



## Recent Publications

**The House of Commons at Work** by John A. Fraser, Les Éditions de la Chenelière, Montreal, 1993, 195 p.

Shortly before he retired in 1949 Arthur Beauchesne, longtime Clerk of the House of Commons, wrote a charming little civics primer entitled *Canada's Parliament*. With his departure the book disappeared and it remains virtually unknown to even the most dedicated students of Parliament. It would be unfortunate, although not altogether surprising, if the same thing happened to this work.

John Fraser will be remembered as a passionate parliamentarian with a special interest in environmental matters. He was the first Speaker of the House of Commons chosen by secret ballot in 1986. One of his passions was to make the work of the House of Commons better known and appreciated by the general public. Hence the decision to write this book, a project he describes as his contribution to the 125th anniversary of Confederation.

The book presents in clear and straightforward terms some widely available facts about our constitution and form of government including the role of the Senate, the House of Commons and Committees. Other chapters contain less well known facts about House services and administrative structures including a marvelous full page chart on the process used by the Human Resources Directorate to fill a staff vacancy. According to this chart there are no less than 17 steps

in the House's hiring process starting with receipt of a request from an authorized manager and ending with a letter of confirmation of appointment!

There is a useful glossary of parliamentary terms and a rather less useful Appendix of the House's sitting days. These are set out in the Standing Orders but frequently altered to in practice.

The failure to distinguish between how things are supposed to work on paper and how they really work in practice is one of the major shortcomings of the book. It is also a bit disappointing that a book on the House of Commons contains virtually no discussion of prospects for legislative reform. This could be justified on grounds that the book is designed to present a number of facts leaving it to the reader to form his or her own opinion about how our Parliament works. However, this ignores the greatest difficulty in educating Canadians about our parliamentary system — the tendency to confuse aspects of the American congressional system with the Westminster parliamentary one. Bombarded as we are by American popular culture every pedagogic tool about Canadian government should start by explaining the basic differences. A few introductory paragraphs along these lines would go a long way to improving the book as a teaching device.

The book concludes by briefly contrasting Canada's peaceful kingdom to the political chaos in much of the world. It notes the role Canada has played in assisting other countries struggling to establish de-

mocracy. Exchange programs and visits are educational for all sides. But the increasing respect for constitutionalism and rule of law we see emerging elsewhere has more to do with local forces than with anything the West in general or Canada in particular is able to offer. Our intentions are noble but there is little evidence to suggest that any new democracy has actually opted for Canadian style government or that Canada's Parliament has been a model as suggested on the concluding pages of this book.

Gary Levy

**Inside The Pink Palace - Ontario Legislature Internship Essays.** Graham White, editor, The Ontario Legislature Internship Programme/The Canadian Political Science Association, Toronto, 1993, 309 pages.

In the mid 1970s the "Trinkets" took the Ontario Legislature by storm. Not a musical group, the Trinkets were the first band of interns who pioneered a new partnership between provincial politicians and the academic community. They were given that *nom de guerre* by a veteran Queen's Park columnist who saw the interns within the context of a political culture which he probably felt was expanding excessively and losing the intimacy of the men's club of yesteryear. He la-

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belled the interns the latest trinkets in an expansion of the services and facilities for MPPs. Only five years earlier members were provided with individual offices, half a secretary and a telephone. The expansion was getting to be a bit much - more trinkets!

Patterned after the successful internship program in the House of Commons under the auspices of the Canadian Political Science Association, the Ontario program had several goals. For the M.P.P. the interns would provide badly needed additional staff capacity. The intern would see the real world of the provincial politician. The community, particularly the academic community would learn more about the legislature and its political denizens. The dearth of authoritative writing about the provincial legislative assembly would be supplemented by a requirement that each intern submit to the academic director, a paper on some aspect of the legislature.

*Inside the Pink Palace* is a compilation of some of the papers Interns prepared between 1987 and 1992. They cover the predictable field of Ontario legislature life. The editor of the volume is the current academic director Graham White, one of the original Trinkets. His own internship paper remains an important chronicle of the development of the contemporary Ontario legislature.

Remembering that the Interns are named by the selection committee for a variety of reasons one should not expect these papers to be doctoral dissertations. Thankfully they are not, although some are heavy with academic theoretical debate and references which will be of interest to political scientists. The goal of the paper is a tough one - to illuminate an aspect of political reality from the privileged position of the trusted fly on the wall.

The devastation wrought upon our Parliaments by a fickle electorate brings a high turnover in the membership of these bodies. It results in much reinvention of the wheel by newcomers. It is therefore not surprising that some themes have remained constant over the years, such as the inordinate time and resources focused by both opposition and government on preparation for the oral question period and the dependence on the Queen's Park media to communicate party messages. The oral question period is traditionally defended as a great democratic accountability session. Christopher Jones describes an interesting scene from inside the NDP caucus before that party came to power. It is one in which the leadership and the caucus researchers dominate question period with minimal involvement by private members who may wish to raise questions of peripheral news value or of important local interest. The victory of partyism over the needs and interests of local representatives is familiar in many Canadian parliamentary bodies.

