

RECENT PUBLICATIONS AND DOCUMENTS

Proposals for a New Committee System, document tabled in the Ontario Legislature by the Standing Committee on Procedural Affairs, June, 1980, 26 p.

Earlier this year, the Standing Procedural Affairs Committee under the chairmanship of Mike Breaugh tabled in the Ontario Legislature "Proposals for a New Committee System". Representing the culmination of two years work, the purpose of this report is to provoke public debate among Members in the hope and expectation that a more rational, coherent and efficient committee system might be established.

The report itself is premised on the correct assumption that the committee system is very rapidly approaching the limits to which it can expand. There is, then, a clear recognition that given the ever-increasing demands made of committee time, there is also an ever-increasing decrease in committee effectiveness. It is this inefficiency which the Procedural Affairs Committee wishes to see redressed. It is their report which they hope will be the vehicle through which substantive change might be initiated.

The recommendations themselves have been influenced by several broad principals. Notwithstanding the burgeoning growth of Government business, the Committee recognizes that while committees have no mandate to govern, they are effective vehicles for detailed study and specialized debate and, by such activities as providing for expert testimony, enable Members the opportunity to develop and reinforce specialized policy interests. The key principle is the recognition, as enunciated by the Federal Conservative posi-

tion paper on Parliamentary Reform, that: "Parliamentarians should be able to effectively put the question 'why' and 'why not'". In other words, by providing for increased surveillance of the Executive, the Breaugh Report intimates that government itself would become more open, more accountable and more receptive to the needs of its citizenry.

Certainly, the proposed recommendations, if implemented, would go some distance in realizing this aim. In short, the Report calls for reducing the size of committees; eliminating the present practice of substituting at will; creating new committees to handle Public as well as Private Bills and making greater use of sub-committees; increasing the surveillance of the manner in which the Estimates are handled; referring, as a matter of course, the Annual Reports of all ministries and agencies to the appropriate committees; incorporating terms of reference into the Standing Orders; reducing the redundancy in, and increasing the accountability of, government agencies; and providing more support staff for both committees and the Private Member. In other words, the Procedural Affairs Committee wishes to create the climate necessary to return to the legislature the many powers it traditionally held and restore to the Members the latitude to enable them to effectively enable them to discharge their duties and responsibilities.

Ontario is, of course, by no means alone in its search for an improved committee system. It is, then, to be expected that many of these recommendations follow closely upon those enunciated elsewhere at both the provincial and federal level: in the Camp Commission,

the Morrow Committee, the Business Council on National Issues and Lambert Reports, the P.C. White Paper on Parliamentary Reform, the work done in 1975-6 by the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization and so on. It is, however, somewhat unfortunate that the scope of the recommendations of the Breaugh Committee do not go quite as far as one might wish. It would perhaps be too idealistic to expect a government to stipulate which legislative measures are ones on which its continued existence depends. By the same criterion, however, a committee should be empowered to recommend a reduction of an item of expenditures without inferring a non-confidence in the government. Similarly, Government should be obliged to implement recommendations of a committee or commission and, if not, provide reasons for not doing so.

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Committees in Legislatures: A Comparative Analysis by John D. Lees and Malcolm Shaw, Duke University Press, 1979, 449 p.

Good books often provoke stimulating questions. Sadly, *Committees in Legislatures* prompts one basic question: why was such an outdated book published?

The book stems from conferences held in 1969 and 1971, and it is evident that the papers have seen little, if any, revision since then. Now it is unfair to expect a book published in 1979 to

include material on the important changes in Westminster's committee system stemming from the 1978 report of the Procedure Committee. However, surely we deserve better than an analysis of the committees of the Canadian House of Commons which treats the 1968 reforms as experimental, and a treatment of Indian committees written entirely prior to the 1975 "emergency", to take only two particularly irksome examples. In a sense, the essay on committees of the Philippine Congress by Robert Jackson is all too symbolic of the whole enterprise: the Congress and its committees ceased to exist in 1972 when President Marcos declared martial law!

