

the success of the Liberal and NDP attacks on their first budget and the reversal of the Tories on their planned deindexing of old-age pensions, the Mulroney Government might come to the conclusion that Parliament is already strong enough. A government or opposition perception of the value of Parliament depends on which side of the green aisle they sit.

The real crux of parliamentary reform is how to convince the government of the day to give up some of its own powers. There are likely few examples in the history of government of a party in power voluntarily relinquishing its grasp on government. To increase the power of the average MP in policy-making and of Parliament in total is to adopt reforms which will likely reduce, in relative terms, the powers of the Prime Minister and cabinet. It seems unlikely

that the trends of recent decades toward "presidentializing" Canadian parliamentary practice can be reversed by good intentions and more active backbenchers.

The *Report* stresses attitudinal changes on the part of the government, opposition, and individual MPs in relation to two key areas: confidence motions and party discipline. Attitudinal change is necessary, but not likely sufficient, in this respect. The proposals do not explain, for example, how we are to get out of the practice of rigid party discipline in the first place. Which develops first: a relaxation of party discipline or attitudinal change? Good intentions do not necessarily make either good politics or adequate reforms.

As long as party discipline remains a government decision, effective

parliamentary reform will be illusory. For example, even under present practices, a free vote does not automatically mean that party discipline is not implicitly involved. Thus, the suggestion that the Speaker of the House of Commons should be chosen by a secret ballot (*Report*, p. 100) may not be effective in taking the real power of choice away from the Prime Minister and returning it to the House. After reading the report one is left in agreement with a current assessment of parliamentary reform in Britain. "The history of parliamentary reform is littered with good intentions left unfulfilled...".

Ron Landes

Department of Political Science
Saint Mary's University
Halifax

James Jerome was Speaker of the House of Commons from 1974 to 1980. The following excerpt is from his forthcoming book, *Mr. Speaker* to be published by McClelland and Stewart in October 1985.

"TAKING THE PLUNGE"

Election day was July 8, 1974, and Prime Minister Trudeau was returned to a majority position of 141 seats. During the August 1 civic holiday, I came home on Saturday afternoon to learn of an urgent call from The Hon. Mitchell Sharp in Ottawa. When the Secretary of State for External Affairs is contacting Members of Parliament in August, one thinks in terms of an invitation to dinner in honour of a visiting Head of State. But when I returned the call, his opening words were: "Make sure you're sitting down, because I have to first tell you what the Prime Minister has asked me to take on before you will understand this call." We shared some banter about his choice as Government House Leader, a responsibility for which he felt entirely unprepared, emotionally or technically — but which he discharged with his customary excellence through 1974 and 1975. In that capacity, of course, the purpose of his call was less of a surprise: it was a preliminary exploration of my reaction to a possible nomination as Speaker.

We gathered everyone immediately

— family, friends, key members of our election team — and we talked it over well into the night. Finally, my wife Barry, as she had done so many times before, injected some common sense into the frenetic political merry-go-round: "This is not a decision that can be made in comparison with something else. It is an absolutely singular responsibility, not something anyone outside the House of Commons fully understands. Jim, you have to decide in a positive way if it's something you want to do." Indeed, our focus had been completely on the negative side. We were worried that our voters would see it as a muzzle, tying my hands behind my back — and maybe it would be so. Personally, it would mean abandonment forever of ambition for upward mobility in politics, which went directly against every instinct that got me into politics in the first place. At the same time, however, I had been greatly impressed with the way The Hon. Lucien Lamoureux had discharged his responsibilities as Speaker, and with the respect all Members had for him and for the

Chair. I was always more at ease when partisan hostility gave way to intelligent compromise, and I felt sure I would be comfortable protecting and balancing the rights of all Members in that kind of process. . . . More and more, I became fascinated with the idea, excited by the challenge. When the last guest left, I think we knew that if the Prime Minister could ease our concerns, I would do it!

The next day, I called Mitchell, and later the call came through from the Prime Minister: When he made the offer, I had the impression he expected me to accept over the phone. Once assured that I was not asking for a meeting just to say no, he quickly agreed to meet for lunch at 24 Sussex after a Cabinet meeting arranged for Tuesday morning. If you have never been in Ottawa in August, you don't know what heat and humidity really mean. Of course, I was in shirt, tie, and suit and, of course, the Prime Minister emerged from Cabinet in T-shirt and sandals. As he jumped behind the wheel of his treasured convertible Mercedes, my jacket and

tie were in the back seat before we were in gear. We stopped at Parliament's Wellington exit, and he cursed at not being able to make a left turn! Before I even had time to smile, the two secret service cars had traffic stopped in both directions; not a photographer in sight!

