



## Recent Publications

**The House of Commons at Work** by John A. Fraser, Les Éditions de la Chenelière, Montreal, 1993, 195 p.

Shortly before he retired in 1949 Arthur Beauchesne, longtime Clerk of the House of Commons, wrote a charming little civics primer entitled *Canada's Parliament*. With his departure the book disappeared and it remains virtually unknown to even the most dedicated students of Parliament. It would be unfortunate, although not altogether surprising, if the same thing happened to this work.

John Fraser will be remembered as a passionate parliamentarian with a special interest in environmental matters. He was the first Speaker of the House of Commons chosen by secret ballot in 1986. One of his passions was to make the work of the House of Commons better known and appreciated by the general public. Hence the decision to write this book, a project he describes as his contribution to the 125th anniversary of Confederation.

The book presents in clear and straightforward terms some widely available facts about our constitution and form of government including the role of the Senate, the House of Commons and Committees. Other chapters contain less well known facts about House services and administrative structures including a marvelous full page chart on the process used by the Human Resources Directorate to fill a staff vacancy. According to this chart there are no less than 17 steps

in the House's hiring process starting with receipt of a request from an authorized manager and ending with a letter of confirmation of appointment!

There is a useful glossary of parliamentary terms and a rather less useful Appendix of the House's sitting days. These are set out in the Standing Orders but frequently altered to in practice.

The failure to distinguish between how things are supposed to work on paper and how they really work in practice is one of the major shortcomings of the book. It is also a bit disappointing that a book on the House of Commons contains virtually no discussion of prospects for legislative reform. This could be justified on grounds that the book is designed to present a number of facts leaving it to the reader to form his or her own opinion about how our Parliament works. However, this ignores the greatest difficulty in educating Canadians about our parliamentary system — the tendency to confuse aspects of the American congressional system with the Westminster parliamentary one. Bombarded as we are by American popular culture every pedagogic tool about Canadian government should start by explaining the basic differences. A few introductory paragraphs along these lines would go a long way to improving the book as a teaching device.

The book concludes by briefly contrasting Canada's peaceful kingdom to the political chaos in much of the world. It notes the role Canada has played in assisting other countries struggling to establish de-

mocracy. Exchange programs and visits are educational for all sides. But the increasing respect for constitutionalism and rule of law we see emerging elsewhere has more to do with local forces than with anything the West in general or Canada in particular is able to offer. Our intentions are noble but there is little evidence to suggest that any new democracy has actually opted for Canadian style government or that Canada's Parliament has been a model as suggested on the concluding pages of this book.

Gary Levy

**Inside The Pink Palace - Ontario Legislature Internship Essays.** Graham White, editor, The Ontario Legislature Internship Programme/The Canadian Political Science Association, Toronto, 1993, 309 pages.

In the mid 1970s the "Trinkets" took the Ontario Legislature by storm. Not a musical group, the Trinkets were the first band of interns who pioneered a new partnership between provincial politicians and the academic community. They were given that *nom de guerre* by a veteran Queen's Park columnist who saw the interns within the context of a political culture which he probably felt was expanding excessively and losing the intimacy of the men's club of yesteryear. He la-