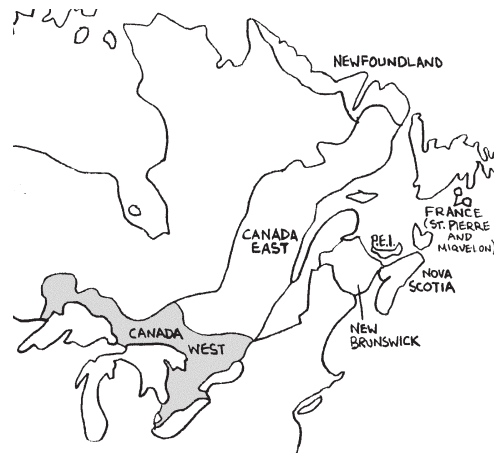


Canada West – Background

Population (circa 1860): 1,396,000

Urban centres: Toronto (56,000)
Hamilton (26,700)
Ottawa (21,500)
London (15,826)
Kingston (12,400)
Brantford (8,100)

Key figures: John A. Macdonald (1815-1891)
George Brown (1818-1880)
William McDougall (1822-1905)
Alexander Campbell (1822-1892)
Oliver Mowat (1820-1903)
James Cockburn (1819-1883)
William P. Howland (1811-1907)



By the 1860s, the Province of Canada (encompassing both Canada East and Canada West) is the most populous, the largest in size, and the most powerful of the British North American colonies. Overwhelmingly Protestant and English speaking, Canada West's population is now greater than Canada East's and it is growing at a faster rate. As a result, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find good farm land in a colony where over 80 percent of its residents live in the countryside. To prevent young farmers from moving to the American West, and to halt American expansion into the British North West Territory, many politicians and newspapermen—led by George Brown and his *Toronto Globe*—are calling for Canada to acquire, to settle and, ultimately, to govern the Western lands, presently controlled by the Hudson's Bay Company.

Another problem magnified by the recent growth is the political deadlock in the Canadian Parliament. The inability to form a majority government led to three different administrations between 1861 and 1864. In 1864, however, the Great Coalition was formed. Made up of Conservatives, Clear Grits and Reformers from Canada West and Canada East, the Great Coalition called for a federal union of the British North American colonies, "rep by pop" (representation by population), and the incorporation of the North West Territory into any Confederation. "Rep by pop," the central demand of George Brown's Clear Grits, would give Canada West the political power its increasing population deserves.

Agriculture and lumbering are the chief industries in Canada West. The wealthy wheat and lumber merchants form the core of the colony's elite. The key to Canada West's economy is the Grand Trunk Railway. The colony's already extensive rail network has made Toronto the commercial centre. Goods from all regions of the colony flow into the growing city, ready for export or to be shipped elsewhere within Canada West.

Trade, however, is hampered by two factors. Not only does the colony lack a year-round, ice-free port, but also one cannot travel from Canada West to the Maritime colonies without travelling through the United States. For six months of the year, Canadian imports and exports are carried on American railways, on American soil and, often, shipped in and out of American ports. The solution, in many Canadian minds, is an Intercolonial Railway. If the Intercolonial were built, it would run through Canada East, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and end in Halifax. Canada West's commercial potential would be immense.

The Intercolonial Railway would also help in the defence of British North America. Great Britain's reluctance to defend the colonies has made closer ties between the British North American provinces crucial to security. The threat of Fenian raids along the Canada-United States border in the Niagara region and along the St. Lawrence River, as well as the threat of American invasion during the Civil War, make an Intercolonial Railway necessary for mobilizing troops.

Canada West — Viewpoints

Drawn from R.D. Francis, R. Jones & D.B. Smith, *Origins: Canadian History to Confederation* (Holt, 1988); H.H. Herstein, L.J. Hughes & R.C. Kirbyson, *Challenge and Survival: The History of Canada* (Prentice, 1970) and P.B. Waite, *Confederation, 1854-1867* (Holt, 1972).

1. Opposition to the Intercolonial Railroad

(*Toronto Globe*, 8 October 1858)

The commercial advantages to be derived from a union of the Lower Provinces [the Maritimes] are hardly appreciable, while in the boundless west there lies open to us a field of enterprise which might cause wealth to flow into every city and village of our land. Why should Canada, at this moment, spend any portion of her means in building a road to Halifax? She will not . . . find in the Lower Provinces a market for any of her manufactures. As an outlet to the ocean, this intercolonial railroad is a mere farce. No one able to take ship at Portland [Maine, U.S.A.] or Quebec [City], would ever dream of travelling by railway to Halifax. And yet this work will engage four or five millions [£] of capital. If the Imperial Government [Great Britain] is willing to grant assistance for the development of British power in North America, let her grant it in aid of the Pacific Railway. . . . Let her [Britain] expend it in founding a great colony on Lake Winnipeg and the Saskatchewan.

2. The importance of the Intercolonial

(*Toronto Leader*, 25 October 1862)

A great country such as Nature has destined this to be would not be justified in refusing to acquire a winter sea-port, when the object can be obtained upon reasonable terms. Without it, what is the possible future of Canada? A back country, with no access to the seaboard, during six months of the year, but through the territory of a foreign power, occupies a position of deplorable dependence.

3. Opposition to the Intercolonial

(*St. Thomas Weekly Dispatch*, 13 November 1862)

What possible benefit can Canada derive from developing the resources of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick or the North West Territory. If the Intercolonial Railway was going to cut through rich portions of the fertile lands of Canada, like the Grand Trunk . . . there might be some reason to talk [as McGee does] of further development; but when it can only push our produce some five or six hundred miles further by rail through a barren country, when we can now send it by sea or by Portland [Maine, U.S.A.], and thereby make a commercial mart of Halifax instead of Montreal or Quebec, such development becomes mere delusion.

4. Support for federation

(*Oshawa Vindicator*, 31 August 1864)

No system of Government could be fairer, or could be better calculated to give satisfaction to all parties interested, than the federal system.

5. On American Aggression

(*Hamilton Evening Times*, 18 March 1865)

Are we going too far when we say there does not exist in the world a country more ineligible for defensive purposes than Canada? We are all frontier, and are open to attack at almost every point of that frontier. . . . Inherently strong, and armed and

equipped at every point, the United States stands forth a giant encased in armor. What would our prospects be should we come into collision with this power?

6. John A. Macdonald for the Intercolonial Railway

(A speech in Halifax, 12 September 1864)

(T)his railway must be a national work, and Canada will cheerfully contribute to the utmost extent in order to make that important link, without which no political connection can be complete. What will be the consequence to this city, prosperous as it is, from that communication? Montreal is at this moment competing with New York for the trade of the great West. Build the road and Halifax will become one of the great emporiums of the world. All the great resources of the west will come over the immense railways of Canada to the bosom of your harbour.

7. George Brown on the economic advantages of Confederation

(Canadian Parliament, 8 February 1865)

I go heartily for the union, because it will throw down the barriers of trade and give us the control of a market of four millions of people. What one thing has contributed so much to the wondrous material progress of the United States as the free passage of their products from one State to another? . . . I am in favour of a union of the provinces . . . because it will make us the third maritime state of the world. When this union is accomplished, but two countries in the world will be superior in maritime influence to British [North] America—and those are Great Britain and the United States.

8. Marching Song of the Fenian Brotherhood

(From sometime in the 1860s)

The group, formed in the United States in 1859, was dedicated to fighting for the independence of Ireland.

We are the Fenian Brotherhood,
skilled in the art of war,
And we're going to fight for Ireland,
the land that we adore,
Many battles have we won, along with
the boys in blue,
And we'll go and capture Canada for
we've got nothing else to do.