
Pictures of Parliament: Canberra and Berlin

A Review of Two Publications

R.L. Cope

Images of the House. The First Hundred Years, House of Representatives 1901-2001. Canberra, Department of the House of Representatives, 2002. xii, 124 p, illus.

Biefang, Andreas: *Bismarcks Reichstag. Das Parlament in der Leipziger Strasse, Fotografiert von Julius Braatz.* (Photodokumente zur Geschichte des Parlamentarismus und der Politischen Parteien vol. 6) Düsseldorf, Droste Verlag, 2002. (Issued on behalf of Die Kommission für Geschichte des Parlamentarismus und der Politischen Parteien, Bonn).

The two works reviewed here are both similar and dissimilar.¹ They have the common objective of providing a photographic record of the interior of a legislative body and of its representatives: the Australian volume covers the first century of the House of Representatives, and the one devoted to the Reichstag in Berlin covers a briefer time span, a mere two months in the year 1889. This was during the short period preceding the end of the era of the Iron Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, following the accession to the throne in 1888 of the fateful Kaiser Wilhelm II. It is a historical curiosity that

¹ Thanks are expressed to Meg Crooks (Department of the House of Representatives, Canberra), and to Dr Martin Schumacher, Bonn/Berlin who provided the copy of *Bismarck's Reichstag* and the speeches delivered at the launching of the book.

photos were taken by Braatz on the very last day (18 May 1889) Bismarck was to enter the parliamentary premises (p. 12). At this time the Reichstag was still meeting in a provisional parliamentary building in Leipzig Street in Berlin. It did not move until 1894 to the massive Wallot building near the Brandenburg Gate. Like the German Reichstag, the Australian Parliament, a mere 30 years younger than its German counterpart, met in different buildings until the New and Permanent Parliament House was opened in May 1988 by the Queen. Apart from these external similarities, there is in fact little to compare and contrast between the two parliaments or, more accurately, the two lower houses of the respective parliaments. For these reasons the two works here under review will be analysed separately.

Canberra Images

Images of The House, dealing with the Australian House of Representatives at Canberra, is a well-produced, largely pictorial work, which will be welcomed by a range of users for the variety of its photos (black and white, and coloured) and for its readable, informative text. The photos are amply annotated and come from private sources, public collections and archives, and from organizations. Many different photographers are responsible for them, but details are not generally given of photographers' names. There are some 243 photos in the book; some full-page coloured photos are strikingly handsome, others photos are small and not coloured. Some of the best photos are unexpected and would not be publicly known. These are usually less stiff, formal or posed than the many official photos. The photo on page 86 showing Bob Hawke being hit in the face by a cricket ball while playing in a match introduces a personal touch that is an asset to a work which could be all too rigid with many posed official groups.

The author of the text (Meg Crooks) is not named on the titlepage, but she is acknowledged in Appendix C. The eight chapters are divided into themes (e.g. In the Chamber, Three Buildings, One House, Dissolving Parliament) and the photos illustrate the themes. This gets away from the purely chronological arrangement that a centennial work often invites. A number of persons have had a hand in advising on the selection of photos and on the general structure of the volume. The diversity of material chosen is excellent and would remind many readers of significant events and personalities, not all of them members of parliament. There are three Appendices giving details of the provenance of the photos, full titles of person mentioned in the text and finally acknowledgments. Appendix B with full titles does not give the academic qualifications of the persons listed for reasons that seem obscure. Dr Cairns is always called by that title, but there is no indication of the justification for this title.