Other aspects of legislature life are new and the interns examination is a useful one. Those who feel that members of legislatures should have a role in the scrutiny or ratification of order-in-council appointments to government posts should read carefully the contribution of Valerie Moore and Heather Plewes. Several Canadian parliamentary bodies have attempted to involve themselves in the scrutiny of political appointments or have attempted to expand their role to share the Crown's authority to make political appointments. When parliamentarians attempt to cross the dividing line between Crown responsibility and parliamentary scrutiny the results are inevitably unsatisfactory.

There is a thread running through these papers, although it is not

likely intentional. It is the angst of parliamentarians coming to grips with the parliamentary form of responsible government in a society which is profoundly influenced by American congressional democracy. While reading Catherine Curtis' and Gordon Wong's comparison of the Rae NDP caucus in opposition with the Peterson government Liberal caucus, and Gerard McDonald's assessment of the Rae government NDP caucus I recalled one former Ottawa MP telling of his expectations after getting elected. "I thought I would come down to Ottawa, sit in a big chair and make decisions about how the country would be run." Canadians generally do not know much about their parliamentary monarchic form of government. They start, like the ex-MP, with the naïve thought that *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* is real, and a part of the Canadian fabric. In response to dissatisfaction by their membership both the Liberal and the NDP parliamentary groups have had to significantly restructure their caucus structures when in government to meet the demands of the caucus for more authority over new legislative initiatives.

Donald Figol assesses the lot of the Parliamentary Assistant and concludes that the role in the present administration is a marginal one. In doing so he highlights an ongoing discussion which is taking place here and at Westminster - that the number of parliamentarians who hold offices of Crown pay, whips, house leaders, committee chairs, parliamentary secretaries, junior ministers, etc, has grown so large that the natural competition between the front and back benches of the parties which should encourage mutual performance has largely been bought off with public money. In Ontario for over half a century members have been paid supplementary amounts for attendance at

committee meetings during periods of parliamentary recess. While initially it was a way to fudge low parliamentary indemnities it has now become part of the Whip's reward and punishment system, a discipline founded on discretionary public expenditure rather than party nominations and constituency party pressure.

Perhaps the most important paper for current political practitioners is by Rachel Grasham who describes the selling of the 1992 NDP budget. Several proposals for a reformed budgetary process are currently in the market place, including one by the elite Public Policy Forum. They focus on

diminished budgetary secrecy and greater public consultation, usually involving a parliamentary committee. Grasham reports that the NDP have successfully used communications, marketing strategies and caucus structures rather than parliamentary structures to satisfy members and the public. Says Grasham, "Members firmly believed that this was a new, more open, consultative process based on public education, in keeping with NDP philosophy. This elevated their self-confidence as well as their confidence in the government's future chances of success. Several MPPs commented that they thought it was a turning point, and that for

the first time, they felt that the government had a chance of being reelected."

In less than two decades the internship program has paid off handsomely, as this collection illustrates. Former interns carry a legacy of insider knowledge. Sufficient time has passed to see former interns in positions of influence in academe, business, professional and public service, journalism, and the like. Their experience generally brings a sympathy for the person who is prepared to serve the public by standing for public office. Janice Duggan arrived "believing that politicians were overpaid and under-worked and that most of their efforts were self-interested, with reelection rather than the public interest as the crux of their efforts." She found the opposite to be true. After an excellent insiders description of the frustrations involved in the politics of Private Members' Business she is left frustrated and ambivalent about the system rather than the participants. It is a commonly held belief.

The function of the internship program has changed. Members have many more resources at their disposal than they did fifteen years ago. Staffing and resources for the Legislative Assembly has grossly proliferate with the consequential ballooning of its budget. We are entitled to ask if we are exponentially better governed, is public policy better considered, or is it as one retired party leader responded, "I'm afraid most of the resources get put into a longer Christmas card list". Perhaps this is a subject for a future intern paper, and like *Inside the Pink Palace* it would be worth reading.

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**Inside the Pink Palace:  
Ontario Legislative Internship Essays**

*Inside the Pink Palace* contains twenty original research essays on how the Ontario Legislature works and how its Members perform their duties.

Topics include question period, legislative committees, party caucuses and private members' business. The papers are based on the interns' firsthand experiences, supplemented by extensive interviews with MPPs, legislative staff and others involved in the process. As participants in a nonpartisan programme co sponsored by the Ontario Legislature and the Canadian Political Science Association, interns enjoy unusual access to key figures in the legislative process. Moreover, the MPPs the interns interviewed were candid and open in their observations. The result is a detailed, insider's view of the legislative process, that Ottawa Citizen columnist Jim Coyle has called "insightful essays on Queen's Park (that) soothe the souls of cynics".

Copies of *Inside the Pink Palace* are \$25.00 each; this price includes postage and applicable taxes. Order from:

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