

## **Election of Speaker of the House of Commons in Canada**

Minutes (extracts) Buenos Aires Session  
(October 1986)

*The President* invited Mr. Lussier, Clerk of the Senate of Canada, to explain to the Association how the new procedure for electing the Speaker of the House of Commons had operated recently.

*Mr. Lussier* said that the Canadian Parliament had recently enjoyed a unique experience. Hitherto, the British practice had been followed in the election of Speaker. The new procedure had been put into effect very recently, and had involved a secret ballot which had been very complicated and had taken a long time. This method, which had been proposed by the Procedure Committee had arisen from the desire of backbench Members of Parliament to choose their own Speaker without the influence of the party whips and government.

On previous occasions the election of Speaker had almost always been unanimous. In 117 years the Prime Minister had only forgotten 2 or 3 times to consult the opposition. According to the new procedure, all Members of the House of Commons were candidates except for Ministers and party leaders. Members who did not want to be candidates had to register their withdrawal in writing by 6 p.m. on the evening before the election. On this occasion, the list of candidates numbered 100 many of whom had simply forgotten to write to the Clerk saying that they did not wish to be candidates. Among these was a Member of Parliament who had always been firmly opposed to the new procedure for election, but he was obliged to be a candidate.

The election was by simple majority vote. Each ballot was counted by the Clerk who reported the result to be outgoing Speaker. At each stage, the candidate or candidates who had received the lowest number of votes in the previous ballot were excluded. This procedure had continued for 11 hours using different coloured ballot papers at each occasion before eventually a new Speaker was elected.

*Mr. Sprey* (Netherlands) asked what were the reasons which led the House of Commons to change its procedure for electing a Speaker.

*Mr. Lussier* said that it was principally to get away from the practice of the Prime Minister appointing the Speaker.

*Mr. Ziller* (Federal Republic of Germany) said that in his country, the method of election was prescribed in the Standing Orders of the Parliament. He wondered if the same was true in Canada.

*Mr. Lussier* confirmed that this was the case.

*Mr. Pentanu* (Papua New Guinea) said that since 1964 elections to the Speakership of the Papua New Guinea Parliament had taken place by secret ballot at the beginning of each new Parliament. The number of votes cast for each candidate was announced after each ballot.

*Mr. Lussier* said that in Canada the number of votes for each candidate had not been announced.

*Mr. Boulton* (United Kingdom) and the *President* asked about the problem of the secret ballot. How was it that the Member of Parliament who was so strongly opposed to this new procedure had remained in the election for so many ballots.

*Mr. Lussier* said that the individual in question had survived for 6 votes and this had been an indication of his popularity.

*Mr. Priestman* said that he was surprised that Members of Parliament had been obliged to attend the session right up to the time at which the Speaker was elected.

*Mr. Ndiaye* (Senegal) said that the method of election of the President of Parliament was laid down by law. He wondered whether the means of election of the Vice-Presidents and the Secretary General of the Canadian Parliament was by the same method as that for the Speaker.

*Mr. Lussier* replied that the new procedure applied only to the election of the Speaker.

**Topical discussion on the role of parliamentary groups**  
**Introduced by Dr. Macris (Argentina)**

Minutes (extracts) Buenos Aires  
Session (October 1986)

*The President* said that the subject had originally been raised by Mr. Perez Serrano (Spain) who had circulated a questionnaire and received some replies, but who had been unable to continue the work as rapporteur. Dr. Macris had kindly agreed to take up the subject in the form of a topical discussion.

*Dr. Macris* said that when the subject had first been raised in Berlin, his country had not been represented in the Association. Nonetheless, the topic seemed to him of considerable importance. The responses to the questionnaire had not been numerous. He drew attention to the situation in Argentina as set out in his introductory note which had been circulated.

*Mr. Hadjiannou* (Cyprus) said that political groups were referred to in article 73 of the Constitution of Cyprus which included the right to establish political groups in parliament, for them to be represented in committees and for their spokesman to participate in debates.

*Mr. Lussier* (Canada) observed that political groups was less important in presidential systems of government and when the President did not have the right to dissolve parliament.

*Dr. Macris* said that the Argentinian political system was close to that of the United States of America in that the Executive relied on the support of parliamentary groups to get laws passed. In Argentina, the political groups worked more coherently than in the American Congress.

*Mr. Lussier* asked what were the powers of the party over its Members in Argentina.

*Dr. Macris* said that there was no written rule about sanctions which could be imposed by a party over a Member who did not follow its instructions and there had been no recent examples of anyone being expelled.

*M. Lussier* said that in Canada it was possible to have a coalition government and he wanted to know whether this was also possible in Argentina.

*Dr. Macris* said that whichever party won the presidential election exercised complete power. The other parties remained in opposition. The recent appeal by the President of the Republic for a national democratic convergence had not been put into effect. Nonetheless, if an important decision that had to be taken, such as changing the site of the capital city or reforming the Constitution, a concensus could merge among the political parties without that amounting to a coalition government.

