

Throughout the 1872 debates reverberate the echoes of issues constant in Canadian politics. Although the Dominion was only five years old, certain subjects were already becoming familiar. Senate reform was one: the clamour for an elected Senate and for a more representative class of men in the upper house. The power of the executive over against that of Parliament was another topic of concern. The stresses and strains within the federation were very much in the members' minds. There was a tendency, it was argued, for the central government to amass power at the expense of the provinces; this was a development that must be resisted. Immigration was a concern. Was Canada attracting, by its immigration promotion efforts, immigrants from desirable countries and with proper moral standards? What should be the requirements for Canadian citizenship? Should "semi-barbarous people," coming from certain British colonies, be admitted to citizenship? Civil service reform was much in the air as government and opposition speakers declared their interest in improving a service which in the old days, Macdonald claimed, had been "little less than a hospital for incurables." United States tariff measures and their impact upon the Canadian economy formed a subject for questioning and debate. Pollution, whether the dumping of sawdust into the rivers or the unauthorized smoking by members in the Commons chamber, was commented upon. The Parliament of Canada might be only five years old but already it was grappling with the pith and substance of deep-seated Canadian issues. For this fact alone, to read the Commons debates of 1872 is both enriching and a salutary experience.

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