



Recent Publications and Documents

THE CANADIAN HOUSE OF COMMONS: ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF NORMAN WARD, edited by John C. Courtney, Calgary, University of Calgary Press, 1985, pp.xv, 217.

This *festschrift*, edited by John Courtney, honours his colleague Norman Ward on his retirement after 40 years teaching political science at the University of Saskatchewan. As the selected bibliography by Shirley Spafford makes clear, Norman Ward has been faithful to his calling, producing a steady stream of books, articles and government reports for four decades. There is more to come, including the 6th edition of *The Government of Canada*, and the biography of James G. Gardiner which he and David Smith are writing jointly. Such an achievement richly deserves the recognition that this volume provides.

Legal scholars assessing court decisions often employ the cogent phrase 'judge and company' to remind the reader that judges do not toil alone, but are ultimately dependent on legal counsel, law professors and the whole infrastructure of learning and legal procedure from which judicial decisions are crafted. Those who 'work' parliament and federalism in Canada are also sustained and guided by their own goodly 'company'. For parliament, especially the House of Commons, Norman Ward has long played a supportive role by contributing an extensive and sympathetic literature to its understanding.

As John Courtney notes in his introduction, our confederation discontents over the last two decades have directed political scientists to federalism, French-English relations and the constitution. This volume, focusing on Canada's principal representative institution, is designed to redress the balance by exploring the House of Commons from various overlapping perspectives. The theme, as summarized by Eugene Forsey is that "the influence of the House of Commons has diminished, is diminishing and ought to be increased." (195)

Collectively, the introduction by the editor, the postscript by Forsey and the eight substantive chapters reveal the complexity of the arrangements and norms which combine to fashion the behaviour of the 282 MPs who populate the more democratic House of our bicameral parliament. Central to that behaviour, as Paul Thomas convincingly argues in an impressive essay on "Parliamentary Reform Through Political Parties" is the political party. Most actions by individuals in the cabinet-parliamentary system are "forms of party behaviour," (43) a thesis supported in David Smith's study of James G. Gardiner who "was nothing if not partisan," and for whom loyalty to the Liberal Party was "his categorical imperative." (70) In a subtle chapter focusing on the organization and role of parties in parliament, Thomas views parties as "organic entities" (45) not amenable to easy manipulation. Reformers, accordingly, should work with the grain of parties if they wish to prevent the frustration of their efforts. Thus the relative failure of committee reform to produce the desired results is explained by the strength of parties. "Strong parties and strong committees," he asserts, "cannot coexist." (51) Thomas does, however, document a significant enhancement of the role of caucus as a vehicle giving MPs increased influence over the party leaders.

In recent decades the electoral context in which parties compete has been extensively modified by legislation dealing with the financing of elections and the determination of constituency boundaries. Two thorough essays by John Courtney and F. Leslie Seidle provide detailed analyses respectively of "Canadian Electoral Boundary Commissions and the Australian Model," and "The Election Expenses Act". Both the electoral boundaries commissions established in 1964 and *The Election Expenses Act* of 1974 have been successful reform efforts, enhancing the legitimacy of the House of Commons by enhancing the integrity of the election process from which MPs emerge.

A more recent change, the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the roles it offers to legislatures and courts

are explored by W. R. Lederman.

Although the Charter clearly enhances the relative role of the courts, he rebuts the common tendency to see the Charter as an instrument which sets legislative bodies and courts on a collision course. Rather, he sees courts and legislatures as partners in the task of delivering justice under the rule of law to the people. By this he means that these differently constituted institutions participate in a division of labour designed to support "the better standards of a free and democratic society" (108) which the Charter has contributed to our political practices. In the Lederman chapter there is not the slightest hint of a view of the Charter as an unwelcome or alien intrusion into a system historically built on the principle of parliamentary supremacy.

