

#3

## Causes of Confederation

Excerpt from an online article entitled “Causes of Confederation 1861-1866” published as part of The History of Canada Online (HCO).



*Comments in brackets are not part of the original document. They have been added to assist the reader with difficult words.*

While there were powerful external forces spurring on Confederation, internal factors also drove the cause. The major factor was political deadlock. The fact of equal representation for Canada East and Canada West in the united parliament sowed the seeds for stalemate. Both Canada East and Canada West were granted 42 members. Not surprisingly often what one side wanted, the other side voted down.

Little could get accomplished under this state of affairs. In slightly more than fifteen years, Canada experienced fifteen different ministries and more than half a dozen elections. No government, given equal representation and the presence of “loose fish” members, could hold power for an extended period of time. They had to find a way out.

On the very day that the Taché-Macdonald ministry fell in 1864, George Brown’s committee, which had been struck to investigate political deadlock, reported back. Their proposed solution was a federal union.

George Brown himself was a major force behind Confederation. He was the leader of the new Clear Grit party of Canada West. He represented the rural, agrarian element which wanted to open up the Northwest and better relations with the United States. But Brown had a thorough dislike for French-Canadians. And he latched onto a new representation system not only as a way out of political deadlock but also to reduce the impact of the French.

Another factor in helping to bring about a federal union is to be found in railways. They had not only economic and strategic importance, but also would improve transportation and communication in any fledging country. However, if the colonies were to remain scattered and disunited colonies, they would remain pipe dreams. Investors would seem them as too risky. Engineers would regard them as impossible to build. However, if the colonies became united, such vital railway links could be built.

Railways would provide legitimacy and reality to what was then merely a theoretical notion of a united nation. They would bring the colonies and people together. They would reduce distances, improve defenses, and stimulate trade. It was scarcely accidental that many of the leading proponents of a federal union were also railway promoters.

History of Canada Online “Causes of Confederation 1861-1866” [http://canadachannel.ca/HCO/index.php/2\\_Causes\\_of\\_Confederation\\_1861-66](http://canadachannel.ca/HCO/index.php/2_Causes_of_Confederation_1861-66) (Accessed March 7, 2012)