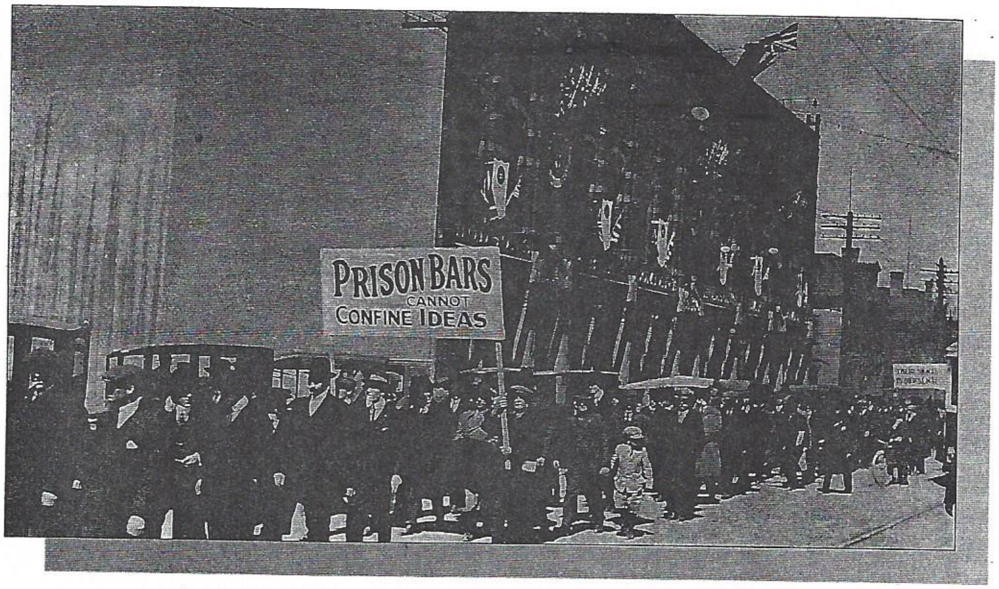


A demonstration protesting the arrest and trials of labour leaders during the Winnipeg General strike.

Politics and Regional Protests

In July 1920 Arthur Meighen, a Conservative, was sworn in as prime minister of Canada. He took over from Sir Robert Borden, who had resigned after the war. The Canada that Meighen inherited was restless and torn apart by strikes and regional interests.

French Canadians were still seething over the conscription crisis of 1917. After the election of 1917, Quebec also did not have a single MP on the government side. French Canadians felt increasingly alienated in Canada after the war. In the 1920s, a group called *Action Nationale* led by Abbé Lionel Groulx warned that French culture had to be protected in Quebec. Groulx wanted French-Canadian ownership of large industries such as hydroelectricity and opposed foreign investment in the province. The movement also supported French-Canadian rural life and traditional values.

The Maritime provinces also felt increasingly alienated in the country. Several Maritime manufacturing companies had moved out of the region to Central Canada, where they could have access to a larger market. Other Maritime industries also struggled with high freight rates on railways. Government policies favoured the growth of manufacturing companies in Central Canada, not in the East. Declining world demand for key Maritime products such as fish, coal, and farm goods also hit hard. Even the steel industry faced tough times as railway building basically stopped after the war. Unemployment soared. Many workers had to move to other parts of Canada to find work.

A Maritime Rights Movement wanted the federal government to increase subsidies (payments to the provinces), encourage more national and international trade through Maritime ports, and help protect Maritime industries with higher tariffs (taxes on imported goods). In 1926, a royal commission was set up to look into the problems. The commission recommended lower rail rates, aid to steel and coal industries, and higher federal subsidies. But the government made only minor changes. The fundamental economic problems in the region remained.

In the West, prairie farmers were also suffering from the post-war slump. In 1920, the world market for wheat collapsed. War-torn Europe could not afford to buy Canadian wheat. Many prairie farmers were desperately short of cash and becoming increasingly frustrated. They claimed that high tariffs pushed up the prices of farm machinery, equipment, and consumer goods. High freight rates on the railways also increased their costs. Farmers had been protesting over these issues since before the turn of the century, but saw no real action from governments. Many farmers believed federal political parties were dominated by business interests in Central Canada.

