

having “free competition” do the reporting but believed that “the Ottawa papers were not up to the task.” Prime Minister Macdonald was cagey; he would leave the “question in the hands of the House.” The House subsequently instructed the committee to prepare a “formal” plan for a Canadian *Hansard*.

The committee reported in March 1868 that an official record of Commons debates, in both French and English, could be had for \$12,000 a year. Any desire for better reporting was quickly overwhelmed by concern over its cost. Wild rumours circulated that the *Congressional Globe* in Washington cost the American taxpayer \$100,000 a year. Other members quipped that once MPs saw their words in print “they would be ashamed to say so much about so little.” When put to a vote, Mackenzie’s *Hansard* scheme was defeated by a margin of almost two to one, with the Prime Minister, sensing the mood of the House, voting “Nay.”

Like a terrier, Mackenzie would not let go of the idea. He doggedly kept the gist of his 1868 report in the consciousness of the House. His campaign acquired allies on both sides of the Commons. Perhaps most notably, Dr. Charles Tupper – Father of Confederation, Tory “lieutenant” for Nova Scotia and a member of Parliament from a province that had recorded its own debates since 1851 – stood shoulder-to-shoulder with his Grit adversary on this particular issue. “Private enterprise,” he argued, had failed to record the debates of Parliament so that “the future historian” could “put his hand on an authoritative narrative of the deliberations of the House.”¹⁵ Francophone members of Parliament such as Dr. Blanchet embraced the idea; private enterprise had seldom reported their words in their own language. In the early 1870s, various attempts were made to tug the House away from its frugality on the issue. Some encouragement came from the Senate, where in 1871 a shorthand reporter was employed to record and prepare its debates for publication. The Commons, however, would go no further than buying copies of the privately produced “Cotton Debates.” It would take the fall of the Macdonald Conservatives in late 1873 to open the way for the decisive shift.

The Pacific Scandal of 1873 not only swept Macdonald out of office, it also brought the Mackenzie Liberals into office on a wave of virtuous indignation over the political morality of the young Confederation. Prime Minister Alexander Mackenzie was now securely positioned to act on his passion for egalitarian democracy. A secret ballot was quickly introduced; Canadians could now cast their vote solely according to their conscience. And the reporting of Commons debates was finally wrested from the press. On 4 February 1875, as soon as the Governor General, Lord Dufferin, had delivered the Speech from the Throne, the Prime Minister moved that “the Votes and Proceedings of the House be printed, being first perused by Mr. Speaker, and that he do appoint the printing thereof, and that no person but such as he shall presume to print the same.” Homework for the motion had been done by a Commons committee in the previous session; a bilingual, published *Hansard* was estimated to cost just under \$8,000. Some debate ensued over whether the official reporter should be placed in a special gallery above the House or allowed as a “stranger” to sit on the floor of the Commons. “As an experiment,” it was decided that a table would be placed on the floor near the Speaker to ensure the reporter the best possible vantage point. Mackenzie’s motion was subsequently passed and Canada’s House of Commons finally, almost a decade after Confederation, had *Hansard*.

But Dr. Tupper had been prophetic. Historians had been left with no “authoritative narrative” of the Commons for the years 1867 to 1874, nor of the Senate from 1867 to 1870. A very assiduous historian might have cobbled together an impression of Parliament in these years by combing through the “Scrapbook Debates” assembled by the Library of Parliament, and the

15. *House of Commons Debates*. 3 March 1870.