

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS AND DOCUMENTS

### COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMEN- TARY ASSOCIATION. SIXTH CANADIAN REGIONAL PARLIA- MENTARY SEMINAR, Ottawa, November 2-6, 1980, 137 pp.

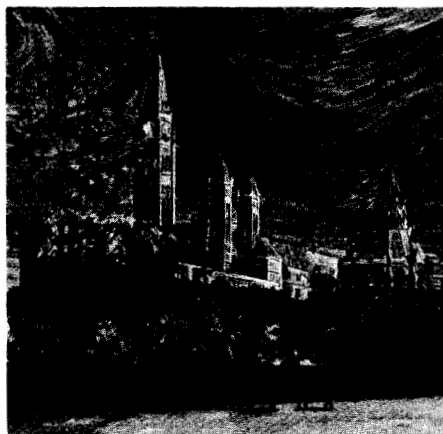
For the past half-dozen years, the Canadian Regional Parliamentary Seminar has provided a forum for legislators to compare and evaluate their institutional and procedural differences. It is the kind of service which goes largely unnoticed by the general public, and may not always be appreciated by the majority of (non-participating) politicians who are the ultimate beneficiaries of the Seminar's discussions.

The Agenda for the 1980 Seminar covered several areas familiar to those concerned with the overall issue of making the elected representative as efficient as possible in his job: "Conceptions of a Parliamentarian's Role," "The Parliamentarian and his Riding," "The Parliamentarian and the Media" and so on.

Transcripts of verbal proceedings are not the most engrossing of reading matter, nor are they the easiest material to evaluate. Certainly, the cold print does little to convey the atmosphere of the presentations and debates and, of course, nothing of the more informal, and perhaps more important lunchtime and coffee-break conversations is included in the formal record of the Seminar.

However, it is evident that at times the contentiousness of several subject

areas did manage to engage the feelings of the Seminar's participants to a degree which is evident in the transcript. This was particularly so in the session devoted to The Parliamentarian and the Media. Surprisingly, given the nature of the Seminar, and the aims of these sessions, rather more heat than light was generated by the exchanges between the questioners and the panel of journalists. It was sadly evident that the flippancy of



the newsmen — with the notable exception of W.A. Wilson — was matched by the petulance of several questioners. The media (and why were there no broadcast journalists on the panel?) have grave faults in their approach to the coverage of politics and politicians, but improvement in their performance is not effected by the tiresome grumbling of the "we wuz misquoted" variety indulged in by too many politicians.

With regard to those old staples of the Parliamentary Seminar, "Conceptions of a Parliamentarian's Role," "The Parliamentarian as Legislator," and "What Can Be Done to Improve the Parliamentarian's Effectiveness?" those in charge of unzipping the legislatures' pocket books should long ago have taken the loud and frequent hints emanating from the Parliamentary Seminar, as well as from individual legislators, journalists and political scientists throughout Canada. The effort involved in representing the people and legislating for them constitutes a full-time job: it may even be a profession. Legislatures should at least provide sufficient scope and institutional support facilities to enable politicians to function as efficiently in their workplace as hockey players and chiropractors do in theirs. There have been vast improvements in most Canadian legislatures in the past two decades, but the process could go much further — and not only in the area of providing funds for research and travel by MPs and MLAs. Legislatures, especially the Parliament of Canada, should be preparing the people they serve for the undoubted changes our society will face in the next few years, and the money required to professionalize the legislators' workplaces — given the present size of federal and provincial budgets — would be piddling compared to the amounts spent on even minor government programmes, and much easier to justify before the public than increases in the salaries of MPs and MLAs.

An area in which legislators should be given much more scope is that of committee work. Several participants in the Sixth Seminar made the point that relaxation of party discipline in committee would be a valuable and even creative development. Indeed, it already occurs in several legislatures and participants reported no serious injury to the vital principle of party discipline. Giving committees their head in formulating and investigating public policy would be a vital step in bringing legislatures into line with the demands on government in the closing years of this complex century.

