

# **Une Loi Extraordinaire: New Brunswick Acadians and the Conscription Crisis of the First World War**

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## Une Loi Extraordinaire: New Brunswick Acadians and the Conscription Crisis of the First World War

IN THE LATE SUMMER OF 1917, at the apex of the First World War conscription crisis, *Le Moniteur Acadien* – the arch-Conservative newspaper among the four French-language *journaux* of New Brunswick – stated its clear position on the passage of the Dominion government’s conscription bill, the *Military Service Act* (MSA): “Le Moniteur reconnaît que la loi du service militaire est une loi extraordinaire; mais aussi la situation dans la monde entier est extraordinaire. Les peuples de toutes les nations alliées sont appelés à faire de grands sacrifices, mais ces sacrifices sont faits dans l’espoir d’en éviter de plus grands et de plus pénibles”.<sup>1</sup> *Le Moniteur* supported the decision of Sir Robert Borden’s Union government to enact conscription, and the newspaper’s opinion helps illustrate the complex reaction of the province’s Acadians to the conscription crisis. In New Brunswick, Acadian support for voluntary enlistment and the overall war effort, and among the elite for the *Military Service Act* itself, co-existed with opposition to conscription. Acadian opposition was founded upon settlement and occupational factors rather than ethnic ones, but this objection was fostered by the self-seeking actions of the Anglophone majority and motivated by the commonly held, but patently false, assertion that all French Canadians were slackers who refused to enlist. Virtually all of New Brunswick’s English-language politicians, military officers and newspapers espoused these unjust views openly while at the same time disregarding Acadian contributions to the war effort and ignoring other reasons for and other sources of anti-conscription sentiment.

Responses to the Great War’s conscription crisis have been typically viewed from a purely military perspective or cited as an example of the division between Québec and the rest of Canada. Reactions to conscription in other parts of the country have been generally ignored in these studies, although the province of New Brunswick provides an ideal case study of the supposedly endemic French-English split. When New Brunswick is considered, Acadians are usually treated as a peripheral group whose reaction mirrors that of French Québec. The historiography does reflect part of the story, for there was significant resistance to conscription within Acadian New Brunswick. Nonetheless, opinion was divided and can only be understood through an examination of the larger historical issues concerning French-English relations in the

1 *Le Moniteur Acadien* (Shédiac), 13 septembre 1917. I would like to thank Efrat Shapir, Melanie Barber, Gail Campbell, and the editor and anonymous reviewers of *Acadiensis* for their assistance in the preparation of this article.

province, Acadian politics, contemporary provincial newspapers and New Brunswick society during the Great War.

The first full-length study on the history of conscription in Canada, J.L. Granatstein and J.M. Hitsman's *Broken Promises*, was published in 1977. Granatstein and Hitsman's work centres on the belief that the conscription crisis was best explained as a division between French- and English-speaking Canadians. In the preface they argue "in neither war did French Canada want or accept conscription; in both wars, insofar as it can be determined, most English-Canadians did".<sup>2</sup> Although this contention reflects the most common historical explanation for the crisis, it neglects the diverse responses to conscription in Acadian New Brunswick.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the relatively few works covering the province during the First World War focus on electoral events and limit discussion of the conscription crisis. Political scientist Hugh Thorburn, in his 1961 monograph *Politics in New Brunswick*, contended that the tumult raised by the provincial and national conscription-centred elections of 1917 solidified Acadian support for the Liberal party. Thorburn's work asserts that Acadians followed the lead of Québec *nationaliste* leader Henri Bourassa and his mouthpiece, *Le Devoir*, during the crisis.<sup>4</sup> Both Charles Ferris and Arthur Doyle support this view. Ferris' master's thesis, "The New Brunswick Elections of 1917", emphasizes an Acadian "racial response" to conscription, while Arthur Doyle's best-selling history *Front Benches & Back Rooms* popularizes the earlier positions.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to these contributions, the scant attention devoted to the conscription crisis in New Brunswick has been principally published in French. Georges Sirois' article, "La Participation des Brayons à la Grande guerre: 1914-1918" and Claude Léger's *Le bataillon acadien de la Première Guerre mondiale* provide detailed coverage of Madawaskayen and Acadian experiences during the war while the works of historians Martin Spigelman and Phillipe Doucet catalogue Acadian opposition to the *Military Service Act* and criticize the Acadian elite for supporting the

2 J.L. Granatstein and J.M. Hitsman, *Broken Promises: A History of Conscription in Canada* (Toronto, 1977), p. 1.

3 See also Ferdinand Roy, *L'Appel aux Armes et la Réponse canadienne-française: Etude sur le conflit des races* (Québec, 1917); Oscar Douglas Skelton, *Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Volume II: 1896-1919* (Toronto, 1921); Elizabeth Armstrong, *The Crisis of Quebec, 1914-1918* (Toronto, 1937); Jacques Michel, *La Participation des Canadiens Français à la grande guerre* (Montréal, 1938); Jean Bruchési, "Service National et Conscription 1914-1917", *Proceedings & Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, Third Series, Volume 44* (1950), pp. 1-18; Mason Wade, *The French Canadians, 1760-1967, Volume 2* (Toronto, 1955); Roger Graham, *Arthur Meighen, Volume 1: The Door of Opportunity* (Toronto, 1960); Sylvie M.J. Arend, "The Political Thought of Selected French-Canadian Politicians in Three Major Debates on Confederation, Conscription, and Separation, 1865-1918", M.A. thesis, York University, 1974; Robert Comeau, "L'opposition à la conscription au Québec", in Roch Legault and Jean Lamarre, eds., *La Première Guerre Mondiale et le Canada: contributions sociomilitaires québécoises*, (Montréal, 1999), pp. 91-109.

4 Hugh G. Thorburn, *Politics in New Brunswick* (Toronto, 1961), pp. 38, 120. This position has been disputed in William Cross and Ian Stewart, "Ethnicity and Accommodation in the New Brunswick Party System", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, XXXVI, 4 (Winter 2001-2002), pp. 32-58.

5 Charles Ferris, "The New Brunswick Elections of 1917", M.A. thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1974, pp. iii, 130-59; Arthur T. Doyle, *Front Benches & Back Rooms: A Story of Political Intrigue and Corruption in New Brunswick* (Toronto, 1975), pp. 85-179.

measure.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the French-language historiography on New Brunswick Acadians and the conscription crisis essentially supports the positions postulated by Thorburn and Granatstein and Hitsman.

