

## Contributors

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***For Peace, Order, and Good Government:***  
**Speeches at the Launch of the Senate Exhibition**  
**29 March 2001**

**Senator Margaret Reid**

Mr Evans, Mr Speaker, senators and members, very distinguished descendants of the first parliamentarians—and I shall mention some that are represented here—Mr Souter and Mrs Souter, very distinguished audience, and staff of the parliamentary departments. Descendants of Senator Hugh De Largie, Senator George Pearce, Mr Donald Cameron, Mr Alfred Deakin, Mr Patrick McMahon Glynn, Sir George Reid, Dr Charles Carty Salmon and Mr Dugald Thomson, and a descendant of Mr George Upward, the first Usher of the Black Rod, are here tonight, wearing a particular badge giving the name of their ancestor. You are particularly welcome, and add considerably to this occasion.

And it was on precisely this day a hundred years ago that the citizens of New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia and Tasmania went to the polls to cast a vote for the first Australian Parliament. Can you imagine how they felt? And the next day, it was quite safe of course for South Australia and Queensland to go to the polls because there was not the slightest chance that they had any idea at all what their sister states had done on the previous day. It is fitting that we look at the Parliament a hundred years on; its founding, its members, and its achievements.

It is interesting for those of us who are members of this great institution to reflect upon the experience of our predecessors one hundred years ago. From my point of view, it is difficult to comprehend the first meeting, where there were no standing orders, or any body of precedent which had grown, and which we now have. Of the 111 members, 87 had in fact come from state parliaments, and I am not quite sure whether that helped or was a hindrance, because each of them seemed to assert that *their* standing orders and precedents were the best ones to follow. But they did get there in the end. Perhaps it was through the wisdom and the stature of Sir Richard Chaffey Baker and Sir Frederick Holder, the presiding officers, that they managed to

achieve so much. Those two, of course, were both South Australians. And, as always, they had experienced and competent Clerks to assist them with their deliberations.

I wonder if we could reflect for a few moments though, on what a discerning observer who was there in 1901 and at the centenary sitting of Parliament in Melbourne in 2001 would see as the differences, leaving aside top hats and frock coats—I don't expect any of them on the 9th of May 2001, but one never knows.

A discerning observer in 1901 would have seen that the chambers of the Victorian Parliament dwarfed the 36 senators in the Legislative Council, and the 75 members in the Legislative Assembly. And in 2001, he will observe that the 76 senators fit in reasonably well, but the 148 members of the House of Representatives are going to be very snug indeed. It will not be a long session.

He might reflect upon the fact that in 1901, the total population of the electorate of a member of the House of Representatives was about 50 000 people, and today it is 130 000 people. So the increase in membership of the Parliament has not been at the same rate as the increase in population, but then I think there are many ways in which we are able to communicate with our electorates these days that certainly were not open at the time.

A discerning observer in the gallery would have noticed in 1901 that there were no women, in either chamber. He would probably reflect a little on the fact that it took another 42 years before there was one in each of the chambers. And today, he will see that that is quite different—but still nothing like the numbers that I think many might have expected would have happened in that time. Women are still under-represented, but there is a trend to increase the number, and I certainly look to the time when gender will no longer be an issue or something that we talk about.

Our discerning observer looking down would have seen in 1901 that half the members and senators were born in Australia, and all except two of the others were born in the British Empire, and broad Irish and Scots accents were common in that Parliament. In 2001 he will observe that only one-eighth of parliamentarians were born overseas. But it is interesting to reflect upon the places they come from—China, Cyprus, Fiji, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Malta, The Netherlands, New Zealand, the United States of America and Zimbabwe. This is a very different nation.

The journalist Walter Fitchett wrote in 1901 of the first parliamentarians as 'men who have earned their bread and in many instances built great fortunes with toil of brain and pen, as well as of hand and muscle.' There may be less hand and muscle today, although there was in fact a higher proportion of lawyers in the First Parliament. If you want to know more about the members of the first Senate, you will have to read the *Biographical Dictionary of the Australian Senate*, which deals with all of them. It is a book worth reading if you are captivated by the things that have gone before.

Our discerning observer, as he sits and think about things, will reflect on the fact that 17 acts were passed in 1901, compared with 210 in the year 2000—we *did* have a busy year, didn't we? But Parliament sat for 115 days in 1901, compared with 75 in 2000, so we obviously do it more quickly.

What were they doing for all those long hours of sitting? The answer is revealed in the *Hansard*. In the first days of the Parliament, they had to determine how to do things, how to proceed, and most of the arguments were actually advanced in the debate. People did persuade each other on the floor of the Parliament, and that is not so much the way that things happen these days. Many, many hours were spent, and no time limits were imposed on speeches in the Senate—or, I think, in the House of Representatives. Even when they first restricted the time for speeches, it was to one hour.

Another difference of course is that the First Parliament started with empty statute books. We still have some laws on our books that were passed a hundred years ago. There were many things that had to be done in the First Parliament.

But how different was the life of the politician of the time? The House of Representatives sat in every week in the seven months between 21 May and 13 December 1901, and the Senate adjourned only for one week, in October. A train was provided on Friday evenings to take New South Wales members to Sydney, but representatives from Western Australia, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania—I think a few Victorians must have escaped to their own homes because they were in Victoria—the rest of them stayed in Victoria. Some of them were wealthy and were able to stay in clubs and hotels; most of them stayed in humble boarding houses. The circumstances they lived in were fairly modest indeed. The parliamentary salary was 400 pounds a year, which was about twice the income of a tradesman, and they had only a very modest provision for travel and other expenses. That is a *very* different life from the way we are able to conduct ourselves today. We in Canberra, like those in Melbourne in 1901, go home every night.

But this exhibition really is a triumph for the Senate and for those who have worked upon it. I particularly want to thank, and I am sure you would want me to as well, the curator, Kay Walsh, her assistant curator, Amanda Hill, and other Research Section staff including Sue Blunden and Wayne Hooper. The exhibition designer, Andrew Rankine and his team, have done an excellent job. It has been beautifully constructed by Design Craft of Queanbeyan, and the panels printed in a very professional manner by the Exhibition Centre of Queanbeyan.

The Senate really does these exhibitions extremely well. We put great emphasis on seeing that people can get to know about the Senate and the Parliament through exhibitions and through lectures and writing. And perhaps on top of the list, is the Parliamentary Education Office, which the two chambers run. Young people can come here and find out about the Parliament. It is important that those coming after us understand what a good functioning parliamentary democracy we have. This year we hope they will get to know more about how it all came about, and this exhibition is a part of what they will see in that process. I do congratulate all who have been involved in presenting it for us and with great pleasure, declare it open.

### **Gavin Souter**

This takes me back to 1988, when a book that I had written with a lot of help from people who are here tonight, was launched by the Governor-General at the time, Sir Ninian Stephen, in the Senate courtyard of the provisional Parliament House (when it wasn't yet the Old Parliament House).

This exhibition also takes all of us back to 1901, when the first of Australia's thirty-nine parliaments to date was opened in Melbourne by the Duke of York, who later became King George V. Some might regard one parliament as enough, but fortunately, this venerable and vital institution has the knack of reincarnation. Like Houdini, it escapes all predicaments, returning from dissolution and general election—not unscathed, but always ready to have another go.

I would like to commend the Senate Department's exhibition, but I won't attempt to cover aspects of Parliament's first two and half years, which are portrayed and recounted here so well. Instead, I am going to mention three practitioners of one of the occupations most preferred by the 111 legislators who formed the new Commonwealth's First Parliament—not the 28 lawyers, who were predictably the largest group in the Parliament, but 18 journalists. They were the second largest group, well ahead of 12 farmers, graziers and pastoralists combined. Many of these men (the first 16 parliaments had only one gender) were newspaper editors, well accustomed to the politics of federation and anxious to practise what they had been preaching.

The first of the three journalists I want to mention, although a distinguished editor, was not in the First, or any other, parliament. I have to declare an interest here, for John West was the first official editor of Australia's oldest surviving newspaper, the *Sydney Morning Herald*. This is a paper on which I once worked and which, in this year of so many symbolic zeros—the centenary of Federation, the Bicentenary of Matthew Flinders, the Millennium and also, I suppose, a Fortieth Parliament—the *Herald* will reach the rare old age of 170.

Although West was long dead by 1901, he had done a lot for the cause that culminated in the Federal Parliament. As long ago as 1854, under the pseudonym of John Adams, he wrote 17 articles for the *Herald*, and his former paper the *Launceston Examiner*. Entitled 'Union of the Colonies', this influential series has recently been published in book form, with a foreword by the Governor of Tasmania, Sir Guy Green. With understandable partisanship, His Excellency argues that the popular description of Henry Parkes as the 'Father of Federation' is a misnomer, for essentially the same proposal—inspired by West—had in fact been made thirty-five years earlier.

That's as may be of course, and I know that Sir George Reid has claims to that title as well. And in any case, no DNA case can prove that sort of paternity.

But during West's 20 years at the *Herald* he did continue to campaign strongly for federation, and in 1851 he had designed a flag for the Australasian Anti-Transportation League which was almost identical with the one finally chosen for the Commonwealth during the life of the First Parliament.

My second journalist certainly *was* in that First Parliament, and during the second session he became Australia's second Prime Minister, succeeding Sir Edmund Barton on his move to the newly created High Court. Throughout the First Parliament and even while Prime Minister, Alfred Deakin—unknown to his colleagues—was the Australian Correspondent for London's *Morning Post*, anonymously writing a

political column, for which he received five hundred pounds per annum—one hundred pounds more than a backbencher’s salary in the Parliament. He wrote well, but not without some bias. Admittedly, the Australian Correspondent often criticised Mr Deakin’s party, and Mr Deakin himself—but as his biographer, the late J.A. La Nauze put it, he never gave the impression that the country was or would be better served by his rivals.

Finally, another columnist who, although not a parliamentarian, often attended the First Parliament—in the Press Gallery. David Maling, chief leader writer for the *Argus* in Melbourne and Chairman of the Commonwealth Press Club, wrote under the pseudonym of Ithuriel from *Paradise Lost*. Ithuriel was one of the angels described by Milton as a ‘strong and subtle spirit’ sent by Gabriel to search out Satan, who, having entered Paradise in the form of a toad, was becoming too friendly with Eve. One light touch of Ithuriel’s spear was enough to reveal the Fiend, and David Maling’s pen seems to have been similarly effective.

Not that there were really any fiends in the first 111. Maling, Deakin and others found plenty to criticise, but they did not disagree with the Governor-General, by then Lord Tennyson, who in proroguing the First Parliament, said:

A complete record of your achievements touches most of the great problems that confront the people of Australia. You have faced their solutions zealously, boldly and with marked success.

In its 59 acts, the First Parliament addressed such crucial matters as tariff, excise, immigration and the establishment of an Army and a High Court—not necessarily in that order. The *Morning Post*’s Australian Correspondent was pleased to describe this as ‘fruitful’, and to report that the reconstructed ministry—that was to say, *his* ministry—‘closed the session without any visible loss of prestige.’

Ithuriel’s farewell to those leaving Paradise was less respectful. He wrote:

Experience has proved that you are what an auctioneer would describe as a ‘mixed lot’. You comprise some of the strongest, subtlest men in Australia, and others of whom the irreverent Byron would say:

*Like the fly in amber, we but stare  
And wonder how the Devil you got there.*

And so Paradise was lost—only to be regained by another set of parliamentarians at the 1904 general election. Some were again strong and subtle, others still inexplicably preserved in amber.

As Forrest Gump reminded me the other night, life is like a box of chocolates—you never know what you’re going to get. But with Parliament, of course, we do have some say in the matter, for we are the manufacturers, and we put them in ‘the box’. Parliaments do, of course, tend to replicate their electors, and we certainly are a mixed lot.

The Second Parliament sat for another two and a half years, but that is another story, and not as interesting as the one told so well by the Senate Department here today.

I hope you will spread the word that this exhibition is well worth a close look for the light it sheds on an institution which, from its earliest days—although its makers had borrowed in many ways from Westminster, Washington, Ottawa and Switzerland—was very much a distinctive, Australian, Parliament.

## Senator James Drake—An Address\*

*James George Drake was a member of the First Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia. A leading federation activist in Queensland, Drake was appointed to the Barton ministry as Postmaster-General in February 1901, well before writs were issued for the first federal election. He was elected as a Protectionist to the Senate for Queensland in the election of 30 March 1901.*

*Drake was in his late eighties when recorded by the ABC in 1938. He speaks of a brief period in his life, many years earlier. Nevertheless, his recollections are definite and precise, giving a picture of how business was conducted in the First Parliament, and touching on a number of pivotal issues. Although Drake was in the Senate for only one term, as a minister he was close to the centre of power. He says: 'If I have not been exactly a maker of history, I have at least enjoyed an inside view of the process of history-making.' Intriguingly, he is reticent about two central concerns of the early Parliament: legislation for customs and excise, and immigration.*

*Drake speaks slowly but without hesitation, enunciating clearly, possibly drawing on his long experience of public speaking as a barrister. His recollections of the first years of the Parliament are characterised by self-deprecating humour, and a mild, restrained, pride in his role in the foundation Parliament. Apart from fragmented recordings of W.M. Hughes, this is the only known recording of a member of the First Parliament speaking of that time.*

I am going to speak to you of many years ago, and of what you might term the early days of Australian politics. Many of my listeners will remember federation in Australia and the stirring events of that time. I was then about 50 years old, having been born in 1850.<sup>1</sup> My memory is not as good as it was; still I have a clear recollection of parliamentary experiences. I believe I am the only surviving member of the first cabinet—and also, indeed, of the second—and there are probably only a few members of the First Australian Parliament living today.<sup>2</sup>

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\* This transcript was made from a tape supplied by the Fryer Library, University of Queensland, and with the permission of the ABC.

<sup>1</sup> For biographical details of Senator Drake, see *The Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 8, and *The Biographical Dictionary of the Australian Senate*, vol. 1, 1901–1929, Carlton, Vic., Melbourne University Press, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> In 1938, Drake was certainly the only surviving member of the first and second Commonwealth ministries. There were, however, 24 other members of the First Parliament still living.



People credit me with being the first Postmaster-General of the Commonwealth, but I have some doubts on the subject. You see, the Commonwealth was inaugurated on the first day of January 1901. I did not become a minister until the fifth day of February of that year. Was there any Postmaster-General acting during January? If there was, which of my colleagues enjoyed the honour?<sup>3</sup>

The commission by which I became a member of the Executive Council was a curiosity in itself. It was in the deepest mourning. Heavy black type, black lines and sealed in the blackest wax with the private signet ring of the Governor-General, Lord Hopetoun. The date is February the fifth, 1901. The mourning was a tribute to the memory of the great Queen Victoria, recently deceased, and the commission was probably the first issued in Australia in the name of King Edward VII.

Under the federal Constitution, the post offices of all the states passed over to the Commonwealth on the first of March 1901, if my memory serves me rightly.<sup>4</sup> My first work was to make provision for that event. I brought down from Queensland Robert D. Scott—who had been Deputy Postmaster-General in that state under several ministers—of whom I was necessarily reliant, who occupied the important position of Secretary to the Department.<sup>5</sup>

He was an unusually competent officer, one of those who make a life study of the work by which they earn their daily bread. Under his management, the public got as good a service as the reasonable charges could afford, and he was rewarded with a knighthood on his retirement many years afterwards.

My work as Postmaster-General was to get a Post and Telegraph Bill through Parliament as quickly as possible after there was a parliament to pass the bill.<sup>6</sup>

The Prime Minister, Edmund Barton, (afterwards Sir Edmund) faced the newly-elected Parliament with a strong team of experienced men, including some of the seasoned veterans of the states. He was a strong man himself, and a splendid party

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<sup>3</sup> The first Postmaster-General of the Commonwealth was Sir John Forrest, appointed on 1 January 1901 at the first meeting of the Federal Executive Council. Following the death on 10 January of Queenslander Sir James Dickson, the Minister for Defence, Forrest was moved to that portfolio. Drake, who was Queensland Postmaster-General at the time of federation, was appointed as Commonwealth Postmaster-General on 5 February, so maintaining Queensland's representation in the ministry.

<sup>4</sup> Section 69 of the Constitution provided that, on a date to be proclaimed by the Governor-General, state departments of Posts, Telegraphs and Telephones were to be transferred to the Commonwealth. Lord Hopetoun proclaimed their transfer on 12 February, effective from 1 March 1901.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Townley Scott had been head of the Queensland postal department before his appointment on 1 July 1901 as secretary of the new Commonwealth department. His appointment was criticised as biased on Drake's part. Although a successful and respected department head, he was blamed for inefficiencies in the unwieldy department by a royal commission on postal services in 1910, and retired at the end of that year. See *ADB*, vol. 9.

<sup>6</sup> The Post and Telegraph Bill, which set up the administrative machinery for a national postal service, was introduced into the Senate by Drake on 5 June 1901. It was the subject of disagreement between the houses, and was returned to the Senate twice by the House of Representatives before agreement on amendments was reached, and the bill passed into law on 16 November 1901. Even so, uniform postal rates were not introduced for Australia until 1910.

manager. Like a skilful commander, he kept his strength in the House of Representatives, the quarter where he most might fear danger. There were only two senators in his cabinet: Mr R.E. O'Connor, New South Wales, barrister-at-law—a hard worker and a sound lawyer—and myself, from Queensland. My colleague, who was told off as leader for the government, enjoyed a large practice in Sydney and it happened occasionally that he was not able to get over to Melbourne, where the Parliament was at that time located. Then, I was alone.<sup>7</sup>

On one occasion this state of things led to an episode more amusing than serious. The Executive Council met at the time when Parliament was sitting. A bill was going through the Senate to which there was some opposition, and an amendment had actually been moved when a messenger came to me with a note scribbled on a scrap of paper from the Prime Minister: 'Governor-General wants you'. My reply was equally brief: 'Can't go, I'm alone'. Back came another memo, very emphatic: 'You must. It's a command'. I turned to a friendly senator and asked him to keep the debate going until I could get back, and then hurried over to the Executive Council chamber, which was close by in Spring Street. When I got there the chamber was as empty as Mother Hubbard's cupboard. So I took a hansom (they were very much in vogue at that date) and made for Government House, where I found the Governor, smiling and happy, and—having heard my explanation—he, like the gentleman he always was, expressed profound regret for having disturbed me, and sent me back to my job.<sup>8</sup>

A change in the Barton cabinet towards the end of 1903 was caused by the resignation of the Minister for Customs, a victim of overwork.<sup>9</sup> In the redistribution of portfolios that followed, I was taken from the Post Office, and put in charge of the Defence Department. This was also congenial work for me.

Soon after my appointment, Major General Sir Edward Hutton, who had been chosen for the position of Inspector-General and military adviser to the government, arrived from England. He was, in my opinion, a good soldier and well fitted to fill the position for which he had been chosen, but he had a reputation for not having got on well with the civil arm. I surprised him at his hotel, The Australia, and caught him in mufti, so to speak, and had a friendly chat with him, strictly non-official. Some time after, in the course of conversation, he remarked that of all the ministers under whom he had served, I was the only one who knew anything at all of the military art. A

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<sup>7</sup> All ministries since federation have included members of the Senate, although there is no constitutional requirement for this. In practice, ministers are necessary in the Senate to facilitate the passage of legislation, and to respond to questions on government policy.

<sup>8</sup> Much executive power in the Commonwealth is held by the 'Governor-General in Council', meaning the Governor-General acting with the advice of the Federal Executive Council. In 1901, the Executive Council consisted of nine government ministers appointed by the Governor-General on the nomination of, and including, the Prime Minister.

<sup>9</sup> The Minister for Customs and Excise, Charles Cameron Kingston, resigned his portfolio on 24 July 1903, over the issue of applicability of conciliation and arbitration laws to seamen on foreign ships in Australian waters. In the ensuing ministerial shuffle, Drake was replaced as Postmaster-General by Sir Philip Fysh, while he became Minister for Defence in place of John Forrest, who went to Home Affairs.

slight emphasis on the *at all* conveyed the implication that I didn't know much, which would probably be true.<sup>10</sup>

The Defence Bill [which] passed through Parliament—through the Senate first—was drafted very much on the lines of the *Defence Act of Queensland 1884*, which was itself a model of good drafting. I got some help from the three or four other senators who had some military experience, and the attitude of the Senate generally was not unfriendly. Over the regulations there was, if I remember rightly, some difference of opinion, as there well might be, but the Act gave the government the power it sought, and under good advice, the six different—and in some cases discordant—forces of six states were welded into a miniature army, which became the foundation of a military body that afterwards gave a good account of itself.<sup>11</sup>

The Judiciary Bill providing for the establishment of the High Court having been passed, the time had come for the appointment of judges. By universal agreement, the position of Chief Justice was offered to and accepted by Sir Samuel Griffith, the Chief Justice at the time of Queensland. The Prime Minister of the Commonwealth, Edmund Barton, resigned that position after having filled it worthily for nearly three years, and accepted the second judgeship, and Mr O'Connor, my only colleague in the Senate, resigned at the same time and took the third judgeship, leaving me quite alone.<sup>12</sup>

Alfred Deakin, as a matter of course, succeeded to the prime ministership. His right was unchallengeable, and unquestioned, but I got a surprise and a bit of a shock when he turned around to me and remarked casually, 'You will be Attorney-General.' I suggested that I was wanting in years and experience, but he would hear of no objection and was insistent. He might very well have retained the office of Attorney-General, which he had held from the start of the Commonwealth, or at least until the High Court had begun its sittings—then he, with his unrivalled eloquence, could have offered to Their Honours the congratulations of the Bar.

It was a great lift up for me, and conferred upon me the honour of offering the congratulations to the newly appointed judges, and later gave me some useful practice in constitutional law.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Sir Edward Hutton is described in *The Australian Dictionary of Biography* (vol. 8) as the 'first organiser of the Australian Army'. During 1902–1904, he was faced with the task of transforming the six colonial military forces into one army. He met fierce opposition in his efforts to merge colonial militia forces, including from within Parliament, and was frequently at loggerheads with his minister.

<sup>11</sup> On 1 March 1901, 28 500 state servicemen were transferred into the Australian service, and state departments of naval and military defence were taken into the Commonwealth Public Service as the Department of Defence. Australia had no Defence Act, however, until the end of 1903, and even then the legislation did little more than transfer the powers of the various state defence acts to the Commonwealth. It was 1909 before a Defence Act implemented a proper defence policy.

<sup>12</sup> Following the resignations on 24 September of Barton and O'Connor, Drake was appointed Attorney-General, replacing Deakin, who became Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs.

<sup>13</sup> Drake successfully represented the Commonwealth as Attorney-General in the first major constitutional case heard by the High Court: *D'Emden v. Pedder*. The judges unanimously held that Commonwealth employees should not be required to pay state stamp duty in respect of salary paid to them by the Commonwealth, in accordance with the affirmation of a doctrine of mutual non-interference between state and federal operations.

Now I must say a few words about the bill that more than any other disturbed the serenity of the First Parliament. It certainly killed two governments, and we might almost say three. I mean the Conciliation and Arbitration Bill. It was introduced in the House of Representatives some time in 1903 I think, and ran a fairly smooth course until the forty-eighth clause was reached, known as the 'preference clause'. Then there were serious differences of opinion. The Opposition became too strong, and the Deakin administration had to give way to a Labor government under Chris Watson.<sup>14</sup> They did not live long. They crashed at the same fence (the preference clause); took offence at the refusal of the Opposition to allow the bill to be re-committed to reconsider one of the amendments, and they resigned.<sup>15</sup> That accounted for two governments killed by the preference clause. This state of things led to the formation of a composite government equal in all things, under a sort of 'gentleman's agreement', by which the new government stood pledged to put the fatal bill in the forefront of its program—forty-eighth clause and all—and to pass it before anything else was done.

George Reid, of whom I expect you have all heard, was the head of the government, and Mr Allan McLean and Sir George Turner of Victoria were his strong supporters. I accepted the position of Vice-President of the Executive Council in that government. The pledge was amply fulfilled. The bill was passed, forty-eighth clause and all, and was out of the way of that Parliament at least. But it brought no accession of strength to the government; rather it weakened it by removing an obstacle in the way of a realignment of parties on former lines. We had succeeded. We should have lived longer if we had failed. We were the third victim of the fatal bill.

But I am near to my time limit and I must make haste.

Of the defeat and resignation of the composite government, much has been written and said, and more might be. But there are matters of which, as Edmund Burke wisely remarked, 'a great deal should be said, or nothing'. I have said all I desire to say, and it is on record.<sup>16</sup> Since that time I have been an observer, pleased to note how subsequent events have justified the work of the First Federal Parliament, and

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<sup>14</sup> The Conciliation and Arbitration Bill introduced into the House of Representatives by the Deakin government on 2 March 1904 excluded from its benefits employees of industries run by state governments. Labor moved an amendment to the 'preference clause' which had the effect of extending the provisions of the bill to these employees. On the passage of the amendment, on a vote of 38 to 29, Deakin resigned as Prime Minister, and John Christian Watson formed a Labor government.

<sup>15</sup> The Watson government also foundered on preference clauses of the Conciliation and Arbitration Bill. It was defeated on a vote to recommit the bill to the committee of the whole, to consider an amendment which required a majority of workers in an industry to approve an award preference to unionists before the preference could be awarded by the Court. Watson took this as a vote of no confidence, and asked the Governor-General for a dissolution, which was refused. George Reid then formed a coalition government of Free Trade and Protectionist members, the so-called Reid-McLean government. Drake was Vice-President of the Executive Council in this government.

<sup>16</sup> Drake is referring to the circumstances under which the Reid-McLean government was defeated. He considers that the removal of the Conciliation and Arbitration Bill, which passed into law on 15 December 1904, allowed a reconciliation between Labor and Deakin and his supporters. Deakin, whom Reid considered had indicated a level of support for the government, moved an amendment to the motion for the Address-in-reply to the Governor-General, which was carried on 30 June 1905, amounting to a vote of no confidence. Drake, who voted against the amendment, was not included in the ministry for the subsequent Deakin government.

vindicated its members, of whom, I expect, there are few now living. I did not offer myself for re-election.<sup>17</sup>

Today, in viewing federal politics, I see, looking over a period of years, the increasing need for unity between the states, and this need is accentuated now that defence has become so important an issue, and aviation and transport problems so vital. Good form, all.

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<sup>17</sup> In a complicated piece of political manoeuvring which backfired, Drake did not nominate for preselection at the end of his six-year term as a senator, and so ended his political career. He returned to the practice of law in Brisbane. He died on 1 August 1941, survived by 16 of his colleagues from the First Parliament.

## Federation: Destiny and Identity\*

*John Hirst*

Australians know little and care less about the origins of their nation. Historians have commonly encouraged them in this response by depicting federation as a business deal or a compact hammered out by hard headed politicians looking after their own colonies. They find little here to inspire later generations.

This is a strange outcome because the people who devoted themselves to the creation of the federation regarded it as a holy or noble or sacred cause which would carry the people to a higher form of life.

Federation would supplant the mutual suspicion and hostility between the colonies with brotherhood, a widening of human sympathy which was the hallmark of moral progress. The petty and provincial concerns of colonial politics—the struggle over roads and bridges, the endless deputations to ministers begging favours—would be replaced by a politics that dealt with a national life and the fate of a whole people.

Federation itself—the means by which Australia was to become a nation—wore a progressive air. It represented so clearly a stage in social evolution from simple to complex forms. It was by federation that men envisioned that the British Empire, the Anglo-Saxon race, the English-speaking peoples and finally the world, would be united. Tennyson, the poet laureate, sang of ‘the parliament of man, the Federation of the world’.<sup>1</sup>

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\* This paper was presented as a lecture in the Department of the Senate Occasional Lecture Series at Parliament House on 21 July 2000.

<sup>1</sup> In ‘Locksley Hall’, line 128.

In looking for the motives for Australian federation, historians usually are far too instrumental in their thinking. The Commonwealth government was given power over various subjects and the puzzle of why federation occurred is reduced to ranking these in order of importance. Was federation chiefly to secure a customs union, or a united immigration policy, or a national defence? To federalists none of these things was sacred; the whole 42 powers given to the Commonwealth did not together make federation sacred. It was the making of the nation, apart from anything it might do, which was sacred.

Because federation was a sacred cause, poetry was considered the most appropriate medium to express its rationale and purposes. It was poetry's role to deal with what was noble, profound, and elevating. There are innumerable federation poems by hundreds of different hands.<sup>2</sup> The nation was born in a festival of poetry. Historians have noticed the poems, but haven't quite known what to do with them. Most of them are valueless as poetry. One leading scholar who produced a bibliography of federation sources decided that it would be kinder to his readers to leave it all out. He thus removed from consideration the best guide to the ideas and ideals which inspired the movement. You are not to be spared, but I will be very selective in my quotations.

The poets considered that God or destiny intended Australia to be a nation. The evidence for this was in the first place physical. They forgot Tasmania (which was inconsiderate since it was always keen about federation) and saw the nation-to-be as a single geographical unit, a whole continent with only natural boundaries. This was a special benediction. Other nations had man-made frontiers; Australia's were the sea. A common word for the sea in this role was 'girdle' and in its verbal form 'girdled' or 'girdling' or 'girt'. 'Advance Australia Fair', written by Peter McCormick in 1878 and now the national anthem, uses 'girt' and assumes the implications of the sea boundary do not have to be spelled out, recording merely 'our home is girt by sea'.

The social uniformity within the continent also marked out Australia for nationhood. The people were of one blood or stock or race; they spoke the same language; they shared a glorious heritage (Britain's), the most celebrated part of which was political freedom which had been extended in Australia to all men so that the country was the freest on earth.

The best federation poem, written very early (1877), does not argue that Australia should be one, but assumes it and deals instead with the ideal becoming real. It is the most powerful expression of the idea that union was Australia's destiny. The author was James Brunton Stephens, a headmaster at a Brisbane state school.

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<sup>2</sup> The poems are scattered through newspapers, periodicals and sheet music; collections are found in 'Federation Songs', an exercise book of newspaper cuttings, created by J. Plummer, in the Mitchell Library at QA 821.08/35; 'Literature on Federation', National Library MS 5911; Australasian Federation League of Victoria, *Songs of Union*, Melbourne, 1899, held in Deakin Papers in the National Library, MS 1540/11/172,178; for a listing of songs see Georgina M. Binns, 'Patriotic and nationalistic song in Australia to 1919: a study of the popular sheet music genre', Master of Music thesis, University of Melbourne, 1988.

His federation poem was called 'The Dominion of Australia: A Forecast':

*She is not yet; but he whose ear  
Thrills to that finer atmosphere  
Where footfalls of appointed things,  
Reverberant of days to be,  
Are heard in forecast echoings  
Like wave-beats from a viewless sea,  
Hears in the voiceful tremors of the sky  
Auroral heralds whispering, 'She is nigh'.*

The middle part of the poem develops an elaborate comparison between the silent force carrying Australia to its destiny and the underground rivers which some experts assumed must run under the parched lands of the outback and which one day might be released to make the desert bloom:

*So flows beneath our good and ill  
A viewless stream of Common Will,  
A gathering force, a present might,  
That from its silent depths of gloom  
At Wisdom's voice shall leap to light  
And hide our barren feuds in bloom,  
Till, all our Sundering lines with love o'ergrown,  
Our bounds shall be the girdling seas alone.*

When Parkes opened his campaign for federation in his famous speech at Tenterfield, he quoted from this poem.<sup>3</sup> He did well to quote from Stephens' poetry rather than his own. At the time he launched his campaign he was revising the proofs of his next book of poems, *Fragmentary Thoughts*. In the preface he said with his usual mock humility that he would be happy to be judged no great poet, but lest anyone dare to make that judgement he reproduced a letter from his friend Lord Tennyson which praised his efforts, how guardedly Parkes probably did not notice. In Brisbane a few days before his Tenterfield speech, he had refused to disclose his federal plans to the *Courier's* reporter but had been very willing to discuss poetry.<sup>4</sup> He passed the proofs of his poems to the journalist for his opinion. He declared Stephens to be the best poet in Australia, a compliment Stephens returned in his review of *Fragmentary Thoughts* which contrived to be favourable without pronouncing definitely on the quality of the poems.<sup>5</sup>

In his new collection Parkes rehearsed a standard theme in 'The Flag':

*God girdled our majestic isle  
With seas far-reaching east and west,  
That man might live beneath this smile  
In peace and freedom ever blest.*

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<sup>3</sup> Reproduced in C.M.H. Clark, *Select Documents in Australian History 1851–1900*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1955, pp. 467–470.

<sup>4</sup> *Brisbane Courier*, 22 October 1889.

<sup>5</sup> *Queenslander*, 25 January 1890, p. 168.



He was a much better phrase-maker in his speeches.

As federation became a firm proposal, it met opposition as well as the old indifference. The poets identified the forces which frustrated it as selfishness, greed, and faction, by which they meant a sinister political combination. Men were damaging the union already created by God. The symbols of this divisiveness were the customs houses on the colonial borders, which were hated not as a commercial inconvenience, but as a moral outrage. So to reveal the Australian nation, men had to repent and return to God. In a Christian culture this was a powerful theme. It was best expressed by William Gay in his sonnet 'Federation' written in the early 1890s:

*From all division let our land be free,  
For God has made her one: complete she lies  
Within the unbroken circle of the skies,  
And round her indivisible the sea  
Breaks on her single shore; while only we,  
Her foster children, bound with sacred ties  
Of one dear blood, one storied enterprise,  
Are negligent of her integrity.—  
Her seamless garment, at great Mammon's nod,  
With hands unfilial we have basely rent,  
With petty variance our souls are spent,  
And ancient kinship under foot is trod:  
O let us rise, united, penitent,  
And be one people,—mighty, serving God!*

Deakin quoted Gay's sonnet to conclude his great speech that launched the 'Yes' case in Victoria in 1898.

According to the poets, the prospects for the new nation were unrivalled. Australia had no ancient feuds, no privileged caste, no bar to anyone making money from its abundant resources; a land of freedom and opportunity. Always imagined as female, Australia was young, pure, virginal. The themes are present in 'Advance Australia Fair', though again rather minimally. Australians are young and free; the land is rich in opportunities—golden soil—which are open to those ready to work: wealth for toil.

There was a constant insistence that no blood had been spilt in this land. This is a puzzle to us who are now so conscious of the violence done to the Aborigines. In part the claim could be made because the slaughter was simply being forgotten, though the forgetfulness was more complete in the early Twentieth Century than in the Nineteenth. It was possible to know well enough what had happened on the frontier and still see Australia as pure. In *Fragmentary Thoughts* Parkes wrote of the Australian flag:

*It bears no stain of blood and tears  
Its glory is its purity*

In the same volume is a poem that gives a chilling account of the murder of an Aboriginal boy by settlers on the Hawkesbury in 1794. He was tied hand and foot,

dragged through a fire until his back was horribly burnt, and then thrown into the river and shot:

*Loud talk ye of savages  
As they were beasts of prey!—  
But men of English birth have done  
More savage things than they*

The two thoughts remain unconnected. It was easy not to make the connection when Aborigines were not seen as part of the future nation since they were dying out and in any case unworthy of its citizenship. Furthermore, when they spoke of no blood spilt, the poets had in mind the European experience of warfare ravaging the land and being constantly renewed.<sup>6</sup>

The best poem on Australia as a new world free from all the ills of the old was written by John Farrell. He was a brewer turned journalist and poet.<sup>7</sup> In the late 1880s he was editor of and chief contributor to a radical Sydney newspaper which supported land nationalisation along the lines of Henry George's single tax:

*We have no records of a by-gone shame,  
No red-writ histories of woe to weep:  
God set our land in summer seas asleep  
Till His fair morning for her waking came.*

*He hid her where the rage of Old World wars  
Might never break upon her virgin rest:  
He sent His softest winds to fan her breast,  
And canopied her night with low-hung stars.*

*He wrought her perfect, in a happy clime,  
And held her worthiest, and bade her wait  
Serene on her lone couch inviolate  
The heightened manhood of a later time.*

The sexual theme was never more explicit. The men worthy to take Australia, the 'manful pioneers', only leave Europe when freedom has dawned there:

*They found a gracious amplitude of soil,  
Unsovn with memories, like poison weeds,  
Of far-forefathers wrongs and vengeful deeds,  
Where was no crown, save that of earnest toil.*

*They reared a sunnier England, where the pain  
Of bitter yesterdays might not arise:  
They said—'The past is past, and all its cries,  
Of time-long hatred are beyond the main ...*

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<sup>6</sup> See editorial in *Brisbane Courier*, 2 January 1901.

<sup>7</sup> There is a memoir of Farrell by Bertram Stevens in *My Sundowner and other poems*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1904.

*And, with fair peace's white, pure flag unfurled,  
Our children shall, upon this new-won shore—  
Warned by all sorrows that have gone before—  
Build up the glory of a grand New World.*

The new Commonwealth did not seem designed to build up a grand new world since it was to have limited powers. In the 1890s Australia was gaining a reputation for progressive social and economic legislation, but this was and would remain chiefly the responsibility of the states. Only at the last minute was the Commonwealth given power over old-age pensions and interstate industrial disputes.

It was in the name of the federation that the delegates most clearly expressed their sense that Australia represented a new dispensation.<sup>8</sup> The name 'Commonwealth' was suggested by Parkes at the 1891 convention and was taken up enthusiastically by Deakin who lobbied the delegates on its behalf. After being narrowly adopted by the convention's constitutional committee, it won general acceptance in the convention and outside it because it embodied an Australian view of the nature of government. The state existed not to aggrandise an elite or to embark on conquest, but to serve the common weal, the common good. It was this view of government which was to make the Commonwealth much larger than its formal powers implied.

The entry which won the New South Wales government prize for a poem celebrating the inauguration of the Commonwealth deals with its name. These are its best lines; the poet was George Essex Evans:

*Free-born of Nations, Virgin white,  
Not won by blood nor ringed with steel,  
Thy throne is on a loftier height,  
Deep-rooted in the Commonweal!*

On 1 January 1901, and for the days before and after, the newspapers gave over a large part of their space to poetry. There was Evans' prize-winning poem; a new poem by Brunton Stephens whose 1877 work was now very well known; and the words of the anthem sung at the inauguration which had been written by John Farrell who had celebrated Australia as a grand new world.

