

Newfoundland

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Newfoundland entered the Great War with great enthusiasm, but was unprepared for what lay ahead. The war greatly stimulated the local economy, since fish prices rose to unprecedented heights. The mining industry also eventually prospered, but the newsprint sector did less well. This is partly because there were endemic shipping problems caused in part by the sale of locally-owned steel-hulled vessels to the Russian government. Originally managed by the Newfoundland Patriotic Association, recruitment became a responsibility of the new National Government in 1917, which brought in conscription. The long-term impact of the war undermined the country's independence.

Table of Contents

- [1 Background](#)
- [2 Newfoundland in the British Empire](#)
- [3 Politics in 1914](#)
- [4 The Economy](#)
- [5 The National Government](#)
- [6 Conscription](#)
- [7 The Aftermath](#)

[Notes](#)

[Selected Bibliography](#)

[Citation](#)

Background

Newfoundland – then as now – consists of two parts.^[1] There is the island, where the bulk of the small population lived (and lives), and there is Labrador, the huge territory to the north. In 1914, the

boundaries of Labrador were contested between Newfoundland and [Canada](#). The final decision in Newfoundland's favour came in 1927, though it was previously agreed that Newfoundland controlled an undefined coastal strip between Blanc Sablon and Cape Chidley.

It was a colony with a large territory – the island alone contains nearly 109,000 square kilometres – and a small population, a little over 243,000 in 1914.^[2] Most residents were native-born (as had been the case since the mid-19th century), and many of them had southwest English or southeast Irish ancestry, population sources that reflected the routes of 18th century migratory fishery. Families lived around the coast, for the most part, and worked in the fisheries. This included the seal fishery, or “hunt”, which was especially important to the island's northeast coast. In 1911, 43,795 men were employed in catching and curing fish, and 23,245 women in curing fish; the forestry, mining and manufacturing industries employed a combined total of 6,285 persons. The small merchant and professional class was centred on the capital, St. John's, on the east coast of the Avalon Peninsula, which had a population of about 32,000. The town was also the colony's political hub.

During the period from 1906 to 1910, 84.4 percent of exports by value were derived from the fisheries. The economy depended on foreign trade, since fisheries products had to be sent abroad – mainly to Mediterranean countries and [Brazil](#) – and most foodstuffs, let alone salt, twine and so on, had to be imported. Imports came mainly from Canada, the [United States](#) and [Britain](#). Between 1909/1910 and 1913/1914, exports averaged \$13.5 million and imports \$14.4 million, a trade imbalance that was not seen as serious, and was paid for largely by borrowing from the Canadian banks that had arrived in Newfoundland in the mid-1890s, and through public debt, which reached \$30.5 million in 1913/1914. The size of the debt was largely the result of building a railway across the island, and then popular, but inefficient and costly branch lines.

The colony was economically undiversified. The one significant move in a new direction was the establishment of the Harmsworth-owned newsprint mill at Grand Falls in central Newfoundland, which began to take shape from 1906. There was another, smaller pulp operation at nearby Bishop's Falls, also British-owned. There had been efforts to develop mining, but the single lasting success story were the iron ore mines on Bell Island in Conception Bay. Other mines had faltered and frequently failed. Similarly, attempts to develop the island's agricultural resources (which were limited) had little success except where significant markets existed. Fishing families tended their often productive gardens, but these were not designed to produce a surplus; if there was one, it was bartered locally. The core of the economy remained the fishery. Total trade in 1913/1914 was valued at \$30.3 million.

Since 1855, Newfoundland had possessed responsible government. There was a bicameral legislature – an elected House of Assembly (though Labrador was not represented) and an appointed Legislative Council. The prime minister in 1914 was Sir [Edward P. Morris \(1859-1935\)](#) who led the People's Party, first elected in 1909.^[3] The opposition in the legislature was divided between the Liberal Party, led by [James M. Kent \(1872-1939\)](#), and the Fishermen's Protective Union (FPU)

headed by [William F. Coaker \(1871-1938\)](#).^[4] It was an alliance, but an uneasy one.^[5] The governor had considerable influence, in this instance Sir [Walter Davidson \(1859-1923\)](#) (fresh from the Seychelles) who, like his predecessors, had no practical knowledge or experience of a responsible government colony.

Newfoundland in the British Empire

Newfoundlanders of European descent – the vast majority – often characterised their country as an “ancient and loyal colony”, the foundation stone of the British Empire. These assumptions derived from the probable transatlantic voyage of Zuan Caboto [John Cabot, c. \(1450-1499\)](#) in 1497 and his possible landfall at Cape Bonavista, and a history that was typically characterised as one of constant struggle: against the English West Country merchants who had controlled the migratory fishery, against local enforcers (the hated fishing admirals), and against an always neglectful and at times hostile British government. Throughout, Newfoundlanders had remained steadfastly loyal to the British Crown. This version of the Newfoundland past was promoted by local historians such as [Daniel W. Prowse \(1834-1914\)](#) and [Moses Harvey \(1820-1901\)](#),^[6] and was shared by those of both English and Irish descent, the latter valuing the freedoms that they enjoyed within the British Empire.^[7]

Newfoundland has and had a substantial [Aboriginal population](#) – Mi'kmaq, Innu, Inuit and Metis – largely on the southeastern and western coasts, and most significantly in Labrador. These peoples have recently asserted their separate existence and land claims. But, in 1914, no official distinction was recognised between Indigenous and European. Newfoundland was seen as a European settler colony; that, and the possession of responsible government, meant that it followed the track of Canada and the larger settlement colonies towards [dominion status](#), which was officially achieved in 1907. It never changed its name, and remained a “colony”. Although it occupied a very large territory, the population was small. Newfoundland never achieved the same status within the empire as Canada or [Australia](#), and had to reconcile itself to a position of minor importance.

