



Reports on Legislative Activities



Quebec

The fifth session of the thirty-second legislature began with the opening address delivered by Premier **René Lévesque**. The session was highlighted by changes in the political strategy of the governing Parti Québécois. Immediately following the opening, the Opposition tabled ten motions condemning the government for its change of position vis à vis federalism following the election of a new government in Ottawa. The independence option and the referendum issue, together with problems of youth underemployment were the focus of speeches made by 70 MNAs in reply to the opening address. The government response came from the Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, **Pierre-Marc Johnson**. He launched an appeal for solidarity with regard to constitutional and economic matters in Quebec.

The visit by French Prime Minister **Laurent Fabius** on November 9 provided a pleasant respite from the general debate which became even more heated following Premier Lévesque's decision not to hold an election on the question of independence despite a resolution to the contrary adopted at the PQ party convention in June 1983. Several MNAs resigned during the days that followed, including: **Pierre de Bellefeuille** (Deux-Montagnes), who crossed the floor to sit as an independent on November 20, **Jérôme Proulx** (St-Jean), who also decided to sit as an independent on November 22. Five ministers resigned from cabinet, Messrs. **Jacques Parizeau**, **Camille Laurin**, **Jacques Léonard**, **Gilbert Paquette** and **Denise LeBlanc-Bantey**. On November 27, the Minister of Cultural Communities and Immigration **Louise Harel**, also resigned. Two backbenchers, **Guy Chevette** and **Jacques Brassard**, were immediately appointed to cabinet.

On December 4, the Minister responsible for Citizen Relations, **Denis Lazure**, resigned from cabinet and from the National Assembly. Several days later, the Opposition tabled a non-confidence motion which was defeated 56 to 49. There was one abstention and 9 government MNAs were absent when the vote was taken.

Legislative Action

A total of 35 bills were passed during the session. Several others remained under study during the intersession, notably Bill 42 pertaining to work accidents and occupational illnesses and a draft bill calling for a review of the collective bargaining process in the public and parapublic sectors. Twelve other government bills remained on the order paper, including Bill 21, legislation to amend the *Quebec Pension*

Plan, Bill 94 respecting workers who earn gratuities, Bill 93 on national parks and Bill 9 concerning the Auditor General.

The main piece of legislation adopted during this session concerned public primary and secondary education (Bill 3 passed on December 20, 1984). This legislation provided for the creation of linguistic school boards to administer public schools within a particular territory, specified the duties of the school board and contained special provisions for the Island of Montreal. The legislation guarantees the continued existence of non-denominational or dissenting school boards and extends their current right to dissention. The legislation, which amends thirty-five existing laws, is scheduled to come into force on July 1, 1986. It was tabled on November 1 by Education Minister **Yves Bérubé** and was debated at length in the assembly and in committee before being adopted just hours prior to the adjournment. The 683 amended sections were finally adopted by 58 members of the governing party, with one member abstaining. In a protest move, the opposition did not take part in the vote.

On the final day of the session, the President of the Treasury Board, **Michel Clair**, tabled a draft bill on the collective bargaining process in the public and parapublic sectors. The draft legislation outlined the framework for collective bargaining in the fields of education, social affairs and government organizations. Furthermore, it proposed that henceforth the salaries of public servants and employees of school boards, colleges and institutions be negotiated and determined separately from other clauses in collective agreements.

Under the terms of the draft legislation, the right to strike and the right to lock-out employees cannot be exercised over

monetary clauses in the collective agreement. Furthermore, these rights can only be exercised after the mediation process has been attempted. The standing committee on budget and administration examined the draft bill for two weeks during January and February 1985.

Bill 19 (Election Law) combines into a single piece of legislation three separate laws pertaining to elections, the electoral roll, the financing of political parties and amends the *Referendum Law*. It also introduces a number of amendments designed to facilitate and harmonize the electoral process.

The aim of Bill 20, which was tabled at the close of the session, is to initiate reforms in the area of human rights, inheritance and property rights so as to tie the Civil Code in with the general legal framework. The bill contains 1,423 sections and will be studied when the assembly resumes sitting in the spring.

Committee Work

A total of 77 committee meetings were held during the fall session, with 91% of these meetings devoted to the detailed study of bills. Three meetings focussed on the activities of crown corporations.

