



***AUSTRALASIAN STUDY OF  
PARLIAMENT GROUP  
(Queensland Chapter)***

**THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE AND THE  
BEGINNING OF THE MODERN COMMITTEE  
SYSTEM IN QUEENSLAND**

**TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

**MONDAY, 12 NOVEMBER 2018**

**Brisbane**

## MONDAY, 12 NOVEMBER 2018

---

**Mr FRASER:** Tonight we have a distinguished group of speakers. We are acknowledging that 2018 is the 30th anniversary of the setting up of a public accounts committee in the Queensland parliament. Our speakers tonight were participants in some of the most significant events that occurred in that process. Our first speaker is the man who introduced the bill to set up the Public Accounts Committee in 1988, former premier of Queensland Mike Ahern; the second speaker is someone known to most of you, the Clerk of the Parliament, Neil Laurie; the third speaker is the man who single-handedly destroyed the coalition government in 1983 over the issue of the Public Accounts Committee, Ian Prentice, the former member for Toowong; and the fourth speaker is a member of that first Public Accounts Committee from 1988, the former member for Bundaberg and a member of this body, Clem Campbell.

We will allow each of the speakers to make their own presentation, and then at the conclusion you can direct questions to any of the four speakers. If you are asking a question will you please identify yourselves by name so that, as this evening is being recorded by Hansard, we will be able to put the appropriate name against the question. I would now like to introduce to you the Hon. Mike Ahern.

**Mr AHERN:** Thank you for the opportunity of saying something about the history of the Public Accounts Committee. I really wanted to get this off my chest so that you can be assured of the role of my cabinet in the formation of this important body. I would like to take you back to my days as a backbencher in this parliament. In those days you were given an overseas trip if you lived long enough. My turn finally came around and I was able to attend a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference in Ottawa. The theme of it was 'The Public Accounts Committee in the Parliaments of the Commonwealth Today'. I was told that I could go there but there would not be much interest from me because there was no public accounts committee here. I went along and, to my horror, I was in the position of being a curiosity because we were the only ones without a public accounts committee. There are more than 100 parliaments in the Commonwealth. The CPA does a very good job of educating people about what parliament is, the separation of powers and things like that. Someone said, 'There's a fellow over there who represents a parliament that doesn't have a public accounts committee but should have.' That was very interesting.

When I came back I had to report to the parliament on my trip. I remember it as though it were yesterday. I made the presentation to the parliament before lunch, at about quarter to 1. I think all of the journos had decided my presentation would be sufficiently boring that they did not have to be there, so there was no-one in the press gallery. There were one or two members of parliament waiting for the luncheon adjournment when I rose to my feet and started to talk about our parliament, which was unique in the Commonwealth. Suddenly there was a lot of interjecting. I looked down and it all came from a fellow called Bjelke-Petersen. He was loud and clear and angry, and he was screaming at me about this 'hoo-ha' which he called the public accounts committee. Afterwards someone said to me, 'Don't worry about him. He belongs to an organisation we call TEN.' I said, 'I've never heard of TEN. Is it T-E-N?' They said, 'Yes, that's it.' I said, 'What does it stand for?' They said, 'It stands for "tell 'em nothing".'

If we could fast-forward from then to the opportunity I had to chair the cabinet after the retirement of Joh Bjelke-Petersen. All of the lurid history surrounding what went on around about that time has been written about time and time again. A fellow called Evan Whitton was one of my lecturers at high school. Some of you would know Evan; he passed away just a couple of months ago. He was in the press gallery. He said to me, 'Ahern, I hope you're going to tell us something significant that you're doing now that you're Premier of Queensland.' I knew that I would be getting a question like that from him, if not from someone else. I said to him, 'We're going to establish a public accounts committee.' That was our signal of change in Queensland at that time. That was the issue that I chose to parade as the first decision of my government at that time, and we went ahead and did it. I wanted the opportunity today to tell you the circumstances and the reasons that all happened.

A parliament that does not have a public accounts committee is unique. It ought not to be an option; it ought not to be something that you can consider—it is something that is just part of a parliament in the Commonwealth, and now it is. Down through the years it is something that everyone has had to accept. These checks and balances are there for a purpose and for a public benefit to do with the separation of powers in a modern state. That was our doing.

There were other people who contributed. I remember there was a ginger group of liberals in the parliament who all had a go at it. Terry White had a miserable go at it; he was put to awful persecution. He cannot be here tonight or he would have been. His son is terminally ill and he cannot leave him, but I know he would want me to encourage you because he did a lot. In the opposition there were lots of speeches, and so I made mine too. A significant thing happened then. Old 'Arg' Whitton, as we used to call him at school, tapped me on the shoulder and said, 'Well done, son.' That was really something. Thank you very much.

**Mr FRASER:** Thanks very much, Michael. Your reflection on the events of 30 years ago is very much appreciated. The next speaker is the Clerk of the Parliament, Neil Laurie.

**Mr LAURIE:** When I was first approached to speak tonight I thought this would be a doddle, because I did a paper about the formation of the Public Accounts in Queensland. Then I saw the list of speakers and I thought, 'I'm going to have to change tack here, because otherwise when I get up to talk about everything I have read concerning the formation of the committee I'm going to be contradicted by these gentlemen over here as to what actually happened.' I think it is far safer ground for me, and it is probably a little bit out of order, but I want to talk about the committee system since I began working for the parliament.