The [British government](#) had been centrally concerned by international treaties giving fishing rights in Newfoundland waters to foreign powers, which had led to some assertiveness on the part of the colony and to endless disputes. But by 1914 these concerns had been settled. France had agreed to give up the seasonal fishery on its “Treaty Shore” as part of the *entente cordiale* in 1904, and American rights in British North American waters had been defined at The Hague in 1910.^[8] In 1914, the colonial government had no wish to trouble the imperial waters, and seemed content with Newfoundland's status within the empire. This status meant, of course, that the colony participated in the Imperial War Conference and Cabinet, and in the peace negotiations at Versailles.

Politics in 1914

All three political parties supported the British declaration of war in 1914 and – the FPU with some

justified hesitation – the decision to raise a Newfoundland Regiment of 500 men. That the already existing Royal Naval Reserve should be enlarged was not disputed. British and imperial loyalty and enthusiasm had long been a feature of the local colonial [nationalism](#) to which almost all residents subscribed, no matter what their ethnic background.^[9] An observer noted that the [level of excitement](#) in August 1914 “could not have been greater if the enemy were at the entrance of Saint John’s harbour.”^[10] The political parties also supported the Newfoundland Patriotic Association (NPA) chaired by Governor Davidson, which was created in 1914 to manage the war effort and regiment.^[11]

Regardless of political affiliation, local newspapers were unanimous in supporting the war and also disseminated pro-war [propaganda](#), insisting that this was a “holy war” against a “barbarous” and “anti-Christian” [German Empire](#).^[12] The Newfoundland Regiment as a distinctly national force brought a strong local dimension to the war effort, constantly emphasized by the press, which referred to the regiment simply as “Ours.” Even press [censorship](#) – confined to war-related issues – was not objected to. There was strong support for the war effort from all the churches and from their allied fraternal and friendly organisations. Even the harsh British suppression of the 1916 [Easter Rising](#) in Dublin does not appear to have negatively influenced Catholic attitudes toward the war to any appreciable extent.^[13] About fifty-eight foreign nationals were deported in 1915 as a result of [spy fever](#) and the caution of the British Admiralty. They were mainly from Germany and [Austria-Hungary](#), but included the provocative American artist [Rockwell Kent \(1882-1971\)](#), then living in Brigus, Conception Bay.

The outbreak of war, as elsewhere, also gave a boost to those campaigning for the prohibition of alcoholic beverages. It was already almost impossible to obtain alcohol legally outside the St. John’s electoral districts, but patriotism strengthened the cause and in 1915 the Morris government agreed to a plebiscite. The proposal was carried, and prohibition came into effect on 1 January 1917. It probably caused as many problems as it solved, and prohibition was repealed in 1924.

William Coaker was a prohibitionist, but the FPU that he had created was anomalous in the local context. The rise of the union from 1908 was probably the most significant political and economic change to occur in Newfoundland during the first part of the 20th century. Founded in Notre Dame Bay on the northeast coast, the union had initially hoped to dominate rural Newfoundland. But there were significant economic differences between the different regions of the island which limited its appeal in some areas, and a conservative Roman Catholic Church was intensely hostile to the FPU from the start, officially because it was seen as a “secret society”. The result was that the union was largely confined to Protestant regions on the east and northeast coasts. Though Coaker was a reformer rather than an iconoclast (and an imperial patriot), and worked within the system, the FPU was also fiercely opposed by most merchants. They did not welcome change or competition, disliked the FPU’s demand for better fish prices, and hated its class-based rhetoric. The establishment, which included many influential members of the NPA, wanted business as usual.

Nevertheless, the FPU started a trading company, opened trading stores, published a newspaper, and decided to form a political party. It first ran candidates in the 1913 general election and elected eight of them. Though officially allied to the Liberal party, FPU seats came largely at Liberal expense and its leader, Sir [Robert Bond \(1857-1927\)](#), resigned in disgust before the first 1914 legislative session opened. The People's Party also lost seats to the FPU, but still managed to maintain a majority of six (though not of the popular vote). The political situation was by no means stable, and it is unsurprising that Morris avoided a coalition by agreeing to the formation of the NPA. This expedient took the war effort out of partisan politics and ensured inter-denominational cooperation – a very important consideration. The war was expected to be of short duration, and imperial enthusiasm papered over political divisions.

Also in the background was the issue of confederation with Canada. This possibility was widely unpopular, and generally regarded as a last resort. But it was strongly supported by the Reid Newfoundland Company, which controlled much of the colony's transportation system and had bankrolled the People's Party. Morris expressed interest, and the Canadian government responded positively, if with great caution. Clandestine manoeuvres continued into 1916, but the flirtation came to nothing.

The Economy

The start of the war prompted an economic downturn, but the export price of codfish had recovered by the end of 1914. Lobster exports were hit hard, though, since most of the product went to Germany. By mid-1915 trade had increased substantially, and by 1916 exceeded pre-war levels. There was a change in direction towards Canada and the [United States](#), because the war closed many European markets, but overall the total value of exports increased from \$13 million in 1914 to \$36 million in 1918. This was in spite of a lack of shipping tonnage, for which St. John's ship owners were partly to blame.

