Canada During the Great War

Robert Borden (PM)

“We are part of the British Empire, so of course we are at war. That is the law. We must now decide on the kind of aid that we should send to Britain. I believe that we should send soldiers to fight alongside the British army in France. Canadians, I am sure, will be proud to fight for their King and country.”

Robert Borden

Adapted from remarks he made in the House of Commons

Aug 18th 1914

Wilfred Laurier (Opposition Liberals)

“We are at war. That is the law. It is now our job to decide just what to do about this sad fact. My hope is that the war will soon be over and our help will not be needed. We should offer both money and food to France and Britain.”

Wilfred Laurier

Adapted from remarks he made in the House of Commons

Aug 18th 1914

Other Opinions

“When the war started I wanted to go, but I was too young, only fifteen. By the time I was seventeen, I couldn’t wait any longer. I guess I was afraid the war would end before I got a chance to get involved.”

Source unknown

Other Opinions

“A lot of us were farm boys. Fighting was bound to be more exciting than farming and none of us thought we’d ever get another chance to see overseas places like England and France.”

Source unknown

Support

* English speaking Canadians supported the war because they were patriotic to Britain
* Soldiers volunteered to join (even ethnic minorities)
  + Joined for adventure, thought it would be a short war, to find a job, and patriotism
* Robert Borden offered 500,000 men
* Newfoundland (not part of Canada yet) sent its own regiment (Newfoundland Regiment)

Canada Entering the War

* Canada automatically entered the war when Britain declared war on Germany for attacking neutral Belgium

War Measures Act 1914

* Borden called for the Act which gives the government full power to act in ways deemed necessary for the defence of the nation
* Germans and Austrio-Hungarians were interned or made to carry ID
  + Internment without charges
  + 8579 men at 24 camps across Canada
    - 5954 were Austro-Hungarians
    - 2009 Germans
    - 205 Turks
    - 99 Bulgarians
  + 81 women and 156 children
  + Most that were interned were recent immigrants

Preparations for war

* Sir Sam Hughes, Minister of Militia and Defence sets up training camps at Valcartier, Quebec
  + Sets up Shell Committee to manufacture artillery shells
  + Created faulty/low quality munitions (Ross-Enfield rifles)
* Canadians served as part of the Canadian Expeditionary Forces (CEF)
  + In 1917, command of the CEF was given to a Canadian (Arthur Currie)
* CEF to fight as one unit instead of being added to British forces

War At Home

Conditions in Canada:

* Industries and factories prosper
* inflation hits but wages don’t rise
  + Everyday items are needed overseas so price goes up
* Wartime production in Canada suffered from war profiteering
  + increasing anger towards war profiteers

Role of Women:

* men were fighting the war so women had to take over all the open jobs
* taking traditionally male jobs like fishing, farming, producing artillery, etc.
* assumption that women would leave these jobs after the war
* strengthened the argument for women’s suffrage
* all Canadian women allowed to vote in federal elections in 1918

War propaganda:

* used to convince someone of an opinion to serve your interest
* seen through media
* uses selective facts or distorts the truth

Government – Saving money and resources:

* Winter of 1918, schools closed down due to scarcity of fuel (coal)
* Honour rationing introduced (limited butter and sugar/ month, no alcohol)
* income tax introduced as a supposedly temporary measure (1917)
* government borrowing money from the people with a low but steady interest (5.5%) – Victory Bonds
* Canada is forced to borrow money from America

War Propaganda

* What were Canada’s main concerns?

Conclusions: How did the war affect Canada?

* Created a sense of unity
  + troops volunteered from all over Canada and trained together
  + CEF fought as a unit, not as British soldiers
  + Canadians at home were pitching in for one single effort

(Road to autonomy)

* Women took a step towards equality by filling in for the men who went to war (from private to public sphere)