Lesson #2: The Home Front

Canada’s Response

• Britain and France declared war on Sept. 3, 1939
• PM King called a special session of Parliament to debate the issue, where he vowed there would be no conscription.
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- Only J.S. Woodsworth (CCF) was against going to war.
- On Sept. 10, 1939, the King of England, on behalf of and at the request of the Parliament of Canada, declared war on Germany.
- Enlistment was not as enthusiastic as in 1914, but many unemployed men were attracted by a pay cheque.
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BCATP

- Canada was not well prepared for war, (old & unfit equipment)
- King was reluctant to send large numbers of troops
- King knew conscription would divide Canada
- In December 1939, Canada announced the BCATP, The British Commonwealth Air Training Program
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• This was a cheap & safe way for Canada to contribute.
• It made sense; Canada = open spaces & is out of enemy reach.
• The majority of Commonwealth pilots trained in the BCATP.
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BCATP Bases in Canada

Many Canadian communities benefited from the BCATP. Employing 104,000 people, the plan consisted of more than 100 flying training schools and 180 support units in communities, large and small, across Canada. It also required an additional effort from the aircraft industry. Eleven thousand training aircraft were built in Canada to train BCATP pilots and aircrew during the war.
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Towards Total War

• Br. PM Churchill described Br. war effort as “Total War” (an economy driven by the war effort.)
• King preferred Canada to be an “Arsenal for Democracy” (supplies & materials)
• 1940 election, King’s Liberals won their largest majority
• In April, Department of Munitions and Supplies was established under Minister C.D. Howe.
• Howe went to Br. to get orders for war materials
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- Howe survived being torpedoed and returned to Canada a hero, with orders for anything Canada could produce.
- As Canada moved towards Total War, manufacturers got orders for trucks, guns, aircraft, radios & radar sets.
- If industries couldn’t handle the orders, Howe created Crown Corporations.
- Exports of these materials helped to pay for the war.
World War Two 1939-1945

C.D. Howe

“The Minister of Everything”

C. D. Howe, Minister of Munitions and Supply, was a driving force behind Canada’s massive industrial output.

C. D. Howe coordinated Canada’s war effort. He allocated resources where they were needed, controlled the labour force, and ensured the steady production of equipment and supplies. Where private industry proved inadequate, he created Crown corporations, like the Park Steamship Company or Victory Aircraft. Howe’s influence extended to virtually every industry.
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• Britain ran out of US dollars to buy weapons with.
• Canada also needed help (our debt went from 3 to 11 billion)
• Canada and the US coordinated their efforts.
• Each country would produce supplies it was best at- linking the economies of the US and Canada during the war.
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Problems

• Canada’s early materials were inferior as we lacked skilled workers.
• The need for workers conflicted with the need for soldiers; Howe was competing with the military for manpower.
• Women joined the workforce in increasing numbers as the war went on.
• By 1943, the quality of goods had improved.
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Conscription Crisis

- Many voices (veterans, media) were calling for “Total War”, which includes conscription.
- 1940- NRMA (National Resources Mobilization Act), allowed people to be put into jobs necessary for wartime production, but not overseas service.
- In 1942, King held a referendum on conscription.
- King’s slogan was “Not necessarily conscription, but conscription if necessary.”
- Anglophones: 80% Yes; Francophones: 80% No.
- Conscription passed, but the country was again divided.
- King could now use conscription if he had to.
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- The NRMA was changed to allow for conscription, but only for home defence.
- Two years later, the Allies invaded Europe, losing many men causing Canada to face a shortage of soldiers.
- King realized conscription was needed.
- NRMA Conscripts doing home defence were sent to Europe.
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• Protests & riots occurred, but none as serious as in 1917.
• 12,000 conscripts left for Europe, but the end of the war came before most of them got to the front.
• Only 2463 Canadian conscripts made it to the front, and only 79 died.
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Japanese Internment

- Canada declared war on Japan on Dec. 7, 1941.
- It was the same day they attacked Pearl Harbor & Hong Kong.
- Early 1942, the Canadian Gov’t required all Japanese Canadians to move from the Pacific Coast (about 22,000 people- ¾ were Canadian citizens).
- Was the largest mass movement of people in Canadian history.
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• Newspapers in BC demanded to be rid of the “yellow menace”
• The gov’t feared they posed a security risk & that their presence in large cities put them at risk from violence
• Initially, families were broken up, men went to work camps while women and children were “relocated” to interior communities, the prairies or Ontario POW camps.
• Conditions were so drastic that Japanese in Japan sent assistance through the Red Cross.
“The thousand little traumas of racism that were our daily diet. Being despised. Being snubbed by white Canadians. Being portrayed in newspapers as ugly, as unwanted, as deceitful, as somehow sub-human.”

Joy Kogawa, recalling her wartime experience

« Chaque jour, nous vivions les traumas causés par le racisme. Nous réjouissons par les Canadiens, dépeints dans les journaux, laides, indésirables, mentant faisant partie d’une classe. »

Joy Kogawa, rappelant son expérience
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Far From Home

Relocated Japanese-Canadians lived in small, hastily constructed buildings. Adults worked when employment was available and the children continued their education as best they could in poorly equipped, makeshift schools.
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- Any property or belongings the Japanese had were confiscated, then sold to pay for their internment.
- At the end of the war, they were forced to move out of BC or be “repatriated” to Japan.
- Many were 2nd generation, & had never seen Japan
- They weren’t permitted to return to the coast of BC until 1949.
- Japanese were not given the vote until 1949.
- 1988, Can. gov’t apologized & paid $21,000 to each survivor.
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An Official Apology

Prime Minister Brian Mulroney (seated on left) and President Arthur Miki of the National Association of Japanese-Canadians (seated on right), signing the Redress Agreement in Ottawa on 22 September 1988.
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Canada’s Wartime Economy

- Inflation was a big concern
- Many people were working, but there were not many consumer goods, causing inflation.
- War bonds were used to ensure people saved money, rather than spend.
- Inflation was slowed, but not stopped
- In 1941 the Wartime Prices and Trade Board froze all wages and prices.
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- 1942, King introduced food rationing

Canadians were encouraged not to hoard food or other goods, and to stretch their supplies, but there were still scarcities. From 1942, the government tried to control prices and supervise the distribution of food and other scarce goods. Every man, woman, and child received a personal set of ration books, and used it to buy gasoline, butter, sugar, meat, tea, and coffee.
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- Unions grew in power, despite an anti union attitude in Gov’t
- The CCF also enjoyed more popularity- (Tommy Douglas formed a CCF gov’t in Saskatchewan)
- Social attitudes & expectations were changing
- In 1940 King had introduced Unemployment Insurance
- In 1945 King introduced Family Allowance to assist families.