

Under a series of governors the Canadas approached and veered away from the accomplishment of responsible government, depending on the personality of the governor. Nevertheless considerable progress was made toward the recognition of at least the principle of responsible government. Robert Baldwin precipitated a discussion of what the governor viewed as "theoretical points of governments" by calling for copies of Lord John Russell's dispatches of 1839, and by moving a series of six resolutions the essence of which was the recognition of cabinet responsibility in colonial government. Sydenham at once drew up four amendments to Baldwin's proposals. They were introduced in the assembly by Samuel Bealey Harrison and were adopted. In conjunction with the contents of Russell's dispatch of October 14, 1839, the adoption of the Sydenham-Harrison Resolutions made responsible government inevitable.

Under Sir Charles Bagot the progress towards responsible government was accelerated. The admission of the French Canadians to the ministry during his regime and the increasing functions exercised by the ministry during his illness marked great steps forward in the struggle for responsible government.

Under Bagot's successor, Sir Charles Metcalfe, the process was once again retarded and it was not until Lord Elgin arrived as governor that responsible government was finally achieved. It was in the passage of the Rebellions Losses Bill in 1849 with the consequent furore over the endorsement by the governor and Elgin's refusal to shift responsibility in a matter of purely local concern to the imperial authorities, that established completely the custom of responsible government. Extreme Tories sent petitions to England asking Parliament to intervene and demanding the disallowance of the Rebellions Losses Bill. In the end Lord Elgin's course was fully sustained and his offer to resign was refused by the Colonial Office.

By the end of Lord Elgin's administration many of the principles that the reform group had been fighting for so consistently had been recognized. No appointments to office were henceforth to be made by the governor except after consultation with his cabinet. It was clearly established that the governor must not identify himself with any specific political party and that he could not interfere in any election. Matters of purely local concern and application were not to be referred to the home government for decision. In Elgin's administration the governor ceased regular attendance at cabinet meetings.

Similar battles to the one in Upper and Lower Canada were being waged on a smaller scale in the colonies by the sea. In Nova Scotia, through the efforts of Joseph Howe, responsible government was won by 1848. By 1855 the evolution of responsible government was completed in New Brunswick and in Newfoundland. In Prince Edward Island it was in 1863 that the legislative council was made elective and thus the last stage of its self government was achieved.

But in the two Canadas, the union did not bring political stability. In 1864 the opportunity for change came when New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island were considering a federal union.

In that year Sir Charles Tupper, Prime Minister of Nova Scotia, after having received the assurance of the British Colonial Office that there would be no interference from the United Kingdom, arranged for the calling of a convention of delegates from the maritime provinces to meet in Charlottetown in September in order to consider plans for legislative union. The deliberations were interrupted at an early stage by the arrival of a delegation of eight members from United Canada who had previously received permission from the Maritime delegates to attend their conference. The Charlottetown convention, in secret session,