The Foreword by Speaker Andrew states: 'Images of the House' illustrates the diversity of characters, issues and events of the House of Representatives during its first one hundred years' (ix). On the same page he writes: 'The images capture everything from routine to momentous occasions, including the importance to the community and the members of the physical 'place' of the parliament'. He mentions as well that this work is but one of projects undertaken by the House to mark the centenary. But the others, about which readers might be equally curious, are not listed in the book. What are they? The Speaker's Foreword suggests *Images of the House* is an embracing work, covering many facets of the life and role of the House of Representatives. It also promises a 'glimpse into Australian society'. The reader is

indeed given much that lives up to these words, and few would not leaf through this handsome book without pleasure and instruction. It should also be mentioned that images include political cartoons, archival pictures of pages from important official publications, scenic photos of areas being visited by parliamentary committees, photos of political demonstrations, official receptions, banquets, commemorative ceremonies, portraits of individuals, and sporting functions with members involved. Some photos come from events overseas at which members of the House of Representatives were present. Some photos, such as that on p. 166 showing the first flight of an Australian Prime Minister (S.M. Bruce in 1924) about to take place, mark historical events in the country's progress. Perhaps the number of group photos is inevitable, but the reader may well feel that fewer of these, but more photos with identifiable persons, might be preferable. But nevertheless there is plenty here to vindicate the Speaker's remarks about 'the diversity of characters, issues and events'. This book would make an excellent gift at a reasonable price. It is well produced, handles easily, and should help in parliament's efforts at political education.

The House of Representatives has not in the past been noticeable for any zeal or flair in publicising itself. *Images of the House* shows a very welcome change in this regard as do two other recent excellent publications: *Your Key to the House* and the periodical *About the House*.² Through these publications Australian citizens can now get an easier insight into more aspects of the work and parliamentary environment than was previously the case. Unfortunately, the latter two works are not listed or mentioned in *Images of the House*, which seems a good opportunity missed. On the other hand, the website of the House is a good guide to its publications and activities. The entry for *Images of the House* is commended to the notice of interested readers.³

Despite the wealth of images offered to readers, there are some puzzling omissions, which give rise to questions. The title 'Images of the House', so self-explanatory and obvious at first glance, does cause us to ask how images of parliament are generated and conveyed to the Australian public. The answer springs out at us: the media are surely for the majority of Australians the creators of our images. Many photos in the work are the work of press photographers who receive due acknowledgment, but why is there so little to show the media actually at work in parliament? One would expect to see some 'images' of notable Parliamentary Press Gallery representatives over the decades. Frank Browne, the producer of a Sydney political news and scandal sheet *Things I Hear* who, together with Ray Fitzpatrick, fell foul of C. A. Morgan MP and the House Committee on Parliamentary Privilege in 1955, is the only journalist this reviewer could find featured as an individual. Some photos of the House in session give a glimpse of the Press Gallery above the Speaker's chair, but the figures are too tiny to be readily identifiable. Television journalism is even less obvious in the book's coverage. The Editor does in fact state: 'You can observe the importance to a member's parliamentary work of the media ... '(p. ix), but this does not emerge convincingly in the range of images chosen.

² The website is located at <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/pubs/images/index.htm>

³ *About the House: House of Representatives Bulletin*. [two-monthly] Canberra, Department of the House of Representatives. *House at Work. Ordinary People in an Extraordinary Building*. Canberra, Parliamentary Education Office, 2001. *Your Key to the House. A guide to your House of Representatives*. Canberra, Department of the House of Representatives, 2002.

Whilst The House is paramount in its own right, it does not operate, and probably cannot, without the ancillary services of parliament, such as Hansard, Catering, Cleaning, Security and Library, to mention those that are most obvious. There is a striking lack of any direct images of them that show their inter-relationship to the work of the House. Perhaps this may be for good and sufficient reason, but this reviewer thinks the lack needs explanation. Surely a rounded picture would give us a glimpse behind the scenes where we might be shown, inter alia, the recreation and sport facilities in the Federal Parliament. Are views of the parking facilities or of the parliamentary dining room, amenities of undoubted importance to members and staff, not available? Is this a trivial point to make, or is there some point in regarding the work and role of the House of Representatives in broader terms than is done in the present case?

Another puzzling lack is the absence of photos conveying an accurate view of members' working environment, although floor plans of members' offices in the old building and the new one are featured on p. 115. Photo 231 on p. 113, showing part of the area where Neville Howse MP is seen writing, can scarcely be said to do justice to the litany of members' complaints about cramped and unsuitable accommodation in the old Parliament House. This was one of the powerful motivators for the enormous expenditure on the building now on Capital Hill. The superior accommodation for members in the New and Permanent Parliament House is not shown in any detail at all for readers to get an impression of the décor, furnishings and facilities of a backbencher's office and of the quarters occupied by his/her staff. Might the lack of such information feed the suspicious mind that it is not 'politic' to show such things? In the present security conscious world, such arguments might be advanced, but then the whole work would need 'sanitising'.