In the period in which support for the Charter was being mobilized, being a Member of the House became a full-time occupation as sessions lengthened. Members of Parliament, notes John Stewart, in his chapter "Commons Procedure in the Trudeau Era," have acquired "offices, facilities and services commensurate with full-time jobs" (39), including a paid office in their constituencies. Stewart analyses the 1968-69 procedural changes of the Trudeau era and concludes that they were not fundamental, and that the goal of greatly increasing the power of the House of Commons will require further steps, which he outlines, by the Mulroney government. (This chapter was written before the McGrath Report and the government response.)

In the last few decades the parties were affected not only by legislation designed to enhance the integrity of the election process, but also by the new television technology which has grown in significance in the last quarter of a century. The modern question period, asserts, C.E.S. Franks, is a child of the television age. Equally, adds John Meisel, are modern elections. Although the reach of his analysis is much broader than the impact of television, in his chapter "The Boob-Tube Election: Three Aspects of the 1984 Landslide," Meisel attributes great importance to television, especially the three debates among the leaders of the parties, in influencing the election outcome.

Turner clearly lost ground in the debates, particularly under Mulroney's accusing finger and the assertion that he could have rejected the patronage appointments bequeathed to him by Trudeau. Meisel's attribution of causal significance to television in the election outcome is accompanied by a concern over the simplifications and distortions to which it leads. He recommends establishing a parliamentary committee to explore ways of minimizing the drawbacks and enhancing the promise of television debates.

Nearly all the chapters have a contemporary focus, with the exception of David Smith's chapter on "Cabinet and Commons in the Era of James G. Gardiner". This chapter, part of the larger Gardiner project on which he is engaged with Norman Ward, is designed to bring some subtlety to the discussion of the role of regional ministers which, Smith suggests, has been naive. To Gardiner, "Cabinet conceived primarily as a collection of regional spokesmen would elevate the diversity he considered natural in a federal country to an intolerable level, at the expense of the unity which party government required and cabinet decision-making made possible." (70) Smith's thesis is that Gardiner's regionalism was embedded in his nationalism, both of which were reconciled by the integrating capacity of the Liberal Party he loyally served.

The most provocative chapter is somewhat innocuously headed "The 'Problem' of Debate and Question Period," by C.E.S. Franks. Franks sheds considerable light on these two processes by analysing them from three perspectives – as a game, as a policy process, and, most creatively, as literature. As a policy process Franks claims that a combination of a centralized and secretive style of cabinet decision-making, with a resultant absence of public preparation for major policy changes, places a heavy burden on parliament to mobilize consent, a task for which it is ill-suited. The problem is compounded by the general policy incapacity of the parties which means that elections do not produce policy mandates for their winners but, especially in the case of new governments, baffled victors devoid of any sense of direction they wish to impart to the country. For Franks, the House of Commons, in spite of party discipline and centralized direction from the political executive, is far more congenial to the particularism of organized interest groups than to a more general public interest. From this perspective, Franks sees the royal commission process, "precisely because it [is] outside the secretive enclosed

structure of the executive, [as] . . . an effective tool for mobilizing consent." (12) Clearly, however, royal commissions can be no more than a supplement to the policy-making process, not only because they are intermittent, but also because they disappear after submitting their reports to government, and hence are dependent on the political process, which Franks castigates, for the implementation of their recommendations. Franks' concern about the deficient integrating capacity of parties and parliament is shared by John Meisel. Meisel fears that single-issue politics, as exemplified by the third television debate of the 1984 election, which was organized by the National Action Committee on the Status of Women could, if extended to other groups, "seriously undermine the capacity of politicians to fashion accommodation and consensus over time". (175)

To stand back from these provocative chapters by individual authors and assemble some cumulative impressions of their academic assessments of the House of Commons is to be struck by several phenomena.

First, those who read this volume will not be allowed to forget that the House of Commons belongs to its members, not to the Canadian people. Thomas reminds us of the centrality of party interest to which reforms must adapt; Stewart supplements the warning by noting that the reforms with the most likelihood of implementation are those which "make life easier" for the members; and it has become a truism that the possibility of getting proportional representation in whole or in part, whatever its merits, will run up against the self-interest of those who got into the House under the existing first-past-the-post system.

