gathered pace during 1920, the Scottish branches of all three organisations were also discussing amalgamation, in parallel with, rather than as part of, their English counterparts. The leadership of the Federation, that is to say the international committee chaired by Lister, assumed its Scottish branches would come into the unified British Legion. Instead, on 18 June 1921, just a couple of weeks before formal unification, they announced the creation of the separate 'British Legion (Scotland)',²⁷² a move that created ill-feeling for over a decade afterwards.²⁷³ The feelings of James Hogge, a long-time supporter of Home Rule for Scotland, are not recorded, but can be readily imagined.

That just left the Officers' Association, which by this time had two functions, primarily as a benevolent organisation dispensing grants to needy ex-officers, while also accepting individual supporters as 'subscribers'. So, because nearly all its funds had been raised specifically for ex-officers,²⁷⁴ it became the Officers' Benevolent Department of the British Legion, as far as its charitable activities were concerned, and only in England and Wales,

²⁶⁹ NICMB, 21 September 1921, item 5.

²⁷⁰ NICMB, 11 April 1922, 2.

²⁷¹ Borgonovo, 'Revolution, Ex-Servicemen and the Cork Branch', 98.

²⁷² Harding, *Keeping Faith*, 36.

²⁷³ Beyond the period of this thesis. See Harding, *Keeping Faith*, 36.

²⁷⁴ Wootton, *Official History*, 33.

while remaining wholly independent of the British Legion (Scotland).²⁷⁵ Ex-officers who had been subscribers were now encouraged to join the Legion on the same basis as other ranks.²⁷⁶ However, it too pre-empted the foundation of the British Legion, by a single day, when it became separately 'incorporated under Royal Charter as the Officers' Association' on 30 June 1921.²⁷⁷ It maintained that separate identity for many years, a strange move given the long-stated commitment of its founder, Haig, to a single organisation for all ex-service personnel, regardless of rank.

In summary then, the British Legion, covering England and Wales, officially came into being on 1 July 1921, alongside the British Legion (Scotland), already two weeks old, and the semi-autonomous Officers' Association, while the British Legion (North Irish HQ), as detailed above, was not recognised until the following year. Its creation came at a low point in overall membership, so there must have been doubts about whether amalgamation had come too late, despite the optimism of the May Conference and the formal launch in July. The finances of the four organisations were so precarious by that time that only the Comrades, and more particularly the Officers' Association, could hand over 'substantial sums' to the new Legion.²⁷⁸ Moreover, unification was, as Graham Wootton describes it, 'only a unification of "the top layer"... the four national headquarters and leaderships', and even that was 'to begin with, only formal'.²⁷⁹ Staff and delegates continued to identify more with their old organisations than the new one, although in time a 'genuine unity' emerged.²⁸⁰ It took longer still to establish unity at local level, where 'rivalries between ex-service organisations could hardly be forgotten overnight'.²⁸¹ Again

²⁷⁵ Niall Barr, "'The Most Happy and Cordial Relations Continue to Exist": The Scottish Ex-Service Movement in the Inter-War Years', *War & Society* 29, no. 1, May 2010, 52.

²⁷⁶ Haig to the Trustees of the Earl Haig Trust, 31 January 1927, with appended 'Note for ex-officers who are NOT already members of the British Legion', and 'The Officers' Association: Charter and Rules', Officers Association (un-catalogued collection), LHMA. It is unclear, from the records, whether Haig supported this move.

²⁷⁷ Wootton, *Official History*, 23.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 34. The OA was able to give the Legion some £10,000, which was derived from subscription fees, rather than public appeals (the latter being restricted to ex-officers alone). No figures have been found for the finances of the Association and the Federation, but the fact they were unable to contribute any substantial sums upon amalgamation speaks for itself.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 34–35.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 34–35.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

Lister proved the key figure, with the Legion's first General Secretary, Colonel E. C. Heath, calling him 'the man who so skilfully piloted the Legion through its early and often stormy days ... no one else could have come near to doing it ... Many men could have killed the Legion in those early days; one man made it'.²⁸² Colonel George Crosfield later recalled that 'before I met Lister I had been taught to look upon him as a giant who went around waving a red flag', an interesting insight into some Comrades' view of the Federation; but he changed his mind when he saw his 'remarkable gifts as a Chairman' during the unity negotiations, and wondered 'who else in the movement could have controlled and got the business through!'²⁸³ Overall, unification proved a success, the numbers of both members and branches rising steadily over the next few years, to reach more than 300,000 members in over 3,500 branches within the decade.²⁸⁴ That process is beyond the scope of this study, and is well covered by Wootton, Barr, Harding and Kimball.

In portraying Thomas Lister (right) as the key figure in the amalgamation process and the founding of the British Legion, it is important to consider Earl Haig's role as well. John Terraine describes him as 'the Founder of the British Legion' and credits him with 'Having brought the British Legion into being',²⁸⁵ while Gerard De Groot concludes that 'The British Legion ... owed its existence above all to Haig'.²⁸⁶ Duff Cooper opined that 'without Haig's efforts this great work could not have been accomplished' (with no mention at all of Lister).²⁸⁷ They are not alone among Haig biographers in reaching such conclusions, but they do so with little reference



Figure 26: Thomas Lister. Credit: ODNB/RBL Birkenhead (unknown photographer).

²⁸² Quoted in Wootton, *Official History*, 34–35.

²⁸³ Crosfield, 'Silver Jubilee Memories', 33.

²⁸⁴ Kimball, 'The Ex-Service Movement', 123.

²⁸⁵ John Terraine, *Douglas Haig: the Educated Soldier* (London: 1963), 483, 485.

²⁸⁶ De Groot, *Douglas Haig*, 403.