The great pity is that the idea behind the book was first-rate: assemble a team of specialists to analyse the workings of committees in eight national Legislatures: Canada, the United States, India, Japan, West Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and the Philippines. This would offer the reader authoritative reviews of particular committee systems and would also provide the basis for more analytical attempts to draw general conclusions about legislative committees.

The eight academics and one practitioner responsible for individual chapters demonstrate a sure grasp of their subjects and generally write well. Several of the chapters, especially those on the United Kingdom and West Germany by S. A. Walkland and Nevil Johnson, are particularly adept in analysing committees within the broad context of a nation's political culture and its overall legislative setting. Perceptive as such insights are, they represent but a small proportion of the book, the bulk of which is given over to extensive detail on the structure and operation of the various committee systems. Much of this material is either outdated or else is of marginal interest to the 1980 reader. Michael Rush's piece on Canada, by way of illustration, is heavily based on surveys of MPs conducted in 1968 and 1970.

Although the editors did not impose a rigid framework on their con-

tributors, each chapter sets out the basics of the political environment within which each committee system operates, and provides the essential information as to committee membership, structure, influence, staff and the like, as they were about 1970. A certain unevenness is evident in that not all chapters discuss the same topics; the chapter on Italy, for instance, makes no mention of committees in the control or oversight of government finance.

The conclusion, by editor Shaw, struggles mightily to divine patterns across the eight committee systems. He reaches few non-obvious conclusions, but is occasionally led astray by surface appearances: "legislatures where British influence is strong give special emphasis to finance at the committee level". Particularly disappointing is Shaw's failure to draw upon the extensive research done into political behaviour in small groups as an approach to understanding legislative committees.

In sum, unless one is interested in decade old information on committees in eight legislatures, and is willing to shell out \$19.75 (U.S.) for it, this book has little to commend it.

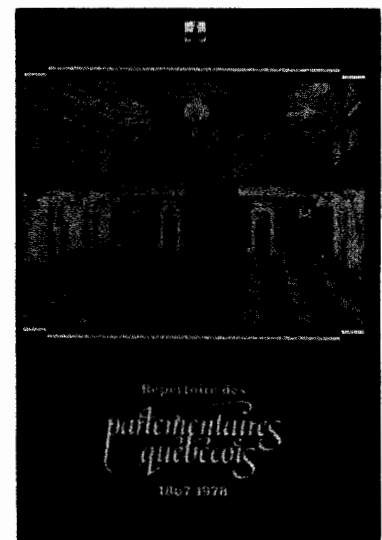
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Répertoire des parlementaires québécois 1867-1978, Québec, Le Service de documentation politique de la Bibliothèque de la législature, 1980, 796 p.

This directory contains biographies of all members of the Quebec Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly since Confederation up to 1968 as well as all members of the National Assembly from 1968 to the by-elections of April 30, 1979. Claude Ryan makes it just under the wire. It does not contain the names of Quebecers appointed to the Senate, elected to the House of Commons or to any other legislative assembly in other provinces or countries unless first elected in Quebec. This

Répertoire des parlementaires québécois does not include the names of Louis St. Laurent, Pierre-Elliott Trudeau, Jean Marchand, Jean-François Pouliot, Jean-Luc Pépin, Réal Caouette, Stuart Smith etc. Perhaps the term *parlementaire québécois* could have been more precisely defined in the introduction.

The book is made up of biographies containing the following elements: basic information (name, place and date of birth, name and profession of parents); marital status (date and place of marriage or marriages and name of in-laws); information on professional, industrial or business careers; an outline of political and parliamentary careers at all levels of government (municipal,



provincial, and federal); university studies; honors (decorations, medals, social and cultural associations); the date and place of death and burial; and finally relatives who were parliamentarians or public figures.

In a few cases information is lacking completely such as the absence of birth or death dates for R.G. Meikle and L.H. Gosselin. In other instances information has not been verified to the editor's satisfaction and he uses brackets as a simple method of indicating such cases. Some references are vague, particularly those pertaining to professional or university careers.