

thing close to absolute authority. He can, for example, dissolve Parliaments.

The Lieutenant Governors can reserve bills passed by provincial legislatures—that is, they can hold up their application until the federal government approves or rejects them. Further, the federal government on its own can disallow them within a year of their passage. These powers, however, have not been exercised for the last forty years. In fact, the duties of the Governor General and the Lieutenant Governors are largely ceremonial.

Changes from the original plan began early, and though there have been occasional movements in the other direction, the trends have been toward autonomy for Canada and power to the provinces. Indeed, the provinces in Canada are probably the most powerful member states of any federation in the world, the Cantons of Switzerland being the closest contenders.

The Nineteenth Century

The Fathers of Confederation had been conditioned by the American Civil War, in which a central government, originally designed to be weak, had to go to war to preserve the union.

They decided to give Canada a central government with dominant powers. The provinces were given a few specific areas of authority—over education and social programs, for example—that didn't seem to be particularly important government activities in 1867.

"We are left," one bitter provincial leader said, "with small and absurd powers."

The final legislative and judicial authority over the Canadian Constitution was in Great Britain. The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council remained the arbiter of all disputes until 1949.

In 1892 the Committee ruled that the provinces were "supreme" within their areas of jurisdiction. The purpose of the British North America Act, it said, was "neither to weld the provinces into one, nor to subordinate provincial governments to a central authority." In subsequent years the Privy Council would continue to give a very broad interpretation of provincial legislative powers.

As the provinces became more autonomous within the federation, Canada as a whole became more autonomous within the Empire. In 1885 Canada's Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, refused to send troops to help Britain in a war in the Sudan. In 1899 Prime Minister Laurier declined to order troops to the Boer War though he did permit volunteers to go in Canada's name.

The Early Twentieth Century

In 1919 Canada signed the Versailles Peace Treaty as a distinct member of the British Empire.


In 1926 there was a crisis. The year before, the Liberals under Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King had won only 101 seats in the House of Commons. The Conservatives won 116,

but the Progressives and others held the balance of power, and they supported the Liberals, who formed the government. Soon, however, there was a scandal in the Customs Department and the Progressives and the Conservatives indicated they would join in a vote of censure that would bring down the government.

To avoid the censure Mackenzie King asked Lord Byng, the Governor General, to dissolve Parliament before the vote was taken. The Governor General felt that this would be improper, he refused and Mackenzie King resigned. The Governor General then asked Arthur Meighen, the leader of the Conservatives, to form a new government. He did, but it was soon defeated and Parliament was dissolved.

In the ensuing election the Liberal Party made the Governor General's earlier refusal a prime issue—should this representative of the British government be allowed to ignore a Canadian Prime Minister's request?

The Liberals won the election and Mackenzie King pressed the issue at the Imperial Conference in London later that year. It was an issue whose time had come. The Balfour Report was adopted recognizing Canada and the other dominions as "autonomous communities," and in 1931 the Statute of Westminster removed Canada from the authority of the Parliament of the United Kingdom except for the BNA Act and recognized Canada's right to conduct its own foreign affairs. It also clarified the position of the Governor General, who henceforth would be an emissary of the monarch, not the British government.



BY THE QUEEN.

A PROCLAMATION

For uniting the Provinces of Canada, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick into One Dominion under the Name of CANADA.

<p>FOR THE PROVINCE OF ONTARIO.</p> <p>JAMES HAMILTON, ROBERTA HATHORN, JOHN BROWN, SAMUEL MILLAR, BENJAMIN MELVILLE, WALTER BARNETT BURNHAM, JAMES SMITH, JAMES JACQUES FREDERICK BLAIR, ALEXANDER CAMPBELL, DAVID CHRISTIE, JAMES C. SMITH, DAVID MURDO, RICHARD LEVINGS, WILLIAM BURNHARTT, IAN ALEXANDER BURNHARTT, JOHN MURPHY, JAMES MURDO, DAVID JAMES BURNHARTT, GERRARD CRAWFORD, DONALD BURNHARTT, ROBERT BLAIR, MILLA BLUNT, WALTER MURDO, SOPHIE WILLIAM MURDO.</p>	<p>FOR THE PROVINCE OF QUEBEC.</p> <p>JAMES LESLIE, SAL BELLAU FORTER, ROBERT JAMES BROWN, JOHN A. HAZLER, JACQUES MELVILLE BURNETT, FRANCOIS BURNETT, JOHN REID, LIEU TENNEDIER DE ST. JEAN, LELIEU JOSEPH TONGER, JOHN BURNHARTT, FRANCOIS FORTER, SYMONE JOSEPH BURNHARTT, DAVID EDWARD PERRY, RICHARD W. J. BURNHARTT, ALEXANDER BURNHARTT, JOHN LAPOSTOLLE, JOSEPH F. LEBLANC, FRANCOIS MURDO, WILLIAM BURNETT CRAWFORD, JEAN BAPTISTE BURNHARTT, JAMES FORTER, NO. SIBBING FORTY-SEVEN BELLEVILLE, THOMAS MURDO, JOHN MURDO SIBBING.</p>	<p>FOR THE PROVINCE OF NOVA SCOTIA.</p> <p>EDWARD SMYTH, JONATHAN McWILLIAMS, THOMAS A. GORDON, ROBERT B. BURNETT, JOHN B. BURNHARTT, JOHN BURNETT, JOHN W. BURNHARTT, BENJAMIN WHEAT, JOHN SMYTH, ALEX. A. BELL, JOHN BURNHARTT, WILLIAM BURNETT.</p>	<p>FOR THE PROVINCE OF NEW BRUNSWICK.</p> <p>EDWARD EDWARD BURNHARTT, JOHN BURNHARTT, ROBERT EDWARD BURNETT, WILLIAM BURNETT BELL, DAVID W. SMYTH, WILLIAM BURNETT SMYTH, BENJAMIN WHEAT, JOHN SMYTH, ALEX. A. BELL, JOHN BURNHARTT, WILLIAM BURNETT.</p>
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Given at Our Court at Windsor Castle, this Twenty-second Day of May, in the Year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-seven, and in the Thirtieth Year of Our Reign.

God save the Queen.

Proclamation of the British North America Act of 1867