

Social Studies 10

Unit 7 Readings

Canada 1885-1911: Into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Pages 1-23

with the words "Riel, our brother, is dead, victim of his devotion to the cause of the Métis of whom he was leader, victim of fanaticism and treason." Jeers and shouts of anger filled the air as speaker after speaker attacked Sir John A. Macdonald and his government. The hanging of Riel produced conflicts and tensions that would trouble Canadian unity for many years to come.

1. Why was Louis Riel hanged after the Rebellion of 1885? How was the hanging viewed in Quebec? in Ontario?
2. Do you believe that Riel's execution was just? Give reasons to support your position.

## **Towards the Twentieth Century**

The two decades from 1885 to 1905 saw still more changes in western Canada. Three developments dominated those years: the settlement of the West, the Klondike Gold Rush, and the creation of two new provinces, Alberta and Saskatchewan.

### **Settlement of the West**

The completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway made large-scale settlement of the West possible. The potential for wheat farming on the fertile Prairie lands had been recognized for some time. However, the lack of an effective means of shipping the grain to markets had kept agricultural settlement to a minimum in the years before the railway.

The CPR owned vast areas of the Prairies. It started immediately to sell many of these lands, making them available to settlers at a cost of \$6.25 per hectare. Half the purchase price was to be refunded for every hectare cleared and ploughed. It was in the company's interest to see these lands become working farms. With its twenty year monopoly, the CPR stood to profit from the shipment of grain eastward from the farms and from the transportation of supplies and people westward to the farming communities.

The CPR advertised Prairie farmland heavily in both eastern Canada and Europe. Special steamship and rail fares were introduced to lure settlers to Canada's West. In 1891, a bumper wheat crop ripening on the Prairies created a huge demand for farm workers. Thousands of young men and women took advantage of the railway's offer of a special fifteen dollar one-way fare from any place in Ontario. The "Harvest Specials" ran each fall from 1891

until the early 1920s. Many of those who rode on the wooden seats of the Harvest Specials' coaches stayed in the West. Others returned to tell their friends and neighbors of the opportunities the West presented.

The population of western Canada grew steadily after the CPR was completed. In 1881, there were 118 706 people living in the North West and the two western provinces, British Columbia and Manitoba. A decade later, the population had more than doubled to exceed 250 000.

In 1896, the Liberal Party, led by Sir Wilfrid Laurier, came to power. Laurier had campaigned on a platform that emphasized increased immigration and expanded settlement of the West. Laurier named Clifford Sifton, a Manitoban, to be Canada's Minister of Immigration. Sifton was committed to building a strong and independent Canadian economy within North America. He believed that Canada needed a larger population to develop industries and find markets for its products. Immigration was a key part of Sifton's development policy for Canada.

In his mind, bringing settlers to the West was linked to a national transportation policy, greater use of Canada's rich natural resources and development of manufacturing industries. Sifton stated his views in a speech made in 1896: "The place to which our merchants and manufacturers of eastern Canada must look for enlarged markets is Manitoba and the North West Territories. There will be no markets until we have the population." He set out boldly to bring that population to western Canada.

Sifton believed that the best possible immigrants for western Canada were hardy peasant farmers. These men and women were more likely to be able to endure the harsh conditions and humble circumstances of pioneer life. Sifton offered the following description of the ideal immigrant: "I think a stalwart peasant in a sheepskin coat, born on the soil, whose forefathers have been farmers for generations, with a stout wife and a half-dozen children, is good quality." Many of these settlers came from dryland regions of central and eastern Europe, where conditions are similar to those of the Canadian Prairies.

Such people, Sifton argued, would bring Canada the best possible return on its investment, year after year. He began a major advertising campaign in Europe, Britain and the United States. The Canadian government offered 160 acres [65 ha] of free land on the Prairies to would-be immigrants, and promised to pay their passage to Canada.



*Advertisements such as this were used throughout Europe to attract settlers to western Canada. Do you think the image of western Canada shown by the poster was realistic? Explain your answer.*

Sifton's views angered many English Canadians. They regarded his "peasants in sheepskin coats" with suspicion at best, more often with undisguised hostility. They regarded the ideal immigrant as being of "the right class of British immigrant from the Old Land." A prominent Conservative politician rebuked Sifton saying: "The quality of population counts much more than the quantity. Five thousand first-class immigrants are much better than 50 000 of a class that it would take a generation or two to bring up to the right standard." Fortunately for Canada, Sifton's views prevailed.

Clifford Sifton was Minister of Immigration from 1896 to 1905. In those years, the population of western Canada grew from 300 000 people to more than one million. Soon there were thousands of family grain farms in Manitoba and the North West Territories. By 1905, western Canadian farmers were producing more than 2 million tonnes of wheat each year. Sifton could say proudly "the world's bread basket is western Canada."

Sifton's immigration policies added a new dimension to the population of Canada. Drawn by the promise of free land and increased opportunities, hundreds of thousands of European immigrants—Germans, Poles, Ukrainians and Scandinavians—came to Canada. A Winnipeg clergyman and political leader, J.S. Woodsworth, recognized both the promise and the problems of such immigration. In "Strangers at our Gate," an anti-immigration pamphlet written in 1909, he noted:

Within the past decade, a nation has been born. English and Russians, French and Germans, Austrians and Italians, Japanese and Hindus—a mixed multitude, they are being dumped into Canada by a kind of endless chain. They sort themselves out after a fashion, and each seeks to find a corner somewhere. But how shall we weld this heterogeneous mass into one people? This is our problem.

1. What development made large-scale settlement of the West possible? How did this settlement change the Prairie landscape?
2. (a) Why did Clifford Sifton advocate large-scale immigration and settlement of the West? Do you think his position was a wise one? Why?  
(b) What would Canada be like today if a more restricted immigration policy had been followed? Would this be a good or bad thing? Why?

3. Who did Sifton feel would make the best settlers for western Canada? Why did he feel this way? Why did some people disagree with him?
4. What did the federal government do to attract settlers to the West during the 1890s? What did the CPR do? Why?

## The Klondike Gold Rush

Mineral exploration was being carried out all over Canada in the late 1890s. Gold, silver and metals for industrial use were being mined in British Columbia and on the Canadian Shield. Other prospectors were pushing northward into the areas along the Klondike and Yukon rivers. One day, in 1896, a prospector named Robert Henderson told his friends: "Go to Bonanza Creek, boys. You're sure to find gold there."

