

The government decided to send a military force to help the British. When the war began, this army consisted of barely 3000 men. But volunteers soon added to this number, and the army quickly grew to 30 000. Most of these volunteers had been born in Britain.

Evidence 1.7a

“England has protected our [French Canadian] liberties and our faith. Under her flag we have found peace, and now in appreciation of what England has done you go as French Canadians to do your utmost to keep the Union Jack flying in honour.”

— Archbishop Bruchesi of Montreal, August 1914

Evidence 1.7b

The French Canadian nationalist Henri Bourassa stated that it was Canada’s duty

“to contribute within the bounds of her strength and by means which are proper to herself, to the triumph, and especially to the endurance, of the combined efforts of France and England.”

— Henri Bourassa, 1914

Evidence 1.7

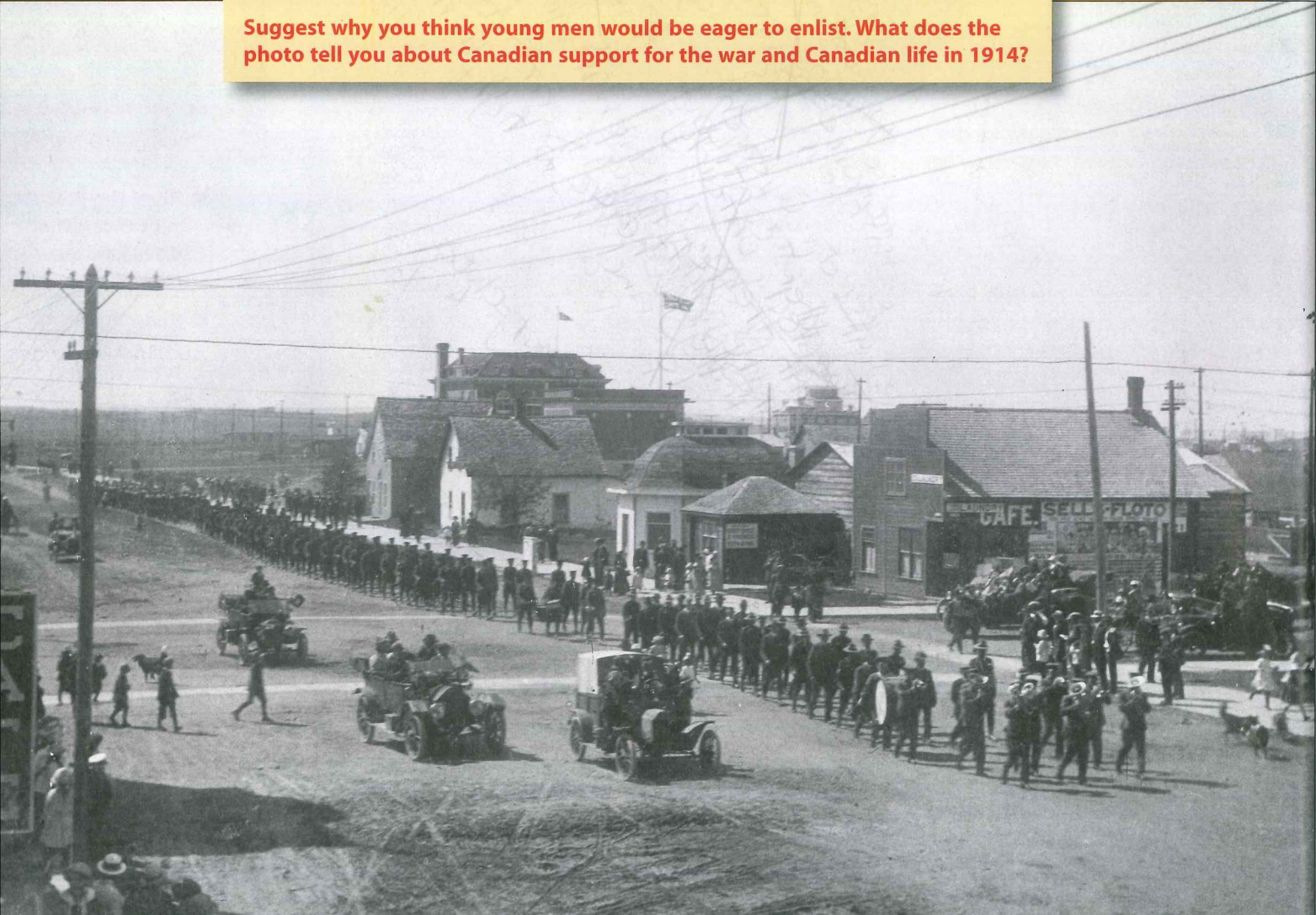
Most Canadians thought the war would be over by Christmas. No one imagined how long the war would actually last or how many Canadians would die on faraway battlefields. Nor did Canadians foresee conscription (forced service in the armed forces) for overseas service.

