



# Parliamentary Book Shelf

***House of Commons Procedure and Practice, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*, by Audrey O'Brien and Marc Bosc, House of Commons, Ottawa and Éditions Yvon Blais, Montreal.**

It is nearly ten years since publication of the first edition of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* by the former Clerk of the House of Commons, Robert Marleau and the Deputy Clerk, Camille Montpetit. And what a decade it has been.

We have witnessed three minority parliaments, governments both Liberal and Conservative playing fast and loose with the confidence convention, committees embarking on investigations that push the bounds of parliamentary privilege to its very limit. There has been fallout from the *Accountability Act*, the fixed date election legislation and some rather novel interpretations of prorogation all of which have caused considerable head scratching among parliamentary experts, Speakers and sometimes the courts. Journalists and ordinary citizens are starting to suggest Canada may soon find itself with one of the most dysfunctional parliamentary systems among Westminster-type Parliaments.

This book is not intended to highlight problems, or to pose solutions, to our parliamentary

conundrums. But it does provide the basic facts that can be used by those who think we have serious problems as well as those who adhere to the "Candide" school of Canadian government – that whatever happens it is all for the best in this the best of all possible parliamentary democracies.

The new volume is nearly a third longer, 1471 pages compared to about 1100 in the previous edition. There are 6,952 footnotes in the new edition. More than 100 individuals worked on the project over a three year period but authorship belongs to the Clerk of the House of Commons, Audrey O'Brien and the Deputy Clerk Marc Bosc. The book will help them provide advice to the members and, hopefully, will encourage members to become more familiar with the operation of their parliamentary institutions.

The new version takes into account many Speakers rulings made during the last decade as well as changes to the Standing Orders such as those relating to the report stage of bills, private members business and the estimates process. The fifteen Appendices in the first volume, always one of the most interesting parts of the book, have been updated and one new appendix was added – a list of

persons holding the office of Law Clerk since 1867. A short but useful bibliography of primary and secondary sources, organized by chapter, has been added in the second edition. This edition is available in its entirety on the parliamentary website.

While all 24 Chapters have been revised, improved and updated, two chapters in particular appear to have significant changes. Chapter 3 on privileges and immunities deals with some important court decisions during the last decade. Chapter 20 on committees includes many references to the 39<sup>th</sup> Parliament where members often found themselves in uncharted territory as half a dozen committees broke down at one time or another over different procedural issues.

In the final analysis this is a reference book for those involved in the parliamentary process not a text book for students or others would like to see the institution reformed in one way or another. However if and when the House is reformed it will be done by those on the inside and a thorough understanding of the information in this book is a necessary prerequisite for any potential reformer.

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