



*AUSTRALASIAN STUDY OF
PARLIAMENT GROUP
(Queensland Chapter)*

*Parliamentary Reform in
Queensland*

Dr DAVID WATSON, MLA
Mrs WENDY EDMON, MLA
Mr MIKE HORAN, MLA

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Three speakers were invited to address this Seminar:

Dr DAVID WATSON, MLA, Member for Moggill, Liberal Party

Mrs WENDY EDMOND, MLA, Member for Mt Coot-tha, ALP

Mr MIKE HORAN, MLA, Member for Toowomba South, National Party

Dr DAVID WATSON, MLA, Member for Moggill, Liberal Party¹

Dr Watson is a former professor of accounting and business finance at the University of Queensland. He was also the Dean of the Faculty of Commerce and Economics at the University of Queensland for two terms—1983-84 and 1988-89. From 1984 until 1987, as a member of the Liberal Party, he represented the Federal seat of Forde. From December 1989 until now, he has been the member for the State seat of Moggill. He is a member of the Parliamentary CJC and other committees.

Dr David Watson: Mr Chairman, parliamentary colleagues and ladies and gentlemen, I must admit that I approach this issue with some trepidation. Certainly, I was an academic, but not in the field of politics. However, I class myself as a practitioner of politics, not as a student of politics. I am very pleased to be here. I also appreciate my parliamentary colleagues allowing me to speak first, as I have a political meeting to attend later tonight. My understanding was that the topic was parliamentary reform in Queensland. In other words, the topic is not quite as broad as Paul indicated earlier on; it is restricted to this State.

We can examine the issue of parliamentary reform in at least three ways. Although I said "at least three ways", there are probably more, but I have thought of three. Firstly, we can look at parliamentary reform in terms of changes to the representative nature of the Parliament; in other words, how members are chosen and whether that choice fairly reflects the views of the citizens. Secondly, we can examine changes in the way Parliament conducts its own business. Thirdly, we can examine changes in the relative power between the Parliament and the Executive, that is, the issue of the separation of powers and, of course, the accountability of the Executive to the Parliament. In addressing the topic, I will say something about what I think has happened in Queensland in relation to each of those three areas.

Firstly, I will discuss changes in the representative nature of the Queensland Parliament. Many academics and other non-members of Parliament would probably say that there has been a substantial change in Queensland. There has been a fair bit of publicity—and, of course, new Acts of Parliament—with respect to the way members are elected. As most of you would know, we changed the four-zonal system which was part of the Queensland political scene for a long period. Essentially, we have moved to having one zone, with a small weighting for five seats. Many people would probably say that that represented a significant reform. Quite frankly, I do not think it did. I say this for a variety of reasons.

Certainly, we have changed the parliamentary dictate of the four zones. But I do not think that it can be said that the Parliament has changed in any fundamental fashion. For example, take the political dichotomy of Labor and non-Labor since the Labor Party split in 1957. I do not think the Australian Labor Party has ever obtained more than 50 per cent of the votes in Queensland. From 1963 onwards under the preferential voting system, at no time during that period until 1989 did the Labor Party ever gain 50 per cent of the vote; 50 per cent of the vote or greater always went to the Liberal and National Parties. The Labor Party gained more than 50 per cent of the vote for the first time in 1989. It won Government then, something which was repeated in 1992. In terms of reflecting the political philosophy of the State, the new system has not gained anything for the populace of Queensland, nor has it taken anything away.

A popular topic at the moment, particularly in the Labor Party, is the representation of women and minority groups in the Parliament. Of course, nothing has changed in that regard. There is nothing in the system of parliamentary reform which would lead automatically to those types of changes. If we compared the biases in the system today with those of the past, we would see that they are the same. Those biases

¹ Dr Watson became Minister for Public Works and Housing on 28 April 1997.

arise through the system of single-member constituencies, which we, in essence, take for granted under our current system.

From the Liberal Party's point of view, one could always argue that the Liberal Party is disadvantaged in that it consistently records a greater percentage of the votes in the electorate than is reflected by the number of seats it holds in the Parliament. I think Malcolm McKerras is right in arguing that this outcome is the result of having single-member constituencies. Paul may disagree with that, but—

Dr Paul Reynolds: Totally.