I started in 1993 and the Public Accounts Committee was established in 1988, so it had been going for about five years when I arrived. We also had a public works committee and the parliamentary criminal justice committee. I have to stop myself every time I say the name of this committee, because it has changed its name about four times during its existence. We also had a travelsafe committee which had recently been established, and I think there was a committee of subordinate legislation as well. That was when I first came here. It was an embryonic parliamentary committee system and everyone at that time was essentially awaiting the EARC report, which was looking at parliamentary committees more comprehensively, and of course the parliamentary electoral committee system, which was the other one that I forgot to mention, the parliamentary committee for electoral and administrative review.

When I came to the committee office it was in an era of flux because, while we had those existing committees, everybody was waiting for change. We have to remember that the committee system, as Mr Ahern has pointed out, had been established prior to the Fitzgerald report, and I think that is something that a lot of people miss. We had started down the road of reform prior to the Fitzgerald report being handed down. In the Fitzgerald report it actually said—and I will always remember these words—that the Queensland parliament had to establish a 'comprehensive system of parliamentary committees'.

I was working for the PCJC as it then was and the report from EARC had been handed down, then the report from the parliamentary committee had been handed down, and finally the government made its decision as to how the new committee system would operate. That was contained in an act called the Parliamentary Committees Act in 1995. That act essentially re-established the Public Accounts Committee, the Public Works Committee and the PCJC. The Electoral Administrative Review Committee was going to be replaced by the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee. The Travelsafe Committee was not part of the legislation, but we had the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee, the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee and the Standing Orders Committee. That was going to be the comprehensive parliamentary system that was introduced in 1995. I do not wish to appear in any way overly negative, because it was a great leap forward in terms of where we had come from, but in my view it was still far from a comprehensive parliamentary committee system.

They were very much function orientated committees. Yes, we had a public accounts committee and we had a public works committee which had wide remit across government in terms of those sorts of activities, but we did not really have committees that covered every area or field of government. You think straightaway when you look at the list which committee in a routine way oversaw what the education system was doing, or the health system, or any of those sorts of large public sector organisations. The bottom line is that there was no committee which had the day-to-day overview of those things.

In my view, whilst we had come a long way from the pre-1988 era, we still had not reached the stage that I think was envisaged by the comments made by Fitzgerald. The reality is that we very much stayed that way for a very long period of time. From 1995 all the way through to the next major reform, which I see as 2011, we still did not have legislation being looked at in a comprehensive way by parliamentary committees.

For the period 2000 to 2010 there were 502 committee reports and 20 referrals by the House to committees, but only four bills of the approximately 1,200 bills that were tabled in the House during that period were scrutinised by committees beyond technical scrutiny applied by the Scrutiny of Legislation

Committee. What I mean by that is that the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee used to look at every bill that was introduced in the House but it used to only look at bills for compliance with the fundamental legislative principles. They never, ever looked at the policy issues in the bills. They never, ever looked at issues that went to funding or implementation of the bills. They only ever looked at fundamental legislative principles.

There was no connection at all between a lot of the work of the committees. A lot of good work was being undertaken by those committees, but the work undertaken by those committees between 1995 and 2011 did not really have any connection to the work that was being done in the House, to such an extent that there was a process in the House for consideration of committee reports but over the course of that 10-year period there was only 45 minutes of formal consideration in the Legislative Assembly of three of 191 inquiry reports, or less than two per cent of those reports. Up until 2011, whilst we had established a parliamentary committee system, I think we still had a long way to go.

In 2011 there was a review of the parliamentary committee system and the new portfolio committee system was established. It is my opinion—and many may disagree with this—that it is a leap forward from where we were in terms of the committees that we have had since 1988. The legislation is routinely looked at by committees—in fact, by default is looked at by committees. Now we actually have an amendment to our Constitution that was passed last parliament whereby legislation is presumed to be referred to committees for a minimum of six months unless the House otherwise resolves. In other words, review of legislation by committees now is almost seen as quasi-constitutionally entrenched. The committees are spending a lot of time looking at legislation. The number of referrals by the House has increased dramatically. Now committees in many ways are getting referrals through the House that are then developing into government legislation. You can see that the work of committees is extending almost to policy formulation to some extent or at least testing the waters, shall we say.

The legislative process itself has changed in the House. That change is all around the ability to use committees now. Once upon a time, when I first got here, bills would be introduced into the House and sit on the table for seven days. We made a huge improvement and increased it to 14 days. Bills could theoretically sit on the table for 14 days and then be debated without an urgency motion because they had sat on the table for 14 days. Now, legislation is introduced into the House and automatically sent off to committee for, generally speaking, unless there an urgency motion, at least six weeks and then it comes back for debate in the House. The quality of debate has changed dramatically because members are so much more well informed about the content of those bills. The engagement with the community has dramatically improved, and the contact between the community and parliament has improved as a result of it. I think the 2011 changes or reforms have made a real impact in the way in which the committees work and in the way in which the parliament works, and I think we are getting better outcomes.

I have sat at that table for probably far too long and seen bills passed, and within six months under the old system there would be another bill that was introduced that would be nothing more than an amendment to the previous bill because of all the mistakes and issues that had been found. Now I think we are being far more proactive as a parliament to properly scrutinise the legislation, not only about fundamental legislative principles but just as importantly about policy, implementation and associated things, so we are getting better outcomes as a parliament.

Do I think our system at the moment is perfect? No, I do not. I still think we have a problem in terms of the amount of time committees get. There are some of my staff from committees here and I am sure they would agree. The six-week minimum in the Constitution unfortunately is becoming—whenever you set a minimum, oftentimes people use that as the benchmark, if you like. In my view, 12 weeks is an appropriate time to be considering bills, but six weeks now is almost by default becoming the period of time. I would like to see us have an average of at least 12 weeks to look at bills, because I think you get far better engagement with the community if the community has a lot more time to consider the legislation and as a parliament we get better outcomes and as a community we get better outcomes.

