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THE MILITARY POLICIES OF CANADA
REACTION TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR

Towards the end of the Nineteenth Century the increasing tempo of scientific and technological advance generated a world wide economic expansion. Canada in particular, after two decades of depression and stagnation, was entering an era of prosperity **predicated in the main upon the** peopling of the territories soon to become the Provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta.

When it was noted overseas that there was much gold in the Transvaal and the clouds were gathering for the South African War, Canada's economy was buoyant. Prosperity in these days did not mean Jet planes, penthouses, easy credit and feather-bedding, it meant that a man willing to work hard could find hard work to do. This prosperity was growing and widening until shortly before the outbreak of the First World War, when it was to give way to a depression caused by overoptimism and excessive speculation.

In attempting to assess Canada's reaction to the Boer War it is easy to ascertain the positions and actions taken by men of commanding stature, but much harder to gain insight into the

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feelings of the average person. For this was still the Victorian age; God was in Heaven, the Queen on the throne, the Governor General the agent of the Imperial will and conformity with the desires and designs of the Establishment an almost inescapable must.

On the whole the general attitude of the Canadian people at the time was 'Canada for Canadians within the Empire', but underneath this general and sincere loyalty there were crosscurrents that were brought out more clearly and intensified by the sentimental and constitutional aspects of participation in the South African War.

The motives and sentiments of men can be understood only in the context of their day and environment, and in examining the public reaction to the South African War it is well to remember that the Dominion at the time was still a colony composed of five rather different societies with not too much intercommunication, and with loyalty to the Crown the main unifying element. For there was no radio or television to keep the rustic Maritimer informed of events in gold-rich British Columbia, no public opinion poll to tell the ardent imperialist in Toronto - had he cared to listen - what was in the hearts and minds of French Canadians, no agency to acquaint the ~~M~~habitant with events beyond the Parish pump, or, perhaps the Province. Of Daily Papers there were many, but apart from the endless diatribes of partisan politics they were largely uniform in content: everything British was good; everything American or French was not so good; social conscience

was still a tender plant, and the racial and religious cleavages, the powerful forces of bigotry and intolerance and the excessive opportunism of the politicians were inhibiting any intelligent discussion of most questions.

Had it been possible to disperse British and French Canadians in equal proportion from coast to coast, Canada might well have become a united nation. But history is not unmade, and at the turn of the century - as today - the central fact of Canadian political life was the duality of the founding races and the resultant need for compromise.

In a period which saw several developments of disruptive potential, it was Canada's good fortune to have Sir Wilfrid Laurier at the helm. As a politician he knew all there was to know about the art of expedient compromise; what made him a statesman was his flair for compromise in the interest of national harmony. In 1897 he participated at London in the Celebration of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee of accession to the Throne, and in the concurrent Imperial Conference. No doubt Laurier enjoyed the popularity his grace and eloquence won for him, no doubt he returned with a deepened understanding of things British, but the honours and blandishments provided by a purposeful Colonial Office had neither turned him into a strident imperialist nor led him to confound the interests of Downing Street with those of Canada. But to protect French Canadians from too great encroachment by the Anglo-Saxon majority, and to

keep Canada from the grasp of the United States, it seemed perhaps better to compromise the dreams of an entirely independent nation and see Canada as an integral though independent part of the British Empire. - Towards the end of the same year, with the opposing camps in the vexed Manitoba School question still deadlocked beyond apparent hope, not without Laurier's foreknowledge to be sure, a papal encyclical dealing with the problem served as a means of reaching compromise. * Soon his statesmanship was to be tested even more severely.

At the end of the Century the racial composition of the Canadian population was still uncomplicated, and reactions and attitudes on the whole were predictable. Almost three fifth of the nearly five million Canadians were of Anglo-Saxon origin; about one third was French-Canadian, the balance was composed of small ethnic groups.⁽²⁾ In their greater or lesser dispersion and more or less advanced state of assimilation the elements of foreign origin or descent did not possess any political power of their own, and in the political equation their weight was not significant. In 1899 the great waves of immigrants about to people the west were still a thing of the future, and for all practical purposes there were only the Anglo-Saxons and Irish, constantly nourished by immigration and eager to maintain and strengthen their supremacy, and the French-Canadians, without recent reinforcement by immigration, impervious to outside influence and destined to play a passive role.

* "Until it shall be granted to them to obtain the full triumph of all their claims, let them not refuse partial satisfaction...." (1)

The several layers of the Anglo-Saxon population had come from widely differing social backgrounds, had settled in Canada at different times and for different reasons and, indeed, occupied different levels of the social structure. But on the whole, the Scots whose ancestors had tilled the soil of Nova Scotia under the French regime, the English, Scotch and part of the Irish settlers of Toronto, the United Empire Loyalists and the descendents of the British garrison populations were loyal to the Crown and united in their pride of race.* In addition to these common bonds there was the fact that more recently they had been exposed to intensive Empire propaganda.

