



Chantier politique

JOURNAL OF QUEBEC POLITICAL AFFAIRS

Published by the Marxist-Leninist Party of Québec (PMLQ) • www.pmlq.qc.ca

November 8, 2017

English Edition, No. 8

Centenary of the End of the First World War Commemorations on the Centenary of the End of World War I



The Canadian state sent thousands of soldiers to Quebec City on April 1, 1918 to repress the demonstrations against conscription. Five people lost their lives in the confrontations.

Centenary of the End of the First World War

- Commemorations on the Centenary of the End of World War I
- Commemorative Evenings at the PMLQ Local

Workers' Struggles

- Concrete Mixer Truck Drivers Demand Increased Safety for Themselves and the Public

Workers Speak Out

- Serious Concerns about the Automation of Mining Processes
 - *André Racicot* -
 - For a Investment in Health Care on Par With the Needs of the People and Staff
 - *Nathalie Savard* -

News

- Activists Meet in Montreal Following Overwhelming

UN Vote Against the Blockade
• **Recent Chronology of Actions and Escalated Rhetoric
of the U.S. Against Cuba**

- For Your Information**
• **Anti-Conscription Protests in Quebec in 1918**
- *Geneviève Royer* -
-

Centenary of the End of the First World War
**Commemorations on the Centenary
of the End of World War I**

November 11, 2018 will mark the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War. The First World War was a war for the redivision of the world between the empires of the day and control over the colonies. This redivision was aimed at grabbing the sources of cheap raw materials and manpower and zones for the export of capital, as well as the acquisition of strategic influence.

This was not the heroic and noble cause that governments like to present as "defending freedom and democracy" and "our values" but rather an imperialist butchery that today's leading elite in Canada and Quebec define as the moment that "marked Canada's coming of age" as a nation.

The war lasted from July 28, 1914 until November 11, 1918. Canada, as an autonomous dominion of the British empire, automatically entered the war as soon as Britain declared war. The horrible conflict between belligerent countries tore asunder the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman and German empires. In Canada, just as throughout the British empire, the massacre ended the euphoria of those who claimed that belonging to the British empire was the most coveted situation.

In Quebec, just as in the rest of Canada, the war was used as a pretext to repress resistance to imperialist war, conscientious objection to participation in war, and attack unions and revolutionary politics. The anti-conscription movement took the form of demonstrations in May of 1917 in Montreal, precisely expressing the determined opposition of the Quebec people, in particular workers, women and youth, to war and empire. The *Military Service Act*, adopted on July 24, 1917 by the House of Commons was a response to the demands of British empire to send more soldiers to serve as cannon fodder. The *War Measures Act* was then used against the people of Quebec in the spring of 1918 and remained in effect for over a year after the war's end. It was used against the organizers of the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919.



We bear witness to a similar, although not quite the same, situation today. Coalitions made up of oligopolies roam the entire globe looking to enrich themselves through any means possible. Even here in Quebec, in the name of the national interest, successive governments talk about making these oligopolies "competitive" to justify pay-the-rich schemes and the criminalization of workers, of the resistance movement of the people, of the movement to vest decision-making power in them, and of the anti-war movement.

During commemorations on the end of the First World War, the ruling circles and their media remain silent about that reality. Not a word is said about similar dangers that current wars present, nor a word about the even greater dangers they are preparing. They claim that war and war preparations are necessary to defend peace and democracy. They resort to the same chauvinism that was used against the world's peoples during World War I, to deprive the people of a world outlook that would allow them to move forward.

An anti-war government is a necessity for the people of Quebec and Canada. An anti-war government would pay due attention to the development of a new democratic personality, based on meeting the needs of the people within the conditions of the 21st century.



Commemorative Evenings at the PMLQ Local

On the occasion of the Centenary of World War I, the Marxist-Leninist Party of Quebec (PMLQ) is organizing three commemorative evenings in Montreal under the theme, "Fight for an Anti-War Government." The commemorative evenings are also putting forward the need to Make Quebec and Canada Zones for Peace. The commemoration will take place over three separate events to mark the 100th anniversary, and will include poetry, music, photographs and film screenings. The events will be held on Friday evenings November 9, 16 and 23.

The evening of November 9 will include the reading of a collection of songs and poems of the period of the First World War that express the anti-war position of the people of Quebec. This will be followed by the screening of a short documentary on the mass demonstrations that took place in Quebec City at the end of Easter 1918, followed by the screening of the movie *La Guerre oubliée* (The Forgotten War).

