

Report of the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association Rapport de l'assemblée annuelle de la Société historique du Canada

Report of the Annual Meeting

Reciprocity and the Joint High Commission of 1898-9

Joan M. V. Foster

Volume 18, numéro 1, 1939

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/300189ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/300189ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0317-0594 (imprimé)

1712-9095 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Foster, J. M. V. (1939). Reciprocity and the Joint High Commission of 1898-9. *Report of the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association / Rapport de l'assemblée annuelle de la Société historique du Canada*, 18(1), 87-98. <https://doi.org/10.7202/300189ar>

RECIPROCITY AND THE JOINT HIGH COMMISSION OF 1898-9¹

JOAN M. V. FOSTER
Bryn Mawr College

Reciprocity between Canada and the United States first became an important issue with the repeal of the Corn Laws by Great Britain, when some other market had to be found for the predominantly agricultural output of the North American colonies. From then on the subject has formed a continuous thread in the international relations of Canada and the United States and also in Canadian political history. In spite of this fact, however, only two treaties have ever been concluded—the Elgin-Marcy Treaty of 1854 to 1866, and that of November, 1935, revised in November 1938.

The tradition has grown up that from the abrogation of the earlier treaty until 1911 it was the United States which was recalcitrant. The purpose of this paper is to suggest that this view needs some revision; that the Canadian attitude on this occasion, as so often in the trade relations of the two countries, was governed by both economic and political considerations; and that Canadian public opinion was already showing many of the signs which were to lead to the “surprising” defeat of reciprocity in 1911.

Before plunging into the story of the Joint High Commission itself, it seems necessary to say a few words about the background. The Liberal party, in power at the time of these negotiations, had fought and been defeated in 1891 on the issue of unrestricted reciprocity—or as the name implies reciprocity in its most extreme form—in an election which, like that of 1911, was distinguished for its screaming appeals to the loyalty of the Canadian people. From 1891 onwards, however, there was a gradual revision in the party’s policy, and in the election of 1896, when the Liberals gained office, they were very guarded in their pronouncements. A general policy of tariff for revenue only was, when fiscal matters were discussed, the chief theme of the Liberal leaders,² though freer trade relations on the North American continent did receive some scant attention.³ Laurier also declared his adoption of the plan of an imperial preference which seems to have been introduced by the Conservative leader, Sir Charles Tupper, in an attempt to divert the issue.⁴

After coming into power the Liberal Government did, nevertheless, make tentative overtures to the Republican Government of McKinley which had, in 1897, replaced the Democratic administration of Cleveland.⁵

¹This paper forms part of a thesis entitled “Reciprocity and Canadian politics, 1887-1910,” presented at Bryn Mawr College in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of doctor of philosophy.

²See Laurier at Montreal, Quebec, and Toronto (*Toronto Globe*, April 25, May 7, June 13, 1896); Cartwright to electors of South Oxford and at Streetsville (*ibid.*, Feb. 28, May 30); Mowat’s open letter to Laurier (*ibid.*, May 4); Paterson at Brant (*ibid.*, May 14); Fielding at Dartmouth (*Halifax Chronicle*, June 15, 1896).

³See Laurier at Valleyfield (*Montreal Herald*, April 13, 1896); Cartwright to his constituents (*Toronto Globe*, Feb. 28, 1896); and Charlton (*ibid.*, May 9, 1896).

⁴*Toronto Globe*, June 4, 1896; Tupper’s manifesto of May 5, 1896, speech at Halifax (*Halifax Herald*, June 4, 1896), at Toronto (*Toronto Mail and Empire*, June 20, 1896); J. S. Willison, *Sir Wilfrid Laurier and the Liberal Party* (Toronto, 1903), II, 287-8.

⁵See *Canada, House of Commons debates*, 1897, 1134, 1253; J. L. Garvin, *Life of Joseph Chamberlain* (London, 1932), III, 183-4; O. D. Skelton, *Life and letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier* (Toronto, 1921, New York, 1922), II, 123-5.

As Fielding, Laurier's Minister of Finance, was later to declare, these "strictly unofficial inquiries . . . were sufficient to satisfy them [i.e. the Canadian Government] that no proposals looking towards a liberal reciprocity treaty between the two countries would be entertained by the United States."⁶ In April, therefore, Fielding introduced the famous tariff which has generally been considered as inaugurating the British preference, and it would seem that reciprocity had been shelved.

