“La fédération impériale, voilà notre ennemie”:
HONORÉ MERCIER AND PUBLIC OPINION ON IMPERIAL FEDERALISM AS SEEN
THROUGH THE MONTREAL PRESS, 1885-1893

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines Québec Premier Honoré Mercier's (1887-1891) critique of imperial federalism from 1885-1893 and its impact on public opinion in Montreal by analysing press coverage. Hostility to imperial federalism was nurtured and maintained by Mercier's continuous, multi-pronged and organised critique. This opposition to imperial federalism has been overlooked as a key issue in Mercier's political strategy. Disappointment with Confederation and the centralising tendencies of the federal government, coupled with surging French-Canadian nationalism, allowed Mercier to successfully frame imperial federation as a threat to provincial autonomy and to French-Canadian survival. Mercier's strategy relied on rhetoric, spectacle and political savvy in a successful example of elite opinion formation. An 1890 motion in the Quebec Assembly condemning imperial federation and an 1892 oratory contest on Canada's future at Sohmer Park, in Montreal, are examined through Montreal press coverage to illustrate the effectiveness of Mercier's critique that transcended partisan and ethnic divisions.
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This modest study is humbly dedicated to Marie-Brigitte Laverdière, my high school history teacher at Pensionnat-des-Ursulines de Stanstead, QC. She helped me believe in my potential when I was a young student. Although my route to graduate studies in History was circuitous, and it has been over twenty-five years since I attended her classes, her influence persists.

Any error or lapse in the present work are mine alone and should not reflect upon these admirable people.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Just shy of Confederation's twentieth anniversary, the Québec Liberal leader aspiring to become Québec's next premier, Honoré Mercier, would warn voters that they faced a "threat to their most precious possession after their religion: the autonomy of their province." Over the following years, the unreconciled critic of Confederation would become more strident in his defence of provincial autonomy as he battled both old foes and new enemies in the shifting landscape of Canadian politics. Infringements on French and Catholic minority rights in Manitoba, New Brunswick and the Canadian North-West, as well as the economic emigration of French-Canadians, stoked an assertive French-Canadian nationalism concerned with cultural survival and the defence of political influence in Canada. These events and the reaction to them would contribute to changing views about Confederation and the British Empire. In Montreal, however, French-Canadian Catholics became the majority in City council, and the first French-Canadian mayor of Montreal was elected in 1877, followed by an uninterrupted succession of French-Canadian mayors throughout the 1880s. By the late 1880s, Montreal was the fast-industrialising metropolis of Canada, and residents there and in the rest of the country were divided on multiple issues along linguistic, religious and partisan lines.

By 1887, Québec's government was led by Liberal Premier Honoré Mercier (1887-1891), a charismatic and unapologetic nationalist who often claimed to transcend traditional party lines.

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1 Honoré Mercier, "Programme politique," June 26, 1886, in Le rouge et le bleu: Une anthologie de la pensée politique au Québec de la Conquête à la Révolution tranquille, ed. Yvan Lamonde and Claude Corbo (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1999), 274.
3 Paul-André Linteau, Histoire de Montréal Depuis la Confédération (Montréal: Boréal, 2000), 51-122. In 1891, the census put the number of French-Canadians at 79.6% of the Quebec population (182-183) and 55% of Montreal's population (204-205). See Canada Department of Agriculture, Canada Census, 1891 (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1893), 116-117.
as the head of a national coalition. Nonetheless, the Montreal press remained partisan in their coverage of Premier Mercier and the issues of the day. Among the subjects discussed were the fate of Confederation and the prospects for imperial federation, a movement to integrate Great Britain and its settler colonies on an equal footing through closer commercial, military and institutional cooperation, promoted by the newly formed Imperial Federation League.

Though generally considered a topic of interest only to British-Canadians, French-Canadians did not ignore imperial federalism. As active participants in political debates about their status in Confederation and the British Empire, French-Canadians in Québec could not be apathetic to imperial federalism. Although the imperial federation project never materialised, the opinions expressed by its opponents formed an essential part of the discourse of late-nineteenth-century Québec politics. The early critiques of imperial federalism in Québec largely reflected concerns resulting from tensions within Canada. Assertive French-Canadian nationalism, a critique of Confederation as a failed plan that undermined French-Canadians and Québec's autonomy, the threat of annexation, and shifting rhetoric of loyalty were central to discussions of imperial federalism in Québec. Just as important, however, was whether imperial federalism was a movement worthy of concern and its use as a partisan weapon.

This thesis examines why imperial federalism suddenly attracted attention in Québec during Mercier's premiership, the extent to which public opinion in Montreal supported imperial federation, and how that opinion was shaped. It focuses on discussions of imperial federation in Quebec from 1885-1893 as seen primarily through the Montreal press. As Mercier's critique spurred much of the discussion, his role is central to this study.

The analysis, which is grounded in Quebec's political culture and the dynamics of Montreal's press, reveals that the critique of imperial federalism in Quebec was as much a
critique of Confederation as it was of the British Empire and the colonial link. These salient issues were tied to imperial federation and aided by political theatrics and strategy to forge public opinion against the movement. To see the discussion of imperial federation in Québec as but another example of the growing pains of a young Canadian nation ignores the many factors specific to Québec informing views on the issue. Thus, a conscious effort is made to avoid reducing history related to Québec as merely a sub-category of Canadian history.

The importance of the questions raised in this thesis can be explained in multiple ways. The early imperial federation movement has not been studied in-depth as it pertains to Québec, in general, or Montreal, specifically. To the extent that critiques of imperial federalism by French-Canadians in Québec have received any attention, the focus has been on the later iterations of the movement and its critics, such as Henri Bourassa's writings during the Boer War and World War I. English-language literature has also largely ignored French-language primary sources on the topic. While opponents of imperial federalism existed throughout the British Empire, including among Canadians, Mercier's attack on the movement was an organised and sustained political assault on all fronts. This work deepens the scholarship on Mercier, whose influence in the history of ideas in Québec as a result of his opposition to imperial federalism has not been the subject of in-depth treatment, while giving him deserved prominence among more frequently studied nationalist leaders, such as Louis-Joseph-Papineau and Henri Bourassa. Further, the critique of imperial federalism has been overlooked as a component of the broader strategy to safeguard Québec's provincial autonomy against federal centralisation. As Canada

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was the largest settler colony in the British Empire and home to well organised support for imperial federalism, Mercier's success in making imperial federalism anathema in Canada's metropolis was necessarily a setback to the broader imperial federation movement.

As Montreal was home to distinct ethnic groups, "Montreal" will refer to the city and its inhabitants, in general. "Montrealer" will refer to Montrealers generally, whereas British-Montrealers, French-Canadian Montrealers, or English-speaking and French-speaking will be used to distinguish these groups when appropriate. While the Irish population of Montreal formed a demographically significant group, distinct Irish views within Montreal on imperial federation have not been found in sufficient quantity to draw conclusions. Since some Irish integrated into French-Canadian Catholic society for religious reasons and others integrated into British-Montrealers, for linguistic reasons, distinct views of Irish-Montrealers were hard to identify. However, no competing narrative among Montreal's Irish population was found that challenged the conclusions reached herein. The imperial federation debate engaged the British and French-Canadian population of Montreal most directly and they thus remain the primary groups in this thesis. By some measures, such as the number of publications produced by its members and the number of entries in the Imperial Federation League Journal reporting branch activity, Montreal was home to the most active League branch in Canada. Support, however,

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6 Based on the Indices of the monthly issues of the Journal, see Imperial Federation: The Journal of the Imperial Federation League, Vol. 1, January to December 1886 (London: Cassell & Company, Limited, 1887), iv. Of 96 cities or venues hosting meetings in 1886 that were listed, Montreal was tied with Cambridge, U.K., for the most
did not noticeably extend beyond the small circle of British-Montrealers who were members of the Montreal branch.

This thesis relies mostly on newspapers as primary sources because they form the most voluminous and diverse source of information on imperial federalism as a public political topic in Montreal. Focusing on Montreal ensures linguistic, partisan and religious diversity of the sample of newspapers. To make such sources accessible to the reader, quotations drawn from French-language sources have been translated by the author. Montreal was the economic centre and most populous city of the province, and its importance in Quebec's press landscape far outstripped its demographic weight. Papers had many subscribers outside Montreal, and news in Montreal newspapers was regularly picked up by papers throughout the province. Centering the present study on Montreal is further justified by the fact that Montreal was home to the only branch of the Imperial Federation League ("the League") in Québec. The focus on the Montreal press thus allows for a self-contained study of the primary locus of public debates on imperial federalism in Québec.

This study demonstrates Mercier's framing and influence on the issue by examining two events: first, a motion condemning imperial federation presented on March 6, 1890, in the

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entries at six. In comparison, there is only one entry for Toronto and one for Ottawa. The Journal included multiple references to Montreal newspapers' coverage and the imperial federation movement in Canada. In the annual index for 1887 under "Meetings, Debates, Etc.", Montreal also had the most entries, tied with London U.K., see Imperial Federation: The Journal of the Imperial Federation League, Vol. 1, January to December 1887 (London: Cassell & Company, Limited, 1888): iv.

7 Newspapers were sourced from Queen's Stauffer Library microfilm collection, Québec National Library and Archives (BANQ), Université du Québec à Montreal microfilm collection, newspapers.com and the Google Newspaper Archive.

8 Montreal newspapers represented 65.3% of total newspaper circulation in Québec, a share that would increase in the following decades, Jean de Bonville, La Presse Québecoise de 1884 à 1914: Genèse d'un Média de Masse (Sainte-Foy, QC: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1988), 259. The population of Montreal was about 11% of the population of the province of Québec in 1881 and 14.55% in 1891. Calculated based on Canada Census, 1891: 7, 370. On the wide subscriber base of The Star, see Enn Raudsepp, “Graham, Hugh, 1st Baron ATHOLSTAN,” in Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vol. 16, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–.
Québec Legislative Assembly by Laurent-Olivier David, MPP in Mercier's government; and secondly, a public debate held at Sohmer Park, November 28, 1892, Montreal, where speakers debated the options of the status quo, imperial federalism, Canadian independence, and U.S. annexation, before a large public audience. Imperial federalism fared very poorly at the event, as measured by secret ballot and press coverage. These two events represented the most detailed discussion of imperial federalism in Montreal in the primary sources, were publicly conducted in important venues by influential actors, and benefited from public participation. As a result, they provide the best cues for understanding public opinion in Montreal on the topic and illustrated Mercier's direct influence at the highest level of government, as well as his continuing indirect influence outside of formal political structures.

As imperial federation received increased attention among the press and political class in Québec following the 1885 founding of the Imperial Federation League's Canadian Branch in Montreal, as well as Mercier’s rise to power, this thesis concentrates on the period from 1885-1893.10 The periodisation reflects critical moments in the life of the League and Mercier's career as their respective highs and lows share a unique correlation. The Imperial Federation League of Canada was founded in Montreal in 1885, and Mercier's rise in influence as a nationalist leader occurred following the hanging of Louis Riel in the same year. The League's greatest success, the Imperial Conference in London, and Mercier's accession as premier of Québec as well as his organisation of the Inter-Provincial Conference, which focused on provincial autonomy, all occurred in 1887.11 In the following years, Mercier would increase his attacks on imperial

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9 Laurent-Olivier David, Québec, Legislature, Débats de la Législature de la Province de Québec, 6th Leg, 4th session, January 7-April 2, 1890 (Québec: Imprimerie de Belleau & Cie, 1890), (March 6, 1890), 577-588.
10 From January 1, 1885 to December 31, 1893, 524 separate issues of The Gazette, almost one-fifth of all issues during the period, referenced "imperial federation," as per newspapers.com full-text search. The number of distinct items is certainly higher as this does not account for multiple articles within a single issue or similar expressions.
11 Donald Creighton, The Young Politician and The Old Chieftain (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 475, refers to the 1887 Imperial Conference as the Imperial federation League's "greatest success." Also, C.A.
federalism and present it as a threat that must be taken seriously. In the meantime, the League finally began to put forward concrete proposals to demonstrate the seriousness of their movement. As of 1892, however, both Mercier and the League's influence were waning within formal political structures. By 1893, Mercier would gradually retreat from politics due to declining health, as well as political and financial setbacks, whereas the League would disband due to disagreement among its members.

In addition to these parallels between the trajectories of Mercier's political career and the League, this thesis is in agreement with the assessment of Michael Burgess that after 1871, there can be seen the "first signs of a sustained political movement advocating the consolidation of the empire [...]" The long-dominant interpretation of historian C.A. Bodelsen argued that from 1870 onward, there was a major shift away from metropolitan indifference and colonial "separatism." Ged Martin, on the other hand, rejected Bodelsen's approach and argued for a longue durée interpretation that saw the imperial federation movement as merely a temporary reinvigoration of a decades-old interest for what he termed "empire federalism." Thus, while imperial federalism might have been a temporary, peculiar form of the broader ebb and flow in

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12 Note on terminology: The expression "federationist" is occasionally used to refer to a proponent of imperial federalism. This is done to lighten the text and to avoid confusion with current "federalists" in the Canadian context. "Federationist" was commonly used by proponents of imperial federation as well as the press, see George Parkin, Imperial Federation: The Problem of National Unity (London: Macmillan and Co., 1892), 102, 171, 258, 261, 262, 265, and Thomas MacFarlane, Within the Empire: An Essay on Imperial Federation (Ottawa: James Hope & Co., 1891), in passim.

13 For key events in the life of the League, see Michael Burgess, The British Tradition of Federalism (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, Madison, NJ, 1995), 60-70.


15 Bodelsen, Studies in Mid-Victorian Imperialism; Burgess, "Imperial Federation: Continuity and Change," 65.

16 Ged Martin, "Empire Federalism and Imperial Parliamentary Union, 1820-1870," The Historical Journal 16, no. 1 (1973): 65, 71. In the Canadian context, some proposed to federate the empire long before the organised imperial federation movement or even Confederation, see Arma E. Smillie, Historical Origins of Imperial Federation: 1754-1867 (Montreal: Mitchell & Wilson, 1910), in passim.
the struggle for "empire federalism," it was marked by a noticeable increase in enthusiasm for federation on an imperial scale. Between the interpretations of Bodelsen and Martin, sits Burgess' nuanced conciliatory interpretation of a recognisable shift in interest and the crystallisation of a movement, which nonetheless was part of a broader trend.¹⁷

More recently, Duncan Bell accepted that a significant shift in thinking about the settler colonies in the empire occurred around 1870.¹⁸ To be sure, this phase of the movement towards British imperial unity was not strictly the result of factors that were endogenous to the movement. It also coincided with what Bell termed the "cognitive revolution" resulting from technologies, such as the telegraph and steamships, that were thought to have produced the "annihilation of time and space," including imperial spaces.¹⁹ Following this shift towards greater enthusiasm for federation projects and concern for imperial disunity after 1870, the life of the League can be seen as the first structured empire-wide organisation promoting imperial federalism. While 1871 approximately marks an increased interest in imperial federalism, the foundation of the League in London in 1884, marks the transition from thought to action. J.E. Tyler divided the movement into three major phases and explored what he dubbed the first phase of the movement in his classic work The Struggle for Imperial Unity: 1868-1895.²⁰ The present work, therefore, sits within the first phase of the imperial federation movement.

¹⁷ Burgess, "Imperial Federation: Continuity and Change," 73. Burgess attributes the beginning of the shift to a backlash following the withdrawal of British troops in the colonies in 1871, and the Gladstone government's indifferent approach to colonies such as Canada and New Zealand, Ibid., 66.
¹⁹ Bell, Reordering the World, 135. See also, Duncan Bell, “Dissolving Distance: Technology, Space, and Empire in British political thought, 1770–1900,” The Journal of Modern History 77, no. 3 (2005): 525.
²⁰ J.E. Tyler, The Struggle for Imperial Unity: 1868-1895 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1938), vii-viii. Tyler explained the other phases as follows: The second, 1895-1906, is summed up in the personality of Joseph Chamberlain, a third in the triumph of the Laurier-Botha-Asquith conception of Empire after the Imperial Conference of 1907. Seymour Ching-Yuan (Matthew) Cheng, Schemes for the Federation of the British Empire (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), compiled federationist writings and his work bears witness to the unique character of the League and the many proposals on the subject during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.
In a slight dissent to Carl Berger's remark that "in French Canada [imperial unity] encountered indifference and hostility," this thesis does not assume indifference in Québec to the late-nineteenth-century imperial federalism movement. This thesis goes beyond assumptions of indifference or natural hostility towards imperial federation to demonstrate that the movement was taken seriously as an external threat, and that its rejection was marked by surprising unity in Montréal. Hostility had to be nurtured and usefully framed for it to become ingrained. During Mercier's time in office, it would have been difficult for the politically aware to be indifferent to the issue due to its centrality to Mercier's politics. Contrary to influential works on imperial federalism, most notably those of Carl Berger and Duncan Bell, which emphasise the views of the movement's proponents among the British colonial or metropolitan elite, this study gives voice to those in the colonies who actively sought the movement's defeat. It provides the perspective of imperial federalism's opponents in Québec who were successful in framing it as a political threat in Montreal public opinion. In addition to nuancing the work of Berger and Bell, this thesis expands on studies of the press and political culture in nineteenth-century Canada, notably by Jeffrey McNairn, Duncan Koerber, and Ian Radforth. Drawing on press analysis and theories of public opinion formation, this work argues that hostile public opinion in Montreal on imperial federalism transcended linguistic and partisan lines, and was heavily influenced by Québec political elites, and Mercier in particular, who made the issue a part of his political strategy.

With regards to the structure of the thesis, Chapter Two provides historical context relevant to the debates on imperial federalism in Montreal, notably the rise in French-Canadian nationalism and Mercier's career, and the early imperial federation movement in Canada. It then

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21 Berger, Sense of Power, 5.
discusses critical works within the historiography with which this thesis engages. Next, a discussion of the sources and interpretive framework on public opinion will clarify the methodology. Chapters Three and Four form the crux of the thesis as they examine key examples of Honoré Mercier's successful framing, through various venues, of imperial federation as a threat to provincial autonomy and French-Canadian survival. Chapter Three examines the early critiques of imperial federalism from Mercier and, most importantly, a motion adopted unanimously on March 6, 1890, in the Québec Legislative Assembly that condemned imperial federation. It analyses the motion's press coverage and impact, as well as its use in the subsequent election. A study of campaign literature, legislative debates and newspaper content will highlight the use of political strategy, spectacle and discourse, at the highest level of Québec politics, to solidify public opinion against imperial federalism in a manner that often eschewed reasoned deliberation. Chapter Four probes the public debate held on November 28, 1892, at Montreal's Sohmer Park. The chapter emphasises Mercier's influence over the event, and examines the event's organisation, views in the press on imperial federalism and its proponent, Archibald McGoun, and newspapers' assessment of the event. It concludes with what the event's results and press' appraisal, when considered in conjunction, revealed about support for imperial federalism in Montreal. The fifth chapter offers concluding remarks.
Chapter Two: Contexts — Historical, Historiographical and Methodological

Imperial federalism was an imperial movement with global aims that was shaped by national and even local concerns. Opinion on imperial federalism in Québec appeared most clearly in Montreal, the juncture where early supporters, organised political opposition and a vocal and partisan press met. As a result, Mercier's influence in solidifying opposition to imperial federalism can only be grasped by establishing the context in which the movement and its opposition arose, and by surveying the historiographical terrain that provides the launch point for the exploration undertaken in this thesis. The interpretative framework that informs this thesis' approach must also be made clear. The present chapter is, therefore, divided into three parts. First, it provides historical context by examining tensions at the heart of Confederation and within Montreal, the birth of the imperial federation movement and its beginnings in Canada, and key events of Mercier's career. Second, it reviews the relevant historiography on the place of British colonies in the empire and imperial federalism. The historiographical review then identifies key works on French-Canadians' changing views of Confederation and the British Empire, historiography on Mercier, as well as on the press and political culture in Canada. Third, a discussion of methodology, including sources and the interpretive framework, completes this chapter.

The imperial federation movement was shaped by global, imperial, national and local trends and events. The unification of Germany and of Italy, in 1871, reinforced the potential for federation in the minds of many and the rise of new nations rattled insecure imperial federalists. Increasing Russian influence in Asia and the growth of the United States, especially, exacerbated the fears of a declining British Empire.\(^1\) Imperial factors, such as the withdrawal of British

imperial troops from the colonies and a perceived indifference towards Canada on the part of British Prime Minister William Gladstone and his Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Lord Granville, contributed to a revival of interest in colonial affairs among some colonists and British leaders and to an opposition movement to reaffirm imperial bonds.²

The American rejection of trade reciprocity with Canada in 1866, the mixed results of John A. Macdonald's National Policy, Britain's preference for free trade, and the American McKinley Tariff in 1890, meant that Canadians faced difficult decisions between imperial and continental political options.³ As hundreds of thousands of French-Canadians from Québec emigrated to New England in search of factory-work and tensions over language and religious rights in Manitoba and the Canadian North-West arose, many in Quebec questioned their role in Canada and the British Empire.⁴ Their fate was increasingly tied to the economic might of the United States as they struggled to maintain political influence in a British-dominated Canada.

Political loyalties within Canada were also changing after the early 1870s when the federal Liberal party had made efforts to appeal to French-Canadians by cracking down on anti-French Catholic rhetoric within their ranks.⁵ Mercier's appeals to French-Canadian unity in Québec helped position him as the unifying leader of the French-Canadian nation. French-Canadian nationalist rhetoric increasingly referred to the "French race," mirroring in many

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respects the "race patriotism" of many British-Canadians. By 1887, a French-Canadian, Wilfrid Laurier, led the federal Liberal Party and the Liberal brand was improving in Québec where the Conservative Party had long dominated. John A. Macdonald's grip on power was loosening although he remained as the Conservative Prime Minister whose centralising policies and disallowance of provincial laws were the cause of frustration for provincial premiers, such as Ontario's Oliver Mowat and Québec's Mercier. Macdonald's use of the "loyalty cry" in his last election, in 1891, would help him secure a narrow victory over the Liberals whose flirtation with unrestricted trade reciprocity with the United States was framed by Conservatives as disloyal or annexationist. Macdonald's most vocal opponent, Mercier, would make the Canadian prime minister's last years difficult.

Mercier was born in 1840 in the small town of Saint-Athanase, Iberville County, Lower Canada, and was the son of a Patriote sympathiser who had been imprisoned for aiding Patriote rebels in the troubles of 1837-38. After studies in a Jesuit college in Montreal, Mercier began his career in the agricultural hub of Saint-Hyacinthe, Québec. Like many young, ambitious French-Canadians, Mercier apprenticed as a lawyer and worked as a journalist before entering politics. From the beginning, he was opposed to Confederation, viewing it as "a mechanism for crushing French-Canadians." After a brief, unsatisfactory stint as a one-term MP in the House of

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Commons under the Liberal-aligned "National Party" from 1872 to 1874, he turned his focus to Québec politics where his oratorical skills and nationalism served him well. Tensions over French-Catholic minority rights outside Québec caused a spike in nationalist sentiment that helped Mercier rally a growing number of French-Catholic Québécois to unite and create a new "national" party. Following the hanging of Riel in 1885, Mercier addressed a crowd of 50,000 at the Champ-de-Mars in Montreal calling upon French-Canadians to set aside their partisan differences. The desire to create a "national" party was a long-held dream of Mercier who had founded the previous short-lived Parti National in 1872. As a result, Mercier led a coalition of Liberals, a few disaffected Conservatives, and members in a newly-created Parti National, to a fragile majority in October 1886 on a platform that had the defence of provincial autonomy against federal Conservative centralisation as its first principle. Mercier's takeover of the provincial government had taken months, however, as Conservative Lieutenant-Governor Louis-Rodrigue Masson first asked the incumbent Conservative Party, which had a greater share of the popular vote of any party, to try to form the government. However, as the Conservatives immediately lost a vote of confidence, Mercier formed a government through an alliance held together by nationalist sentiment and his political acumen. Following resignations within the Québec Conservative Party, Louis-Olivier Taillon became the Conservative leader and Mercier's chief opponent in the assembly and the next campaign in June 1890. Though Ontario premier Pierre Dufour and Jean Hamelin, “Mercier, Honoré,” in Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vol. 12, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–. The French article refers to it as a "machine à broyer les Canadiens français."
9 Mann, Dream of Nation, 152-154; Dufour and Hamelin, “Mercier, Honoré.”
10 Rumilly, Honoré Mercier, Tome 1, 69-80.
11 Ibid., 325-351, 354-367; Serge Gaudreau and Jean-Herman Guay, Les élections au Québec: 150 ans d'une histoire mouvementée (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2018), 70. The Conservatives had won the highest share of the popular vote at 46.19%. The seat distribution, however, was Liberals: 33, Conservatives: 26, National Party: 3, Independent Conservative: 3. In some ridings, Mercier's candidates ran under the Liberal banner, and in others they ran under the Parti National banner. Honoré Mercier, "Programme politique," June 26, 1886, in Le rouge et le bleu: Une anthologie de la pensée politique au Québec de la Conquête à la Révolution tranquille, ed. Yvan Lamonde and Claude Corbo (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1999), 274-278; Kenneth Munro,
Mowat, who argued that Confederation was the result of a compact among provinces, was the first to defend provincial autonomy forcefully, Mercier was the first Québec politician to "learn to exploit effectively the issue of provincial rights," historian Brian Young has written. In his first year in power, Mercier hosted the Interprovincial Conference of 1887, bringing together five provincial premiers to discuss cooperation and means to counteract a centralising federal Conservative government.12

Multiple tensions were felt within Montreal as well. The Montreal press in the nineteenth century had a long history of stoking ethnic tensions, primarily between French-Canadian Montrealers and British-Montrealers, as attested by the burning of the Parliament in Montreal in 1849 over the Rebellion Losses Bill at the instigation of The Gazette.13 Physical confrontation between Anglo-Protestants and French-Canadians would again set the stage for clashes in the press in 1855 following the visit of the anti-Catholic preacher Alessandro Gavazzi at the invitation of Montreal's English-speaking Protestant community.14 Tensions would rise once more in 1885 when Montreal, already reeling from the Riel hanging, was hit by a smallpox outbreak, which affected the working-class francophone neighbourhoods in the east end, leading The Star to promote mandatory vaccination. Riots broke out as some French-Canadians saw vaccination as a plot by British-Montrealers to exclude them from respectable society or to infect

“Taillon, Sir Louis-Olivier,” in Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vol. 15, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–.
them. The English-language press saw the episode as another example of French-Canadian "backwardness." Tensions between these two groups were thus a constant threat and left their mark on Montreal's political practices and recurring violence had been an important factor in the decision to adopt secret balloting in civic elections at mid-century. While outbursts of violence still occasionally occurred in Montreal politics, they would become less frequent and less destructive over the century as campaign laws, changing political customs and social standards tamed violence with rhetoric, spectacle and ideals of respectable behaviour. Nonetheless, Conservatives regularly accused the assertive premier of stoking "race" prejudice.

Key to understanding Montreal's politics in the late nineteenth century was the decline in the political influence of British-Montrealers, mainly Protestant, and the corresponding increase of French-Canadian political influence resulting primarily from demographic growth through natural increase and urbanisation. This slipping of British Montreal's political influence was exacerbated by British immigrants preference for Ontario and accelerated throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. Adding to this anxiety, British-Montrealers were aware of their declining influence. French-Canadians' political influence increased as economic

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17 Ibid., 327-328.
21 Horner, "'Shame upon you as men!',' 33; Dan Horner, "Taking to the Streets: Crowds, Politics and Identity in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Montreal," PhD Thesis (Toronto: York University, 2010), 277; J.R. Miller, *Equal Rights*, 22-23. For a biographical account of the relative decline of the original British elite in Montreal, see Brian
marginalisation led many French-Canadian professionals to seek employment in government rather than in business and to see the growing state as a tool for national development.\textsuperscript{22} Québec's provincial autonomy was, therefore, a fundamental issue since Confederation, shared by Liberals and Conservatives alike, as many saw it as necessary for cultural survival and economic empowerment.\textsuperscript{23} Any plan that threatened provincial autonomy was, therefore, interpreted as an existential threat to Québec and French-Canadians principally.

Among the issues during Mercier's first term in office, his handling of the Jesuit Estates claims was possibly the most controversial. His settlement of long outstanding Jesuit land claims enraged Conservative Protestants in Montreal, and Ontario in particular, who saw it as papal interventionism. Chief among these outraged Protestants was Ontario Conservative D'Alton McCarthy, organiser of the Equal Rights Association who was virulently opposed to Mercier's French-Canadian nationalism. Specifically, McCarthy sought disallowance by the federal government of Quebec's Jesuit Estates Act, adopted in 1888.\textsuperscript{24} McCarthy was also president of the Imperial Federation League in Canada.\textsuperscript{25} The Jesuit Estates Act and the reaction to it, bolstered Mercier's popularity in Québec as a defender of French-Canadians while making him a

\textsuperscript{23} Silver, \textit{French-Canadian Idea of Confederation}, 99, 112.
\textsuperscript{24} Following adoption of the law compensating Jesuits for land confiscated by the British in Québec in 1763 after the Conquest, which included a preamble in the law referencing Pope Leo XIII's role in the distribution of the funds, a movement among some Protestants formed to denounce papal influence in Canada. The Equal Rights Association was the name of the Protestant organisation founded in reaction to the Jesuit bill. J.R. Miller, \textit{Equal Rights: The Jesuits' Estates Act Controversy} (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979), 20, 42, 108-109.
pariah in many Anglo-Protestant circles. The controversy revealed that Macdonald's
government, which was dependent on electoral support in Québec, was hesitant to provoke
Mercier by disallowing the law, although they considered Mercier a foe. Macdonald's timidity
was an acknowledgement of Mercier's ability to exploit outrage at the prospect of disallowance
against the federal Conservatives as Macdonald feared that Mercier had "laid a trap for him" with
the law. Many in Montreal's English-speaking Protestant minority sought to avoid provoking
the Mercier government since they felt increasingly vulnerable, with most of the agitation
coming from Ontario. The episode revealed a critical dynamic that explained the reaction of
Montreal's Conservative press, in particular among English-language papers, to Mercier's assault
on imperial federation. As Montreal's Anglo-Protestant minority sought to avoid galvanising
Mercier's nationalist supporters, imperial federation was likely not the proverbial hill on which
Montreal's British community were willing to die.