These poets are now almost entirely forgotten. The poets of the turn of the century who are remembered, honoured and read are Banjo Paterson and Henry Lawson. They have helped to define the Australian nation. They were new-comers in the 1890s. The critics, while acknowledging the appeal of their work, regarded it as light, ephemeral verse. Paterson's poems had sold in the thousands, but would anyone keep the book on their shelves? He lacked the nobility, the profundity, and moral elevation thought proper to poetry. Brunton Stephens was generous about Paterson's achievement, but could not believe that poems about racecourses and backblocks life would endure. He

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<sup>8</sup> J.A. La Nauze, 'The Name of the Commonwealth of Australia', *Historical Studies*, vol. 15, no. 57, October 1971, pp. 59–71.

regarded William Gay as the true, new poet of the 1890s.<sup>9</sup> Evans conceded that Paterson was a master of the bush ballad, but thought Stephens would always be acknowledged as the founder of the national literature.<sup>10</sup> Of course, no-one in the 1890s ever imagined that a whole nation could come to treasure a Paterson poem about a Snowy River horseman and a Paterson song about a sheep-stealing swagman.

Historians examining what part nationalism played in the creation of federation find it hard to imagine the founding fathers reciting ‘The Man from Snowy River’ and assume that nationalism’s role was small.<sup>11</sup> They overlook the whole school of nationalist poetry which flourished from the 1870s, whose leading practitioners were in a double sense the established poets of their time. Their reputation stood high and they were encouraged and supported by leading colonial politicians who became founding fathers of the Commonwealth. When Griffith took to translating Dante he sent his efforts to Brunton Stephens and Essex Evans for their professional criticism.<sup>12</sup> The flier advertising Gay’s book of sonnets carried endorsements from Parkes, Barton, and Deakin.<sup>13</sup> When Gay produced a book of essays on federation he attracted contributions from Deakin, Inglis Clark, and Griffith.<sup>14</sup>

The nationalism of these poets was a civic nationalism, concerned with the state and the principles and values it should protect and advance; its symbol was female, a young virginal goddess in the classical tradition. The nationalism that grew from Paterson’s verse was social and masculine, concerned to honour men of the outback and their values. It was the civic nationalism, now lost to sight, which inspired the federation movement. It was dignified, earnest, Protestant, not raffish, Irish-Catholic or working-class.

I don’t think I can talk safely for much longer about the idealism that underlay the movement to federation. You hard-headed realistic Australians will want to know what was the true driving force of the movement. It can’t be poetry.

Australian historians who doubt the force of national feeling in federation have looked to economics to reveal the selfish motive behind it. They overlook the motive that is quintessentially selfish and integral to nationalism, the desire for identity and status.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> H.G. Turner and A. Sutherland, *The Development of Australian Literature*, George Robertson, Melbourne, 1898, pp. 43–53; George Essex Evans, ‘The Poetry of Brunton Stephens’, *Lone Hand*, January 1908, pp. 340–3; Cecil Hadgraft, *James Brunton Stephens*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, Qld, 1969, p. 58; Gay to Deakin, newspaper reviews, Deakin Papers NL MS 1540/4/724, 725.

<sup>10</sup> *Brisbane Courier*, 1 January 1901.

<sup>11</sup> McMinn judges the nationalism of politicians by how far they conform to the attitudes epitomised by the *Bulletin* school of writers, in *Nationalism and Federalism in Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, pp. 113, 129.

<sup>12</sup> Brunton Stephens, Essex Evans to Griffith, 28 November, 14 December, 1898, Griffith Papers, Mitchell Library MS Q189/589,639.

<sup>13</sup> Gay to Deakin, 24 February 1896, Deakin Papers, National Library MS 1540/1/314.

<sup>14</sup> *The Commonwealth and the Empire*, George Robertson, Melbourne, 1895.

<sup>15</sup> The first Australian study to highlight these forces is Robert Birrell, *A Nation of our Own*, Longman, Melbourne, 1995, a much underrated work which brings a sociologist’s insights to nation-building.

As the Italian patriot Mazzini declared: ‘... without a country you have no name, no identity, no voice, no rights, no membership in the brotherhood of nations.’<sup>16</sup>

The federalist who was most revealing about this was Samuel Griffith, the chief draftsman of the Constitution.

Griffith came to Australia as a boy of eight.<sup>17</sup> His father was a Congregational minister who gave his bright son a good education, hoping he would follow him into the ministry. But Griffith would not be bound by his parents’ narrow puritanism. His ambition was to become pre-eminent in the law, rich, and famous. There was no open rupture with his parents; the young man kept his exploits with women and drink secret and outwardly conformed. He took to drinking when he was at university in Sydney; at home in Brisbane during vacations he went with his parents to teetotal meetings. From the start there was something unruffled in his progress. Until his father died he attended the Congregational Church and then he switched to the Anglican. Religion did not mean much to him. He invested far more in the masonic lodge, whose codes he studied as assiduously as the law and where his advancement was equally rapid.

He was a man of principle, a legal philosopher in politics who could not rouse a crowd, but could argue a case from first principles. He pursued his personal ambition in politics with the same rectitude, as if he were taking only what was his due. As Premier he directed the government’s legal business to himself and brought his political career to an end in 1893 by getting himself appointed Chief Justice, but only after Parliament had increased the salary.

He liked the trappings as well as the substance of success. At 21 he designed the coat of arms that he hoped would be his; at 41 he secured it when he was made a Knight of the Order of St Michael and St George. One of the jobs of Queensland’s Agent-General in London was to lobby the Colonial Office for honours for Premier Griffith. After gaining his knighthood, Griffith wanted to be promoted to Knight of the Grand Cross. Once he was Chief Justice, he set his sights on being in addition Lieutenant Governor. On formal occasions he delighted in wearing all his badges and ribbons. He was always well dressed; a tall, spare, dignified figure.

On great occasions, when Griffith was called on to detail the advantages of federation, he spoke, quite uncharacteristically, in a personal and heartfelt way. He said, ‘I am tired of being treated as a colonial.’ Even when the English were being considerate, he continued, they could not hide their disparagement of the colonist. In the eyes of the world, Australians were nothing but children while they remained as colonies. As a nation, they would meet the rest of the world as equals and the status of every Australian would be raised.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ignazio Silone, *The Living Thoughts of Mazzini*, Cassell, London, 1939, p. 30.

<sup>17</sup> Roger Joyce, *Samuel Walker Griffith*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Qld, 1984, was reduced from a much longer manuscript which I have also consulted at the National Library, MS 7691.

<sup>18</sup> This was the theme of his speeches to the Queensland Legislative Assembly, 9 July 1890, *Debates*, vol. 61, p. 193; at the Convention and inauguration banquets, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 March 1891, 2 January 1901; and of his article in the *Brisbane Courier*, 1 January 1901.

As Premier of Queensland, Griffith was well aware of the difficulties involved in inter-colonial co-operation and the advantages union would bring. He was a conscientious administrator. Yet at the deepest level, he wanted federation not so that public affairs might be handled differently, but so that he might be someone different. His assiduous application and lobbying for honours could not prevail against one barrier: there would have to be an Australian nation before Samuel Griffith ceased to be a colonial.

Griffith wanted to constitute an independent Australian nation which would remain in the Empire, but without being subordinate to Britain; the only link to Britain would be the crown. Britain would be an equal and an ally and all the people of the Empire would share a common citizenship. This was the arrangement not formally achieved until the passage of the Statute of Westminster in 1931. Legally, Griffith could not produce that outcome in 1901, but he had it in mind as he drew up the Constitution. When Australia became independent, the Constitution did not have to be changed.

Griffith took great satisfaction from the fact that immediately the Commonwealth was established the colonies were to be reconstituted as its states. So the word *colony*, the badge of inferiority, would no longer be used by Australians talking of themselves, nor, Griffith hoped, by other people, particularly the English, in talking about Australia and its people. In England colonial meant second-rate or at least suspect.

Australians laboured under a double handicap because Australian colonist also suggested convict, or the descendant of convicts, or the associate of convicts and their descendants. The Australian rule was not to talk about the convicts—unless to insult New South Wales in inter-colonial feuding—but Australians knew that the world had not forgotten. They were very anxious to find and parade signs that the stock had not degenerated despite this taint. Victories over England at cricket were very comforting.

Australians were annoyed and sometimes angry at British disdain, but they could not easily reject or ignore Britain. Most of them admired Britain and its civilisation and wanted British interest and approval. By the late Nineteenth Century there was more British interest in the colonies than 30 or 40 years before when the colonies were widely viewed as an encumbrance, but old attitudes persisted. Simple ignorance abounded. People in Britain did not know the names of the various colonies or their location. Letters arrived with bizarre addresses: ‘Melbourne, near Sydney, Victoria’.<sup>19</sup> Visitors to England were asked where they learnt to speak English.

In the 1880s the leading colonial politicians, among them Samuel Griffith, were brought into a new relationship with British ministers and officials as they sought to influence the Empire’s defence and foreign policies. The men who were accustomed to govern their own societies were cast into the role of lobbyists and petitioners at the metropolis. Frequently they found it a frustrating and humiliating experience. They felt themselves very much the colonials. ‘We are children’, said Griffith, ‘dependent

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<sup>19</sup> *Victorian Parliamentary Debates*, 1884, p. 388; Frank Crowley, *Colonial Australia 1841–1874*, Nelson, Melbourne, 1980, pp. 633–34.

on a superior people.’<sup>20</sup> They thought the British did not care enough for them. If their submissions were rejected, their first response was to assume it was because they and the people they represented were mere colonists.

The leading politicians gave as one of the advantages of federation that the colonies would speak with one voice and more notice would be taken of them as a nation. Britain would no longer ignore them. Australians would benefit from this increased stature and strength, but so in a very particular way would they as their representatives and spokesmen. They would cease to be colonial politicians. They might be Australian statesmen. It was notable that the founding fathers, having declared that they must limit Commonwealth power and keep the states strong, immediately transferred to the Commonwealth on its inauguration.

The man who hoped to lead the new nation as prime minister was Henry Parkes, an intention clearly indicated by the frequency with which he disclaimed it. He was the best known politician in Australia and the only Australian politician well known in Britain, but he still knew the hurt of being colonial.<sup>21</sup> It was part of his success as a politician that he could fuse his own pursuit of a greater glory with the emancipation of a whole people. In the series of speeches with which he launched his campaign for federation he promised to remove humiliation and slight and bring dignity and pride:

Instead of a confusion of names and geographical divisions, which so perplexes many people at a distance, we shall be Australians, and a people with 7,000 miles of coast, more than 2,000,000 square miles of land, with 4,000,000 of population, and shall present ourselves to the world as ‘Australia’.

We shall at once rise to a higher level; we shall occupy a larger place in the contemplation of mankind, the sympathies of every part of the world will go out to us, and figuratively, they will hold out the right hand of fellowship. We can not doubt that the chord awakened by such a movement will be responded to in the noble old country where our forefathers graves are still. All England has awakened with sympathy to this movement through its press.

We shall have a higher stature before the world. We shall have a grander name.<sup>22</sup>

These are the desires that make nations.

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<sup>20</sup> *Queensland Parliamentary Debates*, 1890, vol. 61, p. 193; for the image of children see also Geoffrey Serle, ‘Victoria’s Campaign for Federation’, p. 17 in A.W. Martin (ed.), *Essays in Australian Federation*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1969; K.S. Inglis, *The Rehearsal: Australians at War in the Sudan 1885*, Rigby, Sydney, 1985, p. 22.

<sup>21</sup> Francis Adams, *The Australians*, Unwin, London, 1893, p. 60; Thomas Bavin, *Sir Henry Parkes*, Angus and Roberston, Sydney, 1941, pp. 32–33.

<sup>22</sup> *The Federal Government of Australasia: Speeches Delivered on Various Occasions*, Sydney, 1890, pp. 25–26.

The committed federalist leaders—Parkes, Deakin, Griffith, Barton, Inglis Clark and others—were pursuing a sacred ideal of nationhood. They can be thought of as both selfish and pure. Selfish, in that the chief force driving them was the new identity and greater stature they would enjoy—either as colonists or natives—from Australia’s nationhood. Pure, in that the benefit they sought did not depend on the particular form federation took. In a sense any federation would do. They knew of course that interests had to be conciliated and other ideals not outraged; they shared some of these themselves. But they were not mere managers or lobbyists; underneath all the negotiation and campaigning there was an emotional drive. Those who only considered economic and provincial interests when they contemplated federation understood this quality in the federalists. They called them federation-at-any-price men, enthusiasts, or sentimentalists.

It might be objected that these enthusiasts were only a minority. Sometimes the test for the role of national feeling in federation has been how widespread it was. So relatively low turnouts for the choosing of convention delegates and at the referendums have been used to indicate that national feeling played a small part in federation. But the role of national feeling is not to be measured by taking the pulse of the community at large. Nationalism has always possessed one section of the population first—whether poets or intellectuals or a new middle class or local officials of an empire. They become passionate for the nation while the mass of the people remain attached to their chiefs, villages, or provinces and can see no benefit in creating a new government. Nationalism in its creative phase is a minority movement.

The practical people, the hard-headed men, saw no need for federation. If the colonies needed to take more joint action, let them co-operate more closely. If the border customs houses were a nuisance, let a customs union be formed. It was the nationalists who wanted a nation and it is to them we owe our federation.



**Question** — You mentioned in passing that the turnout for the referendums was less than wholehearted. Who were the kind of people, in your opinion, that voted ‘No’?

**John Hirst** — A very mixed bag of people voted or campaigned for ‘No’ in 1898–99 and 1900. There were those who thought that their provinces or colonies would be endangered by federation, either economically or as a political power. There were those who thought that their immediate economic interests—jobs in their locality—were being threatened; and there were also those who were in favour of union of some sort, but thought this was the wrong model. There were those—particularly democrats in New South Wales and Victoria—who wanted a more democratic union, by which they meant not a strong Senate, or certainly not a Senate with equally strong representation.

So they were a mixed bag, and among them of course were nationalists—genuine, true nationalists. But the majority were probably the sort of people I’ve mentioned. A lot of these were on the ‘Yes’ side too. People only looked at federation in an opportunistic way: ‘Will it benefit us? Is it a good thing?’ But if the whole thing had



been left to those people, my argument is that they might have found ways to cooperate more, but they weren't fussed about a nation. As I've tried to explain, there was a group of nationalists for whom 'the nation'—that notion, that thing—was of pre-eminent importance.

**Question** — There's an opportunity in what you've said to examine the role of women in the federal story. They miss out when we talk about 'federation fathers' and so on. Look at the record of poetry, starting with Mrs Caroline Carlton back in the 1850s and *Song of Australia*, then to people like Mrs Carney who submitted a poem, *Federation Hymn*, to the people's convention at Bathurst in 1896, and Joan Torrance in 1901, who wrote poems about 'the morning after'—the morning after, of course, the successful passage of the bill. That sort of verse seems reasonably common, but it doesn't seem to be comprehended as historians begin to look at the iconography of federation, in terms of art and music and so on. Would you comment on what you've discovered in your researches regarding the gender balance in poetry? It seems to be something that women could participate in reasonably fully, when they weren't allowed, for example, to be fully involved in the political discussions and debates.

**John Hirst** — I thought my gender awareness was pretty good, because I emphasise that, as a symbol, Australia was always female. But I can see that I am really lacking, because I haven't done a count of how many poetesses there were among the hundreds of people that wrote verse on federation. They would certainly rate higher than the proportion of women who participated in federation, though of course there was a presence of women, as campaigners and speakers, in federation. My guess would be that the number of these poems written by women might be thirty or forty percent. But as I say, I haven't counted.

**Question** — You referred to the general lack of interest and awareness of the founders of our Constitution, which of course is part of the explanation as to why people know so little about the Constitution and how it works. I wonder what your explanation for that might be, and also whether you see any possibility of this changing as we come to celebrate the centenary of federation?

**John Hirst** — One of the things I've done in my book is look at the celebrations in 1951, and they were amazing.<sup>23</sup> They managed to run month-long celebrations while scarcely ever mentioning the process of federation—that is, there was just absolute ignorance and lack of interest in the process by which Australia had become a nation.

We are now more aware, of course, that if we wanted to trumpet ourselves as a great democratic nation, that process would give us the opportunity to do so. The citizens at large voted for the delegates to the Convention, and also on whether they would accept the Constitution or not. It's an amazing democratic moment, and Australians aren't aware of it.

The explanation of that is complex. I hinted at it in my talk, that the nationalism that finally takes hold is not a civic nationalism. The nationalism that works, finally, is bushmen and diggers, the usual male symbols that we all know about so well. And

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<sup>23</sup> John Hirst, *The Sentimental Nation: the Making of the Australian Commonwealth*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2000.

that doesn't have a political element. It's almost determinedly outside the public respectable realm. As I said, this civic nationalism which I see as sustaining the federation movement was respectable, earnest, and mostly Protestant—not working class, not larrikin, not raffish, not the sort of things that finally became accepted as symbolising Australia.

One further reason is that most of our history has been written by people on the left, who think that if middle-class people are doing things they must be wicked or oppressive or nasty in some way. Often for them, the fact that there were no working-class people at the conventions is sufficient to show that this is something that the good-hearted and the true believers should take no interest in, or spurn. So there's that handicap, as well.

The other thing that happened particularly in 1900–01 is that the whole project became subsumed in the bigger project of integrating the British Empire. That had always been part of the federation impulse—that we should unite, because we're all British people, as the poems say—but it was always open in the 1880s as to whether Australia would be in the Empire or not. By 1900 the separation option had really gone, and nearly everyone saw Australian federation as part of this larger, grander theme of the British Empire. So the details of our story were subsumed in that grander story of belonging to Britain and Britain's role in the world. In 1951 that was still very important. So in 1951 they celebrated progress, they celebrated their Britishness, they celebrated the British Empire and Commonwealth, and they didn't talk much—or at all—about what happened in the 1890s.

As to whether it's going to be different this time around—yes, I think it is going to be a bit different, but probably not by much. There is a lot more interest this time in knowing the details of the story, there are more books being written, and the official celebration outfit (the Council for the Centenary of Federation) is encouraging people in their local areas to find out how federation was fought out in their locality. There was none of that in 1951. The most exciting event in 1951 was the re-creation of Sturt's voyage down the Murray, which was thought appropriate for celebrating federation, and of course had absolutely nothing to do with the event they were meant to be celebrating. But it was 'progress', and he was a British explorer.

**Question** — Why did imperial nationalism take over?

**John Hirst** — Partly because Australians welcomed it. Part of the impulse for federation was this gaining of a higher stature being a nation, and usually that implies total independence. But at the time Australian nationalism was growing, Britain was changing course and wanting to take more interest in the colonies, partly because Britain was in decline, which the colonies weren't fully aware of. But because Britain was in decline, they wanted a stronger integrated Empire, and were taking an interest in the colonies. The colonies were flattered by this—this was what they'd always wanted. And so a federation under the Crown within the Empire gave them everything—it gave them national status, recognition from Britain, made them part of an Empire that would defend them and which was a grand thing in itself.

In my previous answer I forgot to mention that 1900–1901 were the years of the Boer War, and this captured the imagination of more people, probably far more, than the

federation movement did. Australian troops fighting in the Boer War were being recognised as good troops, which gave a great boost to Australian self-confidence and pride—more than the amazing achievement of creating, by peaceful and democratic means, their federation.

**Question** — Could you comment on the part played by nationalism? I cannot help remembering that John Downer, a delegate from South Australia, said in one of his speeches: ‘Although I am an Australian, at heart I am an Englishman.’ That sentiment was felt throughout their whole setup. And it would be hard to find anything less nationalistic than the Australian Constitution. I refer particularly to the overwhelming and supreme powers given to the British Crown over anything Australia did. Two words would sum up that Constitution: British colony. Regarding the poets you referred to, none of them were delegates nor were they involved in drawing up the Constitution. I find the emphasis on nationalism not terribly convincing.

**John Hirst** — Well put. If you run a hard line on nationalism, there have been very few Australian nationalists in our history. You quoted Downer, who said he was both an Australian and an Englishman. Most people who have called themselves Australian nationalists in our history have also thought of themselves as British. I can understand a definition that says nationalism has to be exclusive, and until we have people who are nationalists and are opposed to the British connection, we won’t call them nationalists. I can understand that definition, but it’s not going to work very well in Australian history, because I think we can identify a group of people who were very definitely Australian nationalists. They had all the usual signs of being nationalists. The problem with the definition is that they were nationalists within an empire which was happy for them to be nationalists.

The British Empire was an amazing thing—it was an empire prepared to let its colonies become fully self-governing, call themselves nations, have all the appurtenances of nationhood, and yet still remain in the larger empire. If we apply the usual rule, we would say, ‘Well, the people who made the Constitution weren’t nationalists.’ But if you think of them as being placed in that situation, then I think you have to adjust your meaning. Are we going to try and say that Deakin and Barton weren’t nationalists, because they supported the British connection? You’d make a nonsense of their whole view of what they were doing. They were breaking down the barriers between colonies and creating a new Australian identity and attachment, which would sit within the larger one, but was certainly different from what was there before—which was only attachment to province and empire.

On the Constitution itself, yes, the form of it is very British. It’s very misleading. Those who wrote it knew it wasn’t going to be practised in the terms that it was written—that is, that power would actually reside with ministers and parliament and not with the Governor-General and the Queen. Though you’re right, of course—and I regret this, and there were people at the time who regretted it too—that the Constitution features the Queen and the Governor-General prominently.

But here’s a contrast: in the 1860s when it confederated, Canada drew up its broad principles of confederation, then went to London and let the London official lawyers write their Constitution, which could only be amended by the British Parliament. In Australia, right from the jump, when they wrote the Constitution, they wrote it as a

British Act of Parliament, but *they* wrote it because they didn't want any Pom to have any influence over it at all. So they didn't write the Australian Constitution and then let the British have it in a British Act of Parliament, they wrote the British Act of Parliament as well.

So their vision was—and this was certainly Griffiths' vision, who did the first draft, and Inglis Clark, from whom he copied—that we, the Australians, would draw up the Constitution. All the British would have to do was endorse it. That was their position, so that it could then be amended in every respect within Australia. So that's a clear advance on the Canadian position, and I see the impulse behind that as nationalistic.

**Question** — In regard to the previous question, I would like to confirm what you've been saying about Australian nationalism at the turn of the century and for much of the Twentieth Century. It didn't express itself in opposition to Britishness, or the association with Britain. When you look at the institutions that were established with federation, someone like Griffith—who of course didn't want to be called a colonial—nevertheless took pride in the availability of these British institutions to be emulated here in Australia. People tend to make the same assumption in relation to that other national moment at Gallipoli, and to somehow see that as Australians performing some feat in opposition to Britain, as if it's something Australian and anti-British. Australia, like any former colony, has this ambiguous relationship with its mother country, which is at once seeking to prove itself and to obtain the approval of the mother country, or not wanting to be thought of as inferior. I just want to stress that it was possible for people to want to affirm an Australian statehood and nationhood, without in any way departing from Britishness. I think it's a mistake to see, either at federation or at Gallipoli, the idea that somehow to be Australian was in opposition and was hostile to being British.

**John Hirst** — We still have the problem, don't we? I was one of those who said that republicans made a great mistake in the republican referendum by depicting their position as the nationalist one, and their opponents as un-Australian. And yet those who voted for the status quo, I'm sure, think of themselves very firmly as Australians. So the republicans were trying to run a hard line on nationalism—if you are an Australian nationalist, you must have nothing to do with Britain, even this minuscule connection with the Crown is an infringement on that full independence which usually goes with nationalism. That's what I believe myself. But there are clearly lots of Australians who think of themselves as Australian, who don't see the world that way.

**Question** — Why 1901? Why did these forces of nationalism come into play in that particular period? What is the economic context? There was a depression, there were strikes—was this an act of repair, an almost nostalgic act of trying to return to the civic confidence of the 1880s?

**John Hirst** — It is often said that what focused the minds of the colonists on the need for federation was the financial collapse of 1892–93. I had that very much in mind when I was writing my book. What is notable is that the immediate response to that is that federation is far too complicated a solution to the immediate problem which is, to use the modern parlance: 'the markets don't like us any more, and London will not take up our loans.' The response was that federation was far too long and drawn out a response to meet that immediate problem, because the 1891 experience had shown

that it was going to be a difficult business. So all sorts of other solutions were reached for to solve the economic crises, rather than federation. It happened that by the time federation was on the move again in 1896–98, colonial governments had their houses in order, they were borrowing again at very low rates, so that moment of crisis had passed. So I don't think that the specific circumstances of the 1890s were finally a spur.

Of course, for a long time there had been business interests who wanted to get rid of inter-colonial customs duties, but up to almost the last minute they wanted a customs union. They said, again, that federation was too complicated, the politicians were just toying with the problem by talking about federation, which they thought they would never get, and wouldn't it be much simpler just to have a customs union. There were various attempts to get one, which all failed. It turned out that the nationalists were right. In order to overcome the economic differences which always surfaced when talking about a customs union—was the new customs union to be protectionist against the world or free trade with the world?—you could never solve those difficulties. Parkes had the answer—you make the nation first, you use national authority to solve the customs differences. And that's how it panned out. So it's not the practical men who finally hit on the solution, it's the patriot politicians who gave us that answer to the problem.

**Question** — In 1901 school children were expected to celebrate federation, the Australian nation, with the Union Jack, which was distributed widely to state schools. Flags hadn't generally been used in schools before that time. In 1951 the federal government made a decision to give Australian flags to all state and private schools to celebrate the jubilee. It's an interesting comment on Australian nationalism and the way in which it was shaped both in 1901 and 1951.

**John Hirst** — Yes, there was that clearer move towards an Australian symbol in the flag in 1951. But it is amazing when you look at the material produced for children in 1951. They produced a little book for secondary school children, which was a very good description of the Constitution. But on the federation movement, it was just woeful—about four lines dealt with the 1890s. It doesn't mention the great democratic participation in the whole process. Menzies had the idea that what was wanted in this fiftieth federation year was to give everyone a good time. If you were a concert-goer, they would bring out the best symphony orchestra, if you were a lawyer, there would be a guest judge giving lectures. There was some opposition to that, and some thought that there should be Australians performing or writing books. So nationalism in that sense was a force against Menzies' inclination to bring out the best, which would usually be British. But there was still a lack of civic awareness of Australia having done something quite unusual in the 1890s in producing the federation. That civic nationalism was not there at all.

## **The Centenary of Australia's Federation: What Should We Celebrate? \***

*Geoffrey Blainey*

The Australian nation was born on the first day of 1901. The brand new Commonwealth held about three and three quarters of a million people—slightly more than Switzerland then held. At this time the new nation was experiencing the worst drought recorded in the European history of the continent. Australia was also at war against the Boer republics, and in 1901 several young Australians won the Victoria Cross for bravery in South Africa.

The nation was overwhelmingly Christian but in 1901 some outback towns held both a synagogue and a mosque—from memory Coolgardie was one such town. The new nation was overwhelmingly British in descent but not as overwhelming as it tended to assume. Thus there were large but uncounted numbers of Aborigines.

Australia at this time was astonishingly urbanised by world standards. Melbourne and Sydney, of similar size and each holding half a million people, stood higher on the list of the world's largest cities than they stand today. The recent growth of cities in the third world has been on such a scale that Melbourne and Sydney are, measured by population, less important now than they were in 1901. There was another unusual facet of population in 1901—four of the top 11 cities were inland cities. Now only one of the top 11—Canberra—is inland.

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At the start of the last century the average standard of living was close to the highest in the world—for those who had full-time jobs. For the unemployed minority there was little help: Australia's welfare state was just beginning, and Queensland had just experienced for a couple of days the world's first Labor government.

Australia, and the whole western world, were so different in 1901, and many Australian attitudes and assumptions were so different to ours, that the founders of the Commonwealth would not altogether approve of what we see as national triumphs. Nor would they necessarily agree with what we see as failings, during the nation's first century. That will also be our fate when our Australia is reviewed and audited by Australians in 100 years' time.

In a democracy nothing is more certain than that the tides of popular opinion and the tides of learned opinion will continue to ebb and flow.

### **A precarious federation**

The coming together of the six Australian colonies in 1901 had a touch of the miraculous. Alfred Deakin, who was to be three times prime minister, was convinced that the federation had only 'been secured by a series of miracles.' At the end of the first year of the Federal Parliament one leading politician, Glynn of South Australia, confided to his diary that the federation was seen as so pockmarked by failure that, if a new referendum were held, the people of Australia might have voted to disband the federation.

The High Court, so vital to the new Commonwealth and its relations with the six states, was one institution that was postponed as too difficult. When at last in May 1903 the attempt was made by the Barton government to create the High Court, a loud shout of opposition arose. When it was pointed out that the High Court would be the 'keystone of the federal arch', many politicians said they did not want such an arch. Alfred Deakin had to threaten to resign until finally some of his Victorian colleagues came into line. So the bill butted its difficult way through both houses, with the new High Court finally reduced from five judges to three.

### **Federalism**

On the eve of this century, Australians, by popular vote, deliberately chose to become a federation. For a democratic country occupying a huge area and possessing difficult lines of communication and wide regional differences, the federal system is the best known solution. All those who hope that one day the states will be abolished are either hoping in vain or living mainly in Sydney and Melbourne and Canberra.

Like all known political systems, Australia's federation has fallen far short of perfection, but it has been relatively effective. It has even been copied by nations where at one time the concept was seen as alien. Aided by the piloting of Mr Tony Blair, a version of the federal system has unexpectedly taken root in the United Kingdom.

Today, the powers of the federal government, compared to those of the states, are far larger than Barton, Deakin or any father of federation would have envisaged. Two world wars, aided by the High Court, have done much to enthrone the Commonwealth

over the states. The states have also helped. In 1942, a wartime year, John Curtin as prime minister introduced uniform taxation in place of the old arrangement whereby each state levied its own income tax. What was intended during the crisis of war to be only a temporary loss of each state's independence became permanent.

Irrespective of its inadequacies, the federation, and its division of powers between the centre and the states, has proved to be a formidable achievement. One measure of its success is that only once has it experienced acute strain. That was nearly 70 years ago when the state of Western Australia resolved to secede—or to use the threat of secession as a bargaining counter. In the course of the coming century another secession movement will probably arise somewhere far from Canberra. A federal system is at heart a web of compromises, and some fragility will always be present.

In at least one sense, federalism has failed. The essence of the federal system is that the Commonwealth mainly looks after matters of national concern and the states look after matters of regional concern. As Australia possesses a wide range of climates and terrains, and as each region has a different mix of geographical assets and liabilities and sometimes a different mix of people, and as each region has different traditions and maybe a slightly different set of values and priorities, there is a case for each major region possessing its own state government. The sad fact is that the newest state in Australia is Queensland, created more than 140 years ago. Australia has created no new state since 1859: the United States in contrast has created close to 20. For a land of this size we do not have enough states. We thus miss one of the advantages of federalism.

Some of the nation's leaders in recent years have insisted that Australia is part of Asia, including the Indonesian Archipelago, but Australia still has not one capital city in the northern half of the continent. Darwin of course is only half a capital city. Even when the new state of Northern Territory is formed, Darwin, because of the allocation of Senate seats, will not possess in the nation as a whole as much political influence as even Launceston possesses.

### **Democracy and independence**

By 1901 Australia was one of the foremost exponents of democracy in the world: it still is. Admittedly women possessed the vote only in South Australia and Western Australia; but at that time the females in no European country had the right to vote. In addition in 1901 most Aborigines—but far from all—were kept out of the electoral system.

The frail political rights of Australian women were soon amended, and at the federal election of 1903 Australia became the first nation in the world in which women could both vote for and stand for Parliament. But no woman won a seat in the Federal Parliament until forty years later.

In 1901 there had been another restraint on democracy in Australia: this was the rule that its foreign policy should be conducted in harmony with Britain's. On the other hand it must be said that in the first few decades of the Twentieth Century Australia's leaders, irrespective of whether they were Labor or Liberal, believed that a tight alliance with Britain was very much in Australia's economic, political and cultural interests. In the context of those decades those leaders were almost certainly right. In



recent years some historians have lamented that in 1914 and again in 1939 Australia's prime minister of the day automatically followed Britain's lead in declaring war. But in any tight alliance, any worthwhile alliance, nearly every decision to go to war is really made far in advance of the war itself. What Mr Menzies said and did in 1939 was not exceptional, was not colonial in mentality.

By the end of World War One, Australia in effect was an independent nation with a seat and an independent stance at the Paris Peace conference. Indeed it could be argued that in some ways Australia then was slightly more independent than it is in today's era of international covenants.

In asking what should be celebrated next year, a very high place—maybe the highest—should be given to the nation's long tradition of resolving disagreements by discussion and ultimately by the people's vote. In 1975 an acute and unprecedented political crisis was solved in that way.

As democracy in the world is a very young form of government and still an experimental form of government—more experimental than we realise—we should sometimes think about it. Democracy in the last resort depends on the losers accepting their defeat rather than plotting revolution or taking up arms. A live democracy depends partly on a culture, a set of public attitudes, in which defeat, whether in sport or politics, is accepted firmly and even graciously. That is worth emphasising because our sporting culture—such a strong ingredient of national culture—sometimes over-emphasises victory at the expense of defeat.

### **War and defence**

The Commonwealth of Australia was created partly so that the new nation could effectively defend itself, on sea and land, in the face of threat. Beyond doubt the creation of the Commonwealth enabled Australia to defend itself more effectively and to take part more effectively in its international alliances. In any celebration of the Commonwealth's centenary a high place must be given to its role in increasing the nation's security. Pacifists, understandably, may disagree with this statement but they themselves are amongst the main beneficiaries of a free nation's effectiveness in defending itself.

In celebrating a centenary we should remember not only Gallipoli and the heroic events but the dangers averted. We should remember the Second World War.

Australia was better prepared for the First World War, which was largely fought far from home, than for the Second World War which was fought at the front door. Between 1941 and 1945 many Australians became prisoners of war partly because the country's defence forces were equipped—especially in the air—much less adequately than that of Japan. Australian soldiers were well equipped for Gallipoli but were not well equipped for Singapore.

Whereas in the years before the First World War both Labor and non-Labor believed strongly in defence, and the Labor party even believed strongly in compulsory military training, Australia was politically divided towards defence and foreign policy in the late 1930s. Australia's preparations for the Second World War proved inadequate.

Whereas England faced its acute military threat from Hitler with a united government, Australian politicians shunned the idea of a united government. In the initial two years of war, the personal and party and factional divisions in Canberra were acute. Indeed the Federal Parliament early in the war could be said to possess two warring Labor parties, and several warring Country or National parties. The nation also possessed one Liberal Party (then called the UAP) which could not conceal its internal rifts. In crisis the nation, politically, was deeply divided. This is not to cast the bulk of the blame on the nation's leaders, some of whom were heroic. Public opinion and the attitudes of political and non-parliamentary activists were equally at fault.

To play the game of politics strenuously is almost a hallmark of Australian democracy, but at a crucial phase of the war the sheer vigour of democracy might be said to have weakened the nation's preparations for war. I must emphasise that I make that statement with no intent to blame one political party more than others. The wartime leaders—Menzies, Fadden and Curtin—were great men in their different ways.

The nation learned a lesson from the war of 1939–45. So much that happened in national life in the following quarter century—the encouragement of a larger population, the fostering of self-sufficiency in manufacturing—came from that sense of shock experienced when Darwin was bombed, Rabaul was captured, Papua was invaded, and Australia itself seemed in peril.

### **The economy**

By world standards Australia's economic performance since 1901 has been above average in most decades, but one should not be too jubilant.

Australia was probably much more successful in the years 1850 to 1890—a period stretching from the first gold rushes to the last gasp of the urban boom. The other long period of relative success was the 30 years extending from 1940 to 1970. That 1940–70 period was marked by a very low level of unemployment, and in each year it was nearly always lower than that of the USA. For most of the 1990s Australia has achieved an impressive rate of economic growth though the unemployment is still high.

Of the six founding states of the Commonwealth, which state has gained the most and lost the most financially from the federation? New South Wales and Victoria have gained the most financially, in my view. They have usually had the biggest say in the federation; in addition their economies have gained most from federal economic policies. The Commonwealth is run from the Hume Highway because the southeast corner has the bulk of the population.

Western Australia, and to a lesser degree Queensland, are entitled to feel some doubts and to vent considered criticisms. They were the last to decide to enter the federation, largely because their huge untapped base of natural resources promised them a relatively fine economic future, irrespective of federation.

Western Australia has had at times the strongest cause for complaint. Indeed, Western Australia tried to secede, both houses of Parliament being equally concerned, after

five years' experience of the new Commonwealth. It tried to secede again in 1933 when 44 of the 50 lower house seats voted for secession.

What were its grievances? Its capital city, Perth, was the most remote by far from the seat of federal power. It felt its isolation acutely. As an inducement to enter the federation, it was promised a railway in place of the long and rough sea voyage across the Bight. The railway did not arrive until 1917—16 years after the birth of the Commonwealth.

Even after the railway came, Western Australia felt isolated from the rest of Australia, and still does. Western Australia's other grievance was that it depended much more on primary than on secondary industry, but the tariff and other economic policies of the new Commonwealth favoured secondary industry, the activity in which Melbourne and Sydney, and to a lesser degree Adelaide, were strong. This was a powerful reason for the secession movement in Western Australia. Since the 1970s the economic policies of the Commonwealth have been more favourable to Western Australia, but many would say that the Native Title Act has reduced substantially that gain.

My own view is that Western Australia's economy—and probably Queensland's too—would probably have advanced even more in the last 30 years if it were an independent nation, and if it were allowed more licence to shape its own economic policies to suit its own special needs. But I say that with some reserve; and I am speaking only of economic matters. In various political and social ways Queensland and Western Australia have gained enormously from membership of this federation.

Western Australia and Queensland are the states which traditionally, with their huge area and long coastline, are most interested in defence; and they have certainly gained from a united national defence policy. They could have been in a grave plight in the wartime years of 1941 if, as two isolated and independent nations, they had had to defend themselves against the Japanese. Britain of course would have given some help, and the Commonwealth of Australia probably would have given some help.

In a federation there will always be losers and winners. And from time to time some of the losers become winners and some of the winners become losers.

My own view is that the political power base of Australia, the south east corner, is less interested than it should be in the needs and interests of the outlying states of the Commonwealth.

New Zealand in the last two decades has been a special gainer from the creation of the Commonwealth. New Zealand sent delegates to the early federal discussions in the 1890s and some of its leaders at first thought that their country might gain by joining the proposed Commonwealth and the common market it offered them. Indeed the Australian Constitution still has a sentence envisaging that New Zealand might one day join in.

