



# Recent Publications and Documents

**PARLIAMENT IN THE 1980s,**  
**Philip Norton, Oxford University**  
**Press, 1985.**

In his most recent book, Professor Norton provides us with some interesting insights into changes and workings of the British Parliament. Norton's lament over the decline of parliamentarianism is offset by his optimism for certain "internal developments" that he sees as having strengthened the ability of both Houses more effectively to fulfill functions traditionally ascribed to them. Thus, the purpose of the book is to "identify these developments and to analyse their effects", something it accomplishes in fine fashion. Norton's introduction is well written and relates effectively to the rest of the text. Rather than contribute a little reflection of their own, editors are sometimes wont to approach their task with a stapler and little else. This is not the case with Professor Norton. His introduction provides a useful contribution and if there is any regret about the text it is that Norton did not write more of it himself.

Contributions dealing with the House of Commons include chapters on the more active role of backbenchers, the "new" select committees and the changing nature of constituency work. Those dealing with the upper chamber include discussions on the increased professionalism and independence of the House of Lords and the role of committees. While most of the contributions do not bring a particularly profound analytical acuity to their subject matter, they are all, nevertheless, informative. A concluding chapter, evaluating the potential for further reform, provides a moment of sober reflection.

In his discussion, Norton readily accepts the fact that Parliament has long ceased to be a policy-making legislature and has become what he himself refers to as a "policy influencing legislature". Today, "scrutiny and influence" constitute Parliament's most demanding function. If fulfilled properly, it can permit the legislature to "set the broad limits

within which the executive can legitimately operate; at worst it becomes a superficial charade. Parliament's ability to carry out this function effectively is seen as having been adversely affected by the development of the welfare state and the concomitant tendency of Ministers to seek advice and support from an increasing plethora of special interests.

While such developments are not peculiar to Britain, the ability of the British Parliament to effect scrutiny is further challenged by the "movement of the locus of policy-making" to bodies removed from Parliament. Thus, according to Norton, the "locus of policy-making in various sectors has moved upwards, to a supra-national body (the European Communities), and downwards, to disparate 'policy communities'". If the penchant to turn to referendums is added to the foregoing, one quickly realizes that not only is parliamentary scrutiny made more difficult but also that the very decisions of Parliament "may cease to be seen by many groups as definitive."

The increased "independence" of backbenchers is one factor that seems to have helped Parliament reassert some of its authority. During the successive Parliaments of the 1970s MPs "proved willing to vote against their own side in the Commons division lobbies" with considerable effect. While the tendency has decreased under Prime Minister Thatcher, even her government, according to Norton, has been prepared to "offer concessions on a number of sometimes significant issues". Thus, the threat of dissent or cross bench voting has come to prove something of a check on the executive.

After considering a variety of explanations for backbench insurrection – including economic stress, minority and near-minority governments and ideology – Professor Norton concludes that the main cause for the "upsurge in Conservative division-lobby dissent" was Edward Heath's style of prime ministerial leadership. Heath was not prepared to compromise while Thatcher has been careful to try to maintain her contact with backbenchers. Indeed, Nigel

Fraser, a longtime Conservative MP, once noted of Heath that he was "admired, but he was not loved. His colleagues in Parliament accorded him the loyalty due the leader of their party; but few felt any great personal loyalty to him as a friend."

Of particular consequence is the fact that the behavioural and attitudinal changes of the 1970s prompted the creation of the new departmentally related select committee. Their development and impact is examined by Stephen Downs, who concludes that although "they may not have changed the working relationship of Parliament and the executive" they have at least improved it.

James March, in his discussion of the MPs' constituency role found that the "case load" of members has increased significantly and that today "a significant proportion of the backbencher's time is spent carrying out the major role of welfare-rights officer and social worker." As a consequence, the tendency to view a backbencher merely as failed cabinet material is no longer as prevalent as it once was. If nothing else March at least rekindles our faith in the belief that members do indeed perform those tasks for which they are essentially elected.

The chapters on the House of Lords by Nicholas Baldwin and one by Cliff Grantham and Caroline Moore Hodgson, chronicle some of the trends in the newly awakened upper chamber. Baldwin provides an interesting discussion of the manner in which the House of Lords has adapted to socio-political realities and of how, in the process, it has become a more effective chamber. The addition of life peerages is seen as particularly important to the revival of the chamber as is the growing interdependence of backbenchers from both Houses in influencing their respective party leadership. Baldwin summarizes the situation of the House of Lords in perceptive and amusing fashion when he argues that "... it is an illogical institution, to the extent that no one would set out to devise a second chamber like it, but it is its very irrationality that in a strange, even perverse, way is its strength. It

encompasses a delicately balanced combination of limited effectiveness with ultimate impotence through which it is, in a rather haphazard and improbable fashion, able to make a significant contribution to the process of government."

