

Foreword

This volume, the eighth and final in the series to reconstruct the Debates of the House of Commons, represents an unofficial record of debate drawn from newspaper reports of the day for the First Session of the Third Parliament, dating from 26 March until 26 May, 1874.

Canada's Third Parliament opened on March 26 with a new government in power: Alexander Mackenzie led the Liberal Party in a majority government, having defeated the sitting Conservative Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald in the general election of January 22, 1874. The Liberal government would last for only this Parliament, however, with Macdonald returning to power after the next general election in 1878, and the Conservatives forming majority governments through the subsequent 18 years.

Debates in 1874 still heard the ghosts of the previous parliament's disputes, with the Pacific Railway issue resulting in a compromised plan for development of rail in Western Canada, a plan which left British Columbia disappointed and its Members furious. The opening session of the Third Parliament also saw the culmination of the Riel Affair: Louis Riel had won the seat representing Provencher, Manitoba in an 1873 by-election. He was re-elected in the same riding in the general election, and though Riel did sign the roll of members in late March, he never sat in the Commons. The report for the 30th of March in this volume gives an indication of the level of interest and anticipation around Riel's attendance palpable in Parliament at the time.

The majority of government spending was focused on infrastructure development as would be expected for a new and expanding country and prohibition was a constant preoccupation of the chamber, with petitions for prohibition being tabled regularly.

In the context of the reconstituted debates project, it is perhaps most significant that official reporting of debates was finally determined in this session: both the previous and the sitting Prime Minister had endorsed the idea of official reporting, and the matter was referred to a select committee who presented their report on the matter on the 8th of May, 1874. Thus, official reporting began in 1875, and with this final volume, the reconstituted debates project now closes. We are indebted to Parliamentary Librarian, Sonia L'Heureux, and her predecessors who, together with their staff, have filled this significant gap in the record of our Parliament's earliest years, and who continue to work to render our documentary heritage more broadly accessible to the world's researchers, students, and readers of Canada's proud history.

The Hon. Andrew Scheer, M.P.
Speaker of the House of Commons
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