²⁸⁷ Duff Cooper, *Haig: the Second Volume* (London, 1936), 424.

to the predecessor groups and none at all to Lister who, as has been demonstrated here, played a role that was at least as important as, and arguably more so, than that of Haig. It is worth noting that, at the time of his death in 1966, Lister was described in the national and local press as the 'co-founder of the British Legion',²⁸⁸ yet this seems to have escaped the notice of some prominent Haig biographers. Meanwhile, Denis Winter, while also overlooking Lister's role, is sceptical of Haig as 'the crucial factor' in the amalgamation, arguing 'It is a pleasing picture. It does Haig proud. And yet his activities are capable of a very different interpretation'. He points out that 'his involvement with war pensions was ... from the start ... related only to officers';²⁸⁹ a conclusion supported above. Moreover, Colonel John Boraston, who, as Haig's private secretary in 1919, was well placed to know, asserted that he 'formed the Officers' Association with the object of keeping some control over the officers of his old Army, and through their influence ... over the great mass of demobilized men'.²⁹⁰ He feared that 'with the habits of the war not yet shaken off' they might turn 'inevitably to mischief which might end in civil commotion or worse'.²⁹¹ Boraston's assessment was very much in accord with the *Daily Herald's* 'Revelations of Secret Documents of Ex-Officers' Association', analysed above. In short, when considering all the evidence presented here, it is asserted that it was Thomas Lister who played the most important role in bringing about amalgamation, and effectively creating the British Legion, though Earl Haig, whatever his motives, certainly made a major contribution as well, and deserves credit as one of the founders. His public profile, name recognition, and his following among veterans who had hailed him as their 'champion' after his Select Committee appearance in 1919, undoubtedly encouraged unification and played a vital role in popularising the Legion in its early years.²⁹²

²⁸⁸ For example, 'Ex-Corporal became Co-Founder of the British Legion', *Liverpool Echo*, 14 March 1966, 9.

²⁸⁹ Denis Winter, *Haig's Command: A Reassessment* (London, 1992), 331.

²⁹⁰ Lieut.-Col. J. H. Boraston, 'A Soldier's Memoir', *The Yorkshire Post*, 31 January 1928, 11.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² See, for example, Barr, 'Service Not Self', 40–41.

Conclusions

While the differences between the Association, the Federation, and the Comrades had narrowed considerably during 1919, there was nothing inevitable about amalgamation at that time. On the contrary, talks between the Association and the Comrades had broken down rather acrimoniously, while the Federation confidently pressed on with its political activities, aimed particularly at presenting an unanswerable case to the Prime Minister himself. Its confidence was unfounded, for when it finally got its long-delayed meeting, in February 1920, Lloyd George agreed with most of what it said, but responded that the country could not afford to do what was asked. While the Federation attempted for a while to keep up the political pressure, it was clear it could get little more out of the Government. Around the same time, the high profile and very successful launch of the Officers' Association showed the potential for public fund-raising, at the same time scuppering the Comrades' plan for a similar major appeal. Within months, the Federation began to look more favourably at the possibility of amalgamation, adopting it at the annual conference and initiating a meeting with the Association, the Comrades, the NUX and the Officers' Association. There is strong evidence that all except the OA were now suffering from dwindling membership and funds, for which the only realistic answer was amalgamation into a single body, which might also be more effective politically. Another factor favouring unification was that it had already been done successfully between the Federation and the Comrades in Wales, as the Welsh Legion of Ex-Service Men.

That meeting of the veterans' organisations, called by the Federation, seems to have been the turning-point, with Lister skilfully chairing the various negotiations, and leading his members to endorse amalgamation overwhelmingly at their own Special Conference, which had elements of a victory weekend about it. Once the Federation had chosen this path, there was nothing to stop the Comrades and the Association joining it, as both had long favoured amalgamation, provided the new body would be non-party-political, and open to all ranks and both sexes. It is not surprising that the socialist NUX could not accept the bar on party politics, but it was never very significant and was no great loss to the others. The Officers' Association of course, under Haig as founder and President, was wholly committed

to unification, something he had long called for. If the constituent bodies had any doubts about the direction they were heading, negative publicity around the activities of some of their branches, including land-raids in Scotland, house takeovers in the south of England, and the high earnings of supposedly poverty-stricken ex-officers on the streets, was an additional incentive to come together as soon as possible. They also had to cope with a national economy in recession, and rapidly rising unemployment among veterans from the autumn of 1920 onwards. While Haig's role in pressing for a united body since the Armistice, and in founding the OA, was significant, it has often been over-stated, for in his diary and speeches he was primarily concerned with ex-officers, particularly disabled ones, not all ranks. Rather, it is Thomas Lister who stands out as the most important figure in persuading the four groups to work together, and working towards making unity a reality. He was invariably chosen to chair their joint meetings because of his skill at finding acceptable compromises between divergent views, while marginalising those, like Ernest Thurtle in his own organisation, who opposed unification.

While 1 July 1921 was the official date of the foundation of the British Legion, it was also the end of a seven-year journey that had begun not in April 1917 with the creation of the Federation, nor in September 1916, when the Blackburn Association was founded, but in August 1914. That was when trades councils started to take an interest in the plight of wives and other dependants impoverished by the departure of their wage-earners, the men who were volunteering in large numbers for the British Army and the Royal Navy. The same month, James Myles Hogge MP also began what became a personal crusade in support of the same people, and he and the trades councils campaigned in parallel until their efforts led to the foundation of the Federation and the Association respectively. Those two organisations became progressively independent of their founders, and their agitations prompted MPs and senior military figures to form the Comrades in 1917. That was the start of four years of confrontation, as much with each other as with the British Government, only turning into cooperation when lack of political progress, falling membership and financial problems made amalgamation the only realistic option if ex-service men and women were to be effectively represented and supported for many years

to come. It was a decision that would prove to be a good one, and the foundation for a successful and growing united body: the British Legion.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

The most important single finding from this study, and the most significant contribution to the historiography, is that neither the Blackburn (later 'National') Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers, nor the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers, simply emerged in late 1916 and early 1917. Rather, they were the product of more than two years of relentless campaigning by their founders, trades councils and James Hogge respectively, as each realised that separate organisations were necessary to further their efforts to achieve better support from the British state, for both the dependants of serving men and women, and for the veterans when they were discharged or demobilised.

