Rupert Loof:
Clerk of the Senate and Man of Many Parts*

Derek Drinkwater

Rupert Harry Colin Loof, Clerk of the Senate between 1955 and 1965 and a Senate officer for almost forty years, was born at Katamatite, Victoria on 15 August 1900, the son of 'Chas' Loof, a farmer, and his wife, Mary Ann, née Robins. He was educated at primary schools in Katamatite and Melbourne, Melbourne High School, and a Melbourne business academy where he learnt shorthand and typing. Loof was one of the few parliamentary officers of his generation to hold a tertiary qualification, in his case a Bachelor of Commerce degree from the University of Melbourne. He entered the Commonwealth Public Service in Melbourne on 1 February 1919 as a clerk in the Defence Administration Branch of the Department of Defence. Other positions followed, including nine months as Personal Clerk and Confidential Secretary to the First Naval Member, Commonwealth Naval Board, until his transfer to the Senate as Clerk and Shorthand Writer on 21 October 1926.

At the time of Loof's appointment the Commonwealth Parliament was still meeting in Melbourne, but in early May 1927 he found himself among forty parliamentary officers working, sleeping and having most of their meals in the new Parliament House in Canberra pending its official opening by H.R.H. the Duke of York (later King George VI) on 9 May 1927:

> The 27-year-old Rupert Loof, who had been a pianist and church organist in Melbourne, was one of the house's temporary tenants and was fired with an ambition to try the grand piano standing ready for the opening ceremony in King's Hall. In the middle of the night, he crept from his bed and began to play in the darkness and only discovered when interrupted by the unfeeling

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official in charge of the building that the darkness also hid an appreciative audience of colleagues.[1]

The opening of the first session of the tenth Parliament by the Duke, which took place in the Senate Chamber on the same day, marked the formal recognition of Canberra as Australia's seat of government; it was to remain Loof's most vivid memory as an officer of the Parliament.[2]

Loof served as Clerk and Shorthand Writer (1926–c.1929), Correspondence and Reading Clerk (c.1929-c.1932) and Clerk of the Records and Papers, c.1932 until his appointment as Usher of the Black Rod and Clerk of Committees on 1 January 1939.[3] He held this position until 30 November 1942. The ceremonial and administrative position of Usher of the Black Rod, which dates from the sixteenth century,[4] carried with it in Loof's time the secretaryship of two Senate Standing Committees: the Printing Committee,[5] which produced eight reports during Loof's tenure;[6] and the Regulations and Ordinances Committee,[7] which tabled one report while Loof was Secretary. The report, produced in wartime, was a significant one. It concluded, *inter alia*, that the great volume of regulations and orders being issued under the National Security Act to cope with the exigencies of war, made it no longer useful or practical for the Committee to continue reviewing the plethora of subordinate legislation being made under the Act. In June 1944, a non-parliamentary Regulations Advisory Committee (with an MHR as Chairman) was appointed by the Attorney-General to perform this task for the duration of the war.[8] The Usher, as Clerk of Committees, was also responsible for serving as secretary to any select committees appointed by the Senate. Loof was required to perform this role once as Usher and Clerk of Committees, when he acted as secretary to a select committee which investigated the discharge of Captain T.P. Conway from the Australian Army.[9]

[1] J. Gibbney, *Canberra 1913–1953*, AGPS, Canberra, 1988, p. 125.

[2] *Canberra Times,* 13 August 1965, p. 3.

[3] Loof's Commonwealth Public Service personal file, which contains material dating from 1918 until his retirement in 1965, is incomplete. Reasonably detailed records of his career are available only from 1935. Consequently, dates for positions held by Loof earlier than this time can only be approximate.

[4] A history of the position and a description of the Usher's duties can be found in J.R. Odgers, *Australian Senate Practice*, 1st ed., Government Printer, Canberra, 1953, pp. 41–42 and 6th ed., Royal Australian Institute of Public Administration (ACT Division), Canberra, 1991, pp. 196–197.

