

Reform of the Colonial Office

For a long period before Confederation, the Colonial Office in London administered the domestic and imperial affairs of the Provinces of Canada, through Governors. After Confederation, it continued to supervise the Dominion's imperial and foreign relations, through the Governor General.

As has been shown, the Governors General, according to their personal qualities, could make a strong impress and could contribute a great personal influence on Canada's external relations. But in the final analysis, it was the Colonial Office in Downing Street, and the Secretary of State for Colonial Affairs, which exercised dominant control.

Canadians, with but few exceptions, did not chafe under this traditional and constitutional arrangement. But there were times when the trends of autonomy, nationalism, awakening sense of nationhood, and amour propre, inclined some leaders in each of the overseas Dominions to urge a distinction between the self-governing colonies of dominion status, and the non-self-governing Crown colonies.

This manifested itself in an embryonic desire to have the Colonial Office divided in some way into a department administering in the old manner the non-self-governing Crown colonies, and a special department supervising, in a slightly different manner, the self-governing responsible dominions, with recognition of those dominions' growing desire to manage their own external affairs.