How did government war policies affect Canadians?

When war was declared in 1939, Canada immediately sent troops and began shipping goods overseas to help Britain. But at the time, Canada did not have the industrial capacity to wage war. Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King had to put the wheels of industry in motion, and Canadians had to prepare themselves for a long haul.

Up for Discussion

Does waging war entitle a government to take unlimited control of people's lives and businesses?

Central Planning

With Sam Hughes as minister of militia and defence, the Canadian government had stumbled during World War I. King was determined to do things differently this time. His cabinet included C.D. Howe, a former businessperson who knew how to get factories up and running. As minister of munitions and supply, Howe became known as "Minister of Everything," and he handpicked industry leaders to transform Canada into an industrial war machine.

Check Back

You read about Sam Hughes and the munitions scandal in Chapter 6.

King also used wartime government powers to control many facets of Canadians' lives. There were **wage and price controls** — workers were told what they could earn, and companies were told what they could charge. Industries were told what to make for the war effort. People were told what they could — and could not — buy. Censorship was imposed, and **propaganda** was designed to keep people committed.

Paying for the War

Waging war is expensive, so King had to figure out how to pay for it all. One way was by raising income tax. Selling Victory Bonds was another. People purchased a bond from the government, and in a few years, they would get back their money plus interest. In the meantime, the government could use the money to pay for the war effort. By the end of the war, Victory Bond campaigns had raised nearly $12 billion.

Cause and Consequence: During the war, Canada's industrial production doubled, going from $5.6 billion in 1939 to $11.8 billion in 1945. What might be some of the problems in building an economy geared to war?

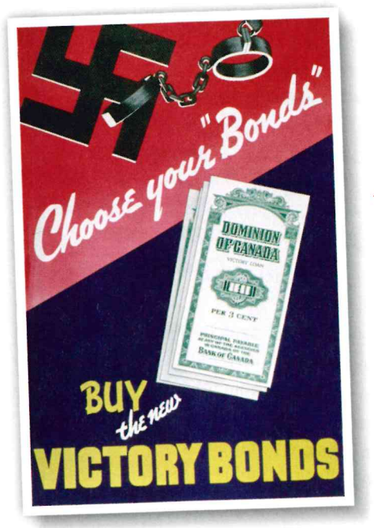


Figure 11–2 Posters played a major role in campaigns to sell Victory Bonds. The creator of this poster used a pun — a play on words. What is the pun? Is it effective? Why or why not?

Figure 11–3 The Cost of War

The total expenses shown extend to the year 1950. What expenses might there have been after the fighting stopped?

Federal Government Spending on the War Effort	
Fiscal Year	**Expenses**
1939–1940	$118 291 000
1940–1941	$752 045 000
1943–1944	$4 587 023 000
Total, 1939–1950	**$21 786 077 519**

Source: *The Canadian Encyclopedia*

Rationing and Wage and Price Controls

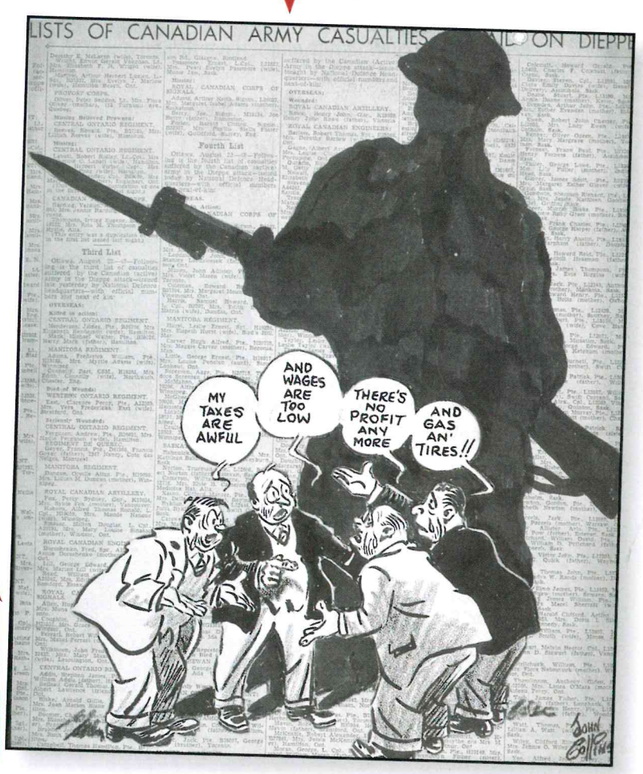
At the outset of war, King created the Wartime Prices and Trade Board (WPTB) in an effort to control the economy. In October 1941, he gave the WPTB powers to control inflation so rising prices would not devastate the economy as it had during World War I. The new measures included

