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A REVIEW AND DISCUSSION ON THE SITING OF
THE NEW AND PERMANENT PARLIAMENT HOUSE.

BASIC PAPER

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DEFENCE, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY.

A Review and Discussion on the Siting of the New and
Permanent Parliament House.

I. Background to the Building of the Present Parliament
House

Part of Walter Burley Griffin's design for Canberra is shown in Fig. 1. The Houses of Parliament are clearly drawn in as situated on Camp Hill together with various administrative buildings within the "Parliamentary Triangle" enclosed by Kings Avenue, Commonwealth Avenue and Lake Burley Griffin. An extended triangle is created by Capital Hill (old name Kurrajong Hill), City Hill and the Australian-American Memorial.

The "land axis" is most important in Griffin's plan and runs between Capital Hill and Mt. Ainslie, a distance of $2\frac{1}{4}$ miles. Both Capital Hill and Camp Hill have been variously interpreted as the peak or climax of the parliamentary triangle. The lake forms the obvious "water axis".

After winning the Canberra design competition of 1912, Griffin was appointed Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction. In 1913 he produced a Report Explanatory which more or less enlarged on his original scheme. An international competition for the design of Parliament House itself was launched on June 30, 1914. The young Commonwealth had no great confidence in its ability to finance a suitably

impressive building; the competing architects were advised to design a shell or core which could be suitably embellished at a later date. Accommodation was the prime initial requirement. Although the competition was revived briefly in 1916, the outbreak of war in 1914 led to its eventual abandonment.

The next approach to the building of Parliament House was made in 1921 when the Government of the day appointed three senior public servants, a consulting architect and a consulting engineer as members of a Federal Capital Advisory Committee. Griffin himself refused an invitation to be a member. The setting up of the Advisory Committee was a significant move away from the earlier international approach, and placed the initiative strongly in administrative hands. In its first report (July, 1921), the committee suggested that a temporary Parliament building be constructed on the land axis but "clear of the site for the Permanent Parliament House" (Fig. 1.) set aside by Griffin. Because of outstanding war debts at that time, a complete full-scale permanent House was considered too expensive. Such a project had not even been envisaged in the original design competition, as mentioned above.

The Advisory Committee was asked by the Government to establish Canberra "as quickly as possible and at the minimum of cost". These requirements, though desirable in themselves, could hardly be expected to produce an inspiring nucleus for Canberra as its designer intended. By 1923, the

Department of Works and Railways (well represented on the Advisory Committee by its Director-General) had completed a design sketch for a "provisional" Parliament House; this, together with the recommendation of building the House just below Camp Hill in front of Griffin's site, was submitted to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, which then heard a great deal of evidence from fifty witnesses including prominent architects, town planners, surveyors, engineers and Members of Parliament.

The most contentious issues raised in the inquiry were:

- (1) the Government's failure to reopen its design competition after the war,
- (2) the recommendation to build a provisional Parliament House rather than a permanent nucleus,
- (3) the site chosen for it right on Griffin's main axis.

Apart from the smaller financial outlay involved, the main advantage seen for the provisional Parliament House was the simplicity and therefore the rapidity of its construction.

From some of the evidence, it appears that there were at the time strong forces against the site of Canberra for the national capital. Certainly the war had slowed matters, but the delay in moving the Australian Parliament to Canberra was fast

becoming intolerable to its advocates in 1923, twenty-two years after Federation. Many submissions to the Public Works Committee therefore favoured the rapid provision of accommodation above other considerations.

The Public Works Committee also covered many aspects of siting of the proposed provisional and permanent Houses of Parliament with respect to Griffin's plan. Even at that time (1923), Griffin's choice of Camp Hill rather than Capital Hill was questioned by architects as well as others. Those who saw the building of a provisional edifice as inevitable suggested two possible sites for it. One was the Knoll, about one-fifth of a mile north of Camp Hill. While commanding a fine view, this site obviously bore no relation to Griffin's plan. Again, although it was suggested the building on the Knoll could be converted to other uses later on, the revelation that earthworks associated with such a building would be expensive caused the final rejection of the site. It is of interest that the designer of the present Parliament House (Government architect J.S. Murdoch) favoured the Knoll site over the present site.

The lower Camp Hill (present) site was favoured by members of the Federal Capital Advisory Committee because it was in harmony with Griffin's land axis. Differences of opinion arose as to what should be done with the provisional building, once the permanent House was erected. One Advisory Committee member felt that the very placing of a

provisional building on the axis would ensure its prompt demolition when the time came, while others claimed on somewhat doubtful evidence that a permanent House on Camp Hill would be able to overlook the former House across to Mt. Ainslie. No wonder Griffin complained:

"To build the provisional building just below Camp Hill would absolutely destroy the whole idea of the Government group, which is the dominating feature of the Federal capital; it would be like filling a front yard full of outhouses, the walls of which would be the frontages of the buildings facing the yard. It would never be pulled down; history teaches us that such things are not changed, the pressure being too great to allow it. Sentiment would play some part in preventing its destruction, but the primary reason would be economy".

