

Parliaments of the World

Philip Laundy

Philip Laundy, Clerk Assistant of the Canadian House of Commons, has written many books and articles about parliamentary government based on the British model in general and about the Canadian system in particular.

His latest work, published in English and French was commissioned by the Inter-Parliamentary Union to mark the Union's centenary.

The challenge was to present succinctly, and yet in some detail, the whole range of parliamentary systems that exist in the world today — and there are estimated to be one hundred and forty-five of them. To extract the essential elements from the mountain of material dealing (unevenly) with parliamentary systems called for an analytical and methodical mind.

Mr. Laundy opted for a comparative approach, assembling and juxtaposing information about different countries under chapter headings covering parliamentary structures and activities for most of the countries of the world. For example, there are sections of the varying types of parliaments and electoral systems and on relations between parliaments and the executive. One chapter is devoted to the role and duties of the Speaker. Another deals with parliamentary business proper including both, the legislative and control functions. Other chapters discuss committees, immunity, staff and services, and public relations. Appended is a summary in table form listing by country the name of its

parliament, the number of seats and the length of a legislative term. For the occasional user, a table of contents makes it possible to find information easily. However neither edition contains a bibliography and the footnote references that appear in English are not found in the French edition.

The end result? An essentially descriptive work, constructed without any *a priori* theoretical or ideological framework apart from a view of parliamentary government as an important mechanism in a society's evolution. This approach enables the author to avoid any value judgements about the extent to which the democratic values on which parliamentary government is based are reflected in the actual exercise of the popular will through parliamentary institutions in a given country.

All parliaments mentioned in Mr Laundy's book thus appear to be equally valid, be they republics, monarchies, people's democracies or one-party states. At a time when the mainstream literature about parliamentary institutions is increasingly critical, even in the so-called democracies, Mr. Laundy seems the eternal optimist. But this aside, his book is a gold mine of information. In just a few pages he succeeds in summing up complex mechanisms and institutions and in ably distinguishing certain countries and groups of countries from others. In this respect there can be no doubt that Mr. Laundy's book will become an essential reference work for every observer, student, teacher or reformer of parliamentary government. Let us hope that the author will be given the support required for regular updates, because institutions can on occasion evolve very rapidly, as recent events in Eastern Europe, have made abundantly clear.

Serge Pelletier
Committee Clerk
The Senate

This collection of biographies makes a handy starting point for anyone

Speakers of the Senate

Grant Purves

interested in doing research of the upper house. The biographies are chronological, but are more than a recitation of awards. Most cover two pages, including the speaker's portrait.

This is not meant to be a comprehensive guide to the Senate speakers office nor are there any juicy details on scandals or financial ruin. The downfall of the Hon. John Ross due to his indecision during the Riel affair is slickly glossed over, as is the colourful career of the Hon. Jean Marchand.

One of the hypotheses of this work is that the speakers chair is not the end of a career. It is not convincing. For most individuals the Senate speakership is only attained at the end of an illustrious public career.

In the end, it is the omissions which detract from the book more than anything. It would be so much better to see such a collection expanded to include the colourful detail and the controversies that first enticed these men and women into public life and inspired them to new heights or contributed to their demise.

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