

AP 25 - THES

OPPOSITION TO CONSCRIPTION  
IN ONTARIO  
1917

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## INTRODUCTION

The introduction of conscription in 1917 evoked a determined, occasionally violent opposition from French Canadians. Their protests were so loud and so persistent that they have tended to obscure the fact that English Canada did not unanimously support compulsory military service. In Ontario the resistance to conscription came from a variety of sources. Chapter One examines the reaction of the Social Democratic Party, the International Bible Students Association (forerunner to the Jehovah's Witnesses) and the Mennonite Church. Chapter Two discusses the stand of Ontario's trade unions, while Chapter Three deals with the province's farmers. Finally Chapter Four looks at the position of the Liberal Party. The purpose of this study is to examine these groups, to define the nature and the extent of the resistance of each to conscription. It will attempt to show that there was no common basis for this opposition. There was a very limited ideological objection (dealt with in Chapter One). However, in the main, Ontario resistance to compulsory military service was based upon pragmatic grounds.

In 1914, Canada's constitutional position within the British Empire gave her no share in formulating foreign policy nor in declaring war or making peace. This fact had been made abundantly clear on various recent occasions. In January 1910

Sir Wilfrid Laurier, then Prime Minister, declared in the House of Commons: "When Britain is at war, Canada is at war. There is no distinction."<sup>1</sup> Only three days before war was declared, Canada's First Minister, Sir Robert Borden, had despatched a telegram to the British Government expressing the firm resolve of the Canadian people to defend the "integrity and maintain the honor of our Empire."<sup>2</sup> On the eve of war, pronouncements in the daily press made it clear that the whole country accepted this view.

Though Canada found herself at war through the action of the British Government, she reserved the right of deciding what form her participation would take. But there was never any doubt that her contribution would be both whole-hearted and generous. Canadian opinion was practically unanimous in support of the war in August, 1914. Laurier voiced the unity of the country when he rose to speak in the House of Commons on August 19, 1914:

I hasten to say that all these measures [to insure the defence of Canada and of the Empire] we are prepared to give immediate assent. If in what has been done or in what remains to be done there may be anything which in our judgement should not be done or should be differently done, we raise no question, we take no exception, we offer no criticism, and we shall offer no criticism so long as there is danger at the front. It is our duty... to let Great Britain know, and to let the friends and foes of Great Britain know, that there is in Canada but one mind and one heart, and that all Canadians stand behind the mother country.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Col. G.W.L. Nicholson, Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1919. The Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War (Ottawa, 1964), p.5.
  2. Henry Borden, ed., Robert Laird Borden, His Memoirs (2 vols.; Toronto, 1960), I, 210.
  3. Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, Debates, Special Session 1914, August 19, p.9.

The formation of the first Canadian Division was authorized. It was to consist of 25,000 men.

Relying entirely on voluntary enlistment, the Government soon had more than sufficient recruits. Supply far exceeded demand and only some 36,000 of those wanting to enlist were accepted.<sup>4</sup> During the first two years of the war, enough volunteers were available that Canada was able not only to maintain the First Division at full strength but vastly increased the authorized strength of her armed forces. On January 1, 1916 Borden optimistically announced that Canada's goal was to place 500,000 men in uniform.

The initial success of the recruiting campaign was in part responsible for the ultimate failure of the voluntary system. The contemporary Canadian Annual Review pointed out an obvious reason. The majority of those enlisting were born in the United Kingdom. Of the 285,858 British-born in Canada eligible for service 156,637 had enlisted by early 1916.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps this was because they were more familiar with what war meant, and because they were specially conscious of its nearness "to those living in the country which they still looked upon as home." Moreover, the Canadian-born were more likely than the recent immigrant to be established in a remunerative, congenial and steady employment, and therefore would find it harder to tear up the deep roots which

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4. Nicholson, op. cit., p.212.

5. J.C. Hopkins, The Story of Canada, (Toronto, 1922), p. 580. They comprised 62% of the Canadian Expeditionary Force in February, 1916.

held them firmly to their native soil.<sup>6</sup> Regardless of the cause, once this fruitful source began to dry up, recruits were much more difficult to obtain.

Other factors were certainly important in the decline of voluntary recruiting. Early enlistments had undoubtedly been spurred by fear of unemployment. When the war broke out in August 1914 it seemed probable that there would be an increased shortage of jobs during the coming winter.<sup>7</sup> But a booming war-time economy provided jobs for all; fear of unemployment was no longer a stimulus for enlistment.

By mid-1917 the voluntary system had clearly failed. Enlistments throughout the country had declined from a high of about 25,000 a month during the winter of 1915-16 to an average of less than 5,000 during the winter of 1916-17.<sup>8</sup> Only a portion of the recruits went into the combatant forces where replacements were most needed. In early 1917, infantry enlistments could no longer supply the men to maintain the Canadian Expeditionary Force (C.E.F.) at full strength on the front. On May 18, 1917 Prime Minister Borden announced in the House of Commons that selective conscription of manpower would be introduced.<sup>9</sup> A month later, the Military Service Act (M.S.A.) was placed before parliament.

Canada was plunged into one of the most serious crises in

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6. Canadian Annual Review, 1914, pp. 194-5.

7. Nicholson, op. cit., p. 212.

8. Ibid., p. 546.

9. Borden Memoirs, II, 78-79.

all her history. Old divisions became meaningless. French Canadians, with remarkable unanimity, opposed Borden's proposal for compulsory military service. Almost all the Conservative M.P.s from Quebec joined Liberals following Laurier in opposition to the M.S.A. In Ontario all but two of the province's dozen Liberal M.P.s gave their uninhibited support to the Tories on the conscription issue. Throughout the province the daily press spoke with one voice. Traditionally Grit newspapers such as the Toronto Globe joined with Tory journals like the Toronto Mail and Empire in chanting the praises of compulsory service. One of the most striking features of the controversy that developed around the M.S.A. was the solidarity of support the bill received from the communications media. During the summer of 1917 the Conservatives were able to consolidate their control of the Ontario press by giving the impression that they alone would enforce conscription and thus supply the replacements the C.E.F. so badly needed. When the Military Service bill became the issue of the 1917 general election only one paper, the London Morning Advertiser, supported the Liberal party in its demand that a referendum be held on conscription.

In Ontario, opposition to the M.S.A. did not come, as one might expect, from the established churches. There was a very brief flurry in July, 1917 when Borden moved an amendment to the M.S.A. that would have exempted divinity students as well as the ordained clergy. Protestant churches raised a strong protest and argued that neither divinity students nor ministers should be

exempted.<sup>10</sup> The Prime Minister withdrew the amendment less than a week after it had been proposed. It was now the turn of the Roman Catholic Church to raise an angry voice. As early as May its Toronto organ, The Catholic Register, had been horrified that the clergy of New Zealand were to be conscripted: "English-speaking Catholics will never consent that their priests who offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass should shed the blood of fellow men."<sup>11</sup> Since a considerable portion of the Catholic clergy were classed under the M.S.A. as divinity students, it is not surprising that there was vehement, if short-lived, opposition<sup>12</sup> to the withdrawal

10. Toronto, Canadian Churchman, July 19, 1917. (Anglican)  
 Toronto, Presbyterian and Westminster, July 12, 1917.  
 (Presbyterian)  
 Toronto, Christian Guardian, August 1, 1917. (Methodist)
11. Toronto, Catholic Register, May 10, 1917.
12. In 1917 the Catholic Church was in a very delicate position. There was widespread anger in Ontario, among the Protestant population, at Quebec's failure to give the war whole-hearted support. Wrath fell upon the most convenient target, the province's Catholics. The priests, it was charged, were ruling Quebec and using their influence to oppose the war effort. French-Canadian unwillingness to aid France was explained as a manifestation of the Catholic Church's hostility to that country's treatment of the native Church. The whole Roman Catholic Church was thus viewed as a "malignant force" and the Church's papers were compelled to spend much effort in defending Catholicism against charges of sedition.

The situation was complicated still further on August 1 when Pope Benedict XV announced proposals for an immediate armistice to be followed by arbitration and mutual disarmament. Germany should evacuate Belgium and France, while the Allies would withdraw from Germany's colonies. Strong elements in Ontario that desired total and decisive victory over the enemy violently attacked the peace proposals. The Pope, and by implication the whole Catholic Church, was on the side of the Hun. Tensions were so great that months had to be spent explaining the plan and attempting to exonerate Rome from the charge of complicity with Austria and Germany.

-P. Oxley, The Toronto Clergy, Conscription and Union Government, unpublished paper, York University, 1968, pp.46-8.

of their exemption. Basing its stand upon the principle that no-one, regardless of creed, who was performing a vital service at home should be sent overseas, the Catholic Register argued that divinity students should be exempted, as there was already a shortage of English-speaking clergy in the country. Moreover, the grant of immunity to divinity students would not hurt the war effort since less than a battalion could be formed from their numbers, while the withdrawal of the exemption would seriously harm the Church.<sup>13</sup> By the end of August, however, the exemption of divinity students had ceased to be a topic of discussion. Roman Catholic papers devoted much of their space to refuting charges that the Church was opposed to the war and that it was pro-German in its sympathies. With this one brief exception, conscription received strong support from the established Churches. In Ontario opposition came, instead, from the Social Democratic Party, the International Bible Students Association, the Mennonites, the trade unions, the farmers and the Liberal Party.

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13. Catholic Register, August 9, 1917.

## CHAPTER ONE: IDEOLOGICAL OPPOSITION

Purely ideological opposition to the Military Service Act derived from three primary sources in Ontario. The Social Democratic Party, basing its stand on sound Marxist theory, opposed the bill as the worst form of "militarism" and regarded it as a weapon to be used by the capitalist class to subjugate and enslave the workers. The International Bible Students Association and the Mennonite Church based their opposition to conscription upon determined opposition to all war. Both "non-resistant" groups, they refused to lift a hand against their fellow men. The method of resistance these groups employed differed in each case. While the Social Democratic Party and the International Bible Students Association undertook extremely vigorous public campaigns, the Mennonites (whose articles of Faith forbade involvement in public affairs) contented themselves with petitioning the Government and explaining the nature of their views.

### I

Intoned a High Priest of Socialism:

All the kingdoms of the earth were his and the power and the glory.

In millions of vaults his gold was heaped high and securities of his power, ... He was ever devising cunning methods to increase the flow [of wealth into his, the capitalist coffers].

Yet one thing annoyed him. Despite his teachers and

priests, despite his careful writers, voices kept rising in the market place, crying "Why?" "Why should we toil for Grab-it-all?"...these cries kept increasing, until at last Grab-it-all sat frowning in his palaces, thinking, thinking.

"There are too many of them, anyway," he thought. "I could spare a few million."

Later he thought:"It will stop their mouths. It will give them something else to think about."

Again he said to himself:"I can make it pay."

In this fashion war came.<sup>1</sup>

Through its official organ, the Canadian Forward, the Ontario Social Democratic Party (S.D.P.)<sup>2</sup> expounded the belief that the power to decide in favor of war or peace lay not with parliaments and kings but with "the great capitalists." They could instigate war "by direct action through their representatives in the government or...by fomenting disorder and yelling for help to save the lives of 'innocent countrymen' who are temporarily residing in the country that is to be attacked." If they opposed war they simply connived to withhold the money with which to finance it.<sup>3</sup> War was an extension of economic exploitation, fought for "territorial and commercial prizes" to benefit the capitalist.<sup>4</sup>

The official attitude of the S.D.P. to the war was based

1. Toronto, Canadian Forward, October 10, 1917.

2. By 1914 Ontario's trade unions represented 50,000 members. These organizations sought the economic advancement and well being of the working class. In addition there were two parties that purported to represent the political interests of the workers. One, the Social Democratic Party, was Marxist. The second, the Independent Labor Party, formed in 1917, was composed largely of trade unionists interested in political action. The latter had the unofficial support of the Trades and Labor Congress (T.L.C.). It was not unusual, however, to find that members of the S.D.P. were also members of a trade union. James Watter, T.L.C. president, and James Simpson, Vice-president of the T.L.C., were both active members of the party.

3. Canadian Forward, November 11, 1917.

4. Ibid., February 24, 1917.

on a resolution passed at the International Socialist Convention of 1907:

If war threatens to break out it is the duty of the working class in the countries concerned and of their Parliamentary representatives, with the help of the International Bureau, as a means of co-ordinating their action, to use every effort to prevent war by all means that seem to them most appropriate, having regard to the sharpness of the class struggle and the general political situation.

Should war none the less break out, their duty is to intervene to bring it promptly to an end, with all their energies to use the political and economic crisis to rouse the populace from its slumbers and hasten the fall of capitalist dominion.<sup>5</sup>

However, when war came little opposition was offered. True, in 1915 a small group of militant socialists, at the Trades and Labor Congress held in Vancouver, maintained that the war was no business of the working class and that it was therefore a matter of indifference which side won.<sup>6</sup> This internationalist point of view appears to have found scant support from the Ontario party at the time. Looking back in 1917, the Canadian Forward sought to explain the stand the Social Democrats had taken at the beginning of the war: "It is quite apparent to all thinking persons that a minority of unarmed Socialist workmen could not have

5. Ibid., April 24, 1917.

6. Martin Robin, Radical Politics and Canadian Labour, 1880-1930, (Kingston, 1968), p. 120.

There was some opposition to recruiting among socialists. Jimmy Simpson, a member of the S.D.P. and Vice-President of the Trades and Labor Congress, refused to support efforts to stimulate enlistment. At a meeting of the Toronto District Labor Council, several Socialists criticized members of the council executive for activity in this area. -Toronto Public Reference Library, Baldwin Room (T.P.L.), James Simpson Papers, clipping from Toronto, Mail and Empire, August 6, 1915.

prevented war amongst states thoroughly organized in the military sense and supported by the inflamed public opinion of the majority."<sup>7</sup>

In August, 1916 the Government at Ottawa passed an Order-in-Council establishing a National Registration Board. The purpose of the Board was to determine the number of men who could be spared from each district without seriously affecting local industries.<sup>8</sup> The spectre of conscription had raised itself, the S.D.P. believed. The registration scheme was regarded as "the thin end of the wedge of both Military and Industrial Conscription." An inventory of the "human assets" of the country could serve no useful purpose unless provision was made for some form of "co-ordination", the Canadian Forward declared. There had to be some means to force labor "to work as dictated by and for the purpose to which the fathers of the registration scheme are bonded."<sup>9</sup> Conscription in principle was meant to be an instrument of national defence and as such might be desirable. However, in practice it was an instrument of working class subjugation. From the moment compulsory military service became

7. Canadian Forward, February 10, 1917.

8. Canada, Department of Labor, Sixth Annual Report on Labour Organization in Canada, 1916, (Ottawa, 1917), pp. 36-7.

The Director General of the National Service Board was Richard Bedford Bennett. He appointed a Director for each of the country's 18 Military Districts. This organization distributed registration cards to be filled in, to gather basic information as to manpower location and distribution. The Director of each district was to co-operate with military authorities by providing them with all the information possible concerning what men would be most expendable from their present positions.

9. Canadian Forward, January 13, 1917.

law "every industrial is a slave, every act of protest a crime and every workman who rises in indignation against the destruction of some hard won right or privilege of his occupation is seized, interned, deported or conscripted." Democracy, it was argued, would cease to exist;<sup>10</sup> militarism would reign. Militarism was "the enemy of Social-Democracy, the tool of despots and the instrument used by the ruling capitalist-class in every country to keep the workers in subjection."<sup>11</sup> A series of resolutions were passed during December, 1916 and January, 1917 by many locals of the S.D.P. to the effect that National Service was the first step toward conscription and urging that the registration cards not be signed.<sup>12</sup>

Conscription received regular attention in the Canadian Forward throughout 1917. In March it published a speech by R.A. Rigg, Vice-President of the T.L.C. (and a member of the S.D.P. in Manitoba), tearing "aside the veneer of 'lying cabinet ministers' who attempt to introduce conscription under a feigned friendship for the unemployed." By quoting statements made by members of the cabinet, Rigg showed that despite "pledges" made by the Premier to the T.L.C. executive in December, 1916 it was intended that compulsory service should follow the National Service scheme.<sup>13</sup> A month later, the journal warned that conscription

10. Ibid., December 2, 1916.

11. Ibid., November 11, 1916.

12. The Canadian Forward reported meetings in Port Arthur, Kitchener, Guelph and Toronto. At the Toronto gathering were representatives of the English, Jewish, Ruthenian, German, Polish, Lettish, women's and juvenile locals.

13. Canadian Forward, March 10, 1917. see. p.40.

was inevitable: "we can say now without much serious contradiction that conscription both military and industrial, will be our lot in a few short weeks, and no serious opposition need be feared by the Government, as the prison has done its work."<sup>14</sup>

The anti-conscription argument was carefully developed. A few days after conscription was introduced, the Canadian Forward warned that by intent it "will smash the trade unions." The Socialist organ noted that numerous quotes could be found in the pages of the leading newspapers and magazines to justify this contention: "trade unionism-that shelter for slinking shirkers-is imperilling our existence and by its action a rot of our national soul has set in. One remedy, and one remedy alone can eradicate this state of rot-martial law will cure it." An extract from the Toronto Daily News was more explicit: "some of them [conscriptionists] desire it as the only weapon against the growing power of trade unions."<sup>15</sup> If more proof was needed one had only to look at the examples of countries in which conscription was existent. In both France and Britain compulsory service had been "used to render nul and void all the achievements of trade unionism-to

14. Ibid., April 10, 1917. Shortly after this editorial appeared, Isaac Bainbridge, editor of the Canadian Forward, was charged with sedition for the printing of a pamphlet "Brockway's Defence". Fenner Brockway, an English conscientious objector, was courtmartialled for refusing to obey a military order. In this defence he had argued that Britain was in part responsible for the war and refused to take any part: "No honorable man would consnet to participate in an act of murder because the State ordered him to do so."- Public Archives of Canada (P.A.C.), Secretary of State, Press Censorship Board, 1915-1920, "Brockway's Defence."

15. Canadian Forward, May 24, 1917.

destroy customs, rights and practices-to dilute and whittle away -to put unskilled [workers] in the place of skilled, women in the place of men, children in the place of adults."<sup>16</sup> Concrete examples were given in the case of Switzerland where universal military training had existed for many years. In 1875, 30 soldiers had fired on strikers at Goschunen, killing 4 and wounding 11, and in 1906 cavalry had been employed against striking metal workers in Zurich. A total of 10 such cases were reported.<sup>17</sup> It was clear to the S.D.P. that conscription was to be used to a similar end against the workers in Canada.

Strong appeals were made to emotions. Commenting on the passage of the M.S.A. through the House of Commons, the Canadian Forward proclaimed that recruiting officers would soon be coming into homes to take men of military age who would be shipped by the hundreds of thousands "to the bloody quagmire of Europe." There, "into the seething, heaving swamp of torn flesh and floating entrails they will be plunged, in regiments, divisions and armies, screaming as they go. Agonies of torture will rend their flesh from their sinews, will crack their bones and dissolve their lungs." Death would soon be a guest in every home.<sup>18</sup>

The manifesto of the S.D.P. declared "uncompromising hostility to all measures of industrial and military conscription, as a menace to the liberties and social aspirations of the

16. Ibid., December 2, 1916.

17. Ibid., February 24, 1917.

18. Ibid., July 24, 1917.

Canadian people."<sup>19</sup> Following the announcement of conscription, a series of meetings was held throughout Ontario. Resolutions passed in Kitchener and Guelph expressed a determination to resist compulsory service: "up with the line, comrades, resolve to resist to the last ounce of strength; the prison farm is in good shape just now anyways and at least we shall be sure of a few murphies."<sup>20</sup> In Toronto the League for Combatting Universal Military Service was established to fight conscription, both before it was enacted and after it was made law, if Parliament so decreed.<sup>21</sup> On Sunday, the third of June a League meeting was broken up by a group of returned soldiers. A letter of protest was sent to the Minister of Militia, Sir Edward Kemp, charging "that soldiers acting under the instructions of superior officers are depriving citizens of Toronto and other places" of the statutory privilege of free discussion on the matter of conscription.<sup>22</sup>

19. Toronto, Telegram, May 29, 1917.

20. Canadian Forward, May 24, 1917.

21. Socialists were active not only in this Anti-Conscription League (its popular appellation) but also in the Canadian Freedom League. The latter sought through public meetings, lectures and distribution of literature "to secure and maintain the rights and liberties of citizens against all encroachments of military or other authorities who shall seek to compel them to follow any course of action which may be repulsive to their sentiments of justice and brotherhood, or to their economic, moral or religious principles." The Canadian Freedom League declared itself ready to give assistance to any person "called or liable to be called before any civil or military tribunal created to enforce such an act of compulsion." -Toronto, Industrial Banner, August 24, 1917.

22. Toronto, Globe, June 6, 1917. Soldiers disrupted Socialist rallies in Guelph and Kitchener in June.

During August a preliminary meeting to an anti-conscription convention to be held the following month in Port Arthur was broken up. Members of the radical International Workers

A second gathering held in Alexandra Park was more successful, drawing some 2,000 persons. Conscription was condemned as the worst form of militarism and it was resolved to use every "legitimate means" to prevent its enactment. However, the principle of "direct action", advocated by the International Workers of the World, was repudiated by the lone speaker, Isaac Bainbridge. He protested against the "assumed democracy" of a Government that would take the power into its hands to enact such legislation without a referendum.<sup>23</sup> No further meetings of the anti-conscription league were reported, although appeals for new members and financial support appeared from time to time in the Canadian Forward.<sup>24</sup>

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of the World (I.W.W.) appear to have played a prominent part in this gathering. -Censorship Board, Col. A.P. Sherwood to Col. E.J. Chambers, Chief Press Censor, August 6, 1917.

The I.W.W. does not appear to have played a significant role in Ontario. However, there is evidence that it was active in New York and other states bordering on the province.

23. Canadian Forward, June 12, 1917.

See also: P.A.C., Sir A.E. Kemp Papers, Charles M. Thompson to Kemp, May 26, 1917.

24. As a result of the disturbance at the June 3 meeting and the threat of violence at subsequent gatherings, the police restricted the use of parks and streets. -Censorship Board, G.J. Greezett, Chief of Police, to James Bainbridge, June 20, 1917.

About the same time reports of Socialist activities ceased to appear in the daily press. The Chief Press Censor urged the "advisability of applying the soft peddle to a matter which is calculated to arouse national animosities and to produce disorder." He argued that the actual merits of conscription provided "ample scope for discussion". -Ibid., Col. E.J. Chambers to C.L. Clarke, June 19, 1917.

In a letter addressed to "Friends and Comrades" of Vladivostock, James Bainbridge commented on the situation: "The news of the Russian Revolution has heartened and strengthened the socialists of our blessed capitalistic country..."

In August, Gertrude Richardson, one of the few women who were active in the party, founded the Women's Crusade. Members of this association pledged themselves to "work for freedom and peace, and the suppression of militarism under all forms."<sup>25</sup> The war, Mrs. Richardson wrote, was arranged and dominated by capitalists whose hands were already red with the blood of the earth's murdered youth. Conscription would make Canada's sons not only soldiers but slaves.<sup>26</sup> "Perhaps we shall be called 'Traitors!'" she exhorted. "Never mind, we shall not be traitors, but the truest of patriots working and living for the uplift of humanity."<sup>27</sup>

The Canadian Forward referred vehemently to resolutions,

You perhaps may be surprised to learn that in Canada we are living indeed, under conditions of like despotism to those of the Romanoff regime...we are envious of your new found freedom...freedom of word and press are prohibited."

-Ibid., translation from Krassnoye Znamya (Red Flag) in Loring Christie to Chambers, November 14, 1917.

Bainbridge's letter is dated July 6, 1917.

25. Canadian Forward, August 24, 1917.

26. Ibid., July 10, 1917.

27. Ibid., August 24, 1917. Laura Hughes, first vice-president of the Independent Labor Party, also had connections with the S.D.P., although she could not be termed a socialist. During the summer she made a number of anti-conscription speeches. In a letter to a close friend, Violet McNaughton, she expressed opposition to the war and suggested that Canada should simply withdraw from the conflict. -Archives of the Province of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon Branch, Violet McNaughton Papers, Laura Hughes to Violet McNaughton, August 28, 1917, quoted in D. Page, Canadians and the League of Nations Before the Manchurian Crisis (unfinished Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto).

She was also active in the Women's Peace Organization, which held a convention in Toronto in 1915. The movement lost much of its strength because of harsh criticism and harassment. By 1917 Hughes' strong anti-war sentiments were only expressed privately.

passed by several Ontario Labor Councils, opposing the conscription of manpower unless preceded or accompanied by conscription of wealth.<sup>28</sup> The two, it argued, could not be made contingent on each other: "To assume there is an equivalent exchange value between life and inanimate products serves only to demonstrate mental depravity, and enslavement to tradition that has long been out of harmony with the qualities that make for intelligent human association."<sup>29</sup> At the same time the Socialist organ declared that measures "relating to the subordination of all the material resources of the country shall take precedence to the conscription of manpower." It postulated that if wealth were conscripted it would "knock the bottom out of the war entirely so far as we are concerned except as a defensive measure, and would make overtures for peace immediately necessary." Since war was instigated by capitalists for personal gain the conscription of wealth would "take away the incentive for territorial acquisition... [and] the possibility of making profits out of the war." Thus "the root cause of all war receives its death blow."<sup>30</sup>

S.D.P. agitation against conscription did not cease with the enactment of the M.S.A. The party undertook to explain to the Canadian people the Act's exemption clause, giving help especially to conscientious objectors. It also was determined to

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28. P.A.C., Sir Robert Borden Papers, A.L. Philp to Borden, May 31, 1917.  
Seventh Annual Report on Labour Organization in Canada, 1917,  
 P. 32.
29. Canadian Forward, July 10, 1917.
30. Ibid., May 24, 1917.

take advantage of the coming general election to work for the repeal of compulsory military service. Three Socialist candidates were in the field on December 17, polling day.<sup>31</sup> Their arguments on the conscription issue, as expressed in the Canadian Forward, reviewed much of what had been said earlier. In an editorial entitled "Our Point of View" the journal declared that "we are opposed to conscript servitude, either military or industrial, regardless of whether such conscription is enforced by means of a press gang or other circumstances of human slavery that are equally degrading."<sup>32</sup> The Borden Administration, it claimed, had challenged political democracy in the M.S.A. and the "Disfranchisement Act"<sup>33</sup>: "This is Boss rule, in

31. Ibid., December 24, 1917. The candidates were John Bruce (Toronto West), Lorne Cunningham (South Wellington) and Mervin Smith (North Waterloo). Bruce was active in the T.L.C., and at its annual convention in September, 1917 had moved amendment to the executive's report (calling for compliance with the M.S.A.) on conscription that "this Congress urge and work for the immediate repeal of the act."
32. Ibid., November 10, 1917.
33. The Government had passed two electoral laws in preparation for the election. Under one, the Military Voters Act, military electors included all British subjects without age restriction, male or female, whether ordinarily resident in Canada or not, who were on active service in the Canadian armed forces, as well as residents of Canada who were serving in any forces of Britain or her allies. This was clearly an attempt to win a large block of votes which according to the Act might be applied in any constituency if the soldier did not know in what riding he lived. The War Time Elections Act, passed on September 14 after closure had been applied, gave the vote for the duration of the war and the period of demobilization to close women relatives (wives, widows, mothers, sisters and daughters) of persons male or female, living or dead, who were serving or who had served outside Canada in the Canadian or British forces. It disfranchised conscientious objectors and all citizens naturalized in Canada after 1902 if of alien enemy

so far as it is a subversion of a constitutional precedent. We are now called to obey the mandate of the usurpers, who rightly should be our servants."<sup>34</sup> On election day, the returns showed how limited Socialist support actually was in Ontario; the three candidates received a total of only 4600 votes.

## II

"The war itself is wrong," declared the International Bible Students Association. "Its prosecution will be a crime. There is not a question raised, an issue involved, a cause at stake, which is worth the life of one blue-jacket on the sea or one khaki-coat in the trenches."<sup>35</sup> Members of the Association were in conscience bound "to 'follow peace with all men', and to do violence or injury to none; that such is in harmony with the teaching of the Master, Christ Jesus, that his followers practice non-resistance."<sup>36</sup> The group's organ, The Bible Students'

birth or extraction.

For an excellent account of the attitude of the Government on the question of the franchise see R. Graham, Arthur Meighen, A Biography (3 vols., Toronto, 1960), I, 163-70.

34. Canadian Forward, November 10, 1917.

35. Censorship Board, extracts from "Studies in the Scriptures, Series VII, The Finished Mystery", p.251.

The International Bible Students Association had its headquarters in London, England with a North American branch centred in Boston, Mass. The organization's name varied: the Associated Bible Students and the Russellites, named for the founder, Pastor Russell. However, the beliefs espoused remained the same.

36. P.A.C., Military District Files, Military District No. 2 (Toronto), copy of an "Affidavit" of the International Bible Students Association. This document sets forth the tenets of the Bible Students' beliefs as related to the war.

Monthly, devoted a great deal of effort to proving that war was sinful and that "the blood spilled in the trenches was merely an offering to Moloch."<sup>37</sup> It cried:

Ye have literally killed over fifty millions in bloody persecutions. Ye have preached millions into a dreadful death in the trenches...the inoffensive, unresisting ones, become the prey of every evil Government and of every employer and corporation. Ye have made them cannon-fodder by the thousands for the blood-guilty kaisers, czars, kings and generals of your evil order of things.<sup>38</sup>

Bible Students regarded the war as fulfillment of the Bible's prophecies relating to the end of the world. Interpreting the scriptures literally, they believed that the "period of Gentile rule" was to last 2520 years beginning with the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. The founder of the Association, Pastor Russell, calculated that this period ended in 1914. The war was but the first stage, to be followed by anarchy and disorder in which the existing system would be swept away.<sup>39</sup> Germany was looked upon as "God's whip hand" in bringing the time of the Gentiles to a close.<sup>40</sup> In explaining his opposition to combatant service an

37. Censorship Board, Col. E.J. Chambers to J.M. Langley, June 28, 1918.

The image of Moloch was particularly appropriate. In ancient Carthage the solar fires were believed to be renewed by human sacrifices to the god Moloch. Children were laid on the sloping hands of the calf-headed idol of bronze, from which they slid into a fiery oven in its hollow body while the people danced to the music of flutes and timbrels to drown the shrieks of burning victims. - J.G. Frazer, The Golden Bough, A Study in Magic and Religion, (Toronto, 1967), p.370.

38. Censorship Board, The Bible Students Monthly, September, 1917.

39. Ibid., clipping from the Vancouver Daily Colonist, March, 24, 1918.

40. Ibid., Rev. H.B. Johnson to Chambers, March 12, 1918. Report of a Bible Students' Meeting. They were not pro-German in their sympathies. The Bible Students, however, believed that

Association member declared: "Jesus said 'My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight.' For a Christian to take part in the present struggle would be for him to battle against God's arrangement in an endeavor to support unrighteous systems which God has decreed must be destroyed and whose destruction is now eminent."<sup>41</sup>

Members of the Association were not content to merely proclaim their personal opposition to military service. Theirs was an active religion. They carried out what officials regarded as "a concerted movement to discourage enlisting" in Ontario and the rest of the Dominion.<sup>42</sup> Many meetings were held at which Bible Students expounded their pacifist ideals. So persistent was the organization in distributing anti-recruiting propaganda (particularly in areas with a large German population) that it appears to have been generally regarded as pro-German in its sympathies.<sup>43</sup> Anticipating the possibility of

40. if they were to take up arms against Germany they would be opposing the will of God since the Germans were his instrument in bringing the time of the Gentiles to a close.
41. Ibid., clipping from the Calgary News-Telegram, March 4, 1918. So extreme was the Bible Students' opposition to enlistment that Judge Rutherford, President of the U.S. branch, declared in Toronto that "a Christian should refuse to take up arms, even in defence of his country against an invader."  
-Ibid., Ottawa, Evening Journal, April 10, 1917.
42. Ibid., Ottawa Free Press, March 7, 1916. See also: J. Gwallia (commandant Kingston unit, Army and Navy Veterans) to Chambers, August 8, 1917.
43. Commenting on the activity of the Bible Students in Ontario the Victoria Week (March 18, 1916) related that the Mayor of a town had cancelled one of their meetings because of the hostile attitude of the population to these "pro-Germans".

conscription of manpower, Bible Students began in 1915 to distribute "Affidavits" to men eligible for military service. These declared that the signatory was forbidden by the teachings of his religion (the Bible Students) to have anything to do with military service and therefore claimed exemption under the Militia Act. By early 1916 hundreds of the "affidavits" had been received by military authorities throughout Ontario.<sup>44</sup>

The Bible Students increased their activities after the M.S.A. was introduced in June, 1917. They were determined to oppose conscription "to a man." "Inveterate workers", the Bible Students began a door-to-door campaign distributing copies of the Bible Students' Monthly that openly damned the war effort. Their propaganda set forth grounds upon which individuals might claim exemption from the law as conscientious objectors. The campaign appears to have had some success. Col. E.J. Chambers, the Chief Press Censor, wrote that "a very large proportion of the men who have applied for exemption in Canada on grounds of conscientious objection to Military Service are readers of this Pastor Russell literature."<sup>45</sup> Chambers added that he suspected many not to be regular readers, but that they had chanced to read copies of the Bible Students Monthly left at their door and had seized upon the opportunity. The Censorship Board received numerous complaints from clergymen, military officers and police

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44. Military District Files, Military District No. 2, ----- to Lt. Col. C.S. MacInnes, March 24, 1916.

45. Censorship Board, Col. E.J. Chambers to Creel, no date. Also: Chambers to Sir E.T. Cook, February 1, 1918.

authorities alleging that the publications of the Association seriously impeded the operations of the M.S.A.<sup>46</sup> Although Lyman P. Duff, the Central Appeal Judge, ruled in January, 1918 that membership in the International Bible Students Association was not sufficient grounds for exemption from military service<sup>47</sup>, the group's efforts continued to be regarded as a threat to the operation of the Act. The following month all publications of the Association were banned in Canada.

### III

The Mennonite Confession of Faith declared that:

Regarding revenge, whereby we resist our enemies by the sword, we believe and confess, that the Lord Jesus has forbidden His disciples and followers all revenge and resistance, and has thereby commanded them not to 'return evil for evil, nor railing for railing'; but to 'put up the sword in the sheath', or, as the prophets foretold, 'beat them into plowshares'. Matt. 5:39, 44; Rom. 12:14; I Pet. 3:9; Micah 4:3.<sup>48</sup>

Mennonites were bound to harm no man, but "to seek the welfare

46. Ibid., Chambers to M. Burrell, Secretary of State, October 23, 1917.

47. Mennonite Church Archives, Conrad Grebel College, University of Waterloo, Military Problems Committee, Reports of Cases Decided by the Central Appeal Judge, Appeal of David Cooke, January 14, 1918.

Exemption claims were heard first by local tribunals. If a claim was rejected the case might be appealed, first before the provincial Appeal Tribunal and finally before the Central Appeal Judge.

48. Ibid., "Mennonites on Military Service. A Statement of Our General Conference, August 29, 1917." The Conference, held near Goshen, Indiana, represented Mennonites of the United States, Canada and India. Ontario was represented by Bishop S.F. Coffman of Vineland, H.W. Stevanus of Sherkston, Peter Boshart of Milverton and A.S. Miller of Preston.

and salvation of all men." If necessary, they would flee rather than give offense to anyone: if they were struck on the right cheek they would turn the other rather than return the blow. This position the Mennonite Church had consistently upheld for more than 250 years. These were the principles upon which it based its resolute opposition to any participation in the Canadian war effort. When he appeared before an exemption tribunal, as required by the terms of the Military Service Act, a young Mennonite was asked: "Supposing the Germans were at the door of this room ready to break in and destroy everyone in this room including the ladies present, do you believe that you ought not to resist them, although you might jump out of the window? No, I don't believe in fighting them, was the candid reply."<sup>49</sup>

Despite these beliefs, a few Mennonites did actually enlist. This was a matter of grave concern to a church that believed that the thousands of men who had gone to fight were "consigned to eternal perdition."<sup>50</sup> In January, 1917 a delegation of Saskatchewan Mennonites, representing their brethren across the country, met with representatives of the Government to ask that members of the sect that had enlisted be released from the C.E.F. In support of their argument, they pointed out that the Government had guaranteed Mennonites "an entire exemption from Military Service" by Order-in-Council dated August 13, 1873.<sup>53</sup>

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49. Ibid., clipping from Toronto, Telegram, July 24, 1918.

50. Ibid. A memo in the Kemp papers indicates that until the end of March, 1917 36 Mennonites had enlisted in the C.E.F. Only 8 were from Military Districts 1 to 6 (including Ontario).

51. Ibid., "A Petition of the Mennonite Delegation to the

(It is important to note that the Order included only those Mennonites that came to Canada in 1873 to settle in western Canada. The Ontario Mennonites immigrated from Pennsylvania in 1808 and had no such guarantees.) The Government promised that the Order-in-Council would be strictly observed and that "in event of any member of the Mennonite communion having joined an overseas battalion under misapprehension or otherwise, and desiring to be released, if he will make an application to the colonel of his battalion, stating that he is a Mennonite, and desires to be discharged, immediate action will be taken to that end."<sup>52</sup>

This pledge, given by Robert Rogers, Minister of Public Works, does not appear to have been given wide circulation, even among cabinet ministers. In February, the Minister of Militia, Sir Edward Kemp, had to send a telegram to Rogers inquiring if such a promise had in fact been made. On learning that a pledge had been made to release Mennonites from the C.E.F. on application, Kemp took a firm stand. He declared that release should be granted only "to those who clearly prove that there was some misunderstanding."<sup>53</sup> A considerable number of men, Kemp reasoned, would become involved if Mennonites were discharged generally. Other denominations would undoubtedly apply for the same privileges for their members.

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Government at Ottawa, in regard to military service.  
January 8th, 1917."

52. Ibid.

53. Kemp Papers, Maj. E. Bristol to A. Meighen, March 3, 1917. Bristol was Kemp's secretary.

The Government honored the commitment made by the 1873 Order-in-Council when the M.S.A. was introduced in June, 1917. A schedule of exceptions to the Act included "those persons exempted from Military Service by Order in Council of August 13th, 1873 and by Order in Council of December 6th, 1898."<sup>54</sup> Since the Ontario Mennonites were not explicitly mentioned in these orders, they became subject to the provisions of the Conscription Bill and thus eligible for military service. There was another option open to them.<sup>55</sup> Ontario Mennonites might apply for exemption as conscientious objectors: any man could ask to be relieved on the grounds "that he conscientiously objects to the undertaking of combatant service and is prohibited from so doing by the tenets and articles of faith...of any organized religious denomination existing and well recognized in Canada...and to which he in good faith belongs."<sup>56</sup> However, this would release Mennonites from "combatant" service only. Members of the sect might be called upon to serve in <sup>non-combatant</sup> support battalions (of such organizations as the Canadian Army Medical Corps, the Canadian Forestry Corps or the Canadian Overseas Railway Construction Corps). Mennonites believed that if any service "whatsoever"

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54. Canada, Statutes of Canada, 1917, Chapter 19. "An Act Respecting Military Service", p. 13.

55. Borden Papers, Borden to Rev. P. Goortz, September 11, 1917. "Mennonites who came to Canada in 1873 are entitled to certain privileges under an Order-in-Council passed at that time...Mennonites who did not enter Canada at that time and who do not come within the terms of that Order are obviously not entitled to the privileges and immunities therein set forth."

56. Statutes of Canada, 1917, Chapter 19, p.8.

was required "it nullifies the pledges of religious liberty on the first actual occasion that privileges of exemption could have been effective."<sup>57</sup> Support service too was regarded as a contravention of the articles of faith of the Mennonite Church.<sup>58</sup>

A small delegation of Ontario Mennonites met with Prime Minister Borden and Arthur Meighen on October 11, 1917. The "appeal" that they presented expressed a willingness to submit "to the wishes of the Government in as far as we can do so without violating a law or principle of Christ, whom we recognize as Lord of lords and King of kings, and whose law we consider the supreme guide of our lives."<sup>59</sup> While recognizing the "goodwill" of the Government in inserting a clause in the M.S.A. exempting all denominations whose articles of faith forbade combatant service, the delegation urged that this be construed to mean that these groups should not be asked to perform even non-combatant duties. The Government stated that "Mennonites are excluded from the operation of the Act." It added that should any members of that Church be prosecuted for non-compliance with the Act, the answer should "be that they are Mennonites, and on proof of the fact, undoubtedly the prosecution would be dismissed."<sup>60</sup> To facilitate matters, elders of the Mennonite Church urged that all

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57. War Problems Committee, "The Conflicting Points Between the Faith of Non-Resistant Churches and the Military Service Act."
58. Ibid., W.D. Euler to Charles Doherty, Minister of Justice, May 29, 1917.
59. Ibid., "Military Service Act. An Appeal to the Government of Canada in Council".
60. Ibid., S.F. Coffman to J.E. Hartzler and D.H. Bender, November 6, 1917.

young men see that their Church Membership Certificates were in the hands of someone who would be responsible for seeing that the certificate was presented before the Exemption Tribunals if necessary.

Some Mennonites believed that the Government might require public service from the Church in place of military contributions.<sup>61</sup> This may well have been a motive in the formation of the Non-Resistant Relief Organization in December, 1917. Its stated purpose was to raise a "generous fund...among the Churches interested which shall be donated to the Government as a memorial of appreciation for the privileges of religious liberty and freedom from military service." However, the organization's first action was to appoint a committee to examine the position of the Mennonite Church under the existing laws regulating military service in Canada.<sup>62</sup> The formation of this

61. Ibid., S.F. Coffman to Girvin Bearss, October 1, 1917.

62. \_\_\_\_\_, Non-Resistant Relief Work in World War I, paper prepared at the University of Waterloo, p.3.

Some \$70,000 was actually raised for relief work. After consultation with the Government, the executive committee recommended in October 1918 that the money go to such organizations as the Merchant Sailors Relief of Canada, and various reconstruction and relief projects in Belgium and France. Since implementation of the program coincided with the end of the war, Mennonites were accused of trying to buy a share of the glories of victory: "If Mennonites feel in this matter [the war] they have acted a worthy part there should be no need of a memorial to the government. 'Virtue is its own reward.' If on the other hand, they now feel, since the war has been brought to a successful conclusion without their aid, they should like to have a part in the glories of the hour, they should be made to understand that the blood sacrifices entailed cannot be differentiated by any monetary consideration on the part of those who, by the power of the dollar would secure a part in the honors of the day." -War Problems Committee, clipping from Hamilton Spectator, no date. The hostility to Mennonites reflected

committee suggests the existence of suspicion that the members of the Mennonite communion were not secure from all military service, despite the Government statement. A number were in fact conscripted, although it would be difficult to discover how many were involved. Undoubtedly, the count would be very small. During 1918, efforts made to gain the release of those taken for military service continued to stress the belief that a non-resistant people could not conscientiously engage in any form of duty with the armed forces.<sup>63</sup>

#### IV

There was a distinct element in Ontario opposed not only to conscription but to the war as well. Of these, the Socialists did not oppose war in principle. They opposed the Great War because they saw two capitalist powers fighting each other. The worker was simply an instrument of war to be used to advance the economic well-being of the wealthy.<sup>64</sup> Conscription was an instrument by which the working class could be subjugated: it was a weapon of militarism and meant that every "industrial" would

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in this statement was common in the years immediately following the war. In 1919 the Government was urged from the floor of the House of Commons to pass an order in council that would prevent any more Mennonites from entering Canada.

63. War Problems Committee, S.F. Coffman to J.A. Calder, May 7, 1918.

64. There was no uniform reaction to the war among Socialists. In the United Kingdom and France they supported the war, while in Canada and the United States the Socialists opposed it.

become a slave. The Social Democratic Party in Ontario consequently waged a vigorous campaign against compulsory military service, that would allow for no compromise.

Both the International Bible Students Association and the Mennonite Church opposed the war in principle. They affirmed the doctrine of "non-resistance", stating that under no condition would they fight. The Bible Students, however, were in an unfortunate position. The Military Tribunals refused to recognize their claim for exemption. The Bible Students undertook an active campaign, damning war, all participation in it, and setting forth grounds upon which individuals might claim exemption as conscientious objectors. On the other hand Ontario Mennonites' opposition to compulsory service was essentially passive. As members of "an organized denomination existing and well recognized in Canada", they were able to qualify for exemption as conscientious objectors. Mennonites limited their protests to appeals to the Government asking that they be given exemption from non-combatant as well as combatant service.

Active opposition from organizations such as the S.D.P. and the International Bible Students Association undoubtedly was annoying to the Government officials. These groups were well organized and vocal. Their influence, however, was limited by the strength of their following. In the 1917 election, the S.D.P. received only some 4,600 votes in the entire province. It would be impossible to give an accurate estimate of the strength of the Bible Students. However, the 1911 census, while

listing sects in Ontario having as few as 1,100 members, makes no mention of them. The Mennonites, the least active of the three organizations, would appear to have been the largest single group (13,000).<sup>65</sup> Though limited in their influence each of the organizations undertook a determined opposition to the M.S.A. The Socialists and the Bible Students did so by public appeals while the Mennonites preferred to rely on the good will of the Government in recognizing the justice of their appeals.

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<sup>65</sup>. Canada, Fifth Census of Canada, 1911, Vol. VII, pp. 42-43.

## CHAPTER TWO:THE TRADE UNIONS

Ontario labor's stand on conscription was based on a curious mixture of self-interest and patriotism. It opposed the principle of conscription, largely on the grounds that it could be used to destroy the usefulness of the unions and all that they had worked for in the past. However, when the Military Service Act was introduced in 1917, Ontario laborites realistically accepted the fact of its existence and demanded that wealth also be conscripted. The campaign that they undertook to this end was both determined and practical.

