

### Dates Women Gained Suffrage in Canada

Province	Suffrage (The Vote)	First Woman Elected
Manitoba	January 1916	June 1920
Saskatchewan	March 1916	June 1919
Alberta	April 1916	June 1917
British Columbia	April 1917	June 1918
Ontario	April 1917	August 1943
Nova Scotia	April 1918	June 1960
New Brunswick	April 1919	October 1960
Prince Edward Island	May 1922	May 1970
Newfoundland	April 1925	May 1930
Quebec	April 1940	December 1961
Federal Dominion of Canada	Close relatives of member of armed forces September 1917; all women May 1918	December 1921



### Conscription

One of the greatest crises in Canada during the war occurred in 1917. It centred around the issue of conscription. **Conscription** means that all able-bodied men would be required to join the army. They would have no choice. Enlistment would no longer be on a voluntary basis only.

The war had dragged on much longer than anyone had thought. By 1917, the death toll was mounting and the number of volunteers was dwindling.

Early in 1917, Prime Minister Robert Borden left to visit the Canadian soldiers at the front. Borden was shocked by the information he received. Casualties were mounting daily on the Western Front. Military officials urged Borden to send even more Canadian troops to Europe. In Canada, volunteer enlistments were not keeping up with the number of men killed or wounded. Borden was concerned. The slaughter of men in the war was horrendous, but he became convinced that the war could not be won without more rein-

### Dates Women Gained Suffrage in Other Parts of the World

New Zealand	1892
Australia	1902
Finland	1906
Norway	1913
Denmark	1915
Britain	1918
Netherlands	1919
Germany	1919
United States	1920
Sweden	1921
Turkey	1934
Brazil	1946
France	1946
Switzerland	1971
Liechtenstein	1986

forcements. He returned home and solemnly asked Parliament to pass a conscription bill.

### A Country Divided

The mention of conscription brought a storm of protest in some parts of Canada, especially among French Canadians. Many English Canadians believed that Quebec was not doing its part in the war. English-Canadian newspapers pointed out that Ontario had provided 63 per cent of the volunteers in proportion to its population. Manitoba and Saskatchewan provided 81 per cent, Alberta 92 per cent, British Columbia 104 per cent, and the Maritime provinces 38 per cent. Quebec had provided only 20 per cent of the volunteers in proportion to its population.

Why were there fewer volunteers from Quebec? The majority of Quebecers were farmers, many with large families. Fewer farmers than city people joined the Armed Forces since farmers were considered essential to produce food for the war effort. But most French Canadians also did not

### Enlistment/Casualty Rate for 1917

Month	Enlistments	Casualties
January	9 194	4 396
March	6 640	6 161
May	6 407	13 457
July	3 882	7 906
September	3 588	10 990
November	4 019	30 741

share the enthusiasm that English Canadians felt for Britain's war. They did not believe that their sons should be forced to join the war. Many also did not feel any real tie to their country of origin, France. They felt they had been deserted by France when they were conquered by British forces in 1760. French language rights had been taken away in Manitoba and other western provinces, and in Ontario schools. French Canadians felt they were being treated like second-class citizens in Canada.

Sir Sam Hughes, as Minister of Militia, had stirred further protest in Quebec when he appointed a Protestant clergyman to supervise recruiting in that province. Quebecers were mostly Roman Catholics. Training programs for French-Canadian volunteers were also in English, even though the men often did not speak the language.

Very few French-Canadian officers received important army posts. Only one French-Canadian regiment—the 22nd, the famous “Vandoos”—had been sent to the Western Front to fight. It seemed to many French Canadians that Hughes's policies had done little to encourage their greater participation in the war. Eventually, Hughes was dismissed by Borden, but not before he caused long-term resentment in Quebec.

The opposition to conscription in Quebec was led by Henri Bourassa.

Bourassa summarized his position in a pamphlet published on 4 July 1917.

*We are opposed to further enlistments for the war in Europe, whether by conscription or otherwise, for the following reasons:*

- *Canada has already made a military display, in men and money, proportionately superior to that of any nation engaged in the war*
- *any further weakening of the [labour force] of the country would seriously handicap agricultural production and other essential industries*
- *an increase in the war budget of Canada spells national bankruptcy*
- *it threatens the economic life of the nation and, eventually, its political independence*
- *conscription means national disunion and strife, and would thereby hurt the cause of the Allies to a much greater extent than the addition of a few thousand soldiers to their fighting forces could bring them help and comfort.*

**Conscription brought a storm of protest in Quebec.**







## SPOTLIGHT ON...

### Robert Borden



In January 1916, Canada's Prime Minister, Robert Borden, wrote in a letter to the British government:

*It can hardly be expected that we shall put 400 000 or 500 000 men in the field and willingly accept the position of having no more voice and receiving no more consideration than if we were toy automata.*

Borden never sent the letter, but it expressed one of his deepest convictions. Borden was an imperialist, but he was determined that Canada should have an independent position within the Empire. Canada's great sacrifice during the war only increased his determination. During the nine years he was prime minister, Canada won greater independence from Britain and gained international recognition for its achievements in the war.