The ironic victim of the 2011 reforms has regrettably been the public accounts and public works roles, and I am the first to admit that. During the course of the 2011 reform process there were a lot of people who expressed to me concern about the fact that we would not have a public accounts committee and we would not have a public works committee. My response to them was, 'No. We're going to have seven public works committees. We're going to have seven public accounts committees.' Unfortunately, I am the first to admit that I was wrong on that account. I think what has happened is that the committees are now so busy,

generally speaking, with their roles with the legislation, their roles with the referrals and their oversight roles that unfortunately they are not devoting the time that they require to do those public accounts and public works functions. They have been the unfortunate victims of the 2011 process.

I said tonight that we were going to have difficulties keeping to time with the panel of speakers that we have, so I am not going to contribute to that and go on any longer, but I am more than happy to answer questions at the end. Thank you.

**Mr FRASER:** Thank you very much, Neil. Before I call our next speaker, I would like to acknowledge the Speaker. The Speaker of the Parliament has been a great supporter of our organisation since he assumed office after the 2017 election. Mr Speaker, we appreciate you dropping in tonight. We also appreciate the support you have given us over the last 12 months or so. The next speaker is, as I introduced him before, the man who single-handedly destroyed the coalition government in 1983, the former member for Toowong, Ian Prentice, who probably put the three words 'public accounts committee' before the public as they had never appeared before.

**Mr PRENTICE:** The initial comment I would make is that, of course, Fraser is complicit in everything I did. To talk about the Public Accounts Committee and the events of August 1983, we need to have a bit of a look at the history of what happened before that time. I came to the parliament having been a Young Liberal president, having had five minutes at the bar and having been actively involved in the push within the Liberal Party to take a more dominant role in terms of the coalition and hopefully to get more seats than the Nats.

We had during that time presidents like Eric Robinson and John Moore. Robinson owned Robinson's sports store but came to the presidency defeating Arthur Hartwig. There were issues about the Landsborough by-election and whether there would be a three-cornered contest. It was a time when within the party and within parliament there was much more freedom than I see around parliament at the moment—that is, it was not at all unusual for people to cross the floor. Within the Liberal Party, that came from a history of people like Charles Porter, my predecessor—Christian Porter's grandfather—Bill Lickiss and members of the ginger group who were constantly agitating on various issues. The fights were not so much about Left, Right or conservative versus moderate or trendy or whatever; they were more about the process and how things were done.

Within the party—I grew up in the party as a Young Liberal president—I would debate government ministers on television having a completely contrary view. I think you get expelled for that these days. When I came to parliament I crossed the floor and voted against sandmining on Moreton Island. I had spoken to my leader at the time—Llew Edwards. He knew my position. He was relaxed about that. There had always been that understanding that people on matters of conscience could in fact cross the floor.

For quite a while the Liberal Party had outpolled the National Party in the early days of the coalition government but never got more seats because of the redistribution, or the gerrymander as it was known—the weighting that was given to country seats. The aim within the Liberal Party was to see what we could do to make that change. We did it against a background of various issues in the late seventies and early eighties: Cedar Bay; the right-to-march legislation; the Premier's support for Milan Brych, who was a dodgy doctor from New Zealand who claimed that he had a cure for cancer and was subsequently struck off in New Zealand; Stephen Horvath and his hydrogen car—well ahead of his time. The Premier was a supporter of that, but unfortunately it did not work. There was the banning of SEMP and MACOS, which were education programs that, God forbid, were secular and that could not happen; the Peel report into travel entitlements of members which highlighted some aspects of accountability in a financial sense; the Bellevue Hotel demolition; the Winchester South deal, where there were concerns as to why it went to Sir Les Thiess and his partners and not to others; the famous *Melbidir* fishing trips for members, journalists and others; and so it went. There was a concern that a lot of those activities were creating problems.

When I first came into parliament, in my maiden speech I said, 'We need a public accounts committee and legislative and general purpose committees, and we need to do it now.' As we moved on during that time, we had argued this within the party. It was generally accepted. We had discussed it in the parliament. We had a vote in the parliament. There was a classic vote—I have been trying to find it in *Hansard* but I found it confirmed in a book this evening—where the bells were ringing and you had the Liberals sitting on one side of the House and the ALP and the National Party together on the other side of the House. The Premier came straight out of the cabinet door—most of you will know that it is just off the side of the chamber—and straight into his seat beside Llew Edwards. On the other side was Bob Katter saying, 'Joh!

Joh, over here, over here!' He got up and he walked to the Speaker's chair. He stopped. He looked. He walked back to Llew. They had a discussion. He hesitated and then he sat down, I think probably because Joh could not bring himself to vote with the ALP and the socialists. That vote is worth mentioning because there was an understanding that there was a free vote on that issue.

When we came to parliament in August—I think it was the 3rd; I can remember the day very well—we had a meeting beforehand of all the conspirators at the Park Royal. We had coffee in the morning at breakfast. To the best of my recollection, it was me; Terry Gygar, the member for Stafford, who is now an assistant professor with Bond; Guelfi Scassola, the member for Mount Gravatt; Terry White; Angus Innes; I think Bill Hewitt; and probably a couple of others.

