

## *Part Two*

# **The Future Isn't What It Used To Be: Disputatious Observations**

## **Introduction**

The future of parliamentary libraries is inextricably linked with the future of parliament. This platitude will be examined from several points of view in this Part.

The point of departure must, therefore, be the parliamentary institution itself. An examination of the institution will necessarily involve a number of issues in which the parliamentary libraries do not figure, but the role to be assigned to them in this Paper can only be fully grasped once the full context has been established.

The complexity of these issues will be divided up as indicated below so as to facilitate argument and to keep the Paper as concise as possible. Section A examines the decline of parliament. Section B suggests how the parliamentary institution might act to redress the decline. The third section looks at the specific part the parliamentary libraries might play in assisting the institution to acquire a revitalised identity and renewed significance.

## **A. The Loss of Substance in Legislatures: A Diagnosis**

It has been said that the 1980s brought an end to a good many certainties of the twentieth century. Interpretations of that contention will vary greatly; few observers, however, will want to claim that the twenty-first century will not radically differ from what we have known in our lifetime. The obvious failure of communism needs no special comment, but the democracies themselves are not without major problems and quandaries. Their fund of ideas and beliefs is under obvious stress in many areas, not just in the political and economic ones. Far-reaching shifts in public attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns are discernible. It would seem that many changes are irreversible, that old-established institutions (the churches, the monarchy, the family, political parties, etc.) and inherited value systems will be subjected to more constant questioning from now on. How much pressure can they withstand?

Legislatures have not been directly challenged yet, partly because their relevance is seen as 'symbolic' rather than as 'real'. They are not so much serious, independent players in the game of government as instruments to be used by other players to achieve political (not necessarily parliamentary) objectives. The old notion of legislatures as the real 'forum of the nation' is as antiquated as horse-drawn trams. In other words, the legislatures have suffered a loss of substance and reputation.

What is the substance that has been lost? Is it true to say, as so many scholars nowadays do, that parliament has long ceased to be a genuine sovereign part of the polity which under the Westminster system it was once considered to be? If we restrict our view to Australia, it is incontestable that parliament has largely lost its scope to call the Executive to account unless the Executive makes this possible. Several recent Papers by a knowledgeable observer, Mr Speaker Rozzoli of the N.S.W. Parliament, analyse aspects of the decline of parliament's sovereignty. Focusing on one aspect, he comments in a 1992 Paper:

I would like to comment on the decline or perhaps, non-existence, of real debate, both on committee reports and the whole range of matters that come before Parliament. Too often we observe Members reading a setpiece speech, perhaps written by their staff or others, then leave the Chamber. No genuine attempt is made to properly debate the issues. Members do not listen, assess, respond to points made...<sup>1</sup>

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1. *Submission by the Hon. K.R.Rozzoli MP, Speaker to the House of Representatives Standing Committee for Long Term Strategies: Inquiry into the Role of Parliaments in the Information Age.* (Sydney, Speaker's Office, 1992)

The decline of parliament is also exemplified by a lack of respect amongst politicians themselves for the institution. Parliament seems, in the eyes of many of its members, to have become merely an instrument and has ceased to be a value in its own right. This situation is, of course, part of the pattern of change affecting party politics. On this point Mr Speaker Rozzoli may again be appropriately quoted as a well-placed observer:

Another part of the answer is changing the culture of Australian Parliaments. Members need to be more conscious of the institution of Parliament and their role in it. Parliament must be seen as something more than just an extension of party conflict or a means of carrying through a party's program. Members need to realise they also have a role as parliamentarians representing a community beyond the party<sup>2</sup>.

The public has grown deeply sceptical of politicians and political institutions, nor do parliaments any longer enjoy the public respect they once received. Their relevance to the processes of government seems now questionable. Their ritual significance and their function as 'theatre'(spectacle) are still acknowledged, but this is bought at the cost of substantive content. It should also be added that the selection process for members of parliament does not necessarily lead to persons of requisite calibre being found.

