

News and notes

When we think of parliaments our thoughts usually turn to activities in the various chambers, especially at Question Time. Committee proceedings increasingly figure in images of parliament, at least among informed observers.

This number of *Australasian Parliamentary Review*, however, provides a powerful reminder of the important, indeed central, role which libraries play in both the buildings and the lives of parliaments. Libraries have been significant historically. After the location and design of the chambers, there is no more vital question from an architectural perspective than location and design of the library.

It is impossible to disagree with the opinion offered in Dr June Verrier's article that existence of high quality information and research services is now 'an accepted part of a robust Australian democracy and parliamentary tradition.'

This number of *APR* demonstrates the importance of libraries to parliaments in three particular ways. In the first instance there are two articles, by Drs Verrier and Cope, which show, one from a contemporary, the other from a historical and contemporary, perspective, the critical professional contributions which libraries and library-based services make to the operations of a parliament in the key activities of legislation, debate and scrutiny of government and administration.

The second contribution of libraries is revealed clearly in the book pages through their publishing activities. Books sponsored by the libraries of the Commonwealth and New South Wales parliaments — respective contributions to the Centenary of the Federation — are rightly well-received. Likewise well-received are the recently published historical works on the National Library (whose existence, for six decades, was closely integrated with that of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library), and the Library of Victoria's Parliament. That Library also figures prominently in Victor Isaacs's study of the Victorian Parliament during its exile of more than a quarter century in the Exhibition Building whilst the Commonwealth Parliament occupied the handsome building in Spring Street.

The third contribution of parliamentary libraries to our knowledge and understanding of Australia's parliaments and the democracies they serve may be seen in several other articles in this number by staff, present and past, of various research services. These articles show very clearly the formidable expertise upon

which parliamentarians and their staffs can routinely draw in performance of their legislative, scrutiny and representational responsibilities. Their articles in this *APR* are major features.

One of these articles, Dr Gareth Griffith's very illuminating account of development of the New South Wales Legislative Council, since it became a fully elected body, provides a pertinent example of innovation in parliamentary practice and the enhancement of accountability of ministers to the legislature. He reports that in New South Wales ministers who are members of the Legislative Assembly have attended public hearings of Legislative Council committees when their department's estimates are under examination. Under the New South Wales Constitution (section 38A) such ministers may also, with the Council's consent, present and explain legislation to the Legislative Council.

These are practices more in accord with Continental parliamentary traditions than those we are familiar with in Westminster-derived parliaments. They nevertheless close a significant loophole in the accountability circle and appear to have prospered in New South Wales without giving rise to much debate or controversy.

Parliamentary elections: candidates

In his article in the last number of *Australian Parliamentary Review* Dr Russel Cope observed (at page 199) that it would be useful to have lists of candidates at various Commonwealth and state elections. An alert reader has written with information that such a database already exists, 'Australian Parliamentary Candidates 1890–1999' at the Social Science Data Archives, Research School of Social Sciences, The Australian National University.

The information it contains is available publicly. Anyone interested should contact the Data Archives at ANU. ▲