

REPORT

OF THE

REPORTING DEBATES COMMITTEE

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COMMITTEE APPOINTED 4TH JUNE, 1869. REPORTS BROUGHT UP 4TH AUGUST, 1869, AND 30TH  
AUGUST, 1869.

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WELLINGTON.

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1869.



## REPORT OF THE REPORTING DEBATES COMMITTEE.

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YOUR Committee have had before them the Annual Report of the Chief Reporter of the *Hansard* Staff, and the remarks thereon by the Government Printer, and have come to the following conclusions, which they submit for consideration by the House :—

2. There does not seem to be any reason for departing from the practice prescribed in the Resolutions of the Select Committee on Reporting Debates, Session 1867, in respect to the corrections of proofs by Members. As a general rule Members do not make material alterations in the reports of their speeches; but where any glaring exception to this rule happens, it is proper that the Chief Reporter should have the power to refuse to pass such corrections to the Printer, subject however to a reference to the Reporting Debates Committee by the Member making such corrections.

3. The Reports during the present Session have been on the whole more satisfactory than they were last Session. In some instances, however, the reporting has been very unequal,—and your Committee recommend, with a view of securing greater uniformity in the reports, that the services of another competent shorthand writer be secured by the Chief Reporter for the permanent staff, which can be done at an additional yearly expenditure of about £70. Your Committee likewise recommend that the steam-boat fare of Reporters, when coming to and returning from the General Assembly, be defrayed by the Government.

4. Considering the extent of reporting during this Session of the General Assembly, your Committee do not think the work could be efficiently performed by fewer Reporters, or at a less cost to the Colony.

5. The expediency of employing shorthand writers to take evidence before Select Committees of both Houses was brought before your Committee. The complaints respecting the way in which the Committee work had been done last year were so great that the Chief Reporter offered occasional reporting assistance to the Clerk of the House, in compliance with his application to that effect; and your Committee have to report that during the present Session several Select Committees have had the assistance of shorthand writers from the *Hansard* Reporting Staff. The saving in time to the Committees, and the greater accuracy of the Minutes of Evidence taken, induce your Committee to recommend that in future all evidence heard before Select Committees should be reported by shorthand writers. This would necessitate the employment of two extra reporters during the Session, but the advantages gained would more than compensate for the difference between the pay of shorthand writers and the ordinary pay of Committee clerks.

### PRINTING OFFICE.

6. Your Committee, by a second Order of Reference, were empowered to institute a full inquiry regarding the Government Printing Office, with power to call for persons and papers. On this part of their duties, your Committee would remark that they did not deem it expedient to examine witnesses or records,—inasmuch as any inquiry regarding the Government Printing Office, such as that contemplated in the Order of Reference, must be more or less of a technical character; and having before them the remarks of the Chief Reporter on the management of the Printing Office in connection with the production of the *Hansard*, and the reply of the Government Printer to these remarks, they conceived that, except as to matters of detail, they had all necessary information before them.

7. Your Committee express no opinion as to the propriety of continuing the Government Printing Office. Much might be said for and against its continuance; but your Committee consider that the Government should institute a searching inquiry into the general system of management during the recess, with a view to the reduction of the very heavy annual expenditure under the head of Printing.

8. They deem it expedient, however, to make some remarks on the Reports before them in relation to the Printing Office.

9. The Chief Reporter complains of delays in the production of *Hansard*, and attributes this in part to the Compositors leaving off work at eleven o'clock each night, and in part to "bad composing." He likewise states that the corrections made by the Members are greater than they otherwise would be because of the delay in issuing proof slips for correction until Members forgot what they said, and it has become all but impossible for the Chief Reporter to correct them. To this, the Government Printer replies that his experience is that more work is done by Compositors during the day than during the night. He likewise attributes the delay complained of by the Chief Reporter to the extent of corrections by Members, and states that until the "unlimited license in the corrections of their speeches by Members, without editorial supervision," be disallowed, these delays must occur. He likewise complains that the Reporters send imperfect reports to the Printing Office, by leaving blanks which Members are to fill up afterwards with extracts read by them in Debate.

10. Assuming the statement of the Chief Reporter to be correct, that inconvenience has been created and expense incurred by delays in the Printing Office, the reasons urged in explanation by the Government Printer do not seem to be entirely satisfactory. It appears to your Committee, however, that the true reason is to be found in the system of management. If a different system prevailed in regard to the production of *Hansard*, there is no reason to doubt that a considerable saving would be effected, and unnecessary delay avoided. It is suggested to separate the *Hansard* staff from the regular staff employed in the Government Printing Office. If that were done, and *Hansard* produced as nearly as possible on the system adopted by the managers of morning newspapers, the report of one

day would be in type and circulated amongst Members for correction early on the morning of the following day,—provided that the number of Compositors employed was equal to the work.

