BLAKE - MACKENZIE RIVALS FOR POWER?

EDWARD BLAKE - ALEXANDER MACKENZIE

RIVALS FOR POWER?

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

May 1965

MASTER OF ARTS (1965)
(History)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario.

TITLE: Edward Blake - Alexander Mackenzie
RIVALS FOR POWER?

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NUMBER OF PAGES: iii, 207

SCOPE AND CONTENTS: This is a study of Edward Blake and Alexander Mackenzie, the two most important men in the Liberal Party of Canada in the immediate post-Confederation period. The difficulties faced by its leader, Alexander Mackenzie, are studied, and particular examination is made of Edward Blake's reluctance to serve as a loyal cabinet minister and subordinate of Mackenzie. The general conclusion is that Edward Blake's latent desire to attain the party leadership was activated, from time to time, by friends and/or 'intriguers', thus accounting for the rather enigmatic behaviour of Blake as he pursued the position held by Mackenzie.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I

INTRODUCTION

July 1, 1867 - the miracle of Confederation had been wrought; four small colonies with less than 3,500,000 population[1] had put aside their differences to form a federal union for their individual betterment. In less than ten years from its conception in the mind of Sir Alexander Galt in 1858, the idea of a confederation of the British North American Colonies had blossomed forth to overcome strong divisive forces threatening prosperity and progress from within, and external threats from the newly-victorious Northern States of America.[2]

Yet although he offered the first comprehensive plan for colonial union, Galt can not be credited with its actual realization. Only when George Brown, the leader of the majority Reform party of Canada West, and publisher of the widely read Toronto Globe, realized that some sort of federal union of Canada East and West offered the sole way out of the governmental deadlock of mid-century, was the machinery to create Canadian Confederation put in motion. In submerging his enmity towards a coalition with the opposing Conservatives, and in joining his hated enemy,

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[1] Lower, A.R.M., Canadians in the Making,(Longmans, Green Co.,Toronto,1958)p.303

[2] In addition there was the ludicrous, but nevertheless real, fear of those misguided Irish Americans, the Fenians. W.R. Graham goes so far as to suggest that "Confederation itself was conceived very largely as an anti-American expedient and executed in that spirit." (W.R. Graham, Liberal Nationalism in the Eighteen-Seventies, Canadian Historical Association-Report of the Annual Meeting 1946. pp. 101-119)

John A. Macdonald, in a ministry pledged to federal Union, Brown can be described as the "real initiator of Confederation".[3]

Although he supplied a great impetus, Brown, however, was not the principal figure in its achievement. Instead, his old opponent, the lawyer from Kingston, John A. Macdonald, after initial reluctance, seized upon the Confederation idea with passion and imagination to convince New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and the British Government of Confederation's inherent value for British North America. Thus the foundations of a new state were laid; a state "which at a future day", suggested Lord Carnarvon in the British Parliament, "may even overshadow this country".[4] Indeed, it would endure and prosper despite economic hardships, sectionalism and threats of separatism. "By the exercise of common sense and a limited amount of that patriotism which goes by the name of self-interest", prophesied Macdonald simply, "I have no doubt that the Union will be for the common weal".[5] With pomp, circumstance, celebrations, and booming artillery salutes was the new nation of Canada born.

Canada in 1867 was a country with few Canadians. By 1871 Ottawa, the new capital, had only 21,000 inhabitants.[6] Except for the expressions of patriotism and dedication of the first birthday of the new nation, no great emotion was experienced in the young country. In Ontario and Quebec, most of the inhabitants would continue to regard themselves as 'Ontarians'

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[3]Careless, J.M.S., Brown of The Globe Vol.2, (Macmillan, Toronto, 1963), p. 146

[4]Creighton, D., quoted in, John A. Macdonald, The Young Politician, Vol.I, (Macmillan, Toronto, 1956), p. 461

[5]Ibid., pp. 466-67

[6]Lower, op.cit., p. 305

and 'Québeçois' respectively. Anti-Confederation feeling was still rampant in many areas. In Quebec, many members of the reformist Rouge Party, despite the pro-Confederation stand of their leaders, Antoine Aimé Dorion and Luther Holton, could not muster much support for the union. In Nova Scotia, Joseph Howe and his seemingly intransigent anti-Confederation Liberals captured all but one of the province's federal seats. This was not a cause for alarm, however, commented the nation's first Prime Minister: in his words, "Nova Scotia...has declared, so far as she can, against Confederation; but she will be powerless for harm".[7] As was to be expected, the anti-Confederation sentiment periodically found expression in certain journals in the first generation after 1867. "There are few provinces, if any, in it (Confederation) to-day," maintained the Manitoba Free Press, "that would not rejoice to be out of it, and that would not forever stay out if they were".[8] It would appear that a mere league of provinces had been formed; and a great task remained for the people of the various parts to conceive and develop a national identity which would fuse them together as Canadians working for the greater good of the community.

In post-Confederation politics, the federal Liberal party in its quest for a strong and appealing national identity had to contend with several major problems. Firstly, its numerical weakness was a source

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[7] Croighton, D., quoted in John A. Macdonald, The Old Chieftain, Vol.II, (Macmillan, Toronto, 1955), p. 3

[8] Lower, op. cit., quoted from The Week, p. 299

of acute embarrassment for some. The Macdonald Tories in 1867 had been voted a substantial majority of federal seats by the electorate on the strength of their 'no partyism' cry to launch Confederation. Secondly, some of the Liberal supporters bore the stigma of their anti-Confederation pact. If the party were to succeed, this liability had to be rapidly overcome. Another major problem confronting the Liberals - or Reformers as many still called themselves - was the party's failure to produce a leader who commanded the loyalties and unswerving support of all Liberals in the Dominion. Thus the party throughout the eighteen-seventies remained somewhat fragmented as a national party since various groupings within the party on occasion refused to agree on common action or policy.

In essence, the spectre of division haunting the Liberals in these years was nothing more than a revival of the troubles that had plagued those opposed to the Macdonald Conservatives in the smaller arena of provincial politics at mid-century. Throughout this period, largely through the efforts of George Brown, there existed three distinct segments in the "Reform Alliance" formed in 1856. Of these, the Brownite Liberal group was the largest and most powerful. Dominated by the founder, its principles consisted of moderation, representation by population, separation of Church and state, honesty and non-extravagance in government, westward expansion, free trade and administrative reform.[9] The two smaller groups making up the party were rapidly losing their influence by 1856. The Reform Party's original nucleus, the Clear Grit

[9]Public Archives of Canada, George Brown Papers, Confidential Circular outlining the main resolutions passed by the Liberal Convention 1856 - dated Dec. 15, 1856

movement, characterized by the agrarian radicalism of frontier democracy and the recreation of government on the American elective pattern, had lost most of its vigorous fighters - such as John Rolph and William Lyon Mackenzie - through withdrawal from politics or through the mellowing process of passing years[10] as was the case with Malcolm Cameron. The small remaining group of Reformers, labelled by J.M.S. Careless as 'Moderate Reformers', had as their champions such men as Michael Foley and Sandfield Macdonald. These individuals were inclined to political opportunism believing that modification of existing Reform principles could be justified for the sake of power[11] - a thought however utterly abhorred by Brown. By the early 'sixties Brownite Liberalism had come to dominate the thinking of most Upper Canadians; the Clear Grit fondness for radicalism had been successfully purged from the Reform movement and Brown in effect controlled "the Grits" - as the Globe called the party - without any serious challenge to his leadership.[12] Thus by achieving this great political triumph Brown was able to swing Ontario Reformers behind his hopes for a federal union and keep them in check during the critical months of 1864 and 1865 as the ground work for Confederation was laid at Charlottetown, Quebec City and in the parliament of the Canadas. Once he conceived that his purpose in the coalition with the Conservatives had been realized and that Confederation would soon be a 'fait accompli', Brown resigned to become "a free man once more".[13]

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[10] Careless, op. cit., p. 13

[11] Ibid., pp. 14-15

[12] Ibid., p. 14

[13] Ibid., p. 218. For a full discussion of the reasons for Brown's resignation, see Careless, p. 218

The 1867 elections, as expected, resulted in an overwhelming triumph for Macdonald's predominantly Conservative coalition[14] which campaigned on the vote-catching slogan of "fair trial" for the new union. The Liberals, Rouges and anti-Confederationists were barely able to elect 60 members[15] who went to the new Parliament at Ottawa more or less determined to pursue their independent courses.

By 1867 Confederation had materialized; the ties of union were formally achieved. Such however, was not the case for the Reform Party. Weak and divided, it would have to resolve several grave problems if it hoped to maintain its political vigour. Firstly, there was the problem of achieving some sort of alliance with all the factions opposed to the new Macdonald government. Since the majority of Rouges by 1867 were "coming round all right"[16] to support Confederation,[17] there would not be

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[14]Macdonald claimed that his new cabinet was essentially a coalition since it included W.P. Howland, William McDougall, and Fergusson Blair - all Liberals who had served in the Confederation coalition 1864-67. At a convention of the Reform Party in late June 1867 however, continued coalition with the Tories was overwhelmingly rejected. Nevertheless, these three remained with the Conservative Ministry.

[15]The factors accounting for the success of the Macdonald coalition were obvious: the prestige surrounding the major figures responsible for Confederation now ensconsed in the Macdonald Cabinet, the 'fair trial' cry for the new Government, the lack of any concrete alternative programme on the part of the Grits, the retirement of Brown, Macdonald's retention of Liberals Howland, Blair, and McDougall in his first cabinet, the association of the Ontario Reformers with the Maritime Liberals and Rouges who were still stigmatized by their anti-Confederation sentiments in the minds of many voters.

[16]Careless, op.cit.,quoted in, Holton to Brown, May 31,1867 p.245

[17]Most realized that Confederation was now a 'fait accompli' and could not be destroyed; therefore support was the only reasonable alternative. In addition, the only effective way to continue their traditional struggle with Sir Georges Cartier and the Bleus was to acquire major influence in the federal Liberal Party. To achieve this, their support for Confederation was a required necessity.

too much difficulty in renewing the old alliance. However, the die-hard anti-Confederation Liberals from the Maritimes would present a much more serious challenge. To win them over to Confederation and support of the Reform party was an absolute necessity if the party were to become national in scope. Then there was the problem of selecting a leader of the Opposition. George Brown had retired from the political lists and would not reconsider the many requests to run again after his defeat by almost 100 votes in the riding of South Ontario in August 1867. Of course, he would still be available to counsel the influential party members and the Government through correspondence and the editorial columns of the Globe.

The next choice in order of seniority was Brown's old political partner from Quebec, Antoine Aimé Dorion. It was certain, however, that the Ontario Reformers would never be broadminded enough to forget past differences and accept a French Canadian to lead an essentially English party, especially since Dorion and his following had not supported Brown's Confederation stand. Besides, Dorion, leader of the Rouges for over a decade, was aging markedly; it was well known that he harboured thoughts of relinquishing the Rouge leadership.

Perhaps Luther Holton, a leading English businessman from Montreal and confrère of Dorion, might have been considered next as a possibility. He had been chosen for the prominent post of Finance Minister in the Brown - Dorion Ministry of 1858, that hapless government which had lasted only forty-eight hours. Later in 1863 Holton served again as finance minister in the Sandfield Macdonald-Dorion Ministry of that year. There was no doubt that he was a commendable minister and possessed exceptional skill in debating. Probably he did covet the position of Opposition

Leader in the Parliament of the new Confederation. Unquestionably certain of the leading Ontario Liberals were of that opinion; as George Brown stated in a letter to Alexander Mackenzie, "Blake thinks Holton aspired to that position & would be satisfied with nothing short of it".[18]

Holton, however, was plagued with certain liabilities. He also, as Dorion had, refused to sanction the union condemning it as a "crude, immature ill-considered scheme...which threatened to plunge the country into measureless debt".[19] This was a reference to the expensive project of building the Intercolonial Railway to the Maritimes at a cost of four to five million pounds for the Canadian tax-payer.[20] In addition to his criticism of Confederation as unjustifiable from a financial point of view, he felt it would lead to the creation of an overpowering central authority that would jeopardize sectional rights. Both Dorion and Holton held out for Brown's initial idea of federating the two Canadas only.[21] Accordingly, both refused to support the pro-Confederation Ministry that Macdonald and Brown created in 1864. Their obstructionist tactics in the Confederation debate alienated any support from Ontario for them as prospective leaders of the Reform Party. Commented Brown on the possibility

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[18]Public Archives of Canada, Alexander Mackenzie Papers, Brown to Mackenzie, Aug. 20, 1869

[19]Thomson, D.C., quoted in, Alexander Mackenzie Clear Grit, (Macmillan, Toronto, 1960), p. 84

[20]Careless, op.cit., p. 142

[21]Ibid., p. 12 As late as 1869, Holton was still encouraging the anti-Confederation sentiment of the Maritime Liberals - See Thomson, op.cit., p. 108

of Luther Holton becoming Opposition Leader; "I am sure that such a step would greatly damage if not utterly ruin, our hopes of success at (the) next election. What a howl would be raised (in Ontario)!"[22]

Then there was Edward Blake, son of the distinguished jurist, William Hume Blake. The Blakes, with the Baldwins and the Cowans, were Irish Anglicans of the established aristocracy who on their arrival in Canada had taken up the cause of liberalism and nationalism.[23] Following in the footsteps of his famous father - a member of the Baldwin-Lafontaine Reform Ministry - Blake was first elected to parliament in both Ottawa and Toronto in 1867 under the dual representation system but first rose to prominence in the provincial legislature of Ontario. By 1871, exceptional mental ability, a razor-sharp legal mind and a flair for politics had all combined to make him at thirty-nine the intellectual giant of the Ontario Reformers, "the only legislator of commanding ability there", as one leading Liberal noted.[24] Certainly Blake had many qualifications for the title of federal opposition leader especially since in 1871 he was recognized as the Liberal chief in the Ontario Parliament. Yet, though exceptionally brilliant, the young lawyer was, as D.M. Farr observes,

> "unstable by temperament; aware of his abilities and morbidly suspicious of any fancied slight: ...subject to alternate moods of exultation and depression: intensely ambitious, restless and independent. Yet withal he was urbane and high-principled, a man who could display great social charm if he were so inclined"[25]

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[22]Mackenzie Papers, Brown to Mackenzie, Aug. 20, 1869

[23]Lower, op.cit., pp. 218-19

[24]Report of the Board of Trustees of the Public Archives of Nova Scotia 1952, Mackenzie to A.G.Jones, December 31, 1870

The only other possibility for the paramount position in the party was a stone-mason named Alexander Mackenzie. An emigrant from Scotland in 1842, Mackenzie had spent a life of unrelenting hardship and penury. After several years, Mackenzie, with the aid of his brother Hope, was able to set up a modest contracting business in Port Sarnia. The business prospered. "From Lake Erie to the shores of Lake Huron", one account states, "the solid flat-roofed brick and stone structures marked his progress. He built well; over a century later, some were still in use".[26] Throughout his career, Alexander Mackenzie was always a staunch supporter of liberalism. Soon after his arrival in Canada, Mackenzie, in the 1840s, had come to sympathize with the Baldwin Reform group and their ideal of responsible government. In 1850, the ex-Scot was captured by the influence of George Brown's tri-weekly Globe, the major journal of western Ontario. He found himself in full agreement with Brown's policies of responsible government, supremacy of British political institutions, religious and civil liberty, and separation of church and state. Thus, as a convert to Brown's political views, Mackenzie became active in politics as Secretary of the Central Reform Association of Lambton County. His first political victory as a Reform candidate came in 1854 as Lambton elected "Sandy Mackenzie" as their representative. It was not long before Mackenzie had established a deep and permanent relation with the Grit chieftain, George Brown, and become one of his

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[25] Farr, D.M.L., The Colonial Office and Canada, 1867-1887, (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1955), p. 22

[26] Thomson, op.cit., p. 25

lieutenants. In 1864 after Brown had explained the purpose of the great coalition to achieve a federal union, Mackenzie was the first Reformer to applaud the new scheme.[27] Although not a 'father of Confederation', Mackenzie made countless speeches in favour of it in both Canadas and the Maritimes, always defending Brown's decision to join Macdonald's Tories. Even after Brown withdrew from the Confederation Ministry when its success seemed certain, Mackenzie rushed to the defence of Brown to refute the criticism levelled by Reformers Howland and McDougall (who had remained in the Macdonald Cabinet) that Brown was splitting the party and not giving the Macdonald ministry a fair chance. So vigorous was his defence that by 1867 Mackenzie was recognized as Brown's chief deputy. As a politician, Mackenzie was a debator of first rank. Always a complete master of his facts, he attacked his opponents with revealing scrutiny and storming barrages of condemnation. Always uppermost in his mind were the principles of honest government, efficiency, justice and fairness to the last detail. Any form of corruption, patronage or political opportunism he was loath to tolerate. Caustic and pugnacious in debate, he soon created respect for his careful examination of questions under discussion. Although bluntly realistic, Mackenzie was not a man to compromise his principles.

Such were the choices for leadership. Brown, after his defeat in 1867, no longer would rule and insisted that his role henceforth would be advisory only. Dorion and Holton had alienated the majority of Ontario

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[27] Ibid., op.cit., p. 82

Reformers by their initial reluctance to accept Confederation. Even after the Rouge Party had been reconciled to the Union, no close harmony was achieved with the Ontario Reformers in the late eighteen-sixties. The Rouges were still essentially Québécois first and party supporters second; their M.P.'s felt no compulsion to support Liberal policy if it seemed detrimental to their interests. So Mackenzie found out when the Liberals opposed the Tory plan for the construction of a railway - promoted by Sir Hugh Allan and his Northern Colonization Railway - along the north shore of the St. Lawrence. The Ontario Liberals maintained, that such a railway was unnecessary and therefore an unjustified extravagance. "Holton is not able to say," Mackenzie wrote in 1869, "whether the Rouge party would consent to aid us in a vote against the North Shore route. Holton himself will do so and very probably a few more may be got but I fear not more than half a dozen".[28] It was obvious that neither Dorion or Holton could be regarded seriously as potential leaders of a united Reform opposition. Indeed they had no control over their own party: as late as 1869, a Rouge minority was still advocating dissolution and independence for Quebec.[29] This, Mackenzie feared, would only lead to eventual annexation by the United States. Thus he was driven to the conclusion that unless this group could be purged, "there must be a separation of the Rouge element from all connection with us".[30] In this George Brown

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[28] Brown Papers, Mackenzie to Brown, April 15, 1869

[29] Mackenzie Papers, Mackenzie to C. Black, May 19, 1869

[30] Ibid.

concurred, as "it would be better for each party to paddle its own canoe a little longer".[31] Likewise the Maritime Liberals, still less than enthusiastic about Confederation, had made no alliance with either the Ontario or Quebec wings; thus any hope that a leader might appear from this quarter was unrealistic. Seemingly, the only possibilities were Alexander Mackenzie and Edward Blake. The Reform opposition might shelve the question of formally uniting its diverse factions for the time being but it could not long beg the question of direction. Someone would have to lead, to supply impetus and momentum for the opposition, to keep check on the Tories. Since the Ontario Reformers constituted a majority of the Opposition, that someone would have to be an Ontario man, again either Edward Blake or Alexander Mackenzie. No other choice existed.

[31] Ibid., Brown to Mackenzie, Aug. 20, 1869

II

A STRUGGLING PARTY

Edward Blake in the eighteen-seventies was the boy-wonder politician of the Liberal Party and at the same time a figure of manifest unpredictability. "He is a perfect enigma to me," J.D. Edgar, an influential Liberal, once commented to Alexander Mackenzie, "... I don't see his game a bit".[1] Even to some journals of the time capriciousness was the main characteristic of this man: "He (Blake) has proven himself to be as erratic as a comet," complained the Montreal Gazette, "and no one friend or opponent can be certain for an hour ahead of his movements."[2] How did this influential politician acquire such a reputation? Firstly, the very nature of his character and manner helped to produce an aura of mysticism that obscured his motivations and repelled the intimacies of close friendship. Cold, reserved, super-sensitive, yet possessing an extraordinarily brilliant mind and endowed with a vast capacity for detail, legal work and administrative efficiency, Blake was, as O.D. Skelton says,

> "the most masterful and overwhelming logician, surveying every phase of the case, fitting argument into argument and heaping demonstration upon demonstration until his opponent sank crushed under the weight." 3

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[1] Mackenzie Papers, J.D. Edgar to Mackenzie, April 27, 1875

[2] The Montreal Gazette, November 3, 1876

This unexcelled ability at reasoned debate soon brought him general recognition as the foremost lawyer in Canada. An intellectual, deeply respected though feared and sometimes hated, he was always aloof from his political colleagues and even the electorate. Nevertheless, the respect that his ability inspired made him one of the most feared warriors of the Reform cause. The old master, George Brown, had early observed the outstanding qualities of the young Blake. Writing to Mackenzie on March 12, 1867,he described Blake as possessing "admirable, excellent common sense, an immense industry and great pluck - not much of a politician, but anxious to learn and as sharp as a needle."[4]

Thus in 1867, Blake, following in the political and legal tradition of his father, a prominent lawyer who had been Solicitor-General in the Baldwin-Lafontaine coalition ministry, entered both Ontario and federal politics. Achieving instant success, he set immediately to work to revive the waning fortunes of the Grit, or as it was known at this time, the Reform party. So great was his success that he became known far and wide throughout the land. His reward came after only three short years when he was named leader of the Ontario Liberals in 1870, replacing the aging Archibald McKellar who had held the post since 1867. McKellar in fact was instrumental in awarding this plum to Blake, since it was on his motion that the party selected the latter to direct its fortunes.[5]

But, like Mackenzie and many other prominent politicians, Blake at

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[3]Skelton, O.D., Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Vol. I (Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1921), p. 167

[4]Mackenzie Papers, Brown to Mackenzie, March 12, 1867

[5]Ibid., George Brown to William Buckingham, February 4, 1870

this time had his hand in both federal and provincial politics, a situation made possible by the then-existing device known as "Dual Representation" which allowed an individual to serve in both the Provincial and Dominion Houses at the same time. Such a dual role was, to say the least, physically exhausting, and most certainly, detrimental to one's business interests. Thus, on being persuaded to accept the provincial leadership, Blake had let it be known that he was determined not "to sit in two chambers as a permanent thing".[6] It remained to be seen which House Blake would select as the more suitable and commensurate with his abilities.

However, by no stretch of the imagination could Blake be considered the designated commander of the federal Liberal contingent. Since the retirement of the old Grit war horse, George Brown, the mantle of leadership had fallen (somewhat by default so it seemed) upon his chief lieutenant in the west, Alexander Mackenzie, the righteous and high-principled Scottish contractor turned politician.[7] The opponents of Sir John A. Macdonald and his cronies had for that matter come to look to Mackenzie for leadership against the Tories in the Dominion Parliament. Even the press had dubbed him with the title of opposition leador, an honour altogether unpalatable to the recipient. "I am nothing of the kind", Mackenzie wrote to a close friend in 1869.[8] "I would not allow

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Brown's other important lieutenant in Western Ontario, Archibald McKellar, was, as noted, named Reform leader in the provincial House in 1867.

[8] Mackenzie Papers, Mackenzie to Charles Black, May 10, 1869

the party to pass a vote naming me such when they proposed to do it last session." Yet, by his own admission, he was doing "the work which devolves on the leader".[9] It should be noted that as early as 1868 a party majority had attempted to persuade him to allow the party leadership to be conferred upon himself. He had refused the position probably because he had hoped that someday, somehow, George Brown might be persuaded to return to his rightful place as Macdonald's chief critic in Parliament.

The party which Mackenzie loosely directed - if it can be classified as a political party - was extremely weak, disorganized and even disunited. If the federal Liberals did possess a common sentiment, it was simply a repugnance towards Sir John A. Macdonald and the Tories. Confederation had only grudgingly been accepted by many in the Reform Party; indeed, in the early years the idea lingered on that it would yet prove to be a costly mistake. Some Liberals, like A.G. Jones of Halifax, were so vehement in their dislike of the new arrangement that they made little effort to attend the sessions of the House. Mackenzie sometimes had to struggle to overcome the reluctance of some Reformers to participate. "You make a mistake in staying away at the present time from Parliament," he admonished Jones in 1869. "You are looked upon as Howes (sic) chief opponent in your province and your absence will naturally be used to your prejudice by him and his friends."[10]

This disinclination of some Reformers to engage in the affairs of the nation illustrates the basic liability of the federal Liberals.

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[9] Ibid.

[10] Report of the Board of Trustees of the Public Archives of Nova Scotia, 1952, Mackenzie to A.G. Jones, May 10, 1869

Unlike the Conservatives who had been moulded by Sir John and Confederation into a unified group in which the majority of members accepted and supported executive direction, many Liberals, prior to 1873, showed little willingness to accept party discipline and support policies and tactics conceived by the prominent men in the party. In essence, they lacked the 'esprit de corps' necessary to involve each member in a concerted effort to achieve party ends. The basic momentum and leadership of the party came from the Ontario core; only if possible regional advantage were discerned by the Quebec and Maritime opponents of Sir John in particular proposals, could the Ontario wing count on their support. At best, all that existed in the immediate post-Confederation years among Reformers of the newly-united four provinces was a loose alignment that was only operative so long as local interests or regionalism did not seriously interfere. Thus provincialism, local jealousy and even sectional suspicion were the foremost problems hindering the formation of a national Liberal party.

Sectional suspicion in the Reform camp was not confined to Quebec or the Maritimes; it was quite prevalent as well among party members in Ontario, and was directed chiefly against the Liberal Rouges of Quebec. In these years the Rouges were still characterized by their radical designation earned in the 1850s and early 1860s. Although the Rouges now refrained from any open advocacy of annexation, many individuals within the party had unofficially voiced the desire to seek Canada's independence from Britain. For his part, however, Mackenzie feared that any disruption of the British connection would be the first step toward annexation. Moreover, he felt that A.A. Dorion, Luther Holton, and other

prominent Rouges, had been "acting in a half hysterical manner" in their pronouncements regarding the need for reciprocal trade with the United States.[11] Also the anti-union sentiment previously voiced by some Rouges had led to disaster for the Party in the form of bitter clerical hostility and open condemnation by the Church.[12] Mackenzie had little desire for the federal Liberals to incur in addition the wrath of the Quebec clergy. Thus he was convinced of the necessity of "a separation of the Rouge element from all connection with us."[13]

Nevertheless, despite Mackenzie's views, the same Luther Holton in the summer of 1869 undertook the task of bringing the two provincial parties into closer alignment. George Brown, who retained a prominent influence within party circles, was, however, exceedingly critical of the wisdom of such a step. And in consultation with Edward Blake, he found that the young lawyer shared his doubts "as to the propriety of a close connection - - - between the U.C. liberals & the L.C. Rouges"; the wisest procedure, in Brown's view was that "it would be better for each party to paddle its own canoe a little longer."[14] If Mackenzie were inclined to work for a closer organization of the two parties, the first step "would be to choose a party leader." Blake thought that "Holton aspires to that position & would be satisfied with nothing short of

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[11] Mackenzie Papers, Mackenzie to Black, May 19, 1869

[12] Wade, Mason, The French Canadians, 1760 - 1945 (Macmillan, Toronto, 1955), p. 340 and passim

[13] Mackenzie Papers, Mackenzie to Charles Black, May 19, 1869

[14] Mackenzie Papers, Brown to Mackenzie, August 20, 1869

it."[15] As previously noted, such a step, in Brown's estimation, would be very unwise.

Mackenzie was of a similar mind; any formal party structure should be avoided was his belief. "The more I think over Holton's proposition," he remarked, "the more I am inclined to avoid any formal organization. We can with some labour and prudence manage to keep up the appearance of a close organization through next session and do the work of a compact body." 16

Furthermore, in regard to the desirability of having Luther Holton as the head of any new political creation, Mackenzie concurred with Brown's opinion of the Rouge leader: "I am quite aware of Mr. Holton's ambition; equally aware that he would never suit."[17] Thus, the question for the present was shelved.

More important, in his letter of August 20, 1869, Brown had urged Mackenzie to consider taking over the mantle of leadership which he had given up. The former realized that Mackenzie was the chief asset and drawing card of the party in Ontario at that time (next to himself) and doubtless the best qualified to relieve Brown of his political responsibilities. "You are making rapid progress in public opinion", he was assured, "every day you are gaining strength with men of all parties & your position, it appears to me, is not capable of improvement. .... It might be useful to you to be formally elected leader of the U.C. section."[18]

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Brown Papers, Mackenzie to Brown, August 21, 1869

[17] Ibid.

[18] Mackenzie Papers, Brown to Mackenzie, August 20, 1869

Lest Mackenzie conceive of his formal selection as an obstacle to the possible return of the crusading journalist to the Parliamentary lists, Brown hastened to add: "I have not the slightest desire or intention of re-entering Parliamentary life." Brown was clearly determined not to undergo any further political humiliations at the polls. Mackenzie replied testily. "I think I need hardly say I would be the last man to subject you to any 'humiliation' . . . The (South) Ontario humiliation would not have happened if my opinion could have prevailed."[19]

Despite his former chief's obvious prodding, Mackenzie preferred to retain his unofficial capacity since the arrangement left open an avenue of escape for him should the position become too onerous. The proposed change would result in no political advantage in Mackenzie's opinion; then too, he possessed serious doubts as to his ability to give the party satisfactory leadership. Stated Mackenzie:

> "I have no wish, no anxiety as to the acquisition of the formal leadership of the Ontario liberals. In my present position I can refuse the often applied title when I please, and withdraw from its labours without blame... I can see no party advantage in the attainment. No man <u>can</u> be a leader unless he really does lead. If I can do so good and well (<u>sic</u>), if not the next best man steps forward." 20

These words were to have real significance in the eighteen-seventies as Edward Blake, "the next best man" stepped forward periodically from the sidelines in search of the party's leadership. As for Brown's desire that Mackenzie should assume the formal leadership immediately, Mackenzie remarked, "I would scorn to be the <u>manufactured</u> figurehead of the party

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[19]Brown Papers, Mackenzie to Brown, August 21, 1869

[20]<u>Ibid</u>.

if not possessed of ability or power to sustain its honours. Who can forget poor Foley's ludicrous leadership in 1862?"[21] It would appear that in 1869 Alexander Mackenzie was wanting in self-confidence, or felt that if he did assume the leadership he would merely be the mouth piece of George Brown. Even four years later, when he became the official leader of the party,some continued to wonder whether he was in fact the leader in his own right, or simply a "manufactured figurehead of the party".

Edward Blake at this time apparently possessed no strong opinions concerning structural changes in the federal Liberal Party. In regard to the proposed merger of the Ontario and Quebec groups, that gentleman seemed rather indifferent. Although he did not share the antagonism felt by both Brown and Mackenzie towards the scheme, neither was he enthusiastic. Rather he accepted any new organization "as a choice of difficulties."[22] Still Mackenzie had "no doubt" that Blake would "be willing to continue our present arrangements".

Mackenzie,however, realized that a coalition of the fragmented opposition groups under central direction offered the only promise of success in the struggle against Macdonald and his efficiently organized national party machine. Only in unity and the party's expansion could any hope be entertained for future success. To persist in the present

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[21] Ibid., Michael Foley had been officially elected Reform leader by the party caucus in 1862 after Oliver Mowat and William MacDougall had both refused the position. As Professor Careless comments, Foley soon "pretty conclusively proved his incapacity for command during the session and ended in violent, open quarrels with his colleagues".
Careless, J.M.S. op.cit., p. 64

[22] Ibid.

Loose organization would only mean continued frustration. Some attempt to achieve political harmony among the various factions of the opposition, therefore, had to be made. Thus, late in March 1870, Mackenzie convened "all the opposition elements" in a general meeting to put forward the idea of a unified opposition party.[23] William Ross and Thomas Coffin, later members of the Mackenzie cabinet, were "a little cautious" about it all. The other leading reformers from Nova Scotia, however, J.F. Forbes and James W. Carmichael, were quick to accept the idea. From New Brunswick, seven Reformers attended and were "well satisfied", while A.J. Smith and T.W. Anglin were "not present but disposed to go with us". Mackenzie fully expected that this meeting would "bear fruit next session".[24] A healthy opposition party for the first time seemed to be in the offing. At this time the Liberals of Nova Scotia were badly split. Joseph Howe, leader of the party, had been won over to the Tories and Confederation by the appeal of Macdonald's ameliorating "better terms" for the Province and by the offer of a cabinet position in Ottawa. Howe's switch in allegiance induced many of his old supporters to follow his lead. The disgruntled Liberals who remained seethed with indignation and a sense of betrayal. Thus, they were willing to consider Mackenzie's proposal to create a strong opposition party as a means of retaliation for Howe's 'desertion'. Probably they were coming to realize at this time that despite their repugnance for Confederation, the bonds of union would

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[23] Nova Scotia Archives Report, op.cit., Mackenzie to Jones, April 12, 1870

[24] Ibid.

remain fixed and that continued opposition to the new state would accomplish nothing.

The next session revealed that Mackenzie's hope had been overly optimistic. This session (1871) was primarily concerned with the terms admitting British Columbia to Confederation. The Conservatives had pledged that the Dominion would build a railway to British Columbia within the exceptionally short period of ten years with the actual construction to commence within two; the cost of construction was estimated at one hundred million dollars. To head off any additional taxation, extensive land grants of rich prairie land, and government subsidies that could be afforded, were to be given to the contracting company. Mackenzie, however, was not convinced that these terms could be realized without additional financial burdens. In his opinion they were wholly unrealistic. It was impossible to attempt to estimate either the cost or the time involved. Since it was impossible to fulfill these conditions, he offered an amendment to the terms of union that

> "Canada should not be pledged to do more than proceed at once with the necessary survey, and, after the route is determined, to prosecute the work at as early a period as the state of its finances will justify." 25

This was the only sound - and honest - policy in Mackenzie's opinion. However, most of the Nova Scotian Reformers refused to join the other federal Liberals in support of the Mackenzie amendment. "If the Nova Scotia members would go with us our amendment would be carried," he

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[25]Debates, House of Commons, March 28, 1871 p. 674

informed Brown during the course of the debate.[26]

> "but I believe they are resolved to go with the Government, all but Jones, Carmichael and Killam. They are without exception the meanest lot of plundering rascals ever known. Jones is very angry and intensely disgusted with his fellow members."

