

Membership

Comrades, the total paid members for 2006 is 1,210. A big thank you is owed to the 2005-2006 membership team for their excellent use of time and talent on behalf of the team and branch.

Thank you to all members of Branch 322 that participated in the Early Bird campaign. The campaign for the 2006 membership year reached a participation rate of 66.7%. That is an approximate 4% increase from the previous year. We have received our 60% sticker. Well done by all.

Please keep up the momentum for this year's campaign starting in September when the Early Bird campaign starts anew so that we can increase participation by 4% again and obtain that elusive 70% for the award.

Your in Comradeship
Janet Kaminsky

Colour Guard



The Colour Guard are preparing for the upcoming parade season. Our first parades were on April 23 in Whitby for the District Convention and we paraded in Oshawa for the Battle of the Atlantic on May 7.

The last weekend in May we traveled to Cuyahoga Falls Ohio where we participated in the American Memorial Day Parade, which this Legion has done so for the last 30 years or so. We also take part in the placing of Flags at over 500 Veterans Graves in their local Cemeteries.

Don't forget Comrades the Ajax Home Week Parade will be on Saturday June 10th, and we hope anyone that would like to march as a Legion contingent are always welcome to join us at anytime.

We welcome Shammi Suchit as are newest Colour Guard member.

Your in Comradeship
Gary Whelan



Opinion Bulletin
Legion Does Not Represent
Present Day Veteran

April 13, 2006

In 1980, at the age of 17, I was sworn in as a private in the Canadian Forces. It was a commitment that lasted 24 years and ended in my retirement as a Captain in the Intelligence Branch. My long service with the Canadian Forces remains something of which I am intensely proud.

But today, as a veteran, I swear that I will never join the Royal Canadian Legion. The Legion has, and continues to do, a lot of commendable community work in the Brampton area. But, in 2006, it cannot claim to be a real advocate for the growing number of younger veterans in Canada.

Last week, the Harper government implemented a new veteran's bill (C-45), a bill that was fast tracked through parliament by the previous Liberal government. For the young, disabled veterans, the bill effectively ends 90 years of social conscience in caring for Canada's disabled veterans.

As of this month, any Canadian Forces member who becomes disabled as a result of his military service will no longer receive a disability pension, but will instead receive a one-time lump sum payment; something to which the veteran community is fiercely opposed. Gone also is the income support once made available for disabled veterans and their survivors after 65. This had the blessing of the Royal Canadian Legion.

Furthermore, the disabled soldier limping back from Afghanistan will, unlike his American counterpart, not be entitled to any government subsidized university education. And, unlike previous veterans' legislation, this new legislation does not have any provision that will deal with a disabled veteran's ability to qualify for insurance or mortgage benefits; something most Canadians regard as essential. And this also had the blessing of the Royal Canadian Legion. In other words, the Legion has conspired with draconian government legislation and has, in effect, sold out an entire generation of younger veterans. And the Legion's ignorance for the welfare of younger veterans does not stop here.

Last November, an independent advocacy group for Canadian Forces veterans compiled a report that called on the government to institute a veteran's ombudsman similar to what we have in the military today. The group also called on the government not to implement the veterans' disability bill in its current form. However, last week this group of veterans from the Gulf War, Bosnia, and other missions were told by the Canadian Legion that they were no longer allowed to use the poppy on any of their reports or correspondence.

"I must question the Legion's Dominion Command and its timing of this attack in the few days before a socially regressive piece of Legislation, the so-called Veterans Charter, was being implemented." said retired Captain Sean Bruyca, who served with the Canadian Forces in the Gulf War from 1990-91 and is currently disabled as a result of his service.

"The Legion's leadership has the audacity to say that the Legion supports the new legislation, even though no open vote was held. It appears quite likely that all but a handful of persons in the legion do not know any details of the legislation." And

though he personally sent notice to the disabled veterans not to use the poppy on their report, Steven Clark, the Legion's Secretary, Poppy and Remembrance Committee admits that he himself is not aware of either the contents of the new veterans bill, or the report released by the group of veterans.