This was just another day at the office. We did not see it as anything terribly dramatic. We did not expect the sky to fall in. We had crossed the floor before. It was raised with Llew Edwards very shortly before it was about to happen in the House. As the vote proceeded, I can remember our small band sitting off to one side—voting with us from the ALP was Rob Akers—John Greenwood, Gygar, Innes, Rosemary Kyburz, myself, Scassola, and Terry White. Russ Hinze came over and sat down beside Terry and gave him a stern talking-to. Terry was unmoved. I had been sitting beside him and you could just suddenly feel the atmospherics. This was not what we thought was going to happen at all.

I said to Terry, 'Mate, I think Llew might sack you.' He said, 'What do you think I should do?' In the worst piece of political advice I have ever given I said, 'Tell him to get'—you know what. The end result was that, eventually, Llew did sack Terry. We replaced Llew as leader with Terry and we moved on. Then it became an issue of managing this extraordinary time. Terry—some bright person, probably Fraser, must have given him this idea—walked out with a sheet of paper and said, 'Today the Premier tore up the coalition agreement,' because he demanded the resignations. Within 24 hours, that was part of an ad. It said, 'Today, Terry White tore up the coalition agreement,' and it ran day and night during the whole process.

The initial reaction in the community was good. The *Courier-Mail* gave us a very positive editorial and stayed positive for a week perhaps. The party polling was quite good. We were not going to win in our own right, but certainly the numbers were looking very good. We had a number of things that impacted on us. People think they have it hard now. The premier of Tasmania supported the National Party. The premier of Western Australia came out and supported the National Party. Former prime minister Malcolm Fraser came out and supported the National Party and said how terrible the Liberals were in Queensland. Then in the week before the election Brian Austin, loyal foot soldier that he was, announced that he was challenging White for the leadership. That was on the Wednesday before the election. With that, what vote there was collapsed even further. I managed to lose my very safe seat. I went back to the bar.

I think the thing about it was that the Liberal Party tried to position itself against the National Party. The concept of honest, open and accountable government, which is what we used during the election campaign, simply did not work when, I will say it again, you had the disunity that obviously showed on the Liberal Party side of the fence. Nobody was going to vote for a group that was not united.

The Public Accounts Committee really summed up the problems with the coalition and the National Party and, more particularly, the Premier. The Premier saw it as just something that would cause trouble, not needed. 'Don't you worry about that' was his approach to life, yet it was the sort of issue that people picked up. At around that time there were concerns about policing, police verballing and issues like that. The campaign itself I thought was run reasonably well, but we were up against a great deal. I think the message was right. Thankfully, Mike acted on it in the fullness of time when he could, but it was dramatic times. Thank you.

**Mr FRASER:** Despite what Ian might have tried to suggest to you, the day he moved his motion in parliament I was lying in hospital with a broken leg, so I had nothing to do with it.

**An audience member:** Who ran over you, David?

**Mr FRASER:** A friend of Bill Lickiss. The next speaker for the night is one of the members of that first parliamentary Public Accounts Committee that was instituted in 1988, the then member for Bundaberg and a member of this organisation, Clem Campbell.

**Mr CAMPBELL:** I would like to recognise you all as global citizens. I think it is very important that we appreciate the role of the parliament not only in Queensland but how it can be very important for the globe.

## The Public Accounts Committee and the beginning of the modern committee system in Queensland

I was asked to give a background of what it was like with the Public Accounts Committee being formed and with me being a member of the opposition. I have to put it how I came to parliament. I am an agricultural scientist. I got my degree up there at Queensland University. I had been a member of the Junior St Vincent de Paul, so I was a good Catholic boy from a fairly conservative family. I worked for the department of primary industries and then the Bundaberg canegrowers. I started to appreciate the sugar industry, and that is when I got a love for the parliament of Queensland. It was here that ordinary men and women of Queensland took an industry based on slavery—sorry, it was called indentured labour, but it was actually slavery—and provided the legislation that provided fair wages, fair prices, fair profits for the processors and a fair and stable price for consumers. I thought, 'What a fantastic legislature to do that.' It has lasted pretty well, but I am not too certain how the sugar industry is going today.

I had never visited the parliament of Queensland until I got elected. I was not, 'This is what I am going to do all my life.' I was a member of the opposition. When we came to parliament we had no orientation. The only thing that happened to us is that, when you were in the Legislative Assembly, if the old fellows could embarrass the new members they would. The National Party members were not allowed to sit with us and eat with us in the members' dining room. No, we could not have that. When the Premier came to Bundaberg, he never recognised the member for Bundaberg. That was the type of system we had at that time.

We in the opposition were looking at how we could improve the parliament. When it came to the Public Accounts Committee, we had the Labor Party members. There was me, Ken Hayward and Dean Wells. We were told, 'Go and have a look at what the public accounts committees are doing in the other states.' There was Des Booth and Gilbert Alison from the National Party. They had travelled around Australia and they were the main ones from the National Party who spoke. The Fitzgerald inquiry came and there was change. Mike Ahern was there to lead that change and we were going to have a public accounts committee. The public accounts committee was one that was accepted in the House of Commons. In 1861, Gladstone said that a parliamentary accounts committee gave the 'circle of control'. There was a public accounts committee in Victoria from 1895, in New South Wales from 1902, the Commonwealth from 1930, and there was even one in the Northern Territory, so Queensland was going to catch up.

It was a good debate. It was interesting that there were amendments moved in that debate when it was felt that there had to be changes. One of the things that was said in the debate was that we were not going to look at anything prior to 1 December 1987. Of course, the opposition got stuck into that but, in reality, it was a smart thing to do. In effect, when you are a member of parliament and you are serving on a parliamentary committee, you really do not have the time to go through the history. You have to be looking at things that will make a change today.