The film was produced in 1987 and includes testimonies from people who actually took part in the struggle against conscription in 1918. It shows how people, irrespective of their religious beliefs or national origin, refused to enlist in an unjust war or to become informants for the Canadian state and its police and military services.

The evening of November 16 will also include the rendering of a collection of songs and poetry mainly from France and Belgium, as well as videos reflecting the ongoing resistance of soldiers enlisted by force during the First World War, their opposition to fight in the name of one imperialist camp or another, and fraternization between "enemy" soldiers from both sides of the trenches, which finally led to general mutinies in both camps towards the end of the war.

The evening of November 23 will commemorate the role played by the Russian people, under the Soviet government, in ending their participation in World War I. By ending their participating in the war, they made a great contribution to the cause of peace worldwide. They created an altogether new situation, one favourable not only to the people of Russia but also to the other peoples of Europe, who were inspired by the Great October Revolution and the fact that Russia was able to extricate itself from this unjust war.

An overview will also be presented of the end of the First World War when over 10 countries, including Canada, sent an expeditionary force to Russia in an attempt to crush the first state power of the working class and the first anti-war government, that withdrew Russia from World War I.

One of the evening's highlights will be the screening of the 1933 Soviet movie *Outskirts*.

All are welcome to participate in these events.

100th Anniversary of the End of World War I **Fight for an Anti-War Government!**



Commemorative Evenings

Songs, poetry, photos, films
Friday November 9, 16 and 23 at 7:00 pm
At 1360 Ontario Street East, Montreal



Organized by the Marxist-Leninist Party of Quebec
514-522-5872 • permanence@pmlq.qc.ca



Workers' Struggles

Concrete Mixer Truck Drivers Demand Increased Safety for Themselves and the Public



The 200 Demix Béton Cement Mix Truck Drivers assembled together at an special general assembly meeting in Laval on October 8, 2018, that was called as a result of ongoing due to problems with the Optimizer dispatch system. This caused persistent problems affecting not only their health and safety but also possibly that of the population residing close to work sites. (FIM-CSN)

The 200 concrete mixer truck drivers working for the five sections of Demix Béton in the Greater Montreal area have been calling for measures since June to correct problems created through the implementation of a new "Optimizer" computer system. The new system is aimed at managing concrete delivery system circuits on construction sites. The workers are members of five unions affiliated with the Manufacturing Industry Federation (FIM-CSN). Demix Béton is a division of CRH Group Canada Inc., itself a division of CRH plc, a global building materials monopoly based in Ireland, with facilities primarily in Europe and North America.

The recently activated Optimizer system connects each concrete mixer truck driver to a distribution plant via an electronic tablet. Optimizer analyzes in real time the itineraries to be taken and the response times required for the delivery of concrete by dictating which delivery routes the drivers are to take. In some instances the system proposes routes through the centre of densely populated neighbourhoods, without any regard to zone designations such as "No Trucks," or to actual restrictions contained in the *Highway Safety Code*.

The Optimizer system regularly experiences computer failures and breaks down, which prevents workers from pursuing their activities and, in particular, from contacting the dispatch centre, thereby increasing their stress levels.

In addition, the system regularly requires that workers exceed their 50 hours per week, further undermining their vigilance and their heavy-load driver reflexes, besides having to sacrifice part of their family life. The workers are demanding that they be able to stop for an hour for a sorely-needed lunch break, which is in accordance with the law. The Optimizer system, however, actually prevents them from doing that.

Concrete mixer truck drivers are denouncing the fact that the Optimizer system was implemented without their being consulted, even though it directly affects their working conditions, including their own health and safety. During a general assembly meeting in early October, the workers unanimously rejected the corrective measures proposed by the company as being entirely inadequate. They have mandated their union leaders to directly call upon senior management in Toronto to find solutions to the problem, which reflect the views and experience of the drivers themselves.

It should be noted that the ready-mix drivers are not currently in negotiations for their collective agreement.

Such significant and detrimental changes for them and for the population have simply been imposed by the company. This is unacceptable and the workers reject these unilateral changes.



Workers Speak Out

Serious Concerns about the Automation of Mining Processes

- André Racicot -



September 19, 2016 demonstration to demand the reintegration of André Racicot, who had been suspended by the mining company Iamgold in Abitibi for having defended the health and safety of mine workers (FTQ)

One of our major concerns right now is the automation of underground operations in the mining sector, of underground machinery. Our concern is twofold. On the one hand, there's the lack of government regulation regarding this new technology; on the other, the issue of the jobs that are going to be taken away from mine workers.