Missing from, yet integral to, studies of the conscription crisis is the demographic reality of First World War New Brunswick. As Table One demonstrates, according to the 1911 census, New Brunswick's population was 65 per cent "British" and 28 per cent "French", with a substantial majority of the province's population locally born.<sup>7</sup>

Table One  
French and Locally-Born Populations, New Brunswick Counties, 1911

County	Total Population	French Population (%)	New Brunswick-Born Population (%)
Carleton	21,446	274 (1.3)	19,788 (92.3)
Charlotte	21,147	244 (1.2)	19,179 (90.7)
Gloucester	32,662	27,732 (85.0)	31,847 (97.5)
Kent	24,376	17,436 (71.5)	23,613 (96.9)
Kings & Albert	30,285	357 (1.2)	28,676 (94.7)
Madawaska & Victoria	28,222	18,480 (65.5)	23,920 (84.8)
Northumberland	31,194	6,818 (21.9)	29,254 (93.8)
Restigouche	15,687	8,136 (51.3)	12,055 (76.8)
St. John	53,572	995 (1.9)	45,946 (85.8)
Sunbury & Queens	17,116	347 (2.0)	15,346 (89.7)
Westmorland	44,621	17,081 (38.3)	40,196 (90.1)
York	31,561	711 (2.3)	29,472 (93.3)
Totals	351,889	98,611 (28.0)	319,292 (90.7)

Source: Canada, *Fifth Census*, pp. 178-85, 381-3.

Although a minority within the province, outside of Québec New Brunswick's francophones made up the largest per-capita population of French speakers in Canada. Coupled with this fact, the French-speaking population was geographically concentrated in the province's northern counties. New Brunswick therefore provides

6 Georges Sirois, "La Participation des Brayons à la Grande guerre: 1914-1918", *Revue de la Société historique du Madawaska: le brayon*, XVI, 3-4 (juillet-décembre 1988), pp. 3-53; Claude E. Léger, *Le bataillon acadien de la Première Guerre Mondiale* (Moncton, 2001); Martin S. Spigelman, "Les Acadiens et les Canadiens en temps de guerre: le jeu des alliances", *Les cahiers de la société historique acadienne*, VIII, 1 (mars 1977), pp. 5-22; Phillipe Doucet, "La Politique et les Acadiens", in Jean Daigle, ed., *Les Acadiens des Maritimes: Études Thématiques* (Moncton, 1980), pp. 235-92. See also Robert Rumilly, *Histoire des Acadiens, Volume II* (Montréal, 1955), pp. 898-909 and Richard Wilbur, *The Rise of French New Brunswick* (Halifax, 1989), pp. 113-6.

7 Canada, *Fifth Census of Canada, 1911, Volume II* (Ottawa, 1912), pp. 178-85, 381-83.

an ideal case study of responses to the conscription crisis.

When the British declared war on 4 August 1914, the Acadian population of New Brunswick shared in the province's enthusiastic support for the cause; this was particularly true of members of the Acadian elite. In his memoirs, Gloucester Liberal MP Onésiphore Turgeon recalled how his Bathurst constituency office was besieged with people eager to find out as much as possible about the European crisis.<sup>8</sup> Sir Pierre-Amand Landry, a provincial Supreme Court Justice and Conservative Acadian leader, actively spoke throughout the province in favour of the Allied cause. On 25 November 1914, Landry addressed a packed crowd in Shédiac with this challenge: "Deux de mes fils prennent les moyens de se rendre sur la champ de bataille et je verrais avec satisfaction, quelque triste qu'en soit la nécessité, l'enrôlement volontaire d'un membre de chaque famille du Nouveau-Brunswick".<sup>9</sup>

Nonetheless, as the war dragged on, New Brunswick Acadians were accused of "slackerism", just as many *Canadiens* had been, for their perceived lack of support for the war effort. These accusations were popular because Acadian enlistment was hindered by two important flaws in the recruitment system: English was the sole language of New Brunswick's military units and recruiting camps were located exclusively in English-speaking centres.<sup>10</sup> In spite of this situation, Acadians enlisted in all of New Brunswick's military units. Acadian enlistment was substantial in Lieutenant-Colonel G.W. Mersereau's 132nd (North Shore) Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) and in the 145th (Kent-Westmorland) Battalion (CEF). However, since no questions were asked about race, ethnicity or mother tongue on CEF attestation papers, there is no definitive way to determine how many Acadians served in Great War military units. Like most CEF units recruiting after 1915, northern New Brunswick battalions had great difficulty filling their ranks. Subsequently, the Acadian population was blamed for disappointing recruiting results and public comments on the supposedly low levels of Acadian enlistment were made by members of the New Brunswick Legislature and by the Minister of Militia, General Sir Sam Hughes.<sup>11</sup>

In response to these accusations, Acadians publicly stressed their vocal support for the war effort while emphasizing that their voluntary active participation in the front lines was a means of exerting a distinct group identity. In late 1915, dairy industry magnate Louis-Cyriaque D'Aigle was selected to raise and command an Acadian

8 Onésiphore Turgeon, *Un tribut à la race acadienne: Mémoires, 1871-1927* (Montréal, 1928), pp. 145-6.

9 Excerpted from Della Margaret M. Stanley, *Au Service de Deux Peuples: Pierre-Amand Landry* (Moncton, 1977), p. 225.

10 T.C.L. Ketchum, *La Part du Nouveau-Brunswick dans la guerre* (Frédéricton, 1918), p. 4; Rumilly, *Histoire des Acadiens*, p. 899; Wade, *The French Canadians*, p. 724; Desmond Morton, "French Canada at War, 1868-1917: The Military Background to the Conscription Crisis of 1917", in J.L. Granatstein and R.D. Cuff, eds., *War and Society in North America* (Toronto, 1971), pp. 84-103; Craig Brown and Donald Loveridge, "Unrequited Faith: Recruiting the Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1918", *Revue Internationale d'Histoire Militaire*, 54 (1982), pp. 53-79; Léger, *Le bataillon acadien*, pp. 50-1.

11 See Doyle, *Front Benches & Back Rooms*, pp. 85-179; Léger, *Le bataillon acadien*, pp. 55-66 and Ronald G. Haycock, *Sam Hughes: The Public Career of a Controversial Canadian, 1883-1916* (Waterloo, 1986).

battalion, the 165th, for overseas service. Inspired by the Acadian elite's belief that ethnic identity was being submerged in English-speaking formations, the 165th was established with the goal of debunking slacker accusations and in the hope that Acadian loyalty to the British empire might help enshrine Acadian rights.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately for newly minted Lieutenant-Colonel D'Aigle and like-minded members of the Acadian community, the battalion, despite being the only unit authorized to recruit throughout the Maritimes, was still 200 men short of full strength by September 1916.<sup>13</sup> Although the recruiting response and the destiny of the battalion – disbandment to reinforce other units – were common throughout the British empire by 1916, this predictable result had a disproportionately adverse effect on Anglophone attitudes toward New Brunswick's Acadian community.<sup>14</sup>

