

“Ambition must be made to counteract ambition. The interest of the man must be connected with the constitutional rights of the place.”

Although the Canadian Confederation is not grounded in the principle of separation of powers, the broader implications of the creative possibilities of political ambition were not lost on the Confederation fathers. In his opening address to the Legislative Assembly, John A. Macdonald suggested that confederation would enhance the prestige of Canada to such an extent that the representative of Queen Victoria in Canada would always be a man of the highest quality, perhaps even “one of her own family, a Royal Prince.” Although Canadians could put no restrictions on Her Majesty’s prerogative to appoint whomever she wished, he added that once confederation is in place, “it will be an object worthy of the ambition of the statesmen of England to be charged with presiding over our destinies.”¹²⁰

Canadian statesmen would also feel the attraction of ambition once they have a broader political field for their actions. Lord Durham had anticipated this development when he wrote that the union he envisioned in 1839 “would elevate and gratify the hopes of able and aspiring men. They would no longer look with envy and wonder at the great arena of the bordering Federation, but see the means of satisfying every legitimate ambition in the high office of the judicature and executive government of their own union.”¹²¹

Charles Alleyne echoed Lord Durham’s sentiments when he predicted that with confederation a “worthy field will be opened for the ambition of our young men and our politicians will have a future before them, and may fairly aspire to the standing and rewards of statesmen. (Cheers.)”¹²²

The release of creative energy occasioned by confederation was felt as far away as British Columbia. Although British Columbia was not a party to the Quebec Resolutions, many people in that part of British North America felt—correctly as it turned out—that the proposed confederation would soon include them as well. H.L. Langevin read aloud an editorial from a British Columbia newspaper which included the following consideration among the advantages of confederation: