

The Art of Government Is the Art of Adjustment

It may sometimes appear that Canada is composed of nine complacent, cohesive English-speaking provinces and rambunctious Quebec. In fact, it is composed of ten provinces, each different and all occasionally rambunctious. They have been held together for more than a hundred years by a federal government whose embrace is sometimes tight but more often loose.

It has always been necessary for Canada's various governments to adjust to realities. In this issue of CANADA TODAY/D'AUJOURD'HUI we discuss recent, past and current adjustments, which include efforts to get together on a new constitution. We also consider a recent report on national unity and the evolution of one rambunctious province, Alberta.

The Balancing of Power

Canada's founding fathers wanted major decisions made by a strong central government and local matters taken care of by provincial ones.

The formula never quite jelled. Some provinces struck hard bargains before they agreed to join, and some renegotiated their terms after they entered. Some did both. Great Britain's Judicial Committee of the Privy Council altered the balance in the early years. Local matters, which seemed of small consequence in 1867, became of prime importance in the mid-twentieth century. The 112-year history of the federal-provincial government relationship has resembled an effort to balance a teeter-totter, which occasionally achieves equilibrium between ups and downs.

In the beginning English-speaking Upper Canada (Ontario) and French-speaking Lower Canada (Quebec), united in an uneasy union called Canada, persuaded Nova Scotia and New Brunswick to join them in a confederation. Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island stayed out.

By the British North America Act of 1867 the new federal government controlled the armed forces, the post office, coinage and banking, fisheries, trade, commerce, direct and indirect taxation, criminal law and all other powers not given specifically to the provinces. It could disallow provincial legislation. The provinces had authority over property and civil rights, municipal governments, education, the chartering of businesses, direct taxation within their own boundaries and "matters of a merely local or private nature." French and English were to be used in the federal and Quebec legislatures. Existing

Catholic and Protestant school systems were to be maintained. The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council was the court of final appeal.

Immediately after confederation, Nova Scotia elected a government that asked Queen Victoria for permission to secede. She declined.

In 1869 Canada bought 1,400,000 square miles of territory from the Hudson's Bay Company for £300,000. French-speaking Métis at Red River, led by Louis Riel, rebelled against the new territorial government and demanded provincial status with protection for land rights and the French language. It was granted, and Manitoba became a province in 1870, though the federal government retained ownership of its natural resources.

British Columbia joined in 1871, after Canada agreed to build a railway to the West within ten years. When work on the railroad slowed down, British Columbia threatened to quit the Confederation, but was persuaded to be patient. When railway construction and settlement accelerated, the Métis in Saskatchewan, believing their land rights in danger, rebelled again. Canadian troops put it down and Louis Riel was executed.

In 1871 New Brunswick dropped sectarian public schools, an apparent violation of the BNA Act, but the Privy Council in London ruled in its favour. When Prince Edward Island joined in 1873, the federal government assumed its railway debts.

In the late 1880s, Nova Scotia, angered at the federal protective tariff, again considered secession, though not very seriously. Manitoba, unhappy with the Canadian Pacific Railway's freight rates, attempted to issue charters for rail lines south to the US, but the federal government dis-

Alberta's present wealth is evident in its enhanced political power and in public displays such as "Aurora Borealis," the acrylic and brushed aluminum sculpture on the cover. It was created by James Houston, and it extends from the ground floor to the fourth floor of the Glenbow Museum in Calgary.