Yvon Thériault



Alberta

The fall sittings of the second session of the twentieth legislature were adjourned on November 13, 1984. Bills passed during

Erratum: On p. 29 of Volume 7 Number 4 the term "election" was used in describing the recognition of a new opposition leader in Alberta. The word should have been "selection".

these sittings included the *Alberta Cultural Heritage Act*, the *Child Transportation Act* and the *Wildlife Act*.

The *Alberta Cultural Heritage Act* reaffirms the government's commitment to development of cultural heritage in Alberta. It establishes a new Cultural Heritage Division in the Department of Culture, and restructures the Alberta Cultural Heritage Council. The *Child Transportation Act* states that children must be secured in a car safety seat when in vehicles travelling on the highway. Prior to the passage of this Bill, Alberta had been one of two Canadian provinces with no form of seat belt legislation.

The new *Wildlife Act* is the result of a review of Alberta's fish and wildlife policy. Highlights of the bill include redefinition of the term "wildlife", restructuring of penalty sections, and establishment of a reward program for information leading to the apprehension of violators. The bill will not go into force until the necessary regulations have been developed.

Doris Bergen



Ontario

The last month of the fourth session of the legislature proved to be of historical importance for the Province.

Having previously announced his retirement from politics **William Davis** made his last appearance in the House as Premier of Ontario on December 14. In an emotional address on the windup of the Budget debate, the Deputy Premier, **Robert Welch**, told the House that: "For me...and for many of us in this House, this is an extremely emotional moment. On a very personal level, I have sat with my leader in this House for nearly 22 years and I can only reiterate what I said following the Pre-

mier's announcement to resign, "There is no finer or more highly principled person ever to have been elected a member of this Legislature than Bill Davis, the member for Brampton. His sensitivity, his compassion and his sincerity have always enabled him, through all his political and personal times of testing, to emerge wiser and more deeply respected by his colleagues and by people of this province and the people of our wonderful country."

In echoing the sentiments of the Deputy Premier, Opposition Leader **David Peterson** and New Democratic Party leader **Bob Rae** recounted personal anecdotes which underlined their respect and affection for Mr. Davis.

In The House

Several important pieces of legislation were passed in the last session. The *Metropolitan Toronto Police Force Complaints Act* (Bill 140), which created a formalized procedure for handling and investigating complaints about the Toronto Police force from the public, was a generally lauded piece of legislation. This bill extends and makes permanent the office of the Public Complaints Commissioner, created on an experimental basis three years ago.

The Opposition did have some concerns with the bill. Acting Liberal Party justice critic **Robert Nixon** and New Democratic Party justice critic **Ed Philip** pressed the Attorney General to take the control for initiating the response to complaints from the hands of the police and give it to the Commissioner himself. Both parties felt such a change in the process would aid in the appearance of a more independent and objective investigation.

In accepting the principle and intent of the bill, Mr. Nixon voiced a further concern. He said, "While I am quite prepared to recognize that the main problems occur in this major urban centre or world-class city with the special law enforcement problems that go along with the size and cosmopolitan nature of the jurisdiction, still you and I, Mr. Speaker, coming from smaller communities, would recognize that such a basis of complaint against police forces and activities ought to be broadened out to include all our police forces."

Bill 17, *An Act to Revise the Election Act*, passed on the last day of the session, introduced significant changes to the Ontario election process. The bill established

a minimum election period of 37 days and a maximum period of 74 days. The bill also made the following provisions: effective July 1, 1986, the present provision permitting British subjects who are not Canadian citizens to vote in Ontario elections will be withdrawn; and the requirement of 12 months' residency in Ontario will be reduced to 6 months; all polling stations shall be made accessible to the handicapped; provision was made for the placement of polling stations in certain institutions, including psychiatric facilities; the franchise was extended to judges in the Province of Ontario, who previously were ineligible to vote in provincial elections, as they still are in federal elections.

The fourth session was 24 weeks long, comprising a total of 115 sitting days. Eighty-eight government bills were introduced, six of which were carried over from the previous session. Four of these six and a total of sixty-seven government bills received Royal Assent. Seventy-three Private Members' Public Bills were introduced as well as thirty-nine Private Bills. Thirty of the Private Bills were passed by the end of the session.