Diagnosis of parliament's contemporary decline in sovereignty and effectiveness focuses generally on the issue of control of the parliamentary budget. Important as this issue is, it does not in itself go to the core of the malaise. Even if the debate over parliamentary control of its own finances were to be resolved, many other things need to be rectified before the parliament can regain its lost relevance in the political system. Internal improvements to the parliamentary administration clearly form one area to be addressed, but even here the Executive has determined many of the parameters within which the parliament can operate. Norms of public employment and management procedures, incorporated increasingly in statute law (equal opportunity, anti-discrimination, etc.), are set by the Executive, leaving limited scope or flexibility to the Presiding Officers of Parliament to exercise their responsibilities with much independence or initiative.

To define the full extent of the loss of relevance and of independent substance of the legislature requires a detailed analysis of contemporary political realities, of the political and parliamentary behaviour of Members as well as an examination of why parliament's bureaucratic structure and its career officers have been ineffectual. Unfortunately, the career officers have been able to do little to stop the decline; perhaps, it could be argued, they have rather in some cases facilitated it. More generally, one can conclude that parliaments, whose debates are now often visible through television to large numbers of citizens, are being detrimentally affected by public perceptions about the behaviour they display. 'We are living in a world generally without dignity. Why then should we expect our politicians to be any different?'<sup>3</sup>

Who can deny that changed norms and mores today radically affect most aspects of our social, economic and political life?

There is a wide range of writing (sometimes abstruse) discussing the nature of late twentieth-century society. There is necessarily a speculative element in this discourse in which uncertainty and contradiction abound. Indeed, the range of ideas under discussion and the variety of viewpoints in public discourse present us with a situation of great fluidity. It is a process of fermentation where outcomes are still indeterminate. A few words on the ferment within political parties will make the picture a little clearer.

In contemporary Australian political parties there is a clash of philosophic and economic beliefs which is a response to the complexity of the world today. Passionate debate between parties and turmoil within parties is commonplace. What was yesterday's truth or unshakeable dogma no longer applies, it would seem. It is also interesting to note in Australia how changes in party adherence and voter behaviour are adding another layer to the problem.

The traditional adherents of the two major Australian political parties are no longer as numerous or as reliable as they once were. With fewer fee-paying members and affiliates the parties are confronted

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2. Ibid, p.3.

3. *Constitutional Change in the 1990s: A Paper presented to Constitutional Conference, Darwin, October 1992 by the Hon. Kevin Rozzoli, Dip. Law, M.P. Speaker, Legislative Assembly of New South Wales.* (Sydney, Speaker's Office, 1992) See p.5.

with disconcerting financial problems. Neither party is able to attract the previous level of support at the ballot box. These trends have been observable for at least ten years, but were especially striking in the 1990 Federal General Election. The winning party (ALP) gained 39.4 per cent of the primary vote; the Liberal Party gained 35 per cent.<sup>4</sup> The Coalition Parties (Liberal Party/National Party) actually polled 43.4 per cent of all primary votes. It is, of course, risky to extrapolate from such data, but it is equally clear that the parties themselves are taking these trends seriously. The 1993 General Election has just been held, with results astonishing almost the entire political spectrum. It will take a while to digest the results, but they seem to reaffirm the point that certainties are still hard to pinpoint.

The parties would like a return to predictability in people's voting behaviour and attitudes. Internally the parties have lost their own certainties if we are to judge by the turmoil they are undergoing in their attempts to come to grips with problems of policy formulation in a world with so many problems of its own. The 'global village' is not a comfortable place to live in!

These few points about the ferment within public discourse with its clash of opinions and beliefs form the backdrop for a consideration of the future of parliament and ultimately of the parliamentary libraries. Their future can only be understood if the proper context is in place. One point to emerge from the panorama sketched above should, however, be kept firmly in mind: nothing should be taken for granted when we come to question the validity and future of institutions in the 1990s.

## B. Replacing the Loss of Substance.

Parliaments may be said to have a binary nature. On the one hand they are elected, legislative bodies and monitors of the performance of the Executive. On the other hand they are also 'public sector' organisations with a bureaucratic structure, staffed by career officers who serve the elected members. The norms and traditions which obtain in the bureaucratic structure are not necessarily of concern to the members of parliament whose activities are located in the publicly visible, legislative side of the parliamentary institution. There may at times seem to be a certain disjuncture between the two arms of the institution. Sometimes their interests appear to run in different directions.

The parliamentary bureaucracy in many parliaments evolved its present basis in the nineteenth century; its structure and rationale were given their initial identity then. Until relatively late into the present century parliaments were modest in their staffing and expenditure. Dr Menhennet's *History* documents this position clearly and sets out the reasons why changes occurred in the House of Commons Library (See Part One). To a large extent the same reasons led to changes in the other administrative parts of the parliamentary organisation. Change and modernisation were a concomitant of the end of the Second World War.

To the degree that the public's negative perception of the performance of parliament stems from those aspects of the institution which make unfavourable headlines and television exposes of Members' transgressions, rectification lies generally within the power of members and parties. Unbecoming behaviour in debate, personal abuse, scandals and excesses in the use of privileges and entitlements, and above all, glaring discrepancy between words and action are not at all uncommon in Australia and other countries as well. These are eagerly picked up by the media. They are often given a disproportionate amount of attention.

The decline in the importance of parliament as a political institution is, however, a problem of a different order, involving the difficult issue of Executive predominance over the legislature. The roots of this development are rather tangled. Perhaps it is simply a natural outcome of political processes and the trends of political reality in our time. To some extent it is an outcome abetted by the lack of institutional vigour in parliaments themselves and the general fall in standards of personal behaviour and public morality in contemporary society. Cause and effect are hard to determine and may indeed be reversible in some instances.

The second, non-elected arm of the legislature, its bureaucracy and its various services, can do little to influence the behaviour of the members in the first arm. If the second arm can give a positive example by maintaining high professional performance and preserving values and standards, even if with some disfavour from members of the first arm, at least this will be an indispensable step towards the ultimate goal of creating an entirely different image of parliament for the future. Nevertheless, the existing image may be too flawed to be able to be restored.

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4. *The End of Certainty: The Story of The 1980's* by Paul Kelly. Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1992. See pp. 587-588.

Some managerial deficiencies of the second arm of the legislature are now becoming more widely recognised. This is partly because of the general process of re-assessment of public sector performance now sweeping over most of the English-speaking world. The political orthodoxy of our age demands such a review and parliaments are not excluded. There is, indeed, no reason why they should be excluded; there are good reasons for them to be included. The norms of effectiveness, efficiency and accountability are increasingly being applied to parliaments where firmer management practices are being introduced. One may wonder, however, whether a focusing on this arm of the legislature is not, to some degree, a device to deflect attention from the faults of the other arm. There is probably no answer possible to this question, but one may be fairly certain that an abundance of virtue in the bureaucratic management of the legislature will not outweigh derelictions committed in the elected arm of the legislature.

The contrast made above between the two elements or arms of the legislature cannot be pushed too far because the picture is in reality more complex. But nevertheless, the juxtaposition is valid in its broad outlines and provides a helpful framework which will, it is hoped, advance analysis of the issues of concern to us here.

Happily there are in each arm of the legislature forces anxious to redress the slide which is so widely recognised as to be generally incontestable. These forces, identifiable in individuals rather than in coherent groups, are scattered and without a unified voice. There seems now to be a growing recognition that the two arms of the legislature must do more to overcome the existing disjuncture and achieve a common unity of purpose. The asymmetry of the two arms is, of course, a fundamental characteristic of the legislature where the public functions must be paramount, but the need for the two arms to pull in the same direction is indispensable if the process of decline is not to prove irreversible.

Members wishing the parliamentary institution to regain substance are numerically few. The party system acts as a check on their freedom of independent thought and action and the predominance of politics over most other considerations limits the influence these members can wield. Being an Opposition Member or a Government Member also plays a role. These are all features well documented in studies of parliament and reinforce the view that the reform of parliament is difficult to envisage if we rely solely on its first arm.

The difficulties outlined above require the second arm of the legislature to be able to offer continuous support and intellectual input (ideas) so that the process of decline might be arrested. Mr Speaker Rozzoli also sees the need for 'Clerks-at-the-Table and the permanent staff of the Parliament' to assist members to create what he calls a 'meaningful chamber.'<sup>5</sup> He continues:

Further, the length of a member's service does not always equate with an equivalent depth of interest and understanding of the Parliament. The preservation of Parliamentary standards is therefore very much in the hands of the continuing entity within the Parliament, that is, the Clerks and their staff.<sup>6</sup>

The argument in this Paper is for something compatible with what the Speaker pinpoints, but going beyond his analysis in some radical ways. It is not just a matter of getting back a lost sovereignty if the *raison d'être* of the institution is in question. All one would retain in this case would be an empty but expensive shell. The process must indeed go beyond mere reform (which is in train in most parliaments at the moment): what is now required for future survival and growth is 'self-transformation'. If the earlier analysis of parliament's loss of substance is accurate, reform as such will scarcely achieve much unless it can tackle the roots of the problem. This will involve a fundamental reappraisal of functions and purpose. This reappraisal seems indispensable if the parliamentary institution is to play a role in the polity of the coming century. It has scarcely played such a real, non-symbolic role in the last third of the present century. Ideas and objectives as well as prognoses about the fundamentals of public policies are now increasingly what are called for.