At the start of the war, Newfoundland ship owners possessed a world-class fleet of steel-hulled steamships. These were used to carry both freight and passengers, and in addition were employed at the annual seal hunt. Then came news that the [Russian government](#) wanted to buy ice-breaking steamers for use in the White Sea, and that they were willing to pay well above market price. Within a matter of months, the Reid Newfoundland Company sold two ships, A. J. Harvey and Company three, and Job Brothers one. Without these large vessels a severe shortage of locally-owned shipping tonnage developed. Opposition politicians and [labour](#) organizations denounced the ship owners for putting greed ahead of the interests of the country, and it remained a focus for critics of the government.^[14]

This problem was exacerbated by a reduction in services to Newfoundland by British and North American steamship companies. Between 1914 and 1918, overseas shipping rates increased by 600 percent, and space on trans-Atlantic vessels for Newfoundland goods was virtually non-

existent.^[15] Thus, as the war continued, Newfoundland was unable to take full advantage of increased demand for its products.

The shipping shortage also reduced the availability and increased the cost of essential imports. In the winter of 1915-1916, there was a shortage of coal, leading to dramatic price increases and accusations from newspapers that merchants were hoarding supplies to drive up the price. This forced the Morris government to intervene and fix the price of coal.^[16] The situation was repeated the following winter, and in 1917 coal was selling at double the pre-war price.^[17] It was reported in April 1917 that the prices of a wide range of foodstuffs and consumer goods had gone up by an average of 100 percent.^[18] The problem was worst in Labrador, which suffered from a severe lack of food during the war.^[19]

The salt cod industry, Newfoundland's economic mainstay, struggled in the years leading up to the war, and the uncertainties of 1914 caused further troubles. But wartime conditions severely disrupted the fish trade of competitors such as [Norway](#), Iceland and France, and Newfoundland's cod fishery started to recover in 1915. Prices for salt cod increased substantially in 1916, and catch rates were higher than they had been for years.^[20] The local press hailed the 1917 fishing season as "perhaps the best in the history of Newfoundland." The next year proved to be even better, with fishermen being paid as much as \$14.46 per quintal for dried cod, double the pre-war price.^[21] The total export value of salt cod increased from \$7.3 million in the 1914 season to \$24.3 million in the 1918 season.^[22] In the last two years of the war, many fishermen invested in new gear, including cod traps and motor boats, to better take advantage of the high prices.^[23] But the expansion of the fishery under such extraordinary circumstances did not bode well for the future.

The war also stimulated demand for other fishery products. The most dramatic expansion was of exports of refined cod oil, used in the manufacture of explosives. In the year before the war, Newfoundland exported 26,218 gallons of refined oil; for 1918, total exports had ballooned to 342,529 gallons at a previously undreamt-of price of \$400 per tonne. Demand for cod oil began to decline as soon as the war was over.^[24]

The dramatic growth in most branches of the fishery did not extend to the sealing industry, which found itself in a decline from which it would never fully recover.^[25] The 1915 spring seal hunt was deemed "practically a complete failure," resulting in the smallest catch on record, though there were slight signs of recovery in 1916.^[26] The sale of the steel-hulled steamers ended their participation, and the sealing fleet declined from twenty steamers in 1914 to twelve in 1918; the number of sealers dropped in the same period from 3,959 to 2,056. Some ship owners got out of the industry entirely. A. J. Harvey and Company abandoned sealing after the sale of its steel steamers, claiming that new sealing regulations passed in 1916 would make the hunt unprofitable.^[27] The sealing industry would never return to its pre-war level.

The war also created major problems for the Grand Falls pulp and paper mill, which, until 1914, exported nearly all of its output to the [United Kingdom](#).^[28] While exports dipped only slightly in 1915, the following years were hard on the industry. In 1916, the British government imposed restrictions on the import of newsprint, while the mill found it difficult to obtain coal and other supplies. The shortage of tonnage created problems throughout the war, even after the Anglo Newfoundland Development Company (“AND Company”) purchased two ships to carry paper overseas. It was a struggle just to keep the mill going, and on a few occasions in 1917 the mill had to curtail production. On top of this, the rate of military enlistment in Grand Falls was second only to St. John’s, which meant the company faced a shortage of workers.^[29] By the latter part of the war, the Grand Falls mill was exporting nearly all of its output to the United States, making up in part for the decrease in exports to Britain.^[30] Nevertheless, exports of pulp and paper remained far below their pre-war levels for the duration of the conflict. Peace brought renewed demand for newsprint, though, and pulp and paper was one of the few export industries that did well in the 1920s.^[31]

Another opportunity, in forestry exports, emerged with the outbreak of war, though it generated controversy. The German naval presence in the Baltic Sea threatened the supply of pit props for Britain’s coal-mining industry, since they came primarily from Scandinavia. St. John’s merchants believed that they could make up for any shortfall by exporting pit props from Newfoundland, a move which seemed to have all the makings of a very profitable venture. But the government had to lift an existing ban on the export of unmanufactured timber, and allow commercial timber cutting within three miles of the shoreline. The “Three Mile Limit” was meant to preserve timber for the use of local inhabitants, and not surprisingly this decision led to widespread protests, in which the FPU took the lead. While large quantities of pit props were exported in 1915 and 1916, by mid-1917 the shortage of shipping tonnage made it almost impossible to get pit props to the United Kingdom, and the timber already cut had to be disposed of elsewhere.^[32]

