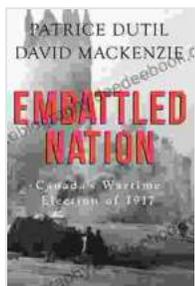


The Embattled Nation: Canada's Wartime Election of 1917

The year 1917 marked a pivotal moment in Canadian history as the nation grappled with the complexities of the First World War and its profound impact on domestic affairs. The wartime election held on December 17th of that year became a watershed event, shaping the political landscape and reflecting the deep divisions that permeated Canadian society.

The Political Climate

The election was held amidst growing discontent with the government of Prime Minister Robert Borden. Borden's Conservative Party had initially enjoyed overwhelming support at the outbreak of war in 1914, but his decision to implement conscription in 1917 had sparked widespread opposition. The Military Service Act, which compelled men of military age to serve overseas, alienated many French Canadians and farmers who felt their sacrifices were not being adequately recognized.



Embattled Nation: Canada's Wartime Election of 1917

by Sanford Levinson

★★★★☆ 4.4 out of 5

Language : English
File size : 7420 KB
Text-to-Speech : Enabled
Screen Reader : Supported
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled
Word Wise : Enabled
Print length : 362 pages
X-Ray : Enabled



In response to the deepening divisions, the Liberal Party under Sir Wilfrid Laurier emerged as a formidable opposition. Laurier, who had served as Prime Minister from 1896 to 1911, opposed conscription and appealed to the sentiments of French Canadians and other groups who resisted the government's war measures.

The Campaign

The campaign was fiercely contested, with both sides engaging in mudslinging and personal attacks. Borden accused Laurier of being soft on the war effort, while Laurier portrayed Borden as a reckless and authoritarian leader. The debate reached its peak during a heated speech by Borden in which he denounced Laurier as a "traitor" who was undermining the war effort.

The Results

The election produced a narrow victory for Borden's Conservatives, who secured 153 seats compared to the Liberals' 82. However, the results revealed significant regional disparities. In English-speaking Canada, the Conservatives dominated, while in Quebec, the Liberals held sway.

The election also resulted in the emergence of a third party, the Unionist Party, which emerged as a coalition of Conservatives and Liberal supporters who backed conscription. The Unionists won 41 seats, demonstrating the deep divisions within both major parties.

The Impact

The consequences of the 1917 election were far-reaching. Borden's victory allowed him to continue his policy of conscription, which contributed to the eventual Canadian victory in the war. However, the election also exacerbated tensions between English and French Canadians and left a lasting legacy of mistrust.

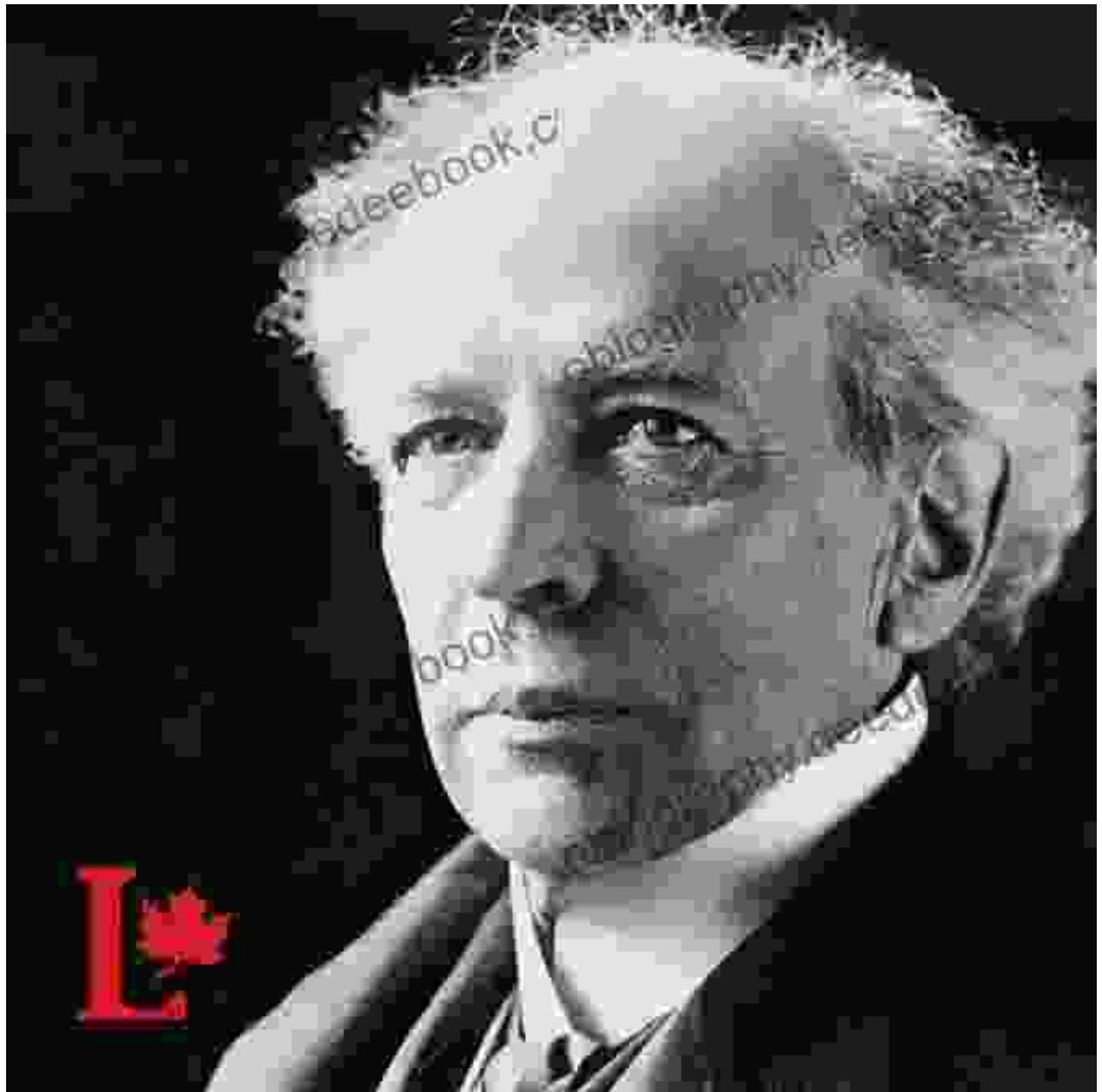
The emergence of the Unionist Party also had a significant impact on Canadian politics. It weakened the traditional two-party system and paved the way for the eventual merger of the Conservatives and Liberals into the Progressive Conservative Party in 1942.

The Legacy

The 1917 wartime election remains a defining moment in Canadian history. It exposed the deep divisions that existed within the nation during the First World War and shaped the political landscape for years to come. The election also highlighted the challenges of balancing the demands of war with the need to preserve national unity.

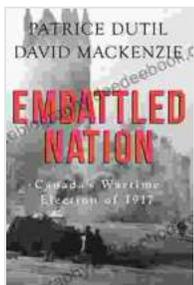
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