

had for years missed no opportunity to stack the Senate with loyal men. Indeed, Macdonald's cabinet during the Second Session had included no fewer than four Senators, whereas Mackenzie's new ministry initially had none. The new Liberal government could have met the Second Parliament again in a Third Session and perhaps commanded a working majority in the House. But the Senate, with its unelected Conservative majority, presented an obstacle to the Liberals' legislative program of reform. Prime Minister Mackenzie nominated George Brown to the one vacant Senate seat in mid-December, and on 23 December his cabinet approved an Order-in-Council asking the Governor General to advise the Queen to appoint six extra Senators, as provided under the British North America Act in the event of a deadlock between the two houses. Another prime minister more than a century later, with no higher master in London, would succeed in swamping Senate opposition to an unloved new tax in this way. But while Dufferin assented to the cabinet order, he delayed its execution so as to consult Whitehall for final approval. This he did only on 26 January 1874, when under changed political conditions Mackenzie's request to name extra Senators was refused by the Imperial government as hypothetical.⁴

The required by-elections had taken place between 25 November and 9 December 1873, and the voters had duly returned Mackenzie and all his ministers to the House of Commons. Serious opposition was not customary in the by-elections held to return to Parliament members unseated by being named to the cabinet, and in only two cases, both involving turncoat former supporters of the Macdonald coalition, did the Conservative party put up a fight. But the electorate was aroused by the Pacific Scandal, and voted the traitors back into their parliamentary seats with the rest of Mackenzie's cabinet.

Additional important seats in Toronto West and in Nova Scotia had also become available when the Macdonald government as its dying act had appointed supporters from the House to fill positions outside Parliament. In the consequent by-elections on 18 and 20 December 1873 the Liberal tide sweeping across Canada was confirmed. Buoyed by this electoral success, over Christmas Mackenzie decided, instead of calling a Third Session in the new year, to request a dissolution and a new general election in January, a course which Lord Dufferin had quietly been advocating since November. After less than ten months of existence, the Second Parliament of Canada came to an end on 2 January 1874.

A Parliament Like None Other

The resignation of the Macdonald government in 1873 is unique in Canadian political history. It has been the only occasion when a majority government has resigned through the defection of its own supporters, giving way to another party without a general election. The early election of winter 1874 allowed the country to pass judgment on Macdonald and his colleagues. It was a massive vote for censure. The Conservatives were defeated by a two-to-one margin, and Mackenzie had his strong majority and his mandate for the next four years.

⁴ The Order-in-Council was P.C. 1873 No. 1711, invoking section 26 of the British North America Act. Historical discussion in Welf Henry Heick, *Mackenzie and Macdonald: Federal Politics and Politicians in Canada, 1873-1878*, Thesis (Ph.D.: Duke University), 1965, pp. 52-53.