

# Canada and the Challenges of Leadership



# CANADA AND THE CHALLENGES OF LEADERSHIP

How Canadian Prime Ministers have Responded to Crises at Home and Abroad

KELSEY LONIE; COREY SAFINUK; AND JONATHON ZIMMER



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## 2.

# INTRODUCTION

Kelsey Lonie, Corey Safinuk, and Jonathon Zimmer, eds.

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Canada is an extremely large country and each province has its own unique resources and culture. Distinct societies exist across the country, and following Canada's Confederation in 1867, each Prime Minister has been tasked with establishing and maintaining unity amidst such differences. Our first Prime Minister, Sir. John A. MacDonald, was charged with carving out the initial policies of a new nation. The Prime Ministers who followed him were also faced with a duty to continue shaping the nation and redefining its policies. While many of their tasks were routine and unexceptional, each Prime Minister also faced a number of adversities and crises, ranging from natural disasters to those created by exogenous sources, including international terrorism, aggressive neighbours, sharp economic downturns, and even war.

Throughout our course titled *Studies in Canadian Political History: Prime Ministers, Leadership, and Managing the Nation*, we conceded that a leader's choices in the way they respond to a crisis can significantly shape the direction of the nation. By their very nature, a crisis must be managed quickly, often during a period of great uncertainty, when the collective national stress is mounting and the nation is looking for strong, decisive, and effective leadership. How a Prime Minister manages a crisis or a particular adversity not only provides a glimpse into the abilities and effectiveness of the leader, but also defines for citizens of a nation — and those observing from a distance outside the national boundaries— what values are being upheld. In other words, how a nation and its political leadership manages a major challenge or crisis, defines its identity.<sup>1</sup>

Relatively little historical research has been conducted regarding the study of the phenomenon of Prime Ministerial leadership in Canada. Although Prime Ministers are the principal spokesperson for the nation, they are, first and foremost, politicians who wish to win the support of voters and maintain that support during a particular mandate. Most are not prepared to effectively manage a crisis when it arises. In studying how each Prime Minister responded to a crisis during their term in office, not only do we gain a deeper understanding about our nation, but we also see how the speeches, language, and rhetoric of our leaders contributed to the evolving and changing ideal of what it means to be Canadian. During these moments of crisis, a Prime Minister displays their intellectual approach to leadership, reveals their ideology and their values, and demonstrates to the nation and its citizens how they wish to construct and build the nation going forward. There may be little

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1. M. G Hermann, T. Preston, B. Korany, and T.M Shaw, "Who Leads Matters: The Effects of Powerful Individuals," *International Studies Review*, 3(2) (2001): 83-131.

doubt that through the exercise of prudent and effective leadership in moments of crisis and adversity, leaders demonstrate their ability to balance and accommodate various competing interests. If they do so successfully, they may remain as Prime Minister for another term. If they fail, they will likely lose the support of the electorate and soon be replaced by another judged better able to lead.

Each student who has contributed to this book has chosen how one Prime Minister – from John A. Macdonald to Justin Trudeau – reacted to a crisis during their time in office, and how their decisions and leadership choices played a role in shaping Canada’s identity. Each of Canada’s Prime Ministers have attempted, by varying degrees, to define Canada and build the national narrative during their time in office. They know, of course, that the national character they build will provide a framework for a series of national policies after a particular crisis has been resolved or an adversity overcome. Crises quickly become highly public affairs that often result in an assessment by citizens of the leader’s abilities and character. Our goal in this book is not to be comprehensive or inclusive of every crisis in the history of Canada since 1867, nor of every Prime Minister since then, but to examine the leadership provided by various Prime Ministers at critical junctures that have helped to define Canada’s political systems and shape the Canada we know today. The crises considered here range from John A. Macdonald and his management of First Nations and Metis people as the new Dominion expanded across the continent after 1867 to make way for the settlement of Europeans in the Prairies, to Justin Trudeau and his navigation of Indigenous-state relations as Canada proposed the construction of a pipeline carrying natural gas to the Pacific Coast.

Outside of Canada there are many instances of political leaders who have failed to lead well during moments of constitutional and economic crisis. Sometimes, a country does not survive significant crisis; that occurred with the collapse of the Weimar Republic in Germany in the 1930s, leading to Adolph Hitler seizing control of the state.<sup>2</sup> Conversely, when America’s President, Richard Nixon, lied to Congress in the 1970s and created a constitutional crisis over revelations from the Watergate Scandal which led to his resignation and the appointment of a new president, the nation remained strong even when the highest political office in the land changed hands.<sup>3</sup> Nixon’s actions demonstrated a colossal failure of leadership, but it did not result in the collapse of democracy.

This collection of essays reveals that while Canada has remained a democracy since 1867, it has faced significant disruption throughout its history and our Prime Ministers did not always respond well. Some made authoritative decisions, some procrastinated, and still others stepped back and facilitated in cases where they understood that consultation with others was the only possible recourse.<sup>4</sup> We see that political leadership in crisis can sometimes be spontaneous, such as was the classical case of Pierre Elliott Trudeau and his encounter with journalists over his invocation of the War Measures Act. Other times, decisions are made with

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2. K.D. Bracher, *The German Dictatorship* (London: Methuen, 1971).

3. Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward, *The Final Days* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976).

4. [4] William Waugh, Jr. and Gregory Streib, “Collaboration and Leadership for Effective Emergency Management,” *Public Administration Review* 66 (2) 2006: 131-40.

great consideration and an understanding of the broader definition of nationhood and the consequences of inaction, as William Lyon Mackenzie King did with great success during the Second World War. Whether spontaneous or carefully crafted in advance, Prime Ministers must provide direction to the nation, making critical decisions on how a crisis might be resolved. Even if a leader is caught by surprise, to be successful they must reduce the uncertainties and fears of citizens as they provide a path forward for the nation. However, as we contend in some of the chapters that follow, not all Prime Ministers have been able to provide effective crisis leadership. Among those that failed to manage a crisis, John George Diefenbaker remains one of the classical examples in Canadian history but there are, of course, others as well.

The chapters in this book have been written either by senior undergraduate students or by graduate students pursuing their Masters of Arts. Each chapter offers an interpretation of how various prime minister attempted to define Canada through their leadership and political management. At the level of research strategy, each chapter focuses on what Prime Ministers said and did, in what contexts, and to what audiences. It is devoted to the practice, not the theories, of political leadership and demonstrates that historical context matters greatly. The chapters also reveal that it is through narrative that we grasp the meaning and the ordering of the events the nation experiences. Narratives help to establish a dominant discourse through their problem specification, creative redefinition of language, and the setting of discursive boundaries. They provide a way for historians to explain how the country came to a certain situation and how it demands change or transformation. Each chapter separates the Prime Ministers into political periods and considers the social, political, and cultural milieu of that period. Prime Ministers are treated as human agents who must act while also hoping to demonstrate solidarity with the nation.<sup>5</sup>

All of the essays in this book are built on the contention that Canada's Prime Ministers have based their leadership decisions, foremost, on policies that were meant protect and safeguard the integrity of the nation. During their time in office, each Prime Minister was pressed to define what it meant to be a country and a Canadian. Confederation, immigration, two World Wars, and many other crises slowly chiseled away at the definition of nationhood, and the process of defining Canada was achieved through not only politics and policies, but also in how each leader managed during moments of crisis and adversity. In those moments, Prime Ministers gave meaning to the ideal of Canada.

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5. John Uhr, "Political Leadership and Rhetoric," in *Australia Reshaped: 200 Years of Institutional Transformation*. Eds. Geoffrey Brennan, Francis Geoffrey Castles. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

3.

## "TO CONVINCE THE RED MAN THAT THE WHITE MAN GOVERNS:" JOHN A. MACDONALD AND CANADIAN INDIAN POLICY IN THE NORTH-WEST

Jack J. Nestor

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### Introduction

The prevailing historiography of Canadian Indian policy in the North-West posits that its architects endeavoured to assimilate First Nations into Canadian society.<sup>1</sup> As Minister of the Interior and Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs for much of the period after the Dominion of Canada's acquisition of the North-West in 1869, Prime Minister John A. Macdonald has figured prominently in this historiography. Buttressed by myriad distortions of the historical record, strict fidelity to Macdonald's public rhetoric and legislative articulation in crafting Indian policy in the North-West has produced the conclusion that, despite its failures, Indian policy in the region was well-intentioned.<sup>2</sup> However, Macdonald's private correspondence with Dominion officials in the North-West, and the behaviour of Indian policy administrators at Macdonald's behest, prior to, amidst, and after the North-West Resistance of 1885 undermine this conclusion. Rather than seeking to assimilate the First Nations of the North-West, Macdonald, together with subordinate policy architects, and Department of the Interior/Department of Indian Affairs employees manipulated the political climate of the North-West to foster and maintain the subjugation of First Nations, and thus ensure the certainty of Canadian sovereignty in the region.

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1. John L. Tobias, "Protection, Civilization, Assimilation: An Outline History of Canada's Indian Policy," in *The Prairie West: Historical Readings*, 2nd ed., eds. R. Douglas Francis and Howard Palmer (Edmonton: Pica Pica Press, University of Alberta Press, 1995), 207. For the purposes of this paper, the North-West refers to the territories comprising Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and parts of Northwestern Ontario. See J.R. Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Native-Newcomer Relations in Canada*, 4th ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 170.
  2. See Timothy C. Winegard, *For King and Kanata: Canadian Indians and the First World War* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2012), 22; D. Michael Jackson, *The Crown and Canadian Federalism* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2013), 50; Richard Gwyn, "Rediscovering Macdonald," in *Macdonald at 200: New Reflections and Legacies*, eds. Patrice Dutil and Roger Hall (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2014), 447; Raymond B. Blake, Jeffrey Keshen, Norman J. Knowles, and Barbara J. Messamore, *Conflict & Compromise: Post-Confederation Canada* (North York: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 32; Greg Piasetzki, "Sir John A. Macdonald Saved More Native Lives Than Any Other Prime Minister," *C2C Journal: Ideas That Lead*, November 27, 2020, <https://c2cjournals.ca/2020/11/sir-john-a-macdonald-saved-more-native-lives-than-any-other-prime-minister/>.

Perhaps the most flagrant distortion of the historical record is that the Dominion applied the same Indian policy that existed in Central and Eastern Canada to the context of the North-West.<sup>3</sup> Although widely accepted in the existing historiography, this assertion fails to account for the unique circumstances which prevailed in the North-West upon and after the Dominion of Canada's purchase thereof in 1869.<sup>4</sup> It became immediately apparent that the First Nations population in the North-West was both more numerous and more powerful than Dominion officials initially believed. The lowest population estimate of the North-West during the treaty-making period (1871-1877) was provided by the Oblate Father Albert Lacombe in 1875 at 9,340.<sup>5</sup> When settlers endeavoured to encroach upon Indigenous territory in Manitoba, a band of *Saulteaux* under Yellow Quill forcibly prevented their advance west of Portage la Prairie and warned them not to harvest firewood until a treaty was negotiated.<sup>6</sup> The repelling of Canadian immigrants (and Dominion survey and telegraph line crews) was observed by the non-Indigenous population as an existential threat to the Dominion in the North-West.<sup>7</sup> Thus, missionaries, traders, and Dominion officials in the North-West lobbied aggressively for treaty negotiations—frequently with the understanding that the First Nations desire for treaty was precarious so long as they remained dominant in the territory.<sup>8</sup>

It is difficult to overstate the dominance of First Nations in the North-West. Indeed, the historical record demonstrates that First Nations were sufficiently obstructive to cast the Dominion's acquisition of the North-West into doubt.<sup>9</sup> In 1873, Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris reported a population of 140,000 west of Fort Ellice could field a force of 5,000 warriors armed with repeating rifles.<sup>10</sup> In the same year, the military force at Fort Garry numbered only 72, and isolated from reinforcements in Central Canada, were as Patrick Robertson-Ross said of the Saskatchewan territory, "living by sufferance, as it were, entirely at the

3. J.R. Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens*, 172.

4. Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 110-113.

5. Noel Evan Dyck, "The Administration of Federal Indian Aid in the North-West Territories, 1879-1885" (master's thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1970), 4.

6. A variety of efforts paralleled that of Yellow Quill's band although tactics could vary. The Plains Cree obstructed the Geological Survey and threatened to violently prevent the construction of telegraph lines. Others, such as Henry Prince (the son of the renowned Peguis), used the *Nor'wester* (ironically the most vocal proponent of Dominion annexation of the North-West) to diplomatically assert their rights. See J.M.S. Careless, *Brown of the Globe: Volume II: Statesman of Confederation, 1860-1880* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1963), 7; Laura Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada, 1780-1870* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1994), 46 and 203; Arthur J. Ray, Jim Miller, and Frank J. Tough, *Bounty and Benevolence: A History of Saskatchewan Treaties* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 103-104; J.R. Miller, *Compact, Contract, Covenant: Aboriginal Treaty-Making in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 153; Aimée Craft, *Breathing Life into the Stone Fort Treaty: An Anishinabe Understanding of Treaty One* (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing Limited, 2013), 43.

7. Ray, Miller, and Tough, *Bounty and Benevolence*, 98-99.

8. Garrett Wilson, *Frontier Farewell: The 1870s and the End of the Old West* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, University of Regina, 2007), 176.

9. Michael Asch, *On Being Here to Stay: Treaties and Aboriginal Rights in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 155.

10. Ray, Miller, and Tough, *Bounty and Benevolence*, 99-101.

mercy of the Indians."<sup>11</sup> The mobilization of the North-West Mounted Police (NWMP) in warfare against First Nations would have undermined the nature of their role without substantially altering the balance of power given that the number of enlisted men and officers plateaued at 500 in 1886.<sup>12</sup> Further, while the United States was spending \$20 million annually on Indian wars the Dominion budget was \$19 million.<sup>13</sup> Only after it was made apparent that the Dominion could not militarily subdue the First Nations of the North-West did it concede that "it is better to feed than to fight them."<sup>14</sup> The dominance of First Nations in the North-West—in conjunction with the economic duress confronting the Dominion—allowed First Nations to wield substantial power in the negotiations of seven Numbered Treaties between 1871 and 1877.<sup>15</sup>

The principal objective of First Nations negotiators was to secure their futures in the face of rapidly declining bison herds. However, that the dominance of First Nations in the North-West was shattered with the demise of the bison herds in 1878-79 constitutes another perversion of the historical record.<sup>16</sup> To be sure, the collapse of the staple of Plains First Nations' economies provoked a crisis among these peoples. By November 1878 so destitute were First Nations that many had resorted to eating their own dogs when denied access to rations.<sup>17</sup> Prior to 1878 and the return of the Macdonald Liberal-Conservatives, Allan McDonald and M.G. Dickieson were effectively the only distributors of relief in the North-West superintendency—comprising some 206,000 square miles.<sup>18</sup> Dickieson admitted that to properly assist First Nations, the Dominion would have to go beyond the terms of the treaty in recognition that "we are on the eve of an Indian outbreak which will be caused principally by starvation."<sup>19</sup>

The suggestion by Dickieson, although made to the outgoing Alexander Mackenzie Liberals, did not accord with the ambitions of the incoming Macdonald Liberal-Conservatives. It is therefore unsurprising that Dickieson left the Department of the Interior shortly after the appointment of Edgar Dewdney as

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11. Canada, Report on the State of the Militia of the Dominion of Canada (Ottawa: I.B. Taylor, 1874), xi.

12. Jack F. Dunn, *The North-West Mounted Police, 1873-1885* (self-pub., 2017), xiv and 5.

13. R.C. Macleod, "Canadianizing the West: The North-West Mounted Police as Agents of the National Policy, 1873-1905," in *The Prairie West: Historical Readings*, 2nd ed., eds. R. Douglas Francis and Howard Palmer (Edmonton: Pica Pica Press, University of Alberta Press, 1995), 227. Significantly, Macdonald acknowledged in the House of Commons that the losses of life and public revenues sustained during the American Indian wars were substantial and regrettable. See Canada, House of Commons Debates: Third Session—Fifth Parliament, 6 July 1885 (John A. Macdonald) (Ottawa: Maclean, Roger & Co., 1885), 3119.

14. Dyck, "Federal Indian Aid," 42.

15. The ramifications of this correction of the historical record are substantial. Since the Dominion attempted to settle the North-West without negotiating the extinguishment of Indian title pursuant to the Royal Proclamation, the impetus of the Numbered Treaties lies outside the parameters of the Royal Proclamation—bringing its applicability in the North-West into question.

16. Walter Hildebrandt, *Views from Fort Battleford: Constructed Visions of an Anglo-Canadian West* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, University of Regina, 1994), 15.

17. James Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life* (Regina: University of Regina Press, 2013), 108.

18. A.J. Looy, "Saskatchewan's First Indian Agent, M.G. Dickieson," *Saskatchewan History* 32, no. 3 (Autumn 1979): 104.

19. Looy, "M.G. Dickieson," 112.

Indian Commissioner in May 1879.<sup>20</sup> By the time of Dewdney's appointment, the Interior portfolio was deemed of such significance that Macdonald assumed the position himself.<sup>21</sup> The importance of the Interior portfolio is explained by Macdonald's National Policy which required docility in the North-West to facilitate the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway mainline and to encourage agricultural settlement near the mainline.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, the Numbered Treaties were reconfigured by Macdonald and Dewdney as instruments to control obstructive elements. First Nations that persisted outside of the treaty relationship, beyond the reach of Macdonald and Dewdney, needed to be brought into treaty and therefore under control. To accomplish this subjugation, Macdonald and Dewdney operated in concert to weaponize the distribution of relief.<sup>23</sup>

From the perspective of Macdonald and Dewdney, the principal agitators in the North-West were Big Bear, Piapot, and Little Pine whose collective band membership composed more than half of the entire First Nations population in Treaties 4 and 6.<sup>24</sup> All three leaders had refused to take treaty at the initial negotiations in 1874 and 1876.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, when the Dominion failed to uphold its obligations towards its treaty partners and starvation set in, the popularity of Big Bear, Piapot, and Little Pine grew substantially.<sup>26</sup> As swiftly as First Nations support coalesced around the leaders, Dewdney's announcement that only First Nations who had taken treaty would be eligible for rations served to erode this support once the Plains Cree were denied access to the dwindling bison herds.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, Dewdney's initiative to acknowledge any man that could procure the support of 100 followers as a chief damaged the authority of the holdouts from treaty as band members formed their own bands or joined others under treaty.<sup>28</sup>

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20. Ibid., 113.

21. Hugh Shewell, 'Enough to Keep Them Alive': Indian Welfare in Canada, 1873-1965 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 13.

22. Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), 22.

23. John L. Tobias, "Canada's Subjugation of the Plains Cree, 1879-1885," in *Sweet Promises: A Reader on Indian-White Relations in Canada*, ed. J.R. Miller (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 212-239.

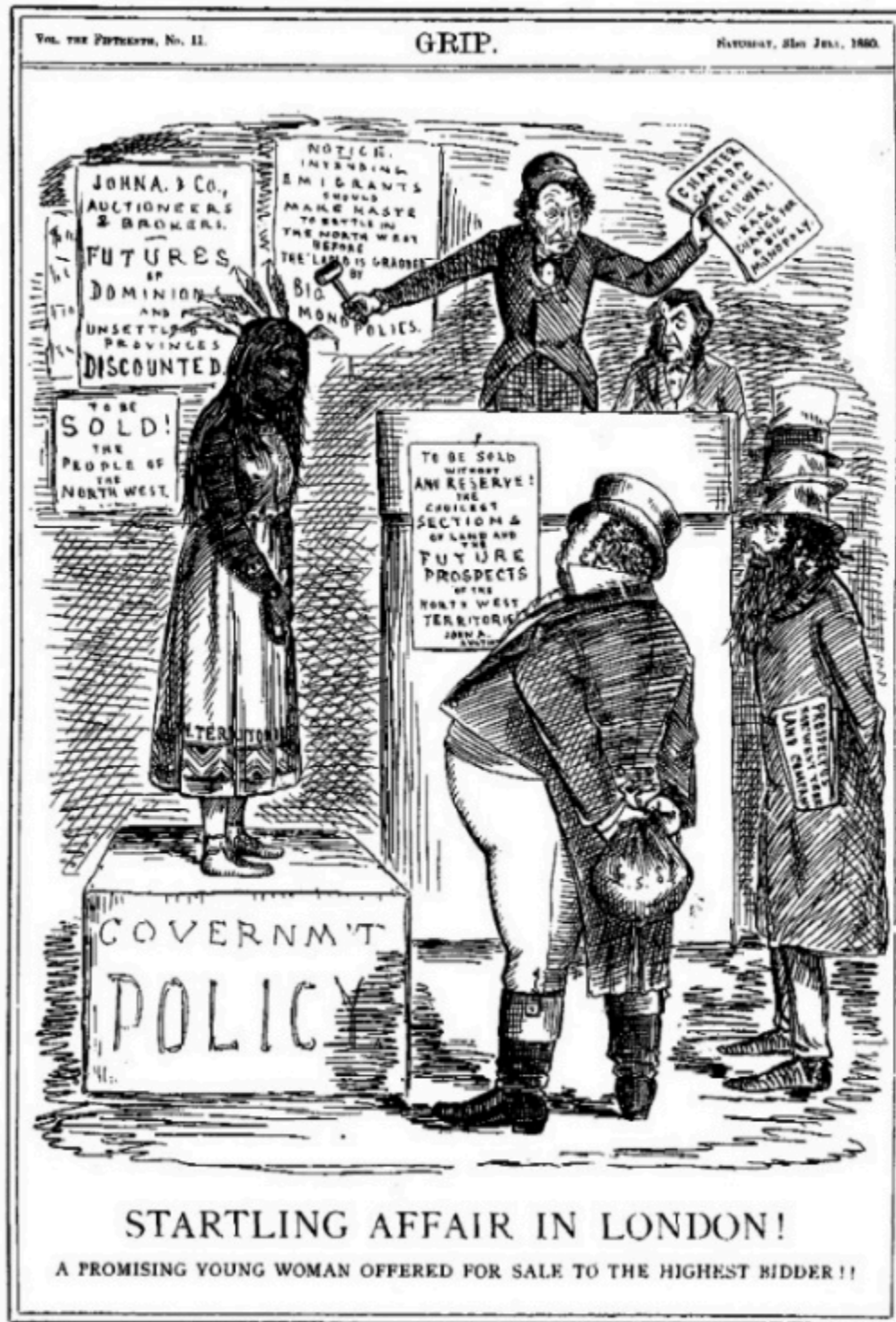
24. Tobias, "The Plains Cree," 215.

25. Ibid., 214-215.

26. Ibid., 216.

27. Ibid., 216-217.

28. Ibid., 216.



Political cartoon depicting Macdonald's vision for the North-West appearing in Grip in 1880. Source: Grip, Vol. 15, No. 11, 31 July 1880.

In 1882, a year after Dewdney became Lieutenant-Governor, all three leaders had been brought under treaty.<sup>29</sup> The taking of treaty by Big Bear, Piapot, and Little Pine did not end the agitating by the Plains Cree leadership or the weaponization of food to quell this agitation. Ostensibly to rationalize liberal expenditures amidst heavy criticisms, Macdonald explained in the House of Commons on 27 April 1882 that, "the agents as a whole, and I am sure it is the case with the Commissioner, are doing all they can, by refusing food until the Indians are on the verge of starvation, to reduce the expense."<sup>30</sup>

Donald B. Smith has cited Macdonald's explanation of rationing as proof of the goodwill which he exhibited towards First Nations by placing it in the context of Liberal accusations of financial mismanagement.<sup>31</sup> Absent from Smith's argument are the dishonesty of ration supply contracts and the deliberate withholding of rations. When the deaths of members of an Assiniboine band were caused by poor quality rations, Macdonald responded to Liberal claims that the Government and First Nations were being defrauded by stating, "[i]t cannot be considered a fraud on the Indians because they were living on Dominion charity... and, as the old adage says, beggars should not be choosers."<sup>32</sup> Erstwhile, rations were known to have gone to waste when employees in the service of the Department of Indian Affairs refused to issue them.<sup>33</sup> Adherence to a strict work-for-rations policy also encouraged instances of violence.

Perhaps the most infamous incident occurred in the Crooked Lakes Agency which demonstrated the prevailing weakness of the Dominion in the North-West.<sup>34</sup> Farm instructor Hilton Keith—who replaced James Setter in 1883 after the latter's failure to conform to rationing policy—proved willing to uphold the rationing policy of the Department of Indian Affairs even during instances of widespread starvation.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, on 18 February 1884, when Keith refused rations to starving Plains Cree at the storehouse on the Sakimay Reserve, a group of 25 armed warriors under the leadership of Yellow Calf seized the storehouse and distributed rations amongst themselves.<sup>36</sup> The inability of the NWMP to make arrests on the Sakimay Reserve required Assistant Indian Commissioner Hayter Reed to negotiate a settlement to the issue.<sup>37</sup> In

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29. Ibid., 217.

30. Canada, House of Commons Debates: Fourth Session—Fourth Parliament, 27 April 1882 (John A. Macdonald) (Ottawa: Maclean, Roger & Co., 1882), 1186.

31. Donald B. Smith, "Macdonald's Relationship with Aboriginal Peoples," in *Macdonald at 200: New Reflections and Legacies*, eds. Patrice Dutil and Roger Hall (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2014), 75.

32. Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains*, 140.

33. Such was the case in the agency of Indian Agent Robert J.N. Pither who, in 1880, withheld rations from First Nations leading to their spoliation having stayed in the storehouse for two years. In the same year, Indian Affairs was given its own department although it remained the responsibility of the Minister of the Interior. See Department of Indian Affairs. *Annual Report for the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended 31st December 1880* (Ottawa: Maclean, Roger & Co., 1881), 60; Brian Titley, *The Indian Commissioners: Agents of the State and Indian Policy in Canada's Prairie West, 1873-1932* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2009), 7.

34. Isabel Andrews, "Indian Protest Against Starvation: The Yellow Calf Incident of 1884," *Saskatchewan History* 28, no. 2 (Spring 1975): 41.

35. Ibid., 43.

36. Maureen K. Lux, *Medicine That Walks: Disease, Medicine, and Canadian Plains Native People, 1880-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 43.

37. Titley, *The Indian Commissioners*, 98.

exchange for the evacuation of the storehouse, Reed agreed to increase rations—a radical departure from the behaviour which had earned him the moniker “Iron Heart” among the First Nations of the Battleford region.<sup>38</sup>

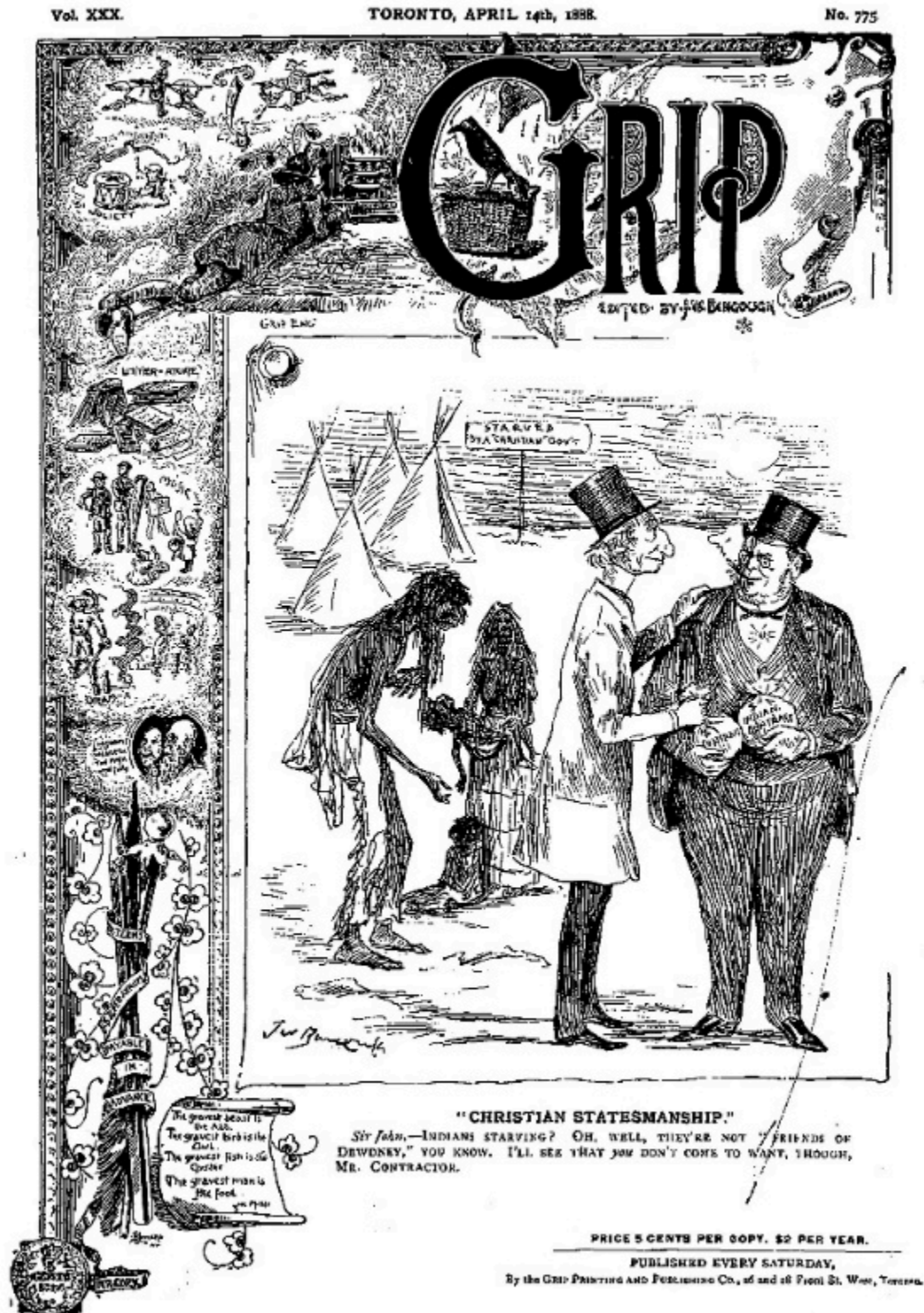
In explaining this course of action to his superiors, Reed reported that the First Nations were aware of the power they wielded in the region. More particularly, Reed observed that First Nations “knew that the White mans (sic) iron horse is useless when the rails on which it travels have been torn up.”<sup>39</sup> Thus, the decline of the bison failed to affect the reversal of the power dynamics of the North-West in the Dominion’s favour. On the contrary, incited by the Dominion’s attempts to manufacture this reversal, the desperation of First Nations encouraged greater willingness to exert their power in pursuit of securing themselves against privation. Until an opportunity presented itself to shatter the power of First Nations in the North-West, Indian policy reverted to avoiding a costly and cataclysmic Indian war.<sup>40</sup>

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38. Andrews, “Yellow Calf Incident,” 47; Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal till Death*, 37.

39. Andrews, “Yellow Calf Incident,” 47. Reed’s comments appear to have disproved the reasoning of Dewdney earlier in 1884 when he arranged for Crowfoot and other Blackfoot leaders to travel to Winnipeg on the railway. Dewdney intended that the visit would impress upon the leaders, “the supremacy of the white man and the utter impossibility of contending against his power.” See Dyck, “Federal Indian Aid,” 74.

40. Noel Dyck, “An Opportunity Lost: The Initiative of the Reserve Agricultural Programme in the Prairie West,” in *1885 and After: Native Society in Transition*, eds. F. Laurie Barron and James B. Waldram (Regina: University of Regina, Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1986), 128; There appears to have been divergence in the opinion of policy architects over the futility of satiating First Nations. On the eve of the North-West Resistance, Reed and Dewdney requested more resources to attend to First Nations concerns. Macdonald replied that “no amount of concessions will prevent starving people from grumbling and agitating.” See Jean Bernice Drummond Larmour, “Edgar Dewdney, Commissioner of Indian Affairs and Lieutenant Governor of the North-West Territories, 1879-1888” (master’s thesis, University of Saskatchewan, Regina Campus, 1969), 171-172.



Political cartoon depicting Macdonald and Dewdney's policy of starvation appearing in Grip in 1888. Source: Grip, Vol. 30, No. 775, 14 April 1888.

While Dewdney moved earnestly to placate First Nations in the North-West, the arrival of Louis Riel in July 1884 threatened to undermine Dewdney's efforts. The attendance of Riel at the Duck Lake council later that month had convinced Dewdney and other authorities in the North-West that Riel was seeking to encourage the prospect of an uprising among the First Nations.<sup>41</sup> Although Reed issued a public statement declaring that the potential of an Indian war was limited, Dewdney expressed great fear to Macdonald—and David McPherson who had assumed *de jure* responsibility for the Interior profile in 1883—and officials in the North-West over the severity of the situation.<sup>42</sup> To ascertain the possibility of a joint First Nations-Métis uprising, Dewdney and Reed canvassed opinion among the Plains Cree.<sup>43</sup> The information gathered by Dewdney and Reed did much to relieve anxieties as it demonstrated the minimal influence which Riel enjoyed amongst the First Nations.<sup>44</sup> However, Dewdney and Reed became acutely aware of a growing campaign among the Plains Cree—who were now making overtures to the Blackfoot Confederacy—to renegotiate the treaties.<sup>45</sup> The power that a Plains Cree-Blackfoot Confederacy general alliance could exert would render Dominion control of the region untenable.<sup>46</sup> Thus, architects of Indian policy moved to implicate First Nations leadership in the impending North-West Resistance in order to stem their diplomatic initiatives.

In reality, officials in the Department of Indian Affairs had been attempting to discredit the leaders of these initiatives prior to the outbreak of violence in the spring of 1885. As early as 1879, rumours circulated of an alliance between Big Bear and the militant Sioux chief Sitting Bull, demonstrating to Dewdney the importance of limiting Big Bear's influence.<sup>47</sup> Accordingly, Big Bear was swiftly labelled as both troublesome and dangerous by the Department of Indian Affairs.<sup>48</sup> Within his band, Big Bear's influence was waning as support for the more assertive tactics of the war chief Wandering Spirit blossomed.<sup>49</sup> On 1 April 1885, Wandering Spirit assumed control of the band and took hostages from Frog Lake and the surrounding area after the refusal of Indian Agent Thomas Quinn to issue rations.<sup>50</sup> The circumstances of the situation at Frog Lake paralleled that at the Sakimay Reserve in the previous year. However, when Quinn—at this point a

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41. Tobias, "The Plains Cree," 225.

42. Larmour, "Edgar Dewdney," 171; Beal and Macleod, *Prairie Fire*, 122; Tobias, "The Plains Cree," 225.

43. Larmour, "Edgar Dewdney," 178.

44. Tobias, "The Plains Cree," 225.

45. Dempsey, *Big Bear*, 82; Tobias, "The Plains Cree," 225-226.

46. To some extent, this fear was misguided. Although warfare between the Plains Cree and Blackfoot Confederacy had ceased after the latter's victory at Belly River in 1870, historic enmities prevented a productive alliance from forming. In fact, during the North-West Resistance, Macdonald had inquired about fielding a force of Blackfoot under Canadian command. See Hugh A. Dempsey, *Red Crow: Warrior Chief* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1980), 153; John S. Milloy, *The Plains Cree: Trade, Diplomacy and War, 1790 to 1870* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1988), 117.

47. Dempsey, *Big Bear*, 82.

48. Dyck, "Federal Indian Aid," 67.

49. Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal till Death*, 109.

50. Hildebrandt, *Views from Fort Battleford*, 72.

prisoner of Wandering Spirit—stubbornly refused to comply with the orders of Wandering Spirit, he provoked an outbreak of violence which left himself and eight others dead.<sup>51</sup>

According to Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser, the Frog Lake Massacre was undertaken independently of the Métis.<sup>52</sup> However, they concede that Métis agitators had encouraged the resorting to violence.<sup>53</sup> Regardless of the degree to which Métis influence had contributed to the violence, the Frog Lake Massacre was carried out in retaliation for grievances independent of the Métis cause.<sup>54</sup> Nonetheless, the temporal proximity of the massacre to the Métis victory at Duck Lake on 26 March 1885 allowed both architects of Indian policy and the press (most notably P.G. Laurie's *Saskatchewan Herald*) in the North-West to establish a link between the actions of Wandering Spirit's band and that of Riel's Adjutant-General Gabriel Dumont.<sup>55</sup>

A connection between the actions of the Métis and Poundmaker's band of Plains Cree-Assiniboiné appeared to stand on a firmer basis. On 29 March 1885, Poundmaker—who as early as 1881 was labelled a troublemaker by the Department of Indian Affairs and who Reed recommended be removed as chief in 1883—travelled to Battleford to express loyalty to the Queen and have his band's grievances addressed.<sup>56</sup> Upon his arrival, Poundmaker found Battleford evacuated, owing to pervasive paranoia among the residents over the intent of the First Nations—fostered by Laurie and the Department of Indian Affairs.<sup>57</sup> Consequently, when a number of settlers and Métis engaged in the looting of the abandoned town-site, Poundmaker and his band were implicated in the 'siege' by Dominion officials and the people of Battleford.<sup>58</sup> That Riel had sent an unrequited call to arms to take Battleford constituted proof of Poundmaker's complicity.<sup>59</sup>

A more dubious piece of evidence was discovered by Colonel William Otter upon his relief of Battleford on 24 April.<sup>60</sup> A letter from Poundmaker to Riel was produced appearing to prove collusion. However, as Stonechild and Waiser demonstrated, the letter was crafted under duress by the farm instructor Robert Jefferson who was compelled by Oopinowaywin—a headman of Poundmaker's—to add

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51. Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal till Death*, 116-117.

52. While referring to the violence at Frog Lake as a 'massacre' certainly aided Macdonald and the Dominion's efforts to discredit First Nations, there is no indication that use of this term was consciously selected. On the contrary, little scholarship on the North-West Resistance departs from the term—which explains its use in this paper. See J.R. Miller, "The Northwest Rebellion of 1885," in *Sweet Promises: A Reader on Indian-White Relations in Canada*, ed. J.R. Miller (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 251-252.

53. Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal till Death*, 115.

54. Dempsey, *Big Bear*, 159-160.

55. Miller, "The Northwest Rebellion of 1885," 252. For an example of newspaper contributions to the hysteria of 1885, consider the *Saskatchewan Herald's* argument that failing to take a hard stance against First Nations was "making them quite saucy and independent." See Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal till Death*, 38.

56. Dyck, "Federal Indian Aid," 64; Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal till Death*, 86.

57. Hildebrandt, *Views from Fort Battleford*, 67.

58. A. Blair Stonechild, "The Indian View of the 1885 Uprising," in *Sweet Promises: A Reader on Indian-White Relations in Canada*, ed. J.R. Miller (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 265.

59. George F.G. Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), 334-335.

60. Hildebrandt, *Views from Fort Battleford*, 75.

Poundmaker's signature.<sup>61</sup> Citing the letter, Otter proposed an attack on Poundmaker's camp at Cutknife Creek to General F.D. Middleton—who held supreme authority over military action during the North-West Resistance.<sup>62</sup> Middleton responded that such an attack would have been ill-advised.<sup>63</sup> Rather than comply with this order, however, Otter telegraphed Dewdney and received permission to attack.<sup>64</sup>

The result of Otter's assault on Poundmaker's band at Cutknife Creek on 2 May 1885 demonstrated the precariousness of the Dominion's continuity in the North-West.<sup>65</sup> Failing to take Poundmaker's band by surprise and frustrated by the tactics of the Plains Cree-Assiniboine warriors, Otter's forces suffered substantial losses.<sup>66</sup> While Otter would later claim that losses were light in comparison to the purported 100 lost by Poundmaker, this account was employed to salvage the attack and Otter's legacy. Rather, Otter's force suffered eight deaths and 14 seriously wounded compared to five dead among the Plains Cree-Assiniboine.<sup>67</sup> It has been argued that had Poundmaker not interceded, the Plains Cree-Assiniboine warriors would have wiped out the entire battalion.<sup>68</sup>

The restraint and mercy exercised by Poundmaker at Cutknife Creek was rarely, if ever, reciprocated by Dominion forces. For example, an individual Cree warrior at the Battle of Frenchman's Butte on 26 May 1885 was cut down by Dominion forces while surrendering under a white flag.<sup>69</sup> This instance preceded more institutionalized betrayals of good faith. After the Métis defeat at Batoche on 12 May 1885, and the 'surrenders' of Poundmaker and Big Bear on 26 May and 4 July 1885, the latter two leaders—along with One Arrow (a principal leader of the Woods Cree) who was forced at gunpoint to Batoche by followers of Riel—were put on trial for treason-felony.<sup>70</sup> Each leader received a sentence of three years in Stony Mountain Penitentiary—and, with the exception of Poundmaker, endured the humiliation of having their hair cut—effectively extinguishing First Nations recalcitrance in the North-West.<sup>71</sup>

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61. Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal till Death*, 139.

62. Hildebrandt, *Views from Battleford*, 77.

63. Beal and Macleod, *Prairie Fire*, 242.

64. It would appear that insubordination was pervasive under Middleton's command. For example, during the Battle of Batoche, officers initiated the final assault against the orders of Middleton. See Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal till Death*, 163.

65. Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 126.

66. Beal and Macleod, *Prairie Fire*, 249.

67. See Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal till Death*, 143.

68. Stonechild, "The 1885 Uprising," 269.

69. Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains*, 201.

70. Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal till Death*, 72, 162, 166, 191.

71. The significance of hair in Plains First Nations cultures rendered this action a humiliation as it signified the subjugation of First Nations by the Dominion. Poundmaker was spared from this humiliation on the initiative of his adoptive father Crowfoot—the foremost Blackfoot chief and Dominion ally. Additionally, the imprisonment of First Nations leadership was undertaken not out of mercy but out of an understanding by Dewdney that First Nations resented imprisonment more than death. See Hugh A. Dempsey, *Big Bear: The End of Freedom* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 1984), 184 and 192; Tobias, "The Plains Cree," 221; Shelley A.M. Gavigan, *Hunger, Horses, and Government Men: Criminal Law on the Aboriginal Plains, 1870-1885* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2012), 127; Bill Waiser, *In Search of Almighty Voice: Resistance and Reconciliation* (Markham: Fifth House Publishers, 2020), 19.

To prevent the emergence of other leaders, the Dominion government sought to make an example out of eight perpetrators of the Frog Lake Massacre. Macdonald maintained publicly that the hangings of the eight perpetrators were an exercise of justice.<sup>72</sup> However, a similar fate did not befall Métis perpetrators of violence during 1885.<sup>73</sup> Of 26 Métis sentenced as a cohort by Judge Hugh Richardson, 11 were sentenced to seven years, three were sentenced to four years, four were sentenced to one year, and eight were acquitted.<sup>74</sup> The disparity between the treatment of First Nations and Métis perpetrators of violence is explained by private communications between Macdonald and Dewdney. Following requests by Dewdney to have the executions carried out as a public spectacle, Macdonald agreed, adding "the executions... ought to convince the Red Man that the White Man governs."<sup>75</sup> In this pursuit, students from the Battleford Industrial School were made to watch in hopes, as Reed expressed, that the hangings would "cause them to meditate for many a day."<sup>76</sup>

The Battleford Hangings—arguably the harshest instance of state-sponsored violence in Canadian history—were thus the final act of retribution for the apparent violence perpetrated against the Dominion by First Nations in the North-West.<sup>77</sup> The Resistance had not only imperilled the security the Dominion of the North-West but cost in the neighbourhood of \$5 million to quash.<sup>78</sup> In his analysis of the Resistance, Macdonald stated in the House of Commons on 6 July 1885: "forgetting all that the Government, the white people and the Parliament of Canada had done for them, in trying to rescue them from barbarity... they rose against us."<sup>79</sup> Macdonald thus portrayed the violence of 1885 as a military confrontation but admitted to Governor General Lansdowne that, "[w]e have certainly made it assume large proportions in the public eye. This has been done however for our own purposes, and I think wisely done."<sup>80</sup>

In the House of Commons, Macdonald maintained that the purposes of Indian policy in the North-West were assimilatory. For example, in 1887, Macdonald argued that "the great aim of our legislation has been to do away with the tribal system and assimilate the Indian people in all respects with the other inhabitants of

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72. Smith, "Macdonald's Relationship with Aboriginal Peoples," 75.

73. Gwyn, *Nation Maker*, 476.

74. Prior to the North-West Resistance, Macdonald had encouraged administrators of justice in the North-West to co-operate with Dewdney's goal of subjugation by rendering verdicts conducive to this goal. Judge C.B. Rouleau, who presided over the trial of the eight men hanged at Battleford, required no such cajoling. While initially sympathetic to First Nations grievances, the destruction of his property during the Resistance encouraged retribution from Judge Rouleau. See Tobias, "The Plains Cree," 227; Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal till Death*, 210.

75. Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal till Death*, 221.

76. Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains*, 156-157.

77. Larger numbers had been executed at once (for example, 12 men were hanged in the aftermath of the Lower Canadian Rebellion of 1837). However, the fact that public executions were no longer in practice by 1870 and that children were made to watch renders the Battleford Hangings still harsher. See Canada, *An Act respecting procedure in Criminal Cases, and other matters relating to the Criminal Law*, 1869, *Vict.* 33-34, p. 285, s. 109; F. Murray Greenwood, "The General Court Martial at Montreal, 1838-39: Operation and the Irish Comparison," in *Canadian State Trials, Volume II: Rebellion and Invasion in the Canadas, 1837-1839*, eds. F. Murray Greenwood and Barry Wright (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 299.

78. Larmour, "Edgar Dewdney," 186.

79. Canada, *House of Commons Debates: Third Session—Fifth Parliament*, 6 July 1885 (John A. Macdonald), 3119.

80. Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal till Death*, 221.

the Dominion as speedily as possible.”<sup>81</sup> Macdonald’s public articulations of Indian policy belied the content of such policy, policy which took as its “great aim” the subjugation of the First Nations of the North-West and the maintenance of this subjugation—ambitions that Macdonald held well before the outbreak of violence in 1885.<sup>82</sup>

The development of post-1885 Indian policy did not occur in Ottawa. Instead, Reed compiled a series of recommendations which weaved its way through the chain of command to Macdonald.<sup>83</sup> The genesis of Indian policy in the North-West has prompted Richard Gwyn to assert that Macdonald resented the character of Indian policy after 1885.<sup>84</sup> However, the Prime Minister either marked his approval or modified the recommendations to suit his understanding of the North-West.<sup>85</sup> For example, Macdonald expanded the scope of Reed’s pass system to apply to all First Nations, regardless of loyalty during the North-West Resistance.<sup>86</sup> Although separation from the dominant society was imagined as a way to protect First Nations from the deprivations of settler society, the success which First Nations enjoyed as labourers without experiencing such deprivations would seem to render such protection obsolete.<sup>87</sup> Further, Indian policy in Central Canada had rejected separation as early as the 1850s when architects (among them Macdonald) found it counterproductive to the goal of assimilation.<sup>88</sup>

The NWMP also proved reticent to enforce the pass system.<sup>89</sup> It was well-known by Macdonald that the pass system constituted a blatant violation of the terms of the Numbered Treaties.<sup>90</sup> Knowing that inconsistent enforcement of the pass system could bring the authority of the Department of Indian Affairs into question—and therefore invite further challenges to this authority—Macdonald cautioned: “no punishment for breaking bounds can be inflicted & in case of resistance on the grounds of Treaty rights should not be insisted on.”<sup>91</sup> At the same time that First Nations were being prevented from accessing economic activity off-reserve, Reed sought to curtail economic activity on-reserve.

In *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (1990), Sarah Carter observed that agricultural activity on Indian reserves met with considerable success when competent farm instructors were supplied, and First Nations farmers were given adequate implements. For example, Louis O’Soup—who

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81. J.R. Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Native-Newcomer Relations in Canada*, 4th ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 207.

82. Shewell, ‘Enough to Keep Them Alive’, 13.

83. Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal till Death*, 221.

84. Gwyn, *Nation Maker*, 488.

85. Lawrence Vankoughnet, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs to John A. Macdonald, 17 August 1885, Library and Archives (LAC), RG 10, Vol. 3710, File 19,550-3.

86. F. Laurie Barron, “The Indian Pass System in the Canadian West, 1882-1935,” *Prairie Forum* 13, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 28.

87. Barron, “Indian Pass System,” 31.

88. Tobias, “Protection, Civilization, Assimilation,” 209-210.

89. Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 153-154.

90. Barron, “Indian Pass System,” 28.

91. Vankoughnet to Macdonald, 17 August 1885, LAC, RG 10, Vol. 3710, File 19,550-3.

had earlier helped to de-escalate the Yellow Calf Incident—regularly produced yields comparable to settler farmers.<sup>92</sup> So successful were First Nations farmers that in 1888 Reed was regularly visited by settlers in Battleford complaining of unfair competition for markets.<sup>93</sup> To limit this competition Reed invoked two measures. First, in order to sell surplus agricultural yields (and any other produce on-reserve), permission had to be attained from the local Indian Agent.<sup>94</sup> Second, to limit the possibility of producing surplus yields, Reed invoked the language of Social Darwinism through the peasant farming policy. Reed reasoned that First Nations had to progress through the social evolutionary stages of agriculture to become properly assimilated, and thus, were relegated to the position of ‘peasant’ farmers.<sup>95</sup>

Macdonald employed a similar logic in launching an assault on the future labour power of First Nations. As early as 1883, Macdonald reasoned that the only way to ensure the success of assimilating First Nations children “would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men.”<sup>96</sup> The outwardly assimilationist conception of Residential Schools belies the nature of the instruction of, and the desired outcomes for, pupils. Although the prevailing historiography has identified the origins of Canadian Residential Schools in American Indian Industrial Schools, it has failed to investigate the origins of the latter institutions.<sup>97</sup> The Carlisle Industrial School, which Nicholas Flood Davin had visited while preparing his report advising the creation of Residential Schools in Canada, was modelled on institutions for the education of formerly enslaved Black Americans.<sup>98</sup> The Hampton Institute, for example, sought to provide freedmen with an education level suitable for a lower-class existence.<sup>99</sup> Dewdney’s preference for Industrial Schools, modelled on institutions for delinquent children, was thus part of an overall strategy to relegate the economic activities of Residential School graduates to a stature of inferiority.<sup>100</sup>

The effects of the pass system, permit system, peasant farming policy, and Residential School system compounded in frustration and destitution. That the Department of Indian Affairs lamented such frustration and destitution is not indicated by the historical record. Officials that attempted to offer relief were promptly

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92. Despite substantial success, reserve agriculture was also mired by insufficient funding and the patronage appointments that populated the Department of the Interior/Department of Indian Affairs—many of whom were ill-equipped in a region largely devoid of agriculture prior to the 1870s. See Andrews, “Yellow Calf Incident,” 46; Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 85-86 and 113.

93. Sarah Carter, “Two Acres and a Cow: ‘Peasant’ Farming for the Indians of the Northwest, 1889-97,” *Canadian Historical Review* 70, no. 1 (1989): 36. <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/573338>.

94. Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 156.

95. *Ibid.*, 212-213.

96. Canada, House of Commons Debates: First Session—Fifth Parliament, 9 May 1883 (John A. Macdonald) (Ottawa: Maclean, Roger & Co., 1883), 1108.

97. J.R. Miller, *Shingwauk’s Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 101.

98. E. Brian Titley, *A Narrow Vision: Duncan Campbell Scott and the Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986), 76.

99. K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *They Called It Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 4.

100. Titley, *The Indian Commissioners*, 74.

dismissed. Charles Adams' dismissal from the Prince Albert Agency in 1886 is demonstrative of the ill intent of the Department of Indian Affairs.<sup>101</sup> After the Inspector of Indian Agencies, T.P. Wadsworth had reported on irregularities "contrary to the rules of the Department" in Adams' agency to Dewdney—which included the issuing of extra rations to a sick child and her mother—the Indian Commissioner reasoned that as a half-breed, Adams did not have the "firmness and tact" requisite of an Indian Agent.<sup>102</sup> F. Laurie Barron—the sole scholar to investigate Adams' dismissal—accepted the reasoning of Dewdney as authentic.<sup>103</sup> However, the racial explanation does not accord with the fact that Adams was a patronage appointment as the brother-in-law of Macdonald's Manitoba ally: Premier John Norquay—himself an English 'mixed-blood.'<sup>104</sup>

Similar racial reasoning was employed in explaining the dismissal of Indian Agent Joseph Finlayson from the Touchwood Hills Agency in 1894.<sup>105</sup> In enforcing the peasant farming policy, Reed—who had ascended to the position of Indian Commissioner in 1888 when Dewdney joined Macdonald's cabinet—barred the use of labour-saving machinery even when it could salvage a critical harvest.<sup>106</sup> Finlayson's refusal to comply with this policy resulted in his dismissal.<sup>107</sup> In Reed's recommendation for his dismissal, it was stated that as "one of the natives of the country" Finlayson was "imbued with Indian ideas."<sup>108</sup> Curiously, scarcely more than a year before his dismissal, Finlayson was given only a "severe reprimand" following an investigation of intemperance—demonstrative of the fact that deviant social behaviour could be tolerated so long as it was not accompanied by the encouragement of progress among First Nations.<sup>109</sup>

When Macdonald's Indian policy failed to facilitate the assimilation of First Nations, the onus was placed on the deficiencies of First Nations character. For example, Macdonald explained on 6 July 1885 in the House of Commons "that a savage was still a savage... until he ceased to be a savage."<sup>110</sup> On 26 February 1886, Macdonald, in response to the Liberal M.C. Cameron's indictment of the Department of Indian Affairs, explained that Indian policy was designed not to "render them still more idle and unwilling to do work *than all Indians are*."<sup>111</sup> Scholars of Canadian Indian policy have accepted the authenticity of Macdonald's claims.

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101. Waiser, *Almighty Voice*, 37.

102. T.P. Wadsworth to Edgar Dewdney, 16 November 1886, LAC, RG 10, Vol. 3773, File 35764.

103. F. Laurie Barron, "Indian Agents and the North-West Rebellion," in *1885 and After: Native Society in Transition*, eds. F. Laurie Barron and James B. Waldram (Regina: University of Regina, Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1986), 142.

104. L.W. Herchmer, *Inspector of Indian Agencies to Dewdney*, 14 February 1886, LAC, RG 10, Vol. 3736, File 27218; W.L. Morton, *Manitoba: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), 196-197; W.G. Hardy, *From Sea Unto Sea: The Road to Nationhood, 1850-1910* (Garden City: Doubleday Canada Limited, 1960), 399.

105. Hayter Reed, *Memorandum for the Information of the Superintendent General, Relative to Mr. Agent Finlayson, of Touchwood Hills Agency*, 26 July 1894, LAC, RG 10, Deputy Superintendent General (DSG) Letterbooks, Vol. 15, p. 382.

106. Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 222.

107. *Ibid.*, 223.

108. Reed, *Mr. Agent Finlayson*, LAC, RG 10, DSG Letterbooks, Vol. 15, p. 382.

109. Reed, *Memorandum*, 24 February 1893, LAC, RG 10, Vol. 3900, File 99,079.

110. Canada, *House of Commons Debates: Third Session—Fifth Parliament*, 6 July 1885 (John A. Macdonald), 3119.

111. Canada, *House of Commons Debates: Fourth Session—Fifth Parliament*, 26 February 1886 (John A. Macdonald) (Ottawa: Maclean, Roger & Co., 1885), 22. Emphasis added.

John L. Tobias reasoned that Macdonald's Indian policy was consistent with the goals of Indian policy in Central Canada: namely, "protection, civilization, [and] assimilation."<sup>112</sup> Similarly, in his analysis of Reed, Robert James Nestor argued that the pervasive racial thinking of the Victorian era shaped the formation of this policy.<sup>113</sup>

The deviation from stated policy and the truncation of First Nations economic progress—even over the objections of settlers—demonstrated the Department of Indian Affairs' insincerity with regard to assimilation. For example, amidst the violence of 1885, the editor of the *Prince Albert Times* vehemently objected to the encouragement of hunting, fishing, and trapping as a supplement to rations since it was contrary to the goal of assimilation through agriculture.<sup>114</sup> In effect, the guiding principle of Indian policy in the North-West was to sow destitution and limit progress even at the cost of unnecessary expenses.

Still stronger evidence that Indian policy was not genuinely predicated on race and the goal of assimilation are the ethnic identity of many of its administrators and the inconsistency which characterized its application. Despite the reasoning of Dewdney and Reed with regard to the dismissals of Adams and Finlayson, English 'mixed-bloods' were regularly employed as farm instructors.<sup>115</sup> Further, amidst the demise of the bison herds in the late 1870s, the Dakota were left undisturbed and able to partake in productive economic activities.<sup>116</sup> Similarly, while Poundmaker, Big Bear, and One Arrow were sentenced to prison terms, Whitecap—the foremost leader of the Dakota in Canada—was acquitted despite the striking similarity between the circumstances of his arrest and those of the incarcerated leaders.<sup>117</sup> The minimal force with which Indian policy was applied to the Dakota may be explained only by the fact that these bands did not pose an immediate threat to the Dominion's control of the North-West.<sup>118</sup>

## Conclusion

In spite of overwhelming evidence, the prevailing historiography on Canadian Indian policy in the North-West has maintained the notion of its benevolent intent. For example, Gwyn cited the *Electoral Franchise Act* of 1885 as an "offer to Indians of enfranchisement, without any loss of their distinctive rights."<sup>119</sup> While partially correct, this characterization neglects the fact that the legislation would have applied only to

112. Tobias, "Protection, Civilization, Assimilation," 207.

113. Nestor, "Hayter Reed," 28.

114. A.J. Looy, "The Indian agent and his role in the administration of the North-west superintendency, 1876-1893" (doctoral thesis, Queen's University, 1977), 232-233.