These campaigns ran in parallel from the first weeks of the war. Trades councils had been largely united before August 1914 in opposing any involvement in a 'European War', believing strongly in the solidarity of the international working class, and in the general strike as a means of preventing war. They were riven with dissent after war was declared, with some supporting recruiting campaigns, while others refused to get involved; but they were united when it came to helping the families of those who had enlisted, regardless of whether they were connected with any trades council or member union. They did this because of their historical constitutional object of 'the advancement and protection of the rights of Labour, as also the well-being of the Working Class generally',¹ and this was a duty they took seriously. They provided practical assistance in the form of advice and sometimes financial help, but their main contribution was to pass resolutions criticising aspects of government support, and to send these to the Prime Minister, relevant Cabinet ministers, their MPs, key figures in other political parties, the press, and anyone else who might be influential in ameliorating the problems. This was anything but the futile exercise that it might appear today, for in an age when there were few indicators of public opinion other than the press, MPs took note of these resolutions and often cited them in debate. Trades councils were very well organised, making use of the highly efficient postal service to rapidly circulate resolutions to other councils across the UK, resulting in hundreds of

¹ See chapter 2.

copies of a resolution arriving on ministers' and MPs' desks if it was widely supported. It is significant that the first Association was set up in Blackburn, one of many towns across north-west England where the diseased and disabled survivors of the Somme offensive returned in the autumn of 1916, to gather on street corners in silent witness to their plight.

James Hogge's efforts also had historical roots, for long before 1914 he had become a committed social reformer, rooted in his religious faith, well informed about the issues, with a strong work ethic, and consistently praised by the influential *Edinburgh Evening News*. His initial contribution to the war effort was to take a characteristically energetic role in recruiting meetings in and around his home city; but he also, very quickly, became concerned at the lack of official support for many of the wives and families left behind. His response was to raise the matter repeatedly in Parliament, in the press and in public meetings, emphasising both the country's obligation to look after these dependants and the damaging effect on recruitment when allowances were inadequate, delayed or denied. Certainly, as described in previous accounts, the 'Review of Exceptions' Act was an important factor in the formation of the Federation, but it is very unlikely that Hogge would have taken that step had he not previously, for more than two years, been devoting all his energies to the problems of service dependants and veterans. Indeed, he had already, prior to the furore over that Act, set up his Naval and Military War Pensions and Welfare League, which a few months later became the Federation, demonstrating that he felt forming a national organisation was the necessary next step.

Charles Kimball is the only previous writer to have closely analysed the formation of the Federation, but in doing so he created a sequence of events that is at odds with the evidence. He asserted that a 'Federation of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers', founded in Liverpool, was the origin of the National Federation, and he credited Hogge only with founding the Naval and Military War Pensions and Welfare League. That is incorrect, and the actual sequence of events, with the National Federation founded in London in April 1917 by Hogge, Pringle, and Rumsey, is set out in chapter 3 with a high degree of confidence. Also incorrect is Ward's assertion that the Federation gave up electoral politics after its failure to win any parliamentary seats in December 1918, and decided instead to

become a campaigning group. That is wrong on both counts, for it had begun as a pressure group, while also, as demonstrated above, continuing its involvement in electoral politics, developing major General Programmes, winning local elections, and stating its intention to achieve representation in Parliament. These were activities that only ended as part of amalgamation. This study has similarly questioned the assumption, by Wootton in particular, that the Association and the Federation excluded officers, other than those risen from the ranks, from full membership because of an 'anti-officer' attitude. It is argued here that it was more a reflection of the society in which they operated, strongly divided by class, and of a desire to run their own affairs and not be taken over by the middle and upper classes.

The creation of the Association and the Federation has been identified by Wootton, and those who have followed him, as prompting the establishment of the Comrades. That is not disputed here. However, the alternative account promoted in some newspapers, that Norton Griffiths came up with the idea two years earlier during the Battle of Loos, seems implausible. That story is regarded here as probably an origin myth, and an attempt to forestall criticism that the Comrades was set up in opposition to the Association and the Federation, an attempt that did little to convince the members of those organisations. Wootton deduced that the Comrades was instigated by Lord Derby, though neither his book nor his PhD thesis cites convincing evidence, and again others have drawn largely on his work. Evidence from the archives of Wilfrid Ashley and Lord Davies of Llandinam, has provided this definitive evidence, confirming not only that Derby was centrally involved in the creation of the Comrades, but also that he took steps to avoid his name being linked with the organisation, even to the extent of threatening to disown fund-raising letters that used his name without his knowledge.

Stephen Ward made much of what he argued was surveillance of ex-service organisations by British intelligence, headed in particular by Basil Thomson from 1917 onwards, but this is not supported by a closer reading of the source material. It is true that Thomson's regular reports to the War Cabinet made occasional reference to the Association, the Federation

and the NUX, but not in particularly alarming language. Where he did raise concerns about revolutionary activity, they were related to groups such as the Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Union, which was not involved with the main ex-service organisations. Even where more radical opinions from other (non-veteran) groups were reported back by his informants, Thomson seems to have regarded them with considerable scepticism; for example dismissing talk of 'arms and bombs being secretly stored' as 'no cause for alarm ... for such talk is the stock in trade of these extremists when they get together'.² Nor does Ward's claim that 'the Government feared and misinterpreted many actions taken by ex-servicemen' stand up to scrutiny. Indeed, the War Cabinet seems to have been rather unconcerned. For example, when Lloyd George reported rumours of a 'highly-organised labour movement, with seditious tendencies' and a danger of 'genuine and legitimate grievances ... being exploited by violent anarchists', the Cabinet merely resolved to 'endeavour to remove the grievances without delay, in order, as far as possible, to forestall trouble'.³ Ward's somewhat contradictory conclusion that veterans' groups were conspicuously non-revolutionary, and largely favoured pursuing the war to victory over Germany, is in much better accordance with the records.