Towards the close of the year the question re-appeared anew, however, as the result of negotiations between the two countries on the problem of seal fishing in the Bering Sea. In November, 1897, Laurier and Louis Davies, Minister of Marine and Fisheries, accompanied by some experts, paid a visit to Washington. Here, with a member of the British embassy, they held various conversations with Secretary of State Sherman and John W. Foster of the State Department. At these conferences the Canadians insisted that the seal fishing matter should not be considered alone, but should be one of a number of subjects which, they thought, needed discussion. Among these they included reciprocity. Foster represented that the President felt that the seal fisheries should not be complicated by the inclusion of other subjects; but, "in his earnest desire to promote a more friendly state of relations between the two neighboring countries," he would agree to all inclusive negotiations, if there were some temporary measure of protection for the seals.⁷

In March, the United States again urged an arrangement for the settlement of the seal fisheries and agreed to a preliminary discussion on the organization of a mixed commission for the settlement of all questions. Davies, therefore, went to Washington in May and, with the British Ambassador, had discussions with Foster and Kasson, representing the United States. At these meetings it was decided that it was desirable that "all controversies" between the two countries should be settled by means of reference to a Joint High Commission, which should have five members from each side—later increased to six on the admission of a member from Newfoundland—and that it should meet at Quebec. The bases to be presented for the consideration of the Commission were also agreed upon. The question of reciprocity formed the subject of the eighth point of reference, where "such readjustments and concessions as may be deemed mutually advantageous, of customs duties applicable iff each country to the products of the soil or the industry of the other, upon the basis of reciprocal equivalents," was stated to be one of the matters to be discussed by the Commission. The other points of reference included seal fishing in the Bering Sea, the Atlantic and Pacific fisheries, the Alaska boundary, and some other minor matters.⁸ On May 31 public announcement was made of the forthcoming meeting of a commission.

In August the Governments exchanged protocols giving their views on

⁶*Fielding papers*, Letter-book, Oct. 13-Nov. 10, 1909, 619-34, Memorandum of the Canadian Minister of Finance for the information of His Majesty's Ambassador at Washington, Dec. 1. I am indebted to the trustees of the *Fielding papers*, the Hon. Norman McL. Rogers, the Hon. Mr. Justice A. K. MacLean, and Mr. Alexander Johnston for access to the letter-books from 1908-10 and also to a miscellaneous collection, relating especially to reciprocity.

⁷*Foreign relations of the United States, 1897*, 320-4; Public Archives of Canada, *Laurier papers*.

⁸*Laurier papers*; W. M. Malloy, *Treaties and conventions between the United States and other powers* (Washington, 1910), I, 770-3.

the different subjects of the terms of reference. The British communication was based on a Canadian Privy Council Minute, prepared in response to a wire from the Secretary of State for the Colonies. In its completed form the paragraph dealing with reciprocity read as follows:

It has always been the opinion of the party now in power in Canada that the geographical position of the United States and Canada makes a large measure of free trade between them most desirable. The fact, however, that each country has a high customs tariff, which is practically protective, renders mutual concessions somewhat difficult. Moreover, the fact should not be overlooked that Canada, while fully appreciating the advantage of the American markets, has in recent years, by the judicious subsidizing of freight steam-ships and the introduction of the cold storage system, succeeded in finding a profitable market for a large portion of her surplus natural products in Great Britain; that this market is capable of indefinite expansion, and that in consequence the desirability of obtaining access to the markets of the United States has been appreciably diminished. Notwithstanding this fact, it is considered that negotiations for a free interchange of a wide list of natural products,⁹—is still desirable and feasible, though it would, of course, be impossible for Canada to grant to the United States tariff concessions without extending them also to such countries as are entitled by Treaty to most-favoured nation treatment in Canada, and it is essential also that the Dominion should maintain unimpaired its right to grant preferential treatment to the mother country and other parts of the Empire of which it is a member.¹⁰

The American comment on the same article was much simpler. "The Government of the United States," it states, "is heartily committed to the policy of commercial reciprocity, and trusts that the labors of the commission will result in some such arrangement with Canada on the basis indicated in this paragraph of the Protocol."¹¹

The Commission met in Quebec from August 23 to October 10, 1898, with a short adjournment in September, and from November 10, 1898, to February 20, 1899, in Washington. The American members were Senators Fairbanks and Gray, Congressman Dingley, and Foster, Kasson and T. J. Coolidge of the State Department. Great Britain was represented by Lord Herschell, Lord Chancellor, who was made chairman of this section, Laurier, Cartwright, Charlton, and Davies from Canada, and Winter of Newfoundland. The three Canadians who accompanied the Prime Minister, it should be noted, had all been prominent in the Liberal agitation for reciprocity in the eighties and early nineties. Both before and during the meeting of the Commission both sides received many communications and these, with the newspaper editorials, give some idea of the state of public opinion.

