

MP, Legion seek ban on war medal sales

Medals of Valour
Road hero to go on
auction block

By **JOAN DELANEY**
Epoch Times Staff

A New Democrat MP is reiterating his call to ban the sale of Canadian war medals as controversy grows over the pending sale of a rare combination of these medals.

One of the medals, the prestigious Victoria Cross, was awarded to Lt. Robert Shankland for his feats of bravery during the Battle of Passchendaele in the First World War.

Shankland's Distinguished Conduct Medal—earned in 1916 for leading a team of stretcher bearers under assault by enemy fire—will also be auctioned, along with seven other medals.

The combination of the VC and the DCM is regarded as extremely uncommon, with only a handful of individuals ever receiving both awards.

NDP veterans affairs critic Peter Stoffer, who wants the government to step in and make sure Shankland's medals do not leave Canada, has been lobbying for ten years for a ban on selling such medals.

"These are medals of great distinction and honour, and they should not be turned into the mercantile system. All those medals are part of our heritage, but most importantly they're part of the individual and the sacrifice they made

for this country," says Stoffer.

Selling the Order of Canada is prohibited by federal law, and Stoffer believes that all other medals, including those awarded to police officers, should be treated likewise.

"The selling of any medals is wrong... The men and women who receive these medals wear them with great pride because of the fact that many of their colleagues never got a chance to wear theirs—they paid the ultimate sacrifice."

Shankland, who immigrated to Canada from Scotland in 1911, is one of three WWI Victoria Cross recipients from Winnipeg's famed Valour Road. In an unusual coincidence, Sgt. Major Frederick Hall, Cpl. Leo Clarke, and Shankland all lived within one block of each other on Pine St., which was renamed Valour Road in their honour in 1925.

Some fear that Shankland's medals will be sold to a foreign buyer. During question period in the House last week, Veterans Affairs Minister Greg Thompson said there are a number of measures in place to ensure that "medals of historical significance" do not leave the country.

"But at the end of the day, as other governments have grappled with this as well in terms of the selling of these medals, it is really a balancing of interests between the Canadian public and the rights of owners. We are cognizant of that and we will do our best."

Bob Butt, director of communications with the Royal Canadian Legion, says the Legion backs Stoffer's position on selling war medals.

"We believe that none of the



The Canadian Victoria Cross. CHRIS WATTIE/REUTERS

medals that were won by Canadians should ever leave Canadians' possession, especially the high-end medals."

The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders, Shankland's former regiment, has expressed outrage that his VC is for sale and is working to secure financing to purchase the medal. Wayne Lightfoot, a federal public servant in Winnipeg, has also kicked off a campaign to keep Shankland's medals in the country.

According to the Winnipeg Free Press, a representative of the Canadian War Museum said museum officials are aware of the pending auction, but refused to say if they will get involved for fear of driving up the cost of the medals.

The museum owns 30 of the 94 Victoria Cross medals awarded to Canadians, has several others on long-term loan, and has a portrait of Shankland painted by Group of Seven member A.Y. Jackson, the Free Press said.

Toronto auction house Bonhams Canada has not disclosed who is selling Shankland's medals, which are expected to fetch about \$330,000. The auction will take place on May 25.

There have been a number of instances in which public ire was ignited over the auctioning of the Victoria Cross, Canada's highest military decoration which has not been awarded to any Canadian since 1945.

An outcry erupted in 2004 when the family of Second World War medic Cpl. Fred Topham planned to auction his Victoria Cross, which Topham had won by several daring forays into no man's land while un-

der intense enemy fire.

Through a public fundraising effort, veterans of Topham's former unit raised \$300,000, preventing the sale of the medal to a British collector. Topham's VC was later donated to the Canadian War Museum.

The ten medals won by Tommy Prince, Canada's most highly decorated Aboriginal soldier who was a veteran of WWII and the Korean War, were put up for auction in 1997. Through a fundraising and media campaign, Prince's family raised enough to buy the medals, which are now held in trust in the Manitoba Museum.

Of the three VC winners from Valour Road, only Shankland lived to see the end of the war. He served his country once more during the Second World War as an officer at the Canadian Army headquarters in Britain, retiring with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. He died in 1968 at age 80.

The three men were commemorated in 2005 with the establishment of a plaza at the intersection of Valour Road and Sargent Ave. Sixty-nine Canadians were awarded the Victoria Cross during WWI.

Canadian war medals have turned up for sale at flea markets, garage sales, and on eBay, says Stoffer, adding that he feels passionate about the issue because he was born in Holland and his parents were liberated by the Canadians and the allies.

"I fundamentally disagree with turning [war medals] into cash—it demeans them and it demoralizes them. Does everything in our society have to have money around it?"

Harper between a rock and a hard place on EI

CONTINUED FROM P1

A report from TD Bank that suggested other changes to EI described those moves as "a good compromise between putting more money into the pockets of the unemployed in the short term while not over-extending the system in the long term."

