

The legacy of the Depression

Do you think you would have been able to survive in the Depression?

There's no doubt that the 1930s was a tough time to live through.

Of course, people's troubles were made a bit easier to bear by the fact that so many others were also affected. Norman Jewison, the famous Canadian film director, was a boy in Toronto at this time. He recalls that kids didn't realize they were poor, so they didn't worry about it. All their friends lived the way they did, and accepted that it was normal.

Although it was a terrible experience for some, the Depression did have some positive and lasting effects. From then onwards, Canadians expected their governments to play a bigger role in keeping the economy strong. It was no longer enough to leave it to the business cycle and individual employers. They also expected governments to look after individual and family security. Unemployment insurance, welfare payments, better pensions, and children's allowances all had their origins in this period. The Depression has made a permanent impact on our history.

Those who lived through the dark years of the Great Depression will never forget it.

It certainly left its mark on Canada as a whole. In this chapter, you have learned the following things about Canada during the Depression:

- Lower prices, lower demand, and drought caused many farmers to lose more than half their income.
- Unemployment was at its highest in cities.
- What relief payments were available were in most cases barely enough to survive on.
- In 1935, unions organized an "On-to-Ottawa" trek by unemployed men from labour camps. The trek was stopped in Regina, where a riot left one police officer dead.
- Several new parties emerged during the Depression, including the CCF, the Social Credit party, and the Union Nationale.

Task #1:

Find out more about the views of the Liberals, Conservatives, and New Democrats (NDP) regarding employment insurance and social assistance today. Create a chart or other graphic display to present your results.

Task #2:

Use the History textbooks to explain the historical significance of the following during the Depression:

- a) the Dust Bowl
- b) relief camps
- c) Bennett's "New Deal"
- d) The On-to-Ottawa trek