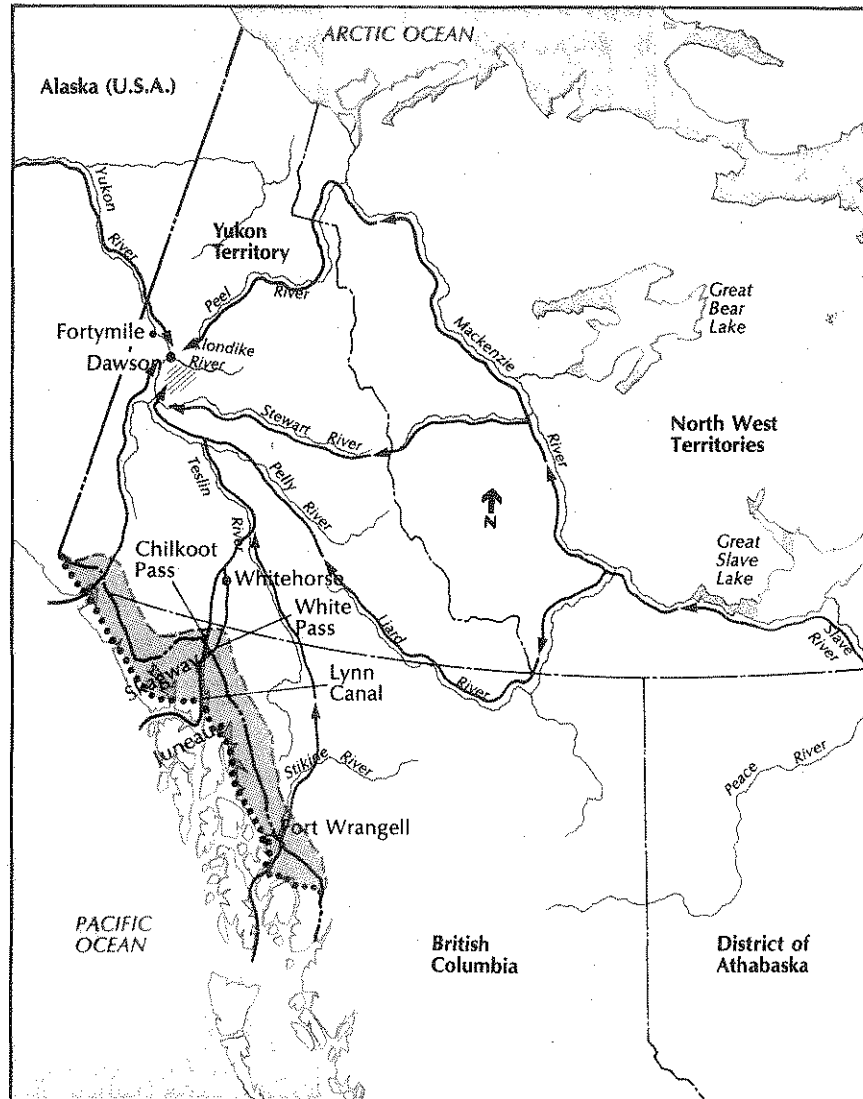
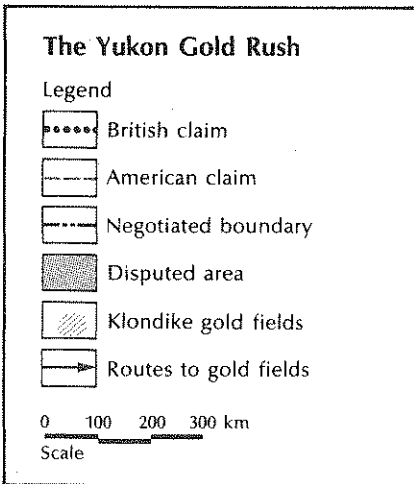
George Washington Carmack and two Native companions, Tagish Charlie and Skookum Jim, took Henderson's advice and began panning for gold in the creek. On August 17, 1896, they struck paydirt: a single shovelful of gravel yielded ten dollars worth of gold. Henderson had been right. There was gold along the Klondike.

News of the Bonanza Creek discovery soon spread, carried by newspapers in New York, Toronto, London and San Francisco. Thousands of men and women read the stories of the riches to be found in the Yukon. They travelled by train or ship to Vancouver, Victoria, Seattle or Edmonton, jumping off points for the Klondike Gold Rush. In these cities, the would-be prospectors loaded up with supplies, then began the long journey north. A few travelled overland from Edmonton, but most sailed to Alaska. Life aboard ship was rough and dangerous. Many of the gold seekers were seasick. Some gambled away all of their money and supplies during the voyage. Others never reached the north at all; their ships were lost on the stormy seas of the North Pacific.

Those Klondike-bound prospectors who survived the voyage came ashore at Skagway, Alaska, a lawless, violent frontier town. From there, the gold seekers set out on foot over the steep Chilkoot Pass into Canada. They stopped on the shores of Lake Bennett to build boats, which they used to travel north along the lake. Then they followed the Yukon River north of Dawson where the richest gold fields had been discovered.

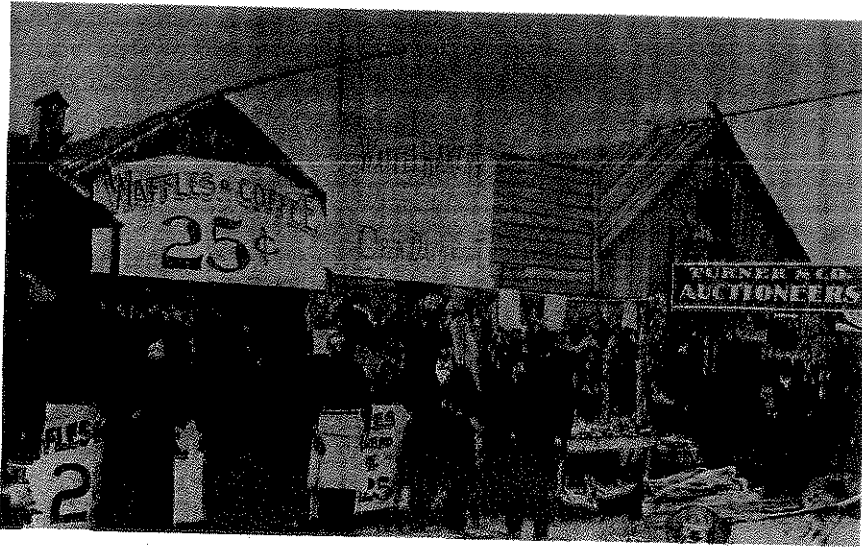
Tens of thousands of miners made the difficult trip north to Dawson. By 1900, the gold rush had made Dawson the largest town

The shortest routes to the gold fields involved crossing the Alaska Panhandle, an area whose boundaries were in dispute. Alternate routes involved long, hard journeys up wild northern rivers.



in Canada west of Winnipeg. The town's population grew as a steady stream of people arrived by sternwheelers travelling along the Yukon River. They brought not only miners but gamblers, tourists, thieves, journalists, dance-hall girls and merchants. All of them were seeking to profit from the gold rush.

The sudden arrival of thousands of people in the region caused concern in Ottawa. The Canadian government had received reports of the lawless conditions in Skagway, and officials were also con-



*While miners worked getting gold from the streams and rock, others worked getting gold from the miners' pockets. This is a street in Dawson at the height of the gold rush.*

cerned about the large number of American miners pouring into the Klondike. A detachment of Mounted Police officers, among them Sam Steele, was sent there to maintain law and order. In 1898, the western section of the North West Territories was officially incorporated as the Yukon Territory, with its capital at Dawson. From this location, the Mounted Police could patrol the area more effectively.

#### ALASKA BOUNDARY DISPUTE

When the United States bought Alaska from Russia in 1867, it acquired a "panhandle" of territory extending as far south as 54°40' (see the map on page 216). A long-standing dispute between Canada and the U.S. over this region came to a head during the Klondike Gold Rush. The U.S. claimed the entire coastline of the panhandle, which is deeply cut by long fiords. Canada demanded control over the heads of certain fiords, especially the Lynn Canal, which gave access to the Yukon. Negotiations through the Joint High Commission of 1898-1899 failed to resolve the dispute.