[5] First appointed in 1901 to make recommendations concerning which papers and petitions presented to, or laid before, the Senate should be published.

[6] See *Journals of the Senate*, 9 June 1939, p. 189; 22 September 1939, p. 235; 8 December 1939, p. 287; 30 May 1940, p. 45; 13 December 1940, p. 38; 3 April 1941, p. 62; 3 July 1941, pp. 89–90; 27 November 1941, p. 151.

[7] First appointed in 1932 to consider and, if necessary, report on all regulations and ordinances before the Senate.

[8] See Senate Standing Committee on Regulations and Ordinances, *Fifth Report*, in *Journals of the Senate; Sessional Papers and Reports* (Vol I, 1940–1943), pp. 365–368*; Journals of the Senate*, 17 September 1942, p. 241; and J.R. Odgers, *Australian Senate Practice*, 1st ed., Government Printer, Canberra, 1953, pp. 165–166.

[9] See *Senate Select Committee on the Discharge of Captain T.P. Conway from the Australian Military Forces*, in *Journals of the Senate; Sessional Papers and Reports* (Vol I, 1937–1940), pp. 309–340; *Journals of the Senate,* 7 September 1939, p. 215.

From 1 December 1942 until 20 July 1955 Loof served as Clerk-Assistant (or Deputy Clerk) of the Senate. The tasks performed by the Clerk-Assistant during this period encompassed Chamber duties and responsibilities such as the preparation and issue of the Notice Paper.[10] Between 2 August 1945 and 9 December 1954 Loof also held the post of Secretary of the Joint House Department, a position which involved numerous administrative duties relating to the operation of the Parliament. Among his most rewarding tasks as secretary was responsibility for organising all formal functions in Parliament House in connection with the Royal visit of Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh in 1954. During this, the first visit to Australia of a reigning British monarch, the Queen opened the third session of the twentieth Parliament on 15 February 1954.

On the recommendation of the President of the Senate, Loof was appointed Clerk of the Senate by the Governor-General in Council on 21 July 1955. As permanent head of the Department of the Senate he was responsible for the overall administration of the Department; for keeping a record of all chamber proceedings; for preparing the *Journals of the Senate*; and for maintaining custody of all documents laid before the Senate.[11] As Clerk, Loof was also *ipso facto* Secretary of the Standing Orders Committee. Although the Committee produced no reports during Loof's time as secretary, important reforms of the Standing Orders followed from the report tabled by the Committee on 25 November 1965, with which Loof had been closely involved before his retirement three months earlier. The report was adopted on 2 December 1965 and the revised Standing Orders came into effect on 1 January 1966.[12] Loof ceased duties as Clerk and retired from the Commonwealth Public Service on 14 August 1965, upon reaching the mandatory retirement age of sixty-five years. His career as a parliamentary officer had spanned sixteen Parliaments. Shortly before Loof's retirement, Sir Alister McMullin, who was Senate President during Loof's time as Clerk, paid handsome tribute to his abilities:

> [Loof's] inbuilt understanding of the parliamentary machine and its workings has ever been present and the functioning of our parliamentary institution has been paramount in his mind at all times.[13]

Loof's stewardship of the position of Clerk of the Senate was a distinguished one. His term of office produced enduring benefits for the Commonwealth Parliament as an institution and for the parliamentary process in Australia. Loof's involvement was central to three major parliamentary reforms whose effect is felt even today: the formation of an Australian National Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in 1956 as a precursor to Australia successfully

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[10] A more detailed outline of the Clerk-Assistant's role at this time can be found in J.R. Odgers, *Australian Senate Practice*, 1st ed., Government Printer, Canberra, 1953, pp. 40–41.

[11] See J.R. Odgers, *Australian Senate Practice*, 2nd ed., Government Printer, Canberra, 1959, pp. 41–43 and 3rd ed. 1967, pp. 76–78.