In the face of growing hostility towards French-Catholic rights outside Québec, Mercier
appealed to French-Canadian unity to confront an existential danger. A ratcheting up of tensions
between French-Canadians and British-Canadians followed as "Confederation itself appeared
doomed as neither the expected economic development nor the new nationality took form,"
historian Susan Mann asserted. The response outside Québec was to push for Canadian national
unity, often at the expense of French-Catholic identity. Liberal nationalists, such as Mercier, saw

27 Miller, *Equal Rights*, 44-45. Miller states that Mercier spread rumours that Macdonald would disallow the Act to
generate animosity towards Macdonald and Conservatives for upcoming provincial by-elections.
28 Ibid., 22-23, 61. Outside Montreal, anglophone Conservative MP Charles Colby of Stanstead in the Eastern
Townships opposed federal disallowance of the Law to avoid subjecting anglophones there to the wrath of an irate
French-Catholic majority. Ibid., 68-69. Mercier would support the Conservative Colby in the next federal election
against an Equal Rights Association candidate in Stanstead. Colby won the election handily. Ibid., 118, 125, 136 and
183 (conciliatory approach).
this trend as illustrative of Conservatives' plans for legislative union, an alternative to Confederation for a centralised unitary state, and a looming "race war." Many imperial federalists, meanwhile, saw Canadian Confederation as a successful model for the federation of other British colonies, seen as the first step towards imperial federation. For others, the difficulties facing Canada fostered a sense of disappointment with Confederation, leading some to ponder options such as continental union or annexation with the United States.

In this context of uncertainty over the fate of the empire and experimentation with federalism, the Imperial Federation League was founded in London in 1884, followed by the establishment of the Imperial Federation League of Canada and its Montreal branch in 1885. Montreal was thus one of the earliest branches of the League and the first in Canada. By 1890, Canada had 26 branches, though many had only a few members, while England and Scotland had 12 large branches, Australia five, and South Africa two, with Quebec's only branch in Montreal. The Montreal branch was very active, holding regular meetings, whereas Toronto only established a branch in February 1888 in reaction to the annexation movement. The organisation did not spread beyond Montreal in the province of Québec, however.

Only three French-Canadian members appeared on the League's membership lists. They were Joseph-Israel Tarte (Israel Tarte), editor of *Le Canadien*, Liberal MP Phillipe Baby

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31 British imperial federalist Sir Charles Dilke saw Confederation as a successful example of British subjects of different religious and linguistic backgrounds cohabitating, which augured well for imperial federation. See Dilke, *Problems of Greater Britain*, (London: MacMillan & Co., 1890), 35-36. George Parkin, *Imperial Federation, the Problem of National Unity* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1892), 12-13, argued: "With comparative suddenness Canada has now caught the inspiration of a large national life. [...] On political lines her people have been the first to prove by actual experiment on a large scale the adaptability of a federal system to British methods of representative and responsible government." Peter Price, "Steppingstones to Imperial Unity?: The British West Indies in the Late-Victorian Imperial Federation Movement," *Canadian Journal of History* vol. 52, no. 2 (2017): 258-259, also noted that local federation plans and colonial expansionist desires generated enthusiasm for a larger-scale federation.
32 Mann, *Dream of Nation*, 155-156.
Casgrain, and Henri Gustave Joly de Lotbinière, the former Liberal premier of Québec (1878-1879). The few French-Canadians who were members of the League were less than vocal about it, and Joly de Lotbinière was added to its rolls against his wishes as the League sought desperately to claim support of influential French-Canadian Liberals. The sole active French-Canadian politician from Québec that appeared on the League's rolls willingly was Casgrain, the Liberal federal MP for the rural riding of L'Islet. Only Tarte, editor of Le Canadien, however, would defend and maintain his membership. Though influential Canadian imperial federalists, such as George Parkin, invoked common Norman origins of the English and French in an appeal to French-Canadians, that sympathy had limits as Parkin would note that an "unprogressive spirit hampers the Frenchman."

Imperial federalists generally avoided discussing the pragmatic aspects of French-Canadian participation, and no instances were found where appeals to a common racial origin were received favourably by French-Canadians themselves.

However, a partial awareness of French-Canadian interests in an imperial federation can be found in some writings by Archibald McGoun Jr., law professor at McGill, founding member of the Montreal branch, and speaker at the 1892 Sohmer Park event studied in Chapter Four. Proponents often invoked loyalty and sentiments of common British brotherhood as support for an imperial federation, and most proposals remained vague although many writings in Canada

34 Imperial Federation League, Constitution, 18-19; Imperial Federation League, Report of the First Meetings; J. I. Little. Patrician Liberal: The Public and Private Life of Sir Henri-Gustave Joly de Lotbinière, 1829-1908. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 158-160. Little states that Joly was added to membership lists against his wishes though he was not necessarily opposed to the movement. Joly's position on imperial federation is ambiguous. No writings of Casgrain's support for imperial federation were found. However, near the end of the League's life, Casgrain became co-vice-president for Québec of the Imperial Federation League of Canada. He chaired the vice-presidency with businessman and Conservative MP Donald Smith, Lord Strathcona. See Ottawa Daily Citizen, January 31, 1891, 1.


36 Many early proposals for federation on a North American or larger imperial scale, however, were often means to assimilate French-Canadians or reduce their influence within the colony. Arma E. Smillie. Historical Origins of Imperial Federation: 1754-1867 (Montreal: Mitchell & Wilson, 1910), 29, 39, 45. Berger, Sense of Power, 145.

37 Archibald McGoun, Federation of the Empire: An Address Before the University Literary Society, 18th November 1884 (Montreal: Dawson Brothers Publishers, 1884), 6, 11.
alluded to potential trade benefits and military defence. The Montreal branch had a membership
drawn primarily from Montreal's Conservative British elite and academics with only a few
members from the commercial class. Many Canadians were prolific promoters of the
movement and had produced influential writings on imperial federation from the beginning. Following the Montreal branch's foundation, its members would produce more writings on the subject, including Archibald McGoun Jr. who published three lengthy pamphlets.

Meanwhile, competing visions for Canada's place within the empire were put forth by influential men, such as Goldwin Smith and George Parkin. Goldwin Smith wrote extensively on the fate of the British Empire as a proponent of a continentalist solution to annex Canada to the United States. Parkin, on the other hand, was the most active proponent of imperial federation in Canada. Parkin's plea for imperial federation, as well as his opposition to Smith's ideas, were already well known by the late 1880s, and his 1892 booklet *Imperial Federation* was widely


42 As such, Parkin has been studied in greater depth than other Canadian thinkers on the issue, see Berger, Sense of Power, in passim; Terry Cook, “George R. Parkin and the concept of Britannic Idealism,” Journal of Canadian Studies 10, no. 3 (August 1975): 15-31. Terry Cook, “Parkin, Sir George Robert,” in Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vol. 15, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003—.
distributed in Canada. Although Mercier or David did not explicitly reference Parkin's writings, his ideas were known in Montreal as the Montreal Gazette covered them. In addition, numerous pamphlets and lectures on imperial federation, mostly in support of the scheme, were published in Canada before 1893. As J.E. Tyler has stated, however, the League, which sought to influence politicians and introduce imperial studies in school curriculums, initially sought to avoid concrete proposals and was an organisation that "avowedly intended to be propagandist."

Mercier, however, was not content to merely voice his opposition to imperial federation but sought to counter the League's "propaganda" with his own relentless message. Taking advantage of the framing of imperial federation as a potent political foil, he made it a key component of his assertive nationalism and defence of provincial autonomy. As an election-conscious premier seeking to strengthen a loose nationalist coalition, Mercier continuously reinforced his message on and off the campaign trail. Mercier would also invoke the spectre of legislative union between Canadian provinces, the alternative to Canadian federalism, and hint at it being Macdonald's persistent wish to bring it about once and for all. Notwithstanding that the Imperial Federation League of Canada's constitution stated that "no scheme of federation should interfere with the existing rights of local parliaments, as regards local affairs," the sympathy of legislative unionists such as former Canadian Minister of Finance Alexander T. Galt for imperial

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44 For example, The Gazette, December 7, 1892, 4 announced George Parkin's lecture and provided a review of the event the following week on December 14, 1892, 5.
45 Most of these publications were of papers presented at branches of the League. Their number precludes listing them all here.
46 Tyler, Struggle for Imperial Unity: 1868-1895, 111.
47 Honoré Mercier, Opening of the Electoral Campaign – Speech Delivered at the Convention of the Nationalists of the District of Québec, held at Tara Hall, on the 15th May, 1890. 1890, 4-5; Silver, French-Canadian Idea of Confederation, 36-37, 204.
federation only made the professed aims of the movement suspect. Legislative union, or the more worrisome imperial federation, were often linked as the true goals of Macdonald and the Conservative Party to destroy provincial autonomy. Mercier, though occasionally suspected by imperial federalists of favouring annexation, had made public pronouncements in favour of Canada's independence during the period studied herein. While Mercier occasionally invoked annexation and argued for colonial independence from Great Britain, his most consistent position was as an outspoken nationalist opponent of imperial federation.

In addition to the preceding historical contextualisation, the following section provides a historiographical survey to clarify the main works and fields with which this thesis engages. The imperial federation movement in Québec, however, sits uncomfortably in standard historiographical categories. In keeping with efforts by "new imperial" and "British World" historians to broaden the scope of imperial history, this thesis focuses on the views of members of the empire outside its metropolitan centre. Examining the reception of the imperial federation movement in Québec offers the perspective of people who appropriated a language of

48 Imperial Federation League, Constitution, 2 (point 3). During his speech in the Legislative Assembly, Laurent-Olivier David mentioned Galt's presence at an Imperial Federation meeting. David, Débats, 581. Jean-Pierre Kesteman, “GALT, Sir ALEXANDER TILLOCH,” in Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vol. 12, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–.

49 Honoré Mercier, Discours prononcé le 10 avril 1888 au banquet du Club national, 18.

50 George T. Denison, The Struggle for Imperial Unity: Recollections and Experiences (London: Macmillan and Co., 1909), 107-112. The Imperial Federation League Journal, which would reprint coverage on the imperial federation movement, regularly reported excerpts describing Mercier as an annexationist, for example, see Imperial Federation League Journal, Vol. IX, January to December 1889 (January 31, 1889), 13; Isabella Winifred McGoun, "Imperial Federation Movement," 49-50, said little of Mercier though she claimed that he was an annexationist. She references "Imperial Federation Journal, 1890, p.4." The accurate reference in the annual compilation of the Journal is Imperial Federation League Journal, Vol. V (January-December 1890), 35; Rumilly, Honoré Mercier, Tome 2, 353-373, however, clearly identified Mercier as a campaigner for colonial independence.

British rights as British subjects yet did not identify as British. Since Linda Colley's exploration of Britishness in Great Britain in *Britons*, many have explored and expanded how events, places and people outside Great Britain contributed to British identity.\(^5^2\) While recognising British influence on Québec, an exploration of how French-Canadian identity fits within the definitions of Britishness falls outside the scope of this thesis, which considers multiple influences on Québec beyond a strict imperial framework. Rather than reinforcing imperial ties or seeking to "build better Britains", as Cecilia Morgan has put it, French-Canadian nationalists, led by Mercier, also invoked their French heritage and Americanness in seeking to downplay colonial ties with Britain.\(^5^3\) The subject studied herein also blurs the line between categories of imperial and colonial history as it examines a colonial debate about whether to further integrate the imperial structure or whether to weaken or possibly sever colonial ties.

Historians have used the "British World" as a concept to decentralise the metropolis in imperial histories by remedying the neglect of settler colonies in studies of the empire. This school has also sought to highlight the persistent attachment to empire in the colonies, which is often erased in colony-to-nation narratives. As Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich state, "its core was the ‘neo-Britains’ where [British] migrants found they could transfer into societies with familiar cultural values."\(^5^4\) Although historian J.G.A. Pocock was among the earliest to appeal

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\(^{5^3}\) Cecilia Morgan, *Building Better Britains?: Settler Societies within the British Empire, 1783-1920* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press: 2016). The Americanness or "L’Américanité" of Québec's culture has been the subject of many studies. Of interest to this period, see Yvan Lamonde, *Allégeances et dépendances : L'Histoire d'une ambivalence identitaire* (Montreal: Éditions Nota Bene, 2001), 62. Lamonde claimed that despite anti-American rhetoric among traditional leaders, including Church leaders, workers drawn to the U.S. and influenced by American culture and labour practices increasingly tended to understand themselves within an American rather than imperial context. Annexationism among some French-Canadians was a manifestation of this understanding.

for the recognition of imperial attachments of the various settler colonies, the "British World" approach gained currency in the late 1990s among historians who were concerned with writing the empire back into the history of the so-called White Dominions.\textsuperscript{55}

The "British World" remains a useful concept for historians seeking not only to study the global expressions of British culture but also British influence and is not necessarily limited to white or Anglo-Saxon populations. By the admission of Phillip Buckner, "the boundaries of the British World were and are open to interpretation."\textsuperscript{56} Among these volumes, however, articles addressing French-Canadians, Quebec or Montreal are few.\textsuperscript{57} Nonetheless, French-Canadians lived in a British World. Many admired British institutions, participated in a British parliamentary system, and their economic fate was largely tied to the empire. As their trade was increasingly integrated to the American economy, however, they were also part of an "American World." As the homeland of a non-Anglo-Saxon people with one foot in the British World, who were also increasingly looking to the United States, Quebec illustrates the limitations of the British World label despite its value. Within Québec, Montreal is where these competing influences converged most strikingly.


\textsuperscript{56} Bridge and Fedorowich, “Mapping the British World,” 3; Buckner and Francis, \textit{Canada and the British World}, 5, 7.

\textsuperscript{57} Buckner and Francis, \textit{Canada and the British World}, has only one contribution out of nineteen on French-Canadians, see Serge Courville, "Part of the British Empire, Too: French Canada and Colonization Propaganda," 129-141. Of interest is a chapter on the \textit{Anglo-Saxon} newspaper, published in Ottawa from 1887-1900, whose Pan-Saxonism and anti-French message received wide circulation among colonial networks in Paula Hastings, “‘Our Glorious Anglo-Saxon Race Shall Ever Fill Earth’s Highest Place’: The \textit{Anglo-Saxon} and the Construction of Identity in Late-Nineteenth Century Canada,” 92-110. Bridge and Fedorowich, \textit{The British World} included one article that addressed the issue of loyalty among "non-British white subjects", including French-Canadians, see Donal Lowry, "The Crown, Empire Loyalism and the Assimilation of Non-British White Subjects in the British World: An argument against 'Ethnic Determinism'," 96-119.
"New Imperial" historians have criticised the “British World” history approach and questioned its utility as a new field of history. The lack of focus on indigenous populations and power dynamics is a weakness of British World history and "new imperial" history can address the concerns of British World historians, they have argued. While differences in power are at play in the French-Canadian and British-Canadian relationship, resorting to subaltern theory or a metropole-periphery binary is inadequate to explain the views on imperial federalism in Montreal. The criticised ambiguity of the "British World" label offers the benefit of flexibility to cover interactions between different groups within the colonies and the concept retains much potential when understood as a fluid concept. In that vein, a new approach labelled "Britain and the World" has recognised the need for greater flexibility in understanding interactions between Britain and the World, outside of purely imperial contexts. While its prospects as a field remain uncertain, this flexible approach has recognised the importance of the local within imperial and global contexts. The present work fits within both a flexible understanding of the "British World" and within the "Britain and the World" approach.

More critically for this thesis, writings by Duncan Bell have revived academic interest in the study of imperial federalism by focusing on its British theoreticians. Bell’s *Reordering the World* examined the ideological underpinnings of British imperialism in the Victorian and Edwardian eras (1840-1914), arguing that “the British Empire provided both a practical

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58 Bright and Dilley, "After the British World," 560, 549.
59 Tamson Pietsch, "A British Sea: making sense of global space in the late nineteenth century," *Journal of Global History* 5, no. 3 (2010): 423-446. Pietsch argues for "worlds" (plural) in recognition of various sites of identity formation, including temporary spaces such as ships on long voyages to the colonies.
laboratory and a space of desire for liberal attempts to reorder the world.” This fact shaped ideas about politics and identity and connected people across the empire.\footnote{Bell, \textit{Reordering the World}, 2. Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette M. Burton, \textit{Empires and the Reach of the Global, 1870-1945} (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), also recognised that these ideas connected people across the empire though Bell’s approach is more centred on influential metropolitan British thinkers than Ballantyne and Burton’s bottom-up approach emphasising the views of colonial subjects.} In particular, Bell explores what he has called “imperial imaginaries”; i.e., shared assumptions about the nature of empire that gave rise to imperial ideologies of which he identified three: ideologies of justification, of governance, and of resistance.\footnote{Bell, \textit{Reordering the World}, 91-118.} Bell only focused on justification and governance, however. Expanding space, racial anxieties, and the desire to reimagine the empire to escape the fate of fallen empires exerted a heavy influence on imperialists, Bell has argued.\footnote{Ibid., 119-147, 161-162, 220. The fall of Rome loomed large in the thoughts of most historians. Bell also studied the imperial \textit{mentalité} expressed in the writings of historians whose thoughts on the future of the empire were rooted in an interpretation of empires as necessarily temporal, in Bell, \textit{The Idea of Greater Britain}, 313 and in passim. Other historians have also highlighted fears of a declining empire, see Antoinette M. Burton, \textit{The Trouble with Empire: Challenges to Modern British Imperialism} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 6, 144.} Bell is aligned, though not explicitly, with many British World historians with a focus on predominately white settler colonies although he devoted little attention to the views of inhabitants of the colonies.\footnote{Bell, \textit{Reordering the World}, 6.} While proponents of imperial federation, as well as its opponents, were informed by a similar concern for the fate of the British Empire, they diverged over proposed solutions to imperial decline and homegrown problems. Mercier's views were not stridently anti-imperial, though they were part of the "ideology of resistance" that Bell identified but declined to examine. Canadian views were also largely overlooked in Bell's metropole-centric work. While the present thesis studies a facet of an "ideology of resistance," it aims for a more grounded approach than Bell's by focusing on ideas in action in the colonial political sphere and their public reception.
Carl Berger’s *The Sense of Power*, originally published in 1970, took up the topic of imperial federation in Canada, which had laid dormant in historiography for decades. Berger challenged the view that Canadian nationalism and British imperialism in Canada were necessarily opposed, as he characterised Canadian support for imperial federalism as a form of Anglo-Canadian nationalism inspired by the loyalist legacy. Sense of Power only included a few pages on French-Canadians, however, and focused on where the loyalist legacy was strongest, Ontario. None of its central figures, George Denison, George Parkin and George Grant, were from Quebec. Moreover, the views of those necessary to implement a new federation scheme, i.e. political leaders, intentionally received little attention. Berger deliberately neglected the views of the movement's opponents as he sought to overcome a situation where, up to that point, "like some other lost causes, the imperial movement in Canada came to be known largely through the writings of its enemies," such as Goldwin Smith and Henri Bourassa. It is a testament to the influence of Berger's work that imperial federation is now more clearly associated with its proponents than its enemies. That said, even in his mention of imperial federation's enemies, Berger referenced Henri Bourassa rather than the earlier French-Canadian critic of imperial federation, Honoré Mercier. The prolific writings of Bourassa and his criticism of Canada's participation in the Boer War and World War I, have attracted greater

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66 Isabella McGoun, daughter of Sohmer Park orator and imperial federation proponent Archibald McGoun Jr., produced the first thesis found on imperial federalism in Canada titled "Imperial Federation Movement with Special Reference to Canada." After her thesis, except for a survey of proposals for imperial federation throughout the empire, attention given to the imperial federation movement in Canada was restricted to a few unpublished academic works between 1930-1970. See Seymour Ching-Yuan Cheng, *Schemes for the Federation of the British Empire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931).


68 Ibid., 134-147.

69 Ibid., 10.

70 Ibid., 6.
attention from historians and, in turn, reinforced, and possibly inflated Bourassa's importance as a French-Canadian nationalist leader and critic of imperial federalism relative to Mercier.71

The Sense of Power generated further debate as to whether imperial federation should be considered an expression of Canadian nationalism or an imperialism informed by pan-saxonism or Britannic idealism. Terry Cook argued that Parkin, the movement's most active promoter, was not a Canadian nationalist but someone who sought the unity of the British nation across the empire.72 Canada, Cook argued, was a keystone country in the empire according to Parkin, but the nation referred to in Parkin's Imperial Federation: The Problem of National Unity was the British nation, not a theretofore unformed Canadian nation.73 Douglas Cole, who was mainly in agreement with Cook, offered the most severe rebuttal to Berger's thesis. Canadian imperial federalists, Cole argued, were motivated by Britannic nationalism, not Canadian nationalism, and the confusion surrounding the nature of imperial federalism in Canada stemmed from a confusion of the concepts of nationalism, patriotism and imperialism. These were distinct concepts, Cole argued, stating that understanding was "only complicated by historians," in reference to Berger, "making Canadian imperialists into nationalists [...]." Nationalism referred to a nation and the relation between members of an ethnic group composing that nation, whereas patriotism related to devotion to state institutions, Cole stated. Canada was not understood as a nation in the years following Confederation, he insisted, at least not in the ethnic sense required

71 The only French-language study of imperial federation is sociologist Sylvie Lacombe's look at later iterations of the movement in English Canada, contrasted with the anti-militaristic critique of Canadian support for British imperialism by Henri Bourassa in Québec. Lacombe's work, however, does not focus on an analysis of opinions expressed in the press, Honoré Mercier or the temporary spike in interest for imperial federation marked by the activities of the Imperial Federation League. Sylvie Lacombe, La rencontre de deux peuples élus (Sainte-Foy, QC: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2002). Yvan Lamonde, Histoire Sociale des Idées au Québec: 1760-1896, Vol I. (Montréal: Fides, 2000), 454, 463, 492, in a passing mention, acknowledges Mercier's political influence and pivotal role in expressing an anti-imperialist critique that would be taken up by Henri Bourassa, editor of Le Devoir, at the beginning of the twentieth century. Mercier's ideas of empire, however, were not explored in Lamonde's book.
73 Ibid., 16, 18, 21.
for a Canadian nationalism. The ethnic identity of imperial federalists in Canada was British, not Canadian, and they therefore could not be Canadian nationalists. Thus, while French-Canadians could exhibit British patriotism, they could not, if one applies Cole's definition, exhibit British nationalism.

More recently, Peter Price has studied the role of the West Indies and racialised conceptions of empire within the imperial federalist movement. Critical to discussions about union between Canada and the West Indies were issues of race and the so-called "colour line;" i.e. whether to only include predominantly white colonies or not in an imperial federation. Most usefully, Price examined practical proposals and went beyond speculative exploration of the psyche of late-Victorian imperialists in Canada. Price's work expanded the study of imperial federalism to practical plans for integrating a diverse empire and challenged the notion of imperial federalism as a homogenous movement. A concern with racial homogeneity was just as present among annexationists and opponents of imperial federation in Québec.

The concepts of "race" and "nation" referred to in the primary sources, however, generally do not invoke biology, Darwinism, or colour, especially when used by Mercier. British-Canadians, imperial federalists or not, as well as French-Canadian leaders, often referred to "race" interchangeably with a culturally defined "nation" or "people." "Race", therefore, could

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75 Berger also failed to explain how imperial federation generated interest in Britain and other colonies if it was a form of Canadian nationalism. Similar confusion over nationalism and imperialism in the late-nineteenth century has plagued the historiography of other British settler colonies, notably Australia and New Zealand. Cole, "The Problem of “nationalism”," 162-163 and in passim. Neville Meaney, "Britishness and Australia: Some Reflections," The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History 31, no. 2 (2010): 121-135.

76 Tyler, Struggle for Imperial Unity, 93, made a similar point in 1938.

be used by inhabitants of Canada to refer to various cultural groups within their colony or province, such as "British race," "French race," or even "English-speaking race." The historical actors did not define their terms or use them consistently. Although they exhibited anxiety about being outnumbered by a diverse population within an imperial federation, especially one including Africa, the term "nationalism" used herein relates to the defence of the interests of a cultural group, mainly defined by language, religion and a sense of shared history or destiny. Imperial federalism evoked fears of French-Canadian marginalisation that were also felt with regards to Canada's white British population.78

What the historiography on imperial federation in Canada has revealed is a dearth of research about French-Canadian reactions to the movement during the life of the League as well as an absence of writings in French about that phase of the movement. As a result, the historiographical debates sparked by Berger's work did not address critical views on imperial federalism in Quebec. The concept of Québec as the homeland of a French-Canadian nation was markedly different from that of a Britannic nation that laid claims to multiple homelands across a globe-spanning empire.79 Despite a sense of their American identity and increasing francophilia among French-Canadian elites in Québec who drew inspiration from France, there was no competing European identity for French-Canadians in Quebec as was the case for British-

78 This is not to say that racism based on a misappropriation of the theory of evolution, among others, or a sense of racial superiority did not exist in Canada at the time or among the actors studied herein, notably imperial federalist Archibald McGoun. Parkin also referenced ancestry and used language imbued with a sense of racial superiority. The term "race" could be inconsistent even as used by the same person. Among French-Canadian nationalists, however, "race" was overwhelmingly understood as a cultural concept that was often used interchangeably with "nation" or synonymous with "ethnic group." This distinction was also noted by Berger's contemporary, Robert J. D. Page, "Carl Berger and the intellectual origins of Canadian imperialist thought, 1867-1914," Journal of Canadian Studies 5, no. 3 (1970): 42. On the gradual shift to a biological concept of "race" in Canada, see Williams, Blood Must Tell, 23-24. Price, "Steppingstones to Imperial Unity?," in passim, 251.
79 For the idea of Québec as a French-Canadian homeland during this period, see Silver, French-Canadian Idea of Confederation, 61.
Canadians. French-Canadian devotion to state institutions might have varied between provincial and federal institutions, to use Cole's distinction between nationalism and patriotism, but their national identity and even their patriotic devotion to their state were less fragmented than that of their British-Canadian counterparts. They were part of an empire but not one that they could truly call their own. Therefore, while debate lingers as to whether British-Canadian imperialism was a form of Canadian nationalism, the opposition to imperial federation mustered by Mercier was an expression of French-Canadian nationalism marked by a surprising degree of unity. While it bore the imprint of international pressures, this nationalism was tied to Québec's frustrations within Canada after Confederation, notably respect for French-Canadian rights and provincial autonomy.

As for the historiographical treatment of Honoré Mercier and his fellow critics of imperial federation, such as Laurent-Olivier David, only Mercier has received sustained attention from historians. The most in-depth work on Mercier, however, remains Robert Rumilly's two-tome biography, originally published in 1935 and revised in 1975. Rumilly did not cover Mercier's attacks against imperial federation although he briefly mentioned the Sohmer Park event of 1892 and Mercier's presence there. Rumilly emphasised Mercier's constant and sincere nationalism but acknowledged his charisma and use of spectacle to shape opinion. Though Berger mentioned Mercier's opposition to imperial federation, J.E. Tyler's The Struggle for Imperial Unity, published in 1938, offered the most extensive grasp of Mercier's views on

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80 Francophilia was not a loyalty to France's institutions but a form of cultural respect for France and its culture used by French-Canadian elites to distinguish themselves, Alex Tremblay, "Les effets de la francophilie sur les élites politiques Canadiennes-françaises: L'exemple de la famille Marchand (1855-1942)," Revue d'Études des Cantons-de-l'Est/Journal of Eastern Townships Studies 9, no. 41 (2013): 108, 111. Mercier's rapprochement with France was the subject of much tension between Mercier and his Conservative foes, Séraphin Marion, "Le Triangle Québec, Paris et Ottawa au cours des années 1888 et 1889," Le Cahier des Dix no. 42 (1979): 61-73; Rumilly, Honoré Mercier, Tome 2, 217-231.
81 Rumilly, Honoré Mercier, Tome 2, 340.
82 Ibid., 322.
imperial federalism. Tyler noted Mercier's opposition and attributed imperial federalism's unpopularity in Québec to it being viewed as "religious and racial bigotry" resulting from "the protestant associations of imperial federation." Tyler also mentioned opposition to "military and foreign complications" and the indifference of "the French-Canadian farmer" to world trade but did not explore its role in Mercier's strategy.

More recent works on Mercier have emphasised his government's policies as part of a progressive nationalist agenda though no article or book addressed his opposition to imperial federation exclusively. The common thread has been Mercier's nationalism and political savvy to present a united front against a centralising Conservative federal government. Indeed, Mercier was recognised as a "nationalist" in his time by commentators in the press. Despite this, though historian Denis Monière acknowledged Mercier as a key nationalist leader "who founded his power on public opinion," Mercier has remained overlooked or underrepresented in most histories of ideas, nationalism and anti-imperialism in Québec. This neglect is possibly due to the mimetic nature of general histories and modern historiography where scholarship builds on previous assumptions and conceptual frameworks. Due to being foremost a politician, Mercier lacked the written body of work of other nationalists, such as Henri Bourassa, that fueled many

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83 Tyler, Struggle for Imperial Unity, see Chapter XIII ("Canada and Imperial Federation") and passages relating to French-Canadians and Mercier at 93-94, 142-143, 147-151, in particular. Berger, Sense of Power, 139.
84 Tyler, Struggle for Imperial Unity, 149-150.
86 The Gazette, July 11, 1892, 4, sarcastically referred to Mercier as "the glory of Québec nationalism."
historical studies. This thesis is in keeping with the historiography that has recognised Mercier's lifelong nationalism, though it emphasises his importance as an influential nationalist leader, the pragmatic nature of his nationalism, and his critical role in shaping ideas on imperial federalism in Québec.

Arthur Silver's *The French-Canadian Idea of Confederation* argued that following a succession of national crises, such as the New-Brunswick schools question in 1871 and the hanging of Louis Riel in 1885, French-Canadian nationalism grew assertive and no longer confined itself to the plight of those in Quebec. Over time, the defence of French-Catholic interests outside Québec became central to a French-Canadian nationalism that came to view Confederation as a compact between nations, British and French-Canadian. While provincial autonomy was critical to this vision, nationalists did not see Quebec merely as a province, but as the homeland of a French-Canadian nation. Silver's other writings also demonstrated a shift in views about the British Empire among French-Canadians in Québec at the same time as their views of Confederation were changing. By the 1890s, many French-Canadians had gone from supporters of imperial military endeavours abroad and British institutions that protected their rights from the British-Canadian majority, Silver argued, to being disillusioned with colonial links when they proved unable to prevent assaults on French-Catholic rights in Canada.