Leadership Convention

On January 26, the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party held its Leadership Convention to replace Mr. Davis. The ultimate successor, after three ballots, one recount and ten hours, was **Frank Stuart Miller**. Mr. Miller, most recently Minister of Industry and Trade in the last Davis Cabinet, defeated **Dennis Timbrell**, **Larry Grossman** and **Roy McMurtry**, each long-time cabinet ministers.

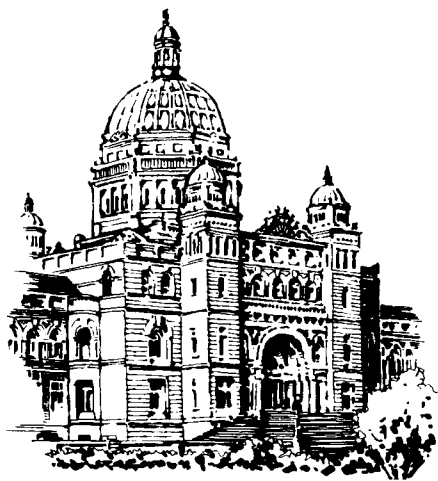
On the first ballot, Mr. Miller lead with 591 (35%) of the ballots, Mr. Timbrell collected 421 (25%), Mr. Grossman won 378 (22%) and Mr. McMurtry, coming in last with 300 (18%), was forced to drop from the ballot under the rules of the Convention. On the second ballot, Mr. Miller retained the lead with 659 votes (39.2%), Mr. Grossman took the second spot at 514 (30.6%), edging out Mr. Timbrell by only 6 votes. Given the extreme closeness of Mr. Grossman's and Mr. Timbrell's results, a complete recount of the second ballot was permitted, however the outcome was identical to the count previously announced and Mr. Timbrell was forced to drop from the ballot.

On the final ballot, Mr. Miller emerged victorious with 869 votes (53.3%)

while Mr. Grossman took 792 (47.7%). The close 77-vote difference between these two men was reminiscent of the 1971 convention, in which Mr. Davis defeated **Allan Lawrence** on the last ballot of that convention by only 44 votes.

Two weeks after the convention, Mr. Miller took the oath as Premier before Lieutenant-Governor **John Black Aird** in a ceremony in the Legislative Chamber. In addition to his duties as Premier and President of the Executive Council, Premier Miller is also Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. His new cabinet is comprised of a record thirty-three members including eleven newcomers.

Todd J. Decker



British Columbia

The second session of the thirty-third parliament resumed its deliberations on February 11, 1985.

Two important reports were tabled on the opening day. The report of the Select Standing Committee on Standing Orders and Private Bills recommended a substantial revamping of the Standing Orders, and, in addition, made detailed recommendations relating to pay allowances for members of the Legislative Assembly. The highlights of the recommendations dealing with the Standing Orders were as follows: (1) Provision for private members statements one day each week. (2) Appeals from the Speaker's rulings abolished. (3) The Committee of Ways and Means abolished. (4) Provision made for reference of Estimates and Legislation to Standing Committees. (5) Time limit for speeches shortened. (6) Wednesday to be designated as Optional Sitting Day to be used for

a full day of committee work when necessary. (7) Clarification of disciplinary procedures in the event a member disregards the authority of the Chair. (8) Provision for stacking of votes. (9) All divisions automatically recorded in the Votes and Proceedings. (10) Rationalization of the Order Paper. (11) Improvement of Standing Orders relating to adjournment of the House on matters of Urgent Public Importance. (12) Inclusion of the Oral Question Period in the Standing Orders. (13) Clarification of the Speaker's jurisdictional authority. (14) Simplification of the rules relating to Petitions. (15) A complete revamping of Standing Orders relating to Private Bills Practice.

The second portion of the committee's report dealt with members' benefits, which included a \$60-a-day Capital City Allowance for members outside Victoria ridings, and a \$30-a-day allowance for local members. The in-constituency expense allowance would be increased and provision was made for a maximum of ten parliamentary secretaries at an additional salary of \$6,000 per year.

The report also made provision for payments to the following officers in the amounts indicated: Deputy Chairman of the Whole — \$4,000 per year; Government Whip — \$4,000 per year; Official Opposition House Leader — \$3,000 per year; and Official Opposition Whip — \$3,000 per year.

Finally, the committee recommended that members of the Assembly would become eligible for superannuation allowance after having served for more than two parliaments, or upon having served seven years. The annual superannuation allowance to be based upon an amount equal to 5% of the highest average legislative allowance, multiplied by the years of service, not to exceed 16 years.

