

Chapter 4- Interwar Period in Canada

1919-1939

Post War Problems

- Wartime industries (examples: munitions factories) closed down after the war when their goods were not needed. Many of these factories went into retooling so that they could be converted to consumer products, but they were still closed for the time it needed to change over.
- Workers were laid off and women were under pressure to return to household duties so that men could have jobs, even though it was really hard for them to find work.
- Many war veterans were unemployed and became angry. They also resented the fact that some business people at home had made huge profits in war industries while they risked their lives in Europe. They felt that they at least deserved the chance to make an honest living.
- Rapid inflation became a problem around 1919. The prices of basic items such as food and clothing had increased greatly, while wages did not. This created a situation where many people could not afford to pay for the necessities for their families.

Workers and returning soldiers joined unions to fight for better living conditions. Union groups were trying to unite all across the country to create what they called the OBU; the One Big Union. In order to get attention for their problems the OBU called for staged strikes in major cities across the country.

The Winnipeg General Strike of 1919

- One of the most important and dramatic strikes in Canadian history was the Winnipeg General strike.
- Trade workers voted to strike; 30 000 others walked off the job as well. With almost all industries and key services being shut down in the city
- On June 10 the federal government ordered the arrest of eight strike leaders (including [J.S. Woodsworth](#) and [Abraham Albert Heaps](#)).
- On June 21, about 25,000 strikers assembled for a demonstration at Market Square. Troubled by the growing number of protestors and fearing violence, Mayor Gray called in the Royal Northwest Mounted Police who rode in on horseback charging into the crowd of strikers, beating them with clubs and firing weapons. This violent action resulted in many people injured, numerous arrests and the death of two strikers. This day, which came to be known as “**Bloody Saturday**”,^[12] ended with Winnipeg virtually under military occupation. Police also shut down the striker’s paper called the Western Labour News and arrested the editors for commentating on the infamous event
- Some were forced not to become union members or become involved in any union activities.
- A Royal Commission was appointed to investigate the causes of the strike.
- H.A. Robson, head of the Commission, concluded that the strike was caused by high cost of living, poor working conditions, and low wages.

Social Developments

Prohibition

- Started in Canada in 1916 and 1917 during World War One. It made the production and sale of alcohol illegal.
- The Women's Christian Temperance Union worked to ban the use of intoxicating liquor.
 - They argued that the grain should be used to feed soldiers and civilians. Also, money spent on alcohol was responsible for many of the problems of the poor.
 - They used statistics to show that alcohol contributed to criminal activities, absenteeism from work, and troubles in the home.
- Even when prohibition was introduced, you could still find "bootleg booze", which was illegal liquor made and sold by organized bootleggers (example: Rocco Perri). There were even private clubs "speakeasies."
- Some Canadian rumrunners made fortunes smuggling Canadian liquor south of the border to the US. Almost \$1 million of liquor crossed from Windsor to Detroit each month.
- Provincial governments realized they were losing money in potential taxes on liquor sales and people argued that legalizing liquor under strict government controls would be easier to enforce than total prohibition. Gradually, individual provinces dropped prohibition throughout the 1920s. (PEI was last to eliminate this law in 1948)

Prohibition Positive Social Effects

- decrease in crime
- less arrests for drunkenness
- more workers took their pay cheques home instead of to the bars
- industrial efficiency improved because of less absenteeism from work.

Changing Lifestyles of the 1920's

Since the economy was on the upswing in the 1920s, many people indulged in non-essential items.

- Inventions like the radio
- The mass production of automobiles
- Talking films
- Air travels were being invented

Fads and fashions were not in the reach of everyone but Canadians were moving into the modern age.

Fads and Fashions

- Most people became interested in dancing, fashion, games, sports, and other activities. Fads are crazes that don't last long.
- One of these fads was a Chinese game called Mah-jong. This game was the entire rave and many people ordered Chinese furniture, robes, and other Chinese objects to accentuate the experience. This fad wore off around 1927.

- Dancing marathons were also popular. People used smelling salts and ice packs to keep themselves awake. To find the record for the world's longest dance we have to shuffle our way back to August 29 1930 when Mike Ritof and Edith Boudreaux started dancing at the Merry Garden Ballroom, Chicago, Illinois. They did not stop until April 01 1931 after clocking in 5,152 hours and 48 minutes, claiming the dance marathon record and \$2,000.00 cash.



- Women of the 20s sported a flapper look. In winter, they wore galoshes with buckles unfastened to create the greatest possible flap. They wore dresses above their knees and their stockings were rolled down. They also chopped their hair in a bobbed style.