Empires are born, grow, flourish and die; built on shaky foundations they last a thousand days rather than a thousand years, but filling a void and - like the British Empire - giving enhancement to mankind, they may endure for centuries. The British Empire was at the crest of its own flood-tide at the end of Victoria's reign, under Joseph Chamberlain's driving imperialism, strongly supported by the literary imperialism of Rudyard Kipling. At that time the insistent colonial aspirations of the continental powers and the growing competition from Germany and America on the one hand, and Chamberlain's awareness of the increasing stature and wealth of Canada and other Dominions on the other, made him

* It is true of course, that not all United Empire Loyalists who came to Upper Canada or the Maritimes were of Anglo-Saxon origin. Many were Dutch, Palatine Germans, Huguenots, Hessians and others who preferred British ways or sought to avoid the consequences of having backed the wrong horse. There were even Indians and Negroes who participated in the migration for a variety of reasons.

anxious to draw the bonds of Empire tighter and tighter. "It was Chamberlain who set about enthusiastically to reorganize and centralize the British Empire."⁽³⁾ He desired Imperial customs union, an Imperial Parliament and centralized Imperial Defence. His chief engine of propaganda, the British Empire League (prior to 1896 called the Imperial Federation League), had long drenched Canada with speeches, pamphlets, magazine and newspaper articles extolling Imperial Federation and questioning the value of colonial independence.⁽⁴⁾

However, the Imperial Conference of 1897 had clearly shown that Canada was not amenable to Imperial Federation or any similar form of close integration. At that time, after listening to the Colonial Secretary's eloquent speech in favour of closer Imperial ties, Laurier was one of the Premiers from the self-governing colonies who dashed Chamberlain's hopes by bringing about the passage of a final resolution describing the existing political relations between the United Kingdom and the self-governing colonies as generally satisfactory.⁽⁵⁾ "While paying lip tribute to the glories of the Empire, [Laurier] would in no way commit himself to an Imperial military alliance. He saw Chamberlain's proposals as a threat to Canadian autonomy."⁽⁶⁾ And in the summer of 1899, when Lt.-Col. Sam Hughes, M.P.-(Cons., North Victoria) in the House of Commons cited the offers of military assistance received in London from sister colonies, and demanded action by the Government, Laurier took refuge behind pious hopes

for peace, though a few weeks later he let the House pass a resolution of sympathy (page 10 below). Subsequently he evaded any positive response to Lord Minto's lordly urgings for a definitive promise of military aid, on 4 October repudiated General Hutton's bold statement of the previous day that a definite force would be offered, and remained completely non-committal as to the Government's course of action in the event of war.⁽⁷⁾ However, the work of the Empire League, coupled with skilful and sustained newspaper propaganda had rekindled Imperial feeling in Anglo-Saxon Canada to the point where an Imperial venture would find powerful and widespread support.⁽⁸⁾

HOW THE STAGE WAS SET

Like a train, public opinion requires a certain time to attain full momentum from a standing start, and it was indeed not by chance that peaceful Canada greeted the South African venture with enthusiasm; public opinion had been prepared for the event with consummate skill.

When the war was becoming a matter of high probability, England was in a state of isolation, as a country illprepared, as an Empire unprepared for war. Moreover, Chamberlain's plans for harnessing Canada had been hampered by the fact that the mutual obligations of Britain and Canada in case of war had never been spelled out and were clearly beyond immediate clarification. Astute handling of the machinery of imperial government and skilful propaganda were therefore necessary, and they were supplied, though at the cost of deepening the gulf between French and "English" Canadians.

On the highest levels of Imperial Government the ground work had been laid by the suitable appointments of Lord Minto* as Governor General, and Major General Edward Hutton as Commander of the Canadian Militia. Negotiations concerning Canadian participation in a possible South African War began in March 1899, when the War Office and Admiralty through Minto raised the question of Canadian troops serving outside Canada.⁽⁹⁾ Some weeks later the South African League Congress, an organization inspired by Cecil Rhodes, urged by cable the despatch by the British Empire League of Canada of a sympathetic resolution to the Imperial Government.⁽¹⁰⁾ By July, official and unofficial pressures on Canada were mounting, and Chamberlain wrote to Minto about procuring an offer of Canadian troops; "it should be made soon, but I do not desire that it should be the result of external pressure or suggestion".⁽¹¹⁾

With his usual zeal and directness, Lord Minto immediately conveyed Chamberlain's wishes to Sir Wilfrid, concluding his letter with the statement:

... But as I have said to you already, it is all important that any such offer as that under consideration should be spontaneous and not merely the result of a desire to meet the hopes expressed at home.⁽¹²⁾

Laurier replied:

The present case does not seem to be one in which England, if there is war, ought to ask us, or even expect us, to take a part; nor do I believe that it would add

*Gilbert John Murray-Kynnymond Elliot, 4th Earl of Minto.

to the strength of the imperial sentiment to assert at this juncture that the colonies should assume the burden of military expenditure, except - which God forbid! - in the case of pressing danger.* (13)

In the meantime, as it had become clear that Laurier was not responding with the alacrity expected by the Colonial Office, the weighty influence of Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal, Canadian High Commissioner in London had been added to the forces of pressure. (15)

In Canada during these days the ball was carried by Sam Hughes. On 13 July he urged in the House that the Government take positive action in the Transvaal matter, but evidently Laurier was still in control of the situation, for only he and the Leader of the Opposition commented on the matter in the House; Laurier hoping that the trouble would subside, and Tupper countering that British supremacy in South Africa was best maintained by the outlying portions of the Empire declaring that they would be ready to strengthen the arm of the mother country. (16)

*In fairness to the Governor General it should be noted that privately he had a good deal of understanding for Laurier's attitude. As late as 28 September, Lord Minto wrote to his brother, Arthur Elliott:

... I don't see why they should commit their country to the expenditure of lives and money for a quarrel not threatening imperial safety and directly contrary to the opinion of a colonial government at the Cape..... if Sir Wilfrid calls a Cabinet Council and asks me to be present... I should be in a nice muddle - my chief at home thirsting for blood, all my friends here ditto, and myself, while recognizing imperial possibilities, also seeing the iniquity of the war, and that the time for colonial support has hardly yet arrived. (14)

