

**FRENCH-CANADIAN NEWSPAPERS AND IMPERIAL DEFENCE 1899-1914**

by

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In October 1899, the Canadian government sent one thousand volunteers to fight as part of the regular British army in the South African war. For the first time Canadian defence responsibilities were seen to include the protection of the empire as a whole and not just Canadian territory.

Among French-Canadian political groups a general consensus prevailed in opposition to broader imperial defence responsibilities for Canada. Disagreements between French-Canadian political groups centred around the means to limit Canadian involvement in imperial defence.

The Liberals, in office under Laurier, combined limited contributions to imperial defence with a policy of dominion autonomy within the empire. This policy of nationhood within the empire was designed to serve as an outlet for the expansive sentiments of English Canadians while avoiding the imperialism which would alienate Quebec.

The Quebec Conservatives, out of power, attempted ineffectually to defend the traditional French-Canadian preference for the status quo in imperial relations. Discredited by their alliance with the strongly imperialist Conservatives of English Canada, the Quebec Conservatives were unable to appear as a desirable alternative to the Liberals on the imperial defence issue. Only Henri Bourassa, the young Liberal member for Labelle, who resigned from Parliament in opposition

to the sending of a Canadian contingent to South Africa, was able to defend the status quo in imperial relations without being liable to the charge of partisanship.

During the period from 1902 to 1909 Laurier worked to further Canadian autonomy within the empire. He successfully resisted pressures for the broadening of dominion defence responsibilities at the Colonial Conferences of 1902 and 1907. He took advantage of Britain's failure to stand by Canada in the Alaska boundary dispute in 1903 to hint that Canada might some day take over the running of her own foreign policy. During this period Laurier could not be challenged in French Canada for his policy on imperial relations. During these years, though, a Nationalist movement grew up in Quebec under the leadership of Henri Bourassa, largely in response to such domestic issues as French-Canadian educational rights outside Quebec, immigration and increasing urbanization. Entering provincial politics in 1907, Bourassa worked in alliance with the Quebec provincial Conservatives to unseat the Gouin government.

The advent of the naval issue in March 1909 provided the opportunity for the Conservative-Nationalist alliance, initiated in provincial politics, to enter the federal arena. In response to the naval scare Laurier opted for a Canadian fleet unit that would be used in imperial defence only to the extent desired by the Canadian government. The Nationalists

saw in the navy the spectre of Canadian participation in all of Britain's wars and the threat of an imperial federation cemented through military cooperation. During the election of 1911, the Conservative-Nationalists attacked Laurier in Quebec on the naval issue while English-Canadian Conservatives assailed him for reciprocity in the rest of Canada.

While the Conservative-Nationalists won twenty-seven seats in Quebec in 1911, they were unsuccessful in their attempt to constitute a new bloc in federal politics that could hold the balance of power between Liberals and Conservatives. The national party system soon prevailed and almost all of the Conservative-Nationalist members became docile supporters of the Borden government. The Borden government's attempt to substitute an emergency contribution to the imperial navy for Laurier's plan to build a Canadian fleet was upset when the Liberal majority in the Senate voted down the Naval Aid Bill in May 1913. The stalemate on the naval question prevailed until World War One broke out a year later.

During the debate on the naval question in French Canada, Bourassa and the Nationalists opposed the navy on the grounds that Canada, as a colony, had no responsibility for imperial defence beyond the defence of Canadian soil. Laurier and the Liberals argued that Canada had achieved nationhood and that the navy was a complement to her status as well as an important measure for national defence. Bourassa held

strictly to what he regarded as the "pact" of 1867 as the best means of assuring French-Canadian rights. Laurier worked to evolve a single Canadian nationhood in which French Canada would play a full role and thus enjoy the broadest possible opportunities as a cultural group.

Most French-Canadian newspapers were owned by local interests and were tied directly to a political party. The French-Canadian press was used to justify or to attack the decisions of the politicians. In the debate in the French-Canadian press on imperial defence from 1899 to 1914, the disagreements between Quebec political groups and the positions they held in common are revealed. The French-Canadian press is a valuable means of discerning the political ideas of Quebec politicians and the ideas they thought would be acceptable to the people of Quebec.

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From the outbreak of the South African War in October 1899 until the outbreak of World War I political groups in Canada debated the issue of contributions to imperial defence as part of a larger debate on Canada's constitutional relationship to the empire. That the issue of imperial defence was as much constitutional as military is one of the most striking characteristics of the period. In the summer of 1902 when Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain told Wilfrid Laurier that the strength and safety of the empire lay in union, the Canadian Prime Minister replied that local diversity and freedom were the foundation of the empire.<sup>1</sup> The two men were using the occasion of a discussion of imperial defence to exchange views on the relation of the colonies to the mother-country. When Canada was called upon to provide troops for the South African War in October 1899 or when the Canadian House of Commons approved the principle of a Canadian naval force in March 1909, it was as much the show of imperial unity as the actual contribution that was sought.

It is possible to deal with the issue of imperial defence as primarily a military one, having to do with the improvement of the Canadian militia and the steps taken toward the establishment of a Canadian naval force. French Canadians, however, viewed the imperial defence debate almost

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<sup>1</sup>Mason Wade, The French Canadians, (Toronto, 1956), p. 490.



exclusively in political and constitutional terms. It is the purpose of this thesis, therefore, to examine the imperial defence question in French Canada as a political question in the years 1899 to 1914.

It is the contention of this thesis that at the beginning of the South African War, a general consensus existed within the political community of French Canada concerning the question of Canada's contributions to imperial defence. French Canadians desired to limit the country's defence commitments to the protection of Canadian soil. More broadly, they sought the retention of Canadian autonomy within the empire, the constitutional arrangement the country had enjoyed since 1867. The rise of pan-Anglo-Saxon sentiment in the empire at the end of the nineteenth century led French Canadians to fear that the issue of imperial defence would be used to prepare the way for a political imperial federation.

Mistrustful of the English-speaking majority, French Canadians tended to hold to a strict interpretation of the constitution, regarded by many of them as the "pact" of 1867. Paradoxically, many French Canadians regarded the British connection, with all its potential dangers, as a guarantee against a fuller Canadian sovereignty that would subject them more directly to the will of the English majority. Colonial status of the kind Canada had known could prove a valuable check on imperialist initiatives desired by English Canadians.

In a period when the imperialists had the political initiative, French Canadians often found that pleading colonial irresponsibility was the best means of guaranteeing Canadian autonomy. At stake in the constitutional question were not simply issues of external affairs, of course. New external policies dictated by the English-speaking majority might lead as well to other changes in the "pact" of 1867 - changes in the language and education rights French Canadians considered were at the heart of their national existence.

Henri Bourassa, the young Liberal Member of Parliament for Labelle, expressed this sentiment in the fall of 1901 when he predicted that "under the absolute control of the Canadian Parliament, our constitution would be exposed to terrible assaults, mainly directed against the French-Canadian minority..."<sup>2</sup>. As well as seeing the British connection as a protection against possible excesses of English Canada, Bourassa viewed it as insurance against American penetration of Canada. He stated: "...placed as we are in the immediate and exclusive neighbourhood of the United States, this ought to be a hint to us that it were safer to postpone the day of our emancipation."<sup>3</sup>.

What French Canadians desired was to continue their isolationism in North America, while retaining the protection of a European power. They viewed Canadian colonial status, as

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<sup>2</sup>Henri Bourassa, Great Britain and Canada, (Montreal, 1902), p. 47.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 46

it had existed in the years from Confederation to the outbreak of the Boer War, as the best arrangement for their national existence. All groups in French Canada agreed that Canada should keep out of Britain's wars and that Canadian autonomy should be preserved. Political conflict was about the means by which these ends could be realized, not about the ends themselves.

The workings of the two-party system were a major determinant in deciding the public stance of French Canadian political groups on the imperial defence issue. The largest bloc in French Canada, the Quebec federal Liberals, were forced to adapt their policies to the English-speaking wing of the party during their years in office from 1896 to 1911. English Canadians were demanding a more active imperial role for Canada, while French Canadians insisted on autonomy. Laurier attempted to meet both demands by promoting a policy of fuller nationhood within the empire.

Though less powerful than the Liberals among French Canadians, the Quebec Conservatives, with the greater freedom of opposition, were able to remain closer to the traditional French-Canadian view of the empire and of Confederation. Increasingly taking their ideas and even their leadership from the Nationalists the Quebec Conservatives defended the colonial status quo against imperialist encroachments. It was Henri Bourassa, though, beginning as a Liberal and admirer of Laurier and ending as a Nationalist opponent of the two-party system,

who came to personify the defence against imperialism. Mistrustful of the English-speaking majority, Bourassa believed that French Canadians should closely protect the "pact" of 1867; he preferred Canadian colonial status and limited sovereignty to imperial federation. He especially objected to the Laurier formula as pseudo-nationhood; in his mind, it combined responsibility for external policy with no power in its formulation. Even under the pressure of the new imperialism he was not prepared to abandon what he saw as a bi-national federation, with clearly delineated powers for the central government, in favour of Laurier's solution, which might be described as pan-Canadian nationhood. One of the clearest statements of Bourassa's conception of the relation of English and French Canadians came in a reply to Jules-Paul Tardivel's espousal of French-Canadian separatism. Bourassa wrote: "Les nôtres, pour nous comme pour M. Tardivel, sont les Canadiens français; mais les Anglo-Canadiens ne sont pas des étrangers..."<sup>4</sup>.

Throughout this study, the terms pan-Canadian nationhood and bi-national federation will be used to contrast the views of Laurier and Bourassa, respectively. Laurier, the French-Canadian Prime Minister, was compelled toward the view that French-Canadian rights would best be guaranteed through the development of a single nationhood in which political debates would centre around administrative questions, common

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<sup>4</sup> Arthur Maheux, Le Nationalisme Canadien-français à l'Aurore du XXe siècle, (Canadian Historical Association Annual Report, 1945), p. 68.

to the entire country. He hoped to avoid the perils of a system with an English party and a French party in which his compatriots would be made to suffer for their minority position. Bourassa, the critic, on the other hand, saw the defence of French-Canadian rights best guaranteed through a strict adherence to the "pact" of 1867. Fearful of the uses to which English Canadians could put a more centralized union, Bourassa saw advantages in the colonial limitations on the Canadian state.

In a letter on 2 November, 1899, Laurier explained his position to Bourassa who had just resigned his seat in the House of Commons:

What attitude, tell me, should French-Canadians take toward Confederation? Either they must isolate themselves, forming a separate group, or they must march at the head of Confederation. They must choose between English imperialism and American imperialism. I see no other alternative. If there is one, tell me what it is.<sup>5</sup>

In his reply two days later, Bourassa was equally revealing of his true position. He stated:

Note that I am much less ferocious on this question of imperialism than you think. I have never been and I am not now in favour of independence - at least not for the moment and for a long time to come. It seems to me that we can remain in our present state of transition for some time yet. Chamberlain wants to get us out of that stage. That megalomaniac's fixed intention is to go down in history as the Builder of the Empire. He could well become the loosener of the Empire...<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> R.C. Brown and M.E. Prang, Confederation to 1949, (Scarborough, 1966), p. 110.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

In 1899, only the beginnings of the Nationalist movement existed and it was the French-Canadian Conservatives, in the main, who upheld the traditional attitude of French Canadians on the question of imperial defence.

Their major disadvantage in winning French-Canadian support was their alliance with the English-speaking Conservatives. The Liberals returned time and again to the theme that support for Quebec Conservatives would mean power for the anti-French Ontario wing of the Conservative party. With Laurier as leader, the Liberals were able to convince French Canada that, though concessions to the imperialists were unfortunate they were preferable to giving power to their ultra-imperialist opponents. Clearly the contributions of Canadian troops to fight in the South African War were only tolerated by Quebec on the grounds that Conservative policies would be worse still.

The unpopularity of Canadian contributions to imperial defence among French Canadians was dramatically revealed in the circumstances of the Colonial Conference of 1902. When in the winter of that year Laurier publicly rejected any discussion of imperial defence at the Conference, the Prime Minister received the full endorsement of all segments of Quebec opinion. During the next seven years the question of imperial defence was to lie largely dormant. There were brief recurrences of the issue in the Alaska boundary settlement and the Dundonald affair, as well as in the Colonial Conference of 1907. Until the opening of the naval issue in 1909, however, Laurier

had little to fear from the defence issue. The retirement of the Nationalists to Quebec provincial politics also contributed to the quiet of these years.

Beginning in March 1909, however, the Conservative-Nationalist alliance, already functioning in provincial politics, entered the federal field on the naval issue. With the Nationalists setting the tone of the campaign to unseat Laurier there was less of the stigma of association with an imperialist party in English Canada, than there had been for the Quebec Conservatives during the Boer War. The Conservative-Nationalist alliance was powerful because it stood for Canadian internal self-government with no responsibility in external affairs, the traditional constitutional arrangement that was disappearing.

In 1911 Bourassa attempted to weld together a coalition of French-Canadian Conservatives, Nationalists, and dissident Liberals to elect an independent bloc of Quebec members to the House of Commons. Had the election resulted in a near even split in seats between Liberals and Conservatives, Bourassa's French-Canadian bloc could have been crucial to the formation of a government and influential on that score. The Conservative victory, however, was too sweeping for that. Winning 134 seats to 83 for the Liberals,<sup>7</sup> the Conservatives were in a position to govern if only a handful of Quebec members voted with them. The election of 1911 witnessed the defeat of a government heavily

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<sup>7</sup> Hugh Thorburn, Party Politics in Canada, (Scarborough, 1967), p. 225.

dependent on Quebec support in favour of one with greater freedom to ignore French-Canadian sensibilities. Bourassa, always in a minority in Quebec, (even in 1911), failed in his attempt to turn the Quebec Conservatives into a French-Canadian party, independent of the English-speaking Conservatives. The desire for office on the part of many of his temporary allies and the fear in Quebec that bloc voting by French Canadians would promote counter bloc voting by the English majority - as happened in 1917 - were also factors in the failure of Bourassa's scheme. French Canada was condemned to minority status in both major political parties in Ottawa. The failure of the Nationalists to create a distinct French-Canadian bloc in federal politics resulted in the long-term retreat to provincial rights that was to form the central challenge to Canadian federalism in the years to come.

#### The Press and the Politicians in Quebec.

In French Canada at the end of the nineteenth century many Quebec politicians owned or edited newspapers and many newspapermen went into politics: Israel Tarte, the Minister of Public Works, owned La Patrie of Montreal and used it as a platform from which to attack the Liberal government after his split with Laurier in the fall of 1902; serving first as a member of both the House of Commons and the Quebec legislature,



Bourassa derived his main political influence after 1910 from his editorship of Le Devoir; Arthur Dansereau, the editor of La Presse of Montreal, wielded great influence in the Conservative Party in Quebec in the 1890's and maintained a close relationship with J.A. Chapleau, the Quebec Party leader;<sup>B</sup> Ernest Pacaud, editor of Quebec City's Liberal organ Le Soleil, was a close friend and a regular correspondent of Laurier. These few outstanding cases illustrate the interrelation of politics and journalism in French Canada in our period.

It appears that the political and journalistic world in Quebec was small enough that the main, and even many of the secondary figures who made them up were well known to one another. This condition, of course, was enhanced by the sense of isolation and self-reliance the French-speaking community in Canada has always experienced. It is to be expected that the politicians and journalists of such a national group were acutely aware of one another and were influenced directly by what each other's ideas..

The French language newspapers in Quebec tended to be owned by local interests and to be attached directly to some political grouping. Treffe Berthiaume of Montreal owned La Presse during its transition from a Conservative supporter in the 1890's to a Liberal supporter by 1904. The Conservative paper in St. Hyacinthe, Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe, was very much a one-man operation, published and edited by

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<sup>A</sup> La Presse, 16 December 1901.

J. de L. Tache. Though most of the papers in Quebec supported either the Liberals or the Conservatives, exceptions did exist. There were tiny independent weeklies such as Le Progrès du Saguenay in Chicoutimi or Le Lac St. Jean in Roberval; there were personal organs such as La Patrie that followed their owner in and out of political parties. There was the Nationalist press, Le Nationaliste and Le Devoir, that represented a political approach that ran counter to that of either party. Political partisanship was the general pattern and there was little to compare with the commercial and relatively objective press of a later day. It can be surmised, under the circumstances, that the common assumptions and aspirations of the political community of French Canada were expressed on the pages of Quebec's newspapers and that this public expression was important in influencing the people of the province.

It is the purpose of this study to examine the attitudes of French-Canadians to the question of imperial defence during the period from the outbreak of the Boer War to the beginning of World War I by a study of a variety of French-language newspapers in the province of Quebec. An attempt will be made to discover the relation between the imperial defence issue and the issue of French Canada's attitude to Confederation and the empire. The importance of political affiliation in shaping the attitudes of the community toward the question will also be examined.

Special attention will be paid to the development of the Liberal case for pan-Canadian nationhood and of the Nationalist case for bi-national federation, on the pages of Quebec's newspapers.

The press has always been considered an important barometer for gauging so-called "public opinion" with regard to social or political questions. The historian, however, must be aware of what things he can reasonably conclude from a study of the public press. He must realize, from the outset, that the press is never a mirror of the spectrum of attitudes held about political issues by the general public. In that sense, to consider the press as a direct measure of "public opinion" will always be misleading, just as it is incorrect to gauge the opinions of an electorate solely by the issues which the politicians debated in an election campaign.

Journalists, unlike the general public, are specialists at having and expressing opinions. By the nature of their work, they are more knowledgeable and more conscious of political events and their implications than the general public. Especially in a setting where newspapers were tied very directly to political parties and political figures, such as the time and place we are examining, we often are being exposed to viewpoints of the politicians in the pages of the popular press. This, of course, can make a study of the press a useful undertaking. Here we are often witnessing the trial balloons of public

figures; the development of the ideologies of political parties; the rationale which the politicians believe will be most effective in explaining party policies to the public; the relative importance which the political community sees in one issue as opposed to another.

Even here, the relationships that exist between a newspaper and a political party are complex. Often personal likes and dislikes on the part of the editor and his relationships with political figures affect editorial policy. The location of the newspaper - whether it serves a metropolitan centre or a small community; whether it is located at a seat of government - will all affect the type of political events covered in its pages and the bias of the newspaper.

The press provides a valuable tool in measuring the development of French-Canadian attitudes toward the question of imperial defence between 1899 and 1914. In its pages we find a day-to-day record of the development of the ideas of political groups in French Canada toward the issue.

## THE BOER WAR AND THE FRENCH-CANADIAN PRESS

In the months prior to the outbreak of the Boer War in October 1899, the French-Canadian press was generally favourable to the British connection. To be sure, Quebec's editors were always wary of any scheme that might draw the empire too closely together; but the traditional internal self-government which Canada had known since Confederation was satisfactory. There were those who dreamed of a far off independence, but most editors conceded that Canada was not yet large enough or powerful enough to go it alone. Besides, the British connection was a useful guarantee of French-Canadian rights against possible excesses of English Canada.

In the matter of imperial defence, John A. Macdonald had recognized that Canada would have to become involved in wars that threatened the empire as a whole<sup>1</sup> and Laurier had pledged that:

...if the day should ever come...when England should have to repel foes, I am quite sure that all British subjects, all over the world, would be only too glad to give her what help they could...<sup>2</sup>

Such general commitments, especially when they had never resulted in the sending of Canadian combatants to a distant imperial war, were scarcely a constant presence in the French-Canadian consciousness. Instead the imperial yoke seemed light indeed

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<sup>1</sup>Donald Creighton, John A. Macdonald: the Old Chieftain, (Toronto, 1955), p. 411.

<sup>2</sup>Canada, House of Commons Debates, 1896, 5 February 1896, p. 1216.

as evidenced in this editorial in La Presse, the independent Conservative Montreal daily with the largest circulation in French Canada:

...sous l'efficace protection de l'Angleterre, les Canadiens-français, se développent en paix et jouissent entièrement de leurs droits.<sup>3</sup>

La Presse used the occasion of Queen Victoria's eightieth birthday to comment that:

Sous son règne l'Angleterre a été non seulement glorieuse, mais pure et respectable.<sup>4</sup>

The next day the Montreal newspaper reported a crowd of twenty thousand in the city to celebrate the Queen's birthday.<sup>5</sup>

But during these months La Presse stood strongly for Canadian autonomy as well as for the British connection. On 29 May 1899 an editorial commented:

Plus que jamais peut-être, les chefs canadiens doivent montrer de la fermeté, et tenir intact le dépôt de nos droits et de notre autonomie. Le temps est passé où le Canada, aussi bien que les autres colonies étaient regardés, comme simples planètes entraînées de nécessité dans l'orbite impériale.<sup>6</sup>

L'Événement of Quebec City, a paper less slick and more opinionated than La Presse, also concerned itself with imperial relations. Owned and edited by "L.J. Demers et Frère", L'Événement was a strongly partisan Conservative paper given to feuding with its Liberal rival Le Soleil and frequently not above contradicting past editorial policy in the interest of scoring

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<sup>3</sup> La Presse, 4 February 1899.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 4 May 1899.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 25 May 1899.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 29 May 1899.

points against its political opponents. Perhaps freer in the more provincial setting of Quebec than in sophisticated Montreal, L'Événement, unlike La Presse, talked openly of Canadian independence. But L'Événement did not expect independence to come soon. On 26 May 1899 an editorial stated:

Le but du Canada doit être, ou plutôt est de rester attaché à l'empire britannique, non pas indéfiniment, mais assez longtemps pour accroître ses forces, développer ses ressources et en arriver à obtenir les moyens de proclamer et de maintenir son indépendance. Car nous ne pouvons nous faire à l'idée que c'est la destinée de notre pays, de rester toujours au rang de colonie. Tôt ou tard la séparation se produira, séparation pacifique, nous l'espérons de tout coeur, et alors le Canada pourra prendre rang au nombre des nations libres et indépendants.<sup>7</sup>

During the summer of 1899 when the situation in South Africa began to deteriorate and to threaten war, the French-Canadian press expressed alarm at the possibility of Canadian involvement. French Canadians opposed participation, in part because they feared the emergence of an imperial federation based on a combination of military and political imperialism. They saw in the new imperialism of Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain a moral energy that was, in O. D. Skelton's phrase, "narrowly racial".<sup>8</sup> A factor in French Canada's specific opposition to war was the feeling that the Boers were the victims of Anglo-Saxon imperialism in South Africa; that all the Boers desired, in fact, was to remain "maîtres chez eux"; that, above all, there was an uncomfortably close parallel between the history of French Canada and the history of the Boers.

<sup>7</sup> L'Événement, 26 May 1899.

<sup>8</sup> O.D. Skelton, The Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, II (New York, 1922), p. 62.

On 15 June 1899, before the Canadian government had in any way involved itself in the South African situation, L'Événement ran an article which drew the parallel between the French Canadians and the Boers. It stated:

Ce que l'on dit des Canadiens-français s'applique bien plus justement à un peuple dont l'état politique n'est pas sans présenter quelque analogie avec eux, entouré qu'il est par la même nation envahissante et dominante qui s'efforce de supprimer ces libertés, sa langue, ses usages et de l'absorber sous le flot toujours croissant de ses masses d'émigrants. Je veux parler des Boers de l'Afrique australe qui, les uns indépendants dans l'Orange et le Transvaal, les autres sujets britanniques dans la colonie du Cap, ont à soutenir les mêmes luttes - avec les coups de fusils en plus - que les Canadiens-français et, comme ces derniers, ne parviennent à se maintenir que grâce à leur abondante natalité.<sup>9</sup>

At the end of July 1899, Prime Minister Laurier, seconded by Sir Charles Tupper, Leader of the Opposition, moved a resolution of support for Britain in the South African crisis. The passage of this motion touched off a torrent of critical comment in the French-Canadian press. An article in La Presse stated on 1 August:

Le premier ministre a demandé à ses fidèles de déclarer que les Boers n'avaient pas le droit d'être maîtres chez eux, si M. Chamberlain ne trouvait pas la chose à son gré. Il a fait passer une résolution pour approuver M. Jos. Chamberlain de "bulldozer" le président Kruger et d'abuser de la force numérique des troupes anglaises pour écraser un petit peuple brave et vaillant qui défend son territoire et ses privilèges.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> L'Événement, 15 June 1899.

<sup>10</sup> La Presse, 1 August 1899.



Comments on national and imperial politics were by no means limited to the daily papers in the cities in 1899. In St. Hyacinthe, a town of ten thousand, thirty-five miles east of Montreal, J. de L. Tache published and edited the staunchly Conservative Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe. Appearing three times a week (reduced to a weekly in 1906) Le Courrier covered federal as well as provincial politics, passing judgements on both in a spirit of intemperate partisanship that exceeded that of L'Événement.

On 26 August, Le Courrier launched a fierce attack on the South African resolution. An editorial satirically recalled Laurier's statement at the Diamond Jubilee of 1897 that he was "British to the core". After condemning the South African policy of Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain, the article pointed out the similarity of the Transvaal and Canada: each lived beside a powerful neighbour, the Transvaal beside the British Empire, Canada beside the United States. Asserting that the Boers were asking for the right to remain "maîtres chez nous", Le Courrier concluded:

Que les députés de langue anglaise, dans notre parlement, aient voté la proposition Laurier, j'ai quelque peine à le comprendre et je ne m'explique leur attitude que par leur chauvinisme impérial et britannique.

Mais, qu'il y ait eu, un canadien-français, pour voter une telle monstruosité, a plus forte raison pour la proposer, voilà qui dépasse mon imagination et ma compréhension.

C'est une faute scandaleuse, irréparable.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe, 26 August 1899.

This editorial is noteworthy not only as a disclosure of the attitude of Le Courrier toward the South African situation, but also as an example of the highly personal attacks made on the Prime Minister by the Quebec Conservative press. This type of attack, often making use of Laurier's statements at the Diamond Jubilee, was aimed at discrediting the Prime Minister's credentials as a French Canadian. When one considers that the Quebec Conservatives had the difficulty of opposing the country's first French-Canadian Prime Minister, while suffering from the disadvantage of alliance with the outspokenly imperialist Conservatives of English Canada, such a tactic becomes understandable.

While the comments in La Presse and Le Courrier were to be expected, the attack on the government's resolution by a Liberal paper was more noteworthy. L'Avenir du Nord, the official Liberal organ for the district of Terrebonne, was published weekly by Jules-Edouard Prevost in St. Jerome, a pulp and paper town of six thousand, thirty-three miles north of Montreal. L'Avenir was virtually a proto-type of the Nationalist press of later years, attacking the Laurier government throughout the Boer War for its concessions to imperialism. On 11 August, L'Avenir criticized the government as vigorously as had the Conservative press:

En proposant des résolutions sympathiques à l'Angleterre dans sa dispute avec le Transvaal, M. Laurier a joué gros jeu. Il a crée le précédent qui permettra aux autres colonies

britanniques de se prononcer, non seulement sur notre politique extérieur, mais même sur nos affaires intérieures.<sup>12</sup>

Although the Quebec press continued to comment on the South African crisis per se, by September 1899 its main interest was in whether Canadian troops would be sent in the event of war. On 22 September, L'Avenir du Nord reported that a prominent Ontario Conservative and imperialist, Colonel Sam Hughes, was distributing a circular in Ontario appealing to young men to enlist under his command in a brigade to fight in South Africa. In the circular, Hughes claimed that J.I. Tarte, the Liberal Minister of Public Works, had promised that Quebec would match Ontario volunteer for volunteer. The article stated:

Il est vrai que M. Tarte est le premier et a longtemps été le seul impérialiste parmi les Canadiens-français et cela pourrait expliquer la confiance que notre ministre des travaux publics a exprimée à M. le colonel Hughes, relativement à la formation d'un bataillon de volontaires parmi ses compatriotes. J'estime que la confiance de M. Tarte est mal placée... je suis douloureusement surpris de voir un Canadien-français inviter ses compatriotes à aller combattre les braves Boers qui défendent leurs foyers contre l'envahisseur anglais.<sup>13</sup>

During the next ten days, it was apparent that within military circles a campaign was being waged to involve Canada directly should war break out in South Africa. On 28 September La Presse ran a story reporting that the Canadian Military Institute favoured sending 1300 troops to South Africa in the event of war. An editorial in the same issue stated:

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<sup>12</sup> L'Avenir du Nord, 11 August 1899.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 22 September 1899.