On the general question of reciprocity the tone of both Laurier's correspondents and of the Liberal press was inclined to be cautious rather

⁹An earlier draft, corrected by Sir Wilfrid Laurier, added here "and a carefully selected list of manufactured products" (*Laurier papers*).

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹Eleanor Poland, "Reciprocity negotiations between Canada and the United States, 1866-1911," 283, quoting *Kasson papers*, U.S. memorandum of views on subjects in protocol of May 30, 1898. I am indebted to the author and the authorities of Radcliffe College for access to this unpublished thesis.

than enthusiastic. As one letter received from a prominent supporter said, "Better no treaty at all than one that will meet with determined opposition;" and another repeated these views, declaring that any reciprocity agreement must be capable of being "reasonably defended, and very well and strongly defended at that, as being a treaty which is not one-sided in the way of too many concessions by Canada without fully corresponding concessions by the United States." Another correspondent said, "The feeling here is very strongly in favor of no reciprocity arrangements with the United States unless with regard to some natural products and raw materials." Clifford Sifton, now Laurier's Minister of the Interior and destined to leave the party in 1911 on the issue of reciprocity, expressed these same views to both Davies and Laurier. Two correspondents of Laurier prophesied that even reciprocity in natural products would result in defeat at the polls, and another, to quote himself, "a life-long Liberal," declared, "More people and cheap transport will be of greater benefit to Canadian agriculture than would any reciprocity treaty that can be framed."¹² Of course there were some enthusiasts, one correspondent even urging that an effort to secure unrestricted reciprocity be made; this, however, only offset the extremists in the other direction. The generally prevalent tone was that of care and caution.

The attitude of the Liberal press was similar. The *Halifax Chronicle* admitted that the two subjects in which the Maritime Provinces were interested were the Atlantic fisheries and reciprocity, but it saw considerable difficulty in the way of achieving any progress in the latter. The *Montreal Herald* considered reciprocity "on a basis which Sir Wilfrid Laurier will approve" a good thing, and, no doubt, beneficial to some industries. On the other hand, however, "Let Canada be made a cheap country to live in, and a cheap country to produce in, and these industries will work out their own salvation just as the agricultural industry did when it was quite as seriously threatened. . . . If Sir Wilfrid brings back a treaty it will be well; if not, it will still be well." The *Manitoba Free Press* was most non-committal in its attitude; and the *Victoria Daily Times*, while more enthusiastic than any other paper in its praise of the benefits of reciprocity, still, possibly influenced by geographical considerations, thought the Alaska boundary question "by far the most important question" with which the Commission had to deal. Both Conservative and Liberal papers warned the Government not to "jeopardize or sacrifice any great Canadian industry," for stable conditions must be maintained and there was no assurance of permanency in any arrangement with the United States, as past experience had all too clearly shown. Even for the farmer the best possibility of expansion lay in the British market, and Canadian opinion in general was opposed to any sacrifice of the preferential clause to gain American reciprocity.¹³

¹²Laurier papers; John W. Dafoe, *Clifford Sifton, in relation to his times* (Toronto, 1931), 191-2; A Canadian Liberal, "The Anglo-American Joint High Commission" (*North American review*, CLXVII, July, 1898, 165-75); *Toronto Globe*, Aug. 27, 1898.

¹³*Halifax Chronicle*, Aug. 17, 24, 25, Sept. 3, 6, 27, 1898; *Halifax Herald*, Aug. 23, 26, 1898; *Montreal Herald*, Aug. 22, 26, Sept. 12, Nov. 21, Dec. 10, 1898; *Montreal Gazette*, Aug. 11, 30, Sept. 6, Nov. 29, 1898; *Toronto Globe*, Aug. 19, 23, 25, Nov. 9, Dec. 10, 1898; *Toronto Mail and Empire*, Aug. 19, 20, 24, 26, 31, Nov. 21, 1898, Jan. 26, 1899; *Manitoba Free Press*, Aug. 23, 1898; *Victoria Daily Times*, Sept. 9,

