“There is considerable consternation”: Lunenburg’s Quiet Riot and Other Minority Responses to the 1917 Military Service Act in the Maritimes Provinces

by

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Abstract

Resistance to the imposition of the Military Service Act during the Great War took many forms in the seemingly compliant Maritime Provinces. Notable areas of resistance include the minority Acadian and African-Canadian populations of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, and somewhat surprisingly, in the minority-German township of Lunenburg Nova Scotia. Heavy-handed actions by the Dominion Police imposing conscription on this fishery-dependent town threatened to disrupt the deployment of the fleet to the Grand Banks, resulting in a 1918 confrontation. Still, they resisted: these generally mild Maritimers protested in spite of the very real potential economic consequences to the entire community. That is the legacy of this underexplored event in our historical narrative, and that is why the people of Lunenburg’s “quiet riot” and the subtle opposition shown by Maritime minority populations should be written back in to the history of resistance to the Conscription Act in the Maritime Provinces.
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For the smartest kids I know, Reeve and Annemarie Townes, who inspire me to be better.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ................................................................................................................ ii

Acknowledgements ............................................................................................... iii

Table of Contents ................................................................................................ iv

Introduction ........................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 1 ............................................................................................................. 6
  “A good deal of cohesion provided by language and religion”: A Brief Portrait of Lunenburg

Chapter 2 ............................................................................................................. 13
  “They must call up all the men necessary to keep the armies at full strength”: the Canadian Conscription Crisis of 1917-1918

Chapter 3 ............................................................................................................. 24
  “This will be a hot time I think”: Acadian Reactions to the Military Service Act

Chapter 4 ............................................................................................................. 30
  “A very considerable amount of feeling among our coloured citizens that they have not been treated fairly”: the Exclusion and Subsequent Resistance of Black Maritimers

Chapter 5 ............................................................................................................. 39
  “A spirit of unrest among the captains of the fleet”: Labour Tensions and the Particular Case of the Fishery

Chapter 6 ............................................................................................................. 50
  “Are these policemen to be allowed to terrorize peaceable citizens”: a Return to the Lunenburg Riot

Conclusion ......................................................................................................... 56

Primary Works Cited .......................................................................................... 60

Secondary Works Cited ....................................................................................... 61

Curriculum Vitae
Introduction

In the weeks after the Military Service Act became law in Canada during the Great War, Dominion Police representatives were sent across the country to shake out the legions of allegedly unpatriotic slackers who had, since 1914, declined to support Canada's efforts with their service. From coastal villages to family farms to the logging camps of the highlands, these deputized representatives of the Dominion Police scoured the country for likely shirkers, ferreting them out and pressing them into obligatory military service. It was uncharacteristic for a region as typically conservative as the Maritimes to respond with outright revolt to the policies of their government, yet in their own quiet and discreet way resistance to conscription and the actions of the Dominion Police were seen in a number of communities. Quite frankly, Maritimers' patience had long since grown thin with the demands placed on them by those in authority. Their sons and fathers were also needed at home, in some cases to ensure the bare minimum level of survival and avoidance of debt. Tensions between the needs of Canada's wartime government and the economic and political rights of individual Canadians are particularly evident in the context of minority groups. The Germans of Lunenburg, with whom this paper is primarily concerned, the Black Canadians of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and the French-speaking Acadians of Kent County all showed resistance to the imposition of conscription in their own ways, from begrudging compliance to outright revolt.
Let us set the scene: the week of June 15th, 1918, was a particularly exciting one in the small but bustling community of Lunenburg, Nova Scotia. In the manner of a typical Maritime fishing village, the people of Lunenburg were readying the schooner fleet for the start of the seasonal Grand Banks off-shore fishery, the town’s primary livelihood. The fishermen’s usual methodical preparations were interrupted by Dominion Police representatives sent from Halifax to reinforce the changes to the Military Service Act. Tensions were already high in Lunenburg, as they were in many Maritime communities, following the withdrawal of conscription exemptions. Agricultural workers, fishermen, day labourers—all were desperately needed at the front to shore up the continuing losses of the Canadian Expeditionary Force’s extraordinary casualties of 1917 and early 1918. Incidents of arbitrary police action in support of the Conscription Act were seen throughout Canada. For instance, in Dartmouth, the father of Hilda Lambert was detained by Dominion Police authorities determined to find all available men: “My father, who was in his late forties, was coming home from work when the military police approached him. They took him to the armouries to be conscripted into the army. He told them he had two sons fighting overseas while they stayed at home, sitting on their butts. After about two hours they decided to release them.”¹ This colourful recollection shows the breadth of the Dominion Police efforts; here, an employed man of over forty

with a family at home was nonetheless subjected to questioning under the full authority of the state. For rural communities, the timing of the policemen’s arrival could be disastrous. In Lunenburg, the policemen’s arrival interrupted the preparations for the season’s fishery on the Grand Banks only added to an already simmering local sense of indignation at the revocation of exemptions from obligatory service. It was a great inconvenience, a hardship, to both the ships’ captains and the ship’s owners to interrupt pre-sail routines by removing able-bodied crewmembers from the schooners at the last minute. Substitutes were not readily available, partly due to the general shortage in manpower created by high wartime employment and partly due to the nature of the skilled labour required in a crew member on an off-shore fishing vessel. A successful catch depended not just on the luck at sea but also on the quality of the crew available. Nevertheless, the Dominion Police pressed on in what was described by Lunenburg’s local weekly newspaper, the Progress-Enterprise, as “a particularly obnoxious manner”\(^2\) in their search for shirkers and delinquents amongst the various men preparing to set out for weeks offshore on the banks. Things rapidly came to a head when a Mr. Wagner, a crewmember of one of the fishing schooners tied up at the wharf, was pulled off his ship by the police and paraded as a prisoner through the town. Tensions ran high throughout the gathering crowd. Undoubtedly feeling vulnerable to the swelling emotions of the angry mob, a member of the Dominion Police drew his sidearm. This officer then threatened to shoot into the

\(^2\) Lunenburg Progress-Enterprise, 19 June 1918
crowd of assembled civilians if he was impeded from performing his duty, inflaming the tensions even further.

The stage was thus set for the Lunenburg ‘riot’ of 1918. Though the word ‘riot’ to describe a non-violent protest is strong language that may, to modern ears seem hyperbolic, that is how it was described at the time by the *Halifax Herald*, the provincial newspaper of record. It is worth noting that neither the local *Lunenburg Progress-Enterprise* nor the *Bridgewater Bulletin* use the word ‘riot’, so the lack of inflammatory language may be due to the community’s emphasis on civic compliance following the event. It was highly uncharacteristic of this quiet community to engage in active resistance to government authority. With this discrete act of resistance to the Conscription Act, the people of Lunenburg showed that their patience had grown thin with the sacrifices demanded of them by Canada’s wartime government.

This mostly-forgotten act of nonviolent community defiance must be explored and placed in the context of the reactions to the 1917 Conscription Act in Canada, particularly the reactions of the Maritime provinces. These reactions are understood as ranging from apathy to outright hostility. They are not acts of an organized, structured resistance; they are local, grassroots movements that show the frustration and anger that existed throughout Maritime communities. Resistance acts in Kent County amongst the Acadian population of New Brunswick will also provide some context for the events that unfolded on the 15th

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3 *Halifax Herald*, 18 June 1918.
of June in Lunenburg; contrary to traditional historical interpretations of the 1917 conscription crisis, Québec was not alone in resistance and civil disobedience. This examination of the issues facing Lunenburg in the Great War will attempt to discover what factors brought the town to the point of riot and will also examine why, given all the social tensions bearing on them, the citizenry of the town chose the surprising route of nonviolence.
"A good deal of cohesion provided by language and religion": A Brief Portrait of Lunenburg

Lunenburg is a small coastal town in Lunenburg County, Nova Scotia. Much of the town’s wealth prior to the fishing moratoria of the late twentieth-century came from its offshore fishery, most notably the cod and lobster fisheries. Its most famous contribution to Canadian popular culture is undoubtedly the construction and operation of the schooner Bluenose, which was immortalized on the Canadian 10-cent coin following racing success throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Lunenburg built the ships that were used to fish on the Grand Banks; schooners such as the Bluenose were an important part of that major local industry. Indeed, the fishery and its various subsidiary industries (including sail-making, ship and boat-building, rope-making, fish processing, and mercantile commerce) were vital to the town’s overall economic health, as in many small maritime coastal communities.

The town of Lunenburg was founded in 1753 by German-speaking immigrants. At a time when most English (Protestant) immigrants seemed to prefer the climates, both political and environmental, of the American colonies, they came as part of a “long-planned scheme to counterbalance the large Acadian (French-Catholic) population of Nova Scotia.” The prospective immigrants were lured by promotional handbills. These, circulated widely amongst Swiss and German Protestant townships, promised free land and paid passage to the “New World”. The establishment of a German community in an English colony was not
entirely smooth, and tensions flared as Lunenburg residents rose up in an armed insurrection in December of 1753. The British military swiftly restored order in the community, and within a few years, the patterns of peaceful fishing and farming were established by its residents. Like many communities in Lunenburg County, the newly-arrived German-speaking residents eventually abandoned farming and turned to shipbuilding and the fishery for employment.

