

toward higher tariffs in the US through the 1920s, the United States was still an impressive importer as well. US capital, propping up the German economy and playing a substantial role in many others meant that as went the US economy, so went the world economy. There were elements of continuity with the prewar period. US companies continued to buy and lease huge amounts of foreign land in their voracious search for raw materials for the overheated US economy. The relative weakness of other economies meant that there was limited competition from overseas firms. But again, these “incursions” into foreign countries and markets were piloted by private enterprise, albeit with a helping hand from the US government. **The Washington Treaty** helped short-term relations with Japan—an important trading partner and the **Dawes Plan** helped rehabilitate the German economy such that it could resume payment of reparations to Britain and France, which would then find their way back to the Allies’ American creditors.

The Washington Treaty signed in 1922 by Great Britain, the United States, France, Italy, and Japan limited naval armaments including ship tonnage.

The Dawes Plan was an economic recovery plan engineered by Senator Charles Dawes designed to address hyperinflation in Germany. Through this plan, US loans would be used to back the revaluation of the German currency. The plan also facilitated the flow of US capital into the German economy. The recovery was intended to allow Germany to resume its reparation payments to the Allies.

Canada and the First World War

Having gained independence in domestic issues in 1867, Canada still labored under a confusing foreign policy structure in 1914. As a Dominion of the British Empire the British government essentially controlled Canada’s foreign policy, which meant she was bound by the course that the British would take in the July Crisis of 1914. Over the course of the preceding 12 years, the Canadian military had been gradually drawn into a more centralized command structure in terms of imperial operations and by 1912 Canadian forces were integrated into imperial defence plans. Despite this integration, there were hints that the issue of British command of Canadian soldiers would prove contentious and in fact would come to a head during the war. In 1904, Wilfred Laurier officially placed the countries militia under the command of a Dominion-born officer. From 1907, however, integration continued with advances in common training and standards among the imperial forces. On paper, Canada had a permanent force of about 4,000 soldiers and about 50,000 militia with some training. The navy consisted of two warships.

Mobilization

In the midst of a heated debate regarding the construction of the Canadian navy, Wilfred Laurier had declared that when Britain was at war, Canada was at war. Although Canada had been debating her place in the British Empire almost since the signing

Discussion point

What were the advantages of Canada integrating her military with British forces? What were the disadvantages? What effect might the position of the United States have played in this decision?

Activity

Canada’s economic context

Research the economic situation in Canada in the period 1912–14. Use the following topic headings to guide your research:

- Manufacturing
- Unemployment
- Agricultural production
- Trade

Questions

- 1 How was the economic context related to Canada’s ability to fight a war in 1914?
- 2 What effect might the unemployment situation have on recruiting efforts in the autumn of 1914?
- 3 What effect did this economic situation have on government revenues? How might this impact Canada’s ability to equip an army and navy? What might be some possible solutions for the government?

of the British North America Act with some advocating greater independence and others arguing caution and the benefits of "Dominion Status", in 1914 the fact remained much as Laurier had characterized it. While it is true that Canada tumbled into the conflict with Britain's declaration of war in August 1914, as the South African War of 1899 had illustrated, the manner of Canada's participation was a matter for the Canadian parliament to decide. That said, there was little debate. Canada and her population of eight million would commit to the total war effort. It would send men and material and mobilize the home front to the war effort. The initial commitment was a contingent of 25,000 men equipped and delivered to the European theatre at Canada's expense—initially estimated at some \$50 million. To facilitate this mobilization the government passed the War Measures Act at the outbreak of the war. The Act reserved for the federal government the right to govern by executive decree in times of perceived "war, invasion, or insurrection."

The mobilization effort would be dominated by the character of the minister of militia, Sam Hughes. Hughes operated free from governmental interference, method and scruples. Within a month of the outbreak of the war, over 30,000 men had assembled at Valcartier, Quebec, for training. Assembling men was one thing, but a modern army had to be equipped and clothed and this proved a challenge. Khaki uniforms and the **Ross rifle** were ordered in huge quantities. Ships were contracted and preparations made, albeit at times unorthodox and somewhat haphazard preparations. The embarkation of the first contingent of the Canadian Expeditionary Force bore a marked resemblance to the US army's chaotic departure for Cuba during the Spanish-American War. Nevertheless, the first contingent of 30,000 troops landed in England in mid October 1914, and Robert Borden's Conservative government ordered a second of the same strength be raised.

The volunteer spirit was not limited to those seeking active service in Europe. Organizations such as the YMCA and other existing associations turned their efforts to raising money and material for the war effort. The Canadian Patriotic Fund was chartered to raise money that would bridge the gap between what soldiers would earn in uniform and what they had earned as civilians thus taking some of the financial burden off those who remained behind. Schools, clubs, and mutual benefit societies raised money to buy food, uniforms and even weapons.

Despite the enthusiasm with which most Canadians approached the war effort, there was, from the start some quiet voices of dissent, voices that would grow in volume as the slaughter in France became more apparent and dragged on from year to year. Pacifist religious sects, such as the Mennonites and Doukhobors, remained opposed to the war though quietly so. Even some among the religious groups that opposed the notion of war, such as the Methodists, were won over to support the war effort on the ground that it was becoming a moral crusade against those who would use war to further their national goals, namely Germany.

The **Ross rifle** was the weapon that Sam Hughes decided would be issued to Canadian infantrymen at the outset of the First World War. The rifle proved to be a good target and sniping rifle, but was heavy and jammed regularly, especially in the trying conditions of trench warfare. Persistent criticism by frontline soldiers eventually led to its replacement by the British Lee-Enfield rifle.

Robert Borden (1854–1937)



Born in Nova Scotia, Borden started his professional life as a teacher and later became a lawyer. After practicing law in Nova Scotia, Borden was drawn into political life and was first elected to parliament in 1896. By 1901, he had ascended to leadership of the Conservative Party and spent ten years as leader of the opposition, responding to the more charismatic prime minister, Wilfred Laurier. While in opposition, Borden championed closer ties within the British Empire and defeated Laurier and the Liberals in the 1911 general election.