115. Tobias, "The Plains Cree," 226. Additionally, Thomas Quinn (whose commitment to rations policy cost him his life) was of partly Sioux ancestry. See Dempsey, Big Bear, 116.

116. Peter Douglas Elias, *The Dakota of the Canadian North-West: Lessons of Survival* (Regina: University of Regina Press, Canadian Plains Research Centre, 2002), 56-57.

117. Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal till Death*, 148-149 and 210.

118. J.W. Daschuk, Paul Hackett, Scott MacNeil, "Treaties and Tuberculosis: First Nations People in late 19th-Century Western Canada, a Political and Economic Transformation," *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 23, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 322. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cbmh.23.2.307>.

119. Gwyn, "Rediscovering Macdonald," 446.

First Nations east of Lake Superior.<sup>120</sup> By Macdonald's own admission, Canadian Indian policy in the North-West was informed principally by the balance of power in the region and his "fear [that] if Englishmen do not go there, Yankees will, and with that apprehension I would gladly see a Crown colony established there."<sup>121</sup> The power which First Nations yielded in the region dissuaded Macdonald from pursuing an authentic policy of assimilation as in Central and Eastern Canada. Thus, while maintaining an assimilationist agenda in the public discourse, Macdonald acknowledged that "the whole thing is a question of management" until such time as the power of First Nations could be shattered.<sup>122</sup> Thus, the rhetoric of assimilation was employed to justify increasingly repressive measures in a social climate where notions of assimilation were more palatable to citizens literate in the tenets of Social Darwinism.<sup>123</sup> Erstwhile, officials in the Department of Indian Affairs under Macdonald's direction employed Canadian Indian policy to foster (and ensure) destitution among First Nations to secure Dominion control of the North-West.

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120. Tobias, "Protection, Civilization, Assimilation," 217

121. J.R. Miller, "Macdonald as Minister of Indian Affairs: The Shaping of Canadian Indian Policy," in *Macdonald at 200: New Reflections and Legacies*, eds. Patrice Dutil and Roger Hall (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2014), 319.

122. Ged Martin, *John A. Macdonald: Canada's First Prime Minister* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2013), 167.

123. Titley, *The Indian Commissioners*, 206.

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# "UPON GROUNDS APPEALING TO THE CONSCIENCE OF ALL MEN" LAURIER, BOWELL, TUPPER, AND THE MANITOBA SCHOOL QUESTION

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## Introduction:

Few political issues have dominated Canadian politics to the degree that the Manitoba School Question did between 1890 and 1896. Centred around education funding for a French Catholic minority that was rapidly declining in both population and influence, the Manitoba School Question essentially began with the 1890 *Manitoba Schools Act*, which removed public funding from confessional schools and abolished the dual-denomination system.<sup>1</sup> However, due to its mishandling by a federal Conservative government that had been weakened by the death of Prime Minister John A. Macdonald, and growing tensions between Canada's French and English-speaking populations, the Manitoba School Question quickly evolved from a regional dispute over language and education rights into a direct challenge on the national stage, with the constitutional authority of both the federal and provincial governments serving as the battlefield. The controversy was only heightened by subsequent actions taken by the government of Manitoba led by Premier Thomas Greenway, whose government acted to eliminate French as an official language in nearly every aspect of Manitoba life, including in its legislation.<sup>2</sup> The Manitoba School Question became a career-defining moment for several Canadian politicians as it grew in importance through two federal election campaigns and at least five separate federal mandates. For the governments of Prime Ministers Mackenzie Bowell and Charles Tupper, their inability to handle the situation spelled the premature end of their time in office and ultimately defined their legacies. On the other hand, no one benefited more from the Manitoba School Question than Liberal Party leader Wilfrid Laurier. Laurier's skillful political maneuvering, highlighted by a series of colourful speeches in 1895 and 1896 in which he appealed to the "conscience of all men" and showed a willingness to take

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1. Alan H. Child, "The Board of Education, Joseph Martin, and the Origins of the Manitoba School Question: A Footnote," *Canadian Journal of Education* Vol. 2, no. 3 (1977), 37.

2. "Official Language Act (1890)." *Compendium of Language Management in Canada*. University of Ottawa. <https://www.uottawa.ca/clmc/official-language-act-1890>.

the “Sunny Way”<sup>3</sup> of political compromise, earned him the first of four majority election victories in 1896 and kickstarted the beginning of his record-setting fifteen consecutive years in office. The Laurier-Greenway Compromise followed five months later and ended the Manitoba School Question in the short term, but failed to address its underlying causes. However, it was also an early example of the diplomatic approach that would soon make Laurier a giant in Canadian politics for the rest of his life.

### **Background History:**

Although the School Question officially began in 1890, its roots stretched back at least twenty years to the founding of Manitoba as a province. Changes in demographics were almost certainly the most significant cause of the crises. At the time of the *Manitoba Act* of 1870, the population in the province stood at roughly 12,000, of which fifty-four percent were French-speaking Metis.<sup>4</sup> Thus, when the first *Manitoba School Act* of 1871 regulated education under a Board of Education that was “divided” into two “largely autonomous”<sup>5</sup> Protestant and Catholic sections, a separate school system was not only sustainable but “absolutely necessary and logical.”<sup>6</sup> However, the population dynamics changed almost immediately, and within a decade there were more Manitobans who had been born in Ontario than those who were born in Manitoba.<sup>7</sup> By 1881, French speakers only represented twelve percent of Manitoba’s population, which had ballooned to over 65,000, of which “fewer than 10,000 were French.”<sup>8</sup> In the province’s largest settlement, Winnipeg, a city that grew from 700 in 1871 to 23,000 in 1891 and 200,000 by 1916, French speakers constituted less than five percent of the population by 1881.<sup>9</sup> By 1891, the membership of the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Anglican churches alone made up sixty-four percent of Manitoba’s population, while the Roman Catholic portion represented less than ten percent.<sup>10</sup> Thus, to the Anglo-Canadian majority, by 1875 the separate school system had become merely “convenient” to keep around, by 1878 it was a “nuisance,”<sup>11</sup> and by 1889 it was inefficient and unsustainable. After the *North-West Territories Act* failed to give French official status in 1875,<sup>12</sup> similar bills were introduced in Manitoba to repeal the separate school system as early as 1875 and 1876, and although they failed to gain momentum, a bill to remove French as an official language would have succeeded in 1879 if not for the

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3. Jamie Bradburn. “‘Try the sunny way’: How Laurier and the Liberals ended 18 years of Conservative rule.” *TVOntario Today*. September 9, 2021.

4. A.B. Bethune, “*Is Manitoba Right?*” *A Question of Ethics, Politics, Facts, and Law. A Complete Historical and Controversial Review of the Manitoba School Question*. (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Tyre Bros Printers, May 18, 1896). 18.

5. Child, 1.

6. Nelson Wiseman. “The Questionable Relevance of the Constitution in Advancing Minority Cultural Rights in Manitoba.” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 25, no. 4 (1992): 700. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3229684>.

7. *Ibid.*, 701.

8. *Ibid.*, 705.

9. *Ibid.*, 701.

10. Christopher Hackett, *The Anglo-Protestant Churches of Manitoba and the Manitoba School Question*. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1988), 4.

11. Wiseman, 700.

12. Bill Waiser, “Teaching the West and Confederation: A Saskatchewan Perspective.” *The Canadian Historical Review* 98, no. 4 (2017): 756.

presence of a French Catholic Governor General, who vetoed it.<sup>13</sup> Tensions only increased throughout the period, as the 1870s saw the highly-publicized Red River trials as well the movement of the anti-Catholic Orange Order into the province.<sup>14</sup> As a result, while French rights in Manitoba were not officially challenged again until 1889,<sup>15</sup> the wheels for a major conflict were already turning at least a decade earlier.

Tensions between the two sides grew as the British nature of Western Canadian society became more pronounced after the 1885 North-West Rebellion and the subsequent execution of Louis Riel, which caused tensions between French and Anglo-Canadians to reach an all-time high. Anglo-Canadians felt betrayed by French Canada's overwhelming support for both the rebellion and Riel,<sup>16</sup> and this sentiment led territorial politicians to try and do away with the French language and separate school guarantees across the country under the motto "one nation, one language."<sup>17</sup> Newspapers such as the *Brandon Sun* and the *Winnipeg Free Press* were influenced by the gradual "influx" into the province of "numerically dominant, racially proud, and socially intolerant" British Protestants, who were "strongly supportive of both secular schools and the attempt to eliminate all cultural differences among the general population,"<sup>18</sup> and began to call for an end to the school system in late 1888 and, more frequently, after May 1889.<sup>19</sup> Thus, while the School Question may have come unexpectedly "out of a clear blue sky" to those outside Manitoba,<sup>20</sup> for Manitobans the process was a gradual "outgrowth of firmly entrenched local conditions."<sup>21</sup>

### **The Manitoba School Act and the Official Language Act:**

A new "local outgrowth" came with the appointment of new Liberal Premier Thomas Greenway in 1888. Greenway was asked to fill the position after Conservative Premier John Norquay was forced to resign in December 1887 due to his mishandling of Manitoba's railway transfer crisis, and after Norquay's initial replacement, David Howard Harrison, failed to form a new government within the first week of his appointment.<sup>22</sup> After his appointment, Greenway called and subsequently dominated a provincial election later that year, but as his government struggled to resolve those same railway transfer issues during the summer and winter of 1888,<sup>23</sup> Greenway needed a distraction. That distraction came as early as January and in the form of education reform. By that point, the strains of the separate school system were starting to become

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13. Wiseman, 700.

14. J.R. Miller, "D'Alton McCarthy, Equal Rights, and the Origins of the Manitoba School Question." *The Canadian Historical Review* 54, no. 4, (December 1973), 381.

15. Wiseman, 698-700.

16. Waiser, 753.

17. [17] *Ibid.*, 757.

18. Wiseman, 699.

19. Miller, "D'Alton McCarthy, Equal Rights, and the Origins of the Manitoba School Question," 385.

20. Hackett, 10.

21. *Ibid.*, 150.

22. J.E. Rea, "Greenway, Thomas," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 13. (University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003).  
[http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/greenway\\_thomas\\_13E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/greenway_thomas_13E.html)

23. *Ibid.*

a matter of concern for the English-speaking and Protestant-believing majority, who had contributed an increasingly large portion of both the enrolment numbers and the taxes that went towards the school board.<sup>24</sup> Thus, in an announcement of a planned review of education funding, Greenway stated: "Owing to peculiar circumstances, the charge upon the taxpayers for educational purposes is abnormally heavy [and so] the Government will devise means whereby the schools will receive a much larger money grant than has heretofore been given."<sup>25</sup> The concern of the majority grew into anxiety when the government review learned of a Catholic "contingency fund" that amounted to nearly \$14,000.<sup>26</sup> This discovery caused the Catholic Section to fear for its future and the Protestant Section to believe their counterparts had "received favourable treatment in the distribution of government funds," and thus this discovery arguably "marked the beginning of the Manitoba School Question."<sup>27</sup> As a result, the Greenway government decided to "economize" by replacing the inefficient separate system with one that placed "Roman Catholic schools under much stricter control"<sup>28</sup> by "abolish[ing] the Board of Education and plac[ing] educational affairs directly under the administration of a minister of the crown," a system similar to the one adopted in Ontario in 1876.<sup>29</sup> However, as this plan did not propose to remove religious education, it caused "considerable apprehension to the board and its two sections"<sup>30</sup> in roughly equal amounts. It was not until August that the debate turned towards abolishing Roman Catholic schools altogether, a turn that caused anxieties within the Roman Catholic community to reach a fever pitch.

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24. Child, 39.

25. Ibid., 38.

26. Ibid., 41.

27. Ibid.

28. D.J. Hall, *Clifford Sifton, Volume 1: The Young Napoleon, 1861-1900*. (Vancouver, CA: UBC Press, 1981), 42.

29. Child, 38.

30. Ibid., 41.



Thomas Greenway, Manitoba Premier 1888-1900. W.J. Topley, Library and Archives Canada, PA-500623

On 5 August 1889, D'alton McCarthy, a Conservative Member of Parliament visiting Manitoba and the North-West Territories from Ontario and a “spokesman for the Equal Rights Association,”<sup>31</sup> gave a speech in Portage la Prairie. In response to the 1888 *Jesuit Estates Act*, which monetarily reimbursed Jesuits in Québec for the land confiscations and cultural suppression that had been imposed on them by the British after 1763, the ardently anti-Catholic and anti-French McCarthy “encouraged his audience to support an attack on the French Roman Catholic minority” to resist similar “inequalities”<sup>32</sup> from occurring to the English of Manitoba and the North-West Territories. While McCarthy said nothing of the school system, his speech “vastly increased” the “tone and bitterness”<sup>33</sup> of the debate. Additionally, it was followed by a similar speech given by Manitoba Attorney General, Joseph Martin, in which Martin pledged that the Greenway government would put an end to both French as an official language and the separate school system in the province.<sup>34</sup>

**Initial Response to the *Manitoba School Act*:**

The *Manitoba School Act* and the *Official Language Act* were immensely popular with most Protestants

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31. Hackett, 9.

32. Ibid.

33. Child, 58.

34. Hackett, 10,

and English Canadians,<sup>35</sup> not only in Manitoba — where they helped propel Greenway to another majority in 1892 — but also across Canada. Conversely, the opposite was true of French Canadians and Catholics. Backlash towards the two Acts came almost immediately, primarily from local French and Roman Catholic communities but also from Quebec, where the development took many by surprise and was perceived as a push towards making Western Canada, which at that time was seen as representing the future of Canada, culturally and linguistically English. However, as the community was pressed both by time and resources,<sup>36</sup> they were forced to choose between contesting the *Official Language Act* or the *Manitoba School Act*. As education was crucial to linguistic and religious retention, they chose the latter.

Led by Archbishop Alexandre Tache of St. Boniface, Manitoba, and his “astute legal counsel,” J.S. Ewart,<sup>37</sup> the Roman Catholic community in the province first appealed to the Manitoba court system through *Barrett v. the City of Winnipeg*, a case in which Ewart represented John Barrett, a Winnipeg resident who “refused to pay the municipal tax for the support of the public schools ... alleging that, as a Roman Catholic, his constitutional rights ... were being violated.”<sup>38</sup> After Ewart lost in the first hearing, the case was appealed, first, to the Court of the Queen’s Bench of Manitoba, which found the *Manitoba School Act* to be *intra vires*, and then to both the Supreme Court and the federal government of Conservative Prime Minister John A. Macdonald, to whom they argued that the new public school system in Manitoba was “in reality a continuation of the Protestant school” system in the “guise” of a secular one, one in which Catholic children were forced to go to Protestant schools by the closing of Catholic schools. Thus, they argued that “only the Roman Catholics had been forced to make significant changes and endure hardships.”<sup>39</sup> Ewart claimed this made the “new laws unconstitutional”<sup>40</sup> under Section 23 of the *Manitoba Act* and Subsections 1 and 2 of Section 93 of the *British North America Act*, which included guarantees that established separate education rights for minorities in Upper and Lower Canada.<sup>41</sup>

Ewart and Tache’s federal appeal was met more with “sympathy than direct action.”<sup>42</sup> Macdonald initially “refused to interfere with the school law of the province,”<sup>43</sup> and instead deferred becoming involved until the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, the highest court in Canada at the time, made a decision. In his

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35. Wiseman, 699.

36. Hackett, 12.

37. Ibid.

38. Richard A. Olmsted, *Decisions of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council Relating to the British North America Act, 1867 and the Canadian Constitution 1867-1954*, Vol. 1, Ottawa, Department of Justice, 1954, 739p., pp. 272.

39. Hackett, 10-1.

40. Ibid., 48.

41. Wiseman, 697.

42. Ibid., 14.

43. *House of Commons Debates: Speech of Mr. D’Alton McCarthy, M.P., on the Manitoba school question*. 7th Parl, 5th Sess, Wednesday, 16 July, 1895. CIHM/ICMH microfiche series; no. 33947, 1.

response, which McCarthy (who by then had switched allegiances to the Liberals) would later describe as the last action taken by the government which he could "commend,"<sup>44</sup> Macdonald said:

If the appeal should be successful these acts will be annulled by judicial decision, the Roman Catholic minority in Manitoba will receive protection and redress. The acts purporting to be repealed will remain in operation... if the legal controversy should result in the decision... being sustained, the time will come for... the petitions which have been presented by and on behalf of the Roman Catholics of Manitoba for redress... under section 22 of the Manitoba Act... and which are analogous to the provisions made by the British North America Act.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, Macdonald sent Ewart away with a promise that "if the law turned out to be within the constitutional power of the province to pass, the Government here would entertain the question"<sup>46</sup> in regards to the Manitoba constitution. This was a promise that would soon have drastic implications. After a separate hearing in 1891 on the *Manitoba School Act*, the Privy Council inconclusively ruled that "Manitoba had acted within its rights but that the federal government also had the right to issue its own replacement legislation" and that it had "affected the minority's rights adversely."<sup>47</sup> The issue was thereby pushed out of the courts and into the realm of politics.<sup>48</sup> Ewart and Tache turned once more to the Macdonald government, which responded by ordering the Greenway government to provide public support to the Catholic schools.<sup>49</sup> Greenway ignored the order, and the "legislation proposed by King's government to address the issue was interrupted by the 1891 federal election," because King was concerned that forcing the issue could potentially hurt his chances of re-election.<sup>50</sup> Macdonald defeated Leader of the Opposition Wilfrid Laurier, who was making his first election appearance, but it would be the last Conservative victory until 1911.

### **The Manitoba School Question:**

Macdonald suffered an untimely stroke on May 27, the same day the Supreme Court first heard Ewart's appeal in the *Barrett* case,<sup>51</sup> and died on June 6, only three months after the 1891 election. On October 28, Supreme Court sided with Ewart and against both the Manitoba government and the Manitoba courts, which they said had acted *ultra vires*.<sup>52</sup> This, too, was appealed to the Privy Council with a hearing set for 1892, and as the country awaited the Council's decision, debates over the Manitoba School Question stalled.<sup>53</sup> By the

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44. Ibid., 39.

45. Canada, Parliament, *House of Commons Debates: Speech of Mr. Laurier, M.P., on Separate Schools in Manitoba*. 7th Parl, 1st Sess, (Ottawa: Printer S.E. Dawson, Wednesday, 8th March 1893). CIHM/ICMH microfiche series; no. 46308., 12

46. Ibid.

47. Child, 37.

48. *House of Commons Debates: Speech of Mr. D'Alton McCarthy, M.P., on the Manitoba School Question*, 2.

49. Child, 58.

50. Ibid.

51. Gordon Bale, "Law, Politics and the Manitoba School Question: Supreme Court and Privy Council, 1985," *Canadian Bar Review* 63-3 (Sept. 1985). 476

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid., 479-84.

time the *Barrett* decision finally came in mid-1892 and handed the problem back to the federal government,<sup>54</sup> the health of Macdonald's successor, John Abbott, was already in decline,<sup>55</sup> putting the Conservative Party in a state of unstable leadership for the first time in decades. Abbott resigned in November and was replaced by John Thompson, who was the first Catholic Prime Minister;<sup>56</sup> this soon became a matter of particular contention regarding the School Question, as he had converted from Protestantism as an adult.<sup>57</sup> Thompson's first action was to appeal to the Privy Council once again,<sup>58</sup> this time through *Brophy v. the Attorney-General of Manitoba*. His second action was to force his government to "reluctantly [take] a stand"<sup>59</sup> against the Manitoba government. However, what that stand would look like was yet to be determined. On 28 November, the *Ottawa World* captured Thompson's lack of clarity, as well as the total uncertainty which surrounded the case, with the following:

Sir John Thompson... is unpledged publicly or privately in the matter, and he is not now going to pledge himself or his party on a question that cannot come up as a political issue for a few years [due to the *Brophy* case]... For the present, separate schools for Manitoba are impossible, and the Roman Catholics must accept it as such. This really relieves [Thompson] and his party of a troublesome question and gives him a free hand.<sup>60</sup>

As the debate over the School Question centred around the intentions behind the making of Section 93 of the *British North America Act*, politicians from both parties did their best to challenge the clarity of the constitutional guarantees. The issue stemmed from whether or not the guarantees covered religious minorities across the country or solely those in Ontario and Quebec, and whether or not the provincial governments had the power to revoke those guarantees.<sup>61</sup> These guarantees were, in fact, "explicit and unambiguous," as the *Official Language Act* was eventually ruled unconstitutional in 1979,<sup>62</sup> and the *Manitoba Act* only succeeded because "notions of constitutionalism and 'constitutional guarantees' were vague and subject to a variety of interpretations."<sup>63</sup> Those interpretations often centred around racial stereotypes, with the intellectual capacity of the Métis involved in the drafting of the *Manitoba Act* being questioned. For example, Bishop A.B. Bethune of Toronto based his argument against the Metis on a description from 1871:

"The French half breed, called also Métis... is an athletic, rather good-looking, lively, excitable, easy-going being. Fond of a fast pony, fond of merry-making, free-hearted, open-handed, yet indolent and improvident,

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54. Ibid., 493

55. Carman Miller, "Abbott, Sir John Joseph Caldwell," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 12. (University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003). [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/abbott\\_john\\_joseph\\_caldwell\\_12E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/abbott_john_joseph_caldwell_12E.html).

56. P. B. Waite, "Thompson, Sir John Sparrow David," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 12. (University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003).

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid.

59. Hackett, 14.

60. "The Manitoba School Question." *The Ottawa World*, November 28th, 1892. 2.

61. Bale, 485-97.

62. Wiseman, 697.

63. Ibid., 704.

he is a marked feature of border life." It is this wild and intractable, but still attractive, child of the plains who, we are asked to believe, was so calculatingly solicitous to secure the permanency of Roman Catholic separate schools. "As different as is the patient roadster from the wild mustang, is the English-speaking half-breed from the Métis."<sup>64</sup>

Early on, opposition leader Wilfrid Laurier was critical of the Conservative Government's handling of the case, but he did not become directly involved. However, when discussions over a potential remedial order started to dominate Parliament in the spring of 1893, Laurier chose to pressure the government on the issue, starting with a speech given to Parliament in March 1893.<sup>65</sup> Framing the situation as the "simplest issue" and one in which the government simply needed to "express an opinion" one way or the other, Laurier "arraign[ed] [the] government for their arrant cowardice," an expression he claimed was in no way "too strong" in the face of such "flimsiness" on behalf of the Conservatives.<sup>66</sup> Laurier claimed the Conservatives had avoided taking a stance on the issue for over three years when he could have addressed it in only one, which Laurier said proved there was not "in this government the courage equal to the duty of the hour."<sup>67</sup> Laurier then accused Thompson of personally avoiding the issue, and sarcastically commended Thompson for his ability to "speak for two hours without having told the House what his policy was."<sup>68</sup> While he described Thomas as an "able lawyer"<sup>69</sup> whose legal skills were well-known, Laurier argued that Thompson should have been disqualified from being involved in the case due to his personal history with both religions.<sup>70</sup> He also used the opportunity to begin discrediting the Conservative ministers tasked with handling the School Question. This included Mackenzie Bowell, the Minister of Trade and Commerce and a newspaper publisher, who had allegedly "never distinguished [himself] by [his] legal studies."<sup>71</sup>

Using his legal background to full effect, Laurier framed the Manitoba School Question as a straightforward question of provincial versus minority rights, with his speech structured to sound like he already had a solution to the problem.<sup>72</sup> However, he did so without disclosing which side he agreed with. Comparing the situation of the French in Manitoba to that of the English Protestants in Québec, Laurier opined that the Fathers of Confederation had intended to ensure minority rights and that they not only guaranteed a separate school system but also separate school boards, saying "if the Catholic claim is true, though my life as a political man

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64. Bethune, 19.

65. Canada, Parliament, *House of Commons Debates: Speech of Mr. Laurier, M.P., on Separate Schools in Manitoba*. 7th Parl, 1st Sess, (Ottawa: Printer S.E. Dawson, Wednesday, 8th March 1893). CIHM/ICMH microfiche series; no. 46308., 12

66. *House of Commons Debates: Speech of Mr. Laurier, M.P., on Separate Schools in Manitoba*, 1-3.

67. *Ibid.*, 59.

68. *Ibid.*, 3.

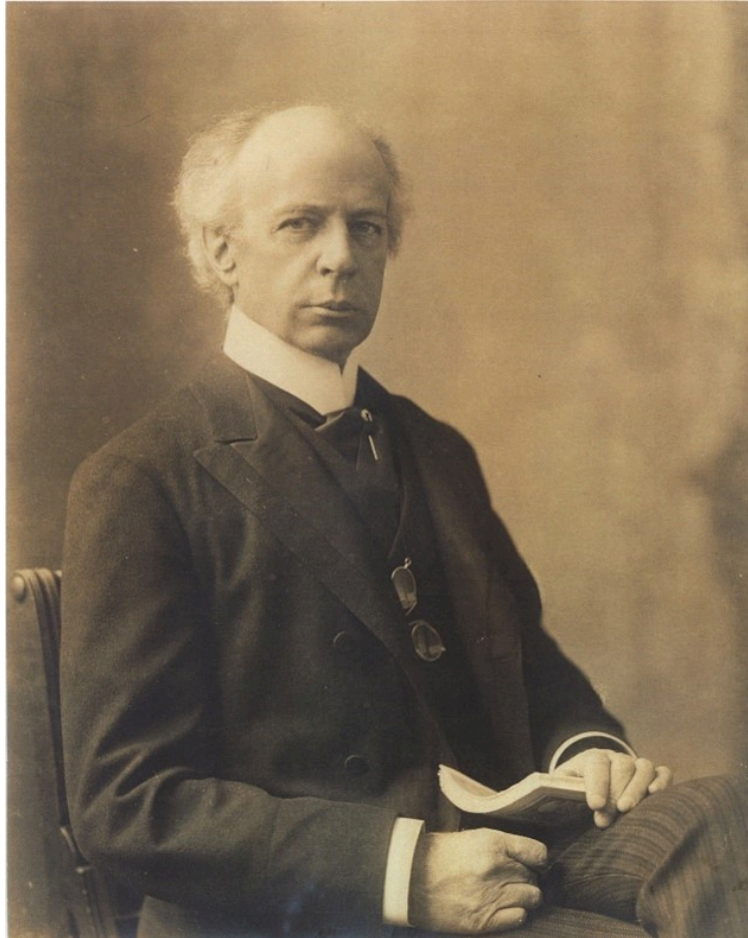
69. *Ibid.*, 9.

70. *Ibid.*

71. *Ibid.*, 13.

72. *House of Commons Debates: Speech of Mr. Laurier, M.P., on Separate Schools in Manitoba*, 3.

should therefore be ended forever... the minority has been subjected to a most infamous tyranny."<sup>73</sup> However, he also reminded Parliament that the *BNA Act* empowered local legislatures to be "almost independent" in most policy areas and that in the case of separate schools, the federal government held only a "supervisory power."<sup>74</sup>



Wilfrid Laurier was the seventh Prime Minister of Canada from July 11, 1896, to October 5, 1911. Wilfrid Laurier University Archives & Special Collections. Public domain: Copyright has expired according to Canadian law. No restrictions on use.

This was the limit to which Laurier was willing to commit. While he agreed that the Catholics had the right to appeal and that the government was failing in its duty to honour that appeal, Laurier did not outright support the Catholics, and in fact, expressed sympathy for Greenway. He was also careful not to criticize the late Macdonald, instead highlighting how the high-ranking members of the Conservative Party had failed to

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73. Ibid., 10-1.

74. Ibid., 4.

follow the groundwork Macdonald had set on the issue: Laurier recalled that the Catholics had been instructed by Macdonald to appeal to the courts first, and if they failed, Macdonald had promised them his government was “endowed with judicial powers” and could “sit as a court”<sup>75</sup> on their issue. Thus, Laurier contended that the Conservatives had an obligation to the Catholics even after Macdonald’s death, and went so far as to accuse the government of “resort[ing] to every possible subterfuge in order to avoid coming to a decision.”<sup>76</sup> The Conservatives may have underestimated the significance of the Manitoba School Question, but Laurier made it clear he did not. In his closing remarks, Laurier blamed the governments of both Abbot and Thompson for “even now not having done sooner what they should have done” before going on to predict that, whenever the government “at last” made a decision, “the population will by that time have been excited to such a pitch that the condition will be scarcely distinguishable from open rebellion to the law... and when that decision comes... great disappointment is sure to result, and an impression will prevail that a great injustice has been done.”<sup>77</sup> Therefore, in using the case of the Catholics to appeal to the moral and religious fibre of every man in Parliament, Laurier, who had already made significant gains in the 1891 federal election, was setting the groundwork for his 1896 campaign.

The Conservative response to Laurier’s remarks was lacklustre, and further development throughout 1893 and 1894 was limited to debating the viability of a remedial order while the country waited on the *Brophy* case. The remedial order, which would theoretically force the Manitoba government to repeal both the *Official Language Act* and the *School Act*, was an issue that the Liberals adamantly opposed and that the Conservatives were split over. Matters were further complicated when Thompson suddenly and unexpectedly died at the age of 49 in December 1894, only a month before the *Brophy* decision was to be delivered. While Charles Tupper, High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, was believed to be the candidate best suited to be Thompson’s replacement, a combination of his “ill health” and the fact that “Governor General Lord Aberdeen and his influential wife disliked him,”<sup>78</sup> caused Mackenzie Bowell to become Prime Minister instead. That decision would soon prove to be a costly one.

### **The Election of 1896:**

On 31 January 1895, the Privy Council ruled the *Manitoba School Act* constitutional but confirmed that, through a remedial order, the federal government was responsible for protecting the Catholic minority of Manitoba.<sup>79</sup> After deliberating on the decision for nearly two months, the Bowell government controversially issued a remedial order on 21 March demanding the Manitoba government to “restore the educational rights of its Catholic decisions”<sup>80</sup> that had been in place before 1890, a decision fervently critiqued by Laurier’s

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75. Ibid., 12.

76. Ibid., 11.

77. *House of Commons Debates: Speech of Mr. Laurier, M.P., on Separate Schools in Manitoba*, 14.

78. Phillip Buckner, “Tupper, Sir Charles,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 14, (University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003), accessed April 3rd, 2023.

79. Bale, 503.

80. Ibid.

Liberals.<sup>81</sup> After discussions with Martin and the rest of his cabinet that lasted another two months, Greenway rejected the remedial order on 5 June. Greenway argued that the inefficiencies of the separate system made it impossible to comply, but that "with more information and negotiation, some compromise could be reached."<sup>82</sup>

Bowell now had a full-blown crisis on his hands. Greenway's refusal was a direct challenge to federal authority, but as Bowell's party had already been split on the issue even before the remedial order, his options were limited. In July, Senator Auguste-Real Angers, Bowell's Minister of Agriculture and a key representative from Quebec, handed in his resignation, and with two other French Canadian ministers threatening to do the same, Bowell was unable to replace him.<sup>83</sup> By December, "the government had lost two critical by-elections in Quebec over the school issue... and Nathaniel Clarke Wallace... the great anti-remedial in the ministry, had resigned."<sup>84</sup> When another remedial bill was introduced to Parliament in January 1896, seven more threatened to resign from their cabinet positions if Bowell was not replaced by Tupper (and then temporarily did),<sup>85</sup> and, with his government falling apart around him, Bowell attempted to resign several times. However, since Tupper was still the clear choice to succeed him, these attempts were all rejected by Aberdeen.

Ever the politician, Laurier used this opportunity to transform his criticisms into an electoral strategy throughout 1895. With the Conservatives less unified than ever over the remedial order and with their 1891 mandate nearing its end, Laurier launched his election campaign with a speaking tour in the fall.<sup>86</sup> The tour peaked on 8 October, when Laurier gave what would become among the most famous speeches in Canadian history and the one that would most define his legacy: the "Sunny Way" speech. After stating that he was "not here to solve the question, because it [was] not in [his] province to solve it" but that he was not "afraid" to speak on it, Laurier invoked an Aesopean fable "in which the sun, representing kindness, and the wind, representing severity, [held] a contest"<sup>87</sup> to remove a traveller's cloak by either warming them so that they willingly removed the coat or by blowing it off of them. Framing the Conservatives as the wind and Greenway as the traveller, Laurier vowed to try "the sunny way," saying:

I would approach Greenway with the sunny ways of patriotism, asking him to be generous to the minority, in order that we may have peace amongst all the creeds and races... Do you not believe that there is more to be

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81. "Opinions of Liberal members on Manitoba School Bill: from "Hansard" of 1896. Canadiana CIHM/ICMH microfiche series no. 11437. <http://online.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.11437.2-4>.

82. Waite, "Bowell, Sir Mackenzie." *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*. Accessed April 10, 2023. [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/bowell\\_mackenzie\\_14E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/bowell_mackenzie_14E.html).

83. Buckner.

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid.

86. Bradburn.

87. Nelle Oosterom, "A Day For Laurier," *Canada's History*. September 12, 2016.

gained by appealing to the heart and soul of men rather than compelling them to do a thing? I intend to do so... to satisfy... every sensible man. [Greenway], I will meet you halfway.<sup>88</sup>

While Laurier continued to play his hand close to the chest by not “leaving the lines” until it was advantageous to do so,<sup>89</sup> his intent was clear: he was extending an olive branch to Greenway in the form of compromise. The response to this speech was rapturous, and from then on Laurier had a clear advantage heading into 1896. By this point, popular sentiment for English Canada had adopted the mantra that “the Manitobans of 1870 had no right to bind the Manitobans of 1895,”<sup>90</sup> and so in issuing the remedial order Bowell had surrendered much of the English vote. However, it had also taken so long for the Conservatives to adopt a stance that in their indecisiveness, they had already lost Quebec as well.<sup>91</sup>

By March of 1896, Laurier was adamant in placing the blame entirely on Bowell, and it seemed the rest of the country agreed. On 3 March, Laurier gave another powerful speech, in which he committed to taking a stand “not upon grounds of Roman Catholicism, not upon grounds of Protestantism, but upon grounds which can appeal to the conscience of all men... upon grounds which can be occupied by all men who love justice, freedom, and toleration.”<sup>92</sup> The reaction to Laurier’s speech was once again overwhelming, and with the time since the last election fast approaching the five-year mark, Aberdeen’s hand was forced. The government called for a new election on the 25th, and the next day, Bowell’s resignation was finally accepted.<sup>93</sup> Tupper had less than three months to campaign before the election, and with the remedial order on hold, the impending election essentially became a referendum on the issue.

Throughout the campaign, Laurier blasted the Tupper government for not “issuing a commission to ascertain the facts of the case,” claiming it was “impossible” to deal with this question without an investigation.<sup>94</sup> In response, Tupper argued that notion had been “completely swept to the wind”<sup>95</sup> by his government. He justified the lack of an investigation, and also the Conservative’s refusal to negotiate with Greenway directly, by arguing Manitoba had forfeited its exclusive jurisdiction over education when it “legislated to take away the rights or privileges enjoyed by the minority as they had existed”<sup>96</sup> before 1890. On 14 April, Laurier promised that “if the People of Canada, carry me to power ... I will settle this question to the satisfaction of all the parties interested ... I assure you that I will succeed in satisfying those who suffer at

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88. Arthur Milnes, “Wilfrid Laurier: “The Sunny Way” Speech, 1895.” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Historica Canada. Article published July 12, 2017; Last edited July 12, 2017.

89. Ibid.

90. Wiseman, 704.

91. Buckner.

92. Bradburn.

93. Buckner.

94. *Speech of Sir Charles Tupper, M.P., on the Winnipeg Negotiations*. (7th Parl, 6th Sess, 14th April, 1896). CIHM/ICMH microfiche series; no. 900562, 8 <https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.46308/1>

95. Ibid., 2.

96. Ibid.

present,"<sup>97</sup> and carry Laurier they did. While Tupper put together a remarkably strong campaign and even managed to claw back enough of the electorate to win the popular vote 46 to 45 percent,<sup>98</sup> the damage had already been done. Laurier easily won the seat count, and the election saw the Liberals achieve a swing of fifty-eight seats over the Conservatives, with Quebec carrying the election by "giving sixteen seats to the bishops" and the other "forty-nine to Laurier."<sup>99</sup>

With the election finally out of the way, Laurier wasted no time in reaching out to Greenway, and over the summer and fall of 1896 the two sides negotiated a compromise. When the provincial and federal governments finally agreed to the Laurier-Greenway Compromise on 16 November 1896, the political hotbed surrounding the Manitoba School Question came to a rather abrupt end. Among several other things, the Compromise "contained a provision allowing instruction in a language other than English in bilingual schools" where enough students spoke the language, allowed Catholic teachers to be employed in schools with at least forty Catholic children, and allowed religious instruction for the last half hour of each day.<sup>100</sup>

### **Historical Significance:**

For all the trouble it had caused Canadian politicians, the controversy surrounding the Manitoba School Question was all but settled by the end of the year. The Compromise did little to satisfy Catholics in Manitoba and to even get the Catholic Church to accept the Compromise, Laurier had to first appeal to the Pope. However, as far as the rest of the country was concerned, the Manitoba School Question had been answered. What officially began in 1890 as a provincial issue over education and taxation bylaws soon evolved into a fierce debate over the role that the majority and minority, the Protestant and the Catholic, and the Anglophone and the Francophone would each play in Canada's future. It was a debate that was just as much about the future status of language, religion, and culture as it was about education and one just as much about the constitutional relationship between the provincial and federal levels of government as it was about the relationship between Manitoban Roman Catholics and Protestants.

The influence that the Manitoba School Question had on Canadian politics during the 1890s is rivalled by only a handful of issues in Canadian history. It defined the politics of Manitoba throughout the decade, and as early as 1893, it had become the most pressing political concern in the country. Politically, the Manitoba School Question and the election it defined marked a significant crossroads in Canadian history. Disagreements over how to respond to the Question caused the Conservative Party to internally split in two, especially after the death of John A. Macdonald left the party without a clear leader for the first time in decades. It impacted the political careers of countless politicians, including at least two provincial premiers and five Prime Ministers,

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97. Bruce Cherney, Bruce. "Manitoba School Question - Controversy Threatened to Tear Nation Apart," *Winnipeg Regional Real Estate News*. March 30, 2007, <https://www.winnipegregionalrealestatenews.com/publications/real-estate-news/616>.

98. Buckner.

99. Ibid.

100. "Laurier-Greenway Compromise." *Compendium of Language Management in Canada*, University of Ottawa. <https://www.uottawa.ca/clmc/laurier-greenway-compromise-1896>.

and it gave birth to the mandates of Tupper, Bowell, and Laurier, while also ending the mandates of the first two. Laurier's victory in the 1896 election conclusively ended the Macdonald era and the Conservative Party dominance that had defined Canada for much of its early history. It also marked the beginning of a new era, one defined by Laurier's record of fifteen consecutive years holding the office of the Prime Minister. The "Sunny Way" promised by Laurier in 1895 and 1896 and implemented throughout negotiations for the Laurier-Greenway Compromise was, in many ways, an early glimpse into what this time in office would look like, and Tupper's inability to regain Canada's confidence in the election of 1900 paved the way for Robert Borden to become the leader of the Conservative Party in 1901.

It also had a significant impact on the provincial level: in Manitoba, English soon became the official language of the province with 1899's *Manitoba Language Act*, and the already diminishing presence of dedicated French-language education all but vanished in the province as a result. With the national focus being placed on Manitoba for the better part of a decade, the School Question perhaps represents the province at its most relevant to national politics, and this relevance indicated the increasingly important role the Prairies would play for the next thirty-odd years as it became one of Canada's fastest-growing regions. The concessions made in the Laurier-Greenway Compromise eventually resurfaced in the Manitoba provincial election of 1900, as the Compromise's unpopularity was among the many reasons that Greenway was voted out. The failure of the Compromise to provide a viable framework for minority education in other provinces, in conjunction with Laurier's unwillingness to take a firm stance on the matter, had repercussions that lasted for decades and affected several provinces. The issues of education funding, control over curriculum, and segregation of schools for religious and linguistic minorities resurfaced less than a decade later, first in the negotiations for founding Alberta and Saskatchewan in 1905,<sup>101</sup> again in 1911 with Ontario's *Regulation 17*, and finally in 1916 when the Manitoba School Question resurfaced for the second -but arguably not final- time under future Prime Minister Borden.<sup>102</sup>

### Conclusion:

The political contexts that made the Manitoba School Question relevant in the 1890s inevitably faded with time, and in retrospect, the situation pales in severity to many of the other crises Canadian Prime Ministers have faced that are covered elsewhere in this textbook, including the related Conscription Crisis covered by Stephen Lylyk. Indeed, the Manitoba School Question was not the first political crisis to prematurely end a Prime Minister's career or dominate an election. It was not the first to deal with the growing divides within Canada: between French and English, Protestant and Catholic, 'West' and 'East,' and provincial and federal government. It was not the first issue related to linguistic and education rights, or even with the French in Manitoba alone. Nor would it be the last — or the most significant — instance of these issues challenging Canadian Prime Ministers. For these reasons and more, while the Manitoba School Question

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101. "Language Debate Rages On." *The Daily Herald*, November 4, 1905, 2.

102. Hackett, 16.

attracted “considerable attention” from Canadian historians in the first half of the twentieth century, the subject has been mostly overlooked over the last fifty years. However, the Manitoba School Question was unique in that it was essentially the first to encapsulate nearly all of these topics — which together account for many of the biggest political challenges in Canadian history — in a single political controversy. It was also the first, and to date, the only federal election predicated on a court decision, and this decision not only “vindicated [the Supreme Court] as a truly impartial court of justice”<sup>103</sup> but set a precedent for the future of provincial-federal relations. In this way, the Manitoba School Question and the 1896 election marked a significant moment in Canadian history and served as a precursor for many of the religious, linguistic, and cultural divides that would define Canada in the twentieth century. It is also a reminder of what a single individual who is willing to compromise can accomplish, of the ramifications such compromises can have, and perhaps that is what makes the Manitoba Schools crisis still worth studying today.

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103. Bale, 518.

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# THE BLOOD TAX: PRIME MINISTER ROBERT BORDEN AND THE CONSCRIPTION CRISIS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Stephen Lylyk

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## Introduction

The First World War, was a conflict fought from 1914-1918. It was a horrific time in the history of Canada as the war “produced unprecedented levels of carnage and destruction.”<sup>1</sup> Actions taken during the war would prove Canada’s valour, and help create an improved position within the “British Commonwealth.”<sup>2</sup> The man who led the country through this period in history was Prime Minister Robert Borden. While Canada did their part in the war effort, policies undertaken by Borden would result in furthering an existing division between French and English Canadians.<sup>3</sup> Feelings of anger and resentment linger within Quebec to the present.

Robert Laird Borden was born in Grand Pre, Nova Scotia on 26 June 1854.<sup>4</sup> His father, Andrew, “had a substantial farm, but neglected it to dabble in business affairs.”<sup>5</sup> Borden’s mother, Eunice, was an influential figure in her sons life.<sup>6</sup> In one of Borden’s later writings, he stated his admiration of her, “very strong character, remarkable energy, and high ambition.”<sup>7</sup> Eunice’s ambition was a trait that rubbed off on her son as he, “applied himself to his studies, while [also] assisting his parents with the farm.”<sup>8</sup> Growing up, Borden was a bright student at the local private academy “Acacia Villa School.” He specialized in Classical studies, specifically

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1. A&E Television Networks. (n.d.). *World War I: Summary, causes & facts*. History.com. Retrieved May 1, 2023, from <https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-i/world-war-i-history>
  2. Tim Cook, ““Our First Duty Is to Win, at Any Cost”: Sir Robert Borden during the Great War.” *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 13, no. 3 (2011). [https://doi.org/https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/journals/jomass/v13i3/f\\_0023349\\_19092](https://doi.org/https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/journals/jomass/v13i3/f_0023349_19092), 23.
  3. Giuseppe Valiante, “Quebec Nationalism and Anti-Militarism Legacy of Conscription Crisis: Historians.” Montreal. CTV News, April 18, 2017. <https://montreal.ctvnews.ca/quebec-nationalism-and-anti-militarism-legacy-of-conscription-crisis-historians-1.3373425>.
  4. Robert Craig Brown. “Sir Robert Borden.” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, February 21, 2008. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/sir-robert-borden>.
  5. John A Stevenson, Sir Robert Borden, 1952 30-4 *Canadian Bar Review* 350, 1952 CanLIIDocs 57, <<https://canlii.ca/t/t49m>>, retrieved on 2023-04-14, 350-51
  6. “Family Tree of Robert Borden.” Geaneastar. Accessed April 13, 2023. <https://en.geneastar.org/genealogy/bordenr/robert-borden>.
  7. Robert Craig Brown, “Biography – Borden, Sir Robert Laird – Volume XVI (1931-1940) – *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*.” Accessed March 15, 2023. [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/borden\\_robert\\_laird\\_16E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/borden_robert_laird_16E.html).
  8. “Family Tree of Robert Borden.” Geaneastar.

“Greek and Latin. His instructor James Henry Hamilton, soon had [Borden] studying Hebrew.” When Hamilton left the school for a new opportunity, Borden found himself in a unique position, as at “age 14 [he] [was] promoted to assistant master, specializing in classical studies.”<sup>9</sup> Borden enjoyed his work as a teacher, however he would eventually conclude that “law was a better profession for him than teaching.”<sup>10</sup> At the age of 20 in 1874, he, “resigned his post to become an articled law clerk [at] Weatherbe & Graham, one of the leading law firms in Halifax.” By 1877, Borden would sit alongside, “23 other students for the provincial Bar examinations.” He would top the class, but still had to complete “a year of apprenticeship before admittance to the bar.” His law career began following a year at the School of Military Instruction in Halifax<sup>11</sup>. During his tenure as a lawyer, Borden formed a relationship with future Conservative Prime Minister Charles Tupper.<sup>12</sup> On 27 April 1896, it was Tupper who presented an idea to Borden that he should run for Member of Parliament in Halifax. Borden agreed, as he believed that “political life was a responsibility that successful men should take on for the public good.”<sup>13</sup>

### **Borden the Politician**

Borden would take on a more “prominent role in the conservative party, and was becoming an emerging figure within it.”<sup>14</sup> Following the Conservative Party’s defeat in the 1900 election, Tupper stepped down as leader of the opposition, declaring that it was “time to make way for a younger man.”<sup>15</sup> On 6 February, 1901,<sup>16</sup> Borden would take on the role, as Conservative Party leader, as “nobody else could match Borden in intellectual gifts and parliamentary skill.”<sup>17</sup> Initially, Borden was resistant to the responsibility he was offered. As he would explain, “I have not either the experience or the qualifications which would enable me to lead the party successfully. It would be an absurdity for the party and madness for me.”<sup>18</sup> As the new Party Leader, Borden led a Conservative party in “desperate need of change.” The issue, as historian Tim Cook explains, was that the “Liberal Party seemed unstoppable. The economy was booming, and immigrants flooded into the country.” Borden’s ability to oust Laurier was put into question following defeats in 1904 and 1908. Borden attempted to sway the Canadian public to vote Conservative, “However his pleas of duty could not match the experienced, charismatic and lyrical Laurier.”<sup>19</sup>

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9. Brown, “Biography – Borden, Sir Robert Laird.”

10. John A Stevenson, Sir Robert Borden, 1952 30-4 *Canadian Bar Review* 350, 1952 CanLIIDocs 57, <<https://canlii.ca/t/t49m>>, retrieved on 2023-04-14, 352.

11. Brown, “Biography – Borden, Sir Robert Laird.”

12. Craig Baird, “Sir Robert Borden.”

13. Brown, “Sir Robert Borden.”

14. “Sir Robert Borden.” Canadian History Ehx, February 6, 2023. <https://canadaehx.com/2021/02/05/sir-robert-borden/>.

15. Stevenson, Sir Robert Borden, 1952 30-4 *Canadian Bar Review*, 357

16. “Sir Robert Borden.” Canadian History Ehx.

17. Stevenson, Sir Robert Borden, 1952 30-4 *Canadian Bar Review* 350.

18. “Sir Robert Borden.” Canadian History Ehx,.

19. Tim Cook, ““Our First Duty Is to Win, at Any Cost” - Ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu,” 2011. [https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/journals/jomass/v13i3/f\\_0023349\\_19092.pdf](https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/journals/jomass/v13i3/f_0023349_19092.pdf), 3

By 1911, the situation had changed for Borden and the Conservatives.<sup>20</sup> The 1911 Reciprocity agreement was controversial in Canada. Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier negotiated the agreement with American President William Howard Taft and a deal was reached on January 26, 1911. Laurier believed that free trade with the United States would “allow manufacturers and farmers to increase their production and sell their commodities to [Canada’s] neighbours.”<sup>21</sup> As discussion on the bill shifted to the House of Commons, support for it began to wane. Debate amongst the country was divided on the issue. Canadian Railway companies were against the agreement, as they believed “Reciprocity would shift trade to a north-south pattern. This would break down the east-west trade routes the railways built up.” Western Grain farmers were amongst those in favour of reciprocity as they “believed freer trade with the United States would open up new markets and reduce transportation costs.”<sup>22</sup> Amongst the rhetoric there were those who rejected the agreement, fearing it would, “lead to annexation,”<sup>23</sup> Borden made his position clear regarding reciprocity in a 1911 Election Gathering in Winnipeg. There he explained, “I am absolutely opposed to reciprocity and if the West was prepared to make me Prime Minister tomorrow, if I would support that policy, I would not do it.” To Borden, reciprocity would, “not only weaken Canadian industry, and the Dominion’s economy as a whole, it would lead to American annexation and the loss of a whole way of life.”<sup>24</sup> The future of Canada hinged on the 1911 election. As a 21 September Toronto *World* headline explained, “Which will it be? Borden and King George, or Laurier and President Taft?” The Americans did their part to help “inflame Canadian fears of reciprocity.” House of Representatives member William Bennet would “introduce a resolution that the United States should begin talks with Britain on how to annex Canada.”<sup>25</sup>

After 15 years as prime minister 1911 marked the end of Laurier’s leadership as the Conservative Party was swept back into power.<sup>26</sup> They would win 133 seats compared to the Liberal Party’s 86,<sup>27</sup> Scholars believed that 1911 “entrenched Canada’s loyalty to the British Empire, and a view that it must remain independent

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20. In Depth: “The Definitive Analysis” of Canada’s 1911 Reciprocity Election.” Accessed March 15, 2023. <https://teachers.plea.org/uploads/content/SS-The-Definitive-Analysis-of-Canadas-1911-Reciprocity-Election.pdf>.

21. “Reciprocity Agreement: Tenacity in the Face of Adversity: Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada.” Wilfrid Laurier: Father of modern Canada, 2023. [https://wilfridlaurier175.ca/accord\\_de\\_reciprocite-reciprocity\\_agreement-eng](https://wilfridlaurier175.ca/accord_de_reciprocite-reciprocity_agreement-eng).

22. In Depth: “The Definitive Analysis” of Canada’s 1911 Reciprocity Election.”

23. Greg Donaghy, *Dictionary of American History*, Encyclopedia.com. 27 Apr. 2023. ” Encyclopedia.com. Encyclopedia.com, 2019. <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/canadian-american-reciprocity>.

24. John Douglas Belshaw, “6.2 Borden vs. Borden.” *Canadian History Post-Confederation*. BCcampus, May 17, 2016. <https://opentextbc.ca/postconfederation/chapter/6-2-borden-vs-borden/>.

25. “In Depth: “The Definitive Analysis” of Canada’s 1911 Reciprocity Election.”

26. Andrew Heard, “Canadian Election Results by Party 1867 to 2021.” *Canadian Election Results: 1867-2021*. Accessed April 13, 2023. <https://www.sfu.ca/~aheard/elections/1867-present.html>.

27. “25. Appendices.” Appendices - General Election Results Since 1867. Accessed May 1, 2023. <https://www.ourcommons.ca/marleaumontpetit/DocumentViewer.aspx?DocId=1001&Language=E&Sec=Ch25&Seq=11>.

of the United States.” As Prime Minister Borden explained, “We must decide, if the spirit of Canadianism or continentalism shall prevail on the northern half of the continent.”<sup>28</sup>

### **Borden and the Naval Aid Bill**

Borden believed, it was the duty of Canadians to best assist the needs of the British Empire. In the event of conflict, he stated that “So long as Canada remains in the Empire, Canada is at war when the British Empire is at war.” His belief was that Canada was “either in the empire for weal or woe, or we are out of it.”<sup>29</sup> Borden believed that it was Canada’s responsibility to support the Empire when in need.<sup>30</sup> He proclaimed that, “If the British Navy stood in need of immediate aid, that aid would be forthcoming.” Borden expanded on this viewpoint in the House of Commons where he stated;

“When Great Britain no longer assumes sole responsibility for defence upon the high seas, she can no longer undertake, to assume sole responsibility for and control of foreign policy, which is closely vitally, and constantly associated with that defence in which the dominions participate.”<sup>31</sup>

One of Borden’s first acts in Parliament was the 1912 Naval Aid Bill. The impetus for the bill came after Borden’s visits to England to attend the “Imperial Conference in December 1912.”<sup>32</sup> The legislation called for a contribution for “\$35 million to the British gov’t for the construction of three Royal Navy Dreadnoughts.” From Borden’s perspective, the bill was a necessity, noting that “the situation is sufficiently grave to demand immediate action.”<sup>33</sup> In a House of Commons speech, delivered on 5 December 1912, Borden declared:

“Any action on the part of Canada to increase the power and mobility of the Imperial Navy, and thus widen the margin of our common safety, would be recognized everywhere as a most significant witness to the united strength of the Empire, and to the renewed resolve of the Overseas Dominions to take their part in maintaining its integrity.”<sup>34</sup>

The debate met fierce opposition from the Liberals, who were angered by Borden’s actions, cancelling Laurier’s “1911 plan to build a Canadian navy.”<sup>35</sup> Debates on Borden’s Naval Aid Bill bogged down in Parliament. On one such occasion, Borden wrote in his memoirs, “Our men [were] angry at the end, and both sides wanted a physical conflict.”<sup>36</sup> The bill was debated for months in the House of Commons,<sup>37</sup> and would

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28. “In Depth: “The Definitive Analysis” of Canada’s 1911 Reciprocity Election.”

29. James Crowley, A. *Borden: Conscription and Union Government*. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1958, 21.

30. F.C. Underhay, “Sir Robert Borden and Imperial Relations. - Dalhousie University.” *The Dalhousie Review*. Accessed April 14, 2023. [https://dalspace.library.dal.ca/bitstream/handle/10222/58358/dalrev\\_vol10\\_iss4\\_pp503\\_517.pdf](https://dalspace.library.dal.ca/bitstream/handle/10222/58358/dalrev_vol10_iss4_pp503_517.pdf), 504.

31. Underhay, “Sir Robert Borden and Imperial Relations. - Dalhousie University,” 503-517.

32. Naval aid bill, 1912. Accessed March 15, 2023. <https://www.lemuseum.org/imperial-influences-1903-13/naval-aid-bill-1912>.

33. Crowley, *Borden: Conscription and Union Government*, 67.

34. Robert Borden, “Naval Aid Bill : Speech Delivered by Rt. Hon. R.L. Borden, 5th December, 1912.” Doullbooks.com, 2023. <https://www.doullbooks.com/product/98669/Naval-Aid-Bill-Speech-Delivered-by-Rt-Hon-RL-Borden-5th-December-1912>.

35. Roger Sarty, “Naval Service Act.” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, February 7, 2006. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/naval-service-act>.

36. Craig Baird. “Sir Robert Borden.” Canadian History Ehx.

37. Crowley, *Borden: Conscription and Union Government*, 71.

get defeated in a Liberal-controlled senate by a determined Liberal party “enraged by the government’s use of closure.”<sup>38</sup>

### **Borden and the First World War**

On 4 August 1914, Britain declared war on Germany. Britain’s decision to join the conflict would “automatically bring Canada into the war, because of Canada’s legal status as a dominion, subservient to Britain. However, the Canadian Government had the freedom to determine the country’s level of involvement in the war.”<sup>39</sup> The Canadian Government was unprepared for the war, “as the only member of the Cabinet with any military experience was Sam Hughes.”<sup>40</sup> Hughes was viewed as “charming, somewhat vain, and colourful, with an extremely strong belief in the imperial connection with England.” Borden trusted Hughes as when he was elected in 1911 “he made Hughes his Minister of Militia and Defense.” With this title, Hughes was given the responsibility to “create his dream army to be used in the case of war.” Following Borden’s 1914 announcement that “Canada would be sending a force to Europe, Hughes set to work on mobilizing the troops.”<sup>41</sup> He would intentionally ignore a plan drawn up in “1911... and chose to create the Canadian Expeditionary Force, made up of numbered battalions separate from the militia.”<sup>42</sup> Through these efforts a “contingent of 33,000 men, and 7000 horses embarked for Europe.”<sup>43</sup> The legacy of Hughes would take a negative turn as due to a list of scandals, from “Favouritism, disrespect of Cabinet, and administrative incompetence,” Borden fired Hughes in November 1916.<sup>44</sup>

On 19 August 1914, Borden explained in a speech to the House of Commons, that it was the duty of Canada to, “stand shoulder to shoulder with Britain and the other dominions in this quarrel. And [in] [this] duty, we shall not fail to fulfill as the honour of Canada demands it. Not for love of battle, but for the cause of honour.”<sup>45</sup> He further emphasized that it was all Canadians who should share the “burden of war,” in an 18 May 1917 House of Commons speech. In that speech he said, “I cannot too strongly emphasize my belief that a great effort still lies before the Allied nations if we are going to win this war.”<sup>46</sup>

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38. David J. Hall and Donald B Smith, “Biography – Lougheed, Sir James Alexander – Volume XV (1921-1930) – Dictionary of Canadian Biography.” Home – Dictionary of Canadian Biography. Accessed March 15, 2023. [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/lougheed\\_james\\_alexander\\_15E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/lougheed_james_alexander_15E.html).

