

Raising his sights beyond the railway proposed in the text before him, Colonel Arthur Rankin proclaimed it but the first step toward "that still more important and magnificent project, the Atlantic and Pacific Railway." Seeing the embryo of this grander project in the proposed Intercolonial Railway, Rankin assured his colleagues that "it would be impossible to overestimate the advantages which any country must derive from being possessed of a line of communication destined to become the highway from Europe to Asia."<sup>72</sup>

With such strong statements both in its favor and against it, the Intercolonial Railway became, of course, the subject of considerable controversy. At the very outset of the debates in the Legislative Assembly, Luther Holton, a prominent anticonfederationist, went to the heart of the matter when he registered his surprise at finding in a constitutional text a proposal to build a railway. He ridiculed this provision as "a novelty that, perhaps might not be found in the constitution of any country."<sup>73</sup> To this John A. Macdonald replied: "The railroad was not, as stated by Mr. Holton, a portion of the Constitution, but was one of the conditions on which the Lower Provinces agreed to enter into the constitutional agreement with us."<sup>74</sup>

Macdonald's distinction between "a portion of the Constitution" and a "condition" for accepting the constitution was no shallow legalism. It produced an immediate and most unwelcome reaction in New Brunswick where the friends of confederation were facing an imminent election that focused on the Quebec Resolutions. For Samuel Tilley, the leading New Brunswick confederationist, the Intercolonial Railway was absolutely essential. It was, as Donald Creighton puts it, "Tilley's biggest political asset."<sup>75</sup> Albert J. Smith, Tilley's principal opponent, seized on Macdonald's unfortunate comment that the railway was not a "portion of the Constitution" to argue that the commitments in the Quebec Resolutions most favorable to New Brunswick, above all the Intercolonial Railway, meant nothing at all. Frantically, Macdonald sent a telegram to Tilley assuring him that the provision for the Railway--regardless of its status as part of the constitution--would appear