Once in power, Borden worked to strengthen military and economic ties with Britain. When the First World War erupted, Borden continued this imperial vision to its logical extension and pledged, with vast popular support, unqualified support for the British war effort. As Canada's wartime prime minister he oversaw the dramatic expansion in Canada's military and industrial capacity. He pushed conscription through parliament, developing a Union government and expanding the franchise to women in order to do so. As he managed her expanding war effort, Borden came to realize that the sacrifice in men and material that Canada was making required a greater say in the direction of the war and from 1915 to the end of the war he energetically argued this position. When it came to crafting the peace settlements, Borden continued this position to the end that Canada signed the treaties on her own authority, not that of Great Britain. After his retirement in 1920, he traveled and wrote, serving as the Chancellor of Queen's University from 1924–1929.

Recruiting remained relatively easy throughout 1914 and 1915, with close to 60,000 enlisting by the end of 1914. By June 1915, Canada had a force of over 100,000 soldiers overseas, with a goal of one man in reserve in England for every two at the front. This was in the face of enormous casualty figures, the like of which none of the belligerents had foreseen. By the fall of 1915, Canada had two divisions with a strength of over 40,000 fighting in France. Sam Hughes boasted an ever-expanding Canadian army, with all new recruits forming into new battalions, which in turn would coalesce

Activity

Volunteer motives

The initial volunteers for the Canadian Expeditionary Force came from all over Canada, although in markedly different numbers. For each of the following people, write a letter explaining your motives for volunteering or not.

- A farm boy from Southern Saskatchewan
- A lawyer from Toronto
- A French-Canadian mill worker from Montreal
- A recent German immigrant living in Edmonton
- A Mennonite farmer from Steinbeck, Manitoba
- A logger from New Brunswick whose parents had emigrated from Scotland

into new divisions. The brutal arithmetic of the trenches, however, dictated that each division that was fighting would need replacements at a rate of some 15,000 men a year. The decentralized recruiting system continually lowered medical and height standards in order to meet the need for men. Volunteer recruiting peaked in early 1916 and fell off from that point. Nevertheless, when the Battle of Arras erupted in the spring of 1917 and the Canadians began their assault on Vimy Ridge, the Canadian Corps consisted of four divisions in France with a fifth waiting in Britain. But by this time, recruit numbers could not keep up with battle losses.



Canadian Machine gunners in shell hole during the advance at Vimy Ridge, near Arras, France, 1917. The Battle of Vimy Ridge is considered an important event in the development of Canada as an independent nation. How can the experience of war foster nationalist feelings?



What are some reasons for the decline in volunteers from early 1916? How might the Canadian government have addressed this problem?

Quebec

Recruiting in Quebec had lagged behind English Canada from the beginning of the war. The reasons were numerous. There was one French-speaking regiment—the Royal 22 Battalion “The Van Doos”—but it was primarily led by English officers. Demographically, men married earlier in Quebec and this shrank the available pool of single men as compared to Western Canada and Ontario. Recruiting in the province was organized by a Protestant clergyman, excluding the most influential social institution in the province—The Catholic Church—from the recruitment process. Anti-French education laws in Ontario and Manitoba epitomized an attitude that convinced many French Canadians that this was not their war. The growing employment opportunities afforded by increased war production and the high wages that accompanied them seemed to young Quebecers a more sensible decision than enlisting. Politically, Henri Bourassa was expressing his opposition to the war openly by 1916 as were many of his *nationaliste* allies and this curtailed Quebec recruitment even further.

Activity

Canada's willingness

Source A

The following is an excerpt by historians J. Finlay and D. Sprague.

At the beginning, mobilization had the effect of unifying the country around a sense of common danger that was far less artificial than anything Canada had experienced in the past. Earlier, in the case of John A. McDonald's attempt to create an atmosphere of national emergency around the building of the CPR, for example, the artificiality of the effort was only too apparent. Or later with the South African war, the episode was only English Canada's adventure.

Source: Finlay, J.L. and D. N. Sprague, D.N. 1984. *The Structure of Canadian History*. Scarborough: Prentice Hall. pp. 298–99.

Source B

Wilfred Laurier, the leader of the official opposition, uttered the following to describe Canada's stance at the beginning of the war.

... when the call goes out our answer goes at once, and it goes in the classical language of British answer to the call of Duty: Ready, Aye Ready.

Source C

Stuart Ramsay Tompkins was a young Albertan working for the Department of Education when the war broke out in 1914. The following is an excerpt of a letter he wrote to his wife-to-be in September 1914.

The whole city [Edmonton] is now astir with a mild form of mobilization. Last night coming down town we passed a squad of citizens marching to the tune of "A Hundred Pipers ...". A whole regiment is being formed to train bellicose citizens. The civil service are forming a squad but in view of the announcement ... there is much less enthusiasm being displayed. Strong exception is being taken to the stand of the government in refusing to allow men any part of their salary while on active service.

Source: Stuart Ramsay Tompkins to Edna Christie, September 10, 1914. Cited in Ramsay Tompkins, Stuart. 1989. *A Canadian's Road to Russia: Letters from the Great War Decade*. Doris H. Pieroth (ed.) Edmonton: University of Alberta Press. p. 36.

Questions

- 1 How does source A contrast the First World War with earlier crises in Canada? Why was it different?
- 2 Why, according to source C, are members of the civil service hesitant to enlist?
- 3 Compare and contrast the sentiments of Canadian citizens regarding enlisting as expressed in sources B and C.
- 4 Using the documents and further research analyze military enlistment in Canada in 1914.

The home front

While the First World War was developing into a human tragedy of catastrophic proportions, it was fundamentally changing the short-term condition and long-term structure of the Canadian economy. Like other countries, Canada entered the war while in the depths of a sharp depression. The increased production required by a European war and the prospect of a vastly expanded army meant that after a period of realignment—and in fact a brief deepening of the depression—unemployment would be a memory. When the massive increase in demand that accompanied a war of this magnitude was combined with the physical devastation and dislocation of established European national economies it meant that Canada, her fields and factories safe on the other side of the Atlantic, could expand into this niche.

