

By law, the House of Commons was to consist of 191 members for the session of 1872. In fact, because Manitoba was under-represented, only 190 members were present in the chamber for the session. Most members had been elected in the first election after Confederation, held over six weeks between August and September 1867, but a few had entered the House through later by-elections.⁷

Members of the two new provinces in the West took a modest part in the 1872 session. Manitoba, admitted on 15 July 1870, had been assigned four members. Three of them participated in the 1872 session; the fourth seat was vacant because of the problem created by a "double return." British Columbia, entering Confederation on 20 July 1871, had been allotted six members, four of whom were subsequently chosen by acclamation. Elections on 13 and 15 December selected the two additional members and all six British Columbia representatives took their seats for the first time in the 1872 session. Among the original provinces of Confederation, Ontario had the largest representation with 82 members, compared to Quebec's 65 (a number fixed in the British North America Act) Nova Scotia's 19 and New Brunswick's 15.

The Manitoba "double return" illustrated the inadequacies of the new Dominion's electoral legislation. In the first federal elections in Manitoba, held on 2 and 3 March 1871, the riding of Marquette, west of Fort Garry, had returned two candidates. Angus C. McKay, a Conservative, received the same number of votes, 282, as his Liberal opponent, Dr. James S. Lynch. Both men journeyed to Ottawa, swore the oath to enter Parliament, signed the roll and took their seats in the chamber, after which they immediately withdrew. Their actions followed the procedure laid down for dealing with controverted elections: all members "returned upon double returns (are) to withdraw until their returns are determined." The cases of the would-be Manitoba members were turned over to the House of Commons Committee on Privileges and Elections, which in May decided to give the candidates six weeks to submit lists of voters whose names they questioned. The Committee then adjourned until this was done. Before the period was over, the Commons had prorogued. Thus, the Marquette seat was not occupied during the 1872 session, giving Manitoba only three sitting members. Neither McKay nor Lynch contested the 1872 election. The seat for Marquette was finally filled by a third candidate who took his seat in the Second Parliament.⁸

National political parties did not exist in the parliamentary session of 1872. Instead, the membership of the House of Commons was characterized by "loose coalitions" which had not yet merged into cohesive parties.⁹

The dominant coalition was led by Sir John A. Macdonald, a grouping later to be identified as the Liberal-Conservative (Conservative) Party. It represented a continuation of the coalition Macdonald had put together to achieve the union of the colonies in 1867. At its core was his personal alliance with Sir George-Étienne Cartier, a partnership created as early as 1854 to control the unruly politics of the old Province of Canada. Macdonald's bloc included Conservatives from Canada West, many

⁷ The physical conditions of the early House of Commons, its "tremendous vitality" as a legislative body and the "un-business-like nature of (its) public business" are well captured in an article by Norman Ward, "The Formative Years of the House of Commons, 1867-1891," in *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, XVIII Number 4 (November 1952), pp. 431-451.

⁸ The *Dominion Elections Act, 1874* (37 Vict., Cap. 9) gave the returning officer the right to cast a deciding vote when "an equality of votes" occurs in an election.

⁹ Escott M. Reid, "The Rise of National Parties in Canada," in Hugh G. Thorburn (ed.), *Party Politics in Canada* (Scarborough, sec. ed., 1967), p. 22.