How do you think this knowledge would have affected support for the war had Canadians been able to see into the future?

Evidence 1.7c

Individual Canadians, too, had to decide what role they would like to play. Here, army recruits parade in Battleford, Saskatchewan in 1914.

Suggest why you think young men would be eager to enlist. What does the photo tell you about Canadian support for the war and Canadian life in 1914?



Support for the War Weakens, and Conscription

By 1916, support for the war was weakening, especially in Quebec.

Evidence 1.8

Henri Bourassa, French Canadian nationalist publisher of *Le Devoir*.

In an editorial on August 2, 1916, Bourassa outlined his arguments against continuing participation in the war.

“There is among the French Canadians a larger proportion of farmers, fathers of large families, than among any other ethnic element in Canada. Above all, the French Canadians are the only group exclusively Canadian. ... They look upon the perturbations [disturbances] of Europe, even those of England or France, as foreign events. Their sympathies naturally go to France against Germany; but they do not think they have an obligation to fight for France, no more than the French of Europe would hold themselves bound to fight for Canada against the United States. ...

English Canada, not counting the blokes, contains a considerable proportion of people still in the first period of national incubation [development]. Under the sway of imperialism, a fair number have not yet decided whether their allegiance is to Canada or to the Empire, whether the United Kingdom or the Canadian Confederacy is their country.”

As you examine the evidence in this section, put yourself in the role of each of the people/groups discussed. What would you do in that particular person’s/group’s position and why? Use an organizer such as the one below to help track your answers.

Source	Point of view	My response and reason



Evidence 1.9

“The enemies of the French language, of French civilization in Canada are not the Boches [the Germans] ... but the English-Canadian anglicizers ...”