- a wage freeze — After the Depression, people needed a break. So King allowed wages to rise for the first year of the war, then froze wages at October 1941 levels and allowed only modest increases.
- a price freeze — Prices of all goods were also frozen at October 1941 levels. Storekeepers were told what they could charge, and citizens were encouraged to report any overpricing.
- rationing — Certain goods were hard to get during wartime, especially imported goods, such as coffee, tea, and sugar. To make sure these were shared fairly, the government issued ration books that controlled how much each person could purchase. To buy butter or meat, for example, shoppers had to have their ration cards stamped. Gasoline was also rationed, and new tires were strictly reserved for the military.

Historical Perspective: Why do you think the government was publicly harsh and threatened to punish people who attempted to disobey the wage and price controls or the rationing laws? Is it fair to demand that individuals sacrifice what they might feel they rightfully earned?

Figure 11–4 By law, shoppers had to present ration cards before they could buy certain goods, such as sugar and meat, during the war. Rationing was an inconvenience, but most people accepted it as a necessary part of the war effort. In what ways might rationing make people at home feel proud? How might it make them feel about the war?

Figure 11–5 Not everyone approved of the wage and price controls the government put in place shortly after the war began. In 1942, John Collins drew this cartoon, titled "Speaking of Sacrifice," for the *Montréal Gazette*. What was Collins's message?



Is History Inevitable?

When we study the many causes that led to a single event in the p es seems that the outcome was almost inevitable. Is history inevitable? Can a single w things turn out?

Consider the story of a very risky secret mission that took place early in the war.

A Secret Mission

During the Dieppe raid, members of the South Saskatchewan Regiment accompanied a British radar expert, Jack Nissenthall, deep into enemy territory to disable a German radar station. Nissenthall knew that his extensive knowledge of Allied radar technology meant that the Canadians had orders to kill him if there was any risk of capture.

Nissenthall succeeded in cutting the phone lines at the German radar station, forcing the Germans to communicate by radio instead. By monitoring these communications, the Allies learned how to jam enemy radar, a key advantage in later battles. This successful mission was one of the few positive outcomes of the Dieppe raid.

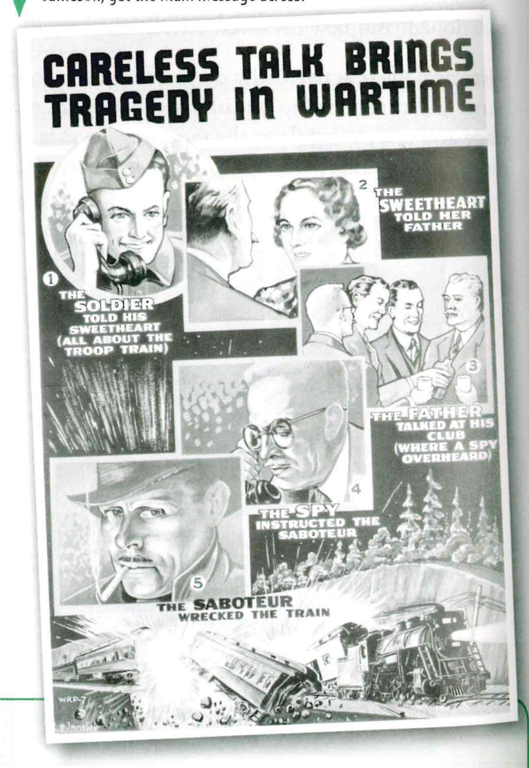
Now consider how things might have turned out differently.

- What if . . . the Canadians had not been able to find the German radar station?
- What if . . . Nissenthal had been unable to cut the phone lines?
- What if . . . the Germans had captured the Allied team?

Not only would the Canadians have had to try to kill Nissenthal, the Allies would not have learned how to jam enemy radar. And if they hadn't had that advantage, perhaps they would have lost key battles later in the war. And if they'd lost those key battles, perhaps they would have lost the war!