In the 1980s, unexpectedly, New Zealand began to join the Australian common market and now is virtually a full member: a fact known by nearly everyone in New Zealand but by few in Australia. Since one of the vital and original aims of the

Commonwealth was to set up a huge common market in 1901, New Zealand belatedly has shared in the rewards of that market without having to take part in a referendum and without having to join the Commonwealth. New Zealand today would be in even more serious economic difficulties but for its access to the Australian market and the right of its people to migrate freely to and fro across the Tasman.

All in all, the Australian economy—and New Zealand's too—has gained much from the creation of the Commonwealth. That is something worth celebrating.

### **Aborigines**

Aborigines for a long period were not gainers from the creation of the Commonwealth. For much of that time they continued to live on the fringe: they were seen as outsiders in their own homeland. In the last 30 years, however, they have gained. The gains have not been anywhere near as considerable as they hoped, but gains there are.

If Australia still consisted of six or even three sovereign states, the attempts to improve the Aborigines' wellbeing, health, status, self esteem and opportunities would have been fewer and less determined and less comprehensive. One of the noticeable gains in the last thirty 30 is the academic and public recognition of how long Aborigines have inhabited this continent and what they achieved. Even that gain owed much to Commonwealth initiatives and especially the work of the Australian National University.

I should add that here I am not asking the crucial and complex question: how much have Aborigines gained and lost from the coming of Europeans in the last two centuries? That question lies outside the topic of this address. Rather I am looking only at the century since federation and simply asking whether the Commonwealth in later years has been effectively encouraged, by Australians both black and white, to try to usher in a new era for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

### **The environment and nationalism**

Nationalism, a complicated phenomenon, has not increased on all fronts since 1901. On the other hand, the sense of feeling at home in a highly distinctive set of landscapes—and that is a vital form of nationalism—has increased substantially. The typical Australian does not feel as much at home in this land as does the typical Aborigine still living in traditional lands, but the sense of belonging has grown for the typical Australian. The creation of the Commonwealth, and the accompanying feeling of affinity with a whole continent, is something that should be celebrated.

Since 1901, the average Australian's concern for the environment has been transformed. Uluru—alias Ayers Rock—reflects the swing in attitude. It was of little appeal to Australians as late as 1950, partly because it was inaccessible. In its ability to fire the imagination, it ranked well below such popular landmarks as the Dog on the Tuckerbox at Gundagai and the Sydney Harbour Bridge. And yet today, the Rock is one of the best known Australian symbols, possibly ranking with the Opera House in Sydney. I am not sure whether it completely fires the imagination of most Australians. I am not sure whether it quite matches the emotional superlatives of the tourism publicity, but it has a national prestige quite unimaginable half a century ago.

The extraordinary increase in the affection or tolerance of the typical Australian towards wildernesses is partly a mirror of the continuing rise of Australian nationalism and the sense of belonging. When I was a child, wilderness was a frightening word in the Australian vocabulary: it is now a friendlier word. That in itself is a profound change.

The new attitude to the environment is also a reflection of the damage done to soils, plant and animal species, and parts of the landscape in the preceding two centuries. The sense of damage, the attempt to reckon the damage, is a recent occurrence.

And yet much of the damage reflects the fact that Australia has been so successful as an economic pioneer—and successful in the face of acute difficulties, whether distance, aridity, puzzling geology, hungry soils and unfamiliar vegetation. The devising and applying of new technology—whether the coming of aircraft, new metallurgy or big dams—has underwritten so much economic development in Australia in the last two centuries and has led to the supplying of large quantities of food, fibres and minerals to other nations. At times when food was scarce and malnutrition widespread, tens of millions of people gained from Australia's economic development. The harm to the environment is the other side of the coin. We tend to see either the head or the tail of the coin—and not both sides—when we debate such topics.

Most Australians see their nation's history in the Twentieth Century as a pronounced success, though they will not necessarily agree on what has been most successful. Many Australians will single out athletic nationalism—the nation's achievement in producing so many heroes in war and champions in sport. Others will argue that Australia's special achievement is a way of life which combines an abundance of space by world standards, a relatively favourable climate and a high degree of prosperity and leisure—it should be noted that some of these good things came without us working for them. Another group will see high merit in Australia's vigorous democracy or its ingenuity in coping with physical obstacles.

In contrast, a minority of Australians see their nation's failures as so conspicuous that they outweigh the merits. They can point to the plight of most Aborigines until recent times and the neglect of the environment. I doubt whether these defects really outweigh the merits, but opinions will differ.

My view is that by world standards Australia has had a very successful history since 1901. Few nations have had more success, especially when the obstacles are considered. The nation's failures are also many, and some are beyond dispute. And yet this remains a place of enormous hope and opportunity. Edmund Barton, before he became the nation's first prime minister, captured that sense of opportunity and privilege too. He penned the stirring words: 'For the first time in history we have a nation for a continent, and a continent for a nation.'



**Question** — Your point about Launceston and Darwin and the number of states that have been created in America, made me think of Canada. Canada, which federated in 1867, has had five more states created since it federated, and in 1982 it put through a Constitution Act, which referred to the need for a bill of rights, the rights of aborigines and also education. Do you not think that Australia should take a leaf out of Canada's book and bring in—in the next 20 years I hope—a Constitution Act, to update the need for a bill of rights, the needs of aborigines and also possibly the need for a flag which reflects our life and the environment?

**Geoffrey Blainey** — My view is that there's much to be said for a bill of rights. It's great to have rights which are proclaimed and which the nation honours. On the other hand, I have considerable doubts. You see, we had a bill of rights before the Federal Parliament for a long period in the 1980s—the longest time, I think, any bill had been debated by the Federal Parliament—and it was eventually rejected. My view is that while a bill of rights has many advantages—especially in inspirational terms—it sets out a whole lot of values and claims, many of which are from time to time in collision with one another. And once you have a bill of rights, the High Court will decide, when two rights are in collision, which right should have precedence. In my view, in a democracy, that is a task for, and the responsibility of, the Federal Parliament, rather than the High Court.

So while a bill of rights has certain advantages, it weakens democracy by taking away from an elected house, and putting in the hands of a learned and unelected house, one of the most important of all decisions a nation can make: its main values and priorities.

The comparison with Canada is very interesting, and I should know the answer to this: why it is that—except for the recent attempt to create self-government in the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory's recent march towards what I ultimately assume will be statehood—so little has been done. Of course, the existing states are strongly opposed to the creation of new states. Queensland and Western Australia especially don't want new states, because the new states would be cut out of their territory, and make them less productive.

It is inconceivable that in the next five or ten years the Northern Territory will not become a separate state, and once that happens—although it won't have full Senate representation—I would think a new state movement will blossom in North Queensland. North Queensland has a much stronger argument for a separate state than the Northern Territory, because it has a larger population and a much stronger economic base. But North Queensland of course has the big problem that Cairns and Townsville are rivals like Melbourne and Sydney, and one wonders whether Charters Towers or some other poor benighted town will have to become their 'Canberra'.

**Question** — Can you comment on the role of the High Court in the shaping and direction of Australia and its Constitution? Can you also comment on compulsory voting and how it shapes Australia's destiny?

**Geoffrey Blainey** — Australia pioneered compulsory voting, and if it wasn't the first in the world, it was close to it. It started as a state experiment and of course the Federal Parliament took it up. It was a Tasmanian backbencher who introduced

legislation in the 1920s to introduce compulsory voting in federal elections. I have read his speeches, and he said that once everybody had to vote, 'it would lead to a transformation in public knowledge.' I have yet to see that transformation, but maybe my eyesight is not as good as that of the revered 1920s member of Parliament.

I don't particularly favour compulsory voting, but we've got it and I have a fifty-fifty attitude towards it. It pronounces that as a citizen you have responsibilities, and one of these responsibilities is to vote. Another advantage with compulsory voting, is that a federal election day has been turned into a kind of 'national day', and election night is a special kind of night, with a lot of national feeling, as well as partisan feeling, in the air. It really is a very special occasion in Australia, such as most European countries and Britain don't have on their election days. But I remain uneasy about the idea of compulsory voting. We make citizenship easier to acquire in Australia than in almost any other country in the world, and then we straight away compel new citizens to vote.

**Question** — And the role of the High Court?

**Geoffrey Blainey** — I've been an Australian historian for a long time—I began to write my first book in 1951, and I've written all kinds of histories—but I didn't realise for a long time that the High Court was so important. I don't think it quite catches our imagination until every now and then we either see something that it does that we strongly approve of, or that we object to. I sometimes think that the High Court sees itself as the third parliament, rather than the High Court that was envisaged by the founders of the Commonwealth. I suppose you can't stop the High Court occasionally seeing itself as the third parliament. I would have to say that, generally, we have been well served by the High Court, but I think democracy is endangered if a High Court sees itself increasingly as a third parliament—and therefore a superior parliament.

**Question** — I was interested in your comments about Western Australia and Queensland possibly having the best case for seceding. I may be wrong, but I don't believe they were doing particularly well up to 1901, and they certainly weren't doing particularly well when they had their own taxing power. It's only virtually since they have had extra returns under the Commonwealth taxing arrangements that they've done spectacularly well.

**Geoffrey Blainey** — I'm quite happy with some of those comments. Western Australia did miserably in the Nineteenth Century. They even actually invited Britain to send convicts there at a time when eastern Australia was saying: 'We've had enough of your convicts.' Western Australia was hoping that their shrivelled economy would grow a little if convicts increased the purchasing power. But in the 1890s of course, Western Australia had those great gold discoveries, and when it made the decision to join federation it was booming. Likewise Queensland, by the 1890s, was doing better and had greater optimism than either Victoria or New South Wales. So I think that those two states came into federation believing that they could, if they so desired, have stayed outside of it.

My view is that it was much better for Australia if they stayed in the federation. But I have no doubt that there have been decades in the last half century when both Western Australia and Queensland would have been decidedly better off if they could have

shaped their own economic policies, providing they managed to use some of their surplus revenue to pay somebody else to defend them.

**Question** — In celebrating the centenary of federation, is there a risk of repeating the error that seemed evident in the republican drive in the 1990s, in that it's asking the Australian people to know more about their Constitution, and like it better? Do you think there's a risk that the celebration of federation and its centenary will perpetuate some of this resentment at elite-driven nationalism in Australia?

**Geoffrey Blainey** — I suppose in a sense, it was elite-driven, but most activist movements are by some definition elite or elite-driven. If I had to comment on the republican movement of the 1990s (of which I wasn't a member) I would say this. In the 1890s when the people of the six colonies made the ultimate decision on whether they should federate or not, the belief was strong that you not only had to listen to supporters of federation, and the kind of Australia they wanted, but you also had to listen very closely to the complaints of people who didn't think they wanted a federation, but who had a vote and whose voice was entitled to be heard.

The Constitution that our nation finally received, and which was put into effect on 1 January 1901, was really a series of compromises. No group, no state, got its own way. Throughout the debates in the Convention and the debates that took place in mechanics' institutes and schools of arts, people said: 'This is our country, and even if we're not sure whether we're going to vote for the Commonwealth or not, we're entitled to have our doubts and our grievances listened to.'

To me, a hallmark of the republican movement in the 1990s was that it was not interested in the opposition. When Mr Keating set up his first committee led by Mr Turnbull to do the initial shaping of the republic, there was no place for non-republicans. He said right from the outset that this must be a controlled movement. I was a member of the Constitutional Convention, and while I opposed the proposed republic, my mind was not fixed when I went to the Convention; and from time to time, even though I was not persuaded by their model, I made suggestions that I thought would make it a better model. In other words, if they were going to win, it was best that they had a better kind of republic than the one they were proposing.

There was no way under the sun that outsiders at the Constitutional Convention could influence the mainstream republican movement. And that's one of the reasons why they lost. If you are going to reshape the nation, you have to make concessions to the potential losers as well as produce a model that your own side will glory in. This is not often said, but one of the reasons why the Australian Constitution has been so rarely changed—when change has been put to the people at referendum—is that the Constitution reflected a series of compromises, rather than the victory of one or other group of the 1890s. And that compromise component is one of the reasons which has made it enduring, and rather difficult to change.





# One Hundred Years of (Almost) Solitude: the Evolution of Australian Citizenship\*

*Helen Irving*

On 1 January 1901, six of the Australasian colonies joined together in one 'indissoluble federal Commonwealth', as the words of the Preamble to the Australian Constitution put it.

Massive celebrations accompanied the inauguration of the Commonwealth. They were repeated for the opening of the First Federal Parliament four months later, and again, around the new nation, for the tour of the Duke and Duchess of York that followed. The celebrations stretched over the first six months of that year. There were parades, banquets, picnics, sporting competitions, exhibitions and historical re-enactments. Streets were decorated, poems were composed, songs were sung, medals were struck, prisoners were pardoned, and fireworks lit again and again.

What was being celebrated? Among the many other achievements of that day, Australians who read their newspapers learned on 1 January 1901, that they had become Australian *citizens*. It was a rather curious claim to make. There had been an attempt in 1898 to write a definition of citizenship into the Australian Constitution, but it had failed. Although the delegates to the Federal Convention laboured long and hard in their effort to say just what it was to be a citizen—traversing legal and political rights, as well as cultural attributes—the Constitution's framers could not settle on a definition.

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Legally, Australians were British subjects, not citizens. To use the term ‘citizen’ meant going beyond this simple fact. It involved moving into the issue of the common rights and privileges of *residents*, not just subjects, as well as the way in which legal subjects might be deprived of these rights, or might lack the full complement of rights to begin with. It also meant facing the difficulty inherent in all federal systems—‘dual citizenship’—being both members of a state and members of a nation. To say in what way the specifically Australian ‘citizenship’ transcended state citizenship is still hard and, in an era when legal Australian citizenship had not been defined, it was felt in the end to be an unprofitable exercise. The Constitution ended up with a provision that ruled out discrimination against a ‘subject of the Queen’ on the grounds of his or her residence of a state alone. We are still not certain of the import of this section.

For all of this, there *was* a notion of ‘citizenship’ one hundred years ago. It was a combination of legal entitlements, cultural attributes, moral standards, and social practices. The term ‘citizen’ was used widely to identify members of the community, measured against these criteria. A ‘citizen’ was an upstanding and respectable person, one who made a contribution to civil society, one who was more than merely a subject by birth. The failure to agree upon a definition for inclusion in the Constitution arose not because the term had no meaning. Indeed, it was charged with meaning. The problem lay in attempting to attach the civic sense of citizenship to what would have to stand as a legal definition. A normative definition was not too difficult, but a legal definition would require taking a step in a direction that the majority of the Constitution’s framers ultimately did not want—towards a category based on equality and ‘sameness’, rather than special attributes.

This tension between the normative and the legal is not a thing of the past. While there have been major shifts in the dominant way of talking about citizenship in Australia, and vast changes in our citizenship law, the core has remained essentially the same. Australians still think in cultural terms when we imagine what it means to be an Australian citizen. We still think of citizenship as a set of attributes and entitlements that cannot be shared by all who come here or live here. We are still a ‘protectionist’ nation in our concept of the Australian community and its members. Although there was a moment, immediately following the Second World War, when a new, expansive approach was promoted, it did not continue to evolve along the lines it promised. Our record has been, effectively, a century of thinking of ourselves as separate: one hundred years of (almost) solitude.

At the start of the Twenty-first Century—in this year of our nation’s centenary—we have an unparalleled opportunity to break out of this solitary way of looking at ourselves. To do so, however, will require a shift in thinking even more dramatic than that which followed the War.

In 1901, by common law—for there were no citizenship acts as yet—all Australians were British subjects. All those born within the King’s or Queen’s Allegiance—that is, in Britain or any of the Empire colonies, or on any British ship—whatever their parents’ nationality, whatever their colour, gender or religion, were British subjects. Subject status could also be acquired by naturalisation. Once acquired it could never be renounced. In theory, and much more often in practice than many might believe, all subjects were equal under the law and entitled to the full protection of British law.

The British Empire was a vast, global enterprise, an international network of legal, political, financial, cultural and technological institutions. It linked markets, transport and communications systems around the world. Its political, legal and financial centre in London had the capacity to overturn decisions and influence investments made in cities ten thousand miles away. When Britain's Barings Bank crashed in 1890, a global Depression followed. Anyone who thinks that globalisation is a phenomenon only of the late Twentieth Century has forgotten the British Empire.

Australians were members of this Empire. From 1901 on, they were also citizens of a federation; that is to say, they were members, or 'citizens' of Australia and simultaneously, members or citizens of a state. As subjects of the Empire, and 'citizens' of the federation, they had multiple citizenship. There was both a well-developed concept of Australian citizenship, and a complex, multi-dimensional way of being a citizen. Multiple cultural affinities, different levels of belonging, a nation that was 'one and many', was thought to be a very satisfactory solution to the simultaneous desire to become united but remain separate. A federal system was indeed *the* political solution of the time for uniting hitherto separate and sovereign regional units, in such a way as to leave as much as possible of their original autonomy intact while providing the advantages of unity.

The majority of Australians in 1901 found the federal solution and the multiple citizenship that went with it very satisfactory. They shared in the great community of Empire, and they were also distinctively Australian. But there was a serpent in this happy federal garden. For all their enthusiasm for being 'British', Australians found British subject status too generous, too broad and too inclusive. They wanted to remain subjects, but they wanted even more to have a distinctive Australian 'citizenship' as well. While anyone born in a British colony was a subject, Australian citizenship was, with some very few exceptions, open to only a limited group: whites.

The Australian Commonwealth in 1901 was fragile, exposed and untried. Its new institutions had constitutional status, and the political power that accompanied it, but they needed legitimacy immediately. They had never existed before and there was no federal model in the world quite like the Australian federation. People had to believe themselves citizens, they had to believe in the Australian federation as something transcendent the moment it emerged, or the whole thing might have collapsed through the inevitable political strains and realities to which it would be subjected right from the start.

The celebrations of the first six months of 1901 were in large part a series of legitimating rituals, anthropologically necessary to make that transition from one status to another. They reinforced people's belief in and commitment to their new status as Australians, and their recognition of the Commonwealth as something greater than themselves. The celebrations were built around the themes of unity, transcendence and protection.

One of the first steps taken by the new Commonwealth Parliament after all these rituals had been performed was the introduction of the Immigration Restriction Act. In combination with several others, this Act, it is well known, founded the White Australia policy. It did so (what is less well known) indirectly. The new Commonwealth had constitutional power over immigration, but the British authorities

had been deeply unhappy with the colonies' immigration policies in the pre-federation days, and they beseeched the Australians not to have a Commonwealth immigration policy built around race. Millions of non-whites were British subjects, all supposedly equal under the law, and entitled to its full protection: no stigma should be placed upon any of Her Majesty's subjects, the Australians were told, 'on the sole ground of race or colour'. Australia resolved the dilemma this created by imposing a European language dictation test in the place of a test of 'colour' for intending immigrants. It had—as was intended—the same effect.

One year later, in 1902, the first Commonwealth Franchise Act was passed. It extended the right to vote to adult women, and gave them the right to stand for Parliament. Plural voting and a property franchise were already ruled out by the Constitution. Australia now had the most democratic national franchise in the world. But the Franchise Act simultaneously prevented the aboriginal natives of Australia, Asia, Africa and the Pacific Islands (with the exception of the New Zealand Maori) from enrolling to vote unless they were already on the electoral roll.

Other steps quickly followed, in which the protectionist character of the new nation was carved out, including import tariffs to protect Australian industry and an arbitration system through which wages were protected. The White Australia policy and the white franchise were not simply a matter of racism, as the exception in the Franchise Act for the Maori people suggests. They were also a cultural strategy, built around the view that the new institutions of the Commonwealth were especially vulnerable and might be endangered by 'non-British' approaches to politics, or by culturally unfamiliar practices, especially in ways of working and standards of wage-earning.

Australian citizenship in the early decades of the century was based on limited membership, but it was a generous, democratic model for those who met the membership criteria. White, protectionist walls were built around the new nation, like a cocoon in which it would be allowed to grow and develop. Everyone assumed that within the cocoon, Australia would grow mightily, as the United States had done over the one hundred years between its federation and the late Nineteenth Century.

Everyone predicted a massive increase in population following Australia's federation. As a minimum, they thought, there would be an Australian population of 50 million by its Centenary. But they had not, in fact, followed the US model. They had not held out their arms to the tired, the poor, the huddled masses yearning to breathe free. They had built the walls too tight. The anticipated great influx of immigrants from Britain and the other white colonies did not occur. By the 1930s, it was clear that this strategy had failed. Against a backdrop of growing Australian independence, the membership category of citizens had to be expanded.

The hostile treatment of British subjects of German ancestry within their own country of birth during World War One began the fragmentation of the once-wide embrace of subject-status. British Nationality Acts from 1914 on began, little by little, to tie citizenship to criteria of eligibility, to particular entitlements, rather than to a broad, inclusive membership by simple birth. The self-governing British Dominions gradually began to see themselves as requiring special legal categories of citizenship of their own, to meet the needs of their particular populations. Australia had

approached this, indirectly, through immigration policy in 1901. In South Africa and Canada, ethnic population mixes created a momentum for special national citizenship laws.

By the end of World War Two, the old self-governing colonies, including Australia, were to all intents and purposes independent of Britain. The Empire, already beginning to unravel at the time of Australia's federation, had all but come apart under the impact of the War. In 1946, representatives of these former colonies met in London to discuss their status. The result was an agreement with the British government that independent national citizenship—this time in the formal, legal sense—would be accepted. Following Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom itself, the Chifley government introduced the first Australian Nationality and Citizenship Act into the Commonwealth Parliament in late 1948. It would come into force, with symbolic intention, on Australia Day, 26 January 1949.

Under attack from the Liberal Party Opposition and a good deal of the press, the Immigration Minister, Arthur Calwell, defended the Citizenship Act. It would, he said, 'prove a binding and unifying factor in the Empire.' The Act did not discard British subject-status. Indeed, Australians retained their British subject status simultaneously with being Australian citizens right up until 1984. The 1949 Act gave special rights of residence and virtually automatic naturalisation to British nationals in Australia. For naturalisation of non-British nationals, in addition to residency conditions (five years), it included requirements of a 'good knowledge of English' and good character, as well as 'an adequate knowledge of the responsibilities and privileges of Australian citizenship.' The Act was also—as Calwell also said—a 'charter of mateship'.

The responsibilities of the new Australian citizen were, however, simple and many were shared by resident non-citizens: effectively the duty to obey the law and to vote, in return for protection of the law, and assistance from Australian diplomatic and consular representatives abroad. It was far from a radical assertion of republican citizenship. But, albeit indirectly, it did express Australian nationalism. It gave Australia a direct control of its own membership rules. It prevented Australians taking out the citizenship of another country and still retaining their Australian citizenship. Among other things, it paved the way for the great expansion in non-British membership of the Australian national community.

As much as anything else, the Citizenship Act was prompted by the growing numbers of immigrants of non-British background who had begun coming into Australia with the Displaced Persons program in the aftermath of the War, and by plans for the great wave of European immigration into Australia which would continue over the next 25 years. It would make no sense to try to turn these people into 'British subjects'; the category was too broad to be adequate for turning people into Australians.

The post-War immigration program was one of the most adventurous and optimistic of any of Australia's official initiatives last century, except perhaps for federation itself. It captured a new nationalist way of thinking about members of the Australian community. But it retained—or at least attempted to retain—the former 'imperial' notion of membership.

The immigration program was linked to a complex cultural program which today we remember only under the simplified name of 'assimilation'. This term now has such pejorative overtones, that it is hard to see it in its original historical context. Assimilation for immigrants was a policy designed to make newcomers understand how to blend as quickly as possible into the national cultural and demographic landscape. It drew upon voluntary organisations, networks of Good Neighbour Councils and New Settlers Leagues, among others. It was linked to a series of annual 'Citizenship Conventions' which began in 1949 and ran for more than 15 years, bringing together members of government and representatives of Australian voluntary organisations, churches, and clubs, with representatives of ethnic communities. These Conventions discussed problems experienced by immigrants, and made recommendations for dealing with them as well as for generally improving the smooth integration of immigrants into the Australian population. The assimilation program also included publications for immigrants and advice on Australian ways of doing things.

*Your Introduction to Australia: Hints and Help on Knowing Your New Homeland*, for example, published in 1948, is a remarkable and charming cultural artefact of these times. It captures a dominant view of the Australian 'citizen' at the time. It is full of useful practical information about matters like postal rates, welfare benefits, and driving on the left-hand side of the road. It gives hints about dressing and avoiding using one's hands when speaking. Australian men, it reveals, 'never wear hairnets'. It defines Australians as advocates of freedom, fair play, and hard, manual work. It describes their tendency to use negative humour, their reluctance to praise or show enthusiasm. It advises the reader to avoid conspicuousness, to aim for a time in the future when he or she would no longer be noticed as strange.

It is a manual for assimilation. But assimilation did not, as is often thought, mean that 'old' Australians were themselves asked to take no part in the transformation. Breaking down of Australian prejudices against immigrants was a persistent and bipartisan theme in official publications and commentary. The fact that white Australians were themselves all descended from immigrants was not something that we discovered in the 1980s or 1990s; it was frequently raised at the time in an attempt to combat negative views of newcomers.

In 1951, the fiftieth anniversary—the Jubilee of federation—was celebrated. There was an expanded Jubilee Citizenship Convention in Canberra, folkloric festivals and performances from immigrant community groups and individuals, as well as an Exhibition of European Arts and Crafts. In the wider community the Jubilee was lavishly celebrated, with parades of floats, as well as numerous sporting, cultural and popular events. As in 1901, the celebrations were repeated in May 1951, for the Jubilee of the Commonwealth Parliament.

The symbols of that year were of youth and growth, of prosperity and natural abundance: sowing the seeds of the future, nurturing and flourishing. Its depiction of citizenship was both expansive and nationalist, building on the protectionism of the earlier decades, but confident that the protectionist strategy had worked.

One group of Australians within the white external walls still did not have citizenship. In law, the Aboriginal people were citizens from 1949, as they had been and as they

remained, British subjects by law. The fact that they did not share many of the social and political rights of other citizens did not make them any less *legal* citizens. What it did show is that citizenship is much more than a legal category.

Over the decades between 1949 and 1992, its complex character began to be more fully recognised. A Citizenship Act was important both to define and control the particular membership of a national community, and also in gaining international recognition for this community. But legal citizenship is far from the end of the story. Many people had and still have, legal citizenship, with only limited access to other entitlements: children can hold passports but cannot yet vote; prisoners serving long sentences are deprived of the vote; people with dual citizenship cannot become members of Parliament.

And many people with full citizenship entitlements find themselves unable to take full advantage of them because they are economically disadvantaged and disempowered. To be a member of the community—a ‘citizen’—entails equal access to political representation and a genuinely equal opportunity to participate, as well as equal treatment under the law and equal protection against injustice. But these needs, it is worth reminding ourselves, are not exclusive to legal citizens. Residents have just as much a need for such protections as those with the right to hold an Australian passport, the majority of whom rarely travel overseas, if at all, in any case. Yet, while Australia has a very generous policy with respect to acquiring legal citizenship for those who are allowed within its walls, it is increasingly ungenerous regarding the entitlements of resident non-citizens, and remains relatively exclusionist—indeed protectionist—in respect of the numbers and type of persons permitted to come to Australia in the first place.

Over the 40 year period from 1949, the Citizenship Act underwent several amendments including, among other things, twice reducing the residency qualification for naturalisation, so that it now is one of the shortest, if not *the* shortest, qualifying periods in the world. It also cut out the dual category of British subject status, and removed the right of unnaturalised British citizens to vote. The Constitution was amended four times, including in 1967, giving the Commonwealth the power to make special laws for the Aboriginal people. Australia’s formal constitutional and legal ties with Britain were severed. The White Australia policy was ended, and multiculturalism was introduced. Australia increasingly looked to, and invoked, its international obligations in passing and upholding Commonwealth laws. The notion of citizenship began to stretch beyond Australia’s nationalist concerns, to a wider, international set of values.

In 1992, several key decisions were taken in this direction. These included the High Court ruling in *Mabo* and the Keating government’s commitment to setting in train an Australian republic. Each entailed a dramatic challenge to Australia’s constitutional certainties, and captured a new notion of citizenship. While republicanism was far from a new idea in Australia, the promise of its realisation demanded a re-thinking of the terms and conditions under which Australians would govern themselves, finally and completely without any reference to Britain.

Profound and profoundly unsettling as they are for many, the initiatives of 1992 were, none the less, still little more than internal measures, dealing with the population of



Australia within its borders, re-working the established community and re-defining the character of its membership. Most recently we have begun to retreat even from the limited imagination of 1992, and have become again fearful and protectionist in the way we think about our citizenry, about those we regard as legitimate members of our community.

In some respects, the republican movement has contributed to this process. I have no doubts whatsoever that Australia will and should become a republic, but to attach the republican goal to a repudiation of our history and to build the campaign around an anti-British rhetoric is misplaced. Many Australians have a British background and relations between Australia and Britain remain close. More importantly, by refusing to recognise any value in the former imperial model and merely asserting an Australian nationalism in its place, we may be throwing out the baby with the bath water. The ideal of the British subject was an expansive, generous one, built around transnational notions of community, rejecting 'racial' or ethnic criteria for membership, and in which free movement, shared entitlements and a type of international 'fellowship' were key components. I am not suggesting that this ideal always operated in practice, but it did have some reality—certainly a legal reality—and it remains preferable to one in which narrow, exclusionist notions of membership of community prevail.

'Citizenship' entitlements within Australia are continuing to narrow. The right to vote is now confined to legal citizens only; the right to stand for Parliament has since 1992 been ruled out for those with dual nationality, equal access to welfare and student assistance is growing increasingly difficult for residents who are not legally citizens; there is a move to have those British residents who are not legal citizens but who remain on the electoral roll, struck off.

Why are we doing this? Is it because only legal citizens need representation or welfare benefits, or opportunities to participate in the political system? Surely not. Is it because we want to punish or shame those who live here but have not chosen to be naturalised? Perhaps. Is it for simple reasons of international *quid pro quo*, because other countries deny our citizens these entitlements when they live away from Australia? This reason, if it ever was sound, is growing increasingly doubtful in the face of international shifts in approach, with reciprocal rights opening up rather than narrowing. There is now every incentive to be generous towards other countries' nationals.

Australia's immigration intake has fluctuated over the last three decades, but has on annual average remained relatively low since the 1970s. As a subject of policy it has become a political hot potato which neither of the major parties wants to handle. Where political discussion on immigration has taken place, it has tended to focus on its imagined negative impact on unemployment, welfare spending, the environment, or on Australia's national identity. Very little evidence has been provided to support such negative causation and there has been almost no exploration of whether any negative impact might be minimised by tying immigration intake to targeted regional re-development, infrastructure projects, and cultural programs. These were all features of the successful immigration program of the post-War years, and should not be off the agenda.

Australia needs to face the Twenty-first Century thinking and speaking of Australian citizenship in more internationally expansive terms than before. The old Empire concept, stripped of its colonising mission, was not a bad model. It is perhaps now more relevant than ever, as a means of re-thinking the nature of globalisation.

We could begin with something simple: removal of the prohibition on Australians taking out the citizenship of another country as well as the prohibition on Australians with dual nationality standing for Parliament. We could move on to an approach to immigration which emphasised the contribution of new immigrants (not just those who settled here in the 1950s), rather than the problems. We could begin once again to think of people as ‘citizens’—as members of our community—even without their becoming legal citizens. We could hold out a range of entitlements and benefits to make the integration of immigrants easier, without attaching punitive conditions to these. Words and symbols of openness, optimism and expansion could be adopted.

In this centenary year, Australians have a unique opportunity to take a new perspective on our history. There has been a tendency for some time to focus on the mistakes that have been made in the past, and in return, an attempt to counter these with positive perspectives on our history, most recently on the federation experience. But we have rarely attempted to learn real lessons from either the negative or the positive approaches. We have remained cautious and fearful about trying out new directions, because we do not recognise that adventurous steps have been taken in the past without disastrous consequences. Federation itself was such a step. We applaud the great, successful experiment with multiculturalism, but forget that this was the outcome of the highly imaginative, indeed daring, policy of post-war immigration undertaken by the Chifley government and continued during the Menzies years.

Australians did not build a permanent memorial to federation in 1901, although they toyed with the idea for a while. One of the proposals in circulation was a massive female figure, 1 000 feet high, to be built in Sydney Harbour—so similar to the Statue of Liberty it is almost embarrassing to contemplate. Fortunately it was dropped. The real Statue of Liberty, which greeted the tired, the poor and the huddled masses of Europe as they reached the shores of the United States, was a gift from the French government for the centenary of America’s independence. Australia did not then, and does not now, need such an object. But a gift to itself of something carrying the same symbolic message would, I believe, be more than welcome, as we face our next one hundred years.



**Question** — Could you give us an idea of the benefits to this country of the new approach that you are espousing?

**Helen Irving** — I think there would be very clear benefits in an increased population in Australia. In terms of where that population is likely to come from, realistically, it is more likely to come from immigration than the natural birth rate. There are also good reasons not to try to massively increase the population by encouraging the current population to have more children. That’s another complex story, however.

The benefits of an increased immigration program in Australia can be—although the circumstances are different now—extrapolated from the benefits that we saw in the immigration program which followed the Second World War. The benefits come in terms of what you can support with a larger population. There are cultural benefits, in terms of the development of Australian industries and initiatives. And in terms of simple things, like the possibility of increasing the circulation of newspapers or publications that are produced in Australia so that you might be able to have a more diverse media.

Economically, I think there would be considerable advantages. There would be benefit also in opening up Australia's relations with the world, and in terms of developing the sorts of advantages that come from international exchanges broadly. I don't think anyone would deny that there are arguments about how you would get those international exchanges, but I think they would be very much supported by an expanded immigration program.

Obviously there are problems with simply introducing large numbers of extra people into Australia's major cities, in terms of demands on resources. An expanded immigration program would need to be tied to other programs—again using the model of the post-war immigration program, which tied immigration intake to regional development, infrastructure programs and to building up Australia's profile in areas where it was considered that there was a shortfall or a need. We have a long way to go before the discussion on how that might be done would be completed, but it is something that is worth discussing. And the idea that immigrants could come here with certain at least initial requirements for settlement attached to their arrival should not be off the agenda.

As well as the advantages to the people who might come here, we would benefit in terms of thinking more generously about who we are, in gaining and enriching our lives from the sort of exchange that would follow, and from ways of thinking about ourselves in a less insular, protectionist fashion.

**Question** — Shouldn't we start thinking in other terms and questioning ourselves on the fundamental weaknesses in Australian society? We seem to have an inability to be a self-sustaining society. We say, all the time, that we need more immigration to maintain our population, because we can't maintain our family structure or population by breeding ourselves. We say we must bring in more foreign investment to sustain our society, and we must bring in more directors from the United States to manage our organisations. And we are continually selling things overseas, until we will end up with practically nothing in this country that is owned by Australia. I think we should be examining how we make ourselves a self-sustaining society, and not create more division and difficulty for ourselves by an immensely diverse society.

**Helen Irving** — I don't think we are saying 'all the time' that we need a greater immigration program. Some people might say that, but I think they are a minority. Certainly, there is discussion about the need for overseas investment and importing the best brains and the best company managers and so on. It's not necessarily the same argument that would suggest that an expanded immigration program would be desirable.

When we talk about making Australia self-sustaining, that is very much part of that rhetoric of protectionism that we have adopted since before 1901. The idea that somehow we are the ones who deserve to use and exploit and live on this land, that we are here by birthright, was certainly entrenched by 1901. We have a suspicion of others getting access to the things that we have. And a lot of the rhetoric about national identity and certainly about the fragility of the environment and so on, supports the view that somehow others don't have a right to be here. What we need to think about is: who are 'we'? Why are the immigrants who come here and work here and make a contribution, not 'we' as well?

Again, in the post-Second World War immigration program, those sorts of concerns and doubts were widely expressed. The people who came after the War have now been embraced and adopted as part of us. They and their children are 'we', and they are, it seems, entitled to share in those things that we enjoy as Australians.

If we think more generously and expansively, we can think about Australia as a unique country, with a great deal that is unique to offer. But we can question whether what it has to offer should only be available to those who are already 'us', already here. Self-sustainability is a bit of dream, not just to Australia, but for any country, and it is a recipe for remaining small and relatively uncompetitive and—certainly in the long run—relatively poorer than we are now.

**Question** — Is Britain's immigration policy one we should emulate, in your view?

**Helen Irving** — There are many things about Britain that we wouldn't want to emulate. It's a complicated question. We hear a lot about the immigration policy in Britain, and the down side of that in terms of what are called the 'race riots'. They are only a very small part of British life. Overall, the integration of people from different backgrounds has been very successful in Britain. But then again, Britain is somewhat closed and more suspicious of the external world than ideally one would want, in particular in respect of integration into the European Community. That hasn't progressed as far as it has in some of the other European countries.

There are some good features of Britain's development, but it's not necessarily the one model that you'd want to adopt. When I talked about the old 'imperial' model, it was one that you would not necessarily *literally* want to follow, but was an alternative way of thinking about what sort of community we belonged to. Of course, there is a long history of a combination of hostility to Britain and also wanting to *be* British in Australia. Australians, at least part of the time, thought of themselves as members of a very expanded international community, and they were encouraged and enriched in many respects by that sense of an international consciousness. And that's all I'm suggesting that we should take from the old 'imperial' model. Britain itself has broken from that model as well, and no doubt builders of the old Empire are turning in their graves now.

It is now very difficult for people who used to be members of the old Empire to get any kind of rights or entitlements in Britain—rights and entitlements that they once automatically enjoyed. So it's a two-way process, but what I'm talking about is not

necessarily a model that you can locate in Britain, but one that was an ideal at one stage.

**Question** — In the early days of the White Australia policy, the device to deny citizenship to people of Asian descent, no matter how long they had lived in Australia, was to deny them access to permanent resident status. Their temporary visas were continually renewed. Do you see any similarity now in the granting of temporary protection visas to people who have been determined to be genuine refugees but who have entered Australia by bypassing the normal processing system?

**Helen Irving** — I think there probably is. That's a good point. I don't know if Australia is absolutely unique in respect of playing between temporary and permanent residence visas and entitlements to citizenship. Our refugee policy is one of the harshest in any comparable country in the world, and one hopes it is not the thin edge of the wedge, and a sign of further measures of suspicion towards immigrants. Those who are given the entitlement to come to Australia and become residents of Australia have a relatively generous approach held out to them. It is relatively easy for immigrants who come to Australia through the normal channels to become citizens when they are here.

