

years of Confederation, the reconstituted debates will represent a distinctive and unsurpassed historical resource.

**Third Parliament, First Session  
from 26 March 1874 to 26 May 1874  
The setting**

The Second Parliament of Canada, just ended, had been short but eventful. It had been elected in August 1872, began its first session on 5 March 1873, was prorogued amid scandal on 13 August 1873, then was reconvened on 23 October for a second session which proved fatal to the government. A new government met the House on 7 November but then prorogued the second session to allow the return of its ministers and other candidates in by-elections. Despite victories in all of these no third session was to be; the Second Parliament had been dissolved on 2 January 1874.

The Second Parliament had been dominated by discussion of the “Pacific scandal”, the charges of serious financial impropriety on the part of the governing Conservative party during the general election of 1872. Facing an adverse vote in the Commons over the issue, Sir John A. Macdonald and his colleagues resigned office on 5 November. They were immediately succeeded as a government by the opposition Reform or Liberal party, the only time when a majority government in Canada has resigned through the defection of its supporters and given way to another without an intervening general election. The new government was headed by the prominent Ontario Reform leader, Alexander Mackenzie of Sarnia. It was only after considering for almost two months the relative merits of carrying on in a third session or going to the people for a clear mandate that the Mackenzie government asked the Governor-General, Lord Dufferin, to dissolve the Second Parliament and issue writs for Canada’s second general election in seventeen months.

Although not required by law, the third general election was, as far as possible, held simultaneously across the country. Most electoral districts voted in late January or early February, thus providing no electoral advantage for the governing party in the spacing of the contests. A single polling day for general elections was indeed to form part of the electoral law of 1874, a centrepiece in the returned Mackenzie government’s legislation. The Liberals, continuing the stance they had taken in opposition, campaigned not only for major reform in Canada’s electoral law, but for the creation of a Supreme Court and for a scale-down in the construction of the trans-continental railway promised to British Columbia when it entered Confederation in 1871. Their platform won overwhelming public support.

The Third Parliament, which assembled on 26 March 1874, was the same size as the Second Session of the Second Parliament, when six members from newly-admitted Prince Edward Island had taken their seats for the first time. It consisted of 206 members, distributed among the seven provinces in the following manner:

Quebec	65	(the benchmark for assigning provincial representation)
Ontario	88	
Nova Scotia	21	
New Brunswick	16	
Manitoba	4	
British Columbia	6	
Prince Edward Island	6	