

Of the 206 members elected in the winter federal election of 1874, no fewer than 70 came to the House of Commons for the first time. The substantial turnover in membership of the House reflected the disastrous losses the Liberal-Conservative party (Conservatives) had suffered in the recent election. From a core Commons support of perhaps 104 members after their victorious 1872 contest, Macdonald's party was reduced to 67 supporters, a loss of about one-third of its strength. The Liberals, on the other hand, won 138 seats in 1874 compared to the much smaller core support they had won in opposition in 1872, in a Parliament where the Maritime Liberals in fact mostly intended to vote with the Conservatives. In 1873 even with the support of the Maritimers the Liberal opposition, until the final defections that caused the government's collapse, could muster no more than perhaps 96 votes in the House; after the election of 1874, the revitalized and unified Liberal government, with the support of an independent from Manitoba, held a majority of some 70 seats over the opposition Conservatives. Forty-eight of the seventy members making their first appearance in the Third Parliament belonged to the Liberal ranks.

Seven years after Confederation and in an election fought on the issue of corruption in government, party affiliations had become more meaningful than in previous elections.³ There was still uncertainty regarding the position of individual members from the Maritime Provinces but party divisions in Quebec and Ontario were clear cut. In Nova Scotia and New Brunswick the Conservatives held on to only eight seats out of the 37 at stake in the two provinces. All six members returned from Prince Edward Island were Liberals. In Quebec the Liberals made smaller gains but still won 35 seats as opposed to the Conservatives' 30. It is significant that 29 seats in Quebec were decided by acclamation, a measure of the continuing traditional basis of voting in that province. In Ontario the Liberals won a resounding victory, taking 66 of the province's 88 seats, 18 more than they had won seventeen months earlier. Thirteen of the Ontario Liberal candidates came into office through acclamation. The Conservatives took the 22 remaining seats. Manitoba sent two Liberals to Ottawa, together with a Conservative and the Métis leader, Louis Riel. Only British Columbia, insistent on the completion of the Pacific railway on the strict terms of union, gave its full support to the Conservatives.

No fewer than thirty by-elections, or "special elections" as they were called, were held in the first year of the Third Parliament.⁴ The most common cause was the need to elect a new member after the results of a previous election had been successfully challenged. The Controverted Elections Act of 1873 (36 Vict., cap. 28) placed the responsibility of examining disputed elections on the courts rather than on committees of the House of Commons. But the new procedure took months to follow through, with the result that members returned in the third general election but challenged in the courts occupied and held on to their seats throughout the sitting of 1874. Eighteen members of the Commons, judged to have won their seats through irregular elections, went through a second election in the final months of the year, to be safely returned to their seats. (Sir John A. Macdonald himself endured this experience in Kingston.) In four other cases a new member was returned when earlier elections had been declared void, but only after the session of 1874 had ended. And a

³ Party standings in the Third Parliament are drawn from *The Canadian Directory of Parliament, 1867-1967*, edited by J.K. Johnson, Ottawa, Public Archives of Canada, 1968, and from J. Murray Beck, *Pendulum of Power*, Scarborough, Ontario, Prentice-Hall, 1968, pp. 22-29.

⁴ The "special elections" held in 1874 are meticulously set forth in N. Ormer Coté, (ed.), *Political Appointments, Parliaments and the Judicial Bench in the Dominion of Canada, 1867-1895*, Ottawa, Thoburn and Co., 1896, pp. 216-227.