With language instruction available through the Lutheran Protestant church in Lunenburg County communities, the German language and culture of residents remained intact. In fact, “there was a good deal of cohesion provided by [the maintenance of German] language and religion” in the area. Interestingly, it was not until the early twentieth century that the influence of German culture began to fade in these communities. It has been argued that the significant decline in the number of Germans in Nova Scotia between the 1911 and 1921 census reports represented this trend, possibly reflecting the Anglicization of the region’s residents and desire to abandon tradition. It could also, as has been suggested, reflect a cultural sense of shame and disgust following the prevalence of anti-German sentiment during the Great War. Whatever the underlying cause, the effect was to definitively sever the German cultural connection that

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6 Patterson, p. 137
7 Lehmann, p. 42
8 ibid.
had existed in Lunenburg since its origins. However, this separation did not occur until after the Great War; the community’s residents would still have described themselves as German during the time frame under discussion. Perhaps more importantly, the provincial authorities would have treated the community as a German one.

It would be erroneous, however, to assume that a German cultural background meant that Lunenburg County did not support the Canadian war effort. Lunenburg residents were forced to tread lightly due to their perceived Germanic roots and assumed sympathies. The difficulty of negotiating around the popular anti-German sentiment of the time was common to all communities with German roots in Canada during the Great War, and Lunenburg was no different. Residents coped with the implied allegations of pro-German sympathy by over-emphasizing their loyalty to the British crown. Bridgewater’s conservative weekly Bridgewater Bulletin, for instance, proclaimed their loyalty proudly in their masthead, saying, “We have no use for Huns or their sympathizers.”

There was local support for the military, including a Lunenburg regiment which merged with a unit from Annapolis to become the West Nova Scotia Regiment. The people of Lunenburg defended themselves against anti-German prejudice by arguing they were “loyal Hanoverians”, just like the British royal family. Lunenburg residents had long taken pride in their ancestry: at the outset of the immigration scheme, “the Germans came mostly from the electorate

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9 Bridgewater Bulletin, June 4 1918.
of Hanover, which at that time was under the English Crown”¹⁰. Still, in 1918, “rampant hostility to all things German” pervaded the Maritime Provinces.¹¹ This ethnic conflict undoubtedly informed the relationship between the citizens and the government agents sent to enforce the Military Service Act.

Lunenburg County had sent some of its sons overseas, but more were needed to meet the increasing demands of the fishery. The off-shore fishery was, then as now, no easy work; men on the fishing schooners in this time faced the dangers of blizzards, enveloping fog, and fields of drift ice on the open ocean.¹² By 1918 they also faced the possibility of being sunk by U-boats while fishing out on the open waters of the banks.¹³ The cruise of U-156 in early August of 1918 has been well-documented elsewhere, particularly by Marc Milner: “In the process of bombarding her way through a group of schooners on Le Have Bank southeast of Shelburne, N.S., she sank seven boats and sent dory loads of Canadian and American fishermen rowing towards the Nova Scotia coast.”¹⁴ These considerable

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¹² Progress-Enterprise, March 27 1918
¹³ There are several documented instances of encounters between members of the Lunenburg county fleet and German u-boats. Crews were permitted to board their dorays and row to land. For instance, the schooner C.M. Walters of Lunenburg encountered a submarine 65 miles from Canso, in 1918. The German sailors, when boarding the schooner to place explosives, claimed they were well acquainted with Lunenburg, and that they planned on sinking everything that was afloat, but that they were supposed to give the crews a chance to get in to land. Hardly a comfort in the North Atlantic. This is one of several anecdotes from an email interview with Ralph Getson, Curator of Education, Fisheries Museum of the Atlantic, Lunenburg, which fall, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this paper.
¹⁴ Marc Milner has previously discussed the U-boat threat in his overview of Canada’s naval history, Canada’s Navy, but this particular quote was taken from one of a series of short articles for Legion Magazine discussing Canada’s Naval History. “The U-Boat Summer of 1918: Navy, Part
dangers were resolutely faced to keep up with the necessary task of feeding the country.

Further, it is important to note that the off-shore fishery required a highly skilled labour force to meet the demands of the work. This was not a job that could easily be filled by a replacement worker plucked off the street. Crewing the fishing boats was a trade that could take a fisherman many years to master. Today, for instance, a commercial fishing crew will spend days on the open waters hauling their trawls: the days start very early, and the crews work well into the darkness to maximize their catch before returning home to port. A successful crew could (then as now) involve an entire family in the catch, the operation of the ship, and the preparation and sale of the fish for market. Should the market value of the catch be low, it can be a challenge to cover the crew’s operational costs in the limited time given by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to a given coastal fishery. This can lead to crews reconfiguring their equipment to participate in a second type of catch in a different season of the year, for instance lobster and scallops15. Since Confederation in 1867, these fisheries had been regulated by the Federal government; Royal Commissions had set rules on gear types, size limits, and seasons for dozens of fisheries.

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15 These insights into the current state of the off-shore fishery are provided by Karen Vickers McCavour, the “Lobster Lady” of Lorneville, New Brunswick, whose family owns and operates Whitetail Fisheries. Mrs. McCavour operates a Facebook group to educate the public about the life aboard a modern commercial fishing vessel, with photos and anecdotes.
In the early 20th century, fishing offshore was intensive labour. Grand Banks schooners of the Great War era relied on men to handle the heavy gear, including the sails, and on wind to move the ships at all. Once on the fishing grounds, the schooners’ smaller dories were manned by only two men, who would haul the catch from the nets into the dory until these were full or the day had ended.

It is important here to recall that the off-shore fishery required the crews to be on the ships for weeks at a time. These crews were also skilled in knots and rope work, as nets and fishing gear required constant maintenance. While repair work would certainly be done in the off-season on land, any broken equipment of this nature would also have to be mended quickly and skillfully whilst at sea to keep up with the catch. Finally, the operation of the vessel itself necessitated a minimum crew of skilled sailors. In general terms, navigation, sail setting, placing the sheets at the correct tension, and boat balance were skills developed by practice and the hard work of an experienced crew during the operation of a schooner. Each crew member had his role to play in the successful running of a ship, and none of the above skills would be easily transferable to a replacement worker. Moreover, fishermen risked death by drowning and exposure in the harsh North Atlantic waters. This work was not just difficult, it was dangerous.

Lunenburg was by no means alone in its economic dependence on the fishery. Digby County in Nova Scotia, Charlotte County in southern New Brunswick, and the Acadian peninsula in the north all had coastal communities
whose survival depended on the successful exploitation of this abundant natural resource. As Andrew Theobald, in his thorough study of Conscription in New Brunswick notes, the 1917 election in Charlotte County hinged on the votes of the fishermen scattered across various islands in the Passamaquoddy Bay, which indicates that this population's political support was courted\textsuperscript{16} – even if their contributions were underappreciated by those in authority.

By 1918 Lunenburg County residents were satisfied with their efforts to support the war effort. It is easy to see how these residents could have been sensitive to the implied charges of “slackness” and “Hun sympathy” from their English-descended neighbors due to their German background. This tension was perhaps exacerbated by the lack of any kind of official recognition of the uniquely skilled labour of fishermen, or an appreciation that this work, undertaken to keep Canada fed, was extraordinarily hazardous. Certainly, the ethnic and social tensions of June 1918 did not appear in Lunenburg out of the blue.

\textsuperscript{16} Andrew Theobald. \textit{The Bitter Harvest of War: New Brunswick and the Conscription Crisis of 1917}. Fredericton: Goose Lane/NBMHP, 2008, p.82
“They must call up all the men necessary to keep the armies at full strength”: the Canadian Conscription Crisis of 1917-1918

To further contextualize the tensions that simmered in Lunenburg, it is necessary to examine the treatment of the conscription issue as it unfolded in Canada during the Great War. Certainly, at the outset of the war, there seemed to be what Desmond Morton described as “remarkable unity” in Canada in the face of news from Europe—excitement, even, that spread from Halifax to Vancouver, including Montreal and Quebec. The war, however, would call on a far greater number of men than politicians or even the military anticipated; military records show that 619,636 Canadian men and women had served by the end of the Great War. The traditional narrative of Canadian conscription shows that as English Canada turned pessimistic about the war’s prospects, enlistments slowed down and conscription rumors grew into outright demands. Meanwhile French-Canadians under a nationalist influence recoiled at the idea of being drafted for a foreign war so little connected to their ordinary experience. A fairly standard interpretation of this sort is provided in the popular 2001 CBC production Canada: A People’s History: “While Vimy had united the country, another issue was tearing it apart: conscription... Recruitment rallies were organized

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17 Bridgewater Bulletin, April 23 1918
throughout the country, at which returning veterans appealed to fellow citizens to join up. They met with less success in the country than in the city, and with the least success in Quebec..."20 While this version is naturally rendered simplistically for its popular target audience of television viewers, it does roughly express the generally accepted themes present in the traditional historiography. It is also typically acknowledged that there was an urban-rural divide pertaining to conscription, and Quebec has often been interpreted as standing alone against imperialist hegemony, in spite of a body of historical evidence that shows the situation across Canada to be far less straightforward than was previously generally accepted.