So Griffin felt that his chosen site at Camp Hill would be hindered by the provisional building, itself unlikely to be removed. He, like most of the other interested architects of the day, favoured building a permanent nucleus which could be completed later.

In its Report, the Public Works Committee more or less left the difficult decisions concerning siting and permanence to the Government, which promptly accepted the cheaper and faster alternative. Of course in doing this, the Government offered no final solution to housing Parliament, only delaying

the controversy until the present time.

II. Recent History of Site Deliberations in and out of Parliament (1955-1973).

The 1955 Report of the Senate Select Committee on the Development of Canberra contains a lively history of the National Capital with many useful insights still applicable today. Although the great depression and Second World War had greatly interfered with Canberra's intended growth, the Committee found it "absurd" that the so-called Administrative Block "should in 1959 be the only permanent building in the Government triangle". Furthermore, there were (and still are) in Canberra "buildings so unsuited to grace a national capital that those responsible for them plead as a mitigation of their offensiveness that they will be screened from the public gaze by trees, as though the function of trees were to hide ugliness, not to enhance and create beauty". Even in 1973, a temporary building was erected in Civic.

Although the Senate Committee gave its full approval to the general principles of Griffin's plan, it was felt that the site for the permanent Parliament House should be changed from Camp Hill to Capital Hill because of the dominance of the latter. Until the question was resolved, it was requested that no other development on Capital Hill be initiated. It was also recommended that the administration and planning of Canberra be carried out by one Authority rather than by a multiplicity of Government Departments.

In 1957 a general statement entitled "The Case for a Permanent (Parliament) Building" was issued by the President and the Speaker. They, like the Senate Committee, called for a change of plans to enable a Parliament House to be erected on Capital Hill. Also in sympathy with the Committee, they strongly emphasised the symbolic associations of a permanent House with Australia's heritage of stable parliamentary government. The present Parliament House was described as overcrowded, low in height, plain and above all, designed to be provisional.

Also in 1957, the controversy over the respective merits of Camp Hill versus Capital Hill was further enlarged by the conclusions of Sir William Holford, an eminent British town planner who had been invited to study the siting problem by the Commonwealth Government. Looking ahead to the day when the Molonglo River running through Canberra would become an ornamental lake, Holford came out strongly in favour of a site of the edge of the lake and in line with the main land axis. His ideas were set down in a paper entitled "Observations on the Future Development of Canberra". The lakeside site was accepted by the then new NCDC and also by Cabinet in July 1958.

The next move by Parliament as to its permanent housing came in 1963, when the House of Representatives created a Select Committee to examine the existing state of accommodation. Without having

to emphasize need for a monumental or symbolic building for Parliament, this Committee stressed the problem of overcrowding. The need for space being truly urgent, it was decided to go ahead with extensions to the present building. As the amelioration of extensions would only be short term, encouragement was given to begin a new Parliament House regardless of other building operations on the old one.

Originally the then President, Sir Alister McMullin, had indicated with the Speaker in 1957 that Capital Hill was the site of choice; his "Observations on the Permanent Parliament House" of 1965, however, appear to accept the lakeside site as the final decision.

That the lakeside site was indeed not a foregone conclusion was made very clear in the House of Representatives by the then Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, in 1965, and later in 1967 by Mr Holt when they agreed to permit a free vote on the site for members of the Joint Select Committee on the New and Permanent Parliament House. On advice by the NCDC, who were still in favour of the lakeside site and planning accordingly, the Committee issued a "Special Report on the Site" in 1968 which reaffirmed the lakeside site by a vote of 11 to 3. On being put to the vote in Parliament in 1968, however, this initial recommendation by the Joint Committee suffered a rejection by both Houses. Parliament thus voted against the view of the President,

the Speaker, the Prime Minister (then Mr Gorton), the Leader of the Opposition (then Mr Whitlam), eight other Joint Committee members, three separate Cabinet decisions, and the NCDC, over the site for Parliament. As to the details of the resolutions and voting, the House of Representatives recorded a majority of 11 against the lakeside site, and on the voices referred a study of Camp Hill versus Capital Hill back to the Joint Committee. The Senate was of even firmer opinion, voting strongly for Capital Hill with a majority of 36, but consenting to the Camp/Capital Hill alternatives being returned to the Committee.