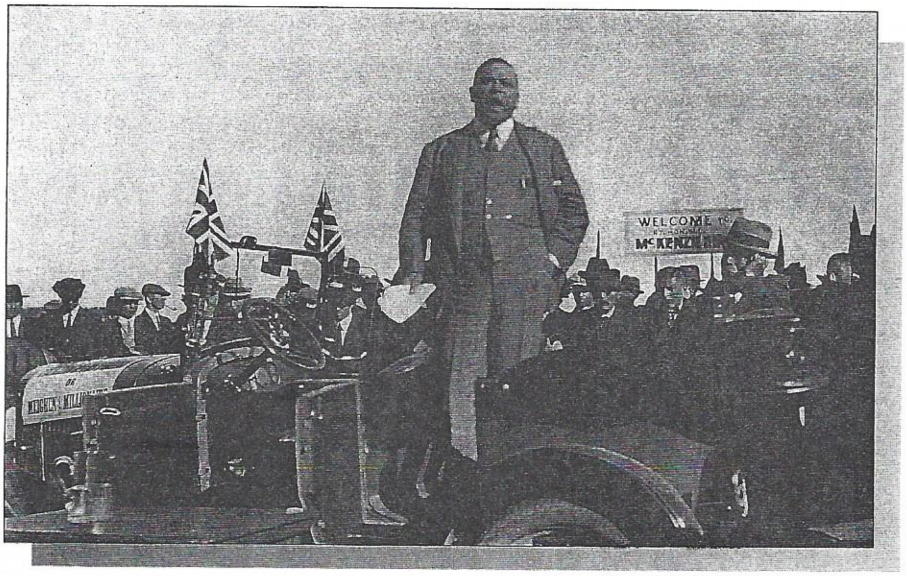
In 1920, a number of farmers decided to form their own federal political party—the **National Progressives**. The party campaigned for lower freight rates and tariffs. It also believed voters should have a chance to propose laws and to recall MPs who were not representing their concerns. In the federal election of 1921, the Progressives stunned everyone and won 65 seats in the House of Commons. This was second only to the Liberals, who won the election.

But members of the National Progressives party often could not agree on major issues. Some eventually joined the Liberals, while others dropped out of politics. Farmers' parties, however, continued to stand for farmers' concerns in provincial elections. While the National Progressives did not last, they showed that the traditional two-party system in Canada was not enough to represent the diverse concerns of groups across the country.

The federal election in 1921 was a tumultuous one. But the man who became prime minister for most of the 1920s was destined to be the most successful political leader of his age. He was the grandson of William Lyon Mackenzie, the leader of the 1837 Rebellion in Upper Canada. For almost 30 years until his death in 1950, William Lyon Mackenzie King dominated the Liberal party and political life in Canada.

On the surface, King seemed to possess few qualities that would attract large numbers of voters. He was cautious and careful, and extremely shrewd. He had a strong interest in spiritualism and sometimes, through mediums and seances, tried to contact the dead. There were times when King believed he had been in contact with his dead mother and had received political advice from important figures of the past, including Laurier.

King's political genius lay in making Liberal policies acceptable to various groups and regions across the nation. He listened to what various regions of Canada wanted. Often, he put off reaching a decision until he worked out compromises among the diverse interests.



William Lyon Mackenzie King during the election campaign. What does this photo suggest about how politicians reached the voters before the days of television?

Veterans and Social Support

War veterans, who had fought for their country, believed they were entitled to a job, a decent wage, and some compensation for the injured. Over 70 000 veterans who returned from the war were injured or disabled. Through a government program, hospitals and clinics across the country provided free medical care for veterans. Many needed artificial limbs, or help for visual impairments, shell-shock, and the effects of gassing. A Canadian veteran, Captain E. A. Baker, returned from the war without his sight and worked to establish the Canadian National Institute for the Blind in 1918.

A vocational training program was set up, and thousands of veterans were given training to help them find new jobs. The Soldier Settlement Act in 1919 offered those who wanted to farm a grant of land. Pensions were paid to veterans, widows, and the wives and children of disabled veterans.

