



**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation to the  
62<sup>nd</sup> Westminster Seminar on Parliamentary Practice and  
Procedure**

**Canadian Branch of the  
Commonwealth Parliamentary Association**

**London, United Kingdom**

**June 17 to 21, 2013**

# Report

## **Participants**

The seminar was attended by 90 delegates from Australia, Bermuda, Brunei, Canada, the Cook Islands, Ghana, Grenada, Guyana, Hong Kong, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Kiribati, the Maldives, New Zealand, Nigeria, Rwanda, the Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sri Lanka, St. Lucia, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, the Turks and Caicos Islands, Uganda, the Virgin Islands and Zambia. Canada was represented by MP Pierre-Luc Dusseault.

## **Purpose**

To provide delegates with information on the practices and procedures of the British Parliament that they can apply in their own legislatures.

## **Summary**

The seminar was extremely well organized. It was an excellent opportunity for parliamentarians and clerks from around the world to learn about the parliamentary system that is the foundation of most of our own legislatures. Delegates learned about many aspects of the British parliamentary system, known as the Westminster system. Each subject was addressed in the form of a panel discussion. Panelists were mainly MPs, lords and employees of Parliament. Over the five-day seminar, participants met with a large number of British parliamentarians. It was a very exciting experience for the delegates.. The seminar also included organized workshops, discussion sessions, receptions and working dinners, opportunities to watch Parliament at work, and visits to constituencies and Westminster. It was also very rewarding to visit Parliament and watch question time and a debate in the House of Commons. Overall, the seminar demonstrated the best of the UK Parliament .

## **Introduction to Parliament**

This first session provided an overview of the Westminster parliamentary system with three panelists: Ms. Philippa Helme, Principal Clerk of Select Committees, Mr. Andrew Percy, MP, and Mr. Gavin Williamson, MP. Delegates learned about the history and structure of Parliament as well as recent reforms.

## **The legislative process**

This session focused on the legislative process for government bills and private members' bills. The speakers were Ms. Jacqy Sharpe, Clerk of Legislation, House of Commons, Ms. Kate Emms, Clerk of Private Members' Bills, and Mr. Jacob Rees-Mogg, MP. Discussions centred around how bills are prepared and how they become law, a process which is very similar to that of Canada.

## **Running Parliament**

The panelists Sir Robert Rogers, Clerk of the House of Commons, Mr. David Beamish, Clerk of the Parliaments in the House of Lords, and Mr. John Turso, MP, discussed the administration of the British Parliament. In England, the House of Commons Commission is the equivalent of our Board of Internal Economy.

## **Bicameralism: The work of the second chamber**

The Rt. Hon. Lord Grocott, Baroness Stern and the Rt. Hon. Baroness Prashar discussed the relationship between the two houses of Parliament in a bicameral system. The three Lords naturally defended the Upper House. The House of Lords is unelected, as in Canada. The panelists explained that the Upper House considers bills introduced in the House of Commons from a much less partisan perspective. The House of Lords actually seems to be much less partisan than Canada's Senate due to "crossbenchers" who do not belong to any specific political party.

## **Parliamentary questions and motions**

This very informative session discussed the significant differences between the British and Canadian systems. The Principal Clerk of the Table Office of the House of Commons and MP Thomas Docherty provided an overview of the procedures for parliamentary questions and motions. To be approved by the Clerk, the questions asked during question time must conform to a very strict format. Once a question has been approved, the minister concerned must answer it on his allotted day. Each day provides members with the opportunity to ask a question of a different minister. Each minister has a question time about once every three weeks, as per an established rotation. The Prime Minister answers questions only once a week on Wednesday at noon. This process ensures that questions are asked according to parliamentary rules. Ministers also know the questions in advance so that they can prepare a full reply.

## **The role of an MP**

Delegates heard from MPs Sir Peter Bottomley, Dr. Roberta Blackman-Woods, Mr. Andrew Stephenson and Ms. Shabana Mahmoud. as they discussed the role of a British MP in greater detail. They are much like Canadian MPs in that they represent the ideas of their constituents in the federal Parliament. They also work within a political party system.

## **The role of the opposition**

Members of Parliament Mr. Elfyn Llwyd and Mr. Jack Straw, and Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top discussed how opposition parties can influence the parliamentary agenda, particularly through opposition days and backbench committees. The latter can influence the parliamentary agenda fairly effectively. These committees are composed of MPs who do not have an official role in the House of Commons. As in Canada, the opposition has a constitutional duty to hold the government accountable to the House

and, ultimately, the public. Like their Canadian counterparts, the opposition parties in the UK receive funding to ensure they can perform their duties effectively.

### **Party discipline**

The Rt. Hon. Greg Knight, MP and Government Whip, the Rt. Hon. Rosie Winterton, MP and Opposition Chief Whip, and Lord Newby, Deputy Chief Whip (Liberal), discussed how party discipline works in the British Parliament. The government has 17 whips and they all have the title of “minister.” The official opposition has 15 whips. Their role is to report to their party leader on the mood of caucus. The panelists also explained the voting system in the House of Commons. It is much different from Canada’s system. MPs have three minutes to get to the lobby of their choice, either the Aye Lobby or the No Lobby. MPs are counted by their party whip, and the results of the vote are reported to the Speaker of the House.

### **The role of the Leader of the House**

The Leader of the House, the Rt. Hon. Andrew Lansley, and the Shadow Leader of the House, Ms. Angela Eagle, discussed their duties in Parliament and how their two roles interact, as well as the importance that the government assigns to parliamentary minorities when setting the House agenda. There are several ways for the opposition to influence the parliamentary agenda. For example, a parliamentary debate is triggered once an electronic petition receives 100,000 signatures. The British government very rarely uses time allocation to limit debate, unlike the practice in the Canadian House of Commons. When time allocation is used, it is always done in consultation with the opposition.