The Automobile

- One of the most obvious signs of prosperity in the 1920s was the growth of the automobile. The automobile was one of the biggest changes in the way of living in the 1920s
- Henry Ford wanted to make cheap, affordable machines that everyone could afford.
- People could go to see relatives 20km away and still be home for supper. Something it would have taken days to do in earlier times.
- With the automobile, many people had summer cabins or traveled on vacations. Most cars included a crank to start the engine and a rope (in case they got stuck... which was very unpleasant on a vacation)

Entertainment

- Jazz moved north from New Orleans in the US and was made popular by such musicians as Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong.
- The Charleston was the dance of the decade that emerged out of African American culture.
- "Talkies," which were talking films, arrived in Canada in 1927. The stars of these films were idolized and they provided excitement to people:
 - Charlie Chaplin
 - Rudolph Valentino
 - Greta Garbo

Effects on the Boom Years

- One result of the industrial boom in the 1920s was that Canadians gradually regained confidence in their country. The mood was generally optimistic and people were willing to take risks.
- Financial success stories inspired ordinary citizens to believe that they too could get rich by two dollar bets on horses, investing in the Stock Market, or investing in new economic ventures.

Political Changes in Canada

➤ The Progressive Party

- The Union leaders from the OBU joined with other labor leaders to form the United Farmers Party in the Prairies, Maritimes and Ontario.
- They built a lot of support and won elections at the Municipal and Provincial levels all through Canada during these years.
- In 1920 they formed the Progressive Party as a national political group consisting of United Farm groups in Ontario and the Prairies.
- They called for lower tariffs on farm machinery and freight rates.
- They also promoted **social welfare programs** such as Old Age Pensions and Widow Allowances.
- The Progressive Party became very popular among the working class and this led them to winning enough seats in the 1921 election to have formed the official opposition in Ottawa. (they chose not to be the official opposition so they could vote freely)

➤ Women in Politics

- Women got the right to vote during the war years but were still not considered 'people' and so could not hold appointed political positions (non-voted posts) like the Senate or higher civil service.
- Although they were allowed, very few women ran for political office in the 1920's. In 1920, Agnes Macphail was the first woman elected as a Member of Parliament and the only one for the next 14 years.
- In 1916, Emily Murphy was made a magistrate (judge) in Alberta, the first woman judge in the British Empire. She had many problems because lawyers could complain that Murphy wasn't able to make legal decisions because she was not officially a person.
- Murphy is known as one of the "[The Famous Five](#)"; a group of Canadian women's rights activists that also included [Henrietta Muir Edwards](#), [Nellie McClung](#), [Louise McKinney](#) and [Irene Parlby](#).
- In 1927, the women launched the "[Persons Case](#)," contending that women could be "qualified persons" eligible to sit in the [Senate](#). The [Supreme Court of Canada](#) ruled that they were not. Their appeal had to go to the [Judicial Committee of the British Privy Council](#) which was the highest court in England. In 1928, the British court decided that women truly were 'people': so the women won their case.
- In 1931, the prime minister appointed the first Canadian woman senator: Cairine Wilson.

➤ The King-Byng Crisis

- In 1925 the Liberals, under Prime Minister William Lyon MacKenzie King, did not win enough seats to form the government, but with the support of the Progressive Party could outnumber the Conservatives. (making an informal coalition government)
- By 1926 there was a scandal in the Liberal party and they lost Progressive support. Before the government could be defeated in a house vote the Prime Minister asked the Governor General (the King's representative in Canada) to dissolve the government and call an election.
- The Governor General was Lord Byng, a British officer who had helped lead the Canadian troops at Vimy Ridge. He decided that they wouldn't call an election and the Conservatives were able to form the government because they had more seats in Parliament.
- The Conservatives, under Arthur Meighen, became the new leading party. However, they soon lost a vote in parliament, forcing them to dissolve the house and call an election anyway.
- King claimed that the Governor General showed favoritism to the Conservatives. The Liberals then won a majority of seats in the 1926 election.



Canada's Growing Independence

1922 - Chanak Affair.

Liberal Prime Minister King stated that only the Canadian Parliament would decide whether to send troops if Britain went to war with Turkey.

1923 - The Halibut Treaty

The Canadian Government made a treaty directly with the United States over fishing rights. This is the first international treaty created and signed without British involvement. Since this time Canada and the US have been having **Summit Meetings** to discuss issues directly.

1926 - Imperial Conference.

The Balfour Declaration stated that Canada was a self governing country having equal status with Britain. From this point on the Governor General becomes just a representative of the British Monarch and not a real position of power.

1927 – Diplomatic Posts

Canada sends out its first ambassador to a foreign country; the US.

1927 – Canada is elected to the Council of the League of Nations

1931- Statute of Westminster

This gave legal status to the Balfour Report of 1926. It specified that Britain could not pass laws binding on the dominions, or disallow the dominions' own laws. What had been known as the British Empire was now referred to as the British Commonwealth of Nations.