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MOBILIZING IMPERIAL SENTIMENT: IDENTITIES, INSTITUTIONS, AND INFORMATION IN BRITISH CANADA'S ROAD TO WAR, 1937-1940

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Using print media and institutional records, this essay examines the influence of English Canadian "imperial sentiment" from the perspective of three Canadian civic institutions with international connections. From 1937 to 1940, various interests articulated and influenced Canadian attitudes concerning the British Commonwealth in diplomatic and cultural affairs. These civic organizations mobilized certain segments of the population – middle-class women, working-class veterans, and nationalist intellectuals, respectively – toward distinct political and ideological ends: Canada's autonomy within a British or democratic world system. Yet their competing objectives helped reconcile Canadian public opinion to support Ottawa's autonomous declaration of war.

En s'appuyant sur les médias écrits et sur les archives institutionnelles, cet article évalue l'influence du « sentiment impérial » canadien anglais à travers le prisme de trois institutions civiles. De 1937 à 1940, certains groupes influencèrent et articulèrent les perceptions canadiennes envers le Commonwealth britannique dans le cadre d'événements diplomatiques et culturels. Elles mobilisèrent ainsi certains segments de la population – les femmes, les vétérans, et les intellectuels nationalistes, respectivement – à des fins politiques et idéologiques précises : l'autonomie du Canada au sein d'un système-monde britannique ou démocratique. Finalement, leurs objectifs concurrents ou antagonistes contribuèrent à réconcilier l'opinion publique canadienne avec la déclaration de guerre signée par le gouvernement canadien en toute autonomie.

The narrative of Canada's entry into the Second World War is simple yet compelling. According to one school of thought, Canadian public opinion was guided by pro-British sentiments to side with Great Britain in war against Germany. In the words of two influential scholars, "old loyalties" and "[t]ies of blood, culture, and sentiment" among Anglophone Canadians were decisive in bringing the nation into war (GRANATSTEIN AND MORTON 2003: 177). By emphasizing parliamentary control in foreign affairs, Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King balanced conflicting linguistic, ethnic, regional, and ideological loyalties to preserve "national unity" (METCALFE 2011: 51-68; GRANATSTEIN 1975: 19). Some historians suggest that pro-imperial opinions trumped French Canadians, pacifist, isolationist, and other resistance to participation in a European conflict (HILLMER AND GRANATSTEIN 1994: 143-151; STACEY 1981: 264-269). Yet this thesis focuses primarily on Mackenzie King's government and domestic issues with minimal reference to non-government actors. It also characterizes legitimate support for British diplomacy or political values as reactionary and driven by irrational impulses. What, if anything, do imperial sentiments resemble up close?

To better interpret imperial sentiment as a form of political culture scholars must examine not only multiple discourses, but also the media through

which ideas were communicated and to whom they were directed. This requires looking beyond the traditional national frameworks. The “British World” approach developed by Philip Buckner, Chris Champion, and others over the last two decades highlights the international and transnational dynamics of imperial sentiment in Canada and elsewhere (BUCKNER AND FRANCIS 2006; CHAMPION 2010). These scholars take seriously the cultural, intellectual and social constructions of Britishness, which have impacted Canadian views on international relations. But none has yet reviewed Canada’s entry into the Second World War, a pivotal moment in the “colony to nation” narrative. This study adopts a British World approach to complement the foreign policy studies of J.L. Granatstein, Norman Hillmer and others. As such, it suggests that the British Commonwealth’s emotional appeal is found outside official circles. Well-organized print media networks and active executive bodies allowed civic organizations such as the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire (IODE), the Canadian Legion of the British Empire Service League, and the Canadian Institute of International Affairs (CIIA) to communicate political values to wide audiences. These three organizations, whose combined memberships numbered over 200,000 persons in 1938, demonstrate how imperial sentiments defined yet transcended Canada’s national borders within the dynamic British Commonwealth.

Civic institutions representing particular interests and demographics worked throughout the 1930s to shape specific policy decisions as well as broader cultural meanings of nation and empire. Seizing the opportunity to prepare public opinion toward Canada’s participation in a European conflict, each mobilized local grassroots networks and used “press, pulpit and radio” (Herbert to Tarr, 12 July 1938, CIIA) to achieve specific goals. The IODE embraced civic education, international peace movements, and practical information through empire study groups. Meanwhile veteran leaders at the Legion’s executive championed more traditional values – a strong nation within a strong empire – alongside civic defense strategies. The CIIA’s elite leadership promoted “North American” worldviews, criticized British “colonial” attitudes, and advocated Canada’s right to neutrality to international audiences. While it claimed to represent a nationalist alternative to explicitly “imperialist” groups, it never sought to sever Canada’s British connection. Rather the CIIA’s leaders sought to maximize Ottawa’s diplomatic authority within a multilateral Commonwealth, which they distinguished from the colonial empire. Through institutions and print media, these case studies integrated their nation into empire-wide diplomatic debates. Only they varied on the degree and responsibilities of such limited independence. As noted by the IODE and CIIA, a rising public demand for news and information stimulated new literatures,

contacts, and publicity campaigns with international reach. In their efforts to inform opinions and affect policies, each national executive mobilized certain segments of the population – middle-class women, veterans, and urban professionals, respectively – toward competing conceptions of Canada's role in the British Commonwealth. In the end their diverse imperial sentiments helped reconcile Canadian public opinion to support Ottawa's autonomous declaration of war in September 1939.

