

provisions triggered debates foreshadowing later controversies over the equalization payments that would play so important a role in the administration of Canadian federalism.⁶⁸

Among the many administrative questions debated in 1865, however, none can match the importance of the Intercolonial Railway. In rehearsing the debates over this immensely controversial innovation, I have no intention of weighing the merits of the issue. I examine the railroad question, which was to dominate the early development of Canadian administration, only to give a very specific example of the salience of administration in the debates. I do this to establish the link between “then and now,” thereby suggesting that when contemporary Canadians link mundane questions of administration to the high statesmanship of saving a great nation, they echo sentiments harking back to the beginnings of confederation.

Quebec Resolution 68 proposed an “Intercolonial Railway” to extend “from Rivière du Loup, through New Brunswick, to Truro in Nova Scotia.” Its importance in the debates for friend and foe alike of the resolutions is textually demonstrable. Speaking before the Legislative Council, William Macmaster, an opponent of confederation, denounced the proposed railroad as “a very questionable part of the project” and then elevated its importance by adding “indeed to my mind it is the most objectionable of the whole.”⁶⁹ Echoing these sentiments, anticonfederationist Matthew Cameron saw the railroad as nothing less than the “leading feature” of the proposed constitutional change and one of the main reasons why it should be rejected.⁷⁰

Not to be outdone, the friends of confederation were no less outspoken in supporting the railroad than their adversaries were in condemning it. For Antoine Harwood, “the building of the Intercolonial Railway” was “the most important consideration of all for everyone, and one which would of itself be sufficient to make us desire the union of the provinces.”⁷¹