Dr David Watson: Malcolm McKerras has always argued—I think quite correctly—that this is a result of the single-member constituencies and where the Liberal Party vote falls rather than the zonal system or something such as that. My general reaction is that there has not really been any substantive change, despite the rhetoric about the representative nature of the Parliament in Queensland.

Secondly, has Parliament been reformed in the way it conducts its business? Again, I think the answer is, in general, "No". The Speaker of the House is here. I must admit that, in trying to control the Parliament, my heart goes out to him every now and again. Probably my colleagues and I do not help him. For example, question time and parliamentary debates are still as constrained by the Standing Orders today as they were in the past. In the past 10 or 20 years, there have been no substantive changes to the Standing Orders of the Parliament that enable the Parliament to conduct its business in a more efficient and fairer way. There has been some modification. For example, this year, Terry Mackenroth gave us a timetable of sittings for the whole year, which was a step in the right direction. I give him credit for doing so. In planning our activities as members of Parliament, having an idea of when the Parliament is sitting is a fairly basic requirement for efficiency and fairness. That is a step in the right direction. Hopefully, it will continue. But really, the system is little different from that which existed before I came into this place. Basically, the Standing Orders and the rules for debate and so on have not changed in a way designed to increase the fairness or democracy in the Parliament.

Thirdly, I will address the changes in the relative power between the Parliament and the Executive. In this area, I think there has been some improvement. I do not think there is any doubt that the Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee, the PCJC, the Public Works Committee, PEARC—and, hopefully, the Estimates committees—will continue to redress the imbalance between the information available to the Executive arm of Government and that which is available to the Parliament. Again, the rhetoric of parliamentary reform in this area outstrips the reality of parliamentary reform. For example, the Estimates committees recently recommended by EARC were modified in some respects by the Parliamentary EARC. The Estimates committee system approved by the House does not give Estimates committees the traditional powers of parliamentary committees, namely, to call for papers, persons and things. If we really want to start to redress that issue, we have to give that type of power to a parliamentary committee, otherwise it hinges too much upon the good graces of the Minister and the Executive arm of Government. I am still not quite sure whether the time limits placed on these committees will be too restrictive. However, until we see them in operation, we will not know for sure.

My experience of public accounts committees, both in Federal and State politics, was that it was very important to give parliamentary committees the power to require members of the Executive to appear before them and to produce papers. Certainly, I can recall a number of exchanges between members of the committee and members of the Executive, directors-general or members of statutory bodies, in which it had to be pointed out that they did have to answer the questions and produce the papers being requested, otherwise the committee would take further action. It concerns me that, if it becomes too politically hot during Estimates committees, it will be too easy to deny the Parliament the information it may desire. In my own experience, parliamentary committees, both here and federally, work quite well, including the Parliamentary Public Accounts Committees and also the PCJC—which may amuse people. Both of those bodies in this Parliament, and the Joint Committee of Public Accounts in the Federal Parliament, strive very hard to work in a bipartisan fashion. When something was required of the Executive, there was unanimous agreement on the committee, regardless of political persuasion. It does disturb me that we have not been given those powers on Estimates committees.

My own feeling—and I expressed this in the Parliament when the Estimates committees were debated although we were not given much time, and I only spoke for a couple of minutes—is that they are a step in the right direction. However, in the march towards making the Executive more accountable to the Parliament, we have much further to go.

MRS WENDY EDMOND, Member for Mount Coot-tha, ALP¹

Mrs Wendy Edmond was elected in 1989, winning the seat of Mount Coot-tha, as it was then constituted. She is one of the 20 women elected to the Queensland Parliament since 1929 and one of the 13 women who sat in the Queensland Parliament in 1994.

Mrs Wendy Edmond: Dr Paul Reynolds, Mr Jim Fouras, fellow panel members, ladies and gentlemen. Before you are led to believe that I am a lecturer or come from a background that will give me insight into parliamentary reform, let me assure you I am not. I am the first and only nuclear medicine technologist ever elected to Parliament. I am not sure what that equips me for, but it is nice to be the first.