No doubt, the Nova Scotia Reformers did not concur with Mackenzie's argument that the whole project was unrealistic. They well realized the value of a railway connecting a remote area of the Dominion to the wealthy core of Ontario; otherwise there was scarcely a hope for prosperity within Confederation for the west coast. They had also heard the Ontario Reformers use the same arguments of needless extravagance and resultant excessive taxation to attack the construction of the Intercolonial Railway to the eastern seaboard. In addition, Mackenzie offered no concrete proof - as far as they could see - that the railway policy of the Conservatives could not be implemented as outlined. Thus because of an affinity of interests with British Columbia and its desire for a railroad to link it to the heart of Canada, the Nova Scotian members were most reluctant to support Mackenzie's railway policy. Thus Mackenzie had not yet succeeded in achieving unity among party members. Nevertheless, this goal was now much closer to realization; had he been able to muster nine more supporters, his amendment would have carried.[27]

For another year the Reform party continued to drift, divided and vulnerable as the unstable Nova Scotians refused to commit themselves to follow consistently the Ontario lead. The main problem for the party was

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[26]Brown Papers, Mackenzie to Brown, March 30, 1871

[27]Thomson, D.C., Alexander Mackenzie Clear Grit, (Macmillan, Toronto, 1960), p. 126

still regionalism. As long as the Ontario majority continued to dominate the party, and made little attempt to define or comprehend the interests of the Maritime Reformers, no cohesive party could materialize. The Ontario Liberals still retained the legacy of the narrow provincial outlook so prominent in Upper Canada during the eighteen-fifties. Mackenzie probably comprehended this situation to some degree; however to him, the interest of the Ontario majority - and of course Liberal principles - could not be sacrificed simply to soothe a handful of Maritime Reformers. None the less, pressure from time to time was exerted on the recalcitrants in the hope of obtaining their loyalty and support. Some promise of a rapprochement did in fact come from these efforts during the parliamentary session of 1872, and Mackenzie became convinced that conciliation was imminent. "It seems probable," he wrote Brown confidentially, "that an understanding will be arrived at with (the) Nova Scotia Members which will bring a good majority from the Province into line" with the Reform policies laid down by Mackenzie and his lieutenants.[28]

It is evident that a reconciliation of sorts with the Nova Scotian Reformers was indeed achieved during the 1872 session; at the same time, however, it cannot be asserted that these bonds were effectively forged. Interestingly enough, only a year later, A.G. Jones, despite his reputation as the leading Maritime Reformer, refused to participate in a gathering called for the purpose of formally selecting an official leader of the federal Liberals. As Mackenzie put it, "he declined as he thought

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[28]Brown Papers, Mackenzie to Brown, no date, but written during the 1872 Parliamentary Session

it better at present not go to that length".[29] Nor is there any available evidence to suggest that any of his Nova Scotian colleagues attended. It is difficult to explain why they hesitated to identify themselves with the Mackenzie party. Seemingly the only plausible explanation is that the old love of freedom, independence and provincialism had not as yet been conquered by the manifest necessity of political unity. In addition, the confining conflict over transcontinental railway policy thwarted any concrete move toward effective co-operation.

Notwithstanding these formidable obstacles, Mackenzie continued to plead for Maritime support. It was useless to insist on regional independence, maintained Mackenzie; only through affecting harmony within the party would there be any hope of achieving positive regional benefits. "In Ontario & Quebec we can carry all before us," Mackenzie told Jones flatly. "N.S. & N.B. should understand that the country cannot be governed by the smaller Provinces combining against the two larger."[30] That the 'leader' of the party that had always championed provincial rights should make such a statement is indeed interesting.

This bluntly worded invitation to get on the Liberal bandwagon while there was still time was probably instrumental in changing the political thinking of Jones and his colleagues. At any rate, by the end of July 1873, the Nova Scotian Liberals as a body were willing to co - operate - and support - their colleagues from Ontario and Quebec. This was joyful news for Mackenzie. "I am very glad," he informed Thomas

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[29] Ibid., Mackenzie to Brown, March 5, 1873

[30] Nova Scotia Archives Report, Mackenzie to Jones, March 11, 1873

Coffin, "that the Nova Scotia Liberals are ready to join their friends in the Commons. I am sure that they will have no reason to regret this at the hands of Ontario's & Quebec Liberals (sic)".[31] Once ensconced within the Liberal camp, the Nova Scotians became stalwart supporters of the party. "The Nova Scotians stood handsomely" was Mackenzie's comment to Jones[32] as he described the manoeuvring by each side in the Pacific Scandal Debate. Even so, it was not long until Mackenzie had cause to regret the presence of certain representatives from the Atlantic coast.

Although the Liberals failed to taste the fruits of victory in the 1872 Dominion election,[33] the splendid showing of the party warmed the hearts of each member.[34] The party had done especially well in Ontario. There were several factors to account for its good showing at the polls. Firstly, there was the dissatisfaction over the onerous

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[31]Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.I, Mackenzie to Coffin, July31, 1873

[32]Nova Scotia Archives Report, Mackenzie to Jones, Nov. 10, 1873

[33]Their failure, no doubt, was partially due to Blake's absence in England. Commented Mackenzie to Jones in August 26, 1872, "Blake's absence has been a heavy drawback to us (in the canvass) & has probably cost us one or two constituencies....I am nearly dead with fatigue." (Nova Scotia Archives Report, Mackenzie to Jones, August 26, 1872)

[34]In the 1872 canvass, the Conservatives captured 103 seats while the Opposition elected 97 members. In Ontario, Liberal strength consisted of 50 members while the Tories managed to carry only 38 ridings. (See E.P. Dean, "How Canada has Voted 1867-1945", Canadian Historical Review, Sept. 1949, Vol.30, pp. 227-248)

railway agreement with British Columbia. Secondly, the Liberals shrewdly exploited the shortcomings of the Washington Treaty allegedly negotiated by Sir John with the United States, in which Canadian rights had seemingly been sacrified, as the United States gained navigational rights on the St. Lawrence and admission to the Atlantic fisheries at incredible low cost. Nor was any compensation for the Fenian Raids obtained from the United States. Also, the memory of the Riel Rebellion of 1870 and the inept handling of it by the Conservatives lingered on - especially their failure to punish the murderers of Thomas Scott. Likewise, the Manitoba settlement with its guarantees to Roman Catholicism rankled the hearts of many Ontario Orangemen. Lastly, the Liberal organization buoyed up by the topling of Sandfield Macdonald's provincial regime fought a campaign of great vigour. In addition to these failures, Mackenzie attacked Macdonald on a number of other charges; namely his hesitancy in accepting Confederation when first proposed, his reluctance to let Parliament control the spending of public monies, his political opportunism, his denial of the 'rep by pop' principle in granting British Columbia an unjustified six representatives, his political patronage and the unjustified spending of money to obtain votes. The list seemed to be endless. All in all, Mackenzie had an abundance of political ammunition which he did not hesitate to fire at the Tories - successfully in many cases. The Tories were only able to wrest victory in the election by a small majority - and only with the lavish spending of Sir Hugh Allan's money as the Pacific Scandal later proved. Thus when the new Parliament assembled, it seemed possible that Sir John might go down to defeat on the floor of the House. With the chance of success so near at

hand, the feeling was prevalent that an official party leader should be selected. The great majority of the Liberal representatives had at last realized by March 1873 that sectionalism was indeed a curse to the political health of the party, and that an official leader acceptable to all Reform factions must be named.

Thus, the day before the House commenced the 1873 Session, the Liberals got down to the serious task of selecting a leader. In a meeting of the Ontario Liberals on March 5, 1873, Mackenzie reiterated the need to select a leader who could weld all sections together into one solid front. Then he expressed his "intention of declining to have my name mentioned in connection with the Leadership."[35] His suggestion was that Edward Blake, recently resigned as Premier of Ontario, (1871) and now returned revitalized and full of energy from his rest-cure in England, be drafted as the new leader. "I then pointed out ... that I thought Mr. Blake's name would probably be received by the other provinces as the most suitable" to bring together the diverse segments of the party.[36] Immediately the wrangling began. Many of the Ontario men felt that since Mackenzie, not Blake, was Brown's chosen disciple, Mackenzie therefore should continue to wear Brown's mantle. Some felt that his association with the old Grit leader was a distinct liability for Mackenzie. As Richards expressed it, "many thought Mr. Mackenzie was too closely allied with Mr. Brown. it (sic) would be much better to consider whether it would not be wise to think of another man". George Brown, as

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[35] Brown Papers, Mackenzie to Brown, March 5, 1873

[36] Ibid.

Professor Careless has vividly revealed, had alienated and earned the hatred of many people - in particular the French Canadians - through his editorial polemics attacking the power of the Roman Catholic Church and what he conceived to be French domination of the government. In a private letter to Edward Blake, Edward Penny, a staunch Quebec Liberal, took stock of the damage done to the party by Brown's paper. "Our French friends were one after another forced out of public life years ago by the fanatical anti-Catholicism of the Globe."[37] Four years after his retirement from active political life, George Brown was still anathema to some people.

Yet others were ready to discount any adverse influence that the Brown connection might have erected at that time. Dr. Bergin, in the same committee meeting of March 5th, vigorously denounced the "Reformers who yielded to the Tory attempt to make a bugaboo of Brown."[38] Bergin had no doubt whatsoever that "the Reformers of the east had entire confidence in Mr. Brown . . . and that the party owed more to him than (to) any other man." In any event, Mackenzie, despite the pleas from certain members, remained adamant in his determination to step down from the so-called leadership.

At a second smaller committee meeting jointly composed of Ontario and Quebec Liberals on the same day (March 5, 1873), the members seemed inclined at first to give approval to Dorion's suggestion that the Ontario wing should select the new leader, since "she (i.e. Ontario) had more than all the others in number." Moreover, Luc Letellier de St. Just

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[37]Mackenzie and Blake Papers, Edward Penny to Blake, Sep. 13, 1873

[38]Brown Papers, Mackenzie to Brown, March 5, 1873

soon put forth Blake's name for consideration. "Quebec would prefer Blake", he proclaimed as he delivered "an extravagant eulogy" on the merits of Blake.[39] This eulogy had little effect, for Blake like Mackenzie was quick to quash the hopes held for his candidacy. Twice "at our own meeting and also in the committee," Blake proclaimed "that he could not accept the position."[40] Seemingly an impasse had been reached; Mackenzie also absolutely refused to be "in any way a candidate". The only other possibility was a dark horse, Antoine Aimé Dorion. Could Dorion be persuaded to accept the leadership nomination? "If Blake persists in his refusal," Mackenzie felt, "Dorion will no doubt be chosen leader."

The next morning, on March 6, a few hours before the time set for the delivery of the Throne Speech, the committee re-convened. Blake positively refused to allow his name to be considered. Mackenzie then tried to persuade Dorion to accept a draft, but "Holton, Geoffrion, Jetté and Dorion were unanimous in the opinion that an Ontario man should lead"[41] since any future leader must have the backing of the large English Reform group in Ontario. At this point in the meeting everyone seemed to clamour for Mackenzie to accept. As the pressure reached its climax Mackenzie finally succumbed and, allowed the committee to submit his name to the meeting. The outcome was a foregone conclusion. The seventy odd members at the meeting gave loud approval to the motion presented by

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[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid., March 7, 1873

Holton and Jetté nominating Mackenzie as leader. Many laudatory speeches were made emphasizing his ability; in fact, recorded Mackenzie, "it would be impossible to make handsomer (sic) speeches than those made by Holton, Dorion and Blake."[42] The same day the party caucus concurred unanimously with the committee's recommendation.

Thus Alexander Mackenzie was officially proclaimed leader of the federal Liberal Party. Why though did Mackenzie accede to the demands of the party? As he informed his brother Charles, although he "was extremely unwilling to accept", he could discover "no escape" from the demands of the members. "Of course," he continued, "the honour is a great one, especially when accompanied by such speeches as Holton's, Dorion's and Blake's, and conferred with entire unanimity"[43] However, despite the glowing plaudits that had come his way, he confessed to Brown: "I am still afraid, indeed convinced that I made a serious mistake in accepting but the way seemed to be closed up against retreat."[44] Yet, despite Mackenzie's acknowledgment of his new responsibilities, a feeling of unity now coursed through the veins of the party for the first time in its history. Everyone was satisfied - at least for the moment. Even Mackenzie himself grudgingly admitted that "altogether nothing could be more satisfactory than the feeling prevalent among members. I never saw so much

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[42] Ibid.

[43] Buckingham, W. and Ross, G., The Honourable Alexander Mackenzie, His Life and Times, (Rose Publishing Company, Toronto, 1892, 5th edition), p. 330

[44] Brown Papers, Mackenzie to Brown, March 7, 1873

unanimity before in my experience."[45] Unfortunately, despite every effort, Mackenzie could not maintain this unanimity. It shortly disintegrated into dissension.

At this time, the party, in addition to naming its official leader, also inaugurated a tighter party organization which included party 'whips' to marshall and co-ordinate Liberal strength in House divisions. For these new changes, Mackenzie was primarily responsible. In doing so, he had definite aims in mind. "I have only adopted party organization as a means to an end", he explained, "that end being a change of policy in the government and on many grounds a change of administration."[46] The programme that Mackenzie desired, whether instituted by the Conservatives or the Liberals was the introduction of such virtues as efficiency, stringent economy and honesty as fundamental criteria for the administration of public affairs. In the early eighteen-seventies, the Liberal Party, despite its potentially disruptive factions, had begun to prove that it did have the necessary flexibility for solving the problems that threatened to destroy it. It was in effect in the process of becoming a national party. Tighter party organization and direction had been established and an official leader named. The party had embraced a philosophy of strict political morality, efficiency in government, and a denial of opportunism for political advantage. The legacy of George Brown had done much to establish the party, but the Liberal Party of the

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[45] Ibid.

[46] Ontario Public Archives, Sir Richard Cartwright Papers, Mackenzie to Richard Cartwright, September 4, 1873

eighteen-seventies bore solidly the imprint of Alexander Mackenzie.

Initially, one of the chief problems for Mackenzie, in addition to the myriad of daily governmental questions, was the construction of an efficient, popularly - supported cabinet that would win the party the allegiance of the country. Revealed in Mackenzie's continuous attempts to maintain an effective ministry were the divisive problems of regionalism, petty politics, patronage, quibbling among certain party lieutenants, and a periodic challenge - though often disguised - to the Prime Minister's leadership posed by perhaps the most able man in the Liberal Party, Edward Blake.

To many, Blake was an enigma. As already noted, no one denied his brilliance, his consummate political skill, his exceptional mind, his legal ability par excellence, his all-encompassing debating technique; however, few could understand his inexplicable political behaviour at certain points during the Mackenzie era. Immediately after assuming the provincial leadership in Ontario from Archibald McKellar in early 1870, Blake had set to work to revitalize the party; simultaneously he subjected the Sandfield Macdonald government at Toronto to a constant verbal barrage. Under Blake's vigorous and brilliant direction, the party sprung back to life. By the end of the year, most party officials were confidently predicting early success. Yet at the same time, although only one or two individuals were aware of it, Blake's zeal was beginning to flag. Mackenzie's diagnosis of the cause of this alarming sign was simply that

Blake was "thoroughly tired of the Local House."[47] Did this mean that Blake was simply dissatisfied, disinterested, or disgusted with local politids? At any rate, the trouble did not develop into a serious problem until the dying days of the following year. One day shortly after mid - December 1871, Mackenzie received from Blake a jarring letter couched in urgent terms. "Take the leadership, I beg of you, as I did long ago."[48] Blake apparently was determined to resign! If Mackenzie was reluctant to assume command, Blake suggested "a small

> committee, Mackenzie, McKellar, Currie, Crooks & Robinson or something like that, to manage in the meantime; however this is a very clumsy expedient, and (I) should infinitely prefer in the interests of the party to see you at once installed." 49

Blake without doubt desired to rid himself of the responsibilities of the leadership, and, as Thomson states, "to avoid the Premiership"[50] which appeared imminent at any moment. Thomson errs however, in stating that Blake also "wanted....to get out of the Legislature entirely."[51] Blake specifically stated in his letter to Mackenzie on December 17, 1871, "I need hardly say that I shall be at the command of yourself or the committee at all times, and that I will try to do my share of the work of the House."[52] Nevertheless, despite all his determination, Blake was

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[47] Nova Scotia Archives Report, Mackenzie to Jones, Dec.31, 1870

[48] Mackenzie Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, December 17, 1871

[49] Ibid.

[50] Thomson, op.cit., p. 128

[51] Ibid.

[52] Mackenzie Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, December 17, 1871

somehow induced, when the Sandfield Macdonald government collapsed, to accept the Premiership and form a Liberal administration with himself as pilot - at least temporarily. As a Conservative informant commented to Sir John, on Dec. 20, 1871, "After my arrival here I met Code M.O.P. ... He says Blake was averse (sic) to going in (i.e. forming an administration) and does not intend to remain in. Mackenzie was of the same mind."[53]

The collapse of the Sandfield Macdonald Ministry was not unexpected. The Government had received a small majority in the provincial elections in the spring of 1871. However, eight seats were still in doubt on account of charges of electoral corruption. The premier's insistence that the eight members should be seated until the outcome of by-elections and that his railway policies could not be changed[54] were instrumental in giving Blake and the Liberals the upper hand. After five adverse votes against the government when the House met in early December, J.S. Macdonald finally resigned as certain key men detached themselves from the "axe-grinder's" band of supporters.[55] This desertion had fatal consequences in the opinion of John Carling, a personal friend of Sir John.

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[53]Public Archives of Canada, Richard W. Scott Papers, A. Morris to Sir J.A. Macdonald, December 20, 1871

[54]Macdonald had insisted that the provincial cabinet have the right to spend $ 1,500,000 as it saw fit on aid to provincial railways. Blake and the Liberals insisted that every railway grant should have the approval of the Legislative Assembly. As C.R. Biggar states, "It was this determination to substitute executive for parliamentary control which formed the chief issue in the provincial elections of 1871." The outcome for Macdonald was the failure to obtain a working majority. (Biggar, C.R.W., Sir Oliver Mowat, Vol.I, (Toronto, 1905) p. 148

[55]For the origin of this nick-name, see Thomson, op.cit., p. 129

"Had we not been deserted by such men as Decon, McCall, Wood (Victoria) McManus & Boultbee", Carling stated, ..."we would have been in a different position."[56] The ringleader of the revolt was none other than the influential Conservative, R.W. Scott, who "used all his influence to get those whom I have named to vote against us".[57]

No doubt, the supporters of Sandfield Macdonald possessed ample reason to rebel. While many were willing to support his policies, most agreed that Macdonald possessed little skill as a legislator or party chief. Inefficiency in drawing up legislation and guiding it through the House combined with a lack of political finesse in the management of his supporters rendered him quite ineffective as Premier. R.W. Scott, in a confidential letter to Sir John summed it up thus: "Sandfield was quite unequal to the management of this House from the start and it became merely a question of time how soon a crisis would be eventuated... a senseless hostility to Ottawa interests was only one of the many causes."[58] The "Ottawa interests" presumably were Scott's financial friends, who were promoting the construction of the Canada Central Railway, a venture opposed by J.S. Macdonald.

Thus it was that the Sandfield Macdonald Government collapsed and Blake and the Liberals took up the reins of government. Blake as provincial leader was called upon to form the new administration and

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[56]Scott Papers, John Carling to J.A. Macdonald, December 21, 1871

[57]Ibid.

[58]Scott Papers, R.W. Scott to J.A. Macdonald, December 20, 1871

selected Scott as Commissioner of Crown Lands and McKellar as Commissioner of Agriculture and Public Works.[59] At first, Blake had an extremely difficult time in inducing Mackenzie to enter the new provincial cabinet, but in the end he overcame the reluctance of the ex-Scot to participate in provincial politics. There were two main reasons for Mackenzie's acceptance of the Provincial Treasury portfolio: Firstly to gain practical experience in the administration of public monies and in governmental affairs generally, and secondly to terminate dual representation.

The Blake administration lasted only six weeks; yet its record was extremely impressive. The highlights consisted of measures to achieve strict legislative control of railway construction, to improve education and the quality of teaching through increased public spending, to augment municipal aid, to give grants to new settlers, and financial help to hospitals and other social welfare measures, and finally to abolish the device of dual representation. To eliminate any possibility of governmental corruption, no legislator would be allowed to hold an office supplying remuneration from the Crown. Procedures for instituting suits against the Crown were also simplified.

The abolition of dual representation in mid-1872 posed a grave question for Blake: should he continue to employ his talents in guiding the fortunes of the Ontario Liberals as a big frog in a little puddle, or should he gamble and transfer his activities to the federal arena in the hope of achieving even greater distinction?

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[59]For the other members of Blake's cabinet, see Biggar, op.cit., p. 150

For Mackenzie, there was no grave or difficult decision to make; since Confederation, he had always been associated primarily with federal politics - and always would be, he was resolved. In fact, as acting leader of the federal Liberals, it was his duty to devote as much of his time as possible to national affairs. Thus, the relinquishment of his Ontario portfolio came as a matter of course with the termination of dual representation.

There were many, however, who wanted Edward Blake to eschew federal politics. His real sphere of influence, it was argued, centered primarily on the politics of Ontario; any departure for the federal arena, in their view, would be a grievous mistake. "You should make up your mind to remain at the head of the Ontario Parliament," advised J.S. Smith in June 1872.[60] Smith's reasoning was simple: little if any political advantage could be gained if Blake were to transfer his abilities to Ottawa; on the other hand, if he remained in Toronto as provincial premier, he could "keep things right there for years to come." There was very little hope, he informed Blake, "of the reform Party getting control of afairs (sic) in Ottawa for some time taking into consideration the amount of money likely to be at their (the Tories) disposal."[61]

Blake, however, by mid-1872, seemed to lose all interest in politics. No doubt he had been left exhausted by the legislative duties as provincial chieftain and the rough and tumble rigours of fighting the Macdonald Government in the federal House. After the close of Canada's

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[60] Blake Papers, J.S. Smith to Blake, June 7, 1872

[61] Ibid.

first federal Parliament, he left immediately for a complete rest in England. However, shortly afterwards rumours began to circulate that he was considering a complete and permanent withdrawal from the political arena. Unquestionably the man was ill but if this rumour was confirmed, it would be a disaster for the party at election time since Blake's prestige accounted for many Liberal votes.[62] William Proudfoot, shortly after he had heard the story in mid-June, wrote hastily to entreat Blake "not to think of this for sometime to come." In Proudfoot's opinion, the young lawyer's influence was "widening & spreading in every direction where opinion is to be influenced irrespective of interest. Your control is to a far greater extent than the same in 'power'."[63] Proudfoot seemingly visualized Blake as the purger of evil and purifier of politics. "What many hope from your influence is the creation of a sounder and healthier tone in politics so that they may be engaged in by honourable men without the necessity of soiling their characters."[64] Various letters of a similar nature were probably influential in persuading Blake to give up any thoughts of resignation that he may have harboured. He did however decide to absent himself from politics for a few months in the hope that a rest in England would restore his physical vigour. But full retirement

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[62]Such was the situation encountered by Mackenzie in the 1872 federal canvass during which Blake was absent. Commented Mackenzie to Nova Scotia's A.G. Jones, "Blake's absence has been a heavy drawback to us, & has probably cost us one or two constituencies." (Nova Scotia Archives Report, Mackenzie to Jones, August 26, 1872

[63]Blake Papers, Wm. Proudfoot to Blake, June 19, 1872

[64]Ibid.

was not his intention: the people, he let it be known, could expect him to resume his political career upon his return, in fact it was to be pursued in the federal parliament exclusively, the only place worthy of his exceptional talents. There had never been any possible chance that Blake would consider returning to the provincial legislature. As noted, as early as December 1870, he had become thoroughly tired of 'the Local House'. The abolition of dual representation was a convenient way to relinquish provincial responsibilities and devote himself exclusively to federal politics. No doubt the thought occurred to him that he might duplicate on the federal level his great success in provincial politics. Leadership of the federal Liberals was within his grasp if he played his cards correctly. Meanwhile, to fill the breach in the Provincial House, Oliver Mowat was persuaded by the Blake-Brown-Mackenzie triumvirate to give up his position on the Bench and assume the leadership of the provincial Reformers.[65]

The disintegration and collapse of the Blake-Mackenzie modus operandi, that is, Blake manipulating Ontario politics and Mackenzie directing Reform fortunes on the federal scene, came as a profound surprise to many. Why had Blake cast aside the glory and prestige that were his as provincial premier? His efficiency and popularity in the Ontario House had been proven both to himself and the people at large. These successes and triumphs, charges Sir Richard Cartwright, an erstwhile colleague, whetted Blake's appetite for greater glories - the glories of

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[65] Biggar, op.cit., pp. 151-152

the Prime Ministership of Canada.[66] If this were Blake's intention, what support could he count on in the realization of such a vaulting ambition? The young lawyer had always commanded a fairly large following in the federal House, as well as substantial support from the general public. Among the various papers of the country, there were some that were extremely laudatory of his activities. A French-Canadian newspaper, La Gazette du Sorel, went so far as to proclaim Blake "le premier homme de l'opposition".[67] Without doubt, he did possess sufficient strength to achieve notable prominence in federal politics.

If Blake had transferred his political ambitions to the federal arena with a view to achieving a greater degree of prestige and the wider recognition that the federal scene could confer, why then did he refuse to contest the party leadership? In the talks to select an official party leader, Blake had refused several times to allow his candidacy for the position, and yet quite probably it could have been his for the asking. The reason for Blake's failure to act, charges Cartwright, was that, despite his desire for the glories and prestige inherent in the position of party leader, "he was so afraid of being criticized as one who had shirked the fight at the general election of 1872 and then demanded the lion's share of the spoils."[68] Indeed, in 1872, the year of Blake's

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[66]Cartwright, Sir Richard, Reminiscences, (Wm. Briggs, Toronto, 1912) pp. 134-148 and passim

[67]Burke, Sister Teresa Avila, quoted in, "Mackenzie and His Cabinet 1873-78", Canadian Historical Review Vol.XLI, No 2, June 1960 pp. 128-148

[68]Cartwright, op.cit., p. 148

absence in England, it had been Mackenzie who had unfurled party standards and directed the party campaign. Thus, Blake "would not allow himself to be nominated and repented ever after."[69] Without doubt, Mackenzie's great effort in the 1872 elections did influence Blake in his decision not to pursue the leadership for the moment. According to Mackenzie, Blake refused to allow his nomination on the grounds that "the late elections were carried by my influence and exertions and consequently if an Ontario man were to be chosen, it must be me (sic)".[70] Thus it was that Mackenzie was chosen official leader of the federal Liberals despite the fact that Mackenzie felt Blake ought to have been selected since "his splendid attributes and his standing in the country gave him many advantages, while his legal knowledge gave him additional power, placing him ahead of all others in the House."[71]

It soon became clear that Blake was not at all happy in his less than commanding position in the party. By August 1873, it was becoming evident to most political observers, as more and more indisputable evidence of corruption against the Macdonald administration in its negotiations with the Allan syndicate to build the Pacific railway came to light, that it was only a matter of time before the government would be toppled from power. Yet Blake was resolved that when the collapse came, he would not be a member of the new Liberal administration. Writing confidentially

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[69] Ibid.

[70] Buckingham and Ross, op.cit., quoted in, p. 330; Mackenzie to brother Charles, March 6, 1873

[71] Ibid.

to Cartwright, he proclaimed "my determination is fixed not to go in... If there were (which there are not) reasons making my presence in a new administration of vital consequence, I would only come in as one of the council without office."[72] It is difficult to conceive what considerations could have persuaded the influential barrister to dissociate himself from his colleagues in any future ministry. Blake in this letter does not specify the reasons for his resolve. One can only conclude that he had decided to make things as difficult for Mackenzie as he possibly could.

In this reluctance to take a cabinet position Blake persisted, even though he employed every available strategem to speed the Macdonald debacle. "Blake absolutely refuses and will not be moved": this was the curt message to Brown from Mackenzie on November 5, 1873. "He says it would ruin him at present."[73] Yet it was not likely that any assumption of a portfolio would prevent a man of Blake's talents from achieving suitable financial goals; however, association with an administration led by Mackenzie might "ruin him" politically, in that any contemplated displacement of Mackenzie might be more easily accomplished from the outside than from within the cabinet.

Unexpectedly on this same day, November 5, 1873, the Macdonald government suddenly gave up the ghost. "The collapse has come sooner than I expected," Mackenzie hastened to tell Brown in a second letter.

> "I found the Governor very cordial ... He offered an immediate dissolution if wanted and intimated his own

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[72]Cartwright Papers, Blake to Cartwright, August 25, 1873

[73]Brown Papers, Mackenzie to Brown, November 5, 1873

> opinion that ... a House "tainted as it must be with the use of Allan's money" could not be respected." 74

As the Governor-General at this time of governmental crisis, Lord Dufferin had played his cards well. Although solidly sympathetic with Macdonald - a man who had no equal in ability or charm he felt[75] - yet the Queen's representative could not be accused of favouritism in his handling of the Pacific Scandal. As early as October 19, he had informed Macdonald that the latter's "personal connection with what has passed cannot but fatally affect your position as minister."[76] Dufferin felt that Macdonald and his ministers should tender their resignations before Parliamentary censure rather than endure the stigma of official public condemnation. In any event, they could not be permitted to retain office by "a vitiated parliamentary majority."[77] Thus, it was, as some of his Conservative supporters - more accurately nominal Conservatives - defected from the party, Macdonald and his cabinet resigned. As Mackenzie was given his commission for forming a new government, Dufferin justified his actions in not calling on the Liberals sooner. "Now," he told Mackenzie,

> "you become Prime Minister ... not through any unfair advantage ... nor through the premature condemnation of men who have been given no opportunity of making their defence, nor in consequence of any violent act

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[74] Ibid., second letter of the day

[75] Creighton, Vol.II, op.cit., pp. 171-172

[76] Ibid., p. 171

[77] Ibid., p. 172

> of intervention on my part, but because your opponents after every chance has been given them have been condemned by a full Parliament of Canada." 78

Thus, as Mackenzie found himself suddenly called upon to construct a cabinet, the problem of Blake's recalcitration would have to be overcome. "I don't see how I can get along without him," Mackenzie sadly informed Brown.[79] Perhaps Blake could be pressured into joining the new administration; no stone must be left unturned in the effort to persuade him to change his mind about retiring. "I want you to send him a strong telegram as soon as you can ... Pressure alone can make him come in and I fear even that will fail."[80] How well Mackenzie knew Blake's mind.

As Mackenzie had anticipated, Brown's influence was not sufficient to induce a change in Blake's thinking. As a last resort to compel the erring lord of power to reconsider his self-imposed exile from the new cabinet, someone - in all probability the influential party whip of the Liberals, J.D. Edgar - conceived the idea of the whole party petitioning Blake to review his stand. This petition, signed by one hundred and four Liberal members of the Commons and Senate, and duly presented to Blake requested "that at this great crisis you will consent to accept a position in the cabinet now being formed, in order to give the weight of your name to strengthen it in Parliament and before the

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[78] Earl of Dufferin Papers, microfilm, Public Archives of Canada, p. 198, Dufferin to Earl of Kimberly, Nov. 6, 1873. (quoted also in Thomson, op.cit., p. 170

[79] Brown Papers, Mackenzie to Brown, Nov. 5, 1873, second letter

[80] Ibid.

country".[81] Mackenzie employed all his influence to acquire as many signatures as possible for the petition. Those he could not buttonhole personally he contacted in writing. "Will you have the kindness to drop a note to Mr. Edgar, Toronto," he requested Albert Hagar in one such communication, "and authorize him to place your name on the requisition signed by members requesting Mr. Blake to accept a position in the Government."[82] On the 6th of November Blake received the document. Its appeal was irresistible. Thus November 7, 1873, the day of oath-taking for the new cabinet members, Blake declared his temporary acceptance of a minor cabinet post, Minister without Portfolio, a position involving no concrete responsibility. Admittedly he had bowed reluctantly to the judgment of his colleagues, but it was evident that he planned to do as little work as possible in the new administration.

[81] Blake Papers, Petition to Blake, dated November 6, 1873

[82] Mackenzie Letter Books, Volume III, Mackenzie to Albert Hagar, November 4, (?) 1873

III

A STRUGGLING PRIME MINISTER

Alexander Mackenzie's first cabinet contained a conglomeration of both highly effective and popular politicians and some ineffective non-descripts. The Liberal leader continued the practice established by Sir John Macdonald of selecting cabinet personnel to represent the main regional, racial and religious divisions of the country in the hope of promoting some degree of harmony throughout the nation. The Ontario contingent in the cabinet were perhaps best equipped to handle the problems of government. In addition to the recognized skill and ability of Mackenzie, both Richard Scott and D.A. Macdonald (the brother of Sandfield) possessed not only high executive ability but also electoral popularity. Scott, a former colleague from the Blake administration, acted as spokesman for the Irish Catholics, while Macdonald, an old-time Reformer and "wobbler",[1] voiced the interests of the Scottish Roman Catholics and also of the railways. The other Ontario man in the cabinet was David Christie, one of the founders of the original Grit party. Edward Blake, as Minister without Portfolio, could hardly be considered as a prominent pillar of the administration. It is interesting to note that Mackenzie shortly

[1] See E.M. Reid, "Rise of National Parties in Canada", in the Canadian Political Science Association Papers and Proceedings, Vol.IV, 1932, p. 196

removed the old Grit stock from the cabinet as both Christie and Macdonald were retired within less than eighteen months. As the Liberal chieftain knew, any provincial personification of Ontario Grittism was a political liability; the new Liberal Party must have a wider, more progressive appeal.

The cabinet representation from Quebec, for the first few months at least, were individuals of relatively high standing and stature. A.A. Dorion, the old Rouge chieftain, possessed exceptional merit; in terms of power and prestige, no equal could be found to match him amongst the Quebec Liberals, although Luther Holton is reported to have dubbed Telesphore Fournier, the new minister of Inland Revenue, as "the ablest and most influential man of our party in the district of Quebec".[2] L.S. Huntingdon had in late 1873 achieved great prominence and popularity as a result of his role in the exposure of the Pacific Scandal. Since Luther Holton could not be obtained on account of 'personal reasons',[3] it was Huntingdon's responsibility to represent the English-speaking interests of Quebec. Luc Letellier de St. Just was the fourth member of this popular Quebec contingent. Gradually however, this influential group was replaced by men of lesser ability when Dorion was retired to become Chief Justice of the Court of Queen's Bench for Quebec in 1874, Fournier named a judge of the newly created Supreme Court of Canada in 1875, and St. Just appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Quebec late in 1876.

