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Centralization and Expansion

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The issues of expansion and centralization were key in the development of the nation in the years leading up to, and immediately following, the creation of the Dominion of Canada. By bringing the political power together the territories would benefit and become more prosperous. This new found prosperity would lead to the growth of the country, and the expansion into the west. The nation would be born but the early growth of the country was faced with several complications that could cause the nation to be considerably less than the country that we know today.

The Maritime provinces were hosting a conference to discuss the possibility of a Maritime Economic Union. This conference had onlookers from Central Canada that came with one thing on their minds, the centralization of political power and the unification of the British North American Colonies. The Maritime Conference at Charlottetown was basically turned over to the men from Central Canada as they discussed their proposition for the creation of a unified nation. Shortly afterwards the country was born but with only five provinces joining Confederation. Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Ontario, and Quebec were brought together as the new Dominion of Canada, a British country that had the potential to expand into something great.

However, the unity of the nation was a problem. The French citizens in Quebec were afraid that the English would make changes so that their language and religion would disappear destroying their social structure. The catholic church has been a major part of the Quebec peoples' lives since the birth of New France. The importance of the church brought about a fear that the centralization of the power in the nation would cause the church to lose its place in

Quebec. The people of Quebec believed they were being prepared to be assimilated into the English culture. They felt that the power for decision-making being in the hands of the English would mean that Quebec would lose its distinctness. They called for a more provincial control on issues like education and language which would help the French keep some control over these issues. The English agreed to these terms to get Quebec in Confederation and keep them happy. The provinces were given some power with the national government having power over any issues that the provinces did not. This helped bring the French into Confederation but the other provinces had issues and they would all have to address to make the nation work.

Nova Scotia did not want to join Confederation but “Charles Tupper, the province’s pro-Confederation premier since 1863 and the leader responsible for bring Nova Scotia into Confederation, refused to hold a referendum or even to debate the question in the legislative assembly because he knew his government would lose on the issue.”¹ The Maritimes couldn’t expand its territory like Ontario and Quebec so the colonies in the Maritimes needed something more for them to join the new nation. John A. Macdonald saw the Dominion crossing from the Atlantic to the Pacific but without the Atlantic Provinces this would not occur. He offered more money to help bring Nova Scotia and New Brunswick into the Dominion but Prince Edward Island backed out because Macdonald would not buy out the absentee landlords and hand the land over to the people of the Island. However, to John A. the dream was on its way to fulfilment. The new Dominion of Canada stretched from the Atlantic Ocean to the center of the

¹Francis, R. Douglas; Jones, Richard; & Smith, Donald B.; *Destinies: Canadian History Since Confederation* (Harcourt Brace & Company, Toronto, 1996) pp. 26.

continent but Macdonald wanted more. British Columbia on the West Coast and the open land of the North West Territory were not yet part of the nation but the railway could easily be stretched across that country to link it together.

The government then faced a dangerous threat to its dream of a nation from sea to sea. The Americans to the south had expressed interest in the North West Territory which was owned by the Hudson's Bay Company. Canada also wanted the region so it could expand its territory westward and bring in immigrants to fill the vacant land. The British government purchased the territory and turned it over to Canada and almost immediately railways were under construction to link the west to the provinces in the east. The land was, however, not vacant but widely inhabited by native and Metis people. "Before settlement could proceed, the federal government had to negotiate treaties and place the Native peoples on reserves."² However, not all of the peoples in the west were about to let the government push them onto reserves. An uprising occurred in the Red River Area of Winnipeg that saw the Province of Manitoba become part of Confederation.

The west was now Canadian territory and the government began an extensive campaign to bring immigrants to the territory to speed up the growth of the country. The government "produced numerous pamphlets -- The Wondrous West; Canada: Land of Opportunity; Prosperity Follows Settlement; and The Last Best West -- which contained glorified descriptions

²Ibid. pp. 59

of conditions in the Canadian West.”³ The government wanted a certain group of settlers. They had to fall under certain criteria that would make it easy for them to fit in with the rest of the people already living in Canada. White, Anglo-Saxons were preferred but anyone who could easily be assimilated were welcome. Central Europeans came by the boat load but Italian, along with others from southern Europe, were not welcome because they were felt to be lazy. The most detested peoples were the Blacks, and the Asian people. Both groups were impossible to assimilate because of the skin color and physical features. The Blacks and the Chinese already made up a portion of Canada’s population, escaped and freed slaves from the United States and Canadian colonies and “coolies” who assisted with the construction of the railway. It became very difficult for Japanese to enter Canada and impossible for Chinese to immigrate into the country. The Japanese were only allowed to send a small number of people to Canada every year and that was only if they could pay the head tax which would gradually raise from \$50 to \$500.

John A. Macdonald’s National Policy for building the nation “rested on three essentials: The National Policy, or high protective tariff; the completion of the transcontinental railway; and the settlement of the West through immigration.”⁴ His plan worked and the Dominion grew to a great country. The territory of Canada stretched from sea to sea and was populated by a diverse group of people making the nation very unique. With the completion of the railway products could easily be shipped from the coast to Central Canada and vice versa. The expansion of the nation is due greatly to the centralization of the political powers in the Dominion of Canada. If

³Ibid. pp. 65

⁴Ibid. pp. 48

the country had not come together when it did who is to say what might have occurred. The map that we see today could be drastically different if it had not.