The debate tonight can touch only briefly on a subject that has filled *Hansards*, critical books, newspapers and the inquiring minds of researchers. All have brought their diverse knowledge and experiences to that debate, just as tonight we are bringing our experiences. I will restrict my contribution to the topic of parliamentary reform. In doing so, I acknowledge the EARC and PEARC reports and the continuing parliamentary debate about that reform. Many of the points about which I will speak tonight have been raised already in those debates. The debate does seem to revolve around three main axes. I agree with David on that point; my axes might be slightly different, namely, the formal parliamentary process itself, question time, debates, broadcasting of debates, petitions, sitting times, the accountability process—largely concentrating on committees, and the role of parliamentarians, resources, access, consultation and representation. As all three are necessarily interwoven, I shall comment briefly on each area as I see it.

A number of much-needed procedural changes have been implemented already in the past couple of years. The Parliamentary Papers Act clarified and extended parliamentary privilege. All Green Papers are now tabled. All departmental Estimates are now debated, rather than a few selected ones that could stand up to scrutiny. There has also been a doubling of time allocated for backbenchers to debate topics other than legislation, with the introduction of extra Adjournment and Matters of Special Public Importance debates. Some backbenchers argue that this is still insufficient; others rarely use the available opportunity. Friday sittings have decreased the number of extremely late nights. Gags and guillotines have been reduced to a very minimal number and are no longer the norm.

However, we all agree that there is room for improvement. More than any other item, question time needs to be overhauled and freed up to allow more access by both Opposition and Government members. I believe strongly that the current hierarchical system should be eliminated, with a random jump system replacing it—first in, first served. Also, questions and answers should have time limits. Although I welcome the system whereby questions on notice are now incorporated in, rather than read into, *Hansard*, I also believe that long, detailed questions should similarly be seen but not heard. While Ministers can be overly verbose in their response, questions are often so long and convoluted that a pithy answer is impossible.

Many Opposition members use question time to make a political speech rather than to ask a question. An attempt was made several years ago, but during my term here, to introduce a more open system. However, the removal of the current pecking order was rejected by the Coalition. I hope my colleagues here tonight will urge the Opposition to reconsider its position on that issue. Certainly, we have seen several days when all question time has been given over to Opposition members to allow them to catch up on queries—something to which we Government backbenchers have not had access. This may not seem important—I know a lot of people scoff at Dorothy-Dixers—but we, too, rely on questions and answers for electoral publicity purposes and to highlight specific concerns and interests.

An area about which I have real concern is the use, or abuse, of parliamentary privilege to bucket members of the public, the bureaucracy or Government authorities who have no right of reply. Often, this is done by inference, though it can be quite blatant and without real justification. Sometimes, I have noted that members continue to do this when they know that what they are saying is very damaging and untrue. Although I accept the role of parliamentarians from all sides to bring matters of concern freely to the attention of the House, some of the cowardly attacks have been inexcusable and bring the Parliament and all parliamentarians into disrepute.

That raises the question of whether or not Parliament should be televised or broadcast. I do not have strong feelings on that issue—I do not want to be a stage star—but I do have some concerns that

¹ In July 1995, Mrs Wendy Edmond became Minister for Employment and Training and Minister Assisting the Premier on Public Service Matters. In February 1996, she became Shadow Minister for Health.

some of my more obnoxious colleagues would become so hooked on the media that the role of a bucketing prima donna would be irresistible with built-in media. Obviously, we could expect to see the usual range of ham acting, feigned outrage and despair or jubilation. However, it may mean that we would see some more interest in the actual Chamber and the debates held therein, and this would lead to a sprinkling of members around the Opposition benches. But I wonder how the public would react to what is often mind-numbing, tedious repetition.

Frequently, the media comments on the shortage of sitting time and, along with the general public, seems to be under the misconception that parliamentarians work only when Parliament is in session. For the record, I point out that parliamentary sittings are directly related to the volume of legislation prepared, rather than our workloads. I am sure my colleagues here tonight will agree that by far our greatest workload comes from our committee work and our electorates. In fact, merely emphasising the need for increasing sitting times for the sake of it downplays our major role as representatives of the people, a role that demands extensive local input and interaction with the community.

The second major area in which reform is generally mooted is that of scrutiny and public accountability. If "Greed is Good" was the catchcry of the 1980s, with its devastating consequences for businesses and Governments, it has been replaced in the 1990s by the motto "Accountability is All". I know some of my colleagues have argued that we have gone too far with accountability, with a range of committees to scrutinise aspects of Government administration, the register of pecuniary interests, detailed obligations and strict guidelines for members' travel. I accept these limitations as an essential transitional phase as we regain public trust.