Si nous en croyons les nouvelles qui nous viennent de Toronto, où l'atmosphère semble se charger, de plus en plus, d'effluves martiales, le ministre de la milice a virtuellement complété ses préparatifs pour l'envoi d'un contingent de 1300 soldats canadiens, infanterie, cavalerie et artillerie, au Transvaal, destinés à guerroyer contre les Boers...<sup>14</sup>

On 5 October, a satirical editorial in La Presse, commenting on the story that twenty thousand Ontarians were prepared to volunteer for service in South Africa, linked the question of imperialism with the traditional French-Canadian mistrust of immigration to Canada:

Vingt mille Canadiens vont partir pour se faire Kaffirs; et, en échange on nous amène vingt-cinq mille Doukhobors pour en faire des Canadiens. C'est beau la politique impérialiste.<sup>15</sup>

With all the rumours and statements circulating in the press and in military and political circles, it was becoming evident that the government would be forced to declare itself on the possibility of a Canadian contingent for South Africa. In an attempt to arrest speculation on the matter, the Prime Minister issued the following statement to the Globe of Toronto on 3 October:

As I understand the militia act...our volunteers are enrolled to be used in the defence of the Dominion. They are Canadian troops, to be used to fight for Canada's defence. Perhaps the most widespread misapprehension is that they cannot be sent out of Canada. To my mind it is clear that cases might arise when they might be sent to a foreign land to fight. To postulate a case: suppose that Spain should declare war upon Great Britain. Spain has, or had, a navy, and that navy might be getting ready to assail Canada as part of the empire. Sometimes the best method of defending one's self is to attack, and in that case Canadian soldiers might certainly

<sup>14</sup> La Presse, 28 September 1899.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 5 October 1899.

be sent to Spain, and it is quite certain that they legally might be so despatched to the Iberian Peninsula. The case of the South African Republic is not analagous. There is no menace to Canada, and, although we may be willing to contribute troops, I do not see how we can do so. Then, again, how could we do so without Parliament's granting us the money? We simply could not do anything. In other words, we should have to summon Parliament. The Government of Canada is restricted in its powers. It is responsible to Parliament, and it can do very little without the permission of Parliament. There is no doubt as to the attitude of the Government on all questions that mean menace to British interests, but in this present case our limitations are very clearly defined. And so it is that we have not offered a Canadian contingent to the home authorities... As to Canada's furnishing a contingent, the Government has not discussed the question, for the reasons which I have stated...<sup>16</sup>

The Prime Minister's statement reveals his intention of keeping Canada out of the South African War, if possible. While acknowledging that in a major imperial war capable of threatening Canada's safety, the country's troops could be sent abroad, Laurier made it clear that he did not see the South African situation in that light. His statement remained within the bounds of his general commitment to the defence of the empire, but attempted to limit that commitment to major threats to the security of Britain and Canada. As had Macdonald in the Sudan crisis of 1885, Laurier was seeking to keep Canada out of local threats to the empire, that he felt were of little close concern to Canadian interests. Laurier, unlike Macdonald, however, was faced with the reality of the new imperialism.

Public and private pressures mounted on the cabinet to force Canada to join in the show of imperial unity that was

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<sup>16</sup>The Globe, 4 October 1899.

sought in the Transvaal expedition. On 4 October, the same day as Laurier's statement appeared in the Globe, Colonel Sam Hughes sent the Prime Minister a confidential note predicting that the government would soon give way before the demand that troops be sent. Hughes wrote:

Today I have dropped a note to the Mail and Empire showing that it is folly to papers like the World to keep on attacking you for non-action: in another week the agitation will be strong enough to guarantee you acting promptly.<sup>17</sup>

Also on 4 October, the Prime Minister received a telegram from London from Davis Allen, a representative of the South African League, an imperialist organisation inspired by Cecil Rhodes. It stated:

Confidential have best reasons for saying imperial government would cordially accept from your government offer 500 infantry on basis of scheme for service and finance just arranged by war and colonial offices. New Zealand and Queensland contingents have been accepted.<sup>18</sup>

The next day Laurier replied to Hughes' letter, revealing that he was already hedging on his statement of two days before. He commented:

...I have not yet made up my mind to any course. There is much to be said in favour of an expedition, much to be said against...imperial authorities themselves are still moving very slowly.<sup>19</sup>

During the 10 days between the appearance of the Laurier statement of 3 October and the order-in-council of 14 October, the Liberal press in Quebec tried to hold the

<sup>17</sup> Laurier Papers, Hughes to Laurier, 4 October 1899, Series A, 37831.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., Allen to Laurier, 4 October 1899, Series A, 37818.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., Laurier to Hughes, 5 October 1899, Series A, 37835.

line the Prime Minister had set down. On 10 October, La Patrie of Montreal, the personal organ of J.I. Tarte, accused the English-Canadian Conservative press of singling out Laurier for criticism in spite of the fact that the English-speaking majority in the cabinet also supported the government's policies. Laurier was attacked because he was of French origin and from the province of Quebec, asserted the article.<sup>20</sup> Even though the government might well be forced to alter its policy on the sending of a Canadian contingent, La Patrie committed itself against such a course on 11 October. An editorial warned that:

si le cabinet Laurier eût pris sur lui la responsabilité d'engager l'avenir du Canada, en envoyant au Transvaal, aux frais de l'Etat, un contingent militaire, nous eussions condamné sa politique. Les Chambres, les représentants du peuple, ont un droit absolu d'être consultés en pareille matière avant qu'aucune action ne soit prise.<sup>21</sup>

In the same issue the paper reported a speech by its mentor, J.I. Tarte at the Montreal Reform Club in which the Minister had stated that it was not in the country's interest to become involved in the war in the Transvaal.<sup>22</sup>

The same day as these articles appeared in Montreal, the retreat of the Liberals was revealed on the front page of Le Soleil, the party's organ in Quebec City. Edited by Ernest Pacaud, a close personal friend of Laurier, Le Soleil was the Liberal Party's most reliable supporter in French Canada during the Boer War. The paper ran three stories on page one on the subject of Canadian involvement in South Africa, and most

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<sup>20</sup> La Patrie, 10 October 1899.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 11 October 1899.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 11 October 1899.

curiously the second of the three, received just before press time, contradicted the first.

The first story defended Laurier from Conservative criticism that he had not yet offered Britain military assistance in South Africa. The article minimized the present crisis, pointing out that war had not yet been declared and that the British had not yet called for Canadian assistance. It is significant however, that Le Soleil did not seek to defend Laurier's position by referring to his statement of non-intervention printed in the Globe eight days before. In answering Conservative criticism Le Soleil stated:

Et parce que Sir Wilfrid et son gouvernement n'ont pas encore fait partir de troupes canadiennes pour le Transvaal, parce qu'ils attendent, au moins, que la guerre soit déclarée et que le général anglais soit au moins parti, Sir Wilfrid est représenté par cette presse venimeuse comme un lâche, fuyant le champ de bataille.<sup>23</sup>

Significantly, Le Soleil did not choose to defend Laurier for deciding against sending troops, a position he was now on record as having adopted, but defended him for not "yet" having decided to send troops. It is likely that Le Soleil was aware of the shuffling that was taking place in Ottawa on the issue; it is possible that the author of this article was already privy to information that was due to become news in the next few days.

However that may be, the problem was solved in the same issue of the paper. In the next column of the front page,

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<sup>23</sup> Le Soleil, 11 October 1899.



a story marked "plus recent" appeared. The unsigned article was headlined, "L'Angleterre demande l'aide du Canada". It stated:

Je tiens d'excellente autorité que le gouvernement impérial a formellement demandé au gouvernement canadien son aide dans la campagne qu'il entreprend contre le Transvaal. Il offre de payer toutes les dépenses de ces troupes. Le gouvernement canadien acquiesça dans ces conditions, à la demande de la mère-patrie. Il sera expédié incessamment pas moins de mille et probablement deux mille soldats canadiens en Afrique. Le départ devra s'opérer avant le 31 octobre. Les troupes seront commandées par les colonels Otter et Lessard. Elles passeront par Québec en route pour Liverpool. Les compagnies seront de 125 hommes comprenant les officiers.<sup>24</sup>

This story, which was datelined "Ottawa 11 October" was published the same day as the Prime Minister received a telegram from London informing him that the Boers had presented an ultimatum and that war was imminent.<sup>25</sup>

The signs that a change of policy was coming had been before the public for a week. In political circles the speculation must have been intense. Under the circumstances, the hard line that J.I. Tarte and his newspaper La Patrie took throughout these days, in opposition to the sending of a contingent, stirred a rumour that the Minister of Public Works was about to split with Laurier. The role that Tarte played during the fall of 1899 was a curious one. In his circular calling for volunteers in Ontario, Sam Hughes had seen Tarte, a member of the Imperial Federation League, as an ally in Quebec. During

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 11 October 1899.

<sup>25</sup> Laurier - Hughes, Dominion to Laurier, 11 October 1899, Series A, 37953.

the period immediately prior to the government order-in-council on 13 October however, Tarte more than any other government spokesman opposed the sending of a contingent. Indeed, J.S. Willison of the Globe was to comment in a letter to Laurier on 16 October:

...through his speeches (Tarte's) in Montreal and the utterances of La Patrie it was made to look in Ontario as though he were leading the government and you will remember that he was talking while other ministers were silent and properly silent.<sup>26</sup>

On 13 October, the day of the crucial cabinet meeting, La Presse stated:

... il appert qu'il y a scission du gouvernement, sur cette question, et que M. Tarte a même menacé de démissionner, si l'on décidait d'envoyer des troupes canadiennes au Transvaal.<sup>27</sup>

Though unable to prevent Canadian participation in the war, Tarte significantly affected the presentation of the decision to the Canadian people.<sup>28</sup> The government agreed to equip and transport volunteers up to one thousand men on condition that they be incorporated into the British army. The order-in-council authorizing the contingent ran as follows:

The Prime Minister, in view of the well-known desire of a great many Canadians who are ready to take service under such conditions, is of opinion that the moderate expenditure which would thus be involved for the equipment and transportation of such volunteers may readily be undertaken by the

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., Willison to Laurier, 16 October 1899, Series A, 38135.

<sup>27</sup> La Presse, 13 October 1899.

<sup>28</sup> Mason Wade, Op. Cit., p. 480.

Government of Canada without summoning Parliament, especially as such an expenditure under such circumstances, cannot be regarded as a departure from the well-known principles of constitutional government and colonial practice, nor construed as a precedent for future action.<sup>29</sup>

Laurier had given in to the demand for Canadian participation, in spite of his earlier intention to keep the country out of the war. Hopefully, however, by stressing the limited nature of Canada's involvement, the Liberals could prevent serious disaffection in French Canada. On 14 October the Liberal press in Quebec began rallying to the new government policy. Le Soleil simply ran a news story that explained the reasons for the order-in-council.<sup>30</sup> La Patrie endorsed the new policy because of the provisions that the troops were merely being raised for the British and that the move did not constitute a precedent. La Patrie stated:

Le gouvernement avait à décider entre deux politiques: l'envoi officiel d'un contingent aux frais du pays; ou le paiement des passages et l'habillement de ceux qui ont manifesté le désir d'aller combattre au Transvaal...

L'envoi d'un contingent a été mis de côté.

Mais le gouvernement a cru qu'il ne pouvait refuser de faire les frais de passages de d'accoutrement des volontaires anxieux d'aller s'enrôler sous les drapeaux de l'armée britannique.

La résolution à laquelle Sir Wilfrid et ses collègues en sont venus, n'engage ce pays à aucune action pour l'avenir.<sup>31</sup>

La Patrie was marshalling its arguments to prove that it had not gone back on the solemn stance taken on its editorial page only three days before. The paper had moved from the

<sup>29</sup>O.D. Skelton, Op. Cit., II, p. 88

<sup>30</sup>Le Soleil, 14 October 1899.

<sup>31</sup>La Patrie, 14 October 1899.

position of "No taxation without representation" to the view that Canada could equip and send brigades to fight in Britain's wars provided the men be volunteers and that Canada take no responsibility for them once they reached the field of battle. This notion that Canada was merely raising troops for Britain, along with the idea that her present action did not constitute a precedent were the concessions to Quebec needed to satisfy Mr. Tarte and La Patrie.

The Conservative press of the province was quick to draw attention to Tarte's retreat from his brave speech at the Montreal Reform Club. On 21 October L'Événement, which had not previously commented on the government's decision to send troops, reprinted an article from Le Courrier du Canada, a newspaper edited in Quebec City by Conservative Thomas Chapais. The article made light of La Patrie's acceptance of the new policy:

...La Patrie qui depuis dix jours, combat toute idée de ce genre, La Patrie dit: très bien.  
Et M. Tarte ne démissionne pas.  
Voilà le spectacle ridicule et honteux que les chefs libéraux donnent depuis quinze jours. Ils ont répétés pour la guerre la tactique leur a réussi une fois pour la question des écoles.<sup>32</sup>

The most comprehensive rebuke to the decision to send a contingent came from La Presse, French Canada's largest and most politically independent newspaper. On 14 October, La Presse devoted its entire front page and its lead editorial to the South African question. On Page one, it carried a

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<sup>32</sup> L'Événement, 21 October 1899.

history of the Boer people entitled "Chez l'Oncle Paul" (Paul Kruger, president of the Transvaal) that was sympathetic to the Boer army in its preparations to fight the English. In an editorial "Les Canadiens-français et le Transvaal", La Presse set forth its position on the question of Canada's participation in imperial defence and Canada's proper relationship to Britain.

The editorial began by asserting that "L'élément canadien-français était certainement opposé à l'envoi d'un corps armé et entretenu par nous..."

But then the article made a concession that many French Canadians were to continue to make until World War I was well advanced, a concession that was to divide French Canadians on the question of imperial defence. La Presse stated, as Laurier had, that should Britain be in serious trouble "ce serait autre chose: nous ne discuterions ni les flammes, ni les torrents pour aller porter un secours..." La Presse quickly added that it believed the proportions of the present war to have been greatly exaggerated.

The editorial then explained that English and French Canadians had a different attitude to imperial defence in general:

Nous, Canadiens-français, nous n'appartenons qu'à un pays: le Canada...Le Canada est, pour nous, le monde entier. Mais les anglais ont deux patries: celle d'ici et celle d'outre-mer. Leurs parents sont là-bas; et liens de famille, souvenirs d'enfance, appels d'un même sang, noble orgueil de la race, tout les identifie aux luttes de la mère-patrie. L'Anglais n'est devenu coloniste, que

par son déplacement volontaire; il était, précédemment d'emblée et par naissance, fils du royaume britannique. Nous ne sommes que colonistes.

The article pointed out that the colonies had no influence over British policy:

...l'anglais d'Angleterre considère-t-il l'anglais des colonies son égal? Nullement. Notre voisin de langue anglaise souffre comme nous, ici de la distinction. Les colonies ne sont qu'un accident dans l'Empire, qui délibère sans nous et décide sans nous. L'idée ne viendra jamais à un gouvernement anglais de nous consulter sur les intérêts ou l'exercice des droits britanniques: nous ne sommes pas dans son Parlement pour l'aviser et, encore moins, pour le restreindre.

If Canadians were colonials without influence in the affairs of the mother-country, then what had the mother-country done for Canada in its own disputes?

Lorsque les féniciens ont envahi le Canada, est-il venu à l'Angleterre la tentation romanesque de nous envoyer des troupes ou de l'argent? Non, nous avons tout payé. Malgré que l'aggression fût organisée sur le territoire américain, l'Angleterre n'a pas demandé aux Etats-Unis, responsables, selon le droit international, par leur incurie, de nous compter une indemnité? Mais quand les endistes sont partis de chez nous pour aller pieller la banque de St. Albans, l'Angleterre nous a bien appliqué le principe de la responsabilité, en nous forçant à restituer, nous-mêmes, l'argent volé par les sudistes. L'Angleterre n'a jamais songé au sentiment lorsqu'elle a laissé le Maine se grossir aux dépens du Nouveau-Brunswick et de la Province de Québec; lorsqu'elle a permis aux Etats-Unis de nous prendre les états des Illinois, du Dakota, de Washington, de l'Orégon, le détroit de Fuga.

And then a passage pointing out that Canada should expect nothing more from Britain in the current Alaska boundary dispute.

Summing up all these issues La Presse concluded that:

...ce n'est pas un reproche que nous faisons à l'Angleterre. Nous ne lui en voulons pas plus pour ces choses que pour le retrait de ses troupes disparues depuis longtemps de Québec, Montréal, Kingston et Toronto: elle juge à propos d'agir à sa manière et selon ses goûts: c'est bien son affaire. Mais c'est elle, la Mère-Patrie, qui nous enseigne sagement qu'il ne faut pas mettre de sentiment en politique.

This editorial in La Presse is an important one as it deals with most of the aspects of the imperial defence question that were of concern to French Canadians in the years from 1899 to 1914. It records the French-Canadian suspicion of the sentimental relationship that existed between English Canadians and the mother-country. Lacking these ties of race and family, French Canadians tended to view the empire from a utilitarian standpoint. It was natural for them to ask what Canadians were required to contribute to the empire and what they, in turn, were to receive. Considering Canada's lack of influence in imperial affairs and the long list of Britain's failures to defend Canadian interests against the United States, La Presse concluded that in like fashion Canada should not rush to Britain's side in every war.

In spite of its conclusion that Canada should stay out of the South African War, La Presse conceded, as had Laurier, that in time of serious peril for the empire, Canada should actively support the mother-country. At bottom,

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<sup>33</sup>La Presse, 14 October 1899.

a community of interest between Canada and Britain was recognized though a complete coincidence of interest was certainly denied. It was a position rationally arrived at and it represented the maximum concession that French Canadians were willing to make. In a real emergency, little fervour and little sacrifice could be expected on the basis of such a commitment. Rather those who denied any responsibility in imperial defence beyond the borders of Canada would be likely to gain in influence in a serious crisis.

The Liberals in French Canada had no illusions about the popularity of the South African War in Quebec. Instead of meeting the criticisms of the Conservative press directly, the Liberal papers tended to defend their policy as the lesser of two evils. They developed a penchant for quoting extreme anti-French statements from English-Conservative papers, in the hope that Quebec would be convinced that a Conservative government would make matters worse still. Indeed, Laurier, himself, approved this policy; in a note to L.O. David, he commented: "Il est bon que nos amis dans la province sachent quels sont les allies des bleus."<sup>34</sup> The Liberals became so convinced of the utility of their quotations from the Conservative press of Ontario that they featured them in their advertisements in Quebec newspapers during the election campaign of 1900.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Laurier Papers, Laurier to David, 19 October 1899, Series A, 38142.

<sup>35</sup> La Presse, 6 November 1900.



On 17 October 1899, La Patrie ran the following reprint in English from the Toronto News:

Unless the British-Canadians of the Province (Ontario) are cravens, they will not tolerate a condition of subjection to the French Canadians, and if through the ballot boxes there is no redress, they will find other means of emancipating themselves from the dominance of an inferior people that peculiar circumstances have placed in authority in the Dominion.

La Patrie commented:

La menace de nous subjurer par les armes, de nous réduire à l'esclavage politique, ne vient point de la majorité de la population de ce pays. Elle est l'un des articles du programme du parti tory tel que dirige actuellement. Sir Charles Tupper, qui n'eût ni tenu ni permis un pareil langage il y a dix ans, est devenu un instrument entre les mains d'hommes qui ne reculeront devant rien pour arriver à leurs fins criminelles.<sup>36</sup>

Le Soleil was also quick to defend the Liberals by attacking the English-Canadian Conservatives. On 18 October 1899, the Liberal newspaper devoted its entire front page to an assault on the Conservative press of English Canada. Quoting from anti-French-Canadian remarks in the News, the World, the Hamilton Spectator, the Mail and Empire and the Montreal Star, Le Soleil asserted that the Liberal press of English Canada had not taken the same unfriendly attitude to Quebec. The article quoted a particularly venomous statement from the Toronto News which asserted that Ontario's interest in the war lay in avoiding disaster to British arms which would encourage the two million French in Canada to follow the example of the Boers.<sup>37</sup>

Finding a formula for defending their policy in

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<sup>36</sup> La Patrie, 17 October 1899.

<sup>37</sup> Le Soleil, 18 October 1899.

French Canada, did not protect the Liberals from individual defections from their ranks.

The decision not to regard the sending of troops to South Africa as a precedent, prevented any resignation from the cabinet. It did not, however, prevent Henri Bourassa, the young Liberal member for Labelle, from resigning from Parliament in protest against the despatch of troops without the calling of Parliament.

On 20 October La Presse ran Bourassa's letter of resignation on its front page. The letter quoted from Laurier's statement of 4 October that no contingent of Canadian troops could be sent without the calling of Parliament. Now that soldiers were being dispatched by order-in-council Bourassa stated:

L'arrêté ministériel, qui décrète l'enrôlement et l'expédition de nos troupes, réserve, paraît-il, l'avenir et empêche cette action d'être considérée comme un précédent.

Le précédent, monsieur le ministre, c'est le fait accompli.

Le principe en jeu est l'axiome par excellence du libéralisme anglais, c'est la base même du régime parlementaire: NO TAXATION WITHOUT REPRESENTATION. Et l'impôt du sang constitue la forme la plus lourde des contributions publiques.

Il s'agit de savoir si le Canada est prêt à renoncer à ses prerogatives de colonie constitutionnelle, à sa liberté parlementaire, au pacte conclu avec la métropole après soixante-quinze ans de luttes - et à retourner à l'état primitif de colonie de la Couronne....loyal, avant tout, pardessus tout et toujours au Canada, j'ai promis aux électeurs de mon comté de travailler au progrès de mon pays sans déroger à l'esprit fondamental de sa constitution.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> La Presse, 20 October 1899.

Bourassa was arguing that the dispatch of troops by order-in-council marked the return of Canada to the status of a crown colony. He based his opposition on the "pact" concluded with the mother-country in 1849 that conceded responsible government to Canada. Nowhere in the letter is there any reference to the "pact" Bourassa believed to have been made between English and French Canadians in 1867. This is significant because it indicates that at the time of his resignation Bourassa felt optimistic enough to appeal to all Canadians, not just French Canadians, on the general principle of "No taxation without representation". He did not yet feel it necessary to appeal to English Canadians not "to infringe on the treaty of alliance"<sup>39</sup> concluded in 1867 between Canada's two peoples, as he was to do in 1901.

Bourassa took full advantage in his statement of the fact that he was basing his case on the traditional view of Canada's commitments to imperial defence. He made the statement, "Le précédent...c'est le fait accompli" in the knowledge that Laurier had made the new departure and that the onus for justification was on the government. The basic constitutional assumption that Bourassa and his supporters were to make throughout this period was that Canada as a colony of Great Britain enjoyed internal self-government, but had no responsibilities in imperial defence save the protection of Canadian soil.

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<sup>39</sup> Henri Bourassa, Great Britain and Canada, (Montreal, 1902), p. 45.

Bourassa's resignation was treated as a major news event throughout French Canada. Even the insular Le Progres du Saguenay, published in Chicoutimi, reprinted Bourassa's letter to the Prime Minister in full. This paper, which was politically independent in the sense that it was normally indifferent to political issues, approved Bourassa's act of courage in resigning.<sup>40</sup> In general, both the Liberal and Conservative press of the province had difficulty in knowing how to respond to the resignation.

Le Soleil, the Liberal organ of Quebec City, was frankly unsympathetic to Bourassa. Conceding that the member for Labelle was a man of principle, the paper went on to justify Laurier's change of policy. Le Soleil asserted that Bourassa, in breaking publicly with Laurier was, in fact, assisting the Conservatives, the real imperialists. Canada, because of the different origins of its population, was a difficult country to govern, and compromise the only possible governing principle. Laurier, Le Soleil continued, had no choice but to give in to the overwhelming sentiment of the country. If he had followed Bourassa's advice, he would have aligned the six English provinces against Quebec.<sup>41</sup> It is clear that Le Soleil, along with the government was hoping to concede enough to English Canada to prevent a split between the English and French wings of the Liberal Party and more

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<sup>40</sup>Le Progres du Saguenay, 26 October 1899.

<sup>41</sup>Le Soleil, 21 October 1899.

generally to prevent the isolation of Quebec before a solid phalanx of English-Canadian opinion.

Le Soleil's position was that French Canada should take part in the war, not because it was just, but because otherwise there could be a serious deterioration in English-French relations at home. O.D. Skelton argues that one of the factors in Laurier's decision to send troops to South Africa was his dislike of the restrictive franchise in the Boer republics.<sup>42</sup> If this was a factor, it did not cut enough ice in Quebec to merit more than cursory mention in the Liberal press. It is likely that Laurier's supporters in the province more readily accepted his later explanation in the House of Commons on 5 February 1900 that:

...public opinion was then speaking in such energetic tones that there was no misunderstanding it, and we felt warranted in undertaking the expenditure, relying upon parliament to indemnify the government and to sanction our illegal action in that respect.<sup>43</sup>

La Patrie of Montreal was more sympathetic to Bourassa than Le Soleil had been. Upholding the position of the government, La Patrie argued that no new precedent had been established:

Persone ne songera à mettre en doute la sincérité des motifs qui l'animent. (Bourassa).  
Il était que l'action du gouvernement en payant les frais de voyage et d'accoutrement des volontaires qui s'enrôlent en ce moment pour le Transvaal, n'établisse un précédent dangereux pour la Puissance. Le Parlement, dit-il, avait le droit absolu d'être consulté en une aussi grave matière.  
La Patrie est aussi jalouse des libertés de notre

<sup>42</sup>O.D. Skelton, Op. Cit., II, p. 90.

<sup>43</sup>Canada, House of Commons Debates, 1900, 5 February 1900, p. 70.

jeune nation, et assez fière de nos privilèges de citoyens anglais, pour ne pas contester la force de la position constitutionnelle prise par M. Bourassa. Si nous croyions que le précédent redouté par le député de Labelle fut de nature à engager notre avenir, nous tiendrions le langage que nous trouvons dans sa lettre...

Nous disons...que le départ des volontaires, dans les circonstances et dans les conditions où il se fait, n'est point et ne sera point un précédent.<sup>44</sup>

While their emphasis was somewhat different, both Le Soleil and La Patrie defended the government with regard to Bourassa's resignation. This however, was not the case with the official Liberal party organ in St. Jerome, L'Avenir du Nord. The St. Jerome paper fully supported Bourassa's decision to resign and accepted his argument that the action of the government in sending the contingent had established a dangerous precedent. The paper rhetorically asked: if Canada is required to send one thousand troops when the enemy is fifty thousand peasants with primitive means, what will Britain request when she is at war with a nation that has a million seasoned troops and a powerful fleet?<sup>45</sup>

L'Avenir du Nord maintained a remarkable editorial policy throughout this period, attacking the Liberals for being soft on imperialism and countering the English-speaking imperialists at every turn. In an article on imperialism on 3 November 1899, the newspaper blamed Laurier as well as Chamberlain for the current situation. Appealing to French-Canadian history, the article asserted that during the years

<sup>44</sup> La Patrie, 21 October 1899.

<sup>45</sup> L'Avenir du Nord, 26 October 1899.

when Quebeckers had been treated as a conquered people, the British never had requested troops from them. Only now, after their rights had been secured for fifty years did they court the dangers of military imperialism.<sup>46</sup>

The Conservative press reacted variously to the Bourassa affair. L'Événement and La Presse simply did not editorialize on the subject. Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe contented itself with trying to embarrass the Liberals by pointing out that La Patrie had almost approved Bourassa's resignation, while Le Soleil had been highly critical. Le Courrier went on to hint that this might indicate that Tarte was planning to turn against Laurier.<sup>47</sup>

Not surprisingly, French Canadians generalized from the experience of the Boer War and examined its implications. Underlying the immediate issue of imperial defence was the deeper question of imperial federation. A struggle five thousand miles away had suddenly intruded on Canada's isolation in North America. Did this mean the end of Canada's journey toward autonomy and the beginning of a new path into international conflicts at Britain's side? The Boer War convinced many French Canadians that imperial federation was not merely a matter for oratory and sentiment.

On 21 December 1899, Wilfrid Gascon, the political editor of L'Avenir du Nord, warned of the dangers of imperial

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 3 November 1899.

<sup>47</sup> Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe, 26 October 1899.

federation in an article on page one of his paper. Gascon asserted that there were three ways an imperial federation could be achieved:

1. by giving Canada and the other colonies a just representation in the parliament of the United Kingdom in London.

2. by creating an imperial council where the colonies and Britain would be represented in just proportion.

3. by adding a new clause to the Canadian constitution by which the country would contribute to the cost of wars of the empire and would provide troops when the government or Parliament at Ottawa so decided.

Gascon began by discussing the possibility of an imperial parliament. He pointed out that, since Britain, with a population of forty million out of a total of four hundred million in the empire, would only have one-tenth of the members in such a body, she would never consent to it. French Canada, he added, would have only three members out of one thousand in an imperial House of Commons and two members in the House of Lords in such a scheme.

Dismissing this plan as impossible, Gascon examined the prospect of an imperial council. He ruled it out for the same reason: Britain would never surrender its sovereignty to such a body unless she retained preponderance, and the colonies would never accept the scheme without representation by population.



Gascon turned to the third prospect, the one he considered a true danger, the changing of the Canadian constitution, so that with the application of moral pressure, Canada would contribute men and money to imperial defence on a continual basis. The present contribution of one thousand men would only serve, he predicted, to whet the appetite for more contributions.

Gascon then went on to state that in 1867 Lower Canada had made an agreement with the three English-speaking provinces and that the other three provinces that had joined Confederation since had agreed to the conditions of 1867. One of these conditions was that Canadian military forces and monetary levies were only for the protection of Canada "en cas de guerre, d'invasion ou d'insurrection." Now, according to Gascon, the other parties to the Confederation agreement were trying to change its conditions by adding a moral and material obligation which would be most onerous. They were trying to involve Canada in distant wars that did not concern it.<sup>48</sup>

Gascon's article contains most of the elements of the Nationalist position on the question of imperial defence. Gascon, in fact, defined the most dangerous kind of imperial federation as being the kind of contribution to the Boer War which the Laurier government was making.

In general, the imperial federation debate in French

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<sup>48</sup>L'Avenir du Nord, 21 December 1899.

Canada was about what constituted it and how to avoid it. The Liberals who had to defend the sending of the contingent argued that, far from promoting imperial federation, their policy would prevent it by stopping the real imperialists, the Conservatives, from coming to power.

