

The Senate, in the meantime, had adopted official reporting with the appointment of the young John George Bourinot of Sydney as “Short-Hand Writer to the Senate and Committees of the Senate”. Bourinot had begun recording Senate debates in 1871, establishing the first continuous official record of debates in the Canadian Parliament.

In the light of his long-standing interest in an official *Hansard*, Prime Minister Mackenzie did not delay in striking a select committee of the House of Commons in 1874 to enquire into “the most effectual and cheapest mode of obtaining the publication of a Canadian *Hansard*”. The committee of nine members was led by James Young of Waterloo South, a businessman from Galt. With Tupper’s backing, the committee went to work, reporting on 18 May. The official record of debates should begin in the next session with each intervention to be reported in its own language. There should be a Chief Reporter, a permanent employee of the House and under him four reporters, one French-speaking. Two thousand copies of *Hansard* would be printed in sheet form, one for each newspaper in Canada and six for each member. The probable cost of the operation for each session would be \$7984, of which \$5000 would be needed for the stipends of the reporters. The committee’s report was opposed by a small group of members, the proponents of private reporting. The most outspoken were both Liberals: Frank Killam of Yarmouth and Robert Wilkes from Toronto City Centre. Their amendment was turned down on a division, as Mackenzie, Blake, Mills, Macdonald and J.-E. Cauchon all endorsed the proposal for an official report. Thus the official record of debates for the Commons would begin with the Second Session of the Third Parliament in 1875.⁵

If reform of the political process was a congenial subject for the new government, the responsibility for the construction of the Pacific railway linking British Columbia with Ontario was not. The terms of union for British Columbia’s entry into Confederation, negotiated by the Macdonald government in 1871, contained generous provisions for the completion of a transcontinental railway. The line would be commenced within two years of the act of union, i.e. by July 1873. It would be completed within ten years, i.e. by July 1881. Evidence suggests that even the British Columbia delegates were surprised by the promises made by the federal government respecting the railway. In addition Cartier, the minister responsible for the negotiation of the railway terms, had promised that the enterprise would be carried out without an increase in general taxation! The Liberal opposition had been aghast at the railway commitments, which it characterized as reckless and ruinous, from the moment the terms had been announced. It had fought the Macdonald government’s transportation plans through the parliamentary sessions of 1872 and 1873, but in vain. It had seen the company chartered to build the railway fail because of its inability to raise the necessary private capital in England. It had seen the government which had sponsored the railway fall from grace and leave office. Now it was faced with the awesome responsibility of carrying forward the Pacific railway project.

By 1874 the management of the project seemed more of a burden than ever. An economic slump in North America had depressed Canadian government revenues and two years of waiting had only hardened the demand of the province of British Columbia that the railway terms be fully honoured. They represented a solemn obligation on the part of the federal government, the administration in Victoria insisted. True, surveys for the line were going forward, but in the western mountains they only revealed what most people suspected, that the

⁵ For a fuller account of the controversy over official reporting of debates see David Farr, “Reconstituting the Early Debates of the Parliament of Canada”, *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, 15 (Spring 1992), pp. 26-32.