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[2]quoted in: Burke, "Mackenzie and His Cabinet, 1873-78" Canadian Historical Review, op.cit., pp. 128-148

[3]Brown Papers, Mackenzie to Brown, November 13, 1873

In replacing and maintaining Quebec representation in the cabinet, Mackenzie, throughout his administration, was plagued by the almost insoluble problem of finding suitable representatives with some executive ability who would be acceptable to the various factions of the Quebec Liberal Party as well as enjoying some popularity with the general electorate.

Maritime representation in the cabinet inflicted another chronic headache on Mackenzie. The two Nova Scotian appointments, William Ross and Thomas Coffin, immediately aroused criticism of the administration. "It would be difficult," stated the Halifax Reporter, "to search the Province through and find two such men in every way qualified to make poorer cabinet material than Messrs. Ross and Coffin."[4] Unfortunately for Mackenzie much of the criticism was justified, but since they were demanded by the Nova Scotian representatives, he felt compelled to take them in order to establish harmony. The New Brunswick representatives, Isaac Burpee, and Albert Smith, proved fortunately to be quite adequate in the fulfilment of their official responsibilities. David Laird from Prince Edward Island was also an efficient administrator, but, despite his personal popularity, failed to establish a Liberal stronghold on the island.

Mackenzie's first cabinet was not strictly a matter of personal choice. "I was compelled", he informed A.G. Jones, the leading Nova Scotian Liberal, "to take the elements at my hand"[5] as the Liberal M.P.s

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[4]Burke, op.cit.

[5]Nova Scotia Archives Report, Mackenzie to Jones, Nov.10, 1873

from that province had put pressure upon him in demanding that Reformers William Ross and Thomas Coffin be given the two available cabinet posts for Nova Scotia. Jones himself, a prosperous businessman and influential party official, had to be ruled out since he did not hold a seat in the federal parliament, nor had he shown any desire to obtain one. In so far as Mackenzie could determine, there were others in the Nova Scotian contingent who were better cabinet material. "I would have preferred Killam & Church", revealed Mackenzie; but in face of a virtual ultimatum from the group, the Prime Minister "was obliged to defer to the wishes of the delegation"[6] in order to maintain the shaky alliance and party unity.

Moreover, the Mackenzie ministry would also have been immeasurably strengthened had he been successful in persuading Luther Holton, powerful proprietor of the Montreal Herald, to join the cabinet. Long associated with the leadership of the Quebec Rouge party, this paragon of influence in the political and business circles of the province, refused to associate himself with the Prime Minister's cabinet. Mackenzie was hard put to explain Holton's standoffishness: "Holton acted very badly if not absurdly in refusing to join" Brown was told, "I could not fathom his reasons, though he said they were purely of a personal kind, his duty to his family & so on." To Mackenzie this was a weak excuse.

> "My own impression is that Holton felt conscious that he did not have a brilliant Finance Minister in him, as he certainly has not great capacity for work, and that he feared to undertake a Department." [7]

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Brown Papers, Mackenzie to Brown, November 13, 1873

The prestige of Holton's participation would probably have insured the support of the Montreal business community - essential for a party still relatively weak - but then they still might be won over through honest and efficient government. If Holton chose to be obstinate, the way would be harder, but Holton was not indispensible. If the party could do without Brown in a position of prominence, it could equally it seems get along without Holton.

This experience of cabinet building was extremely harrowing for Mackenzie; in fact "I was sick, sick, before it was done, really ill".[8] Mackenzie was certainly aware that mistakes had been made but he could only hope they would prove of a minor nature. "After a little time we will be able to rectify all mistakes & carry on the government I hope in a satisfactory manner."[9]

In the new Cabinet, Mackenzie had delegated to himself the lion's share of the work. In addition to the time consuming duties he would have as Prime Minister, the dour ex-stonemason assumed the portfolio of Public Works - a job perhaps even more onerous than the Prime Ministership on account of the numerous building and railway construction schemes already slated for completion. One might have expected that if Mackenzie were to assume another Department it would have been the Finance portfolio since he had served most efficiently as Provincial Treasurer in the Blake Ministry of 1871/72 in Ontario. But, as he realized, someone with experience and authority had to administer the Public Works department,

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

the great spending office of the government at that time. The huge amounts of public monies involved in the construction of the Intercolonial, Canadian Pacific, and other railway projects[10] as well as in the extension of the canal system and public works demanded the services of a minister of the highest integrity and efficiency. Mackenzie felt that he could not afford to have the work of such important office "ill done"; and yet there seemed to be no one capable of handling the great load with dispatch. There seemed only one solution: "Reluctant as I was to do the work of this office, and be chief also, I saw I must do it or have it ill done... besides I wanted to unearth past transactions."[11] Thus, Mackenzie took on this extremely burdensome chore in addition to all his other responsibilities and selected Richard Cartwright to watch over the government coffers as Minister of Finance. Mackenzie also requested T.W. Anglin of New Brunswick to join the select circle of policy-makers, but the New Brunswick Liberals had, however, strongly insisted that places be found in the cabinet for the ex-premier, Albert Smith and Isaac Burpee, a powerful Saint John merchant. In order to pacify these demands, Anglin would have to be excluded.

The stubbornness of the Irish Catholics was a cause of annoyance for Mackenzie during the days of cabinet appointments. "The Irish Catholics were determined to force some man on me", he wrote, "John O'Donahue considered he should be the man and that I was bound to get

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[10] These other projects included the construction of a Fort Garry-United States border branch line, and a line from Lake Nipissing to the mouth of the French River.

[11] Brown Papers, Mackenzie to Brown, Nov 13, 1873

a constituency for him ... I have a great mind to tell them to go to Jericho."[12] Finally, it was decided; the Irish Catholics would have to be content with Richard Scott to represent their interests. Thus, the obstacles were overcome and the Mackenzie ministry completed.

Yet, as Mackenzie realized, there were errors to be rectified and changes of personnel to be made. And then there was Blake, a big question mark. Mackenzie could vividly recall Blake's Walkerton pronouncement in the 1873 electoral canvass in which he had rejected office in a future Reform administration. He could also recall the enormous effort it had taken to induce Blake to accept even a minor portfolio and how he had made it unmistakably clear that his chief could expect him to play the role of willing servant for a short period only. Serious doubts as to the unity and strength of the Reform Party began to seize many minds. Could the two foremost powers of the party be at loggerheads? One could remember various alarming signs: his somewhat strange need for a rest-cure in England after only several months as Provincial Premier - an absence that coincided with the 1872 election campaign, his Walkerton pronouncement, the necessity of a united party petition to Blake to reconsider. Something ominous seemed to be brewing in the party cauldron.

Indeed, it was not long before Mackenzie again had to contend with the young barrister. After only two months of nominal service in the cabinet, Blake became convinced that he could not indefinitely remain in the administration. "It will be impossible," wrote Blake in a curt

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[12] Ibid.

communication on January 3, 1874,

> "for me to stay in office after the election. During the election I am "yours to command" for it might be inconvenient that there should be any announcement pending the contest, but that over & your majority secured, I must go." 13

It was a critical time for the influential Blake to depart. Mackenzie needed a strong working majority if the party were to give effective government. The time seemed right for an election. A clear mandate must be obtained from the electorate. Since John A. Macdonald and the Tories still languished under the stigma of the Pacific Scandal disgrace, Mackenzie did not foresee any great problem in obtaining a solid stamp of approval from the voters. However, if Blake should suddenly depart after such short service, embarrassing questions were bound to be asked by Liberals and Tories alike. At first, the new Prime Minister attempted to ignore Blake's proffered resignation. "Please don't tell me any more bad things ... Your retirement we need not discuss more," wrote Mackenzie.[14] Yet Blake remained firm in his resolve. Nothing Mackenzie could do would move him to reconsider. As Blake had suggested, no announcement was made of his impending retirement during the canvass. No doubt, the Prime Minister hoped during this period by reasoning with Blake to dissuade him from his intentions. From one town to the next up and down the country they reviewed the record of the old 'corruptionists' and the necessity for a strong Liberal government. Blake throughout co-operated to the full; but in the process became "tired out by his speaking". Reported

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[13] Mackenzie and Blake Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, January 3, 1874

[14] Blake Papers, Mackenzie to Blake, Jan. 4, 1874

Mackenzie to A.G. Jones near the close of the canvass, "he does not stand speaking in large drill sheds very well, and it is in such places that he & I have to speak."[15] After the last speech had been delivered, Blake, on the very day of polling,[16] penned his official resignation.[17] The Globe explained the surprising departure thus: he had "chosen this moment as the most convenient time for carrying out his intentions of retiring..." in order to devote "his attontion to those professional engagements (that) he has found to be incompatible with a share in the duties of government, even although unencumbered with a department."[18]

The Tory press was inclined to be rather skeptical. Commented the opposition Mail:

> "It (the Globe) pleads that his private business requires his whole attention ... but we submit that it was hardly the correct thing for that gentleman to lend the weight of his name and of his tongue to help a government over a general election and then suddenly discover that private business has a paramount claim upon his time." 19

Then peering into its crystal ball, it gleefully predicted that all was not well within the Reform camp.

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[15]Nova Scotia Archives Report, Mackenzie to Jones, Jan. 21, 1874

[16]Mackenzie and the Liberals, the upholders of purity in office, received, as expected substantial support in the 1874 election. When the ballots had been counted, the results showed that the Liberals had elected 133 members while the Conservatives managed to carry only 73 constituencies. Dean, "How Canada has Voted", Canadian Historical Review, op.cit.

[17]Mackenzie Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, January 29, 1874

[18]Toronto Globe, Feb. 14, 1874

[19]Toronto Mail, Feb. 16, 1874

> "Those who have some opportunity of knowing ... say that Mr. Blake's parting has not been of a cordial kind ... we fancy the public will be equally quick to recognize that it is simply not among the possibilities that a man of Mr. Blake's mental calibre and force could play second fiddle to so commonplace a politician as Alexander Mackenzie... Conscious of his own powers, he (Blake) chafes when the bit is put into his mouth." 20

Surprisingly enough, The Mail had indeed made a reasonably, accurate assessment of the situation. Indeed, despite an 'official' denial and rejection of the Mail's charge by the Globe, Blake's cold, stony silence on practically all subjects debated in the House in which he continued to sit, gave rise to much anxiety and uneasiness within the party.

The bombshell soon burst; the divisions within the party were blasted open in the thundering terms of Mr. Blake's 'National Sentiment' speech, delivered at Aurora, October 3, 1874. The revolutionary goals of Mr. Blake were quite astounding to say the least; a distinctive Canadian autonomy yet Imperial Federation of the Empire on a federal basis, a reformed Senate selected by the Provincial Legislatures, a compulsory system of voting, and the Hare system of minority representation through proportional voting.[21]

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[20] Ibid.

[21] The Hare system, also known as the single transferable vote, requires a multiple-member constituency of "at least 5 members", maintain Professors J.A. Corry and J.E. Hodgetts, "if it is to achieve its purpose of enabling each substantial minority to elect a member". Ballots in this system are marked by the voters in order of their preference for the candidates, 1,2,3,4, etc. The number of votes necessary for a candidate's election is determined by dividing the number of votes cast, by the number of seats to be filled plus one, and then adding one to the result. After this required number of first preferences have elected a candidate, the remaining first preference ballots of this candidate are transferred to the voter's second choice, and so on. Upon the completion of this transferral processes, the candidate with the smallest total is eliminated, and the ballots cast for him are then transferred to the candidate

"It is impossible," proclaimed Blake,

> "to foster a national spirit unless you have national interests to attend to, or among people who do not choose to undertake the responsibilities and to devote themselves to the duties to which national attributes belong ... The future of Canada, I believe, depends very largely upon the cultivation of a national spirit ... I do not believe it is consistent with the true notion of popular Government that we should have a Senate selected by the Administration of the day, and holding seats for life ... I desire to see a Senate selected upon truly popular principles, and in a way consistent with popular government ... It is the function of Ministers ... to say nothing that can be caught hold of - nothing in advance of the popular opinion of the day, to watch the currents of that opinion, and when it has gathered strength, to crystallize it into Acts of Parliament. That is the function of a Liberal Minister. The function of a Tory Minister is to wait until he is absolutely forced to swallow his own opinions." 22

George Brown, when he read the reports of Blake's Aurora Speech, was thunderstruck. Seizing his pen, he hastened to warn Mackenzie: "Blake ... is out on the rampage. Look out for Squalls!" 23

Blake's Aurora 'heresy' afforded excellent propaganda for the Conservative journals, especially the Mail, which gloated that Blake had bade farewell to the Reform Party, and at the same time given his inaugural address as Goldwin Smith's[24] lieutenant in the Canada First Movement.

> "Mr. Blake has virtually severed himself from the Grit Party and in his defection the 'Canada First' men may perceive a gleam of sunlight piercing through the thick

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of the voter's second choice. These processes of transferral and elimination of weaker candidates continue until the required number of members are elected. (J.A. Corry & J.E. Hodgetts, Democratic Government and Politics, (University of Toronto Press, Toronto 1962) pp. 273-74)

[22]Public Archives of Canada, pamphlet, "A National Sentiment", speech of Edward Blake at Aurora, (Perry, Ottawa, 1874)

[23]Mackenzie Papers, Brown to Mackenzie, Oct. 6, 1874

cloud which has heretofore enveloped their pathway." 25

The bulk of the Reform press, however, hardly viewed the Aurora speech as a "defection"; rather, its stirring sentiments were hailed as the dawning of a new and glorious day for the Reform cause. Within the few short months that Mackenzie had been in command, many papers - both Reform and independent - had grown dissatisfied with his administration.

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[24]Goldwin Smith, an erstwhile professor of history at Oxford, and later Cornell, settled in Toronto after marrying a wealthy widow. A noteworthy Manchester School anti-Imperialist and acid polemicist, he saw as his challenge in Canada the necessity of elevating the tone and practice of colonial politics and convincing Canada that the British connection served no useful purpose and should be abolished. Smith must be accorded the distinction of being the first influential person in the new union to champion complete independence for Canada through his journal, the Nation. He soon became the mentor of a like-minded group of devoted followers known as the Canada First Party which, in addition to its national sentiment of greater independence, advocated such things as the secret ballot, compulsory voting, representation of minorities, income taxes, Senate re-organization, governmental purity and economy among other things. The party however, differed with Smith in insisting upon the maintenance of loose imperial ties. As Professor Careless points out, Smith was more of an absorptionist than a nationalist in that he felt that absorption by the United States was to be Canada's destiny. He was, maintains Careless, "essentially more concerned with the negative task of cutting colonial bonds than (with) the positive problem of erecting a national structure".* As Colonel George T. Dennison, one of the founders of the Canada First Movement claimed, Smith used "the association to advocate disruption of the Empire". ** It was obvious that the movement was out-of-step with that prevalent form of Canadian nationalism characterized by its British ties. Through Smith's diatribes, the movement had gained extensive publicity but little support.
*Careless, op.cit., p. 329
**Masters, D.C., The Rise of Toronto 1850-90, quoted in, (University of Toronto Press, Toronto 1947) p.131

[25]Toronto Mail, October 7, 1874

As the Bobcaygeon Independent expressed it,

> "Whilst Mr. Mackenzie is labouring with commendable industry at checking the accounts of his department, cutting down messenger's wages, making small savings in the departmental expenses ... to Mr. Blake is left the task of supplying the party with political principles and the Government with a policy." 26

Most Reform papers conceded that Blake's ideas were worthy of consideration, although many felt them to be premature. Editorialized the Ontario Reformer (Oshawa):

> "The theory of a great Federal Empire is hardly practicable... There will be great difficulty in compelling men to vote... The question of the representation of minorities is one that deserves ... much attention and study, but we think it will be a long time before we shall so change the basis of our political policy ... In a national sense we are yet in our teens. When we shall have come to our majority it will be time enough to discuss our right to a voice in the Government of the Empire." 27

Unlike the Tory papers and some of the Reform journals the Ontario Reformer failed to see any great gulf between Blake's views and those of the main body of the Liberal Party:

> "There is nothing in Mr. Blake's position to prevent his acting in the future as in the past in perfect sympathy with the Reform Party to-day ... He does not find one word of fault with any act or measure of the present Government ... The new ideas which he expressed are more as suggestions than as matters demanding our immediate attention. The Honourable Mr. Blake has taken his place in the front ranks of the Great Reform Party." 28

No doubt, this was indeed what the honourable gentleman had hoped to

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[26] Bobcaygeon Independent, Oct. 10, 1874 - clipping in Blake's Scrapbooks

[27] Ontario Reformer (Oshawa), Oct. 16, 1874, quoted in pamphlet, "A National Sentiment", op.cit.

[28] Ibid.

accomplish, but he had yet to attain the very front position. Other journals such as the Liberal Hamilton Times suggested that he was simply leading a mild ginger group within the party. "Free from official responsibility, he is free to speak out all he thinks", the paper maintained, "whether it is in advance of the general policy of his party or not ... There is not a word (in his speech) which will ... alienate him from the Reform Party." [29]

Most people however, were not inclined to accept Blake's pronouncements as mere "suggestions"; rather they were viewed as open challenges to the Mackenzie government. It was obvious that two marked, diametrically opposed factions - one progressive, even somewhat radical, the other essentially cautious - existed within the party. The official spokesman of the party, the Toronto Globe, after a few initial attacks[30] on Blake's Aurora proposals - considered utterly worthless by Brown, since in his view Canada was progressing satisfactorily on its own and did not require any radical innovations - suddenly switched its attack from Blake's views to those of the Canada First Movement which in its eyes had transmuted itself from a political absurdity into something sinister and menacing. But it was obvious to all that these violent attacks on the Canada First Movement were also designed to neutralize

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[29] Hamilton Times, Oct. 16, 1874

[30] The following editorial comment was typical of the Globe's position regarding the Aurora Speech: "Mr. Blake's utterances ... are to be regretted because coming from so high an authority they tend to create popular dissatisfaction with existing institutions, which may find vent in the direction that Mr. Goldwin Smith is so eager to foreshadow". (Toronto Globe, Oct. 23, 1874)

the effect of, and to lay to rest if possible, Blake's Aurora suggestions which had exposed party divisions and tensions to the searchlight of public scrutiny. The Aurora Speech had fanned, at one and the same time, the ire of the 'standpatters' and the hopes and aspirations of the progressive reformers. Party unity, if such existed, was certainly in a precarious state - at least in the opinion of many journalistic sooth-sayers. As far as the party's chief was concerned, the Aurora speech was not the prelude to full scale revolt. Blake in an unwise moment, had simply vented his old pet peeves. The speech was to be taken calmly, Mackenzie informed Brown,

> "There is not much in it that he has not spoken before. The 'Reorganization of the Empire' is an old hobby aired extensively first in June 1871 at Strathroy ... The Senate is also old. The representation of minorities is not new either, although it has not been insisted on much hitherto ... He knows well enough that a change in the Senate is only possible after some new appointments are made. It was therefore useless to discuss the subject at the present moment." 31

In reply, the master of the Globe dismissed Blake's ideas as ineffective nonsense. "The old intelligent reformers who have fought the battle for many years are indifferent to it (the Aurora Speech)", Brown confided to the Prime Minister. "Your position has been greatly strengthened by Blake's avowal of your opinions." In Brown's opinion, never had such a man "made such a mistake".[32] The majority of party supporters it would appear would not allow these half-baked ideas to contaminate their thinking. Mackenzie however, was not so sure. "It would have been better

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[31] Mackenzie Papers, Mackenzie to Brown, October 8, 1874

[32] Ibid., Brown to Mackenzie, October 18, 1874

the speech had never been delivered," he told John Cameron, a prominent Blake supporter, for it was in essence "a very superficial examination of the several theories in that speech."[33] Doubtless, to a realistic student of the Canadian political scene at that time Blake's ideas were hardly practical. Pushed to their logical conclusion, some would certainly produce chaos. As Mackenzie was quick to point out to him, it would be ludicrous to have both secret and compulsory voting at the same time, since "a man may put a blank in the (ballot) box."[34] Minority representation was an unrealistic pipe-dream, and would involve, as the Prime Minister put it, "a revolution" since it would require

> "1st, enlarged constituencies with 3 or more members, 2nd a consistent application of the principle by giving minorities in Parlt. representation in (the) cabinet, and giving in (the) 3d (sic) place minorities' views effect in legislation and on public policy. This means anarchy." 35

Blake's Imperial Federation of the Empire was "not worth discussing", for it was simply a "chimera"[36] on account of the 'Little England' policy of the British government which decried the value of the Empire. The proposal for Senate Reform also have to be written off as unfeasible on two counts. Firstly, the Senate of Canada by 1874 had hardly been in operation a sufficient duration of time for its ineffectiveness - or effectiveness - to be proved. Until documentary proof could be established,

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[33]Mackenzie Letter Books Vol.III, Mackenzie to Cameron, October 28, 1874

[34]Blake Papers, Mackenzie to Blake, October 13, 1874

[35]Brown Papers, Mackenzie to Brown, October 28, 1874

[36]Ibid.

neither the Canadian electorate nor the British government would desire or approve any constitutional change affecting the Senate. Secondly, any idea of a Senate selected on 'truly popular principles' smacked of the American system, and hence, would be unpalatable to the British mentality of the average Canadian voter. Thus, there was little likelihood that such proposals would or could be implemented; yet expressed by such an eminent personality as Blake, they had been taken up with great enthusiasm (as press editorials showed) by many. Possessing such a quick mind, Blake obviously recognized the impracticability of his proposals. Why then had he made these pronouncements? As far as Mackenzie could ascertain, there seemed to be no valid reason for such ideas at that moment, for "there was no prospect for their realization in legislation".[37] Certainly, Blake had been less than discreet in his speech. In the Prime Minister's opinion, "the elaborate reference to these subjects when the Government here is still struggling with initial difficulties and heavy engagements bequeathed to them is neither wise nor friendly though it may, or may not be so meant".[38]

Another explanation for this disturbing speech crossed Mackenzie's mind. Could it signify the prelude to an organized palace revolution? Mackenzie was quite aware that in the few short months in which he had administered the Public Works Department, he had aroused the enmity not only of various building contractors but also of many party supporters

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[37] Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.III, Mackenzie to Cameron, October 28, 1874

[38] Ibid.

because of his zeal for honesty and efficiency, and his belief that the lowest possible tender for a project must always be accepted. In explaining his refusal to grant a party supporter a government contract, he told L.H. Dessaulles:

> "it is quite impossible for the Government to give contracts to any but those whose tenders are lowest ... You think it is our duty to give contracts to (our) supporters if there does not happen to be much difference in their offers, as compared with others. Well, the question would immediately arise, how much difference might be allowed? That would be a mere matter of opinion. Your own idea would be a few dollars - that of some others, a few thousand ... there would be no safety and I may frankly suggest, no justice in doing otherwise than giving tenders for public works to those who are lowest." 39

Mackenzie was determined that no one would ever be able to charge him with crass political favouritism. In these views, throughout his entire administration, Mackenzie never wavered despite the heavy pressure frequently exerted. This policy, as one might expect, aroused considerable dissatisfaction in some quarters. Should Blake's Aurora Speech be construed, wondered Mackenzie, as an expression of this prevailing enmity?

Perhaps there was another explanation for this disturbing speech. Personal animosity on Blake's part might be the explanation. The Prime Minister was fully aware that certain people within the party felt that Blake had suffered a humiliation through the selection of Mackenzie as official leader. "I know from many sources," he confided to the Globe proprietor, "that a certain class of friends chaff at Mackenzie being Blake's leader and endeavour in many ways to make him feel as they

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39 Ibid., Mackenzie to the Hon. L.H. Dessaulles, August 28, 1874

do."[40] Perhaps the Aurora speech had been intended to indicate that Blake had accepted the arguments of his friends who stood in opposition to the leadership of Mackenzie.

Without doubt, a group of 'anti-Mackenzieites' did exist within the Liberal Party. In this class was a prosperous lumberman, John Charlton, first elected for North Norfolk in 1872. Charlton was convinced that Blake would be much superior as party leader and would exercise the duties of the office "more creditably and efficiently."[41] The selection of Mackenzie as leader had not settled the issue and the hope that Blake would, in the near future, displace Mackenzie remained in the hearts of some Reformers; as Charlton summed up the situation, "jealousies were rife" within the party.[42] Mackenzie, in his simple way, was inclined to attribute the feeling of such members to a "little soreness" towards himself "simply because the public interests forced me to stand between them and some cherished but improper object"[43] - namely governmental patronage for party supporters. In the opinion of the righteous Scot, efficiency, honesty and inexpensive government must come before all. Patronage was to be dispensed to party backers only if it was consistent with these principles. "It is impossible to fill the Railway offices on political

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[40]Mackenzie Papers, Mackenzie to Brown, October 8, 1874

[41]University of Toronto Library, Personal Transcript of John Charlton concerning his political career in federal politics from 1872 to 1893 (hereafter cited as Charlton Transcript)

[42]Ibid.

[43]Mackenzie Papers, Mackenzie to Brown, October 19, 1874

grounds; they (the appointees) must have experience" stated Mackenzie in a letter to Alfred Jones who had been pressuring him to appoint certain Liberal supporters from the Maritimes to managerial positions on the railways: "if we cannot get experienced men among our friends we must take them elsewhere just as you would do in a private company or in your own office."[44]

Nevertheless, Mackenzie could comprehend the gravity of the situation. "I believe nothing would be easier than for an able man in the ranks to form a formidable cave."[45] He could not however, since he possessed "perfect confidence in his honour", conceive of Blake fomenting rebellion.

If Mackenzie possessed "perfect confidence" in Blake, the Governor-General, Lord Dufferin, did not. To him, the challenges of the Aurora Speech, plainly testified "that Blake has gone in with Goldwin Smith for independence."[46] This interpretation Mackenzie refused to accept. "Well," the Queen's representative retorted, "it either meant that or opposition to you, or it was mere buncombe, and he is not the man for the latter article."[47] Indeed, there was little doubt as to the popularity of Dufferin's opinion: "nearly every public man I have seen has spoken in the same strain", Mackenzie reported to Brown.[48]

Yet, for more than two weeks after the Aurora bombshell had exploded,

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[44]Thomson, op.cit., quoted from the Alfred Jones Papers, Mackenzie to Jones, November 18, 1874. p.219

[45]Mackenzie Papers, Mackenzie to Brown, October 19, 1874

[46]Ibid. [47]Ibid. [48]Ibid.

Mackenzie was reluctant to view the speech as anything more than "disturbing."[49] He was convinced that rational men would realize the impracticality of instituting the proposals Blake had made. The Prime Minister's opinion was bolstered by a discussion with Luther Holton who wholeheartedly backed his own ideas. Gradually, however, Mackenzie was forced to admit that his confidence in Blake had after all been misplaced. He awoke to the stark reality that, in fact, a 'formidable cave' with Blake at its head, had emerged, a development that for him was completely incomprehensible: "I cannot understand him now," he wrote,

> "but I gather in a general way that he means isolation if not hostility. I did everything I could to show him how much I appreciated his ability and his labours ... if he chooses to go into a cave, why I cannot help it." 50

The question now was how to fight the Blake insurrection. Brown had no advice to offer; rather he was disposed to ignore the whole matter - at least, in so far as it could be ignored. "I am not much afraid of him dividing the party" were his far from reassuring words.[51] Nevertheless, Brown was annoyed at the wide publicity given to the Aurora proposals by many of the Reform journals - of which the most vocal and the most influential was John Cameron's London Advertiser. If Cameron thought that he could induce the Globe to follow and support the Blake line, "he is very much mistaken", fumed Brown. "From any point of view the Aurora

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[49] Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.III, Mackenzie to John Cameron, October 28, 1874

[50] Mackenzie Papers, Mackenzie to Brown, October 19, 1874

[51] Ibid., Brown to Mackenzie, November 1, 1874

speech was a mistake and I fancy he (Blake) knows it by this time."[52] Cameron apparently did not realize his folly for he soon stepped up his campaign to propagate Blake's views.

If any doubts had existed in late 1874 about the reality of party division, the appearance at the beginning of 1875 of a new newspaper in Toronto, The Liberal, founded by John Cameron and the London Advertiser, soon laid such doubts to rest. A staunch, unrelenting promoter of those reforms proclaimed at Aurora, The Liberal acted as little more than Blake's mouthpiece, designed to do battle with the apparent conservatism[53] of George Brown and his Globe. The new journal was also designed to challenge Brown's power to "bludgeon" the party in general and the Mackenzie administration in particular into compliance with his editorial edicts.[54] To Blake and the progressive wing, Reform policy as formulated by Mackenzie seemed to be so infused with Brown's spirit that it was impossible not to conceive of Brown as the 'dictator' of government policy. In the opinion of the Blake wing, both Brown and

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[52] Ibid.

[53] The impression conveyed by the Liberal and the pro-Blake press seemed to be that Brown and the Globe had become more conservative than the Conservative Tories - an unpardonable sin. This of course was hardly accurate. Brown had long fought for - and by the mid 1870s finally obtained - the reforms he considered necessary. He could hardly be expected to continue to give battle for reforms he felt to be unnecessary and of little value - especially when there was little chance of their implementation.

[54] It was suggested by Blake that Goldwin Smith be the first editor of the Liberal. However, since he felt the editorship of both journals (the Liberal and his Nation) would be too onerous a duty, Smith declined the invitation. Thus, John Cameron became the first editor of the Liberal. (Elizabeth Wallace, Goldwin Smith, (Toronto, 1957), p. 77 and Blake Papers, Smith to Blake, July 7, 1875)

Mackenzie were characterized by 'stand pattism' and the opposition to any fundamental and worthwhile changes. True, a more efficient electoral law had been placed on the statute books, the parliamentary scrutiny of finance had been revived, and the corruption of the 'Old Charlatan' Macdonald, corrected. As a result, at least in Brown's opinion, all the political evils that had previously beset the young Dominion had been purged, and Canada was, in effect, in the pink of political health. For Brown, and apparently Mackenzie too Canada had reached its Utopia - for Blake there was still a long way to go to reach this lofty plateau.

Indeed, the political views of Alexander Mackenzie - until the summer of 1875 at any rate - did seem to parallel the public and private utterances of George Brown. The explanation for this state of affairs is relatively simple; in addition to the high respect he had always entertained for Brown as a man and as a politician, Mackenzie, occupied by the petty and multitudinous detail of day-to-day administration and the many problems requiring his judgment, had little if any time to devote to speculating on the evils - let alone on the means of removing them - in the political institutions and procedures of the day. It is a truism that any party of reform will gradually drift to a form of conservatism once it relinquishes the freedom of opposition and assumes the responsibilities of government, especially as in this case, if a depression happens to plague the country. Mackenzie and his administration was 'conservative', in that he did not espouse the projected Blake reforms simply because he held them to be impractical.

In any case, there is no real evidence to substantiate the Tory charge that George Brown was the ultimate power that dictated government

policy. Mackenzie was always ready to consider objectively any proposed reform; yet Brown in the eighteen-seventies tended to reject instantaneously anything that smacked of novelty. But despite the charges of the Tory journals and even some of the Liberal papers, Brown did not attempt to force his views upon Mackenzie. "Since I have conducted the Government," the Prime Minister told the editor of the Liberal Hamilton Times in October 1876, "no man in public life has sought so little as him (sic) (i.e. Brown) to intrude or offer advice, and nothing could be more praiseworthy than his efforts to assist us in every movement even when he did not feel enthusiastic as to our views."[55] These remarks must be taken at face value. Proud and independent, Mackenzie was never dominated or manipulated by the Globe publisher; nor did Brown attempt to subject the Prime Minister to his will. Bound by a common bond of loyalty and respect, both men pursued the time-honoured goals of efficient government and national expansion characterized by spotless political morality on all levels. However, since Brown had voluntarily departed from active politics; it was Mackenzie primarily who made the decisions of the eighteen-seventies. Brown might give advice but he did not demand that his ideas be accepted.[56] As the Prime Minister revealed to John

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[55]Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.I, Mackenzie to E.B. Wood, October 14, 1876

[56]Even when requested to do so, Brown occasionally failed to state his opinions on account of his preoccupation with business affairs, (See Mackenzie Papers, Brown to Mackenzie, Oct. 30, 1874 and Nov. 13, 1875) or on account of his insufficient knowledge of a given problem. As early as March 1870 Brown refused to give advice on party reorganization because he considered himself out of touch with the situation. (Mackenzie Papers, Brown to Mackenzie, March 21, 1870)

Cameron, "Since the formation of the Govt. I have never received a single letter from him (Brown) asking or pushing any favour or opinion upon me. He has been of all politicians, of all men, the most considerate."[57] Thus, Mackenzie could not comprehend what the Times hoped to achieve by "always applying ugly names" to the Globe proprietor. Reprimanding editor E.B. Wood for his policy, Mackenzie stated bluntly:

> "The "Times" and a few small journals seem to think it a merit to attack him. I assure you this is doing much harm. Whenever the "Times" is quoted approvingly by Tory Papers you may depend on it harm is being done. This has happened so frequently this year that it has ceased to be uncommon." 58

As for the Globe, it was essential to the well-being and political strength of the party; "in an election we would fare badly without it."

Shortly after Brown's death in May 1880, Mackenzie commented on the intimate relationship that thirty years of political struggle had forged between the two veterans. Although he had come to love Brown "as a brother", Mackenzie related to Charles Black, yet "I was never under any obligation to him of any sort. Our friendship was an unselfish one... We did not always agree but we never quarrelled."[59] Throughout Mackenzie's premiership, Brown had never written on public affairs, "unless I addressed him on some special case."[60] At any rate, if the policies of the

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[57] Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.III, Mackenzie to Cameron, October 28, 1874

[58] Ibid., Vol.I, Mackenzie to E.B. Wood, October 14, 1876

[59] Mackenzie Papers, Mackenzie to Charles Black, May 20, 1880

[60] Ibid.

Mackenzie government are to be praised, or condemned, George Brown can not, in either case, be held responsible except perhaps indirectly or in a minor capacity. Those who held that Brown was the power behind the throne would appear to have been completely inaccurate in their assessments. There have been those who have maintained that Edward Blake after 1875 became the de facto leader of the government; they also, as shall be seen, were in error. Alexander Mackenzie was from all accounts the sole master of his cabinet and his administration.