Second, John Courtney's distinction in the introduction between the relative success of reforms to improve "the 'getting there' aspect of Canadian parliamentary politics" contrasted with the lesser success of those addressed to "certain critical aspects of 'being there' ". (xv) is unquestionably valid, although the contrast may be too starkly portrayed. Meisel's concern about single-issue television debates indicates that 'getting there' needs continuing attention. The women's movement, conscious of the gender ratios in the House, would doubtless also challenge the assertion that 'getting there' is in good shape. Frank's concern about the inability of elections in the Canadian context to produce policy mandates for their victors, and to even minimally educate the electorate in the realities the country

faces is a further weakness in the 'getting there' process. Finally, of course, unless 'being there' is seen as a worthwhile, dignified activity there will be a decline in the quality of those prepared to go through the hoops of 'getting there'.

Third, there is a general contrast between the assessment of the House of Commons – devastatingly summed up by Franks: "Government, opposition and Parliament alike are brought into disrepute by the prolonged, brutal, boring, degrading and generally unproductive parliamentary processes" (15) – and the affection which the authors clearly feel for it. Years of commentary have produced a formula for those who write of its affairs: it is to be approached with a combination of affection, concern, and exasperation mixed with recommendations for improvement, and doubts that they will be implemented. The crucial question is, what keeps alive the idealized version against which actual performance, somewhat indulgently, is measured; and what would happen if the idealized version came to be seen as an irrelevant sentimental nostalgia? In addition to the sheer inertia derived from history, the status of the House of Commons is sustained as much by the rose-coloured lenses through which it is viewed as by its actual performance. What would happen if its nagging admirers became disenchanted? Some time ago Richard Crossman suggested that the British House of Commons was becoming part of the dignified rather than efficient machinery of government. It is not evident that the Canadian House of Commons would receive more favourable evaluations if it were judged in terms of dignified rather than efficient criteria.

Fourth, a volume such as this is inevitably forward-looking. Those who propose reforms presuppose a future to which they will apply. However, the particular chapters in this volume make little attempt to discern the nature of the future in which the House of Commons of the twenty-first century will exist, and therefore of the demands that will be placed on it. This Oakeshottian approach of "keeping the ship afloat" by attending to the needs of the moment has its virtues. On the other hand, there seems little doubt that the future will not lighten the burden on government. Whatever the return to the market achieved in response to neo-conservative sentiments it is probable, indeed almost certain, that the demands on the Canadian government for leadership and coordination in both domestic and international arenas will

increase. The world is not going to become an easier habitat for nations and states to live in. Over the long haul, the struggle among the institutions of government for influence, as well as among nations and states, is Darwinian. Will the House of Commons be adequate to that future challenge? The answer, which is not provided by this unusually rewarding collection of essays, is not self-evident.

Norman Ward should be pleased by these essays in his honour, and John Courtney is to be congratulated for bringing together such a stimulating collection. They are uniformly of high quality. The book, inexpensively priced, would be a suitable supplementary text for a course focusing on the House of Commons.

Alan C. Cairns

Department of Political Science
University of British Columbia

* * *

PROVINCIAL POLITICS IN CANADA, by Rand Dyck, Scarborough, Prentice-Hall, 1986, 626 p.

Rand Dyck's *Provincial Politics in Canada* is a systematic and fairly comprehensive introduction to the history and politics of each province in Canada. Dyck outlines the different political cultures, histories, and structures in a most lucid and readable manner. He pays particular attention to each constituent unit's evolution, political ideology, party and electoral systems, voting trends, pressure groups, and relationship with the federal government. Dyck's primary sources are 1981 and 1984 poll data and Statistics Canada reports.

