

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, November 6, 1967

The house met at 2.30 p.m.

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr. Speaker: I have the honour to inform the house that I have received the following communication:

Government House, Ottawa, November 6, 1967

Sir:

I have the honour to inform you that the Honourable J. R. Cartwright, M.C., Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, acting as Deputy of His Excellency the Governor General, will proceed to the Senate chamber on November 6, at 4 p.m., for the purpose of giving the royal assent to certain bills.

I have the honour to be,
sir,

Your obedient servant,

A. J. Cherrier

Assistant Secretary to the Governor General

HOUSE OF COMMONS

ONE HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF FIRST
SESSION OF FIRST PARLIAMENT

Right Hon. L. B. Pearson (Prime Minister):

Mr. Speaker we are marking a most important occasion in our history, the opening of the first session of the first parliament of Canada. To use a phrase from the *Commons Journals* of that day, this first sitting was "begun and holden" exactly a century ago today. The great Canadian parliamentary political debate began, the vigorous expression of free democracy which has continued to this moment, or to the moment that will shortly follow this one.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Pearson: Politics could be contentious in those days with a vigour of conflict both in debate and in election that would hardly be tolerated today. Indeed, there was proof of this in the fact that when the first sitting was opened on November 6, 1867, there already was a vacant seat in the house. The returning officer for Kamouraska had been unable to conduct the election in that constituency. "The hustings" which, in his words, "I had caused to be erected on the gallery of the sacristy" had been destroyed. He had himself been attacked by the mob

and had been told by a delegation that unless he gave up the writs of election, his house would be demolished and he would be in danger of personal molestation.

The election was postponed.

But if politics was more lively in some areas in that confederation year, it was less so in others. Of the 181 seats in the commons for its first session, some 40 had been filled by acclamation. Perhaps one reason may have been that the sessional allowance for members was only \$600.

Ottawa was a lively town for the occasion of that first opening. As some kind of portent, perhaps, of things to come the new capital had been hit by the worst windstorm in years a couple of days before the opening.

Mr. Knowles: It has never stopped.

Mr. Pearson: It has been blowing ever since. The sitting opened at the hour which has long since become the usual hour for the opening of new sessions, 3 p.m. The military were out in splendid ceremonial force; flags flew from public buildings and many private homes; all carriages coming to the hill for the event had to be here by 2.30 because at that time the gates were closed to all but the Governor General's.

But not everyone in the capital came up to the hill for the occasion. At 2 p.m. that day a lacrosse match was started in another part of the city and was reported to have been very well attended. The night before a group of visiting United States gymnasts and acrobats opened at Her Majesty's Theatre, where later in the week they were replaced on the bill by "The Fakir of Vishnu", a magician. The cynic might say that the character of the week's entertainment was not inappropriate to mark the parliamentary occasion. It was certainly appropriate that the great song of the day advertised by a local music store the day before the first sitting should be entitled "Put Your Shoulder to the Wheel".

• (2:40 p.m.)

It was a momentous week, for earlier the till of a certain barroom had been robbed twice in three days; and the governor of the local jail had surprised a would-be