

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

... an excellent Minister of Finance ... politically sensitive and sensible. If he had stayed he would have been my choice to succeed to the leadership, ahead of Pearson. While his sympathies were not quite as broad as Pearson's, he had an even clearer mind, a better understanding of most issues and above all a greater capacity to make firm decisions and a stronger grasp of how to execute them. Letting Abbott and Claxton go was the first evidence, and in my view one of the most serious consequences, of the recurrent bouts of passivity that marked Mr. St. Laurent's behaviour from 1954 on."

((Policy Planning) "Modern government is far too complex for a Prime Minister and ministers to do much serious policy-planning after they are in office. They are always too busy with the immediate. If they do not come to office with clear, comprehensive, realistic objectives, they will not formulate them afterwards. In many areas of policy, they will be the slaves of events, of lobbying groups, of officials who know so much more than they do, of opinion polls, of short-term calculations.

(Preparing for Office) "Mike Pearson was certainly neither the first nor the last political leader to approach government with a style that has too little regard for its management aspects. Indeed, while the reasons have varied in detail, the upshot has been the same for all our federal governments since 1953: faced with the complexities of public affairs in the modern state, none has succeeded in organizing its central processes in a way that fosters the sense of reasonableness and foresight, of coherence and efficiency, which is at the heart of good management in all collective activities...."

(Influence of Bureaucrats) "The role that public servants play in policy-making is widely misunderstood. The idea that they should merely implement policy decisions, for which all the ideas have come from elected men, is nonsense. Government has never been so simple that it could be run that way, and certainly it is not today. We pay senior public servants to be the professionals in government and they would not be doing their job if they did not have significant influences on policy.

What they should not have, and as far as I have seen usually do not have, is decisive influence, as long as the politicians are doing their job. But for that the politicians in office ... have to be agreed on clear objectives."

(Press in Politics) "Most politicians exaggerate, I think, the influence of the press on public opinion. They are themselves the most avid readers of newspapers and nowadays watchers of TV news and public affairs programs. The consequence is a mutually-regarding relationship between the media and public personalities. The media feel important because they constantly see how much their subjects care, while the vanity of the subjects makes them take the media much more seriously than do other readers, listeners and viewers.... In the large world one sees, time and again, that much of the public has a healthy distrust of media comment and makes its own common-sense judgment of people and measures."

En passant, Tom Kent torpedoed a couple of quaint notions. He terms the idea that a minority government is necessarily weak "a myth created by politicians out of self-interest". In his view a minority government may be less comfortable to be in, but "is not necessarily less able to govern".

In this age of SIN and computers Kent sees no reason why Canada should not abandon its "clumsy process of voter registration for each election, now the only excuse for the length of the campaign". "Voter lists could easily be kept in a form in which they can be readily updated" allowing Canada to have campaigns lasting about three weeks, "common in more densely populated countries". The only beneficiaries of our long campaigns are the political parties, each seeking to "put up a better smokescreen than the others."

The book is valuable in its analysis of the Pearson character and of the rivalry between Messrs Pearson and Diefenbaker.

In history Pearson will be seen as a fairly successful Prime Minister and Diefenbaker as a highly ineffective one. But it was Diefenbaker who was given widespread credit for good intentions. The side of his personality that in 1964 was still

best known was expressed in his avuncular stance with his fellow Canadians: in the speaking style of sentences without logical beginning or end, words without clear meaning, but words replete with a good man's emotions. The cloud of obscurities often made it hard to appreciate the sharpness of Diefenbaker's mind in debate. He was a matador in a contest where Pearson often seemed to be his victim, hurt, slow and blundering. Diefenbaker was entirely unscrupulous; he could set aside facts or invent whatever alleged facts suited his purpose at the moment. And he was cruel, a master of innuendo with an unerring instinct for what would most hurt his opponent.

Debate with Diefenbaker was, therefore, a game that Pearson was utterly incapable of playing. For Diefenbaker, a politician was a platform orator and a parliamentary debater. He therefore despised Pearson who was little good in either role. Nevertheless Pearson had taken the prime ministership from him. That this was so inappropriate, in Diefenbaker's terms, meant that the despising was mingled with hating. Pearson on his part, hurt as he was by Diefenbaker's attacks, came to hate too. And he despised, because of Diefenbaker's intellectual dishonesty and his evasiveness and indecision when he was the leader of a government. But above all, Pearson was afraid of Diefenbaker in the House of Commons. That mixture of feelings seemed to numb the normally agile Pearson brain. In anything but a set speech, his parliamentary performance was increasingly evasive and indecisive."

The author's way with words ensures that the serious content of this memoir does not weary the reader; humour shines through from time to time. For example when Kent ran as a candidate in Burnaby-Coquitlam against Tommy Douglas in 1963 he was aware that his "Englishness" might well be a disadvantage. Hence delight when a large gang of NDP hecklers "prepared for the occasion with plenty of beer" drowned out his efforts to speak by chanting "Yankee Go Home".

Tony Wright