The report of the Standing Committee on Standing Orders and Private Bills was unanimously approved, not only by the all party committee, but by the House itself.

The Standing Orders are in the process of being reprinted, and most observers feel the net result will be a well-balanced set of Standing Orders providing ample debate opportunity for all members, consistent with a responsible allocation of time.

The proposed increased member benefits are recommendations only, and at the date of this report necessary supporting

legislation has not been passed by the House. The committee recommended further study be given to the matter of televising and broadcasting the debates of the House.

Another report of considerable interest was by the British Columbia Electoral Commission. It related to amendments to the *Constitution Act*. The committee concluded that 12 additional seats should be added to the Legislative Assembly. The Electoral Commission Report and supporting legislation have not as yet been debated in the House.

Another event of interest was an announcement by **Graham Lea**, MLA for Prince Rupert, that he will be sitting in the House as the leader of a new party called the United Party of British Columbia.

There have also been announcements from both the Premier of the province, **William R. Bennett**, and the Leader of the Official Opposition, **Robert Skelly**, to the effect that mutual consultation and cooperation between the two parties will produce a more satisfactory atmosphere in the legislative chamber. To date, there is considerable evidence that this is the course both parties intend to pursue.

E. George MacMinn



Saskatchewan

The session which was adjourned in June resumed sitting on November 22, 1984 with the primary purpose of determining the status of a member who had been

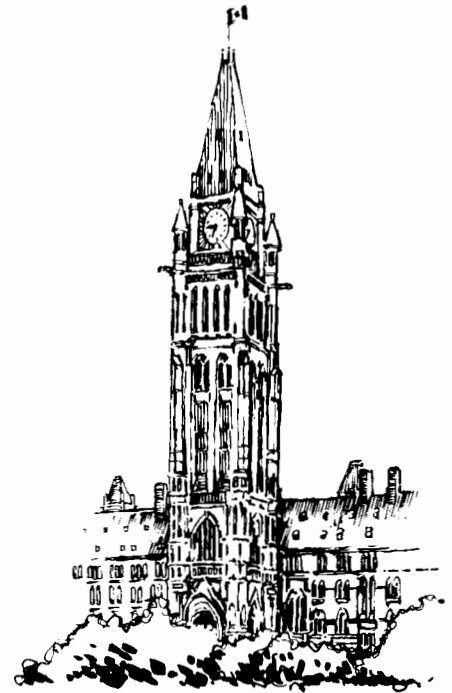
convicted by a Court of Queen's Bench of first-degree murder. In the absence of a resignation by the member for Thunder Creek, **Colin Thatcher**, the Legislative Assembly passed an amendment to the *Legislative Assembly Act* which spelled out the powers of the House to deal with a member who is convicted of an indictable offence for which he is sentenced to a prison term of two years or more. The legislation provides that a member in such circumstances may be either suspended, or his seat vacated to be determined by resolution of the Legislature. Following passage of the bill, a resolution was passed which vacated the seat of Mr. Thatcher. No date for a by-election has been announced.

The old session prorogued on November 28 just in time for the opening of the fourth session of the current Legislature the following day. The Speech from the Throne noted the need for measures in the agricultural sector to deal with the disastrous results of severe flooding in the north-east and severe drought in the southern part of the province in 1984. A *Farm Land Security Act* to provide a moratorium on foreclosures on farm land was passed before the session adjourned on December 19. Among the 24 other bills passed was legislation to establish the Employment Development Agency to co-ordinate and focus the government's employment strategy. The year 1985 was proclaimed Saskatchewan Heritage Year with a broad theme encompassing the commemoration of the Riel Rebellion, the province's 80-year history and a focus on youth as a special resource.

In January, the composition of the Legislative Assembly was again altered by the decision of the Executive of the Liberal Party of Saskatchewan to oust MLA **Bill Sveinson** from the ranks of the Liberal Party thereby reverting the Liberal Party to its former status of holding no provincial seats west of Ontario. The move resulted from apparent disagreements between the member and the party over legislative tactics. Mr. Sveinson continues to represent the constituency of Regina North West as an Independent.

The Clerk of Malawi, **Pete Mpasu**, will be at the Saskatchewan table on attachment for 4 weeks in late March – early April.