My concern is really with how narrowly we think about those who are entitled to come here in the first place. Once they get through the net and are regarded as legitimately here, they are treated relatively generously, if they meet the dominantly 'white' racial criterion that has applied all along.

**Question** — I was struck by your reference to Arthur Calwell's rationalisation of the mutual obligations of citizenship: that provided people obeyed the laws and voted, they had all the protection and abundant benefits of being a resident and citizen of Australia. How might one expand the set of republican-type rights and obligations that could represent a new approach to citizenship in Australia? You have already referred to an international perspective to obligations, but perhaps you could address the more domestic rights and ethics that are not in the Constitution, but could somehow be a part of our constitutional background?

**Helen Irving** — The question is often asked whether becoming a republic means also looking at what republicanism means in a more profound sense, in terms of the rights and duties of the citizens of a republic. It's a large question. I do not favour an entrenched bill of rights, but I do favour the examination of the sorts of rights that are available—not just to Australian citizens but to all residents in Australia. Indeed, rights under the law should be—and in many cases are, although as I pointed out some of the political rights have been narrowing—available to all residents and not just those who are legally citizens. I think there is a lot of confusion in our discussion about citizenship these days, whether we are talking about legal citizenship, or citizenship in a more conceptual sense, as contributing members of a community.

Regarding what rights might be entailed if we start to think of ourselves more internationally, but in the context of an Australian republic—that debate has to go on and it will go on. I think it will become one of the prominent issues of the next few years. But my concern is that we should not move in a direction that is narrow or punitive, or ties rights to particular duties or responsibilities. I am concerned about the

shift towards thinking about rights and responsibilities as necessarily tied together or travelling together, because if you have rights, you have rights—they're not conditional. Rights are something that people should enjoy without having to prove that they have a right to have the rights.

Responsibilities are another matter, and this is again a big question. But what our specific responsibilities as Australians should be, and whether we should indeed be required legally to do things other than obey the law—which includes of course voting and serving on juries and so on—that's really a big debate that has to go on. The tendency is moving towards tying rights or entitlements to particular criteria of eligibility and criteria of performance, and I think that's a regrettable direction.

**Question** — You mentioned the greater cultural and artistic community and the vibrancy that that would produce, and I would value that. But there is also the problem that, at the moment, Australians don't seem to be very good at living within the limits of the environment and the resources that they have. It would be excellent if, in the early years of this century, we found some political commitment toward actually improving our performance in resource demands so that we can make room for the sort of things that you talk about. It seems that one has to do both at the same time. And it is a principle that is much bigger than the principles of mateship or equality and so on that were seen as part of the Australian federation era development and expansiveness of spirit. It would be terrific if this was taken up politically, and we need people to articulate it. It is excellent that a historian, who may be thought of as looking backward, can look forward also. We could cause tremendous damage, even at our present population, and if we don't do things well. If we commit ourselves to doing things a hell of a lot better, then we can make life a lot better in those other respects you spoke about.

**Helen Irving** — I agree that an expanded immigration program would really need to be tied to a whole range of other initiatives. It would be crazy to talk about increasing numbers, either naturally or by immigration, in isolation.

Although I'm not an environmentalist, I have not seen convincing evidence that Australia's environmental problems have been caused by over-population, so much as by bad management. There would certainly be a problem in terms of resources if you had, overnight, a massive increase in population in our cities. That is perhaps where the focus should go. Regional redevelopment could be something that is thought about in terms of an expanded immigration program, and certainly you would want to look at the environmental impact. But I think the problem lies really in the cities, and less in country areas. When we think in terms of protecting the environment, we think in terms of the outback or the country environment, rather the city environment. We would also need a shift in thinking along those lines.

**Question** — Given that people with dual citizenship have obviously met the requirements initially to become Australian citizens, I'd like to know your opinion on why our legislators would prevent those people from representing us?

**Helen Irving** — I'm not sure whether your question is about the rights of dual citizens to sit in Parliament or about the rights of Australians to take out dual citizenship, which I think is something that will change. There's an undertaking on the

part of the government that they may look in that direction. But it was a constitutional decision of course, in 1992, (*Sykes v Cleary* (1992) 176 CLR 77), which led to the interpretation of the Constitution to rule out anyone with dual nationality from sitting in the Parliament. And then, more recently, in 1999, it was confirmed that that included people with dual Australian/British nationality. It would be a huge shock to the founders of Australian federation—and, indeed, to many people after federation—that Britain is now a foreign power for the purposes of our Constitution.

Why people with dual nationality can't serve in the Parliament—outside of war time when perhaps a person might have allegiances with the country with which Australia is at war, which would be a relatively special case—is something that mystifies me as well. And I don't believe that that was the intention of that section of the Constitution that says: 'If you are a citizen or a subject of a foreign power or under an allegiance to a foreign power, you are ineligible to stand for Parliament.'

If you look at the debates at the time when that section was introduced into the Constitution in 1898, you will see that what they were concerned about was people who were actively engaged with another country and who were potentially going to be traitors to Australia in time of war. They didn't really mean people who were entitled to hold a passport of another country. Indeed, there weren't passports at the time, so that has really only been a later interpretation—that if you are entitled to hold a foreign passport, even if you got it years before and have never exercised it, you are the citizen of a foreign power.

I think Australia would gain a great deal by allowing people with dual nationality to sit in the Parliament. If there are questions of loyalty arising in time of war, there are all sorts of ways of providing for emergency situations. But you really shouldn't build a policy of representing the people around what might potentially happen if someone in Parliament were to have dual nationality with a country with which you were at war.

## 1901: the Forgotten Election\*

*Marian Simms*

This paper draws on my chapter, 'Election Days: Overview of the 1901 Election', in a recently published work which I edited, titled *1901: the Forgotten election*.<sup>1</sup> The book was one product of a project on the first federal election, which was commissioned and sponsored by the National Council for the Centenary of Federation. I'm extremely grateful to Tony Eggleton, the Chief Executive Officer, Rodney Cavalier, the Vice-Chair, and the History and Education Fund of that group, for their help and support.

The Council had a particular role to play in this project, in that they believed that the 1901 election was important and, like some scholars, had noticed that there was very little available research. Consequently the Council's History and Education Program commissioned a study, and I responded to their advertisement. I used a format that the ANU has been using to analyse contemporary elections, namely to gather together academics and practitioners, and using different techniques ranging from qualitative analysis, interview-based research, observation, and also practitioners' comments, to provide a comprehensive book of analysis of a particular election. The advertisement prompted me to muse that the ANU's post-election study approach would be a really interesting framework to bring to bear upon 1901. Consequently, I drafted a proposal for a very detailed and comprehensive study of the 1901 election, bringing together not only research that I would conduct, but also colleagues' research.

The biggest challenge in mounting this particular project was of course the practitioners, because they were no longer with us. A session of our conference held

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<sup>1</sup> M Simms (ed.), *1901: the Forgotten Election*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Qld, 2001. The research assistance of Sonya Welykyj is gratefully acknowledged.



in December 2000 involved several distinguished academics representing the roles of a number of the key 1901 political leaders, and I pay tribute to Bruce Scates from the University of New South Wales, who was asked to represent Andrew Fisher, a Labour member of Parliament. Bruce constructed from historical documents a set election speech and delivered it in a brogue such as Fisher had.

Many of Australia's leading political scientists—such as Dean Jaensch, the political commentator, and Patrick Weller, who had worked as a government adviser—also had backgrounds in history or in economic history, and were delighted at the prospect of being able to return to their youthful origins, as political historians. We were also excited about the project because there had been so little research done on the topic, so we were dealing with fresh fields that had hardly been tilled. There was just so much work that had simply not been undertaken, so an important early question was to understand why the Australian academic and political communities had largely forgotten about the 1901 election. I established two main reasons.

In the first instance, the 1901 election was atypical. It was conducted with an incumbent government, that was appointed, not elected by the body of people it was governing. The interim government was led by Prime Minister, Edmund Barton (often called a premier). Barton had been appointed in December 1900, and he and his cabinet were sworn in on 1 January 1901 in Centennial Park in Sydney. (The Constitution provides for there to be ministers of state, who are not elected members of Parliament, for a period of grace of up to three months).

The first Australian cabinet consisted of men who had been elected as colonial politicians. In many ways for them—and they included some of the great scribes of the period, notably Deakin—the election was less significant than the process of taking office and laying down the foundations of federal administration in key areas, such as posts and telegraphs, customs, and defence. So for them the election was a secondary event.

I think the second reason why the 1901 election fell from historical consciousness was because it was actually conducted relatively smoothly. There was little controversy over its management and no dissent over the results. Let me draw a contemporary contrast. When we had our conference on the 1901 election in December 2000, it was an auspicious time for international democratic events, because at that time the result of the American presidential election, which had been held the previous November, was still being unravelled. One reason for that was because the American system is still very much state-based. Even though there is a broad national system, the details of the election administration are organised on a state-by-state basis, and in some cases a county-by-county basis. There is no national equivalent to our Australian Electoral Commission. Many of the people involved in making deliberative decisions about election outcomes in America are partisan appointed people. In Australia, the founding fathers decided during the conventions that we should have uniform aspects of the franchise, including the abolition of plural voting. They also expressed a preference for uniform franchise (included as a plank in Edmund Barton's 1901 Policy Speech) and for a system of national election administration, even though the implementation of such a system was left to the new Parliament. Which it did of course in the next year, 1902.

So while this year has been absolutely crucial in marking the centenary of federation, I would say that 1902—and next year, being the centenary of 1902—is equally as important, because in 1902 the fundamentals of a unified national electoral system were laid down by the Commonwealth Parliament.

Consequently, in 1901, the election was organised on a state-by-state basis, in the same way that the last presidential election and subsequent ones will be in America. The states were able to provide frameworks in a hurry, there was a broad national framework that overlaid all of the state frameworks—and it did work, which is the most significant feature. While 1901 was not controversial, it should be seen as both interesting and pivotal. Issues of particular interest are: the economic, cultural and political context, the constitutional background, the system of electoral administration, the advantages flowing from incumbency, the emergence of strong state-based political parties, the particular style of campaigning, the conduct of the election days (for the election was held on Friday 29 and Saturday 30 March) and the assessment of the results.

Because the election was conducted on a state basis the constitutional and administrative contexts provide keyholes into the different state cultures. The conduct of the 1901 election also reflected the emerging national electoral culture. This culture was based on discussions between state returning officers, common debates over electoral systems in the community and in the colonial parliaments, especially over proportional representation, and friendships between colonial politicians who had regularly shared laws, systems and procedures. One common view about nationhood is that it was forged on the battlefields of the First World War. A more domestic reading is that administrative bonds and practices dealing with elections were important as first steps and this will be discussed below.

The study of the 1901 election can be used to discover signs of precocious political modernity and of a progressive liberalism—on some topics. The 1901 election reflected its cultural and economic context. I should say as well that there is a problem if Australians are simply to be encouraged to venerate the past with fond nostalgia. I've always been critical of the previous generation of political scientists and historians saying 'things used to be wonderful, but they've slipped.' What I want to do here is to reflect upon those policies where colonial practice was simply ahead of its times in terms of democratic practice, and we've subsequently slipped. But on other issues, I want to point out ways in which there were a lot of problems and issues and how we've actually improved and lifted our game in all sorts of ways.

The cultural and economic context deserves scrutiny. Then, as now, globalisation—although that term was not used in 1901—was extremely important. The big issue in the election campaign was the question of what was known as the 'fiscal faith'. Not of a religious kind, although religion was salient. But economic factors and issues were of central importance.

The fiscal divide essentially meant that there was a campaign revolved around free trade versus protection, especially in New South Wales and Victoria. The economic context was also important in that during the 1890s there had been a series of crashes, economic downturns, and problems at the turn of the century with a major drought. So there were economic uncertainties, which underpinned the move to federation and the

first election. They were reflected differently in different parts of the federation. But I think—as in many subsequent elections—economic questions dominated.

Consequently, if contemporary commentators, including myself, are sometimes very critical of politicians for letting economics—and tax in particular—dominate issues, we are part of a century-old tradition, both the politicians for saying that the economy is really important and the tax question is absolutely essential, and commentators for saying: ‘Stop obsessing about the economy, other things are important as well.’ This tussle seems to be a fixed part of our political system.

On the cultural context, in many ways it was very different from now. They didn’t use the term ‘millennium bug’, because it wasn’t the millennium, but there was certainly a sense of the end of one century and moving into a new one, and all the anxieties and angsts that that generated. I think there are a couple of interesting features that are worth spelling out about the cultural context, that need to be understood before you can understand the political players and the constitutional backdrop.

Ideas that we would now deride as ‘new wave’ ideas, including spiritualism, were very significant at the end of the Nineteenth Century. Those values were seriously held by a number of key political players—to such an extent that, when we were talking at the workshop about the problem of none of the practitioners still being alive, someone suggested only half-jokingly that, as Deakin was a spiritualist, we should have a seance and get him here in some sense or another.

All joking aside, those kinds of ideas were not only in vogue, but people could speak about them publicly, and that’s the difference. Over the last couple of decades there have been ‘shock/horror’ responses to revelations about Nancy Reagan consulting an astrologer, or the late Princess of Wales consulting a spiritualist. There was an entirely different response in Deakin’s time, and then it was seen as acceptable to have such experimental attitudes.

In terms of the cultural context, one feature that was very interesting about the period was the level of bipartisan and cross-partisan debate and discussion. There were various forums, often in private houses, where people from different walks of life and different political parties would come and discuss key political issues. Key women here included Rose Scott, the noted Sydney suffragist, who held court in Jersey Road Woollahra. She would bring together a diverse group of people such as the Labour Party’s James McGowen, the then Premier of New South Wales, George Reid, and the Attorney-General, Bernhard Wise. If the matter under discussion was of great concern to her, such as the question of the long working hours of shop girls, she would arrange for groups of so-called ‘shop girls’ to come to her home and actually discuss issues of concern with the leading politicians of the day.

I think all those features are remarkable—that we did have arenas where people of different political persuasions could come and discuss matters of policy, and that there was that level of interaction between so-called ‘ordinary’ people and the political elite. Perhaps we can learn something from the processes in place in colonial politics.

After federation and the move to the Commonwealth Parliament in Melbourne, a lot of those easy avenues for debate and discussion simply dried up. Interestingly, many

of the anti-federationists came from New South Wales and when they had said: 'After federation, we will lose a lot of our easy discourse and debate', they were laughed at, usually by the Victorians. Perhaps because the Victorians were smart enough to have organised for the Parliament to be in their city. Victorians said it was simply sour grapes from New South Wales, and 'anti-federationist bile'.

The constitutional background was quite significant, because there was a veritable patchwork quilt of electoral laws. In a sense, the electoral law was really a major indicator of the state of democracy and the nature of the political culture in each particular colony.

A lot of our old stereotypes (and modern stereotypes, too) are reinforced by the different electoral laws. In South Australia it really was a 'paradise of dissent' and a 'democratic laboratory'. The kind of rules and laws in place in South Australia by the early 1890s were in advance of the rest of the democratic world. In many ways Australia has gone backwards—in the sense that South Australia had a set of regulations that put a cap on campaign expenditure and restricted very carefully and clearly what was a political advertisement and what was not. South Australia, of course, didn't prohibit Aborigines from voting, and women were enfranchised in 1894, with the legislation proclaimed in 1895.

Postal voting, secret ballot, payment for members and so on were all-important features of the South Australian design. Political trust—a very fragile creature—can also be measured. For example, South Australia had pioneered a claim form, which is in many ways a prototype of the current electoral enrolment form, and there were no witnessing provisions. It was assumed that a person was who they said they were. That was ensured by the fact that, when people enrolled to vote, they actually enrolled at a particular polling booth. So they were likely to be known in that particular area, thus dealing with problems of impersonation and corruption.

Less trusting was Queensland—and Western Australia, which borrowed many of its electoral procedures from Queensland. Western Australia came late to responsible government and self-government. Friendship networks were quite important. The Premier of Western Australia, Sir John Forrest (who later became Minister for Defence), had a close personal friendship with a fiery radical from South Australia, Charles Cameron Kingston. So Western Australia took on board large slabs of the South Australian legislation, except where it came to two really important issues: the question of race, and the question of lack of political trust.

The Western Australian Aboriginal franchise was borrowed directly from the Queensland legislation—so Aborigines could vote, *if* they had freehold property to the value of one hundred pounds. I have trawled through as many documents as are available in Western Australia and Queensland—which both had that freehold provision for Aborigines and other coloured races including Pacific Islanders 'and Asiatics'—and I have certainly found no reference to any Aborigines who met the freehold provision.

On the issue of lack of political trust, essentially it was very hard to get on the roll in Western Australia. For example, if a voter was an import from the east—in other words, if they had come to Western Australia for the gold rushes and had previously

been naturalised in the eastern states—that was not seen as good enough and the voter had to be re-naturalised. There was an additional waiting period of six months. There were further restrictions. If one enrolled or made a statement about oneself, then that statement had to be witnessed by a person in an official position. So South Australia and Western Australia were really the two extremes in terms of political trust

Tasmania was quaint and interesting in a number of ways. It was quaint in the sense that it had an income test. Basically people either had to have property or meet the minimum wage test. People who had no property but were dependent on wages had to provide an update every six months to prove that they were still in receipt of a minimum wage. So there was an enormous amount of paperwork. Tasmania was embarrassed into abolishing their income test, right on the eve of the first election.

Tasmania was interesting also because they were experimenting with the Hare-Clark system—in local elections in Hobart and Launceston, and colonial elections in Tasmania—in the early 1890s. That was probably because of the influence of key people such as Andrew Inglis Clark.

So we had a political patchwork quilt, which as well as providing insights into contemporary practice, also presented challenges to the smooth running of the election. Colonies voted on different days—most colonies had traditionally voted on Fridays, except South Australia and Queensland, which voted on Saturdays. The polls closed at different times in different colonies. New South Wales had early closing, including at the polls, and Victoria was an hour later. This led to terrible confusion in border towns. One feature of 1901, which was very similar to the presidential election in America of 2000, was incredibly long queues. In both cases voters were lining up and then missing out on voting because of the huge rush towards poll closing time and confusion about the real closing time.

I want to mention electoral administration. The noted political scientist A.F. Davies once said that Australians had a characteristic talent for administration. Then, in case we were in any doubt that he was trying to flatter us, he went on: ‘Of course, being good at administration is akin to being a good forger.’

Elector’s rights were voting documents, namely a form of voting identification. New South Wales used them in the first federal election. They had been pioneered in Victoria much earlier. There are arguments—using quite advanced democratic theory—about elector’s rights, from the Victorian ‘small l’ liberals. A particular favourite of mine was George Higinbotham, the fiery Irish Protestant who would stand up in the Parliament with a bible in one hand and John Stuart Mill in the other and quote extensively from both. What Higinbotham argued in respect of the introduction of elector’s rights in Victoria, was that liberalism was all about the individual standing up and claiming rights on his or her own behalf. Hence, rather than seeing democracy as being about mustering people and forcing them to participate in a process, it was all about encouraging people to stand up and *claim* their right to vote—hence this was an elector’s right.

When the Victorians introduced them in the 1860s, they were introduced with a great fanfare of John Stuart Mill on the one hand—on the other hand of course, the Victorian colony was usually going from crisis to crisis in terms of its economic

affairs, particularly after the first flush of the gold rush. There were many good Methodists involved at the time, which meant that in order to make your John-Stuart-Mill-style claim, you needed to pay a shilling. So they were actually a form of revenue generation in Victoria.

Their format was based on miners' rights, which were developed in Victoria after the Eureka Stockade, to replace the much-hated mining licence. The miner's right looked quite similar, and there was also a similar fee in order to buy a miner's right. In fact, in Victoria, they were a source of eligibility for the franchise and in the first Legislative Assembly elections there were actually eight designated miners' seats, and the franchise was based on a miner's right.

So electors' rights have a rather chequered history, which is partly a reflection of political theory and partly a reflection of economic necessity.

New South Wales was always much more pragmatic than Victoria—and many people would say it remains so. It was also wealthier. When the system was introduced in New South Wales it was seen not as a way of people stepping forward to claim their rights, but as a way to administer the population. So, with an interesting New South Wales touch, the police force were charged with administering election processes. In fact electors' rights were doled out by the police in New South Wales. This process started in the 1890s, and they were hand-delivered by the police with assistance at local government elections. The police had been actively involved in different aspects of electoral administration in New South Wales from the 1850s, and were prohibited from voting or becoming candidates because of the perceived conflict of interest rule.

Therein hangs a tale in respect of electors' rights. We know that, particularly in New South Wales, people did not like police knocking on their doors to deliver electors' rights. They were hated and despised, and in fact after the first election there were a number of committees set up to look at administration of the 1901 election, and it was uniformly reported from New South Wales that these documents were most heartily disliked. I think in a sense this reflects the Australian dislike of authority that has occurred at other stages, including the response to the Australia Card.

No matter what one has to say about the different ways that electors' rights are interpreted, the point is that there were efficient systems of electoral administration in place—even if rather quaint systems—throughout most of the Australian states. And South Australia was a shining example to the other states, with a Returning Officer who took a leading role in setting up the Commonwealth system of electoral administration.

There were of course claims and counter-claims of corruption. It's interesting that one way that the nascent party system developed, for example in South Australia, is that the Labour Party (which had been around since the mid-1890s) and the trade union movement were accused by non-Labour forces of being able to use volunteers to police the electoral rolls. Hence the conservatives decided they needed to form an organisation to counter the Labour Party, and decided to call it the National Defence League, which was the forerunner of the Australian National League and the Protectionist Association. It grew out of the issue of policing the rolls.

I want to say something briefly about incumbency advantages. There are different sorts of incumbency advantages. Sir William Lyne—who hasn't quite gone down in history the way he would have liked—was the person who was originally called upon by the Governor-General, the Earl of Hopetoun, to form a ministry, and was unable to do so. The mantle then passed more successfully to Barton. Sir William Lyne was at the time the Premier of New South Wales, which was why Hopetoun had called upon him. Sir William Lyne in fact liked being the Premier of New South Wales so much that he only resigned from that post in the last week before the election. So he was in fact the Minister for Home Affairs, Premier of New South Wales, the state Member for Hume and the federal candidate for Hume—all at once. More importantly, he owned the only motorcar in the New South Wales campaign.

There were other ways in which incumbency advantages were manifested. As Customs Minister, Charles Cameron Kingston had to travel a lot. While doing so, he was happy to make speeches on behalf of the ministerialist and protectionist interests. The same was true of other ministers. Edmund Barton, the Prime Minister, also used advantages of office in a material sense, and also the mantle of office to gather support around him.

The underdog in 1901 was the former Premier of New South Wales, George Reid, who lacked a motorcar, whose ample girth was much lampooned by the cartoonists (particularly those in the *Bulletin*), but was a man of great energy and determination. He in fact called himself 'the Leader of the Opposition'—it wasn't an official position, and he received no financial assistance for it—and he ran a single-handed campaign covering most of the eastern states of Australia, according to the contemporary press.

But then, even more than now, the press often took sides. The *Argus* was a free trade paper, the *Daily Telegraph* was determinedly free trade, and the *Sydney Morning Herald* was somewhat free trade. The *Age* was a law unto itself, run by the patriarch David Syme. His idea of what constituted a good candidate was often different from the views of the Protectionist Party, whose cause he was allegedly espousing. Then, one needed to treat the press accounts with caution. But across the board there was the view that Reid was a fiery platform speaker, who was able to make a very good fist of a losing cause, and the losing cause was free trade—although free trade, of course, 'got the numbers' in the Senate. It outperformed the Protectionist Party in the Senate.

The interesting thing about the first election is that if, in certain close contests, the result had gone differently, the whole Australian settlement would have been vastly different, and this is explored, below.

The fluidity of early political boundaries is reflected also in the political advertising. I have copies of the election advertisements for two groups in South Australia, the Labour Party and the Protectionist Association of South Australia. The names are not well known—Gregor McGregor and E.L. Batchelor were important contemporary figures—but there are more familiar names as well. The Protectionist Association of South Australia advertisement had Sir John Downer on top. Two Labour Party people, McGregor and Price, appear on the Protectionist Association ticket as well. The same was true in New South Wales; there was a blurring of the interests in the tickets handed out. I also have an Edmund Barton ticket, which includes two Labour men,

James McGowen and 'Chris' Watson. There are Reid tickets, for the free trade interest, that include his great friend William Morris Hughes and various other less well-known Labour candidates, who were running in rural and regional areas where free trade sentiment was strong.

So consequently, to project back to the present, I think it is interesting that when Paul Keating adopted a free trade position many in his party lampooned him. They said he had sold out Labour ideals, when in fact for several decades New South Wales Labour was determinedly free trade because of the different economic base and the nature of the workforce in New South Wales compared with Victoria.

The Australian settlement was based on protection, White Australia, and arbitration—and the first and the last elements lacked the strength of support given to White Australia. Protectionism was by no means the overwhelmingly dominant voice of the time. There were other voices that, partly through accident and partly through the operation of networks and personality factors networks, were drowned out. Incumbency had brought some free traders and others who were neutral to the side of Edmund Barton's 'Ministerialist' team. Had Reid still been Premier of the 'premier' colony in December 1899, it is likely that the Governor-General would have commissioned him as the first Premier. The composition of his cabinet would have been more difficult. Barton may have served, but the Victorians, especially Deakin may have been less willing. According to Reid's account, the Bartonites gained 33 out of 75 House of Representatives seats. Also by his account—corroborated by contemporary newspapers—four or five of those were not Protectionists. Under the Reid as Prime Minister scenario they may have joined with his 26 seats, leaving Labour with the balance of power. In that case, Labour's 'Billy' Hughes' friendship with Reid may well have been a critical factor in swinging Labour support to Reid.

What the Protectionist victory evidenced—and in some ways the whole nature of the Commonwealth compact demonstrated—is that the Victorians were much better at politics than those in New South Wales. They set the agenda for federation and for the post-federation settlement as well, leaving New South Wales very much in the lurch in many ways.

Let me comment further on political parties and campaigning. I think one of the interesting things about political parties in 1901 is that the situation was nowhere near as clear-cut then as it is today. Links of friendship and personality, and also the overwhelming significance of the fiscal issue, meant that what was called at the time 'the line of cleavage' was very different from today.

The 1901 election proved to be a salient factor in the formation of modern parties. Alfred Deakin had prophesied in 1900 that the method of electing the Senate from the states at large would lead to great national parties. Deakin was a great party man and a great defender of parties as necessary engines for the operation of responsible government.

In fact, what happened was that, instead of national parties, we still have very much a state-based party system, with relatively weak national machinery—as compared, say, with the Canadian system, where there's a much stronger national arm in place.



Of pivotal importance was the impact of the Labour Party pledge and the caucus system. That was a very early development in Australia, before comparable countries including—and especially—Great Britain. The Labour Party was very strong in New South Wales, quite strong in Queensland, buried in the Protectionist Movement in Victoria, and very strong on the Western Australian goldfields. What held those individuals together was the ideal of the caucus—in other words, the idea that the group would meet together and agree on a fixed line on every policy issue.

That was a very different reading of democracy than the British tradition of responsible government, which was simply that there are key issues on which the government of the day needs support from its supporters. But only if you're a member of the ministry do you need to support the government on every issue. That particularistic reading of Westminster by the Labour Party meant that the other parties quickly fell into line and developed a system of pre-selection, which was called 'candidate selection' in 1901. The Labour Party took the lead and the Protectionists followed. In fact, Deakin's great headache—because everyone in Victoria was a Protectionist—was to try and make sure that there was only one endorsed Protectionist candidate per electorate, so that the vote wouldn't be split—given that it was first-past-the-post—and Free Trade or Labour elected by default. That actually happened in several Victorian seats.

The campaigning style also prefigured contemporary styles in many ways. While, in 1901, mass rallies and meetings were a feature, voters tended to be observers, not activists. Many candidates used paid agents to co-ordinate their campaigns, although on the Labour side trade unions assisted with campaigning. One of the really big differences between then and now is the role of grass roots campaigning in the pre-electronic media age. Candidates in metropolitan or suburban seats would have meetings every evening, over a three or four week period. If we believe the press, the meetings were very well attended. In both South Australia and Western Australia, where women had the vote, women also attended public meetings. So the level of interest in the political process was quite high. It varied from colony to colony and, toward election day and the outcome issue, with voluntary voting, the turnout was a good indicator of the level of interest.

Newcastle was really important, because over 90 percent of eligible voters turned out to vote. The national average was around 60 percent.

Western Australia had an appalling turnout rate of around 30 percent, and Sir John Forrest admitted to great national embarrassment. He said that the 1901 elections generated less interest than the Perth mayoral election. A couple of reasons were put forward for this. One was that Western Australia had been dragged, kicking and screaming, into the federation and was never a strong supporter. Equally, if you look at the turnout for colonial elections in the 1890s, that was also quite low. Ironically enough, the great interest in the west was at the local level. This was a very different case from New South Wales and Victoria, and South Australia was midway between the high turnout east coast and the low turnout west coast.

There were how to vote cards, there were red and blue rosettes for the Free Trade and Protectionist groups. I have no record at all of rosettes for the Labour Party and no material has stood the test of time.

The results were interesting and pliable. In the Senate the Free Trade group out-pollled the Protectionist group, with Labour holding the balance of power. However there are different readings of the House of Representatives results, signalled in the discussion of the Reid scenario, above. While on the one hand, the fiscal divide was the overwhelming issue, a number of the people who supported Barton—who got on the ministerialist incumbency bandwagon—said they weren't actually Protectionist.

Other labels emerged to describe people who were 'not a Protectionist, but ...'. They were known as Revenue Tariffists—in other words they were in favour of a tariff, but only enough to raise the revenue and not in order to create the great welfare heaven that Deakin and the other Victorians wanted. Or they were known as 'Moderates'—in other words they only wanted a moderate tariff and did not want to use it for the social welfare purposes that Deakin and his group were in favour of.

A front page from the *Brisbane Worker* at the time had two interesting features. One showed that the spelling of Labor was 'Labour', certainly in a number of colonies at the time. And the same cover at the bottom had the rallying cry 'A White Australia'.

White Australia was policy glue for the incipient nation, and played a larger role in this process than the more benign question of democratic institution building discussed above. White Australia was one issue on which there was broad cross partisan agreement. In fact Reid and Barton argued with one another as to who had invented the term! The only area where there was some equivocation about White Australia was in Queensland, and that was largely because the Queenslanders thought that 'no white man could work in the tropics', and in order to preserve the sugar industry it was essential to have 'black labour' from the Pacific Islands. So, again, there is evidence of Queensland having a different agenda than the other states.

One of the interesting features about White Australia and the fact that there was widespread agreement about the need for such a policy was that it was a relatively new policy for the Australian colonies. Until the 1880s the colonies had welcomed people from different backgrounds and they were eligible to become naturalised as British subjects. This happened in Queensland and Western Australia. It was really only in the 1880s moving towards federation and Henry Parkes' 'crimson thread of kinship' that the notion came about that the way to unify these very disparate colonies with their cultural and economic differences was through the unifying concept of a 'white' race. So the important feature here is that, while it was a major issue in the 1901 election, it was a relatively recent issue and not one that was somehow embedded in the nature of Australian colonial practice.



**Question** — With the first-past-the-post system of voting, is there any record of how many of those elected actually got 50 percent of the vote and how many would have been elected on a minority?

**Marian Simms** — I think the interesting thing about the question of electoral outcomes is that in lower house constituencies across the country, in most cases there wasn't a three party contest, it was a two party contest—except in Victoria. So there would have been about four seats in Victoria where the vote would have been different under a preferential system. But that would have gone to the Protectionist interest rather than the Free Trade interest, so there wouldn't have been a big difference in the outcome.

Of the 63 single member House of Representatives seats, 43 were decided on a clear majority of votes, six were uncontested and only 14 were decided on less than 50 percent of the vote. Tasmania (five seats) and South Australia (seven seats) were undivided and went to the elections as electorates-at-large and are therefore not included in these calculations.

Nine of those 14 minority vote seats were in Victoria. This reflected a lack of discipline within the Protectionist Party. In four seats there were multiple Protectionist candidacies and a majority vote for Protectionism. In a further two seats the lack of Protectionist discipline saw parties without majority support elected (Free Trade and Labour). This was partly cancelled out by the election of a minority Protectionist in another seat, due to Free Trade in-fighting. This intra-party conflict also saw a minority Free Trader elected, but with a clear majority of votes for the Free Trade interest. Only one seat showed a lack of majority support for any of the three main parties.

Overall there were only a handful of seats where the likely result would have been different under a preferential system of voting.

**Question** — Would the results of the election have been any different if there had been uniform rules for the franchise, taking into account that two states had female suffrage and four did not, and two states voted as a whole and four did not?

**Marian Simms** — That's a very difficult question to answer, simply because the rolls would have included people voting about who's political values we know nothing. All we know, for example, in South Australia and Western Australia where women did vote, is that their turnout rates—judging by knowledge of who was enrolled and who voted (because there were separate results kept for men and women)—was slightly lower than men's turnout rate.

**Question** — Am I correct in recalling that most of the contests in 1901 were straight contests anyway, and that there were some unopposed returns? And in Tasmania the preferential vote applied anyway?

**Marian Simms** — Regarding the first question, there were six non-contests, out of 75, and only a handful of contests where all three parties were involved, with the exception of where there were multiple candidates from the Protectionist side. In terms of the Tasmanian system, it's true that in both upper and lower houses there was an electorate at large with the Hare-Clark system.

**Question** — As a result of the gold rush, Australia had citizens from many countries. How many of them were able to vote in 1901?

**Marian Simms** — We can only base that on guestimates, because the electoral rolls did not record information about race. We have various estimates of the numbers, and the estimates are much better for New South Wales than Victoria. The estimate of the Chinese population in New South Wales is only quite small. On the issue of changing public policies on immigration in Australia, essentially what had happened—as a result of the impact of immigration restriction laws uniformly legislated for across the colonies—was that the size of the Chinese population, for instance, had actually declined by 1900. So it was a very small population, and we have an estimate only. A similar point is true in respect of Aborigines—the colonies where most Aborigines resided, namely Western Australia and Queensland, were the two colonies where there were *de facto* restrictions on Aboriginal participation through the property clause.

**Question** — For the Senate, presumably they were electing six from each state. Exactly what was the method of election?

**Marian Simms** — I am pleased about these questions, because I actually have another paper that is on the specifics of these electoral laws and details of mechanisms and I thought that would have been too dry for general discussion. The system in most states, with the exception of Tasmania, was simple majority; the candidate who got the most votes was elected. One technical difference was that for a number of the colonial elections they had a system called ‘bunching’. What this meant was that you could give multiple votes. If there were four vacancies (because there was often multi-member constituencies) you could give all your four votes to one candidate. That was thought to be a way of giving some degree of representation to minorities. Bunching was banned in New South Wales and Victoria for the first elections, and there was some degree of argument about that process. So it was a simple first-past-the-post system of majoritarianism, with the exception of Tasmania, which had a Hare-Clark system.

I have a detailed report on election day in New South Wales. New South Wales had 50 candidates for six Senate vacancies and I know they had blue coloured pencils and people were required to put a mark through the name of the candidates that they *didn't* want, leaving six. There was an enormous amount of discussion in the press about the simple mechanics of this system. A lot of people complained, particularly people with big hands, that they made mistakes because it was so hard to see and to differentiate.

That was the old colonial system, going back to the 1850s, of crossing out names, which obviously wasn't really designed to cope with as many candidates as there were in the 1901 election. South Australia actually invented the system of having a box and putting a cross next to the names of the six Senate candidates and the nine from the House of Representatives. That was used on the referendum on the Constitution. There were a lot of debates on tickets, etc. because having a ticket—which is where a newspaper would publish a list of names, the same as how to vote cards today—was seen as being undemocratic in some quarters as well.

## **Inventing the Nation Through the Ballot Box\***

*Marian Sawyer*

### ***My Ancestress and the Secret Ballot, 1848 and 1851<sup>1</sup>***

*Put about, wee ship, on your Great Circle course,  
don't carry Bella's Murray daughter and boys  
to the British Crown's stolen Austral land.  
In ten years the Secret Ballot will force  
its way into law in those colonies...*

*Don't sail, don't sail, Great-grannie (cubed) dear:  
wait just a century and there'll be welfare  
in full, and you won't play the Settler role.  
The polling booth will be a closet of prayer.*

*(Les Murray 1996)*

Australia has been described as the first nation created through the ballot box. Much of Australia's early identity as a nation revolved around its democratic experiments. In this paper I look at how Australian elections became family festivals rather than the

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\* A lecture based on this paper was presented in the Department of the Senate Occasional Lecture Series at Parliament House on 21 September 2001.

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Mark McKenna for alerting me to the existence of this poem. A hundred years earlier William Kidston, later Premier of Queensland, also published a poem about the secret ballot, entitled 'The Ballot's The Thing' (*The Worker*, 4 April 1891).

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drunken riots of Nineteenth Century Britain, focussing on the invention of the secret ballot. While the right to vote is frequently commemorated, the freedom to vote without intimidation or corruption and the abolition of open nomination and open voting is less often celebrated. Yet the elimination of violence and drunkenness prepared the way not only for fair elections but also for participation of what was called the 'fair sex'. It became possible for women not only to vote but also to stand for Parliament without any threat to their modesty.

### **Elections before the ballot**

In democracies we often take voting for granted, particularly in the 'old' democracies such as Australia where democratic institutions have been in continuous existence for most of our history. Indeed, we hear complaints that we have too many elections and we may be in danger of that new democratic complaint—'voter fatigue'. It is difficult to recall the intense struggles over the vote, and the belief in its power to make a difference. Both those struggling for the right to vote and those resisting thought important issues were at stake, such as the protection of property from the enfranchised working man or the defence of 'manly pursuits', such as war and alcohol, from enfranchised women.

It is not only the right to vote, but also the freedom to vote without intimidation or corruption, that is such a significant, though often forgotten, part of our political history. The violence, drunkenness and bribery associated with elections before the introduction of the ballot are vividly portrayed by the English painter William Hogarth in his series entitled 'An Election' that hangs alongside 'The Rake's Progress' at Sir John Soane's Museum in London. The series was inspired by the 1754 election in Oxfordshire and depicts in grotesque detail the abuses involved in all stages of the election, from 'treating' and canvassing through to polling and the declaration of the poll.