By April 1969 the Joint Committee on the New and Permanent Parliament House had examined a study by NCDC of the two remaining sites on the axis and had completed a new Report in two volumes. Submissions had been invited from Members of Parliament and the public, including several architects and town planners. The Report recommended that the present Parliament House be demolished and that a permanent House be erected on Camp Hill. This was the site which the NCDC and many of the architects had favoured. Two Committee members prepared a dissenting report which favoured Capital Hill.

Upon referral to Parliament for approval, there was again failure to reach agreement on the Committee's recommendations. While the House of Representatives accepted the Camp Hill site by a majority of 9, the Senate refused to rescind its

earlier preference for Capital Hill and also voted against a joint meeting of the two Houses to resolve the matter. The Government intervened at this juncture by announcing an Executive decision to build on Camp Hill. On the argument that the siting of Parliament should be a Parliamentary decision and not an Executive decision, and also that an appropriations bill for the building would eventually have to be passed through both Houses in any case, the Senate formally declared its disapproval of this intervention.

By 1970 the Joint Committee had sent a delegation abroad to study the parliament houses of other countries and had collected together much useful material on accommodation requirements for a new Parliament House. Although no external design features were detailed, an initial floor space approximately three times that of the present Parliament House was envisaged. Meanwhile a ring road around Capital Hill to relieve the traffic pressure from the Woden Valley and elsewhere was being built by the NCDC.

With regard to the Parliament House, an NCDC feasibility study was circulated in 1973 which showed in more detail a possible means of construction without too much disturbance of the workings of Parliament. The key element in the proposed scheme was that the building be completed on Camp Hill in stages, a first stage to be finished by 1979. This would be used in conjunction with the present House and would consist of offices to serve pressing accommodation requirements of Members and Senators together with new refreshment rooms. In the second stage, the

so-called obsolete area at the rear of the present Parliament House would be demolished. At the final stage, all of the old building would be removed. The approximate cost for the new Parliament House was set at \$75 million, the first stage accounting for \$24 million of this.

So far, the reaction of Parliament to this scheme has been inconclusive. Although the Minister for Urban and Regional Development, Mr Uren, urged the House of Representatives to favour the Camp Hill site, a motion was carried by a majority of 9 merely to meet jointly with the Senate to decide over the site. It should be noted that those who voted against naming specifically Camp Hill in the resolution (Mr Uren's amendment) were not necessarily voting against Camp Hill, but may have wished the question to be decided by a joint meeting of the Representatives and the Senate.

In response to the request of the House of Representatives for a joint meeting, the Senate declined by a majority of 22, and reasserted its preference for Capital Hill. Rather than perpetuate the exchanging of resolutions between Houses, and to avoid a possibly precedent-forming joint meeting, the Senate considered and passed a Bill to declare Capital Hill the site for the new House, while proclaiming a Parliamentary area to include Capital Hill, Camp Hill and the present Parliament House site.

As mentioned above, a clear vote for or against Capital Hill has not been called for in the

House of Representatives recently. The only record is a small majority in favour of Camp Hill back in 1969. If the Senate's Bill favouring Capital Hill is not passed in the House of Representatives, the position at the end of 20 years active discussion and planning will remain a stalemate.*

III. The Setting for the Parliamentary Zone.

A. Natural Features

Apart from the splendid backdrop of the Brindabella Ranges, Canberra is intimately linked with natural features, the most important of which are Mt Ainslie, Black Mountain and the Molonglo R. Relative to the Brindabellas, Mt Ainslie and Black Mountain are really only hills, but are high enough to catch a great deal of moisture from the west. Consequently, their forests are rather more lush than, say, the poorer ridges of Queanbeyan. Black Mountain in particular has a highly varied flora, including 40 species of orchids. A main feature of these hills is that for the most part they have been carefully protected from development. The early encroachments on Black Mountain (Belconnen Way and the suburb of Aranda) will not affect the beauty of the hills so drastically as the decisions being made in the last 5 years concerning the Black Mountain Tower, freeways and other new roads. Critics of these developments claim that planners have placed more weight on immediate technical problems than on the proper role for Mt Ainslie and Black Mountain, as a setting for the Parliamentary Triangle, that this setting is a priceless asset to Canberra and that no amount of landscaping or architecture can replace hills in their native state.

* A similar Bill has now been passed - see addendum.

Capital Hill is the highest of a number of undulations at the foot of Red Hill, although it is only about 150 ft above the present level of Lake Burley Griffin. Although it still has some native trees left on it, Capital Hill by itself is an insignificant physical or biological feature, the present flagpole being far more conspicuous at a distance than the hill itself. On the other hand, a fine low level view of Canberra can be had at the top of Capital Hill.

