

ineffectiveness portrayed by the rest of the text.

Indeed, to reinforce his depressing picture, the author contrasts Canadian with British experience. "The British House of Commons is a far more independent-minded and – acting body than the Canadian House" (p. 24). That is true, though Professor Franks rather enthusiastically overstates the case, an overstatement derived from an apparently shaky factual knowledge of British experience: by-elections are not always called "immediately" upon a seat becoming vacant (p. 61), candidates who win marginal seats do not, after some time in the House, "gain candidacy in a safe seat" (p. 75) and the convention concerning confidence did not change in the 1970s (p. 140) – behaviour changed, not the convention. There is also reference to the British House having 640 members (p. 60), but as the author gets the number right (650) on three other occasions we may assume a typographical error.

But it is in discussing parliamentary reform that the author slips badly. There are two principal errors. First, Professor Franks appears to assume that there is a sharply dichotomised choice between an executive-centered and a Parliament-centered system. Any significant accretion to Parliament's power is assumed to threaten the capacity of the government to govern. The Special Committee on Reform of the House of Commons, the McGrath Committee, is berated for its failure to appreciate this point.

Second, in advancing his own limited proposals for reform, Professor Franks fails to explain how such reforms are to be achieved in the face of the executive-dominated system he has so convincingly sketched.

On both points, the McGrath Committee was far more perceptive than Professor Franks concedes – and, indeed, more perceptive than Professor Franks. On page 140, the Special Committee is condemned for failing to appreciate that in Britain a behavioural change among MPs preceded an attitudinal change. The Committee did no such thing. It was very much aware of the sequence and the relationship of the changes. I know because I was the person who drew them to the Committee's attention. Members recognised that they could not induce the behavioural change witnessed in the British House (the product of a phenomenon peculiar to Britain), but what they could do was emphasize that no effective change was possible unless there was a change of attitude on the part of Members of Parliament. Attitudinal change is a prerequisite for effective structural and procedural change. Such recognition escapes Professor Franks in advancing his own proposals for change.

Nor can I find anything in the Special Committee's list of specific recommendations that would have the effect of creating a Parliament-centered political system. The Committee was seeking to make the House a more effective policy-influencing legislature – not elevate it to the status of a policy-making one. One can make the government listen and behave, to an extent not previously witnessed this century, without having to make oneself the government.

Professor Franks has written an important book that makes for depressing reading. The McGrath Committee produced a report that was more optimistic – and, as a practical contribution to debate, far more important.

Philip Norton

Maureen McTeer, *Parliament: Canada's Democracy and How it Works*, Random House, Toronto, 1987, 104 pages.

In October 1987 a committee on compensation and expense allowances for members of the Quebec National Assembly expressed the hope that "genuine, serious efforts would be made as soon as possible to inform people about the work actually done each day by the 122 members from Quebec in the service of the entire country."



Anyone who wants to help make this wish come true should turn to Maureen McTeer's *Parliament: Canada's Democracy and How It Works*. The book goes beyond similar documents published in the past resembling, in some ways the interesting *BBC Guide to Parliament* produced in London in 1979. It is certainly very different from the old citizenship education brochures published by in the 1950s.

At first glance, the table of contents resembles that of Russell Hopkins' *How Parliament Works*, with the inevitable sections on the Constitution, the Governor General, the House of Commons, the Senate, the legislative process and elections. Her book does not dwell too long on procedure, however, and covers the parliamentary buildings, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and a glossary of parliamentary terms.

The format is quite distinctive and includes photographs as well as explanatory diagrams and drawings. The guide is peppered with side notes explaining customs and supplying biographical and historical data. Finally, the author gives practical suggestions on how to obtain more information on the topics discussed.

Very little fault can be found with the book's overall content. A few paragraphs should perhaps be added about the MP's role as a "watchdog" of government activity, and the role of Speaker of the House probably deserves a bit more attention.

The author adopts the neutral tone suited to this type of work, allowing her feelings to show through only once when expressing her personal opinion of the Meech Lake accord. The information given to students is generally useful, but should Ms. McTeer have gone as far as to volunteer the services of MPs to help with homework or collect stamps from the parliamentary postmaster?

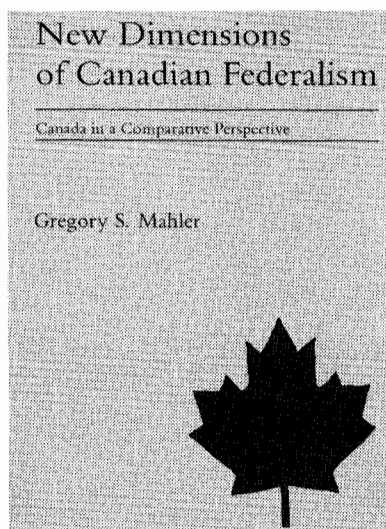
Finally, there are some errors and "overtranslations" in the French version. For example, it would have been better to speak of hustings rather than *tréteaux* (p. 89) and to keep backbenchers instead of *députés d'arrière-plan* (p.112) and filibuster for *obstruction* (p. 85). Elsewhere, anglicisms like *office*, *prendre le vote*, *rapportés*, *division*, *redistribution* and *statut* have crept in. We should add that strangers should be translated by *étranger* and not *intrus*, and a safe seat is a *château fort* or *forteresse* and not a *compté sûr*. As for that expert in parliamentary procedure, Sir John C. Bourinot, his name is not translated as "Boreno" (p.70).

These details do not detract from the book's merit but are numerous enough to attract attention.

Gaston Deschênes

New Dimensions of Canadian Federalism by Gregory S. Mahler, Associated University Presses, Cranbury, New Jersey. 1987, 195 pages.

During the 1960s Professor Donald Smiley noted that a mild state of chaos was the normal condition of the Canadian federation. This is even more true in 1988. A Constitutional Accord (signed by the Prime Minister and Premiers of ten provinces but not yet approved by the legislatures), a free trade agreement negotiated but not yet implemented with the United



States, and a Supreme Court beginning to interpret legislation in light of the 1982 *Charter of Rights and Liberties* have added to the regularly scheduled chaos that derives from federal-provincial negotiations on various issues.

To some extent this book has been overtaken by events since it was published before the Meech Lake Agreement which envisages a number of changes in the nature of Canadian federalism including the method of appointing Senators and Supreme Court Judges.

Nevertheless the book does provide a brief and well written overview of some traditional

themes of Canadian federalism and compares it with other federal systems, mainly Australia, the Federal Republic of Germany and Switzerland.

For an American, teaching at an American University, the author demonstrates admirable ability in understanding and summarizing the complicated series of events that led to the 1982 patriation of the Canadian constitution. He then moves on to three chapters examining the way policy issues are handled in Canada. He looks specifically at health policy, foreign policy and energy policy. In all three instances he finds that in Canada debate seems to focus more on process than on policy. For example "at times in the recent past more attention has been paid to the question of which level of government will make energy-related decisions than to the question of what policies those decisions ought to recommend" (p. 146).

The final chapter offers a comparative perspective in which he attempts to explain why Canada is less efficient in making social policy than the other federations. His explanations are grouped into four categories: historical patterns of behaviour, the constitutional balance of powers, governmental institutions and attitudes of political leaders. In each case he makes at least one astute observation. For example he suggests, perhaps too politely, that Canada suffers "from certain ambiguities in its constitution which were not addressed during the 1982 constitutional changes."

His conclusion that Canada has its own brand of federalism "and it is unlikely that anything is going to happen of a radical or drastic nature..." will offer food for thought to both the proponents and opponents of Meech Lake.

Gary Levy