

# Conscription

## Crisis

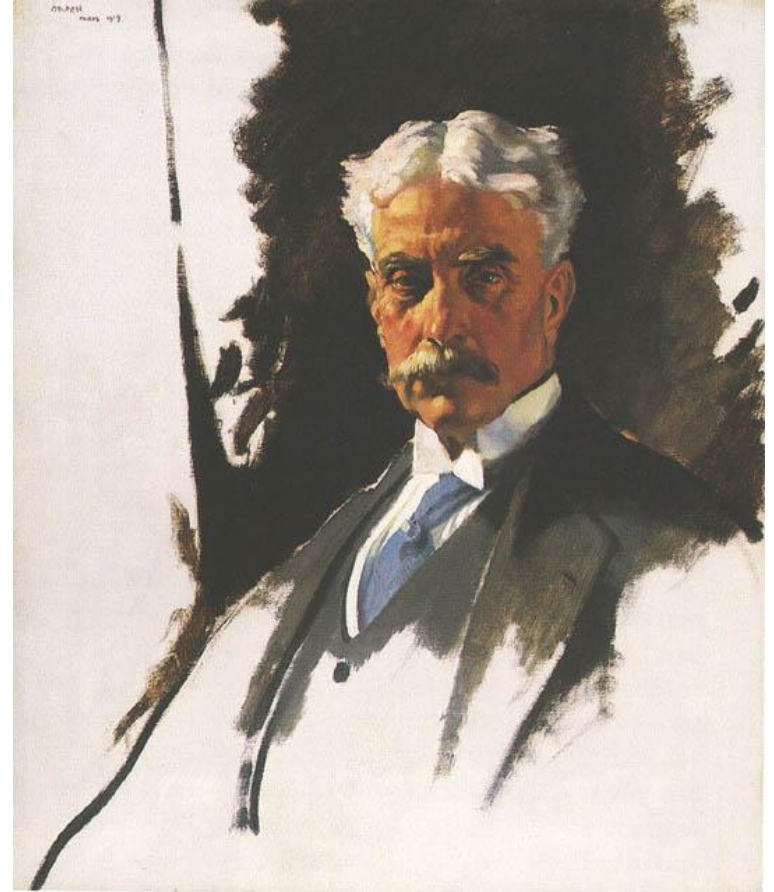
**Conscription-** A plan created by the government to force citizens to join the armed forces.

# The Beginning of WWI

- **Recall – At the start of WW1, many people volunteered to fight in the Canadian army.**
- **For the volunteers, the war was to be an adventure. As well, the war would be over very quickly.**
- **It did not go as thought. The war was long, and everyday, more and more soldiers were killed or wounded.**
- **By late-1916, people stopped volunteering.**

# Borden and Conscription

- In the summer of 1915, Prime Minister Borden went overseas to visit the Canadian troops. He was appalled by the harsh realities of trench warfare and the growing casualty list. **In his 1916 New Year's Eve address Borden declared, "On this last day of the old year the authorized force will be 500 000. This announcement is made in token of Canada's unflinchable resolve to crown the justice of our cause with victory and with an abiding peace."** Given that Canada's population was barely eight million citizens, this was an incredible request.



# Borden and Conscription

- **By 1917, conscription appeared to be the only means of finding sufficient troops to fight overseas.** Yet while conscription was meant to solve the shortage of soldiers in Europe, it created conflict at home.
- **In May 1917, Borden announced to Parliament his plan to introduce conscription, His statement divided Parliament along French and English lines and had a similar effect across the country.** Quebecois, who felt little connection to either Britain or France, were outraged. Conscription was not simply an English / French issue however, as farmers from across the country, especially in the prairie provinces, resisted mandated service, fearing that their livelihood would be lost if young men were forced to leave the family farm.

# 1917

Month	Casualties	New Enlistments
January	4 396	9 194
February	1 250	6 809
March	6 161	6 640
April	13 477	5 530
May	13 457	6 407
June	7 931	6 348
July	7 906	3 882
August	13 232	3 117
September	10 990	3 588
October	5 929	4 884
November	30 741	4 019
December	7 476	3 921
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>122 946</b>	<b>64 339</b>

# Military Voters / Wartime Elections Act

- An election was called for December 1917. Conscription was the main issue and Borden passed a series of controversial acts that helped him secure victory. **The Military Voters Act gave the vote to men and women serving overseas. Even British subjects, serving with the Canadian forces were given the vote.**
- **The Wartime Elections Act was passed that gave Borden the means to pick and choose his voters. He gave the right to vote to women at home who had relatives serving in the military. This was the first time women were allowed to vote in a federal election. He also ensured that Canadian citizens who had emigrated from enemy nations were unable to vote.**



# Conscription of 1917

- Borden ultimately won the election with 153 seats .
- In total, just over 400 000 men were called up to service under the Military Service Act. Of these, 379 629 sought exemptions and only 24 132 draftees ever made it to France.





# Military Service Act

- **The Military Service Act** was passed in the House of Commons on July 24, 1917 and on August 28, **conscription became law.**
- **Subjected all able bodied males in Canada between 20 and 45 to compulsory military service.** The exceptions were conscientious objectors, those necessary to vital industries and those whose absence would pose serious hardships for their families or themselves.



# Conflicting Opinions

- French-English tensions were running high; French were enraged Ontario banned French language instruction in its schools in 1913.
- **400,000 Canadians volunteered for service in WWI, fewer than 1 in 20 were French. Of English Canadian volunteers, 70% were recent immigrants from Britain.**
- **French felt confident it could remain removed from the action in Europe because PM Robert Borden had promised no obligatory military service known as conscription.**



# The Pros and Cons of Conscription

## Pros

- It would help our Allies win the war.
- It would allow soldiers that have been fighting for a long period to come home safely.
- It would force French Canadian men to play a role in the war effort.
- It would ensure that Canada would keep the strong reputation they had gained by fighting in the war to this point.

# Cons

- French threatened to riot if this happened because they did not want to fight for the British Empire. They also felt that the military did not treat them equally because officers did not speak French to them.
- Farmers felt that they were playing an important role by being at home, producing food for the Allies. Factory workers felt the same way because they were building weapons for the war.
- Pacifists did not want to be forced to fight in a war because they felt that violence wasn't the solution to this international problem.