

**Remarks Made by David Smith to the CPSA/CSPG Roundtable
Winnipeg, MB
June 5, 2004**

- I want to thank the Canadian Political Science Association and the Canadian Study of Parliament Group for organizing this Roundtable and for arranging the reception that follows. The gesture, as Eugene Forsey used to say on such occasions, is “too kind, ‘too kind’.

- In the spirit of the moment, I suppose it is only to be expected that such a courtesy will be reciprocated. But it would be a pity if my remarks were interpreted as nothing more than good manners. For they are intended to convey a sentiment of substance—and that is the central importance of organizations such as the CPSA and the CSPG to the professional political scientist.

- They have been extremely important to my career and to the sense of myself as a political scientist. To some extent this may be because I did not initially think of myself as a Canadianist. As an undergraduate, I studied economics at UWO and then, when I went to Duke, I thought of (and later, advertised) myself as a comparativist. For the first five years of teaching that was what I did—teach European and British politics.

- In a small department like Saskatchewan’s, especially when someone as dominant as Norman Ward monopolized the sub-field, there was not great latitude to acquire a broad acquaintanceship with the subject. For me, it was the CPSA that introduced the breadth of Canadian politics and political scientists, one difficult to obtain otherwise as a young academic learning to juggle the daily demands of teaching, administration and research.

- There is a mutual reinforcement of the discipline when the members of a department are involved in the activities of the Association. I realize that I am talking to the converted, and am reminded of attending a concert by Hank Snow at London’s Centennial Hall many years ago. The auditorium was less than 1/3 full, and the

artiste (as he called himself) berated the audience for the poor turnout. This seemed a remarkable instance of misdirected grievance.

I do not wish to repeat his *gaucherie* here. I mention it only because I think the strength of political science in Canada rests on its representation through the CPSA. I am beginning to sound like a shop steward, which would be both impolite and groundless, so I shall stop.

- If I began as a comparativist, I did—because of increasing enrolment in Canadian politics courses and because of Norman Ward’s poor health— begin teaching Canadian government in the late 1960s.
- My initial interest was political parties, and because no one had studied it, the Liberal party in Saskatchewan. That choice set in train a series of publications that continued for 20 years. Approaching retirement has made me sensitive to the efflux of time, an attitude of which I was recently reminded when riding in a university elevator with two young female history students on their way to collect graded essays. I overheard one say to the other—“what was your paper on?” (ie. the subject), to which the other replied: “Like Saskatchewan and stuff”.
- In retrospect, I think that reply pretty well summarizes my research career; the first half, Saskatchewan; the last half, stuff (the Crown, republicanism, and the Senate).

I seem to have become—or chosen to be—the anatomist of endangered or neglected subjects. Psychologically, I am not sure what such unremitting interest in political arcana reveals, except I would like to think, along with Robert Baldwin a century and a half ago, that (in his words) ‘the idol of my idolatry is Canada’.

Canada in 1867 (and still today) constitutes an experiment in monarchical, parliamentary federalism. How the institutions that articulate these features interact is central to my interest in the study of politics. I am now so old that I can remember a time, when I was in university, that it was laughingly said that whatever virtues the United States possess, Canadian superiority was evident in its beer, football and politics. Budweiser and the NFL have made that boast antique and current

disparagement of monarchical; parliamentary government along with a willingness to advocate American-style practices but in the absence of American constitutional theory seems calculated to exert the same effect on our politics.

There are many fine characteristics of the United States to emulate, but its political practices (especially in Canada's institutionalized pluralistic society) are not one of them. Perhaps that is why so few countries have successfully done so.

- It is the distinctiveness of Canada's parliamentary system which the Canadian Study of Parliament Group has anatomized for some decades now, and for which its labours deserve to be celebrated. What the CSPG does, and what is essential to understanding parliamentary government, is to bring practitioners, students, and observers of the political system together.

The heart of parliamentary politics in activity—in the parties, in the caucus, on the floor of the House and in its committees, and, increasingly, in the penumbra of officials and agencies that report to or support Parliament. Personality, what nineteenth and early twentieth-century commentators labelled 'character', counts for a great deal in parliamentary politics. And that quality is difficult to communicate to those beyond the walls of Parliament. It is in this respect that CSPG makes such an important contribution. If you have not attended one of the Groups' seminars designed to explain parliamentary practice not to academics but to those with a need-to-know, such as interest groups, you should: the study of politics is not the preserve of academics.

In its educative function the Canadian Study of Parliament Group carries on a tradition that is distinctively Canadian. Most political scientists have heard of Walter Bagehot and his English Constitution, published in 1867. Bagehot is rightly celebrated as a pre-eminent interpreter of nineteenth-century parliamentary government. But his classic book was neither the first nor the most scholarly work in its field. That distinction rests with Alpheus Todd, Canada's first Librarian of Parliament, who, also in 1867, wrote a two-volume work entitled On Parliamentary Government in England: Its Origin, Development, and Practical Operation. It was Todd who reported of Sir Robert Walpole that he

grasped in his own hands every branch of government; had attained the sole direction of affairs, monopolized all the favours of the crown; [and] compassed the disposal of all places, pensions, titles and rewards.

Here is an indictment of misgovernment the National Post could only lament it had not itself formulated against Jean Chrétien.

- In his Autobiography, Anthony Trollope said he did not read the kind of books he wrote. This is a sentiment most of us can understand, but it is easy to be too selective in what we choose to study. For this reason, I believe I speak for many political scientists when I say we are indebted to the Association and to the Group for expanding our horizons on the subject of politics and government.