

### 2.3.3 Building a nation

At this early period, Canada was still mainly a moral and political union, a union on paper, without real economic and physical links to hold it together. Businessmen and MPs, travelling to Montreal or Ottawa from the Maritimes, had to go via Portland, Maine; MPs from Manitoba travelled via St. Paul, Minnesota; those from the west coast had to go to San Francisco by ship and thence eastward by the Union Pacific Railway. Canada needed to be joined together by railways. The first of these, the Intercolonial Railway, was embarked upon almost at once after 1867 with the government surveying the route, constructing the line and operating the railway. It went from Halifax via Moncton, Campbellton and the Matapédia valley to Quebec. The first through train from Halifax to Quebec arrived at Lévis on July 6, 1876.

The construction of the 561-mile Intercolonial Railway was by no means easy even with an Imperial government guarantee to back the required bond issues of the Canadian government. The building of the Pacific Railway, nearly 2,000 miles from North Bay, Ont. to Vancouver, BC, was far more formidable. In 1871, when British Columbia joined Confederation, the Macdonald government committed itself to starting the railway within two years and completing it within ten. This was impossible. For one thing, surveys of routes had to be made and no one had any idea where an economical and efficient route through British Columbia would be found. As a result of early experience with government construction of the Intercolonial, the Macdonald government decided to allow a private company to build the Pacific Railway. Macdonald knew the project was sufficiently large to absorb more than the available capital in Canada as Sandford Fleming (1827-1915) had estimated it would need at least \$100 million. Toronto and Montreal interests were both interested in building such a railway and Americans also wanted to supply capital. All these conflicting interests culminated in the famous Pacific Scandal which brought down the Conservative government of Sir John A. Macdonald in 1873.

The new Liberal Prime Minister, Alexander Mackenzie (1822-1892), pushed forward the work of government surveying and construction as government resources allowed. Throughout his term of office he struggled with the enormous costs of Sandford Fleming's surveys in British Columbia, and began construction of the line between Fort William and Winnipeg. Five years later the Conservative government was returned to office but progress on railway construction was hampered by lack of government finances until the fall of 1880 when a private company was formed that was strong enough financially to undertake the enormous task. The Canadian Pacific Railway Company began work and within five years the last spike was hammered home, thanks to a dynamic general manager, William Van Horne (1843-1915) and a good deal of support from the Canadian government. Furthermore, the government had constructed the most difficult part of the railway between Kamloops and Vancouver.

It was the CPR that enabled the Macdonald government to transport Canadian troops west to defeat the combined Métis-Indian forces in the North-West rebellion of March to May 1885. The North-West Mounted Police had controlled and pacified the west from 1873 onward, but could not handle a large-scale outbreak such as that of 1885. The trial and execution of eight Indians for the massacre at Frog Lake and other incidents of the rebellion did not arouse much controversy in the east but the execution of Louis Riel (1844-1885), the leader of the rebellion, did. Although the Catholic Church condemned Riel as an apostate, his fate engaged the sympathies of French Canadians. The Macdonald government was caught between two factions: Ontarians and some westerners who demanded Riel's death, and Québécois and other westerners who, while admitting Riel was guilty, felt that the Macdonald government was also guilty of having provoked a rebellion in the first place. One result of Riel's execution was that the Conservative party was weakened in Quebec sufficiently to allow Honoré Mercier (1840-1894) win a narrow victory in the 1886 election. The party recovered sufficiently to defeat Mercier decisively in 1892, however, it was never quite able to disassociate itself from the Riel affair.

Macdonald died in June 1891 and was succeeded by Sir John Abbott who in turn was succeeded by Sir John Thompson (1844-1894) who took office in December 1892, the first Nova Scotian to become Prime Minister of Canada. Thompson died suddenly in 1894 and the Conservative government fell in 1896 after 18 years in power, on a complicated and difficult issue, the Manitoba Schools Question. This was one of several awkward questions of provincial minority rights to separate schools. In the 1870s Manitoba had developed its