It is important, however, to recognize that the swirl of political and social tensions that created the heady brew of the conscription crisis had its roots in the blatantly gerrymandered 1917 federal election. The Conservative Prime Minister Robert Borden was determined to pass a Conscription act that would keep Canada in the field in 1917 and beyond. Borden had attended an Imperial Conference in London in May 1917. This was a time of great upheaval for the Entente powers: in March, the Russians had fallen into revolution, thus effectively eliminating them from the war; the American declaration of war on 6 April 1917 would not yield any real relief in the field for an estimated two years; by May, the exhausted French armies were in mutiny. More men were needed to shore up the fight, and it seemed, inevitably, that such a task would fall to the

20 Canada: A People’s History, p. 108-109
men of the British Empire. So Borden launched a political and propaganda battle that is without parallel in Canadian history. This action split the country—not necessarily along ethnic or racial lines, but instead along socio-economic ones. There is a distinct difference between the reactions of communities whose survival was dependent on an effective harvest or catch, and the reactions of communities with a more diversified economic base that also included manufacturing and service industries. The survival of smaller rural or resource-based communities depended on the presence of a labour force to complete the work of the community’s primary industry, and the surplus of men available for the armed forces in addition to that work was a supply that had long been exhausted. Borden’s determination to pursue the military service was out of sync with the realities facing the families and communities across Canada.

Nevertheless, Borden was insistent that the election would give him the authority to implement order and to doggedly pursue the supposed legions of unpatriotic slackers who were hiding behind their jobs and alleged usefulness, when they would be more useful filling the ranks of a war that was conservatively expected to extend into the 1920s. The government was prepared to fight with whatever means at its disposal to ensure this bill would be passed. Women, but only those with immediate relatives (husbands, sons, brothers) in the army, were offered the vote, whilst simultaneously enfranchisement was removed from immigrants from countries at war with Canada. As Tim Cook writes:
Although it was sold as a reward for women who had done their bit in supporting the country, many accused the government of simply creating new votes for itself, since it was almost assured that the vast majority would support the soldiers overseas and the Union government’s primary platform of conscription. In a far more controversial measure, the government rescinded the enfranchisement rights of immigrants who had arrived in the last fifteen years from ‘enemy countries’.21

This was a stunningly calculated and blatantly transparent political move, since most immigrants tended to vote Liberal.22 The removal of voting rights from a population who may not have tended to agree with the government’s position was draconian. Additionally, soldiers’ votes (certainly soldiers could be relied upon to support conscription) would be distributed by the government as it saw fit, for instance in gerrymandering the Conservative vote in traditionally Liberal-leaning constituencies. Further, Borden’s Union government, formed of Conservatives and Liberals who supported conscription, made sweeping (and completely untenable) promises to Canada’s rural populations to guarantee wins in those precious rural seats by offering mass exemptions to their sons. This election was about more than just conscription, as it showed the breakdown of the democratic process in Canada. The machinations of the government to pass the Military Service Act by any means encouraged intolerance and divisiveness.

22 ibid.
on a national scale. By dividing the country, the Union government was able to manipulate conditions where political compromise seemed impossible. Who would stand up to a government so callously imposing its will on the general populace?

The traditional interpretation of lonely Quebec standing firm against the cold and calculating manipulations of English Canada over the subject of conscription has been an enduring one. The Archbishop of Montreal, Paul Bruchési, stated at the outset of the debate over the Military Service Act: “Don’t you believe, given the size of our population, that we have done more than our fair share?” 23 This complaint lies at the heart of the opposition to conscription in Quebec; the feeling that the population had already contributed all it could, and that further impositions by the recruiting officers were burdensome on the remaining population. This sentiment was certainly not unique to the people of Quebec, but it is a feeling that was compounded by the linguistic grievances of the population. Popular sentiment against French ‘slackers’ was already strong. Furthermore, the Canadian army was a predominantly Anglophone institution and orders were given in the English language, with the notable exception of the 22nd Battalion. There was also continued tension in Quebec following Ontario’s decision to make English the sole language of instruction in schools in spite of a not-insignificant Franco-Ontarian minority population. Manitoba schools were also English-only, in spite of Manitoba’s proud francophone heritage. These

23 quoted in Canada: A People’s History, p. 109
tensions were only exacerbated by anti-French (outside Quebec) and anti-English (within Quebec) rhetoric; Ontarians were “hunnish” and Quebeckers were “slackers”, even before the issue of obligatory military service raised its head.

The deterioration and ultimate breakdown of order around the conscription issue in Quebec centers on the events of the Easter 1918 riot in Quebec City. Thanks to the implementation of the Military Service Act, tensions were already simmering in the city. When the military police arrested a young man without his papers, the situation suddenly turned explosive, as “furious crowds attacked the military service registry and tossed records into the snow. Then they roamed the streets, smashing windows of English-owned businesses. Police did nothing.”

In fact, the mayor of Quebec was convinced the police force was sufficient to the task of crowd control, and hesitated in proclaiming the Riot Act. On Easter Monday, the military read the Riot Act to the assembled crowds. Believing that the soldiers were armed with blanks, the assembled civilians were reluctant to disperse. The soldiers, trapped in a square and pelted with ice and snow, opened fire:

A number of civilians were hit by the first volley, which convinced us that the soldiers were not firing blanks. Each fled for his life. We approached the machine guns, which began to sweep the streets, and then the soldiers

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24 Morton, A Military History of Canada, p. 157
26 Filteau, p. 160
charged. The streets filled with the furious pursuit of panicked runners. At the end of the evening, the cost was ten or so wounded soldiers... on the civilian side, four dead, and between 30 and 75 wounded depending on your estimate.²⁷

In reaction, the federal cabinet suspended *habeas corpus* and conscripted the rioters.²⁸ Unsurprisingly, the violence of the Quebec protests did nothing to improve English-Canadians’ belief that French-Canadians were unpatriotic. This, again, has been the traditional framing of this event along *nationaliste* lines.

Historians have, however, gradually been moving away from this polarizing dichotomization of conscription in Canada. The conflict is not absolutely ethnic-based. There is also evidence of clear splits between rural and urban communities and their abilities to sustain repeated recruitment drives, or the impact of repeated recruitment on a resource economy versus an economy based on industrial or service employment. Desmond Morton, for instance, has described how “across Canada, most men of military age never volunteered. Those who lived on farms, were married, or had jobs or deep ancestral roots in the country were least likely to enlist.”²⁹ Why would a man leave his farm in a lurch when harvest was at hand or leave a job that may pay more than the paltry daily wage of a Canadian soldier? Even communities with deep English-Canadian

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²⁷ ibid, p. 160  A note on translations: this and all translations from French which follow are mine.
roots, who would under a more traditional ethnic historical interpretation be considered as ideal recruitment candidates, found themselves in opposition to the government. Farmers, in particular, expressed their displeasure with the proposed conscription plan. In Ontario and the West, farmers wanted their sons at home to harvest their increasingly profitable crops. With agriculture booming and a shortage of labour, it was necessary from a farming perspective to keep the sons at home as long as possible to meet the needs of the market. To farmers, their contribution was just as important as that of the soldier in his trench; without the farmers' crops, the armies would starve. Interestingly, this logic did not seem to transfer to other types of food production such as the fishery, possibly due to a lack of opportunities to organize and distance from the seat of power in Ottawa. It was certainly difficult to find additional labour at harvest time, thanks in no small part to the many recruitment pushes in rural areas. There were also incidents of violent resistance in the West, as in the case of labour leader Ginger Goodwin, shot by the Royal North-West Mounted Police “trying to escape” his conscription duties. Whether Goodwin was trying to escape the Military Service Act or not is a question of historical debate that lies beyond the scope of this paper. But the case nevertheless illustrates that resistance was in no means limited to the borders of Quebec, or to the Francophone population in Canada. In fact, it has been argued to the contrary

30 Filteau, p. 162. Filteau finds it extraordinary that the Anglophones of Western Canada, in particular those of Calgary, expressed opposition to the Conscription act.
31 Morton, When Your Number's Up, p. 67
that, “nowhere were tempers higher in 1918 than in the Canadian West.”

Notably, rural workers resented the implication that their service in maintaining a steady supply of food for the nation was somehow less important a contribution to the war effort than military service in the fields of France and Flanders.