11. Your Committee would recommend, therefore, that instead of the Compositors employed on *Hansard* working during the day, they should commence at eight o'clock each evening, and continue at work until the reports supplied by the shorthand writers have been set up in type and corrected. This would enable the Compositors engaged on *Hansard* to be kept separate from the men permanently employed on the general work of the Government Printing Office, and get rid of the difficulty raised by the Government Printer, that there is not sufficient space in the building to keep the two branches distinct.

12. Further, the plan recommended would harmonize with the work of the Reporting Staff, inasmuch as the Reporters are compelled to write out the reports of each day's sitting, however protracted, before retiring to rest; thus the composition would go on simultaneously with the reporting. Three or four men should be employed each day making the corrections from Members' proofs, and distributing type for the Compositors who would resume work at eight o'clock. If the Compositors employed on *Hansard* were paid by piece instead of time, deducting from their earnings the proportion for distribution of type by time-hands, the actual cost of composition and correcting proofs could be ascertained, which can now only be arrived at approximately.

13. Your Committee are of opinion that a permanent Reader for *Hansard* should be appointed, and that he should not be called on to undertake any other duty during the Session. It is impossible for a Press Reader to discharge his very critical duties efficiently if his attention is taken up by other matters. During the recess the *Hansard* Reader might be employed as Assistant Reader in the Government Printing Office. A salary at the rate of £250 a year appears to your Committee to be reasonable for an efficient Press Reader of *Hansard*, and is not in excess of the average earnings of first-class Compositors at the current rates of pay in the Australian Colonies. This appointment would not add to the cost of producing *Hansard*, except to a very trifling amount, but the extra outlay would be more than counterbalanced by securing the permanent services of an efficient Reader.

OSWALD CURTIS,  
Chairman.

30th August, 1869.

## APPENDIX.

### REPORT OF the CHIEF REPORTER, "HANSARD STAFF."

Wellington, 1st June, 1869.

THE Chief Reporter begs to submit the following Report to the Select Committee on Reporting Debates:—

#### STAFF FOR SESSION 1869.

The Staff for the present Session consists of:—Mr. G. McIntyre and Mr. W. Mitchell, permanently engaged; Mr. A. J. Dallas, a member of the first *Hansard* Staff, who declined to accept a second engagement at the then salary; Mr. E. Fox, late of the *Otago Daily Times and Sun*; Mr. W. Drake, formerly Parliamentary Reporter with Mr. G. McIntyre in Hobart Town, and strongly recommended by that gentleman and others.

#### EXPENSE OF REPORTING, &c.

Estimating the Session at thirteen weeks as heretofore, the expense of reporting will be:—

|  |     |     |     |               |
|--|-----|-----|-----|---------------|
| Chief Reporter                                 | ... | ... | ... | £500          |
| Two Reporters permanently engaged at £200 each | ... | ... | ... | 400           |
| Three Sessional Reporters at £9 per week each  | ... | ... | ... | 351           |
|  |     |     |     | <u>£1,251</u> |

The expense of printing, publishing, &c., was estimated by the Government Printer, in 1867, for the same period, at £1,059 15s.

From a subsequent part of this Report it will be seen that in Victoria and Queensland, where *Hansard* Staffs are engaged, the expense of reporting is £1,500 per annum, as against £1,251 in New Zealand. In the two first mentioned Colonies also the members of the staffs are wholly disengaged during the recess, whereas in New Zealand the services of the Chief Reporter are available to the Government in several ways, and he is employed in compiling the Index of the *Gazette*, and the Reports of the Court of Appeal, and in acting as Secretary to the Central Board of Civil Service Commissioners.

#### CORRECTION OF REPORTS BY MEMBERS.

The Staff of Reporters mentioned above ought to be competent to produce full and accurate reports of the Debates. If, therefore, the present system is to be continued, I would recommend that the following Resolutions passed by the Committee in 1867 should be re-affirmed and circulated amongst honorable Members:—

"That Members be allowed the opportunity of revising the reports on the strict understanding that the alterations are to be confined to making the reports more in accordance with the remarks actually uttered in the House.

"The Head Reporter to be judge of the alterations, and to refuse to pass those which he considers are departures from a correct report of what the speaker said. Differences of opinion between the Member revising and the Head Reporter to be referred to the Committee."