Initially, in Canada, this expansion would be in the traditional role of supplier of primary resources. Acreage under cultivation increased dramatically early in the war and this pushed wheat production to new levels. Thereafter, production would stabilize at lower levels. The massive demand created by the disruption to European wheat supplies sent commodity prices higher. The net result was that the value of wheat exports doubled during the war, although it would never match the amount of grain produced per acre in 1915. Wartime necessity also buoyed the Canadian lumber industry, which had been hit hard by the building slump that accompanied the depression of 1913. Dairy products and meat also found new markets. Meat exports increased by some 1400% during the course of the war. Mineral extraction also increased during the war.

Munitions production was certainly not a traditional sector of strength in the Canadian economy. The expanded Canadian army, her British allies, the grinding nature of trench warfare, and the domineering personality of Sam Hughes all demanded that she create one. It was initiated in typical Sam Hughes fashion—ad hoc with a heavy dose of **patronage**. But such a “system” was bound to collapse under the massive demands of a war the scale of which was developing in Europe. Initial war production suffered in both quantity and quality. Hughes’ Shell Committee set up in 1914 to manage munitions production proved incapable of keeping up with purchase orders from both the Canadian and British army, plagued by Hughes’ meddling, profiteering and old party patronage. The Imperial Munitions Board over which Hughes had no control was created to replace the Shell Committee in 1915. The quantity and quality of munitions improved almost immediately.

The issues with the Shell Committee and munitions production illustrated the fact that the Canadian government did not have an overall plan for wartime economic coordination. Rather, it responded to issues and situations as they arose. The War Measures Act gave the government a powerful tool with which to address these emergent situations. Nevertheless, as the war progressed, a patchwork of government intervention appeared in Canadian society:

Patronage is the practice of giving political positions and economic opportunities to political allies and supporters.

3 • The emergence of the Americas in global affairs, 1880–1929

- 1915, Imperial Munitions Board coordinated production of artillery shells and later other materials from ships to airplanes
- 1915, War Purchasing Commission coordinated military procurement
- 1915, Munitions Resources Commission supervised the conservation of natural resources for war production
- 1917, Fuel Controller coordinated fuel import, export, production and distribution
- 1917, Board of Grain Supervisors managed wheat marketing
- 1918, War Trade Board managed import and export licenses
- 1918, Canadian Food Board supervised food distribution,

Financing the war

With a massive war effort comes a massive financial burden. Canada, like all countries had two means at its disposal to meet this burden—taxation and credit. Taxation was anathema to the finance minister, Thomas White, but there really seemed no alternative. A multitude of indirect taxes descended on the Canadian public. Steamship and railroad tickets were taxed, as were items such as coffee, sugar, tobacco, cheques, and telegrams. Tariffs increased. It was clear from the beginning that indirect taxation would not suffice and in 1916 the federal government passed its first direct taxation measure, a power that the **British North America Act** had reserved for the provincial level of government. It was a tax on profits made from war materials. It was not the last such tax and in 1917, with bills mounting, the federal government introduced Canada's first income tax, assuring the public that it was a temporary measure. The new taxation, however, came nowhere near meeting the government's wartime obligations. The rest would have to be raised by borrowing.

Canada was already in debt when the war broke out. Years of railroad construction and subsidies had pushed government expenditures well beyond its income. The problem with wartime debt was where was there money available to borrow? Britain, a traditional source of credit for Canadian enterprise, was strapped beyond her capacity to pay and indeed would become a debtor nation to Canada by the end of the war. The United States was an economy that, free from wartime expenditure and flush with war profits, became one source of credit. The other, more important Canadian source, starting in 1915 and continuing throughout the war, were a series of federal government bonds that would raise Can \$2.3 billion. Provincial and municipal governments were also looking for credit during the war and when the resultant burden was added to the federal numbers Canada emerged from the war with a debt of close to \$5 billion.

While spending helps create employment it also causes prices to increase. When this spending is undertaken by the government on a scale like that required by the First World War, inflation is bound to be significant. The Borden government had taken Canada off the gold standard early in the war and began to print money. When this was added to the dramatically increased demand in the war years, prices almost doubled. The war also put strains on world supply that exerted an upward pressure on prices.

British North America Act This was an 1867 Act of the British parliament that established and governed self-government in Canada—it, in essence, formed part of the Canadian constitution until 1981 when the constitution became a solely Canadian document.

A question of leadership

The war brought into sharper focus an issue that Canada and her leaders had been grappling with increasingly over the preceding 20 years—namely the dominion's relationship with Great Britain. The simple fact that a declaration of war by the British Parliament committed Canada to war highlighted the limited nature of Canada's independence as did the fact that her constitution was in fact an Act of the British Parliament and would remain so into the 1980s. It is true that when the British Parliament declared war in August 1914, there was no hesitation on the part of both Borden and Laurier, himself somewhat cool to imperial integration. Canada would commit completely to Britain's cause. But as Canada's commitment grew and the war dragged on in its vicious stalemate, questions of dominion sovereignty began to emerge. Nowhere was this more clear than in the matter of the leadership of Canadian troops.

At the outset of the war, the British High Command gave brief consideration as to how the Canadian troops would be distributed among existing British formations, but very early determined to use the Canadians as a division led by a British general. Borden favored the idea that Canadian officers would lead these units. While he was largely successful in these efforts, the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) would become, for operational purposes, part of the British army. Operationally, the Canadian troops would gradually come ever more under the Canadian commanders as the war progressed with Sir Arthur Currie becoming the first Canadian-born commander of the Canadian corps in 1917. But the overall direction of military operations was another matter.

Throughout 1914 and the first half of 1915, Prime Minister Borden began to realize that the Canadian troops had essentially been turned over to the British government to do with as they pleased, short of splitting them up. While this might have been inconsequential had the war been over by Christmas and Canada's contribution remained proportionally small, by the summer of 1915 it was becoming evident that the war was going to be a long, brutal and grinding affair and that the Canadian contribution was growing in significance. Borden found it increasingly difficult to accept that he and the Canadian parliament had no say in the policy and strategy that its troops would execute. Facing staggering casualty figures with no end in sight, Borden traveled to Britain in the summer of 1915 to assess the situation for himself and argue for a more significant decision-making role for his Dominion.

