
Canada Hosts 40th CPA Conference

by Gary Levy

It is now some eighty-three years since parliamentarians from Great Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Newfoundland and South Africa decided to create an association to facilitate closer understanding between those engaged in parliamentary government in different parts of the Empire. The 1994 Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference in Canada will be the fortieth since the Association was re-organized in 1948. This article outlines the history of the CPA with particular emphasis on conferences held in Canada.

The idea of an association for legislators from Parliaments of the British Empire originated with Howard d'Egville, a young lawyer and Secretary of the Imperial Co-operation League in the early years of the twentieth century. A British Member of Parliament, L.S. Amery picked up the idea and proposed that the Coronation of King George V in 1911 was an appropriate occasion for a first meeting. A committee was set up to work out the details. Howard d'Egville wrote the constitution and it was approved on July 18, 1911 at a meeting of thirty parliamentarians from six countries.

The original constitution made no provision for membership from component states of federal countries but this was later changed as a result of pressure from Australia, Canada and South Africa. The goal of having a conference every two years proved impossible

following the outbreak of hostilities but the war did result in a special five week visit to Britain by selected members of Empire Parliaments. They were taken to munitions factories, shipbuilding yards and even to the French and British fronts in France. In London they were briefed by some of the leading political figures of the day including Bonar Law, and Lloyd George. Discussions were held in private and there is no record of the proceedings but as one of the Canadians Sir George Foster noted in his diary, "the meetings were excellent and full of inside information".

After the war the first full parliamentary conference outside the United Kingdom took place in Australia in 1926. A second conference was held in Canada two years later. In August 1928 some fifty-four delegates from nine branches arrived in Canada for a visit that lasted two



Delegates to the 1928 Conference on the steps of the Parliament Buildings. Canadian delegates included a future Prime Minister, R.B. Bennett, (front row, third from the left) and the Speaker of the House of Commons, Rodolphe Lemieux (first row, 6th from the left)

months and covered more than 15,000 miles. Formal meetings and speeches were devoted mainly to commercial topics such as tariffs, marketing, immigration and communication but informal meetings were held in Quebec City, Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, Victoria, Vancouver, Regina, Fredericton and Halifax. At every stop the visiting delegates were given an enthusiastic reception by host parliamentarians.

Interest created by the tour led to the formation of provincial branches in Ontario and British Columbia. Howard d'Egville tried to establish branches in the other provinces although he was careful to point out that they should approach the UK through the federal branch. It was not until 1932, when d'Egville again visited Canada, that two more provincial branches were formed — one in New Brunswick in April 1933 and one in Quebec a week later. A branch was also constituted in Nova Scotia in 1932 but it did not hold its first meeting until 1934.