The experience of the Bell Island iron ore mines was mixed. There were two companies involved, the Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Company, and the Dominion Iron and Steel Company. Both depended heavily on exports of iron and steel from Cape Breton to Europe, including Germany, and the onset of war rendered these markets largely inaccessible. In the autumn of 1914, the Dominion mine laid off 1,500 men, 75 percent of its work force, while the Scotia mine ceased production altogether.^[33] The rapid development of war-related industries in Canada turned the mines’ fortunes around fairly quickly, since Canada obtained roughly one third of its iron ore supply from Bell Island. By 1916, the mines had recovered, and operated for most of that year at full capacity.^[34] Though there was slight increase in the price of iron ore, shipping problems meant that exports thereafter were below pre-war amounts.^[35]

There was a temporary boom in the market for copper, leading to a mine reopening at Tilt Cove on the Baie Verte peninsula, but rising shipping rates made the venture unprofitable and the mine soon closed.^[36] Coal shortages led the AND Company, in conjunction with the Reid Newfoundland

Company, to mine (once again) a coal seam at Howley in the Grand Lake area. It produced several hundred tons of coal before shutting down in 1920.^[37]

There was some stimulus to local manufacturing for the domestic market, at least where raw materials could be obtained. The production of clothing in St. John's increased considerably. At least two new factories opened in 1917-1918, and existing facilities expanded production. One firm which did particularly well was the Newfoundland Clothing Company, which obtained the contract to produce British service dress uniforms for the Newfoundland Regiment.^[38]

There was also an attempt to secure business from the growing demand for [artillery shells](#). In 1915, a group of St. John's businessmen secured a contract from Britain to manufacture 4.5-inch howitzer shells and formed the Newfoundland Shell Company. It employed around 80 men and women, and produced 40,000 shells by 1917. Despite difficulties in obtaining raw materials and maintaining quality control, the factory managed to return a profit to its shareholders. But, by mid-1917, it had become impossible to secure shipping space to get the shells to Liverpool, and the company closed down.^[39]

The tonnage crisis stimulated the building of wooden sailing vessels. In the first half of 1916, Newfoundland shipping interests purchased thirty sailing vessels to carry fish and other cargo, and there was a demand for locally-built vessels as well.^[40] Shipyards were busier than they had been in years, often building large vessels. The Norwegian-owned Newfoundland Shipbuilding Company, established at Harbour Grace in 1917, built six large tern schooners before its yard was destroyed by fire in 1919.^[41] The FPU set up a shipyard in its new town of Port Union, aiming to construct schooners to take salt fish abroad.^[42] The AND Company commissioned two of the largest schooners ever built in Newfoundland in order to ship pulp overseas and coal back to the mill, but they did not go into service until after the war.^[43] By November 1918, around 150 large Newfoundland-based sailing vessels were engaged in the carriage of salt fish and other goods, a response to wartime demand and the tonnage crisis.^[44]

The expansion of Newfoundland's economy, together with a high level of working-class enlistment in the [military](#), meant that the widespread unemployment that had characterised the pre-war period had disappeared by 1917.^[45] There was also a major (if temporary) increase in the number of [women in paid employment](#), especially in the manufacturing sector.^[46] But if the high levels of employment in the later stages of the war created some degree of prosperity, this was offset by a substantial increase in the cost of living. The issue of workers' purchasing power was a key factor in the formation, in April 1917, of a new broadly-based union, the Newfoundland Industrial Workers Association (NIWA), which grew to 3,500 members within a year, including over 400 women. It rapidly became the face of a new labour militancy which emerged from wartime conditions. In the spring of 1918, the NIWA launched a successful three-week strike against the powerful Reid Newfoundland Company, which appeared at first to usher in a new era for local workers. But the NIWA, and the hopes it represented, faded into obscurity during the post-war recession.^[47]

The National Government

Morris and his government faced few local political problems during the first two years of the war. Financial strain and inter-party tensions certainly existed, and, in March 1916, Morris moved to simplify the situation by sending James Kent to the Supreme Court, an offer the latter could not refuse. An acolyte of Sir Robert Bond, Kent had been determined to keep the Liberal party in existence; his promotion removed both an impediment to confederation, and to national government, should either be necessary. The new leader of a now amalgamated opposition, known as the Liberal-Union party, was [William F. Lloyd \(1864-1937\)](#), a working-class Englishman who, though a Liberal, had known Coaker for many years. A former schoolteacher and newspaper editor who had become a lawyer, Lloyd was a conciliatory figure, but by no means a cypher. Opponents claimed that he was a lackey of Coaker, arguing that the FPU now dominated the opposition, and there is some truth to this accusation. However, Morris and his party knew that the result of the election scheduled for 1917 was very uncertain. The People's Party might well lose, and an extension of the usual term (four years) therefore seemed necessary. Morris wanted to avoid a contest if at all possible, especially if conscription became a major issue, and extension was approved by the British government. This placed Morris in a strong position to bargain with the opposition.