### **The media’s role in parliamentary oversight**

Lord Black of Brentwood, Ms. Kerry McCarthy, MP, and Mr. Tristram Hunt, MP, spoke on the media’s role in British politics and the significant difference they see in the way that the national media and local media cover politics. They also stated that the media are essential to holding the government accountable.

### **The committee system**

The panelists for this session were Mr. Malcolm Bruce, MP, Dr. David Harrison, committee clerk, and Ms. Fiona O’Donnell, MP. This session was particularly informative since committees in the British parliament operate differently from their Canadian counterparts. For example, committee chairs are elected by members of the House of Commons. The chairmanship of committees is decided by all MPs during a vote in the House. Committees also use social media to draw attention to their studies. Lastly, *in camera* proceedings are very rare in the British Parliament, and the decisions made *in camera* are publicly released afterward.

## **Holding the Prime Minister to account – Prime Minister’s Questions**

This was a very practical session, as delegates watched Prime Minister’s Questions live. This event is held on Wednesdays from 11:30 to 12:00. The Prime Minister answers questions from the opposition and government colleagues for 30 minutes each week. The Commons Speaker is very involved in these proceedings, which are the focus of media attention. Each MP can rise to seek permission to speak. The Speaker decides who will ask a question. It is very interesting to see large numbers of MPs rise to catch the Speaker’s eye. The Speaker will often reprimand MPs or the Prime Minister if he believes the question or answer was unsatisfactory. At one point, when the Prime Minister did not answer a question and simply talked about the opposition, the Speaker asked him to start over and answer the question this time. This is something you do not see in Canada.

## **Standards, privileges and the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA)**

Compared with the Canadian system, IPSA has a lot of power. Kathryn Hudson, Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, MPs Greg Hands and Kevin Barron, and Eve Samson, Clerk, explained the process and the consequences for MPs who break the code of ethics. The process starts with a complaint to the Commissioner, who conducts an investigation and issues a report. IPSA, which the committee responsible for ethics, considers the report and reports its findings back to the House. The repercussions for MPs can include suspension.

## **The working Parliament**

Delegates observed the House of Commons debates from the Speaker’s Gallery.

## **Devolution**

The panelists for this session have extensive experience with devolution, also known as decentralization. They all are from the northern area of the United Kingdom, including Scotland. Discussions centred around the features of a decentralized government in which powers are delegated to lower jurisdictions.

## **Electoral systems**

Various electoral systems in place in the United Kingdom, such as the first-past-the-post system used in Canada and the single transferable vote system were discussed. Lord Kennedy of Southwark, Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale, Lord Harrison and MP Anne McIntosh drew on their extensive expertise to describe the main electoral systems.

## **Broadcasting Parliament**

This session described how the debates of both Houses are broadcast. The system is practically identical to that of Canada except that the BBC, the national broadcaster, is responsible for broadcasting the proceedings to all British citizens.

## **Parliament, non-governmental organizations and civil society**

During this session, the relationship between civil society and elected officials in Britain was discussed. MPs Andrew Mitchell and Stephen Doughty as well as NGO representatives Melanie Ward and Isabella Sankey discussed the advantages of working with NGOs when developing government policies and programs. Legislators seem to work with these organizations extensively to document situations. The “buy one get one free” funding model seems to be the most widely advocated: groups raise their own funds and the government doubles the amount.

## **Women in Parliament**

The role of women in the British Parliament and around the world, and the benefits of their political participation was discussed.

## **The role of the Speaker**

The Speakers of both Houses attended, Mr. Bercow and Baroness. D’Souza, as well as the Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons, Nigel Evans. They discussed their roles and how they preside over proceedings in their respective Chambers. One significant difference between the Canadian and British systems is that the Commons Speaker runs uncontested in his constituency. Since the Speaker is required to be impartial, he does not comment on the issues dividing political parties.

## **Parliamentary information services**

The research service within the British Parliament. is almost identical to that of the Canadian Parliament. MPs can call on library staff to research very broad issues.

## **Commonwealth matters**

Current and upcoming issues facing the Commonwealth, as well as how to improve the way in which the Commonwealth functions in order to benefit all member countries were discussed.

## **Constituency visits**

Delegates spent the morning in the riding of Chelsea and Fulham with Conservative MP Greg Hands. They attended a “constituency clinic” where residents were invited to meet with their MP to discuss an issue or problem they have regarding the government.

## **Young people and Parliament**

Ms. Kate Hoey and Ms. Rushanara Ali, both MPs, discussed the important role of young people in politics and their representation in the British Parliament. They stressed that young people bring a different perspective to bear in decision-making and that they can be a benefit to political institutions.

## **Closing plenary**

Seminar participants expressed their appreciation and said how much they had learned about the British political system over the five days. Delegates returned home with many ideas for improving their own political system.

Respectfully submitted,

Joe Preston, MP

Chair

Canadian Branch of the  
Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)

## Travel Costs

<b>ASSOCIATION</b>	Canada-UK Inter-Parliamentary Association
<b>ACTIVITY</b>	62 <sup>nd</sup> Westminster Seminar on Parliamentary Practice and Procedure
<b>DESTINATION</b>	London, United Kingdom
<b>DATES</b>	June 17-21, 2013
<b>DELEGATION</b>	
SENATE	
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault, M.P.
STAFF	
<b>TRANSPORTATION</b>	<b>\$1,903.67</b>
<b>ACCOMMODATION</b>	<b>\$1,950.82</b>
<b>HOSPITALITY</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>
<b>PER DIEMS</b>	<b>\$716.82</b>
<b>OFFICIAL GIFTS</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>
<b>MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES</b>	<b>\$426.64</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$4,997.95</b>