Finding no answers and plenty of condescension from the British government and military officials, Borden returned to Canada determined to raise enough soldiers for the cause that Canada's concerns could not be ignored. It was not until the horrific battles of 1916 decimated Allied ranks and David Lloyd George became the Coalition leader of a new British government that this situation began to change. In January 1917, Lloyd George convened an Imperial War Conference and the Dominion leaders formed into an Imperial War Cabinet. Two things became evident at the Cabinet table: Britain expected even more from her imperial partners and, in turn, the dominions wanted a change in their status.

Discussion point

Canada emerged from the First World War with a greater degree of sovereignty than it had in 1914. Was this the same in the cases of the other dominions—Australia, New Zealand and South Africa?

Quebec

The initial wartime consensus welded together by war fervor and patriotic outpouring soon began to show cracks and as might be expected these were most evident in French–English relations. Wilfred Laurier, ever an eloquent advocate of Canadian unity, never wavered in his exhortations to cooperation. But as the war dragged on, recruiting numbers began to reveal a perceived gap between English volunteers and French volunteers. Lack of distinct French military units and a perceived prejudice against French officers combined with anti-French language legislation in both Ontario and Manitoba to further enflame a tense situation. The Quebec nationalists had furthered their alliance with the Conservatives early in the war by joining Borden's government. The *nationaliste* leader, Henri Bourassa, however, had turned publicly against the war by 1916.

Much of this was brought to a head by the conscription crisis and subsequent 1917 federal election campaign. The Liberal Party under Laurier, whose power stretched across the Quebec/Ontario border, was severely split by the question of conscription. Many Ontario and western Liberals who either supported conscription or recognized the prevailing political winds crossed to join Borden's new Unionist government, leaving the aging Laurier feeling betrayed and with only a few Quebec MPs.

In the streets, conscription proved deeply unpopular in Quebec. Riots and protests spread across the province and with them denunciations of treason by pro-conscription advocates. Order was restored with the help of the War Measures Act. When the dust of the 1917 election settled, Quebec found itself with its MPs in parliamentary opposition and with conscription a reality. While to the community of nation states the First World War helped propel Canada toward nationhood, within its borders Canada was more divided in 1918 than it had been in 1914.

Political unity and division

When the British government tumbled into war in August 1914 dragging her Empire over the edge with her, the news was greeted with pledges of cooperation and support from politicians on both sides of the House of Commons. Wilfred Laurier put aside his pre-war Imperial misgivings and ranged his Liberal Party behind the Borden government. Henri Bourassa, although personally opposed to the war, would not speak against the war as a politician until 1916. His parliamentary followers backed the government, as many had in the years preceding the war. This united front, however, was built more on circumstances than it was on deeper political principles. There was agreement on the ends, but not the means. All could agree if not on the necessity of supporting Great Britain, then at least on opposing the dangers of "Prussianism" and the evils of an unprovoked expansionary war. How that was to be accomplished was another matter.

The government's approach to meeting these ends was to place a great deal of power, money and trust in the controversial minister of the militia. Sam Hughes was a bombastic, stubborn, energetic

politician who had little use for the formalities of parliamentary government or his own prime minister. He did, however, have a great deal of use for people who supported him and the quirky ideas that took his fancy. His championing of the Ross rifle, a fine target weapon, but unsuitable for the dirty rigors of trench warfare, left the riding (electoral district) in which it was produced flush with employment and the Ross Rifle Company flush with profits, but Canadian soldiers bereft of a workable rifle in France. His lack of a centralized recruiting system created chaos at the same time as tens of thousands of Canadians signed up. Mounting scandals and criticism finally pushed Borden to fire Hughes in 1916.

The corruption that accompanied Hughes' "system" as well as non-Hughes related scandals, brought political opposition to the Borden government's handling of the war. A number of Liberals had been calling for a coalition government from early in the war and these calls increased in intensity as 1916, with its seemingly endless casualty lists, dragged on. Borden himself began to see that this was going to be necessary before the end of the war. It was the combination of dwindling enlistment numbers and growing casualty lists that would bring about the formation of a Union Government.

The conscription crisis

Unable to maintain voluntary enlistment numbers that could sustain the Canadian Corps in the face of battlefield losses, Prime Minister Borden decided that the only alternative was conscription and in May 1917 announced it to the House of Commons. After announcing it, he approached Laurier with the prospect of forming some kind of coalition government, not necessarily with Borden as prime minister. Laurier, struck by the fact that the prospect of conscription was raised before he was approached, essentially asking his endorsement rather than his input, declined and set himself against conscription.

The Military Service Act was debated throughout the summer of 1917 and passed by August. It would call up single men first and provide for conscientious objectors. Borden hoped it would raise an additional 100,000 men for the Canadian Corps. Borden was unable to persuade opposition leader Laurier into a coalition government and his inability to get the opposition Liberals to consent to a further year's postponement of a general election meant that conscription would be decided largely at the polls. To bolster the chances of victory, the government drafted and passed the Military Voters Act. This Act provided for soldiers serving overseas to cast a vote. As if to underscore the fact that it was essentially a one-issue election, they could either cast a "yes" or "no" vote for the current government. Alternatively, they could write in the name of a candidate if they knew it. A helpful list of government candidates accompanied the ballots. The Wartime Elections Act significantly extended to the franchise to female relatives of serving and deceased soldiers. The same Act removed the franchise from those immigrants who had come to Canada from enemy countries after 1902.

As it became increasingly obvious that the pro-conscription forces would win the looming election, many English-speaking Liberals

Discussion point

To what extent do you think the Wartime Elections Act was based on ideas of gender equality? How did it contribute to the fight for granting the vote to women?

Activity

The Canadians in battle

From their initial blooding in 1915, the Canadians took part in numerous battles on the western front. Research the following battles to complete the following chart.

| Battle | Dates | Canadian Commanders | Description | Significance |
|---------------|-------|---------------------|-------------|--------------|
| 2nd Ypres | | | | |
| St. Eloi | | | | |
| The Somme | | | | |
| Courselette | | | | |
| Virmy Ridge | | | | |
| Hill 70 | | | | |
| Passchendaele | | | | |
| The 100 Days | | | | |

began to take Borden up on an offer to accept them into what he called a Union Government. Regardless of how these politicians read the prevailing winds, the general election of 1917 was a hard-fought affair that revealed the issue of conscription to be divisive across the country. In an effort to secure the western farm vote, Borden announced that farmer's sons would be exempt from military service. The outcome of the election returned a Unionist government with a 71-seat majority. Closer examination of the returns reflected the divided nature of the country that had emerged in the campaign. Quebec and the Maritimes had gone heavily against the Unionists, but Borden was able to carry the day on the strength of Ontario and Western Canada. In terms of the popular vote, Quebec had voted four to one against the Unionist government while the rest of Canada had voted in favor of it by a margin of almost three to one. Not surprisingly serving soldiers voted overwhelmingly for the Unionists and by association for conscription.

