



Recent Publications and Documents

Busboy: From Kitchen to Cabinet
by Don Boudria, Optimum Publishing International Inc., Montreal, Maxville, Ottawa, 2005.

For more than twenty years Don Boudria was an observer and participant in most of the political and parliamentary events of the day. By his own admission this book will likely be a disappointment to those seeking inside gossip. It also does not tell us very much about how public policy is made in Ottawa. What we do learn is about Don Boudria's life and it is an extraordinary story.

No single path is taken by the 308 men and women chosen to represent their fellow Canadians in the House of Commons. But the usual route begins in a well to do or at least a middle class family with stops at university, perhaps law school or a career in business or one of the professions. Not so for Mr. Boudria.

He came from a family of very modest means whose situation was made even more difficult when his father was killed in a car accident when Don was five years old. He dropped out of high school, joined a rock band, and eventually got a job as a busboy in the Parliamentary Restaurant.

This book traces his life from that time to his career as municipal councillor in a rural area outside of Ottawa, to a seat in the Ontario Legislature, to the House of Commons

and eventually a seat in the Cabinet of Jean Chrétien's Government.

A great deal of this book is devoted to his family, extended family and to the larger franco-Ontario community which he served in so many capacities and which was so supportive of him. Unlike many political memoirs he mentions and acknowledges virtually every staffer who ever worked for him in Ottawa or in the constituency office. Indeed when he defeated the Conservative incumbent to win a seat at Queen's Park one of his first acts was to re-hire the incumbent's constituency assistant. His attention to those who helped him over the years explains why he enjoyed such support and rolled up so many convincing electoral victories even if people did not agree with his position on every issue.

The years at Queen's Park are treated briefly but he does mention a few important lessons that he learned, particularly about the need to represent local interests. In 1984 Don Boudria left Queen's Park to run federally and was one of only 40 Liberals elected in the Mulroney landslide. Along with Sheila Copps and John Nunziata he formed the so-called Rat Pack, a group of young Liberal members who took the lead in attacking the Conservatives and were not shy about using whatever means they could to embarrass the government.

Most of the book deals with his years in the House of Commons. In opposition he slowly mastered the various elements that lead to a successful career including a knowledge of parliamentary procedure. He discusses the major issues of the day including the Free Trade Debate, the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords, the disappointing tenure of John Turner as Leader of the Party and the selection of Jean Chrétien as Leader in 1991. These

are largely factual accounts of information that is in the public domain with the occasional personal comment on a rival or a colleague.

In September 1989, Mr. Boudria decided to address his academic shortcomings and enrolled as a correspondence student at Waterloo University. He took the entire BA programme this way over the next decade. It was all done anonymously so as not to obtain any special consideration and frequently involved writing essays and tests in hotels around the world or rising at 4:00 am to study before a day's work as a cabinet minister.

Aside from old fashion hard work there is another anecdote that reveals the secret of Don Boudria's success. After supporting Jean Chrétien's leadership campaign he was disappointed at being replaced as Deputy Opposition Whip and

given the new position of deputy Opposition House Leader. After brooding a few days about the loss of income he decided not to consider it a demotion and issued a press release thanking the leader for the promotion. One of his colleagues said "Boudria this is not a promotion and we both know it." He replied: "It is now" and by the end of the year everyone else was also considering it a promotion.

Generally speaking Don Boudria has something good to say about everyone. He discusses briefly his tenure as Minister of Public Works where he replaced Alphonso Gagliano at the time when revelations were coming forth about the sponsorship programme. We learn little about the programme or the department but he does make the point that Mr. Gagliano is "a kind decent man and a hard working, highly competent public servant."

It is clear that Mr. Boudria enjoyed immensely his first cabinet position as Minister for la

Francophonie. It allowed him to travel extensively and the issues were not generally controversial. His reward, after the 1997 election was the position as House Leader, a much more demanding job involving constant negotiations with the other four parties.

Once again we do not learn much that is not on the public record but there are some interesting tidbits such as the fact that potential cabinet appointees like himself had to be interviewed by Mitchell Sharp who was the special dollar-a-year ethics advisor to the Prime Minister.

The election of Paul Martin spelled the end of Don Boudria's career in cabinet. His offer to serve Mr. Martin was made sincerely and in person. It was not accepted and this was a point of some disappointment although he is not in any way critical of Mr. Martin.

The final section of the book deals with his time as Chairman of the House of Commons Committee on Procedure which was responsible, among other things, for the study of electoral reform including proportional representation. He discusses the Committee's trip to Australia and New Zealand to study Electoral Reform but reveals very little about the substance of the debate.

While the absence of policy discussion is a bit frustrating it was clearly not the purpose of this book and as Mr. Boudria is still fairly young one expects there may be another career and perhaps another book that covers some of his thoughts on public policy.

Gary Levy