Their conflicting sentiments are understandable. Since the First World War Britain's relationship with the settler societies – Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa – had evolved considerably but remained ill-defined. The Commonwealth, like each case study, was an amorphous institution whose purpose adapted to changing international circumstances. The 1926 Balfour Declaration gave these "Dominions" considerable liberty to craft their own foreign policies, while the Statute of Westminster offered them legislative independence five years later. Yet few observers knew how theoretical sovereignty affected practical issues of war and peace. Autonomous within the empire but not wholly independent, Canada's wartime obligations remained open to interpretation. Some emphasized Canada's diplomatic and constitutional independence. Others dwelled on the cultural, economic, social and ideological interdependence of the English-speaking peoples, which reinforced common and conflicting identities. Many successfully reconciled imperial and national worldviews while others, such as the CIIA, considered them incompatible. Widespread debates about Canada's Commonwealth role thus offer insight not only into how international affairs were discussed in unofficial circles but also how competing ideas of British imperialism reflected collective identities and emotions.

Unlike elected officials bound by partisan or bureaucratic limits, these groups had considerable freedom to say and do as they pleased. Each group had unique local, national, and international ties which shaped meanings of Britishness, and consequently reacted differently to diplomatic crises such as the September 1938 Munich Agreement. In contrast to groups such as the League of Nations Society, whose membership declined during this period, these case studies experienced institutional growth in the three years preceding war. Memberships and subscriptions grew as middle-class Canadians became increasingly interested in world affairs.

Overall these case studies were selected based on three criteria. Firstly, each has survived into the twenty-first century in some form. Even if mandates and identities have evolved with time, the IODE, the Royal Canadian Legion, and Canadian International Council remain important cornerstones of national civic life. Moreover, emphasis was on organizations linked to like-minded

groups outside Canada. Therefore French-Canadian and other regional institutions lacking affiliated bodies in other Commonwealth countries are not discussed here. Lastly, religious or professional groups were excluded in favour of secular public institutions.

New Perspectives on Imperial Sentiment: Three Case Studies in Britishness

Using print media, meeting minutes, circulars and correspondence, this essay examines how civic groups defined imperial sentiments through identities, institutions, and information. Between the world wars, the IODE, Legion and CIIA defined Canada's British connection in at least three ways. First, each organization complicates scholarly attempts to isolate "blood, culture, and sentiment" from other influences. Their strategic efforts to affect Canada's international status, apt use of contemporary media, and broad institutional mandates all blurred material and moral influences. For many individuals in the late 1930s the British Empire elicited some emotional or psychological appeal. For others, such as the CIIA's leaders, "imperialism" and "colonialism" were cultural forces to be rallied against. As the Australian delegate to the 1938 British Commonwealth Relations Conference wrote about his nation's outlook, "[i]n the world as it is, sentiment, tradition and rationalization are as much to be taken into account as the hope of material gain, 'obvious' interests, and cold calculation" (HARRIS 1938: 120). A history of imperial sentiment offers new insight into how emotions and interests collided to shape international relations thinking within Canada and the Commonwealth.

Second, while British-inspired ideas of peace, order and Anglo-Saxon culture served as guiding principles in foreign affairs discussions, the IODE and Legion believed imperial sentiment enabled Dominion autonomy within the British World. The British Empire and Commonwealth – terms used often interchangeably – offered a reliable form of economic stability, military security, and moral leadership. The CIIA rejected this worldview. Although they differed in their internationalism, the IODE and Legion sought to "modernize" British imperialism to meet ideological threats. By contrast, the CIIA hoped to bring public opinion against an automatic alliance with Britain. All three sought to make the British Commonwealth relevant to Canadian audiences through various avenues of imperial sentiment: empire study groups, commemoration, voluntary defense schemes, academic conferences and public debate. In some form each institution embraced explicit internationalist, imperial, and nationalist ideas.

