

World War II and the Canadian Conscription Crisis

Before we start, we need to first understand answer the question – What is Conscription?

Canadian Experience with Conscription

This would not be the first time that Canada had come up against the issue of conscription during wartime. When was the last time that this issue came up?

During that period, there was a distinct division between those who supported conscription and those who did not. For the most part, _____ supported conscription while _____ did not. Why do you think the French refused to support the idea of conscription while English Canadians were heavily in favour of such an act?

The French Canadian population was so outraged with the idea of conscription that during _____, there were riots that brought out across parts of _____ in protest to Prime Minister Borden's decision.

World War II, Canada, and Conscription

With another war, there again arose the issue of whether or not Canada would need to conscript men into the army to fight against Germany. Many people remembered what happened in Quebec during the _____ and were not anxious to repeat that situation. In order to placate the fears of Canadians – and to ensure that French Canadians voted for him – Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King promised at the outset of the War that he would not issue an order for conscription for _____ service. King was very careful in his choice of words – he said there would be no conscription for overseas service. Why is this differentiation important?

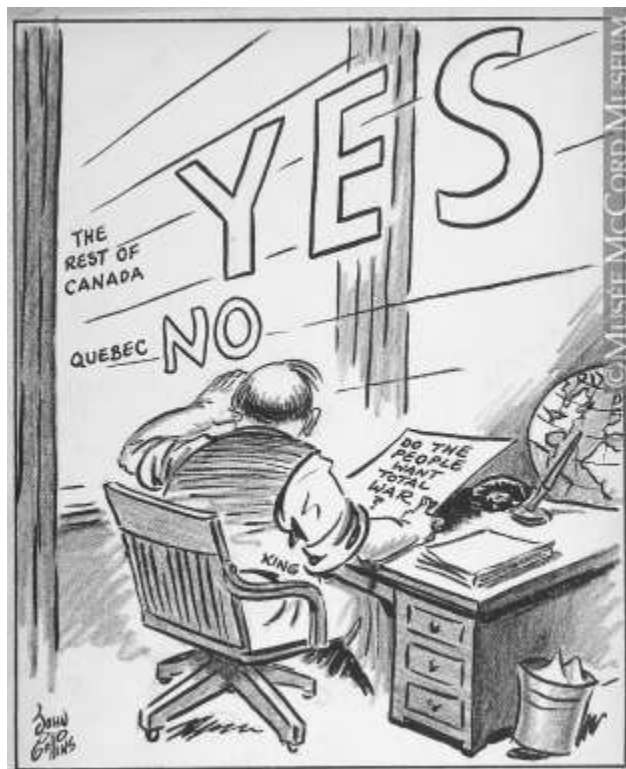
In 1940, the Canadian government introduced and passed the _____ (NRMA) that allowed for the government to conscript people into the military – but only to be placed in Canada. The idea was to train and prepare men and women for military service if Canada were to be invaded. It also allowed the government to place men and women into wartime production jobs to help increase the output of the defense manufacturers. According to the NRMA, those men

and women who were conscripted could not be sent overseas for service. Canada would maintain its volunteer military service.

By the _____ of 1944, however, issues began to arise with the number of Canadians who were joining the military to go overseas and fight. Although the war would soon be over, nobody had any idea of how to determine this. The number of Canadians volunteering to enter the military could not keep up with the demand of troops needed over in _____. Something needed to be done and King knew he needed to act.

King had faced pressure from the Conservative party and the military to introduce conscription as early as _____. In response to the Conservatives calls to bring back conscription, despite the fact that it could again lead to rioting in Quebec and perhaps even election defeat, King sought a compromise. In _____, he arranged for a plebiscite to be held across Canada. Does anybody know what a PLEBISCITE is?