The matter was then referred to an international tribunal composed of three American judges, two Canadian judges, and Lord Alverstone, Lord Chief Justice of Britain. Alverstone sided with the Americans, supporting their claim to a boundary line lying behind the heads of the fiords. The result was a wave of angry anti-British and anti-American sentiments in Canada. Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier asserted that Canada's lack of treaty-making power, as the Dominion was still technically a British colony in international matters, made it difficult for the country to assert itself in international disputes.

The boom of the gold rush ended a few years later. Some of the miners had made great fortunes along the Klondike. One young man made \$40 000 during one winter's digging, 10 percent of which was collected by the NWMP for payments of royalties to the federal government. Many others left the Yukon with just what they had when they arrived. Dawson became little more than a ghost town, but the Klondike Gold Rush had left its mark on the history of Canada.

## Alberta and Saskatchewan Become Provinces

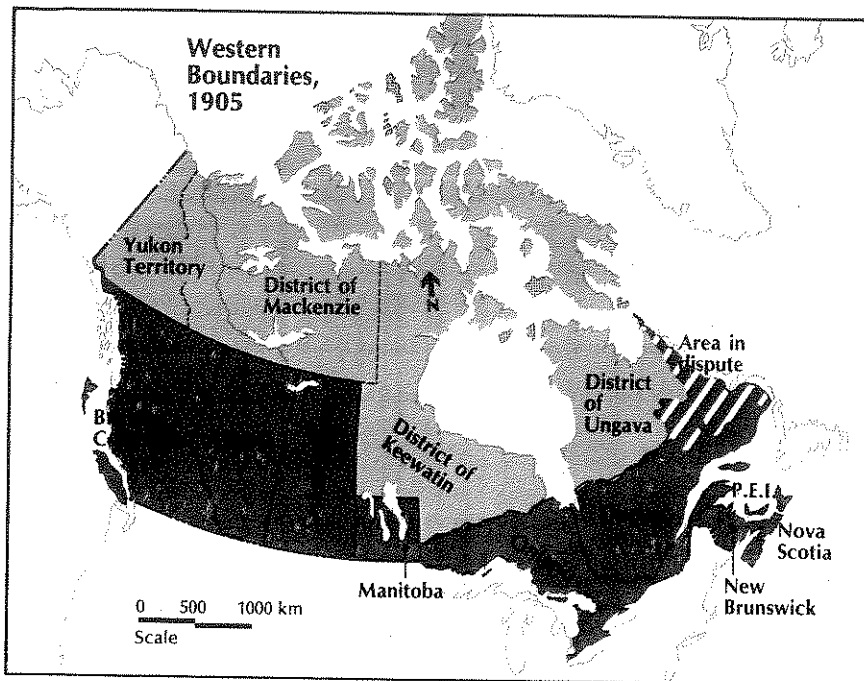
Population growth and plentiful harvest brought prosperity to Canada's West during the opening years of the twentieth century. Where great herds of buffalo had roamed thirty years earlier, there was now a checkerboard pattern of grain farms. Small towns and villages marked by tall grain elevators could be seen at regular intervals along the railway lines. A network of roads and rail lines linked these small farming communities to fast growing cities such as Calgary, Edmonton and Regina.

In the large cities and small towns of the North West Territories, citizens were beginning to seek a greater say in how they were governed. Responsible government had been granted to the North West Territories in 1891, but the Territories' budget was still controlled by Ottawa until 1897. In 1905, the federal government decided that the people living between Manitoba and British Columbia were ready for their own provincial governments. The acts that created these new governments were set by the federal government without any negotiation with the people of the region.

On September 1, 1905, two new provinces were added to Confederation. The North West Territories south of the sixtieth parallel was divided into two sections. The western province was named Alberta, after Queen Victoria's husband Prince Albert. The eastern part of the territory became the province of Saskatchewan a name taken from the Cree word for "swift-flowing." The sparsely settled area north of the sixtieth parallel remained known as the Northwest Territories. It was governed directly from Ottawa until the establishment of a territorial capital at Yellowknife in 1967.

There had been little opposition to the two Prairie provinces' entry into Confederation. The West was booming. Its farms were prosperous and more settlers were arriving each day. The railway





*By 1905, the boundaries of the three western provinces were established. The boundaries of Manitoba were extended in 1881 and 1884 and finally set along their present lines in 1912.*

had been built, and mail service and telegraph lines linked the Prairies to all parts of Canada. The people of Alberta and Saskatchewan were proud of their new provincial status.

Three controversial issues, however, marked the entry of the two new provinces into Confederation.

One issue involved the location of the boundaries and capital cities which had been decided by the government in Ottawa. Albertans wanted their eastern boundary at 110° west longitude, but had to accept 107°. Within Alberta, rivalry developed between Calgary and Edmonton over which was to be the capital city. The dispute was settled in favor of Edmonton. Regina, previously capital of the North West Territories, became Saskatchewan's capital.

The second issue was the question of separate schools for Catholics. The Conservatives had greatly angered many English- and French-speaking Catholics over their handling of the Manitoba schools question a few years earlier. Now, the Liberals, led by Sir Wilfrid Laurier, would take steps to ensure that a separate Catholic school system would exist in each of the new provinces. This action upset some of Laurier's Protestant cabinet ministers, among them Clifford Sifton. When Sir Wilfrid Laurier took part in the ceremonies in Edmonton on September 1, 1905, marking that province's

birth, Sifton was not there. The man who had played such a big part in bringing settlers to the West had resigned as minister of immigration over the separate schools issue.

The third and most enduring controversy arose from the federal government's retention of control over crown lands and mineral resources. Twenty-five years would pass before these responsibilities were transferred to Alberta and Saskatchewan. In the 1970s and early 1980s, federal-provincial conflicts over control of energy resources brought back bitter memories of this controversy.

1. Describe the political process used by the federal government in the creation of the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan.

## Summary

The Prairie region of Canada changed dramatically between 1871 and 1905. The Canadian government created the North West Mounted Police in 1873 because of fears that American westward expansion might spill over into the Prairies. One of the NWMP's first duties was to keep out American whisky traders. The force also helped to negotiate treaties with the Native peoples of the Prairies during the 1870s. These treaties were intended to prevent the bloody conflicts between Native peoples and settlers that were taking place in the United States. The treaties resulted in the creation of reserves for Native peoples, ending their nomadic, hunting way of life forever and making them dependent on the government for support.

Construction of a transcontinental railway was one of the conditions on which British Columbia entered Confederation in 1871. The railway was to be completed in ten years. However, because of political and financial problems, the last spike of the Canadian Pacific Railway was not driven until 1885. The construction of the Canadian Shield and Western Cordillera portions of the railway proved to be enormously difficult and expensive.

The coming of the railway greatly altered the West. Faced with the loss of their traditional ways of life, the Native peoples and Métis rebelled against the Canadian intruders in 1885. Both the NWMP and the CPR played important roles in the suppression of the North West Rebellion, led by Louis Riel. Riel's arrest and subsequent execution deepened the divisions between English- and French-speaking Canadians.