Third, imperial identities were influenced by global contacts and local dynamics. Internationalist themes of diplomatic cooperation, disarmament, civic engagement, and liberal democratic values, and transnational forces such as identities and print media, form core themes of this essay. Cultural and diplomatic interests linked international peace movements, First World War leaders, and intellectuals from around the British Empire. The CHA, an elite organization with government connections, did not speak for all Canadians, but it had a marked influence on Canadian foreign policy decision-making and historiography (SOWARD 1977-78). The IODE and Legion had complex local and regional organizational structures and diverse social agendas, yet their national executives urged important groups to support British Commonwealth's nascent alliance. Even in 1940, imperial sentiments, however defined, helped Canadians make sense of international relations and collective identities in novel ways.

This essay considers each case study individually in the chronological order in which they were founded. It begins with a brief overview of its mandate and institutional interests before discussing cultural values and interpretations of Britishness. Lastly each section lays out the various media and publicity strategies employed by the case study in its attempts to simultaneously affect policy and political values.

Learned Imperialists: the IODE, World Peace, and Empire Study Groups

Formed in Montreal in 1900, the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire was a response to the Empire's conflict in South Africa. Its primary objective, expressed through patriotic and philanthropic initiatives, was to "stimulate, and give expression to the sentiment of patriotism which binds the women and children of the Empire around the Throne" ("Constitution and Statutes of the IODE"). To this end it funded schools, libraries, and scholarships for study in England. Additionally its membership of about 25,000 middle-class women administered Imperial War Graves sites in South Africa and helped assimilate new immigrants to Canada (COOPS 2005: 252; PICKLES 2002). It was organized into six hundred local chapters (Minutes of the 37th Annual Meeting: 12), most represented by a provincial executive, and junior branches for girls. Following broader patterns of British migration, chapters in the U.S., the Caribbean, and India were also established. By 1937 the national executive was focused on international peace and Canadian immigration concerns, particularly Jewish and Central European refugee issues. It cultivated ties to the global peace movement through the League of Nations Society, the Red Cross, and the YMCA. In addition to fostering imperial sentiment, it

petitioned Ottawa to appoint a woman to represent Canada at the League of Nations (Minutes of the 38th Annual Meeting: 21). National President W.G. Lumbers remarked in May 1937 that that “the efforts of British statesmen (...) have been the foundations upon which the Nations inspired hopes for the peace of the world” (Minutes of the 37th Annual Meeting: 10). While it remained faithful to British symbols and values, it embraced contemporary international discourses and objectives.

Indeed, as its meetings throughout the 1930s attest, the IODE’s identity reflected its own brand of imperial internationalism. Whereas the Canadian Legion pushed for rearmament and an empire-wide alliance and the CIIA desired a firm declaration of neutrality, as will be noted, the IODE tied Britishness and peaceful cooperation through its local chapters, Canada’s League of Nations Society and international allies. In 1937 the executive vowed to contribute “in every way possible” to a nation-wide peace campaign, although no such campaign yet existed. Instead authorities encouraged members to counter intolerance in their own neighbourhoods by improving housing conditions, aiding the poor, and promoting public education (Minutes of the 37th Annual Meeting: 12)¹. Fearing the impact of foreign-language publications on immigrant communities, IODE members also cooperated with police to remove “undesirable” German propaganda in Western Canada (Minutes of the 39th Annual Meeting: 26). Meanwhile its own print publication, *Echoes*, which emphasized pro-British themes, grew in the late 1930s with circulation and subscriptions increasing by over 40 per cent in one year in New Brunswick, Alberta, and Quebec. By 1938 the quarterly magazine had a circulation of over 13,000 per issue (Minutes of the 37th Annual Meeting: 37; Minutes of the 38th Annual Meeting: 39).

The IODE’s identity was exhibited through community education and other youth-focused activities that served to promote complementary goals of peace and patriotism. Whether for new immigrants or school children, education meant encouraging Britons and non-Britons alike to become more familiar with their Anglo-Saxon heritage and democratic political system (PICKLES 2002: 5). This took on increasing significance as international tensions rose. According to the organization’s education committee, “[c]hanging times demand constant study in order to keep abreast of modern progress” (Minutes from the National Executive Committee, 1 February 1939)². Often this philosophy materialized in colourful booklets. In early 1939, the

¹ Annual Meeting minutes located in IODE fonds, volume 12 (part2), unless otherwise noted.

² National Executive Committee Meeting minutes located in IODE fonds, volume 5, file 4, unless otherwise noted.

national education committee printed a pamphlet for children titled “Canada within the Empire”, whose primary goal was to teach the privileges and responsibilities of “British democracy” (*Canada within the Empire*). The text explained civil liberties and the “supremacy of law” in the moderate ideological tone characteristic of the period’s literature. The Union Jack and the monarchy, it argued, symbolized liberal and democratic values in an uncertain age. Canada’s autonomy represented the success of colonial self-government: “[t]he emergence of the Dominions from colonies into six self-governing national groups is especially significant in a world where a number of nations are asserting that democracy is out of date”. By July, over 15,000 booklets had been distributed, mostly to schools but also to department stores (Minutes from the National Executive Committee, 5 July 1939). In this respect they helped stimulate imperial sentiments among youths, educators, and perhaps new immigrants. To what extent is difficult to determine, but they nonetheless set traditional ideas of political authority in contemporary context.

