



## *Parliamentary Book Shelf*

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**David C. Docherty, *Legislatures (The Canadian Democratic Audit Series)*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005.**

**L**egislatures offers an audit of the democratic nature of Canada's legislative bodies. As part of the Canadian Democratic Audit Series, the book moves beyond the study of federal parliament and provides, where available, information on the current state of provincial legislatures. Although Docherty does attempt to show changes over time where data is available, the book is not meant to be a history lesson on how legislatures have developed. This is because the purpose of the audit is to provide a snapshot of the current democratic state rather than focusing on the past.

This book has a number of positive aspects. The first of these is that the audit provides current and revised information on how Canada's legislatures work. The book presents an update on the institutional rules, both formal and informal, that are presently utilised in legislatures. These rules affect the behaviour of prime ministers, cabinets and backbenchers, as well as the process for debating and enacting legislation. Furthermore, the broad themes addressed in analysing the function of Canadian legislatures are representation, scrutiny and producing legislation. Things like party discipline, the selection of legislative roles, and committee performance have been analysed according to these themes, and this was a valuable update from

previous volumes of work in this field.

The second advantage of this audit relates to its focus in analysing not only the function of legislatures, but also the impact that governing institutions have on citizens. This is in specific relation to the audit's criteria of examining democracy in terms of participation, inclusiveness and responsiveness. The implication of this on the study of governing institutions is that we should not solely analyse the work conducted inside the walls of legislative buildings, but we should also acknowledge the work that is done away from these institutions as well. We often think of our legislatures as distant, and we sometimes fail to realise that politicians have duties to perform in electoral districts across the country when they do not sit in the legislature. This may not be a novel concept, but it is sometimes overlooked in legislative studies. However, it is appropriately considered in Docherty's work.

Another particularly positive aspect of this book rests in the accessible manner in which it is written. It was not cluttered with technical jargon that is normally saved for experts. In fact, a wide range of readers will find this audit on Canada's legislatures understandable. At the same time, the book avoids being too general in a way that would render it useless to the very experts that are seeking an up-to-date book on legislative institutions. The book strikes the appropriate balance between the two.

Throughout the book, Docherty also attempts to balance competing views on where legislatures are and where they should go. For example, in his chapter on who represents us, Docherty writes about the desire of having a legislature that mirrors the demographic makeup of society. However, he also points out that this desirability of demographic parity in our legislatures does not mean that we should have or expect equal demographic distribution. This is particularly due to an electoral system that makes it difficult to ensure a legislature that demographically mirrors society. Therefore, this audit does what audits are supposed to do, which is analysing these concepts objectively.

Some of the more insightful sections in *Legislatures* relates to the author's analyses of legislative web sites and unpublished survey work. This was coupled with an extensive literature review of legislatures in Canada and around the world. There are not many people writing about legislatures in Canada. Docherty appears to be one of the few, and one can easily tell that his expertise is established by the frequency at which he cites his own previous studies. The author also collected some data from other countries to give a sense of where Canada stands in comparison to other Westminster countries and the United States. One example of this is the comparison of legislators' staffing and office resources. It was interesting to see how the allocation of budgets for legislators is uneven across jurisdictions. The lack of standard formula for levelling such

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disparities across jurisdictions, and there are more examples of them, was a noticeable trend in the audit.

If there was a contentious section of the book, it would be found in its concluding chapter which recommends possible reforms. However, as Docherty suggests, the recommendations he makes are hardly revolutionary. Some of these include making legislatures more relevant, increasing the size of legislatures, providing more resources to riding offices, changing rules to reduce the influence of political parties, and better utilising parliamentary committees. Yet, in these recommendations, one may be able to sense some conflicting messages.

Take the recommendation of making legislatures more relevant as an example. The complaint is that cabinet ministers have a tendency to make major policy announcements outside of the legislature. Cabinet ministers appear in these staged photo shoots across their respective jurisdictions to announce major new funding announcements and programs. Docherty believes that such an exercise is anti-parliamentary because it sidesteps scrutiny. According to him, cabinet ministers should be making most of these announcements in the legislature, especially if legislatures are to become more relevant. However, it has to be said that one of the reasons these announcements have taken place outside legislatures is to bring the government to the people. These announcements are trying to make the capital seem less distant, and it is a way of letting people know what their government is doing.

Beside this point, every announcement that is made outside the legislature requires legislation to be introduced inside if it is to become law. Contrary to Docherty's view, this appears to maintain a leg-

islature's relevance. Just because new funding and programs are announced outside the legislature, it does not mean that members fail to debate and scrutinize the issues in their respective chamber. They still get this opportunity along with voting for or against a bill. It is true that procedures in the House can limit debate. However, the other recommendations Docherty suggests appear to be sufficient enough to reduce the frequency of these.

This recommendation of relevance seems to also be at odds with other recommendations. Part of the rationale for increasing the size of legislatures, for example, is to create smaller constituencies that will enable closer contact with legislators. Similarly, increasing the resources given to legislators will also allow the constituency office to better serve citizens in their electoral districts. All of these seem geared toward increasing the interaction between the politician and the citizen.

Despite these contentious points, readers should not be dissuaded from reading this book. There is a lot of useful and worthy information written in its pages, and most of the recommendations, particularly those involving party discipline and updating institutional rules in legislatures, will go a long way in improving the democratic aspects of Canada's governing institutions.