IV

A DIVERGENCE OF OPINION

Alexander Mackenzie's reluctance to adopt a seemingly more progressive outlook did give rise in the Blake wing to the belief that as a Prime Minister he was little short of failure. In this assessment they were largely correct. Mackenzie, however, was a failure not so much because he lacked ability or rectitude, but because he strove to do too much. In addition to the time-consuming responsibilities of the premiership, Mackenzie, determined to ensure that honesty and efficiency accompany the spending of public monies on the Pacific Railway and all the other projects facing the country, had assumed what was at that time the most onerous and compelling portfolio, that of Public Works. Here he spent by far the greater portion of his time labouring sometimes up to "fourteen hours ... every day."[1] However necessary Mackenzie may have felt these exertions to be, they had the effect of leaving very little time for the fulfilment of his duties and responsibilities as first minister. As Richard Cartwright later put it:

> "Had Mr. Mackenzie but devoted 4 hours a day to studying how he could best keep his party together and to the grave questions of state policy with which he had to deal, he would have done infinitely more for himself and his country than by

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[1] Mackenzie Papers, Mackenzie to Mary Thompson, December 7, 1873

> slaving as he often did, for 14 hours at his desk at details which any second class clerk in his department could have done as well." 2

Cartwright no doubt exaggerated the situation, but it is a fact that Mackenzie, running virtually a 'one-man' government, was always overworked, and hence often negligent in his responsibilities as party chief. It was quite a common occurrence for him to be "fairly driven off ... (his) feet with work and deputations."[3] In 1878 so voluminous was the business demanding his attention that, to quote his words, "it was impossible for me to prepare for House work and I had no one to trust it to"[4] - an unhappy commentary on the capacity of his own party. Thus Mackenzie was forced to devote far more time to public works than was wise or prudent, and consequently his personal health and that of the party suffered badly during his five years of office.

Edward Blake had from the beginning grasped the implications of Mackenzie's massive work load. When the administration had been formed, Blake had asserted that the dual role the leader had assumed would prove much too burdensome, and that disaster would ensue should he persist in it. "I early told you that in my opinion your cabinet would not endure if you retained the office of Minister of Public Works," wrote Blake on May 31, 1874, shortly after the start of the new regime.[5]

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[2]Cartwright: Reminiscences op.cit., p. 146

[3]Blake Papers, Mackenzie to Blake, September 25, 1875

[4]Mackenzie Papers, Mackenzie to brother Charles, May 12, 1878

[5]Blake Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, May 31, 1874

> "The experience of the past few months has confirmed my opinion. As First Minister you must have a light department to give you time to perform the true functions of First Minister which would tax the energies of any man without the attempt to perform the duties of a department so vast that it alone would tax the energies of any man. You cannot manage both and the departmental work will cause the neglect of the duties of First Minister."[6]

There were others who also attempted to persuade the Prime Minister to swear off his public works commitments. Within a few days of the receipt of Blake's communication, a letter voicing similar sentiments arrived from the recently retired Rouge chieftain, A.A. Dorion. Now was the time, advised the influential French Canadian, to bolster the sagging cabinet; it was particularly necessary that Mackenzie should find "a strong man"[7] to assume the Department of Justice portfolio recently vacated by Dorion on his appointment as Chief Justice for Quebec.

The departure of Dorion from that post was a severe blow to the young ministry. Mackenzie can be criticized perhaps for allowing it, especially since Dorion was willing to carry on in his capacity as Minister of Justice. Mackenzie knew however, that Dorion and his family wanted his retirement from politics; thus, considering the sacrifices made by the old Rouge on behalf of the party, the Prime Minister felt it was his duty to relieve him of ministerial responsibility.

Upon Dorion's withdrawal cabinet reconstruction became of prime importance. Dorion himself suggested that Felix Geoffrion, an extremely strong party man in French Canadian Liberal circles, be given his old

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Mackenzie Papers, A.A. Dorion to Mackenzie, June 10, 1874

department even though he lacked the professional qualifications. Mackenzie was also advised to induce Blake, Holton, and Jones to enter the cabinet for they would add "great weight" in public estimation.[8] While Blake in his communication of 31 May made no mention of his own availability for office, he did suggest that either Albert Smith or Telesphore Fournier might be suitable for the Justice portfolio; the services of Jones and Holton, he felt, should also be acquired. As for Mackenzie, in place of the Public Works portfolio, he

> "might take the Presidency of the Council or the Receiver Generalship & still exercise as 1st Minister some sort of general superintendence over the policy of the P. Works dept. Though you could not muddle with details ... the choice is between sacrificing your govt (sic) to the Department (of Public Works) & imparing the efficiency of the department in order to maintain your govt (sic)." 9

Blake had clearly stated the alternatives; Mackenzie must make his own choice.

For some reason however, Mackenzie failed to act upon the critical need for reshuffling his cabinet. Whether Scottish pride - or stubbornness - prevented him from fully realizing that he could not adequately handle the Prime Ministership and the Public Works portfolio simultaneously, or whether he felt that he could muddle through in the hope that at some juncture he would emerge into the political sunshine, cannot be determined. Again, according to Luther Holton, Mackenzie seemed"fully alien to the necessity of imparting into his administration additional

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Blake Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, May 31, 1874

intellectual strength, administrative capacity and personal prestige."[10] The strange part of the matter, continued Holton, was that he admitted "fully the conscience of the arguments in favor of his relinquishing the personal charge of the Great spending Department of the Govt (sic)." Although Mackenzie did in fact concur in the advisability of giving up his Public Works post, he was, on the other hand, fired in his belief that no change was possible until someone else was found suitably qualified for the task. The logic of this reasoning could not be disputed. The only alternative that Holton could suggest was that, in order to relieve himself of departmental "drudgery", Mackenzie should appoint the best man to be found at the moment and that the chief could act in an advisory capacity to "direct his successor".[11] Upon this suggestion, Mackenzie failed to act, doubtless because either he could not conceive of anyone sufficiently capable to handle what he regarded as the grave responsibility of the Public Works Department, or because personal desires for being in the political limelight could not tolerate any delegation of the authority and influence of this department.

In this same letter of June 14, 1874, Holton urged Blake to reconcile his differences with Mackenzie so that the government might be strengthened through his active support as a cabinet minister. "The Universal sentiment of the party and of members of the Administration," proclaimed Holton, "is that your acceptance of office is the one thing needful to ensure efficacy and the stability of the Govt (sic)."[12]

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[10] Ibid., Holton to Blake, June 14, 1874

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

But this assertion fell upon deaf ears as Blake continued to play the role of the unwilling politician.

Throughout 1874 and part of 1875, the bonds of party unity were severely strained by an unofficial campaign waged by certain influential Liberals to remould the Mackenzie Ministry. The paramount cause of the ill-feeling that plagued the party seemed to be Blake's secret ambition. The latter at this time felt that he had been wrongfully deprived of his rightful due, the premiership, even though he had refused the party leadership (the reasons for which have already been noted - pages 43-44). When Mackenzie reluctantly accepted the official party leadership, the Tories were apparently solidly entrenched with substantial support from an uncommitted 'floating' block of members in the federal parliament. Thus, Mackenzie's chances of becoming prime minister seemed slim indeed, since there was little likelihood that the Reformers could expel the government in the foreseeable future. Moreover, in all probability, the next federal election would not be called for several years if parliament ran its normal course. All this Edward Blake seemed to have realized; in his probable reasoning, Mackenzie was welcome to the leadership and its thankless drudgery. Blake wished for neither one.

Unmistakably however, once the Pacific Scandal broke, Blake underwent a change of heart. As it became obvious that Macdonald's government would topple, the young lawyer realized that Mackenzie would soon become prime minister. For this, the former was not prepared; doubtless, he had transferred his political activities to the federal arena in the belief

that some day he would become first minister.[13] There was however, he probably reasoned, still a hope that the Governor-General would ask him and not Mackenzie, when the time came, for it was he who had been trained for the position as premier of Ontario - Mackenzie had merely been one of his assistants. Therefore, when the latter was asked to form the new ministry, Blake, being fully sensitive to his many and varied qualities, was, beyond a doubt, extremely dissatisfied; he soon became obsessed with the idea that, as a colleague put it, "Lord Dufferin ought to have sent for him at once and not for Mr. Mackenzie."[14] Indeed, as his correspondence with Mackenzie will verify, Blake believed that both Mackenzie and Dufferin were favourable to his assumption of the office, but somehow, Mackenzie had manipulated a 'fait accompli' and Lord Dufferin had instead selected him to form the new administration.

This situation was first disclosed by Mackenzie who, in a note to Blake on May 28, 1874, a few days before Dorion's departure from the cabinet, unwittingly mentioned a subject very close to Blake's heart. "I see the 'Gazette' says you are to take my place." From there, Mackenzie depressed by the cares of office and the challenge of cabinet reconstruction went on to add the fatal words which aroused Blake's latent desires: "I wish to heaven it were true".[15] The words seemed to imply that Mackenzie was willing to renounce his position in favour of Blake should

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[13]This is the only reasonable explanation for his resignation as premier of Ontario.

[14]Cartwright, op.cit., p. 148

[15]Mackenzie Papers, Mackenzie to Blake, May 28, 1874

the latter indicate his willingness to accept the position. Now was the time to acquaint Mackenzie with his true feelings.

For the moment however, he decided to refrain from commenting on the Gazette story and Mackenzie's apparent desire to be relieved. Instead he confined himself in his reply to suggesting various moves in the projected cabinet shuffle, and to emphasizing the necessity of lightening Mackenzie's work load. "I cannot speak too strongly", he wrote, "of the necessity of a change in this respect & I believe ... this opinion is stressed by many of your friends."[16] At no time did he indicate his own availability for any office. As has been noted, Mackenzie, despite the pleas of Blake, Holton and others, failed to relinquish any of his duties to others, and continued as before at the killing pace he had set for himself.

Yet a few months later, Blake became determined to persuade Mackenzie, if possible, to give up his principal portfolio, and devote himself exclusively to the concerns of the Public Works Department. If Mackenzie vacated the Prime Ministership, it was a foregone conclusion that Blake, if willing, would be selected unanimously the former's replacement. Blake by this time was more than desirous of this change; in pursuit of this goal, he, first of all, planted the seed of suggestion. He wrote thus to the Prime Minister:

> "In your letter of the 28 May referring to a statement in Ml' Gazette that you were about to retain the Public Works and I was to become first minister, you told me that you wished to Heaven it were true." 17

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[16] Blake and Mackenzie Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, May 31, 1874

[17] Ibid., September 6, 1874

After referring vaguely to pressure exerted upon him from "various influential quarters", Blake came to the point.

> "I have been brought reluctantly to the conclusion ... that it might be my duty under certain circumstances to face my difficulties & overcome my personal reluctance to office."

Blake, employing obvious flattery, wrote that the Public Works was a "great department" which only Mackenzie "alone" could "adequately fill"; however, Mackenzie's tenure of that office was "not compatible with that of the First Ministership." Although Blake did not state it, his conclusion was obvious. If Mackenzie concurred with Blake's wishes, Mr. Blake would "address[18] myself to the effort of so arranging my professional and private affairs as to enable, by devoting my whole time for the future to public business, to meet your views." Lest Mackenzie fail to comprehend the implications of his thoughts, the Toronto lawyer left no doubt as to his intentions.

> "But on the other hand, if what you wrote me was but the result of some temporary feeling, or if your mind has since changed, and you prefer to remain first minister, ... I shall ... retain my present position". 19

For Blake, clearly it would either be the Prime Ministership or nothing at all.

Why had Edward Blake now decided to aspire to the highest political office in the land? What role had the "various influential quarters" played in determining his decision? In all probability,

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[18] Thomson deciphers Blake's semi-illegible handwriting to read, "I will add up myself" (Thomson, op.cit., p. 214); however, it appears that Blake's word is actually "address" - a word that makes better sense in the context.

[19] Blake and Mackenzie Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, Sept. 6, 1874

these "influential quarters" were Blake's personal friends, principally Holton, Jones and Cameron. It is also quite likely that Mrs. Blake could be credited with a major responsibility for her husband's new outlook. Then too, Blake's personal ambition for greater political prestige probably influenced his decision to acquaint Mackenzie with his desire for party pre-eminence. Unfortunately, there is no inkling of the identity of these "influential quarters." If Blake received any communications suggesting that he seek the leadership of the Liberals - as he probably did - then, such were burned when Blake later organized his Canadian Correspondence.

As the days sped by and no answer arrived from Mackenzie, Blake grew impatient. After eleven days he had reached the breaking point and could restrain himself no longer. "I think I should no longer delay to write you on the subject of my note of 6th inst.", he scrawled hurriedly in his almost illegible style.

> "Considering that the question I raised was as to your own feelings, I think I may reasonably draw from a silence so long continued the inference that these are adverse to the change, and as I said in my note this conclusion ends the matter for me." 20

Once an ambitious and influential individual like Blake commenced political intrigue however, it could not be terminated until he had either realised his goals or lost all. The matter was by no means concluded in his case.

Blake's note spurred Mackenzie to issue an immediate rejoinder. "In the words you quote I expressed my feelings fully." replied Mackenzie the next day, September 18. But a maritime newspaper report had prevented him from taking any concrete steps towards installing Blake as

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[20] Blake Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, September 17, 1874

Prime Minister. As Mackenzie explained,

> "a day or two before your letter (of May 27) reached me an article appeared in the St. John Globe stating very concisely the change you suggested as one that would soon be carried out. This article was copied in all the Tory papers and of course accompanied by the expected comments while it was carefully pointed out that this was a government paper and in Burpee's confidence. 21 Hence the inference that a cabal existed in the cabinet. I foresaw that to at once carry out the programme laid down for me would subject me to humiliation if I remained in the Gov't, and while willing enough to leave the Government I saw that this involved my leaving the House also. This I would not hesitate a moment to do so far as I am personally concerned, but I had to consider the general effect on the party and to give some thought to personal friends ... The matter causes me much anxiety and I am as yet unable to see my way to the right conclusion." 22

Mackenzie had always been ready to welcome Blake into the administration with open arms. Three months before, in July, he had attempted to persuade both Blake and Holton to enter the Cabinet; in fact L.S. Huntingdon and D.A. Macdonald were willing to relinquish their places in order to make room for the new men. But the proposed shuffle did not materialize as Holton refused "temporarily"[23] and Blake "completely".[24] Mackenzie also reminded Blake of the cabinet negotiations in 1873. At that time, Mackenzie, when invited to form a new administration would have preferred a cabinet commanded by Blake. He had informed His

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[21] Isaac Burpee was the Minister of Customs in the Mackenzie Cabinet

[22] Ibid., Mackenzie to Blake, September 18, 1874

[23] At this time Luther Holton requested - and shortly received - a postponement of a cabinet appointment until his daughter - in delicate health and expecting a child - should be completely recovered. Ibid., Holton to Blake, June 14, 1874

[24] Ibid., Mackenzie to Blake, September 18, 1874

Excellency that he would have preferred the young Blake to construct the cabinet, that is, if he was so disposed, and if Lord Dufferin voiced no objections. "He made no objection but you declined."[25] Blake apparently had been accorded the opportunity of setting up his own administration at Ottawa, but had refused to accept the invitation. The explanation for his refusal, as has been pointed out, stemmed no doubt from his absence in England during the 1872 elections, and his consequent fear of criticism if he attempted to unseat Mackenzie. In 1873 Blake might have been named the official leader of the party after all that the latter had done, if he had shown the least inclination to accept the honour. It was now obvious, however, that, at this late juncture, the Scottish pride of the ex-stonemason turned prime minister would resist any attempt on Blake's part to assume the leadership.

One might think that Blake, after receiving clear intimation of Mackenzie's sentiments, would withdraw as quickly as possible to lick the wounds his pride had suffered. This however, was not the case; Blake could not allow the issue to be shelved, since he had not, he contended, been fairly asked by Mackenzie to head up a new administration. The only reference to his assuming the responsibilities of the highest office occurred, claimed Blake, after Mackenzie had decided that he himself would take the post. As Blake put it,

> "The only reference to me in connexion (sic) with the duty occurred after you had intimated to two or three of us that you had undertaken the task, & which (sic) you were engaged in consultation with us as to the persons whom you should invite to join you. In this conversation Holton was good enough to press me very earnestly to join. I de-

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[25] Ibid.

> clined stating that it was impossible; when you said that if it would make any difference to me, you were willing that I should take your place." 26

This of course, since Mackenzie the official party leader had already accepted the commission, would be extremely awkward and difficult to arrange, thus Blake "replied ... in the negative". [27]

Although Blake in his conclusion stated that the "affair" was "terminated to my satisfaction", Mackenzie felt called upon to answer his allegation of underhandedness in the matter. "Having no copy of my letter," replied Mackenzie soothingly on October 13,

> "my recollection is that I did not say that I mentioned to you my conversation with Lord Dufferin ... I meant to recall my conversation with you on our walk immediately after my interview with the Govr. My recollection is that I there said I would prefer you would undertake the work. Not as you think on a subsequent occasion. It would be idle for me to say such a thing unless I had made the way clear for it first. In conversation with the Govr on Saturday I asked him if he remembered my suggestion concerning you and what I said about you. I found he remembered it perfectly and I will be glad to ask him to mention it to you if you allow me to do so." 28

Obviously, His Excellency supported Mackenzie's reconstruction of events on that disputed day.

Still Blake persisted in his quest. Replying immediately in somewhat obscure and inflated phraseology, Blake had this to say to Mackenzie:

> "You are correct in stating that you did not in your former note say that you had mentioned to me your conversation

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[26] Blake and Mackenzie Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, Sept. 24, 1874

[27] Ibid.

[28] Blake Papers, Mackenzie to Blake, October 13, 1874

> with Lord Dufferin. It is not very material whether your suggestion to me ...occurred during our walk or a few minutes later in as much as that conversation was with reference to the persons you should invite to join you and the suggestion if made then, would be open to the same observations as would apply to it if made during the later conversation of the same character. But my memory is clear upon the subject, and is confirmed by the recollection of the only other person to whom I mentioned the matter at the time." 29

Despite the alleged clarity of his own memory however, Blake apparently had no desire to seek His Excellency's personal recollection of the matter "It would be useless for the Governor to mention anything to me now"; he concluded,

> "but in as much as I should have thought it my duty (had I understood at the time what your note disclosed to me) to give such a message from His Excellency delivered at your instance & supported by your request, grave consideration to consult some of my leading friends upon it and to communicate to His Excellency the decision to which I might arrive, it would I think be right that he should even now be made aware of the facts." 30

Blake evidently conceived that Dufferin had requested him, through Mackenzie, to form the new Government and that he had not been allowed sufficient time to consult his supporters.

This assertion was strongly denied by Mackenzie the following day, October 15.

> "I find from your note that I am misunderstood to some extent. I seem to have conveyed the impression that I carried a message from His Excellency and that you was (sic) deprived of the opportunity of consulting friends and conveying to him your decision. I was not the bearer of any message or I should assuredly have said so at once...

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[29] Blake and Mackenzie Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, Oct. 14, 1874

[30] Ibid.

> I simply acquainted His Excellency with (the) circumstances connected with my election to, and my assumption of the leadership of the party, and then expressed my belief that you would succeed better than me and that I would still retire if you could be induced to come." 31

It was Lord Dufferin who had decided the matter. His Excellency, Mackenzie added, "briefly discussed our relative positions and expressed the hope that you would be one of the ministers. I had the matter simply in such a state that, if you had agreed to my suggestion, I could have gone back & told him I had spoken to you and that you would consent to assume the task." 31a

But since Blake had declined the task, - as Mackenzie had reminded him on September 18 - Lord Dufferin, accordingly, had had no alternative but to call upon Mackenzie, the official party leader whom Blake had supported to form an administration after the Pacific debacle. Had Mackenzie refused to accept the commission, Dufferin was, of course, aware that Blake was the only other possibility. But as the vice-regal representative later confided to Lord Carnarvon, "I don't think he could have constructed a Government."[32]

Despite the conciseness of Mackenzie's note, Blake remained

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[31] Blake Papers, Mackenzie to Blake, October 15, 1874

[31a] Ibid.

[32] De Kiewiet, C.W., and Underhill, F.H., Dufferin - Carnarvon Correspondence 1874-78, (Champlain Society, Toronto 1955) p. 279, Dufferin to Carnarvon, October 8, 1876. Lord Dufferin's speculation in this regard, was probably accurate. Blake's political career, while meteoric in nature, had been of considerably shorter duration than Mackenzie's. Blake lacked not only wide political experience but also suitable political contacts with Reformers outside of Ontario (since he had concentrated more on Ontario politics and on his own private law practice before 1874)

somewhat confused in his own mind as to what had actually transpired on the day in question. "I have your note of (the) 15th inst." Blake replied, "and will frankly confess that I don't understand the matter, but it is of no consequence."[33] In one sense the matter was now "of no consequence" for nothing further could be accomplished, as Blake realized, by fruitless bickering over what had been said and when at the time of the ministry's formation. Yet, in essence, the matter remained of vital consequence for the influential lawyer as his personal ambition refused to free him from the vision that occupied his mind. In these years he never abandoned his pursuit of the Prime Ministership; this tantalizing goal was unquestionably a primary consideration in the explanation of Blake's enigmatic behaviour.

There was, furthermore, another major dispute that spurred Blake and his supporters to action, and promoted dangerous conflicts among the Liberals during 1874 and the early months of 1875. It revolved around the administration's Pacific Railroad policy and its corollary, imperial domination and Canadian dependence on the mother country.

On acquiring control of the Treasury Benches, the Mackenzie government had inherited a massive headache from the Conservatives. Sir John Macdonald had obligated the nation, as the price for British Columbia's admission to federation, to complete a railway to the Pacific Ocean within ten years. "And the Railway, Credat Judaeus," ejaculated an astonished British Columbian, "is guaranteed without a reservation. Sir

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[33]Blake Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, October 16, 1874

Georges Cartier says they will do that or 'burst'."[34] Mackenzie, of course, was convinced that the government would indeed 'burst' if they attempted to fulfil the bargain with existing sources of public income. Thus, he introduced his amendment calling for the limitation of national responsibility to the completion of the survey, and then prosecution of the work in accordance with available revenues.[35] As he later explained his action to a British Columbian, Thomas Hobson:

> "I objected to it being made part of the terms of Union that this Railway should be constructed throughout, within 10 years for several reasons. In the first place I believed it was impossible ... in the second place I never believe in entering into any engagement that I was not prepared to implement." 36

Consumption of much valuable time with a juicy scandal to boot had been the only results of Sir John's 'labours' to fulfil his obligation to British Columbia. Accordingly, Mackenzie after 1873 was confronted with a labour of Sisyphus involving huge expenditures in a time of deepening depression. Economy in public expenditure had always been a basic tenet of Liberal philosophy, but with the thumbscrews of depression tightening upon the country, retrenchment appeared as a vital priority. Nevertheless, Mackenzie was determined not to renege on his responsibilities as long as some way existed to discharge them. On the other hand, to attempt to complete the railway bargain in the specified time under such adverse

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[34] Ormsby, Margaret, British Columbia, A History, (Toronto 1958), p. 249

[35] Parliamentary Debates, p. 674, March 28, 1871

[36] Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.III, Mackenzie to T. Hobson, December 15, 1873

financial conditions was, as Mackenzie well realized, sheer folly. "We are ... advised by our engineers", wrote the chief on Feb. 19, 1874 to J.D. Edgar,[37] a prominent Liberal residing in Toronto,

> "that it is a physical impossibility to construct the road ... within the time provided in the terms of union, and that any attempt to do so can only result in very great useless expense & financial disorder." 38

Therefore, in an attempt to extricate the federal government from the letter of the commitment, Edgar was authorized to journey to British Columbia and on behalf of the Mackenzie administration offer the provincial government, firstly, the construction of a wagon road and telegraph in advance of the railway over its line; secondly, the completion of surveys and then railway construction as rapidly as the existing means would allow; thirdly, a minimum annual expenditure of $ 1,500 000 on the project; and lastly, a pledge to live up to another Macdonald commitment of June 1873, namely, the construction of the Esquimalt to Nanaimo Railway on Vancouver Island. Edgar was explicitly counselled to do everything within his power to achieve a satisfactory compromise. "You will point out," instructed Mackenzie, "that it is because we desire to act in good faith towards Columbia that we at once avow our inability to carry out the exact conditions of the terms of union."[39] Accordingly, in its

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[37]For an interesting article on Edgar's associations with the Liberal Party, see R.M. Stamp "J.D. Edgar and the Liberal Party 1867-96" published in the Canadian Historical Review, June 1964, pp. 93-115

[38]Ontario Public Archives, James Edgar Papers, Mackenzie to Edgar, February 19, 1874

[39]Ibid.

"desire to deal frankly & honestly with Columbia", the Government was proposing new terms that, to them at any rate, were realistic and feasible.

These proposals immediately angered the Blake wing of the party, for it was estimated that the new commitments, if approved, would mean an increase in national taxation by one-sixth, or $ 3,000,000 yearly. In addition these critics refused to consider the Esquimalt-Nanaimo Railway as part of the obligation under the terms of Union. Blake was prompted to say at Aurora that, if

> "under all the circumstances the Columbians were to say - 'You must go on and finish this Railway according to the terms or take the alternative of releasing us from the Confederation', I would take the alternative. If these 2000 men understand that the people of Canada are prepared, in preference to the compliance of their ruinous demands to let them go, and to leave them to build the Columbia section... their tone will be more moderate and we shall hear no talk about secession ... They won't secede, they know better ... I go heart and soul for the construction of these lines as rapidly as the resources of the country will permit." 40

Blake and his supporters had one major objection to the Confederation terms and also Mackenzie's proposed modifications. In their eyes the railway undertaking was an overly ambitious and dubious project which could only be realized at prostrating cost and with questionable benefit for the taxpayers of Ontario and Quebec. Blake's conception of an all-embracing and all-unifying Canadian nationality and national sentiment was apparently very limited, yet, with the country in the throes of a depression, it did not pay, as Blake came more and more to insist, to be excessively idealistic.

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[40] Edward Blake, "A National Sentiment", pamphlet, op.cit.

After the rejection of the Dominion's compromise proposals by Premier George A. Walkem of British Columbia, Lord Carnarvon at the colonial office put forth his own proposals to resolve the deadlock. His Lordship recommended the following terms:

1. Immediate commencement of the Esquimalt-Nanaimo Railway.
2. Completion of the surveys as soon as possible and construction of a temporary wagon road and telegraph line.
3. A minimum expenditure of two million dollars annually on the railway works within the province.
4. Completion of the line by December 31, 1890.

This intervention of the part of the Crown was construed by Blake and company as intolerable Imperial meddling in a matter of strictly domestic concern. Furthermore, Mackenzie's compliance with Carnarvon's proposed terms (which, except for the addition of a time limit for completion, did not differ radically from the Prime Minister's) seemed a glaring indication not only of his subservience to the Colonial Office but also a significant demonstration of his weakness and unsuitability as Prime Minister. "I am surprised," exclaimed Blake in a note to Mackenzie on December 17, "that Ld C. should venture to "decide"; but that is obviously the present English Tory policy - and I am grieved that we should see your terms fettered & fresh time bargains made."[41] Blake and his supporters were again confirmed in their belief when Mackenzie failed to place the proposed terms before parliament for its judgment with the exception of a bill authorizing the construction of the Esquimalt-Nanaimo Railway.

The introduction of this legislation provided the occasion for a

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[41]Mackenzie Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, December 17, 1874

party revolt in which the Blake wing refused to support the administration and voted against it. The government however, retained the support of most Liberals and was able to pass the bill. None the less, substantial Tory opposition in the Senate led by Alexander Campbell combined with that of two Grit Senators to kill it by two votes in that chamber.

Surprisingly, Blake did not fully reveal his own policy towards British Columbia until well on into 1875. Finally, on April 30, 1875, he expressed his convictions to Mackenzie in no uncertain terms. Firstly, the terms of Lord Carnarvon should be refused; as early as "last summer... I urged you to decline his proposals ... the view of your friends is adverse to them."[42] Next, a substitute plan should be found which should not "further raise the rate of taxation." In Blake's opinion,

> "the Pacific Railway should be built only as fast as the work can be done without further increasing taxation, that no time bargains should be made and that reasonable compensation should be given to Columbia for the delay thus involved." 43

Further, he felt that Parliament and not the Cabinet should make the necessary decisions. Also he would be agreeable to compensation of between $ 50,000 to $ 100,000 a year to the province for the delay. As for Lord Carnarvon's terms,

> "You suggest that you are bound to carry them out. If you mean that you are bound ... to resign in case Parliament should decline to agree with you, I must express my humble dissent from such a motion. ... The terms (for railway construction) should be expressly subject to the sanction of Parliament and should be embodied in an Act." 44

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[42]Blake Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, April 30, 1875

[43]Ibid. [44]Ibid.

No one could deny that signs of schism were posted within the Reform Party during 1874 and the early months of 1875. Mackenzie, if he hoped to survive as leader, would have to destroy these divisive elements before he and party unity were toppled into the abyss.

V

THE BLAKE CAVE

"I believe Mr. Blake is the only public man who had the capacity, the courage, the independence, the patriotism to carry to successful accomplishment that grand and glorious object ... of 'making the name of Canada one of honour and pride'."[1] Egerton Ryerson, in penning this laudatory estimate of Edward Blake, did, indeed, voice the feelings of a sizable segment of the Canadian population. Blake's Aurora Speech and other pronouncements had aroused considerable admiration and critical acclaim throughout Reform circles and beyond, so much so, that by the close of 1874, the dynamic lawyer commanded a considerable following among the general public. Blake, felt many people, would sweep away the evils of the day and purge the political system of its corruption. "Mr. Blake uttered a noble sentiment in his speech the other day at Vittoria," exclaimed Ryerson,

> "when 'he appealed more particularly to the younger generation, to them who looked to the future of the country and asked them no matter what the proclivities of their predecessors may have been to join with the men who were determined to make the name of Canada one of honour and pride rather than of contumely and disgrace'." 2

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[1]Blake Papers, E.Ryerson to Edward Harris, December 22, 1874

[2]Ibid.

As can be seen, the Toronto barrister directed his stirring appeals for support to relatively young men, more susceptible, presumably, to the appeal of his idealism.

In the parliamentary arena, Blake's challenging words stirred the party's young blood. Eagerly, the new generation of politicians, who had entered the party after 1867 came to support his more progressive pronouncements. They assessed the leadership of the old guard party hierarchy and found it lacking. George Brown, once the paragon of radicalism in pre-Confederation days, seemed to adopt, when awarded with a Senatorial appointment, a 'rest and be thankful' attitude which appeared to dull his sensitivity to the 'inadequacies' of the political institutions he had helped create.[3] Typical of Brown's new 'let us rejoice' attitude was this editorial statement attributed to the Globe by the Acadian Recorder: "Speculative ideas may be well allowed ... to rest. The time is one of external peace and internal prosperity."[4] How the country could be said to be enjoying prosperity in the midst of a severe

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[3]There were several factors that promoted the development of these sentiments on the part of the Blake wing. Brown had virtually withdrawn himself from the party and politics in general even though he remained a senator. His journal condemned the suggested political changes of Blake (in the Aurora Speech) and of the Canada First Party as unwarranted 'constitutional tinkering' which should be written off immediately as impractical. Also, the Globe was reluctant to admit that any shortcomings in the Canadian constitutional system had yet been exposed since the still new federal arrangement had not had sufficient time for a fair trial. Yet, as Professor Careless has pointed out, there were logical and valid reasons for Brown's stand: "He and his journal had not become conservative; they had never been radical. This was their moderate Victorian Liberalism still: believing in empirical parliamentary growth, suspicious of doctrinaire remaking of the constitution." (Careless, op.cit., p. 327)

[4]Acadian Recorder, Feb. 15, 1875, (Blake's Scrapbooks, Book 18)

depression is indeed a mystery. The younger men however, attracted in the beginning, no doubt, by the spirit of progressiveness nd the heroic atmosphere of reform that Brown had once inspired, were not in the least content to allow the party to become stagnated by Brown's new 'religion'.

In the Blake camp there were many who were ready to champion the political interests of the young lawyer either with or without his approval. Most prominent among Blake's lieutenants was his closest political friend, David Mills, an avid champion of Senate reform, and perhaps, next to Blake himself, the brightest light of the rising generation. Other politically influential figures in the Blake camp were Thomas Moss, also a prominent lawyer, and A.G. Jones, the leading Reformer from the Maritimes. While not a member of parliament, John Cameron, the crusading proprietor of the London Advertiser and later The Liberal, was nevertheless a real power behind the 'Blake Movement' and did much through his papers to foster public admiration for that gentleman. In addition, there were other elected members of the Reform Party who were quite sympathetic to Blake and his goals, including the Premiership. A fairly comprehensive list of these supporters was included in a letter Blake sent off to A.G. Jones on March 22, 1875:[5]

C. Archibald	L.A. Jetté	T. Moss
I. Burpee	R. Laflamme	J. Rymal
J.W. Carmichael	W. Laurier	R. Scatcherd
J. Charlton	S.L. McDougall (Renfrew)	J. Scriver
J.S.B. Deveber	D. Mills	D. Stirton
W.A. Thomson	P.A. Tremblay	

John Charlton, in his unpublished transcript of the events of these years,

[5] Mackenzie and Blake Papers, Blake to Jones, March 22, 1875

also lists as friends of Blake: C.A. Pelletier, F. Geoffrion, I. Pickard and F. Béchard. All these men, claims Charlton, were his "advisors".[6]

Upon examination of parliamentary records, it will be found that these individuals were mainly post-Confederation politicians - the 'angry young men' of the Reform party who felt that much still remained to be accomplished in order to achieve the ideal of democracy, namely, a government as fully representative of the people as was conceivably possible; hence their embarking on a programme of Senate reform, proportional representation and recognition of minorities. To them, Mackenzie's goal of retrenchment coupled with limited reform was not adequate; Blake and the young men raised their eyes to search for new horizons. As W.R. Graham maintains, "less involved in the struggles of the past, they tried to suggest the course of the future."[7] How similar to Brown's split with Hincks was Blake's rupture with Mackenzie of the eighteen-seventies. Here, in these men and their vision of the future, obscured though it was, one can observe the first faint adumbrations of a new Liberalism that would be finally achieved in finished form in the ministries of one of these 'angry young men', Wilfrid Laurier. All these rising individuals were solidly united behind Blake and his campaign for leadership. As an undated record of one of the meetings of the Blake Cave (probably held in early 1875) stated: "All agreed that it was of the first importance to devise (if possible) some means of Mr. Blake's being

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[6] Charlton Transcript, op.cit.

