

from Ireland, Scotland and England flocked into Canada, helping to push back the frontiers and develop new settlements. In 1824 the population of British North America (excluding Newfoundland) was 900,000. By 1861 the population of the four separate colonies which had emerged was over 3,170,300.

These four -- Upper Canada (Ontario), Lower Canada (Quebec), Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick, each with its own system of parliamentary government -- were drawn together in making plans for union or confederation for a variety of reasons: certain difficulties had arisen in the functioning of the political system; the need for a common plan of defence was felt; the development of trade made some kind of inter-colonial organization desirable; and, in the minds of the leaders at least, there was the idea of laying the foundation for a nation that would stretch from sea to sea, taking in the whole territory to the west of the Great Lakes.

July 1, 1867, was proclaimed the birthday of the Dominion of Canada. Confederation inaugurated an era of expansion and tremendous development. The Canadian Pacific Railway linking the Atlantic and Pacific coasts made possible the settling of the west, and helped to unite the nine provinces in one vast country. With the maximum encouragement from the railways and the government, immigrants not only from the British Isles but from all parts of Europe poured into Canada. Some settled in the great agricultural lands of the west, turning them into one of the world's leading granaries; some brought their skills to the urban centres of the east and played their part in the growing industrialization of the central section of the country. Between 1871 and 1911 the population doubled.

Problems of assimilation and internal development still abounded but, with the achievement of self-government and union, Canada could turn to external relations with the Empire and the world and to the development of its nationhood. Fighting side by side with Britain in the First World War, Canada was none the less anxious to speak for itself in international matters, and demanded -- and obtained -- a separate seat at the peace conference and in the League of Nations.

The logical outcome of the growing importance and independence of the Dominion in world affairs was reached in the enactment of the Statute of Westminster, in 1931. This gave statutory effect to the Declaration made at an Imperial Conference held in 1926, that the various members of the British Commonwealth of Nations were "autonomous communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs". They are united only by a common allegiance to the Crown.

Free to make treaties and trade agreements, free to declare war or stay at peace, Canada can be as independent of Britain as it chooses. Canada, like the other dominions, has a separate system of diplomatic representation. When the Second World War broke out, Canada declared war on its own behalf, seven days after the United Kingdom's declaration. With rapid rise to international importance and advance to the position of fourth largest exporter in the world, Canada is now recognized by other nations as a country in its own right.