During lunch, the Prime Minister's answers were direct and thorough. In terms of individual constituents, he confirmed that the Speaker has extra staff to ensure the best possible service. In terms of the constituency as a whole, obviously no Member, Minister or otherwise, sees much to be gained by antagonizing the one who presides over every meeting of the House. But more than that, it was his view that no Member should be embarrassed in front of his constituents by virtue of his service as Speaker, so Cabinet should always meet the Speaker's reasonable requests. Obviously, the emphasis had to be on "reasonable," but he backed it with his personal commitment to intervene if I felt that Sudbury's needs were not being fairly met by any of his Ministers. In terms of my own future, he did not disagree that this probably was a step that would lead me out of political life — but neither did he think that any Prime Minister should be expected to write a blank cheque so that even the most disgraceful performance in office might call for some reward negotiated in advance. On the other hand, he had responded fully to the requests of my predecessor who had been appointed to the Diplomatic Corps in Brussels only weeks earlier: Moreover, and perhaps more significantly, he was then in the process of considering a judicial appointment in Nova Scotia for The Hon. Robert McCleave, a Conservative Member who had served for two years as Deputy Speaker. How much more so then, should he be expected to be forthcoming in respect to an appointment for a retiring Speaker.

Fair enough: my objections were fully answered. I am sure he was surprised when I asked for time to think about it. His reasons were plausible: he was in the process of selecting his Cabinet for the new Parliament and, as a matter of propriety, felt that the selection of his candidate for Speaker should be announced first. Furthermore, by doing it that way, he avoided any impression that his candidate for Speaker had been chosen only among those he had rejected as Cabinet Ministers. We agreed to meet again at 4 o'clock, at which time I thought I could probably give him a final answer. One more call home and that was it.

At 4 o'clock, when I went back to tell the Prime Minister of my decision, he began to gather the people who would normally be involved in handling the matter from then on. But about half his staff had taken off the only days likely to be available to them for a bit of summer vacation. In particular, Joyce Fairbairn, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister in matters relating to Parliament, was away on holiday. The result was that a press officer came in, and we simply ran over whether the announcement could be released right away. Of course, as far as I was concerned it was fine. In fact, I had one eye on the clock because the small airline I had come down on during the holiday weekend had a flight going back in about an hour's time, and I was anxious to be in Sudbury as soon after the announcement as possible. I left almost immediately, ran to my office to tell my staff the news, and then dashed to the airport. On the plane, I was a jumble of emotions. I had a great sense of relief that all of the discussion and handwringing had finally ended, that the decision had been made — but more than that, I had a sense of pure exhilaration that I can only remember two or three times in my entire life. It was the right choice!

We expected a stir, but I don't think anyone was ready for a volcano. Every representative of the news media was at the airport in teams of twos and threes. This time they were not just there for the usual 30-second interview for local consumption; they all had national or international assignments. From that moment on, our lives were catapulted into national prominence that stayed with us until 1980. The next few days were absolute bedlam. Everybody at both my constituency and Ottawa offices, and at our home, hardly did anything else except deal with requests for photo sessions, interviews, background material, and so on.

In politics, the higher you fly, the harder you hit when you come down and, in this case, it didn't take long. Within a couple of days of the announcement from the Prime Minister's office, one came in turn from the office of The Hon. Robert Stanfield, Leader of the Opposition. He deeply regretted the Prime Minister's failure to consult him in the selection of the candidate for Speaker, which he considered to be an impropriety of considerable dimension. Normally, he would have been pleased to have seconded the nomination on the opening day of Parliament and

therefore to encourage all Opposition Members to join in making the vote unanimous. Under the circumstances, he would have to discuss the matter with his caucus to find out what course they should follow. His announcement also pointed out that the question of principle had nothing to do with the particular choice in this instance, with which he could find no fault.

In fairness to The Hon. Mr. Stanfield, there was more than simple courtesy at stake. The Speaker is not appointed, of course, he is elected by all Members of Parliament on opening day. Section 44 of The British North America Act provides that "the House of Commons on its first assembling after a general election shall proceed with all practical speed to elect one of its Members to be Speaker." Without that election, it is an unwarranted assumption to consider anyone as Speaker-elect. He was emphasizing the point that the Speaker's role, as guardian of the rights of all Members on an equal basis, should be emphasized through the seconding of the nomination by the Leader of the Opposition. As well, he felt that there should have been not only formal advance consultation, but possibly a joint press announcement. Incidentally, the British avoid this problem by having the nominating Member and the seconder from the backbenches on opposite sides of the House.

In fairness to The Right Hon. Mr. Trudeau, I don't think these parliamentary niceties crossed his mind on the day that he and I discussed the Speakership. Normally, it would have been something on which he would have taken direction from senior staff (who were away on holidays). In addition, there had been considerable talk around Parliament and in the press about my possible appointment, and there was some justification for the Prime Minister in simply considering the announcement as confirmation of something that had been expected for some time.

For my part, it was typical of political life: give you the world in the morning and take it away in the afternoon. The whole thing was now plunged into great uncertainty, and was not resolved until the opening of Parliament almost two months later. Right up until the very last moment, I thought there was every possibility that during the actual election something might be said or done which would lead me to feel that the choice was not unanimous and that as a matter of honour I might be required to reject the nomination. Thank God it didn't happen!