Such abuses became the stuff of great literature in the Nineteenth Century, when George Eliot wrote her election book, *Felix Holt, the Radical*. Eliot describes the nature of electioneering in the English Midlands immediately after the Reform Bill. Her theme is the systematising of bribery and intimidation as the pocket boroughs are abolished and elections become more competitive. One would-be voter in her novel, a gentleman farmer, puts on two greatcoats to protect himself from the violence and takes the added precaution of voting by nine o'clock in the morning. Felix Holt is the maverick who takes a stand against the system of 'treating' and the use of voteless men to cause mischief at nominations and elections.<sup>2</sup>

Charles Dickens' account of the Eatanswill election in *Pickwick Papers* is even more famous, reinforcing the picture of violence surrounding the hustings. Some writers were directly affected as when novelist Anthony Trollope stood as a Liberal candidate in Beverley in 1868. The Conservative agent was systematic in his approach to bribery, entering the names of voters and the amount paid to each. When the successful Conservative candidates arrived at the hustings, enraged Liberals tore down the barricades and threw rocks and beams of wood. Despite this, Trollope remained an opponent of the secret ballot on the grounds that it was unmanly.

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<sup>2</sup> Eliot, George. *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1866). Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 110.

In Australia, we need only dip into Samuel Shumack's *Tales and Legends of Canberra Pioneers* for similar vignettes of Nineteenth Century electioneering as observed in the New South Wales seat of Queanbeyan.<sup>3</sup> Squatters intimidated those, such as the local blacksmith, known to be supporters of free selection; they also put on free beer in the hotels, leading to riot. As in the United Kingdom, hotels played a central role in elections; election agents 'treated' voters there and hotel balconies or verandahs were frequently used for electioneering purposes.

The 1869 Braidwood election, the so-called 'pick-handle election', was another notorious example of intimidation. Polling in the goldrush settlement of Araluen was aborted when the supporters of one of the candidates 'armed to the teeth with pick-handles, shovel-handles, and bludgeons of every description' blockaded all approaches to the polling place (*Goulburn Herald & Chronicle*, 22 December 1869).<sup>4</sup> Nor was electoral mayhem unknown in South Australia, despite its more sedate reputation and lack of convict heritage. In the seat of West Adelaide in 1855, 'On election day there was a serious riot, some civilians and a constable were injured and it took mounted police to disperse the crowds.'<sup>5</sup>

### **The introduction of the ballot and an end to the hustings**

In 1856 Victoria and South Australia started a global revolution in the way elections were conducted by introducing the secret ballot. This was a new system whereby voters had their names marked off on the electoral roll at the polling place, were presented with a printed ballot paper, and retired to separate compartments to mark their ballot paper in secrecy before depositing it in a locked box watched over by the presiding officer, poll clerks and scrutineers. It is the system now regarded as synonymous with voting in most countries, but it was only invented in 1856 by Henry Chapman, author of the pioneering ballot provisions in the Victorian Electoral Act of that year.<sup>6</sup> It was first used in the Victorian election on 23 September 1856. That election actually took one month to conduct, but the 23<sup>rd</sup> was the first day of voting.

Chapman was a philosophic radical and friend of John Stuart Mill, and had been influenced by his experience of elections in Canada during 1834, where he saw the power of employers to intimidate their workers under the open voting system. The ideas of the philosophic radicals were, along with Chartism, an important influence on Australia's electoral history. A significant number of Chartists had emigrated to the goldfields of Victoria after the collapse of the Chartist movement in Britain. They were veterans of the new techniques of mass action, which they brought with them to the colonies. The ballot was one of the six points of the People's Charter, although their views on how it was to be operationalised were somewhat vague.

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<sup>3</sup> Shumack, Samuel. *An Autobiography or Tales and Legends of Canberra Pioneers*. Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1967.

<sup>4</sup> The *Yass Courier*'s description underlined the ethnicity of the rioters by describing them as 'a mob of about 150 determined looking men, in shirt sleeves, carrying shillelaghs about two and a half feet long.' *Yass Courier*, 21 December 1869.

<sup>5</sup> Pike, Douglas. *Paradise of Dissent: South Australia 1829–1857*. Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1957, p. 477.

<sup>6</sup> Neale, R.S. 'H.S. Chapman and the "Victorian Ballot"', *Historical Studies*, vol. 12, 1967.

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The other points of the Charter, first published by the London Working Men's Association in 1838, were universal (manhood) suffrage, annual elections, equal electoral districts, removal of property qualifications for parliamentary candidates and the payment of members of parliament. The six points were aimed at achieving the representation of the people, not property. To maximise their political impact, they were linked to local grievances such as the licence fee on the diggings, land reform in rural areas, or the eight-hour day campaign in town. The Chartist veterans provided leadership in a range of campaigns, in which radical journalism went hand-in-hand with petitions, mass meetings and people's parliaments. In Victoria three Chartist demands were achieved in three years: the secret ballot in 1856, manhood suffrage in 1857 and 'short parliaments' in 1858 (see Appendix). 'Short parliaments' were a compromise in terms of the original Chartist demand of annual parliaments but were a radical step in terms of reducing parliamentary terms to three years, while the British retained seven-year terms well into the Twentieth Century.

One Chartist demand that took longer to achieve in Victoria was the payment of members of Parliament. When the Chartist stone mason Charles Jardine Don was elected to Parliament in 1859, the 'first working-class representative in any legislature in the British Empire', he was in constant financial strife. After his election he had to continue working by day as a stonemason while working at night as Member for Collingwood.<sup>7</sup> Parliamentary salaries were finally introduced in Victoria in 1870.

Chartist agitation provided the backdrop to the achievement of the ballot and manhood suffrage in the 1850s, while Chapman provided the practical detail. An Irish observer of the first Victorian election after its introduction claimed there could be no greater contrast: 'An elector, exercising his franchise under the ballot, instead of running a desperate gauntlet through corruption, drunkenness, violence and uproar, walks, as it were, in an even frame of mind, through a smooth, private avenue to discharge the political duties of citizenship.'<sup>8</sup>

Even Anthony Trollope, as we have seen an opponent of the secret ballot on the grounds that it was unmanly, was forced to admit when visiting Australia in 1872 that it was generally popular and led to more orderly elections. There was none of the violence customary with open polling when numbers were near each other as the poll drew to a close. He questioned, however, whether tranquillity at elections was an unmixed blessing, feeling it might be akin to apathy and suggested that 'broken heads are better than political indifference.'<sup>9</sup>

The law and order issue helped secure the eventual passage of the Ballot Act in the United Kingdom in 1872, despite the lingering reservations over the un-Britishness of secret voting and other concerns. The House of Lords initially rejected the bill, on the grounds it would lead to the overthrow of the monarchy. Lord Shaftesbury had been

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<sup>7</sup> Wright, Raymond. *A People's Counsel: a History of the Parliament of Victoria 1856–1990*. Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 35.

<sup>8</sup> Kelly, William. *Life in Victoria, or Victoria in 1853 and Victoria in 1858*. London, Chapman & Hall, 1859, v.2, p. 318.

<sup>9</sup> Trollope, Anthony. *Australia and New Zealand*. London, Chapman & Hall, 1873, v.2, p. 245.



warned: ‘Resist to the very last the introduction of the ballot; for, as a Republican, I tell you that the ballot can never co-exist with monarchical institutions.’<sup>10</sup>

The new electoral acts in the Australian colonies provided that polling using the ballot was all to be conducted on the same day (except where adjourned on account of riot!), eliminating some of the dubious practices occurring when polling was spread out over weeks as in the United Kingdom and Canada. In South Australia and Tasmania, the secret ballot was accompanied by the abolition of the public nomination of candidates, another practice associated with riotous behaviour. Up until this time in Australia (and until later in the United Kingdom and Canada), candidates were nominated and addressed electors from hustings—a temporary platform erected in a public place such as a market on nomination day. Then a show of hands took place for each candidate. After results were declared, a poll could be demanded by either a candidate or a specified number of electors.<sup>11</sup> In *Felix Holt*, the nomination experience included ‘the hustling and the pelting, the roaring and the hissing, the hard hits with small missiles, and the soft hits with small jokes.’<sup>12</sup>

A mid-Nineteenth Century poem described the hustings in the following terms:

*Now greeting, hooting, and abuse,  
To each man’s party proves of use;  
And mud, and stones, and waving hats,  
And broken heads and putrid cats.  
Are offerings made to aid the cause  
Of order, government and laws.*<sup>13</sup>

In Victoria, the reform of nomination procedures came later than the secret ballot. The Irish observer we have already encountered singing the praises of the secret ballot was also an eloquent advocate of nomination reform: ‘... all that is wanting to render such an election a really halcyon scene from beginning to end, where the proudest civil rights may be exercised with all the peace and security of a religious ceremony, is ... the abolition of the barbarous parody of bull-baiting that candidates undergo on the hustings, without use or object, and which, after all, is nothing more or less than pantomime in a frenzy.’<sup>14</sup>

One thing that is notable about Australia’s electoral history is that modern political parties were relatively slow to emerge—there were factions and pressure groups but not parties in the period up until the 1890s. Then the Labour Party, with its new forms of party discipline over MPs, quickly became a catalyst for the transformation of Australian politics, forming its first minority government in Queensland in 1899. By 1910 a two-party class-based political system had taken shape and liberal reformers

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<sup>10</sup> Cook, Hartley Kemball. *The Free and Independent: the Trials, Temptations and Triumphs of the Parliamentary Elector*. London, Allen and Unwin, 1949, p. 121.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, the New South Wales Electoral Acts of 1858 and 1880.

<sup>12</sup> Eliot, op. cit., p. 242.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Grego, Joseph. *A History of Parliamentary Elections and Electioneering: from the Stuarts to Queen Victoria*. London, Chatto & Windus, 1892, p. 394.

<sup>14</sup> Kelly, op. cit., v.2, p. 318.

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were no longer an independent force. Many of Australia's electoral reforms dated from the earlier period, when liberals and radicals were able to garner support on the floor of the house for democratic experiments.

### **Election day: from free beer to family festival**

South Australia not only led the way with manhood suffrage in 1856, but also led the way with universal suffrage in 1894. Elimination of the free beer and rioting associated with elections earlier in the century, even in relatively sober South Australia, was reinforced by the advent of women's political rights on the 'watery tide of temperance'. It was not the case that women became 'coarsened' by the 'roaring, hustling and pushing at the polling booth' as had been anticipated by some (*Country*, 14 April 1894), but rather that women's suffrage, if anything, reinforced the trend towards more orderly elections. This was stressed by suffrage supporters such as Alfred Deakin and Andrew Fisher when supporting the cause in Britain. When in London for the coronation in 1911, Fisher said that women's suffrage had helped make elections more like what they ought to be, making polling day more like an ordinary church gathering than the rowdy entertainment he had seen in more than one country (*Morning Post*, 3 June 1911). Certainly the curbing of the violence and drunkenness associated with nomination and voting at the hustings helped prepare the way for women's political participation, as did the 'unmanly' practice of the secret ballot. Only the most conservative could argue that the polling booth (as contrasted with the hustings) was an inappropriate place for a woman.<sup>15</sup>

Another electoral innovation for which South Australia was responsible was legislation in 1896 to ensure that 'No day other than Saturday shall be fixed as polling day' (*The Electoral Code*, Clause 87). South Australia was followed by Queensland and then by the Commonwealth in 1911. Already by the end of the Nineteenth Century most Australian workers had a half-holiday on Saturday, making this the most convenient day for electors to vote.

The establishment of Saturday elections was the beginning of the great Australian tradition of the festive nature of polling day. The local primary school becomes a political market-place on election day, with the umbrellas and tables of the rival political parties and groups, the line of booth workers handing out 'how-to-vote' cards, and the Parents and Citizens Association running a sausage sizzle or a cake stall. Schools were already singled out as appropriate polling places in early electoral acts and helped make voting a family occasion.

The *Adelaide Observer* of 2 May 1896 provided a comprehensive account of polling on the previous Saturday—the first election in which women voted for the state Parliament. There were familiar features, such as the 'candidate cards and leaflets' that strewed the path to the poll, and the workers outside the booths who thrust flyers

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<sup>15</sup> For a different interpretation of these reforms see Vernon, James, *Politics and the People: a Study in English Political Culture, c. 1815–1867*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 158, who argues in the British context that they removed the disenfranchised from the electoral process: 'No longer could the disenfranchised vote at the nomination or hold a vigil beside the hustings to intimidate the voters ...' For Vernon the Ballot Act meant 'the closing down of the public political sphere by officials who sought to replace the public and collective experience with an increasingly private and individual male one.' I maintain that the large-scale drunkenness, intimidation of voters and pelting of candidates with missiles were not gender-inclusive forms of political participation.

into the hands of electors as they walked into the polling booth. A slightly higher proportion of enrolled women than men voted (66 per cent), including the Dominican nuns who voted at the North Adelaide Temperance Hall. The *Adelaide Observer* was quite carried away by the refining influence of women voters: 'Never have we had a more decorous gathering together of the multitude than that which distinguished the first exercise of the female franchise.' The journalist suggested that pre-poll verses were borne out on the day, although not the aspersions on women's competence to vote:

*Lovely woman, hesitating  
Round the booths in sweet dismay  
Her gentle bosom palpitating  
Lest she cast her vote away*

*And when she glides in graceful, pretty,  
To vote in her most charming frock  
The poll clerks in suburb and city  
Will thrill with an electric shock.*

Provisions for postal voting had become permanent in South Australia in 1894 and some conservative politicians, such as Sir John Downer, the grandfather of our present Foreign Minister, believed that this was necessary to protect women's sensitivities. He suggested that every member of Parliament would sooner his lady relatives voted by post than 'amid the bustle of the open polling booth.'<sup>16</sup> In the event, women did not make as much use as expected of the right to cast a postal vote, preferring to attend the polling booth in person.

Ironically, the solidary character of the Saturday polling day and its status as a civic ritual has been threatened in the last decade by the deregulation of the labour market and the increasing prevalence of work on Saturdays. Pre-poll voting was largely introduced to cater for this phenomenon and represented about six percent of all votes cast in the 1998 federal election.

### **Professionalising electoral administration**

Meanwhile, the Australian colonies were not only introducing payment for MPs, but also developing a professionalised approach to electoral administration characterised by a centralised electoral administration and paid electoral officials. The absence of entrenched local authority structures encouraged this development and provided a significant contrast with the United Kingdom. Electoral administration was at first conducted by public servants in a standard ministerial department, but was later given increased independence by the creation of statutory bodies.

At the federal level, the establishment of the Australian Electoral Commission as an independent statutory body in 1984 was an important milestone, as was the establishment at the same time of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters. This parliamentary committee has proved an extremely important forum for obtaining bipartisan support for technical improvements in electoral administration. This had

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<sup>16</sup> *South Australian Parliamentary Debates*, 17 December 1894.

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previously been difficult to achieve even on such apparently straightforward matters as the closing time for polling booths.

The early development of specialist electoral administrators enabled other innovations such as continuous roll maintenance—where there was proactive canvassing to ensure eligible voters were on the electoral rolls and at the right address. This contrasted strongly with systems in use in other countries where voters had to wait for rolls to open. Other developments included arrangements intended to maximise access to voting such as the introduction of provisions for absent and postal voting in the Nineteenth Century and of mobile polling booths in the Twentieth.

South Australia had introduced postal voting as early as 1890, initially to ensure the voting rights of those working away from their electorate, such as seamen and railwaymen. The introduction of ‘compulsory voting’ (actually compulsory attendance) at both Commonwealth and state levels in the Twentieth Century, with financial penalties for non-compliance, meant that much more elaborate provision needed to be made for voters unable to attend a polling place.

The spirit of professional electoral administration was to maximise accessibility as well as integrity of the system. This spirit was often notably absent when it came to the administration of Aboriginal voting rights, as in the process whereby Aboriginal people ‘lost the vote’ at the Commonwealth level after 1901. As recently as 1977, electoral administrators, together with intimidatory party scrutineers, were found to have effectively impeded Aboriginal voting rights in the Kimberley. Another problem before 1980 was reliance on postal voting in remote areas, where many Indigenous voters had low literacy skills. Third parties providing assistance to such voters might abuse their position as intermediaries.

Mobile polling was first used extensively at the state and territory level in 1980 and at the federal level in 1984 to try to address this problem. Mobile polling booths with experienced officials would travel through sparsely settled remote areas collecting votes for a week or two leading up to polling day.

From the 1980s, Commonwealth electoral education targeted to Indigenous voters gradually became more effective in achieving a high level of formal votes, before being abruptly terminated by the newly elected Howard Government in 1996.

Other recent encroachments on the principle of access have included proposals for making enrolment more difficult and expensive for those who do not already possess the necessary documentary evidence, or closing the rolls immediately upon the issuing of writs for an election, often just when new voters or those who have changed address think about getting onto the roll.

### **The right to stand but not to sit**

John Stuart Mill and his circle were of considerable importance in Australian electoral history, with supporters of women’s suffrage or proportional representation clothing themselves in his intellectual authority. Mill famously wrote to Henry Chapman, on 8 July 1858, after the latter had become Attorney-General in Victoria, to congratulate him on the recent extension of the suffrage: ‘The only thing which seems wanting to make the suffrage really universal is to get rid of the Toryism of sex, by admitting

women to vote.' Mill urged his friend to quote him on the issue of women's suffrage and also on the subject of the representation of minorities. It is interesting that Mill was able to write such lengthy letters during his working hours at East India House.

Mill continued urging women's suffrage on the Australasian colonies, while failing in his own attempt to achieve women's suffrage during his brief term as a British MP. It was one of Mill's followers who introduced the first women's suffrage bills into the South Australian Parliament and he also inspired suffrage leaders in the other colonies. The rise of the women's movement had political effects even before the achievement of suffrage, with male votes becoming conditional on behaviour towards wives under the New South Wales Elections Act of 1893. One disqualification for electors was having an outstanding maintenance order against them; another was a conviction for aggravated assault on their wife in the previous year. These disqualifications remained in the Act until 1928.

Soon after achieving the vote, suffragists were travelling to London to help the cause in the mother country. Attractive 'women voters' from Australia took the platform in the Albert Hall to demonstrate that political rights did not 'unsex' women. Others took more militant action, such as Adelaide-born Muriel Matters, who became known as the first woman to give a speech in the House of Commons—while chained to the grille of the Ladies' Gallery in 1908. She and her colleague from the Women's Freedom League were removed still attached to the grille.<sup>17</sup> Subsequently, she floated over the House of Commons at the time of the State opening of Parliament in 1909, in an airship inscribed 'Votes for Women'.

The airship photographed well, and the *Daily Mail* even provided fashion notes: 'Miss Matters wore a large green coat, motor cap and veil and woollen gloves. She also wore a rosette of the [Women's Freedom] League's colours—white, yellow and green—and took into the basket-car a large supply of handbills, flags and a megaphone.'<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately at this stage she was up about 3 500 feet so she was unable to use her megaphone but she did scatter a large quantity of handbills.

It was not only expatriates who enlisted in the cause; Federal Parliament also played its part. In 1909, a motion put forward by Prime Minister Alfred Deakin concerning the positive effects of women's suffrage in Australasia was unanimously passed in both houses. The following year, Senator Arthur Rae was responsible for another resolution being passed by both houses and cabled to the intransigent British Prime Minister, Asquith. The text of the resolution was drafted by Vida Goldstein and spoke of consequences in terms of 'more orderly conduct of elections' as well as of greater prominence being given to legislation particularly affecting women and children.<sup>19</sup>

The Woman's Press in London rushed out the text of the Senate debate under the title *Australia's Advice* (1910). Such advice was presented pictorially during the great coronation year suffrage procession when women voters, including the wife of Australian Prime Minister Andrew Fisher, marched behind the banner that depicted

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<sup>17</sup> Holmes, Marion. 'Concerning Muriel Matters', *The Vote*, 19 February 1910.

<sup>18</sup> *Daily Mail* (London), 17 February 1909.

<sup>19</sup> *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 17 November 1910, p. 6300.

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the young Commonwealth of Australia pleading with Britannia to ‘Trust the women, mother, as I have done.’

Pride in democratic credentials was particularly true of those representing the first majority Labor government, newly elected that year. They had signalled the new order in Federal Parliament by doing away with the ceremonial wigs and gowns of the presiding officers. The President of the Senate was a former wharf labourer who had become Home Secretary in the world’s first Labor government in Queensland in 1899. While the senators agreed Australia was a young country, they spoke of its seniority in democratic experience and expertise.

### **Other democratic experiments**

Of course from the Nineteenth Century the Australian colonies were initiating many other democratic experiments such as the development of new voting systems. All the major forms of preferential voting—the alternative vote, the contingent vote and Hare-Clark, also known as the Single Transferable Vote (STV) were substantially developed here. Catherine Helen Spence played a major role in popularising STV in the late Nineteenth Century and, interestingly, was also the author of Australia’s first civics textbook, commissioned by the South Australian Minister for Education in 1880.

The extent of electoral experimentation in some states was truly remarkable and quite unlike the stolid reliance on first-past-the-post voting in the United Kingdom and other dominions. New South Wales, for example, tried the second ballot from 1910, in the lower house, the single transferable vote 1918–1926, contingent voting 1926–1928, compulsory preferential 1929–1980 and optional preferential from 1981. In the upper house the single transferable vote was used from 1978.

Another crucial aspect in ensuring that elections mirror the nation’s mind is the institution of compulsory registration and voting. Compulsory registration was introduced at the federal level in 1911 by the Fisher Labor government, which argued it was as much a part of democracy as compulsory education or compulsory arbitration. Australia was the first English-speaking country to introduce compulsory voting, starting with Queensland in 1914 and followed at the federal level ten years later. Belgium had led the way with the introduction of compulsory voting in 1893 (Article 48 of its new Constitution). In Australia compulsory voting was famously introduced at the federal level under a conservative government, without serious discussion either on the floor of the House or in committee, where only 15 minutes were spent on it. Both major parties had an interest in increasing turnout.

If we ask the question ‘Whose vote does compulsion protect?’ we find that compulsory voting plays a crucial role in reducing the social bias in turnout. In voluntary systems it is the poor and the marginalised who are the non-voters, something that decreases even further their capacity to influence government or achieve better welfare outcomes. Compulsory voting underpins all the other innovations in electoral administration found in Australia, designed to ensure the integrity of the rolls and accessibility of voting, whether voters are in prison or in the

outback or overseas.<sup>20</sup> It contributes to social capital by ensuring solidary participation in Australian elections, with doorknocking by electoral officials and birthday cards to 17-year-olds to ensure the rolls are as comprehensive as possible.

When so many other democratic experiments were taking place, it is perhaps not surprising that Australia's constitution-making process of the 1890s was also uniquely democratic in form. Whatever the flaws, no other country had created itself in this way. The process of federation was built around popular election of delegates to the Constitutional Convention of 1897/8 and popular ratification of the Constitution Bill. The delegates were also highly conscious of the advanced democratic nature of the provisions they were entrenching for the new Federal Parliament, such as the direct popular election of both houses and the ban on plural voting. The provision made for payment of members of the new Federal Parliament was regarded as another democratic advance pioneered in the colonial parliaments but highlighted by its inclusion in the Constitution of the new Commonwealth.

### **Conclusion**

Australia has long enjoyed stable democratic institutions, and at federation took pride in being a young country but an old democracy. Australia is now quite a different type of country than it was in 1901 and 'Britishness' no longer provides the flip-side of its democratic identity. We look back with condescension at the fear of the 'piebald ballot box' expressed by one senator when opposing the franchise for Aborigines or coloured aliens. For more than a decade we have been trying to articulate a national identity that is based on our democratic institutions and values but which is cut free from any one ethnicity.

In the light of popular reactions to the *Tampa* crisis, when a Norwegian ship was prevented from bringing the Middle Eastern asylum seekers it had rescued at sea to Australia, we are clearly still a long way from succeeding in this enterprise. There has been fear and resentment in some parts of Australia that immigrants no longer have to be of British origin or at least to assimilate to Britishness to become full citizens. This resentment has fuelled support for populist politicians who claim to be a voice for the people rather than for the political elite.

A civic identity capable of sustaining national cohesion needs to include some emotional identification with the history of the nation. Knowledge of Australian democratic struggles and accomplishments should be sufficient to promote such emotional identity without the need for racial pride. There is evidence from the 1996 International Social Survey Program that pride in Australia's democracy is very high by international standards, ironically exceeded only by Norway, and well ahead of Britain, Canada and New Zealand. While pride in democracy still plays such a large role in Australian national identity, there can be some optimism for the future, despite the insecurities of the present.

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<sup>20</sup> Similarly elaborate arrangements are made to ensure that Australians stationed at Antarctic bases are able to vote, although this is one category of elector for whom voting is not compulsory. The reason for this exception is that because of the uncertainty of communications, voting is not secret—the Antarctic Returning Officers have to telephone the votes back to Australia.

**Appendix**  
**Achievement of innovation in representational arrangements—Lower Houses<sup>1</sup>**

<b>Parliament</b>	<b><i>Manhood Suffrage</i></b>	<b><i>Adult Suffrage</i><sup>2</sup></b>	<b><i>Abolition of Plural Voting</i></b>	<b><i>Secret Ballot</i></b>	<b><i>End of Hustings</i><sup>3</sup></b>	<b><i>Payment of Members</i></b>	<b><i>Compulsory Registration of Voters</i></b>	<b><i>First Election with Compulsory Voting</i></b>
United Kingdom	1918	1928	1948	1872	1872	1911	–	–
Canada	1920	1920	1920	1874	1874	1867	–	–
New South Wales	1858	1902	1894	1858	1893	1889	1921	1930
Victoria	1857	1909	1899	1856	1865	1870	1923	1927
Queensland	1859	1905	1905	1859	1872	1886	1914	1915
South Australia	1856	1894	Never Existed	1856	1856	1887	–	1944
Western Australia	1907	1907 <sup>4</sup>	1907	1877 <sup>5</sup>	1895	1900	1919	1939
Tasmania	1901	1903	1901	1858	1858	1890	1930	1931
Commonwealth	1901	1902 <sup>6</sup>	Never Existed	1901	Never Existed	1901	1911	1925

1. Except for the final column, the legislative date is given, rather than date of coming into effect.
2. i.e. votes for women. But note some states did not enfranchise Aborigines or indigent inmates of state charitable institutions until later.
3. i.e. end of open nomination.
4. WA gave some women the vote in 1899 on the same restricted franchise then applying to men.
5. This was for the elective element of the old Legislative Council of the years before self-government.
6. In 1901, women generally in SA, and some women in WA, had a vote for the first Commonwealth Parliament, which in turn legislated for complete adult suffrage for subsequent federal elections.

Source: Adapted from L.F. Crisp, *Australian National Government*, Melbourne, Longman Cheshire, 1983.



# Housing a Legislature: When Architecture and Politics Meet

*Russell L. Cope*

## **Introduction**

By their very nature parliamentary buildings are meant to attract notice; the grander the structure, the stronger the public and national interest and reaction to them. Parliamentary buildings represent tradition, stability and authority; they embody an image, or the commanding presence, of the state. They often evoke ideals of national identity, pride and what Ivor Indyk calls ‘the discourse of power’.<sup>1</sup> In notable cases they may also come to incorporate aspects of national memory. Consequently, the destruction of a parliamentary building has an impact going beyond the destruction of most other public buildings. The burning of the Reichstag building in 1933 is an historical instance, with ominous consequences for the German State.<sup>2</sup>

Splendour and command, even majesty, are clearly projected in the grandest of parliamentary buildings, especially those of the Nineteenth Century in Europe and South America. Just as the Byzantine emperors aimed to awe and even overwhelm the barbarian embassies visiting their courts by the effects of architectural splendour and

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<sup>1</sup> Indyk, I. ‘The Semiotics of the New Parliament House’, in *Parliament House, Canberra: a Building for the Nation*, ed. by Haig Beck, pp. 42–47. Sydney, Collins, 1988.

<sup>2</sup> Contrary to general belief, the Reichstag building was not destroyed in the 1933 fire. The chamber was destroyed, but other parts of the building were left unaffected and the very large library continued to operate as usual. A lot of manipulated publicity by the Nazis surrounded the event. Full details can be found in Gerhard Hahn’s work cited at footnote 27.

magnificent interiors, parliaments, like palaces, can have a psychological objective or at least a psychological impact in their design and setting. Their symbolic effect is almost always cited as one powerful attribute common to them. This symbolic force, most visibly seen in the iconography of the building's decoration, acts as a magnet and focus, but what exactly does that mean? In contemporary times modernity has made us more alert to questions of how our perceptions are created and moulded, and how our understanding is 'mediated' or constructed by a range of factors that may not be consciously or immediately present in our mind. Public buildings are increasingly interpreted as 'statements' as well as representations. As Goodsell noted in an important article on parliamentary architecture, we must take conscious and unconscious factors into account when judging the architecture of legislative buildings. He makes the further claim that '... the impact of parliamentary architecture on political culture is essentially mediated by national elites.'<sup>3</sup>

We are powerfully aware of the ideological manipulation of architecture in Twentieth Century politics, but architecture has always been an expression of a point of view. Questions of interpretation arise because of the difficulty of agreeing on the nature of the architectural statement. Is there, for example, really a 'Fascist' or a 'Bolshevik' or even a 'democratic' style of architecture?<sup>4</sup> Opinions vary. Layers of meaning may need to be uncovered in order to pinpoint the fundamental determinants of statements on architectural styles. A work such as *Temples of Democracy* by Hitchcock and Seale, which gives an historical survey of the creation and architecture of the capitols of the various states of the United States, is an excellent introduction to the range of social, political and ideological factors underlying their evolution.<sup>5</sup> The capitols were clearly seen by their creators as powerful statements of American democratic beliefs, vigorously developing after the War of Independence. They expressed in stone political and national ideals, often stemming from the teachings of the Enlightenment in France. The Capitol in Washington celebrated its bicentenary in 1993, and it too is called a Temple: the Temple of Liberty.<sup>6</sup> The quasi-religious nature of this designation cannot be overlooked. This historical background and the iconography, which these buildings incorporate, are vital for understanding the rationale of their style and function. But particularities of time, place and personality should never be overlooked when considering the nature of a specific parliamentary building; and, as Taylor and Wefing remind us, generalisations too quickly drawn are dangerous.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Goodsell, C.T. 'The Architecture of Parliaments: Legislative Houses and Political Culture', in *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 18, no. 3, 1988, pp. 287–302.

<sup>4</sup> Taylor, Robert R. *The Word in Stone: the Role of Architecture in the National Socialist Ideology*. Berkeley, Calif., University of California Press, 1974.

<sup>5</sup> Hitchcock, H.-R. and Seale, W. *Temples of Democracy: the State Capitols of the USA*. New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976.

<sup>6</sup> Scott, Pamela. *Temple of Liberty: Building the Capitol for a New Nation*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1995.

<sup>7</sup> Wefing, Heinrich. *Parlamentsarchitektur. Zur Selbstdarstellung der Demokratie in ihren Bauwerken: eine Untersuchung am Beispiel des Bonner Bundeshauses*. (Beiträge zum Parlamentsrecht, Band 31) Berlin, Duncker and Humblot, 1995. (Title translated: *Parliamentary Architecture. On the Way Democracy Presents Itself in Its Buildings. An Investigation Based on the Bonn Bundeshaus*), p. 84.

The Twentieth Century is particularly rich in examples of architecture being harnessed in the service of political, especially totalitarian, ideology. One recalls the Nuremberg rallies, for instance, and Adolf Hitler's vision of the new Berlin, to be renamed Germania, with its massive, neo-classical architecture and grandiose dimensions.<sup>8</sup> Albert Speer, the architect so dear to Hitler's heart, has much to say about this theme in his memoirs. Robert R. Taylor's *The Word in Stone*, written with some assistance from Albert Speer, provides important documentation on the complex role of architecture under the National Socialist regime.<sup>9</sup> Soviet architecture, which the Nazis labelled as 'architectural Bolshevism', aimed to create a socialist counterpart to the 'fascist architecture' of Italy and Germany. It too produced its share of ponderous structures projecting an image of the state. This Soviet style was applied throughout the Eastern block. Stalin also took a personal interest in architectural proposals and the characteristics of Soviet architecture were in accordance with his taste and Central Committee directives. In each of these political systems the result in architectural terms was a high degree of 'totalitarian uniformity' where individual human needs were subservient to the representational ideals and the accepted symbols of the state and the dominant regime. Static monumentality, the symbol of political power, triumphed over the sense of movement and any personal freedom of response to light and space. The word 'symbol' is apt for use to cover a multitude of sins.

It is noteworthy that the second half of the Twentieth Century and now the first decade of the Twenty-first Century is a period of unprecedented activity for architects and builders of parliamentary buildings. Many parliamentary premises are being renovated, re-modelled and extended; in some cases brand new buildings have been erected. The time appears more than ripe for a full-scale review of all these developments, but that is a very big task for any one researcher. In Germany alone there are a number of proposals afoot to renovate existing substantial parliamentary buildings and, of course, the position in the former East Germany is particularly instructive. In Canada the native Nunavut people have recently received their own Parliament, and new buildings for the Flemish Parliament and for the parliaments in Stockholm and The Hague have created interest, to cite but a few recent instances. In the Pacific and Asian areas other instances are not far to seek (Papua New Guinea, Malaysia, Fiji, India, Northern Territory of Australia).

## **PART 1: PARLIAMENTARY BUILDINGS FOR THE GERMAN FEDERAL REPUBLIC**

The present paper aims to survey only part of this development, by examining some questions in relation to three recent national parliamentary buildings and one at the state level. Attention is first devoted to German developments, both in regard to the Bundestag in Bonn and the renovation of the Reichstag building in Berlin, a project particularly rich in sensitive historical and political associations. Both these impressive projects raise large, sometimes abstract questions of national symbols, European traditions and, latterly, the democratic aspirations of the newly reunited Germany. The latter part of the paper moves from the elevated German and European

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<sup>8</sup> See details of Germania and Speer's role in designing it in *Faust's Metropolis: a History of Berlin*, by Alexandra Richie, New York, Carroll & Graf, 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Speer, Albert. *Erinnerungen* [numerous editions] Frankfurt am Main, Ullstein Verlag, 1974. (Ullstein Buch Nr. 3026). Taylor, Robert R., op. cit.

plane to look at related issues in Australia, which arose with the planning of the new Parliament House in Canberra. The question of the relationship between architects, builders and parliaments as clients is dealt with in the case of the Parliament of New South Wales. This Parliament is taken as something of a 'case study', since this author was involved in aspects of the planning of the new building opened in 1980, and can draw on personal experience and observation. Finally, some consideration will be given to parliamentary buildings as part of the process of political communication in modern societies.

(i) *The Bundeshaus in Bonn*

### **Early Architectural Changes, 1949–1971**

Reunification of Germany from 1990 onwards has had such a magnetic effect that it has caused significant events of even a few years earlier to fade from memory or to be uninteresting. This applies, it seems, to the very detailed and lengthy project to rebuild and expand the parliamentary and government complex in Bonn. The inadequacies of the Bonn site, where in 1949 the Bundestag had taken over a former pedagogical college as its seat, had long been recognised and had been the subject of debate and disagreement over a period of years. Architectural changes were undertaken from 1949 by a leading architect of the day, Hans Schwippert, whose erection of a new chamber for the Bundestag had been completed promptly. Glass figured prominently in this project and indeed it was said that glass structures were a trademark of German post-war architectural style ('Bundesrepublican style'), picking up trends that had existed in the 1920s. But nevertheless, piecemeal development of both the parliamentary and the executive buildings in Bonn led to a fragmentary and increasingly inefficient and even messy official infrastructure for a country undergoing major economic and political expansion.<sup>10</sup> An important change came to the parliamentary site when a large multi-storey building to accommodate members and some services was erected in 1969. This building, of some 30 storeys, was colloquially known as the 'tall Eugen' in contrast to the short stature of Eugen Gerstenmaier, the then President (Speaker) of the Bundestag. This building, which soars over the surrounding townscape, is a notable landmark in the Bonn region, especially when seen from the Rhine. Eugen Gerstenmaier, who had succeeded in getting this new building for members' accommodation, favoured a re-designed chamber along the lines of the chamber of the British House of Commons. Others wanted the existing semi-circular seating arrangements retained.

In December 1969 the federal cabinet ordered a stop to the ad hoc building programs of the government in Bonn and set up a planning commission to look at the wider town planning implications of government office and parliamentary accommodation. At the same time, the Bundestag proceeded to draw up plans for additional accommodation and agreed to set up an architectural competition. For the town planning concerns of the federal government a separate commission (Gremium) of experts was set up to make recommendations. As a result, the city of Bonn, the state government of North Rhine-Westphalia and the federal government agreed to a framework for the development of the city of Bonn as well as for its government and parliamentary needs. By 1972 an architectural competition was held for major

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<sup>10</sup> Gerstenmaier, Eugen. *Streit und Friede hat seine Zeit: ein Lebensbericht*. Frankfurt am Main, Propyläen Verlag, 1981, pp. 395–6.

restructuring (including new buildings for the Bundestag (Lower House) and the Bundesrat (Upper or States House), office blocks for government departments, child care facilities, an international conference centre, and an hotel with apartments).<sup>11</sup> The results of the competition were equivocal and no-one was outright winner. Various complications ensued because of this confused outcome, with different architectural firms being asked to do certain projects, in co-operation with other firms. Disagreements and further confusion followed.

### **Redesigning the Bonn Parliamentary Building, 1971–1992**

It would lead us too far from our chief purpose to trace all these permutations in detail, but as far as the parliamentary needs were concerned, by May 1977 clarity had been reached on how to proceed. These needs were very comprehensive and involved virtually an entirely new parliamentary precinct. Under the Bonn town planning arrangements, consultation with concerned citizens became necessary and criticism on the extent of the proposals was made. Revised plans were announced in December 1978, but opposition to the dimensions of the proposal continued, leading the Bundestag to opt for further reductions. Further architectural competitions, this time for stage 1 of the re-building program, were held.