In the Maritime provinces, the reception of the Military Service Act was problematic at best and disastrous at worst. Ambivalence to the war effort was evidenced by the fact that the Maritimes were only slightly ahead of Quebec in recruiting rates. Opposition to conscription and showed a deepening chasm between rural and urban Maritimers, similar to patterns seen elsewhere in Canada. Given the significant rural population of the Maritime provinces at this time, this attitude is unsurprising. As Theobald writes on the case in New Brunswick: “all of these occupational groups [farmers, fishermen and labourers] tended to oppose conscription, even while supporting the war effort through valuable sacrifices and hard work on the homefront.”

Local newspapers worked hard to turn the tide of anti-conscription. The Nova Scotia Bridgewater Bulletin reported the objections of farmers to conscription, with a distinctly conservative twist: “Will it cheer the boys in the trenches,” they asked, “to learn that there are folks at home who think farm work is as effective war work as trench work?” A later article entitled “The Farmers

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32 Desmond Morton, Working People, p. 114
33 Morton A Military History of Canada, p. 153
34 Theobald, p. 68
35 Bridgewater Bulletin, June 4 1918
and the Draft” argued that “farmers as a class are intelligent men and surely, they see and realize that while the importance of food production is very great to both Canada and the Empire, yet it is even more important that our lines in France and Flanders should be held.” 36 How the farmers were to simultaneously bring in their crops in Nova Scotia and serve in France and Flanders was not addressed by the author of the article. There was not much sympathy from the Bulletin for the dwindling labour supply. Daniel MacMillan, a farmer in extremely rural Williamsburg, New Brunswick, knew this struggle well. In spite of his personal support for conscription as a policy, his diary entry of June 10th 1917 illustrates the mentality shared by many farmers of the period: “I did not get to Sunday School this afternoon. I cut seed potatoes instead. I did so feeling I was performing a national service.” 37 MacMillan supported the war effort wholeheartedly, even when his hired hand enlisted. But without additional labour, how was he to perform the basic tasks necessary to keep the farm afloat? Without this labour force available, his farm was doomed to fail. To Canadian farmers, it was very clear that their efforts to maintain a continued and consistent availability of food was of an equivalent national importance to the service of the men in the trenches overseas. A dwindling labour source made that continued work challenging.

36 Bridgewater Bulletin, June 25 1918
Of course, the crops had to be brought in whether the labour was there or not, as Canadians still needed to be fed, and rural-dwellers opposed to conscription were unmoved by even the most eloquent pleas of local editorial writers. The Halifax Herald, meanwhile, urged recalcitrant Nova Scotians to do their bit by asking its readers to “suppose this ‘living hell’ was being experienced by the people of the South Shore, the Annapolis Valley, Cumberland, Pictou, or the Cape Breton counties!”38 Rural anti-conscription sentiment clearly ran deep and spread across regional and ethnic borders. Ian McKay notes, for instance, that by November of 1917 of the 6,250 New Brunswickers called up as first class under the Military Service Act, 5,500 had applied for an exemption.39 Is this a reflection of anti-conscription sentiments, or of the real pressures on those remaining to do their bit on the home front as well? By engaging in this debate, residents of the Maritimes reflected the same social tensions that were evident at that time clear across the country. However, it is also notable that nowhere in the Maritimes was there violent opposition like that found amongst its Acadian population.

38 Halifax Herald, April 29 1918.
39 McKay, p. 220.
“This will be a hot time I think”: Acadian Reactions to the Military Service Act

The Acadians were no simple parrots of Quebecois nationaliste opposition to the war; there was a profoundly varied reaction to the war effort amongst different elements of the Acadian population. Many Acadians enlisted, including sons of prominent Acadian citizens. There was an Acadian battalion raised, the 165th: however, once at the front, it was broken up and most Acadians sent to work in the Forestry Corps. The history of the Acadian battalion has been detailed by Andrew Theobald in his work on conscription in New Brunswick, and lies somewhat beyond the scope of this paper, but it is worth noting that the support for the war effort was not merely lip service. There was a real sense of pride amongst the Acadian elites in having done one’s bit, which is a sentiment far more typically associated by historians with Canadians of English descent. Andrew Theobald’s work in showing the wide disparity within the Acadian responses is revealing here. When it came to the question of compulsory conscription, Acadians showed a surprising lack of cohesion except in one regard: the desire to rebut the region’s English-Canadians’ perception of the Acadian population as a bunch of French slackers. A fairly typical example of the prevailing attitude amongst Anglophones can be found in Daniel MacMillan’s diary, wherein he muses in November of 1917, “This will be a hot time I think. There is evidence of a bad feeling between the French and English-speaking people. Quebec has not responded to the call to help in Europe; in fact the
French all over the country have not enlisted in anything like proportion to the other.” 40 The perception of difference was clearly already extant. Undoubtedly, however, conscription “decisively sharpened perceptions of the cultural and political gap” between English- and French-speaking Maritimers. And while there was not the explosive violence seen in Quebec City, there was still a great deal of friction between the English and French population, as well as between the civilians and the government agents imposing the Military Service Act on them. Moncton’s Liberal French-language newspaper, L’Acadie, was blunt in its criticism of the Union Government’s policies, stating, “For more than two years this country’s francophones have been forced to submit to a hunnish system that is becoming increasingly unbearable with the passage of time.” 41 To L’Acadie, it was an issue of cultural exploitation. “Borden and his cronies”, they accused, “impose on Canada their conscription law, as if it’s not his desire to give into the fanatics from Hun-tario who want this law to ship all the ‘French slackers’ off to the Front.” 42 The use of the expression “Hun-tario” alone shows the adverse reaction to the law expressed in the Moncton paper.

There was a perception amongst the Francophone minority that the Union government was plotting to exploit the French rural population in a sinister and unequal fashion as compared to the expectations placed on English farmers. This perception was exacerbated by the inflammatory openly anti-French language

40 Parenteau and Dutcher, p. 36
41 L’Acadie, April 5, 1918.
42 L’Acadie, February 25, 1918.
used by English-language newspapers, Anglophone New Brunswick’s politicians, and its leading citizens. And yet, there was also Francophone support for conscription, most notably evidenced in Shediac’s *Le Moniteur Acadien*, which unsubtly placed the notice that 19-year olds there would be called up following the repeal of exemptions alongside a devotional article encouraging parents to instruct their children on the subject of sacrifice, as “Christian parents, you do not know what fruits of devotion your children can embrace from a very young age...” Curious that the Shediac paper felt it necessary to remind its Acadian readership of their duty to not just their country, but also their faith; what was preached from the pulpit often influenced the political action of an Acadian village, as the average Acadian would not want to go against the highly-regarded counsel of the parish priest. Indeed, such devotion was not the exclusive domain of the Francophone population, as Anglophone Catholics were also leveled charges of slackness, charges refuted by the Irish Catholic weekly *New Freeman* of Saint John.

The call to arms from the pulpit is, however, a point of clear difference from traditional French-*nationaliste* interpretations of the implementation of and initial resistance to conscription. It is important to note here that Acadian priests did not necessarily come from the same religious seminary system or order as those serving the Quebec faithful. In northern New Brunswick, for instance,

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43 See Theobald, p. 64-65 for an accounting of the anti-French positions promoted by various New Brunswick political leaders during this contentious debate.  
44 *Le Moniteur Acadien*, May 9 1918.
priests of the Eudist order (from Caen, France) were found in Francophone
catholic pulpits; their cultural influence was seen in the operation of “collèges
masculins” (boys schools) in the north of that province.\(^{45}\) The point of view of
priests with a closer connection to contemporary French culture would
necessarily have been different from the Anglophone Irish Catholics whose
thoughts on the duty to support the British Empire was complicated by the 1916
uprising in Dublin and the complexities of home rule, and yet again different
from those priests (of English and of French descent) who were locally born and
with deep ancestral roots in the Canadian provinces they had been called to serve
via the ministry.

Acadian resistance was not confined to debates in the local newspapers or
to sermons from the village pulpit, however. Francophone constituencies voted
en masse against conscription in 1917.\(^{46}\) Acadians turned out in force to vote
against the “anti-slacker” Union Government.\(^{47}\) To hurl the insult of “slacker"
was amongst the harshest insult used at the time. There was also physical
resistance, with groups of young men dodging conscription enforcers by hiding
in the forests of Kent County, mirroring the resistance seen in the Laurentian
mountains of Quebec.\(^{48}\) In spite of these increasingly deliberate and organized

\(^{45}\) From 2016 email correspondence with the archivist of the Eudist order in Canada. Further
information on this order’s operations during the First World War period are contained in their
papers held at the archives of the Université de Moncton, in Moncton, New Brunswick.

\(^{46}\) McKay, p. 221

\(^{47}\) Theobald, p. 77.