Patriotic pamphlets and other efforts helped instil in youth, genuine emotional attachments to imperialism and peaceful cooperation. Calendars, flags, pins, photos and other ephemera were distributed *en masse* to stimulate patriotic values (Minutes of 39th Annual Meeting: 86-87). In the 1930s, the IODE, in association with the Victoria League, revived the school correspondence program it had ended in 1914. By 1938, at least 2,150 students from five provinces, including Quebec, were engaged in the organization’s pen pal program, which facilitated the flow of culture and information between Canada and Edinburgh, Capetown, India, Tasmania, Jamaica and other locales (ibid; *Bulletin*, May 1938: 11). It was in these informal exchanges that many “British” children of the interwar period had their first personal encounter with an otherwise abstract Empire. Sometimes the students agreed to visit one another, or sent printed materials to communities thousands of miles away. More than the other case studies, they IODE was conscious of the need to cultivate future generations of imperial leaders. As the program’s convener observed, they were “[j]ust small things, these letters with enclosures, but they are links, close-binding our Youth of to-day who will be our Empire citizens of the morrow” (Minutes of the 40th Annual Meeting: 112-113).

Self-directed education was also encouraged for similar reasons. Formed in 1931, the IODE’s Empire Study Committee was a well-organised intellectual network whose primary goal was the “spreading knowledge about one part of the Commonwealth in another” (*Echoes*, March 1938: 1). Its organizer, Edith Henderson, asserted on several occasions that the IODE had global concerns. “How many of you realize that our Order was founded not as just another group of sewing circles but as a patriotic society and with great stress laid on the

importance of becoming familiar with subjects vital to the Empire?" To Henderson, the message was simple: "We can have no influence in our country if we are ignorant of what is going on in the Empire either at home or abroad" (Minutes of the 37th Annual Meeting: 75; Minutes of 38th Annual Meeting: 79).

Research topics varied across time and space, but the Empire Study Committee was mostly concerned with contextualizing the present world crisis. "If one looks over the list of subjects for study", Edith Henderson rightly observed in June 1939, "one cannot help being impressed with their intimate connection with stirring world events of today. Gibraltar, Palestine, Hong-Kong...[and] each one of them is included in the Empire Study pamphlet" (Minutes of 39th Annual Meeting: 80). The Commonwealth was the basis of study, but topics included Africa, China, and the Mediterranean. In 1938, the Study Committee began shipping its literature to other "British" communities, including India, where branches already existed, and Argentina, where some members hoped a branch would soon be formed. Through such initiatives, hundreds of Canadian women connected with friends and neighbours through lessons in international relations and imperial history.

In 1935 fifty-four Canadian branches hosted Empire Study Groups. Within two years, 246 new groups were established across the country. By 1940, that number had reached 384, made possible by over 3,000 new members that year (Minutes of the 37th Annual Meeting: 82; Minutes of 38th Annual Meeting: 72; Minutes of the 40th Annual Meeting: 33, 39). As membership developed, so did the organization's professionalism. Local and provincial associations were cooperating with one another through new intellectual channels. Some women presented their own research at the study groups while other chapters preached patriotism to students and organized essay competitions on world peace (Minutes of the 37th Annual Meeting: 75). The study groups were pragmatic and varied, driven by genuine interest as well as emotion. By spring 1940, the committee had turned its attention to providing "authentic information in condensed and readable form" (Minutes of the 40th Annual Meeting: 142). Maps were popular commodities within study groups and in *Echoes*, giving readers visual perspectives of the British Commonwealth's regional problems.

Thanks to its active membership and flexible organizational structure, the IODE promoted imperial internationalism among a wide network of middle-class women, children and recent immigrants. While the CIHA has often been credited for bringing internationalism to Canadian audiences, the role of imperial women cannot be discounted. Education and personal contacts were integral to their views of Britishness and peace. The classroom and the

community centers became sites of diplomatic colonization whereby “British” ideas of international relations were transmitted through informal social channels. The thousands involved in international peace initiatives and Empire Study Groups show the IODE as a source of, and conduit for, imperial sentiment.

