

supporters, and with the Maritime Liberals perhaps as many 123 votes, in the new 200-member House. The scattered opposition of 73 to 79 members to the government in the fall of 1867 had become a more organized opposition core of 75 to 78 members, and if the Maritime Liberals all defected from the government, as many as 99 votes in opposition in the House. While the opposition's support in the Commons was growing, Macdonald still held a working majority in the House in March 1873; but his position was not so secure as it had been before the general election of 1872.

Unfortunately the exact numbers of the supporters of the ministry and the opposition in March 1873 are difficult to determine. This is partly because a considerable minority of members (the "loose fish" in the political jargon of the time) might vote their conscience on any given issue, rather than the government or the opposition line. But it is also because one can only calculate political party standings in the early Canadian Commons with a healthy dose of scepticism. Parties were by no means the coherent disciplined bodies which they became later. In Central Canada the Rouges, Nationalists, Grits or Reformers of 1873 all more or less counted themselves Liberals; the Conservatives and Liberal-Conservatives, the self-declared partisans of Macdonald or Cartier, the old-style Baldwin Reformers and even a Conservative-Labour member usually stood with the governing Conservative coalition. These diverse labels either were unknown, or did not carry the same political meaning, to voters in the Maritimes. There, the test on the hustings in 1867 had been whether a candidate was for or against Confederation, and in 1872 was simply whether a member supported the government or opposed it. In fact most of the members elected as Liberals from the two Maritime Provinces in 1872 declared in the 1873 edition of the *Canadian Parliamentary Companion* that they supported the ministry of Sir John A. Macdonald. The same situation occurred in the two Western provinces, where the Macdonald government, as the promoter of the Pacific Railway, was seen as the key to the development of the region. Nine of the ten Western members in the 1873 House, whatever their party label, could usually be counted upon to support the ministry.

The Conservatives, probably because a number of their members had worked together in the first federal cabinet, displayed greater party solidarity than the Liberal opposition. Among the Liberals historic suspicions between the Reformers of Ontario and the Rouge members from Quebec still made cooperation a difficult exercise. Things improved when a leading Reformer from Ontario, Alexander Mackenzie, was chosen as the party's first parliamentary leader early in the 1873 session. Mackenzie assumed the post, filled for the first time, of Leader of the Opposition. Around him the opposition members came together, prepared to drive Macdonald and his colleagues out of office at the earliest opportunity. That opportunity came, sooner than had been expected, through the agency of the "Pacific Scandal" in the parliamentary sessions of 1873.

Macdonald's cabinet had survived the 1872 election with two casualties, neither of them fatal. The most serious was the defeat of Sir George-Étienne Cartier, Macdonald's principal partner, in Montreal East. However, with the elections in the West coming several weeks after those in Central Canada, it was possible to find a seat for Cartier in Manitoba. Louis Riel and another candidate were persuaded to step aside in Provencher and Cartier was elected by acclamation. Although still a member of the cabinet, he was not to sit in the Second Parliament. Afflicted with Bright's disease, he went to England for medical treatment and there he died on 20 May 1873. Cartier's death was the most serious personal loss in Macdonald's long career. Sir Francis Hincks, Minister of Finance since 1869, was defeated in Brant South in 1872 but was found a seat in Vancouver. He gave up the finance portfolio before the opening of the first session of 1873 and was succeeded by Samuel Leonard Tilley of St. John. One minister, Peter Mitchell, a