\(^{48}\) Theobald, p. 87.
acts of resistance, the conservative Moniteur Acadien urged citizens of the French “chivalrous and courageous race” to comply with the law, stating, “those who do not present themselves in accordance with the law, and who are by consequence deserters.... We will not neglect any method that may lead to their apprehension by officers of the law.” This advice from the Moniteur, however, was in the minority, and went unheeded. Unable to defuse the situation, shooting incidents were soon reported between resisters and police near Bouctouche, New Brunswick. This resistance culminated when Lorenzo Sawyer was killed in Bouctouche on May 20, 1918, for resisting arrest by the Dominion Police, an incident which “only increased Acadian criticism of the government and hardly encouraged trust in conscription authorities.” Whether the rigidly-applied enforcement of Conscription by government agents worsened these previous incidents of resistance is a matter of debate. While we may speculate how communities would have reacted to a more flexible or compassionate approach to the Conscription Act, the fact still remains that it was late in the Great War and the needs at the front were paramount. The forceful interpretation of the Act is reflective of a very serious crisis. In fact, by the Spring of 1918, the Germans were in the final stages of a wave of major offensives on the Western Front

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49 Le Moniteur Acadien, May 30 1918
50 Le Moniteur Acadien, May 9 1918
51 McKay, p. 221
52 Theobald, p. 88
designed to crush the British and French armies before the Americans could arrive.

It is likely, however, that rumor and secondhand reports also played a role in determining the behaviour of government agents in Lunenburg. The underlying issues were not unique to Acadians or to any ethnic minority in the Maritimes, but the reactions of the Dominion Police in response to the worsening conditions on the ground can be examined through that lens. The reports of violent reactions experienced in other cities across Canada, and most notably the violence experienced amongst the Acadians of Kent County, likely informed the decisions Dominion Police agents in Lunenburg (a minority linguistic and cultural group as the Acadians were) in 1918.
“A very considerable amount of feeling among our coloured citizens that they have not been treated fairly”: The Exclusion and Subsequent Resistance of Black Maritimers

For the Black population of the Maritimes, their position regarding conscription was informed by more overt discrimination, rooted in a systemic opposition to the inclusion of Black Canadians in the Canadian military system. While opposition was not limited to specific ethnic communities, there were challenges facing Black Canadians as a group that went beyond economic class anxieties or the rural/urban split indicated by Theobald and others. It is worth noting here that Black Canadians had been well settled in various communities throughout the Maritimes since the Loyalist period. In spite of their long establishment, there were nevertheless numerous sources of racial tension, made evident in the outbreak of war.

In the initial fervor of 1914 and 1915 some Black men had attempted to offer their service to the Army, they were refused as unsuitable candidates. For instance, in Halifax, a number of local men attempted to volunteer for service overseas, but their eagerness did not transfer to the officers manning the local recruiting office, and the colour bar was firmly applied: their offer of service was rejected. The story of Black Maritimers in the First World War is one of struggle against this colour bar, and is a story that remains woefully underrepresented in the historiography of this period:

53 McKay, 212
An examination of policy towards them and of their participation in the war offers a temporary opening in the curtain which typically covers Canadian racism, revealing some details from the set of stereotypes applied to certain minorities. The curtain also lifts upon the determination and self-confidence of Canadian minorities, and their struggle to be accorded equal responsibilities as well as equal opportunities.54

As James Walker identifies above, it was a struggle for Black Canadians to be given the opportunity to fight at all, in what was largely considered to be a “white man’s war”.

Although some authorities in Ottawa and some scattered local recruiters, faced with the need to fill ranks, had expressed a desire to desegregate, the political will simply did not translate to the entirety of the Canadian Expeditionary Force. It was so common for Black Canadians to be turned away at the recruiting office that William Pugsley, the Member of Parliament for Saint John, felt obliged to interrogate the Minister in the House of Commons on that subject, on March 24th 1916. “There is a good deal of complaint”, he stated, “and a very considerable amount of feeling among our coloured citizens that they have not been treated fairly. They have been told that their services would be accepted, and when they have gone to the recruiting office where they were told

to go, they have been sent away without satisfaction.” 55 Sadly, prejudice held sway. While some individual Black Canadians were welcomed into the rank and file, in accordance with Sam Hughes’ edict, it was up to the individual commanding officer’s discretion.

The additional scrutiny applied in this instance was particular to Black potential recruits, and illustrates the systemic blocks raised to integration. Since the population in question was predominantly urban instead of rural, and employed in industrial or service industries instead of resource extraction and processing, the exclusion of this group does show that there were some were exclusions applied based on moral judgments rather than employment. Here, for example, is an excerpt from an infamous memorandum by Major-General Gwatkin concerning the perceived fighting spirit of Black Canadians: “in Canada he is not being impelled to enlist by a high sense of duty; in the trenches he is not likely to make a good fighter; and the average white an will not associate with him on terms of equality.” 56 Black soldiers, he concluded, could be enlisted in any battalion who would accept them – but he also concluded that perhaps a labour battalion may be more appropriate, and should be formed exclusively for them.

Gwatkin was not alone in voicing these objections and concerns. There was a deliberate exclusion of Black Canadians from the war effort by reason of

55 quoted in Theobald, p. 41
their suitability to the task, an exclusion that was compounded by continued and worsening racial struggles on the home front throughout the Maritimes. McKay, for instance, identifies racial disturbances in both Glace Bay and Truro, and an increasing segregation of public facilities throughout Nova Scotia. These are small urban areas, and McKay does not mention Halifax, despite the established Black populations of Halifax and Dartmouth, and the recorded instances of conscription in these communities. Could it be that with the labour requirements for Halifax’s reconstruction, the tensions surrounding work that came to the surface in the smaller communities of Glace Bay or Truro were simply not experienced; or could it be that the narratives of any existing racial tensions were suppressed in the name of maintaining order in aftermath of the great Halifax Explosion of December 1917? It is difficult to speculate, given the lack of information available, but the increasing tensions expressed in racial conflicts and increased segregation throughout Nova Scotia deserve closer historical examination. It is also worth noting that for Black Canadians, the choice between serving as labour in a construction unit overseas or making more money doing similar work at home in the industrial or service industries was easily made based on economic considerations. In this, they parallel the Acadian population, whose men had been sent to the Forestry Corps.

In the face of increasing racial strife, the conscription Act was clearly a contradiction of both implied and enacted military policy, and of the increasing

57 McKay, p. 212
social conflict playing out in the Maritimes under the increased pressures of the war. As could be predicted, the government's about-face was poorly received by an embittered population whose efforts to volunteer had been previously rebuffed. Some men, as Calvin Ruck pointed out in his history of the No. 2 Construction Battalion, outright refused to comply: "The Act was an ironic twist for Black patriots who tried to serve their country, and were rejected as unsuitable by a military establishment that could not earlier accept the concept of Black Canadians under arms. Men who from 1914 to 1916, had difficulty serving their country on a voluntary basis were now subject to being conscripted. Some embittered Blacks refused to respond to the call-up notices." Unfortunately, this remains an underexplored area in Maritime historiography. To what extent were Black Canadians able to realistically state their objections in the face of the authority of the state? Just how embittered were the men whose attempts at volunteerism had been refused, but who were now expected to comply with a forced conscription?

The answer to this last question, at least, can be somewhat surmised from accounts such as that of Isaac Phillips, a veteran from Dartmouth, NS: "In Sydney, after the war started, quite a few Blacks volunteered for active service and were told point blank 'we don't want you, this is a White man's war.' However, around 1917, the Canadian army was up against it, they had lost a lot of men in France. At

58 Ruck, p. 37
that point they were willing to take anyone. Conscription came in and then they took Blacks and Whites. You had no choice you had to go.”

It is plain that these Black Canadians had no choice; unlike other minorities in Canada, which had been disenfranchised from citizenship rights (or, in the case of First Nations, who had never had them), they had no legal recourse to object to military service. Of course, for those embittered men whose attempts to volunteer had been rebuffed, to now refuse military service was a criminal, punishable, offense.

With conscription in place, Black soldiers were placed in the segregated unit dedicated to manual labour that had been created following Gwatkin’s report, and were still placed under the command of white officers instead of promoting from their own ranks. While the existence of the No. 2 Construction Battalion, established in 1916, was a result of the continued persistent efforts of Black Canadians to enroll as volunteers in the Canadian forces, the unit’s very existence also shows the efforts of the state to uphold and maintain a strong institutional segregation. This construction battalion had been staffed mainly with volunteers from Nova Scotia, Ontario and Western Canada, and filled a predominantly auxiliary role even within the Canadian Forestry Corps. Again, this secondary role reinforces the expressed doubts and prejudices about Black Canadians’ fitness for service held by members of the upper echelon, such as Gwatkin. Beyond this unit, as mentioned above, military command still reserved

59 Ruck, p. 38
the right to refuse the service of Black Canadian recruits.\textsuperscript{60} Racism was deeply engrained on a structural level in the Canadian Expeditionary force; even for those few, scattered Black Canadians who were integrated into regular units, the racial prejudices they faced echoed the social pressures of the civilian world. For those men in the Construction Battalion, the harshly enforced social limits of segregation were very real. The progressive Black newspaper \textit{The Atlantic Advocate} did not mince words: “These men are volunteers anxious to do their bit for the Country in which they live despite the fact that at first they were rejected... has the country forgotten that the crisis is not yet over? That some time or other another Colored Battalion might be needed?”\textsuperscript{61} It is clear that continued racial tensions and persistent prejudice forced Black Canadians into limited, secondary roles in the Forces, just as they struggled with these same roles in their communities.

