
Reimagining Parliament, edited by David Judge and Cristina Leston-Bandeira, 2024, pp 180 RRP GBP 19.99, ISBN: 9781529226980.

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Reimagining Parliaments is a collection of essays carefully curated and introduced by two highly regarded political scientists, Professor Cristina Leston-Bandeira (University of Leeds) and Emeritus Professor David Judge (University of Strathclyde, Glasgow).

This fresh, challenging edited collection invites its expert contributors to ‘step outside their professional and academic comfort zones’ and think ‘afresh about how they might reimagine parliament’.¹ This in turn takes readers on a future-focused journey, where entrenched ‘problems’ are presented as reform opportunities, and multi-disciplinary approaches are embraced as possibilities for breaking free of conventional quagmires that have often curtailed the imagination of political scientists and parliamentary procedure specialists.

Although most of the contributors to *Reimagining Parliaments* are based in the United Kingdom, this work has direct relevance to parliamentary practitioners and scholars in Australia and New Zealand, as it engages with shared parliamentary practices derived from Westminster traditions and confronts some of the universal challenges facing modern democracies, including:

*widespread public dissatisfaction with the practice of ... politics, comparatively low levels of trust in parliament and even lower levels of trust in political parties.*²

¹ David Judge and Cristina Leston-Bandeira (eds) *Reimagining Parliament*. Bristol University Press, 2024.

² Judge and Leston-Bandeira (eds), *Reimagining Parliament*, p. 2.

For example, Emma Crewe's reimagining of 'rhythms, rituals and symbols' invites us to reflect on the impact of the ceremonial and theatrical elements of parliamentary practice, and its potential to exclude, or welcome, alternative perspectives or experiences from its ambit. Crewe suggests that:

[w]e should not get rid of rituals and symbols, because we cannot do politics without them, but we can review and reimagine them with certain principles to guide us.³

For Crewe, these principles include the need for a more inclusive approach to what counts as 'knowledge', reforming processes that are more inclusive of and less alienating for minority groups, reflecting on how to promote the wellbeing of key parliamentary actors through changing aspects of parliamentary procedure, and restoring standards and ethics so they become social norms (rather than the exceptions).⁴ Crewe encourages us to move away from the 'pervasive fixation on disciplining individuals'⁵ and instead focus on 'slowing down' the rhythms of parliament, and focusing institutional attention on the most important national and global challenges as an inclusive collective of decision-makers, bound by a shared commitment to ethical conduct and acting with integrity.⁶ This will no doubt resonate with policy makers and parliamentarians in Australia and New Zealand grappling with 'wicked problem' type policy challenges, including responding to climate change and achieving meaningful self-determination for First Nations peoples.

There are also multiple chapters devoted to reimagining parliament as a *workplace* which will resonate with Australian scholars and practitioners seeking to respond to recent reviews and inquiries into workplace culture, including the work of former Australian Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins in the *Set the Standard Report* published in 2021.⁷ For example, Hannah White identifies the three sets of key principles that should underpin any mid-21st century workplace, including parliaments.⁸ These

³ Judge and Leston-Bandeira (eds), *Reimagining Parliament*, p. 36.

⁴ Judge and Leston-Bandeira (eds), *Reimagining Parliament*, p. 37.

⁵ Judge and Leston-Bandeira (eds), *Reimagining Parliament*, p. 46.

⁶ Judge and Leston-Bandeira (eds), *Reimagining Parliament*, p. 47.

⁷ Australian Human Rights Commission 2021. *Set the Standard: Report on the Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces*.

⁸ Judge and Leston-Bandeira (eds), *Reimagining Parliament*, p. 86.

include: a safe, secure environment for workers; encouragement of equality, diversity and inclusion among its workers; and the creation and maintenance of a culture and environment that supports its organisational goals.⁹ For White, a successfully reimagined parliament would see itself as ‘exemplar of, rather an exception to, the rules it has established for other workplaces’.¹⁰

Lucinda Maer, Deputy Principle Clerk in the House of Commons, takes up the challenge of ‘reimagining scrutiny’, focusing on identifying the pre-conditions for parliaments to more effectively gather and interrogate evidence and information, connect parliament to the public, and impact the way in which we are governed.¹¹ Maer reminds us not to underestimate the ‘soft power’ of select parliamentary committees, who engage in ‘quieter scrutiny’ than the more confrontational chamber-based scrutiny of question time, to enhance the deliberative quality of the business of parliament, whilst also holding the executive to account.¹²

Retired House of Commons Clerk, Paul Evans, also encourages rethinking four key areas of procedure that currently ‘fail the imagination’ including: the complexity of standing orders, the experience of ‘executive capture’ that has disempowered MPs and disengaged them from their critical role in holding the executive to account, and the alienation and illegitimacy of aspects of parliamentary procedure that ‘do not resonate with the way we conduct our lives’.¹³ Evans points to a range of ‘desiderata’ that might inform a reimagining of parliamentary procedure, focused on the need to use procedural rules to ‘confer legitimacy’ of the process of parliamentary lawmaking and parliamentary decision making, and this demands that procedure ‘encourage rather than discourage participation’ and ‘bring in expertise, but not only experts’.¹⁴ A reimagined approach to parliamentary procedure would, according to Evans, ‘empower parliament, not just the executive’ and have an inbuilt capacity to respond to changing community expectations.¹⁵

⁹ Judge and Leston-Bandeira (eds), *Reimagining Parliament*, p. 86.

¹⁰ Judge and Leston-Bandeira (eds), *Reimagining Parliament*, p. 94.

¹¹ Judge and Leston-Bandeira (eds), *Reimagining Parliament*, p. 113.

¹² Judge and Leston-Bandeira (eds), *Reimagining Parliament*, p. 124.

¹³ Judge and Leston-Bandeira (eds), *Reimagining Parliament*, p. 126.

¹⁴ Judge and Leston-Bandeira (eds), *Reimagining Parliament*, p. 129.

¹⁵ Judge and Leston-Bandeira (eds), *Reimagining Parliament*, p. 130.

A specific example might be to challenge the current clause by clause committee of the whole stage of debate on a Bill to include the opportunity for the broader public to engage directly with the content of a draft law, and the opportunity for technical 'revision' prior to voting on proposed amendments, to ensure that the proposed new law is readily understood by the public, fit for purpose, and clearly drafted to avoid any unintended consequences.¹⁶ According to Evans, the goal would be to promote less partisanship and more deliberation, moving beyond the 'time-bound bearpit of the plenty' and placing the 'more open-ended world of committees' at the centre.¹⁷ These observations are apposite for Australian parliaments, many of which are grappling with how to ensure the more innovative, inclusive practices of committees are reflected on the floor of the House.¹⁸

It is tempting to see this edited collection as a catalogue of the many complex, intersecting 'problems' with modern, Westminster inspired parliaments. However, in fact, when taken as a whole, this is an *optimistic* read, that reminds us of the power of the shared 'belief in the *principle* of democracy'¹⁹ and our collective ability to 'reimagine' our shared democratic future.

¹⁶ Judge and Leston-Bandeira (eds), *Reimagining Parliament*, p. 134.

¹⁷ Judge and Leston-Bandeira (eds), *Reimagining Parliament*, p. 139.

¹⁸ See e.g. *Australasian Parliamentary Review* Volume 37(2) Special Edition on Connected Parliaments, published in November 2022 and available at <https://www.aspg.org.au/a-p-r-journals-2/spring-summer-2022-vol-37-no-2/>.

¹⁹ Judge and Leston-Bandeira (eds), *Reimagining Parliament*, p. 2.