39. “World War 1: 28 July 1914 to 11 November 1918.” World War I. Accessed April 13, 2023. [https://canadianfallen.ca/conflict/2/world\\_war\\_1](https://canadianfallen.ca/conflict/2/world_war_1).

40. Brown, “Biography – Borden, Sir Robert Laird – Volume XVI (1931-1940).”

41. Craig Baird, “Sir Sam Hughes.” Canadian History Ehx, July 11, 2021. <https://canadaehx.com/2021/07/11/sir-sam-hughes/>.

42. Craig Baird, “Sir Sam Hughes.” Canadian History Ehx, July 11, 2021.

43. “Canadian Mobilization: Aug, 1914.” Canadian mobilization: Aug. 1914. The Loyal Edmonton Regiment Military Museum, 2018. <https://www.lermuseum.org/first-world-war-1914-18/1914/canadian-mobilization-aug-1914/>.

44. Roland G. Haycock, “Sir Samuel Hughes.” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, January 29, 2009. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/sir-samuel-hughes>.

45. “Sir Robert Borden Declares War.” Sir Robert Borden declares war. Accessed March 15, 2023. <https://www.mta.ca/library/courage/sirrobertbordendeclareswar.html>.

46. “Election of 1917: Military Service Act.” VALOUR CANADA. Accessed May 2, 2023. <https://valourcanada.ca/military-history-library/election-of-1917-military-service-act/>.

### Borden and the Question of Compulsory Service

When war first broke out, Borden made sure to state that there would be no conscription implemented in Canada.<sup>47</sup> As he stated in an address at the Halifax Canadian Club,<sup>48</sup> “There will not be compulsion or conscription.”<sup>49</sup> However Borden made it clear that he was willing to enforce it if the situation demanded. In a 1916 address Borden stated that, “...if [conscription] should prove the only effective method to preserve the existence of the state and liberties we enjoy, I should not hesitate to act accordingly.”<sup>50</sup>



A Canadian Battalion in a Bayonet Charge on the Somme (I0004777).JPG.”  
Accessed May 3, 2023. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A\\_Canadian\\_Battalion\\_in\\_a\\_bayonet\\_charge\\_on\\_the\\_Somme\\_\(I0004777.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_Canadian_Battalion_in_a_bayonet_charge_on_the_Somme_(I0004777.jpg)).  
[/footnote]

As the war continued, many Canadian soldiers lost their lives. An estimated “130,000 Canadians were either killed or wounded in battles at Vimy Ridge and the Somme.”<sup>51</sup> The deaths were mounting at a time when voluntary enlistment had nearly dried up. It was on a visit to France in the spring of 1917 where “Borden was

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47. “Election of 1917: Military Service Act.” VALOUR CANADA.

48. Brown, “Biography – Borden, Sir Robert Laird – Volume XVI (1931-1940).

49. Martin Thornton, “Rough Road to Versailles: the First World War and the Planning for Peace.” Story. In *Sir Robert Borden: Canada*, 29–40. London: Haus Histories, 2010, 2.

50. Robert Laird and Heath Macquarrie. *Robert Laird Borden: His Memoirs Vol. II, 1916-1920*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969, 47.

51. Valiante, “Timeline of Events for WW1 and WW2 Conscription Crises in Quebec.” thespec.com. TheSpec.com, June 30, 2017. <https://www.thespec.com/news/2017/06/30/timeline-of-events-for-ww1-and-ww2-conscription-crises-in-quebec.html?rf>.

shocked by the enormity of the conflict. He [became] determined that Canada should play a significant role in the war.”<sup>52</sup> As he would write in his memoirs:

“I had kept closely in touch with conditions in Canada, and greatly to my disappointment, I was obliged to conclude that any further effort for voluntary enlistment would provide very meager and inadequate results. Upon my return to Canada, a quick decision was necessary. Four days after my arrival I announced that compulsory military service was necessary.”<sup>53</sup>

Borden introduced the Military Service Act on 29 August 1917, making all “male citizens aged 20 to 45 eligible for conscription for military service.” The Act initially included “Status Indians and Metis men between the ages of 20-45... However, some First Nations leaders challenged it on the grounds that it violated treaties between the Crown and Indigenous peoples... Indigenous peoples were thus exempted from the Act in January 1918.”<sup>54</sup> Canadian farmers also expressed their concerns regarding the Act. They believed “conscription would create a shortage of agricultural labor at a time when they were hard pressed to meet the demands of wartime consumption.”<sup>55</sup> The farmers would “push the Borden government to acknowledge their important work by exempting their sons from conscription. Borden’s government initially would comply but ended the exemption in April 1918 with continuing casualties overseas, and recruitment shortages at home.”<sup>56</sup> The Military Service Act was popular amongst English-speaking Canadians. This was due to their general “support of the war because they believed that Canada had to keep fighting until victory.”<sup>57</sup> However, in French-speaking areas, Borden’s conscription laws faced significant opposition.<sup>58</sup>

### **Borden and Tension between English and French Canadians**

Canada’s bilingual status of French and English has, since the country’s inception, been “at the heart of the Canadian identity.”<sup>59</sup> Lord Durham, (former Governor General of British North America)<sup>60</sup> in his 1838 Durham report,<sup>61</sup> compared, French and English Canada to “two nations warring in the bosom of a single

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52. Richard Preston, “Military Service Act.”

53. Borden and Macquarrie. *Robert Laird Borden*, 77.

54. Preston, “Military Service Act.”

55. “Conscription Crisis: 1917.” Conscription crisis: 1917, 2018. <https://www.lemuseum.org/first-world-war-1914-18/1917/conscription-crisis-1917>.

56. “The War Economy - Farming and Food.” Canada and the First World War. Accessed April 13, 2023. <https://www.warmuseum.ca/firstworldwar/history/life-at-home-during-the-war/the-war-economy/farming-and-food/>.

57. “Conscription Crisis.” Civilization.ca - history of Canadian medicare - 1914-1929 -.

58. Serge Durlinger, “Dispatches.” French Canada and Recruitment during the First World War | Dispatches | Learn | Canadian War Museum. Accessed March 15, 2023. <https://www.warmuseum.ca/learn/dispatches/french-canada-and-recruitment-during-the-first-world-war/>.

59. Government of Canada, Statistics Canada. “The Evolution of English–French Bilingualism in Canada from 1901 to 2011.” Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, May 17, 2018. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2016001-eng.htm>.

60. Phillip A. Buckner, “Lord Durham.” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, January 14, 2008. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/john-george-lambton-1st-earl-of-durham>.

61. David Mills, “Durham Report.” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, February 7, 2006. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/durham-report>.

state.”<sup>62</sup> Further developments only served to heighten that sense of fear, as in 1912, the province of Ontario passed “Regulation 17.” This law resulted in the teaching of the French language being limited in Ontario to the “first two years of elementary school.”<sup>63</sup> Quebec was angry, accusing Ontario of being “intolerant, and not holding to the spirit of Confederation.” Quebec politician and nationalist, Henri Bourassa publicly denounced the English calling them the “Prussians of Ontario, Saying they were strongly opposed by Franco-Ontarian’s, particularly in the national capital of Ottawa.”<sup>64</sup> Such friction was still noticeable when Borden passed the Military Service Act, as he stated that “[conscription] might mean civil war in Quebec.”<sup>65</sup>

The First World War was a contentious issue for French Canadian citizens as “there were only few French Canadians were willing to risk their lives in defence of England” When Canada sent their First Expeditionary Force to the front in October 1914, there was only a singular “French-speaking company involved. Out of 258 infantry battalions formed throughout the war, only 13 were French Canadian.”<sup>66</sup> French Canadian politician, publisher, and nationalist figure, Henri Bourassa was a vocal critic of compulsory service. As he wrote in his newspaper, *La Devoir*,

“The government, the opposition, and the entire parliament have plunged the country into the European tempest. Whereas no international commitment and no constitutional or moral obligation impose any other duty on Canada than to look after the defence of its own territory.”<sup>67</sup>

To Bourassa, compulsory service was a form of a blood tax, and he asked the Canadian public if “National emancipation should be paid for in blood?” In one of his writings, Bourassa argued that, “Canada could have intervened in this war as a nation with no more subservience to England than to France or Belgium, and reserving expressly its full freedoms of action for the future.” In his view, the future of Canadian independence mattered more than the human sacrifice in a European conflict. Bourassa’s beliefs conflicted with those of English Canadians, who believed that “paying their tribute to the British Empire in men would earn the right to emancipation in the new order.”<sup>68</sup> Archbishop Monseigneur Bruchesi of Quebec warned Borden in a message about the potential for riots if Conscription were to be enforced: “Do you not think, in light of our

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62. “Francophone-Anglophone Relations.” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, February 7, 2006. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/francophone-anglophone-relations>.

63. “Regulation 17 - 1912.” *Canada a country by consent: World War I: Regulation 17 - 1912*. Accessed March 15, 2023. <https://canadahistoryproject.ca/1914/1914-02-reg-17.html>.

64. Academic Kids. “Regulation 17.” *Regulation 17 - Academic Kids*. Accessed April 13, 2023. [https://academickids.com/encyclopedia/index.php/Regulation\\_17](https://academickids.com/encyclopedia/index.php/Regulation_17).

65. Brown, “Biography – Borden, Sir Robert Laird – Volume XVI (1931-1940).”

66. Durlinger, “Dispatches.”

67. Pierre Ancil, “Henri Bourassa on Conscription, June 6, 1917,” *The Champlain Society*. The Champlain Society. Accessed March 15, 2023. <https://champlainsociety.utpjournals.press/findings-trouvailles/archive/henri-bourassa-on-conscription>.

68. Richard Beatrice Richard, “Henri Bourassa and Conscription: Traitor or Saviour?,” 2006. <http://www.journal.forces.gc.ca/vo7/no4/doc/richard-eng.pdf>, 76-77.

population, that we have largely done our share? The people are agitated. In the province of Quebec, we can expect deplorable revolts. Will this not end in bloodshed?”<sup>69</sup>

### **Borden defends the Military Service Act**

In a 1916 address in Montreal, Borden spoke to its citizens on the importance and urgency of the duty Canadians had during the war. Borden in his speech, attempted to convince the citizens of Montreal to put aside their differences to fulfill the needs of the Empire:

“It was inevitable from the first that in this dominion we should have our differences whether of party, race or of creed... If ever devotion to duty, if ever a high conception of service and of national unity were essential to the lifetime of our country, they are demanded today. All controversies of a minor character sink into insignificance when the very foundation of our national existence is in danger of being overthrown.”<sup>70</sup>

When Borden introduced conscription in the following year, he spoke with a similar urgency. In a House of Commons speech, Borden proclaimed, “If we do not pass this measure, if we do not keep our plighted faith, with what countenance shall we meet them on their return?”<sup>71</sup> In an Ottawa announcement on 11 November, Borden defended the Military Service Act: “The government realizes that in this national emergency, there is an imperative necessity for the fulfillment of its policies with the least possible delay. It pledges itself to prosecute the war with senseless vigor.” Borden also stated in the speech that;

“There was no thought of compulsion until compulsion became imperative. There was no hesitation to seek authority for enrollment by selection when the necessity was established. It was the enemy, not the government which issued the calls to arms, and compelled a mobilization of the empire’s resources.”<sup>72</sup>

During the lead-up to the 1917 election, Borden proposed to Laurier, the formation of a “unionist government.”<sup>73</sup> As he explained in his memoirs, “I was confronted with the possibility, perhaps the duty, of establishing such a government by association with that element of the Liberal party, outside of Quebec, which was prepared to support compulsory military service and was resolute in the determination to maintain Canada’s war effort.”<sup>74</sup> Laurier began the war in support of Borden’s efforts in Europe, going as far as “becoming involved in the recruitment of combat volunteers.”<sup>75</sup> However, Laurier had long been opposed to conscription due to the potential damage it could have on the country. As he stated in a message to Borden

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69. “The Conscription Crisis: French Canada Erupts in Anger When the Federal Government Forces Its Men to Go to War.” CBCnews. CBC/Radio Canada. Accessed March 15, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/history/EPISCONTENTSE1EP12CH2PA3LE.html>.

70. “Canada At War: Speeches Delivered by Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Laird Borden.” Accessed March 15, 2023. <https://wartimecanada.ca/sites/default/files/documents/CanadaAtWar.Borden.May1917.pdf>.

71. Brown, “Biography – Borden, Sir Robert Laird – Volume XVI (1931-1940).”

72. “Borden Defends Conscription Act: Appeal to Canadians to Support New Government,” 1917. [login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/borden-defends-conscription-act/docview/145528582/se-2](https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/borden-defends-conscription-act/docview/145528582/se-2).

73. Patrice Dutil and David MacKenzie. “Canada’s “Doomsday Election” of Dec. 17, 1917.” *thestar.com*. Toronto Star, December 14, 2017. <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2017/12/14/canadas-doomsday-election-of-dec-17-1917.html>.

74. Borden and Macquarrie. *Robert Laird Borden: His Memoirs*, 93.

75. “Conscription and Coalition Government: Tenacity in the Face of Adversity: Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada.” Wilfrid Laurier: Father of modern Canada, 2023. [https://wilfridlaurier175.ca/conscription\\_et\\_gouvernement\\_de\\_coalition-conscription\\_and\\_coalition\\_government-eng](https://wilfridlaurier175.ca/conscription_et_gouvernement_de_coalition-conscription_and_coalition_government-eng).

“Is it not true that the main reason advocated for conscription – not so much publicly as privately – is that Quebec must be made to do her part, and French Canadians forced to enlist compulsorily since they did not enlist voluntarily?”<sup>76</sup> Upon receiving the union offer, Laurier was initially hesitant to make his decision, “aware that English-speaking Liberals were in favour of joining Borden’s union.” On “6 June 1917, Laurier declined Borden’s offer,” choosing to continue as Liberal party leader. This decision appeased many members of the Conservative party who were not interested in aligning with Liberals.<sup>77</sup> That news did not stop certain Liberals from breaking away from the Liberal Party, when Borden formed his government following the election. The Union Party Cabinet was composed of “12 Conservatives, 9 Liberals, independents and one Labour MP.”<sup>78</sup>

Another maneuver Borden undertook prior to the election was the Military Voters Act, which expanded voter enfranchisement. Now, “every person, male or female, who being a British subject, whether or not ordinarily resident in Canada, was able to vote in a federal election”.<sup>79</sup> As a result of this policy, many “French-Canadian women were not allowed to vote, as well as immigrants from countries Canada had been at war with since 1902.”<sup>80</sup> Another group removed from the list of available voters were those who were “exempted from the coming conscription draft, such as conscientious objectors.”<sup>81</sup> The bill was “met with indignation from suffragists; some saw its half-measures as an overt attempt to service the wartime cause rather than the rights of women.” In the spring of 1918, “the government extended the right to vote to Canadian women over the age of 21.” Borden “declared that women would exert a good influence on public life.” Author Stephen Leacock was critical of giving women the vote, as he argued sarcastically that they would do nothing but “elect men to the government.” History would prove him wrong, as three years later, Agnes Macphail would become “the first woman to sit in the House of Commons.”<sup>82</sup>

The 1917 election campaign was a bitter one, as in the lead-up to election day, the Manitoba Free Press wrote that “a vote for Laurier is a vote for the Kaiser.” The Toronto Daily News posted a map of the country, where “English speaking Canada was coloured red. Quebec in black.” This anger from these fierce debates was best symbolized during Interior Minister Alfred Seigney’s visit to Quebec. It was here that he was “driven from a

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76. “The Conscription Crisis: French Canada Erupts in Anger When the Federal Government Forces Its Men to Go to War.” CBCnews. CBC/Radio Canada. Accessed March 15, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/history/EPISCONTENTSE1EP12CH2PA3LE.html>.

77. Brown, “Biography – Borden, Sir Robert Laird – Volume XVI (1931-1940).

78. David Mitchell, “Coalitions: a Brief History,” December 3, 2008. <https://login.libproxy.uregina.ca:8443/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/coalitions-brief-history/docview/330945757/se-2>.

79. W.P Lt.-Col. Purney, “Dominion of Canada: Military Voters Act, 1917. Directions for Guidance of Voters.” Accessed March 15, 2023. <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/canada-first-world-war/Documents/vote-poster.pdf>.

80. Dutil and MacKenzie. “Canada’s “Doomsday Election”.

81. Richard Foot, “Election of 1917.” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, August 12, 2015. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/election-of-1917>.

82. “Extending the Vote: Canadian Women Win the Right to Vote in National Elections.” CBC news. CBC/Radio Canada, 2001. <https://www.cbc.ca/history/EPISCONTENTSE1EP12CH3PA1LE.html>.

platform, amidst revolver shots and flying stones. After he took refuge in a hotel, the building's windows were smashed and Sevigny had to escape out the back door."<sup>83</sup>

### **Borden and the Aftermath of the 1917 Election**

Borden's Union Party won the 1917 election, "dominating English-speaking regions, and returning to parliament with a majority of 154 seats, three from Quebec. Laurier's Liberals won 82 seats, 72 from Quebec."<sup>84</sup> To the public, the Union victory was a validation of Conscription. A 17 December *Washington Post* article wrote that the "Union Government has been returned, and conscription confirmed by the Canadian Domestic vote."<sup>85</sup> To Borden, the election was a "confirmation of a solemn covenant and a pledge he and Canada had made to the soldiers at the front."<sup>86</sup> The election results isolated Quebec. Three weeks after the election, a member of the Quebec Legislative Assembly, Joseph Napoleon Francoeur,<sup>87</sup> expressed his feelings at a meeting. As he explained, he "would be disposed to accept the breaking of the Confederation pact of 1867 if, in the other provinces, it is believed that she is an obstacle to the union, progress, and development of Canada."<sup>88</sup> The political isolation felt by Quebec, would end up "hurting Conservative party fortunes there, and haunt Canadian unity, for generations to come."<sup>89</sup>

The initial call-ups for conscription began in "January 1918 and 400,000 men were registered for conscription. Ninety-three percent of registered members asked for exemptions."<sup>90</sup> There were many examples of citizens claiming that "they were the sole supporter of their families, disabled, students, or vital to the economy." One story was from Jules Lachapelle who "sought refuge in the countryside with his wife Anna. When Anna learned that enlistment officers were searching the region she asked her sister-in-law to lend them their 18-month-old girl to pass off as their own child." The number of exemptions forced Borden to use his authority and cancel many of the restrictions in April 1918.<sup>91</sup>

Following the enactment of Military Service Act, the tension was noteworthy, especially in Quebec where protests would take place. During the summer of 1917, "angry crowds broke office windows at the pro-conscription Montreal newspaper *The Gazette*. The Home of Lord Atholstan, proprietor of the equally pro-conscription *Montreal Daily Star*, was dynamited earlier that month, but he would escape unharmed."<sup>92</sup> The

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83. Brown, "Biography – Borden, Sir Robert Laird – Volume XVI (1931-1940).

84. Foot, "Election of 1917".

85. The Associated Press. "Canada Confirms Conscription Act: Borden Government Is Reelected by Heavy Vote." *The Washington Post*, 1917. [login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/canada-confirms-conscription-act/docview/145519301/se-2](https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/canada-confirms-conscription-act/docview/145519301/se-2).

86. Brown, "Biography – Borden, Sir Robert Laird – Volume XVI (1931-1940).

87. Valiante, "Quebec Nationalism and Anti-Militarism Legacy of Conscription Crisis: Historians." Montreal. *CTV News*, April 18, 2017. <https://montreal.ctvnews.ca/quebec-nationalism-and-anti-militarism-legacy-of-conscription-crisis-historians-1.3373425>.

88. Dutil and MacKenzie. "Canada's "Doomsday Election".

89. Foot, "Election of 1917." *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.

90. Valiante, "Timeline of Events for WW1 and WW2 Conscription Crises in Quebec."

91. "Avoiding the War: Canada Struggles to Enlist More Soldiers as Casualties Mount during the First World War." CBCnews. CBC/Radio Canada, 2001. <https://www.cbc.ca/history/EPISCONTENTSE1EP12CH2PA2LE.html>.

92. Durflinger, "Dispatches."

tension culminated on 28 March 1918 when two young men, Joseph Mercier and Alfred Deslauriers, came across a group of policemen who were known to “rough up anyone caught without conscription exemption papers.” Mercier had received his exemption for compulsory service but “his card was at home that night.” When Mercier couldn’t show his papers, the officers “reportedly arrested [Mercier] aggressively.”<sup>93</sup> A mass of angry French Canadian citizens retaliated the following day, “smashing windows and setting the city’s military service registry office ablaze.” The riots continued to escalate and on 30 March 1918, “the commanding officer of the district called in 1000 further troops to help control the crowd.” Frank Scott, a soldier on leave nearby noted that “rioters had put out the street lamps: the lower city was shrouded in mist and darkness. Suddenly I could make out the fire and several machine guns. It gave the impression that a massacre was taking place at the foot of the cliff.”<sup>94</sup> Following a violent clash, numbers suggest that as many as “150 civilians had been wounded, and four had been killed.”<sup>95</sup> One of those citizens was “fourteen-year-old Georges Demeule.” According to coroner reports from the scene, Demeule “had died of a bullet wound to the heart.” According to his mother, Demeule had “worked 12 hours a day, and had planned to go that evening to Garde Champlain hall in Saint Roch, to play euchre.”<sup>96</sup>

### Conclusion

The Military Services Act saga, left a negative effect on French Canada’s perspective of their English counterparts. As historian Desmond Morton explained “One of the outcomes of the war, was a disenchantment with Britain, and a desire to be self-governing.” French Canadians were treated harshly throughout the war by the Canadian press. As Morton explained, the Quebecers were called “cowards, traitors, and probably German Agents... In the eyes of Anglo Montreal, and the rest of Canada, French Canadians were worthless and evil.”<sup>97</sup>

By the war’s end, statistics suggested that “401,882 men registered for conscription and 124,588 were drafted to the Canadian expeditionary force.” Overall there were “47,509 conscripted men were sent overseas and 24,132 men served in France.” These measures proved to add a “necessary addition of troops, as the Canadian troops with its four infantry divisions could not have been sustained in the field without them.” The conscripts were able to “comprise a significant percentage of front line infantry in the last few months of the war, as their numbers were essential to keeping infantry battalions at full strength providing crucial manpower to the depleted divisions of the Canadian Corps.”<sup>98</sup>

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93. Valiante, “Quebec Nationalism and Anti-Militarism Legacy of Conscription Crisis: Historians.”

94. Paige Jasmine Gilmar, “Quebec City’s Bloody Weekend: The Easter Riot of 1917.” *Legion Magazine*, March 15, 2023.

<https://legionmagazine.com/en/quebec-citys-bloody-weekend-the-easter-riot-of-1917/>.

95. “Conscription in Canada (Plain-Language Summary).” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, September 1, 2022.

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/conscription-in-canada-plain-language-summary>.

96. Jean Provencher, “Biography – DEMEULE, Georges – Volume XIV (1911-1920) – Dictionary of Canadian Biography.” Home – Dictionary of Canadian Biography. Accessed March 15, 2023. [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/demeule\\_georges\\_14E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/demeule_georges_14E.html).

97. Valiante, “Quebec Nationalism and Anti-Militarism Legacy of Conscription Crisis: Historians.”

98. Preston, “Military Service Act.”

Canada's actions in the war led to a developed sense of nationalistic pride seen across the country. As Borden wrote in 1933 "the portal of full nationhood due to the valour, the endurance, and the achievement in France and Belgium which inspired our people with an impelling sense of nationhood never before experienced." However, as historian Tim Cook explains, the country "reeled from the war, scarred and battered, grief stricken by what it had lost in the fight to the finish." While the pride was felt, the effects of the war changed the landscape of Canadian politics, Cook explains that "one thing became clear: Canada had changed forever. It was a far more difficult country to lead, and perhaps even to hold together, yet it was also one that had made a name for itself."<sup>99</sup>

Lawrence Martin of the *Globe and Mail* described Borden best in a 2007 article. Martin wrote that "Borden was a plain man. Never one to make an electrifying speech, never one to capture the imagination of the people or the historians." While a firm believer in backing the British Empire, Borden aimed to further Canada's standing on the world stage. He helped accomplish this reality by demanding, "independent voting status for Canada in the Paris Peace Conference,"<sup>100</sup> which ended the war. Canada, along with other overseas dominions was "given representation on the British Empire delegation to the Peace conference in Paris. [They] were given two seats, occupied by Sir Robert Borden, Sir George Foster, the Hon. A.I. Sifton, and the Hon. C.J. Doherty."<sup>101</sup> Borden also convinced British Prime Minister Lloyd George that Canada should, "have its own seat in the League of Nations." These resolutions furthered the progress of Canada as an independent, self-governing nation.<sup>102</sup> Borden had long held a belief that the country "had the capacity, and was entitled to control its own external affairs in both peace and war."<sup>103</sup> As a result of the peace treaty Canada obtained "separate representation in the Assembly of the League of Nations, and obtained the recognition of her right to have her representative elected to the council of the league."<sup>104</sup>

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99. Cook, "'Our First Duty Is to Win, at Any Cost': Sir Robert Borden during the Great War." 23-24.

100. Lawrence Martin, "Borden: A Forgotten War Hero."

101. "Quebec History." Treaty of Versailles (1919) - Canadian History, 2005. <http://faculty.marianopolis.edu/c.belanger/quebechistory/encyclopedia/TreatyofVersailles1919-CanadianHistory.htm>.

102. "Borden, Sir Robert Laird." *Queen's Encyclopedia*. Accessed March 15, 2023. <https://www.queensu.ca/encyclopedia/b/borden-sir-robert-laird>.

103. Brown, "Biography – Borden, Sir Robert Laird – Volume XVI (1931-1940).

104. "Quebec History." Treaty of Versailles (1919) - Canadian History, 2005. <http://faculty.marianopolis.edu/c.belanger/quebechistory/encyclopedia/TreatyofVersailles1919-CanadianHistory.htm>.



Sir Robert Laird Borden, 1915.Png – Wikimedia Commons.” Accessed May 3, 2023. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sir\\_Robert\\_Laird\\_Borden,\\_1915.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sir_Robert_Laird_Borden,_1915.png)[/footnote]

Eventually, health issues began to cause problems for Borden. His doctors advised him that he “should leave politics immediately. On 16 December 1919, he told his Cabinet he was going to resign, however, they pleaded with him to stay in office, but take a vacation for a year.”<sup>105</sup> On 10 July 1920, Borden officially retired and was replaced by Arthur Meighen.<sup>106</sup> Following his retirement, journalists believed that Borden’s biography would be unremarkable.<sup>107</sup> However Borden’s legacy as Prime Minister led to Canada earning its status of “Dominion Autonomy.” In a 1927 conversation with South African General Jan Christiaan Smuts, Smuts gave Borden

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105. Brown, “Biography – Borden, Sir Robert Laird – Volume XVI (1931-1940) 1.

106. Museum, Proctor House. “Proctor House Museum.” This day in Canadian History July... - Proctor House Museum, July 10, 2019. <https://www.facebook.com/proctorhousemuseum/posts/1291834160987525/>.

107. Cook, ““Our First Duty Is to Win, at Any Cost”: Sir Robert Borden during the Great War.” 1.

credit for the Canadian's newfound equal status within the Commonwealth. As Smuts said, "You were no doubt the main protagonist for Dominion Status."<sup>108</sup>

Borden's Military Service Act heightened the severity of the divisions between French and English-speaking Canada as the people of Quebec developed a sense of alienation within their own country.<sup>109</sup> The crisis provided French Nationalists with "evidence of the impossibility of reconciling the views of French and English Canada." The bitter memories from this conflict existed among French Canadians would exist for decades.<sup>110</sup> The First World War, Morton argues, helped transform Canada, into a "country of two nations."<sup>111</sup> This argument is something Archivist Marcelle Cinq-Mars disagrees with, stating that the conflict only "deepened a pre-existing divide."<sup>112</sup> English-speaking Canadians created a narrative following the conflict that the war was a glorious success. It was a narrative that alienated French Canadians. As historian Carl Bouchard explains, the First World War in French Canada is viewed as the "forgotten war." Bouchard argues that even though the English saw World War One "as glorious in Canada, Quebecers will not see themselves in it."<sup>113</sup> Canada had emerged from the war as a nation with increased status within the British Commonwealth. However the actions taken during the war left French Canadians feeling excluded from their fellow citizens. The First World War was a conflict that left the country of Canada a changed nation.

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108. Brown, "Biography – Borden, Sir Robert Laird – Volume XVI (1931-1940).

109. Valiante, "Quebec Nationalism and Anti-Militarism Legacy of Conscription Crisis: Historians."

110. Durflinger, "Dispatches."

111. Valiante, "Quebec Nationalism and Anti-Militarism Legacy of Conscription Crisis: Historians."

112. Stéphanie Trouillard, "The Scars World War I Left on French Canadians." France 24. France 24, April 3, 2014. <https://www.france24.com/en/20140403-quebec-world-war-one-conscription-crisis-canada>.

113. Valiante, "Quebec Nationalism and Anti-Militarism Legacy of Conscription Crisis: Historians."

6.

# UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES: WILLIAM LYON MACKENZIE KING AND THE 1926 CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS

Garett Harnish

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*“At the present time, there is no government. I am not Prime Minister; I cannot speak as Prime Minister. I can speak only as one member of this House, and it is as a humble member of this House that I submit that insomuch as His Excellency is without an adviser, I do not think it would be proper for the House to proceed to discuss anything.”<sup>1</sup>*

## Introduction

The constitutional crisis of 1926 had a profound and lasting impact on Canada, but since the mid-1960s, it has become a historical footnote. Nowadays, people only mention it when a Prime Minister makes a controversial request to the Governor-General or when opposition parties in a minority government consider forming a coalition to oust the current government. In the four decades following this crisis, numerous scholars have written about what happened, how it happened, and who they believed was right. Constitutional scholar, Eugene Forsey,<sup>2</sup> attempted to settle the latter argument by examining the constitutional question in depth in his *The Royal Power of Dissolution in the British Commonwealth*<sup>3</sup>. Almost all articles and books on the crisis predate the publication of W.L. Mackenzie King’s diaries, and as such, many scholars inferred King’s intentions from his political behaviour later in life. These scholars suggested that King engineered the crisis to evade the political fallout of a scandal with his minister in the Department of Custom and Excise, eliminate his arch-rival Arthur Meighen, and secure a majority government for his party. They also believed King willingly sacrificed his friendship with Governor-General Byng to protect his political career.

While this is what happened, a different story emerges when we view the crisis through King’s diaries. King believed Byng had no right to refuse his request for dissolution, and his actions, at least immediately following King’s resignation, were born out of anger and not part of any strategic plan. That is not to say however,

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1. Canada, “28 June 1926: Resignation of the government,” *Official Report of the Debates of the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada: First Session—Fifteenth Parliament, 16-17 George V, 1926* (Ottawa, ON: F. A. Acland, Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1926), 5096-5097.

2. Eugene Forsey was considered one of Canada’s foremost constitutional experts.

3. Incidentally, Forsey concluded that Governor-General Julian Byng had the power to refuse William Lyon Mackenzie King’s request for dissolution, and was right to do so given what Byng knew at the time.

that King's plight was not of his own making. King violated convention by refusing to request that Byng call on Meighen to lead the country after the Conservative Party won a greater number of seats than the Liberal Party in the 1925 election,<sup>4</sup> which led to the King Government's complete dependence upon the support of the Progressive Party to retain power.<sup>5</sup> His attempt to conceal corruption within the Customs and Excise department before the fall election backfired, leading to a customs scandal during the 15th Parliament that eroded support for his government among the Progressives. The scandal was exposed because the Commercial Protective Association (CPA) became outraged by King's inaction on the evidence they had given him a year earlier. As a result, they provided their findings to the Conservative Party sometime after the 1925 election. The Conservatives, who were also displeased with King over his political manoeuvres after the election which robbed them of their right to form the government, were eager to use the CPA's evidence to destroy King.<sup>6</sup>

The revelations from the CPA and a subsequent investigation by members of the House of Commons combined to lead to a vote of censure in the House of Commons against the King government at the end of June. If it had passed, it would have also acted as a vote of want of confidence for his regime. To avoid such a likely outcome, King advised Byng to dissolve Parliament. Byng interpreted King's tactics as a naked attempt to dodge the consequences of his actions and felt it was his moral duty as Canada's Governor-General to reject it. Byng's decision, while constitutionally within his prerogative, quickly led to a constitutional crisis. During the 1926 election, King's control of the narrative created consequences Byng had not intended and it had a tremendous impact on the political careers of several leading politicians and Canada's relationships within the British Empire.

### **An Undignified Request – Byng & King**

On Saturday morning, 26 June 1926, King met with his Privy Council [Cabinet] to discuss possible options. Consultation was King's standard way of dealing with any significant decision, and, in this particular situation, he wanted a consensus from his Council before acting. His cabinet ministers did not disappoint and agreed that dissolution was their only way forward.<sup>7</sup> They considered parliamentary precedents, wrestled with how to legally run the government without proroguing Parliament, and planned counter-arguments for Byng's potential responses to the request for dissolution.<sup>8</sup>

King met with Byng that afternoon; they discussed the voting defeats on Friday and how the King

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4. Arthur French Sladen, *Report on the 1925 Federal Election*, Library and Archives Canada. MG27-III A2 Byng Correspondence, 120089 (Ottawa, ON, n.d.): pp. 1-4, <http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=FonAndCol&id=120089>, 1-3; William Lyon Mackenzie King, *Mackenzie King Diary*. 30 October 1925. Library and Archives Canada, MG26-J13 Diaries of William Lyon Mackenzie King, 5308. <http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=DiaWlmKing&id=5308>.

5. King, *Mackenzie King Diary*. 30 October 1925, 7032; Canada, "14 January 1926: Government's Right to Office," 190-1; 5 progressives voted with the Conservatives, 19 voted with the Liberals.

6. Canada, "8 January 1926: Government's Right to Office," 19; Canada, "2 February 1926: Adjournment–Customs Inquiry," 680-1.

7. King, *Mackenzie King Diary*. 26 June 1926, 7776.

8. King, *Mackenzie King Diary*. 26 June 1926, 7776, 17243, 7777.

Government was now a majority of one, which King “considered too small to carry on.”<sup>9</sup> King’s meeting with his Council influenced the opening spiel, and he started countering Byng’s likely responses before he had even made them.<sup>10</sup> King stated his belief that no one in Parliament was in a position to carry on and that the Governor-General could not refuse him a dissolution and then grant it to someone else. Doing so, King stated, would become a factor in the subsequent general election that could do “irreparable harm”<sup>11</sup> to Byng both “personally and as the representative of the Crown.”<sup>12</sup> He added that such an action would favour one party over the other and “would be unconstitutional.”<sup>13</sup> King concluded his argument by stating that he was not asking for a dissolution but might do so soon.<sup>14</sup> Overall, his request came across more like a demand than advice.

Byng stated that he would not grant King a dissolution if he asked for three reasons. His first point was that Conservative leader, Arthur Meighen was entitled to govern after the 1925 election, but King had robbed him of the opportunity. Byng’s second point was that after the election, they had agreed to let the House decide who should lead, and the House had now decided it was not King. The third reason was that Byng thought the country had turned against King,<sup>15</sup> a point that Byng had given King the previous November when he urged the Prime Minister to resign.<sup>16</sup> The public fallout of the customs scandal had only reinforced Byng’s belief. King strongly disagreed with Byng’s statement that the House had decided he could not govern. The House had decided in January that the Liberal government had its support.<sup>17</sup> His Excellency countered that the latest votes in the House “meant a defeat”<sup>18</sup> and that King had admitted his government could not carry on. King corrected this, noting that he had said no one could carry on, not just him. He also argued that Meighen had already had his chance, the same one as he had when the House first sat and had failed to win its support.<sup>19</sup>

Byng urged King to do the dignified thing and asked him to call Meighen to form the government as Byng had advised after the last election.<sup>20</sup> King countered that he “did not think it was for the Sovereign to choose between the parties; that [Byng] had to accept the advice of the Prime Minister or take the consequences; that [Byng] was not an umpire.”<sup>21</sup> Byng responded that dissolution “like all the other prerogatives of the

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9. Ibid., 7778.

10. Ibid., 7777.

11. Ibid., 7779.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. King, *Mackenzie King Diary*. 30 October 1925, 5308.

17. Ibid. 26 June 1926, 7779.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., 7780.

21. Ibid.

Crown was exercised as a discretionary right on the advice of the Ministry.”<sup>22</sup> King reiterated his stance that the Governor-General should not be deciding who should govern and that the public should do so “in the constitutional way; that any other attitude would mean allowing the Crown – rather than the duly authorised people’s representatives – to say what the policies of the country were to be.”<sup>23</sup>

Byng agreed that “it was true that a request for dissolution had not been refused for 100 years” and that “dissolution had not been refused a Prime Minister since Confederation,” but countered that “the situation was different to anything that had arisen” before.<sup>24</sup> Byng continued, he would rather have his head chopped off than take a course of action that went against his principles.<sup>25</sup> King stated that he would resign if Byng refused his constitutional right and threatened that the resulting chaos would make it impossible for Meighen to govern.<sup>26</sup> In desperation, King continued his threats of consequences if the Governor-General refused to follow his dissolution advice and urged His Excellency to send a “cable to England to the Secretary of State for the Dominions and ask for his advice.”<sup>27</sup> Adding that Leo Amery was “not likely to favour me in any way, he would like to see me out of Office and out of the country altogether.”<sup>28</sup> Byng countered that King had frequently said that “it was not for England to advise.”<sup>29</sup> King restated his threat as plainly as he could, that “were [Byng] to refuse [him] dissolution and give it to a political opponent it would become an issue in a campaign which might work no end of injury to the British connection, not only as between Canada and Britain but between all parts of the Empire.”<sup>30</sup> If Byng had asked Amery before making his decision, it’s unlikely that anything would have changed. Amery supported Byng’s decision and expressed his agreement in a telegram sent on 1 July 1926.<sup>31</sup> In that same telegram, he also commended Byng for keeping the home office uninvolved, as they had no right to decide on an internal Canadian matter.<sup>32</sup> It is perhaps ironic that King would go on to denounce the British government for interfering in Canadian politics through their “Crown Colony Government.”<sup>33</sup>

King posed a hypothetical question to Byng, asking if he would impose the same restriction on Meighen’s

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22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., 7780.

24. King, *Mackenzie King Diary*. 26 June 1926, 17244.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., 23318.

30. Ibid., 17244.

31. Leopold Amery. *Cypher Telegram From Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to The Governor-General of Canada*, Library and Archives Canada. MG27-III A2 Byng Correspondence, 120089 (London, Great Britain, 1 July 1926): pp 17. <http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=FonAndCol&id=120089>, 17.

32. Ibid.

33. Leopold Amery. *Letter From Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to The Governor-General of Canada*, Library and Archives Canada. MG27-III A2 Byng Correspondence, 120089 (London, Great Britain, 3 July 1926): pp 18-20. <http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=FonAndCol&id=120089>, 19.

government as he had on his, namely, that Byng would not grant Meighen a dissolution if the House determined Meighen's government lacked its confidence. Byng replied, "I cannot say to you what I would or would not do, but I think you can trust me to see that what you have in mind is something of which I would have to take account."<sup>34</sup> King took Byng's answer to this hypothetical to mean that Byng would reject Meighen's request for a dissolution, and King would be returned to power and granted his election. This false impression, supported in a letter from Byng two days later,<sup>35</sup> would be the reason King's immediate strategy after resigning was to secure the failure of the Meighen Government.

It is unclear why King was pushing so hard for dissolution. The phrases he used in his diary around these discussions suggested he did not think he would be Prime Minister again. "I felt much relieved as [the] prospect of freedom from office draws nigh,"<sup>36</sup> he wrote after he met with Byng on the 26th. The next day, after an equally unsuccessful meeting with Byng, he noted his visit to Kingsmere was his "last drive there in [a] Government car as Prime Minister."<sup>37</sup> King was in a life-and-death political struggle with his party. They blamed their poor showing in the fall election on his leadership, with his critics claiming that he was "politically naive and inept."<sup>38</sup> He had declared that he would bear full responsibility for the election's outcome in the event of a loss<sup>39</sup> and had disregarded all requests to postpone it.<sup>40</sup> Even before he advised dissolution, dissent within his party was growing, and many wanted him replaced with Charles A. Dunning, the Liberal Party's new rising star from Saskatchewan.<sup>41</sup> In his book *The Politics of John W. Dafoe and the Free Press*, Ramsay Cook noted that Dafoe and other critics of King believed that he was incapable of keeping the West, which required uniting the Liberal and the Progressive parties<sup>42</sup> – something they thought only Dunning could accomplish.<sup>43</sup> Ironically, Byng's refusal to grant King a dissolution saved King's political career.

### **An Offer Meighen Could Not Refuse – Byng & Meighen**

On 28 June 1926, King presented Byng with an order-in-council requesting a dissolution that Byng refused to sign. King immediately tendered his government's resignation, leaving Canada without a government and triggering one of the roughest transitions of power in Canadian history.<sup>44</sup> After resigning, King wrote that

34. King, *Mackenzie King Diary*. 26 June 1926, 7781.

35. Ibid. 29 June 1926, 7838.

36. Ibid. 26 June 1926, 7776.

37. King, *Mackenzie King Diary*. 27 June 1926, 7782.

38. Ramsay Cook, "Lord Byng Intervenes, 1924-6," in *The Politics of John W. Dafoe and the Free Press* (University of Toronto Press, 1963), pp. 146-169, 155.

39. King, *Mackenzie King Diary*. 27 July 1925, 6572.

40. Ibid., 17 August 1925, 6671; Ibid., 18 August 1925, 6674; Ibid. 22 August 1925, 23420.

41. Cook, "Lord Byng Intervenes, 1924-6," 154.

42. Ibid., 146 & 152

43. Ibid., 155.

44. Roger Graham, "The Constitutional Crisis," in *Arthur Meighen Volume II: And Fortune Fled*, (Toronto, ON: Clarke, Irwin & Company Limited, 1963), pp. 414-451, 421.

Byng said: “He supposed he should send for Mr. Meighen.”<sup>45</sup> King replied that he could no longer “advise him what to do; that he would have to take whatever course he thought best.”<sup>46</sup>

King then announced what he had done to a stunned audience in the House of Commons.<sup>47</sup> “Meighen was clearly taken by surprise and dumbfounded,” King would record in his diary. “Indeed, the whole House was taken completely unawares.”<sup>48</sup> A few hours later, Byng called upon Meighen, as leader of the Official Opposition, to become Prime Minister, which Meighen did not immediately accept and asked for time to consider. Byng agreed that this would be wise but suggested that Meighen also “consider [Byng’s] position.”<sup>49</sup> Meighen would later write that he had felt “that a refusal on my part would have been proclaimed at once as a rebuke to Lord Byng.”<sup>50</sup> After a lengthy meeting with former Prime Minister Robert Borden, Meighen returned to Byng just before midnight and accepted his offer.<sup>51</sup> In retrospect, refusing the offer and facing an election with the Liberals on the defensive would likely have resulted in a Conservative majority.<sup>52</sup> However, Meighen was in a difficult position and could not have rejected the offer for three reasons. Firstly, he and Borden agreed with Byng’s decision to refuse King’s advice and did not want to suggest His Excellency had been wrong to do so. Secondly, Meighen had announced his readiness for months to form the government, and changing course would have hurt his chances of winning a majority in the next election.<sup>53</sup> The final reason, and likely the most immediate concern, was that his party would have “been in the mood to hang, draw and quarter him”<sup>54</sup> if he refused.

Meighen’s path to victory in any election was never certain. His “Ready, aye ready”<sup>55</sup> speech from the Chanak Affair in 1923 and his close association with conscription during the Great War haunted the Conservatives in Quebec elections. Following the 1925 election, the Liberal candidate for Bagot, Quebec passed away, necessitating a by-election. Meighen delivered a speech in Hamilton aimed at boosting his party’s prospects of winning the by-election; this speech was later called the “Heresy at Hamilton”<sup>56</sup> by his party. In it, Meighen stated his government would hold a referendum before deploying any troops overseas to assist the

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45. King, *Mackenzie King Diary*. 28 June 1926, 7828.

46. *Ibid.*, 7829.

47. Canada, “28 June 1926: Resignation of the government,” 5096-5098.

48. King, *Mackenzie King Diary*. 28 June 1926, 7836.

49. Graham, “The Constitutional Crisis,” 419.

50. Arthur Meighen, *Letter to Roger Graham*, 21 August 1956 as quoted in Graham, “The Constitutional Crisis,” 419.

51. Graham, “The Constitutional Crisis,” 420.

52. *Ibid.*, 421.

53. Graham, “The Constitutional Crisis,” 420.

54. *Ibid.*

55. Larry A. Glassford, “Arthur Meighen,” In *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 18, University of Toronto/Université Laval, accessed 2 Mar 2023, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/meighen\\_arthur\\_18E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/meighen_arthur_18E.html).

56. Allan Levine, “Vindication and Victory,” in *King: William Lyon Mackenzie King - A Life Guided by the Hand of Destiny* (Vancouver, BC: Douglas and McIntyre Ltd., 2011), pp. 139-165, 150.

Empire in a future war.<sup>57</sup> His reversal from “Ready, aye, Ready” failed to persuade Quebec voters to support the Conservative Party and instead provoked anger within his party.<sup>58</sup> Influential members began to express their dissent and pushed for R. B. Bennett to replace Meighen.<sup>59</sup> During the six months of the 15th Parliament, Bennett became as actively involved in debates as Meighen and it seemed Bennett was already preparing for a leadership race.<sup>60</sup> Had Meighen declined the opportunity to form an administration, the outcome would have been career-ending.

Parliamentary rules of the day made it necessary for a minister to stand in a by-election when they decided to accept the role of Minister of the Crown and take the Sovereign’s pay. At this point, ministers standing for re-election normally faced no opposition from the other parties, making it a mere formality.<sup>61</sup> However, Meighen had a thin majority in the House, and appointing official Ministers who would then have to leave the House would make it impossible to maintain the House’s confidence, likely resulting in Meighen’s government losing a confidence vote. To avoid such a possibility, Meighen appointed several acting Ministers without portfolios, who were not accepting the Sovereign’s pay, and thus did not need to step down. Meighen believed he had to resign to become Prime Minister, but his other Ministers could wait until the end of the session to do likewise. Consequently, Meighen was forced to watch helplessly from the Gallery as his government disintegrated.

### **Blame for the Customs Scandal – King & Bureau**

King blamed Jacques Bureau, the former Minister of Customs, for the situation he found himself in. R. Percy Sparks, the chair of the CPA, had approached King about the corruption in the Customs and Excise department in early 1925 because Bureau had refused Spark’s demand to fire Joseph Bisailon, the Chief Preventive Officer for Montreal.<sup>62</sup> Bisailon had been living like a king in Montreal on the proceeds of his alleged illegal activities,<sup>63</sup> and he had just meddled in the seizure of a barge smuggling liquor into the port of Montreal.<sup>64</sup> When Sparks approached Bureau, Bisailon was facing conspiracy charges and the Crown accused him of striking a deal with the smugglers to help them evade custom patrols.<sup>65</sup> Although the case was eventually

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57. Ibid.

58. Glassford, “Arthur Meighen.”

59. William Lewis Morton, “The Progressive Group in the Constitutional Crisis of 1926,” in *The Progressive Party in Canada* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1950), pp. 236-265, 250.

60. Richard Wilbur, “A New Leader,” in *H.H. Stevens, 1878-1973* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1977), pp. 50-88, 56.

61. Wilbur, “A New Leader,” 60.

62. Vernon McKenzie, “Customs’ House-Cleaning Imperative,” *Maclean’s Magazine* 39, no. 5 (March 1, 1926): pp. 24-45, 25.

63. Ibid.

64. Ralph Allen, “Another Close Victory for the Government—The Customs Scandal Comes into the Open – The Barge Tremblay, Chicago Benny, Joseph Bisailon, and Moses Aziz,” in *Ordeal by Fire: Canada, 1910-1945*, ed. Thomas B. Costain (Toronto, ON: Doubleday & Company, 1961), pp. 261-273, 263.

65. Wilbur, “A New Leader,” 55.

dismissed “for want of evidence,”<sup>66</sup> the business community had already lost confidence in him and wanted him removed.<sup>67</sup>

King met several times with Sparks and agreed that Bisaillon had to go, but failed to fire him until after the 1925 election because “[h]is dismissal may lead to exposure that will seriously affect some of our party friends and the party as well.”<sup>68</sup> While King blamed Bureau for the ensuing scandal, King’s decision to delay firing Bisaillon was why the CPA passed their evidence to the Conservatives. Additionally, King was aware of Bureau’s inability to manage his department due to Bureau’s alcoholism, and King had appointed Bureau to the Senate just before the 1925 election so he could replace him.<sup>69</sup> However, King knew “an investigation would have to come sooner or later.”<sup>70</sup>

The eventual investigation would be chaired by Harry Stevens, a long-time Conservative then representing Vancouver Centre, who convinced the House to authorize a committee to investigate allegations of corruption in King’s government. Shortly after this committee began its work, King wrote that his “shielding of Bureau will cost [him] and the party something,”<sup>71</sup> but he was happy his “Quebec friends [in the House] had to face it alone.”<sup>72</sup> King held his Quebec ministers responsible for obstructing his efforts to take action against Bureau and believed they would learn a lesson from having to handle the consequences.<sup>73</sup> In the only instance of pointing some of the blame at himself, King wrote that he “should have taken a firmer stand with Bureau and instituted an inquiry or insisted on his resignation.”<sup>74</sup> He also admitted he had shielded Bureau because of his “illness.”<sup>75</sup> When King discovered customs officers had been passing along “samples” of seized cargo to higher-ups, including Bureau, he wrote, “[i]t is [a] shocking thing to think that a Minister could allow himself to be so compromised by his staff.”<sup>76</sup> In short, King blamed everyone for the scandal except himself. On the first day of the Meighen Government, King noted that “it looked as though if Progressives could be secured [and] we would be [the] Government again.”<sup>77</sup> King believed that Bureau’s resignation from the Senate might satisfy the Progressives and allow his party to survive the night without censure, so he summoned Bureau and requested he resign his Senate seat.<sup>78</sup>

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66. Allen, “Another Close Victory for the Government,” 264.

67. McKenzie, “Customs’ House-Cleaning Imperative,” 25

68. King, *Mackenzie King Diary*. 11 December 1925, 5552.

69. Ibid. 4 September 1925, 6773.

70. King, *Mackenzie King Diary*. 5 February 1926, 15559.

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid. 3 February 1926, 5806.

73. King, *Mackenzie King Diary*. 3 February 1926, 5806.

74. Ibid. 11 February 1926, 5812.

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid., 5812.

77. Ibid. 28 June 1926, 7838.

78. King, *Mackenzie King Diary*. 28 June 1926, 7838.

Bureau did not respond well and asked if King “wished him to commit suicide,”<sup>79</sup> adding that “he could not go back to his wife and children if he took this step.”<sup>80</sup> He further claimed that he was “innocent of charges against himself.”<sup>81</sup> King was worried about Bureau’s mental state and asked Bureau’s friend Arthur Cardin to stay with him. Meanwhile, Sir Allen Aylesworth, a Liberal senator and the former Minister of Justice under Sir Wilfrid Laurier, talked with King.<sup>82</sup> Sir Allen “bitterly resented Bureau being asked to resign and... [how] he had been left without counsel in the inquiry before [Stevens’] Committee.”<sup>83</sup> He correctly believed that “an effort was being made to heap everything on Bureau and he indicated that he had lost confidence in [King] because of that.”<sup>84</sup> This conversation convinced King not to compel Bureau to resign his Senate seat. King explained to Bureau why he asked him to quit and left the decision on the proper action to him, but Bureau elected not to resign.<sup>85</sup> As a result, the Progressives remained united behind the Conservatives, resulting in the censure of the former Liberal government.<sup>86</sup>

### **The Death of the Meighen Government**

King took a different approach when the issue of Supply arose in the House, and he challenged the legality of Meighen’s ministers. It is possible that the idea came from King’s conversation with Robert Forke, who had resigned as leader of the Progressive Party on the same day he was asked by Byng to support the Conservatives.<sup>87</sup> During the meeting between King and Forke, Forke expressed doubts about his party’s ability to remain united in support of the Meighen Government.<sup>88</sup> The Liberals and Progressives had parted ways over allegations of corruption within the Liberal administration and it seemed King suspected that the Progressives would abandon the Conservatives if faced with a similar ethical quandary. King seemed to believe that the situation created by his government’s resignation was rare enough that few officials would be aware of the constitutionality at play to make an informed decision, thereby accepting his claim that Meighen had illegally appointed his ministers.<sup>89</sup> The result of the accusation was a resounding success as the Progressive Party fractured over the issue of legality, which impaired its ability to support the Meighen Government.

Although Eugene Forsey later concluded that Meighen’s government was perfectly legal,<sup>90</sup> on its third

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79. Ibid.

80. Ibid.

81. Ibid.

82. Ibid.; Additionally, Sir Allen had held King’s former North York seat in the 10th and 11th parliaments before losing it to the Conservative John Armstrong, who held it for the 12th and 13th parliaments.

83. King, *Mackenzie King Diary*. 28 June 1926, 7838.

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid.

86. Canada, “29 June 1926: Customs Inquiry – Division,” 5157-9.

87. Morton, “The Progressive Group in the Constitutional Crisis of 1926,” 256.

88. King, *Mackenzie King Diary*. 28 June 1926, 7839.

89. King, *Mackenzie King Diary*. 28 June 1926, 7839.

90. Eugene A. Forsey, *The Royal Power of Dissolution of Parliament in the British Commonwealth* (Toronto, ON: Oxford University Press, 1968), 206-214.

day in power, the Meighen Government ended in a dramatic late-night vote where it was defeated on the motion regarding its legitimacy by one vote. The Liberal victory, however, relied almost exclusively on luck. In Parliament at the time, members were allowed to participate in pairing. This practice allowed one member to vote on behalf of another member if they were absent from the chamber or abstaining from a vote. On that particular vote, a few Members of Parliament forgot to update or cancel their pairings when allegiances shifted due to the chaos King had sown.<sup>91</sup> In nearly all of those cases, however, their votes cancelled each other out, except in the case of the Progressive Thomas Bird. Bird and Donald Kennedy, a Conservative-Progressive, had agreed to pair their votes earlier in the session; however, the Speaker called the confidence vote when Kennedy was absent and Bird was unaware that he was voting for both of them.<sup>92</sup> The mistake was discovered only after the motion had passed, making it too late to correct.<sup>93</sup> Viewing that one mistake as the difference between the government standing or falling is only valid if Kennedy had been present in the House to vote or had changed his pairing to a Conservative member. In the event of a tie, the Speaker, who was a Liberal, would have voted. Regardless, the Conservatives had lost a vote of want of confidence, and King believed he was about to be returned to power and granted his dissolution.<sup>94</sup> Instead, Byng granted a dissolution to Meighen, which King also viewed as another constitutional issue. Byng reasoned that the censure against King's administration indicated he had lost the confidence of the House and could not be called upon to form the government again.<sup>95</sup> King was disappointed with Byng's decision and wrote his diary entry under the heading "Bills Payable, August,"<sup>96</sup> noting in the margin "they will come due then or in September!"<sup>97</sup> In the court of public opinion, King argued his case against the injustice he believed Byng had subjected him to.

### Unintended Consequences

The Conservatives did not gain any benefit from their brief tenure as the government, but more than that, the Liberals used it to create their narrative for the 1926 election. The main thrust of the Conservative campaign was that the Liberals were corrupt and that King "tried to run away from the just condemnation of himself and his Government by Parliament, but he was not permitted to do so; he thereupon hatched a constitutional issue to act as a smoke screen."<sup>98</sup>

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91. Canada, "1 July 1926: Supply-Formation of Ministry," 5311.

92. Ibid.

93. Ibid.

94. Julian Hedworth George Byng, *Letter From The Governor-General of Canada to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs*, Library and Archives Canada. MG27-III A2 Byng Correspondence, 120089 (Ottawa, Canada, 17 July 1926): pp 21-23. <http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=FonAndCol&id=120089>, 23.