We have been talking to the Labour Standards, Pay Equity and Occupational Health and Safety Commission (CNEEST) about this for two or three years now. We have argued with them that the lack of regulations regarding this equipment is worrisome. This is about remote-controlled as well as autonomous and semi-autonomous equipment. These different processes involve a high level of automation. In the case of remote-controlled equipment, we are referring to equipment operated from a distance, by means of remote controls. The problem we are facing right now is that although technology has advanced, the regulations are not keeping pace. This is wanted by the mining companies because they like to have a free hand and not have too many regulations restricting what they can do. They want to decide for themselves what changes will be made. In the past, when such things were left to employers, the workers paid a very high price, particularly in terms of their health and safety.

In this instance, in the case of autonomous or semi-autonomous equipment, what happens if the equipment does not stop when it is supposed to? Will it detect a worker in its way? If an accident occurs it could be fatal. It must be understood that there is always human intervention somewhere. Take the example of semi-autonomous equipment where the operator controls the underground equipment from the surface. In theory, no human beings are supposed to be in the way of the equipment. We know very well that it is virtually impossible to ensure that there are no human beings in areas where machinery is in operation. It takes mechanics to fix the machines, it takes electricians, it takes human beings to repair the equipment. The worker must enter the danger zone and approach to the machine. Although the equipment has a brake system operated from the ground level, what

guarantee is there that the brakes will work? At the moment, we are somewhat at the mercy of big multinational companies that use that use the equipment all over and who themselves decide the protocols governing their use.

In the case of the remote-controlled equipment, an operator can be thousands of kilometres away, in India or Bangladesh, operating equipment in a mine in Abitibi. Were we to have a regulation, it would be valid for Quebec but would not apply in the country where the operator is located. The regulation would not be applicable to the company renting the services of an operator in a far-away country. This creates a legal vacuum. The union raised this issue with CNESST and the Commission so far does not seem to know what to do with such a problem. We've started putting pressure on the government to have the functioning of the equipment regulated in Quebec and, if operated from another country, to have the operator subjected to the same regulation.

The technology that makes these long distance operations possible exists. We have only to think of the U.S. drones that are used to bomb in Iraq or elsewhere and are operated from Arizona.

We have a serious concern about health and safety, with regard to the inter-relation between such equipment and humans.

The other concern is jobs. The mining companies dream of operating the mines without human beings. They dream of it because they would have no wages to pay, no pension plan to fund, etc. In addition, equipment does not speak out. It does not present demands. It does not take sick leave. We are very concerned about the loss of jobs. Mining companies are claiming that even though there will be fewer miners, there will be more people repairing and operating the equipment. We know very well, however, in light of what is happening around the world, that the strategy of the mining companies is to use operators who are not even miners. These are people who have never set foot in a mine in their lives. They are capable of operating the technology, a bit like a video game. We believe that over time the people operating the equipment will increasingly be people with no connection whatsoever to the mining industry.

We are proposing regulatory changes to ensure that qualified people, with knowledge of underground miners' work, operate the equipment. There is a case in Vermont where semi-autonomous drilling machines are being used. The operator works from the head office while the drilling machine is at the bottom of the shaft. When the operator leaves his work station to go for lunch the machine is in remote operation while he is away. The process has already been engaged.

We, the unions, are there to protect the health and safety of workers, as well as their jobs.

André Racicot is President of the United Steelworkers Local 9291 in Abitibi.

(Translated from original French by Chantier politique)



Workers Speak Out

For a Investment in Health Care on Par With the Needs of the People and Staff

- Nathalie Savard -

What's essential at this time is the renewed investment required in public services -- in health care in particular, but also in education and early childhood education. It's important because as a society we chose to have quality public services for all, regardless of the size of one's wallet. Investment in our public services is essential when we look at working conditions and the deterioration of services taking place. The North Shore Integrated Health and Social Services Sector (CISSS) has announced a \$15 million deficit again this year. We are no longer able to assume such cuts. The human capital providing services is no longer capable of shouldering them. We must reinvest, fund public services to meet the needs and keep in mind that Quebec is a vast territory and no matter where we live, we need public services. There must be an investment made equivalent to what the public is entitled to expect.

