

NOVA SCOTIA AND THE CONSCRIPTION ELECTION OF 1917

by

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ABSTRACT

This study traces the course of federal politics in Nova Scotia from the time of the federal government's announcement of a policy of military conscription in early 1917, through the period of the formation of Union Government, to the federal election in the fall of 1917. The study attempts to explain why the Liberal Party received substantial support in the 1917 election in predominantly English-speaking Nova Scotia, when it was soundly defeated in English-speaking Canada west of Quebec. The study suggests that constituency organizations of both parties were unwilling to renounce party loyalty in 1917, even in the face of such important national questions as conscription and Union Government, and that, as a consequence, the election in much of the province became, to all intents and purposes, a traditional 'Grit-Tory' contest. Moreover, the effectiveness of conscription as an election issue was largely neutralized during the campaign by the tactics of both parties: Liberal candidates were for conscription in some areas, and against it elsewhere, depending upon the mood of the electorate, and Unionists watered down their party's pro-conscription stand

by promising substantial exemptions from conscription.

The result was a re-assertion of the traditional voting pattern in the province: the Liberal Party received a majority of the civilian votes, as in previous elections, and was defeated only by pro-Union soldiers' votes.

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KEY TO PRINCIPAL ABBREVIATIONS

AP	E.H. Armstrong Papers
BP	R.L. Borden Papers
<u>CHR</u>	<u>Canadian Historical Review</u>
DLL	Department of Labour Library, Ottawa
LP	Laurier Papers
MP	Meighen Papers
PAC	Public Archives of Canada
PANS	Public Archives of Nova Scotia
RP	E.N. Rhodes Papers

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The War, Conscription, and the Road to Union Government

Nineteen hundred and seventeen marked the third year of the great European conflict, World War One. The strain of war was beginning to tell on all the warring nations by 1917: their people had greeted the war's outbreak in 1914 with firm resolutions to sink internal differences in the common cause; now they were finding that the military stalemate and the almost endless outpouring of flesh and blood made such resolutions seem more and more meaningless. The situation in 1917 was most serious in Russia: first the overthrow of the Romanoffs; then Lenin; and ultimately withdrawal from the war, defeated by the Central Powers. Elsewhere in Europe popular unrest was reflected in the downfall of cabinets and the alienation of segments of national populations. War, a wasting disease, was seeking out the internal weaknesses of all those infected with it.

Canada was not immune. In 1917, the problem of maintaining four full divisions in the distant battlefields of France struck at a basic weakness in the Canadian body

politic, a tendency towards national discord along racial and geographic lines.¹ Falling enlistments induced the federal government to introduce military conscription, a measure that was anathema to French-speaking Quebec, but welcomed by the majority of English-speaking Canadians. A subsequent election fought on conscription returned an English-backed government committed to conscription, but left French Quebec almost isolated in parliamentary opposition.²

The party which had taken Quebec's side in the election, the Liberal Party under Sir Wilfrid Laurier, was thus all but wiped out as a national force in 1917. This party, however, was to become the vehicle for French Canadian revenge in future years: Quebec for many years after was to vote overwhelmingly Liberal at the federal level, providing a solid substructure upon which a revived Liberal Party could base an infrequently interrupted series of election triumphs over the victors of 1917. The strains of war had left an indelible mark on the Canadian political scene.

* * *

¹Ramsay Cook, The Politics of John W. Daffoe and the 'Free Press' (Toronto, 1963), p. 83; D.J. Hunden, "Manpower Mobilization in the First World War" (M.A. Thesis, Carleton, 1966), p. 62.

²Mason Wade, The French Canadians (Toronto, 1968), II, 754.

Yet this picture of political and racial conflict in 1917 must not be oversimplified. The Liberal Party, it is true, returned only twenty members outside of Quebec in the 1917 election, but whereas ten of these were scattered here and there across Ontario and the western provinces, the remaining ten were concentrated in the three small maritime provinces to the east, and represented almost one-third of the seats available in that region. Now it has become almost a commonplace in historical analysis of this 'conscription election' to ignore the 'minor' anomaly presented by the Liberal strength in the 'unimportant' maritimes, and to present the election in terms of a racial split -- English against French -- on the conscription issue. But why should this anomaly be ignored? The Atlantic provinces, especially Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, were largely English-speaking, and supported Canada's participation in the war loyally and unquestioningly. Yet Nova Scotia, with a total of sixteen seats, returned four Liberals; Prince Edward Island gave two of its four seats to the Liberal Party; and New Brunswick returned four Liberals to seven for the government.³ Altogether it was a total of ten Liberal M.P.'s out of thirty-one.

³Canada, Sessional Papers, 1920, Vol. 4, No. 13, passim.

The anomaly is even more striking when one considers the election results before the inclusion of the service vote. Of twelve seats contested, Nova Scotia's civilians returned Liberal candidates in nine, and Prince Edward Island gave all four of its seats to the Liberals. Only in New Brunswick did the totals remain the same. In the Maritime provinces, therefore, the civilian population gave a majority to the Liberal Party, seventeen seats to fourteen.⁴

The question then is this: in an election where the government almost eliminated Liberal parliamentary opposition west of Quebec why did English-speaking Maritimers give the Liberal Party so much support? Why, in other words, did the Liberal Party in the Maritimes survive the war-time election which almost destroyed it elsewhere in English Canada? This study is an attempt to give some answers to this question.

The field of enquiry will be Nova Scotia. New Brunswick had a substantial French population, 35.7% of which spoke no English,⁵ and it is possible that the national struggle was re-enacted here on a small scale. Prince Edward Island had a population of less than one

⁴Canada, Sessional Papers, 1920, loc. cit.

⁵Sixth Census of Canada, 1921 (Ottawa, 1924), II, 493.

hundred thousand and returned only four members to Parliament. But Nova Scotia had the largest population of the three provinces, the largest number of seats, and, in addition, possessed a relatively small French minority (less than 60,000 in a total population of over half a million)⁶ composed of Acadians who had never identified themselves with the Quebec French. Moreover, the 1917 election in this province is of interest because Prime Minister Borden was a Nova Scotian, contesting a Nova Scotian riding; he might well have expected stronger support from his native province in 1917, as Robert Stanfield was to get in 1968.

* * *

Nova Scotia in 1917 had a long-settled and slowly growing population which was predominantly English-speaking and British or American in origin,⁷ but which also contained several minorities, for example the English-speaking descendants of German settlers in Lunenburg County, and the aforementioned French-speaking Acadians who lived, for the most part, in the counties of

⁶Sixth Census of Canada, 1921 (Ottawa, 1924), I, 3, 354.

⁷The British population of Nova Scotia broke down as follows: English, 202,106; Scotch, 148,000; Irish, 55,712; others, 1,800. Ibid., I, 354.

Richmond, Digby and Yarmouth.⁸ The province's people were over three-quarters Protestant, with the remainder Roman Catholic. The province was less urbanized than central Canada, and the 1921 census was to show that the greater part of the population was still living in rural areas.⁹

These Nova Scotians had a distinctive regional outlook which owed much to geography and to a consequent isolation from the rest of Canada: the province is bounded largely by the sea -- part of it is an island, and the remainder a near-island connected to the mainland by a narrow isthmus; and a traveller from Nova Scotia, once having reached the mainland, must still pass through many miles of thinly populated countryside to reach central Canada.¹⁰ In 1917, such a traveller could reach central

⁸Sixth Census of Canada, 1921, I, 360-361. The Acadians of Digby County were concentrated in the district of Clare. Clare adjoined Yarmouth County and, in 1917, was part of the electoral district of Yarmouth-Clare.

⁹In 1911, the population of Nova Scotia was 36.7% urban, in 1921, 44.8%. Ontario, by contrast, was 49.5% urban in 1911 and 58.8% in 1921. Leroy O. Stone, Urban Development in Canada (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1967), p. 29. Stone's data is based upon the following definition of an urban area: ". . . a densely settled built-up area with a selected minimum population . . . [which] has been set at 1,000. . . ." Ibid., p. 221.

¹⁰See W.M. Whitelaw, The Maritimes and Canada before Confederation (Toronto, 1966), pp. 12-15; D.C. Harvey, "The Heritage of the Maritimes," Dalhousie Review, XIV (1934), 28-29.

Canada only by railroad, which meant a day and a half of upper berths, poor food and soot -- but if one wanted faster communication, there was only the telegraph. These nineteenth-century means of communication must have perpetuated a feeling of detachment and disinterest in Nova Scotia concerning affairs in the rest of the Dominion,¹¹ a feeling which would only be eroded (and then slowly) by radio in the twenties and television in the fifties, and by the advent of good roads and commercial airlines. It seems probable, therefore, that many Nova Scotians in 1917 were still reluctant to think of themselves as Canadians: a Halifax newspaper editor declared in a Dominion Day editorial in 1917 that the province had gained little from Confederation.¹²

Nova Scotia had, of course, gone to war in 1914 with the rest of the Dominion and the rest of the Empire, and there is little evidence to indicate that it had done it with regret. By 1917, however, the strain of war was beginning to tell. The province's mine owners found that the armed forces had deprived them of irreplaceable key personnel, the "young, agile" underground workers, while

¹¹See P.B. Waite, The Life and Times of Confederation (Toronto, 1965), pp. 16-17.

¹²Halifax Acadian Recorder, 2 July 1917, PANS.

leaving almost untouched the older "surface" workers.¹³ Coal production had been restricted as a result,¹⁴ and some of the remaining mine workers found themselves out of work.¹⁵ And some farmers were finding things difficult, despite the demand for their products, because of the drain of their sons and hired men into the services. Many of these farmers, more isolated than the urban population from the outside world, must have begun to entertain serious doubts about the necessity of contributing essential labor and loved ones to a war in a distant land. Some sections of the province, of course, benefitted from the war-time boom, and war-time prosperity was probably greatest in the port of Halifax.¹⁶

Nova Scotia remained loyal during the war years. But loyal to what? War-time spirit manifested itself in the negative manner common throughout North America: the persecution of enemy nationals, the search for enemy spies, and the screaming headlines proclaiming allied victories.

¹³D.H. McDougall, General Manager, Dominion Steel Corporation Limited, to E.H. Armstrong, 19 Feb. 1917. AP, vol. XIX, PANS. Armstrong was Minister of Mines and Public Works in the provincial cabinet.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Toronto Industrial Banner, 19 Oct. 1917. DLL.

¹⁶Hugh MacLennan has given a vivid portrait of wartime Halifax in his novel Barometer Rising (Toronto, 1967), passim.

It is clear that Nova Scotia was in favor of 'Winning the War'. But the nature and extent of positive patriotism is more difficult to assess. Loyalty to Canada as such was probably weak in comparison with loyalty to the Empire in 1917, but provincial loyalty and provincial pride were also strong. Even twenty years later Nova Scotians were to claim that

for over a century and a half prior to 1867 this Province was a distinct community under the British Crown. It is not a matter for wonderment, therefore, that the traditions and loyalties engendered in this long period of separate existence should create in this Province a distinct consciousness and sense of independence. These sentiments have never been wholly superseded by the larger idea of Confederation. Nova Scotia[ns], to a larger extent perhaps, than the people of most of the other Provinces, cherish a double loyalty . . . a loyalty to their own Province and a loyalty to the Dominion as a whole. . . .¹⁷

* * *

On May 18, 1917, Sir Robert Borden, leader of the federal Conservative Party and Prime Minister of Canada, announced that his government had decided conscription to be the only solution to the problem of maintaining the Canadian Corps overseas at full strength, and that a bill, the Military Service Act, would soon be introduced into Parliament to bring the measure into effect. Borden thus

¹⁷See J. Murray Beck, The Government of Nova Scotia (Toronto, 1957), p. 342.

solved one problem, military manpower, at the cost of increasing his domestic difficulties.

Although Borden could be fairly sure that his party's majority in Parliament would be sufficient to pass the Military Service Act, he could not be as sure in the spring of 1917 that the bill would be popular with the electorate and permit his government's return to power in the autumn election which, thanks to opposition leader Sir Wilfrid Laurier, now seemed certain.¹⁸ The situation was especially critical since the Borden administration was experiencing growing unpopularity because of its conduct of the war effort. Moreover, should the government be defeated in the election, Borden could not be sure that conscription would long survive at the hands of a Liberal régime. The solution to Borden's problem, therefore, was coalition with the Liberal Party -- or with those Liberals who believed in conscription: the resulting Union Government could go to the country with an excellent chance of electoral success and thereby guarantee that conscription would be retained as government policy. Borden therefore immediately began a series of negotiations to this end, first with Laurier

¹⁸A.M. Willms, "Conscription, 1917: A Brief for the Defence," CHR, XXXVII, 345. Laurier had already indicated that he could not agree to a further year's extension of the normal term of Parliament as he had in 1916.

himself, and when this failed, with Liberals who disagreed with Laurier. Nova Scotian Liberals played a minor, but significant role in these negotiations. The result was the formation of Union Government in October, 1917, which fought the election on a conscription platform.

In this way, conscription and coalition were brought together as issues in May of 1917, although both had been discussed without relation to each other across Canada for some time. In Nova Scotia, before May 1917, conscription had been treated primarily as a political issue, in the sense that the government's recruiting methods had become the subject of partisan rivalry, rather than of non-partisan discussion as to principle or necessity: in contrast with central Canada or the West, few non-partisan public meetings were held in Nova Scotia on compulsory military service (or at any rate, were not reported in the press) either to promote it or reject it.

Within this vacuum created by public indifference and inactivity, therefore, the discussion of conscription in the Nova Scotian press had developed along party lines before May, 1917: the Liberal newspapers attacked the government's recruiting methods, the Conservative press defended them. The Liberal press, led by the Halifax Morning Chronicle, suggested that the overall war effort should be conducted more energetically by the Borden

government and, more specifically, believed that recruiting methods should be improved. In taking this line, the Liberal press came close to suggesting that conscription was the only way to effect this improvement. In early February 1917, the Chronicle commented on Borden's statement that the government had "under consideration ~~an~~ more systematic methods of recruiting and would likely adopt them." This statement, declared the Chronicle, was "the old paltering excuse of a government of hesitation and indecision. What the country wants is not 'consideration' -- we have had two years and a half of that -- but action."¹⁹ The bellweather of the Nova Scotian Conservative press, the arch-rival of the Chronicle, the Halifax Herald, on the other hand, defended the government's voluntary manpower policy in early 1917. The Herald glorified "the willingness of our men and women to serve" and declared that "there should be very cogent reasons before we depart from the system of free and voluntary service, and adopt the European system of conscription."²⁰

Privately, however, many Nova Scotian politicians held opinions on conscription at this time which were at variance with the quasi-official pronouncements of the

¹⁹Halifax Morning Chronicle, 7 Feb. 1917. PANS.

²⁰Halifax Herald, 9 Jan. 1917. PANS.

party press. Senator William Dennis, for example, the proprietor of the Herald, wrote to Borden in December 1916 to recommend a radical revision of government policy which would include conscription of surplus war profits "from 25 as now to 66 2/3 or 75 -- or even 100 percent" with, as a natural concomitant, "the conscription of all able-bodied men for National Service (in whatever capacity most needed). . . ." ²¹ And J.H. Sinclair, Liberal M.P. for Guysborough, warned Laurier in October 1917 that should the government go to the country with a conscription plank in its platform, this could adversely affect the Liberal Party's chances. "It is said that we now have about 300,000 volunteers," wrote Sinclair. "Every one of them, as soon as they enlist, becomes a conscriptionist. So do their fathers and relatives." ²² These privately expressed opinions, however, suggest merely the shape of the struggle to come: public sentiment in Nova Scotia was as yet largely unorganized and inarticulate on the conscription question.

Coalition government was not a significant issue, political or otherwise, in Nova Scotia before May 1917. It was rarely mentioned in the local press. Although the

²¹Dennis to Borden, 24 Dec. 1916. BP, OC285, PAC.

²²Sinclair to Laurier, 2 Oct. 1916. LP, reel 174, PAC.

Halifax Herald fulminated against 'Party-Mad Liberals' in almost every issue, it is clear that the paper was not thinking in terms of coalition, but was damning Liberal failure to cooperate with the government on war measures in the Commons. And on the Liberal side, no major Liberal newspaper in Nova Scotia advocated coalition government, as did, for example, the Toronto Star.²³ It is probable that much of the appeal of coalition in Ontario and in the West stemmed from a war-induced, but as yet unrecognized, political and social radicalism that was generally lacking in the conservative and stable society of Nova Scotia.²⁴ It would appear, in fact, that most of such political radicalism as existed in Nova Scotia at this time was largely to be found in the labor movement, and was hence confined almost entirely to the industrial and mining regions of Cape Breton and to a few of the urban centres such as Halifax.²⁵ Labor radicals, however, especially in Cape Breton, were not thinking in terms of coalition with the old parties, but of independent political action of their own. But as noted earlier, Nova Scotia in general was still more rural than urban in 1917, and was still

²³Canadian Annual Review for 1917, p. 555.

²⁴See Ramsay Cook, "Dafoe, Laurier, and the Formation of Union Government," CHR, XLII, 199.

²⁵See Beck, Government, pp. 166-167.

content with the traditional party structure and with the old political game of 'ins' and 'outs'.

Hence it was this traditional outlook which was reflected in the political controversies in the press in 1917, where war-time issues were discussed in party terms. And it was this allegiance to the established parties and to the party system itself which was in large measure to set the tone of the election in December of 1917 in Nova Scotia, and to affect its outcome.

* * *

Borden's announcement of conscription on May 18, 1917, elicited a spate of editorial comment in Nova Scotian newspapers. Conservative newspapers, led by the Halifax Herald were enthusiastic. The Herald, never noted for restricting its political opinions to the editorial page, greeted conscription with a bold front-page headline: "Compulsory Service", surmounting a flag-bedecked picture of Borden.²⁶ A subsequent issue reported unanimous and province-wide support for conscription and criticized Liberal provincial premier George H. Murray, and other Liberals, for not displaying sufficient enthusiasm for the measure.²⁷ Liberal newspapers tended to follow the lead of

²⁶Halifax Herald, 19 May 1917. PANS.

²⁷Ibid., 21 May 1917.

the Halifax Morning Chronicle. There was little outright condemnation of the principle of conscription. Said the Chronicle, "If men to fill the fighting ranks of our glorious battalions in France cannot be obtained by any other method than conscription, the people of Canada, we are convinced, will be willing to make any sacrifice which the great cause demands."²⁸ Similar sentiments were expressed by the New Glasgow Eastern Chronicle,²⁹ the Halifax Acadian Recorder,³⁰ and the Liverpool Advance,³¹ among others. Sniping at the government continued, however. The Advance, for example, heaped scorn upon the Borden Government for "at last" finding the "courage to take steps to secure the 100,000 men lacking of the half million men it boasted of raising over two and a half years ago."³²

The Liberal press in Nova Scotia thus greeted conscription fairly calmly, with few of the florid effusions of the Halifax Herald. Conscription was acceptable if necessary, but surely some further attempts might be made to test improvements in voluntary enlistments,

²⁸Halifax Morning Chronicle, 21 May 1917. PANS.

²⁹Eastern Chronicle, 25 May 1917. PANS.

³⁰Acadian Recorder, 22 May 1917. PANS.

³¹Advance, 23 May 1917. PANS.

³²Ibid.

since the government's record in this respect was so lamentably poor. Said the Chronicle,

We are not prepared to agree or to admit that the voluntary system is a failure or that the manhood of Canada, under proper leadership would refuse to respond to the inspiration of a great cause. The voluntary system has not, we are persuaded, been given a fair trial. We hesitate to believe that the voluntary spirit of free Canadian manhood has been exhausted.³³

The Acadian Recorder was more succinct:

There is nothing wrong in principle in compelling the manhood of the nation to defend the nation, but in a democratic state like this, it is incumbent upon those in power to show that the voluntary system has failed. This has not been done.³⁴

The critical point, as far as the Liberal newspapers were concerned, was that the government's record in most of its undertakings was lamentable; who then could be sure that it could administer conscription fairly or adequately? The government, said the Chronicle, "which all Canada knows is thoroughly discredited, is going to ask parliament to hand over to it the tremendous power of conscripting the manhood of the country and of putting into force compulsory military service."³⁵ The question raised by conscription, therefore, was, as far as Liberals were concerned, the

³³Morning Chronicle, 21 May 1917. PANS.

³⁴Acadian Recorder, 22 May 1917. PANS.

³⁵Morning Chronicle, 21 May 1917. PANS.

same one asked before May 1917: why should a corrupt régime be permitted to run the country's war effort? The correctness of the principle of conscription was not at issue: it was the record of the Borden government.

And having reverted to one pre-conscription topic, the government's record, Liberals began to consider another, in the light of the new circumstances: an election was coming. How did conscription affect Liberal chances? How should they deal with it, especially since conscription might well prove to be necessary? One obvious solution was the formation of a national or coalition government to enact conscription; it might also prevent an election. This was suggested by the Acadian Recorder.³⁶ A second solution was more congenial to die-hard Liberals, however, one which would not necessarily bring harm to Canada's war effort, or prevent a Liberal election victory either. The Eastern Chronicle explained:

It might be objected that the election program might be that the government would go to the people on a conscription platform and the Liberal Party apparently opposed. This is more apparent than real. The people generally understand that more soldiers must be found and that if they cannot otherwise be found, they must be found by conscription. Liberal candidates need only be frank and straightforward with the people and tell them that their party did not oppose the conscription bill; knowing that men will not come

³⁶Acadian Recorder, 22 May 1917. PANS.

forward and trust the government by enlisting. We believe that with a new administration it may not be necessary to resort to conscription; but if there should be such a necessity, and our party is in power, it must be resorted to.³⁷

It is clear from this why the Liberal Party was to find the methods and ideology of Mackenzie King so congenial in later years: 'Conscription if necessary, but not necessarily conscription.' But here as well, formulated and ready for use was the campaign tactic for Liberals in a conscription election: support conscription if necessary, but suggest that a Liberal government could handle the enlistment problem, and by inference the war effort as a whole, better than Borden.

A long summer lay ahead. The election probably would not come until fall, and before then a Liberal-Conservative coalition seemed a distinct possibility: the Acadian Recorder's suggestion for a coalition (which the paper ultimately disavowed) could not help but reflect the opinions of an indeterminate number of Liberals in Nova Scotia, but it was also likely that many Liberals would find coalition distasteful. This likelihood was to be increased when the revered leader, Laurier, rejected coalition in early June: these Liberals could fight the election as the Eastern Chronicle suggested, with some

³⁷Eastern Chronicle, 18 May 1917. PANS.

hope of success. And as we shall see in a subsequent chapter, this is exactly what they did.

* * *

Immediately following Borden's conscription announcement, Nova Scotian premier George H. Murray was pressed by the newspapers for a statement. As the leader of the provincial Liberals, Murray could be seen as the key man in any movement towards coalition in the province. He was cautious in his appraisal of the situation: "I do not propose at present to discuss the general principle embodied in selective conscription," he told the press. He then proceeded to analyse the new development in political terms.