95. Byng, *Letter From The Governor-General of Canada to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs*, 23.

96. King, *Mackenzie King Diary*. 2 July 1926, 7841.

97. Ibid. 26 June 1926, 7841.

98. Arthur Meighen "The Issues as I see them – Meighen," *Maclean's Magazine* 39, no. 17 (September 1, 1926): pp. 6, 32, 32.



Figure 1: Mackenzie King in the 1926 Election ca. July 1926 F.J. Skitch / Library and Archives Canada / PA-138867

In Terry Goodkind's *The Wizard's First Rule*, he wrote that people are stupid and would believe a lie because they wished it or feared it to be true.<sup>99</sup> If anyone ever needed proof of that idea, they might look to the 1926 election. The Liberals offered no evidence of their claims of constitutional wrongdoing; instead, they used the narrative of wrongdoing and appealed to the emotions of an electorate unfamiliar with constitutional law. Later scholars would argue that the Governor-General and Meighen had done nothing illegal or wrong; however, truth does not always matter in an election. The Liberals wrapped themselves in nationalistic words like "sovereignty" and "autonomy."<sup>100</sup> They tapped into an existing undercurrent of anger towards Great Britain that welled from a feeling of betrayal after the Great War. The Liberal campaign also accused Meighen of being an autocratic dictator since he was the only "legal" Minister of the Crown during the election.<sup>101</sup> The Liberals were not alone in making these charges – the Progressive Party launched similar attacks. In his blistering indictment of Meighen, Progressive<sup>102</sup> E. J. Garland was reported saying that Meighen's actions "constitute[d] not only a breach of faith to the people of Canada but a disgusting insult to the people's

99. Goodkind, Terry. *Wizard's First Rule*. New York City, NY: Tor Books, 1997, 560.

100. Ralph Allen, "The Constitutional Crisis—The Liberals evade a desperate defeat and Meighen makes way for R. B. Bennett," in *Ordeal by Fire: Canada, 1910-1945*, ed. Thomas B. Costain (Toronto, ON: Doubleday & Company, 1961), pp. 274-86, 284.

101. William Lyon Mackenzie King, "The Issues as I see them – King," *Maclean's Magazine* 39, no. 17 (September 1, 1926): pp. 7-36, 36.

102. Garland would run in the 1925 election for the United Farmers of Alberta, but at the time of the interview, he was still part of the Progressive party.

representatives.”<sup>103</sup> He added that Meighen had “made His Excellency the Governor-General of Canada a party to this deliberate theft of the people’s legislation.”<sup>104</sup>

It is hardly surprising that King’s Liberals returned with one-hundred-and-sixteen seats to Meighen’s ninety-one. The Progressive Party had not weathered the year well, and the stress fractures caused by the 1925 election and the customs scandal broke them. By the 1926 election, they had separated into three factions. The Manitoban Progressives under Forke became the Liberal-Progressives.<sup>105</sup> The second group, which consisted of most of the Progressives from Alberta, joined the United Farmers of Alberta.<sup>106</sup> The last faction was the conservative-leaning members, who continued to function as the Progressive Party until their end less than a decade later.<sup>107</sup> Two weeks after the election, on 25 September 1926, Forke’s Liberal-Progressives joined the Liberal Party when Forke accepted a position in King’s new Cabinet.<sup>108</sup> This merger gave the Liberals their first strong majority in the House since the Great War.

While the election was a complete vindication for King, it was a disaster for Meighen – he had lost the election, his seat, and his party. Following their disastrous showing, the Conservatives held a leadership convention in Winnipeg where Meighen announced that he would not be seeking re-nomination.<sup>109</sup> It was, however, clear that he would not have managed to secure his former position had he tried.<sup>110</sup> Despite not running, his party attacked him for his “Heresy at Hamilton” and for losing the election. Bennett secured the leadership on only the second ballot.<sup>111</sup>

An Imperial Conference followed on the heels of the election, and more unintended consequences of the Canadian constitutional crisis played out there. Prime Minister James Herzog of South Africa and King used the Canadian issue to demand changes from the British Crown. In a summary report on the conference, Great Britain made clear its relationship with the Dominions: “They are autonomous communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations.”<sup>112</sup> In short, the Empire granted its Dominions control of their foreign policy, something they had been fighting for since the end of The Great War – even if Great Britain did not formalise this until the Statute of Westminster in 1931.

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103. *Montreal Gazette*, July 5, 1926, quoted in “The Constitutional Issues of 1926,” in *Constitutional Issues in Canada: 1900-1931*, ed. Robert MacGregor Dawson (Toronto, ON: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp. 72-92, 87.

104. *Ibid.*, 88.

105. Morton, “The Progressive Group in the Constitutional Crisis of 1926,” 256 & 264.

106. *Ibid.*, 257.

107. *Ibid.*, 264.

108. *Ibid.*

109. Allen, “The Constitutional Crisis,” 285.

110. *Ibid.*

111. *Ibid.*, 285-6.

112. “The Period of Equal Status, 1926-1936,” in *The Development of Dominion Status: 1900-1936*, ed. Robert MacGregor Dawson (Toronto, ON: Oxford University Press, 1937), pp. 325-357, 331.



Figure 2: Peter Larkin and Mackenzie King during the 1926 Imperial Conference, Oct 1926 Central News / Library and Archives Canada / C-013264

Additionally, concerning the Governor-General, the conference agreed that “the Governor-General of the Dominion is the representative of the Crown... [and] is not the representative or agent of His Majesty’s Government in Great Britain or of any Department of that Government.”<sup>113</sup> It later added that “it would not be in accordance with constitutional practice for advice to be tendered to His Majesty by His Majesty’s Government in Great Britain in any matter appertaining to the affairs of a Dominion against the views of the government of that Dominion.”<sup>114</sup> In other words, the Dominions now had the right to advise the Crown on who they would like the Crown’s representative in their country to be.

### Conclusion

King’s diary makes it clear that he had not asked for dissolution to accomplish any of what historians later concluded; he was merely trying to avoid facing an election under a cloud of defeat. His diary entries around the period when he asked Byng about dissolution demonstrated that King feared he was committing political suicide and would be replaced as leader of the Liberals if he lost the election. King’s records of his arguments with Byng make it apparent he thought Byng could not refuse his request for dissolution, and King maintained

113. “The Period of Equal Status, 1926-1936,” 332.

114. *Ibid.*, 333.

that belief to the grave. For forty years after the crisis, and before King's diaries were published, the accounts of his actions in the crisis, and the 1926 election, were given a Machiavellian ruthlessness. Historians and political scientists credited King with trapping Meighen in a no-win scenario, vanquishing all threats to his leadership and gaining the majority the Liberal Party desired in just two months. However, King did not enter the crisis with a brilliant political strategy. He took advantage of the hand he had been dealt and used the election to argue his case against Byng. King felt wronged, and his righteous anger towards Byng resonated with voters' fear of never obtaining autonomy from Great Britain and their outrage over having been denied independence after their sacrifices in the Great War. One person's misinterpretation of constitutional law and another's decision to do what was right were pivotal to Canada gaining its sovereignty.

7.

# PATRIOTISM, POLITICS, AND PARITY: WILLIAM LYON MACKENZIE KING AND THE DEATH OF THE SMALL-SCALE FARMER IN THE PRAIRIE WEST, 1941-1946

Kelsey Lonie

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## Introduction

Historians generally agree that food production was of vital importance to Canada during the Second World War. Food was needed to sustain soldiers, civilians, and Allied countries, and Canadian farmers played a crucial role in that initiative. Agriculture was an essential aspect of Canada's war effort, and farmers in Western Canada, particularly, played a significant role in the production of both livestock and grains. Canadian newspapers boasted that food would help win the war,<sup>1</sup> and Hon. James G. Gardiner, Canada's Minister of Agriculture and the former premier of Saskatchewan, reminded Canadians that victory would be achieved only if Britain and Allied troops were well fed.<sup>2</sup> Even Walt Disney produced a short film entitled "Food Will Win the War."<sup>3</sup> One might, therefore, assume that Canada's farmers were in good standing with Prime Minister Mackenzie King during the Second World War. However, this was not the case.

Determined not to repeat the high inflation of World War One, Mackenzie King chose to enact a price ceiling on all goods in December 1941. Even if it achieved his objective on inflation, it drove a wedge between his government and the farmers of Western Canada. Under the Wartime Prices and Trade Board (WPTB) that had been established in 1939, the price ceiling placed a 'freeze' on prices so that producers could not charge a higher price for their commodities than the one dictated by the government. Farmers argued that a price ceiling contradicted King's earlier promises of equal opportunity and freedom; with prices set so low, farmers

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1. See "Home Economists Elect Miss Gertrude Connors," *The Calgary Herald*, 6 October 1941, 16. Women at Alberta's Home Economics Association annual meeting agreed that "food will win or lose this war," and "European Hunger seen bar to peace. Food may win the war and it may also win peace of future," *The Montreal Gazette*, October 19, 1942, 25, which noted that if there was to be lasting peace after the war, Europe must be restored. This would be attained through food production.
  2. "Food to Help in Winning War Says Hon. J. G. Gardiner," *Ottawa Evening Citizen*, June 5, 1941, 10.
  3. Dorothy Thompson, "Why Does U.S. Government Announce Meat Rationing Four Months in Advance?" *The Vancouver Sun*, September 11, 1942, 6.

felt unable to meet production quotas, buy new equipment, or compete in the labour market.<sup>4</sup> While a few large-scale farmers may have been able to mechanize and adapt to production demands, most smaller farms were still recovering from the Great Depression. Any hope of a wartime boom for small scale farmers had been dashed by King's policy. If food was supposed to "win the war," farmers must certainly have wondered how this would happen under Mackenzie King's policies. Farmers voiced their opposition in newspaper articles, at meetings, and in letters to the Government. While Mackenzie King did introduce subsidies and allow irregular changes in the price ceiling, he remained dedicated to his anti-inflation approach in his government's policy. Over the course of the war, trust in the Prime Minister waned in Western Canada, and many farmers eventually rejected Mackenzie King's Liberal Party, believing that their cries for parity with other business enterprises had fallen on deaf ears.

Prior to 1941, Prime Minister Mackenzie King's relationship with Western Prairie farmers had been favourable. King had carried the vote in the Prairie West throughout the latter half of the Great Depression, winning 26 of the 38 seats in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and expressing sympathy for the demands of labour and farmers who struggled against big banks, railways and other corporate interests.<sup>5</sup> His Liberal Party promised labour reform and new social policies, and many farmers welcomed his message of equality and justice for all Canadians. Political Scientist Reginald Whitaker provides a detailed analysis of Mackenzie King's definition of "liberalism" that would drive his party platform.<sup>6</sup> Mackenzie King tried to balance his policies and promises between conservative and liberal values; his Christian values may have been more conservative, but his policies favouring the redistribution of wealth were much more liberal.<sup>7</sup> One of King's greatest inspirations, the economist Arnold Toynbee, influenced many of his policies as Prime Minister. Toynbee's teachings were critical of a laissez fair economic market and he imagined a "political economy which would retain the market and individualism but with a dedication to Christian duty impelling capitalism toward more moderate redistribution of resources to the poor."<sup>8</sup> Such a doctrine appealed to Mackenzie King, a politician whose policies were driven by compromise and the desire to build a more united country. King believed if he could protect and promote individual rights while, at the same time, redistribute the nation's wealth and foster an

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4. Jeffrey Keshen, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers: Canada's Second World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 65-9.

5. Robert Wardhaugh, "The 'Impartial Umpire' Views the West: Mackenzie King and the Search for the New Jerusalem," *Manitoba History*, 29 (Spring 1995).

6. In this paper, liberalism refers only to Mackenzie King's vision for the Liberal party. King was passionate about industrial labour reform and a redistribution of wealth to "to better the condition of the poor, denounce corruption, the tyranny of abused power, and uphold right and honoured principles." As a religious man, he also felt an obligation to "Christianize" capitalist economics by creating equal opportunities for all. See Reginald Whitaker, "The Liberal Corporatist Ideas of Mackenzie King," *Labour*, 2 (1977): 144 and Robert Wardhaugh, "The 'Impartial Umpire' Views the West: Mackenzie King and the Search for the New Jerusalem," *Manitoba History*, 29 (Spring 1995).

7. Reginald Whitaker, "The Liberal Corporatist Ideas of Mackenzie King," *Labour*, 2 (1977): 150.

8. *Ibid.*, 141.

equitable market, perhaps he could unify the upper class with the working class and build a more co-operative and united nation.<sup>9</sup>

However, Mackenzie King's balanced approach to the economic management and his promotion of equal opportunities and freedom for all Canadians was tested when the nation entered the Second World War. For farmers living in Western Canada, especially, one of his most divisive policies was the decision to impose a universal price ceiling policy on Canadians. It stirred up feelings of resentment and friction with King's Liberals even though farmers in the Prairie Provinces had long been praised for their wartime food production. It is true that farmers put forth a concerted effort, increased production, and provided a necessary service during the Second World War, but they also complained bitterly about inequality in the market due primarily to King's price ceiling. This paper addresses how the crisis created in Western Canada by King with his price ceiling policy impacted the agricultural industry during the Second World War and how it helps explain why Mackenzie King lost favour with the farmers in the Prairie West as a result.<sup>10</sup>

The first section of this paper explores Mackenzie King's decision to enact a price ceiling in December, 1941 and how the policy worked. Section two examines the ways that Mackenzie King's speeches appealed to the farmers' sense of patriotism and duty, hoping to encourage their acceptance of the price ceiling and engage, at the same time, in the government's policy of total war. The third section argues that while they were well aware of their patriotic duty, small-scale farmers were conflicted about how to meet production quotas while their incomes remained largely stagnant from the pre-war period. Section four analyzes the growing disconnect between Mackenzie King's attempts to centralize control over the economy and the regional impacts on farmers created by the price ceiling. As small farms in Western Canada were replaced by larger, more efficient producers, Mackenzie King's basic promise of the liberal values of equality and fairness never materialized in the opinion of Prairie farmers. As this paper will show, it was King's approach to wartime market prices that precipitated among farmers in Canada's western provinces a loss of confidence in Mackenzie King and his Liberal government.

### **The Politics of Inflation**

Food production has always played an important role in times of war, but political leaders rarely agree

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9. Ibid., 148.

10. Some Canadian Historians have written about Mackenzie King's price ceiling policies and their impact on farmers in Western Canada. Three admirable secondary sources used in this paper should be mentioned here. Sheila Hanlon's PhD dissertation "Feeding the Hungry Allies," is an excellent analysis of Canada's wartime food and agriculture production in the Second World War. Jeffery Keshen's book, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers* addresses the frustrations farmers felt towards Mackenzie King's Liberal Government's price ceiling. Robert Wardhaugh's book *Mackenzie King and the Prairie West* provides a detailed history of the declining sentiments towards King in the Western Provinces. The research for this paper builds on the historiographical bodies of work listed above, providing an analytical structure through which to view and contextualize primary sources. A significant number of primary sources were also analyzed in the writing of this paper. Mackenzie King's diaries and speeches provide insight into the rhetoric and tactics used as he attempted to shape the nation's confidence in price ceiling controls. Newspaper articles express the ideas of editors, columnists, farmers, and the Government, showing the ideological framework of the time. By including contrasting opinions on the price ceiling, I hope to illustrate the mounting friction between Western Canada and their Prime Minister and the difficult position that both parties were in.

on how the market for food should be managed. During the First World War, Canada's Prime Minister, Robert Borden, took a laissez-faire free market approach to the economy.<sup>11</sup> Farmers raised their prices to match increasing transportation, production, and manufacturing costs, and while urban Canadians begged the government to impose a price ceiling to fight inflated food prices, none was ever established. The Canadian Wholesale Price Index, which measures the cost of essential goods, doubled between 1914 and 1918, and likewise, the prices of agricultural products spiked with a general upward trend in inflation. Farmers obtained mortgages at high interest rates so that they could invest in land, machinery, and labour, which, arguably, led to inequity, profiteering, and greed among many producers. Such inflated prices could not be sustained in the post-war period and, by 1923, farm product prices had fallen 50 percent from their 1920 rate, and the agricultural economy crumbled.<sup>12</sup>

Agricultural distress was exacerbated by a world-wide depression that followed in 1929. The international market for agriculture collapsed, and drought and drifting soil led to repeated crop failures on the Western prairies.<sup>13</sup> Year after year, farmers saw little improvement, and by 1933, a study revealed that 79 percent of Saskatchewan farmers were in a state of indebtedness that they could not overcome. With so many farmers on the verge of bankruptcy, the Dominion Government under R.B. Bennett established the Farmers' Creditors Arrangement Act of 1934. This act appraised the value of farms and provided relief or debt adjustments, allowing farmers to remain on their land during the worst years of the Great Depression.<sup>14</sup> Over time, their homes, equipment, and land deteriorated further. Many families endured hopelessness and famine as they anticipated better days to come.<sup>15</sup> The Second World War and improved weather conditions finally restored a glimmer of optimism to those who had survived the worst of the Great Depression. With Europe at war again in 1939, farmers hoped that the wartime economy would pull them out of debt and increase production quotas, as had occurred after 1914.<sup>16</sup>

However, Mackenzie King was determined not to allow prices to spike and crash as they had during and after Borden's leadership. To control wartime inflation, Mackenzie King established The Wartime Prices and Trade Board (WPTB) on 2 September 1939, at a time when Canada was still experiencing the low prices and high unemployment rates of the Great Depression.<sup>17</sup> With almost a million Canadians on relief in the 1930s, it took time for Canada to gain economic momentum, and the country did not reach full employment until the spring of 1941. Canada's price index reflected the situation; wholesale prices rose, as did the exchange rate,

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11. G. E. Britnell and V. C. Fowke, *Canadian Agriculture in War and Peace 1935-1950*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), 23.

12. *Ibid.*, 52-4.

13. Britnell and Fowke, 73.

14. R. McQueen, "The Farmers' Creditors Arrangement Act. 1934," *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, 1, no. 1 (1935): 107-8.

15. Britnell and Fowke, 73.

16. Keshen, 66.

17. K.W. Taylor, "Canadian War-Time Price Controls, 1941-6," *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 13, no. 1 (February 1947): 81.

freight and insurance rates, and wartime commodity taxes.<sup>18</sup> Canada's official Cost of Living Index between February and October of 1941, was equal to that of the previous 18 months of war.<sup>19</sup> The WPTB was ready and waiting to combat this inflation.

By the summer of 1941, Mackenzie King began to examine price ceiling models under the WPTB. To create a balanced economic program and control the cost of the war, he would need to place controls on prices.<sup>20</sup> Mackenzie King had always been committed to "total war," meaning that all available resources and materials were needed to aid Canada in battle. If the government were to compete with an unregulated price system, then it would be constantly outbidding its citizens, creating a significant increase in prices and driving up the cost of living. Such a development would also increase the overall cost of war, create social and political unrest, and make post-war readjustment more difficult.<sup>21</sup> In his mind, Mackenzie King was left with no alternative but to consider whether he should enact selective or universal price fixing. A selective ceiling fixed the prices of wartime goods and services that were directly related to the war, meaning that cosmetics, clothing, and other civilian materials, for example, would not be subject to fixed pricing. However, in "Canadian War-Time Price Controls, 1941-6," K.W. Taylor notes that "the price structure is a complex and delicately balanced thing," and the price of one item is always closely tied to another.<sup>22</sup> If a primary producer's costs were fixed, he would find it difficult to purchase secondary materials not covered by a price ceiling. In those cases, the system could hardly be considered fair, and would not promote the sense of unity that Mackenzie King desired for Canada. Therefore, he chose to impose a universal price ceiling; it was simple, fast, fair, and easier to manage from an administrative standpoint.<sup>23</sup> However, it would be much more difficult to convince Canadians that this was, indeed, the case. In B.K. Sandwell's introduction to Mackenzie King's collection of speeches, he explains that the Prime Minister had been given the "difficult task of introducing Canadians to a degree of control in their economic life which most of them must have regarded as simply unthinkable up to the moment when he spoke."<sup>24</sup> Mackenzie King knew that it would take significant effort to assure the people of his vision for a balanced and fair economy, and his speeches attempt to do just that, especially early in the war.

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18. Taylor, 82-4.

19. Louis C. Wagner, "Price Control in Canada," *Journal of Marketing* 7, no. 2 (October 1942): 107.

20. W. L. Mackenzie King, *Canada and the Fight for Freedom* (Toronto: The MacMillan Company of Canada LTD., 1944), 60.

21. Taylor, 4-5.

22. *Ibid.*, 85.

23. Taylor, 86. Initially, Mackenzie King suggested a "horizontal" ceiling, meaning that it would be applied "rigidly at every stage of production and distribution," but the WPTB argued that it would be a difficult system to moderate. Instead, they chose to enact a "retail freeze," which restricted producers from charging above a maximum price. The WPTB had complete control over all prices federally, provincially, and municipally and could override any price system previously in place. See Wagner, 107-8.

24. Mackenzie King, xvii.



Figure 1: Mackenzie King Addressing an Outdoor Audience on his Western Tour, 1941, 1941, Library and Archives Canada, C-068667, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/28853433@N02/6348497074>

In a CBC broadcast from Ottawa, 18 October 1941, King reminded Canadians that while “a few made large fortunes,” in the First World War, most had only experienced anxiety, inflation, and sacrifice.<sup>25</sup> He shared that as Prime Minister, he felt personally responsible to ensure that such a situation did not happen again, and that while it was not an easy decision to make, Canadians could expect a price ceiling to be imposed in the coming months. King emphasized that “in a democratic country, price control cannot succeed without the active support and co-operation of the mass of the people,” and that this would require “cheerfulness” and

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25. Ibid., 32-5.

“willingness” on the part of all Canadians.<sup>26</sup> King specifically addressed farmers in the broadcast, reminding them that agricultural prices were higher now than they had been at any time in the past ten years, and that “by its policy the government hopes to avoid the fears, the sense of insecurity, the suffering and the profiteering which the inflation of prices inevitably brings in its train. The measure now being announced should help in the winning of the war, and, after the war, facilitate recovery and reconstruction.”<sup>27</sup>

Less than two months after enacting the price ceiling, King described his plan as “progressive and orderly” in a speech in the House of Commons on 26 January 1942.<sup>28</sup> He reminded Canadians that the ceiling had been imposed only when it became “really necessary.”<sup>29</sup> His approach, he added, was a “balanced programme” that would help to keep “our country united.”<sup>30</sup> Mackenzie King had carefully constructed his speeches to reassure Canadians that he had their best interests in mind. However, one might also discern a warning in his words; unlike Borden’s Conservative government in the First World War, Mackenzie King was not willing to accept greed or the manipulation of market prices. The Prime Minister’s economy would remain highly regulated to avoid the pitfalls of a free market during this period of crisis.

Mackenzie King’s decision to establish a price ceiling was well-received by most Canadians. He had taken measures to ensure that the evils of inflation, which had ravaged citizens in the Great War, would be minimized. King’s vision for unity fueled his belief that a country’s various interests and economies should be balanced. He claimed that the price ceiling was part of Canada’s total war effort, enacted to keep the country united.<sup>31</sup> His rhetoric on the importance of total war and total mobilization, were used as a continuous effort to encourage Canadians throughout the war to work together as a nation to achieve victory. By 1942, Louis C. Wagner had already published an article titled “Price Control in Canada,” in the *Journal of Marketing*, noting that the price ceiling had been reasonably successful. The cost of living had stabilized and the cooperation of the people had been positive.<sup>32</sup>

### **Farmers Fight for Parity**

Despite its positive attributes, Mackenzie King’s price ceiling policy was disruptive for Western Prairie farmers.<sup>33</sup> The Canadian government had inserted an extreme measure of control over market prices, and while many Canadians were thankful for the cessation of inflation, small-scale farmers were not. They were frustrated. Mackenzie King’s price ceiling made it clear that farmers would not enjoy the same economic growth that they had experienced in the previous war. Farmers began wondering how they could be expected

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26. Mackenzie King, 32-5.

27. *Ibid.*, 39-41. It is important to note that the previous ten years had been during the Great Depression when prices were exceedingly low.

28. Mackenzie King, 59-60.

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Ibid.*

32. Wagner, 113-4.

33. This paper will focus on farmers in Alberta and Saskatchewan, but Manitoba and British Columbia farmers were affected by the Price Ceiling as well, as seen in Robert Wardhaugh’s book, *Mackenzie King and the Prairie West*.

to recover from the Great Depression, update their equipment, and compete for labour if they were victims of price controls. An article in *The Western Farm Leader* reflected those sentiments when it reported, “Persons who have not actually carried on farming in Western Canada since 1930 have but little conception of the extent to which farm machinery has been worn out and is in need of replacement, due to the distressed conditions in agriculture which prevailed at least from 1930-1937.”<sup>34</sup> Their land, buildings, and machinery had not been maintained or updated in almost a decade. With that critical investment, farmers feared they would not be able to meet wartime production demands.

It is important to note that not all farmers shared these concerns. In “The End of Agrarianism,” David Monod analyzes how large- and small-scale farmers responded to Mackenzie King’s market controls.<sup>35</sup> Farmer with sufficient capital and land were able to adapt. They brought modern conveniences into their homes, invested in capital expansion, and organized themselves into wheat pools and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA). A price ceiling actually stabilized the economy for them and lowered production costs for those who had the capital to afford it. They viewed the price ceiling from a long-term perspective. Price control allowed farmers to accurately predict future prices, which afforded them with a measure of stability.<sup>36</sup> However, as agriculture became more industrialized, smaller farms were not able to compete in the market. Instead, they continued to cultivate quarter-section plots and resist the price ceiling through strikes, agitation, and a demand for parity of prices under the United Farmers of Canada (UFC). Soon, large and small farms became two distinct classes of farmers, with large-scale ones complaining that there were too many farmers trying to “scratch out an existence” in the Prairie West and small-scale farmers struggling to survive.<sup>37</sup>

The smaller-scale farmers in Saskatchewan and Alberta feared that the price ceiling would reduce their abilities to maintain their standard of living and compete for labour, which was in short supply because of the war. Machinery was expensive, and without a suitable margin of profit, smaller-scale farmers would be unable to afford new equipment.<sup>38</sup> Further exacerbating their plight was the rationing of materials; by the end of 1942, with much of the manufacturing of equipment reoriented towards the war effort, Canada was producing only one third of the machinery it had built in 1940, requiring farmers to continue to use outdated, less-efficient equipment.<sup>39</sup> They also feared that a price ceiling would limit their ability to offer a competitive wage for farm labour in a booming economy where there was a constant demand for additional manpower. A *Macleans* article in early 1943 reported that 400,000 men had left the farm for higher paying industries or the Armed

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34. Hon. J. E. Brownlee, “Rationing Farm Machinery,” *The Western Farm Leader*, October 16, 1942, 3.

35. Monod defines smaller farmers as working or owning quarter or half sections of land (up to 320 acres), and large-scale farmers as those who owned or operated over 480 acres. His criteria will be used as measurements in this paper as well. See David Monod, “The End of Agrarianism: The Fight for Farm Parity in Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1935- 48,” *Labour*, 16, (Fall 1985): 118-9, and 128.

36. Monod, 127, 130.

37. *Ibid.*, 120-1.

38. Keshen, 67-8.

39. Keshen, 67-8.

Services since the beginning of the war, and argued that if farmers were expected to meet higher wage demands, the current price ceiling could not be maintained.<sup>40</sup>

The fight for parity of prices was becoming a mantra of the small-scale farmer. If farm commodities were not placed on a price level that matched the increase for other products in the industry, the farmer would not be able to cover his input costs. The less financially secure farmer depended on short-term gains to cover the cost of next year's planting, and if the price level did not match that of other industries, he would not be able to compete within the market.<sup>41</sup> Many farmers believed that by asserting government control over the agricultural prices, Mackenzie King had effectively threatened to eliminate all of the independent, small-scale farms in Western Canada. Centralized federalism may have been of benefit to other industries, but prairie farmers had become its victims.<sup>42</sup>

Farmers voiced their concerns over the price ceiling in both *Maclean's Magazine* and prairie newspapers.<sup>43</sup> The Minister of Agriculture, James Gardiner heard their protest and advocated strongly for them. A former Saskatchewan premier and a product of the prairies, he empathized with prairie farmers and stubbornly defended their interests in Cabinet meetings. To Gardiner, the only way for all farmers to advance and thrive was to raise or remove the price ceiling.<sup>44</sup> When he noticed a gap growing between farming and non-farming wartime industries, he reminded Mackenzie King that if there was not equity across Canada and the various sectors of the economy, the nation could never be unified.<sup>45</sup> Gardiner maintained that the WPTB's desire to curb inflation did not seem to consider the plight of the less financially secure farmer. No small business owners or farmers sat on the WPTB, and the Prairie West was under-represented in Canada's wartime policy-making process.<sup>46</sup> Gardiner also argued that the National War Services Board had drafted "almost everyone off the farm" and would not do any favours for a Liberal government in the Prairie West.<sup>47</sup> In *Mackenzie King and the Prairie West*, Robert A. Wardhaugh notes that Gardiner "battled relentlessly in defence of western issues," which became an annoyance to others in Mackenzie King's Cabinet.<sup>48</sup> The Prime Minister mentions this irritation himself in his diaries, notably on 21 February 1944, when he recorded that Gardiner again had proposed more subsidies to the agricultural industry. Mackenzie King wrote that "the whole business was

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40. The Man with a Notebook, "Backstage in Ottawa," *Maclean's Magazine*, May 1, 1943, 14-5, 57.

41. Monod, 123, 131.

42. Ibid. Centralized Federalism in this paper refers to the movement towards a common economic market and a more "united" country, resulting in less regional autonomy. See Robert A. Wardhaugh. *Mackenzie King and the Prairie West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 2000), 231.

43. See T.L. Shepherd. "A Farmer's Viewpoint" *Regina Leader Post*, August 24, 1942, 9, and The Man with a Notebook, "Backstage in Ottawa," *Maclean's*, April 1, 1943, 14-5, 41.

44. D. Smith and N. Ward, *Jimmy Gardiner: Relentless Liberal* (University of Toronto Press, 1990), 264.

45. Smith and Ward, 254-5.

46. Wardhaugh, *Mackenzie King and the Prairie West*, 236-7.

47. Ibid., 240-1.

48. Ibid., 233.

most difficult and tense.”<sup>49</sup> However, most members of Cabinet stood against Gardiner and understood the importance of controlling inflation during the war and remained firmly loyal to the price ceiling policy.<sup>50</sup>

### **Patriotism as a Solution**

Mackenzie King’s movement towards a centralized style of governing eventually led to a loss of support from many small farmers in the Prairie West. Once Mackenzie King shifted his gaze away from the regional needs of farmers and towards central Canada, the rift was almost irreparable. Canada was quickly evolving from a rural-agricultural nation into an urban-industrial one during the Second World War, and the Prairie West felt ignored.<sup>51</sup> While trying to balance the economy, Mackenzie King was also centralizing power in Ottawa in a desperate attempt to contend with Quebec over the issue of conscription and general management of the war effort. The world was at war, and King was not able to address regional needs as he had done earlier in his career. Instead, it was of utmost importance to him for the nation to work collectively towards a common goal.<sup>52</sup>

As farmers began to radicalize, it clashed with Mackenzie King’s desire to promote unity and balance the country’s competing interests. Wardhaugh argues that even if Mackenzie King was sympathetic towards Western prairie farmers, his hands were tied. If he opened the agrarian market or removed tariffs on farm products, Eastern Canada would then have their own demands that King would have to accommodate. Moreover, if King conceded to Prairie demands, transportation and freight rates would increase, inflation would spike, and the cost of living would rise, which would anger many citizens.<sup>53</sup> Mackenzie King had always maintained that Canada had entered the war united on Canada’s contribution, and that total war called for cooperation and sacrifice on the part of all citizens. In a CBC broadcast from Ottawa on 4 December 1943, Mackenzie King reminded Canadians that true patriotism was demonstrated in the practice of self-denial and self-discipline; the nation would succeed because of citizen cooperation.<sup>54</sup>

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49. Diaries of William Lyon Mackenzie King (King Diaries), February 21, 1944, 30568, LAC.

50. Keshen, 66-7.

51. Wardhaugh, *Mackenzie King and the Prairie West*, 263.

52. *Ibid.*, 266.

53. Robert Wardhaugh, “The ‘Impartial Umpire.’”

54. Mackenzie King, 304.



Figure 2: International Harvester, All Working for Victory, Now Farm Work is War Work! Join the Farm Victory Volunteers, See Your Principal, Circa 1940s, War poster, 47 x 30.5 cm., Hennepin County Library, MPW00857, <https://digitalcollections.hclib.org/digital/collection/p17208coll3/id/1815>

As he fought to keep the country united, supply the allied cause with sufficient troops and food, and keep Quebec happy, little time was spent on considering the interests of what many considered greedy farmers. *Maclean's Magazine* sympathized with Canada's Prime Minister, noting that "The King Government is like a juggler attempting to keep five balls in the air at the same time. They are the armed forces, the munitions

industries, agriculture, civilian services, and government services.”<sup>55</sup> While agriculture was a crucial sector in Canada’s wartime economy, it slowly declined in importance at King’s Cabinet meetings. There were simply too many larger, more pressing issues to manage.<sup>56</sup> In the crisis of the Second World War, Mackenzie King had begun to realize that he would not be able to appease the farmers of Western Canada and continue to promote stability in the economy through price control.<sup>57</sup>

Instead, King chose to remind the public of their patriotic duty, urging the workingman to remain patriotic and not lose heart at any inconvenience they faced. “The men in the fighting forces, we know, will never fail us. They are ready, if need be, to sacrifice their lives, as many already have, that others may remain free,” he declared on a CBC broadcast from Ottawa on 10 September 1943. He then proclaimed that “to be worthy of our fighting men, we must work more intensely, accept heavier burdens, [and] cooperate more fully in a united effort.”<sup>58</sup> How could a farmer complain about wartime product prices when his sons and daughters were laying down their lives for their country? Their willingness to produce food for victory and feed the fighting forces conflicted with their mounting frustrations towards the Government’s price ceiling. In her dissertation on the topic of wartime agriculture in Canada, Stacey Barker suggests that “For Canadian farmers, the issue would be one of safeguarding their own interests within a wartime atmosphere fraught with the rhetoric of sacrifice and duty.”<sup>59</sup> In a desperate attempt to be heard, many farmers who may have traditionally voted for a Liberal government turned towards political parties that might be better able to fight for their cause.<sup>60</sup>

In 1943, Alberta elected Earnest C. Manning of the Social Credit Party as their government and premier. Saskatchewan followed suit and voted for the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) under Tommy Douglas’ leadership in 1944. Both premiers had grown up in Saskatchewan during the “darkest days of the depression and drought,”<sup>61</sup> which won them immense respect among farmers.<sup>62</sup> Manning and the Social Credit Party promised “parity prices... fair and equitable adjustment of all farm debts... land tenure... credit

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55. The Man with a Notebook, “Backstage in Ottawa,” *Macleans*, September 15, 1942, 45.

56. Wardhaugh, *Mackenzie King and the Prairie West*, 235-6.

57. One news article that aptly demonstrates the economic state of Western farmers appeared in *Macleans Magazine* in December of 1942. During the summer, the government launched a large War Bond campaign in hopes that farmers would be willing to accept ‘Victory Loans’ instead of immediate cash payments for their farm produce. By accepting a Victory Loan, the farmer agrees to be paid with interest at a later date, and the Government saves money in the short term. However, out of the 250,000 farmers who were campaigned, only 12 bonds were sold, which was not even enough to pay the cost of the promotional literature. The article accuses farmers of being tax-shy, while their “cash continues to pile up in the bank or be spent in new equipment, livestock, home improvements, etc.” However, if one takes into consideration the previous decade, one can understand why farmers were holding on to their money and making improvements to their farms. In addition to their need for money, the Great Depression had instilled a certain amount of skepticism in banks and investments. See *The Man with a Notebook*, “Backstage in Ottawa,” *Macleans Magazine*, December 1, 1942, 14-5, 42.

58. Mackenzie King, 272-3.

59. Stacey Barker, “Feeding the Hungry Allies: Canadian Food and Agriculture during the Second World War” (PhD diss., University of Ottawa, 2008), 51.

60. Wardhaugh, *Mackenzie King and the Prairie West*, 262.

61. Hugh Boyd, “The New Premier: No Puller of Punches,” *Regina Leader Post*, June 17, 1944, 9.

62. “Manning Becomes New Premier of Alberta,” *Edmonton Journal*, May 31, 1943, 1-2.

facilities... [and] rural electrification.”<sup>63</sup> Tommy Douglas also “championed the underdog,”<sup>64</sup> and brought “five farmers, three teachers, a lawyer, a railway man, and a co-operative expert as his advisers” into the Provincial Legislature.<sup>65</sup> In his first year as Premier, Douglas cancelled nine million dollars of farmer debt and passed the Farm Security Act, in which “no farmer can be evicted from his home quarter section of 160 acres under a mortgage agreement.”<sup>66</sup> In choosing Manning and Douglas as provincial leaders, Alberta and Saskatchewan farmers demonstrated their desire to be properly represented in government. As the *Regina Leader Post* reported, while “the Saskatchewan farmer is not a socialist at heart,” they had been “doing a good deal of thinking these past 10 years,” and were ready for social change.<sup>67</sup> Mackenzie King lost his riding in Prince Albert in the general election of 1945, and when Gardiner suggested that he again run for the Prince Albert riding in 1947, King replied that “Nothing would induce me to run in Prince Albert again.”<sup>68</sup> It was clear that Canada’s Prime Minister had given up hope of ever re-gaining favour in the Prairie West.

### **Death of the Small-Scale Farmer**

Overall, Mackenzie King’s price ceiling policy was generally well-received and King was often praised for controlling inflation, the cost of living, and Canada’s total war debt. With it and other policies, Mackenzie King brought Canada through the war without the considerable economic distress that had marked the First World War. The price ceiling stabilized markets during and after the war, and Canada escaped the chaos that enveloped Borden’s government after 1914.<sup>69</sup> Mackenzie King also introduced several social policies and developed three new Government departments to contend with Reconstruction, National Health and Welfare, and Veterans Affairs, partly made possible due to his strict wartime price policies.<sup>70</sup>

If Mackenzie King had eliminated or held off on imposing a price ceiling during the Second World War, the idea of a “total war” would not have been actualized and Canada’s wartime debt might have been much higher. In “Canadian War-Time Price Controls,” Taylor contends that, “Reliance on a free price system would have required the government to keep continuously outbidding its citizens [for goods and services]. The consequent rapid and accelerating rise in prices would have entailed acute hardship on the economically vulnerable.”<sup>71</sup> A free market would have also contributed to social and political unrest, especially in urban areas, increased the total cost of war to the government, and perhaps unleashed economic turmoil in the post-war period.<sup>72</sup> Market

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63. “Hon. Earnest C. Manning, Social Credit,” *The Farm and Ranch Review*, August 1, 1944, 4.

64. Hugh Boyd, “The New Premier: No Puller of Punches,” *Regina Leader Post*, June 17, 1944, 9.

65. “C.C.F. Assumes Office Monday,” *Regina Leader Post*, July 7, 1944, 3.

66. T. A. Rusch, “One Year of Socialism in Saskatchewan,” *The People’s Weekly*, July 14, 1945, 6.

67. Hugh Boyd, “Born in Depression: Explaining the Farm Vote,” *Regina Leader Post*, June 17, 1944, 9.

68. Wardhaugh, *Mackenzie King and the Prairie West*, 253, 257.

69. Wardhaugh, *Mackenzie King and the Prairie West*, 230 and Keshen, 57.

70. Wardhaugh, *Mackenzie King and the Prairie West*, 244.

71. Taylor, 85.

72. *Ibid.*

prices are interdependent and it could be argued that the Canadian economy during and after World War Two thrived under a universal price ceiling.

The price ceiling contributed positively to agricultural development in Canada as well. During the war, Canada doubled its output of agricultural products, achieving this success with a limited supply of labour.<sup>73</sup> Farmers were pushed to increase production and efficiency, which led to revolutionary advances in farm equipment. More efficient machinery allowed for larger farms with less labour requirements.<sup>74</sup> While only 38 percent of Western Canadian farmers owned a tractor in 1941, that number climbed to 80 percent by 1951.<sup>75</sup> Livestock production also increased and farmers began to explore selective breeding programs, hormones, and scientific breakthroughs in livestock care.<sup>76</sup> Farmers who were able to adapt to the industrialization of agriculture during the Second World War thrived, and the industry increased in both quantity and quality. In *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers*, Jeffrey Keshen argues that while the war created the strong, competitive agricultural sector we see in Canada today, it also contributed to the decline of small family farms in the Prairie West and the resentment many felt towards the federal government.<sup>77</sup>

In 1946, small-scale farmers in Alberta and Saskatchewan made one last attempt to resist the shift to modern, industrialized farming under Mackenzie King's Liberal government. Some sixty thousand farmers staged a 30-day strike, the largest in Canada's agrarian history.<sup>78</sup> Farmers blocked highways, halted deliveries, dumped their grain, and froze their shipments of animals to stockyards, hoping to get the attention of Mackenzie King. "Use your Brain. Hold your Grain," they shouted; "Parity or Poverty!"<sup>79</sup> Tommy Douglas, Saskatchewan's CCF Premier, and Earnest Manning, Alberta's Social Credit Premier, both quietly supported the farmers' strike of 1946. While neither openly endorsed it, knowing that large-scale farmers would likely withdraw their support of the premiers, they allowed the strikers to make their demands known to Ottawa.<sup>80</sup>

While impressive, the strike changed little. The small-scale farmers only deprived themselves of valuable income, and their enthusiasm quickly diminished. Quarter and half section farms fell by one-third in Saskatchewan and one-quarter in Alberta during the first half decade of peace, and by 1961, those numbers had been further reduced. Seventy percent of small farms in Saskatchewan and 40 percent in Alberta had disappeared.<sup>81</sup> The loss of small family homesteads was followed by the loss of support for Mackenzie King's Liberal, centralized leadership in Western Canada.<sup>82</sup> In the 1945 federal election, the Liberals who had held 178

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73. Barker, 437.

74. Britnell and Fowke, 406-7.

75. Monod, 141.

76. Britnell and Fowke, 410-1.

77. Keshen, 65.

78. Monod, 121.

79. Ibid., 137.

80. Monod, 138.

81. Ibid., 139-141.

82. Wardhaugh, Mackenzie King and the Prairie West, 265.

seats in 1941, now held 127. Many of these seats were lost in rural parts of the Prairie Provinces; Liberal seats dropped from 12 to 3 in Saskatchewan and 7 to 2 in Alberta.<sup>83</sup>

One could argue that the growth of mechanized farming was inevitable, with or without Mackenzie King's price controls. Stacey Barker suggests that the Second World War was less an agent of change, than it was a catalyst. She contends that technological advances and progress would have eradicated the family farm eventually, but the industrial revolution of the Second World War expedited that process. Perhaps a farmer's success during the war was less about Mackenzie King's tight price controls and more about their ability to modernize and adapt to the future of the business. Whether it was Mackenzie King's price ceiling, paired with the inability of small-scale farmers to overcome the ravages of the Great Depression that squeezed many farmers out of business or simply there was an unwillingness to modernize, the number of farms shrank significantly in the post-war years, while the size of farms increased substantially.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, in the federal government's attempt to increase production rates, freeze prices, and commit to "total war," small family homesteads across Western Canada were, indeed, sacrificed in the process.<sup>85</sup>

### Conclusion

Prime Minister Mackenzie King's decision to legislate a price ceiling under the WTPB was sensible economics and effective management during the crisis of war. It stabilized the economy, maintained an affordable cost of living, and lowered Canada's overall wartime debt. While inflation reached an estimated 77 percent in the First World War, followed by an economic crash,<sup>86</sup> the difference during the Second World War was remarkable. Following the enacting of the price ceiling in 1941, inflation climbed only 2.8 percent by 1945, the lowest rate experienced by any nation in the war.<sup>87</sup> From a governing standpoint, Mackenzie King's price ceiling policy was a resounding success.

However, one could argue that in an effort to centralize the economy and mobilize the nation into "total war," Mackenzie King failed to recognize regional differences and individual hardships experienced by Canadians. His price ceiling policy was particularly disruptive to small-scale Western Canadian farmers who had been decimated by the economic depression and drought of the 1930s. Food production was paramount during the Second World War and the federal government asked farmers to produce more, in order to feed soldiers, citizens, and hungry Allied nations. However, smaller farmers believed that a price ceiling disadvantaged them greatly. As they toiled and broke the earth with fewer labourers and outdated machinery, their incomes were capped by a price ceiling and what they considered an uncaring Prime Minister. The

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83. Keshen, 70.

84. Barker, 448. During the Second World War, there were 733,000 farms in Canada; in 2008, there were approximately 250,000.

85. Monod, 143.

86. Keshen, 57.

87. "Canada and the War: The War Economy and Controls: Wage and Price Controls," Canadian War Museum, Accessed February 22, 2023, [https://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/newspapers/canadawar/wageprice\\_e.html](https://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/newspapers/canadawar/wageprice_e.html)

farmer's livelihood was determined by the price earned on his yields, and if he was not able to keep up with increased production costs, his livelihood would suffer, as farmers insisted it had.

Canada was quickly industrialized and farmers were expected to modernize and update their equipment accordingly, but after a decade of depression, many small-scale farmers were unable to do so. No longer were they in the age of threshing crews and horse-drawn ploughs. However, without the appropriate capital to cover production costs, and replace their worn equipment, farmers fell further behind and began to look "old fashioned" in Canada's modernized, industrial wartime nation. Farmers voiced their concerns, lobbying to have their regional interests heard by the federal government, but Mackenzie King refused to meet their demands. He was much more concerned with promoting unity and pursuing a centralized war strategy, a stable economy, and achieving balance between Eastern and Western Canada.

There was no simple remedy for the less financially secure farmers of Western Canada. If Mackenzie King had raised the price ceiling or opened the market, the whole economy would have been at risk. However, in his decision to control prices under the WTPB, small prairie farmers were largely sacrificed. Those who were able to modernize, invest in more efficient equipment, and adapt to the industrialized economy succeeded in Canada's wartime market and beyond. However, in the process, hundreds of family homesteads were abandoned or purchased by others, and after one final attempt to reclaim their place in prairie life with a strike in 1946, many small-scale farmers admitted defeat.

The prairie farmer certainly blamed Mackenzie King and his Liberal, centralized government for their difficulties and resented him for demanding that they act 'patriotically' rather than in self-interest when he seemed to be ignorant of their cries for parity in the marketplace. Angry and defeated, they took their vote from Mackenzie King and his Liberal party and gave it to the CCF and Social Credit Party, in an attempt to have their voices heard in the federal chambers of power. It might have been a futile attempt to turn back time, as the world became increasingly more industrialized with little space for the small family farm. However, for many farmers, the price ceiling was an important contributing factor to their demise, and they were determined to exact retribution on the nation's Prime Minister and wartime leader. The death of the small-scale farmer is inexorably linked to the decline of Mackenzie King's liberalism in the Prairie West.

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## KOREA, A HOT START TO THE COLD WAR: ST. LAURENT AND PEARSON'S ONGOING FIGHT AGAINST COMMUNISM

Ryland Gibb

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### Introduction

Louis St. Laurent became Prime Minister of Canada in 1948 and led an already successful Liberal Party to continued success. During and after his time as Prime Minister, he was praised for his decisiveness and for doing his duty to his country and leading Canada through uncertain times. When the previous Prime Minister, MacKenzie King, invited St. Laurent to be his Minister of Justice in 1942, he felt it was his duty to accept the offer and serve his country during the crisis of the Second World War. St. Laurent later became secretary of state for external affairs. when King relinquished the position in 1948. Soon St. Laurent became King's choice of successor for Liberal Party leader, which he won in a vote, becoming Prime Minister in November 1948. By then, Canada had assumed a greater global presence and St. Laurent needed a capable leader at the position. He would appoint Lester B. Pearson to be the external affairs minister, a future Nobel Peace Prize winner and Prime Minister of Canada. With Pearson, St. Laurent would lead Canada through the beginnings of the Cold War against the Soviet Union and Communist expansion, most notably in the Korean War. The war would be a 'hot' start to the Cold War and it demonstrated the Western and democratic fight against the spread of Communism. The war and the politics surrounding the crisis of Korea would also demonstrate the leadership of St. Laurent and Pearson as they managed Canada's role on a global stage.

The outbreak of war in Korea resulted, in large part, from the American and Soviet conflict both on the Korean peninsula and in the United Nations. Canada was one of the few western countries fancied by both the Soviet Union and the United States to be on the UN Temporary Committee on Korea which had been created to alleviate tensions in the region. St. Laurent, who was the Secretary for external affairs, and Pearson, as his under-secretary, saw the UN involvement as an opportunity for the budding global political power of Canada to show what it could do. Mackenzie King, the Prime Minister at the time, was weary of the UN committee and what it might mean for Canada. He feared that the US would use Canada to push its own agenda and, in the worst case scenario, push the world back into war. St. Laurent and Pearson, on the other hand, were fierce opponents of Communism and worried greatly how it might be spread throughout the world. Fearing that if the UN let Korea fall completely into the Communist sphere of influence, other countries in the area and around the world would follow suit. This was the beginning of what was known as the domino effect, and it is

also why St. Laurent, especially as prime minister, and Pearson, as Secretary of State for External Affairs, began taking more action in the UN against the hostile spread of Communism.



Canadian Delegation, United Nations Conference on International Organization. Pictured from Left to Right C.S. Ritchie, P.E. Renaud, Elizabeth MacCallum, Lucien Moraud, Escott Reid, W.F. Chipman, Lester Pearson, J.H. King, Louis St. Laurent, Rt. Hon. W.L. Mackenzie King, Gordon Graydon, M.J. Coldwell, Cora Casselman, Jean Desy, Hume Wrong, Louis Rasminsky, L.D. Wilgress, M.A. Pope, R. Chaput. Image taken May 1945 / San Francisco, Calif., U.S.A. Credit: Nicholas Morant / National Film Board of Canada. Phototheque / Library and Archives Canada / C-047570

### **Cold War and Spread of Communism: St Laurent's Principles**

As minister of external affairs before he became prime minister, St Laurent outlined his vision for Canada in the world. In the Gray Lecture at the University of Toronto in January 1947, St. Laurent outlined five principles to guide Canada. These five principles, according to historian Hector MacKenzie, were “national unity, political liberty, rule of law in national and international affairs, the values of a Christian civilization, and the willingness to accept international responsibilities.”<sup>1</sup> Of these, two are directly related to international

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1. Hector Mackenzie, *Shades of Gray? The Foundations of Canadian Policy in World Affairs* (2007)

affairs and they show how St. Laurent believed Canada should play an international role. The “willingness to accept international responsibilities” is a hint that Canada would act in accordance with the objectives of the United Nations. In fact, one might argue that St Laurent’s Gray Lecture was the beginning of Canada’s policy on “peacekeeping”, whereby it would send troops to countries the UN declared as in need of help to keep the peace. This can be seen in conjunction with St. Laurent’s third principle, “rule of law in national and international affairs.” It established the principle of not intervening in the affairs of other countries without the undeniable truth of international laws or human rights being broken. MacKenzie further states that St. Laurent “neither repudiated nor reconsidered the policies of his predecessor.”<sup>2</sup> This would continue to be the trend adopted by other Canadian Prime Ministers who make only minor policy changes to those ideas during their tenure. St. Laurent set the standard for the future of Canadian external affairs with these five principles laid out in the Gray Lecture.

For a better look at Louis St. Laurent’s stance on Communism, one can look at his principle of “values of a Christian society”. This shows Canadians that the non-religious Communists would get no sympathy in St Laurent’s new Canadian foreign policy. This is especially so when, according to the western view, Communists often bent or broke international law and provided no political liberty for the people within their jurisdictions. This could be interpreted as St. Laurent’s plea to Canada to become united over the mutual threat of Communism and accept that Canada has a duty to protect not only itself, but other countries from the evils of the Communist threat. Adam Chapnick interprets those principles slightly differently. In his view St Laurent’s “Christian values” meant for Canada “the requirement to consider the values of humanity in the conduct of politics.”<sup>3</sup> If this is how St. Laurent intended it to be interpreted, it would still be aimed at the threat of Communism for its disregard of human rights and freedoms, especially in its conduct of politics. Adam Chapnick further claims “St-Laurent had set a new precedent by articulating a clear set of Canadian foreign policy principles and values.”<sup>4</sup> Pearson, when he was Under-secretary of State for External Affairs, repeated St. Laurent’s principles in a speech in Vancouver he titled “Some Principles of Canadian Foreign Policy.”<sup>5</sup> When Pearson gave this speech the tension between the democratic west and Communist east had increased, and while he did not emphasise Canadian national unity as St Laurent had, he instead suggested a guiding principle for Canada should be to provide “steady and consistent, but unprovocative resistance to Communist aggression or indeed to any aggression.”<sup>6</sup> The shift in tone from national unity to resistance to Communism was a sentiment that St. Laurent shared but it did not diminish St Laurent’s commitment to the

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2. Mackenzie, *Shades of Gray? The Foundations of Canadian Policy in World Affairs* (2007)

3. Patrice A. Dutil and Adam Chapnick, “St-Laurent’s Gray Lecture and Canadian Citizenship in History,” in *The Unexpected Louis St-Laurent: Politics and Policies for a Modern Canada* (UBC Press, 2020), . 467-479.

4. . Dutil and Chapnick, “St-Laurent’s Gray Lecture and Canadian Citizenship in History. 467-479.

5. Dutil and Chapnick, “ St-Laurent’s Gray Lecture and Canadian Citizenship in History,” in *The Unexpected Louis St-Laurent: Politics and Policies for a Modern Canada* (UBC Press, 2020), pp. 467-479.

6. Patrice A. Dutil and Adam Chapnick, “Chapter 21 St-Laurent’s Gray Lecture and Canadian Citizenship in History,” in *The Unexpected Louis St-Laurent: Politics and Policies for a Modern Canada* (UBC Press, 2020), pp. 467-479.

other principles, he articulated in his Gray Lecture. However, both he and Pearson directed their attention to the growing threat of the spread of Communism and authoritarianism.

### **Pearson as External Affairs Minister**

Almost immediately after the Second World War, a number of international concerns materialized for Canada as, together with the United States, France, and Britain, it turned its attention to rebuilding Europe and to the emerging tensions around the world. “Decolonization, insurrections, civil wars, the fear of Communism, and economic concerns”<sup>7</sup> were some of the major reasons why St. Laurent and Pearson believed Canada should become involved in international affairs. The two of them would have two years working closely under Prime Minister King, developing their plans and trusting each other; this pairing would turn out to be beneficial for Canada. They had similar ideals and thoughts on many subjects, allowing them to work well together, and had mutual trust that allowed them to work on items separately without micromanaging or intervention. Political scientists, Hilliker and Barry, show the similarities between the two. They claim “St. Laurent believed that enlightened public support was critical to the effective conduct of foreign policy.” Pearson did too, stating: “We were both convinced that our country should play its full part in the international organisation of peace and security.”<sup>8</sup> The relationship they would build and continue aided Canadian foreign affairs and allowed Pearson to gain experience that he would put to use in the future, becoming President of the United Nations General Assembly and winning a Nobel Peace prize for his role in the Suez Canal Crisis.<sup>9</sup>

When St Laurent became Prime Minister he allowed Pearson nearly free reign over Canadian foreign affairs with few exceptions, although they continued to work together closely. “St Laurent had no reason to fear that he might have to take responsibility for actions he disagreed with, and the minister could be confident of support in cabinet for his actions.” Although Pearson was well trusted in foreign affairs, St. Laurent did not hesitate to step in when he felt he needed to.<sup>10</sup> The foreign affairs ministry was always working to promote Canadian values even when those values also reflected Canada’s self-interests such as securing new trade deals, developing collective security arrangements and engaging in peacekeeping operations around the world.<sup>11</sup> It was an approach that became known as dualism, which Ernest LeVost describes as “acknowledging the Canadian ideology, with its emphasis on democracy defined as anti-Communism, [while working] in tandem with Canada’s self-interests.”<sup>12</sup>

### **Outbreak of the Korean War**

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7. [7] Ernest A. LeVos (National Library of Canada = Bibliothèque nationale du Canada, 1991), pp. 1-325.

8. Hilliker, John, and Donald Barry. “The PM and the SSEA in Canada’s Foreign Policy: Sharing the Territory, 1946-1968.” *International Journal* 50, no. 1 (1994): 163–88.

9. Hilliker, John, and Donald Barry. “The PM and the SSEA in Canada’s Foreign Policy: Sharing the Territory, 1946-1968.” *International Journal* 50, no. 1 (1994): 163–88.

10. Hilliker, John, and Donald Barry. “The PM and the SSEA in Canada’s Foreign Policy: Sharing the Territory, 1946-1968.” *International Journal* 50, no. 1 (1994): 163–88.