It is also clear that he wanted to leave everyday politics. Morris was in Europe for much of the summer and fall in 1916, and again from late January to the spring of 1917, attending meetings of the Imperial War Cabinet and Conference. This was in spite of the fact that the government faced major problems. The first was maintaining the strength of the Newfoundland Regiment, which had suffered severe casualties in [France](#). Voluntary recruitment was insufficient, the NPA seemed incapable of dealing with the situation, and conscription looked inevitable, widely unpopular though it was. The second problem was inflation and profiteering, confirmed by the reports of the High Cost of Living Commission appointed in April 1917.

Given that government action on these problems would demand the support of all parties, Morris proposed a coalition in July 1917; and after a period of political deadlock, a national government emerged. It was the result of agreements between the People's Party, and Morris personally, with the Liberal-Union opposition, which had its own demands. There would be a unified national government, and a ministry of militia would replace the NPA. Morris would resign his seat by the end of 1917, and the national government would then be led by Lloyd, seen as a mutually acceptable figure. The life of the legislature would be extended even further, and it was accepted that the issues of direct taxation and conscription had to be faced. Morris in fact dealt with a profits tax in 1917 by adding compliant members to the recalcitrant Legislative Council and restricting its powers concerning money bills. Income tax was imposed the following year. William Lloyd became prime minister in January 1918. It was his national government that had to face the divisive issue of conscription.

Conscription

The NPA's initial recruitment drive in 1914-1915 had met with success in St. John's and adjacent areas. But in the small outports scattered around the coast, the infrastructure needed to facilitate enlistment simply did not exist. Nor, in many cases, did sufficient available manpower. Roughly half of the adult male work force was employed directly or indirectly in the fishery, and the proportion was much higher in smaller communities. Since the fishery was, in most areas, based on household production, men were not as easily replaced as the clerks and labourers in St. John's. The absence of a crewman on a small fishing vessel could doom a family to destitution. The leaders of the NPA, and many contributors to the St. John's press, tended to attribute low recruitment numbers to a lack of patriotism in the outports. This was a simplistic conclusion that showed little understanding of the rural economy.^[48] While the government and employers tried to make it easier for urban workers to join the regiment, no such measures existed to protect the livelihoods or incomes of men employed in the fishery.^[49]

There were other factors. Over 2,000 Newfoundlanders enlisted in the Royal Naval Reserve and a further 550 in the merchant marine; the vast majority of these men came from the outports. At least two thirds of the 494 men who enlisted in the Newfoundland Forestry Corps came from rural areas.^[50] Additional complications derived from the NPA's insistence that only recruits who signed up in Newfoundland could be accepted into the regiment, which excluded men living in Canada or the United Kingdom. Thousands of military-age men from Newfoundland were living in Canada, most of whom were from rural communities, and this decision removed a potentially large body of recruits.^[51] Moreover, between 1915 and 1918, roughly half of all volunteers for the regiment were rejected, mostly on medical grounds. This continued to be the case even after the British Army's strict physical standards were relaxed in 1916.^[52]

Calls for conscription began in April 1917, after the regiment suffered heavy casualties at Monchy-le-Preux. There was considerable support in St. John's, where material and emotional investment had been made in the Newfoundland Regiment, and the regiment's performance increased the pressure to maintain its separate existence.^[53] Generally speaking, while support for conscription was strongest in St. John's, there was widespread opposition in rural areas – though many individuals and organizations were resigned to its inevitability.^[54] However, Coaker estimated that rural Newfoundlanders opposed conscription by two to one.^[55]

A militia department was created in July 1917, but it did not move immediately towards conscription. The government decided instead to organize a major recruiting drive in rural districts at the end of the fishing season. The results were disappointing.^[56] The fishery was booming and high prices made men reluctant to leave for the trenches.^[57] In early 1918, Coaker stated that he would support conscription, but only if it was endorsed by a national referendum.^[58]

What happened in Europe eventually decided the question. The German offensive in the spring of 1918 caused Britain to call for reinforcements, and in late April, the regiment was withdrawn from the

front: it would see no action until it received more men.^[59] The government then decided to introduce a conscription bill, tied to second bill postponing elections until after the war.^[60] Coaker dropped the demand for a referendum and other union members followed.^[61] To win over public opinion, the government also promised to introduce income tax, thus linking the conscription of men to the conscription of wealth.^[62] The news that conscription was coming led to a significant upsurge in enlistments. Over 600 men volunteered that spring, enough to bring the regiment at up to strength for the remainder of 1918.^[63]

The Military Services Act (MSA), which became law on 11 May 1918, required that unmarried men between 19 and 25 years of age should register for the draft by later that month. The time period was short and there was an enormous amount of confusion, especially since the registration period coincided with start of the fishing season. Ultimately, the deadline was extended.^[64]

There were rumours in St. John's of violent disturbances in the northern bays, but most were wildly exaggerated. The most serious incident seems to have taken place at Wesleyville, where anti-conscription agitators disrupted a patriotic concert.^[65] An anti-conscription demonstration in Bonavista came to nothing, and the only reported case of violence occurred in Conception Harbour, where some young men allegedly knocked down a local schoolteacher who had been involved in recruiting.^[66] Some men in Torbay and Flatrock allegedly made threats against the police, but were swiftly arrested. Such incidents show that while strong opposition to conscription existed in some areas, the situation was nothing like the rioting that followed the 1917 imposition of compulsory service in Canada. The reaction to conscription was in fact fairly muted, and the "crisis" fizzled out quickly.^[67] Attacks on the government, and especially on William Coaker, led to the only major official actions to stifle dissent. Two newspapers were temporarily shut down. They were accused of trying to stir up anti-conscription sentiment in Roman Catholic districts, after they attacked the government for bungling the exemption process and causing delays to the start of fishery.^[68]