[12] The Committee was first appointed in 1901 to examine and report upon the Standing Orders. See *Report from the Standing Orders Committee*, in *Journals of the Senate; Sessional Papers and Reports* (Vol I, 1964–1966), pp. 669–681; *Journals of the Senate*, 4 March 1964, p. 21, 25 November 1965, p. 414, 2 December 1965, p. 427.

[13] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 26 May 1965, p. 1293, during tributes on Loof's retirement; see also tribute in *Canberra Times*, 13 August 1965, p. 3.

applying for membership of the IPU; a significant change to budget and estimates procedures in 1961; and the administrative reorganisation of the Department of the Senate in 1964.

Inter-Parliamentary Union Membership: 1956

Although Australia had been a member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association[14] since its inception, like most members of the Commonwealth of Nations, she had never joined the IPU.[15] Only four Commonwealth countries were active IPU members in mid-1956[16] when Loof set in train moves which would see Australia's increasing trade, diplomatic and political involvement abroad matched by greater cooperation and consultation between its national parliament and those of other Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth nations through the forum of the IPU. Loof's proposals were taken up by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives who gave them strong support. On 11 September 1956 a Committee was appointed, with Loof as Secretary, to consider the questions of forming a National Group of the IPU within the Commonwealth Parliament and applying for membership of the IPU.[17]

At a meeting on 17 October 1956 the Committee presented its report, unanimously recommending that an IPU Australian National Group be formed and an application be made for IPU membership.[18] On the nomination of the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives was elected Chairman of the Group. Following the President and the Speaker's election as Group Joint Presidents, Loof was appointed the Group's Honorary Secretary-Treasurer, a position he held until 1964. Loof acted as Secretary to the Australian delegation to six IPU conferences: 45th (Bangkok, 15–22 November 1956); 46th (London, 12–19 September 1957); 48th (Warsaw, 27 August–4 September 1959); 49th (Tokyo, 29 September–7 October 1960); 51st (Brasilia, 24 October–1 November 1962); and 53rd (Copenhagen, 20–28 August 1964). On these occasions Loof also represented Australia at the Plenary Sessions of the Association of Secretaries-General of Parliaments. He was elected to the Association's Executive Committee at The Hague in 1962, and served until 1964.

Among Loof's most treasured experiences as a parliamentary officer was a brief visit to Israel in 1959 where he represented the Australian delegation of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, en

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[14] An association of sitting British Commonwealth of Nations parliamentarians, formed in 1911 (as the Empire Parliamentary Association) to make possible regular consultation between them on parliamentary issues and to promote the study of Commonwealth parliamentary institutions.

[15] The world organisation of Parliaments of sovereign states. British and French MPs convened a conference attended by the parliamentary representatives of nine nations in 1889 which resulted in the establishment of the IPU. By 1996 133 national Parliaments and three international parliamentary assemblies were represented in the IPU.

[16] Great Britain, India, Pakistan and Ceylon.

[17] The Committee consisted of the following members:
    Senate—J.J. Arnold, K.A. Laught, A.M. (later Sir Alister) McMullin, President of the Senate,
    1953–1971, D.M. (later Dame Dorothy) Tangney, R.C. (later Sir Reginald) Wright
    House of Representatives—G.W.A. Duthie, L. W. Hamilton, W.C. Haworth, R.W. Holt, J. (later Sir John)
    McLeay, Speaker of the House of Representatives, 1956–1966, H.G. Pearce, E.G. Whitlam.

[18] Copies of the report and minutes of the meeting can be found in the IPU files, held by the House of Representatives, Parliament House, Canberra.

route to the 48th IPU conference in Warsaw. As he has testified, the visit had a profound effect on both Loof and his wife, who accompanied him: 'Our earliest religious memories were stories of Israel, so the holy places we visited during the tour were the most memorable and moving religious experiences of our lifetime.'[19] Loof's central role in Australia becoming an IPU member was acknowledged by the Senate political leadership involved in the formation of an Australian National Group, Sir Alister McMullin praising his 'industrious work in the formative stages of the Australian Branch of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.'[20] Australia hosted spring meetings of the IPU (a kind of half-conference) in 1966 and 1977 and an IPU conference (the 90th) for the first time in 1993.