These recruiting difficulties contributed to conspiracy theories about Acadian plans to "subvert" the province, which were rooted in French New Brunswickers' overwhelming vote for the victorious Liberals in the provincial election of February 1917. The bitter complaint of Conservative Saint John Senator William Thorne, writing to Saint John MP and Minister of Marine and Fisheries J.D. Hazen about Kent County's election result, typified these beliefs: "Although I have written our French friends in Kent Co. to get their views upon the situation, I have not had a reply as yet. It appears that they [the Liberals] have cleverly managed the French vote by having emissaries from Quebec thoroughly canvassing all the French localities and putting forward the French propaganda of bilingualism and creating a fear that conscription would be the result of a Government success".<sup>15</sup> These claims were amplified by the alarmist attitude of the defeated Conservative press. The Fredericton *Daily Gleaner* led the way, reporting ominously on 28 February 1917 that "if the English-speaking electorate submits quietly to this humiliation, the Acadians and their church will soon be in absolute control of the Government and affairs of the Province".<sup>16</sup> The Francophone reply to this slander was tactful and reserved. The Conservative Edmundston weekly, *Le Madawaska*, decried the "Mauvaise Tactique" of the *Gleaner*, closing its editorial on the issue with the hope that "les esprits vont se calmer et que ces questions de race, qui font tant de mal ailleurs, vont bientôt être abandonnées dans l'intérêt de tout le monde".<sup>17</sup> In spite of this approach, when the conscription issue reached its zenith, Acadians did not forget the anti-French

12 Lieutenant-Colonel L.C. D'Aigle, *Un Aperçu Historique, et Un Régistre Photographique de Bataillon "Acadien" D'Outremer 165ième F.E.C.*, par Lt. Col. L.C. D'Aigle, O.C. (Ottawa, 1918), p. 2; Spigelman, "Les Acadiens et les Canadiens en temps de guerre", p. 9; Gérard Pinsonneault, "La Propagande de Recrutement Militaire au Canada, 1914-1917", M.A. thesis, Université de Sherbrooke, 1981, p. 53; Sirois, "La Participation des Brayons à la Grande guerre", p. 25; Ronald Cormier, *Les Acadiens et la Seconde Guerre Mondiale* (Moncton, 1996), p. 73; Léger, *Le bataillon acadien*, pp. 55-77.

13 Doucet, "La Politique et les Acadiens", p. 276 and Léger, *Le bataillon acadien*, pp. 80, 88-90.

14 See Rumilly, *Histoire des Acadiens*, p. 904 and Léger, *Le bataillon acadien*, pp. 147-98. The 165th proceeded overseas with 550 officers and men on 28 March 1917. The unit, and the many lumbermen in its ranks, provided reinforcements for the 39th and 40th Forestry Corps Companies in Britain and the Jura region of France.

15 Senator W.H. Thorne to J.D. Hazen, 1 March 1917, Sir J.D. Hazen Papers, MG H 13, box 17, folder 159, files 2 & 3, University of New Brunswick Archives (UNBA).

16 *Daily Gleaner* (Fredericton), 28 February 1917.

17 *Le Madawaska* (Edmundston), 15 mars 1917.

sentiment that had enveloped New Brunswick following the provincial election.

The fall 1917 decisions of the Union government – to enact conscription legislation in order to ensure overseas reinforcements and to contest the election of 17 December 1917 on that issue – placed the opinions of the Acadian population into stark relief. Like most New Brunswickers, Acadians supported the Allied war effort and many enlisted for military service; at the same time, however, the mass of the Acadian population opposed conscription, which exacerbated the anti-French rhetoric that maligned or ignored Acadians' communal and voluntary sacrifices. Aimed at the British-born and the empire-loving, conscription failed where neither the British-born nor the empire-loving could be found, partly because the Union government's appeals excluded many Canadians, including Acadians, from the outset. The Unionists focussed attention on those "slackers" in New Brunswick perceived to be doing less than they should for the war effort. As in the rest of the country, this was largely directed against French Canadians. In spite of propaganda claiming that French Canadians were not doing their duty, however, New Brunswick's Acadians appear to have enlisted in numbers approximately equal to those of English-speaking New Brunswickers.<sup>18</sup> Acadians were willing to enlist, yet most opposed conscription and, by extension, the Union government.

Assuredly, many of New Brunswick's Acadian elites wholeheartedly supported conscription. Kent MP F.J. Robidoux, senators Thomas Bourque and Pascal Poirier, Bishop of Saint John Édouard LeBlanc, the majority of the Acadian clergy and the newspaper *Le Moniteur Acadien* (edited by Robidoux's father) all supported the *Military Service Act*.<sup>19</sup> Acadian leader Sir Pierre-Amand Landry even actively advocated for conscription until his death in 1916.<sup>20</sup> These elite men, however, were all Conservatives, came mainly from the southeastern part of the province, belonged to the so-called Shédiac clique and spent the majority of their time in Ottawa. The Acadian response to the conscription crisis was thus characterized by division between elites and the mass of the population, between supporters of the two major political parties and between the regions of French-speaking New Brunswick.

F.J. Robidoux was in the vanguard of Acadian support for the *Military Service Act*. The member for Kent County explained in the House of Commons on 26 June 1917: "I would take no part in this debate did I not feel bound to raise my voice in support of the measure introduced by the Prime Minister, and I take this position believing it to be in the best interests of the race to which I belong". Robidoux also took strong issue with Henri Bourassa and his supporters: "I believe that, fortunately for Canada, the

18 Rumilly, *Histoire des Acadiens*, pp. 898-909; Brown and Loveridge, "Unrequited Faith", p. 71 (n. 36); Léger, *Le bataillon acadien*, pp. 50-1, 92, 142.

19 *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 9 août 1917; Rumilly, *Histoire des Acadiens*, pp. 899, 907; Wade, *The French Canadians*, p. 744; Léger, *Le bataillon acadien*, p. 33. The Senators' pro-conscription speeches may be found in Canada, *Debates of the Senate of the Dominion of Canada, 1917* (Ottawa, 1918), pp. 348-55 (Poirier) and pp. 406-8 (Bourque). Other Acadian supporters of the Military Service Act included Nova Scotia Senator E. Lavin Girroir and Prince Edward Island Premier Aubin Arsenault. See *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 4 octobre 1917; *Debates of the Senate, 1917*, pp. 386-94; Rumilly, *Histoire des Acadiens*, p. 906 and Georges Arsenault, *Les Acadiens de l'Île: 1720-1980* (Moncton, 1987), pp. 202-3.