Finally, however, the pressures from the militant imperialists induced Laurier to deviate from his course of masterly inactivity: on 31 July he introduced a motion of sympathy with the efforts of Her Majesty's Imperial authorities "to secure full possession of equal rights and liberties for British subjects residing in the Transvaal",⁽¹⁷⁾ Quickly the motion was agreed to, "all members of the House rising to their feet and singing the National Anthem"⁽¹⁸⁾

With this the die was cast, though there were not too many persons who realized at the moment that the resolution was more than an amiable reaffirmation of the Imperial tie, and fewer still who could have been aware of the true nature of Chamberlain's machinations in the Transvaal matter. In any case, the Canadian press paid scant attention to the passage of the resolution. Perhaps it was the silence of consent; typical was the Victoria Colonist (Cons.), which carried the item on the front page in a few lines of almost microscopically small print.

In supporting the resolution before the House, Alexander McNeill (Cons. North Bruce) had deplored the wretched conditions imposed on Her Majesty's subjects in the Transvaal, and made it a point to state that if no offer of material assistance was embodied in the resolution this was only so "because it is felt that it is unnecessary to render assistance to a one hundred ton hammer to crack a hazlenut".⁽¹⁹⁾ In the event the Hazlenut proved harder to crack than expected, but in Canada at the time it was generally felt that a South African involvement would

hardly be more than a lark for a few young bloods. Had not Mr. Chamberlain intimated repeatedly that as far as this trivial war was concerned, England could manage alone, but a Colonial display would be a step towards Imperial Union.⁽²⁰⁾ Typical of Canadian opinion was the Free Press (Winnipeg, Lib.) of 16 October, which stated editorially: "That a South African War is to be a small war is a foregone conclusion".

... It was not until the Siege of Ladysmith began that Canadians believed the Boers capable of resisting even a comparatively small British force. Bravery and determination were conceded and inferiority of generalship was assumed. A war against the Boers alone was not regarded as a serious undertaking for the Empire. (21)

On 11 August the House was prorogued, and any further action would have to come from the Cabinet.⁽²²⁾ In September Sir Charles Tupper returned from England and spearheaded the growing movement for the sending of a Canadian contingent. Insistent articles were written and numerous interviews obtained from leading citizens. Excitement began to mount.⁽²³⁾ Newspaper articles, particularly on the part of the Star (Montreal, Cons.) fanned the flames.⁽²⁴⁾ Later, on 7 November, The Times (London) carried an extensive analysis of Canadian press opinion during the critical weeks and noted its overwhelmingly "warmly imperialistic" attitude.

CANADIAN ATMOSPHERE IN THE SUMMER OF 1899*

During the last years of the century the Dreyfus Affair exercised the minds of men in all countries. Looking back from our rough world it seems incredible that the fate of an army captain should hold the interest of the world for almost a decade. But so it did, and in the summer of 1899, pride of place and space in most Canadian papers went to the Dreyfus trial at Rennes.

In September persons interested in commercial matters learned from numerous advertisements in the press that the Canada Cycle and Motor Car Company, president E.H. Massey Harris, was planning the manufacture of motors and motor cars and inviting the public to purchase shares in the company: "This branch of business is believed to offer profitable investment for capital".⁽²⁵⁾ With only one gasoline motor car in Canada in 1898,⁽²⁶⁾ this was a bold claim to make, but it was also prophetic, for in the years to come the number of motor cars increased rapidly and a number of companies proved that the automobile industry could be a "profitable investment for capital".

As the summer ripened into fall, however, discriminating newspaper readers could hardly fail to realize that Britain was getting set for war in South Africa. Earlier in the summer even Conservative

*It has not been possible to make a thorough survey of the contemporary newspapers. Press opinions recorded in the present Notes are the result of spot-checks. However, the subject is being dealt with in detail in a book about to be published by Norman Pendlington of the Michigan State College.

papers had still noted occasionally that there might be two sides to the Transvaal question. On 29 July, e.g., the Victoria Colonist carried a London despatch to the effect that Sir H. Campbell-Bannermann, Liberal leader, had said he saw nothing from the beginning to the end of the story to justify armed intervention [in South Africa], a statement immediately branded by Mr. Chamberlain as calculated to embarrass the action of the Government. And on 17 August the same paper reported that there was a new Commanding Officer in South Africa, his predecessor having been transferred by the War Office "for seeming to applaud the Boers".* On 9 September the Morning Chronicle (Halifax, Lib.) reported Paul Kruger, President of the Transvaal Republic, as praying for a change of heart in Chamberlain, and stating that England's action was "like putting a revolver in a man's face"; on 20 September the same paper carried a long letter to the Editor from a clergyman with a South African name, who felt that the Dutch in the Transvaal had a very strong case against the pretensions of the British Government. But more and more openly newspaper despatches assumed the character of undisguised propaganda and editorial opinions were hardening in favour of Canadian participation. Towards the end of September, at a time when La Presse (Montreal) stated flatly that French Canada was favouring the Boers, the English Language press was featuring articles like "Sam Hughes wants to fight" and carrying obviously inspired despatches from Toronto about arrangements being made for the despatch of Canadian

*Maj. Gen. Sir William Butler recalled and transferred to Egypt. (loc. cit.)

troops to the Transvaal. Rather amusing to a generation used to the elasticity of cold war thinking was the quaint bombast of an editorial in the

Victoria Colonist of 3 October:

... If a hostile shot is fired by the Boers, it will become the duty of Great Britain to wage a campaign which will terminate with the end of the Transvaal as an independent government.*

Little more than one week later the war broke out, and in England, where anti-war sentiment had been strong in many circles, including highly responsible ones, the declaration of war "finally released the full flood of 'jingo' frenzy".(27) In Canada, where outside of Quebec there had been little articulate opposition, the imperialist element was in full cry, and, not unnaturally at this juncture, the question of loyalty to the Empire took precedence over any other consideration.