The other thing that was really good that the Ahern government had introduced was that the government had to report back to the parliament within six months of that report being tabled. We thought that was good, because too often reports are just put in there and nothing happens. It was interesting to note that one of the people who had an impact on me in that debate was Terry White, because he put everything that had been said about the Liberal situation. On 10 November 1988 Terry White said—

... canvassing events of 1982 that led to the dispute over the Public Accounts Committee issue and finally to the end of the coalition ...

That is one of the things that led to it. He said further—

... Executive arm of the Government had in many ways usurped the legitimate role of this Parliament.

I think that is very important for a good committee system—that is, to keep the legislative government in check, to make them accountable. That was how we happened. It was interesting that, on 29 August 1989, you would not believe it but Gilbert Alison, the chair of the committee, was appointed a minister. Would you believe that the committee met and said, 'Gilbert Alison was going to table the first report of the Public Accounts Committee, but he's not here. He's gone to the executive government, but that does not stop the work of the committee'? I remember Terry White was very strong on this. We presented that report. Of course, the deputy chair of the Public Accounts Committee tabled the first report of the Public Accounts Committee on 27 September 1989 and said—

I lay upon the table of the House the report of the Parliamentary Committee of Public Accounts into the administration of drought relief by the Department of Primary Industries.

In presenting this historic first report of the Public Accounts Committee I must acknowledge the work of the former chairman, Gilbert Alison, researcher, Kevin Lambkin, and secretary, Don Bletchly. It is a courageous report with positive, strong recommendations and sets a high standard for parliamentary committees.

The members of the committee worked in the co-operative spirit of all-party committees to present a unanimous report worthy of the support of this Parliament. I move that the report be printed.

I presented that report as a member of the opposition. The first ever Public Accounts Committee report was actually presented to the parliament by a member of the opposition.

It was an interesting report, because it looked into the administration of drought relief. It came from a leaked memo from the department of primary industries that said that there were deficiencies. Point 4.3 of the report was titled, 'Mr JJ Dan Daly'. The officer in charge of the drought secretariat, Mr JJ Dan Daly, in September 1988 circulated to selected administrative district inspectors of stock an internal departmental memo. It showed deficiencies in the system. I will tell you what the deficiency was. It was highlighted that the drought relief was not there to help primary producers. What was happening was that the big pastoral companies made this system part of their management system. They would get subsidised to bring their stock from the gulf country down to the Channel Country and it would be subsidised. The poor little farmer who was suffering from drought might have got a few bucks out of it, but over 80 per cent of all the money spent on drought relief went to a few large pastoral companies. The recommendations changed that to make certain that we would support the smaller graziers, the smaller farmers and help them.

The other interesting thing that was very important to us was that Mr Daly was moved, at the direction of the minister, who was subsequently, on 3 August 1989, reported as stating that the removal 'was because Mr Daly did not have the administrative skills for the job'. It goes on—

In the course of its inquiry, the Committee has had need to consider both Mr Daly's administrative and technical qualifications and experience, and taking into account also that its inquiry, as well as that conducted by the Technical Departmental Committee, has substantially confirmed the concerns expressed by Mr Daly in his December 1988 memo, the Committee believes that his arbitrary removal from the position of Officer in Charge, Drought Secretariat, was not justified.

That was fantastic because for the first time public servants appreciated that the parliament was prepared to stand up for them. That is what was important about that report: not what we were doing for better policy but that we were going to stand up for good public servants. That is how I came to enjoy the work as a member of the Public Accounts Committee.

The Legislative Assembly is based on an adversarial system, the Westminster system. I could not really take that. I had been in research. I would see reports presented and members on one side would totally misinterpret the report. I thought, 'How could they say that?' The problem was that that happened on both sides of the House; they were all misinterpreting. When you come from that background, you feel that the work of the committees was good; you all worked together.

Most of my parliamentary work was on the Public Accounts Committee, then on the Travelsafe Committee—and I loved the Travelsafe Committee, working together to see how we could save lives on the roads of Queensland. Then I was the inaugural chairman of the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee. We have to have a strong parliamentary committee system to have a good parliament. I believe that is so important.

Every time I would come to parliament I would carry two things in my briefcase. There was a poem by Thomas Shapcott, who was a poet in the Bjelke-Petersen years. His poem titled *Advice to a Politician* basically said that if you are going to be a successful politician you must have an enemy. If you do not have an enemy, make an enemy. If you need to change policy to have an enemy, change the policy. You can just see it today, can't you? You find someone you can make an enemy and then you get everyone behind you. The other thing I always had was a poem by Henry Lawson, the unionist. That poem has one line, 'I'm too old to rat.' Regardless of what your party did, you would stick by it.

There were things that changed. We introduced competition policy, and I believe in orderly marketing. All of a sudden there was the introduction of student fees and student loans. I always believed in free tertiary education. Those things make it difficult. Over the period the difficulty was being a member of a political party when these things were changing. You were not changing, but you think the party is. What is the difference between loyalty and weakness? Do you give in because you are loyal to the party or you are just too weak to argue any longer? That has always been a difficult situation.

The other aspect that I believe is very important is respect for the institution of parliament. I believe a lot of members of parliament do not really understand what parliament is all about, what we do in there. We do things that judges cannot do, that bishops cannot do, the Police Commissioner cannot do. We make laws; we legislate. That is the important thing. That is a very unique position for us. Because of that, I think there is something very important—and I would like to end on this. We talk about today's committee structure. Because I have been a member of the opposition, I will say this. I appreciate the logic when people say the new parliamentary system is perhaps better than the old. I have to say that a respected and

powerful public accounts committee, a public works committee and a scrutiny of legislation committee are the ones that bring respect and accountability to a parliament. With a strong parliamentary system we can ensure that we do have, and will always have, good governance for Queensland.