[7] W.R. Graham, The Alexander Mackenzie Administration 1873-78, (unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Toronto, 1944) p. 90

placed in the position of Premier."[8] There was only one course open to them: either from without or within the party, there was no alternative but to revolt against the policies of Mackenzie. "It is said," commented Brown in a letter to his wife, Anne, on March 15, 1875, "that members have been sounded as to a serious attack on the Government."[9] Four days later the Esquimalt-Nanaimo Railway Bill was introduced in the House, and Blake, Mills, Moss and a few other Liberals refused to support it.[10] Despite this opposition, the bill, as noted earlier, passed the House, only to be killed in the Senate. Blake had not yet aroused sufficient party support in the House to force Mackenzie to resign; however, in the words of Brown, the whole "Blake & Co. matter" was beginning "to assume a rather serious cast."[11]

At the same time, it was becoming embarrassingly evident to Reformers in general that this growing conflict between the two wings of the party might conceivably cause permanent injury. Somehow the differences within the party had to be composed, personal animosities relegated to the background, and harmony restored in order to give strength to the party in its struggle against the problems posed by depression. In practical politics, this meant that the government's policy had to be formulated by the best men available labouring in close co-operation.

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[8] Blake Papers, Record of a Cave Meeting N.D. (probably early 1875)

[9] Brown Papers, Brown to wife Anne, March 15, 1875

[10] Parliamentary Debates, March 19, 1875

[11] Brown Papers, Brown to wife Anne, March 15, 1875

Convinced that the Blake bluster would come to naught, Brown was optimistic. "It will blow by," the Grit Senator on March 15 informed his wife, "as almost every man of sense in the house acknowledges that it is right down madness."[12] Certainly it was not the best time to attempt a palace revolution; Mackenzie had been in office less than a year and a half and had hardly enjoyed sufficient time to display his legislative skills. At the same time the nation's economy was beginning to stagger from the effects of economic stagnation. In any case, according to Brown:

> "The Blake cabal does not prosper. The general feeling is strongly against anything that would disturb the administration & threaten the harmony of the Liberal party. I think the Blakesites begin to feel that they have made a decided mistake."13

Indeed, it was true. Blake's supporters were, in fact, beginning to realize the need for some form of reconciliation in the party hierarchy, since the displacement of Mackenzie in the immediate future seemed remote. The conviction grew that any protracted dissension would not promote the ambitions of their chief. Although the members of the Blake Cave remained united in their belief that "it was of the first importance to devise (if possible) some means of Mr. Blake's being placed in the position of Premier," they fully comprehended that "any attempt to effect this would result in Mr. Mackenzie's immediate retirement and would cause a breech in the party which might prove irreparable."[14] Seven of the Cave

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., Brown to wife Anne, March 18, 1875

[14] Blake Papers, undated Cave record.

membership voiced their agreement in a meeting, probably held in late March 1875, observing that "considering all the circumstances the future interests of the party would be conserved by Mr. Blake's joining the Government." Four other members felt that Blake should not be humiliated by being offered a position inferior to "that of Premier but that existing circumstances were so dangerous as to make it advisable in the interests of the country that Mr. Blake should go into the Cabinet." Two others were persuaded by the rest to support their resolution. However,

> "one of these concurred in this only upon the condition that Mr. Mackenzie should be informed of the dissatisfaction with his leadership which exists, and another that he should remain Minister of Public Works so as to leave the control of general legislation in other hands." 15

Only three inveterate Blake supporters remained adamant, holding "that the real difficulties of our position would not be permanently got rid of by Mr. Blake's entering the Cabinet except as leader of the Government, and would not advise his entering otherwise."[16] In any case, the consensus of opinion favoured their chief's reconciliation with Mackenzie and his admittance as a cabinet minister. Doubtless, this statement of opinion by the majority made Blake more amenable to the negotiations, that soon commenced, to achieve this end.

In the succeeding days of March, April and May of 1875, various individuals proceeded to exert pressure upon both Blake and Mackenzie to compose their differences and extend the mutual hand of friendship. In the Blake camp, A.G. Jones took the initiative. Not only did he underline the necessity of Blake's assuming cabinet responsibility, but

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[15] Ibid. [16] Ibid.

also suggested that the other reluctant party giant, Luther Holton, be induced to take on Mackenzie's second portfolio. These suggestions however, met the cold reproving stare of Blake, who replied icily on the nineteenth of March:

> "Considering the increasing gravity of the situation, the great difficulties which will beset the administration, & the personal sacrifice involved, I cannot conclude that I am called on to take office unless the Govt be constructed on a basis giving the best available guarantees of stability & success. I must say frankly that I do not believe that these conditions would be answered by the proposed plan." 17

Blake was determined apparently to hold out to the last in the hope of realizing his ambition. What excuse could he offer to Jones for his reluctance to become an integral part of the administration? "I have been opposed to one important part of Mackenzie's policy," he explained, "& I do not think I ought to be asked to assume personal responsibility for that part of his policy by joining his government."[18] This "important part of Mackenzie's policy" was, of course, the Government's Pacific Railway programme and all its ramifications.

Nevertheless, despite his strong views, the young lawyer was not insensitive to the gravity of the situation. If only Mackenzie would resign the party leadership, then party differences, implied Blake, could be easily ironed out and forgotten. As he told Jones:

> "had Mackenzie requested it, I should in the present critical condition of affairs, have consented to join an administration

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[17] Ibid., Blake to Jones, March 19, 1875. A copy of Jones' letter dated March 20, 1875 is included in the Mackenzie Papers. Also an identical letter was sent from Blake to S. Louis on March 20, 1875

[18] Ibid.

> under Holton's lead, Mackenzie retaining the public works, or in case that arrangement were impractical, to take the lead myself, Mackenzie retaining the Public Works & Holton joining the Cabinet ... I understand that neither of these plans is acceptable to Mackenzie." 19

Therefore, in Blake's opinion, nothing could be accomplished at that moment; he was clearly ill-disposed to serve in a cabinet headed by Mackenzie.

Once in receipt of this letter, Jones passed it on to the party leader. A few days later, the latter posted Brown on "how the conspiracy prospers." Blake had stated, he informed the publisher, "in effect that he would not enter under me but might be induced to lead or even to accept Holton as leader."[20] Mackenzie, always anxious to promote party peace, immediately sounded out Holton on Blake's proposal that he should resign his office. Holton's reaction was unmistakeably negative. Despite his great desire to see Blake in office, that newspaper proprietor informed the Premier that "he would not think of such a condition nor did he believe ten men in the House and a still fewer proportion in the country would consent to favour such a proposition."[21] Holton went so far as to contact Blake in person in order to inform him that if he forced a show-down, there would be no possible chance of success "as Mackenzie controlled both the House and the country."[22] The accuracy of Holton's observations was verified in the Esquimalt-Nanaimo Railway debate when Blake, in an attempted show of strength threw "away the

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.I, Mackenzie to Brown, March 25, 1875

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

scabbard" and pitched "into Mackenzie right & left."[23] Mackenzie's superior strength was soon demonstrated.

Even so, Blake, refused to heed Holton's advice and continued, charged Mackenzie, to complain "of (my) Pacific Ry Policy!! and of my not being firm enough with Downing St!!!"[24] Rather nettled, the Prime Minister was quick to label these grumblings as "all bosh or worse." In his opinion there was no legitimate cause for dissatisfaction on the part of Blake in regard to either of these matters.

> "He knew we had to settle (the) Columbia question ... and the country is satisfied as well as the House. On the other point his complaint is groundless, but it is possible he may wish to quarrel with (the) Imperial Govt in which case he will not have his way in my day. I have ascertained that there is an overwhelming preponderance of opinion against him in the House." 25

Secure in the knowledge that the rank-and-file Liberals placed complete confidence in his leadership, the Prime Minister had no worries that the Blake Cave could wrest the reins of government from his hands. Alexander Mackenzie would indeed continue to control the House of Commons.

Meanwhile, Jones and his committee, composed of Laflamme and McDougall,[26] increased the pressure on Blake to terminate his opposition. His stubborness was completely unrealistic and unjustifiable, Blake was told; further, he was reminded that it was his imperative duty to resolve

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[23]Brown Papers, Brown to wife Anne, March 29, 1875

[24]Mackenzie Letter Books,Vol.I, Mackenzie to Brown, March 25,1875

[25]Ibid.

[26]Blake and Mackenzie Papers, Jones to Blake, March 24, 1875

his differences with the leader. Under such criticism, the young rebel soon began to weaken. "You have prossed me earnestly to enter Mackenzie's govt with Holton", he replied on March 22.

> "I have explained to you my own views, my reluctance to take office at all, my ideas as to the probable future of the party; my conviction that the proposed arrangement ... would not result in any permanent success ... But you have so forcibly set before me the responsibility (under which you think I labour and the universality of your own opinion) that I believe I must accede to your proposal ... I confess I am unable to convince myself, but I may be bound to yield to the convictions of others and to suppose that if all the world differs from me, I must be wrong". 27

The chinks in Blake's armour were indeed beginning to show. Mackenzie sprang to action. A major concession, it appeared, had to be offered to Blake in order to induce him to accept a cabinet portfolio. The concession that Mackenzie was prepared to make was the relinquishment of the Public Works Department if Holton would accept it and if Blake would enter the administration.[28] Would Blake pledge his support of this proposed arrangement? It was possible that he would, for as the Prime Minister realized, Blake's position outside the administration was becoming so weak politically that he would find it difficult to gain acceptance for any refusal on his part.

But complications soon appeared which threatened to disrupt the negotiations. Blake became even more obstinate,[29] and refused to consider

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[27] Ibid., Blake to Jones, March 22, 1875

[28] Thomson, Mackenzie, op.cit., p. 234, and Blake Papers, Mackenzie to Blake, letter labelled 'Saturday Morning'.

[29] The reason for this renewed stubborness was apparently that the Prime Minister had not made - nor seemed likely to make - any change in his policy regarding British Columbia or the Carnarvon Terms. It is also

any association whatsoever with the Ministry unless Holton was persuaded to enter the cabinet.[30] In the meantime, it seemed that the temperamental politician - in Brown's words - "has taken dire offence at everybody & refuses to go in".[31] How were the negotiations to be freed from this new snag? The President of the Privy Council, L.S. Huntington, approached George Brown and suggested that he attempt to obtain Holton's formal consent to the proffered cabinet post so that Blake might feel free to enter the government. Investigating further, Brown discovered that "Huntington, Geoffrion, Scott & Fournier - are very anxious to get Blake into the Govt - quite as much to keep Mackenzie in order as to quiet Blake & his clique."[32] All in all, in the words of Brown, the whole affair was quite "a mess"!

Why did Holton - not a member of the Blake camp - present such a problem at this juncture? Obviously, that Montreal businessman still had no desire to move to the Treasury Benches as either Prime Minister, Public Works Minister, or Minister of anything else. Perhaps he anticipated that as a minister of the crown, his work load would be too burdensome; perhaps also, he felt that he had neither the capacity nor the strength to administer either of the two portfolios offered him. In any event,

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possible that the young lawyer felt that he was being subjected to too much pressure to reconcile his differences, and thus became reluctant to continue negotiations.

[30] Mackenzie did not achieve this feat in 1875, nor in any of the succeeding years of his administration.

[31] Brown Papers, Brown to wife Anne, March 27, 1875

[32] Ibid.

he once more gave 'personal reasons' as his excuse for refusing, an extremely ill daughter[33] who barely survived a most difficult childbirth.[34] Since he could not leave her, he promised nevertheless, to urge Blake to reconsider the plan for enlisting his particular services.

Meanwhile, negotiations dragged on. Blake decided he must have time to consult his wife and legal partners.[35] It appears however, that he did not confer with his supporters in the Cave at this juncture, but then, no doubt, he was completely familiar with their views.

The Cave followers in these months were torn by two loyalties: on the one hand, allegiance to their party; on the other, loyalty to their chief. To a great many, the most sensible solution to this problem would be simply the resignation of Mackenzie as Prime Minister and the selection of Edward Blake to head a new administration. As Jones reported to Mackenzie on April 12, 1875, regarding the proceedings of a recent Cave meeting, "the general impression seemed ... that with you at Public Works and Blake as Premier we should have a government that would unite all parties and prove irresistible in the future".[36] Such a step

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[33]See Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.I, Mackenzie to Holton, January 16 and 17, and February 9, 1875

[34]This reason given by Holton for refusal to enter the cabinet was apparently valid. When his daughter passed away in October 1875, Holton was then willing to accept a cabinet portfolio. By this time however, L.S. Huntingdon, recently appointed Postmaster General, refused to leave the cabinet to make way for Holton. At the same time, Blake and Cartwright were reluctant to alter the status quo of the cabinet by admitting Holton since they were the senior members next to Mackenzie.

[35]Ibid., Brown to wife Anne, April 6, 1875, and Mackenzie Letter Books Vol.I, Mackenzie to Jones, April 8, 1875

[36]Blake Papers, Jones to Mackenzie, April 12, 1875

Mackenzie once more refused to consider. Jones continued to communicate with Blake by letter. In each, he repeatedly stressed Blake's duty to his party and his own objectivity and fairness in presenting the wishes of the party to Blake for his consideration.[37] Notwithstanding this prodding by Jones and others, Blake still refused to come round. Then, the Prime Minister, apparently hoping to induce the young barrister to quit the political arena for good, offered him the chief Justiceship of the new Supreme Court. But Blake refused to take the bait. He would not be swayed from his political ambitions;[38] the impasse in the negotiations was now more formidable than ever.

Even from outside the Blake camp came strong pleas to compose these basic differences in the party. J.D. Edgar, fearing that British Columbia might secede from Confederation should the railway project falter, implored Blake to aid the government in finding a solution to the problem.

> "I feel convinced that your presence in the cabinet today is so great a political (and perhaps party) necessity that scarcely any considerations ... can outweigh it. You are altogether too prominent a figure in public life to stand by, and not grapple with this momentous and difficult question of policy ... when your counsels are most urgently required ... You should buckle into harness, accept office ... no matter what and help drive the machine of state". 39

Despite the almost overwhelming pressure exerted upon him from

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[37]Mackenzie Papers, Jones to Mackenzie, April 18, 1875 and Blake Papers, Jones to Blake, April 23, 1875

[38]Mackenzie Papers, Holton to Mackenzie, April 19, 1875; Blake Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, April 22, 1875 and May 6, 1875

[39]Blake Papers, Edgar to Blake, May 1, 1875

all sides, Blake stuck to his resolve to remain aloof from the Mackenzie administration. The reason offered was his personal repugnance for the government's policy. "Last summer when at Ottawa ...", Blake reminded the Prime Minister on April 30, 1875,

> "I urged you to decline his (Carnarvon's) proposals ... In order to give any assistance I could to what I thought was the best course, I gave public expression to my views at Aurora. 40 Thinking as I do of the ministerial policy, it would be wrong for me to sustain it; having been forced to declare my opinions, that wrong would become a public shame." 41

In Blake's opinion, Carnarvon's terms should be repudiated, and a substitute plan maintaining taxation at existing levels and allowing monetary compensation to British Columbia for the delay be instituted in their place.

This proposal found qualified support from the economically-minded Prime Minister. "Remember", he informed a party member, "I don't want to spend a dollar I can avoid";[42] however, principle and necessity were also involved in the matter as well as economy. "Remember also", he continued,

> "we had to come to some arrangement with Columbia. We as a Govt were responsible for the peace of the country.

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[40] Blake had stated at that time, that if British Columbia insisted that the Dominion live up to the bargain negotiated by the Macdonald Conservatives, or the modifications of railway terms suggested by Mackenzie and Edgar (and later Lord Carnarvon), then he would be glad to let them depart from Confederation. The Pacific Railway should be built "as rapidly as the resources of the country permit" without increased taxation upon the country. Edward Blake, "A National Sentiment", op.cit.

[41] Blake Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, April 30, 1875

[42] Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.I, Mackenzie to D. Thompson, April 29, 1875

> Remember that Edgar was sent to Columbia by us (Blake included) to ... obtain a relaxation of the original terms. Thus we admitted the legality of the terms of Union and our resolve to keep Columbia in the Union." 43

It is interesting to note that the high principles which inspired respect for the Columbian contract did not prevent the Prime Minister from stating that, as an individual, he had "no desire to give Columbia anything ... Remember I propose no increase of taxation."[44] In essence, Mackenzie's private outlook [45] regarding the British Columbian affair was indeed similar to the views expressed by Blake.

Only on two main points did Mackenzie differ from the latter regarding the dispute. He disagreed that the Carnarvon intervention signified Canada's subservience to London,[46] as Blake claimed, and that, under no circumstances, could the west coast province be allowed to secede from Confederation. Writing on April 30, 1875 to Thomas Moss,

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[43] Ibid. [44] Ibid.

[45] The thrifty Scot did not support the terms of the bargain made with British Columbia originally by Macdonald, yet the ministry had agreed that the province must be kept in the union. Modification of the original agreement had to be obtained. Certainly, if Mackenzie had been in Macdonald's position in 1871, he would have offered much less to British Columbia. Whether the province would have joined Confederation on less agreeable terms is interesting speculation.

[46] Nevertheless, Mackenzie did feel that the Colonial Secretary had overstepped his terms of reference and was now meddling in a matter beyond the proper sphere of Imperial authority. As the Canadian Prime Minister noted in a private memorandum, "Lord Carnarvon should not have pressed his interference on us, that in a great country like this, it was not well for the Colonial Secretary to be too ready in interfering in questions having no bearing on imperial interest". (Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.I, memorandum of an interview with Lord Dufferin, n.d.) Here, of course, the accuracy of Mackenzie's assessment regarding the Colonial Secretary's intervention is open to question.

one of Blake's most ardent supporters, Mackenzie pleaded for a rational consideration of his position and argued that circumstances could not be changed no matter how appealing certain alternatives might be to the Blake Cave. In regard to the Columbian matter, even if the province decided to press unreasonable demands, the alternative of secession, first suggested at Aurora, would not be at all wise.

> "I am not sure how far that it would go down with the country. I am quite sure it would not go down with the Imperial Government or their representative here. It would result in the Tories being called in a general election, and a general Omnibus Bill for the benefit of all the small Provinces to secure for them no end of advantages to buy them up. Please consider all this." 47

Feel as he might privately, Mackenzie realized that the province must be contained within the confines of Union, an object for which Blake and his followers would have to be persuaded to strive.

Despite the gloom occasioned by the stalled reconciliation talks, a ray of hope pierced the darkness a few days later on May 3, as The Liberal, Blake's journalistic mouthpiece paraded a new sentiment. "The feeling appears to be universal" editorialized Cameron, "that a Liberal Government in Canada without Mr. Blake in its ranks is almost as incomplete as would be a Liberal Government in England without Mr. Gladstone".[48] Was this an obvious hint that Mr. Blake should be given the position in the Canadian Government that corresponded to that occupied recently by the grand old man of the English Liberal Party? It would appear not, for Blake apparently would be content with a lesser

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[47] Ibid., Mackenzie to Moss, April 30, 1875

[48] The Liberal (Toronto), May 3, 1875

position. The Liberal went on strongly to support a reunion of Blake and the party hierarchy: "Mr. Blake's entry into the Ministry, carrying with him as he necessarily would, his well-defined and clearly expressed views ... would give him his deserved influence in public affairs and give the country the full benefit of his counsels."[49] The opposition journal, The Mail, in interpreting this editorial, quickly reached the conclusion that some form of agreement was near.[50]

Holton was also certain that Blake's entry into the cabinet could soon be achieved, but felt, as he informed Mackenzie on May 12, 1875, that his (Blake's) .

> "adhesion should be obtained and as nearly as possible on his own terms ... if he stays out because (his) terms, so plausible, so constitutional, so much in harmony with the traditions of the Liberal party ... are rejected, it is easy to see the vantage ground that would be given to the disappointed who want Blake for their leader." 51

In Holton's opinion, there were certain individuals in the Blake camp who placed personal desires ahead of party and even national considerations.

Negotiations continued; Mackenzie was able to wring from Blake an assurance that he would very likely consent to enter the ministry.[52] This was bad news for the vice-regal representative. Because of Blake's opposition to the Carnarvon terms, Lord Dufferin had come to regard him

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[49] Ibid.

[50] Toronto Mail, May 5, 1875

[51] Mackenzie Papers, Holton to Mackenzie, May 12, 1875

[52] Ibid., Mackenzie to Brown, May 13, 1875

as the principal force frustrating the Imperial will in Canada.[53] In early May, Dufferin had taken it upon himself to advise the Prime Minister that, in his opinion, the recruitment of Blake would prove a distinct liability to the government. This expression of the Governor General's prejudice came as an unexpected surprise to Mackenzie. Moreover, Dufferin was not content with mere advice: he also warned Mackenzie that Blake would surely continue to play the role of "traitor"[54] within the cabinet should he become a member of it.

A few days later, Blake received some distressing news that threatened disaster for his fight to achieve a new and advanced Liberalism outside the cabinet. His paper, The Liberal, had gone bankrupt. "The expenses of the Liberal," wrote its editor, John Cameron on May 17, 1875,

> "have been greatly in excess of original estimates laid before you and therefore the capital at our disposal is inadequate to carry the venture through to a successful issue ... it is impossible for the Liberal to become a financial success ... We know of no alternative but to cease publication at once, in which case our loss will be about $ 25,000." 55

The collapse of the publication was unquestionably an important factor in influencing Blake's final decision to join the cabinet, for

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[53] As far as Dufferin was concerned, he had done nothing to provoke Blake's wrath. Warning Lord Carnarvon not to be deceived by Blake's "gentlemanlike" manner, Dufferin explained, "you must not be misled by his (Blake's) amiable 'allures' for the pot boils over without giving any warning, though as far as I am concerned, I have always taken care never to light a match beneath it." Dufferin to Carnarvon, June 1, 1876 quoted in, Farr, D.M., The Colonial Office and Canada, 1867-1887, (University of Toronto Press, Toronto 1955), p. 22

[54] Ibid.

[55] Blake Papers, Cameron to Blake, May 17, 1875

a prominent newspaper was a vital necessity for anyone crusading on his own in those times. He no doubt, felt that since he would soon be deprived of this sounding-board for his views, the cabinet remained the only adequate means through which he could pursue his objectives. Thus, in all probability, the bankruptcy of The Liberal helped to precipitate the course of action that had been forming in the lawyer's mind in the past few days. The very next morning he met with Mackenzie and negotiated his entry into the ministry.

The position accorded Blake was that of Minister of Justice. In order to acquire his services, the Prime Minister made some concessions on the British Columbia dispute, and thus a compromise was achieved. The terms of reunion were contained in a letter dated May 18, 1875 which reviewed the fruits of the morning's negotiations:

> "The result of our discussion of this morning is that I agree to join the Government on the understanding as to the general policy arrived at ... and in the understanding as to the Columbian terms reached this morning viz. that the Government shall negotiate with Columbia for the payment of a cash subsidy in lieu of the agreement to construct the Vancouver R.W.
>
> 2. that the Government shall propose to Parliament a measure for the carrying out the old terms as modified... providing that the obligations to secure the annual expenditure of $ 2,000,000 and to complete the line from the Pacific to L. Superior by 1890 shall not be construed to render it obligatory on Canada further to raise the rate of taxation in order to (obtain) their fulfilment.
>
> It is understood that in case British Columbia or England should raise any difficulty as to these provisions, the Govt. will notwithstanding proceed to carry them out in good faith". 56

Blake had, in fact, accepted the main Carnarvon terms with minor modi-

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[56] Blake Papers and Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.I, (copy) Blake to Mackenzie, May 18, 1875

fications. Why had Blake renounced his isolation and consented to return to the Mackenzie Ministry? Firstly, the Prime Minister, by displaying a rare skill at compromise, had met his main railway demands while retaining intact major terms set forth by Carnarvon. There were other factors, however, working independently of Mackenzie, that had helped Blake to renounce his self-imposed exile. Apart from the failure of his paper, The Liberal, the extensive campaign by many influential people within the party had doubtless convinced Blake that to retain political influence, he would have to associate himself with the Mackenzie Cabinet. It was obvious that he would become the Prime Minister's chief lieutenant; if Mackenzie ever abdicated his position, Blake would be readily available to fill the breech. If Blake aspired to the leadership of the party and the country - as he in all probability did - the only logical way to obtain it was to become as prominent and as influential in the cabinet as possible.

Seemingly, both sides, and the party at large, were more than satisfied with the compromise that permitted Blake to re-enter the cabinet. Party harmony and unity had been restored - at least for the time being. The news of Blake's decision however, did not arouse much jubilation in the hearts of some of his friends. Indeed, they were inclined to view the reunion with mixed feelings; to quote a supporter, John Young,

> "on the one hand, gratification that the Reform Party and Canada were to have your invaluable services ... and on the other hand the feeling that you were sacrificing much in entering the Govt and (would) probably share less than anyone else in the general satisfaction which the event has produced." 57

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[57]Blake Papers, James Young to Blake, May 20, 1875

Edward Blake, as future events would verify, did not, in fact, enjoy much satisfaction in his new change of state. As his journal let it be known, Blake considered his action as a real "sacrifice" on his part. Furthermore, within a year certain individuals found it necessary to write warnings to Mackenzie to beware of Blake. As O.D. Skelton states, Blake's joining the cabinet "did not mean immediate harmony".[58]

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[58] Skelton, O.D., Laurier, Vol.I, op.cit., p. 180

VI

THE RELUCTANT MINISTER

The influential Blake had now become an integral part of the Mackenzie administration. To some, this indicated that a magical transformation of governmental policy was imminent. He would soon translate his compelling utterances into concrete acts of long-promised reform. Other observers were inclined to take a less optimistic view of the situation. He had, at long last, been "caught", proclaimed the Mail, by "Scotch tenacity and perseverance" and would simply "settle down on the Premier's tail".[1] All the country waited, with eager anticipation, to see what changes, if any, would take place in the government's programme.

In the cabinet, the lawyer's abilities were immediately recognized as Mackenzie appointed him to the second most important portfolio, placing him before all others in influence. Moreover, the order of seniority in the cabinet, stated Mackenzie, would be "Blake, Smith, Cartwright, Huntington, Letellier".[2] Blake now possessed, as Mackenzie's chief lieutenant, a degree of power almost equal to that of the Prime

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[1]The Mail (Toronto), May 20, 1875

[2]Blake Papers, Mackenzie to Blake, May 26, 1875

Minister. But would he employ his power to accomplish the radical constitutional reforms that he had already proclaimed in public, or had he come to the conclusion that they were little better than pipe-dreams?

The newly-appointed cabinet minister soon revealed his position in a speech at Walkerton on June 2, 1875. Here Blake resolutely maintained that he had no sympathy for those who were Liberal in name only but Conservative in every action, with a Reform Party that had nothing to reform, or a progressive party that advocated standing still, and that if he had believed that the Mackenzie administration embodied such sentiments, he never would have joined it. Blake, it would appear, was entering the cabinet holding high his cherished projects of reform. Yet at the same time, in keeping with the art of a true politician, the legal genius provided himself with a loophole, quite noticeable in this case, by promising not to rest from his labours until the people had been educated to accept his doctrines unreservedly.[3] The implication was quite obvious; the time was not opportune for his reforms to be implemented. The Mail, comparing the Walkerton speech with his Aurora effort, wondered if the two speeches had been delivered by the same person. "The 'Disturber' has come down from his lofty pedestal", snorted the Conservative journal.

> "Advanced views, we are assured Mr. Blake still holds, but they are for the press and the public to discuss - as for him, he will now give his attention to 'practical politics' ... Festina Lente is now the motto of 'Canada's Disturber'." 4

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[3] Lucknow Sentinel, Report of Blake's speech, June 2, 1875 at Walkerton, (contained in Blake's Scrapbooks)

[4] Toronto Mail, June 4, 1875

How strikingly similar was this new philosophy of 'action after education' propounded by Blake, to Mackenzie King's philosophy of 'decision by Parliament and People' some years later. No doubt many people were compelled to conclude, after reading Blake's Walkerton Speech, that, as the Montreal Gazette put it,

> "the member for South Bruce has been fairly caught and tamed into an ordinary politician and that the Globe is right in its assumption that with all his love for theoretical questions, he has indeed given evidence by this speech that 'he can sink the doctrinaire in the public servant'". 5

Indeed, Blake had purged the radical element in his own political philosophy. Never did he attempt to promote the specific proposals so widely publicized at Aurora. The only Aurora project that Blake even half considered as a possibility was his notion of Senate reform. To him, the Canadian Senate would function much more efficiently if popularly elected. But the establishment of a completely elective upper house was deemed unwise by David Mills, himself an avid champion of Senate Reform.[6] Leaving other objections aside, it would mean, argued Mills, that "you would throw way the advantage of your just influence in the House of Commons ... you would be defeated & deserted by all the other provinces".[7] Furthermore, Ontario would be aligned against all the other provinces, and an agitation for "rep^{n} by pop^{n} " started in the Senate. "I would much prefer a single chamber to this."[8] No doubt, Blake desired Senate reform but he apparently could not support Mill's idea of a half-appointed,

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[5] Montreal Gazette, June 7, 1875

[6] Blake Papers, Mills to Blake, October 16, 1875

[7] Ibid. [8] Ibid.

half-elected House. Thus, instead of risking a breach in the party over this issue, he apparently put all thoughts on Senate reform out of his head.

Beyond a doubt, Blake, as an accepted member of the Mackenzie team, possessed considerable influence. One writer has even gone so far as to claim that the new Minister of Justice commanded sufficient prestige to set himself up as the dominant power behind the scenes, in reality, the de facto leader of the party.[9] Still others deny this assertion, and maintain rather that the Blake Cabal was transferred to the cabinet, and that friction between the two politicians, Blake and Mackenzie, continued unabated. Another prominent politician in the same cabinet, Sir Richard Cartwright charges in his Reminiscences, "so long as Mr. Blake remained in Parliament, Mr. Mackenzie led a divided Party," and that Blake was "constitutionally incapable of serving loyally under anybody".[10] One would think that since Blake was apparently satisfied regarding the conditions of his re-union, and since he had been honoured as the second in command of the nation's fortunes, he would buckle on the harness of service and accept graciously the role of the willing servant. It is conceivable that a forceful person in this eminent position might install himself as the directing force of the government. Certain people in the next few months were led to believe that this had, in fact, happened. One of those was Lord Dufferin, who concluded that Blake had indeed assumed

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[9]This is one of the main conclusions of W.R. Graham's thesis, The Alexander Mackenzie Administration 1873-78, op.cit.

[10]Cartwright, Reminiscences, op.cit., p. 134

primacy in the cabinet. His Excellency intimated openly to Mackenzie, "that perhaps he was not strong enough to control his cabinet", especially in the matters concerning the projected Pacific Railway.[11]

Furthermore, Dufferin soon satisfied himself that Blake and his colleague, Richard Cartwright, were in reality, determining government policy. In a report to his superior, Lord Carnarvon, on June 1, 1876, the Queen's representative confided,

> "I am now quite convinced that Blake and Cartwright have got the upper hand of him (Mackenzie) ... Indeed the British Columbia question is not the only subject with regard to which Blake is asserting his ascendency." 12

Dufferin's explanation for this state of affairs was simply that the Prime Minister had allowed himself to be hoodwinked by these gentlemen. "Mackenzie is a small man, without creative genius, or any real initiative of power of forecast," he asserted. [13]

In order to view these statements of Lord Dufferin in their proper light, lest one attach too much importance to them, it must be remembered that Blake had incurred the hostility of Lord Dufferin for his objections to the Carnarvon terms and the Pacific Railway, his Lordship's pet project. In addition, Blake's nationalism[14] - nationalism that

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[11] Dufferin - Carnarvon Correspondence, op.cit., Dufferin to Carnarvon, May 4, 1876, p. 223

[12] Ibid., June 1, 1876, pp. 234-35

[13] Ibid.

[14] W.R. Graham defined this nationalism as a nationalism "directed against the imperial powers of Great Britain, and "preoccupied ... with enhancing the constitutional autonomy of the Dominion". (W.R. Graham, "Liberal Nationalism in the Eighteen-Seventies", Canadian Historical Association Report, 1946, op.cit., pp. 101-119

Mackenzie strongly supported - which rejected Imperial 'meddling' in the Dominion's domestic affairs, had earned his added displeasure. Then too, Blake had also run afoul of Dufferin by insisting that the prerogative of pardon should be exercised by the Governor-General only on the advice of his ministers. Thus, in Dufferin's mind, Blake was a distinct threat to the powers of his office and also to the British connection. As the frustrating thorn in the royal side, Blake became intolerable to the Governor-General as he pursued the policies he felt were best for the young nation. "The fact that Mackenzie is very frequently overruled by Blake and Cartwright," lamented Dufferin on June 28, 1876,

> "and is so far from being supreme in his own cabinet, greatly complicates my difficulties, for I often find that after having succeeded in convincing him of the correctness of a certain view, or after persuading him to agree upon a certain programme everything is thrown into confusion by his being compelled to adopt a change of front by his colleagues whom of course it is very difficult for me to reach." 15

There is no doubt that Blake did resist anything that smacked of Imperial intervention in the internal concerns of the country. Although he had publicly gone on record as advocating Imperial Federation, he soon realized the impracticality of such an arrangement. Throughout the eighteen-seventies and eighteen-eighties when the movement was displaying great vitality, Blake refused to number himself amongst its supporters. "When the subject was brought up twelve years ago", he commented in 1886 on his Imperial Federation pronouncement at Aurora,

> "it seemed impossible to evoke any interest in the question, and ... as I then apprehended, the course of events has in

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[15] Ibid., June 28, 1876, p. 244

> my judgment both narrowed and obstructed the path of progress towards Federation." 16

No doubt Blake did possess a conception - although indistinct and hazy - of the future development of Canada, namely, the realization of the widest possible freedom of action consistent with membership in the Empire. For the moment, however, as Blake recognized, such freedom of action would be limited to domestic policies, and must be stoutly maintained against imperialistically-minded Governors-General. In these sentiments, Alexander Mackenzie fully concurred.

By expounding these and other views, Blake enlisted substantial political support for himself. Lord Dufferin, who fancied himself to be an astute observer of the Canadian scene, analysed the barrister's following thus:

> "his admirers have the most perfect confidence in his patriotism, honesty of purpose, & loftiness of aim, coupled with a well-deserved admiration for his general ability, and an undue estimate of his political sagacity and statesmanship." 17

Dufferin was interested not only in gauging Blake's appeal to the rank-and-file party members, but also in attempting to determine his relationship with the Prime Minister. After observing Blake in office for only a few short months, his Excellency concluded that Blake had become "sore, acrid & susceptible".[18] Again, Dufferin surmised that Blake's

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[16]Blake Papers, Blake to J. Castell Hopkins, July 31, 1887; and Skelton, Laurier, Vol.II, op.cit., p. 345

[17]Dufferin - Carnarvon Correspondence, op.cit., Dufferin to Carnarvon, February 2, 1876, p. 186

[18]Ibid.

