
CPA Activities: The Canadian Scene

Sixteenth Parliamentary Seminar

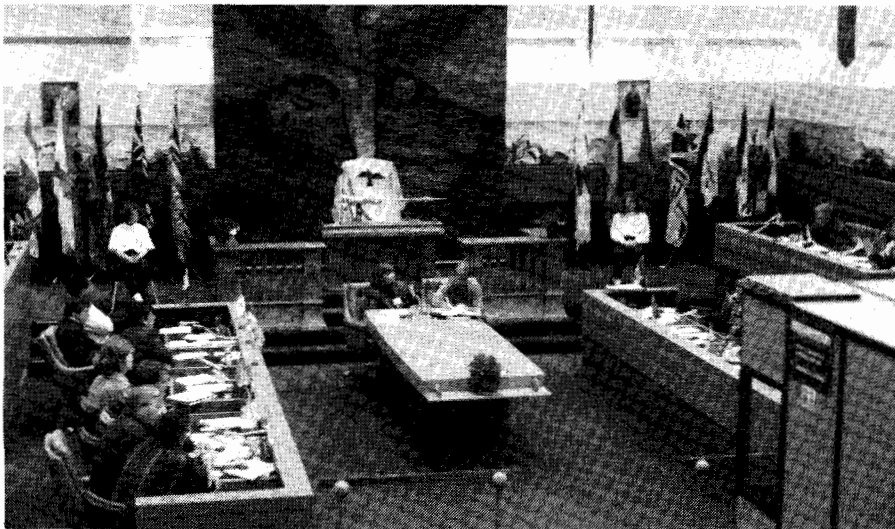
The Sixteenth Parliamentary Seminar of the Canadian Region, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association was held in Whitehorse, Yukon from November 14-16, 1991.

The Seminar was opened by the Speaker of the Yukon Legislative Assembly, **Sam Johnston**. The first session dealt with the topic of "Public Cynicism and the Legislator of the 1990s".

The opening Speaker was **David Carter**, Speaker of the Alberta Legislative Assembly who dealt with some examples of behaviour by politicians that had contributed to the increasing cynicism among the population. He brought along a videotape of a few recent unparliamentary incidents



Yukon Speaker Sam Johnston with two participants, Maurice Richard (Quebec) on the left and Maurice Tremblay (House of Commons). (Terry Moore)



The business sessions took place in the Legislative Assembly Chamber. (Terry Moore)

including the case of the federal member who was censured for trying to grab the mace from the Sergeant-at-Arms to protest adjournment of the House. A few examples of general disorder during the Senate debate on the GST were also shown.

Other participants pointed to the double standard of morality often applied to elected officials who are accused of wrong-doing. Many persons felt media coverage had a lot to do with the negative image of politicians while others suggested the parliamentary form of government itself ought to be seriously reexamined. Others suggested it was the members own fault if Canadians did not

understand their form of government or the role of members of legislatures.

The Second session dealt with "National Transportation Links" which in the words of **Joe Comuzzi**, MP, who led off the discussion, are the glue that keeps Canada together. He outlined a number of problems in the trucking, airline, railway sectors but suggested that the greatest problem was the lack of an integrated approach to transportation planning that would bring together those responsible at the federal, provincial and territorial levels of government. Other delegates noted that the ability to travel easily and cheaply was vital to keeping the country together. Our current constitutional problems would be much less if more Canadians had an opportunity to spend time travelling in other parts of the country. There was a general feeling that if a National Transportation Committee could be established with representatives from all

legislatures many of the difficulties in the transportation sector could be tackled in a more rational manner. However, in keeping with the tradition of CPA conferences no resolutions were adopted on this or any other subject.

The third session dealt with "The Possibilities for "Effective Representation of the First Nations within the Parliamentary System". The opener, **Margaret Joe**, of the Yukon, outlined different political traditions of aboriginals who are more at home in a consensual rather than an adversarial context. People speak only if they have something to say and the type of interruptions typical of parliamentary debate are considered impolite.

Other members suggested that non aboriginals could learn a lot about politics from the aboriginal people but, nevertheless, parliament is based on the adversarial approach. Some saw a parallel between aboriginal demands and the desire of Quebec to take its own approach to politics.

The fourth session on "Direct Democracy" brought together a number of the themes that had been discussed in previous session. The opener, **Carmen McClelland** of Ontario, posed a number of questions about the use of referenda, recall, initiative and other forms of direct democracy. He and others pointed out that these were double edged swords that did allow more individuals to get involved in the political process but also opened the door to majority rule and oppression of minorities.

The final session on tourism was opened by **Ross Young** of Prince Edward Island. He identified several issues having a profound impact on tourism in Canada including the impact of the GST, the high cost of gasoline and the increase in cross-border shopping. Others suggested that by paying more attention to services offered and making sure that we protect our environment, the greatest Canadian tourism attraction would continue to be our landscape and natural resources. Once again the necessity of all jurisdictions working together was emphasized by many delegates.

Although the conference lasted only two days delegates from most Canadian jurisdictions were in attendance. When it was over visitors had an opportunity to tour the Yukon Game Farm and then a short visit to Takhini Hot Springs where a few delegates joined some of the local residents for a mid-winter swim in the natural outdoor pool. A final banquet with traditional Yukon entertainment brought the seminar to a close. For most delegates it was the first trip to the Yukon and they will long remember the warm welcome, excellent hospitality and spectacular beauty of Canada's northern territory.