On the North Shore, over the past three or four years, the anticipated annual deficit has been between \$10 and

\$15 million. For us, this demonstrates an under-funding of public services in health care on the North Shore. Even elected municipal officials and deputies for the region are joining forces to demand investments in health care services.



Under the law, health care facilities must have a zero deficit for each fiscal year. When there is a deficit, it must be absorbed and this is done through major budget cuts. Last year, the government put up \$5 million to cover part of the deficit. A shortfall of \$10 million remained and the North Shore CISSS produced a plan to balance the budget that included 26 cutback measures, which affected services to the population through a decrease in the staff providing those services. Although the law requires a balanced budget in health care and social services, four years of \$15 million deficits means there is a problem of money. Although the law exists, none of the problems are being sorted out. In fact, the Couillard government made huge budget cuts. It gave a little back because of the elections, but nowhere near what had been cut over the years.

The result of these cuts is that a lot of staff are sick, there is a shortage in personnel, there is mandatory overtime. The costs are both human and financial. We must get the situation back on track. We must take stock and draw conclusions quickly. The restructuring of the health care system that was carried out is not working. This way of managing institutions does not work. There are a lot of problems with it and it has not sorted anything out. It needs to be discussed and drastically corrected, with a clear message sent to the new government that action must be taken. Our profession is wonderful, we have chosen to devote ourselves to it, but it's making us sick.

In that regard, our federation, the Quebec Federation of Health (FSQ), and the union central with which we are affiliated, the Centrale des syndicats du Québec (CSQ), launched the "100 Days for Health" campaign during the election campaign to request that the newly elected government implement measures to correct the situation in the health care system. For example, we are asking the government to restore power at the local level, to stop centralizing everything in Quebec City and to provide the necessary resources at each level so that each region is able to properly manage itself, by giving it some autonomy.[1]

My greatest wish is for a renewed investment in health care, so that we are able to take care of people, so that we ask ourselves why our people are sick and take care of them.

Note

1. Under the theme "100 Days for Health," the CSQ and the FSQ-CSQ identified four concrete measures that, in their view, would seriously contribute to correcting the situation in the public health care system if they are adopted quickly. These measures are:

- Immediately increase and stabilize health care facility funding so that attractive full-time positions are posted and correct the problem of staff shortages that plague the health care system in a sustainable manner;

- Decentralize human resource management, restore the various health facilities' ability to manage work schedules according to specific needs and the reality of each environment, and end work schedule management through the systematic use of overtime;
- Issue a ministerial directive prohibiting indecent flexibility and mobility demands;
- Adopt a framework law aimed at promoting and supporting family-work-study balance.

Nathalie Savard is the President of the Union of Health Care Workers in Northeastern Quebec (SIISNEQ-CSQ).

(Translated from original French by Chantier politique)



News

Activists Meet in Montreal Following Overwhelming UN Vote Against the Blockade



Meeting with the Consul General of Cuba in Montreal, Mara Bilbao Diaz, on November 1, 2018, following the massive UN vote demanding an end to the U.S. blockade against Cuba.

On November 1, the day of the UN vote on the resolution against the blockade, the Marxist-Leninist Party of Quebec (PMLQ) held an evening get-together with Mara Bilbao Diaz, Consul General of Cuba in Montreal. The meeting opened with an outburst of applause when Christine Dandenaault announced that the resolution entitled "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba" was adopted: 189 countries voted in favour and 2 countries voted against, the United States and Israel. This is the 27th consecutive year that the resolution has been adopted. Ukraine and Moldova were not present during the vote.

The day before, on October 31, 31 countries took the floor to firmly express their support for the resolution and call for an immediate end to the blockade, said Christine. "Egypt, Venezuela, El Salvador, Singapore, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Belarus, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Jamaica, India, South Africa, Namibia, Mexico, China, Bolivia, and many others." The UN meeting on the resolution resumed again at 10:00 am on November 1, with many more, equally determined, interventions.

The Consul General then took the floor saying that during the two days, "all Cubans were glued to their television sets listening to the interventions and following the vote. For Cubans, today is a celebration, it is a day of pride and filled with emotion." She explained that the Cuban people had achieved 10 victories over the past two days, despite all the shenanigans, threats and attempts by the United States to change the vote and to sow and maintain confusion. For example, this year, the United States demanded that the vote be determined by a simple majority. The Cuban delegation opposed this by presenting a two-thirds majority motion, which was adopted. Next, the U.S. proposed eight amendments to the main resolution and demanded a vote on each

amendment. Again, it was defeated as all eight amendments were rejected. Finally, the main resolution against the blockade was overwhelmingly adopted.