"personal rolations with Mackenzie", were "very irksome" for the lawyer.[19] If the Governor-General were correct in his analysis, a very explosive situation had developed within the Mackenzie cabinet within a few months of Blake's return. If indeed, the new minister's position had already become vexatious after such short service, somthing was bound to happen.

The answer soon came. "Blake is playing for the leadorship in the Govt as he played for it out of the Govt till his game was exposed and defeated when he had to start on a new tack."[20] This was the ominous warning in a gloomy letter received by the Prime Minister from Luther Holton in mid October 1875, a mere five months after Blake's return to the cabinet. Holton, the erstwhile friend of Blake, could not state specifically what had led him to suspect the intentions of the Minister of Justice. He had no real proof - only certain inferences drawn from a number of circumstances that had aroused his apprehension. He was certain nevertheless, that he would have "no difficulty in convincing" Mackenzie that his inferences were "well-grounded". Not only did the proprietor of the Montreal Herald attempt to point the finger of suspicion at Blake, but he also singled out certain cabinet colleagues, namely Scott, Smith, Cartwright, Huntingdon and Laflamme as being in sympathy with the latter's designs. The Minister of Justice, concluded Holton, was out to secure "the adhesion of the Quebec contingent", a "plot" that Mackenzie should immediately "take steps ... to defeat."[21]

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Mackenzie Papers, Holton to Mackenzie, October 19, 1875

[21] Ibid.

Despite this very blunt warning and designation of certain key men as being Blake's liegemen, and despite the forecasted plan of attack to displace the Prime Minister, Mackenzie still seemed to believe that his eminent subordinate was a loyal and trustworthy minister in whom he could repose perfect confidence. In so far as the Prime Minister was concerned, Holton's charge was occasioned by sheer hypersensitivity on his part. It is indeed strange that Mackenzie had apparently forgotten that once before his perfect confidence in Blake had been rudely shattered.

Not to be discouraged by the Prime Minister's failure to act, Holton soon penned another note reiterating his charge that a "compact between Blake and the gentlemen I named" did, in truth, exist.[22] "I think he has a fixed purpose", Holton stated, "and in pursuit of it is cultivating ... all whose natural bias would be gratified or whose interests personal or political would be promoted by its accomplishment."[23] Nothing Holton said, however, could convince the Liberal leader that the missives should be considered as anything more than poison-pen letters owing their origin to nothing more than an unjustified fear of the Prime Minister's lieutenant.

Interestingly enough, one of the 'intriguers', L.S. Huntington, was convinced, as he informed Blake on November 2, that Holton, was, in fact, "hypercritically disposed" towards the administration, and had also become "afflicted with malaise in his relations towards us, and especially perhaps towards you."[24] Since Huntington was "not unaccustomed to his

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[22] Ibid., October 21, 1875 [23] Ibid.

[24] Blake Papers, Huntington to Blake, November 2, 1875

restless ways," it did seem as if Holton bore a grudge against Blake, perhaps on account of Blake's position of prestige in the ministry. Huntington harboured the impression that Holton felt that he did "not exercise fair influence with the administration",[25] desiring apparently to influence government policies without having to bear any responsibility for their implementation.

Understandably, Mackenzie failed to take any action on the information from Holton. In so far as Mackenzie could ascertain, there was no concrete indication that Blake was acting in an underhanded or disreputable fashion. In his estimation, Blake's aloofness and cold courtesy could not be construed as signs of disloyalty and intrigue; such characteristics were simply inherent in the nature of the man.

The possibility, however, that certain other people within the Reform Party were concocting plans for the involuntary retirement of the Prime Minister should not be overlooked; indeed, specific letters - to be quoted presently - verify that certain 'conspirators' were at work, and succeeded, after a few months, in arousing Blake's old ambitions of leadership. Yet there is no evidence suggesting that Blake, even after he began to think once again about such matters, had any preconceived plan of action; rather he was content, apparently, to apply the old adage of 'everything comes to him that waits', with perhaps a subtle push in the right direction now and then at the opportune moment. Blake probably never did acquire sufficient influence and prestige to install himself as *de facto* leader of the party; certainly he possessed enough respect

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[25] *Ibid.*

and ability to influence public policy, but never enough to assume a behind-the-scenes control of the government. In all probability, this failure to attain the supremacy, as well as his extreme sensitiveness to press criticism, produced his noticeable restlessness and periodic threats to resign.

Blake had not served more than six months as Minister of Justice before he became convinced that he should resign. This first ministerial crisis involving the administration's judicial expert stemmed from an editorial in The Mail. On June 28, 1875 the Tory journal had vigorously belaboured Blake for continuing to practise his profession while administering the Department of Justice, condemning him for "appearing in a Court whose judges were appointed through his influence, to plead the case of a strong partizan of that side of politics to which he is himself attached".[26] The editorial strongly insinuated that Blake's activities could not help but result in a miscarriage of justice.

The upshot of the Mail editorial was a long and furiously fought press battle between Reform and Conservative journals, in which Blake came in for much abuse and condemnation. Cried the Globe:

> "A great deal of very unnecessary criticism, and much of it of a needlessly offensive manner has been current of late ... We discard the notion utterly that any suitor is advantaged or injured by the appearance of a Minister of Justice in the case, and it is a gross libel on the Bench to assert the contrary." 27

Commented the Montreal Gazette: "No public man in Canada has ever before

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[26]Toronto Mail, June 28, 1875

[27]Toronto Globe, November 16, 1875

descended to this degradation." 28

This mounting crisis came to a head on November 26, 1875. On that day The Mail had this to say:

> "The precedent which the Minister of Justice is setting may be fraught with mischievous results, in that it may lead some suitors to think that the fortune of law is in favour of the side which secures the services of the chief law officer of the Crown. Some few of the country organs ... tell us that it is ungenerous to ask Mr. Blake to give up taking clients because it is asking him to surrender a practice worth $ 14,000 a year and to give his services to the country for half that income. The public man enters public life with the desire of serving his country. From him self-interest must depart ... If he had rather serve himself than make a small sacrifice to serve his country, there is no law to prevent him doing so." 29

To Blake, these attacks could not long be ignored. He had acquainted Mackenzie upon his joining the cabinet with his intention of continuing his legal practice, if only in a limited way. No objections whatsoever had been voiced by the Prime Minister. He could not however, endure such verbal assaults, for which the Globe was partly responsible. "The Globe has an article", he informed Mackenzie,

> "suggesting that I should be paid a larger salary and so in effect bought off from practice. As I anticipated the opposition press has taken this up as a proposal on my behalf, with appropriate comments, and holds me up to the public gaze in a character which I do not deserve & will not wear; and some of our own papers have very properly expressed their disapproval of the proposal... I have determined ... I will not appear at the Bar while I remain here." 30

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[28] Montreal Gazette, November 22, 1875

[29] Toronto Mail, November 26, 1875

[30] Mackenzie Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, November 26, 1875

Mackenzie immediately attempted to mollify his distressed colleague.

> "Your extreme sensitiveness has led you into error in two matters; 1st in thinking our press has not sufficiently sustained our position, 2nd in thinking that... any portion of the public or particularly of the profession gives any head of attach (sic) any weight to the Mail's attacks." 31

As they had decided when Blake had joined the government, there was no reason not to continue his private practice. In fact, "judges and lawyers have expressed themselves to me in the strongest terms in confirmation of these views within the last few days."[32] Mackenzie, in truth, did not wish Blake to forego his promising legal career.

> "I hope therefore you will not adopt the course you propose. It would do you no good. It would gratify malicious and heartless opponents whose attacks cannot affect you or change the position you hold in the country."33

Despite the approval and support of his chief however, Blake, always so vulnerable to adverse criticism, did abandon eventually what promised to become "an enormous practice by far the richest in Canada."[34]

Not long after this crisis had passed, an even more sensational controversy involving the Minister of Justice rocked the editorial columns of the country's newspapers. The issue in question was Blake's new policy of displaying mercy whenever possible in capital punishment cases through the commutation of the death penalty. Over the course of a few months, his decisions were questioned by various journals. Those disputed

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[31] Blake Papers, Mackenzie to Blake, November 27, 1875

[32] Ibid. [33] Ibid.

[34] Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.VII, Mackenzie to Brown, November 24, 1877

commutations, felt to be justly deserved by some, aroused much criticism of the Minister and his policy. George Brown's Globe was one of the attackers:

> "What we especially regret ... is this persistent interference with the verdicts of juries and the sentences of judges. It gives an air of uncertainty to the law which ought to be avoided if possible for it leads offenders to presume on the law's uncertainty to execute clemency so that they can have full confidence that in any case their lives will be safe ... when exercised too often, and for trivial reasons or none at all, it (the power of commutation) is in danger of falling into contempt." 35

This uproar reached such proportions that the cabinet finally felt called upon to review the whole matter. Although it made no recommendation regarding the situation, the Minister of Justice sensed a reluctance in some of his colleagues to support his general policy.

For his part, Blake, convinced of his far superior knowledge and abilities in the legal field, bitterly resented ignorant newspaper propagandists and others who did not have full access to the facts of each case acting as self-styled judges. In his view, the Minister of Justice should not have to furnish detailed explanations of each decision to the public in cases of this kind. "I cannot conscientiously alter my conduct or advise the adoption of a different line",[36] he wrote Mackenzie on September 25, 1876. When commutations advised by the minister even in the clearer cases provoked dissatisfaction and adverse comment, "it is fit then that a minister so circumstanced should retire." Blake had

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[35] Toronto Globe, September 22, 1876

[36] Mackenzie and Blake Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, September 25, 1876

not wanted office, he claimed; he had taken it only "in deference to the advice of others and against my own judgment."[37] It had been his sincere hope that the experiment would succeed, he told Mackenzie, but the repudiation of his policy in capital cases impelled him "to immediate action", and therefore he was obliged to submit his resignation.[38]

Mackenzie vainly endeavoured to soothe Blake's ruffled feathers: "I need hardly point out to you that there is no difference of opinion between you and myself, or our colleagues generally," he replied immediately.[39]

> "I am also quite certain that our general course will meet the approval of the country though newspaper conceit or malice may for a time in certain quarters produce more or less (a) divergence of opinion. I do not believe that 'public opinion' is against us ... I do not believe a single complaint will be made in Parliament." 40

Blake's resolve had come at a very inopportune moment - the financial depression and the weakened condition of the party in Quebec had already proved very detrimental to the party, and now, the Liberals had to contend with this extremely distressing letter "I feel pained that your over-sensitiveness should force you into what I cannot help but consider wrong ground, " stated Mackenzie, "I assure you nothing would be more disastrous to the Govt. & the liberal party than your retirement."[41] Perhaps there were "other circumstances" that were governing Blake's actions; if there were any annoyances or any changes that in Blake's opinion should

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[37] *Ibid.* [38] *Ibid.*

[39] *Ibid.*, Mackenzie to Blake, September 25, 1876

[40] *Ibid.* [41] *Ibid.*

be considered, Mackenzie was more than willing to do so. "I think I need hardly say to you that I am ready to discuss anything with you with a view to meet your wishes." Mackenzie was making a desperate attempt to retain his disgruntled colleague. "Indeed", he wrote, "I do not see how we can get on" if Blake were to insist upon his resignation. "Let me beg of you", pleaded the sorrowing Prime Minister, "to consider your letter as never written."[42]

Why was Mackenzie so desperate to retain the excitable Blake in the cabinet? There were several reasons. Firstly, his widely - respected name added considerable lustre to the Mackenzie cabinet; without him, the Ministry's popular appeal would be substantially weakened. Secondly, Blake was one of the few cabinet members possessing genuine administrative talent. He was indeed almost indispensable to Mackenzie in the formulation of government policy, in the management of the extremely onerous Department of Justice, and in untangling the complexities in the relationship between the Dominion and British Governments (in such cases as the establishment of the Supreme Court of Canada, for example). Thirdly, a divided party would be the inevitable result of Blake's departure. His friends were still numerous and would, in all probability, urge him to take up once again the radical constitutional reforms spelled out at Aurora. Mackenzie had no desire to jeopardize the precarious 'unity' that had been established since mid-1875, for as he told E.B. Wood, it was "a hard task keeping the Liberal party together in the face of a foe (the Tories) who unite by natural cohesion in defiance

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[42] Ibid.

of principle". [43] Lastly, Mackenzie was convinced that the Toronto lawyer's over-sensitivity was driving him to a totally unnecessary act; this must not be allowed to happen! Brown had erred in writing such a strong article against the minister's decisions. "I don't think it was fair", reprimanded Mackenzie,

> "to write of the Govt as systematically interfering with the verdicts of Juries and sentences of the Courts ... the law commits to us the prerogative of mercy ... whenever there is a reasonable doubt entertained, the doubt should be in favour of sparing life ... The article of the "Globe" contributes very largely to the formation of a public opinion adverse to any executive clemency by those who are unquestionally in possession of the right information to form a sound judgement ... to argue editorially that we are abusing our position ... was surely going a great deal too far." 44

Brown, in Mackenzie's opinion had made a serious error of judgment. Clearly Mackenzie concurred completely with Blake's opinion, that no human life should be taken by the law except in cases of deliberate premeditated murder. It is amazing how closely this view of the Mackenzie Ministry accords with modern day thinking on the subject of capital punishment.

Despite Mackenzie's pathetic pleading to reconsider, Blake remained unmoved. He was obviously determined to resign, and resign he would. Although he appeared to have no 'annoyances', no complaints, no changes to suggest (at least openly), yet he was resolved to leave the administration. It was his responsibility to "take the consequences on

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[43] Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.I, Mackenzie to E.B. Wood, October 19, 1876

[44] Ibid., Mackenzie to Brown, September 26, 1876

my own shoulders ... You yourself", Mackenzie was reminded in a second note on the same day, "agreed & indeed stated that the general impression was that there had been too many commutations."[45] Furthermore, Mackenzie had greatly over-estimated the effects of the proposed retirement. Assuming the complex of a political martyr, Blake sadly lamented, "I have, as I expected I would, lost the greater part of what little strength I ever had in the country; I shall lose the rest by my retirement. I shall make no effort to regain it." Indeed, it was not, as Blake concluded "a very happy ending" for the parting of the ways between the two men, but Blake could "see no ground for changing" the course his mind was set on.[46]

It was evident that Blake's acute sensitivity to criticism had induced a state of melancholia in his assessment of the political future. Why should his depression however, be so overwhelming? Mackenzie had stated that Blake did enjoy the support of his colleagues; in all probability, the country as well would sustain his general policy. No one was demanding his resignation. Why should Blake be so determined to sever his connections with the Ministry? Was it his desire to return to private practice that made him act in such a fashion? Seemingly, it was not that; for as Thomson states, "a lucrative law practice did not appear to be his sole heart's desire."[47] There is only one plausible explanation

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[45] Mackenzie and Blake Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, second letter on September 25, 1876

[46] Ibid.

[47] Thomson, op.cit., p. 276

for his action: the severity of the criticism directed at him as Minister of Justice convinced him that if he ever was to achieve enough support for his campaign for the highest office, he must dissociate himself from the Mackenzie Ministry in order to commence afresh outside the cabinet.

But during the following twenty-four hours, Blake forced himself to review the whole matter more rationally. After considering further entreaties from Mackenzie, Smith, and Cartwright, he came to the conclusion that he had been overly pessimistic in forecasting his political future, and that his decision to resign had been made too hastily. He reasoned that he still might accomplish his goals from within.[48] Although "the difficulties of my situation already great have been unduly increased", he informed the Prime Minister late on the 26th of September, "yet I yield my own views and authorize you not to proceed further in the matter of my resignation".[49]

Nevertheless, despite this change of heart, he gave warning that his staying on might be only temporary:

> "I am constrained however to add that I do not agree in the arguments used as to the inconvenience of this time for my retirement or as to the extent of my party obligations and that in case ... my resignation be hereafter tendered, I shall hold myself free in my own justification

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[48]It is quite possible that Blake was still in the self-depreciative frame of mind of the previous day (25 September 1876). Thus, if such was the case, he probably felt that resignation at that time would be tantamount to political suicide. This, Blake was not prepared to do.

[49]Blake and Mackenzie Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, September 26, 1876

to refer to this correspondence". 50

In conclusion the temperamental minister added that he was "truly sorry" to have caused his colleagues so much trouble.

A few days later, Blake received a reassuring communication from the editor of the London Advertiser. In his letter, Cameron strongly advised the Minister not to allow himself to be worried by anything "the great Globe" might say. The Globe's remarks on the commutation issue had "caused the utmost indignation here among our friends, betraying as they do, equal malice & ignorance."[51] Brown's pigheadedness, suggested Cameron, had had a damaging effect upon the journal's prestige and influence. "Without exception", he continued,

> "the principle outside Reform papers repudiate its leadership. The Hamilton Times, London Advertiser, Kingston Whig, Guelph Mercury, St. Thomas Home Journal, Chatham Banner, Seaforth Expositor, Lindsay Post, & others that might be named, have a common understanding & it is not in the direction of bowing the knee to Brownism." 52

This union of "common understanding" had given its allegiance to Blake, and was united in its determination to help the minister "triumph over those who unjustly assail you, whether they are called Tories, or those who ought to be so termed." There was no doubt as to whom was meant by this last remark. The Brown brothers no longer had in their possession "power enough to control public affairs", yet they still had "enough to do mischief".[53] In all probability, Brown himself was cognizant that

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[50] Ibid.

[51] Blake Papers, Cameron to Blake, September 29, 1876

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

the power and prestige of his journal had vastly deteriorated; if any doubts on this subject persisted, they were soon laid to rest after the outcome of the 1878 elections. Perhaps this recognition of the declining power of the Globe and its publisher is the main reason for Brown's general "hands off" policy towards the Mackenzie administration, except for the occasions when he could rap Blake's knuckles.

Thus, the commutation tempest blew itself out, but a feeling of uneasy calm lingered on, soon to be shattered by an astounding letter from the influential Montreal Liberal, Luther Holton.

VII

"WE PERISH IGNOBLY"

The bombshell came September 26, 1876. On that day Luther Holton levelled the following criticism at Mackenzie and his administration:

> "The feeling of dissatisfaction and despondency is all but universal. No one ventures to say that if we were to have a general election now, more than fifteen of us could come back ... Something must be done to raise the spirits of our Party and regain public confidence in this Province (Quebec) or we perish ignobly and under your leadership." 1

One could hardly imagine a more sweeping indictment of the Prime Minister's two and a half years of leadership. There was no doubt that since the retirement of Dorion the Liberal Party had fallen upon evil days in Quebec. Clerical hostility, the alignment of the Conservative opposition with the Church, divisions within the provincial party and the Depression, all had played havoc with the fortunes of the Government. Holton however, was content to place the main blame for the disastrous condition of affairs squarely on Mackenzie's shoulders. In attempting to do so much at the Public Works Department he was, in effect, destroying the party by his failure to spend enough time at the Prime Minister's desk. Almost continuously throughout his five weary

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[1] Mackenzie Papers, Holton to Mackenzie, September 26, 1876

years in office Mackenzie received letter after letter to this effect; in practically every instance he was advised to relinquish the Public Works Portfolio. The Minister of Finance, writing in late September 1876, after the summer's loss of two Ontario by-elections, suggested that the only way to strengthen the party was for Mackenzie to free himself from his "most laborious department" so that he might personally supervise the general re-organization of the party.[2] No one but the Prime Minister, it was argued, could effectively manage this task. Moreover, felt Cartwright, "it is unfair to you as premier to be in charge of a department where you must of necessity say no very often to your supporters".[3] He might have added that it was even more unfair and unwise to retain Public Works, since the Premier, lacking Sir John's forte of the graceful mollifying refusal, had become noted for his curt and abrupt rejection of undeserving requests.

The sensitive Scot reacted bitterly to what he considered to be unjust and unwarranted criticism of his administration. Holton's remarks on the state of the party were "very painful"for him, the Premier said in reply to Holton's strongly-worded criticism. Holton himself, he argued, must share the blame for the first mistake of the Ministry: "you should as a prominent member of the party have accepted office"; the failure of both Blake and Holton himself in refusing to join the

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[2]Cartwright Papers, Cartwright to Mackenzie re by-election results in North and South Ontario ridings, September 25, 1876

[3]Ibid.

Government, Holton was told, "was not fair to me or the party".[4] So great had been his anguish, he claimed, that he had almost declined the opportunity to form the Ministry. The subsequent misfortunes that had befallen the party he felt, should entitle him to claim sympathy rather than receive "a cold intimation that under my leadership the party will 'perish ignobly'." Mackenzie pathetically concluded,

> "You know I never sought the leadership, and I need not say ... that I do not now hold it for any personal reasons but in the party interests ... If ... my leadership is considered a failure, I need not assure you how gladly I will relieve myself of a burden of care, the terrible weight of which presses me to the earth". 5

Obviously, Mackenzie did not consider himself indispensable to the country or to the party.

Holton hastened to reply. He had not meant to reproach the Prime Minister with the charge of "insufficient leadership", rather he had only intended to make him aware of the gravity of the situation in order to move him to action. His words, he claimed, had been misinterpreted.

> "I said if something be not done & that quickly the party will perish & that under your leadership, not by reason of any ... fault of yours but because you failed to do now what was needful to save the party. I have not lost confidence in your leadership. I do not want to change leaders." 6

All that Holton desired was a little more leadership. "Men of lesser ability are in control of moulding the country's policy", he continued,

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[4]Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.I, Mackenzie to Holton, September 26, 1876

[5]Ibid.

[6]Mackenzie Papers, Holton to Mackenzie, September 28, 1876

because Mackenzie was devoting too much time to the business and policy considerations of the Public Works Department. Again the old argument was repeated: "no frail human machine is equal to the performance of the two-fold duties of Political Leader and Chief of the most labourious department in Government."[7]

Wearying of the mounting pressure, Mackenzie decided to consult the Minister of Justice for suggestions. He could surmise what Blake's advice would be: he had already stated his opinion in a definitive fashion several times. As early as May 31, 1874, Blake had written that Mackenzie could not "manage both" portfolios, and had advocated an immediate change: the relinquishment of the Public Works Department.[8] Directly and indirectly, Blake had, during the succeeding months, underscored his feeling that the calibre of leadership had to be improved.

Strangely enough, however, when asked for his advice on this issue early in October, 1876 Blake was rather non-committal, reserving the decision entirely to the Prime Minister. "I have been thinking over what you asked me to consider", replied Blake.

> "You propose to withdraw from P.W. I admit that the difficulties in your retirement and in your accession as a minister are considerable; but I think they will rather increase than diminish by time ... My view therefore if there is to be a change, is for an immediate change." 9

Blake went on to suggest a few possible changes that might be considered in any contemplated cabinet shuffle; the most beneficial from his point

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Blake Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, May 31, 1874

[9] Blake and Mackenzie Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, October 6, 1876

of view would be the establishment of "a second legal office".

All in all, a cabinet shuffle at that time, in Blake's opinion, was not absolutely essential. Yet, in all certainty, Blake was indeed convinced of Mackenzie's inability to fulfil adequately the duties and responsibilities of both offices simultaneously, a shortcoming that was obvious to all who came in intimate contact with the Prime Minister. Thus, the only plausible explanation for the sentiments expressed in the letter quoted is that once again Blake had begun to conceive of himself as party leader; doubtless this possibility would soon be a reality, felt Blake, if the inefficacy of Mackenzie's leadership continued to plague the party. In all probability, Blake hoped that through his contrived indifference to whether Mackenzie retained or gave up the Public Works portfolio, Mackenzie would conclude that no real need existed for abandoning it, and thus through his retention of it, Blake's chances for promotion to the Prime Ministership would be greatly improved, especially if dissatisfaction mounted with Mackenzie's dual role. If such was Blake's strategy, it achieved the desired effect: no cabinet shuffles were instituted and Mackenzie continued as before. In fact, as a reply to Luther Holton's criticism demonstrated, Mackenzie had once more convinced himself of his 'ability', capacity and also the necessity to preserve his dual responsibility. "I must," wrote Mackenzie on October 13, 1876,

> "take exception to the convictions of what you take for granted, viz. that the Premier's duties are neglected to enable the Minister of Public Works to attend to <u>his</u> duties. Liberals are exacting and I venture to say I have done at least as much work as any previous Premier in endeavouring to meet this exaction by correspondence

> and otherwise ... I would have as Premier to deal with many matters which are in this Dep't. though I had ten P.W. Ministers." 10

Mackenzie was convinced that the shortcomings of his administration were due, not to his assumption of too much work and responsibility, but rather to "the results of sectional representation forcing upon (me) men of so inferior calibre as to be utterly useless".[11] No doubt, both factors shared equal responsibility for the failure of the Prime Minister to enthuse a sagging ministry.

Only once in the remaining days of his administration did Mackenzie waver in his faith in his own ability to manage satisfactorily the two portfolios. During another cabinet crisis involving Blake - in May of the following year - Mackenzie came to the conclusion that David Mills, the Minister of the Interior, should prepare himself for assuming the duties of Public Works.[12] This proposed change however, did not materialize; either Mills was not requested to switch departments, or if requested, refused to do so. In any event, Mackenzie continued to retain strict control over all phases of the Public Works Department until the removal of his government by the electorate in September 1878.

As time progressed, life in the Mackenzie ministry became progressively distasteful for Blake. Increasingly, the administration and

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[10] Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.I, Mackenzie to Holton, October 13, 1876

[11] Ibid.

[12] Blake Papers, Mills to Blake, May 10, 1877

dispensation of justice became increasingly onerous; as early as November 25, 1875, Blake complained that "at present and for some time past it is quite clear that the Department (of Justice) has been overburdened."[13] Relief was "absolutely necessary" he announced; but no amelioration was achieved. Renewing his complaint on October 6, 1876, Blake urged that "one of the lighter offices" be converted "into a second legal office",[14] and eight days later suggested that the Receiver-General should assume some of the "legal & legislative work."[15] Throughout October 1876 Blake continued to press his demands for relief; the present duties of the Receiver-General, he felt, could be re-assigned to "the ministers of the financial & fiscal branch of the Government".[16] The Prime Minister however, did not see any great need for such a move, and neglected to act on the proposal.

At this point, Blake began to show signs of depression. By the end of the year he had convinced himself that the prospects for the government's continuance in office after a general election were far from promising. Would it not be better politically, he wondered, to divorce himself from the ministry while there was yet time? His friend, Jeremiah S. Smith, a merchant of St. John,[17] endeavoured to dissuade Blake from so acting. "I am sorry you are not more sanguine of the result of (the)

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[13] Mackenzie Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, November 25, 1875

[14] Mackenzie and Blake Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, October 6, 1876

[15] Mackenzie Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, October 14, 1876

[16] Ibid., Blake to Mackenzie, October 20, 1876

[17] From this city came another of Blake's supporters, the Honourable Isaac Burpee.

next election for the Commons," wrote Smith on January 4, 1877.

> "I trust you will excuse me when I tell you that I disapprove altogether of the course you seem inclined to take at & after (the) next election. Supposing the Liberal Party to be in power, if you remain in Parliament you must be in the Govt: no Govt could exist if you stand aloof from it at the present time. Sooner than take that course I would advise you though reluctantly to retire from public life altogether." 18

Nothing, however, could dispel the lawyer's gloom, and he resolved to sever his relationship with the cabinet.

Clearly the Blake - Mackenzie relationship was not a demonstrably harmonious one. Throughout the Parliamentary Session of 1877, Mackenzie's distinguished colleague participated as little as possible in government affairs. At times it seemed as if Blake was out to settle a personal grudge against the Prime Minister by this behaviour. Even the somewhat naive Mackenzie could occasionally discern hostility in Blake's actions as the latter repeatedly refused to shoulder his full responsibilities in the preparation and presentation of the government's legislative programme. "Mr. Blake won't take a hand unless everything is as clear as day," complained Mackenzie to his brother Charles early in March 1877. "So much is this the case that I sometimes think he would not be sorry to see me worsted."[19] These were indeed ominous words. The conciliatory relationship established when Blake entered the cabinet had obviously deteriorated.

Blake indeed clashed several times with the Prime Minister over various minor issues during the early part of 1877. Most important of

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[18] Blake Papers, J.S. Smith to Blake, January 4, 1877

[19] Mackenzie Papers, Mackenzie to brother Charles, March 4, 1877

these disputes was the so-called Anglin issue. The Speaker of the House, T.W. Anglin, was accused of violating the Independence of Parliament Act by accepting a printing contract from the government. With some assistance, he was able to show, as Mackenzie later related to David Laird, that, "the printing was a departmental not a Govt. matter."[20] In Mackenzie's opinion, Speaker Anglin was not guilty, either morally or otherwise, of the charge. But Blake strongly disagreed.[21] All in all, the growing friction between Blake and his chief produced an atmosphere unbearable for the sensitive and temperamental Minister of Justice. Doubtless, as he mulled over his grievances, Blake recalled his former days in the Cave when prospects had given some hope, at least, for the realization of his political ambition to obtain the party leadership. In his present condition, there seemed to be not one iota of hope. Since his entry into the Government, departmental work had become more and more tiresome and time-consuming; the longer he remained a part of the administration, he realized, the greater the blame he would have to share for its failures.

Blake's political condition rapidly worsened. Seized by fits of depression, he deteriorated quickly as violent headaches and recurring insomnia began to plague him. There was no doubt in his mind that he

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[20] Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.VII, Mackenzie to Laird, May 14, 1877

[21] When Blake finally quit the cabinet in January 1878, the Mail was convinced that the most important cause of his resignation was "the question of the Speakership". Toronto Mail, February 1, 1878

could not continue as Mackenzie's cabinet colleague. If he wanted to preserve himself in order to attempt once more to realize his great ambition - no longer latent - he must quit the Ministry.

Accordingly, on April 30, 1877 Blake penned his resignation and sent it off to the Prime Minister. "I can no longer remain a minister," Blake bluntly wrote. He gave as the reason for his resignation the poor state of his health. As it "disables me from adequately discharging my official duties, I am spared the necessity of adding any other to this sufficient ground for retirement."[22] One could see, however, Blake was not resigning solely on the grounds of faltering health.

Mackenzie as usual was caught totally unprepared. The session had been a long and exhausting one and he had emerged from it completely worn-out and looking "like a washed out rag, and limp enough to hang upon a clothes line", to quote the comments of the Governor-General.[23] And now he was confronted by this disheartening communication from Blake. "I had no idea of your taking such a step and it quite discourages me," replied the deflated chief. "Barely out of a severe session I had hoped for some peace of mind and bodily rest ... I begin to feel that I cannot sustain the struggle of leading the party."[24] Once again the weary Mackenzie made the customary plea:

> "Is it not possible for you to reconsider your resolution? I do not conceal from myself that such a step will weaken

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[22]Mackenzie and Blake Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, April 30, 1877, first letter.

[23]Dufferin - Carnarvon Correspondence, op.cit., Dufferin to Carnarvon, May 3, 1877

[24]Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.VII, and Blake Papers, Mackenzie to Blake, April 30, 1877

> the Government very much at a time when Lower Canadian affairs have made us weak there ... It may also prejudiciously affect the pending elections." 25

This time Blake refused to be dissuaded. "I cannot reconsider my resolution," came the immediate and tersely worded reply;[26] however, the reluctant servant promised to stay on for two or three weeks while Mackenzie sought a successor. In the end Blake remained for five weeks at the helm of the Justice Department until replaced by Rodolphe Laflamme on June 7, 1877. In this interval Blake was induced to modify his decision to retire completely, and to assume the nominal duties of the Presidency of the Council. Mackenzie at the same time came to accept Blake's stated excuse as sufficient explanation for his recent behaviour, writing to this effect to Wilfrid Laurier, the rising young Liberal in Quebec.[27] Blake had now come into a cabinet portfolio which could hardly be regarded as a taxing one. His prestige, however, would continue to accord him a major role in moulding policy if he chose to play such a role. Yet within eight months he elected to sever all connections with the Mackenzie cabinet. On January 17, 1878 came the final farewell as he departed from the ministry for good. The official explanation, published by the press, was that ill health had compelled his withdrawal from the cabinet.

Yet on the whole, Blake seemed to possess reasonably good health.

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Mackenzie and Blake Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, April 30, 1877, second letter.

[27] Public Archives of Canada, Sir Wilfrid Laurier Papers, Mackenzie to Laurier, June 8, 1877

Admittedly, throughout the 1872 canvass he had been forced to take a complete rest in England in order to recuperate from the ravages of over-work. But, after his return, and for the next four years Blake was not troubled by any real threat to his health. The first sign that he was ailing appeared in his resignation of April 30, 1877, at which time he abruptly stated, "the state of my health disables me from adequately discharging my official duties".[28] Unquestionably, the drudgery of the Justice Department was responsible to a large extent for the impairment of his constitution.

Even his shift to purely nominal cabinet responsibilities failed to improve the condition. Indeed, in September, most of his engagements had to be cancelled or rescheduled, as he was "physically unequal" to the tasks involved.[29] Thus he was "obliged to postpone the meeting indefinitely", he informed J.D. Edgar on September 17th, as he excused himself from his promise to speak to the Young Canadian Liberal Club in London.[30] In the latter part of September, although Blake did summon up the energy to deliver a speech at Teeswater, it was evident to the people and reporters present that he was in much physical pain.[31] Although the tired lawyer put aside all duties and demands upon his time

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[28]Blake and Mackenzie Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, April 30, 1877

[29]Edgar Papers, Blake to Edgar, September 17, 1877

[30]Ibid.

[31]Reported the Globe September 24, 1877: It was an "eloquent and comprehensive speech ... not withstanding that it was uttered under the disability of manifest and very great physical feebleness. So much was this the case that at the conclusion of his address, Mr. Blake was quite exhausted, and was compelled to retire before the termination of the day's proceedings".

after his Teeswater effort, his vitality continued to ebb. Therefore, there seemed no alternative but complete retirement. Moreover, his medical consultants verified that an examination of his recurring headaches and insomnia had disclosed a "serious constitutional disturbance".[32] they therefore advised him that "some cessation of work" was necessary and hinted that he might have to "desist from all active participation in governmental office ... for a time."[33] It is evident from their report that Blake possessed some cause for alarm concerning his health.