Despite the confusion over registration, 1,573 men were conscripted by the war's end, and 2,056 were rejected. The irony is that conscription proved to have been unnecessary, since the war ended before any conscript reached the front.^[69]

The Aftermath

The Armistice found the Newfoundland economy at an historic high point, but prosperity was not to last. Demand for goods related to the war effort collapsed, and industries that had expanded to meet that demand contracted. The post-war recession was an international phenomenon, but Newfoundland was particularly hard hit. In large part, this was because the wartime boom had made the colony's economic well-being even more dependent on fish sales abroad. Of the \$36.8 million of goods exported in 1917-1918, the fisheries accounted for 89 percent, and salt cod alone 66

percent.^[70]

The immediate post-war period saw a revival of the French and Norwegian fisheries, and expanded fishing efforts by such competitors as Iceland and Portugal. Currency movements were erratic until at least the mid-1920s. The northern countries in particular were not afraid of a degree of state control and moved towards a much improved competitive position. Newfoundland, by contrast, stagnated as fish merchants rejected state management and insisted on preserving traditional laissez-faire attitudes. At the same time, some consuming countries like Italy refused to continue to pay inflated wartime prices.^[71] The result was that the price paid to fishermen dropped from \$14.46 per quintal at war's end to \$9.77 in 1920 and \$6.86 in 1922, lower than the pre-war price. In 1931, it reached \$4.52. The collapse devastated many fishing families and encouraged emigration to the United States and Canada, particularly since the cost of food and other essentials had not also declined.

It was also devastating for the government. Newfoundland had borrowed almost \$15 million to fund its war effort, driving the public debt to \$43 million in 1919-1920. The actual cost of the war over time was nearer to \$35 million, a huge amount for a small population. In terms of lives lost, 167 naval reservists were killed or died of disease, and 125 became invalids. Of the nearly 5,000 soldiers who went to Europe, 1,232 were killed, 18 declared missing, and 174 taken prisoner (29 of these died in German [camps](#)). Many were wounded, and these figures do not include the Newfoundlanders who joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force and other units, estimated at 3,268. Others joined the Forestry Corps, and approximately 175 women served as [nurses](#) and in other capacities. Enlistment may not have been the highest among empire troops, but the colony's war effort had been certainly been significant, particularly when the contributions of those who remained at home are included. The cost of pensions, rehabilitation and other services was a major charge on the public accounts, both during and after the war; and the country was hard-pressed to provide sufficient funds.

There was also the problem of what to do with the Newfoundland Railway, which the Reid Newfoundland Company announced in 1920 that it could no longer afford to operate. The eventual solution was a government takeover in 1923, which only added to its financial burdens – some \$18.8 million until 1933. However, the deal was tied to the development of a second pulp and paper mill at Corner Brook, which provided some economic relief. That, and a zinc mine at Buchans (1928) in the interior, were the only indications of the economic diversification that was so badly needed. Conditions improved somewhat in the late 1920s, but this proved to be a temporary respite.

The long-term financial cost of the war, which represented about one third of the public debt, became a major factor in the colony's fight for survival as an independent political unit, which intensified after the arrival of the Great Depression in 1929-1930. Easy borrowing during the 1920s allowed the public debt to spiral upwards, and it can certainly be argued that the politicians in charge behaved irresponsibly. But another legacy of the war was a continuation and intensification of the political fragmentation that had developed since 1914. Political warlords contested place and power, and public life became increasingly unstable. It was a situation that eventually opened the way, in the

extreme financial crisis of the early 1930s, for a conservative mercantile takeover and surrender to the British government, which in 1934 suspended responsible government and established a species of direct rule through a Commission of Government. In this sense, there is a direct line between the Great War and Newfoundland's loss of independence and dominion status. Some might argue that joining Canada, which happened in 1949, was the inevitable result.