1901 and 1911, while jobs in the forest industry, long stagnant, grew by 150 percent.

Like so much else in Canada, business changed during the boom years. Big companies hired professional managers and talked of "scientific" approaches to industrial problems, whether labour conflicts or quality control. Canada had looked to Britain for ideas and capital during the nineteenth century. Now, more businesses began to look to the United States for both.

Prosperity won Laurier re-election in 1900 and a larger majority in 1904. "Let me tell you, my fellow Canadians," he addressed a packed Toronto audience, "that all signs point this way, that the Twentieth Century shall be the century of Canada and of Canadian development. For the next seventy-five years, nay for the next hundred years, Canada shall be the star towards which all men who love progress and freedom shall come."

## QUESTIONS

1. (a) How did Canada's fortunes change after 1896?  
(b) Why did these changes occur?
2. Why did immigration to Canada increase so rapidly after 1896?
3. How did prairie settlers support industry in British Columbia?
4. What was the significance of the growth of hydroelectric power in the early 1900's?

## What Kind of Canada?

In 1920, a Manitoba author described Canada as a "mosaic". She meant that a great many different people can make a beautiful whole without losing their differences. Today, we call her idea "multiculturalism". As



"One hundred and sixty acres of free land for all settlers" is the message on this Department of Immigration poster, written in Ukrainian. About 170 000 Ukrainians settled in Canada between 1891 and 1914. Why did they choose Canada?



*"Galicians" is what the Department of Immigration photographer called these people, since the Ukraine was not recognized by either the Austrian or the Russian Empire—or, therefore, Ottawa. Such people could expect a thin welcome from more established Canadians. Was Sir Clifford Sifton right? Would they succeed?*

you will see in a later chapter, the concept of multiculturalism is enshrined in the Constitution of Canada.

Laurier's generation, however, did not see Canada in the same light. In 1901, more than 90 percent of all Canadians were of either British or French ancestry. Confederation had already been torn by conflicts between francophones and anglophones, Protestants and Roman Catholics. Now, hundreds of thousands of immigrants poured into the cities and "The Last Best West". Most Canadians wanted immigration; newcomers became producers, consumers, and workers at such arduous tasks as building railways, mining, and tree-felling. But Canadians also worried about adjusting to people with unfamiliar languages and cultures. They wanted newcomers to have the same background as themselves, if possible. If not, they wanted immigrants to adapt to the dominant culture. "If we do not Canadianize and Christianize the newcomer," warned the *Canadian Courier*, "he will make us foreigners and heathens on our own soil and under our own flag."

Clifford Sifton and his immigration officials agreed; they preferred settlers from the United States, Scotland, Germany, and Scandinavia, because they were most likely to adjust to Canadian ways. However, Sifton also knew that people from what we now call the Ukraine had the special experience needed to farm the prairie drylands. When he was later accused of bringing "quantity", not "quality", to Canada, Sifton responded with his most famous lines:

I think a stalwart peasant in a sheepskin coat, born on the soil, whose

forefathers have been farmers for ten generations, with a stout wife and a half-dozen children, is good quality. A Trade Union artisan who will not work more than eight hours a day and will not work that long if he can help it, will not work on a farm at all, and has to be fed by the public when work is slack, is in my opinion quantity and very bad quality.

Sifton's opinion was obviously not flattering to working people, but it was shared by many powerful business leaders. For example, Sir James Dunsmuir, a wealthy British Columbia mine owner, hated unions. He soon found that Chinese immigrants would work longer and harder for lower wages than other miners. Instead of trying to organize them, the unions wanted to drive the Chinese workers out. Dunsmuir did not care who dug his mines as long as no-one questioned his authority and the profits rolled in. Many employers in the Laurier era agreed.

In fact, Sifton took the longer view. He thought that a single system of "national schools", taught in English, would make loyal Canadians out of all children. In 1905, however, Laurier insisted on creating a dual system of Protestant and Roman Catholic schools in the new provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta. He wished to ensure that francophones would have an equal right to their own educational system. Sifton resigned in protest. Laurier gave way and allowed the single system.

Whatever he might say about "quality", Sifton's policies were not welcomed by most Canadians. *Canadiens*, in particular, protested that immigration would make them an even smaller minority in Canada. Few of the new immigrants came from France, and most non-anglo-phone immigrants were assimilated into the English language community. Liberal Member of Parliament Henri Bourassa bitterly denounced his former friends for trying to "drown" *Canadiens*. His supporter, the Québec politician Armand Lavergne, stated the *Canadien* view as follows:

In constituting the French Canadian, who has lived in the country since its discovery, the equal in rights and privileges to the Doukhorbor or the Galician who has just disembarked, we have opened a gulf between the Eastern and Western sections of Canada, a gulf that nothing will ever be able to close.

One point on which Canadians were almost unanimous was that Canada must be a "white man's country". Native people were pointedly overlooked in this view of Canada. At the time, poverty and sickness seemed to promise an end to Canada's original people. Few Canadians seemed concerned. In addition, Sifton's officials discouraged Black Americans from joining the thousands of American farmers who moved north to the Canadian Prairies. The race issue was most bitter in British Columbia, and focused on the immigration of Asians. The battle lines were drawn between employers who wanted cheap labour, and workers who feared that Asian immigrants would throw them out of work. The workers got plenty of support from other British Columbians. The federal government's failure to exclude Chinese,

*Discrimination against Chinese and Japanese immigrants took a violent turn in 1907, with the anti-Asiatic riots. Canadians from Asia were denied the right to vote, and were not allowed to teach, work in the civil service, or practise many professions until the 1950's.*



Japanese, and East Indian immigrants became one of British Columbia's most bitter grievances against Ottawa.

Why did Laurier not respond to the trade unionists, politicians, and leaders of the Vancouver-based Asiatic Exclusion League? The matter was complex. East Indians, who worked mainly in the sawmills, were fellow citizens of the British Empire. Japan, a growing military and naval power, was Britain's most powerful ally in the Pacific. Chinese immigrants were sponsored by the most powerful employers in B.C., and Laurier did not wish to antagonize big business.

On September 7, 1907, matters came to a head when 30 000 people gathered in Vancouver at an overflow meeting of the Asiatic Exclusion League. Inflamed by angry speeches, mobs spilled out of the meeting and raced through the Chinese section of town, smashing and looting. Forewarned, the Japanese immigrants in the neighbouring part of the city armed themselves and held off the gangs, though not before shop windows were smashed.

