



Parliamentary Book Shelf

Parliament and the People: The Reality and the Public Perception, by Philip Laundy, published by Ashgate Publishing Company, 1997.

From February 24 to 27 1995 the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, in association with Wilton Park, the conference organisers, sponsored a conference on the theme *Parliament and the People: Making Democratic Institutions more Representative, Responsible and Relevant*. Philip Laundy has summarised the papers presented at the conference along with the discussions that ensued into a relatively short but handy reference work.

The book comprises eleven chapters which essentially parallel the themes of the presentations; each chapter giving a summary of what the presenter or presenters had to say. Within each chapter the author has captured the essence of the discussion that followed each presentation and has interspersed throughout the text his own incisive observations. He has presented conclusions at the end of each chapter as well as a concluding chapter to summarise the results.

There are four appendices included in the book, two of which are quite substantial. Both directly relate to one chapter; one is a British report on standards in public life, and the other is a Canadian committee report on the registration of lobbyists.

The book is a handy reference tool for parliamentarians and those connected with parliaments to learn more of the problems associated

with parliamentary democracies, particularly the perception that the public has of parliaments and parliamentarians. For those wishing to understand the importance of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association the chapter on "Enhancing Professionalism through the Work of Parliamentary Associations" gives an excellent description of its role.

Chapter six: "Ensuring Ethical Standards in Public Life" goes to the very heart of the overall theme of the conference. The presenter was a member of the Nolan Committee set up by the British Prime Minister in 1994, and their first report was published after the conference in May of 1995. (The full text is included in Appendix 1.) A code of conduct was one of the main items of discussion. It is interesting to note that the report of the Joint Committee of the Canadian Parliament on a code of conduct has not yet been implemented.

The chapter on "The Role of Political Parties" has an interesting presentation and discussion on the control that parties and the leadership have on the members in their legislatures. It basically contrasts the British parliamentary system with the congressional system in the United States. It suggests that party discipline is predominant in the former, whereas that is not the case in the latter. It was felt that the looser control of parties could only exist where there is a separation of powers between the legislature and the executive.

The last chapter that I want to mention is "Direct Democracy: The

Way Forward?" It deals with referenda, mostly in California and New Zealand. The presenter is an MP from New Zealand. One point brought out very well was the suggestion that under the parliamentary system, governments have come to be regarded as elective dictatorships, particularly in the case for majority governments with disciplined parties.

I personally would have liked to see more on second chambers as a solution to the problem of making parliaments more representative and responsible, especially with their membership elected on the basis of proportional representation. At the moment, there is no perceived representative public check on the executive between elections in a majority government situation. The only representative check is privately in caucus. Controversial legislation has gone through parliament and some legislatures in recent years, such as the GST or NAFTA federally and legislation with respect to funding of municipalities provincially in both Ontario and Quebec. A second chamber, constituted on the basis of proportional representation, in those cases, would at the least, have changed the perception of the public and maybe the reality too.

It is always fun to look for possible errors in fact. I was only able to find one. The author was talking about the Charlottetown Accord – the 'package deal' constitutional amendment voted on in a referendum in 1992. He says it was "defeated in nearly every province" whereas it actually

passed in four (including the largest one, Ontario) and was defeated in six. This was a minor detail in a good informative book. I would recommend it both to those who participated in the conference and those who would have liked to participate. Few solutions were discovered to the many problems that all parliamentarians have to struggle with but just setting forth the problems is a valuable first step.

David Gussow
Ottawa

Books Received

The following books have been received from publishers.

Mr Smith Goes to Ottawa: Life in the House of Commons, by David Docherty, UBC Press, Vancouver, 1997, 295 p.

T.A. Crerar: A Political Life, by J.E. Rea, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal & Kingston, 1997, 307 p.

Provinces: Canadian Provincial Politics, Edited by Christopher Dunn, Broadview Press, Peterborough, 1996, 531 p.

The Government and Politics of Ontario, Edited by Graham White, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1997, 458 p.



Letters

Dear Sir:

I have just finished reading the Autumn 1997 issue and feel compelled to write to you about your review of *Parliamentary Practice in British Columbia*, 3rd edition by Mr. E. George MacMinn, Q.C., Clerk of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia.

Firstly, I find your review to lack insight, objectivity and balance. As a former Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of B.C. who used both the first and second editions of Mr. MacMinn's books, I can tell you that the third edition is even more informative and provides excellent guidance for all Members in the B.C. House. Indeed, it is used as an authority by all Canadian legislatures as well as throughout the Commonwealth.

Remarks such as "western alienation" found in your review are gratuitous, offensive and detract from your book review. I have read reviews of the Third Edition written by procedural experts at Westminster which more accurately reflect the nature of the book and its author.

After reading your review of Mr. MacMinn's book I can only say that you left me with the impression that you are not qualified to speak about parliamentary procedure. Unfortunately, there will be those who know little about the subject and after reading your review will conclude that the third edition of *Parliamentary Practice in B.C.* is not well done. Nothing could be further from the truth. Mr. MacMinn has more experience than practically anyone else in the Commonwealth and has earned his place as the pre-eminent expert on the subject of parliamentary procedure.

Sir Erskine May's *Parliamentary Practice*, Beauchesne's *Parliamentary Rules and Forms*, the Australian House of Representatives *Practice*, and *Parliamentary Practice in B.C.* are, in my opinion, documents which are evolutionary in nature. They build upon past practice and precedent and incorporate changes to the manner in which the respective parliaments conduct their business. No other jurisdiction in Canada can lay claim to publishing a more sophisticated, definitive and thoughtful book on procedure than B.C. A fairer assessment by you would have been expected to point that out.

John Reynolds MP
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