**Mr FRASER:** Thanks very much, Clem. I saw the Clerk taking copious mental notes of what you said, particularly your concluding remarks. I am sure we will see some reforms in the very near future! We will throw it open to questions. As I said earlier, if you could identify yourselves when you ask your question it will make the transcription much easier. If you could direct your questions to one of the speakers they will respond as best they can.

**Mr MUIR:** I think Neil Laurie may have made a comment about quasi entrenchment of the committees in the Constitution. I would like to have that topic ventilated a bit more about how we could better entrench the parliamentary committees in the Constitution.

**Mr LAURIE:** At the moment there is presumption in the Constitution that bills are sent to the committees for six weeks unless the House otherwise determines that they are urgent. It has been my belief that if something is genuinely urgent its urgency will be supported by the House generally, and I have seen genuinely urgent legislation come into this place. For example, a few years ago the oaths for magistrates had been changed in the legislation. Unfortunately, the administrators at the Magistrates Court did not apply the oaths. As a result, all of the magistrates who had been appointed since that legislation was enacted were probably invalidly exercising power because they had not been properly sworn, according to the legislation. There was no dissension on the proposition that that bill be treated as urgent, that the House fix it up immediately. I can point to numerous occasions throughout the time I have been here on which genuinely urgent legislation has been authorised to be passed by the House urgently.

The reality of the situation is that the majority of urgent legislation is just politically expedient and oftentimes for no real reason apart from the fact that a minister wants to get the legislation through for some manufactured reason. A special majority for urgency is something that I think would be an important advancement in a unicameral parliament and an important further entrenchment of parliamentary committees. I think an upper house is more significantly and appropriately called a house of review. What we are missing in a unicameral parliament is that house of review—that is, a house that puts a brake on legislation sometimes for members to think, 'Is this the best way to go? Should we not think about this?' That does not happen in Queensland because we are unicameral. I think urgency itself is something that needs a brake on it, and you could link that with the entrenchment of committees.

**Ms NELSON:** You have pre-empted what I was going to ask, Neil. I think it is amazing the way the committee structure has been improved since I was first here, when the committees were made up largely of government members and were policy driven and so on, but the opposition did not get a look-in unless it was the committee of subordinate legislation, the house committee or the works committee et cetera. That was really a pointless exercise which made it more adversarial.

During the last 20 years I have seen a decline in the quality of debate in the parliaments of Australia. I think your point about the lack of an upper house—here we are in this beautiful, useless room, which we do not use anymore. We should reinstate the upper house in Queensland. I think it is a long overdue process. I know people shake their heads, but it is the house of review. The Senate has saved Australia from some diabolical things at the national level and I think it is high time we reintroduce the opportunity for the Queensland people to vote on that topic.

The other thing that I would like to ask Neil about—or perhaps I should not ask Neil—is what was a joint venture by the opposition and the government to diminish the powers of the Speaker in the parliament not very long ago and to increase the powers of the executive over the parliament, which I find appalling. If we are really going to change the way the public view the parliament and the people wish to participate in the democratic process, we need to lift the standard and we need to reinstate the powers of the Speaker, the authority of the Speaker, and we need to give the people a house of review. Neil, Ian, Mike, Clem or anyone else, what are your views?

**Mr LAURIE:** You can ask me anything you want. Whether I will answer it is another question. I have long been of the view that we are never going to have an upper house again in Queensland. Neither major political party is ever going to support its reintroduction. I would say that you have to direct your energy into making the parliament that you do have the best it possibly can be.

As a parliamentary purist, I think having an upper house that is properly structured and is a house of review which puts a brake on the Assembly but is not able to obstruct the agenda would not be such a bad thing; it would be a great thing. However, we have to be realistic. In my opinion, the upper house is never going to ever be reintroduced.

In relation to the powers of the Speaker, they have basically been restored now. The Speaker's powers have been restored. There is nothing from the 2010 or 2011 reforms that I think exists. The Committee of the Legislative Assembly still exists, but it is basically an advisory body for the Speaker now if he wants to take matters there. The powers of the Speaker are back.

**UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** I might add to that, particularly on the question of political debate—and I remember what Clem was saying about that period. We got instructions that we were not allowed to eat with the ALP. A few of us thought we had an obligation to eat with them after that and did so. What troubles me about political debate—and it is more evident in the national parliament than it is here—is what I describe as the politics of relentless negativity. It was developed by Tony Abbott and turned into an art form by Bill Shorten. It simply is: 'Whatever the other side says, we are against it; it does not matter what I said five minutes ago.' It seems to get traction and it seems to have an impact in terms of the community.

I miss the really genuine debates in which people expressed their views and explained them, sometimes with acknowledgement of contributions from the other side of the House. I think of Jim Killen as a classic example of someone who could do that; he had good friends on all sides of the House. While I am sure there are still friendships across the table, it is not quite the same as it was some years ago.

**Mr CAMPBELL:** I think one of the difficulties we had was that we had a Premier who had not served in the parliament of Queensland and did not understand the institution of parliament and did not respect it. I really believe that if you are going to be a leader you have to be in the House for perhaps two terms or more, so you understand what the institution of parliament is all about. We make laws and legislation. For many constituents, the local member of parliament is the last person who can help you. Those are the things that you do. Unless you have been here, and especially if you have been in opposition, you really do not appreciate what the parliamentary system is all about. I do not think we need a house of review, simply because it becomes another party house. That is the problem. If it was individuals there to review, not on a party basis but on what is best for the state, then fair enough, but I think a good parliamentary committee system can keep a government accountable.