### I

Capitalists of the world "cause all war and should be allowed to do the fighting" declared the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada (T.L.C.) in September, 1911. It endorsed the idea of a general strike to prevent the outbreak of war, "so that the workers also may see the pitiful exhibition of fighting of those capitalists who seem so fond of it."<sup>1</sup> The following year the Congress reiterated its opposition to war:"the only result war between Germany and Great Britain would achieve would be the degradation of the toilers."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Canada, Department of Labor, The Labour Gazette, Vol. XII (1911-12), p.34.
  2. Ibid., Vol. XIII, p. 352.

War broke out about one month before the T.L.C. met in 1914. The preamble to the executive resolution on the war rehearsed all the old arguments of the organization's "utter abhorrence of war as a means of settling disputes." Despite these protestations, there was a noticeable shift in the attitude of the Congress. The resolution recognized that "the working class in one country alone cannot stop the war, and to prevent these struggles it is necessary for the working class among the great nations of the world to come to an understanding." Should the workers in other countries involved in the war make a move to end the struggle, Canada would co-operate. Until such a moment, the great care of Canadian workers ought to be the defence of themselves "and their dependents at home in this Dominion."<sup>3</sup>

The Trades and Labor Congress executive spoke for almost all of Canada's organized workers when it declared "that in this unfortunate struggle is involved a principle which should have our individual support." Germans had for years, it maintained, labored under a despotism that had no place in the 20th century. Great Britain and France now stood together for the cause of democracy, against autocracy. Canadian workers were not for a moment willing to change their institutions for German despotism. The T.L.C. executive was determined that "despotism in Europe will be hurled to its final destruction, to make way for constitutional freedom in all the countries of Europe, in preparation for

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3. Fourth Annual Report on Labour Organization in Canada, 1914,  
p.20.

the last and great struggle of the working class to their own actual freedom."<sup>4</sup>

When the Congress met in Vancouver in 1915, it again emphasized its support of the national war effort: "under existing conditions it becomes the duty of the labour world to lend every assistance possible to the Allies of Great Britain and, for us in Canada, more especially to the Empire of which we are a part, in a mighty endeavour to secure early and final victory for the cause of freedom and democracy."<sup>5</sup> To this end, the T.L.C. pledged its voluntary support. Any form of compulsion was opposed. The recommendation of the executive calling for "unchangeable opposition to all that savours of conscription in either here or the empire"<sup>6</sup> was strongly endorsed. The anti-conscription resolution was re-affirmed the following year.<sup>7</sup>

The organized workers of Ontario had an excellent war record- competent service, avoidance of strikes and heavy enlistment. By December, 1917 they had provided 9,807 recruits for active service in Europe out of a total membership of about 77,000.<sup>8</sup> This meant that a high proportion of all members, 12.7 percent, were then in uniform. It appears that the only recognizable group that provided a higher percentage enlistment

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4. Ibid.

5. Fifth Annual Report on Labour Organization in Canada, 1915, p.22.

6. Proceedings of the Thirty-first Annual Convention of the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, (1915), p. 15.

7. Proceedings of the Thirty-second Annual Convention of the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, (1916), p. 23.

8. Seventh Annual Report on Labour Organization in Canada, 1917, p. 26.

was the Church of England with 15 percent.<sup>9</sup> In this light the contribution by organized labor to the Canadian armed forces was very generous.

Trade unionists who did not enlist often supported their brothers overseas by paying the absentees' annual dues to the central body of the union. In many cases, heavy enrolments of members of a local in the armed forces had meant that these fees had to be increased in order to meet expenses. This met with no objection.<sup>10</sup> Maintenance of a soldier's union standing entitled his family to "death benefits". In locals where the annual dues were not paid on their behalf, the enlisted frequently were given cards which entitled the holders to return to the union without payment of initiation fees.

Labor's patriotic attitude was emphasized by the fact that the number of strikes during the first three years of the war was less than half of what it had been in the three years preceding the war. Moreover, the loss of time involved was cut to only one sixth of what it was in the prewar period, from about 4.5 million hours to approximately three quarters of a million hours.<sup>11</sup> There was a considerable jump in the number of strikes in 1917, however. The total of 148 in that year was only 14 short of the number of strikes in the previous three years.<sup>12</sup>

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9. Catholic Register, November 8, 1917.

10. Sixth Annual Report on Labour Organization in Canada, 1916, pp. 17-8.

11. Canada, Department of Trade and Commerce, Canada Year Book, 1916-17, p. 497.

12. Ibid., 1918, p. 467.

Most of these were minor and involved little loss of time. This may well have been the result of a growing war weariness in the country.<sup>13</sup>

## II

Until conscription was introduced in 1917, the Government played a very limited role in the actual raising of troops for European service. It preferred to depend largely upon the work of the military officers and civilian recruiting leagues of each area. These recruiting organizations were generally established and run by influential business and professional people of the community. As early as 1915, active recruiters began to suspect that the voluntary system of enlistment would not be sufficient to meet Canada's needs. A delegation, representing 42 of these leagues from across the country, met in Ottawa in 1916 to present a "memorial" to the Prime Minister urging a national registration of men and resources to be followed by conscription.<sup>14</sup> At a conference on April 13, these representatives agreed to form the Canadian National Service League to further these measures.

The National Service League had a highly decentralized structure, under the honorary presidency of Chief Justice Mather

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13. P.A.C., Sir George Foster Diaries, August 1, 1917. Commenting on a meeting to mark the anniversary of the outbreak of war, Foster wrote that "the war spirit appears weak."  
14. P.A.C., "Canada and National Service" (pamphlet, 1917).

of Manitoba. Its stated purpose was "to promote any form of National Service which the need of the hour may demand."<sup>15</sup> More specifically this meant "authoritative selection" by the Government "of every person of both sexes, from 15 to 65 years of age, for all purposes in connection with the war."<sup>16</sup> This would include the "selection" of individuals for industrial and military service.<sup>17</sup> The significance of the organization lies in the fact that it was the only nation-wide pressure group formed to forward the cause of conscription. It represented what was by this time becoming an increasingly popular demand.

This pressure was the first serious test of labor's determination to resist any form of conscription. James Watters, President of the T.L.C., reacted by sending out a circular, on April 29, 1916, asking the various affiliated central trades councils and unions whether or not they were ready to stand by the 1915 resolution calling for an "unchangeable opposition to all that savours of conscription." He also sounded the unions on the advisability of calling a general strike:

To prevent anything that savours of "conscription"... are you prepared if every other means fails, to use the most effective and almost the only weapon within your reach...Or should occasion require it, are you prepared to simply register your protest.<sup>18</sup>

No official congress action was taken. Ontario, however, stood against the introduction of any form of conscription. The

15. Canadian Annual Review, 1916, p. 318.

16. Toronto, News, June 12, 1916.

17. P.A.C., Sir Wilfrid Laurier Papers, J.M. Godfrey to Sir Wilfrid Laurier, June 12, 1916.

18. Industrial Banner, May 5, 1916 quoted in Robin, op. cit., p.122.

Industrial Banner, official organ of the T.L.C. in Ontario, referred to the efforts to force conscription, and reminded the government ministers that the Immigration Department had given definite assurances that there would be none.<sup>19</sup>

When the Government introduced the National Service scheme in late 1916, Ontario laborites made little public comment. There was suspicion, however, that behind the registration plan was an intention on the part of the Government to bring in conscription.<sup>20</sup> This had been the British experience: national registration had preceded compulsory military service by about six months. In January, 1917 this feeling was voiced at a meeting of the Toronto Labor Council, when it was declared that national registration was the prelude to conscription: "it was the entering of the thin wedge."<sup>21</sup> The T.L.C. executive communicated this conviction to Prime Minister Borden in late December, 1916.

Conscription was not the aim of the Government at the time, despite the fact that the information gained from the registration could not be used effectively without some form of compulsion. This misunderstanding between the Government and the leaders of organized labor seems to have arisen from a lack of communication. Despite the fact that the labor interests would be considerably affected by the registration plan, its leaders were not consulted before the step was taken. They were not even

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19. Industrial Banner, October 20, 1916.

20. Borden Papers, H.H. Stevens to R.B. Bennett, December 20, 1916.

21. Industrial Banner, January 12, 1917.

provided with a copy of the Order-in-Council establishing registration.<sup>22</sup> There was very little with which labor might reassure itself.

It was a serious weakness in the Borden Administration not to provide for labor representation on boards or committees where labor interests were directly involved. Moreover, it did not even seek the opinion of labor leaders in these matters. Yet labor's willing co-operation in the war effort should have indicated the desirability and the simplicity of including labor somewhere in the decision-making process. Indeed, if this had been done a great deal of friction could have been avoided in the conscription issue. It is likely that had labor leaders participated in the decision their supporters would have felt bound to co-operate. This was the experience of the United States, where President Woodrow Wilson sought and obtained the co-operation of the American Federation of Labor.

The executive council of the T.L.C. met with Prime Minister Borden and Richard B. Bennett, the Director General of National Registration, on December 26. It demanded an assurance that under no circumstances would conscription be undertaken or carried out.<sup>23</sup> Borden refused. He did, however, issue a statement the following day in which he hoped the appeal to National Service would make resorting to conscription unnecessary. But, if at some future time conscription "should prove the only effective method

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22. Borden Papers, Stevens to Bennett, December 20, 1916.

23. Ibid., Borden to J.C. Watters, J. Simpson and R.A. Rigg, December 27, 1916.

to preserve the existence of the state and the institutions which we enjoy"<sup>24</sup>, he would not hesitate to act accordingly.

Despite the Prime Minister's failure to disavow conscription of manpower, the T.L.C. executive was satisfied that registration was not necessarily a prelude to compulsion. In view of this, a circular was issued on December 28 to all members of affiliated unions. The executive urged that the registration cards distributed during the fall be filled out in accordance with the "conscientious opinion" of each individual, and returned as directed.<sup>25</sup> This was not a repudiation of labor's opposition "to all that savours of conscription" as expressed in the Watters circular of late April. They sought to co-operate in furthering the war effort and could do so because of Borden's assurance that conscription was not involved in the registration scheme.

Borden's statement was given wide circulation during January, 1917 in the Industrial Banner. It was strongly advocated that the executive recommendations be adopted. At the regular meeting of the Toronto District Labor Council, the circular occasioned lively discussion. A few members remained suspicious of the intent of registration. But by far the greater number accepted the argument of James Simpson, Vice-President of the Trades and Labor Congress. He was, Simpson said, impressed by Borden's assurances and satisfied that the Government had no

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24. Ibid.

25. Ibid., memorandum of the labor executive, December 28, 1916.

desire to enforce conscription. He urged that the registration cards be filled in, and that in so doing the individual had the right to voice his views and objections.<sup>26</sup> Trade councils in Ottawa, Hamilton, Guelph, Peterborough and St. Catherines passed resolutions in support of the executive's position. Ontario labor was reluctant to oppose the registration scheme.

### III

The early months of 1917 were relatively calm, at least with regard to registration and conscription. The only indication of the storm that would break with the introduction of the Military Service Act was a stir caused by the report of a recruiting meeting in Winnipeg. At this gathering the Capt. Rev. W.J. Hindley had claimed that the Militia Act<sup>27</sup> would be put

26. Industrial Banner, January 12, 1917.

27. Borden acknowledged, in his speech announcing conscription, that Canada had had compulsory military service for about 50 years. -Borden Memoirs, II, 79. See also: Ottawa, Le Droit, November 23, 1925, public letter, Sir Robert Borden to Sir A.E. Kemp.

The Militia Act of 1868 provided for the selection of men, by ballot, to serve in the defence of Canada. As amended in 1904, under Laurier, the Act said that these levies might be employed "beyond Canada, for the defence thereof, at any time when it appears advisable to do so by reason of emergency." -Kemp Papers, Maj.-Gen. W. Gwatkin, Chief of General Staff, to Kemp, December 28, 1916. The need was left to the Government to decide on.

The Military Service Act was introduced in order to change the method of selection. Borden believed that it should not be done by ballot, but should be based on an intelligent consideration of the country's needs and condition. In an industrial society, such as Canada, selection by ballot might well remove men from vital positions in industry, and

into force in a few days. Though the Government quickly denied that Hindley had any authority to make such a statement, the Industrial Banner took the opportunity to stress that it had been agreed at the December meeting with Borden and Bennett "that mutual co-operation on a voluntary basis alone would meet the situation."<sup>28</sup>

During the period from February 14 to May 15, 1917 Borden attended the meetings of the Imperial War Conference in London. His absence likely contributed to the prevailing calm. Without Borden's leadership little would be done towards implementing any form of compulsion. However, during the three months he had been away, the Prime Minister had been in close touch with the situation in Canada. He had come to the conclusion that "any further effort for voluntary enlistment would provide very meagre and wholly inadequate results."<sup>29</sup>

On May 18, Borden announced that the National Registration plan would not be sufficient to fulfill Canada's commitment of 500,000 men to the Empire and that conscription was imperative. The T.L.C. executive had been willing to accept registration on the basis that it was not a prelude to compulsion. With

26. end in doing extensive damage to the war effort. This was avoided under the new act.
28. Industrial Banner, March 16, 1917.
29. Borden Memoirs, II, 77. From August, 1916 until late in 1917 the strength of the C.E.F. showed little change. The number of men in the Canadian armed forces varied no more than 5,000 from the 303,000 level. -Nicholson, op. cit., p. 547. This stability meant that an increasing portion of the army consisted of inexperienced or partially trained men.

conscription imminent, James Watters, the T.L.C. President, headed a strong protest movement. On May 21 he, Simpson and P.M. Draper, Secretary Treasurer of the Congress, met with the Prime Minister to hear a statement in justification of the selective conscription of 50,000 to 100,000 men.<sup>30</sup> They demanded unsuccessfully that conscription measures not be initiated. The executive summoned a meeting of 80 international trade unions shortly thereafter. The convention, which included representatives of many Ontario labor organizations, met from June 1 to 4 and placed itself on record as emphatically opposed to conscription. It urged "the workers of Canada to oppose by every means in their power, the enactment of such legislation."<sup>31</sup>

These elements of organized labor stood solidly in opposition to the principle of manpower conscription. The introduction of compulsory military service, laborites argued, would require "in Canada an entire and radical change in the Constitution." The people "would no longer have a voice in their own government." Canada would be carried back in one fell swoop "to conditions that obtained when serfdom was in vigour and before political autonomy existed." Organized labor had struggled against such conditions for years and had "no intention that the fruits of such endeavour should be destroyed in a moment."<sup>32</sup>

More than the loss of freedom, labor feared the estab-

30. Proceedings of the Thirty-third Annual Convention of the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada (1917), p. 36.

31. C.A.R., 1917, p. 419.

32. Fifth Annual Report on Labour Organization in Canada, 1915, p. 24.

lishment of a precedent that might be used after the war:"once the principle is admitted and put into practice, under the excuse of pressure in time of unwonted war, there would be no hope of it not being made permanent afterwards."<sup>33</sup> Government intervention against labor in the past was not unknown and now would be facilitated by conscription. It was believed that trade unions should under no circumstances permit themselves to be "saddled" with anything such as conscription, which could reduce their effectiveness as agents of betterment for the workers. Once passed, conscription could be used to frustrate the workers' ambitions by "simply calling them to the colours."<sup>34</sup>

These were potential problems. But another reason for opposition lay in the text of the M.S.A. itself. The Industrial Banner warned that the bill provided that employers were to be consulted on the question of exempting their employees from service. By claiming that trade unionists were expendable, it argued, the unscrupulous employer might replace them with non-union labor. The result would be disastrous: it would give employers stronger control of the wage scale<sup>35</sup>, create an open shop, and negate years of union accomplishment.

On June 14, three days after the M.S.A. was introduced in the House of Commons, Watters issued a manifesto re-emphasizing opposition to the conscription of manpower and warned "the organized workers not to permit themselves to be shackled with the

33. Ibid., pp. 24-5.

34. C.A.R., 1917, p. 420. see pp. 13-14.

35. Industrial Banner, June 1, 1917.

chains of Conscription."<sup>36</sup> By early July, the conscription bill was in its second reading and it became increasingly obvious that despite Liberal opposition it would become law. Organized labor felt betrayed. Had not Borden given "his written statement that should he deem it necessary to introduce conscription he would consult the representatives of organized labour?"<sup>37</sup>

On July 3, Watters issued a statement emphasizing the Prime Minister's promise that conscription "would be resorted to only when it should prove the only effective method of preserving the existence of the state." If such a situation existed, Watters argued, then manpower alone was not sufficient. The full resources of the country, including wealth, must be organized efficiently. After all, Borden had pledged the full power of the country to the task of winning the war, and that power must not be limited to manpower. Watters strongly advocated that

the greatest and most patriotic service we can render to our country...is, on the day conscription of manpower is put into effect, to implement the pledge of the Prime Minister by forcing the Government to conscript material wealth through every worker in the Dominion refusing to work for the gain of the private profiteer, and offering his services to the nation, and the nation alone.<sup>38</sup>

If the existence of the state was in jeopardy, the Government must not hesitate to conscript wealth and all other resources. Failure to do so would mean that "we have either been deceived" as the state "is not in danger, or betrayed" because the whole power of the nation was not being devoted to the war effort. In

36. C.A.R., 1917, p. 420.

37. Industrial Banner, July 20, 1917.

38. Ibid., July 6, 1917.

either case, to save the nation, it would be the duty of labor to bring pressure on the Government "even if a general strike is necessary."<sup>39</sup>

Ontario labor, however, did not support Watters' proposed solution to the conscription threat. It is true that Ontario unions opposed the conscription of manpower. This had been made clear on various occasions. The Industrial Banner had taken every opportunity to remind the Government of its repeated statements that there would be no conscription in Canada. During the National Registration discussions in January, 1917 opposition to compulsory service had been voiced. Ontario had accepted the scheme only after the T.L.C. executive had received the Government's assurances that there was no intent to introduce conscription. At the meeting of the Labour Education Association of Ontario (the one province-wide labor organization), that was in progress when Borden first proposed compulsory military service in the House of Commons, several delegates expressed disapproval: Angus MacDonald of Cobalt declared "the mining districts were solidly opposed to compulsory military service." R. Hessel of London was of the opinion that "the moneyed interests were making a concerted effort to force conscription selective or not. They were attempting to have the Canadians drafted that they might fill their places with foreigners and better control the wage scale."<sup>40</sup> Resolutions passed throughout the province expressed the belief

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39. Ibid.

40. Ibid., June 1, 1917.

that no case had been made for conscription. The failure of the voluntary system had been "solely" due to Government inaction and inefficiency. Should compulsory military service become law, Ontario laborites argued, it "would be manipulated to the advantage of useful party supporters or men of social distinction."<sup>41</sup>

The T.L.C. President's general strike proposal had expounded the position of Western labor unions.<sup>42</sup> Ontario, on the other hand, tended to rely on political action. The province's trade unionists decided to put their own candidates in the field in the anticipated elections of 1917.<sup>43</sup> In so doing they hoped to bring the real issues before the electorate and to offer a clearcut and uncorrupted alternative to the two old parties.<sup>44</sup> This, to Ontario laborites, was a practical solution to conscription.

The Ontario labor preference for political action as opposed to the Western solution of a general strike can be attributed, at least in part, to its own early development. In relatively unsettled western Canada "the isolation of communities turned the inhabitants inward" and "the high general level of the work force invited an industrial form of unionism to which western workers took vigorously and consistently." In addition, because of frequent Government hostility to their struggle for the improvement of labor conditions, western unionists looked

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41. P.A.C., George Keen Papers, resolution of the Brantford Trades and Labor Council on Conscription.

42. Martin Robin, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

43. The term of parliament was due to expire on October 7.

44. Industrial Banner, July 27, 1917. For a description of Ontario labor's involvement in politics see pp. 56-61.

favorably upon radical syndicalist devices such as the general strike.<sup>45</sup> Ontario labor, however, adopted the British expedient of political action through an independent labor party.

Ontario labor was strongly in favor of conscripting "material wealth" and had advocated the concept for some time, but the introduction of conscription brought this proposal into especially sharp focus. Although the province's laborites were opposed to the principle of compulsory service, they argued pragmatically that since conscription of manpower was to become law it should be preceded or accompanied by conscription of wealth. The Labor Education Association of Ontario dealt briefly with the question at its annual convention in May, 1917. It warned: "any scheme that does not conscript wealth as absolutely as it does labour will not be acceptable to the workers of Canada." The association defined wealth as including "the food supplies, the railroads and the mines, and all natural sources of wealth." These ought to be nationalized for the duration of the war.<sup>46</sup> The South Waterloo District Trades and Labor Council went on record as being "opposed to the application of the principle of conscription on the manpower of the country for service in the field unless, preceded or accompanied by the conscription of wealth."<sup>47</sup> The Toronto council passed a resolution that favored the conscription of wealth with manpower.<sup>48</sup>

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45. H.C. Pentland, "Fifty Years After", Canadian Dimension, July, 1969, pp. 15-16.

46. Industrial Banner, May 25, 1917.

47. Borden Papers, A.L. Philp to Borden, May 31, 1917.

48. Seventh Annual Report on Labour Organization in Canada, 1917, p. 32.

The labor argument in favor of conscription of wealth was developed in the columns of the Industrial Banner. "Will the Government allow wealth to go free now that labour is to be conscripted?" it wanted to know.<sup>49</sup> The manpower of the nation had thus far borne the burden of the war, while speculators had been inflating prices, gouging excessive profits and "hoarding up the necessities upon which the life of the consuming public depends."<sup>50</sup> There were examples of such "profiteering" to be found in almost every industry connected with the war. Industry simply had not been doing its fair share. Now that manpower was to be conscripted for service at the front, labor demanded that the "profiteers" be forced to give their wealth:"it [the Government] cannot any longer consistently force one class to serve while it allows another class to shirk." It was the Government's duty to take hold and organize the resources of the country.<sup>51</sup>

To a considerable extent, this attitude may be attributed to class jealousy arising from desires for wealth. But at the same time it seems to have been an honest desire to organize the country's resources in the most efficient manner for the prosecution of the war. There had been many errors made in the Canadian production that might have been avoided by Government control. The charge that Canadian nickle was reaching Germany and being

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49. Industrial Banner, May 25, 1917.

50. The Canada Year Book for 1916 and 1917 show that in the period from January, 1916 to December, 1917 the cost of feeding an average family increased from \$8.28 per month to \$12.24 per month, an increase of almost 50%.

51. Industrial Banner, May 25, 1917.

used in German munitions was but one example.<sup>52</sup>

Ontario labor firmly believed that "the whole means of producing and distributing commodities that are essential to the successful conduct of the war should be confiscated for the duration of the war."<sup>53</sup> There was an essential difference here from the position that Watters had taken. Ontario laborites held that conscription of wealth meant the operation of all the resources of the country by the Government until the end of the war. Then they would be returned. However, in his manifesto of June 14, Watters appears to have indicated that any source of wealth conscripted would become Government property: "the greatest service Canada can render the Allies...is to conscript (not borrow) the wealth of the nation...giving the nation the benefit, instead of the profiteers, of the work done."<sup>54</sup> Watters' socialist background was making itself apparent here.

