

# KENT ROACH

## AN INQUIRING MIND

**I**f Kent Roach '87 has anything to say about it, public inquiries and royal commissions, the butt of many a Canadian joke, will have their day in court.

In fact, if there's an appellation that fits this calm, intellectually incisive law professor, it could be "Mr. Public Inquiry." Kent, who holds the Faculty's Prichard-Wilson Chair in Law and Public Policy, has participated in or led research teams on a host of Canadian inquiries from Guy Paul Morin, to Robert Driskell, to Dudley George and Ipperwash, to Maher Arar, to the Air India tragedy.

That is the considerable bad news – the injustices done and in need of serious retroactive correction. A piece of good news, however, is the way in which Canada has 'outed' itself in terms of its own record. "Every country is guilty of wrongful convictions," says Kent. "But Canada is now the global model in terms of taking seriously why they happen and how we can fix what went wrong."

Illustrating his point, Kent cites a recent video-conferenced law class with a colleague in Singapore on the Arar inquiry: "They are totally up to speed with what's going on in Canada. The results of phase one (which, in September 2006, completely exonerated Maher Arar of any ties to terrorism) were also on the front page of *The New York Times* the day the report came out."

When asked how he got "to here" – for instance, to his current role as research director in legal studies for the Air India inquiry – from "there," from his childhood, Kent laughs. "As a little boy I remember wanting to be an RCMP officer," he says without a hint of irony, "and being desperately worried that I wasn't going to hit six feet (the height requirement at the time). My fears were well founded. When I enter RCMP headquarters now as a policy researcher and advisor for either the Arar or Air India commissions, I know it's as close as I'm going to get to the uniform!"

There are other inspirations for a man committed to civic duty, among them Kent's father, whose public service focused on the regulation

of financial institutions; colleague Professor Marty Friedland; and Kent's undergraduate political science professor at U of T, now Professor Emeritus Peter Russell, who encouraged Kent as he prepared his thesis on the McDonald Commission on RCMP wrongdoing. Kent also cites Supreme Court of Canada Justice Rosalie Abella's appointing him as project director, in 1992, of the Ontario Law Reform Commission's report on the state of public inquiries.

As to what particular talent or orientation it takes to do public policy work with the aim of restoring justice, Kent speaks about his newspaper days on U of T's downtown campus. "In the end, you have to bang it out. In policy research and the public inquiry, we have to get to recommendations that are relevant on an accelerated timetable." Deadlines work for this man who has not only authored more than 100 scholarly articles, but has also written or co-edited 12 books, including recent books on the effects of 9/11 on Canada and global anti-terrorism law and policy.

Increasingly transnational policy-making feeds directly back into Faculty classrooms and elsewhere, Kent adds. He has taught a "mini version" of his comparative antiterrorism course in both Sydney, Australia and Cape Town, South Africa. Meanwhile, Justice Dennis O'Connor, who heads up the Arar inquiry, will be speaking to the law school's bridge program, which will expose first-year students to the role of public inquiries.

It is clear that Kent has great hopes for the next round of policy research on Air India – what he has described as the most heinous act of terrorism prior to 9/11. The case will now be subjected to a different kind of peer review on the ground, as practitioner-experts who must deal with the outcomes of policy-making will pull apart, before the presiding judge, retired Supreme Court Justice John Major '57.

Judging by the persistent twinkle in Kent's blue eyes, it seems he's up to this latest, long-overdue move to ensure justice, Canadian style.

*By Lisa E. Boyes*