Mara quoted U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley, who told the UN assembly that the most unfortunate part of this resolution every year is not that the United States is alone in opposing it. "The most regrettable fact of this resolution is that it is a waste of everyone's time. It's one more time that countries 'feel like they can poke the United States in the eye.' But you're not hurting the United States when you do this. You are literally hurting the Cuban people by telling the regime that their treatment of their people is acceptable. For 27 years, we've had this debate and nothing has changed in Cuba."

According to the U.S., the United Nations General Assembly has failed to show leadership and demand a better life for the Cuban people. They claim to speak in defence of human rights while the blockade itself is an attack on human rights. Cuban Minister of Foreign Affairs Bruno Rodriguez said in his speech that Cuba is always ready to talk, to deal with human rights and to cooperate, in a respectful manner and to discuss "amongst equals," but that this must take place in the appropriate UN fora. "We will never make concessions that affect our sovereignty and national independence. We will not negotiate our principles or accept conditions," reported the Consul General.

A lively exchange followed the presentation. A participant asked about what could be done in the face of the U.S. that maintains the blockade. "Why won't they accept the UN verdict?" The Consul General explained that the UN vote is not binding, it is indicative. She gave several examples of how the blockade works. The U.S. talks about a unilateral embargo between only the U.S. and Cuba, which is a lie. It is an extra-territorial blockade that affects all countries that do business with Cuba as well as the Cuban people and the peoples of the world. Several examples were given such as the enormous pressure put on Canadian companies doing business with Cuba. Seventy per cent of Canada's trade is with the United States, and companies are threatened with losing their contracts if they continue to trade with Cuba. In recent months, the Cuban Consulate in Montreal worked with a small Canadian company offering debit and credit card services. The day after signing the contract, the company representative informed the Consulate that the contract could not be respected, because of a call from a U.S. company with whom they do a lot of business, who requested that the contract be broken, under threat of breaking their relationship.

In the sphere of medicine, a Cuban doctor present at the get-together explained that Cuba received a nuclear magnetic resonance machine for children. The machine is broken and to repair it, Cuba has to search all over the world to find someone who can repair the device. What is noteworthy is that once equipment contains 2 percent or more of components coming from the United States, the extra-territoriality of the blockade applies. To acquire medicines, Cuba must go through Europe, where costs are rising and trade must be conducted in euros. As a scientist, she cannot directly participate in scientific conferences in the United States. To travel to the U.S. Cubans have to first travel to another country to obtain a visa to then travel to the U.S.

One participant asked what alternatives exist. Cuba is making great efforts to expand trade with all countries despite the difficulties, including the addition of high transportation costs when the country is thousands of kilometres away, such as China.

The Consul added that the U.S. blockade is felt within all aspects of the daily lives of Cubans. There are certain commodities that they cannot obtain; the cost of other products is very high; the repair of specialized materials is very high. Seventy per cent of the Cuban population today were born and raised under the blockade. It is part of their daily lives and the way in which they approach life in all spheres. As a result, Cuba knows its enemy well and can predict events because of its vast, over 50-year experience in building the Cuban socialist society under the conditions of the blockade.

Participants took the floor to commend the resistance of the Cuban people, their principled positions, their ability to stand firm in the face of provocations, their right to decide their destiny as well as their internationalist spirit towards the peoples of the world. This internationalism is reflected in the support at every level that Cuba brings to the world. It is also reflected in the vote in support of the Cuban resolution over the past 27 years.

Several announcements were made before the close of the meeting. Everyone was invited to the next picket against the blockade on Saturday, November 17. The Consul General also invited all friends of Cuba to participate in the commemoration that will take place at the Cuban Embassy in Ottawa on Monday, November 26, on the second anniversary of the loss of Commander Fidel.

The evening ended with the slogans: No to the U.S. Blockade Against Cuba! End the Blockade Against Cuba! Long Live the Cuban Revolution! Viva Cuba!



Pickets are held at the U.S. Consulate in Montreal on the 17th of each month to reiterate the demand that Guantanamo be returned to Cuba and that the U.S. government end its blockade. Shown there, the September 17, 2017 action.



Recent Chronology of Actions and Escalated Rhetoric of the U.S. Against Cuba

At the evening gathering in Montreal, the Consul General of Cuba Mara Bilbao Diaz, read a chronology of recent hostile actions taken by the U.S. against Cuba. It is printed below.

