

I will add that this mode of appealing to the people is not British but American, as under the British system the representatives of the people in Parliament are presumed to be competent to decide all the public questions submitted to them.⁵⁴

The problem with this argument was that it was easily defeated by recalling that there were ample precedents for Canadians and other colonists adapting British practices to local circumstances. Recourse to the people, like Confederation itself, would be such an adaptation.⁵⁵

Throughout the debates, the confederationists were reluctant to challenge directly the call for recourse to the people, preferring instead to dismiss it on procedural grounds. For example, when James Currie, an articulate anti-confederationist, introduced a resolution that the Legislative Council should not make a decision on the Quebec Resolutions “without further manifestation of the public will than has yet been declared,” he met a host of procedural objections⁵⁶. Alexander Campbell queried him on just how this “further manifestation of the public will” would come about. Transforming Currie’s resolution into a man of straw, he dismissed as absurd the notion--a notion never proposed by Currie-- that “the nearly four millions of people who comprise the provinces to be affected by the union should meet together en masse.”⁵⁷

He also rejected the possibility of a special election on confederation because such an election would require that Parliament first be dissolved, an impossible precondition since a majority of the members in both houses supported the government’s commitment to confederation and, therefore, there was no basis for dissolution. “Receiving the support of more than two-thirds of the representatives of the people as the present Government does,” Campbell asked, “how is it possible that Parliament could be dissolved to suit the views of a small minority?”⁵⁸

Timing was another procedural roadblock the confederationists placed in the path of recourse to the people. On the very first day of the debates, 3 February 1865, confederationist Fergusson Blair said that submitting the plan to the electors at that time