*M. Ndiaye* (Senegal) asked whether the leaders of all political parties were represented on the bureau of the two Chambers, and if a Member of Parliament could rely on the support of his political if he was subject to legal action against him.

*Dr. Macris* said that the bureau of each Chamber comprised representatives of all political parties of sufficient weight. On the second point, the courts could call for the waiver of parliamentary immunity and that was a matter to be decided by the relevant Chamber. In fact the attitude of individual political groups depended on the seriousness of the alleged crime. It was more than 30 years since this problem had arisen. In 1948 the question had been raised more for political reasons than for legal ones.

*The President* commented that the word "caucus" and "group" seemed to be used in a different way in the Argentine Parliament to that in the United Kingdom. Political parties were very important in the British Parliament. At the moment the government had a majority of about 140 over all other parties. Party discipline was therefore difficult. The principal means of control over individual party Members was the offer or prospect of promotion to the government or some other form of patronage. The two most important parties were "broad churches" with various different groups represented within them. When moral issues were discussed, it was rare for there to be a clear view from either party. This had particularly been the case in a recent vote on the opening of shops on Sundays in England and Wales. Only recently had the Standing Orders of the House recognised the existence of parties, and this was confined to the allocation of certain days for the subject of debate to be chosen by opposition parties.

*Mr. Boulton* (United Kingdom) said that with respect to financial support from the state, only opposition parties received funds for their parliamentary work. The Government party relied on the resources of the civil service.

*M. Khair* (Jordan) asked how the 21 justicialist (peronist) Senators voted, given that they were divided into 3 groups.

*Dr. Macris* said that they behaved in a very pragmatic fashion and generally voted as one group.

*The President* thanked *Dr. Macris* most warmly for having introduced the topical discussion which had proved so fruitful.

## ASSOCIATION OF SECRETARIES GENERAL OF PARLIAMENTS

### AIMS

The Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments, constituted as a consultative organism of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, seeks to facilitate personal contacts between holders of the office of Secretary General in any Parliamentary Assembly, whether such Assembly is a Member of the Union or not.

It is the task of the Association to study the law, procedure, practice and working methods of different Parliaments and to propose measures for improving those methods and for securing co-operation between the services of different Parliaments.

The Association also assists the Inter-Parliamentary Union, when asked to do so, on subjects within the scope of the Association.

### STRUCTURE

*President:* Sir Kenneth Bradshaw (United Kingdom).

*Executive Committee:* El Hadj Hayatou (Cameroon), Vice-President; H. Hjortdal, F. Humblet, J. Lyon, M. Rosetti, A. F. Schepel, S.L. Shakhder and N. Lorch (Israël) (former Presidents); D. Ndiaye (Senegal), H. Khair (Jordan), C. Hadjoannou (Cyprus), C. Lussier (Canada) and Sir David Lidderdale (United Kingdom), G. Hoff (Norway), Honorary Vice-Presidents.

*Membership:* Secretaries General or Clerks of Parliamentary Assemblies in the following countries or international institutions are Members of the Association:

Algeria, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Congo, Cyprus, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Ecuador, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Federal Republic of Germany, Finland, France, Gabon, German Democratic Republic, Ghana, Greece, Guyana, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Ireland, Islamic Republic of Mauritania, Israel, Italy, Ivory Coast, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Korea (Republic of), Luxembourg, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Monaco, Morocco, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Cameroon, Rwanda, Syrian Arab Republic, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Tunisia, United Kingdom, United States of America, Upper Volta, USSR, Venezuela, Yemen (Arab Republic of), Yugoslavia, Zaire, Zimbabwe, Andean Parliament, Assembly of Western European Union, European Parliament, North Atlantic Assembly, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

### CONSTITUTIONAL AND PARLIAMENTARY INFORMATION

Published by the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments, under the auspices of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, is issued quarterly in both English and French.

Swiss francs

One number. . . . . 7 F  
One year (4 numbers). . . . . 25 F

Orders for Subscriptions may be sent to:

Secrétariat de l'Association des Secrétaires Généraux des Parlements  
Assemblée Nationale  
Palais-Bourbon  
75355 Paris - France

## NEW PUBLICATION

### PARLIAMENTS OF THE WORLD

A new, enlarged, revised and updated edition of the reference compendium "PARLIAMENTS OF THE WORLD" is to be published in English and in French during 1986.

This new edition will provide a comparative survey of the structure, powers and operation of Parliaments in 83 countries, as well as of the working relationship between Parliaments and Governments. The information given is drawn from responses by the Parliaments to a study conducted by the Union and from the Union's large collection of documents on parliamentary and constitutional matters.

The work, in two volumes, can be obtained from the Gower Publishing Company Ltd., Gower House, Croft Road, Aldershot, Hants GU11 3HR, England (Tel. 252-331551) at a price of £70 including postage and packing.

Inter-Parliamentary Groups of the Union will receive a special order form from the Union Secretariat entitling them to a member's discount.