B. Architectural Features.

Griffin's plan for Canberra can be said to succeed because it slightly formalizes the natural landscape without trying to subdue it. The scale of the city is made so vast that we are struggling to fill in the spaces 60 years later. In its fully developed form it demands virtually unlimited resources of building materials, an aggressive and innovative architectural heritage and a wealthy nation bent on impressing itself and the rest of the world with a prestige capital city. Canberra's development struggles have arisen mainly because acceptance of these requirements has been spasmodic. A fairly long period of peace together with cheap migrant labour in the building industry have been important factors in Canberra's post war boom. Now, shortages of building materials and scarcity of labour once again threaten development.

Over the years, the main design features of Griffin's plan have been effectively delineated by roads, bridges and trees if not by buildings. The top

of Capital Hill is one of the best places to appreciate the magnificent Commonwealth and Kings Avenues as they converge at the hill itself. Various geometrical arguments have been advanced as to the exact area which is enclosed by the Parliamentary Triangle. The triangle which is visually most apparent has its apex at Capital Hill, from which the eye naturally travels to City Hill on the left hand side and the Australian-American Memorial on the right hand side. This triangle is not at all apparent from Camp Hill.

The triangle is suitably emphasised by trees. Unfortunately, the cedars of Commonwealth Avenue are either dead or dying and will have to be removed soon. The pines of City Hill on the other hand, are healthy and seem appropriately chosen. It should be noted that the fairly even carpet of trees breaks down the outline of most buildings of three stories or less. This is why the present Parliament House is hidden from the main avenues on either side of the land axis.

Both Griffin and other prominent architects felt that the buildings of the Parliamentary Triangle should not be designed in isolation but be made to integrate harmoniously with Parliament House. Thus G.H. Godsell, one of the witnesses in the 1923 Public Works Committee hearings stated that:

"if a competition for the design of the governmental group were held, you would get the scheme of one master and for a type of building, and every structure whether modest or ornamental, would be following one line, and you would get a balanced and symmetrical result".

K.A. Henderson, another architect, made this comment in 1923:

"Canberra must be more than a collection of individual buildings designed hurriedly one at a time, each for its own purposes".

In 1974 it seems that the fears of these architects were justified. Always regarded as a provisional building, the present Parliament House has exerted no influence over recent Government buildings. Neither it nor any future Parliament House can now set the architectural pattern for the Parliamentary Triangle as it should. Events have proved that the present Parliament House (siting and scale, not necessarily design) was not a wise compromise.

The first of the permanent buildings to rise above the trees of the Parliamentary Triangle was the Administrative building, constructed about 20 years ago. Although fairly dignified at close quarters, the yellowish stone blocks, the tortuous roof line and the stark drainpipes all help to make this the most severe Government edifice in the capital. Unless drastically facelifted with white marble or even concrete, the Administrative building will always detract from the Triangle.

The Treasury and National Library are more recent additions to the mixture of architecture in the Triangle, and each taken on its own is fairly effective. Similar proportions and roof shape help the two buildings to blend satisfactorily.

The next stages in the development of the Parliamentary Triangle will drastically change its appearance. There seems to be a real danger that each new building will constitute a feature and together they may present a varied collection of styles almost like chapters out of a textbook of architecture.

Compared with the Parliamentary Triangle itself the other main groups of buildings seen from the top of Capital Hill appear well ordered. Recently, Pegrum (Ref. 1.) has criticized some of the new commercial buildings in Civic. There is no doubt that when taken singly most of the office blocks could have been improved in some way; taken together, however, and with the close-range backdrop of Black Mountain, the combination of Civic buildings and City Hill is visually satisfying, at least so far. Likewise, there are critics of the Russell Offices and those flanking Anzac Parade. Taken singly, they might be regarded as plain, even severe. But because of their relationship with each other and the placement of a ornamental device within each group (The War Memorial and the Australian-American Memorial), the aspect by day or floodlit by night is impressive.

Lake Burley Griffin and its associated developments have a considerable architectural influence on the Parliamentary Triangle. Vertical elements provided by the Fountain and the Carillon Tower flank the land axis. Both the informal shape of the lake and the small sailing craft using it, as distinct from larger vessels, are important for the softening of the impact of massive Government buildings.

The Canberra Hospital also strongly influences Lake scenery but is a most unfortunate mixture of styles.

An example of additions made to the Canberra scene without reference to previous planning is provided by the Black Mountain telecommunications tower, which will soar almost as high again as Black Mountain itself. The tower will initiate new lines of sight which are quite inappropriate for a Department edifice, quite alien to the land axis and demeaning to the Parliamentary Triangle and all its buildings including any new Parliament House.