General Sir Ian Hamilton's efforts, at the behest of the War Office, to create an Empire Services League, as both a vehicle to distribute the surplus canteen funds, and as a way to overcome the rivalry between the Association, the Federation, and the Comrades, and bring together a huge range of service and veteran organisations across the British Empire, have been unfairly dismissed previously. Once again Wootton set the pattern, with a brief account that under-played the scale of Hamilton's work, and an incorrect conclusion that the Association and the Federation rejected his scheme and thus sunk it. On the contrary, both fully supported it, provided it was genuinely democratic in character and free of Government control; stipulations that Hamilton, and his loyal colleagues Jellicorse and Clifford, completely understood and endorsed as essential. Instead, when the scheme went to Churchill, accompanied by a speech written for him to announce it to the public, he referred it instead to a new committee under the out-of-touch chairmanship of Viscount

² See chapter 5.

³ 'Labour Grievances and Seditious', WC 115, 6 April 1917, item 9, TNA, CAB 23/2/33. Discussed in more detail in chapter 4.

Peel, probably at the prompting of Ashley, who felt the Comrades should control the canteen funds. Together they changed the proposed constitution, watering down the democratic aspects and restoring a measure of government control so that, unsurprisingly, the Federation denounced it and walked away. Hamilton, as stated in later correspondence, believed that the scheme that eventually succeeded in bringing together the three main organisations, namely the United Services Fund, did so precisely because the War Office and General Byng learned from the stillbirth of the Empire Services League, and made sure that the USF would be both democratic and free of government control. Hamilton's belief was certainly supported by Byng's own statements and actions.

Another significant conclusion from this study is that Earl Haig's role in bringing about amalgamation and the founding of the British Legion has been somewhat over-rated, particularly by some of his biographers. That is not to say he did not play an important role in refusing a title until disabled ex-officers were better provided for, rejecting a leading role in any one ex-service organisation until they amalgamated, providing devastating testimony to the Select Committee on Pensions in the middle of 1919, establishing the Officers' Association at the beginning of 1920, and agreeing to become a figurehead, a very active one, for the British Legion. However, important as those steps were, it has been shown here that his greatest concern, as evidenced by his diary, letters to his wife, and testimony to the Select Committee, was for ex-officers. It is argued here that the single most important figure was Thomas (later Sir Frederick) Lister, Chairman of the Federation, who realised that lobbying by a political organisation did not offer much hope of success after the deputation to the Prime Minister in February 1920. Lister brought his own organisation round to the principle of amalgamation, and his negotiating skills meant that he was given the lead in the conferences and meetings that progressed amalgamation to its eventual fruition. He became the Legion's first Chairman, and he held the new organisation together in a way that 'no one else could have come near to doing'.⁴ It must also be recognised, however, that while not wanting to suggest that unity was in any way inevitable, both men were aided in their support for amalgamation by the declining membership and finances of the three main organisations. The difficulties faced by the Comrades, for example, are

⁴ Colonel George Crosfield, quoted in Wootton, *Official History*, 34.

evidenced here through the minute-books and other records in the Scottish and North Irish archives of the British Legion. Other factors that contributed to the organisations coming together included the well of public support revealed by the Officers' Association's successful fund-raising, the wider context of the economic recession in 1920–21, and the pressures brought about by the accompanying rise in unemployed veterans.

Another new addition to the historiography is the discovery of the Welsh Legion of Ex-Servicemen, which was formed by the amalgamation of Welsh branches of the Federation and the Comrades. This is significant both because it happened some eighteen months before unification of the Association, the Federation and the Comrades as the British Legion, and because its title 'the Welsh Legion' long pre-dated the similar title adopted by the UK body. While few records have been found of the Welsh Legion to date, it is an area that may deserve further research, and this was not the only development of significance outside England, which has been the almost exclusive focus of previous accounts. There were important developments in Scotland, where the third branch of the Association was established in Dundee, where members of both the Federation and the Comrades took part in land-raids that attracted national attention, and where their branches asserted their independence to the extent that they pre-empted the official launch of the British Legion by forming their own British Legion (Scotland) two weeks earlier, to the lasting annoyance of the UK leadership. Ireland was quite a different matter, due to the very uneasy political situation. What is significant here is the extent to which Irish men and women, who had served in the British armed forces, suffered because of the post-war activities of the British state in Ireland, particularly the behaviour of the Black and Tans. They felt abandoned by the British Government, and the optimism that at times appeared in the Federation's *Bulletin* during 1919 - for example claiming that 'the ex-service men in Ireland know no border-line in the Federation' - dissipated during the following year.⁵ By the time the British Legion was formed on 1 July 1921, Irish veterans were as divided as Ireland itself, with the organisation in the south adopting the name 'Legion of Irish Ex-servicemen', while that in the north demanded the title 'British Legion (North Irish HQ)'; a title that was resisted for some months by the London HQ, reluctant to endorse partition of its areas.

⁵ 'Irish News', *The D.S.S. Bulletin*, no. 16, 9 October 1919, 10.

Overall, this thesis has shed light on an important stage in the evolution of what is now known as the Military Covenant, a recent phrase that codifies what is argued to be the obligation of civilised society to properly reward those who take up arms on its behalf. This entails supporting their dependants while they serve and the men and women themselves after they are discharged. Examples of this obligation can be traced back to sixth-century BCE Athens, although it is also one which the British Government and military authorities had for centuries resisted putting into statute, other than for short periods. Thus, by the outbreak of the First World War, only a small number of soldiers' wives, and no sailors' wives, were entitled to separation allowances, while war pensions for disabled veterans, widows, and other dependants were of meagre amounts and often refused. There was no appeal against refusal, or the sums awarded, as they were a matter of 'Royal Bounty' and dispensed at the discretion and under the supervision of the Royal Hospitals. Veterans, dependants, widows and orphans who were not adequately supported by that system, or not covered at all, had recourse only to charities such as the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association and the Royal Patriotic Fund, or to the Poor Laws. Successive governments, strongly supported by most MPs, had long welcomed this arrangement, preferring charities to shoulder society's obligation, rather than fund it from taxation; indeed they had established the Royal Patriotic Fund, to collect and disburse public donations, at no cost to the Treasury. The First World War changed that system considerably, with separation allowances extended to all soldiers' and sailors' wives; much improved rates of pensions and allowances, which were gradually put onto a statutory basis; pensions for disease attributable to military or naval service, not just for wounds acquired in action; an independent appeals tribunal; assistance with re-training; a prolonged 'Out of Work donation' for veterans who struggled to find employment post-war; land grants and assistance to farm the land; and more. Perhaps the only significant failure was that anyone who applied for a war pension due to disease attributable to their service had to prove that was the case, rather than the onus being on the state to prove it was not, a position that it would take another World War to reverse. What is most important to recognise is that almost all these improvements were the direct result, wholly or at least in large part, of the activities of the major ex-service organisations, or of the trades councils, MPs, and many

others who campaigned on the issues before these groups were founded, and continued to do so alongside the new bodies.

