



Recent Publications and Documents

**THE PARLIAMENTARIANS:
THE HISTORY OF THE
COMMONWEALTH
PARLIAMENTARY
ASSOCIATION, 1911-1985, Ian
Grey, Gower Publishing Company
Limited, Hants, England, 319 p.**

In September 1986 the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association marked its 75th anniversary with publication of an official history by Ian Grey.

A first draft of this book was completed in 1974 by the British parliamentarian and historian Patrick Gordon Walker. The Executive Committee of CPA felt it gave inadequate coverage to more recent events. The Committee prevailed upon the Association's Editor of Publications to finish the job. Mr. Grey, author of several highly readable histories, mostly on Tsarist Russia, agreed but waited until retirement in 1983 to take on the job.

The twenty-three chapters each cover a distinct period in the life of the CPA. The organization of the material leaves no doubt as to Mr. Grey's mastery of the subject but the analysis is less successful. The post 1970 period is still unsatisfactory. It now reads much like a series of extracts from annual conferences or minutes of Executive Committee meetings. Indeed many paragraphs are recognizable from various reports and documents prepared over the past fifteen years.

The early period is somewhat more interesting. It is essentially a biography of Howard d'Egville. This rather remarkable character – a mixture of Machiavelli and Rasputin – wrote the original constitution of the Association in 1911, served as Secretary of the United Kingdom Branch until 1947 and was Secretary General of the Association until he retired, somewhat against his will, in 1959 at age 84. D'Egville's entire life and energy was devoted to the Association. We can only hope that some history student or professor will latch upon Howard d'Egville and complete the biography which Ian Grey has begun.

Howard d'Egville even spent the war years in Canada and was seriously thinking of emigrating. He realized the importance of Canadian-American relations and organized a number of exchanges with American Congressmen. When he finally decided to return to London no further Canada-United States parliamentary meetings were held for many years.

A book like this should have

interested Canadian parliamentarians for a number of other reasons. Canada was one of the six original members of the Association and has played a leading role in transforming the organization from an Empire to a Commonwealth body after the War. Indeed Canada is now the only single country to form one of the Association's seven Regions. This has given Canadians a significant role in shaping the organization and has helped to give the Canadian Region (which consists of the federal, provincial and territorial legislatures) a fairly high profile among parliamentarians and non parliamentarians.

While Grey devotes considerable space to d'Egville and other members of the British secretariat he tends to ignore the influence of officials in other countries in the development of the Association. Arthur Beauchesne, for example, had a prominent role in Canada and no doubt there were other individuals in other countries. More significantly the whole book is written from a British perspective. One cannot help but think that the author would have benefitted by doing more of his research outside the CPA Secretariat in London.

The most important thing about an official history is to get it done. Having accomplished this perhaps it is now up to others to analyze and reflect upon the relative importance of CPA in the overall national and international political context.

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