Canada’s Response to the Great Depression
Effects on Canada

- Some argue that Canada was the country *worst* hit during the depression (especially the prairies).
- Wheat prices go from $1.43 a bushel in 1925 to just 35 cents in 1932.
- Income in Canada fell by 50% and unemployment went from 4 percent to 27%! (More than 1 in 4 Canadians)
- No unemployment insurance or social welfare...people were humiliated, malnourished, and suicide rates soared.
Wealthy Canadians with secure jobs noticed little change in their lifestyles… but farmers, factory workers, and small business workers were laid off and often evicted from their homes.

Massive line-ups for soup kitchens – a humiliating experience.
Drought

- Prairies got nailed by a) collapse of wheat market and b) a severe drought (*)
- Started in 1928 and lasted for almost 8 years!
- Accompanied by constant dust storms and a plague of grasshoppers.
Suicide

- Suicides high – (One man returned home in Winnipeg to discover that his wife drowned their son, strangled their daughter, and poisoned herself. She left a note “I owe the drugstore 44 cents. Farewell”)
- Suicide increased from 14 – 17%
Disadvantaged

- The Aboriginals – given $5 a month to survive and told to “live off the land.”
- The Chinese – In Vancouver, by 1932, many were starving to death. Given half the food by soup kitchens than white Canadians.
- Jews – Suffered anti-Semitism…employers posted signs telling Jews not to apply.
Immigration/Deportation

- Immigrants – 10,000 were deported in the first half of the depression and, in 1931, the government put a complete stop to immigration.
Our 2 Prime Ministers during the Depression were:

1. RB Bennet (Conservative)
   - 1930-1935

2. Mackenzie King (Liberal)
   - 1935-1948

Both were quite unprepared to deal with the crisis. King lost the 1930 election when he said, “I would not give a 5 cent piece to any province electing a Tory (Conservative) government.”
Bennett’s Response

- Introduced the “Unemployment Relief Act” which gave $20 million to provincial gov’ts for job creation – was ineffective
- Raised tariffs on imports by 50%, which did protect some Canadian businesses, but resulted in other countries raising tariffs on Canadian exports. Overall… a failure.
- Banned Canadian Communist party in 1931 – jailed leaders
- Introduced the “Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act” to help farmers build irrigation systems, but most farmers had already left farms due to drought.
More Bennett Solutions

Work Camps
- Created for single unemployed men in BC
- Built roads, cleared land and drainage ditches
- 20 cents per day and free room and board
- Terrible food
- Bed bug infestations

Jokes of Early 1930’s
- What do you call a deserted prairie farm? A Bennett Barnyard
- What is another name for a newspaper? A Bennett Blanket
- What is a car without an engine pulled by horses called? Bennett Buggy
Bennett’s New Deal

Based on USA President Roosevelt’s New Deal, Bennett created his own social insurance program.

- Progressive taxation (earn more money = pay more taxes)
- Insurance to protect workers against illness, injury and unemployment
- Regulated work hours, minimum wage, working conditions
- Revised old age pensions to support workers over 65
- Agriculture support programs
- Create Canada Wheat Board to regulate prices
Bye Bye Bennett

- By 1935, voters wanted Bennett gone! King was re-elected.
- King investigated to discover that millions of dollars needed to be spent on job creation...but he only spent a fraction of what was needed.
Mackenzie King – Take Two

King was back in power by 1935

- Created some “commissions” to investigate plight of unemployed

- These recommended he spend money on job creation and training programs
  - Rowell-Sirois Commission
    1. Equalization payments by federal gov’t to poorer provinces
    2. Social welfare programs like employment insurance and pensions

- King spent little on these – most were implemented years later
Going on the Pogey

- Gov’t created “relief” – vouchers could be submitted in exchange for groceries
- Men had to line up, prove he was unemployed and in need – this was humiliating
- Chinese and Aboriginal Canadians only granted half the amount of “pogey” than other Canadians
POLITICAL PARTIES: CCF

CCF = NDP!

- Co-operative Commonwealth Federation
- Created by J.S. Woodsworth
- Supported public ownership of main industries and social programs for sick and elderly
- Appealed to a wide variety of Canadians who were angry at the current government (farmers, labourers, socialists, intellectuals)
POLITICAL PARTIES: SOCIAL CREDIT

- Led by William “Bible Belt” Aberhart
- Saw capitalism as a waste, felt that government should give out money so that people could spend it (promised $25 a month, but not allowed by federal gov’t).
POLITICAL PARTIES:
UNION NATIONALE PARTY

- Started by Maurice Duplessis in Quebec
- French Canadian nationalist party
- Supported by Roman Catholic Church
PEOPLE’S RESPONSE

Riding the Rails
- Though illegal, thousands of single unemployed men would hop on top of trains to look for employment in other Canadian cities
- Vancouver sit ins
  - 1937 Federal Gov’t closed relief camps and reduced relief payments
  - 1600 protesters at Vancouver Art Gallery
  - Chased out with tear gas
  - Damage to downtown Vancouver over next 2 days
On to Ottawa Trek

- Protests over work camp conditions
- 2000 Trekkers rode rail cars to Regina where Bennett called the RCMP to stop them – trekkers put into football stadium
- Only leaders allowed to continue, but Bennett called them communist radicals
- Union leader Slim Evans told Bennet he was unfit to lead Canada
- RCMP in Regina ordered to clear stadium – fights became known as the Regina Riots. Some deaths.