However, I would argue that there is a need for the public to realise the value of MPs' genuine study travel. Previously, I have suggested that the focus of our trade growth, South East Asia, should be included in our permitted sphere of study, a notion supported by those business members whom I have met who have experience in these countries. Breaking down cultural barriers is important in gaining the confidence of these countries and accessing trade opportunities. This could be done without increased cost to the public purse by increasing the permitted travel arena without increasing the allowance. I might add—and I know Mr Horan will agree—that, although a fascinating and a wonderful experience, these trade and study trips are not a junket, as they involve long hours of constant learning. Mike and I were lucky enough to go together on a trade delegation last year to South East Asia. Certainly, the hours were long.

Former Premier Mike Ahern initiated the committee system in Queensland, with public accounts and public works committees. However, at the same time, he severely limited their scope. These committees have had their roles and responsibilities increased. Also, we have seen the establishment of the PCJC and PEARC to oversee their relative commissions. Paul did not tell you that I was a member of the inaugural PCJC. I was one of the people who had to go through the learning process to help set it up. The role of the parliamentary committee is still relatively new to Queensland, and we are about to see an expansion with the introduction of six Estimates committees, each focussing on a cluster of three departments. I am a strong believer in the committee structure. Although we will all undergo a rapid learning process, I do believe it will improve public sector accountability.

I am particularly pleased that the introduction of the Estimates committees is accompanied by an education program for MPs, staff and bureaucrats. As we are constantly reminded, this is one job for which there is no prerequisite training. We come from all walks of life with all levels of education and ability—something which I would not change. The concept of a Parliament totally peopled by lawyers, economists and, heaven forbid, political scientists terrifies me. There is a need for a comprehensive induction course after each election. The duties and role of an MP are a closely guarded secret—seen as a key to electoral success perhaps—leaving newcomers to learn by trial and error, with mistakes an inevitability and often following poor role models. They should also include guidelines for parliamentary committee members, helping them to distinguish their roles as committee members and party members and how those roles must, of necessity, interact. Ideological differences may mean that differing parties never get consensus within a committee, but at least analysis of different viewpoints should be possible from an informed perspective.

Standing and parliamentary committees in particular provide means for increased input by backbench members to obtain detailed knowledge of particular issues via research and hearings. It also provides a public forum for debate that can be seen as bipartisan and productive, and it allows that accumulated knowledge to be presented to Parliament as a report. Again, I would argue that while there have been significant reforms in this area, there are some problems that should be addressed. For instance, while a committee can diligently investigate an issue and report to Parliament, there is no

present legislative requirement for that report to be considered by Parliament, let alone debated. I strongly believe that should be changed; that there should be a requirement of a response or a parliamentary debate, and that a report cannot be lost in limbo. Certainly with the benefit of hindsight, I am sure that current members of the PCJC may have been spared considerable angst if early reports generated by the inaugural PCJC, when consideration was given to procedural fairness and natural justice and hearing procedures were recommended, had been debated and accepted or rejected by Parliament. This would have established clear protocol for such hearings. Similarly, I believe that committee chairmen are the appropriate people to answer on-notice questions relating to the functioning of their committee or the authority that falls within their responsibility.

The emphasis in reform has been on the role of committees to supervise and monitor and, indeed, control the Executive in particular and the Government in general. But legislative committees also play a valuable role within parliamentary procedures. These enable backbenchers to gain expertise and increase their knowledge of different portfolios and gain an understanding of the workings of the bureaucracy in areas of interest. They also provide a focus for interested groups and give valuable input into policy decisions by providing a wider spectrum of experience and opinion. Certainly, they should not be overlooked as a tool of Government. I would also suggest that the Opposition could also use such a tool to assist with research, for example, with the shadow Ministry.

Effective committee function can actually assist in negotiating different ideological stances and lead to smoother acceptance in Parliament. Any member of a parliamentary committee who has served with any level of diligence will agree with the final success of reform, and that is to recognise the increased expectations of and demands on parliamentarians. The committee structure does create an increased burden, and while a member of the inaugural PCJC, I found that work related to that committee made up over half of my workload. This, of course, was much greater for the Chair of the committee, and I think it must be realised both in Parliament and in public that for the committee system to really work it needs to be adequately resourced. I am mindful that any increase in resources incurs a public cost, and I am reluctant to advocate that. I prefer to see money focused on essential services. I also believe that there is a risk that if too well resourced with research assistants, our representative role would be usurped and replaced and we could become merely the mouthpiece of our electorate or committee researchers. Assistance with the heavy load must, therefore, be tempered by these considerations. The public are often the last to accept that their interest is better served by a well-resourced and experienced representative.