Gwenn Ronyk



Senate

There were many changes to the Senate as it began the work of the first session of the thirty-third parliament, which opened on November 5. As a result of the general election, the government had changed hands, but unlike the House of Commons, the new Conservative government was in a minority situation in the Senate.

Most of the Senate's standing committees held organization meetings and chose their presiding officers. Two special committees were established. On December 11, the Senate approved a motion by **Jacques Hébert** to appoint a committee of 12 senators to make recommendations on the problems and issues facing Canadian youth between 15 and 24 years of age. The committee was to present its report no later than October 1, 1985.

On November 27, the Senate re-established the Special Committee on National Defence, which had been conducting inquiries in the previous parliament on matters relating to national defence. On January 23, Committee Chairman **Paul Lafond** tabled its study of the Canadian Air Command entitled "Canada's Territorial Air Defence". The Committee noted the growing obsolescence, inefficiency and cost of the system now in place and examined the options available to Canada in seeking their modernization. It urged the government to

undertake without delay the planned defence review and recommended that Canada should explore the possibility of reviewing the NORAD agreement to the turn of the century, with provision for review every five years. The committee favoured the acquisition of twenty additional CF-18 jet interceptors and recommended that Canada contribute to the operation of AWAC airborne radar aircraft. The committee also called for an early inquiry into Canada's present and future military requirements in space with a view to establishing a national military space programme.

Other committees also received permission to continue studies begun in the last parliament. On December 18, the Energy and Natural Resources Committee was authorized to carry on its review of all aspects of the National Energy Program, including its effects on energy development in Canada. Also on December 18, the Foreign Affairs Committee obtained permission to continue its examination of Canadian relations with countries of the Middle East and North Africa.

On December 19, the Senate approved second reading of Bill S-2, *An Act to Amend and Consolidate the Laws Prohibiting Marriage Between Related Persons*, presented in the Senate by Senator **Jacques Flynn**. The bill was referred to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee which had spent several months of the last session of parliament studying cases involving consanguinity. Committee Chairman **Joan Neiman** expressed the hope that the committee would explore as well the question of adoptive relationships and that, in due course, it would be able to bring before the Senate recommendations for a general law with respect to prohibited degrees of marriage.

Gary O'Brien

House of Commons

The first weeks of the new Parliament were occupied with the debate on the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne and the economic statement made to the House by the Minister of Finance, **Michael Wilson**. Much of the legislation introduced in this period by the new government of Prime Minister **Brian Mulroney**

were housekeeping bills carried over from the previous administration. There was one notable exception, however, Bill C-15 which displaces the Federal Investment Review Agency (FIRA) with Investment Canada. The standing committees were busy with the task of studying Supplementary Estimates. Reform of parliamentary procedure continued and the special committee charged with this task produced a substantial report in December. The new Speaker, **John Bosley**, was one of the first witnesses to appear before the committee.

The Speech from the Throne and the Economic Statement

In the Speech from the Throne pronounced to assembled senators, members and guests by Her Excellency the Governor General on November 4, 1985, the new government outlined its objectives and agenda for the session. The major theme of the Speech was restoration and renewal. The government promised to undertake measures to "breathe a new spirit into federalism and restore the faith and trust of all Canadians in the effectiveness of our system of government". A series of meetings between the federal and provincial governments and consultations with representatives from the private and labour sectors was promised. The process of "consensus building" was also fundamental to the government's approach to the economy. Its three-part strategy, as explained in the Speech, is aimed at restoring fiscal responsibility, removing obstacles to growth and encouraging new investment. In addition, the government proposed to take steps to improve the social and economic status of women, to reduce crime, to reform the prison system, and to strengthen Canada's relationship with the United States in defence and trade.

Reaction of members came during the nine days allotted to the debate on the Address in Reply. The Leader of the Official Opposition, **John Turner**, denounced the government's lack of specific plans to tackle the nation's problems. At the same time, he defended the accomplishments of previous Liberal governments and asserted that he and his colleagues would not go along with any attempt to dismantle social programs in the name of economic expediency. In his conclusion, he said that, "Perhaps what is most disappointing is that there is really no vision of the future in that Throne Speech.