Borden was prime minister of Canada during very trying times. The challenges of leading Canada through World War I were immense. Borden did not have the flare and charisma of some other prime ministers, but he was hard-working, methodical, and steadfast. As a young man in Nova Scotia, he had had to work hard to get an education first as a teacher and then as a lawyer. In 1896 he joined the Conservative party and helped to rebuild it after years of disarray following the death of John A. Macdonald. In 1911, Borden defeated Laurier in the federal election. After just three years in office, he was plunged into World War I.

Under Borden's leadership, Canada raised, trained, and equipped a large fighting force during the war. The country's businesses, industries, agriculture, and transportation were all reorganized to support the war effort. New measures were introduced to finance the war. On the international front, Borden persistently insisted that Canada

should have a greater voice in the way the war was waged. He was sometimes appalled at the senseless slaughter of soldiers and the incompetence of the British generals. After Passchendaele, he bluntly told Britain's prime minister, "... if there is ever a repetition of the battle of Passchendaele, not a Canadian soldier will leave the

shores of Canada as long as the Canadian people entrust the government of Canada to my hands."

In 1917, Borden's persistence paid off. Canada and the other dominions of the Empire were represented at the Imperial War Conference. Britain was finally recognizing that it could not ask for yet more soldiers without at least consulting the dominions. At the conference, Borden played a major role in drafting a resolution that promised the dominions autonomy (complete control over their own affairs) after the war and an "adequate voice" in Empire foreign policy. At the Paris Peace Conference after the war, Borden ensured Canada had a voice independent from Britain.

But Borden's leadership was not without crisis and controversy. He faced a country that was bitterly divided when he introduced conscription in 1917. His government interned "enemy aliens" and with the Wartime Elections Act, unjustly took away the vote from conscientious objectors and all those born in an enemy country. Finally, exhausted from the war and with failing health, Borden resigned as prime minister in 1920.

1. How did Borden contribute to Canada's growing sense of identity during World War I?
2. Would you consider Robert Borden a "great" Canadian prime minister? Justify your answer.

More moderate French-Canadian opinion was represented by Sir Wilfrid Laurier, the leader of the federal Liberal party and former prime minister. Laurier had struggled all his life to keep Canada united. He did not support conscription. He realized it was an issue that could tear the country apart. Laurier was disillusioned when 22 Liberals from Ontario, the West, and the Maritimes voted with the government for the conscription bill. Only the Liberals in Quebec and a handful of English-speaking Liberals stood with Laurier against conscription.

Borden also knew that conscription was a dangerous policy. It could divide French and English Canadians. Farmers would also protest the loss of their remaining sons and farm hands. Still, Borden felt the shortage of troops was so severe that he had no other choice. The **Military Service Bill** was passed in the summer of 1917. The bill made conscription a law. Military service became compulsory for all males between the ages of 20 and 45. Only men in vital wartime production jobs, those who were sick, or conscientious objectors (those for whom fighting was against their religious or other beliefs) did not have to join the Forces.

### The Election of 1917

With a general election coming in December 1917, the government passed two further bills. They were both meant to strengthen Borden's position on conscription. The **Military Voters Act** allowed soldiers overseas to vote. More important was the Wartime Elections Act. It gave the vote to female relatives of soldiers. These women could be expected to vote for conscription and a government that promised to support their loved ones overseas. The **Wartime Elections Act** also took away the vote from people born in enemy countries or who

spoke the language of an enemy country, and conscientious objectors.

The election of 1917 was particularly bitter. Conservatives and Liberals who believed in conscription formed a **Union government**. Voters were asked by the Union government: "Who would the Germans vote for?" Laurier and his followers were accused of letting down the soldiers at the front. The election results saw Borden and the Union government returned with an overwhelming majority, but with only three seats in Quebec.

The split in Canada that Laurier had feared for so long had occurred. There were riots in Montreal and Quebec City against conscription. Four people were killed and many were injured. Troops had to be sent in with machine guns to restore order.

Emotions among other Canadians also ran high. Many people saw support of the war effort as a moral duty. They felt justified in putting down others who did not fulfil this duty. Conscription and the dire need for men overseas hardened these attitudes. Men who had not signed up to fight overseas were seen as "slackers." One woman admitted:

*When you had your own there voluntarily, you hated all those others sitting around having a nice time while yours were being killed. You didn't like them. You'd no respect for them. But I was never one of those or approved of going around handing out white feathers. Do you know that some women did? ... They actually went to men on the street whom they knew, or if they didn't know them—strong working men—and handed them a white feather.*

The white feather was a symbol of cowardice.