The chapter by Grantham and Hodgson is a nice extension to Baldwin's piece and provides a useful description of how the select committees in the House of Lords function. In their analysis they focus primarily on the European Communities Committee and its sub-committees and come to conclude that, "The role of the E.C. Committee is essentially an informative and educative one – there is little else it could be given the nature of the House – but it is a role that it fulfils well, at little cost and to the benefit of all interested parties."

In pointing to various signs of "parliamentary revival", if one may call it that, the authors provide some hope for reaffirming one's belief that the basic strength of democratic government rests on the ability of the individual to make up his mind, to choose and judge. The *raison d'être* of parliamentary democracy, even when given the dictates of party discipline, rests on the confidence in man's independent judgement. Reform that reaffirms this precept cannot but be healthy.

Throughout the work a clear distinction is maintained between "external" and "internal" reform. The former includes proposals for radical change such as calls for an elected upper house or proportional representation in the Commons. The latter encompasses the more incremental pressure for change from within; including the changing attitudes of members, the establishment of select and standing committees, better resources for backbenchers, etc. It is this second type of reform for which Norton expresses the most hope. This is not surprising given that the institution to which he has devoted the study is very much the product of a slow evolution, founded on that "practical wisdom" in which Burke put so much trust. In attempting to bring about wholesale change radical reformers lose sight of what history and experience have taught – particularly when they attempt to proceed according to a pre-conceived all embracing plan.

On the whole this book is well written and presented, and certainly makes worthwhile reading for both the

novice and for those more familiar with British Parliamentary practice.

Wolfgang Koerner  
Library of Parliament  
Ottawa

\* \* \* \*

**THE ONTARIO COLLECTION,  
Fern Bayer, Fitzhenry &  
Whiteside, Markham, Ontario,  
1984, 389 pages  
(500 illustrations of which 100 are  
in full colour).**

*The Ontario Collection* testifies to both provincial government commitment and lack of commitment to the visual arts in Ontario from the 1850s to the present. Along with a series of informative essays to describe this journey, the book also provides a detailed catalogue of the art works acquired by the province. The author, Fern Bayer, who is the Curator of the provincial art collection seems to have functioned as much as detective as curator as she tracked down not only missing individual works but whole bodies of objects and information that had disappeared. What she has produced is a document that reveals the changes in taste, sophistication, and values among Ontario's citizens over a period of 130 years.

The first of four essays entitled "Objects of Tastes" deals with the efforts of the Rev. Dr. Egerton Ryerson, to build a fine art collection for Upper Canada in the mid-nineteenth century. It was Ryerson's view, not uncommon at the time, that the collection should begin with copies of Old Master paintings, plaster casts of ancient statues, portrait busts of famous individuals and architectural ornaments. The hundreds of objects that he assembled on his tours of Europe formed the basis of the first fine art museum in Canada. This chapter describes in some detail Ryerson's own background, attitudes toward art and education at the time, the actual assembling of the collection, and the development of the museum. Bayer credits Ryerson with encouraging sufficient interest in government support of the arts that by 1875 there was a formal acquisitions policy that provided for annual purchases from the Ontario Society of Artists.

The second essay, "Politics and Painters," is devoted to that thirty-nine year period, beginning in 1875, when the government, through the

Education Department, acquired contemporary works of art from the annual exhibitions of the Ontario Society of Artists. By the time the last selection was made in 1914 several hundred works had been acquired, of which only forty are still in the collection. Bayer recounts both the assembling and the dissolution of this part of the collection as well as the difficult relationship that existed between the government and the Society. A key figure in this period was the Hon. George William Ross who, as the new Minister of Education, inaugurated new art acquisition policies in 1895. Among his important contributions were providing increased funding for purchases, acquiring portrait busts of important Canadians, and commissioning portraits of political figures for the Legislative Building. Bayer suggests that Ross and Ryerson were "the most important figures in the formation of the art collection as a whole." This phase of government purchasing ended in 1914 and was not resumed again until 1966. Decentralization of the collection, begun in 1912, and poor record-keeping led to the disappearance of most of the works.

The development of a collection of portrait paintings and plaster busts of leading politicians and other important figures was a more traditional role for a government to play and most of this collection, as described in the third essay, "Faces of History," has survived. Portraits were commissioned of lieutenant governors, governors general and speakers of the legislature as well as of figures of historical importance. The chapter describes in some detail, events surrounding individual commissions and the backgrounds of both the artists and the subjects. Portraits are still commissioned of the lieutenant governor, the premier and the speaker of the legislature.