The one avowed imperial federationist who was a major public figure in French Canada was J.I. Tarte. At a rally at St. Vincent de Paul on 28 October 1899, the Minister of Public Works spoke on the theme, "No taxation without representation". However, instead of concluding, as had Bourassa, that because Canada had no representation in imperial councils, she should not be taxed, Tarte favoured some form of imperial federation. He stated:

L'Empire Britannique et ses colonies formant une grande fédération, ce serait un spectacle magnifique et puissant. Mais quant à retrograder de cent ans, quant à consentir au principe que les colonies seront obligées moralement ou autrement, de fournir de l'argent, de fournir des troupes sans avoir un mot à dire - pour ma part, je ne prendrai jamais cette responsabilité - je suis prêt à discuter cette question dès demain. Je suis le premier Canadien-français qui ai fait partie de la ligue de la Fédération Impériale.<sup>49</sup>

On 11 November 1899 L'Événement quoted Tarte as saying:

Je n'ai pas le moindre doute qu'ils (French Canadians) n'objecteraient pas à des relations plus étroites avec l'Angleterre, pourvu que ce pays obtienne une représentation équitable.<sup>50</sup>

Tarte's espousal of imperial federation won him few

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<sup>49</sup> La Presse, 30 October 1899.

<sup>50</sup> L'Événement, 11 November 1899.

friends in either English Canada or French Canada. The English-Canadian Conservative press noticed only that he did not favour contributions to imperial wars without representation in imperial councils. For this opposition they pilloried him. When the Toronto World was grieving about the Conservative defeat in the election of 1900, it saw Tarte as the arch villain of French Canada who had made the province more French than ever and now was dominating the government.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, the Conservative press in French Canada noticed only that he favoured imperial federation and regarded him with suspicion on that account.

In December 1899, events in South Africa intervened dramatically in the debate on imperial defence that was taking place in French Canada. Britain appeared to be in serious military difficulties. On 19 December Britain accepted the offer of a second contingent of Canadian troops which had been made by the Laurier government the previous month. Under the pressure of these events, the Minister of Public Works, Mr. Tarte, apparently forgot his widely proclaimed belief that Canada should be represented in Britain's councils before she should contribute to the empire's defence. He came out in full support of the second contingent, stating:

Il y a en ce moment des hommes qui n'appartiennent pas à notre race...qui cherchent à susciter dans le pays une guerre de race et de religion, avec cette affaire de l'envoi d'un contingent. C'est pourquoi je n'hésite pas à dire que je suis en faveur de

<sup>51</sup> As cited in Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe, 13 November 1900

l'envoi d'un second contingent.<sup>52</sup>

Not surprisingly the two Liberal metropolitan dailies which had backed the dispatch of the first contingent again came to the side of the government. Le Soleil devoted its entire front page on 20 December to four articles designed to convince French Canadians to accept a second contingent.<sup>53</sup> Le Soleil at that moment was under heavy fire in Quebec City for its support for the government's policy of sending troops to South Africa.

On 19 December L'Événement had broken a two month editorial silence on the issue of Canadian involvement in the war to make a vituperative attack upon Le Soleil and its editor Ernest Pacaud. L'Événement accused Le Soleil of being the only paper in the province of Quebec to side with the British in the Boer War. L'Événement gave its own summation of the press and the war, stating:

Bien que l'hon Thomas Chapais du Courrier du Canada et l'hon T. Berthiaume de La Presse aient prêté serment d'allégeance à la Reine, leurs journaux respectifs sont tout a fait indifférente au sort de l'armée anglaise dans l'Afrique australe, et La Presse est même remplie d'articles originaux ou empruntés, hostiles à l'Angleterre, quant à La Patrie, c'est N. Tarte, et on n'en attend rien de mieux. Le Quotidien, feuille tory publiée dans la Pointe Levis, est remplie depuis des semaines et des semaines de grossières insultes à l'adresse de l'Angleterre et de l'armée anglaise,...

Continuing in a satirical vein, L'Événement suggested that Ernest Pacaud should receive the sincere thanks of the

<sup>52</sup> La Presse, 21 December 1899.

<sup>53</sup> Le Soleil, 20 December 1899.

Queen and country for his efforts on their behalf, when everyone else in Quebec was hostile to the British cause.

Turning to its own view of the war, L'Événement called it unjust, stating that the paper agreed with the view of an English statesman that it was a crime against civilisation, wanted only by Mr. Chamberlain. On the issue of the loyalty of opposition to the war, the editorial concluded:

Est-ce que pour continuer de prouver notre loyauté à l'Angleterre et mériter les rares amabilités des Anglais du Canada, nous devons jouer ici le rôle d'esclave, ne penser que par notre dominatrice, épouser toutes ses querelles, justes ou injustes, lui fournir de la chair à canon, applaudir ses actes condamnables et proclamer une victoire lorsque son armée subit une défaite?  
Oui, au sens du Soleil et de son directeur...<sup>54</sup>

Although this editorial in L'Événement did not mention the second contingent, its publication on the day before Le Soleil came to the defence of the government, conditioned the treatment which the Liberal paper gave the subject on 20 December. Le Soleil argued that this was a time for action not for debate, because of the serious military difficulties that had arisen for Britain. As for the justice of the course, Le Soleil stated:

Si cette guerre est injuste, ce n'est ni L'Événement ni nous qui avons à porter jugement. Il y a un Parlement à Londres pour cela.<sup>55</sup>

This rejoinder to L'Événement is remarkable because it suggested that Canadians should resign themselves to allowing

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<sup>54</sup>L'Événement, 19 December 1899.

<sup>55</sup>Le Soleil, 20 December 1899.

the British to decide what was right and wrong in the world, and should willingly assist the mother-country in whatever ventures she undertook. The only rationale for this position was that the success of British arms and the protection of British interests were essential to the safety of Canada. But in this defence of the government's policy there was none of the romance of a crusade for democracy, none of the sense of grandeur of membership in a world-wide empire that made the Boer War appeal to many English-Canadians. This, of course, is not surprising. How could French Canadians, themselves a conquered people in the past, become enthused about a war to conquer another small nation? How could they warm to the prospect of a world-wide Anglo-Saxon federation which might well be hostile to their existence as a people? The Liberal policy of sending troops to South Africa could never be popular in French Canada. The Liberals continued to prosper in Quebec in spite of their policy simply because there was, as yet, no viable alternative. Though Quebec Conservatives attacked the government's policy, the majority of French Canadians knew that, once the Conservatives came to power, the English-Canadian imperialists would be in the driver's seat. For the moment, many French Canadians were willing, therefore, to countenance limited military assistance to Britain when she was in difficulty. The truth of this contention is borne out by the dramatic shift of editorial policy in La Presse on the

sending of the second contingent. Now that Britain was in military trouble, La Presse favoured the sending of more troops. The newspaper had conceded in its 14 October editorial that, should Britain ever really need help, then French Canadians would forget their normal scruples and come to her aid. This, in the view of La Presse, was such a moment:

C'est dans des conditions bien différentes du premier envoi, que le second contingent pour le Sud-Africain va se former.  
 ...c'est au milieu du danger...Ce rôle, nous le comprenons bien: sauver la situation. Ici, plus de théories, plus de discussions politiques; mais un seul mot d'ordre: "Il le faut."  
 ...il n'y a pas de temps à perdre et allons au plus pressé. Les intérêts du Canada sont tellement liés à la force du nom britannique que, depuis les derniers revers, toute notre finance est bouleversée...<sup>56</sup>

The conversion of La Presse to the war seemed complete, but within a few months, after the military crisis had passed, the newspaper returned to its anti-imperialist position. It was possible to bring a section of French Canada to temporary support for a contribution to imperial defence, but it was not long before the basic isolationism of Quebec reasserted itself and French Canadians returned to their traditional view that Canada was an autonomous colony in the empire with no responsibility and no interest in the wars of the empire.

The sudden upsurge of imperial loyalty in La Presse was the occasion of a satirical attack in the Montreal Star.

<sup>56</sup> La Presse, 19 December 1899.

On 21 December La Presse replied to the Star, describing the effect that anti-French sentiment had on the French-Canadian population:

Donc, le Canadien-français, étrivé, harcelé, humilié par de gens experts en malfaisance, devient grincheux, soupçonneux, presque indifférent aux intérêts britanniques.

La Presse warned English Canadians who attacked their French compatriots of the effect they would have on the young generation in Quebec:

Quelle génération d'insoumis, d'agitateurs vous préparez inutilement, par la faute de vos quelques mauvaises têtes!<sup>57</sup>

In February 1900 the end of whatever support there had been in Quebec for the war was heralded by military events in South Africa. This time, however, an ugly incident in Montreal became the focal point for emotions. On 28 February 1900, students of McGill University, elated by the news of the relief of Ladysmith, paraded through the streets of the city waving their Union Jacks. Seized by the jingoism of the moment, they marched on the offices of French newspapers, forcing the proprietors to hoist the British flag, as if their loyalty to the empire was suspect.<sup>58</sup> The next day students of Laval University in Montreal poured into the streets carrying the tricolor. A series of street fights took place between the French and English students of Montreal. Promptly dubbed

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 21 December 1899.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 1 March 1900.



the "Battle of the Flags", the incident was widely reported in Quebec. On 6 March 1900 L'Événement, referring to the troubles between McGill and Laval, commented on the state of English-French relations in Canada:

Nous nous exprimons, avant d'aller plus loin de reconnaître hautement la libéralité et la largesse de vue du peuple anglais pris dans son ensemble; mais nous permettrons d'ajouter que le Canada renferme, au sein de sa population anglaise des éléments de discorde, des éléments ou le fanatisme aveugle et l'étroitesse de vue ne le cèdent qu'à l'impudence et à l'ignorance. Ces éléments, qui sont malheureusement un trop grand nombre se recrutent un peu partout dans tous les coins du pays; mais c'est surtout dans la province d'Ontario...<sup>59</sup>

The sending of the contingents to South Africa in the fall of 1899 had broadened Canadian defence responsibilities to include the empire as whole, in spite of the Government's refusal to see it as a precedent. Under pressure from English Canada, Laurier had chosen to challenge the French-Canadian preference for limiting Canada's defence commitments to the protection of Canadian soil. In doing so, the Prime Minister had given the Quebec Conservatives the opportunity to challenge his hold in French Canada, by abandoning to them the unimpeachable ground of traditional colonial isolation in defence matters.

Significantly, Laurier's concession on the question of the contingents introduced an element of doubt about the strength of his political leadership. Minorities such as the

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<sup>59</sup> L'Événement, 6 March 1900.

French Canadians are peculiarly prone to perceiving political issues as tests of strength. In a letter to Goldwin Smith on 20 January 1900, Bourassa expressed his view that Laurier had acted from "a higher motive than personal ambition and self interest" in sending the contingents. Laurier, in his view, had feared a serious English-French rift in Canada. Bourassa, however, revealed that he was troubled about Laurier's ability to resist imperialist pressures. He asked Smith:

Don't you think that these repeated concessions to the fear of racial animosity have simply the effect of developing that sentiment?<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Craig Brown, "Goldwin Smith and the Anti-Imperialistes" (Canadian Historical Review, 1962), p. 100.

## LAURIER RESTORES THE CONSENSUS 1900-1902

After the issue of the second contingent had subsided the major question in Quebec for 1900 was whether the Liberals would suffer in the forthcoming federal election because of their policy on the South African War. The other side of that question concerned the Conservative Party: could the Quebec Conservatives capitalize on the unpopularity of the war in French Canada? Much depended on whether they could prevail on the national leadership of the party to moderate the imperialism of the English-Canadian Conservatives so that the Quebec bleus could take advantage of the opportunity the war presented.

For La Presse the attitude of the English-speaking Conservatives was to be crucial in deciding whether the paper would support the party in the forthcoming federal election. La Presse did not explain the basis for its editorial policy during the election until over a year later. In an editorial on 16 December 1901 La Presse reviewed its attitude to the Conservative Party during 1900.

The editors of La Presse, deeply troubled by the frank imperialism of the English-Canadian wing of the party, chose 31 March 1900, the day Sir Charles Tupper was to address the party faithful in Quebec City, to warn the Conservative leader that the party must mend its ways:

Sir Charles Tupper et ses organes attitres: Le Star,

le Citizen, le Mail, l'Evening News, etc., prêchent une croisade des plus agressives en faveur de l'impérialisme. A la grande surprise des vieux conservateurs, on veut exiger, de la part des Canadiens, des sacrifices pécuniaires considérables pour aider l'Angleterre dans les guerres qu'elle soutient à l'étranger. Tous ceux qui s'opposent à cette prétention ou qui étonne même les Anglais, sont accusés de déloyauté et trahison...pour tout homme sensé, il est évident que ce zèle outré, cette soudaine métamorphose n'ont d'autre but que la poursuite de la popularité parmi une certaine classe de nos compatriotes de langue anglaise.<sup>1</sup>

Sir Charles Tupper responded that night to the assertion in La Presse that the Conservative party had traditionally stood against imperialist ventures. The Conservative chieftain attacked the idea of imperial federation. After stating that he opposed the Liberal government's concession of commercial preference to Britain without obtaining for Canada a preference in return, Tupper moved on to discuss imperial federation. He believed that the idea of one imperial parliament, was impractical. Under such an arrangement, Canada would be taxed at the same level as the other parts of the empire. Since our population was one seventh of that of Great Britain, we would have to pay one seventh of the taxes for the maintenance of the army and navy; that would amount to forty-six million dollars a year. Sir Charles stated that the Conservative party rejected any such idea and instead favoured commercial union based on mutual advantages for Canada and the empire. No power in the world, he added, outside of the Parliament of Canada must ever have the authority to impose

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<sup>1</sup>As reprinted in La Presse, 16 December 1901.

one cent in taxes on the Canadian people. "We are loyal", proclaimed the Conservative chief, "and in Confederation no province is more loyal than the province of Quebec. We have shown our willingness to aid the mother-country; but we decided to do so freely and we wish to remain free always to judge such situations for ourselves".<sup>2</sup>

Tupper's speech won the immediate approval of the Conservative press of Quebec; they saw in it a winning formula for the election of 1900. On 2 April L'Événement commented:

C'est tout un programme pour la prochaine campagne électorale que le brillant chef du parti conservateur, sir Charles Tupper, a tracé dans le discours qu'il a prononcé... C'est aussi une vigoureuse critique de la politique du gouvernement Laurier sur la question commerciale, sur l'impérialisme... Comme tous les sujets anglais, sir Charles veut bien la prospérité de la gloire de la mère-patrie, mais ses affections sont avant tout pour le Canada. Il désire que notre pays soit administré au point de vue canadien et que la politique commerciale du gouvernement d'Ottawa ne préjudicie en rien notre commerce et nos industries...

Then came the line which the Quebec Conservatives hoped would win them the province in the federal election:

Sir Wilfrid Laurier, M. Tarte et la plupart des chefs libéraux veulent la fédération impériale, c'est-à-dire que notre pays, soit représenté dans le parlement de la mère-patrie, à condition que nous participions aux dépenses de l'empire. C'est un honneur qui nous coûterait les yeux de la tête. Sir Charles, lui, désire que la contribution du Canada à l'Empire continue d'être volontaire, et que notre pays puisse en toute circonstance déterminer lui-même la nature et l'étendue de cette contribution.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe, 5 April 1900.

<sup>3</sup> L'Événement, 2 April 1900.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 2 April 1900.

Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe waxed enthusiastic about the speech also turning it to the advantage of the Quebec Conservatives:

Pour notre part, nous saluons avec joie les déclarations si importantes de notre chef au sujet de la fédération impériale. Sir Charles a déclaré formellement qu'il ne veut pas de cette union parlementaire avec l'empire qui semble être le rêve de sir Wilfrid Laurier et de M. Tarte.<sup>5</sup>

During the next few weeks the Conservative press took the offensive against the government. With backing from Sir Charles Tupper in the battle with the imperialists, L'Événement's performance contrasted significantly with that of the two month period following the announcement of the sending of the first Canadian contingent. Singling out Laurier as the chief of the imperialists, L'Événement campaigned to blacken the name of the Prime Minister in the eyes of French Canadians. On 4 April the paper accused Laurier of wanting to see Canada represented in the imperial parliament and, in return, being willing to sacrifice Canadian commerce to Britain's and to send troops to all imperial wars. Tupper and his colleagues, on the other hand, were represented as being opposed to this diminution of Canadian powers.<sup>6</sup> Two days later L'Événement charged Laurier with being dangerously fickle. Contrasting the Prime Minister's opposition in 1896, to any closer alliance between Britain and the colonies with

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<sup>5</sup> Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe, 5 April 1900.

<sup>6</sup> L'Événement, 4 April 1900.

his decision to send 2,000 Canadians to South Africa, the editorial asked what confidence the country could have in such a man.<sup>7</sup>

On 10 April Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe reprinted an article from Le Courrier du Canada which replied to statements in the Liberal press accusing Sir Charles Tupper of battling imaginary monsters in his attack on imperial federation. The article charged that from the time of the Diamond Jubilee Laurier had been a convert to imperial federation.<sup>8</sup>

La Presse also lauded the Conservative leader for what appeared to be his break with imperialism. However, as the editorial in La Presse in December 1901 later pointed out, the Conservatives soon revealed that they had not mended their ways. The Conservative English-language newspapers in Montreal and Toronto became, in the opinion of La Presse, more jingoistic than ever. Sir Charles, himself, said the December 1901 editorial, never missed a chance to reproach the Laurier government for its hesitancy about sending contingents to South Africa. The influence of what La Presse called the chief jingo force, the Montreal Star, in the Conservative camp made the split with La Presse irreconcilable. "Le militarisme a donc, toujours, été la pierre d'achoppement du parti conservateur en 1900 et le but constant de notre opposition", recalled La Presse a year later.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 6 April 1900.

<sup>8</sup> As cited in Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe, 10 April 1900.

<sup>9</sup> La Presse, 16 December 1901.

Because of the split with the English-speaking Conservatives, La Presse, the newspaper that had been at the side of the party when it had won its election victories in 1887 and in 1891, adopted a non-committal editorial policy during the campaign of 1900. In its editorial of 16 December 1901, La Presse revealed the battle that had taken place among the editors of the paper the previous year. G.A. Nantel had wished to back the Conservatives, while Arthur Dansereau, the editor-in-chief, had wanted to be non-committal. Dansereau, the senior policy-maker, had carried the day.

On 13 August 1900, Dansereau sent the following letter to Nantel disapproving of the pre-Conservative line the paper had been taking:

Adams House,  
553 Washington St.,  
Boston, 13 août 1900.

Mon cher Nantel,

...Vous me permettez bien de vous dire, en bon compagnon d'armes, qu'il me semble que vous faites changer entièrement le ton de La Presse. Ce que nous devons éviter, selon moi, c'est d'être la doublure du Journal, et de tirer les marrons du feu pour des gens qui ne diront: "Merci", ni à vous, ni à nous. Notre position, c'est d'être le sphinx; c'est alors, seulement, qu'on nous craindra. Si nous brûlons nos vaisseaux, vous verrez ce qui nous arrivera.

En toute amitié et c'est à votre discrétion fraternelle que je confie ces remarques. J'ai bien plus peur de nos amis que des adversaires.

Votre tout dévoué  
ARTHUR DANSEREAU.

This disagreement between the editors of La Presse led to the resignation of G.A. Nantel in October 1900.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 16 December 1901.



An article by Nantel, that had appeared in La Nation, a Conservative weekly that he edited in St. Jerome, was reprinted by La Presse in December 1901, along with its revelations of editorial policy. The article shows us something of the close relationship that existed between the political elite of Quebec and the journalistic elite and also reveals the role that La Presse had traditionally played as a mainstay of the Conservative Party. It thus gives us some measure by which to judge the importance of the defection of this newspaper from Conservative ranks. Nantel began by describing the long standing relationship which had existed between Arthur Dansereau of La Presse and the late Quebec Conservative leader, J.A. Chapleau. Rebuking Le Journal, the Montreal Conservative daily, for its attacks on La Presse because it had abandoned the party in the 1900 election, Nantel asserted that one could only condemn Dansereau by condemning Chapleau at the same time, so intimate was their relationship:

M. Dansereau remonte à 1863 et jusqu'à l'affaire de La Presse, octobre 1900, je ne sache pas que l'on puisse séparer son histoire de celle du parti conservateur. De 1879 à 1891, Chapleau et Dansereau, entr'autres, firent nos campagnes fédérales, surtout, et nous gagnèrent une longue série de victoires. Ils sont intimement liés à l'histoire de notre parti. Or, en tapant sur M. Dansereau on tape sur tout le vieux parti qu'on veut relever!<sup>11</sup>

Then Nantel turned to the issue which damaged the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 16 December 1901.

**Conservatives in 1900:**

Je n'ai pas à défendre le très grave incident de 1900, que provoque ma démission à La Presse. Si je ne pouvais approuver La Presse dans son attitude, je ne pouvais pas davantage approuver la conduite des journaux toriens de Toronto, pas plus d'ailleurs que je ne pouvais approuver le Montreal Gazette et le Star, sur la question des contingents et sur leurs exagérations jingoïstes.

Nantel revealed that in the election of 1900 the French-Canadian wing of the Conservative party had been weakened because of lack of funds and because of its association with English-speaking imperialists. Stating that La Presse could not be held uniquely responsible for the party's defeat, Nantel pointed to the real culprits:

POURQUOI ENDORMIR LES ELECTEURS ET LEUR FAIRE CROIRE QUE LE PARTI CONSERVATEUR EST TOMBE VICTIME DE LA TRAHISON QUAND IL EST TOMBE VICTIME SURTOUT DE L'AVEUGLEMENT DE CERTAINS DE NOS CHEFS, DU FANATISME DE NOS ALLIES, DU MANQUE DE SENS POLITIQUES, DE GENS QUI N'ONT PAS VOULU COMPRENDRE QUE DANS LA PROVINCE DE QUEBEC C'EST UNE ORGANISATION FRANCAISE QU'IL FAUT AU CONSERVATEURS FRANCAIS, UN COMITE FRANCAIS, DES JOURNAUX FRANCAIS, ET ESSENTIELLEMENT FRANCAIS, ET DES CHEFS FRANCAIS.<sup>12</sup>

On 10 August 1900, three days before Dansereau sent Nantel the letter which led to the shift in the editorial policy of the paper, La Presse ran an endorsement of the Conservatives. The editorial stated:

Essentiellement canadien, par conséquent à l'antipode de l'impérialisme politique, tel a toujours été le parti de sir John A. Macdonald et de Cartier. Telle sera donc la politique de sir Charles Tupper. Ce qui est de nature à favoriser le Canada, serait-ce même au dépens du commerce et de l'industrie britannique, voilà ce qu'il faut accepter, défendre,

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 16 December 1901.

faire triompher.

M. Laurier ne peut se réclamer de cette politique nationale qu'il a délibérément sacrifié en accordant, sans retour d'aucun avantage, une préférence des marchandises anglaises par toutes les marchandises du monde.<sup>13</sup>

During the rest of the campaign La Presse did not play favorites. On 13 September the newspaper attacked the Liberals for conceding commercial preference to Britain.<sup>14</sup> On 24 October the paper criticized the Conservatives for the attacks made on French Canada in Ontario.<sup>15</sup>

The rest of the Conservative press in Quebec was puzzled by the shift of editorial policy in La Presse. On 24 October L'Événement stated:

L'attitude de La Presse de Montréal, depuis quelques temps à l'égard des partis politiques qui se disputent le pouvoir dans l'arène électorale en ce moment, est le sujet de bien de commentaires dans tous les cercles. Notre confrère loue aujourd'hui ce qu'il condamnait hier, et il tient maintenant un langage absolument contraire de celui qu'il faisait entendre à ses lecteurs, il y a à peine quelques mois. Quels sont les motifs de ce changement subit en pleine lutte électorale à la veille du jour du scrutin?<sup>16</sup>

In the same issue L'Événement carried the story of the resignation of G.A. Nantel from the editorial board of La Presse.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 10 August 1900.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 13 September 1900.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 24 October 1900.

<sup>16</sup> L'Événement, 24 October 1900.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 24 October 1900.

Throughout the election campaign L'Événement firmly supported the Conservatives but played down the issue of imperial defence, evidently believing that there was no advantage to be gained from the issue because of the ultra-imperialist position which the Conservatives and their newspapers were taking in English Canada. For the most part, L'Événement concentrated on criticism of Laurier for his defection in the Manitoba Schools Question. Finally on the day before the election when there was little chance for the Liberals to reply, L'Événement reopened the issue of imperial defence:

Il (the Liberal Party) pousse notre pays dans l'impérialisme militaire. Il envoie nos soldats en Afrique pour y défendre le drapeau anglais. Bref, il engage le Canada dans une voie de sacrifices pour le plus grand bien et la plus grande gloire de l'Angleterre, et en retour de tout cela il ne lui demande pas même le moindre avantage commercial, la plus petite préférence en faveur des produits canadiens.<sup>18</sup>

The Quebec Conservatives were never given a chance to take the offensive against the government's unpopular policy of sending troops to South Africa. Lacking funds and strong leadership, overshadowed by the imperialist English-Canadian wing of the party, and campaigning against the country's first French-Canadian Prime Minister, the Quebec Conservatives were hopelessly outmatched.

In English Canada the Conservative press provided ample ammunition for the Liberal charge that the Conservatives were anti-French. Singling out Tarte as the enemy, the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 6 November 1900.

Conservative press charged the government with harbouring treacherous elements. The Toronto Evening News declared:

Every vote given a Liberal candidate is a vote for Tarte, Bourassa and Monet, the declared enemies of the British connection, who have been stirring up race feeling in Quebec as a preliminary to restoring Canada to French dominion or building up an independent French state.<sup>19</sup>

The Toronto World also took part in the anti-Tarte, anti-French campaign:

Mr. J. Israel Tarte is as much out of place in a British cabinet as the tri-color would be out of place in Yonge Street today. If there is no room in this city for the tri-color and other foreign flags, there ought to be no room in the cabinet for Mr. Tarte and his like.<sup>20</sup>

The day before the election the Mail and Empire advised its readers:

Vote for the closer union of the empire.  
Vote against the anti-British minister.  
Vote that Canada shall be British.  
Vote for the British flag.  
Vote against Tarte.<sup>21</sup>

With such a foe in English Canada, it was the government forces which were able to take the electoral offensive in Quebec. On 18 October La Patrie raised the spectre of the race issue, warning French Canadians that:

Un vote pour Sir Charles, c'est un vote pour les fanatiques du News, du Mail and Empire, du Spectator et du Star, c'est un vote pour nos ennemis.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Toronto Evening News, 25 October 1900.

<sup>20</sup> The World, 2 November 1900.

<sup>21</sup> The Mail and Empire, 6 November 1900.

<sup>22</sup> La Patrie, 18 October 1900.

The day before the election, La Patrie returned to this theme:

Le Parti tory d'ontario est redevenu le parti de Sir Allan MacNab, le parti de l'intolérance, du fanatisme, de l'écrasement des minorités. Que tous les patriotes sincères, anglais, français, irlandais, se rallient autour des candidats de Sir Wilfrid Laurier - le successeur de Lafontaine, l'héritier de la politique de Lafontaine et Baldwin.<sup>23</sup>

On 8 November 1900, the day after the federal election, it was clear that the Liberals had won an increased majority. In Quebec the Conservatives had dropped to eight seats from sixteen in 1896. Surprisingly, there was unanimity in the press across the country concerning the election result. Most papers, whether French or English, Liberal or Conservative, agreed that it was the "race issue" in the broad sense that had decided the election. The Conservatives emphasized the solid French vote; the Liberals emphasized the failure of the imperialist campaign of the Conservatives. "L'excès tory", commented La Presse, "comme tous les excès, a produit ses fruits de réaction!"<sup>24</sup>

L'Événement offered the same interpretation as the Montreal paper and, in spite of its Conservative affiliation, saw a certain justice in the result:

...si nous le considérons au point de vue national, en nous rappelant tous ce que la presse fanatique d'Ontario ne cesse depuis longtemps de vomir contre tout ce qui est français et catholique, nous

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 6 November 1900.

<sup>24</sup> La Presse, 8 November 1900.

ne pouvons nous défendre d'un certain sentiment de satisfaction surtout en ce qui regarde notre province.<sup>25</sup>

The Conservative Courrier du Canada explained the result in terms of Laurier's popularity in French Canada:

Le parti conservateur a été défait parce que le parti libéral a pour un chef un Canadien-français. Jetez un coup d'oeil sur le résultat dans la province de Québec, dans la Nouvelle-Ecosse, le Cap Breton et l'île du Prince-Edouard et dans tous les comtés où domine l'élément français, et vous verrez là que se sont les partisans de Sir Wilfrid Laurier...<sup>26</sup>

Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe ran reprints of editorial reactions in two English Conservative papers, the Toronto World and the Mail and Empire. The World stated that Sir Wilfrid Laurier was responsible for ranging the province of Quebec as a solid bloc against all the rest of Canada.<sup>27</sup>

From the Mail and Empire came a statement that the province of Ontario had shown that it would not tolerate anti-English propaganda and would not pardon anti-patriotic attempts to incite the races against each other.<sup>28</sup>

The Liberal press in their jubilation saw primarily the same factor at work. La Patrie declared:

Le résultat de l'élection qui s'est terminée mercredi soir, est une réponse éloquente à la campagne de préjugés, d'intolérance, de haine sectaire que nos adversaires ont menée.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> As cited in Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe, 13 November 1900.

<sup>26</sup> As cited in Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe, 13 November 1900.

<sup>27</sup> As cited in Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe, 13 November 1901.

<sup>28</sup> As cited in Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe, 13 November 1900.

