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THE CASE AGAINST CONSCRIPTION

II

Canada's Economic  
Destruction

*by*

*Edouard MONTPETIT*

Professor of Political Economy  
at Laval University

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## The Case against Conscription

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## CANADA'S ECONOMIC DESTRUCTION<sup>1</sup>

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The New York *Evening Post* has asked me to sum up, for the benefit of its readers, the economic situation at the present time, as regards the application of the Military Conscription law in Canada.

Political men and economists of all nations are unanimous on the necessity for positive action and political reorganization, in order to help the Allied armies, and to prepare for the after-war period.

This war has apparently taught to all nations an imperative lesson which can be expressed as follows: The organization of all military and economic forces, at the front, as well as in the rear, is the only guarantee of the decisive victory, which we desire, and which must be extended, even when the armies have ceased fighting, into the commercial and industrial fields.

Prepare for the aftermath, is the message which comes to us from such eminent Frenchmen as Daniel Bellet, Georges Blondel, Henri Hauser, Edouard Herriot, Victor Cambon, Charles Gide, D'Avesnel, and many others. Germany is already preparing for business, according to the testimonies given by Edward Lyall Fox, in the United States, and Austin Harrison, in England. Can-

<sup>1</sup> Reproduced from the *Evening Post*, July 16, and *Le Devoir*, July 17.

ada can only derive from this war commercial advantages in the shape of treaties and agreements, and the question is, how can she hope to reap any benefit, unless she coordinates, immediately, all her forces of production? The necessity for commercial and industrial preparedness is recognized by all. Our Federal Government, following England's lead, has created the Honorary Advisory Council for Scientific and Industrial Research; it has officially approved of a well organized and far flung system of technical education; it has called into the Council of the nation, in order to elaborate a programme of collective action, the great financiers, the manufacturers, and the business men; it has created the Office of National Service, whose messages, distributed in all the newspapers, call upon Canadians for greater production and thrift, so that they may be in a position to place their savings at the disposal of the country, thereby effectively participating in the fight and enlisting among the financial recruits.

We have, therefore, on one side, the immense effort which we are urged to accomplish and whose effectiveness is admitted, and which the Government confidently expects we shall give. It would be dangerous and impolitic to shirk it. Woe upon us, if peace catches us unprepared. No matter how interested Canadians may be in the triumph of the Allied Nations, no matter how convinced they may be of the justice of the cause for which they are fighting, it is impossible for them totally to ignore their own country—particularly at this time, when the United States is bringing to the common

cause, to which Canada has given so much, the backing of a strength at once new and stupendous.

It is admitted that from the population of British or Canadian born citizens of military age amounting to not more than a million and a half, over 550,000 men have volunteered for overseas service. Twenty-five per cent, failed to pass the physical examination, but 450,000 have now enlisted under the British flag. Moreover, Canada has mobilized an industrial army of 400,000 men; 650 munition plants, distributed all over Canada, are now turning out shells at the rate of 800,000 per week. Besides, Canada has the greatest railroad mileage per head of population of any country in the world, and the operation of these railways as well as the operation of other public utilities, further taxes the manpower of the country to the tune of probably 200,000 men.

In Europe, all the munition workers, and a part of the men employed for transportation, would be listed as forming part of the active army, so that Canada can well lay claim to an effective army of over 900,000 men. This means that Canada has mobilized for this war one man out of every eight, whereas France has mobilized one out of six; England, one out of ten; Italy, one out of eleven, and Russia, one out of twenty. The Canadian contribution has astonished the world: none, before the war, would have deemed it possible.

Notwithstanding this remarkable achievement, the Canadian Government now desires, to increase, by means of military conscription, our military forces by 100,000 men or more. What would be the consequen-

ces of this undertaking examined from a purely economic point of view? It would completely paralyze the positive policy of preparedness, to which we have referred, and upon which opinion is unanimous. It would endanger the national production and, which is primordial, jeopardize our quota of supplies to the Allies.

Canada's industry, which has recently been developed by a combined system of protection and subsidies, would be handicapped in its development. Already the manufacturers are complaining of the shortage of men, even those at the head of our most important industries, like Mr Mark Workman, president of the Dominion Steel (see annual report published in June, 1917).

### Lord Shaughnessy's Protest

As early as 1916, Lord Shaughnessy, the financier who probably knows best the requirements of Canada, as well as its interior economic fabric, declared: "Canada has already accomplished marvels, but I cannot believe that the proposition, now made, to raise 500,000 men can be considered as a practical or even possible proposition. We have so many things to do, munitions to manufacture, lands to cultivate; we are asked to help to feed the English nation; besides, we have our financial problems. In sending 500,000 men from Canada, we would create in the industrial population of this country, a void which would cause serious results".