William Derby of Port Alberni, BC, was the first to receive a pension cheque in Canada following the Pension Act in 1927.

But in the early 1920s, even veterans who had received training could not find jobs. Those on farms found it difficult to keep up their mortgage payments. Others found their disabilities or injuries had worsened, making it difficult for them to work. The government responded by raising the cost-of-living bonus on pensions and providing unemployment assistance. In 1930, the War Veterans Allowance Act provided veterans who were unemployable and those who reached the age of 60 with a pension. These were some of the first social support programs in Canada.

Meanwhile, labour and farmers' groups were also pressuring the federal government to introduce social support programs such as unemployment insurance and "old-age" pensions for people beyond the veterans. The government was slow to act, despite widespread public support for the schemes. In 1926, J. S. Woodsworth and A. A. Heaps sent a letter to Prime Minister King:

> *Dear Mr. King:*
> *As representatives of Labour in the House of Commons, we ask whether it is your intention to introduce at this session (a) provision for the Unemployed; (b) Old-Age Pensions.*

Despite opposition from Conservatives in the Senate, the **Pension Act** was passed in 1927. Opponents of the scheme believed that if people knew the government would support them when they turned 70, they would make little effort to provide for themselves. By the Pension Act, British subjects over the age of 70 were entitled to a pension of $240 a year. Pensioners had to have lived in Canada for at least 20 years. Anyone who earned more than $365 in income a year could not receive a pension, and people who owned a home had to transfer it to the

Pension Authority. The Pension Authority sold the home and used the money to pay the person's pension. Women could receive a pension only if they were widows. Aboriginal peoples and people who were not British subjects were not eligible for the pension. A small step had been taken toward social support programs, but they did not apply equally to everyone in society.

Aboriginal Political Movements

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Aboriginal nations struggled to keep their cultures and to have their rights recognized. Since the Indian Act, which was passed in 1876, government policy had stressed assimilation. That is, the government wanted Aboriginal nations to give up their traditional ways and be absorbed into Canadian culture, which was predominantly "white" culture.

The Indian Act had made Aboriginal peoples "wards of the state." In other words, they were not considered independent, self-governing nations. They were placed under the guardianship of the Canadian government. A Department of Indian Affairs determined the rules by which they would live. Many Aboriginal nations had been moved onto reserves, lands set aside for them. They were given housing, fishing, and hunting rights on reserves and rights to education. These rights were part of their status as "Indians" under the Indian Act, or part of their treaty rights. But the government considered this status as temporary. It expected Aboriginal peoples to eventually give up their status and become assimilated Canadian citizens.

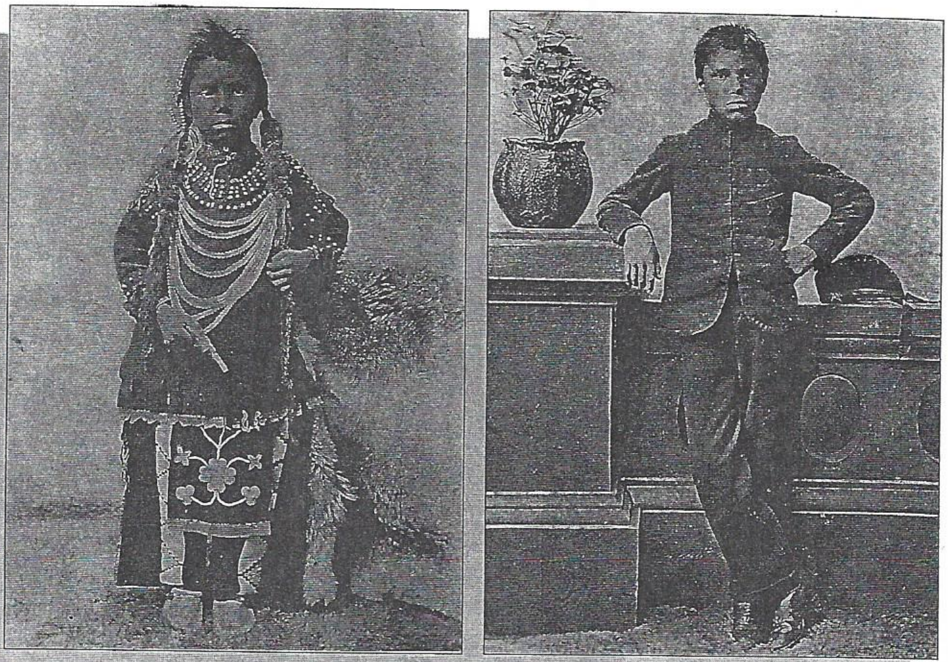
Duncan Campbell Scott, Superintendent of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1932, put the government's policy this way:

> *The happiest future for the Indian race is absorption into the general population, and this is the object of the policy of our government. The great forces of intermarriage and education will finally overcome the lingering traces of native custom and tradition.*

One way the government aimed to assimilate children of Aboriginal nations was through residential schools. Residential schools were funded by the government, but run by various churches. The first schools were established in the mid-1800s. By 1931, there were 80 residential schools operating across the country. At first, attendance was voluntary. But in 1920, all children of Aboriginal nations between the ages of 7 and 15 were required to go to the schools. These children were taken from their families and sent to live in the schools. They were not allowed to speak their own languages or to follow their traditional cultural and spiritual practices. Rules were strict and

FAST FORWARD

In 1998, the Canadian government made a formal apology to Aboriginal peoples for the treatment they received in residential schools. A total of $350 million was set aside to compensate the victims of the schools. But for many, it was too little too late. The schools had a devastating effect on Aboriginal cultures. Today Aboriginal communities are working to revive lost traditions, languages, and spiritual practices. They hope to heal the damage done during this difficult period in their history.



Thomas Moore attended a residential school in Regina. The photo on the left shows him as he entered the school. The photo on the right shows him after he had been in the school for a time.

1. Compare the photos. What changes do you notice in Thomas Moore's appearance, clothing, pose, and surroundings?
2. What effects do you think these changes would have on children of Aboriginal nations?
3. What do these photos show about the purpose of residential schools?

punishment was severe. Students were sometimes beaten for speaking their languages. Teachers were often poorly trained. Few children received a good education and many were ill-treated. The schools broke the connection between children, their parents, and their cultures. Many traditional Aboriginal ways were lost or forgotten. Residential schools were not phased out until the 1960s.

On reserves, Aboriginal peoples struggled with the loss of their traditional lifestyles. The government wanted Aboriginal peoples to become farmers. But land on reserves was often poor and agents sent to teach farming were not well trained. Aboriginal people who tried to live off reserves in Canadian towns and cities faced discrimination and prejudice. They were given few opportunities to find good jobs and make a living. Many faced poverty and despair.

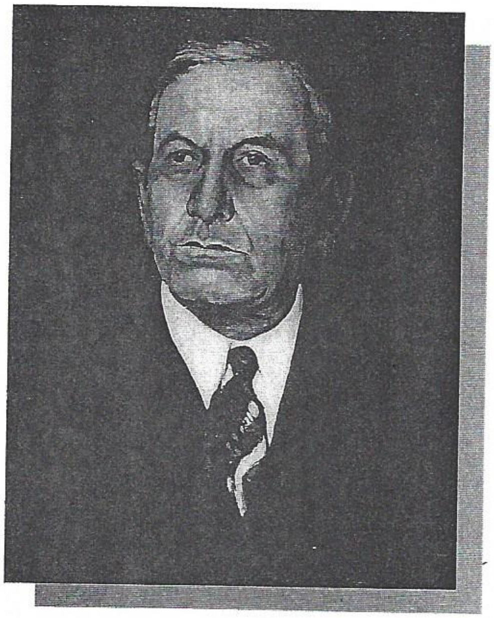
In the 1920s and 1930s, Aboriginal peoples began to form organizations to fight for their rights. In 1919 Frederick Loft, a Mohawk veteran from World War I, organized the **League of Indians**. The League was the first attempt at a united voice for Aboriginal nations. After the war, the government wanted to enfranchise Aboriginal veterans. By enfranchisement, the veterans would have the right to vote, but only if they gave up their Aboriginal status. Many Aboriginal veterans refused. To them, giving up their status meant giving up their identities. Loft believed that Aboriginal people should have the right to vote without giving up their status.

