

Why Canada Slept

While Hitler and Mussolini were establishing fascist governments in Europe, Canada and Canadians paid very little attention to what was happening. In a political and military sense, Canada was sleeping.

Why were we unprepared for the outbreak of WWII?

- **Memories of WWI** - the losses of WWI were still fresh in the minds of Canadians. The last thing that Canadians wanted was another conflict on foreign soil.
- **Pacifism** - many Canadians were completely disillusioned with war and worked tirelessly to promote peace. Films such as "All quiet on the Western Front" revealed the tragic waste of war in the 20th century. Political leaders (JS Woodsworth, CCF) tried to have the House of Commons declare Canada's neutrality in any future war.

- **The Great Depression** - Canada was in its 10th year of the Depression, with over one million people still on public assistance. Foreign politics took a back seat to the daily problems faced by Canadians (food, clothing and shelter).
- **Isolationism** - Canada followed a policy of isolationism during the 1930's. Canada joined the League of Nations, but never played an active role, and wanted to avoid conflict at all costs. When Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935, Canada's Justice Minister said " No Interest in Ethiopia, of any nature whatsoever, is worth the life of a single Canadian citizen."
- **Political Leadership** - At this point in time Canada's foreign affairs were carried out by Prime Minister Mackenzie King. With only 7 diplomatic missions abroad, Canada did not have many contacts in the world. He also wanted to protect the autonomy Canada had won after WWI. King did not want Canada to be drawn into British Imperial Affairs.

- **Appeasement** - King along with other world leaders supported the policy of appeasement in the Munich Agreement of 1938. King misjudged the fascist threat in general and the character of Hitler. King stated the "he was a simple sort of peasant, not very intelligent and no serious danger to anyone". King's observations were tragically inaccurate and were factors in Canada's lack of readiness for WWII.