Despite changing views of Confederation and the empire, Damien-Claude Bélanger has argued that many influential French-Canadian Conservatives in Québec openly expressed their

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88 For example, Ramsay Cook, ed., *French-Canadian Nationalism: An Anthology* (Toronto: Macmillan Canada, 1969); Michel Sarra-Bournet, and Jocelyn Saint-Pierre, eds., *Les nationalismes au Québec, du XIXe au XXIe siècle* (Sainte-Foy, Qc: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2001) are but a few of the overviews of French-Canadian nationalism found in academic literature that ignore Mercier's nationalism or critique of imperialism entirely.
89 Silver, *French-Canadian Idea of Confederation, 1864-1900*, 223, and in passim.
90 Ibid., 148.
91 Ibid., 61.
92 Silver, "Quelques considérations," 71-73.
loyalism. Notably, historian, Quebec City newspaper editor, and Conservative statesman, Thomas Chapais' loyalism was an expression of his religious faith and respect for British political institutions that indirectly enabled French-Canadian cultural survival in his opinion. Distinct from Upper Canadian loyalism, French-Canadian loyalty did not appeal to anglophilia nor to a loyalist heritage but mostly to respect for the monarch and conservative values of social order. As Bélanger argued, French-Canadian loyalism did not entail zealous support for British imperialism and could be coupled with a strong attachment to the French-language and Roman Catholicism. Nationalism and variants of loyalism could both transcend party lines. Indeed, as Jacques Monnet's Last Cannon Shot had demonstrated, French-Canadian nationalism at mid-century was often paired with strong expressions of loyalism towards British institutions and a conciliatory approach, in what he termed a "theory of mutual dependence." This sentiment persisted throughout the nineteenth century as Yvan Lamonde noted increased respect for England following responsible government in 1848 and Berger described a contrast between Mercier's "discordant separatist doctrines" and the loyalism of many French-Canadians. Indeed, Wilfrid Laurier, the federal Liberal leader, would come to embody strong French-Canadian loyalty well into the twentieth century despite his nationalist sympathies. French-Canadian loyalism in Quebec was sufficiently potent that Mercier and his acolytes found it necessary to

94 Ibid., 449.  
96 Bélanger, "Thomas Chapais, Loyaliste," 450, 443.  
98 Lamonde, Histoire Sociale des Idées, 384. Isabella McGoun, "Imperial Federation Movement," 49-50. In her view, most French-Canadians, including Laurier, were "passive imperialists" who preferred the status quo and opposed involvement in imperial wars abroad, rather than "anti-imperialists."
defuse charges of disloyalty while criticising the colonial link though opponents regularly accused him of resorting to "racial" prejudice.99 Mercier, however, could also be conciliatory despite his assertive nationalism and rejected blatant anti-British attitudes stating that "patriotism should be enlightened, sincere and generous and not based on exclusion" and without "hatred of other peoples."100 Therefore, despite a distancing from the empire by French-Canadians noted by Silver, the sentiment was not unanimous during Mercier's time in office as seen in the work of Bélanger and others. Criticism of imperial federation was not stridently "anti-British" or disloyal. This thesis seeks a balance within the broad competing trends identified by Silver and Bélanger.

Recent historiography of press history in Canada has been marked by Jeffrey McNairn's *The Capacity to Judge*.101 Its analysis drew on Jürgen Habermas' notion of the rational public sphere to analyse the role of the press in Upper Canada in shaping democratic political institutions.102 McNairn saw the Upper Canadian press as central to the emergence of a deliberative democracy and showed how public debate in the press led to a broader public seeing itself as the competent and legitimate arbiter of political decisions.103 Although McNairn's study examined Upper Canada from 1791 to 1854, the concepts and practices he examined have been picked up in other studies on the press outside of his original geographic area and timeframe.104

102 McNairn, *Capacity to Judge*, 9 and in passim.
104 Michael Eamon, *Imprinting Britain: Newspapers, Sociability, and the Shaping of British North America* (Kingston-Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), xvi, xvii, xix, an in passim, references the work of McNairn and explores the mediation of opinion and imprinting of British identity in Quebec City and Halifax from
The rationality of the public sphere, the deliberative process at the heart of liberal democracies, and the role of the press, in particular, provide jumping-off points for discussions of the press and political discourse. McNairn has acknowledged that despite appeals to reasoned debate, violence and spectacle remained part of the process of political deliberations. While public opinion was vaunted as a new authority, and reason as an ideal, discussion often fell short of this ideal, as McNairn admitted, and appeals to the authority of public opinion often served to legitimise the views of politicians and increased the temptation to control public opinion.¹⁰⁵

Since the publication of McNairn's book, Duncan Koerber has written on the intersection of political culture and the press in Upper Canada. Koerber argued that early political communities in Upper Canada were united through the press as "newspapers imagined parties, creating political labels and constructing meanings of sides."¹⁰⁶ The labelling of communities and opponents became more explicit as a result of this press mediation of political discourse.¹⁰⁷ Factionalism, a lack of transparency, and conspiratorial behaviour became common pejorative charges against opponents.¹⁰⁸ Further, Koerber has claimed that the "print public sphere" emphasised style over substance and was "almost entirely devoid of rational-critical political information or deliberation" though it still had value from an electoral standpoint. The growth of a competitive press and political faction, which would morph into parties, promoted public participation, drama and emotion.¹⁰⁹ The expansion of a competitive and partisan commercial

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¹⁰⁵ McNairn, *Capacity to Judge*, 65, 175.
¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 132-133.
press in late-nineteenth-century Montreal fostered a similar approach to public political discourse where spectacle and the fictions of the press were paramount.\textsuperscript{110}

Yvan Lamonde's \textit{Histoire sociale des idées au Québec} documented influential ideas and practices in Québec, as well as the fora in which they were communicated. Lamonde argued that French-Quebecers in Montreal were enthusiastic adopters of British-Canadian associative practices from 1840-1880 after which political clubs and partisan socialisation became prevalent.\textsuperscript{111} As Québec historian Jean-Marie Fecteau argued, such organisations represented both a form of social cohesion among individuals with common interests, as well as a fragmentation of the nation into interest groups. Such groups sought to influence the "general will" as much as they promoted conforming to it.\textsuperscript{112} Such associations were, as Jeffrey McNairn has argued, "experiments in democratic sociability" that served as a training grounds for broader participation in the democratic processes and provided credibility to the notion of public opinion.\textsuperscript{113} The tension between individual participation in Québec's democratic process as well as partisan and political club activity was most evident in the 1892 Sohmer Park event.

Much of the electoral practices and legislation in Québec, including municipal voting laws in Montreal, developed with the growth of responsible government and an expanding

\textsuperscript{110} Rutherford, \textit{A Victorian Authority: The Daily Press in Late-Nineteenth-Century Canada} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 9-35, 53. Montreal's commercial press expanded rapidly due to increased literacy, technological innovations and declining newsprint prices. Rutherford refers to these as "the prerequisites of mass communication." On growth factors, see also Jean de Bonville, \textit{La Presse Québécoise de 1884 à 1914: Genèse d'un Média de Masse} (Sainte-Foy, QC: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1988), 33 and 268; and Galichan, \textit{Honoré Mercier: La politique et la culture}, 102.

\textsuperscript{111} Lamonde, \textit{Histoire Sociale des Idées}, 406, 467.

\textsuperscript{112} Jean-Marie Fecteau, "État et associationnisme au XIXe siècle québécois: éléments pour une problématique des rapports État/société dans la transition au capitalisme," in \textit{Colonial Leviathan: State Formation in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Canada} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 137-140, on "general will" see 138. In the period from 1850-1870, Martin Petitclerc saw associational life among working-class groups as a means to not only foster group solidarity but to ensure participation in a complex liberal society with autonomy from government and Church institutions by requiring unanimous votes and disciplinary action for bad behaviour, Martin Petitclerc, "Classes populaires et culture démocratique au Québec lors de la transition au libéralisme (1850-1870)," \textit{Bulletin d’histoire politique} 14, no. 2 (2006): 75, 79.

\textsuperscript{113} McNairn, \textit{Capacity to Judge}, 66, 69.
franchise under the united Canada (1840-1867) and used the laws of that period as templates. Studies of electoral practices in Upper Canada are therefore relevant to a study of Quebec's late-nineteenth-century political culture where many shared practices continued. Most notably, Ian Radforth has explored spectacle and violence in nomination and electoral processes. In his examination of political assemblies in Toronto in the period 1841-1874, Radforth demonstrated the aggressive nature of not-so-deliberative assemblies that often degenerated into violence. While spectacle was central to these events, they were opportunities for people without the right to vote, including women and the underaged, to participate in democratic fora, such as nomination assemblies and controlling access to polling stations. The emphasis on behaviour varied according to the partisan affiliation of the paper as each sought to distinguish their version of respectable behaviour from the unworthy behaviour of their opponents. Jack Little's recent study of political picnics as accessible deliberative spaces in Ontario also underscored the fusion of entertainment and politics and emphasised some commonalities among electoral customs in Quebec and Ontario. These events increased the reach of parties and maintained contact with sympathisers outside the official campaign. The press also allowed disenfranchised members of society to participate in discussions about government.

Ian Radforth also explored the role of reasoned deliberation, including its limits, and the nature of the public sphere in the context of agitation over the Rebellion Losses Bill. Appeals to respectable deliberation were often in competition with the temptation to resort to spectacle, labelling, and even violence when structured, reasoned discussion failed. Despite this, Radforth

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114 Grittner, "Bludgeons and Ballots," 326.
115 Ian Radforth, "Motley Crowds and Splendid Assemblies: Press Depictions of Election Culture in Mid-Victorian Toronto," Histoire sociale/Social history 51, no. 103 (2018): in passim, 8 (women), 9 (nomination assemblies were often attended by people who did not have the right to vote).
117 Little, "Picnics and Politics," 37, 45; Radforth, "Motley Crowds," 8-9; McNairn, Capacity to Judge, 167.
argued that violent "tactics were widely deplored in the Reform press and by some Conservatives, too. [...] Deliberative democracy came out the winner – though lively street confrontations would never disappear from the Canadian scene." Building on Radforth’s observation, though recognising that the victory of deliberative democracy was far from complete, this thesis recognises appeals to respectable conduct, and deliberative fora, including the press, while claiming that the discourse was not strictly reasoned even if rarely violent. Rhetoric remained aggressive, hyperbolic, partisan, and shaped by theatrics.

While earlier practices continued in milder forms, Renaud Séguin has argued that many political reforms that sought to restrict corruption and rowdism limited political participation. More civilised forms of doing politics emerged with the "cult of the written word," and genteel forms of debate gradually replaced the rowdy spectacle of earlier election culture. Conversion was long and partial and required repeated appeals to respectable conduct, culminating in what was dubbed a period of "salvation by the law" where legal reforms sought to reduce corruption and violence. The appeals to civility, however, were also part of the "ritualised confrontation" and political spectacle as rhetoric sought to label those who resorted to irresponsible or irrational behaviour as unworthy of participation in the public sphere. Mercier's oratory and competitive streak, as well as the Sohmer Park event, exemplify these points.

120 Séguin, "Pour une nouvelle synthèse," 98. McNairn, Capacity to Judge, 17; Martin Pâquet, "Le sport de la politique: Transferts et adaptations de la culture politique britannique au Québec, 1791-1960," in Des cultures en contact: visions de l'Amérique du Nord francophone, ed. Jean Morency (Québec, Nota Bene: 2005): 156-160. Pâquet has argued that British sport culture and British parliamentarianism shaped Quebec's political culture as seen in the ritualised confrontation and the appeals to "fair play" at political assemblies and in the press. On continuing infatuation of French-Canadians in Québec with the oratorical prowess of politicians and confrontation-as-spectacle, see Hamelin, Moeurs électorales, 100, who reference observations from journalist Edmond de Nevers (1862-1906).
This thesis engages with the insights found in the precited works while avoiding overt theorisation and the strictures of schools and does not seek to prove or disprove the Habermasian theory of the rational public sphere. This thesis acknowledges the growing authority of public opinion forged in the press, as demonstrated by McNairn, though it applies it within the context of late nineteenth-century Montreal's political culture. However, it also explores the limitations of rational deliberation in the public sphere exposed in the work of McNairn, Koeber and Radforth, as seen in the debates on imperial federalism.

Having provided essential historical context as well as the historiographical foundations of this thesis, the next section will discuss sources and methodology. Montreal newspapers form the bulk of the primary sources used to gauge support for imperial federalism in Montreal and the impact of Mercier's critique. By 1890, Montreal was the largest newspaper market in Canada and The Star led with the largest circulation. Reflecting the rising influence of French-speaking Montrealers, the rapidly growing populist Conservative paper La Presse, founded in 1884, was the most important French-language daily in Québec. Although an increase in the number of Liberal papers was underway, as a result of the rising influence of Liberal politicians Mercier and Wilfrid Laurier, the most widely read papers defended the interests of the Conservative party. All ten daily newspapers, six French-language and four English-language, and the short-lived Mercier-allied weekly Le Clairon, are used to explore the press' coverage across linguistic and partisan divides.\footnote{121 Their language and affiliation are noted in the following Table 1.}

### Table 1 – Montreal Press in 1890 and 1892

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>LANGUAGE</th>
<th>PARTISAN AFFILIATION (March 1890)</th>
<th>PARTISAN AFFILIATION (November 1892)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Le Canadien</em></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Conservative (Québec City)</td>
<td>Liberal (Montreal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Le Clairon</em> (Weekly)</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>No longer in print.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>L'Étendard</em>&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Independent Pro-Mercier</td>
<td>Independent Anti-Mercier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>La Minerve</em></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Le Monde</em>&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>Independent (Pro-Mercier)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Montreal Daily Herald</em></td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Gazette</em></td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Star</em></td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Independent-conservative</td>
<td>Independent-conservative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>La Patrie</em>&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Independent-liberal</td>
<td>Independent-liberal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>La Presse</em></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<sup>a</sup> Formerly Conservative but consistently socially conservative and nationalist;  
<sup>b</sup> Formerly ultramontane paper turned Conservative under ownership of federal Cabinet member, Hector Langevin, in 1890. In 1892, sympathetic to Mercier under new ownership.  
<sup>c</sup> Ideologically liberal, pro-free trade but anti-Mercier and staunchly Protestant.  
<sup>d</sup> Radical Liberal, annexationist, and anti-Conservative. Often supported Mercier's policies.

In addition, the debates of the Québec Legislative Assembly are a unique source on imperial federation as they have not received the attention of a single historian despite providing detailed examples of the Mercier government's framing of imperial federation. While it is tempting to see the press as the sole marker of public opinion, it was a tenet of nineteenth-

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century British political culture, which influenced Québec's political culture, that there existed an "intimate relationship between parliamentary and public opinion" and that the legislative body represented, to a large degree public opinion, as historian James Thompson pointed out.

However, "the public was broader than the electorate," he added, and parliamentary debates were increasingly "subservient to outside opinion," which was largely shaped by the press. As Jocelyn Saint-Pierre has shown, the parliamentary press gallery at the Québec Legislative Assembly drew on British, American and French influences in press coverage of legislative bodies. The press gallery was a unique institution as a result of the collaboration among journalists of different newspapers and the increased reliability of the reports it produced. As these reports were less overtly partisan than the opinion pieces written by an editor or other contributors, they constitute a more stable reference point against which to analyse diverse commentary in the press. These various sources and fora, therefore, must be understood as being in communication with each other and all providing insight into a broader public opinion. While many people's opinions will be left out of even broad definitions of "public opinion," the use of many newspapers in French and English, across partisan divides, to examine multiple events, allows for a close approximation of public opinion on the issue of imperial federalism.

Finally, to better understand how Mercier shaped public opinion on imperial federation, ideas on public opinion formation that inform this thesis' interpretation must be clarified. Definitions of public opinion vary, though as Carroll J. Glynn et al. pointed out, there is much "overlap" among the different concepts of public opinion. The public opinion on imperial

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124 Jocelyn Saint-Pierre, *La Tribune de la Presse à Québec depuis 1960* (Québec: Septentrion, 2016), 41-42. In 1890, although the assembly debates were published as accurately as possible, they are not completely verbatim as is currently the case. Ibid, 191.
125 Ibid., 18, 21, 147.
federation in Montreal, as understood herein, can be included in the overlapping definitions of public opinion as "a reflection of majority beliefs," as the result of "a clash of group interests" or public debate, and as the reflection of "media and elite influence."  

As Jeffrey McNairn has noted, public opinion is not simply the sum of all the individual opinions held by members of a group, and it is more accurately described as a consensus opinion, one that represents the common view of a collectivity following deliberation. That common view, however, can reflect elite, and less than rational, influences. Accepting that analysis of multiple sources can reveal public opinion, the process of public opinion formation accepted herein corresponds to an opinion held by a majority of people who were exposed to an idea through interactions of varying quality wherein this opinion was primarily shaped by elite influence. In this case, the elite were Mercier and his allies, and subsequently, the press. In addition to explicit hostility, reticence to publicly express support for imperial federation further pointed to a hostile public opinion since publicly expressed views are often those that carry the least risk of social ostracisation for the speaker.

Mercier and his contemporaries regularly appealed to “public opinion” to justify their positions as much as they sought to influence it. Early conceptions of public opinion generally

126 Carroll J. Glynn et al., Public Opinion, 3rd edition (Boulder, CO., U.S.A.: Westview Press, 2016), 13-20. A definition of public opinion as "an aggregation of individual opinions" is of little interest from a social-historical standpoint as it ignores deliberation and processes of opinion formation, but also because of its inaccessible methodology for studying past events due to potential respondents no longer being alive, Ibid., 23. As John Durham Peters has noted, for public opinion to exist, it must be an opinion expressed in public, as opposed to private opinion, which is often what is expressed in modern polling. John Durham Peters, "Historical Tensions in the Concept of Public Opinion," in Public Opinion and the Communication of Consent, ed. Theodore L. Glasser, and Charles T. Salmon (New York: Guilford Press, 1995), 20-21. Though appeals to public opinion often assumed that the public was predominantly male, when possible, this thesis highlights the participation of women in the debates about imperial federalism, most notably at the Sohmer Park event.

127 McNairn, Capacity to Judge, 177. As McNairn and Koerber have shown, a public can be broad and even constituted through interaction in the press. McNairn, Capacity to Judge, 116. Koerber, "Early Political communities," in passim.

referred to a majority opinion with the power to censure. However, the concept of public opinion increasingly became linked to actors whose opinion was deemed worthy of informing and legitimising government action and was often used synonymously with "general will" or the "people's voice" in democracies.\(^\text{129}\) According to Yvan Lamonde, public opinion, as understood in its political sense, developed in Québec as a result of the interaction between diverse groups, democratic institutions, and the spread of the press following the British Conquest of Canada. From the beginning, newspapers would be in debate with each other and transmit competing visions between English-language and French-language inhabitants of Québec.\(^\text{130}\) In the period studied herein, “public opinion,” though not defined, appeared frequently in the press and was invoked by parties for support as a majoritarian, allegedly informed view on a salient political issue.\(^\text{131}\) Public opinion was often invoked to silence critics, however, as it still carried enough opprobrium to be tinged with a sense of moral and political authority. Public opinion as understood in nineteenth-century Montreal, therefore, fits within the framework of overlapping definitions adopted by this study.

Mercier, who like many Québec politicians, had worked as a journalist in his young adulthood saw the press as a critical tool for public literacy as well as political education. Newspapers, Mercier believed, were "the most efficient, quickest way to spread a political teaching" and he saw the press as "the first power of the country."\(^\text{132}\) While Mercier was

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\(^{129}\) For the early and changing concept of public opinion, see in the classic article by Hans Speier, "Historical development of public opinion," *American Journal of Sociology* 55, no. 4 (1950): 376-379. Speier noted an increased recognition of public opinion among statesmen, including in foreign affairs, after the Congress of Vienna in 1815, Ibid., 385. Though dated and a somewhat complex attempt to codify practices of historical study of public opinion, Lee Benson, "An approach to the scientific study of past public opinion," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (1967): 524, defined public opinion as a political position "on proposed, future, present, or past government actions." *La Patrie*, November 29, 1892, 1 (appeal to "people's voice" as public opinion).

\(^{130}\) Lamonde, *Histoire Sociale des Idées*, 18-19, 48-49.

\(^{131}\) *The Gazette* referred to "public opinion" in 1,185 issues from 1885-1893 as per newspapers.com full-text search.

influential in framing political issues, he was cognisant of the press' crucial role in the process. Further, the importance given to the views of Mercier and other influential members of the political elite and the press is necessary if one is to consider the power dynamics at the heart of political communication. Ownership of the press organs was dependent on political and economic influence, and the views reflected partisan perspectives. While attempts were made to document views among the broader population, and despite frequent appeals for more "history from below," elite formation of public opinion is a common thread throughout this thesis. The primary sources, and much recent research on political opinion formation, support the idea that political opinion is often not a bottom-up process but a top-down process with rhetoric and spectacle filling in for critical debate.133

Indeed, deliberation does not necessarily mean that a discussion was strictly rational, independent of pressures to conform, devoid of emotion, or undertaken in full possession of the facts. The effects of framing in political communication resulting from potent rhetoric tied to a salient theme are important in how public opinion takes shape as politicians and the media reinforce each other's frames and the acceptable terminology describing an issue.134 A highly polarised and partisan context, as found in Montreal's press, would have heightened these elite framing effects.135 Further, new topics tend to bear the impact of elite framing more than older

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issues and early exposure to the framing of an idea increases the effect of elite framing. In-depth knowledge is also not essential to opinion formation since exposure to an idea with salience can suffice, with repeated exposure further ingraining the opinion.

Such observations are not judgments on the public’s intellectual ability. As Chong and Druckman pointed out, "strong frames" do not always mean "intellectually or morally superior arguments." Imperial federation, as a complex scheme with global implications, was an issue where a barrier would inevitably exist between leaders and the people. It was suitable for elite framing because the public could not have a direct experience of it and what they knew of it was provided by their elites who tied it to known concerns, such as provincial autonomy and French-Canadian rights. The lack of information only made imperial federation more suspect among the public and made the familiar charge of a lack of transparency on the part of political enemies resonant. While much of the discussion was devoid of rational or even reasoned debate, that did not imply that the actors were themselves irrational as resorting to heuristics can often be the rational course of action on complex matters outweighing the human capacity to process information. Given the information available to the public, and the repeated attacks made at the highest level by Mercier, albeit theatrical, the hostility to imperial federation in Montreal was a rational response whether it resulted from strictly rational deliberation or not.

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136 Scheufele, "Framing as a theory," 116 (impact on new topics); Chong and Druckman, "Framing theory," 120 (impact of early exposure). The effects are then often amplified through later discussions in assemblies or face-to-face communication, see James N. Druckman, Matthew S. Levendusky, and Audrey McLain, "No need to watch: How the effects of partisan media can spread via interpersonal discussions," American Journal of Political Science 62, no. 1 (2018): 99-112.


Chapter Three:
"Cette chambre est hostile à la fédération impériale":
Mercier's formal campaign against imperial federalism - 1885-1890

When Mercier became premier in 1887, French-Canadian cultural survival and provincial autonomy framed the issue of imperial federation in Québec. Indeed, these themes were central to the previous 1886 election and Mercier's motivation behind the organisation of the Inter-Provincial Conference of 1887. While federationists seeking to discuss their project had a modest platform in Montreal since the founding of the League's branch in 1885, Mercier's assault on imperial federalism would be relentless and use all platforms available to him from the beginning of his premiership. In a speech at the Club National in Montreal in 1888, Mercier launched a detailed attack on imperial federation. Delivered almost two years before David's motion condemning imperial federation in the assembly, Mercier referred to imperial federation as "another project of the tories destined to destroy provincial autonomy and to launch us into a form of disguised legislative union" among Canadian provinces or with Britain – evoking the 1840 Union and Macdonald's preferred alternative to Confederation, which created the separate province of Québec in 1867. Further tying the movement to his partisan enemies, he stated that Macdonald was the soul behind this "anti-provincial movement" because he wanted to move the dispute with the provinces to a playing field beyond their reach. In other words, Mercier suspected Macdonald of seeking to pursue imperial federation to exclude the provinces from negotiations and weaken their status in a new scheme. Emphasising once again the link between Conservatives and imperial federation, Mercier stated that La Minerve, "the French tory party

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organ" in Montreal, had complacently reported Lord Stanley's favourable comments on imperial federation and that it was clear that the order was for "all tories, French or English, to support imperial federation." Mercier believed that the situation was dire and warned of the risk of imperial wars and military draft, which could "scatter Québec's sons around the World" and "force us to pay a tax of blood and money." Imperial federation, he added, was "an odious regime" and a "machiavelic plan" that he vowed to fight. He added that its leaders were getting bolder as evidenced by the nomination of a new Governor-General, Lord Stanley, a proponent of imperial federation. Lord Stanley was coming, Mercier declared, to accomplish Lord Durham's unfinished work of "national destruction." In light of Mercier's repeated use of expressions such as "French-Canadian race" and "nation" and since Durham's 1839 *Report on the Affairs of British North America* predated Confederation, the nation to be destroyed in Mercier's estimation was not a new Canadian nation but the French-Canadian nation. The reference to Lord Durham's assimilationist designs, temporarily implemented in 1840 through the union of Lower Canada and Upper Canada, recycled a common refrain from the early liberal French-Canadian opponents to Confederation who denounced it as fulfilling "Durham's wicked plans" to destroy "the French race in Canada".  

A month later, Mercier used his platform in the Legislative Assembly to assert "imperial federation, there is our enemy" and added that its proponents were "our worst enemy." Mercier skirted a fine line between loyalism and anti-imperialism as he clarified that the imperial parliament was not the enemy and that "no one could doubt our loyalty to England," whom he claimed to "respect as a son respects his mother." Imperial federation, however, was but a plan

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3 Honoré Mercier, *Discours prononcé la 10 avril 1888 au banquet du Club national* (Montréal, 1888), 18 (all quotes).

for a "few Englishmen accustomed to crawling at the foot of the throne," he claimed, in a recurring allusion to "excessive" or irrational loyalty marked by immaturity. In a taunt he would repeat in the Assembly in 1890, he exclaimed that none of his critics in the Assembly would dare endorse imperial federation openly.⁵ Imperial federation had become a sufficient potential political liability in Québec by the autumn of 1889 that even Macdonald's Conservative lieutenants in Québec were urging him in private correspondence to distance himself from the movement.⁶ At its most basic level, Mercier's critique of imperial federation combined his concerns for the French-Canadian nation and the protection of provincial autonomy and drew on rhetoric borrowed from the earliest critics of Confederation.

The March 6, 1890, motion in the Québec Legislative Assembly condemning imperial federation put forth by sitting-member of Mercier's government, Laurent-Olivier David, echoed Mercier's rhetoric and provided the most detailed critique of imperial federation in Québec yet. David's motion illustrated that imperial federation was also a campaign issue for Mercier as it was presented with the upcoming campaign in mind. As a result of the Mercier government's successful framing of imperial federation, the Montreal press, regardless of language or partisanship, was either hostile to imperial federation or refused to embrace it. The motion's adoption, therefore, became national— even international — news, with some seeing it as a sign of annexationist sympathies, disloyal or unnecessary.⁷

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⁵ Honoré Mercier, May 16, 1888, Débats de la Législature de la Province de Québec, Deuxième Session du Sixième Parlement de la Province de Québec ouverte le 15 mai et close le 12 juillet, 1888. (Québec: Imprimerie de L.-J. Demers et Frère, 1888), 75. Mercier's comment was in response to the opposition's claim that he was contradicting himself by arguing for autonomy at the Interprovincial Conference of 1887 while asking that disallowance be removed from the federal government to be exercised by London. This thesis' title, "La fédération impériale, voilà notre ennemie" is drawn from this speech.


⁷ The motion was reported by dozens of newspapers far outside of Montreal. For example, Quebec Weekly Chronicle, March 13, 1890, 1 (denounced Mercier's use of "force"); The Ottawa Journal, Evening edition, March 7, 1890, 1; The Salt Lake Herald, March 8, 1890, 1 (Salt Lake City, Utah); Daily Nebraska State Journal, March 8,
At the opening of the session of the Assembly, on Thursday, March 6, 1890, David proposed a motion, seconded by premier Mercier, condemning imperial federation. The preamble of the motion made two claims. First, that the "declarations and actions of influential men in the politics of Canada and England" gave a certain official character to the imperial federation movement. Second, that "considering the constitutional changes proposed would endanger the material and political position of Canada and of Québec, in particular, it has become necessary to make the Province's sentiments known." The motion resolved as follows: "Resolved, That this Chamber is hostile to imperial federation, which would prevent Canada from having, with the peoples of the American continent, relations most favourable to its commercial and industrial prosperity, as well as to its social and political development." [author's translation]

The motion, indicative of the distancing of French-Canadians from the empire, thus positioned Canada's prosperity within a continental, rather than an imperial, context. Support for greater commercial trade with the U.S. was not necessarily indicative of annexationist sympathies, however. David's speech in support of the motion lasted almost two hours and touched upon multiple themes, principally: that imperial federation was a serious threat; that Conservatives in Québec and Ottawa supported imperial federalism; the threat of an imperial military draft; anxieties over the ethnic diversity of the empire; and the benefits of continental

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1890, 2; The Hartford Courant, March 8, 1890, 1; Pall Mall Gazette, March 8, 1890, 4 (London, U.K.); The Manchester Guardian, March 8, 1890, 8 (Manchester, U.K.). Many American newspapers, large and small, reported the resolution as front-page news. It is possible that this reflected hostility towards imperial federation in the U.S. and hopes for annexation. For an example of anti-imperial federation, pro-annexation reporting in the U.S. press, referencing earlier events in Québec, see Chicago Daily Tribune, December 12, 1889. ("The Future of Canada").

8 David, Débats, 1890, 577. The original French: "Considérant que les changements constitutionnels projetés, mettraient en danger la position matérielle et politique du Canada, et de la province de Québec en particulier, et qu'il est devenu nécessaire, en conséquence, de faire connaître le sentiment de cette Province à ce sujet [...]".

9 Ibid., 577. "Résolu, Que cette Chambre est hostile à la fédération impériale, qui empêcherait le Canada d'avoir, avec les peuples du continent américain, les relations les plus favorables à sa prospérité commerciale et industrielle, et à son développement social et politique." Despite covering the event, English-language newspapers did not distribute a translation of the text of the motion.
free trade, flirtation with annexation and French-Canadian loyalty. All these themes were suffused with a direct or indirect critique of Confederation as experienced by French-Canadians and a defence of Québec's provincial autonomy under a centralising Conservative federal government. These points will be presented thematically, highlighting their basis in frustration with Confederation, though David did not address the issues in a systematic or linear fashion and revisited them throughout his speech.¹⁰

To ground his argument, David began by claiming that Canada was witnessing one of the most turbulent moments in its history since many "national and political complications predicted by those who had fought Confederation were now coming true." David, like Mercier, who had opposed Confederation and split with the Conservative party over the issue in 1867, claimed that the "seeds of discord" contained in the 1867 constitution were naturally bearing fruits.¹¹ Though annexationists in the rest of Canada, such as Goldwin Smith, were critical of imperial federalism and saw annexation as a means to remedy Confederation's problems, it was not federalism, anxiety over minority status, nor a lack of transparency reminiscent of Confederation's negotiations that informed their critique. Though few Canadian opponents of imperial federation were as vocal as Mercier, Liberal supporters of the status quo in English-speaking provinces also did not focus heavily on Confederation's beginnings or its inability to defend minority rights to attack imperial federalism.¹²

¹⁰ David, Débats, 1890, in passim. The Conservative La Presse, March 10, 1890, 2, and the Liberal Montreal Daily Herald, March 10, 1890, 4, both claim that the speech lasted two hours.
¹² New-Brunswick Liberal George E. Fenety published one of the few Canadian English-language pamphlets critical of imperial federalism. The crux of his argument was that the rush to imperial federation was based on "scares" and an erroneous view of a declining empire or a militarily weakening England. His concern was largely with military expenditures in an imperial federation and the little colonial interests in defending other parts of the empire, though he admitted that wars were unlikely in what he saw as a time of overwhelming peace. His only reference to Confederation was that the fear of American annexation or Fenian invasion led to appeals for Confederation and that a similar negative and fearful view was fuelling imperial federalists. Curiously, he quoted from the Liberal Montreal
Further seeking to justify the need for the motion, David argued that the imperial federation movement could no longer be ignored, and it was his duty to warn the populace before it was too late. Invoking the alarm of Roman senators to warn of a danger to the state requiring a united front, he shouted "Caveant consules!" as he likened the threat of imperial federation to Confederation's adoption. Those who had been promised the opportunity to approve or oppose Confederation, he argued, were then told that it was too late to oppose it. Imperial federation must be taken seriously, David argued, invoking many events, namely speeches by Canada's High Commissioner in London, Sir Charles Tupper, before the League in England; a speech on imperial federation by Macdonald during the 1887 Imperial Conference in London; the resolutions adopted at that Conference; the many provincial lieutenant-governors acting as vice-presidents of the League; and the names of nearly sixty members of the House of Commons and Senate claimed as members in the League's literature.  