In an effort to win the election of 1917, the Union government had promised a number of conscription exemptions—farmers' sons and Mennonites for example—but the sheer number of those seeking exemption ran the appeals mechanism to a standstill. The conscription machinery in Quebec proved incapable of compelling a largely unwilling population to register for the draft. Faced with the alarming casualties at the beginning of 1918, Borden and his cabinet ended most exemptions causing violence to erupt in Ontario and Quebec. In the west, the violence was often turned on those seeking exemptions. The divisions created by conscription would continue to the end of the war.

Activity

Wartime elections

Compare and contrast the issues, electoral tactics, and results of the following wartime elections:

- Argentina, 1916
- Canada, 1917
- Canada, 1940
- United States, 1944
- United States, 1952
- United States, 1968
- United States, 2004

Activity**The conscription debate**

Divide into two groups. One group will take the pro-conscription position and the other will take the anti-conscription position. Conduct a debate on whether or not the Canadian government should pass conscription into law in 1917. In researching your positions be sure to include a representative sample of perspectives including:

- The Maritimes
- The Western Prairies
- British Columbia
- English-speaking Quebecers
- French-speaking Quebecers
- Immigrants
- Families of soldiers
- Members of the Conservative Party
- Members of the Liberal Party
- Labor leaders

By the end of the war, some 24,000 conscripts had made it to the front and were assigned as reinforcements to existing formations within the Canadian corps and many played an important role in the battles that took place in the last three months of the war. While it can be argued that conscription was necessary to maintain Canada's overseas fighting strength, which it did, it was bought at the cost of the national unity that appeared to be forming at the beginning of the war and the division thus engendered would continue throughout the century.

At the front

The first contingent of the Canadian Expeditionary Force arrived in England in October 1914 and soon began a haphazard training at their quarters on the infamous windswept, cold and wet Salisbury plain. While the bulk of Canadian troops would serve as a distinct division and later corps in the British army, some units served in other British formations. The Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, a unit raised in Canada at the outset of the war consisting of Canadians with British military experience, initially served within a British division. Some Canadian specialist units served in other theatres of war, but the vast majority were stationed at various points on the western front throughout the war.

The Canadians arrived in France in February of 1915. After some minor engagements in March, in April the Canadian brigades were stationed in the Ypres Salient, a bulge in the British line near the ancient cloth-making town of Ypres. On April 22, the Germans opposite the Canadians, who were flanked by French and Algerians, released chlorine gas for the first time on the western front. The ensuing 2nd Battle of Ypres was a chaotic and bloody affair that revealed the Canadians as inexperienced but courageous soldiers.

The shortcomings of the Ross rifle were becoming dangerously evident and Canadian soldiers would abandon them for the more robust Lee Enfield of the British army whenever they could.

With the arrival of the second contingent in mid 1915, the Canadians were formed into a corps commanded by a British general with the component divisions being commanded by Canadian generals. The Canadian Corps began to gain reputation as skillful trench raiders and eventually as shock troops leading larger assaults on German lines. By 1917, the Canadian Corps, by then consisting of four divisions, was given the task of capturing Vimy Ridge, a commanding position that the French army had been unable to wrestle from the German army. This operation, to commence on April 9, was to be Canadian in conception, planning, and execution. General Arthur Currie took note of previous failures and determined not to repeat them had his corps meticulously rehearse the plan behind the lines. Innovations such as platoon tactics, new methods for counterbattery targeting as well as ensuring that all men, especially non-commissioned officers, understood their objectives and how to find them both on a map and in reality helped make the operation a huge success.

The peace

From Borden's first wartime visit to England it was evident that he believed the scale of Canada's commitment entitled her to a share in determining the direction of the conflict. While this was not immediately evident to the British authorities, by the time David Lloyd George formed the Imperial War Cabinet, it was fairly clear that the role of the Dominions would have to be redefined.

The British assumed that the Dominions would be consulted, but submit as subordinate to the British delegation at the Peace Conference. Borden would have none of this; Canada must have a seat at the conference on her own merits and the merits of her contribution to the Allied victory. Canadian delegates sat on committees that decided some aspects of the final treaty. Their position on the whole can be seen as a mixture of US and British sentiments. Borden refused the notion that Canada might benefit from German territorial concessions. While Borden may have seen Canada's new position in the world as ideal to act the middle ground between Britain and the United States, Wilson saw it quite differently. Wilson and other US diplomats preferred to deal with Britain on matters involving Canada. Britain could be counted on to arrive at compromise more quickly than Canada, having little direct interests in much of Canada-US relations. Article X of the League of Nations Covenant providing for international response to aggressive acts, was as much a concern for Borden as it was for US opponents of the treaty. He was worried that this clause might drag Canada into another European war—her hands tied this time by the League as it had been by the British Empire in 1914. Canada also opposed any part of the League of Nations Covenant that might curtail her ability to limit immigration based on race or any other criterion. In the end, Canada became a signatory to the Treaty of Versailles separate from the British delegation. Likewise, she was admitted to the League of Nations as a country.

The impact of the First World War on Canada

Demobilization

Canada had mobilized close to 9% of her total 1914 population for the war effort. Close to 60,000 of these had not returned, but reintegrating those scores who did return into an economy that was no longer buoyed by wartime demand was going to be a difficult task. For the most part, the government made little provision to provide for demobilized soldiers. They were given money for civilian clothing, access to medical care for a year and some help, depending on where they were, in finding a job. Those so inclined and deemed good investments could apply for a low-interest loan to purchase farmland. Remaining free land was made available to veterans, but this was far from prime agricultural land. Beyond this, the veterans were left largely to their own devices. Nevertheless, the veterans were reintegrated into the economy with fewer problems than might have been expected. While the veterans integrated into society, organized labor struggled to adjust to the new ideological and economic landscape. When the Bolsheviks seized control in Russia in 1917, it invigorated left-wing politics in Canada. As in the United States, this prompted a reaction by the Canadian government who worked to shut foreign language newspapers and banned a number of "radical" organizations in 1918. The economic disruption prompted by the end of the war, helped spark a number of radical labor actions in the immediate postwar period, the most significant being the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 which shut this major western Canadian city down for six weeks, prompting sympathy strikes across the country.