Reform of parliament is a topic which is well nigh inexhaustible. Dr Menhennet's *History* records how much the House of Commons Library benefited from the writings of academics concerning parliamentary reform and the need for the Westminster Parliament to provide its Members with information and research services of quality (See Part One). In Australia there has been less academic interest in parliament as an institution, but some attention has been paid to the question of its reform. It is not the purpose of this Paper to go deeply into the specifics of reform or, as is argued here, self-

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5. See Footnote 5.

6. Ibid.

transformation. It is, however, important to emphasise the point that more will be ultimately achieved by the parliaments themselves defining their own reform needs and proposing the remedies than by reacting to the views from outside. The insights and assistance of outsiders may well be vital at the right time and place, but the institution should ideally instigate and, at best, lead the process. This requires the best efforts of each arm of the legislature, working together towards mutual goals.

For parliament to be able to begin a genuine process of self-transformation, a lot of things need to be in place first. It is, in fact, at this point that the second arm of the legislature must come to the fore and play its appropriate (and enlarged) role. Probably the first point that needs to be made is that the second arm must have as unified a voice as one can expect from such a composite body. Then this voice must be made stronger. It will, of course, always be the case that the voice of the first arm of the legislature will be even stronger as befits the public face of the institution.

How can the second arm gain a stronger voice? Firstly, there is a need for a much greater and more consistent stress to be placed on professional identity and all that the idea implies. Professions earn recognition through their competence and intellectual stature. The profession of 'parliamentary officer' is largely undeveloped and still interpreted in too narrow a fashion. The creation of a recognisable 'parliamentary officer' corps with a genuinely parliamentary professional basis extending, with appropriate differentiations, across the whole spectrum of the parliamentary service, is becoming an inescapable necessity. More is said later on about this point, but it is now clearly the case that a complex range of professional skills, management expertise as well as practical experience are required to manage a modern legislature. Whilst knowledge of parliamentary practice will always remain a skill of exceptional importance, it is not necessarily enough to achieve the objectives of efficiency, effectiveness (both in costs and services), and accountability, or enough to assist the transformation process advocated in this Paper.

Modern legislatures must look more closely at how they utilise an often disregarded asset: the talents, skills and experience of all the staffs which they employ. Some conscious policy shifts, revised staff procedures and re-thinking are required, with some radical changes being the likely result. The fairly inflexible compartmentalisation of staff organisation and management perspectives within parliaments — to some extent an outcome of the bicameral nature of parliament — needs to be re-assessed to encourage staff mobility within the organisation and to create better career paths, but coupled with much more stringent performance norms from the top to the bottom. If re-assessment shows that the existing position is valid, there is no need to change it; if this cannot be demonstrated, it should be changed and improved. There is obviously a major study here waiting to be tackled.

The recent and on the whole deserved criticisms by members and others (compare with the Fitzgerald Report in Queensland) about the performance of the non-elected arm of the legislature are reason enough for re-appraisal and upgrading of activities, procedures and policies to be undertaken. There is already much progress in this respect in Australia. A further reason for re-appraisal is that the talents and skills of the various parliamentary staffs have only rarely and then fitfully been harnessed in an overall management and planning sense for the benefit of an institution suffering, not only internal stresses (criticisms of the second arm by the first arm), but also public criticisms of the effectiveness of the first arm and of the institution of parliament as such.

If the non-elected arm can undertake the steps of self-transformation (upgrading its performance, creating a recognisable career service with a genuine professional basis, functioning as a collective consciousness on matters affecting the institution's own viability, etc), it will be possible to create a synergism as one important step towards achieving the ultimate goal of transforming an institution which is fairly intractable to change. Synergism is the term used to describe the joint action of substances which increases and enhances their individual effectiveness. In other words, something additional is created by this combination which is not attainable to its unaided elements.

From this synergism, arising from possibly a largely new method of functioning of the second arm, we would expect it to create outputs able to assist parliament as an institution under real threat. These outputs include defining the nature of the threat, formulating ideas and strategies on how to counter it, and devising feed-back mechanisms to monitor the situation constantly. Perhaps it might be asked whether these outputs cannot be produced by the existing principal departments within the parliament, traditionally those serving each House. Evidence does not suggest that they can achieve these results unaided.

The idea of creating a synergism within the second arm implies an overall quality of staff and an inter-relationship of sections superior to anything traditionally seen in Australian parliaments. The idea is not intrinsically unattainable, however.

If the synergism within the second arm can be developed, it could produce long-range benefits for the institution and in particular spark off the creative thinking now so necessary for the institution's future direction. The results of this process, placed at the disposal of the first arm, will contribute towards redressing parliament's loss of relevance, but clearly a second synergism is required between both arms of the legislature.

The second synergism is ultimately the crucial one, for it alone can transform the legislature so as to convert it into an institution valuable and effective in its own terms and able to play a useful, not merely 'decorative' role in the country's polity. It will be very difficult to achieve this second kind of synergism. Unless it is achieved, however, one may be deeply sceptical whether any genuine transformation process of parliament is feasible.

Furthermore, the synergism of the two arms of parliament will only occur when the second arm can show itself capable of gaining the respect and ear of the first arm by the quality of its intellectual and professional outputs. Not the least of these outputs will be to define the objectives, strategies and mechanisms for parliament to acquire a new content and direction. The chief onus in creating these outputs, a process which must be a continuous one, will rest on the second arm. But the more the first arm can contribute to the process the stronger it will be. Naturally the implementation of strategies and the creation of the various mechanisms to upgrade and, hopefully, to transform parliament, will remain essentially the responsibility of the elected arm. To a large extent, the elected arm is the engine, whereas the non-elected arm provides the constant fuel supply for the engine to operate. The analogy sets out the processes which we see as necessary.

### C: Parliamentary Libraries and The Transformation Process.

The argumentation of this Paper is that the decline of parliament as a sovereign body in the nation's polity will continue until the two arms of the legislature, the elected, public arm and the non-elected, bureaucratic and service arm, can create a synergism to regain at least some of the substance (independence, initiative and reputation) lost over recent decades. To retrieve the position in its entirety requires admittedly much more than what this synergism alone can achieve. But the process must necessarily involve the two arms co-operating in a way not yet in evidence.

The Paper is based on the assumption that transformation is possible as well as desirable, and that the will to undertake this action is present. If the will is lacking, the institution will not necessarily disappear. Its decline will simply continue and the institution will become a parasitical growth on the polity. The transformation process is pre-eminently an intellectual one. It is a task requiring ideas on how the legislature can once more be made effective; it is also a task requiring the power to convince sceptics and to overcome lethargy and intransigent entrenched interests which are comfortable with the status quo. It is a task which will not be easy to accomplish if the requisite mental and personal qualities are not present in those who may be ready, even with the odds against them, to devote themselves to it. And of course, the ideal situation is for input to come from a cross-section of the whole of the non-elected arm of the legislature, not just from a few isolated individuals within it.

The parliamentary libraries are well placed to be able to make a significant contribution to the process. They have already established credibility through the reliability and quality of their information and research services. They have also been amongst the first parts of the legislature to embark upon automation. Their services have received much attention in the literature on parliaments and need not detain us very long. Dr Menhennet's *History* is an excellent record of what one major library has achieved and he also indicates that there is much more that users can look forward to from the parliamentary libraries. In other words, the libraries have established the basis upon which enhancements and outputs going beyond their traditional raft of services can build.

The information, research and traditional library functions of the parliamentary libraries are, at their peak, unique in their range, depth and their personalised nature, aligned with ever increasing sophistication to the needs of individual legislators. It is qualities such as these that lend parliamentary librarianship its special identity, differentiating it from other types of librarianship. One must be sober, however, in assessing the value of such services in their present form to the parliamentary and political process. Nowadays a certain 'mystique' attaches to the word 'information'. Obviously we are all in need of the commodity, but it might be reasonably questioned whether the parliamentary libraries are at present strictly essential to the process they serve. Perhaps like most generalised questions, there is no real answer available. It may simply be a matter of perspective. What is, however, within the grasp of the parliamentary libraries is the capacity to make themselves, in Dr Menhennet's phrase, 'an integral part of the political process'.