All the high-ranking supporters of imperial federalism mentioned by David were Conservatives. Therefore, once having established the threat of imperial federation, David sought to frame it as a partisan issue by demonstrating that Conservatives in Québec and Ottawa supported it. This was an easy task considering that many prominent Conservatives were listed as members in the League's brochures. In March 1890, all seven provincial lieutenant-governors were Conservatives, and though David did not name which were members of the League, its literature listed four of them as members. A fifth, Alexander Campbell of Ontario, was likely

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_Herald_, despite it being the Montreal newspaper with the lowest circulation, and a speech by Honoré Mercier, which were critical of imperial federation. Mercier's critique was, therefore, being picked up outside Québec. Fenety's arguments, however, lacked Mercier's concerns over minority status in Confederation or an imperial federation, as well as Mercier's critique of Confederation or pessimism about the prospects of war. George E. Fenety, _Imperial Federation_ (Fredericton, N.B.: September 1888), 21, and in passim. 

13 David, _Débats_, 579.

14 Ibid. David named the following Conservatives: Charles Tupper (579), John A. Macdonald (579, 580-581, 584), Israel Tarte of newspaper _Le Canadien_ (580), Alexander Tilloch Galt (581), and Dalton McCarthy (585).
sympathetic to the movement as he had represented Canada at the Imperial Conference of 1887, instigated by the League, alongside vocal imperial federalist Sir Alexander Fleming. David argued that the best proof that imperial federation was inimical to Québec's interests was that the Conservative "fanatic Dalton McCarthy," well-known in Québec for his animosity towards French-Catholic nationalism and Mercier especially, following the Jesuit land issue, was its president. David drew a parallel between Confederation being imposed by Conservatives, and their supposed desire to do the same with imperial federation. He sought to tie imperial federation to the Conservative opposition and their press organs, most notably, Joseph-Israel (Israel) Tarte of the Conservative Québec City daily Le Canadien, who was a member of the League. The partisan nature of the motion was thus paramount and sought to turn the electorate against the Conservative party as much as it sought to turn people against imperial federation.

As to the interests defended by the League, David asserted that the objectives of imperial federation were to ensure colonial markets for the metropolis and military protection for England. Quoting Macdonald's recent assurances that, if needed, Canada would be ready to defend the empire, David added sarcastically that "those are nice sentiments" before being interrupted by the applause of the Conservative opposition. David responded that he could only conclude that such applause meant that they agreed with imperial federation and Macdonald's promise. If war were to break out between "England" and the U.S., David added, Québec would be forced to "spend our money and our blood to ensure the victory of European interests over

15 The lieutenant-governors who were listed as members of the League represented British-Columbia, Manitoba, P.E.I., and New-Brunswick. Only the then lieutenant-governors of Québec and Nova Scotia could not be tied to the League. Donald Swainson, “CAMPBELL, Sir ALEXANDER,” in Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vol. 12, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–. Imperial Federation League, Constitution (Toronto: 1890).

16 David, Débats, 580. Tarte also contributed on a few occasions to the Imperial Federation League Journal. On one occasion, Tarte, whom the League recognised as a friend, wrote to defend the loyalty of French-Canadians towards the empire following remarks in a previous issue which questioned their loyalty. See Joseph-Israel Tarte, "The French Canadians: Letter to the Editor of Imperial Federation," Imperial Federation League Journal, Vol. IV, January to December 1889 (October 1, 1889), 224-226.
American interests, which are our own." This was the same point made by Mercier in April 1888 at the Club National, thus demonstrating the consistent messaging against imperial federation and Mercier's influence on David's speech. Referencing League brochures that emphasised imperial defence, David claimed that Canadians would have to fight in "England's" wars around the world, notably to put down "negro" rebellions in Central Africa. As Québec would have a minority of seats in an imperial parliament compared to England's, Québec would have little say in the matter. Although French-Canadian "voyageurs" had participated in their first imperial military effort abroad to suppress a revolt in the Sudan in 1884-85, David did not reference this experience specifically. However, his example revealed an uneasiness among opponents of imperial federation about the racial diversity of the empire and emphasised a lack of shared interests. It also echoed French-Canadian fears of increased marginalisation resulting from their minority status.\footnote{David, D\'ebats, 1890, 580 (interrupted by opposition's applause), 582 ("spend our money and blood," and rebellions). Honoré Mercier, Discours prononcé la 10 avril 1888 au banquet du Club national, 18. "England" is often used by David and other French-Canadian contemporaries as shorthand for Great Britain. Only one reference to rebellions in "Africa" was found in Mercier's speeches. Following Riel's hanging, Mercier asked why "ultra-loyal" British Canadians could not forgive Riel whereas the Queen forgave African rebels in rebellions that cost far more, Honoré Mercier, "À propos de l'affaire Riel et de l'action maléfique de Sir John A. Macdonald: Réplique au discours du trône, Assemblée Législative du Québec, April 9, 1886," in Claude Corbo, Honoré Mercier: Discours 1873-1893 (Montréal: Del Busso, 2015), 200. Many Conservative newspapers had supported French-Canadian participation in the Sudan/Nile expedition to retrieve General Charles Gordon and defended French-Canadian loyalty in the face of doubts among some British-Canadians, Arthur Silver, "Quelques considérations sur les rapports du Canada français avec l'impérialisme britannique au XIXe siècle," Canadian Journal of African Studies 15, no. 1 (1981): 65-66.}

In addition to the risk of an imperial military draft to fight foreign wars that Québec would be unable to resist, David addressed the potential problems of sharing democratic assemblies with African nations, further illustrating that the imperial "colour line" that divided imperial federalists also made their opponents uneasy. Though the role of African colonies in a federation was ambiguous in the League's literature, David asked bluntly: "What right do the negroes of Central Africa have to impose their will on us?" Again, grounding his critique of
imperial federation in a critique of Confederation, David argued that if Confederation was not working "with only five or six provinces," a federation of "ten or twelve countries with opposite interests" certainly could not work. Likening such an institution to a "tower of Babel," David questioned the workability of such a diverse institution in a context where assaults on French-language and Catholic rights in Canada fuelled a French-Canadian nationalism focused on cultural survival. Expressing French-Canadian fears about minority status that were voiced at Confederation and since aggravated by their experience within a British-dominated Canada, David added that "we would certainly be crushed." While praising British political institutions, he argued that the "union of separate provinces" in an imperial federation could never work because they "had no common interest," and were "separated by distance, mores and languages." Thus, while David was mostly concerned with African nations, he also did not claim any common interests with other British colonies.18

While imperial federation was concerned with England's interests, Canadians' interests, David said, required the ability to conclude treaties with the peoples of America and to gain access to the "greatest market in the World," the American market.19 With the ills of Confederation and threat of imperial federation, Canadians were now asking if annexation was not a better solution, he claimed. Likely seeking to avoid charges of disloyalty for raising the possibility of annexation, David added that if he "speaks of annexation, it is only in the event it becomes a necessity [...] imposed on us by those who would want to impose a change in our political system on us." The expectation, therefore, was that imperial federation would be

18 By 1890, there were seven Canadian provinces. David, Débats, 1890, 582-583. Original text: "De quel droit les nègres de l'Afrique méridionale pourraient-ils nous imposer leur volonté?" (582), and "nous serions infailliblement écrasés" (583). For similar concerns over French-Canadian survival expressed during discussions on Confederation, see Silver, French-Canadian Idea of Confederation, 52.
19 David, Débats, 584.
imposed on Québec. As a result, David's references to annexation were, by his own admission, used as a threat to imperial federalists, most of whom found annexation abhorrent.\(^{20}\)

David reiterated that he was not for annexation, though if forced to choose between imperial federation and the U.S.A., he would fly the U.S. flag. While he insisted that French-Canadians had loyally "defended England" in the past, a common argument for French-Canadian loyalty, he added that loyalty had come at a cost since they would have been richer had they joined the United States, as seen by the large number seeking their fortunes there. He warned those that threatened imperial federation or legislative union, and feared annexation, to cease putting French-Canadian "interests in conflict with their loyalty." Loyalty, therefore, could be excessive or against one's own interests, a point also made by Mercier in the past. In a shifting rhetoric of loyalism, however, he added that a people's "first loyalty is the one it owes to its flag, national institutions and the sacred heritage of their fathers," alluding to the province's French heritage. The language of "fathers" distinguished Québec's French heritage from that of their "mother," Great Britain, to whom even Mercier showed respect. However, to preempt the charge of loyalty to France, sometimes made against French-Canadians at the time, David reassured everyone that he would also fight against a French imperial federation if that was the case.\(^{21}\)

The motion provided further insight into the changing rhetoric of loyalty and French-Canadian identity as David stated unequivocally "we are not Europeans." He would add "we are an American people" and, invoking an idea reminiscent of the Monroe Doctrine, "no one has a

\(^{20}\) David, \textit{Débats}, 1890, 578. Many opponents of Mercier and his allies suspected that they were annexationists, see \textit{Les Principes de l'Hon. M. Mercier} (Saint-Hyacinthe: Courrier de St-Hyacinthe, 1890), 59-62. The \textit{Courrier de St-Hyacinthe} was a Conservative anti-Mercier paper. George T. Denison, \textit{The Struggle for Imperial Unity: Recollections and Experiences} (London: Macmillan and Co., 1909), 111.

\(^{21}\) David, \textit{Débats}, 1890, 584-586. For example, convinced of Mercier's disloyalty, D'Alton McCarthy claimed that Mercier's Liberals wanted a French republic under the tri-colour flag of France in a speech in the House of Commons. Canada, Parliament, \textit{House of Commons Debates}, 6\textsuperscript{th} Parliament, 4\textsuperscript{th} session, 1890, vol. 24, February 18, 1890, 861.
right to impose political projects on us outside the American context.”22 His preference for the American market also alluded to imperial decline, a key concern among annexationists and imperial federalists alike, though each sought differing solutions. In keeping with late-nineteenth-century Liberal party views on economic development, he supported free trade and sought it with the U.S.A.23 Québec's American identity was, therefore, increasingly emphasised against federationists who looked to Britain and the wider empire. A critique of Confederation and a defense of Québec's autonomy, bolstered by asserting Québec's Americanness, a distancing from a diverse empire, and annexation as a counter to the threat of imperial federation underpinned David's argument. Most critically, he sought to make imperial federation a partisan issue. As a declaratory measure with no legal impact, its immediate effect would be to frame imperial federation in the press in anticipation for upcoming elections.

In addition to the previously discussed themes found in the motion, David's speech and the parliamentary theatrics were key to its impact. David had told all his friends about the upcoming motion, delivered with rhetorical flourishes, La Presse asserted, because he "did not want to preach in the desert," and made sure to speak when the galleries were full.24 By speaking early when the public and press galleries were full, David ensured that it would make it into the next day's early newspapers. As the motion sought to forge public opinion against imperial federalism, David was aware that his audience was broader than just those in the assembly.

22 David, Débats, 582, 584. J.E. Tyler, The Struggle for Imperial Unity: 1868-1895 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1938), 142, writes of Commercial Union with the U.S. as making "more complete that quasi-shelter behind the Monroe doctrine which Canada already enjoyed."
24 La Presse, March 10, 1890, 2.
Once David's speech was complete, the floor was opened to members of the Assembly. Three men rose, but the speaker of the Assembly first recognised Georges Duhamel, MPP in Mercier's governing National-Liberal coalition, before an opposition Conservative MPP. Duhamel proposed that the preliminary question on the motion be submitted directly to a vote to avoid amendments. The speaker of the assembly was Félix-Gabriel Marchand, a member of the Parti National and a decades-long ally of Mercier who would become Mercier's successor as leader of the Quebec Liberal Party. The Conservative opposition decried the tactic to shut down debate and claimed to want to present an amendment to the preliminary motion itself. Ultimately, the entire opposition walked out of the Chamber in protest.

Mercier took the floor after the opposition had left and claimed that the opposition's refusal to vote was proof that they approved imperial federation and would have proposed amendments to avoid taking position, just as they had done in 1885 and 1886 on the Riel affair. It was a common claim by Mercier that Riel's hanging demonstrated Québec's weakness in Confederation resulting from Quebec Conservatives' failure "to use the provincial institutions to reflect the will of the people." As the Riel hanging had allowed Mercier to successfully coopt the issue of provincial autonomy from Conservatives by blending it with concern for national survival, Mercier's explanation revealed how the motion was rooted in partisanship and Mercier's nationalist understanding of the tensions within Confederation. The procedural tactic was necessary in Mercier's view to avoid giving the Conservatives a way out. Their decision to leave rather than condemn imperial federation was in poor judgement, he claimed. Mercier's final

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25 David, Débats, 586. The expression "orateur" was used for "speaker" of the assembly. This position is now known in French and in English in the Québec National Assembly as the "president" of the assembly.
26 David, Débats, 1890, 586. Seconded by a fellow member of his party, M. Charles-Antoine-Ernest Gagnon.
28 Mercier, Débats, 1890, 587-588.
29 Silver, French-Canadian Idea of Confederation, 174-175.
words after the opposition had left confirmed that his speech was intended for the record and members of the press. Ever aware of public opinion, he stated that "the country, tomorrow, will learn with regret that these men thought it appropriate to desert the honourable position given to them by their countrymen." This was essentially an admission that the motion was a partisan ploy to frame the Conservative opposition as supporters of imperial federation. Mercier added that the opposition preferred to leave since they could not vote against it, as he implied they intended to do, because "they know that an MPP that would vote against this motion simply would not be returned at the next elections."30

The remaining government MPPs voted and adopted the motion unanimously. The opposition having refused to vote, the motion passed thirty-one to zero. Three members of Mercier's coalition government, however, refused to vote in favour of the motion and left the chamber when the opposition did. The government sympathisers who refused to support the motion represented ridings with a substantial or majority anglophone population.31 The framing of the opposition as supporters of imperial federation in David and Mercier's speeches in the chamber ensured that it would be treated as a partisan campaign issue. David's oratory prowess, moving the motion to prevent amendments, and the opposition's walk-out grounded the press' discussion of imperial federation in the political theatrics of the day.32

30 Mercier, Débats, 1890, 587-588. In 1888, Mercier made a similar claim that supporters of imperial federation would lose their seats, see Mercier, Débats, 1888, 75.
32 La Presse, March 10 1890, 2; The Herald, November 7, 1890, 5, sympathetic to Mercier, referred to David's "eloquence in ridiculing imperial federation."
While a motion of the assembly could be reflective of a "general will" or "popular opinion," it could only be partially so in this instance as a result of the decision of the entire opposition to leave the chamber.\footnote{For the assembly as a tool of general will according to Québec liberals, see Silver, \textit{French-Canadian Idea of Confederation}, 174. In British political culture, see James Thompson, \textit{British Political Culture and the Idea of 'Public Opinion', 1867–1914} (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 87.} As debate was shut down in the Assembly, this section will examine the motion's press reception to better grasp views on imperial federalism. All Montreal papers reported the details of David's motion and speech on the following day, March 7\textsuperscript{th}. As reporting on assembly affairs was done by reporters assigned from different papers who nonetheless worked collaboratively as part of the parliamentary press system, news reporting was quite consistent.\footnote{Jocelyn Saint-Pierre, \textit{La Tribune de la Presse à Québec depuis 1960} (Québec: Septentrion, 2016), 20-21.} Separate columns in the papers offered clear opinions on the matter, however, including by sitting politicians, such as Conservative MPP Guillaume-Alphonse Nantel, who also served as parliamentary correspondent for \textit{La Presse}.

As Arthur Silver noted, the affairs of the Quebec Legislative Assembly, where "the only real political interest was centred," often received more attention from the press than the federal parliament.\footnote{Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée Nationale, \textit{Les Membres de la Tribune de Presse: liste chronologique 1871-1989}, (Québec: Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée Nationale, 1990). No page numbers, see years 1889-1890.}

Conservative papers, such as \textit{Le Canadien} and \textit{The Gazette}, made a point of relaying the opposition's proposed amendment to justify the Conservatives' actions.\footnote{Silver, \textit{French-Canadian Idea of Confederation}, 117.} All papers emphasised the theatrics surrounding the motion, but varied on whose behaviour was most blameworthy, and in their assessment of imperial federation as a serious threat. The Conservative French-language press, which had been directly called-out in David's speech, made the most sustained critiques of the government's actions. Although it was possible to identify themes within David's meandering speech, the press avoided in-depth discussion and ignored most of David's themes, preferring a

\footnote{\textit{Le Canadien}, March 7, 1890, 2; \textit{The Gazette}, March 8, 1890, 4.}
partisan focus on theatriecs, making press analysis mirroring David's themes unworkable. The following analysis of press commentary will, therefore, first examine the French-language press, Conservative then Liberal, followed by a similar examination along partisan lines within the English-language press. Such an approach considers that newspapers frequently interacted with each other within their language group, even across partisan divides, as well as the scattered nature of the coverage. While certain commonalities will be pointed out, the coverage emphasised partisan spectacle and often veered from rational discourse. The main commonality, however, was the lack of support or even consideration of imperial federalism's specifics.

First, the influential Conservative Le Canadien, though located in Québec City, must be examined since David's speech had denounced its editor, Joseph-Israel Tarte, and his paper as supporters of imperial federation. Tarte was a prolific journalist who devoted much energy to criticising Liberals and Mercier, especially. Tarte's membership in the League – the only French-Canadian found to have admitted it in writing – was the strongest link between Conservatives in Québec and imperial federalism. Although Tarte sat alongside Mercier at the Champ-de-Mars demonstration in Montreal following Riel's execution in 1885, as Mercier appealed to French-Canadian unity, Tarte would maintain his affiliation with the Conservative Party until late 1891.

Le Canadien described the government's actions as an "indignity" and underscored, as The Gazette had done, that three members of the government coalition had also refused to vote for the motion. In a lucid defence of free speech in the assembly, Tarte argued that as the

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39 Imperial Federation League, Constitution, Rules (Toronto, 1890), 20.
40 Brassard and Hamelin, “Tarte, Joseph-Israel.”
majority party, the government could have debated and then simply rejected the opposition's amendment, but preventing further discussion only discredited the government. To demonstrate the reasonableness of the opposition's position, Le Canadien printed the text of the proposed amendment, which stated that the people were happy with the current constitution and that there was a danger in changing it whether for annexation or imperial federation. As a long-time supporter of Confederation, Tarte's defence of imperial federation was as much a defence of Confederation as a rebuke of annexationist sentiments. The opposition likely insisted on rejecting both annexation and imperial federation as they were so commonly viewed as opposites that a critique of one alone risked being interpreted as support for the other. "The happiness and prosperity of the people" of Quebec, Le Canadien claimed, "resided in their attachment to the current Constitution." This was becoming a standard line among Quebec Conservatives whose focus shifted to Ottawa as they were shut out of power in Québec. Le Canadien, however, insisted that David's speech was annexationist despite what he stated to the contrary.

In any event, Tarte claimed, the Imperial Federation League did not propose any change to the Canadian constitution though he avoided specifying what the League proposed. While Tarte's support for imperial federation appealed to loyalty to the Queen, it did not appeal to a common British identity. His support could be patriotic and loyal but it could not be nationalistic, to use Douglas Cole's distinction. At a time where loyalty was being redefined, French-Canadian nationalism was becoming more assertive, and Québécois were seeing their

41 Le Canadien, March 7, 1890, 2. The text of the amendment in English, as printed in the Montreal Gazette, March 8, 1890, 4, was as follows: "Whereas, the people of this province are satisfied with the constitution as it exists: whereas, as there might be danger in modifying it by accepting a project of Imperial federation or annexation to the United States or otherwise, and that such is the general opinions in Canada, especially in the province of Quebec; whereas, the present discussion will produce no practical result."

42 Le Canadien, March 11, 1890, 2 ("Caveant Consules"); Silver, French-Canadian Idea of Confederation, 206. Le Canadien, March 7, 1890, 2.

43 Le Canadien, March 11, 1892, 2.

44 Le Canadien, March 10, 1892, 2.
fate increasingly tied to America, Tarte's appeal lacked the emotional potency of David and Mercier's rhetoric. Tarte's initial retorts were pragmatic and emphasised that the provincial legislature did not have the jurisdiction to discuss imperial federation under the Constitution.\footnote{Le Canadien, March 7, 1890, 2.}

Although he acknowledged the risk of a draft for imperial wars, Tarte saw representation in an Imperial Parliament as the best way to ensure that French-Canadians had a say on the matter. He judged it likely that all Canadians would be involved should Great Britain declare war on the United States, with or without imperial federation. This was the extent of discussion on imperial federalism's merits in the entire press, however. Tarte's calm, rational approach shifted as he claimed that David had an unreasonable "fear of war and negroes" due to having raised the spectre of wars in Africa and "long marches and crawling on the humid ground" in a war against Americans, in what \textit{Le Canadien} deemed was an illustration of David's "cowardice" and "devotion to Americans."\footnote{Le Canadien, March 8, 1890, 2. This quip about "long marches" was not in the published version of the Assembly journals. \textit{Le Canadien} was the only paper to have mentioned it. The Conservative \textit{La Presse} also relayed some of Tarte's attack on the Mercier government, \textit{La Presse}, March 12, 1890, 2.}

\textit{As Le Canadien} sustained its coverage over the following days, it turned its focus to the theatrics in an attempt to embarrass David and Mercier. David did not know what he was talking about, Tarte stated in a commentary, and had misrepresented imperial federation, "ridiculed our institutions" and made Quebecers out to be "the idiots of the empire" by trying to make imperial federation a bogeyman. Using a label that would be hurled at opponents by both parties, David's motion was a "dangerous comedy" orchestrated by Mercier, Tarte claimed.\footnote{Le Canadien, March 10, 1890, 2.} Tarte insisted that his support for imperial federalism did not commit the Conservative party, emphasising that it was a non-partisan organisation. He had joined the movement, he claimed, because he was
opposed to annexation and the League was "an instrument of resistance against the attempts at disintegration and treason," though he did not explain how that resistance would operate.  

Such an admission illustrated that many viewed imperial federation as the opposite of annexation and showed Québec Conservatives' anxiety about annexation. Tarte's final attack on the motion contrasted with Mercier and David's assertive nationalist rhetoric as Tarte claimed that the motion was dangerous as it risked antagonising British-Canadians outside Québec with whom relations were already strained. While Tarte was personally called out in David's speech, his response was in keeping with Conservative interests and sought to limit damage to his party. Despite arguing against any link between Conservatives and imperial federation, attempts to defend his membership in a Conservative paper could only aid David and Mercier's claims that the Conservatives supported imperial federation.

On the other hand, La Minerve, a fervently anti-Mercier Conservative paper from Montreal, let David's motion go after publishing only a standard report of the motion's adoption. Perhaps it felt there was little to gain from wading in on the subject. On the other hand, the popular La Presse, owned by former Québec premier (1879-1882) and Federal Conservative MP Joseph-Adolphe Chapleau, which shared an editor with La Minerve, sustained its attack on the government. Chapleau had also distanced himself from imperial federalism though this was not stated by La Presse. La Presse took up Le Canadien's theatrical characterisation of the motion

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48. Le Canadien, March 11, 1890, 2.
49. Le Canadien, March 12, 1890, 2.
50. La Minerve was owned by Joseph Tassé although much of the editorial work was done by Treflé Berthiaume, future owner of La Presse, who shared his services with La Minerve at this time. André Beaulieu et Jean Hamelin, La Presse Québécoise: Des origines à nos jours, Tome I, (Sainte-Foy, Presses de l'Université Laval, 1973), 55-57. La Minerve, March 7, 1890, 3; La Presse, March 10, 1890, 2. Cyrille Felteau, Histoire De La Presse. Tome I : Le Livre du Peuple 1884-1916 (Montréal: La Presse, 1983), 221-248; Chapleau also did not support imperial federalism, see J., A. Chapleau and A. de Bonnete, L'honorable J. A. Chapleau: Sa biographie, suivie de ses principaux discours, manifestes, etc. (Montréal: E. Senécal & fils,1887), 378, 391, 528. Contrary to Le Monde, however, La Presse was not an official Conservative paper. Andrée Désilets, “CHAPLEAU, Sir JOSEPH-ADOLPHE,” in Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vol. 12, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–.
as its Québec correspondent mocked "La Comédie David," and described the speech as dark and gloomy. He noted how planned the government's actions were and downplayed the seriousness of imperial federalism, comparing David to a Dr Purgon of Molière's *Imaginary Invalid* who proposed a cure for an imaginary disease. The summary of David's motion was offered, the journalist claimed, to give serious people a laugh. The motion went nowhere, according to *La Presse*, although Mercier was counting on it "to stoke the flames of religious and civil discord, which fuels his government," a common charge among Conservatives.51

Downplaying the scope of imperial federation proposals, *La Presse* claimed the movement only sought closer commercial links with the "mother country," ignoring issues of military cooperation and colonial representation in an imperial parliament.52 Wisely, *La Presse*, as a French-language paper, also ignored mentioning the desire for British "racial" unity that fuelled many Canadian imperial federalists, such as George Parkin and George Taylor Denison. *La Presse* did not claim to support imperial federation, however, adding that it was a supporter of the "current arrangement of 1867" since it offered French-Canadians all the rights and protections they needed. The article strongly defended the naval and military strength of England and the trade benefits of the empire and argued that David's motion was disrespectful to England. Invoking the language of loyalty, *La Presse* stated that David's motion appealed to disloyal sentiments and that it should be considered treason, a point also argued by *Le Canadien*. According to *La Presse*, the government likely regretted the motion because their "publicity stunt" had failed.53 The coverage did not address the central elements of the government's

51 *La Presse*, March 10, 1890, 2. *La Presse*, March 10, 1890, 2. The term "comédie" related to acting or theatrics and did not connote "comic" exclusively as it did in English. A "comédien" in French refers to an actor, not a comedian. 52 *La Presse*, March 12, 1890, 2 ("la mère-patrie"). For an inventory of various issues of importance to imperial federalists, see Tyler, *Struggle for Imperial Unity*, 96-98. Michael Burgess, *The British Tradition of Federalism* (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1995), 66. 53 *La Presse*, March 12, 1890, 2.
critique of imperial federation other than to mock David. Thus, the Conservative *La Presse* predictably positioned itself in favour of the constitutional status quo and appealed to a strong language of loyalty to Britain without defending or accurately describing imperial federation.

Unsurprisingly, *Le Monde*, a Conservative paper owned by Macdonald's influential cabinet minister Hector Langevin, was also critical of David's motion. A report one hour into David's speech simply provided the brief text of the motion itself and wondered why such a motion was necessary. Benefitting from the use of recently installed telephone cables linking the assembly in Québec City to Montreal, however, *Le Monde* found it necessary to rapidly transmit such newsworthy information, before much of the drama had unfolded. The author did not think that there was an imperial federationist threat as it was rarely discussed and had not been submitted to the people of the province. Echoing a similar legalist argument made by Tarte in *Le Canadien*, *Le Monde*'s journalist stated that the assembly had no jurisdiction to decide the matter and the motion had no impact anyways. Seeking to stress a lack of seriousness of the federationist threat and the comedic element of David's motion, *Le Monde* claimed that he was "tilting at windmills." The imperial federation project, the writer added, was "not even hatched" yet it was being turned "into a scarecrow for our populations, which have barely even heard of it." Nonetheless, despite claiming that imperial federalism was no threat, *Le Monde* reminded readers that its owner, Langevin, had "categorically" come out against imperial federation and

54 Gérard Bouchard, "Apogée et déclin de l'idéologie ultramontaine à travers le journal *Le Nouveau Monde*, 1867-1900," *Recherches sociographiques* 10, no. 2-3 (1969): 278. The paper was founded by Montreal's ultramontane Monsignor Ignace Bourget, was conservative in tone and originally defended the interests of the conservative wing of the Catholic Church. However, by 1890, the ultramontane influence had been tempered following the death of Bourget and the purchase of the paper by Langevin in 1884. Ibid., 281.

55 *Le Monde*, March 7, 1890, 2.

56 Saint-Pierre, *Tribune de la Presse*, 110-111. Although a telephone linking the Parliamentary press room, specifically, to Montreal was only installed on October 30, 1890, telephone service between Québec City and Montreal was established in 1880. The Legislative Assembly was equipped with a telephone soon thereafter.
"denounced the project," illustrating how Conservatives in Québec sought to avoid the federationist label.57

Other Conservative papers, notably Le Courrier du Canada in Québec City, edited by Thomas Chapais and sympathetic to Langevin, had explicitly rejected any Conservative preference for imperial federation in response to Liberal attacks and sought, in turn, to apply the label to Liberals.58 In 1888, Chapais had quoted approvingly from Toronto's Liberal Globe that claimed that credit went to Quebec's Conservative Ministers in Ottawa for "striking the death blow to imperial federation."59 He repeatedly stated that opposition to imperial federation in Québec was "unanimous" and that this assessment reflected "public opinion," uniting both Conservatives and Liberals.60 His arguments reflected a concern among Conservatives across Québec about Mercier's adoption of imperial federation as a partisan issue. Le Monde echoed Le Canadien's opinion that Mercier, the "sinister joker and cynical comedian that is the pseudo-providential man at the helm of the Quebec ship of state," was autocratic for shutting down debate and that David's speech was annexationist.61 Conservative papers were determined to emphasise the theatrical and unnecessary nature of David's motion and portray it as proof of annexationist sympathies.