Watters' general strike proposal received its fullest

52. Though Canada had vast resources of nickle (in 1914 estimated to be 75% to 80% of the world supply) she had no facilities for refining the ore. Canadian nickle was consequently shipped to the United States for processing. Since the U.S. was a neutral in the war (until April, 1917) there was no way to ensure that Canadian nickle would not then be sold to the enemy. It was charged that due to lack of Government control over the production and export of nickle it was following this route to Germany. There it was used in the manufacture of the munitions used to kill Canadian soldiers. In April, 1917 the Toronto World declared that in 1915 the United States had exported some 1,036,242 pounds of Canadian nickle to Germany and that there were even larger shipments during 1916.

- C.A.R., 1917, p. 660.

53. Industrial Banner, July 13, 1917.

54. C.A.R., 1917, p. 420.

consideration at the Trades and Labor Congress convention at Ottawa, in September, 1917. By that time conscription was law. The Congress was now faced with the problem of what action should be taken. Debate was initiated when the Committee on Officers' Reports recommended the adoption of the executive proposal on conscription, which read that

While the Congress cannot stultify itself to the degree of either withdrawing or contradicting this year its firm and carefully thought out views on the question of Conscription as embodied in the Resolutions of 1915 and 1916, still, under our representative form of Government, it is not deemed either right, patriotic or in the interests of the Dominion or of the Labour classes, to say or do aught that might prevent the powers that be from obtaining all the results that they anticipate from the enforcement of such law.<sup>55</sup>

This was a considerable reversal of the T.L.C. executive's general strike proposal made during the summer.<sup>56</sup> An alternative was offered, although it was not connected directly with the conscription statement. The executive recommended the formation of a national labor party in Canada which would allow for group affiliation, contracting out by individual members, and at the same time provide a basis for political action.<sup>57</sup> It had chosen

55. Proceedings of the Thirty-third Annual Convention of the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada (1917), p. 43.

56. Henri Bourassa in Syndicats Nationaux ou Internationaux (Montreal, 1919), has suggested that this shift was due to the strong influence of Samuel Gompers, President of the A.F.L., on Canadian unions (page 7):

"Il [Gompers] a fait avaler la conscription par les ouvriers américains et naturellement, par les ouvriers canadiens, qui ne forment qu'une infime minorité dans l'immense armée du syndicalisme international. Il a même réussi à faire faire sa besogne au Canada par les ouvriers canadiens, qui s'étaient posés en adversaires résolus de la conscription et qui ont dû plier le cou sous le joug de leurs maîtres des Etats-Unis."

57. Proceedings of the Thirty-third Annual Convention of the

the Ontario approach.

The debate on the conscription resolution clearly revealed the split in the national labor movement. A number of western delegates were opposed to the enforcement of the Military Service Act.<sup>58</sup> A. Farmilo of Edmonton sought to amend the executive's report with a proposal "that every effort be made to force the complete conscription of wealth as an essential part of conscription for war purposes, and that pending the conscription of wealth no support be given to the principle of conscripting men for war purposes."<sup>59</sup> Speaking in support of the Farmilo amendment, Vice-President Simpson may well have reflected the feelings of the executive: "it [the amendment] takes into account the fact that the Government of this country has given no guarantees that conscription of manpower will not be extended to the industries and also calls for the conscription of wealth before the support of the workers can be given the measure."<sup>60</sup> The Government, he argued, had completely disregarded the interests of the workers of Canada in the discussion of the war program; but in view of the fact that the M.S.A. was now law, Simpson was reluctant to break the law by refusing to obey it. Despite his sympathy with the amendment, he was evidently not prepared to take any revolutionary steps.

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58. Trades and Labour Congress of Canada (1917), p. 43.  
Industrial Banner, September 28, 1917.  
 59. Proceedings of the Thirty-third Annual Convention of the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada (1917), p. 142.  
 60. Ibid., p. 153. Simpson went on to define conscription of wealth as being "the complete socialization of all the essential industries of the nation."

Opinion among the Ontario delegates was against the Farmilo direct action amendment and in favor of the executive's proposals. The most forceful statement in favor of the acceptance of conscription was that of J.A. Murphy of Ottawa, who declared that he "desired to hold allegiance to Canada and the Empire. He preferred Lloyd George to the German Chancellor and King George to Kaiser Wilhelm." He was, therefore, prepared to support the Committee's report and "the traditions of the past."<sup>61</sup> J. Dean, London, said that he believed that the law should be obeyed and that he personally favored conscription.<sup>62</sup> The Toronto Labor Party went on record as supporting the conscription of both men and wealth. C.I. Aitchison of the Hamilton Trades and Labour Council supported the executive report. He was glad that conscription was law, for "it would mean the salvation of the workers and would waken them up."<sup>63</sup>

One Ontario figure, however, stands out for his opposition to the executive report on conscription. John Bruce of Toronto moved that "this Congress urge and work for the immediate repeal of the Act."<sup>64</sup> He was an unusual example; unlike most Ontario laborites, Bruce had been opposed to the war from the start: "I felt that if I was loyal to the workers I would oppose the War." But he did not support a general strike. The proper course would be to "win the political fight" and put men in

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61. Ibid., p. 146.

62. Ibid., p. 147.

63. Ibid., p. 149.

64. Ibid., p. 142. Bruce was also a member of the S.D.P. and ran as a Socialist candidate in the December, 1917 election.

office who would repeal the Military Service bill. In the meantime, he urged that the law should be obeyed.<sup>65</sup>

Both the Farmilo and Bruce amendments were defeated. By a vote of 134 to 101, the Executive Report was passed with only minor changes.<sup>66</sup> The Industrial Banner noted that the decision of the Congress not to sanction a general strike nor to demand repeal of the M.S.A. "will meet with the approval of organized labour."<sup>67</sup> During September and October, the various Ontario Labor Councils passed resolutions endorsing the action of the Trades and Labor Congress, often with the understanding "that no obstacle should be placed in the way of the Government in the present crisis"<sup>68</sup> and that conscription of wealth be included with that of manpower.

#### IV

Ontario's "practical"<sup>69</sup> stand on conscription may be explained in the words of Delegate Bruce at the T.L.C. convention: "it is better for us to go out and win the political fight than to get a half-hearted general strike and wreck the labour movement."<sup>70</sup> The province's labor bodies had begun to organize as

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65. Ibid., p. 150.

66. The Committee on Officers' Reports added that the Congress emphatically opposed any development in the enforcement of any legislation that would make for industrial conscription.

67. Industrial Banner, September 28, 1917.

68. Seventh Annual Report on Labour Organization in Canada, 1917, p.32.

69. Proceedings of the Thirty-third Annual Convention of the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada (1917), p. 43.

70. Ibid., p. 150.

early as April, 1916 when an independent labor party was formed in London. The movement expanded rapidly under the tutelage of the Labour Educational Association.<sup>71</sup> By November, 1916 party groups had appeared in London, Toronto and Hamilton. Eight months later, representatives of 16 branch locals gathered in convention to found the Independent Labour Party of Ontario (I.L.P.).<sup>72</sup>

The Industrial Banner became the chief propagandist of labor action in politics. This was the great opportunity "for labour to make its influence felt,"<sup>73</sup> it declared. In almost every issue it urged its readers to get into line with the new party,<sup>74</sup> and to support labor candidates whether it be in municipal, provincial or federal election contests.<sup>75</sup> During the days that conscription was before Parliament, more space was given to political action than to the question of conscription. The Industrial Banner emphasized and re-emphasized the splendid advances labor's party was making.<sup>76</sup>

71. The Labour Educational Association was a purely voluntary organization formed in Woodstock, Ontario in 1903 with the object of bringing "in close touch the workers throughout the province who are willing to co-operate to advance the principles of the labour movement and labour when and where possible." -Martin Robin, op. cit., p. 123. Originally restricted to Western Ontario, it soon expanded to include all areas of the province.

72. Industrial Banner, July 6, 1917. Cobalt, North Bay, Norwood, Toronto, Kingston, Niagara Falls, Port Colbourne, Welland, Thorold, Chippewa, Hamilton, Brantford, Guelph, Kitchener and London sent delegates.

73. Ibid., October 20, 1916.

74. Ibid., February 23, 1917.

75. Ibid., December 29, 1916.

76. On June 26 the Industrial Banner printed a report of a "large and enthusiastic" meeting of the Hamilton Labor

When the federal elections were officially announced in October, 1917 Ontario labor had a young, vigorous and growing party with which to contest them. Moreover, it had an enthusiastic, if small, press with which to reach its supporters. The I.L.P. contested 16 Ontario seats.

On the conscription issue, labor candidates emphasized that they were for one thing only- winning the war! The best way to do it was for all classes to contribute what they possessed. If it was right to "conscript flesh and blood", then "likewise should Canada's whole natural resources and wealth be conscripted."<sup>77</sup> The M.S.A. had not done enough. The Government should "supplement the conscription of manhood with the - not confiscation, as some would make believe, but - conscription of wealth."<sup>78</sup> When restricted to the question of manpower, there was a general acceptance by labor candidates that conscription was the law and should be obeyed. Labor's basic demand appears to have been that the principle be extended. In London, one of the hotbeds of political action, the labor (and Liberal) candidate, G.S. Gibbons, argued that since conscription was passed it should be carried out to the extent of the 100,000 men that Borden had asked for. If a new levy were required the whole question should be submitted to the country in the form of a referendum.<sup>79</sup>

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Party. On July 27 it announced that labor would put up a "real fight" in the federal elections. On September 14 it declared that "the labour party is going to be a real factor."

77. Industrial Banner, November 30, 1917.

78. Ibid., December 7, 1917.

79. Laurier Papers, Laurier to G.S. Gibbons, October 23, 1917.

Conscription did not become the dominating issue in the labor party's campaign. Labor candidates addressed themselves to the Borden Government's record, and sought to demonstrate that the entire war effort was tainted with scandal and corruption. Who, the Industrial Banner wondered, would the Kaiser vote for? The question was rhetorical. He would vote for the Government that had sent the boys at the front spavined horses, cardboard-soled boots, faulty binoculars, improper clothing and rifles that jammed under battle conditions.<sup>80</sup> Referring to the Government's new election laws, labor candidates argued that a blatant attempt was being made to "steal the election" by disfranchising "thousands of legitimate voters."<sup>81</sup> During late November and early December, the labor press ran a campaign to make sure that electors were aware of their rights and that their names were on the enumerators' lists.<sup>82</sup> Nonetheless, on December 17, when the votes were cast, many found themselves disfranchised.

Labor organs were hopeful as voting day approached. There were 37 candidates across Canada; there was a chance that if everyone did his duty they could hold the balance of power in the new parliament.<sup>83</sup> On December 14, the Industrial Banner proclaimed that the best way to win the war was to vote labor. It alone would see that the country's entire resources were directed

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80. Industrial Banner, November 30, 1917.

81. Ibid., December 7, 1917. see p. 19.

82. Hamilton, Labour News, December 7, 1917.

83. Industrial Banner, December 7, 1917.

toward the war effort. In Hamilton, "prospects for the election of both candidates [looked] bright."<sup>84</sup> Many of the unions' locals were closing up shop on election day to help get the voters out. A week later the hopes were gone. The banner headline read "Only One Result Was Possible And The Big Interests Are In Control In Ottawa."<sup>85</sup>

Ontario had not elected a single member for the labor party. A strong showing was made in the heavily unionized Hamilton ridings where labor candidates polled 30% of the vote. In Timiskaming, Arthur W. Roebuck received endorsement from both the I.L.P. and the Liberal Party. He was able to attract about 40% of the vote. A great portion of this support undoubtedly came from Liberals who stood by Sir Wilfrid Laurier.<sup>86</sup> The official I.L.P. candidate in Nipissing C.R. Harrison, carried his constituency by 44 votes. However, Borden had given Harrison his blessing and it was this Unionist support that won the election. He sat in the new parliament as a Government supporter.<sup>87</sup> Elsewhere in Ontario, labor candidates were unable to win more than 20% of the vote, and in many of these cases there was no Liberal

84. Ibid., December 14, 1917.

85. Ibid., December 21, 1917.

86. The 1921 census showed the riding of Timiskaming had 17,614 residents of French origin. This represented 35% of the area's population. Moreover, 43% was of Roman Catholic faith. An examination of election results in Ontario for 1917 shows that wherever there were significant concentrations of French Canadians and Catholics Laurier's Liberal Party did well.

87. Harrison was opposed by a Liberal who carried the civilian vote by 1,339. When the military vote had been counted, however, Harrison had won. Although it would be almost impossible to prove now, it is likely that the majority was "supplied" by Borden from the unassigned military votes.

in the field. The large Government majorities in Ontario suggest that many workers supported the Union Government despite the presence of the I.L.P. These results are not surprising.

There are a number of factors that contributed to the defeat of the I.L.P. The labor opposition to Borden's policy came not from the workers in general but from the organized sections; at least, these groups were the most articulate. Since the membership in the trade unions represented only about <sup>2%</sup> 20% of the Canadian population, they could not expect to represent the opinion of their unorganized brothers.

Another problem arose from the size and recent emergence of the I.L.P. The party had been in existence for less than a year in Ontario and for less than three months nationally by election day. In this situation, its program could scarcely be known widely, given the party's limited finances. Moreover, with only 37 candidates across the country, realistically it could not be expected to be the balance of power in the House of Commons. The I.L.P., then, did not provide a real alternative for the voter. If an individual wanted to protest against the Government, he was much more likely to look to the Liberal Party, where there was a Liberal in the field. A vote for the Liberals was likely to be more effective than one for a labor candidate.

Perhaps the most difficult problem that the I.L.P. had to face, however, was the influence of tradition. In federal elections the province of Ontario has always shown tremendous loyalty to the old parties. Since 1867, it has given a full 97%

of its seats to them.<sup>88</sup> While there had been some support for minor parties at the provincial level, Ontario had never provided any hope for a federal third party movement. It was highly unlikely that the I.L.P. could do better. As indeed it did not.

## V

When war was declared in 1914, Ontario labor stood ready to do its share. It wished to contribute on a voluntary basis. Ontario trade unionists feared that to accept the principle of conscription would destroy what they had worked for years to build. Nonetheless, when the Military Service Act became law in 1917 they argued realistically that since the war had reached such a crisis that it was necessary to conscript manpower, wealth should be included. Conscription ought to be applied equally and fairly to all classes, rich or poor. Moreover, in a crisis such as the one facing Canada, only the utilization of the entire resources of the state, including wealth, could efficiently meet the situation. Thus, in the election campaign of 1917, Independent Labor Party candidates emphasized that they were the true "win-the-war" party, for they alone would see Canada gave her all to the present world crisis. Though opposed to the conscription of manpower without that of wealth, Ontario

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88. E.P. Dean, "How Canada Has Voted", Canadian Historical Review, 1949, p. 232.

organized labor was not prepared to go to the extreme of disrupting the entire nation in war time. It preferred to work within the framework of the parliamentary system. The I.L.P. became the major mode of protest against conscription, and even the more extreme elements of Ontario labor recommended that the law be obeyed once the M.S.A. had been passed.

## CHAPTER THREE: THE FARMERS

There were elements of both ideological opposition and self-interest in the stand Ontario farmers took on the conscription issue. A small group regarded the M.S.A. as the introduction of militarism in Canada. However, most of rural Ontario based its opposition to the bill on studied economic self-interest. Farmers feared that compulsory military service would draw men away from the land and reduce productivity at a time when the need for food was great and prices were high. They sought, through the use of patriotic appeals and intimidation by mass protest, to gain exemption for themselves, their sons and their hired men.

### I

"The new year opens most auspiciously for advocates of world peace," declared the Weekly Sun in January, 1914. This old and respected farm journal regarded the settlement of the previous year's hostilities in the Balkan countries as a most promising development: "the estrangement between Britain and Germany is rapidly disappearing with the prospect of an early and complete understanding between these powers."<sup>1</sup> In August, it was

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1. Toronto, Weekly Sun, January 7, 1914. The Weekly Sun was closely associated with Goldwin Smith until his death in 1910. During the period of the First World War it was edited by

reluctant to accept Canada's entrance into a general European conflict:"When the struggle is over, when all Europe is covered with the slain, when widows and orphans mourn their dead, when harvests lie blackened by the blast of war, and smoke no longer rises from the chimneys of broken and dismantled factories, what then?"<sup>2</sup> Canada's position of dependence within the British Empire obliged her "in defence of her own interests to shoulder the burdens of war."<sup>3</sup>

Certainly, not all Ontario farmers accepted the pacific views of the editors of the Weekly Sun. Many, however, were reluctant to accept Canadian participation in the war. "There was an isolationist sentiment in rural thinking which was strengthened by the suspicion voiced by Master Henry Glendenning to the Grange convention in 1913:'Militarism is fostered and kept before the public by shipbuilders, manufacturers of armaments, admirals, generals, colonels, etc. who strut around in gold and lace and feathers and look down upon ordinary mortals as if they were made of inferior clay.'<sup>4</sup> The Grange had agitated against military training in the schools, and had demanded immunity from imperial

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W.L. Smith, W.D. Gregory and James McEwing, all of whom had close connections with the United Farmers movement in the province. With a circulation of about 17,000 it ranked well behind farm journals such as the Farmer's Advocate and Home Magazine of London (31,000). In 1918 the Weekly Sun was purchased by the United Farmers of Ontario as their official organ.

2. Ibid., August 12, 1914.

3. Ibid., August 5, 1914.

4. Jean McLeod, The United Farmers in Ontario 1914-1943, unpublished M.A. thesis, Queen's University, 1958, p. 34. The Grange, established in 1880, was the largest of the many farmers' associations existing in Ontario in 1914.

navy and military burdens. Ontario farms seemed distant from European wars.

Farmers were soon preoccupied with expanding production to meet seemingly unlimited wartime demands for farm products. The most serious difficulty that had to be faced in order to accomplish this task was the steadily decreasing supply of farm labor. Referred to on the concession lines simply as "the problem", the movement of men and women from Ontario farms to the city was a part of a world-wide phenomenon that had begun during the 1880's.<sup>5</sup> During 1914 and 1915, this did not prove to be a serious impediment to production, and the province's farmers responded with a record crop in 1915. "The problem" was discussed in farm journals, but largely at theoretical levels of the relative advantages of city and farm life.

By 1916 the situation had been altered considerably. Large numbers of farmers and farm employees had enlisted. Many more farm employees had left to take well-paying jobs in munitions factories and in other urban industries. Commenting on rural recruiting in February, 1916 the Weekly Sun warned that "agriculture is already sadly undermanned, and any further decrease in the number of those engaged in it cannot but reduce farm production very materially."<sup>6</sup> Another journal, The Farmer's

5. Public Archives of Ontario (P.A.O.), Conservative Party of Ontario, The Ontario Government and the Farmers, Toronto, 1919, p.4.

Census statistics show that in 1881 the rural population of Ontario was 1,393,917 but by 1911 it had declined to 1,307,076, a loss of 86,841 while the population of the whole province had increased from 1,923,228 to 2,523,274.

6. Weekly Sun, February 9, 1916.

Advocate and Home Magazine, published in London, noted that there were 175,000 farms in Ontario and nearly all of them were short of labor.<sup>7</sup>

The farmer was now caught between two thrusts of the Canadian war effort. On the one hand was the campaign conducted jointly by the Federal and Provincial governments to increase food production. Appeals were made to the patriotism of the farmers: "Is it nothing to Canadians that troops fighting at the front are now on reduced rations, and that food restrictions unknown in this country are cheerfully borne by the people of the British Isles as necessary to the achievement of victory?...the call of the Empire for food is one that appeals to the humanity of the race as well as to its fighting instincts."<sup>8</sup> No Canadian, it was declared, could feel satisfied with his or her part in the war who was not making sacrifices in some degree commensurate with those willingly suffered by the British people. The Toronto Globe urged the farmers on: "Famine will dog the flanks of our advancing armies unless there is an increased production of food stuffs this year."<sup>9</sup> Sir William Hearst, Premier of Ontario, argued that failure to make all possible provisions available to the men at the front meant "we are as guilty and as justly entitled to condemnation as that man who is able to fight and refuses to fight."<sup>10</sup> The farm fields of Ontario, the farmer was told,

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7. London, Farmer's Advocate and Home Magazine, November 9, 1916.

8. Globe, March 24, 1917.

9. Ibid., April 13, 1917.

10. P.A.O., Sir Wm. Hearst Papers, envelope 2, speech 45.

were the second line of trenches.

While the farmers were being urged to produce more, the military authorities were combing the countryside for recruits for the Canadian armed forces. Recruiting speeches were often far from complimentary to the farmers' spirit and courage; they and their sons were called "cowards and yellow" when they failed to enlist.<sup>11</sup> They were termed "slackers" and "shirkers", and it was not infrequently suggested that farmers' sons went to the United States to work after the harvest was in, to avoid the recruiting sergeant.<sup>12</sup>

This treatment came as a shock to the farmers. They were used to having agriculture described in the deferential terms of its primacy as a moral, social and economic force: "agriculture is not only an occupation which some individuals follow for profit, it is a great national interest, determining in a dominant way the fortunes of the nation, and the opportunities and character of its population."<sup>13</sup> Although appeals for increased food production were made to rural patriotism, the criticism from recruiters annoyed farmers who "believed that they could, in many cases, best do their part by bending all efforts to produce more food for the fighters and the people who were carrying on 'business as usual' at home."<sup>14</sup> The reduction of manpower was already so serious on the farm that it was felt that more men could not

11. Farmer's Advocate, April 19, 1917.

12. Weekly Sun, December 28, 1916.

13. quoted in J. McLeod, op. cit., p. 40.

14. Farmer's Advocate, April 19, 1917.

leave without jeopardizing the food supply flowing from Canada to Europe. Patriotism was undoubtedly a basis of the farmers' annoyance. But the factor of self-interest cannot be overlooked. The unlimited wartime demand for food brought good prices, and farmers wanted to maintain production in order to reap personal profit while the market was strongly in their favor.

The farmers criticized the military authorities for accepting men vitally needed on the farms for food production. Thus they welcomed the National Service scheme of the Borden Government which, they hoped, would "determine an accurate estimate of the manpower of the Dominion." The results of the registration that was to take place would show where the men were and what "those who are willing to do work for the Empire in Canada are doing now."<sup>15</sup> With this information, the farm journals proclaimed, a systematic recruiting campaign might be undertaken. It would be directed against "the idle, and those who are occupied in positions, which might be filled by women."<sup>16</sup> Farmers believed that if all the National Service cards were completed truthfully they would show little idleness in rural districts. Early returns from Brant county bore out this expectation. The survey showed that there was not more than one man per hundred acres of cultivated land. This labor shortage, the Weekly Sun predicted, meant greatly "reduced production next year."<sup>17</sup> It was fully expected that the results of the registration would direct the

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15. Ibid., December 28, 1916.

