



Recent Publications and Documents

Making Government Work, Public Policy Forum, Ottawa, June 23, 1993, 17 pages.

On June 23, 1993 two days before a new Prime Minister was sworn into office the Public Policy Forum which describes itself as a "non-partisan organization dedicated to excellence in the way Canada is governed." issued a short paper entitled *Making Government Work*. The Forum was established in 1987 to promote better relations between the private and public sectors and to identify measures to improve the functioning of government. The Forum is sponsored by over 90 private sector organizations representing a broad range of private sector activities as well as by the governments of Canada, British Columbia and Ontario.

The Steering Committee for this project consisted of thirty individuals ranging from the President and CEO of The Royal Bank of Canada to a former lobbyist now Chief of Staff to Prime Minister Campbell. Small wonder the project elicited support from some 21 organizations contributing \$100,000 in cash or services for round table discussions in various cities (none of which seems to have resulted in any published records) to consider the rea-

sons Canadians have lost faith in their institutions and their politicians.

The best part of the report is the opening sentence, born perhaps out of sober experience by so many Forum members who sided with the YES committee in the recent Canadian constitutional wars. "We do not believe that good process automatically guarantees sound public policy, but we are sure that sound policy is seldom the result of bad process."

The twenty-four recommendations that follow are grouped into several areas - better public participation, increased public-private sector co-operation, opening up the budget process, parliamentary reform, cultural change in the public service and public awareness. Unfortunately there is little meat on the bones. The report acknowledges that most of its suggestions have been proposed by various governments, parliamentary committees and Royal Commissions in recent years thus inferring there is little need for elaboration. The real message that comes through this terse report is that members of the Forum are all busy people and do not have time to read long studies. Anyone who is anyone in this country knows the problems so why waste valuable time explaining things to the uninitiated.

In terms of parliamentary reform the Forum calls for less party discipline, greater division of chairmanships between government and opposition, establishing a roster system for Ministerial attendance at Question Period and advance notice of questions. The Forum also calls for legislation to be referred to committee before the House has given approval in principle and for creation of a Standing Committee of the House on the Public Service as well as establishment of a mechanism for

formal exchanges between the private and public sector.

This idea that the public sector has much to learn from the private service is a sub theme running through the report like a self evident truth that requires no justification or argumentation. It does little to enhance the report's credibility.

The average Canadian will see this report for what it is - another bit of handy work by the Canadian establishment whose view of public policy and national interest is very much tied to their own pocketbook. A more interesting question is how members of Parliament elected after the next election choose to tackle the problems articulated by the Forum. Will they look to the Government or to the private sector for the answer? Will they understand that parliamentarians are the only ones who can reform Parliament and the most probable path would start with their own officer, the Speaker of the House of Commons.

The last time public disillusionment with parliament was so low was in the early 1960s. Speaker Alan

Macnaughton was instrumental in initiating and bringing to fruition a wide range of parliamentary reforms that transformed the House and brought it into the modern era. As we wrestle with postmodernism a similar effort is going to be required.

Since 1986 the House of Commons has elected its Speaker by secret ballot making the Presiding Officer potentially much stronger than pre-1986 Speakers. John Fraser the first and only person elected by this method used the strengthened office to make many administrative changes and some memorable rulings. But he did not involve himself in the rough and tumble debate over parliamentary reform.

As long as we have a parliamentary form of government the Speaker of the House will never have the power of his counterpart in the United States House of Representatives. But members of the new Parliament can and should look to the new Speaker for leadership in many of the areas of parliamentary reform highlighted by the Forum.

He or she can use the prestige and authority of the Speaker's Office to suggest the establishment of appropriate mechanisms. He or she can use the discretionary powers of the Chair to establish a new approach to time allocation. The new Speaker, with help from members, can ensure that the distinction between Second Reading, Third Reading and Report stage are respected.

The Report of the Public Policy Forum makes no mention of a role of the Speaker of the House in Making Government Work. It does not recognize the elementary point that Government has little incentive to change the rules of the parliamentary game. Only an activist Speaker working on behalf of all members and in a broader sense on behalf of all Canadians is likely to put into motion the kind of reforms needed to restore confidence in Canadian parliament and Canadian politics.

Gary Levy
Editor