L'Étendard was an independent paper with Conservative social leanings but nationalist sympathies. Its founder, François-Xavier-Anselme Trudel, was opposed to imperial federation, a scheme he considered would overwhelm French-Canadians in a demographically British

57 Le Monde, March 7, 1890, 2. Langevin's early opposition to imperial federation can also be found in Le Drapeau 1, No. 2 (Oct. 1889): 54-55, and Le Drapeau, 1, No. 3 (Nov. 1889): 119-120.
58 Chapais deemed it necessary to underscore Conservative Langevin's opposition to imperial federation on many occasions and point out that Liberal Ontario Premier Edward Blake was a supporter. See Thomas Chapais, Mélanges (Québec, 1905), 19-68, which includes a collection of articles from 1884 to 1889.
59 Chapais, Mélanges, 36. See pages 19-68, for an entire section of his writings dedicated to rejecting Conservative preference for imperial federation.
60 Chapais, Mélanges, 31, 35.
61 Le Monde, March 8, 1890, 4.
federation. He often supported Mercier while admitting that "he could not say whether Mercier [was] sincere or not, only he hoped that he was," though by the time of the motion the paper was under the editorship of Trudel's son. Its coverage illustrated how nationalist sentiment targeting imperial federation often transcended the Liberal-Conservative divide. In addition to a standard brief description as part of the assembly report the day after the event, L'Étendard later printed a pseudonymous letter by "Stadacona," written in agreement with David's motion. In a federation with delegates from across the empire, French-Canadian representation would be swamped, the writer reminded readers, and claimed that Canada was part of America, not Europe, and that Quebec's interests were American. Referencing once again David's critique of Confederation, "Stadacona" added that Québec had enough trouble having its rights respected in Ottawa and that in an imperial federation, Québec would be crushed. Imperial federation was, in other words, a project where the ills of Confederation would be amplified. The League's true intentions in Canada could be determined by considering the choice of D'Alton McCarthy as president, "the avowed enemy of the French race in America," the author claimed. As to the opposition leaving the chamber, the writer claimed that even some Conservatives found it juvenile though he did not provide names. As L'Étendard was a socially conservative paper with nationalist sentiments that had taken its distance from the Conservative party, Stadacona's mention of Conservative reactions was possibly a recognition of the mixed readership of this independent

63 L’Étendard, March 10, 1890, 2 (Letter from "Stadacona"). Original French text: "L'ennemi juré de la race française en Amérique."
newspaper or that the opposition to imperial federation in Québec was bipartisan. The letter emphasised David's points so closely as to be exempt of any new or personal opinion.

The treatment of what Mercier and David's critics saw as theatrics predictably differed between the Liberal and Conservative papers. Among the Liberal press, La Patrie, the radical paper owned by the former mayor of Montréal – an annexationist and overt Francophile – Honoré Beaugrand, was known for its inflammatory rhetoric. La Patrie generally supported Mercier's nationalist government though it did not shy away from disagreeing with it. On imperial federation, however, it was fully behind David and Mercier. La Patrie turned charges of performance against the opposition by claiming that they created an "unchivalrous scene" and a "spectacle." La Patrie claimed that those in the hallways of the Assembly were "unanimous" in their disapproval of the Conservatives' decision to leave the chamber and even added that a reporter for "one of the large Conservative papers" thought the opposition's behaviour was ridiculous. Much like Stadacona's letter in L'Étendard, La Patrie emphasised broad disapproval of the opposition's behaviour although it was more hyperbolic in claiming that the reaction was "unanimous" in an appeal to the power of public opinion.

Despite the opposition leader's desire to continue the discussion with all his "expressive power," sarcastically using the English expression to refer to Taillon's oratorical skills in a French text, La Patrie stressed that the role of the opposition should not be "to hide behind the luggage of an ambulance" but to "rush to the frontlines of the battle." When the people see

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64 Glynn et al, Public Opinion, 191-19, note the risk of a "false consensus" wherein people appeal to the authority of public opinion, erroneously believing their opinion to be the dominant opinion.
66 Jean-Philippe Warren, Honoré Beaugrand: La plume et l'épée, 1848-1906 (Montréal: Boréal, 2015), 365. While La Patrie amplified Mercier's position on many issues, including imperial federation, Mercier had taken efforts in the past to distance himself from La Patrie's inflammatory anti-clerical rhetoric, Gallichan, Honoré Mercier: La Politique et la Culture, 103.
67 La Patrie, March 7, 1890, 2. The opposition's "spectacle" was also discussed on page 4.
their leaders run from a fight, they tire of such a spectacle," *La Patrie* commented in its variation on the theme of masculine bravery versus cowardice. The Conservative opposition leader, Taillon, was "too frightened to upset the federationists," *La Patrie* claimed.

Over the following days, seeking to extend the controversy's impact, *La Patrie* made multiple references to the motion, including a reprint of the text of the motion, reminding readers that it was adopted when "the opposition fled in a hurry." While it was a tactic for French-Canadian MPs to leave the chamber at the time of Papineau, the paper argued, it was never to avoid hindering the actions of "francophobes," implying that imperial federalism was an anti-French-Canadian movement. *La Patrie* also responded to *Le Canadien* by reminding readers that Tarte was also a long-time supporter of Confederation, which *La Patrie* virulently opposed. *La Patrie* argued that it was only as a result of concessions and weakness on the part of French-Canadian leaders, alluding to French-Canadian Conservative supporters of Confederation, that "enemies of our race" and the "arrogant pretensions of francophobes" had been strengthened. Participating in federation projects would consist of "blindly accepting the utopias of those that are determined to defeat us," *La Patrie* added. Once again, the failings of Confederation, as well as imperial federation as another existential threat to French-Canadians achieved through federal means, were central to *La Patrie*'s attack on imperial federalism. Nonetheless, the "spectacle" of the opposition's behaviour received most of the attention in an attempt to discredit

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68 *La Patrie*, March 7, 1890, 4.
69 *La Patrie*, March 8, 1890, 1.
70 The colloquial expression "[prendre] la poudre d'escampette", meaning to flee in a hurry without explanation was used. *La Patrie*, March 10, 1890, 1.
71 *La Patrie*, March 12, 1890, 1 ("Menace d’Interdiction"), criticised Tarte's views on the David Resolution; *La Patrie*, March 14, 1890 ("Caveant consules") said Tarte continued his complaints in *Le Canadien*.
72 *La Patrie*, March 14, 1890, 1.
73 Ibid. By March 17, 1890, *La Patrie* was no longer talking about it. Some copies are missing in between, however.
imperial federalism and the Conservative opposition as *La Patrie* levelled charges of cowardice, wrapped in rhetoric of nationalism, at the Conservative opposition.

The weekly *Le Clairon*, founded by Mercier's closest allies, picked up on David's points as it emphasised "grave events" in Canada, "the weak edifice" of Confederation, and the need to sound the alarm about the "pernicious projects" underway. "Imperial federation is being affirmed with much force and is not an undefined or inoffensive project like those who wish to lull our race to sleep would have us believe," it claimed. *Le Clairon* sought to portray the supposed secretiveness with which imperial federalism was being discussed as reminiscent of the secrecy of negotiations for Confederation. Regarding the British identity central to imperial federation, *Le Clairon* asserted that as a people living in America, "there can be no community of ideas or interests between our country and the other colonies such as Australia and the other possessions of Africa." Emphasising that D'Alton McCarthy was the president of the League and that if such "fanatics" continued their threats, French-Canadians "will not always be inclined to sacrifice their interests to their loyalty," it repeated David's veiled threat to support annexation.74

A week later, *Le Clairon* responded to *La Presse*, which had included a comment by the Conservative MPP Guillaume-Alphonse Nantel who had denounced David's speech as a "tightrope act" that was "dark" and "outdated." In a harsh retort, *Le Clairon* commented that Nantel could never attain the level of stylistic eloquence of David and that Nantel had yet been unable to produce any ideas "in his sterile brain." In an appeal to manly courage, frequent in political discourse on the topic, it added that David's "spine was not as supple" as that of "good tories." *Le Clairon* described the opposition's behaviour in mocking terms, stating that the public laughed at the opposition's "tragi-comedy" and that their theatrics had missed the mark.

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74 *Le Clairon*, March 8, 1890, 3.
Replying to Nantel's criticism that David had opposed Confederation at its inception, *Le Clairon* replied that this was to David's credit since although Confederation created a "great country," it was a "great English country" where "French minorities are always threatened when they are not mistreated outright." When seeking to extend the motion's reach in the press, Mercier's allies also focused on matters of style, theatrics and ad hominem attacks with little further comment on imperial federation itself other than to stoke fears of national extinction. As it reminded readers of the risk of another failed federation plan, its commentary confirmed that Mercier's critique of imperial federalism was rooted in frustrations with Confederation. Imperial federalism, in other words, was not a remedy to Confederation's ills but rather a scheme to amplify Confederation's assault on French-Canadians to which all means of resistance, rational or spectacular, were valid.

Much like the French-language press just examined, coverage regarding the motion also reflected partisan divides in the English-language press. Montreal's English-language press was dominated by the populist *Montreal Daily Star* ("The Star"), which was officially independent though sympathetic to the Conservative Party. Most English-language newspapers, except *The Montreal Daily Herald* ("The Herald"), were critical of Honoré Mercier's nationalist agenda, though they all covered the drama surrounding David's motion. Once again, partisan views informed the discussion. In the least partisan analysis found, *The Star* claimed that though imperial federation was unlikely, whether one was for or against imperial federation, the motion was of little consequence and there was "little glory" for either party involved. The "retreat of the loyal Opposition was anything but glorious," it added, while "the introduction of such a sham

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75 *Le Clairon*, March 15, 1890, 2.
76 Beaulieu and Hamelin, *La Presse Québécoise*, Tome II, 128.
issue by the Ministerialists was not much to brag about." Unlike other papers, in particular in the partisan French-language press, *The Star* did not sustain coverage of the issue over the following days.

*The Montreal Daily Witness* ("*The Witness*") , a Protestant paper with a history of antagonism to the French-Canadian community of Montreal, opined that imperial federation was merely "the dream of theorists having no relations to practical politics" which "has been suddenly lifted into a place as an appreciable political factor." While minimising the seriousness of the imperial federation movement, *The Witness* recognised that it was now politically relevant due to Mercier's critique. French-English tensions in Montreal were also at the heart of *The Witness* ' coverage as it claimed that the purpose of the motion was "to make the French vote in the country solid against English representatives who will not pronounce this anti-British Shibbolette." *The Witness* ' comments highlighted the French-English tensions exacerbated by Mercier's affirmative nationalism and the insecurity felt by a growing number of British-Montrealers. *The Witness* ' language underscored the effectiveness of the Mercier government's use of nationalism, at a moment of heightened ethnic tensions, to undermine imperial federation and attach it to his partisan opponents.

Mercier and David's provocative position irritated Conservative paper *The Gazette* the most as a result of what it perceived to be David's annexationist sympathies.\(^{79}\) *The Gazette* argued that while leaving the house was an extraordinary move, "a statement of the facts of the case will show that it was justified." *The Gazette* provided the text of the amendment proposed

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\(^{77}\) *The Star*, March 7, 1890, 2.  
\(^{78}\) Beaulieu and Hamelin, *La Presse Québécoise*, Tome I, 149; *The Witness*, March 7, 1890, 4-5.  
\(^{79}\) *The Gazette*, March 8, 1890, 4, took exception to the last paragraph of the motion that stated that an imperial federation would "prevent Canada from having with the other nations on the American continent relations the most favorable to its commercial and industrial prosperity and its social and political development." *The Gazette* was the oldest paper in operation in Montreal, the mouthpiece of the Conservative English elite, and was anxious about French-Canadian influence in politics; Rutherford, *Victorian Authority*, 236.
by the opposition, which while claiming that "general opinion in Canada, especially in Québec [my emphasis]," opposed both imperial federation and annexation, and favoured the status quo. This was, in *The Gazette*'s estimation, "the views of the great majority," illustrating that all sides in the press appealed to the authority of public opinion. That an English-language Conservative paper would clarify that majority opinion, "especially in Québec," opposed imperial federalism, and included itself and the English community within that mostly-francophone majority opinion, is revealing. Such comments demonstrated that the British-Montreal community were being shaped by Mercier's influence on the topic in a way that was not the case for British-Canadians outside Québec.80

Both parties in the Assembly might have supported the motion if it simply condemned imperial federation without further explanation or veiled support for annexation, *The Gazette* added in a comment similar to Conservative papers *La Presse* and *Le Canadien*. *The Gazette* took exception to the last paragraph of the motion that stated that an imperial federation would "prevent Canada from having with the other nations on the American continent relations the most favorable" to its progress. David's comment that he would prefer federation with the U.S. over federation with the British Empire was the most problematic. Opposing imperial federation was only acceptable if it was coupled with a strong denunciation of annexation, which again revealed that these options were linked as opposites since criticism of imperial federalism could only mean support for annexation. David's resolution "was unnecessary [...] as imperial federation is not a practical issue" since "but a small number of people in Canada look upon it as a possibility" and "the number is smaller in Québec probably than in any other of the large provinces," it argued. *The Gazette* charged that "the Government were not seeking to condemn

80 *The Gazette*, March 8, 1890, 4.
imperial federation so much as to make political capital for the coming elections." While Mercier
and David's attack on imperial federalism was constant and likely sincere as it was tied to their
cherished cause of provincial autonomy, The Gazette's labelling of the motion as electoral was
also accurate.81

Interestingly, The Gazette also published a letter by H. Lyman.82 This is presumably
either Henry Lyman or his son Henry Herbert Lyman, both of whom had been active and
influential members in the League in Montreal since the branch's founding in 1885.83 Curiously,
Lyman did not identify himself as being tied to the League, and he offered no defence of
imperial federation. Lyman objected to the use of "American" for United States by David as he
did not consider that the U.S.A. had exclusive use of the word and criticised noted annexationist
Erastus Wiman. He then stated that the best solution was to maintain the status quo, i.e. current
colonial ties to Great Britain.84 That an active imperial federationist declined to defend his
movement and fell back on the status quo is revelatory of the reticence of British-Montrealers to
voice their support publicly, even in an English-language Conservative paper. Another piece in
The Gazette stated that the ministerial press was having difficulty in qualifying the walk-out by
the opposition as a dignified protest or a "coup de théâtre." Describing the government's actions
as brute force, the paper went on to state that "Mr. Mercier has succeeded so far [...]."85 This is a
revealing admission of the Mercier government's success with the motion from a Conservative
English-language anti-Mercier paper that was likely read by many federationists. The Gazette

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81 The Gazette, March 8, 1890, 4.
82 The Gazette, March 10, 1890, 2.
83 See Imperial Federation League of Canada, Constitution, 12, 13, 17, 19, 23; Imperial Federation League of
Canada - Report of the First Meetings of the League in Canada, Montreal, May 9th, 1885, 3, 6-8, 20, 54. By 1890,
H. Lyman was President of the Montreal Branch. Isabella McGoun, "Imperial Federation Movement with Special
Reference to Canada," 55, claims that the son, H.H. Lyman was Chairman of the League in Canada.
84 Robert Craig Brown, “Wiman, Erastus,” in Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vol. 13, University of
Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–.
85 The Gazette, March 10, 1890, 5.
also picked up critical excerpts from regional papers in the following week and revisited David's motion in a review of the work of the legislative session the following month.\textsuperscript{86} The Gazette, therefore, sustained the critical coverage of David's motion longer than other newspapers. That said, it raised no substantive criticism, except to point to annexationist tendencies in the speech or most often, to denounce the tactic used by the government. While it criticised the motion as unnecessary since imperial federation was not a threat, The Gazette regularly reported on federationist activities before and immediately after David's motion despite claiming that Conservatives preferred the status quo.\textsuperscript{87} Curiously, unlike French-language Conservative papers, The Gazette did not dare question David and Mercier's loyalty. Like all Conservative papers, however, it was most offended by annexationism although, as the preferred paper of Montreal's Conservative British elite, its hostility to annexation did not lead it to support imperial federation.

Despite being an English-language paper focused on business news, the Liberal Herald supported the Mercier government.\textsuperscript{88} It sarcastically claimed that the opposition "covered themselves with glory yesterday." Once again resorting to the charge of cowardice, the Herald stated that the Conservative withdrawal was due to fear that supporting David's resolution "would displease Sir John [Macdonald] and his imperial federation friends at Ottawa."

Paraphrasing Mercier's response to the opposition's decision to leave the chamber, the Herald

\textsuperscript{86} The Gazette reported the comment by Le Quotidien of Lévis that the motion "had no more raison d'être [...] than a protest against Chinese federation [...]" and referred to the government's actions as an "outrage on parliamentary justice and decorum," The Gazette, March 11, 1890, 4; The Gazette, March 17, 1890, 7 (Sherbrooke Gazette refers to "the trickery in Mr. David's resolution"); The Gazette, April 3, 1890, 4 ("session review").

\textsuperscript{87} While The Gazette downplayed the seriousness of imperial federalism, on March 6\textsuperscript{th}, the day before David's motion was presented, it published a detailed review of Dilke's book, Problems of Greater Britain. The reviewer defended Dilke's book and the concept of imperial federalism and provided many excerpts. The Gazette, February 24, 1890, 4, stated that David gave notice to present a motion on imperial federation but that it was not necessary since Imperial Federation had no force and Conservatives prefer the status quo.

\textsuperscript{88} The Herald, March 10, 1890, 4, refers to "our natural enemies – the tories [...]" and defended Mercier's "National" government for its liberal principles on trade.
stated that the opposition was afraid to oppose the measure "because that would mean political extinction to most of them" and that they were "afraid to face the music they gallantly turned tail and fled," using language similar to *La Patrie*. While *Le Canadien* claimed that David was "afraid of war and negroes," the *Herald* insinuated cowardice on the part of the opposition for leaving the assembly. The *Herald* emphasised the oratory prowess of David and claimed that he "spoke for nearly two hours, during which he ably and eloquently ridiculed the idea of imperial federation [...]." The following day, it continued its commentary on the issue, stating that John A. Macdonald had since repudiated imperial federation in an interview with the *New York Herald* and that this is a surprising "conversion" or an act of hypocrisy considering all his previous pronouncements in favour of imperial federation.\(^{89}\) As its usual coverage focused on business and trade news, however, The *Herald* did not pursue the issue further.

In sum, among the English-language press, only *The Star* treated the motion dismissively in a somewhat even manner. All other English-language papers, though they disagreed in their support for Mercier's government, emphasised the elements of spectacle and gave little weight to imperial federation as a movement, with *The Herald* dismissing it most harshly and portraying it as a Conservative project. The cautious approach of the English-language press on imperial federation would generate an angry anonymous missive to the *Imperial Federation League Journal* denouncing the extensive coverage afforded to David's motion as "indicative of the crass stupidity of some of the English with regard to the affairs of their own empire."\(^{90}\)

As seen, however, a similar dynamic where the press ignored most substantive elements and sought to portray the motion as outright annexationist or pure theatrics was also present in

\(^{89}\) *The Herald*, March 7, 1890, 4-5 (quotes), and March 8, 1890, 4 (quotes *New York Herald*).

the Conservative French-language press. While rhetoric remained civil, without appeals to violence, it was more hyperbolic and partisan than rational. Even the French-language press sympathetic to Mercier emphasised the theatrics, partisan spectacle and intra-press feuds rather than put forward their preferred option or rationally rebut imperial federalism. Imperial federalism's sole defender, Israel Tarte of Le Canadien, was an outlier on the issue. His defence, however, was necessary as he, his paper and his party were called out in David's speech. It was not simply a matter of defending imperial federalism's specific proposals. Also, the opposition's need to release the text of the amendment to the media was as much to defend their actions as to prove that they were against imperial federation, thus reinforcing the interpretation that support for the movement was politically damaging, just as Mercier had claimed. The following month, at a Conservative Association meeting at the Chateau Ramezay in Montreal, Tarte would attempt to strike back at Mercier's continued attempts to tie imperial federation to Conservatives, including Mercier's references to David's motion, by insisting that Mercier and David's opposition to imperial federation was due to their annexationist agenda. Official Conservative papers unanimously denounced the government's actions and sought to claim imperial federalism was a non-issue thus portraying the Mercier government's actions as partisan frivolity. Official Liberal papers, in turn, drew attention to the "cowardice" of the Conservative opposition. Liberal papers were unanimously opposed to imperial federation but provided little analysis of the movement or the ideas put forth by its leaders. Conservative papers, in turn, unanimously sought to apply the "annexationist" label to the motion as a slur rather than a valid political project shared by opponents. As represented in the press, imperial federalism was a partisan issue for an upcoming provincial election, not fodder for thoughtful deliberation. Whether the public

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91 La Presse, April 24, 1890, 3.
considered that imperial federation was a credible threat to the survival of French-Canadians or not, it could at least be a believable threat to the practical issue of provincial autonomy, Mercier's key issue in the upcoming Québec election in June 1890.92

After the press had rendered their judgements, Mercier sustained the impact of David's motion by using imperial federalism as a campaign issue in the June election. Mercier was in many respects a perpetual campaigner. Speeches, rallies to shore up support, and partisan appeals in the press were not reserved for the campaign season. Mercier's lead up to the next general election followed redistricting in various ridings, including in Montreal, to reflect demographic changes, primarily reflecting an increase in the number of francophones.93 The coming election campaign to which Mercier alluded in the assembly after David's motion, began on May 15th, 1890.94 Mercier appealed to a united front to counter those whom he deemed were "surely working to bring about legislative union, which means the annihilation of the Province, or imperial federation, which means the annihilation of Canada." For Mercier, imperial federation was the continuation of centralising tendencies, dominated by Conservatives, and was largely an English anti-Catholic invention. To fight imperial federation was the logical extension of the fight for provincial autonomy and national survival. "We are confronted with the same enemies – enemies of our race and creed, and consequently of the autonomy of the Provinces," Mercier claimed at the opening of the campaign on May 15th, 1890 in a speech that was published as a pamphlet. "One must be for or against the Provinces; for or against Legislative Union; for or against Imperial Federation. There is no halfway," he added emphatically. The outcome of federal centralisation would bring about the rupture of Confederation, leading to either

92 Serge Gaudreau and Jean-Herman Guay, Les Élections au Québec: 150 ans d'une histoire mouvementée (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2018), 73.
93 Rumilly, Honoré Mercier, Tome 2, 134-135.
94 Ibid., 151.
independence or annexation, he claimed, though he again declined to state exactly where he thought the rupture of Confederation could or should lead. The language of "enemies of race" and fears of the loss of provincial autonomy were not new, however, as it was recycled rhetoric from the original opponents to Confederation. Mercier would use it to great effect, however, as he tied provincial autonomy and French-Canadian survival to the threat of imperial federalism with greater emphasis during the campaign.95

Mercier's campaign literature laid out his government's achievements and insisted that "les bleus," i.e. Conservatives, supported imperial federation as did "Le Canadien, the authorised outlet of M. Taillon," leader of the Conservatives in the campaign. It reminded readers that Tarte was a member of the League and that "one of its principal members was the 'famous' McCarthy", which the pamphlet referred to as "the most brutal fanatic, the most ferocious orangist, the most implacable and restless enemy of all that is French-Canadian and Catholic." It added that the proof that Conservatives supported imperial federation, which "would bring about the loss of our distinct race," was that they preferred leaving the chamber rather than voting against David's motion, the text of which was included in the pamphlet. Mercier's campaign literature contained a now familiar message, repeated in his previous speeches and in David's motion, of imperial federation subjecting French-Canadians to "a blood tax." References to the flight of the Conservative opposition further reinforced the insinuation of cowardice. By refusing to vote against it every member of the Conservative opposition implicitly approved imperial federation, the pamphlet claimed. At the height of his popularity, as well as at the height of popular discontent with Conservative rule in Ottawa, Mercier hammered home a consistent message in

95 Honoré Mercier, Opening of the Electoral Campaign – Speech Delivered by the Hon. Honoré Mercier at the Convention of the Nationalists of the District of Québec, held at Tara Hall, on the 15th May, 1890, 4-5. The pamphlet was published in an English version and a French version. Silver, French-Canadian Idea of Confederation, 106, for similar language at Confederation.
making imperial federation a target to counter "enemies" of French-Canada who threatened provincial autonomy. In various ridings too, Mercier's campaign speeches emphasised the threat of legislative union or worse, of imperial federation, and Conservative silence in the face of threats in Canada to "our religion" and "our race." On May 31st, in Montreal, Mercier boasted of his record in favour of working-class interests and concluded his speech by warning the crowd about imperial federation.

The multiple forceful references to imperial federation and David's motion in the Liberals' campaign literature contrasted sharply with Conservative campaign literature. The Conservatives' main campaign pamphlet against Mercier's "disastrous regime" made no mention of David's motion, imperial federation, provincial autonomy, or French-Canadian ethnic pride. It focused exclusively on mismanagement of funds, high deficits and provincial finances. Defining imperial federation in the public's mind, therefore, was left entirely to Mercier. During the campaign, the Conservative Gazette stated that Liberals in the Québec City suburban riding of Montmorency were "telling the people that the Conservatives are striving to force the country into imperial federation, and that the farmers will be liable to be called away at any moment to fight England's battles in every part of the World." This message, The Gazette claimed incredulously, was "having its effect among the more ignorant of the electors."

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96 Élections 1890: Le Gouvernement Mercier, Trois années de progrès, de réhabilitation et de revendication (Québec, 1890), 293: "Un des principaux membres de cette ligue est le fameux McCarthy, le fanatique le plus brutal, l'orangiste le plus féroce, l'ennemi le plus implacable et le plus acharné de tout ce qui est canadien-français et catholique."; Ibid., 294-295: "[...] cette fédération impériale, qui nous perdrait comme race distincte [...]."
98 The Witness, June 2, 1890, 6. At Robert Hall on Ste-Catherine Street.
99 Le Gouvernement Mercier devant les Électeurs: Un régime Désastreux (s.l.: s.n, 1890).
100 The Gazette, July 23, 1890, 2 ("New Tactics in Montmorency").
language papers opposed to Mercier, *The Gazette* and *The Witness*, exhibited worry over ethnic tensions and appealed to voters to reject Mercier's allegedly divisive brand of nationalism.\(^\text{101}\)

While it is not possible to determine the precise impact of Mercier and David's attacks on imperial federation on the 1890 election, Mercier won the election with a greatly increased seat majority. From a near-evenly split chamber after the 1886 general election, Mercier's coalition increased its number of seats to fifty-seven with more than 50% of the popular vote. The Conservative opposition won thirty-one seats. In addition, the Conservative leader, Taillon, lost his seat. Mercier's party only slightly declined in two enclaves, the ultra-conservative Trois-Rivières and the majority-anglophone Eastern Townships, while increasing its vote everywhere else, including in Montreal among the increasingly urban French-Canadian electorate. Among the redistricted ridings was Montreal-East where L.O. David was MPP, portions of which were now divided into Montreal No. 1, Montreal No. 2 and Montreal No. 3. David had only represented the riding since 1886, following his defeat of long-time Conservative incumbent Louis-Olivier Taillon who was now the defeated Conservative leader in Montreal's Jacques-Cartier riding in the 1890 election.\(^\text{102}\) In Montreal No. 1, the Liberals did not run a candidate to lead the way for the candidate of the Parti Ouvrier, Joseph Béland, to win against the Conservative candidate. In Montreal No. 2 and No. 3, Mercier's Liberal candidates won. The Conservatives had held the anglophone riding of Montreal West, which was divided into Montreal No. 4 and Montreal No. 5, and both remained in the hands of anglophone Conservative MPPs. In the new riding of Montreal No. 6, a mostly anglophone riding, Liberal James

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\(^{101}\) *The Gazette*, June 17, 1890, 4, described Mercier's platform as "Nationalism of the Champ de Mars platform," referring to the mass protest in Champ-de-Mars in Old Montreal following the hanging of Louis Riel in 1885. *The Witness*, June 4, 1890, 4, argued that true liberals should support Conservatives because Mercier was simply a nationalist, not a true Liberal.

McShane, who had not voted on David's motion, was elected without opposition. In Montreal, the issue of federal imperialism did not hurt Mercier's results, while Liberal seats increased with the increase in the number of French-Canadian ridings.

In Montmorency, where The Gazette claimed Mercier's attack was "having its effect," the incumbent Conservative MPP, Louis-Georges Duhamel, who rose in the assembly to unsuccessfully propose the Conservative opposition's amendment to David's motion, was defeated by the Liberal candidate, Charles Langelier, by a comfortable margin. As the election was overturned, a by-election was called, though this time Langelier was acclaimed without opposition, thus putting an end to a near-uninterrupted Conservative reign in the riding since Confederation. Considering the success of Mercier's candidate in comfortably defeating the incumbent Conservative veteran, The Gazette's assessment of the effectiveness of the Liberals' campaign messaging on imperial federation cannot be dismissed.

Mercier's success in the election, J.R. Miller has argued, "was a measure of the ineffectiveness of all opposition to the Premier." Admittedly, even in the words of its own proponents, such as Israel Tarte of Le Canadien, the majority of the French-Canadian electorate had not studied imperial federalism in detail. That did not mean that they were not acquainted with it and acquaintance was all that was needed to make it an effective political issue. As this chapter has shown, the near totality of newspapers and politicians in Québec, of both parties,

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103 Pierre Drouilly, Statistiques Électorales du Québec, 1867-1989 (Québec: Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée Nationale, 1990), 5-6; Gaudreau and Guay, Les Élections au Québec, 76-77; Drouilly, Résultats Électoraux, 184-187; Rumilly, Honoré Mercier, Tome 2, 160-162; The Herald, June 18, 1890, 1. The day after the election, defeated Liberal candidate in Montreal no. 5, G.W. Stephens, would launch a challenge to Conservative victor in Montreal No. 5, Jack Hall, to give up his new seat and face him in a by-election following an insult. Stephens questioned Hall's courage by stating that he doubted that Hall would accept the challenge after "dodging the Jesuit amendment and the Imperial federation vote." The Gazette, June 20, 1890, 8.
104 Drouilly, Résultats Électoraux, 174-175; Drouilly, Répertoire du personnel, Vol. 2, 425.
105 Miller, Equal Rights, 152.
106 Joseph-Israel Tarte, Les périls de la souveraineté des provinces l'autonomie canadienne est notre sauvegarde (Québec, 1889), 59-60.
either opposed imperial federation, rejected any affiliation with it or most often claimed that it was not sufficiently serious to warrant discussion. Mercier used his platform as premier to assail imperial federalism on all fronts, including rallies, pamphlets, and, most importantly, the assembly. The motion in the assembly, in turn, helped frame the issue for the upcoming election. Mercier, therefore, effectively stigmatised imperial federation as a national concern that would only worsen the existing problems within Confederation, while his opponents could not or dared not defend it. In other words, there was no counter-narrative on imperial federation. While biographies of Mercier do not mention the 1890 motion, David's retrospective on the important events of his political life included the text of the motion and described his speech. The fact that David, who went on to become a senator, highlighted the motion in his memoirs was indicative that he considered it an important event. If nothing else, it allowed Mercier to stress that he and his party alone were willing to stand up for Québec's autonomy. Thus, the framing of imperial federation as a threat to provincial autonomy and French-Canadian survival was a central part of a very effective political communication strategy that paid dividends for Mercier in the 1890 election. This, however, would not be the final assault on imperial federation that Mercier would mount with the help of his allies.