Notwithstanding the passing of these Resolutions, the general impression amongst Members in previous Sessions has been that they were justified in improving the diction of their speeches where

necessary; and as there was no doubt that some members of the Reporting Staffs were inefficient, and as I was unable to certify to the correctness of the reports in consequence, it was impossible for me to use the discretion which I am supposed to have under the above Resolutions. The authenticity and consequent value of the record is, however, so injured by this so-called improvement of diction, and the expense is so much enhanced through the numerous corrections, that I trust I shall have the support of the Committee in refusing to admit anything which cannot fairly come under the heading "inaccurate reporting."

Further on in the Report, the Committee will see the system adopted in this respect by those Australian Colonies where *Hansards* are published.

#### PRINTING, &c.

I feel some delicacy in referring to the Printer's work in connection with *Hansard*, as that Department does not come under my immediate supervision; but I am bound to say that I think there is considerable room for improvement in this portion of the production of *Hansard*. The work should not be allowed to get into arrears as it did last Session, chiefly through the Compositors ceasing work at 11 o'clock each night, when the Reporters remained up until their work was done. When this is the case, there can be no limit to the time during which corrections can be made: Members do not receive proofs of the reports of their speeches until too long after the delivery of those speeches for the speakers to remember accurately all that they have said, or for me to decide which is the more correct, the report or the correction; and at the close of each week the work so accumulates that a great deal of the week's debates is left out, or the latter part is hurried through in order to make the pamphlet up to the usual size. The cost of corrections, put down by the Government Printer (as I think, excessively) at half the cost of printing, was by no means due in previous Sessions to bad reporting alone, but might fairly have been shared in equal parts by bad "composing." The original cost of printing might, I believe, be much reduced by paying Compositors by the piece and not by time, as at present, when no distinction can be made between the good and bad workman. The argument against the change is that under the present system the men are available for other work; but I do not see how this argument holds good; for last Session, when the Compositors were put to other work, *Hansard* had to be neglected, which I am sure the Committee will not approve of this Session. Furthermore, if the *Hansard* work should chance to be slack for a time, I do not see why the piece system should prevent the men being otherwise employed.

Again, with regard to reading, which is one of the most important branches of the work, and involves a great deal of special knowledge, I would suggest that the Reader's time should be solely devoted to this work, and that he should not be called upon to do Compositor's work as well as Reader's, which was very often the case last Session. I think, also, he should receive special remuneration.

#### ACCOMMODATION.

I shall feel much obliged if the Committee will request the House Committee to have a portion of the Reporter's Gallery railed off for the *Hansard* Staff. This could easily be done, and would be a great convenience to my staff. It is impossible for me, amongst my multifarious occupations, to undertake the duty of keeping strangers out of the Reporters' Gallery.

#### HANSARDS IN OTHER COLONIES.

During the recess I communicated with the neighbouring Colonies, in order to obtain information respecting the systems adopted in reporting the debates in the various Parliaments, and have elicited the following:—

*Victoria*.—There are three Reporters, who are engaged permanently at £500 a year each, are all on an equality, and who have nothing to do during the recess.

The sitting days of the Parliament are nominally the same as in New Zealand, but the hours are much shorter. My informant (the oldest member of the Staff) says, "I have noticed that when regularity has been in the ascendant, the disposition of Members has been to sit three nights per week from 4:30 to about 11:30 each night. The Sessions generally extend over a much longer portion of the year than in New Zealand."

He also says:—"Members of Parliament are not, as a rule, supplied with proof slips of the reports of their speeches for correction. If a Member desires to see a slip of his speech, we endeavour to oblige him; but any alteration which he may wish to make is subject to our approval. However, I don't suppose that we have more than twenty such applications in the course of a Session, and the emendations, whenever suggested, are very trifling." . . . "The debates are published weekly. Our contract requires the delivery of all copy for one week to the Government Printer in time sufficient to enable him to publish the number before the sittings for the next week commence."

The total cost he estimates at about £2,250.

*Queensland*.—The Staff consists of three, who receive £400 a year each, and have nothing to do in the recess.

Besides reporting for *Hansard* they have to take evidence before Select Committees, but my informant (the senior Reporter) says:—"The strength of our staff, who have the combined duty of reporting *Hansard* as well as the evidence taken before Select Committees, sometimes very voluminous, is, as your experience will tell you, quite unequal to the occasion, and the result is that as soon as two or three Committees begin to pursue their investigations in earnest, and summon their witnesses *de die in diem*, the weekly proof sheet of *Hansard*, which should make its appearance on Tuesday morning, does not come out. We have then to represent the state of things to the President of the Council and the Speaker of the Assembly, and a small vote for extra assistance is usually given, so that virtually the work is not done by three men." . . . "We get out proof sheets weekly for Members to correct, exercising our own judgment to admit or excise the alterations they make."