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Notes

1. ↑ This essay uses the older name “Newfoundland”, rather than “Newfoundland and Labrador”, which was introduced in 2001.
2. ↑ This estimate includes the island and Labrador. There had been a census in 1911; we have allowed for a very modest population increase of about 750.
3. ↑ Hiller, James K.: Morris, Edward Patrick, 1st Baron Morris, in: Dictionary of Canadian Biography, volume 16, 2015.
4. ↑ On Coaker, see Smallwood, J. R. (ed.): Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador, volume 1, St. John's 1981, pp. 457-461; Baker, Melvin: Coaker, Sir William Ford, in: Dictionary of Canadian Biography, volume 16, 2015. On Kent, Poole, C. F.: (ed.), Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador, volume 3, St. John's 1991, p. 167.
5. ↑ McDonald, Ian D. H.: To Each His Own. William Coaker and the Fishermen's Protective Union in Newfoundland Politics, 1908-1925, St. John's 1987, p. 43.
6. ↑ Prowse, D. W.: A History of Newfoundland, St. Phillip's 2002. Harvey, Moses / Hatton, Joseph: Newfoundland, the Oldest British Colony. Its History, its Present Condition, and its Prospects for the Future, London 1883.
7. ↑ Mannion, Patrick: A Land of Dreams. Ethnicity, Nationalism, and the Irish in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and Maine, 1880-1923, Montreal et al. 2018, p. 48.
8. ↑ Thompson, F. F.: The French Shore Problem in Newfoundland. An Imperial Study, Toronto 1961. Gluek, Alvin C.: Programmed Diplomacy. The Settlement of the North Atlantic Fisheries Question, 1907-12, in: *Acadiensis* 6/1 (1976), pp. 43-70.
9. ↑ The only active opposition to the war and enlistment seems to have come from Roman Catholic priests of Irish birth. Patrick O'Flaherty notes, however, that while Protestant clergy were active in recruiting efforts, Roman Catholic clergy were far less so. O'Flaherty, Patrick: *Lost Country. The Rise and Fall of Newfoundland, 1843-1933*, St. John's 2005, p. 272.
10. ↑ Cramm, Richard: *The First Five Hundred*, Albany 1921, p. 20.
11. ↑ The standard work is O'Brien, Patricia R.: *The Newfoundland Patriotic Association. The Administration of the War Effort, 1914-1918* (thesis), Memorial University 1982.
12. ↑ Selwyn-Brown, Arthur: Newfoundland and the War, in: *Newfoundland Quarterly* 14/4 (1915), pp. 2-4.

13. † Mannion, Patrick: Newfoundland Responses to the Easter Rebellion and the Rise of Sinn Fein, in: Newfoundland and Labrador Studies 24/1 (2009), pp. 6-9; Proceedings of the House of Assembly 1916, 2 May 1916, p. 575.
14. † O'Brien, Michael: Producers vs. Profiteers. The Politics of Class in Newfoundland during the First World War, in: Acadiensis 40 (2011), pp. 52-53.
15. † Board of Trade Report, 1918, pp. 14-15.
16. † Evening Telegram, 15 January 1916; Daily News, 10 January 1916.
17. † Evening Telegram, 5 May 1917.
18. † Daily News, 16 April 1917.
19. † O'Brien, Producers versus Profiteers 2011, p. 59.
20. † Board of Trade Journal 96 (1917), p. 304.
21. † Higgins, Jenny: First World War and the Economy, issued by Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage Web Site, online: <http://www.heritage.nf.ca/first-world-war/articles/first-world-war-economy.php> (retrieved: 23 January 2019).
22. † Journal of the House of Assembly, 1916, Appendix, p. 196; 1920, Appendix, p. 274.
23. † Mackenzie, David: Eastern Approaches. Maritime Canada and Newfoundland, in: Mackenzie, David (ed.): Canada and the First World War. Essays in Honour of Robert Craig Brown, Toronto 2005, p. 363; O'Flaherty, Lost Country 2005, p. 293.
24. † Evening Telegram, 16 January 1919; Board of Trade Report, 1919, pp. 16-17; Journal of the House of Assembly, 1915, Appendix, p. 203; 1920, Appendix, p. 280.
25. † Sealing was already in a decades-long decline prior to the war. Ryan, Shannon: The Ice Hunters. A History of Newfoundland Sealing to 1914, St. John's 1994, p. 117.
26. † Evening Telegram, 31 December 1915; Board of Trade Journal 92 (1916), p. 506; 92 (1916), p. 506.
27. † Candow, James E.: Of Men and Seals. A History of the Newfoundland Seal Hunt, Ottawa 1989, pp. 45-46, 90-91. The Seal Fishery Act was passed in May 1916, bringing in new safety regulations meant to prevent a repeat of the sealing disasters of 1914. Cadigan, Sean. Death on Two Fronts. National Tragedies and the Fate of Democracy in Newfoundland, 1914-34, Toronto 2013, p. 119.
28. † Journal of the House of Assembly, 1915, Appendix, p. 204.
29. † Price, F. A.: Fifty Years of Progress at Grand Falls. The Impact of Anglo-Newfoundland Development Company Ltd. on the Economy of Newfoundland, St. John's 1959, pp. 23-26; Marsh, Bryan: The Weathered Storm. The AND Co., Central Newfoundland and World War One, issued by Anglo Newfoundland Development Company, online: <https://anglonewfoundlanddevelopmentcompany.wordpress.com/2017> (retrieved: 23 January 2019).
30. † Report on the Trade of Canada and Newfoundland for the Year 1917, London 1918, p. 46; United Empire 9 (1919), pp. 235-236.
31. † Price, Fifty Years of Progress 1959, pp. 26-27.
32. † O'Brien, Producers versus Profiteers 2011, pp. 54-57; Journal of the House of Assembly, 1918, Appendix, p. 333.