20 Stanley, *Au Service de Deux Peuples*, p. 225; Spigelman, "Les Acadiens et les Canadiens en temps de guerre", p. 10; Léger, *Le bataillon acadien*, p. 91.



deeds of bravery and of heroism which have been performed by the sons of French Canadians at Courcellette, at Vimy Ridge and elsewhere on the bloody battlefields of France, will wield a much broader influence in shaping the future destinies of this country than will the irresponsible speeches of demagogues and political agitators".<sup>21</sup> Conservative New Brunswick senators Poirier and Bourque shared Robidoux's sentiments. Poirier, a skilled rhetorician, couched his description of the war in racial terms; he saw it as a conflict between Latins, Celts, Slavs, and all "humane Christians" opposed to the evil Teutons and "brutal Christianity". The senator for Acadie also claimed that French Canadians had a special requirement to serve and that conscription was necessary to bring the "war to end all wars" to successful completion.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, Thomas Bourque, in one of his first Senate speeches, simply stated that "in justice to those who have already gone to France, in justice to Great Britain who is giving us our protection and our liberties, in justice to the allied cause, in justice to the fair name of Canada, it seems opportune at this stage to pass this measure".<sup>23</sup>

The newspaper *Le Moniteur Acadien* disseminated the position of these New Brunswick Acadian elites. Long the Conservative party's French-language organ in the Maritimes, the Shédiac weekly exhibited an anti-German and anti-Bourassa tone as pronounced as any English-language publication in Canada.<sup>24</sup> The paper printed Acadian soldiers' letters alongside the regular feature *Au Champ d'Honneur*, a listing in every issue of Acadian casualties overseas. *Le Moniteur* boldly supported national registration, a precursor to conscription, stating in March of 1917 that "l'objet des cartes du service nationale est si simple et si clair que le Moniteur n'a jamais pensé qu'il serait nécessaire de l'expliquer au public".<sup>25</sup> The weekly also reprinted the speeches in support of conscription made by Poirier, Bourque and Senator E. Lavin Girroir of Antigonish, Nova Scotia.<sup>26</sup>

Although the Acadian senators supported conscription in the upper chamber, even urging "their Quebec colleagues to emulate the Acadian example", the appeals of Robidoux, Poirier, Bourque and *Le Moniteur* had no discernible effect on the overwhelming Acadian sentiment against the *Military Service Act*.<sup>27</sup> When François Veuillot, a representative of the French government, toured Québec and Acadian centres in 1917 attempting to persuade French-speaking Canadians to support conscription, he was scorned at every turn.<sup>28</sup> The overwhelming majority of New

21 Canada, *Debates of the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada (Hansard)*, 1917 (Ottawa, 1918), pp. 2703-7.

22 *Debates of the Senate*, 1917, pp. 351-5.

23 *Debates of the Senate*, 1917, p. 407. Bourque's speech came on 2 August 1917, one day after Poirier's.

24 See *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 6 septembre 1917. See also the series of editorials, beginning on 21 June 1917, entitled "La Loi de Service Militaire".

25 *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 8 mars 1917.

26 *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 9 août 1917, 16 août 1917; Léger, *Le bataillon acadien*, p. 189.

27 Rumilly, *Histoire des Acadiens*, p. 905; Thorburn, *Politics in New Brunswick*, p. 36; Wade, *The French Canadians*, p. 744; Doucet, "La Politique et les Acadiens", p. 277; Robert G. LeBlanc, "The Franco-American Response to the Conscription Crisis in Canada, 1916-1918", *American Review of Canadian Studies*, XXIII, 3 (1993), pp. 343-72.

28 *Le Devoir* (Montréal), 15 décembre 1917; Rumilly, *Histoire des Acadiens*, p. 908; Sirois, "La participation des Brayons à la Grande guerre", p. 9.



Brunswick's Acadians opposed conscription and its proponents. The province's other three French-language newspapers and the 1917 Dominion election results definitively support this contention.

Anti-conscription sentiment was most pronounced in the pages of Moncton's *L'Acadien*. *L'Acadien* staunchly supported the Liberal party and Sir Wilfrid Laurier; this support was epitomized by a massive headline – accompanied by a dignified photograph of the Liberal leader – declaring “Le Parlement actuel n’a pas le droit d’imposer la conscription au pays”.<sup>29</sup> *L'Acadien* published soldiers' letters, but far fewer than *Le Moniteur* and, unlike most New Brunswick newspapers during the First World War, these letters were usually relegated to the back pages of the publication. The views of Acadian conscription-supporters, although reported, were also downplayed; Poirier's Senate speech, for example, was relegated to second-page news.<sup>30</sup>

More balanced media coverage of the conscription crisis appeared in Edmundston's *Le Madawaska*. Originally a Conservative twin to *Le Moniteur*, *Le Madawaska* evolved into an independent voice in 1917. Although Madawaska County was distant from the southeastern vortex of the conscription debate and the weekly reprinted articles from Québec Conservative papers *L'Événement* and *La Patrie*, the crisis was still given wide and even-handed coverage. A series of editorials declared that Parliament should have appealed to the people before imposing conscription. *Le Madawaska*'s editors also conceded, however, that the Dominion government legitimately possessed the right to conscript men for overseas service.<sup>31</sup> Likewise, *Le Madawaska* counselled adhering to the provisions of the *Military Service Act*, noting “la loi est la loi, quelque dure qu'elle soit”.<sup>32</sup> Editorials, in the days before the election, favoured no particular party and urged *Le Madawaska*'s readers only to exercise the franchise: “Suivant nos convictions soyons unionistes ou soyons laurieristes, mais votons, votons, en bloc”.<sup>33</sup>

Along with *Le Madawaska*, Moncton weekly *L'Évangéline* tempered the emotional partisanship so prevalent in *Le Moniteur* and *L'Acadien*. *L'Évangéline* provided the widest French-language news coverage in the province and, while the politically neutral paper attempted to shy away from controversy, it did publish an editorial against participation in foreign wars on 27 April 1916. The piece was subsequently attacked from all sides, with *L'Acadien* asking, rhetorically, “si *L'Évangéline* est vraiment un journal national ou simplement une édition acadienne du Devoir”?<sup>34</sup> *L'Évangéline* retracted the editorial in the following week's edition while refusing to divulge its author.<sup>35</sup> The paper remained as balanced on the

29 *L'Acadien* (Moncton), 22 juin 1917.

30 *L'Acadien*, 7 août 1917.

31 See *Le Madawaska*, 24 mai 1917, 21 juin 1917, 28 juin 1917 and 12 juillet 1917.

32 *Le Madawaska*, 13 septembre 1917.

33 *Le Madawaska*, 13 décembre 1917.

34 See *L'Évangéline* (Moncton), 27 avril 1916 and *L'Acadien*, 28 avril 1916. Coincidentally, *L'Acadien* and *L'Évangéline* claimed Acadians were part of one large French-Canadian race, while *Le Moniteur* declared Acadians a separate people.

