



World War I

The Conscription Crisis

Background

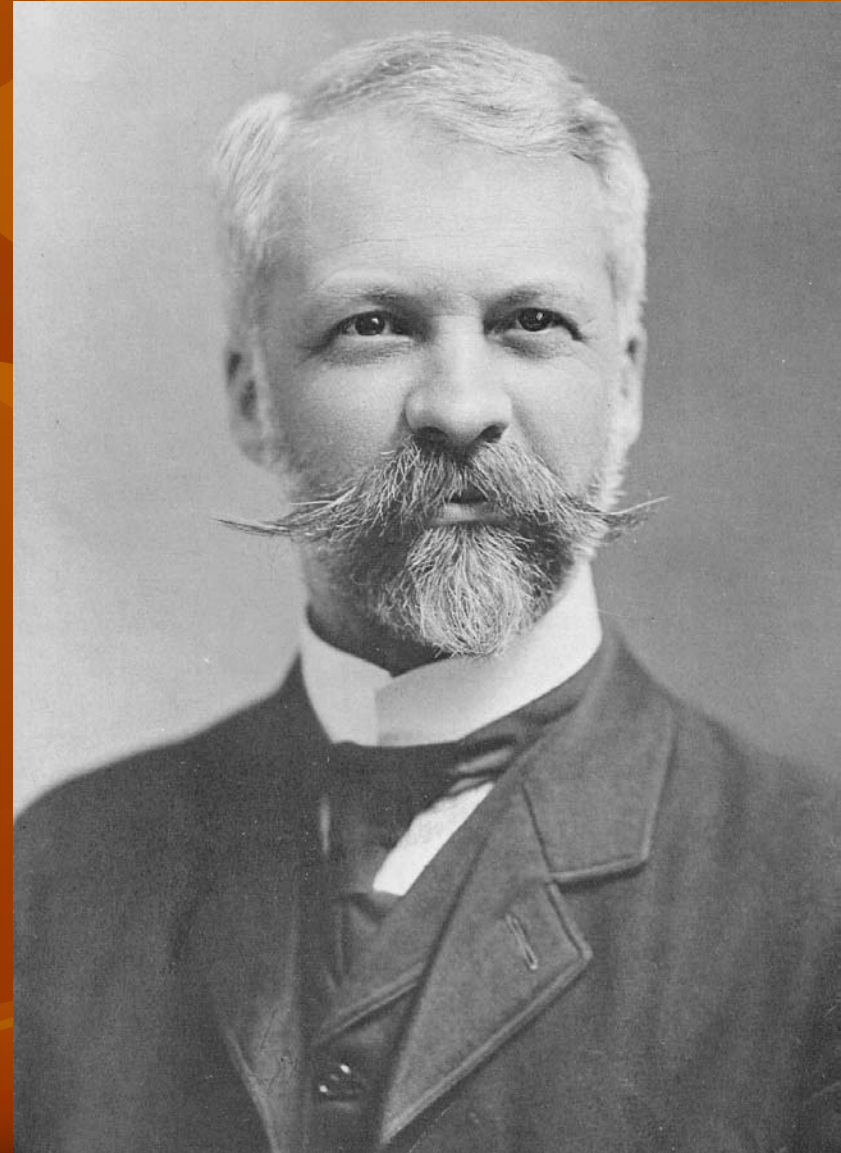
- Canadians expected WWI to be over quickly, many thought by the end of 1914
- War dragged on, casualty numbers increased
- Fewer volunteers enlisting in the military
- By 1917, PM Robert Borden decided conscription in Canada was necessary
 - Conscription = mandatory military service
 - Borden had previously promised no conscription
 - Introduced the Military Service Act (exceptions at first – conscientious objectors, farmers, etc.)

Opposition to Conscription

- Quebec
 - Lowest voluntary enlistment rate in Canada
 - Few officers spoke French
 - Most French soldiers put in English regiments
 - Exception: Twenty-Second Battalion (Van Doos)
 - Many French-Canadians still angry over Ontario restricting French in schools (1912)
 - Most French-Canadians did not feel connected to Britain or France
 - Conscription forces them to fight in someone else's war

Henri Bourassa

- Led anti-conscription movement in Quebec
 - Believed that WWI had little to do with Canada
 - Too many soldiers and money spent already, more would endanger Canada's economic future and decrease the country's autonomy
 - Canadians should not be forced to fight in a foreign war



Opposition to Conscription

- Prairies
 - Farmers needed sons and workers to work on their farms
- Factories
 - Industrial workers felt they were already contributing to the war effort, didn't want to give up jobs
- British Columbia
 - Vancouver Island coal miners already struggling to provide for family, conscription meant less money
 - Labour leader Ginger Goodwin hid, eventually killed

1917 “Khaki” Election

- Khaki = colour of many military uniforms
- PM Borden calls an election to check for support of conscription
- Passes new legislation first
 - Military Voters Act – men and women serving in Europe can vote
 - Wartime Elections Act – all Canadian women related to soldiers allowed to vote; conscientious objectors and recent immigrants from enemy countries not allowed to vote

1917 “Khaki” Election



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1917 “Khaki” Election

- PM Borden (Conservative) invited pro-conscription Liberals to join him and his Cabinet in a Union Government
 - Liberal Party leader Wilfrid Laurier against conscription, unless Canada directly attacked or invaded
- Union Government won, but country divided
 - Liberals won 95% of Quebec seats (results on p. 51)
 - Union Government won 88% of seats outside of Quebec
 - Anti-conscription riots in Quebec City, Easter 1918
 - Four demonstrators dead, ten soldiers wounded

Anti-Conscription Riots



Result of Conscription

- 402,000 men conscripted
- 380,500 applied for exemptions (medical, etc.)
- 125,000 eventually were enlisted
- 25,000 reached France before the war ended