11. Ernest A. LeVos (National Library of Canada = Bibliothèque nationale du Canada, 1991), pp. 1-325.

12. Ernest A. LeVos (National Library of Canada = Bibliothèque nationale du Canada, 1991), pp. 1-325.

Shortly after the end of the Second World War, the USSR and the USA needed to clear the Japanese occupied territories of remaining troops. The Korean Peninsula was one of them, with the USSR starting from the north and the USA from the south. The two nations agreed to meet at the 38th parallel. The result was that Korea was split in two sections, with pro-Communist sympathizers in the north (with influence from China and the USSR) and pro-capitalism democratic factions in the south (with influence from the USA and other western allies). From the Soviet Union's perspective, Korea was a 'springboard' that the west could use to launch an attack on the Communist nations and it thus wanted the peninsula to be Communist and loyal to the USSR. It would act as a buffer state between the western nations and the Russian motherland, just as Poland and East Germany were in Europe. From the western perspective, Korea must have its own 'unimpeded' and free elections as a necessary condition to full independence. 'Unimpeded' to the west meant that Korea would be supervised by the United Nations, a western dominated council at the time. To the United States and its allies, including Canada, if Korea were to be ruled by the Communists, it would mean that other smaller countries might fall to the threat of Communism as well, with several of these smaller countries being too close to the United States for its liking. There were other frustrations experienced by western powers with the Soviet Union, "in particular, the intransigence of the Soviets to cooperate with the UN Temporary Commission on Korea, which included Canada as a member state, to hold free elections."<sup>13</sup> The USSR, however, insisted that all nations leave Korea to itself and let it not be interfered with by outside forces. This, of course, for St. Laurent and others merely would hide the Soviet Union's true intentions of wanting Korea to become Communist controlled, as they prepared the North Korean military with Soviet military personnel and Chinese backing. North Korea and its sponsors anticipated an easy victory over South Korea, provided that the United States would not rapidly intervene with its forces.<sup>14</sup> North Korea felt that it could rapidly win the war against the south had the peninsula been left to just its inhabitants. That may have been the case, but in an area where the fear of Communist expansion and outright aggression within the region was acute, the western led United Nations authorised support of South Korea in its defence against an authoritarian Communist regime in North Korea.

### **UN Declaration and USA**

The outbreak of the war tested the United Nations for the first time in its then five year history. It needed any and all interventions in conflict around the world to be legal and "within the terms of the Charter" if it were to remain a trusted entity and continue on, as it does today. If the Americans were to act without UN approval, it could start a worldwide struggle between Communist and non-Communist nations. In the emergency meeting held on the 25th of June, the day North Korea began its invasion, the UN decreed that a breach of peace had been conducted and that action needed to be taken, it voted 9-0 in favour of the action. Unfortunately for the UN, the permanent force that it has envisioned had not yet come to fruition. "In

13. Colbourn, Sarah. "Canada Declassified. Canadian Perspectives on the Conflict in Korea." University of Toronto. Accessed March 14, 2023

14. Ohn Chang-II, "The Causes of the Korean War, 1950-1953," *International Journal of Korean Studies* Vol. XIV, no. No. 2 (2010), [https://doi.org/https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/journals/ijoks/v14i2/f\\_0019548\\_16694.pdf](https://doi.org/https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/journals/ijoks/v14i2/f_0019548_16694.pdf).

consequence, if any steps were to be taken to deal with the crisis, they would have to be taken by individual council members “acting within the terms of the Charter, but on their own initiative.”<sup>15</sup> Yugoslavia abstained and the USSR was not present for the vote, as it was boycotting the UN over the exclusion of the People’s Republic of China, in favour of the Republic of China (which had lost the civil war and was now confined to the Island of Taiwan). This was almost a relief to the Security Council as the USSR could have vetoed the declaration and forced the issue into further debate, giving the North Koreans more time to continue their assault against the South Korean Army. If the 25 June decree was not enough for the legality of UN member intervention, than the decree on 27 June went further, stating “that the members of the United Nations furnish such assistance to the Republic of Korea as may be necessary to repel the armed attack and to restore international peace and security in the area concerned.”<sup>16</sup> Those words were repeated by Pearson in an address to the UN on 28 June, defending the United States for actions taken in preparation to help the South Korean defence.

The controversy stems from the wording of the 25 June resolution, as it entails that any member forces of the UN were to go to Korea to ‘observe’ the North Korean forces back to the 38th parallel. This would then make the American action of sending forces to help fight back the South against the North Korean forces illegal and outside of the UN resolution, as the 27 June resolution would not be approved until eleven hours after the American action. This could make the UN look as if it was just following the actions of the United States, which contravened the purpose of the UN. The debates, especially in French-language newspapers in Canada, used this as the reason Canada would be supporting the war, to follow in the footsteps of Uncle Sam. Soon though, most of the Canadian MP’s were on the side of support for the South Koreans, with only a few disagreeing. Many of those were from around areas in Quebec, which historically were opposed to Canada’s involvement in overseas intervention.

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15. Margaret Doxey, “Denis Stairs, the Diplomacy of Constraint: Canada, the Korean War and the United States. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974, Pp. XV, 373,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 8, no. 1 (1975): pp. 152-153, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0008423900045339>.
16. Margaret Doxey, “Denis Stairs, the Diplomacy of Constraint: Canada, the Korean War and the United States. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974, Pp. XV, 373,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 8, no. 1 (1975): pp. 152-153, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0008423900045339>.



Pres. Eisenhower (left) met Prime Minister St. Laurent (bottom right), Cdn. ambassador Hume Wrong to the US (top left), Foreign Minister Pearson (centre) and US Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles (top right) to discuss their war against Communism in Korea, and other matters. US Vice Pres. Richard Nixon said the talks “assist in tightening the bonds of co-operation between the two countries.” (St.Louis Post Dispatch, May 7, 1953, p.2.)

### Canada's Reaction and Involvement

As the US made headway in securing forces to be put into immediate action in Korea by 27 June, “Policy-makers in Canada, meanwhile, confined their efforts... to a continuing assessment of the developing conflict. The politicians among them contributed to the cause by delivering stout declarations of piety and goodwill.”<sup>17</sup> Although Canada did not have a huge permanent military force to take immediate action, debates in the House of Commons continued to be focused on Canadian issues, not issues of building a force for dispatch to Korea. It was not until 30 June that debate on the Korean issue and Canada's involvement would be discussed. This discussion, starting late in the session, would be brought up by an anti-war MP, arguing that Canada should not follow the US into the conflict. That member was the only one who spoke against Canadian involvement. St. Laurent would reassure the House that “Canada would not be participating in war against any state. It would [only] be part of collective police action under the control and authority of the United Nations for the

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17. Margaret Doxey, “Denis Stairs, the Diplomacy of Constraint: Canada, the Korean War and the United States. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974, Pp. XV, 373,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 8, no. 1 (1975): pp. 152-153, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0008423900045339>.

purpose of restoring peace to an area where an aggression has occurred.”<sup>18</sup> This was met with applause and agreement and would have implications that would ripple within Canada for decades to come. Canada was not going to war on the side of US aggression against Communism; it was helping the United Nations to enforce a Security Council resolution to enforce international law and secure peace.

The initial Canadian contributions to the Korean War first came from the Navy and Airforce, offering three destroyers and an air transport squadron. Canada informed the United Nations these destroyers were headed to the Pacific on 12 July – the U.S. had already been informally informed – with the intent to have these destroyers join the United Nations forces,<sup>19</sup> the first of what would be a total of eight Canadian warships to serve in the waters off Korea during the course of the conflict. Their duties included blockading the coast, preventing enemy amphibious landings, protecting the UN fleet, bombarding onshore targets and offering humanitarian aid to isolated Korean fishing villages.<sup>20</sup> This was aligned with St. Laurent’s plan of Canada being a nation joining the UN in Korea to secure peace and enforce law, while keeping its servicemen out of immediate harm’s way for the time being. Canada would not get through the conflict without having troops be on the front lines, however, although they tried when it looked like the war was lost, and when the war looked to be won. Sarah Colbourn brings the Canadian public’s feelings further into light when she quotes a message sent to Pearson from Leolyn Dana Wilgress, the High Commissioner for Canada in London, England on July 18th 1950:

A rather smug, but entirely natural feeling, that it is the turn of the United States to bear the first brunt. Canada went to war in 1939, twenty-six months earlier than the United States, and there is a strong feeling that there is some justice in the present turn of the wheel of fortune.<sup>21</sup>

This feeling in Canada would show in their hesitance to send ground troops to Korea, especially with the initial advances made by the North Koreans. Canada would send air and naval forces to the peninsula in July 1950, but Canadian ground troops would not set foot on Korean soil until the following December and would not see the front lines until February 1951. The tardiness of the Canadians during the start of the war meant that they would miss the major front line challenges that defined the first months of the war.

St. Laurent and Pearson did not take the sending of troops and equipment to Korea lightly but knew how they needed to act to support South Korean independence and to secure the UN’s place on the world stage as it was still living in the tainted legacy of the League of Nations. When the Korean War broke out, the strength of the army’s active force stood at 20,369 in all ranks.<sup>22</sup> Many of these ranks were administrative, as Canada had undergone a rapid dismantling of its military immediately post-war to allocate money for social programs that

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18. Margaret Doxey, “Denis Stairs, the Diplomacy of Constraint: Canada, the Korean War and the United States. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974, Pp. XV, 373,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 8, no. 1 (1975): pp. 152-153, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0008423900045339>.

19. Colbourn, Sarah. “Canada Declassified. Canadian Perspectives on the Conflict in Korea.” University of Toronto. Accessed March 14, 2023

20. Canada. Department of National Defence. Directorate of History Heritage. “Canada and the Korean War”. Montreal, Quebec: Art Global, 2002.

21. Colbourn, Sarah. “Canada Declassified. Canadian Perspectives on the Conflict in Korea.” University of Toronto. Accessed March 14, 2023

22. David Jay Bercuson, *Blood on the Hills: The Canadian Army in the Korean War* (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

Mackenzie King would implement. The military could send a brigade of around 800 men to Korea but officials feared that the brigade would not be enough to maintain Canada's commitment as a separate, independent force and would be quickly swallowed by the Americans. The fully trained professional army was also needed post-war to defend Canadian territory, and sending them across the globe could put Canada's security in jeopardy. For these reasons, Canada decided on 7 August to raise a 'Special Military Force' to be sent to Korea, leaving the full time forces in Canada for home defence.

This 'Special Military Force' would be raised completely by volunteers and to get it done expeditiously, much of the screening process for recruits was by-passed. This meant that as quickly as men were recruited and began training, they were being uncommissioned if ailments became apparent, slowing the already slow training of troops. All of the requirements of training new replacements were amplified as the war went on into September. Now the Americans and the South Koreans were barely holding the line along the Naktong, and Canada was under pressure to make up for its limited contributions. This resulted in a partially trained Canadian Battalion being made ready to sail from the Seattle docks for Korea by the third week in November 1950.<sup>23</sup> Once in Korea, Canada's Special Military Force was in disarray, caught between using the outdated British equipment and weapons they had trained with, and the superior and updated American weapons and equipment. Some of the heavy weapons they thought they would use would be discarded once they got to Korea, in favour of the more mobile American heavy weapons.

When the North Korean and Chinese counter attack was observed, Canada approved a larger portion of troops to be dispatched to Korea. This force was approved on 21 February 1951.<sup>24</sup> The Canadians would help push the enemy back to the 38th parallel and the war became a stalemate. Canadian defensive positions during the stagnant war would hold and be recognized internationally. The North Korean advance had stalled near the 38th parallel, similar to the line agreed upon by the US and USSR at the end of the Second World War. In the end, 516 Canadians would be lost in the Korean conflict.

### **Korean War Truce and Canadian Peacekeeping**

The Korean War has not officially ended as a peace treaty has never been signed, although the fighting ended on 27 July 1953, when military commanders from the United States, representing the United Nations Command, the Korean People's Army, and Chinese People's Volunteer Army signed the Korean Armistice Agreement, ending the three years of fighting of the 1950-1953 Korean War.<sup>25</sup> In the Armistice Agreement, a four kilometre wide demilitarised zone would separate the two nations from coast to coast. In Korea and afterwards, Canada's soldiers abroad were almost always professional and always sent wherever their government believed that they were needed to shore up the outer defences of Western democracy, usually with

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23. David Jay Bercuson, *Blood on the Hills: The Canadian Army in the Korean War* (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

24. David Jay Bercuson, *Blood on the Hills: The Canadian Army in the Korean War* (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

25. United Nations Command, "Armistice Negotiations," United Nations Command & History & 1951-1953: Armistice Negotiations, accessed April 1, 2023, <https://www.unc.mil/History/1951-1953-Armistice-Negotiations/#:~:text=On July 27, 1953, military,the 1950-1953 Korean War.>

little fanfare at home.<sup>26</sup> St Laurent's principles had paved the way for Canada's commitment and the Korean War had put them to the test, but both he and Pearson would not waver. Their principles held true in Korea and showed to the world that Canada was a force that would legally enforce international law, but only within rules set by the UN. This would be put to the test a number of times after 1950, the most recent incident occurring in Iraq in 2003.

### **Conclusion**

Canada's involvement in Korea was substantial, both politically and militarily. The process which led Canada there was slow and tedious as legal connotations, public opinion, and time and financial constraints made logistics difficult. St. Laurent and Pearson shared a similar commitment that helped push Canada onto the global stage, particularly through the United Nation involvement and resolution. The trust St. Laurent had in Pearson to handle foreign affairs at the UN was unmatched and it paid off, as St. Laurent could focus on domestic or other pressing matters, knowing that his international policies would be fulfilled by Pearson. Although Canada was late in sending a substantial force to Korea, once there the troops handled the logistics of weapons and commanders well, making a name for themselves in the conflict. This test of St. Laurent and Pearson's role on a global scale made Canada better and when other crises would arise later in the decade, Canada would be there to help keep the peace and prevent conflict. The decade that followed in Canadian history would chart Canada's foreign policy for decades to come, particularly its commitment to peacekeeping forces, if they were sanctioned by the UN, and adopted a hard line to counter the threat of Communism.

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26. David Jay Bercuson, *Blood on the Hills: The Canadian Army in the Korean War* (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

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# JOHN DIEFENBAKER AND THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

Olivia Moat

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## Introduction

The Cuban missile crisis signifies the height of the Cold war, the moment when the world came closest to total nuclear global destruction. In 1962, the world teetered on the brink of war. Not only was it a low-point in Soviet-American relations, but it also was a crisis in Canadian-American relations. Prime Minister John Diefenbaker is typically noted by scholars as being hesitant and indecisive during the crisis. His hesitation was, in part, due to the strained relations and lack of trust between him and John F. Kennedy, the President of the United States. A lack of communication between the two leaders and the vague outlines in the NORAD agreement that governed air defences between the two nations worsened this relationship at a crucial time. The Second World War had seen the development of the most dangerous weapon humans have ever created: nuclear power. First deployed by the United States against Japan in 1945, other world powers, such as the Soviet Union, strived to obtain the weapon as well. They rushed to possess their own nuclear warheads, both as a display power and to deter any attack against them. While Canada never sought to develop or acquire such weapons, the Cuban missile crisis brought Canada and the rest of the world close to nuclear war.

Diefenbaker had astonished many when he defeated the long-serving Liberal government and became Prime minister in 1957. His popularity declined after winning this massive majority government in 1958, as he was increasingly described as indecisive and hesitant regarding many issues, but particularly over Canada acquiring nuclear weapons and Canada's participation in engaging in acts that might be deemed aggressive.<sup>1</sup> Diefenbaker's attitude towards the use of weapons of mass destruction was cautionary and it affected relations with United States, especially with President Kennedy in the period leading up to – and during – the Cuban Missile Crisis. The crisis and Diefenbaker's handling of it contributed significantly to his downfall. While Diefenbaker supported Kennedy's decision during the crisis, he was unwilling to immediately take the action Kennedy wanted. Diefenbaker needed to consult with his cabinet and work with the United Nations to mediate the situation before taking action that Diefenbaker feared could have been deemed aggressive in the

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1. Denis Smith, "DIEFENBAKER, JOHN GEORGE," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 20, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003

eyes of the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> The United States played a significant role in Diefenbaker's approach to the crisis as there had developed with the United States a lack of trust between the Prime Minister and the President. This chapter explores John Diefenbaker's handling of the Cuban missile crisis and how it contributed to his downfall as prime minister of Canada.

### **Who was John Diefenbaker?**

John George Diefenbaker came from a hard-working family who moved from Ontario to the Northwest Territories, which later became Saskatchewan. His mother was a Scottish immigrant, and his father was German. Given his German name, he faced discrimination during the First World War. Diefenbaker's family was by no means wealthy and moved several times in young John's childhood years. In 1912, John Diefenbaker attended the Saskatoon Collegiate Institute where he studied law and arts. It is important to note that John Diefenbaker had a goal of becoming prime minister since the young age of ten years old. He aimed for a career in politics and admired Prime ministers such as Robert Borden in 1917.<sup>3</sup> During the First World War, Diefenbaker enlisted and became a lieutenant in Infantry. He set sail for England in the 196th Battalion. Deemed medically unfit in 1917, he was demobilized and denied pension sought on the grounds for disability.<sup>4</sup> This may have been the beginning of his commitment to ensure social justice for Canadians.

### **Diefenbaker: A Proponent of Canadian Social Justice**

Diefenbaker was regarded by many as a promotor of social justice in Canada, and that may explain some of his opposition to nuclear weapons with their lethal, indiscriminate and widespread destructive capacity. He was opposed to the death penalty and aimed for equality and justice for those who deserved it. This led to him creating the Canadian Bill of Rights in 1960, a precursor for extending voting rights for Indigenous peoples. In fact, Diefenbaker's commitment to social justice had a long history. In 1920, when he was elected to the Wakaw Council, he quickly developed a reputation as a defender of minorities. He was a defence lawyer with a powerful and edgy voice, and identified with the dispossessed and the poor, with those who lacked wealth and power and those who did not identify with the British Canadian mainstream. During the 1930's he was diagnosed with a Gastric illness, and was witness to the Great Depression, crop failures and unemployment. During this time, he developed his vision of a "One Canada," through which he believed all Canadians were equal and all should prosper in Canada. He first handedly had witnessed what it was like for Canadians in the west, north and east coast to be treated differently, both within the law and from other Canadians. This created a driving force within Diefenbaker to be a fighter for social justice and give Canadians a foundation of national identity. As Diefenbaker imagined a life full of politics from a very young age, his experience and knowledge

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2. Asa McKercher, *A "Half-hearted Response": Canada and The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962*. Taylor and Francis Ltd, 2011, 342

3. Smith, "DIEFENBAKER, JOHN GEORGE."

4. Smith, "DIEFENBAKER, JOHN GEORGE"

led him to have a confident edgy voice, and a determination like no other.<sup>5</sup> He lived his life fighting for others and wanting to make Canada a place where all would be accepted, all were heard, and all had a voice.

### **A Diefenbaker Government**

In 1957, after 22 years in opposition, the Progressive Conservatives took control with John Diefenbaker as prime minister.<sup>6</sup> When Canadians went to the polls that year, a Liberal victory seemed highly probable, but John Diefenbaker was the voice the Conservatives needed. Diefenbaker won a shocking victory with 38.5 percent of the popular vote and 112 seats.<sup>7</sup> After the election, Lester B. Pearson, the new Liberal leader, called for a vote of no confidence in the Diefenbaker government.<sup>8</sup> Pearson suggested that the election was used by Canadians to show the Liberals a lesson and suggested the Conservative Party step down to allow the “natural Government” to retake control.<sup>9</sup> This led Canadians to the polls in 1958. Seizing the opportunity and making good use of the arrogance of the Liberal opposition Diefenbaker presented a vision for Canadians based on development of resources and of the North. Diefenbaker won a majority vote in 1958, reaching a whopping 208 out of 265 seats<sup>10</sup>, 50 of which were from Quebec.

From the moment he gained power Diefenbaker would attempt to prove to Canadians that he was the right choice. He did not want to disappoint, but the lack of experience in his Cabinet after 22 years of being in opposition to the Liberals, proved disastrous. His government had to face a new economic downturn, the recession of 1960, and created its own troubles with the Coyne Affair as well as the fall of the Canadian dollar that led to the mocking printing of Diefenbaker by the Liberals.<sup>11</sup> This was all stirring while Canada was finding its footing on the world stage, as a developing middle power and a firm believer in the mediation possible through the United Nations.<sup>12</sup> Some nations began to see Canada as a western ally, while others identified Canada with being a puppet of Britain and the United States. While Canada was a member of the Commonwealth and had strong political ties with the United Kingdom, Canada had become a key western ally to the United States.

### **Canadian defense politics and developments leading up to the Cuban Missile Crisis**

The Cuban Missile Crisis was not the beginning of the people’s lack in confidence in Prime Minister Diefenbaker. Plans directed towards the defence of the West from possible Soviet aggression had been in progress during the early 1950s. Beginning at the end of the Second World War, the Cold War continued into the early 1990s, and centered on the geopolitical ideologies demonstrated in the West and with the

5. For this part of Diefenbaker’s life, see Denis Smith, *Rogue Tory: The Life and Legend of John G. Diefenbaker* (Toronto: Macfarlane Walter & Ross, 1977).

6. Smith, “DIEFENBAKER, JOHN GEORGE.”

7. Smith, “DIEFENBAKER, JOHN GEORGE.”

8. Smith, “DIEFENBAKER, JOHN GEORGE.”

9. Smith, “DIEFENBAKER, JOHN GEORGE.”

10. Robert Wardhaugh and Alan MacEachern, *Destinies: Canadian History Since Confederation* (Toronto: Nelson Publishing, 2017), 405.

11. Smith, “DIEFENBAKER, JOHN GEORGE.”

12. Smith, “DIEFENBAKER, JOHN GEORGE.”

Soviet Union. Fearful of the Soviet Communism making its way to the West, the United States built up its defense capabilities, while the Soviets, on the other hand, were fearful of Western ideologies threatening them.<sup>13</sup> In the early years of the Cold War, the main threat in the west came from Soviet bombers armed with nuclear bombs.<sup>14</sup> To defend against these, the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) equipped itself with high-performance fighter jets. These included the Canadian-built CF-100 Canuck interceptor, and later, the planned CF-105 Arrow.<sup>15</sup> It was during this time that Canada and the United States collaborated on several lines of defence in northern Canada, including the early warning radar stations, today known as the Distant Early Warning (D.E.W) line.<sup>16</sup>

The Avro Arrow project was another planned aspect of Canada's defence infrastructure put in to play by the Liberal Government after the Second World War. The project was supposed to produce CF-105 Avro Arrow Airplanes, designed to intercept Soviet nuclear bombers heading for the United States and Canada. These aircrafts were a highly advanced aerodynamic achievement, a military investment Canadians could be proud to have. Even under the Liberal government of Louis St. Laurent, officials were unsure of the viability of the production as well as its escalating cost.<sup>17</sup> The Liberal Government discussed scrapping the project but decided to move forward until at least after the federal election in 1967. When he was elected, Diefenbaker inherited a project that had an increasing number of problems and was deemed a public relations nightmare. As the economy was declining and intercontinental ballistic missile rendered interceptor aircraft such as the Avro Arrow obsolete due to their inability to carry nuclear warheads, Diefenbaker decided to shut down the Avro Project. An interesting piece to note here is that while this must have been a difficult decision for Diefenbaker, it was something that could have been avoided all together if the Liberal Government had acted before the election. Since the Liberal Government failed to act on this issue, Diefenbaker was blamed for cancelling the project and destroying, in the view of many Canadians, a great technological advance invented by Canadians.

Even with the Avro project terminated, Diefenbaker still believed that a defence system was necessary and turned to intercontinental missiles to protect North America from possible Soviet aggression. After the 1957 election Diefenbaker committed Canada to the North American Air Defence Command (NORAD), a continental air-defence alliance headed by an American Air Force general but one that the US and Canada co-operated on.<sup>18</sup> By then, it was clear that the use of nuclear technology was not going away, and with rising Soviet-Western tension, Canada and the United States worked together to assure North American continental Protection. The North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) was a pact made in 1957, at the

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13. Wardhaugh and MacEachern. *Destinies*: 440-44.

14. Alex Herd, 2006. *The Candian Encyclopedia: Canada and The Cold War*.

15. Herd, *The Candian Encyclopedia: Canada and The Cold War*.

16. Herd, *The Candian Encyclopedia: Canada and The Cold War*.

17. Smith, "DIEFENBAKER, JOHN GEORGE."

18. Wardhaugh and MacEachern, *Destinies*, 441.

height of the Cold War.<sup>19</sup> It officially went into effect and placed the air forces of Canada and the United States under joint command in 1958.<sup>20</sup>

As part of the defence strategy, Canada had acquired Bomarc Missiles to contribute to the intercontinental defense strategy of both nations.<sup>21</sup> In total, 56 Bomarc Missiles were purchased and sent to Canada; however, issues soon began when Diefenbaker took a step back and refused to equip the missiles with the nuclear warheads that the United States insisted were needed to make them fully functional and effective. That decision was among the first that made President Kennedy, who have been elected in 1960, frustrated with Diefenbaker and his frustrations only grew. Diefenbaker had become increasingly hesitant to place nuclear weapons on Canadian soil or have Canada become a nuclear power. He believed many Canadians were opposed to such weapons but for other Canadians – and for the United States – it gave them reason to doubt Diefenbaker’s judgment.

### **Canada, and the Relationship with the United States**

It is widely known that the relationship between Diefenbaker and President Kennedy was never a friendly nor even a tolerant one. The developments within NORAD and Diefenbaker’s decision on nuclear warheads caused a deep wedge between the two leaders. Both leaders deeply mistrusted one another, and both pursued what they felt was their countries greatest national interest. Entering Parliament, Diefenbaker describes in his memoirs how his government “inherited a degraded Parliament as a direct consequence of Liberal Policies.”<sup>22</sup> He describes the trade imbalance with the United States that Canada had developed in the post-1945 period as shocking, noting that by 1957, the United States accounted for 60 percent of Canada’s exports and 73 percent of its imports.<sup>23</sup> Diefenbaker aimed to change this, and reduce the dependence of Canada’s trade on the United States and diversify trade with different trading partners. He was worried heavily about the threat to Canada’s sovereignty with its dependence on the American market. Moreover, to many, Canada looked to be a puppet of the United States and with so much American investment in Canada, it would be hard for one to reject this notion. Diefenbaker was determined to see that Canada’s sovereignty as a nation was not compromised. In an effort to reduce U.S investments in Canada, Diefenbaker applied special taxes on interest, dividends and profits to non-residents. Such policies furthered his reputation for being Anti-American.<sup>24</sup>

“I am not anti-American but pro- Canadian,”<sup>25</sup> Diefenbaker insisted. He noted that if Canada failed to diversify its trade, Canada would no longer belong to Canadians, a very real fear for Canadian citizens.<sup>26</sup> Diefenbaker had a strong desire to limit American economic influence on Canada and he hoped the lessening

19. J.L. Granatstein, *The Canadian Encyclopedia: NORAD*. 2006.

20. Granatstein, *NORAD*.

21. Taylor C Noakes, *The Canadian Encyclopedia: Canada and Nuclear weapons*. 2021.

22. John G. Diefenbaker, *One Canada: Memoirs of the Right Honourable John G. Diefenbaker*. Toronto: Macmillan Canada, 1975), 67.

23. Diefenbaker, *One Canada*, 71

24. Wardhaugh and Alan MacEachern, *Destinies*, 440.

25. Arthur. Milnes, n.d. "Remembering the Chief Average Canadians felt empowered by Diefenbaker." *Toronto Star*.

26. Diefenbaker, *One Canada*, 73.

of American influence would change how some of the world perceived Canada. While Canada is a close ally and friend of the United States, its first duty is to take care of its own citizens and continue to make sure their global relations are in order. Making drastic cuts to American businesses in Canada could have long-term lasting negative effects, and Diefenbaker took this into consideration when Kennedy urged him to become a part of the Organization of American States (O.A.S.).<sup>27</sup> Diefenbaker politely declined, acknowledging that joining the O.A.S. would cause more issues than it would solve for Canada.

While John F. Kennedy was never Diefenbaker's close friend, there was a diplomatic incident that pushed the two to a point of no return in terms of their relationship. Prime Minister Diefenbaker discovered a memorandum left behind by the U. S ambassador during his visit to Diefenbaker's office. The famous "Rostow Memo" indicated a number of key issues that the United States wanted to "push" Canada and the prime Minister on.<sup>28</sup> Diefenbaker was not pleased. One could say the memo gave Diefenbaker the justification to be fearful of the United States and to be worried about their true intentions. While Kennedy by no means wanted to be close with Diefenbaker, Diefenbaker now had a clear reason to be suspicious towards Kennedy and felt the memo was a clear sign that the United States believed they could dominate Canada. Diefenbaker realized he had to be careful about what the United States expected of Canada, and step carefully to avoid Canada becoming an American puppet state. The United States believed that with agreements such as NORAD, Canada and its military would come to their aid whenever the United States deemed it necessary, wanting no questions to be asked.<sup>29</sup> Due to the lack of trust caused by the Rostow memorandum, Diefenbaker believed Kennedy would not be completely truthful on any issues.

### **Cuban Missile Crisis**

The Cuban Missile Crisis is a major event of the Cold war. The United States and the Soviet Union were competing to be the dominant power, metaphorically speaking the two have been attempting to be the bigger fish in the pond, or rather the tough person on the playground. While the United States were first to develop the nuclear warhead, the Soviets were close behind. In a letter written by USSR President Nikita Khrushchev to President Kennedy, Khrushchev outlined his reasoning behind the placement of Soviet nuclear war heads in Cuba:

You want to make your country safe. This is understandable, but Cuba, too, wants the same thing. All countries want to make themselves safe. But how are we, the Soviet Union and our government, to assess your actions which are expressed in the fact that you have surrounded the Soviet Union with military bases, surrounded our allies with military bases, literally disposed military bases around our country, and stationed your rocket armaments there? This is not a secret. American officials are demonstratively saying this. Your rockets are situated in Britain and Italy and aimed against us. Your rockets are situated in Turkey. You are worried by Cuba. You say that it worries you because it is 90 miles by sea from the American coast. However,

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27. Diefenbaker, *One Canada*, 171.

28. Smith, "DIEFENBAKER, JOHN GEORGE."

29. Jocelyn Maynard Ghent. "Canada, The United States, and the Cuban Missile Crisis." *JSTOR*, 1979, 161.

Turkey is next to us. .... I therefore make this proposal. We agree to remove from Cuba those means which you regard as offensive means. We agree to carry this out and declare this pledge in the United Nations. Your representatives will make a declaration to the effect that the United States on its part, considering the uneasiness and anxiety of the Soviet state, will remove its analogous means from Turkey. Let us reach agreement as to the span of time needed for you and us to achieve this. After this, persons enjoying the confidence of the U.N. Security Council might check on-the-spot fulfillment of the pledges assumed.<sup>30</sup>

In this letter, we can gauge the thought process behind the Soviet action that resulted in the Cuban Missile Crisis. There is a justification as a means of providing a defence from the United States. With Khrushchev mentioning the United States' placing of nuclear warheads in close proximity to the Soviet Union, we can easily sense Khrushchev felt threatened by the United States. The world had descended into a fight between Democracy and Communism. Both the United States and the Soviet Union felt threatened and no provocation from the other could go unchallenged.

A month prior to the Cuban Missile Crisis President Kennedy expressed growing concern with Russian build up of military power. Kennedy had stated that there was no immediate evidence of a significant offensive capability, however if this were to change the United States would do "whatever must be done to protect its own security and that of its allies."<sup>31</sup> While Diefenbaker believed the United States was overreacting to Cuba's potential threat, the United States expected Canadians to cooperate in containing Cuba due to their location in the western hemisphere.<sup>32</sup> This American assumption was based on the previously situated NORAD agreement, as well as the understanding that Canada was an essential part of the western hemisphere and thus would want to protect its allies. Despite the desires of the United States, "Whatever or wherever you lead, we follow", was no policy for Canada<sup>33</sup>.

While American planning was in progress prior to October 1962, the Cuban missile crisis is deemed to have begun on the 16th day of that month.<sup>34</sup> An American U2 Military Aircraft was instructed to fly over Cuba in efforts to identify what the Soviet Union was doing there.<sup>35</sup> The images it returned threatened the tenuous peace between east and west, Soviet nuclear missiles were now in Cuba. With photographic evidence of the installation of missiles in Cuba, President Kennedy took several days to develop a response.<sup>36</sup> The pressure was on, and the United States planned to do whatever necessary to protect its country and citizens. Ironically, while Diefenbaker was expected to react quickly to the intelligence from President Kennedy, the American President did not begin consulting with world leaders until several days after the crisis began. Kennedy and his

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30. Khrushchev, 1962, "Message from Khrushchev to Kennedy." 1962, Oct 27.

31. Ghent, "Canada, The United States, and the Cuban Missile Crisis," 162.

32. Ghent, "Canada, The United States, and the Cuban Missile Crisis," 161.

33. Ghent, "Canada, The United States, and the Cuban Missile Crisis," 181.

34. Diefenbaker Canada Centre: Canada's Role in the Cuban Missile Crisis n.d.

35. Mathew Gurney, *Leaders in Conflict: Diefenbaker, Kennedy, and Canada's Response to the Cuban Missile Crisis*. Thesis, Wilfrid Laurier University, 2009, 70.

36. Ghent, "Canada, The United States, and the Cuban Missile Crisis," 162.

advisors spent a week discussing what to do.<sup>37</sup> Kennedy mounted an immediate naval blockade of Cuba, and he labeled it a “quarantine,” since in international legal terms a naval blockade was an act of war that required a formal declaration of war.<sup>38</sup>

Prior to the United States Government informing Diefenbaker, two Canadian intelligence officials were informally invited to sit in on a meeting of their American colleagues. These agents immediately reported to Ottawa about the missiles in Cuba.<sup>39</sup> In a meeting with the United States ambassador, Diefenbaker was presented with a letter that Kennedy intended to use to address Americans in a live broadcast. Diefenbaker had several questions about the letter as well, questioning the President’s haste in moving to impose a blockade, which was technically an act of war. Diefenbaker was disappointed that Kennedy did not consult the United Nations for approval before taking such an aggressive action.

The speech that Kennedy gave took Diefenbaker by surprise, as it was not at all what he had previously been informed. As the U.S. Military went on to defense condition (DEFCON 3) on 22 October, U.S. officials requested that Canada match the level of readiness.<sup>40</sup> A major issue during this crisis was the lack of communication between leaders, while Kennedy had promised to keep Canada informed, stating “I will do all I can to keep you fully informed”<sup>41</sup> most communication went through military personnel. In Canada that meant going first to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Howard Green, who then consulted Prime Minister Diefenbaker.

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37. Denis Stairs, 2006. *The Canadian Encyclopedia: Canada and The Cuban Missile Crisis*.

38. Stairs, *The Canadian Encyclopedia: Canada and The Cuban Missile Crisis*.

39. Gurney, *Leaders in Conflict*, 77.

40. Asa McKercher, *A "Half-hearted Response"? Canada and The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962*. Taylor and Francis Ltd, 2011, 342.

41. Ghent, “Canada, The United States, and the Cuban Missile Crisis,” 163.



A24 Sussex – Prime Minister Diefenbaker, President Kennedy, Mrs. Kennedy, and Mrs. Diefenbaker, May 17th, 1961- Library and Archives Canada

Diefenbaker believed that all major decisions should go through him and the Cabinet. He did not feel that decisions, especially in such critical situations as this one was, should be left up to the military. Many Canadian citizens were deeply concerned with the potential use of nuclear technology and were opposed to them being placed on Canadian soil.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the use of nuclear technology was typically against Canadian beliefs and values and not aligned with the goals of the United Nations. Being a middle power and having a reputation as a mediator, Canada might be able to play a role that might defuse the situations and avoid Canada going to Defcon 3 as per request by the United States.

Diefenbaker had several reasons for procrastinating on this important decision. Not only was he asked to set alert to Defcon 3 with no initial warning directly after President Kennedy's speech, but also Diefenbaker did also not want to go against Canadian values and place Canadian citizens into a situation they did not ask to be in. While he was in support of the United States doing what was necessary to deal with Soviet aggression, he expected due diligence by the United States and to have them engage in dialogue with the Soviets through the United Nations and certainly consult with him before issuing instructions to the Canadian

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42. Diefenbaker Canada Centre: The Nuclear Question in Canada n.d.

military. Diefenbaker and the Canadian Government were concerned with the appearance of Canada to other nations if it simply did what the US instructed it to do. If Canada were to go on Defcon 3, Canada could appear defensive, aggressive and even as a puppet of the United States. One thing Diefenbaker wanted to make sure of as prime minister was that Canada was able to stand on its own and act independently, not only as an independent secure member of the Commonwealth and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization but as well as independent from the United States.

Diefenbaker had refused to place the military on alert and deliberated for several days over raising Canadian forces to DEFCON 3.<sup>43</sup> The issue here was whether to comply with the United States' request. The vague outlines of the NORAD agreements had given the United States the ability to inform the prime minister of the plans, and this would count as a consultation. Diefenbaker and Canada's Foreign Minister, Secretary of State for External Affairs, Howard Green, were wary of falling too quickly into line with American demands. They were also concerned that placing Canada's military on alert might provoke the Soviet Union.<sup>44</sup> Regardless of this, it did not stop Green from going behind the Prime Minister's back and informing the military to place their awareness level to DEFCON 3. Two days later, as the United States had increased their DEFCON level from level 3 to DEFCON 2, a level representing imminent war. Diefenbaker did tell his defense minister to go ahead to DEFCON 3, but Harkness later acknowledged, "I never told him that I had already done so".<sup>45</sup>

Lasting for 13 days, the Cuban Missile crisis ended after a standoff on 28 October with the help of United Nations diplomats. Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev agreed to dismantle and remove the Soviet missiles, in return for Kennedy's promise not to invade Cuba<sup>46</sup>.

### Conclusion

The Cuban missile crisis was one of the closest moments in history when humanity came closest to total nuclear annihilation. John G. Diefenbaker wanted the best for all Canadians and the world. Many have argued that Diefenbaker hesitated in a time of great need and uncertainty, but perhaps one can also argue that his careful consideration was warranted. Given his relationship with United States President John F. Kennedy, his distrust of American motives given the Rostow Memorandum, Diefenbaker was justified in his hesitation and exploring other avenues were available to deal with the Soviet threat, decidedly through the United Nations. In his delay to respond to the incident as the Americans expected, Diefenbaker searched for several options that would benefit all parties. He did not want to send the Canadian military into another war if it were something that may have been prevented. Nor did he want Canada to look like a 'puppet' of the United States or be bullied by the Americans into using force. If he had not stood his ground, believing in what he felt was right for his citizens and his country, and then the result very well may have ended differently. We know that his delay

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43. Diefenbaker Canada Centre: Canadas Role in the Cuban Missile Crisis n.d.

44. Stairs, *The Canadian Encyclopedia: Canada and The Cuban Missile Crisis*.

45. Ghent, "Canada, The United States, and the Cuban Missile Crisis," 177.

46. Stairs, *The Canadian Encyclopedia: Canada and The Cuban Missile Crisis*.

or hesitation is what made citizens distrust his judgment in Cabinet and as Canada's prime minister, but the Right Honorable John G. Diefenbaker proved that through his life in politics he stayed true to his values.

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# LESTER B. PEARSON'S RESPONSE TO QUEBEC SEPARATISM

Corey Safinuk

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## Introduction

Since before the Confederation in 1867 Francophone-Anglophone relations have been a troubling issue in Canada. The Anglophone population of Canada outpaced their French-speaking counterparts by the 1850s, aided largely by the arrival of British Loyalists following the American Revolution in 1776. As they became a minority in British North America, the Francophone population came to view numerical disparity as a political and existential threat.<sup>1</sup> As a defence mechanism, Quebec turned increasingly inward, believing that it could protect its culture and distinct identity by embracing Catholicism, the French language, and a rural way of life. It frequently rejected much of what was happening in the rest of Canada and lamented that when its interests and objectives conflicted with English-speaking Canada, it was ignored, even by the federal government. In the period following the Second World War, Quebec underwent a significant transformation, generally referred to as the Quiet Revolution. The transformation led to demands for greater powers with the Canadian federation to manage its own affairs and then, by the 1960s, to an increasing demand for separation. It was a development that L.B. Pearson, Canada's 14th Prime Minister, could not avoid.

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1. Cameron I. Crouch, "Managing Terrorism and Insurgency, (London: Routledge, 2010), 32.



City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 563, File 31, Item 04

## Toronto History, Lester Pearson at election campaign event. 9 May 1962

### Toronto History, Lester Pearson at election campaign event. 9 May 1962

In his memoirs, *Mike: The Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Lester B. Pearson*, Pearson describes the issue of national unity as “the most important issue of [his] career.”<sup>2</sup> There were several key issues that Pearson faced while attempting to bridge the gap between Quebec and Ottawa. Although Pearson’s efforts to provide representation for the French language seemed to be a clear effort towards solving the issue, many in Quebec viewed the new federal pension program as a federal overstep. Pearson’s efforts with the Fulton-Favreau Formula for repatriating the constitution were blocked by the Quebec government, and Quebec’s attempts to establish its own presence, threatened to split the nation apart. Add to this the actions of the terrorist movement, the Front de Libération du Québec which was formed in 1963, and it is easy to see why Pearson

2. Lester B. Pearson, John A. Munro, Alex I. Inglis, and Jean Chrétien, *Mike: the Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Lester B. Pearson*. Volume 3, 1957-1968. Edited by John A. Munro and Alex I. Inglis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 236.

considered national unity to be so important. Pearson spent much of his career working as a diplomat and, undoubtedly, developed a talent for finding the middle ground between two conflicting sides.<sup>3</sup> Those issues — and how Pearson responded to and addressed them — provide a clear example of Pearson's approach to a crisis.

Pearson went to considerable effort to promote the French language in Canada. This can be seen even before he was elected as prime minister. In a speech in December 1962, in the House of Commons, he argued that from the very confederation of Canada there was a misunderstanding between Francophones and Anglophones. He believed that French-speaking Canadians looked at Confederation as the creation of a bilingual Canada, but the Anglophones instead considered it an English-speaking Canada with a bilingual Quebec.<sup>4</sup> This lack of understanding of the importance in Quebec of the French language among English-speaking Canadians was what Pearson believed to be one of the issues plaguing Francophone-Anglophone relations. The misunderstanding had been the cause of such issues as the Manitoba Schools crisis and the tensions faced in Quebec during the First World War over conscription. Here, even before his election as Prime Minister, Pearson demonstrated his belief that Quebec and French-speaking Canadians were being treated unfairly and he believed certain compromises were needed by English-speaking Canada to improve relations between Anglophones and Francophones. He emphasized this point in his speech when he said: "The answer also depends, and I believe in greater degree, on English-speaking Canadians because we are in the majority. In managerial levels in industry, for instance, and in the federal public services, it is the English-speaking Canadians who must accept the changes which are required to make a reality of full partnership."<sup>5</sup>

Such an attitude permeated Pearson's approach throughout his time as Prime Minister. In his memoirs, Pearson described how, at the very first cabinet meeting of his government, he allowed any Minister who wished to speak in French to do so without fear of being misunderstood.<sup>6</sup> Such a step was an indicator of his willingness to accommodate Francophones both in his government and throughout the nation as a whole. Furthermore, Pearson emphasized the importance of the French language and encouraged its use throughout the federal government. It was encouraged in caucus and in the House of Commons, and Pearson even gave several broadcasts in French. Besides promoting French in the federal government, Pearson also expressed his concern over the lack of French education, summing it up in *Words and Occasions* to his own education in. His statement that, "Il est déplorable qu'au Canada chaque enfant d'âge scolaire n'ait pas au moins la possibilité d'apprendre la langue maternelle de près du tiers de notre population" was succinct and eloquent.<sup>7</sup> By making

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3. Lester B. Pearson, John A. Munro, Alex I. Inglis, and Jean Chrétien, *Mike: the Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Lester B. Pearson*. Volume 2, 1957-1968. Edited by John A. Munro and Alex I. Inglis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015).

4. Lester B. Pearson, *Words and Occasions an Anthology of Speeches and Articles Selected from His Papers* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970.), 193.

5. Pearson, *Words and Occasions*, 195.

6. Pearson, *Mike*, 237.

7. A rough translation would be: "It is deplorable that in Canada each child of school age does not have at least the opportunity to learn the mother tongue of around a third of our population" Pearson, Lester B. *Words and Occasions*, 208.

use of his own deficiency in the French language, he argued for a more bilingual education and, therefore, for a more bilingual Canada.

While it was important to Pearson to show respect and offer dignity to French-speaking Canadians, he was careful to not alienate English-speaking Canadians. Some of his statements and actions in consideration of Quebec and its people caused tension among the rest of the Canadian population. They began to worry that Pearson was asserting Quebec's interests and beliefs over that of the rest of Canada. Pearson responded to these concerns with confidence and patience. In a letter sent to a concerned citizen in April 1964, he wrote, "I have not and will not make any concessions to Quebec... which I do not feel are justified... Quebec [has] certain rights and privileges which are guaranteed by our constitution... this is not appeasement, but justice."<sup>8</sup> In those words, Pearson was expressing his understanding of Francophone-Anglophone relations. His concession towards the French language and the Quebec government were not an effort to promote the French language or the province of Quebec over the English language and the rest of Canada, but instead to provide them the just treatment long withheld from a member of the Canadian federation.

The most obvious example of Pearson's efforts to respect the right of Francophones to promote and use the French language and culture was the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. Pearson established the Commission in July 1963 to look into bilingualism and biculturalism across Canada. The Commission's broad purpose was to thoroughly examine relations between "Canada's two main language groups, with the purpose of recommending measures to establish a better relationship for the future."<sup>9</sup> Chaired by Andre Laurendeau and Davidson Dunton and staffed by academics and experts, it was not until 1970 that the Commission issued its final report. In the meantime, the Commission undertook years of hard work and faced considerable opposition throughout. Some claimed that the existence of the Commission itself would create additional problems rather than offering solutions to the crisis of Canadian unity. The preliminary report, submitted by the commission in 1964, pointed towards the time and effort required to complete such a project. It also expanded the goals of the Commission, stating that it would be looking not only at the French language and culture "but also with the problems arising from the existence in Canada of two distinct societies, each with its own culture, linguistic majority, and the power to break up the country."<sup>10</sup>

The Commission continued its work and finally published its report in six books, most of which were released after Pearson had already left office.<sup>11</sup> The publication of the report led to Pierre Trudeau's adoption of Canada's multiculturalism policy<sup>12</sup>. The Commission recommended widespread changes throughout Canada with the most notable being in education initiatives adopted across the country as well as New Brunswick declaring itself officially bilingual. The report laid the foundation for bilingualism, as well as multiculturalism

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8. Pearson, Mike, 244.

9. Pearson, Mike, 240.

10. Norman Hillmer, *Pearson the Unlikely Gladiator* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 84-85.

11. G. Laing, and Celine Cooper, "Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Accessed March 20, 2023.

12. G. Laing and Celine Cooper, "Royal Commission".

across Canada, and it served as proof that Pearson believed in equalising the relationship between the French and English languages and those who spoke it. Even though the effects of the Commission would not be implemented until after Pearson had left the office, the fact that Pearson appointed it almost immediately after assuming power, suggests Pearson's commitment to national unity and resolving the animosities between the Francophone and Anglophone populations of Canada.

Despite Pearson's efforts at promoting the French language and Francophone culture, the movement for Quebec nationalism and provincial autonomy continued to grow. That is evident in Quebec's objections to Pearson's proposed pension program, introduced in 1964. Pearson presented the plan to the provinces where it ran into serious trouble. The Premier of Ontario, John Robarts, made several objections to the plan at the federal-provincial conference in September 1963, and it had to be redrafted to take these into account. When Premier Jean Lesage of Quebec suggested that the next conference be held in Quebec City in late March, the federal government did not object. Jean Lesage had seemed cooperative at the September conference and being a Liberal himself had worked with Pearson for years before. They were even "cabinet colleague[s]" between 1953 and 1957<sup>13</sup>.

However, the confidence of the federal government crumbled once Lesage presented his demands for the pension scheme. The provincial government of Quebec demanded widespread changes including collection of 25 percent of federal income tax, millions more in assistance from the federal government, and that Quebec be allowed to have its own separate pension plan.<sup>14</sup> This drastic change in relationship was part of a growing trend of Quebec nationalism from Lesage – to have greater autonomy for the Quebec provincial government within the federal arrangement. It is unclear as to whether the Quebec Premier adopted new beliefs of Quebec nationalism himself, or whether he was instead put under growing pressure by separatists both in and out of his government to adopt a harsher relationship with Ottawa.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, the result is the same: Jean Lesage and his provincial government could no longer be counted on to support Pearson and the federal government, especially if Pearson's plans were to further centralize power in Ottawa. Despite this, Pearson and Lesage maintained an amicable relationship. They would meet up during their vacations and, in January 1965, Pearson even offered Lesage his pick of a cabinet position if he joined Pearson in his government in Ottawa.<sup>16</sup> Lesage declined, insisting he could not abandon Quebec, but the offer stands as evidence of Pearson's dedication to reconciling with Quebec.

The objection to the pension program was part of not just the issue of Francophone-Anglophone relations but also an example of a continuous push by the provinces, especially Quebec, against Ottawa attempting to strengthen federalism. Matters of jurisdiction like this are a part of any nation, but in Canada, and especially in reference to Quebec, they have played a critical role. Quebec has a long history of fighting with the federal

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13. Pearson, Mike, 244.

14. Peter Stursberg, *Lester Pearson and the Dream of Unity*, 1st ed. (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1978), 185.

15. Hillmer, *Pearson the Unlikely Gladiator*, 74-75.

16. Pearson would later deny this offer publicly, but confirm it later in his memoirs.

government over jurisdiction, as it believed that Quebec should be able to use its provincial powers to protect and promote its own distinct society. This created conflict between Quebec and Pearson's government over the funding of higher education when the Prime Minister and his government attempted to address the growing expense of higher education with scholarships and grants. Quebec pushed back on such federal intrusion, considering the application of funding by the federal government a direct interference in education, which had always been under provincial jurisdiction.<sup>17</sup> Quebec's objections to the pension program and to funding higher education brought the issue of jurisdiction to national attention, and as Pearson would later say in reference to the disagreements between the federal and Quebec governments, "There was danger of a real rift."<sup>18</sup>

Pearson was encouraged by those in his own government to go ahead with the pension plan in spite of the objections raised by Quebec but he decided to seek a compromise rather than risk a permanent split and further fracturing the country. Pearson met with Lesage in Quebec. The discussions were off-the-record, but Pearson describes them in his memoirs as "frank to the point of brutality."<sup>19</sup> In the end the two sides were able to reconcile by making modifications to the pension plans so that they were almost equal in effect while still allowing Quebec control over its own pension scheme. Further, an opting-out plan was implemented for some of the other shared-cost programs that Pearson considered, allowing Quebec to pick and choose from these programs. These concessions show, once again, that Pearson was willing to compromise with the Quebec government if it meant preserving national unity. Even when others from many quarters, including within his own government encouraged him to ignore Quebec, he still chose to meet with Lesage directly and find middle ground that would leave both sides, if not entirely thrilled, at least sufficiently mollified.

Pearson was well suited to finding compromise, and this can be seen in his reaction to Quebec's demands on a variety of issues and to how he navigated the complex world of Canadian federalism. Pearson believed that the federal government needed the tools to act in the nation's interest and such protection of the consolidation of power in Ottawa when he felt it was necessary could see him labeled as a centralist. In his memoirs, he describes his view on centralization as one of need.<sup>20</sup> However, when faced with growing pressure from Quebec to preserve its own rights and powers, Pearson was accommodating. He was firmly under the impression that forcing Quebec into line would not strengthen the nation but rather weaken it. Instead, he adopted a policy of Co-operative Federalism wherein the provinces would participate with the federal government in shared efforts at time, and in other instances tailor their participation to meet both federal and provincial objectives. Pearson demonstrated that loyalty to one's province and culture could coexist with loyalty to the nation. A person could be entirely loyal to Quebec and through the embrace of co-operative federalism, demonstrate their loyalty to Canada. This is demonstrated in his actions regarding the Canadian Pension Plan. When

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17. Pearson, Mike, 248.

18. Pearson, Mike, 248.

19. Pearson, Mike, 248.

20. Pearson, Mike, 238.

presented with a superior plan by Quebec, rather than ignore it and forge ahead, Pearson used the Quebec plan to improve what the policy he wanted for all Canadians.

Pearson's term in office was ambitious, but he was hampered by the fact that his government was a minority in both his terms and he was not able to accomplish several of his goals. Several of these unaccomplished goals were halted due to a lack of cooperation with Quebec with perhaps the most obvious example being the patriation of the constitution. The British North America Act was created in a time when Canada was far from truly independent of the British Empire, but since the World Wars Canada had won greater autonomy from Britain. The fact that the constitution was technically an act of the British parliament was something that Pearson believed he could change.<sup>21</sup>

The Fulton-Favreau Formula was not the first attempt by the Canadian government to patriate the constitution, but it was one attempt that seemed like it would finally succeed. It was co-authored by a Conservative and a Liberal, and when it was presented at the Charlottetown federal-provincial conference in 1964, Pearson believed that they had finally found a solution to the long-running problem of Canada's inability to change its constitution without the involvement of the British government. Pearson spoke to the premiers at the conference about the need to patriate the constitution, saying "we must acknowledge the strains imposed by our times on the national structure bequeathed to us; we must acknowledge them without being daunted by them. We must define them. And remove them."<sup>22</sup> It is evident that the repatriation was something Pearson believed essential to continued political growth for Canada, but it was not something that he alone could accomplish.

Jean Lesage made a commitment during this conference to have the formula approved during the 1964 Charlottetown conference along with the other premiers. Despite his commitment, one year later Lesage expressed his concerns with the formula to Pearson during a holiday in Florida. Lesage said that while there was strong opposition to it in the government of Quebec, he was still hopeful of finding approval for the formula in Québec.<sup>23</sup> By 1966, however, Lesage had all but abandoned the Fulton-Favreau Formula. The government of Quebec could not pass the formula and Lesage placed blame on the two houses of the Quebecois government.<sup>24</sup> While the agreement might have received enough support in the Legislative Assembly, the Upper House had an opposition majority. Lesage attempted to remove this second house from the government of Quebec but was defeated in a general election before it could be achieved. With the withdrawal of Quebec from the constitutional process, patriation was not achieved. Pearson held back from expressing publicly his dismay towards Lesage, but from how Pearson spoke of the necessity of passing the Fulton-Favreau Formula this failure must have been discouraging. The repatriation was finally passed by Pierre Trudeau and only in 1982. Trudeau, much like Pearson, ran into trouble with Quebec when attempting to repatriate the constitution.

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21. Pearson, Mike, 252.

22. Pearson, Words and Occasions, 235.

23. Pearson, Mike, 252.

24. Pearson, Mike, 252-253.

Trudeau's methods involved an aggressive stance against the government of Quebec, which was quite unlike Pearson's more conciliatory and accommodative approach. If Pearson had chosen a more aggressive stance towards national unity and the Fulton-Favreau Formula, it is possible that it might have been passed, but in exchange for pushing it through relations with Quebec might have worsened. This is the third example presented of Pearson's willingness to compromise and find a middle ground when faced with a crisis. At times that approach resulted in failure to solve a pressing issues but perhaps it helped to maintain national unity.

Throughout the national unity crisis during Pearson's tenure at prime minister, there was not only political tension, but also violence and political extremism perpetuated by Quebec separatists. The Front de Libération du Québec or FQL was an extremist movement dedicated to Quebec independence from Canada. This insurgency began shortly before Pearson became Liberal leader and Prime Minister and would continue after he left office. FLQ actions were instigated against federal buildings and officials and, while not as lethal as other more infamous terrorism movements elsewhere around the world, would still result in five deaths and a great number of injuries.<sup>25</sup> The first attack occurred on the 7 March 1963, when four youths spray painted a wall and threw an incendiary device at the Royal Montreal Regiment Armoury. Many of the attacks that followed were similar and mostly involved bombings, but with a notable exception, discussed in further detail in the following chapter on the 1970 October Crisis. In total the FLQ committed more than 200 violent acts. While many of these attacks were directed at the federal government and its agencies, police and government response was left to Quebec. The RCMP was involved in investigations of FLQ attacks and during the 1970 crisis the army was called in to support, but Pearson did not consider this movement to be a serious consideration while he was in office. In his memoirs Pearson mentioned the actions of the FLQ only briefly, and even then, he chose to focus on the October Crisis of 1970 and Trudeau's response rather than any actions he or his government took.<sup>26</sup> Pearson's reflections on this affair are indicative of his policy towards Quebec. Where possible, Pearson gave Quebec the freedom to manage their own affairs. Only when the decisions made by Quebec threatened the stability of the nation, was he willing to step in directly.

There were some issues, however, where Pearson could not and would not compromise. The efforts by the government of Quebec to present itself as partner to Canada on the international stage was one such issue. As part of the growing Quebec nationalist movement, Quebec had begun reaching out to other nations, independently from the federal government. The ability to conduct negotiations and arrange agreements with other nations is one of the criteria that defines a nation. The recognition from foreign powers that a state is separate from any other and is regarded as an equal is how people are able to define a state as a nation instead of only being a part of a nation. This idea is one that Pearson understood and he saw clearly the threat posed by allowing Quebec to be seen as separate from Canada on the international stage.<sup>27</sup>

The Quebec government's move towards international relations was followed both by Jean Lesage and

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25. Crouch, *Front de Libération Du Québec*, 33.