Financial Procedure Reform: 1961

Calls had been made in the late 1950s for new procedures to enable Senators and Members of the House of Representatives to review financial policy more effectively. However, movement in this direction was slow. After advocating such reform, G.S. Reid, for example, referred in 1959 to:

> … an ultra-conservatism about matters of parliamentary procedure which has to be penetrated before reforming action can commence. This is particularly the case with financial procedure.[21]

In 1961 Loof played a major role in framing a significant reform, proposed by Senator Spooner, the Senate Government Leader,[22] which was aimed at improving Senate consideration of the estimates.[23] Since 1909 the estimates, which came to the Senate principally in the form of the Appropriation Bill and the Appropriation (Works and Services) Bill, had been tabled in the Senate with the Budget Papers when the Treasurer delivered his Budget speech in the House of Representatives. The motion 'That the papers be printed' then originated a **general** debate of the Budget in the Senate. At the conclusion of that debate, the Senate awaited the passing of the Appropriation Bills by the House of Representatives and their transmittal to the upper chamber.[24] The Leader of the Government in the Senate, in outlining the proposed reform, explained that the increasing amount of legislation arising for consideration in the Budget session was hampering the Senate's ability to examine the estimates.[25] To circumvent this difficulty, he argued that henceforth the Senate should resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole and give **detailed** consideration

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[19] Note provided to the author at an interview with R.H.C. Loof, 10 December 1995. See *Inter-Parliamentary Union Conferences: Reports of Australian Delegation* (Nos 45-54), Government Printer, Canberra, n.d., (incomplete).

[20] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 26 May 1965, p. 1293.

[21] G.S. Reid, 'Financial procedure in the Commonwealth Parliament', *Public Administration*, (18), 3, September 1959, pp. 217–238.

[22] W.H. (later Sir William) Spooner, Leader of the Government in the Senate, 1959–1964.

[23] *Canberra Times*, 13 August 1965, p. 3.

[24] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 27 September 1961, p. 654.

[25] ibid.

to the estimates (which formed part of the Budget Papers already tabled in the Senate) **before** they were passed by and transmitted from the House of Representatives. The proposal was adopted by the Senate and its financial procedures altered accordingly. Loof has referred to the important practical benefits that the reform had for the process of government:

> It had been the practice in the Senate that when the Estimates and Budget Papers were being discussed in a *general* way, officers located in Melbourne [where several government departments were still based] would have to travel to Canberra not knowing whether the items with which they dealt would be discussed and would often have to return again to Canberra, if necessary. As the discussion of the Estimates and Budget Papers in *detail* would be conducted in an orderly way the officers concerned would know exactly when their advice would be required.[26]

As Loof told the ACT Group Seminar on the Process of Legislation on 7 August 1963, the main benefit of the reform was that it permitted:

> … a detailed discussion [of the Estimates] in addition to the general one. The preliminary examination of the Expenditure proposals for the financial year enables the Appropriation Bills when eventually received from the House of Representatives to be passed with the minimum discussion and consequently with the minimum delay.[27]

But the implications of the change, first outlined in detail in a report by Loof to Spooner, were much wider. It represented, in G.S. Reid's opinion, another important step in the Senate's assertion of its role as a house of review:

> The Senate is a powerful upper chamber … It has demanded financial equality and it has been given it; it has won representation on the Public Accounts Committee; it receives the Budget Speech and the Estimates simultaneously with the House of Representatives, and it begins its scrutiny of them without waiting for them to be 'transmitted' from the House.[28]

Loof and Spooner worked closely together to achieve this reform, the latter appreciating Loof's trenchant knowledge and understanding of parliamentary practice as well as the unusual amalgam of personal qualities necessary in a successful Clerk. On 5 July 1965, on the eve of his retirement from Parliament, Spooner wrote privately to Loof to thank him for 'the help and assistance you gave me over the years during which I was a Minister … I have … a

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[26] Memorandum on the 1961 procedural changes provided to the author at an interview with R.H.C. Loof, 1 October 1995. See *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 26 September 1961, pp. 641–653; 27 September 1961, pp. 654–655; pp. 681–683.

