

## INTRODUCTION

The publication of the debates of Parliament, 1867-1868, is a Centennial project of the Parliament of Canada, organized through the Library of Parliament. This undertaking is both useful and fascinating. The inadequacy of the "Scrapbook Debates" has long been felt, and particularly so for the lengthy and vital first session of Parliament that opened in Ottawa on Wednesday, November 6, 1867. The first speeches of the new Members of Parliament of the new Canada reflect their growing and broadening sense of common commitment to a common cause, and the impact of events, such as the assassination of D'Arcy McGee on April 7, 1868, give these debates much of the immediacy of the time.

The official debates of the Parliament of the Dominion of Canada were first published only in 1875. Between 1867 and 1874 they exist only in newspapers, or in a semi-official form such as the "Cotton" debates of 1870-2. In the British North American colonies before Confederation, publishing debates was not established practice. Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island had published debates, and once in a while so had New Brunswick, but the old Province of Canada had not, nor had Newfoundland. The one notable exception to the Province of Canada's lack of official debates was the official reporting of the debate on Confederation in 1865. (Not, by the way, the whole session of 1865.) It is fair to say that the 1032 pages of that Confederation debate of 1865 went a long way to persuade parliamentarians of the Province of Canada then, and afterward, that official publishing of debates brought out the worst habits of the *genus*: the long speeches for the delectation of constituents, the readings for the record, the interminable reworking of speeches that were not otherwise fit to appear in cold print. In short, Parliament boggled at the sheer volume of talk to be printed for what was then thought to be the doubtful edification of posterity.

As a result, after 1865 no further official debates were published by the Province of Canada, or by the Dominion of Canada, for another decade. Every year a few earnest souls, of whom Alexander Mackenzie was one, would propose that Parliament consider the question of official reporting of debates, and these efforts usually met with the same reaction. That in 1867-8 is quite characteristic. Mackenzie submitted on December 4, 1867, an interim report from the Joint Printing Committee on the possible organization and costs of an official report of debates. It was not to be a verbatim report; it was to be compressed roughly to the reports current in the *Toronto Globe*, i.e., about one-third of the length of the original speech.

In March, 1868, the Joint Committee on Printing recommended, in its Fourth Report, that both Houses favorably consider the official reporting of debates. The House of Commons opposed the project, by a vote of 94-48, on March 27, 1868. The Senate, on the same day, seems to have been rather less cavalier, as it might have been expected to be, but, equally, the Senate was disposed to be cautious. Senator McCully liked the idea but was uncomfortable about the expense. It is fair to say that Senator Hazen's view tended to prevail: that there was no good reason for reporting debates officially, since "a very good report of the speeches of members was now given in the newspapers."