We must remember that Canada, while thoroly [sic] loyal to the Empire, is a democratic country in which party feeling is strongly developed. The administration of any form of conscription by a party government whose mandate from the people has expired involves a serious question, and many worthy citizens of the country will certainly feel that political exigencies of the past will be a controlling factor.

Selective conscription must be based on justice to all our citizens. Can this be done by a partizan government?

So far as I am concerned, I would prefer expressing an opinion when I have information as to how selective conscription can be brought about. A Canadian volunteer chooses his own course and his action is a deliberate one. When compelled to serve, political favoritism must cease; and if the welfare of the Empire is a justification for the departure from the volunteer system, it certainly becomes a question of how far the government at

Ottawa is prepared to go to convince the people of Canada that fair play and justice must be dealt out to every citizen.

We must remember that a coalition government exists in England, that conscription was defeated in Australia, and that the United States has called to its councils the leaders of both its parties. We must first be satisfied that the volunteer system has had a fair trial. There are many who question that proper methods to obtain volunteers are exhausted and who believe that the young manhood of Canada, given the leadership which the occasion demands, would not fail to respond to the inspiration of a great cause.³⁸

Murray then did not necessarily oppose the principle of conscription, despite his refusal to be explicit on the matter, but was primarily concerned with its political implications. He was a characteristically cautious man and was in the process of testing the wind: it now appeared that an important decision might have to be made, not on conscription itself, but on the political path to follow into a future suddenly obscured by the government's adoption of the measure. Which was the safest political course? Should he support coalition, or recognize the strength of "party feeling?" His political career hung suddenly in the balance, and Murray was not to be rushed.

The pressure, right from the beginning, was therefore upon Nova Scotian Liberals to decide whether or not to support Union Government. These Liberals were not uniform

³⁸Halifax Herald, 19 May 1917, reporting Murray's statement to the press of 18 May 1917.

in outlook. One group of Liberals considered loyalty to Laurier and to the Liberal Party to be the primary consideration. This group, led by E.M. Macdonald and D.D. McKenzie, was not necessarily hostile to coalition, provided that Laurier agreed to it and provided that the Liberal members of the coalition not be put in a subordinate position by being forced to agree to important decisions already made by the Conservative régime on the future conduct of government business. Hence, in late May, E.M. Macdonald suggested to Laurier that the Liberal leader agree to coalition "provided that the new cabinet are to be entirely unfettered by any proposed legislation, either in regard to conscription or any other matter, which may either be put on the order paper or have been announced by the government."³⁹ This, of course, became Laurier's demand of Borden, and led to his rejection of coalition in early June upon Borden's refusal to accept this demand. With Laurier into opposition to Union at this time went E.M. Macdonald and the other Nova Scotian 'loyalists'.

A second and perhaps smaller group of Nova Scotian Liberals believed that conscription and hence Union were of primary importance, transcending loyalty to the Liberal

³⁹Macdonald to Laurier, 31 May 1917. LP, reel 177, PAC.

Party or its leader. The only prominent member in this group of idealists in Nova Scotia was A.K. Maclean, the Liberal Party's financial critic in the federal house. Although Maclean had long been one of the more effective critics of government policy, in and out of the House, he was convinced, almost from the time of Borden's announcement of conscription, that coalition was the only correct course for Liberals to follow.⁴⁰ He became an active worker in the Union cause and provided liaison between the Conservative team of Borden and Meighen and a third group of Nova Scotian Liberals: those who were hesitant as to which course to take after May of 1917.⁴¹

This third group of Nova Scotian Liberals, the waverers, were torn between conflicting loyalties and uncertain as to political realities. They included in their numbers the most powerful and influential members and supporters of Nova Scotian Liberalism: provincial premier George Murray, W.S. Fielding, and the editorial staff of the Halifax Morning Chronicle. Any member of this group would be an asset to Union Government, and ultimately all decided to support union. Because of their importance, and because of their awareness of the hazards presented to

⁴⁰Halifax Herald, 21 May 1917. PANS.

⁴¹Ibid.

their position by any false step in the wrong direction, much of the story of the formation of Union Government in Nova Scotia is the story of the decisions of these three pillars of the provincial Liberal establishment -- two men and a newspaper -- to abandon, for the time being at any rate, their long-held and deeply felt hostility to Conservatives and the Conservative Party.

As already suggested, George Murray was probably the key figure in this group. He had been premier of Nova Scotia since 1896 and was unchallenged in his position as leader of the provincial party: for this reason his influence in provincial Liberal circles probably exceeded that of his friend and former mentor, W.S. Fielding, who had been out of office since 1911. Should Murray give his whole-hearted support to Union, therefore, it was likely that many Liberals, including Fielding, would follow his lead. But the premier was by nature an exceptionally cautious man. His long tenure of office had been marked by an avoidance of controversy, and his political philosophy called for a thorough appraisal of the mood of the public and of his fellow Liberals before making a decision.⁴² Hence, while it seemed to Murray that conscription "met with the approval of the Liberal Party in the province

⁴²Beck, Government, pp. 161-162, 201.

generally,"⁴³ caution was nonetheless essential: "I did not express," he told Laurier in early June, "any opinion on the direct issue [conscription] because I felt there was much to be discussed and disposed of before I was confronted with the necessity of dealing with that issue." He privately leaned toward some form of coalition since "in a democratic country such as Canada, conscription was a policy dangerous in the hands of a partizan administration." Yet, "the policy of conscription is one which is going to cause tremendous difference of opinion in this Country. It is impossible to foresee at the present moment to what extent that difference of opinion will lead."⁴⁴ Roger Graham has compared the Union negotiations to "a great, crowded, swirling ballet," with Borden occupying "the centre of the stage, reaching this way, then that, while various Liberals boldly approached them coyly retreated, until some of them joined their hands to his."⁴⁵ In this political drama, Murray played the part of the shyest of ingénues, and timidly joined hands with Borden only at the final curtain.

⁴³Murray to Laurier, 2 June 1917. LP, reel 177, PAC.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Roger Graham, Arthur Meighen (Toronto, 1960-65), I, 159.

As for W.S. Fielding, Borden's problem was to persuade the former Finance Minister to leave his political retirement and his business interests in Montreal, and to break his ties with his leader, Laurier. Fielding's ties with Laurier were still close, and he continued to offer advice to the Liberal leader. Yet he did not see eye to eye with Laurier on the conscription issue: Fielding did not oppose the principle of conscription and he believed that Laurier's own solution to the problem, a nation-wide referendum on the issue, was ill-advised. "It is not in harmony with our British ideas of parliamentary government," he told Laurier. Moreover, to condemn the conscription bill and to demand a referendum on the issue would "antagonize all those, Conservatives and Liberals, who think that conscription is now necessary."⁴⁶ There thus existed a distinct possibility that Fielding could be persuaded to break with Laurier and support coalition. His close ties with Nova Scotia Liberalism, however, made it equally probable that he would not act alone, but would require the approval and cooperation of his former colleague and protégé, George Murray.

The editorial course of the Halifax Morning Chronicle between May and October of 1917 was a tortuous

⁴⁶Fielding to Laurier, 31 May 1917. LP, reel 177, PAC.

and troubled one. For example, on 28 June, the paper praised A.K. Maclean's stand in parliament supporting the passage of the Military Service Act, and on 5 July headlined with approval E.M. Macdonald's speech in the House opposing it. The Chronicle's inconsistencies were a product of a natural desire to discern a unified national Liberal policy on the issues of coalition and conscription,⁴⁷ a reluctant recognition (rarely made explicit) that this unity was non-existent,⁴⁸ and an inclination to differ with Laurier and the loyalist Liberals on solutions to the problems of the day. The paper thus fluctuated from one position to another, from week to week, and even from day to day, making any attempt to discover a consistent pattern of behavior difficult. Yet it is clear, when all the editorial undergrowth has been cleared away, that the paper's deeply held views on conscription and coalition led inexorably to its break with Laurier and the loyalists on October 18, 1917.

To begin with, the paper was never hostile to the principle of conscription, differing in this way with Laurier and the Quebec wing of the Liberal Party, if not with the majority of Liberals in Nova Scotia. The Chronicle, from the first, declared that it did not oppose conscription in

⁴⁷Morning Chronicle, 19 July 1917. PANS.

⁴⁸Ibid., 26 June 1917.

principle, but soon came to the conclusion that conscription of manpower did not go far enough. A total mobilization of the nation's resources should be undertaken in a general policy of "Universal Service" which would entail the conscription of wealth and labor as well as military manpower.⁴⁹ Universal service was a continuing theme in the editorial columns of the paper from May until October, although it is clear that the institution of a federal income tax in late July went part way toward satisfying the paper's demands.⁵⁰

Nor did the Chronicle oppose coalition in principle either, but for some time linked it with the concept of universal service, and with the claim that a truly 'National Government' would result from a Liberal election victory, bringing in a more non-partisan administration.⁵¹ If the paper's reasoning seems faulty or fuzzy on this point, it is an indication of the general tone of confusion emanating at times from its editorials: thus Laurier's decision to reject coalition on June 6 seems to have saddened the paper, despite its hopes for a Liberal election victory; the

⁴⁹Morning Chronicle, 5, 14 June 1917. PANS.

⁵⁰Ibid., 17, 26 July 1917.

⁵¹Ibid., 5 June, 17 July, 2 Oct. 1917.

sought-for Union was unfortunately now "impossible", it declared.⁵²

And Laurier's subsequent call for a referendum apparently caught the Chronicle's editors unawares: they favored the idea when it was announced on June 17, but on June 20 rejected it, declaring that

we regret to have to differ with the course of procedure as proposed by Sir Wilfrid Laurier. . . . We still think the fairest, most equitable, and the best way to secure an intelligent verdict from the people is to present to them for their consideration and their mandate a complete and perfect measure of universal service instead of merely asking them to record their votes for or against the principle, the scope and extent of which every voter must interpret for himself.⁵³

From this point on, the Chronicle apparently regarded the referendum as a divisive issue for the Liberal Party; and while it continued to support Laurier and the Liberal Party in general terms, it rarely mentioned the referendum again.

Hence, while coalition and conscription in principle were not anathema to the Chronicle, yet it continued in opposition to the Borden régime until mid-October 1917. Several reasons may be advanced to account for this. First, the paper had a long tradition of loyalty to the Liberal Party which could not lightly be abandoned and, more important, had readers who expected it to remain loyal.

⁵²Morning Chronicle, 8 June 1917. PANS.

⁵³Ibid., 20 June 1917.

Secondly, simple pride made it difficult to agree that its hated rival, the Herald, might for once be right. The Chronicle continued to defend Laurier and other Laurier-Liberals against "vicious attacks" made by the "subsidized government press"⁵⁴ -- a thinly-veiled allusion to the government connections of the Herald's proprietor, Senator William Dennis. Thirdly, the Chronicle could not forget its earlier criticisms of the Borden government and, during the summer of 1917, discovered new fuel for its wrath in the C.N.R. bill, the press gag rule in the Military Service Act, and the disfranchisement of immigrants by the Wartimes Election Act.⁵⁵ For these various reasons, the Chronicle continued its hostility to the Borden government, and to the attempts by Borden to form a coalition cabinet, well into October 1917, despite some dissatisfaction with Laurier's actions and policies.

* * *

It is not the purpose of this study to examine the events taking place on the national scene between May and October, 1917 -- the passage of the Military Service Act through parliament, the Borden government's preparations for the coming election which were embodied in such bills as the

⁵⁴Morning Chronicle, 6 July 1917, PANS.

⁵⁵Ibid., 13 July, 15 Aug., 19 Sept. 1917.

Wartime~~s~~ Elections Act and the Military Voters Act, and the complex events and negotiations which led to the formation of Union Government -- except as they involved Nova Scotia and Nova Scotian politicians. In General, Nova Scotians played a relatively unimportant part in these events:⁵⁶ the strong and loyal parliamentary support given to Laurier by most Liberal Nova Scotian M.P.s -- to the extent of voting against the Military Service Act in its passage through the House -- could only have stiffened the Liberal leader's resolve rather than changed his mind, and did not result in the defeat of the bill; and Union Government was officially announced on October 12, despite premier Murray's failure to declare definitely whether he would support it or not. It is likely, however, that the success of the Union movement in Nova Scotia assumed some special importance in Borden's mind, despite Nova Scotia's unimportance in relation to the western provinces: firstly, his feelings of uncertainty as to the outcome of the war-time election would make even Nova Scotia's small number of seats appear of importance in a close election;⁵⁷ secondly, Borden would wish to make Union Government appear as a truly nation-wide

⁵⁶Borden, in this context, must be considered primarily a national figure.

⁵⁷See Graham, Meighen, I, 146.

movement, involving all provinces outside of Quebec; and thirdly, the premier would quite naturally want his home province to support the new government which he was forming.

Borden began negotiations with Laurier as to the possibility of forming a coalition government on May 29, and these negotiations broke down a week or so later, on June 6, when Laurier refused to accept conscription as the policy of the new government. While these negotiations were going on, Premier Murray expressed a somewhat less cautious approval of the principle of coalition than earlier. He stated at a public meeting in Halifax that this "is a time when the very best should be given the country, when Liberals and Conservatives should lay aside their party feelings and unite for the one great object of presenting a united and unanimous front to the world."⁵⁸ In addition, he intimated to Laurier privately that he would not oppose such a coalition.⁵⁹ At this time, Murray was rumoured as a possible member of the coalition cabinet.⁶⁰ But when Laurier rejected coalition, Murray drew back, knowing full well just how loyal Nova Scotia Liberals were to their national leader, and became noncommittal on the subject.

⁵⁸Canadian Annual Review 1917, p. 562.

⁵⁹Murray to Laurier, 2 June 1917. LP, reel 177,
PAC.

⁶⁰Halifax Herald, 31 May 1917. PANS.

Not so A.K. Maclean, however. He had approached Arthur Meighen in company with Frank Carvell of New Brunswick in late May as to the possibility of forming a coalition,⁶¹ and Laurier's rejection of it required only a short re-evaluation of the situation on Maclean's part. On June 7, he and Carvell approached Borden once more, and again discussed the formation of a Union Government, this time without Laurier: Borden detected some hesitancy on Maclean's part, but it was apparent that Maclean still favoured the idea and would promote it in Nova Scotia.⁶²

But Maclean could accomplish little during the summer of 1917. He voted with the government on the Military Service Act, but was supported in this by only one other Nova Scotian Liberal M.P., J.H. Sinclair of Guysborough, and then somewhat equivocally. Sinclair voted for both the M.S.A. and Laurier's amendment to it (which did not pass), recommending a referendum on the issue. The national Liberal Party, despite strains, still appeared united to Nova Scotian Liberals, and this unity seemed confirmed by two party conventions, one in Ontario and the other in the west, which staunchly upheld Laurier as the national leader.⁶³

⁶¹Graham, Meighen, I, 125.

⁶²Robert Borden, Memoirs (Toronto, 1938), II, 730.

⁶³Morning Chronicle, 11 Aug. 1917. PANS.

For the cautious Murray, this was clearly no time to rush headlong into the arms of the Conservatives.

But after the passage of the Wartime Elections Act in mid-September, Liberal confidence across the country began to evaporate. It was obvious that this act, disfranchising many recent European immigrants to the western provinces, was a stinging blow to Liberal hopes in these provinces, since these immigrants had tended to support the party which had brought them into the Prairies in the first place. The Union negotiations dragged on, but success now seemed in sight, and the belief began to grow in Liberal circles that a Union Government would sweep the country outside Quebec in the coming election. This belief began to be shared in Nova Scotia, easing the way for A.K. Maclean and other promoters of the Union idea. Laurier loyalists such as E.M. Macdonald still remained obdurate, and this stubbornness was no doubt reinforced by the knowledge that their support of Laurier during the debate in the House on the Military Service Act would, in all likelihood, make their entry into Union Government impossible. To Murray (and Fielding), on the other hand, it seemed that the rising tide of Unionism must now be taken into full account, and the urgings of A.K. Maclean,

as well as Borden and Meighen, that Murray join the Union cabinet⁶⁴ began to be received with more warmth.

Yet Murray continued to hesitate, and Borden was forced to announce the formation of Union Government on October 12 without having received any decision as yet on Murray's part.⁶⁵ Murray visited Laurier in Ottawa on that day, accompanied by Maclean. He asked Laurier's opinion, and while Laurier valued Murray's friendship and loyalty highly, the national leader refused to advise the Nova Scotian on the matter: it was a matter of personal conscience Laurier believed.⁶⁶ Murray, who had earlier decided not to move without the support of his fellow Nova Scotian Liberals,⁶⁷ returned to Halifax for further consultations: should he, or should he not accept Borden's offer of a post? Nova Scotian Liberalism was split: on the one side were A.K. Maclean and some members of Murray's provincial cabinet,⁶⁸ and on the other were the Laurier loyalists who begged Murray not to join the Union

⁶⁴Morning Chronicle, 24 Oct. 1917. PANS.

⁶⁵Borden, Memoirs, II, 752.

⁶⁶Laurier to D.D. McKenzie, 13 Oct. 1917. LP, reel 178, PAC.

⁶⁷Borden, Memoirs, II, 746.

⁶⁸For example, R.M. MacGregor, M.L.A. for Pictou. J.M. Cameron, Political Pictonians (Ottawa, n.d.), p. 235.

cabinet.⁶⁹ But the Union tide was now at the flood: the Halifax Chronicle swung over to Union on October 18, and on October 21 Fielding confided to Laurier that he believed that "the bulk of our friends will accept the Union Government."⁷⁰ Yet the Laurier loyalists were still influential; it would not do for Murray to alienate such men as E.M. Macdonald or D.D. McKenzie (whose federal riding of Cape Breton North-Victoria overlapped Murray's own provincial riding). The provincial premier, therefore, and characteristically, decided on a compromise. He would attempt to please the Laurierites by remaining out of the Union cabinet, but he would bow to the demands of the present situation by giving his approval to A.K. Maclean's entry into the federal cabinet and, moreover, would publicly endorse Union Government. Fielding, a close friend of Murray's,⁷¹ would also endorse Union Government at the same time, and accept Borden's offer of an acclamation in the riding of Queens-Shelburne as the

⁶⁹Kyte to Laurier, 18 Oct. 1917. LP, reel 178, PAC.

⁷⁰Laurier to Macdonald, 22 Oct. 1917. LP, reel 178, PAC.

⁷¹E.M. Macdonald, Recollections, Political and Personal (Toronto, 1938), p. 20.

reward for his cooperation.⁷² Thus, on October 23 1917, ten days after the rest of the country, Union Government was formally accomplished in Nova Scotia.

Murray's public endorsation of Union Government appeared in the Halifax Chronicle beside that of Fielding on October 24. Murray stated that he was pleased that A.K. Maclean had been asked to join the Union cabinet, a post which he himself had been offered but had turned down. He gave his blessing to the new government and asked that it be given careful consideration by all politically active citizens of Nova Scotia: "A new system of government is on trial. Its success will depend on the honour and fair dealing of both of the great political parties." That he was not yet, however, completely convinced of the good faith of the Conservative Unionists, became apparent at one point in his statement, when he declared that although this was no time for recrimination, "there was much in the record of the Conservative party which did not meet with the approval of the Liberals."⁷³ And Fielding's statement, although termed "generous" in its support of

⁷²Canadian Annual Review 1917, p. 607. Fielding, of course, was a free agent to an extent denied the provincial premier, and had little to lose -- or so it seemed at the time: the confrontation with Mackenzie King in 1919 was still hidden in the future.

⁷³Morning Chronicle, 24 Oct. 1917. PANS.

Union by the Chronicle,⁷⁴ was framed largely in terms of political expediency. If Nova Scotian Liberals, said Fielding,

refused to have any part in the movement they will isolate themselves from the Liberalism of the rest of the dominion excepting the province of Quebec. . . . It is my judgment that in this crisis both the public interests and the ultimate good of the Liberal Party will be promoted by the cooperation of the Liberals of the Maritime provinces with the Liberals of Ontario and the west who have deemed it their duty to participate in the formation of Union Government.⁷⁵

All in all, the statements of Fielding and Murray endorsing Union seem rather unenthusiastic to the present reader in comparison with the rhetoric of Conservative Unionists (of which the Halifax Herald was the most outstanding example in Nova Scotia). Yet these statements represented a startling overturn of the normal order of Nova Scotian politics -- "a bombshell" was the judgment of one Liberal observer.⁷⁶ The effect of these statements, accordingly, was fully appreciated by Nova Scotian Conservatives. As one Conservative editor said, "It is not necessary to agree with all the passages in Mr.

⁷⁴Morning Chronicle, 24 Oct. 1917. PANS.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶J.B. Black to Laurier, 13 Nov. 1917. LP, reel 179, PAC.

Murray's statement . . . to appreciate the value of the service he has done to the dominion by issuing it."⁷⁷

Nor could the potential impact upon the Liberal electorate of the Halifax Chronicle's earlier conversion to Union be underestimated either. This paper was, as the Conservative Sydney Daily Post noted, the "leading Liberal organ" in Nova Scotia⁷⁸ and should it give its wholehearted support to Union in the coming election, its influence in this direction was certain to be great. Although (as has been noted above) the Chronicle had not expressed hostility to the basic principles of conscription and coalition during the preceding months, the switch to Union on October 18 seems to have been triggered off by the formation of Union Government on October 12, and by the reports that either Murray or Maclean would enter the new cabinet. The Chronicle at this time did not oppose the new government, but merely stated that it could not be considered a true 'union' until all provinces (including Nova Scotia) were represented in it. This would obviously be accomplished within a few days,⁷⁹ and between the 13th and the 18th,

⁷⁷Sydney Daily Post, 26 Oct. 1917. PANS.

⁷⁸Ibid., 1 Nov. 1917.

⁷⁹Morning Chronicle, 13 Oct. 1917. PANS.

the Chronicle reported and discussed the continuing negotiations in both its editorials and on its front page in neutral tones. The final switch on October 18, therefore, was probably based on the paper's growing belief that Murray would support Union along with other members of his entourage.