Edward Ahenakew, a Cree, helped to extend the League into western Canada. During the 1920s and 1930s, the League worked for better health and education programs, more financial aid, control over reserve lands, and the right to hunt, fish, and trap without government interference.

In British Columbia, organizations such as the Allied Tribes pushed for recognition of Aboriginal land rights. The government had never signed treaties in British Columbia for Aboriginal lands. Aboriginal nations believed they had rights to land as the original inhabitants. The Allied Tribes took their case to the Privy Council in London, but they were blocked by officials at the Canadian High Commission. At a meeting in 1927, Duncan Campbell Scott rejected the Allied Tribes' land claim saying it would "smash" Confederation.

In response to this political activism, the government made it illegal for Aboriginal nations to raise funds for land claims. It also restricted their right to form political organizations. Bans on traditional ceremonies such as the potlatch were more strictly enforced. Some West Coast Aboriginal people were thrown into jail for taking part in a secret potlatch ceremony. In 1884, the Canadian government had banned the potlatch. By the 1920s the police were seizing masks and other sacred objects.

When the Six Nations attempted to gain international recognition as an independent nation equal to other nations in the world, the government blocked the actions. An RCMP detachment was stationed on the Six Nations reserve in 1923. In 1924, the police expelled the traditional council and seized sacred wampum belts. By 1930, these early political movements by Aboriginal nations had been stifled by the Canadian government, at least temporarily.



Mohawk Fred Loft, founder of the League of Indians in 1919.

Immigration

Immigration became another major issue in the 1920s. During World War I, immigration had slowed to a trickle. After the war, the federal government once again began to promote the Canadian West as a land of opportunity. But Canada was looking primarily for British immigrants. British youth and British ex-service men were actively recruited for the development of agriculture in Canada. Non-British, or "foreigners," were shut out.

Why? During the war many Canadians had become more suspicious and less tolerant of "foreigners" (non-British) and ethnic minorities. An intense dislike of foreigners is known as **xenophobia**. Changes to the Immigration Act in 1919 reflected feelings of xenophobia. It became compulsory for immigrants to pass an English literacy test. Canada was looking only for immigrants who could be easily assimilated into society. A large part of the population and the Canadian government, whether it was Liberal or Conservative, did not want more non-British people in the country.

James Gray describes feelings in Winnipeg at this time:

> *None of the city's chartered banks, trust companies, or insurance companies would knowingly hire a Jew, and anyone with a Ukrainian or Polish name had almost no chance of employment except rough manual labour.The oil companies, mortgage companies, financial and stockbrokers, and most retail and mercantile companies except the Hudson's Bay Company discriminated against all non-Anglo Saxons ... There was a possible solution if they could beat the accent handicap.They could change their names .... Caoline Czarnecki overnight became Connie Kingston, Mike Drazenovick became Martin Drake, and Steve Dziatkewich became Edward Dawson.*

Feelings of resentment against people from former enemy countries and pacifists also remained. In 1919 the government passed an Order-in-Council barring all Mennonites, Doukhobors, and Hutterites from coming to Canada. Just the year before in 1918, a number of Hutterites had moved into Manitoba and Alberta from the United States. The government had granted them exemption from military service, permission to settle communally, and the right to independent private schools. These were the same rights the Mennonites and Doukhobors had been granted when they came to Canada. But hostile public opinion pushed the government to overturn its policy. People complained about the special privileges given to the Hutterites. Many returned to the United States. Mennonites were not allowed into Canada again until 1922, and Doukhobors not until 1926.

In British Columbia, the discrimination was mostly directed against Asians. Immigrants from China, Japan, and India had over the years settled in British Columbia. They worked building railroads, mining, fishing, in sawmills, and in businesses. But all these groups faced racial discrimination. They were often paid lower wages than other workers for the same job, were excluded from most professions, and did not have the right to vote even if they were born in Canada. Many could find jobs only within their own communities.