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Appendix 1: Archives lost and found

This thesis is founded on archival sources, including several that were not consulted in any previous studies of these organisations. However, several other important collections, referenced previously, could no longer be found for this study.

For details of the Accession Numbers, and other reference details, please see the bibliography.

Newly consulted archives

James Hogge: National Library of Scotland

While the Hogge collection was briefly cited by some previous authors, none made any significant reference to his many activities prior to 1917. Much of what is written about him here, in the main text, draws on the extensive collection of his papers in the NLS.

Lord Davies of Llandinam, National Library of Wales.

David Davies MP, ennobled in 1932, was a founding member of the Comrades of the Great War, in 1917, and was active in its organisation until well into 1919. His papers include many hundreds of Comrades' documents, including minutes and correspondence not known to be preserved in any other archive. Note that nearly all the documents referenced here from the Davies papers use the Library's preferred citation, C5/6-10, as those five folders are not sorted by date, and a particular folio may be found in any one of those folders.

Officers' Association: Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Kings College London.

A substantial collection of OA papers has been donated to the LHMA. They had not been catalogued at the time of consultation, and it is necessary to seek permission in advance to view them.

Trades council records: various national and local archives.

These are generally found in local archives, while a few are kept in national collections. While some records of hundreds of trades councils have survived in such archives, only a few dozen have any material relating to the period 1914-21. Those consulted for this study are listed in the Bibliography and they include trades councils in Aberdeen, Belfast, Blackpool, Bristol, Burnley, Cork, Darwen, Dublin, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, London, Nelson & Colne, Nottingham, Perth, Preston, Rawtenstall, Sheffield, and Wolverhampton.

Waldorf Astor: University of Reading.

Astor had only a minor role in the Comrades, and his papers include only a small number of documents relating to the organisation, but several are important and unique records, and are cited in the main text.

Wilfrid Ashley: University of Southampton.

Ashley was another founding member of the Comrades, and one of the most important, who remained active until 1921, when he resigned, due to his opposition to amalgamation with the other organisations. Like Lord Davies, his papers include many hundreds of Comrades' documents, including minutes and correspondence not known to be found in any other archive.

Updated archives

Ian Hamilton: Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Kings College London.

Note that earlier works, such as Barr, 'Service Not Self', have references in the form IH25/nn/ etc, where 'nn' is a number from 1 to 37, representing one of the thirty-seven boxes that originally contained the Hamilton papers before cataloguing. The papers have since been thoroughly indexed, and those earlier references bear no relation to the current catalogue numbers.

Missing archives

Records of the Executive Committee of the Federation, previously cited as being in the archive of the Royal British Legion, London, can no longer be found.

The full set of *The Comrades' Journal*, from November 1918 to April 1921, catalogued in the collections of the British Library as BL P.P.4050.ci, has for some years been marked as 'item mislaid', with no apparent prospect of it being found. Only two issues from 1919 have been found in other collections, namely vol. 1, no. 6, 1 April 1919, in the Imperial War Museum (catalogue no. LBY E.J. 1200) and vol. 1, no. 11, September 1919, in the Lord Davies of Llandinam papers, National Library of Wales, GB 0210 LDDNAM, C5/6-10.

The journal, *The Ex-Service Man*, which would in all probability have covered the formation of the Welsh Legion, had a long struggle with shortage of funds, and ceased publication in November 1919. Only a few issues can now be found, in various archives, the majority in the Hamilton papers.

Appendix 2: Data sources, statistical calculations, and additional data for maps, graphs and tables

Only those figures that require more detailed explanation than could reasonably be inserted into the main text or footnotes are listed below, namely figures 6, 7, 13, 24, and 25.