Another disappointment is that there is no photo of King's Hall or of the splendid Great Hall in the new building. Indeed the only criticism of any consequence that this reviewer would make of the book is that the photos of the New and Permanent Parliament House convey no adequate sense of the nature of that building.⁴ The reader fails to see its opulence, its lavish spatial aspects, its splendid ceramic panels and other works of art, and its 'forbidden city' image so often commented on by those who work in it. If considerations made it impractical to cover these points in *Images of the House*, there should surely be at least a reference to the excellent book *House at Work*, issued by the Parliamentary Education Office in 2001. This latter book gives brief personal accounts by both members and staff of how they find the new building. Those are impressions worth recording and noting.

Since *Images of the House* does not purport to be a quasi-reference work, it foregoes any bibliography or index. Was this a mistake? The reviewer feels the extra effort of providing some reference apparatus would have added value to a good work and answered some of the questions raised above. Perhaps there is room for further

⁴ Some of the questions relating to the nature of a parliamentary building are examined in the following publication: 'Housing a legislature: when architecture and politics meet', by R.L. Cope in *For Peace, Order, and Good Government: the Centenary of the Parliament of Australia: Papers on Parliament* No. 37, November 2001, pp. 83–130.

publications on the parliamentary building by the House of Representatives. A good model would be the publication of the House of Commons at Westminster entitled *Art in Parliament*.⁵ The House and the Senate have splendid works of art in their accommodation: they are certainly worth celebrating as a public asset.

It is obvious that different approaches are possible to the production of a book with this theme. The present result is generally very satisfactory and would meet the needs of many readers. Let us wish it good success with the book-buying public. It deserves a wide, appreciative audience. It is a book which will outlive the quickly forgotten centenary and should prove to be of historical interest to later decades of students of the Australian Parliament. We are not likely to see again this range of photographs brought together in one publication.

One small spelling mishap was noticed on p. 52 where Anderson appears as Andersen.

Berlin Images

Bismarck's Reichstag also commemorates an anniversary: the 50 year existence of the German body called Commission for History of the Parliamentary System and of Political Parties. This notable event is dealt with in the appendix to this paper. The photos come from two sets done by 'Court Photographer', Julius Braatz in the 1880s and 1890s, those of chief interest dating from April and May 1889. The 1889 photos form the content of both the contemporary exhibition in the refurbished Reichstag in Berlin and its catalogue, which is the book under review. They are here published for the first time in their existing entirety. The Editor, Andreas Biefang, discovered photos by Braatz, the existence of which had been previously unknown. Biefang surmises that these photos may be the first photo documentary or report ever made of a legislature as distinct from photos of individual parliamentarians. This may be true, but we need to recall that the American State Capitols were much photographed in the early days, so the German claim may need to be modified. The interesting feature of these photos is that they are all taken on the personal initiative of Braatz. The substantial scholarly text by Andreas Biefang (11–115) explains the unusual circumstances which led to the photos being made with considerable co-operation from the Reichstag authorities and the members themselves. The result is not only an important documentary record of the Reichstag in 1889, but it also provides a valuable visual impression of the composition of the Reichstag's membership. The social historian will find this insight well worth attention. The work's title in English is *Bismarck's Reichstag. The Parliament in Leipzig Street. Photographed by Julius Braatz*.