The Chronicle declared its support for Union in a long editorial entitled "Unity." The editorial mentioned the discussions regarding the new Union Government that had been going on in Halifax for several days past among leading provincial Liberals, and noted that it was understandably "difficult for Liberals to give their full confidence to a cabinet which numbers among its members so many ministers whose administration record during the past six years has been the subject of so much criticism." Yet, continued the editorial, "we are engaged in a great war which taxes our every energy. We must sink our local prejudices and concede something to the prejudices of our political opponents. . . . In these circumstances, and for these purposes, this paper believes that the Liberal Party of Nova Scotia should give its cooperation to the new government." This would not require a Liberal to desert his principles, continued the paper, nor did the paper intend to do so: it was clear that the new

government would avoid "the evil ways of its predecessor" because of its bipartisan nature.⁸⁰

* * *

Thus on October 24, 1917, the Unionist movement in Nova Scotia was at its zenith: the support for it by Murray, Fielding, the Morning Chronicle, and other lesser Liberals seemed to assure triumph for Union Government at the polls in the coming elections. Pro-Union Liberals had every reason to feel confident: Murray and Maclean were reported to have insisted that one-half of the Union candidates in Nova Scotia be Liberals.⁸¹ And those Liberals who opposed Union had every reason for despondency. As one loyalist reported to Laurier, it was "a very peculiar situation all around, and the result of the proposition may be that it will not be possible for me to contest my County with any hope of success."⁸² Moreover, Laurier's continuing refusal to alter his stand on conscription or referendum must have seemed the final blow to the hopes of these loyalist politicians, since it appeared to them that the majority of Nova Scotian Liberals were in favor of

⁸⁰Morning Chronicle, 18 Oct. 1917. PANS.

⁸¹Macdonald to Laurier, 18 Oct. 1917. LP, reel 178, PAC.

⁸²Ibid.

conscription, and would consequently feel obliged to desert their national leader and his candidates.⁸³

Yet, as events were to prove, the loyalty of this latter group of Liberals to Laurier was an accurate reflection of a similar sentiment among the mass of Liberal supporters in Nova Scotia.⁸⁴ And given this unexpected base of loyal support, the Laurier Liberals in Nova Scotia, aided by a relaxation of Laurier's earlier rigidity, would be able to utilize the strategy suggested so much earlier in the year by the Eastern Chronicle. These Liberals would prove that late October 1917 represented, not a continually rising Union flood, but the high water mark of Union Government in Nova Scotia.

⁸³See Sinclair to Laurier, 18 Oct. 1917; Laurier to Sinclair, 26 Oct. 1917. LP, reel 178, PAC.

⁸⁴See 'Chubby' Power, A Party Politician (Toronto, 1966), p. 62.

CHAPTER II

THE REVIVAL OF PARTY FEELING

The Breakdown of Inter-party Negotiations and the Nomination of Candidates

The Union cabinet complete, the government armoury equipped with the latest weapons of political warfare -- conscription, coalition, the Wartimes Election Act and the Military Voters Act -- and his own leadership reaffirmed and assured, Borden revealed on October 30 the official date for the coming election. It was to be held on December 17, although the Yukon was to vote later, on 28 January 1918. Nomination day was set for November 19 and it was generally expected that this date would mark the end of the election in most of Nova Scotia's ridings as a result of successful negotiations between Conservatives and Liberals leading to a series of acclamations.¹ Most of these negotiations failed, however, and this failure was in a large part the consequence of selfish striving for advantage on the part of potential candidates, strong party loyalty among the rank-and-file of both major

¹See E.N. Rhodes to Borden, 24 Oct. 1917. RP, vol. X, PANS; also Truro Daily News, 23 Oct. 1917. PANS.

parties and, in a few ridings, the desire of minority groups for a voice in political affairs.

* * *

In the fourth week of October 1917, the Liberal Party in Nova Scotia appeared split in two by Union Government: many Liberal politicians broke with the loyalists in their party and followed the pro-Union lead given by Murray and Fielding, and it seemed highly likely that the remaining loyalist fragments of the party would be isolated and impotent in the coming months. Some of the newly converted Liberal Unionists undoubtedly favored Union because of a belief in the merits of war-time coalition, and because of these patriotic motives were close in outlook to the most strenuous Liberal advocate of Union, A.K. Maclean. In many cases, however, Liberal acceptance of Union arose from doubts as to the political practicality of an anti-Union stand. As a loyal Liberal reported to Laurier in late October, "I cannot say that the Union proposal is popular [among Liberals], but it has considerable support among our leading friends and it will likely grow."² Thus it was clear that should these reluctant supporters of Union decide that some measure of

²Sinclair to Laurier, 22 Oct. 1917. LP, reel 178, PAC.

electoral success was possible outside of the Union movement, the success in Nova Scotia of Union Government was in danger.

For those Liberals who rejected Union outright, late October and early November was a time of confusion and despair: they were faced with the defection of their leaders, the loss of their most important newspaper and, thanks to Laurier, were saddled with a platform which they might find impossible to defend in the coming campaign. A few loyalists panicked completely. Among these was E.M. Macdonald, who in previous elections had been almost invincible in the constituency of Pictou: he refused to stand for renomination despite the plea of Laurier himself. In later years Macdonald explained his withdrawal as follows: "My reluctant decision . . . was that if I was to make any provision financially for the future, I must give up my political career and devote myself wholly to my profession before it became too late to do so."³ Yet his panic, which reinforced a normal fear of personal enemies, is apparent in a letter written to Laurier in November 1917:

To run to the end would mean my defeat by a man whom as a Scotchman I would never submit to be defeated by. Reid and Cochrane are after me, and between money and soldiers' votes, they

³Macdonald, Recollections, p. 344.

would do it, so I would not run. . . . I cannot get in from here. Sir Lomer[Gouin] has always talked about Quebec electing me, but as for that you and he will know whether it is possible.⁴

Laurier replied that a seat in the Quebec redoubt was unavailable, and Macdonald retired from the field.⁵

For many loyal Liberals in the lower echelons of the Party, it was the suddenness and unexpectedness of the Liberal-Conservative entente which brought confusion and panic. This was evident, for example, in Hants County where, in late October, the delegates to the riding's Liberal convention, "after mature consideration and with a full knowledge of the tricks and manners of our Tory friends, . . . decided that Mr. Martell run as a 'Union-Win-the-War' candidate," and as an "ardent and loyal" supporter of Sir Wilfrid Laurier.⁶ A Hants County correspondent subsequently explained this contradictory decision to a mystified Laurier: the statements of Murray, Fielding, and the Halifax Chronicle ("the only Liberal paper circulating in this County") "came as a bombshell to our people and alarmed the more timid

⁴Macdonald to Laurier, 16 Nov. 1917. LP, reel 179, PAC.

⁵Laurier to Macdonald, 19 Nov. 1917. LP, reel 179, PAC.

⁶Black to Laurier, 30 Oct. 1917. LP, reel 179, PAC.

ones. . . . Men were confused by the sudden and unexpected pronouncements. . . ."7

Yet, even as Laurier's correspondent in Hants was writing, this confusion was already dying down in the County, and it was becoming clear that Liberal sentiment here favored the loyalist position.⁸ Moreover, it was becoming clear as well that this sentiment was not restricted to Hants: the strength of 'straight' Liberalism in much of Nova Scotia was more vigorous, more robust -- and more indignant about Union -- than George Murray or other Liberal politicians had dreamed. E.H. Armstrong, a provincial cabinet minister, wrote to a friend in mid-November: "All over the Province, my general impression is that a very large proportion of the Liberals are opposed to the present frame-up."⁹ Murray began a hasty retreat from Union, and attempted to undo the damage already done. George Kyte reported to Laurier early in November that

Premier Murray, having given out offence to N.S. Liberals on account of declaring for Union Government is endeavouring to get Liberals elected irrespective of whether they

⁷Black to Laurier, 30 Oct. 1917; Laurier to Black, 3 Nov. 1917. LP, reel 179, PAC.

⁸Black to Laurier, 30 Oct. 1917. LP, reel 179, PAC.

⁹Armstrong to Suttie, 14 Nov. 1917. AP, vol. XIX, PANS.

are supporters of Union Government. In this way he is helping your supporters. . . .¹⁰

Other pro-Union politicians in addition to Murray began to wilt. For example, the Conservative-Unionist Sydney Daily Post bitterly reported that Dr. A.W. Chisholm, Liberal member for Inverness, had at first "signified his intention to support the Union Government. . . . He succumbed, however, to the ultimatum presented to him by a gang of malignant partisans from the north part of the constituency. . . ." ¹¹

Laurier himself may have strengthened the hand of straight Liberals in late October by modifying his position on conscription and the referendum. It had been apparent from the first that many Nova Scotian Liberals had supported Union because it seemed the only way of insuring compulsory military service in view of Laurier's well-known opposition to it. By the same token, the referendum plank was equally unacceptable to these Liberals. On October 22 J.H. Sinclair, Liberal M.P. for Guysborough, pleaded with the Liberal leader for a change in his position:

¹⁰Kyte to Laurier, 4 Nov. 1917. LP, reel 179, PAC.

¹¹Sydney Daily Post, 22 Nov. 1917. PANS.

The only thing that can rally us as a party is your announcement of a military policy that the people of the Province will accept. If you will excuse me for speaking plainly, I hope there will be no referendum proposal. A referendum was quite in order last spring when an extension of parliament was possible, but now that we are going to the people, we must say what we stand for.¹²

Laurier's first response to this plea was to reject it out of hand, declaring that "the last and only thing I have left to me now is my own record and consistency."¹³ But such consistency was no substitute for votes, and Laurier began to look for a way out of the impasse. A way was soon found; the Liberal leader wrote to Sinclair the next day to redefine his position.

There are three things which Liberals can now do, any one of which I am prepared to accept. First and most preferable would be opposition to Union Government and to Conscription. Second, opposition to Union Government with reserve to support Conscription, as a good many Liberals are in favour of Conscription. Third, running as Independent Liberals. If you or any one of our friends cannot take one of these three courses, then of course, I must accept the inevitable and resign myself to severance from some of my dearest friends.¹⁴

¹²Sinclair to Laurier, 22 Oct. 1917. LP, reel 178, PAC.

¹³Laurier to Sinclair, 26 Oct. 1917. LP, reel 178, PAC.

¹⁴Laurier to Sinclair, 27 Oct. 1917. LP, reel 178, PAC. It is likely that Laurier had been under considerable pressure from many Liberals across Canada to modify his position. See Canadian Annual Review for 1917, p. 600.

This redefinition of policy was communicated to other Nova Scotian Liberals; it was now possible for all 'patriotic' Party members to support Laurier and oppose Union Government. Moreover, this redefined policy preserved Laurier's "record and consistency" since it was essentially an adaptation of his earlier declaration that a Liberal M.P. could vote as his conscience dictated in Parliament on the Military Service Act.¹⁵ In this way a parliamentary policy became a campaign tactic -- but why had this tactic not been used during the summer to stem the tide of Union?

But dislike of coalition was not restricted to Liberals. Many Nova Scotian Conservatives disliked Union Government just as much as did their Liberal opponents: in Conservative ranks in Nova Scotia, as in Liberal, it appeared that there was a divergence of opinion on Union, the higher echelons of the party favoring it, with most of the real opposition coming from the lower rungs in the party ladder. This rank and file opposition was of great concern to Party workers. One such worker reported to Borden that "party lines are broken, and some of our people will go against us. . . ."¹⁶ And Senator William

¹⁵O.D. Skelton, Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier (Toronto, 1921), II, 516.

¹⁶T.P. Calkin to Borden, 25 Nov. 1917. BP, OCA 105, PAC.

Dennis later recalled that Union Government resulted in "chaos" in the Nova Scotia Conservative Party, necessitating the formation of an ad hoc Union organization in the province that fell apart once the election was over.¹⁷

And on top of this, and adding to Unionist woes, there was the defection of some Conservatives from Union over conscription itself, in unknown but discernible numbers. These people would, no doubt, be attracted to Liberal candidates in the coming election.¹⁸ Nor was there much that Union organizers could do about Conservative opposition to conscription: no such flexible formula as Laurier had devised for his followers was possible for Union leaders, because a Union candidate must at all times and in all places declare for conscription or deny the primary reason for his Party's existence.

Hence, as nomination day drew close in Nova Scotia, there was no reason to expect a series of Union acclamations, as had been anticipated in the halcyon days of late October. It was obvious that Union Government had failed to unite all men of both parties in a common cause in Nova Scotia, but instead had added another

¹⁷W.H. Dennis, cited in Graham, Meighen, II, 29.

¹⁸Rhodes to Curry, 10 Nov. 1917. RP, vol. XI,
PANS.

divisive issue to an already long list. On one side, the reviving Liberals were trying to turn Union to their advantage if possible. Murray's support of Union in October had destroyed the Liberals' mid-summer hopes of sweeping the province,¹⁹ but the premier's growing disenchantment with Union gave assurance that all was not lost. It even appeared for a brief while in early November that Murray might be able to smuggle some 'straight' Liberals into parliament by acclamation by using his new-found influence in Union circles.²⁰ While it soon became clear that this hope was ill-founded, as Murray withdrew from all Union activities, yet the numerical strength of mass 'straight' Liberal support assured first, that Liberal nominating conventions would be unwilling to support a Conservative or a Unionist Liberal, and second, that the evidence of Laurierite voting strength would attract a reasonable number of capable 'straight' Liberal candidates. On the Conservative side, the prospects for acclamation were no more encouraging. There was no guarantee here either that local nominating conventions could be persuaded to

¹⁹Kyte to Murphy, 10 Nov. 1917. LP, reel 179,
PAC.

²⁰Kyte to Laurier, 4 Nov. 1917. LP, reel 179,
PAC.

cooperate with hated Liberal opponents when faced with the necessity of nominating a Liberal as the government candidate.

It was clear then, as nomination day drew near in Nova Scotia, that the hardy native plant 'partyism', which had wilted in late October under the hot sun of Union, had revived and put forth new growth. In riding after riding, negotiations between Liberal and Conservative conventions either broke down or never took place, and when nominating day had ended, only one riding, Fielding's constituency of Queens-Shelbourne, had escaped the necessity of an election campaign, and only two other Liberal Unionists had been nominated.

Even in Queens-Shelbourne, acclamation did not come easily and required the personal intervention of Sir Robert Borden, who afterwards admitted that his aim was accomplished only with "great difficulty."²¹ It is likely that much of this difficulty came about because Fielding, like Murray, began to have second thoughts about supporting Union soon after his statement to the press on October 24: probably much of the same pressure from the Liberal rank and file which Murray felt was being applied to Fielding as well. The former Finance

²¹Borden, Memoirs, II, 761.

Minister's change of heart became clearly visible on November 14, five days before official nominations. Though their presence had been advertised in the press, Fielding and Murray failed to appear at Borden's monster rally which kicked off the Union Government's national campaign.²² A 'straight' Liberal Haligonian telegraphed with evident delight that night to Laurier, "Murray Fielding refused to attend Borden meeting nothing more from them for union. . . ."²³ And two days later, E.M. Macdonald wrote to Laurier that Fielding was obviously "all right at heart."²⁴ Fielding's volte-face can have done nothing to gladden the hearts of Queens-Shelbourne Conservatives who, in any case, had originally wanted to nominate their victorious candidate of 1911, F.B. McCurdy.²⁵ Hence, while Fielding's reversal probably enabled him to gain the support of the riding's Liberals with greater ease,²⁶ Borden was forced to apply personal

²²See Halifax Herald, 14, 15 Nov. 1917. PANS.

²³Finn to Laurier, 14 Nov. 1917. LP, reel 179, PAC.

²⁴Macdonald to Laurier, 16 Nov. 1917. LP, reel 179, PAC.

²⁵McCurdy was, instead, assured of the Union nomination in Colchester. Morning Chronicle, 14 Nov. 1917. PANS.

²⁶Ibid.

pressure to balky local Conservatives in the form of an open letter to the Conservative nominating committee.

Borden put his position and prestige on the line:

If Mr. Fielding accepting, as he does, the principles of Union Government, and undertaking to give it a reasonable support, should be opposed by members of the Party of which I have been the acknowledged leader in federal affairs for more than sixteen years, the effect of such action would be deplorable throughout the whole Dominion.²⁷

Borden's action succeeded. Fielding received his acclamation. But a question remains: why did the Prime Minister continue to support Fielding after the latter had obviously changed his mind? The answer is straightforward enough: to do otherwise would have meant loss of face for Union Government, and moreover, would have nullified any progaganda value still to be extracted from Fielding's initial statement to the press.²⁸ Fortunately for Borden, Fielding realized the necessity for discretion. He made no move to repudiate Union openly during the campaign, remaining silent, as one observer put it, "as a graven image."²⁹ Only when he was safely seated in parliament did he reveal his true feelings, when he moved

²⁷Morning Chronicle, 19 Nov. 1917. PANS.

²⁸Unionist papers continued to cite Fielding's statement throughout the campaign. See Sydney Daily Post, 5 Dec. 1917. PANS.

²⁹Eastern Chronicle, 14 Dec. 1917. PANS.

to the cross-benches in the temporary Commons chamber.

A second acclamation took place, in Colchester County, but some time after nomination day, on December 11, and was not the product of inter-party negotiations. G.H. Vernon, who much earlier had received the nomination from the local Liberal association, was nominated as "The People's Independent Win-the-War Candidate" by an "Independent People's Convention."³⁰ He was opposed by the former Conservative member for Queens-Shelbourne, F.B. McCurdy, who was running as a Unionist. Vernon was not a true Independent, however: he was endorsed by Laurier and supported Liberal Hance Logan in nearby Cumberland.³¹ His nomination as an Independent probably resulted from pessimism as to the changes of a 'straight' Liberal in the riding: he and the other local Liberal leaders apparently failed to realize that their dislike of Union^c was shared by many rank-and-file Liberals. At any rate, Vernon's determination to run quickly evaporated as the Unionists mounted a strong campaign under the proven vote-getter, F.B. McCurdy. The 'Independent' withdrew from the campaign on December 11, using the Halifax explosion as a pretext, giving an acclamation to McCurdy.³²

³⁰Truro Daily News, 6 Nov. 1917. PANS.

³¹Ibid., 27 Nov. 1917.

³²Ibid., 11 Dec. 1917.

Local inter-party negotiations came closest to success in the constituency of Yarmouth-Clare. Edgar K. Spinney, a Liberal, was nominated by the riding's Liberal convention and accepted as a Union candidate by the riding's Conservatives. Spinney was genuinely in favor of Union Government,³³ and gained the support of local Liberals with the backing of E.H. Armstrong, the local M.L.A. who was a minister in the provincial cabinet.³⁴ Moreover, local Conservatism was weak: only one Conservative candidate had been successful in Yarmouth County since Confederation, and that in 1882. Local Conservatives had little to lose, and Spinney, a political new-comer, brought with him none of the accumulated bitterness of past election struggles to make him persona non grata with the local Conservative hierarchy. The special issue of the war-time election, conscription, however, intervened to prevent an acclamation. The riding's Acadians were hostile to conscription (and hence Union),³⁵ and the Acadian delegates to the Liberal convention held another meeting

³³Spinney to Armstrong, 28 Dec. 1917. AP, vol. XIX, PANS.

³⁴Armstrong to Spinney, 20 Nov. 1917. AP, vol. XIX, PANS.

³⁵Halifax Herald, 22 Nov. 1917. PANS.

after the convention adjourned and offered nomination to the Acadian M.L.A. for the constituency, J.W. Comeau, as a 'straight' Liberal.³⁶ Comeau, a provincial minister without portfolio, decided to resign his provincial seat and accept the nomination despite pleas from fellow cabinet ministers.³⁷

Much confusion was created by the presence of two Liberal candidates in Yarmouth-Clare. Laurier, who had earlier been told by a reliable informant in Nova Scotia that Murray and his associates were backing all Liberals for acclamation regardless of their sentiments on Union,³⁸ was in doubt as to which candidate to support. He despatched an envoy from Halifax to Yarmouth with orders to "try to call off either one of them. If not, let me know whom I should endorse."³⁹ Unfortunately for Comeau, news of his acceptability reached Laurier too late for the Acadian to receive Laurier's endorsement as an official candidate.⁴⁰ It may well be, indeed, that Laurier

³⁶Morning Chronicle, 15 Nov. 1917. PANS.

³⁷H.T. D'Entremont to Armstrong, 28 Nov. 1917. AP, vol. XIX, PANS.

³⁸Kyte to Laurier, 4 Nov. 1917. LP, reel 179, PAC.

³⁹Laurier to Finn, 20 Nov. 1917. LP, reel 179, PAC.

⁴⁰Laurier to Finn, 27 Nov. 1917. LP, reel 179, PAC.

continued to be uncertain as to the exact situation in Yarmouth-Clare, since he ignored subsequent requests for even so much as a telegram indicating that Comeau should be given the support of loyal Liberals.⁴¹ As a consequence, rumors spread throughout the Acadian districts of the riding, Argyle and Clare, that Laurier found Comeau unacceptable.⁴² Comeau was very disheartened. He had resigned his seat in the local legislature and accepted the federal nomination out of loyalty to Laurier and had received nothing but rebuffs.⁴³ Yet Comeau did not withdraw, but carried through to the end and defeat at the polls.

The nomination picture in the remaining constituencies of Nova Scotia was more bleak for the coalition movement. 'Partyism' triumphed in these ridings. Some potential Liberal candidates attempted to get acclamations for themselves without deserting Sir Wilfrid Laurier or without feeling any genuine sympathy for the

⁴¹Finn to Laurier, 6 Dec. 1917. LP, reel 179, PAC.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid. Endorsation as the official Liberal candidate was of some importance because of the wording of the service ballot: the ballot did not list the names of the candidates, but merely had spaces for 'the Government', 'the Opposition', 'the Independent Candidate' and 'the Labour Candidate.' House of Commons Debates, 1918, II, 2401. Comeau was credited with only seven service votes in his riding.

principles of Union Government; and some potential Conservative candidates assumed that, as Conservatives, they were the logical choice as 'fusion' candidates. Almost everywhere the Party faithful found negotiations uncongenial and, in a few ridings (as in Yarmouth-Clare), minority or special interest groups which were completely hostile to Union further impeded progress toward inter-party compromise.

In the dual constituency of Halifax, the local Liberal association recovered quickly from the shock of Union Government. On October 29, Robert Finn, Liberal M.L.A. for Halifax, wired Laurier: "Party in splendid fighting trim . . . feeling frightfully strong against Union Government. . . ." ⁴⁴ Some of this returning confidence can be attributed to the continuing loyalty of the Acadian Recorder to Sir Wilfrid Laurier; ⁴⁵ because of the locally distributed Recorder, the loss of the Chronicle was not as serious for local Liberals as it was for Laurierites elsewhere in the province. ⁴⁶ Moreover,

⁴⁴Finn to Laurier, 29 Oct. 1917. LP, reel 178, PAC.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶The Recorder, an afternoon paper, did not have extensive circulation outside Halifax. See Eastern Chronicle, 18 Dec. 1917: the editor of the Eastern Chronicle suggested that the Recorder issue a morning edition "convenient for county circulation."

