

Canada: Becoming A Nation

Independence is what makes us different from others. It's something unique and special to have and maintain. Canada's independence from Britain is a defining moment. With passing of British North Act in 1867, Canada became a dominion in the British Commonwealth and this did not mean that it was a fully independent country. Canada evolves over the years to become a one of the best countries. Showing Britain and to many other countries that they are capable of being independent. Canada wanted to be an independent country and by participating in world war one Canada started its journey to towards its independence. Where, signing the "Treaty of Versailles" (1919) was their remarkable success. For greater recognition from Britain they started a move which was fruitful. Statute of Westminster in 1931 after five years of Balfour Report was passed by Britain. It transferred to Canada full control over foreign affairs. The next step towards nationhood was Canada's own flag (1965) and national anthem. Finally in 1982 Canada became fully independent country by "bringing home the constitution" that ends the British control over Canada.

At the beginning of world war one, Canada's foreign policy was decided by Britain. But by the end Canadian performance on battle field had earned Canada the right to be more independent. When world leaders met in 1919 in Paris to discuss terms for peace after world war one , the Prime minister Robert Borden was also invited. But he refused to be one of Britain's delegates to the Paris Peace Conference insisting that Canada's war record had earned this country its own place at the table.

First, other world leaders were astonished that Canada demanded the right to send its own delegates. As Canada was a British colony and had never before signed a treaty with another foreign nation. But eventually they

accepted and Canada was given two seats at the Peace Conference. So Canada signed the “Treaty of Versailles” as an independent nation and gained a seat in the League of Nation too. In this way Canada grew in status both as a nation and internationally.

Although Canada demonstrated its independence in practical matters but it was still legally bound to British Empire. The decisive step in changing Canada’s legal status was the Imperial conference of 1926. Where dominions of British Empire including Canada, requested formal recognition of their autonomy. A special committee under the leadership of Lord Balfour represented “Balfour Report”. The recommendations of Balfour report were made law in 1931, “Statute of Westminster” by British government.

Statute of Westminster is an important act; it transferred to Canada full control over foreign affairs, a role previously exercised by Britain. This meant, for example, that in world war two, Canada made its own declaration of war – the declaration by Britain didn’t automatically bind Canada. Although Canada had the right to make decisions, but still the word “independence” was not used.

Shouldn’t a country have a flag of its own? This was asked by Canadian government after world war one and again after world war two. Many Canadian felt it was time for the country to choose a flag that would show Canada had a unique identity and was separate from Britain.

In 1964, with Canada’s 100th birthday only 3 years away, Prime Minister Pearson said “I believe we should have a national flag that stands for Canada – a flag that will say one word and that word is Canada”. Despite considerable opposition and after long and nasty debates, parliament adopted the present design which became effective on February 15 1965. Finally the British Union Jack – the red ensign was replaced by red maple leaf. That

truly represents Canada. Even the national anthem “God Save the Queen.....” was replaced by “O Canada” And this helped to strengthen the nationhood.

Now there was just one restriction on Canada’s independence: it could not reform its constitution. In 1982 by “brining the constitution home”, Canada became fully independent. It means that Canada no longer has to ask the British parliament for approval of amendments. This act followed a long period of federal- provincial negotiations.

Bringing home the constitution and charter of rights gave a new role to Canada. This represented Canada’s last step to true nationhood. By this Canadian received clearer and more lasting protection of our democratic rights and freedom. Now Canada becomes a sovereign state with its constitution at home.

Today Canada is an independent nation of more than 30.5 million people. And things had changed in a big way since the 1890’s when Canada was mostly controlled by Britain but now Canada has its own flag, national anthem and specially its constitution with all the powers of amending too. No doubt Canada has become a fully independent nation and its identity as a sovereign state is clearly defined in political and social life of Canada.