Yet another complication arose in 1983 when it was found that the fabric of the main chamber (Plenarsaal) was seriously impaired. This meant that it could not be re-built, but should be demolished. Since this chamber was regarded as being of heritage significance, new agitation developed. The whole exercise became both complex and highly public. Of course, changing constellations within the Bundestag could not fail to add political piquancy to the mixture. The Bundestag set up its own building committee of members to watch over progress and plans, but, as the Bundestag member Conradi commented in 1999: 'We built the plenary chamber in Bonn almost without the participation of members, since almost no one had any interest in it. This is the reason that it took 21 years from the commencement of planning in 1971 until completion in 1992.'<sup>12</sup>

Public attention was most caught by the fate of the plenary chamber (Plenarsaal). Intervention by the state government of North Rhine-Westphalia in February 1986 led to a conservation order (Denkmalschutz) being placed on this chamber through the city of Bonn. Further agitation by members within the Bundestag threw doubt on the feasibility of decisions already made. Various experts were called on for advice and in the upshot it emerged that preservation of the existing building in its framework would greatly increase expenditure because of its unsuitable nature. Despite continued opposition to the total demolition of the existing chamber, the decision to build an entirely new chamber was finally made.

The limited power of the state government to intervene in a matter affecting the federal Parliament was given as a decisive factor in allowing the demolition to proceed. Alternative accommodation for meetings of the full Bundestag was made at this time and demolition was announced to begin on October 1, 1987. As may be expected, both costs and timetabling of completion of the projects under way far exceeded original estimates. Dissension still continued among members about the

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<sup>11</sup> Schindler, Peter. *Datenhandbuch zur Geschichte des Deutschen Bundestages*, 1999, p. 3297.

<sup>12</sup> Wefing, H. (comp.). *Dem Deutschen Volke*, Bonn, Bouvier, 1999, p. 165.

shape of the chamber and the way seating should be arranged. This harks back to what Gerstenmaier, for example, had felt in 1969. The completion date of the chamber had receded still more until in October 1989 a provisional completion date of June 1992 was announced.

The year 1989 became a portentous date in German history, since it was the time when the fall of the East German government and then of the whole state system of the German Democratic Republic began to take concrete shape. This led to calls for the parliamentary building project in Bonn to be discontinued. In February 1990 the Bundestag commissioned the architect of the new chamber (Günter Behnisch) to consider how the extra members from East Germany might be accommodated if reunification became a reality. Already, however, the future of Bonn as capital of a reunified Germany began to be raised. In March 1990, the Upper House, the Bundesrat, decided to stop its project for a new building in Bonn.

Following on the political developments with the fall of the East German State, the Bundestag decided (in June 1992) by a narrow majority to transfer the seat of government administration and of parliamentary functions to Berlin. Nevertheless, the saga with building the new plenary chamber still continued. The original chamber was demolished, and an alternative provisional chamber was provided in a nearby building while the entirely new chamber based on the semi-circular model was built. But even after the decision on the shape of the chamber had been made, members still introduced motions to alter the intention. The effect of any late-minute changes on costs was emphasised and finally agitation for change subsided. Delays nevertheless occurred. In 1989 the cost of the new chamber was reported to the Bundestag to be DM 265 million, with date of completion to be 1992. Calls for a suspension of the building proposals multiplied, especially as political developments in East Germany began to make an impact. It should be noted that the rebuilding of the chamber also included other ancillary facilities adjacent to it, so the project is wider than just the chamber, although public and political attention concentrated on this one element.

### **Completion of Rebuilding in 1992: Some Mishaps**

The projected date of completion was virtually realised when the new semi-circular chamber was inaugurated with much public fanfare at the end of October 1992. It incorporated many new features, but was still influenced by the example Hans Schwippert set in 1949. This applies especially to the use of glass. The emphasis on the idea of democratic openness and the transparency of Parliament's operations were impressively exemplified by this architectural device. Care had also been taken with regard to security of members. Costs rose from an estimated DM 87.6 million (1985) to some DM 256 million (1992). This latter figure is slightly less than the estimate made in 1989. Public reaction to the finished project was positive and the media praised the strong emphasis on the concept of transparency in its design. Wefing's important work on the architectural history of this project describes the 1992 chamber as follows:

The newly constructed plenary area of the German Bundestag, handed over in autumn 1992, crowns the line of tradition in the Bundesrepublik's self-presentation through the use of architecture. It is characterised by a clearly set out internationalism in style which is ascetic and functional, just as it represents a rejection of any kind of striving for effects of

representation by appeals to emotion (Pathetisch-Repräsentatives) which could recall the neo-classic style associated with Speer and which was regarded as historically tainted.<sup>13</sup>

The irony of the situation was that this new chamber was completed and used after the decision to move the seat of government and Parliament to Berlin had already been taken. History had overtaken its painful genesis.

Further troubles still dogged the new chamber: although opened in October 1992, the whole acoustical system of microphones and speakers failed in November, and the Parliament moved back to the temporary chamber until this embarrassing failure of German technology could be rectified. Use of the new chamber began again in September 1993. One other incident which might be said to belong partly to the realm of farce befell the construction of the new chamber. This relates to the very large eagle, the Bundestag and state emblem, which adorns the wall behind the president's rostrum.<sup>14</sup>

The Bundestag had voted in June 1987 to have the existing eagle preserved when the chamber was to be demolished. This plaster eagle, colloquially called a plump hen (fette Henne), was taken down, but sawn in 25 pieces. So badly damaged was it that it could not be used again. The architect for the new chamber wanted to install a different (and slimmer) eagle in aluminium. The heirs of Ludwig Gies, the creator of the original eagle, believed their copyright to be infringed. The union representing the interests of artists became involved. This dispute was finally settled with a compromise satisfactory to all parties. No mention is made of the fact that a parliament's wishes were simply ignored.<sup>15</sup> The German press and television seem to have enjoyed this incident which gave rise to various cartoons and humorous reports.<sup>16</sup>

The long saga of the renovation and expansion of the parliamentary and government complex in Bonn was finally visited by a natural disaster in December 1993, when the Rhine reached levels unprecedented since 1926, flooding part of the supposedly protected building site. Finally, when Sir Norman Foster handed over the key of the now renovated Reichstag building in Berlin to Wolfgang Thierse, President of the Bundestag, on 19 April 1999, the ownership and control of the Bonn site became the responsibility of the federal government. The total costs of the protracted Bonn project with its numerous facets must have been very considerable, but those were to be dwarfed by the expenditure involved in the move of both Executive and Legislature to Berlin and the re-building of the centre of Berlin to accommodate Parliament, ministries and governmental apparatus. The re-building of the Reichstag building alone is reported in the German press to have cost DM 600 million. Naturally the embassies in Bonn were now in the wrong location and they too had to move.

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<sup>13</sup> Wefing, *Parlamentsarchitektur*, op. cit., p. 89.

<sup>14</sup> Full details as well as a number of photographs and models are found in the *Datenhandbuch* pp. 3270–3333.

<sup>15</sup> Schindler, Peter, op. cit., pp. 3326–7.

<sup>16</sup> An example of the press reaction may be found, for example, in the *Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung* of 9.1.97, 'Schlanker Adler lässt 'fette Henne' vergessen', by Reinhard Urschell, p. 3.

## The New Chamber and Parliamentary Transparency

The success of Behnisch's redesigned new chamber was generally acknowledged. Before we move to the next stage of the story in Berlin, further reflection on the background to the new design will enable us to understand the intense feelings that often relate to nationally important buildings so intimately linked to both history and politics. Heinrich Wefing has produced a monograph devoted to this specific building and the re-building project.<sup>17</sup> Based on his doctoral thesis, Wefing's monograph traces the historical antecedents of German parliamentary buildings, examines the concepts used by states to present a public face in such buildings, and looks at legal precedents. Questions of symbolism, ritual and iconography are also touched on. Wefing's book is an indispensable and illuminating guide, enriched by some international comparisons (Canberra is mentioned briefly), an extensive bibliography and photographs.

Wefing deals at some length with the concept of 'transparency' that has acquired such a key identity in German parliamentary architecture, both at the federal and the state level. This fact clearly has its roots in a reaction to the National Socialist era and to the even earlier influence of the notion of the strong, generally authoritarian state, where the executive held parliaments in slight regard and met without any thought being given to public accountability. In reading his text one is made amply aware of these facts, but another fact emerges which is worth note. The way in which transparency and accountability are interpreted and finally realised seems largely in the hands of the architects: the input from the politicians; that is, the clients, does not emerge with any clarity or force. There is little sense of the dynamics of planning as a process of inter-action and negotiation between client, architect and builder. This is not to imply that this process did not occur; it is just difficult to get any sense of the machinery of consultation. This may be a reflection of the paucity of German material available to researchers in Australia, but it must be mentioned that the topic itself gets scarcely a mention in the German literature seen by this writer. Indeed, it is not easy to determine how much significant input the clients may have had in matters of detail or overall conceptualisation. Conradi's remarks quoted above seem to confirm this impression.

We may, however, be sure that like parliamentarians everywhere, the Germans were firm in their own opinions. Eugen Gerstenmaier, who was President of the Bundestag from November 1954–January 1969, recounts in his autobiography the electrifying effect that a visit to the new Parliament House in Kuala Lumpur had on the German parliamentary delegation under his leadership. A spark was ignited.<sup>18</sup> This small incident is of symptomatic importance for what we can observe with parliamentarians generally: the degree to which the developments in facilities and premises, conditions and salaries in other parliaments serve to arouse their interest. A certain spirit of competitiveness seems to be sparked. This is not something that can be readily demonstrated, but its importance will be acknowledged by those acquainted with parliamentary culture.

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<sup>17</sup> Wefing, *Parlamentsarchitektur*, op. cit.

<sup>18</sup> Gerstenmaier, Eugen, op. cit., p. 396.



We are also partly at a disadvantage from not having available for study the brief given by the parliamentary client to the architect: this would, we might expect, cast significant light on some important matters and the general parameters within which the architect was directed to operate. It is indeed a striking fact that these briefs are generally not analysed in any detail, nor are they easily accessible, although parts are sometimes cited briefly in works dealing with parliamentary architecture in Germany. One wonders, for example, how the briefs come to be formulated: who does the drafting, whose ideas are really expressed, how much consultation is done with all the stakeholders, including those who are permanent officers, and so on? However, it seems true that the creative conceptions which parliamentary building incorporate stem chiefly from the architect rather than the client. 'Buildings may be seen as a form of non-verbal communication in which messages are encoded by [architects] and then decoded by occupants, with probabilistic but potentially powerful ensuing effects as a result'.<sup>19</sup> These words are worth pondering over, not only in relation to Bonn and Berlin, but to Canberra and Sydney as well.

That parliamentarians can, however, have firm views on architecture is documented in the correspondence that Konrad Adenauer had in 1949 with the prominent architect Hans Schwippert, mentioned earlier. Adenauer expressed his opposition to the use of glass and transparency in the changes to the parliamentary building which Schwippert had in mind. Curiously, the Chancellor's views did not prevail; indeed, in the chamber, later re-designed by Behnisch in 1992, Schwippert's ideas were taken much further. These same ideas also became an element in Sir Norman Foster's re-designing of the Reichstag building in 1999.<sup>20</sup>

Transparency aims to bring the public into the ambit of the chamber and to avoid any sense of arcane proceedings of no relevance to the citizens. The openness that the extensive use of glass provides, also conveys a sense of accountability in that the public gains direct insight into what is taking place. The outside environment is also brought in closer; this is certainly an aspect to which people are nowadays more sensitive. The aim is also to show how the members work to serve the interests of their constituents and, on a larger plane, of the state's welfare. Of course, with the arrival of direct television transmission of parliamentary proceedings in many national parliaments, transparency has acquired a new two-edged meaning. Too much 'transparency' can lead to unfavourable public comment about empty benches and, particularly in Australia, about unedifying personal behaviour and abusive language. Part of the decline in the reputation of the parliamentary calling may be attributable to the effects of this type of 'transparency'. Naturally, transparency of the political process is very much a subjective judgement. In any case, it is sometimes argued that the real political process occurs outside the chamber, sometimes in parliamentary committees, in constituency work, or in the inaccessible close confines of political parties and other powerbrokers. The recent scandal about the illegal receipt of money for the Christian Democratic political party and the consequent damage to the reputation of former Chancellor Kohl are a blow to the idea of transparency in German politics. Now there is much criticism of the 'Kohl System' of government in Bonn and Berlin. This may have some influence on what 'transparency' adds up to in a modern state.

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<sup>19</sup> Goodsell, C.T., op. cit., p. 288.

<sup>20</sup> Wefing, *Parlamentsarchitektur*, op. cit., pp. 115–116.

A factor today which makes design of parliamentary buildings more complex, is the question of security. It is hard to credit that it was possible for a disaffected person to drive a vehicle through the closed glass doors of the new Parliament House in Canberra. In the Senate chamber in Washington a gunman has been apprehended. The environs of the Palace of Westminster has been the scene of a terrorist killing of a member of Parliament. In Germany in the 1970s the Baader-Mainhof terrorist gang succeeded in kidnapping a judge and a leading industrialist. Security of public figures became, and still remains, an urgent matter of high priority. It is quite a challenge to balance the desire to have as much architectural openness and public accessibility as possible with the concern for effective security.<sup>21</sup>

### **Reviewing the Bonn Experience**

In looking back at this account of what happened in Bonn, one is struck by several features. Firstly the tortuous processes which accompanied the building programs there. Political timidity certainly played a role in postponing the decisions that needed to be made. The political powers of the time did not want parliamentary buildings to become an election issue, so on at least two occasions when general elections were due, decisions were left for 'the next parliament'. The second feature is the degree to which the members of the Bundestag changed their minds on matters that seemed settled. But it is surprising that parliamentary motions passed by the Bundestag regarding matters it deemed important were ineffectual in the upshot. Finally, it is also clear that the dynamics of parliamentary and especially party discussion on the nature of the parliamentary buildings and the infrastructure they were to provide does not emerge with much clarity. Conradi maintains that members showed a marked lack of interest in the building proposals for the Bundestag in Bonn.<sup>22</sup>

It is also to be regretted that we have so little insight into the wider parliamentary culture in which all these issues were of such central concern. In addition to the parliamentarians there is also a large influential bureaucracy, technical and computer information science personnel and a major library, reference and research department, who have a very shadowy presence in all this discussion about new parliamentary buildings. Examination of the official records (debates, records, party minutes and official reports) needs to be made to elucidate these points. These records have not been accessible to this writer who has had to rely on secondary sources, which seem almost universally to ignore most of this primary material. There is thus still scope to add to the details given here of the history of the parliamentary buildings in Bonn.

Another facet of the situation that is implied, but not strongly delineated, is the sensitivity of German politicians to the legacy of the recent past. Architecture played an unusually emphasised role in the Nazi era. The desire to avoid the impression of any connection with the style and orientation of public architecture of the National Socialist past was a very real consideration. Hence, the avoidance of those architectural features which were prominent at that time. Striving for grandeur and an imposing presence with an accent on ceremonial use of space (large areas for parades, impressive staircases etc.) was clearly the last thing desired. The former pedagogical college in Bonn is indeed a building that could never lend itself to any aspirations of

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<sup>21</sup> Goodsell, C.T., op. cit., p. 297.

<sup>22</sup> *Dem Deutschen Volke*, p. 165.

grandeur. It is in fact a bland building from the outside and devoid of any noticeable impact in its architecture or its setting.

*(ii) Berlin: the New Capital and Seat of Government*

**Introduction**

The experience gained by the Bundestag from the program to rebuild and expand the parliamentary premises in Bonn might perhaps be seen as an appropriate training school for the much more demanding program to transfer a large national parliament with its extensive, if not indeed bloated, infrastructure to Berlin. The new home of the Bundestag for its meetings and for its office bearers (president and senior members) and for party meetings was now the Reichstag building, which needed a total overhaul. Accommodation for the Upper House, for the Chancellor and Federal President, for government departments, office accommodation for members and party staffers and so on was also needed. The whole area around the Reichstag building, near the Brandenburg Gate, was designated as the official parliamentary quarter; massive rebuilding, restoration and refurbishment were all required, in some cases from the ground up. Central Berlin became one vast building lot for a period of years. Ministries scattered at various locations in Berlin were now to occupy restored existing buildings rather than brand new buildings as originally believed. The political considerations involved in making Berlin the new governmental hub of the largest nation in Europe were of a more crucial nature than those that accompanied the protracted, but also rather piecemeal operations in Bonn. But before we look at the renovation of the Reichstag building and the creation of a very large official precinct in Berlin, it is necessary to look at the whole question of Berlin as capital of the reunited Germany.

Reunification, which came so unexpectedly (officially from October 1990), caught the Federal Republic totally unprepared for a change of this magnitude. Both nationally and internationally, the occasion was of profound importance. The Federal Republic was immediately faced with issues of unparalleled urgency. Berlin had as long ago as 1949 been designated by the Bundestag as the capital of Germany if reunification were ever to occur. Bonn was clearly seen as a provisional capital. But as the decades passed, Bonn acquired the whole apparatus of multi-storey executive office buildings, political party headquarters, diplomatic premises, and so on. Heavy investment had occurred on many fronts in Bonn and, in the eyes of many, Bonn had proved itself a suitable permanent capital, free from the heavy historical and political legacy of Berlin. In addition, Bonn was acceptable to both North and South Germany, whereas the old Bavarian-Prussian dichotomy was strongly identified with Berlin. One argument used in favour of retaining Bonn as the capital of the unified Germany was that it represented an entirely new start in 1949, and one that had proved successful and, of course, free from the negative historical associations of Berlin and its ghosts.

Reunification led many political figures to see the 1990s as the opportunity to start yet another fresh page in German history, where a new image of unity and vigour could be presented in the robust and internationally famous metropolis of Berlin. Bonn was considered to be still somewhat provincial, and lacking in any potential to serve as an image for an innovative, technologically advanced state, able to hold its own on the international and European stage.

## **The Debate on the Site of the New Capital**

The debate on where the capital should be situated was held on June 20, 1991. It created intense interest within Germany because views were divided within parties and a free vote was allowed. Three principal motions were put to the Bundestag concerning the question of the capital and the location of the organs of the state. The motion that succeeded, the one sponsored by Willy Brandt and others, favoured Berlin as the new seat of government and of the legislature. A second motion sponsored by Norbert Blüm and others wanted government and legislative functions to be divided between Bonn and Berlin. A third motion, sponsored by Heiner Geissler and others, wanted Berlin to be the seat of the legislature and Bonn to be the seat of government. Two other motions, one of which was withdrawn, wanted the executive and legislative functions not separated geographically. Helmut Kohl made an excellent speech (not in his capacity as Chancellor), supporting the choice of Berlin.

At issue was the question of the nature of the future reunified German State and its relationship to the difficult historical legacies of both pre-war and post-war history. European sensitivities could not be overlooked. In all, 107 speeches were given, most limited to five minutes in duration. The final vote where members were called on by name (namentliche Abstimmung) was close, 337 to 320, confirming Berlin as both capital and seat of federal government executive and legislative organs. This indicates the degree to which opinions were divided and can hardly be seen as a ringing endorsement for Berlin as the capital of the reunited Germany.

Initially there were grandiose intentions of building a number of completely new buildings for parliamentary and governmental purposes. The sky was the limit with regard to the quality and extent of accommodation desired. Realism set in as soon as the costs became clear. As a result, the re-use of older and often damaged buildings was settled on, but major re-building was still necessary.

The Reichstag building had been restored after the war by the architect Baumgarten, but in a way which was insufficient to make it suitable as the new home for the Bundestag. Major restoration was necessary here too. In fact, a large part of the building was reduced to the shell of the outside walls and an entirely new interior was provided. The newly restored Reichstag building was opened in April 1999 and immediately created great public interest in Berlin and throughout Germany. The influx of visitors wishing to inspect the building with its striking glass dome and its novel spiralling public viewing galleries, led to long queues and lengthy waiting. The Reichstag had declared 'open house' for the citizens of Berlin and some 24 000 persons came on the first day. Visitors still come in considerable numbers, necessitating long queues. The Reichstag website provides views of the imposing dome and details of the building.<sup>23</sup> Before we deal with the nature of the restoration and the discussions on how this was to be achieved, it is first necessary to place the Reichstag in a short historical and cultural context.

## **The Reichstag: Historical Background**

A special house for the German Federal Parliament (created in 1871) was provided, after various preliminaries, in 1894 following a period of construction lasting ten

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<sup>23</sup> The Reichstag website is located at <[http://www.bundestag.de/berlin/berlin/b\\_doro.htm](http://www.bundestag.de/berlin/berlin/b_doro.htm)>.

years. Its architect was Paul Wallot, who won the second (1882) architectural competition. Wallot's structure, a massive, richly ornamented building with numerous pillars, pilasters, columns crowned with capitals, an impressive dome, and a large array of statuary and allegoric figures, was controversial in its day. The Kaiser had called it 'a monument to lack of taste', but recent writers now see virtues in it that its contemporaries denied.<sup>24</sup> The building was partially destroyed by arson in 1933, but the damage to it during the Second World War, and especially during the Soviet advance into Berlin, was very extensive. In the second half of the 1960s, the architect Paul Baumgarten worked on the commission to restore the building, but because of the expansion of Bonn and the shift of political weight to it, the Berlin project wilted and was in fact never officially inaugurated (eingeweiht) although the building was brought into use after a reconstruction period of 12 years. Baumgarten later disclaimed any responsibility for the result: 'As it stands there now, it is a caricature of itself. It is the work of the Federal Construction Authority (Bundesbaudirektion).'<sup>25</sup> Contrary to some claims, the Bundestag did actually convene in Berlin after the war, but the only full meetings (Plenarsitzungen) occurred in the period 1949–1965. After the Wall was built in 1961 and the relations between the two Germanies deteriorated, Berlin became a hot point of controversy in international politics between the superpowers of East and West. As a result the Bundestag as a whole no longer held any plenary sessions in Berlin, although committees and party bodies did meet in the Reichstag building as occasion demanded. The detailed data in Schindler's *Datenhandbuch* give a full account.<sup>26</sup>

During the period of the National Socialist regime, the Reichstag as a legislature ceased to play any role since a totalitarian state made its functions irrelevant, but the Nazi regime kept the fiction alive that there was a Reichstag in existence. The now appointed members (almost entirely Nazi Party members) of the Reichstag met on special occasions in the Kroll Opera House, a building nearby, to acclaim major pronouncements by Hitler. Members of the Nazi Reichstag continued to receive full parliamentary salaries, allowances and privileges until the end of the war.<sup>27</sup> The Berliners, noted for their sharp tongues, called the Reichstag the 'most expensive choir in the world', reflecting their awareness of the real situation.<sup>28</sup> The building itself still housed for some time the famous Reichstag Library, one of the major libraries of the time in Germany. Hitler's plans for a new Reichstag building and an entirely new grandiose centre for Berlin, the so-called Germania project, are amply documented and need not be gone into here.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Dem Deutschen Volke*, op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>26</sup> Schindler, Peter, op. cit., p. 1500.

<sup>27</sup> Hahn, Gerhard. *Die Reichstagsbibliothek zu Berlin—ein Spiegel deutscher Geschichte: mit einer Darstellung zur Geschichte der Bibliotheken des Frankfurter Nationalversammlung, des Deutschen Bundestages und der Volkskammer: sowie einem Anhang: ausländischen Parlamentsbibliotheken unter nationalsozialistischer Herrschaft*. Düsseldorf, Droste, 1997, p. 409. (Veröffentlichung der Kommission für Geschichte des Parlamentarismus und der politischen Parteien in Bonn). (A detailed review of this work by R.L. Cope was published in *Legislative Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1, Spring 1998, pp. 105–120.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Hahn, Gerhard; Speer, Albert; *Dem Deutschen Volke*; Richie, Alexandra; all op. cit.

During the Second World War, the Russians made the Reichstag the focus of their assault on Berlin, believing that Hitler had his headquarters in it. The fall of the Reichstag is considered by the Russians to be the end of the Great Patriotic War and the famous, still disputed, photograph of a Russian soldier showing (not hoisting as is often said) a flag from the summit of the Reichstag is reproduced across two full pages in the recently published history commemorating the 1999 restoration of the building.<sup>30</sup> That flag (or supposedly so) is in a museum in Moscow and brought out on occasions celebrating the Soviet victory in 1945. The complex circumstances surrounding the fate of the Reichstag in May 1945 are dealt with lucidly in Gerhard Hahn's masterly history of the Reichstag Library.<sup>31</sup>

The weight of history and German values associated with the Reichstag building can scarcely be over-estimated.<sup>32</sup> The Bundestag debates on the return to Berlin as the capital indicate that the passage of time and the success of the Federal German Republic in its home at Bonn, changed perceptions about the importance of Berlin. The closeness of the parliamentary vote had some influence on how matters were to proceed in the re-building in Berlin. The term 'Berlin Republic' began to gain some currency, distinguishing the 1990s from the 'Bonn Republic' of the preceding decades.<sup>33</sup>

### **Rebuilding the Reichstag in the 1990s: Preliminary Developments**

Once the decision had been taken in 1991 to move the seat of government administration and the Parliament to Berlin, focus switched from Bonn to Berlin. There were a number of projects under way simultaneously to put this decision into effect. Architectural competitions were held for suitable designs. In 1993 three first prizes were awarded for designs for the re-building of the Reichstag. The English architect, Sir Norman (now Lord) Foster, was finally chosen to carry out the project. Foster has an international reputation and is associated with a number of major building projects in his native country, and in Europe and Asia. Other competitions selected architects for buildings to be erected next to the Reichstag itself for members' accommodation and parliamentary services. All these buildings are connected by tunnel with the Reichstag and are also within easy walking distance of it. These brand new buildings bear the names of former eminent parliamentarians.<sup>34</sup> Different architects were responsible for each of these buildings. The overall aim was to avoid any suggestion of an official uniformity in appearance. This policy gave considerable scope to creativity and a high standard of architectural excellence. In February 1992 and March 1993 there were two official Reichstag colloquia in which members of the public such as architects, artists, political scientists, journalists met with politicians to

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<sup>30</sup> *Dem Deutschen Volke*, op. cit., pp. 44–45.

<sup>31</sup> Hahn, Gerhard, op. cit.

<sup>32</sup> Ladd, B. *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1997.

<sup>33</sup> Habermas, Jürgen. *A Berlin Republic. Writings on Germany*. Lincoln, Nebraska, University of Nebraska Press, 1997.

<sup>34</sup> The three buildings are: Paul-Löbe-Haus, Marie-Elisabeth-Lüders-Haus, and Jakob-Kaiser-Haus. Details of the competition and the four winning proposals are given in the Bavarian Landtag's magazine *Maximilianeum*, v.12.5, January 2000. Thanks are expressed to engineer Herr Helmut Schnitzler for providing this work and photos of the winning entries with the jury's comments.

discuss proposals for the future.<sup>35</sup> The results of these discussions would be interesting to know, but are not readily available. This kind of public consultation seems not common when the planning of parliamentary buildings arises.

It is not clear how much discussion (or if any) was devoted to consideration of the existing infrastructure within Berlin, and whether the Bundestag needed to move in toto from Bonn. This may be a relevant consideration with regard to library and information resources. In Bonn there was a great need to create an adequate library and information service for the national legislature and its numerous committees. Bonn lacked any notable resources of this kind as a city. The Bundestag Library consequently became a major library in its right, with important deposit collections of national, international and inter-governmental agencies' official publications and materials from a number of legislatures throughout Germany and abroad. In Berlin there are already large libraries with the same kinds of materials. The speed with which the decision to move from Bonn and the actual move to Berlin were carried out, must have made searching consideration of issues of policy impractical. It should, however, be noted that not all parliamentary services were moved to Berlin at the same time. Some, including some library and information functions, have not yet transferred from Bonn.

The re-building of the Reichstag was preceded in 1995 by an unusual spirit of anticipation when the artist Christo and his wife Jeanne-Claude completely draped the Reichstag building so that only the outline of the building's form was visible. This event created a major public spectacle, attracting large crowds of viewers and even being commemorated with its own large postage stamp. An excellent photo in a double-page spread is featured in Foster's *Rebuilding the Reichstag*.<sup>36</sup>

### **Inauguration of the New Reichstag Building**

The opening of the restored Reichstag building occurred on April 19, 1999. It was an appropriately celebrated occasion, with speeches given by the President (i.e. Bundestag Speaker), Wolfgang Thierse, Chancellor Schröder, Opposition Leader Schäuble (Christian Democrats), Peter Struck, parliamentary Leader of the Government party, and other major parliamentary figures from all parties, the Lord Mayor of Berlin, and the Prime Minister of the State of Brandenburg, within which Berlin is situated. These speeches, reproduced in full in the April 23, 1999 issue of the weekly journal *Das Parlament*, are interesting for the various viewpoints expressed about what the move to Berlin means.<sup>37</sup> Also of interest is the exchange of some sharp remarks about what the new Parliament is now to be called. It had been officially decided to keep calling it the Bundestag, but support for the name Reichstag was voiced. In this disagreement we may see yet another example of the politics of language at work.

Thierse's speech covered the history of the building and set an appropriate tone for succeeding speakers. He drew attention to the blending of the old structure and parts

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<sup>35</sup> *Dem Deutschen Volke*, op. cit., p. 170.

<sup>36</sup> Foster, Sir Norman. *Rebuilding the Reichstag*, ed. by David Jenkins. London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2000, pp. 10–11.

<sup>37</sup> This issue also contains some excellent photographs of the new building. On page 5 is a photograph of the restaurant on the roof with the dome rising behind it.

of its interior decoration with their strong historical associations and the new political culture and modern outlook of post-war Germany. Peter Struck mentioned for commendation the work of the advisory parliamentary building committee (Baukommission des Ältestenrates). He also spoke the following words:

We, Parliament and Government, are returning to Berlin. But the move is no journey into the past. It marks the entrance into a new century, into, despite all international shadows, a future rich in chances. And: we are not coming with empty hands from the Rhine to the Spree. We bring with us the democratic traditions we have created by our work over fifty years. Those are stable traditions. We are not going from the Bonn Republic into the Berlin Republic: we will remain the Bundesrepublik. ( p.6)

The speeches took particular note of the foreign policy issues of European unity and the decision of Germany to participate in the armed NATO actions in Kosovo. The latter issue had arisen at just this juncture and had caused considerable debate within Germany where the whole question of German armed intervention outside its own borders awakened echoes of former times. The seriousness as well as the historical nature of the occasion were done full justice by the speakers, some of whom recognised the added importance given to such international policy matters by the ambience of the Reichstag. The Bonn building seemed to lack this atmosphere of high seriousness.

### **Assessing the Success of the Foster Project**

We are fortunate to have an impressive publication commemorating the rebuilding project. Its title bears the words inscribed at the entrance of the Reichstag building: 'Dem deutschen Volk', that is, 'To the German People'. This publication is edited by Heinrich Wefing, whose name is now well known to us. The book, handsomely illustrated in colour, has an important series of essays by experts in the history of the Reichstag, German architecture, the prize-winning architect Sir Norman Foster, and, most helpfully, a revealing interview with two members of the 11-member Bundestag advisory building commission on the re-building project. These men, Dietmar Kansy and Peter Conradi, give details from the inside of politics about party attitudes, relationships with architects, the dynamics of the non-public negotiations and so on which are not publicly known and yet which bring a project of this complexity to life. They were also members of the panel judging entries in the international architectural competition on the Reichstag, and reveal details about the awarding process and the three winning entries (Foster, Santiago Calatrava, and Pi de Bruijn); they explain why finally Foster was chosen to carry out the project. They speak very candidly and it is obvious that they were no ciphers in their dealings with the architects. As Conradi notes on p. 175, 'We gave the architects a lot of trouble. They had frequently to make changes and the Building Construction Company complained that they had not expected this massive intervention from the Bundestag as client.' They also explain how previous dissatisfaction with the Federal Building authorities caused the Bundestag to vote unanimously to set up its own building body (Building Construction Company) for the Berlin project; this was done jointly by the Bundestag and the Government.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *Dem Deutschen Volke*, op. cit., p. 166.



Particularly interesting is the members' account of how the spectacular glass dome came to be built against the initial opposition of the architect, Sir Norman Foster, but at the insistence of the government coalition parties (Christian Democrats and Christian Socialists) in the parliamentary Council of Elders. The crucial decision was taken within this forum, not by the full House, but later ratified by it.<sup>39</sup> S. Calatrava, one of the three architectural finalists, later claimed that Foster had plagiarised the dome from him. Some public controversy followed.<sup>40</sup> The dome became architecturally the most impressive feature of the entire project and its greatest public attraction. The dome is accessible to the public and has internal walkways spiralling up it; there is a viewing terrace on the roof beside the dome, where there is also a public restaurant. Foster's recently published work on the project has numerous full-page coloured illustrations of the interior and exterior of the dome, which gives panoramic views of Berlin, as well as of the chamber below it through a glass soffit. Foster did not want a dome at all, and at one point threatened to withdraw from the project when pressed on this point, but finally agreed to the parliamentarians' desire for a dome. Sir Norman later conceded his mistake. One other point that the members insisted on against the architect was the use of blue upholstery for seating in the chamber. Blue was the colour used in Bonn and the use in Berlin was thought to link the two sites of the legislature. The shape of the chamber is not semi-circular, as in Bonn, but rather elliptical. Chancellor Kohl was one of those who did not want to retain the shape Behnisch introduced in Bonn, since it did not sufficiently emphasise the distinction between parliamentary members and the executive.<sup>41</sup>

The interview with the two members reveals how effective parliamentarians can be in dealings of this kind. They obviously brought a high degree of intelligent understanding, historical awareness and independent judgement to their task. They had the ability to withstand the commanding attitudes that architects can sometimes exhibit. The political judgment and wide historical perspective of the members may be gleaned from the following remarks made in the interview by Peter Conradi:

In Bonn we have an architecture that does not try to reduce the human dimension through figures incorporating dignity and exaggerated symmetries. We preferred relaxed, open buildings with a view of the Rhine. This picking up of the expressive forms used in modernity represented after the war primarily a conscious turning away from the buildings of National Socialism with their accent on might. This new architectural style was also an indication to those abroad that we had embarked on a fresh political start. Of course, one should not forget that this modesty also sprang from the economic necessity of the time. For me the Behnisch building reflects the best qualities of the old republic on the Rhine. It is not possible to build this in Berlin anew ... (p. 176)

Foster's contribution to this same volume, 'An Optimistic Sign for a Modern Germany', provides extra insights into the planning and the guidelines underlying the project. His chapter (pp. 180-191) sheds further light on a number of matters. It is

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<sup>39</sup> *Dem Deutschen Volke*, op. cit., p. 169.

<sup>40</sup> Foster, Sir Norman, op. cit., p. 135.

<sup>41</sup> *Dem Deutschen Volke*, op. cit., pp. 168-9.

interesting to realise the degree to which environmental concerns were in his mind and incorporated into the final design. He deals with these matters even more fully in his own book on the project.<sup>42</sup> The glass cone which descends like a quasi-chandelier into the chamber from the dome, serves both air-conditioning and lighting concerns. The architect was also anxious to preserve features from the original building (such as decorations which had survived from 1894), and even graffiti by Russian soldiers from the period at the end of the War (Russia has asked that some graffiti not be displayed). Foster has shown a great degree of sensitivity to the historical dimensions of the building and has achieved a result which blends the old and the new with notable, but not undisputed, success.

Norman Foster has just now published his own account of the project. This has appeared, together with five other contributors' offerings, in *Rebuilding the Reichstag*.<sup>43</sup> This book is an impressive blending of text and a large range of historical and contemporary coloured photos. Together with the work in German already mentioned (*Dem Deutschen Volk*), the Reichstag project is amply documented and splendidly caught on camera.

Reactions to the re-designed Reichstag are naturally mixed. Judging by the public response, measured by the high numbers of visitors, the success is considerable. The visual impact of the dome and its interior is undoubted. The Reichstag building has once more acquired an outstanding presence in Berlin, which is enhanced by the large park-like space in front of it, its proximity to the Tiergarten, and by the way it integrates with the whole environment of this historic section of Berlin. Falk Jaeger is rather negative in his assessment:

With his (all too German) virtues of solidity and seriousness, he (Foster) has delivered a work whose perfection is simultaneously captivating and boring, a building which ultimately lacks inspiration, courage, and *joie de vivre*.<sup>44</sup>

It may be questioned whether the term '*joie de vivre*' is a legitimate one to use in conjunction with a legislative building. His judgment seems over-severe, and it may be that he was expecting something different from what Sir Norman was asked to provide. Rita Süßmuth, the Speaker under whom the project first started, believes: 'The architecture of power has been replaced with an architecture of openness and freedom appropriate to the vision of Germany as a truly democratic society.'<sup>45</sup> A different assessment is offered by Heinrich Wefing in an article which deals with both the Reichstag project and the wave of new architecture appearing in Berlin. His perspective is consequently wider and less concerned with the particularities of the Reichstag building as such. He states:

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<sup>42</sup> Forster, Sir Norman, op. cit., pp. 244–5.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Jaeger, Falk. 'The Missing Music: Norman Foster's Reconstruction of Berlin's Reichstag' in *Kulturchronik* no.4, 1999, p. 46.

<sup>45</sup> Foster, Sir Norman, op. cit., p. 9.

The buildings in Berlin [in the new projects] are not united by some suspect will to power; they simply display a new sense of relaxation vis-à-vis the past. For the first time since 1945 builders and clients have regained confidence not to deny history in stone, to plaster over it or even to demolish it ... The relationship between the present and the rest of time: there we have the core of the changes. Perception of the past and future expectations have been newly codified in a contrary direction. The future is no longer a point into which to flee as in Bonn, and the past is no longer a taboo area.<sup>46</sup>

It is easy to forget that the Parliament in Berlin consists of four separate buildings. The buildings accommodating members and parliamentary services are very large and of interest in their own right. The relationship and integration of these structures and their success as working environments need to be assessed in the light of the experience of a range of users. The striking visual and artistic effects of the Reichstag building are only the most immediate response and should not overshadow or underplay the other considerations that are intrinsic to the whole undertaking of moving the legislature from one city to another.

One aspect of the Reichstag project deserving comment is the degree to which works of art are incorporated into the building. As is usual with such public buildings, a certain percentage of the costs was allotted to works of art. Those chosen for the Reichstag project are very much of the contemporary avant garde 'high art' and 'cerebral' kind which is not out of place in Berlin with its modernist traditions. They reflect a certain contemporary taste, but we may wonder what the taste will be in another two decades. Whose taste they reflect may well be that of the architects rather than the clients. Sir Norman and his colleagues were closely involved in their commissioning. Not all the artists are from Germany and this international selection reflects the desire of the clients to go beyond a purely national image in the architecture and in the building's decoration and outfitting. German crafts in the form of ceramics and textiles, to which ordinary citizens might be expected to relate easily, are not widely used.

