
Changing Times at the Canadian Parliamentary Review

Will Stos

The new editor of the Canadian Parliamentary Review introduces himself to readers in this article. He explains his approach to his new role and to the publication as being one which fosters discussion and debate about new ideas about parliamentary democracy while recognizing its distinguished past. Particular emphasis will be given to people and projects which seek to continue to make these institutions responsive and relevant to Canadians. A concluding section outlines some of the editorial board's proposals for the Review during this time of transition and renewal.



As I begin my tenure as editor of the *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, I pause to consider and question my professional purpose and the kind of contribution I can make to this long-standing and well-regarded institution as it enters a period of immense change. I imagine many parliamentarians may have had similar thoughts as they first entered their respective legislatures.

As a proponent of the value of historical knowledge generally, it is a personal tenant of faith that one must look to the past to be best prepared for the unfolding future.

In preparation for the commencement of my duties as editor I spoke with some contributors to and readers of the *Review* to ask how they conceived of the publication's purpose and how I might build on the solid foundations and successes of my predecessor, Dr. Gary Levy. In these discussions it soon became clear that the *Review* had found a particular niche which it served well. Parliamentary observers, in Canada and abroad, find this publication a valuable source for

keeping up to date on the happenings in legislatures across the country. Current and former members publish pieces which seek to comment on some of the pressing issues or peculiarities of parliamentary life in a non-partisan setting. Legislative staff can be alerted to issues arising in certain legislative bodies or which they may soon experience in their home parliament. And academics with an interest in parliamentary matters can present some of their work for the benefit of both their colleagues and their subjects themselves.

At its best, then, the *Canadian Parliamentary Review* is reportorial, reflective and an incubator for new ideas about parliamentary democracy in this country and occasionally in others which share the Westminster tradition. These views correspond very well to the sentiment encapsulated in our masthead's mission statement: "The *Canadian Parliamentary Review* was founded in 1978 to inform Canadian legislators about the activities of the federal, provincial and territorial branches of the Canadian Region of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and to promote the study of and interest in Canadian parliamentary institutions."

The *Review's* more than three decade-long legacy, replete with rich archives, has made this an incredibly valuable source of information about the activities of Canadian parliaments. Moreover, the promotional aspect of our mission statement intrigued me greatly.

I think it fair to suggest that over the past decades a portion of the Canadian electorate seems to have lost interest and/or faith in our parliamentary democracy. Opinion polls suggest trust in politicians and governments is lagging, cynicism appears to

Will Stos is the new Editor of the Canadian Parliamentary Review. A Ph.D. candidate in History at York University, his research explores provincial political parties engaged in region-building projects from the 1960s to the 1980s.

have grown, and declining voter turnout has been a great source of concern in many quarters. And, as an academic historian who has closely followed professional debates about the value and utility of political histories focused on institutions such as parliaments, I might pose a question which directly challenges the work of many readers of this piece: Are parliaments truly worthy of study when the electorates they purport to represent appear to have disengaged?

If the answer to this question prompts a shrug instead of a battle cry, the future for this publication and defenders of the value of our democracy would be grim. Of course parliamentary democracy matters; not only in principle but also in practice. While there may be cynicism and disinterest among some elements of the electorate, other elements surprised political observers in the recent past by becoming incredibly engaged in discussions about possible coalition governments, referenda on important policy decisions, and the use of the heretofore mostly unremarkable tool of prorogation.

Moreover, in meeting new colleagues at Queen's Park (where the *Canadian Parliamentary Review* is now housed and published), I have learned of some exciting projects that represent a part of ongoing efforts to make parliaments more open, accessible, understandable and relevant to the public. As I meet legislators and parliamentary staff across the country I am positive that many of these projects and discussions have counterparts elsewhere as well. Proponents of parliamentary democracy have looked to ways this system can evolve alongside technology and society

and I hope the *Review* can publicize some of their exciting work and innovations.

This publication will be evolving as well. In step with the staffing changes (the retirements of Dr. Levy and his long-time editorial assistant Anna LaBallister), and production changes (the relocation of the *CPR's* office to Queen's Park), the editorial board has endeavoured to survey our readership to see how we might best continue to fulfill our mandate and their needs (a questionnaire has been mailed to subscribers and will also be posted on our website).

Chief among our plans will be to work on updating our website to provide more interactive features, exploring possibilities for new designs for the print edition, and adapting our style to acknowledge the changing ways readers want to access news and views. We will aim to be responsive to our audience and produce a publication which continues to serve its existing niche and, it is hoped, attract new interest from other quarters as well. In this way, the *CPR* will embody the change and renewal its contributors often propose with respect to parliamentary institutions.

I view the *CPR* as a nexus: a coming together of many individuals and organizations – often perhaps at odds in terms of partisan beliefs – who have a common goal in fostering the growth of our parliamentary democracy and slaying our common enemy: apathy. I look forward to the challenges that lay ahead and on behalf of the editorial board I extend an invitation to all our readers to join us as we enter this exciting period in our publication's history.