

on the momentous matter of a greater union “encouraged quantities of plain drivel . . . dressed up for public consumption.”<sup>8</sup>

Confederation in 1867 brought no decisive break with this patchwork tradition. The new House of Commons made no provision for recording its debates. By default, the task was left to journalists sitting in the Strangers Gallery. The reporters brought partisan dedication to their assignment. Mid-nineteenth-century newspapers reflected the rough sectarian world in which they lived; publishers courted readership by sporting their religious, ideological and ethnic sentiments. Circulation and advertising were not the only foundation of a paper’s commercial success; the spoils of power – government printing contracts, railway passes, inside information – came to publishers whose party had found the voters’ favour. As historian Paul Rutherford has noted of the nineteenth-century Canadian press:

Journalism and party seemed inextricably linked – by tradition and necessity. . . . The typical publisher or editor remained addicted to playing politics, for him a grand sport that added spice to life and gave significance to his calling. . . . The result of the game often gave him, or at least his newspaper, sustenance in the form of readers, subsidies, and patronage.<sup>9</sup>

The Toronto *Globe*, founded in 1844 by Scottish immigrant George Brown, perhaps best typified this partisanship; the paper habitually sounded clarion calls for the defence of the Grit cause and Toronto’s commercial ambitions. Brown’s bugbear of “French domination” was a constant editorial theme. But political coloration was not a nineteenth-century newspaper’s only tint. Editors assiduously curried the favour of particular business and religious agendas. The Montreal *Gazette*, partly owned in the 1870s by steamship mogul and railway promoter Hugh Allan, could be relied upon to pump any political platform that aligned with a railway platform.<sup>10</sup> Across the border in Ontario, Mackenzie Bowell used his proprietorship of the Belleville *Intelligencer* to trumpet the interests of the ultra-Protestant Orange Order.<sup>11</sup> As the nineteenth century drew to a close, Canadian newspapers slowly shifted their focus from the profits of partisanship to the more lucrative rewards of advertising, mass circulation and political independence. As late as 1891, however, 36 of Canada’s 101 daily newspapers still openly styled themselves as Conservative and another 35 flew Liberal colours. Only 30 declared their independence. Partisanship in Canadian journalism had a long sunset.<sup>12</sup>

To this motley and often self-interested crew of journalists fell the task of conveying the deliberations of Parliament in the years 1867 to 1874. As they had in England, reporters appeared in the Commons gallery, where they transcribed what they heard below them. These accounts were taken in the third person and were then hastily despatched, usually by telegram, to Toronto or Montreal newspapers. The *Globe* and the *Mail* were the most persistent Toronto observers, while the *Gazette* eavesdropped on the debates for its Montreal readers. The *Globe*,

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8. P.B. Waite, ed. *The Confederation Debates in the Province of Canada, 1865*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1963, p. ix.

9. Paul Rutherford. *A Victorian Authority: The Daily Press in Late Nineteenth-Century Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982, p. 212.

10. See: Minko Sotiron. *From Politics to Profit: The Commercialization of Canadian Daily Newspapers, 1890–1920*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997.

11. See: P.B. Waite. “Bowell, Sir Mackenzie.” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*. Vol. XIV, 1911–1920, pp. 120–124.

12. See: R. Louis Gentilcore *et al.* *Historical Atlas of Canada*, Vol. II: The Land Transformed, 1800–1891, Plate 28: “Politics and Parties, 1867–1896” and Plate 51: “The Printed Word,” Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993; and Brian P.N. Beaven, “Partnership, Patronage and the Press in Ontario, 1880–1914: Myths and Realities.” *Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (September 1983), pp. 317–351.