The financial problem, to which Lord Shaughnessy has referred, is also very complex. We have already borrowed millions of dollars ;

and if we add up the Federal, provincial, and municipal debts, with the amounts borrowed by the railroad companies and other industrials, we realize that a load of many billions — four, perhaps five — burdens our population. A weakened country could never hope to carry such a load : “We know”, declared Sir Edward Walker, president of the Canadian Bank of Commerce, “that the future prosperity of the country with its load of war debt, depends upon greater production in the field, the pastures, the forests, the mines, the sea, and in the workshops, and we cannot afford to be behind any nation in the world in efficiency when the fierce race for success in trade follows the war.”

But it is only when the economic arguments are brought to bear upon conditions now prevailing in agriculture that they develop their full strength. We are now facing a crisis, and it is imperative that production be increased. Mr. R. B. Bennett, director of the National Service ; Mr. Burrell, Minister of Agriculture ; Sir Thomas White, minister of Finance ; Mr. Caron, minister of Agriculture in Quebec ; Messrs. Arthur A. Barnstead, of Nova Scotia ; W. A. Biddell, of Ontario ; F. H. Auld, of Saskatchewan ; H. A. Craig, of Alberta ; W. E. Scott, of British Columbia, have, with Sir George Paish, England’s foremost economist, urged the return of labor to the land.

### **Threat of World Starvation**

Not long ago Mr. David F. Houston, Secretary of the United States



Department of Agriculture, declared : "A general starvation threatens the whole world." As a matter of fact, the belligerent nations are now facing an enormous food deficit, according to Prof. Arthur Richmond Marsh, director of the *Economic World* ; the producing nations cannot possibly satisfy the ever-increasing demand. Once more, figures are there to prove it. Mr. Marsh bases his arguments upon the opinion of Mr. Borel, president of the French Commission of Agriculture, and upon statistics issued by the International Institute of Agriculture. The examination of these figures have led Professor Marsh to the conclusion that, conceivably, the allied armies may "have to yield that to hunger which they would never have yielded to the force of arms — a premature and inconclusive peace, with none of the great ends of the war attained." Our own Federal Minister of Agriculture has just issued some statistics confirming all these opinions. It is apparent from a study of all these figures that upon Canada and the United States will rest the task of feeding the allied nations. This is the point emphasized by Mr. Bonar Law and Mr. Balfour. Sir George Paish summed up the situation as follows : "Victory over militarism will depend as much upon the world's farmers in general, and upon those in America and Canada, in particular, as it does upon the armies at the front." Mr. Prothero, Minister of Agriculture for the United Kingdom, also uses similar language ; the Hon. W. J. Hanna, the Canadian Food Controller, urges our people to "save food or lose war". The *London Daily News* points out that

the "whole situation with respect to the production of food in Great Britain is thoroughly unsatisfactory and likely to remain so as long as men continue to be drawn from agriculture for the army."

These ideas have penetrated in France where the people are beginning to realize that the fight is not solely waged on the battle-field. Senator Humbert went even so far as to advise the demobilization of the older classes in order to utilize them on the farms: "We have delayed too long already, to-morrow may be too late."

Based on relative population and wealth, Canadian achievements have set marks for the American people which are well nigh impossible for it to reach. Assuming that the Canadian effort were to stop definitely now, the Americans would have to accomplish the following tasks before being in a position to urge further action from Canadians: Mobilize, fully equip, and transport on the other side of the Atlantic, three months after their entry into the war, an army of half a million men. Raise, within two years and a half, a total army of about thirteen million men; place six million of these men at work on war contracts and send an army of about seven million men to relieve the western front. Advance to the Allies, to pay for munitions made in the United States, about twenty billion dollars, and undertake to expend for war purposes alone a sum exceeding one hundred billions and probably in the neighborhood of one hundred and fifty billion dollars. Verily, the Canadian achievements in this war will take some beating!

A reader of the Post having expressed doubts as to the accuracy of some of the figures given by Mr. Montpetit, he wrote the following letter:

Montréal, August 3rd, 1917.

Mr. Charles McD. Puckette,  
Acting Managing Editor,  
The New York *Evening Post*,  
New York.

Dear Sir,—

I have duly received your letter of July the 25th stating that you had "received a letter from Montreal from a gentleman in official life whose name I am not permitted to give, as follows:

"With reference to the economic view of Canadian conscription by Mr. Edouard Montpetit, published in your issue of the 16th instant, while not wishing to contradict the statements made by him I would call your particular attention to paragraphs 6 and 7 and would suggest that you have them verified, as the figures given therein are somewhat extraordinary, and I am firmly of the belief, quite incorrect."

In answer to your correspondent I wish to submit, following incriminated paragraphs, the various sources from which my figures were derived and upon which my statements were based:

"It is admitted that from the population of British or Canadian born citizens of military age amounting to not more than a million and a half, over 550,000 men have volunteered for over-seas service. Twenty-five per cent, failed to pass the physical examination, but 450,000 have now enlisted under the British flag. Moreover, Canada has

mobilized an industrial army of 400,000 men; 650 munition plants, distributed all over Canada, are now turning out shells at the rate of 800,000 per week. Besides, Canada has the greatest railroad mileage per head of population of any country in the world, and the operation of these railways as well as the operation of other public utilities, further taxes the manpower of the country to the tune of probably 200,000 men. In Europe, all the munition workers, and a part of the men employed for transportation, would be listed as forming part of the active army, so that Canada can well lay claim to an effective army of over 900,000 men. This means that Canada has mobilized for this war one man out of every eight, whereas France one out of six; England, one out of ten; Italy, one out of eleven, and Russia, one out of twenty. The Canadian contribution has astonished the world; none, before the war, would have deemed it possible."

