

INFORMATION GIVEN TO NEW MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

Minutes of the spring meeting 1985 (Extracts)

(Lomé — Togo)

Topical discussion introduced by Mr. Jacobson

The *Vice-President* invited Mr. Jacobson to introduce the topical discussion on the information given to new Members of parliament.

Mr. Jacobson (Israel) said he had raised the issue principally as an opportunity to gain information about what the practice was in other countries. At present in Israel new Members of Parliament were invited to have personal talks with the parliamentary officials on matters of parliamentary rules and procedure. A special meeting had been arranged after the most recent election but there was a feeling that this was not sufficient. He was keen to learn how other parliaments introduced new Members to their procedures.

Mr. Pring (United Kingdom) said that in the United Kingdom every new Member of Parliament received a letter from the Clerk of the House of Commons together with booklets on the different activities of the House and directing them to the offices responsible for the various services of the House. The main political parties usually invited a clerk to address new Members belonging to their party soon after the election but this was done only at the request of the parties. Members were expected to seek information from the offices and from the clerks.

Mr. Tumangan (Philippines) said that in the 1981 parliament in the Philippines the secretariat had organised a seminar for newly elected Members. There had been some resistance to this from members and so the Secretary General had issued a booklet with information about the secretariat and a description of the various offices. This had included a flow-chart on how a bill was considered by parliament. Members did tend to seek private advice directly from the secretariat.

Mr. Lussier (Canada) said that the Clerks of both Houses would receive each new Member and spend an hour or more explaining to them how their Chamber worked. They would also arrange for new Members to meet the heads of different services in each Chamber. This first meeting did not necessarily provide the chance for Members to grasp all the details and a second session was sometimes held several weeks later.

Mr. Guthrie (United States) said that in the House of Representatives the Clerk invited all new Members to attend an organisational conference. Packets of

information were also sent to them. A committee arranged the training of freshmen by officers and counsel who explained the procedure of the House during the organisational conferences. The conferences also included seminars at Harvard on political issues. Conferences were bi-partisan and so included Members from both parties.

Mr. Charpin (France) said that in the French Senate new Members were given a dossier of information and told that staff were at their disposal to resolve any problems. Political groups were responsible for training their own Members. In the National Assembly there was financial provision on the budget of the Assembly for training Deputies in the use of television. Deputies were pleased with this training system, as were Senators who used it.

Mr. Hjortdal (Denmark) said that the Speaker briefed new Members and held a question and answer session for them. The Secretary General also sent a letter to all new Members together with various information booklets. Further meetings were arranged by the library and information service on the facilities of the Folketing. Within their first three or four months of membership most Members learnt what they needed to know about parliamentary procedure and practice.

Mr. Blake (Australia) said that both Chambers conducted a two-day seminar for new Members. The usual documentation was also provided. The seminars were run by the Clerk and all Members took part. Senior officers of both Houses attended the seminars. This enabled new Members to identify which service could help them with particular problems. At the end of each seminar a wash-up session was held to see how the seminar could be improved for the next session. There were also social events organised to enable new Members to get to know each other.

Mr. Davies (United Kingdom) said that one of the unusual features of the House of Lords in the United Kingdom was that Members joined on an irregular basis and that there were rarely more than one or two new Members at any one time. Each received a letter from the Clerk and held a meeting with him before they took their seats. The usual documentation was provided. A twenty-page 'brief guide' was also issued to new Members. He drew the attention of the Members of the Association to a number of articles published over the last few years in the *Journal of Society of Clerks at the Table* on this subject.

Mr. Sherbini (Egypt) said that in Egypt each Member was given a copy of the constitution and the rules of procedure. There was no special programme for the training of new Members. The Secretary General and his staff were always at their service to explain how parliament worked.

Mr. Morosetti (Italy) said that in Italy the same arrangements existed in both Houses. A questionnaire was sent to new Members about their experience and knowledge. Political groups gave information to their supporters on the working of the political system. A list of the services of each chamber and the staff responsible for dealing with them was given to all Members.

Mr. Mo (Norway) said that a booklet was given to new Members about the facilities that were available for them. This included wider information about

living facilities in Oslo. Political groups arranged training for their own new Members and this was conducted entirely by those groups.

In conclusion *Mr. Jacobson* thanked those who had supplied information on the practice in their own countries which he said was very useful. He noted that seminars conducted in the United States Congress and in Australia looked very impressive and that almost all parliaments sent out various information booklets to new Members.

The *Vice-President* thanked Mr. Jacobson and said that, judging by the number of participants, this new method of spontaneous topical discussion had proved fruitful. He hoped that at future sessions the Association would have opportunities for similar exchanges of views.

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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:

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