Even after the imposition of the Military Service Act, the impulse to segregate remained strong. Phillips, for instance, recalled on arrival in England “Black soldiers were placed in a segregated unit and assigned to performing fatigue and labour duties.”\textsuperscript{62} Black Canadians were made to accept the same manual labour they had performed as civilians, but were forced by the MSA to accept a reduction in earnings in exchange for the privilege of performing this work for an institution that had openly refused to accept their voluntary service.

\textsuperscript{60} Walker, p. 18
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{The Atlantic Advocate}, April 1917, p. 3
\textsuperscript{62} Ruck, p. 38
There are several questions that remain unresolved. Was there a desire amongst this population to show themselves overtly compliant to patriotism, in order to avoid reprisals by the state? McKay concludes that “this disappointing outcome of a decade’s energetic Black activism lies both in the depth and power of racism and the difficulty of associating Black issues with the dominant wartime drive for moral regulation.” The progressive newspaper of the Black community, The Atlantic Advocate, was a strong voice with regard to activism, attempting to bring unity to this community under pressure. Curiously, in May 1917, they chose to focus on American conscription and the continued question of segregation, expressing wariness at the possibility of an executive order implementing conscription on the American black population. It is not an outright critique, but it is placed next to various local Nova Scotia grievances. The juxtaposition of these two articles is significant – is the inclusion of the American case an oblique reference to the potential for Conscription in Canada?

Was the Black community able to fully express the deep-rooted racial nature of their discontents, or was their resistance sidelined to serve the greater needs of conformity to the majority’s moral imperatives? It is clear from what limited analysis of this period exists that there was a nascent collective consciousness amongst Black Canadians at this time. Was there accordingly a greater sense of freedom to express dissent from the majority, along the lines of the French-speaking Acadian population? Do similar tensions exist in this

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63 McKay, p. 212
population as existed in the German-speaking minority at Lunenburg? As with the quiet resistance of the linguistic minority population of Lunenburg, the tensions between a marginalized population and a dominant majority have been largely relegated to footnotes in the historical narrative.

The role of the Dominion Police as a political force is also an important factor in examining the events surrounding the implementation of Conscription in Canada during the Great War, as Dominion Police worked to identify potential threats to the federal government and their order. Resistance to the Military Service Act, be it violent or nonviolent, represented a potential threat to the established order.64

Tensions surrounding conscription were not the only factors in play in Lunenburg, however, as there were also unresolved labour grievances informing the actions of Lunenburg residents.

“A spirit of unrest among the captains of the fleet”: Labour Tensions and the Particular Case of the Fishery

Labour tensions in the Great War followed the same rhythm as conscription tensions. At the outset of the war, social conflict was replaced with harmony and the unifying force of patriotism. However, by 1917–1918, “many workers had distanced themselves from the bourgeois ‘common sense’ that demanded they place patriotism ahead of their economic interests.”65 Not every region shared equally in the profits of war; in fact, the Maritime provinces shared least in the prosperity of wartime economic development.66 It became more difficult sell goods to support the needs of industry when the benefits of profits were not regionally felt. It was also plain that as the war drew on, “a spirit of revolt was in the air, primarily as a result of the war’s impact on working-class life.”67 1918 marked the beginnings of an explosive labour situation in Canada, evidenced in the “increasing defiance of government and authority.”68 Indeed, as a whole, “organized labour had been humiliated by the failure of its pathetic resistance to conscription.”69 This spirit of revolt was not limited to manufacturing, or to Nova Scotia industry; it spilled over into the agricultural sector as well, inspiring farmers and fishers to their own acts of resistance.

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67 Heron and Siemiatycki, p. 18
68 Morton, Working People, p. 114
69 ibid, p. 113
The Maritimes were certainly not alone in experiencing increasing tensions between labour and authority (be it government or management authority), as confrontations were evidenced from Ginger Goodwin in British Columbia to the mining communities of Cape Breton. The imposition of conscription, followed by the withdrawal of proposed exemptions in spite of organized protests from farmers and workers, showed the weak position of labour in the face of a Union government determined to maintain both their military commitments at the front and a social status quo at home.

The withdrawal of exemptions particularly posed a direct threat to the economic well-being of rural communities. Just as farmers were economically threatened by the removal of their sons and hired labourers by the Military Service Act, so too were the fishermen of the East Coast. As a result, fishers were distinctly unenthusiastic about conscription, and yet outside close readings of local newspapers’ Shipping News sections, their voices were not heard to the same degree as those of the farming communities. Already by 1917–1918, men were at a premium for schooner and steamer crews. This was hard work, requiring men to be gone for weeks at a time out on the Grand Banks. These were company towns, but the “company” was the fishery. Coastal communities depended not only on the income of the single fisherman and his family, but on the entire complex economic system built around the fishing industry. Crews used local merchants to purchase their required equipment, from nets to funding for the construction of the ships themselves. Shipbuilding was still an important
part of the fishing industry, and local shipbuilders operated in Lunenburg County just as they did in a number of communities along the Atlantic Coast of Canada. Once the fish were brought in, the catch had to be processed in plants or canneries as well, which employed local residents on land as a subsidiary industry. The fishery was a surprisingly multi-pronged industry in these small coastal communities, and like any company town, the profitability of the town was tied inexorably to that of the industry.

Throughout the Great War (and indeed, up until the Depression of the 1930s) the so-called “Lunenburg-64” system was used in Lunenburg and its surrounding area. This system, not dissimilar to the merchant system used by the Newfoundland fishery, provided credit from local merchants at the start of the season under the assumption that this extended credit would be repaid by a successful catch at the season’s end. The system worked as follows: “each schooner is ordinarily divided into 64 shares... which may be owned by the builders, the chandlers, the fishermen, or the townspeople who may wish to invest – there are possibly forty or fifty share owners in one vessel. Credit is obtained from outfitting companies, which, in turn, are financed by local banks.” 70 Each schooner also had to support a typical crew of twenty-one men: a skipper, cook, salter, header, throater, flunker, and fourteen fishermen divided into double dory crews. 71 Each of these contributed uniquely to the successful

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71 Clement, p 21
operation of the ship, and each of these jobs was considered skilled labour and was recompensed accordingly.

The Lunenburg-64 share system “gave merchants leverage over supplies and fish sales”, which created a cycle of dependency on merchant capital amongst the direct participants in the fishery. This market-share system was also seen in other Atlantic coastal communities, from the Acadian shores of New Brunswick to the outports of Newfoundland. In order to repay the debts levied on the ship and against the participating individual shareowners at the outset of the season to mount their operating costs, it was absolutely necessary for each schooner to complete a successful catch. There could be great profit to be shared, but it was absolutely dependent on the luck of the season and the skill of the fishing crews. Failure to succeed could result in severe consequences, up to and including imprisonment. In the fishery, as in many other industries across the country, “capitalists dug in their heels to prevent wartime conditions from introducing any permanent changes in power relations”. In this case, the precarious relationship established between investors and operators based on the annual adoption of potentially catastrophic debt loads left the schooner operators and crews extremely vulnerable to any loss of income. Clearly, the introduction of compulsory military service could have been catastrophic to the regional economy. It is impossible to overstate the importance of timing in Lunenburg’s

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72 Clement, p. 22
73 Heron and Siemiatycki, p. 24
reaction to this issue. Disrupting the crews at this crucial moment and holding back the fleet from precious time on the fishing grounds of the Grand Banks could have dire consequences not just for the individual schooner and its crew, but due to the highly intertwined and interdependent local economy of Lunenburg (as in many coastal communities), it could mean outright disaster for the community as a whole.