However, the strength of the author's approach is also a weakness. Dyck follows the pattern of other scholars, most notably Martin Robin in his *Canadian Provincial Politics*, who focuses almost exclusively on a province-by-province account rather than attempting the more intellectually demanding comparative approach. Except in his all too brief conclusion, Dyck makes no attempt to contrast the provincial policy formation process. There is no concerted effort to demonstrate the relative economic and political strengths and weaknesses present in each province. There is no effort to explore how federal and

provincial political cultures are reconciled and translated into policy preferences. Admittedly, this is a difficult task. In my view, however, it is a particularly rewarding one. The reader is directed to the work of Roger Gibbons, most notably in his *Regionalism: Territorial Politics in Canada and the United States*, or to Mildred Schwartz' *Politics and Territory: The Sociology of Regional Persistence in Canada*, for two examples of this comparative approach.

One other important omission is the limited attention paid to the role of provincial bureaucrats. Provincial public servants have become integral to the policy process in recent years, but their presence is almost totally ignored in this book.

I do not want to be too hard on *Provincial Politics in Canada*. The author's goals are quite modest and as a broad introduction to the subject, the book is perfectly adequate for the undergraduate and educated layman. The bibliography is quite complete and is a useful guide for those who would like to know more about a particular province.

Jonathan Lemco

School of Advanced
International Studies
The Johns Hopkins University
Washington D.C.

* * *

FRANK UNDERHILL: INTELLECTUAL PROVOCATEUR by R. Douglas Francis, University of Toronto Press, 1986, 219 p.

Frank Underhill would have liked the sub-title. Intellectual provocateur – those two words capture the essence and the limitations of this northern Socrates who spent some fifty years trying to "stir the flaccid mind of Canada" with his teaching and writing.

Oxford scholar, Fabian socialist, historian, political scientist, drafter of the CCF's Regina Manifesto, nationalist, liberal, curator of Laurier House, whatever his station in life Underhill felt that the only way to make himself useful was to be constantly critical.

Professor Francis of Calgary University has chosen a worthy subject for his biography but the question is whether this book tells us anything about Underhill that is not readily available in his classic *In Search of Canadian Liberalism*, in the book of essays in honour of Underhill by Norman Penlington or in various other

speeches and articles by or about Underhill. The answer is yes but not a great deal.

We do catch a glimpse of someone whose feelings of insecurity and inadequacy at Oxford perhaps contributed more than he would admit to subsequent views toward this country's relations with the British. We detect strains of self righteousness as Underhill dabbled in real estate during his years at the University of Saskatchewan while, at the same time, castigating the capitalist mentality of western Canadians.

The chapter on his near firing by the University of Toronto gives splendid insight into how that institution and some of its leading scholars reacted when a member of the legislature called Underhill "one of the rats trying to scuttle the ship of state" for daring to question Canadian aid to the mother country during the 1930s.

Underhill produced no definitive study of any important theme in Canadian history. He was never completely accepted by any political party because he found it so delightful to poke holes in all their arguments. Francis does cover, in workmanlike if rather colourless style, many of the causes for which Underhill fought – to get more Canadian and American history on the curriculum, to demonstrate the true nature of Confederation as a business proposition which favoured certain interests, to convince socialist politicians to be more pragmatic and less dogmatic, and to uphold individual freedom as the hallmark of liberal democracy.

Both the introduction and conclusion to this revised doctoral thesis argue convincingly, if somewhat repetitively, that Underhill penetrated Canadian politics to its very depths. The reactions he provoked were to be expected by anyone telling the Emperor he has no clothes.

The book is less enjoyable than a few hours spent studying Underhill himself. However, if it stimulates people to read or reread Underhill it will have served a valuable purpose. Whereas Underhill tended to leave his students sadder but wiser, this book makes us wonder whether the present generation of political commentators – infatuated by single issue politics, personalities, collective rights and public opinion polls – is capable of producing intellectual successors to Underhill. If not, our political life will be poorer and more confused than it already is.

Gary Levy