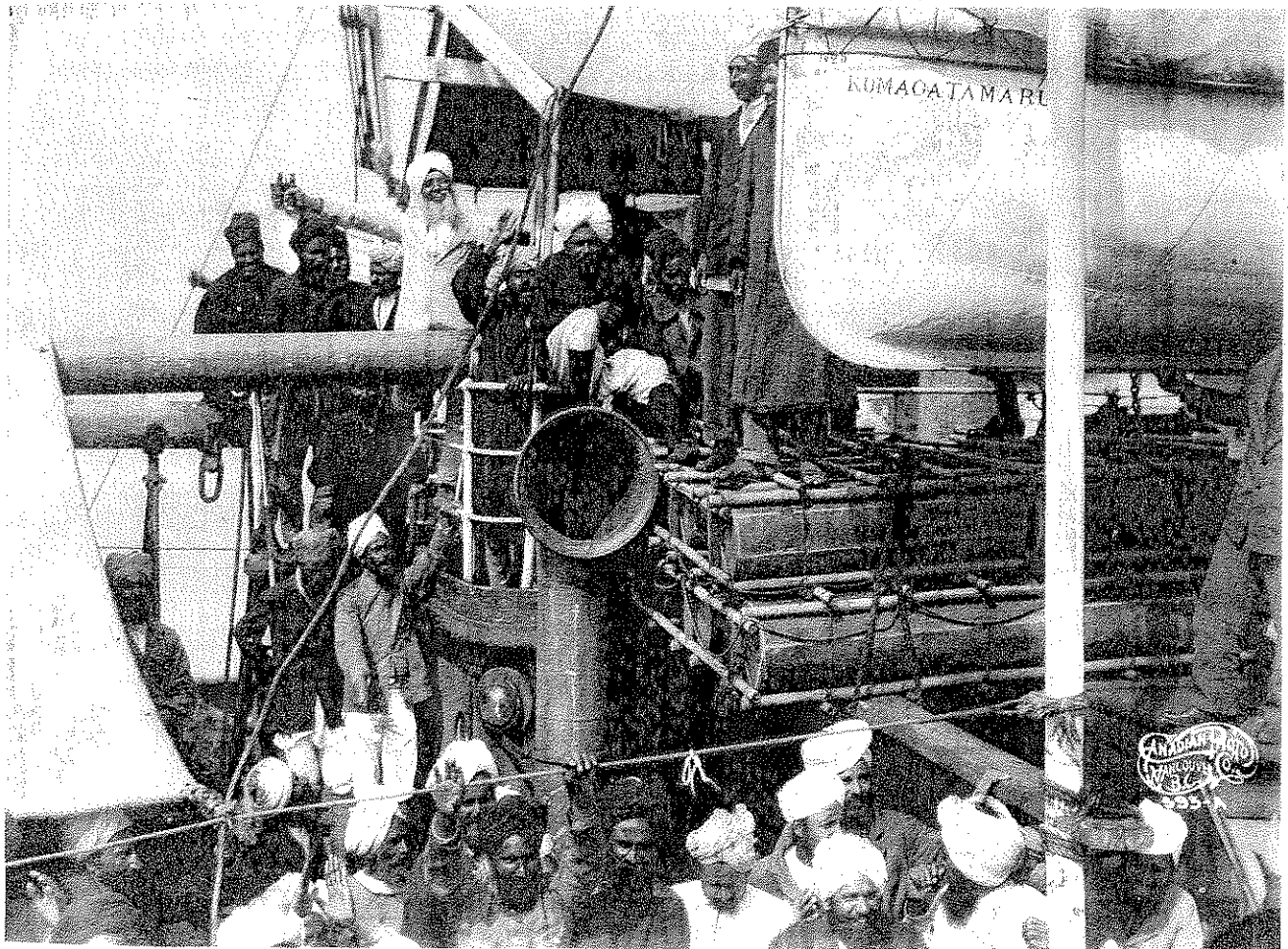
Laurier finally acted. He apologized to the Japanese Emperor for the treatment meted out to the Japanese immigrants, then concluded an agreement virtually to end immigration from Japan. Ottawa also arranged some meagre compensation for the victims of the riot. The incident convinced the transcontinental railway companies that they would get along without Chinese or Japanese workers.

To limit the immigration of East Indians, the government ruled that

immigrants must come to Canada by "continuous passage". Since no shipping line sailed directly between Canada and India, would-be immigrants found it almost impossible to meet the requirement. The same regulation effectively barred immigrants from other "undesirable" locations, such as the southern Mediterranean.

There was little that Asian Canadians or their few sympathizers could do, especially since only whites could vote in British Columbia. Immigration to Canada from Asia slowed to a trickle. Then, in 1914, Sikh nationalists in India's Punjab region decided to test the Canadian law. Nearly 400 Sikhs, many of them veterans of British wars, chartered a Japanese ship, the *Komagata Maru*, and sailed directly from Calcutta to Vancouver. The citizens of Vancouver protested, and Ottawa listened. The *Komagata Maru* swung at anchor for weeks in the hot summer sun. Finally, immigration officials decided to force the ship to return. Their first attempt failed when the Sikhs drove off the Canadian boarding party. Finally, the *Komagata Maru* was escorted out of the harbour by the Canadian cruiser *H.M.C.S. Rainbow*. In 1914, Canada remained a "white man's country".

*Like Canadians, Sikhs were British subjects. In 1914, these Sikhs hired a ship to make a "continuous passage" to Canada, carefully obeying Canada's own Immigration Act. Why, then, were they rejected?*



Although they opposed the vote for women at first, in 1910 they adopted a policy of female suffrage. Many Protestant churches were closely allied with the NCCW and other women's groups in the cause of social reform. One of the main concerns of the churches was declining attendance. Supporters of the "social gospel", including J.S. Woodsworth, insisted that the poor would come to church only when the churches took up the fight for justice and morality.

## QUESTIONS

- (a) Find evidence in this section that life in the Laurier era could be "hard, narrow, and uncomfortable".

(b) Did this description apply equally to men and women? Rural and urban populations? Explain your reasoning.
- During the Laurier era, some women's groups opposed votes for women. What arguments do you think they used? What arguments would pro-suffrage women have used?