On 1 July 1923, Canada passed the **Chinese Exclusion Act**. This Act banned all Chinese except students, merchants, and diplomats from entering Canada. From 1923 until the Act was repealed in 1947, only eight Chinese people were admitted to Canada. To Chinese Canadians, 1 July 1923 is known as "Humiliation Day."

Other policy changes followed. In 1927 officials in prairie cities complained to the federal government that many European immigrants were not staying on farms as intended. Instead, they were flocking into the cities and towns looking for jobs. This was adding to growing unemployment problems in cities. Under pressure, the federal government agreed to restrict European immigrants. In 1928, the government also limited to 150 the number of Japanese allowed to enter the country. That same year, the provincial Liberal government in British Columbia petitioned Ottawa to end all Asian immigration and to patriate, or send home, as many Chinese or Japanese people as possible. Applications were still accepted from British citizens who wanted to immigrate to Canada, however.

Canadian Culture

Popular movies, music, dance, and fashions were dominated by American influences, but more Canadians were becoming concerned with creating distinctively Canadian art. The Group of Seven artists in many ways led the way. Group of Seven artist Arthur Lismer wrote, "After 1919, most creative people, whether in painting, writing or music, began to have a guilty feeling that Canada was as yet unwritten, unpainted, unsung . . . In 1920, there was a job to be done."

As more Canadian artists focused on Canadian themes, magazines, journals, and other organizations were formed to promote them. The Canadian Authors' Association was founded in 1921 to back Canadian writers. More art schools opened in cities across the country. Emily Carr became the first woman artist to gain national and international recognition for her painting. Later in her career, she also won fame for her writing. Other organizations to promote Canadian culture would be formed in the 1930s.

Women in the 1920s

Women in the 1920s still did not enjoy all the privileges men had. Although women had won the right to vote during the war, few women were elected to the House of Commons or to provincial governments. In the 1921 federal election, Agnes Macphail was the only woman elected. She found she could not do her job in the House of Commons "without being ballyhooed like a bearded lady." She said, "I was a curiosity, a freak." Despite the obstacles, she strongly supported women's rights, and worked to improve conditions for farmers, miners, and prisoners.

In the 1920s, women were still seen mainly as homemakers. They were expected to give up the jobs they had in the war and return to looking after their husbands and families. By 1929, women made up 20 per cent of the workforce, but most worked in traditional female jobs as domestic servants, secretaries, sales clerks, or factory workers. The majority of these women were single, since employers expected women to give up their jobs when they married. Since these "female" jobs were considered less valuable than the work men did, wages were low. Women who did the same jobs as men were also paid less. On average, women earned between 54 and 60 per cent of what men earned. There were also still few women in the professions outside teaching and nursing. Only a few overcame the obstacles to become doctors, lawyers, or professors.

Women from minority groups faced even greater challenges. Many employers discriminated against Chinese and Japanese women, and women of colour. Employers simply would not hire them. Many of these women could not find jobs outside their own ethnic communities. Japanese and Chinese were barred from entering Canadian colleges, universities, and hospitals.

The Persons Case

The **Persons Case** underlined the inequality women still faced. In 1916, Emily Murphy was made the first woman judge in the British Empire and she was appointed to an Alberta court. A lawyer in her courtroom challenged her right to judge any case because she was a woman. He said that no woman was a "person" in the eyes of the law. Emily Murphy was supported by the Supreme Court of Alberta, which said that a woman had every right to be a judge. This should have settled the matter, but it did not.

Over the next several years, women's groups asked the prime minister to

Netsurfer
Visit the web site for the Status of Women Canada at www.swc-cfc.gc.ca.

FAST FORWARD

The contribution of the "Famous Five" to Canadian history is still remembered today. In 1999, Edmonton artist Barbara Paterson unveiled her bronze statues of the Famous Five at Olympic Plaza in Calgary. She shows the women in an imaginary scene when they hear the exciting news of the decision that women are "persons" in the eyes of the law. Another set of statues will be placed in the Parliament Buildings at Ottawa, honouring the contribution of these women to Canada's history.

appoint a woman to the Senate. The British North America Act stated that qualified "persons" could receive appointments. Again the question was raised: Was a woman a "person" in the eyes of the law? Was a woman qualified for an appointment to the Senate?