DISSENTING VOICES IN CANADA

The positions taken by the imperial-minded press in Canada at large and the anti-imperialistic elements in Quebec are widely known.** In attempting to assess the nature and quality of dissenting opinion in the English-speaking parts of Canada it is to be remembered that in England, in addition to other groups, the majority of the Liberal party,

*This was the kind of language to be expected from a paper which on 12 Sep had run an editorial "In Defence of War", quoting a prominent personality as saying that war, while not a comfortable avocation, on the whole did good, gave employment to thousands of men and reduced the surplus population. This somewhat unadorned statement had been softened by the remark that it was "a sad reflection upon human enlightenment; if the conclusion had to be accepted that the only way to make room for the natural increase of the race was to set a number of able bodied men to work periodically killing off each other".

**For comprehensive information see: "Memorandum by Sir Charles Tupper on Canadian Participation in the South African War", 1902.(28)

including its leader, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, and his predecessor, internationally famed Jurist Sir William Harcourt, prior to the outbreak of hostilities strongly opposed Chamberlain's aggressive policies. Moreover, Lord Salisbury, Prime Minister and great Empire statesman, had long resisted before finally "yielding to Chamberlain's wearisome importunities".⁽²⁹⁾

In Canada, on the other hand, dissenting opinion was marginal in volume and inconsequential in effect. Outside of the limited circulation journals of the elite, unless the House was in session, dissent had no platform from which to be heard. This was not yet the day of all-revealing 'Letters to the Editor'; few were printed, and most of them were from educated persons discussing at great length matters of the most trifling import. In addition, once the war had started, time for dissent had run out; vague and tendentious reports filled the columns and, according to the Winnipeg Free Press, censorship was "splendid". Perhaps with tongue in cheek it noted:

... The censorship is well managed for just enough comes through to confuse every expert and render intelligent judgment out of the question. (17 November, p. 5)

There are no indications of any entire ethnic group having been opposed to the war. The Irish element was of two minds; the Protestant Orange group was enthusiastically imperialistic; other elements were pro-Boer. A Montreal dispatch of 12 October in the Globe (Toronto) of 13 October, immediately after describing the enthusiasm of the

Montreal Corn Exchange at the news of the outbreak of the war, added:

In striking contrast was the following resolution passed at a regular meeting of Division No. 1, Ancient Order of Hibernians, held last evening at their hall No. 5, Place d'Armes; Whereas Ireland has been persecuted for the past 300 years and denied the right of self-government, and has suffered the gibbet, the rack and all sorts of cruelties to obtain that right, therefore, be it resolved that Division No. 1 extends its fullest sympathy to those brave people, the Boers, who are at present struggling to maintain that right against our most cruel and unjust enemy, the British Government, and we strongly condemn the sending of a Canadian Contingent to the Transvaal to fight against a people with whom we have no quarrel. Copies to be forwarded to President Kruger and to the Press.*

Further investigation might strengthen the tentative conclusion that the Irish-Catholic element was largely opposed to participation. It is worthy of note in this connection that Laurier's Secretary of State, Hon. Sir Richard William Scott, prominent Catholic of Irish descent, "together with Israel Tarte of Quebec headed the opposition to participation". (31)

As today, at the turn of the Century the largest non-British, non-French ethnic group in

*Some twenty years later, Douglas Skelton was to write:

... Yet the grievances [of the Outlanders] were not so serious as they were represented by the unscrupulous subsidized press of Johannesburg and Cape Town: The Orange Free State, perhaps the best-governed small state in the world, showed what the Boer could do under favouring circumstances; the corruption which existed was hardly sufficient to warrant the Canada of Pacific Scandals and McGreevy lootings going Sir Galahading across the world to redress it.... Time and good-will would have brought reform... but time and good-will were lacking. (30)

Canada consisted of German or Germanic settlers. As Germany was hostile to the British aspirations in South Africa it might be thought that the German element would have been opposed to the South African war, but this was not the case. There were, of course, the Mennonites and Hutterites and similar religious communities - opposed to the use of force in principle - but they did not participate in public affairs and kept strictly to themselves. And there is nothing to indicate that the non-sectarian German elements in Canada were opposed to participation in the Boer war, though for different reasons in the east and west.

In the east some of the earliest settlers in the Maritimes had been Germans up from Pennsylvania and New York. Later large tracts of land in Ontario and other eastern areas had been cleared and settled by United Empire Loyalists of German or Germanic origin. Most of them had obtained land grants, which were available at the time to all who professed loyalty to the British flag. Thus they were securely tied to the British interest⁽³²⁾ and, in due course, had become fully assimilated. In the west the latter part of the Century had seen a moderate influx of immigrants directly from Germany, but with the exception of a few persons of note in Manitoba, they were mostly poor, uneducated, fighting for survival, widely dispersed and without voice or influence.

