

## **Module 4 - British North America (1791-1867)**

### Population and Settlement:

Between 1791 and 1850, the populations of Upper and Lower Canada would increase greatly; especially that of Upper Canada.

Due to poor living conditions and famine (potato famine), thousands of Irish people immigrated to North America during the first half of the 19th century.

Thousands of these Irish would make their way to Upper Canada and the population grew greatly

However, these immigrants were very poor and some of them sick with cholera and typhus. Irish immigrants had to be quarantined at Grosse-Île in Lower Canada to prevent epidemics in the cities of Lower Canada. After being declared healthy, they could continue their journey; but many never leave Grosse-Île

These new immigrants were excited for the opportunity to get land grants or work in the fur trade. Others took unskilled jobs in the cities of Upper and Lower Canada, creating poor, working class neighbourhoods.

French Canadiens, however, were not so happy with the thousands of new English speaking Irish immigrants arriving in Lower Canada.

They felt the Irish may take their jobs, bring harmful diseases and cause epidemics, and turn the Canadiens majority into a minority in Lower Canada leading to assimilation. Their fears were real as the population of Montreal became an English majority for the first time in 1845.

By 1840, the population of Upper Canada (952 000) was greater than the population of Lower Canada (890 000) and the English were the dominant language group. Due to the Rebellions of 1837-1838. The British Government was certain that a solution to discontent in Upper and Lower Canada could be achieved by assimilating the French. They chose to ignore true cause of the Rebellions, which was a lack of responsible government and freedom in the colonies; life was simply unfair and unjust

And so, in an effort to assimilate the French by sheer majority in population and political control in the Assembly, Britain passed another Constitution called the Act of the Union which united Upper and Lower Canada into one colony called the "United Province of Canada"

The new colony would have one government but be separated into two halves; Canada West (Ontario) and Canada East (Quebec)

Though the troubles of old did not go away just because the colonies were united. the main issue, a lack of democracy of freedom for the people and accountability for the government still existed.

Finally in 1848, Responsible Government (Democracy) was granted in the colony and soon after several British North American colonies would join together in a federal union to create the Dominion of Canada with Confederation in 1867.

Through thousands of new immigrants had been arriving in Canada during the early 1800s, there was a group of people leaving the colonies; Canadiens of Lower Canada and later Canada East were emigrating to the U.S by the thousands

Starting around 1830, times became difficult for Canadiens living on the farms of the St. Lawrence Valley in Canada East:

Due to an agricultural crisis where the land of the St. Lawrence had lost its fertility over time and overpopulation in the farms, thousands of young Canadiens found themselves without land or opportunity. There were few jobs in Montreal and so many went south to the USA for jobs in factories

The government and the Church were not happy with so many French Canadiens leaving the colony; it could put the future of the French language and culture in danger of assimilation

The Government and Church worked together to open up or “colonize” new lands in the Saguenay, Mauricie, Laurentians, and other regions of Lower Canada for French Canadiens to move to instead of the USA

Some did move to these new areas and try to make settlements, but the majority still left for the US

Despite the “Great Exodus” of French Canadiens leaving to the USA, the populations of English and French people had been growing in British North America. English areas such as Upper Canada and later Canada West grew mostly as a result of immigration. French areas such as Lower Canada and later Canada East grew mostly because of natural growth or births.

Aboriginal peoples of the St. Lawrence Valley had suffered greatly since the days of the French Regime. After dealing with wars, violence, disease and alcohol, there were only 5 000 aboriginals left in the St. Lawrence Valley. The rest had moved West to try and continue a traditional lifestyle or had simply disappeared as they became assimilated into European culture. This would make the beginning of the low point for Aboriginal peoples in Canada

### Economy and Development:

#### *An Economy based on Timber*

Luckily for Canada as the fur trade started to decline, a new resource became valuable in Canada : **TIMBER**

## WHY?

In Europe, Britain was at war with France and its famous leader Napoleon. He created a “blockade” between all of Europe and Britain to cut them off from supplies and European goods.

One of the main items Britain needed to make its warships was timber but it was cut off from suppliers in Europe

Therefore, Britain turned to Canada for a source of timber and even gave Canada “**PREFERENTIAL TARIFFS**” (better tax rate) which meant that British consumers had to buy their timber from Canada.

By 1810 timber replaced fur as the main economic resource in Canada

Most of the **CAPITAL** (\$\$/investment) came from English businessmen looking to make a profit in the colonies

But, most of the workers in the timber trade were French Canadian or Irish. They did jobs such as lumberjack, log driver, and sawyer.

Most of the timber was cut into long planks and beams of pine and oak to be shipped (exported) to Britain

Timber was found in the forest of Quebec (Lower Canada) and then sent to the port of Quebec City to be shipped to Britain

The need for more capital (\$\$) in the colony to invest in the timber trade led to the creation of Canada’s first **BANKS**

The banks would lend money to business people to create new timber companies or expand existing companies

The timber trade increased the number of workers in the colonies and created a new, wealthy business class.

New regions of Lower Canada developed because of the timber trade, such as the Saguenay and Mauricie regions (people went there to cut wood but ended up settling there and making communities).

Some people held two jobs; one as a farmer in the summer and another as a timber worker in the winter

## Culture and Currents of Thought:

### *Beginning of a Dual Identity*

After the conquest of N.F by Great Britain, the British would try to assimilate the French with the Royal Proclamation. The Governors did not really follow this constitution and when the Loyalists arrived for the 13 colonies they were outraged that the colony was very French.

Both the French Canadiens and the British Loyalists rejected the **IMPERIALIST** ways of the British Government and loved the ideas of Liberalism and Freedoms

They both pushed the British Government for **RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT** (the right to vote for a leader form the people or otherwise called **DEMOCRACY**). They used newspapers to promote their ideas and held protests and public demonstrations. The English "Montreal Gazette" and the French "La Minerve" were examples of such newspapers.

