

Perhaps the most significant new legislation, in view of the successor role of the R.C.M.P. in national life, was the act to establish a police force in the Northwest Territories. Introduced by Macdonald as Minister of Justice, the act provided for a centralized federal force to bring order to the Red River and the vast territories lying to the west. The first detachment of the Northwest Mounted Police arrived at Fort Garry in August, to winter there before moving out on to the plains.

After a protracted dispute over the 1872 election in the constituency of Peterborough West, a revised controverted elections act, under which judges, rather than committees of the House, examined petitions arising from disputed elections, became law on 23 May. The controversial question of the New Brunswick school law was also taken out of Parliament, much to the government's relief, and referred to the British Empire's highest tribunal, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, sitting in London.

Another act provided for the assumption by the federal government of the debts accumulated by the provinces before Confederation. This act laid the basis for a national debt structure able to cope with the heavy costs of transportation improvement in the future. Perhaps not by coincidence, terms for the admission of Prince Edward Island, which had stayed out in 1867, were considered in May. These included a guarantee of ferry connections to the mainland and a railway, subsidized by the federal government.<sup>3</sup> The new province, Canada's last eastward extension until the 1949 incorporation of Newfoundland, entered Confederation during the First Session of the Second Parliament, on 1 July 1873. An election for Prince Edward Island members would be held in the fall and they would sit in the Commons in the Second Session.

Yet discussion of these measures, important as they were, paled beside the energy and passion devoted to the Pacific Scandal. The consideration of the allegations about the railway charter began innocuously enough when the Liberal member for Shefford, Lucius S. Huntington, rose quietly in his place three weeks after the First Session had begun, to give notice of a motion bringing charges against the government. On 2 April Huntington declared that the government had entered into an improper association with Sir Hugh Allan and American associates for the award of the contract to build the Pacific railway. He moved for the appointment of a select committee to investigate the recent grant of the Pacific railway charter to Allan's company. The charges, expressed in a statement of only seven paragraphs, were not supported by any documentary evidence. The Macdonald government easily disposed of Huntington's motion by a majority of 31 votes.

But questions were raised in the country and on 8 April Macdonald moved that a select committee of the House be appointed to inquire into and report upon the Huntington charges. It would consist of five members: John Hillyard Cameron of Cardwell, Dr. J.-G. Blanchet of Lévis and James McDonald of Pictou (Conservatives) and Edward Blake of Bruce South and A.-A. Dorion of Napierville (Liberals). The committee was given the power to examine witnesses under oath by an Oaths Bill which was duly passed in the following weeks. The committee met for the first time on 5 May but decided not to proceed as Sir Hugh Allan was absent in England attempting to raise funds for his Pacific Railway company. Parliament itself adjourned on 23 May, agreeing to meet again on 13 August when, the opposition claimed, the committee would have an obligation to report its findings.

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<sup>3</sup> For discussion of the terms of entry of Prince Edward Island into Canada, see Frank MacKinnon, *The Government of Prince Edward Island*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951, chapter 6, "Confederation", pp. 120-140.