**Mr SCOTT:** We are setting history in terms of lots of information. I invite Mike to think about the reasons that he supported his role as the chairman of a select committee in an era before he even thought about public accounts committees. It seems to me that that select committee—and I have to declare an interest in that my wife wrote a PhD on it—was an important contribution to public policy, because it did not get caught up in party politics.

**Mr AHERN:** Yes, it was an interesting time, and I thought about that as you talked today. Back in the seventies, I was invited to chair the Select Committee on Education with broad terms of reference to look at the whole issue of social education versus literacy, numeracy and those sorts of things. For two years there were hearings in this place and all over Queensland, and we heard and we listened and we wrote six reports. They are parliamentary documents. That was the first time that parliament in my time had ever had a go at something like that. It looked at it all and it brought the profession together. I think there were very constructive outcomes all around. We reported, I think, across-the-board. We were not on party lines. We had all these fundamentalist people—Rona Joyner and STOP and CARE and so on—who carried out a big campaign against me in my electorate. It was really good fun.

At the same time, there was a select committee on crimes of violence in Queensland. There were a lot of rapes and things like that going on, as there always are. There was an initiative, under the chairmanship of Charles Porter, I think, that we look at crimes of violence. That was very interesting, too. We went around and did a very thorough job on that. I advise you to go back and look at those reports. It was quite interesting because, unless Bill Hewitt and I had voted with the Labor Party on that report, we would have been executing people in Queensland from the day that report came up onwards. That is what a minority report from all government members recommended. The Labor Party voted against capital punishment, plus Hewitt and Ahern.

I am not going to joke about whether it was a good idea or not for certain people who probably would have been better off not being here, but it was well done. These things brought us into a situation where slowly people were looking at what a committee system might do. The education committee was an

important one. It had six reports: social education, literacy and numeracy, distance education, postsecondary education and those sorts of things. They were all dealt with in those reports, which are now part and parcel of the documents of the parliament.

**Mr FRASER:** We have a couple of items of business to conclude with, but we will take two more questions.

**Dr DEWAR:** My question is to you, Neil. In your address you mentioned that, in your view, with the establishment of portfolio committees public accounts inquiries have suffered. Could you explain that and share your views on how that situation could possibly be addressed?

**Mr LAURIE:** I think the fundamental problem with the portfolio committees doing the public accounts and public works roles is that they tend to be overly distracted, not necessarily through any fault of their own, by the legislative workload and the referrals. In 2001 the legislative workload was reasonably predictable. The number of referrals on policy related matters is something that I have been very surprised at. We have received far more referrals from the Assembly to those portfolio committees in the past six or seven years than I ever anticipated. Therefore, part of the problem is about the workload, but it is not the whole reason.

Part of the problem is also cultural. The cultural issue is that after the 2012 election, I think, we inducted 56 new members. After the 2015 election we inducted 46 new members. The bottom line is that the membership of this place has turned over dramatically, to such an extent that at the commencement of this parliament the average service of a member was less than four years. If you go back 10 years, the average service would have been probably about 10 years. That gives you an indication of the sort of turnover.

I think in many ways we have lost touch with what public accounts and public work committees do. There has been a lot of work behind the scenes to encourage committees to take on public works and public accounts roles. I think part of it is workload related but part of it is cultural—and a bit of reluctance about what they are getting into to some degree as well. Certainly there have been some interesting public works and public accounts committees in the past few years, but the issue is both structural and cultural. No, Clem: no consultancy!

**Mr CAMPBELL:** One thing I did not mention, and I am sorry that I did not, is that parliamentary committees really only work when you have good staff. I really have to acknowledge the committee staff of this parliament. As a member of parliament, you are busy. You have so many roles you have to do. You really depend on them to make certain it is good stuff. I want to acknowledge the staff not only of the committees but also of the parliamentary library. I believe when I came in here we had—and I think we still have—probably the best parliamentary library in Australia.

**Mr FRASER:** We can take one more question.

**Mr JONES:** This question is for you, Clem. As you introduced your presentation you asserted that we are all global citizens and that made me think. My understanding of a global citizen is that you would put the world ahead of your nation and that is okay. It made me think: when we have these parliamentary committees, should we have someone representing the world or someone representing the nation as part of those parliamentary committees, so that they have more of a global and a national nature?

**Mr CAMPBELL:** In a way I think we do. I believe that every member of parliament, state and federal, should go to Hiroshima and see what happened with the atomic bomb. You would not do anything like that again. That is why I think it is important. I am now with the United Nations Association. I believe it is important that we acknowledge our role—Queensland's role—in the world.

It interests me, because do you remember it being said that you have to have an enemy, and if you do not have an enemy make an enemy? Do you know what they are trying to do in Canberra? Make China the enemy. That is what they are doing. I have looked at the history of China. China has never tried to evade Australia. It has never thought of it. In actual fact, out of the 178,000 people who came to Australia in the gold rush days, 24,000 were Chinese. They have always been here.

I think it is important, and in my role with the United Nations I try to say that we have to take that responsibility to acknowledge not only what we are as Queenslanders and as Australians but also our role in the world, because we only have one world. If we stuff up this one, we cannot just go to another one. I think it is very important.

People do not realise that the parliament of Queensland has had so many firsts. That is something that we do not go back to. Ordinary men and women of Queensland passed legislation that was the first of its kind in the world. We introduced things such as public hospitals, the state government insurance office, different orderly marketing—and those kinds of things went on and on. I have to respect all members of parliament from all different political parties for the way they have played their role.