The inability to blend groups of buildings is all too common in Australia, as can be demonstrated by almost any Australian university campus. As for a new Parliament House it must be hoped that the building can be placed far enough from other Parliamentary Triangle developments. It is unthinkable that a new Parliament House should be forced to follow the design of previous buildings.

IV. The Present Parliament House.

The role, if any, of the present Parliament House following the completion of a new House is an extremely vexing question. This section looks at the present House in isolation, while a later section discusses the possible restraints the building might have on the development of Camp Hill and Capital Hill.

It might be said of Members, Senators and Parliamentary Staff that enthusiasm for the present House is influenced by the quality and quantity of one's own present work facilities as much as any other factor. Similarly, enthusiasm for the proposed new Parliament House might depend on one's future planned work facilities set out so thoroughly in the 1970 report of the Joint Select Committee on the New and Permanent Parliament House. Severe criticisms of the present building have arisen over (i) lack of space, (ii) inadequacies of structural design and building materials, (iii) smallness of scale, (iv) aesthetic grounds.

(i) Lack of space. With a continually growing number of workers and visitors, it cannot be denied that Parliament House is crowded, even with the newest of the extensions completed. Probably by now each Member would have his own office, but many of these are small and have no room for private meetings. The Library, the printing office, the kitchens and the dining rooms are quite inadequately housed at present, while certain groups such as Press representatives and some typists are particularly disadvantaged.


(ii) Structure and materials. Although lack of space certainly hinders Parliament House in its present function, recent attacks on the quality of the construction itself raise the contentious question of whether the building should be demolished. The main criticisms have been directed at the supposed temporary nature of the building, its age, depredations of white

ants, and so-called "structural unsoundness". A number of exaggerations and inaccuracies having crept into the debate, a closer look at the building materials and their state of preservation is warranted.

The most recent general survey of Parliament House to be published is found in the 1969 NCDC submission "A Comparative Study of Capital Hill and the Camp Hill Area". The survey was carried out by the then Department of Works and included summaries of East and West Blocks as well as Parliament House. Apart from a general lack of space which was even more severe in 1969 than 1974, detailed inspection of the walls, floors, roofs and windows revealed no termites and "no major maintenance problems". For a building so often derided as temporary, Parliament House emerged from the survey as rather well built for its 42 years. To quote again from the survey, "the provisional Parliament House has stood the test of time and is considered structurally sound". An updated report is now in preparation but is not expected to reverse the conclusions of 1969. Maintenance costs are indeed rising, but they are mostly to do with items such as air conditioning and electrical wiring which would have had to be replaced whatever building was erected in 1927. These costs are inevitable and should be dissociated from the building itself. The concept of a Parliament House whose walls and floors are continually having to be shored up or replaced is quite misleading.

Although in 1923 the official estimate of the life of the House in its present function was fifty years, the planners rightly calculated this lifetime on the basis of space considerations not structural considerations. "Buildings of brick and hardwood with a good tile roof, in such a place as Canberra, might stand for 500 years", said an architect in 1923 (Ref. 2 p.73), and no-one would have expected Parliament House to fall down in 50 years. The word "provisional" was then as now a handy compromise term used by the Government and should not be taken to imply an inferior building standard. Simply put, the present building is of the very best quality that Australia's post-war economy could afford. Sound materials and good workmanship have proved themselves in later years.

(iii) Scale. Parliament House has been described as "small and poor". This criticism is levelled mainly at the lack of impressive height of the building as compared with say, the National Library, together with the bricks, wood, concrete and stucco exterior instead of steel, stone and marble. This quickly leads into a discussion of aesthetics, but it is debatable whether the traditional argument that prestige is measured by height of the building from ground level and by the proportion of marble facing should be used against the present House. J.S. Murdoch, its architect, may have been astray when he remarked in 1923 that "the average Australian is such that he would not be any happier in one of those extremely elaborate structures. to be found anywhere else in the world, than in this proposed building" (Ref. 2 p.24), but his observation nevertheless deserves some consideration.

(iv) Aesthetics. While not architecturally very exciting in 1974, the present Parliament House is a solid functional design with softening features such as the interior courtyards and the  ornament. The extensions have been sensitively designed to harmonize with the original structure while the whole front aspect is of understated dignity. From a distance, the fact that the external walls are stucco becomes quite immaterial. The service area at the rear of the building is rather cluttered by comparison, although this is somewhat relieved by two elegant walkways. There is no doubt that Parliament House is popular with visitors; architects themselves have been hard put to criticize the design other than in the terms described above.