The Editor is at pains to describe the photographic context of the period, presenting us with a veritable cornucopia of information and insights about the early history of photography of German parliamentarians. There are also useful glances at the situation in other countries. His bibliographical references are particularly valuable for

⁵ *Art in Parliament. The Permanent Collection of the House of Commons. A Descriptive Catalogue.* Compiled by Malcolm Hay and Jacqueline Riding with contributions from Christine Riding and Annabel Cassidy. London, The Palace of Westminster and Jarrold Publishing, 1996.

anyone wishing to look deeper into this history. The first part of the book is devoted to the career of Julius Braatz and the development of a career in photography. The title 'Court Photographer' did not imply that the holder was in the employ of the Court since it was possible to acquire the title from some Courts by paying a fee. This was the case in Bavaria, for example (p. 36). Braatz got his title not from the Kaiser, but from his brother Prince Friedrich Carl von Preussen. This fact led to some official questioning of the way Braatz made use of the title in his business.

Biefang examines the stylistic practices adopted by Braatz in his photographic portraiture, but perhaps his claim to fame is that he was the first photographer to see the parliament as a theme in itself. Photos or sketches of parliamentarians were quite common from about the 1840s onwards (in Germany and elsewhere), but Braatz was the first to go beyond the traditional practice to take interior shots, including some taken from the floor of the Chamber whilst in session, and shots of parliamentary facilities, such as the Parliamentary Library, the Reichstag refreshment rooms and postal facilities. He showed members at work and relaxing, and not simply posing for an 'official photo'. He wanted to convey an impression of their special environment as well as of their work.

Until this exhibition in 2002 Braatz was almost totally forgotten, but Biefang makes a very good case for a renewal of interest in him as one of the founders of photo reporting, a phenomenon we nowadays take for granted. In addition, the work of Braatz fills some gaps in the study of parliamentary symbols and iconography. The semiotics of parliament will profit from the study of what Braatz has captured on film. This is in part because the provisional building of the old Reichstag was demolished in 1898. This provisional building whose history Biefang traces in some detail, was seen as representing in its architecture and interior design a 'popular or bourgeois spirit' which was far from what Bismarck or his imperial master, Kaiser Wilhelm II wanted. This building was replaced by the grandiose Wallot building, restored most notably by Sir (later Lord) Norman Foster in the 1990s.⁶ The Wallot building was commissioned by the Kaiser to represent a vision of the power and prestige of imperial Germany and the rule of the House of Hohenzollern. The Kaiser took a direct personal interest in the project and intervened in matters of detail when he saw fit.

Braatz published two works on the Reichstag. These are *Der deutsche Reichstag in Wort und Bild* [The German Reichstag in Word and Picture, 1892] and *Der deutsche Reichstag und sein Heim* [The German Reichstag and its Home, 1889]. The 1892 work was simply a collection of small individual studio photos of the head and shoulders of members, which were printed in small frames arranged in alphabetical order within their respective parties (Fraktionen). There were twenty-five frames per page. The result is a static photographic gallery. These are reproduced in the present book (pp. 122–137).

The 1889 publication, which is by far the more important and which makes up the bulk of this book, is quite different in intention. It consisted of a number of party group photos, a few photos of individuals, photos of meeting rooms and other

⁶ See *Rebuilding the Reichstag*, by Norman Foster [and others]. London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2000.

interiors, sometimes empty and sometimes with members present, glimpses of members at relaxation and sometimes speaking to the Chamber. In all, the book offers 158 black and white full-page pages and 192 smaller photos. Braatz originally offered his 1889 photos for sale as singles or in groups according to the desire of the person ordering a set. 240 shots were taken and 184 were placed on sale. (p.101). There are also other photos, not the work of Braatz, reproduced in this work. Most of the 1889 photographs of members in party and sometimes mixed groups show them usually at a table in one of the Reichstag vestibules and generally under one of the wall medallions featuring busts of notable German patriots accompanied by quotations from their works. Several individual photos are very striking: those of Bismarck, aged 74 but looking much older, and of Field-Marshal Moltke (he was a parliamentarian from East Prussia) are particularly impressive. The shots of the Chamber in session are of great interest: not all members chose to speak from the rostrum but instead spoke from their seats within the tiered semi-circular rows. One gets the impression that members moved around the Chamber freely during debate. This made the photographer's job very difficult. Braatz succeeded admirably. There is some slight evidence of blurring, but the photos compensate with the reality they convey. Of course, the party group photos were posed, but Braatz managed to instil a fair degree of liveliness into these photos. They are far from static or monumental. Members may be reading or smoking in these shots.