Economic changes

The Canadian economy itself had undergone a significant restructuring during the war. Manufacturing played a far greater role in 1919 than it had in 1914. Not only had existing sectors expanded, but new areas of activity also expanded. Textiles and chemical production had expanded with the wartime demand and the decline of British imports. It would prove far less expensive to convert wartime industries to civilian production than to build these from scratch and thus the war provided an important accelerant to Canadian manufacturing. Despite the advances in manufacturing, expanded land under cultivation, new forests and mineral deposits being exploited, the war had created another important structural shift in the Canadian economy. The relative weakness of the British economy and strength of the US economy meant that, increasingly, the United States replaced Great Britain as Canada's leading trading partner, creditor and foreign investor.

Diplomatic changes

On the world stage, Canada took its independent membership in the League of Nations and the International Labour Organization very

Activity

Labor unrest

Compare and contrast labor unrest in the Americas in the immediate postwar period:

- United States
- Canada
- Argentina
- Brazil
- Central America

seriously. It did not take long after the war, however, for the reality of this independence to be tested. When, in 1922, Turkish forces tested the resolve of the British garrison at Chanak in the Straits, Britain summoned her Dominions to her side once again. Canada's Liberal prime minister, Mackenzie King, discovered the British assumption of Canadian aid in the press before he heard from the British government. King responded by declaring publicly that it would be the Canadian parliament that would decide if Canada would participate, not the British government. While the Chanak crisis was resolved without recourse to arms, it prompted a further clarification of Canada's international position. The conference that assembled at Lausanne to negotiate with the Turks did not include Canada to which King responded by stating that Canada would not be bound by any agreement to which she was not a signatory. The Liberal Mackenzie King continued the course set by the Conservative Borden at Versailles in 1923 when Canada signed the Halibut Treaty with the United States with no participation by the British—the first time that Canada had negotiated and signed a bilateral treaty on her own. By 1927, Canada had appointed a Canadian envoy to the United States who, for the first time, would officially act and work independently of the British embassy. The sovereignty that had begun on the battlefields of Flanders progressed throughout the 1920s.

Activity

Comparing the First World War in the Americas

| | Argentina | Brazil | Canada | United States |
|---|-----------|--------|--------|---------------|
| Reason for involvement/ Noninvolvement | | | | |
| Nature of Involvement | | | | |
| Military role | | | | |
| Economic role | | | | |
| Diplomatic role | | | | |
| Impact on society | | | | |
| Impact on economy | | | | |
| Impact on hemispheric status | | | | |

The impact of the First World War on Latin America

Economic conditions prior to the First World War

The end of the 19th century saw an incredible integration of the world economy. Goods, people and capital moved around the globe with increasing ease and in ever-growing amounts. Technology allowed for a uniform system of commodity prices to exist and thus trade to be more globalized. While this integration allowed consumers and producers around the world to take advantage of foreign markets and prices, it also exposed them to the vagaries of these markets. Changes in livestock prices in Canada could affect the price of Argentine beef and thus the life of Argentine ranchers. A catastrophe the scale of the First World War was bound to have profound effects on this global economy and all its participants whether they were a belligerent or not.

Latin American countries were certainly a part of this global economy. Massive amounts of European capital flowed into the region. By 1914, Great Britain had poured close to four billion dollars-worth of capital into Latin America. Large sums were also invested by France (\$1.1 billion) and Germany (\$.9 billion). Foreign capital was heavily invested in communication and transportation networks. The British enjoyed a telegraph monopoly in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay while the US-owned Central and South American Telegraph Company was also heavily invested in the region. British and American banks were scattered throughout the continent facilitating the movement of this capital.

Latin America's major role in this global economy was as an exporter of commodities. Argentina exported wheat, corn, beef, and wool. Foreign capital and technology fueled the Chilean copper mining industry at the turn of the century. Chile's production of nitrates for the world market was also expanding rapidly, as were its wheat and wool industries in the years leading up to the First World War. Although Brazilian coffee production was volatile in the years leading up to the war it was nonetheless an incredibly important part of the Brazilian economy accounting for over half of the value of all Brazilian exports in the years 1870 to 1911. Significantly, for the coming war the primary consumers of Brazilian coffee were the United States, France and Germany. The Mexican export economy grew dramatically until 1911 and tended to be more diversified than other Latin American economies. Ranching, mining, as well as henequen and oil production were important elements in Mexico's export economy.

| Latin America in the First World War | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Country | Status |
| Brazil | Declared War on Germany in 1917 |
| Argentina | Neutral |
| Colombia | Neutral |
| Venezuela | Neutral |
| Perú | Broke diplomatic relations with Germany |
| Chile | Neutral |
| Uruguay | Broke diplomatic relations with Germany |
| Paraguay | Neutral |
| Ecuador | Broke diplomatic relations with Germany |
| Bolivia | Broke diplomatic relations with Germany |
| Nicaragua | Declared War on Germany in 1918 |
| Guatemala | Declared War on Germany in 1918 |
| Mexico | Neutral |
| Cuba | Declared War on Germany in 1917 |
| Panama | Declared War on Germany in 1917 |
| El Salvador | Neutral |
| Costa Rica | Declared War on Germany in 1918 |
| Haiti | Declared War on Germany in 1918 |
| Honduras | Declared War on Germany in 1918 |

Discussion point

What are the uses of nitrates?
Why might the world demand for nitrates increased during this period?

Migration was also an important aspect of the prewar global economy. Europeans came to Latin America and these people were increasingly from Germany. Germany was taking an ever more aggressive approach to foreign policy with the Kaiser's imperial desire for "a place in the sun" and this included Latin America. By 1900, well over a quarter of a million Germans had emigrated to Brazil and some 120,000 to Chile. German migrants could be found throughout the region. At the turn of the century, where German people, business and money went, the German army would not be far behind, most notably in Chile where German officers instructed the Chilean army. The Germans also had a military presence in Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay. The German High Command mapped out contingency plans for a war with the United States during this period which included operations in the Latin American region. German interest in the region raised the ire of the United States and was an important factor in its own ambitions to expand in the region throughout this period.

