

The Defeat of the Pawley Government ¹⁰⁰

Much has been said about the instability of minority governments. While accountability plays a greater role—the government must acquire and maintain the support of members beyond its own party—this often comes at the expense of stability. One bad vote and the government can fall. Little did Premier Howard Pawley know in early 1988 that his relatively safe majority government would succumb to this same instability.

After the 1986 election, Howard Pawley's NDP held 30 of the legislature's 57 seats. Gary Filmon's Conservatives held 26 and Sharon Carstairs held the remaining seat as the sole Liberal. The NDP selected Myrna Phillips to serve as Speaker of the House, leaving the governing party with 29 votes (the Speaker can only vote in cases of a tie). This still left the government with a two vote advantage in the House. Then, in February 1988, Laurent Desjardins, Pawley's Health Minister, resigned his seat. Pawley decided not to call a by-election immediately which left Desjardin's seat vacant and left the government with a precarious one vote advantage in the House. At the time, it was evident to most members that Jim Walding, a former Speaker and now a Pawley government backbencher, was the loosest cannon in the House. Opposition Leader Gary Filmon would later note, "I was watching him, because obviously, every time there's a vote in the House, the most likely person to defeat the government is Jim Walding."¹⁰¹

Walding's discontent with his Pawley government had started years earlier. He was passed over for a Cabinet position in 1981. He was later appointed Speaker and served as Speaker of the House during the French-language crisis—an attempt by the government in 1983-84 to pass a constitutional resolution on the guarantee of French-language rights in Manitoba. The acrimonious and often volatile debate saw the legislature's division bells ring for unprecedented stretches of time as the Opposition Tories continually walked out of the House refusing to participate in votes. Walding was approached by

¹⁰⁰ Much of the information for this account came from B. Bosiak, "By One Vote: The Defeat of the Manitoba Government" (1989) 12:1 *Canadian Parliamentary Review* 15.

¹⁰¹ D. Benham & R. Pollett, "Tory leader one happy man" *Winnipeg Sun* (9 March 1988) 3.

Premier Pawley and asked to intervene and put a stop to the Tories' tactics. Walding refused to intervene, stating this would compromise his impartiality as Speaker.¹⁰² It can be readily surmised that this became a major crack in the relationship between Walding and his NDP colleagues.

In 1986, Walding resigned as Speaker and after the 1986 election, he was again passed over for a Cabinet position. He was relegated to the government backbenches where he would serve his remaining two years.

Walding grew increasingly critical of his government's policy initiatives. In his response to the Throne Speech in February 1988, Walding made no attempt to hide his criticism of the government, especially noting the massive increase in taxes and Autopac rates.¹⁰³ Despite this criticism, Walding voted with his colleagues to support the Throne Speech.

Less than a month later, the Pawley government delivered its Budget Speech. Walding did not speak to the budget, and as late as two days prior to the vote on the budget, he indicated he "rather like(d) the general tone of it".¹⁰⁴ There was little to warn the Pawley government, and Filmon's opposition, of the pivotal about-face Walding was about to make.

On 8 March 1988, the vote on the budget took place. The Opposition had introduced the typical non-confidence motion—a motion indicating a lack of support for the government's budget and a loss of confidence in the sitting government.¹⁰⁵ When the motion was called for a vote, Walding rose with the Conservatives and the Liberal in favour of the motion. The motion was passed by a vote of 28-27, a result leaving no room for the Speaker to add her support in the form of a tie-breaking vote. Speaker Phillips ruled the non-confidence motion had been passed.¹⁰⁶

By parliamentary tradition, the loss of a non-confidence vote on a budget forces the sitting government to ask the Lieutenant-Governor to dissolve the House and call an election. On March 9, Premier Pawley announced a provincial election would take place on April 26. He also announced his

¹⁰² See G. Mackintosh, "Heading Off Bilodeau: Attempting Constitutional Amendment" (1986) 15:3 *Manitoba Law Journal* 271 at 284.

¹⁰³ Manitoba, Legislative Assembly, *Debates and Proceedings* [hereinafter *Hansard*], Vol. XXXVI No. 2 (12 February 1988) at 18-23.

¹⁰⁴ Canadian Press, "Quiet backbencher felled New Democrats" *Globe and Mail* (9 March 1988) A4.

¹⁰⁵ In this case, the motion was actually an amendment to the government's motion to approve the budget. See *Hansard*, Vol. XXXVI No. 19 (8 March 1988) at 590.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* at 591.

resignation as leader of the NDP.¹⁰⁷ On March 31, the party elected Gary Doer as the new party leader.¹⁰⁸

The election of 26 April 1988 saw Gary Filmon and the Conservatives win a minority government and Sharon Carstairs lead the Liberals as the Official Opposition. Gary Doer and the NDP won only 12 of the legislature's 57 seats.

¹⁰⁷ See P. McKinley, "NDP leadership up for grabs" *Winnipeg Free Press* (10 March 1988) 1.

¹⁰⁸ See P. McKinley, "Doer wins NDP cliffhanger" *Winnipeg Free Press* (31 March 1988) 1.