Aside from the general question of the desirability of a treaty there was, of course, as in all tariff negotiations, a considerable amount of correspondence and expression of opinion on the specific articles which should be included. "The subject of woods generally," wrote Laurier, "whether in log or in any way prepared for consumption, is one of the most difficult questions with which we have to deal." It certainly called forth the largest amount of correspondence and was complicated by the regulations of the province of Ontario requiring manufacture of lumber before its export. The lumbermen presented a memorial to the Commission protesting against the removal of these regulations, except in return for the free admission of Canadian lumber, and this was repeated in several letters to Laurier, including one from the Premier of Ontario, who also visited Quebec to impress the Commission with his views.¹⁴ Some of Laurier's correspondents, including a member of his Cabinet, did not, however, think that this was an adequate return, pointing out that if the Ontario law was retained the duty on lumber must soon be withdrawn by the United States.¹⁵ Others asked for an import duty on American lumber, laths, and shingles, equal to that imposed on Canadian products by the United States.¹⁶

There was also considerable demand for the remission of duty on minerals,—iron, nickel, silver, lead, phosphorus, gypsum, and mica all being brought forward by those interested.¹⁷ Some were careful to add, however, that ores should not be admitted free, unless the same concession was made to bullion, as this would destroy the smelting industry in Canada;¹⁸ and there was protest against a proposal, favoured by Fielding, to place pig-iron on the free list.¹⁹ Others suggested that an export duty should be placed on nickel ore and matte, or other provision made for its compulsory manufacture in Canada.²⁰

A number of letters asked for the free admission of barley and corn-meal into the United States, and the Minister of Customs suggested that binder twine and fencing should be placed on the American free list.²¹

There was quite a brisk demand from Ontario for admission of coal into Canada free of duty, but this was opposed by the Nova Scotia interests, whose views were pressed by Fielding in the Cabinet. Laurier, in a letter to the latter, confessed that he found the question "full of difficulties. . . .

28, 1898; Robert McConnell, editor of the *Halifax Chronicle*, "Commercial relations between Canada and the United States" (*Canadian magazine*, XII, Jan., 1899, 198-201).

¹⁴*Laurier papers*, Gillies and Co. to Laurier, Resolution of Penetanguishene Town Council, A. S. Hardy to Laurier; *Toronto Globe*, Sept. 20, 1898; *Montreal Herald*, Sept. 12, 1898.

¹⁵*Laurier papers*, Orillia and Owen Sound Boards of Trade, L. P. Graves, J. E. Murphy, Thomas Conlon, E. W. Rathbunn, R. W. Scott to Laurier.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, Boards of Trade of Orillia and District of Rainy River, Lumber and Shingle Manufacturers of British Columbia, C. Beck to Laurier.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, T. D. Ledyard, T. P. Brazill, W. Gibbs, W. A. Williams to Laurier; W. J. McAndy to Fielding.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, H. W. Bostock, Kaslo Board of Trade to Laurier.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, E. W. Rathbunn, Clifford Sifton and Fielding to Laurier.

²⁰*Ibid.*, Municipal Council of Drury, Dennison and Graham, Sault Ste. Marie Board of Trade and John Patterson to Laurier.

²¹*Ibid.*, Petitions from some inhabitants of Nova Scotia, Whitby, and Chatham Boards of Trade, Wm. Betcher, J. Penfound, W. Paterson to Laurier.

There are some important sections of the country which expected it and which will be grievously disappointed if we refuse it."²²

The manufacturers were, of course, busy urging that there should be no concessions on their products. Manufacturers of different implements and machines—axes, scythes, forks, sewing-machines, typewriters, and type-setting machines—all sent memorials to this effect.²³ They were joined by the bicycle and furniture manufacturers, and representations came also from soap manufacturers, leather and boot and shoe manufacturers.²⁴ The Dominion Cotton Company and a wholesale dry goods firm in Montreal protested against the inclusion of cotton goods in a reciprocity agreement declaring that the New England market was glutted and, therefore, the advantage would all be on the side of the Americans.²⁵

The Dominion Millers' Association presented a memorial against the removal of the duty on flour and this protest was repeated by several interested private individuals, though there seems to have been some division of opinion among those engaged in the business.²⁶

It would, of course, be unwise to build too much of an argument on these representations. In all tariff negotiations and revisions those who claim that their interests will be hurt by any reduction seem always to be more vocal. As a report of the *Montreal Gazette* said, "The advocates of restricted—not unrestricted trade—were thick on the ground here today in the proportion of three to every one who is anxious to see the tariff barriers between the United States and Canada reduced."²⁷ It can at least be said, however, that they bear out the impression, gathered from more general letters and newspaper editorials, that the interest in and desire for a reciprocity treaty had waned considerably now that it had become evident that Canada was once more enjoying prosperity.