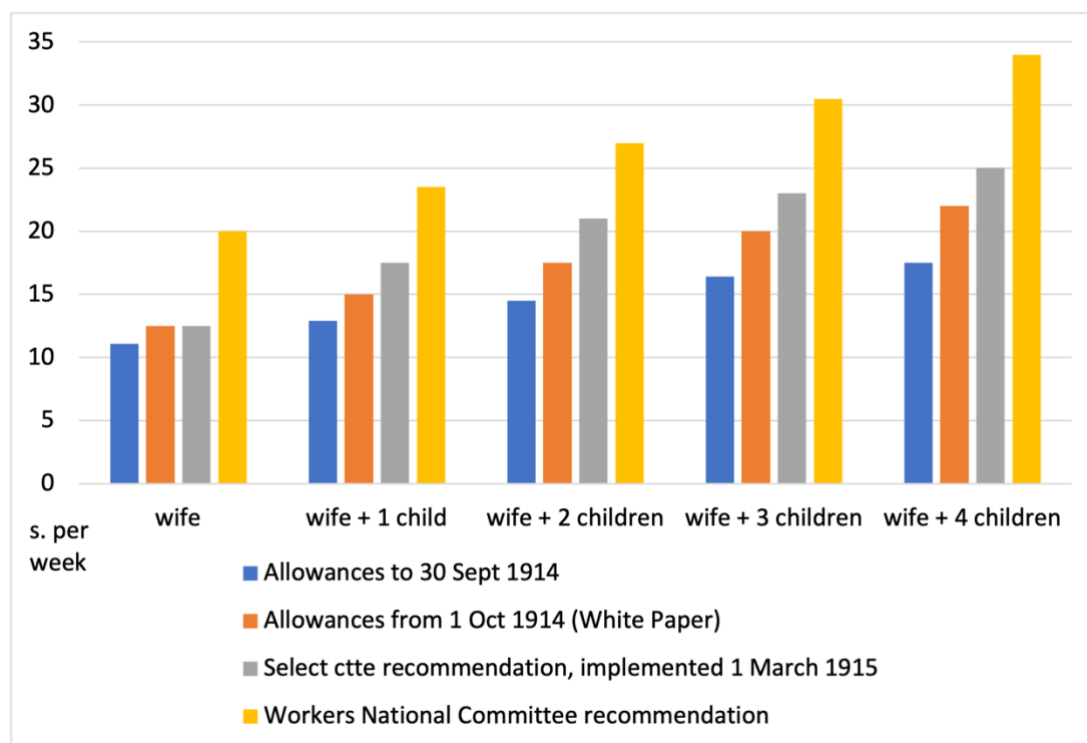


Figure 6: separation allowance rates and recommendations for wives and children of private soldiers, in shillings per week

Sources: the first data series, 'Allowances to 30 Sept 1914', is from the White Paper Cd. 7662,⁶ Section D, on page 8, column 'Old Scale', pars (q) to (v), with the addition of the 'compulsory allotment' by the soldier to his wife of 3s 6d, plus 7d per child, up to a maximum of 5s 3d.⁷ Thus, for example, a wife with four children received 12s 3d from the state and 5s 3d from her husband, a total of 17s 6d. The second data series, 'Allowances from 1 Oct 1914', is from Cd. 7623,⁸ table on

⁶ Navy and Army, *Allowances and Pensions in respect of Seamen, Marines, and Soldiers and their Wives, Widows and Dependants*, 9 November 1914, Cd. 7662, 8.

⁷ While Cd. 7623 (below) only details this for allowances after 1 October 1914, 'Recruiting Still Brisk: Married Soldiers and their Families', *The Times*, 9 September 1914, 5, shows that the same formula applied prior to 1 October.

⁸ Army, *Increased Rates of Separation Allowance for the Wives and Children of Soldiers*, October 1914, Cd. 7623, 2.

page 2. The remaining two series, the ‘Select ctte recommendations’, and the ‘Workers National Committee recommendations’, are from the Select Committee report, pages v and 175, respectively.⁹ The raw data is tabulated below.

Family size	Allowances to 30 Sept 1914	Allowances from 1 Oct 1914 (White Paper)	Select Committee recommendation, implemented 1 March 1915	Workers National Committee recommendation
wife	11s 1d	12s 6d	12s 6d	20s 0d
wife + 1 child	12s 10d	15s 0d	17s 6d	23s 6d
wife + 2 children	14s 7d	17s 6d	21s 0d	27s 0d
wife + 3 children	16s 4d	20s 0d	23s 0d	30s 0d
wife + 4 children	17s 6d	22s 0d	25s 0d	34s 0d

⁹ *Special Report and Second Special Report from the Select Committee on Naval and Military Services (Pensions and Grants)*, 14 April 1915, House of Commons 1914–16, volume 4, paper 196.

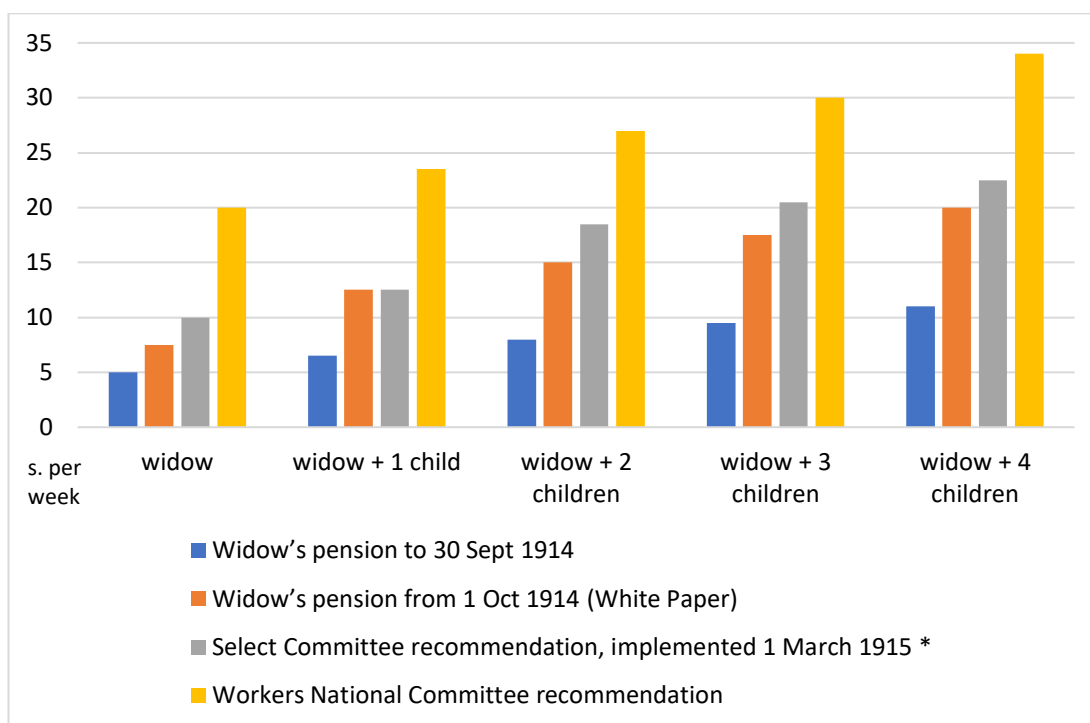


Figure 7: minimum War Pension rates and recommendations for widows and children of private soldiers, in shillings per week.

Sources: the first and second data series, 'Widow's pension to 30 Sept 1914', and 'Widow's pension from 1 Oct 1914', are both from the White Paper Cd. 7662,¹⁰ Section D, on page 8, columns 'Old Scale' and 'New Scale', pars (a) to (c). The remaining two series, the 'Select ctte recommendations', and the 'Workers National Committee recommendations', are from the Select Committee report, pages v and 178, respectively.¹¹ The WNC recommended that pensions for widows and orphans be on the same scales as separation allowances. The raw data is tabulated below.