## A Nation, an Empire—or Both?

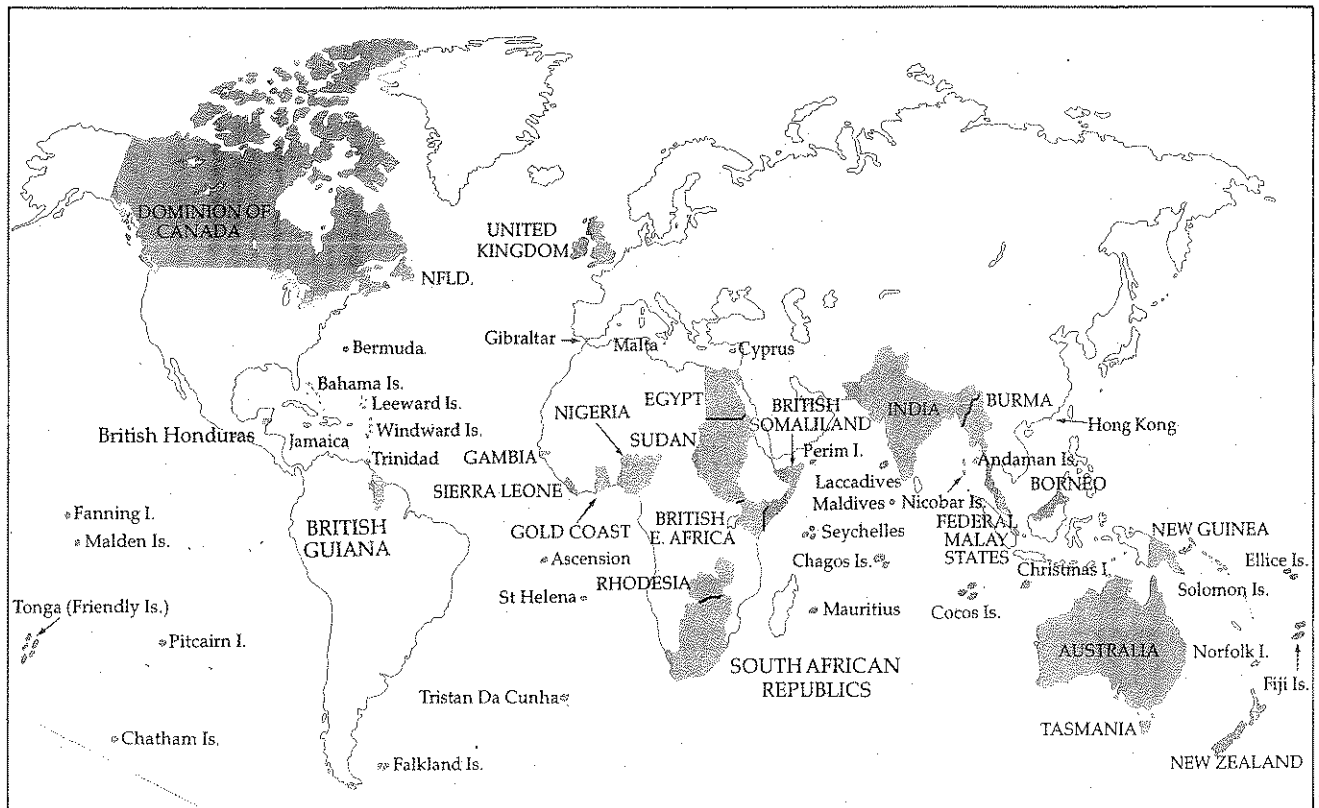
At the turn of the century, the most exciting news in Canadian papers came from Africa, where Britain was battling two small South African republics, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. Britain asked its colonies for assistance. The Canadian and Australian contingents sent in response adapted quickly to the fast-moving guerrilla war. Between 1899 and 1902, 6000 Canadian soldiers and nurses served in Boer War. Of this total, 1800 belonged to official contingents, while the rest were recruited by the British.

*Canadian soldiers in the Boer War. Why is this action recorded by a drawing, not a photograph? Do you think the artist saw the battle?*





FIGURE 1.3 *The British Empire (1900)*



Their deeds gave many Canadians a sense of pride. They also started a long and sometimes bitter debate about Canada's role in the twentieth century world. Over the succeeding decades, such debates would come close to tearing the country apart.

What was Britain's motive for inviting the colonies to send troops to South Africa? No-one doubted that Britain could win the Boer War and avenge its earlier defeat of 1880. What Britain wanted was to impress potentially hostile nations with proof that the Empire was a strong, voluntary alliance. Writers and politicians promised that Canada would show loyalty by deeds, not words. The Laurier government, reluctant at first, surrendered to the pressure and agreed to send volunteers to Cape Town. Once in South Africa, the British would pay for their keep. Parliament need not be called, nor would the decision be considered "a precedent for future action". Canada had responded as Britain wished.

Despite Laurier's words, the emotional loyalty that led Canada to join the Boer War would make that war a precedent for joining two world wars. Many Canadians felt a deep kinship to Britain and loyalty to the Empire. There was, at the time, no Canadian citizenship; Canadians were British subjects. Some Canadians looked forward to the day

*When Laurier visited Britain in 1897, he was acclaimed as a hero. Here, the cartoonist compares his behaviour in 1899, when he did not want Canada to share in a British war. Do you feel this is a fair comment?*



when Canada would become the leading nation in the largest empire the world had ever seen. Sir John A. Macdonald expressed the view of many Canadians when he said that, in negotiations with other countries, Canada enjoyed "the prestige inspired by a consciousness of the fact that behind us towers the majesty of England".

Not all Canadians agreed. Laurier had not wanted to call Parliament to make the decision about the Boer War because he wanted to delay an angry debate. Even some who sympathized with the British wondered why Canadians should be sent to a war that did not endanger Britain, much less Canada. Macdonald himself had refused to send troops to Egypt in 1884 when a similar situation arose. As for *Canadiens*, very few felt any enthusiasm for the country which had conquered Québec in 1760. Their view was that Canada had enough domestic worries without engaging in foreign quarrels. Henri Bourassa, the rising star of *Canadien* nationalism, warned that, in fact, the decision *would* be a precedent. The next time, Canadians might even be conscripted for battles on distant shores.

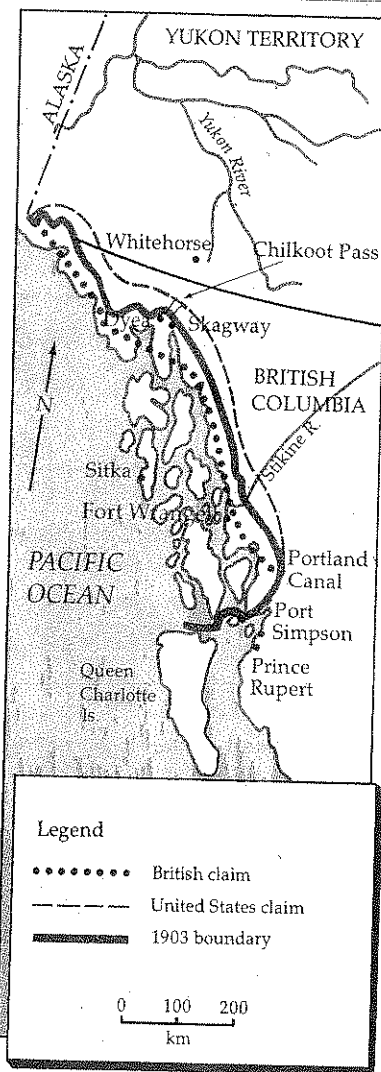
In 1903, a dispute over Canada's boundaries reminded Canadians of their humble place in the Empire and the world. The Alaska Panhandle, a long, narrow strip of land along the Pacific Ocean, had been claimed originally by Britain. A treaty made in 1825 gave it to Russia. When the United States bought Alaska from Russia, they acquired the Panhandle as well. Canadians could therefore reach the Yukon only by crossing American territory, or by enduring a long, arduous overland route. Canada asked a tribunal to rule that the heads of some of the fjords extended into Canadian territory. The British judge on the six-man tribunal sided with the three Americans against the two Canadians.

Canada felt betrayed; was this the reward for helping Britain in South Africa? Laurier criticized the United States, but blamed mainly Britain. He hinted that colonial status might no longer be enough: "The difficulty as I conceive it is that so long as Canada remains a dependency of the British Crown, the present powers that we have are not sufficient for the maintenance of our rights." Why did Britain support the United States? It is true that the Canadian claim was weak, and the case badly prepared. What mattered more was that Britain owed the Americans thanks for their support during the Boer War, in the face of sharp criticism from European countries.

The dispute was soon overshadowed by events in Europe, where the German Empire was becoming a threat to Britain. The German army, the most powerful in the world, presented no direct danger. However, its existence prompted France and the vast Russian Empire to make an alliance. Germany had already found an ally in Austria-Hungary. What alarmed Britain was Germany's sudden decision to build its own fleet and carve out its own colonial empire. Such a rivalry could only bring conflict.