The political 'concept artist', Hans Haacke, has been invited by the Bundestag to install a work of art in the Reichstag. His proposal is a work of art to replace the words over the portal (Dem deutschen Volk) with the words 'Der Bevölkerung', translated as 'To the People of Germany'. This new text is said to reflect the multicultural nature of the new Germany and to move beyond the spirit of nationalism seen as implied by the existing inscription. 'After a fierce debate the German Parliament decided by a majority of just one vote to buy the work ...'<sup>47</sup> This episode might with some justification be said to be 'typically German'!

On a more mundane level, we may close by noting that according to press reports there was some dispute between the client and the architect about the payment of fees

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<sup>46</sup> Wefing, Heinrich. 'Republikanische Lockerungsübungen. Der Umzug nach Berlin und das Ende der Angst vor der Baugeschichte', 1999, pp. 25–30 *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, B32–33. (Title translated: 'Limbering up Exercises of the Republic. The Move to Berlin and the End of Anxiety vis-à-vis the History of Building').

<sup>47</sup> 'The State isn't Only Me', *Kulturchronik*, no. 3, 2000.

and some dissatisfaction with aspects of the workmanship. This is probably not unusual with projects of this scale. It forms a useful counterbalance to the euphoria and rhetoric which have accompanied the Reichstag project, which, when all is said and done, is a striking way for the reunited Germany to enter the Twenty-first Century.

### **A Further Parliament in Berlin: the Berlin City Members' Assembly**

There is another parliament house in Berlin which has not yet been mentioned. It is the successor to the former Prussian State Parliament and is now the Berlin City Members' Assembly (Abgeordnetenhaus). This building is of considerable interest in its own right and is in certain respects more interesting to the historian of parliamentary institutions than the Reichstag. Its complex history, however, will not be dealt with here, where we will give instead a very abbreviated outline of its recent history.

Until the Nazi seizure of power in 1933, the state of Prussia, the most powerful in Germany, had its own Parliament of two houses. In the 1890s new buildings were provided for each house (Landtag, the lower house, and Herrenhaus, the upper house). These buildings were joined by a connecting wing. The founding conference of the Communist Party of Germany took place (December 1918–January 1919) in the banquet hall (Festsaal) of the Landtag, where Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were present. This portentous event is sometimes overlooked in the history of the building. When the Prussian state was annulled by the Nazis in 1933, one part of the building became the headquarters of the newly created People's Court which acquired a notorious reputation under its head Roland Freisler. Most of the building was, however, taken over by Hermann Göring to form, together with several other buildings, his Air Ministry in which the Aviators' House (Haus der Flieger) was incorporated. These buildings formed the centre of Göring's power base within Berlin. Opposite the Landtag building on the Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse was the School for Arts and Crafts (Kunstgewerbeschule) which became the headquarters for the Gestapo which Göring had installed in Prussia. The name of this street became notorious in the Third Reich and synonymous with terror and torture. The Nazi associations of this whole area are significant.

After the War the Landtag building, badly damaged, but not destroyed, was renovated without delay and became the provisional offices of the Soviet administration. Large-scale restoration was still necessary and this began in a rather arbitrary fashion under an architect named Rey, who documented very little and apparently gave orders personally to the building contractors on the site. Initial uncertainty about the ultimate fate of the building ended in October 1949 when the German Democratic Republic was proclaimed in the former banquet hall of the Air Ministry. The Landtag building was to become the seat of the new Government. As events unfolded, restoration dragged on and the intention to use the building as a seat for the East German legislature was never realised. Instead a new building, the Palace of the Republic, became the seat of the People's Chamber. This building was found after reunification to be a health risk because of its heavy use of asbestos. There is now a suggestion that it should be demolished, but other views for preserving it are also heard. The Herrenhaus is also to be renovated for use by the Bundesrat, the Upper House of the German Parliament.

The Landtag building was next designated for the use of the Council of Ministers whilst the Herrenhaus, the former upper house of the Parliament, was designated for the use of key ministerial offices. The Council of Ministers ceased its occupancy in 1955 and the Landtag building was used for subordinate government offices, chiefly the Agricultural Ministry. But some intelligence services used parts of it as well. With the building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961, the building became virtually isolated, since it was right by the Wall. It was apparently used as part of the apparatus of the Stasi to monitor West Berlin and prevent defectors crossing over into the West.

After the fall of the Wall in 1989 and official reunification in 1990, the former Prussian Landtag became designated as the seat of the Berlin Parliament. Berlin is a city-state within the German federation. The restored building was officially opened in 1993 and the first plenary sitting occurred on April 29, 1993. The excellent publication *Der Preussische Landtag: Bau und Geschichte*, issued in 1993 to mark this occasion, contains a wealth of detailed exposition and photos. It has been used for most of the account given here. Without this authoritative volume it would be close to impossible to recount the details given above.<sup>48</sup>

### *(iii) A Brief Glance at Other German Parliamentary Buildings*

Before we leave Germany, it is worth noting that in Munich, the capital of Bavaria, plans to renovate the state parliamentary building, the Maximilianeum, are proceeding after the awarding of prizes in an architectural competition. One proposal was made to remove the chamber to the roof of the existing building and to place a glass roof over it. This proposal by Günter Behnisch's architectural firm in Stuttgart was awarded a special prize and seems to have gained support from members. The example of Foster's Reichstag restoration may have influenced this idea. A final decision is to be made by the state legislature during 2000. Re-building is required because this legislature has decreased the number of its members from 204 to 180. Problems of air-conditioning and heating also require urgent attention.

In 1988 in Düsseldorf, the capital of the large state of North Rhine-Westphalia, a completely new parliamentary building, not just a renovated building, was inaugurated. This is now the new home of the state Parliament. The site chosen for this large building is on the banks of the Rhine, at a former industrial location which has been completely cleared of warehouses and wharves, landscaped and converted into a showpiece for the city. The building itself is of a most striking style, being a series of interconnected semi-circular six-storey structures with inner open spaces between the various segments of the building. The design of the main chamber shows the influence of the idea of glass as an aid to the transparency of the political process. It has been likened to an open flower in its form, which, to judge from photographs, is a good simile. The discussions in Bonn about the shape of the main chamber and about the type of architectural appropriate for modern German parliamentary democracy seem to have played a role in what was done so imaginatively at Düsseldorf. The architect, Fritz Eller, has created a building which would seem to have also influenced the rebuilding of the Reichstag by Sir Norman Foster. There is

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<sup>48</sup> *Der Preussische Landtag: Bau und Geschichte*. Herausgegeben von der Präsidentin des Abgeordnetenhauses von Berlin. Berlin, Argon Verlag, 1993. (Title translated: *The Prussian Parliament. Building and History*.)

good reason to consider this building to be one of Germany's most significant contributions to public architecture in the Twentieth Century.

Works of art are used very effectively in its decoration, but although they are mostly of the modern abstract style, they seem accessible to general taste and not just that of a cultural elite. They contrast to some extent with the experimental art used strikingly, but with rather less popular appeal, in the Reichstag building. The Düsseldorf building (or more accurately, the complex of buildings), makes a powerful visual impact, but with dimensions which do not dwarf those who use or visit it. The cost of what is clearly a major piece of construction is given as DM 280 million (as at 1988), which more than favourably compares with the cost of renovating the Berlin Reichstag at DM 600 million.

The parallels which can be easily detected with the construction of a new parliament house in Canberra would suggest that a detailed comparison of both projects would be worth undertaking. It is the legislature of the largest German state, with a population of 18 million and 201 members of Parliament, elected by a mixture of direct votes and party list votes. The publications issued by this Parliament to commemorate the new building are of high standard and appear superior in quality of production and information value to similar publications available from other parliaments.<sup>49</sup>

## **PART 2: PARLIAMENTARY BUILDINGS FOR AUSTRALIA**

### *(i) The New Parliament House, Canberra*

The New Parliament House, Canberra is now, strictly speaking, no longer new. It has been occupied since 1988 and the history of the project has been amply documented in several noteworthy publications.<sup>50</sup> Controversies have not been absent from this project. These centre around the enormous blow-out in its cost and on the grandeur of the project. Some have questioned whether a moderate economy such as Australia's should convey the impression of being a major power in its legislative building. The initial spate of publications, mostly reacting with enthusiasm to the completion of the project in 1988, has now subsided and comment is less frequent. Certainly a visit to the new building continues to be a tourist attraction in the national capital. The 12 years since its inauguration creates a distance which is helpful for considering aspects of the project. Whether this distance in time also gives objectivity may be a moot point. There is also a body of experience by the clients and occupants of the New Parliament House to allow us to ask questions which could not be appropriately asked of the newly completed building. Some of the themes and issues already encountered

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<sup>49</sup> Three publications, all under the Parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia's imprint, are known to the writer. They include one large-format pamphlet of 31 pages with a number of full-page coloured photos, one book with contributions on the technical details of the project (131pp.), and another more elaborate work of 160 pages with many full-page coloured photographs commemorating the project.

<sup>50</sup> Publications on the New and Permanent Parliament House which might be mentioned are: Fitzgerald, Alan, *Canberra and the New Parliament House*, Sydney, Lansdowne Press, 1983; Beck, Haigh, ed., *Parliament House, Canberra: a Building for the Nation*, Sydney, Collins, 1988; and particularly Weirick, James, 'Don't You Believe It: Critical Response to the New Parliament House' in *Transition*, issue 27/28, Summer/Autumn, 1989, pp. 7-66.

in connection with the parliament houses in Bonn and Berlin—with some understandable variations—emerge again. There are striking parallels and some interesting differences.

After a chequered ten-year period of erection the New Parliament House was brought into operation in 1988. It is designed to last for 200 years, but is also expected to have additions in the Twenty-first Century. When Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser announced, in November 1978, approval for a project to erect a new Parliament House in Canberra, a flood of political and media comment developed on the importance of national symbols, and the pivotal role of the proposed structure as the outward sign of Australian national identity and prestige. The project came to be seen as a demonstration of Australia's political maturity. The unifying and symbolic force of such a major political structure was quickly recognised. The project received a heightened profile by becoming a focal point of the 1988 Bicentenary celebrations: its completion date was set for 1988. It was opened by the Queen in May 1988. The first sittings of Parliament in its new venue began in August 1988. The project may perhaps also be understood as responding at an indefinable level to a desire to overcome some of the tensions and disunity arising from the dismissal of the Whitlam Government in November 1975. We cannot ignore, even if we have difficulty in defining, the idea of this architecture as a 'political statement'. It would seem in fact that the building, so painstakingly designed down to its smallest element, comprises a number of statements.

It was more as a result of backbench dissatisfaction with working conditions and facilities in the old Parliament House, rather than enthusiasm from the Executive for major building undertakings, which finally led to the decision to begin a project which took on dimensions few had anticipated. Initially, the rhetoric which followed this decision was predictable and on the whole enthusiastic. Great public interest was generated by the international architectural competition in 1979–1980 for a design, and the progress of the project received continuing close attention in the Australian media. As the project ran into trouble with what seemed high cost over-runs, industrial disputes and poor public relations skills on the part of the Construction Authority, media attention became less positive and parliamentary comments were at times unsupportive to the project.

None of this is unexpected with a high profile public project of such magnitude, novelty and cost, operating under very demanding time constraints. The project was also subject to colliding interests of political and parliamentary forces. Of course, the fact that the project was almost unprecedented in contemporary Australian history threw up problems of its own; the constructing and architectural authorities had few local precedents to draw on for information or guidance. The 1927 provisional parliamentary building was by its nature of only limited use as a reference point for the new, vastly grander project. The Burley Griffin town planning scheme for Canberra also imposed certain limits. All these factors are documented in varying detail in publications of the Parliament House Construction Authority, in the reports of the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on the New Parliament House, Senate Estimates committee hearings, parliamentary debates, and in other publications produced in the private sector.

The Parliament House Construction Authority issued in 1990 an invaluable documentary record of its operations entitled *Project Parliament: the Management Experience*.<sup>51</sup> This is a publication of considerable importance to a variety of users, not just builders and architects. Political scientists and students of parliament will find it worth their attention as well, but the material may be of value for what it suggests rather than explicates to these students. Indeed, comments of the Parliament House Construction Authority seem at times cautiously mindful of the sensitivities of the political class. The peculiar nature of the political and parliamentary clients with a range of sometimes conflicting priorities and preconceptions deserves more explicit notice than is generally given. Further important information is contained in the efficiency audit report of the Auditor-General and in the response to it by the Construction Authority and the further comment by the Australian Audit Office. The robust exchange of responses between these two bodies would appear to be without parallel in official reports to the Parliament. The Auditor-General seems to have been the winner.

### **Reactions to the New Parliament House**

In 1995 Peter Walsh, the former Finance Minister in the Hawke and Keating era, published his political memoirs and gave some forthright views on the New Parliament House project. His criticisms reflect many of the criticism generally met with regard to this project.<sup>52</sup> He explains the political reasons behind the failure of the governments to curb the cost over-runs; the 1978 estimate of cost was 180 million dollars. It was 'optimistic, if not dishonest'; the politicians on the New Parliament House Committee later upgraded the building and further added to its cost.<sup>53</sup> Political and industrial circumstances at the time made the project vulnerable to 'union blackmail'.<sup>54</sup> Walsh refers to other grave factors as follows:

The new building moreover, was maldesigned, the main kitchen was closed within a few years—a typical architect-dominated construction, conceived from the outside in, instead of the inside out. It is also an antiseptic, isolated and impersonal place, compared with its predecessor, and is so vast it takes ten to fifteen minutes walking from one extremity to the other.<sup>55</sup>

These are strong strictures, but not likely to be endorsed by everyone. His criticism would profit from a more analytic differentiation of points. A 1988 paper by the then President of the Senate (Sibraa) gives more detailed comments about costs which offset and balance some of Peter Walsh's charges, without nullifying them.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Parliament House Construction Authority. *Project Parliament: the Management Experience*, Canberra, AGPS, 1990.

<sup>52</sup> Walsh, Peter. *Confessions of a Failed Finance Minister*. Sydney, Random House, 1995, pp. 157–161.

<sup>53</sup> Warden, James. *A Bunyip Democracy: the Parliament and Australian Political Identity*. Canberra, Department of the Parliamentary Library, 1995, p. 43.

<sup>54</sup> Walsh, op. cit., pp. 167–158.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>56</sup> Sibraa, K. 'Australia's New Parliament House', in *The Parliamentarian*, vol. 69, no. 3, July 1988, pp. 160–167.



Another point made by the former Finance Minister concerning the 1927 Parliament House is, however, likely to gain wider support, or at least sympathy:

... at the risk of being sentimental, I do not believe a nation so young, should dump the limited heritage it has.<sup>57</sup>

His comment about dumping our heritage will be considered again later in this paper when the Parliament of New South Wales is dealt with.

When we review the sizeable body of literature on the new Parliament House, one word jumps out at the reader: *symbol*. So various is the use to which this word is put that one comes in some cases to doubt that it has a definable meaning.<sup>58</sup> Certainly the strict sense of 'symbol', as used in philosophical discourse, seems inappropriate to much of its use with regard to this building. One of the difficulties that some commentators seem to experience is finding adequate language to express the impact that the building makes. The language chosen is sometimes over-stretched and too elevated to sustain itself in the long run. If, as the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor maintains, the true symbol defies characterisation, then the abundant attempts to characterise the new Parliament House as symbolic appear problematic.<sup>59</sup> But, of course, there are strong reasons why a building of this kind should seek for ways to express meanings going beyond purely architectural ones.

The competition documents, which set down the guidelines on what the architects should seek to realise in their proposals, indicate that the finished building should represent or convey the image of Australia as a nation. The task of the entrants is described as providing a building that is more than merely functional: 'it must be a symbol of nationhood and commitment to the democratic process of government and it must relate sensitively to its total environment.'<sup>60</sup> 'The Authority is convinced that, when completed, the building would be an outstanding National Symbol of which all Australians could be justly proud.'<sup>61</sup> The building should 'express the aspirations of the nation and ... symbolise virtuous political principles.'<sup>62</sup> Symbolism is defined by the Parliament House Construction Authority as the 'image ability of the building, given the significance of the site and the role of the building'.<sup>63</sup> In her speech opening the new building, the Queen spoke of its distinctive Australian character, adding:

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<sup>57</sup> Walsh, op. cit.

<sup>58</sup> Freeland, G. *Canberra Cosmos: the Pilgrim's Guidebook to Sacred Sites and Symbols of Australia's Capital*. Sydney, Primavera Press, 1995.

<sup>59</sup> Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1989, pp. 479–481.

<sup>60</sup> Parliament House Construction Authority. *Parliament House Design Competition: Report on Winner's Design*. Canberra, The Authority, 1980. Processed, 25 leaves.

<sup>61</sup> Parliament House Construction Authority. *Australia's Parliament House 1988. The Competition Process*. Canberra, The Authority, 1980, p. 4.

<sup>62</sup> Warden, *A Bunyip Democracy*, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, p. 36.

More than ten thousand men and women can take great pride in the parts they have played in the creation of this symbol of Australian unity and democracy.<sup>64</sup>

Some of the ideals associated with the rebuilding of the Reichstag re-emerge here with a similar understanding of the nature of democracy common to both structures. The great differences between the two projects is that in Berlin the redesigned building already carried a heavy load of associations and significance. In Canberra it was necessary to create a different level of significance and to make a building which in some respects would also be an 'educational picture book in stone' for all Australians. But we should also be mindful of the prerequisites of the site that spring from the Burley Griffin town-planning scheme for Canberra. There were some important design and aesthetic parameters established before the Parliament had left Melbourne. The importance of an orientation to the landscape of Canberra was one of the most significant of these. But within those parameters the architects have created what is akin to a 'total work of art' with an integration of all elements and details to their overall vision.

The emphasis on the public's free access to each building (Bonn, Berlin, and Canberra), and the openness of proceedings in the chambers is not conveyed 'symbolically', but in specifics of design and materials chosen (glass, for instance). But the question might be asked whether those features and the implication that the building is somehow the 'people's house' have an underlying reality or are simply a pleasing intellectual construct.<sup>65</sup> One should not forget that 'the people' have limited or indeed no access to large parts of the building. The flagpole at Canberra is seen by most commentators to be of symbolic importance. Some writers see it as being of negative symbolic import, but perhaps it is stretching credulity too far to claim that 'for many citizens [the placement of] the current flag [on Capital Hill] is also [a statement of conquest]'.<sup>66</sup> With such a range of rich associations possible in the nature and placement of a flag, we might expect many additional perceptions to be held by citizens as well. Ivor Indyk puts the matter well when he states:

The colonnade is the sign of an entrance, the walls define the limits of the place, the flag mast declares this place to be of national significance—it is as if the basic sense of possession had been performed, and marked out, so that the process of building might now begin.<sup>67</sup>

Argument about the nature of symbols, icons, allegory and metaphor, and about the most appropriate means (linguistic, pictorial, statuary, decorative, representational, abstract, etc.) to convey or embody values, political principles, national myths and so on, can easily consume much energy and passion. Language can be made to do strange things in such cases, especially if the disputes are surrogates for arguments about power, control and prestige. The writings on the new Parliament House do

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<sup>64</sup> Speech by the Queen at the Opening of the New Parliament House, Canberra, on Monday 9 May. [Typescript, 1988.]

<sup>65</sup> Indyk, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

<sup>66</sup> Warden, *A Bunyip Democracy*, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>67</sup> Indyk, *op. cit.*, pp. 42–43.

indeed offer their authors ample opportunity to show all these rhetorical possibilities and the pitfalls of language. We may perhaps take Horatio's advice to Hamlet against becoming absorbed in abstruse or fruitless speculation, where the danger becomes 'to consider too curiously'. The nature of the project, however, makes this admonition unlikely to have much effect and symbols are perceived in what seem to be unlikely places. Indyk sees, for example, the placement of the Prime Minister's suite as conferring on him the role of *concierge*, the caretaker of the democratic process, rather than its ruler.<sup>68</sup> This notion is more likely to cause humour than assent.

One article reflecting sophisticated personal impressions from a visit to Canberra in 1988 to inspect the recently opened building is John Carroll's 'The New Parliament House: the Monument to 1988'. Carroll's account reflects some interesting attitudes, such as an earlier scepticism about the role of Canberra as the capital, firm views on Australian parliamentary culture and about the nature of a parliamentary building to incorporate it. He discusses the political forces which led the Fraser Government to undertake the project. The building is, he avers, 'in part oriented to tourism: tourism empties out everything it touches, even under an educational gloss.'<sup>69</sup> This may be an extreme, even heretical sentiment, but it is worth pondering as well. Perhaps it is more justified than many would like to acknowledge. Parliamentary education is a new growth industry which has support on all sides.

Carroll believes that the dimensions and design of the building impact unfortunately on parliamentary culture, where 'the human element' becomes reduced or lost. He is also of one mind with former Senator Peter Walsh about the jettisoning of heritage. He strongly defends the virtues of the old Parliament House and would like the legislature to return to it. 'The old Parliament was right for Australia. It symbolised the nation and its style of democracy at their best.' But at the same time he praises as well. He sees much good in various aspects which he singles out, and his overall impression of the building as a monument is positive: 'The new Parliament House is a building of singular architectural merit, and it fits into the grand town plan of Burley Griffin, bringing it to a brilliant completion.' His strong quarrel is with specific elements in the design and with the way traditional parliamentary culture is subverted. In particular, the two chambers are called the 'explicit catastrophe' of the new building: the one is like a 'bull-ring', whilst the other is like an 'expensive pink bordello'. Selective quoting from this article does not do it justice: it is both thoughtful, based on appreciation of parliamentary history and candid in its likes and dislikes. Even though Carroll expresses unfashionable views, he obliges the reader to re-assess the merits of the argument. Some of his criticism, seen in the light of 12 years after, do not seem to have been vindicated, but the principles he points to or implies are still open to discussion. As an expression of strong immediate impressions from the new project, the article is an admirable effort and it would merit a place in an anthology of political writing in Australia.

### **Burley Griffin and Landscape**

The Walter Burley Griffin legacy and its relationship to the natural setting in Canberra have already been mentioned. Landscape in the vision of this American town planner

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<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>69</sup> Carroll, J. 'The New Parliament House: the Monument to 1988.' *Quadrant*, vol. 34, March 1989, pp. 30–35.

and architect is the one major factor in the siting and design of the new Parliament House. It poses challenges to architects and planners and represents values which are intrinsic to the idea of Canberra. Those values, 'the language of landscape and natural forms'<sup>70</sup> may be open to interpretation and dispute, but they cannot be escaped. The prize-winning American-Italian architect, Romaldo Giurgola, has written intriguingly about landscape and its influence on the design of the new building. The intertwining of the two themes of landscape and symbol is also a recurring motif in the writings on the New and Permanent Parliament House.

In his important prize-winning article on the challenges and implications of the new Parliament House project, Terry Fewtrell refers to the influence of Burley Griffin's American ideas of democratic government on the siting of the parliamentary building on Capital Hill and the nature of the capitol building he had in mind.<sup>71</sup> He does not explicitly deal with this architect's views on symbolism and landscape. These two topics have received close attention in the writings of Peter Proudfoot, an academic with architectural expertise. Proudfoot has variously analysed how Burley Griffin's writings have impacted on Giurgola, and has made some surprising claims about esoteric ideas concerning chthonic and cosmic forces being employed by Burley Griffin and his wife in architectural terms. He states:

Giurgola draws a veil over the true nature of the Parliament House design in his writing, denying the ancient paradigms which underlie the geomantic matrix established by Walter and Marion Griffin: the geometry to which his work in fact responds.<sup>72</sup>

Just how seriously these claims are to be taken may be left to the test of time and the analysis of those experts best placed to offer sound assessments. It must be reiterated that writings about the New Parliament House by Giurgola himself contain ideas which indicate an imaginative and poetical strain in the architect. There is also at times a quasi-mystical note discernible in his two important papers of 1986 and 1988. These are the Ian McLennan Oration of 1986 and the A.S. Hook Address of 1988, two documents of basic importance to students of the New Parliament House. In the 1988 Address, Giurgola talks about the 'spiritual dimension' of a building. He states, for example:

Buildings based on these kinds of principles [i.e. those he advocates] are not intended as impositions but rather are generated by the natural state of things; they are buildings which can reach out to make connections without being in submission and which have the possibility of formulating a symmetry between the cycles of the natural environment and products of the rational mind.<sup>73</sup>

In the 1986 Oration he expresses the hope that the finished project will:

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<sup>70</sup> Indyk, op. cit.

<sup>71</sup> Fewtrell, T. 'A New Parliament House—A New Parliamentary Order?', *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, vol. 64, no. 4, December 1985, pp. 323–332.

<sup>72</sup> Proudfoot, Peter. *The Secret Plan of Canberra*, Kensington, NSW, University of New South Wales Press, 1994, p. 109.

<sup>73</sup> Giurgola, Romaldo. The A.S. Hook Address, *Architecture Australia*, vol. 77, 1988, pp. 73–75.

... achieve the kind of unity one senses as being part of a great community, where the contributions of it are not measured according to self-interest, but rather by their meaning for others and for the human community at large.<sup>74</sup>

These sentiments do not seem to exist in the same universe as the realities of party politics in Australia. This is not to say that some of the idealism of Giurgola's position is out of place; his writing does indeed oblige us to look at the building from unexpected perspectives and even suggests overlooked (and even unrealisable) possibilities. With regard specifically to the landscape and setting of the new house, he explains in his A.S. Hook Address that the impact of Canberra's natural environment, which he relates to the plans of Burley Griffin, made the architects determined:

That the building configuration must not impose its presence on the top of the hill, but should rather be comprehended visually with the help of the natural elements and the surrounding sites.

This forms some of the motivation for placing the building within Capital Hill, rather than on it. Part of the building is actually underground and the grassy mounds over the building give public access up to the crowning flag pole. This feature is said to be a symbolic representation of the supremacy or dominance of the public will in the democratic system. How many of the public would think this idea other than a poetic fancy? Proudfoot comments in several places about the literary source of some of the architect's inspiration.<sup>75</sup> That does indeed seem to be case. But Proudfoot makes a further point which has a force that cannot be ignored: 'Despite Giurgola's rhetoric, there remains the distinct dissatisfaction with the perceivable gap between the aerial plan view and the experience on the ground.' Symbols have to be perceived to be able to exert any effect, however we might want to interpret that effect. Giurgola's views are, however, far more convincing when he talks about the place of the arts and crafts in the project. These will be considered later.

Guy Freeland's account of the way a visitor to Canberra would perceive the new building provides a different orientation from that of other authors already mentioned. Like Proudfoot, he believes that the reality of the building is at odds with the architect's ideas and he analyses Giurgola's intentions with both sympathy and scepticism. Freeland's text, which has not appear to have yet received the attention it merits, contains an abundance of useful observations and common sense.<sup>76</sup>

### **In Canberra, but not of Canberra?**

In Franz Kafka's novel *The Castle*, the castle looms over the village at its foot as a controlling, ominous presence. A similar picture could easily have been the result of a monumental new official building on Capital Hill. Without wanting to strain the

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<sup>74</sup> Giurgola, Romaldo. 'Architecture More Than a Building.' (Fourth Ian MacLennan Oration), *Architecture Australia*, vol. 76, 1987, pp. 43–46.

<sup>75</sup> Proudfoot, Peter. 'Canberra, Landscape and Symbolism in the Parliamentary Triangle', *Populous Places: Australia's Cities and Towns*, ed. by A. Rutherford. Sydney, Dangaroo Press, 1992, p. 84.

<sup>76</sup> Freeland, G., op. cit.

analogy beyond what it can stand, it seems that Giurgola was anxious not to have the New Parliament House seen in this light. It was not to be divorced from the environment and community in which it is situated. The desire to avoid an impression of dominance and remoteness is seen in the way the building was placed in, rather than on, Capital Hill. The architect's sensitivity to landscape and the integration of the elements of his building to the environment has already been explained. The success achieved is generally recognised. But there are still points about the building and its site which deserve comment.

The first point to be made is that the site is one exposed to all the influences of Canberra's sometimes harsh climate. There is no shelter from wind, rain or snow as one approaches the building. In addition, the location at the summit of a steep rise means that none but the fit and young would be anxious to walk to it. It may be questioned whether much thought went into ways of approaching the building other than by vehicle.

The monumental scale of the interior of the building is another aspect which may have, over time, a psychological effect of dwarfing the occupants in ways which could evoke a range of diverse individual responses. Loss of a sense of intimacy, which was present in the old building, may be unsettling to those who come from it to the new building. There is no information readily available on such matters, but the recent suicide of a federal member of the Lower House has been attributed in part to the way in which the parliamentary building isolates those working within it and thus prevents the kind of close personal contact helpful to persons undergoing emotional crises. They can become isolated from one another within the building and at the same time they are isolated from the community outside its walls. It would be interesting to ascertain if levels of sickness, resignation and morale among permanent staff can be correlated to cast light on these points. There is some belief that the fully air-conditioned environment of the new parliamentary building in Sydney has led to problems such as these, but the matter of occupational health in parliamentary buildings needs research.

The nature of the location of Parliament House and its relative remoteness from the homes of the inhabitants make it different from the other parliaments mentioned in this paper. Berlin, Bonn and Sydney, not to mention Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Hobart and Perth all have parliamentary buildings which are within easy reach of pedestrians and the main thoroughfares of their respective cities. There are other kinds of problems for some of these buildings, but of course most of them do not have the advantages of the landscape setting enjoyed in Canberra. Someone has jokingly referred to the new building as the 'forbidden city'. The self-enclosed nature of the structure does indeed suggest such an image of a place where one is cut off from the world outside whose destiny it nevertheless controls. Such a view makes claims about the 'people's house' and national unity questionable.<sup>77</sup> The phenomenon of popular political alienation which is mentioned frequently in Australia has not been assuaged by the New Parliament House.

There are obviously advantages and disadvantages in any setting and it is a matter of weighing up competing factors. With regard to the gathering of specific information

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<sup>77</sup> Warden, *A Bunyip Democracy*, op. cit., p. 112.

on questions of 'user satisfaction' about the New Parliament House in Canberra, there is the important research carried out by Terry Fewtrell as a follow-up to his 1985 paper discussed above. In his second paper of 1991, Fewtrell asked federal parliamentarians their views on a number of questions relating to the new house, contrasting them with their expectations and their experiences in the old house. His data form a valuable barometer of views soon after the move to the new house and will be useful if further surveys are carried out.<sup>78</sup> What is surprising and a weakness in his survey is that only members of Parliament are interviewed and not officers of the Parliament and ordinary staff. Members' views are certainly important, but since most of them work only part of the year in the building, it is obviously insufficient to disregard the experience of the others who spend their entire working life in it. Sometimes the most revealing sources of information on the questions of how a building works come from those who are not in glamorous or high profile positions, but are instead those who carry out lesser tasks. The remarks by Peter Walsh about the kitchens of the new building prompt questions which could perhaps be best answered by kitchen staff. Have the officers of the Parliamentary Library, for example, found their expectations about their new quarters realised or not, and so on?

One recurring complaint about the New Parliament House, and one that comes also from parliamentarians in other parliaments where large-scale building changes have taken place, is the loss of the previous good informal relations and camaraderie that existed between members across party lines. Malcolm Fraser has mentioned this as an undesirable effect of the new building. Such subjective judgments should be taken seriously, but they do also need to be accompanied by some evidence for their validity. Parliamentary culture and parliamentary sociology are not generally as closely understood by architects as they need to be if architectural changes are to preserve some of the psychological aspects important to members of Parliament. The same could be said about the choice of works of art and craft, and of furniture styles; not all members and staff are comfortable with pieces with which they now have to work and live, even if they are selected by panels which include members of Parliament.

The economist would ask a different set of questions about the costs of running the new building, comparing them with comparable costs elsewhere. The Clerk of the Senate published in 1998 a paper dealing with the cost of the Commonwealth Parliament.<sup>79</sup> This paper, unfortunately, does not cast any light on the costs of running the new building, but it is valuable for other uses relating to public expenditure on parliamentary government in Australia. The question of interest to us is one that requires clear parameters and detailed research. This paper is not the place for that. Perhaps the topic might recommend itself, difficult as it may prove to be, to one of the future Political Science Fellows sponsored by the Federal Parliament.

### **Artworks and Craftworks in the New House**

Most commentators seem agreed that the works of art and the craftworks in the New Parliament House are one of its great successes. The large number of artists and groups commissioned to produce items is considerable and the quality and range of

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<sup>78</sup> Fewtrell, T. 'A New Parliamentary Order? A Preliminary Report', *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, vol. 50, no. 1, March, 1991, pp. 84–93.

<sup>79</sup> Evans, H. 'The Cost of the Commonwealth Parliament: Amalgamations, Values and Comparisons.' [Typescript, 20 August 1998.]

items produced are outstanding.<sup>80</sup> They represent an excellent cross-section of Australian artistic achievement of the 1980s. Ivor Indyk's sophisticated essay 'The Semiotics of the New Parliament House' analyses the role allotted to the crafts and to materials such as timber in the overall conception of the building. He relates the arts and crafts to Giurgola's vision of the integration of architecture, landscape and human dimensions. He states:

It may be a heavy burden to place upon the arts and crafts, but the architects would have us see them as the products of a community rooted in the soil, a language formed from the elements of nature accessible and intelligible to all. In these ways then, the new Parliament House bears out Giurgola's definition of the relationship between architecture and nature, 'to perform art within nature, by nature, and of nature.'<sup>81</sup>

The presence of artworks with some Aboriginal association is another noteworthy feature of the project. Michael Tjakamarra Nelson's striking forecourt mosaic is principal among these and is often reproduced in publications on the building. It has found a mixed reception and is, according to John Carroll, 'a pseudo-Aboriginal mosaic which looks like a flattened vegetable omelette.' Carroll is not impressed by the art works. For him 'The building is littered with modern art—sculpture, painting and tapestry, in content either infantile or meaninglessly abstract. Even were the art of value, what is it doing here? This is a Parliament, not an Art Gallery.'<sup>82</sup> These are personal sentiments which will raise strong reaction in many other visitors, yet the point Carroll makes about parliaments being art galleries is worth considering further.

As representative buildings, visited by distinguished overseas personalities and of course by many ordinary tourists and citizens, their decoration and outward appearance are important elements in their overall impact. The message they convey is not irrelevant to the politics and prestige of the country. The type of decoration appropriate for them is determined by various considerations. Certainly one might have misgivings if it is primarily the taste of the architects that is reflected in them. There has been little note made in Australia of the discussions which surrounded the type of decoration used in the Nebraska State Capitol where the sculptures and other works of art are a celebration of the industry, agriculture and other aspects of the State of Nebraska. These are largely allegorical depictions and are not of the modern abstract school of art. This seems an entirely reasonable attitude to take, provided that the works are done by skilled artists. Quality is important as well as message. The results in Lincoln, Nebraska appear very suitable and while to some eyes they may be old-fashioned, they are readily understood, convey their message clearly, and are not likely to become dated in the way that happens with taste in modern painting, for example.<sup>83</sup> There is justly said to be a 'multi-cultural' aspect to the works of art in the

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<sup>80</sup> Parliament House Construction Authority. *Australia's New Parliament House*. Canberra, the Authority, 1986; Smith, D. *Interpreting the Art and Design of Parliament House. a Guide for Senior Secondary Schools*. Canberra, Parliamentary Education Office [in conjunction with] Built Environment Education Working Party of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, 1989.

<sup>81</sup> Indyk, op. cit., p. 46.

<sup>82</sup> Carroll, J., op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>83</sup> Luebke, Frederick C., ed. *A Harmony of the Arts: the Nebraska State Capitol*. Lincoln, Nebraska, University of Nebraska Press, 1990.



Canberra building.<sup>84</sup> It might be said that this aspect is not inclusive enough of all cultures and peoples now represented in the Commonwealth of Australia. The Chinese presence seems, for example, to be largely lacking, which is regrettable when we consider the Nineteenth Century role of the Chinese in Australia. No doubt the same could be said for other cultural groupings. There is always the risk that the pressure groups and those most vocal get more attention than those who are quiet and content to stay in the background. Politics rather than other factors generally seem to dictate the outcome.

Carroll's strictures are not likely to be widely shared, but in the matter of works of art there is no hope of achieving unanimity of response. The passing of time has a winnowing effect and it may well be that in representative buildings such as parliaments a periodical replacement of some items is desirable. Indeed, parliaments are built to last generations, so it would be surprising if redecoration were not necessary periodically. What is a real danger is that the fads of taste of certain key players might run amok and destroy or damage what are national assets. To guard against these dangers, parliaments need to establish (and adhere to) guidelines ensuring that where changes are decided, what is no longer in favour is still preserved in some other location. Works of art no longer fashionable have a habit of coming back into vogue. Parliaments have not had a good record on preserving the items they have collected over the decades. This is particularly true of furnishings and movable items. Their libraries are now in the firing line and valuable state and national assets are being lost (by sale, sometimes) for the very temporary gain of some money for the annual budget. From some points of view, parliaments should not be organisations that undertake other than minimal levels of collecting. They are not really organised in a way to guarantee that the funds in this area are spent for real advantage. The changing rule (and policy orientation) and variable taste of political masters do not create the continuity and certainty that are essential for organisations that collect. The perspectives are different in each case and the parliaments should focus on the central issues which are relevant to their principal role in society.

Perhaps public confidence would be reassured in parliaments as collectors and custodians if they were better at publicising their activities and in giving periodical accounts of the way they manage the state assets entrusted to them. It is almost impossible to know how the collections of the parliaments, that is, their works of art and of craft, their china, silver, paintings and prints, furniture and furnishings, their historical archives and library collections of books, records, files and audio-visual materials are being cared for, preserved and recorded. It is not easy to ascertain, for instance, whether they have policies about receiving and retaining gifts of items and bequests. We seldom hear of stock-takes, but theft and wear and tear must be factors affecting them as they affect other institutions. What is the value of these national assets, are they insured, are they inventoried as they should be? How active are auditors-general in this respect? One expects that the answer in the Federal Parliament is affirmative, but it would be useful for the Presiding Officers to present a report on their stewardship to the nation once every five or so years. Collections involve a burden of continuing responsibility for their care and study; Carroll may be right to ask the question we have highlighted, but the answer is not readily found. More is said on this topic when we discuss the Parliament of New South Wales.

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<sup>84</sup> Warden, *A Bunyip Democracy*, op. cit., p. 77.