In August 1927, Emily Murphy and four other prominent women decided to petition the prime minister. The group of women included Nellie McClung, Louise McKinney, Henrietta Edwards, Irene Parlby, and Judge Murphy. They asked, "Does the word 'persons' in Section 24 of the British North America Act include female 'persons'?" In April 1928, the Supreme Court of Canada decided that women were not "persons" qualified for appointment to the Canadian Senate.

Judge Murphy and her supporters, nicknamed the **"Famous Five,"** were discouraged, but not defeated. They decided to appeal their case to the Privy Council in Britain. After three months of consideration, the judges of the Privy Council announced their decision. They declared that the word "persons" referred to men and women. Women were indeed qualified to sit in the Senate of Canada. Emily Murphy won her fight.

Many of her friends thought that Emily Murphy deserved to be the first woman appointed to the Senate. However, it was two more years before the first woman was named to a Senate seat. When it did happen it was not Emily Murphy, but Cairine Wilson, who received this honour. Senator Wilson of Montreal had worked as an organizer and president of the National Federation of Liberal Women.

Canadian Sports

The 1920s were also a golden age of sport in Canada. Many of the sports heroes of the decade were amateurs. They seemed to come out of nowhere to grab the headlines and establish world records. Percy Williams is an example. This 20-year-old sprinter, almost unknown in Canada, stunned onlookers at the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics. In the 100- and 200-metre sprints, he won a sensational double gold victory. Competing athletes acknowledged him as "the greatest sprinter the world has ever seen."

Canada's most famous male athlete of the first half-century was Lionel Conacher. He piled up trophies and medals in wrestling, boxing, lacrosse, hockey, football, and baseball. One day in 1922,

SPOTLIGHT ON . . .

Emily Murphy

Emily Murphy was a writer, journalist, magistrate, reform-er, and famous crusader for women's rights. In her early career, Murphy published a series of popular and delightful books of personal impressions under the pen name "Janey Canuck." Born in Cookstown, Ontario, she later moved west with her family and spent a large part of her life in Edmonton, Alberta. It was there that she developed her interest in law and women's rights.

One afternoon, when Emily was visiting a prairie farm, she met a bitterly distraught woman. The woman's husband had, without warning, sold their land and gone off to the United States. The woman was left penniless and homeless. Women at that time had no property rights. Men could sell land and home without their wives' consent and without giving her any part. It was law. Emily Murphy determined that day to change that law. Seven years later, she had won the fight. In 1911, Alberta passed the Dower Act giving women rights to one-third share of their husband's property.

Emily Murphy went on to become the first woman magistrate in the British Empire. She led the battle to have a woman judge preside over cases involving women and children so that their cases could be fairly heard and their interests protected. She also campaigned against drug addiction and fought to prove that women were "persons" under the law and could therefore be appointed to the Senate.

1. Why do you think it was important for women to win property rights?
2. Today, a "Governor General's Award in Commemoration of the Persons Case" is given every year on October 18. The Award recognizes the contributions of individuals in both the paid and unpaid workforce to promote equality for women in Canada. Find out about women who have won the Award in the past. Who would you nominate for the Award today? Why?

Conacher starred in championship games in two different sports. He hit a triple in the last inning to give Toronto Hillcrest the city baseball championship. Then he drove across town to play in the Ontario Lacrosse Championship. In this game, he scored four times. Conacher also excelled in football. In the 1922 Grey Cup game, he scored 15 points leading the Toronto Argonauts to a 23-0 win over the Edmonton Eskimos.

Women also enjoyed a golden age in sport. Before World War I, the sports considered "proper" for women included croquet, skating, fencing, cycling, and lawn tennis. Women participated in many other sports, but it was not until the 1920s that it was socially acceptable for women to play body-contact sports. Women began to compete more actively in a wide range of organized team sports.