Halifax Liberals realized that all Nova Scotia paid close attention to events in the provincial capital. A forceful show of support for Laurier on their part, these Liberals believed, would "have a tremendous influence on future actions of the Liberals in other counties throughout the province."⁴⁷ Halifax Liberals therefore stoutly resisted the advances of Union-minded Conservatives, and steadfastly refused to negotiate with the Conservative convention⁴⁸ despite Borden's personal offer to permit the nomination of two Liberals, the Unionist A.K. Maclean and the 'straight' Liberal Edward Blackadder, M.D.⁴⁹ Indeed, the very presence in Halifax of the 'turncoat' Maclean served to stiffen Liberal resistance to Union: Maclean, reported E.M. Macdonald to Laurier

is in the most abject position and could not find a seat in any Liberal county and has been compelled to run in Halifax where the Liberal Party are in revolt against him. He tells me that he wishes he had never seen Union Government and is nearing nervous prostration.⁵⁰

⁴⁷Finn to Laurier, 29 Oct. 1917. LP, reel 178, PAC.

⁴⁸Morning Chronicle, 14 Nov. 1917. PANS.

⁴⁹Finn to Laurier, 14 Nov. 1917. LP, reel 179, PAC. Dr. Blackadder should not be confused with Charles C. Blackadar, editor of the Acadian Recorder.

⁵⁰Macdonald to Laurier, 16 Nov. 1917. LP, reel 179, PAC. Maclean was a personal friend of Macdonald's, and so remained, despite Union. Macdonald, Recollections, p. 49.

A straight Liberal convention was held which nominated Edward Blackadder and G.A. Redmond. Yet this did not put an end to Liberal difficulties. In accordance with tradition in Halifax, the convention had nominated one Protestant and one Catholic (a necessary bow in the direction of resolving religious differences within the local Liberal organization),⁵¹ but unfortunately Redmond, the Protestant nominee, soon proved to be more suitable because of his religious affiliation than for his political loyalty. He withdrew just before nomination day, declaring that he hoped that his action would make possible "some sort of arrangement with the riding's Conservatives."⁵² Halifax Liberals were in a quandary: Robert Finn, who was Redmond's logical replacement because he had placed third in the convention's balloting, was a Catholic and hence unavailable. At this eleventh hour, however, local labor stepped in: Robert Eisenor, president of the Halifax Trades and Labor Council, offered himself as a Liberal-Labor candidate "in the interests of the working men," and in opposition to the "Big Interests."⁵³ Eisenor's offer was gratefully accepted

⁵¹Morning Chronicle, 14 Nov. 1917. PANS.

⁵²Ibid., 20 Nov. 1917.

⁵³Ibid., 29 Nov. 1917.

by the Liberals who were thereby spared either the necessity of choosing a weak Liberal candidate or the ignominy of making concessions to the Halifax Unionists.⁵⁴

Organized labor in this way played a significant role in the nominations in Halifax. Endorsement in this riding of a Labor candidate by the Liberal convention was unprecedented, and indicated both the determination of the local Liberals to avoid at all cost any compromise with Conservatives, and a substantial opposition to Union Government among organized labor: although the labor movement in Halifax was moderate in its outlook, and in the past had shown some sympathy for the Liberal Party, it had heretofore refrained from an open alliance.⁵⁵

In Cape Breton South-Richmond, as in Halifax, organized labor was to play a significant role in preventing an acclamation. There were two reasons for the interest of the labor movement in this region in politics in 1917. First, many working men had developed a profound dislike for the Borden government: wages had

⁵⁴Laurier endorsed straight labor candidates as Liberals in several constituencies in the Western provinces. See Ross McCormack, "Western Workers and the War Time Election," (Ditto copy in writer's possession), p. 24.

⁵⁵H.A. Logan, Trade Unions in Canada (Toronto, 1948), pp. 171, 173.

failed to keep pace with rising prices⁵⁶ and, moreover, there was actual unemployment in some of the coal mining regions;⁵⁷ in addition, many working men distrusted the motives of the government in introducing conscription of manpower (which they disliked to begin with) without bringing in a corresponding conscription of war-time business profits.⁵⁸ Secondly, the labor movement itself in this region was becoming more radical and independent in outlook, a development owing in part to war-time difficulties, but perhaps more important, deriving from the makeup of the work force and changes in the organizational set-up of the labor unions: mine workers in Nova Scotia, as across North America, had traditionally been more radical in outlook than skilled tradesmen,⁵⁹ and this radicalism in coal mining Cape Breton was enhanced in 1917 by the absorption of the long-established and somewhat conservative Provincial Workmen's Association by

⁵⁶Sydney Canadian Labor Leader, 15 Dec. 1917; Toronto Industrial Banner, 2 Nov. 1917. DLL.

⁵⁷Industrial Banner, 19 Oct. 1917. DLL.

⁵⁸Canadian Labor Leader, 15 Dec. 1917. DLL.
William Rodney, Soldiers of the International (Toronto, 1968), p. 13.

⁵⁹S.M. Lipset, Political Man (Garden City, 1963), pp. 245-246.

the more militant United Mine Workers of America.⁶⁰ The growing political independence and radicalism of labor in Cape Breton toward the end of 1917 was signified by the establishment of a labor newspaper in Sydney, the first issue of which appeared in late October,⁶¹ and by increased interest being shown in the formation of an Independent Labor Party on the Ontario model.⁶²

Cape Breton South's substantial Acadian population was also to play a role in preventing an acclamation in this riding. These Acadians were concentrated in Richmond County and shared the anti-Union sentiments of their French-speaking compatriots in Yarmouth-Clare: Acadians in the Maritimes did not share the reluctance to enlist ^{of} the Quebec French, but nonetheless opposed conscription and hence Union.⁶³ Thus Laurierite Liberal G.W. Kyte, who had been M.P. from the formerly separate constituency of Richmond since 1908, complained to a close confidant of Laurier's that "if only I had my old county

⁶⁰ Logan, Trade Unions, pp. 190-191.

⁶¹ Industrial Banner, 2 Nov. 1917. DLL.

⁶² Ibid., 15 June 1917, 11 Jan. 1918.

⁶³ Moncton L'Acadien, 23 Nov. 1917, 4 Dec. 1917. Library, University of New Brunswick.

of Richmond to reckon with I would feel quite easy. . . ." ⁶⁴
 An anti-Union block of Acadian delegates therefore existed in the riding's Liberal convention which would oppose negotiations with the riding's Conservatives.

Nonetheless, negotiations were carried on between the two major parties with a view towards acclamation: it is likely that George Kyte, and other Liberals as well, hoped that a 'straight' Liberal could be acclaimed as one of the riding's two members. ⁶⁵ Labor at first insisted that it have a voice in these negotiations, ⁶⁶ but insisted as well on the nomination of two supporters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier. ⁶⁷ Should both these Laurierites not be nominated, labor would field its own candidates to prevent the "saw-off". ⁶⁸ Hence, when it seemed that an inter-party agreement was imminent, labor carried out its threat and nominated two laborites under the banner of a newly formed Independent Labor Party. ⁶⁹ In this way, the threat of acclamation triggered off independent action by Cape Breton

⁶⁴Kyte to Murphy, 10 Nov. 1917. LP, reel 179, PAC.

⁶⁵Kyte to Laurier, 4 Nov. 1917. LP, reel 179, PAC.

⁶⁶Kyte to Murphy, 10 Nov. 1917. LP, reel 179, PAC.

⁶⁷Ibid. Also Morning Chronicle, 9 Nov. 1917. PANS.

⁶⁸Kyte to Murphy, 10 Nov. 1917. LP, reel 179, PAC.

⁶⁹Morning Chronicle, 15 Nov. 1917. PANS.

labor leaders. Yet their action made good political sense at the time: a two way struggle between Unionists and Laborites could well give Labor a fighting chance to win, in the light of anti-Union and anti-conscription sentiment in various parts of the riding. Unfortunately for the Labor candidates, however, the negotiations between the two major parties broke down at the last moment. The Liberal convention rejected the recommendations of its negotiating committee and instead nominated two 'straight' Liberals.⁷⁰ Two factors probably account for the action of the Liberal convention: first, the manifestation of rank-and-file 'straight' Liberal sentiment, already noted earlier, reinforced by the influence of Acadian delegates; and second, the impossibility of avoiding an election in any case now that Labor was in the field.

In the adjoining riding of Cape Breton North-Victoria the failure of inter-party negotiations owed much to the determination and character of D.D. McKenzie, the Liberal incumbent. McKenzie, a staunch Laurierite, was in a strong position. He had never been defeated in any previous election and was the former mayor of North Sydney.⁷¹ Moreover, he seemed assured of the support of

⁷⁰Sydney Daily Post, 17 Nov. 1917. PANS.

⁷¹See Macdonald, Recollections, p. 45.

Murray's provincial organization regardless of the position which either he or Murray should take on Union: wrote George Kyte in early November,

D.D. Mackenzie [sic] is a source of great embarrassment to Premier Murray. The latter represents part of McKenzie's riding in the legislature and Murray has to have a bye-election there within a few months, as his colleague died last spring. McKenzie is running as a straight Laurier candidate, and if Murray supports his opponent, there will be a war and Murray will lose the bye-election, whereas if he supports McKenzie, he will be in the awkward position of supporting an anti war candidate while declaring for Union Government.⁷²

McKenzie rejected an offer from the riding's Conservatives for an acclamation in return for supporting Union Government,⁷³ and found himself opposed to a man he had defeated in two previous federal elections, John McCormick.

In Cape Breton's third riding, Inverness, Liberals were equally scornful in rejecting negotiation with the riding's Conservatives. Their man, M.P. A.W. Chisholm, had won the two previous federal elections by over 1,000 votes and there was no indication that the Conservatives could offer any stronger opposition in 1917.⁷⁴ The

⁷²Kyte to Murphy, 10 Nov. 1917. LP, reel 179, PAC.

⁷³Sydney Daily Post, 14 Dec. 1917. PANS.

⁷⁴Kyte to Murphy, 10 Nov. 1917. LP, reel 179, PAC.

riding's Liberals, therefore, cut Chisholm short when he showed signs of supporting Union Government,⁷⁵ and Inverness was assured of an election.

On Nova Scotia's mainland, Cumberland County was assured of an election because of the unwillingness of either party's candidate to step down in favor of his opponent. This uncooperativeness was based upon a long-standing personal rivalry between the candidates and the strength of grass-roots partisanship. E.M. Rhodes, the Conservative incumbent and Speaker of the House, assumed blandly that he was the only logical choice as Union candidate.⁷⁶ His opponent, Hance Logan, on the other hand, had won three earlier federal elections in the riding and, in 1896, had broken the hold which the Conservative Party had had on Cumberland County since Confederation. Logan was only too willing to continue his battle of former years with Rhodes, and was backed by the local Liberal convention which flatly refused to negotiate with the riding's Conservatives.⁷⁷ Premier Murray wisely refused to intervene on Rhodes' behalf: the Conservative candidate complained to his uncle, Senator Nathaniel

⁷⁵Sydney Daily Post, 22 Nov. 1917. PANS.

⁷⁶See Rhodes to Maclean, 9 Nov. 1917. RP, vol. XI, PANS.

⁷⁷Ibid.

Curry, that Murray was "afraid to do anything to break up his political machine," and instead of making a formal visit to Cumberland to bring the riding's Liberals into line, as Rhodes requested, "shivered in his office in Halifax."⁷⁸

In Borden's riding of Kings County, Liberal determination to oppose the Conservative leader triumphed over difficulty of unearthing a candidate willing to challenge the native son who had become Prime Minister of Canada and leader of the war-time coalition. Five persons declined the Liberal nomination, and it was only at the last minute that a candidate was found.⁷⁹ And in Pictou County, Liberals were equally inclined towards independence. At the Liberal nominating convention in Pictou, reported the Conservative New Glasgow Evening News,

after the delegates had been finally convinced that Mr. [E.M.] Macdonald would not be a candidate, they united on Mr. [R.H.] MacKay, but it was only on his pledge that he would be a straight Laurier Liberal.

There was no doubting the tone of the convention. Delegate after delegate stated that he had been instructed to vote for Macdonald first, and failing him, for some other Laurier Liberal. . . . [R.M.]

⁷⁸Rhodes to Curry, 10 Nov. 1917; Rhodes to Murray, 9 Nov. 1917. RP, vol. XI, PANS.

⁷⁹Maclean to Borden, 19 Nov. 1917; Calkin to Borden, 25 Nov. 1917. BP, OCA105, PAC.

MacGregor, who might have been Macdonald's successor, was barred by his stand on Union Government.⁸⁰

Further south, in Lunenburg County, the Liberal nominee, Mayor William Duff of Lunenburg, stated his position early in November. Although he was in favor of all necessary war measures, he said, he would contest the election "as a straight Liberal." Despite this, however, he would seek the Union nomination:

I wish to say that as I am the only candidate in the field up to the date of the writing of this letter, and whereas I am the only candidate so far, who has a practical knowledge of two of our greatest industries, fishing and shipping, that if our Conservative friends are sincere in their desire for Union, I respectfully submit that they would prove to the County their sincerity by allowing me to be elected by acclamation.⁸¹

Such brashness was not, however, to be rewarded, and at a joint Party conference held shortly thereafter at Bridgewater, the riding's Conservatives maintained (with some logic) that since their man had held a seat in the last parliament, he should receive the acclamation. But the Liberals would not abandon Duff, whom they had selected three years earlier; the negotiations thereupon broke down and an election was assured in Lunenburg.⁸² In Hants,

⁸⁰New Glasgow Evening News, 16 Nov. 1917. PAC.

⁸¹Lunenburg Progress-Enterprise, 7 Nov. 1917. PANS.

⁸²Morning Chronicle, 9 Nov. 1917. PANS.

Digby-Annapolis, and Antigonish-Guysborough, the theme of partisan rivalry continued with slight local variations. Laurier was assured by his Hants County informant that "Our candidate will be nominated as a straight Liberal and Laurier supporter. . . . So far as Hants County is concerned, this will be a straight Party fight on our part. . . ." ⁸³ In Digby-Annapolis, L.J. Lovett, the Liberal nominee, was encouraged by evidence of strong support to confront A.L. Davidson, the sitting member. ⁸⁴ And in Antigonish-Guysborough, J.H. Sinclair declared, in his nomination day speech, that "he was nominated as a Liberal and had to keep faith with the men who honored him with their confidence." ⁸⁵

Hence, when nomination day was over, it was clear that most Nova Scotians of either party had been unable or unwilling to eliminate party differences. Acclamation involved concession and compromise -- perhaps more of each from the Liberals, since they would be required to abandon their national leader. Hence only two Liberals, Spinney and Maclean, became Union candidates, although others might have if they had not been pulled up short by those

⁸³Black to Laurier, 13 Nov. 1917. LP, reel 179, PAC. See Morning Chronicle, 20 Nov. 1917. PANS.

⁸⁴Annapolis-Royal Spectator, 22 Nov. 1917. PANS.

⁸⁵Morning Chronicle, 20 Nov. 1917. PANS.

under them: in Nova Scotia it would appear that the hope of gaining office could overcome the party loyalty of politicians, but not of their supporters (who had no hope of office and for whom party loyalty was thus the prime consideration). Yet it is clear that the second thoughts of Fielding and Murray on Union were of some importance too; and Laurier was right in saying, a year later, that "during the last election there was no profound division within the Nova Sctian Liberal ranks."⁸⁶

⁸⁶Laurier to Sinclair, 1 Oct. 1918. LP, reel 182, PAC.

CHAPTER III

A GRIT AND TORY CONTEST?

The Election Campaign

In a sense, the election campaign of 1917 had begun in Nova Scotia as soon as it had become clear, a year earlier, that Laurier might not sanction another extension of parliament. Campaigning, therefore, had been carried on in the newspapers throughout the summer of 1917, in conjunction with the debate over conscription and the formation of Union Government. This was only preliminary sparring, however. The campaigning could only begin in earnest after the formation of Union Government and after inter-party negotiations for acclamation had broken down at the riding level. The full campaign thus got under way slowly, as each riding in its turn joined the fray. Nomination day marked the completion of this drawing of battle lines throughout the province and the beginning of the struggle on a province-wide basis.

At this point four weeks of campaigning lay ahead, with election day on December 17. Some Party organizers felt that this was little enough time to conduct an adequate campaign, and this was especially so in the case

of Unionists who were intent on the difficult task of persuading Liberal voters to discard their old allegiance to Laurier.¹ Yet, as it was, the interval between nominations and election day had been extended to three or four times the normal week or so, the government giving as its reason the length of time required to poll the overseas vote: voting overseas began one week after nomination day and continued until the close of polls in Canada.²

Campaigning by both parties was conducted largely with the techniques developed in earlier elections. In Nova Scotia, these techniques fell into two general categories. The first, the direct purchase of votes with either money or liquor (or both), can be disposed of quite briefly. To begin with, it was used, by both parties.³ And to conclude, there is no way of assessing its extent, or its importance.⁴ The second category is more amenable to description and analysis (although perhaps less directly satisfying to the voter): it involved dissemination of the

¹Calkin to Borden, 25 Nov. 1917. BP, OCA105, PAC.

²Canadian Parliamentary Guide, 1918, pp. 194-195.

³See Windsor Hants Journal, 12 Dec. 1917; Morning Chronicle, 6 Dec. 1917. PANS.

⁴An exception to this general rule, in Pictou County, will be discussed later.

candidates and his party's claims on the voters' support by means of public meetings, door-to-door canvassing, and the printed word.

The public meeting was still, in these days before electronic media, the principal means of acquainting the public directly with the candidate, but door-to-door canvassing had always been used extensively as well, and in 1917, had become essential now that many women had the franchise for the first time. Housewives in particular could be reached most effectively by this latter means, since they were less likely to attend public meetings than their husbands.⁵ The use of the printed word during the campaign involved newspapers, pamphlets, and broadsides.⁶ The Union Government was better equipped in this respect, having the support of both major Halifax dailies, as well as dailies in New Glasgow, Sydney and elsewhere. In addition, Union headquarters in Ottawa seemed prepared to flood the province with campaign literature of every variety.⁷ The Liberal Party was less well-equipped. Most of its newspaper support came from local weeklies, and

⁵See Sydney Daily Post, 6 Dec. 1917. PANS.

⁶See the E.N. Rhodes Papers, vol. XIA, PANS, for examples of these.

⁷An example was The Union, a multi-page newspaper inserted in many Unionist newspapers. For a list of these newspapers, see the Borden Papers, OCA108, PAC.

almost the only daily of any importance which it could depend upon was the elderly Acadian Recorder of Halifax, an afternoon paper with considerable prestige but limited circulation.

A feature of the campaign in Nova Scotia, affecting both parties, was the scarcity of speakers from outside the Maritimes.⁸ Both national parties were concentrating their attention upon Ontario and the western provinces, and almost the only major national figure to speak in Nova Scotia was Sir Robert Borden, who made two speaking tours of the province. Even Borden might have preferred to turn his attention elsewhere, had he not been a native Nova Scotian contesting the riding of Kings. Fortunately for Borden, his principal lieutenant, Arthur Meighen, could be depended upon to shoulder the burden of conducting the western campaign.

The basic plank in the Union platform, and the major theme of the Union campaign, was conscription. The Halifax Herald declared, in early November, that conscription would be the only issue in the election: "This election is going to be different from any other election ever held in this country. There will be no fiscal or other economic

⁸Canadian Annual Review 1917, p. 624.

issue before the public."⁹ The Union Government, claimed Unionists, was the sole party pledged to maintain the continued application of the Military Service Act. Only the return of Union Government to office would therefore guarantee that the Canadian Corps would continue to be maintained at full strength in order to combat the forces of Kaiserism and win the war for the Allies. Only the Union Government, moreover, would ensure that those of military age who, up until now, had failed to enlist -- the 'slackers' -- would now be compelled to do their duty. In this connection, Union publicity declared that the Military Service Act would fall most heavily on the reluctant male population of Quebec, and as a consequence, fall less forcefully on more loyal (i.e. English-speaking) Canadians.¹⁰

Closely connected with the basic plank of compulsory military service was an emphasis on the concept of Union itself: it was an amalgamation of the best elements of both main parties into a completely new party, with the primary purpose of conducting the war effort more efficiently.¹¹ There was only one precedent for Union in

⁹Halifax Herald, 7 Nov. 1917. PANS.

¹⁰Ibid., 4 Dec. 1917; Sydney Daily Post, 1 Dec. 1917. PANS.

¹¹Sydney Daily Post, 21 Nov. 1917. PANS.

Canadian history, in fact, and this was the Great Coalition of 1864 in the province of Canada which had brought the country into being.¹²

In Nova Scotia the Union campaign was conducted like a great patriotic crusade, and the atmosphere of the revival meeting prevailed at Government rallies. Speakers at these rallies were often selected primarily for their inspirational abilities, and ministers appeared frequently on the platform with Unionist candidates. Especially in demand were speakers in uniform, and the well-known writer, Ralph Connor (C.W. Gordon), now an army chaplain with the rank of major, made a swing through the province in support of Union.¹³ The Halifax Chronicle described a Unionist meeting in Dartmouth on December 4:

there was a patriotic note right through the meeting. Before the meeting opened, the National Anthem was rendered by the orchestra and every speaker uttered patriotism in practically every sentence. And at the close of the meeting, the chairman called on the audience to sing "O Canada" and the National Anthem.¹⁴

¹²Sydney Daily Post, 15 Oct. 1917. PANS.

¹³Rhodes to Secretary of Militia Council, Ottawa, 10 Dec. 1917. The Militia Council was quite willing to permit the use of government armouries for this "patriotic purpose." Secretary of Militia Council to Rhodes, 11 Dec. 1917. RP, vol. XIA, PANS.

¹⁴Morning Chronicle, 4 Dec. 1917. PANS.

The crusading atmosphere carried over into Sunday church services. The Presbyterian Church in Nova Scotia had come out in support of Union Government in mid-October, demanding, in a formal resolution, "the coming into power of a Union Government which will enlist the sympathy and active support of all parties for the winning of the war."¹⁵ This statement echoed the beliefs of many Protestant clergymen, who preached the moral necessity of Union from their pulpits.¹⁶ The Catholic clergy in Nova Scotia was, on the whole, less enthusiastic about Union, since they disliked the attacks on Catholic Quebec coming from Protestant pulpits and the Union press.¹⁷ Nonetheless, Union Government did receive the support of individual Catholic clergymen, and such support was fully reported in the Union press.¹⁸

Public meetings and church services were well suited to stirring the emotions of the voter, but the public platform was also suited to more mundane tasks of acquainting him with the issues of the election and of

¹⁵Enclosed in Borden Papers, 00363 (2), PAC.

¹⁶Eastern Chronicle, 14 Dec. 1917; Sydney Daily Post, 17 Dec. 1917. PANS.

¹⁷See Antigonish Casket, 19 July, 1917, 23 Aug. 1917; Eastern Chronicle, 14 Dec. 1917. PANS.

¹⁸Sydney Daily Post, 17 Dec. 1917. PANS.

convincing him that reason and logic called for the election of a Union candidate.¹⁹ A.K. Maclean and other former Liberals took this logical approach in their campaign speeches, both in order to justify their swing to Union, and to persuade other Liberals to do the same. "We are living in abnormal times," Maclean told an audience in Bridgewater.