Goldwin Smith

Views at variance with majority opinion were expressed in the main by three members of Canada's English-speaking intellectual community. Most prominent was English born Goldwin Smith, erstwhile professor of history at Oxford, subsequently professor of English and constitutional history at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York. Settling in Canada in 1871, he soon allied himself with the "Canada First" movement, later advocated commercial union with the United States and expressed the opinion that political union with that country was the ultimate destiny of Canada, "a view that earned for him much unpopularity".⁽³³⁾

Smith, a master of English style and lucid argument was a prolific writer who fought many battles against imperialism and against the prosecution of the South African War, largely in the Bystander (Toronto) and the Weekly Sun (Toronto). Naturally he was attacked violently from many quarters, but the passage of time has made him appear in a more favourable light. Claude J. Bissel, amongst others, has praised him for challenging the backwoods colonial mentality of those early years and called him "a civilizing force if there ever was one".... [his] Bystander nourished us with the best that was being thought and said in the world".⁽³⁴⁾

In reviewing his own stand on the South African War, Goldwin Smith, in a pamphlet entitled: In the Court of History, an Apology for Canadians who were opposed to the South African War, wrote in 1902:

... In the British Parliament, though the war party had an overwhelming majority, there was still freedom of debate. Nor was the influence of the minority unfelt. It put some restraint on sanguinary excesses; it tempered violent counsels; it helped to hold open the door of ultimate peace with foemen of whom a Tory Minister now speaks not as bandits to be exterminated, but as honest enemies, presently to be our good friends.

But Canada, on the other hand, has been simply swept in the train of the dominant party in the Imperial country. In our parliament free speech has been drowned in clamour. Our public press almost universally has been a transcript of the jingo press of England. Thus the main facts of the case have never been allowed to come before the Canadian people.... So it would always be under Imperial Federation. Political life and leadership would centre in the Imperial country.(35)

For all his understanding of the point of view of the Boers, or, rather, his opposition to aggression and Canadian participation therein, Goldwin Smith was thinking in purely "Anglo-Saxon" terms. When in 1863 he had described the French Canadian element as "an antediluvian relic of French society with its torpor and bigotry utterly without value for the purposes of modern civilization",⁽³⁶⁾ he failed to reckon with the potent factor of national survival, which makes it possible today for French Canada to awake from centuries of induced sleep.

Principal Grant of Queen's University

George Munro Grant, a native of Nova Scotia and an ordained minister of the Church of Scotland, was minister of St. Matthew's Church, Halifax, from 1863 to 1877, and principal of Queen's University, from 1877-1902. He was intensely individualistic and would not condone anything that seemed morally wrong. To preserve his freedom of speech and the possibility of disregarding the

clamour of the moment and look to first principles, he refused to become a practising politician.⁽³⁷⁾ He regarded Sir John MacDonal'd as responsible for much of the corruption which had eaten deep into our political life.⁽³⁸⁾ Gradually he became an admirer and close friend of Laurier and after Sir Wilfrid's advent to power found himself in a position of great influence.⁽³⁹⁾ He was a fervent believer in Canadian independence ("some men, and all cattle lack patriotism") - coupled with close union with Britain.⁽⁴⁰⁾ For many years he was one of the chief speakers for the Imperial Federation League.⁽⁴¹⁾ But no public event during his life so saddened his heart than the outbreak of the war between Britain and the allied forces of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State:

For the Boers he had a deep admiration. He knew their history, sympathized with the struggles and the sacrifices they made for liberty, and understood the monstrous mistakes which, with the best of motives, had been perpetrated by the British Government. Whilst in South Africa he had become a warm personal friend of [a man of high character]. The wanton lawlessness of Jameson's filibustering raid in 1895 moved his indignation, his admiration for Rhodes, of whose complicity he felt certain, changed into what can only be described as loathing. 'I hope to see the rascal hanged' he said more than once. (42)

In June 1899 he had written: "God keep us from a war of aggression on the Dutch, who would be fighting for an independence sanctioned by solemn treaty". But the insolent ultimatum of President Kruger solved his dilemma; there was now nothing for Britain to do "but to see the thing through". When the war began "he heartily approved of the sending of Canadian troops" and was aggrieved by the "niggardliness" of the Canadian Government in dealing with the matter.⁽⁴³⁾

Dean Weldon of Dalhousie University

Richard Chapman Weldon was born and educated in New Brunswick, became dean of the law faculty of Dalhousie University in 1884 and held that post for thirty years. In politics he was a Conservative, representing a New Brunswick riding in the Commons from 1887 to 1896. He was known as "a splendid speaker and keen thinker" (Montreal Gazette), "a man of unflinching and uncompromising integrity" (St. John Telegram).⁽⁴⁴⁾ Like Grant of Queen's, he was a professor of constitutional law and strongly opposed to Chamberlain's policies in South Africa.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Both men were legal experts and thus perhaps traditionally inclined to be legalistic rather than mindful of the spirit of the law. Apparently it mattered little to them that the Boers were living in a state of civilization well above that of the natives they controlled but below that of a modern society.