<sup>29</sup> As cited in Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe, 13 November 1900.

L'Avenir du Nord stated:

La population d'Ontario refuse de reconnaître un premier canadien-français, quand toutes les autres provinces l'acceptent avec joie et orgueil. Ontario s'isole dans la haine sectaire; il se renferme dans sa francophobie; il s'immobilise dans son orangisme et son puritanisme; seul, il veut la lutte à mort avec les Français du Bas-Canada.<sup>30</sup>

The Conservative resort to racial appeals in English Canada gave the Liberals the advantage in Quebec in spite of the unpopularity of the government's policy of sending troops to South Africa. During the campaign both the Liberal and Conservative press in French Canada reflected the French-Canadian consensus against Canadian participation in the defence of the empire. The Conservative press took this position from the first in attacking the government's policy. The Liberals responded to the unpopularity of the contingents by charging that a Conservative government would go far beyond such limited involvement. Their own policy was more attractive simply by being less objectionable.

Ironically it was French Canada's adherence to the two-party system, a system which supposedly guaranteed that she would never be out of the councils of the federal government, that left Quebec's traditional attitude to imperial defence so poorly defended. The wave of sentiment in English Canada in favour of sending troops to South Africa was a phenomenon that cut across party lines. This meant that whatever party was in power, the French Canadians within that

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<sup>30</sup> L'Avenir du Nord, 8 November 1900.



party, if they wished to remain in the government, would have to give way to some extent before the imperialist pressure. The fact that the Liberals were in office meant that participation in the Boer War was less than would have been the case with a Conservative government. However, this left the Quebec Conservatives as the only political force to uphold the view of imperial defence policy that opinion in Quebec favoured. The French-Canadian Conservatives, embarrassed by their alliance with imperialist Conservatives of English Canada, were helpless on that score, and had no hope of effectively defending Quebec's position.

Only Henri Bourassa, by resigning from the House of Commons over the issue, was able to muster some defence that could not be undermined by pointing to his partisan connections. For the moment, however, there was no organized Nationalist movement. In spite of this, those who were willing to challenge the two-party system on the imperial defence question had one enormous advantage in the long run. They alone of the political groupings in Quebec could defend the traditional French-Canadian view of Canada's proper relation to the empire. The Quebec Liberals and Conservatives were compromised by the necessities of the national party system. Although the Boer War did not, by itself, provide Bourassa and other nationalists with the opportunity to make themselves a major political force, the continuing

issue of imperialism had the potential to make them just that in the future.

At the beginning of March 1901 Bourassa presented a resolution to the House of Commons stating that, since Canada had sent troops to South Africa, she had a right to express her opinion of the war. He wished the Commons to go on record in favour of the right of independence of civilized peoples. This meant, in practice, asking the Canadian Parliament to declare itself in favour of self-determination for the Boers - a position that would have made an absurdity of the country's participation in a war whose aim was to prevent just that.<sup>31</sup> The Bourassa resolution certainly contradicted his contention that Canada had neither rights nor responsibilities in imperial defence. It revealed that, faced with imperialist policies, Bourassa was tempted to espouse a separate Canadian foreign policy even though he did not believe that Canada was ready for independence. La Presse warned that the resolution had dangerous implications:

Si nous ne voulons pas que l'Angleterre se mêle de nos affaires, ne lui donnons pas l'argument que nous nous sommes bien insinués dans les siennes.<sup>32</sup>

L'Événement, always quick to take up any cause that might embarrass the government, challenged the view that Bourassa's motion flirted with imperial federation:

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<sup>31</sup>La Presse, 4 March 1901.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 4 March 1901.

Nous sommes bien convaincu que M. Bourassa, en rédigeant sa motion, n'a pas songé un instant à voir le Canada représenter dans le Parlement Imperial, en retour des secours qu'il a accordés, à l'Angleterre, dans sa guerre sud-africaine. D'ailleurs, nous ne voyons pas comment le fait de réclamer en faveur du peuple canadien le droit d'exprimer une opinion sur la question en conflit puisse pousser vers l'impérialisme. N'avons-nous pas NOTRE PARLEMENT ET NOS JOURNAUX POUR FAIRE SAVOIR A LA MERE-PATRIE CE QUE NOUS PENSONS SUR TELLE OU TELLE QUESTION DE LA POLITIQUE ANGLAISE, surtout celle où nous sommes concernés?... nous comprenons que la motion Bourassa a tout simplement pour effet de faire affirmer OFFICIELLEMENT par notre Parlement, le DROIT incontestable de discuter la guerre sud-africaine PUISQUE nous y avons pris part. De là à l'impérialisme, il nous semble qu'il y a très loin.<sup>33</sup>

Bourassa was gradually becoming French Canada's most important spokesman against imperialism. On 14 August 1901 La Presse ran an interview with Bourassa in Dublin conducted by an Irish journalist. He stated that the French Canadians, like the Irish, naturally sympathised with the Boers, not because they hated Britain but because they admired a small nation struggling for independence against a great empire. Turning to Canada's own military situation, he identified the United States as the country's only possible enemy. He asserted that, since the British navy was useless in trying to defend Canada against this enemy, Canada had no interest in assuming new responsibilities in imperial defence.<sup>34</sup>

In the fall of 1901 Bourassa returned to the task

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<sup>33</sup>L'Événement, 4 March 1901.

<sup>34</sup>La Presse, 14 August 1901.

of warning French Canadians of the imperialist danger in their midst. He accused Lord Minto, the Governor-General, of directing the imperialist campaign in Montreal.<sup>35</sup>

One of the constant minor irritants to French Canadians during this period was the appearance of a stream of statements by British or English-Canadian figures on the subject of imperialism. These statements were often highlighted in the press and frequently drew editorial fire from Quebec newspapers. Such activities on the part of the pro-imperialists kept alive the issues of imperial defence and imperial federation even when there were no important political events to do so. They lent credibility to men like Bourassa when they warned of the dangers of imperialism. During the Boer War the issue of Canada's relation to the empire, focussed on contributions to imperial defence, was the most important theme in the Quebec press. The tours and speeches of imperialists were significant in maintaining a constant atmosphere of crisis about the question. Such events were reported regularly in the Quebec press.

On 3 June 1901 La Presse opposed Sir Charles Dilke's scheme of an imperial army which would include colonial troops.<sup>36</sup> The next day the Montreal paper condemned proposals for a Canadian representative in the British House of Lords or on

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 21 October 1901.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 3 June 1901.

the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council and attacked Chamberlain's advocacy of a British veto over colonial legislatures.<sup>37</sup> A week later, La Presse reported the departure of David Mills, the former Minister of Justice, as the Canadian representative to a conference in London on modification of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council for colonial cases.<sup>38</sup>

L'Événement chose the occasion of the return of Premier Ross of Ontario from London to rail against the frequent junkets of Canadian officials to the imperial capital. The Quebec City newspaper expressed its anxiety that such visits seemed to have a great effect on Canadian politicians; after all, it was after such a visit that Laurier returned to Canada "British to the core" and imbued with the imperialist spirit.<sup>39</sup> L'Événement also reacted editorially to a speech in England made by Colonial Secretary Chamberlain, on the occasion of the anniversary of Confederation, in which the Secretary urged closer ties between the mother country and the colonies.<sup>40</sup> In the fall of 1901 La Presse disapproved of Colonel Denison's suggestion that the finest venture for Canadian youth was to fight for the empire in South Africa.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps the most unhappy event of the period in this respect

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 4 June 1901.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 10 June 1901.

<sup>39</sup> L'Événement, 25 September 1901.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 3 July 1901.

<sup>41</sup> La Presse, 11 November 1901.

was the visit of the Duke and Duchess of York to Canada. The French-Canadian press welcomed the royal visitors warily<sup>42</sup> and it appeared that all would go well. However, when the English-Canadian press criticized the Mayor of Montreal for addressing the Duke in French as well as English, La Presse replied with an angry editorial.<sup>43</sup>

In November 1901 the imperial defence question flared up once again in the Quebec press around the decision of the government to dispatch a third Canadian contingent to South Africa. Instead of a contingent, like the others, the government undertook a mere "recruitment", granting the commissions and enlisting the men, but then immediately handing the force over to the British to be equipped and sent. Previous contingents had been equipped and sent by Canada and integrated into the British army on reaching South Africa.

The Liberal press in Quebec declared itself satisfied with the recruitment and then began its usual game of pointing out the inconsistencies between the English and French Conservatives, instead of defending the government's policy on its own merits. On 22 November 1901 La Patrie accused the Conservatives of playing both sides of the fence. The Mail and Empire, the editorial pointed out, was not satisfied with a mere recruitment, while Le Journal of Montreal denied that there was any difference between the recruitment

<sup>42</sup> Le Soleil, 17 September 1901.

<sup>43</sup> La Presse, 19 September 1901.

and the previous contingents. La Patrie concluded that the Conservatives found Laurier too French for the English provinces and too English for Quebec; Borden preached imperialism in English Canada while Monk preached opposition to it in Quebec.<sup>44</sup>

On 25 November L'Événement commented that as far as it was concerned there was no difference between the current recruitment of troops and the previous contingents.<sup>45</sup> As was often the case, La Presse adopted a middle position agreeing with the Liberals that the recruitment was legitimate because it merely allowed those who wished to fight to enlist and did not, in any way, officially involve Canada.<sup>46</sup> However, a few days later the Montreal paper was incensed at Chamberlain's acceptance of a regiment of Canadian troops, implying that the recruitment was indeed just another contingent.<sup>47</sup>

The recruitment debate at the end of 1901 was the last of the Boer War controversies in Canada. By the winter of 1902, while the war was limping to a conclusion, the focal point of the debate in Canada about contributions to imperial defence switched to the Colonial Conference that was to be held in London in the summer of 1902 following

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<sup>44</sup> La Patrie, 22 November 1901.

<sup>45</sup> L'Événement, 25 November 1901.

<sup>46</sup> La Presse, 25 November 1901.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 29 November 1901.

the coronation of Edward VII.

On 11 March Laurier tabled the correspondence between the Colonial Secretary and the government on the subject of the coronation and the Colonial Conference. A letter from Chamberlain dated 23 January 1902 outlined the purposes of the conference:

It is proposed by his Majesty's Government to take advantage of the presence of the Premiers at the coronation to discuss with them the questions of political relations between the mother country and the colonies, Imperial defence, commercial relations of the empire, and other matters of general interest.<sup>48</sup>

The Prime Minister's reply of 3 February set out the Government's intention of standing by the status quo in imperial defence arrangements:

Referring to the several questions mentioned in your despatch of 23rd January, the only one which, in the opinion of my Ministers, gives promise of useful discussion is that of the commercial relations between the various sections of the empire. The political relations now existing between the mother country and the great self-governing colonies, and particularly Canada, are regarded by my Ministers as entirely satisfactory, with the exception of a few minor details, and they do not anticipate that in the varying conditions of the colonies there can be any scheme of defence applicable to all.<sup>49</sup>

Since the Government officially viewed the sending of the South African contingents as not establishing a precedent, the status quo with which the government declared itself satisfied can only be taken to refer to the situation

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<sup>48</sup> The Globe, 12 March 1902.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 12 March 1902.



prevailing before the outbreak of the Boer War. Clearly Laurier had no intention of allowing Chamberlain to review the question of Canada's political relations with the mother country. Such a review could only work in the direction of imperial centralization, politically and militarily. Instead the Prime Minister intended to safeguard Canada against imperialist schemes, by limiting in advance the agenda of the Colonial Conference.

In a statement in the House of Commons on 15 April 1902, Laurier stated that the building of the Inter-Colonial and Canadian Pacific Railways had done more for the defence of the empire than any expenditure in military armaments could have done. He reiterated his plan to discuss only commercial relations at the Colonial Conference.<sup>50</sup>

These two statements, signalling as they did a stiffening government attitude towards new imperial defence ventures, brought Laurier the approbation of all sections of the French-Canadian press. On 13 March La Presse greeted the official government statement:

Voilà un langage très franc, très net, qui remet chaque chose à sa place et qui dissipe pour longtemps les rêves de l'impérialisme.<sup>51</sup>

On 17 April Laurier's statement in the House inspired an even more forthright statement in La Presse:

Nous savons que les assauts ne manqueront pas

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 16 April 1902.

<sup>51</sup> La Presse, 13 March 1902.

à Sir Wilfrid Laurier lorsqu'il sera de l'autre côté de l'océan. Il s'en va vers une lutte gigantesque... Pour nous le programme si vigoureux de Sir Wilfrid Laurier est la fin de l'impérialisme.<sup>52</sup>

L'Événement greeted the government statement by recalling that Laurier had been pursuing a policy of military and political imperialism since the diamond jubilee in 1897, but offered its congratulations to the Prime Minister on his belated decision to take a stand against imperialism.<sup>53</sup> On 18 April L'Événement echoed the statement of La Presse welcoming Laurier's speech in the Commons:

La Presse estime que la déclaration fait ces jours derniers, à la Chambre des Communes, par Sir Wilfrid Laurier, est la fin de l'impérialisme. Cette déclaration est bien ferme, bien claire, et elle aura pour effet, si non de mettre complètement fin à l'impérialisme en ce pays du moins d'étraver considérablement les efforts de ceux qui veulent entraîner le Canada dans les projets impérialistes de Chamberlain.<sup>54</sup>

Even the strongly nationalist L'Avenir du Nord, the Liberal paper which had held Laurier along with Chamberlain responsible for the imperialist menace in Canada, ran an editorial on 20 March entitled "Bravo, Laurier" which congratulated the Prime Minister for his reply to Chamberlain.<sup>55</sup>

Laurier's reply to Chamberlain is, in many ways an epilogue to Canada's involvement in the Boer War. For though

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 17 April 1902.

<sup>53</sup> L'Événement, 17 March 1902.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 18 April 1902

<sup>55</sup> L'Avenir du Nord, 20 March 1902.

the event took place before the war's technical end on May 31, 1902, it, in reality belonged to the period of the Colonial Conferences that were held during the coming years. However, the event was an integral part of the Boer War experience for Quebec, inasmuch as it was the first government position on imperial defence taken since 1899 which received the support of all sections of French Canada. With this step Laurier achieved a consensus of opinion in Quebec in support of his policies such as had not existed since the passage of the Commons resolution on South Africa in the summer of 1899. For the moment Laurier had signalled the end of the danger of imperial federation; he had taken up pursuit of Canada's traditional policy of internal self-government and non-involvement in external affairs.

The Boer War had aroused all or most segments of French Canada in opposition to any thought of imperial federation or closer imperial ties, especially if these should involve military commitments. In the long run anti-imperialist sentiment in French Canada could lead either to the idea of accepting national rights and duties in external affairs or to a preference for the colonial status quo. During the Boer War French Canadians, defensively, had tended to cling to the latter rather than to assert the former. The sending of Canadian troops to South Africa, however, had challenged the notion that Canada as a colony was responsible simply

for the defence of her own soil. It had meant that in future the idea of Canada running its own external policy would gain currency in some French-Canadian circles as a means of counter-acting imperialism.

## NATIONHOOD WITHIN THE EMPIRE - 1902-1909.

Sir Wilfrid Laurier arrived in London in June 1902 for the coronation of Edward VII and the Colonial Conference. His determination to limit the discussions to commercial relations in imperial defence had won him the accolades of the French-Canadian press on a scale unknown since the summer of 1899. In London the Prime Minister performed his task well - so well, in fact, that he was not to be seriously troubled by the defence issue for almost seven years.

Just as Laurier was to be the hero of the piece in the eyes of the Quebec press, Premier Seddon of New Zealand took on the role of the villain of the conference. On 3 June 1902, the day after the close of the Boer War, La Presse had opposed the New Zealander's scheme of an imperial navy which would include colonial units. La Presse reiterated the position that Canada's responsibility in imperial defence was limited to the defence of her own territory.<sup>1</sup> A month later, with the conference just beginning, La Presse expressed confidence that Laurier would not give in to Chamberlain's imperialism; nothing more than an imperial line of transportation, conjectured the paper, would be achieved at the conference.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> La Presse, 3 June 1902.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 5 July 1902.

During the Colonial Conference the French-Canadian press recited the themes on the imperial defence question which had become so familiar during the Boer War period. La Patrie supported statements made by Laurier opposing militarism and favouring Canadian autonomy.<sup>3</sup> Le Soleil waxed eloquent about the good effect Laurier's trip to London was having on French Canada's reputation.<sup>4</sup> Employing a familiar tactic, the Quebec City Liberal organ accused the Conservative press of being two-faced: with the Ontario Tories decrying Laurier's anti-imperialism and the Quebec Conservatives charging the Prime Minister with selling out the country.<sup>5</sup> The Quebec Liberal press, in a period when Laurier's policy was drawing considerably less criticism in French Canada than during the Boer War period, persistently argued that the Laurier way was the moderate way, the way to Canadian unity.

La Presse, having moved into a politically independent stance from its previous Conservative alignment, printed editorials repeating the arguments which the paper had developed during the Boer War. On 12 July 1902 the Montreal daily repeated the familiar contention that Canada, by building the transcontinental railways, had contributed enormously to imperial defence and should be expected to do no more.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> La Patrie, 18 July 1902.

<sup>4</sup> Le Soleil, 17 July 1902.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 28 July 1902.

<sup>6</sup> La Presse, 12 July 1902.

On 31 July 1902 L'Événement, continuing its long effort to undermine Laurier in French Canada, accused the Prime Minister of being an enthusiastic imperialist.<sup>7</sup> The paper's comments are reminiscent of its earlier fondness for quoting Laurier's statements at the Diamond Jubilee. Even L'Événement, however, was forced to concede that the Canadian delegation was standing firm on the imperial defence question.<sup>8</sup> In fact, L'Événement very largely dropped the imperial defence issue in favour of the question of an imperial shipping line. On the latter subject the Quebec City Conservative daily complained about too little imperial cooperation rather than too much. When it appeared that plans for the "all red line" might fail to materialize, a prospect that would deprive Quebec City of becoming the line's Canadian port, L'Événement complained that the city was receiving short shrift at the hands of the empire.<sup>9</sup> So concerned was L'Événement with this local issue that it suggested that Laurier should not receive a reception in Quebec City on his way home from the conference because he had failed to assure Quebec's position as the terminus of the imperial line.<sup>10</sup>

As was to be expected the Colonial Conference touched off a general discussion of imperial relations in the

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<sup>7</sup> L'Événement, 31 July 1902.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 26 July 1902.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 25 July 1902.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 1 October 1902.

French-Canadian press. A whole rash of minor incidents and statements were recorded similar to those that had occurred during the Boer War. On 3 July La Patrie complained that the detachment of Canadian troops which had been sent abroad to take part in the festivities in London had been treated like valets.<sup>11</sup> The next day La Presse attacked the suggestion by Premier Ross of Ontario that the province's Lieutenant Governors be appointed by the Imperial Government in future.<sup>12</sup> Ten days later the Montreal daily criticized a speech in England by the Duke of Devonshire favouring greater colonial contributions to imperial defence.<sup>13</sup>

At the conference in London, Chamberlain asserted that "bloodshed has cemented the British Empire and the sense of unity is stronger than it has ever been before".<sup>14</sup> The Colonial Secretary's hope for machinery to establish an empire-wide defence policy was met by Laurier's determination to safeguard Canadian autonomy and to limit the country's military commitments to the defence of her own territory.<sup>15</sup> The only plan for defence that the Canadians announced was their tentative consideration of the establishment of a local naval force.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> La Patrie, 3 July 1902.

<sup>12</sup> La Presse, 4 July 1902.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 14 July 1902.

<sup>14</sup> Mason Wade, Op. Cit., p. 488.

<sup>15</sup> L.O. David, Laurier, (Sa Vie - Ses Oeuvres), (Beauciville, 1919), p. 84.

<sup>16</sup> O.D. Skelton, Op. Cit., II, p. 297.



In general, Laurier's performance at the conference was endorsed in French Canada. On 13 August 1902 La Presse praised Laurier for not undertaking added commitments to the empire.<sup>17</sup> Ten days later, La Presse challenged the accuracy of an article in the Times of London which had asserted that Canada had agreed to contribute to the expenses of the British navy. La Presse went on to state that it had no objection to a plan involving local naval defence:

...le Canada accomplira un projet entretenu depuis longtemps, savoir la construction et le maintien d'un ou deux navires de guerre, qui seront sa propriété et feront la police de nos pêcheries et de nos côtes. De même que nous avons notre milice, de même nous aurons notre marine...<sup>18</sup>

On 15 August 1902 Le Soleil declared triumphantly on page one that the Prime Minister had not agreed to any contribution to defray the cost of imperial defence.<sup>19</sup>

L'Avenir du Nord, the strongly nationalist Liberal paper of St. Jerome, contrasted the mood of the summer of 1902 with that of previous imperial gatherings:

C'est le retour à l'état normal, la fin d'une mauvaise fièvre. Les discours d'aujourd'hui sont moins éclatants, mais ils sont plus rassurants pour les partisans de l'idée française dans le nouveau monde.<sup>20</sup>

When Laurier returned to Canada in the fall of 1902, he was greeted by an editorial in La Patrie that declared:

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<sup>17</sup> La Presse, 13 August 1902.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 23 August 1902.

<sup>19</sup> Le Soleil, 15 August 1902.

<sup>20</sup> L'Avenir Du Nord, 7 August 1902.

Il nous revient sans avoir sacrifié une parcelle de notre autonomie, de notre souveraineté nationale.<sup>21</sup>

Not surprisingly L'Événement tried to raise some doubt in the minds of French Canadians about the defence issue. An editorial on 16 October 1902 questioned whether the danger of imperialism had really passed, an approach which conceded that many French Canadians were satisfied for the moment that it had.<sup>22</sup> L'Événement was going through the motions of providing an opposition to the Liberals; it was not crusading for the overthrow of Laurier with anything like the conviction it had shown at certain periods during the Boer War.

The consensus in French Canada that had developed around Laurier's replies to Chamberlain in the spring of 1902 concerning the imperial defence question, had been primarily maintained by the Prime Minister's stubborn refusal to be drawn into firm military or naval commitments at the Colonial Conference. Naturally the Conservative press criticized where it could, but the statement in Le Soleil that "Sir Wilfrid Laurier a fait ce qu'il avait promis"<sup>23</sup> held largely true. The fact that the Canadian government had undertaken tentative consideration of the establishment of a local naval force did little to mar its record of achievement in combating imperialist schemes. For the moment Laurier had made up the losses in public support he had suffered in French Canada during the

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<sup>21</sup> La Patrie, 15 October 1902.

<sup>22</sup> L'Événement, 16 October 1902.

<sup>23</sup> Le Soleil, 8 November 1902.

### Boer War.

In January 1903, a six-man convention was established to resolve the long outstanding Alaska boundary dispute. The boundary question provided a test of Britain's willingness to come to the aid of Canada in a dispute with the United States. Inevitably, Britain's failure to uphold Canadian interests would be contrasted with Canada's contribution of troops in the South African War. The French-Canadian press regarded the boundary question as an important indicator of the utility of the imperial connection.

On 26 January 1903, La Presse responded to the establishment of the convention by charging that Britain had been weak in protecting Canadian interests. The editorial asserted that this failure had been the major justification used by the government against a broader scheme of imperial defence at the Colonial Conference.<sup>24</sup> A few days later an editorial in the Montreal daily stated even more bluntly that the commission on the boundary was a farce and that Canada was about to be sacrificed again for Anglo-American friendship.<sup>25</sup>

The Conservative L'Événement greeted the announcement of the commission with typical cynicism:

Trois américains et trois anglais forment la commission.  
Pour qu'elle donne un résultat pratique, il

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<sup>24</sup> La Presse, 26 January 1903.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 3 February 1903.

faut que l'une ou l'autre des parties gagne un adversaire à sa cause, car il n'y a pas d'arbitre réel dans cette commission.

L'on a déjà vu des Anglais céder facilement aux Américains.

Nous ne connaissons guère d'Américains qui aient cédé aux Anglais.

Et il ne nous semble pas que nos voisins soient en peine de créer des précédents.

C'est pour cela que nous ne voyons dans cette nouvelle aucun motif d'action de grâce.<sup>26</sup>

La Patrie, the personal organ of J.I. Tarte, criticized the Laurier government for accepting this form of arbitration in the Alaska boundary question. La Patrie, now hostile to the government since its mentor's resignation from the cabinet in the fall of 1902, put the blame on the Canadian government rather than on Britain. This was not typical of the French-Canadian press, however, and was merely a reflection of the now open hostility between Tarte and Laurier.<sup>27</sup>

The feud between La Patrie and the Liberal government left the party vulnerable in Montreal and in need of a supporting newspaper. During the winter of 1903, there was recurrent speculation in the Quebec press about the new paper the Liberals would launch in the city.<sup>28</sup>

When the new publication, Le Canada, edited by Godfroy Langlois, appeared in Montreal on 4 April 1903, it carried an editorial on the Alaska boundary question in its

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<sup>26</sup> L'Événement, 27 January 1903.

<sup>27</sup> La Patrie, 27 January 1903.

<sup>28</sup> Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe, 28 January 1903.

first number. Asserting that the manner in which the British commissioners had been appointed was a victory for Canadian autonomy, the editorial stated:

...un autre motif en faveur de ce traité de l'Alaska. Il a donné à notre pays une occasion nouvelle de s'affirmer de parler haut, d'imposer ses désirs à la métropole. Le Canada compte deux commissaires sur trois représentants des intérêts britanniques, Sir Louis Jette et le juge Armour; et le troisième, lord Alverston, comme, du reste, les deux autres, a été nommé sur la désignation du gouvernement canadien.<sup>29</sup>

Le Canada followed the same line of policy on questions of imperial relations as the other Liberal papers in the province traditionally had done. It was quick to defend the position that Canadian internal development was the country's most important duty to the empire.<sup>30</sup> On 26 May 1903 an editorial stated that the telling argument at the Colonial Conference the year before had been Laurier's contention that Canada's railways were a contribution to imperial defence.<sup>31</sup> While the paper's editorial policy was nothing new for a Liberal organ, Le Canada was, on the whole, less erratic than La Patrie had been during its years of support for the government. While Tarte had used his paper as a personal mouthpiece that had, on occasion, revealed tensions within the party, Le Canada was a reliable supporter of Laurier throughout.

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<sup>29</sup> Le Canada, 4 April 1903.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 14 April 1903.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 26 May 1903.

During 1903 the Alaska boundary question prompted a series of articles in the French-Canadian press questioning the usefulness of an integrated defence policy. Typically, the critique of defence policy ran as follows: Canada does not need the British navy for defence either for its territory or its commerce because of its geographic isolation and the ease with which its products can reach the United States; Canada's only possible enemy is the United States against whom the British navy is useless; in any case, Britain is not prepared to stand up for Canadian interests in opposition to the United States.

On 14 May 1903 La Presse expressed these ideas in an editorial which stated that in time of war Canadian commerce would have no difficulty reaching the American market, unless, of course, the war was with the United States. In that event, Canada would be too busy to worry about commerce.<sup>32</sup> A month later La Presse accused Britain of failing consistently to prevent the Americans from appropriating desirable parts of Canada, including the disputed territory with Alaska - and this in spite of Canada's contribution to imperial defence through the construction of railways and canals that put the Atlantic ocean only six days travel from the Pacific for

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<sup>32</sup>La Presse, 14 May 1903.

British forces.<sup>33</sup> L'Événement similarly deprecated the value of imperial defence arrangements, arguing that British diplomats had sacrificed Canada's most important interests in return for American friendship.<sup>34</sup>

With all sectors of French-Canadian opinion questioning the value of the imperial link, the Nationalist movement now began to take a more definite organizational form. Under the leadership of Oliver Asselin, a disciple of Bourassa, the Ligue Nationaliste was founded in March 1903. The following plank was included in the organization's programme:

Pour le Canada, dans ses relations avec la Grande-Bretagne, la plus large mesure d'autonomie compatible avec le maintien du lien colonial.<sup>35</sup>

In August 1903, a resolution favouring colonial contributions to imperial defence, passed by the Conference of Chambers of Commerce of the Empire in Montreal, provided an occasion for the Nationalists to express themselves on the defence issue. The resolution which the conference had passed was, in fact, quite innocuous. M.D. Masson, president of the Montreal Chamber of Commerce, had successfully amended the motion to favour contributions to imperial defence only to the extent that the colonies wished. The amended resolution read:

Résolu que les colonies reconnaissent en principe

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 22 June 1903.

<sup>34</sup> L'Événement, 13 February 1903.

<sup>35</sup> Arthur Maheux, Op. Cit., p. 68.

qu'il y a lieu de contribuer à la défense de l'Empire.

Mais que les colonies se réservent le privilège d'user de leur propre initiative quant au mode et à la nature des secours qu'ils pourraient juger à propos d'offrir à l'avenir à l'empire britannique.<sup>36</sup>

La Presse in the same issue in which it reported the passage of the resolution, criticized the conference for its position on the question of imperial defence.<sup>37</sup> This response by La Presse, a paper which had never disputed the notion that Canada had a role to play in imperial defence, provided that the role be decided on by the Dominion, and consist, for the most part, of measures for Canadian defence, reveals the continuing sensitivity of French Canadians to the imperial defence question.

L'Avenir du Nord, the Liberal organ of St. Jerome also saw the resolution as dangerous. Criticizing the French Canadians who had voted for it at the conference, the paper declared that the amendment did not offset the dangerous admission of the principle that Canada should contribute to imperial defence.<sup>38</sup> Le Canada commented that those who had voted for the resolution did not speak for the majority of their countrymen.<sup>39</sup> The Conservative Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe

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<sup>36</sup> La Presse, 17 August 1903.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 17 August 1903.