26. Pearson, *Mike*, 242.

27. Pearson, *Mike*, 259.

his successor, a more extreme Quebec nationalist, Daniel Johnson.<sup>28</sup> The primary interest internationally for Quebec centered around French-speaking nations throughout the world with France itself playing a major role. Quebec sent delegations to Paris, an act that Pearson believed was not unusual in and of itself. What Pearson did not agree with was the Quebec delegation signing international treaties as if it was its own separate state. When Gabon, a French-speaking nation, called an international conference in 1968, it invited Quebec to attend as a separate or independent entity. Pearson and his government were angered by that invitation and suspended their relations with Gabon in response. Pearson was well aware of the risks being posed by such international arrangements. In his memoirs he states in no uncertain terms that “two political nations cannot exist within one country.”<sup>29</sup> Here is found the breaking point for Pearson’s compromises. He would not allow Quebec to present itself as an international entity, and this fact would cause tension with France and its leader Charles De Gaulle.

Relations with France and De Gaulle started off rather promisingly for Pearson. In 1964 Pearson travelled to Paris to meet with the French leadership directly. Pearson had promised to visit Paris and London during the 1963 election, but he had been delayed by other affairs. Despite this delay the meeting between Pearson and Charles De Gaulle during this trip went, in Pearson’s opinion, quite well.<sup>30</sup> However, relations between France and Canada deteriorated sharply. De Gaulle and Pearson clashed on several points of international affairs ranging from the purchase of American rather than French airliners,<sup>31</sup> Canada’s refusal to sell uranium to France without conditions,<sup>32</sup> and many other direct insults and military withdrawals.

De Gaulle’s belief in a “grand dessin”<sup>33</sup> for Europe following the Second World War meant that he opposed American influence in Europe and believed that Canada was firmly under American sway. De Gaulle withdrew France from NATO military arrangements in March 1966 and, as part of such a decision, Canadian forces stationed in France were forced to leave.<sup>34</sup> This decision caused tension and was seen as an insult by many Canadians, including Pearson himself. To further aggravate this insult, the French government refused to participate directly in the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, a battle that played a large role in defining Canada as an independent nation and one that continues to play a role in Canadian-French relations. This snub, which Pearson believed was caused by mismanagement of a guest, shows clearly the tension and deteriorating relationship between Canada and France.<sup>35</sup>

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28. Hillmer, *Pearson the Unlikely Gladiator*, 72

29. Pearson, *Mike*, 238.

30. Pearson, *Mike*, 261.

31. Pearson, *Mike*, 263.

32. Hillmer, *Pearson the Unlikely Gladiator*, 80.

33. Hillmer, *Pearson the Unlikely Gladiator*, 79.

34. Hillmer, *Pearson the Unlikely Gladiator*, 80.



The Canadian Press/Chuck Mitchell. JULY 24/67–Former French President Charles de Gaulle making his famous “vive le Quebec libre” speech at Montreal’s city hall.

Worse than the deterioration of relations between Canada and France, were the growing ties between France and Quebec. France was the key supporter for Quebec’s push for independence in international affairs, which De Gaulle believed would be useful for his own goals. France began favoring Quebec City over Ottawa in international communications and relations which only emboldened Quebec nationalists. The most extreme example came during De Gaulle’s visit to Canada in 1967. Rather than beginning the trip in Ottawa, De Gaulle went straight to Quebec City and from there to the Exposition in Montreal. Once in Montreal he gave an impassioned speech comparing Quebec with France during the Second World War and finished with the inflammatory statements, “Vive Montreal! Vive le Quebec! Vive le Quebec libre! Vive le Canada francais et vive la France!”<sup>36</sup> This was a step too far for Pearson, and he responded aggressively in a speech. His sentiments are best expressed through this excerpt:

The people of Canada are free. Every province of Canada is free. Canadians do not need to be liberated. Indeed, many thousands of Canadians gave their lives in two world wars in the liberation of

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36. Hillmer, *Pearson the Unlikely Gladiator*, 79.

France and other European countries. Canada will remain united and will reject any effort to destroy her unity.<sup>37</sup>

De Gaulle took this as the reprimand it was meant to be and returned to France the next day without completing his planned visit.

With this example, it is clear that Pearson was unwilling to compromise when it came to Quebec participating separately in international affairs. Pearson's unwillingness to compromise on this subject may seem to contradict his actions and statements regarding other Quebec affairs, but this is incorrect. The above example instead serves to prove that Pearson could have resisted any of the decisions made by Quebec in opposition to him. It is clear that positive relations between Francophone and Anglophone were important to Pearson and his actions show how far he was willing to go in order to promote a strong and unified relationship between Quebec and the federal government.

### **Conclusion**

Pearson was prime minister during a trying time for Canada. The Quebec government and its Francophone population birthed a crisis in the form of Quebec nationalism. Pearson faced the crisis using the skills acquired through a long career in diplomacy. He promoted bilingualism and the French language to improve relations between Anglophones and Francophones. He reached a compromise with Lesage when Quebec refused to accept the federal pension program. He even yielded when it came to the patriation of the constitution, a problem that Pearson believed desperately needed resolution. When faced with the insurgency of the FQL, he allowed Quebec to handle it internally instead of stepping in directly. Despite these concessions, Pearson held firm when Quebec tried to present itself as a sovereign state to the international community. In summary, he conceded whenever possible in order to promote closer ties and rectify the long-standing issue of Francophone-Anglophone relations, but when he believed the integrity of Canada was threatened on the international stage, he refused to yield to Quebec's aspirations. On that issue, Pearson held his ground and fought for a strong, unified Canada.

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37. Pearson, Mike, 268.

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# TERRORISM IN CANADA: AN ANALYSIS OF PIERRE TRUDEAU'S RESPONSE TO THE FLQ AND THE 1970 OCTOBER CRISIS

Kara Sirke

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## Introduction

Tension and unease were words commonly used to summarize the experience of Canadians, and, indeed, citizens throughout much of the Western world, as they struggled during an era of social change in the 1960s.<sup>1</sup> In a period of sustained economic growth that had marked much of the world since the end of the Second World War, violence became the norm as marginalized groups protested for equality, basic freedoms, and their rightful place alongside the majority. It was a period of decolonization, especially in the developing world as citizens fought to remove imperial powers from their homelands. Canada was not immune to the social unrest and the violence that often accompanied the demand for radical change. Much of the tension and social unrest in Canada centered on a minority of Québécois who had grown increasingly frustrated with their English-speaking counterparts who, for decades, dominated the political, economic, and social spheres of the province of Quebec. The history of struggle between the French and English-speaking nations is older than Canada itself, and by the 1960s it appeared to some Quebec extremists that all previous attempts at establishing greater autonomy within the confines of the Canadian democratic system, had failed. In 1963 an extremist guerilla group, the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ) was founded, and its members vowed to end the marginal and disadvantaged status of French-speaking Québécois. The aim of the FLQ was a separate Quebec state, and the means required to achieve its goal were violence and terror.<sup>2</sup> It was a development that shook the very foundations of Canada.

With a terrorist presence threatening Canadian democracy, it was the role of the federal government to preserve the democratic system and bring order to the social unrest. Moreover, the federal government had a duty to preserve the rights and freedoms of all Canadians.<sup>3</sup> In 1968, towards the end of what had been

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1. "Pierre Trudeau's War Measure Act Speech during the October Crisis," CBC Archives, 1970, video, <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1558489391>.

2. William Tetley, *The October Crisis, 1970: An Insider's View* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 4.

3. Tetley, *The October Crisis*, 4.

a tumultuous decade, Canada elected Pierre Elliott Trudeau, a new prime minister. Trudeau envisioned a Canada that rejected the negative consequences of ethnic nationalism, and he embraced a culture of bilingualism and multiculturalism that recognized and promoted the inclusion of all of Canada's ethnic communities. He was also a champion of all forms of individual rights.<sup>4</sup> The new prime minister mixed his concerns with rights and freedom with a charisma that gave him celebrity status and led him to the first majority government in Canada since 1958. He came to office with a knowledgeable perception of the separatist crisis in Quebec and was prepared to bring his vision of Canada to fruition for the betterment of all Canadians, including the Québécois.<sup>5</sup> But, in 1970, a tragedy, now known as the October Crisis, shocked the nation and tested Trudeau's vision of a united Canada.

In early October 1970, two separate FLQ cells turned from violence through bombings and robberies to the kidnappings of political dignitaries, namely James Cross, British Trade Commissioner, and Pierre Laporte, Quebec Deputy-Premier and Minister of Labour. With the lives of Cross and Laporte in jeopardy, and with the fear of further kidnappings and violence, Trudeau and his cabinet faced a threat unlike anything before it in Canada.<sup>6</sup> This essay is an analysis of Trudeau's discourse and actions throughout the October Crisis, and it explores how his policies demonstrated the necessity to protect the parliamentary and democratic system and maintain a united front against the threat of insurrection. Trudeau rejected the FLQ's demands for a separate nation in Quebec; in his vision of Canada, there was no place for revolutionaries. Trudeau fought to protect Canadians' right to safety and individual freedom through a strict policy of determined state action. The escalation of violence by the FLQ, coupled with the threat of insurrection, forced Trudeau to deploy the army and invoke the War Measures Act, emergency legislation never before used during times of peace. Ultimately, Trudeau's actions were successful for his policies permanently nullified the FLQ threat, and he successfully achieved his objective of keeping the democratic system intact and Canada united.

### **Circumstances Prior to the 1970 October Crisis**

The October Crisis did not occur in a vacuum; its origins can be traced to the Quiet Revolution, a period of great social and political change that occurred in Quebec during the 1960s. The period for change was reflected in the Liberal Party of Quebec's rallying cry, *maîtres chez nous*, or "masters in our own home." Elected in 1960, the Liberal Party of Quebec replaced the earlier government of former Union Nationale leader Maurice Duplessis. Under the leadership of Premier Jean Lesage, the Liberals supported numerous social movements, such as student activism and feminist and gay rights, and made major reforms in social and economic policy.<sup>7</sup> In the 1960s, Francophones took control of their own affairs. The Quebec dream of "two equal collectivities" (English-speaking Canada and French-speaking Quebec) and the promotion of

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4. Robert Wright, *Trudeaumania: The Ride to Power of Pierre Elliot Trudeau* (Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, 2016), xiv.

5. Wright, *Trudeaumania*, xiv.

6. Pierre Elliott Trudeau, *Memoirs: Pierre Elliott Trudeau* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993), 134.

7. Dominique Clément, "The October Crisis of 1970: Human Rights Abuses Under the War Measures Act," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 42, no. 2 (2018): 162.

Quebec nationalism and patriotism became main objectives of the Quiet Revolution. There emerged the belief that social change led by Quebecers and control by French-speaking Quebecers over their own affairs in all spheres of government, economy, and society was possible only if the province had greater autonomy.<sup>8</sup> In essence, Quebec saw Canada as dual nations, one French-speaking and the other English-speaking, and one whereby the Francophone population in Quebec would enjoy greater autonomy. The Quiet Revolution was a manifestation of Québécois nationalism and while some supported the incremental, democratic approach to achieving greater control of its affairs, others believed that such a process was too slow and wanted to accelerate Quebec's new sense of nation.<sup>9</sup>

Quebec's dream of an autonomous nation also inspired the formation of separatist groups committed to an extreme version of Quebec nationalism. The most vocal and dedicated to that version was the terrorist group known as the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ). Founded in 1963, the FLQ and its members fought for reform and a separate Quebec. While once believed to have been connected to international Marxist or socialist factions, the FLQ had few such connections and had uniquely emerged from within the social and political environment of Quebec. Its members shared a distinct vision of a Quebec worker's state and sought to preserve French culture and language.<sup>10</sup>

What made the FLQ volatile was its membership structure and methods of promoting its objectives. It was comprised of various radical cells and by members that joined and left at random (often due to prison sentences for their criminal activity) and worked in secret and independently to achieve its different objectives.<sup>11</sup> The fluid movement of members and secrecy left authorities speculating about the actual size of membership of the FLQ. During the 16 October 1970 House of Commons debate, while the Crisis was ongoing, several ministers argued the FLQ was a small group of a few dozen, while others speculated a much greater membership of three thousand or more.<sup>12</sup> And who were these members? New Democratic leader, Tommy Douglas argued its membership was of the "disadvantaged" and "unfortunate" in Quebec, but Quebec MP and Social Credit leader, Real Caouette, disagreed with that interpretation. He insisted that FLQ membership was mostly from the educated middle-class.<sup>13</sup> Between 1963, when it was formed, and the October Crisis of 1970, the FLQ's revolutionary actions in public escalated and were often unpredictable. Banks were common targets of armed robberies as well as assaults on buildings that the FLQ claimed symbolized Francophone oppression. In fact,

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8. Guy Laforest, *Trudeau and the End of a Canadian Dream* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), Electronic Version, 5.

9. Consult Corey Safinuk's article within this Pressbook titled "Pearson and His Response to Quebec Separatism" for more information on Quebec nationalism and the 1960s Quiet Revolution.

10. Tetley, *The October Crisis*, 18.

11. Tetley, *The October Crisis*, 18.

12. Canada, "16 October 1970," *Official Report of the Debates of the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada: Third Session – Twenty-eighth Parliament: Volume 1* (Library of Parliament, 1970), 199 – 201, [https://parl.canadiana.ca/view/oop.debates\\_HOC2803\\_01/](https://parl.canadiana.ca/view/oop.debates_HOC2803_01/).

13. Canada, "16 October 1970," 200 – 201.

the FLQ bombed and torched two hundred buildings during this period,<sup>14</sup> including the Montreal Stock Exchange in February 1969 in an attack that injured twenty-seven people. It had been the ninth bombing incident that year.<sup>15</sup> The FLQ did not only cause injuries. In the seven years between 1963 and 1970, five innocent people were killed by FLQ bombings.<sup>16</sup> As the decade progressed and FLQ violence became more severe and sporadic, a state of paranoia emerged amongst the people of Quebec who did not know what might happen next.

It was into this unstable political environment that Canada elected the stylish and captivating, Pierre Elliott Trudeau. Born in Montreal on 18 October 1919, Trudeau inherited both French-Canadian and Scottish lineage. He studied law at l'Université de Montréal, political economy at Harvard University, and he continued his education in schools in both Paris and London. Self-identifying as "citizen of the world", Trudeau's travels gained him a special appreciation and global identity, however, it perhaps negatively impacted his identification with both his English and French roots. His bilingualism would aid him in his career in politics, however, his allegiance to the Francophone culture was always tainted by his English Canadian heritage at home in Quebec and, as such, he never fully embraced the ideals of Quebec nationalism that were espoused by many engaged in Quiet Revolution.<sup>17</sup>

Trudeau held a negative opinion of traditional Quebec nationalism based on ethnicity and language, and argued that it was "unnecessary, wrong-headed, and...immoral." He asserted that Francophone nationalism "imprisoned" French-speaking Canada from the rest of Canada and many of the nations around the globe. As a result, Trudeau was "uncomfortable" with much of French-speaking Quebec, and he viewed those who harboured a notion of Quebec independence as "politically backward." To Trudeau, too many in Quebec were stuck in its *ancien regime* heritage with its anti-democratic views, authoritarian clergy, and its inability to recognize that its nationalism was dangerous and prevented Quebec from changing for the betterment of its people.<sup>18</sup> To Trudeau, traditional French-Canadian nationalism rejected liberal values and was "the enemy of democracy, individual rights, and social and economic justice."<sup>19</sup> The best form of government, Trudeau believed, ensured its citizens personal freedom and protected the rights of all individuals. States that had embraced those ideas were said to have also embraced civic nationalism.<sup>20</sup> In contrast to nations that embraced a regime of rights and individual freedom, other forms of nationalism privileged collective rights, which, later in Trudeau's career, he argued created a hierarchy of citizens based on characteristics such as

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14. Tetley, *The October Crisis*, xxxvi.

15. Special to The New York Times, "Bomb Explodes in Montreal Stock Exchange, Wounding Many," *New York Times* (1923-), Feb 14, 1969, 8, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/118729920/EBD0683B30784617PQ/1?accountid=13480>.

16. Tetley, *The October Crisis*, XXVI & 39.

17. Kenneth McRoberts, *Misconceiving Canada: The Struggle for National Unity* (Toronto: Oxford University Press), Electronic Version, 56.

18. McRoberts, *Misconceiving Canada*, 56 – 57.

19. McRoberts, *Misconceiving Canada*, 58.

20. Raymond B. Blake, *We Are Canadian: Prime Ministers Build Canada's Story, From Mackenzie King to Justin Trudeau* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, Forthcoming 2023), 5.

race and language.<sup>21</sup> Those were values associated with ethnic nationalism, and Trudeau believed that the promotion of ethnic nationalism, or one collectivity over another, would create an unequal society, as it favored and prioritized certain groups within that society to the exclusion of others.<sup>22</sup> Finally, Trudeau argued that ethnic nationalism often led to war and governments based on that form of nationalism based its decisions on emotion and prejudice rather than logic and reason.<sup>23</sup>

Trudeau valued reason as the foundation for politics and offered federalism as a superior alternative to nationalism. Nationalism works to divide, he insisted, whereas federalism, with its divided jurisdiction between two orders of governments, functions to unite both levels of government to maintain the integrity and independence of both federal and provincial governments.<sup>24</sup> Trudeau argued that the unemotional dimensions of federalism made it the more inclusive and harmonious option for any state, especially those that were ethnically diverse.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, Trudeau valued federalism as he argued its division of powers was well-suited in Canada's diverse, multiethnic society. Trudeau envisioned a federalized Canada that was "balanced", neither predominately centralized nor decentralized, but a system that promoted the well-being of its workers and all citizens.<sup>26</sup> Trudeau's sense of nation was one that was united and equal. No ethnicity or group was above another or received special autonomy or special status. As a result, Trudeau vehemently opposed Quebec separatism and the idea of Canada as two-nations. In the case of Quebec, Trudeau feared that to grant the province special jurisdiction that other provinces did not have, or to allow it sovereign status, would place minorities in a French-speaking Quebec in a difficult situation. He argued new minority problems would arise in a separate Quebec if French nationalism continued to dictate decision making and policies.<sup>27</sup>

Trudeau had clear hopes for the nation that elected him, however it would be a long road to achieve his goals. Trudeau's support of federalism was central in his vision for Canada, however, for federalism to work, Trudeau theorized that all provinces must support an important role for the central government. Trudeau had the difficult task of securing the favor of many Quebecers who distrusted the federal government. Many in Quebec felt that the federal government treated the French-speaking minority as subordinate to the English population, and as a result the federal government gave English-speakers preferential treatment.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, with the state of nationalist fervor in 1960s Quebec, winning positive support for federalism proved to be an immense challenge for Trudeau.

### **The October Crisis**

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21. Paul Litt, *Elusive Destiny: The Political Vocation of John Napier Turner* (Vancouver: UBC Press), 131.

22. Raymond B. Blake, *We Are Canadian: Prime Ministers Build Canada's Story, From Mackenzie King to Justin Trudeau* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, Forthcoming 2023), 5.

23. McRoberts, *Misconceiving Canada*, 59.

24. Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopedia, "Federalism," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, February 7, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/federalism>.

25. McRoberts, *Misconceiving Canada*, 62.

26. Allen Mills, *Citizen Trudeau: An Intellectual Biography, 1944 – 1965* (Toronto: Oxford University Press), 330 – 333.

27. Allen Mills, *Citizen Trudeau: An Intellectual Biography, 1944 – 1965*, 126.

28. Tetley, *The October Crisis*, 12.

The October Crisis began 5 October 1970 when four FLQ members armed with guns stormed into British diplomat James Cross's Montreal home and abducted him from his bedroom.<sup>29</sup> The kidnapping severely tested Trudeau's ability to act during a national crisis, and the terror that unfolded was unlike anything ever experienced in Canada. According to *The Globe and Mail*, Mr. Cross was the first foreign diplomat to be kidnapped by a terrorist organization in Canada, but the twelfth in the Western Hemisphere since 4 September 1969.<sup>30</sup> Immediately after the kidnapping, the FLQ released its set of demands that were to be met by officials in Ottawa and Quebec City within 48-hours. The series of demands included \$500,000 in gold bars, the publication of the FLQ manifesto, and the release and safe passage to Cuba or Algeria<sup>31</sup> of FLQ "political prisoners" detained in Canada.<sup>32</sup>

The initial statements by the press reported an optimistic tone by the federal government. External Affairs Minister Mitchell Sharp was the first to address the public. He announced he was "hopeful" Mr. Cross would be released safely without the government needing to make any concessions to his FLQ kidnappers.<sup>33</sup> Later, in Trudeau's 1993 memoirs, Trudeau revealed a different tone when he stated the kidnapping shocked the federal government who "were badly equipped to deal"<sup>34</sup> with the seriousness of domestic terrorism. The abduction made clear to the government that the FLQ had changed their tactics to kidnapping, ransom, and the potential assassination of diplomats to have their demand for Quebec independence met.<sup>35</sup> After the kidnapping of Mr. Cross, Trudeau reiterated Mr. Sharp's hopeful statements to the House of Commons on 6 October, but his inability to offer much in the way of details suggested his Cabinet was still coming to grips with the complexity of the situation. Trudeau admitted that the government considered a reward payment, and that he was in close contact with the Quebec Premier, Robert Bourassa, who, along with Quebec police, were handling the situation.<sup>36</sup> Some opposition members in Parliament argued that the federal government was too silent on

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29. Ronald Lebel, "Ransom for Kidnapped Diplomat: FLQ Demands 0,000 in Gold, Free Prisoners, Part of Terms," *Globe and Mail* (1936-), Oct. 06, 1970, 1. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1242196429/2C5EE74663D3472APQ/1?accountid=13480>.

30. Ronald Lebel, "Ransom for Kidnapped Diplomat: FLQ Demands 0,000 In Gold, Free Prisoners, Part of Terms," *Globe and Mail* (1936-), Oct. 06, 1970, 1. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1242196429/2C5EE74663D3472APQ/1?accountid=13480>.

31. Cuba and Algeria had histories of class struggles against colonialism and imperialism in addition to previous accounts aiding foreign revolutionaries. The FLQ believed that either country would be sympathetic to their cause and would aid FLQ prisoners. Consult Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 of William Tetley, *The October Crisis, 1970: An Insider's View* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007) for further history.

32. "Note sets 48-hour Deadline," *The Ottawa Citizen* (1954-1973), Oct. 06, 1970, 1. <https://login.libproxy.uregina.ca:8443/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/october-6-1970-page-1-56/docview/2338776826/se-2>.

33. Greg Connolley, "Anxious MPs Grill Minister," *The Ottawa Citizen* (1954-1973), Oct. 06, 1970, 1. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2338776826?parentSessionId=MXtxki80eEwowCZCPSmT64+zkhMmVLKGi8ZqZfheyDA=&accountid=13480>.

34. Trudeau, *Memoirs*, 134.

35. Trudeau, *Memoirs*, 134.

36. Canada, "6 October 1970," *Official Report of the Debates of the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada: Second Session – Twenty-eighth Parliament: Volume 8* (Library of Parliament, 1970), 8,801, [https://parl.canadiana.ca/view/oop.debates\\_HOC2802\\_08/1](https://parl.canadiana.ca/view/oop.debates_HOC2802_08/1).

the matter and should not delay,<sup>37</sup> however, the quiet response from the federal government in the days after Cross's abduction suggested Trudeau and his cabinet took the matter very seriously but chose to proceed with caution. By 7 October, Trudeau made his position regarding the FLQ demands clear to the public when *The Montreal Gazette* publicized his statement that Ottawa would not allow a "minority group" to use violence and blackmail to force demands on the majority, and the government would not, in any way, bargain with the terrorists. Furthermore, Trudeau conceded that his decision was difficult since Mr. Cross's life hung in the balance, but, ultimately, the government's "commitment to society" was "greater than anything else."<sup>38</sup> At this stage of the crisis, Trudeau appeared confident and hopeful that he would bring the ordeal to a swift conclusion.

The seriousness of the FLQ intentions was made more horrifyingly clear when just days later, on 10 October, Quebec's Minister of Labour, Pierre Laporte, was abducted outside his home by a separate FLQ cell.<sup>39</sup> Laporte's kidnapping heightened the gravity of the situation for it became evident that the actions of the FLQ had increased in its unpredictability and that the potential for further kidnappings of politicians and government officials was extremely likely. According to a report from *The Globe and Mail*, the situation for Mr. Cross and Mr. Laporte was cause for great concern. Two separate letters, secretly left by the separate groups of kidnappers, revealed what would happen to both men if the updated set of FLQ demands were not met. For Mr. Cross to be returned "safe and sound" required the "liberation of political prisoners and an "end to the massive police manhunt." The FLQ cell that captured Mr. Laporte "insisted" they would "kill Mr. Laporte unless" the government did not accept the FLQ's original conditions.<sup>40</sup> Included with the conditions was a handwritten letter from Mr. Laporte that offered a disturbing glimpse into his current state. He pleaded for a safe return home and stated each meal felt like his last but that he hoped to soon be free. He was hopeful that the government would meet the FLQ demands, and he thanked those who had "contributed to this reasonable decision" to give in to the FLQ terms for his release. If all worked out, he would be back at work tomorrow, he wrote.<sup>41</sup>

Even after the kidnapping of Mr. Laporte, the federal government still had no intentions to give in to

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37. Canada, "6 October 1970," *Official Report of the Debates of the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada: Second Session – Twenty-eighth Parliament: Volume 8* (Library of Parliament, 1970), 8,801, [https://parl.canadiana.ca/view/oop.debates\\_HOC2802\\_08/1](https://parl.canadiana.ca/view/oop.debates_HOC2802_08/1).

38. "October 8, 1970 (Page 8 of 40)," *The Gazette (1867-2010)*, (Montreal, Canada), Oct 08, 1970, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2199044435/5F8BC98194E44B8PQ/1?accountid=13480>.

39. Edward Cowan, "Asked Men Seize Quebec Official; Briton Still Held: Kidnapping Comes Minutes After Government Offer for Cross's Release Masked Men Take Quebec Minister," *New York Times* (1923-), Oct 11, 1970, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/117862347/86C3E70E18B4513PQ/1?accountid=13480>.

40. Ronald Lebel and Lewis Seale, "Cabinet's Lawyer Talks to Lemieux," *Globe and Mail* (1936-) (Toronto, ON), Oct. 13, 1970, <https://login.libproxy.uregina.ca:8443/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/cabinets-lawyer-talks-lemieux/docview/1242206893/se-2>.

41. P.L., "Typewritten Message Sent to Station CKAC: Texts of Chenier Cell Communique and Laporte Letter to Premier of Quebec," *Globe and Mail* (1936-) (Toronto, ON), Oct. 13, 1970, <https://login.libproxy.uregina.ca:8443/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/typewritten-message-sent-station-ckac/docview/1242212925/se-2>.

the FLQ demands. On the same day the letters were found, the federal government had decided to enlist the Canadian Army to guard federal property in Ottawa and protect potential targets.<sup>42</sup> The need for extra protection in Ottawa coincided with the fact that cabinet ministers and Members of Parliament had returned to work after the Thanksgiving weekend.<sup>43</sup> While the 400 troops were used for protection, their presence on Canadian streets during a time of peace was an uncomfortable sight for many. Some felt that the troops only added to the public's anxiety and might antagonize the FLQ, prompting them to commit more, or worse, acts of terror or harm. Trudeau responded to the increase in public tension and fear outside Parliament the following day on 13 October. CBC reporters waited for his arrival and for the perfect opportunity to probe the prime minister on his response to the crisis. This spontaneous interaction with journalists became one of Trudeau's most defining interviews, for the chance to hear the prime minister speak frankly, without a rehearsed script, is a rare opportunity indeed.<sup>44</sup>

Trudeau's words and demeanor throughout that seven-minute interview revealed a great deal about his opinion on the FLQ, the kidnappings, and his response to the terrorist threat as well as his approach to governing in a crisis. In true Trudeau fashion, he did not hold back or equivocate, but rather chose to engage in the reporter's banter and defend Parliament's actions to the developing state of emergency. Trudeau was presented with challenging questions and concerns, but he responded to all with a sense of confidence and fortitude that could have been interpreted as arrogance. To the reporter's concern over a police state, Trudeau replied with "don't be silly" and argued that the army were only there to be "agents of peace" and to free up the responsibilities of the police so that they could concentrate on locating Mr. Cross and Mr. Laporte. Trudeau appeared to have little patience for those who were opposed to the extra protective measures and referred to those worried about the army as "bleeding hearts" and "weak-kneed" who could "go on and bleed". Trudeau believed the "natural" and most important response to terror and blackmail was to rid society of those committing that violence, and it was the government's "duty" to "protect government officials and important people" who were being used as "tools in this blackmail." To the reporter's question of how far he was willing to go, he infamously replied "just watch me." He ended the engagement in characteristic fashion: "This society must take every means at its disposal to defend itself against the emergent of a peril of power which defies the elected power of this country" and "so long as there is a power...which is challenging the elected representative of the people, I think that power must be stopped."<sup>45</sup>

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42. Tetley, "The October Crisis," 4.

43. David Crane, "Federal Ministers' Homes Protected: Troops Called in to Guard Ottawa; Quebec Starts FLQ Negotiations RCMP Gets Help in Security Move," *Globe and Mail* (1936-) (Toronto, ON), Oct. 13, 1970, <https://login.libproxy.uregina.ca:8443/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/federal-ministers-homes-protected/docview/1242206857/se-2>.

44. "1970: Pierre Trudeau says 'Just watch me' during October Crisis," CBC Archives, 1970, video, <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2565499342>.

45. "1970: Pierre Trudeau says 'Just watch me' during October Crisis," CBC Archives, 1970, video, <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2565499342>.



Reporters Tim Ralfe (right) and Peter Reilly (centre) question Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau (left) on the steps of Parliament Hill about the FLQ crisis and the invocation of the War Measures Act, Oct. 13, 1970, Peter Bregg, CP2871546, The Canadian Press.

Trudeau would not stand for any form of violence that threatened the unity of the nation or Canada's system of democracy. His response to the FLQ was to assure its members that he would do everything in the government's power to stop its threat to the democratic state, for he was obligated, as prime minister, to do exactly that. The FLQ threat was not limited to Quebec, Trudeau maintained, as Canada was a united nation and any threat to its unity in any one part of Canada was a national concern. As the FLQ appeared to gain support, and with potentially an escalation of its acts of violence, Trudeau urged Canadians, including the press, to work alongside the government to put an end to this collective threat. However, as the interview described above made clear, some members of the press questioned the federal government's approach to the crisis. Trudeau acknowledged at the end of that interview that the reporters play "devil's advocate" and that it was one "hell of a role." Trudeau was offended by the press's commitment to challenge the federal government rather than support its decisions. Trudeau revealed exactly how difficult it was to manage a crisis by stumping

the interviewer with the interviewer's own questions. For example, the reporter stated his discomfort over the presence of the military and asked Trudeau if he was worried that the army was not large enough to protect everyone and would only cause more harm in an already tense situation. Trudeau replied sarcastically with: "So what do you suggest? That we protect nobody?" This forced the reporter to rephrase his position on the matter. Furthermore, Trudeau argued that it was the press who had judged the situation incorrectly and had responded poorly, not the federal government. Trudeau stated that the goal of the FLQ was to receive publicity, and the press played a complicit role by providing it the publicity it sought. Trudeau called on the press to stop using the FLQ term, "political prisoners" and call them what they were — convicted criminals. Trudeau called them "bandits" and "outlaws,"<sup>46</sup> and in doing so called on the Canadian public to recognize the distinction. Throughout the interview Trudeau presented himself clearly, firmly, and without hesitation — as a determined and forceful leader. Overall, Trudeau's language and firm approach implied that he spoke as if his audience were FLQ members, and that a clear message had been sent that the federal army would not stand down or give in to its acts of terror.<sup>47</sup> The interview reflected one aspect of Trudeau's approach to managing a crisis.

Throughout the crisis, Trudeau kept in constant communication with the RCMP, Montreal police, and all levels of government in Quebec, and it was clear that not everyone agreed on the best course of action. The kidnappings had placed Trudeau in a complicated situation, for while the actions had taken place in Quebec, the kidnapping of a British diplomat made the crisis a federal issue. In his memoir, Trudeau writes "Just as our government counted on foreign governments to protect Canadian representatives when they were on their soil, it was our [federal] duty to protect their diplomats on ours."<sup>48</sup> Nonetheless, Trudeau depended upon the RCMP, as it was its mandate to ensure the safety of Canada, as well as the better judgement of the Mayor of Montreal, Jean Drapeau, and Premier Bourassa to make decisions that were best for their city and province. During a crisis, it is easy to predict that consulting with this many forms of leadership may lead to confusion and even disastrous outcomes if all advice is followed. Prominent labour and political leaders, for instance, including Parti Québécois leader René Lévesque, called on Bourassa to "free the 'political prisoners' to save Laporte." Mayor Jean Drapeau and Premier Bourassa recommended that all suspected FLQ members and sympathizers be detained. During a Cabinet Committee on Security and Intelligence meeting to discuss the federal government's response, RCMP Commissioner William Higgitt stated that provincial authorities only wanted "action for the sake of action" and he suggested that no further legislation was required.<sup>49</sup> Based upon these very different opinions surrounding the situation and ideas for which to proceed, one leader had to take charge and make the difficult decision.

During two meetings on 15 October, Trudeau's Cabinet was told the conditions in Montreal were dire. The Quebec government had called on the federal government to enact special legislation to deal with the

46. "1970: Pierre Trudeau says 'Just watch me' during October Crisis," CBC Archives, 1970, video, <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2565499342>.

47. "1970: Pierre Trudeau says 'Just watch me' during October Crisis," CBC Archives, 1970, video, <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2565499342>.

48. Trudeau, *Memoirs*, 135.

49. Litt, *Elusive Destiny*, 123.

ongoing crisis. Authorities knew the FLQ had in their position dynamite and explosives and, combined with the growth of public support for the FLQ and the very real threat of insurrection, time was running out for the government to act. In fact, the federal government needed to “act as soon as possible.”<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, Trudeau argued that the more time the federal government allowed opinion makers in Quebec to negotiate the release of FLQ prisoners, “the more we stood to lose.”<sup>51</sup> The release of FLQ criminals was not an option for Trudeau. In Trudeau’s 1993 memoirs he reiterated his position to never negotiate with terrorists, “not even to obtain the release of a hostage.” Trudeau explained that to do so would begin an endless chain of violence and kidnappings for it would have taught the FLQ one thing: they could continue to be arrested on acts of violence because all that was needed to be set free was to kidnap again and demand their safe release.<sup>52</sup> Trudeau made it clear that he would avoid insurrection at all costs, for insurrection would be the ultimate defeat of democracy and political stability, and the only way to prevent it was to act before the FLQ had a chance to succeed.<sup>53</sup> Trudeau and his cabinet considered and debated their special legislative options and reached a consensus that evening. All ministers agreed to invoke the War Measures Act as it was the best means to, as Trudeau explained in his memoirs, “prevent the situation from degenerating into chaos”.<sup>54</sup> The War Measures Act, however, would have limits in its “duration” and “scope,” and would not become official until the federal government received an authorized written request from the Quebec levels of government stating there was “no alternative” but to invoke emergency powers.<sup>55</sup> On 16 October, Trudeau addressed the House of Commons with the cabinet’s decision. Later that same day, Trudeau delivered a speech to the nation which explained the reasoning for the government’s decision to invoke the War Measures Act, and reminded the nation that the federal government was in charge of the situation.

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50. “The FLQ Situation,” Cabinet meeting, October 15, 1970, 9:00 a.m., 4, Cabinet conclusions, LAC, RG 2, Privy Council Office, Series A-5-a, vol. 6359, <http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=CabCon&id=137&lang=eng>.

51. “The FLQ Situation,” Cabinet meeting, October 15, 1970, 9:00 a.m., 5, Cabinet conclusions, LAC, RG 2, Privy Council Office, Series A-5-a, vol. 6359, <http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=CabCon&id=137&lang=eng>.

52. Trudeau, *Memoirs*, 134.

53. Trudeau, *Memoirs*, 143.

54. Trudeau, *Memoirs*, 143.

55. “The FLQ Situation,” Cabinet meeting, October 15, 1970 (p.m. Session), 8, Cabinet conclusions, LAC, RG 2, Privy Council Office, Series A-5-a, vol. 6359, <http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=CabCon&id=138&lang=eng>.



War Measures Act, A newsboy holds up a newspaper with a banner headline reporting the invoking of the War Measures Act Oct 16, the first time Canada had invoked the act in peacetime, 1970, Peter Bregg, CP2757477, The Canadian Press.

The first portion of Trudeau's speech over the entire CBC network was to deliver a clear overview of the current situation with the aim to ensure Canadians knew the facts. Until this moment, most of the information Canadians had received came through the press. Therefore, Trudeau's speech provided the public the prime minister's perspective. Trudeau connected to the deeper emotions and fear of Canadians and offered a national warning. He described the kidnappers as "violent and fanatical" who were "attempting to destroy the unity and freedom of Canada." As such, Canada was in a "grave crisis" and the safe return of Mr. Cross and Mr. Laporte was of "utmost gravity" to the government. While the FLQ worked to divide Canada, Trudeau's address to the nation worked to unite Canadians. Trudeau also hoped to dismantle any public support or sympathy for the FLQ members by presenting them as murderers, not martyrs, who were to pay for their violent crimes against democracy and the freedom of all individuals. While Trudeau described Canadians as "tolerant" and "compassionate," the federal government was showing leadership with a firm approach to a growing crisis. Ottawa would not give in to FLQ blackmail to release criminals for if it did Canada's legal system would "breakdown" and, Trudeau warned, would be replaced by "the law of the jungle." Trudeau played on the public's fear to paint a picture of a chaotic future if the FLQ were supported or were victorious, but he did acknowledge that there was work needed to fix Canada's deeply rooted social issues. Violence, however, was not the answer to enact change. Democracy needed to be preserved, for if Canadians disagreed with its government, they were free to elect others to replace it through peaceful means. Finally, Trudeau concluded the first portion of his speech with a clear message: if harm were to come to Mr. Cross or Mr.

Laporte, it would be the fault of the FLQ, not the government, and “only the most twisted form of logic could conclude otherwise.” This statement was an attempt to remind the nation that its enemies were the FLQ, not the federal government, and that the government did not stand for violence against individuals or individual liberties but acted in Canadians best interest.<sup>56</sup>

The final portion of the speech to the nation highlighted the seriousness of the crisis, and the government’s reasoning for invoking the War Measures Act. Trudeau used clear language to explain how the government planned to use the Act, and dramatic language to justify its necessity. Trudeau compared the armed revolutionaries to a “cancer” that needed to be destroyed to protect Canadian freedoms. Trudeau realized there would be opposition to the War Measures Act, and his attempt to deflect blame made it clear that the federal government was “reluctant” to invoke such powers. The Act was only invoked at the request of the Quebec government which made it “crystal clear” that there was no other alternative to control the situation. Trudeau acknowledged that the “strong powers” were “distasteful” but necessary to effectively prevent the “violent overthrow of [the] democratic system” by allowing the police more freedom to do their job. The government was accountable for any action taken while the Act was in place, and the legislation providing for the Act would be revoked as soon as it was deemed necessary. Trudeau called on Canadians not to become “obsessed” with the government’s decision, but to recognize that the “vicious game” was started by the revolutionaries. The government was only acting to defend a Canadian society free from hate. Finally, Trudeau presented a clear message for anyone who was still unsure about the use of emergency powers. The War Measures Act would protect the life and liberty of all Canadians and make clear to “kidnappers, revolutionaries, and assassins” that “laws are made and changed by the elected representatives of all Canadians,” not “self-selected dictators.” Trudeau’s speech ultimately presented to Canadians that their interests and freedoms were protected in its current state, and an FLQ victory would be a nightmare, for all those who gain power through terror rule through terror.<sup>57</sup>

On 18 October, two days after the War Measures Act was invoked, the crisis peaked after Pierre Laporte was found executed in a trunk of a car at St. Hubert Airport.<sup>58</sup> Trudeau addressed the nation again, only this time the tone of his speech was somber as he shared the same shock felt by all Canadians. Trudeau’s address was brief. He called Mr. Laporte’s assassins “cowards” and his death a “cruel and senseless shame” that should never have occurred. He ended with an expression of deep regret to Mr. Laporte’s family and called on all Canadians to “stick together” in this “very sorry moment in our history.”<sup>59</sup> The outcome of Laporte’s murder united Canadians and as a result Trudeau received significant support. Trudeau opened the 19 October House

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56. “Pierre Trudeau’s War Measure Act Speech during the October Crisis,” CBC Archives, 1970, video, <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1558489391>.

57. “Pierre Trudeau’s War Measure Act Speech during the October Crisis,” CBC Archives, 1970, video, <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1558489391>.

58. Litt, *Elusive Destiny*, 128.

59. “Pierre Laporte Crisis,” Fed Vid, March 29, 2011, video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-Oia6N5600>.

Debates with a message that the FLQ had revealed it had “no mandate but terror, no policies but violence, and no solutions but murder” and had “sown the seeds of its own destruction.” The death of Laporte would become a symbol for Canada’s “opposition to division, disunity, and hatred,” and Canadians shared “passion for justice” would bring an end to the terrorism and “find peace and freedom.”<sup>60</sup> While some opposition towards the use of the War Measures Act was expressed in the House of Commons, ultimately all members agreed that it was important to stand together in Canada’s time of mourning,<sup>61</sup> and the House of Commons passed a motion in support of the War Measures Act.<sup>62</sup>

Trudeau deflected blame for any criticism the federal government received for invoking the War Measures Act on Quebec police, and alternatively argued that the federal government responded the best it could under abnormal circumstances precipitated by the crisis. By 28 October, due to the police’s power to arrest freely, almost 400 people were detained on suspicion of FLQ affiliation, and of that total number 259 were eventually released without charges.<sup>63</sup> In Trudeau’s 1993 memoir, he takes no responsibility for those arrests and argued it was the job of the Montreal and provincial police to properly verify its list of suspects. He acknowledged that mistakes happen, especially in a time of crisis, therefore forgiveness and understanding should be given to the police.<sup>64</sup> This made for a strong argument and proved Trudeau’s intentions were not dictatorial when he invoked the War Measures Act, for he allowed each branch of police the freedom to act without federal intervention. Furthermore, the federal government followed through on its promises to defend Canadians and revoked its emergency powers as soon as the crisis ended. The government, still unsure of FLQ popularity and depth at the time, introduced new legislation on 2 November 1970 when it replaced the War Measures Act with the Public Order (Temporary Measures) Act. This act came into effect 3 December 1970 and lasted until 30 April 1971 and was a more direct legislation as it dealt specifically against the FLQ.<sup>65</sup> In the end it was discovered that the FLQ “masterminds” reaping havoc on the state consisted of “two rag-tag gangs of radical misfits.”<sup>66</sup> While in hindsight this information provides strong evidence against the necessity of the War Measures Act, this was only discovered after the crisis had already reached its conclusion. Trudeau responded with the information that was provided to him and Parliament by Quebec and the RCMP. Based on that information, there was a strong argument for insurrection, therefore, the government’s decision to act quickly and invoke the Act was justified.

Just before 1970 concluded, the October Crisis came to an end. Beginning on 6 November and continuing

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60. Canada, “19 October 1970,” *Official Report of the Debates of the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada: Third Session – Twenty-eighth Parliament: Volume 1* (Library of Parliament, 1970), 331, [https://parl.canadiana.ca/view/oop.debates\\_HOC2803\\_01/](https://parl.canadiana.ca/view/oop.debates_HOC2803_01/).

61. Canada, “19 October 1970,” *Official Report of the Debates of the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada: Third Session – Twenty-eighth Parliament: Volume 1* (Library of Parliament, 1970), 331 – 332, [https://parl.canadiana.ca/view/oop.debates\\_HOC2803\\_01/](https://parl.canadiana.ca/view/oop.debates_HOC2803_01/).

62. Litt, *Elusive Destiny*, 128.

63. Litt, *Elusive Destiny*, 128.

64. Trudeau, *Memoirs*, 146 – 147.

65. Litt, *Elusive Destiny*, 128.

66. Litt, *Elusive Destiny*, 129.

into December 1970, the kidnappers of Mr. Cross and Mr. Laporte were arrested.<sup>67</sup> On 4 December James Cross was released “in good shape” in exchange for the safe passage of his three kidnappers and their four family members to Cuba which had agreed to accept them. Trudeau, however, did not grant Mr. Laporte’s murderers the same leniency.<sup>68</sup> Just before New Year’s Eve, those responsible for Laporte’s murder were arrested and detained in Canada bringing an official end to the Crisis.<sup>69</sup> The October Crisis brought Canadians together over the country’s shared mourning of Mr. Laporte’s death and over its strong support for democracy. It was clear that the anxiety and fear created by the FLQ’s actions were not limited to Quebec and Ottawa. The *Regina Leader Post* reported on 31 December that the abduction of Cross cast a “shadow [that] fell across all Canada” and that people from across the nation came together to share in a collective suffering. For example, during Sunday morning service at Knox United Church in the remote town of Gull Lake Saskatchewan, the congregation paused to sing O Canada in an act of public support.<sup>70</sup>

When the chaos ended, the country reflected upon the government’s and Trudeau’s response to the October Crisis. Public support for the War Measures Act was “powerful and immediate,” including in the Prairie Provinces.<sup>71</sup> A November 1970 Gallup survey found Canadians approved of the invocation of the War Measures Act to control the crisis. Worried and fearful for Mr. Cross’s safety and of a terrorist uprising,<sup>72</sup> an overwhelming 87 percent of Canadian’s supported the government’s use of the emergency legislation. In the same poll, 60 per cent of Canadians said that their opinion of Trudeau increased as a result of his actions and language throughout the crisis. In contrast, 49 per cent said that their opinion of opposition leader Robert Stanfield, who opposed Trudeau’s response to the crisis, declined.<sup>73</sup> The only individuals who seemed to oppose the Act were members of the opposition.<sup>74</sup> NDP leader Tommy Douglas stated the Act was akin to “using a sledgehammer to crack a peanut.”<sup>75</sup> Trudeau responded best to Douglas’s statement by stating in his memoir: “peanuts don’t make bombs, don’t take hostages, and don’t assassinate prisoners. And as for the sledgehammer, it was the only tool at our disposal.”<sup>76</sup> John Turner, the Minister of Justice from 1968 to 1972,

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67. Litt, *Elusive Destiny*, 129.

68. Jay Walz, “Cross Free as Kidnappers Fly to Cuba: Briton Rescued in Montreal After being Held for 59 Days,” *New York Times* (1923-), (New York, N.Y.), Dec 04, 1970, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/118971488/7A9916903B79495CPQ/1?accountid=13480>.

69. Litt, *Elusive Destiny*, 129.

70. “December 31, 1970 (Page 8 of 32),” *The Leader Post* (1930 – 2010), (Regina, Saskatchewan), Dec 31, 1970, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2217854742?parentSessionId=9SH8gWvm3CZM2juDk08JiP8Js/b8qNerXIFgfl755g4=&accountid=13480>.

71. “December 31, 1970 (Page 8 of 32),” *The Leader Post* (1930 – 2010), (Regina, Saskatchewan), Dec 31, 1970, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2217854742?parentSessionId=9SH8gWvm3CZM2juDk08JiP8Js/b8qNerXIFgfl755g4=&accountid=13480>.

72. Litt, *Elusive Destiny*, 128.

73. Gallup Canada, 2019, “Canadian Gallup Poll, November 1970, #344”, Borealis, V1, <https://doi.org/10.5683/SP2/IWGCOC>.

74. “December 31, 1970 (Page 8 of 32),” *The Leader Post* (1930 – 2010), (Regina, Saskatchewan), Dec 31, 1970. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2217854742?parentSessionId=9SH8gWvm3CZM2juDk08JiP8Js/b8qNerXIFgfl755g4=&accountid=13480>

75. Canada, “16 October 1970,” *Official Report of the Debates of the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada: Third Session – Twenty-eighth Parliament: Volume 1* (Library of Parliament, 1970), 198.

76. Trudeau, *Memoirs*, 143.

initially contemplated the need to use the War Measures Act, and, in a private letter to a friend stated “...a threat to the very structure of society can only be met sometimes by a temporary suspension of some of the ordinary rights to which we are accustomed.” Upon reflection Turner concluded that if the government had let matters escalate with no intervention for just a few more hours that things “might have been disastrous.”<sup>77</sup> While hypotheticals offer little justification, what is certain is that the federal government won popular support for its actions during the October Crisis.

### Conclusion

Trudeau’s disdain of nationalism and his prediction of its adverse consequences was evident during the FLQ crisis that threatened the very unity of Canada. Furthermore, Trudeau’s preference for federalism proved, in this case, to be the successful alternative of ardent nationalism. The handling of the crisis was a joint effort between the federal and Quebec governments, and Trudeau and his cabinet did not make any decision unless requested or approved first by Quebec.<sup>78</sup> Whether or not individuals agree with the policies Trudeau and his government followed during the October Crisis, Trudeau’s unwavering leadership and firm opposition to the crisis created by the domestic terrorism that threatened Canadian unity can be admired. While Trudeau’s value of the rights of the individual was, ironically, tested and compromised during the invoking of the War Measures Act, he assured all Canadians that the emergency powers were temporary and limited in scope. For the federal government, time was of the essence for the lives of Mr. Cross and Mr. Laporte were in jeopardy. The primary focus was the elimination of the FLQ, which had used violence for almost a decade and had proven itself an unpredictable guerilla group. Temporary emergency powers that could restrict individual freedom was a limited price to pay for eliminating further violence and possible insurrection. Trudeau’s answer to the FLQ was a defensive strategy to deploy Canadian troops and use emergency powers through the War Measures Act. The use of both measures came at a moment when all Canadians were called upon to trust that their government would not abuse its power but use it instead to protect the nation. Trudeau succeeded in doing that. Support for the FLQ, and its overall existence, ended with the invoking of the War Measures Act and after the appalling murder of Mr. Laporte. And, while Quebec separatism continues to be an ongoing discussion in Canada, violence, like that experienced at the hands of the FLQ, has not since occurred in Quebec.<sup>79</sup>

In a 1972 CBC interview Trudeau was asked to reflect upon his first four years as prime minister. The reporter asked Trudeau how he felt about being labelled as “arrogant” and how this label has contributed to his negative image. Trudeau considered the question carefully and replied that having a strong central government and a strong constitution was essential for Canada “to have a real existence.” Trudeau believed he had to be strong, and unfortunately sometimes that appeared as arrogance. He hoped this was not true, but if he had made mistakes, he was just an ordinary person for “no man is without sin.”<sup>80</sup> While judged upon his actions,

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77. Litt, *Elusive Destiny*, 130.

78. Tetley, *The October Crisis*, 188.

79. Tetley, *The October Crisis*, 188.

80. “A 1972 CBC Weekend Interview with Pierre Trudeau,” CBC Archives, 1972, video, <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1844713021>.

Trudeau acted in the interest of Quebec, and in accordance with what he felt was best for Canada. Trudeau and his cabinet faced a crisis unique and unprecedented in Canada, and their actions sent a strong message and set a standard for dealing with future threats to Canadian democracy.

12.

# HOW THE WEST WAS LOST: PIERRE E. TRUDEAU'S 1980-1985 NATIONAL ENERGY PROGRAM AND WESTERN ALIENATION

Jesse Fuchs

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## Introduction

It is the summer of 1973 in North America. Marvin Gaye and Jim Croce are topping the music charts, the United States has ended its war in Vietnam, pride events are taking place in cities across Canada for the first time in history,<sup>1</sup> the President of the United States was insisting he is not a crook,<sup>2</sup> and the international price of oil is a cool \$3.40 a barrel.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, in the Middle East, a conflict is mounting between Israel and an Arab coalition led by Egypt and Syria. The conflict escalates to war when the Arab Coalition attacks Israel on the Jewish holy day, Yom Kippur. Global oil prices spike three-fold. Hostilities would eventually end between Israel, Egypt, and Syria, and global oil prices remained steady until 1979, when a revolution in Iran caused global oil prices to climb once again.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, the Western provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan, Canada's major producers of oil, exported most of their oil east to either Ontario and Quebec or south to the United States at world prices.<sup>4</sup> The world price of oil is calculated by taking the average of the West Texas Intermediate market, the Fateh Petroleum Market, and The Dated Brent Petroleum Market.<sup>5</sup> That all changed in the 1970s, when the Organization of the Petroleum Export Countries (OPEC) oil embargo and the Iranian Revolution of 1979, saw oil prices soar from around three dollars in the early 1970s to over \$34 in 1980.<sup>6</sup> The oil-rich provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan began to enjoy healthy profits as the US increased the volume of oil

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1. For the first time, national gay rights events are taking place in major Canadian cities across the country. <https://www.queerevents.ca/canada/pride/history>

2. In the summer of 1973, President Richard Nixon was in the midst of the Watergate scandal and refusing to turn over presidential tape recordings. It was not until November when he famously states, "I am not a crook." <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/nixon-insists-that-he-is-not-a-crook>

3. Government of Canada, *The National Energy Program*, 1980, 24.

4. Ian Muller, "Evolving Priorities: Canadian Oil Policy and the United States in the Years Leading Up to the Oil Crisis of 1973." Order No. MR43753, University of Waterloo, Ontario. 2008, 18.

5. <https://www.ibisworld.com/us/bed/world-price-of-crude-oil/990007/>

6. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/03/05/what-irans-1979-revolution-meant-for-us-and-global-oil-markets/>

imported from Canada. The two provinces that had once struggled economically, looked to capitalize further on oil revenue by creating financial safe guards. In 1975, Saskatchewan NDP Premier Allan Blakeney created SASKOIL, a crown corporation to capture a greater share of oil production revenues for the province.<sup>7</sup> In 1976, Alberta was flush with cash and created a Heritage fund, where 30 percent of oil revenue would be deposited for future generations.<sup>8 9</sup> Not all of Canada was enjoying the financial windfall of high oil prices. While the Western provinces were generating increased tax revenues from exporting excess oil reserves, Eastern Canada, which was dependent on oil imports, suffered under the financial strains of high gasoline prices. The situation became a crisis in Canadian federalism.

On 18 February 1980, the Liberal Party won the federal election with Pierre E. Trudeau at the helm. The Liberals won a majority government with 147 seats but lacked representation west of Manitoba, where Conservatives dominated the vote. Although Trudeau had resigned as Liberal leader after losing the 1979 election to the Progressive Conservatives and Joe Clark, he returned in 1980 with an ambitious political agenda. For the next four years, his goals consisted of quashing the French separatist movement, patriating the constitution, creating a charter of rights and freedoms, developing a national identity based on bilingualism and multiculturalism, and navigating a decade-long global energy crisis that had inflated the cost of importing oil and created an economic crisis in Eastern Canada. One of his most challenging issues on his agenda was to deal with the national energy crisis. Without western representation in his cabinet,<sup>10</sup> Prime Minister Trudeau and his Minister of Energy, Marc Lalonde, created a plan to make Canada self-sufficient in oil by increasing national ownership of oil and gas companies, to set the price of oil from Alberta and Saskatchewan to half the rate of international prices for domestic imports, to impose new taxes on oil exported from the Western provinces to the United States, and to use federal revenue to subsidize prices in Eastern Canada.<sup>11</sup> Such policies became the foundation of the National Energy Program (NEP) that was revealed eight months later, in October 1980.<sup>12</sup> The NEP reignited feelings of western resentment towards the Prime Minister and the federal government, while creating a national unity crisis that threatened the Canadian nation.

### **Not so Quiet on the Western Front: History of Western Resentment Towards Ottawa**

Western resentment towards the central provinces of Canada and the federal government was not a recent phenomenon. It can be traced to the mid-1800s shortly after Confederation. In the late 19th century, the Canadian government was concerned with securing land for resources and keeping the Americans out of the northwest. Canadian westward expansion was achieved in 1870, when Ottawa purchased Rupert's Land and

7. [https://web.archive.org/web/20100130044541/http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/blakeney\\_allan\\_e\\_1925-.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20100130044541/http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/blakeney_allan_e_1925-.html)

8. <https://www.alberta.ca/heritage-savings-trust-fund.aspx>

9. <https://greatcanadianspeeches.ca/2019/11/28/peter-lougheed-albertas-oil-october-1980/>

10. Bruce G Pollard, "Canadian Energy Policy in 1985: Toward a Renewed Federalism?" *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, Volume 16, Issue 3, Summer 1986, 165.

11. *Ibid.*, 165.