"I am aware of Bill C-45 but I'm not aware of the specifics of it, nor am I aware of the criticisms that are contained in their report," said Clark. And though the independent disabled veterans report was released last November, the Legion's notice not to use the poppy on its cover page only came on the heels of a news conference that Bruyca, and other young, disabled veterans held in late March that criticized the new legislation.

"It wasn't anything that was done intentionally because of any news conference, but may have been a product of that news conference," noted Clark. But, it is infuriating that disabled veterans, who I had served with, who were willing to give their lives for this country, have, by the Legions actions, less of a right to use the poppy than do my Grade 10 history students.

"The Legion claims to have a copyright on poppies despite these flowers being internationally recognized as symbols of remembrance and peace," said Perry Gray, a former intelligence officer from the Canadian Forces, who is currently suffering from post traumatic stress disorder as a result of his service in the former Yugoslavia. "We have here a national organization that is predominantly civilian and centered on drinking establishments or social clubs deciding to impose draconian rules on the use of poppies."

But in spite of its political stand, the Legion, demographically, is swiftly losing its connectivity to the veteran community. These days, actual veteran involvement in the Legion is becoming more the exception than the rule. Approximately 80 per cent of Canada's veterans, young and old, do not hold a Legion membership. And indeed the Legion's 2004 Convention report stated that "our membership continues to flounder, regardless of our efforts to stabilize our losses."

Just look around most legion halls today and you will be hard pressed to find many people who actually served in the military. Over 50 per cent of the Legion's membership today has never actually served in the Canadian army, navy and air force.

Today, Legion membership is open to the children, grandchildren, siblings, nieces, nephews, parents or spouses of someone who had served in the militaries of Canada, the United States or any allied nation. Membership in the Legion is also open to relatives of police, volunteer firemen and people who served in cadets as children or adolescents.

But as long as it lasts, the Royal Canadian Legion will no doubt continue to provide much charitable work for the local community. And no doubt, the Legion's remaining branches will continue as popular venues for dances as well as watering holes for local revelers. But the present day reality is that the Legion's composition, as well as its politics no longer validates its recognition and status as an organization to promote the welfare of disabled veterans. All you need to do is attend a Legion Bingo night, dance, or dart tournament to understand that.

Robert Smol
"Smol Talk"

The Brampton Battalion



Ontario Provincial Command

*Rebuttal To
Brampton Battalion Editorial
Written By Freelance Writer
Robert Smol re:*

*Legion Does Not Represent
Present Day Veteran*

April 27, 2006

Letter to the Editor
Brampton Bulletin

I am sorry to read that Robert Smol will never join the Legion (*Legion does not represent present-day veteran, April 13, 2006*). While I cannot speak for the Legion nationally, nor comment on national Legion policy, I can tell you that beyond community service, our membership is still enormously dedicated to serving veterans.

Through our service bureau officers, we continue to advocate for individual veterans to ensure they are treated fairly by the system. Our members' dues help to fund the operation of a professional service bureau that continues to put forward the lion's share of pension claims going forward from the Legion. We have represented countless traditional and modern day veterans in the pension system and are proud of the results we have obtained for these members and the difference our work has made in their lives.

We have established a network of branch service officers who refer veterans and widows to our office for assistance with emergency needs. It is true that many of our members have not served in the military but they are no less dedicated to ensuring that those who have served have access to benefits when they need them.

Of our four professional service officers, two have served in the military and two have not. They all serve our veterans with equal professionalism, compassion and tenacity and experience has told us that a belief in the value of the work that we do far supersedes other attributes, including military service.

While we cannot set policy at this level, I can assure you that our command will continue to serve all veterans and to advocate for change when and if the system fails them.

George O'Dair
1st Vice President
The Royal Canadian Legion
Ontario Command