Thus, by November, Blake could no longer accept even a nominal cabinet post. It is interesting to note that the physicians did not prescribe an immediate retirement for Blake; only if "those unpleasant symptoms" of which they had warned him were to reappear, would resignation from the government become imperative.

This Mackenzie clearly realized when he received the doctors' diagnosis attached conveniently to Blake's resignation of November 5th. In replying to his request for retirement, the Prime Minister left no doubt that he did not consider that the state of the Minister's health made it necessary. Although he was very sorry to hear of this "unfavourable report," he was "glad to know it was no worse as it is evidently precautionary chiefly. We may presume", he continued, "that a man of your good constitution and habits at your age will overcome any tendency to disease with comparative ease".[34] The Prime Minister was convinced

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[32]Blake Papers, and Mackenzie Papers, Bowell and Johnson to Blake, November 3, 1877

[33]Ibid.

[34]Blake Papers and Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.VII, Mackenzie to Blake, November 9, 1877

that Blake's impairment was only temporary.

Nevertheless Blake continued to press his case. The news that the President of the Council was demanding his immediate freedom did not come as much of a surprise to George Brown. "I was somewhat prepared ..." admitted Brown in a letter to Mackenzie on November 18, 1877,

> "by what his brother ... has been recently saying - with this difference only, that he gave the idea that it would be his brother's duty (i.e. Blake's) and (as I understood) his brother was prepared to act upon it - to hold his position until after the coming session & if necessary (until after) the coming election before he resigned." 35

One could certainly expect that, if only out of common courtesy, Blake would lend his support to the administration until the upcoming parliamentary session had terminated. This however, was not to be the case.

In any attempt to explain the enigma of Edward Blake one must look beyond the public explanation of deteriorating health. Indeed, there were much deeper motivations at work - political considerations of the utmost importance. Commencing some time in 1876 certain people had set to work to encourage and manipulate the one great goal to which Edward Blake aspired - the leadership of the Liberal Party. Although previously frustrated in the realization of this ambition, Blake had not completely suppressed this desire, even though forced by his friends to assume office in the Mackenzie administration for the good of the

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35 Mackenzie Papers, Brown to Mackenzie, November 18, 1877

party and the country. Apparently, there were certain individuals who set out to fan the embers of Blake's hopes, the so-called "intriguers" about whom Mackenzie had been warned[36] in September 1876. It is debatable whether they actually inflated Blake's belief that he was the superior leader. Blake's close friend and fellow cabinet colleague, David Mills, suggested a more alarming possibility in a letter to Blake on May 24, 1877 when he wrote concerning Blake's proposed relinquishment of the Justice portfolio.

> "I don't think you are well or wisely advised when you are advised to resign at the present time. Your conduct will be misunderstood. It will hurt the government much, the party much, but yourself most of all. Now I think if you resign you will discover that your quondam friends will be found pouncing upon you for leaving the Government at present. I know that you will be asked (to) withdraw from Parliament. I believe there are some more anxious to get you out of public life than they are to get rid of Sir J.A. Mod. It is a sound rule not to do what some people want you to do... I would earnestly urge you not to think of resigning at present." 37

A more pointed warning could hardly have been given.

This letter was written a few days after Blake had forwarded his resignation to Mackenzie, and showed clearly that certain persons were actively bent on encouraging the susceptible Blake to break his ties with the ministry. In Mills' opinion, Blake had been receiving counsel from "quondam friends" who would prove to be false at the first opportunity. That he would destroy himself politically if he accepted the proffered advice, was the ominous intimation from Mills. As to why these unnamed

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[36] Mackenzie Papers, Holton to Mackenzie, September 28, 1876

[37] Blake Papers, Mills to Blake, May 24, 1877

figures desired to remove Mr. Blake from the political scene, there seems to be no satisfactory answer. If Blake was requested to withdraw from Parliament if he resigned - as would be the case according to the prediction made by Mills - his chances for the leadership and political advancement would be greatly diminished. Clearly, in the opinion of Mills, the intriguers did not desire to see Blake installed as leader. Therefore, one can only surmise that these advisers were actually motivated by feelings of revenge toward the Minister which could only be satisfied by his destruction.

Holton in his letter of September 28, 1876, suggested a more simple and perhaps a more plausible explanation for the actions of the intriguers, namely, that they sought to weaken the administration, destroy Mackenzie, and achieve Blake's appointment as Prime Minister. While this is perhaps a more logical explanation, it must be remembered that Holton never achieved with Blake the intimacy of a close confidant friendship, such as the bond of loyalty that existed between Edward Blake and David Mills.

One can conclude however, that there were intriguers within the party endeavouring to manipulate Blake in order that their own goals - either the installation of Blake as Prime Minister, or the removal of Blake as a political force - might be furthered. Who were these "quondam friends" of Blake? This question cannot be readily answered from the evidence available. Holton, in his letter of September 28, designated certain individuals, namely Scott, Smith and Cartwright, as Blake's "natural allies." 38

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38 Mackenzie Papers, Holton to Mackenzie, September 28, 1876

Yet it is extremely difficult to believe that such staunch upright Liberals as these would stoop to such an intrigue. Certainly, there are no other grounds for even suggesting the involvement of these men in such a conspiracy, nor is there any document that implicates any one else in the matter.

How did Blake react to this warning from Mills? Once more it is difficult to answer this question, but conceivably the communication was instrumental in persuading Blake to remain in the Cabinet as President of the Privy Council rather than carry through his intention of resigning.

Even the Prime Minister had come to realize by late November, that certain of Blake's friends were indeed encouraging his desires by playing on the loss of his lucrative legal practice and the lack of adequate rewards for his personal sacrifices to the party. Even the Conservatives were expressing these views, for "Sir John has talked of his poverty and his sacrifices", Mackenzie informed George Brown[39] on November 24.

While these three communications are the only ones that suggest the presence of conspirators stimulating Blake's latent ambition, nevertheless, they are sufficient, when considered together to substantiate the validity of this theory. Doubtless, there were other factors that provoked Blake's increasing dissatisfaction with the Mackenzie administration and contributed to his decision to resign: namely, the drudgery of the Justice Department, the bitter press criticism of his

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[39] Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.VII, Mackenzie to Brown, November 24, 1877

decisions, the differences of opinion with the Prime Minister,[40] and his deteriorating health. When the most potent force of all, however, his ambition for the party leadership, was added to these other factors, there remained no other alternative but the severance of all ties with the government.

Mackenzie tried all possible means to persuade Blake to remain in the cabinet. Even though, as President of the Council, the latter had done "no work for a long time", and had rarely attended a cabinet meeting,[41] any burden felt to be too taxing, offered the Prime Minister, would be shifted elsewhere. Even the publisher of the Globe was enlisted in the battle to hold Blake. Refering to the exploitation of "his poverty and his sacrifices", made by Blake's friends, Mackenzie on November 24th suggested that Brown should apply healing balm to the smarting annoyances

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[40]Perhaps, there was a difference of opinion between Blake and the Prime Minister concerning the government's tariff policy; however, it is unlikely that a difference of this sort existed between the two men. Mackenzie constantly practiced the traditional Liberal policy of free trade. (Thomson, op.cit., p. 260) Personally, Mackenzie and some of his cabinet favoured small increased in the general tariff level to offset the growing government deficit caused by the depression. The Maritime Liberals however, forced Mackenzie to abandon any projected increase. As far as can be ascertained, Blake agreed with Mackenzie's personal views, but had no major objections to the prevailing low tariff wall. Certainly Blake, after he became official party leader in 1880, continued Mackenzie's policy of free trade if possible, otherwise a moderate revenue tariff. Blake however, in the face of growing protectionist sentiment, was forced to emphasize moderate protection except where such would cause hardship and injustice. "Free trade," stated Blake in the 1882 election campaign, "is ... for us impossible"; however, since the Tilley tariffs on coal and certain foods would hurt the poorer classes, Blake maintained, "articles of such necessity as fuel and breadstuffs should be (admitted) free." (Public Archives of Canada pamphlets, # 443,44,45, Edward Blake and Liberal Principles, 1882 Election)

[41]Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.VII, Mackenzie to Jones, January 7, 1878

that troubled the Minister. "If you would point out the sacrifice made by Blake", requested the Premier,

> "in having to give up the most lucrative practice in Canada is immensely beyond any possible sacrifice by Sir John (which would be true), it would help me a great deal. He likes I know to have this noticed and there is a lingering suspicion with him always that the "Globe" is more or less hostile to him". 42

This "lingering suspicion" was quite justifiable. Blake and Brown were never on friendly terms. Although they half-heartedly attempted to mask their animosity for the sake of party unity, their hostility towards each other was always manifest in the background. Each feared what the other might do with the party if he were to achieve a de facto supremacy. Periodically, Brown would launch an editorial attack on Blake and his friends, or omit mention of their activities completely. "I do not think that the Globe has any special friendliness for either Mr. Blake or myself" stated David Mills in a letter to John Cameron on the tenth of December 1877. "So far as I am concerned, I think my name has never been mentioned in any ordinary article in the Globe newspaper".[43] The failure of the Globe to report the activities of the individual who had administered for more than a year the then - important departments of the Interior and Indian Affairs can not be put down to mere oversight. It was not until 1883,[44] when his friend John

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[42]Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.VII, Mackenzie to Brown, November 24, 1877

[43]David Mills Letter Books, Mills to Cameron, December 10, 1877

[44]Even though George Brown died in 1880 of infection caused by a gun-shot wound inflicted by a disgruntled employee, the Globe under its new editor, Gordon Brown, continued the same policies towards Blake and his supporters.

Cameron assumed the editorship of the paper that the Globe's hostility towards Blake and his friends ceased. However, despite this coolness constantly shown by Brown during his editorship, the Globe publisher, did consent, upon receipt of Mackenzie's November 24th communication, to publish an eulogistic editorial; however, Blake was not mollified.

In one last desperate effort to heal the breech, the Prime Minister suggested an extended vacation for Blake. "I could see no reason", wrote Mackenzie in putting the idea to Blake on November 27, 1877,

> "why you should not go away for a lengthened period where you could have absolute repose and yet remain a member of the Government. I found Mills and Cartwright held my views very thoroughly. D'Arcy McGee, Macdonald and Cartier were all away many months. I am perfectly certain this course would meet the unanimous approval of our Party friends and I don't believe our worst opponents would dare to attack you on that ground". 45

Interestingly enough, one of Blake's most intimate friends, David Mills, supported Mackenzie's plan. Of course, as has been shown, Mills felt that Blake's resignation would have many injurious repercussions both for the Minister and the party.

Nevertheless, from the day (November 5, 1877) that he forwarded his medical report and resignation to the Prime Minister, Blake never waivered in his determination to depart. The ministry association was unbearable. His goal beckoned. His health was questionable. He must go. In reply to Mackenzie's vacation proposal, Blake stated:

> "I am quite decided that it is not feasible. In the first place neither my circumstances nor my tempera-

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45 Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.VII, and Blake Papers, Mackenzie to Blake, November 27, 1877

> ment invite a lengthened absence from home & friends. In the next place, I could not, if I were to go away, retain the responsibilities ... of office. To do so would be to defeat the very object of my absence, nor I should be subject to much ... worry & anxiety to which I mainly attribute my illness ... Considering then the wretched condition of my health, I must ask you without further delay to place my resignation before His Excellency," 46

Obviously, nothing could hold Blake. The Council President not only refused to labour on behalf of the administration, but in early December, gave up attending the meetings of the cabinet. "I have had great difficulty in keeping him so long", Mackenzie informed A.G. Jones on January 7, 1878, "and he only remained on account of those special elections (in Quebec to acquire electoral approval for the new Minister of Militia and Defence, Wilfrid Laurier) for fear that his retirement might do damage by the misconstruction our enemies would put upon it."[47]

Thus, on January 17, 1878, a few weeks after Laurier was safely elected for Quebec East, Blake bade farewell to the government just as the federal election loomed on the horizon. It was a rather painful parting. Despite their inability to co-operate, each, on this occasion, accorded to the other a strong measure of respect and affection. Blake found it extremely difficult to compose his farewell letter, and could not even say good-bye to his colleagues.[48] Mackenzie for his part was overcome with sorrow. "I cannot tell you how much it (has) saddened me"

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[46]Blake Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, December 3, 1877

[47]Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.VII, Mackenzie to Jones, January 7, 1878

[48]Blake Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, January 17, 1878

sighed the Prime Minister the following day.

> "Although I knew the present separation had become inevitable the actual accomplishment I had instinctively kept out of view ... Painful though ... separation is, I am very glad that there is in it nothing of either personal or political estrangement." 49

Unfortunately, Mackenzie, in his naivety, could not comprehend the major motive for Blake's departure.

In the opinion of the Minister of the Interior, the parting was lamentable. "I deeply regret Mr. Blake's resignation", Mills informed Sheriff MacKellar of Hamilton, "but he was resolved under the circumstances not to remain."[50] For the rising young Liberal of Quebec politics, Honoré Mercier, Blake's resignation was calamitous. In his view, there was now no hope for the party: "I believe honestly you have given a decisive blow", he wrote Blake, "and brought with you our last hope. Laurier and you could have saved the party. Laurier alone will be powerless."[51] For the publisher of the Globe, The Minister's departure was nothing short of "shabby conduct".[52]

Certainly, desertion of the political ship at this critical juncture did not deserve plaudits; nevertheless it should be remembered that the ex-minister would have gladly departed in mid-1877 had not pressure been applied by Mackenzie, Cartwright and Mills. At the same time, there were many who felt that Blake's ill health was not sufficiently

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[49] Ibid., and Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.VII, January 18, 1878

[50] Mills Letter Books, Mills to Sheriff MacKellar, Feb. 4, 1878

[51] Blake Papers, Mercier to Blake, February 5, 1878

[52] Mackenzie Papers, Brown to Mackenzie, February 2, 1878

serious to warrant his complete withdrawal. Even the Prime Minister, as has been shown, interpreted Mr. Blake's medical diagnosis as being "precautionary chiefly". The Mail editorialized on March 2, 1878, that Blake was actually

> "very far from being the sick man he has been represented to be; when one attends dinner parties and balls, night after night, ... it is impossible to accept the hollow excuses which have been offered as to the state of his health". 53

In assessing Blake's behaviour, the Mail concluded:

> "He left the Government because he would not continue to serve under a man whom he regarded as his inferior. ... Conscious of the weakened condition of the Cabinet and aware of the desire for changes which exists within Reform ranks, he has freed himself from the Government entanglements and thrown out his bids for the first position". 54

Although this editorial was probably regarded in 1878 as solely Tory propaganda by many Reformers, it was still fairly accurate analysis. The publisher of the Globe, was also privately convinced that Blake was far from being seriously ill.[55] Indeed, if Blake's constitution enabled him to participate actively in the social life of the capital, he could have discharged the nominal duties of the Council Presidency without suffering any further impairment of health. Again, one is forced to conclude that Blake, in quitting the Mackenzie administration, was actually seeking to further his own political ambition - the achievement

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[53] The Mail, March 2, 1878

[54] Ibid.

[55] "The Blakes are going in for all the gaieties", Brown informed his wife, "They have a good house & entertain freely". (Brown Papers, Brown to his wife, Anne, February 18, 1878)

of the Liberal Leadership through the displacement of Mackenzie from the outside.

It may be that his wife was responsible to some extent for this decision. It has been shown that prior to his entry into the Ministry in 1875 Blake consulted with his wife and she no doubt advised him as to what she thought best. It is quite conceivable - although no evidence exists for verification - that she was one of the influential forces promoting the rupture which finally occurred in January 1878. It is interesting to note that when the Blakes decided to sail to England in the summer of 1878, it was not the state of Mr. Blake's health that dictated this course of action - rather it was, apparently, the condition of his wife's constitution that prompted Blake to undertake the journey. "My wife is but poorly," he wrote Mackenzie on July 3, 1878, "and I am anxious to see the effect of change & rest on her".[56] Thus he could not give his aid, except to let his name stand in absentia, for re-election in South Bruce in the forthcoming federal contest. It is indeed possible that Mrs. Blake more than anyone else desired to see her husband as leader of the Federal Liberals. It may be that she is the key to the understanding of the strange enigma of Mr. Blake.

The 17th of September was the day of disaster for the Mackenzie administration, and for the man who had given his all for his country. As election reports came in, it was evident that Macdonald and his forces were enjoying a sweeping triumph at the polls. When the final results

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[56] Mackenzie Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, July 3, 1878

were tabulated, the Liberals had been completely routed; the Conservatives had defeated the Government by the same sixty-seat majority that had so hopefully ushered in the five years of Liberal rule in 1874. "The conduct of Ontario, Nova Scotia and the Island is utterly inexplicable", the astounded Mackenzie wrote one supporter. "I can give no explanation of it!"[57] Indeed it was almost a mortal blow. How could the electorate have been so easily deceived by the promises of Protection promoted by the Opposition? Were they completely lacking in sagacity and perspicacity? "Is it not a woeful commentary on the intelligence of the people to have to state that the Government was defeated because it refused to levy more taxes and make commodities dearer?" Mackenzie bitterly asked J.D. Edgar after the election. "The Tories said, and the people believed, that it was possible to make all classes rich by passing an Act of Parliament. This is not much in advance of the superstitions of Central Africa".[58] It was enough to make him think seriously of giving up the leadership; however, the new leader if he were to succeed in wooing the favour of the electorate, would have to be a "horse thief or at least have distinguished himself as having chiseled a municipality or robbed a Railway Company".[59]

What had really caused this debacle at the polls? Throughout this period the country had been plagued by a deep depression which had sucked at the commercial life blood of the nation. It was a natural reaction

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[57] Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.II, Mackenzie to Pichard, Sept. 24,1878

[58] Edgar Papers, Mackenzie to Edgar, September 24, 1878

[59] Ibid.

on the part of the people to place the responsibiltiy for the "hard times" upon the shoulders of the government even though the crisis was not of their making. During 1877 the Conservatives began to expound the policy of Protection as the only means to fight the Depression. The Protection cure-all cry spread magically throughout the land as the Conservatives promised glowing benefits to each occupation through safe-guarding of home industries. Even a large number of Liberals from the manufacturing areas of Ontario and Quebec had at one time favoured a raise in the general level of the tariff. Yet - during 1876 when the matter was discussed, the proposal was bitterly attacked by Maritime Liberals. At one point the whole Maritime contingent headed by A.G. Jones threatened to bolt the party and join the Opposition if the caucus approved the measure.[60] The continuing depression, nevertheless, did force the cabinet to approve, in the 1877 session, small increases in the tariff on certain goods.[61] These tariff changes however, were kept to a minimum.

There were other causes which all combined to produce the great disaster for the Reformers. On October 28, 1878, John Cameron compiled and sent to Mackenzie a comprehensive list of issues that provoked dis-satisfaction in various quarters of the electorate. Some felt the government had not been parsimonious enough with the purse strings because they had previously in Cameron's opinion been "educated too much to believe ... that expenditure was necessary extravagance".[62] Others

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[60] Charlton Transcript, op.cit., and Thomson, op.cit., pp. 260-61

[61] Thomson, op.cit., p. 299

[62] Mackenzie Papers, Cameron to Mackenzie, October 28, 1878

felt ill-used since they had not received their desired patronage. Still others suffered from "over-confidence". In the opinion of Cameron "one of the most damaging cries ... was the constant assertion that George Brown was the real leader of the Reform Party". The Messrs. Brown, Cameron explained, had not enjoyed much personal popularity of late, "and besides, ... the public have been over jealous of what looked like back-stairs influence".[63] It is evident that Cameron did not give any validity to this assertion, but did see it as having a very detrimental effect on party fortunes. There were also several other contributing factors in the Liberal defeat, namely, an un-wise election month and the resentment aroused by the administration's Temperance Act of 1878.[64] But even though the party had suffered an overwhelming defeat, Mackenzie took comfort from the knowledge that he had waged a good fight for those things he considered right. As he told J.Z. Bliss, "We fought on principle, we did what was right and it is better to be right and defeated than to be wrong and successful."[65]

How did the defection of Edward Blake affect the 1878 results? One might expect that Blake's resignation and subsequent departure coming at such an inopportune moment would result in the loss of many Liberal ballots. In the opinion of Sir Richard Cartwright, Blake's desertion did produce a pronounced deleterious effect which "in the uncertain temper of the public mind" hurt the party "a good deal".[66] When that gentleman

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[63] Ibid. [64] Ibid.

[65] Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.II, Mackenzie to Bliss, Dec.10,1878

[66] Cartwright, Reminiscences, op.cit., p. 177

comes to list the specific causes of the electoral disaster, however, he significantly and completely omits any mention of Blake's resignation as being in the least contributary to Mackenzie's defeat.

After the election, James Pattullo, Secretary of the Reform Association of Ontario, sent out circulars to various Liberal officials in each constituency in an attempt to determine the reasons for the failure of the party to win the expected victory. In only one constituency was the behaviour of Edward Blake cited as contributing factor in the Liberal defeat. This was the constituency of South Bruce,- the home riding of the lawyer-politician - where he had allowed his name to stand in absentia while in England. One reply received from South Bruce stated, in answer to the query requesting the chief causes which affected the results in the local riding, "Mr. Blake's absence and the fact that he published no address".[67] The other Reform official gave as the reason for Blake's defeat: "the protection deception and (the) reliance on a large majority for Mr. Blake". These are the only two references in all the replies received by Pattullo that saddle the former Minister with any responsibility for the Government's rebuff at the polls, and significantly even they do not mention Blake's withdrawal from the government as having the least influence in the stunning upset. In the voluminous correspondence received by Mackenzie from the many sympathetic friends analysing the causes of the Liberal rejection by the electorate, the fatal forces mentioned were almost always the same: namely, Protectionism, Sir John's rosy promises, the hard times of the depression, lack of Reform organization

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[67]Toronto Reference Library, James Pattullo Papers.

and candidate apathy or over-confidence, certain Acts of the government such as Mackenzie's Temperance Act, and the unwise election time[68]. Never once was Blake's defection listed as a factor in the Liberal defeat. Thus it can be concluded that Blake's resignation had at least to his contemporaries, virtually no influence or effect, either positively or negatively upon the fortune of the Reform Party in the 1878 Federal Election.

It has been argued by W.R. Graham and J.A. Maxwell that Edward Blake, after his reconciliation and reunion with the Mackenzie cabinet on May 19, 1875, enjoyed in reality the de facto leadership of the Mackenzie Government.[69] They strongly suggest that Mackenzie was forced to accept Blake's railway demands, his policy of economy and retrenchment, his determined resistance to the Imperial 'meddling' by the Colonial Office and his ideal of the fostering of a Canadian nationality. What these gentlemen neglect to stress, is the fact that Alexander Mackenzie was not pressured into accepting Blake's philosophy of government - Mackenzie already possessed a similar sentiment of his own, even in regard to the value of British Columbia. Writing to D. Thompson April 29, 1875 Mackenzie stated: "Individually, I have no desire to give Columbia anything".[70] Similarly in governmental spending, Mackenzie's

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[68] See D. Lee, "The Dominion General Election of 1878 in Ontario", in Ontario History, Vol.LI # 3, Summer 1959, for a fuller treatment.

[69] W.R. Graham, The Alexander Mackenzie Administration 1873-78, op.cit., and J.A. Maxwell, "Lord Dufferin and the Difficulties with British Columbia", Canadian Historical Review, December 1931

[70] Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.I, Mackenzie to D. Thompson, April 29, 1875

objective was "to make this a cheap country to live in".71 In addition, Mackenzie was quite reluctant to accept Lord Carnarvon's mediation of the British Columbia dispute for precisely the identical reason that Blake did not relish it, namely, that such would be Imperial 'meddling' in the domestic affairs of Canada; yet at the same time he had little choice in the matter. Previous commitments, even if they were not of Liberal origin, could not simply be flung aside; they must be respected as far as possible. As Mackenzie pointed out to Blake in April 1875, the Government could not "make any arrangement that would merely suit ourselves".72

As has been pointed out, the two men finally settled their differences concerning Columbia in an agreement that was not too far removed from the original Carnarvon terms. Here Blake did not have his way completely, and was eventually forced to give way to the pressure of his friends and party colleagues and agree to reconciliation with Mackenzie.

If Blake did succeed in becoming a de facto leader as Graham and Maxwell contend, why was he always so extremely eager to withdraw from the administration? On at least three occasions namely, in November 1875, September 1876 and in May - June 1877, Blake vainly attempted to extricate himself from Governmental responsibility. Yet each time Mackenzie assisted by certain colleagues exerted sufficient influence to dissuade Blake from fulfilling his fixed intention to resign. Why did Blake

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71Public Archives of Canada Pamphlet, Alexander Mackenzie, "Reform Government in the Dominion, Pic-Nic Speeches 1877

72Edgar Papers, Mackenzie to Edgar, April 26, 1875

actually sever his ties with the cabinet in January 1878 if he did, in fact, wield the club of authority behind the scenes? Certainly the state of his health was not the primary reason for his departure; no doubt the bitterness aroused over Mackenzie's strong defence of Anglin was only a minor cause; but the most plausible explanation is that, only from the outside could Blake make any real headway in his quest for leadership. If Blake possessed a de facto supremacy, what prevented him from obtaining the second legal office which he requested on October 6, 1876, from Mackenzie? If he controlled the power behind the scenes, why did he not persuade the Mackenzie administration to institute at least some of his proposed Aurora Reform programme? Certainly it could not be said that public opinion at that time was hostile to Senate reform; yet Blake did absolutely nothing to aid his friend David Mills, while simply an ordinary member of Parliament in his yearly struggle to revise the method of Senatorial appointment. Once Mills however, became a cabinet Minister (October 24, 1876), he quietly dropped his reform ideas. Blake occasionally thought about reform but never progressed much beyond the thinking stage. "You know that I have for some time favoured a change in the present system of representation", he reminded his audience at Teeswater on September 24, 1877. "You are aware that I did not think the subject ripe for Parliamentary Action".[73] Nevertheless, the matter was under consideration, for a select committee had been struck to proceed with an inquiry. As to whether the committee would continue its investigations at the next parliamentary session Blake could only "suppose

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[73]Pamphlet, "Reform Government in the Dominion" - op.cit., Blake at Teeswater, September 24, 1877

that it will be resumed". 74 For some reason, once Blake and certain of his followers entered the hallowed hall of the Cabinet chamber, most of their enthusiasm for reform diminished markedly. One can only conclude that the restraining, more realistic conservatism of the 'old guard' led by Mackenzie, was the dominant and controlling force within the cabinet. Thus, Edward Blake never acquired the de facto leadership of the Mackenzie Cabinet; his power was only sufficient to suggest and influence governmental decision and policy. As D.C. Thomson has shown throughout his biography,[75] Alexander Mackenzie - not Edward Blake - was always in control of the Cabinet.

It was all over - five long years of constant trouble, heartache and strain. No longer would the Prime Minister be plagued by the constant stream of office seekers who continuously buttonholed him in the quest for personal favour. No longer would he have to assume and carry the great work load of daily administration or be responsible for the preparation of legislation. No longer was there the constant thorny problem of Blake and his supersensitive ego. No longer was there any challenge to the Prime Minister's authority and position. "Well, it is all over", mused the exhausted Mackenzie before the election to his brother Charles.

> "five years of the Premiership successfully carried over under many disadvantages. For many reasons I would be glad to stop there but I must try again. There is no escape from it. There is now no dispute about the leadership in any quarter,

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[74] Ibid.

[75] Thomson, op.cit., passim

> and consequently there is no way out however anxious I might be". 76

How blind to reality, how complacent in his naivety was Mackenzie. The 'dispute about the leadership' had not been settled in the least by Blake's departure from the cabinet. Rather, the seeds of discontent that had been nourished over the years were almost ready to bear fruit, as plans were well advanced for the installation of Blake in Mackenzie's place of leadership. This time however, the employment of skill and finesse would ensure the success early in 1880 of the 'palace revolution' that had once failed.

Edward Blake returned from a holiday in England in the autumn of 1878 full of vim and vigour, eager to resume his political activities. "I never saw him look better", commented Mackenzie to A.G. Jones.[77] Rumours began to circulate that the legal expert was planning a political 'come-back'. It was not long before certain papers known to be sympathetic to Blake began to suggest that the former Minister of Justice should be selected as the party leader. However, as yet, Blake, on account of his defeat in South Bruce by Alexander Shaw in the 1878 election, was a politician without a seat and hence could not participate in the 1879 Parliamentary Session. Yet, he was still potentially dangerous to the established leader of the party. "I have thought all along", Mackenzie was warned by Luther Holton on December 2, 1878, "that the best thing Blake could do in furtherance of his undisguised object (namely, the party leadership) would be to stand out of Parliament for

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[76] Mackenzie Papers, Mackenzie to brother Charles, May 12, 1878

[77] Nova Scotia Archives Report, Mackenzie to Jones, December 8,1878

one session, possibly two". 78 Blake, in Holton's opinion, was planning a full scale assault on Mackenzie's position, and thus the former Premier's attitude and posture should now be "defensive", if he wished to survive in his present office. "I have been told on what I consider reliable authority", Holton added, "that he will not act again in a secondary capacity either in opposition or in an administration".[79]

This news was a bolt out of the blue for Mackenzie. Since he had been perusing only the columns of the Globe after leaving Ottawa, he had not received any intimation that his position was being threatened. Holton's letter was the first news he had had concerning the Blake movement for the leadership. Mackenzie was spurred to investigate this ominous charge. "Yesterday", the former Premier replied on December 11, "I went to a reading room and glanced over several journals which are more of less devoted to the party you refer to".[80] Indeed, Holton's report was accurate - there was a movement afoot to displace Mackenzie. But the ex-Premier could not come to believe that Blake himself was the instigator.

> "I am quite satisfied that some encouragement has been given to the movement by some one acting in his behalf... Do you know I half suspect our friend D.A. (Macdonald) has had something to do with the business at present. I understand a second term was eagerly looked for and a feeling of disappointment settled(?) in his mind." 81

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[78] Mackenzie Papers, Holton to Mackenzie, December 2, 1878

[79] Ibid.

[80] Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.II, Mackenzie to Holton, December 11, 1878

[81] Ibid.

Holton however was not ready to accept Macdonald's complicity in the scheme. "It would be surprising indeed", he informed Mackenzie a few days later, "if D.A. Should cherish any latent hostility towards you."[82]

Once before, Alexander Mackenzie had refused to accept Luther Holton's intimation of intrigue against him from within the cabinet. In 1878 however, it was a completely different story: the former Premier now possessed no doubt whatever that his erstwhile friend and subordinate was engaging in sinister machinations against his leadership. "Was I far wrong?" gloated Holton referring to the unheeded warning of 1876. "I read the whole case as clearly then as I can do now when we are reaping the bitter fruits of ill regulated ambition in some quarters and wretched intrigues in others."[83] Clearly Holton still conceived of certain intriguers exploiting and promoting the "ill regulated ambition" of Blake.

The year 1879 was a year of steadily mounting bitterness between the Blake and Mackenzie factions within the Liberal party. Unlike Sir John A. who, when defeated in the 1873 canvass called a party caucus and tendered his resignation which was not accepted, Mackenzie steadfastly refused to call a caucus of his party to discuss the question of a new leader. If he had done so, it would have been, in the words of John Charlton, "better for his own interests". Charlton states flatly: "Had the party caucus been held at the opening of the Session of 1879, Mr. Mackenzie as a matter of course would have received the

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[82]Brown Papers, Holton to Mackenzie, December 18, 1878

[83]Ibid.

unanimous vote of the caucus as a party leader". 84 This, the ex-Prime Minister failed to realize.

Mackenzie late in 1878 certainly did intend to submit the question of his leadership to the party's parliamentary membership. Fully expecting that re-election to the post would be simply a formality as it had been in the case of Sir John and the Conservative leadership in 1873, Mackenzie had told Cartwright and Holton, among others, of his intention to submit his resignation when the party met in Ottawa for the 1879 Parliamentary session. The revelation of the Blake intrigue however, induced the angry Mackenzie to change his mind. Having "a lively feeling of indignation at all caballing" he would not "commit myself to anything",[85] Holton was told on December 11, 1878. A few days later Mackenzie had positively, though unwisely, resolved not to submit his resignation. "I cannot now with any self respect do this," the determined leader informed his colleague Richard Cartwright on December 20. "I am not inclined to submit to any conspiracy on his part whatever happens."[86] Mackenzie's magnanimous generosity was being "paid back by an organized attempt to belittle myself and my services with a view to supplant me"![87] Mackenzie would risk no possible further humiliation by opening the leadership question to discussion. One can only conclude that in his righteous anger, he greatly over-estimated

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[84] Charlton Transcript, op.cit.

[85] Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.II, Mackenzie to Holton, December 11, 1878

[86] Ibid., Mackenzie to Cartwright, December 20, 1878

[87] Ibid.

the strength of the Blake conspiracy.

In vain Cartwright attempted to soothe the enraged leader. There was really no challenge or humiliation involved in the journalistic comments regarding Blake's intentions. They were "the result of the indiscreet action of Blake's friends ... than of Blake himself. I do not believe he is disposed to allow his name to be brought forward as a candidate for the leadership at present."[88] This assertion Mackenzie rejected in toto. There was no doubt in his mind, he informed Holton on January 30, 1879, that "the press movement (for Blake as leader) was either commenced, or accepted and stimulated by the candidate himself".[89]

Mackenzie was now assured in his own mind that Blake had always desired the party leadership. "I am now convinced by many things which have been recalled to my memory", Holton was told, "that he (Blake) refused the leadership in 1872-73 because he did not dream then of office being so near and that he never ceased to regret his course then. I am also satisfied that you was (sic) right in your view of the motives for subsequent action".[90] Mackenzie now believed that Blake early in 1873, had he perceived that very little labour on his part would have been necessary to achieve office, would not have refused the leadership. Mackenzie apparently conceived of Blake as thinking of himself first and of the party second. The implication was that Blake would have gladly

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[88] Mackenzie Papers, Cartwright to Mackenzie, December 27, 1878

[89] Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.II, Mackenzie to Holton, January 30, 1879

[90] *Ibid.*

played the role of political opportunist if he could have envisaged the Conservative débâcle. Mackenzie now fully accepted Holton's theory that even after the first cabal had been broken and the Cave dispersed, Blake continued to dabble in intrigue from within his master's cabinet. And still these "treacherous actions" on the part of Blake continued even though the party had been expelled from office. "No member is entitled to cabal against one who has at least been faithful to the trust reposed in him and made all possible exertions and sacrifices for the party".[91] At the same time, Mackenzie exonerated "D. A." from any complicity in the movement. Thus Mackenzie never summoned a caucus of the party to discuss the leadership question.

