

Shortly before the First Session of the Third Parliament convened, Riel secretly came to Ottawa and, accompanied by Dr. J.-B. Romuald Fiset, Liberal member for Rimouski, took the oath as a member of the House of Commons. This action created a passionate debate between English and French-speaking members. Most Ontario members saw Riel as the murderer of Thomas Scott and a fugitive from justice. Quebec members celebrated him as a hero who had upheld the Roman Catholic faith and French culture in the Northwest. They insisted that he had been guaranteed an amnesty for his conduct during the Red River disturbances, by Sir George-É. Cartier on behalf of the Macdonald government. The issue posed a delicate question for the new Mackenzie administration. It had not been in office at the time of the negotiation of the Manitoba Act but two of its leading members, Alexander Mackenzie and Edward Blake, had been members of the Ontario government which had offered the reward for Riel's arrest.

Riel's audacity in coming to Ottawa to sign the parliamentary roll created great excitement at the opening of the 1874 session. Would the "rebel leader" attempt to take his seat? On the day following the Speech from the Throne, 30 March, Col. L.-F.-R. Masson, a Conservative member (Terrebonne) and a friend of Riel's, delivered an impassioned speech urging an amnesty for Riel and the other Métis leaders. Masson had hardly finished when another militia colonel, Mackenzie Bowell of Belleville, rose to the counter-attack. Bowell, Grandmaster of the Orange Order of British North America since 1870, moved that the Clerk of the Crown in Chancery attend the House to produce the evidence respecting Riel's election for Provencher and that the Attorney-General of Manitoba be summoned to give information on Riel's indictment. Both motions, seconded by Dr. John C. Schultz (Lisgar), who had been a leader of the Canadian party in the Red River troubles, were approved without division.

The next day evidence was submitted that showed Riel had been duly elected. There was a long questioning, by Bowell and others, of H.J. Clarke, the Manitoba attorney-general, who appeared at the bar of the House. Bowell's purpose was clearly to show that Riel was a fugitive from justice who had been directly involved in the "murder" of Thomas Scott. At the end of Clarke's interrogation Bowell moved that Riel appear in his place in the House on the following day. This motion was also carried with a recorded vote.

On 1 April, with Riel still not present, the order for his appearance was withdrawn and another date fixed, "Wednesday next" (8 April). The week's delay was caused by the House going into recess for Easter from 2 to 6 April. In the meantime it was decided to appoint a nine-member select committee to enquire into the causes of the difficulties in the Northwest in 1869-1870. Bowell, Edward Blake, Masson and Donald A. Smith, the Hudson's Bay Company official who had negotiated with Riel on behalf of the Canadian government and was now the member for Selkirk, Manitoba, were named to the committee.

When the Commons resumed after the Easter break, the Riel case again took centre stage. Clarke returned to appear before the House again on 8 and 9 April, together with two Ottawa detectives who had been vainly seeking Riel in order to serve him his warrant. Hon. Timothy W. Anglin, the Speaker, called upon the member for Provencher to appear in his place but, as the *Journals* quaintly recorded, "the said Honourable Member appeared not".<sup>7</sup> The way was now clear for Bowell to give notice of his intention to move a motion to expel Riel from the Commons. He had fixed the date of 13 April for this action but for some reason the matter did not come up on that day. The next day had already been allotted for the first budget

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<sup>7</sup> *Journals*, 9 April 1874, p. 37.