35 *L'Évangéline*, 4 mai 1916; Spigelman, “Les Acadiens et les Canadiens en temps de guerre”, pp. 15-6; Gérard Beaulieu, “*L'Évangéline* limitée, propriétaire du journal, 1910-1944” in Gérard Beaulieu, ed., *L'Évangéline 1887-1982: Entre l'élite et le peuple* (Moncton, 1997), pp. 56-64; Léger, *Le bataillon acadien*, pp. 103-4.

conscription issue as the times allowed, simultaneously reporting elite opinion, taking pride in widespread Acadian enlistment and urging Acadians to obey the *Military Service Act*.<sup>36</sup>

Newspaper opinion may have been divided, but New Brunswick's Acadians were united on one issue – even the most ardent anti-conscription advocates resented the ethnic and personal categorization of Acadians as slackers. Most notably, Liberal MPs Pius Michaud and Onésiphore Turgeon, both of whom voted against the MSA, were regular speakers at voluntary recruiting meetings in northern New Brunswick.<sup>37</sup> Michaud assailed his Conservative colleagues who slandered French Canadians in Parliament and, during the *Military Service Act* debates, stated: “My ancestors became British subjects about two centuries ago; to-day their descendants willingly form part of the great army of the Allies in the fight for freedom and liberty. The French Acadians and French Canadians in New Brunswick have enlisted in good numbers”.<sup>38</sup> Likewise, in his memoirs, Turgeon noted that his Gloucester constituency voluntarily enlisted 1,400 men and that “le comté de Gloucester est un des comtés agricoles qui s’est montré des plus généreux et patriotes de tout le Canada dans cette guerre”.<sup>39</sup> Members of the Acadian elite voluntarily enlisted as well, including *L’Évangéline* editor Rufin Arsenault, two sons of provincial Minister of Public Works P.J. Veniot, two sons of Sir Pierre-Amand Landry and Onésiphore Turgeon’s son.<sup>40</sup> Accusations of slackerism were a particularly personal slight for provincial cabinet minister Auguste Dugal, as his son Louis Armand lost his right leg in action while fighting in Flanders with the 26th Battalion.<sup>41</sup>

In spite of these prominent volunteers, a host of factors impeded both Acadian enlistments in the Canadian Expeditionary Force and pro-conscription sentiments among Acadiens: the English and very limited French-language New Brunswick recruiting programmes ignored Acadians, no legislation existed to protect the use of the French language, Roman Catholicism was publicly denounced and the anti-French rhetoric that characterized federal Unionist propaganda flowed freely after the Liberal victory in the provincial election. Historian Phillipe Doucet suggested that Acadian opposition to conscription might have been partly motivated by the directive’s

36 *L’Évangéline*, 26 août 1917, 26 septembre 1917 and 7 novembre 1917; Armstrong, *The Crisis of Quebec*, pp. 191-2, 250.

37 Rumilly, *Histoire des Acadiens*, p. 906.

38 *Hansard*, 1917, p. 2810.

39 Turgeon, *Un Tribut à la race acadienne*, p. 147. See also *Hansard*, 1917, pp. 2667, 5559; *Hansard*, 1918, p. 1294 and Ptre. Donat Robichaud, “Vétérans de Gloucester à la Première Guerre Mondiale”, *Revue d’histoire de la Société Histoire Nicolas-Denys*, XIV, 2 (avril-juillet 1986), pp. 3-28.

40 Turgeon, *Un Tribut à la race acadienne*, pp. 148-9; Rumilly, *Histoire des Acadiens*, pp. 898-99; Doyle, *Front Benches & Back Rooms*, p. 88; Stanley, *Au Service de Deux Peuples*, pp. 224-5; Spigelman, “Les Acadiens et les Canadiens en temps de guerre”, p. 10; Douglas How, *One Village, One War: A Thinking About the Literature of Stone* (Hantsport, 1995), pp. 25-7; Beaulieu, “L’Évangéline limitée”, p. 56; Léger, *Le bataillon acadien*, pp. 61, 129. Some Acadian officers supported conscription publicly, notably Major J. Arthur Léger, the son of the Liberal candidate opposing F.J. Robidoux’s Kent re-election and a veteran infantry officer who succeeded Lieutenant-Colonel D’Aigle as the Acadian Battalion’s commanding officer. See *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 29 novembre 1917 and 13 décembre 1917 as well as Will R. Bird, *The North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment* (Fredericton, 1963), p. 86 and Léger, *Le bataillon acadien*, pp. 174-5, 193.

41 *Le Madawaska*, 15 mars 1917; Sirois, “La Participation des Brayons à la Grande guerre”, pp. 22-3.

authoritarian resemblance to *le grande dérangement*.<sup>42</sup> It is most likely that the attitudes of the Anglophone majority, especially the widespread idea that French Canadians were slackers unwilling to assist the British empire, played a vital role in solidifying Acadian opposition to conscription.

A focus on Acadians defined purely by their ethnicity or language has typified studies concerning French New Brunswickers' opinions of conscription – despite the fact that many New Brunswickers were labourers, farmers and fishermen and that these occupational groups tended to oppose conscription.<sup>43</sup> The vast majority of New Brunswickers, of every ethnic origin and mother tongue, were locally born, long-settled and distant from European affairs, exactly the category of Canadian least likely to enlist.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, opposition to conscription among Acadian labourers, farmers and fishermen was only more pronounced than the opposition of non-French-speaking working-class New Brunswickers because the Anglophone majority singled out the ethnic response of the Acadian population. The New Brunswick Anglophone elite, in particular, supported Canada's racially motivated recruiting system and used it for their own ends against the French-speaking minority. This position inevitably alienated the province's Acadians and ensured wider antagonism towards conscription.

Liberal politicians and newspapers worked to disseminate working-class positions on conscription and to emphasize non-Acadian opposition. The key grievances were summarized in a letter to the *Moncton Transcript* from a Kings County farmer: "When, however, it comes to the poor farmer or laborer, they [the Unionists] want conscription to take the latter's sons, their flesh and blood, and drive them to the battlefield to fight for the rich as well as the poor, and then laugh and say he is nothing but a poor boy".<sup>45</sup> This bitterness was widespread in a 71 per cent rural province, just as it was among farmers throughout the Dominion.<sup>46</sup> Likewise, despite the vital role of fishermen in the New Brunswick economy, especially along the predominantly Acadian North Shore, fisheries workers were widely conscripted. Onésiphore Turgeon argued in vain against this self-defeating position, supporting the fishermen's "special case" in the House of Commons and stressing the importance of Canadian

42 Doucet, in "La Politique et les Acadiens", p. 278, states: "Ces directives autoritaires leur rappelaient-elles trop le traitement qu'avaient connu leurs ancêtres lors de la déportation".

43 The 165th Battalion's 13 February 1917 nominal roll listed 273 labourers, 159 farmers and 68 fishermen, which represented 69 per cent of the unit's 724 officers and men. See Léger, *Le bataillon acadien*, p. 132.

