



## Interview

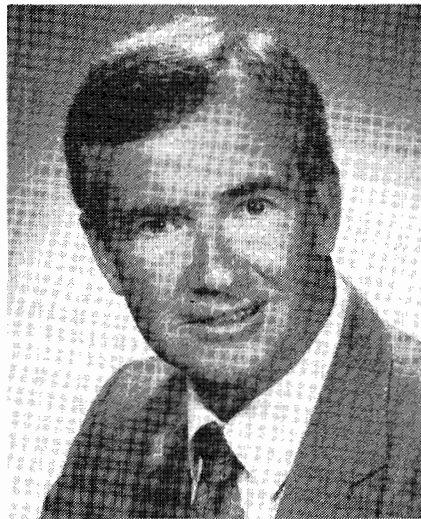
*On January 1, 1993 Arthur Donahoe became Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the first Canadian to hold this position. Mr. Donahoe was first elected to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly in 1978. He served as Deputy Speaker for three years before becoming Speaker in 1981, a position he held for more than ten years. Arthur Donahoe is a former Canadian Regional Representative of CPA and a participant in many Canadian and international activities of the Association. He replaces David Tonkin, former Premier of South Australia as Secretary-General. He was interviewed in Quebec City in September 1992 during the Symposium on Parliamentary Democracy organized by the Quebec National Assembly to mark the Bicentennial of Representative Government in that province.*

**How would you describe the value of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association to a newly elected member?**

**Mr. Donahoe:** The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association is the parliamentary wing of the Commonwealth with members in some 120 national and state legislatures. Its conferences and seminars provide an excellent vehicle for the professional development of new members. It provides a way for new, and indeed, veteran members to familiarize themselves with the issues and individuals in various legislatures in the Commonwealth.

**How do you respond to criticism that CPA is essentially a vehicle to allow parliamentarians to travel to exotic places?**

**Mr. Donahoe:** I have heard this argument but I do not accept it. Most activities are centered around a serious agenda and members generally participate in the discussions. I



think it is just as important for the professional development of public officials as it is for similar associations in the private sector.

We should not discount the important opportunity CPA provides to meet individuals from other cultures and races. Participation in CPA can be a very educational experience.

**What are some of the things that you personally have learned?**

**Mr. Donahoe:** At the most fundamental level, I learned that every parliament and legislature is different. Yet there are common threads throughout the Commonwealth.

I was also impressed by the way the parliamentary system can flourish in all types of societies regardless of the background of individuals. This is important when so many countries are emerging from other forms of government and looking around for new models.

**How is one chosen Secretary-General?**

**Mr. Donahoe:** It was an extensive process. When the former Secretary-General, David Tonkin, announced he was retiring, notice was given to all branches. An advertisement was placed in most of the national newspapers in countries throughout the Commonwealth.

The CPA is organized into eight geographic Regions and preliminary interviews were held in each Region. One person per Region was selected to be interviewed in London in April 1992. The final Selection Committee had representatives from each of the Regions.

I was fortunate enough to be chosen and my appointment was put before the General Assembly at its annual meeting in October for final approval.

**Is there any way to prepare for an interview like this?**

**Mr. Donahoe:** Not really. I thought about my experiences with CPA in the more than 10 years in which I was Speaker of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly. I knew the organization was looking to improve certain things and I tried to familiarize myself with the thinking of the current executive. Otherwise I just tried to be myself and answer the questions as best I could.

**Did you have any qualms about accepting the position?**

**Mr. Donahoe:** No. But the decision to apply was not taken lightly. I gave it a lot of thought because I knew that if successful it would change my life completely.

It would mean moving from a relatively small city in Eastern Canada to one of the largest metropolitan areas in the world. It would mean a change in focus from being a lawyer and a member of a fairly small legislature to looking at questions of international nature.

So, I did not make the choice lightly but having made it I am excited and look forward to my term in office. I hope to make the CPA an even better organization and look forward to the help and cooperation from many people in CPA both in Canada and around the world.

**What do you see as some of the potential areas of action during your term?**

**Mr. Donahoe:** In addition to continuing our education role by means of conferences, seminars, exchanges and publications, I think the Association wants to play a role in election monitoring.

We have in our membership a body uniquely qualified to play a role in this area. We could establish an inventory of members and former members willing to advise or assist countries in organizing or monitoring elections.

**Would you describe the administrative structure of CPA?**

**Mr. Donahoe:** Overall policy rests with the Executive Committee and General Assembly. My job is to see that policy is implemented smoothly.

The Secretariat in London consists of thirteen people from different parts of the Commonwealth. A recent study of the organization has led to a number of changes including the establishment of a position of Head of Administration. This position was filled by Radjah Gomez of Sri Lanka who was recruited at the same time as me.

So, I will be entering a new administrative structure and will be watching carefully and analyzing it to see if it obtains the objectives envisaged.

**What is the relationship between the Commonwealth Secretariat and the CPA?**

**Mr. Donahoe:** The Commonwealth Secretariat is a governmental body. The CPA is a parliamentary organization.

I understand that relations have been strained in the past but have

improved recently. At the last Heads of Government meeting a declaration was adopted recognizing the CPA as the parliamentary wing of the Commonwealth.

My objective is to build on this recognition and to develop a good working relationship in the area of election monitoring for example. I think we have to make the Heads of Government more aware of the work of CPA.

**Does this mean CPA might be adopting resolutions?**

**Mr. Donahoe:** This is a longstanding debate in the Association at the policy level. The present practice is to have wide-ranging discussions rather than try to make people accept or reject a given point of view or resolution. We meet as a parliamentary organization and not as representatives of governments or countries.

This does not mean we cannot improve how we deal with topics at our conferences or seminars. For example, instead of having only parliamentary participants, I think there is something to be said for having experts to outline the nature and background of certain issues. There is some resistance to the involvement of outside "experts" but sometimes you can have a more informed discussion than might be possible otherwise.

As for the use of resolutions I think it is up to the Executive Committee to decide. I think we have functioned fairly well without resolutions and any move in that direction would probably have fairly profound consequences for the Association.