

Canada but, in any case, its prime purpose was to be frustrated by an alliance between French Canadian reformers under Louis-Hippolyte Lafontaine (1807-1864) and Upper Canada reformers under Robert Baldwin (1804-1858), both of whom were leaders in the movement for responsible government.

2.3.1 Toward responsible government

Responsible government had been one of Durham's recommendations, but the British government did not believe it was possible to implement it. After a change of ministry in London, however, and a great deal of manoeuvring in the province of Canada and in Nova Scotia, responsible government was effectively achieved by both in 1848. Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick had their own approaches to this question though the forms of government were the same. Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island were sufficiently small and parochial that even a liberal-minded British government felt it difficult to concede responsible government to them but by 1855 all five colonies had their own working versions of the principle.

These constitutional changes of the 1840s were accompanied by rather drastic commercial ones, affecting wheat and lumber exports especially. Britain's need for wheat and lumber had grown rapidly as a result of the changes wrought by the industrial revolution. Britain lowered her customs duties on colonial produce which stimulated the export business from Canada and New Brunswick in lumber, wheat and flour. Canadian flour could be milled, by British regulation, from both Canadian and American wheat; and between 1843 and 1846 a considerable milling business was begun in the province of Canada. Then, in 1846, as a result of the pressure of bad harvests of 1845 and famine in parts of Ireland, Britain abandoned all forms of protection, eliminating the advantage enjoyed by the Canadian milling business. The preference for Canadian wheat and flour was broken and by 1848 Canada was suffering from a severe commercial crisis, aggravated by a general one which it shared with the United States. These conditions were largely responsible for the riots in Montreal in April 1849 when the Governor General, Lord Elgin (1847-1854), was harassed as he signed the Rebellion Losses Bill. The Parliament buildings in Montreal were set on fire shortly afterward and Montreal was never to be a capital city again.

By the early 1850s the commercial depression was over, and Canada experienced its first railway boom. Railways changed all of British North America in the 1850s. The story of the inception and building of the Grand Trunk Railway, the Great Western Railway and others in the province of Canada, the European and North American in New Brunswick, the Nova Scotia railway, and long efforts to build the Intercolonial railway from Halifax to Quebec, is lengthy and complex, but the changes they produced in Canadian society were permanent. Railways made possible the growth of cities which began in the 1850s. Railways also changed the countryside as they broke down isolation. They also made possible the conceptions that were to lead to the union movement of the 1860s.

It was no accident that the 1860s were an age of political unions. Italy was made one country between 1859 and 1861; Germany was largely united in the North German Confederation of 1867; the United States defeated an attempt to split the country in the Civil War of 1861-1865. All of these events were, to a considerable degree, the concomitants of railways.

2.3.2 Events leading to Confederation

Some of the strongest forces that helped to produce Confederation were external to British North America. The American Civil War broke out in 1861 and soon created a climate of tension and unease throughout British North America, noticeably after the *Trent* crisis in November 1861, and increasingly as the war went on. Nor were these the only tensions in North America. In Mexico a revolutionary struggle had been going on since 1858, under the leadership of Juarez, and the eventual result was that Emperor Maximilian — the brother of Franz Joseph II of Austria — was shot on orders of Juarez, in June 1867. Well might Thomas D'Arcy McGee (1825-1868) declare in 1865 "...we were taught that the days of the colonial comedy of Government were over and gone, and that politics had become stern, and almost tragic for the New World". McGee himself was assassinated in 1868. These conditions made the far-reaching changes proposed by Confederation justifiable to some, essential to others, and made resistance to Confederation more difficult.