2017

September 29: Rex Tillerson, the Secretary of State at the time, ordered the withdrawal of Cuban diplomatic personnel, within the framework of an operation of a purely political nature.

October 3: Expulsion order of 15 Cuban diplomats accredited by Washington.

October 5: The U.S. embassy in Havana issues a statement informing Cuban citizens requiring travel or immigration visas that its services cannot be guaranteed.

November 8: U.S. agencies announce provisions and regulations aimed at restricting "people to people" travel and that transactions with over 100 companies or Cuban businesses have been prohibited.

2018

April 5: Vice President Mike Pence speaks about Cuba in a disrespectful and aggressive manner during the Summit of the Americas in Lima.

June 2: The new U.S. Ambassador to the OAS, Carlos Trujillo, of Cuban origin, declares that "Cuba is the mother of all evil," a ridiculous statement coming from the mouth of someone who is stateless.

June 4: Pence once again speaks about Cuba in a hostile manner at the OAS.

June 5: The Secretary of State announces the creation of a task force to respond to "health incidents" suffered by its diplomats.

June 14: Vice President Pence again attacks Cuba during a National Prayer Breakfast in the U.S.

July 18: The U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations describes Cubas as a "tyrannical regime" at the Heritage Foundation.

September 19: The U.S. Ambassador to the OAS confirms it is necessary to be "tough on Cuba, as they are all the same," alluding to fraternal countries in the region.

October 1: The U.S. government violates its commitment of the previous fiscal year to deliver at least 20,000 travel documents or visas, which contravenes the migration agreements that had been signed during the previous fiscal year. This affects family reunification while other actions severely limit the right of Cubans to travel all over the world.

October 8: The Secretary of Defense declares that the world recognizes that the Cuban model is not working for anyone, including Cuba. Amongst the exceptions of a so-called shared vision, of a supposed collaborative regional order, prosperous and sure for the well-being of nations, he speaks of an unfortunate and obstinate Cuban leadership, while attacking other sovereign Latin American nations.

October 16: The U.S. Mission to the United Nations Organization organizes a demonstration in the offices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to launch a defamatory campaign against Cuba. The manoeuvre is met with an appropriate response by the international and continental community: not a single representative of a country on the continent assists in the action, with the exception of those designated by the United States Mission and the Department of State. All other representatives of countries in attendance express their solidarity with Cuba.

October 23: The Secretary of State declares that the delegation of Cuban diplomats had a childish tantrum during a meeting sponsored by U.S. at the United Nations. As for the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the United Nations, it declares that it will continue to exercise its right to participate in any event concerning Cuba at the headquarters of the international organization and will respond accordingly.



For Your Information

Anti-Conscription Protests in Quebec in 1918

- Geneviève Royer -

The end of March and beginning of April this year marked the 100th anniversary of the militant protests by Quebecers against attempts by the Canadian government to use its police powers to impose conscription on the working people and youth of Canada and Quebec during the First World War.

Within the conditions of the day, the ruling elite in Canada found a wall of resistance among the working people of Quebec to being forcibly sent to war. The aspirations of the Québécois for nationhood had been put down prior to Confederation through force of British arms. Along with the subjugation of the Indigenous peoples and by subjugating the settlers in Upper Canada, the basis was laid for the establishment of an Anglo-Canadian state and Confederation. It is not hard to imagine that the Quebec working class would not look favourably on being mowed down on the battlefields of Europe in the service of the British Empire.



Demonstration against conscription in Square-Victoria in Montreal on May 17, 1917.

Canada's Entry into the War

In August 1914, Britain declared war on the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Canada, as a dominion of the British Empire, was automatically bound to take part.

Robert Laird Borden, then Conservative Prime Minister of Canada, was eager to participate in the war. By Sunday, August 9, 1914, the basic orders-in-council had been proclaimed, and a war session of parliament opened just two weeks after the conflict began. Legislation was quickly passed to secure the country's financial institutions and raise tariff duties on some high-demand consumer items. The War Measures Bill, giving the government extraordinary powers of coercion over Canadians, was rushed through three readings.[1]

Businessman William Price (of the Price Brothers and Company -- predecessor of Resolute Forest Products) was mandated to create a training camp at Valcartier, near Quebec City. Some 126 farms were expropriated to expand the camp's area to 12,428 acres (50 square km). "From the start of the conflict, a range of 1,500 targets was built, including shelters, firing positions and signs, making it the largest and most successful shooting range in the world on August 22, 1914. The camp housed 33,644 men in 1914." [2] At the time Valcartier was the largest military base in Canada.