10. Population of British or Canadian born citizens of military age, not more than 1,500,000.

Canadian Yearbook, 1915, p. 86.

Male population of Canada, 18 to 45 years of age:

Canadian born . . . . .	1,109,383
British born . . . . .	306,377

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Total . . . . . 1,415,760

Military age in Canada is from twenty to forty-five so that male population of 18 and 19 years of age should be subtracted.

Total 18 to 45 . . . . .	1,415,760
Less 18 and 19 . . . . .	122,177

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Total military age . . . 1,293,583  
 (exclusive of foreign born).

20. 450,000 have now enlisted under the British flag.

Can. expe. force on 31st of May 1917 (Sir Edward Kemp, Hansard, July the 6th, 1917) . . . . .	418,102
Enlistment June 1st to 15th	3,392
Enlistment June 15th to 30th	2,358
Enlistment July 1st to 15th	2,166
(Official statements given to the papers).	
Active militia on duty . . .	9,052
Permanent military corps .	2,470
Canadian naval service . .	3,310
British naval service . . .	1,600
British mechanical trans- port . . . . .	1,200
British munitions works .	3,000
British reservists . . . . .	3,750
	<hr/>
	450,390

(Declaration of the Hon. R. Borden, on the 22nd of January, 1917, Hansard of same date).

To these might have been added, if the foreign born population had been taken into consideration, the following:

French reservists . . . . .	5,000
Russian reservists . . . . .	7,500
Italian reservists . . . . .	5,000

Total allied armies reservists . . . . . 17,500  
(Borden, Hansard of the 22nd of January, 1917).

30. Twenty-five per cent failed to pass the physical examination.

Declaration made by the Hon. Sir Robert Borden to the House of Commons on June the 18th, 1917. (Hansard of same date).

40. 550,000 have volunteered.  
Canadian expeditionary  
force to July the 15th . 426,000

Twenty-five per cent re- fused . . . . .	106,000
Other branches of service.	24,000

Total . . . . . 556,000

50. Canada has 400,000 men working on war contracts.

Men engaged in the manufacture of war material: 397,421. (Canadian industrial census, 1915, table I, quoted by le "Mois libéral", July 1917).

Men employed in the manufacture of munitions: 250,000 to 300,000 (Mois libéral).

Colonel David Carnegie, member and ordnance advisor, Imperial Munitions Board, in an address delivered before the Canadian Society of Civil Engineers, Ottawa Branch, stated that 250,000 workers have become skilled in the art of making shrapnel shells.

Sir Joseph Flavelle, President Imperial Munitions Board, the Gazette, January 16th, 1917: declared that 400,000 were working on war contracts.

60. 650 munitions plants turning out 800,000 shells per week.

See Colonel David Carnegie's address quoted above.

70. The operation of railways and other public utilities absorb probably 200,000 men.

Canadian Yearbook, 1915, p. 98, gives as 210,692 the number of men employed in transportation, and on page 99, as 56,571 the men employed in various services allied to transportation.

80. 900,000 men are either enlisted, absorbed by war contracts or by the operation of our transportation facilities and public utilities:

Total army . . . . .	450,000
War contracts . . . . .	397,000
Munitions . . . . .	250,000
Transportation, etc. . . . .	210,000
Allied to transportation . . . . .	57,000
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Total . . . . .	1,364,000

90. Canada has mobilized for the war one man out of every eight ; France one out of six; England one out of ten; Italy one out of eleven; and Russia, one out of twenty.

The figures for England, France, Italy and Russia were taken from an article of *La Croix de Paris*, "Les conséquences économiques d'un excès de mobilisation", reproduced by *Le Devoir* of the 16th of June 1917.

Last Wednesday, the Honorable Senator Charles Beaubien, who represented the Government on the Canadian Commercial Commission which visited England, France and Italy, declared on the floor of the Senate (see *Devoir*, Aug. 2nd, 1917) that Canada had mobilized 13 per cent of its population, against England 12 per cent, and France 17 per cent. This would mean that Canada has contributed to the cause one man out of every 7.7 men, England one out of 8.3 and France one out of 5.9.

Since the publication of my article by the *New York Evening Post* on July the 16th, the Hon. Lloyd George, at a luncheon given to the Parisian journalists, in Paris, on July the 27th, made a statement which would tend to show that the United Kingdom has now one man out of every five either enlisted or otherwise absorbed by the war.

Might I suggest to your correspondent that a careful study of the

war achievements of Rumania, Portugal, Japan, Greece, etc., would tend to show Canada's contribution to the war in a still better light than when compared with the war activities of the nations of the quadruple entente.

Yours truly,  
*Edouard MONTPETIT.*