Every event that has ever happened is caused by a multitude of factors coming together in just the right way. Change just one of them, and the event might turn out differently — or might never happen at all.

Figure 11–6 This poster was published by the Bureau of Public Information in May 1941. How did the poster's designer, Lionel Jameson, get the main message across?



Explorations

1. Consider the situation shown on the propaganda poster. Create a series of "What if . . ." questions that show how a similar small, simple action might have led to Hitler being killed early in the war. How would history have been different then?
2. A science fiction novel, *What If Hitler Won the War*, speculates on how the world would have been different if Germany had won World War II. Think of one change in history that could have led to that outcome. How would life in Canada be different today?

Censorship

Citizens, the military, and the government were all concerned that sensitive information might fall into enemy hands. So the military censored letters to and from the front, especially to prisoners of war, by blacking out potentially dangerous information. Telegrams sent by war reporters were also censored. And the media, including newspapers, radio broadcasts, and movies, were all screened by government officials and by media companies themselves. Nothing was communicated that was not approved by the censorship board.

Up for Discussion

Given the information technology now available, do you think the government could control information today?

Propaganda

Today, if the federal government wants to communicate with Canadians, ministers or federal officials hold news conferences, send out news releases, or give media interviews. To influence public opinion directly, it posts information on government websites or creates print, radio, and television campaigns. In the 1940s, the government communicated through posters, radio broadcasts, and short films that were played with the movies in theatres.

Wartime information campaigns primarily attempted to convince Canadians that the war was necessary. A common approach was to appeal to people's emotions. The government might, for example, publish a poster that showed what might happen if the war were lost — and the results were often portrayed as gruesome and terrifying. In propaganda, the crucial goal was not truth but persuasion. Without people's support, the war efforts could fail.

CONNECTIONS

In George Orwell's book *1984*, conceived in 1944 and written in 1947 and 1948, the main character works for the Ministry of Truth. As the novel develops, it becomes clear that the ministry's mission is in fact to feed lies to the public — displaying posters that, for example, proudly proclaim "War is Peace." Orwell lived in wartime and postwar Britain, and many believe that he was responding to wartime propaganda and the onset of the Cold War.

The National Film Commission

In Chapter 9, you read how the National Film Board (NFB) was established in 1939 to produce Canadian movies. Its first commissioner was John Grierson, an expert in psychology who directed both the Wartime Information Board and the NFB. During wartime, the NFB mostly made films designed to boost morale and inspire patriotism. *Churchill's Island*, for example, was about the Battle of Britain and won an Academy Award in 1941 for best documentary film.

Figure 11–7 John Grierson (right), National Film Board (NFB) Commissioner, and Harry Mayerovitch, director of the Wartime Information Board's (WIB) Graphic Arts Division, examine war posters in 1944.

Up for Discussion

What's the difference between propaganda and advertising?

Check Back

You read about conscription during World War I in Chapter 6.

Not Necessarily Conscription

During World War I, conscription had divided Canadians. This time, many Québécois were again fiercely opposed because they had little attachment to Britain or to Canada's English-speaking military.

King believed it was important to keep the country united. So in 1939, and again during the 1940 election campaign, he rejected conscription for overseas service. But in June 1940, his government enacted the National Resources Mobilization Bill, which allowed conscription for service at home.

At first, conscripts were called up for 30 days' training. Then this term was extended to four months. Then, in April 1941, the term was extended again — to last as long as the war.

Aboriginal Soldiers

In World War II, about 4000 Aboriginal people, including 72 women, volunteered to join the Canadian Forces. Aboriginal people of military age signed up at about the same rate as other Canadians. More than 200 First Nations soldiers died in battle, and 18 were decorated for bravery.

But many First Nations said that treaties had promised they would not be forced to fight British battles. In 1944, the government agreed to exempt members of these particular groups from conscription.

Up for Discussion

During World War II, Aboriginal peoples did not have the right to vote. Why would they have volunteered to fight overseas?

Figure 11–8 In 1939, Université de Montréal students demonstrated against conscription (top). The sign on the truck says, "Pas de conscription. La jeunesse veut la paix" — "No conscription. Young people want peace." In 2003, thousands of people demonstrated in Vancouver against the war in Iraq (bottom). What has changed in these photographs? What has stayed the same?