Building upon the massive advantage of its resources and expertise, the parliamentary library can undertake important new functions on behalf of the institution as an entity in a way not yet attempted. What is envisaged here is first of all a feedback function through which the parliamentary library monitors and digests the data available in print and non-print (electronic) forms relating to the vitality, performance and reputation of the parliamentary institution, irrespective of party politics and ideology. A strict division between party affairs and the purely parliamentary aspects is not always possible, but the aim of the monitoring is to be a barometer of the health of the institution itself as an organism with an identity and life of its own.

The information gathered under this proposal must be analysed and evaluated. It must then be utilised so as to provide the data from which the first arm of the legislature can counter the decline in the institution. Ideally, the objective is to use the data to fuel the transformation process. The analysis and evaluation of the information gathered by the parliamentary library should be carried out by the best brains of the second arm. In any case the parliamentary library will have a significant input into the process. As an end-product of the analysis and evaluation it is possible to envisage the production of parliament's own institutional Green Papers, issued under the joint authority of the Presiding Officers. The Green Papers, issued possibly twice every 12 or 18 months, will be addressed to an audience which might have the improvement of the political system as a whole at heart as well as the continued effectiveness of the legislature as an element of the system.

If the monitoring of information regarding the reputation and performance of the parliament as described above forms the first part of the enlarged function of the parliamentary library, the second part derives its substance to some extent from it. The idea is for the creation of a kind of parliamentary 'think-tank', institutional in its basis but with a varying membership and participation extending beyond the legislative institution itself. The parliamentary library's research functions draw on an often extensive network of outside research bodies and specialists in a broad range of fields. It is easy to see the possibility of programs being implemented by the library on behalf of the second arm of the legislature and for the benefit of the institution as a whole, to bring together the relevant mix of members of parliament, outside experts and authorities, and parliamentary officers, to offer periodic assessments of the issues at the heart of the vitality and survival of the legislature. A potential network for this purpose exists already within the reach of the parliamentary library.

The parliamentary 'think-tank' envisaged here would have a fluid outside membership and should decidedly avoid any suggestion of its being a purely academic grouping. The input from academics and universities is desirable, but the Australian universities have not shown themselves very concerned with the study of parliament (as distinct from politics). It is preferable to have a broader membership from bodies active in public affairs as well as private foundations, commercial think-tanks, research associations, management bodies and the like. But even more important is the participation of trade union bodies and of the political party organisations. It may be that the latter suggestion will present some difficulties because of the danger of politicisation of the think-tank idea. This need not necessarily be the case if the idea is implemented and monitored sensibly and responsibly.

The activities of the parliamentary 'think-tank' which could, of course, be given a grander title if required, would be an ideal and obvious source of material for further Green Papers of the parliament. The funds to support the idea need not be great; in fact, the expenditures should not be allowed to become great because that will fuel potential criticism of parliamentary self-indulgence. Most parliaments have shown a readiness to draw upon financial sources for less useful purposes than a 'think-tank' proposal, the objectives of which certainly go to the heart of parliament's own survival.

It may be asked why the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association has not yet been mentioned as a participant in the processes and activities outlined above. In some respects that body seems an obvious focal point for addressing most of the issues raised in this Paper since it aims 'to promote the study of and respect for Parliament'. The reply might be that the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association has some of the failures which are being attributed to the parliaments themselves. It too has not been able to maintain a high rate of credibility. This is greatly to be regretted since its membership contains men and women of outstanding ability.

This is not the place to go into the weaknesses of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, but perhaps enough is said if it is pointed out that, in Australia at least, a number of parliamentarians choose not to be members of the Association for reasons of dissatisfaction with its role.<sup>7</sup> That situation need not remain so, and one may hope that the future will see the emergence of a body which can be enthusiastically supported by all parliamentarians and parliamentary officers. Its contribution to the transformation of parliament could be invaluable, but there is little prospect of such a contribution being offered under existing circumstances.

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7. Based on personal knowledge gained from conversations with Members of the N.S.W. Parliament.