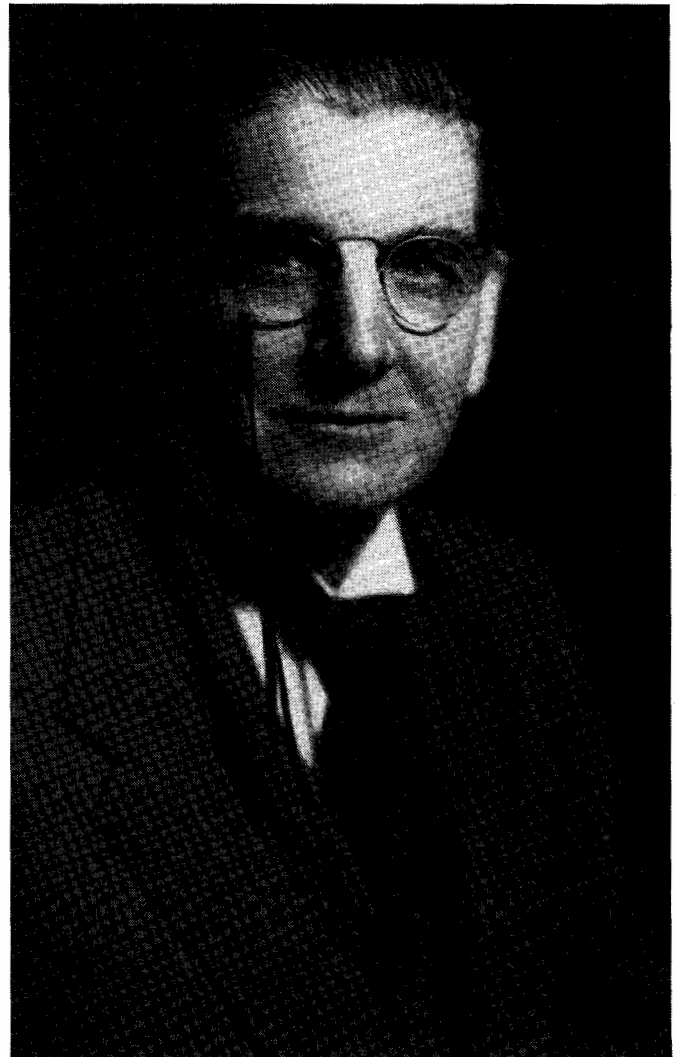
The prairie provinces were slower to join, particularly Alberta where Premier Aberhart was apparently opposed to any affiliation. In Saskatchewan a committee for the association had been formed in 1928 but on account of the 1929 election some of the most important members lost their seats and it was not until 1937 that the Saskatchewan branch was established. The Manitoba legislature formed a branch in 1938 and after the war Alberta and Prince Edward Island joined. Newfoundland, of course, had belonged to the Association since its foundation in 1911.

During the Second World War the Association once again became a vehicle for information about the Allied war effort. For example in 1941 the United Kingdom branch invited Canada to send an all-party delegation to see war conditions and to meet Canadian troops. The members attended a number of official functions including the Opening of Parliament but most of their time was spent at Canadian army bases, hospitals and cemeteries in various parts of England. They also toured London and noted the destruction caused by the bombing. Canadian MPs took back with them a picture of the grim determination of British people in the face of adversity and promised to co-operate with them to the full extent of their power.

Post War Reorganization

The post-war world was a very different place and the changes were not lost on those associated with the Empire Parliamentary Association, particularly the Canadians. Senator Arthur Roebuck was instrumental in arguing for a new administrative arrangement whereby the Association would have an international executive supported by an independent secretariat. He also called

for a change in name for the Association to recognize that the British Empire had been replaced by a group of nations freely associated in a Commonwealth. Both these proposals were accepted and Senator Roebuck was named Chairman of a committee charged with amending the constitution.



Senator Arthur Roebuck one of the driving forces behind the re-organization of CPA in 1946 and the conference in Canada in 1952 (National Archives of Canada - PA 47656)

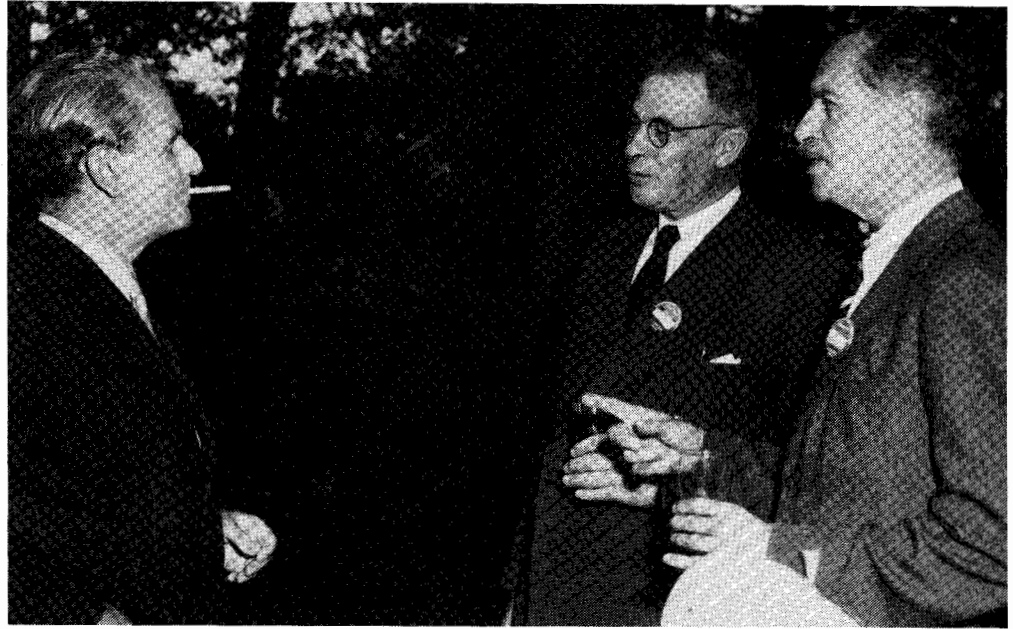
The Third CPA Conference (Ottawa, 1952)