Old parties are shattered and Union must take their place. . . . Our task is to concentrate on the war, and although we may support Union Government, yet the Conservative so doing will remain a Conservative, and the Liberal so doing will retain allegiance to the Liberal Party. It is claimed that we have not a genuine union and that it is the Conservatives masquerading under another name. This is not true. Members of both parties supported it. . . . Coalition is necessary on many grounds, but particularly because only a non-party Government should enforce the Military Service Act. . . .²⁰

The support of both major Halifax dailies for Union brought a truce in the traditional electoral battle between the two newspapers. Yet the approach of the two papers differed, despite the common cause. The Herald continued its highly partisan tactics, and carried on a

¹⁹Indeed, as one Union party worker pointed out to Borden, the shortness of the campaign, and the resistance of some to conscription, made public meetings the most effective method of educating and informing the electorate about the campaign issues. Calkin to Borden, 25 Nov. 1917. BP, OCA105, PAC.

²⁰Morning Chronicle, 6 Dec. 1917. PANS.

lively personal vendetta against Laurier, reprinting anti-Laurier cartoons from the Toronto News, and linking Laurier with Bourassa and the Kaiser. The Herald further promised that a Union victory would compel the population of French Canada "to contribute its fair proportion of young men" to the struggle "for the defence of Canada in France."²¹ The approach of the Morning Chronicle on the other hand was less partisan in tone: like A.K. Maclean, the paper was faced with the problem of explaining its switch to Union, and swinging unconverted Liberals over to the side of the new government. The Chronicle, moreover, continued to reprint news of Liberal goings-on in a manner much as before its conversion to Union,²² and there was little except the editorials on page six to indicate the paper's new allegiance. These editorials staunchly supported Union, while denying that the Chronicle's own change of allegiance meant that the paper had "gone back on" the Liberal Party;²³ the Chronicle was still "Liberal to the backbone, and exceedingly proud of it", and although

²¹Halifax Herald, 4 Dec. 1917. PANS.

²²See the fair and unbiased report of a Laurier speech on page one of the Morning Chronicle, 28 Nov. 1917. PANS.

²³Morning Chronicle, 29 Nov. 1917. PANS.

"we withdraw not one iota of our charges against the late government," the support of Union was an absolute necessity to serve, not only "our country and our Empire, but "the cause of Liberalism in Canada."²⁴ All in all, the Chronicle's was not an altogether satisfactory defence of Union, in the light of the straight Liberal emphasis on Borden's poor record in Office.²⁵ Yet these editorials may have reflected similar mixed feelings of many rank-and-file Liberals regarding cooperation with former Conservative foes, and been all the more convincing because of this. The Chronicle apparently realized, moreover, that many Liberals still revered Laurier, and thus refused to join the Herald in castigating the 'Old Chief.' Instead the paper blamed Henri Bourassa for the stand which the non-Union Liberals were taking in Quebec, and accused him of trying "to break them to his will."²⁶ On December 6, the day of the Halifax explosion, the paper went so far as it was ever to go in its criticism of the Laurierites, when it declared that "a vote for disunion now will be a vote for the defeat of the allies,

²⁴Morning Chronicle, 4 Dec. 1917. PANS.

²⁵This feature of the Liberal campaign will be discussed shortly.

²⁶Morning Chronicle, 6 Dec. 1917. PANS.

for the triumph of Germany, and for our own immediate or ultimate ruin . . . at the hands of a triumphant Germany."²⁷

Other pro-Union newspapers in Nova Scotia resembled, to a greater or lesser degree, the Halifax Herald rather than the Chronicle in their approach to the election issues. These papers had, for the most part, been Conservative before the formation of Union Government and had little difficulty in supporting the new Borden régime. The standard Union arguments were put forward, although perhaps with not the verve of the Herald (only the Herald placed crossed Union Jacks at its masthead, and separated its paragraphs with rows of miniature flags, cannons, and marching soldiers). These newspapers continued earlier feuds with Liberal newspapers in their vicinity. The New Glasgow Evening News, and its rural affiliate, the Free Lance, jostled with the New Glasgow Eastern Chronicle, edited by the redoubtable Liberal, James A. Fraser (whom the Free Lance had called a "public nuisance" and "egregious ass" the previous April),²⁸ and the Sydney Daily Post cast verbal thunderbolts at its old Liberal rival, the North Sydney

²⁷Morning Chronicle, 6 Dec. 1917. PANS.

²⁸New Glasgow Free Lance, 13 April, 1917. PAC.

Herald. The North Sydney Herald particularly irritated the Post because the former paper was allegedly controlled by Premier Murray,²⁹ an ostensible convert to Union but, nonetheless, continued its support of D.D. McKenzie, the Liberal candidate in Cape Breton North-Victoria. On December 14, the Post denied as "a falsehood" the claim of its rival "that Hon. G.H. Murray is supporting the anti-conscriptionist, lose-the-war candidate, D.D. McKenzie."³⁰

An important element in Borden's election strategy was the enfranchisement of wives and immediate female relatives of soldiers overseas: it was hoped that these women would vote Union to support their men in the trenches. The Unionists in Nova Scotia made strenuous efforts to exploit the female vote. For the first time, women appeared on public platforms, usually in support of Unionists, and women's win-the-war committees were formed in many ridings, often under the direction of wives of candidates or former Conservative office holders. In

²⁹See Sydney Daily Post, 24 Dec. 1917. PANS.

³⁰Ibid., 14 Dec. 1917. Rumors to the contrary persisted, however, and were probably given credence by Murray's continued silence. After the election, the Post was to demand that the provincial Premier dispose of the question of his allegiance, since it was difficult "to accept the theory that the Prime Minister of this province would lend himself to such duplicity and trickery." Ibid., 24 Dec. 1917.

Colchester, for example, the riding's Women's Win-the War League had as its vice-president Mrs. John Stanfield, wife of the retiring Conservative member now in uniform.³¹ In many ridings, women's rallies were held in support of Union, and housewives were canvassed in extenso by female supporters of the government. Some of these canvassers undoubtedly overstepped the bounds of strict truth: Hance Logan, the Liberal candidate in Cumberland, complained after the election that women had been "influenced by the promises that their men would be returned in the early Spring, if Union Government should be victorious."³²

The Sydney Post carried an article in early December describing the Union canvass of women, however, which casts doubt on the theory that the women electors would vote for Union en masse. Firstly, it was difficult to arouse the interest of the women in the election.

Said the Post:

The experience of the canvassers among the newly enfranchised women voters and an effort to get them to express an opinion on the policies of the government has been most interesting. One canvasser said that at least 7% of the women in the district which she had to cover did not know that an election was to be held. "Well I am not interested in voting. I have my house to attend to and that's my place."

³¹Truro Daily News, 5 Dec. 1917. PANS.

³²Logan to Armstrong, 19 Jan. 1918. AP, vol. XX, PANS.

Secondly, it was difficult to convince women to vote differently from their husbands. The Post quoted one canvasser:

You know it's hard to argue with a woman who doesn't read the newspapers, and who doesn't think, but the hardest proposition is the woman who echoes her husband. . . . I long to 'mop the floor' with a woman who stares at me and says: "John says that it [Union] is only a ruse of the Conservatives."

And thirdly, the Post's article revealed that Union hopes regarding the patriotic motives of soldiers' womenfolk may well have been based on a false premise. The Post reported a conversation between a canvasser and a soldier's mother.

"You have two sons in France, haven't you?"
 "Yes," was the reply, "and two more home, and if I vote for conscription, they'll take them, too."³³

Conscription, and Union Government, might thus appeal to a woman with all her sons overseas, but what of the woman with "two more home?"³⁴ And in all, the judgment of one Union organizer may have been fairly accurate. He believed that the enfranchising of women would do little good to anyone, but simply mean "more votes, without changing results."³⁵

³³Sydney Daily Post, 6 Dec. 1917. PANS.

³⁴See also Liverpool Advance, 5 Dec. 1917. PANS.

³⁵Calkin to Borden, 25 Nov. 1917. BP, OCA105, PAC.

Some male voters, however, may have disliked female suffrage in principle, and hence disliked the Union Government for having brought it into effect. Nova Scotian males, on the whole, were rather more conservative in their outlook regarding female suffrage than men elsewhere in Canada. In 1851, an act of the legislature had specifically restricted voting to males,³⁶ and the view continued to be expressed that "women should continue to exercise the functions which nature had imposed upon them. . . ." ³⁷ By 1917, several provinces, including Ontario, had adopted woman suffrage, but Murray and his government still continued to oppose it.³⁸ In the spring of 1917, E.H. Armstrong, a minister in the Murray government, wrote to a friend in Ottawa regarding a proposed women's Franchise Act for Nova Scotia: "It may be that the Liberal Party must keep abreast of the times, by adopting these modern Western fads, but in my opinion, we will go cautiously, and a little more conservatively than Mr. Rowell in Ontario."³⁹ And during

³⁶Beck, Government, p. 119.

³⁷J.W. Longley, Assembly Debates, 1893, p. 204, quoted in Ibid., p. 259.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Armstrong to Goddard, 28 March 1917. AP, vol. XIX, PANS.

the election campaign, the editor of a weekly newspaper in Windsor wrote of his feelings at seeing women actively pursuing a heretofore exclusively male activity:

. . . If they are going to behave on polling day as some of them have behaved already this week when participating in political arguments, we think the proper remedy would be to roll in a barrel of flour and keep them at their breadboards on the seventeenth.⁴⁰

Admittedly, the female franchise, as such, was probably a minor issue in the campaign. Yet it may well have influenced those male voters who still adhered to Victorian notions regarding the proper place of women in society.

* * *

A striking feature of the Liberal campaign was an increase in confidence as the campaign progressed, although Liberal candidates never quite overcame fears that they might be "completely snowed under" as a consequence of the opposition "of several of our leaders, together with the Liberal press, and the Presbyterian churches,"⁴¹ not to mention the effects of the addition of large numbers of women to the voters list.⁴² The

⁴⁰Hants Journal, 28 Nov. 1917. PANS.

⁴¹R.H. MacKay to Armstrong, 22 Dec. 1917. AP, vol. XIX, PANS.

⁴²Logan to Armstrong, 19 Jan. 1918. AP, vol. XX, PANS.

actions of E.M. Macdonald were a barometer of this increased confidence: he recovered from his earlier pessimism and began to campaign actively in the last week or two before election day on behalf of R.H. MacKay in Pictou County.⁴³

The rise in Liberal spirits may have owed something to Premier Murray's retreat from support of Union and to reports that he was assisting 'straight' Liberal candidates in the Cape Breton ridings.⁴⁴ But it may also have come about because Liberal campaigners had evolved an effective strategy to deal with the two paramount issues of the election, Union and conscription.

Concerning Union, Liberal tactics were to attempt to identify Union Government with the former Conservative Borden administration, and then to attack it on the basis of the Borden government's record. Liberals therefore declared that Union Government was "simply a continuation of the Old Administration,"⁴⁵ and supported this claim, firstly, by saying that the Union cabinet was essentially Conservative in make-up and orientation:

⁴³Eastern Chronicle, 14 Dec. 1917. PANS.

⁴⁴Ibid., 11 Dec. 1917; Sydney Daily Post, 14 Dec. 1917. PANS.

⁴⁵Acadian Recorder, 22 Oct. 1917. PANS.

a real Union Government cannot be made up of fourteen Conservatives and eight Liberals under a Prime Minister whose administration for six years was the most cruelly partizan that Canada ever knew. . . .⁴⁶

Secondly, Liberals pointed out that Liberals were opposing Conservatives as in times past in most of Nova Scotia's constituencies. Said Liberal candidate R.H. MacKay to the voters of Pictou:

. . . There is no doubt that in Pictou, the fight has developed along the old recognized Party Lines. My opponent was nominated two or three years ago as a Conservative by a Conservative Convention. . . . Whatever opinions individuals may hold respecting Union Government, I make bold to assert that there is no Unionist Candidate contending this County at this time.⁴⁷

Hence, since this 'so-called' Union Government was really the old régime in a new guise, it must "therefore take the full responsibility for the sins of the old Borden government. . . ."⁴⁸ These sins were manifold: "profiteering that went on almost unchecked during a time of National Distress;"⁴⁹ the high cost of living;⁵⁰ graft and the use of partonage;⁵¹ and many others.

⁴⁶Eastern Chronicle, 30 Nov. 1917. PANS.

⁴⁷New Glasgow Evening News, 8 Dec. 1917. PAC.

⁴⁸R.H. MacKay, speech, New Glasgow Evening News, 8 Dec. 1917. PAC.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Liberal advertisement in Hants Journal, 5 Dec. 1917. PANS.

Liberal advertisements continually hammered at this shameful record, and decried the attempts of Unionists to obscure this record "in a whirlwind of rhetorical dust. . . ."52

Nor did the attack on Union overlook the historical parallels or the 'lessons' of history. Nineteen seventeen was the fiftieth anniversary of Confederation, and during the Union negotiations in October, the Acadian Recorder had warned Nova Scotian Liberals of the dangers of coalition in these terms: the result of the great coalition which brought about Confederation was that the Liberal Party

was largely denuded of its leaders and suffered more or less political eclipse for thirty years until the inspiring Leadership of Sir Wilfrid Laurier breathed into it the breath of new life and made Liberal Government in Confederated Canada possible.53

This claim, which appealed to whatever anti-Confederation sentiment still existed in Nova Scotia, invoked the historic role of the Nova Scotian Liberal Party as opponents of Confederation. One Liberal advertisement referred to the coalition government's "bribery" in 1867

⁵²Truro Daily News, 26 Nov. 1917. PANS.

⁵³Acadian Recorder, 17 Oct. 1917. PANS. In its Dominion Day editorial the previous July, the Recorder had declared that little good had come out of Confederation: "unfortunately too many of the predictions of the anti-Confederates have since come to pass." Ibid., 2 July 1917.

and compared it with the present government's activities,⁵⁴
and another ad spoke of the "Unionist frame-up" of 1867.⁵⁵

Nova Scotian Liberals approached conscription pragmatically. They realized (or believed) that most Nova Scotians approved of Canada's part in the war against the Central Powers, but they were also aware that Nova Scotian approval of conscription was less clear-cut and straightforward. Liberal candidates therefore approached conscription from two directions, either favoring conscription or criticizing it as the situation demanded, and the resolutions moved in Liberal nominating conventions across the province were flexible enough to permit Liberal candidates to do this. The following such resolution is fairly typical: Pictou County's Liberals resolved that "the paramount issue before the people of Canada is Winning the War," and that "this convention relies upon its nominee to support every necessary measure tending to this end, whether proposed by a Union or a party government."⁵⁶ The key word in such resolutions, of course, was 'necessary': conscription might be acceptable in principle, but was it 'necessary'?

⁵⁴Morning Chronicle, 4 Dec. 1917. PANS.

⁵⁵Truro Daily News, 1 Dec. 1917. PANS.

⁵⁶New Glasgow Evening News, 16 Nov. 1917. PAC.

Hence, in areas where conscription was favored by the voters, Liberals could be conscriptionists, neutralizing the main Unionist plank. In these areas, therefore, the election would be even further reduced to one along traditional party lines: Union, already under attack as basically Conservative, lost its primary claim upon the votes of patriotic Liberals -- conscription. A Union party worker wrote to his candidate to complain of the effectiveness of this tactic:

I feel that it may not be easy to make this a campaign of Win or Quit. . . . Fundamentally it will be a grit and tory contest -- if we can decorate our platform with Win the War and Union festoons so much for us -- But down to brass-headed tacks it is Grit vs. Tory.⁵⁷

And with conscription removed as an issue from the campaign in 'patriotic' areas, Liberals could hope that here government corruption could become the only major election issue.

And in areas where anti-conscription sentiment existed, Liberals could be anti-conscriptionists, and declare that conscription was not necessary to win the war. Liberal campaigners claimed, for example, that there were ample reserves of men, and that a complete extra division of Canadian troops existed in England,

⁵⁷Gilroy to Rhodes, 9 Nov. 1917. RP, vol. XI, PANS.

ready for active duty if the need arose.⁵⁸ A Unionist party worker in Cumberland complained to his candidate about the flexible Liberal approach:

True Logan [the Liberal candidate] is a Conscriptionist on the platform but he will be more or less indefinite where he needs be -- He will draw the Anti-vote.⁵⁹

Liberal strategy in areas of anti-conscription sentiment, therefore, was to try to turn the election into what Unionists had wanted it to be everywhere in the province -- a referendum on conscription.⁶⁰ Unionists, on their part, could only hope that some strategy would be devised so that their conscriptionist stand would not be held against them.

Acadians were perhaps the most uniformly hostile of all Nova Scotians to conscription. They detested the measure, despite the fact that they were not against the war as were the French in Quebec, and had proven this by

⁵⁸W.E. Roscoe, K.C., speech evening of 6 Dec. 1917; in BP, OCA98, PAC. Speech of 'Lieutenant McCord' on behalf of Hance Logan, Amherst, N.S., Dec. 12, 1917, in RP, vol. XIA, PANS.

⁵⁹Gilroy to Rhodes, 9 Nov. 1917, RP, vol. XI, PANS.

⁶⁰Halifax Herald, 7 Nov. 1917. PANS. Referring to the national campaign as a whole, Roger Graham has said: "As it turned out, the election might well have been a conscription referendum since the Government's manpower policies proved to be the overriding, indeed about the only, issue in the campaign." Graham, Meighen, I, 146.

enlisting voluntarily in good numbers.⁶¹ Accordingly, in the Acadian regions of Richmond County, Liberal candidates Carroll and Kyte ran on a straight anti-conscription platform.⁶² In Yarmouth-Clare, of course, Liberal candidate Comeau, who had been nominated by Acadian elements in the Liberal Party, ran with a clear conscience as an anti-conscriptionist supporter of Laurier.⁶³

The Unionist appeal to Acadians, on the other hand, did not disavow conscription, but used a racial argument similar to that employed in English Canada: "Why Should 100,000 French Acadians of Nova Scotia Have to Do the Fighting of 2,000,000 French Canadians of Quebec?" said the Halifax Herald.⁶⁴ This argument had some logic: Acadians had never identified themselves with the Quebec French and had long been proud of their separate identity. Yet, despite this, the Union campaign among Acadians was

⁶¹Robert Rumilly, Histoire Des Acadiens (Montreal, 1955), II, 899, 905; L'Acadien, 23 Nov. 1917; Halifax Herald, 22 Nov. 1917. Rumilly's claim that the Halifax Herald was hostile to Acadians as "traïtes à l'empire," (Histoire, II, 903) is not borne out by careful examination of the newspaper.

⁶²Sydney Daily Post, 6 Dec. 1917. PANS.

⁶³Armstrong to Spinney, 26 Dec. 1917. AP, vol. XIX, PANS.

⁶⁴Halifax Herald, 15 Dec. 1917; Ibid., 4 Dec. 1917. PANS.

probably doomed to failure in advance, firstly, because Acadians had traditionally supported Sir Wilfrid Laurier, and secondly because the Borden government had earned the distrust of patriotic Acadians because of its handling of Acadian recruits. A letter from an Acadian soldier in France complained that

to all true Acadians, it is a most disappointing fact that these men have lost their identity by being merged indiscriminately into English-speaking units with the result that the Acadian race is now sharing in the opprobrium everywhere being showered on the Quebec French Canadians.⁶⁵

Long before the election, therefore, the Borden government had nullified the effectiveness of an appeal to Acadian pride and to Acadian racial prejudice against Quebec French Canadians. The Liberal Party could not but benefit from this Conservative mistake.

And Unionists had been aware for some time that farmers and fishermen feared conscription. This segment of the Nova Scotian electorate was large: about one-third of the working population of the province was made up of farmers, their sons and hired men, and fishermen.⁶⁶ Their feelings, therefore, could not be ignored by the

⁶⁵Halifax Herald, 4 Dec. 1917. PANS.

⁶⁶According to Census Reports, the working population of Nova Scotia in 1921 was 185,556. Of this number, 12,351 were engaged in fishing, 49,264 in agriculture. Sixth Census of Canada, 1921 (Ottawa, 1924), IV, 670.

government. E.N. Rhodes, M.P. and Unionist candidate in Cumberland had been receiving letters from farmers and their wives in his riding requesting exemptions for their sons or husbands for some months, as well as reports warning him that "the rural electorate is more or less alarmed over Conscription and the draft."⁶⁷ His own investigations showed him, moreover, that "there is a strong feeling in the country districts against Conscription; in fact there is almost a reign of terror on the part of the people. They seem thoroughly frightened. . . ." ⁶⁸ That this rural sentiment was not confined to Rhodes' riding was confirmed, after the election, by the Unionist New Glasgow Evening News, which reported that "there was a good deal of quiet latent anti-conscriptionist sentiment" in "the country districts" during the election period. ⁶⁹

Rhodes and other Nova Scotian Unionists had acted in October to reassure the farmers that they would be exempted from conscription. It was for this reason that "anti-conscriptionist sentiment" remained "latent" in rural areas of Nova Scotia. That these reassurances had

⁶⁷Gilroy to Rhodes, 9 Nov. 1917. RP, vol. XI, PANS.

⁶⁸Rhodes to Curry, 28 Nov. 1917. RP, vol. XI, PANS.

⁶⁹Evening News, 18 Dec. 1917. PAC.

made some impact on the rural consciousness can be seen in the following letter which Rhodes received from a poorly educated rural mother requesting an exemption for her son as a farmer.

I trust god that you will [get the exemption] as i see Bye al your Readings where Mr. Borden Has promised to exempt al the Farmers and says they must not be taken and we Believe he surly will leve the Farmer as they are doing more in winning the war than them on the Battle Field. . . .⁷⁰

It is clear that Rhodes' election jitters had led him to 'jump the gun' in promising exemptions to farmers, although he was probably aware of whispered reports which had been coming from "well-informed government circles" since mid-August that indicated farmers would be "shown there is nothing to fear from conscription."⁷¹ For it was not until early December that Unionist headquarters in Ottawa became aware of rural anti-conscription sentiment, which had become particularly evident in Ontario. The Minister of Militia, General Mewburn, immediately issued this pledge:

⁷⁰Mrs. J.H. Douglas to Rhodes, 2 Nov. 1917. RP, vol. XI, PANS. The spelling, grammar and punctuation are as in the original; the painful scrawl must be left to the imagination of the reader.

⁷¹Morning Chronicle, 16 Aug. 1917. PANS.

I will give you my word that if any farmers' sons who are honestly engaged in farm work and in the production of foodstuffs are not exempted by the tribunals and are called up for military service, I will have them honourably discharged.⁷²

This statement was circulated in Nova Scotia forthwith, and was reproduced in the Union press.⁷³ An attempt was also made to assure fishermen that the exemption referred to them as well, as producers of essential foodstuffs.⁷⁴

Liberal candidates, who were the natural beneficiaries of rural anti-conscription sentiment, responded to Unionist promises of exemptions by either claiming that the government was promising exemptions for political purposes only, and would withdraw the exemptions after the election,⁷⁵ or declaring that the exemptions applied only to the province of Ontario.⁷⁶ These were 'scare' techniques, of course, and thus were in keeping with Liberal strategy in general in rural areas. The speech of a Liberal campaigner in rural Kings

⁷²Skelton, Laurier, II, 536.