An important point was raised by Mr John Butt of the Newfoundland House of Assembly, and by the journalist Mr W.A. Wilson: the legislator's role is changing in ways largely beyond his control, because of a transformation in the interests and priorities of people in a rapidly-evolving society. As Wilson pointed out, many of today's major public concerns — the environment, the changing position of women, consumerism — developed outside the political process, but very much in the public eye. He might have pointed out, however, that legislatures have had their role in *responding* to these concerns. Legislatures with adequate facilities, and parties prepared to let up on party discipline in certain circumstances might even have a role to play in anticipating what the media can merely chronicle. Wilson's remarks supported those of John Butt: in the complex process by which public concerns are reflected in, or turned into government policy, legislatures today have many more competitors for attention than in previous years. As Butt says "As an input channel... Parliament today is in competition with many other institutions, such as interest groups and parties, the media, and the bureaucracy. Indeed, I certainly feel that these people have as much input into Cabinet-made decisions as private members..." (p. 35)

The contributions to the Seminar of two former party leaders, Mr T.C. Douglas and Mr Robert Stanfield, are a rueful reminder of how much Parliament is diminished by their retirement.

It is not just by legislative performance or electoral victories that politicians are remembered. The fundamental decency of these two men is evident in their contributions to the Seminar; their humanity should stand as a perpetual rebuke to those who would prefer to elevate partisanship above principle or the public good.

Finally, while the Canadian Regional Parliamentary Seminar needs no strained justification for its existence — its value as a forum for informed debate is self-evident — the form in which this latest Seminar is presented to the interested reader is less easy to justify. When verbal proceedings are printed, they become part of a permanent and usually public record. There is no excuse for the disgracefully sloppy standard of proofreading evident in this transcript: even the words of *O Canada* manage to suffer from copy-editing barbarism (p. 19). The readership of this volume may not be large, but an organization such as the Canadian Parliamentary Association should treat those readers with somewhat more respect. The only redeeming factor in the proofreading is that those dozens of errors are sprinkled with admirable impartiality between both official languages.

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**IMPROVING ACCOUNTABILITY:  
CANADIAN PUBLIC ACCOUNTS  
COMMITTEES AND LEGISLATIVE  
AUDITORS** by John J. Kelly and  
Hugh R. Hanson, *Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation, 1981, 132 p.*

This is unquestionably one of the most important books on Canadian legislative institutions to appear in some time. The first research report of the non-profit Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation, this study examines in depth one of the key phases of the

'accountability loop' and proposes sixty-nine recommendations to improve the work of legislative Auditors and of PACs.

Authors John Kelly, an Assistant Auditor General of Canada, and Hugh Hanson, a consultant of wide government experience, set out to provide a work which was practical rather than theoretical. By and large they succeeded in producing a report which serves, in their phrase, as "an achievable first step" in rendering Auditors and Public Accounts Committees effective watchdogs of government spending.

The authors reviewed in depth, via both documentary analysis and personal interviews, the workings of all provincial and federal legislative auditors and of PACs in all jurisdictions save the Northwest Territories, which had no PAC, and Quebec, where the relevant committee had not met in more than five years to review the Auditor's report or the Public Accounts. (Predictably, this very fact was highlighted in press accounts of the report.) The resulting wealth of comparative data is well summarized and cogently analysed with a view to recommending the best approach to a wide range of concerns such as size of PACs, provision of research for PACs and the approval of Auditors' budgets.

All of the recommendations suggested in this report had been implemented in some Canadian jurisdiction and thus are of proven practicality and benefit. Kelly and Hanson are none the less sensitive that no one model of a PAC and an Auditor can meet the needs and circumstances of all Canadian jurisdictions and accordingly leave certain questions (substitution of membership for one) to be resolved within the traditions and particularities of individual legislatures.

Yet the report pulls no punches on what are seen as crucial points. The principal conclusion of the study is that "a number of legislatures in Canada have failed to provide themselves with all the means necessary to hold a government fully to account for its handling of public moneys" (p. 103). Nor does it avoid specific recommendations clearly