There are no new goals to inspire us, no new directions in which to lead us. Instead, we are presented with a long list of studies, consultations, consensus and process". A similar theme was raised by the Leader of the New Democratic Party, **Ed Broadbent**. However, as he explained, what also concerned him was the economic philosophy which permeated the Speech. He denounced the perspective and policies of the new Progressive Conservative government, and its Liberal predecessor, as fundamentally wrong because, as he said, it attacked the symptoms of the economic malaise as if they were the disease.

Following normal practice, the two Leaders concluded their speeches by moving an amendment and a subamendment respectively to a government member's motion of appreciation to the Governor General for the Throne Speech. Mr. Turner's amendment condemned the government for lack of leadership in not taking immediate action to create new jobs. Mr. Broadbent reiterated the objection of the amendment and added to it the government's failure to reform the tax system and to bring forward measures to support the equality of women. With the government's large majority, the outcome of the vote on the amendment and subamendment was not in doubt. Perhaps as proof of the opposition's determination to be tenacious, despite their reduced number, another amendment was put forward once the first had been disposed of; this one by the Liberal opposition employment critic, **Warren Allmand**. His amendment condemned the government for not being open and for restricting the availability of information on decision-making in government. The charge had to do with the uneasy and cautious relationship between the media and the government in its first months and the decision to prevent access of correspondents to the Government Lobby, contrary to past practice. This amendment, too, was defeated.

Three days after the session began, **Michael Wilson** made a statement to the House and the nation on the economy. To promote recovery, he said, the government was prepared to meet four basic challenges: reduce the federal deficit, redefine the role of government to promote economic growth and job creation, encourage investment and competitiveness and bring about these necessary changes through consultation and consensus. The deficit,

and the accumulated debt in particular, was singled out by the minister. In his view, "the mounting federal debt has become a powerful obstacle to growth and to private sector job creation". As a first step, he announced a reduction of \$4.2 billion in projected government expenditures for fiscal year 1985-86. Other areas raised in the statement indicating the priorities of the government included the tax system, the energy and resource sectors and employment creation.

In the reply allowed to him as the Opposition finance critic, **Donald Johnston** reviewed some of the details of the announced cuts in government programmes. Citing the cuts for the CBC, the Canadian Council, the PIP Program and the National Research Council among others, he rhetorically asked how such reductions could be expected to create jobs. In contrast to the policies of the new government, Mr. Johnston defended the record of former Liberal governments. Speaking on behalf of the New Democratic Party, **Nelson Riis** claimed that the proposals of the Progressive Conservatives were likely to keep government "on the backs of ordinary Canadians once again". The result of cuts in government services and tax increases, he charged, "will be continual confrontation, continual economic stagnation and a continuation of the social injustices".

Legislation

Legislation passed through all stages in the House and the Senate prior to receiving Royal Assent has been of a generally non-contentious nature. The bills passed have included marketing acts for farm products and freshwater fish, acts to amend the law respecting the income tax, the petroleum and gas revenue tax and, also, the customs and customs excise tariff.

One government bill, however, has drawn sustained fire from the opposition: Bill C-15, an Act respecting investment in Canada. The objective of this bill is to keep domestic venture capital here and to attract foreign funds into the country. Investment Canada is to be set up as a Crown agency to accomplish this goal. The effect of the bill is to virtually eliminate a review process which the Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion, **Sinclair Stevens**, claimed has stymied the growth and development of the economy. In response to the second reading motion moved by the Minister, **Lloyd**

Axworthy and **Steven Langdon** both questioned whether the anticipated results would in fact be achieved, or whether the government was simply selling its economic nationality and integrity. At the end of January, after nine days of debate, the minister's parliamentary secretary, **Monique Tardif** moved the previous question and, two days later, the bill was read a second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Regional Development.

Supply Days

The themes and policy outlooks of the political parties were underscored in supply-day debates. These are occasions when the opposition parties present a motion for consideration by the House and try to expose any perceived weaknesses in the government. Among the topics taken up were regional disparity in transportation, the plight of farmers, the need for open government, the difficulties created by reduced government services and the urgent need to promote nuclear disarmament. While these debates are intended to be confrontations of a sort, they were usually marked by a degree of civility which, as members have noted, was often lacking in recent years. Indeed the mood and temper of the House as a whole has been generally moderate and even-tempered.