As war clouds gathered, there were signs that the world economy was beginning to change. Much of this had to do with the ascendance of the United States in international economic importance and the looming comparative decline of the British economy. While the British remained the most important foreign economic power in South America, in Central America the United States had made important inroads. It also had a strong presence in the economies of South American countries, especially those on the Pacific coast. These were changes that were to be accelerated by the outbreak of the First World War. Seen in this light, although there were drastic changes in Latin America as a result of the war, there were also elements of continuity in terms of trends that had begun prior to 1914.

The economic impact of the outbreak of war

The August 1914 outbreak of the war had been preceded by a short sharp world economic recession. Although this represented a dramatic slowdown in economic activity, the war brought things to a near standstill. Part of the reason was that the war immediately affected the physical and the financial apparatus by which world markets operated. Credit was no longer available, and insurance became scarce. There was an immediate impact on shipping as British ships, which carried the bulk of Latin American goods, waited for orders and naval escorts. Thus, shipping rates skyrocketed with the reduction in availability. These effects were fairly immediate but the increased demand that accompanies war had yet to be felt. The end result was that export economies that were dependent on foreign capital and foreign shipping, such as Latin American economies, were hit particularly hard very early in the war.

As they were reliant on foreign credit, predominantly from London, the outbreak of the war in which Great Britain had decided to participate placed immediate pressure on Latin American banks. Loans were called in. There were significant runs on banks and a number of governments responded by declaring "bank holidays" and

placing temporary moratoriums on debt. The short-term credit upon which day-to-day business in Latin America and indeed the world depended began to collapse making even small domestic transactions difficult. The Argentine and Brazilian governments were also dependent on long-term loans, as were all the governments that ran deficit budgets as part of their national finances, and these too suffered.

It might be expected that export economies, would fare well in wartime with its dramatically increased demand for everything from food to chemicals and minerals. But this took some time to filter through. For example, Chile was one of the world's leading producers of nitrates (key components in both fertilizer and explosives): two products in particular demand in wartime. But in the early months of the war, other factors conspired to hurt Chilean nitrate sales. The prewar recession and slump in prices meant that many countries carried surplus supplies of nitrates into late 1914. Much of Chile's nitrate sales were to central European countries with close to a third of these sales to Germany. The British naval blockade closed this market creating a nitrate surplus in Chile as well. Only when the incredible destruction of the war continued into 1915 did the massive demand for nitrates among other goods erode the surpluses and increase exports.

By 1915, Latin American economies had begun to recover from the initial shock of the war. The massive demand for the raw materials of war fueled this recovery. Although the volume of exports would not completely recover due to the interruption of shipping and capital, the demand drove prices dramatically higher and therefore the income from exports did recover by 1916. Wartime demand also sparked a rise in international inflation, pushing the price of imports higher. Eventually, as in most other national economies during the war, domestic inflation followed. The price of food in Argentina rose by 50% during the war and clothing in some cases tripled in price. Financial mechanisms such as currency exchange systems also began to improve in Latin America in the second year of the war making it easier to conduct business than it had been when the war broke out. The international value of the US dollar and the pound sterling began to stabilize. Nevertheless, the amount of foreign capital that was directed at infrastructure and capital building projects did not recover. In general, the governments of Latin America responded to the unavailability of foreign loans by curtailing public works and other major projects. Some loans were secured in the United States and others through domestic bonds, but on the whole austerity was the primary response.

The debt problem of many Latin American economies was compounded during the war by the fact that around 50% of states' revenues came in the form of duties. With the slump in imports, this revenue stream was cut dramatically. Some countries, such as Brazil, responded to this revenue shortfall by printing money with the predictable inflationary effects, already extreme, due to supply and demand issues created by the war.

Discussion point

What other minerals and chemicals were needed in the war effort. From where did the Allies and the Central Powers import these goods?

The combination of fiscal austerity and domestic inflation created a volatile labor situation in a number of Latin American countries. By 1917, employment was rising in Argentina, as were consumer prices. Real wages were falling. Consequently labor union activity increased drastically during this period. When the government seemed to side with the workers in these instances they were quickly denounced as pro-German, especially by British business interests. In January 1919, Buenos Aires erupted in a violent general strike that started in the Vesena metal works and quickly spread to other sectors in which a number of strikers and police officers were killed. In this case, the government ordered the army to end the strike and a week of violence, arrests and many deaths followed—a period known as the “Tragic Week.” This week was followed by a period of popular reprisals against Russian and Jewish communities in the country, fueled by the belief that the general strike was a prelude to a Bolshevik-like revolution. The war and related events seemed to spark unrest beyond the labor movement in Argentina. Student movements, influenced by the Mexican and Russian revolutions, staged strikes and demonstrations calling for academic reform and these demonstrations did find support from the Yrigoyen government despite its violent suppression of the general strike.

In the end, the effect of the war on the various economies of Latin America depended to a degree on the state of these economies at the outset of the war. Countries such as Brazil and Chile, which had begun to industrialize in the prewar years, used the wartime demand to accelerate industrial output during this period. Perú, Colombia and countries with stronger trade ties with the United States built on these ties during the war and therefore had to substitute for lost imports to a lesser degree than those economies more dependent on European trade. The less industrially developed economies of Central America saw in the war a disruption to their regular economic activity to which they would return at the end of hostilities. Regardless, all these economies would return to export dependence after 1919.

