

FIFTH CONFERENCE OF SPEAKERS AND PRESIDING OFFICERS OF COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTS

The Fifth Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of Commonwealth Parliaments took place in Australia in August-September 1978. It was attended by delegates from 24 Commonwealth countries, Canada being represented by the Speaker of the Senate, the Hon. Renaude Lapointe, and the Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons, Mr. Gérald Laniel, who was accompanied by Mrs. Laniel. The Clerk of the House of Commons, Mr. Alistair Fraser, and the Director of the Research Branch of the Library of Parliament, Mr. Philip Laundry, were also included in the delegation. Mr. Laundry has played a continuing role in the preparation of these Conferences since their inception in Canada in 1969, and he acts as Secretary to the Conference Standing Committee.

The delegates assembled in Sydney on August 26 and the Conference sessions were held in the chamber of the House of Representatives in Canberra from August 28 to September 1. The Conference was opened by the Governor-General of Australia, Sir Zelman Cowen, a distinguished constitutional lawyer whose thought-provoking speech on the parliamentary system and its significance impressed all who heard it. The delegates were also welcomed by the Prime Minister, Mr. Malcolm Fraser; the Speaker of the Senate, Mr. Condor Laucke; the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Sir Billy Snedden and the Speaker of the British House of Commons, Mr. George Thomas, in his capacity as outgoing Chairman of the Conference Standing Committee.

The broad subject headings of the agenda were:

- 1) The Speaker and Party Politics;
- 2) The Role and Status of the Speaker;
- 3) Parliamentary Privilege;
- 4) The Working of the "Westminster Model";
- 5) Parliament and the News Media;
- 6) Parliamentary Procedure;
- 7) Powers of the Chair and
- 8) the Committee System.

The discussion on Parliament and the News Media was led by Canada, both Speaker Lapointe and Mr. Laniel participating. Speaker Lapointe, drawing on her wealth of experience as a journalist, dealt with the relationship between Parliament and the media, while Mr. Laniel concentrated on the televising of parliamentary proceedings and provided an informative account of the recently acquired experience of the House of Commons in this area.

As Conference host the Speaker of the Australian House of Representatives, Sir Billy Snedden, became Chairman of the Conference Standing Committee. The other countries represented on the incoming Standing Committee are Canada, India, Great Britain, Zambia, Trinidad and Tobago and Cyprus. Canada, India and Great Britain are founder members of the Standing Committee and have been consistently re-elected. Cyprus will be the venue of the next Standing Committee meeting which will decide the timing and venue of the next Conference.

A number of tours were organized following the Conference, and Speaker Lapointe and Mr. and Mrs. Laniel visited one of Australia's more tropical regions. They went to Magnetic Island, a resort off the coast of Queensland near Townsville, and afterwards to Brisbane, the State capital where they were received by the Queensland Branch of the C.P.A. The Conference and its related activities were by common consent a great success and the Australians showed once again that they are gracious and generous hosts.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES

The National Conference of State Legislatures, which is headquartered in Denver, is the official coordinating body for 7,600 U.S. State Legislators. It works to improve the quality and effectiveness of state legislatures, lobbies on their behalf and fosters communication and cooperation among the 50 states. The organization holds annual meetings which Canadian provincial legislators have, in the past, been invited to attend and it is expected that more of them will do so in the future. Last summer, the William H. Donner Foundation, based in New York City, awarded to the permanent conference a grant that will "underwrite several special programs for Canadian and U.S. legislators aimed at providing a meeting of minds on key issues such as health, energy and tax and revenue policy". Legislators from both countries will be eligible to participate.

In Canada, the foundation is known as the Donner Canadian Foundation. Its offices are located in Toronto.

INFORMATION PLEASE

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