107 Laurent-Olivier David, Les Gerbes Canadiennes (Montréal: Beauchemin, 1921), 199-201. The memoirs of influential Canadian diplomat, Raoul Dandurand, also recalled David's motion. Raoul Dandurand and Marcel Hamelin, Raoul Dandurand, Le Sénateur-Diplomate: Mémoires: 1861-1942 (1967; repr., Sainte-Foy, Qc: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2000), 154. The speaker of the Assembly when the motion was presented, François-Gabriel Marchand, was Dandurand's father-in-law. Brassard and Hamelin, “Marchand, Félix-Gabriel.”
Chapter Four: The Sohmer Park Debate, November 28, 1892, or Mercier's Legacy Continued

Concerns continued over Confederation as well as Canada's place in the empire, though Québec's political landscape had shifted spectacularly in the period between Mercier's triumphant election in 1890 and 1892. Following allegations of fraud, Mercier was deposed by Conservative Lieutenant-Governor Auguste-Réal Angers in 1891 who asked the Conservative opposition to form the government pending investigation.¹ In the subsequent election of March 8, 1892, held as formal investigations were conducted into the allegations and continuously exploited by the Conservatives and their newspapers, Mercier failed to lead the Liberals to victory. Conservatives regained control of the legislature and swept Mercier's Liberals from Montreal, even in the francophone ridings where they had met with success in 1890.² Mercier would also be accused of the crime of fraud in the award of a publishing contract.³ Meanwhile, the federal Liberals under Wilfrid Laurier, free from scandal, were ascendant in Quebec.⁴

Despite these tribulations, Mercier's long-time Conservative foe, Israel Tarte of Le Canadien, not only moved his paper's headquarters to Montreal in 1891 but became a Liberal and outspoken defender of Mercier throughout his trials.⁵ Mercier's trials would shift the

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² Rumilly, Honoré Mercier, Tome 2, 302-307; Pierre Drouilly, Statistiques Électorales du Québec, 1867-1989 (Québec: Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée Nationale, 1990), 6. Conservatives would win 60 of 84 available seats. While support for Mercier's Liberal party increased from 29.6 to 29.9% of the popular vote, support for Independent-Conservatives and Nationalist Party candidates, allied with Mercier, shrunk precipitously. The swing votes appear to have gone to Conservatives who increased their share of the popular vote from 30.2% to 35.8%. Conservatives also won more seats by acclamation. Pierre Drouilly, Les Résultats Électoraux depuis 1867 (Québec: Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée Nationale, 1990), 184-185.
³ Rumilly, Honoré Mercier, Tome 2, 329-331.
⁵ Tarte published a book defending Mercier against wrongdoing, Joseph-Israel Tarte, Le Procès Mercier: Les Causes qui l'ont provoqué, Quelques Faits pour l'histoire (Montréal: Louis-Joseph et Eugène Tarte, 1892). During the 1892 campaign, Conservatives would reprint excerpts of Tarte's previous critiques of Mercier, see M. Mercier Jugé par les Libéraux (s.l., s.n.), 3-18. They did not mention David's 1890 motion on imperial federalism, however.
loyalties of other papers as well, such as the Conservative-turned-independent Le Monde, which considered the trial abusive. During 1892, Le Monde would shift to a nationalist position, express disillusion with Confederation by December 1892, just days after the Sohmer Park event, and renounce all support for the Conservative party. L'Étendard, on the other hand, argued for prosecution despite having supported Mercier in the 1890 election. 6 Official party organs remained, however, such as the Conservative Gazette and La Minerve and the Liberal Montreal Daily Herald ("The Herald"). During Mercier's premiership and Laurier's rise, the strength and circulation of Conservative papers in Montreal had stagnated, with the partisan split almost even by 1892. 7 Mercier, meanwhile, was forced to declare bankruptcy two months before the Sohmer Park event and his health seriously deteriorated as his diabetes worsened. Nonetheless, by the end of 1892, Mercier increased his public appearances and was formally acquitted of criminal charges on November 4, 1892, only a few weeks before the Sohmer Park debate. 8 Imperial federalist George Parkin had claimed in June 1892 that the "exposure of Mr. Mercier's political methods and the collapse of his system make it perhaps unnecessary to discuss his views on national affairs." 9 Parkin's dismissal of Mercier's influence would prove premature, however.

As this chapter will show, the Sohmer Park event combined deliberation and spectacle on a large public scale and reflected Mercier's continuing influence on public opinion on imperial

8 Rumilly, Honoré Mercier, Tome 2, 323-324 (bankruptcy), 326 (L'Étendard), 333 (acquittal), 355 (diabetes). Dufour and Hamelin. “Mercier, Honoré,” Mercier would cede his property to a trustee in June who would oversee the sale of Mercier's property, including his home. By September 1892, he officially declared bankruptcy. Newspapers, notably Conservative papers, such as the Gazette seemed to delight in reporting the selling of his property, see Gazette, July 11, 1892, 4; Gazette, October 3, 1892, 3. Also, La Minerve, November 26, 1892 ("L'Annexion aux États-Unis") a tongue-in-cheek comment on Mercier relating to the sale of household goods.
9 George Parkin, Imperial Federation, the Problem of National Unity (London: Macmillan and Co., 1892), 159-160.
federalism despite no longer holding formal political power. The first section will critically examine the venue, the event's organisation and participants to reveal the Liberal partisan nature of the event and determine its value as a metric of popular opinion on imperial federation in Montreal. The second section examines the views of Archibald McGoun, the proponent for an imperial federation, which will then be compared to the other speakers' views. The third section will show that the press focused on the spectacle, including a disturbance of one of the speeches, and was divided on the value of the event as a forum for serious discussion. Finally, it will be shown that the event's results, when combined with an analysis of press coverage, demonstrate that public opinion on imperial federation was indeed hostile in Montreal.

Since June 1889, Montrealers had a new outlet for entertainment in Sohmer Park. Owned by music conductor and merchant Ernest Lavigne, Sohmer Park was a popular place for public entertainment. Located in the working-class francophone neighbourhood of Sainte-Marie in the south-east of Montreal and surrounded by the francophone neighbourhoods Hochelaga and Saint-Jacques, the park quickly became a successful attraction.\(^\text{10}\) The park hosted music concerts, acrobatic shows, political and labour union meetings, and even added a zoo by 1892. The park's growth led to the inauguration of a large concert pavilion with a maximum capacity of ten thousand people in 1891.\(^\text{11}\) The neighbourhood was in the Montreal No. 1 riding, formerly within the Montreal-East riding, which had mostly elected Liberal politicians at the provincial level throughout the 1880s, including Laurent-Olivier David.\(^\text{12}\) Combining spectacle and

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\(^\text{10}\) Paul-André Linteau, *Histoire De Montréal Depuis La Confédération* (Montréal: Boréal, 2000), 76, 79, 81, 83. The Eastern part of Montreal was majority francophone, while most anglophones lived in the West, Ibid., 47.

\(^\text{11}\) Yvan Lamonde and Raymond Montpetit. *Le Parc Sohmer de Montréal, 1889-1919: Un lieu populaire de culture urbaine* (Québec: Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1986), 37-39 (beginnings), 63-64, 67 ("zoo"), 182 ("labour organisations"), 187-191 ("political rallies"), 203-204. The authors estimate that the actual seating capacity was closer to 6000 to 8000, depending on seating arrangements. Ibid., 64.

\(^\text{12}\) Drouilly, *Résultats Électoraux*, 184; *The Montreal Daily Herald*, March 9, 1892, 1. *The Montreal Daily Herald* was formerly *The Montreal Herald*. It will be referred to as *The Herald* throughout to lighten the text.
entertainment with partisanship, an event on the evening of November 28, 1892, at Sohmer Park offered Montrealers an opportunity to express their opinion on Canada's future.13

The options discussed were: the status quo, i.e. Confederation with colonial links, imperial federation, annexation to the United States, and independence. The speakers were, in order: Joseph T. Cardinal (status quo); Archibald McGoun, Jr. (imperial federation); Rodolphe Lemieux (Canadian independence); Elgin Myers (annexation).14 The order of the speakers likely favoured Lemieux and Myers as the vote was held late and their supporters, drawn from the nearby francophone population, were more likely to stay until the end of the event, which was held on a weekday. Spectators paid ten cents to attend and were invited to cast a secret ballot in favour of an option after all speakers had spoken.15 There was no debate between the candidates though the later speakers occasionally responded to claims made by earlier orators. The doors opened at 6:00 p.m., and the event lasted until the organiser announced the results at about midnight.16 An orchestra played music at the beginning of the event, to introduce each speaker, and at the announcement of the results. The speakers stood on a stage decorated with flags representing each option while influential politicians sat behind the speakers on the dais. Each speaker had a maximum of twenty-five minutes to make their case.17 The results were as follows: independence 1614 (53.8%); annexation 992 (33%); status quo 364 (12.1%); imperial federation

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13 Although the Sohmer Park event was a well-attended public discussion on Canada's options, it was one among many lectures and similar events held across Canada in the late 1880s and early 1890s, see The Gazette, December 14, 1889, 3; The Victoria Daily Times, February 10, 1893, 2. Aaron W. Boyes, "Canada's Undecided Future: The Discourse on Unrestricted Reciprocity and Annexation in Quebec, 1887-1893," Master's thesis, University of Ottawa, 2010, 99.

14 La Patrie, November 28, 1892, 4 (announcement on day of event). Reports following the event also confirm the order of the speakers. La Patrie, however, does not explain how the order was determined.

15 The Montreal Daily Witness, November 29, 1892, 8. Will be referred to as The Witness hereinafter.

16 La Patrie, November 29, 1892, 1-2. Most arrived after 7:00 p.m. and the speeches began around 8:00 p.m., Montreal Star, November 29, 1; The vote was taken around 11:30 p.m., and many people apparently had already left by then, La Presse, November 29, 1892, 1, and Le Monde, November 29, 1892, 2.

17 Le Canadien, November 29, 1892, 1, 3. The elements of decor, such as the flags, were noted by multiple papers. La Patrie, November 28, 1892, 4 (speaking time).
29 (less than 1%) for a total of 2999 votes.\textsuperscript{18} The few brief comments on the event in the academic literature have focused on the surprisingly strong support for annexation, which arrived in second place.\textsuperscript{19}

Fusing elements of spectacle and reasoned argument, the Sohmer Park debate reflected multiple practices of public participation and press culture of late nineteenth-century Montreal. For example, the adoption of the secret ballot at the event reflected electoral practices, following recent legislation.\textsuperscript{20} The continued appeal of orators in Québec and the popularity of "contradictory assemblies" found their echo at the event as well.\textsuperscript{21} By the end of the century, however, new election laws and outrage at scandals promoted what political reformers considered more respectable ways of doing politics.\textsuperscript{22} The press and the event's organiser, Liberal nationalist and Mercier ally Joseph-Xavier Perrault, sought to overcome the violent reputation of political events by denouncing disruptions, appealing to fair play, and defending free and respectful speech.\textsuperscript{23} Such appeals were also a partisan tactic to distinguish responsible participants in public debate from opponents who fell short of the standard, as noted by Jeffrey

\textsuperscript{18} For status quo \textit{La Presse} noted 314 votes while \textit{La Patrie}, and \textit{Le Monde} state 364. Considering the total number of votes reported, 364 would be the correct amount.


\textsuperscript{20} Québec introduced secret balloting in 1875, though it was used at various times in Montreal in the past, see Renaud Séguin, "Pour une nouvelle synthèse sur les processus électoraux du XIXe siècle québécois," \textit{Journal of the Canadian Historical Association} 16, no. 1 (2005): 77. Montreal municipal elections introduced it in 1889, Linteau, \textit{Histoire De Montréal}, 121.


\textsuperscript{22} This has mostly been studied for Ontario, however. See Ian Radforth, "Motley Crowds and Splendid Assemblies: Press Depictions of Election Culture in Mid-Victorian Toronto," \textit{Histoire Sociale/Social History} 51, no. 103 (2018); Jack I. Little, "Picnics and Politics."

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{La Patrie}, November 29, 1892, 2.
McNairn for Upper Canada. The journalistic practice of emphasising spectacle and unanimous crowd approval, such as cheers or hisses that Koerber identified as forms of political participation in the early 1840s, was also found in the press coverage of the Sohmer Park event.

A public event such as this offered an opportunity to reach a large audience outside of the official campaign season and the increasingly restrictive framework of campaign laws. Indeed, the event cannot be seen outside of its partisan context despite participation from non-Liberal members. In addition to its Liberal partisan organisation, the event reflected the lingering influence of associative life in Montréal and the rising influence of local political clubs. While it is reasonable to question why Conservatives and imperial federalists would attend an event organised by Liberals favouring either annexation or independence, the large venue made it a difficult opportunity to pass up. Members of various political clubs were invited to attend and to provide members to act as scrutineers. Further, the event's profits were allegedly dedicated to completing the construction of the Monument National, the French-Canadian cultural centre built by the non-partisan Association Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal. As a result, the event likely appealed to francophones with a nationalist inclination — Liberal or Conservative — who had an incentive to attend the event in their part of the city.

26 de Bonville, La Presse Québécoise de 1884 à 1914, 298-299. Including through the partisan press.
28 La Patrie, November 28, 1892, 4.
29 Montreal Star, November 29, 1892, 1. André-Gilles Bourassa et Jean-Marc Larrue, "Le Monument National (1893-1923): trente ans de théâtre dans la salle Ludger-Duvernay," L'Annuaire théâtral n° 10 (1991): 70-78, stated that the Monument National was the idea of Liberal opponent of imperial federation Laurent-Olivier David. Launched as a project in 1884, it would not open until 1893 due to fundraising difficulties.
According to most estimates, the Sohmer Park's auditorium could comfortably hold about six thousand to seven thousand spectators based on seating arrangements.\(^{30}\) *La Patrie*, which promoted the event and praised its results, estimated the attendance at ten thousand, while *Le Monde* estimated the crowd at close to six thousand people, including many women.\(^{31}\) As *La Patrie* appealed to women to attend to get the vote out for its favoured option, annexation or independence if necessary, and many speakers appealed to women to get their vote, it is reasonable to conclude that women participated in large numbers.\(^{32}\) Although early conceptions of the public sphere did not include women, who were not afforded the same opportunities as men for official political participation, a gradual shift was underway by the late 1880s despite cultural and legal factors barring women from voting in provincial and federal elections. Canadian dailies, for instance, began featuring columns for women and reports by female reporters. Though women in Québec did not get the formal right to vote in provincial elections until 1940, the government of Conservative Premier Charles-Eugène Boucher-de-Boucherville adopted a law in 1892 giving women the right to vote in municipal and school elections. Since the mid-nineteenth century, women had been gradually entering the public sphere through local voting and various forms of participation in the press and politics.\(^{33}\)

\(^{30}\) Lamonde and Montpetit, *Le Parc Sohmer*, 196.

\(^{31}\) *La Patrie*, November 29, 1892, 1; *Le Monde*, November 29, 1892, 1.

\(^{32}\) *La Patrie*, November 28, 1892, 1 (Invited women on day of event); *La Patrie*, November 29, 1892, 2 (Lemieux and Myers both appealed to women in their speeches). *La Patrie*, November 28, 1892, 4. *La Patrie* also called on workers' groups and students to attend. It also insisted that people bring their own pencil to make sure that they would be able to vote. A few hundred people also came from St-Jean, Saint-Hyacinthe and other francophone towns, *Le Monde*, November 29, 1892, 2. St-Jean remained a Liberal stronghold in 1892 and was represented by Mercier's Liberal successor and ally, Félix-Gabriel Marchand. Saint-Hyacinthe, though represented by a Conservative MPP in 1892, was the hometown of Honoré Mercier.

An examination of the various participants at the event underscores its partisan nature.

First, Joseph-Xavier Perrault, the organiser of the event, had been an opponent of Confederation from the beginning, as Mercier had been. They had been members for many years in the Liberal Club National and Perrault was a regular contributor to the short-lived Mercier-supported weekly, *Le Clairon*, in 1889-1890. Perrault was a virulent anti-imperialist who had published a pamphlet denouncing colonial ties to Britain and demanding complete independence for Canada as early as 1878 and was active in promoting Canadian independence within political clubs. In addition, he was a francophile who worked to tighten links between Québec and France. It has been argued, however, that he sought to have Mercier lead the annexationist movement and to use the Sohmer Park event as a showcase for annexation. That Elgin Myers spoke last could support this view. However, as an indication of his affinity with Perrault, the winning speaker, Rodolphe Lemieux, proposed in jest to form a Canadian Republic with Perrault as the first president after the results were announced. The organiser of the event was thus very active in Liberal politics and was a supporter of independence, and possibly annexation.

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36 Joseph-Xavier Perrault, *Le lien colonial, c'est la banqueroute; la nation meurt de faim parce qu'elle est pieds et poings liés par le lien colonial* (Montréal, 1878). *The Witness*, March 7, 1890, 6, stated that a league was organised to achieve independence by 1892 with the help of Americans and that "young Liberals, of whom J.X. Perreault [sic] is one of the chief, are the promoters of the new league."
37 Perrault sought to establish a steamship service between France and Quebec, subsidised by the French government, see J.-X. Perrault, *Transatlantique franco-canadienne* (Montréal, 1885). He would represent the Montreal Chamber of Commerce at the Paris exhibition of 1889, see Hudon, “Perrault, Joseph-Xavier,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*.
38 Boyes, "Towards the ‘Federated States of North America’": 158-159.
39 Curiously, *The Ottawa Citizen*, November 17, 1892, 1, announced the event a week and a half before the event under the title "Annexation in Montreal," indicating that the purpose of the event was to promote annexation.
40 *Montreal Star*, November 29, 1892, 1.
Moreover, six newspapers reported the presence of multiple "notables" in attendance, though all six papers were either Liberal papers or independent.\(^{41}\) While the papers mostly noted Liberals in attendance, they also underscored the presence of a few Conservatives. This discrepancy was possibly an attempt either by Liberal papers to highlight bipartisan participation to increase the event's legitimacy or by independent papers to appeal to a broad readership. No Conservative papers noted these notables. The notables in attendance, however, reflected the partisan Liberal influence of the event. The number of notables indicated varies though some appear in all descriptions.

In addition to these "notables," the most notable present was Mercier, whom all papers identified, regardless of affiliation or language, and agreed that he was acclaimed by the crowd, including thunderous applause and a standing ovation.\(^{42}\) It was a triumphant return or even a redemption as Mercier, a mere three weeks before the Sohmer Park event, had been acquitted of corruption.\(^{43}\) This was his first significant public appearance since his acquittal. The Montreal Daily Witness ("The Witness"), though critical of Mercier, could not ignore his presence. It stated that he showed up, "his head covered with a soft hat, à la Bonaparte" and sat behind Lemieux who defended the independence option, "in a truly Napoleonic attitude, one hand concealed in his coat breast."\(^{44}\) Le Canadien, now sympathetic to Mercier and the Liberal party, claimed that Mercier was "restored to his former glory."\(^{45}\) Everyone, La Patrie claimed, was on their feet, clapping or waving their hat and handkerchiefs, to greet the rehabilitated nationalist leader as he entered the venue.\(^{46}\)

\(^{41}\) See La Patrie, November 29, 1892, 1; The Herald, November 29, 1892, 1; Le Canadien, November 29, 1892, 1; The Witness, November 29, 1892, 1; Montreal Star, November 29, 1892, 1; and Le Monde November 29, 1892, 2.

\(^{42}\) Le Canadien, November 29, 1892, 1; The Gazette, November 29, 1892, 3; La Presse, November 29, 1892, 1.

\(^{43}\) Rumilly, Honoré Mercier, Tome 2, 333.

\(^{44}\) The Witness, November 30, 1892, 4.

\(^{45}\) Le Canadien, November 29, 1892, 1. Mercier was acquitted on November 4\(^{th}\), 1892.

\(^{46}\) La Patrie, November 29, 1892, 4.
Among other identifiable "notables," there was a greater number of Liberals than Conservatives. The most influential Conservative present was likely Senator Joseph Tassé, former owner of the struggling *La Minerve*. Besides Mercier, notable Liberals included David, and Lomer Gouin, future premier and Mercier's son-in-law. Many sitting Liberal MPPs were present, and many others were members of the Club Letellier or Club National, local Liberal clubs. Many papers also noted the presence of women in attendance, including wives of Conservative politicians, though Conservative papers derided or generally ignored women's participation. Their participation likely impacted the results substantially and increased the value of the event as reflective of a broader public opinion than was understood for most of the nineteenth century. No papers noted any warm reception for any Conservatives in attendance. The predominance of notable Liberals reflected the composition of the crowd, as also perceived by the Conservative press, and as corroborated by the evidence to follow.

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48 Jean-Marie Lebel, “TASSÉ, JOSEPH,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 12, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–. The Club National was a Liberal club with French-Canadian nationalist leanings, founded in 1875 to counter the Conservative Club Cartier, according to Jean-Paul Bernard, “Laframboise, Maurice,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 11, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003. Winning speaker Rodolphe Lemieux and former premier Honoré Mercier were members of the Club National, see *The Gazette*, April 24, 1890, 2, “The Late Mr. Lareau.” Rumilly, *Honoré Mercier*, Tome 2, 49, states that Lemieux was its secretary. The Liberal paper *The Herald* noted ladies and gentlemen among the notables, including Mrs David, Madame Tassé, Miss Tassé. *The Herald*, November 29, 1892, 1. *The Witness*, November 29, 1892, 8, noted "a fair sprinkling of ladies" but did not name any. *Le Monde*, November 29, 1892, 2, noted "a good number of women." No Conservative papers noted the presence of women. *La Presse*, November 28, 1892, derided the event as "ultra-universal" due to the ability of women and children to vote at the event.

49 The Liberal paper *The Herald* noted ladies and gentlemen among the notables, including Mrs David, Madame Tassé, Miss Tassé. *The Herald*, November 29, 1892, 1. *The Witness*, November 29, 1892, 8, noted "a fair sprinkling of ladies" but did not name any. *Le Monde*, November 29, 1892, 2, noted "a good number of women." No Conservative papers noted the presence of women. *La Presse*, November 28, 1892, derided the event as "ultra-universal" due to the ability of women and children to vote at the event.

50 *La Presse*, November 29, 1892, 1, stated that “the audience was obviously composed of Liberals [...]” (original: "la majorité de l'auditoire était composée évidemment de libéraux [...]").
The speakers' affiliations revealed that a well-known ally of the organiser and of Mercier defended the winning option. Mercier sat behind Rodolphe Lemieux on the dais, signalling his support for independence.\footnote{Despite the ballot being officially secret, La Patrie stated that they had it on good authority that Mercier voted for independence. \textit{La Patrie}, December 1, 1892, 4. \textit{Le Monde}, November 30, 1892, 4, also claimed this.} Lemieux, at twenty-six years of age, was already a rising star in Liberal circles and often gave speeches alongside his mentors, Mercier and Wilfrid Laurier, and had worked as a journalist for their official Quebec city Liberal paper, \textit{L'Électeur}.\footnote{René Castonguay, “Lemieux, Rodolphe (baptized Rodolphe-Toussaint),” in \textit{Dictionary of Canadian Biography}, vol. 16, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–.} Lemieux was active in local Liberal political clubs and had already publicly argued for independence in 1891.\footnote{René Castonguay, \textit{Rodolphe Lemieux et le Parti libéral, 1866-1937: Le Chevalier du Roi} (Sainte-Foy, QC: Presses Université Laval, 2000), 28.} Mercier had even entrusted Lemieux to represent him at the gathering of French-Canadians at Nashua, New Hampshire in 1889. After Mercier's fall from power and financial difficulties, Lemieux remained a constant supporter as he took Mercier in as a law partner and financially supported him.\footnote{Rumilly, \textit{Honoré Mercier}, Tome 2, 96 (Lemieux in Nashua, N.H.), 30, 32 (law partner and financial support).} Reports from papers on each side of the partisan divide noted that Lemieux was well-known and well-liked by the crowd.\footnote{Montreal Star, November 29, 1892, 1: "It was clear from the outset that the sympathies of the spectators were with the popular young advocate of independence, Mr Rodolphe Lemieux."; \textit{Le Canadien}, November 29, 1892, 3.}

Other speakers, however, were not as well-known as Lemieux. Conservative J.T. Cardinal was a lawyer from Montreal and was president of the local Club Conservateur, founded in 1890.\footnote{Le Canadien, November 29, 1892, 1. Montreal Star, November 29, 1892, 1.} By the time of the Sohmer Park event, he had never run for office.\footnote{Cardinal would run as a Conservative candidate in Montréal-Saint-Jacques riding in the 1904 election but lost. Drouilly, \textit{Répertoire du personnel politique}, 134.} Though Cardinal did not have a large following in the crowd, reports assumed that he was known, and even the Liberal \textit{Herald} noted that he received a warm welcome because the crowd recognised him as a descendant of a Patriote of 1837.\footnote{The \textit{Herald}, November 29, 1892, 1.} The proponent for annexation, Elgin Myers, had a higher...
national profile than Cardinal or McGoun as he was a former member of Ontario premier Oliver Mowat's cabinet before being ejected for his support for annexation.\textsuperscript{59} Myers was likely more familiar to British-Montrealers since the English-language press had reported his dismissal and hecklers chanted "Three cheers for Mowat" in English.\textsuperscript{60} However, most of the French press informed their readers that he was a lawyer from Toronto who had a recent dispute with Premier Mowat, assuming that he was unknown to their readers.\textsuperscript{61}

Archibald McGoun, the proponent of imperial federation, was likely the speaker who was least known to attendees. That his name was repeatedly misspelt by French-language newspapers as "McGown" was likely an indication of this.\textsuperscript{62} That said, he was a founding member of the Imperial Federation League of Canada and its Montreal Branch, and he also participated in discussions of league affairs with British leaders of the movement.\textsuperscript{63} McGoun, a law professor at McGill, had multiple publications on imperial federalism to his credit prior to the Sohmer Park event and had met with occasional success in defending imperial federalism in front of small groups of English-speaking Montrealers.\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Le Canadien}, November 29, 1892, 3. Many papers noted Myers' dispute with Premier Mowat.
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{The Witness}, November 29, 1892, 8.
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{La Patrie}, November 29, 1892, 2. The night before, Myers gave a speech at St. Lawrence Hall at a banquet for Université Laval students in Montreal. Not only did many Université Laval students attend the Sohmer Park event, but \textit{The Herald} listed many politicians who would also attend the Sohmer Park event, as well as the Sohmer park event organiser, J.X. Perrault, as being at the banquet. \textit{The Herald}, November 28, 1892, 8.
\textsuperscript{62} The following papers spelt his name correctly as McGoun: \textit{The Witness, The Gazette, The Herald, The Star} (M'Goun), \textit{Le Canadien, Le Canadien}, whose editor was a member of the Imperial Federation League was the only French-language paper to spell McGoun's name correctly. The following spelt it incorrectly as McGown: \textit{La Presse, Le Monde, La Minerve, La Patrie} referred mostly to McGown and occasionally to McGoun.
\textsuperscript{63} Michael Burgess, \textit{The British Tradition of Federalism} (Madison, N.J., Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1995), 61-63.
One might assume that the man who had once written of "the celebrated report of the Earl of Durham on the condition of British North America [my emphasis]" would have views at odds with the general French-Canadian sentiment on politics. On the other hand, McGoun spoke French, had lived in France, and saw imperial federation as offering opportunities to French-Canadians, such as getting closer to France by acting as liaisons and having a French-Canadian Imperial Minister of Public Works. Thus, McGoun was seemingly sympathetic to French-Canadians' place in an imperial federation.\(^6\) In what could be a reflection of Mercier's effective campaign against imperial federation, D'Alton McCarthy had been removed as president of the League due to the hostility his presence generated towards the movement among French-Canadians, although McGoun favoured keeping McCarthy as head of the League.\(^6\) It is unknown if McGoun's support for McCarthy was known to the voting public at Sohmer Park, however. Nonetheless, though McGoun was not well known to the attendees, he was probably the speaker at Sohmer Park with the most in-depth knowledge of his subject.

Despite the fact that the annexationist Myers spoke in English to a mostly francophone crowd with little knowledge of him, and some anglophone spectators hostile to him, he came in second, with thirty-three percent of the vote. As McGoun had many students and colleagues at McGill, and local League membership exceeded the number of votes for his option, it was probable that most of his fellow federationists avoided the event or left after his speech. Papers reported that many in attendance were young and that support for independence and annexation

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\(^6\) McGoun, *Federation of the Empire*, 4 (celebrated report), 11 (French-Canadian opportunities). It is difficult to ascertain whether this is recognition of growing francophilia among French-Canadian elites or an assimilation of French-Canadians as foreigners or unequal members in the British Empire, as he stated: "[...] We cannot forget that a large and important section of our people have for France the same affection and regard that we have for the United Kingdom; and on this account as well as on many others, we should try to tighten, rather than to sever, the bonds that unite us to the old world." \(^6\)

was more popular among younger people. Most likely, the crowd was overwhelmingly young, Liberal and francophone, and had come with their mind made up and were determined to stay until the end.  

As the partisan influence of Mercier and his Liberal allies over the event has been established, the following section will examine the speakers' arguments and performances, McGoun's especially. Although most speakers discussed familiar themes, such as militarism, concerns about imperial "racial" diversity, the fate of the empire, and French-Canadian cultural survival, they offered few new or substantive arguments. Arguments popularised by Mercier and David were recycled at the event. Not all speakers covered every one of these themes, however. Therefore, these arguments and how their use shifted since 1890 will be pointed out within the speeches that used them, although the structure will present the speeches separately to contrast their views on imperial federalism and highlight their respective performances. This serves to highlight the performative aspects of the event, which were central to its coverage, rather than confusing the speeches based on their themes alone. Papers agreed on the main points of the speeches, though their assessment of the performances and the options differed. The similarities in reporting reflected the gradual professionalisation of journalism and, possibly, the self-policing among newspapers who commented on each other's coverage. Opinion pieces still expressed the editors' views, however, and subtle differences were perceptible in what were meant to be factual reports, such as crowd numbers, composition, and reactions.

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67 Boyes, "Canada's Undecided Future," 91, also claims that the public was mostly francophone without elaborating. Le Monde, November 29, 1892, 2. La Presse, November 29, 1892, 1, claims that the audience "was obviously composed of Liberals".