The Study of Parliament Group might also be mentioned as an obvious body to be involved in the questions raised in this Paper. Regrettably there is little energy in the Groups at the local level in Australia, but the possibility for some input still exists. The Groups have an unfortunately limited membership and seem unattractive to persons outside universities and a few parliamentary staff.

The issues raised in this Paper affect parliaments in general and this fact makes it sensible for them to co-operate as far as possible in confronting them. Since the chief emphasis of the argumentation offered here has centred on the expanded role of the second arm of the legislature, it is a corollary that the co-operation of these arms should follow. There are already in existence excellent conferences of Presiding Officers and Clerks which produce proceedings and some occasional papers which relate to the problems of concern to this Paper. These conferences are not by their nature and constituency able to go much beyond what they have been in the past and that is certainly not enough for advancing the process of reform or transformation. There are also conferences of parliamentary librarians which are relatively limited in scope. The editors of debates also meet on a wider scale, but their objectives are, like those of the librarians, largely self-centred. Something of a different order from these conferences is now required, but this will require a degree of organisation and intellectual input which may be difficult to achieve if the effort is to be equally spread. The effort is well worth making, however, especially since there are some elements of a framework already in place.

The efforts of the present Speaker of the New South Wales Parliament, the Hon. K.R. Rozzoli M.P., deserve special notice. In particular his seminal Paper entitled *New Life for an Old Concept: An Automated Network of Australian Parliaments* should be seen as the source for a great part of the current Australian parliamentary discussion on bringing parliamentary co-operation to fruition.<sup>8</sup> His strong personal advocacy for an automated network of Australian parliaments is unique amongst politicians at this level, both for an understanding of the issues and benefits involved and for continuing personal commitment to an idea which does not have immediate political attraction. Whilst the Rozzoli proposal is directed at the sharing of data and expertise, mainly through the parliamentary libraries, the networking proposal has far wider possibilities. It is the wider aspects of networking which are of concern here, although the data sharing aspects are not to be overlooked either.

Using the Rozzoli networking structure it would become possible for the second, non-elected arms of the Australian legislatures to tackle an issue which has been alluded to already. This is the creation of a class of 'parliamentary officer' with skills and qualifications able to attract superior recruits. There are no formal tertiary avenues in existence to offer the necessary training and certification, so it remains for the legislatures themselves to set up a mechanism to fill this gap. This could be done, at least initially, through the network providing some suitably devised and mutually acceptable courses and in-service training at an agreed location. There are now a number of senior retired parliamentary officers available and, presumably, willing to undertake the instruction required. This is obviously only the bare bones of a proposal which would need to be fully elaborated to be acceptable and viable. Some analogy to what is suggested here may be found in the practices of self-regulation and training carried out by guilds and smaller professions.<sup>9</sup>

A third area where the parliamentary libraries could play an enhanced role is concerned with education and public relations on behalf of the whole institution. It is now common enough for parliaments to have an education officer or even an education section to cater for the educational needs of schoolchildren. Much progress has already been achieved in the creation of programs of instruction, guided tours of parliamentary premises and the production of suitable educational literature. There is not as much done for the education of older groups or for in-House staff. Induction of new members and their staffs is the responsibility of the respective houses to which they belong. This induction process, which is sometimes reinforced by a second stage at a later date, needs to be enlarged so that it can become a more focused process able to offer help at any period throughout the year to newly employed members' staff (whose turnover is fairly high). There is also a great need to offer some educational services to media representatives who are sometimes unaware of how great their need for this service really is. For specialised groups the educational needs will be quite different from the pedagogical approach which characterises the work of existing parliamentary education officers.

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8. *New Life for an Old Concept: An Automated Network of Australian Parliaments*, by the Hon. K.R. Rozzoli, M.P. Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Parliament of New South Wales; Sydney, Library of Parliament, 1990. (This paper was first presented to the Conference of Presiding Officers and Clerks in Perth, June 1990.)

9. For further discussion of this idea, see *Myths and Realities of Administering Australian Parliaments: Comments on the Foley-Russell Report*, by R.L. Cope, in 'Legislative Studies,' v.7 no.1., Spring 1992, pp. 45-52.