⁷³See Free Lance, 4 Dec. 1917. PAC; Sydney Daily Post, 8 Dec. 1917. PANS.

⁷⁴Borden to Senator Charles E. Tanner, 5 Dec. 1917. BP, OC502, PAC.

⁷⁵Sydney Daily Post, 6 Dec. 1917, PANS, citing G.W. Kyte.

⁷⁶Eastern Chronicle, 14 Dec. 1917. PANS.

County began as follows:

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, this Conscription Bill means that a Sergeant will knock at your door, and take your husbands away from you, all they hold near and dear, the Sergeants will march them away, drill them in platoons, then companies, then battalions, and then take them to France to shoot or be shot at, I tell you Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, that when Sir Robert Borden says he will truly take 100,000 men, it is a farce, the next he will take will be your "husbands."⁷⁷

The effectiveness of such an appeal was likely to be greatest, of course, in rural areas of Acadian settlement where anti-conscription sentiment was already to be found. But it must have been clear to Liberals, however, that the Unionists had been able to devise a strategy which, in most rural areas of Nova Scotia, might well protect Union candidates from the worst consequences of rural anti-conscriptionism.

This was not the case in working-class areas of Nova Scotia, and it is likely that only luck, not conscious strategy, served to protect Unionists in some of these areas. For the Unionists failed to develop a strategy (or even, it is likely, realize the necessity of it) for dealing with anti-conscription and anti-government sentiment among Nova Scotia's working men,

⁷⁷W.E. Roscoe, K.C., speech evening of 6 Dec. 1917; in Borden Papers, OCA98, PAC.

the largest concentrations of whom were to be found in the ridings of Halifax, Cape Breton North-Victoria, and Cape Breton South-Richmond.

A substantial number of laborites in the province, for one reason or another, opposed conscription and Union Government: the Dominion Trades and Labor Congress annual convention of September 1917, which included delegates from Halifax and Cape Breton, had expressed considerable opposition to the Military Service Act;⁷⁸ moreover, industrial labor in the province tended to blame unemployment and the high cost of living on the federal government.⁷⁹

The Liberal Party was therefore potentially in the stronger position in Nova Scotia with regard to the labor vote than were the Unionists, since many labor criticisms of the government coincided with those of the Liberals.⁸⁰ Thus in Halifax, it had not been difficult for the Halifax Trades and Labor Council to cooperate with the riding's Liberals, each nominating a candidate in opposition to the two Unionists; and in Cape Breton North-Victoria, working men could vote in good conscience

⁷⁸Report of Proceedings of the Annual Convention of the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, 1917, p. 155.

⁷⁹Sydney Canadian Labor Leader, 15 Dec. 1917. DLL.

⁸⁰Morning Chronicle, 29 Nov. 1917. PANS.

for the straight Liberal, D.D. McKenzie, who, it was certainly known, had voted against the Military Service Act in parliament, and who remained a critic of government policy.

Fortunately for the Unionists, however, the outlook was less bleak in Cape Breton South-Richmond: in this riding, labor had proved more independent in outlook than elsewhere in the province and had nominated its own candidates. Hence, in this riding, there was a good chance that the Unionist candidates could survive a flood of anti-conscription and anti-government working-class votes: all that was required for Union survival was that working men divide their vote against Union and conscription between the Liberal and Labor candidates, permitting the Union candidates to win with a minority of the total vote. Now, the very presence of Labor candidates, supported by major labor unions such as the Amalgamated Mine Workers of Nova Scotia (A.M.W.), indicated that working men would probably give these candidates a substantial number of votes, particularly in those areas where working conditions were bad (for example, mining areas) or in areas of unemployment or inadequate wages. There was still a possibility that the majority of working men might vote Liberal, since the Liberal Party loomed large on the national scene as the party of

opposition to conscription. Union propaganda had helped by making it clear that hostility to conscription was the great national role of the Liberal Party in this election. However, Unionist campaigners reminded the working men that the Liberal Party had shown hostility to organized labor in the past: Unionists pointed out, for example, that the provincial Liberal government had sent in the militia during the Cape Breton coal strike of 1909-11.⁸¹ Given the hostility of working men to Union Government, this reminder would probably not induce working men to desert the Liberals to vote for Union (as Unionists surely hoped), but instead, for Labor. Moreover, Unionists attacked the labor movement itself by charging that "the present movement of bringing out labor candidates was not a genuine labor movement" because it did not have the support of the labor unions, especially the A.M.W.⁸² This charge was patently untrue, since one of the Labor candidates, Robert Baxter, was vice-president of the A.M.W.;⁸³ and this attack on the solidarity of the labor movement might well have strengthened the resolve of working men (who were already against the government in

⁸¹ Sydney Daily Post, 5 Dec. 1917. PANS.

⁸² Ibid., 30 Nov. 1917.

⁸³ Logan, Trade Unions, p. 191.

any case) to demonstrate their solidarity by voting heavily for the Labor candidates. The Union campaign in working-class Cape Breton South-Richmond, therefore, showed little appreciation of the hostile mood of working men,⁸⁴ but despite this probably assured that the Union candidates would top the poll in a three-way struggle -- providing that a substantial minority of the riding's voters either approved of conscription and Union, or continued to show a Conservative orientation as in the past.

The Unionists, therefore, paid considerable (if misinformed) attention to the labor vote in Cape Breton South-Richmond, but in Halifax and Cape Breton North-Victoria, they ascribed little importance to the political activities of labor, or to labor's special grievances. The Halifax Unionist press paid little attention to labor matters, and perhaps the Chronicle was echoing the prevalent Union attitude in the area when it said that "the Labor group calls for no extended consideration. It is small and untimely in organization."⁸⁵ And in Cape

⁸⁴The Sydney Daily Post, for example, feared that the presence of Labor candidates would split the government vote, since this had been the experience of Conservative candidates in the past. Post, 14 Dec. 1917. PANS.

⁸⁵Morning Chronicle, 23 Nov. 1917. PANS.

Breton North-Victoria, the Unionist's tactics were to concentrate most of their fire on the redoubtable D.D. McKenzie, the Liberal candidate. The Liberals thus fell heir to working-class hostility to the government in both of these latter ridings.

The Unionists thus completely failed to appraise accurately the hostile mood of working men in labor ridings in 1917, and to consciously devise a strategy to deal with it, as they had in the rural areas of the province. Nonetheless, luck was on their side, both in Cape Breton South-Richmond, as indicated, and, as events were to prove, in Halifax -- if not in D.D. McKenzie's riding

* * *

As in every election, strong candidates and local issues influenced the progress of the campaign of both parties in 1917 in Nova Scotia. On balance, the Liberal Party fielded, by a good margin, the stronger team of candidates. D.D. McKenzie, in Cape Breton North-Victoria, had never been beaten in any previous election;⁸⁶ others with good election records included G.W. Kyte, A.W. Chisholm, and J.H. Sinclair; and William Duff, the mayor of Lunenburg, must also be considered a strong candidate.

⁸⁶See McDonald, Recollections, p. 45.

On the Union side, only Borden and E.N. Rhodes were of the same stature -- A.K. Maclean, F.B. McCurdy, and W.S. Fielding were excellent candidates, but their acclamations prevented this being put to the test.⁸⁷

The importance of local issues will be examined with reference to three ridings. In each of these ridings unusual circumstances, personality clashes, or local preoccupations distracted the attentions of the voters from national issues. In Lunenburg, William Duff, the Liberal candidate, saw no need to pay attention to national issues at all in his campaign. Duff, complained the editor of a Unionist newspaper,

stands on his business record and asks for election because he has been the friend of the fishermen and a businessman, making no reference to the supreme issue of the election [conscription] which ought to be decided irrespective of issues.⁸⁸

In a county in which fishing was of such importance, a well-known and respected fish merchant might have a definite edge, and Duff apparently realized this.

In Pictou County, a local issue, the affair of the electoral alcohol, proved particularly embarrassing to

⁸⁷Maclean and McCurdy were ultimately acclaimed as a consequence of the Halifax explosion. This will be discussed presently.

⁸⁸Annapolis-Royal Spectator, 29 Nov. 1917.

the Unionists. Although both parties in Pictou had long been in the habit of distributing liquor to voters as an election bribe, the Unionists in 1917 were unfortunate enough to have the location of their cache of potables discovered by the opposition before it could be distributed. A Temperance Act Inspector was informed, and on entering the house where the liquor was hidden, he discovered therein two Union Party workers, neither of whom were known to have any connection with the trade in illicit liquor.⁸⁹ The Eastern Chronicle made much of the issue, heaping ridicule upon the Unionists, "the party of purity."⁹⁰ Unionist protestations of innocence probably did more harm than good under the circumstances:⁹¹ ridicule, based on fact, is perhaps the most difficult thing for any politician to deal with, or live down. "Alas for McGregor," James M. Cameron has said of the Union candidate, "he had to shoulder the blame and carry the ridicule, the first and only candidate in Pictou County politics to be victimized by his party's handling of liquor."⁹²

⁸⁹Cameron, Political Pictonians, pp. 121-122.

⁹⁰Eastern Chronicle, 7, 11 Dec. 1917. PANS.

⁹¹Free Lance, 11 Dec. 1917. PAC.

⁹²Cameron, Political, p. 122.

The local issue in Cumberland involved the adherence of the local M.P.P. for the riding, J. Layton Ralston, to Union Government. Ralston, serving overseas as an officer with the 85th Overseas Battalion,⁹³ was personally hostile to E.N. Rhodes, the Union candidate,⁹⁴ and refused for some time to declare his feelings on Union. Hance Logan, the Liberal candidate, made the most of this: Ralston, claimed Logan, although a Liberal, a conscriptionist, and a soldier overseas, rejected Union and supported Laurier.⁹⁵ Rhodes begged A.K. Maclean to persuade Ralston to clarify his position by sending a cable to the Nova Scotian press, declaring his support for Union.⁹⁶ Ralston was apparently difficult to persuade, and his cable to the press supporting Union Government, did not appear in print until shortly before election day.⁹⁷ Ralston's reluctance was understandable -- he had been defeated by Rhodes in the federal election of 1908 -- and any fears he might have had about the wisdom

⁹³Parliamentary Guide, 1917, p. 370

⁹⁴Hayes to Rhodes, 7 Feb. 1918. RP, vol. XII, PANS.

⁹⁵Rhodes to Maclean, 20 Nov. 1917. RP, vol. XI, PANS.

⁹⁶Ibid.; also Rhodes to Maclean, 10 Nov. 1917. RP, vol. XI, PANS.

⁹⁷New Glasgow Evening News, 14 Dec. 1917. PAC.

of crossing party lines proved justified: Logan, who remained loyal to the Liberal Party, was successful in the next federal election in 1921; Ralston, on the other hand, though running as a Liberal, was defeated in Cumberland in the next two provincial elections. The Ralston affair in Cumberland in 1917 demonstrates how party loyalty and personal feuds could sometimes assume greater importance than issues in Nova Scotia, even when these issues involved the winning of the war against Germany.

* * *

The last week or two of the campaign was conducted during some of the worst winter weather that Nova Scotia had known for many years.⁹⁸ The consequences were predictable, and one can visualize the despair of party organizers who were faced with poor turnouts at meetings, the non-arrival of outside speakers, and the difficulty of canvassing outlying areas.⁹⁹ Yet bad weather could be expected during a winter campaign, if not welcomed. Another complication, however, was quite beyond anticipation. This was the Halifax explosion of December 6,

⁹⁸New Glasgow Evening News, 8 Dec. 1917. PAC. For the weather between 6 and 12 December see Samuel Henry Prince, Catastrophe and Social Change (New York, 1920), p. 65.

⁹⁹See Rhodes to Thompson, 19 Dec. 1917. RP, vol. XIA, PANS.

1917 -- a disaster of such proportions that it caused ripples of shock across the continent and, in Nova Scotia, thrust the election and the war into the background.

Said the Digby Weekly Courier a week after the event:

The things which we are near have been during the past week of such fearful magnitude as to drive completely out of sight important events transpiring in distant places. The appalling disaster in Halifax has occupied all the thoughts and attention of people.¹⁰⁰

Both parties cut down on their campaigning as a result of the disaster. Indeed it would have been politically unwise to do otherwise, as the Eastern Chronicle pointed out, "in view of the suffering involved, and the need for immediate relief work."¹⁰¹ Premier Borden, who was making his second swing through the province, cut short his tour immediately, and hurried to Halifax to offer his aid, and the aid of the federal government. And in Truro, which had been within earshot of the disaster and had become the main provincial centre for hospitalized victims,¹⁰² Vernon, the Liberal candidate, withdrew from the election saying, "feeling as I do that our whole energy should be conserved and

¹⁰⁰Digby Weekly Courier, 14 Dec. 1917. PANS.

¹⁰¹Eastern Chronicle, 14 Dec. 1917. PANS.

¹⁰²Truro was on the main railway line between Halifax and points west.

utilized towards relieving the suffering and distress, and helping the unfortunate, that this is no time for an election with its attendant excitement and expenditure of energy."¹⁰³ In Halifax itself, the election was postponed until January, and soon voices were heard calling for an effort to be made to avoid an election entirely by arranging an acclamation.¹⁰⁴

A direct result of the explosion was to remove political news and commentary from the Halifax newspapers. The Herald dropped political material from its contents completely, and with its usual vigor, devoted itself almost entirely to comprehensive coverage of explosion damage, lengthy lists of the dead, and queries about the missing. The Chronicle, as well, discarded politics to cover the biggest local story any Halifax paper was likely to carry short of the last trump. The Herald resumed electioneering on December 12, but the Chronicle never really did return to the fray, and carried only two more editorials favoring Union Government, both of which were so oblique or qualified as to indicate that their writer

¹⁰³Halifax Herald, 12 Dec. 1917. PANS.

¹⁰⁴See Chapter IV.

now entertained serious doubts about the Liberal-Conservative coalition.¹⁰⁵

What were the overall political effects of these extraordinary circumstances -- the unusually severe weather and the explosion? It is difficult to be certain, but it is likely that these occurrences worked greater hardship on the Union than on the Liberal election chances. The Union forces had counted on converting as many Liberals as possible to their point of view, in order to compensate for Conservative losses occasioned by the stand on conscription.¹⁰⁶ Winter weather made this difficult, and the loss of the Halifax Chronicle in the late stages of the campaign because of the explosion was another blow, the seriousness of which can only be speculated upon. Catastrophe and bad weather, in this way, brought an unusual climax to the campaign in Nova Scotia.

¹⁰⁵Morning Chronicle, 15, 17 Dec. 1917. PANS.

¹⁰⁶See Calkin to Borden, 25 Nov. 1917. BP, OCA105, PAC.

CHAPTER IV

FROM THE JAWS OF DEFEAT

The Results and Their Significance

The results of the election, as they appeared in the press on December 18, indicated, indeed, that all had not gone well with the Union campaign in Nova Scotia:¹ of twelve seats contested on December 17, the Union Government won only three. The Union showing on the popular vote was necessarily better, 44%, but this was down from the Conservative showing in the 1911 election (9 seats won of 16 contested, and 49% of the popular vote) and the 1908 election (6 seats won of 18 and again 49% of the popular vote). The Liberals in 1917 obtained 49% of the popular vote as against 51% in 1911 and 1908. And the remaining 7% of the popular vote was gained by the unsuccessful Labor candidates in Cape Breton South-Richmond.² As these figures indicate, and continuing a trend in Nova Scotian politics, many of the contests had

¹Election results, Table One at end of this chapter.

²Canada, Sessional Papers: 1909, Vol. 8, no. 18; 1912, Vol. 11, no. 18; 1920, Vol. 4, no. 13.

been close, and four seats (three Liberal) had been won by less than 200 votes.

Unionists, though disappointed, had anticipated that the civilian vote might go against them. They consoled themselves, however, with thoughts of the military votes yet to be counted, and confidently expected that Canada's soldiers would right the wrong inflicted upon them by obstinate or disloyal civilians: the "trench vote" would offset the "French vote".³ Wrote E.N. Rhodes to a friend on December 18,

All along I have had the view that if I broke even in this county I would be doing well, and as the majority against me is only 83, I am well satisfied, as I have no doubt that the overseas vote will give me a substantial majority.⁴

And the Halifax Herald commented:

This War Time Election is not going to be decided by the Stay-at-Homes, but by the soldiers who have fought and are still fighting for the safety and salvation of Canada.⁵

Yet the Herald could not conceal its disgust with the civilian voters: "The sorry result of the election in this province constitutes a shameful message to send to our

³Sydney Daily Post, 22 Dec. 1917. PANS.

⁴Rhodes to McDougal, 18 Dec. 1917. RP, vol. XIA, PANS. Logan's majority was actually 82.

⁵Halifax Herald, 18 Dec. 1917. PANS.

soldier sons at the front this Christmastide."⁶ The Morning Chronicle was more reticent than the Herald, and contented itself with the comment that, as a result of the Dominion-wide Union landslide, much would be expected of the new government.⁷

Liberal politicians were highly gratified by the results, which had exceeded their expectations. Yet they too anticipated that the military vote would affect the final results to their disadvantage. Liberal candidate R.H. MacKay, for example, was especially pleased with his victory in Pictou, in the light of the opposition of press, pulpit, and Liberal Unionists: "It is a wonder that we were not completely snowed under," he wrote a fellow Liberal.⁸ He did not, however, feel confident of ultimate success: his majority of 144 was too small and "When the overseas vote comes in this will no doubt be wiped out. . . ."⁹

As to the Union landslide in the country as a whole, the Liberal press in Nova Scotia reacted with resignation

⁶Halifax Herald, 22 Dec. 1917. PANS.

⁷Morning Chronicle, 19 Dec. 1917. PANS.

⁸MacKay to Armstrong, 22 Dec. 1917. AP, vol. XIX, PANS.

⁹Ibid. See also Logan to Armstrong, 19 Jan. 1918. AP, vol. XX, PANS.

or resentment, according to temperament. The Acadian Recorder merely commented that one must wait and see whether the Unionists would "carry out their promises,"¹⁰ whereas the Eastern Chronicle repeated earlier charges that "Every Liberal in it [Union Government], by the fact of his going in, denied the principles he professed for his lifetime."¹¹

* * *

Two general observations may be made regarding the civilian vote in 1917. The first concerns the fate of strong candidates in this election -- of men with good election records or high standing in their community. In general, such men either won or did well, whether Unionist or Liberal: there were few upsets in 1917 in Nova Scotia. D.D. McKenzie won, as did J.H. Sinclair, Borden and William Duff -- all against weaker opponents; and in Cumberland, the margin between Rhodes and Logan was only 82 votes, demonstrating the electoral strength of both men. This pattern shows two things. Firstly, it shows that issues assumed less importance in the minds of many electors than did personalities; and that both parties had apparently transcended both liabilities and

¹⁰Acadian Recorder, 19 Dec. 1917. PANS.

¹¹Eastern Chronicle, 28 Dec. 1917. PANS.

assets deriving from the special issues of the war-time campaign -- conscription and coalition -- to run a more or less 'normal' campaign in one respect: 'our man is better than your man.' Secondly, it showed that the campaign was 'normal' in another respect. Strong candidates who had either built up an effective constituency organization over the years, such as D.D. McKenzie, or candidates who had been induced to run because the constituency organizations were still effective, as in the past, discovered that these organizations were still effective in 1917, despite the strain put on them since May of that year. MacKay thus stepped into the shoes of 'Ned' Macdonald in Pictou and won narrowly on the civilian vote, showing that Macdonald's fears were, if not groundless, at least exaggerated: Macdonald might well have won by a larger margin than MacKay in 1917, had he not shown unsuspected timidity. This pattern therefore shows how well the constituency organizations of both parties had survived the shock of Union and the controversy over conscription:¹² No matter how appealing a candidate might have been personally, without an effective organization (based upon grass-roots enthusiasm), or

¹²It has already been indicated that the Conservative constituency associations had been disrupted to (perhaps) a greater extent than the Liberal by Union,

with an organization much weakened in relation to his opponent's (resulting from defections at the grass-roots level), he might have found it impossible to campaign effectively and put up a good showing on the civilian vote. This pattern therefore indicates that, in some respects, the 1917 election represented continuity with past electoral behavior in the province, rather than a sharp break with it. That this was so in other respects will be seen shortly.

The second observation to be made about the civilian vote requires more extensive treatment than the first, and concerns the voting in those ridings where there was strong actual or potential anti-conscription sentiment. As indicated in the preceding chapter, the Liberals, by taking an anti-conscription stand among Acadians, working men and farmers, tried to turn the election among these three groups into a genuine referendum on conscription, whereas the Unionists, effectively or otherwise, attempted to counter this Liberal tactic. An analysis of the voting among these

and that, as a consequence, Union associations were constructed on an ad hoc, or temporary basis. Despite this, however, these Union associations seem to have been effective in bringing out the former Conservative vote: that these associations may have disintegrated after the election, as Senator Dennis claimed, does not deny their effectiveness during the campaign itself.

three groups therefore can show first, how successfully the candidates and parties dealt with the conscription issue when faced with it, secondly (and to a lesser degree) the actual amount and extent of anti-conscription sentiment present in Nova Scotia, and thirdly, how this sentiment was reflected in the election results.

First, let us look at the voting among the Acadians.¹³ In Cape Breton South-Richmond the margin of victory on the civilian vote of the Liberal candidates, Kyte and Carroll, was provided by Richmond County, with its substantial Acadian population: the Liberal majority of 2,317 in Richmond County offset a Union majority of 1,333 in Cape Breton South. Moreover, Richmond County increased its support for the Liberal candidates in 1917 (69% of the vote) considerably from the election of 1908 (55%) and 1911 (56%) demonstrating the importance of the special issues of the 1917 election to Richmond County's voters. This pattern of Acadian voting was even more pronounced in the riding at the other end of the province, Yarmouth-Clare. For purpose of analysis, this riding can be divided into the geographical districts of Clare, Yarmouth, and Argyle. The Acadian Liberals of the district of Clare, as we have seen, had strenuously opposed the

¹³See Table Two, at end of this chapter.

nomination of the Liberal Unionist candidate, E.K. Spinney, and had nominated an Acadian, J.W. Comeau, as a straight Liberal. Comeau won every poll in predominantly Acadian Clare, taking 91% of the popular vote in the district. In Yarmouth on the other hand, he won no polls and received only 12% of the popular vote. And in Argyle, with a mixed French-English population, Comeau won 8 of 15 polls and 60% of the vote. The voting in Yarmouth-Clare, then, appears to have divided largely along racial lines, with the larger English-speaking population giving Spinney the victory. It is difficult to determine exactly whether this pattern of voting in this riding in 1917 derived from an upsurge of racial animosity, or from a divergence of opinion on the conscription issue. However, it is likely that conscription was the more important factor. Racial animosity was traditionally less pronounced in Nova Scotia than in central Canada, probably because English and French lived in distinct settlements of their own, minimizing contact between them, and because the French minority was too small to be of great concern to the English-speaking majority.