Clashes between the needs of the fishery and the state’s imposition of controls as the Military Service Act was enforced are evidenced through 1917 and well into 1918. In April of 1918, when exemptions were revoked, “about one-third” of Lunenburg County fishermen of the Grand Banks fleet were considered conscripts; a loss on this scale was potentially catastrophic to Lunenburg’s single major industry and all of its associated secondary and tertiary industries.74 Coastal communities such as Lunenburg and nearby Bridgewater took to their local newspapers, defending the fishing industry’s vital importance to the Canadian economy in editorial articles. In August 1917, the Bridgewater Bulletin proudly proclaimed in a headline “Fisheries occupy big place in Canadian trade: thirteen million dollars brought in from the sea by the fishermen of the Maritime Provinces each year,”75 and in March of 1918, it was the turn of the Lunenburg weekly to boast how its “Fishermen render country high service [sic].”76 The Progress-Enterprise continued to argue with somewhat dubious logic that “fish as

74 McKay, p. 220
75 Bridgewater Bulletin, 21 August 1917
76 Progress-Enterprise, 27 March 1918
food, conserves meat for our troops, without meat they cannot fight, for it is a proven fact that an army fights on its stomach. Fish and money are practically synonymous, and money and munitions should be spelled alike." This echoed the rhetoric employed unsuccessfully by the farmers, but took it one level further by stating that canned fish for the home front outright benefitted the war effort by freeing up meat for the soldiers to consume. The implication was that fishermen were even more important than farmers—farmers whose voices were already heard and whose rhetoric was repeated across the country while the complaints of the fishermen fell on deaf ears. The Progress-Enterprise continued its spirited defence of its fishermen the following month, after the announced intention to repeal exemptions, stating that

No farmer is exempted merely because he is a farmer. He must justify his claim to exemption by showing that he produces sufficient not only to supply himself and his household, but to contribute to the general food supply of the country, and must otherwise demonstrate that he is as valuable, if not more so, to the state as a farmer than as a soldier.

Fishermen are exactly in the same position, and a somewhat similar statement might be made with respect to several other occupations.\textsuperscript{78}

The frustration of Lunenburg residents at the lack of recognition for their industry is clearly seen in this excerpt. Like the farmers before them, fishermen

\textsuperscript{77} ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} Progress-Enterprise, 24 April 1918.
felt they were being asked to prove the value of their time and their catch to the heads of government, when the value of food on the table should have been self-evident. The Bridgewater weekly disagreed, however, arguing that “munitions, fish, food lumber, clothing... are absolutely necessary, and yet it would be impossible to exempt as a class all the men engaged.” The Bulletin’s position is hardly surprising; as the local conservative voice in Lunenburg County, it strongly supported both the Union government and the war effort. By June 1918, tension was building in Lunenburg County between the fishermen and the networks that supported that industry and a government policy that could wreak serious damage on a precarious local economic balance.

The tensions can be traced by reading the Shipping News columns from the region, which list the comings and goings of ships and cargo into port. As the Military Service Act was enacted in 1917, and then imposed, the brief mentions of conflict in these columns show the continued and increasing interference of Dominion Police with the working of Nova Scotia’s coastal fishing fleets. The Halifax Herald documents several instances throughout April and May of 1918 of police officers taking crew members off their ships; the Herald complained that “the scarcity of men for coasting vessels caused by the strict operation of the Military Service Act is certainly bringing about a serious situation in Halifax, not to mention other ports” before listing the schooners Nellie Moulton and Lasca as two specific cases in which crews were “rounded up this week by Dominion

Police.” Whether or not the crewmembers in question were able to provide papers attesting to their exemption status was not discussed. The articles also did not mention whether these individuals were subsequently freed, although this did also sometimes occur. The interruption itself was the source of the problem, as by interrogating or removing crewmembers from ships impeded the ships’ ability to return to the banks, thereby negatively impacting the season’s catch (and also possibly scuttling the ability of the ship owners to repay the credit extended to them at the beginning of the season). These were skilled, qualified and well-trained employees, and it is important to restate here the hardship being imposed on this industry by the state’s callous implementation and imposition of its authority in this regard.

The local Lunenburg Progress-Enterprise also complained about the heavy-handed methods employed by the Dominion Police, as conscription was “taking so many of the young men from the fishing vessels that the older men are in great demand and some of our shore fishermen who have not been fishing for more than ten years are now in the Grand Bank fleet.” Old men, who had thought they’d left their days aboard the schooners long behind them, were urgently pressed to return to service as dorymen. This sentiment was echoed by the Halifax Herald, where anxious readers learned “there is a very serious situation not only in Halifax but at all the principal North Atlantic Ports... all

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80 Halifax Herald, 11 May 1918.
81 Progress-Enterprise, 19 June 1918.
kinds of labor for schooners and steamers is short and inducements are being made to those who have followed this line of work, but who have not followed the sea for a number of years, to return to their former vocation...”82 With young men being taken off the ships, it was the responsibility of the elderly in the community to maintain the industry. It was imperative that the fleet be able to continue its operations in spite of Dominion Police interference. By all accounts there was no organized resistance to the direct threat the enforcement tactics posed to the economic well-being of the fishery and the regions that supported it. Could it be that the fishers themselves were simply not sufficiently organized to produce a cohesive resistance?

The answer lies in simple logistics. Unlike farmers or labourers who were able to co-ordinate to develop effective mass protests, fishers were isolated for months at a time in their ships on the Grand Banks with only the same crew of twenty for company. While there was undoubtedly much sympathy shared by workers facing a common situation, they did not have the opportunity to organize themselves as other industries could. It is very difficult to have a political meeting in the middle of the ocean. Simply put, the logistics of running a fishing crew on a ship did not support collective organization during the season. Regardless of the extant political support from sympathetic elected officials like Onésiphore Turgeon on the Acadian north shore of New Brunswick, the individual crews were unable to support an organized collective protest

82 Halifax Herald, 21 April 1918
amongst the workers of the fishing industry; the logistical barriers to organizing individual complaints into a collective voice were too powerful to overcome. 83 Without the ability to express what McKay and Morton termed their shared “quiet misery,” fishers on the Grand Banks were forced into a collective passivity. 84 Some resisted by refusing to take their registration notices from the Lunenburg post office, but it was speculated that even being off-shore hundreds of kilometers from the nearest Dominion Police constabulary was no protection from the imposition of the Military Service Act. The Halifax newspaper even reported that “young Lunenburg fishermen out on the banks will likely be brought home by the Canadian patrol boats.” 85 Perhaps this outright threat to the necessary manpower of the fishing industry was why the Halifax Herald’s shipping news went on to report in April that “fishing schooners have been conspicuous by their absence and there have been no arrivals in consequence for three days.” 86 The scuttlebutt of the port city—the wild rumours and conjecture about what the Dominion Police may or may not have been willing to do to fill the ranks of men at the Front—only added to the unease with which fishermen greeted the withdrawal of exemptions and the increasingly stringent application of conscription by state authorities on a local level. The deep economic anxiety over their ability to complete the season’s catch was not limited to a single

83 Theobald p. 70
84 McKay and Morton p. 60
85 Halifax Herald, 22 April 1918.
86 Halifax Herald, 21 April 1918
community, but was echoed in the various communities whose survival depended on the harvesting and processing of fish. Discrete acts of resistance performed by individual men, such as not picking up one's registration notice, could ensure the continued operation of a skilled crew, which could have cascading consequences on their industry's continued survival and by extension the survival of a community (like Lunenburg among other coastal communities) in the face of interference by the Dominion Police. The continued persistence of unfounded rumours targeting the operation of a crew undoubtedly informed the situation as it developed in Lunenburg on that day in June of 1918.
“Are these policemen to be allowed to terrorize peaceable citizens”: A Return to the Lunenburg ‘Riot’

On June 15th 1918, Dominion policemen, some of whom were apparently inebriated, searched the town of Lunenburg for slackers and draft evaders. Policemen interrogated the citizenry, targeting men of a likely age to be implicated under the Military Service Act. If these men were unable to produce their exemption papers on demand, the police used stronger tactics in search of answers. The people of Lunenburg’s annoyance quickly turned to frustration and then anger at the belligerence of these policemen conducting their interrogations.

Austin Knickle, reported to be a father of twelve, was arrested and put in jail for evading conscription. At the same time, Allen Weaver was taken off his ship and ordered to walk the four miles to his home to bring back the certificate that would prove he had been married for eleven years. Greville Knickle, another married man, was compelled by the Dominion Police at gunpoint to produce his papers. A young man named Kaizer was arrested as he walked along one of the wharves to board his vessel; forbidden to fetch the requested papers from the schooner, he was incarcerated in the county jail until his captain was able to liberate him. Individually, these incidents may have passed discreetly, but together in rapid succession they inflamed the tensions already simmering in the community.
When the policemen again hauled another individual, the previously mentioned crewmember Wagner, off his ship, the community had had enough. As Wagner was paraded, against his loudly vocalized objections, through the streets of Lunenburg, the citizens of the community began to show signs of civil disobedience. The Progress-Enterprise described how “J. B. Young, one of the leading citizens of Lunenburg... asked them a civil question as to why this man was arrested. One of the police immediately drew his revolver and threatened to shoot Mr. Young if he did not stand back.”87 Members of this community were not prepared to stand idly by in the face of such belligerence, particularly not when the actions of the police were holding up the all-important fishing fleet from the season. That some of the police on duty were reportedly inebriated only exacerbated tensions in the community. Before long, a crowd gathered around the local hotel where the Dominion Police interrogations were held. Officers soon emerged, with Wagner in handcuffs.