44 F.H. Underhill, "Canada and the Last War", in Chester Martin, ed., *Canada in Peace and War, eight studies in National Trends since 1914* (Toronto, 1941), pp. 120-49; Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, pp. 23-4; Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto, 1993), p. 314 (n. 2); Jason Churchill, "Of Fighting Baymen and Townies – Towards a Reassessment of the Conscription Crisis in Newfoundland and Labrador 1917-1918", in Yves Tremblay, ed., *Canadian Military History Since the Seventeenth Century* (Ottawa, 2001), pp. 167-75.

45 *Moncton Transcript*, 15 December 1917.

46 Canada, *Fifth Census*, p. 530. See also Daniel S. MacMillan Diaries, MG H 130, book 1, UNBA; Louis Aubrey Wood, *A History of Farmers' Movements in Canada* (Toronto, 1924); W.R. Young, "Conscription, Rural Depopulation and the Farmers of Ontario, 1917-1919", *Canadian Historical Review*, LIII, 3 (September 1972), pp. 289-320; John Herd Thompson, *The Harvests of War: The Prairie West, 1914-1918* (Toronto, 1978).

food production to the Allies.<sup>47</sup> Calls to oppose conscription also came from the labour and socialist movements. Although working-class voluntary enlistment was high throughout the war, workers resented the rising cost of living and the implication that the only valid demonstration of support for the war effort was coerced military service.<sup>48</sup> Like the Acadians, the province's large English-speaking Catholic population felt duty-bound to defend themselves against accusations of slackerism. Spearheaded by the *New Freeman*, an ultramontane Irish republican Saint John newspaper, Catholics repeatedly decried the myth of low enlistment among members of their faith and even urged open defiance of the *Military Service Act*.<sup>49</sup> Significantly, conscription supporters privately recognized the pronounced opposition of non-Acadians while they consciously and publicly singled out French New Brunswickers as their only rivals.<sup>50</sup>

The results of the December 1917 Dominion election clearly demonstrated how Acadians felt about conscription. New Brunswick elected 4 Liberals to its 11 seats, with Unionists winning by wide margins in the remainder.<sup>51</sup> All of the Liberal victories came in ridings with large Acadian populations. Likewise, Acadian soldiers' ballots were swamped by the votes of those who remained at home and no seats changed hands as a result of the military poll.

Although Kent incumbent F.J. Robidoux offered for the Unionists, support for the Liberal party was practically absolute in the five provincial ridings with large Acadian populations.<sup>52</sup> Robidoux advocated for conscription in Parliament, on the hustings and through *Le Moniteur Acadien* and, as a result, lost his deposit and suffered the

47 *Hansard*, 1917, pp. 1296, 3354-5; Lieutenant-Colonel Richard O'Leary to F.J. Robidoux, 25 June 1917, Robidoux Fonds, 4.1-5, Centre d'études acadiennes (CEA); *Moncton Transcript*, 1 December 1917.

48 *Hansard*, 1917, pp. 1555, 2670, 2808-10; *L'Acadien*, 6 juillet 1917; J.H. Crocket to J.D. Hazen, 12 June 1917, Hazen Papers, box 19, folder 185, file 1, UNBA; St. John Local No. 1, Socialist Party of Canada to J.D. Hazen, 8 July 1917, Hazen Papers, box 19, folder 185 file 1, UNBA; *The North Shore Leader* (Newcastle), 2 November 1917; *Maritime Baptist* (Saint John), 7 November 1917; Martin Robin, "Registration, Conscription and Independent Labour Politics 1916-1917", *Canadian Historical Review*, XXXVII, 2 (1966), pp. 101-18; James Naylor, *The New Democracy: Challenging the Social Order in Industrial Ontario, 1914-1925* (Toronto, 1991), pp. 32-5, 81, 98-100, 123; Gregory Kealey, "State Repression of Labour and the Left in Canada 1914-1920: The Impact of the First World War", *Canadian Historical Review*, LXXIII, 3 (1992), pp. 281-314; Ian McKay and Suzanne Morton, "The Maritimes: Expanding the Circle of Resistance", in Craig Heron, ed., *The Workers' Revolt in Canada, 1917-1925* (Toronto, 1998), pp. 43-86.

49 *The New Freeman* (Saint John), 24 November 1917, 1 December 1917 and 15 December 1917. See also David Fitzpatrick, "The Logic of Collective Sacrifice: Ireland and the British Army, 1914-1918", *The Historical Journal*, XXXVIII, 4 (1995), pp. 1017-30.

50 A.R. Slipp to J.D. Hazen, 26 June 1917, Hazen Papers, MG H 13, box 19, folder 185, file 1, UNBA. As the disgruntled Slipp wrote to Hazen, "It is amazing how many districts there are even in English speaking sections of New Brunswick which give no volunteers, or very few".

51 Canada, *Sessional Papers of the Dominion of Canada*, LVI, 4 (1920), pp. 220-31.

52 These five ridings – Kent, Gloucester, Restigouche and Madawaska, Northumberland, and Westmorland – had at least 20 per cent French populations. Nationwide, the only other Acadian to offer for the Unionists, T. Gallant, fell to Liberal E.W. Chisholm in Cape Breton-Inverness. Just one French Canadian, avowed Ottawa imperialist Dr. J.L. Chabot, won a seat on the Union ticket. See J.H. Tuck, "Nova Scotia and the Conscription Election of 1917", M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1968 and J.M. Beck, *Pendulum of Power: Canada's Federal Elections* (Scarborough, 1968), pp. 136-48.

province's largest per-capita electoral defeat.<sup>53</sup> However, Robidoux's fate was hardly a surprise. Kent was a traditional Liberal riding and Robidoux's Conservative 1911 victory was more of a shock than was his defeat in the conscription election.<sup>54</sup> Compounding these factors, he was essentially abandoned by the party to whom he devoted a decade of his life. Robidoux understood Acadian opposition to conscription, writing to J.D. Hazen that "the French people are inclined to be opposed to the Military Service Act; it has been represented to them by interested parties wishing to make political capital that this act was designed to get at the French people; they are prompted to view with distrust the enforcement of the act".<sup>55</sup> When Robidoux requested changes in the representation on Kent County MSA exemption tribunals (which consisted of one French and three unilingual English judges – all Conservatives), French-speaking doctors on medical boards and the dissemination of conscription information in French, he was rebuffed by his political masters in each instance.<sup>56</sup> Robidoux won only 7 of 23 polls in Kent, all marginal victories in English-speaking areas. A.T. Léger benefited from Union floundering, winning the election with 3,563 votes to Robidoux's 1,323.<sup>57</sup>