The question the people of Canada was asked was very simple: Would you allow the government of Canada to repeal the parts of the National Resources Mobilization Act of 1940 that forbid overseas military conscription? The question essentially asked whether or not you would allow conscription. When the final vote came down, 63% of Canadians overall said 'Yes' and released the government from their promise not to introduce overseas conscription. Just like World War I, however, the issue came down to linguistic and cultural lines: 78% of English Canadians voted in favour of releasing the government from their promise, while 72% of French Canadians voted against the measure.



With the country split along cultural lines, King sought to compromise. He stated that he would only use conscription in an emergency situation. He used the slogan: “_____”. What do you think this slogan means?

The first part of King's statement was aimed at _____ Canada, and the second part of King's statement was intended for _____. What this slogan essentially did was to allow King to use conscription only if it turned out to be absolutely necessary. He promised not to use it immediately, only if the situation called for it. King was the ultimate politician who attempted to please everyone. It was this type of approach that allowed him to remain as prime minister for more than ___ years.

Conscription would not be used until _____ during the Aleutian Islands Campaign. The Italy invasion (which we will be talking about very shortly) had severely depleted Canadian troop levels and resources, and King was forced to send the home-front conscripts overseas. _____ and the D-Day Landing of _____ also took its toll on the Canadian troops, and further men were conscripted to be sent overseas – about _____ in total.

Zombies



With conscription came a very curious issue – the _____ of the Canadian army. These were men who were conscripted into the army under the National Resources Mobilization Act and had completed their basic training here in Canada but then refused to go overseas to fight in Europe or the Pacific. They stayed in Canada and had nothing to do: they basically were “sleep walking” through the War like zombies. These men were very disliked amongst others in the military: people who served could not believe that the Zombies would wear the uniform of the Canadian military, but refused to fight alongside their brothers over in Europe and the Pacific. Eventually, however, King forced _____ of the Zombies to be sent to Europe and be prepared for battle.

In the end, very few conscripts would see action: of the over 17 000 men sent over under the NRMA, only _____ made it to the front lines and any fighting. Of these, ___ did lose their lives. Politically, this was a successful gamble for King, as he avoided a drawn-out political crisis and remained in power until his retirement in _____.

Questions and Assignment

Please read each of the articles that are in this package and answer all of the questions below. Each question relates to the specific article – be sure to answer them all. You are to hand these in on: _____.

Article 1: “The Conscription Issue” *The Globe and Mail*, September 19, 1939.

1. How is the issue of conscription in World War I perceived in 1939?
2. What does the newspaper believe must happen if there is going to be conscription?

Article 2: “Canada Hesitates Over Wider Draft” *The New York Times*, January 11, 1942

3. What does this article say Canadians thought about conscription?

Article 3: “A Plebiscite” *The Globe and Mail*, January 23, 1942.

4. What did the article state would be the result of people voting against conscription?

Article 4: “Justifies His Stand” *The Hamilton Spectator*, January 27, 1942.

5. What reasons did PM King give for making this decision?

Article 5: “Canada Holding War Plebiscite” *The New York Times*, April 25, 1942.

6. Based on the article, describe Canada’s place in the world at that time.
7. Why is conscription a democratic problem?

Article 6: “Canada Keeps the Faith” *The Hamilton Spectator*, April 28, 1942.

8. To what extent was Canada divided by the referendum?
9. Which provinces supported conscription and which opposed it?

Article 7: “Girls Refuse to Work Under ‘Zombie’ CSM” *The Globe and Mail*, August 22, 1944.

10. What does this article tell us about how people viewed conscripted soldiers?

Article 8: “The Conscription Question Must be Settled Now” *The Toronto Telegram*, November 2, 1944.

11. What did the Minister of Defense do and why did he do this?

Article 9: “Armed Violence Threat Holds Unit in Camp” *The Globe and Mail*, November 29, 1944.

12. Which soldiers were given the greatest blame in the article for the problems in Terrace British Columbia?
13. What other problems were reported in the area?

Article 10: “Reveal 12,000 N.R.M.A. Troops Went Overseas” *The Hamilton Spectator*, July 9, 1945.

14. What is this say about the J.R. Ralston’s ideas in 1944?