Working-class preferences in Nova Scotia at this time are more difficult to analyse, but as indicated in the previous chapter, probably found the greatest expression in the ridings of Cape Breton South-Richmond,

Cape Breton North-Victoria, and Halifax.¹⁴ In contrast with the experience of the Liberal candidates in Cape Breton South-Richmond, the labor candidates showed their greatest strength in the Cape Breton South portion of the riding.¹⁵ Here, Labor gained only 7% less of the vote than did the second-place Liberals, and in some parts of the riding, did even better, placing second to the Unionists in Glace Bay and topping the poll in smaller centres such as New Waterford, and Dominion No. 6. The Laborites' excellent showing in these latter centres showed where their support lay -- among the mine and industrial workers of the riding; they placed third in the larger and more socially diversified urban centre of Sydney.

That this Labor vote in the Cape Breton South portion of the riding was largely an anti-government vote can be shown by comparing the results here with the results in industrialized Sydney Mines in the neighbouring riding of Cape Breton North-Victoria. Here, D.D. McKenzie, the Liberal candidate, with no Labor candidate to contend with, took 53% of the vote; he had not received more than 43% of the vote in Sydney Mines in the

¹⁴There was, of course, no election in Halifax to be analysed.

¹⁵See Table Two.

two previous federal elections.¹⁶ It is highly probable, therefore, that the Labor candidates in Cape Breton South split the anti-Union vote, giving the victory in this part of the riding to the Union candidates. In this connection, it is worthwhile noting that the combined Liberal-Labor vote in Cape Breton South, 61% of the total vote, was quite close to D.D. McKenzie's 60% of the vote in Cape Breton North-Victoria. And it is worthwhile noting as well, that the Conservative and Liberal Parties in the former separate constituency of Cape Breton South had broken almost even on the popular vote in the two previous federal elections. The 1917 election, therefore, saw many working-class voters rejecting Union Government in the two Cape Breton ridings under review.

To what extent was this anti-Union working-class vote a vote against conscription per se? The answer is less clear-cut than in the case of the Acadians, since the Labor candidates in Cape Breton South-Richmond had made much political capital of unemployment and the high cost of living. But Liberals and Laborites had raised the issue of conscription in addition to these other issues, and an anti-conscription bias was probably reflected in

¹⁶Canada, Sessional Papers: 1909, Vol. 8, no. 18, pp. 298-301; 1912, Vol. 11, no. 18, pp. 298-301; 1920, Vol. 4, no. 13, pp. 205-208.

the voting as a result: partly because conscription could be seen as a further indictment of the Union Government, and partly because positive approval for conscription in working-class districts could only be registered with any certainty by voting for the Union candidates. The vote against Union was thus in some degree a vote against conscription per se on the part of the working class, reflecting a similar bias of labor union leaders.

This analysis of the working-class vote in this chapter and the preceding one has concentrated on the Cape Breton ridings and on Halifax. And for good reason. A large and concentrated industrial working class was to be found here, whereas elsewhere in Nova Scotia, industrialization (including mining) was less extensive and was scattered in small pockets in various ridings, for example, Pictou and Cumberland Counties. Because these latter working-class areas were small, blending working men within the general population, hostility to conscription was likely to be poorly articulated as a working-class cry, and opinions were likely to mirror those of the surrounding population. Analysis of specific working-class anti-conscriptionism in these ridings is therefore difficult. In the city of Halifax, of course, the labor movement was well developed but unfortunately, no election was held in the Halifax riding because of the explosion, making any

post mortem on the anti-conscription bias of working men here impossible.

The picture among Nova Scotia's rural producers is in marked contrast with that among Acadians and Cape Breton's industrial workers. It appears, from examination of the election results on a poll-to-poll basis, that farmers and fishermen were only slightly influenced, if at all, by fears of conscription in the 1917 election. In Pictou County, for example, Unionist MacGregor gained a slight edge in the major towns and cities in the New Glasgow area, and Liberal MacKay achieved his overall majority of 144 by virtue of a 162 vote edge in the more rural parts of the riding. And in Cumberland, Liberal Hance Logan won by a slightly wider margin in rural than in urban districts. The difference, however, between rural and urban margins in both of these ridings (and in others as well) was so small as to suggest that other factors (traditional voting patterns, for example) were much more important than conscription in determining the overall results. Nor did fishermen show any greater tendency to vote Liberal because of conscription than did farmers. In Lunenburg County, in fact, Liberal William Duff's margin of victory was somewhat smaller in the towns and villages along the coastline than in the more inland

areas.¹⁷ The Union promise of exemptions for rural producers, therefore, seems to have been effective in the 1917 election. But only in a negative sense: the exemption pledge merely eliminated conscription as a reason to fear Union Government, but did not provide any reason to vote Union, given the Liberal 'Win-the-War' position.¹⁸ The whole conscription issue, therefore, was largely irrelevant to rural voters when it came to casting their ballots. Moreover, any residual rural distrust of the government because of conscription was probably offset by some suspicion that Liberals were not entirely sincere in their support of the war effort.

To conclude, anti-conscription sentiment did make its mark on the election results in Nova Scotia, but the pattern of voting was not necessarily related to the amount of such sentiment in existence. Those most hostile to conscription were the Acadians, and this hostility was translated directly into increased support for Liberal candidates in this election. Industrial working men included conscription in a general indictment of the government but, in one of the two ridings where

¹⁷Fifty-five percent as against sixty-two percent.

¹⁸The Liberal position here was, of course, that they could win the war without conscription. See speech of W.E. Roscoe cited earlier. BP, OCA98, PAC.

their vote was likely to be decisive, divided their allegiance between two anti-conscription parties and negated the force of their protest. And the largest group potentially or actively hostile to conscription were the rural producers, but their hostility failed to affect the election results, owing to the Union Government's timely promise of exemptions for farmers and fishermen. The anti-conscription stand of Liberals among these three groups of Nova Scotians was thus quite justified, but Union strategy, or good fortune, prevented Liberal candidates from making the most of it.

* * *

Shortly after the Halifax explosion of December 6, 1917, the election in Halifax riding was postponed until January 28, 1918. The disaster, however, completely altered the election picture in this riding, to the detriment of Liberals; the Liberal candidates who had campaigned with some hope of success before the disaster, came increasingly to find after December 6 that their position in relation to the electorate was deteriorating badly. This deterioration accelerated after the nationwide Union victory of December 17, as Halifax voters came to realize that the national Liberal Party had suffered a resounding defeat, and that to back the local Liberal nominees would be to back a losing cause; and as they came

to realize, moreover, that federal aid to the stricken city would have to come from the newly elected Union Government.¹⁹ The two Liberal candidates, after some hesitation, therefore, opened negotiations with the riding's Unionists whereby one Liberal and one Unionist (preferably Maclean) would be acclaimed. They received help from an unexpected quarter. W.S. Fielding, who was still under attack from some Liberal quarters for his Union affiliations,²⁰ broke his silence, and in a letter to the press asked that this solution be adopted.²¹ The Union forces were, however, unyielding, confident of ultimate victory.²² Said the Herald (revealing for a moment its true Conservative feelings regarding Liberal Unionists such as Maclean): "It would be the acme of folly to send two opposition members to Ottawa."²³ Liberal resistance collapsed on January 22, 1918, and their candidates resigned. Liberal candidate Edward Blackadder gave his reasons for resigning in a letter to the Acadian Recorder, printed on the twenty-third.

¹⁹Halifax Herald, 19 Dec. 1917. PANS.

²⁰Eastern Chronicle, 8 Jan. 1918. PANS.

²¹Ibid., 25 Dec. 1917; Halifax Herald, 21 Dec. 1917. PANS.

²²A.K. Maclean, cited by Eastern Chronicle, 25 Dec. 1917. PANS.

²³Halifax Herald, 14 Jan. 1918. PANS.

There was . . . a pervading fear that if Halifax stood to its guns and defeated one of the Unionist candidates, a full and generous compensation might be denied the thousands of suffering people who had lost their all. I do not believe that any such atrocious threat was ever made by any responsible representative of the government, but unquestionably there has been such a vague fear among the people. Our fair and just offer being rejected, still wishing to avoid a contest in this time of mourning and desolation and not being desirous for one moment to stand between the stricken public and full Government compensation, we decided to withdraw from the field, leaving the constituency to be represented by the two Union candidates and in a position to receive every possible favour which Government representation is fondly believed to provide. Halifax is now a purely Government constituency, and it is incumbent upon that Government to do the just and generous thing for Halifax, and to do it quickly.²⁴

Altogether, this was a sulky and graceless exit from the contest, and Blackadder's near slanderous letter casts doubts upon the purity of his own motives in withdrawing from the campaign.

* * *

As soon as election day was over, the Nova Scotian Liberal Party moved quickly to heal the rifts created within its ranks by the upheaval. E.H. Armstrong, Minister of Public Works and Mines in the provincial government, was one of those who dedicated himself to this healing task. Although his leader, G.H. Murray, was ostensibly a Unionist, Armstrong seems to have directed

²⁴ Acadian Recorder, 23 Jan. 1918. PANS.

his letters of congratulations after the election exclusively to Liberal victors with small majorities: Logan, MacKay, Carroll, and Kyte. To these men, he expressed hope that "no subsequent turn of events will be made use of to deprive you of a victory which I am sure you have deservedly won."²⁵ To Liberal-Unionist E.K. Spinney, on the other hand, in Armstrong's own provincial constituency of Yarmouth, Armstrong preached party loyalty and Union perfidy in an attempt to bring Spinney back into the Liberal fold:

My great difficulty in Yarmouth was not so much that I had any doubt about the merits of a National Government as to know best how to meet a division within our own ranks in the Constituency. . . . It was very distasteful to a great many Liberals all over the County with whom I discussed the situation, to be eye-witnesses of the manoeuvring that was going on, and that had not anything in the nature of Union at its back. . . . The result of the vote in Nova Scotia shows very clearly the attitude of the Liberals of this province toward the so-called "Union".²⁶

Spinney was not, however, to be persuaded: he wrote back to Armstrong declaring that he did not agree with Armstrong's analysis, and had been, since the beginning,

²⁵Armstrong to Logan, 19 Dec. 1917. AP, vol. XIX, PANS.

²⁶Armstrong to Spinney, 26 Dec. 1917. AP, vol. XIX, PANS.

a staunch believer in Union Government.²⁷ Armstrong thereupon moved to placate Spinney's opponent, J.W. Comeau, in order to preserve party unity at the provincial level: apparently little could be done to persuade some Liberals in Yarmouth that Union was undesirable federally. Armstrong therefore emphasized to a party worker in the constituency who had relations with Comeau that Union, after all, was primarily a federal issue, and

I know of no good reason why if some of our friends, leaders or otherwise, thought best to favour the War policy of Borden et al., they should not in provincial matters support Murray on policies that have nothing to do with the issues that confronted us during the Federal election.²⁸

Armstrong thereupon offered to recommend Comeau as a Liberal candidate for a vacant seat in the provincial legislature and asked if Yarmouth Liberals would support him.²⁹

Other Liberals were apparently of the same mind as Armstrong regarding party unity. Seemingly wide rifts were easily bridged. Laurier had reportedly suffered

²⁷Spinney to Armstrong, 28 Dec. 1917. AP, vol. XIX, PANS.

²⁸Armstrong to A.F. Hogan, 23 Jan. 1918. AP, vol. XX, PANS.

²⁹Ibid.

bitter anguish as a consequence of the 'irrevocable' break with his principal lieutenants in Nova Scotia, Murray and Fielding, at the time of the formation of Union Government.³⁰ Yet in late February 1918, Laurier wrote to E.M. Macdonald from Ottawa that

I saw a good deal of Murray when he was here. He called on me at my office, and we had a long chat. The following day we had him at dinner with Mrs. Murray and Mr. and Mrs. Fielding. The conversation between Murray, Fielding and myself was of a general character, not going into any particular questions; but I had a heart-to-heart talk with Murray. All that I can say here is that he does not seem happy with the present situation.³¹

In all probability, much of Murray's unhappiness with the "present situation" in February 1918 derived from early reports coming in on the progress of the military vote: various press reports suggested that the vote was a large one and that between 88 and 92 percent of the vote had been cast for Union Government.³² And when the results of the military vote were officially

³⁰ See H.S. Ferns and B. Ostrey, The Age of Mackenzie King: The Rise of the Leader (London, 1955), p. 230, for the biblical cast of Laurier's reaction to Fielding's defection. And Murray's acceptance of Union, Laurier had told a friend, "would be the worst blow of all." Laurier to McKenzie, 13 Oct. 1917. LP, reel 178, PAC.

³¹ Laurier to Macdonald, 28 Feb. 1918. LP, reel 184, PAC.

³² Morning Chronicle, 26, 28 Feb. 1918. PANS.

revealed a few days later, the worst fears of Murray and other Nova Scotian Liberals were realized: five 'straight' Liberal candidates in the province had their December victories taken away from them, giving victory to the Unionists in the province, twelve members to four.³³

It was tempting for disappointed and angry Liberals to discern a well-organized Union plot to manipulate the military vote to the advantage of Union candidates.³⁴ They were encouraged in this view by the rumors of government manipulation of soldiers' votes which had begun to circulate in December, shortly after election day.³⁵ Moreover, there was direct evidence of such manipulation readily available (some of which related to Nova Scotia), and it had been collected and compiled by W.T.R. Preston, Laurier's chief lieutenant overseas during the election.³⁶ Liberal charges of election fraud were therefore aired in parliament in May 1918 by Arthur P. Copp, Liberal M.P. for Westmorland, New Brunswick. Copp declared he was convinced by soldiers' letters and other evidence that

³³See Table One.

³⁴See Armstrong to Burrill, 21 Feb. 1918. AP, vol. XX, PANS.

³⁵Halifax Herald, 31 Jan. 1918. PANS.

³⁶See W.T.R. Preston, My Generation of Politics and Politicians (Toronto, 1927), pp. 364-374.

"frauds, irregularities and election crimes had been committed" regarding soldiers' votes, and that "a conspiracy existed in connection with the allocation of those votes with the object of destroying the effect of the elections that were being held."³⁷ Copp produced a long list of specific charges in support of his contention, and stated that this "fraudulent conspiracy was particularly operative" in certain electoral districts, including, in Nova Scotia, Cape Breton North-Victoria, Cape Breton South-Richmond, Cumberland, Digby-Annapolis, and Pictou.³⁸ He moved for an investigation of his charges.³⁹ Secretary of State Martin Burrell, speaking for the government, rejected the charges, pointing out that most of them related to the polling of soldiers in England and originated with that most partisan of Liberals, W.T.R. Preston, "whose history in connection with election work is well known."⁴⁰ Burrell further declared that "the soldiers were so overwhelmingly in favour of conscription that the matters my hon. friend refers to are a mere bagatelle and infinitesimal grain of sand, so far as

³⁷House of Commons Debates 1918, II, 2402.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid., II, 2436.

they affect the general results of the mandate of the people as expressed in the last election."⁴¹ The government chose to treat Copp's motion for an investigation as a motion of want of confidence, and won on the ensuing division.⁴²

Now, sufficient evidence exists in connection with the election, as far as Nova Scotia is concerned, to make possible an evaluation of the Liberal charges of a Union 'conspiracy' to manipulate the service vote. Indeed, if this charge is correct, one would expect to find this substantiated in Nova Scotia, with its fierce party rivalries and long history of election bribery. As we shall see, however, the Liberals (as far as Nova Scotia was concerned at any rate) exaggerated the extent of Union duplicity.

The first category of charges to be examined concerns fraudulent allocation of military votes during the balloting itself to ridings in which the voters in question had not resided before enlistment. Under the provisions of the Military Voters Act, soldiers who did not designate themselves as residents of a particular riding could assign their votes to whichever riding they

⁴¹House of Commons Debates 1918, II, 2445.

⁴²Ibid., II, 2475-76.

chose: Union campaign organizers were in a position to use government influence in military circles to influence this choice, and weak Union candidates could therefore expect help from this quarter.⁴³ Hence this telegram from E.N. Rhodes in Cumberland to Union election headquarters in England: "Try to arrange three hundred undesignated votes for Cumberland. Urgently needed."⁴⁴

There was, however, a certain lack of system in the distribution of the undesignated votes overseas, which argues against a coordinated conspiracy. Rhodes' cabled plea quoted above appeared not to have reached all those concerned with arranging this distribution: a Union organizer overseas wrote to Rhodes in early 1918, declaring that he had not known that the contest might be close in Cumberland County, otherwise

I would have made assurance doubly sure by lining up a number of units to turn the loose i.e. non-resident vote in to you. I did not think Logan had a ghost of a show. Nor was Cumberland given to me as one of the constituencies needing help. The only ones wired to me by McInnis [Hector McInnis of Halifax, a law partner of Borden's] were Pictou, Hants, Lunenburg, and Digby-Annapolis. The inference, of course, was that all the other seats were sure or hopeless. I knew, however, that the contest would be close in Cape Breton South and Richmond, and before

⁴³Canadian Annual Review 1917, p. 635.

⁴⁴Rhodes to Major Harold Daley, 11 Dec. 1917. RP, vol. XIA, PANS.

getting any definite word, I lined up a number of units to turn their loose votes in to that constituency and I think the chances are pretty good for upsetting the adverse vote there, although it is quite large for the comparatively small overseas vote to wipe out.⁴⁵

The question here, clearly, is whether such electoral activity overseas was fraudulent, or merely unethical -- whether the Unionists were justified in taking advantage of superior government resources and influence with the military, and of the regulations they themselves had written into the Military Voters Act.

There is, on the other hand, evidence of direct and fraudulent manipulation of the service vote in this way in Nova Scotia which went beyond the mere exercise of superior government power to influence the military voters. Again the evidence comes from Cumberland County. A letter to the Amherst Daily News declared that bodies of soldiers were brought into the province to vote for Union, and immediately shipped out again. Many of these soldiers, claimed the letter writers (one of whom was a Liberal scrutineer) had never lived in Canada, but had been recruited in the United States, and in one such body of soldiers, voting in Cumberland

⁴⁵Joseph Hayes to Rhodes, 7 Feb. 1918. RP, vol. XII, PANS.

numbers openly stated in the booth . . . that they were voting for Union Government and were brought here for that purpose because this was the weakest constituency.⁴⁶

Whether such evidence should be accepted as genuine depends upon the analyst's willingness to accept the testimony of admittedly partisan witnesses.

The second category of Liberal charges concerns claims that substantial numbers of soldiers' votes were 'transferred' from riding to riding during the counting of the ballots to assure the election of Union candidates.⁴⁷ There is certainly some evidence from Nova Scotia that this was contemplated by the Unionists, as this letter from J.C. Douglas (one of the two Union candidates from Cape Breton South-Richmond) to E.N. Rhodes shows:

By this time doubtless you may be getting a line on the count of the military vote as far as Canada is concerned, and perhaps even the Overseas. I am interested to know how you are getting along, and also how the other N.S. seats are being affected by the count. We have a number but I do not for the time being recall it, but suppose you use 333 for this purpose and let me have privately anything you

⁴⁶James A. Hanway and Clarence E. Casey to Amherst Daily News, reprinted in Eastern Chronicle, 25 Dec. 1917. PANS. For a similar charge see W.H.R. Preston, Generation, p. 368.

⁴⁷Skelton, Laurier, II, 542. Eastern Chronicle, 5 Feb. 1918. PANS.

can get, as soon as you know it. . . . You might be good enough to write or wire me as soon as you can.⁴⁸

Yet Rhodes' answering letter also shows that the Union Government must have felt confident enough by this time of the result of the military vote to make the illegal transfer of votes unnecessary. Rhodes did not mention Douglas' request, but merely assured Douglas that he and his fellow candidate in Cape Breton South-Richmond could count on being elected because of the large percentage of soldiers' votes cast for Unionists.⁴⁹

So much for the direct evidence of the transferral of votes in Nova Scotia. It is certainly skimpy enough. But what of indirect evidence? Should not extensive fraud -- if it existed -- have shown up in the election returns?⁵⁰ Should not Union candidates who had won on December 17 have received substantially fewer soldiers' votes than losing candidates, since they had no need of them to win?

Unfortunately, such is not the case. William Duff in Lunenburg, for example, might have been defeated if

⁴⁸Douglas to Rhodes, 23 Jan. 1918. RP, vol. XII, PANS.

⁴⁹Rhodes to Douglas, 30 Jan. 1918. RP, vol. XII, PANS.

⁵⁰See Table Three, at end of this chapter.

his opponent had received approximately 900 more soldiers' votes, whereas the Union candidates who had already won on December 17 -- Spinney, Borden and Davidson -- received between them over 1,700 pro-Union soldiers' votes which they did not require to win. Moreover, other Union candidates, such as E.W. Rhodes, received substantially more pro-Union soldiers' votes than they required to overturn the civilian vote -- in Rhodes' case over 1,100 votes. It seems, indeed, that had conspiratorily minded Unionists so desired, they might have overturned every seat taken by a Liberal on December 17, so large was the number of pro-Union soldiers' votes at their disposal.⁵¹

It might, however, be argued by those Liberals supporting the conspiracy theory that this tactic would have been too obvious, too lacking in subtlety, and that the foregoing evidence does not vitiate the argument that some Liberals were defeated by the reallocation of soldiers' votes. This argument falls to the ground on two counts. First, only Liberal candidates with small majorities on the civilian vote, the very candidates who stood the best chance of being defeated by the military vote, were so defeated. And second, if a conspiracy had

⁵¹The over-all Liberal majority on the civilian vote was 5,832; the Union majority on the military vote was 9,230.

existed, it should have logically been directed at defeating the strongest, most anti-Union candidates, candidates such as D.D. McKenzie, who had a national reputation and could be counted upon to be highly effective on the Liberal benches in the future parliament. There is no evidence that this tactic was used. The number of service votes going to McKenzie's riding (1,016) for example, was not substantially greater than the number of such votes going to the riding of Liberal L.J. Lovett (925) -- who had not previously run in a federal constituency and who had already lost on the civilian vote. Further, the percentage of pro-Union votes in the total of service votes going to McKenzie's riding was 83%, whereas in Lovett's riding, 87% of the service votes were pro-Union.

