

CHC2P Unit 3: 1939-1959: War and Peace

Activity 10: Prosperity at Home

Overview

In this activity, you will explore how Canada continued to develop as a country, by looking at some important demographic trends, following the conclusion of the war.

Lesson

Canadian Life in the 1950s

Demography is the study of the characteristics of human populations, such as size and growth. In the assignment, you will examine some of the demography of Canada in the 1950s. The dramatic shift in population during this time period was called the Baby Boom.

Demographics Table

YEAR	TOTAL BIRTHS	BIRTH RATES (# of live births per thousand people)
1945	300 587	24.3
1950	372 009	27.1
1955	442 937	28.2
1965	418 595	21.3
2002	328 802	10.5

In the period after the Second World War, Canada experienced economic growth. For the first time, a large number of consumers could afford to purchase television sets. In 1952, the first two Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) television stations (in Toronto and Montreal) went on the air, with three hours of programming per day. New cars and new houses were also in high demand during the 1950s.

A New Canada

Canadians knew that the Second World War had changed their world, but the exact nature of this change remained to be determined. Mere decades before, Canada had been a colony of mother Britain – now, with many of the developed countries in rubble, she was among the most powerful nations in the world. Moreover, in most respects Britain was no longer Canada’s most important ally: this role now belonged to the United States. Canada joined the fledging United Nations (UN), and would participate in a reorganized Commonwealth, and be a founding member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Economically, the effects of the ‘dirty thirties’ had been overcome through wartime production and centralized government control of the economy. Nevertheless, it was initially unclear to what extent the

provincial governments would allow the federal government to retain many of these powers in peacetime. Financial prosperity helped create and was sustained by a major upsurge in the Canadian population. Canadian soldiers arrived home with 43,000 war brides and 21,000 children, and this signaled the start of the 'baby boom,' which would be at its most prolific in the decade after 1945. After making an extremely valuable contribution to the war effort, most women returned to the home. However, important inroads towards changing the traditional role of women had been made. Reacting to growing families, technological and industrial age, and virtually full employment, patterns of life also began to change. Canadians increasingly moved to cities and suburbs, purchased cars, and bought new products such as televisions and electric fridges at the shopping centers that began to appear.

Canadian Politics in the 1950s



With the retirement of Mackenzie King in 1948, Louis St. Laurent became Prime Minister, and he and the Liberal Party won elections in 1949 and 1953.

St. Laurent's government spent money on large public works projects such as the Trans-Canada Highway, the St. Lawrence Seaway, and the Trans-Canada Pipeline. Often, large amounts of American money poured into Canada to help finance these and other projects.

When the Opposition in Parliament objected to large loans for a pipeline from Alberta to Central Canada, the St. Laurent government cut off Parliamentary debate. The so-called "pipeline debate" was bad news for the Liberal Party. The Progressive Conservative Party under leader John Diefenbaker painted the Liberals as arrogant. They had been in power since 1935, and the man known as "Dief the Chief" said it was time for a change. The voters agreed and Diefenbaker became Prime Minister after winning the 1957 election.

Assignment

1. In a 1-page summary, explain the changes Canada underwent after the war. Be sure to identify significant trends such as demographic, cultural, political, economic changes, as well as technological innovations. Make sure to explain why you think these changes happened.