Examples of the Canadian state's maladroit Anglo-Canadian chauvinist attempts to recruit Quebecers to its unjust cause of imperialist war, exhorting them to enlist on the basis of loyalty to the old colonial power, France; opposition to tyranny by supporting the new colonial power, Britain; or protecting themselves from foreign invasion.

On October 15, 1914, the 22nd Battalion was officially created to bolster French Canadian involvement. As the only combatant unit in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) whose official language was French, the 22nd (French Canadian) Infantry Battalion, commonly referred to as the "Van Doos" (from vingt-deux, meaning twenty-two in French), was subject to more scrutiny than most Canadian units in the First World War. After months of training in Canada and England, the battalion finally arrived in France on 15 September 1915.[3]

In April 1916, the unit participated in one of the Van Doos' most dangerous assignments of the entire war, the Battle of St. Eloi Craters. St. Eloi was fought on a very narrow Belgian battlefield. A fierce battle ensued — with heavy casualties. Following St. Eloi, the battalion prepared for taking the French village of Courcellette in the Somme sector of France. The battalion suffered hundreds of casualties. To many, it showed just how violent war could really be. In the months following the Somme operations, the battalion began suffering from desertion and absence without leave. According to battalion officers, the months following Courcellette witnessed a complete breakdown in troop morale. In the next 10 months, 70 soldiers were brought before a court-martial (48 for illegal absences) and several were executed by firing squad.[4]

The number of volunteers continuously declined with the growing refusal to serve as cannon fodder for imperialist powers and as a result of the profound impact of the war efforts on the country's economy. The threat of compulsory military service hung over the country. The people of Quebec, expressing their anti-war sentiment, were at the forefront of the opposition to conscription. The Canadian establishment at the time blamed Quebecers for the "the lack of French-Canadian participation in the war." [5]

By the summer of 1917, Canada had been at war for nearly three years. More than 130,000 Canadians belonging to the Canadian Expeditionary Force had been killed or maimed.[6]

The lack of enthusiasm for the war was such that the government resorted to conscription of soldiers, even though Borden had promised earlier not to conscript Canadians.[7] On August 29, 1917, the *Military Service Act* was passed. It stipulated that "All the male inhabitants of Canada, of the age of eighteen years and upwards, and under sixty, not exempt or disqualified by law, and being British subjects, shall be liable to service in the Militia: Provided that the Governor General may require all the male inhabitants of Canada, capable of bearing arms, to serve in the case of a levée en masse."

Of the 3, 458 individuals of the City of Hull called-up by military authorities who had not been granted an exemption, 1,902 men failed to report and were never apprehended, for a total conscription evasion rate of 55 per cent, the highest in all Canadian registration districts, followed closely by Quebec City at 46.6 per cent, then Montreal at 35.2 per cent. Furthermore, 99 per cent of those called up from the City of Hull applied for an exemption, the highest application rate in all of Canada.[8]

War Measures Act Imposed

The process of conscription call-ups began in January of 1918.[9] In Quebec, demonstrations in opposition to conscription intensified. Dominion agents, known as "spotters," tracked down men who refused to sign up. Professor Béatrice Richard at Royal Military College Saint-Jean writes of these press gangs: "These agents had the reputation of being thugs in the employ of the federal government and were more interested in filling their pockets -- at a premium of \$10 per refractory captured -- than enforcing the law." [10] Every arrest further inflamed the people's anger. Quebec historian Jean Provencher writes that some young Quebecers, whose applications for exemption were pending in court were "kidnapped in the street, and it took parents a week to learn that they were sent to the European battlefields." [11]

On the evening of March 28, 1918, federal police raided a bowling alley and arrested the youth there. Faced with the arbitrariness and violence of the police, 3,000 people besieged the police station and continued their demonstration in the streets during the night.

The next day, a crowd of nearly 10,000 gathered in front of the Place Montcalm auditorium (currently called Capitole de Quebec), where the conscripts' files were administered. The military, with bayonets and cannons, were called in and shortly thereafter the riot act was read, giving them permission to fire.



Thousands of demonstrators march to Place Montcalm on March 29, 1918

The next day, "General Landry received from Ottawa the directives he expected: the army will now have full powers to enforce law and order in Quebec City. [...] In concrete terms, this meant that public security would no longer come under the municipal authorities, as the police were now subject to military authority." [12] The demonstrations continued anyway and on March 31, demonstrators suffered gunshot wounds.