Ultimately, what must be said about David Docherty's audit in Legislatures is that we finally have a modern, comprehensive update on Canadian legislatures that has been missing since C.E.S. Franks' 1987 contribution in this area. For nearly 20 years, students of Canadian legislatures have only had that source to utilise, and Docherty's update will certainly be a must read for anybody remotely interested in

Canada's legislative institutions from this point forward.

**Rob Leone**

Ph.D. Candidate

Department of Political Science  
McMaster University

**Busboy: From Kitchen to Cabinet**  
by Don Boudria, Optimum Publishing International Inc., Montreal, Maxville, Ottawa, 2005.

For more than twenty years Don Boudria was an observer and participant in most of the political and parliamentary events of the day. By his own admission this book will likely be a disappointment to those seeking inside gossip. It also does not tell us very much about how public policy is made in Ottawa. What we do learn is about Don Boudria's life and it is an extraordinary story.

No single path is taken by the 308 men and women chosen to represent their fellow Canadians in the House of Commons. But the usual route begins in a well to do or at least a middle class family with stops at university, perhaps law school or a career in business or one of the professions. Not so for Mr. Boudria.

He came from a family of very modest means whose situation was made even more difficult when his father was killed in a car accident when Don was five years old. He dropped out of high school, joined a rock band, and eventually got a job as a busboy in the Parliamentary Restaurant.

This book traces his life from that time to his career as municipal councilor in a rural area outside of Ottawa, to a seat in the Ontario Legislature, to the House of Commons

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and eventually a seat in the Cabinet of Jean Chrétien's Government.

A great deal of this book is devoted to his family, extended family and to the larger franco-Ontario community which he served in so many capacities and which was so supportive of him. Unlike many political memoirs he mentions and acknowledges virtually every staffer who ever worked for him in Ottawa or in the constituency office. Indeed when he defeated the Conservative incumbent to win a seat at Queen's Park one of his first acts was to re-hire the incumbent's constituency assistant. His attention to those who helped him over the years explains why he enjoyed such support and rolled up so many convincing electoral victories even if people did not agree with his position on every issue.

The years at Queen's Park are treated briefly but he does mention a few important lessons that he learned, particularly about the need to represent local interests. In 1984 Don Boudria left Queen's Park to run federally and was one of only 40 Liberals elected in the Mulroney landslide. Along with Sheila Capps and John Nunziata he formed the so-called Rat Pack, a group of young Liberal members who took the lead in attacking the Conservatives and were not shy about using whatever means they could to embarrass the government.

Most of the book deals with his years in the House of Commons. In opposition he slowly mastered the various elements that lead to a successful career including a knowledge of parliamentary procedure. He discusses the major issues of the day including the Free Trade Debate, the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords, the disappointing tenure of John Turner as Leader of the Party and the selection of Jean Chrétien as Leader in 1991. These

are largely factual accounts of information that is in the public domain with the occasional personal comment on a rival or a colleague.

In September 1989, Mr. Boudria decided to address his academic shortcomings and enrolled as a correspondence student at Waterloo University. He took the entire BA programme this way over the next decade. It was all done anonymously so as not to obtain any special consideration and frequently involved writing essays and tests in hotels around the world or rising at 4:00 am to study before a day's work as a cabinet minister.

Aside from old fashion hard work there is another anecdote that reveals the secret of Don Boudria's success. After supporting Jean Chrétien's leadership campaign he was disappointed at being replaced as Deputy Opposition Whip and given the new position of deputy Opposition House Leader. After brooding a few days about the loss of income he decided not to consider it a demotion and issued a press release thanking the leader for the promotion. One of his colleagues said "Boudria this is not a promotion and we both know it." He replied: "It is now" and by the end of the year everyone else was also considering it a promotion.

Generally speaking Don Boudria has something good to say about everyone. He discusses briefly his tenure as Minister of Public Works where he replaced Alphonso Gagliano at the time when revelations were coming forth about the sponsorship programme. We learn little about the programme or the department but he does make the point that Mr. Gagliano is "a kind decent man and a hard working, highly competent public servant."

It is clear that Mr. Boudria enjoyed immensely his first cabinet position as Minister for la

Francophonie. It allowed him to travel extensively and the issues were not generally controversial. His reward, after the 1997 election was the position as House Leader, a much more demanding job involving constant negotiations with the other four parties.

Once again we do not learn much that is not on the public record but there are some interesting tidbits such as the fact that potential cabinet appointees like himself had to be interviewed by Mitchell Sharp who was the special dollar-a-year ethics advisor to the Prime Minister.

The election of Paul Martin spelled the end of Don Boudria's career in cabinet. His offer to serve Mr. Martin was made sincerely and in person. It was not accepted and this was a point of some disappointment although he is not in any way critical of Mr. Martin.

The final section of the book deals with his time as Chairman of the House of Commons Committee on Procedure which was responsible, among other things, for the study of electoral reform including proportional representation. He discusses the Committee's trip to Australia and New Zealand to study Electoral Reform but reveals very little about the substance of the debate.

While the absence of policy discussion is a bit frustrating it was clearly not the purpose of this book and as Mr. Boudria is still fairly young one expects there may be another career and perhaps another book that covers some of his thoughts on public policy.

Gary Levy