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The Future of Parliaments and Their Libraries

A review article by Dr Russell Cope

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All inquiries should be made to:

The Director of Research
Procedure Office
Senate Department
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Telephone: (06) 277 3057

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FOREWORD

A good deal is written about reform of Parliament, even in Australia where Parliament is a neglected subject of study, but very little is heard about parliamentary libraries. These institutions are important sources of information and analysis for members of Parliaments, and, as Dr Russell Cope points out, parliamentary reform requires intellectual activity in which ideas and information are vital. It is therefore to be expected that parliamentary libraries, as intellectual resources, would play a large role in stimulating reform proposals. It is surprising that this does not appear to have happened.

No one is better qualified to write about parliamentary libraries than Dr Cope. For over 30 years he was the Parliamentary Librarian of the New South Wales Parliament, and generations of parliamentary officers and students of Parliament have found his writings of great interest.

In the first part of the article to which this issue is devoted, he analyses, through a review of a history of the United Kingdom House of Commons Library, the ingredients which go to make a great parliamentary library. In the second part of the article he makes some observation about the future of Parliaments, and the role which parliamentary libraries should play in ensuring that that future is characterised by restoration and renewal rather than continued decline. His ideas and suggestions are worthy of serious attention.

The second part of this issue seeks to put into effect a suggestion made by Dr Cope: that there should be regularly published a parliamentary bibliography, a list of works and articles on Parliament and related subjects. The bibliography in this issue is backdated to 1991, which happens to be the life span of the current software on which the Senate Department's internal bibliography has been maintained.

It is intended that this bibliography will be updated in future issues. It is significant that the bibliography was not only suggested by Dr Cope but compiled with the assistance of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library, one of the great, but neglected, and now threatened, institutions of the Commonwealth.

Harry Evans
Clerk of the Senate