The assault upon Mackenzie gradually gained momentum. It was argued in the journals that supported Blake that Mackenzie, while in office, should have been more receptive to the wishes of public opinion and not constantly so unbending and inflexible. Mackenzie, it was proclaimed, should have seen that the people desired some form of Protection, and should accordingly have taken some action in this matter. On all prominent public questions, it was suggested, he should have obtained a consensus within the party before any implementation of policy. Nevertheless, Mackenzie remained convinced that he had given the nation the best government possible. "I am unable to see what other course I could have pursued were it all to be done over again", the ex-stonemason and Prime Minister commented to David Laird on January 29, 1879. "I always had a horror of the policy of carrying on a government

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[91] Ibid.

by compromises of views on great public questions".92 This perhaps was the flaw in Mackenzie the aspiring statesman: he did not realize that the qualification for greatness in a Canadian Prime Minister was the ability to obtain compromise and harmony from the diverse elements inherent in the Canadian nation while at the same time promoting his own basic concepts and ideals. In regard to the question of Protection, the Maritime Liberals had been mainly responsible for the rigidity in the Liberal Tariff policy in 1877 and 1878, Mackenzie admitted to Laird. "The Islanders and New Brunswickers and also the Nova Scotians were most determined of all" to prevent any increase in the tariff. "They waited upon me to warn me that an increase would be fatal to them and indeed said that they would not promise to support the govt. if such an increase should be proposed".[93] Yet only a year later, the Maritimers had helped to elect "an ultra protectionist party".

Thoughout 1879, Alexander Mackenzie continued to exercise the functions of party leadership as his natural right and prerogative. As a result, the rumblings in the Blake Camp became more ominous. Many people began to see Edward Blake as the new Moses who could regain the lost ground and rectify the mistakes made by the former Prime Minister. The time was now right for Blake to re-enter the political lists. On October 18, 1879, W.H. Burke, the member for West Durham resigned his seat, and shortly afterwards, Blake was elected as his successor by acclamation. Soon Blake's supporters were openly voicing the opinion

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[92]Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.II, Mackenzie to Laird, January 29, 1879

[93]Ibid.

that Mackenzie's leadership was no longer an asset to the party. "This is a case of disputed succession", maintained the Hamilton Spectator on November 19, 1879.

> "We have Mr. Blake's friends vowing with deadly earnestness that Mr. Blake must be leader ... Mr. Mackenzie's usefulness, they freely say, is gone as party leader. His subserviency to the Globe, they affirm, has landed the party in the undelightful atmosphere of Opposition. Had he conceded ever so little upon the tariff question it is their opinion that they could have carried the election of 1878". 94

Poor Mackenzie was fast becoming a scapegoat and whipping boy for the Party's failures. The stage was set for a "show-down" at the 1880 session of the federal parliament.

What manner of campaign did the strategists planning Blake's drive for the leadership employ to attack Mackenzie? Not only newspapers but also private party members were canvassed for support of the project to oust the former Premier. "I was not attacked in any gross way" related the scrupulous principled Scot to the Honourable L.H. Davies on May 20, 1880, "but Mr. Blake was well and constantly lauded and deprecatory remarks now and then made as regards Mackenzie".[95] The main attack was centred on what was, in the minds of many, the ex-Prime Minister's inflexibility.

> "It was a common thing for instance to say that no one doubted Mackenzie's zeal and devotion to party and principle but (that) he was too unyielding, that a politic leader would in the trade matter have made

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[94] Hamilton Spectator, November 19, 1879

[95] Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.II, Mackenzie to Davies, May 20,1880

> some concession to the clamour and thereby have saved the election. (I may here remark that my cabinet was thoroughly agreed on our trade policy and I simply carried out our agreement ...). For the last 16 months a process of sapping and (under)mining was zealously carried on in and out of Parliament by Blake and his partizans". 96

How long could the harried Liberal leader confronted with ever-deepening intrigue retain his composure? Try as he might, it was becoming more and more difficult to disguise his knowledge of this caballing. Mackenzie began to feel "as if I was obliged to guard my back as well as my face".[97] What should be done? The party must remain united at all costs, decided the incumbent leader. If he secured a majority of support in the caucus, how could Blake possibly be forced to submit to the will of the majority? He had in 1875 bowed only with extreme reluctance to the overwhelming pressure exerted by practically every influential member in the party. Such unanimity could not be attained at this juncture. Perhaps retirement from the leadership was the only practical and realistic course open to Mackenzie. If he did not resign, he would have difficulty commanding a deeply divided party. "I scorned to command a divided camp", Charles Black[98] was told May 20, 1880.

During the 1880 Parliamentary Session the aging leader reached his breaking point. The matter could not be allowed to drag on any longer; some resolution of the conflict had to be offered. Thus, "I...

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[96] Ibid.

[97] Nova Scotia Archives Report, Mackenzie to Jones, May 3, 1880

[98] Mackenzie Papers, Mackenzie to Black, May 20, 1880

determined to precipitate a crisis", he confided to the Honourable L.H. Davies.[99] At the same time, as part of his responsibility as party leader he "felt bound to avoid breaking up the party". He was positive that a majority of the caucus would support his continued leadership of the party, yet on the other hand he "did not believe Mr. Blake would submit"[100] to the decision of the caucus members. Thus, in order to avoid a prolonged and perhaps permanent rupture of the party, Mackenzie came to the unwelcome conclusion that resignation was his only feasible course.[101] At first, he had planned to tell only his close friend, Sir Richard Cartwright of his resolve;[102] however Cartwright, on hearing of his leader's intention, informed the former speaker of the House, T.W. Anglin. Both men tried desperately to dissuade Mackenzie; finally, in deference to their pleas, he agreed to defer a decision for twenty-four hours and consult his other colleagues.

After this short interval of careful reflection, Mackenzie remained adamant in his decision. His old colleagues, with the exception of David Mills, who was not present, listened silently and grimly as Mackenzie again expressed his intention to resign.[103] There was only one, Richard Scott, who approved the chief's plan. All the rest voiced their loud opposition. "Burpee, Cartwright, Laurier,

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[99] Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.II, Mackenzie to Davies, May 20, 1880

[100] Ibid. [101] Ibid.

[102] Nova Scotia Archives Report, Mackenzie to Jones, May 3, 1880

[103] Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.II, Mackenzie to Davies, May 20, 1880

Pellotier & Huntingdon objected", recorded Mackenzie, "and insisted they could restore order. Smith was sick but he coincided with them."[104] But their old chief was determined not to be swayed by this demonstration of solidarity for he was convinced that there was no workable alternative. "I was however so satisfied that my plan was the only one to avoid a breakup that I could not yield, and they with Anglin (whom I consulted the same evening) unltimately assented."[105] Thus it was on the evening of the 27th of April 1880, after a strenuous day of examining, criticizing, and suggesting changes in the legislation presented for the consideration of the chamber, that Alexander Mackenzie, a few moments before adjournment at two o'clock in the morning, arose to address the sparsely filled House. "I desire to say a word or two", he said lifelessly, "with regard to my personal relations. I yesterday determined to withdraw from the position as Leader of the Opposition and from this time forth I will speak and act for no person but myself."[106] It was done - he had written finis to eight long years of exhausting service as party leader.

Professor O.D. Skelton in his biography of Sir Wilfrid Laurier gives a different version of Mackenzie's resignation. According to him[107] the party caucus passed a resolution asking the chief to "consider the question of the leadership". Five former colleagues including

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[104] Ibid. [105] Ibid.

[106] Parliamentary Debates, April 27, 1880, p. 1815

[107] Skelton, Laurier, Vol.I, pp. 220-21

Pelletier and Laurier were selected, he claimed, to attempt to persuade Mackenzie to resign. It would appear they approached the leader and ultimately, were successful in persuading him to retire from the post.

It is extremely doubtful that this story is accurate. Firstly, it is highly unlikely that the party caucus, or certain representatives of the caucus group, requested Mackenzie's resignation. The ex-Prime Minister specifically states in his letters to Jones and Davies that he had resolved to announce his resignation to the Commons without prior intimation to or consultation with his colleagues. His friends would not have had any warning whatever of his determination if he had not mentioned it to Cartwright. Nor is there any evidence available to show that a formal session of the party caucus was convened when the news was first revealed in private, although one was called after Mackenzie's announcement in the House. Mackenzie met with certain of his friends, but it is obvious that they did not constitute a full caucus of the party. Secondly, Laurier and Pelletier did not, as Skelton claims, attempt to persuade Mackenzie to resign; Mackenzie specifically states in his letter to Davies of May 20, 1880 that Laurier and Pelletier, among others, "objected" to his proposed course and insisted that they could quell the dissenters and restore order in party ranks. It is only a very remote possibility that Mackenzie presented "a biased account" of the proceedings as Thomson seems to think he may have done;[108] the accounts written by his hand to certain of his friends are quite specific and show no emotion or prejudice. Therefore Skelton's

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[108] Thomson, op.cit., p. 362

account must be rejected as inaccurate and probably based on hearsay.

There is no doubt that, had Mackenzie decided to contest that challenge posed by the Blake movement to his leadership, he could have quelled the mutiny. Many of the leading figures of the party, namely, Cartwright, Laurier, Burpee, Pelletier, Huntington, and Smith, as has been shown, were agreed that order could be restored within the party ranks. But the great fighter of the party, who had always faced squarely every challenge, declined to combat the second Blake revolt. Mackenzie may have greatly underestimated his own power and the degree of support at his disposal. As he mournfully related to Charles Black a few weeks after his resignation, "I find now (that) I was much stronger than I thought."[109] Nevertheless, he did not care to risk the danger of promoting an irreparable breach in the party. Some of the Tories, he reported to Davies, on hearing of his resignation, "offered to follow me as leader of a new party ... I will not connive at any break up of the Liberal party".[110] Nor could he bring himself to consider commanding the divided camp that personal opposition to the Blake campaign on his part would produce. "I could", as he informed Jones, "have broken up the party in (the) House and country. That I would not dream of doing".[111] Furthermore, Mackenzie's damaged pride and wounded dignity prevented him from taking any action to resist the opposition. As he

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[109]Mackenzie Papers, Mackenzie to Black, May 20, 1880

[110]Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.II, Mackenzie to Davies, May 20, 1880

[111]Nova Scotia Archives Report, Mackenzie to Jones, May 3, 1880

disclosed to the Rev. John McKinnon on May 25, 1880:

> "I could have smashed the attempt but the very knowledge that it was more or less successful among the common members ... roused my pride and indignation, as no man ever hinted to me that I was blamed for any act of omission or commission". 112

Finally, the arduous, exhausting years in office had sapped much of his vitality, and to make matters worse, in the summer of 1879 he suffered a recurrence of an old stomach ailment. He had not pressed the leadership issue, he told Charles Black at Christmas time 1880 because of his uncertain health.[113] Hence the fighting Scot decided that the only way to avoid disastrous results to himself and the party, was to submit graciously and with dignity.

Why was Mr. Blake's second attempt at a palace revolution so much more successful than his first attempt in 1874/75? There is no doubt, if one accepts Charlton's Transcript, that in his achievement of the leadership in 1880, many of the Liberal members of the House gave their full support to Blake.[114] After all, Alexander Mackenzie was saddled with the stigma of having been rejected by the Canadian electorate. As has been shown however, Mackenzie after his defeat did not unfortunately submit his resignation and seek a vote of confidence from the party caucus. Had he done so, there would have been doubtless little dispute about the legality of his continued leadership and the question would have been settled to almost everyone's satisfaction.

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[112] Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.II, Mackenzie to Rev. McKinnon, May 25, 1880

[113] Mackenzie Papers, Mackenzie to Black, December 20, 1880

[114] Charlton Transcript, op.cit.

Blake had left political life, and as far as was known at that time, did not plan to return. By failing to obtain confirmation of his leadership from the party Mackenzie virtually encouraged a challenge to his position.

Moreover, the Blake movement to secure both journalistic and other means of support was skillfully conceived and executed; Mackenzie was successfully stamped with the label of being too rigid and unyielding in his leadership. This criticism of Mackenzie unfortunately has persisted to this day. It is true that Mackenzie never participated in graft and corruption as has been characteristic of so many political administrators, that he often replied ruthlessly and unwisely in the negative to the requests for political consideration and governmental patronage, and that where he believed principle to be at stake, he would tolerate no compromise. Mackenzie however, was always cognizant of the value - and even wisdom - of expediency at least to some extent when it could successfully be implemented without abandoning his principles. The Mackenzie Administration has always been praised for the passage of legislation establishing the secret ballot. Mackenzie himself did not approve of this innovation,[115] yet because the party and the country desired it, he saw the wisdom and necessity of putting aside his own views on the subject. Mackenzie cannot be accused of turning his back on expediency. As he told the Hon. W.D. Stewart on May 25, 1880, "In the matter of mere expediency I would yield to my

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[115]Some politicians of that time, including Mackenzie and Sir John A. Macdonald, took the attitude that a voter should not have to conceal his choice from the world at election time. As Thomson states, "when a man voted, ... he should be responsible for that vote" (Thomson, op.cit., p. 194)

fellows a great deal. I did not, for instance, believe in the ballot, but the party generally did and I gave effect to their views."[116] Mackenzie, at least in his own opinion, was also a man of compromise. This perhaps was responsible - at least partly - for his undoing, he lamented to Brown late in 1878. If he ever should be called upon to supply leadership again to the country, "I would never again subordinate Govt & Premier's necessities to individual aspirations or wants as I was obliged to do on many occasions".[117] Yet, as far as major public issues or party principles were concerned, never did Mackenzie allow himself to be diverted from what he felt must be done. "I always had a horror of the policy of carrying on a government by compromises of views on great public questions".[118]

Yet on the other hand, it is quite inaccurate to claim, as does Sister Teresa Burke, that Mackenzie suffered from a "complete lack of political instinct."[119] Nothing could be further from the truth. When it came however, to considerations of principle, Mackenzie would tolerate no compromise. Protection he believed to be "a great moral and political wrong." Consequently, as he admitted to the Hon. W.D. Stewart, "I could not therefore avow that I would be willing

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[116] Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.II, Mackenzie to Stewart, May 25, 1880

[117] Brown Papers, Mackenzie to Brown, October 2, 1878

[118] Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.II, Mackenzie to David Laird, January 29, 1879

[119] Burke, "Mackenzie and his Cabinet", Canadian Historical Review, op.cit., p. 148

to take a certain quantity of it." 120 Mainly because of his intransigence concerning the tariff, the Blake movement was successful in its attempt to label Mackenzie as unfit to continue to direct party fortunes.

Lastly, many members sincerely believed that Blake possessed qualities of leadership superior to those displayed by the former Prime Minister. "Many members of the party", John Charlton reported, "felt that Mr. Blake possessed abilities so great as to make him better fitted for the position of leader than Mr. Mackenzie".[121] This opinion shared by many others stemmed no doubt from Mackenzie's performance in office which had alienated many supporters and promoted party discontent through his tactless application of party principles. Many had become convinced that power and principle were not synonymous nor congenial bed-fellows. Still, there was no doubt that they respected their former leader for his high principles and strict sense of honesty and economy. But the electorate had shown that it was not impressed by such characteristics. Thus many members "as a rule took the ground", maintains Charlton, "that personal considerations ought not to enter into our calculations at all, but that we should be governed exclusively by our opinion as to that would be best for the interests of the party".[122] This in a nut shell was the political philosophy of Edward Blake.

Viewing in retrospect the events leading to his resignation, the

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[120] Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.II, Mackenzie to Stewart, May 25, 1880

[121] Charlton Transcript, op.cit.

[122] Ibid.

ex-Premier was convinced that he had chosen the right course as he "had long ago discounted the popularity of power".[123] Party unity must be maintained if at all possible. Accordingly, Mackenzie advised all his friends to promote unity, not division, not to oppose Blake and his friends, but "to accept the changed position and avoid discussion."[124] Thus it was that the Blake palace revolution was able to achieve success in 1880.

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[123] Mackenzie Papers, Mackenzie to Black, May 20, 1880

[124] Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.II, Mackenzie to Rev. McKinnon, May 25, 1880

VIII

EPILOGUE

With the accession of Edward Blake to the leadership of the Liberal Party in 1880, one of the most unusual struggles in Canadian political history came to an end. It had been a struggle of dark intrigue, smouldering ambition and political manipulation. Yet never did the rivalry between the two main participants attain the proportions of open burning enmity. Not once did this protracted contest create a political estrangement between the two combatants; even when Mackenzie finally comprehended the full extent of Blake's machinations, he did not give vent to the anger he must have felt. The Blake - Mackenzie rivalry could be characterized, not as an animated bitter feud but rather as an exciting struggle of wits. The tone and wording of the Blake - Mackenzie correspondence, except for the occasional note of curtness on Blake's part - which is in keeping with the general character of the man - is quite amicable, and always respectful even when the position or policy discussed is not in the least, acceptable to the writer concerned.[1] Never is destructive criticism employed.

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[1]Typical are Blake's replies to the Prime Minister's communications attempting to dissuade Blake from his periodically proposed intention of resignation. Witness Blake to Mackenzie on September 25, 1876: "I have your note. I have nothing whatever to complain of, on

Without doubt, Blake's participation in the two intrigues against Mackenzie is open to criticism. Yet, while a member of the administration, Blake did serve his country and party. If his latent ambitions had not been excited by certain unidentified friends, and if a combination of circumstances had not contributed to make his life as an underling too onerous to bear, Blake, in all probability would have continued to serve in the administration.

Alexander Mackenzie never did feel great animosity towards those who obstructed him. While lacking political insight and the ability to put his hand on the pulse of the electorate, Mackenzie did enjoy an amazing ability to discern the essential spirit of the party he tried to direct.[2]

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the contrary, I have everything to be grateful for in the conduct of yourself ... I am too well aware that any step I may take will be open to misconstruction ... But I cannot bear the existing condition of things." (Mackenzie and Blake Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, Sept. 25, 1876) And again on April 30, 1877: "I have your note, I can only repeat that I am grieved to distress you. I am truly sorry to be troublesome to you, but I am obliged to refer to the subject of our correspondence of September last. (1876) I can no longer remain a minister. As the state of my health disables me from adequately discharging my official duties, I am spared the necessity of adding any other to this sufficient ground for retirement." (Mackenzie and Blake Papers, Blake to Mackenzie, April 30, 1877)

[2]Sister Teresa Burke makes a somewhat more sweeping assessment of Mackenzie's failings. "A more important factor in his defeat," she claims, "was his complete lack of political instinct. Mackenzie was not a politician in any sense of the term." (Sister Teresa Burke, Canadian Historical Review, op.cit., p. 148). This judgment is rather harsh. Mackenzie, despite some obvious shortcomings, did keep the party together, in the face of such things as cabinet crises, inept ministers, disputes over tariff and railroad policy, and other problems. In the final assessment of Mackenzie, it must be remembered that he had to contend with several major problems not of his own making and with rather severe economic conditions that plagued the country. If he did not distinguish himself as a leader, neither did he harm the country or the party by his deficiencies.

"Liberals", he told the Honourable W.D. Stewart, "are more or less disposed to divide in pursuit of hobbies or changes which are more innovations than reforms sometimes."[3] It was his duty to keep "the liberal party united",[4] and bridge the divisions that were bound to appear in a ruggedly individualistic political organization. This was the understanding that always made for tolerance on his part when party dissension occurred. Even after his rejection as party leader in 1880, he continued to co-operate with Blake, his successor, just as he constantly strove in and out of Parliament even after his voice had given out leaving him virtually unable to speak, to promote party harmony. Still it was only natural that he and his admirers could not help feeling, as Mills expressed it, "a passive hostility" towards the new leader and his friends.[5] Mackenzie however, never allowed it to become active, lest it produce deleterious effects upon the Party.

Edward Blake as Opposition Leader, though not successful in achieving electoral victory, nevertheless, as "an indomitable worker", served the party well.[6] Despite certain flaws in his political make-up Edward Blake was a very powerful political figure who commanded deep respect in the country. "Had he been at the helm of party affairs in the election of 1891, there is little question", Charlton maintains, "but that the Liberal Party would have won the victory."[7]

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[3]Mackenzie Letter Books, Vol.II, Mackenzie to W.D. Stewart, May 25, 1880

[4]Ibid.

[5]Blake Papers, Mills to Blake, March 9, 1887

[6]Charlton Transcript, op.cit.

[7]Ibid.

But in many ways Blake's leadership suffered from the same disabilities that had plagued Mackenzie in office. Blake, like Mackenzie, attempted to undertake too much personally; he failed as Mackenzie had failed to distribute responsibility amongst the party members in parliament, and he monopolized to too great an extent the opportunities afforded the party for the discussion of parliamentary issues. G.W. Ross, discussing his transfer to the field of provincial politics, once commented, "Oh well, what is the use of remaining? Blake takes first hand in every subject, and when he is done with it there is nothing left for us but the dry bones. I am tired of trying to gnaw on these".[8] As Mackenzie was guilty of over-conscientiousness, so too was Blake in that he "wasted his great abilities and impaired his health", as M.A. Western states,[9] labouring personally over the multitudinous details of the government legislation.[10] Again,

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[8] W.S. Wallace, The Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Sir George Foster, (Macmillan, Toronto, 1933), p. 63

[9] M.A. Western, "EDWARD BLAKE, Leader of the Opposition", (unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Toronto, 1939), p. 282

[10] Blake suffered from "nervous prostration (and) extreme incapacity for work & play"; he had never, he informed J.D. Edgar in 1885, "felt more unstrung at any former season" as he did then, and even "fainted dead away ... for the first time in my life a time ago" (Edgar Papers, Blake to Edgar, September 7, 1885). Laurier diagnosed Blake's fits of despondency and nervous exhaustion as the result of his "soul ... preying on the body". "I believe," he confided to Edgar, "he is under the opinion that his followers hold him responsible for the lack of success of the party". Such an impression was utterly false, maintained Laurier: if necessary his followers would "forever remain in opposition" rather than reject his leadership. (Edgar Papers, Laurier to Edgar, October 22, 1885) Throughout 1886 his sleepless nights continued as his "nervous system" remained "overstrung". (Laurier Papers, Blake to Laurier, June 26, 1886) By early 1887, he was completely worn out from the rigours of the federal election campaign. Blake could stand no more; resignation was the only way out.

Charlton contends:

> "Mr. Blake was often advised and urged by his followers to give a more superficial attention to matters under his charge, to throw more work upon his leading supporters ... Had he consented to follow this advice there is little doubt that his leadership would have been more popular and effective than it actually was." 11

Above all, both men were deficient in the ability necessary to galvanize party members into shouldering the burden of hard work, both in and out of Parliament. Both men suffered from a lack of personal charm: Blake to a much greater degree than Mackenzie. The former was often unapproachable; his icy demeanour repelled all attempts to achieve any sort of intimacy and denied a rapport with his followers. None the less, despite these damaging traits, Blake paradoxically achieved amongst the diverse segments of the party a far greater and closer degree of harmony than Mackenzie had ever been able to accomplish. "We felt in the presence of genius", as Laurier once explained, "and would have been proud to serve (him) to the end, had he not drawn himself aloof",[12] No doubt, they were in the presence of a genius - unfortunately for the party, he was a legal and not a political genius. Edward Blake made his preparations for debating with elaborate and thorough care, explored every ramification of each point under consideration, and gave in his speeches, states Charlton, "such a maze of argument, statement and analysis as to require an effort even on the part of the trained mind to fully follow him."[13] Such speeches

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[11] Charlton Transcript, op.cit.

[12] Skelton, O.D. quoted in, Laurier, Vol.I, op.cit., p. 224

[13] Charlton Transcript, op.cit.

were completely wasted upon the masses which composed the Canadian electorate. "I wish you would try to convince him (Blake)", Cartwright once pleaded to Laurier, "that no human being ever did appreciate a seven hours speech and that his real forte is in reply."[14] Blake's impromptu rejoinders and comments were always far more devastating than his elaborately constructed wagnerian-styled speeches. This Blake could never fully comprehend.

But the commanding genius of Edward Blake brought the party closer to a unified whole than it had ever been before. For the first time, the party achieved through his leadership an increasingly solid backing of support in the province of Quebec. "Our friends here respect you:" reported Henri G. Joly to Blake in 1882. "They believe in your broad statesmanlike views, your Parliamentary skill and your manly honesty. It is seldom a leader can bind his followers to himself by so many ties."[15] It was only through Blake's efforts that the French and English elements in the party did not split the party in the crisis following Riel's execution in 1885.[16] It is indeed true

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[14]Laurier Papers, Cartwright to Laurier, November 13, 1885

[15]Blake Papers, H.G. Joly to Blake, January 4, 1882

[16]Blake held Macdonald responsible for the Riel crisis on account of the Conservative leader's "most scandalous misgovernment and corrupt practices". Riel deserved to be hanged in the opinion of many Liberals, commented Richard Cartwright to Laurier but "Sir J. Mc is a thousandfold the more guilty of the two". (Laurier Papers, Cartwright to Laurier, November 13, 1885) Laurier, Blake's chief lieutenant in French Canada, agreed with the Liberal leader that "Riel was a monomaniac" and that the French-Canadian Liberals supported his policy of "holding the government responsible not only for the (North-West) rebellion but for all the consequences of the rebellion, including Riel's death". (Blake Papers, Laurier to Blake, December 31,

the great majority of Parliamentary Liberals, as Western states, were "enthusiastically loyal to their chief."[17]

In political belief and principle, Edward Blake did not depart noticeably form the programme laid down by Alexander Mackenzie. Not once did he sacrifice principle in the hope of gaining power; he was always a staunch upholder of the traditional Liberal principles of governmental economy, morality and purity. These principles furnished the basic ammunition of every Liberal attack against the Macdonald Conservatives. Throughout the 1880s Blake and the Liberal Party never compromised or modified these principles in the least. The rank-and-file members of the party, L.H. Davies once reported to Blake in 1887, had always believed "in your desire to give them honest government and in your power to obtain it for them."[18]

Nor can Edward Blake as leader be accused of stooping to political opportunism. Although in 1879and 1880 it had been suggested by the Blake camp that Mackenzie should have modified his resolute stand upon the low tariff principle. Blake in most cases surprisingly was just as unrelenting as Mackenzie had been. When it was suggested that principle had to be tempered with opportunism to achieve electoral

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1885) In a speech delivered in London early in 1886, Blake drew great applause from both English and French speaking Liberals as he attacked the Tories for fomenting a war of race and creed over their handling of the Riel affair. It was, reflected John Cameron an "uniting speech - it reassured Ontario, & does not repulse Quebec". (Blake Papers, Cameron to Blake, January 18, 1886)

[17] Western, op.cit., p. 275

[18] Blake Papers, L.H. Davies to Blake, March 15, 1887

success, Blake adamantly refused to consider such a doctrine.[19] As Laurier, the leader of the French-Canadian Liberals, once said in a letter to Blake,

> "I do not care, & I know you do not care, to adopt any new policy with the sole object of making it a stepping stone to power ... publicly it is always held up that we must adhere to principles, but privately we often hear that the tories must be fought with their own weapons ... Such doctrines individually professed are collectively weakening." 20

Blake, as Mackenzie had done, always resisted the temptation to sacrifice principle for power.

In one field however, that of trade, Blake did modify the old Grit dogma built on the Manchester School precepts and defended so staunchly by Mackenzie. Blake, unlike Mackenzie, was willing to accept what might be termed modified protection for Canada. During these years he attempted to find, as F.H. Underhill says "a reasonable compromise by which the party might accept the fact of protectionism while criticizing particular items in the tariff."[21] Blake singled out certain items in the Tilley tariff, such as the high duties on coal, sugar and breadstuffs, and constantly attacked the government for taxing these 'necessities of life'. The levies on these items, main-

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[19]Blake, once the leadership struggle had been settled to his satisfaction, saw in all probability, no reason not to embrace completely the traditional philosophy and principles of the Liberal Party. Doubtless, he felt that these accepted ideas still possessed great appeal with the voters.

[20]Blake Papers, Laurier to Blake, December 20, 1882

[21]F.H. Underhill, "Laurier and Blake", Canadian Historical Review, December 1939, Vol.XX, pp. 392-408

tained the Liberal chieftain, worked untold hardships on the lower classes. The issue in Blake's mind was always the justice or injustice of the protective duties as applied to the necessities of life. "Free Trade" said Blake, "as I have repeatedly explained, is for us impossible; the issue is whether the present tariff is perfect, or defective and unjust. I believe it to be in some important respects defective and unjust."[22] On the whole, it was a very cautious trade policy put forth by the Liberals as they centred their attack on the National Policy of the Conservatives. Any buoyancy that the economy was experiencing at that time (1882-84) was only a temporary phenomenon, argued Blake in 1884. "I believe that wa have already reached the period of over-speculation, of over-trade, of over-importation."[23] The economic programme constantly proposed by Blake throughout the years of his leadership was always wherever possible "a policy of reduced taxation, of readjusted taxation, of economy in administration."[24] Blake was never a thorough going rebel against party tradition.

Blake in these years also revived the old idea of Senate Reform, first voiced in his Aurora Speech of 1874. It is interesting, however, to note that none of the other radical notions projected at Aurora, namely minority representation and compulsory voting, were ever advocated during these years. Even in his promotion of an elective Senate, Blake

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[22] Globe, (Toronto), May 23, 1882, also PAC pamphlets # 443, 444,445, Edward Blake and "Liberal Principles, 1882 Election"

[23] House of Commons Debates, 1884, p.16

[24] Globe, January 15, 1885, Report of Blake's speech to Young Men's Liberal Club, Toronto.

proceeded cautiously.

In essence, the Liberal Party under Blake did not depart markedly form the concepts that had influenced it under Mackenzie. Honesty, economy, retrenchment, and provincial rights were still the keystones which shaped the outlook and strategy of the party. It was still mainly the lower classes, the primary producers who remained uppermost in party considerations. But Blake had injected a new idea in party thinking: the producing and monied class must also be accorded attention, and their desires and fears taken into account when formulating legislation. Together the party must from these two forces form a coalition which would produce a sound legislative programme for the whole country. As Blake informed John Hallam in 1887, "the question and the only question with me is the interest of the country. I have done my best to formulate a policy in that interest."[25] Essentially Blake prepared the stage for the entry of Laurier and eventual victory by modifying and eliminating the stultifying rigidity characteristic of the party during the eighteen-seventies.

Why did Blake fail in his bids for success? It was not because he shirked his duties as leader. Blake, like his predecessor, laboured so strenuously on behalf of his party that eventually his health did indeed suffer badly. Blake as leader strove to build up the party organization, to increase its efficiency, and to bring all the motley elements into one effective unity.[26] In this effort he was only

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[25]Blake Papers, Blake to J. Hallam, February 19, 1887

[26]Blake's labours, on behalf of the party were once described as "herculean" in scope by his friend, L.H. Davies. (Laurier Papers, Davies to Laurier, July 29, 1885

partially successful as a "dense wall of apathy & indifference" constantly contributed to rob his efforts of real fruit.[27] The responsibility for his failures lies not so much at his door as with the circumstances of the time. Blake as a politician was burdened with flaws, but his personality, although at times frigid, was so commanding a stature as to constantly inspire his disheartened followers to rekindled zeal. Blake during the 1880s periodically felt the load of leadership to be too onerous; however, each time he attempted to tender his resignation, a chorus of nays greeted his proposal. Even when Edward Blake finally resigned early in June 1887, his hand-picked successor, Wilfrid Laurier, was reluctant to assume his mantle. "I know that I am not fitted to take the lead of the party," wrote Laurier to Blake on June 10, 1887. "The fact that the best minds in the party think that in the interests of the party I should accept, makes me hesitate in my determination to refuse."[28] Laurier, nevertheless, eventually accepted the position and proved to be one of the greatest leaders the Liberal Party has ever known.

Despite Blake's unending struggle to revitalize the Liberals, the party seemed doomed to wander forever in the political wilderness. As A.H. Gilluier put it in a letter to Blake, "When the liberals are out, it seems almost impossible for them to get in, and when in, it

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[27]Edgar Papers, Blake to Edgar, January 9, 1882

[28]Blake Papers, Laurier to Blake, June 10, 1887

seems equally difficult for them to retain favour." 29 The explanation, it was alleged, lay in the "very low" standard of political morality amongst the people. "The electors must have office and money", he commented bitterly. "If we were in to-morrow we could not satisfy them unless we decided to become free booters and distribute the plunder right and left."[30] A great many Liberals felt similarly. Nevertheless, Blake constantly refused to relax principle in order to offer patronage. There was one way to beat the tactics of the Conservatives, he told Laurier at the end of his Canadian political career. In his opinion, the road to success could only be achieved by a much greater effort on the part of each individual member.

> "The liberal party, which does not use corruption & has no contractors fund (sic) cannot succeed against corruption & contractors funds (sic) without sacrifice of individual time and means ... they (the party members) must learn sooner or later that if they value their principles they must exert themselves for their triumph... Now is your opportunity for an effort in this direction; mine failed, may yours succeed." 31

Laurier, in truth, did rally each individual member to a new, revitalized effort on behalf of the party, which coupled with the disintegration[32] in the Conservative camp after 1892, eventually swept

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[29] Ibid., A.G. Gilluier to Blake, July 29, 1882

[30] Ibid.

[31] Laurier Papers, Blake to Laurier, March 20, 1887

[32] An interesting explanation for this disintegration is offered by L.C. Clark who convincingly contends that the alliance between the English and French speaking wings of the party was shattered when the party leaders between 1892-96 either placated, or could not control, Protestant extremism and Anglo-Saxon radicalism. The Quebec wing became disillusioned when it became obvious to all in the Manitoba

the party to power in 1896. Yet, it was the mistakes, the failures and the successes of both Alexander Mackenzie and Edward Blake that prepared the way for the great Liberal triumph under Laurier and which aided the silver-tongued French Canadian to maintain the Party in power for over fifteen years. Under Laurier, the Liberal Party of Canada emerged as a modern, national, unified force representing and promoting the well-being of all classes and interests as part of the welfare of the Canadian nation as a whole. But earlier, both Alexander Mackenzie and Edward Blake had played a decisive role in the shaping of the modern Liberal Party of Canada.

Schools dispute of 1896, maintains Clark, that the "hope of the 'Founding Fathers' that French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians would share the new western domain on equal terms" was being frustrated by militant protestantism within the party as exemplified by the Protestant Protective Association. (Clark, L.C., "The Conservative Party in the Eighteen Nineties", published in, Report of the Canadian Historical Association, 1961, pp. 58-74

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