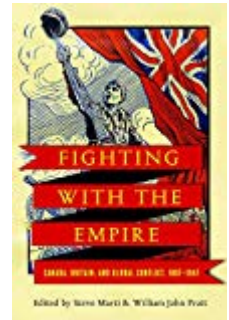


Steve Marti, William John Pratt, eds. *Fighting with the Empire: Canada, Britain, and Global Conflict, 1867-1947*. Studies in Canadian Military History Series. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2019. 220 pp. \$89.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7748-6040-6.



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An Empire Tested in Canada

The last two decades have yielded rich pickings for those interested in the history of the British world, including explorations of the “Britishness” of the white dominions Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. For many Australian historians, perhaps more than others, the mixture of affirmation and tension in the jostling of imperial and national rationales for their country’s involvement in the two world wars has been a recurring theme.[1] The edited collection, *Fighting with the Empire*, reminds us that Canadians also felt distinctive tensions and contradictions shaped by region, race, ethnicity, and indigeneity as they joined with Britain in conflicts and the diplomacy surrounding conflicts.

There are strengths and weaknesses in putting together a collection such as this. The work lacks a strong sense of continuous narrative threads joining the chapters together. The collection does not focus on the best-known contours of bigger conflicts or the burgeoning sense of Canadian nation-

alism. Instead, this work brings new perspectives and methods in Canadian international history to the two more familiar pulls of historical attraction: relations with Britain and involvement in global conflict. The book is more focused on shining a new light from different angles than trying to tell an overarching story. The result is a satisfying series of insights that conveys a sense of where recent research is taking historians and whetting the appetite for more. It is rare to find a collection that boasts, through its different chapters, an evidentiary basis that shifts from government archives in Canada and the UK to regional newspapers, soldiers’ clothing and letters to home, and personal scrapbooks from a Royal Tour. But it is also a collection that either speaks to the well read in the history of Canada in the world or needs to be enjoyed alongside some works of broader narrative, thereby enabling the reader to appreciate how these chapters serve as interventions, illumina-

tions, and suggestive new research paths into the bigger story of Canada in world affairs.

The collection shows that attachment to empire was highly variable in form and revealing of both divisions and sources of unity in Canada. Managing the tensions and even contradictions that arose in forms of mobilizing for the imperial cause was a task not only for governments in Ottawa and provinces but also for nongovernment bodies. Steve Marti's chapter on patriotic women mobilized in the First World War through the Imperial Order Daughters of Empire reveals how an elite basis of organization that started with a somewhat restricted notion of patriotic ideals and work became a victim of its own growth. A narrow version of women's patriotism necessarily gave way as new chapters arose, tied together by ethnicity (for example, women identifying as French, Welsh, and Scottish) and/or geography, such that local causes and ties mattered as much as overseas events and dedication to an overarching imperial cause. During the Second World War, some of the bigger Canadian workers' unions wielded patriotism with xenophobic intent. As Mikhail Bjorge shows, the war was, for some unions, an eagerly seized opportunity to tap deep-rooted fears of foreign labor and to exclude Asians in particular. And, as was the case with workers in other countries, the coal miners of Nova Scotia took action, including strikes, also in response to the early events of the war. The fate of German-born miners and workers in factories was shaped by events in Europe, and government trod carefully in responding to acts of industrial militancy when those acts were also accompanied by the rhetoric of high patriotism. With neither strike-breaking manpower on hand nor a politically safe way of elevating pluralism over patriotism, government timidity toward the strikers was the safest stance.

The cloak of patriotism was thus strategically donned in Canada as well as being eagerly worn. Even in the late nineteenth century, Canadian parliamentarians took two patriotic steps forward

and one nationalist-idealist step backward in their admiration of British military professionalism. As Eirik Brazier shows in his chapter on British Imperial Officers in Canada in the forty years preceding the First World War, many of these parliamentarians also held commissions in the militia and were dedicated to the idea of citizen soldiers rather than professional armies. British officers advising on Canada's military were feted and they did much to instill British culture and practices in the organization of local military forces. They were focal points for ceremonial splendor, epitomizing all that was virtuous in the British world, but there were strict limits to what they could achieve with Canada's legislators.

The collection offers some insights into the perspectives of soldiers fighting in Canadian/imperial causes, including Amy Shaw's exploration of Canadians' determination to find distinctiveness in their Stetson hats during the Anglo-Boer War and William John Pratt's study of how troops based in England during the Second World War drew partly on a second sense of "home" in England but still yearned for forms of food, alcohol, and entertainment that came from their Canadian home. But the balance and strength of the book as a whole is in Canadian society and politics.

In focusing on popular reactions to the Royal Tour of Canada in 1939, Claire L. Halstead draws on recollections, personal memorabilia, ephemera, and early film to make the related argument that Canadians identified with King George VI and Queen Elizabeth with excited enthusiasm but also in ways that spoke to their different regions and their imagined sense of themselves in the world. And R. Scott Sheffield shows that First Nations people rallying to the war effort in the 1940s invoked Britain as a worthy cause partly on legal grounds as Status Indians but also as a source of higher moral authority than Canadian government agencies telling them how war measures would circumscribe their lives.

Of interest to many readers will be the collection's insights into the Francophone attitudes to the British Empire in times of crisis. Geoff Keelan's chapter reveals lines of division that grew as the First World War unfolded. But it was the likely prospect and then the reality of conscription in 1917 that enabled anti-imperial member of Parliament Henri Bourassa and Quebecois allies to mobilize against the war in ways that fractured the unity of the nation. On the other hand, Robert Talbot's chapter explores the central role played by Mackenzie King's French Canadian ally and minister of justice, Ernest Lapointe, in sustaining a Liberal Party commitment and a more popularly held embrace of the British Commonwealth during the interwar years, while continuing to cultivate a sense of independence in the conduct of Canadian foreign policy. There were passionate advocates for Quebecois secession, but they were outmaneuvered by the skillful and moderate work of Lapointe in particular. In Talbot's words, "the Liberals managed to craft an independent foreign policy of the 'mushy middle' that more or less accommodated both cultural-linguistic groups" (p. 88).

Researchers of imperial/Commonwealth, international, and Canadian history will draw considerable riches from this somewhat eclectic but insightful collection. While the focus might jump around from chapter to chapter, the collection as a whole features writing that draws on important innovations in writing histories of empire and modern international relations. The archival diversity underpinning arguments and the attention to gender, artifacts, place, and the nexus between imperial mindedness and local, even individual perspectives, all help to build the sense of a historical lens that both zooms in and goes wide to good effect.

Note

[1]. See, for example, Carolyn Holbrook and Keir Reeves, eds., *The Great War: Aftermath and Commemoration* (Sydney: New South Books, 2019); Joan Beaumont, *Broken Nation: Australians in the Great War* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2013); Marilyn

Lake and Henry Reynolds, with Mark McKenna and Joy Damousi, *What's Wrong with ANZAC?* (Sydney: New South Books, 2010); and Peter Cochrane, *Australians at War* (Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Commission, 2001).

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