As mentioned above, the photos were taken in May 1889 and on the last day Bismarck was to enter the Chamber. It was also shortly before he ceased to be Chancellor. As a member of the Upper House (Herrenhaus) Bismarck had the right to be present at debates of the Lower House as well as the right to address it. He is shown both sitting in the Chamber and then addressing it. On May 18, 1889 Bismarck addressed the House in order to secure passage of the Invalid and Old Age Pension Bill, a contentious measure opposed by the strong left-wing members. Bismarck's speech, said to be one of his best, was a triumph. This may explain why the Chancellor stayed in the building after delivering his speech. Photos show him socialising with members and allowing Braatz the unusual opportunity to photograph the Chancellor with different members. Bismarck commented to Braatz that when he was being photographed he was unsure whether he was to be shot or photographed. These photos contain a good indication of the special feelings of the occasion.

Among the groups Braatz photographed were the Polish members of the Reichstag and those from the recently annexed Alsace-Lorraine. Of the latter, 10 of the 15 members were priests and some wore clerical costume. Some also refused to be photographed. The group of Social Democrat members include Bebel, Liebknecht and Dietz (p. 232). Biefang mentions in his notes that the photograph with Bebel was doctored by scholars in the former German Democratic Republic when they used it in a biography of Bebel. Apparently the words on the wall medallion behind Bebel were not deemed politically correct to be seen in his presence and were brushed out.

The photo-reporting aspect of the book is emphasised by the number of photos where members are smoking cigars. Biefang comments that these instances reflect the men's club aspect of the Reichstag. The only woman in all these photos is a waitress in the refreshment rooms (p. 266). Amongst the rooms photographed is that used by the Speaker (p. 261), by the Chancellor (p. 259), and on p. 86 where Bismarck is shown seated at this desk with his large pet dog in the foreground. The Clerk's office is

shown (p. 235) where he and two colleagues are seen standing together. Some of the photos are of empty rooms.

This handsomely produced book offers those interested in German parliamentary and political history insights that would not otherwise be easily found, but beyond that it offers students of parliament, especially those interested in parliamentary sociology, architecture and symbolism stimulating lines for further investigation. Biefang's text (pp. 11–115) is a most valuable analysis, enriched by a detailed bibliography and notes. It is a stimulating contribution to the study of an under-researched aspect of parliamentary institutions in Germany and, one might add, in the Westminster system as well. In his Foreword to this work, the well-known German historian Klaus Hildebrand writes that Andreas Biefang's analysis and the photos he has brought together have produced a 'first class source for the history of the parliamentary system' [Parlamentarismus]. He also notes that the Commission for the History of Parliamentary Institutions and Political Parties has produced in this work a contribution to the promising field of parliamentary iconography. *Bismarck's Reichstag* is indeed a treasure trove, which should be found in every major research and parliamentary library.

Appendix

The Commission on the History of the Parliamentary System and the Political Parties: Its First Half-Century

The German body whose title may be translated as Commission on the History of the Parliamentary System and the Political Parties (The Commission) has no direct counterpart in English-speaking countries. The British History of Parliament Trust is a body that seems slightly comparable, but then only in a limited and less impressive sense. Both the range of Commission's work and the distinction of so many of its monographs, reference and documentary source works give it a unique status within Germany and, more broadly, across the international scholarly world. Germany has strong traditions dating from the mid-nineteenth century in the fostering of basic historical and social research, based on the study of archival and documentary sources. Germany still possesses famous historical research institutes to this day. The German models in turn were notably influential in the development of the American university schools of history.

