



Letters to the Editor

Sir:

It is satisfying to learn that articles written for this publication can prompt a response from a former colleague whose interest in Parliament has continued even after years away from the Hill. In the summer 2003 issue of the *Canadian Parliamentary Review* Mr. Richard Jones took exception to my rejoinder (published in the Autumn 2002 issue) to an article on the Speakers Baton by Bruce Hicks in the Winter 2001 issue.

Apparently in disagreeing with Mr. Hicks, I have also managed to disappoint Mr. Jones. This is unfortunate, but it could not be helped. The fundamental purpose of my article was to contest the arguments put forward by Mr. Hicks who defended the introduction of the Speaker's baton within the context of British parliamentary tradition as he understands it. I did not set the framework of the debate; Mr. Hicks did. In my assessment, his arguments are weak and unconvincing and my letter sought to explain why.

Mr. Jones is mildly chagrined that I did not seize the opportunity to appreciate the "imagery" and "symbolism" that is behind the creation of the baton. As he puts it, Jeanne Sauvé, the first woman Speaker of the House of Commons, who subsequently became the first Governor

General of her gender, establishes an in-Canada heraldic authority which, in turn, devised a baton as a symbol of the Speaker's office to be used in the coat of arms of John Fraser, the first man elected to hold that position by secret ballot. Upon leaving the Speakership, Mr. Fraser presented a real baton to be used by his successors. Whatever the merits of this sequence of events, its supposed "symbolism" is beside the point. More important by far is the baton itself as a symbol for the office of Speaker. Here, Mr. Hicks had it right. My objection, however, is to the invention of something that is inappropriate to the nature of the office of Speaker whatever the source, British or Canadian.

Would Mr. Jones be just as comfortable with a sword or a hockey stick instead of a baton? Probably not. A symbol to be effective has to have some meaningful relationship or association to the position or person it identifies. That is why I do not believe that a baton is the best choice as a symbol. It has no significance to the role or office of Speaker. The mace, on the other hand, does relate to Parliament and to the Speaker as I maintained in my letter. I have two examples to prove the point, one of which involves Madame Sauvé.

When Roland Michener became the third Canadian-born Governor General, he was, in accordance with established practice, granted a personal coat of arms. In recognition of

the fact that he had been a Speaker of the House of Commons during the Diefenbaker era, his crest included a lion in profile holding, not a baton, but a mace in both paws. Madame Sauvé also had a coat of arms. In fact, there were two versions designed for her. The first, as the one for Roland Michener, was designed by the College of Heraldry in London. The second, however, was prepared by the Canadian Heraldic Authority. In both, there is the traditional mace in the shield, rather than the crest, signifying the fact that she too had been a Speaker of the House of Commons during her public career.

It is a pity that the examples of Roland Michener and Jeanne Sauvé were not followed when the Canadian Heraldic Authority set about designing a coat of arms for John Fraser. The departure from two Canadian precedents that should have been relevant guides was unnecessary and unwarranted. That an actual baton was subsequently made by Mr. Fraser, though purportedly a gift of the Queen as Mr. Hicks insists, was a misplaced gesture at best. That its possible use could rival the significance of the mace, however, renders the baton absurd.

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