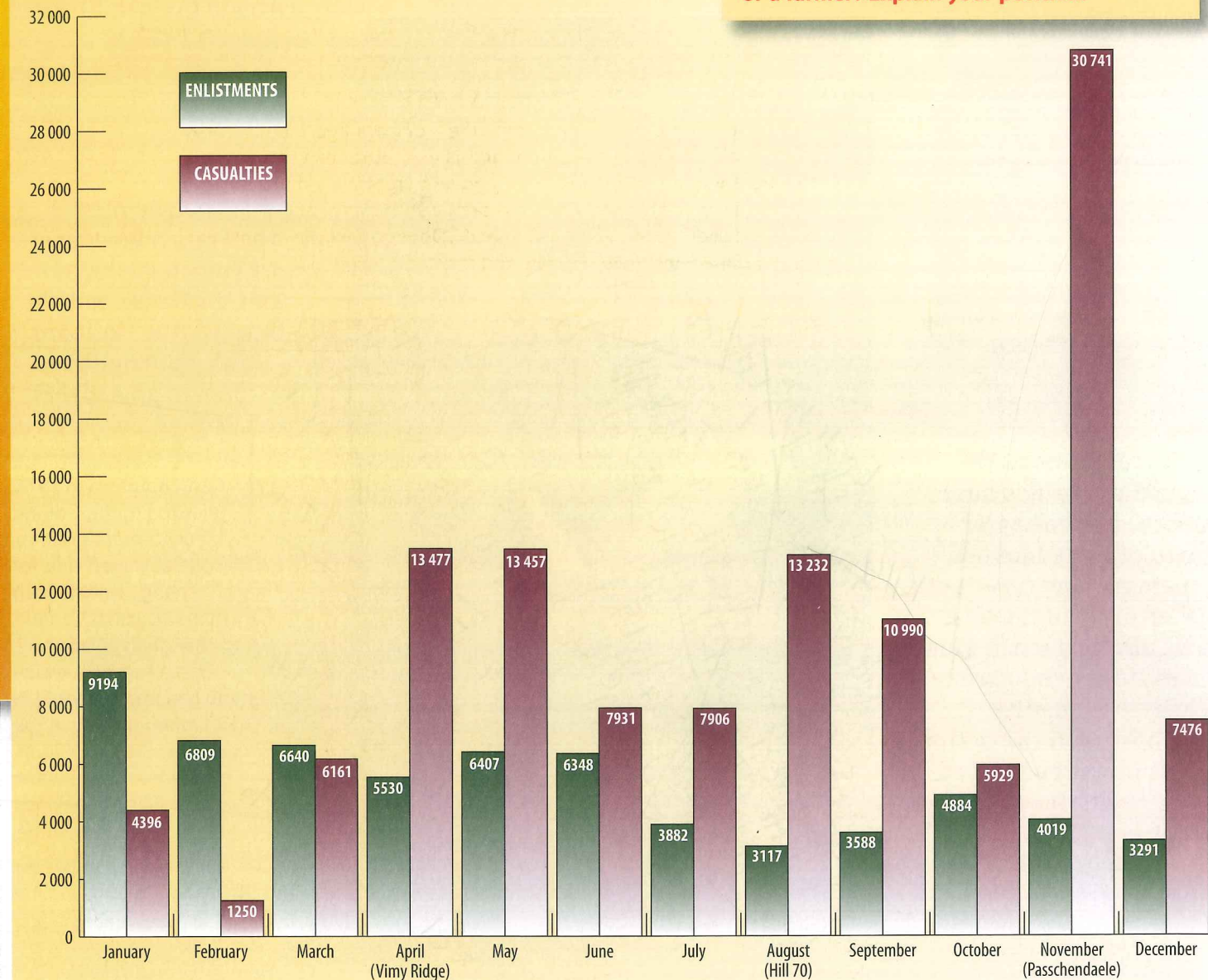
— Henri Bourassa in 1915, referring to the Ontario government’s refusal, despite outraged calls for change from French Canadians all across Canada, to change Regulation 17. This regulation, which Ontario had implemented in 1912, limited the use of the French language in schools, even where there was a large French-speaking population.

As early as 1915, Bourassa had concluded that the war was serving Britain’s imperial interests, not Canada’s interests.

- Read the first sentence. What does Bourassa suggest about French Canadians? How does Bourassa think French Canadians are different from other Canadians?
- Read further in this paragraph. What is Bourassa saying about the role of French Canadians in the war?
- Read the second paragraph. What is Bourassa saying about English Canada?
- What conclusion does Bourassa draw about Canada’s role in the war?

In December 1914, Prime Minister Borden had told the Canadian people that “there has not been, there will not be, compulsion or conscription.” However, by 1916, Canadian forces in Europe needed 75 000 men annually just to replace losses. By 1917, enlistments were so low that the army often sent wounded soldiers back to the front before they had fully recovered from their wounds.

Evidence 1.10



Source: Data from Statistics Canada.

On August 28, 1917, the government reluctantly passed the *Military Service Act*, which allowed conscription of single men between the ages of 20 and 35 if necessary. In November 1917, Borden and a new Union party, made up of the Conservative Party and English-speaking Liberals, won the federal election. On January 1, 1918, the new government began to enforce the *Military Service Act*.