How would Canada respond? "If Britain is at war," Laurier told the House of Commons in 1910, "Canada is at war. There is no distinction."

FIGURE 1.4 *The Alaska Boundary Dispute*



If anything, ties with Britain were even closer in that year than during the Boer War; many immigrants had arrived in Canada during the decade, and most of them were British. Nevertheless, Laurier hoped that Britain (and therefore Canada) would remain neutral in a European war. He knew that one way to avoid the overseas commitment which so alarmed Québec was to take on the full burden of defence at home. In 1905, Canada agreed to replace the British army garrisons which defended the naval bases at Halifax and Esquimalt. Defence spending increased fivefold between 1897 and 1911. Cadet training was introduced into the high schools in many provinces, including Québec.

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## C L O S E - U P

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### A Canadian Navy?

Laurier was a master of compromises. In the early years of the twentieth century, his establishment of a Canadian navy seemed to be the best of them.

To its proponents, a Canadian navy seemed logical and inevitable. Canada's coastline was the second longest in the world. Thousands of Canadian fishing vessels navigated both oceans, an enormous fleet of merchant ships was registered at Canadian ports, and Canadian seamen served around the world. In 1905, Ottawa took over the naval bases at Halifax and Esquimalt from the British—but where were the Canadian warships to defend them? If Canada took over the rest of its own defence, who would protect that long coastline, the fishing vessels, and the merchant fleet? Clearly, Canada needed its own navy.

Opponents of the idea quickly pointed to the fact that the Royal Navy, the most powerful in the world, protected Canada's coasts and shipping at no cost. Moreover, they argued, a tiny colonial navy would be expensive, inefficient, and absurd.

Britain's new naval rivalry with Germany swung the argument in favour of the scheme. New technology—better guns, steel plate, and engines—had transformed naval warfare, and Germany led the world in the production of these items. The British tried to maintain their naval primacy in 1905 by launching the *Dreadnought*, by far the largest and best-armed battleship made till that time. German industrial might was hardly fazed; the Germans built their own dreadnoughts and the arms race continued.

The Royal Navy also responded by strengthening home defences. It started to bring home the warships it had scattered around the world. An Anglo-Japanese alliance in 1902 allowed Britain to cut its fleet in the Pacific. Canada saw the growing

strength of the Japanese navy and the lessened defence of its Pacific shore as a threat. It was suggested that Canada and Australia should band together to form a Pacific fleet.

Laurier saw the idea as having imperialist overtones, and was not enthusiastic. Yet surely it was the right moment to create a Canadian navy to defend both coasts. There would be many advantages. Victoria and Halifax would benefit from increased government business; shipyards would profit from the building of warships; and nationalists and advocates of the navy, who had organized themselves into a Navy League, would be pleased. The idea became so popular that it was actually the Conservative opposition who on March 22, 1909 called for the creation of a Canadian navy. Laurier agreed willingly.

Yet just one year later, when the Liberals introduced the Naval Service Bill, the public mood had utterly changed. One reason was that the naval race between Britain and Germany had suddenly accelerated. British spies had found out that Germany was building four dreadnoughts. The Royal Navy, whose building program had been cut back, would be left far behind. "We want eight and we won't wait" became a popular cry in Britain. Imperialists in Canada insisted that the government send help.

If the ten warships which were to be Canada's naval fleet seemed feeble and unnecessary to imperialists, they were perceived as a menace by *Canadiens*. Henri Bourassa told his followers that, whatever Laurier might be pretending, the warships would launch Canada—and *Canadiens*—into a British war. In September, 1910, Laurier called a by-election in a rural Québec riding. Québec nationalists dressed up as recruiting sergeants and went from door to door, counting young men. The voters got the message, and the Liberals were defeated.

But by then, Canada's navy was afloat. The Royal Navy had sold Canada two cruisers, and loaned some of its finest officers and men to help the new service start at Esquimalt and Halifax. The Conservatives were not pleased. When they came to power, they warned, Canada's navy would be sunk.

## QUESTIONS

1. How did Anglo-German naval rivalry lead to the idea of a Canadian navy?
2. Who originally supported the creation of a Canadian navy? Who eventually opposed it? Why did the plan go sour?
3. Why do you think Laurier chose to take a middle course on the navy issue?

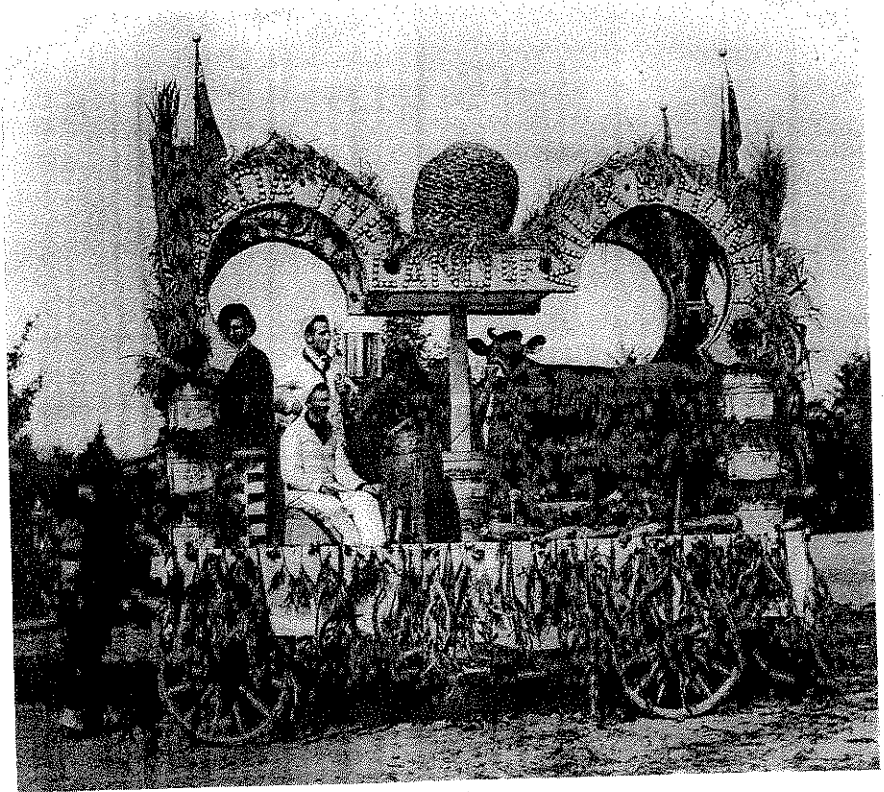
## QUESTIONS

1. Why did "many Canadians (feel) a deep kinship to Britain"?
2. Why did Britain ask for Canada's help in the Boer War?
3. How did *Canadiens* view Canada's involvement in the Boer War?
4. (a) Why do you think there was a Briton on the tribunal which was to decide Canada's Pacific coastline?  
(b) What did his presence say about Canada's sovereignty at that time?

## The End of the Laurier Era

Laurier was not worried about the outcome of the general election which had been called for 1911. It helped that the country was prosperous, and that nearly all civil servants and government contractors owed their positions to patronage. They would do anything in their power to keep the Liberals—and their jobs. Laurier also knew himself to be a powerful factor. Robert Borden, the Conservative leader, was conscientious but lacked Laurier's elegance and charm. Moreover, Laurier had been in power for 15 years, and it was hard to imagine anyone else as Prime Minister.