The opposition parties managed to take the offensive in the days just prior to the Christmas adjournment on the issue of universality in social programmes. The tempest was sparked by a statement of the Minister of Finance which suggested that the government might tax back benefits in social programmes received by upper- and middle-income families. Heated exchanges ensued in the following days between the government and the opposition during the Question Period. On Friday December 14, the Prime Minister took a barrage of questions from **Douglas Frith**, **Raymond Garneau**, **Margaret Mitchell**, **Herb Gray** and others demanding to know what were the implications of the Finance Minister's statement. The basic position of Mr. Mulroney was to deny not only the imputed interpretation of the statement but also that the Finance Minister had even said it at all. The following Monday, the NDP Leader joined the fray and asked the Prime Minister to withdraw his denial. Near to indignation Mr. Broadbent warned, "You just start tampering with those social programs and you'll see a political fight like you've never seen

before in this country." Shortly afterwards he charged that the Prime Minister had deliberately misled the House. Such an accusation is unparliamentary and must be withdrawn. Despite the requests of the Speaker, Mr. Broadbent refused and was subsequently suspended from the House for the balance of the sitting. Not to be outdone, the Liberal Leader made a request the next day for an emergency debate to discuss the issue of universality, but was turned down by the Speaker. Shortly afterwards, when debate was resumed on a government bill, and a Liberal Member, **George Baker** was recognized, a motion to adjourn the House was proposed and the bells for a recorded division were kept ringing for the remainder of the day until stopped by the Speaker at the normal adjournment hour. The voting system was used again the next day as part of the same protest of the government's apparent position on universality.

The tempest, however, seemed to have passed by late January when the Minister of National Health and Welfare, **Jake Epp**, tabled his consultation paper, *Child and Elderly Benefits*. In it the federal government maintained that it supported universality as a principle. At the same time it proposed for consideration two recommendations. The first would eliminate the child tax exemption from income tax returns. The resulting funds, estimated at \$800 million, would be used to increase the child tax credit, a payment directed towards lower- and middle-income parents. An alternative proposal would reduce both the child tax exemption and cut the size of family allowance by one-third. No recommendations were put forward respecting elderly benefits, basically because the government decided that "no change is required in the Old Age Security Guaranteed Income Supplement payments system".

Consultation papers such as *Child and Elderly Benefits* have become a feature of the new government. In the period under review, seven such discussion or consultation documents have been tabled in the House. Other papers have addressed such issues as housing, small business and farm taxes. Another method Ministers have used to present government policies is through revival of *Statements by Ministers*. In recent years, ministerial statements had fallen into abeyance, much to the chagrin of opposition members who consequently lost an opportunity to criticize or question a gov-

ernment policy in the House while it was still an item of media attention. The Secretary of State for External Affairs has used Minister's Statements three separate times; the first was to explain the government's plans to assist in famine relief in Africa. Others including **Marcel Masse**, Minister of Communications and **Michel Côté**, Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, have revealed the government's intentions with respect to CBC cut-backs and the use of metric and imperial standards of weights and measures.

Committee Reports

Many of the Standing Committees of the House have been busy with Supplementary Estimates and some of them are also engaged in consideration of legislation on various matters. One special committee was established to continue the work of a committee of the previous Parliament charged with examining reforms to the

House. In speaking to the motion on November 29, Government House Leader, **Ray Hnatyshyn**, emphasized that the mandate of the special committee, while certainly broad, was nonetheless focused on the role of the Private Member. The lead-off speaker for the Liberals, **Jacques Guilbault**, an Assistant Deputy Chairman of the Committees of the Whole in the last Parliament, endorsed the motion to pursue reform which, he noted, had been initiated in the Parliament of a Liberal administration. He also complained that contrary to recent practice some standing committees proposed to allow evidence to be received without requiring the presence of an opposition member. This objection was supported by **Ian Deans** of the NDP and some days later the proposed new practice was abandoned.

The motion was adopted on December 5 and the Special Committee set to

work immediately. It presented its First Report barely two weeks later, the day the House adjourned for Christmas. In substance, the report revived the work done by its predecessor. It recommended changes to provide for an election of the Speaker, for consideration of bills by ad hoc legislative committees, the creation of a Chairmen's Panel and broader representation on the Board of Internal Economy. Notable by its absence was the earlier Committee's suggestion of a new system of finance committees to study the government's short and long term expenditure policies. Another feature which distinguished the work of this committee from its predecessor is the request for a comprehensive response from the government within 120 days.

Charles Robert

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