
Two Upcoming Conferences in Quebec

by Pierre de Bellefeuille and François Côté

In October two major conferences dealing with parliamentary government and representative democracy will be held in Quebec. The first is a Symposium in Quebec City organized by the Association of Former Members of the National Assembly. The other is a Conference on Global Governance to be held in Montreal under the auspices of the Montreal International Forum. In this article the Chairman of the Quebec Symposium describes the purpose of that Conference and the Secretary General of the National Assembly writes about the parliamentary component of the Conference on Global Governance.

The International Symposium on the Parliamentary System in the 21st Century

Parliament is the fundamental institution of democracy. The principle of legislative autonomy has underpinned political thinking since Montesquieu. But now, with this many-faceted phenomenon we call globalization, new powers are appearing that know no borders and question the prerogatives of both centralized and federal states. Cultural diversity is also threatened, as are certain laws and regulations, notably those dealing with environmental protection and free trade.

In 1978 the late political scientist Léon Dion declared that "the struggle to reestablish the value of Parliaments may be the most relevant and promising manifestation of the battle that democracy is facing today."

Legislative power has been undergoing an erosion that has tended to distance Parliament from what it should be—a place of fundamental debate and decision-making. Certain practices, such as towing the party line and an-

swering to whips, have been imposed, and have enabled the executive branch to dominate the legislative branch.

The six plenary sessions of the symposium will focus on the following questions:

- What are the roots of the democratic malaise?
- Is the decline of Parliament irreversible?
- Is it possible to thwart parties and individuals who defend only a single cause—their own?
- Should we limit ministerial responsibility?
- Can Parliament be reinvented?
- Can the Internet lead to a resurrection of the role?

The international symposium entitled *The Parliamentary System in the 21st Century* will take place at the National Assembly of Quebec from October 9 to 12, 2002.¹

The lecturers—thinkers, politicians, and political observers from North and South America, Europe, and Africa—will debate these questions and exchange views with some two hundred attendees. Simultaneous interpretation will be provided in French, English, and Spanish.

This symposium, which will serve as the 25th regional conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, is presented by the *Amicale des anciens parlementaires du Québec* with the enthusiastic coopera-

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tion of the National Assembly of Quebec. Mrs. Louise Harel, the Speaker of the National Assembly of Québec and Member for Hochelaga-Maisonneuve, is the honorary president of the symposium.

The founders of the *Amicale* provided, in section 6 of their incorporating act of December 17, 1993, that their main function is to put the knowledge and experience of former Members to use in order to serve parliamentary democracy in Quebec and elsewhere. In section 7 the act specifies that the *Amicale* may form task forces and organize meetings, symposia, and conferences where former parliamentarians can share ideas with participants and get information on issues of common interest.

The 2002 Conference on Global Governance

The 2002 Conference on Global Governance: Civil Society and Democratization of Global Governance will take place at the Montreal Convention Centre from October 13 to 16, 2002. This event is organized by the Montreal International Forum (FIM)². The FIM is a worldwide alliance of individuals and organizations with the mission of increasing the participation of civil society within multilateral institutions in order to more effectively remedy global problems such as extreme poverty, war, human rights violations, and environmental degradation.

The 2002 Conference will focus on the emergence of civil society-driven participatory democracy on a global scale. The conference will bring together top officials from the United Nations, multilateral organizations, parliamentarians, representatives of local and national governments, academics, human rights advocates, unionists, representatives of native peoples and civil society. Conference attendees will take part in work sessions on nine topics: United Nations, Capital Movement, Parliaments, Trade, Human Rights, Local Government, Transnational Civil Society, Non-Dominant Societies, and Multinationals.

The Speaker of the National Assembly, Mrs. Harel is in charge of coordinating the parliamentary component of the Conference. This component, which addresses the theme of *Parliaments and Parliamentarians in a Context of Global Governance*, will take place on Monday, October 14. Throughout the day participants will discuss the various effects that globalization and the emergence of global governance have on Parliaments and the performance of parliamentary duties.

The parliamentary component will include three work sessions: one opening conference and two plenary sessions. The opening conference will broadly address these themes, and the two plenary sessions will discuss the following specific topics: *Reestablishing the Value of the Par-*

liamentary System and The Parliamentary System and Global Governance.

Lecturers and participants will be invited to share their perspectives and to debate the following questions:

- In these times of global governance are parliamentarians still able to play an effective role as representatives of their people?
- Does the influence of certain interest groups in public decision-making lead to difficult relations with elected bodies?
- Does the privatization of public decision-making exclude elected bodies from participating?
- What types of solutions are there to counter this growing trend of skepticism and cynicism towards the current effectiveness of parliamentary governance?
- Should the role of parliamentarians be revitalized and repositioned, given the preeminence of executive powers in the management of public affairs?
- Should representative democracy be given a new direction?
- Do elected officials have the power to oppose the restrictive effects of globalization on their constituents?
- Is it possible to counter the negative effects of globalization by expanding the democratic model to a larger number of states?
- How can their actions come to be valued in a context of globalizing public decision-making?
- What role can parliamentary diplomacy play in the establishment of a new international order?
- Can a watch on globalization contribute to making parliamentarians' work more effective in the context of global governance?
- Given this environment, how do we extend the constitutional powers of non-sovereign states?

Through its participation in organizing the symposium on *The Parliamentary System in the 21st Century* and the parliamentary component of the 2002 Conference on Global Governance the National Assembly of Quebec will be contributing to the ongoing and necessary examination of the parliamentary system and representative democracy.

Notes

1. For more information on the Amicale des anciens parlementaires du Québec:
www.assnat.qc.ca/fra/amicale/amicale.htm
2. For more information on the Montréal International Forum (FIM) and the 2002 Conference on Global Governance see:
www.fimcivilsociety.org/