Borden, obsessed with sending Canadians to the trenches, gave special powers "with special instructions to quell unrest." Trains jammed with soldiers were hustled to Quebec City. For two days, between March 31 and April 1, no less than 10,000 men from Ontario and Manitoba converged on the capital. [13] The people confronted the army, not hesitating to surround the soldiers and chase them. Each time a demonstration was dispersed, it reassembled a few streets away.

On Monday, April 1, the military received the following instructions:

1. Any gathering is forbidden
2. Anyone who does not obey can be arrested on the spot
3. Soldiers can use any force necessary to make arrests. [14]

That same day, four civilians were killed. More than 50 were wounded and about 60 arrests were made.



Victims of the Canadian state's deadly criminalization of dissent against conscription in Quebec City on April 1, 1918.

On April 4, martial law was imposed on Quebec City under the *War Measures Act*. It legalized all intervention

of the federal army "on or after the 28th day of March." [15]

Borden's government then cancelled all exemptions to conscription. [16]

Borden maintained the pressure on Quebec to crush the resistance to conscription. He also sought to prevent any risk of "revolutionary contagion." To that end, Ottawa made any association deemed subversive, be it trade union or political, illegal. [17]



March 21, 2018 - Members of the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Québec commemorated those killed 100 years ago during the demonstrations against conscription at a monument in their honour.

The "conscription crisis" ended when the war itself was brought to an end on November 11, 1918. But before it was over, the unscrupulous sums being reaped by the rich from the war became so prevalent that Borden "had to fire his Minister of Militia and Defence, and deal with scandals involving graft and wartime profiteering." [18] The opposition of the people to the war was such that the Conservative Party "was wiped out for decades to come in the province of Quebec." [19]

Quebeckers' have expressed their opposition to imperialist aggression and war for the past more than 100 years. Today, every attempt is made to undermine their anti-war sentiment and movement with neo-liberal sophistry which claims humanitarian aims and the highest ideals such as defence of women's rights. The slogan guiding our people continues to be: Not a

Single Youth for Imperialist War !

Notes

1. "Sir Robert Laird Borden," greatwaralbum.ca.
2. "Les débuts du camp de Valcartier et d'une armée improvisée de toutes pièces," Pierre Vennat, *Le Québec et les guerres mondiales*, December 17, 2011.
3. Maxime Dagenais, The "Van Doos" and the Great War, November 5, 2018, *The Canadian Encyclopedia*
4. *Ibid.*
5. "The First World War," Sean Mills (under the direction of Brian Young, McGill University), McCord Museum website.
6. Richard Foot, Election of 1917, August 12, 2015, *The Canadian Encyclopedia*
7. *Ibid.*
8. Claude Harb, *Le Droit et l'Outaouais pendant la Première Guerre mondiale*, Bulletin de l'Institut Pierre Renouvin, 2017/1 (N 45), Éditeur: UMR Sirice
9. J.I. Granetstein, Conscription in Canada, February 6, 20016, *The Canadian Encyclopedia*
10. "Le 1er avril 1918 -- Émeute à Québec contre la conscription: résistance politique ou culturelle?," Conférence de Béatrice Richard, professeur agrégé, directrice du département des Humanités et des sciences sociales au Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean, January 31, 2013.
11. Jean Provencher, *Québec sous la loi des mesures de guerre -- 1918*, Editions Lux, 2014.
12. "Le 1er avril 1918 -- Émeute à Québec contre la conscription: résistance politique ou culturelle?," Conference by Béatrice Richard, Associate Professor, Director of Humanities and Social Sciences Department at Royal Military College Saint-Jean, January 31, 2013.
13. *Ibid.*

14. Jean Provencher, Québec sous la loi des mesures de guerre -- 1918, Editions Lux, 2014.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Desmond Morton, First World War (WWI), August 5, 2013, *The Canadian Encyclopedia*
17. "Les débuts du camp de Valcartier et d'une armée improvisée de toutes pièces," Pierre Vennat, Le Québec et les guerres mondiales, 17 décembre 2011.
18. "Biography: The Right Honourable Sir Robert Laird Borden," Library and Archives Canada.
19. *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*



[PREVIOUS ISSUES](#) | [HOME](#)

Read *Chantier politique*

Website: www.pmlq.qc.ca Email: permanence@pmlq.qc.ca