

**Robert J. Fleming, ed., *Canadian Legislatures 1987/1988* (Ottawa: Ampersand Communications Services, 1988)**

Parliamentarians, academics, legislative staff and others who have come to depend on this invaluable annual yearbook will be pleased to see that it continues to appear despite the editor's departure from the Ontario Legislature, which published previous editions. They will be less pleased that the shift to a private sector publisher has meant more than a three-fold price increase.

*Canadian Legislatures* continues to be an authoritative source of information on administrative structures, budgets, support services for members, members' indemnities and allowances and a host of related topics. The data, covering the House of Commons, the ten provincial houses and the two territorial assemblies, are arrayed in easily read tables. As in previous editions, only limited discussion accompanies the tables. Although the text points up the more noteworthy changes from past years, it might have been better had all changes been indicated in the tables.

An innovation in this edition is the presentation of extensive data on committees, including a comprehensive listing of all legislative committees in Canada together with their mandates. However, since some committees exist only on paper, rarely if ever meeting, it is disappointing that the listing offers little indication of most committees' level of activities. For the first time, the Senate finds its way into *Canadian Legislatures*. Among the intriguing information included on the Senate is a province-by-province rundown of where vacancies can be expected until the year 2000. Whether this is provided so that armchair analysts can speculate on the party composition of future Senates under Meech Lake or so that would-be Senators can plot their strategies is not specified.

Two brief sections offer some international perspective. One sets out basic data on American state legislatures size, expenditures, salaries and the like. The other offers a short, primarily statistical review of West German legislatures, with the

main emphasis on members' remuneration and benefits. Neither section attempts to go beyond the statistics into comparison of the operation or effectiveness of Canadian, American and German legislatures.

The 1987-88 edition continues the practice, begun in 1986, of supplementing the statistical material with a number of mainly short essays on matters parliamentary. All are worth reading, though inevitably the quality varies a good deal. David Nethering on "The Role of State and Provincial Legislatures" and Lothar Spath on "The New Politics" are long on high-sounding rhetoric but short on substance. Also disappointing is the piece entitled "Group Dynamics of the Legislative Process" by Dr Jim Henderson, a psychiatrist who is also a member of the Ontario Legislature. Rather than bringing the insights of his profession to bear on his fellow MPPs, which might have truly fascinating, Henderson concentrates on attacking party discipline.

Michael Adams and Jordan Levitan report the results of a specially-commissioned Environics poll on public perceptions of media bias. The survey confirms that television ranks as the primary source of news for most Canadians and, more surprisingly perhaps, that television fares better than newspapers for perceived objectivity, accuracy and depth. By a large margin, the CBC is the most trusted of the TV networks for political news. Another surprise, given the government's complaints over bias in CBC coverage is that Conservative supporters regard it as more objective than do New Democrat or Liberal partisans.

Peter Desbarats manages fresh insights into a well-worn topic in a first rate analysis of media influence on politics. Not the least of Desbarats' contribution is a debunking of the 'golden age of print' myth: "for anyone who believes that the age of television was preceded by an era of superior newspapers, a few hours in the microfilm archives of any major Canadian daily will prove to be a sobering experience".

As ever, Eugene Forsey is trenchant and stimulating on reform of the

Senate. He is not sanguine about the prospects for a triple-E Senate, but returns to the 1980 Lamontagne report for some workable reforms, many of which would not encounter the all but insurmountable hurdles of the constitutional amending process.

By far the longest paper, and in some ways the most valuable is Carolyn Thomson's thorough analysis of conflict of interest legislation across Canada. Though it concentrates on such details as the scope and coverage of legislation, definitions of conflict of interest and provisions for disclosure, divestment and blind trusts, the paper is leavened with insightful commentary on the larger political questions at issue.

The book is marred by an unconscionable number of typographical errors and loose copy-editing; to take but one illustration, within two pages, we are told that following the recent Ontario election, 48 per cent, "approximately 40 per cent" and 37.6 per cent of the membership was newly elected. Still and all, *Canadian Legislatures 1987/88*, like its predecessors, is a goldmine of useful information, with some stimulating essays thrown in for good measure.

Graham White

**A Public Purpose**, Tom Kent, McGill-Queen's University Press, Kingston & Montreal, 1988, p.433.

After a distinguished career at the *Guardian* and the *Economist* in Britain and editor of the *Winnipeg Free-Press*, Tom Kent in early 1958 joined the office of the new leader of the Liberal Party, Mike Pearson. This book is a refreshing and blunt account of Kent's experiences at the centre of a vanquished party striving to regain power.

Neither history nor biography, *A Public Purpose* shrewdly assesses the politics and personalities of the years between 1954 and 1971. Kent surveys the main achievements of the Pearson era – the Canada Pension Plan, Medicare, Cooperative Federalism etc. His frank comments make good reading for those who study or practice politics.

For example: Leadership) "Abbott was the strong man among the younger ministers