It would seem sensible for the education officers and the parliamentary libraries to be closely aligned so as to be able to carry out a much broader program of activity. The institutional and political knowledge and historical expertise on parliament which reposes in the library could be invaluable in this context. Dr Menhennet's *History* explains how the House of Commons Library carries out a well developed series of educational and public information activities. He documents the success of this aspect of the Library's work. A better degree of co-ordination and management of the whole complex of topics covered by the word 'education' is needed in the majority of Australian parliaments. Their tendency is all too often to create a myriad of ad hoc bodies for subordinate activities. There are various objections to this regrettable and probably wasteful management style. The educational and public information services could be more rationally and effectively combined under the umbrella of the parliamentary library whose resources and expertise relate so well to the functions of education and provision of information at varying levels of complexity.

It would not be difficult to suggest some further initiatives which might be undertaken by parliamentary libraries so as to enhance the image and the continuing good health of the legislature.<sup>10</sup> One further example only will be offered so as not to tax the reader's patience unduly. The establishment of a parliamentary research centre under the direction of the Presiding Officers and located within the parliamentary library would be a further step towards fostering a wider, informed interest in the legislature. It could raise public and scholarly perceptions about the nature and role of parliament. The guidelines for such a centre would need to be rigorous so as to emphasis the institution and not the political parties.

The parliamentary research centre could encourage research from within the parliament as well as from outside it. Publications could be sponsored on a modest scale and could also contribute to the Green Papers of the parliament where suitable. The placing of the research centre within the library would link up with the public relation and educational roles outlined above. The Victorian Parliamentary Library has embarked on the creation of such a centre, but its orientation seem somewhat different from what is proposed here. Different versions would undoubtedly suit different parliaments. Finally one might ask why parliaments are so backward in using electronic means and modern technology to publicise themselves. They provide good facilities to the press and television industries within parliamentary premises, but get so little in return. This is once again an area where the parliamentary libraries could play a role.

## Conclusion

The importance to the stability and progress of a nation of its public institutions scarcely needs stating. One can cite the sorry case of the states of Eastern Europe which, amongst other things, are now suffering the catastrophe of deficient public institutions and the lack of traditions associated with them. Parliaments are far from perfect because the political parties and their members are all too imperfect. Parliamentary officers are not perfect either and unfortunately the decline in the status of parliaments, especially as viewed through the media, means that parliaments as employers are not attractive to the really top flight of applicants. Nor can they retain the best brains as long as they would like. Staff turnover in most parliaments in Australia is reported to be higher than it ever was; those leaving are sometimes the better intellects and the more ambitious performers. These are the people whom the institution would normally look to for its future managers and executives.

The proposals outlined in this Paper are, in the context of Australian parliaments, radical, if not revolutionary. They may for that reason elicit little support or response. Not everyone will share the belief that the parliamentary institution is under threat. It is perhaps appropriate to end on a different note, citing the author Stephen Ambrose, who in volume 2 of his biography of R.M.Nixon writes (p.440):

It took no great insight or stunning brilliance to see these rather simple truths or to recognise the opportunities that were opened up by them. It did take courage, political skills, diplomatic sensitivity, and dogged determination to respond appropriately, because the men and forces...who were opposed...were numerous, cunning, and powerful.<sup>11</sup>

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10. For articles by a number of Australian and overseas parliamentary librarians on the future of parliamentary libraries, see the Bicentennial publication of the N.S.W. Parliamentary Library, entitled *Parliamentary Libraries and The Future: A Bicentennial Collection of Papers*. Sydney, Library of Parliament, 1988. 182p.

11. *Nixon: volume 2: The Triumph of a Politician, 1962-1972*, by Stephen E. Ambrose. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1989.

It will be interesting to see how the parliamentary institution looks in ten years' time. Stephen Ambrose's words, referring to a foreign policy context in the United States, may be applied to a totally different situation and be interpreted as indicating a *via dolorosa* for the parliamentary institution and its allies if the qualities he mentions are not available and the dogged determination absent. However, nothing will be achieved by accepting that this is an immutable situation; it has not always been so and it need not necessarily remain the case. This Paper has argued that transformation is possible, necessary and arguably urgent. Some suggestions have been made on how the existing positive forces in legislatures might be mustered to effect the process. That the parliamentary library can play a significant part has been the tenor of the argument, but equally there is a belief that the task requires the best efforts of all available talent and skill within the second arm. The library has no lien on those; others will want to play their part too. The challenges require a concerted effort and commitment from as many allies as the legislature can muster if they are to be successfully addressed.

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