Nation and Empire United: The Canadian Legion, British traditions, and civic defense

The Canadian Legion of the British Empire Service League was formed by thirteen veterans’ groups in 1925 under the Earl Haig’s stewardship (Royal Canadian Legion Branch Leadership Manual 1997), and its identity was rooted in war, economic depression, collective memory, and social tensions. Officially it represented servicemen’s social and economic interests, but it also expressed imperial sentiments at ceremonial events, through civic defense, and in print media. With over 178,000 members in 1,512 branches across North America, it was one of Canada’s largest civic organizations (*Legionary*, Sept 1938: 1).

Like its Australian and New Zealand counterparts, the Legion supported a united Dominion within an equally united Empire. Whereas the IODE stressed international cooperation through the League of Nations, the Legion championed diplomacy through “the British family of nations” (*Legionary*, Sept 1938: 9). Shared historical myths about British democracy, liberty, and rule of law were central to the Legion’s imperialism. According to John Bowler, the Legion’s National Secretary, the “sole purpose” of symbolic events such as Magna Carta week was “to clear the public mind and restore their proper perspective those fundamental rights and principles, including the principle of democratic government, which go to make up our British heritage” (Legion circular 39/4/6, 23 March 1939)³. Magna Carta Week was overshadowed in 1939 by the royal visit to North America. The British Crown’s continental tour offered the Legion an excellent opportunity to bolster North American support for Britain’s rearmament policy and deepen Canadians’ emotional attachment to the empire. Individual branches throughout Canada and the U.S. organized honour guards and security, while the national executive assembled ten thousands veterans in Ottawa for the unveiling of the National War memorial in May 1939. *The Legionary*, the organization’s monthly periodical, declared that the King’s unveiling of the war memorial “symbolized the fusion of a people in a nation and a nation in an empire” (*Legionary*, June 1939: 2). Not by accident, the Legion paraded its loyalty to

³ Legion circulars located in RCL fonds, volume 8, unless otherwise noted.

King and Country precisely when influential segments of Canada's population, notably the CIAA, favoured neutrality in the event of war with Nazi Germany.

Veterans' groups often fostered a broad sense of Britannic citizenship rooted in traditional values but articulated in modern ideological terms. In a phrase that could have been printed in Melbourne or Auckland, *The Legionary* proclaimed that, "despite the burlblings of the ultra-nationalistic champions we ARE British people – Democracy has a long discipline of many centuries for its background" (*Legionary*, March 1938: 21). But what did it mean to be "British"? Former president Alex Ross' report to the Rowell-Sirois Commission on federal-provincial relations in April 1938 offers some insight. For the Legion, federalism, imperialism and international relations discourses intersected. The submission quoted the Legion's 1925 constitution that it stood for "loyalty to the reigning Sovereign, Canada and the British Empire, [and] for maintenance of the foundation principles of the British Constitution". Ross emphasized the importance of democratic liberties and civic rights, which he acknowledged citizens in other nations lacked. He warned Mackenzie King's government to respect legislative autonomy so that Canada, a "British state", would not become a "totalitarian state". Demonstrating how imperial and national goals overlapped, Ross also demanded parliamentary control over Canada's constitution – an authority Ottawa did not have until 1982 – and supported national unity. "Canada should develop as a united nation and...provincial rights should not be permitted to develop to the point where each province becomes a sovereign state" (Legion circular 38/2/5, 6 April 1938). To be British, in the Legion's view, was to support a world order where empire, nation, and province formed a seamless hierarchy.

Predictably, the Legion was one of the first organizations to urge for closer defense coordination between the English-speaking states. William Foster, the Legion's President from 1938 to 1940, was pivotal in mobilizing Canadian veterans for civil defense. He also personified the rugged masculine values of the Legion's imperialism. Born in England, he moved to British Columbia in 1895 where he worked in various positions of authority, including police officer, parliamentarian, and military leader ("In Memoriam"). Determined and resourceful, he coordinated the Legion's effort to assemble its members and future soldiers to Britain's side. After September 1938, the Legion ended its association with the League of Nations Society as they did not feel peace would last. Instead of international cooperation, Foster and others believed the Legion had a responsibility to prepare the nation psychologically and materially for war. "War is a terrible thing," noted one veteran, "but there are worse things than war: loss of civil and religious liberties, submission to a debasing tyranny, and dishonour from the betrayal of those who have trusted us

(Abyssinia and the League of Nations) are examples” (*Legionary*, Jan 1938: 17). With little confidence in Great Power diplomacy, the Legion sought to improve civic and moral defenses before war erupted. For the executive, the end of collective security marked the beginning of peacetime mobilization (Dominion Executive Council Meeting Minutes, 7 September 1938). Foster and other executive members it was also an opportunity to bolster the Legion’s prestige, broaden its public mandate, and monopolize veteran advocacy within Canada. The imperial tie was both a means and an end toward these social and institutional goals.