<sup>38</sup> L'Avenir Du Nord, 24 August 1903.

<sup>39</sup> Le Canada, 17 August 1903.



pointed gravely to the influence which gatherings like the Chambers of Commerce often had on influencing imperial relations:

Les conséquences de semblables réunions sont d'une portée toujours considérable. Elles influent beaucoup sur la politique, dont elles ne sont au fond qu'un déguisement et peuvent amener un changement radical dans notre état politique vis-à-vis de l'Angleterre.<sup>40</sup>

In this widespread mood of concern, Henri Bourassa criticized the French Canadians who had voted for the resolution.<sup>41</sup> On 23 August the Ligue Nationaliste held its first public meeting at the Theatre National in Montreal to protest the stand which the conference had taken on imperial defence. Bourassa, the principal speaker, accused Chamberlain of sponsoring the meeting of Chambers of Commerce in Montreal and the defence resolution to promote his imperialist policies in Britain. Bourassa attacked the resolution as follows:

Le compromis reconnaît le principe de la défense impériale. Ce n'est plus notre pays que nous promettons de défendre, c'est tout l'Empire. ...Notre premier devoir est de développer notre pays. A l'Angleterre nous ne devons ni rancune ni reconnaissance.<sup>42</sup>

After Bourassa's address the meeting passed a resolution stating in part:

Considérant que la situation particulière du

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<sup>40</sup> Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe, 22 August 1903.

<sup>41</sup> La Presse, 18 August 1903.

<sup>42</sup> Robert Rumilly, Histoire de la Province de Québec, (Montreal, 1954), XI, pp. 23,24.

Canada le met à l'abri de toute attaque des nations européennes et asiatiques; Considérant que les Etats-Unis sont la seule nation avec qui le peuple canadien puisse se trouver en conflit, et que la Grande-Bretagne nous a donné mainte preuve qu'elle ne peut et ne veut protéger nos intérêts contre les exigences de la république américain: Cette assemblée se déclare opposée à toute dépense considérable pour l'organisation militaire du Canada; elle condamne le militarisme, et affirme que le peuple canadien doit concentrer tous ses efforts vers le développement pacifique de ses richesses naturelles.<sup>43</sup>

It is significant that this resolution was drafted at a time when the Alaska boundary question was creating concern about the country's relations with the United States. The meeting was expressing autonomous sentiments, but equally it was expressing dissatisfaction with British defence of Canadian interests against the United States. Britain's weak stand on the Alaska boundary question caused the Nationalists to question the imperial link. Bourassa's belief in the fall of 1899 that the British connection could protect Canada against the United States<sup>44</sup> was becoming untenable in the light of the events of 1903. The resolution of the Conference of the Chambers of Commerce served only to make matters worse. The imperial tie, at best a guarantee of Canada's position in North America, as far as the Nationalists were concerned, was becoming instead a link that might draw the country into the

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<sup>43</sup> La Presse, 24 August 1903.

<sup>44</sup> Henri Bourassa, Op. Cit., p. 46.

defence of the empire, while serving Canada no useful purpose.

While the French-Canadian press had generally been hostile to the imperial defence resolution, it was not any friendlier to Bourassa's address to Le Ligue Nationaliste. La Presse took issue with Bourassa's criticism of the French Canadians who had voted for the resolution. The editorial stated that only two French Canadians had been at the meeting and that they had managed to convert a dangerous resolution into a meaningless one. La Presse congratulated the two men for winning a diplomatic victory.<sup>45</sup>

La Patrie, whose mentor J.I. Tarte had split with Laurier in the fall of 1902 over the question of tariff policy, attacked Bourassa for raising false issues. The editorial pointed out that Britain was a valuable market for Canada and that now that Chamberlain had come out in favour of imperial preference greater advantages could be obtained. Under the circumstances, there was no reason to make a loud protest about the imperial defence resolution, which in no way threatened Canadian autonomy.<sup>46</sup>

L'Événement commented that Bourassa, in his criticism of the resolution, had not taken Laurier to task for speaking to the final banquet of the conference without mentioning the

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<sup>45</sup> La Presse, 25 August 1903.

<sup>46</sup> La Patrie, 24 August 1903.

defence resolution.<sup>47</sup>

The incident of the defence resolution at the Conference of the Chambers of Commerce died down quickly after Bourassa's meeting at the Theatre National. The issue had held the attention of Quebec for about a week; it had shown that the imperial defence issue lay constantly beneath the surface of French-Canadian politics ready to erupt on the slightest pretext. Imperial gatherings like the commercial conference in Montreal in the summer of 1903 often served as the occasion for every segment of Quebec opinion to reiterate its views on imperial relations. A few days after the conference ended, the commission of arbitration on the Alaska boundary held its first meeting in London.<sup>48</sup> The attention of the French-Canadian press thereupon shifted from the minor tempest of the Chambers of Commerce meeting to the far more serious question of the Alaska boundary.

When the story broke in Canada on 19 October 1903 that the United States had been favoured by the commission of arbitration on all major points of dispute relating to the Alaska boundary,<sup>49</sup> there was a bitter response throughout the French-Canadian press. All sections of the press agreed on the importance of the territory that Canada had lost. However, the press was divided sharply in assessing responsibility for the outcome. The opposition press, including the Conser-

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<sup>47</sup> L'Événement, 26 August 1903.

<sup>48</sup> La Presse, 3 September 1903.

<sup>49</sup> L'Événement, 19 October 1903.

vative papers and the dissident La Patrie, condemned the Canadian government and Sir Wilfrid Laurier for having accepted a scheme of arbitration which had been properly rejected in 1899. The Liberal press and the independent La Presse attacked the British and especially Lord Alverstone for having sided with the United States against Canada.

L'Événement of Quebec City ignored the question of Lord Alverstone and concentrated its attack on Laurier, commenting that he had suffered a humiliating defeat.<sup>50</sup> Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe also centred its attack on Laurier but noted that Canada had been sacrificed by British diplomacy.<sup>51</sup> La Patrie, in the heat of the Tarte-Laurier feud, commented:

Nous avons sous les yeux, le résultat de la politique nouvelle adoptée par le cabinet de Sir Wilfrid Laurier. Nous perdons - sans retour - l'entrée principale du Canada, en fait la seule entrée commerciale du Yukon.<sup>52</sup>

The Liberal press of French Canada, released for once from the necessity of keeping up appearances of good relations between the Laurier government and the mother country, hotly attacked the British. Le Canada commented:

Nous allons avoir encore une nouvelle trahison de nos intérêts à ajouter à la longue liste de défections britanniques.  
...Nous ne sommes aucunement surpris de ce qui arrive. Nous nous y attendions.  
...la décision du tribunal de l'Alaska parlera sûrement chez les hommes qui réfléchissent un rude coup à l'impérialisme au Canada.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 22 October 1903.

<sup>51</sup> Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe, 24 October 1903.

<sup>52</sup> La Patrie, 19 October 1903.

<sup>53</sup> Le Canada, 19 October 1903.

L'Avenir du Nord recited the long list of past border disputes with the United States to demonstrate the equally long tradition of British perfidy regarding Canadian interests. The editorial concluded with a warning that the imperial link was in danger of becoming a chain.<sup>54</sup>

La Presse was bitter in its denunciation of Britain:

Nous l'avons dit vingt fois: à quoi bon nous jeter par la tête à tous moments la protection du drapeau, quand il nous manque chaque fois que nous en avons besoin? A quoi bon faire miroiter l'avantage d'avoir une représentation dans le Parlement britannique, quand une représentation d'un tiers dans la Commission de l'Alaska ne nous a pas valu la moindre influence?<sup>55</sup>

Four years earlier, in the fall of 1899, when La Presse had opposed the sending of a Canadian contingent to fight in South Africa, an editorial had warned that Britain traditionally had not stood up for Canadian interests against the United States. The same editorial had cited the Alaska boundary as a current dispute which would likely lead to another sacrifice of Canadian interests.<sup>56</sup> In the fall of 1903 the assertions of the anti-imperialists that the imperial link was a one-way alliance which benefitted only Britain seemed to have been borne out. A few weeks later La Presse drew the inevitable conclusion from the course of events: "Nous imiterons l'Empire. Nous consulterons nos intérêts avant les siens".<sup>57</sup>

Early in December 1903 Henri Bourassa addressed a

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<sup>54</sup> L'Avenir de Nord, 24 October 1903.

<sup>55</sup> La Presse, 20 October 1903.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 14 October 1899.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 3 November 1903.

meeting of the Ligue Nationaliste in Quebec City, where he repeated an assertion made at his earlier meeting at the Theatre National that Britain would not and could not defend Canadian interests against the United States.<sup>58</sup> Bourassa's view that the colonial status of Canada meant protection from the United States and no responsibility in imperial defence had subsequently been undermined both by the sending of Canadian troops to fight in South Africa and by the settlement of the Alaska boundary dispute.

Although the outcome of the boundary dispute was of great importance in shaping the attitude of French Canadians toward the imperial connection, the issue did not threaten a sharp political battle within French Canada, as had participation in the Boer War. Not surprisingly, the opposition press took the government to task, but Laurier did not find himself in anything like the embarrassing position he had occupied during the South African war. The Prime Minister moved immediately to derive what advantage he could from the defeat. He told the House of Commons:

I have often regretted...that we have not in our own hands that treaty-making power, which would enable us to dispose of our own affairs, ...so long as Canada remains a dependency of the British Crown the present powers that we have are not sufficient for the maintenance of our rights. It is important that we should ask the British Parliament for more extensive power, so that if ever we have to deal with matters of a similiar nature again we shall deal with them in our own way.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>58</sup> L'Événement, 9 December 1903.

<sup>59</sup> Canada, House of Commons Debates, 1903, VI, 23 October 1903, pp. 14814, 14817.

Canada had lost the Alaska panhandle but her Prime Minister had responded by deflecting the blame on the British Government and by asserting the need for enlarged Canadian control over Canada's foreign relations. For the moment Laurier was far removed from the imperialist rhetoric of 1897 that had done him so much damage. Placing himself on the road to greater autonomy he could not be challenged in French Canada. The strongly Canadian emphasis of his policy was reiterated in a speech at the Canadian Club of Montreal in January 1904. Laurier emphasized colonial self-government as the link binding the empire together, and expressed the hope that Canada would some day have treaty-making powers. He went on to state:

Le 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle a été le siècle des Etats-Unis sur la terre d'Amérique. Sans être prophète, je crois pouvoir affirmer que le 20<sup>ème</sup> siècle sera le siècle du Canada.<sup>60</sup>

During the year following the settlement of the Alaska boundary dispute the issue of imperial defence in Canada focussed on the Canadian militia, its internal reorganization and the relation of the militia's British commander to the Canadian cabinet. In March 1904 the government introduced a new Militia Bill which would enlarge the force, lengthen the period of its summer manœuvres, and make the commander more directly responsible to the cabinet.<sup>61</sup> The new law, like the old, provided for a levée en masse in time of emergency, but under the new bill the Canadian cabinet and not the Imperial

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<sup>60</sup> La Presse, 19 January 1904.

<sup>61</sup> Le Soleil, 28 March 1904.



government would have this power to raise troops.

The Conservative press in French Canada attacked the bill both for the added expense it would entail and for the provision for compulsory service in time of emergency.<sup>62</sup>

Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe deplored what it called the militarism of the Laurier government and described the bill as a conspiracy for the destruction "de notre autonomie et de notre race".<sup>63</sup>

The Liberal press took issue with the Conservative criticisms. Le Canada pointed out that the compulsory service clause of the bill was almost identical to a clause in the previous Macdonald-Cartier militia law. Le Canada warned that the country's armed forces were inadequate and argued that the new expense would be justified by the need to improve the effectiveness of the militia. The editorial denied any danger of war with the United States but said that military preparedness was a guarantee of peace.<sup>64</sup> The editorial went on to say that under the new bill the government would be able to appoint a Canadian officer to command the militia.

Bourassa, writing in the new Montreal weekly Le Nationaliste, defended the government for its new militia bill. He ridiculed the Conservatives for holding up the old bill as

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<sup>62</sup> L'Événement, 17 March 1904.

<sup>63</sup> Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe, 30 March 1904.

<sup>64</sup> Le Canada, 24 March 1904.

a model of virtue:

Le changement est notable. En vertu de la loi Cartier, le roi peut appeler notre milice à l'étranger lorsqu'il y a menace au état de guerre, d'invasion ou d'insurrection, sur un point quelconque de son empire.

...Dans son ensemble la loi projetée marque un grand progrès de l'idée autonomiste; et il est parfaitement ridicule, de la part des journaux qui glorifient sans cesse l'esprit national de sir Georges Cartier.<sup>65</sup>

Since the Colonial Conference of 1902 Laurier had regained the support of Bourassa. Nevertheless, the Montreal Liberal organ, Le Canada, had been unfriendly to Bourassa and Le Nationaliste on the occasion of the latter paper's founding. Le Canada had observed that imperialism was already dead and that there was no need for a new newspaper to extinguish it.<sup>66</sup> For the time being however, Laurier's pursuit of Canadian autonomy helped to avert a final break with Bourassa.

Three months after the passage of the Militia Act, the militia was to provide a new issue that was indirectly to assist Laurier in the pursuit of his policy of nationhood within the empire. It involved Lord Dundonald, the General Officer Commanding the Canadian Forces.

The G.O.C., appointed by the British government and yet responsible to the Canadian Minister of Militia, had always occupied an ambiguous position. Apparently it was difficult for the Commander accustomed to the more sophisticated

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<sup>65</sup> Le Nationaliste, 3 April 1904.

<sup>66</sup> Le Canada, 14 March 1904.

British regular army to submit to the ways of the Canadian militia, or to resist becoming involved in squabbles with the government. Major-General E.T.H. Hutton, G.O.C. at the time of the outbreak of the Boer War, had joined in the pressures on the government to send a contingent to South Africa; subsequently, the government had forced his recall in a patronage dispute in 1900.<sup>67</sup>

In mid-June 1904, Lord Dundonald, G.O.C. for the previous two years, charged the government with exercising undue political influence in the appointment of militia officers.<sup>68</sup> He was referring to the fact that Sydney Fisher, the acting Minister of Militia, had removed the name of one Dr. Pickel of Sweetsburg from the list of officer appointments because the Doctor was a political opponent.<sup>69</sup> Whatever the merits of Fisher's action, the case soon became one of civilian versus military control of the militia, and the government had no choice but to fire the G.O.C. by order-in-council.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, though it was clear from the start what the outcome of the Dundonald affair would be, there was an enormous uproar in the French-Canadian press.

The Liberal press at once leapt to the attack, using the occasion to advance the cause of Canadian autonomy. Le Canada declared that the incident proved once again that the British

<sup>67</sup> G.F.G. Stanley, Canada's Soldiers, (Toronto, 1956), p. 293.

<sup>68</sup> L'Événement, 9 June 1904.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 9 June 1904.

<sup>70</sup> Le Canada, 15 June 1904.

officers appointed to command the Canadian militia did not understand the nature of their position. They were nothing more than functionaries who were responsible to the Minister of Militia, the paper stated.<sup>71</sup> The independent La Presse, taking a similiar stand, appealed to the Conservatives in the House of Commons to limit their criticism to the question of whether Fisher had turned down the commission of a qualified man and to avoid the question of whether the minister had the right to take the action he had taken.<sup>72</sup>

In an article in Le Nationaliste, Olivar Asselin used the occasion of the Dundonald affair to expound his views on the relationship between Canada and Britain and its implications for defence policy. He said that because of Canada's colonial status within the empire, Britain had the benefit of the country's ports and railways for her military use. In return for this, Asselin argued, Britain was responsible for the defence of Canada, except, of course, for the keeping of internal order. He continued:

Le jour où nous serions en état de nous défendre contre les Etats-Unis, nous serions plus forts que l'Angleterre. Nous n'aurions besoin ni de généraux anglais, ni de gouverneurs anglais, ni du drapeau anglais.

Asselin then added, as Bourassa had in 1899, that Canada was not yet ready for independence:

Nous voulons bien le maintien du status quo pendant

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 9 June 1904.

<sup>72</sup>La Presse, 10 June 1904.

plusieurs années encore, mais à condition que le gouvernement impérial cesse de se faire représenter au Canada par des valets qui n'ont pour mission que d'intriguer contre nos intérêts.<sup>73</sup>

The Conservative press in Quebec concerned itself with the right of government opponents to positions in the militia rather than with the question of the relation of the commander to the Minister of Militia. For them, the villain was Sydney Fisher, not Lord Dundonald. L'Événement supported Lord Dundonald's criticism of the government:

...les assertions du général démontrent que le ministre de l'Agriculture (Fisher) a voulu mêler la politique à l'organisation d'un régiment, qu'il a longtemps travaillé dans ce but et qu'il a réussi dans la mesure de son possible. Voilà en quoi il a abusé de son droit et comment s'explique la protestation du général. Et l'abus est tel qu'il justifie la protestation.<sup>74</sup>

In another editorial, L'Événement rejected the idea that the Dundonald affair would have been for the best if his Lordship were replaced by a Canadian officer. The editorial suggested that if the officer were not from the party in power he would be forced out with disastrous results.<sup>75</sup>

L'Événement continued its campaign, elevating Dundonald into something of a hero by suggesting that while others had been playing politics he had been trying to build the army.<sup>76</sup> On 4 July 1904 the Quebec City Conservative daily backed T.C. Casgrain's position in the House of Commons that Fisher was not a superior officer of Dundonald and therefore had not had the right to deal with him the way he had. This extreme

<sup>73</sup> Le Nationaliste, 27 June 1904.

<sup>74</sup> L'Événement, 13 June 1904.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 16 June 1904.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 29 June 1904.

position on the part of L'Événement, implying as it did the supremacy of the British militia commander over the Canadian government, was so much at variance with the paper's traditional defence of Canadian autonomy as to be explained only by partisan considerations.<sup>77</sup>

Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe, while agreeing with L'Événement in its criticisms of Fisher, did not try to make a hero of Dundonald. Le Courrier considered the ex-commander to have been imprudent in his behaviour.<sup>78</sup>

The Dundonald affair soon took on the appearance of an English-French confrontation as well as a Liberal-Conservative clash. Speaking in the House of Commons, Laurier, in an unfortunate slip of the tongue, described Dundonald as a "foreigner" and then, quickly checking himself explained that he had meant "stranger".<sup>79</sup> The word étranger has both meanings in French. This error provoked a series of attacks on French Canada in the English Conservative press, such as a reference in the Ottawa Citizen to French Canadians as foreigners in Canada.<sup>80</sup> A noisy speaking tour of Canadian cities by Lord Dundonald before his departure for Britain helped keep the issue alive.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 4 July 1904.

<sup>78</sup> Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe, 23 July 1904.

<sup>79</sup> Le Canada, 16 June 1904.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 6 July 1904.

<sup>81</sup> Le Canada, 28 July 1904.

The Dundonald incident hastened the replacement of the office of G.O.C. with a Militia Council, comprising the Minister of National Defence, the Deputy Minister, the accountant of the Department and the four military heads of the Branches of the Staff. Created by order-in-council in November 1904, the Militia Council was clearly an advisory body at the disposal of the Militia Minister. Though a modest step, the replacement of the office of G.O.C. further reduced the imperial role in the defence of Canada.<sup>82</sup>

With the calling of a federal election in the fall of 1904, the aftermath of feeling from the Dundonald affair was quickly dissipated. Laurier went into the campaign without serious problems in French Canada. Tarte, admittedly, had left the fold but as yet Bourassa and his followers had not broken with the Liberal chief. Besides, Laurier's record since the previous general election was unimpeachable. He had successfully withstood Chamberlain's plans for imperial defence in 1902. He had turned defeat in the Alaska boundary dispute into an argument for Canadian treaty-making power. He had dismissed Lord Dundonald when he had publicly criticized the government. For the moment there were no threats to Canadian autonomy on the horizon and it was difficult to attack the Prime Minister on that score. The main issues of the campaign were: prosperity, the tariff and the Grand Trunk Pacific.

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<sup>82</sup>G.F.G. Stanley, Op. Cit., pp. 299, 300.

The unimportance of the imperial defence issue is revealed in a list, printed in L'Événement, of 150 reasons to vote against Laurier; not one of them had to do with the defence question.<sup>83</sup>

As in the election of 1900, an incident developed around the question of which party La Presse would support. This time the Mackenzie and Mann interests, who wished to defeat Laurier so as to do away with the Grand Trunk Pacific, were the prime movers. On 11 October 1904 Treffe Berthiaume sold La Presse to the Mackenzie and Mann interests; according to the plan, the paper was now to come out against Laurier and the Grand Trunk Pacific. However, Laurier caught wind of the sale and convinced Berthiaume that, if it became known that La Presse had been sold for such partisan purposes, its reputation would be ruined and the paper would be worthless.<sup>84</sup> On 21 October 1904 La Presse ran an editorial denying that the paper had come under the control of the imperialists. The editorial stated that in the present election campaign the paper limited its interests to three questions: defence of the Grand Trunk; denunciation of imperialism; and promotion of a protective tariff. The paper, the editorial stated, retained its political independence.<sup>85</sup> Accounts of the sale of La Presse and questions about its future editorial policy were printed

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<sup>83</sup> L'Événement, 28 October 1904.

<sup>84</sup> Joseph Schull, Laurier, (Toronto, 1966), p. 444.

<sup>85</sup> La Presse, 21 October 1904.



in several Quebec papers during the campaign.<sup>86</sup> It is possible that this public scrutiny as well as Laurier's work behind the scenes convinced the owners of La Presse that their scheme was a ruinous one. In any case, the incident had negligible effect and Laurier was returned to power on 3 November 1904 with an increased majority. One long term result of the La Presse incident was that the paper emerged a regular and permanent supporter of the Liberals. Although not a party organ like Le Canada or Le Soleil, La Presse could be counted on to defend Laurier in times of political struggle.

The next three years - from the election of 1904 to the Imperial Conference of 1907 - was to be a quiet period as far as the imperial defence issue was concerned. During that period Canada took over the naval bases at Halifax and Esquimalt and the last British troops left Canada. The debate continued between those who favoured contributions to imperial defence and those who did not, but it was largely a theoretical controversy, not involving immediate decisions. From the standpoint of French Canadians, the major political issues were internal: immigration, minority education in the new provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta, and the entry of the Nationalists into Quebec provincial politics. The struggle between Laurier's vision of pan-Canadian nationhood and Bourassa's ideal of a bi-national federation continued during these years. For the

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<sup>86</sup> Le Canada, 24 October 1904; Le Nationaliste, 16 October 1904; L'Événement, 21 October 1904.

moment questions of imperial relations lay dormant.

On 22 February 1905 Le Canada reported that Canada would take over the bases at Esquimalt and Halifax in the near future. The Montreal Liberal organ considered that the move would be an extension of Canadian autonomy and would ensure Parliament's complete authority in defence matters.<sup>87</sup> The step in keeping with the Laurier policy of the preceding years, caused little comment in the French-Canadian press and evoked no criticism. On 20 July 1905 Le Canada reported that Canada would take over the bases on 1 January 1906 and would pay all the costs of running them.<sup>88</sup> To demonstrate the desirability of the move, Le Canada ran excerpts from an article by Lord Dunsford in Fortnightly Review which warned that the taking over of the bases would separate colonial and imperial forces still further.<sup>89</sup>

During these years a minor issue developed over the question of whether the next Colonial Conference should become instead an "imperial council". On 5 December 1905 Le Canada reported that in imperialist circles it was hoped to have the next conference set up a permanent imperial council which would possess the machinery to draw the empire closer together in various ways.<sup>90</sup> Le Canada commented that the government was

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<sup>87</sup> Le Canada, 22 February 1905.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 20 July 1905.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 30 September 1905.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 5 December 1905.

opposed to any changes before the next Colonial Conference and was determined to defend Canadian autonomy.<sup>91</sup> La Presse also attacked the idea of an imperial council warning that the change would create frictions.<sup>92</sup>

During this period the opposition press continued its time-worn tactics of trying to discredit Laurier in French Canada. L'Événement accused the government of spending too much money on the militia<sup>93</sup> and charged Laurier with forgetting his French Catholic origin in favour of being "British to the core".<sup>94</sup> It was suggested that beneath his apparent concern for Canadian autonomy, Laurier was, in fact, an imperialist.<sup>95</sup>

The central political controversy of these years, however, had nothing to do with imperial relations. It was the creation of the provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta in 1905 that held the public's attention. Over the issue of separate schools Laurier lost Sir Clifford Sifton, his able Minister of the Interior.<sup>96</sup>

The same question compelled Bourassa to re-evaluate his concept of Confederation. He stated:

I regret every time I go back to my province to find developing that feeling that Canada is not Canada for all Canadians. We are bound to come to the conclusion that Quebec is our only country because we have no liberty elsewhere.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 5 December 1905.

<sup>92</sup> La Presse, 5 December 1905.

<sup>93</sup> L'Événement, 7 November 1905.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 1 March 1906.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 25 September 1906.

<sup>96</sup> Schull, Op. Cit., p. 430

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 453.

Bourassa was becoming discouraged with federal politics at a time when Laurier was having little difficulty with imperial relations. In fact, the Colonial Conference of 1907 was to prove a notable success for the Prime Minister.

During March 1907, a brief storm blew up about whether the Prime Minister should attend the conference if it meant leaving Ottawa before the end of the parliamentary session, on the ground that the government had already revealed its intention not to countenance any change in the status quo as a result of the conference. Under the circumstances, the editorial maintained, it was more important for Laurier to finish up his work in Ottawa before leaving for London.<sup>98</sup> On 28 March 1907, however, L'Événement reported that Laurier would leave for the conference to be there for its opening.

The same story reiterated Laurier's position favouring the status quo in imperial relations.<sup>99</sup> On 30 March 1907 Le Canada informed its readers that Laurier considered the relations currently existing with the imperial government to be perfectly satisfactory. With regard to contributions to imperial defence, Laurier would stand by his determination to keep Canada out of the vortex of European militarism.<sup>100</sup> In an editorial a few days later the Montreal Liberal organ expressed its opposition to any monetary contributions to imperial defence. The article asserted that although such contri-

<sup>98</sup> La Presse, 9 March 1907.

<sup>99</sup> L'Événement, 28 March 1907.

<sup>100</sup> Le Canada, 30 March 1907.

butions might begin voluntarily, they would become compulsory through the force of precedent as the years went by. To begin such contributions was to court the loss of autonomy.<sup>101</sup> In two separate editorials, another Liberal organ, L'Avenir du Nord of St. Jerome, reminded its readers that Laurier had barricaded Canada against Chamberlainism<sup>102</sup> and stated that the Prime Minister's determination to maintain the status quo deserved the approbation of his countrymen.<sup>103</sup> With the Liberal press and the Liberal government standing on the unimpeachable ground of Canadian autonomy and the maintenance of the status quo in imperial relations, there was little possibility for the opposition press in French Canada to complain. L'Événement, the inveterate enemy of the Prime Minister, found so little room for manoeuvre that it could only make a few allegations about Laurier's ardent imperialism that dated back to the 1897 Diamond Jubilee.<sup>104</sup> For the most part, the Conservative daily simply refrained from comment.

On 10 May 1907 Le Canada recorded Laurier's triumph at the conference:

On avait parlé de Conseil Impérial...de contribution à la défense impériale sous forme de sommes d'argent versées au trésor de l'Empire hors de caisses coloniales...d'entente commerciale basée sur un tarif impérial fixé.  
Ces projets étaient de la plus haute portée. La présente Conférence, en les rejetant dans l'ensemble, leur a substitué une union plus large progressive des colonies.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 5 April 1907.

<sup>102</sup> L'Avenir du Nord, 22 March 1907.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 29 March 1907.

<sup>104</sup> L'Événement, 23 April, 1907.

<sup>105</sup> Le Canada, 10 May 1907.

Le Nationaliste of Montreal, however, was not pleased with the results of the Conference. In an editorial 28 April 1907, the paper pointed out that although there would be no imperial council, there would be imperial conferences every four years presided over by the Prime Minister of Great Britain. There would be, as well, a permanent secretariat in London to deal with intercolonial matters and there would be a military council sitting in London to advise the colonies. Le Nationaliste, conceding that the imperialists had not gained all they had wanted, contested the idea that the conference was a victory for Canadian autonomy.<sup>106</sup>

Nevertheless in spite of the comments of Le Nationaliste Laurier had been successful. His conception of an "imperial conference" had won out over the idea of an "imperial council", a change which implied an enlarged status for the dominions over the days of the "colonial conferences". Though a military council had been established, its functions were to be purely advisory and the dominion governments could take or leave its suggestions.<sup>107</sup> The Prime Minister had maintained the autonomous position for Canada which he had marked out at the Colonial Conference of 1902. The contributions of Canadian troops to fight for the empire in South Africa were now a little removed in time and as long as Laurier could remain a defender of the status quo in imperial relations he would have

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<sup>106</sup> Le Nationaliste, 28 April 1907.