No official minutes of the meetings of the Commission or its committees were kept, and therefore no account of its progress, except a report of the last meeting, appears in any official publication, either of Canada or of the United States. Thus it is necessary to piece the story together from newspaper reports, which, except for the delegations appearing before the Commission, must be considered as unreliable, for its secrets were well kept. The personal relations of the commissioners seem on the whole to have been harmonious. Laurier commented on the "new and general goodwill observable here," though he complained of the influence of local interests on the American members, so that "the Commission is bounded on the east by Gloucester cod and on the west by Indiana lambs, no, sometimes on the west by Seattle lions." The American Secretary of State made the same complaint about the Canadians, whose minds, he said, were "com-

²²*Ibid.*, Hamilton, Chatham, and Kingston Boards of Trade, Petitions from the towns of Trenton, Belleville, Tweed, Napanee, Deseronto, Farnworth, Francis Frost (M.P. for Grenville), Elias Rogers (President Toronto Board of Trade), H. A. Calvin (M.P.), Walter Macdonald, R. J. Hopper to Laurier, Laurier to Fielding.

²³*Ibid.*, Bedford Manufacturing Company, Williams Manufacturing Company, Canadian Typograph Company, Manager of the Massey-Harris Company to Laurier.

²⁴*Ibid.*, Memorials from the Canadian Bicycle Manufacturers, Furniture Manufacturers of Ontario, Leather Manufacturers, Boot and Shoe Manufacturers, J. Humphrey Parker, and R. H. Hudson to Laurier.

²⁵*Ibid.*, C. R. Whitehead of the Dominion Cotton Mills Co., J. N. Greenshields, and A. F. Gault to Laurier.

²⁶*Ibid.*, John Mather, Robert Meighen, Archibald Campbell (with enclosures) to Laurier.

²⁷*Montreal Gazette*, Sept. 2, 1898.

pletely occupied with their own party and factional disputes. . . . Sir Wilfrid Laurier is far more afraid of Sir Charles Tupper than he is of Lord Salisbury and President McKinley combined." The Americans also complained of the contentiousness of Lord Herschell who, they said, was "more cantankerous than any of the Canadians. . . . In fact he is the principal obstacle to a favorable arrangement." The American Ambassador in Great Britain was asked to hint this to the British Government, which countered, however, by an attack on Foster, the Canadian dislike of whom had already been conveyed in a roundabout way to the American Government and resulted in the substitution of Kasson wherever possible.²⁸

The Canadian newspapers reported that reciprocity was the most difficult problem before the Commission and despaired of any agreement,²⁹ but as a matter of fact substantial progress seems to have been made and the press even contained some hints of the possibility of an agreement.³⁰ Laurier wrote later:

We struggled to obtain reciprocity in lumber, because the condition of things in so far as lumber is concerned is acute and may become worse. I may say, however, that in this we made no progress whatever. We also endeavoured to obtain a fair measure of reciprocity in minerals, in which we were altogether successful; in quarry products, in which we were also quite successful; and in a few agricultural products in which we had some partial success. On the whole, with reference to the reciprocity question, I am quite satisfied with the progress which we made, barring the sole article of lumber, and we can at any moment make a very fair treaty.

Our chief efforts, however, were directed to these subjects: the Atlantic fisheries, the Pacific seal fisheries and the Alaska boundary.

Charlton also said, with reference to the reciprocity agreement, "We came very near getting a good treaty," but "a little trouble intervened between the trade treaty and something else." Senator Fairbanks, in summing up the results of the Commission, said that "a tentative agreement" was reached on the question of trade relations, "though satisfactory conclusion not probable on many articles chiefly lumber and farm products, on which Canadians urged very considerable concessions." Foster alone maintained that "little progress" had been made on reciprocity.³¹

Most important in this connection are the various memoranda drawn up by Kasson. He reported that the Canadians had demanded concessions on natural products—"products of the mines, forest and farm"—and that the Americans had offered to admit mineral products free, to increase the free list of forest products, to reduce the duty on sawed lumber, to put on the free list "two of the important products of the farm which they demanded," to reduce the duty on the remaining three, and, finally, "a

²⁸Allan Nevins, *Henry White* (Boston and New York, 1930), 134, 187-8; Wm. Roscoe Thayer, *Life of John Hay* (Boston and New York, 1915), II, 204-5; Skelton, *Laurier*, II, 127-9.

