

British colonies in North America were ready to discuss union of some kind in the early 1860's. Politics, trade, defence all played a part. Ontario and Quebec, although divided on racial lines, had for some time been united in one legislature and political deadlock had ensued. New Brunswick and Nova Scotia on the Atlantic seaboard were isolated from central Canada and wished a railway connecting link, which would only be possible through union of some kind. Trade difficulties were serious. An advantageous reciprocity treaty with the United States was expiring and there was doubt that the United States would be willing to renew it. Canadian producers thus faced serious loss of markets.

Defence, too, had something to do with bringing Confederation about. It seems unthinkable now, that we should have had some doubts about the pacific intentions of our great and friendly neighbour to the south. But remember that in 1864 and 1865 when we were discussing the principles of our constitution, the North was emerging victorious from the Civil War. During that war, relations between the North and the United Kingdom had from time to time been strained and bellicose utterances had been made by some American politicians. The British colonies lay helpless along the American frontier.

There was also the problem of the northwest. This is the immense territory out of which the prairie provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba were later formed. It lay practically uninhabited and, unless British North America took steps to build railways through it and colonize it, there was a possibility that the whole of the rich northwest might have gone to our neighbour to the south.

An obvious answer to all these difficulties and doubts was a political union of some kind. Opportunity came in 1864 when at Charlottetown in the Province of Prince Edward Island, representatives of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island met to consider a smaller project, namely the possible union of the maritime provinces. Delegates from Ontario and Quebec, hearing of this project, appeared at this conference and suggested a wider union. A conference took place later in October of the same year at Quebec, and in the course of a few weeks hammered out a series of resolutions which were to form the basis of federal government. Delegates left for London with the agreed resolutions. Some more changes were made there and eventually the British North America Act was passed, putting in statutory form the resolutions which had been accepted by the delegates.

You may like to hear about some of the difficulties which faced the Fathers of Confederation in drafting a constitution and the manner in which they were solved.

There was never any real doubt about the form that union would take. It is no secret that some of the Fathers of Confederation would have preferred a unitary form of government. They were anxious to create a strong government and they considered that a unitary government would be stronger than any form of federal union. It is easy to see, however, that a unitary legislative union as it was called, was never within the realm of practical politics. Consider the position of Quebec. Here you had a people whose race, language, religion and laws differed from the majority of the people in the other provinces. Is it to be wondered that the people in Quebec would only agree to a union with the other provinces on a basis which would preserve their cherished rights and way of life. But Quebec was not alone in desiring a federal form of government. The