12. Nor. Ovenden, "Now THIS Was a Tax Revolt; When Pierre Trudeau Decided to Redistribute the Country's Oil Wealth, Alberta Really Got Mad: FINAL Edition." *Edmonton Journal*. Edmonton, Alberta. 1995, 2.

the Northwest Territory from the Hudson's Bay Company, annexing it to Canada. The First Nations, Metis people, and the colonial trappers living on Rupert's Land and the Northwest Territory were not consulted on either the purchase or the transfer of ownership of the large swaths of land to the Dominion. The North-West Rebellion of 1885, led predominantly by Metis in the region, was fueled by the discontent and distrust of the central Canadian government.<sup>13</sup> Colonization ensued when the uprising was defeated during the Battle of Batoche, and the west became, in many ways, an economic colony of central Canada.<sup>14</sup> The Western feeling of being considered a colony was accentuated by John A. Macdonald's National Policy in 1879, which Saskatchewan Premier Allan Blakeney described in 1980 as "an act of political will which pushed Canadian settlement west beyond the shield" but led to the region being controlled and exploited by resource and railways interests of Central Canada.<sup>15</sup>

Western alienation is the term used to describe the feelings of western resentment towards Ottawa. Western alienation is unique since provincial and municipal governments in Manitoba, Alberta, and Saskatchewan do not face the same level of resentment from their citizens as the federal government does.<sup>16</sup> Author Helen Mackenzie describes Western alienation as the "... sense of estrangement from central Canada economically, politically, and, to an extent, culturally.[17]" This feeling of estrangement is pervasive in Western Canada as it transcends age, education, class, or occupation. It has led to a distinctive culture and government policy from governments in Western Canada that have been based on a sense of political isolation from, and the exploitation by, the more populous regions in the Canadian federal political system.<sup>17</sup>

Pierre E. Trudeau had few supporters west of Ontario, especially after the late 1970s. Although generally more conservative in their beliefs than the eastern provinces, Alberta and Saskatchewan's issues with Trudeau's government were not merely cultural and ideological. Liberal policies, such as access to abortion, homosexuality, bilingualism and even the metric system, pushed some western voters away but the greatest resentments and dissatisfactions were over fiscal and economic matters, and particularly over resource-development policies.<sup>18</sup> It is common for people living west of the Canadian Shield to believe that their economic development has been impeded by national tariffs, freight rates, transportation policies, federal disallowance, agriculture policies, and national energy management, all imposed by what, at times, seemed to be an insensitive federal government.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, Trudeau was not afraid to challenge the Western provinces

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13. Daryl Boychuk, *Western Alienation: A Study Done at the Political Science Department*, Regina, Saskatchewan. University of Regina 1982, 9-10.

14. Allan Blakeney, "Notes for Remarks by Premier Allen Blakeney of Saskatchewan – Western Alienation – Friday, April 11, 1980." Osgood Hall, Ontario. 1980. P.10.

15. Ibid, 9.

16. Shawn Henry, "Revisiting western alienation: towards a better understanding of political alienation and political behaviour in western Canada," (Unpublished doctoral thesis). University of Calgary, Alberta. 2000. P.7.

17. On this point see, Henry, "Revisiting western alienation."

18. Mark Lisac, "Trudeau's Western Legacy: You Must Look Past the NEP to Appreciate What the Former PM Meant to the Western Provinces," *Edmonton Journal*, 2000, 2.

19. Helen McKenzie, *Western Alienation in Canada*. Rev. ed., 1984, 2-8.

and doing so further strained relationships with the region. Within Saskatchewan, his last bridge may have been burned when he asked “Well, why should I sell the Canadian farmers’ wheat?<sup>20</sup>” at a Winnipeg Liberal gathering in 1968.

During the 1970s and the 1980s, western frustration with the federal government was, however, mainly centered round the federal government’s colonial attitude regarding natural resources, which had become a significant source of revenue for western provinces, as well as the belief that the federal government was attempting to restrain economic growth there. Before the 1973 oil crisis, Ottawa had little interest in helping the struggling western provinces by, for example, applying taxes to the Eastern province’s main exports of timber, nickel, gold, or hydroelectric power and use that tax revenues to supplement the Western economies. Ontario and Quebec began exporting hydroelectric power to the United States at the turn of the last century. In the west, electricity prices were five times that of Ontario, but federal energy policy was not adjusted – or energy exports to the US taxed aggressively — to reduce higher power rates in Saskatchewan and Alberta.<sup>21</sup> It was not until Western provincial revenue grew sharply in the 1970s from oil extraction that the federal government adjusted national policies to target provincial earnings on resource exports. And then, the revised policy only applied to western oil exports<sup>22</sup> and not the offshore resources under federal jurisdiction being developed in the Atlantic region.<sup>23</sup> The anger and resentment brewing in Western Canada was captured in an article by Mark Lisac in the *Edmonton Journal*. He identified the inconsistency of Trudeau’s policy choices and their impact on the western provinces, when he wrote, “He [Trudeau] saw no need to sell farmers’ wheat. He did see a need to intervene in energy pricing, foreign investment and wage and price levels. Each choice, interventionism or not, seemed to go against western interests.”<sup>24</sup>

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20. Mark Lisac, “Trudeau’s Western Legacy: You Must Look Past the NEP to Appreciate What the Former PM Meant to the Western Provinces.”

21. Blakeney, “Notes for Remarks by Premier Allen Blakeney of Saskatchewan – Western Alienation – Friday, 15.

22. Ibid., 14-15.

23. Bruce G. Pollard, “Canadian Energy Policy in 1985: Toward a Renewed Federalism?” *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, Volume 16, Issue 3, Summer 1986, 165.

24. Lisac, “Trudeau’s Western Legacy: You Must Look Past the NEP to Appreciate What the Former PM Meant to the Western Provinces,” 2.

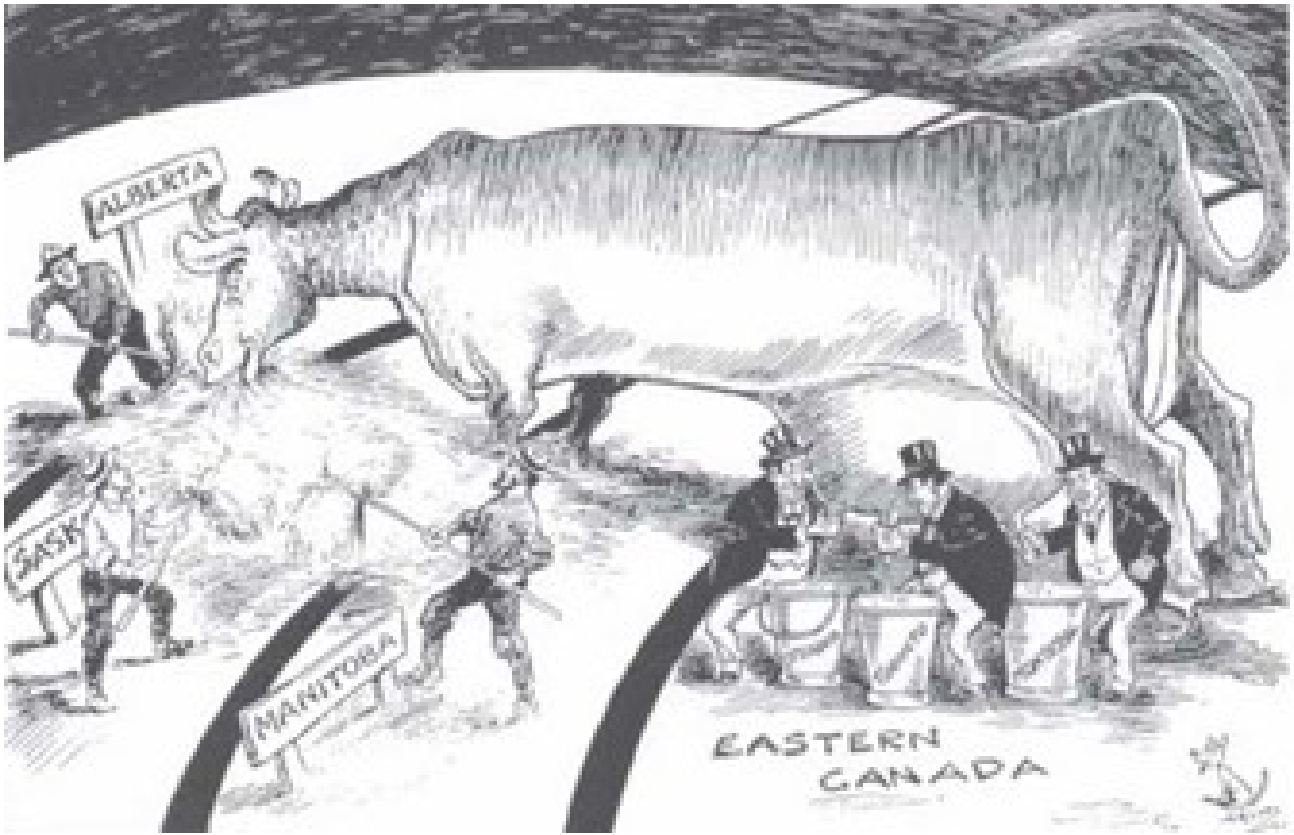


Figure 1 Released in the December 1915 edition of the Grain Growers Guide, The Milch Cow Cartoon represents the historical Western economic resentment with Eastern Canada.  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_Milch\\_Cow,\\_Grain\\_Growers\\_Guide,\\_15\\_December\\_1915.gif](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Milch_Cow,_Grain_Growers_Guide,_15_December_1915.gif)

### From Have not to Have – Global Oil Shocks and Western Canadian Oil Revenue

Prior to 1973, despite growing US demands for oil, Canadian federal energy policy focused on ensuring Canadian reserves could meet domestic requirements.<sup>25</sup> Ottawa began limiting oil exports and applied a tax of \$0.40 a barrel to oil headed south to the US.<sup>26</sup> Ian Muller describes the changes as focusing "... on the need for Canada to protect Canadian reserves from international oil shortages as well as insulating the domestic price from a volatile world market."<sup>27</sup> For domestic trade, the price of oil was capped at \$3.80 a barrel.<sup>28</sup> An imaginary line was drawn at the Ottawa Valley that would dictate what part of the country was supplied by international imports and what side was supplied by Alberta. Areas west of the line was supplied by Alberta

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25. Ian Muller, "Evolving Priorities: Canadian Oil Policy and the United States in the Years Leading Up to the Oil Crisis of 1973." Order No. MR43753, University of Waterloo, Ontario. 2008, 87.

26. Ibid., 88.

27. Ibid., 88.

28. Ibid., 89.

crude, and the portions of the country east of it was primarily supplied by Middle Eastern oil brought in through the United States.<sup>29</sup>

In October 1973, the situation changed. The United States provided Israel with substantial military aid after Syria and Egypt attacked Israel on 6 October 1973. The following day, Saudi Arabia and the Arab members of OPEC reduced international oil exports and placed an embargo on oil shipments to Israel's supporters. Global oil prices rose from \$2.90 to \$11.65 a barrel,<sup>30</sup> and oil-exporting nations had to rely on conserving domestic reserves instead of exporting to embargoed nations.<sup>31</sup> The cost of importing oil rose drastically for the United States and Canada, and the price of gasoline at the pumps followed suit. Higher oil prices were good news for Canada's oil-rich provinces that exported substantial quantities of crude to their neighbours to the south. With oil prices skyrocketing, profits were at an all-time high. Canada's smaller population meant less demand for oil, creating less dependency on imported energy, and the detrimental effects of the embargo in Canada paled in comparison to that of the United States.

### **When the Levy Breaks: The National Energy Program**

In 1980, as Pierre E. Trudeau's Throne Speech addressed energy and resource policy, he emphasized the importance of Canadian ownership of oil and using Canada's own reserves to benefit the entire country.<sup>32</sup> In October, 1980, the Trudeau government unveiled a new approach to energy policy in the National Energy Program (NEP). The NEP had three main objectives:<sup>33</sup> provide security of energy supply for Canadians, offer Canadians the opportunity to participate in the petroleum industry, and establish oil pricing and revenue sharing that was fair to all Canadians. The 120-page document accompanying the new policy outlined the problems, program, and the impacts. The NEP looked to achieve its main objectives by creating federal incentives for developing new oil projects, offering programs for promoting energy conservation and alternative energy sources, requiring a 50 percent Canadian ownership in companies involved in new production, and engaging global partners on renegotiating international trade agreements.<sup>3435</sup>

Ottawa's share of energy revenue grew with new revenue-sharing strategies that restricted the amount and frequency of price increases, and with new taxes and incentives, including the Petroleum and Gas Revenue Tax (PGRT), the Natural Gas and Gas Liquids Tax (NGGLT), and the new Petroleum Incentive Program (PIP) which encouraged oil development by Canadian companies.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps the most controversial objective of the NEP was the blended pricing system. The blended pricing system restricted the cost of domestic oil imports

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29. Ibid., 110.

30. <https://www.federalreservehistory.org/essays/oil-shock-of-1978-79>

31. Muller, "Evolving Priorities: Canadian Oil Policy and the United States in the Years Leading Up to the Oil Crisis of 1973," 10.

32. Alexander Washkowsky, Braden Sapara, Brady Dean, Sarah Hoag, Rebecca Morris-Hurl, Dayle Steffen, Joshua Switzer, and Deklen Wolbaum, *Canada and Speeches from the Throne: Narrating a Nation, 1935-2015*. University of Regina, Regina, Saskatchewan. 2020, 37.

33. Pollard, "Canadian Energy Policy in 1985: Toward a Renewed Federalism?," 165.

34. Ibid., 165.

35. Washkowsky, *Canada and Speeches from the Throne: Narrating a Nation, 1935-2015*, 37.

36. Pollard, "Canadian Energy Policy in 1985: Toward a Renewed Federalism?," 164.

to 75 percent of global prices. Blended pricing kept Western Canadian oil shipped to Central Canada below the world price to redistribute and equalize the burdens and benefits of pricing across the entire country.<sup>37</sup> The federal government's policies clearly represented a more interventionist stance towards an increasingly profitable oil industry.<sup>38</sup>

The provincial response to the NEP varied, but the Western provinces that had been benefiting financially from oil exports offered the most critical response.<sup>39</sup> In a province-wide address in reaction to the NEP, Alberta Premier Peter Lougheed called the Federal budget and the NEP "stupid" and "the worst economic and financial decision in (Canadian) history." He blamed a "select group" within Ottawa for not allowing Alberta to be even "moderately independent" and used the word "storm" to describe the inevitable forthcoming political climate being created as Western provinces responded to the restrictive NEP.<sup>40</sup> Although lacking the strong language that Lougheed used, Saskatchewan's NDP Premier Allen Blakeney's response was just as critical. In a speech at Toronto's Osgoode Hall Law School, Blakeney described the history of the relationship between Western Canada and the federal government, outlining past and present policies that he claimed restricted economic growth within the west while favouring the central provinces' economic and social agendas.<sup>41</sup>

It was all the more disturbing to Lougheed and Blakeney as Section 109 of the British North America (BNA) Act concedes ownership and control of natural resources to the provinces.<sup>42</sup> In response to the NEP, they often cited the BNA Act and argued that the PGRT, for instance, was a well-head tax that infringed on provincial rights.<sup>43</sup> Alberta called the NEP a "Canadianization" policy that bolstered federal power within the Canadian energy industry while destroying Alberta's economy.<sup>44</sup> The Alberta government retaliated to the NEP by reducing oil shipments to Eastern Canada, challenging the constitutionality of the PGRT and NGGLT taxes in court, and withholding approval of new mega projects in the northern Alberta oil sands.<sup>45</sup>

Western Canadian resentment of Eastern Canada and the federal government grew substantially after the NEP was fully implemented. At the heart of the NEP, the Western premiers believed, was money and power.<sup>46</sup> In 1980, prior to the NEP, federal oil and gas revenue share was 13.1 percent of the total national revenue. After the NEP was put in place in 1982, the federal government's share of oil and gas revenues more than

37. Ibid., 164.

38. Barbara Jenkins, "Re-examining the 'obsolescing Bargain': A Study of Canada's National Energy Program." *International organization* 40, no. 1, 1986, 145.

39. Ibid., 167.

40. "The Word Is 'Storm': Nov. 20, 1980: The NEP: National Edition." *National Post (Toronto)*. Don Mills, Ontario. 2000, 1.

41. Blakeney, "Notes for Remarks by Premier Allen Blakeney of Saskatchewan – Western Alienation".

42. Mary Joy Aitken, "The National Energy Program: A Case Study of State Energy Policy," Master's thesis, University of Alberta, Alberta. 1983, 71.

43. Pollard, "Canadian Energy Policy in 1985: Toward a Renewed Federalism?" 167.

44. Ibid., 167

45. Ibid., 167

46. Ovenden, "Now THIS Was a Tax Revolt; When Pierre Trudeau Decided to Redistribute the Country's Oil Wealth, Alberta Really Got Mad: FINAL Edition," 3.

doubled to 27.4 percent. At the same time, the provincial government's share of oil and gas revenues dropped from 45.7 to 32.3.<sup>47</sup> From 1980 to 1984, the price of Canadian oil was held at half the global price while the federal government used its new share of profits from the oil industry in Alberta and Saskatchewan to subsidize oil imported for the rest of the country. Lost revenue for Alberta alone was estimated to be as high as \$60 billion.<sup>48</sup> The NEP was blamed for multinational energy companies deciding to leave Canada, further reducing investment for oil producing provinces and resulting in the loss of thousands of jobs in Western Canada.<sup>49</sup> Western newspaper columnist Norm Ovenden describes the 1980 Liberal budget that introduced the NEP as "... one of the most disastrous budgets in Canadian history; a fiscal blueprint which deepened the western suspicion of all things Liberal, plundered the Alberta treasury." [52] Ovenden captured the sentiments of an entire province when he wrote, "Alberta was treated as a colony which could not be allowed to keep the windfall profits of soaring petroleum prices at the expense of Canada's manufacturing heartland."<sup>50</sup>

### **All for One and One for All: Trudeau's Response to Western Disdain**

Pierre Elliott Trudeau's legacy is a polarized one. On the positive side, Trudeau advocated for human rights and equality. He was intelligent, charismatic, and a dynamic politician that inspired many. His speeches were calculated and direct, often powerful enough to impress even the most fractious opponents.<sup>51</sup> He is credited with quelling the Quebec sovereignty movements in the 1960s and 1970s in the name of national unity by introducing such policies as bilingualism with the Official Languages Act in 1969. He cemented fundamental freedoms as well as the democratic, mobility, legal, equality, and language rights of Canadian citizens by including the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in the patriated Constitution Act of 1982.<sup>52</sup> On the negative side, many regarded Trudeau as stubborn and arrogant, not afraid of inciting national controversy for his beliefs and for his staunch support of Canadian federalism. He saw Canada as a nation, a collective greater than the sum of its parts, and rejected special status for any province.<sup>53</sup>

Trudeau's quest to assert the federal government's power following the decentralization of the 1960s and 1970s has been described by author Bruce Pollard as a "new federalism".<sup>54</sup> It consisted of replacing provincial consultation with unilateral decision-making. Pollard contends, "One area which exemplified the "new federalism" approach was energy policy."<sup>55</sup> In 1969, during a television interview with the CBC, Trudeau

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47. Jenkins, "Re-examining the 'obsolescing Bargain': A Study of Canada's National Energy Program," 151.

48. Ibid., 3.

49. Ibid., 3.

50. Ibid., 1.

51. Lisac, "Trudeau's Western Legacy: You Must Look Past the NEP to Appreciate What the Former PM Meant to the Western Provinces: Final Edition," 1.

52. *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, s 15, Part I of the *Constitution Act*, 1982, being Schedule B to the *Canada Act 1982* (UK), 1982, c 11, (QL).

53. Robert L. Wereley, "NEP Didn't Cause Alberta's Woes: Final Edition," *Edmonton Journal*. 2000, 1.

54. Pollard, "Canadian Energy Policy in 1985: Toward a Renewed Federalism?," 164.

55. Ibid., 164.

affirmed his approach to unity and nationalism. When asked if “...the prime minister understand[s] the western point of view?” by the CBC interviewer, Trudeau responded by acknowledging that the immense geographical size of Canada can create regional loyalties where provinces feel disconnected from national issues. He said it was the federal government’s responsibility to make hard decisions: “It’s normal that a government, a central government in a large country like this, will have to make decisions which will sometimes favour one part of the country and sometimes favour another...” In that interview, Trudeau foreshadows the NEP by mentioning oil specifically, saying “...whether it be with tariffs or with oil... we are always making some allocation of resources which means we are taxing one part of the country to help another or putting tariffs on one part of the country to help another...” Trudeau’s frustration with a province-first rhetoric was clear, and he acknowledged that, in his opinion, too often in Canada people forget that they are a part of a nation, and that Canadians should “... pull up our sleeves and not just gripe and bitch [but] get in there and make sure we are taking the decisions” that benefit the whole national community.<sup>56</sup>

In his memoirs, Trudeau acknowledges the role of government to create a fair and equitable society for all citizens or, in his own words, to “take from the rich and give to the poor.” During the international oil crises of the 1970s and early 1980s, he believed he was managing the crisis by doing precisely that – redistributing wealth from one region of Canada to another. He viewed Western provinces as rich, and feared they were taking advantage of the high energy prices without regard for the hardship it created in the central provinces of Quebec and Ontario. In the West, many voters believed that Trudeau was making a political decision to appeal to the larger populations that had ensured the Trudeau-led Liberals of their majority government in 1980.<sup>57</sup> In a sense, it might be argued that Canada as a whole was mainly unaffected during the international oil crises, but they paved the way for a domestic crisis that was, ultimately, the result of the federal government’s actions and Trudeau’s approach to the crisis. By attempting to mitigate the price increases for Canadians dependant on imported oil at the expense of the energy-producing provinces, Trudeau created serious divisions in the country. The domestic crisis resulted from the 1980 National Energy Program and the interprovincial turmoil that followed its creation.

There are many ways a prime minister can navigate a crisis. Pierre E. Trudeau chose to maintain the status quo in oil pricing that Canada had adopted years earlier. He believed he was championing national unity through his new nationalist policy. Those views had been evident during a speech during the first session of the thirty-second Parliament on 15 April 1980. It was a powerful speech, one that reaffirmed the sentiments he expressed during the 1969 CBC interview on western alienation eleven years prior. Trudeau disregarded regional loyalties and promoted national pride, saying, “Very often we hear Quebecers or Albertans say “I am a Quebecker” or “I am an Albertan,” but if you really press them and examine them, they will always say “I am a Canadian first and a Quebecker second” or “an Albertan second.” What he advocated was a national duty and

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56. CBC. “Pierre Trudeau Not Worried About Western Alienation in 1969.” Thursday Night TV, 3 October 1969.

57. Ovenden, “Now THIS Was a Tax Revolt; When Pierre Trudeau Decided to Redistribute the Country’s Oil Wealth, Alberta Really Got Mad,” 3.

asked "... that disagreement not be based on regional interests, on the fact that it might be the duty of provincial governments to serve but be based on the concept of the whole which we try to serve in our different ways." In true Trudeau fashion, he did not deviate from his core idealism of a unified Canadian national interest and a strong federal presence. He went on to state, "... the concept of sharing can only be guaranteed, I repeat, if there is a national government which is prepared to state that the national interest must prevail in any situation of conflict over regional differences."<sup>58</sup>

Trudeau's determined stance towards naysayers and his usually impenetrable exterior would eventually soften on energy policy, perhaps in the interests of maintaining national unity during the energy crisis. Although Trudeau and the federal government dismissed Western disdain and threats of separatism, the infamous "Let the Eastern bastards freeze in the dark" bumper stickers that began circulating in the early 1980s struck a chord with the Prime Minister. He would regret the negative response to the NEP in the West and worried that "kind of negative attitude could hurt national unity."<sup>59</sup> Within a year of the NEP, changes were made to soften the economic impact on Western provinces. Understanding the importance of national unity, Lougheed and Trudeau agreed on a pricing and revenue sharing in 1981. The change would ease regional tensions that the NEP had created but maintained most of the intentions of the original NEP. Bruce Pollard writes, "The agreement [was] formed out of necessity."<sup>60</sup>

### Conclusion

The Yom Kippur War Oil Crisis of 1973 and the Iranian Revolution Oil Crisis of 1979 fueled regional resentment and conflict in Canada between the Western provinces and the federal government. During the 1970s in the midst of the international oil crises, Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau considered Alberta and Saskatchewan's revenue from international oil exports as a benefit for all Canadians and believed that it should be used to mitigate the high cost of importing oil in the eastern provinces and ease the financial burden. Trudeau fancied himself a modern-day Robin Hood, who believed that the nation's wealth had to be shared by all Canadians, and in 1981, created the National Energy Program to provide security of energy supply for Canadians, offer Canadians the opportunity to participate in the petroleum industry, and establish an oil pricing and revenue sharing arrangement that he considered fair to all Canadians.<sup>61</sup> The NEP effectively transferred greater control of natural resources in the provinces to the federal government, and infuriated Western Canada, where the policy was regarded as an attack on their economy.<sup>62</sup> It was described

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58. Canada, *Official Report of the Debates of the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada: First Session—Thirty-Second Parliament, 29 Elizabeth II, 1980*. Ottawa, ON: Hon. Jeanne Sauv , Queen's Printer for Canada, 1980. P.34-35.

59. Ovenden, "Now THIS Was a Tax Revolt; When Pierre Trudeau Decided to Redistribute the Country's Oil Wealth, Alberta Really Got Mad: FINAL Edition," 3.

60. Pollard, "Canadian Energy Policy in 1985: Toward a Renewed Federalism?," 167.

61. Energy, Mines, and Resources Canada. *The National Energy Program*. 1980.

62. John English, "TRUDEAU, PIERRE ELLIOTT," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 22, University of Toronto/Universit  Laval, Quebec. 2003.

in Alberta and Saskatchewan as the “single worst economic decision of Canada’s 20th century.”<sup>63</sup> The West rejected Trudeau’s insistence that oil was Canada’s resource, regardless of where it was produced and that oil revenue should benefit all Canadians. The creation of the NEP cost Trudeau’s Liberal party dearly in the 1984 election, when the Progressive Conservative party won the greatest number of seats ever in any federal election, including every seat in Alberta and Saskatchewan.<sup>64</sup> In fact, the memories of Pierre Trudeau and his controversial energy policy remain vivid even today, as demonstrated with a recent conversation with an Albertan oil industry worker: “I will never forget... I’d never support the federal or provincial Liberals because of that. [That bill essentially] stole about \$60 billion from Alberta to benefit Ontario and Quebec.”<sup>65</sup> Politicians, too, still use the NEP in their campaigns. Former Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper, whose roots are in Alberta, described the NEP as a product of not only a regional misunderstanding, but also the poor response to a crisis by a greedy federal government whose “ideological motivations directly or indirectly [were] hostile to Alberta and its society.”<sup>66</sup> That is the way Trudeau’s response to the energy crisis is remembered in Western Canada. Without a doubt, his approach to the energy crisis renewed a sense of alienation in the West and, in the process, threatened to tear apart the Canadian national fabric.

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63. David Frum, “The Disastrous Legacy of Pierre Elliott Trudeau; From Cozying up to Dictators to Alienating Washington to the NEP, Trudeau Created a Trail of Wreckage That’s Taken Three Decades to Clean Up.” *National Post*. 2011, 2.

64. *Political Database of the Americas (1999) Canada: 1984 Parliamentary Election Results*. [Internet]. Georgetown University and the Organization of American States.

65. Ovenden, “Now THIS Was a Tax Revolt; When Pierre Trudeau Decided to Redistribute the Country’s Oil Wealth, Alberta Really Got Mad: FINAL Edition,” 2.

66. *Ibid.*, 4.

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## MOBILIZING THE WORLD: BRIAN MULRONEY AND CANADA'S HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE TO FAMINE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Jonathon Zimmer

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### **Introduction:**

When Progressive Conservative leader, Brian Mulroney ran for federal election in 1984, he campaigned on four broad themes in an attempt to defeat the governing Liberals that had held power almost continuously since 1963: prudent fiscal management, an engaged and responsive foreign policy, a revamped social policy, and improved federal-provincial relations.<sup>1</sup> While humanitarian issues in Canadian foreign policy were absent from the campaign, especially those related to a relatively unknown famine developing in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Progressive Conservatives were well situated to address disasters from their own policy standpoint. However, once the election concluded with a Progressive Conservative victory, and the new government was sworn in, media outlets across the nation presented shocking images of human suffering in that region of Africa, which moved Canadians towards action. Mulroney and his Cabinet found themselves beset by an eager public demanding the Canadian government to assist those affected by the famine in Sub-Saharan Africa, especially in Ethiopia. An all-party response quickly coalesced as Canada's public and private resources began an arduous process of mobilization to deliver aid to the people of famine-stricken Ethiopia. This paper demonstrates how Mulroney managed Canada's response, both within his government and those interacting with the international community through the United Nations. His deployment of key individuals to critical areas in the relief effort and in international relations played a pivotal role in marshalling the Canadian people in an effort never seen before.

We should not minimize Mulroney's personal commitment, however, as he was moved by the images just like the rest of the nation: he was appalled and shocked by human suffering on such a large scale. Even if he wished to act expeditiously, Canada's response to the crisis was hampered by a sluggish international

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1. Christopher Waddell, "Policy and Partisanship on the Campaign Trail: Mulroney Works His Wonder, Twice." In *Transforming the Nation: Canada and Brian Mulroney*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007. 20.

response, wariness among its allies towards Africa, and bitter Cold War politics that forced Canada to build an international coalition with the aim of addressing the crisis in the beleaguered African nation. If it were not for Mulroney's own determination to act on the famine, aid to Ethiopia would have been severely undermined, and the new Progressive Conservative government's image at home and abroad would have been tarnished.

Various factors led to the famine in Sub-Saharan Africa, namely political instability, drought, and overpopulation. These emerging trends, combined with previous famines that dotted the twentieth century, quickly overwhelmed the impoverished nation of Ethiopia. Emperor Haile Selassie had ruled Ethiopia until the early 1970s, when a communist revolution, spearheaded by a military junta, seized power. Famine had been one of the reasons Selassie had been overthrown. The new communist government was widely regarded in the West as having rectified many of the issues that plagued the previous monarchy, so much so that by 1980, famine was widely regarded as no longer being a threat to the country.<sup>2</sup> However, within the first few years of the 1980s, signs emerged of an impending disaster. Civil conflict ensued, particularly in northern Ethiopia, which led to both Cuba and the Soviet Union deploying troops to help their African ally.<sup>3</sup>

The first reports of a renewed famine came from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), which had acted on unconfirmed rumours of a crisis in the Horn of Africa. What they saw shocked reporters. The Ethiopian government was hesitant to allow reporters into areas affected by famine, specifically into the northern areas, such as Eritrea and Tigray, that were in active rebellion.<sup>4</sup> As footage reached viewers in the United Kingdom, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) dispatched its own team to Ethiopia, headed by Brian Stewart, a CBC reporter. Quickly, the Canadian team, too, realized the scope of the humanitarian disaster and took innovative measures to smuggle the footage back to Canada.<sup>5</sup> Just as the footage made its way onto the CBC's news programs, the recently elected 33rd Parliament under Brian Mulroney was in its first days of its administration. It was ill-prepared for the outpouring of support and demands for action from the public once the CBC broadcasted Stewart's reports.

In his own writings, Mulroney demonstrated a personal commitment to humanitarianism. However, his legacy on foreign policy is situated more with his policies against Apartheid, acid rain, and certainly the promotion of free trade with the United States. On the Ethiopian famine, Mulroney's legacy is rooted more on the role he played in managing the crisis in his Cabinet and delegating to others rather than taking control of the crisis himself. Even Brian Stewart lamented the fact that many facets of Canada's response to the famine and Mulroney's part in it have often been muted.<sup>6</sup> When he came to power in 1984, Mulroney expressed a desire to circumvent Canadian bureaucracy by making appointments based on recommendations of those

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2. Robin Wright, "Butter, bullets, and books." *Maclean's*, Sep 29, 1980.

3. Ibid.

4. Suzanne Franks, *Reporting Disasters: Famine, Aid, Politics and the Media*. London: Hurst & Company, 2013. 16.

5. Tony Burman, "Ebola: Canada Forgets Its Leadership in Ethiopian Famine." *thestar.com*. *Toronto Star*, November 1, 2014.

6. Brian Stewart, "When Brian Mulroney was Great." *www.cbc.ca*. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. May 15, 2009.

for roles that he believed would make an impact.<sup>7</sup> Once the story of Ethiopia broke, he was receptive to disaster relief, but it was only when he was shown images of human suffering that he finally got involved. The visual representation of Brian Stewart walking amongst suffering Ethiopians made a difference. Aired on 1 November 1984, on CBC's premier news program, *The National*, Stewart proved that the situation developing in Ethiopia could no longer be ignored. Mulroney now had the opportunity, as this was his first foreign affairs crisis, to chart a new course for Canadian foreign policy, distinct from that of the previous Liberal administrations.<sup>8</sup> In his memoirs, Mulroney noted his own surprise at the images of famine and death, with children, "dying in the ravaged country and nothing was happening to stop it."<sup>9</sup>



Figure 1: Famine victims at Makelle, Ethiopia. Videos of the disaster would transform public opinion in Canada. Photo by Brian Stewart.

The images that aired on CBC and the country's reaction to them provided a challenge for both politicians and the media to comprehend why they resonated with Canadians when previous famines had failed to capture widespread interest. In the previous famine of the 1970s in Ethiopia, television aired similar videos of human

7. Brian Mulroney, *Memoirs: 1939-1993*. Toronto: M&S, 2007. 330.

8. Brian Stewart, "Alerting the World to Famine in Ethiopia." Video. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. November 1, 1984.

9. Mulroney, *Memoirs*, 331.

suffering, but these images quickly slipped out of public interest. However, in 1984, media and government interest in the famine converged and created real desire to act.<sup>10</sup>

The Progressive Conservatives had originally opposed providing aid to Ethiopia, claiming Canada should not be aiding, through humanitarian efforts or otherwise, a Marxist nation. In fact, Brian Stewart echoed reports of concerned European Union (EU) parliamentarians who believed foreign aid to Ethiopia was simply being forwarded to the Soviet Union.<sup>11</sup> During the Liberal government's time in office, the Minister of Agriculture, Eugene Whelan, had recommended to Pierre Trudeau that Canada send a \$20 million aid package. Trudeau refused, believing the situation was simply not dire enough to warrant such a response.<sup>12</sup> Because of this, foreign aid became a highly politicized topic in Canada, as various Canadian governments had sought to establish their own policy in the area. Yet, the images by Brian Stewart washed away political concerns over Ethiopia's Marxist government, along with suspected inabilities in the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the federal Canadian organization that administered foreign aid programs in developing countries, to help in such situations.<sup>13</sup>

As prime minister, Mulroney had demonstrated that his stance on a number of policy issues was notoriously fluid, and he would compromise in making a political decision. However, on humanitarian issues, he was unequivocal. He openly disagreed with the notion that the United Nations (UN) was not able to act on the African famine. Under his instruction, the Canadian delegation at the UN pressed for an international response.<sup>14</sup> Brian Stewart, who was later surprised how few Canadians recall the effort on the part of Brian Mulroney and his government in demonstrating leadership, noted that Mulroney developed a legacy as having been the politician who was "totally committed and in-charge."<sup>15</sup> Many questions and later testimony point to Mulroney's commitment in the initial days after the coverage by the CBC, which set the direction of Canada's aid policy during the crisis. To assist the government in establishing an appropriate response, Mulroney relied on bipartisan support. Largely in part due to the humanitarian nature of the disaster, and because no party in Parliament or the provinces had advocated for aid to Ethiopia before the CBC report, no party could be held accountable for the situation.

Mulroney's appointment of former Ontario NDP leader Stephen Lewis as Canada's representative at the UN is one such example of bipartisan support. This unusual selection represented an instance of Mulroney focusing more on personal recommendations from his advisers rather than party affiliation of the candidate. Mulroney also wanted a strong voice at the UN, one that would stress his own personal views on Apartheid and

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10. Michael Valpy, "Mass Starvation in a TV World: Africa." *The Globe and Mail* (1936-), Nov 07, 1984.

11. Nassisse Solomon, "Tears are Not Enough: Canadian Political and Social Mobilization For Famine Relief in Ethiopia, 1984-88", in *The Samaritan State Revisited*, University of Calgary Press. 2019. 255.

12. Kim Richard Nossal and Nelson Michaud, "Out of the Blue: The Mulroney Legacy in Foreign Policy." In *Transforming the Nation: Canada and Brian Mulroney*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007. 118.

13. Solomon, "Tears are Not Enough," 256.

14. Mulroney, *Memoirs*, 331.

15. Stewart, "When Brian Mulroney was Great."

fulfill his own interests in Africa.<sup>16</sup> As the new ambassador, Lewis quickly repented of his prior transgressions during his tenure as NDP leader, specifically when he had claimed that Mulroney had been “grovelling reverentially to the White House.” Mulroney himself noted that Lewis had now learned “the art of self-discipline.”<sup>17</sup> Mulroney demonstrated his own desire to capitalize on the famine and reassure the public of his commitment to the situation and mobilized the international community. In a conversation with Mulroney, after watching Brian Stewart’s report on 1 November 1984, Lewis commented: “I hope, Prime Minister, that you’re thinking of doing what I think you’re thinking of doing.”<sup>18</sup> Mulroney quickly responded: “I am.”<sup>19</sup> Lewis, according to Brian Stewart, “galvanized the General Assembly into taking action on African famine, which demanded nothing less than “a Herculean effort on the part of all member nations.”<sup>20</sup>

Not all political leaders agreed with Lewis and Mulroney. The “herculean” task of mobilizing aid for Ethiopia was met with a cool reception from both the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and the United States President Ronald Reagan. Thatcher was well regarded as a leader whose government “was generally one of strong policy positions and this was no exception.”<sup>21</sup> While public pressure would take more time in the UK to force a change in her anti-communist position, Mulroney tasked Stephen Lewis to bring forward a motion in the General Assembly calling for aid. A combination of public interest and coverage from media outlets across the Western world helped. The United Nations created a special office in Addis Ababa to make coordination easier between various organizations and the Ethiopian government through the Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission.<sup>22</sup> However, while the Canadian government had also channeled aid through the same commission, the Canadian media became skeptical as they reported that the Commission was responsible for maintaining Ethiopia’s 300,000 strong standing army.<sup>23</sup> This, along with the tumultuous political situation in Ethiopia, fueled fears that much of the aid for famine relief was not actually reaching victims, who were “located behind rebel lines in Tigray and Eritrea.”<sup>24</sup> Regardless of the situation, the Canadian delegation, headed by Stephen Lewis, demonstrated its commitment in pushing the international community into action. Mulroney’s original objective in selecting someone who would be a capable force in the UN had paid off.

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16. Mulroney, *Memoirs*, 330.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., 331.

19. Ibid.

20. Stewart, “When Brian Mulroney was Great.”

21. [21] Franks, *Reporting Disasters*, 5.

22. Franks, *Reporting Disasters*, 114.

23. Shona McKay, “The terrible face of famine.” *Maclean's*, Nov 19, 1984.

24. Franks, *Reporting Disasters*, 115.



Figure 2: Relief flight lands at a make-shift airstrip at Korem, Ethiopia. Photo by Brian Stewart.

While Steven Lewis became a powerful force at the UN, Mulroney also had the capable former prime minister and current Secretary of State for External Affairs, Joe Clark in his political arsenal. Clark was instrumental in recognising the emerging role between the media and government, as well as the potential for creating a relationship between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government agencies and policies. Alongside the efforts of David MacDonald, who was tasked with coordinating Canada's relief efforts, Joe Clark measured the inclusion of NGOs in crafting foreign policy as one of his hallmark achievements, based on their own interests and involvement in various crises.<sup>25</sup> When reflecting on his time as foreign minister, Clark recalled that NGOs had been his most ardent critics: they had been suspicious of anything that he, representing the government, had put forward. For this reason, he had transitioned the focus away from the innate disagreements found between NGO and government agencies and, instead, redirected them towards their common agreements.<sup>26</sup> What he had forecasted, stemming from his and other foreign minister's experience in Ethiopia and beyond, was a crucial element of interdependence between various organizations. The late twentieth century saw an explosion in the number of operable NGOs that were able to work relatively

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25. Joe Clark, *How We Lead: Canada in a Century of Change*. Toronto: Random House Canada, 2013. 64.

26. Clark, *How We Lead*, 64.

efficiently with government.<sup>27</sup> It was this mixture of commonalities and public interest that created an efficient system that enabled two-thirds of Canadians to donate towards Ethiopia, and, as Clark, quoting Brian Stewart, notes, “was probably responsible for saving an excess of 700,000 lives.”<sup>28</sup>

In the House of Commons, Joe Clark received questions and various commendations from the Opposition, both for Canada’s demonstration of leadership in the crisis and concerns as to where Canada’s activities could be improved. Several archived debates from the House identify MPs, such as John Oostrom, who echoed the sentiments of his constituents in the “exemplary” action taken by Clark in delivering aid to Ethiopia.<sup>29</sup> However, various members also sought to address many underlying issues. In early November, Jean Chrétien directed his attention to Conservative efforts abroad, beginning first by congratulating Clark for visiting Ethiopia to see the situation for himself.<sup>30</sup> Chrétien’s intrigue pointed to the idea of establishing a more efficient system of relief by way of a mobile unit that would utilize De Havilland type aircraft to make food delivery much more efficient.<sup>31</sup> While Chrétien also expressed pleasure that Canada was leading in the famine relief, Clark foreshadowed in his response that such a rapid-relief force could be included in a final recommendation made by the emergency response coordinator. Clark also hoped that the Ethiopian government would do whatever was necessary to ensure that food reached all affected parties, thus also addressing another of Chrétien’s concerns.<sup>32</sup> In a caucus meeting, Joe Clark further reiterated his commitment to Ethiopia by stating that the crisis warranted treatment as an all-party committee.<sup>33</sup> This point was further corroborated later in December 1984, when NDP MP Lynn McDonald stated before the House of the “solid unanimity” across Parliament as to both the impression they as MP’s had about the crisis and what actions Canada should be taking.<sup>34</sup> Her reaction was in response to a delegation of representatives from the three major parties who personally surveyed the situation in Ethiopia. She also stressed the varied nature of Canada’s response, noting that Ethiopia, together with other Sub-Saharan African nations, would require continued assistance to become “self-sufficient in agriculture [while] massive intervention is needed for reforestation, agricultural improvement, and water projects.”<sup>35</sup> The cooperation in the House demonstrated that the Conservative government could rely on bipartisan support in their approach to Ethiopia. Moreover, many of the criticisms of the government would eventually be addressed in new policy initiatives.

Members of the House of Commons were quick to chastise the government for not delivering information immediately to their colleagues. Ms. Pauline Jewett, NDP MP for New Westminster-Coquitlam, took aim at

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27. Ibid., 67.

28. Ibid., 65.

29. Canada, *House of Commons Debates*. 33rd Parliament, 1st Session: Vol. 1. Library of Parliament / Bibliothèque du Parlement. Image 735.

30. Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, image 24.

31. Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, image 24.

32. Ibid.

33. Solomon, “Tears are Not Enough,” 247.

34. Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, image 1341.

35. Ibid.

Joe Clark for what she claimed was giving management of the crisis to MacDonald. She claimed, regarding aid and MacDonald's position, that he "is co-ordinating it, not instigating it," and wanted to know the precise measures that the government itself was taking in conjunction with public commitments.<sup>36</sup> For his part, Clark recommended patience while the government gathered information and prepared its own course of action. Such actions were later applauded by Chrétien, specifically where the government itself had steadily increased contributions to Ethiopia over the course of November. Chrétien also commended Clark for his nonpartisan handling of the crisis, with such high praise as Clark's statement for 17 November 1984 reflecting "the thoughts of the Canadian people."<sup>37</sup> As with most instances of debate in the House, Chrétien criticized the government for reducing foreign aid commitments while simultaneously allocating new funding toward the crisis. "No one wants to be partisan about this issue," Chrétien declared before the House, "While I believe the Minister is taking the right steps, I hope he can assure us that it is not just a façade to hide cuts in other areas."<sup>38</sup> In other instances in the House, Clark also indicated some of the funding was coming from a special fund established for famine relief, while his Conservative government was taking steps to cancelling cutbacks that had been ordered under the previous Liberal administration.<sup>39</sup>

General enthusiasm from the public was crucial to Canada's response. Other MP's, like Jim Edwards, recounted how the Kiwanis Club of Edmonton was motioning a donation of \$10,000 from its boards for the purpose of famine relief.<sup>40</sup> Liberal MP Alfonso Gagliano declared that he had received a check for \$547 from the students of Pierre de Coubertin School in Saint-Leonard that read, "we felt that it was our duty as Canadians, Christians, and as human beings to save someone's life."<sup>41</sup>

The House of Commons's Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence, while commending Clark's actions, also raised concerns over the conduct of CIDA toward Ethiopia in the years leading up to the famine.<sup>42</sup> Steven Langdon, NDP MP for Essex-Windsor, explained to the Committee on 29 November about the categorizing system employed by CIDA, and that it has miscategorised Ethiopia which then reduced aid to the country.<sup>43</sup> Other MP's on the Committee questioned how CIDA evaluated its activities of as governments change. Langdon chastised Margaret Catley-Carleson, president of CIDA during the famine and vice-president during the Liberal administration in the late 1970s, for initially ignoring his specific questions. Her response on CIDA's categorizing system employed during her tenure as vice president

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36. Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, image 29 - 30

37. Ibid., image 308.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid., image 309.

40. Solomon, "Tears are Not Enough," 249.

41. Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, image 1054.

42. Canada. Parliament. House of Commons. House of Commons Committees, 33rd Parliament, 1st Session: Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence, vol. 1 no. 1-29. Library of Parliament / Bibliothèque du Parlement. Image 35.

43. House of Commons Committees, 33rd Parliament, 1st Session: Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence, vol. 1 no. 1-29. Image 35.

was that it was essentially a new methodology, and it was a blend of various “characteristics which is reviewed at the ministerial level to make decisions on eligibility.”<sup>44</sup> External Relations Minister Monique Vezina interjected in defence of Catley-Carleson during Langdon’s gruelling interrogation and stated that Joe Clark’s objectives were tied to consultations on rewriting Canada’s foreign policy, not dwelling on what happened prior. In further regards to CIDA, Langdon accused the department of making political considerations its paramount concern in categorizing the level of developmental assistance a nation was set to receive. Vezina responded aptly: “We are a new government, which has promised to elevate the various programs, to keep what is worthwhile, and to correct any deficiencies.”<sup>45</sup> Several other questions put forward during the hearing, such as why Canada was not putting forward short-term famine relief solutions prior to November 1, were simply dismissed as they were decided by the previous government and Vezina claimed she could only speculate on their motives.

A third key component in Mulroney’s famine response was the appointment of David MacDonald, a former Conservative MP and a politician who had a “sterling reputation in Ottawa as a man of conscience,” who had been tasked with directing Canada’s response to the crisis.<sup>46</sup> His unique and personalized style of leadership, combined with a keen understanding of the novelty of the situation, proved that he was effective in maintaining momentum, and was careful in framing the famine in terms that tended to portray Ethiopians as victims of circumstance. Still, MacDonald was surprised at the overwhelming support that came from across Canada, saying that “it just came up from the ground.”<sup>47</sup> He, too, received considerable praise for activities undertaken by his office, and by issuing reports that were well-received by Canadians.<sup>48</sup> Further evidence of his capabilities came from Canadians who were facing hardship but were still more than willing to donate to the aid effort. Nancy Leavitt, a mother of three and a student, offered \$125 under the belief that the money she gave would go to food, not arms, and that her family could “all have a clear conscious” at Christmas.<sup>49</sup> These offerings, made by members of the public, were also then redressed by various MPs in the House.

While many MPs from both parties regarded the selection of David MacDonald as the best choice to manage and coordinate both the private and public resources for famine relief, it was not without controversy. MacDonald was held responsible by the media on a variety of topics that pertained to both the actions of government and concerns over whether aid was going specifically to famine victims. In one such claim, made in January 1985, of aid being withheld from conflict zones in Eritrea and Tigray, Liberal MP Brian Tobin called for an independent investigation into the accusations of the media. Monique Vezina promptly dismissed the

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44. House of Commons Committees, 33rd Parliament, 1st Session: Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence, vol. 1 no. 1-29. Image 40.

45. House of Commons Committees, 33rd Parliament, 1st Session: Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence, vol. 1 no. 1-29. Image 41.

46. Solomon, “Tears are Not Enough,” 250.

47. Stewart, “When Brian Mulroney was Great.”

48. Solomon, “Tears are Not Enough,” 253.

49. Ibid., 254.

request and stated in the House: “We knew very well that helping Ethiopia was helping a country where a civil war was underway.”<sup>50</sup> Likewise, MP Ken James also pointed out that a sizeable donation of \$82,000 from a constituent of his was earmarked for Mother Theresa operating in Addis Ababa, yet the money was waiting at the Canadian embassy to be dispersed.<sup>51</sup> Such concerns were easier for the government to respond to as they could (and did) claim that it would be distributed as soon as possible.

MacDonald was able to effectively deliver reports to Clark and the Canadian public as to how the Canadian government was dealing with various aspects of the crisis. Transparency and reporting were two important factors throughout the various phases of the crisis. The core tenet behind federal allocation and the matching of public donations by the government was presented as a way to prevent another famine. This took a variety of initiatives, such as food-for-work programs, education, and, as would eventually become controversial, relocation.<sup>52</sup> Most importantly, MacDonald and his staff were able to frame the crisis as Canada helping Africans to help themselves.<sup>53</sup> Featured in his report for March, 1985, MacDonald also delivered a list of recommendations for Canada to undertake in the future to avoid similar crises, with one of them being cooperating with NGOs and maintaining a permanent office designed to watch for famine.<sup>54</sup>

The Mulroney government’s focus on the famine won it praise as it entered 1985. For example, a public opinion survey from the government’s chief pollster, Allan Gregg, demonstrated that the majority of those surveyed were more concerned with famine relief than economic issues that had been a key element in the 1984 federal campaign.<sup>55</sup> MacDonald was keenly aware of the variety of ways that he could take advantage of the public’s interest in the crisis, and sometimes interested groups came to him. Bruce Allen, manager for the homegrown music group *Northern Lights*, approached MacDonald asking for financial assistance for a recording session for what would become one of the most memorable creations of the crisis in Canada, the single *Tears Are Not Enough*.<sup>56</sup> Aside from generating an incredible number of donations for famine relief, which was then matched by CIDA, people involved with the single remained in contact with the federal relief efforts and some even went to Africa to see the situation for themselves.<sup>57</sup> Mila Mulroney, long after the single’s debut, was so interested in the song that she would record a documentary in late 1985 of how the single was made.<sup>58</sup>

As the media moved on to other issues, topics of misconduct in managing the crisis steadily emerged. Clark’s initial reassurances in the House in 1984 proved to only delay the inevitable. The confusing situation

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50. Fen Osler Hampson, *Master of Persuasion: Brian Mulroney’s Global Legacy*. New York: Signal, 2018. 52.

51. Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, image 1059

52. Hampson, *Master of Persuasion*, 53.

53. David MacDonald, *The African Famine and Canada’s Response*. CIDA, Public Affairs Branch. Quebec: Hull, March 1985. 19.

54. MacDonald, *The African Famine and Canada’s Response*, 34.

55. Solomon, “Tears are Not Enough,” 249.

56. Janyce McGregor, “Tears Still Not Enough.” [www.cbc.ca](http://www.cbc.ca). Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, February 10, 2015.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid.

in Ethiopia, having been ongoing for much of the 1980s, was eliciting wariness from many Parliamentarians. Bill Blaikie, the NDP's foreign policy critic, took the Conservatives to task and claimed, "There is a place where Canada will draw the line."<sup>59</sup> The complex situation in Ethiopia, coupled with a progressively worsening case of donor fatigue, reflected the reality of the scale of the crisis, whereas the political situation was still "off putting."<sup>60</sup> As David MacDonald was ordered by Mulroney to wind down his office in 1986, renewed calls for aid had emerged from international organizations like the World Food Program, which claimed that "Ethiopia, Mozambique, Malawi, Angola, Somalia, and the Sudan needed 2.3 million tons of food."<sup>61</sup> Still, Canada considered its work done in Ethiopia.

### **Conclusion:**

It was Mulroney's sense of Canada's commitment to the African famine, and humanitarian issues more generally, that propelled Canadian activities at home and abroad. While the United Kingdom and the United States floundered on the issue of supplying aid to a communist nation, Mulroney sought to create a new role for Canada by demonstrating not only an independent foreign policy but also one based on the values and morals that he claimed represented Canada. That attitude also prompted the public's interest in the crisis. Ultimately, Mulroney was subject to the same pressure that defined his immediate response to the famine. After nearly two years of action, Mulroney ordered David MacDonald to conclude his work and deliver his final recommendations as the public prepared to move onto the next major issue. Earlier, he had ordered Steven Lewis, already in place as Canada's UN ambassador, to mobilize international aid to the crisis. Joe Clark, having already commanded a short-lived administration, effectively controlled issues in the House of Commons and provided answers to his colleagues on the opposite bench. His role in facilitating dialogue between NGOs and the government completed the government's objective to establish a foreign policy that became distinct and would be used by future administrations to deal with future crises. Just as during the 1984 campaign, Mulroney keenly understood public interest. His understanding of personal relationships over party politics enabled him to become an effective leader at home and abroad during the Ethiopian crisis and with a judicious selection of Cabinet colleagues and other Canadians, he effectively mobilized Canada and the world to address a pressing social issue in Africa.

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59. Solomon, "Tears are Not Enough," 257.

60. Ibid., 262.

61. Solomon, "Tears are Not Enough," 262.

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# SAYING "NO" TO THE UNITED STATES: HOW PRIME MINISTER JEAN CHRÉTIEN KEPT CANADIAN SOLDIERS OUT OF THE IRAQ WAR

Ryan Whippler

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## Introduction

For many political leaders, committing troops to a combat zone is one of the most difficult decisions they have to make. Among the many ramifications of such decisions is the knowledge that some of these soldiers will not come home alive. For Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, Canada's twentieth prime minister, soldiers coming home in body bags was one of many factors to weigh on his decision of whether to commit troops to an invasion of Iraq in 2003. Following the attack on the United States on 11 September 2001, US President, George W. Bush, declared war on terrorism and sought retribution for those who died. President Bush had asked for — and received — support from numerous nations, including Canada, when United States dispatched troops to Afghanistan looking for the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in October, 2001. As the American war on terrorism escalated, Bush sought support from the United Nations to invade Iraq under the premise that it was hiding weapons of mass destruction. While Great Britain and Australia supported the US, other nations, including Canada, demanded additional proof of the US claims that Iraq leader, Saddam Hussein, was, indeed, harbouring weapons of mass destruction. Canada and other nations sought a binding resolution from the United Nations for a campaign against Iraq. The request bought time for Jean Chrétien, as he gauged the resolve of his Cabinet, weighed the potential fall-out from the opposition parties in Parliament, and determined how the Canadian public might react to Canada joining the military campaign against Iraq. Chrétien knew his decision would have ramifications on Canada's foreign policy, especially its relationship with the United States, its closest neighbor and most important trading partner. With Great Britain already pledging its support for the American invasion, Canada would be in a unique position if they refused to join the coalition. While Canada had earlier refused to join British and American military operations, notably with the British in Egypt in 1956 and the Americans in Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s, staying out of Iraq would mark the first time Canada said no to both long-term Allies as they engaged in a military incursion at the same time. This essay examines the internal and external pressures on Jean Chrétien as he decided on Canada's

participation in the Iraq War, how he communicated his ultimate decision to the Canadian public, and the ramifications for Canada of not joining their closest ally.

Although the Canada-United States relationship has been long described as special and unique, that relationship has also had its share of challenges over the past two hundred years. Presidents, prime ministers, and political parties have adopted different positions on a variety of issues important to the two countries over many decades. They have often developed different foreign policy positions on numerous issues, but, invariably, economic, and geographic proximity has ensured they never stray too far from each other on most issues. The symmetry between the two nations has often been reflected in the public relationship between the President and the Prime Minister. Following the inauguration of Republican George W. Bush in 2000, many believed it would be one of those times when relations would be strained with Canada, as the two leaders were philosophically different and the ideological difference between the two governments seemed to growing.<sup>1</sup> According to author and political commentator, Michael Adams, the slow divergence between the two countries had been gathering momentum since the end of the Cold War. While Canadians questioned authority and became more socially liberal, Americans drifted in the opposite direction, towards social conservatism, especially when it came to foreign affairs.<sup>2</sup> With a Republican president in the White House and a Liberal Prime Minister in 24 Sussex Drive, there was, indeed, a possibility — even a high probability — the two leaders would not agree on certain issues.

Following the September 11 attacks by al-Qaeda terrorists, President Bush announced that America would wage “war on terrorism.” Immediately after the 9/11 attacks, Bush made an unequivocal statement, “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.” It was a clear message to every other nation in the world.<sup>3</sup> For Bush, there was no middle ground, but it presented a serious conundrum for Prime Minister Chrétien, as he had to define what any support for the US would look like. As early as 2002, President Bush began to signal to the international community his preference for a ground assault in Iraq. Canada, under Chrétien’s leadership, had joined the United States and NATO forces on Al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan earlier, in October, 2001, demonstrating, too, that it was committed to fighting terrorists around the world. However, Canada and other members of the United Nations looked at a potential war in Iraq differently. While Chrétien received up-to-date intelligence reports from the United States, he also leaned on his own diplomats and Canadian intelligence to help him formulate Canada’s policy and use that information to devise his own plan moving forward. Chrétien had to weigh the accuracy of the American claim that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction, one of President Bush’s main arguments for mounting an Iraq

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1. John Herd Thompson, "Playing by the New Washington Rules: The U.S.-Canada Relationship, 1994-2003," *The American Review of Canadian Studies* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 9.

2. Michael Adams, *Fire and Ice: The United States, Canada and the Myth of Converging Values* (Toronto: Penguin, 2003), 44.

3. President George W. Bush, "Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People," September 20, 2001, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/print/20010920-8.html>.

invasion.<sup>4</sup> Chrétien and Canada's intelligence community were wary of such claims from the Americans, and focused on the ongoing United Nations investigations into whether or not Iraq did, indeed, possess weapons of mass destruction. Canada made it clear that their support would hinge upon a United Nation resolution to invade Iraq.



Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien meets with US President George Bush, April 20, 2001. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?search=Jean Chretien and George Bush&title=image](https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?search=Jean+Chretien+and+George+Bush&title=image)

Wary of American and British motivations for invading Iraq, Chrétien weighed his options carefully and refused to be rushed into a decision by either the Americans or the British. While awaiting the results from a United Nation team of weapons' investigators, Chrétien was looking — and hoping — for a diplomatic solution for Iraq rather than an invasion. The lead UN investigator, Hans Blix, had stated in January 2003 that he did not expect to find a “smoking gun” to support the American claim that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction.<sup>5</sup> The United Nations, nevertheless, continued to assess the situation and investigate American claims, but it was becoming clear, at the same time, that President Bush intended to invade Iraq with, or without, a UN mandate. This left other UN members, including Canada, with a difficult decision. Chrétien, meanwhile, was considering advice from within the bureaucracy as well as listening to

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4. Alan Barnes, (28 May 2020). "Getting it right: Canadian intelligence assessments on Iraq, 2002-2003". *Intelligence and National Security*. 35 (7): 940.

5. Donald Barry, "Chrétien, Bush, and the War in Iraq." *The American Review of Canadian Studies* 35, no. 2 (2005): 222.

criticism from those who opposed a military intervention in Iraq. When asked on 23 January about the pressure he was receiving from the Americans to make a decision, Chrétien responded, "If I have to say no, I will. If I have to say yes, I will. We are an independent country."<sup>6</sup> In the days leading to the US invasion, Chrétien continued to use the United Nations as a shield to push for additional time to achieve a peaceful and diplomatic solution. It was becoming apparent, however, that the Americans had already made up their mind to invade, and a diplomatic solution was unlikely. For Chrétien, time was running out, and he would soon have to make a decision.

While the Canadians continued to ruminate about joining the Iraq invasion, the United Kingdom rendered its decision. By April 2002, British Prime Minister Tony Blair had pledged his support to George Bush and the United States. Blair agreed with his American counterpart that it was time for a regime change in Iraq: "I made up my mind that Saddam needs to go."<sup>7</sup> Then, Blair joined President Bush in trying to persuade Chrétien on the importance of the invasion. In the fall of 2002, Chrétien informed Blair at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg he was not interested in "getting into the business of replacing leaders we don't like without being covered under the flag of the UN."<sup>8</sup> While intelligence gathering continued, Chrétien realized his decision would center on two main items. First, was it, indeed, time for a regime change in Iraq, and second, did the country possess weapons of mass destruction even though United Nations investigators had not found any evidence to support that claim?

The attitude of the Canadian public mattered a great deal to Chrétien, and a potential invasion of Iraq never seemed to resonate with Canadians. As early as November 2002, large anti-war demonstrations occurred across the country. In one such demonstration, 2,000 people gathered in Queen's Park in Toronto.<sup>9</sup> They were joined the following day by demonstrations in other Canadian cities, notably Edmonton, Winnipeg, Vancouver and Halifax. By March 2003, both the size of crowds and the number of locations grew as Canadians across the country voiced their opposition to Canada joining the coalition against Iraq. Not surprisingly, the largest protest took place in Quebec, where there was a long history of opposition to Canada's participation in overseas engagement. In Montreal, more than 200,000 people gathered in near frigid conditions to send a message to Chrétien and American President George Bush to stay out of Iraq.<sup>10</sup> While over sixty percent of Canadians told pollsters they were opposed to the war, that number increased to 77 percent when looking at Quebec.<sup>11</sup> Opposition to Canadian military incursions abroad from Quebec citizens have been strong, dating to the First World War and earlier. The 1918 Easter Riots in Quebec City left 150 casualties, when people protested the *Military Services Act*, which forced conscription upon certain Canadian

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6. Rick Mofina and Sean Gordon, "Chrétien wants weapons evidence," *Calgary Herald*, January 24, 2003.

7. Andy McSmith and Tony Harnden, "Blair backs military action against Iraq," *National Post*, April 8, 2002.

8. Jean Chrétien, *My Years as Prime Minister*. 1st ed. Toronto: A.A. Knopf Canada, 2007, 307.

9. Canadian activists stage anti-war rallies". CBC. 17 November 2002. Retrieved 22 September 2009.

10. "Millions say 'no' to war in Iraq". CBC. 16 February 2003. Retrieved 22 September 2009.

11. Galloway, "reveals."

citizens by the federal government.<sup>12</sup> While the opinion of Quebec may not have been a central consideration for Chrétien, it likely factored into Liberal discussion and debate. In a referendum held in October, 1995, only 50.6 percent of Quebecers voted to remain part of Canada.<sup>13</sup> Less than a decade later, the separatist movement remained strong, and Quebec was about to enter a provincial election. Staying out of the war could temper separatist rhetoric and potentially benefit the provincial Liberals in that election and relegate the Parti Québécois to the opposition benches. With citizens marching through Canadian streets, it seemed to confirm popular support for Prime Minister Chrétien's leanings to stay out of Iraq unless there was a UN Resolution. By the time Prime Minister Chrétien officially announced Canadian soldiers would not take part in a ground invasion of Iraq, 66 percent of citizens approved of how he handled the situation.<sup>14</sup> Although two-thirds of Canadians sided with Chrétien, one-third believed Canada needed to support the United States. Many of the dissenting voices against Chrétien came from the business community worried his decision would negatively impact trade with the Americans.<sup>15</sup> These fears were not unfounded, as the potential fall-out of upsetting American trade relations could be substantial.

If Chrétien was looking for support, however, he found it amongst his Liberal party colleagues. There was thunderous applause from them in the House of Commons when he stated, "If military action proceeds without a new resolution in the Security Council, Canada will not participate."<sup>16</sup> A number of Liberal MP's had earlier publicly voiced their objection to the invasion of Iraq and the aggressive action taken by the United States and Great Britain. Leading up to Chrétien's announcement on 17 March 2003, several Liberal MPs made inflammatory remarks. In one instance, Carolyn Parrish, Liberal MP for Mississauga—Erindale, blurted out "Damn Americans. Hate those bastards," after leaving a Liberal party meeting in February 2003.<sup>17</sup> The anti-American and anti-Bush comments from Liberal MPs seemed contagious as a number of MPs and party members made similar comments that had the potential to undermine Chrétien's principled stance on the invasion. Minister of Natural Resources Herb Dhaliwal accused President Bush of "not being [a] statesman."<sup>18</sup> Chrétien demanded his colleagues cease with such insults: "It was the Americans' privilege and right to make the decision they made," he countered.<sup>19</sup> While Chrétien brought his members into line, several within the Liberal caucus continued to harbor doubt on whether the right decision had been made. Liberal MP and

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12. Martin F. Auger, "On the Brink of Civil War: The Canadian Government and the Suppression of the 1918 Quebec Easter Riots." *The Canadian historical review* 89.4 (2008): 504.

13. Nicholas Bayne, "So Near and Yet So Far: The 1995 Quebec Referendum in Perspective." *London journal of Canadian studies* (2017): 25.

14. Gloria Galloway, "PM's Iraq call backed by 66% poll reveals," *Globe and Mail*, March 22, 2003.

15. Chrétien, *My Years as Prime Minister*, 315.

16. Canada, "17 March 2003," Official Report of the Debates of the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada: Second Session—Thirty-Seventh Parliament, Hansard 71. <https://www.ourcommons.ca/PublicationSearch/?View=D&Item=&ParlSes=37-2&coob=&Topic=&Proc=&Per=&Prov=&Cauc=&Text=~AND~ Jean Chretien&RPP=15&order=&targetLang=&SBS=0&MRR=150000&Page=26&PubType=37>, 2003.

17. Barry, "Chrétien," 222.

18. Shawn McCarthy, "Dhaliwal joins chorus in his caucus against Bush," *Globe and Mail*, March 20, 2003.

19. Brian Laghi, "Americans had the right to attack Iraq, Chretien says," *Globe and Mail*, March 21, 2003.

President of the Treasury Board, Lucienne Robillard, asked candidly during a Cabinet meeting, "What if [the Americans] find WMD?"<sup>20</sup> However, by that time, Chrétien had only one Liberal MP who withheld his support. David Pratt, Member of Parliament for Nepean—Carleton, found fault in relying on support from the United Nations, calling Chrétien's decision an "abdication of national responsibility."<sup>21</sup>

While Prime Minister Chrétien had to deal with his own party members and cautioned them to tone down their anti-war and anti-American rhetoric, he was careful on how he positioned himself and the country with the United States. While publicly stating his respect for the American decision to commit troops to an Iraq ground war, Chrétien would later give insight into his thoughts at the time: "It [invasion] would be justified if there were an authorization from the Security Council. We would have said yes if that was the case. But when we said no, it was because the case was not made."<sup>22</sup> On 17 March 2003, Jean Chrétien stood in the House of Commons and announced that Canadians would not be involved in the pending invasion of Iraq. He spoke to Parliament before informing either the United States or British government.<sup>23</sup> With the decision made, the ramifications and reaction from the Canadian public, Chrétien's Liberal colleagues, his political opponents, the media, and the international community were about to begin.

While Liberals in the House of Commons showered Chrétien with applause, the cheers, not surprisingly, were not shared across the aisle with the Opposition conservatives. The Bloc Québécois and New Democratic Party, however, were supportive as both opposed war. Canadian Alliance leader, Stephen Harper, was careful not to specifically advocate support for an invasion of Iraq but condemned Chrétien for not supporting Canada's neighbor, ally, and its largest economic trade partner. In responding to a question about the implications on Canada's relationship with the United States, Harper quipped, "I don't know what the ramifications are, but I know they won't be good."<sup>24</sup> When the House of Commons' motion to stay out of the Iraq War came to a vote, members of the Canadian Alliance and the Progressive Conservatives were overwhelmingly opposed, with only one of their members supporting it. As American and British troops began their assault on Iraq, the opposition rhetoric intensified, especially from Stephen Harper, who said, "Whatever side you are on, this government is embarrassing. The Prime Minister's behaviour is gutless ... We have historically as a country stood beside our best friends and allies, the United States and Britain whenever they have been together. That is where we should be now."<sup>25</sup>

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20. Timothy A. Sayle, (2015). "'But he has nothing on at all!' Canada and the Iraq War, 2003". *Canadian Military History*. 19 (4): 16.

21. "Liberal dissent, confusion brewing over Iraq crisis, Star reports," Canadian Press NewsWire, 14 January 2003.

22. Sheldon Alberts, Deputy Ottawa Bureau Chief, with Files from Anne Dawson. "PM Maintains War in Iraq Is 'not Justified': 'Case Was Not Made'." *National Post (Toronto)* (Don Mills, Ont), 2003.

23. Sayle, "nothing," 18.

24. Shawn McCanhy and Paul Koring, "War isn't justified, PM says," *Globe and Mail*, March 19, 2003.

25. Alberts, "PM maintains."



A convoy of U.S. Marine Corps High-Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles arrives in northern Iraq, during a sandstorm, March 26, 2003. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?search=Iraq War=image](https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?search=Iraq+War=image)

It may be difficult to align and reconcile a specific decision, such as refusing to join the invasion in Iraq in 2003, to Canada's overall foreign policy initiatives, but it is important nonetheless to consider the decision from that perspective more broadly. When Chrétien was first elected as an MP in the riding of Saint-Maurice Laflèche in 1963, it was under the Liberal leadership of Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson. As a Pearson disciple, Chrétien shared Pearson's notions of multilateralism and liberal internationalism, and looked to apply that philosophy to his own foreign policy decisions. By the mid-1990's, moreover, the Liberal government had committed Canada to a values-based foreign policy, promoting such Canadian values [as] democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and the environment."<sup>26</sup> It was difficult to espouse those values and then not oppose the dictatorial rule of Saddam Hussein, but Chrétien believed that those values should be promoted within UN action. In an interview many years later, Jean Chrétien described the pressure being exerted upon him by Tony Blair to participate in the removal of Saddam Hussein, whom he [Blair] labelled a terrible dictator, "I said. Of course, Tony, he's a terrible dictator. But if we're in the business of replacing all

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26. "Canada in the world," Canada foreign policy review, Ottawa, 1995.

the dictators we don't like, who's next?"<sup>27</sup> Chretien's response clearly shows the precarious balance between calling for democratic rule in other countries and inserting it into his foreign policy objectives with the full knowledge he will not always be willing to join with other nations to impose or enforce Canada's values on rogue nations. Nonetheless, Chretien and the Liberal party continued their rhetoric that "Canada's foreign policy should promote core Canadian values," even as talk of a potential Iraq invasion gained momentum throughout 2002.<sup>28</sup> Such rhetoric led critics to accuse Chrétien and the Liberal Party of making disingenuous and contradictory foreign policy statements. Political scientist Denis Stair went one step further, suggesting that, "Canadians, in their approach to international affairs, have grown alarmingly smug, complacent, and self-deluded." They speak of values but do little to enforce them.<sup>29</sup>

Chrétien's detractors were worried that his decision to refuse participation in the Iraq War would have a detrimental impact on the Canadian economy as noted above. With Canada depending so heavily on trade with the United States, the business community was fearful of potential sanctions from the Americans. With an estimated 87 percent of Canadian trade dependent on the American market, any disruptions would have disastrous consequences.<sup>30</sup> Fears about whether US governmental policy would be re-adjusted to punish Canada were heightened, especially when the US Ambassador to Canada, Paul Celluci, stated a week into the Iraq War that Americans, "are so disappointed and upset that Canada is not fully supporting us."<sup>31</sup> The fear of the Canadian business community was further heightened when US National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice, cautioned in May that Canada's decision to stay out of the war would not be forgotten.<sup>32</sup> Such warnings caused justified anxieties among Canadians. In reality however, the trade between the two countries was so intertwined that no significant damage or fallout was felt in the months and years following Canada's decision. Prime Minister Chrétien downplayed the potential economic fallout himself when discussing the consequences on trade relations, "We have disagreed in the past. We will disagree in the future. But in terms of our trade relations – we represent 25% of their market, and they represent 87% of our market. So we are a community of interests, and what we are selling to them, most of it, they buy because they need it, not because they want to be nice."<sup>33</sup>

While isolated incidents of cancelled contracts and petty economic harassment did occur, the larger concerns and fears from Canadian businesses did not materialize, neither during the conflict nor in the

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27. "Chretien Says Blair Pushed Canada to Join Iraq War.(Jean Chretien)." *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC)*, 2011, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), 2011.

28. "A dialogue on foreign policy," Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Ottawa, 2003.

29. Denis Stairs, "Myths morals, and reality in Canadian foreign policy," *International Journal* 58, no. 2 (2003): 239.

30. Rick Fawn. "No Consensus with the Commonwealth, No Consensus with Itself? Canada and the Iraq War." *Round Table (London)* 97, no. 397 (2008): 528.

31. Speech by the US Ambassador to Canada A. Paul Cellucci, to the Economic Club of Toronto (2003), 25 March, available on the US embassy website, [http://www.usembassycanada.gov/content/content.asp?section=embconsul&document=cellucci\\_030325](http://www.usembassycanada.gov/content/content.asp?section=embconsul&document=cellucci_030325).

32. Cf. *The National*, CBC TV, 25 April 2003.

33. Alberts, "PM maintains."

immediate aftermath. However, that was not the end of the concern from the business community. Like most conflicts, the invasion of Iraq resulted in massive destruction not only in human costs but also in infrastructure and materials. The reconstruction of Iraq had the potential to result in very large and lucrative contracts for the business community. As the war in Iraq moved swiftly, talks of reconstruction began just weeks after the invasion and the focus for Canadians turned to whether they would be able to bid on what could amount to be massive expenditures on rebuilding Iraq. There was fear that Prime Minister Chrétien's decision to stay out of the war would prevent Canadian firms from bidding on US contracts for work in Iraq. This sense of fear was heightened when United States Secretary of State, Colin Powell, discussed the possibility of excluding those countries that voted against the United Nations Security Council resolution against invading Iraq from bidding on reconstruction projects: "Let's be candid," he said. "It was a coalition of the willing...that took on this task in the face of direct political opposition from a number of nations around the world, and quite frankly, from Canada."<sup>34</sup> Such comments were disturbing and unwelcome not only from the Canadian business community, but also from the Canadian government that was looking to participate in what was deemed, by some, to be a lucrative reconstruction process. The Liberals were quick to point out that humanitarian needs were driving their push to be part of Iraq reconstruction when they sent a delegation to a UN conference on Iraq reconstruction in June 2003.<sup>35</sup>

In the fall of 2003, the US government announced only "coalition nations" would be allowed to bid on what they called 'primary' contracts. These reconstruction projects were funded by the American government and worth an estimated \$18 billion. While it was unlikely any Canadian companies were large enough to bid on such contracts, the exclusion angered large business leaders as well as the Liberal government. Jean Chrétien had already announced his resignation by this time and was to leave office on 13 December 2003. His successor, Paul Martin called the decision "difficult to fathom" and wanted the US government to reconsider as the Canadian taxpayers were financially helping with the reconstruction projects in Iraq.<sup>36</sup> Prime Minister Martin hoped for a better relationship with President Bush than Chrétien had with President Bush. A month after taking office, President Bush confirmed to Paul Martin that Canadian companies would be allowed to bid on the next wave of Iraq reconstruction projects, estimated at approximately \$6 billion. Shortly after this announcement, Prime Minister Martin announced that Canada would forgive the Iraq debt of \$750 million.<sup>37</sup> While the fear of economic reprisals from the United States were valid leading up to and during the early months of the invasion, most experts agree the impact of Canada's decision to not join the war was minimal to business and industry.<sup>38</sup>

Even if the Canadian business community did not suffer any severe economic impact from Chrétien's

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34. Cf. *The National*, CBC TV, 25 April 2003.

35. S. Edwards. (2003) Canada eyes Iraq role now that war is over, *National Post*, June 25.

36. Barry, "Chrétien," 233.

37. David E. Sanger and Douglas Jehl, "Bush seeks help of allies barred from Iraq deals," *New York Times*, December 1, 2003.

38. P. Morton. (2003) Manley plays down potential rift with United States, *National Post*, April 8.

decision to keep Canada out of the Iraq War, what impact did it have on the relationship between he and President Bush? After Chrétien made his decision, many, including Chrétien, felt it was time for fence-mending between the two nations. Throughout the lead-up to his decision, the Prime Minister had always been careful not to publicly admonish those who felt overthrowing Saddam Hussein was necessary. Nor did he criticize Bush's war on terror. In fact, Chrétien increased the size of the Canadian forces in Afghanistan, which took some of the financial and military strain off the United States and its allies fighting in Iraq. He was also quick to offer financial and humanitarian aid to help repair the damage in Iraq. It appeared, however, that President Bush was not as quick to forgive and forget. Bush cancelled his planned official visit to Ottawa on 5 May 2003, pointing to the pressure of dealing with the ongoing war. However, at the same time, Bush invited Australian Prime Minister John Howard to his ranch in Texas. Howard and the Australians were active participants in the Iraq war, and many felt this was a deliberate attempt by the Americans to show favour to those who supported him and shun those who did not. The American Ambassador to Canada, Paul Celluci, removed any ambiguity about Bush's intentions shortly after the event, when he bluntly stated the President would have made the trip to Ottawa if Canada had participated in the war.<sup>39</sup>

Even though Canadian Armed Forces were not part of the Iraq invasion, Canada's significant deployment of soldiers within the region, in some ways aided the US invasion of Iraq. That Canada followed such a policy prompted some critics to accuse Chrétien of playing a shell game with Canadian and United Nation forces. One political commentator noted that "the plan is to mask [Canada's] military's Iraq pacifism with Afghanistan activism and hope President Bush is somehow appeased."<sup>40</sup> Another common criticism was that if Canada were able to send enough soldiers into Afghanistan, they would not have sufficient military personnel to help if the Americans and British came calling. In Parliament, the opposition parties accused Chrétien of playing political games with Canada's Armed Forces. Bloc Québécois leader Gilles Duceppe was concerned military personnel would be used in Iraq and grilled the Prime Minister for clarification. Chrétien was quick to clarify that no soldiers would be used in Iraq and justified Canada's presence in Afghanistan: "Mr. Speaker, we still have many soldiers in Afghanistan, and we will have thousands there this summer. It is our duty to maintain our presence in the gulf to protect them and to provide them with the materiel they need to carry out their job, to keep the peace in Afghanistan and to try to help rebuild the country."<sup>41</sup>

Hurt feelings, petty grievances, and differing opinions aside, the relationship between Canada and the United States was too important to let deteriorate too far. Canada was committed to helping rebuild Iraq and, at the same time, to rebuild their relations with the United States. It was hoped the reconstruction

39. Robert Fife, "Bush cancels visit to Canada," *Calgary Herald*, April 12, 2003.

40. D. Martin. (2003) The Prime Minister's moment of truth, *National Post*, March 18.

41. Canada, "18 March 2003," Official Report of the Debates of the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada: Second Session—Thirty-Seventh Parliament, Hansard 72, <https://www.ourcommons.ca/PublicationSearch/en/?View=D&Item=&ParlSes=37-2&coob=&Topic=&Proc=&Per=&Prov=&Cauc=&Text=~AND~ Jean Chretien&RPP=15&order=&targetLang=&SBS=0&MRR=150000&Page=24&PubType=37>, 2003.

project and the \$300 million the Canadian government committed to the effort would be appreciated by their southern neighbour. U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, who had made no secret of his displeasure with the Canadian government over its Iraq decision, seemed to signal a thawing in the relationship and a path to move forward, when he said "We will get over whatever disappointments that existed in recent weeks."<sup>42</sup> In Iraq, no weapons of mass destruction were found, and by fall of 2003, the United Nations passed a new Security Council resolution asking members to supply troops and financial considerations to help reconstruct Iraq. The occupying forces would be led by the United States military, and it was hoped in Canada that having the countries working together again would also help to heal any rift that had developed between the two nations during the crisis over the Iraq War.

### Conclusion

In retrospect, Prime Minister Chrétien's decision to keep Canadian soldiers out of the war would appear to be one of his best decisions as leader. Nearly twenty years later it is difficult to quantify the positive aspects of the US led invasion in Iraq. There were no weapons of mass destruction and while Saddam Hussein was removed as leader, the region remains unsettled. While Canadians favoured staying out of the Iraq War, Chrétien has also received praise from around the world that considered his decision to be made, "with courage and some dignity."<sup>43</sup> From the beginning, Chrétien had taken what he insisted was a principled view on the war and one that reflected a long practice in Canadian foreign policy. Chrétien asserted that Canada would participate only if war was sanctioned by the United Nations. Chrétien did not wish to betray Canada's longstanding commitment to liberal internationalism and that position had support from his own party. His critics, chief among them the opposition Canadian Alliance party and some members of the business community, were hard-pressed to find fault in keeping Canadian soldiers out of harm's way. Instead, they focused on the potential consequence in Canada's relationship with the United States of not siding with their American and British allies and friends. Even now it is difficult to find quantitative data that would suggest Canadian businesses or Canada's foreign trade was negatively impacted by Chrétien's decision. Relations between the two countries have continued pretty much as they were before the war, with the usual ups and downs, as political leaders come and go. Speaking on the subject in 2011, Chrétien stood by the decision that he made in 2003. While acknowledging the strain in his relationship with President Bush, Chrétien stated, it was actually Tony Blair who pushed him most aggressively and broached the subject of removing Saddam Hussein from power. "I had more discussions about the possibility of going to war with Tony Blair than with George Bush," Chrétien recalled. "I always had a suspicion that Tony said to George, 'I will take care of Jean.'"<sup>44</sup> Whether it was a personality conflict between Chrétien and Bush or an inside glimpse into the ever-changing world of foreign policy, this candid statement gives us a sense of the strained relationship between the two

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42. Allan Thompson, "Canada, U.S. try to mend ties frayed by Iraq war." *Toronto Star*, April 16, 2003.

43. Jeff Sallor and Paul Koring, "Martin wades into spat over U.S. contracts," *Globe and Mail*, December 1, 2003.

44. "Chretien Says Blair Pushed Canada to Join Iraq War.(Jean Chretien)." *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC)*, 2011, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), 2011.

leaders. Input from other world leaders, the question of aligning with the foreign policy of other nations, following the United Nations, feedback from the public, and pressures from the political world – both within the Liberal party and opposition parties — all factored into Chretien’s decision. With all of those factors, as well as numerous insights from military, foreign affairs, political and personal advisors, the decision ultimately rest with the prime minster. Jean Chrétien weighed every piece of information he received and decided in the crisis, “I have said clearly our position [on war against Iraq] is that it is not justified.”<sup>45</sup> Chrétien has never wavered from that statement, not even twenty years later.

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45. Canada, "17 March 2003," Official Report of the Debates of the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada: Second Session–Thirty-Seventh Parliament, Hansard 72, <https://www.ourcommons.ca/PublicationSearch/en/?View=D&Item=&ParlSes=37-2&coob=&Topic=&Proc=&Per=&Prov=&Cauc=&Text=~AND~ Jean Chretien&RPP=15&order=&targetLang=&SBS=0&MRR=150000&Page=24&PubType=37>, 2003.

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# AN EVALUATION OF JUSTIN TRUDEAU'S RECONCILIATION POLICIES: A CASE STUDY ANALYSIS OF THE WET'SUWET'EN NATION AND COASTAL GASLINK PIPELINE CONFLICT

Kien Hoang Trung

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## Introduction

The relationship between the State and Indigenous peoples has been fraught with challenges and historical injustices throughout Canada's history. The struggle for recognition, respect, and reconciliation is ongoing, and the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples has become a central focus for many politicians and policy-makers. Since Justin Trudeau became Canada's twenty-third prime minister in 2015, he has repeatedly promised to make reconciliation with Indigenous communities a top priority for his government, making it a cornerstone of his policy agenda.<sup>1</sup> Trudeau's administration has introduced several policy initiatives to address the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and, at the same time, uphold the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).<sup>2</sup> However, his attempts to right the historical wrongs of Canada's colonial past have been put to the test recently, particularly in the context of the conflict between the Wet'suwet'en Nation and Coastal Gaslink Pipeline Limited over the construction of a pipeline that will deliver natural gas to the LNG Canada facility in Kitimat, British Columbia. This paper aims to evaluate Trudeau's reconciliation efforts by closely examining, as a case study, the federal government's response to the Coastal Gaslink pipeline dispute. It will provide insight into the broader implications of Trudeau's reconciliation policies and the struggles Canada has been facing in its pursuit of genuine reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. The paper is divided

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1. Laforest, G., & Dubois, J. (2017, June 19). *Justin Trudeau and "reconciliatory federalism"*. Policy Options. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/june-2017/justin-trudeau-and-reconciliatory-federalism/#:~:text=The message emerging from the Prime Minister's Office,recognizes the sovereignty of provincial and Indigenous partners.>
  2. Government of Canada. (n.d.). *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1450124405592/1529106060525>

into three sections: the first provides an overview of Trudeau's leadership and reconciliation policies, which gives background on the government's efforts to foster a better relationship with Indigenous communities in Canada; the second provides a thorough account of the Wet'suwet'en Nation and the conflict with Coastal Gaslink over the pipeline running through their traditional territory, including an examination of the historical, cultural and legal aspects of the dispute; and the final section provides an analysis of Trudeau's policies, actions, language, and rhetoric in addressing the conflict, highlighting both the successes and shortcomings of his approach.

### **Overview of Trudeau's Leadership**



Encyclopædia Britannica (2015). Justin Trudeau [Photograph].  
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Justin-Trudeau#/media/1/1927952/203041>

As Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau has become well-known for his charismatic personality and dedication to inclusiveness and diversity. He has introduced several significant policies and initiatives to promote social justice, environmental sustainability, and economic growth. However, he has also faced considerable criticism. Some critics have argued that his leadership is focused on superficial symbolism and rhetoric rather than implementing effective policies. He has been criticized for being too concerned about creating positive images and perceptions rather than taking concrete steps to address real issues. His leadership style has often involved

attracting huge media attention through public appearances and speeches.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, he has been found guilty of violating ethical principles, including the Conflict of Interest Act, on several occasions by accepting gifts and vacations from wealthy individuals and organizations.<sup>4</sup> These challenges and controversies have raised concerns about Trudeau's ability and credibility to serve as prime minister, and despite winning a huge majority government in 2015, his popularity has declined since then.<sup>5</sup>

### Trudeau's Reconciliation Policies

Justin Trudeau has made significant efforts towards promoting reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. He has attempted to implement some of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and adhere to the principles of the UNDRIP as noted above.<sup>6</sup> The Trudeau administration introduced Bill C-15 in 2020 to bring UNDRIP into line with Canadian law.<sup>7</sup> Trudeau's statement on the release of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) on 15 December 2015, demonstrated a deep sense of empathy and understanding of the pain of Indigenous peoples. In a statement in the House of Commons, Trudeau acknowledged that the residential school system is "one of the darkest chapters in Canadian history," and he promised the government was dedicated to finding ways to "restore the trust lost so long ago" from the people affected by the system and society in general. By referencing his role as a father and a former teacher, he tried to connect with the emotional aspects of the residential school system's impact. Representing the people of Canada, he acknowledged the responsibility of the government for the system and showed commitment to seek forgiveness as well as take concrete action to move towards reconciliation.<sup>8</sup> In 2016, he established the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) to investigate the high rates of violence encountered by Indigenous women and girls.<sup>9</sup> Trudeau's government has also made considerable investments in Indigenous housing, healthcare, education, and infrastructure to reduce the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians.<sup>10</sup>

Despite such rhetoric, several critics doubt the government's commitment to reconciliation since its actions

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3. Marland, A. (2017). The brand image of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in international context. *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, 24(2), 139-144. <https://doi.org/10.1080/11926422.2018.1461665>
  4. Tunney, C. (2017, December 20). *Trudeau 'sorry' for violating conflict laws with visits to Aga Khan's island*. CBC News. Retrieved April 1, 2023, from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/trudeau-ethics-aga-khan-1.4458220>
  5. Wesseling, E. (2022, August 18). *Canada's 2022 Foreign Policy Report Card: An Overview*. IAffairs Canada. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from <https://iaffairscanada.com/canadas-2022-foreign-policy-report-card-an-overview/>
  6. Government of Canada. *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*.
  7. Diabo, R. (2020). Indigenous Peoples Should Reject Canada's UNDRIP Bill C-15: It's not all That Meets the Eye. *Indigenous Policy Journal Home*, 31(3). <https://indigenouspolicy.org/index.php/ipj/article/view/723/689>
  8. Prime Minister of Canada. (2015, December 15). *Statement by Prime Minister on release of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/statements/2015/12/15/statement-prime-minister-release-final-report-truth-and-reconciliation>
  9. Needham, F. (2022, September 30). *Prime minister admits road to reconciliation is moving slowly*. APTN News. Retrieved April 1, 2023, from <https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/prime-minister-trudeau-admits-road-to-reconciliation-is-moving-slowly/>
  10. Government of Canada. (n.d.). *Investing in Indigenous community infrastructure*. Retrieved April 1, 2023, from <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1526995988708/1526996020578>

have not always aligned with its statements. In 2021, the federal government, for instance, designated 30 September as a federal holiday to highlight the legacy of the residential schools.<sup>11</sup> However, on the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (as the day was officially known), Trudeau took his family on vacation in Tofino, British Columbia.<sup>12</sup> His decision was heavily criticized by the public, especially after it was discovered that Trudeau had been invited twice to visit the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation in Kamloops, British Columbia.<sup>13</sup> Although he admitted that the holiday was “a mistake” and he regretted not marking it more solemnly, Grand Chief Stewart Phillip of the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs described Trudeau’s action as “a slap in the face” to all the survivors of the residential schools.<sup>14</sup> The holiday incident is not the only reason why Trudeau has been accused of engaging in tokenism and symbolic gestures, rather than enacting substantive policy changes. His government has been criticized for not making sufficient effort to address the long-standing issue of clean drinking water in Indigenous communities.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the TRC’s Calls to Action were released in 2015, but overall progress has been too slow, and many recommendations have not been fully addressed, leading to skepticism regarding the government’s commitment to reconciliation.<sup>16</sup> Even the incorporation of Bill C-15 into Canadian law was condemned by some Indigenous peoples because while the bill seems like a positive move, it was not made legally binding on the government.<sup>17</sup> Although the UNDRIP was integrated into Canadian law, the government still has the power to override the veto of Indigenous peoples through Free, Prior, and Informed consent requirements.<sup>18</sup> Let us turn now to the Wet’suwet’en Nation and the Coastal Gaslink Pipeline conflict to consider Trudeau’s handling of the matter.

### **Background of the Wet’suwet’en**

The Wet’suwet’en Nation is located in the north-central interior of British Columbia. The name Wet’suwet’en means “People of the Wa Dzun Kwuh River,” which refers to what non-Indigenous people had called the Bulkley River.<sup>19</sup> The Wet’suwet’en have lived in the region for many centuries and have maintained a strong bond with the land, relying on the seasonal resources offered by salmon and various land-based resources for hunting, gathering, and trading.<sup>20</sup> Central to Wet’suwet’en culture are gifting and feasting practices and kungax, their oral history tradition. Despite facing numerous challenges, such as epidemics, forced relocation,

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11. BBC News. (2021, October 1). *Truth and Reconciliation: Trudeau slammed for taking vacation*. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-58765502>

12. BBC News. *Truth and Reconciliation: Trudeau slammed for taking vacation*.

13. BBC News. *Truth and Reconciliation: Trudeau slammed for taking vacation*.

14. BBC News. *Truth and Reconciliation: Trudeau slammed for taking vacation*.

15. Needham. *Prime minister admits road to reconciliation is moving slowly*.

16. Needham. *Prime minister admits road to reconciliation is moving slowly*.

17. Diabo. *Indigenous Peoples Should Reject Canada’s UNDRIP Bill C-15*.

18. Reynolds, J. (2018). *Aboriginal Peoples and the Law: A critical introduction* (pp. 160-161). Vancouver: Purich Books.

19. Hume, R., & Walby, K. (2021). Framing, suppression, and colonial policing redux in Canada: News representations of the 2019 Wet’suwet’en blockade. *Canadian Studies*, 55(3), 507–540. <https://doi.org/10.3138/jcs-2020-0021>

20. Hume & Walby. *Framing, suppression, and colonial policing redux in Canada*.

and oppressive colonial policies, the Wet'suwet'en have persevered in maintaining their traditions and cultures.<sup>21</sup>

The Wet'suwet'en Nation is governed and administered by two separate systems: the traditional governance led by hereditary chiefs and the colonial system created by the Indian Act and led by elected chiefs and councils. The traditional governance system predates colonization and is organized into five clans: Gilseyhu (Big Frog), Laksilyu (Small Frog), Gitdumden (Wolf/Bear), Laksamshu (Fireweed), and Tsayu (Beaver). Each house is headed by a hereditary chief and includes ceremonies, laws, and political and economic organizations.<sup>22</sup> In contrast, the elected chief and council system, introduced by the Canadian government in the 19th century and administered under the Indian Act, was intended to replace and suppress traditional Indigenous law and governance. Under this system, the Wet'suwet'en are divided into six First Nations recognized by the Government of Canada: Witset First Nation, Skin Tyee Nation, the Nee Tahi Buhn Band, Ts'il Kaz Koh First Nation (Burns Lake Band), the Wet'suwet'en First Nation, and Hagwilget Nation. Each Nation is administered by an elected chief and a band council.<sup>23</sup> Although elected chiefs and councils are governed under the regulations set out in the Indian Act, they may not necessarily represent the entire Nation because these elected leaders are chosen only by community members with "Indian" status.<sup>24</sup> Certain bands have adopted particular election codes to allow non-status Indians to vote. Still, individuals who do not qualify for Indian status under the Indian Act are generally ineligible to vote in band elections. Consequently, Indigenous individuals who do not obtain Indian status due to numerous legal challenges may not be considered official members of the band under the Indian Act.<sup>25</sup>

Regarding Indigenous land rights, two geographical terms in the discussion are "reserves" and "traditional territories." Indian Reserves, established under the Indian Act and now known as First Nations, are the exclusive territories for Indigenous peoples under government treaty and legislation.<sup>26</sup> In the past, the Indian Act strictly mentioned that no "Indians" owned reserve lands, as the lands were owned by the Crown, and the Minister of Indian Affairs had the lawful authority over the activity on reserves. However, in 1969, the federal government issued a White Paper proposing (unsuccessfully) transferring such lands to Indigenous peoples. In other words, the bands led by the band councils and elected chiefs would not only have authority over the activity on their reserve lands but they would own the lands.<sup>27</sup> However, reserve lands are only part

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21. Hume & Walby. *Framing, suppression, and colonial policing redux in Canada*.

22. Hume & Walby. *Framing, suppression, and colonial policing redux in Canada*.

23. Hume & Walby. *Framing, suppression, and colonial policing redux in Canada*.

24. Gunn, K., & McIvor, B. (2020, February 13). *The Wet'suwet'en, Aboriginal Title, and the Rule of Law: An Explainer*. *First Nations Drum*.

Retrieved April 2, 2023, from <http://www.firstnationsdrum.com/2020/02/the-wetsuweten-aboriginal-title-and-the-rule-of-law-an-explainer/>

25. Gunn & McIvor. *The Wet'suwet'en, Aboriginal Title, and the Rule of Law*.

26. Gunn & McIvor. *The Wet'suwet'en, Aboriginal Title, and the Rule of Law*.

27. Lagace, S., & Sinclair, N. J. (2015, September 24). *The White Paper, 1969*. *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/the-white-paper-1969#:~:text=The White Paper would convert,provide funds for economic development.>

of Indigenous traditional or even broader unceded territories. Traditional territories refer to the land that the First Nations have traditionally occupied and used for many generations, including for hunting, fathering, fishing, and cultural and spiritual sites outside the reserves.<sup>28</sup> Under Wet'suwet'en law, the hereditary chiefs retain jurisdiction over 22,000 square kilometers of the nation as unceded territory.<sup>29</sup> Regarding the rights over the lands, the Supreme Court of Canada in 1997 acknowledged the existence of the Aboriginal title of Wet'suwet'en Nation.<sup>30</sup>

The Wet'suwet'en people have a long history of resistance against colonization and the imposition of Canadian law on their territory. In 1899, the federal government proposed Treaty Eight with various First Nations in present-day Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and the Northwest Territories to legalize their access to the region's natural resources and to facilitate economic development.<sup>31</sup> Some First Nations groups agreed to sign the Treaty and to cede their rights to the land, except for reserve lands set aside for them, in exchange for annual payments, farming equipment, livestock, and access to education, healthcare, hunting, and fishing on their traditional territories.<sup>32</sup> However, the Wet'suwet'en Nation, together with other First Nations, did not sign Treaty Eight.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, the Wet'suwet'en Nation has never formally ceded their rights to the land to the Crown or the Government of Canada.

### **The Conflict between Coastal Gaslink and Wet'suwet'en Nation**

The Wet'suwet'en Nation's opposition to the Coastal Gaslink pipeline construction is rooted in their concern over the potential harm the pipeline might have on their land and the natural resources on which they depend. The pipeline, which runs through their unceded traditional territory, poses a significant environmental risk, including the potential for oil spills and the degradation of salmon habitats, which are essential for the Wet'suwet'en people's subsistence and cultural practices.<sup>34</sup>

The Coastal Gaslink Pipeline is a proposed project spanning 670 kilometers to transport natural gas from northeastern British Columbia to a liquefied natural gas (LNG) facility in Kitimat's port.<sup>35</sup> The project aims to fulfill the growing demand for natural gas in Asia and support LNG production, which is considered a cleaner burning fuel than other fossil fuels.<sup>36</sup> This pipeline is predicted to create about 10,000 jobs during construction and generate millions of dollars in tax revenue for local and provincial governments once completed.<sup>37</sup> The

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28. Gunn & McIvor. *The Wet'suwet'en, Aboriginal Title, and the Rule of Law*.

29. Hume & Walby. *Framing, suppression, and colonial policing redux in Canada*.

30. Hume & Walby. *Framing, suppression, and colonial policing redux in Canada*.

31. Tesar, A. (2016). *Treaty 8*. The Canadian Encyclopedia. Retrieved from <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/treaty-8>

32. Tesar. *Treaty 8*.

33. Hume & Walby. *Framing, suppression, and colonial policing redux in Canada*.

34. Hume & Walby. *Framing, suppression, and colonial policing redux in Canada*.

35. Hume & Walby. *Framing, suppression, and colonial policing redux in Canada*.

36. Hume & Walby. *Framing, suppression, and colonial policing redux in Canada*.

37. Schmunk, R. (2018, October 2). *B LNG project in northern B.C. Gets go-ahead*. CBC News. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/kitimat-lng-canada-1.4845831>

construction began in 2019 and is expected to finish by 2023.<sup>38</sup> However, the project has become a point of contention over Indigenous rights and sovereignty in Canada, aside from concerns about environmental issues.<sup>39</sup> The Coastal Gaslink Pipeline project has divided the Wet'suwet'en Nation, whose traditional territory the pipeline runs through.<sup>40</sup>

The conflict between the pipeline company and the Wet'suwet'en Nation arises from the different opinions and authorities between the two bodies governing the Wet'suwet'en Nation. The Coastal Gaslink has obtained benefit agreements with five out of six elected band councils, which are Witset First Nation, Skin Tyee Nation, the Nee Tahi Buhn Band, Ts'il Kaz Koh First Nation (Burns Lake Band), and the Wet'suwet'en First Nation.<sup>41</sup> Hagwilget Nation has not signed any agreements since the pipeline route does not go through their territory.<sup>42</sup> However, eight of 13 hereditary chiefs have opposed the pipeline, and this group even signed an eviction letter to Coastal Gaslink in early January 2020, ordering company workers off the unceded territory of the Wet'suwet'en Nation.<sup>43</sup> The Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs contend that the project is being built without their consent.<sup>44</sup> They emphasized that Wet'suwet'en law predates colonization, and they have never signed treaties to cede their territories to the Canadian government.<sup>45</sup>

Land defenders, led by hereditary chiefs, started blockading access to the pipeline's construction sites in 2019.<sup>46</sup> This action led to solidarity rallies across the country, with protestors blocking rail lines to #ShutDownCanada in support of the Wet'suwet'en Nation.<sup>47</sup> However, the B.C. Supreme Court granted Coastal Gaslink an injunction, calling for the removal of any obstructions on roads, bridges, or construction sites the company had been authorized to use.<sup>48</sup> The issue has escalated since it involved the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), who have been accused of intimidating and harassing the members of the Wet'suwet'en Nation.<sup>49</sup> The police have reportedly invaded village sites, used various tactics, including high beams and spotlights on residential buildings at night, and confiscated Indigenous people's equipment and

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38. TC Energy. (2023, February 1). *TC Energy provides Coastal GasLink Project update*. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from <https://www.tcenergy.com/announcements/2023-02-01-tc-energy-provides-coastal-gaslink-project-update/#:~:text=Coastal GasLink is working closely,continuing into 2024 and 2025.>

39. Schmunk, R. *B LNG project in northern B.C. Gets go-ahead*.

40. Hume & Walby. *Framing, suppression, and colonial policing redux in Canada*.

41. Baker, R. (2020, February 26). *A who's who of the Wet'suwet'en pipeline conflict*. CBC News. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/wetsuweten-whos-who-guide-1.5471898>

42. Baker. *A who's who of the Wet'suwet'en pipeline conflict*.

43. Baker. *A who's who of the Wet'suwet'en pipeline conflict*.

44. Hume & Walby. *Framing, suppression, and colonial policing redux in Canada*.

45. Hume & Walby. *Framing, suppression, and colonial policing redux in Canada*.

46. Baker. *A who's who of the Wet'suwet'en pipeline conflict*.

47. Hume & Walby. *Framing, suppression, and colonial policing redux in Canada*.

48. Hume & Walby. *Framing, suppression, and colonial policing redux in Canada*.

49. Trumpener, B. (2021, December 20). *Wet'suwet'en protesters block Coastal GasLink site again, 1 month after RCMP crackdown*. CBC News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/wet-suwet-en-protesters-block-pipeline-site-again-1.6293000>

property.<sup>50</sup> The Trudeau government defended the RCMP's engagement, asserting that the B.C. Oil and Gas Commission had approved the Coastal Gaslink pipeline project and insisted the police were enforcing the court injunction to protect the workers in the construction sites.<sup>51</sup>



Hunter, P. (2016). Solidarity Rally with the Wet'suwet'en! [Photograph].  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/43005015@N06/49504486782/in/album-72157713018356257/>

### Trudeau's Approach to the Coastal Gaslink Conflict: Action and Policies

The Trudeau government has undertaken numerous actions to address the Coastal Gaslink crisis and engage with the Wet'suwet'en people and the hereditary chiefs. In January 2020, the Canadian government appointed Nathan Cullen, a former New Democrat Member of Parliament, as a liaison to engage with the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs.<sup>52</sup> This appointment aimed to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict, which had escalated due to widespread protests and blockades throughout Canada in support of the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs opposing the pipeline construction through their traditional territory. Cullen was responsible for gathering perspectives and advice from the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs, and other affected Indigenous groups.<sup>53</sup> In March 2020, a draft agreement was reached between the Canadian government and the Wet'suwet'en

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50. Trumpener. *Wet'suwet'en protesters block Coastal GasLink site again, 1 month after RCMP crackdown.*

51. Trumpener. *Wet'suwet'en protesters block Coastal GasLink site again, 1 month after RCMP crackdown.*

52. Bellrichard, C. (2020, January 27). *B.C. Premier tasks former MP Nathan Cullen with 'de-escalating' Coastal GasLink conflict.* CBC News. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/nathan-cullen-intermediary-coastal-gaslink-1.5441785>

53. Bellrichard, C. (2020, January 27). *B.C. Premier tasks former MP Nathan Cullen with 'de-escalating' Coastal GasLink conflict.*

hereditary chiefs, addressing land rights and title issues. However, the agreement did not provide a solution to the problem, as it did not explicitly mention or prohibit the pipeline project.<sup>54</sup>

In another effort, on 14 May 2020, the hereditary chiefs of the Wet'suwet'en Nation signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with British Columbia and Canada.<sup>55</sup> This MOU acknowledged that the traditional system of governance, led by Wet'suwet'en Houses and hereditary chiefs, holds rights and titles over their traditional territory.<sup>56</sup> This recognition emerged from the resilience of the Wet'suwet'en Houses over 23 years since the Supreme Court of Canada's acknowledgment of Aboriginal title.<sup>57</sup> Tsayu clan Chief Na'Moks described the MOU as "the goal of all hereditary chiefs." However, the MOU did not resolve the conflict over the pipeline because, according to the MOU, the jurisdiction would be transferred over time, and until then, "there will be no impact on rights and interests pertaining to land."<sup>58</sup> Consequently, the MOU did not cease the construction of the Coastal Gaslink pipeline.

In addition to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Canada also ratified the United Nations International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in 1970, requiring the country to report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD).<sup>59</sup> In 2019, UNCERD intervened in the dispute over the Coastal Gaslink pipeline, when it issued its first letter, calling for the Canadian government to withdraw police and halt the construction of two disputed pipelines then underway in Canada, including the Coastal Gaslink pipeline in northern B.C., until obtaining free, prior, and informed consent from relevant Indigenous peoples.<sup>60</sup> In 2020, UNCERD issued a second letter, reaffirming the requirement for Indigenous people's consent before making decisions related to their rights. This letter was issued after the federal and B.C. governments agreed to good faith dialogue but implied that the pipeline construction would continue.<sup>61</sup> On April 29, 2022, UNCERD addressed a third letter to Canada's representative to the United Nations in Geneva, Leslie Norton, reiterating their 2019 decision and calling for both the federal and B.C. governments to cease construction on the pipeline and

54. CBC News. (2020, March 1). *Wet'suwet'en chiefs, ministers reach tentative arrangement over land title but debate over pipeline continues*. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/wetsuweten-agreement-reached-1.5481681>

55. Government of Canada. (n.d.). *Memorandum of Understanding Between Canada, British Columbia and Wet'suwet'en as agreed on February 29, 2020*. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1589478905863/1589478945624>

56. Government of Canada. *Memorandum of Understanding*.

57. Bellrichard, C. (2020, May 14). *Wet'suwet'en, B.C. And Canada sign MOU on negotiations for legal recognition of title*. CBC News. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from [https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/wetsuweten-mou-title-negotiations-signing-1.5570128#:~:text=We all know that this was their goal,"the Wet'suwet'en Nation,"under their system of governance.](https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/wetsuweten-mou-title-negotiations-signing-1.5570128#:~:text=We all know that this was their goal,)

58. Government of Canada. *Memorandum of Understanding*.

59. Government of Canada. (n.d.). *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from [https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/pch/documents/services/canada-united-nations-system/reports-united-nations-treaties/conv\\_intnl\\_elim\\_discrim-intnl\\_conv\\_elim\\_discrim-eng.pdf](https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/pch/documents/services/canada-united-nations-system/reports-united-nations-treaties/conv_intnl_elim_discrim-intnl_conv_elim_discrim-eng.pdf)

60. CityNews Ottawa. (2022, May 11). *UN committee criticizes Canada over handling of Indigenous pipeline opposition*. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from <https://ottawa.citynews.ca/national-news/un-committee-criticizes-canada-over-handling-of-indigenous-pipeline-opposition-5357794>

61. CityNews Ottawa. *UN committee criticizes Canada over handling of Indigenous pipeline opposition*

withdraw the police. The 2022 letter also required the Canadian government to report to the Committee on the measures taken regarding the issue. However, the government has not submitted the report.<sup>62</sup>

### **Trudeau's Speeches, Language, and Rhetoric in Addressing the Conflict**

In his statements regarding the Coastal GasLink conflict and Indigenous issues, Justin Trudeau constantly emphasized the importance of dialogue, collaboration, and working together to resolve the crisis. Trudeau frequently used words such as “partnership,” “engage,” “work together,” and “collaboration” to highlight the need for open dialogue and cooperation between the government and Indigenous communities. This approach demonstrated that the government was willing to participate in the reconciliation process and dedicated to resolving the dispute through communication. In a speech in the House of Commons, Trudeau asserted that the government had always listened.<sup>63</sup> Still, the situation worsened because the relevant parties “refused to listen” and did not choose “respect and communication.”<sup>64</sup>

Trudeau acknowledged the complexity of the situation and emphasized the responsibility of the Government of Canada to understand the historical and cultural context surrounding Indigenous issues and to find nuanced solutions. He and his government consistently repeated that “There is no relationship more important to Canada than the one with Indigenous peoples,”<sup>65</sup> implying that the government was aware of the profound impact of colonialism on Indigenous communities, including the land rights issue and the ongoing process of healing and reconciliation that must be undertaken to address the legacy of these historical injustices. However, despite protests from Indigenous peoples, Trudeau described the LNG Canada Project as one of his government's top achievements because it will “supplant coal in Asia as a power source and do much for the environment.”<sup>66</sup> As can be seen from his language, he might have been listening to the wishes of Indigenous peoples but had chosen not to prioritize them in his policies and in his approach to reconciliation.

In his many speeches addressing the conflict and Indigenous – non-Indigenous relations more generally, Trudeau appealed to Canadian values and the importance of national unity to emphasize the importance of cooperation with Indigenous peoples. By invoking these values, Trudeau clearly aimed to foster a sense of shared responsibility and collective identity that might help bridge the divide between opposing perspectives. He consistently referenced the rule of law as a fundamental Canadian value that underpins the country's democratic system and social order.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, when handling challenging situations like the Coastal GasLink conflict, he emphasized the importance of respecting the legal processes and institutions.<sup>68</sup> This

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62. CityNews Ottawa. *UN committee criticizes Canada over handling of Indigenous pipeline opposition*

63. Trudeau, J. (2020, February 18). *Prime Minister's speech in the House of Commons about the blockades*. Prime Minister of Canada. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/speeches/2020/02/18/prime-ministers-speech-house-commons-about-blockades>

64. Trudeau. *Prime Minister's speech in the House of Commons about the blockades*

65. Trudeau. *Prime Minister's speech in the House of Commons about the blockades*.

66. APTN National News. (2019, January 10). *Trudeau touts controversial pipeline project ahead of town hall meeting in Kamloops*. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from <https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/trudeau-touts-controversial-pipeline-project-ahead-of-town-hall-meeting-in-kamloops/>

67. Trudeau. *Prime Minister's speech in the House of Commons about the blockades*.

68. Trudeau, J. (2020, February 21). *Prime Minister's remarks for a media availability at the National Press Theatre on the blockades*. Prime Minister

appeal served to remind Canadians of the necessity of upholding legal principles to maintain a stable, just, and fair society. Trudeau's failure to specifically address Indigenous concerns over the pipeline's construction in his speeches implied that the government believed the project was lawful and aligned with Canadian values and Canada's economic interests. By emphasizing the need to enforce court injunctions to maintain order<sup>69</sup> and referring to the responsibility of Indigenous and land defenders to adhere to the law, the government effectively shifted blame away from themselves and toward those opposing the pipeline's construction. Despite this, Trudeau remained confident that his government's "reconciliation agenda with Indigenous peoples is as strong as ever."<sup>70</sup>

By adopting such an approach, Trudeau sought to convey the government's commitment to finding a resolution that considers all parties' concerns, striving to achieve a middle ground that satisfied the needs of Indigenous communities and industry groups. He emphasized engaging in meaningful dialogue with Indigenous peoples, recognizing their unique historical and cultural contexts, and ensuring their voices are heard in decision-making. At the same time, he recognized the potential and substantial economic benefits of the Coastal GasLink project, including increased investment, job opportunities, and revenue generation. However, from the policies he has embraced, it appears that after consideration, economic development was a higher priority for Justin Trudeau than the renewal of relationships with Indigenous communities. It was not the commitment and pledge he and his government had made to Indigenous peoples in 2015. His singular focus seems to be on the economic impacts of the blockades and his tendency to blame the land defenders reveal his true priority in a moment of crisis.

While Trudeau's language on the Coastal Gaslink conflict demonstrates a commitment to dialogue and empathy towards Indigenous peoples, his language is often empty and relies too much on broad, idealistic Canadian values that do not particularly reflect the government's action. The disconnect between words and actions lies in his acknowledging the rights over ancestral lands of the Wet'suwet'en Houses and hereditary chiefs. In contrast, the government's continued support for the construction of the pipeline without proper consultation with the relevant Indigenous groups has caused doubts among the public about Trudeau's commitment to dialogue and cooperation with Indigenous peoples and to the whole process of reconciliation.

## Conclusion

In light of the analysis presented in this paper, it is evident that while Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has constantly stated that reconciliation with Indigenous peoples is the top priority of his government, there are significant inconsistencies and contradictions in his policies and speeches when it comes to the actual implementation and implications of the Wet'suwet'en Nation and Coastal Gaslink conflict and in dealing with crisis. This case study has highlighted the challenges of dealing with Indigenous issues in Canada and

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of Canada. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/speeches/2020/02/21/prime-ministers-remarks-media-availability-national-press-theatre>

69. Trudeau. *Prime Minister's remarks for a media availability at the National Press Theatre on the blockades.*

70. Trudeau. *Prime Minister's remarks for a media availability at the National Press Theatre on the blockades.*

the inherent tensions between the pursuit of reconciliation and the realities of economic development and resource extraction. Similar to Trudeau's other domestic and foreign policies, there is a discrepancy between his public statements and actual actions taken by his government to address this particular Indigenous issue, which is demonstrated by the tokenism in his policies and language. At face value, he encourages dialogue, empathy, Canadian principles, and respect for Indigenous rights. The recognition of Indigenous rights has been contradicted by the government's handling of the Wet'suwet'en conflict where the economic interests of the pipeline seem to outweigh the relationship with the involved Indigenous peoples.

The tokenistic nature, or virtue signalling, of Trudeau's policies, is further demonstrated by terms of the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Canadian government and the Wet'suwet'en Nation in 2020, which is considered one of the governments' most notable successes.<sup>71</sup> Despite acknowledging the title and rights of the Wet'suwet'en Houses and hereditary chiefs over their traditional territory, the MOU has not altered the existing situation with the Coastal Gaslink pipeline, which initially sparked the conflict and led to the MOU's negotiations. The pipeline construction remains ongoing and is expected to be completed by the end of 2023, meaning that although Indigenous peoples have won some battles along the way, they will not stop the controversial pipeline which has been supported by the Trudeau government.

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71. Bellrichard. *Wet'suwet'en, B.C. and Canada sign MOU on negotiations for legal recognition of title.*

## CONTRIBUTORS

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