To summarize, Parliament has been lucky to have a well designed and well constructed building in which most staff and services have been more or less adequately housed up to now. It is interesting to note that many newer overseas Parliaments such as those at Kuala Lumpur, Lagos, New Delhi, Brasilia and Chandigarh have impressive monumental buildings to house their Legislative Chambers but relatively ugly inharmonious office blocks to provide supplementary space some distance away. Although our present Parliament House now seems too small all round to serve for many more years in its present function, it is to be hoped that the building itself will be considered in too good condition to be demolished. It is perhaps ironical that at the very time when demolition has been considered likely and even desirable, public opinion inspired by

the new nationalism has been moving altogether away from destroying buildings significant in Australian history. Thus the stated "value" of Parliament House calculated in 1969 by Commonwealth Valuers as \$2 million is not likely to be accepted today by a heritage-conscious nation.

V The Three Sites for a New Parliament House

Since 1968, nearly 400 pages of Hansard have recorded debates on siting for a new Parliament House. So many points of view have been expressed on the subject both in the debates and in the various reports mentioned earlier that it is difficult to deal with them with any detail here. Although the lakeside site is no longer under active consideration by Parliament, a summary of it is included for completeness.

A. The Lakeside Site

The advantages of this site are discussed at length in "The Development of the Central Area of Canberra including Aspects Related to the New Parliament House" (an NCDC report, 1967). It was considered that any large building near the lake would be very obvious and very central, that is, if one considers Parkes Place, the lake, the National Library and the future High Court as central. Of course, it could be argued that wherever Parliament House is built, that area is made central automatically.

In the lakeside scheme, the present Parliament House would not need to be demolished, but would become a conference centre close to some new administrative buildings erected on Camp Hill. There are several well

known examples of buildings designed for Parliaments or international assemblies which are situated on waterfronts (Palais des Nations, Geneva; United Nations, New York; Houses of Parliament, London; Parliament House, Ottawa). It can be said that a lakeside Parliament House is not only physically close to the National Library and other buildings having service facilities, but that the site symbolises a Parliament "down among the people". On the other hand, not only would the lakeside House be difficult to harmonize with the classic National Library and the contemporary High Court so close by, but the land axis would be chopped in half, thus spoiling the important visual link between Mt. Ainslie and Anzac Parade at one end and the present Parliament House and Capital Hill at the other. Furthermore, the magnificent view from the front steps of Parliament House would be blocked out.

Probably the main reason for Parliament's rejection of the lakeside was that the site was too low relative to surrounding administrative buildings. It was felt undesirable that administrators should look down on Parliament House from Camp Hill. The lakeside site is extremely prominent but is not the focus point of the Parliamentary Triangle. The real focus is either on Camp Hill or Capital Hill.

B. Camp Hill versus Capital Hill

Canberra is indeed fortunate in having the luxury of choosing between such fine sites as Camp and Capital Hill, since both are spacious by world standards and both are highly integrated into the plan of the city. Although innumerable arguments have been raised

favouring one or the other sites, from the ability of elderly Senators to ascend Capital Hill to its proximity to heaven, the following are proposed as the most significant considerations, although not necessarily in order of importance:

- (i) use or demolition of the present Parliament House,
- (ii) comparison of aspects from and towards the two sites,
- (iii) the wisdom of deviating from Griffin's plan, and
- (iv) function for Capital Hill if Camp Hill is chosen.

These will now be examined further.

(i) Use or demolition of the present Parliament House. As has been outlined previously, the present Parliament House is structurally sound, well designed, although small for its present function, and popular with visitors. Since 1923, architects have had to realize the possibility as did Griffin that the building would gather historical associations with time, making it difficult to pull down after the projected fifty years or so.

Parliament House may well be considered more important today than the disadvantage of blocking the land axis. Somehow the new Parliament House must accommodate the old building. Naturally, Parliament House

could more readily be demolished if it were an eye-sore, or if sited with no relationship to the Parliamentary Triangle. It has been suggested that the best long-term use for the present Parliament House would be as a National Museum, especially as no firm plans for such an institution in Canberra have emerged. Material on display could emphasize peace-time exploits of Australians, as a contrast to the exhibits at the Australian War Memorial.

If the present Parliament House is considered worthy of being saved, an alternative future for it other than simply as a museum may be derived from the NCDC feasibility study of 1973 ("The New and Permanent Parliament House"). If the scheme described in the study were to be brought to the second stage only, but with the Camp Hill buildings not necessarily including new chambers, and designed to harmonize with the old building, the urgently needed dining rooms, committee rooms and office space would be provided at lesser cost than a completely new building. The advantages of this idea are that the obsolete and unattractive rear section of Parliament House would be removed, yet the respected and historical front aspect would remain. Portions of the old building could be used for displays (that is, to a greater extent than at present), with the chambers retained in use.