<sup>107</sup> La Presse, 23 April 1907.

nothing to fear in French Canada on that account. When the Prime Minister returned to Canada at the end of July, he received two of the warmest welcomes of his career in Quebec City and Montreal.<sup>108</sup>

Despite Laurier's success at the conference, however, he returned to find a dark shadow descending across the domestic political scene. His efforts to woo Sifton back into the cabinet had been unsuccessful,<sup>109</sup> and Bourassa, weary of federal politics and the leader of a growing political movement in French Canada, decided to enter the provincial field.<sup>110</sup> Bourassa's object, according to Le Canada, was to upset first the provincial and then the federal Liberals.<sup>111</sup> In spite of Bourassa's defeat in the provincial riding of Bellechasse in November 1907, his entry into provincial politics marked the beginning of an attack on Laurier's political base. For the moment, however, the challenge to the Liberals had not found a telling issue around which to crystallize support. On 26 October 1908 Laurier led his party to victory for the fourth time. Around the corner waited the twin perils of reciprocity and the naval bill; and in his home province a political movement which could threaten his hold on French Canada was taking shape around the person of Henri Bourassa.

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<sup>108</sup> Schull, Op. Cit., p. 466.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 467

<sup>110</sup> Le Canada, 15 August 1907.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 15 August 1907.

## LAURIER, THE NATIONALISTS AND THE NAVY 1909-1913.

In March 1909 the Anglo-German naval race made the issue of imperial defence a live one in Canadian politics again. Although the naval rivalry had existed for some years, it had largely escaped the notice of Canadians until they learned from the debate on Admiralty estimates at Westminster that at the present rate of construction, Germany would achieve equal dreadnought strength with Britain by 1912. At once, Canada was faced with a dilemma as difficult and as pressing as that of October 1899. In 1902, at the Colonial Conference the Canadian government had announced its tentative consideration of the establishment of a local naval force. Since that time however, the government's only progress toward that goal had been the takeover of the running of the bases at Halifax and Esquimalt in 1905. In 1907 Laurier had returned from London without making any additional commitments concerning Canada's naval defence.

The naval scare led many in English Canada to believe that Britain's security was in danger. In this atmosphere on 29 March 1909, Conservative member George Foster introduced the following motion on the defence of Canada's sea coast:

That in the opinion of this House, in view of her great and varied resources, of her geographical position and national environments, and of that spirit of self-help and self-respect which alone befits a strong and growing people, Canada should



no longer delay in assuming her proper share of the responsibility and financial burden incident to the suitable protection of her exposed coast line and great seaports.<sup>1</sup>

In the speech explaining his resolution, Foster canvassed the methods by which Canada might contribute to her naval defence. First, he examined the option of paying a fixed annual sum to the admiralty for the enlargement of the British navy. The objection to this, in his view, was that the paying out of money left no residue of experience or permanent benefit for Canada. After discussing the gains that would accrue to Canada, Foster concluded that Canada ought to adopt "home defence, by a coast line and harbour protection of torpedo vessels..." He went on to say that he favoured emergency contributions to the admiralty in emergency situations and that he considered the present naval situation for Great Britain one fraught with peril.<sup>2</sup>

Replying to Foster, Laurier expressed regret that the Conservative member had not stated his conclusions in a more concrete form. After challenging any hint that Canada had failed to take adequate measures for its defence in the past, the Prime Minister stated the government's intention to adhere to the policy of 1902 and then he stated:

In the development of naval defences, I admit we are altogether behind the times. Engaged as we have been in works of peace, we have delayed and put off the development of our navy. ...I agree...

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<sup>1</sup>Canada, House of Commons Debates, 1909, II, 29 March 1909, p. 3484.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 3484-3503.

that we shall undertake this work also, and undertake it immediately; but upon what lines should we do it? Upon the lines, I repeat, of our own action - of undertaking to do with respect to a navy what we have done with respect to the militia. I think we should commence to establish the nucleus of a navy.

Dealing with the question of military threats to the security of the empire, Laurier said that "if the day should come when the supremacy of Britain on the high seas will be challenged, it will be the duty of all the daughters of the nation to close around the old mother land and make a rampart about her to ward off any attack".<sup>3</sup> The Prime Minister closed his address by proposing a substitute for the Foster resolution. The Leader of the Opposition, R.L. Borden, voiced his general acceptance of the Laurier proposal stating that:

In so far as my right honorable friend the Prime Minister today outlined the lines of naval defence of this country I am entirely at one with him. I am entirely of opinion, in the first place, that the proper line upon which we should proceed in that regard is the line of having a Canadian naval force of our own.

Borden then left open the possibility that in the event of an emergency Canada might have to make some kind of contribution to Britain to make up for the dominion's own absence of preparation. After a number of amendments which tended to strengthen the resolution had been suggested by the Leader of the Opposition and accepted by the Prime Minister, the House passed the resolution as follows:

That this House fully recognizes the duty of the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 3504-3512.

people of Canada, as they increase in numbers and wealth, to assume in larger measure the responsibilities of national defence.

The House is of opinion that under the present constitutional relations between the mother country and the self-governing dominions, the payment of regular and periodical contributions to the imperial treasury for naval and military purposes would not, so far as Canada is concerned, be the most satisfactory solution of the question of defence.

The House will cordially approve of any necessary expenditure designed to promote the speedy organization of a Canadian naval service in cooperation with and in close relation to the imperial navy, along the lines suggested by the admiralty at the last imperial conference, and in full sympathy with the view that the naval supremacy of Britain is essential to the security of commerce, the safety of the empire and the peace of the world.

The House expresses its firm conviction that whenever the need arises the Canadian people will be found ready and willing to make any sacrifice that is required to give to the imperial authorities the most loyal and hearty cooperation in every movement for the maintenance of the integrity and honor of the empire.<sup>4</sup>

A few days before the Foster motion was debated in the House, L'Événement had described the coming resolution as academic, merely pointing out that Canada was rich enough and strong enough to play a part in the defence of the empire, especially in protecting her own exposed coastlines.<sup>5</sup> The Quebec City paper was attempting to play down the resolution, obviously believing it potentially capable of alienating French Canadian support from the Conservative Party.

Not surprisingly its Liberal rival Le Soleil was not willing to let the matter drop so lightly. In an editorial, the paper warned that the Conservatives would try to make use

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 3564.

<sup>5</sup> L'Événement, 25 March 1909.

of patriotic Anglo-Saxon sentiment in order to promote the idea of a Canadian contribution to the imperial navy.<sup>6</sup> Two days later L'Événement challenged the allegation that the Conservatives were the prime movers in the country on naval policy, and said that a Liberal source, left unnamed, had made it known that the federal cabinet was unanimous in its intention to offer the mother-country whatever aid she might need to maintain her maritime supremacy.<sup>7</sup>

On 30 March two days after the House of Commons passed the naval resolution, L'Événement charged that the government substitute for the Foster resolution threatened Canadian freedom of action in a way the original motion had not done.<sup>8</sup> L'Événement was trying to make it appear that although the Conservatives had taken the initiative in promoting naval preparations for Canada, it was the Liberals who had imperilled the country's autonomy.

The Foster resolution proved to be merely a brief skirmish for the Liberals, however. Although no step toward greater Canadian participation in imperial defence could be expected to be popular in Quebec, the incident caused little immediate difficulty there for Laurier. So far the government had not committed itself to any concrete naval policy. For the moment, as well, the Nationalist chieftain, Bourassa, was absorbed in provincial politics and he lacked a daily newspaper

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<sup>6</sup> Le Soleil, 26 March 1909.

<sup>7</sup> L'Événement, 29 March 1909.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 31 March 1909.

from which to launch a systematic attack against Laurier.

The rural press in Quebec gave the Foster resolution moderate coverage. The Liberal L'Avenir du Nord said the Laurier government had maintained its position firmly while the imperialist storm blew over.<sup>9</sup> In St. Hyacinthe, the Conservative Courrier commented that the Liberal substitute went further than the Foster resolution and could be interpreted as sanctioning Canadian participation in all wars of the empire.<sup>10</sup> The characteristically parochial Saguenay paper, Le Progrès made no mention of the naval resolution.

Under the impetus of the naval scare an Imperial Defence Conference was held in London in the summer of 1909. Canada was represented by Militia Minister Sir Frederick Borden and Marine and Fisheries Minister Louis-Philippe Brodeur. A week before the conference convened Laurier sent Sir Frederick Borden a letter that revealed his forebodings:

I confess that I am somewhat nervous as to the outcome of the Conference which is to open on the 26th of this month. A big effort will be made to bring us into the maelstrom.<sup>11</sup>

As was to be expected British authorities pressed for the construction of dominion fleets, including a dreadnought, capable of being quickly integrated into the imperial navy in time of war. When the Admiralty scheme was unveiled at the conference, Brodeur requested instructions from Laurier on what to do about a resolution requiring dominion forces to

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<sup>9</sup> L'Avenir du Nord, 2 April 1909.

<sup>10</sup> Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe, 3 April 1909.

<sup>11</sup> Laurier Papers, Laurier to Borden, Series A, 153918.

be arranged to allow them "to render each several force capable of performing the most efficient service in any embroglio which might threaten the integrity of the Empire".<sup>12</sup>

Laurier could only reply that he considered it impolitic to undertake any new commitments going beyond those already made.<sup>13</sup>

He was trying to steer a course that would allow the government to pursue the undertaking made at the Colonial Conference of 1902 about building a local Canadian naval force to be controlled from Ottawa. The naval scare meant, however, that this time Laurier would have to do more than proclaim a naval policy. Whatever the dangers in French Canada, he would have to act to meet imperialist sentiment before he was forced to undertake policies that would further undermine the country's autonomy. In accordance with these aims, the Canadian delegates to the Imperial Defence Conference requested from the Admiralty two plans for the construction of a local fleet, one requiring the expenditure of three million dollars and the other two millions.<sup>14</sup>

Because the detailed proceedings of the Imperial Defence Conference were kept secret, Laurier was in a position to choose his own timing for the unveiling of his naval plans. Until then the press could only speculate on what the government was likely to do.

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., Brodeur to Laurier, Series A, 158893.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., Laurier to Brodeur, Series A, 158899.

<sup>14</sup>Mason Wade, Op. Cit., p. 564.

Conservative leader R.L. Borden had been in London in the summer of 1909 rethinking his position on naval policy. So far, he had occupied a middle position close to that of Laurier, endorsing the idea of a Canadian navy, while keeping open the possibility of contributions to the Admiralty in emergency situations. On his return from London, Borden was still occupying middle ground. La Presse reported a speech he delivered in Halifax on 14 October in which he charged that Laurier was working to cut the imperial tie, but suggested as well that nationhood brought with it certain responsibilities, among them the responsibility to defend Canada's frontiers and protect her commerce.<sup>15</sup> In spite of his criticism of Laurier, Borden was also basing his advocacy of a local fleet on the argument of Canadian nationhood.

In the weeks before the government's naval policy was finally unveiled, the Liberal press in French Canada pressed the argument that the building of a Canadian navy would be an important step in the direction of full nationhood. This was the only argument which the Liberal press could use to prepare French-Canadian opinion for the navy and, at the same time, present the policy as non-imperialist. La Presse had favoured the idea of a Canadian naval force since 1902, a time when the Montreal daily had not yet become a regular

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<sup>15</sup> La Presse, 15 October 1909.

supporter of Laurier. On 19 October 1909, La Presse led the way, proclaiming that "...nous sommes pour une marine canadienne avec d'autant plus de sincérité qu'au désir patriotique de défendre notre pays..."<sup>16</sup> A week later La Presse adduced nationalist reasons for supporting the navy:

Les ultras loyaux ne veulent pas d'une flotte canadienne, parce qu'elle ne sera pas assez "british". ...si le Canada est, aujourd'hui, puissant, ce n'est à la Grande-Bretagne qu'il le doit, c'est uniquement à lui-même.<sup>17</sup>

In a transparent reference to the Alaska boundary issue, the editorial added that whenever the United States wanted a piece of Canadian territory, British protection was of no avail to prevent her from taking it. The logic of the editorial was that Canada should build a navy to strengthen her autonomy, not least because the dominion could not trust Britain to handle her defence. The Conservative Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe used this argument to reach the opposite conclusion. An editorial maintained that a navy would be of no use against Canada's only possible foe, the United States. Therefore, it concluded that, instead of building a fleet, Canada should strengthen her militia.<sup>18</sup> Characteristically, the debate in French Canada was presented in terms of means not ends; everyone was on the side of autonomy, the question was whether a navy would further or retard it.

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<sup>16</sup> La Presse, 19 October 1909.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 26 October 1909.

<sup>18</sup> Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe, 23 October 1909.



The rest of the Liberal press followed the lead of La Presse in praising the navy as the ideal complement of Canadian nationhood. Le Canada declared itself in favour of the project "parce qu'il marque une phase de développement qu'a connue toute grande nation, soit."<sup>19</sup> L'Avenir du Nord stated:

Le Canada est une nation. A ceux qui ne veulent pas l'admettre, nous dirons que si le Canada n'est pas encore une nation, il en sera une un jour, que telle est la destinée vers laquelle il court et que personne n'a le droit de lui refuser cette légitime et naturelle ambition.

Therefore, the editorial continued, Canada must defend herself. L'Avenir went on to say that a Canadian navy would help defend the country against imperialists and then reminded the Nationalists that in 1903 Bourassa had declared himself satisfied with the position of Laurier at the Colonial Conference of 1902 where the government had undertaken to consider the establishment of a Canadian navy.<sup>20</sup>

The traditional Nationalist argument about Canadian participation in imperial defence had always been that Canada should take no responsibility because she was still a colony. Bourassa had maintained this position in 1899 in justifying his opposition to the despatch of Canadian troops to South Africa. The Liberals were trying to outmanoeuvre the Nationalists by stating that Canada already was a nation and not

<sup>19</sup> Le Canada, 23 October 1909.

<sup>20</sup> L'Avenir du Nord, 22 October 1909.

merely a colony. They hoped in this way to make the Nationalists appear to be colonials who stood in the way of Canadian development. Clever though this argument was, it could easily be countered if the Nationalists and their Quebec Conservative allies could show that the navy would come under imperial control as soon as war broke out, thus taking the decision whether and in what way to participate in Britain's wars out of Canada's hands. In fact, the naval issue was to prove highly advantageous for the opposition forces in Quebec. On 8 November 1909 F.D. Monk, the Quebec Conservative leader in the House of Commons, came out against the idea of a Canadian navy in a speech at Lachine. He reiterated the argument that against Canada's only possible enemy, the United States, the country needed an army not a navy.<sup>21</sup>

On 17 November 1909 L.P. Brodeur tabled in the House of Commons the Blue Book reporting the deliberations of the Imperial Defence Conference in London that summer. The report contained the Admiralty's frank assessment that one unified navy would best serve the defence needs of the empire.<sup>22</sup>

Legislative action implementing the naval plan came two months later when Laurier introduced the Naval Service Act into the Commons on 12 January 1910. In Brodeur's absence the Prime Minister presented the case for the establishment of a Canadian naval corps and fleet to be placed under the control

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<sup>21</sup> Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe, 13 November 1909.

<sup>22</sup> La Presse, 18 November 1909.

of the Department of Marine and Fisheries. He explained that the Act was based on the Militia Act in many respects but that it departed in establishing only voluntary service in the navy. The Act provided that the cabinet could call the force into active service in case of war, invasion or insurrection. It further provided that in emergency the cabinet could place the men, officers and ships of the force at the disposal of the British Government for general service in the Royal Navy. Should this take place when Parliament was not in session, the following provision would take effect:

Whenever the Governor in Council places the naval service, or any part thereof, on active service, if parliament is then separated by such adjournment or prorogation as will not expire within ten days, a proclamation shall be issued for the meeting of parliament within fifteen days, and parliament shall accordingly meet and sit upon the day appointed by such proclamation, and shall continue to sit and act in like manner as if it stood adjourned or prorogued to the same day.

Laurier explained that "emergency meant war, invasion, riot or insurrection" and that "war" referred to "war everywhere" and not simply in Canada. The Prime Minister continued:

When Britain is at war, Canada is at war; there is no distinction. If Great Britain, to which we are subject, is at war with any nation, Canada becomes liable to invasion, and so Canada is at war.

Laurier announced that the government had decided to implement the more expensive of two plans submitted to it by the Admiralty. The fleet, to cost three million dollars

annually, would consist of 11 ships: four Bristols (4,800 ton cruisers), 1 Beadicea (a 3,300 ton cruiser) and 6 destroyers.<sup>23</sup>

R.L. Borden, the Leader of the Opposition, in his reply to the Prime Minister, described the pressing and immediate danger of the rise of German naval power. Suggesting that the construction of a Canadian fleet would take many years to achieve results, he charged that the Government had not provided for the present emergency:

In the face of such a situation immediate, vigorous, earnest action is necessary. We have no Dreadnought ready; we have no fleet unit at hand. But we have the resources and I trust the patriotism to provide a fleet unit or at least a Dreadnought without one moment's unnecessary delay. Or, and in my opinion this would be the better course, we can place the equivalent in cash at the disposal of the admiralty to be used for naval defence under such conditions as we may prescribe.<sup>24</sup>

Ten months after the debate on the Foster Resolution, Borden was making the most of his earlier statement that in emergency situations, direct contributions to the Admiralty were justified. In the winter of 1910, it was his reading of the German peril and his conviction that an emergency contribution was immediately necessary, that largely separated Borden's position from that of the Prime Minister.

The Liberal press in Quebec strongly supported Laurier's Naval Service Act. Le Canada stressed the clauses necessitating the calling of Parliament in the event of the

<sup>23</sup>Canada, House of Commons Debates, 1909-1910, 12 January 1910, pp. 1732-1736.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 1750-1762.

dispatch of the fleet to join the Royal Navy and the provision that Canada's ships be manned by volunteers only. The editorial concluded:

Le Canada fera son devoir envers l'Empire, mais il le fera de son plein gré et il conserva le contrôle absolu de sa marine.<sup>25</sup>

In an editorial on 19 January 1910 La Presse also emphasized the guarantees of Canadian parliamentary control, stating that while the dominion would legally be at war with any power at war with Britain, she would herself determine whether to take military action outside the country.<sup>26</sup>

In Parliament F.D. Monk called for a plebiscite on the naval question. The most important development in the ranks of the opposition, however, took place outside Parliament. It was the appearance on 10 January 1910 of an independent Nationalist daily in Montreal edited by Henri Bourassa.

Le Devoir was born after an eighteen month campaign for funds. Controlling 51 per cent of the stock of the paper, Bourassa, the editor-in-chief, was assured of editorial freedom. Omer Heroux and Georges Pelletier left L'Action Sociale, a clerical-nationalist Quebec City paper, to become his associates.<sup>27</sup> In the first number, Bourassa attacked the party system, made his position on the naval question clear, and placed the new paper squarely behind Monk on this issue:

<sup>25</sup> Le Canada, 13 January 1910.

<sup>26</sup> La Presse, 19 January 1910.

<sup>27</sup> Mason Wade, Op. Cit., p. 565.

Par une sorte de conspiration, les deux groupes parlementaires se sont entendus pour donner à chacun de ces problèmes, une solution où le droit, la justice, l'intérêt national ont été sacrifiés à l'opportunisme, aux intrigues de partis ou, pis encore, à la cupidité des intérêts individuels.

A l'heure même où nous entrons en scène, le parlement est saisi d'une question de la plus haute importance qui n'est pas qu'un épisode nouveau du mouvement impérialiste: la construction d'une marine canadienne.

Assisterons-nous à une répétition de la comédie de 1899? Le peuple canadien sera-t-il la dupe des machinations et des misérables intrigues des partis?

Le discours retentissant de M. Monk, à Lachine, nous donne l'espoir que la situation dangereuse et abrutissante où nous gisons ne durera pas.

Le député de Jacques-Cartier peut-être assuré de notre appui, s'il maintient son attitude avec fermeté, logique, et persévérance.<sup>28</sup>

On page four of the first issue, an article outlined the political programme of the new paper. The section on federal politics formed a traditional nationalist catechism, reminiscent of the programme of the Ligue Nationalist, formulated in 1903. Le Devoir called for:

Autonomie la plus complète pour le Canada compatible avec la fidélité à la Couronne britannique.  
Autonomie des provinces canadiennes, dans l'esprit des auteurs de la Constitution.  
Respect des droits des minorités, catholiques et protestantes, en matière d'enseignement religieux et ethnique.<sup>29</sup>

The day after it had been launched in the Commons, the Naval Service Bill was attacked in Le Devoir. In a front

<sup>28</sup> Le Devoir, 10 January 1910.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 10 January 1910.

page, signed editorial (to become the customary format for Le Devoir), Bourassa criticized the expense of the navy, predicting that the three million dollar annual figure would be just the beginning. He went on to make the same point that Monk had, that the people should be consulted in a plebiscite before such a basic innovation as the naval bill was accepted.<sup>30</sup>

On page two of the same issue, Le Devoir ran a news report on the first reading of the naval bill the day before. The report made light of the provision that Parliament was to be called into session to ratify cabinet action in despatching the navy. Quoting Laurier's statement that when Britain is at war Canada is at war, the article concluded:

Ceci signifie en bon français, que si l'Angleterre guerroye contre la Russie ou n'importe quel autre pays, le Canada est en guerre avec ce pays et, alors, sa marine doit assister celle de l'Angleterre. C'est bel et bien l'entrée dans le militarisme européen, quoi qu'on dise.<sup>31</sup>

On 15 January 1910, Bourassa's colleague, Omer Heroux, attacked La Presse for its support of the Laurier naval bill. Singling out Dansereau, the editor of La Presse, for special attention, Heroux accused him and his newspaper of misleading French Canadians by telling them that opposition to the naval bill would mean isolation for Quebec from the rest of the country. Heroux claimed that farmers in the Ontario Grange and in the Grain Growers' associations of the west, as well as trade unionists, some English Canadian Members of Parliament

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 13 January 1910.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 13 January 1910.

and such figures as Goldwin Smith, were all opposed to the government's naval policy.<sup>32</sup> It is important to note that Le Devoir maintained, from the beginning, as Bourassa had in the past, that it sought the building of a political movement that would bring together English as well as French Canadians in the struggle against imperialism.

The campaign in Le Devoir against the navy began in the first issue of the paper; for over three years the naval question was to dominate its news and editorial columns. There can be no doubt that throughout the daily press in French Canada the naval issue received incomparably more space than any other during this whole period. In Le Devoir, however, the question had special significance: to block the establishment of a Canadian navy became an obsession and a crusade for Bourassa and his associates. In issue after issue the same points were reiterated. With each new development the whole history of the question was reviewed. Often Le Devoir traced the French Canadian attitude to imperial defence right back to the American Revolution and the War of 1812, repeating the time-worn contention that French Canada had saved Canada for the British crown on those two occasions.<sup>33</sup> On other occasions Bourassa would relate the naval issue to his view of Confederation. In one editorial he expounded the theory of a "pact" between Canada

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 15 January 1910.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 26 July 1910.



and the mother country that left certain responsibilities with Britain in handling dominion external policy and defence:

La constitution de 1867 n'est pas seulement la ratification du pacte conclu entre les provinces de l'Amérique anglaise. Elle contient également les termes du traité conclu entre l'Angleterre et la confédération canadienne. ... Cette charte définit les obligations et les pouvoirs des divers corps politiques appelés à gouverner la colonie. Le parlement fédéral a reçu le pouvoir, et par conséquent l'obligation, de pourvoir à la défense du territoire, dans la mesure des ressources du pays. La Grande-Bretagne a conservé l'obligation exclusive de pourvoir à la défense générale de l'Empire, conséquence juste et logique de son droit exclusif de négocier, de conclure et de rompre les alliances d'où naissent les causes de conflit. En d'autres termes, la mesure partielle d'autonomie dont nous jouissons ne comporte que l'obligation d'aider à la défense du territoire; tandis que la souveraineté qu'exerce la mère-patrie lui impose l'obligation de pourvoir seule à la défense générale de l'Empire et d'aider à la défense particulière de chacune des colonies.<sup>34</sup>

The arguments used in Le Devoir on the imperial defence issue were not new. They had been developed in the great debate over Canada's contribution to the South African War. Le Devoir updated and reworked these positions as the debate on naval policy in Canada progressed. At the time the Naval Service Act was first presented in the House of Commons, the French-Canadian Conservative press advanced much the same case in criticizing the government's policy as did Le Devoir. L'Événement of Quebec City pointed to the same fear that Canada would be dragged into Britain's wars in all parts of the world

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 1 April 1910.

through the construction of a navy.<sup>35</sup> The paper called repeatedly for a plebiscite on the naval question.<sup>36</sup> L'Événement continued its characteristic practice of quoting back Laurier's pronouncements from earlier days expressing his intention to keep Canada out of Britain's wars,<sup>37</sup> and out of involvement in European militarism.<sup>38</sup> When the first number of Le Devoir appeared, L'Événement reprinted the political programme of the new paper and offered congratulations on its launching.<sup>39</sup>

As the split in federal Conservative ranks widened, the French-Canadian Conservative press followed Monk and openly criticized Borden. Always, however, the attacks on Laurier were stronger. L'Événement, reviewing Laurier's record on imperial defence since 1897, charged him with opportunism. But challenged by L'Action Sociale to assess Borden's stand on the naval issue, the Quebec City Conservative paper charged the Leader of the Opposition with being mistaken on the question of Canada's obligation to the mother country. L'Événement stated flatly that it would not follow him in his error. The article then went on to add that it did not doubt Mr. Borden's sincerity and it pointed out that he wished to consult the people on the question of establishing a Canadian fleet.<sup>40</sup>

In 1910, the difference between Le Devoir and the

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<sup>35</sup> L'Événement, 14 January 1910.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 14 January 1910, 15 January 1910, 18 January 1910.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 18 January 1910.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 27 January 1910.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 11 January 1910.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 8 February 1910.

French-Canadian Conservative press did not lie in their respective positions on the Naval Service Act. They were agreed in opposing it and in supporting Monk's call for a plebiscite. What made Le Devoir unique was its independence of both political parties, its impressive team of journalists and, of course, the remarkable person of its editor. Bourassa was both a major political analyst and practising politician. He openly described his paper as a "journal de combat"<sup>41</sup> and filled its columns with brilliantly argued articles that were often collected and published as brochures, sometimes in English as well as French. As well as producing an enormous amount of copy himself, Bourassa appeared on the platform at most of the important Nationalist rallies in Quebec. Le Devoir alternated between publishing his crusading journalism and reporting his personal political triumphs. Le Devoir was consciously regarded by its managers as a repository of nationalist thought in book or newspaper form, as well as a centre for conferences and other kinds of political action.<sup>42</sup>

Ten days after the appearance of Le Devoir, Bourassa addressed a rally in opposition to the Naval Act at the Monument National in Montreal. He repeated all the standard arguments about the cost of the navy and about the uselessness of the guarantee that Parliament would be called into session to ratify the use of the navy in an emergency. By the time

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<sup>41</sup> Le Devoir, 10 January 1910.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 7 January 1911.

Parliament met, said Bourassa, the fleet would have departed from Canada under orders from the Admiralty. Using the argument about colonial irresponsibility, he predicted that the wars into which Canada would be led would be wars fought to maintain Britain's world position, about which Canada had not been consulted.<sup>43</sup> Then Bourassa reiterated the view that Britain had neglected to protect Canada in the past:

L'Angleterre nous protège-t-elle et avons-nous besoin de sa protection? Au contraire, à deux reprises différentes, nous avons versé notre sang pour la mère-patrie. Nous n'avons qu'un ennemi possible, les Etats-Unis, mais si nous entrions en guerre avec la république voisine et que l'Angleterre vint à notre aide en bloquant les ports américains, 8 millions d'anglais mouraient de faim. Bien plus, on m'a affirmé en Angleterre que jamais ce pays ne tirerait un coup de canon pour la défense du Canada.<sup>44</sup>

The meeting ended by passing a resolution, to be forwarded to Laurier, Borden, Monk and the Governor General, calling for a plebiscite on the naval question.<sup>45</sup>

In response to Nationalist and Quebec Conservative attacks on the government's naval policy, Laurier's most reliable voice in French Canada, Le Canada, developed the Liberal defence in a series of editorials. The paper described Bourassa as an extremist while picturing Laurier as standing at the centre of Canadian politics.<sup>46</sup> Another editorial took characteristic delight in pointing to the gaping disparity between the position of the English-Conservative press, notably the

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<sup>43</sup> La Presse, 21 January 1910.

<sup>44</sup> L'Événement, 21 January 1910.

<sup>45</sup> La Presse, 21 January 1910.

<sup>46</sup> Le Canada, 22 January 1910.

Nail and Empire, and the French Conservative press, especially L'Événement.<sup>47</sup> Le Canada outlined the Laurier position on Canada's relations with the empire, describing the dominion as "une nation indépendante alliée à la Grande Bretagne, qui s'engagerait par traité à joindre ses forces navales aux flottes anglaises, en cas de guerre".<sup>48</sup> The Quebec Conservative position was described by Le Canada as objecting to Canadian contributions to imperial defence on the grounds that the country was only a colony. Only a colony, indeed, quipped the editorial.<sup>49</sup> In another issue, Le Canada replied to Conservative charges that Laurier's policy on defence over the years had been marked by tortuous twists and turns. Le Canada reminded its readers that the essentials of the current naval policy had been outlined as early as 1902.<sup>50</sup> With the debate still raging in French Canada the Senate completed the passage of the Naval Service Act on 4 May 1910.<sup>51</sup> Passage of the bill, however, did not halt the controversy in Quebec. During the summer of 1910 Monk and Bourassa and their supporters took the stump against the Naval Act. On 17 July a meeting in front of the church in St. Eustache, where French Canadians had died in 1837, drew a special trainload of Montrealers to hear Nationalist and Conservative speakers declaim against the navy. In

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 18 January 1910.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 20 January 1910.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 17 January 1910.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 25 January 1910.

