

Competing ideologies



The first being Imperialism, a belief favoured by English speaking Canadians and the Conservative government, that strong British ties held a better future for Canada. Within Imperialism, French-speaking Canadians who preferred Canada to be self-governing and bi-lingual nation within the British Empire favoured a Nationalist ideology.

Continentalism was the third philosophy held mainly by Liberal English speaking rural Canadians, which recommended strong continental ties with the United States. The division caused by these competing ideologies is evident in 3 heavily debated events faced by Canada in the late 1800s: the South African war, the naval crisis and the reciprocity agreements with the United States. The South African war was a conflict the British Empire faced in the 1899, when British expansionists clashed with the Boers.

Unable to defeat the Boers guerilla warfare techniques, Britain was forced to seek support from its dominions. (Francis, Jones, Smith 116) Imperialists immediately supported Canadian participation in the war, seeing it as a way to show devotion to the British Empire. At the time the British Empire was the dominant world power and Imperialists predicted lending any support would greatly benefit Canada on an international level. French Canadian Nationalists strongly opposed any involvement in the war for two reasons: 1. French Canadians empathized with the Boers. 2.

Nationalists saw any support as a step away from Canadian Autonomy. Many felt Britain would continue to expect Canadian aid in any future conflicts. (Francis, Jones, Smith 116) Wilfred Laurier, prime minister at the time, came up with a compromise to send 1000 volunteer Canadian troops that would be under British care and fight as British soldiers. The Imperialists felt not

enough was done to show loyalty to Britain. While at the same time the sending of any troops caused Nationalists to believe Canada was now expected to become involved in any future European wars.

This compromise pleased neither the Imperialists nor the Nationalists and caused a further division between the two. (Francis, Jones, Smith 116-117) Once again Nationalists and Imperialists collided in the first decade of the 1900s. Britain feared a growing German navy and thus called for support from its dominions. Similar to the South African wars, Imperialists saw a chance to confirm British allegiance and Nationalists saw another step back from Canadian autonomy.

Laurier again chose to compromise, the British government in any situation approved by Canadian parliament could use a small navy that was to be built. (Francis, Jones, Smith 122) This compromise again did not please either group and would contribute to Laurier's loss in the 1911 election. The defeat of Laurier came before the Naval Bill could be passed and thus his proposed small navy never came to be. Robert L. Borden and his Conservative government took over following the election and immediately proposed a donation to the British navy.

Using a strong majority in the Senate the Liberals denied Borden's Naval Aid Bill and no donation was made. (Francis, Jones, Smith 123) The naval crisis and South African war had contributed to a stronger division between Imperialists and Nationalists and solidified a strong line between the support of future Canadian military action. The government faced political deadlock between the 2 groups, neither one able to further its cause. Continentalists

favoured ties with the United States that ranged from freer trade to complete political union.

Nationalists opposed Continentalism because political union with the United States could lead to annexation. Many people saw union with the United States as a way to further assimilate French Canadians. Imperialists also shared this same fear of annexation; many imperialists believed any ties with the United States threatened future ties with Britain. The three ideologies became very divided over the idea of reciprocity with the United States. The division mainly came between rural and urban areas, with rural having the most to gain trading north-south.

Continentalism offered very little to urban industrialist and many of the growing industries in central Canada. However in the 1870s the debate was temporarily put on hold as American protectionists denied any reciprocity negotiations. It wasn't until 1910 that the United States began to see how valuable Canada's raw materials were to its expanding industries. A reciprocity agreement was passed in 1911 in order to open up trade between the neighboring countries. Canadian imperialists and nationalists in central Canada were both angered, both branding Wilfred Laurier as a Continentalist.

In conclusion although Canada had unified as a nation following confederation, much of the population found itself divided as a result of different ideologies including Imperialism, Nationalism and Continentalism. These differing views led to great debates over Canada's military presence in Britain's South African wars and naval crisis and trade agreements between the United States and Canada.