Down and out of work

EI applications hit record numbers in February with more than 325,000 new or renewed claims, the largest number since the Liberals changed the system in 1996.

Claims increased by 51,000, or almost 19 percent, from January, with the highest jumps in some of the country's best-employed regions.

Statistics Canada reports that Alberta's urban centres have seen the number of EI recipients double since February last year. So have cities in southwestern Ontario, like Windsor and Hamilton. Cities in British Columbia's interior, including Kelowna and Penticton, have seen the same and Vancouver has had a 75 percent increase.

The dramatic jump is revealing cracks in a system redesigned when times were good, says Sylvain Schetagne, a senior economist for the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), one of several groups pushing the government for significant changes to the current EI system.

He points to statistics that indicate only 43 percent of Canada's unemployed are on EI, a nearly 40 percent drop from when the system was reformed. Of the 60 percent not on EI, most people have either used up their benefits or didn't qualify because they did not work enough hours.

Schetagne says the current requirements are particularly unfair to the latter group.

"Is it fair to pay for house insurance and when your house is burning you cannot receive any benefits? It is clear it is not. If you pay for insurance, you should be entitled to get it."

While the system may have occasionally been abused before the '96 reforms, the current system is far too stringent, he says.

"The swing went from one side to the other side. I wouldn't say we have found the right balance."

While part-time workers and others pay into EI but may not qualify, another group excluded from the system is the self-employed, who are exempt from paying premiums.

They account for roughly 15 to 20 percent of the unemployed, says Schetagne.

Besides also pushing for a 360-hour qualification, the CLC wants rates raised from 55 percent to 60 percent of the maximum \$42,000 income cap.

The very maximum a recipient can get is little more than \$400 a week and the average is \$325, he says.

"Try to live out of that, it is just impossible, especially in Toronto or Vancouver... That is less than minimum wage—it is lower than the poverty rate."

Calls for Change

Among those calling for changes to EI are economists from TD Bank. A recent TD report notes that the huge disparities in EI requirements will likely result in undercoverage.

The report recommends lowering the hours' requirement to 560, 240 more than the CLC and opposition parties are calling for. TD estimates this will cost \$500 million a year. The report projects a move to 360 hours would cost \$1 billion while 420 hours would cost \$800 million.

"I think even the five weeks they added, it is not going to be easy to go back"

—Craig Riddell, economist and EI expert

Another opposition bill the TD report validates is the call to cancel the two weeks an EI claimant must wait before benefits can begin. In normal times, those two weeks give workers added incentive to find a job and eliminates administration costs. Cutting the wait could cost the government around \$1 billion a year, it said.

Peter Milliken, the Speaker for the House of Commons, recently broke a vote in the House so that Bloc MP Christian Ouellet's private member's bill to eliminate the two week period could get a second reading.

While Ignatieff hasn't spelled out all the details of the EI changes he wants the Conservatives to make, he has said he wants an independent investigation to suggest changes for the system.

EI entanglements

But more important than all those changes is how to deal with long-tenured workers suddenly unemployed, says Craig Riddell, an economist at the University of British Columbia specialized in labour economics, public policy, unemployment and EI.

Riddell says benefits are not well aligned with the costs of being unemployed. Such costs are much higher for people who have been in the same job for many years, he says. These workers are often older, have lifestyles matched to their frequently well-paying unionized jobs, and find it more difficult or impossible to re-enter the workforce at similar pay.

"Right now the program doesn't make any distinction between [short-term workers] and long-tenured workers... I think that is the biggest flaw in the system."

These older workers often need more retraining and are in sectors where the lost jobs are harder to replace, like southern Ontario's ailing manufacturing sector.

But Riddell, who is also the academic director of the Canadian La-

bour Market and Skill Researcher Network, says he isn't sure it is a good idea to adjust EI requirements or increase benefits in response to short-term economic conditions. Though he credits the Conservatives for extending the length of benefits, he says other changes need to be soberly considered.

The problem, he says, is that any move to make the system more generous will be extremely difficult to undo and could leave the EI unsustainable in the long term. Easing hours' requirements and boosting benefits will earn political support now, but when it comes time to repeal the changes, powerful regional interests will make it almost impossible to go back.

"I think even with the five weeks they added, it is not going to be easy to go back," Riddell says.

Because EI is adjusted regionally, affected areas become powerful lobbying groups. The Liberals lost the Atlantic region after their changes in 1996 and later diluted those changes for political reasons, he says.

The TD report also said the government could find it hard to repeal the changes that it advocated.

Rather than making quick changes to adjust for the immediate situation, the government will need to take a careful review and get input from all the stakeholders, Riddell says. He notes that the changes made in 1996 were completed after two years of hearings and research.

Riddell advocates extending the length of benefits but suggested this should be conditional on the state of the economy. In the U.S., the length of benefits doubles during a recession. The current EI system in Canada fails to adjust to those conditions, he says.

"I think that is one of the downfalls of the Canadian system."