<sup>51</sup> G.N. Tucker, "The Naval Policy of Sir Robert Borden", Canadian Historical Review, 1947, p. 2.

a fierce attack, Bourassa accused the Prime Minister of denying French Canadians linguistic and religious education rights in half of Canada while pushing French Canada toward imperialism.<sup>52</sup> After the meeting at St. Eustache, the campaign against the navy increased in intensity in a series of meetings in Quebec and the Maritimes. After assemblies in St. Henri and St. Hyacinthe, the Nationalists held eight separate rallies in eight different counties on 21 August and again in eight more counties on 28 August. Meanwhile, Bourassa hoping to include English as well as French Canadians in the movement embarked on a two-week speaking tour of the Maritimes. Back in Quebec on 4 September, the Nationalist chieftain addressed a meeting of between four and five thousand in Saint-Remi-de-Napierville.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps as ominous for the Liberals as the strength of these rallies was the growing support for Bourassa among the clergy. Laurier having lost the great majority of the French-Canadian clergy over the Manitoba schools question was now faced with a growing Nationalist challenge to his supremacy in Quebec that was especially strong in the church-run classical colleges. In his tour of Quebec, Bourassa was often received by the local clergy as well as by the students of the local college.<sup>54</sup>

More unified after the campaign in the summer of 1910, the Conservative-Nationalist forces almost immediately faced

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<sup>52</sup> Robert Rumilly, Henri Bourassa, (Montreal, 1954), p. 364.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pp. 368-370.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 366, 367.

their first electoral test in a by-election in Drummond-Arthabaska. The appointment of a Liberal Member of Parliament, Louis Lavergne, to the Senate created a vacancy in what traditionally had been a safe Liberal seat. The ground on which the Naval Act was first to be tested before the Quebec electorate was considered so favorable to Laurier that Bourassa stated on the front page of Le Devoir on election day that he expected the Liberals to win and that this victory in a safe ministerial seat would not signify French-Canadian acceptance of the navy.<sup>55</sup>

The Liberals took no chances about losing Drummond-Arthabaska. Laurier, himself, presided at the party convention that chose J.E. Perrault, an Arthabaska lawyer, as the candidate.<sup>56</sup> For their part, the Nationalists selected Arthur Gilbert, a young farmer, as their candidate.<sup>57</sup> From the outset the campaign drew national attention and was treated as a major testing ground for the Naval Act.

Just before the by-election campaign opened, Laurier addressed a mass meeting in Montreal at the Monument National. The Liberal press of the province hailed the speech as a major attack on the Nationalists, covering it as though it were the climax of a general election campaign. In La Presse the story

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<sup>55</sup> Le Devoir, 3 November 1910.

<sup>56</sup> Mason Wade, Op. Cit., p. 587.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 587.

ran on five pages, under the headline, "LE PEUPLE ACCLAME SIR WILFRID LAURIER".<sup>58</sup> In Le Canada and Le Soleil the story took up the whole front page as well as much of the inside space.<sup>59</sup>

Laurier began his address by attacking the resurgent casters among the Quebec Conservatives. He then proceeded, at some length, to justify the defence policy of his government since 1902. He explained that the government had brought forward the Naval Act in 1910 in keeping with long range commitments undertaken eight years before, because the country had grown in wealth and population and was now prepared to undertake this measure for its defence. Laurier then stated what he considered to be the paramount reason for the navy in 1910:

Il y aurait peut-être eu lieu d'avoir quelques hésitations, en 1902, mais à l'heure où je vous parle, Messieurs, qui peut en douter, nous sommes devenus une nation. Or, c'est le devoir de toute nation de pouvoir défendre son territoire et cette obligation est acceptée par toutes les grandes puissances...

Then Laurier turned to attack Bourassa on this vital question of nationhood:

...d'après M. Bourassa, nous ne sommes donc guère plus que les Iles de la Guyane, de la Jamaïque, des Iles Sous-le-Vent, des Iles Bermudes et de toutes ces autres colonies qui forment partie de l'Empire Britannique, mais que l'on désigne sous le nom de Crown Colonies et qui sont gouvernées par Downing Street, de même que nous l'étions alors que M. Papineau a attaqué ce régime avec tant de force, avec tant de raison, avec tant d'éloquence. Nous avons une population de huit millions; nous

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<sup>58</sup> La Presse, 11 October 1910.

<sup>59</sup> Le Soleil, 11 October 1910, Le Canada, 11 October 1910.



avons un territoire qui couvre tout un continent; nous avons le pouvoir de faire nos lois; nous avons le pouvoir de faire nos traités de commerce et cependant nous ne serions pas une nation!

Asserting that the Canadian navy would not be required to fight in all of Britain's wars, the Prime Minister repudiated what he called Bourassa's insinuation that in wartime Canada would have compulsory naval service. Laurier admitted, as he had in the past, that according to international law Canada was at war when Britain was at war, and consequently, open to attack from her enemies. This legal position did not mean, however, that Canada had to take part in all the wars of the empire. Laurier concluded with the prediction that, as the spread of democratic government continued, wars would occur less and less frequently.<sup>60</sup>

Ten days after the Laurier meeting in Montreal, Bourassa and Monk also held a rally there attended by 15,000 people.<sup>61</sup> The meeting was intended to reply to the Prime Minister and to open the Conservative-Nationalist campaign in Drummond-Arthabaska. Monk attacked the Laurier Naval Act as an unconstitutional measure that ought not to be implemented without consultation of the people. Bourassa launched into a long personal attack on the Prime Minister, reviewing his record on defence since the Diamond Jubilee of 1897.<sup>62</sup> On the hustings of Drummond-Arthabaska, a constituency which Laurier had once

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<sup>60</sup> La Presse, 11 October 1910.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 21 October 1910.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 21 October 1910.

represented, and where he kept his summer home, the campaigning was vigorous on both sides. The Conservatives supplied funds and organization, while their Nationalist allies sent in the orators.<sup>63</sup> They campaigned on the slogan, "A vote for Perrault (Liberal) is a vote for war; a vote for Gilbert (Nationalist) is a vote for peace".<sup>64</sup> To dramatize the dangers of the navy the Nationalists sent men in uniform to take a census of the country houses, supposedly to have the lists of eligible men ready when the Laurier Naval Bill went into force.<sup>65</sup>

The Liberals were not idle in Drummond-Arthabaska. By the end of the race they had thirty-five M.P.'s and seventy speakers in the field.<sup>66</sup> For all their activity, however, the Liberals were uneasy about the contest. On 26 October, Beland, the Liberal campaign manager, wrote to Laurier:

From the first the farmers have accepted the navy badly...Nothing remains but to oppose cold reason to sentiment and that is always a thankless task.<sup>67</sup>

It seems also that for all the surface appearance of Liberal health in the constituency, local factional disputes over a period of years had undermined the party organization in the area.<sup>68</sup> Whatever the internal difficulties in the Liberal effort, the by-election was watched by everyone as a test for the Naval Act; a defeat for Laurier here would be

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<sup>63</sup> D.J. Wurtele, "The Drummond-Arthabaska By-Election of 1910", Dalhousie Review, 1960, p. 19.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>65</sup> O.D. Skelton, Op. Cit., II, p. 350.

<sup>66</sup> D.J. Wurtele, Op. Cit., p. 19.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>68</sup> O.D. Skelton, Op. Cit., II, p. 130.

interpreted as a serious blow to him in French Canada.

The French-Canadian press was unanimous in recognizing the importance of the by-election and in considering it a test for the Naval Act. In an editorial on 31 October, Le Soleil predicting a crushing Liberal victory, stated that the battle was being fought exclusively on the naval issue. The editorial contended that, with well qualified orators arguing the case on both sides, no electorate had ever been better informed on any issue.<sup>69</sup> Apparently confident of a Liberal victory, Le Canada saw the campaign as representing the voice of Quebec as a whole and as obviating the need for a plebiscite on the naval issue:

...les comtés unis de Drummond et Arthabaska, vont rendre le verdict de la province toute entière. Ils diront que la province de Québec a toujours confiance au grand Canadien, qui dirige la politique de pays, Sir Wilfrid Laurier; qu'il n'était pas besoin de plébiscite pour savoir que la province de Québec est loyale à l'empire, pour savoir qu'elle est toujours prête à faire son devoir, comme à revendiquer ses droits; qu'elle est assez libre pour ne pas se dérober au devoir de défendre son territoire et son littoral contre tous venants; qu'elle ne demande pas mieux que de voir son autonomie se développer par la possession d'une force défensive composée d'une milice terrestre et navale volontaire, pour la protection de ses intérêts matériels et de ses droits nationaux.<sup>70</sup>

On election day, 3 November, La Presse also predicted a Liberal victory. Not least to the surprise of the Nationalists, however, their candidate, Gilbert, was elected by a 207 vote

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<sup>69</sup> Le Soleil, 31 October 1910.

<sup>70</sup> Le Canada, 2 November 1910.

margin.<sup>71</sup> Bourassa, having written off the election the day before, responded with surprise and delight, picturing the Liberal defeat as both a personal rebuff to Laurier and a rejection of his naval policy. Now that his side had won, Bourassa proclaimed that the people of Quebec had spoken at Drummond-Arthabaska. If Laurier did not believe it, Bourassa challenged, let him call other by-elections in the province and find out.<sup>72</sup>

The Liberal press had committed itself too deeply to the idea that the election was being fought on the naval issue to claim subsequently that their policy had not been rejected. On the whole they faced the fact of that defeat squarely. La Presse headlined its front page story, "Les électeurs de ce comté se prononcent, hier, contre la politique navale du gouvernement..."<sup>73</sup> Le Canada credited the defeat to Nationalist appeals to prejudice and to a campaign that had represented the Naval Act to farmers as costly both in terms of their money and the blood of their sons.<sup>74</sup> Le Soleil also owned up to the cause of the defeat:

La conclusion qui s'impose et sans conteste possible: c'est que l'électorat de Drummond et Arthabaska s'est prononcé de façon très catégorique contre la loi de la marine.

La lutte s'est faite entièrement sur cette question; et la victoire de M. Gilbert est la réponse très nette à cette consultation.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>D.J. Wurtele, Op. Cit., p. 20.

<sup>72</sup>Le Devoir, 4 November 1911.

<sup>73</sup>La Presse, 4 November 1911.

<sup>74</sup>Le Canada, 4 November 1911.

<sup>75</sup>Le Soleil, 4 November 1911.

In a letter to Laurier, on 4 November, Perrault, the defeated Liberal candidate, blamed his failure partly on inferior organization but added:

The appeals to prejudice and anti-English feeling, denunciations of England and fear of war have done their work.<sup>76</sup>

Writing on 10 November 1910, Laurier seemed discouraged about his prospects of winning the fight against the Conservative-Nationalist forces on the naval question. "Governments cannot live forever, for governments are born to grow and die as well as men", he pondered.<sup>77</sup> Even in defeat, however, Laurier defended his policy, "...whoever may take the reins of power will have to have a navy, as every nation must have and has had in the past".<sup>78</sup>

The Drummond-Arthabaska by-election proved to be the opening round in the 1911 general election campaign in Quebec. In the fall of 1910 negotiations between Canada and the United States for a reciprocity treaty had set the stage for the major struggle of the coming year in English Canada. In Quebec, however, the Conservative-Nationalist allies continued to single out the naval issue as the paramount concern. One reason for playing down reciprocity was the apparent disagreement on the question between Monk and Bourassa. In the early months of 1911 Bourassa approved reciprocity as a measure favorable to Canadian farmers and not disadvantageous to the country's industry. He

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<sup>76</sup> D.J. Wurtele, Op. Cit., p. 23.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

was not, however, prepared to sacrifice his alliance with Monk to satisfy his inclination toward reciprocity. In a front page editorial in Le Devoir on 18 April 1911, Bourassa argued that reciprocity was not a question of great national importance. Minimizing the difference between Monk and himself on the question, he declared that, if the measure were put into effect, and proved detrimental, it could always be reversed. In any case, Bourassa concluded, on more fundamental questions, such as the naval issue, there was close agreement between Monk and himself.<sup>79</sup>

In the spring of 1911 with the reciprocity struggle growing in intensity in English Canada, Laurier had to turn his attention toward the last of the imperial gatherings he was to attend. The conference of 1911 was to witness the decisive failure of the idea of imperial parliamentary federation. The British Prime Minister, H.A. Asquith, as well as Laurier, opposed any plan which might threaten the principle of governments remaining responsible to their respective parliaments, both in the United Kingdom and in the Dominions.<sup>80</sup> At the conference Laurier opposed the idea of the dominions being consulted in matters of foreign policy that would bind the whole empire. Not wishing to sacrifice Canada's freedom of action, he expressed his fear that advice would mean taking responsibility for imperial policy:

...I do not think the United Kingdom can undertake

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<sup>79</sup> Le Devoir, 18 April 1911.

<sup>80</sup> O.D. Skelton, Op. Cit., II, p. 370.

to carry out that advice unless you are prepared to back that advice with all your strength, and take part in the war...We have taken the position in Canada that we do not think we are bound to take part in every war.<sup>81</sup>

Laurier's stand at the conference of 1911 was in keeping with the position he had taken in 1902 and in 1907. He had long since given up the imperialist slogans of 1897 and had worked to change the empire into an alliance of autonomous nations. Under the pressure of a rising imperialist sentiment in English Canada which included a demand for a more active role for the dominion in imperial affairs, Laurier had evolved a policy of building Canadian nationhood within the empire. His policy, designed to meet both the isolationism of French Canada and the expansive mood of English Canada, was aimed at bringing together the country's two peoples into one nationality. In 1904 he had written to a friend:

My object is to consolidate Confederation, and to bring our people long estranged from each other, gradually to become a nation. This is the supreme issue. Everything else is subordinate to that idea.<sup>82</sup>

The pressure of his convictions and the difficulty of leading a country that was two-thirds English-speaking, had driven Laurier toward a naval policy which was designed to reconcile autonomist and imperialist sentiments. Bourassa continued to hold with equal determination to what he regarded as the traditional relationship of Canada to the empire. When the

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>82</sup> H.B. Neathy, Laurier and Imperialism, Canadian Historical Association Report, 1953, p. 24.

Prime Minister returned from the 1911 conference, Bourassa warned of the dangers of imperial centralization:

Oui, la conférence est devenue un véritable Conseil d'empire, une junte secrète, ne laissant connaître au public que ce qu'il plaît de dévoiler de ses débats et de ses décisions. C'est un Etat dans l'Etat - ou plutôt un Etat au-dessus des Etats - un véritable cabinet impérial...sans responsabilité non plus à aucun des pays autonomes de l'empire...<sup>83</sup>

The next day, Bourassa reiterated the danger to Canadian autonomy arising from the imperial conferences, stating that such meetings inevitably tended toward greater concentration of power in the hands of the imperial government and the weakening of the autonomy of member states.<sup>84</sup>

During the ten-day period before the dissolution of Parliament on 29 July 1911, when Laurier was trying to decide whether and when to face the electorate on the reciprocity issue, he was being fiercely attacked as an imperialist in his own province. As he had many times in the past, Bourassa reviewed the history of the naval issue in Le Devoir. He pointed to the experience of Australia and New Zealand to demonstrate that the Admiralty would inevitably control dominion fleets in times of war.<sup>85</sup> On 28 July Bourassa attacked the Prime Minister for his conduct at the recent Imperial Conference. He claimed that while Laurier had publicly opposed imperial integration, he had imperilled Canadian autonomy in the secret sessions of

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<sup>83</sup> Le Devoir, 6 July 1911.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 7 July 1911.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 20 July 1911.



the defence committee:

Il fait habilement répandre dans journaux de Londres que le Canada entend rester maître de décider à quelles guerres il prendra part; puis, dans le secret du comité de la défense, il se fait ou se laisse imposer ces fameuses zones qui, malgré la duperie des textes, en réalité soumettent de plus en plus la 'marine canadienne' aux décisions de l'Amirauté anglaise. Il conclut également avec lord Haldane une entente secrète assurant l'unité des forces impériales en temps de guerre.<sup>86</sup>

After the calling of the election, Le Devoir reviewed the history of the naval issue, time and again, drumming home the same case it had been making since the Naval Act had been unveiled in January 1910. In this climactic struggle with Laurier, Bourassa took no chances on the longevity of his readers' memory. He reproduced quotations from the Liberal press, especially Le Canada, showing its persistent opposition to any naval undertaking for Canada, until the government brought forth its policy in 1909.<sup>87</sup> Expressing confidence in the outcome of the crusade of Le Devoir, Omer Heroux attributed the moderation of Opposition Leader Borden's recent statements on the navy to the rising anti-imperialist sentiment, not only in Quebec but in the English-speaking provinces as well.<sup>88</sup>

The Liberal press answered the Nationalists and their Quebec Conservative allies with a personal attack on Bourassa that grew increasingly bitter as election day approached. The

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 28 July 1911.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 16 August 1911.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 16 August 1911.

Prime Minister's campaign in Quebec set the tone for Liberal replies to the opposition. Brushing aside Monk as inconsequential, Laurier singled out Bourassa for his fire:

De M. Monk, je n'ai en vérité rien à dire: c'est la doublure de M. Bourassa. M. Bourassa n'aura pas besoin d'aller à la chambre, il écrira ce qu'il voudra dans son journal et M. Monk sera sa trompette au parlement.

M. Bourassa m'attaque sur la question de la marine: je persiste à dire que le Canada est aujourd'hui une nation et qu'elle en a les devoirs. Au nombre de ces devoirs est celui qui consiste à pourvoir elle-même à sa propre sûreté sur terre et sur mer.

...M. Bourassa passe pour le champion des Canadiens-Français. Il dit: j'ai aimé Laurier, mais je l'ai quitté parce qu'il a sacrifié Québec. Je suis de race française et la race française reste pour moi la plus chère, mais je ne suis pas le ministre d'une race, je suis le ministre de toutes les races sans distinction.<sup>89</sup>

The Liberal press also chose to regard Bourassa rather than Monk as the chief adversary in Quebec. La Presse repeatedly linked Bourassa to the imperialist Conservatives of English Canada, warning French Canadians that, if the Conservatives came to power, it would be the "voice of Toronto", the voice of fanaticism and religious intolerance which would rule Canada.<sup>90</sup> On one occasion La Presse accused Bourassa of being in league with the imperialist News of Toronto. The editorial went on to state:

Le chef nationaliste se rend-il bien compte du rôle misérable qu'il joue? Il ne peut pas s'apercevoir qu'il est en ce moment la principale espérance de ces mêmes impérialistes qu'il prétend combattre...<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> La Presse, 23 August 1911.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 25 August 1911.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 13 September 1911.

Again, in the same issue, La Presse quipped:

M. Bourassa et ses disciples avouent maintenant que le service dans la marine n'est pas obligatoire, mais ils prétendent qu'il le deviendra nécessairement. Oui, peut-être, si les nationalistes réussissent à faire arriver M. Borden au pouvoir.<sup>92</sup>

La Presse assailed Bourassa for suggesting that conscription would be the outcome of the government's naval policy.<sup>93</sup>

The paper charged him, as well, with arrogance and egotism in thinking that he alone knew right from wrong or that he alone could decide who was a patriot and who a "vendu".<sup>94</sup>

Le Canada, Laurier's principal organ in Montreal, made use of a technique practised by the Liberals in past election campaigns in Quebec. Quoting from a variety of English language Conservative papers such as the Mail and Empire and News of Toronto, the Standard of St. John, the Ottawa Journal, the Winnipeg Telegram and the Orange Sentinel, Le Canada set out to show that the opposition in English Canada was ultra-imperialist while that in Quebec was ultra-nationalist. The excerpts were designed to prove that the election of a Conservative government would mean closer defence ties with the empire and a policy of direct contributions to the imperial navy; a vote for the Quebec Nationalists, therefore, was a vote for Borden and the imperialists.<sup>95</sup> Le Canada also attempted to demonstrate that Monk's current autonomist campaign was in direct contrad-

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 13 September 1911.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 11 September 1911.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 12 September 1911.

<sup>95</sup> Le Canada, 2 September 1911 and 5 September 1911.

iction to the pro-imperialist position he had taken in the period from 1897 to 1900.<sup>96</sup> This charge was used to balance the accusations in the Nationalist and Conservative press that Laurier had always been an opportunist on the question of defence policy. Finally, on the day before the election, Le Canada ran a banner headline predicting a Liberal victory which would wipe out the Nationalists.<sup>97</sup> It was clear that in Quebec the Liberals saw their main foes as the Nationalists and not Borden's federal Conservatives.

At the same time as they struck back at the Nationalists, the Quebec Liberal press attempted to maintain Laurier's accustomed image as the pride of the French-Canadian people. On 19 September La Presse ran a lengthy personal tribute to the Prime Minister, praising him for the high esteem in which he was held by all Canadians. The article went on to point out that French Canadians had special reasons for being faithful to Laurier. Through the service he had rendered his country, had he not done more than any other to enhance the reputation of his race? Considering the fact that French Canadians were in the minority in Confederation, how could they dethrone one of their own who had attained the highest post in the land? The article concluded by stating that if his compatriots abandoned him in the evening of his life, it would be the province

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 6 September 1911.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 20 September 1911.

of Quebec and not Laurier that would be diminished.<sup>98</sup> Le Soleil joined in the adulation of Laurier running, as the main headline of the paper on 15 September, his famous slogan "Je ne suis ni impérialiste ni anti-impérialiste, je suis simplement canadien".<sup>99</sup> As the campaign entered its final days, Le Soleil played up the positive advantages of reciprocity in an attempt to draw attention away from the troublesome naval issue. The paper called on readers to vote for "Laurier and Reciprocity".<sup>100</sup>

It is evident from the press campaign of the Liberals in French Canada that Laurier's supporters felt constantly on the defensive on the naval issue. Thus, they emphasized the far greater dangers of electing an imperialist Conservative government. As in past elections, Laurier's defence policy was upheld not on its intrinsic merit as much as on its being the lesser of two evils. French Canadians were reminded of their minority position and cautioned against turning one of their own sons out of office. Significantly, the Liberals were forced to rely on Quebec's insecurity and weakness in Confederation to justify their naval policy. It is clear that they believed that the overwhelming sentiment in French Canada was still opposed to Canadian participation in imperial defence except, of course, for the defence of Canadian soil.

The unprecedented character of the 1911 election in

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<sup>98</sup> La Presse, 19 September 1911.

<sup>99</sup> Le Soleil, 15 September 1911.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 20 September 1911.

Quebec arose from the fact that the opposition to the Liberals was not compromised from too close an association with the imperialist Conservatives in English Canada. In 1900, the French-Canadian Conservatives had attacked Laurier for sending Canadian contingents to fight in South Africa. This charge had been successfully countered by pointing to the weakness of French-Canadian Conservatives within their own party whose majority was more outspokenly favorable to the Boer War contributions than were the Liberals.

In 1911, however, the opposition to the Liberals gave every appearance of constituting a new political bloc in federal politics. Monk, the leader of the Quebec federal Conservatives, had spoken out against the English-Canadian wing of his party on the naval question. Bourassa, who held together the coalition between Nationalists and Monk's Conservatives, had launched his journal, Le Devoir, with an attack on the two-party system in its first issue. His endorsement of Monk had been precisely because of the Quebec Conservative leader's greater concern for principle than for party solidarity.<sup>101</sup>

An ex-Liberal and one-time supporter of Laurier, Bourassa could present himself to Liberals as well as Conservatives on the basis of a common Nationalist platform. Bourassa had long urged French Canadians to vote for candidates not tied to either political party, candidates who would follow the independent

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<sup>101</sup> Le Devoir, 10 January 1910.

line of Monk if elected. Thus, the editor of Le Devoir proclaimed that he was not concerned about whether the candidate was called a Conservative, a Liberal or a Nationalist, provided that he oppose the anti-national policies of the Laurier government. Bourassa warned his readers that, unless they embarked on a new political course, they would always be faced with the Liberal argument that "Borden would be worse than Laurier".<sup>102</sup> On 8 September 1911 in an election rally at the Monument National in Montreal, Bourassa said the main reason the meeting had been called had been to explain why one-time Liberals who had worked to put Laurier into power, now wanted to turn him out of office. He then set out to prove that Laurier had abandoned his principles while ex-Liberals, now opposing him, had not.<sup>103</sup>

Clearly, Bourassa's aim was to establish an independent bloc of Quebec M.P.'s at Ottawa who would be freed from the need to compromise their positions in the interest of party solidarity with a larger group of English-Canadian members. A French-Canadian party at Ottawa could only be successful, of course, if neither Liberals nor Conservatives had a clear majority and if English Canadians did not unite against it. Bourassa hoped a French-Canadian party would be able to resist imperialist incursions into Canadian autonomy. He saw it as the only means of protecting the "pact" of 1867 and the

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<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 11 August 1910.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 9 September 1911.

"pact" with the mother country.

Laurier's enemies in Quebec included traditional bleus, Nationalists, and disillusioned Liberals. Try as his allies might to insist that a vote for the Conservative-Nationalist candidates was tantamount to a vote for Borden, the old tactic did not work as it had in the past. There were many reasons why this was so. The Liberals had been in office for fifteen years and their opponents were better organized and better financed than they had been in the past three general elections. There was, however, the crucial fact that a potent political alliance, not hopelessly discredited by its English-speaking confederates and armed with a telling issue and able leadership, existed in 1911.

On 21 September 1911 the Laurier government went down to defeat. In fact, there were two defeats. In Ontario, the Conservatives won 72 seats to 14 for the Liberals. In Quebec, Laurier's base, where the navy and not reciprocity had been the decisive issue, the Liberal majority had been reduced from 43 to 11. The Conservative-Nationalists in Quebec had won 27 seats; but, in their hour of triumph they faced the chilling fact that they had turned out of office a government based on a solid Quebec and had replaced it with one based on a solid Ontario. Most important, the Nationalists had not met their objective of holding the balance of power in Parliament. The Conservatives had a clear majority in the House without the



support of the Nationalists. Borden needed only a few votes from Quebec to assure him a working majority and for these he could count on the English members and the traditional bleus.<sup>104</sup>

Not surprisingly, the Liberal press of French Canada was stunned by the fall of their chieftain. Le Canada commented:

Nous avons perdu beaucoup de terrain dans la province de Québec, grâce à l'alliance Borden-Monk-Bourassa; grâce à la campagne de préjugés qui a été menée parmi les Canadiens-français, au sujet de la marine.<sup>105</sup>

Le Soleil, without offering any explanation for the defeat, bemoaned the ingratitude of the people. Coming close to charging those French Canadians who had abandoned Laurier with treason, the editorial suggested that they would regret the error for the rest of their lives. Le Soleil warned that French Canada was now entering one of the most alarming periods in its history.<sup>106</sup> With nothing but contempt for Bourassa, La Presse refused to concede that he had won a victory. The Montreal daily pointed to reciprocity as the government's main stumbling-block. As for the Nationalists, La Presse drew attention to the fact that Bourassa had lost many of the counties in which his efforts had been greatest, including, ironically, Drummond-Arthabaska. La Presse, differing from Le Canada, concluded that even in Quebec reciprocity had been more important

<sup>104</sup>The Conservatives had a total of 134 seats and the Liberals 87. Therefore, Borden needed only 5 votes from Quebec to assure his majority. H.G. Thorburn, Party Politics in Canada, (Toronto, 1967), p. 225.

<sup>105</sup>Le Canada, 22 September 1911.

<sup>106</sup>Le Soleil, 22 September 1911.

than the navy in defeating Laurier.<sup>107</sup> It is difficult to tell, of course, whether this assessment of the election by La Presse was motivated out of a desire to belittle the Nationalists in their moment of triumph or out of a serious analysis of the facts.

Le Devoir, after greeting the news with almost violent enthusiasm,<sup>108</sup> quickly settled down to the political battles it expected to face in the future. In a front page editorial on 25 September, Omer Heroux credited the increase in Conservative strength in Quebec to the diffusion of ideas which had created a new political atmosphere in the province. He observed that the success with which old Liberals had been brought to vote alongside Conservatives for the overthrow of the government had demonstrated that any future government corruption would be met by the same sort of abandonment of the party responsible. As though he was not entirely sure of the Quebec Conservatives who had been elected, Heroux warned that, if any of them departed from the line set out by the Nationalists and Monk on the naval issue, they would meet with certain defeat.<sup>109</sup>

After being satisfied that Borden had agreed to hold a plebiscite on the naval issue, Monk entered the cabinet of the new government as Minister of Public Works.<sup>110</sup> His acceptance of office meant that the Liberal press in French Canada

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<sup>107</sup> La Presse, 22 September 1911.

<sup>108</sup> Le Devoir, 22 September 1911.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 25 September 1911.