The cost of reporting is estimated at £1,500 a year.

## REPORT OF THE

*South Australia.*—A contract for three years has been entered into by the proprietors of the *South Australian Register*, and the *Observer*, by which reports of the debates are to appear daily in the former and weekly in the latter, “such reports to consist of a fair abstract of all speeches upon matters of general public interest so often as the same shall arise, and to deliver on the morning of the day following each debate a proof slip to each member.” A referee is appointed by the Government to act in case of dispute between the contractor and any member of the Legislature respecting the adoption of a correction. This decision is final. £5 per day is paid to the contractors for each day on which they publish the debates, and £250 as soon as 250 bound copies are delivered at the Colonial Secretary’s Office.

## SELECT COMMITTEE WORK.

During the recess I had a communication from Major Campbell with regard to obtaining the assistance of shorthand writers to take evidence before Select Committees. I informed him that I did not think he could obtain competent men for this work at a less rate of pay than I was giving, which is considerably more than that given to Committee Clerks. The complaints respecting the way in which the Committee work was done were, however, so great, that I offered, if possible, to give him some assistance myself during the present Session, though it must be to a very limited extent, and only in case of a Select Committee sitting on days on which no important debate is going on in the Houses. I imagine that if once the system of employing a shorthand writer for Select Committee work is introduced, the improvement in the style of taking the evidence will be found so great as to render the system permanent. Under these circumstances I think it would be worth consideration whether I should not hold the position of sworn Reporter in connection with that of Chief of the *Hansard* Staff, and be authorized to engage extra sessional assistance. Of course it would be only necessary to take the evidence on important subjects, and no doubt one extra reporter would be sufficient.

C. C. N. BARRON.

Chief Reporter, *Hansard* Staff.

SIR,—

8th June, 1869.

I have been directed by the Chairman of the Reporting Debates Committee to forward you a copy of that portion of the Chief Reporter’s Report which refers to the printing of *Hansard*, with a request that you will be pleased to furnish the Committee, at your earliest convenience, with any remarks you may like to make on it.

I have, &amp;c.,

JOHN S. M. CAREY,

Clerk of the Committee.

To Mr. Didsbury, Government Printer.

SIR,—

Government Printing Office, Wellington, 9th June, 1869.

Having considered the remarks of the Chief Reporter on the Printer’s work in connection with the publication of *Hansard*, and the suggestions he has submitted to the Committee, I beg to observe that while I concur in thinking that there is “considerable room for improvement,” I most decidedly disagree with him as to the direction in which that improvement should be made. To go to the root of the matter at once: relieve me of the work of correcting—in some cases, I may say, re-setting—honorable Member’s speeches, and the great cause of delay in publishing the debates would at once be removed. This has proved our greatest stumbling-block; and as long as honorable Members are allowed unlimited license in the correction of their speeches—unchecked by editorial supervision, as was the case last Session—so long will difficulty and delay attend the publication of *Hansard*. The causes, however, which led to the corrections being so heavy last Session may not now exist; and if the Chief Reporter is allowed to refuse all corrections which bear the character of embellishments, and admit those only which are necessary for the correct rendering of a sentence, the difficulty I complain of would then in a great measure be removed. This plan was adopted by the Head Reporter with some of last week’s debates, a number of corrections by Members being disallowed by him. But then this difficulty presents itself: will he always be in a position to examine Members’ corrected speeches before they are placed in my hands? He has not been able to devote the necessary attention to this matter in previous Sessions, and, as I considered it no part of my duty to do so, the proofs were sent into the composing-room for correction, in numberless cases, just as they were returned by Members.

Another cause of delay, and one which I certainly think it is in the power of the Chief Reporter to avoid, is the imperfect manner in which copy is at times supplied to the printers. I allude to the practice of trusting to honorable Members to furnish the extracts required when they return their proofs. In many cases the proofs are returned without the necessary extracts, Members either forgetting to supply them, or else considering it the Reporter’s place to hunt them up. It has not unfrequently happened that the “make-up” has come to an abrupt stoppage on discovering that an extract is wanting. In some cases the gap might be closed up, and the extract omitted; but in others the speech would be rendered quite unintelligible without it, and progress effectually stopped until it was supplied. This cause of delay could, I believe, be easily avoided were honorable Members requested to forward the extracts, or directions where to find them, to the Reporters’ Room immediately on the conclusion of their speeches.

