

Government, the Bishop of St. Boniface was the actual ruler of that Government, and his influence was supreme. (Cries of Oh! and No! No! from various members.)”<sup>19</sup>

The government, conscious that its power crucially depended on support from Catholic *bleus* from Quebec, did its best to parry these charges. Militia and Defence Minister George-Étienne Cartier, always careful to avoid the word “murder,” suggested that since Scott’s execution had taken place *before* Manitoba entered the union, the federal government had no retroactive jurisdiction over the sad incidents at the Red River. Furthermore, Riel was beyond its reach; the 1842 Webster–Ashburton Treaty with the United States did not permit extradition for cases of treason. Other Conservatives suggested the Manitoba issue was being fanned for reasons of pure Ontario parochialism. Mackenzie Bowell attacked Edward Blake (a Liberal who would, a year later, use his position as Liberal premier of Ontario to place a \$5,000 bounty on Riel’s head) for exploiting the situation: “The portals of the grave have been opened, and the dust of the martyred dead dragged forth to do the works of such politicians as the member for Durham. Crocodile tears have been copiously shed, and affected tears wiped from where none existed, in order to carry the Ontario elections.”<sup>20</sup> Such was the language of “race” in nineteenth-century Canadian politics.

The festering dispute over Manitoba and Riel showed just how close to the surface the old sectarian jealousies of pre-Confederation colonial life still lurked. Regional and religious jealousies not only threatened the bonding of the young country, but also tore at the cohesiveness of the nation’s political alliances. They kept Ontario Liberals from embracing Quebec *rouges* and constantly destabilized the precarious union of Anglo-Conservatives and Quebec *bleus* at the heart of Macdonald’s ruling party. Other issues in the 1871 session warmed this ever-present animosity. At Confederation, the accumulated debt of the legislative union of Ontario and Quebec had been apportioned between the two new provinces and Ottawa. The terms of the division pleased neither province; it was “unequal” and an “injustice” from each perspective. Some favoured legal arbitration, others a political settlement. The spirit of parochialism reared its head elsewhere. When an Ontario member of Parliament opposed a \$10,000 subsidy on the Halifax–Saint John steamer, Haligonian Charles Tupper complained of the “niggardly spirit” at work and remarked that “a similar spirit . . . had almost rent old Canada apart”<sup>21</sup> before 1867.

The mean sectarianism of the 1871 session thus provided evidence of an old set of British North American sensibilities wrestling with the spirit of a fragile new nationality. Only occasionally did a tone of higher purpose emerge. “We are now in Confederation for weal or for woe,” Toronto Tory Robert Harrison (a frequent complainer about Ontario’s share of the debt distribution) sanctimoniously pointed out. “The man who needlessly provokes sectional strife wickedly weakens the ties of Confederation, and knowingly strengthens the hands of our enemies.”<sup>22</sup>

If looking backward could excite differences among the members of the 1871 House, so too could looking forward. As Lord Lisgar had indicated in his Throne Speech, an address from the legislature of British Columbia invited Ottawa to engage in a negotiation for the entry of that distant colony into the new Confederation. Egged on by its shrewd Governor, Sir Anthony Musgrave, the Confederation cause in British Columbia coalesced around a clique of local

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19. 27 February 1871.

20. 12 April 1871.

21. 21 March 1871.

22. 13 March 1871.