Family size	Widow's pension to 30 Sept 1914	Widow's pension from 1 Oct 1914 (White Paper)	Select Committee recommendation, implemented 1 March 1915 *	Workers National Committee recommendation
Widow	5s 0d	7s 6d	10s 0d	20s 0d
widow + 1 child	6s 6d	12s 6d	12s 6d	23s 6d
widow + 2 children	8s 0d	15s 0d	18s 6d	27s 0d
widow + 3 children	9s 6d	17s 6d	20s 6d	30s 0d
widow + 4 children	11s 0d	20s 0d	22s 6d	34s 0d

* The Select Committee also recommended that a widow's pension be increased by 2s 6d at age thirty-five, and by 5s 0d at age forty-five.

¹⁰ *Allowances and Pensions*, Cd. 7662, 8.

¹¹ *Special Report and Second Special Report*, HC paper 196.

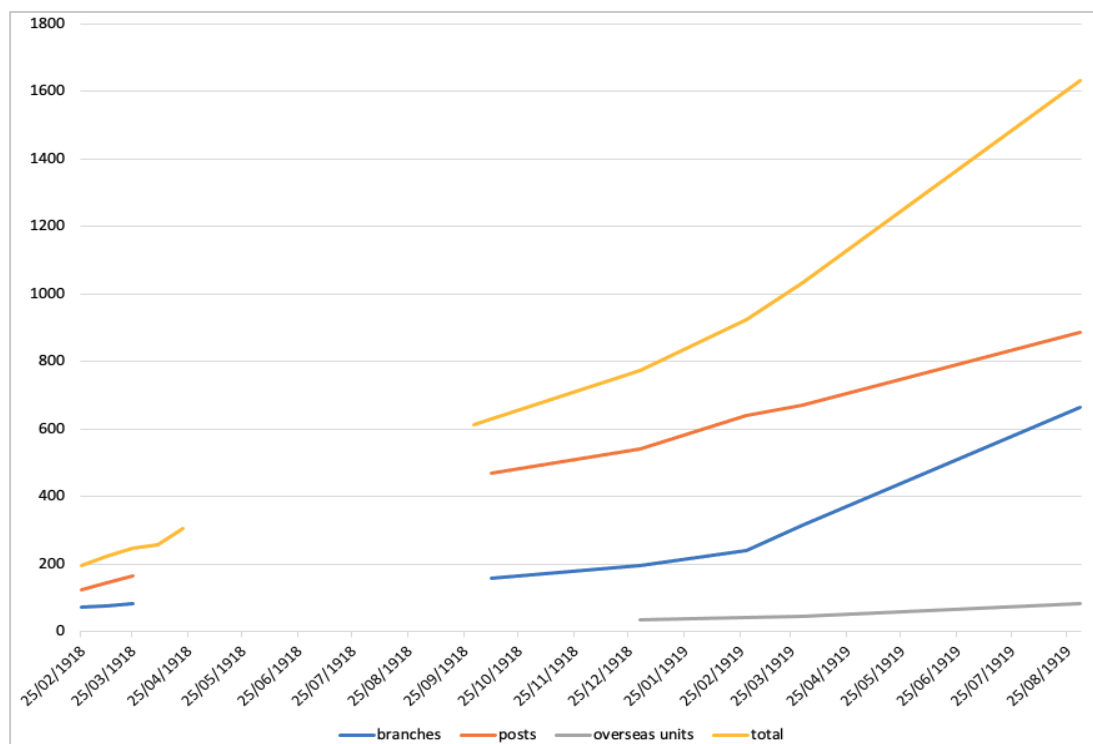


Figure 13: Comrades of the Great War growth from February 1918 to August 1919

Sources: the data is taken from the Comrades of the Great War's 'Headquarters Progress Reports', which generally detail only the totals of 'posts' (a minimum of five members), 'branches' (100 members or more) and 'overseas Units' (any number of members),¹² and a few other documents such as the first Annual Report.¹³ The gap in the curves above reflects lack of data for those months, but the overall steady growth throughout the period, from a total of approximately 200 in late February, to over 750 by the end of December, is clear, and the rate of growth increases to August 1919 (no data found beyond that date). The total number of individual members was not published, only the claim that several branches had each recruited over 5,000 members.¹⁴ If one takes the average size of a post to be fifty members, and of a branch to be 500 members (and these are pure guesses) then a very rough estimate of the Comrades' total membership by August 1919 would be of the order of 375,000, but that figure must be treated with great caution.

¹² Comrades of the Great War, 'What the Comrades are Doing. Headquarters Progress Report', numbers 3 (25 February 1918), 4 (11 March 1918), 5 (25 March 1918), 6 (8 April 1918), 7 (22 April 1918), 10 (3 June 1918), 21 (28 February 1919), 22 (31 March 1919). Davies papers, C5/6–10.

¹³ 'Report', 3 September 1918; 'List of Posts and Branches formed to October 10th 1918'; 'First Annual Report for the year ending 31st December 1918', 12-13. Davies papers.

¹⁴ 'What the Comrades are Doing', *The Comrades Journal*, vol. 1, no. 11, September 1919, p. 11. Copy in the Davies papers.

