

There can be no doubt, from the perusal of this material, that Sir George-É. Cartier, on behalf of the Macdonald government, had held out the promise of an amnesty to Riel.<sup>9</sup> The Provencher seat having been declared vacant, a by-election was necessary and called for 3 September. Riel was the only candidate and was defiantly re-elected for the third time by the voters of the Manitoba riding. He did not, however, attempt to take his seat for the 1875 session of Parliament.

Early in the 1875 session Riel's attempts to enter Parliament would come to a conclusion in a second expulsion from the Commons, occasioned not by any action of his but by the eventual political resolution of the Manitoba question. The issue of an amnesty for the leaders of the Red River uprising had continued as a *cause célèbre* in the months after Riel's first expulsion from the Commons. In Manitoba one of his lieutenants, Ambroise Lépine, was tried and found guilty of the murder of Thomas Scott. Riel was clearly also guilty by association. Lépine's death sentence posed a cruel dilemma for the Mackenzie cabinet. Quebec and the Roman Catholic Church continued to demand an amnesty for Riel and his associates. French-speaking members of Mackenzie's cabinet threatened to resign if Lépine's conviction was allowed to stand. Ontario members, reflecting the emotional views of their constituents, pressed for justice to take its course. In the end it was the Governor-General, Lord Dufferin, who extricated Mackenzie and his colleagues from their dilemma. With the approval of the Colonial Office, Dufferin commuted Lépine's death sentence on his own authority, waiting until the Ontario election of January 1875 was over before announcing his decision. Lépine's sentence was commuted to two years' imprisonment, coupled with a loss of civil rights.

In consequence, early in the 1875 session Prime Minister Mackenzie was able to move in the House of Commons that an amnesty be granted to all those involved in the Manitoba troubles except for Riel, Lépine and an associate, W.B. O'Donohue. Riel and Lépine would receive the pardon if they agreed to leave "Her Majesty's dominions" for five years. Riel was once again expelled from the House of Commons on 12 February 1875, when Mackenzie's motion to this effect was carried, 126-50. Riel's Commons seat was declared vacant once again.

Before going into exile, Riel suffered a mental breakdown and was confined, under a pseudonym, in hospitals in Quebec. In 1878 he went to the United States, whence, six years later, he was called back to Canada by the grievances of his people living in northern Saskatchewan. His end would be tragic, executed for renewed rebellion there, and his ghost still haunts Canada today.

### **An incomplete agenda**

Other issues of the day did not surface or were touched upon only briefly in the session of 1874. The Liberals had campaigned on the promise of an appellate court, a supreme court, for the new Dominion but the government put aside this promise during its first crowded year in office. The act establishing the Supreme Court would only be presented during the 1875 session and it would be left to Edward Blake, as the new minister of justice, to argue unsuccessfully with the British authorities that there should be no leave to appeal to England from the judgments of the new court. Appeals to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London would only be abolished in 1949.

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<sup>9</sup> See the committee's report, *Journals 1874*, Appendix 6, "North-West Committee Evidence".