French Canadians in particular opposed conscription, sometimes violently. While the strongest and most violent reaction was in Quebec, there were demonstrations else-

where as well. In June 1918, farmers from across Canada staged a massive protest in Ottawa. They complained that the exemptions from military service given to their sons at the beginning of the war were being taken away—at a time when their sons were desperately needed at home. Labour leaders, too, opposed conscription and considered calling a general strike in protest.

Conscription raised about 120 000 soldiers, of whom 47 000 men went overseas. However, the war ended before most of these men faced combat.

Enlistments versus casualties, 1917.

What would you do if you were prime minister and were faced with these statistics? Assume that you, like Borden and other leaders, believed that the war would go on for a long time yet. What would be your stand if you were a French Canadian or a farmer? Explain your position.

Evidence 1.11

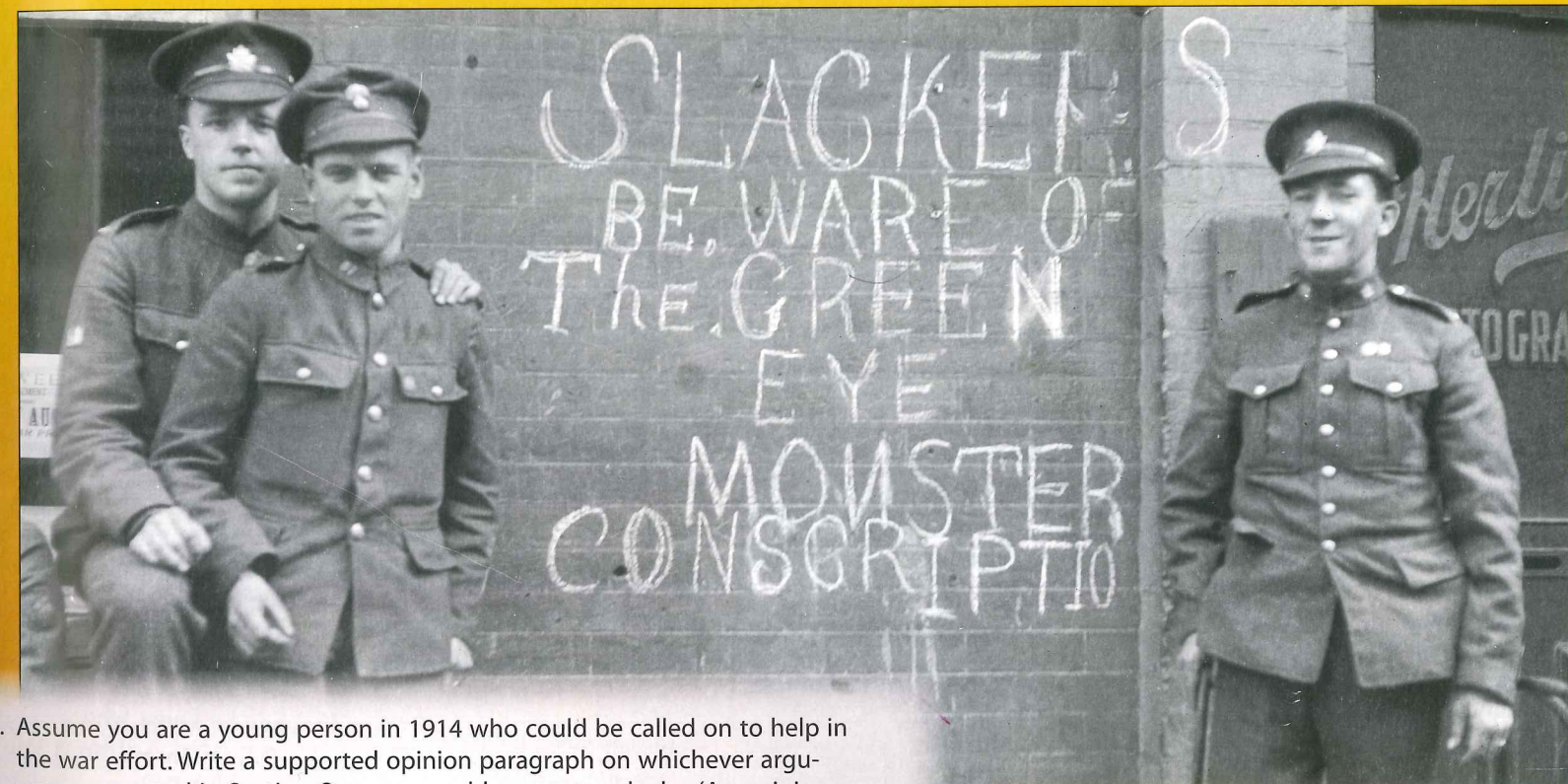
What do these statistics suggest about voluntary enlistments among Canadian-born? How might the evidence explain some French Canadians' reluctance to join the Canadian army?