LAURIER'S COMPROMISE

A few days before President Kruger's ultimatum Laurier had still been able to forestall a British attempt to force his hand in the matter of Canadian participation,⁽⁴⁶⁾ but when the war had become a fact it was no longer possible to evade the issue. With Parliament prorogued and the Cabinet divided (page 16 above), Laurier was forced to seek a compromise that could be accepted by both the imperialists of Ontario and the nationalists of Quebec. On 13 October Laurier and his colleagues decided upon, and on the next day published an order in council to the effect that the Government would equip and transport 1,000 volunteers,

that it would not send an official contingent and that the action was not to be construed as a precedent.⁽⁴⁷⁾

Chamberlain at that time presumably cared little whether Canada would send few or many volunteers; what he no doubt regretted, however, was that Laurier had failed to commit Canada unequivocally to participation in the wars of the mother country. In that sense the Governor General had failed to produce the desired results, and in reporting the matter to his principal, Lord Minto somewhat evasively stressed the financial considerations advanced by Laurier:

14 October... though he thoroughly approves the action of the Imperial Government on South Africa and admits the undoubted necessity of the war* he has not been inclined to admit the policy of his colony accepting pecuniary liabilities for the old country. He says it is contrary to the traditions of Canadian history.... He considers, however, that the acceptance of your offer to contribute to pay and transport of troops so minimizes the expense that the principle of non-acceptance of pecuniary liability is hardly departed from. (48)

On this same 14 October, La Patrie, organ of Israel Tarte, Laurier's Minister of Public Works and right hand man in the Province of Quebec, stated for the first time that Canada was not obligated to participate in the wars of Great Britain as long as it was not represented in the Parliament where such wars were decided upon. At the same moment La Presse was remarking bitterly: "We French Canadians have only one home and country, Canada,... but the English Canadians have two, one here and one overseas". On the other hand, the News (Toronto, Ind.) complained that at the very time when English-

*A nice touch, for privately Minto considered the war an "iniquity". (page 9 above, n.)

Canadians from coast to coast were filled with enthusiasm, the representatives of a race which had been granted special privileges and concessions by England were blocking the way and shaming Canada before the eyes of the entire world.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Since world opinion outside of the Empire was almost solidly pro-Boer, the language of the News may have been unduly vigorous, but in any case it was typical of the acerbity of the political dialogue.

There is no doubt that the departure of the contingents was accompanied by scenes of wild enthusiasm. What percentage of the population shared this fervor is more difficult to tell, for unfortunately the contemporary papers did neither discuss that matter nor carry the telling photographs which make it easy today to draw interesting conclusions. The political situation during the period between the decision to send volunteers and the opening session of Parliament on 1 February has been summarized by George Stanley:

Laurier... tried to chart his course between the English Scylla and the French Charybdis. But the despatch of troops to South Africa opened the flood-gates of protest in Quebec where a considerable number of French Canadians, led by a former Laurier supporter, charged the government with adopting a course contrary to the whole history of Canadian autonomy. Many of the larger newspapers in Quebec were openly critical of Laurier, and only the Prime Minister's tremendous personal popularity held the opposition movement in check. Meanwhile the imperialist press poured abuse upon the French **Canadians**, whose lukewarm attitude towards the Empire and indifference to participation in Imperial wars was a sin against the light. (50)

THE SUBJECT IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS (1900)

When the House met in February 1900 it faced accomplished facts. All it could do now was to review the actions of the Government and sanction or

refuse to sanction the expenditures incurred. Laurier was in a strong position. No doubt some members would accuse him of unconstitutionality, others of vacillation and half-heartedness, but by and large he had done that which the opposition had urged him to do and the majority of the electorate seemed to have wanted him to do. There was, of course, the embarrassing fact of his volt-face, - ten days before authorizing participation he had claimed the absence of constitutional authority for such action, but in view of the political climate, disposing of that matter would hardly tax his forensic skill.

Motives are not always easy to discern, and it is still a moot question whether patriotism or opportunism were his strongest motive. Both traits were represented abundantly in his make-up; perhaps it was his good fortune that both tended to propell him in the same direction.

The intellectual leader of the dissenting Liberals was Henri Bourassa, great grandson of Louis-Joseph Papineau:

Keenly intelligent, idealistic, widely read in both French and English and a powerful speaker in either tongue, unimpeacheable in character, deeply religious, highly cultured, and charming in manner, Bourassa represented the best of the French-Canadian elite and was soon singled out as a promising disciple by Laurier, who thought it well that a politician should be a gentleman....

He made dismaying use of his training in the fall of 1899 when he broke with Laurier on the question of participation in the Boer War..(51)

Indeed, in October 1899 Bourassa resigned his seat, advising Laurier that he believed the Government to have jeopardized constitutional liberty in Canada. Deprived of his right to express his views in Parliament before action was taken, he would appeal to his constituents before taking again his seat in the House.⁽⁵²⁾ With neither Party ready or willing to lay down a blueprint for future Empire relations, Bourassa remained unopposed and was returned by acclamation.

During the Session of 1900 the war was a frequent subject of debate in the House; the questions of principle were reviewed most thoroughly in a series of speeches by Bourassa, Monet and Laurier on 13 March 1900, when Bourassa moved the following amendment to the motion of supply:

That this House insists on the principle of the sovereignty and the independence of parliament on the basis of British institutions and the safeguard of the civil and political liberties of British citizens, and refuses consequently to consider the action of the government in relation to the South African war as a precedent which should commit this country to any action in the future.

