

The electoral legislation of 1874 was the child of A.-A. Dorion, minister of justice, a veteran Rouge who had fought his way through many elections and knew their defects. Introduced by Dorion for second reading in a long speech on 21 April, the bill was the subject of lengthy debates over fine points before attaining royal assent at the end of the session on 26 May 1874. The act (37 Vict., Cap. 9) overhauled federal voting practices. General elections were now to be held on the same day across the country, except for isolated ridings in Ontario and Quebec and for contests in Manitoba and British Columbia. The secret ballot would become the norm in federal elections as it had already become in New Brunswick even before 1867 and in Nova Scotia in 1870; Ontario had adopted it in 1873 and Quebec was to follow two years later. Election expenses were to be tabulated and made public within two months after the voting and the use of liquor for election purposes was forbidden. The franchise for Dominion elections was to continue to be defined by the provinces, except that property qualifications were to be abolished. The old-style raucous election meetings “on the hustings”, held for the purpose of publicly nominating candidates, were to become a thing of the past.

The whole of the electoral law of 1874 was used for the first time in the fourth general election on 17 September 1878. The secret ballot was used for the first time federally in a by-election in the constituency of Toronto City West in November 1875.

Reformers in the Ontario wing of the Liberals continued in the First Session of the Third Parliament to make efforts to modify the structure of the federal government. The legally learned David Mills, member for Bothwell, moved that the Senate be appointed by the provincial legislatures, while George W. Ross, member for Middlesex West, argued in favour of an elected Senate. A debate on the subject occurred on 13 April 1874 but it was inconclusive, the Mackenzie government having no intention of committing itself on the matter; late in 1873 it had already sought, but failed to get, approval from Whitehall to appoint extra Senators itself and swamp the Conservatives in the upper house.

A change in House practice introduced in the 1874 session complemented the new electoral law. This was the decision, made through the adoption of a committee report, to begin the official recording of the debates of the Commons. The matter had come up many times before in the First and Second Parliaments but had never won the necessary bipartisan support. The objections to the introduction of official reporting were twofold: that the task has already been carried out satisfactorily by newspapers such as the *Globe* and the *Times* and that official reporting would be too costly. There were also the side issues as to whether official reporting could ever be truly non-partisan and whether it would encourage verbosity in the House.

Alexander Mackenzie, who had prepared the first report favouring an official *Hansard* in the 1867-1868 session, saw a public record of debates, prepared by the Commons' own staff, as leading to a more accountable Parliament. He envisioned an official record of debates as similar in intent to the changes embodied in the new electoral law. Mackenzie was supported, in his endorsement of an official record, by Dr. Charles Tupper, who saw such a record as a useful historical document for the Canadian people and as a reference source for prospective settlers and investors living abroad.

In 1872 the Commons had decided, as an experiment, to purchase copies for members of a shortened report of the debates prepared by James Cotton of the *Ottawa Times*. Six hundred copies of the “Cotton Debates” for 1870 and 1871 were eventually purchased and distributed.