The revival of the provincial commitment to collecting fine art, under the leadership of Premier John Robarts in 1966, forms the subject of the fourth and final essay, "Robarts and Renewal." The new program rose out of a decision to allocate a percentage of the construction costs of the Macdonald Block (Queen's Park) to commission murals and sculptures by Canadian artists for public areas. When it was completed, \$328,550 had been spent on 23 murals and 6 sculptures – the beginning of what is now a collection of over 500 works of contemporary art. Again Bayer describes the political as well as the artistic issues involved in the

selections which now grace government buildings throughout the province, including the Middlesex County Court House in London, the Ontario Police College in Aylmer and the Land Registry office in Kitchener. Although the Macdonald block project was a national competition, the current policy of the "art-in-architecture" program is to support the work of Ontario artists. The scope of purchasing has also been broadened to include original prints, other works on paper and other smaller works of art.

The catalogue portion of the book is divided into four sections as well, each supporting the text areas described above. The 1100 works that comprise the Ontario Collection are described in detail – medium, size, method of acquisition, catalogue number, and brief information on the artist. More detailed discussion is provided for some works, especially in the portrait section where there are extensive notes on the sitters. Many of the considerable illustrations are in colour. There are a series of useful appendices, a detailed bibliography arranged by chapter and an index covering both artists and subjects. Fern Bayer's scholarly and handsome book will be appreciated by professionals and amateurs alike.

**Merle Fabian**  
Librarian  
Canadian Embassy  
Washington D.C.

\* \* \* \*

**INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS  
FOR REPRESENTATIVE  
GOVERNMENT, Peter Aucoin,  
Research Coordinator, University  
of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1986,  
159 pages.**

This is a difficult book to assess. It has many of the ingredients of success. It is an outgrowth of the fruitful and generally successful research and publications programme of the Royal Commission on the Economic Union. The title of the volume pinpoints two

vital issues, institutional reform and representativeness. The research coordinator is a respected public administration specialist at Dalhousie University. Three of the four contributors are major scholars – John Courtney (Saskatchewan), William Irvine (Queen's), and Vincent Lemieux (Laval). The fourth contributor, Peter Dobell, is a longtime observer and participant in parliamentary affairs. Judged individually, each of the four chapters is good to very, very good. However, the value of the book as a whole seems to be a little less than the value of the sum of its parts.

Professor Courtney, a known advocate of a large House of Commons, provides a broad, systematic overview of the issue of the "Size of Canada's Parliament." He discusses the question of Parliamentary size from the vantage of Canada's obligations to underpopulated regions of the country, British political experience, representativeness, the autonomy of individual MPs, the size of the Commons chamber, the style of Parliamentary debate, and the actual financial cost of a larger Commons.

In a chapter entitled "Some Comments on Parliamentary Reform," Peter Dobell offers a personal view on selected aspects of free votes in the Commons, private members' bills, the role of the Opposition in Commons' committees of inquiry, and the benefits of horizontal committees.

Professor Irvine, a longtime known advocate of proportional representation, offers a clear sighted encyclopedic overview of the many proposals for electoral system reform in Canada. This will be a useful source for many years to come. But, Irvine can be faulted for downplaying the powerful cross-national literature critical of the impact of PR on the renewal of party elites and the effectiveness of government. Even if Irvine is in the end right, it might have been helpful to show why his opponents (mainly non Canadian) are wrong.

Professor Lemieux provides an elegantly written and well organized overview of referenda both abroad and among the Canadian provinces. This too will remain a useful source of

baseline information and thought for some time to come. If Lemieux can be faulted, it can be for not enough attention given to the process by which referendum questions are worded. He does note the similarity between polls and referenda, but misses the opportunity to explore their interplay.

It is difficult to know to what extent the authors and research coordinator should be commended or faulted because it is unclear under what constraints they laboured. The book would have benefitted from a strong introductory chapter explaining why these four themes were selected from among the myriad of potential issues in institutional reform. The mandate of institutional reform and representativeness could lead to many studies of Parliament alone, not to mention studies of public service appointments and accountability, the powers of regulatory agencies, the mass media, freedom of information, lobbying, citizen-government relations, and so forth.

A strong introductory chapter might also have explained why the authors were chosen for their particular tasks. Three of the contributors were already *parti pris* on at least some of the issues which they explored. Would the book have been more useful to readers if it had contained structured rebuttals?

A strong introductory chapter might also have shed light on the mode of analysis which contributors were expected to adopt. Were the chapters to be written for an audience of specialists or a lay audience? At least two of the chapters were suitable for specialists while one of the chapters had some of the character of an undergraduate primer. Were the chapters to be rigorously structured around specific reform issues or were they to be discursive essays? Were the chapters to be systematically cross-national or essentially Canadian with occasional British or American anecdotes? Answers to these questions might have made a good book still better.

**Conrad Winn**  
Professor of Political Science  
Carleton University