That this House further declares that it opposes any change in the political and military relations which exist at present between Canada and Great Britain unless such change is initiated by the sovereign will of parliament and sanctioned by the people of Canada.⁽⁵³⁾

Referring to the order in council authorizing the despatch of volunteers, Bourassa claimed that the reservation regarding not setting a precedent had been utterly disregarded in Canada as well as abroad, and been brushed aside everywhere as a mere bit of political window dressing. Refusal at this time to sanction the

reservation made by adopting his motion would in fact constitute a rejection of the reservation. By adopting his motion, on the other hand, the House would minimize his own argument that irrespective of any reservation the accomplished fact constituted the precedent. (54)

Laurier said that he did not find fault with the principles of the motion, but was unable to accept the language in its entirety. Moreover, he was not prepared to accept the opportunity.* Had the motion been presented as an amendment to the address or to the resolution providing for the war expenditures, he himself might have proposed an amendment to the amendment that would have set forth the same principles in language more suited to the House. (56)

Bourassa had expressed the opinion that the resolution of sympathy with the Uitlanders (31 July), had created a compelling mandate for the Government to offer armed help to Great Britain if war was declared. Moreover, according to Sir Charles Tupper the resolution had been urged upon Parliament by a representative of the Transvaal Uitlanders, or, as it seemed more likely to Bourassa, an agent of Cecil Rhodes. Furthermore, the resolution seemed to bear all the earmarks of having been inspired by Chamberlain. To all this Laurier answered blandly that no one had seen the resolution except the leader of the opposition, who had received

* Without going into detail it might be said that Canadian parliamentary practice at the time required that "an amendment should be relevant to the question to which it is proposed to be made". (55)

it from the Prime Minister after it had been adopted by the council.⁽⁵⁷⁾

In justification of the actions taken by the Government, Laurier cited British constitutional precedents for urgent expenditures without the prior consent of parliament (e.g., Disraeli's purchase of Suez shares from the Khedive).⁽⁵⁸⁾ But Bourassa contended that there had been no urgency and that the passing of the Resolution of 31 July had rendered invalid any later contention that the situation had been unforeseen. Indeed, there had not even been a necessity, for the British Empire had not been hard pressed at the time and was not depending for survival on the immediate arrival of a few men from overseas.⁽⁵⁹⁾ Moreover, in relation to the broad constitutional questions involved the cost of a Special Session would have been a small matter.⁽⁶⁰⁾ Laurier answered to all this by asking: "What would be the condition of the country today if we had refused to obey the voice of public opinion?"⁽⁶¹⁾

Bourassa had shown in considerable detail how utterly wrong it was to believe and contend that great enthusiasm had been displayed by the Australian colonies.⁽⁶²⁾ Reverting to the Canadian scene he pointed out that contrary to frequent allegations public opinion had not been unanimously for participation. Quite apart from Quebec's almost unanimous opposition, he could and did name a number of English language papers which had voiced opposition in greater or lesser degree. Some of these papers were of limited circulation but nevertheless exerted a considerable influence on public

opinion. Some "large circulation" papers, on the other hand, were being bought mainly for news, cartoons, sensational reports and such! "Whoever thought of reading the Montreal Star for an idea or a principle? Just as well study Chinese with a German Grammar and a French Dictionary".*(63) If the wave of public opinion were to flow strongly in a given direction, the government would not of necessity have to give way to the current. The government had a duty to enlighten public opinion. The South African problem was a question entirely foreign to Canada. But for weeks and months the yellow press, headed by the Montreal Star, had been filling their columns with inflamed articles and reproductions from the jingo press of England, whilst the counterpart - so ably presented in Great Britain by its sound Liberal organs - was virtually unreported in Canada.(64)

In the event that the Liberal government and the Liberal majority in the House should oppose his motion they would indeed renounce the principles on which Canadian Liberalism was based. Views corresponding with

* This was over sixty years ago. Today the metropolitan press carries much that appeals to the more thoughtful reader, the big interests have come to prefer the lobby to the sledgehammer, and in the realm of thought the dictatorship of the untutored had lost a good deal of its former power.

his own attitude, Bourassa continued, had been set forth in a long article in the Toronto Globe of 4 November 1900; some of the more remarkable passages being the following:

If a government to-day usurps the powers of parliament the effect may be felt after the present situation has passed into history. Every Canadian who desires the honour and prosperity of his country is interested in the power and independence of parliament and in the freedom of its discussions. One of the most serious dangers which threatens the parliamentary system here, as in great Britain, is the tendency to increase the strength of the executive at the expense of parliament... It would be dangerous, too, to allow the government to fall into the habit of acting on expressions of public opinion. It may be said that to-day these expressions are so hearty and spontaneous that there is no danger of straining the constitution. But all of us, Liberals and Conservatives, can conceive of an unscrupulous government -- on the other side of of politics, of course -- making a very cunning and dangerous use of the power to act upon public opinion as expressed in newspapers and public meetings. 'Suffer not the old kings under any name.' Parliament is the place for the discussion, the place where great public questions can be decided with effective guarantees of freedom and orders.... Loyalty to the Queen does not mean loyalty to Gladstone or Salisbury to Chamberlain or Morley, to men who may be removed by the people at the polls, or to the Liberal or Conservative party of Great Britain. Our ministers must look for their instructions, not to ministers at Westminster, but to the parliament of Canada, of which they are a committee, and to which alone they are responsible.(65)

In his speech Bourassa delivered also a parting shot in the direction of those who had been saying how little Canada was doing compared to what England was constantly doing for our protection. He cited the words of one "whose loyalty or loyalism or Imperialism can not be questioned, an ex-minister of the Crown, a baronet, a Grand Cross of the Order of St Michael and St. George, a member of the Imperial Federation League, now Leader of the Opposition in Canada", who six years earlier, when he was High Commissioner of Canada in England had said:

I deny that we are a burden to the empire, I say that if to-morrow Canada was dis severed from the Crown of England, if to-morrow Canada became a portion of that great republic which lies to the south of us, England could not reduce her army by a man nor her navy by a ship. She would want more soldiers and sailors and ironclads than she has to-day in order to maintain her prestige. I say, if this great continent was closed, as closed it would be to the ships of England, under the circumstances I have named, if they had no harbour in which to run or a place where they can obtain a ton of coal or a spar, instead of England being strengthened, she would be enormously weakened. Her power in the Pacific, her possessions in India and China would be imperilled and her prestige as a nation entirely changed. Instead of relieving her from any charge for diplomatic services, or her army or her navy, it would impose greater burdens upon the taxpayers of Great Britain than at present. I deny that we are a burden. There is not a pound of British money spent in the Dominion of Canada, from end to end, for any Canadian purpose. (66)

After quoting extensively from other statements on empire defence by the same Sir Charles Tupper as High Commissioner, Bourassa remarked that he should be allowed to agree with the High Commissioner without being denounced as a French Rebel by the Tory leader. (67) He made it quite clear that in his opinion a refusal to pass his motion would be a rejection of the reservation and "an emphatic and humiliating admission of subservience". (68)

Laurier, on the other hand, cited Lord Grey's despatch to Lord Elgin in 1847; "It must be remembered that the Government of the British Colonies in North America cannot be carried out in opposition to the will of the people". This, he said, was the doctrine in 1847 and held good in 1900. If it should be the will of the people of Canada at any future period to take part in any war of England, the people of Canada would have their way. (69)

Additional speeches produced little that had not been said before. With Laurier calling the amendment inopportune and tending to deepen the gulf between the races, the outcome of the vote was a foregone conclusion. The motion was defeated 10 : 119. (70)

The remainder of the Session was uneventful and devoted to partisan sniping:

The most important fact is that no clear views on Imperialism were evolved upon which the judgment of the electors could be taken at the elections a few months later.

Imperialism remained as confused an issue as it had been before. In place of any broad general principles, the exigencies of partisan warfare had brought into prominence personal differences, race differences and tariff differences. (71)

THE ELECTIONS (7 Nov 1900)

The election campaign was neither distinguished by great clarity of argument nor excessive candor. In Quebec both parties conducted an anti-imperialist campaign. The decisive factor in the outcome was the realism of the French Canadians, who preferred to vote for a leader of their own race, who had made a reasonable compromise and could win, ~~to~~ voting for one who might reflect their aspirations more faithfully but could not win. The Conservatives did not lose because they were not imperialistic enough, but because Laurier carried the overwhelming vote of the French Canadians in Quebec and in almost 30 constituencies in other Provinces where their vote was an appreciable factor. (72)

The results of the elections, as compared with the distribution of membership at the time of the

dissolution, were as follows:

	Elections of November, 1900			Previous representation.		
	Lib.	Con.	Ind.	Lib.	Con.	Ind.
Ont.	34	54	4	48	40	4
Que.	57	7	1	51	14	0
P.E.I.	3	2	0	3	2	0
N.S.	15	5	0	11	9	0
N.B.	9	5	0	6	8	0
Man.	2	3	2	4	2	1
N.T. Terr.	4	0	0	3	1	0
B.C.	3	2	1	4	2	0
Total	<u>127</u>	<u>78</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>130</u>	<u>78</u>	<u>5</u>

(73)

INFLUENCE OF WAR ON PUBLIC OPINION

For the purpose of the present study the course of the military operations in South Africa is relevant only with regard to the influence it exerted on the public state of mind in Canada. Up to the time of the relief of Ladysmith in February 1900, the British campaign in South Africa was a story of dismal failure. Strangely enough, this very fact was one of the factors which helped to create the upsurge of self-confidence and national feeling which was the greatest single effect of Canadian participation in the war. The other important factor was the realization that the Canadian volunteer had proved himself the equal of the best British soldier. In "The Canadian Contingents...", impeccably pro-British and Empire minded Sanford Evans noted:

... The frequent lack of success, particularly in the opening stages, and its revelations of the fallibility of the methods of military administrators and generals were a painful shock to the pride Canadians had felt in their ideal of the British Army. Nurtured on popular accounts of British wars... average Canadians did not entertain a doubt that the British War Office, British generals and British soldiers would be found equal to any emergency that could possibly arise in South Africa.... The effects were profound and the mistakes were referred to by the young and thoughtless with a tone almost of satire... Lord Roberts's first brilliant success caused a welcome reaction. (74)

The stimulation of Canadian self-respect derived from the initial British shortcomings was shown by an anecdote which may or may not be true:

"There is a newspaper story to the effect that a person high in viceregal circles visited a school in one of the Canadian cities and while speaking to the children of the war, asked the question: "Why were not the British successful at first?" The answer came promptly: "Because the Canadians had not arrived".(75)

However that may have been, Canadians had learned that military co-operation without complete centralization was possible and worthy of future consideration.(76) With regard to the relations between Canada and Great Britain, Canada had been the gainer, for Chamberlain had failed to achieve his objective of sharply centralized Empire defence, while the Dominion had grown in self-reliance and self-confidence.

Obviously the despatch of 3,000 men from Canada did not decide the outcome of the war, but to the five million Canadians who remained at home, the 3,000 who had gone overseas were a matter of high importance. They represented Canada, they did well individually and by comparison, and - as any and every contemporary newspaper proves - on coming home they were received in city, village and hamlet with enthusiasm, affection and pride.

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