68 Jean de Bonville documents the professionalisation of the journalistic trade, La Presse Québécoise de 1884 à 1914, 157-158, 171, 188, 217, 220-222, 238-240. Fetherling, Rise of the Canadian Newspaper, 96.
McGoun opened his speech by stating, in French, that due to a lack of time he would gladly discuss the issue at length at any of the local political clubs. McGoun would deliver the rest of his speech in English, however. His admission that imperial federation could not be explained in depth at the event could do little to appease those who saw the project as vague. Despite consideration for the role of French-Canadians in an imperial federation in McGoun's writings, he referred to French-Canadians in the audience simply to warn them that annexation would be a threat to their survival. Instead, his speech emphasised the practical benefits of the empire. While he spoke to the crowd as fellow Canadian members of the British Empire, the fact that he addressed some words in French, appealed to the political clubs, and tried to address particular concerns among the French-Canadian population, such as autonomy and national survival, is further evidence that the crowd was French and primarily Liberal.69

To counter ideas that equated colonial links with immaturity, McGoun argued that as British subjects, Canadians were entitled to rights in the British Empire. Appeals to manly character and maturity once again informed the discussion on Canada's future as he argued that Canadians had "reached national manhood and must have full national powers and assume national responsibilities." Canadian representation in Westminster and bearing greater responsibilities for defence could provide Canada with an increased role, McGoun argued. That said, he did not feel that Canada was sufficiently strong militarily to be independent. On the other hand, an earlier argument by Cardinal for postponement of independence for when Canada would become sufficiently strong did not appeal to McGoun either. "The idea of remaining under British protection till we are strong enough to throw off our allegiance is to bring up our people

69 The Herald, November 29, 1892, 2. He also suggested that people come to a meeting planned for the following week with George Parkin.
degraded, dependent parasites," he stated. McGoun's speech emphasised potential defence and trade benefits from greater integration as he portrayed imperial federalism as a means to increase, rather than decrease, Canada's influence.

McGoun had harsh words for annexationists, whom he spent the greater part of his speech attacking. While Americans would naturally be annexationists, a British subject who would favour such an option was a traitor and "the argument for him is the lamp-post," he said, referring to a symbol of public execution by hanging, before describing such a person as a "bastard citizen." Such rhetoric of "parasites" and "bastard" contrasted with the tamer language used by the other speakers, as well as with the language in much of the imperial federalist literature, including McGoun's previous writings. His surprisingly aggressive language appeared to be an attempt at a forceful defence of imperial federation in front of a crowd that was hostile to his option. While McGoun's speech and writings emphasised the commercial benefits of trade with Britain, as well as legal and constitutional arguments, this rhetoric revealed that his loyalism contained a level of anti-American sentiment, which he shared with other notable imperial federalists such as George Denison. Except for these statements, the tone and style of delivery were rather academic, with Le Monde noting it as "dry and sleep-inducing" before adding that McGoun seemed "as unsympathetic as his cause."

As for concerns over provincial autonomy, McGoun argued that federation would preserve existing local freedoms while only transferring what Canada agreed to surrender to the Imperial Parliament. These powers would also be surrendered by "England" as "it must be a

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70 The Star, November 29, 1892, 2. The current predicament, he argued, was "an accident of administration, and the short-sightedness of statesmen has saddled the United Kingdom with all the expense and given her all the control of the Empire."
71 The Herald, November 29, 1892, 2.
72 Berger, Sense of Power, 171-175, on Denison and Anti-Americanism.
73 Le Monde, November 29, 1892, 2.
union of equals," McGoun stated. In a surprising point that possibly would not have been made in front of an anglophone Conservative or staunchly loyalist crowd, McGoun stated that the important thing was that the empire stay united and that federation would still work should the members, including Britain, opt for a republican regime. While some degree of emphasis on unity was at the heart of all federationist pleas, McGoun's concession that unity could be achieved in a republican form was unique among his Canadian peers. McGoun's previous speeches and writings, however, never considered an imperial federation, republican or not, as including the United States. His British patriotism and hostility to the United States were consistent, and this argument was possibly an attempt to muster the little support he could from a crowd that was unsympathetic to colonial ties.

Although most arguments for imperial federation related to defence, trade, and British "racial" or "national" unity, McGoun avoided promoting British unity or even English-speaking unity altogether. This was not due to a lack of interest on his part as he had previously written that federation would "keep the British stock pure" by preserving it from mixture with Americans. His emphasis on defence, however, was standard for proponents of imperial federation. His attempt to convince the audience that preferential treatment for imperial trade was more desirable than commercial union with the U.S. was also common among federationists, although McGoun placed a greater emphasis on trade than most. On the other hand, McGoun

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74 The Herald, November 29, 1892, 2. McGoun used "Britain" and "England" to refer to "Great Britain".
75 For example, see Le Canadien, November 29, 1892, 1; Le Monde, December 2, 1892, 2. This was noted as part of his speech by multiple papers. Some papers, such as the Montreal Star, which only provided abridged versions of the speeches, did not mention it. In 1884, McGoun acknowledged that some sought Anglo-Saxon unity with the United States, Federation of the Empire, 7. By 1890, he was more critical of such rapprochement, see McGoun, A Federal Parliament of the British People, 2.
76 Archibald McGoun, "Federation of the Empire," in Imperial Federation League Journal Vol II, (July 1887), 149. Despite the title of the article, it should not be confused with McGoun's 1884 pamphlet of the same title wherein no reference to the purity of the British stock was mentioned.
77 Berger, Sense of Power, 233, 257; Burgess, British Tradition of Federalism, 66.
78 Burgess, British Tradition of Federalism, 35-37. Tyler, Struggle for Imperial Unity, 151. See McGoun, On
had to refute unique arguments as a result of the largely French-Canadian audience whose views had been primed by Mercier's years-long campaign against imperial federalism. Among these concerns were how an imperial federation would affect French-Canadian cultural survival, the political and military participation of the French-Canadian minority, and how provincial autonomy could be preserved. McGoun could only respond to Cardinal who spoke before him and was, therefore, unable to respond to the options most popular at the event and most often opposed to imperial federalism, namely annexation and independence.

How the other speakers saw imperial federation provided further insight into how the topic was framed. J.T. Cardinal's speech offered glimpses into the Conservative opposition to imperial federalism outside of a strict annexation-imperial federalism binary. His critique of imperial federalism was revealing as he thought it necessary to attack the other scheme favouring imperial ties, imperial federalism, which Mercier had repeatedly tried to link to the Conservatives. As Cardinal spoke first, he did not have the benefit of responding to the other speakers though he derided imperial federation and claimed that "the advocates of the [imperial federation] were more British than the British themselves." As some, such as D'Alton McCarthy, had raised doubts about French-Canadian loyalty, and even nationalist Liberal politicians such as David were cautious not to appear disloyal, Cardinal's statement reversed the charge by hinting at possibly "excessive" loyalty among imperial federalists. The notion of "excessive" loyalty, however, had been repeatedly raised by Mercier and David in the Assembly. Cardinal was against imperial federation, he added, because Britain's leaders and people were not even for it as they feared that the colonies would have too much power in a federated imperial Parliament. The fear that one party would have too much power in an imperial parliament was

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Commercial Union, comparing the benefits of British trade to pursuing American trade treaties.
79 The Herald, November 29, 1892, 2.
thus made by most opponents of imperial federation, with either Britain or the colonies fearing the other's power.

Despite being a Conservative, Cardinal underscored that Liberal British Prime Minister William Gladstone foresaw Canada's separation from Great Britain and was dismissive of plans for colonial representation in Westminster.\textsuperscript{80} As a defender of Confederation's status quo, as many Conservatives were, Cardinal's jabs at imperial federation lacked the full critique of Confederation that had informed much of Mercier's attacks on imperial federation though Cardinal acknowledged these concerns. Indeed, Cardinal quoted Sir George-Étienne Cartier and Wilfrid Laurier to reassure those present that the constitution offered the greatest protection of French-Canadians' "language, institutions and rights."\textsuperscript{81} Cardinal nonetheless picked up on other arguments that had been made by Mercier and David, as he argued that imperial federation was bad for Canada because Canadians would have to participate in the defence of the empire.\textsuperscript{82}

Under imperial federation, "every year our brave young men would be obliged to leave their native soil to perhaps fight Zulus and die on African soil [...]" he asserted, making arguments previously made by Mercier and David his own. Cardinal's comment revealed that unease with the expansive and diverse nature of the empire, where French-Canadians would have to contend with a new, foreign majority, transcended party lines. All speakers, except McGoun, raised anti-militaristic arguments, including the annexationist Myers who claimed that "imperial federation means imperialism, militarism [...]" and Lemieux, the proponent of independence, who argued that Canada could be forced to go to war if it remained in the empire.\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{80} La Patrie, November 29, 1892, 2.
\textsuperscript{81} Le Monde, November 30, 1892, 2.
\textsuperscript{82} La Patrie, November 29, 1892, 1. Le Canadien, November 29, 1892, 1.
\textsuperscript{83} The Herald, November 29, 1892, 2.
While Cardinal sought to deconstruct imperial federation, he also spent a large portion of his speech attacking annexation, which was also fuelled by discontent with Confederation. Although he acknowledged that many people complained of a lack of recognition of French-Canadian rights in Ottawa and that "these grievances are justified," they would not be addressed by annexation. Specifically, he asked where in the United States constitution could one find official recognition of the French language or how many Catholic presidents there had been. The proponent of the status quo, therefore, had to admit that the Confederation was far from perfect for French-Canadians but that things could only be worse for them in a continental union.\textsuperscript{84}

Imperial federalism and the constitutional status quo defended by Cardinal would be lumped together as colonial schemes by papers such as \textit{La Patrie}, the persistent critic of Confederation and imperial federation that favoured annexation.\textsuperscript{85} In the minds of some, the status quo was not far distant from an autonomy-destroying imperial federation as evidenced by the fact that the organiser of the Sohmer Park event, Perrault, had to notify the crowd of an "error" on the ballot identifying Confederation as the "maintenance of the feudal link," rather than the \textit{colonial} link [my emphasis].\textsuperscript{86} Cardinal did, however, resort to arguments, such as the spectre of war and excessive loyalism that had been repeatedly used by Mercier, which had not been made by Conservatives in reaction to David's 1890 motion, or in the elections of 1890 or 1892. His appeal to the authority of Liberal politicians, such as Gladstone and Laurier, was sensible, since he spoke to a mostly Liberal crowd. Such arguments by Cardinal and his

\textsuperscript{84} \textit{Le Monde}, November 30, 1892, 2. Noted by multiple papers covering the speeches in full, such as \textit{Le Monde} and \textit{Le Canadien}.
\textsuperscript{85} \textit{La Patrie}, November 29, 1892, 1.
\textsuperscript{86} This error was only pointed out by Conservative papers, \textit{The Star}, November 29, 1892, and \textit{La Minerve}, November 29, 1892, 3. "Maintien du lien féodal." It is not clear if this misprint was a joke or was an honest error. The only papers reprinting the ballots, \textit{La Patrie} and \textit{L'Étendard}, being French-language papers, it is unknown if the ballots were French-only.
concession of the problems within Confederation, however, were illustrative of Mercier's ideas becoming public opinion in Montreal.

Curiously, the critics of imperial federalism claimed that the project was vague or impracticable in its institutional structures but then stated categorically that it would work to the detriment of Canada. Cardinal asked: "In what did it consist? What were its advantages? And what could it give to the Canadian people?" That a proponent of imperial federation was invited to speak and had written extensively on the subject did not prevent Cardinal and other speakers from claiming that the project was vague or utopian. There was some merit to Cardinal's claim, however. Due to differences of opinion among federationists and efforts to rally members around common sentiments, rather than specifics, the League had avoided committing itself to a plan. However, by 1892, the League's London headquarters, at the request of British Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, who demanded a concrete proposal before considering support for the movement, solicited the opinions of leading thinkers on the subject, including Archibald McGoun. In any case, none of the speakers at Sohmer Park appeared to have read McGoun's writings or they thought it best to ignore them for the sake of their presentation. As McGoun had admitted that he had little time to discuss details, claims that the project was imprecise would have rung true for those present. However, arguments made by Conservative papers only two years earlier that imperial federalism was insufficiently serious to merit attention were not used by Cardinal at Sohmer Park. His arguments assumed, as Mercier and David had in previous

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87 The Herald, November 29, 1892, 2. Cardinal referred to it as "utopian" and Myers described imperial federation as "beautifully vague" and an "impracticable shadow of a dream."
88 Berger, Sense of Power, 124; Bell, Reordering the World; Duncan Bell, The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860-1900 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 2007), 202-203. The League's refusal to commit to a specific plan was intentional. Burgess, British Tradition of Federalism, 40-41, describes the League and its founding President in London, W.E. Forster, as determined to avoid hatching a specific plan. Also, Ibid., 60-66, 69 stated that the proposal requested by Lord Salisbury would be received by his successor, Liberal William Gladstone, who rejected the proposals.
years, that the movement merited serious discussion despite its ambiguity. As David and Mercier had done, Cardinal, Myers and Lemieux raised the lack of precision in federationist proposals in a manner that hinted at a lack of transparency or even a secret plan. Ambiguity was no longer a reason to avoid discussing imperial federalism but to reject it outright.

That Cardinal, the Conservative defender of the status quo, thought it necessary to spend so much time attacking imperial federalism is perhaps indicative of a crowd that was already hostile to it. He expressed shock to see his opponents propose changes to the Canadian federal system, listing them and finishing, incredulously, with "and even imperial federation." Thus, even to the other orator favouring the maintenance of colonial ties, imperial federation was the least plausible option. Among Cardinal's most applauded arguments, The Herald reported, were his criticism of imperial federation, "which, it was soon evident was in a hopeless minority." 89

The evening's most popular speaker, Rodolphe Lemieux, spoke next. He primarily targeted colonial links in general although he too raised common criticisms of imperial federation. As Cardinal had done earlier, Lemieux stated that even Gladstone foresaw Canada's separation from Great Britain and was dismissive of plans for colonial representation in Westminster. Since Canada was part of the empire but did not have representation in imperial institutions, and likely would not get it, the only feasible option remained independence, he argued. The material benefits of the colonial links were few, and Canada could be forced to go to war if it remained in the empire, reiterating a common anti-militarist critique. 90

Lemieux toned-down the rhetoric of "race" compared to what Mercier had accustomed his audiences. Lemieux nonetheless referred to "us, of the French race" and appealed to preserve the "sacred space" bequeathed to them by France. On the other hand, he referred to Canada as a

89 Le Canadien; La Patrie; Le Monde; La Presse, November 29, 1892, 2.
90 Le Canadien, November 29, 1892, 1; La Patrie, November 29, 1892, 1. Noted by multiple papers.
place of "many races" whose people form "one nation, one people," but suggested that unity was hindered by the colonial link. The colonial link, in his opinion, also offered no material benefits. In a similar manner to David's attempt to repel charges of treason during his 1890 assembly speech, Lemieux reiterated that his first loyalty was owed to the country where he was raised though he also praised England as well as English political institutions and politicians. He argued for the same positive trade and capital investment benefits that were at the heart of annexationist arguments although he never mentioned, let alone criticised, annexation.\textsuperscript{91} This avoidance of attacking annexation likely reflected an awareness that many in the crowd supported annexation, although it was also in keeping with his positive tone. Even though Lemieux was arguing against the status quo, he did not explicitly attack Cardinal, Conservatives or Confederation, but instead presented the benefits of independence. The maintenance of the colonial status was an anomaly in the Americas, in his view, as he noted that most independent nations in the Americas had a smaller population than Canada. Independence was simply a matter of enjoying the full benefits of statehood and demonstrating that Canada had reached its full maturity. Lemieux's speech was inspirational in tone, leading to a final plea to make "the dream of independence" come true.\textsuperscript{92} Of all the speeches, Lemieux's speech was the most inclusive and bipartisan and the least critical of the competing options. While Lemieux would praise the Canadian constitution as an example of Canadian genius, he also called for the creation of a Canadian republic.

Lemieux listed politicians from both parties, before ending with Mercier who sat on the dais behind him, as evidence that Canadians were capable of producing leaders fit for an

\textsuperscript{91} \textit{Le Canadien}, November 29, 1892, 1.
\textsuperscript{92} \textit{La Patrie}, November 29, 1892, 1-2.
independent nation. To reinforce his point, while appealing to as many groups as possible, Lemieux appealed to Irish Catholics by arguing that former Liberal Ontario Premier Edward Blake, who was pursuing his career in the United Kingdom, would soon pick up the mantle from Irish nationalist Charles Stewart Parnell to obtain Irish Home Rule. More than the other speakers, Lemieux continually appealed to women to vote for his option and used the expression "Mesdames et Messieurs" throughout his speech. He argued that it was only with the help of women that the dream of independence could come true. Lemieux thus resorted to flattery by praising England, members of the "French race," Irish, Liberals, Conservatives, and women, while stressing "racial" harmony. His speech, though devoid of specifics, was the most exhaustive in addressing various segments of the population and alluded to benefits from pursuing trade agreements with all nations, including the U.S., as well as job opportunities from an independent army and navy. Lemieux's anti-militarist argument and rejection of colonial ties, though reflecting anxieties with the status of French-Canadians in Confederation and a possible imperial federation, did not rely on explicit references to Confederation's weaknesses. Of all the options, however, the only one to receive a sustained critique from Lemieux was imperial federation even though there was little more he could add as the third speaker. Mercier's salient arguments against federationism, popularised in the preceding years and appropriated by Cardinal at Sohmer Park, would already have been known to the audience. Lemieux needed only to reap the benefits of proposing a positive vision for independence without alienating the small anglophone population present.

93 Le Monde, November 29, 1892, 2: "Quelle est la colonie qui a fourni des hommes publics d'une plus grande valeur que les Macdonald, les Cartier, les MacKenzie et les Dorion? Quel est le peuple qui ait produit une plus belle pléiade que les Thompson, les Laurier, les Chapleau et les Mercier!"
95 La Patrie, November 29, 1892, 2.
The final speaker, Elgin Myers, defended annexation and picked up on common criticisms of imperial federation. "Its advocates," Myers added, "wisely keep it so far as its details are concerned in the clouds," and added that it was an "impracticable shadow of a dream." Not only was imperial federation ambiguous but it was hostile to the United States and risked shutting Canadians out of the critical U.S. market, Myers argued in a point similar to the one made by David in the assembly in 1890. Though the Conservative Cardinal's reference to Zulu wars was a common fear among opponents of imperial federalism, McGoun did not attempt to deflect these worries, whereas Lemieux alluded to "race" only in positive tones. Myers' speech however, revealed the pervasive uneasiness about imperial diversity. He not only raised the familiar spectre of foreign wars but, as he argued for continental union with American "kinsmen," a member of the crowd interrupted and asked him if he considered the "seven million negroes" in the U.S.A. his kinsmen. Myers' retorted that the seven million "negroes" were not his kinsmen but that they were "as much" his kinsmen as the "250 million Hindoos" and "50 million of Africans" of the British Empire. The concerns over the "racial" heterogeneity of any new scheme were thus present in discussions of both annexation and imperial federation. While a "continental colour line" was a concern for some opponents of annexation, the "imperial colour line" also seemed to be a deterrent to drawing annexationists to an imperial federation. In fact, the increasingly popular idea of Anglo-Saxon unity motivated imperial federalists to unite as much as it encouraged fellow Anglo-Saxon Canadians and Americans to unite in a continental

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96 The Herald, November 28, 1892, 2. Peter Price, "Steppingstones to Imperial Unity?" in passim, 251. Price noted that McGoun's scheme for federation did not foresee equal representation between white and non-white populations. Price, at 242, borrowed from the expression "global colour line" used by Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, Drawing the Global Colour Line: White men's countries and the question of racial equality (Melbourne: Melbourne Univ. Publishing, 2008). Lake and Reynolds draw the expression from W.E.B. Dubois' writings on the "colour line" denoting racial divisions within America as well as globally. The "global colour line" in their study reflected a push among white populations, British, imperialist, American or otherwise, to defend their interests as a result of concerns from colonial uprisings and the rise of non-white powers, Lake and Reynolds, Global Colour Line, 2-3.
union or full annexation. Addressing an argument often made by federationists that telegraphic cables and technology had collapsed time and space and made imperial integration feasible, Myers argued that "imperial federation will not annihilate space," implying that the empire would still be too dispersed. Although this was a practical argument about the power of new technologies to unite the empire, it was possible, considering his anxieties about a diverse empire, that Myers' preferred a distant empire to an integrated one.

Picking up on the recurring theme of loyalty, Myers claimed that Canadians had been disloyal to themselves and their continent by looking to Europe for recognition. In response to an argument allegedly made by McGoun that annexation would lead to the disappearance of the "French race," Myers argued that if the coalition of European states against Napoleon could not destroy the "French race," he would not "have the temerity to attempt such an enterprise," prompting "thunderous applause." Myer's arguments thus reflected common arguments against imperial federation, many of which had been made by Mercier and David in the past. Myers' did not explicitly reference Mercier's anti-Confederation message although he raised the "fatal defect that was present" at Confederation in 1867, i.e. a lack of national spirit stemming from the absence of a common Canadian identity between French-Canadians and British-Canadians. If there was a nuance between the failings of Confederation found in Myers' and Mercier's critique, it was that Confederation was failing to achieve its goals according to annexationists, whereas it was going as poorly as critics of Confederation, such as Mercier, had always claimed it would.

98 The Herald, November 28, 1892, 2. On federationists' enthusiasm for new technologies tying the empire together, see Bell, "Dissolving Distance," in passim. For such an argument in the Canadian context, see George Parkin, The Struggle for National Unity, 174.
99 Le Canadien, November 29, 1892, 3. No papers, including Le Canadien, reported McGoun's claim that Myers was refuting. Cardinal, the Conservative in favour of the Confederation status quo did make a claim about the annihilation of French-Canadians in a Continental Union, which Le Canadien did report at Le Canadien, November 29, 1892, 1. La Patrie, November 29, 1892, 1, noted "thunderous applause" for Myers' quip.
The event was as much a showcase for annexation or independence as an opportunity to discredit the common enemy to all other options, i.e. an imperial federation. Pretenses of reasoned debate were challenged, however, as Myer's speech was disrupted by hecklers.  

The press' assessment of the speakers' performances provided further insight into public opinion on imperial federation in Montreal. As organised commercial and political interests controlled the press, this event on the future of Canada and its coverage were not an exercise in perfect rational deliberation. Strictly speaking, the event was not a debate either. Some speakers, such as Lemieux, drew on multiple references to present a relatively more persuasive case for independence. The critique of imperial federalism by the speakers, however, differed little from what David and Mercier had argued. Discussion in the press was marked by labels and a lack of substantive discussion. The event did not seek consensus through strictly rational debate, nor was it reported that those who voted had engaged in any debate before their vote. The vote also did not appeal for responsive politicians in authority to implement the result. It was thus far from Habermas' concept of a sphere that "put the state in touch with the needs of society," but closer to the "manipulatively manufactured public sphere of the election campaign" disguised as debate. News of the event was likely more important than the event itself as the press helped frame the event and extended its reach among a broader public. As communications historian Marshall Poe has indicated, print did not replace face-to-face interactions or manuscripts, but added a powerful mode of communication to the mix. While these discussions are not recoverable, they likely constituted a locus of opinion formation that was derivative of the

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100 The Herald, November 29, 1892, 2. Most papers reported rumours of the disturbance on the day of the event. It was covered in all papers the following day. The disturbance is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

101 Jürgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 31 ("put the state in touch with the needs of society"), 214 ("manipulatively manufactured public sphere of the election campaign").
agenda, frames and stereotypes used at the event and provided by political elites and reinforced by the press.¹⁰²

*La Patrie*, the virulent critic of imperial federation reported McGoun's performance somewhat consistently with what others reported. Nonetheless, a subtle difference appeared in the description of McGoun's speech wherein *The Witness* noted applause for his speech, while *La Patrie* did not note any for McGoun on arrival nor at the end of his speech.¹⁰³ *Le Monde* was also dismissive of McGoun and imperial federation.¹⁰⁴ Though it offered equal coverage to all speeches, reflecting its claims as an independent paper, it commented that "imperial federation was getting clearer but we will likely have to pay to defend the empire," adding that such a scheme "would never succeed."¹⁰⁵ Again, it offered no analysis of imperial federation proposals or why it would not succeed. The anti-Mercier *Witness* description somewhat excused McGoun's poor performance. It stated that "he could hardly be heard on the platform and not at all in the rear of the hall." *The Witness* noted "hear, hear" and "cheers" in reaction to McGoun's arguments and "roars of pleasure" in response to his comment about annexationists as traitors. Like other papers, it noted "deafening applause" for Lemieux and "applause" for Cardinal, although it was unique in recording positive reactions to McGoun's speech.¹⁰⁶ The press' varying emphasis on crowd participation noted by Duncan Koerber for Upper Canada can thus also be seen at Sohmer Park. Further, the description of the crowd as acting in unison, especially in favour of Liberals,

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¹⁰³ *La Patrie*, November 29, 1892, 2; *The Witness*, November 29, 1892, 8.

¹⁰⁴ *Le Monde*, November 29, 1892, 2.

¹⁰⁵ *Le Monde*, December 2, 1892, 2.

¹⁰⁶ *The Witness*, November 29, 1892, 8.
was more prevalent among papers that sought to legitimise the event such as La Patrie.\textsuperscript{107} Considering the support for annexation and lack of support for imperial federation at the event, as well as the supposed difficulty in hearing McGoun, it was unlikely that McGoun's points were received with such enthusiasm unless most federationists left before the vote occurred.\textsuperscript{108} That said, nowhere did The Witness defend imperial federation. It even published a letter by a member of the Liberal Club Letellier, who argued that the meeting proved that the public had dismissed imperial federation and that proponents should "bury their scheme forever" in Canada or "in the Province of Québec at least."\textsuperscript{109} Again, the distinction between Québec and the rest of Canada in a Montreal English-language paper, regarding support for imperial federation, hinted at an understanding of public opinion in Montreal that included anglophones, and that their views likely differed from those of their English-speaking counterparts outside Québec.

Le Canadien's coverage of McGoun's speech was respectful though it offered no public support for imperial federation even though the paper's owner, Tarte, was a member of the League.\textsuperscript{110} Tarte did not criticise imperial federation as other Liberal papers such as La Patrie or The Herald had done, nor had he defended it. Le Canadien praised Lemieux' "remarkable speech" but struggled to maintain the pretence of respect for speakers it disagreed with most by stating that although Myers was not brilliant, he spoke well.\textsuperscript{111} As seen, most of the press, whether Conservative, Liberal or independent, gave little weight to McGoun's arguments or his performance. The other speakers' arguments and the press commentary mostly recycled earlier attacks against imperial federalism made by Mercier with little in-depth discussion.

\textsuperscript{107} Koerber, "Style over Substance," 441. La Patrie, November 29, 1892, 1.
\textsuperscript{108} The Witness, November 29, 1892, 8, claimed that by the time the vote occurred, most people had left.
\textsuperscript{109} The Witness, December 2, 1892, 5. (Letter by Joseph Daoust).
\textsuperscript{110} Imperial Federation League of Canada, Constitution, Rules, Toronto, 1890; Imperial Federation League, Report of the First Meetings of the League in Canada, Montreal, May 9\textsuperscript{th}, 1885, 1885.
\textsuperscript{111} Le Canadien, November 29, 1892, 1.
In addition to the partisan organisation of the event and the competing views on imperial federalism discussed at the event and in the press, as seen in the previous sections, the following section, will look at the press' assessment of the event itself to determine the weight to be given to it as a reflection of public opinion. In fact, whether the event was serious or not divided the partisan press as much as the discussed options did. Papers satisfied with the results, mostly Liberal, tended to claim that it was a serious event whereas Conservative papers, which favoured the status quo and found annexation abhorrent, saw the event as entertainment or even a waste of time. That assessments varied was expected as the fact that women and children could vote led the Conservative *La Presse* to pre-emptively deride the vote as "ultra-universal." *Le Monde*, on the other hand, claimed that the event was important despite its setting in Sohmer Park since even Irish emancipator Daniel O'Connell had begun his career speaking on a barrel. *Le Canadien*, newly sympathetic to Liberals, stated that the event "was of importance" though it did not exaggerate its legitimacy nor sustain coverage for days.\(^{112}\)

Of all papers, *La Patrie* gave the most importance to the event and had heavily promoted it.\(^{113}\) As a supporter of annexation and independence, if necessary, *La Patrie* sought to legitimise the event by emphasising that the event was well advertised, that every speaker had an opportunity to speak, and that members of both parties were present. In an appeal to public opinion to legitimise the results, *La Patrie* claimed that "the people's voice" was heard at Sohmer Park. The "defeat of the ultraloyalists was crushing," *La Patrie* added, echoing a claim that was even made by the Conservative Cardinal who alluded to the "excessive" loyalty of imperial

\(^{112}\) *La Presse*, November 28, 1892, 4 (in announcement on day of the event). *Le Monde*, November 29, 1892, 2. *Le Canadien*, November 29, 1 (Original French text: "L'Assemblée d'hier soir a de l'importance").

\(^{113}\) *La Patrie*, November 28, 1892, 1.
federalists. It also argued that the results illustrated the public's political maturity, adding that the event demonstrated that "public opinion" was now ready for annexation.  

In the opinion of the Conservative *Gazette*, however, the event "turned out a fizzle." The next day, *The Gazette's* byline was harsher, claiming that: "A Good Natured Crowd assembles to Hear Four Orators Discuss the Future of Canada and Laughs at Them." As to the crowd estimate, *The Gazette* offered a low estimate by judging the crowd at "about 4,000." It then sarcastically congratulated the owner of Sohmer Park, Ernest Lavigne, and asked that he reveal how the money from tickets "were divided between Mr. Perreault [sic], the very active manager of the special attraction, the Zoo and the orchestra."  

Other Conservative papers such as *La Presse* and *La Minerve* also saw the event as pure entertainment, stating that "it was for laughs." The nominally independent, socially-conservative and nationalist *L'Étendard*, now critical of Mercier, offered a mixed assessment as it claimed that the event was a success and "an interesting discussion" but mostly "for laughs" and only provided practice to young orators. The largest daily in Montreal, *The Star*, described it as entertainment rather than a serious or authoritative body. No Liberal-leaning papers reported the "error" on the ballot referring to a "feudal" regime either, which was possibly only mentioned by Conservative papers to undermine the seriousness of the event and the value of the vote.  

