

Section 2.—Dominion Public Finance*

Historical Sketch.—Both under the French regime and in the earlier part of the British, the territorial or casual revenues of Canada, consisting of certain seigniorial dues and the proceeds of the sale of government timber and land, were reserved to the Crown. In addition, the right of levying taxes and of regulating the trade and commerce of the colony was, after 1763, deemed to be vested in the British Parliament.

By the Quebec Act of 1774, certain duties on spirits and molasses were imposed in order to provide a revenue to be expended by the Crown "towards defraying the expenses of the administration of justice and the support of the civil government of the province". A little later, in 1778, the British Government, by the Declaratory Act (18 Geo. III, c. 12), renounced forever the right of taxing the colonies to provide Imperial revenue, but maintained its claim to impose duties considered necessary for the regulation of trade, the proceeds to go towards defraying the expenditures of the colonial administration. After the Constitutional Act of 1791, the customs duties remained under the control of the Imperial Government, their revenue, as well as the territorial revenue above mentioned, coming in to the Executive Administration independently of the Legislative Assembly and thus making the Executive power largely independent of the Legislature. In case these revenues proved insufficient, recourse could generally be had to the grant made by the Imperial Government for the support of the army. As time went on, however, the Crown revenues became more and more inadequate to meet the increasing expenditure, while the wave of economy in the United Kingdom after 1815 made it impossible any longer to supplement these revenues from military sources. On the other hand, the purely provincial revenues collected under the authorization of the Provincial Legislatures showed an increasing surplus. The power of the purse thus began to pass into the hands of the Legislatures; further, in 1831 the British Parliament passed an Act placing the customs duties at the disposal of the Legislatures.

Under the Act of Union, a consolidated revenue fund was established. All appropriation bills were required to originate in the Legislative Assembly, which was forbidden to pass any vote, resolution, or bill involving the expenditure of public money unless each had been first recommended by a written message of the Governor General. The British Government surrendered all control of the hereditary or casual revenues, which were thenceforth paid into the treasuries of the Provinces to be disposed of as the Legislatures should direct.

At the interprovincial conference that took place prior to Confederation, it was decided that the new Dominion Government was to assume the provincial debts and to provide out of Dominion revenues definite cash subsidies for the support of the Provincial Governments, also, the Government was to take over permanently, as its chief source of revenue, the customs and excise duties that had yielded the greater part of the revenues of the separate provinces (direct taxation being as unpopular in British North America as in other new countries).

* Revised under the direction of Dr. W. C. Clark, Deputy Minister, Department of Finance, with the exception of those parts dealing with war-tax revenue and income-tax revenue at pp. 759-766, which were revised by the Department of National Revenue.