²⁹Halifax *Herald*, Oct. 14, Dec. 3, 1898; Montreal *Gazette*, Nov. 19, 1898; Toronto *Globe*, Sept. 28, Oct. 7, Nov. 12, Dec. 8, 1898.

³⁰Montreal *Gazette*, Oct. 11, 1898, Interview with Clarke Wallace; *ibid.*, Nov. 17, 1898.

³¹Canada, *House of Commons debates*, 1902, 1539; 1903, 1651, 1663; Skelton, *Laurier*, II, 131-3; John W. Foster, *Diplomatic memoirs* (Boston and New York, 1909), 188.

general reduction of existing duties." A suggested draft for a reciprocity treaty with several rough lists of articles which might be reciprocally admitted free and at specified reduced duties also appears among the Kasson papers.

The commodities mentioned on these lists show an effort on the part of the commissioners to conform to the requests made in both the American and Canadian representations. The free admission of natural ores is mentioned in three lists, coal appears on two, gypsum on three. Of farm products barley, butter and cheese, wheat and wheat flour appear on two lists, live animals on one, canned meat and vegetables on two. Some vegetables, fruit and berries, seed of various sorts, and nursery stock also receive mention. Manufactured articles appear very sparsely; furniture, agricultural machinery, locomotives and their parts, are each on one list, mining tools and machinery on two. There is some effort to meet the Canadian demand with regard to lumber and wood products in lists specifying the qualities and articles which might be admitted free. On the whole the lists cannot be said to be very comprehensive, but they might, as was evidently expected, have formed a basis for further discussion and agreement.³²

The Commission, however, broke up on February 20, because of the failure to reach an agreement on the Alaska boundary or the conditions on which it should be submitted to arbitration. The American commissioners proposed that attention should be turned to the determination of the other subjects "several" of which "were so far advanced as to assure the possibility of a settlement"; but the Canadians refused, stating as their reason that "the manner in which they would be prepared to adjust some of the other important matters under consideration, must depend, in their view, upon whether it is possible to arrive at a settlement of all questions which might at any time occasion acute controversy or even conflict."³³ In this attitude they received the support of the Conservatives.³⁴

Technically the Commission only adjourned till the second of August and some of the Liberal papers, therefore, refused to believe that it had failed.³⁵ It did not meet on the date set, however, and in fact never met again, though various approaches were made with a view to its re-opening. In March, 1900, Laurier said in the House of Commons that he did not consider the negotiations were at an end, though he was unable to say when they would be re-opened.³⁶ In his budget speech of 1903 Fielding announced that there had been some correspondence between Laurier and Fairbanks on the subject. The American chairman, in a letter written on February 13, 1903, had suggested that since the question of the Alaska boundary had by then been transferred to a special tribunal, the Joint High Commission should re-convene. The Canadian Government, however, would only agree to another session if an informal preliminary meeting should give "reasonable hope" of a successful outcome.³⁷ Laurier, in a confidential letter to the secretary of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association written

³²Poland, *Reciprocity negotiations*, 291-6 and Appendix a.

³³*Canada, Sessional papers*, 1899, no. 99; Laurier in the House of Commons (*Canada, House of Commons debates*, 1899, 3341, 3668).

³⁴*Ibid.*, 3780, 4266.

³⁵*Halifax Chronicle*, Feb. 24, 1899; *Montreal Herald*, Feb. 21, 1899.