In conclusion, may I say that while to the professional political commentators the reform process may appear slow, to those of us who must accept and master each change it is gradual but constant. Reform is a process of evolution. Steady evolution should lead to increased strength and vitality and the survival of the fittest; but rapid mutation due to extreme external pressures can lead to freakish disability and ultimate dysfunction.

MR MICHAEL HORAN, Member for Toowoomba South, National Party¹

Mr Michael Horan: Mr Chairman, the Honourable Mr Speaker, my parliamentary colleagues, former parliamentarians, ladies and gentlemen. As Paul said, I guess I am the embryo of parliamentary reform, because I came in after the by-election in 1991 when Clive Berghofer, the then Mayor of Toowoomba, had to decide whether or not he wished to remain in local government or in State politics. I thought that tonight I might share with you what it is like to come into Parliament in a by-election and talk to you about the particular area that I have been involved in almost exclusively since I entered Parliament, that is, being in Opposition and being in a shadow Ministry.

When I came into Parliament in 1991, I had been a member of my political party, the National Party, for four weeks. I had just run the thirteenth Toowoomba Royal Show. I was general manager of the Toowoomba showgrounds. I finished the show, joined the National Party, stood for preselection and, within about four weeks, here I was in Parliament. For me, it was an enormous change. I think as representatives of political commentators, academics and members of Parliament, you would probably be interested in what my thoughts were. I think it perhaps helps a little towards the judgment of parliamentary reform.

When I first sat here in Parliament, my first thoughts were, "What have I let myself in for?" I had been used to a system. We ran about 190 events a year at the Toowoomba showground, from the annual show, with over 60000 attendees, to home shows, trade fairs, major indoor attractions, weekly greyhound racing, weddings, campdrafts, rodeos, speedway, rock concerts—you name it; we ran the lot. All of those required quick decision making, making things happen, having a budget and marketing the event. If the event was not successful, it did not make money and the people did not come, my job was on the line and so were the jobs of those on the show committee, and other people. So, really, I was involved in a very intense area where we had to make things happen. We were always achieving, and so on. Over about five years, I had also taken part in developing an \$8.5m showground, which is an exciting project and something to look back on every day of my life.

So here I was suddenly sitting in this chair—a nobody—listening to all the talk and wondering, "Now, if I spend a week here and if I do my 100 hours a week, at the end of the week when I drive home to Toowoomba what will I see for my efforts?" It took a bit of soul searching just to understand what Parliament is really about. Why am I there? What am I going to achieve? How am I going to achieve it? I came fairly quickly to the opinion that Parliament is the genuine pressure cooker of society. If we go back to when Parliament was first formed in the 1600s, when people took to each other with sticks and stones in the street, Parliament does truly represent that place where we can at times espouse quite radical and different philosophies, or we can espouse the very different needs of the sorts of people we represent. We can do that in a peaceful method—albeit fairly rough and tumble at times within the bearpit of Parliament.

I have sometimes compared Parliament with a football field. When you cross the white line and run on, you give it everything—100 per cent—and you prepare yourself for it. When you cross that line and walk off, you have to prepare yourself for the normal, real world that you work in and where you represent the people.

I think one of the things that has given me a lot of confidence about Parliament—and I think it would be of interest to you people in this particular study group—is how much Parliament means to the average person in the street. When I came into Parliament, I had no experience of it whatsoever. I just felt that I had a fairly fortunate life and would like to get involved in Parliament and do something for the people of my area. When I started to move around amongst the people, people would say to me, "Mike, could you bring this up in Parliament? Could you bring that up in Parliament?" It really made me think. Even though most of the people in my electorate, or areas that I move around in, have had no formal or academic training in Government, or perhaps no experience of Parliament other than reading about it in the paper or hearing about it, it means something to them. No matter what strata of society they come from, it is very important. It is quite incredible how much it means to people for a particular issue to be aired. At times, I thought, "What is it? I stand up and speak. There are only 16 or 20 people here to listen. The media rush out as soon as question time is over. What does it all mean? What is it about?" It is extremely important as a forum. It means a lot to people to have their issues aired.