But Conscription If Necessary

By 1942, King knew that more troops were needed. So he decided to hold a **plebiscite** — a special vote on a specific proposal. King wanted Canadians' permission to break his promise not to send conscripts overseas. "Not necessarily conscription, but conscription if necessary" was the slogan he used to describe how this government would approach the issue.

The results of the plebiscite showed how deeply Canadians were divided when 79 per cent of Anglophones voted yes to conscription, while 85 per cent of Francophones voted no.

In spring 1942, Parliament authorized the use of conscripts overseas. By then, King had the power to call for conscription, but he chose not to use it at that time. In October 1944, after the heavy losses in Normandy and amid the fierce battles to liberate Italy and the Netherlands, King finally gave in and ordered 16 000 conscripts for overseas duty.

Most Canadians accepted King's decision — but many Francophone Québécois felt betrayed. As in World War I, protests occurred in Québec.

In the end, about 13 000 conscripts were actually sent overseas, but only about 2500 reached the front lines, where 60 were killed in action.

Cause and Consequence: Create a timeline showing the steps that King took to deal with conscription. What lessons do you think King learned from the 1917 conscription crisis? Do you think he succeeded in his efforts to handle this sensitive issue? Provide the criteria for your judgments.

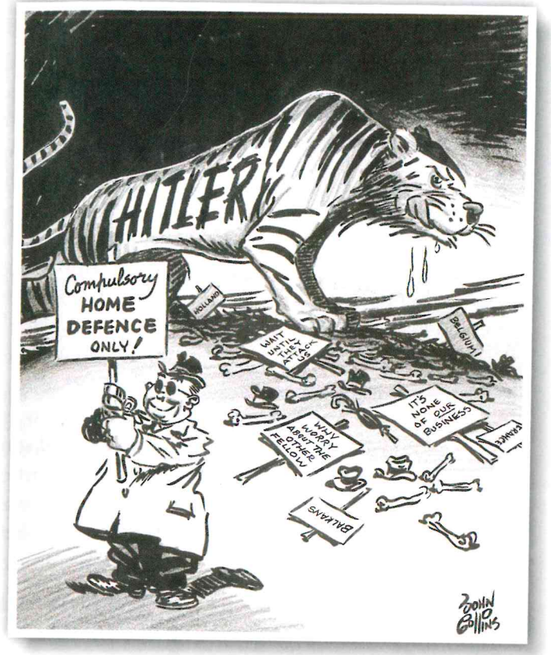


Figure 11–9 The *Montréal Gazette* published this cartoon by John Collins on October 30, 1941. What is Collins's message?

World War II Internment Camps

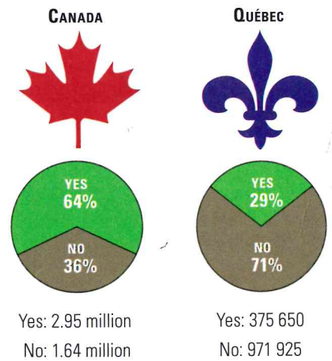
During World War II, Canada used the War Measures Act to create both internment and prisoner-of-war camps. Captured enemy soldiers and merchant sailors — mostly German — were kept at high-security POW camps for the duration of the war. At the peak of the war in 1944, Canada was holding 34 193 prisoners of war.

German and Italian Internments

As in World War I, internment camps were used to detain people identified as "enemy aliens." This would ultimately include thousands of Canadians who were innocent of any wrongdoing. About 30 000 people of German and Italian descent were required to register and report monthly to the RCMP, and many were interned in 26 camps set up across the country. Anyone who was even suspected of sympathizing with the Nazis or fascists, as well as about 100 members of the Communist Party, was also arrested.

Figure 11–10 Results of the Conscription Vote, 1942

Why is it important to look at the total population in each pie chart as well as the percentage vote?



CONNECTIONS

A number of well-known, gifted, and influential Canadians of Japanese descent were interned in British Columbia and on the Prairies during World War II. Several, such as best-selling novelist and poet Joy Kogawa, scientist and broadcaster David Suzuki, and writer Ken Adachi, have written about how profoundly their experiences in the camps affected their own lives, as well as the lives of thousands of other Canadians of Japanese descent.

Japanese Internments

Before the war, 22 096 Canadians of Japanese descent lived in British Columbia. Three-quarters of them were born in Canada. But after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor and attacked Hong Kong in 1942, Canada confiscated these people's property and deprived them of rights.