16. Weekly Sun, August 23, 1916.

17. Ibid., January 3, 1917.

efforts of recruiters away from the land to those not employed in industries essential to the war effort.

In March, 1917 the Weekly Sun commented cynically on the failure of National Service to bring the expected results. "It is difficult," the journal declared, "from either a party or a public point of view, to condone its [the Borden Government's] lack of candor and courage in dealing with recruiting." The Government ought not to have yielded to the selfish clamor of munitions makers and factory owners for exemption of their employees. This threw the onus of enlistment on the unskilled labor, and indirectly placed a burden on the farm by creating vacancies in the city attractive to farm laborers. The National Service Board, created at the suggestion of the manufacturers, to recruit from the idle and those they considered not profitably employed, had failed "because in the main, the material of these classes has been exhausted."<sup>18</sup>

## II

The farm press was divided on the question of conscription. One segment, represented by the Farmer's Advocate, favored its introduction. In December, 1916 it had welcomed the National Service scheme as being "the first step towards universal enlistment."<sup>19</sup> An editorial, two months later, went a step further

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18. Ibid., March 21, 1917.

19. Farmer's Advocate, December 28, 1916.

and suggested that those who opposed conscription did so because they had something to lose or simply because they wanted "to do nothing" in the national crisis. It clearly implied that patriotic Canadians supported conscription while the slackers opposed it. The Farmer's Advocate went on to discuss the difficulties of food production in the face of a severe labor shortage and suggested that a few conscripts might well be used on the farm.<sup>20</sup>

The anti-conscription segment, represented by the Weekly Sun, based its stand on both practical and ideological grounds. As early as 1913 the journal had condemned the principle of conscription. The proposal of the Ontario Artillery Association to introduce compulsory military service in Canada was branded as "the opinion of the advanced militarist party."<sup>21</sup> The Weekly Sun, in 1915, warned that any form of universal military service "would greatly circumscribe human liberty and of necessity, in a democracy, it would transfer power to a military caste."<sup>22</sup> Conscription was regarded as a threat to the existence of the very things Canada was fighting to preserve in Europe: "such a policy, in this country...would in the end not only cause great injustice to individuals but would in the end prove injurious to the state."<sup>23</sup>

At the Second Annual Convention of the United Farmers of Ontario, held at Toronto in February, 1916 a resolution was passed

20. Ibid., February 8, 1917.

21. Weekly Sun, January 28, 1914.

22. Ibid., September 1, 1917.

23. Ibid., February 7, 1917.

that succinctly summarized the practical grounds. A plea was directed to the federal government for special exemptions from overseas conscription for the rural community. The resolution declared that

Agriculture is already undermanned and any further decrease in the numbers of those engaged in it cannot but reduce farm production very materially. As an increase of farm production is most necessary...the imperative need for a large enlistment from the rural sections might be demonstrated beyond any question before such enlistment is encouraged.<sup>24</sup>

As the war progressed, the Weekly Sun was acutely aware of the growing demand for conscription, and in 1917 warned that it was no longer possible to add materially to the army without drastically limiting the production of food or munitions.<sup>25</sup> The announcement of conscription on May 18, 1917 produced a flurry of editorials and letters to the editor in farm journals. "Grave considerations present themselves," the Weekly Sun declared. Canada had already made a tremendous effort that had cost the lives of thousands of men. More than that, the country had assumed burdens which would keep it in poverty for a generation. But now the Government was proposing to add "another hundred millions...to the annual war outlay." If the United States, which had just entered the war, was to do as much as Canada she would have to send 5,000,000 men overseas. In light of this the Prime Minister would have to present "clear and convincing proof of the need of the greater sacrifice."<sup>26</sup>

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24. quoted in J.D. Hoffman, Farmer-Labor Government in Ontario 1919-1923, M.A. thesis, University of Toronto, 1959, p. 3.

25. Weekly Sun, May 16, 1917.

26. Ibid., May 23, 1917.

The Weekly Sun appears to have taken for granted that the farmers' contribution to the war was essential and that consequently they would be granted exemption from military service. What it feared was that the provisions exempting farmers would not be effective. Farm labor would be drawn away to fill the places of workers conscripted in the towns. "When the supply of labor in the towns is insufficient or falls below the demand, wages rise until the farmer outbid loses his help." The farm owner simply could not afford to pay the wages comparable to those offered in the factories. This, after all, was the main reason for the rural depopulation that had been going on during the past thirty years.<sup>27</sup> The Farm and Dairy and Rural Home, a Peterborough farm journal, seconded the Weekly Sun in this view. "The end of the war is not yet in sight," it declared, "and the food problem is becoming more pressing every day. Any system of conscription that would further denude the farm of manpower, would surely be short sighted and calamitous in its effects."<sup>28</sup> This position was the crux of the farmers' argument against conscription.

The opposition to the Military Service Act that was reflected in the columns of such farm papers as the Weekly Sun and Farm and Dairy appears to have represented the views of the majority of farmers. The United Farmers of Ontario, which in May, 1917 represented some 8,000 members, declared against conscription

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27. Ibid., June 27, 1917.

28. Peterborough, Farm and Dairy and Rural Home, June 7, 1917.

of manpower without a referendum.<sup>29</sup> Both Sir Robert Borden and Sir Wilfrid Laurier received large numbers of letters from Ontario farmers: "I take liberty as a farmer to urge that Compulsory Military Service should not include farmers. Already all spare help has left the farms to enlist or work in munitions and other factories."<sup>30</sup> A correspondent wrote Laurier that "during the past week I have been about a good deal among the farmers and in the village...I tried in every way to inform myself fully about the public attitude toward conscription and my conclusion is that practically everyone is opposed to it." Political allegiance appeared to have no bearing on the attitude taken.<sup>31</sup> By the end of May, M.P.s for rural constituencies stated frankly "that many farmers are strongly opposing compulsion, making the shortage of farm labor their specific plea."<sup>32</sup>

Nonetheless, as we have seen, there was a definite pro-conscription element among Ontario farmers, represented by the Farmer's Advocate. This journal had "for months...believed that conscription is the only fair and democratic system of fighting any great war."<sup>33</sup> The voluntary system, it argued, had been successful in Canada, but had about reached its limit. Replacements were immediately needed and now that the state had called Canadians would "go forward with willing hearts to join their comrades, who have gone on before." Moreover, if conscription

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29. Kemp Papers, J.J. Morrison to Kemp, May 26, 1917.  
 30. Borden Papers, "A Farmer" to Borden, May 25, 1917.  
 31. Laurier Papers, Alex Smith to Laurier, June 1, 1917.  
 32. Globe, May 25, 1917.  
 33. Farmer's Advocate, July 5, 1917.

were properly carried out, system would replace the muddling that had characterized the period of voluntary enlistment. Men would find themselves doing that which they were best able to do, and farmers would "not be exhorted to produce one day and called a slacker if he doesn't enlist the next." Finally, turning to the argument that conscription meant the introduction of militarism, the Farmer's Advocate declared that "conscription does not militarize democracy but democratizes the military service. Conscription need not mean militarism and will not after the war is over."<sup>34</sup>

Conscription of manpower raised, among the farmers, "a demand for conscription of wealth, or, in other words, for equality of sacrifice, by rich and poor."<sup>35</sup> The annual U.F.O. convention, held in March, 1917, summed up the argument:

Since human life is more valuable than gold, this convention most solemnly protests against any proposal looking to the conscription of men for battle while leaving wealth exempt from the same measure of enforced service. It is a manifest and glaring injustice that Canadian mothers should be compelled to surrender boys around whom their dearest hopes in life are centered, while plutocrats, fattening on special privileges and war business, are left in undisturbed possession of their riches.<sup>36</sup>

Both the pro- and anti-conscription journals joined in the demand for conscription of wealth: if men "must go into the service of the country, money and all resources should be organized to serve the country at the same time."<sup>37</sup>

34. Ibid., May 31, 1917.

35. Weekly Sun, May 23, 1917.

36. Farm and Dairy, May 31, 1917.

37. Farmer's Advocate, July 5, 1917.

There was little suggestion as to just what was meant by conscription of wealth. F.M. Chapman, managing editor of The Farmer's Magazine, pointed out that it did not mean conscription of the few thousand dollars that a man had in his savings account at the bank.<sup>38</sup> The Weekly Sun was more explicit; it proposed taxation of all incomes "above exemptions necessary for a frugal maintenance." But it considered dangerous any proposal that would require "conversion of capital or the withdrawal of capital from business." Such action would limit the profits of capital and cut back on economic expansion by reducing reserves and incentives for further investment.<sup>39</sup> The Weekly Sun consequently welcomed the Government's proposal of an income tax in August "as a just mode of conscripting wealth and as a necessary means of revenue at this time."<sup>40</sup> It predicted that the financial burdens created by the war would make the tax necessary far beyond the end of the war. Other advocates of conscription of wealth did not give so full an exposition of their views.

The M.S.A. was signed by the Governor-General, the Duke of Devonshire, on August 28, 1917 but the first class (unmarried or widowers without children between the ages of 20 and 34) was not called until October 13. During the intervening period, tribunals were established to examine the cases of individuals who believed they should be granted exemption from military service. Farmers, disappointed that they had not been given a special exemption, continued to fill the columns of farm and daily papers

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38. Toronto, The Farmer's Magazine, July, 1917.

39. Weekly Sun, June 27, 1917.

40. Ibid., August 1, 1917.

with letters to the editor. They urged that consideration be given to the plight of the farmer, and emphasized the hardships he had to endure in the cause of the war: "Nowhere else, we fancy, is the war a burden."<sup>41</sup> A letter signed "Protestant Liberal" to the editors of the Globe urged that farmers "do not want conscription of young men and shall fight against it. There should be production of food above anything else in Canada." Thousands of farmers needed help urgently and were unable to obtain it. The result, it was claimed, was that much food would not be gathered and many city people might well go hungry before the winter was over.<sup>42</sup> Commenting on the fact that the draft in the United States was creating hardship on the farm, the Weekly Sun declared: "if that sort of thing goes on all over North America there will be a lot of hungry people in the world before 1918 ends."<sup>43</sup>

Local tribunals were to meet in early November to consider

41. Ibid., October 3, 1917. The editorial continued: "In towns except for those who have suffered loss in the battlefields, it is not a burden or distress, but the source of luxury and wealth." The same issue contained an article entitled "Sacrifice of Ontario Women and Children". Commenting on the continued calls for increased food production, James McEwing of Drayton, Ontario described three cases of aged women and very young children forced to work 12 to 15 hours a day in the fields in order to get crops in. All this was due, he said, to the labor shortage. The situation, McEwing declared, was likely "to become even more acute in the near future when the Military Service Act is put into operation." Such descriptions of the hardships of life on the farm became a common feature in discussing rural problems. This sort of feeling appears to have contributed a great deal to a martyr complex among Ontario farmers, and helps to explain why they reacted so strongly to charges of profiteering that were laid against them by city dwellers as food prices continued to rise. See p. 50, fn. 40.

42. Globe, September 6, 1917.

43. Weekly Sun, October 17, 1917.

claims for exemption. As the date approached, there was some confusion on the part of farmers as to how the law would operate. Some believed that farmers "generally will be exempted," while others declared that the farm had not done its share "in providing food for powder, and that the draft should be used to equalize the call between the country and the city."<sup>44</sup> Military authorities, however, had a more definite idea. In late October, Lieut.-Col. Smith, who was in charge of exemption tribunals in Military District I (London), announced that a limit of one and a half men per hundred acres of cultivated land would be set. A half man was defined as an old man, a woman or a boy. Any men in excess of this number falling within Class I would be conscripted.<sup>45</sup> If this rule were followed, the farmers replied, there would be little hope of increasing food production in 1918, and they went so far as to predict a serious food shortage.<sup>46</sup> Two men per hundred acres would not be enough to handle the farm work in some cases.<sup>47</sup> Uncertainty as to the labor supply for the following year caused many farmers to hesitate in doing their fall ploughing and planting until they knew more precisely what the situation would be.

As the work of the tribunals progressed, there were an

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid., October 31, 1917. Globe, October 25, 1917.

46. Farm and Dairy, November 1, 1917. The Farmer's Advocate, November 1, 1917 added its word of caution: "the tribunals passing upon the exemption cases in the interests of the country now that the food problem is likely to become acute, should think twice before sending a man to the front who would be of more real service to his country, producing food."

47. Weekly Sun, November 7, 1917.

increasing number of reports of farmers' sons being refused exemption. One young farmer had been working his land alone. When ordered into uniform, he objected that he could not let his land lie idle. He was told that women could work his farm and that it was his duty "to put on the khaki."<sup>48</sup> In another case, a 67-year-old farmer, crippled with rheumatism, applied for exemption for his son, his sole assistant on a 150-acre farm. He was assured that at 67, a man should be in his prime, and his son was taken.<sup>49</sup> While such cases were by no means general, they were frequent enough to raise widespread alarm among Ontario's farming community. F.M. Chapman wrote in the Farmer's Magazine that "the work of the exemption boards all over rural Canada during the past month have created unrest, suspicion and utter lack of confidence in the cabinet."<sup>50</sup>

A series of protest meetings were held by farmers throughout the province. At a Brantford meeting, it was declared that Canada was not far from starvation if many more men were taken from the farms. As evidence of the unjust actions of the local tribunal, the case of a widow whose only son was drafted was cited.<sup>51</sup> At Perth, it was said, of 100 applications for exemption (75% being on behalf of farmers' sons) 20 were ordered to report immediately and the remaining 80 were ordered to report within 2 to 8 months.<sup>52</sup> Speaking before this gathering, William

48. Farm and Dairy, November 22, 1917.

49. Ibid.

50. Farmer's Magazine, December, 1917.

51. Globe, November 17, 1917. Weekly Sun, November 21, 1917.

52. Weekly Sun, November 21, 1917.

C. Good, vice-president of the United Farmers of Ontario, declared that "it would be small satisfaction to win the war and incidentally fasten upon ourselves many of the worst features of German autocracy, for we should be as badly off under the tyranny of Canadian plutocracy as under the iron heel of German militarism." He believed in democracy, Good declared, and in universal service in time of need. But he was quick to point out that he meant "social and industrial activity" as well as military service. The present law, Good said, was "unjust because it aimed merely at the conscription of life." Administered by "ignorant, careless or callous tribunals", the M.S.A. would "do much harm."<sup>53</sup> Good momentarily raised the argument above the practical to a theoretical discussion of the rights and duties of the individual. But on the whole, the farmers' argument emphasized an extreme shortage of manpower resulting from the operation of the conscription law and the danger of serious food shortage. The farmer could not fight in Europe and produce food at the same time.<sup>54</sup> In the circumstances, the strongly pro-conscriptionist Globe went so far as to urge that "labor on the farm is service to the Allied cause as necessary to victory as fighting at the front."<sup>55</sup>

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53. P.A.C., W.C. Good Papers, copy of address made at Brantford, November 15, 1917.

54. Farm and Dairy, November 22, 1917.

55. Globe, November 17, 1917. The Globe noted largely attended protest meetings in Brantford, Perth, Downsview, Kintail, Alliston, Peterborough, Woodbridge, Stouffville, and Brant and Norfolk counties. These meetings all passed resolutions which emphasized the repeated appeals by the Government for increased food production.

The federal government had little sympathy for the farmers. Sir George Foster, Minister of Trade and Commerce of the Union Government, wrote ironically of farm attitudes: "the greed of men how it comes out and among no class more rudely than with the unimaginative farmer who curses all others as profiteers and himself claims the last cent for all he raises."<sup>56</sup> When interviewed on the subject of the working of the tribunals in mid-November, 1917, E.L. Newcombe, the Deputy Minister of Justice, emphasized that out of 1,350 tribunals, there were bound to be some that would make unjust decisions. At about the same time, Prime Minister Borden pointed out that where exemptions were refused the farmer had recourse to the appeal tribunals.<sup>57</sup>

But in November, 1917 the country was in the midst of one of the bitterest election campaigns in its history. With Quebec almost certain to be solidly in favor of Laurier's Liberal party on the conscription issue and the west an "uncertain quantity"<sup>58</sup> the fate of Union Government might well be settled by Ontario's 82 seats. Faced by the alienation of the rural vote in this crucial province, Newton Rowell, President of the Privy Council, sent a telegram to Borden urging him to change his position with regard to farm exemptions "lest the cause of Union Government be imperilled."<sup>59</sup> On November 25, the Minister of Militia, Maj.-Gen.

56. Foster Diaries, February 19, 1918.

57. Globe, November 21, 1917, quoted in W.R. Young, Conscription, Rural Depopulation and the Farmers of Ontario, 1917-1919, unpublished paper, York University, 1969, pp. 11-12.

58. M.E. Prang, Political Career of N.W. Rowell, Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1959, p. 428.

59. P.A.C., N.W. Rowell Papers, Rowell to Borden, November 14, 1917.

Sydney C. Mewburn, announced a new government policy: "I will give you my word that if any farmers' sons who are honestly engaged in farm work and in the production of foodstuffs, if they are not exempted by the Tribunals and are called up for military service, I will have them honorably discharged."<sup>60</sup> A week later, the Government took a second step to appease the farmers. Mewburn's promise was put into effect by an Order-in-Council authorizing the discharge of any person whose services "are essential for promoting agricultural production."<sup>61</sup> This was confirmed on December 6 in a decision by the Central Appeal Judge. In order that the military power of the allies might be adequately sustained, he declared, "it is essential that in this country and under present conditions, there should be no diminution of agricultural production."<sup>62</sup>

Ontario farmers generally welcomed these promises. "Lived up to, these statements will reassure farmers and place them in a position to lay plans for bigger crops," wrote the Farmer's Advocate.<sup>63</sup> The three decisions, following close on each other, appealed directly to the farmer's ego and to his sense of having made a great contribution to the war effort. Rural opinion would not have agreed with Oscar Douglas Skelton's later estimate that

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60. Farm and Dairy, November 29, 1917. The Globe printed the Mewburn statement frequently during the election campaign to remind farmers that the Union Government would exempt them from military service.

61. Military District Files, Military District No. 2, Order-in-Council dated December 3, 1917.

62. Globe, December 7, 1917.

63. Farmer's Advocate, December 20, 1917.

Ontario farmers had been offered and had accepted a bribe.<sup>64</sup> They believed that they had neither asked nor received special consideration. The government's action was regarded as just recognition of the importance of the farmer's part in the nation's great struggle.

### III

It would appear, nonetheless, that there existed among some farmers a lingering distrust of the Borden Government. Even before the election, the Weekly Sun was not optimistic about the effect of the promised exemptions. It doubted that city dwellers would abstain for long from bringing pressure on the Government to change a policy that conscripted their sons but left farm boys free. Even if the promise were kept, it would not do much to relieve the labor shortage or increase food production. "The depopulation of the land of late has been due mainly to the higher wages in the towns. If now, in case Mr. Borden wins, 100,000 draftees are taken from the towns, town wages will inevitably rise, and the attraction of labor from the land will be stronger than in the past."<sup>65</sup> The sudden change of Government policy was further reason for suspicion.

Two days after the December 17 election, Ontario's United Farmers held their fourth annual convention. Discussion revealed

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64. O.D. Skelton, Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, (2 volumes, Toronto, 1965), II, 196.

65. Weekly Sun, December 5, 1917.

that despite the strong support they had given the Borden Government, farmers were still concerned over the question of farm exemptions. E.H. Stonehouse, President of the Milk Producers Association, declared that only farmers understood the serious nature of the situation. The debate, which was characterized by "moderation and good sense", rehearsed many of the old arguments. "We are not asking for exemption as a class," the convention declared. "We realize that our blood is no more sacred than that of others." However, food production was necessary to winning the war. Every skilled laborer removed from the land added to the body of consumers and withdrew from the farm a man capable of providing food for six to eight others.<sup>66</sup> The strongest applause, reported the Weekly Sun, was for delegate W.A. Amos when he declared that "our kinsmen are fighting for us in France, and the least we can do is to fight for them."<sup>67</sup>

The first four months of 1918 were peaceful. Ontario farmers devoted their attention to preparing and planting a record crop. In the farm journals there was little mention of conscription. The Weekly Sun did publish an editorial commenting that the federal government was considering some form of industrial conscription: "Labor ought, of course, to submit to work on the farms at \$1.10 a day."<sup>68</sup> Attention was directed to the problem of rural depopulation and the patriotic efforts of farmers to

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66. Ibid., December 26, 1917.

67. Ibid.

68. Ibid., January 16, 1918. \$1.10 was the basic wage paid to Canadian soldiers.

produce food in the face of extreme hardship. On April 19, 1918 the farmer-government honeymoon came to an abrupt end.

That afternoon, Sir Robert Borden rose in the House of Commons to ask its support of P.C. 919, which cancelled all exemptions granted under the M.S.A., and enabled the Government to call up men for the army at its discretion.<sup>69</sup> It had taken a long time for proponents of conscription to admit that it was not working. Borden had said in May, 1917 that Canada needed to raise 70,000 men under the Act by December. But by March 31, 1918 only 31,000 had reported for duty, of whom 5,000 had defaulted.<sup>70</sup> Ontario's three military districts had provided about 13,000 of the 26,000 draftees then under arms.<sup>71</sup> Additional manpower was badly needed to hold back the German spring offensive, Borden declared. Russia's withdrawal from the war and the lack of time for the American military power to be brought to bear made the situation particularly grim. Canada badly needed the troops

69. P.C. 919 made provision for a reduction of the minimum age to 19. This was in fact the age originally proposed by the Government in May, 1917. However, Borden had revised this portion of the bill when women from across Canada put pressure on the Government to raise the age to 21.

70. Skelton, op. cit., II, 200.

71. Foster Papers, Report of the Military Service Council on the Administration of the Military Service Act, 1917 (1918), p. 25.

Men attested under the M.S.A. were generally referred to as draftees. The word 'conscript' was used by a few journals. Col. E.J. Chambers, Chief Press Censor, issued a memorandum to press correspondents on September 11, 1917 instructing that the word should be avoided. 'Conscript' carried with it the idea of 'slacker' or 'shirker', and it was feared that use of the word would lead to a misconception as to the status of future recruits. -Censorship Board, memorandum from Col. E.J. Chambers, September 11, 1917.

that the revised M.S.A. would provide if she was to do her fair share. Anticipating farm reaction, Borden declared that though this would mean hardship and decreased production, Canada must go on. It was the duty of the government, he said, to avoid hardship as far as possible, but in time of war "it is not humanly possible to avoid it."<sup>72</sup> The first responsibility of the government was to provide adequate reinforcements at the front.

The Ontario farming community was aroused to indignation. This new order was aimed at farmers as a class, they believed, and threatened their livelihood.<sup>73</sup> Removal of more men from the farm would limit manpower to such an extent that the 1918 crops could not be harvested. Farmers fell back on the old arguments that this would result in famine and extreme hardship lasting beyond the end of the war. P.C. 919 was just another example of how the government favored the urban interests; exemptions had been cancelled to appease organized labor and the manufacturers who had protested against conscription "until both Quebec and the farmers of Ontario have done their duty."<sup>74</sup> There was also a new argument that tended to increase bitterness. The government's actions completely disregarded the promises made to the farmers during the recent election. Moreover, it paid no attention to the appeals for greater production that had been made during the past four years.<sup>75</sup> Farm feeling ran so high that rural M.P.s were flooded

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72. Debates, April 19, 1918, pp. 933- 940.