Except for *The Gazette's* harsh evaluation, *The Witness* provided the most substantive criticism of the event. *The Witness* offered a detailed report under the derisive title "Lavigne’s Circus – Six Thousand Spectators pay Six thousand Ten Cents." It included detailed coverage of

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115 *The Gazette*, November 29, 1892, 3 ("turned out a fizzle"). *The Gazette*, November 30, 1892, 4.

the speeches as well as bust sketches of the speakers, which indicated that it could not ignore reporting on such a major happening despite what the paper thought of it. *The Witness'* description emphasised theatrics and rowdyism during the counting of the votes, during which La Marseillaise and other French songs were played. When asked by certain Englishmen why "God Save the Queen" was not played, the organiser Perrault told them that it was because McGoun had asked for Rule Britannia to represent his option. In response, these Englishmen yelled to "get McGoun out!" Such a reference to poor behaviour by members of the English-speaking community seems hard to explain unless *The Witness* meant to underscore the lack of seriousness of the event, which was tainted by the presence of disreputable people. Other people jumped on stage during the vote count, *The Witness* claimed, including one who grabbed the French tri-colour flag and waved it around, followed by other people who grabbed the other flags and "waved them violently." Another person jumped on stage and shouted something about workers' rights and cursed loudly, *The Witness* reported in descriptions that were probably intended to discredit the event by associating it with vulgar behaviour for a political forum.\textsuperscript{117}

*The Witness*'s reference to the person who cursed about workers' rights was remarkably the only clear reference to the issue. While the park was in a working-class neighbourhood, the speakers said very little about these interests. Lemieux alluded to independence stemming the tide of emigration to New England, attracting capital and revivifying "moribund industries", commerce and agricultural exports.\textsuperscript{118} Cardinal and Myers also alluded to trade benefits and slowing outward migration whereas the imperial federalist, McGoun, did not refer to the

\textsuperscript{117} *The Witness*, November 29, 1892, 8. *The Witness* was the only paper to mention these incidents. *Le Canadien* also included sketches of head busts of the speakers.

\textsuperscript{118} *Le Monde*, November 28, 1892, 2.
emigration to New England at all. No speaker elaborated on the conditions of the working-class although some referenced the lack of well-paid work pushing many to emigrate. As a result, The Witness reserved its most detailed commentary to further downplay the event's value for addressing serious issues by underscoring the lack of discussion of workers' concerns.

The general opinion of the working-class on imperial federation, however, could have varied and reflected multiple other cultural factors. Overt expressions of loyalism to the Crown and the empire have been found among the working-class although that by no means entailed support for imperial federalism. Politician and historian Eugene Forsey has indicated that the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada demanded, at their annual meetings of 1892 and 1893, a public referendum on the options facing Canada, including imperial federation, although the position of their members is unknown. In any event, there was apparently little sympathy, let alone public support, for imperial federation from organised labour. In addition to the neglect of

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119 Le Monde, November 30, 1892, 2 (Cardinal's speech); Le Monde, November 31, 1892, 2 (Myers' speech); Le Monde, December 2, 1892, 2 (McGoun's speech).
120 Lemieux argued that independence would offer new opportunities for industry and commerce and help stem emigration to the U.S., Le Monde, November 29, 1892, 2. Elgin Myers, annexationist, argued that annexation would foster economic growth and help retain Canadians, Le Monde, December 1, 1892, 2. Cardinal and McGoun did not mention emigration or workers.
121 The Witness, November 30, 1892, 4.
123 Eugene Forsey, "Historique du mouvement ouvrier au Canada," 262-274, in L'Étude de la Société, ed. Jean-Paul Montminy (Québec: Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 1965), 269. There is some indication, however, that many members of large unions in the early 1890s, though not representative of all workers, favoured independence or even a republican regime over maintaining colonial links, see Eugene Forsey, Trade Unions in Canada, 1812-1902 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1982), 410, 464, 474.
worker's rights, the interests of other groups, such as the growing Jewish minority in Montreal, were not referenced at Sohmer Park either.  

The space given to each speaker and the order of the speech summaries also provided clues to the importance given to the event by the press. Notably, despite enthusiastically announcing the event on November 28th, expecting a large crowd and including the sample ballot and instructions on how to vote, L'Étendard offered the most coverage to the least popular options. For example, Cardinal's status quo speech received half a column, followed by a summary of McGoun's speech in one-third of a column, followed by concise paragraphs on the speeches for independence and annexation. This lack of coverage corroborates that L'Étendard gave little weight to the results of the event and likely disagreed with them. Although its front-page coverage of the event stated that the evening was "magnificent" despite being "for laughs," it provided only brief coverage and made much of the disruption of Myers' speech. The Gazette also provided little coverage of the event except to undermine the event, did not reproduce the speeches in detail, and did not revisit the event after two days. Although The Gazette had previously stated that it favoured the status quo, it reported extensively on discussions of imperial federation, including in the week following the Sohmer Park event. Despite this, it did not defend McGoun's performance nor advocate for an imperial federation. Le Monde, however, offered detailed and equal coverage to all speakers, with each one being featured on a different day, starting with Lemieux and ending with McGoun, in order of the

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124 Members of the local Jewish literary association, Montreal Montefiore Club, had previously adopted a motion indicating their sympathy for imperial federation, five years before the Sohmer Park event though no later expressions of support were found, Imperial Federation League Journal, Vol. II (February 1887), 41.  
125 L'Étendard, November 28, 1892, 4. The ballot was identical to La Patrie's, including "régime colonial," not "féodal." L'Étendard, November 29, 1892, 1, 4. It referred to Cardinal as "notre jeune ami".  
126 The Gazette, November 29, 1892, 3. Its coverage consisted of a summary half the length of a column.  
127 For coverage of George Parkin's speeches in the days following the Sohmer Park event, see The Gazette, November 30, 1892, 1; December 5, 1892, 3; December 7, 1892, 4; December 14, 1892, 5. The Gazette, therefore, gave more coverage to Parkin's speaking engagements than to the Sohmer Park event.
voting results. Its reporting, therefore, seemed relatively balanced although its opinion pieces and letters to the editor reflected its opposition to imperial federation.\textsuperscript{128}

Most critically, in addition to general assessments, the press devoted most commentary to the disturbance of Myers' speech by certain young British-Montrealers opposed to annexation. Many papers on the day of the event had hinted at rumours of a disruption.\textsuperscript{129} Although the behaviour was denounced by all, some used it to either discredit McGoun and imperial federation or Conservative English-language newspapers. Others listed the disturbance among various theatrical moments in an apparent attempt to undermine the seriousness of the event itself rather than to undermine a specific option. \textit{La Patrie}, for example, stated that Myers received lots of applause "except for about one hundred Englishmen, apparently from the Victoria Rifles of McGill University." The organisers had trouble maintaining order and someone shouted, "Ask Mr McGoun to intervene to establish order disturbed by his friends," while McGoun allegedly stayed seated. The annexationist, Elgin Myers, then apparently continued his speech to enthusiastic applause, it said. \textit{La Patrie} not only sought to shame the disruptors but to tie them to McGoun. It asked if the "professor," McGoun, and his students were accomplices in the disturbance and claimed that the "cry babies" were mostly "unstable hotheads" from McGill University, which was why McGoun remained passive during the disturbance. McGoun vociferously denied that his students were involved in the rowdyism, followed by a McGill student who wrote into \textit{La Patrie} to deny the allegations.\textsuperscript{130}

In portraying the disruptors as not adhering to standards of respectable and rational discourse, \textit{Le Monde}, under the title "Fanaticism," made much of the incident and stated that

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{128} \textit{Le Monde}, November 29, 1892, 2, 4.
\bibitem{129} \textit{The Herald}, November 28, 1892, 4; \textit{La Presse}, November 28, 1892, 4; \textit{La Patrie}, November 28, 1892, 4.
\bibitem{130} \textit{La Patrie}, November 29, 1892, 2 (\textit{La Patrie} accused McGoun of inaction); \textit{La Patrie}, November 30, 4 (McGoun denied charges); \textit{La Patrie}, November 30, 1 (McGill student denied involvement).
\end{thebibliography}
some "blackheads" from the "West" interrupted the event, which it blamed on The Witness.\textsuperscript{131} The Witness's first coverage of the event responded to Le Monde's "ludicrous charge" that the disturbers were "blackheads created and brought into the world by The Witness," thus immediately deviating from discussion of the few substantive points raised at the event. The only disruption was from about fifty students during Myers' speech, it claimed, offering a much lower estimate of the number of disruptors than La Patrie.\textsuperscript{132} In other words, most debate between papers centred on who was to blame for the disreputable behaviour.

Unlike La Patrie and Le Monde, Le Canadien did not use the disruption to discredit anyone or any position though it mentioned it. Le Canadien stated that the event went well despite rumours of disruption. Like most papers, the article included a reminder of the importance of free speech and added that "the common tendency to engage in America-bashing," exhibited by the anti-annexationist disruptors, was "in bad taste."\textsuperscript{133} As Le Canadien's editor, Israel Tarte, had joined the Imperial Federation League because he saw annexationism as treasonous, his newfound restraint on the issue, following his migration to the Liberal party, contrasted with his past statements following David's motion in 1890.

While La Patrie's perspective led it to amplify the disruption, including by inflating the number of disruptors, The Gazette's perspective led it to downplay it. For example, when Myers appeared, the students simply gave "three cheers for Mr. Mowat" and they "occasionally expressed their dissent" from Myers, according to The Gazette.\textsuperscript{134} La Presse also stated that the students gave "three cheers for Mr. Mowatt [sic]" but noted that the disturbance required

\textsuperscript{131} Le Monde, November 29, 1892, 4. It is likely that "blackhead" is a misspelling of "blockhead," meaning a stupid person, by the French-language newspaper. No instances of "blackhead" as an insult were found in the numerous Canadian and American papers found in the newspapers.com database. However, "blockhead" was common.

\textsuperscript{132} The Witness, November 29, 1892, 8.

\textsuperscript{133} Le Canadien, November 29, 1892, 1.

\textsuperscript{134} The Gazette, November 29, 1892, 3. Ontario premier, Oliver Mowat, had recently expelled Myers from his cabinet as a result of Myers' support for annexation.
intervention by the police, who had trouble establishing order, whereas *L'Étendard* said little about Myers but emphasised the disruptions during his speech.\(^\text{135}\) The French-language Conservative or anti-Mercier papers, therefore, did not downplay Myers' disruption but also did not use it to discredit imperial federalists or McGoun nor to foster sympathy for the annexationist Myers. *The Herald* surmised that it was possible that the poor showing for imperial federation resulted in part from the poor behaviour towards Myers as the crowd gained sympathy for him and lost some for McGoun and his option.\(^\text{136}\) *The Star*, sympathetic to Conservatives, concurred that the disruption "did not tend to increase the popularity of Mr. McGoun," before adding sympathetically, "who by some extraordinary process of reasoning was held accountable for the conduct of his friends."\(^\text{137}\) While the disruption possibly did not help McGoun's case, as a partisan event there was little sympathy for imperial federation to begin with. If anything, it was the press that made the most of the disturbance. Those most supportive of Mercier and opposed to imperial federation used the disruption to discredit imperial federalism and its supporters. On the other hand, papers opposed to Mercier's Liberal-National agenda, such as *La Presse, The Gazette*, and *The Witness*, sought to categorise the event as entertainment. Thus, the drama of the disruption received disproportionate press attention from all newspapers and was used by critics to undermine McGoun's performance and the cause of imperial federation. There were also accusations of voting fraud although these charges were only made by two Conservative papers and they could not agree on whether independence or annexation was favoured by the ballot-box stuffing.\(^\text{138}\) Although newspapers were divided in their assessment of the event's value as a

\(^{135}\) *La Presse*, November, 29, 1892, 1. *L'Étendard*, November 29, 1892, 1, 4.  
\(^{136}\) *The Herald*, November 30, 1892, 4. *The Herald* would report that many in the crowd were enthusiastic to hear Myers and that the French-Canadians present likely gained sympathy for Myers as a result of the disturbance.  
\(^{137}\) *The Star*, November 29, 1892, 1.  
\(^{138}\) *La Presse*, November 29, 1892, 4 (blames independence supporters for fraudulent vote ballot stuffing). *The Gazette*, November 29, 1892, 3 (accuses annexationists of vote fraud). This difference might reflect who these Conservative papers saw as the greatest threat to the Confederation status quo.
serious forum reflecting public opinion, the judgement of some newspapers that the event was a partisan spectacle was borne out by the facts surrounding its organisation as well as the emphasis on its entertainment value and the disruption of Myers' speech.

Finally, a critical analysis of the results in context, combined with press analysis, will show that despite the partisan nature of the event, its successful labelling of imperial federalism as reprehensible was shared beyond the venue. The results were as follows: independence 1614 (53.8%); annexation 992 (33%); status quo 364 (12.1%); imperial federation: 29 (less than 1%). If reports that fifty to a hundred people harassed Myers' but only twenty-nine votes for imperial federation were cast, either the number of harassers was inflated, the protestors were not affiliated with McGoun, they did not bother to vote, or voting fraud occurred. Upon hearing the result, *The Herald* described a pitiful scene where "each of the three votes called for cheers, but the last to be announced was received by a well-known 'battery' man and a prominent lawyer with a feeble 'hooray'."\(^{139}\) While the battery man is unknown, the lawyer was McGoun.

Considering the large vote for annexation, an option that many historians agree received little support though it garnered some interest during the 1890-1892 period, a partisan organisation was surely at play. If annexation had been truly popular in Montreal, the organisers could have found a local representative to defend the option in French. Likewise, however, a French-speaking representative of imperial federalism could have been found if the option had had more than marginal support within the broader population.\(^{140}\)

The results for independence, though an option espoused by Mercier, likely did not receive the same strong support among the general population, among anglophones or

\(^{139}\) *The Herald*, November 29, 1892, 8.

francophones. As the option favoured by the Conservative press, the Confederation status quo should have received, at least, the support equivalent to independence or annexation, which divided Liberals, if the event had been representative of the general population. Not all Liberals espoused independence over the status quo or imperial federation, either. While Mercier's presence was strongly felt, Laurier would advise Lemieux in a private letter that publicly defending independence was imprudent and potentially damaging to the federal Liberal Party.\footnote{Castonguay, Rodolphe Lemieux, 29-30.}

The results, in large part, merely reflected the opinions of francophone Liberals sympathetic to Mercier's nationalist stance and his hostility to imperial federation.

Thus, although newspapers reported McGoun's comments similarly despite different partisan leanings, many described his performance and movement unfavourably in separate pieces. The other speakers also made imperial federation a prime target. If the results were a reliable snapshot of the views of those present, they reflected the views of a crowd that was hostile to imperial federation. Nonetheless, the press coverage fully corroborated the event's results on one crucial point: low public support for imperial federation in Montreal. Nowhere in the press do we see a defence of imperial federation in Montreal in response to the movement's poor result at Sohmer Park. While partisanship likely exaggerated results, combining them with coverage analysis allowed for a clear view of the weak support for imperial federation. The event and the reaction in the press thus reflected the normalisation of Mercier's framing of imperial federation over the years. Though political opposites, Cardinal, the Conservative in favour of the status quo, as well as Elgin Myers, the annexationist from Toronto, made arguments that were similar to those previously made by Mercier and addressed concerns for provincial autonomy and French-Canadian national survival. The winner, Rodolphe Lemieux, also emphasised
Mercier's points on imperial federation, such as anti-militarism, and a defence of provincial autonomy though he did not need to resort to rhetoric of "enemies of race" or speak of annihilation of Canada or of "tory plots." As public opinion on imperial federation as an unacceptable option that would worsen Confederation's faults was now accepted, Lemieux's success hinted at the threat as already having been defused by the power of public opinion. The repeated warnings by Québec's charismatic Mercier, which drew on nationalist sentiment and resonated with the concerns of the public, had sufficiently acquainted the public with imperial federalism's potential ills. Hyperbolic rhetoric was no longer as necessary to foster hostility towards the movement because its unacceptability was now ingrained as public opinion.

The press that was openly sympathetic to Mercier and the Liberal party amplified the attack on imperial federation begun at Sohmer Park. *Le Canadien* offered no support for imperial federation or McGoun, and *Le Canadien's* editor, who now sat uncomfortably on the fence as a French-Canadian Liberal member of the League, gave a positive description of Lemieux's performance. Contrary to its coverage of David's 1890 motion in the assembly, which characterised the government's attacks on imperial federation as an embarrassment to Québécois, *Le Canadien* made no such remarks about Lemieux nor about the critique of imperial federalism made by any speaker. The French-language nominally independent press, such as *Le Monde* and *L'Étendard*, were also critical of imperial federation and tied it to the disturbance, whereas the professedly independent English-language press, *The Star* and *The Witness*, both opposed to Mercier's agenda, dedicated little coverage to the Sohmer Park event and offered no support for imperial federalism. At most, *The Witness* offered an apologetic coverage of McGoun's poor performance, though it also published a letter that saw the main takeaway as the discrediting of imperial federation. The anti-Mercier Conservative press undermined the seriousness of the
event while emphasising their preference for the status quo. The lack of concrete proposals for an imperial federation was now reason to publicly take their distance from the movement as papers of all allegiances appealed to the power of public opinion to put imperial federalism to rest.

As demonstrated, the results illustrated the effects of imperial federation's framing as a partisan issue by influential actors by means that relied more on spectacle and style than rational deliberation. While imperial federation had supporters among the British-Canadian population, there was no explicit defence of imperial federation in the Montreal press, including in English-language or Conservative papers. Though McGoun was the speaker with the greatest knowledge of his subject, as a long-time devotee to his cause and the only speaker with multiple publications on his topic, his option received the least support. With independence winning, followed by annexation, the status quo, and finally, imperial federation, the results show that the stronger the colonial tie, the weaker the results. Unlike Laurier who had to contend with Canada outside Québec, once again Mercier and his allies not only argued for independence but used annexation as a threat to those might attempt to impose imperial federation on Quebec. The night's results were in the order of Mercier's stated preferences. The acclaim he received in the venue was proof of the continued influence of the recently acquitted nationalist hero. The framing of the options was illustrative of Mercier's realpolitik in manoeuvring between competing options. Imperial federation was the enemy, and Confederation was a failing plan, but annexation was a plausible option should the preferred option, independence, not work out. The hostility of a large segment of the French-Canadian population to imperial federation was, in fact, an expression of nationalism informed by Mercier's persistent critique, which was rooted in Confederation's failure to ensure French-Canadian minority rights and to safeguard provincial autonomy. In turn, this expression of French-Canadian nationalism as hostility to imperial
federalism necessarily affected the views of Montreal's English-speaking minority who declined to defend the project as they also included themselves as part of the "public" opinion.

Despite the speeches, those present seemed mostly to have attended with the intent of registering their pre-existing preference rather than letting themselves be swayed by the most rational or well-informed arguments. This was in keeping with earlier electoral practices noted by Duncan Koerber in nineteenth-century Upper Canada where parties and their press organs put greater emphasis on getting the vote out than on presentation of detailed argumentation.\(^{142}\) The press and the vote did not align on all issues as the event's results were lopsided and opinions in the press were evenly split in their assessment of the event. There was overlap between the event's results and the press' assessment on imperial federalism, however, since both agreed that it was not an acceptable option. While imperial federalism was rejected at Sohmer Park, this did not imply in-depth familiarity with the project. The setting, spectacle and the disturbance during Myers' speech were stressed by the press and were critical to attempts at shaping public opinion. Although many papers carried the details of the speeches, the speeches appealed to fear, oratory prowess, and tropes of manhood and cowardice, collective identities – called race in the period – and resembled campaign slogans. No additional in-depth analysis was provided in the press. The twenty-five-minute time limit per speaker would have favoured the status quo or independence, while a complex issue like imperial federation required time to expand, especially if the demands that its inner workings be explained in detail were to be met. While the public participated through cheers, hisses, shouts and song, they were also given the opportunity to cast their vote even if it had no binding effect. The Sohmer Park event was thus a hybrid event of sorts, part

\(^{142}\) Koerber, "Style over Substance," 443.
participatory democratic event and part "participatory spectacle." The prior framing of the issues by Mercier and the press was, therefore, critical to shaping opinion in advance. In that respect, Mercier and his Liberal allies had at least a seven-year head start in making imperial federation a cursed option in Montreal. Whether understood or not, beneficial or not, imperial rapprochement, let alone federation, was a political non-starter in Montreal by 1892. Imperial federation had no chance at the Sohmer Park event. It had even less of a chance after the event since the authority of public opinion, as substantiated by the press coverage, was more explicitly allied against it than ever.

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143 The expression "participatory spectacle", referring to events wherein the public or crowd reacts to news or entertainment without their reactions being registered or considered, is borrowed from John Durham Peters, "Historical Tensions in the Concept of Public Opinion," in Public Opinion and the Communication of Consent, ed. Theodore L. Glasser, and Charles T. Salmon (New York: Guilford Press, 1995), 26.
**Chapter Five: Conclusion**

As a complex scheme to unite much of the British Empire, imperial federalism was naturally a hard sell. In Montreal, the political dynamics would make it even more difficult for imperial federalism to gather support. For Mercier, however, it was not enough to claim that imperial federation had no support. Rather, it was necessary to sustain an organised critique on and off the campaign trail. At the least, the critique of imperial federalism was one more tool leveraging nationalism in a context of ethnic tensions over minority rights in Canada in the service of Mercier's fight against John A. Macdonald and the Conservatives. The interest in imperial federation in Québec and the resulting hostility to the movement, therefore, derived from its potency as a political issue for Mercier. The present thesis has shown public opinion to have been clearly hostile to imperial federalism, while demonstrating clearly how public opinion was shaped on the issue through extensive discussion in multiple fora and the Montreal press.

While some imperial federalists saw Canadian Confederation as a successful first step towards imperial federation, David and Mercier's critique of imperial federation, which was based mainly on the perceived failings of Confederation, offered a unique counterpoint. Imperial federationists could never escape the stigma laid upon them in Québec by Mercier and David who had made imperial federalism a useful partisan target. In Montreal, the increasing demographic influence of the French-speaking population, and Mercier's growing political influence among this segment of the population, also led the Conservative Anglo-Protestant minority to pick its battles wisely.

This study of increased interest in imperial federalism from 1885-1893, as analysed through Montreal press reactions to critical discussions of the topic, demonstrated that Mercier's critique of a potential imperial federation was a successful part of his political strategy and ensured that the movement would not gain traction in Québec. French-Canadian political elites
were not always hostile to the British Empire nor were they unanimously opposed to the empire or all things British and it would be reductionist to equate Mercier's use of the issue as simply anti-British. Going beyond assumptions that French-Canadians were naturally indifferent or hostile to imperial federation, this thesis has shown that the critique of imperial federalism was sustained and organised at the highest level of Québec politics. Informed by Mercier's frustration with Confederation, which was shared by many, as well as his assertive nationalism, Mercier's use of imperial federation as a political scapegoat buttressed his defence of provincial autonomy and served as a rallying cry against "enemies" of the French-Canadian "race."

As seen in Chapter Two, Mercier's time in power and the life of the Imperial Federation League in Montreal overlapped. While concerns over the fate of the empire as well as military and economic threats fuelled the momentum of the imperial federation movement, proponents and opponents of the movement in Canada were also informed by many of the same concerns over Confederation, annexation and competing nationalisms — British and French-Canadian. The historiographical review demonstrated that historians had yet to fully explore Mercier's critique of imperial federation as central to his political strategy and as an expression of his nationalism. Engaging with the work of Carl Berger, Arthur Silver, Duncan Bell, and studies on Canadian press and political culture by Jeffrey McNairn, Duncan Koerber, and Ian Radforth, this work's grounded approach demonstrated Mercier's influence on public opinion of imperial federation in Montreal.

As Chapter Three demonstrated, Laurent-Olivier David's motion condemning imperial federation was not the work of David alone. The language used and the key themes emphasised Mercier's earlier talking points on imperial federation, which recycled common critiques of Confederation, and Mercier played a key role in the parliamentary theatrics. Commentary in the
press overwhelmingly emphasised either the government's or the opposition's behaviour and the theatrics surrounding the motion. Among the Conservative press, papers either sought to underscore that the imperial federation movement was marginal or, as in the case of *Le Monde*, that influential Conservatives such as Hector Langevin were also opposed to imperial federation. Even the critics of Mercier and David dared not defend imperial federation.

Chapter Four showed that although the November 28, 1892, Sohmer Park event appeared to be a bipartisan deliberative forum, an analysis of its setting, organisation, and crowd composition revealed that the event bore the heavy influence of Mercier and his allies in the nationalist wing of the Québec Liberal Party. The speakers emphasised emotional elements and showed oratorical skills to win over a public in what was largely political entertainment. The press' treatment further revealed that the event was considered as such by most newspapers. Despite being the speaker with the most in-depth knowledge of his topic, Archibald McGoun's performance was hurt by his uncharismatic oratorical skills as well as Mercier's success in bringing imperial federation into a negative light in the years preceding the event. The press focused heavily on the disturbance of annexationist Elgin Myers' speech by supposed supporters of McGoun, either to discredit the event or to discredit imperial federalists. Again, no Conservative paper defended imperial federation at this moment as they favoured the constitutional status quo. The abysmal results for imperial federation and its subsequent press coverage reflected a general hostility towards imperial federalism among Montrealers.

As seen in both Chapter Three and Chapter Four, part of Mercier's strategy was a flirtation with annexation. As influential British-Canadians, especially outside Québec argued more strenuously for imperial federation as a response to annexationism, the dynamic differed in Québec. Liberal nationalists like Mercier and David cleverly floated the spectre of annexation as
a counter-offensive to imperial federalism. While support for annexation remained low in Québec, imperial federation garnered even less support as a counter to annexationism despite expressions of loyalism in the Conservative Montreal press. Further, these chapters revealed examples of Mercier's effective framing of imperial federation that was the result of his cunning use of political strategy and rhetoric. In both cases, the press amplified the impact of the events.

The press analysis revealed as much about support for imperial federation by what the press said as what it did not say. The one outspoken French-Canadian imperial federalist, Israel Tarte, editor of *Le Canadien*, went from being a vocal conservative critic of Mercier to a vocal Liberal party supporter of Mercier in the time between the 1890 motion and the 1892 Sohmer Park event. In addition, his support for imperial federation became less vocal from 1890 to 1892 as he became a supporter of Mercier. That imperial federation was a tory plot meant to destroy the French-Canadian race, to paraphrase Mercier, might not have been true, at least as it pertains to the intentions of Quebec Conservatives and their Montreal press organs, but support for the movement among federal Conservatives in the rest of Canada was sufficient for Mercier to label the party as advocating imperial federation. By 1892, however, Liberals and Conservatives in Québec both sought to avoid any affiliation with the movement. The Montreal press — French-language and English-language, Conservative and Liberal — did not deem imperial federation worthy of a defence on its merits at the time.

Despite the presence of influential British-Montrealers in what was then Canada's metropolis, the most influential Canadian proponents of imperial federalism were not from Montreal. That Ontario's imperial federalist voices would grow louder within the Canadian movement while those of their counterparts in Montreal's British community, where the first Canadian branch was established, did not, coincided with Mercier's increasing influence. This
difference in support between two urban British populations in Canada can be mostly explained by the dynamics of Montreal's dual cultures at a time when it was politically disadvantageous even for British-Montrealers to publicly support imperial federalism outside league meetings.

The label of "imperial federationist" was thus one that most English or French-speaking Montrealers sought to avoid at a time when the causes of provincial autonomy and French-Canadian nationalism challenged party-loyalties in Québec. While Mercier sought to emphasise the seriousness of the movement, Mercier's critics sought to downplay the seriousness of imperial federation as an attempt to take away any justification for Mercier's attacks. By refusing to defend imperial federation, the Conservative press essentially ceded the point to Mercier. As Tocqueville had observed earlier in the nineteenth century about democracy in America, "[...] it will always be extremely difficult to believe what the bulk of the people reject or to profess what they condemn." Once public opinion had formed on an issue "those who still dispute it in their hearts conceal their dissent" and "are careful not to engage in a dangerous and useless conflict." The press further contributed to this "spiral of silence." ¹ Throughout Mercier's premiership a similar dynamic was at play, and his influence-by-proxy would endure despite personal setbacks.

As with all research, the present thesis has certain limitations due to the partisan sources used though the recourse to them was justified as the debate had to be understood in the context of a partisan press and Québec's political culture. Studying a movement that never achieved its objectives is particularly challenging. Nonetheless, the debates studied in this thesis are indicative of their salience to politicians, readers of the press and voters of the time. The

cumulative effect of studying multiple news sources and different fora, and the commonalities in the Montreal press's treatment from both sides of the partisan and linguistic divide, supports the conclusion that imperial federation in Quebec was a more significant political issue than has been recognised. The evidence also supports the conclusion that Mercier successfully defined imperial federalism politically as a threat to provincial autonomy and an existential threat to French-Canadians in a manner that shaped public opinion as hostile.

Going beyond rigid categorisations of imperial or colonial history and giving voice to overlooked members of society, whether women, working-class individuals, or indigenous people, notably through different sources, could reveal new pathways for further study while recognising diversity within colonial societies. While the most vocal proponents of imperial federation were colonial and imperial elites, their most vocal opponents in Canada were also part of Québec's French-Canadian elite. By focusing on Quebec, this thesis admittedly has remained within white colonial society despite exploring new territory. As the scholarly debate on the impact of the colonies on the metropole continues, the influence of colonial supporters of imperial federation in promoting a conception of the British Empire must be weighed against the influence of its opponents in the colonies as well.

As would befit a man who sought the last word on the debates of his day, Mercier's final reflections provide insight into his impact and motivations. By 1893, Mercier, now in opposition following his destitution and subsequent acquittal on fraud charges, would give a speech of his own on the future of Canada at Sohmer Park. Discussing the options facing Canadians, he claimed: “I will not address imperial federation, which was never taken seriously in our country [...]”. British prime minister Gladstone, he added, had discarded it as an option, a point made six
months earlier by Mercier's protégé Lemieux at Sohmer Park.² Whether this surprising statement is evidence that Mercier and his allies never really saw imperial federation as a threat despite previous claims to the contrary is uncertain. Rather it seems to be false modesty for his contributions to burying the movement in Québec. Considering Mercier's repeated attacks, his criticisms, genuine or not, bore fruit in Québec. There was now little more he could add or gain by attacking imperial federation. On October 30, 1894, the combative Mercier would die from complications of diabetes. Expressing forgiveness in his parting words, while remaining true to his nationalism, he said: "Tell my adversaries that I have forgotten everything... Tell everyone that I have worked for my country."³

As the charismatic leader of an influential province, home to Canada's metropolis, in the Dominion vaunted as a success for future federation plans, Mercier's critique of imperial federation was felt outside Québec. Mercier and the members of his party forged opinion on imperial federation through a sustained and organised critique that reflected the tensions at the heart of Confederation. The critique was neither exhaustive nor based solely on reasoned deliberation and was often hyperbolic. Mercier's framing of imperial federation, however, was very effective, which in the political realm is the measure of success.

² Honoré Mercier, L'Avenir du Canada: Discours prononcé au Parc Sohmer, April 4, 1893, in Claude Corbo, Honoré Mercier – Discours 1873-1893, 442; “Je ne m’occuperai pas de la fédération impériale qui n’a jamais été prise au sérieux dans notre pays [...]."
³ Rumilly, Honoré Mercier, Tome II, 399, "Dites à mes adversaires que j’ai tout oublié ... Dites à tous que j’ai travaillé pour mon pays."
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