Both the military and the RCMP argued that Canadians of Japanese descent did not pose a threat to Canada. But on February 24, 1942, all male Canadians of Japanese descent between the ages of 18 and 45 were rounded up and shipped to camps in the interior of British Columbia. Two days later, the government gave the remaining Canadians of Japanese descent 24 hours to pack a few belongings and prepare to be moved inland. And on March 4, they were ordered to turn over their property and belongings to the Custodian of Enemy Alien Property as a "protective measure only." Most never saw it again. Everything was auctioned off for a fraction of its worth, and some of the proceeds were used to pay for housing in the camps — the internees were forced to pay for their own incarceration.

When the war ended, many Canadians of Japanese descent were encouraged to leave Canada. Many did, but those who stayed were not allowed to return to Vancouver until 1949.

Figure 11–11 A Canadian naval officer questions two fishers of Japanese descent as he confiscates their boat.

Recall . . . Reflect . . . Respond

1. Choose three historically significant policies the government imposed during the war and create a three-column chart that uses one policy as a heading for each of the columns. Then respond to the following questions about each policy:
   - How did this policy benefit Canada?
   - What, if any, rights or privileges did this policy take away from Canadians during the war?
2. Choose one of the policies you selected in Question 1 and write a short paragraph about why this policy was or was not necessary and justified. How would you have reacted to this policy? In what ways might this policy have been adjusted to make it more equitable for Canadians?
3. Do you think it is fair for people in the 21st century to judge the actions the government took during World War II? Why or why not?

Thinking Historically: Ethical Dimension

Responding to a World War II Injustice

The internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II was the largest forced evacuation of people in Canadian history. More than 22 000 Japanese Canadians were uprooted, stripped of their possessions, and sent away from their homes. Many ended up in work camps. Many lost their citizenship.

Yet, of all those people, not a single one had been charged with an act of disloyalty to their country. How could such an injustice occur? Do we have a responsibility to find out? Should we acknowledge our mistakes? If so, how should we respond?

For years, members of the Japanese Canadian community campaigned so that the historic injustice would be recognized. Finally, they convinced many Canadians that acknowledgment and compensation was the right way to go.

In 1988, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney formally apologized to the Japanese Canadian survivors and their families on behalf of the Canadian government and people. The apology was part of a landmark settlement that included

- acknowledgement of what happened
- payment of $21 000 to all surviving Japanese Canadians who were interned during the war
- payment of $12 million for the well-being of the Japanese community in Canada
- payment of $24 million to set up the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, which combats racism
- Canadian citizenship for all Japanese who had their Canadian citizenship taken from them during the war

David Suzuki, a third-generation Japanese Canadian was interned along with his family at the age of six. He wrote about the experience:

> On December 7, 1941, an event took place that had nothing to do with me or my family and yet which had devastating consequences for all of us — Japan bombed Pearl Harbor in a surprise attack. With that event began one of the shoddiest chapters in the tortuous history of democracy in North America.

The Right Honourable **Brian Mulroney** spoke to Canadians when he announced the settlement:

> We cannot change the past. But we must, as a nation, have the courage to face up to these historical facts.

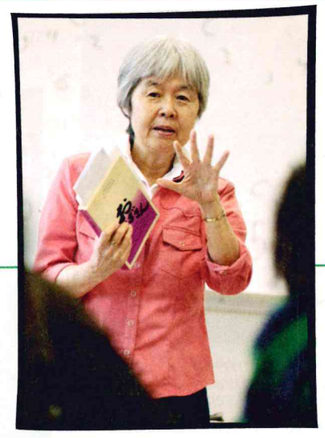


Figure 11–12 Joy Kogawa reads from her novel *Obasan* to a class of Grade 11 students. A recipient of the Order of Canada, Kogawa wrote the book to tell about the internment camps. She also tells students about her personal experience of the camps. How do her efforts help Canadians consider the "right and wrong" of their history?

Explorations

1. Canadians benefit in a variety of ways when we respond to mistakes Canada has made in the past. Speculate on the benefits of the whole compensation package for Japanese Canadians to (a) survivors, (b) their descendants, (c) young Canadians, (d) the government, (e) Canada's reputation, (f) future Canadian governments during wartime.
2. How can a fair assessment of the ethical implications of history help us respond appropriately to injustices? How can we achieve that fair assessment?