¹ Mr Horan was Shadow Minister for Health, November 1992 – 19 February 1996, and Minister for Health from 26 February 1996.

That is one of the things that we should be looking at in parliamentary reform. People feel frustrated about a particular issue and they want it brought out in a public forum, because at least if it is out in the public forum then it has an opportunity to go further, or it has an opportunity to solve their problems or give them particular satisfaction. They cannot always achieve that through the media, and they see the Parliament as the very legitimate and honest way of putting forward their particular point of view or issue.

About four or five months after I got into Parliament, I became a shadow Minister, first of all for Small Business, Industry and Regional Development and, since the 1992 election, for Health. So I cannot really speak to you about the committee processes of the Parliament, because I have not had experience in that, other than to say that it seems to me an excellent way to gain experience and learn about the parliamentary processes. My colleague for Toowoomba North, Mr Graham Healy, is very fortunate in coming into Parliament and having a full three-year term. He will spend most of that term on the Public Works Committee. I believe it is a great learning process for him and for other parliamentarians who are new to Parliament.

I will speak to you particularly about shadow Ministries and the need for reform. Recently, we had a debate in Parliament about what parliamentary reform had taken place. I made the point that I thought that generally, from my perspective, much of it was a charade, because the real area of reform—the real area where a Government can be subject to scrutiny and to challenge and opposition—has been completely neglected and circumvented. We are all aware—it has been mentioned by previous speakers—of the power of the Executive Government and the power of the Ministry. When you go through Parliament and see question time and the importance of that, when you listen to the media releases that come out of the weekly Monday Cabinet meeting, and when you understand that all the decision making and the people who make things really happen in Government are essentially those 18 Cabinet Ministers, then you realise that that is what Government is all about. I believe that we are only tinkering around the edges if the shadow Ministries are not properly resourced. People might say that the party that I represent did not do much in that regard. But, quite honestly, what we are talking about tonight, and what your group is about, is that there were substantial changes and recommendations in the late eighties. They were a reflection of the time, and they were generally meant to be adhered to.

The particular portfolio that I look after is Health. So I shadow, virtually on my own, a department with a budget of \$2.3 billion, with 36000 staff, 160 hospitals, some 600 or 700 mobile clinics, a whole host of very deep and important issues, such as Commonwealth Government funding, Medicare Agreements and funding, mental health, Aboriginal health, vaccinations, medical research, and so on. A department that once was basically one department, with some divisions within it, is now basically 14 departments due to regionalisation; a department that has a head office in Brisbane and some 13 regional health authorities, each of which you could view as a mini-department, because the ones with the biggest budget have budgets in the order of some \$400m. Most of them have budgets in the order of \$100m to \$200m. Most of them have around 20 to 28 staff. They are all very highly paid senior executive staff at the top, but other staff are exceptionally well paid and reasonably well paid. So, in a way, I am dealing with all these different departments, each with their own structure: a regional director on around \$115,000 to \$130,000; a deputy on \$90,000-odd; some executive staff on \$70,000 and \$80,000; and journalists. Those departments have a whole structure to them.

If the people of Queensland, whom the Opposition represent—and that is currently some 46 per cent of the population—are going to have honest, talented and proper Opposition, which is a very important part of the working of the Parliament, then I think it is important that, for the shadow Ministers to function properly, they have a minimum of adequate resources. My suggestion would be that shadow Ministers should have one research person.

In the Opposition office at the moment, we have a limited number of staff. So that means that, as a shadow Minister, I basically share with 13 other people one journalist and two junior research people, who are mostly involved in doing clippings, and so on. Some people might say that we do a reasonable job with that particular infrastructure. But in terms of the quality of the Parliament, what we could do in the House, what we could do in bringing up issues and the depth to which we could talk on particular issues, there would be an enormous improvement in the quality of that if we had a particular staff person with us at all times. In my particular case, it would be to have a person ensconced at my electorate office in Toowoomba, who would work on issues so that I could speak on more things and could speak with confidence and adequate research. When we talk about the quality of Parliament, I think that would add greatly to the quality. I think Wendy mentioned that sometimes it is a bit lonely in the House because there are not many other members there. But as a shadow Minister, once question time is over I just have to

rush back to my office and get back into preparing speeches or dealing adequately with the shadow Ministry.