In predominantly Acadian Gloucester, incumbent Liberal MP Onésiphore Turgeon was acclaimed after Union candidate Édouard DeGrâce wisely dropped out of the race just five days before the election. DeGrâce's decision avoided an electoral annihilation that would have rivaled Robidoux's one-sided defeat.<sup>58</sup> The pairing of the counties of Restigouche and Madawaska matched Liberal Pius Michaud against Unionist D.A. Stewart. Charles Ferris' scholarly work claims that the "race cry" played a major part in the riding's campaign.<sup>59</sup> In fact, Michaud downplayed ethnic issues, a stance best exemplified by his parliamentary statement during the MSA debates: "What is the trouble with the highly-paid political campaign writers in Ontario who are sending to New Brunswick literature similar to that which is being used against the province of Quebec? I ask my friends on the other side of the House to stop sending this seditious literature, for we [New Brunswickers] want to continue to respect one another; we want to continue to work together for the one great purpose of winning the war".<sup>60</sup> Stewart fared well in Restigouche, capturing all six polls in his Campbellton hometown and remaining close everywhere outside of Tobique,

53 *Sessional Papers*, 1920, p. 221. Robidoux captured only 27.1 per cent of the votes in Kent. See also Ferris, "The New Brunswick Elections of 1917", p. 155 and Spigelman, "Les Acadiens et les Canadiens en temps de guerre", p. 21. *Le Moniteur Acadien* collapsed in the fall of 1918. Most commentators have rightly cited *Le Moniteur*'s support of conscription as the reason for its demise, although the owners of the paper blamed rising prices of newsprint and ancillary materials in their final issue. See *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 25 octobre 1918 and *L'Évangéline*, 30 octobre 1918.

54 See Thorburn, *Politics in New Brunswick*, pp. 62-3, 66, 193 and Robert Garland and Gregory Machum, *Promises, Promises: An Almanac of New Brunswick Elections, 1870-1980* (Saint John, 1980).

55 Robidoux to Hazen, 9 October 1917, Hazen Papers, box 19, folder 185, file 1, UNBA.

56 Robidoux to Hazen, 9 October 1917, Hazen Papers, box 19, folder 185, file 1, UNBA.

57 *Sessional Papers*, 1920, p. 221.

58 Turgeon, *Un Tribut à la race acadienne*, pp. 158-60; Ferris, "The New Brunswick Elections of 1917", pp. 158-9.

59 Ferris, "The New Brunswick Elections of 1917", pp. 158-60.

60 *Hansard*, 1917, p. 2810.

Kedgwick and Anderson. However, in Madawaska, Stewart garnered only 124 total votes and never more than 22 in any one poll; fully 95.5 per cent of Madawaska's voters preferred Michaud. The military vote had no hope of saving Stewart, and Michaud glided to an easy electoral victory.<sup>61</sup>

Unlike the one-sided contests in Kent and Restigouche and Madawaska, the riding of Northumberland produced a very close race. The Miramichi's rival newspapers threw their support behind the opposing candidates, with Newcastle's Liberal *North Shore Leader* backing fur merchant and regular *Leader* advertiser John Morrissy.<sup>62</sup> Unionist incumbent W.S. Loggie had the support of Chatham's newspapers, *The Commercial* and *The World*, and of Newcastle's aptly named *Union Advocate*.<sup>63</sup> As a result, the civilian vote was the closest in New Brunswick. Although Loggie captured most polls, his success was offset by Morrissy's victories in working-class areas. Northumberland's Acadian vote was also solidly Liberal, most notably in Rogersville – where Morrissy won 396 to 19 – but the Union military vote ensured Loggie of a comfortable victory.<sup>64</sup>

Significantly, the mixed French and English Westmorland riding was the site of the only Liberal victory by an Anglophone candidate. The victorious incumbent, Arthur Bliss Copp, was a popular personality with partisan media support.<sup>65</sup> Party loyalty also remained strong in the riding, so strong that Baie Verte Private Vincent Goodwin noted that, like himself, the Westmorland voters with whom he was serving in the 2nd Canadian Motor Machine Gun Brigade voted Liberal, as they had always done, despite the centrality of the conscription issue.<sup>66</sup> Championing this reasoning, 26th Battalion Private J. Ulric LeBlanc of Cap-Pelé wrote home to his parents: "Conscription is passed although I won't hide and say that I voted against it. The only way I would have voted for it was if they had conscripted the wealth of the Country first".<sup>67</sup>

Westmorland's three Unionist papers, the *Sackville Post*, Moncton *Daily Times*, and *Le Moniteur*, assailed the Liberals outright, with the *Post*'s sardonic "letter from Copp to the soldiers" epitomizing their campaign tactics: "Dear boys – I am the Laurier candidate in Westmorland County and I hope to be elected largely because of the Acadian support I hope to get. I know I voted against sending reinforcements to you, but I could not help that Laurier wanted me to vote that way, so I did. I believe in carrying on the war to a successful conclusion, but how it is going to be carried on without more men I have not exactly figured out yet".<sup>68</sup> Despite the Sackville paper's efforts, and contrary to other counties across New Brunswick, Copp captured more of the small Westmorland military vote than his Unionist opponent, Moncton dentist

61 *Sessional Papers*, 1920, p. 223.

62 *The North Shore Leader* (Newcastle), 23 November 1917, 30 November 1917 and 14 December 1917.

63 *Chatham Gazette*, 28 November 1917; *Union Advocate* (Newcastle), 6 December 1917.

64 *Sessional Papers*, 1920, p. 222; *The North Shore Leader*, 21 December 1917.

65 *L'Acadien*, the *Moncton Transcript*, the *Sackville Tribune* and Hillsborough's *Albert Journal* were all Laurier Liberal papers.

66 David Pierce Beatty, *Memories of the Forgotten War: The World War I Diary of Pte. V.E. Goodwin* (Port Elgin, 1986), p. 90.

67 Private J. Ulric LeBlanc to Dr. H.C. LeBlanc, 4 January 1918, fonds J. Ulric LeBlanc, non-classé, CEA.

68 *Sackville Post*, 30 November 1917.



O.B. Price. Copp handily won virtually every poll with especially large majorities in the Acadian ones. Price's only substantial victories came in Salisbury and a few English-speaking Moncton city polls.<sup>69</sup>

Although the Liberals virtually swept Acadian New Brunswick, the Unionists won a resounding majority in the House of Commons, taking 153 seats to the Liberals' 82. Nonetheless, as Table Two illustrates, the Union victory was tempered by the popular vote. Four of the five New Brunswick ridings with large Acadian populations went Liberal, with fully 62.0 per cent of voters preferring the opposition and with the 17.7 per cent military vote much more supportive than either the provincial or national averages (8.5 per cent and 7.9 per cent respectively).<sup>70</sup> Union failure in Acadian New Brunswick was exemplified by the experience of F.J. Robidoux. In spite of his loyalty to the war effort and the party, Robidoux and his supporters were abandoned and their legitimate concerns with government policies ignored. The Unionists' decision to forsake their supporters, and particularly their failure to help allay Acadian fears about the *Military Service Act*, constantly undermined attempts to encourage Acadian support for the party and its legislation.

