CLB 7 – June Question

Name:

Date:

Democracy in Canada

Rebellions of 1837–38

In the 1830s, reformers in Upper and Lower Canada believed that progress toward full democracy was too slow. Some believed Canada should adopt American republican values or even try to join the United States. When armed rebellions occurred in 1837–38 in the area outside Montreal and in Toronto, the rebels did not have enough public support to succeed. They were defeated by British troops and Canadian volunteers. A number of rebels were hanged or exiled; some exiles later returned to Canada.

Lord Durham, an English reformer sent to report on the rebellions, recommended that Upper and Lower Canada be merged and given *responsible government*. This meant that the ministers of the Crown must have the support of a majority of the elected representatives in order to govern. Controversially, Lord Durham also said that the quickest way for the *Canadiens* to achieve progress was to assimilate into English-speaking Protestant culture. This recommendation demonstrated a complete lack of understanding of French Canadians, who sought to uphold the distinct identity of French Canada.

Some reformers, including Sir Étienne-Paschal Taché and Sir George-Étienne Cartier, later became Fathers of Confederation, as did a former member of the voluntary government militia in Upper Canada, Sir John A. Macdonald.

Responsible Government

In 1840, Upper and Lower Canada were united as the Province of Canada. Reformers such as Sir Louis-Hippolyte La Fontaine and Robert Baldwin, in parallel with Joseph Howe in Nova Scotia, worked with British governors toward responsible government.

The first British North American colony to attain full responsible government was Nova Scotia in 1847–48. In 1848–49 the governor of United Canada, Lord Elgin, with encouragement from London, introduced responsible government.

This is the system that we have today: if the government loses a confidence vote in the assembly it must resign. La Fontaine, a champion of democracy and French language rights, became the first leader of a responsible government in the Canadas.

Review Question:

What is responsible government?

○ If the elected party loses the confidence of the House of Commons, it must resign.

○ The government is responsible for everything that happens in Canada.

○ If Canadians lose confidence in the government, the Prime Minister must resign.

○ The elected party is responsible to Canadians.