Since the general consensus of Parliament seems to favour a completely new House within the next twenty years, its placement on Camp Hill would mean that the present House would be demolished. There is some disagreement over the compatibility or otherwise of a new

House on Capital Hill and the present House; this conveniently leads us into the next section.

(ii) Comparison of aspects from and towards the two sites. To continue, there is no reason to prefer Capital Hill as a means of saving the present Parliament House if the latter also unacceptably blocks the view from Capital Hill. From the present ground level of Capital Hill, the House cannot be said to intrude unpleasantly on the land axis and could be obscured even more by careful planting on Camp Hill. To permit the erection of a large building or buildings totalling about one million square feet of floor space, it is clear that Capital Hill will have to be lowered a few feet in order to accommodate the foundations. Just how many feet depends on the final design. A plan making good use of the present contours of Capital Hill will not lower the aspect so far that the present Parliament House can be an obstruction. It has sometimes been remarked that the $2\frac{1}{4}$ mile land axis is too long; while the present House stands, the axis is already broken down satisfactorily.

No one denies that Capital Hill dominates Camp Hill. From Capital Hill, a 360° panorama including both close and distant mountains, the lake, Civic, Russell Offices, Anzac Parade and Commonwealth and Kings Avenues is obtained. The Avenues are particularly important for they define the Parliamentary Triangle, they converge impressively on the site, and they offer people using them an unobstructed view of any building on Capital Hill. In fact no matter what modes of transport evolve, the Avenues are more likely to command a higher density of people than the parks and open spaces. From this it could be argued that views

of Parliament House from nearby roads serve better than from points along the land axis. That a Parliament House on Capital Hill might not be visible from Parkes Place, for example, is not necessarily very relevant.

Even with the present Parliament House removed, the outlook from Camp Hill is formal and restricted. From ground (that is, visitor) level, only a limited conception of the Parliamentary Triangle can be obtained because of trees and intervening buildings. Thus there is nothing about the NCDC artist's impression of the Camp Hill outlook (as shown following p. 35, "A Comparative Study of Capital Hill and the Camp Hill Area", 1969) that even suggests that a triangle is the basic design. This emphasizes the dangers of relying too much on small scale models which are of necessity viewed from the equivalent of a thousand feet up. At Camp Hill, removal of the mature street trees would not help the outlook very much, whereas the body of the Parliamentary Triangle will be much more obvious from Capital Hill when some of its trees are removed. This is because Capital Hill has height as well as all round views in its favour; just how much levelling for foundations will be necessary would depend on the design. Levelling would also be necessary at Camp Hill so that the relative heights of the two sites will remain about the same.

Just as the aspect from Camp Hill is too low and too close to the Parliamentary Triangle for the Triangle to be comprehended, a Parliament House on Camp Hill will not appear as a focus of Triangle buildings from any angle except along the land axis and (inevitably) from a thousand feet up. For example, a Parliament House on Camp Hill would hold little more

significance from the main Avenues than the present Parliament House. The new building would have to be truly large to overcome perspective and appear above the National Library and the Treasury from Commonwealth Avenue. As more and more buildings were erected in the Triangle, the Parliament would become relatively less significant.

To sum up, whereas the Capital Hill site is physically removed from the body of the Parliamentary Triangle, it has many visual links with the Triangle; by contrast, Camp Hill is close to other Triangle Buildings but its aspect is too close to comprehend the Triangle. Superimposed on the peak of the Triangle 150 feet above Lake Burley Griffin, Capital Hill is hardly "remote" as some of its opponents have claimed. A site on top of Black Mountain or Mt. Ainslie would seem to fit this description more appropriately.

(iii) Deviation from Griffin's plan. and (iv) Function for Capital Hill. Griffin always insisted that Parliament House should be situated on Camp Hill and it can be argued that his wishes should be carried out. Having accepted that the broad outlines of the city plan are excellent for their own worth rather than being simply Griffin's, in 1974 all alternatives must be examined on their own merits. Over the years, buildings such as the Lodge and the Governor-General's residence have not been sited where Griffin wanted them, nor is there any reason to regret this. Maybe the least desirable of Griffin's ideas today is the provision of a Watergate site (see Fig. 1)! His sketch of the aspect along the land axis to Capital Hill (Fig. 1) shows a

of Parliament House from nearby roads serve better than from points along the land axis. That a Parliament House on Capital Hill might not be visible from Parkes Place, for example, is not necessarily very relevant.

