

ment. Elle note cependant que le gouvernement fédéral, en développant toute une gamme de stratégies (dissimulation, division et compensation, p. 13) et en adoptant une politique « des petits pas », a su triompher à la fois des rigidités structurelles des programmes et des effets de rétroaction s'incarnant notamment dans la résistance de divers groupes sociaux.

Nicole Bernier démontre ainsi dans son étude que nous avons assisté au Canada, de 1975 à 1995, à un réaménagement de la forme de l'État providence issu de la période d'après-guerre; celui-ci concourt désormais au développement d'une nouvelle politique nationale de la main-d'œuvre au détriment de la sécurité du revenu des citoyens. Cette reconfiguration des politiques sociales n'est pas anodine car elle suppose une nouvelle vision de la société canadienne, qui tend à s'articuler sur les principes de responsabilité et de prévoyance plutôt que de solidarité. Nous sommes donc devant un choix politique qui ne peut faire l'économie d'un véritable débat citoyen, alors que celui-ci a fait cruellement défaut durant tout ce processus. Tout n'est cependant pas encore joué, et comme le suggère l'auteure à la fin de son ouvrage : « Somme toute, l'issue de ce processus repose, pour beaucoup, sur les calculs électoraux et les choix politiques des dirigeants actuels et futurs. Et l'on peut penser que ceux-ci ne peuvent pas demeurer insensibles à l'opinion publique et à la vigilance des électeurs, pour autant qu'elles se manifestent » (p. 231).

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Legislatures

David C. Docherty

The Canadian Democratic Audit Series

Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005, pp. 224

David Docherty's book, *Legislatures*, is ambitious both in terms of its comparative perspective and the territory it reviews. The book deals with virtually all important aspects of the Canadian Parliament and provincial legislatures. The main focus, however, is on the House of Commons.

The book has eight chapters that centre around three overarching themes: responsiveness, inclusiveness and participation. The chapters are written to give life to a "democratic audit," to take stock of the state of Canadian legislatures, their strengths and weaknesses. The author also seeks to identify means to strengthen legislatures and the level of democratic participation available to their members. Docherty makes excellent use of revealing data that he was able to assemble from his own and other sources.

The chapter on representation presents a balanced view making the case that, though Canadian legislatures still do not fully reflect the society they represent, there has been important progress in recent years. Most formal barriers to getting elected have been eliminated, but many informal ones remain. The chapter on the workings of the assembly examines how the speaker is selected, the role of party whips, House leaders and parliamentary secretaries. The author explains that Canadian legislatures tend to reinforce party strength rather than independence from party leadership. He reports that loyalty to the party leader is a key factor in determining whether one assumes a position of influence. The chapter on constituency work reports on the pull of the constituency for members of legislatures, the challenges of looking after a constituency in a country as large as Canada and new options, such as the Internet, that assist MPs in keeping in touch with their constituents.

The chapter on opportunities in the assembly outlines the various ways Members can participate in the work of the legislature. Docherty underlines the importance of Question Period as a means of holding the government to account for its policies and programs. Question Period enjoys a high profile in all Canadian legislatures, though there are variations in how the process works. Different legislatures have different customs. Ontario, for example, allocates one hour for question period, British Columbia only fifteen minutes. Question Period is not the only opportunity for participation, however. Members' statements are another. Docherty gives a breakdown of the focus of statements for the 35th and 36th Parliament. He writes about a "large drop in regional representation in the government caucus" after the 1997 election and the subsequent "increasing focus on regional concerns." He does not fully explain what he means by "regional," though he points to the "west" and the "east" (108). One is left to assume that, for Docherty, "east" and "west" concerns are regional in nature, but that Ontario and Quebec concerns are national. This, in turn, may explain his willingness later to dismiss out of hand suggestions for Senate reform when he writes "no sane government would open up the constitutional can of worms that is Senate reform" (196). Sanity, when it comes to Senate reform, appears to be in the eye of the beholder. Promoting regional concerns before national political institutions, in the eyes of Docherty, should presumably not be taken too seriously. He explains: "Those concerned that the Canadian political party system is becoming increasingly narrow and territorial will not find solace in this seeming trend [the increasing focus on regional concerns]" (109).

The chapter on scrutiny and the size of legislatures makes a convincing case that we ought to increase the size of our legislatures. He writes that decisions to cut back the size of the Ontario and New Brunswick legislatures, for example, were misguided. He points out that the cost per provincial legislator in Ontario went up considerably when the number of members was reduced to 103 from 130. Docherty also briefly reports on the role of Officers of Parliament.

The chapter on the legislature presents an account of the budget process, and discusses how legislation is enacted and the role of legislative committees. He considers the impact of party discipline on the ability of members to represent the interests of their constituents and concludes by advocating the introduction of the British-style three-line whip system and a greater reliance on the work of legislative committees.

The chapter on what legislatures should and should not do outlines a series of recommendations for the way ahead. Docherty warns against "sweeping reforms" and makes the case that "if legislatures are becoming irrelevant, it is because governments want them to be" (177). He once again supports increasing the size of legislatures, reminding the reader that "democracy is not cheap" (183). He insists that party discipline in Canada is too strong but maintains that unfettered free votes are not the answer to that problem.

The book has important strengths: it presents a full range of issues confronting Canadian legislatures. Students of Canadian politics, as well as practitioners, including current and aspiring MPs, will gain much insight from reading it. It is timely, comprehensive, insightful and written in a highly accessible style. There are, however, also some shortcomings: insufficient attention is paid to relations between ministers, their departments and public servants and the legislature and some of the issues dealt with require more profound analysis, notably how legislatures deal with the estimates process and the regional perspective. That said, the book's strengths far outnumber its weaknesses.

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