The Legion’s leadership took seriously its self-appointed role to mobilize human resources in preparation for war. In January 1939, the national executive issued a manifesto clarifying that imperial security was a Canadian interest. It asked veterans to enlist for home defense since such volunteerism demonstrated that, unlike Nazi Germany, “our Democratic Nation can inspire unselfish service without any vestige of compulsion” (Legion circular 39/10, 4 March 1939). Voluntary service was viewed as an ideological statement, which blurred the boundaries between nation and empire. Before war was declared in September, over 100,000 veterans had replied to Foster’s appeal, more than 2,700 of which were involved in civil defense (HALE 1995: 59). Whether in royal ceremony or garrisoned near a railroad terminal, Legion men stood as symbols of British duty, law, and order on Canadian soil. Since Foster also acquired priority manufacturing contracts for ex-servicemen from the British government (Legion circular no. 39/4/5, 5 September 1939), this mobilization effort sustained inter-imperial trade and met the Legion’s mandate to get veterans employed.

The Legion authorities also mobilized its monthly magazine for recruitment, profit, and instruction. Like the IODE’s *Echoes* but unlike the CHIA’s publications, *The Legionary* was meant primarily for internal communication and revenue. When the organization took control of the publication in 1933, it had only a circulation of 11,000 and a \$6000 deficit. By 1940, the periodical had nearly 42,000 subscribers and a \$5200 surplus. The magazine kept soldiers past and present informed about the Legion’s activities, current affairs, and military history. It also connected Canadians and “Imperials” to the British Commonwealth through information, advertisements and images, which bred familiarity and reinforced commonalities. The steady stream of news from Great Britain meant that Canadians knew, for instance, how well their British peers were eating, or the status of South African’s veteran legislation (*Legionary*, April 1938: 13-24). It often articulated a more forceful worldview which emphasized the British connection: “The British Commonwealth was rapidly becoming a loose federation of

democracies...[and] is one of the greatest stabilizing forces in the world today” (*Legionary*, Jan 1938: 17). These familiar and intimate connections gave meaning to the Commonwealth as a diplomatic and cultural community.

The Legion’s strategic use of print media was more limited than our other case studies for it generally distributed materials mostly to its members. Nonetheless its activities reveal some aspects of its worldview. Allusions to “British traditions” were coloured by conservative ideological language and justified a broader mobilization of veterans for civil defense. It relied more heavily on public ceremonies, martial imagery, and patriotic sentiments than many civic groups. Still imperial loyalty had a practical military, diplomatic and social significance to many of its leaders. Like the IODE, the Legion’s executive reconciled an autonomous Canadian nation within a united British Commonwealth, particularly in defense matters. Unlike the IODE, however, it did not support sustained critical analysis of imperial and foreign affairs. Its primary mandate remained soldier welfare and education programs, which became increasingly important as war progressed. Nonetheless it was most successful in achieving its core foreign policy objective: a British Commonwealth alliance against Germany by 1939.

“Self-determination” in North America: the CIIA, neutrality, and public opinion

Conversely, the Canadian Institute of International Affairs, the Dominion’s largest foreign affairs study group, claimed to support nationalist or “North American” views of international relations. Its elite leadership viewed imperial sentiments negatively and sought Canada’s right to neutrality before a European conflict. Founded in 1928 by Sir Robert Borden, Newton Rowell and other influential men (SOWARD 1977: 67), the institute had ties to the League of Nations Society, the Royal Institute of International Affairs (RIIA), the Institute of Pacific Relations, and the Department of External Affairs. The organization’s research discussed “international questions and problems...[that] may relate to Canada and the British Empire” (*Organization, Objects and Constitution* 1929: 14). Numerous conferences beginning in the 1920s put Canadian intellectuals into contact with others across Asia, North America, and Europe. Although the senior leadership was suspicious of British diplomats, whom they believed did not sufficiently consider Dominion views, it generally cooperated with its Commonwealth counterparts. By 1939, it had seventeen branches in Canada, all in major cities, and a membership of 1,190 (*Report on the Work of the CIIA* 1939: 28). The organization had its greatest influence in the immediate postwar years (CHAPNICK 2005: 3), yet before the war it had resources, prestige, and influence beyond its size. Indeed, the CIIA’s

writings were Canada's earliest international histories and have strongly influenced its national historiography.

As an elite organization, the CIIA's membership consisted of intellectuals, businessmen, civil servants, and other professionals. Generally its members were well-educated and maintained correspondence with high-level figures at home and abroad. It wanted not only to inform public policy but to shape cultural attitudes toward nation and empire. While critical of conservative parties and policies, the national executive avoided anything resembling propaganda. But as war neared, President Edgar Tarr, a Winnipeg lawyer and businessman, hoped the CIIA would lead public opinion toward a distinctly "nationalist" outlook. Tarr also thought the Canadian government should declare its right to neutrality before Britain and Germany went to war. The organizers were concerned that public opinion was fickle and ill-informed and sought to correct misinformation about Canadian independence (Herbert to Tarr, 12 July 1938)⁴. But Tarr, Claxton, and F.R. Scott, Professor of Civil Law at McGill University, believed that Canadians needed stronger sense of their national interest both inside and outside the British Commonwealth. Print media, public debates and muted political advocacy were means to their ends.