73. Young, op. cit., p. 16.

74. Weekly Sun, May 1, 1918.

75. Ibid., April 24, 1918.

with requests to make a stand for exemption of farmers' sons and farm labor. Failure to comply with these demands brought a flow of petitions demanding the immediate resignation of their representatives. W.F. Maclean, M.P. for York South, received a petition signed by ninety percent of his rural constituents.<sup>76</sup>

Meetings were held in many Ontario localities. The resolutions raised at these gatherings frequently emphasized that crops would be severely reduced by the cancellation of exemptions.<sup>77</sup> Farmers looked to the United Farmers of Ontario for leadership. Its office "was besieged all day and sometimes more than half the night by farmers asking that something be done." J.J. Morrison, secretary of the U.F.O., was authorized by the organization's executive to call together a delegation to go to Ottawa and lay the farmers' case before the government.<sup>78</sup>

A delegation of some 200 Ontario farmers met with representatives of the cabinet on May 3. They argued that as a result of government assurances during the election campaign they "had strained every nerve to increase production." These efforts would be meaningless if farmers' sons were siphoned away from agriculture. The delegation asked that the government temporarily hold up the application of the new regulations at least until the representatives of the large deputation planned for May 14

76. Borden Papers, clipping from Farm and Dairy, May 30, 1918.

77. Weekly Sun, May 1, 1918. The Weekly Sun noted that protest meetings had been held in Norwich, Burgessville, Agincourt, Markham, Stouffville, Downsview, Petrolea, Galt, Brantford, Woodstock, Welland, Goderich and Ayr.

78. P.A.C., J.J. Morrison Memoirs (1929), pp. 28-29.

could be heard.<sup>79</sup> The government did not heed their arguments. N.W. Rowell declared that the revision of the conscription law had been undertaken with "eyes open." Thomas A. Crerar, Minister of Agriculture, argued that it was necessary to "adjust the balance between the need of food and the need of men according to our best judgement." Even if the boys were taken from the farm, Canada's sacrifices would not measure up to those of Britain and France.<sup>80</sup> The protest attracted to the farmer "the flouts and jibes of the city press." The object, it was believed, was to "cow the farmers."<sup>81</sup> This was not the result. Farmers felt that when they asked for exemption from military service for their sons, they were making a very moderate demand and one that was in the interests of the empire.<sup>82</sup> Harsh criticism served only to make them more determined.

Almost 5,000 farmers from Ontario and Quebec gathered in Ottawa on May 14. At 11:30 that morning they met with Prime Minister Borden in the Russell Theatre. Manning W. Doherty of Malton and W.A. Ames of Palmerston spoke on behalf of the delegation. Old and familiar arguments were repeated: the farmers of Canada were loyal but they feared the demands being made on the government would lead it, through misunderstanding of the true conditions, to withdraw manpower and make it impossible to supply not only men but food. By initially taking men between the ages

79. Weekly Sun, May 8, 1918.

80. Borden Papers, clipping from the Morning Chronicle, May 4, 1918.

81. Weekly Sun, May 8, 1918.

82. Ibid., May 15, 1918.

of 19 and 23, 90 percent of young unmarried men would be removed from the land. This would reduce production drastically and bring hardship to many dependents of draftees. Doherty concluded his remarks by reading the official presentation of the farmers' case: "as farmers and loyal Canadian citizens we hereby enter our solemn protest against the great breach of faith by breaking those sacred covenants and taking from our farms the very labor which will enable us to produce."<sup>83</sup>

Borden's reply did not satisfy the delegates. "We cannot emphasize too strongly the absolute, urgent necessity for increased food production," he declared. But the need for reinforcements was infinitely greater. There was danger that the German offensive might capture the channel ports and then "no amount of production would be of any value, as the submarine menace would prevent transportation across the Atlantic."<sup>84</sup> Rebuffed by the Prime Minister, the delegation sought permission to send two representatives to present its case to the House of Commons. However, the Speaker, Edgar N. Rhodes, refused to allow them to speak, arguing that the cabinet had already heard their appeal and there was no need for further hearings.<sup>85</sup> Before the gathering dispersed, they met one final time and endorsed a Remonstrance to the government taking exception to its apparent disrespect of

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83. Ibid., May 22, 1918. The official presentation had been prepared and approved the previous day in Toronto, where farmers from western and northern Ontario gathered to make the trip to Ottawa.

84. Borden Memoirs, II, 133.

85. A. Hawkes, The Birthright, A Search for the Canadian Canadian and the Larger Loyalty, (Toronto, 1919), p. 364.

civil liberties:"The curtailment of the liberty of written and spoken speech...has caused especial concern to all who are aware of the history of free discussion in Canada."<sup>86</sup>

The "Delegation of Remonstrance"<sup>87</sup> produced no appreciable change in government policy. Borden had suggested that some consideration might be given in "the extreme cases"<sup>88</sup>, but in the farmers' view no attempt was made to answer their arguments. The deputation drew upon the rural community even harsher criticism than had the earlier protest. Farmers were disloyal, the daily press proclaimed. They were seeking to avoid what was their clear duty, to serve their country at the front. The Toronto Telegram complained of the time lost from seeding, and the Ottawa Journal characterized the affair as "puerile and trifling."<sup>89</sup> So intense was urban reaction that a correspondent of the Weekly Sun felt compelled to warn farmers not to claim exemption or continuous leave of absence for their sons or hired men. "Overwhelming public sentiment is against that, and may easily develop into hostility unless the leaders of the farmers' movement guide it into channels of national efficiency for winning the war."<sup>90</sup>

The outcome of the Ottawa delegation fostered a general feeling of disappointment and indignation in rural Ontario. The

86. Ibid., p. 367.

87. Morrison Memoirs, p. 29. This was the name given by Morrison to the May 14 delegation.

88. Weekly Sun, May 22, 1918. On May 25 an Order-in-Council provided relief from conscription where it would result in abandonment of farms or the sale of livestock. -C.A.R., 1918, p. 462.

89. Weekly Sun, May 22, 1918.

90. Ibid., June 5, 1918.

U.F.O. executive responded by summoning a second meeting in Toronto for June 7, 1918. This large gathering was not characterized by the orderliness that prevailed at Ottawa.<sup>91</sup> Farmers showed little restraint and a great deal of intolerance. When statements were made with which the audience did not agree, the speakers were howled down. The government was denounced for introducing "military autocracy" in Canada and accused of being in league with organized labor and the manufacturers. "The drive is now against the farmers in Ontario and Quebec," declared C.W. Gurney of Paris.<sup>92</sup> A resolution was endorsed demanding that enough skilled labor be exempted to supply one man per hundred acres of producing land. It further proposed that an advisory board be set up that would examine the manpower situation and make recommendations for the regulation of the labor supply.<sup>93</sup>

There was no immediate change in the government's stand on conscription after the turbulent Toronto meetings. The cumulative effect of the farmers' agitation, however, did bring a gradual revision. By early July the government had begun to draw back from its intention to conscript 19-year-olds and issued a statement that harvest leave would be granted whenever possible. In the middle of July, the Weekly Sun noted that some farmers' sons were receiving exemptions.<sup>94</sup> When the war came to an end on

91. In his Memoirs, J.J. Morrison estimated that there were over 7,000 farmers in attendance. This, however, is probably an exaggeration. The Weekly Sun set attendance at 3,000 and the Toronto Daily Star said it was over 2,000.

92. Borden Papers, clipping from Toronto Daily Star, June 7, 1918.

93. Ibid., clipping from Toronto Mail and Empire, June 8, 1918.

94. Weekly Sun, July 17, 1918.

November 11, 1918 some 83,000 men had been drafted. Of these, 7,100 were on compassionate leave and 13,333 were on agricultural leave.<sup>95</sup>

#### IV

Opposition to conscription among Ontario farmers rested on both ideological and practical grounds. The Weekly Sun opposed it as part and parcel of militarism, against which Canada was at war. Its pacific views, however, represented only a small portion of the province's farming community. More generally, opposition took the practical grounds. Farmers argued that wartime conditions had speeded up the process of rural depopulation that had begun in the 1880's. While the Conscription Act might exempt farm help, it would still accelerate the trend. Vacancies left by city men that were drafted would be filled by farmers' sons and hired men. Wages paid in city factories were higher

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95. F.H. Underhill, "Canada and the Last War" in Chester Martin, Canada in Peace and War, (Toronto, 1941), p. 146.

It has been suggested that the conscription controversy served to give a new impetus to the movement to organize the farmers of Ontario. In this way it contributed to the victory of the U.F.O. in the 1919 provincial elections.

See: Dudley Bristow, Agrarian Interest in the Politics of Ontario: A Study with Special Reference to the Period 1919-1949, unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Toronto, 1950.

J.D. Hoffman, Farmer-Labor Government in Ontario, 1919-1923, unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Toronto, 1959.

J. McLeod, The United Farmers Movement in Ontario, 1914-1943, unpublished M.A. thesis, Queen's University, 1958.

R.W. Trowbridge, Wartime Discontent and the Rise of the United Farmers of Ontario, unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Waterloo, 1966.

than anything the farmer could afford to pay. The situation was made worse by the fact that the labor shortage had reached what the Weekly Sun described as an "irreducible minimum". Should any man be taken from the farm, manpower would be limited to such an extent that food production would be drastically reduced. In view of repeated government appeals for increased production, it was a patriotic duty of the farmers to stay on the land and provide food for the Allied armies and for the people of Canada.

Farm emphasis on the patriotism of production seems to have taken on overtones of self-righteousness at times. This contributed to a persecution complex that became most obvious after the M.S.A. was revised in April, 1918. The government, it was believed, was in league with organized labor and the manufacturers in opposition to the farmers. P.C. 919, the farm journals declared, was aimed directly at the farmers of Ontario and Quebec.

There was something more behind the farmers' stand than patriotism. Food prices during the war reached record levels and farmers wanted to get their share of the profits. The Canada Year Book shows that between January, 1916 and December, 1917 the cost of feeding an "average" family increased from \$8.28 per month to \$12.24 per month, an increase of almost 50%. Conscription threatened to reduce production at a time when it was most attractive to produce more. The farmers were determined to have their part of the nation's wealth (the wealth they alone produced, farmers believed). Rural Ontario, then, was motivated, at least in part, by self-interest. It played, perhaps, the larger part in their opposition to conscription.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THE LIBERAL PARTY

Conscription divided the Liberal party in Ontario. Of the province's twelve Liberal M.P.s in the House of Commons when the M.S.A. was introduced, only two followed the lead of Sir Wilfrid Laurier and voted against it. A similar split occurred in the provincial Liberal organization. The majority of its leading figures, including N.W. Rowell, the provincial Liberal leader, supported conscription. However, many of the grass-root Grits were against compulsory military service. It would appear that this derived in part from personal loyalty to Laurier and from a belief that conscription would destroy national unity, weakening the Canadian war effort. But a third factor cannot be overlooked. The Borden government had been in office for six years. Many Liberals felt that they could win the December, 1917 election. Some of the Grit candidates, although personally favoring conscription, undoubtedly supported Laurier in anticipation of gaining power.

### I

The Liberal party loyally gave its unanimous support to the Canadian war effort. Addressing the Special Session of the House of Commons in August, 1914, Sir Wilfrid Laurier voiced this solidarity and deep commitment to the cause:

Speaking for those who sit around me...I hasten to say that all these measures [to insure the defence of Canada] we are prepared to give immediate assent. If in what has been done or in what remains to be done there may be anything which in our judgement should not be done or should be differently done, we raise no question, we take no exception, we offer no criticism, and we shall offer no criticism so long as there is danger at the front.<sup>1</sup>

There was, nonetheless, a divergence between Liberals regarding the nature of the Great War and the part that Canada should play in it. William Proudfoot, K.C., an Ontario party stalwart since the election of 1878, believed it was Canada's war, and that Canada's interests and aspirations were wagered upon its outcome: "I feel that Canadians fighting in France are defending it just as truly as if the battle was on the banks of the St. Lawrence, besides it is a fight for right and the safeguarding of our civilization." Canada was fighting for the Empire, but it was because the interests of Canada and the Empire in maintaining "our civilization" were the same. "It is needless to say what our position might be if the Huns prevailed," wrote Proudfoot.<sup>2</sup> In these views he was seconded by N.W. Rowell.<sup>3</sup>

Laurier undoubtedly represented many other Ontario Liberals when he took what was the constitutionally correct position. "We are British subjects," he declared, "and to-day we are face to face with the consequences which are involved in that proud

1. Debates, August 19, 1914, p. 8.

2. Laurier Papers, Wm. Proudfoot to Laurier, June 27, 1917.

3. M.E. Prang, The Political Career of N.W. Rowell, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1959, abstract.

"In Rowell there were two over-riding passions during the war—the preservation in the field of the values he believed distinctive in a democratic and Christian society, and the desire that Canada should play a large and worthy part on the world stage at this decisive moment in human history."

fact...to-day we realize that Great Britain is at war and that Canada is also at war." This was not a Canadian war but a British war. Canada's part was not that of a principal (as Rowell or Proudfoot suggested) but that of a colony giving all the assistance possible to the mother country:"It is our duty, more pressing upon us than all other duties,...to let the friends and foes of Great Britain know, that there is in Canada but one mind and one heart, and that all Canadians stand behind the mother country, conscious and proud that she has engaged in this war...to save civilization from the unbridled lust of conquest and domination."<sup>4</sup> Since Canada was fighting for Britain, she could not be called upon to make the same sacrifices as the main participants. Laurier was willing to face any sacrifice short of conscription.<sup>5</sup> This view could never be acceptable to men such as Newton Rowell, who saw the war in Europe as Canada's war, and who was determined that the country should do its full share.<sup>6</sup>

Canadians expected that Britain, France and their allies would win a quick victory. But as the war dragged on, signs of discouragement appeared and party strife, which had been largely put aside in 1914, became more marked. In early 1916, the Liberals re-emphasized Laurier's pledge to support government measures "which had as their object the successful prosecution of the war." However, they had warned that "to all wrongs, to all

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4. Debates, August 19, 1914, pp. 8-9.

5. G.R. Cook, "Dafoe, Laurier and the Formation of Union Government" in Canadian Historical Review, 1961, pp. 206-207.

6. Rowell Papers, Rowell to Laurier, July 11, 1917.

frauds, we shall offer determined opposition."<sup>7</sup> The session that followed was one of exposure and denunciation. Liberals paraded numerous examples of Government inefficiency and corruption before the House: Government 'mistakes' included the purchase of spavined horses, many of which had to be sold at a great loss. It had bought cardboard-soled boots and faulty binoculars for the soldiers. The Canadian Liberal Monthly, the national party publication, declared that "in the conduct of the war the public interests had been sacrificed to the interests and greed of their [the Government's] friends."<sup>8</sup> In October, Liberals seized upon the resignation (on the grounds of Government interference) of Sir Thomas Tait, Director General of the National Service Board, as further proof that the Government was using the war to distribute patronage to its friends.<sup>9</sup>

Nonetheless, many Liberals, including Laurier and Rowell, were willing to assist in the recruiting effort. Sir Wilfrid, in his 73rd year when war was declared in 1914, addressed as many meetings as his duties as leader of the opposition would permit. In September, 1915 he collapsed at a recruiting rally in Napanee and thereafter curtailed his appearances.<sup>10</sup> Rowell, F.F. Pardee,

7. Debates, February 8, 1916, p. 633.

8. Canadian Liberal Monthly, November, 1916, p. 28.

9. Canada, House of Commons, Sessional Papers, 1917. Number 88, "Correspondence between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition concerning the formation of a Parliamentary National Service Commission."

Sir Thomas Tait was appointed Director General of the National Service Board in August, 1916. He resigned in late September and was replaced by R.B. Bennett.

10. Skelton, op. cit., II, 164.

the chief party whip and many other leading Liberals continued these activities.

## II

Throughout the war the federal Liberal party emphatically opposed conscription. Commenting in January, 1916 on the Prime Minister's promise of 500,000 troops for service in Europe, Laurier declared "that we must repel at once the impression which has been sought to be created that this offer is a preliminary step to conscription. There is to be no conscription."<sup>11</sup> Despite these brave words there was a growing sentiment in favor of compulsory military service, and by early 1917 the Conservative press appeared to be attempting to prepare the way for it by discrediting the Liberal position. The Toronto Globe quoted two Conservative papers, the Brockville Times and the Belleville Intelligencer, as talking of a Laurier-Bourassa alliance.<sup>12</sup> (Henri Bourassa, leader of the Nationaliste movement in Quebec, was to English Canada synonymous with anti-conscription and anti-war sentiment.) The implication was clear enough: Conservatives were loyal, the Liberals disloyal. Finally, on May 25, 1917 Borden proposed to Laurier that a coalition be formed to pass conscription.

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11. Debates, January 17, 1916, p. 9.

12. Globe, March 27, 1917. Loyalty was an old and proven Tory battle cry. It had been used effectively in the elections of 1891 and 1911.

The coalition proposals produced a split among the Liberals. On June 2, 1917 Laurier conferred with his parliamentary followers. A report received by Borden indicated that Laurier, F.F. Pardee (M.P. for Lambton West) and George Graham (South Renfrew) had voted for it, while Charles Murphy of Russell stood strongly against it.<sup>13</sup> A great deal of pressure was placed on Laurier by both those who favored coalition and conscription and those who opposed it. Rowell wrote the federal leader that "I still earnestly hope that common ground may be found upon which you and Sir Robert Borden can stand, and that a truly national government may be formed."<sup>14</sup> By June 6, a decision had been reached. Laurier refused to enter a coalition.

This was not the first occasion on which Laurier had come into conflict with the leaders of Ontario liberalism. In 1916, at the height of the controversy over Regulation 17 (which drastically limited the teaching of French in Ontario schools), Laurier had supported a resolution in the House of Commons calling upon the Government of Ontario to acknowledge the right of French-speaking children to be taught in their mother tongue. There was, Laurier argued, ample precedent for such a move. However, Rowell had insisted that "the question was one which must be settled by the people of Ontario alone." He had strongly opposed raising the question in Parliament and contended that "the minority in

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13. P.A.C., Sir R.L. Borden Diaries, June 3, 1917. Borden welcomed the split: "I think we can unite more solidly with Laurier and Gouin (Premier of Quebec) if a portion of their party fight us."

14. Laurier Papers, Rowell to Laurier, June 6, 1917.

each province must depend upon the sense of justice and fair play of the majority to secure any redress of grievances...and any action...by the Federal Parliament would...be looked upon as an interference with the free action of the province in settling its own problems."<sup>15</sup> In their private and public discussions Laurier and Rowell separated the bilingual schools issue from their disagreement over coalition with the Conservatives, and from the conscription issue. However, the intense emotions that the crisis had aroused undoubtedly were not forgotten.

Laurier certainly had a multiplicity of reasons for opposing conscription. It was implicit in his position on the war, that Canada was fighting to assist Britain and not in her own interests. Perhaps nothing was more indicative of this attitude than Laurier's belief that conscription (and coalition) were merely aspects of an imperialistic plot to centralize the Empire according to the plan of the Round Table. Like every other scheme for imperial reorganization, this one had to be resisted.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, Laurier believed that if he were to flinch in his expressed opposition to conscription he "would...lose the confidence and respect of those who believed me when I said I was against conscription."<sup>17</sup> Should this happen, Laurier feared that

15. Rowell Papers, Rowell to Laurier, April 26, 1916 quoted in M.E. Prang, "Clerics, Politicians and the Bilingual Schools Issue in Ontario, 1910-1917" in Canadian Historical Review, 1960, p. 300. see pp. 120-121.
16. Laurier Papers, Laurier to Sir Allen Aylesworth, May 15, 1917, quoted in Skelton, op. cit., II, 181-188.
17. Laurier Papers, Laurier to Wm. Proudfoot, June 29, 1917. See also: P.A.C., Hartley Dewart Papers, Laurier to Dewart, May 29, 1917.

Quebec would pass into the hands of ~~an~~ what he considered to be extremists like Bourassa who advocated Canada's withdrawal from the war. But Canada would not be divided just on racial lines: "there is," wrote Laurier, "amongst the masses an undercurrent that will be sore and bitter if at the present moment a conscription law is forced upon them".<sup>18</sup> Laurier's first consideration was national unity. Only a united country could fight efficiently. He offered a solution to the problem. "There should be consultation of the people," Laurier declared, "and when they decide, carry out their will with vigour and determination."<sup>19</sup> If this referendum policy were accepted and carried out, it would clear the atmosphere and secure the loyal acceptance of the verdict by those opposed to the bill. In these views he was supported by some Ontario Liberals including Charles Murphy and William Lyon Mackenzie King. However, they would not have argued that conscription was an imperialist plot.

However, most of the province's M.P.s supported the proposed conscription measure. They accepted Borden's assertion that the voluntary system of recruiting could no longer provide the replacements necessary to bring the Canadian army up to strength at the front. Canada, they believed, had a duty to perform: a duty to do its full share as a participant in the war. Rowell also argued this point of view: "Canada's contribution in men has been substantially lower in proportion to her population

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18. Laurier Papers, Laurier to E.S. Caswell, June 5, 1917.

19. Ibid., Laurier to Rowell, June 2, 1917.

than the contributions of the other dominions." he added that while Canada had provided indispensable munitions which Australia, New Zealand and South Africa could not, it had greatly increased her prosperity. The result was that "Canada has profited most and suffered least from the war of any of the nations of the Empire."<sup>20</sup> To maintain Canada's Honour in the struggle, more men had to be obtained for the army.<sup>21</sup> National unity among the races, Rowell believed, was the best means of carrying on the war. In Ontario there was a definite feeling that Quebec had not done her fair share in the war, and "however good the explanations may be, people at the present time are not in a frame of mind to dispassionately consider matters." Unity could be achieved only through Quebec's coming wholeheartedly into the struggle. To him, conscription appeared to be a solution not only to the problem of reinforcements but also in the creation of national unity through equality of sacrifice.<sup>22</sup> Rowell's correspondence with George Graham and F.F. Pardee, who supported conscription, shows they were substantially in agreement with the Ontario Liberal leader regarding the urgency of conscription to

20. Rowell Papers, Rowell to Laurier, July 11, 1917.

21. Ibid., Rowell to R. Lemieux, May 21, 1917. Rowell appears to have been The leading pro-conscription Liberal in Ontario. A long-time advocate of compulsory military service he enthusiastically supported the M.S.A. from the time it was first proposed. In October, 1917 when Borden's coalition or Union Government was formed Rowell was the most important Ontario figure to join the new cabinet, taking the Presidency of the Privy Council.

22. Ibid., Rowell to A.K. Maclean, May 18, 1917. Many Liberals would not have agreed with Rowell's expectation that conscription might bring national unity.

provide reinforcements.