<sup>110</sup> Mason Wade, Op. Cit., p. 614.

would make use of every opportunity to point to inconsistencies between his anti-imperialist electioneering and the policies of the new government. On 7 November 1911, La Presse ran an editorial pointing to differences of opinion among Conservatives regarding naval policy members of the party variously favoured: a gift of dreadnaughts to the British navy, a monetary contribution to the British navy, the construction of a Canadian navy (the Laurier position), or nothing at all. The editorial then quoted a story in the Ottawa Journal which suggested that Borden would only make up his own mind about a naval policy after he had consulted the imperial authorities to find out which policy they would prefer Canada to follow. La Presse asked maliciously if it was for this that Bourassa had worked so ardently for Borden and if this was all the guarantee that Monk had obtained on entering the cabinet.<sup>111</sup>

Bourassa would not, however, allow himself to be made the butt of anti-ministerial sniping. His old penchant for remaining in opposition soon reasserted itself. In February 1912, he was calling for the repeal of the Naval Act with all the invective he had ever summoned when Laurier was in office. By then, the Borden government's continuing hesitancy about what naval policy to follow made it an easy target both for the Nationalist and for the Liberal press in Quebec. On 1 February 1912, Bourassa, writing in Le Devoir, pointed to the unfairness of a colony like Canada contributing to the defence of an empire

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<sup>111</sup> La Presse, 7 November 1911.

whose foreign policy was entirely formulated by the mother country:

Seuls, dans le monde entier, les Canadiens, les Néo-Zélandais, les Australiens, les Sud-Africains, n'ont rien à y voir. Sujets de Sa Majesté britannique, ils subiront les effets de cette politique, sans même pouvoir y répondre, favorablement ou défavorablement, comme peuvent le faire à loisir les Allemands, les Russes, les Français, les Américains, les Chinois, les Belges, les Suisses, les Hollandais. Citoyens des "nations-sœurs de l'empire", ils paieront peut-être l'impôt du sang ou de l'argent afin de soutenir cette politique; mais ils n'auront pas, comme les contribuables d'Angleterre, d'Ecosse, d'Irlande, le droit d'exprimer par leur vote - l'expression ultime des volontés d'un peuple libre - leur satisfaction ou leur mécontentement.<sup>112</sup>

In a pamphlet published in both English and French and entitled Why the Navy Act Should be Repealed, Bourassa outlined his opposition to the navy in all its aspects. He traced imperialist pressures for dominion participation in Britain's wars back to the South African war in 1899. He described that war as "a conflict provoked by Chamberlain with the almost avowed objective of bringing to a white heat the exalted jingoism of the colonies and their mistaken loyalty". He contended that this new wave of imperialism was a departure from the traditional practice of the empire as it had existed from at least the time of Confederation. The earlier view, given expression as recently as 1896 by the Colonial Defence Committee, had been that dominion protection of its own territories was all that could be expected of a colony in the way of imperial defence.

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<sup>112</sup>Le Devoir, 1 February 1912.

Carrying forward the development of the new imperialism Bourassa dealt with the naval question. He claimed that at the Imperial Defence Conference in 1909, the Canadian ministers had been forced to acknowledge that in case of war local navies would come under the control of the Admiralty. What then was the value, he asked, of Laurier's contention that Canada would decide for herself whether to participate in imperial wars? By the time Parliament had been called, in time of war, the navy would already have sailed off under orders of the Admiralty. The crucial point in Bourassa's argument, however, was that Canada, having no say in the formulation of British policy, should take no responsibility for it:

...it shows...how far Canada is from being a nation, and, consequently, how illogical and unjust it is to try and make her assume the responsibilities of a nation as Sir Wilfrid Laurier wanted her to do, by creating his navy.

Bourassa also called into question the contention that Germany posed a real naval threat to Great Britain. Quoting Sir William White, late director of naval construction in Great Britain, to the effect that the two-power standard remained unimpaired, Bourassa challenged the strategic basis of the need for urgency on the naval issue.

Now that Laurier had been defeated, Bourassa maintained, his Naval Service Act should be repealed, "above all, because it strikes at the basic principles of popular rights and colonial autonomy, and thereby at the very foundation of

the Espire".<sup>113</sup> As usual, Bourassa did not base his case on a demand to cut the tie with the mother country. On the contrary, he was basing his position on a plea that the traditional framework of the empire be respected and restored. Any departure from the traditional usage of the empire would necessitate a choice between imperial federation and complete independence. Bourassa had not wanted Canadians to be forced to make that choice. In 1912, he still preferred Canada's role as an autonomous colony within the empire with no power or responsibility in external affairs. He was not confident that his English-Canadian fellow countrymen were as yet ready for full nationhood which would require them to pursue a purely Canadian and not an imperial foreign policy. Unquestionably, it was French Canada's minority status that led a Nationalist like Bourassa to cling to a colonial arrangement primarily to safeguard his own people against the majority of their compatriots. On that basis he had worked to defeat French Canada's most illustrious son, Sir Wilfrid Laurier. It was surely in keeping with his personality and his purposes that Bourassa should continue his crusade during Borden's term of office.

In February 1912 P.A. Choquette, a Liberal Senator, proposed a resolution that would repeal the Naval Service Act. Choquette, who had voted against the bill when it was passed two years before, argued that the Conservatives had opposed

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<sup>113</sup> Henri Bourassa, Why the Navy Act Should Be Repealed, (Montreal, 1912), pp. 5, 27-32.

the bill when they had been in opposition. He said the electorate had disavowed the Laurier naval policy when it had defeated the Liberal government. Therefore, the Senator concluded, the Naval Act should be repealed. The Senate, however, defeated Choquette's motion by a vote of 51 to 2.<sup>114</sup>

In an editorial on the issue, La Presse, though not approving the Choquette motion, took up his argument and pointed out that the Conservatives had changed their tune about the Naval Act since coming to power. The editorial also made use of the opportunity to recall the Nationalist boast in 1911 that if they had twenty seats in Parliament they would soon be rid of the Naval Act. La Presse ended on a more solemn note, warning that the government, instead of doing away with the navy, might well undertake schemes more agreeable to the imperialists and the Admiralty.<sup>115</sup>

The Choquette resolution was not, in itself, a particularly important event. It did succeed, however, in dramatizing the fact that the Conservative government had not yet decided on a naval policy. Borden had been placed in the absurd position of having to defend the Laurier Naval Act until he could produce an alternative undertaking. The Prime Minister, therefore, announced that the government intended to consult on the naval question and then present a new bill which would replace the Laurier Act. The Prime Minister also stated that

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<sup>114</sup> La Presse, 29 February 1912.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 29 February 1912.

before a "permanent" naval policy for Canada could be undertaken, the people would be consulted. He did not, however, indicate whether by consultation he had in mind a plebiscite or a general election, or how soon after the bill the opinion of the electorate would be sought.<sup>116</sup>

As it turned out, the first body to be consulted was the Admiralty. In the summer of 1912, Borden paid an extended visit to Britain, where he was warned by Winston Churchill of the pressing danger of German aggression. In a series of conferences at the Admiralty, Borden expressed willingness to commit Canada to a naval programme.<sup>117</sup> The details of that programme were to remain unknown to Canadians until the fall of 1912.

After Borden's return to Canada on 6 September 1912, it became clear that the government planned to undertake a new departure in naval policy. The plan that had been agreed upon between Borden and the Admiralty was that Canada would make an emergency contribution of thirty-five million dollars to Britain for naval purposes. When Monk demanded that a plebiscite be held on the issue, he was turned down by the cabinet. On 18 October 1912 the Quebec Conservative leader resigned.<sup>118</sup>

Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe commented that Monk had quit for honorable reasons.<sup>119</sup> L'Événement also paid tribute

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<sup>116</sup> Le Canada, 6 March 1912.

<sup>117</sup> Mason Wade, Op. Cit., p. 624.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 627.

<sup>119</sup> Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe, 26 October 1912.



to Monk for his sincerity in remaining true to the position he had taken on the navy.<sup>120</sup> In an editorial on the resignation, La Presse held Bourassa responsible for the calamity that had now befallen the Quebec Conservative-Nationalist alliance:

M. Bourassa a bien raison de couvrir de fleurs sa tombe (Monk's) politique, car c'est lui qui l'a tué, c'est lui qui l'a convaincu que tous les moyens étaient bons pour renverser Laurier, qui lui a mis entre les mains l'arme à deux tranchants du plébiscite, en lui faisant croire que Laurier disparu, les conservateurs-nationalistes gouverneraient le pays et forcerait la majorité d'accepter leurs vues.<sup>121</sup>

In a subsequent editorial, La Presse conceded that Monk had taken an honourable course in resigning and called on L.P. Pelletier and W.B. Nantel to follow suit.<sup>122</sup> When Louis Coderre, Conservative member from Hochelaga, subsequently accepted the position of Secretary of State instead of the more important Ministry of Public Works, which Monk had given up, La Presse charged him with entering the cabinet in a dishonorable way and claimed that Quebec's position in the government was being reduced.<sup>123</sup>

On 5 December 1912, the Prime Minister introduced the Naval Aid Bill calling for the immediate expenditure of thirty-five million dollars for the construction in Britain of three dreadnoughts to become part of the Royal Navy. Borden justified the measure by arguing that the Royal Navy was seriously threatened by the build-up of German naval power. He further maintained

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<sup>120</sup> L'Événement, 19 October 1912.

<sup>121</sup> La Presse, 19 October 1912.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 21 October 1912.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 29 October 1912.

that in the light of present circumstances such a contribution would constitute the best defence for Canada's coasts. He pointed out that the emergency contribution was intended only as a temporary policy.<sup>124</sup>

The Conservative press in French Canada supported the Naval Aid Bill. L'Événement said the measure would increase the importance of Canada in the empire and would mean an increase in stature for the country.<sup>125</sup> Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe argued that the continuing Liberal support for a Canadian fleet was proof that Laurier and not Borden was the true imperialist.<sup>126</sup>

The Liberals in the House of Commons and the Liberal press in French Canada, denying that Germany posed any serious threat to Britain, challenged the basis of the Prime Minister's action. On 8 February 1913, Le Canada ran a front-page story quoting a statement by British Colonial Secretary, Lewis Harcourt, to the effect that the imperial government did not need the gift of a New Zealand dreadnought for use in European waters. Arguing that this was proof of the falsity of Borden's statements about the naval emergency, Le Canada observed that the Laurier naval policy had put Canada in line with the other dominions and in perfect harmony with the imperial government.<sup>127</sup> With the Conservatives proposing new Canadian expenditures for naval

<sup>124</sup>G.N. Tucker, "The Naval Policy of Sir Robert Borden", (Canadian Historical Review, 1947), p. 13.

<sup>125</sup>L'Événement, 6 December 1912.

<sup>126</sup>Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe, 14 December 1912.

<sup>127</sup>Le Canada, 8 February 1913.

defence and with the Nationalists ineffectually calling for no naval policy at all, the Liberal press held to their middle path, - in their eyes the golden mean, - of the Laurier Naval Service Bill.

After a long and arduous debate in the House of Commons, the Borden Naval Aid Bill passed third reading and was sent to the Senate on 15 May 1913.<sup>128</sup> There, the Liberals, so long under attack in Quebec for their imperialism, voted to defeat the measure by a vote of 51 to 27.

The Quebec Conservative press remained loyal to Borden throughout the debate on the Naval Aid Bill. Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe asserted that if asked to choose between a contribution to the imperial navy and the construction of a Canadian fleet, the province of Quebec would side with the contribution proposed by Borden.<sup>129</sup> After the Senate had defeated the Borden bill, L'Événement accused the Liberals of deserting their patriotic responsibility.<sup>130</sup>

With the defeat of the Naval Aid Bill in the spring of 1913 the debate in French Canada about imperial defence before the outbreak of World War I virtually came to a close. Ironically, in the end the Nationalists and the Liberals were in agreement about the Senate's rejection of Borden's bill. Naturally, they disagreed on the reason for the impasse. Bourassa,

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<sup>128</sup>G.N. Tucker, Op. Cit., p. 14.

<sup>129</sup>Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe, 24 May 1913.

<sup>130</sup>L'Événement, 3 June 1913.

exultant, expressed his opinion in Le Devoir:

Ainsi, après quatre ans de projets de toute sorte...  
 il ne reste rien, rien - ni marine canadienne, ni  
 dreadnoughts, ni contribution à l'Angleterre...  
 Et pourquoi? Grâce à l'opposition constante des  
 nationalistes.  
 Oui, grâce à nous, à nous seuls... 131

The extravagance of Bourassa's claim to credit for the defeat of both Liberal and Conservative naval policies, is revealed by the fact that there were no Nationalists in the Senate and that even if all the Nationalists in the House of Commons had been Liberals, the Conservatives would still have had a majority. Bourassa may have thought that the pre-1899 situation had been restored. For the moment, Canada had no active policy on imperial defence beyond the protection of her own territory and the obligation undertaken by Macdonald, Laurier and Borden to go to Britain's aid in war if she were menaced. The chapter that had opened when Laurier despatched Canadian troops to South Africa in 1899 had hopefully been permanently closed.

French Canada's opposition to a more active role in imperial defence had continued undiminished from the Boer War to the defeat of the Naval Aid Bill in 1913. In spite of the impressive strength of the Nationalists in 1911, however, Laurier retained his majority in French Canada. The Nationalist challenge to the two-party system, generated around the imperial defence issue, had failed to gain a stronger voice for French Canada at Ottawa.

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<sup>131</sup> Le Devoir, 30 May 1913.

## CONCLUSION

The sending of a Canadian contingent to South Africa in October 1899 ushered in a new era in Canada's relations with the empire. For the first time Canada's defence responsibilities were seen to include the protection of the empire as a whole and not just Canadian territory. It is beyond the scope of this study to inquire into the reasons why the British dominions, Canada in particular, were entering into a more active role in imperial affairs at this time. For our purpose it is sufficient to note that the rise of pan-Anglo-Saxon sentiment and the widespread demand for closer imperial unity were relatively recent phenomena. It was in response to these trends rather than in seeking a new arrangement that the French-Canadian attitude to imperial defence was crystallized.

French Canadians were not attracted by a vision of closer imperial unity which was, in Skelton's phrase, "narrowly racial" in its principal features.<sup>1</sup> Canadian self-government in internal affairs had been accomplished and eventual independence was seen as little more than something to hope for in the distant future. The proximity of the United States and the possible threat to Canada from that quarter was a factor in making the status quo appear

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<sup>1</sup>O.D. Skelton, Op. Cit., II, p. 62.

as the best arrangement that could be realized. Moreover, many French Canadians regarded the colonial limitations on the Canadian state as a protection against attempts by English Canada to tamper with the constitutional guarantees of French-Canadian rights.

As our study has shown, French-Canadian newspapers, of all shades of opinion, tended to reflect this general agreement in 1899. The decision of the Laurier government to send troops to South Africa altered the pattern of relations that had grown up between Canada and the mother country since Confederation. This specific threat to the status quo necessitated specific responses for the safeguarding of broad principles about which there was general agreement. There was little enthusiasm in Quebec for the South African war, not least because the Boers were a people analagous, in many respects, to the French Canadians. The French-Canadian Liberal press, concerned to uphold the position of the government, defended its decision to send troops on the ground that if the Conservatives had been in office, a larger commitment would have resulted. The Quebec Conservative press, with the advantage of freedom to attack government policy, expressed openly the traditional preference of French Canadians for isolationism in imperial relations. Clearly, the response of the partisan press in French Canada was shaped by party necessities. There was no disagreement, however, between the papers

of the two political parties on the general desirability of Canada remaining aloof from the wars of the empire. Whatever advantage accrued to the Quebec Conservatives from being in opposition was more than offset by their alliance with the strongly imperialist Conservatives of English-speaking Canada. In fact, the two-party system served as an instrument of majority rule which overrode French Canadian views on this issue; it tended, moreover, to prevent French Canadians from unreservedly defending their traditional view of imperial relations in the election of 1900.

Although no effective opposition to Canadian participation in the Boer War developed in French Canada, the Conservative and independent French language press did continue to express the traditional French-Canadian attitude to imperial defence. In its editorial of 14 October 1899, La Presse outlined the basic case against participation in imperial wars that was to be reiterated until World War I: the colonies were an accident of empire with no influence on the mother country; Britain had done nothing to assist Canada in her disputes with the United States and Canadians should expect no aid in future. The editorial drew the lesson that Canada and the mother country did not have identical interests in defence policy and urged Canada to follow Britain's example in not mixing politics with sentiment.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>La Presse, 14 October 1899.

Henri Bourassa was, in fact, the one political figure in French Canada able to oppose the sending of troops without being liable to the charge of partisanship. He was able to defend what he considered to be the traditional Canadian attitude to imperial defence only by resigning from Parliament and by breaking, at least temporarily, with the Liberal party. He based his criticism on the argument that Canada, lacking a voice in the formulation of British policy, should take no responsibility for backing up that policy around the world. For the time-being Canadian independence was less important to Bourassa than the avoidance of the new imperialism. Clinging to the guarantees of colonial irresponsibility as the best protection for the French-Canadian minority, Bourassa dared not hope for independence. Beyond internal self-government loomed either imperial federation, independence or some mixture of the two, as the next stage in Canadian development. For the present, Bourassa believed that "it were safer to postpone the day of our emancipation",<sup>3</sup> but faced with the alternative of imperial federation, he would definitely opt for independence.<sup>4</sup> Fearing that Canada would be forced to choose too soon between the two alternatives, Bourassa expressed his foreboding about the new era in imperial relations that had opened with the Boer War:

A new chapter is opened up in the history of our country which alters the situation so favorable to us of sixty years...The champions of our liberties are no more; their disciples, reduced to impotency,

<sup>3</sup> Henri Bourassa, Great Britain and Canada, (Montreal, 1902), p. 46.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Rumilly, Histoire de la Province de Québec, XVIII, p. 34.



have been succeeded in the British cabinet by adherents of a new school of thought, the direct descendants of the very men who had planned our enslavement.<sup>5</sup>

The central feature of the new era was the prospect of a closer tie between Canada and the mother-country or some form of imperial federation. It was this spectre that overshadowed the response of French Canadians to any discussion of imperial defence. Wilfrid Gascon, the political editor of L'Avenir du Nord, warned his readers, in an editorial on 21 December 1899, that the most likely road to imperial federation lay in a changed Canadian constitution that would require Canada to contribute men and money to imperial defence on a continual basis.<sup>6</sup> In Gascon's claim that contributions to imperial defence involved a change in the Canadian constitution there was implicit the argument that the people should ratify any such change, an argument which F.D. Monk used a decade later in calling for a plebiscite on the naval question.

Justifying their party's policy of moderate contributions to imperial defence on the grounds that the Conservatives would commit Canada to further imperial ventures, the Liberal press in Quebec were able to remain on the offensive during the election of 1900. At the first possible opportunity, however, the Liberals abandoned what they realized was an unpopular policy in French Canada. In an official government

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<sup>5</sup>M.P. O'Connell, "The Ideas of Henri Bourassa", Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, 1953, p. 367.

<sup>6</sup>L'Avenir du Nord, 21 December 1899.

declaration<sup>7</sup> and in a statement by Laurier in the House of Commons<sup>8</sup> in 1902, it was made clear that the government considered Canada's main contribution to the empire's defence to be the economic development of the country and the improvement of the militia. For this reason the government refused to countenance changes in the status quo on imperial defence. As far as Laurier was concerned, only commercial relations would be discussed at the Colonial Conference of 1902. With this initiative, Laurier was retracing government policy to the pre-1899 practice of non-participation in imperial wars. For the first time since the outbreak of the South African war, he received the unanimous backing of the French-Canadian press.

During the next seven years, the Liberal government was able to avoid serious criticism in French Canada concerning the imperial defence question. Indeed, in 1903 the unfavourable settlement of the Alaska boundary, due to the defection of Lord Alverstone to the American side, allowed Laurier to hint that Canada might some day take over the running of her foreign policy. The Alaska boundary decision underlined the view that Britain could not be relied upon to side with Canada against the United States. Laurier responded to the double lesson of the Boer War and the Alaska boundary question by preceeding to evolve his policy of promoting Canadian nationhood within the empire. Nationhood would protect Canada against

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<sup>7</sup> La Presse, 13 March 1902.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 17 April 1902.

the schemes of the imperial federationists as well as encouraging self-reliance in dealings with the United States. Nationhood would further serve as an outlet for the expansive sentiments of English Canadians while avoiding the imperialism which would alienate Quebec. Of course, the imperial defence question was only one aspect of the Laurier policy of nationhood. The promotion of immigration, the building of a second transcontinental railway, the settlement of the Canadian west - these were the ingredients of the Macdonald-Laurier national policy and of the prosperous first decade of the twentieth century.

In spite of Laurier's successes in imperial relations, a new Nationalist movement appeared in Quebec. The very factors that led to success for Canada as a whole promoted uneasiness in French Canada. The traditional rural society of Quebec was being rapidly transformed by industrialization and urbanization. The flood of European immigrants to the country was adding a whole new section to the population that could only increase the English-speaking element in the long run. The creation of the provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta in 1905 and the loss of French-Canadian educational rights there underlined the fact that western Canada was to be almost entirely English-speaking. The founding of the Ligue Nationaliste in 1903 was indicative of Nationalist response to the threatening situation facing French Canada in these years. In 1907 Bourassa turned his attention to provincial politics, and in conjunction with the Quebec Conservatives attempted to unseat the

Gouin government.

The advent of the naval issue in March 1909 provided an opportunity for the Conservative-Nationalist alliance, initiated in provincial politics, to enter the federal arena. Under the formal leadership of Monk, but guided primarily by Bourassa, the new force was to pose an alternative to Laurier's pan-Canadian nationhood. Concerned that French Canada have an independent voice in Ottawa to state its case in imperial relations and domestic affairs, Bourassa believed that only by breaking with the two-party system could his people prevent the erosion of their rights. Such a change of the Canadian political system was needed, in his opinion, to safeguard the "pact" of 1867. Bourassa was working for a fundamentally different Canada - one in which the duality would be institutionalized in the country's political system as well as in the country's cultural life. Thus he posed what might be described as a bi-national alternative to Laurier's pan-Canadian formula.

At the core of the debate between Laurier and the Nationalists on the naval question was a disagreement about the extent to which Canada had already achieved nationhood. Laurier justified the creation of a local Canadian naval force on the ground that Canada had become a nation and must take a larger responsibility for her defence. In presenting Laurier's case to the French-Canadian people, the Liberal press played down the extent to which the naval force was to be part of a

larger scheme of imperial defence, involving in wartime, the likelihood of admiralty command of the Canadian fleet. Instead, the Liberal press in Quebec saw it as a step in the achievement of nationhood, a move in the direction of self-reliance. On the other side the Nationalists and their Quebec Conservative allies argued that Canada, far from being a nation, was an irresponsible colony with no rights or duties in the matter of defence or foreign policy, beyond the strict protection of Canadian soil. Naturally, the Nationalists attacked the Laurier formula as pseudo-nationhood, while they were themselves criticized for demeaning the extent to which Canada had outgrown her colonial past.

In countering the Conservative-Nationalist onslaught in the election of 1911, the Liberal press made much of the contradiction between the imperialist wing of the Conservative party in English Canada and the Nationalist wing in Quebec. They were relying on this technique, as they had in 1900, to convince French Canadians that the Liberal way was the moderate way, and that it was still the best guarantee of French-Canadian rights. Le Canada of Montreal, for example, quoted the English-Canadian Conservative press to show that the election of a Conservative government would mean closer defence ties with the empire and a policy of direct contributions to the imperial navy.<sup>9</sup> As in 1900, the Liberals upheld their defence

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<sup>9</sup>Le Canada, 2 September 1911, 5 September 1911.

policy not so much on its intrinsic merits as on its being less ambitious and less dangerous than that of a Conservative government would be. The Liberals continued to believe that the French-Canadian consensus in opposition to a more active role in imperial defence still prevailed. In any case, the Liberal tactic did not succeed as well in 1911 as it had in 1900. The Conservative-Nationalists could not simply be written off as the French supporters of a primarily English and imperialist movement.

No essentially new element was added to the naval debate in the French-Canadian press with the advent of the Borden government. The Liberal press continued to reiterate its belief that the Laurier bill was the best solution and took every opportunity to demonstrate the impotence of the Nationalists in the new government. When the Borden Naval Aid Bill was voted down by the Senate's Liberal majority on 29 May 1913, both the Liberal press and Le Devoir were pleased with the outcome. The Liberals and the Nationalists both took credit (the Liberals more convincingly) for having halted a dangerous imperialist initiative. For the moment, Canadian efforts to build a local fleet or to contribute to the navy of the mother-country had been stalemated. In the last year before World War I, a deceptive calm prevailed, and it appeared, superficially at least, that the pre-1899 era of isolationism had returned.

The outbreak of a general European war in August 1914 took Canadians by surprise. The situation, placing Britain herself in mortal danger brought into play the repeated pledges of Laurier and Borden to place Canada at Britain's side in such a case. In the face of this unprecedented situation, the French-Canadian press responded initially with support for Canadian participation in the war. On 6 August 1914 La Presse told its readers:

Le fait est que nous sommes en guerre comme la Grande-Bretagne elle-même; et pour ceux qui tiennent à la Mère-Patrie, nous devons entrer de tout coeur dans l'esprit nouveau.<sup>10</sup>

The reasons for the temporary French-Canadian support for the war are beyond the scope of this thesis. Suffice it to suggest that the appearance of Britain and France in a common mortal struggle, the heroism of Belgium in August 1914 and the enormity of the crisis itself, may explain the cheering of French reservists and the waving of Union Jacks that occurred in Montreal in the first weeks of the war. It should also be pointed out that it was generally expected until 1914 that a European war could only last a few months. Thus Canadian involvement could be anticipated to mean little more than the sending of supplies and the assurance of moral support. Certainly the idea of sending hundreds of thousands of Canadian troops to Europe, contemplated by the end of 1914, would have been quite beyond the thought of anyone in Canada when war broke out.

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<sup>10</sup> La Presse, 6 August 1914.

In this initial atmosphere even Le Devoir was vague in its position, with Bourassa writing passionately about the fate of France after his return from Europe.<sup>11</sup> On 29 August 1914, however, Bourassa wrote his first critical editorial about the war:

Sans doute, il est naturel et légitime pour tout Canadien de souhaiter ardemment le triomphe des armes Anglo-Françaises; mais tenir l'empereur Guillaume seul et personnellement responsables de la catastrophe paraîtra exagéré sinon injuste à tous ceux qui ont observé avec sang-froid et vigilance les prodromes de la tempête.<sup>12</sup>

On 8 September 1914, it became clear that Bourassa's discussion of the origin of the war had little to do with a concern to protect the German Emperor's reputation. On that day, he picked up the threads of his traditional position on imperial defence and analysed the present conflict in these well-known terms:

Le Canada...n'a aucune obligation morale ou constitutionnelle ni aucun intérêt immédiat dans le conflit actuel.

In the same editorial he referred to Canada as a "dépendance irresponsable de la Grande-Bretagne", a position he had long held in contrast to Laurier's view that the country had already achieved nationhood. He then stated the corollary of his view of Canada:

C'est donc le devoir de l'Angleterre de défendre le Canada, et non celui du Canada de défendre l'Angleterre.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Le Devoir, 27 August 1914.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 29 August 1914.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 8 September 1914.



It had taken Bourassa a little over a month to make his position on the war coincide with the position he had held on the question of imperial defence for the previous fifteen years. Sir Wilfrid Laurier campaigned in Quebec to encourage French-Canadian recruitment into the armed forces. By the end of 1914, though, it appears that enthusiasm for the war had largely worn off in French Canada.<sup>14</sup> Considering the unbroken tradition of opposition to participation in imperial wars that had proved so durable in the fifteen year period from 1899 to 1914, it is not surprising that French Canadians soon came to feel that the war was not theirs to fight. Even if the recruitment of French Canadians into the armed forces had been carried out with more tactful consideration for their sensibilities or the divisive Ontario schools dispute not existed during these years, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that superficial attempts at bonne entente would not have altered French Canada's deep opposition to participation in Britain's wars.

The French-Canadian press, during the period we have been examining, served as a major vehicle for transmitting the views of the political leadership in Quebec to the people. Partisanship, of one kind or another, was so strong throughout the French-Canadian press that no standard of objective journalism could be said to have existed. Consequently, news and feature copy, as well as editorials, were heavily slanted in the direction of the paper's political bias. Especially during election

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<sup>14</sup>Elizabeth Armstrong, The Crisis of Quebec 1914-18, (New York, 1937), p. 91.

time, most of the daily newspapers of Quebec became unabashed party organs.

Considering the sharply partisan nature of the French-Canadian press, it is important to realize that on the crucial question of imperial defence, a broad consensus existed in favour of limiting Canada's participation in imperial wars. The press did not waver in its support for party policy; but the press always cast its backing in terms that would be acceptable to French-Canadian opinion.

The major division between French Canadians was on their attitude to the basic question of Canadian nationhood. Here, Laurier represented those who wanted to work toward the evolution of a common Canadian nationality. Bourassa, on the other hand, sought a union that would accommodate two distinct nationalities in its midst. For this reason he favoured a strict adherence to the constitution and to what he regarded as the "pact" of 1867.

It would be a mistake, of course, to see the debate as taking place between political factions of anything like equal size. Only Le Devoir and the weekly Le Nationaliste gave full support to the bi-nationalist position. Laurier's conception of Canada received the support of the much larger Liberal press, notably Le Soleil, le Canada and increasingly La Presse. The Conservative press, notably L'Événement and Le Courrier de St. Hyacinthe stood somewhere in between. Basically, they were straightforward party organs whose edit-

perial policy was sympathetic to Bourassa only during the period of the Conservative-Nationalist alliance. In fact, Bourassa's failure to affect the thinking of Quebec Conservatives more fundamentally, as reflected in the Conservative press, was an important reason for his failure to launch a permanent new bloc in federal politics. The failure of this attempt at securing an independent Quebec bloc at Ottawa, an attempt which arose out of the issue of imperial defence, can be seen as one of the main factors in the concentration of most future French-Canadian nationalists on provincial politics.

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