³⁶*Canada, House of Commons debates*, 1900, 2147.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 1903, 1407-8.

on May 29 of the same year, said that he expected that the Joint High Commission would re-assemble before long.³⁸ Nothing came of the suggestion however. On October 20, the decision of the Alaska boundary tribunal was announced and this so enraged Canadian public opinion that any effort to reach an agreement with the United States at that time, on any subject whatever, would have almost certainly proved abortive. In the parliamentary session of 1904 Laurier definitely stated that the American Government would have to take the initiative for further negotiations; and though the American press of November 22 contained an announcement of an informal meeting of the commissioners in New York, nothing further resulted. Apparently this ended all efforts to revive the ill-starred Commission.³⁹

All sides explained the failure of the Joint High Commission in accordance with their own views. The Americans blamed the Canadian negotiators, who, they considered, were governed more by the exigencies of national politics than by the desire to make a settlement. "The Canadian matter in a nutshell is this," wrote Secretary of State Hay, "Laurier preferred to pose before his Parliament as a stout defender of Canadian rights and interests against Yankee selfishness, rather than have the trouble to defend himself against the attacks of the Opposition for having made a just and reasonable treaty—which was within his reach."⁴⁰ Kasson also was of the same opinion and declared that the American commissioners "were more surprised by this sudden termination of our negotiations because they [i.e. the Canadians] had previously indicated to us that the question of reciprocity in trade relations was the hinge upon which success or failure of negotiations would turn."⁴¹ Foster went so far as to compare the abortive efforts of this Commission with the success of that of 1871 and pointed out that the latter contained one Canadian and four English statesmen, while in 1898 there were three Canadians and only one Englishman.⁴²

The Conservatives blamed the "bungling incapacity" of the Canadian negotiators, of whom only Charlton had shown any ability. Their previous record and policies made it vain to hope that they would get any favourable consideration from the United States. Not only had they been the proponents of unrestricted reciprocity and on most of the disputed points taken the side of the United States, but in the last two tariffs they had discriminated against the United States.⁴³

The Liberal explanation, that reciprocity had been refused by the United States, was that which was to become traditional. "There was found no disposition on the part of the representatives of the United States," said J. W. Longley, a prominent Nova Scotia Liberal, speaking at a meeting of the Canadian Club of Boston three years later, "to even discuss the question of reciprocity upon any basis upon which it could be honorably considered by the Canadian delegates." Fielding was even to declare in an official document, "Again a failure to come to an agreement was due to

³⁸Laurier papers.

³⁹Canada, House of Commons debates, 1904, 75; Montreal Gazette, Nov. 30, 1904, Jan. 13, 1905.

⁴⁰Nevins, *Henry White*, 191.

⁴¹Poland, *Reciprocity negotiations*, 296.

⁴²Foster, *Diplomatic memoirs*, II, 189.

⁴³Comment of Sir Charles Tupper, Conservative press, Feb. 21, 1899; Toronto Mail and Empire, Feb. 20, 21, 22, 1899.

the manifest unwillingness of the United States authorities to make any substantial concessions in favour of imports from Canada."⁴⁴ This interpretation should, however, be challenged. As has been seen, it was the Canadians who insisted that, on the failure to reach an agreement on the Alaska boundary, the Commission should adjourn, although a tentative treaty had been drawn up and Laurier himself had declared, "We can at any moment make a very fair treaty." A further quotation from this letter strengthens this point. "There has been a great deal of misconception as to the character of the negotiations at Washington," he wrote. "The impression was that we were struggling with might and main to obtain a wide measure of reciprocity. The reverse is the truth."⁴⁵ The Liberal defence of their position in the parliamentary session of 1899 is also far more consistent with this view. Here Laurier explained the attitude of the Canadian negotiators as follows:

Now, Sir, the hon. gentleman [Tupper] assumes that in all these negotiations we have been begging for reciprocity; he assumes that in all these negotiations that took place at Quebec and in Washington we were not dealing with the Bering Sea question, that we were not dealing with the Atlantic fisheries but that we were seeking to modify [*sic*] the American commissioners in order to obtain some trade concessions. Let me tell the hon. gentleman that in this matter, as in all others, and especially in this one he is mistaken. I have no right to speak of what took place in the commission, but I have a right to refer to what is now in the minds of the Canadian people; and if we know the hearts and minds of our people at present, I think I am not making too wide a statement when I say that the general feeling in Canada to-day is not in favour of reciprocity. There was a time when Canadians, beginning with the hon. gentleman himself, would have given many things to obtain the American market; there was a time not long ago when the market of the great cities of the union was the only market we had for any of our products. But, thank heaven! These days are past and over now.⁴⁶

There was very little disappointment expressed in Canada over the failure of the negotiations. The Hamilton *Spectator* spoke of the country having escaped the "calamity" of a reciprocity treaty,⁴⁷ and the Montreal *Gazette* declared: "There was really less risk of Canada losing from the commission's failure to come to an understanding than from its reaching one. Nobody expected a reciprocity arrangement that would be fair to Canada from the high tariff men who presently control the United States affairs."⁴⁸ Even the Toronto *Globe* said: "It was important to have trade relations liberalized: it was of far greater importance to have the boundary