With the approach of debate on the conscription bill, a gradual realignment of forces could be observed. There was a drift of prominent Liberal members of the House of Commons toward the Government position on the issue.<sup>23</sup> Though deeply hurt by defections on the conscription question, Laurier struggled to prevent a permanent split in the party. Frank discussions in the Liberal caucus seemed to indicate a genuine desire on the part of all concerned to reach some common ground.<sup>24</sup> It soon became evident however that this could not be achieved. Laurier sought to make it as easy as possible for dissidents to remain within the party fold. By early June it was "pretty generally recognized that members must be free to express their convictions irrespective of party allegiance" when the conscription bill was debated.<sup>25</sup> This was confirmed in Laurier's speech on second reading of the M.S.A.

On June 18, 1917 Borden moved second reading of the Military Service Act. Laurier replied in a moderate speech, taking constitutional grounds against the straining of the Militia Act which, he said, could only be invoked to repel invasion or for the defence of the country. Laurier concluded by moving an amendment that the bill receive no further consideration until its principle had been approved by the people of Canada.<sup>26</sup>

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23. University of Toronto Archive, Sir Edmund Walker Papers, Walker to W.B. Pitkin, June 26, 1917.

24. Globe, June 9, 1917.

25. P.A.C., W.L.M. King Papers, King to H. Cane, June 11, 1917.

26. Debates, June 18, 1917, p. 2393.

Charles Murphy, one of the two Ontario Liberals to vote against conscription, followed Laurier's line of argument. Borden had declared that the Militia Act gave the Government the power to raise troops to defend Canada overseas and that he was not deviating in any way from the law of the land in introducing conscription. This, Murphy emphatically denied. By quoting from telegrams sent to British authorities by the Government at the outbreak of the war, he demonstrated that the Government itself had doubted that it had the power to use conscripts raised under the Militia Act for service in Europe. There was, then, a new principle involved.<sup>27</sup> Continuing, Murphy pointed to agitations in Quebec and Ontario to show that the new law did not have the support of the people. He argued that "a law which is not sustained by the moral sanction of the people cannot be enforced by constitutional means." Murphy concluded by calling upon the Government to be "frank and courageous" and acknowledge "that their action was hasty, and that it is better to yield before than after they have caused a disastrous cleavage in our national life."<sup>28</sup> The bill, Murphy urged, must be withdrawn or suspended until the people had been consulted.

Hugh Guthrie (South Wellington) well represented Ontario's pro-conscription Liberals when he rose to speak on June 19. He supported the bill, Guthrie declared, because "in my mind, the principle involved in the Military Service Bill at this moment is

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27. Ibid., June 21, 1917. pp. 2540-2541.

28. Ibid., pp. 2542-2545.

one to the advantage of the people of Canada, to the advantage of Canada herself, to the advantage of the Empire and to the advantage of the Allies."<sup>29</sup> Canada had done well under voluntary enlistment, but the system had its limitations. The country had about reached that limit. Guthrie pointed out that during the spring (of 1917) "recruiting in Canada had fallen so low that we did not have sufficient recruits to make up the actual wastage in Canada." There was certainly ample manpower in Canada, he declared, if it could be utilized. Conscription would "get" the men who were not doing their duty, yet it would not interfere with production because of its selective nature. For this reason he preferred the M.S.A. to the old Militia bill.<sup>30</sup> Guthrie, however, went a step further and suggested that the Military Service Act might be broadened to enable the Government to conscript labor as well as men.

The debate dragged on for almost three weeks. Finally, on July 5, the Government applied closure. The M.S.A. passed second reading with Ontario Liberals voting 10-2 in its favor.<sup>31</sup>

Both pro- and anti-conscription Liberals joined in the demand that wealth should be conscripted as well as manpower. On June 14, George Graham gave notice of a resolution

that in the opinion of this House it is desirable that steps should be taken forthwith by the Government to provide that accumulated wealth should be contributed immediately and effectively to the cost of the war, and that all agricultural, industrial, transportation and

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29. Ibid., June 19, 1917, p. 2453.

30. Ibid., pp. 2455-2459.

31. See Appendix A.

natural resources of Canada should be organized forthwith so as to ensure the greatest possible assistance to the Empire in the war and to reduce the cost of living to the Canadian people.

Graham proposed that an income tax be applied to the wealthy. This would be above the business tax levied, because the existing system permitted a man to claim a large salary for himself as a tax-free business expense. He further proposed that every man holding capital be compelled to invest a large portion of it in war bonds and that a tax be placed on land held for speculation.<sup>32</sup> This, Graham believed, would equalize war sacrifice. The idea received warm support from other Ontario Liberals including R.E. Truax (South Bruce) and D.C. Ross (West Middlesex) as well as F.F. Pardee and Hugh Guthrie.

The divisions of the federal Liberal party reflected conditions in Ontario. There was strong conscriptionist sentiment among members of the Liberal Associations of the Toronto area, which undoubtedly contributed to Rowell's belief that a great majority of Liberals supported compulsory military service.<sup>33</sup> In North York, the executive unanimously passed a resolution in favor of conscription.<sup>34</sup> But despite the fact that the majority of Grit M.P.s from Ontario had supported the M.S.A. and that the provincial organization seemed to favor it, there were strong indications that in actuality most Liberals still supported Laurier.

32. Debates, June 22, 1917, pp. 2576-2577. This was moved on July 17 as a formal amendment to a government resolution to extend the life of Parliament. It was defeated by a mere 17 votes, 78-61.

33. Rowell Papers, Rowell to H.C. Brewster, July 30, 1917.

34. King Papers, J.M. Walton to King, May 26, 1917.

In the rural districts "down with conscription is the cry to both Liberals and Conservatives...except in the villages and towns and they are pretty well divided."<sup>35</sup> There were indications of discontent from constituencies represented by the pro-conscription Liberals. In South Wellington it was reported that the people were 2 to 1 against it, and Graham was well aware that his constituents opposed compulsory service, before the bill had come before the House for second reading.<sup>36</sup> Particularly strong opposition came from the Franco-Ontarian population. Le Droit, commenting on conscription in an editorial entitled "C'est une loi mauvaise", demanded: "Est-il honnête de vouloir punir les Canadiens français parce qu'ils sont convaincus qu'on rend plus de service au pays en restant ici et en produisant, qu'en s'enrôlant pour le service d'outremer, surtout quand il était entendu que l'enrôlement était libre?"<sup>37</sup>

The pro-conscriptionists arranged a meeting of forty-five Ontario Liberal members and candidates in Toronto on July 20, 1917 in anticipation of gaining more support for the M.S.A. But "there was an avalanche that could not be stemmed." The majority believed that the voluntary system would provide all the men necessary under a new government. Feeling "was not only strong, but in some instances bitter against the action of us who voted for Conscription," wrote George Graham the next day.<sup>38</sup> The

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35. Laurier Papers, W.J. Kehoe to Goddard, May 28, 1917.  
See also: W.D. Gregory to Laurier, June 2, 1917.  
36. Rowell Papers, Rowell to Graham, June 16, 1917.  
37. Le Droit, 9 juillet 1917.  
38. Rowell Papers, Graham to Rowell, July 21, 1917.

conclusions of the meeting were summed up by George S. Gibbons of London: "I can state my views in very few words. I am for Sir Wilfrid Laurier as Leader, and for him only. I am for a general election. I am against coalition, extension of Parliament and conscription. I take it that that is all I need say."<sup>39</sup> Many of the speakers present emphasized that the people in their ridings were opposed to conscription. A public statement to this effect was issued by Graham at the end of the meetings, declaring unanimous agreement.<sup>40</sup>

The outcome of the meeting shook Rowell's conviction that Ontario Liberals stood united: "I am surprised beyond measure at the decision announced in the press of the meeting of the Liberal members and candidates...if the situation is to be saved it must be by co-operation between real win-the-war Liberals in Ontario and those in western Canada."<sup>41</sup> Any illusions that may have remained concerning Ontario Liberal Party solidarity were shattered by the controversy that developed around the report. Both F.F. Pardee and Hugh Guthrie quickly repudiated the statement, declaring that they had spoken in favor of conscription and that there was therefore not the unanimity Graham had claimed.<sup>42</sup> There

39. King Papers, Memorandum, Summary of Extracts from Statements made at a meeting of Ontario Liberal Members and Candidates for the House of Commons, p.3.

40. Globe, July 21, 1917. C.A.R., 1917, p. 596.

41. Rowell Papers, Rowell to J.W. Dafoe, July 21, 1917.

42. Foster Diaries, July 24, 1917. Globe, July 24, 1917. Both Guthrie and Pardee had made their statements and then left the meeting. Thus when the statement was prepared at the conclusion of the gathering they were not present to express their disapproval.

was also criticism from the non-official Liberals. John M. Godfrey, President of the Ontario branch of the Win-the-War League, termed the affair a "hole-in-the-corner" meeting and claimed that "those Liberals who were at the meeting do not represent the Liberal party." But the association's secretary, Frank Wise, declared that "the Liberal convention simply showed up the hand of the win-the-election party."<sup>43</sup> Such acrimonious public discussion clearly did nothing to consolidate Ontario Liberals.

Despite the deep divisions within the party, Laurier continued to command affection and loyalty, even from many of the pro-conscription Liberals. His leadership could not easily be replaced: "They [the conscriptionists] are indifferent to Graham and Pardee, and for the most part, they detest Rowell."<sup>44</sup> It is difficult to explain the reasons for this affection. Certainly there was an element of gratitude "for carrying and maintaining the Liberals in office" for a fifteen-year period. This could not account for the depth of feeling. Perhaps the best explanation lay in "his concern for others and his understanding and respect for their convictions."<sup>45</sup> P.C. Larkin, a Toronto Grit, wrote

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43. Toronto News, July 21, 1917. The Win-the-War League was formed in May, 1917 for the purpose of promoting conscription and coalition. Its President, J.M. Godfrey, was an unsuccessful Liberal candidate in the 1908 provincial election. Borden agreed with Wise's estimation of the affair. He wrote in his diary on September 6 that "Plainly they had no thought but party advantage."

44. Laurier Papers, Alex. Smith to Laurier, July 9, 1917.

45. Paul Stevens, "Wilfrid Laurier: Politician" in The Political Ideas of the Prime Ministers of Canada, M. Hamelin, ed. (Ottawa, 1969), p. 71.

that "No one was too young, or too mean in intellect, to gain his earnest and concentrated attention."<sup>46</sup> Laurier respected a man's views, even when he disagreed, and bore no animosity. These personal qualities were undoubtedly important factors in keeping many pro-conscription Liberals within the party fold.<sup>47</sup>

### III

Borden introduced a resolution on July 17, 1917 to extend the life of Parliament. Laurier refused his support, and although the resolution was passed on a straight party vote, it was clear that an election would be held. The widespread unpopularity of conscription caused much apprehension in the Conservative ranks: "The best part of the country does not want an election - is deadly opposed to it. For myself I fear the non-war elements and then what?"<sup>48</sup> In early August, Clifford Sifton toured the country to survey the situation. He concluded "that we are measurably near a disaster of the worst kind and only a very strong combination of all the loyal elements will pull us through."<sup>49</sup> The Conservatives were convinced that a Liberal victory represented for Canada a disaster to be avoided at all costs. The result would be victory for Quebec, virtual withdrawal of Canada

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46. Ibid., p. 72. quotes P.C. Larkin, The Statesman, January, 1920.

47. For example George Graham, A.J. Young (candidate in North Toronto) and R.E. Truax (Bruce South).

48. Foster Diaries, July 4, 1917.

49. University of Toronto Archives, G.M. Wrong Papers, Clifford Sifton to Wrong, August 8, 1917.

from the war, abandonment of her soldiers overseas, surrender of honor and loss of pride.<sup>50</sup> Borden believed that the well-being and security of the country depended on a Conservative victory: "Our first duty is to win, at any cost the coming election in order that we may continue to do our part in winning the war and that Canada be not disgraced."<sup>51</sup>

With an election certain, the Government planned shrewdly. In September it introduced two measures that temporarily altered the franchise. One, the Military Voters Act, gave the vote to all British subjects regardless of age who were serving in the C.E.F. The other, the Wartime Elections Act, enfranchised the female relatives of Canadian servicemen. Disfranchised were men of enemy birth and tongue who had been naturalized for less than 15 years, and specifically Mennonites, Doukhobors and other conscientious objectors. This latter measure was obviously aimed at the Liberal party, as a great majority of those excluded under the act were known to be among its supporters.<sup>52</sup> There can be

50. Graham, *op. cit.*, I, 146.

51. *Ibid.*, I, 147 quotes Borden Diaries, September 25, 1917.

52. *Ibid.*, I, 170. Among the disfranchised were those exempted from military service by Orders-in-Council of August 13, 1873 and December 6, 1898. These specifically referred to Mennonites who came to Canada in 1873. The Act did not include Ontario Mennonites who settled in Canada in 1808. They were in fact eligible to vote.

It is interesting to note that among those disfranchised as conscientious objectors were members of the Society of Friends, who despite their moral opposition to war had contributed generously to the non-military war effort. Moreover, many of them, in Ontario, could claim to be United Empire Loyalists.

- King Papers, W.H.S. Cane to King, September 21, 1917.

little doubt that this prompted conscriptionist Liberals who had been flirting with coalition to hasten their decision. On October 12, 1917 the cabinet was reorganized to permit the appointment of Rowell and 7 other English-speaking Liberals to form a self-styled Union Government. The Conservatives were elated! "It surely spells the end of Laurierism and effectually curbs the ambitions of the pure party-fight Liberals," wrote Sir George Foster.<sup>53</sup> The situation had improved considerably from a Government point of view.

The formation of Union Government created a number of serious problems for the Ontario Liberals. Almost the entire Liberal press, including the Toronto Globe and the Toronto News, supported the new coalition and conscription. The one daily paper to support the Laurier Liberals was the London Morning Advertiser. Moreover, Rowell was able to win most of the provincial Liberal organization and the party's financial backing. Those who remained loyal to Laurier were forced to set up a new party structure.<sup>54</sup> Despite these serious setbacks, there was considerable optimism in the ranks of the Liberal party: "I am confident

53. Foster Diaries, October 12, 1916. Coalition also brought disunion to the Conservative party. Many Tories refused to co-operate with Liberal Unionists. One supporter wrote Arthur Meighen to suggest that a Conservative candidate be placed in every riding by the Union Government before a Liberal could be nominated.

-P.A.C., Arthur Meighen Papers, C.J. Bowell to Meighen, no date.

54. Laurier Papers, Laurier to R.T. Harding, October 18, 1917.

The Liberal party had no separate federal organization. When elections were held, it depended upon the provincial machinery. Its defection in 1917 was thus a serious blow to Liberal expectations.

a real Party fight can be made, in spite of the loss of our Press and our Ontario leaders, as the common people are determined, if an opportunity is offered, to destroy Sir Robert Borden."<sup>55</sup>

Although the election was not officially announced until late in October, the campaign had been under way for some time. The attacks that had been made on the Liberals in March and April were an early indication of the tone it would take. In late September the Toronto News printed a cartoon depicting Laurier, flanked on either side by a number of his followers. The caption read, "The Hindenburg Line-Front Line of the Laurier Offensive."<sup>56</sup> No further explanation was necessary. Laurier was clearly identified with the anti-war, pro-German element in the country. The first gun of the defamatory campaign had been fired.

Prof. Roger Graham has said that the electoral battle that followed "witnessed a descent into the abyss of French-English violence and prejudice to a depth without precedent in Canadian history." Many statements made were so extreme that under normal circumstances they would have been "repugnant to all but the lunatic fringe."<sup>57</sup> Believing that a Unionist victory was essential to Canada's security and well-being, the Government undertook a campaign of unrestrained abuse:

Of course there will be oily-tongued followers of Laurier and Bourassa who will go among the people, and particularly the people of English descent, saying that

55. Ibid., C.W. Kerr to Laurier, October 31, 1917. Kerr was president of the Toronto Reform Association.

56. Ibid., A.H. Beaton to Laurier, September 24, 1917. See p. 97.

57. Graham, op. cit., I, 188. See Appendix B.

Laurier means to keep Canada in the war, that Laurier doesn't mean to quit, that he wants the vote of the people on the conscription issue, that Laurier will stay behind England as long and as firmly as anybody. But in this election Laurier's strength lies in those extremists who have worshipped at the shrine of Henri Bourassa. Without Bourassa and his French-Canadian Nationalists Laurier would be nowhere. Bourassa! The man who nearly got caught by the Huns in Belgium at the beginning of the war and thanks to the English navy made good his escape, and then when safe in his Montreal newspaper office, reviled the name of England, and discouraged help from Canada. When Laurier receives his main support from such a leader, is he likely to lead Canada on in war till the Hohenzollern is overthrown.<sup>58</sup>

The accusations were often plainer: "The openly declared policy of Bourassa and the Nationalist wing is that CANADA HAD NO RIGHT TO GO INTO THE WAR, AND THAT WE MUST NOT FURTHER PARTICIPATE IN IT. In short if Laurier wins, we are to quit." More than that, the Government frequently quoted a Nationalist pledge, allegedly taken by Laurier-Liberal candidates in Quebec, calling for immediate suspension of the M.S.A. and the discharge of all conscripts.<sup>59</sup> Was English Canada to give way to a conquered minority which had enjoyed justice, liberty and security under the British crown but that refused to do its duty in Canada's hour of need? "Is Quebec to rule Canada?" demanded the News:

Is the one French-Canadian Province to lord it over the eight English-speaking Provinces? Are the people of Quebec, in alliance with the anti-British and pro-German elements of the population in the other Provinces, to take the Dominion out of the war? Are the French-Canadians, who have refused to fight for Canada's liberties, to prevent the re-inforcement of the gallant troops which

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58. P.A.C., "English Canadians and the War", Union Government Publicity Bureau, (Ottawa, 1917)

59. P.A.C., "Plain Facts for English-speaking Electors", Union Government Publicity Bureau, (Ottawa, 1917), pp. 4-5.

for over three years have upheld the national honor in countless bloody encounters.<sup>60</sup>

The Globe finished the campaign with one final thrust. A cartoon depicted "Old man Ontario" lying crushed under a great weight, "a solid Quebec", and on top stood a gloating Henri Bourassa declaring "to the victor- the spoils." Beneath it, the caption warned: "A Solid Quebec Will Vote to Rule All Canada. Only a Solid Ontario Can Defeat Them."<sup>61</sup>

On November 5, Laurier (a candidate in the dual constituency of Ottawa) issued his election manifesto. He declared that "the supreme end is to assist in the tremendous struggle in which we are now engaged." Ontario's "Laurierites" were quick to adopt his argument that in the face of a powerful and brutal enemy Canada must not allow internal dissension to weaken the war effort. The issue was not conscription or no conscription: it was whether there would be a united or a divided Canada.<sup>62</sup> Union Government, the Ontario Liberals argued, was an excellent motto but it did not represent the policy of those who espoused it. In North York, William Lyon Mackenzie King pointed out that the Union Government

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60. C.A.R., 1917, p. 612. A report of a meeting of women Union Government supporters was more explicit. There were only two parties in Canada, namely "Canada and the enemy." It left little doubt that the enemy was the Laurier-Liberals.  
-Waterloo News Record, December 5, 1917.

61. Globe, December 19, 1917.

62. Aurora Banner, November 23, 1917.

Laurier believed that conscription was only transient, and he placed highest importance on "unity of Liberal principles to deal with the many questions which will rise as a consequence of the war."

-Laurier Papers, Laurier to Houston, September 19, 1917.

By minimizing the importance of conscription in his election manifesto, he provided wide latitude for the division of opinion on the question in the party.

was not a union in "any true sense of the word." It was not a union of race, religion or even party. The existence of widespread opposition, King believed, "is evidence in itself that the union is one in name rather than in reality."<sup>63</sup> Its appeal to the country served only to create division. In actual fact, the Pembroke Observer editorialized, the Union Government "is nothing more or less than the old Borden Government bolstered up on the eve of dissolution in order that, buttressed by every legal (or illegal) device which could be forced through a gagged Parliament, the will of the people may be thwarted and the Borden forces given a new lease on power." The conscription cry was to be used to distract attention from the Government corruption and lack of leadership that had characterized the three years of the war.<sup>64</sup>

An anonymous poet questioned the Unionist approach:

My dear friend Advertiser, I am trying to get wiser -  
 Is conscription the main issue after all?  
 Or is it one of Borden's dodges, fathered by our friend(?)  
     Bob Rogers,  
 To be used in this campaign as Battle-Call?  
 To line up next door Quebec, or to save the Borden neck,  
 To make him boss again, our lives and all.

Is conscription of man power the question of the hour,  
 Or just election music for the song  
 To be sung while Joe Flavelle lets the profits go to hell?  
 (Someone else's - not his own - that would be wrong),  
 And Quebec to war is sent, well, that is, say, three  
     percent,  
 While the wealth conscription gets the go-along.

Will conscription of the graft that flourished fore and  
     aft  
 Under Premier Sir Robert be renewed?

63. King Papers, King to A.W. Connor, December 27, 1917.

64. Ibid., editorial from the Pembroke Observer, October 25, 1917.

Or under Laurier, will there come a happy day  
 When the people of our land, with faith imbued,  
 Down the profiteers and hoarding, rotten Government and  
 Borden,  
 "Carry on" to unity and common good?

If this Union Government exempts the great per cent  
 Of eligible Que-beckers, as they say,  
 People of this province better recall a certain letter  
 Mr. Rainville sent his followers one day.  
 If Canada would unite to use her force and might  
 To treat our boys half white who fight the valiant fight,  
 Vote Gibbons and Sir Wilfrid Laurier.<sup>65</sup>

The Laurier-Liberals insisted that the people should have the opportunity to express itself on the Borden record. They promised national unity, an end to profiteering and rigid control of food supplies and prices to regulate the rising cost of living.<sup>66</sup>

The Unionist party and press would not permit the "Laurierites" to stray from "the supreme issue" - conscription! "Against the imperative need and duty of maintaining Canada's strength and honor at the front, party controversy counts for little with serious people," wrote the Globe.<sup>67</sup> It maintained that the Borden Government's record was not a point of discussion. The only question of importance was the immediate need for reinforcements. Laurier had pledged himself to suspend the M.S.A. until a referendum had been held. "Not a man to be raised or drilled under the Act, and assuredly not a man raised and drilled under the law before his [Laurier's] accession to power would be dispatched to France," the Union Government speakers

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65. London, Morning Advertiser, December 8, 1917.

66. P.A.C., "Manifesto of the Right Honorable Sir Wilfrid Laurier", Central Information Office of the Canadian Liberal Party, (Ottawa, 1917).