From this indirect evidence, then, it appears that any Union conspiracy to transfer votes illegally (in Nova Scotia at any rate) existed only in the minds of disgruntled Liberals, and that much of the illegal or unethical activity which was undertaken by Unionists was directed towards mobilizing the servicemen at home and overseas to vote Union in the first place. And even here, the task may not have been too difficult:

There was only one issue for the soldier in that election [1917] and the result was almost twelve to one in favour of conscription. Anyone who has spoken to veterans of the First World War could hardly doubt their feelings on the subject.⁵²

And even here, the direction of this pro-Union service vote to the specific constituencies was conducted on a hit or miss basis, which seems to have depended as much on the apprehensions, influence or dislikes of Conservative Unionist politicians as upon any accurate appraisal of need. E.N. Rhodes' worried personal plea to Union headquarters in England appears to have borne fruit: 1,546 service votes were assigned to his riding, whereas he ultimately needed only 83 pro-Union service votes to win; these extra votes of Rhodes', cast instead in Lunenburg, might have narrowly defeated William Duff, the successful Liberal candidate in that riding. Further, the Cape Breton riding of D.D. McKenzie, the prominent anti-Union Liberal, received 1,106 military votes -- a considerable number, but quite insufficient to defeat him, whereas neighbouring Inverness, the riding of the less prominent Liberal A.W. Chisholm, received only 353 service votes. And finally, Sir Robert Borden, in Kings, obtained a highly satisfactory majority of 908 civilian votes, but

⁵²Willms, "Conscription . . .," p. 348. As Liberal J.H. Sinclair had said in late 1916 (see Chapter I above), "Every one of them, as soon as they enlist, becomes a conscriptionist." LP, reel 174, PAC.

also obtained 623 wholly unnecessary service votes as testimony to his status as Prime Minister.

To conclude then, there is strong evidence that the service vote was 'manipulated' by the Union Government, but evidence, as well, that this manipulation occurred almost entirely during the polling of the service votes, and was probably made possible by the greater ability of the government to mobilize service opinion in its favor, and by the cooperation of sympathetic officer personnel.⁵³ The government's labors in this regard, moreover, were probably made easier by a genuine sympathy of the average serviceman for the government's pro-conscription policy. The contention that the service vote was manipulated after the votes were polled is, on the other hand, much more difficult to support, and runs counter to much of the evidence. It is significant, in this context, perhaps, that the charges of "conspiracy" were presented in the House by a Maritime Liberal M.P., since it was in this part of Canada that the Liberal Party had made its best showing in the civilian vote: Liberal resentment against the military vote was bound to be greater in the Maritimes, as would be the temptation to regard it as further evidence of government corruption.

⁵³W.T.R. Preston, cited in the Canadian Annual Review, 1917, p. 635.

Senator 'Chubby' Power, a prominent Liberal politician who began his political career during the First World War, and opposed conscription in the Second, is in agreement with much that has been said above regarding election frauds in 1917.

I do not think that any impartial student of history would give any verdict other than that very extensive frauds were practised. However, he would also come to the conclusion that these frauds were neither systematic nor effectively organized, and that, as far as the military voters were concerned, the tide of sentiment was running so strongly for what they really believed to be the patriotic cause that it is difficult to attach much condemnation to the acts of frauds that were undoubtedly committed.⁵⁴

* * *

If, as the evidence suggests, grass-roots support for the traditional party system remained strong in 1917, one would expect that this would be reflected in the final results, and that, as a consequence, these results would show a reassertion of traditional patterns of voting. This was in fact the case in 1917. Nova Scotians, of both parties, it seems, tended to agree with the Liberal contention that Union Government was essentially Conservative in orientation.

To begin with, Union Government's performance in the province as a whole on the civilian vote in 1917 closely

⁵⁴Power, Party Politician, p. 61.

matched Conservative performance in the previous five federal elections: in 1917, Union Government elected 25% of its candidates on the civilian vote; between 1896 and 1911, the Conservative Party elected 26% of its candidates.⁵⁵ But this pattern of voting regularity becomes even more apparent if the results are examined constituency by constituency and if the military vote is taken into account.⁵⁶ First, five ridings had shown a pattern of voting Liberal between 1896 and 1911;⁵⁷ all five returned Liberals on the civilian vote in 1917. Furthermore, three of these ridings had been more doubtfully Liberal in the long run, since 1867, and of these three in 1917, the margin of Liberal victory was small

⁵⁵Data from Canadian Parliamentary Guide, 1918. Ridings in which acclamations took place in 1917 were not considered in this analysis. Federal elections before 1896 were not considered here either because the federal election of 1896 seems to have represented a watershed in Nova Scotian federal politics: in the seven federal elections before 1896, going back to 1867, the two parties broke almost even on seats won -- Liberals 49%, Conservatives 51%. It is possible that many Nova Scotians before 1896 were retained for the Conservative Party by the influence of Sir Charles Tupper and the power of Conservative patronage. Between 1911 and 1917 there is evidence that the federal Conservatives failed to re-assert themselves in the province by adequate use of federal patronage. On this latter point, see Alex McGregor to John Bain (confidential), 15 Dec. 1920. MP, series 2, vol. 41, file 155, PAC.

⁵⁶See Table Four, at end of this chapter. Data from Parliamentary Guide, 1918.

⁵⁷Group One, Table Four.

enough in two for them to be decided in favor of Unionists by the military vote.⁵⁸ Second, four ridings could be considered to be of more doubtful loyalty to either party traditionally, but had returned more Liberal than Conservative candidates between 1896 and 1911.⁵⁹ Three of these ridings returned Liberals on the civilian vote in 1917, and the one which did not had shown a long-run tendency (since 1867) to return a substantial number of Conservatives. In addition, the two ridings in this group which went from Liberal to Union as a result of the military vote (because of small Liberal majorities) had shown a strong tendency to vote Conservative in the long run as well. Third, only two ridings reversed their traditional voting pattern:⁶⁰ both had been Liberal strongholds since 1867, but went Union in 1917. The first, however, was Kings County, won by her famous native son, Sir Robert Borden, and the second was Yarmouth, won by the

⁵⁸The third of these ridings was Cape Breton North-Victoria. Here an exceptionally able Liberal candidate, D.D. McKenzie, had been able to impress his own personality upon the electorate, and had been the successful Liberal candidate in every federal election since 1904. See Macdonald, Recollections, p. 45. After his appointment to the bench in 1923, the constituency soon returned to Conservative hands.

⁵⁹Group Two, Table Four.

⁶⁰Group Three, Table Four.

Liberal-Unionist E.K. Spinney with the support of much of both Liberal and Conservative constituency associations.

Given this pattern of party regularity in Nova Scotia, what then was the importance of the specific issues in the 1917 election in this province? The answer is largely in terms of party strategy. The major issue of the election, conscription, was kept continually before the electorate by the Unionists: if the Liberals had mishandled it -- if they had opposed it, let us say -- or failed to recognize its central importance to the Union campaign, they might well have lost badly in a Nova Scotia which favored 'Win-the-War'; and if the Unionists had not promised exemptions for military service to farmers and fishermen in rural Nova Scotia, they might have seen conscription there translated into Liberal votes. That the conscription issue was not placed before the electorate in terms of a clear alternative, yes or no, in much of Nova Scotia therefore, does not indicate that the issue was unimportant, but that neither party was willing to commit political suicide to present Nova Scotians with this clear alternative. The issue was so potentially dangerous to the Liberals in Nova Scotia, in fact, that they were prepared, if necessary, to reject their revered leader Laurier's own personal policy on the matter. It is perhaps significant, in this context, that Nova Scotian

Liberals made few if any demands on Laurier to visit the province,⁶¹ and his name was infrequently invoked during the Liberal campaign in the province. The conscription issue, thus, was not fought out on the hustings (although it hung over all like an ominous cloud), but between the spring and fall of 1917 within party ranks, and within the minds and hearts of individual party members. The conscription issue was, in this way, crucial in the election: the wrong decision on the issue would have been disastrous for either party. And that the right decisions were made does not diminish the issue's importance for both parties: that Liberals especially recognized this importance is shown by the declaration by Liberal candidates of their support for the Military Service Act (if obliquely at times) in much of Nova Scotia or, of course, their rejection of it in areas where it was likely to be unpopular.⁶²

Yet conscription could be made to reflect adversely on the Liberal Party in particular in much of Nova Scotia because of the stand of Laurier on the issue. For this reason, the poor record of the former Borden

⁶¹The writer has failed to discover any such demands in the Laurier correspondence.

⁶²As we have seen, the 'correct' use of the Conscription issue in Richmond seems to have reinforced the traditional tendency to vote Liberal.

régime was a godsend (and for this reason, Liberals were so anxious to deny that Union was a genuine amalgamation of both parties, but was merely Conservatism in disguise). Not only could it be used to offset the ill effects ^{YU}accruing from the 'disloyal' utterances of the Quebec Liberals which were so well reported in the Unionist press, but it could reduce the campaign to comprehensible and hence manageable proportions: an old-fashioned Grit-Tory contest over the government's record, in which Liberals might well have the edge.

Both Nova Scotian parties had long tended to smooth over issues, and to dispense with "genuine" philosophies permitting "the meaningful cleavage of the electorate along party lines."⁶³ Their handling of the 'meaningful' issue of conscription in 1917 was therefore quite in keeping with past behavior. But before one becomes too critical of this expedient approach to politics, one should recall the consequences elsewhere in Canada, in terms of French-English relations, of making this 'meaningful' issue the basis of the national party struggle.⁶⁴

⁶³Beck, Government, p. 156.

⁶⁴See Herbert Agar, The Price of Union (Boston, 1950), pp. 688-691.

TABLE ONE
ELECTION RESULTS, NOVA SCOTIA, 1917

			Civilian	Military	Total
Antigonish- Guysborough	J X.H. Sinclair	L	3,862	82	3,944
	J.A. Wells	U	2,171	335	2,506
Cape Breton North- Victoria	D.D. McKenzie	L	4,304	173	4,477
	J. McCormick	U	2,806	843	3,649
Cape Breton South- Richmond	J.C. Douglas	U	6,150	1,923	8,073
	R.H. Butts	U	5,771	1,874	7,645
	W.F. Carroll	L	6,421	269	6,690
	G.W. Kyte	L	6,473	265	6,738
	R. Baxter	Lab.	3,644	23	3,667
	J. Gillis	Lab.	3,593	22	3,615
Cumberland	E.N. Rhodes	U	5,243	1,412	6,655
	H.J. Logan	L	5,325	134	5,459
Colchester	F.B. McCurdy	U		Acclamation	
Digby- Annapolis	A.L. Davidson	U	3,791	805	4,596
	L.J. Lovett	L	3,657	120	3,777
Halifax	A.K. Maclean	U		Acclamation	
	P.F. Martin	U		Acclamation	
Hants	H.B. Tremain	U	2,475	514	2,989
	L.H. Martell	L	2,641	55	2,696

TABLE ONE--Continued

			Civilian	Military	Total
Inverness	A.W. Chisholm	L	3,473	71	3,544
	T. Gallant	U	1,976	282	2,258
Kings	R.L. Borden	U	3,375	566	3,941
	J. Sealy	L	2,467	57	2,524
Lunenburg	W. Duff	L	4,629	70	4,699
	J.W. Margeson	U	3,324	537	3,861
Pictou	A. McGregor	U	5,772	1,028	6,800
	R.H. MacKay	L	5,916	127	6,043
Queens- Shelburne	W.S. Fielding	U?		Acclamation	
Yarmouth	E.K. Spinney	U	3,922	541	4,463
	J.W. Comeau	L	3,440	7	3,447

TABLE TWO

VOTING IN CAPE BRETON SOUTH-RICHMOND

Candidates	Richmond County		Cape Breton South		Total Overall	
Liberal	4,020	69%	8,874	34%	12,894	40%
Union	1,703	29%	10,207	39%	11,910	37%
Labor	98	2%	7,139	27%	7,237	23%
Total Vote	5,821	18%	26,220	82%	32,041	100%

TABLE THREE
THE MILITARY VOTE

Riding	Liberal Candidate	Union Candidate	Civilian Liberal Majority	Military Vote	
				Total	% Union
Antigonish-Guys.	J.H. Sinclair	W.A. Wells	1,961	417	80.3
Cape Breton N.-Vic.	D.D. McKenzie	J. McCormick	1,498	1,016	83.0
Inverness	A.W. Chisholm	T. Gallant	1,497	353	80.0
Lunenburg	W. Duff	J.W. Margeson	1,305	607	88.5
Cape Breton S.-Rich. *	W.F. Carrol G.W. Kyte	J.C. Douglas R.H. Butts	243	1,094	86.8
Hants	L.H. Martell	H.B. Tremain	166	669	81.5
Pictou	R.H. MacKay	A. McGregor	144	1,155	88.9
Cumberland	H.J. Logan	E.N. Rhodes	82	1,546	91.3
Digby-Ann.	L.J. Lovett	A.L. Davidson	- 134	925	87.0
Yarmouth	J.W. Comeau	E.K. Spinney	- 482	548	98.7
Kings	J. Sealy	R.L. Borden	- 908	623	90.8
TOTAL				10,660	87.8

* Calculated Average

TABLE FOUR

ELECTION BEHAVIOR, 1867 - 1911, IN RIDINGS CONTESTED IN 1917

Group	Riding	<u>LIBERAL</u>				<u>CONSERVATIVE</u>				Doubtful Since 1896	Doubtful Since 1867	Liberal on Civilian Vote	Reversed by Military Vote
		Strong Since 1896	Strong Since 1867	Weak Since 1896	Weak Since 1867	Strong Since 1896	Strong Since 1867	Weak Since 1896	Weak Since 1867				
	Antigonish- Guysborough	X	X									X	
	Cape Breton N.-Victoria	X			X							X	
1	Cape Breton S.-Richmond	X			X							X	X
	Hants	X			X							X	X
	Inverness	X	X									X	
	<hr/> Cumberland			X		X						X	X
2	Digby- Annapolis			X		X							
	Lunenburg						X			X		X	
	Pictou			X		X						X	X
	<hr/> Yarmouth	X	X										
3	Kings	X	X										

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Tradition, Insularity, and Nova Scotian Politics

At the time of its formation, Union Government had an imposing appearance in Nova Scotia, including nearly all of the leading Conservatives in the province and some of the most notable Liberals. Yet within days the coalition began to crumble, and ultimately many Union candidates in the province were forced to base their hopes for election upon the votes of service men. Why did Union Government fail to meet the expectations of its supporters in Nova Scotia? The foregoing pages have proposed a few reasons; these will be summarized here, along with some further and more general suggestions based in part upon an analysis of subsequent events.

* * *

There were two factors involved in the failure of Union Government in Nova Scotia. The first of these was the strong attachment of the majority of Nova Scotians to the traditional party system. Thus the announcement of the formation of Union Government in October, 1917, and of the support for it by most of the province's leading

Conservatives and some of the most prominent Liberals caused widespread shock and an almost immediate reaction against Union's instigators and supporters: Liberals such as Murray, Fielding and A.W. Chisholm were forced by those under them to hedge on their support of Union or even reject Union entirely; and Conservative leaders discovered that Union had cost them the support of former staunch followers.

This Nova Scotian reaction against Union reached full force during the Liberal and Conservative nominating conventions: attempts by Unionists to bring about the nomination of 'fusion' candidates failed in all but one of Nova Scotia's ridings. As a consequence, Union Government in Nova Scotia, which had contained more Conservatives than Liberals in any case, began to look (to the average voter) more and more like the old Conservative Party with a new name. It was as though the traditional party system had been re-established, in most essential details, after a short interregnum. It thus appeared that the election campaign would be fought as earlier ones had -- with some new battle cries, perhaps, but the same familiar adversaries.

"Conscription!" was the principal new battle cry in the election campaign of 1917, and had been echoing in the ears of the people of Nova Scotia and Canada since May 18

of that year. Union Government had been formed, nationally, under the aegis of the Conservative federal government to protect and maintain the government's conscription policy, and Unionists across the Dominion ran on an election platform whose main plank was compulsory military service. Conscription was therefore the principal ideological force uniting Liberals and Conservatives in the new political alignment in much of English-speaking Canada; it therefore accounted for much of the national success of Union Government.

The failure of conscription to perform this national role in Nova Scotia is the second factor involved in Union Government's failure to take root in the province in 1917. Few constituency associations, whether Liberal or Conservative, were sufficiently impressed by the conscription issue to wish to eliminate or redraw party lines and, as a consequence, competing candidates were nominated in most ridings. And, during the election itself, both parties devised strategies which, acting in combination with each other, all but eliminated conscription as an effective campaign issue in the greater part of the province: Liberals were anti-conscriptionists everywhere that conscription was unpopular, but this tactic was countered by Unionists (probably successfully) in the principal regions of anti-conscription sentiment,

rural areas, by promises of substantial exemptions to farmers and fishermen; and on the other hand, in regions where conscription was popular, candidates of both parties were conscriptionists. Both parties, therefore, campaigned to a considerable extent on similar war-time platforms, i.e. 'Win-the-War': by conscription if necessary (Liberal); or by the conscription that was necessary (Union). The campaign thus developed into a straight party fight involving the government's record in all but those regions where anti-conscription sentiment was not successfully offset by Union promises of exemptions (the Acadian settlements in Yarmouth-Clare in Richmond County, and the working-class areas of Cape Breton) -- and these regions were in any case either already pro-Liberal (Acadians), or partially divided in their opposition to conscription (working men in Cape Breton). And since neither party had been damaged extensively by the formation of Union Government at the constituency association level, each was able to present its case to the electors in almost as effective a manner as it had in the past. Liberal success on the civilian vote, then, owed much to the Liberal Party's traditionally stronger organization at the county level (and a

consequent ability to attract the 'floating vote'),¹ and was not, to any great extent, a manifestation of anti-conscription sentiment in the province.

* * *

In the immediate post-war period, the Liberal Party in Nova Scotia demonstrated that its victory on the civilian vote in 1917 had not been accidental. It won both the provincial election of 1920 and the federal election of 1921. The war, and the events of 1917 left their marks on the Liberals -- but primarily at the provincial level: whereas the federal Liberals swept the province in 1921, taking all sixteen seats, the 1920 provincial election saw a significant drop in the popularity of the Liberal Murray régime. This provincial loss of popularity in the early twenties owed much to a Liberal decline which had begun before the war, in 1901, and reflected the gradual aging of the Liberal government of Nova Scotia which had held office without interruption since 1882.² But the provincial decline in 1920 also derived, in part, directly from the war and the events of 1917. The war-time strains had produced increasing discontent with the traditional party system among farmers

¹Beck, Government, pp. 158, 161.

²Ibid.

and working men:³ the 1917 election itself gave inspiration and encouragement to those wishing to form a provincial labor party; and conscription increased discontent among rural elements which, although kept in check by Union Government during the election itself by promises of exemptions, burst into the open after 1918 when these exemptions were suddenly withdrawn. This third party activity, therefore, represented a protest directed primarily at the federal government but, at the same time, attracted the support of some Nova Scotian Liberals as well, cutting into the support of the Murray régime.⁴

But the Nova Scotian Liberal Party weathered the strains of the war-time election and immediate post-war discontent better than did the Conservatives in the province: the federal victory of 1917 proved a Pyrrhic one for the Conservative Party in Nova Scotia. The Union campaign organization, which had been constructed on an ad hoc basis, gradually disintegrated leaving the provincial Conservatives with a disorganized party apparatus which was ill-equipped to contest either the provincial election of 1920 or the federal election of 1921.⁵

³See Louis A. Wood, A History of Farmers' Movements in Canada (Toronto, 1924), pp. 302-303.

⁴Ibid., pp. 301-303.

⁵Graham, Meighen, II, 29.

This disorganization, plus rural and working-class discontent, produced the stunning Conservative defeats in 1920 and 1921.

Yet the Nova Scotian Conservative Party survived these crushing defeats, and went on to re-build and re-organize. Moreover, it had discovered an issue with strong local appeal, 'Maritime Rights', and went on to win both the federal and provincial elections of 1925, crushing, in the process, an aging Liberal Party which was unable to cope with current social and economic difficulties.⁶ This Conservative success proved short-lived: "the voters of Nova Scotia elect Conservative governments by spasms and these spasms are of short duration. . . ."⁷ Nonetheless this success proved first, that local issues, such as 'Maritime Rights', could arouse the voters of Nova Scotia in a way that national issues such as conscription could not, and second, that a degree of normality had returned to Nova Scotian politics after the upheavals of the war years and after -- third parties had dwindled into insignificance, and Grits were opposing Tories as of yore, with few hints of the coalition struggle of 1917.

⁶G.A. Rawlyk, "Nova Scotia Regional Protest, 1867-1967," Queen's Quarterly, LXXV (1968), 120.

⁷Beck, Government, p. 157.

The shape of war-time and post-war politics in Nova Scotia thus took the form of a mosaic containing both local and national elements, but in which local elements dominated. The rise of farmer and labor third parties was a nation-wide phenomenon which included Nova Scotia, and a degree of cooperation was maintained between these parties in Nova Scotia and their counterparts in other provinces;⁸ moreover the revival of Nova Scotian Liberal fortunes at the federal level after the war was to be seen elsewhere in Canada as well. Yet a greater degree of continuity with the past, in the face of these developments, was maintained in Nova Scotia than in central Canada or the West: farmer and labor parties in Nova Scotia were unable to duplicate the successes of their brethren further west; and the sweeping Liberal victory in Nova Scotia in 1921 was a local phenomenon, duplicated outside of the Maritimes only in Quebec (and there for different reasons). One can only conclude that continuity with the past -- tradition -- was basic to the form which Nova Scotian politics took during the war years and after, and reflected a rather insular concern with local problems.

⁸Wood, History, p. 303; Beck, Government, p. 168.

Hence, the important national issues in 1917, conscription and coalition, failed to shake the traditional strength of party loyalty in the province. And hence, too, the mid-twenties saw the complete re-emergence of the traditional party structure, aided in part by a local issue, 'Maritime Rights'. Only for a brief period did party loyalty falter during this time, when the Farmer-Labor Party obtained 31% of the popular vote and eleven seats in the 1920 provincial election.⁹

It thus appears that the 1920 election was much more an anomaly in Nova Scotian politics than the 1917 federal election, the subject of this study. Yet, despite this, the 1917 election in Nova Scotia had some unusual features. It is true that the party structure retained a considerable resemblance to its normal form and that the traditional methods of party struggle were employed: the 'ins' promising to maintain government policy and to improve upon past performance; the 'outs' attacking the government's record and promising to do better if elected. Yet the unique, peculiarly war-time issue, conscription, did, nevertheless, twist and distort the party structure to a degree unknown in earlier years: the resulting Union movement, after all, did persuade some of the faithful of

⁹Beck, Government, p. 168.

both parties to desert their parties, if only temporarily in many cases; and conscription did contribute directly to the formation of ephemeral third parties, and to an increase of support for Liberals in some ridings. But the fact remains: the election and its issues did not lastingly change the structure of party politics in Nova Scotia; they merely provided a test for the traditional party structure -- a test which it survived with flying and only slightly tattered colors.

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