33. ↑ Martin, Wendy: *Once Upon a Mine. The Story of Pre-Confederation Mines on the Island of Newfoundland*, Montreal 1983, p. 96; Neary, P. F.: 'Traditional' and 'Modern' Elements in the Social and Economic History of Bell Island and Conception Bay, in: *Canadian Historical Association Papers* (1973), p. 120.
34. ↑ *Board of Trade Journal* 96 (1917), p. 304; MacLeod, Malcolm: *Kindred Countries. Canada and Newfoundland before Confederation*, Ottawa 1994, p. 10.
35. ↑ *Journal of the House of Assembly, 1914-1919, Appendices*, passim.
36. ↑ Martin, *Once Upon a Mine* 1983, pp. 23-24; Marshall, Jill: Tilt Cove, in: *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, St. John's 1994, volume 5, p. 388.
37. ↑ Martin, *Once Upon a Mine* 1983, pp. 68-70; Price, *Fifty Years of Progress* 1959, p. 24.
38. ↑ McInnis, Peter: *Newfoundland Labour and World War I. The Emergence of the Newfoundland Industrial Workers' Association"* (thesis), Memorial University of Newfoundland 1987, pp. 47-48; Service dress replaced the makeshift fatigues worn by the first contingent of the regiment. *Daily News*, 19 December 1914.
39. ↑ O'Brien, Michael: *Our Own Military-Industrial Complex. The Newfoundland Shell Company, 1915-1918*, in: *Newfoundland Quarterly* 100/2 (2007), pp. 34-36.
40. ↑ *Canadian Railway and Marine World*, August 1916, p. 344.
41. ↑ Thornhill, D. J.: Shipbuilding, *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, St. John's 1994, volume 5, p. 170.
42. ↑ Goodspeed, Rhona: Port Union Historic District, in: *Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada* 28/33 (2003), p. 73.
43. ↑ Price, *Fifty Years of Progress* 1959, p. 24; Marsh, *The Weathered Storm*.
44. ↑ Baker, Melvin / Neary, Peter: P. T. McGrath's 1918 Account of Newfoundland's Part in the Great War, in: *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 29/2 (2014), pp. 293-294.
45. ↑ *Commercial Annual* (1917), p. 83.
46. ↑ Forestell, Nancy / Chisholm, Jessie: Working-Class Women as Wage Earners in St. John's, Newfoundland, 1890-1921, in: Tancred-Sheriff, Peta (ed.): *Feminist Research. Prospect and Retrospect*, Kingston 1988, pp. 148-149.
47. ↑ McInnis, Peter: All Solid Along the Line. The Reid Newfoundland Strike of 1918, in: *Labour/Le Travail* 26 (1990), pp. 61-84; O'Brien, *Producers versus Profiteers* 2011, pp. 61-62, p. 66.
48. ↑ McDonald, *To Each His Own* 1987, p. 69; Martin, Christopher C.: The Right Course, the Best Course, the Only Course. Voluntary Recruitment in the Newfoundland Regiment, 1914-1918, in: *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 24/1 (2009), pp. 55-89.
49. ↑ O'Brien, Michael: 'Out of a Clear Sky'. The Mobilization of the Newfoundland Regiment, 1914-1915, in: *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 22 (2007), pp. 8-9; Cadigan, *Death on Two Fronts* 2013, p. 166. It should be noted that many volunteers whose place of residence was listed as St. John's were young men who had moved to the city from rural districts.
50. ↑ O'Brien, *Out of a Clear Sky* 2007, pp. 408-409.
51. ↑ By one estimate, 3,296 native Newfoundlanders served in the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Sharpe, Christopher: The 'Race of Honor'. An Analysis of Enlistments and Casualties in the Armed Forces of Newfoundland, 1914-1918, in: *Newfoundland Studies* 4/1 (1988), p. 30.
52. ↑ Martin, *The Right Course* 2009, p. 70.
53. ↑ O'Brien, *Newfoundland Patriotic Association* 1982, p. 159; Cadigan, *Death on Two Fronts* 2013, p. 160.

54. † Churchill, Jason: Of Fighting 'Baymen' and 'Townies'. Towards a Reassessment of the Newfoundland Conscription Crisis 1917-1918, in: Canadian Military History since the 17th Century. Proceedings of the Canadian Military History Conference, Ottawa, 5-9 May 2000, Ottawa 2001, pp. 167-175.
55. † PHA, 11 May 1918, p. 169.
56. † Churchill, Of Fighting 'Baymen' and 'Townies' 2001, p. 170.
57. † Journal of the House of Assembly, 1919, p. 533.
58. † Evening Advocate, 10 January 1918.
59. † Nicholson, G. W. L. The Fighting Newfoundlander. A History of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, St. John's 1964, p. 459.
60. † O'Brien, Newfoundland Patriotic Association 1982, p. 315.
61. † McDonald, To Each His Own 1987, p. 70.
62. † PHA, 23 April 1918, p. 26.
63. † PHA, 11 May 1918, p. 165.
64. † O'Brien, Newfoundland Patriotic Association 1982, pp. 321-323.
65. † Evening Herald, 17 May 1918.
66. † Evening Telegram, 17 May 1918.
67. † RPA, MG 632, File 22, Carty to Harris, 22 November 1918.
68. † O'Brien, Newfoundland Patriotic Association 1982, pp. 315-316, 324-325; Cadigan, Death on Two Fronts 2013, p. 182. The government's action against the two newspapers was mild in contrast to the widespread and harsh suppression of dissent in Canada during the last year of the war. Kealey, Gregory S.: State Repression of Labour and the Left in Canada, 1914-20. The Impact of the First World War, in: Canadian Historical Review 73 (1992), pp. 281-314.
69. † Journal of the House of Assembly 1919, p. 521.
70. † Journal of the House of Assembly 1920, Appendix, p. 274, 286.
71. † Baker, Melvin: Challenging the 'Merchants' Domain'. William Coaker and the Price of Fish, 1908-1919, in: Newfoundland and Labrador Studies 29/2 (2014), p. 215; O'Flaherty, Lost Country 2005, pp. 293-294.

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