## The building and the question of political identity

The New Parliament House has given rise to a range of writings of a high standard, even if the temptation to hyperbole is occasionally evident. Authors' impressions cover many aspects and this variety of points of view is instructive. The majority of the writings mentioned so far have been essays or contributions to books dealing with specific questions, such as the influence of landscape on the architectural style, the place of works of art in the design, and so on. James Warden has, however, produced a monograph which differs in important respects from the publications so far mentioned. His monograph, a veritable *tour de force*, uses the new building as a basis for discussing a whole bundle of political and parliamentary concepts, which he relates to the completion of the project and the occupancy of the new building. His work, entitled *A Bunyip Democracy* (1995), published as one of the series of monographs produced by Political Studies Fellows of the Federal Parliamentary Library, is a searching discussion of ideas in relation to the parliamentary institution and the ideology of politics. The book's sub-title, *The Parliament and Australian Political Identity* indicates a wide scope, and it is the author's ability to bring together a surprising number of strands, touching on a host of questions and phenomena in the process, which commands respect. The monograph broaches many of the political and parliamentary themes of the 1980s and earlier, and could well be studied as an expression of the attitudes of that era. Warden's monograph is mirrored by an address he gave in 1995 in the Senate Occasional Lecture series. The address is to some extent a brief version of his monograph and is also an impressive piece of work.<sup>85</sup>

*The Bunyip Democracy* is founded on a broad base of historical discussion and a wide knowledge of the literature of political science and of parliamentary government. It has a comprehensive bibliography which has a few surprising omissions. The introduction by Tom Uren MP deserves explicit mention. Uren justly praises the work for tackling contentious questions, and for 'stirring the possum'. He opines that the book 'will make an important contribution in the democratic process of our parliament and our nation.' He also makes one perceptive criticism that pinpoints a certain uncertainty in the author's handling of his own role. This may explain the varying tone of the monograph, which is sometimes didactic, sometimes ironic or explicit, and sometimes witty. It is partly scholarly and partly polemical, with brilliant passages, especially in the earlier sections of the work. It is a tightly compacted work, containing much more than can be easily absorbed in one reading. Above all, it is full of perceptive remarks and insights that illuminate a difficult topic. For example, one might refer to his remarks on 'gendered architecture' (p. 84) which is one of the few occasions on which this idea appears in any of the literature reviewed in this paper.

The argument of Warden's monograph is complex and needs a depth of analysis which cannot be given here. One might, for example, follow up his remarks on p. 42 about the new building reflecting the concept of the citizen and how this causes us to 'reunderstand' existing institutions:

Parliament House is no longer just an expression of democracy and nation, but of citizenship, democracy and nation. So, while the original 1980s ideas inherently to be expressed in the building were democracy,

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<sup>85</sup> Warden, *A Bunyip Democracy*, op. cit., and 'Parliament, Democracy and Political Identity in Australia', *Papers on Parliament*, no. 25, 1995, pp. 47–64.

openness and identity, additional concepts must be added in the form of republicanism, participation and citizenship.

His remarks on the use of language are often penetrating and clinch his line of argument. In mentioning that 'the people who come to Parliament House are called *visitors*', Warden defines the theme of the 'people's house' (sometimes called the People's Palace) in convincing terms:

While the parliamentary security people comment anecdotally [sic] that visitors are impressed and have a clearer sense of value for money, there is no suggestion that the people have a sense of ownership of the Parliament or of Parliament House. They just visit it occasionally and pay taxes to foot the bill ...

One wonders how James Warden's formulation of matters of political identity and of parliamentary democracy might now be affected by the unequivocal results of the referendum on the republic. Political identity and political behaviour are two sides of a coin; it would be good to have more on the 'behaviour' side than we are offered. His work reflects some of his own political beliefs, but without any sense of ideological commitment as such. His understanding of 'political identity' is indebted to many sources and is rich in its implications. For the purposes of this paper, the great benefit of his work lies in the manifold way he links the New Parliament House, its style of architecture, its decoration and its setting, to broad political and social phenomena and to issues of political theory. It is a stimulating work to read and deserves a wide audience.

If a revised edition is produced it would be useful to have the author tell us how he personally experienced the New Parliament House. He presumably spent his Fellowship year in it, but reveals no personal impressions at all. Buildings influence patterns of behaviour, and these in turn may have political relevance. This is an intriguing topic which James Warden is well qualified to discuss.

To conclude this selective review of publications on the New and Permanent Parliament House, mention must be made of James Weirick's lengthy, informative article which is both a detailed literature review and a distillation of most of the lines of argument made about (and against) the project up to 1989.<sup>86</sup> It also introduces important additional arguments and observations. This article, published in the architectural and planning journal *Transition* is a far-ranging study of the project, based on a more elaborate context than is generally the case, but suffused with a polemical spirit. Weirick, head of the Landscape Unit at the Faculty of Environmental Design and Construction of the then Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, draws on both published and unpublished material to provide a rich analysis of the competition's parameters (the Canberra setting, the Griffin legacy), the elements of the winning design, the influence of modernist architectural tendencies, the nature of the American architectural profession and the career of Aldo Giurgola, and the characteristics of Australian parliamentary and political life. It is remarkable how much the author has covered in his article and how well he is able to illuminate the

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<sup>86</sup> Weirick, James. 'Don't you believe it: critical responses to the New Parliament House', *Transition*, issue 27/28, Summer/Autumn 1989, pp. 7-66.

undercurrents as well as the all too obvious main features of the project. His scope is as much cultural as architectural and the result is both stimulating and provocative. Weirick's attitude to Giurgola is at times puzzling because the tone seems resentful. It suggests that there may be some unstated reason for his negative remarks, although he quotes other writers who praise the architect. Weirick is strongly of the school of thought that believes that Australian values were unfulfilled by having an overseas architect determine the design of our national legislature. Remarks about the 'Canberra power elite' and its self-interested role in the competition's outcome need more convincing argumentation and documentation to support his case.

The author makes the following claim:

The inescapable reality of the New Parliament is that the curved walls, the entry portico, the long facades of the House and Senate offices, the block house mass of the Executive Wing and countless other elements suggest nothing so much as the suborned rationalism of Mussolini's Italy (p. 61).

This description implicitly raises questions rather than states facts. It is another example of the power of the project to arouse a 'poetic' strain where words convey attitudes rather than simple unambiguous meaning. But this is not to deny that there is ample reason to take Weirick's overall analysis seriously and to be grateful for its direct confrontation of interwoven cultural, historical, political and architectural themes. 'Don't You Believe It' is a major contribution to the debate on the merits of the Canberra project, reflecting attitudes of its time and possibly of Melbourne architectural circles. It will be interesting to see how it stands the test of time and maturing perceptions, and the evidence of actual experience.

### **Conclusion**

It is a truism that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. The same might be said about the merits of architecture. No one view is likely to command total agreement. While some views may be of greater authority than others, it is possibly the judgment of time that must be the final arbiter. In complex structures such as the New and Permanent Parliament House, we would need also to assess the experience of those for whom it is their working environment over a period of time. Some of these persons are members of Parliament who periodically spend concentrated periods of time in the building; others are permanent officers and staff who may spend most of their working lives in it. Empirical evidence would be useful to have in an area where so many opinions vie for attention.

One aspect of the building which has not been dealt with in this paper is the incorporation of ministerial offices in the new house. This policy decision is mentioned by Weirick, Indyk and Fewtrell in particular. The coupling of the legislative and the executive functions in one structure highlights the 'forbidden city' impression that was alluded to earlier. It may well be asked whether ordinary citizens are aware of the fact. If they are, they do not seem troubled by it. Perhaps developments in the parliamentary and political process may one day make the issue more important than it seems at present.

The time is now approaching when a fresh monograph, or better, a symposium, on the New and Permanent Parliament House might seem worth undertaking. The period of

euphoria as well as animosity and even resentment is past: but is it yet too soon for sober assessments to be attempted about the justification of the project, the design deficiencies which may have surfaced, and the influence of the building on the nation's political class and on parliamentary government? The question of cost-benefit to the nation needs some research as does the real rather than supposed effect of the sophisticated information and research facilities on the processes of scrutiny and policy assessment in the national legislature. The range of writings reviewed here suggest how complex such an assessment might be and how necessary it is to have a variety of viewpoints from more than a narrow group of participants. Consensus is hardly to be expected, but a clearer idea of what are legitimate arguments (rather than just personal impressions) might emerge. An acquaintance with even a few of the publications reviewed above will convince doubters that issues of genuine importance are at stake. We should likewise recognise how our perception of the role of public architecture has been greatly enhanced by the numerous writers on the New Parliament House. Their passion and strong attitudes cannot leave us unmoved, even if they do not necessarily invite agreement.

*(ii) Proposals for Extra Parliamentary Accommodation in Sydney*

### **Introduction**

The focus of this paper now changes by introducing a personal element. What follows is based on the author's personal experience and recollection of the planning procedures in the 1970s at the New South Wales Parliament, when major extensions to the existing Macquarie Street building were undertaken. While no claim for any special insights or privileged knowledge can be made, the reason for recording these matters is that there seem to be few writings by parliamentary officers of Australian state parliaments on the internal parliamentary planning and bureaucratic mechanisms in such major parliamentary projects. This is especially the case if we wish to know about procedures that are not related to the accommodation and facilities for the elected members and for ministerial needs. These receive a fair amount of notice and analysis, and are often the chief focus of select committee inquiries. Infrastructure for services and subordinate parliamentary activities tends to be relegated to back of stage. The one great exception seems to be information technology, now playing so great a role in parliamentary and electorate work. A good example is the article by T. Wharton<sup>87</sup> that gives a detailed insight into the procedures followed in the Federal Parliament in planning for the information technology and data processing requirements of the New Parliament House. These needs take in an ever-widening range of services and hardware. There is, on the other hand, little available on the negotiations or other means whereby requirements are determined for meeting the varied and sometimes diffuse needs of parliamentary services such as catering, cleaning, storage and archiving, public relations, educational facilities and infrastructure, library and parliamentary reporting needs, to mention a few.

### **The State Parliamentary Buildings: the Victorian Example**

Australia has nine parliament houses, most of which have been renovated or expanded in the last 25 years, yet strangely enough there is no overall survey of them. It is a curious, little remarked fact that the parliaments give very little ongoing information

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<sup>87</sup> Wharton, T.H.G. 'The Development of Computerized Information Systems for the New Parliament House in Canberra', *The Parliamentarian*, vol. 69, no. 2, April 1988, pp. 90–94.

on the important buildings in which they meet. Information is scattered in small pamphlets issued for visitors, but anyone seeking information in depth is likely to be faced with a difficult search. The state parliament houses deserve a scholarly monograph of their own because they are historically, politically and architecturally of intrinsic interest and importance. Dating for the most part from colonial times, these buildings form an integral part of the nation's cultural heritage. Their history is sometimes difficult to unravel; it is different in each case. They have also experienced controversy and vacillations on their future over the years. With the considerable changes in parliamentary needs (e.g. information technology, parliamentary education), and the altered ambit of government in the Twentieth Century, these buildings, erected for the quieter tempo of colonial legislatures, have become increasingly unsuitable for the modern functions they have to serve. Dissatisfaction has been expressed by members of most of them over decades, about the inadequacies under which they have to perform their parliamentary duties, but for the most part executives, long reluctant about upgrading, renovating or even re-building existing premises, have in recent decades taken the hard decisions. Major expenditure has occurred, for example, in Brisbane, Sydney, Perth, Hobart, and Darwin. In some of these cases, political courage was necessary for the state government to spend money on their parliamentary building. Such decisions are almost invariably unpopular with the media, who seem partisan rather than objective in their assessments. While public perception of parliamentary self-indulgence may be based largely on ignorance, it may be also argued that the parliaments are woefully deficient in making the public aware of the conditions under which members and parliamentary staff work and the way the parliamentary process is hampered by poor accommodation, and deficient facilities. The media rarely provide information on these matters, but they readily report items that cast a poor light on personal behaviour or party intrigues.

The case of the Parliament of Victoria is a topical example that shows some of the predictable and unpredictable occurrences associated with carrying out major work on a parliamentary building. The Victorian Parliament, with its impressive façade and its ideal central location in Melbourne, but its unfinished state, is acknowledged to be inadequate for the primary legislative and political tasks that it now carries out. These deficiencies have been recognised for many decades, but unlike almost all the other Australian states, the state of Victoria has been reluctant to grapple with a problem that is admittedly thorny. The completion of the building has never had a place on the priorities of the Executive until the election of the Kennett government.

Premier Jeff Kennett had expressed the view soon after taking office that the Victorian Parliament's heritage building, begun in 1856, but never completed and in particular still lacking a dome, should be finished. The dome seemed to receive more comment than it might intrinsically warrant; the example of what happened in Berlin might be considered in this respect. The parliamentary building suffers from a number of problems, chief among which is lack of adequate accommodation for members working in the new information age. It is an expensive building to maintain adequately, especially as regards the elaborate and ornate interior and the exterior. Provisional quarters for some members are available in a structure (nicknamed the 'chook house') in the parliamentary garden. At first all parties agreed on the need to complete the structure, and an estimate of 80 million dollars to carry out the project seemed settled. This 'gentleman's agreement' did not last, however, when disputes about the quarrying of stone to finish the building led to some industrial and political

agitation. In 1996 the Premier said that the withdrawal of Labor Party support had scuttled the project. Legislation to abolish the Parliament House Completion Authority was enacted in 1997. During the discussions about the building project, estimates of costs rose from 80 to 230 million dollars. This naturally caused considerable public and parliamentary disquiet.

New ingredients were added to the debate on the project by Premier Kennett suggesting that the site of the Parliament might be moved to the western suburbs at Jolimont. Another site at Melbourne's Federation Square had also been mentioned at one stage. Finally, with the defeat in 1999 of the Kennett government, the idea of completing the building seems to have been dropped completely, although the inadequacies of the existing premises remain. It should be noted that the Victorian Parliamentary Library, possibly the finest and most valuable of all the state parliamentary libraries, has long suffered from lack of proper accommodation for its irreplaceable collections. Outside storage has been one palliative that has been tried, but the break-up of the collection has started and is an inevitable outcome of the failure of the political masters to resolve an issue that can scarcely ever be publicly popular.<sup>88</sup> The idea of moving the legislature to a new location, one of the few new ideas advanced in Australia about the problems of existing parliament houses, is a reasonable option if one considers economic, demographic and geographic factors. Also the way people and government work is now radically changed by the use of information technology. One day 'e-lancing' (freelance working by computer from locations not necessarily in a central office) might have a counterpart in a form of 'pe-lancing' (parliamentary e-lancing), but this is an idea ahead of its time. Other options might be explored as well, but first the objectives being sought have to be determined. This is generally the aspect that is least satisfactory in discussions about parliament houses.

The Parliament of Queensland is now carrying out extensive renovation to its old Parliament House, built in 1868. A ten-year project to replace the building's outer perimeter with fresh sandstone began in 1993. In the 24-storey annexe, built in 1977, refurbishment has been proceeding for some time. The annexe building is having trouble with the lifts, the air conditioning and with power costs. It too is reported to be short of accommodation for parliamentary committees and other needs not envisaged in the original brief. In 1992 Speaker Fouras advocated 'a three-floor extension' to the annexe building (*Courier Mail*, May 22, 1992). Another problem has been discovered in part of the historical original building where termites are active. The parliamentary annexe is unlike most other Australian parliamentary buildings in that it also provides overnight accommodation for members, including the Premier's penthouse suite. The 1977 building was notable for setting the standard for its time among state parliamentary buildings. Its design was much studied by visiting members from other parliaments in Australia, including members of the New South Wales Parliament. In another respect Queensland has set a standard: this is in the care it has devoted to the preservation of the heritage aspects of the old Parliament House. The interior, with its fine colonial furniture and craftsmanship, and the famous O'Donovan library collection, are all maintained as a showpiece for the state and for the nation.

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<sup>88</sup> I am grateful to officers of the Victorian Parliamentary Library for a number of newspaper clippings and references on the completion project.

## **The New South Wales Parliamentary Building: Developments in 1999**

In July 1999 the New South Wales Public Works Department held a special workshop of members of Parliament, parliamentary officers and staff from the Department to discuss planning strategies for proposed new accommodation for the New South Wales Parliament. For the purposes of a historical background a paper was presented by R.L. Cope, entitled 'Parliamentary Accommodation. A Personal Record of Experience and Views'.<sup>89</sup> It attempted to outline the main planning procedures followed in the 1970s when the new building was built; it also reviewed both the successes and failures of the planning results. The paper concluded with suggestions of how a successful planning process might be achieved in the complex context of the political and institutional culture of parliaments in Australia. It seems generally the case that this culture is too little understood by those outsiders who come to have dealings with the parliamentary institution. This in turns leads to frustrations and misunderstandings for consultants, architects and technologists. The account in this section draws heavily on this earlier paper.

No official announcement has yet been made concerning the Executive's decisions about what is to be done with regard to parliamentary needs in Sydney. Indications point to larger decisions being considered, embracing a far-reaching re-development of the Macquarie Street area. An integrated program taking in legislative, executive and judicial needs seems the option most favoured at present. Of course, public criticism of a project just for parliamentary purposes, especially after the 1980 building project was supposed to solve needs for decades to come, will be dampened if the scheme adopted goes far beyond parliamentary needs. Plans have arisen earlier for re-developing the Macquarie Street area, and we may also be reminded of the town-planning concerns that arose in Bonn when parliamentary accommodation was under review.

The historical context of the New South Wales parliamentary buildings must be briefly outlined in order to provide an adequate understanding of some deep-seated attitudes about the buildings that continue to have influence, even in the present day.

### **Historical Aspects of the New South Wales Parliamentary Buildings**

The New South Wales Parliament occupies part of what was, in colonial times, the Rum Hospital, dating from 1811–1819. It is consequently a building of considerable heritage, historical and cultural importance in Australia. It is one of the very few buildings from that era which has been in continuous use since its erection. Its inadequacy for parliamentary purposes, particularly after bicameral representative government was inaugurated in the late 1850s, soon became apparent, and led to an architectural competition being called in 1861 for an entirely new structure. An award for the prize-winning entry went to an architect in Dublin (Henry Lynn), whose neo-gothic extravaganza was fortunately never built. Succeeding decades gave rise to sporadic calls for a new building, while the existing building underwent innumerable ad hoc additions and renovations. Parliamentary debates are full of humorous and caustic comments by members on the conditions of their accommodation and working facilities. Little sensitivity can be detected in the way the Parliament used a building of such intrinsic heritage significance until very recent times. It is probably true that

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<sup>89</sup> Cope, R. 'Parliamentary Accommodation. A Personal Record of Experience and Views'. [Typescript, 1999.] Copies available from rcope@ozemail.com.au.



even now parliamentary recognition is still deficient of the burden of responsibility that occupancy of this building and its historical site imposes. As former Senator Walsh noted in his autobiography, we are not rich enough in cultural heritage to be able to ignore or undervalue what we have.

Because of the vacillations of successive parliaments and governments, the flexibility for re-development of the parliamentary site grew steadily circumscribed. When the Mitchell Library wing was opened in 1910, and the Public (later State) Library of New South Wales was built in the 1930s hard by the parliamentary site, the Parliament was hemmed in by the State Library with its ever-growing collections and needs, and on the other side by Sydney Hospital with its needs to expand. It also transpired that part of the land the Parliament occupied belonged in fact to the State Library. It was ultimately returned to the Library's control when the major multi-storey new State Library building was erected in 1988 on Macquarie Street. The proposed height of the new State Library had to be amended so that it would not be higher than the adjacent Parliament House: symbolism was of concern here.

Over the years various departmental and select committee reports were made, but yielded no tangible results. In 1955, Douglas Darby MP, member for Manly, suggested that the Parliament be removed to Bathurst. This suggestion, at the time thought rather fanciful, is to-day, with government departments being decentralised to locations outside Sydney, not as extreme as it formerly was. The pioneering research publication of the New South Wales Parliamentary Library entitled *New Parliament Buildings, Sydney: Proposal from 1856 to 1969* (second ed, 1970) is still the best source for locating an account of views and proposals on parliamentary accommodation. Reference should also be made to the illustrated book *Australia's First Parliament* (1987), issued to commemorate completion of the new parliamentary building and the refurbishment of the historical Rum Hospital section of the old building.

### **Memories of New South Wales State Parliamentary Planning Processes in the 1970s**

When the decision was finally made to proceed with a new building for parliamentary accommodation, the Parliament set up a Joint Committee of members to deliberate on the needs and details of the program. This Committee called on submissions from interested parties, and as Parliamentary Librarian of the time the present writer contributed views. Individual departmental heads and their staffs were called on to prepare their own specifications and to discuss these with the project architect, Andrew Andersons. The Parliamentary Committee maintained overall control, but in practice left much decision-making about matters of detail to Andrew Andersons, to whom much credit for the building must be given, and who had the expertise and taste to guide the Parliamentary Committee on the overall concept of the project and on matters of decoration, furnishing and presentation.

There was from the parliamentary side little co-ordination between parliamentary departments and services. Each department did its own planning without consulting other departments or having any insight into what others had in mind. The co-ordination lay in the hands of the project architect who had to show a strong degree of negotiating and diplomatic skill since there were undercurrents of competitiveness and suspicion among some of the key parliamentary officers. The chief motivation

behind much of the in-house planning of the time seems to have been to do away with the existing and long-suffered deficiencies of the building. This reactive character characterised all the planning of members and staffs. In other words, it was the responsibility of the project architect to provide any vision of the future or consideration of long-term developments. The lack of expertise or any attempt at training of parliamentary staff to equip them to carry out the elaborate and time-consuming tasks necessary for planning a major new building reveals how unsophisticated and even naive Parliament's own efforts were at the time. This reinforces the remarks above about the key role of the planning architect. Without his creativity and professionalism the project could have turned out to be yet another 'official building' lacking any distinction.

The chief focus of planning was to provide parliamentarians with better personal accommodation and facilities than they had ever enjoyed in New South Wales. In the light of what has happened since 1980, it is evident that the understanding of the time about what constitutes essential working facilities was too narrow. Too much was dictated by what was wrong in the past, rather than by any thought of what might be needed in the future. Perhaps the desire for more 'glamour' and prestige in the new building, fuelled by the splendid example of the new parliamentary annexe in Brisbane, was at the cost of what the building should provide for basic services, storage and upkeep costs.

### **The New Parliamentary Building's Features**

The site's grave limitations, with two 'immovable objects' on either side of it (Sydney Hospital, and the State Library) and the heritage nature of the old building with its Rum Hospital origins, were major constraints. Premier Kennett's suggestion that the Victorian Parliament should move to an entirely new location never found any echo in Sydney, where this option seemed then unthinkable. The site continues to have serious limitations, but the lack of political vision over decades has reduced options to very few; earlier bad decisions are now all too obvious and increasingly expensive to the state.

The new building was obviously superior in every respect to what had existed before. It provided individual office accommodation, dining facilities, an indoor swimming pool, and underground parking which might be described as relatively luxurious in comparison with earlier times. Special features such as indoor gardens, the ample and architecturally striking fountain vestibule and the judicious display of artworks made the building something of a 'museum-showpiece' for Sydney. The building received a great measure of public and professional acclaim and was seen as being of international standard for a legislative building. Indeed, the architectural authorities had stated that the building, designed as an organic unit, should not be altered without their sanction and approval. This was gradually disregarded or circumvented within the Parliament, which gradually started altering here and there until some real damage was done to the initial concept of the project. Here we see the unequal relationship that exists between architects and Parliament.

One aspect of the project architect's overall planning that caused misgivings at the time was the decision that the new building should contain uniform furnishing and outfitting and that little of the Nineteenth Century cedar furnishings should be used.

There were some concessions made to this decision in specific instances, but a great quantity of material was simply removed from the site when demolition of some parts was carried out. This does not reflect well on Parliament's responsibility as the custodian of the state's heritage consciousness.

The standards set by the new building have proved impossible to sustain. Visitors would not be aware of this fact, but those who have or who still continue to work in it would have experienced the decline. Much of this is the result of political developments, such as more committees and hence more staff to service them, the growing presence of executive staff and control within Parliament House, and severe budgetary constraints affecting the maintenance of services at the former level.

The new building provided good quarters for the New South Wales Parliamentary Press Gallery. Originally this accommodation was cost free, but it is understood that rentals may now be charged. The location of these quarters within the building has been a difficulty since press personnel, at best a group whose job makes them liable to 'cut corners' and set their own standards of behaviour, could gain access to almost the entire building. The manner of their use of the refreshment room facilities led on occasions to comment because of the behaviour of a few media representatives. The power of the media influenced aspects of the planning of the new building because of their strong pressure group presence. Some parliamentarians as individuals have mixed feelings about the privileges and access enjoyed in Parliament House by media representatives, but the attitude of political parties tends to be more cautious. Obviously both groups have an interdependent relationship and each lives off the other.

The parliamentary dining rooms—there are three as well as a staff cafeteria—were an instant success, but they have not been economically viable. As long as Treasury subsidies continued to maintain them (and the rather special prices charged for meals), there were no worries, but those times are passed. The dining facilities are now often used by organisations and groups for private functions for which the Parliament receives payment. The parliamentary dining rooms in Canberra and Melbourne are experiencing financial difficulties and this causes us to ask whether something is fundamentally wrong or unrealistic in the planning of these services. It is a subject on which it is not easy to find much information or objective discussion.

The theatrette in the new building was an excellent addition and has made meetings with public attendance possible. But the location of the theatrette is now proving unsuitable in times where security issues and control of the movement of people in the building require monitoring in a way not so vital when the feature was planned in the 1970s. A similar situation exists with the location of the Parliamentary Post Office; the public reach it by crossing the entire ground floor entrance lobby.

Parking has been mentioned above. It has proved a continuing worry and a matter on which the rules and guidelines are subject to continuing trouble. Members have been hard to discipline on their entitlements, and cases where family members wish to park at Parliament House are well known to staff. Since members now must pay for this entitlement, it seems some of them believe that they now 'own' a continuing parking spot and this in turn leads to dispute and policing difficulties. Originally parking in the 1980s was available to members and staff. The pressure from the executive for

parking has proved irresistible and staff parking is now considerably reduced. The parking issue highlights the inadequacies of the site where there is the poorest possible public vehicular access. It is possibly worse than in any other Australian parliament.

Finally, the planning of the building shows deficiencies with regard to the public's presence. The space available for public exhibitions is poor and there is a lack of adequate cloakroom and toilet facilities. This is especially evident when groups of young schoolchildren visit the legislature.

In a fully air-conditioned building, the quality of the control of the atmosphere is vital. A member of Parliament has publicly stated (July 2000) that her intention to resign from Parliament has as one cause health problems stemming from smoking by members penetrating the air-conditioning system. Although the parliamentary workplace is said to be a 'smoke-free zone', there is reason to believe that some members disregard this regulation. Although this is not a design fault of the building itself, it is worth noting that fully air-conditioned premises cause unexpected problems since they are dependent on technology functioning according to specified norms. If there are power failures, lifts and other systems are affected, and fail-safe mechanisms may not be as reliable as they are supposed to be. There is plenty of evidence of this happening in Sydney, to look no further.

Previous sections of this paper have mentioned that the nature of parliamentary culture is not widely understood by outsiders. Members of parliament represent a cross-section of the population and their patterns of behaviour are correspondingly varied and alter with the influx of new members. There is a common core of interests and attitudes to members as a class, but the variables of behaviour and individual needs cannot be easily generalised. Architectural solutions which are on too elevated a plane are not likely to be widely successful in meeting the diverse range of needs of the parliamentary clients. There must always be tensions between the ideals of architects and the pragmatic concerns of members of parliament. To resolve those tensions becomes one of the challenges for those designing parliamentary accommodation. Of course, provision must be made in architectural terms to adapt to changing needs. Too much 'set in concrete' will prove a mistake in the long (or even short) term.

### **Works of Art and Other Collections in the Parliament of New South Wales**

Like the other parliaments described in this paper, the Parliament of New South Wales had works by artists and craftsmen provided in its new building. A great many were specially commissioned, while others were purchased. The result added a sense of prestige and culture to the building. The choice of items acquired seems to have been largely in the hands of the project architect. Works included oil paintings, prints, the specially commissioned courtyard fountain designed by Robert Woodward, ceramics and weavings, and items of appliqué embroidery. While the quality of the prints which were acquired for members' and officers' rooms was high, those actually placed on walls in individuals' rooms were not always acceptable and were exchanged for others. In some cases, members or their staffs simply privately swapped with others the prints they did not like; this led to problems with the inventory. In the case of one prominent oil painting—the portrait of Patrick White by Brett Whiteley—it was not regarded kindly by some influential politicians and for a

period it simply 'disappeared'. The Judy Cassab portrait of Robert Askin, which was the property of the Parliament before the new building was built, continues to suffer the same fate even to-day. An interesting side-light on parliamentary collections is given in an article in the *Sydney Daily Telegraph* (2 June 2000) concerning the purchase by a no longer serving President of the Legislative Council of exceptionally expensive silver tableware for his private dining room. The newspaper reports the items cost more than 60 000 dollars. Presiding officers do not publish annual accounts of their administration and are in some respects shielded from accountability. The present example is perhaps extreme, but how are we to know?

These few instances underline the difficulties that can arise in selecting and acquiring works of art acceptable to the tastes of such a disparate (and changing) group of persons such as members of Parliament. Since they rightly regard the parliamentary building as their home, they feel justified in suiting their own taste with regard to decoration and furniture. The aspirations of architects to create a stylistic, uniform and harmonious decor has little chance of success if the members do not feel comfortable with the result. Parliamentarians are not likely to be easily bound by rules in this and other matters.

One great oversight of the new building in Sydney was a reflection of the spirit of the time; the failure to include more than a token piece or two of Aboriginal art. The writer of these lines had pushed hard to have in the Parliamentary Library a ceramic mural by the Aboriginal artist Thancoupie, but this never came to pass. This is still a matter of regret. The New Parliament House in Canberra has fortunately been more enterprising in this regard and acted accordingly. What is also troubling is that the ceramic pieces (by Janet Mansfield, for example) bought for the new building in Sydney have been given scant regard and are no longer on display. Some seem to have been broken. In retrospect, it seems ill-advised to have placed them on tables in open areas. The Parliament is a working environment with heavy movement of persons during session. It is not as controlled or disciplined an environment as one finds in museums and galleries, and can consequently not offer the same level of care or respect for works of art and decorations.

The new building was erected originally in response to long cries from the Parliamentary Library for adequate accommodation for its extensive culturally and politically important collections. In the upshot, the planning of the new library was at a late stage gravely impaired by a personal decision of the Premier of the time to move the location of the parliamentary theatre. This affected ceiling heights in the library stack underneath; consequently the stack did not have the space originally requested, that is, space enough to house 250,000 volumes. This change is not mentioned in the commemorative book on the completion of the project, but on p. 77 project architect, Andrew Andersons, states:

Work on the sketch plans proceeded satisfactorily in 1974, but in 1975 was subject to extensive change by Premier Lewis who required the inclusion of a television studio and associated facilities in the building. At

the same time, [the Clerks of both Houses] obtained more generous facilities to accommodate the growth in Parliamentary staff numbers.<sup>90</sup>

The Library started life in its new location with a potential deficit of space that became increasingly problematical. This is not the place to go further into the fate of the Parliamentary Library and its collections of heritage value.<sup>91</sup> The question should be raised, however, whether parliaments should properly become collectors of works of art, specimens of craftsmanship and collections of books, other than what is needed for pragmatic reasons and for day to day information and research requirements. What is now increasingly clearer is that the costs and responsibilities (not to mention the expertise, and levels of appreciation and historical knowledge) for parliaments to be collectors on other than a limited scale are no longer as easily met as was formerly the case. The nature of the parliamentary institution has also changed and may change even further, further affecting the rationale and fate of such collections and the investment of public money in them. Such collections are in essence a reflection of Nineteenth Century ideals and mentality. Their validity in parliaments in the Twenty-first Century is surely ripe for re-assessment.

### **Conclusion**

Parliamentary buildings are generally built to last more or less indefinitely. The same used to be true of other major public structures. However, the sale and demolition of the multi-storey State Office Block in Sydney, built by the government to house most of its public service departments only some three decades ago, shows that this need not remain the case. It seems, in retrospect, folly to build a parliamentary building designed to last for 200 years, as is the case in Canberra. The level of continuing public investment required, the impossibility of foreseeing changes in politics, in technology and in social needs, are all at variance with building on this basis. This is a debatable matter, but one that would benefit from closer analysis of basic attitudes that are becoming irrelevant to present-day realities.

The fact that the New South Wales Parliament is no longer adequately housed and resourced in a building of such recent vintage (planned in the 1970s and occupied in stages from 1980 onwards) should give us pause. But based on the author's memories of the planning procedures of the Parliament at that time, it must be conceded that there is much to suggest that short-term perspectives, political rather than parliamentary priorities, and some self-interest will determine how planning is to be undertaken. Perhaps this is to adopt too pessimistic an outlook? Certainly the range of options available to architects and planners at the existing Macquarie Street site is very limited. They were limited in the 1970s, as Andrew Andersons' text already quoted makes abundantly clear. In the year 2000 they are even further limited.

To overcome these limitations calls for creative thinking able to envisage new and different roles for parliamentary representation in coming decades. If, as we hear

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<sup>90</sup> *Australia's First Parliament: Parliament House New South Wales*. Sydney, New South Wales Parliament, 1987. Illustrations of Henry Lynn's 1861 prize-winning design for a new Parliament House are reproduced, pp. 42–43.

<sup>91</sup> R.L. Cope. 'If special libraries are disappearing, why are parliamentary libraries surviving?' *Australian Library Journal*, vol. 49, no. 4, November 2000, pp. 307–326.

nowadays, the American Congress needs ‘reinventing’, so does the New South Wales Parliament.

Changes in the Australian polity are occurring at a rapid rate, with political parties feeling the pinch. More women are being elected to parliament, but parliamentary traditions and arrangements are not noticeably geared to this fact. The question of ‘gendered architecture’ becomes an issue. More Independents are being elected. Their accommodation and service needs throw up challenges, especially if there is a need to keep the Independents housed apart from other members. But beyond these obvious developments, there is the slowly growing momentum for public involvement and participation in the processes of consultation. Talk of participatory democracy has not yet led to many concrete results, but as Carmen Lawrence advocated in a recent speech:

It is possible to do much better [with parliamentary government], to open up decision making, to involve more MPs and engage the wider community, to actually thrash out the issues in real debates [and not just the existing empty rituals]. Australia was once considered the ‘democratic laboratory’ of the world. It’s time to conduct a few new experiments to revive our body politic and embrace principles openness, accessibility and accountability.<sup>92</sup>

These are interesting ideas, even if they sound utopian and lack concrete detail. They deserve public discussion and input not only from the politically aware but also from a spectrum of social interests, including architects. Perhaps it is time for Australian parliaments, especially those of the states and territories, to look in fresh directions away from the strong models in Washington and Westminster. Have these models served their purpose? Should we look for new Australian-grown models or, at least, formulate new aspirations, which may well require some re-thinking on the score of parliamentary architecture. This idea is developed a little more fully in the last section of this paper.

### *(iii) Political Communication and Parliamentary Buildings in Australia*

The reviews of the various parliamentary buildings touched on in this paper make it clear that architects and parliamentarians share a belief that the buildings play a role in the process of political communication. The role is often formulated in rather elevated or abstract terms, using vague words such as ‘symbol’. These buildings can indeed be seen to serve symbolic and representational purposes with which the citizens of the country can identify. But other possibilities of political communication can be discovered as potentially available in and through parliamentary buildings. One relates to the educational and information resources of the parliamentary research and information services.

In the paper referred to above, this author has argued that parliamentarians are ‘over-resourced’ as regards access to information in comparison to the rest of society. The

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<sup>92</sup> Lawrence, Carmen. ‘Renewing Democracy: Can Women Make a Difference?’ Address to the Sydney Institute, 17 August 2000. Available at <http://www.carmenlawrence.com/says/papers/sydneyinstiti.htm>.

resources at their disposal are abundant and heavily used by them during the limited sessional periods when parliaments meet. Should not those resources, not duplicated elsewhere, be made accessible to the community the parliamentarians serve? Such an idea is not new, although it is novel in Australia. The German Bundestag Library planned a special reading room with separate entrance for the public in the design for its new quarters in Bonn. Because of the creation of Berlin as the new seat of the government and the legislature, this proposal did not proceed as planned in Bonn, and this writer is not certain of what is to happen in Berlin. The case for the Australian parliaments enlarging the access of the public—under appropriate conditions and safeguards—to resources built up at public expense is not as revolutionary as it might appear. The benefits are easily explained and the improvements that could flow from the idea to the image and role of parliament in a time of ‘participatory democracy’ are not hard to grasp. Implications for parliamentary architecture spring to mind. It will be interesting to follow the course of consultation and decision-making to be adopted in New South Wales if the proposal to increase parliamentary accommodation, or more likely, to redevelop the official enclave in Macquarie Street, Sydney. Architects will, whatever the outcome, be assuredly heavily involved.

*(iv) Concluding Remarks*

Consideration of parliamentary buildings throws open a range of questions about important political, social, cultural and architectural issues. A few of them have been touched on in this paper, and reference to many other writings and views on the topic have been given on the way. Political scientists and public commentators in Australia have been aware of the rich implications of this topic, but there is still much more work to do to define the topic more closely. In particular, the state parliaments are worthy of far closer attention than they have hitherto received.

One of the conclusions that may be drawn from the account of the Australian parliaments is that their occupiers, sometimes called the ‘temporary kings’, are, as a class, remiss in keeping the public adequately informed about the quality of their ‘housekeeping’. The amounts of public money spent on these buildings and the services and staff they house are not inconsiderable, but to obtain current information on the cost of upkeep of the buildings and a range of other related questions is difficult. Despite the provision of annual reports (of varying degrees of value and accountability) by parliamentary authorities and departments, there is no report published devoted to the actual parliamentary building and its preservation and use. It is almost impossible to obtain an informative and current picture of the present position of these buildings. This is not to suggest any impropriety on the part of the parliamentary authorities, but rather a lack of awareness of the degree of public interest their houses, the ‘people’s house’, arouse.

In 2000 this does not seem an unreasonable request, nor is it one difficult or expensive to satisfy. Australian parliament houses deserve their own periodic reports published for public benefit and general interest of all. The presiding officers of the Australian parliaments will perform a valuable service to the community if they produce reports of this kind.