

Speeches

CPA Dinner, Awards Ceremony, Sherbourne Center, May 2001

Mr. Arthur Donahoe, Q.C., Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association
Members of the High Table

Mr. Arthur Donahoe, Q.C., our Secretary-General, and a native of Nova Scotia was admitted to the Bar in 1966. He then began his law practice, and became a Queen's Counsel in 1982 after only 16 years in the profession. He is a past President of the Canadian Bar Association (Nova Scotia Branch) and of the province's Medico-legal Society.

In his early involvement with politics, Mr. Donahoe did research and writing for a group of Federal Members of Parliament, served as Executive Assistant to the Senate Opposition Leader and was President of the Young Progressive Conservation Association in Nova Scotia. Mr. Donahoe has also been heavily involved in community service in his province in many areas, with senior citizens homes, the Charitable Irish Society, the Catholic Social Services Commission and other organisations.

Arthur Donahoe endorsed a strong paternal political inheritance in the province. His father, Mr. Richard Donahoe, was a Mayor of Halifax, capital city of Nova Scotia, served for many years as a member of the House of Assembly and as Attorney General of Nova Scotia and was thereafter for some years until he retired a Senator in the Canadian Parliament.

Art entered the House of Assembly in 1978. He was Deputy Speaker for just over two years until he became Speaker in February, 1981. He served with distinction in that office for precisely 10 years. He resigned that office and resumed his practice.

Ships from Barbados would travel to Newfoundland and Nova Scotia before sailing down the Eastern seaboard to the United States. Many Barbadians originally bound for New York would end their journey in Halifax, where their descendants now live and thrive.

But as several of us here already know, Art and his wife, Carolyn, who is also happily with us this week, took the opposite direction for their honeymoon as long ago as 1972. They spent their honeymoon with us in Barbados, and have been with us regularly since that time I am happy to say. Like so many Canadians and so much of Canada, they are our good and loyal friends.

I originally met Art in my first CPA role in Fiji in 1981 where the Plenary Conference for that year was held, and the Small Countries Conference, which is now permanently on the CPA calendar, was inaugurated.

I was then into my sixth year as a Minister of Government. I was Leader of the Barbados delegation. The late Sir Arnott Cato, then President of the Senate, who later served on CPA Study Groups on Second Chambers and the Security of Small States, was a member of our delegation. The late Prime Minister, the Rt. Excellent Errol Barrow, one of our National Heroes, was in 1981 Leader of the Opposition, was also in our delegation. He served with the CPA Study Group on Parliament and the Scrutiny of Public Finance. Mr. Barrow would during those Conferences strengthen his friendship with Fiji's Prime Minister, Sir Kamisese Mara, his contemporary at the LSE where my colleague, David Simmons, had also studied with great distinction.

The Secretary-General was already committed to CPA. From his entry to the House of Assembly in

1978, he established a positive presence at Canadian Regional Conferences and at Conferences and Seminars of the Atlantic Provinces. He was a Canadian Regional Representative on the International Executive Committee from 1983 to 1986, served in 1984 on the Working Party on CPA and the Future and hosted as Speaker the 1985 CPA Study Group on Electoral Law. Art was also regularly a delegate of the Nova Scotia Branch to plenary conferences while he was in the Chair.

Arthur Donahoe devoted a quarter of a century to the public and political life of Nova Scotia and the practice of his profession before moving on to CPA. He is the fifth chief executive of our Association which started as the Empire Association in 1911 and was reformed as the CPA in 1948. Mr. Donahoe took over in January, 1993. Probably the most important item of business of Executive Committee at its meeting here has been to nominate his successor for confirmation by General Assembly in Canberra later this year.

In his address to the CPA Conference in Edinburgh last September, Commonwealth Secretary-General the Rt. Hon Don. Mckinnon made a point of acknowledging the key role which the CPA continues to play in strengthening the parliamentary tradition and the deepening of democracy in the Commonwealth. The Secretary-General expressed his "recognition of the part played by one particular individual, your Secretary-General, Art Donahoe, who has presided over a tremendous growth in your Association".

The Secretary-General has personally participated in many of these seminars. Of course, impelled by their own momentum, many Branches, including several in the Caribbean have structured Branch Seminars using regional resources. Again, parliamentary workshops have been heavily used in recent years in the post-election programmes developed in South Africa. Election monitoring in collaboration with COMSEC is a dominant perspective in CPA's work. Study Groups continue to be developed. In February/March a group met in Kuala Lumpur to discuss the issue of Gender-sensitising Commonwealth Parliaments. Another Study Group should meet shortly to consider Public Accounts Committees. The CPA/Wilton Park Conferences continue their immense success. Study tours by individuals and groups between Branches continue to be developed. We have had a number of them in Barbados.

The CPA Parliamentary Information Reference Centre has moved into highly structured new dimensions of comparative information services to Branches. CPA publications have continued to improve and to increase strategies for building the knowledge base of members. The recent publication of the series called "The CPA Library" is an additional opportunity for education and training of members. The Study on Barriers to Women's Participation in Parliament is a major addition to the literature on the subject. The CPA's Guidelines for the Training of Parliamentary Staff, first conceived in 1996, is now in extensive use throughout the Commonwealth and in non-Commonwealth countries.

Art has maintained a constant vigil on his watch. He spreads the gospel of the CPA with great fervour, favouring a quasi-judicial approach which has clearly won him friends and influenced people. He has entrenched our presence at CHOGM. He has strengthened our strategic alliance with COMSEC.

He has done much to improve networking in the Regions and to encourage a higher level of visibility and performance in the Branches. His excellent memory for names in conjunction with the faces to which the names belong has served the Association and himself in good stead. One of my abiding thoughts of Art will be that he is an excellent raconteur, with a formidable repertoire of humour at his disposal, regularly arrayed, displayed and updated.

During my Chairmanship of the Executive Committee from 1996 - 1999 I worked closely with the Secretary General and Headquarters Secretariat. It was a memorable, enjoyable and rewarding experience. I am sure my successor, Hon. Pius Msekwa has that view of his experience.

I should like to mention in particular that Mr. Donahoe's collaboration in the Report of the 1998 Working Party entitled "Rediscovering the CPA: Towards the 21st Century" has helped to position the Association for the coming years when the speed and changes in technology will assume a measure of government of our lives in dictating change. The Association has also embraced a Strategic Plan which is in place until the end of next year when progress in its core objectives will be examined and assessed. The management and the executive direction of the incoming Secretary-General of the CPA will be seen in the dynamism of this century performing a role of ever greater importance in one of the central, unifying and vital bodies of the Commonwealth. He should be seen as a worthy successor to the great achievements of Mr. Donahoe at the centre, at Headquarters and in the Branches.

Art himself has written that "... Parliaments are unusual institutions. They differ greatly from one to another, both constitutionally and in other practical political operations. They vary in size and shape, in tenure, in powers and functions, in autonomy and in procedures and traditions ..." Canadian Parliamentary Review Summer 2000 Vol. 23 No. 2 p. 13. He was fortunate to be brought up in the system, as I was. I recognise that quotation as an important statement.

Art has secured a special niche for himself throughout the length and breadth of this mosaic of the Commonwealth of nations in which he is well known, well travelled, immensely popular and greatly regarded.

We in Barbados have been and will be sustained by fond memories of Carolyn and Art. We must continue to work together to build the CPA and to secure for it an even greater voice in the councils of nations and to develop its principles of democracy, good governance and a well ordered civil society.