⁴⁴Halifax *Chronicle*, April 9, 1902. See also Longley's article, "Reciprocity between the United States and Canada" (*North American review*, CLXXVI, March, 1903, 407; reprinted *National reciprocity*, March, 1903, I, 23); Memorandum by the Canadian Minister of Finance for the information of His Majesty's Ambassador at Washington, Dec. 1, 1909, 620-1; Victoria *Daily Times*, Feb. 17, 1899; Toronto *Globe*, Feb. 21, 1899.

⁴⁵Skelton, *Laurier*, II, 131.

⁴⁶*Canada, House of Commons debates*, 1899, 10, 102, 157.

⁴⁷Quoted by the Halifax *Herald*, Feb. 25, 1899.

⁴⁸Jan. 26, 1899; see also Feb. 22, 1899. Sifton's views were apparently similar to those expressed here; see Daffoe, *Sifton*, 193.

question, a possible source of serious international complications, removed from the field of disputed issues.”⁴⁹

Both before the Commission met and during its sessions, it had been stated that Canada would make this one effort to secure reciprocity with the United States, but if this were unsuccessful, “the idea of better trade relations with the United States will be abandoned by our people one and all,” and the Government, backed by a united nation, would be free to take “the measures which shall then be deemed necessary.” Charlton was more explicit as to what these “measures” were to be.

We will seek in every possible way to develop and extend our export trade with England, and we will be impelled by every consideration of fair play and filial feeling to arrange a tariff that will permit the imports from England to wipe out to the greatest practical extent, the balance of trade that we now score up against her. We shall look with more favour upon schemes for the consolidation of a world-wide empire, and will be ready and anxious to meet any discrimination that England may be induced to make in favour of colonial products by discriminations as generous in favour of British imports. The parting of the way is just before us; we have a preference as to which road we shall take; but if access is denied us, we will enter upon the other with high resolve to make it the road to victory over all the obstacles that may confront us.

The note of national growth and self-reliance was struck by the *Toronto Globe*, which said: “Each country [i.e. Canada and the United States] has its own business to do and its own destiny to fulfil, and in our case there is every reason to believe that the path of independence and of an intelligent care of our own interests will also be the path of friendship.”⁵⁰

Thus after the failure of the Joint High Commission, at the turn of the century, Canadian public opinion resembles that of a decade later far more than it does that of the eighties and early nineties, when the Conservative Premier, Sir John Macdonald, had felt it necessary to make concessions to the prevailing advocacy of a large measure of reciprocity with the United States. Indeed the speeches made and articles written at this time express the essence of the principal emotions which were to defeat the reciprocity agreement when presented in 1911 by the United States and point clearly to the fact that the reciprocity of the eighties and nineties was dictated in large measure by the poor economic conditions of those years. It was the reviving spirit of national independence and prosperity and of imperial attachment which in 1899 prevented any keen disappointment at the failure of the Joint High Commission to produce any results. Thus from this episode emerge the two salient features of the discussion of reciprocity in Canada—first that it has been regarded as a depression measure, and second that it is inseparably linked with the position of Canada as a part of the British Empire.

⁴⁹Feb. 21, 1899. See also *Victoria Daily Times*, Feb. 17, 1899.

⁵⁰*Toronto Globe*, Feb. 16 and May 25, 1899; Charlton in *Canada: an encyclopaedia*, I, 378; A. H. U. Colquhoun, “Reciprocity trips to Washington” (*Canadian magazine*, VIII, March, 1897, 423).

DISCUSSION

Mr. Martin discussed the position of John Charlton as an important factor in the attitude of the Liberal party to reciprocity. Charlton had been a completely consistent supporter of the freest commercial relations between Canada and the United States; he had, with some reluctance, abandoned commercial union in favour, first of unrestricted, and then of restricted, reciprocity. His convictions, Mr. Martin believed, did not change after 1896; but the imposition of the Dingley Tariff drove him to the conclusion that nothing was to be hoped for from the Americans, and, in disillusionment, he turned to a policy of reprisals.

Miss Foster agreed with Mr. Martin as to Charlton's sincerity and the consistency of his views. She drew attention, however, to the lumber interests which Charlton represented, and to the importance of lumber as a factor in reciprocity negotiations.