**Mr FRASER:** Thanks very much, Clem. Tonight has been a very useful discussion. We have assembled the most prestigious group of speakers available in the Western democracies. I would like to thank Mike Ahern, Neil Laurie, Ian Prentice and Clem Campbell. I ask you all to join me in thanking them.

We have one other item of business we would like to conduct tonight. As some of you may be aware, at our AGM the ASPG resolved to confer life membership on Dr Paul Reynolds. As I indicated before, Paul Reynolds' first year at the University of Queensland as a lecturer was my first year as a student, which probably indicates how old both of us are. Paul has been the mainstay at the ASPG throughout its entire 25 years of existence. At our AGM we were delighted to confer life membership on Paul. I said to him tonight that there is no real point in just going around and saying that you have life membership of the ASPG, because what can you show people? How can you demonstrate your life membership? I suppose you could get a tattoo, but that is pretty unseemly.

Therefore, tonight we decided to make a small presentation to Paul. I would like Mike Ahern to join me. As you know, Paul is Mike's biographer and we thought it most appropriate, as he is here tonight, that Mike help me with the presentation. At the same time, we would have a few words from one of Paul's professional colleagues from the University of Queensland, Roger Scott.

**Mr SCOTT:** This was unscripted when David told me that we were doing this ceremony. Although I am now retired, I am a foundation member of the ASPG and, more importantly, I was around the University of Queensland for most of my working life. I think the university should be recognising Paul's contribution, as well as the ASPG, because community engagement is all the go these days. It has been discovered. They have not discovered Queensland as a community and they certainly have not discovered the study of Queensland government. Paul is the person who has kept it alive and, in his two roles as lecturer and then engaged within parliament, has maintained a connection that is fundamental to the health of democracy in Queensland. Speaking with absolutely no authority, the university would want to endorse the honours being bestowed on Paul tonight.

**Dr REYNOLDS:** Thank you very much. It is a very great privilege and honour to have been here from day one with the ASPG. Since it has been 25 years—yes, because we had a dinner at 20 years—I want to share a few bits and pieces on the history on the way through. We have former Speaker Mr Fouras to thank for our existence. We were the last jurisdiction in Australia and New Zealand to have an ASPG, and it was Jim's determination to found it and to round out some of the reforms that were being introduced to the parliament starting, as we know, with Mike in 1988 and with the election of the Goss government. He convened a meeting here, and we did not stack it but my mate Gary Chittick, who is with us tonight, nominated me and Jim seconded the nomination. Just to show you that God has a sense of humour, there were a number of people who nominated themselves for the first committee. Bill Hewitt nominated Don Lane, who then nominated Bill Hewitt. That is a side of Bill Hewitt you had not seen before, but that was okay. I made sure that at the first AGM after the initial meeting a year later the former member for Merthyr got his marching orders. That was fine.

When I took the chair I had a survey of the jurisdictions in Australia and I had a fair idea of what was happening across the Tasman. There was a tremendous variability in terms of what happened. In some of the jurisdictions, for example, a few academics sat down in the Strangers Bar with a few members and had a natter about mutual matters and that was it; that was the ASPG meeting. I was determined that we were going to be an activist chapter. We were never going to be big, because we are a niche market; we are a cheer squad for the parliament. There is still astounding ignorance out in the community about what the parliament is and what it does. Just to give you a quick illustration, I had my hair cut today and the very nice lady who cut it said to me, 'Are you going somewhere?' I said, 'Yes, I've got a function at parliament.' She said 'Oh, where's that?' Okay: I would know as little about hairdressing as she does about the parliament. I suppose I am lucky that at my age I still have some hair to dress!

That was the problem. What we did was we had three meetings a year. Over that period I calculate that we probably had about 200 people come through the red chamber in any given year. Of course, that is not 200 separate new people, but there were 200 bodies, as it were. We always had a good active

membership of around 40 to 50 and we touched a lot of people beyond that as well. After 10 years I felt it was time to pack it in, but the question was: who could take over? I was tremendously fortunate and the chapter was tremendously fortunate that Nonie Malone stepped up, and she proved an admirable chair. I had run the 2000 conference here. She ran the 2008 one and we just had one again this year. The tradition to me showed that the chapter is going from strength to strength.

I would like to conclude on this note of thanking you very much for your loyalty, your support and your continued interest in the ASPG. It is a small but a vital cog. We have been very fortunate that I changed the constitution so that we had a member of the opposition and a member of the government on the executive committee. We have always had tremendous support from Neil Laurie and the Clerk's office. Indeed, there is a Clerk's representative on the committee which makes our links even firmer and stronger. I would finally like to say to all successive Speakers, including the current one: thank you for your patronage, for your unstinting support for what we do and for the kind of institutional framework and nurturing that that has given the chapter. It has been invaluable. Thanks.

**Mr FRASER:** We just have one small presentation to make. It has become a tradition—I do not know if it was a tradition before I took over as chairman—that we seem to hand out booze to our speakers. To Neil, Ian, Mike and Clem, we have a traditional ASPG offering for you. That concludes the formal part of the evening. We all appreciate your attendance here. We will be kicking off next year with a function around the February sitting dates of parliament. We have not actually alighted on a date yet, but you will be advised in due course. As is our custom at the end of the year, we have drinks available just across the walkway in the new parliament. It is 40 years old, but I still call it new! Thank you for attending tonight and I look forward to seeing you next year and at drinks later on. Thank you.