This float built by workers on an experimental farm advertises Canada's prosperity.



Borden, a lawyer from Nova Scotia, had done his best in the two previous elections, denouncing Liberal patronage and urging new ideas for honest, efficient government. He had, however, been defeated. The main opposition to Laurier came from the provincial premiers. Québec had been Liberal since 1897, but Ontario, formerly a Liberal stronghold, had elected a reform-minded Conservative party in 1905. Manitoba was Conservative, too, as was British Columbia. Each premier found Ottawa a convenient scapegoat for provincial ills. Whatever the problem, whether poor roads or Asian immigrants, the Liberal government got the blame for failing to recognize special provincial needs.

The creation in 1905 of two new provinces, Saskatchewan and Alberta, added to the Liberals' troubles. As in Manitoba, the federal government kept control of the land and mineral resources, so that nothing might interfere with the prairie settlement program. In future years, this would cause strife between the federal and provincial governments. A more immediate problem had to do with Laurier's desire to build guarantees for French and Roman Catholic rights into the constitutions of the new provinces. As a *Canadien*, Laurier saw this as important. To his dismay, his ministers disagreed. As you read earlier, Clifford Sifton resigned, and others threatened to do so. Laurier backed down, leaving Alberta and Saskatchewan free to make their own arrangements about schools and language.

Most of Canada soon forgot the matter, but not Québec. *Canadiens* had received the message that, if they left their province, they would have to accept the language and customs of the majority. "I regret every time I go back to my province," Bourassa wrote, "to find developing that feeling that Canada is not Canada for all Canadians. We are bound to come to the conclusion that Québec is our only country because we have no liberty elsewhere." Moreover, few in French Canada had received much of the benefit of the Laurier boom. Perhaps their sons and daughters only had to go as far as Montréal or Valleyfield to work, instead of New England, but they still had to leave home to make a living. Prosperity had passed rural Québec by. Some *Canadiens* did profit from the boom, but most of the gains went to the anglophone industrialists and investors. It was hard for Bourassa and other Québec nationalists to see what they had gained from having a *Canadien* Prime Minister.

Nor did Laurier's problems end there. On a journey to the Prairies in 1910, he found homesteaders demanding that the Liberals return to free trade. Why, they asked, should Canadian farmers pay high tariffs on farm machinery made in Minneapolis, just across the border, in order to provide work for Ontario labourers and profits for Ontario factory owners? Like most people in those days, Laurier had travelled little; he had not seen the West since before the huge waves of settlement had swept in. This trip convinced him that the West

## Reciprocity

"Reciprocity" refers to the elimination of tariffs by Canada and the United States on goods traded between the two countries. This arrangement, a more limited version of free trade, was favoured by consumers, who would benefit from lower prices on imported goods. It was also supported by businesses which wanted a chance to sell in the large American market. It was opposed by business (and workers) who feared losing customers to stronger competitors from the south.

In 1854, an agreement to end tariffs on many products traded between the United States and Canada led to 12 years of prosperity. The Americans cancelled the agreement when Britain aided the Confederates during the Civil War. Since that time, Canadians have frequently debated whether they would be better off economically under a free trade arrangement with the Americans or under a system of tariff protection. The free trade issue was revived again in the late 1980's, when the Conservative government of Brian Mulroney negotiated a trade deal with the United States.

What connection does the artist make between reciprocity and annexation?

was the new power centre of Canada. Its wishes had to be considered.

The opportunity presented itself in the same year. The new American Congress, elected that year, was full of proponents of free trade. The President, William Taft, also believed there would be no harm in reviving the old reciprocity agreements of 1854 with Canada, since they posed no threat to the largest American industries. Laurier was delighted when the Americans offered to sign an agreement. A leading Conservative later confessed that his heart sank to his boots when he heard of the American offer. Here was the pact that Canada had sought to re-establish for generations, and Laurier had delivered it. The Liberals would remain in power forever.

Both parties had misjudged the public mood. Reciprocity had many enemies. Workers in the branch plants of American companies knew their jobs depended on a tariff wall. Canadian businesses and industries were horrified at the prospect of American competition. Surely, the politicians thought, the farmers had always wanted free trade. Some, however, did not. From British Columbia there came reminders from apple growers as well as sawmill operators that their livelihood, too, was protected by the tariffs. Ranchers and meat packers also feared American imports. Still Laurier remained confident. For much of the summer of 1911 he was in England, defending Canada's interests in the Empire. When he returned, he called an election for September 21.

In Québec, the navy was an election issue, and Québec nationalists broke up a Liberal rally in Montréal. Elsewhere, the Liberals and



Conservatives wrangled over the free trade issue. "No truck nor trade with the Yankees," was the slogan of George Foster, one of Robert Borden's lieutenants. The crowds loved it. The American Senate was showing reluctance to sign the agreement. Americans who favoured the deal added fuel to the anti-reciprocity fire by boasting that it would lead to the Stars and Stripes waving at the North Pole. The Conservatives used such wild talk to embarrass the Liberals. Eighteen wealthy Toronto Liberal supporters abandoned the party over the free trade issue; their action signalled a general movement to the Conservative side by businesses. Suddenly the Conservatives had all the campaign funds they needed. One of their main aims was to break the Liberal hold on Québec. To this end, Conservative money was spent on Henri Bourassa's nationalist newspaper *Le Devoir*.

On election day, the Laurier era ended. In Québec, Laurier's support fell from 54 seats to 38. Borden owed 28 of his Québec seats to Bourassa's fiery editorials in *Le Devoir*. The Conservatives also made a near-sweep of British Columbia, Manitoba, and Ontario. Thus, they needed only four of their Québec seats for a clear majority. For the first time since Confederation, Québec was not a major power in Ottawa.

As so often happens, winning the election proved easier than running the country. Borden wanted the clean, progressive government which he had promised in the campaign; his followers wanted vengeance for years of Liberal power and patronage. All Conservatives, however, agreed on putting an end to the 1910 *Naval Service Act* which had established the tiny Canadian navy. On the next step, there was again furious dissent. Borden and the majority of his party pledged \$35 million, the price of building three dreadnoughts, to Britain. The Québec members opposed any aid at all. In Parliament, the Liberals stalled the Naval Aid Bill endlessly, until, for the first time in Canada, the Conservatives cut off debate with a motion of closure. The bill was passed in the House of Commons but was defeated by the huge Liberal majority in the Senate. The idea of a Naval Aid Bill was quietly dropped, and Canada's fledging navy survived.

As early as three years before the Laurier era ended, the Laurier boom had been slowing down. European investors in Canada were made cautious by the threat of war. Just when the two new transcontinental railways were completed and might have started paying off their debts, the world slid into a new depression. By 1913, thousands of Canadians were once again hunting for work, competing with the immigrants who continued to pour into the country. The winter of 1913-1914 brought more misery than any in over two decades. The Liberals—and perhaps other Canadians—blamed the new government and waited confidently for its early defeat. Borden and his government laboured to solve the problems, but many of their causes were beyond the borders of Canada. As the country sweltered through the unusually long, hot summer of 1914, the main distraction was offered by the news of events in Europe.