Source: Adapted from Dr. Serge Durflinger, *Military History: Dispatches: Backgrounders in Canadian Military History* (Ottawa: Canadian War Museum, May 6, 2005).

SOME STATISTICS TO THINK ABOUT

- When war was declared, only 10 percent of the population of Canada was British-born. Yet of the 33 000 troops that went to Britain in October 1914, two-thirds had been born in the British Isles and had immigrated to Canada in the 15 years before 1914.
- By the end of the war in 1918, of English-Canadian volunteers, 70 percent were recent immigrants from Britain.
- One thousand French Canadian volunteers were in the first contingent to go to Britain.
- French Canadians who volunteered for overseas service did not, at the outset of the war, have any regiments of their own. They were scattered throughout the army, serving under English-speaking officers. Instruction manuals were in English. French-Canadian soldiers, no matter how worthy, were generally not promoted to high officer positions. Even after a French regiment was formed, many French volunteers continued to be scattered throughout English-speaking companies.
- In Quebec, most recruitment was carried out by Protestant, often English-speaking, clergy.
- Most Canadian-born men of military age, regardless of language, did not volunteer. Included among these Canadians were farmers; immigrants from European countries other than Britain and France; labourers; and married men. Farmers and labourers argued that they and their families, including service-aged sons, were needed to carry out the work of growing food and manufacturing supplies for the war effort. As well, Doukhobors, Mennonites, and Hutterites, along with many other Canadians, were pacifists and resisted going to war.

Evidence 1.12



1. Assume you are a young person in 1914 who could be called on to help in the war effort. Write a supported opinion paragraph on whichever argument presented in Section One you would support and why. (An opinion paragraph presents a clear opinion or point of view on a topic. Begin with a clear topic sentence, such as whether you would support the war effort in 1914. In the body of the paragraph, provide reasons and evidence, including facts, examples, or quotations to support your opinion. Use key words to persuade the reader of your opinion. End with a concluding sentence.)
2. In small groups of four to six, debate one of the following statements:
 - a) Canada should have provided any support Britain requested (military, supplies, etc.).
 - b) Conscription was the only possible solution to the shortage of voluntary enlistments in 1917.
3. Create two posters, one to represent Borden's position (Evidence 1.5) or Laurier's position (Evidence 1.6) in 1914, and another to represent Bourassa's position in 1915 and 1916 (Evidence 1.8 and 1.9).

AFTER READING

From 1916 on, and especially during the conscription crisis, in English Canada there were often efforts to shame men into enlisting. Here, soldiers stand by a sign denouncing men who did not sign up for the war. Members of the women's organization Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire (IODE) and others pinned a white chicken feather on men who were not in the services to expose them as “cowards.”

What impact would this action have on the men who had not enlisted? What would you have done in response, and why?