The Commission came into being in 1951, largely on the initiative of several prominent historians and social scientists of the day. Their objective reflected in part the post-war wish amongst Germans to understand better the course of political events in Germany in the twentieth century. Why the German political and parliamentary systems succumbed so swiftly to the totalitarian onslaughts of National Socialism

seemed indeed a question necessary to analyse if the new Germany were to have a secure future and move beyond the dead-ends of the past. The overall aims of the Commission encompassed thus broad educational goals and a desire to make available to the German community original documents and sources to enable a balanced and verifiable interpretation of the past. In addition, the Commission began to publish detailed scholarly and well-documented monographs on specific political and parliamentary themes. These monographs range from minute examinations of important topics to broader surveys. Indispensable collections of the minutes of parliamentary party caucus meetings for some major parties are another aspect of the Commission's publishing programme. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that the publishing programme of the Commission has greatly extended the boundaries of parliamentary and political knowledge in Germany and, to some extent, of Europe. We should also mention that the Commission has also drawn on the practical experience of parliamentarians who have also written monographs in its series. The result is an impressively authoritative series of fine works which command the respect of experts.

The fiftieth anniversary of the Commission was celebrated with speeches at the opening of the exhibition of the parliamentary photos of Julius Braatz in May 2002 at the Paul-Löbe building, one of the complex of buildings in Berlin which make up the premises of the Reichstag. Speeches reviewed the origins and work of the Commission and paid tribute to the work of its numerous authors, including its energetic Secretary General, Dr Martin Schumacher. The Commission for the History of the Parliamentary System and the Political Parties is an independent non-parliamentary body, but supported over the years in varying ways by the Bundestag and now in particular by the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, whose territory takes in the city of Bonn, the Commission's location. The work of the Commission also receives financial grants from private foundations and research organizations. The financing of a body such as the Commission, which undertakes long-term research requiring a painstaking assembling of often obscure and not easily located material, now makes it necessary for it to seek extra aid wherever it can be found.

The Commission has a board of governors who are prominent historians and political scientists. Their stature as scholars and researchers ensures that the Commission's publications maintain a high scholarly standard meeting the rigorous demands of modern scholarship and research. The Commission's own small staff produces publications of a reference nature rather than monographs devoted to individuals or on specific limited themes. Anyone examining publications of this body will be struck with the fine standard of printing and presentation. The Droste Verlag in Düsseldorf is the publisher of the Commission's publications and deserves mention for the excellence of its work. Australians might see a similarity of standard in the publications of the Melbourne University Press. Electronic publication is also now entering the

Commission's ambit and its website is informative on this and other aspects of its work.⁷

Since the Commission is not the only body in Germany working in the field of parliamentary and political history, it tries to avoid overlapping with others by entering into co-operative arrangements. This has happened with several of the large political party foundations, with parliamentary parties and authorities of the Bundestag, and with other specialised research institutes. Such arrangements help secure good outcomes for all concerned. It is not feasible to mention by title the numerous publications of this body although some have been reviewed in recent times in Australia.⁸ In its 50 years of existence the Commission has published over 200 titles, many of international importance and certainly in themselves an invaluable research and reference collection on modern German (and European) political and parliamentary history. It is clearly a body worth the attention of all those concerned with the course of parliamentary history, in particular that of Germany.

Because of the severe pressures the public finances of the various German states and its Federal Government are now experiencing, the announcement that the State of North Rhine-Westphalia was no longer able to continue its financial support for the Commission came as a considerable blow. Although some period of grace was allowed before the cessation of support, it was a time of major upheaval until finally the Federal Parliament, the Bundestag, agreed that it would fill the gap. This necessitated the transfer of the Commission's seat from Bonn to Berlin where, since late 2005, the Commission is now located. We must await developments to gauge the effects of this transfer on the scope and work of the Commission. Certainly the economic difficulties of contemporary Germany may have ramifications for scholarship and study there that cannot be foreseen at present. But the Commission remains a unique body admirably serving in a non-partisan manner both the parliamentary and political system and equally enhancing the reputation of Germany for scholarly excellence and reliability.

⁷ The Commission's website is <http://www.kgparl.de>

⁸ Reviews of two major biographical reference works by the Commission, and a review of a very detailed monograph on the history of payment of members of the Reichstag can be cited as examples. See, for example: *Australasian Parliamentary Review*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 2001, p. 198ff.; *Legislative Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2000, p. 66ff., and *Legislative Studies*, Vol. 13, No.1, 1998, p. 105ff.