Even with the present Parliament House removed, the outlook from Camp Hill is formal and restricted. From ground (that is, visitor) level, only a limited conception of the Parliamentary Triangle can be obtained because of trees and intervening buildings. Thus there is nothing about the NCDC artist's impression of the Camp Hill outlook (as shown following p. 35, "A Comparative Study of Capital Hill and the Camp Hill Area", 1969) that even suggests that a triangle is the basic design. This emphasizes the dangers of relying too much on small scale models which are of necessity viewed from the equivalent of a thousand feet up. At Camp Hill, removal of the mature street trees would not help the outlook very much, whereas the body of the Parliamentary Triangle will be much more obvious from Capital Hill when some of its trees are removed. This is because Capital Hill has height as well as all round views in its favour; just how much levelling for foundations will be necessary would depend on the design. Levelling would also be necessary at Camp Hill so that the relative heights of the two sites will remain about the same.

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long low Parliament House at virtually the same level as the administrative buildings (that is, the House is on Camp Hill). Parliament House is shown completely dominated by a huge Capitol building something like a Thai temple rising from Capital Hill. In 1969, the Joint Select Committee on the New and Permanent Parliament House strongly disagreed that any building should overshadow Parliament House. The Committee seems to have missed Griffin's original concept that Capital Hill should be the site of the dominating architectural element. If one accepts that Parliament House and not a "Capitol" should be dominant, then Capital Hill should be the site for the House. No one ever seems to have criticized Griffin's Capitol for being too isolated or remote. Actually, Griffin weakened his case for Parliament House on Camp Hill by changing his mind about the role of Capital Hill. Over the years, it has been suggested as a place for popular assembly and festivities, a ceremonial place, a site for commemorative or national gardens, "just a flagpole", steps and stairs, cultural centre, archives, museum of peace, art gallery, architectural shaft, Capitol or administrative building.

Of course, there are those who feel that Parliament does not deserve to occupy the most exciting building site in Canberra. This is not always stated on aesthetic grounds, but from a deep seated feeling that Capital Hill is "too good for the politicians" and should be a "place of the people". Mr. R. Johnson, late of the NCDC, rather scathingly refers to a Parliament House on Capital Hill as a "Versailles of le roi soleil, isolated and set in a commanding position at the centre of all axes, where guns can most easily be

mounted to control the mob" (Canberra Times, 23/8/73). Apart from the extremely generous numbers of parks, gardens and lookouts already provided exclusively for the people in Canberra, it must again be asked: if Parliament is not worthy of the dominant site, what superior function does merit the site?

Other site considerations are not as important as the four listed above. It was once thought, for example, that Capital Hill was more exposed to the weather than Camp Hill. The Joint Committee of 1969 found that Camp Hill offered no advantage in this respect, and further discussion is therefore unwarranted. Members of Parliament are accustomed to chauffeur driven cars, so that a further objection to Capital Hill as impractically remote is not really sustainable. Small electric cars may be the prevailing future mode of transport, however. It has also been said that without close support of administrative buildings the Parliament will appear insignificant on Capital Hill. The answer to this problem is to have a Parliament House with only a few floors so that the net ground area covered will be large. The floor area has been envisaged as greater than twice that of the National Library. Alternatively, the Parliament could itself be composed of several closely matching buildings as suggested by J.S. Murdoch in 1923 (Reference 2, plans no. 7, 8). The latter scheme might usefully preserve most of the contours of Capital Hill.

Much time has been spent debating the relative areas of the rival sites. If East and West Blocks were

to be removed, there is no reason to believe that Camp Hill is inferior in this respect, especially when overseas facilities are studied. More important, but not greatly so, is the assertion that Capital Hill is difficult to plan, both with respect to vehicular access and the need to have the building attractive from many angles. The Ring Road is often cited as a major obstacle to further development on Capital Hill. In "A Comparative Study of Capital Hill and the Camp Hill Area", however, the NCDC states on p. 21 that:

"Supplementary vehicle access has been provided by internal roads from both State Circle and the Ring Road. These internal roads can easily be adjusted to enter the building site at a variety of positions and levels".

Again, in the Joint Committee's 1969 Report, the NCDC claimed that:

"It is the Commission's considered view that the Ring Road does not create a design impediment to a new and permanent Parliament House on Capital Hill and, in fact, the proposed traffic system best fits into the parliamentary environment" (p. 32).

On p.30 is found the following:

"In dealing with the alternative sites it should be noted immediately that a broad cost appreciation leads one to the conclusion that a decision in favour of either site should not be influenced by costs. They are broadly of the same order for both sites".

This leaves the question of difficulty of designing the building on Capital Hill. Griffin pointed out these difficulties but felt that they could be overcome if the site were finally chosen. We can only trust the architect to be challenged by the site and leave it with him.

REFERENCES

1. R. Pegrum, Canberra Times. 14 January, 1974.
2. .Parliamentary Standing Committee of Public Works Report Relating to the Proposed Erection of Provisional Parliament House, Canberra (1973).