EI in the economy

But while any changes to EI can be painful and costly to undo, they do have an immediate economic impact, says Schetagne of the CLC.

Recipients receive far less than their normal pay and that money is immediately put back into the economy. Rather than buying items like electronics that are made elsewhere, most recipients use the funds to pay rent or mortgages, buy food and pay other bills, all of which go directly into the Canadian economy.

Of course, if the Conservatives do give in and adjust the system, asking regions that get used to the increased generosity to let it go could prove their undoing. And leaving those adjustments in place could damage the system in the long term or require increased premiums or government support.

Either way, Prime Minister Stephen Harper will have a tough decision to make. The Liberals are calling for changes before parliament gets out in June and it would seem unlikely the other opposition parties would save the government from defeat if it comes down to changes over EI.

Vancouver designer leads in sustainable fashion

EPIC showcases green options galore

By **JUSTINA WHEALE**
Epoch Times Staff

Vancouver, a city famous for its abundance of cherry blossoms, is now becoming known for another spring event: EPIC, the hot sustainability consumer lifestyle show that just keeps getting bigger and better.

Slated to take place at the new Vancouver Convention Centre this weekend, western Canada's only green consumer tradeshow and eco-marketplace will host over 300 exhibitors, up from 200 last year.

EPIC provides a perfect showcase for people such as Mark Trozduk who, with his environmentally responsible clothing line, has raised the bar for green standards in fashion.

Trozduk's Boardroom Eco Apparel has recently been awarded "Bluesign" certification, the highest standard possible for environmental preservation in the textile industry.

Boardroom Eco Apparel also happens to be the first—and only—company selling Bluesign-approved garments at the retail level in all of North America.

Bluesign is a global independent auditor based in Switzerland that monitors every step of the textile production cycle to ensure that it meets the highest environmental standards possible with the lowest environmental impact.

Trozduk uses materials such as organic cotton, bamboo, recycled polyester, and tree pulp to name just a few. But to be Bluesign-approved, a company also has to adhere to strict requirements throughout the entire manufacturing process, taking into consideration water, chemical and energy usage, and workers' health and safety.

He says most environmental damage occurs during the manufacturing process rather than from the actual materials used, an important point that is often misunderstood or overlooked by consumers and companies that claim to be "green."

"Nobody understands that it's mostly about [safe use of] water, chemicals and energy, because the biggest impact to the environment is during the dyeing and finishing phase of the textile. Eighty percent of the damage to the environment happens there. It's not about cultivating an organic fiber or processing bamboo, it's about the dyeing and finishing of the fabric itself," Trozduk explained.

Bluesign's standards evaluate resource productivity, water

emissions, air emissions, and occupational health and safety. This means every component of the garments are Bluesign-approved, from the fabric and the thread to zippers, labels and trim.

Trozduk studied agricultural economics at the University of British Columbia and has a background in clothing manufacturing and design. After the birth of his first child, and realizing how harmful the clothing industry was to the environment and to future generations, he decided to take responsibility and began converting his existing clothing line to meet Bluesign standards.



ECO APPAREL: Boardroom Eco Apparel is the first and only company selling Bluesign-approved garments at the retail level in North America. JUSTINA WHEALE/THE EPOCH TIMES

He says Vancouverites are very environmentally aware and therefore "more cautious about what they purchase," which pushed him to raise his own standards.

"They ask the hard questions. They ask where the material comes from, who made it, what's in it, was it made of a renewable resource... So what I've been up against in changing my business to being more sustainable is to be more transparent. I have to make sure I have all of my documents in place."

He notes that although the green movement has become main-



ECO APPAREL: Boardroom Eco Apparel on display at a Rio Rain store in West Vancouver. JUSTINA WHEALE/THE EPOCH TIMES

stream, there is a wide definition of what actually constitutes being green.

"Companies can claim all they want, but then somebody like me comes out with a standard that is so much higher than everybody else, and people find out about that standard and they look at the other guy and say, 'Good on you for trying to do 10 percent organic cotton, that's better than zero; however you need to improve and you need to get better.'"

Trozduk hopes that by leading the industry in the highest and most exemplary eco-safe practices, his example will encourage other businesses to raise their standards as well.

"We keep pushing the envelope... which will push [other companies] to that standard, and that's how we'll get there... It's about educating people and letting them know that [being environmentally safe involves] more than meets the eye. And then you let the consumer decide, you educate them and let them determine what is equal and what is not equal."

Boardroom Eco Apparel can be found at Trozduk's three Rio Rain stores at locations in West Vancouver, Richmond, and Kelowna.

EPIC (Ethical Progressive Intelligent Consumer) is produced by The GLOBE Foundation, a Vancouver-based, non-profit organization dedicated to finding practical business-oriented solutions to the world's environmental problems.

EPIC will take place at the Vancouver Convention Centre in Canada Place from May 8-10. Tickets are available at the door or online at www.epicvancouver.com/Buy_tickets.aspx. The Epoch Times is a proud sponsor of the EPIC Sustainable Living Expo.