Most CIIA members believed Germany would attack Canada regardless, but Tarr wanted clear evidence of national sovereignty before war erupted. Most important was to clarify Canada's *right* to neutrality before war broke out. Neutrality was essential to "the preservation of Canadian unity and the development of Canada's position in the world", he remarked to a contact in Geneva. "If only they [British supports] had the sense enough to see it, a neutrality policy is in the interests of Imperialists and anti-Imperialists alike" (Tarr to Craig, 18 January 1939). It was also the only group to address the issue of French Canada's anti-war opinions, a particular concern for governing authorities focused on national unity. They urged the prime minister, who was reluctant to make binding commitments either way, to publicly declare Canada's autonomy in the event of war. Tarr was supported by F. R. Scott, who believed that "the only alternative" to neutrality was "to reject the new concept of the Commonwealth" articulated in the 1926 Balfour Declaration and to "delegate expressly to Great Britain the power to conduct our foreign policy" (Scott to Tarr, 23 March 1939). While the situation was more nuanced – the Dominions did not require a neutrality policy to retain diplomatic influence – the CIIA's leaders saw the Commonwealth's diplomatic unity as irreconcilable with national autonomy. While many Canadians sympathized with this

⁴ All subsequent correspondence located in CIIA fonds, volume 1, unless otherwise noted.

position, particularly French-speakers, socialists, and ethnic minorities, it was by no means a majority opinion.

With particular focus on influencing popular attitudes toward foreign policy, Tarr and others indirectly challenged the IODE and Canadian Legion through academic analysis and publicity campaigns. The Sydney British Commonwealth Relations Conference in September 1938 was one such attempt to shape debates war, peace, King and country. This was the second unofficial conference organized to improve Commonwealth relations, but questions of foreign policy, imperial defense, and citizenship hindered consensus among the conference's ninety delegates (MACKENZIE 1939). As one participant, F.W. Soward, recalled four decades later: "All of us had a strong sense of nationality and an increasing anxiety about the trend of British foreign policy" (SOWARD 1977-78: 70). The Sydney meeting did not resolve the major problems affecting Commonwealth unity, but offered self-proclaimed nationalists a chance to make their case before the empire's leading scholars.

The Canadian delegation's major scholarly presentation at Sydney was based on F.R. Scott's manuscript, *Canada Today*, later published by Oxford University Press. Using a phrase not often employed by Canadian nationalists, Scott encouraged Ottawa's "self-determination" in foreign affairs (SCOTT 1938: 147). While acknowledging that Canada benefited from informal trade and cultural relations with other Commonwealth countries, he critiqued that "Canadians with a pro-British attitude occupy most important positions in the Protestant churches, in public affairs, in education, in business and in the press" (*ibid*). Despite many changes, too many persons retained a backward sense of "colonialism" which fuelled a "distrust of things Canadian, a sense of inferiority, a tendency to follow borrowed traditions blindly" (*ibid*: 102, 115). To be truly Canadian or North American, then, was to reject Commonwealth cooperation for an independent course. Scott's interpretation of imperial sentiment certainly clashed with those of the IODE and Canadian Legion. Regardless, the book had some popular appeal. Montreal lawyer and future defense minister Brooke Claxton noted that "[q]uite conservative people have been buying copies to give to their even more conservative friends" and that "every store of any consequence should have not less than fifty copies on consignment" (Reid to Tarr, 22 July 1938).

The emphasis, however, was on the CIIA's "North American" identity. What this meant is unclear, but it supported a worldview, which many claimed differed from more traditional imperial outlooks. As Tarr remarked to John Dafoe, the influential editor of the Winnipeg *Free Press* and a founding member of the CIIA, "[u]nless a sound North Americanism shows signs of developing in a strong way, I fear I shall commence to think that Canadians are

morons” (Tarr to Dafoe, 3 November 1938). Brooke Claxton also concluded anyone who supported the British government was “just as ignorant about affairs as [Prime Minister Neville] Chamberlain is himself” (Claxton to Carter, 1 November 1938). However Tarr was right to state that “[c]riticism of British policy is not enough” and that Canada needed a foreign policy based on a “strong North American attitude” rather than “closed-minded imperialism” (Tarr to Claxton, 7 November 1938). This entailed cultivating political, economic and cultural ties with its American neighbour. The organization’s continental identity mirrored its financial position: it survived on grants from the Rockefeller and Carnegie foundations (Report on Activities and Organization for July 1, 1937 to March 31, 1938).