67. Globe, November 7, 1917.

declared. This would mean paralysis of the military effort, at least until the people had been polled, and no replacements would be available until late 1918.<sup>68</sup>

The Unionist accusations forced the Laurier-Liberals into futile refutation. Laurier acknowledged this fact openly: "It never was my tactic...to run away from a question, and if the Government want to confine the issue in this election to conscription I am here ready to meet them upon the ground chosen by them."<sup>69</sup> "Laurierites" asserted that the Liberal party was "in the war to the end," and was pledged to supplying the replacements that were required at the front. Suspension of the M.S.A. did not mean changing anything that had been done: Laurier, it was stated, would conserve what had been achieved but would not proceed any further until conscription had been submitted to the people.<sup>70</sup> Liberal candidates repeated over and over that they were "determined and committed to maintain Canada's honour at the front." However, the lack of a party press to circulate these statements left the electorate unconvinced. As election day approached, many voters still confused Laurier's stand with that of Bourassa, who demanded immediate repeal of the Military Service Act.<sup>71</sup>

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68. Ibid., November 20, 1917.

69. Ibid., December 4, 1917.

70. Newmarket, Era, November 30, 1917.

71. King Papers, King to Laurier, November 21, 1917. The Liberal party was able to establish a paper, The Grit, in Toronto in early December. However, it was harassed. When it proposed to print an advertisement that read "Every cross marked on a ballot for Borden means a wooden cross in Flanders" an injunction was obtained to prevent it. On the eve of the elec-

The Ontario Liberals argued that conscription was not necessarily the racial issue that the Unionists sought to make it. Australia, which had no Quebec, was a country settled entirely by people from the British Isles, and yet it had deliberately rejected conscription. There must have been "some other reason than the race question to induce the loyal people [of Australia] to reject the system of compulsory enlistment." Speaking in his home riding of Ottawa, Laurier declared that it was "because Australia has remained true to the principles prevalent in all British countries...from time immemorial up until 3 years ago, that the British people will do their duty without being compelled to do it." Great Britain had waged its wars with volunteers; she had brought down that colossus Napoleon with them. Britain had changed to conscription in 1915 but Australia had not.<sup>72</sup> "Laurierites" proposed that Canada should maintain these traditions, and believed that if properly administered the voluntary system would supply all the troops required.<sup>73</sup>

Ontario's Laurier-Liberals readily acceded to the charge that Quebec had not done her share in the war. However, they believed that the Government was responsible. [In 1910, the Conservative party had joined with the Nationalists of Quebec to attack Laurier's proposal for the creation of a Canadian navy.

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tion The Grit was seized by the Government and soldiers were placed on guard at its offices.

72. Globe, November 28, 1917.

73. Ibid., December 6, 1917.

During the 1911 election campaign, this Conservative-Nationalist alliance had gone "through the province creating a feeling of opposition to...war."<sup>74]</sup> Even now "it is yet possible to have all the soldiers we want from the Province of Quebec," the Liberals argued.<sup>75</sup> But it was clear that the coercion of an entire province would never succeed. The solution lay not in conscription but in appeal to valor, pride and patriotism.<sup>76</sup>

In the largely rural constituencies the "Laurierites" had to contend with General Mewburn's pledge to exempt "any farmers' sons who are honestly engaged in farm work and in the production of foodstuffs." The Government, they proclaimed, had no legal right to exempt farmers as a class. Borden had given his word before Parliament that there would be no interference with the work of the military tribunals in the granting of exemptions. If this promise could be broken so easily, would Mewburn's pledge be any more sacred? "After the election is over," the Grits warned, "if Borden should win, farmers will find conscription a terrible fact for them." The only safe thing to do was to turn out "the promise breakers."<sup>77</sup> Commenting on the Order-in-Council of December 3, 1917 authorizing the discharge from the army of those whose help was vitally needed on the farm, the London Morning Advertiser declared: "Bluff, bluster and deceit

74. Ibid., November 28, 1917.

75. Ibid., December 17, 1917.

76. Era, December 7, 1917.

77. King Papers, The Voice of the People, December 15, 1917.

This was a campaign publication issued by W.D. Euler, Laurier-Liberal candidate in North Waterloo. cf. pp. 81-82.

are its [the Borden Government's] weapons...the Order-in-Council is purely a vote catching bluff, and every member of the cabinet knows it is."<sup>78</sup>

When the ballots were counted, the Union Government held 74 of Ontario's 82 ridings. Even though the Liberal vote had increased by 66,403, its percentage of the popular vote had decreased from 43.1% to 33.7%. Despite this appreciable reduction, it was clear that the Liberal party still had strong support in Ontario.<sup>79</sup>

It is interesting and significant that in three of the eight Liberal constituencies, Essex North, Prescott and Russell, French Canadians accounted for over 30% of the voters.<sup>80</sup> This element opposed the Union Government's conscription policy. Its leading journal, Le Droit, a strong advocate of the right of French Canadians to elect M.P.s of their own race, had been prepared to sacrifice this principle for the time being, in the interests of unity in the anti-conscription cause: "Pour que cette cause puisse triompher, il est important que tout le monde soit uni, et comme ce fut toujours l'habitude de demander aux Canadiens français de sacrifier leurs légitimes ambitions pour sauvegarder les intérêts de tous c'est encore ce qui s'est fait cette année. Mais ce doit être la dernière fois."<sup>81</sup> Another factor helped to explain the intensity of feeling evidenced by Le Droit. In 1912

78. Morning Advertiser, December 7, 1917.

79. See Appendix A.

80. Sixth Census of Canada, 1921, Vol. 1, pp. 360-381.

81. Le Droit, 7 décembre 1917.

the Ontario Government had introduced Regulation 17. An agitation had arisen among Franco-Ontarians that reached crisis proportions during 1915 and 1916. The decision of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council that Regulation 17 was *intra vires* of the powers of the province, and a papal encyclical urging that it be submitted to, had resolved the matter. That intense feeling remained was evidenced by a report to Archbishop Gauthier of Ottawa: "Cette opposition si vaste, si imposante et fortement organisée, n'a rien obtenu; le Gouvernement d'Ontario n'a rien cédé, rien accordé, rien adouci, et son attitude sur ce point n'est ni changée, ni modifiée."<sup>82</sup> The emotions aroused by the Regulation 17 controversy served to aggravate the resentment of conscription in Ontario's French community.

Party loyalty undoubtedly played a significant role in a number of Ontario ridings. The Liberals were able to retain six of the thirteen constituencies that they had held since the 1911 election. In a number of other cases, Liberal Unionists who had broken with Laurier during the conscription debate were able to hold their seats by only a slim margin. The two seats won from the Conservatives were Essex North and Waterloo North. A large French-Canadian vote in the former contributed to the reversal. In the latter there was a very large German Mennonite element. These people were conscientious objectors and appear to have

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82. Ottawa Archdiocesan Archives, Commission des Ecoles Séparées (Règlement XVII), Situation Scolaire D'Ontario: Règlement XVII, Que Faire à ce Sujet., report to l'Archevêque d'Ottawa, 30 novembre 1917.

avored Laurier's policy over the seemingly more militaristic program of Borden. This in fact bore out the expectations of Sir George Foster, who had campaigned for the Union Government in the area: "The constituency is a hard one-the Germans are going against Merner to a man."<sup>83</sup>

Some less tangible factors contributed to the Liberal defeat in Ontario. When Rowell had joined with Borden in the formation of Union Government, he had taken with him most of the provincial party machinery. In discussing the election results, the London Morning Advertiser listed this first among the reasons for the Grit failure.<sup>84</sup> Of no less importance was the Union Government's domination of the mass communication media. Almost the entire daily press (except the Morning Advertiser) and the great majority of weeklies supported the Unionist campaign. This meant that their arguments were constantly before the electors, while the Liberals found it very difficult to give their views wide circulation. True, Stewart Lyon, editor of the Globe, did honor his pledge to Laurier that the Liberals would receive unbiased exposure. However, reports of Grit meetings frequently were brief and tended to be hidden away inside the paper, whereas those of the opponents were often front page news. Unionist influence extended beyond the newspapers and into the province's pulpits. Particularly in Protestant churches, Sunday services took on some of the overtones of a campaign rally.<sup>85</sup>

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83. Foster Diaries, November 28, 1917.

84. Morning Advertiser, December 18, 1917.

85. Oxley, op. cit., p. 56.

The Morning Advertiser argued that the Unionist victory was in part due to the fact that it had worn "two masks." One, the two-sided mask of conscription, it had taken off or put on as the occasion demanded. To the farmers they had appeared as "no conscriptionists." To the city crowds "that had given their teeming thousands to war the mask of enforced service was used in an effort to stir every emotion which its electors sought to quell in other sections of the country." The second portrayed the Liberal argument: the "old government willingly damned itself as a weak, corrupt, inefficient regime." This was not an issue, the Unionists had insisted; when Union Government was formed in October, the old Conservative administration had ceased to exist. The Morning Advertiser commented sardonically that Unionists had been "all things, to all sections of the country."<sup>86</sup>

It would be impossible to say how many Union Government candidates won their seats because of the Wartime Elections Act, but certainly three had been elected by manipulation of the soldier vote. The civilian vote had given the Liberals the ridings of Essex South, Nipissing and Perth South. However, when all the military ballots had been counted, the Unionists had won by less than 200 votes in each case. The Morning Advertiser complained as early as December 7, 1917 that "every loose vote possible is to be gathered in [by the Government], as a military vote to be applied where it will best serve the Union."<sup>87</sup> Later, it men-

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86. Morning Advertiser, December 18, 1917.

87. Ibid., December 7, 1917. Nipissing is a particularly interesting case. The Laurier candidate, E.A. Lapierre,

tioned that these votes were to be applied in the ridings of Perth South and Nipissing. W.T.R. Preston, who represented Liberal interests in the overseas vote, was certainly a biased observer, but he produces enough factual evidence to prove that the Military Voters' Act came close to being "a 'letters patent' for electoral villainy of the first order."<sup>88</sup> To say that these tactics won the election would be an exaggeration. The Unionists appear to have won because they were able to mould public opinion by a high-pressure sales campaign. The pitch "dinned into the head of the ordinary citizen, who was not all that enthusiastic about conscription, that to demonstrate his loyalty to Britain, maintain Canada's self-respect, and keep faith with Canada's fighting men, he had no choice but to vote for Borden, the more so because French Canada was not prepared to do its duty."<sup>89</sup>

## IV

The Liberal party was deeply committed to the Canadian

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carried the riding on the civilian vote with a majority of 1,339 but eventually lost by 44 votes.

88. W.T.R. Preston, My Generation of Politics and Politicians, (Toronto, 1927), p. 365.

89. J.M. Beck, Pendulum of Power, Canada's Federal Elections, (Toronto, 1968), p. 146. The question arises in the writer's mind as to whether the people of Ontario were generally as enthusiastically in favor of conscription as the election results suggest. Certainly the newspapers and individuals (particularly among those holding prominent positions) were strong and vocal advocates of the M.S.A. But to what extent can these be taken to represent the mass of the people? It is my impression that generally Ontarians had no strong feelings in either direction and that conscription was in fact "sold" to them.

war effort. During the first three years of the war, it consistently supported all Government measures that were intended to further that cause. Liberals contributed generously in time and effort to assist recruiting and fund raising for patriotic purposes. However, when the Borden Government introduced the Military Service Act to provide reinforcements for the front, a number of Liberals found themselves unable to accept the measure. This produced a serious split in the party.

In part the split was a result of divergent ideological concepts of the extent of Canada's participation in the war. Such abstractions did not provide the main content of the argument. N.W. Rowell and the majority of Ontario's Liberal M.P.s believed that the immediate need for reinforcements was an overriding consideration that could be satisfied only by conscription. In their eyes the voluntary system could no longer provide the replacements needed, and extreme measures were called for regardless of the consequences.

Two Grit M.P.s and many grass roots Liberals followed Laurier's lead in opposition to the M.S.A. Like their pro-conscription compatriots, they were determined that Canada should fight on until final victory was achieved. These "Laurierites" (as they were termed during the 1917 election campaign) believed that voluntary enlistment, properly administered, could still provide all the men needed. Moreover, they argued, conscription hastily introduced would create dissension in Quebec, and bring strong protests from all parts of Canada, at a time when national

unity was most essential. A divided country could not fight efficiently. As a solution to this problem, the anti-conscription Liberals accepted Laurier's proposed "consultation of the people"; if approved, the M.S.A. would receive the grudging acceptance of even those who were opposed to compulsory military service.

The strong support that Laurier's Liberal party received in Ontario on the conscription issue would appear to have been based on several factors. There was, of course, strong anti-conscription sentiment among the Franco-Ontarian population. The seeming solidarity of their support of the Liberal party undoubtedly derived from this source. Party loyalty certainly cannot be overlooked. But a third feature, loyalty to "the old man", to "the chief", must also have been of great importance. This latter factor does much to explain why some Liberals who had voted in favor of the M.S.A. in the House of Commons either ran as "Laurierite" candidates (R.E. Truax and D.C. Ross) or gave vigorous support to the Grit cause during the election campaign.

## CONCLUSION

There was no common basis of opposition to the Military Service Act in Ontario. Ideological opposition of some nature was found within each of the six groups discussed, but it lacked unity. The Social Democratic Party's stand was essentially based on Marxist economic interpretation; conscription was regarded as simply a weapon that might be used to suppress the workers and maintain the capitalist system. Both the International Bible Students Association and the Mennonite Church based their position on conscription upon opposition to war. They were "non-resistant" organizations, and as such believed a doctrine that forbade them to "return evil for evil." Under no circumstances might Bible Students or Mennonites kill another man. Among Ontario trade unionists, a few Socialists represented the extent of ideological opposition. Their influence is apparent in the early resolutions (1911-1913) opposing war. Again, it was the Socialists, Jimmy Simpson and John Bruce (both of Toronto), at the September, 1917 Trades and Labor Congress convention, that opposed the executive resolution calling for compliance with the Military Service Act. The Weekly Sun's frequently stated opposition to "militarism", though representative of only a small portion of Ontario's farmers, was another strain of ideological opposition. Unlike the Bible Students and the Mennonites, the Weekly Sun had reluctantly accepted the war. Finally, the

Liberal party was divided, not on the war itself but on the nature of Canada's participation in it. A tenuous link, then, may be drawn between the Socialists and the trade unions, but only in so far as the latter was composed partly of members of the S.D.P. A similar comparison may be made between the International Bible Students and the Mennonites, as they were both members of "non-resistant" groups. However, they were widely divergent in the other tenets of their faiths.

The most striking feature of the ideological opposition was the fact that it was extremely limited, both in its size and in the part it played in the province. Of those basing their objections to the M.S.A. on purely ideological grounds, the S.D.P., the International Bible Students Association and the Mennonite Church, the first two put up a determined and noisy opposition. The Mennonite Church, while no less determined, undertook a much less active campaign. However, all these represented a relatively insignificant portion of the Ontario population. The trade unionists, farmers and Liberals included a much larger part of the province's people. But in these groups ideology played a relatively small part.

The trade unionists, the farmers and the Liberal party based their objections to the Military Service Act on practical grounds. Economic considerations were a dominating factor in the opposition of Ontario's trade unionists to conscription. Many argued that it was to be used to ~~the~~ advantage of the Government's wealthy friends. The belief was expressed that the moneyed

interests wanted conscription so that Canadian unionists could be drafted and their places filled with foreigners. This would have the effect of giving the employer better control of the wage scale and upsetting years of union work by creating an "open shop" situation. Nonetheless, Ontario trade unions were strongly opposed to the T.L.C. executive's general strike proposal, preferring instead to rely on political action. In September, 1917 they in fact accepted the law and demanded the extension of the principle to include the national resources of the country.

Like that of the organized workers, rural Ontario's opposition to the Military Service Act was basically economic. However, unlike the trade unionists, the farmers preferred to accept the principle but wished the Act changed so that farmers' sons and hired help would be exempt. Farmers were quick to point out that the manpower shortage in rural districts was already critical, and that any further reduction would mean a decrease in food production at a time when an increase was imperative. A country could not fight without food to feed it. These were patriotic appeals, but behind them was economic self-interest. Wartime conditions had brought an almost unlimited demand for food, and with it came steadily rising prices. Farmers saw the opportunity to make quick profits. They opposed anything that might threaten the situation. No doubt the farmers sincerely believed that by staying on the farm they were doing a patriotic duty, but the economic factor cannot be overlooked in explaining

the stand rural Ontario took on the conscription issue.

Liberals, determined that the war should be won, believed that if conscription were foisted upon the people of Canada, as the Conservatives proposed, there would be a strong protest that would divide the nation and pit French against English at a time when unity was essential. They argued that a referendum must be held to determine the will of the country before the Act could be put into force. Grits doggedly maintained this stand from the time the M.S.A. was introduced in June, 1917, insisting that if this was done and the people gave their consent, even those that opposed compulsory military service would accede to the law. Other practical grounds were concern for the welfare of the party and personal loyalty to Sir Wilfrid Laurier. The opposition to the Military Service Act in Ontario derived primarily from practical objections. These were economic and political in their nature.

APPENDIX A

Ontario Liberals in the House of Commons at the introduction of the Military Service Act, May 1917 and after the December 1917 election.

May 1917

Constituency	Member
Bruce South	R.E. Truax**
Glengarry	J.A. McMillan
Kent West	A.B. McCoig**
Lambton West	F.F. Pardee
Middlesex West	D.C. Ross
Norfolk	W.A. Charlton
Oxford North	E.W. Nesbitt
Prescott	E. Proulx*
Renfrew South	G. Graham
Russell	C. Murphy*
Welland	W.M. German**
Wellington South	H. Guthrie

\* voted against conscription  
and for referendum

\*\* voted for referendum only

December 1917

Constituency	Member
Bruce South	R.E. Truax
Essex North	W.C. Kennedy
Kent	A.B. McCoig
Middlesex West	D.C. Ross
Prescott	E. Proulx
Renfrew South	I.E. Pedlow
Russell	C. Murphy
Waterloo North	W.D. Euler
<u>Liberal Unionists</u>	
Durham	N.W. Rowell
Glengarry & Stormont	J. McMartin
Hamilton East	S.C. Mewburn
Lambton West	F.F. Pardee
London	H. Cronyn
Norfolk	W.W. Charlton
Oxford North	E.W. Nesbitt
Parkdale	H.M. Mowat
Simcoe East	J.B. Tudhope

APPENDIX B

"The Fiery Cross" was written anonymously. It was not published by either of the major political parties. However, it does seem to represent the extremity of emotion that appeared during the 1917 election campaign. A reading of it would suggest that it was a chain letter passed among strong opponents of Laurier's Liberal party.

"THE FIERY CROSS IS NOW UPLIFTED THROUGHOUT CANADA"

The FIERY CROSS calls loudly upon every true Canadian to carefully consider the real situation before deciding to support Sir Wilfred [sic] Laurier.

Which will it be "Laurierism and Kaiser Bill or Liberty, Justice and Freedom?.

A vote for Arch Traitor Laurier or any of his candidates means a vote for Kaiser Bill. Lenine of Russia and Laurier of Quebec would both sell us to the enemy. Lenine wields the hand of Germany in Russia, Laurier will do the same in Canada.

Who is financing Sir Wilfred Laurier's election campaign in Canada, Germany?.

Laurier, the friend of renegade Louis [Reil] sic is the friend of the Kaiser, the ambassador of the "Black Pope". A vote for Laurier, the traitor to the boys at the front, means that he will desert our sons in Flanders and that you will be a party to their murder, that the reins of power in Canada will pass into the hands of Hyphens.

Can you not see the hand of the "Black Pope-the Jesuit Fathers". They have been kicked out of France for interference with State and will eventually be kicked out of Canada and have nowhere to rest their miserable heads. Their hands control Laurier today. Dont you see the point?.

Remember true Canadians "THE FIERY CROSS IS PASSING THROUGH THE LAND, and as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so do we now lift up the Fiery Cross in Canada, to save Canada from shame and dishonor.

A vote against Laurier and his candidates means a vote for Canada,

Liberty, Freedom and honor.

A vote for Laurier means a vote for Kaiser bill [sic], a vote for the Black Pope, no more civil or religious freedom for Canada, that you will also be a traitor to Canada and the boys at the front and will help to place upon Canada a stain of dishonor from which she will never recover

Pass the Fiery Cross on to your friend. It will be passed from one end of Canada to the other.

AWAY WITH LAURIERISM, HYPHENISM, AND KAISER BILLISM. One Flag, one language, one country.

Ist. issue. To be passed on as given in instructions per separate letter.

"THE FIERY CROSS IS PASSING THROUGH THE LAND"

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so do we now lift up the Fiery Cross of Protestantism, that all Protestants may realise that with Sir Wilfred Laurier as Premier of Canada, with a solid Quebec representation behind him, Protestantism is in grave danger.

Herein is an excerpt from the oath of a certain order which is now dominating Sir Wilfred Laurier. Arch-Bishop Bruchesi states there is grave danger of civil war. Does Arch-Bishop Bruchesi tell you why?. No he knows why. This little excerpt helps to explain just why. The meaning is plain. French-Canadian Jesuit domination of Canada is the reason why. He knows Protestantism will fight to the last man to retain religious freedom. Sir Wilfred Laurier is the figurehead of the Jesuit Father, the Holy Society of Jesus. Look at a portion of their oath:-

"I do further promise and declare, that I will, when opportunity presents, make and wage relentless war, secretly and openly, against all heretics, Protestants and Masons, as I am directed, to extirpate them from the face of the whole earth and I will spare neither age, sex nor conditions and I will hang, burn, waste, flay, strangle and burn alive these infamous heretics, rip up the stomach and womb of their women and crush their infants heads against the walls in order to annihilate their execrable race, and if the same cannot be done openly I will secretly use the poisonous cup, the strangulation cord, the steel of the Poinard or the leaden bullet, regardless of rank, honor and dignity or authority of persons what so ever may be their

conditions in life, either public or private, as I may at any time be directed by any agent of the Pope, or Superior of the Brotherhood of the Holy Society of Jesus. In testimony thereof I take this most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist and witness the same further with my hand, written with the point of this dagger dipped in my own blood and sealed in the face of this Holy Eucharist."

Sir Wilfred Laurier, the henchman of the Jesuit Fathers, those very men who were kicked out of France, now refuses to compel his French-Canadian degenerate brothers to go to the war for why? Simply because he has orders from the Jesuit Fathers, who want all of our Protestant Soldier boys murdered at the front for want of re-inforcements, that French-Canada and the Jesuit Fathers may secure a firm control of Canada. A vote for Sir Wilfred Laurier is just the same as standing over our Protestant Soldier boys in the trenches and plunging a dagger into their hearts. Sir Wilfred will leave them in the trenches with the hope they will be killed off. Why? Because they are mostly all Protestants.

"Remember the Fiery Cross is now uplifted"

Letter 2. Distribute as instructed in letter I.

Source: P.A.C., Charles Murphy Papers.

KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

C.E.F.....Canadian Expeditionary Force  
I.L.P.....Independent Labor Party  
I.W.W.....International Workers of the World  
M.S.A.....Military Service Act  
P.A.C.....Public Archives of Canada  
P.A.O.....Public Archives of Ontario  
S.D.P.....Social Democratic Party  
T.L.C.....Trades and Labor Congress of Canada  
T.P.L.....Toronto Public Reference Library  
U.F.O.....United Farmers of Ontario



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