With reference to the alteration in the hours of labour suggested by the Chief Reporter, I would remark that it would not in the least facilitate the early publication of the *Hansard*, but rather the reverse. If men have to work sixteen out of every twenty-four hours for a period of three or four months, I have found by experience that a much larger quantity of work is done during the hours of the day than is produced at night, while it is infinitely less exhaustive and trying to the men. Night work was tried during the first year of the publication of *Hansard*, and in my opinion signally failed. It did not prevent our falling into arrears, while it did prevent our proceeding as fast as we should have done with other work urgently required by the Assembly; and the result was that a number of the Bills and Parliamentary Papers had to be printed among the various

private printing offices in town, at a very heavy cost to the Government. But mark the difference last Session: not one of the 120 Bills printed were done outside of the Government Printing Office, neither was a single Parliamentary Paper printed elsewhere. It frequently is of more importance—as you will readily concede—for the House to be placed in possession of a Bill than it is that they should be supplied with the debates. There are times when the contrary is the case; and a necessity of this kind having arisen during last Session, I issued a supplementary number of *Hansard* to meet the case. It has, however, been an established rule—fixed, I believe, by the first Reporting Committee—to publish the *Hansard* on every Tuesday, and the reasons which weighed with the Committee in fixing that day were, that Saturday and Monday being non-sitting days, would be available for pulling up any arrears that might occur—a state of things which cannot possibly be prevented at times, owing to the unequal length to which the reports extend.

I come next to the cost of corrections. The Chief Reporter states that my estimate of their cost last Session he thinks excessive. Now that reliable data is available for computing the time and cost of such corrections, I find that my estimate considerably overstated the amount. I must, however, demur to the statement that “bad composing” had anything to do with the matter, the “office proofs” throughout the Session being rather above the usual average.

The proposal to have the debates printed by “piece-work,” instead of by day-labour, although at first sight it may appear specious and attractive, will, upon calculation, be found neither to diminish the expense of printing nor to expedite the publication of the debates. The crowded state of the office does not admit of the *Hansard* staff being kept in a room by themselves; they are obliged to mix with men engaged upon other work; and although this is unobjectionable while the men are all employed on daily wages, it would, under other circumstances, become a constant source of bickering and dispute. Again, the work required by the Assembly is of such a varied description as to prevent my setting apart any definite staff of hands for any particular work. When work of an urgent and pressing nature is placed in my hands, it is absolutely necessary that I should have the entire resources of the office at my disposal, and regulate them accordingly—a proceeding which would be quite impracticable if one portion of the staff were on their “lines” and another on establishment wages.

Taking last year’s *Hansard* as a basis for calculation, I find the cost of printing under the present system amounted to £937 19s. 11d.; of this sum £208 2s. 3d. consisted of salary of Sub-overseer, Reader, and Reader’s Assistant; £226 11s. 8d. in making corrections in Members’ speeches; the balance, £503 6s., being the cost of composition. The amount here put down for corrections has been accurately ascertained by the time-checks of the office, which show a total of 2,719 hours devoted to this work during the Session. Were the work done on the “piece” system, the cost of last year’s *Hansard* would have been increased by the sum of £183 7s. 4d. A sheet of eight pages of *Hansard* contains 49,984 letters, which, at 1s. 4d. per 1,000, would cost £3 6s. 8d. As last year’s *Hansard* made 206 of these sheets, the total cost for composition would have amounted to £686 13s. 4d.; and if to this is added the salaries of Sub-overseer, Reader, &c. (£208 2s. 3d.), and the cost of correcting Members’ speeches (£226 11s. 8d.)—for of course all authors’ corrections would have to be paid for on time—the total cost of printing *Hansard* last year would have reached £1,121 7s. 3d., as against £937 19s. 11d. under the present system. I do not include the cost of machine work in the above totals, the amounts being the same under both systems.

The experiment of doing certain work on the “piece” system has been already tried in the Government Printing Office of Victoria, in the printing of the *Gazette*, and, from its being discontinued shortly after its inauguration, I presume it signally failed in reducing the expense of the publication. Both the *Gazette* and *Hansard* of Victoria are now got out on the system adopted in this office—namely, by day labour.

In reference to the Chief Reporter’s remarks as to the readership of *Hansard*, I may state that I have already procured the sanction of the Government to his being paid during the Session at the same rate as the permanent Reader in the establishment. I cannot, however, agree with the suggestion that the Reader (who is also a Compositor on the permanent staff) should do reading and nothing else during the Session. It sometimes happens that his services are not required during the whole or a greater portion of the day, and I fail to see why he should not, on such occasions, fill up his spare time at case.

Apologizing for the rather lengthened remarks I have felt myself called upon to make, and thanking you for affording me the opportunity of doing so,

W. H. Harrison, Esq.,  
Chairman of Reporting Debates Committee.

I have, &c.,  
GEO. DIDSBURY,  
Government Printer.