The countries represented included many colonies in Africa (such as Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia, and the Gold Coast) that have since become independent and changed their names. Two non Commonwealth countries were also represented, the United States and Ireland.

The Conference took place in the Senate and was opened by Harold Holt, Chairman of the CPA and a Minister in the Australian Government. Delegates were welcomed by Elie Beaugard and Ross MacDonald, Speakers of the Senate and House of Commons. The Secretary of State for External Affairs, Lester Pearson also spoke.

As it was still the practice of the Association to hold meetings *in camera* Speaker MacDonald concluded the opening with what he called a rather unpleasant duty. He asked the general public and the press to leave.

Only three topics were on the Agenda and one of these, International Affairs and Defence, generated by far the most interest. The discussion was opened by the Canadian minister of Defence, Brooke Claxton. He



Informal discussions and tours have always been an important part of CPA activities
(Globe and Mail Photo)

focused on problems relating to the arms race, the War in Korea and the need for solidarity among non Communist countries. Other delegates agreed with him although some called for more United Nations control over the American military action in Korea.

Most provinces took the opportunity to send at least one delegate to the conference. The representative from Quebec was Daniel Johnson who later became Prime Minister of that province.



Delegates to the 1952 Conference in Ottawa

The Twelfth Conference (Ottawa, 1966)

The 1966 the conference attracted one hundred and thirty eight delegates from sixty-five branches. It was held in the House of Commons and was presided over by CPA Chairman Senator John Connolly who was also Minister without Portfolio and Leader of the Government in the Senate. The federal delegation was led by another Minister, John Turner. One of the provincial representatives was Gil Molgat of Manitoba presently Deputy Government Leader in the Senate. The Conference was opened by Governor General Georges Vanier. Lester Pearson once again spoke at the opening ceremonies this time in his capacity as Prime Minister. The United States was represented this time by two prominent Senators Edmund Muskie and William Fulbright who clashed over American policy in Vietnam. Sessions were open to the public and the press with a verbatim Hansard published daily during the conference. A new format for the conference was introduced with the proceedings split between plenary sessions and committee meetings. One of the plenaries was devoted to the topic of relations between the CPA and the Commonwealth Secretariat. The guest speaker was Arnold Smith, a Canadian diplomat and head of the Commonwealth Secretariat. Other plenary sessions were on "The Commonwealth and the World" and "Commonwealth Self-Help, Trade and Aid". The two committee sessions dealt with "Parliamentary Government in the Commonwealth" and "Education and Technical Assistance".



Governor General Georges Vanier (centre) with Speaker of the House of Commons Lucien Lamoureux (left) and John Turner.

The official opening of the 1966 conference



The Twenty-Third Conference (Ottawa, 1977)

The official opening of the 1977 Conference took place in the Senate Chamber but because of the large number of delegates the balance of the proceedings were held in the Government Conference Centre. The Speaker of the House of Commons, James Jerome, invited the Governor General to declare the conference open. This was followed by a speech of welcome by Prime Minister Trudeau who noted the role of elected members in maintaining an awareness and concern for the human condition in their respective countries.