As with Canada, one overarching result of the war in Latin America was the growth in importance of the United States at the expense of European economies, particularly the United Kingdom. US representatives, private and official, advocated this course from very early in the war. The United States government used forums such as the Pan American Financial Conference held in Washington in 1915 to make the point that the outbreak of the war highlighted the problem of relying on European countries economically and to suggest that a more hemispheric approach was desirable. Trade with the United States increased drastically during the war, especially in the west coast economies such as Perú and Chile. The flow of US capital also increased during these years. This increase was not uniform; Brazil and Argentina, for example, did not see much of an increase in US economic activity. In some ways, the United States economy was not predisposed to supplant the British economy either in the region or globally. As Bill Albert has pointed out, the United

States would become increasingly protectionist in the postwar period. The United States also produced a great deal of primary products on its own and was interested in protecting and growing these industries, whereas the domestic British economy produced far less primary goods. These factors meant that although the United States would become more economically dominant in Latin America it would not replace the United Kingdom. Albert also contends that the immediate dislocation caused by the war spurred nationalist sentiments in a number of Latin American countries. In fact, once the United States joined the war, neutrality itself became a point of nationalism as was the case in Colombia.

Noneconomic issues

Throughout the first years of the war, it was Latin America's strategic location that conditioned its role in the war. The terms of neutrality permitted the presence of ships for a 24-hour period in a neutral harbor and both sides availed themselves of this provision in terms of Latin American ports. Naturally, it led to both abuse and accusations of abuse by both sides. German ships were seized on more than one occasion. Latin American goods and ships were subject to the German U-Boat campaign and the British Royal Navy conducted operations in the territorial waters of some Latin American states such as Chile.

Brazil was the only Latin American country to participate in the war beyond a symbolic declaration of war. After the United States entered the war, and after a number of German attacks on Brazilian shipping, Brazil drifted to a more rigorous pro-Ally "neutrality." The April 5, 1917, sinking of the Brazilian ship *Parana* resulted in anti-German rioting in Rio de Janeiro, the expulsion of the German ambassador and the severing of diplomatic ties between the two countries. By late October 1917, Brazil had formally declared war on Germany and the Central Powers. Her main contribution would be to providing naval support in patrolling South American waters and minesweeping activities on the west coast of Africa. By mid-1918, Brazil sent a nominal number of troops to the western front as well as a medical detachment. Brazil's participation in the Paris Peace Conference provided the opportunity to argue for compensation for Brazilian goods confiscated by the Central Powers.

| Structure of prewar/wartime exports 1910-14/1915-18 | | |
|--|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Country | 1910-12 | 1915-18 |
| Argentina | Wheat 19.4% | Wheat 12.9% |
| | Corn 17.9% | Corn 9.6% |
| | Linseed 10.2% | Linseed 5.4% |
| | Hides 10.2% | Hides 9% |
| | Wool 12.9% | Wool 12.9% |
| | Frozen Beef 7.6% | Frozen beef 15.3% |
| | | Tinned meat 5.9% |
| Brazil | Coffee 54.2% | Coffee 47.4% |
| | Rubber 27.9% | Rubber 8.8% |
| | | Hides and skins 7.7% |
| | | Sugar 4.5% |
| Chile | Nitrates and iodine 86% | Nitrates and iodine 74.6% |
| | Copper 8% | Copper 17.3% |
| Perú | Sugar 17.5% | Sugar 27.6% |
| | Cotton 13.8% | Cotton 18.3% |
| | Copper 20.5% | Copper 26.3% |
| | Rubber 12.3% | Petroleum 7.5% |
| | Petroleum 6.3% | Wool 7% |

Source: Albert, Bill & Henderson, Paul. 1988. *South America and the First World War: The Impact of the War on Brazil, Argentina, Peru and Chile*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 59.

Activity

Brazil's rationale for war

Letter from the Brazilian Foreign Minister Lauro Müller to the Imperial German Government, February 6, 1917.

The unexpected communication we have just received announcing a blockade of the wide extent of countries with which Brazil is continually in economic relations by foreign and Brazilian shipping has produced a justified and profound impression through the imminent menace which it contains of the unjust sacrifice of lives, the destruction of property, and the wholesale disturbance of commercial transactions.

In such circumstances, and while observing always and invariably the same principles, the Brazilian Government, after having examined the tenor of the German note, declares that it cannot accept as effective the blockade which has just been suddenly decreed by the Imperial Government.

Because of the means employed to realize this blockade, the extent of the interdicted zones, the absence of all restrictions, including the failure of warning for even neutral menaced ships, and the announced intention of using every military means of destruction of no matter what character, such a blockade would neither be regular nor effective and would be contrary to the principles of law and the conventional rules established for military operations of this nature.

For these reasons the Brazilian Government, in spite of its sincere and keen desire to avoid any disagreement with the nations at war, with whom it is on friendly terms, believes it to be its duty to protest against this blockade and consequently to leave entirely with the Imperial German Government the responsibility for all acts which will involve Brazilian citizens, merchandise, or ships and which are proven to have been committed in disregard of the recognized principles of international law and of the conventions signed by Brazil and Germany.

Questions

- 1 What is meant by "the means employed to realize this blockade?"
- 2 How does this justification compare to the rationale for war in the United States and Canada?
- 3 Brazil would not declare war until October 1917. Why the delay?
- 4 With reference to its origin and purpose, assess the value and limitations of this document for historians studying the First World War.
- 5 Draft a response to this letter from the Imperial German Government.

Activity

Latin America and the First World War

The previous section deals primarily with the economic impact of the war on the Latin American region. Choose a Latin American country and conduct more in-depth research on the impact of the war looking at a variety of factors. This will allow you to come to some conclusions about the important historical theme of continuity vs. change. To what extent did the war represent a continuation of prewar trends or a disruption of those trends? Use the following chart to help organize your research.

| | Pre-1914 | Post-1918 |
|----------------------|----------|-----------|
| Economics | | |
| Social structures | | |
| Labor relations | | |
| Domestic politics | | |
| Diplomatic relations | | |
| Culture | | |

Exam practice and further resources

Sample exam questions

- 1 “The causes minor, the effects major.” To what extent do you agree with this view of the Spanish–American War (1898)?
- 2 How significant was the First World War for the status of the United States in the region?
- 3 “The arguments against taking part in the First World War were stronger than those for joining in.” Discuss this view with regard to either Canada or one Latin American country.
- 4 For what reasons and with what results did US foreign policy change between 1880 and 1929?
- 5 Compare and contrast the political impact of the First World War on two countries of the region.

Recommended further reading

Latin America

Bill Albert & Paul Henderson. 1988. *South America and the First World War: The Impact of the War on Brazil, Argentina, Peru and Chile*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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