The crowd was displeased. The police, however, responded with a threat—should any individual interfere with the Dominion Police in their enforcement of the Military Service Act, the police “would shoot him dead.”88 There would be no civil disobedience on these officers’ watch; they were ready to stamp out any resistance with violence if necessary. The Dominion Police on the scene were intransigent and resolute. “There is considerable consternation in Lunenburg

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87 Progress-Enterprise, 19 June 1918
88 Progress-Enterprise, 19 June 1918
County,” the Halifax Herald had reported well ahead of this confrontation, “over the recent order in regard to enlistments without exemptions.” With an angry crowd facing off against armed and belligerent members of the Dominion Police, Lunenburg’s “consternation” had clearly reached a tipping point.

As the Dominion Police manhandled Wagner across the town square to the county jail, the citizens of Lunenburg were faced with a choice in how to organize their resistance, whether they should follow the examples of Quebec (or to a lesser extent Bouctouche), and spark a violent uprising against government authority. Rumors were running rampant. The Dominion Police was reported to have put the local constabulary in their place, coolly informing Lunenburg’s chief of police that “they were running the town.” The local police would not, therefore, be an option for local leaders to cool down the situation by acting as an intermediary between the angry crowd and the obdurate authority of the Crown. This was clearly not a situation where negotiations were welcomed. Further, reports of some Dominion policemen unfit for duty due to being “under the influence of intoxicants” (although that claim was later disputed by the Halifax Herald) continued to spread through the gathered crowd. Tensions were at a tipping point.

The people of Lunenburg had to weigh the crucial importance of Lunenburg’s fishery and the necessity that the fleet remain unimpeded as much

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89 Progress-Enterprise, 19 June 1918.
90 Halifax Herald, 18 June 1918.
91 Progress-Enterprise 19 June 1918
as possible in their preparations to return to the Grand Banks against the possibility that the Dominion Police representatives could conceivably ban ships from leaving port. Furthermore, the fear of official reprisals for civil disobedience, compounded with the town’s delicate position as a German minority and the community’s desire to prove itself loyal to the Crown undoubtedly informed the actions of the population gathered in the town’s square on June 15.

Given the conditions at hand, it is hardly surprising that the crowd chose to yield, choosing non-violence over the active civil disobedience and resistance that had been dramatically recounted in their local newspapers. The Progress-Enterprise described how the crowd, “on the advice of some of the influential citizens, made no demonstration” in spite of deliberate provocation on the part of the Dominion Police. The newspaper stressed the town’s civic compliance, stating that “there has been no attempt to interfere with these men, or evade the act.” By emphasizing their civic compliance, the citizens of Lunenburg both evaded charges of pro-German sympathy and were able to continue their all-important fishery relatively unimpeded.

It was, in the end, a quiet riot.

The Lunenburg residents listed by name above are not to be found among attestation papers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, although there are other Knickles and Weavers of the town. We can conclude that these particular men

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92 Progress-Enterprise 19 June 1918
were not coerced into the Canadian Forces on that day, and that as cooler heads prevailed, they were released.

When faced with the choice between active, possibly violent resistance and passive resistance in compliance with the law, Lunenburg residents instead chose to stress their civic compliance and loyalty to the British Crown. It can hardly be a surprise—their position as town of German heritage dictated their overt compliance with the arm of the state as it was deployed against them. And yet, this compliance is not entirely complete; in the days and weeks that followed the incident at Lunenburg, local residents maintained a public campaign of passive resistance in the local press to hold the state authorities accountable for their actions. As a result of seeming inaction, their quiet resistance has faded into obscurity.

It may not have been overt, but articles in the Progress-Enterprise published through the weeks following this ‘quiet riot’ showed the fruits of the community’s quiet resistance to the imposition of government authority. Some references are comic and lighthearted, like the sly blurb that suggested “the residents of Lunenburg preserve such a look of pristine innocence and delightful freshness, that men who have been married for years and are the fathers of a dozen children are accosted as youths of 20 or 22.” 93 Some of the challenges to official authority were more direct and forceful, such as the insistence that, “this matter is not going to be allowed to rest here and the citizens demand the

93 Progress-Enterprise, 19 June 1918.
withdrawal of these incapables and the sending of sober men of ordinary
d judgment to carry out their work." The tensions that became evident on the day
did not disperse as easily as the crowd itself. Indeed, the experience of
Lunenburg’s citizenry in negotiating the needs of the local community with the
pressure to show overt loyalty to the Crown in wartime can be compared to other
predominantly German communities, such as Berlin (famously renamed
Kitchener) Ontario.

94 Progress-Enterprise, 19 June 1918.
Conclusion

The Lunenburg ‘quiet riot,’ then, can be interpreted as an expression of outward civic compliance, one that allows for indirect challenges to the status quo by means of the local press and through local leadership. Because of the lack of an explosive element, this area of resistance to state authority has been previously underexplored by historians examining the Great War in Canada. In fact, most of the Maritime resistance to the imposition of conscription in 1918 has been glossed over in favour of the traditional narrative. There are, however, questions here on our doorstep that merit closer historical examination. For instance, to what extent does the Dominion Police act as a coercive force in implementing a draconian policy on the Canadian people? A full history of this ad hoc federal authority is certainly overdue, especially their role in rounding up the citizens in rural communities and assuring their compliance. How do other economic groups in the Maritime provinces express their resistance? For instance, are labour exemptions granted to the mining communities of Nova Scotia? How do typically organized labour groups in resource industries react differently than the fishermen or farmers? Why are the Maritime provinces so hesitant to support the war effort by 1917, in comparison with Newfoundland’s steadfast support for the Newfoundland Regiment in spite of that unit’s catastrophic losses? The lack of cohesiveness, or uniformity, in Maritime regional responses to this despotic law does not mean the resistance was not there. It simply means that acts of resistance were kept within discrete
populations: these clusters were seemingly incapable of organizing collectively in
the face of their common struggle. These questions are all worthy of closer
historical examination.

And yet, Lunenburg’s protests are illuminating in their common bonds
with other minority responses in the Maritime provinces to the adoption and
implementation of the Military Service Act. It is not enough to solely examine
ethnic and linguistic factors such as the perceived German-ness of the Lunenburg
community in assessing the resistance of these communities to the draconian
implementation of the Military Service Act: there are socio-economic
considerations that must be taken into account. The patterns of community
dependence on employment in resource-based industries and a lack of desire to
abandon those economic considerations for the front lines is repeated amongst
the Black Canadian communities of the Maritimes and the francophone Acadian
communities of the Maritimes, just as they are seen in the German community of
Lunenburg. Maritime historians have often noted the uncomfortable
relationship between the economic needs of heavily resource-based industries
and the needs of the state, and the tensions revealed by these conflicts shows this
relationship in a different light.

As with many coastal communities, there were deep economic factors in
play in Lunenburg. These stemmed from the potential removal of nearly
irreplaceable manpower from the fishery (and consequently its secondary
byproduct industries) with the imposition of conscription and the removal of
highly trained skilled labour off the fishing schooners of the Atlantic fleet; from
the apparent lack of official respect given to the fishery as an important resource
industry contributing to the much-needed national food production; and lastly
from the logistical inability of fishermen to organize the a collective response to
the imposition of state authority on their industry. These factors created the
circumstances for tensions to explode into an uncharacteristically overt
resistance. There were, as has been stated above, deep economic anxieties that
informed their reactions to the heavy-handed deployment of state authority.
These tensions are not unique to Lunenburg. As Theobald, for instance, has
shown, the anxiety seen in rural, resource-based communities faced with the
ham-fisted manipulations of Dominion Police implementing the widely-derided
Military Service Act is repeated throughout the Maritime provinces.
Nevertheless, the tensions explored above were in full display in 1918 in
Lunenburg, and that makes this unique case worth exploring in further detail.

However, there is something unique about this particular community, that
in spite of their misgivings, Lunenburg’s population chose to follow their local
leaders and to adopt a tactic of non-violence on June 15, 1918. Certainly, the
crucial importance of the fishery’s continued operation to the well-being of the
community played a role in assuring the situation did not turn violent. Possibly,
there was also recognition amongst Lunenburg’s community leadership that the
alleged inebriation of the Dominion police agents was inducing belligerence, and
that cooler heads would prevail if these men were not engaged with reciprocal
antagonism. Yet, the *Progress-Enterprise* asked, following the event, “are these police men to be allowed to terrorize peaceable citizens and threaten to shoot, or can civil law protect its law abiding citizens?” This is the underlying question of the implementation of the Military Service Act in Canada—the Union government’s heavy-handed attempts to impose its coercive will on the coastal communities overplayed its hand by interfering with their economic survival. As suggested above, for the law-abiding residents of Lunenburg, their acts of complex, quiet resistance during and following the ‘quiet riot’ undermined the possibility of state-inflicted terror. They still protested, in spite of the very real potential of dire economic consequences to the entire community. That is the legacy of this underexplored event in our collective narrative, and that is why the people of Lunenburg’s “quiet riot” and subtle resistance should be written back in to the history of resistance to the Conscription Act in the Maritime Provinces.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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