A total of 179 delegates from 89 branches attended the conference, including the Yukon and Northwest Territories which in 1966 had been limited to observer status. Also absent from the list of observers was the United States. The Canadian delegation was led by Maurice Foster. No cabinet Ministers were



Speaker James Jerome and Maurice Foster,
leader of the Canadian delegation (Photo by Martine Bresson)



Speaker of the Senate, Renaude Lapointe, the co-host of the
1977 Conference (Photo by Martine Bresson)

included but two parliamentary secretaries and two former Speakers were among the 14 man delegation. Several Speakers and Ministers were among the provincial delegates including Gerald Ottenheimer of Newfoundland who is now Deputy Speaker of the Senate.

Once again the conference was divided between plenary session and panels but this time the focus was clearly on the kind of less formal exchanges that can take place in panel discussions. Among the panel topics were: Commodity Prices and Relations Between Industrialized and Primary Producing Countries; Racial Conflicts within the Commonwealth; Challenges to Parliament by External Groups; Assistance to Developing Countries; Social Effects of Continuing Unemployment; Parliament's Role in the Control of Government Expenditure; The Law of the Sea; The Preservation of the Environment and Wildlife; The Relevance of Westminster-type Parliamentary Systems in Developing Countries.

The plenary sessions included: The Commonwealth and World Security; The Problems of Rhodesia, Namibia and South Africa; The Preservation of Human Rights; and The World Energy Crisis.

The Thirty-First Conference (Saskatchewan, 1985)

The Province of Saskatchewan became the first non National legislature to host a CPA conference in 1985. This conference attracted 154 elected members of Commonwealth parliaments representing some 143 jurisdictions. The conference began in Regina with meetings of the Executive Committee and Representatives of Small Countries on October 1-2. The remaining delegates and observers arrived in Regina by October 2 and the conference was officially opened in the legislative chamber by Grant Devine, Premier of Saskatchewan. The city of Regina and the Province of Saskatchewan hosted gala dinners in honour of the conference. Following the opening Speaker Herb Swan invited delegates to a reception on his farm.

Participants were divided into four groups which toured the province. The conference then re-grouped in Saskatoon for working sessions which were held in the convention facilities of the Ramada Renaissance Hotel. There were five plenary sessions and six panel sessions. The plenary sessions dealt with: The United Nations: How Can it be Strengthened to Enable it to Preserve Peace and Promote Disarmament; Trade and Development Assistance: What Special Obligation Does Membership of the Commonwealth Imply?; Electoral Law and Practice; The Debt Crisis and International Currency Fluctuations: What Can be Done to Stabilize the Global Economy; The Role of the Member of Parliament — Legislator or Social Worker; and "International Year of Youth: What can Tomorrow's Commonwealth Offer Today's Youth?"

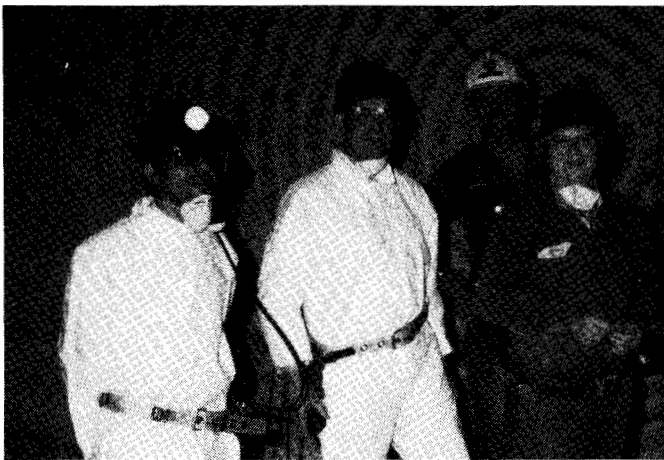
Panel sessions included: The Gleneagles Agreement on Sporting Contacts with South Africa; Agricultural



The official opening

(Saskatchewan Photographic Services)

Prices, Production and Distribution: What Must be Done to Relieve and Prevent Famine; "Educational Mobility in the Commonwealth: What Can be Done to Enhance Education Opportunities Throughout the Commonwealth; What Can the Commonwealth do to Curb Drug Abuse; The Decade for Women: Past Achievements and Future Challenges for Women in Public Life; "The Image of the Parliamentarian: What can be Done to Improve the Standing of the Politician in the Eyes of the Public?"