These papers criticized the British Government and the Catholic Church for their resistance to Liberal ideas.

Though English and French Canadiens got the right to vote for members of a "Legislative Assembly" in Upper and Lower Canada under the Constitutional Act of 1791, they did not have any real power ( the Governor could veto (cancel) at any time).

This frustration led to the creation of racial political parties in Upper and Lower Canada, such as the "PARTI PATRIOTE" led by **LOUIS JOSEPH PAPINEAU**. When the British Government rejected Parti Patriote demands (**92 RESOLUTIONS**) in 1837, violent **REBELLIONS** took place but were defeated by the British Army. The Church and the Nobles of Lower Canada were not supportive of the French rebels. This going power of the Church and its control of things outside of religious duties such as education, welfare, orphanages, health care are examples of **ULTRAMONTANISM**; the Church considered the **POPE** and Rome (or the Vatican;home to the Pope) to be its rulers; not French or British governments. In Quebec Monseigneur Bourget was a leader of the Ultramontanist movement.

After the rebellions, the British Government united Upper and Lower Canada with the **ACT OF THE UNION** in 1840. By this time, there were more English people in the "Canada's" than French people and the British hoped the French would be dominated in the Assembly and then assimilated into the larger English culture.

After the Act of the Union, the **PARTI ROUGE** and the Institut Canadiens replaces the Parti Patriote. Once again young, smart French people began to push for Liberal changes in government, such as Responsible government and the separation of Church and State or **ANTICLERICALISM**. The Church opposed these changes and asked the Pope to excommunicate members of the Parti Rouge.

### *Last thoughts:*

These were certainly tense times for people living here in our territory and many regular folks may have felt oppressed and frustrated by the British Government. Perhaps some of your own ancestors may have been apart of these struggles for freedom and rights that we appreciate and defend to this day. Whether you were English or French, the struggle was indeed “real” but change was on the way as by 1849 we would see the start of true Democracy or Responsible Government in the colonies and by 1867 we would be celebrating the creation of a country of our own; CANADA!

### Power and Countervailing Powers:

#### *Beginning of a Parliament Regime 1791-1840*

With the arrival of British Loyalist in Quebec by the 1770's and the growth of a new French “middle class” or bourgeoisie, the demands for a representative (elected) Legislative assembly grew.

These two groups got together and as “reformers” were able to obtain a Legislative Assembly with the Constitutional Act of 1791

However, this Assembly has no “real” power because the Governor had the right of “veto” or cancel any laws the assembly created.

Between 1791 and 1840 the Assembly of Lower Canada was dominated by 2 political parties:

The **TORY PARTY**: Conservatives representing English Merchants

The **PARTI CANADIEN**: Reformers representing French Canadiens. Not happy with lack of Democracy; changed their name to Parti Patriote because they were becoming more rebellious

#### *Relationship Between The Patriotes and the Governor*

Tension between the Canadiens and government grew over time due to the lack of rights and “democracy” in the colony

Louis Joseph Papineau, leader of the Parti Patriote, became the voice of anger towards the British

In 1834, he and the Patriote wrote a list of 92 Resolutions or demands of the British Government

The main demand was for “Responsible Government” or democracy; the right to vote for the leaders of a colony

The British government's representative, Lord Russell, responded with his list of 10 "Resolutions" which made the colony even more unfair towards the French

This was the last straw and the Patriotes were ready for violent protest : Rebellion

### *Militant Organizations*

Both sides of the debate in Lower Canada had organizations that were more radical than normal political parties

The French has the Society St. Jean Baptiste de Montreal and the Fils de la Liberte while the English had the Doric Club

These groups were always quick to fight and street level confrontations occurred.

### *Rebellions of 1837-1838*

The Patriotes used public assemblies and speeches to spread their pressure tactics like boycotting British products. The Fils de la Liberte were there to pressure people to pick up weapons and revolt

When street fights between the Doric Club and the Fils de la Liberte broke out, the Governor, banned public meetings and this led to armed Rebellion by the Patriotes

The Patriotes were defeated by the British Army. Many Patriotes fled to the US, some were arrested and exiled to Australia and 12 were tried and executed

### *Act of the Union 1840*

After the Rebellions, Britain sent **LORD DURHAM** to investigate the causes and make a report

His report recommended the assimilation of the French and the establishment of Responsible government. The British agreed to assimilate the French by uniting Upper and Lower Canada but did not trust the "colonials" enough to grant Responsible Government

### *Relationship between the Reform Party and the Tory Party*

Britain's idea of assimilating the French by uniting the colonies didn't work as members of the Legislative Assembly worked together along political lines instead of language

In this way, a group of English and French Reformers led by Robert Baldwin and Louis Lafontaine created the Reform Party and were able to control the Assembly and push for responsible government

*Gaining Ministerial Responsibility (Responsible Government)*

In Great Britain the Liberal took power and became more open to the idea of Responsible government in Canada

In Canada, the Governor, Lord Elgin, **GRANTED RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT TO THE REFORM PARTY IN 1848**

The Reform Party immediately started to pass laws that had been banned before, as recognizing the French Language in the Assembly and compensating victims of the Rebellions of 1837

Governor Elgin respected Responsible Government and did **NOT** veto the laws

the Tories (conservatives) became enraged and **BURNED DOWN THE PARLIAMENT IN MONTREAL**

As a result of this anger among political parties, no party was able to win a majority government through the 1850s. **THIS LED TO THE IDEA OF A FEDERAL UNION (BNA or BRITISH NORTH AMERICAN ACT) OF COLONIES AND THE CREATION OF CANADA IN 1867**