Table Two  
Results of the 1917 Dominion Election, New Brunswick

Riding	Civilian Vote		Military Vote	
	Union No. of Votes (%)	Liberal No. of Votes (%)	Union No. of Votes (%)	Liberal No. of Votes (%)
Charlotte	2,812 (52.0)	2,600 (48.0)	436 (93.4)	31 (6.6)
Gloucester	Liberal Acclaimed			
Kent	1,126 (24.4)	3,491 (75.6)	197 (73.2)	72 (26.8)
Northumberland	3,596 (50.6)	3,510 (49.4)	1,052 (92.0)	91 (8.0)
Restigouche and Madawaska	1,769 (26.1)	4,999 (73.9)	502 (86.6)	78 (13.4)
Royal	4,976 (64.2)	2,775 (35.8)	983 (94.3)	59 (5.7)
Saint John and Albert (2 seats)	21,612 (66.5)	10,874 (33.5)	5,593 (94.1)	350 (5.9)
Victoria and Carleton	Union Acclaimed			
Westmorland	4,846 (42.8)	6,480 (57.2)	136 (45.2)	165 (54.8)
York-Sunbury	5,922 (66.2)	3,020 (33.8)	1,035 (93.4)	73 (6.6)
Totals	46,659 (55.3)	37,749 (44.7)	9,934 (91.5)	919 (8.5)

Source: Canada, *Sessional Papers*, 1920, pp. 220-31.

69 *Sessional Papers*, 1920, pp. 228-9; *Moncton Transcript*, 18 December 1917.

70 *Sessional Papers*, 1920, pp. 226-7. See also Beck, *Pendulum of Power*, pp. 136-48 and Desmond Morton, "Polling the Soldier Vote: the Overseas Campaign in the Canadian General Election of 1917", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, X, 4 (November 1975), pp. 39-58.

Although widespread opposition to conscription existed in New Brunswick, violence on the level of the infamous spring 1918 Québec riots never occurred in the province. There were incidents between authorities and deserters in the Acadian counties, most notably the 20 May 1918 shooting death of 24-year-old Lorenzo Sawyer by the Dominion Police outside of Bouctouche.<sup>71</sup> Following the incident, *Le Moniteur* cried scandal against the Liberals and their supporters, asserting they fostered Acadian opposition to conscription for base political ends, and urging everyone to embrace the “justice égale” of the *Military Service Act*.<sup>72</sup>

The Armistice of 11 November 1918 hastened the conclusion of the conscription crisis. Conscription legislation was in effect until the 28 June 1919 signing of the Treaty of Versailles with Germany, but the Armistice held and no further conscripts were sent overseas. During the relatively brief period conscription was in force, opposition was widespread – most notably in French Québec. However, the views of Québec *nationalistes* represented only the most conspicuous opposition to the *Military Service Act*. Clearly, the strength of that reaction has distracted historians of the First World War conscription crisis from other manifestations of dissent.

Essentially, the predominant Acadian ideological position on conscription closely resembled that of the Australians. Like New Brunswick’s Acadians, Australians willingly volunteered for military service but were, many politicians and officers excepted, opposed to reinforcing their ranks by conscription.<sup>73</sup> Australia’s civilian and military voters defeated referenda on conscription held in 1916 and December 1917, yet Australia’s contribution to the war was rightfully considered above reproach. Unlike the Acadian example, Australian opposition to conscription did not result in a widespread questioning of the country’s support for the Allies. In spite of pronounced opposition to conscription in Acadian newspapers, within the Liberal party and among Acadians generally, no accusations were made against the war effort itself. This was in stark contrast to the oft-examined response of French Québec, where conscription, the war and the British empire were all regularly denounced in colourful terms.<sup>74</sup>

Acadian resistance to conscription was rooted in the reality of Anglophone hegemony in New Brunswick and in the wrongheaded claims of the Conservative

71 *Carleton Sentinel* (Woodstock), 24 May 1918. Newspaper coverage of the shooting detailed a similar Kent county incident with deserter James Cormier and rumoured that one hundred armed deserters had constructed backwoods fortifications in preparation for a confrontation with the Dominion Police. See also Kealey, “State Repression of Labour and the Left”, p. 311 (n. 86) and Léger, *Le bataillon acadien*, pp. 194-5.

72 *Le Moniteur Acadien*, 6 juillet 1918.

73 L.L. Robson, *The First A.I.F.: A Study of Its Recruitment 1914-1918* (Melbourne, 1970), pp. 96, 114, 116, 180; J.M. Main, *Conscription: The Australian Debate, 1901-1970* (North Melbourne, 1970); Francis Barrymore Smith, *The Conscription Plebiscites in Australia, 1916-17* (Melbourne, 1988).

74 For more on French Québec’s response, see Lieutenant-Colonel L.G. Desjardins, *L’Angleterre, le Canada, et la Grande Guerre* (Québec City, 1917); Michel, *La Participation des Canadiens Français à la grande guerre*; Armstrong, *The Crisis of Quebec*; Chubby Power, *Party Politician: The Memoirs of Chubby Power* (Toronto, 1966); Morton, “French Canada at War”, pp. 84-103; Marc La Terreure, *Les Tribulations des conservateurs au Québec* (Québec, 1973); Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, pp. 22-104; Gérard Filteau, *Le Québec, le Canada, et la Guerre 1914-1918* (Montréal, 1977); Pinsonneault, “La Propagande de Recrutement Militaire au Canada”; Réal Bélanger, *L’impossible défi: Albert Sévigny et les conservateurs fédéraux, 1902-1918* (Québec, 1983); Robert Comeau, “L’opposition à la conscription au Québec”.

English-language press that Acadians were not contributing to the Allied war effort. Yet the very real support of Acadians for voluntary enlistment and, among nearly all of the elite, for the *Military Service Act* itself, illustrates the danger of importing to New Brunswick the traditional contemporary and historiographic analysis of a simple ethnic response to the conscription crisis. This is not to say that “race” did not play a part or that it was unimportant, but rather that it should not be assumed as the sole factor governing the Acadian reaction. Moreover, Canadian historians of the conscription crisis have not devoted enough attention to the idea that voluntarism and opposition to conscription could co-exist, as they did in New Brunswick’s Acadian community. As such, the Australian conscription experience provides a comparison to the Canadian example that deserves further study as well.

The 1917 imposition of conscription in Canada raised over 20,000 soldiers for active service, exactly when they were most needed. The toll of this endeavour was widespread. New Brunswick’s Acadians felt these costs when their volunteers suffered and died overseas, when conscripts struggled for exemption from military service and when deserters clashed with the Dominion Police. The extraordinary law widened and deepened New Brunswick’s cleavages, failing utterly to foster the unity its supporters envisaged. Beyond a purely English versus French mantra, the rending of Acadian New Brunswick’s complex society by the imposition of a compulsory service law demonstrates a clear example of a predominantly locally born and working-class group defying both their own elites and a province and country that failed to respect Acadians’ legitimate contribution to the war effort.