Wheat and potash are two of Saskatchewan's main exports and during the conference delegates had an opportunity to visit a mine and a grain farm

(Saskatchewan Photographic Services)

The 40th Conference (Banff, 1994)

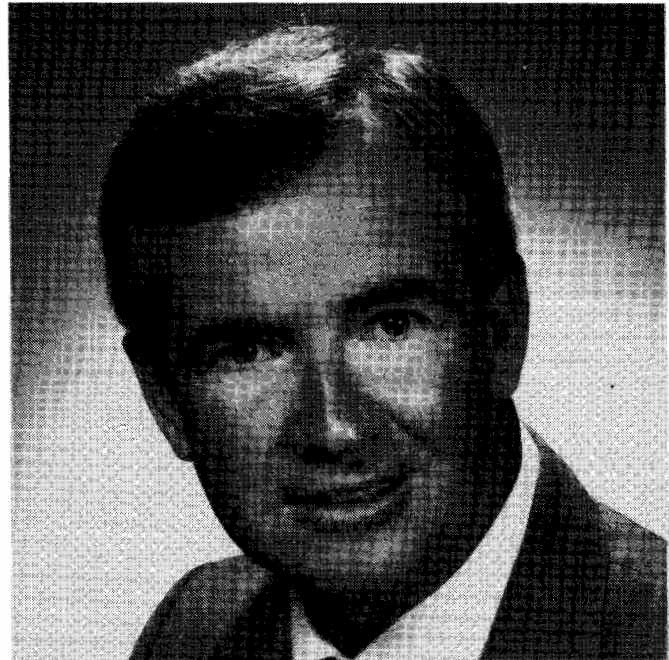
The 1994 Conference carries on the Canadian tradition of hosting CPA approximately once a decade. Like the 1952, 1966 and 1977 conferences this one is officially hosted by the federal branch, however financially and in every other way it is really a collective undertaking of all legislatures in the Canadian Region of CPA. Because the Conference is being held in Alberta the Speaker and Legislature of that province have played a key role in the organization. Legislative staff from many provinces have been loaned to the Secretariat to help.

The official opening of the Conference takes place on Saturday October 8, 1994. The Governor General will welcome the five hundred or more delegates, observers, and others expected to attend. The Commonwealth Secretary General has also been invited to speak on opening day and there will be remarks by the Speaker of the House of Commons and other officials. The General Assembly of the Association will meet on the morning of October 9. This will be followed by some Alberta hospitality including a tour of Calgary and a special rodeo performance.

The business sessions begin on Monday October 10. This year there will be two plenary sessions one at the start and one at the end of the conference. The topic will be Parliament and People and the focus will be on ways to make democratic institutions more representative, responsible and relevant.

In addition there will be 6 panel sessions during the week. These include:

- Panel A: What Contribution Can Parliamentarians Make to the Development of the United Nations, the Commonwealth and Regional Organizations and the Prevention and Resolution of International Disputes?
- Panel B: What Practical Steps Can be Taken to Enhance Relations Between Commonwealth Countries with Regard to Trade, Debt Repayment and Deficit Reduction Problems and Resist the Tendency Towards a Widening of the Inequality Between Developed and Developing Countries, and How Can Parliamentarians Assist These Efforts?



The head of the CPA Secretariat, Arthur Donahoe, former Speaker of the Nova Scotia Legislative Assembly.

- Panel C: How Can Commonwealth Parliaments Develop Practical and Innovative Processes to Achieve Full Equality for Women?
- Panel D: How Can Parliamentarians Contribute to the Understanding of Environmental Protection Problems and Their Implications for Development and the Need for Effective Legislation to Deal with Them?
- Panel E: How Can Parliamentarians Help in Achieving a Better Understanding of the Worldwide Problems of Unemployment, Drug Abuse and AIDS and Encourage the Acceptance of Ideas for Combating Them?
- Panel F: What Steps Can be Taken to Enhance the Public Perception of Parliaments and the Legislative Process?