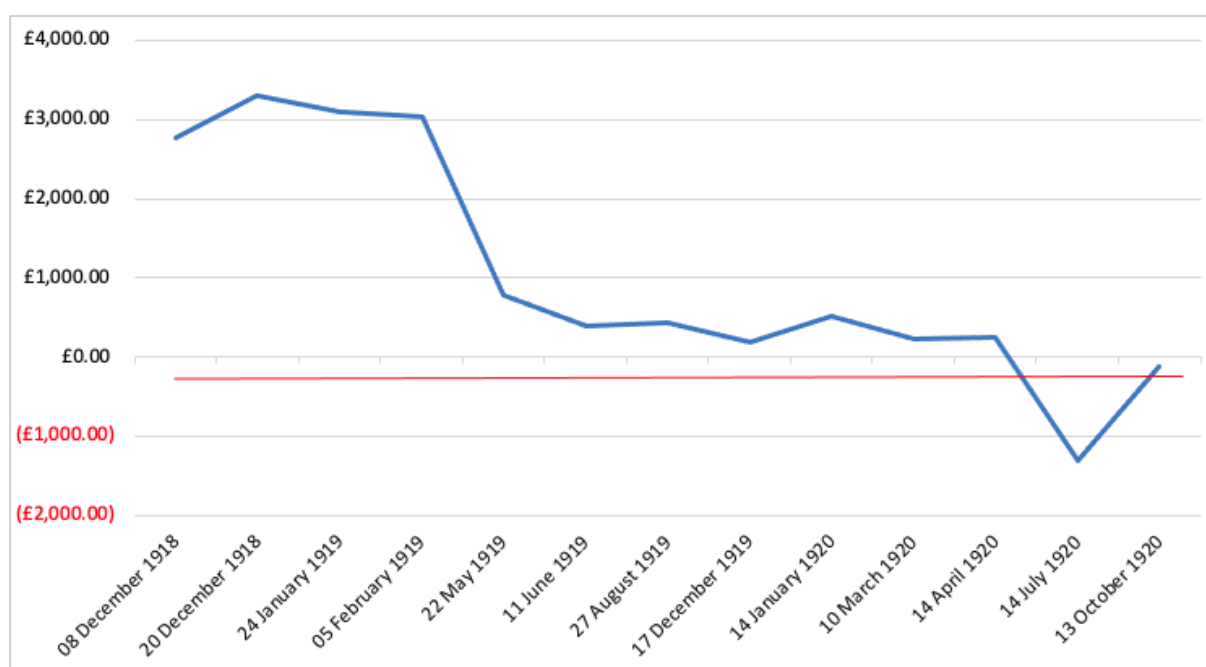


Figure 24: Comrades of the Great War in Scotland – cash in hand and at bank

Sources: the figures are taken from the Scottish Comrades of the Great War Minute Book,¹⁵ pages 14, 21, 24, 35, 48, 58, 82, 98, 108, 124, 132, 152, 168 (dates as shown above). The figure for 13 October 1920 represents an overdraft of £111, and may not include the additional debt, of over £1,100, that accounts for most of the debt shown for 8 July 1920 (the minutes do not specify).

¹⁵ 'Minutes of Exec. Committee of Comrades of the Great War prior to Amalgamation into British Legion 26/11/1918 to 15/12/1920'. Royal British Legion (Scotland) headquarters, Edinburgh.

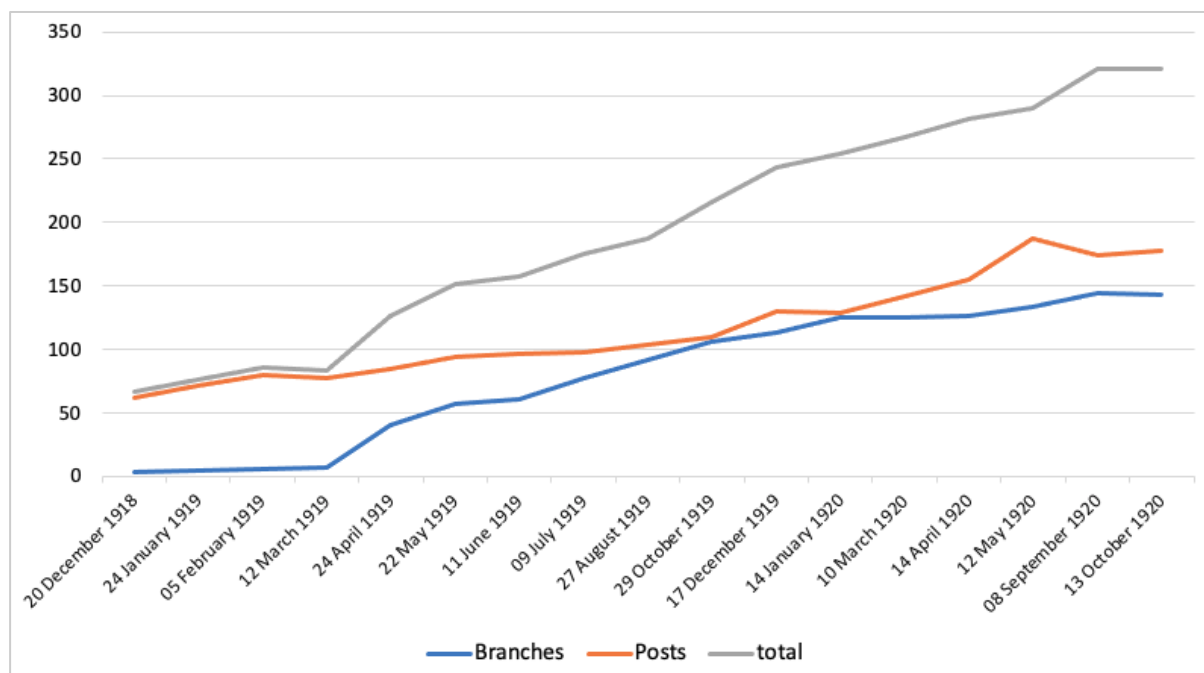


Figure 25: Comrades of the Great War in Scotland – growth of Branches and Posts, 1918–1920

Sources: the figures are taken from the Scottish Comrades of the Great War Minute Book,¹⁶ pages 20, 24, 35, 38, 42, 46, 56, 66, 82, 88, 96, 108, 124, 132, 140, 160, 170 (meeting dates as noted above). For the first three dates, and for 27 August 1919, only totals were minuted, so interpolated figures are used.

¹⁶ 'Minutes of Exec. Committee of Comrades of the Great War prior to Amalgamation into British Legion 26/11/1918 to 15/12/1920'. Royal British Legion (Scotland) headquarters, Edinburgh.