[27] R.H.C. Loof, 'The legislative process in the Senate', *Public Administration*, (23), 2, June 1964, pp. 146–159.

[28] G.S. Reid, 'Australia's Commonwealth Parliament and the "Westminster Model"', *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, (2), 2, May 1964, pp. 89–102.

great respect not only [for] your knowledge of Senate procedure but also [for] the sagacity and wisdom in the advice which you tendered.'[29]

Senate Department Reorganisation: 1964

The structure and organisation of the five parliamentary departments remained virtually unaltered between 1901 and the mid-1960s, with Senate staff increasing in number only from ten to nineteen. By 1964 pressure on staff in the Senate (and the House of Representatives) was growing in the face of numerous new demands being made by the Parliament. In response Loof initiated an inquiry into the operations of the Senate Department, which was undertaken by the Clerk-Assistant, J.R. Odgers, who conducted a review of Senate administrative and staffing arrangements in early 1964. The House of Representatives was the subject of a similar review at this time and the reasons given by the lower house for such an inquiry were essentially the same in respect of the Senate:

> … changes in the power and scope of the federal government, the increase in the number of parliamentarians (bringing greater demands for information, legislation, regulations and procedural advice, and more parliamentary questions), the gradual transfer of departments to Canberra, the increased activities of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the expansion in committee activity, had left the department ill-equipped to deal with the further changes that were likely to occur.[30]

The Senate Department reform proposals, which were approved by the Executive Council on 5 March 1964, resulted in a major reclassification of positions within the Department, a greater emphasis on meeting the demands of committees and the separation of the accounts staff from the promotional hierarchy of the Department (in which two junior positions were created). The position of Clerk-Assistant was also redesignated to that of 'Deputy Clerk'. These reforms were significant ones:

> The changes made in 1964 to the two house departments represent an important landmark in the history of parliamentary administration in so far as they ushered in a period of sustained staff growth and organisational change which was in marked contrast to the experiences of the previous sixty years.[31]

The ambitious initiatives with which Loof was associated during his decade as Clerk had important benefits for the Senate. IPU membership increased the opportunities for Australian participation in international parliamentary affairs; the financial procedure changes made possible a more thorough and expeditious consideration of the estimates; and the Senate Department reorganisation greatly improved the capacity of parliamentary officers to service the Senate's chamber, procedural and committee needs.

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[29] Letter provided to the author at an interview with R.H.C. Loof, 1 October 1995.

[30] G.S. Reid and M. Forrest, *Australia's Commonwealth Parliament, 1901–1988: Ten Perspectives,* Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Vic., 1989, p. 417.

[31] ibid., pp. 417–418.

Like many of his colleagues, Loof had not been enthusiastic about leaving Melbourne for Canberra in 1927.[32] However, he came to love the city, choosing to retire there. On 28 December 1929 Loof married Margaret Beatrice, daughter of James White of Melbourne. There were three children of the marriage, a son and two daughters. Mrs Loof died on 23 November 1995 at the age of 92. Loof is a man of wide interests, which include music (the piano and the pipe organ), painting (mainly oils), A grade golf (he designed and produced a golf driving practice device which was 'Invention of the Week' on ABC TV's 'The Inventors' program in November 1978), pottery (using a kiln and a wheel he made himself), and in youth and middle age, A grade tennis. Loof was appointed CBE in June 1962.

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[32] *Canberra Times,* 13 August 1965, p. 3.