American financing notwithstanding, the CIIA took seriously its public education mandate. Its scholarship was generally strong, and it helped develop public discussions on international relations. In the year leading up to war, it sponsored twenty-six radio broadcasts on Palestine, Asia, Anglo-American Relations, and other geopolitical concerns. Tarr also suggested creating a “Public Information Committee” in 1938 to help meet “the increasing popular demand for reliable information on international affairs”, although little came of the initiative (*Report on the Work of the CIIA* 1939: 8, 27). By December, the CIIA had to expand its efforts into a high-profile lecture series. A variety of notable speakers including Harold Laski, Dean Acheson, Vincent Massey and Lionel Curtis were invited (Baldwin to Tarr, 11 August 1939). One of the speakers enlisted to bolster Canadian unity was Tarr himself, who, in April 1939, asked imperial supporters “to genuinely readjust their attitude and give to Canada their primary loyalty” (“Canada at the Crossroads”). During the 1938-39 fiscal year, individual branches hosted fifteen British speakers, eight Americans, and one each from China, Japan, New Zealand, Poland and the U.S.S.R. In 239 branch meetings over that period, fourth-three were dedicated to the British Commonwealth – only topics on Europe and Asia proved more popular (“Annual Report, 1938-39”). While it lobbied for neutrality and isolation, its membership actively engaged scholars and organizations abroad.

Still, the CIIA did not seek to end British imperialism everywhere. It sought to strengthen the decentralized and multilateral aspects of the British Commonwealth rather than eliminate it altogether. In correspondence with British colleagues at the RIIA, Tarr distinguished between self-governing territories and colonial dependencies, noting that only the former were allowed national autonomy (Tarr to Ivison Macadam, 10 March 1938). Many also shared, with qualification, the view that the Commonwealth was a stabilizing force in international relations. “[I]f the Commonwealth itself is to last, its center may have to shift westwards to the greatest Anglo-Saxon area in the

world, North America”, John Baldwin noted after Germany’s defeat of France. “Great Britain’s position as a traditional and cultural leader may remain but power and leadership must be found on this continent” (Untitled memorandum, July 1940). The CIIA’s hemispheric identity did not undermine its imperialism. Indeed, the evidence suggests that at least some members hoped the New World would inherit and transform the British Commonwealth.

The CIIA rejected the “colonial” worldviews of groups such as the IODE and Legion but often for their own emotional and nationalistic reasons. While claiming impartiality, the executive’s contrasted pro-imperial sentiments to their own North American views, implying supporters of British foreign policy were confused, ill-informed, conservative, “morons” or psychologically defective. These intellectuals represented only a fraction of Canadian opinion: educated, urban elites with important official and academic connections worldwide. Nonetheless the CIIA shared with the IODE a commitment to public information and education not matched by the Legion. Arguably they failed to appreciate the nuanced nationalism and social concerns, which motivated the explicitly imperial organizations. While their goals differed considerably with regards to Canada’s Commonwealth and international roles, all three encouraged Canadians’ critical engagement with diplomatic problems in order to shape debate and policy.

Conclusion

For at least three imperially-minded civic organizations, Canada’s Second World War started well before September 1939. One year earlier the IODE, Canadian Legion, and CIIA had already organized committees and conferences, printed pamphlets, and assembled troops in their efforts to affect Canada’s place in international affairs. The national executives were particularly active and their efforts reveal how localized English Canadian political values were cultivated in international and transnational networks. It is difficult to quantify the impact these organizations had on public opinion and policymaking – their membership rosters and print media distribution provides only two indicators – but the implications for Canadian historiography are clear. If scholars continue to rely on “imperial sentiment” thesis, they must accept that such sentiments intersected with multiple identities, institutional goals, and political interests rather than simply traditional values and loyalties. The IODE’s internationalism and the Legion’s commemoration efforts reinforce this argument. The CIIA’s case against “colonial” worldviews was somewhat misplaced, as is the conventional belief that “old loyalties” and emotional ties were necessarily decisive. Imperial sentiments were modern, dynamic and connected to broad

webs of meaning, particularly for the IODE. Institutions supporting the British connection were not colonial relics but were complex, well-organized and well-led civic organizations, which gave agency to imperial voices. They were no less “national” than the CIIA and similar groups antagonistic to pro-British sentiment, but simply sought to realize their nationalism through imperial channels as Canadians had done for at least a century. Their mobilization efforts blended traditional values with contemporary communication methods and political discourses, and consequently served to modernize British imperialism in the Dominions. More broadly, their abilities to evolve with changing local and global dynamics while inside the British Commonwealth suggests how they have survived into the twenty-first century.

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