I would like to give you an insight into a shadow Ministry such as Health. It is one that involves a lot of what I might call domestic work. I get an incredible volume of work from all over the State from people, many of whom are in some state of grief or sadness. They are angry that a dear relation has died. Very often the shadow Minister is the end of the line; they have gone through the various processes at the hospital, the Health Rights Commission, or whatever. Also, we get some very complex issues that you cannot deal with superficially. It might be an ethical matter to deal with a doctor or some other professional person. It might be something to do with a mental health issue. You really do not know whether the issue is highly serious, or whether it is someone who does have a genuine mental health problem and is simply complaining that they have been ill treated. There is a huge range of things from vaccinations to mental health, to complaints about doctors, complaints about nursing standards, waiting lists, and so on. To speak with some genuine authority about those issues, you really cannot jump on the airwaves or the media release machine. It is important, if we are genuine about parliamentary reform, that shadow Ministers have adequate resources in that regard.

There are three items that I want to touch on briefly. One is what I have seen of the various sizes of electorates and the philosophy of one man, one vote. I represent an inner-city metropolitan electorate, and I can get to anywhere in my electorate within 10 minutes. I have been out with some of my colleagues, and the amount of travel and moving around to cover some of those massive electorates is unbelievable. Take the example of Vaughan Johnson, who covers an electorate that is about 13 000 kilometres long, contains 35 schools, about 28 police stations and a great variety of communities from Emerald to Longreach, including Aboriginal and mining communities. Put a shadow Ministry for Transport on top of that and you can understand the huge workload and time involved. It is almost enough to kill a person, if you do it properly.

The other aspect that I wanted to canvas with you is the limited opportunities in Parliament to speak up. I spoke about how people say to us, "Would you bring up such and such?" As Wendy indicated, question time is limited. Generally, only four or five people ask questions. In our case, it is often the Leader and the Deputy who ask questions first. Then we have the MPI debate, when only three people from our side participate. The next day, in the Matters of Public Interest debate, only three of our people participate. Each week that the Parliament sits, there is an opportunity for six members from our side to participate in a five-minute Adjournment debate. Other than that, you are really limited to Notices of Motion or a particular Bill that you want to speak to that might, within the guidelines of that Bill, allow you to speak about an issue in your electorate. But generally, that opportunity is rare.

I also think that, in terms of media coverage of Parliament, a newspaper such as the *Courier-Mail*, or the northern newspapers, should contain a summary of what has happened in Parliament. I believe that TV coverage of Parliament is bad, because television goes for the spectacular, and we would just be looking at the theatre of question time. That is what people think Parliament is all about. They would not see the ongoing debate about extended trading hours or parliamentary reform or a transport Bill being debated. There should be a very succinct summary in the *Courier-Mail* when Parliament sits. They always put in the tides and shipping movements. It behoves our State newspaper to have a summary of what Bills went before the House and who spoke on them. I believe that would give people who have a genuine interest in Parliament an indication of what really happened in Parliament in that particular week. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak.

DISCUSSION

Dr Colin Kennard: I would like to ask a question about the Westminster style of Government. Traditionally, in Anglo-Saxon society, we have a Government and an Opposition. The Government always downs the Opposition; the Opposition always tries to down the Government. In some societies there is a mixture, and all political parties participate in the governing process. Do you think this could be a successful way to govern our society?

Mr Mike Horan: Being in Opposition, I find that quite interesting. Last year, Wendy and I were in Indonesia in central Java. We noticed that its Parliament consisted of a system of five committees. From memory, there were about four or five political parties. These parties had representatives on the committees, and these representatives sat in the Chamber. The five chairmen of the committees sat at the front of the Chamber. There was also the President of the Parliament. It struck me that they were making use of the talent of everybody who was elected.

To some degree, under the Westminster system, people with talent in the Opposition are limited in the use of that talent, that is, they can develop policies which will be used only when the party wins Government. Should we not win Government, those policies are there for someone else to pilfer. Making proper and adequate use of every person in the Parliament is an interesting concept. Everything in parliamentary life generally comes down to numbers, talent and so on. In the Indonesian system, the numbers still hold the day, but there would probably be a greater degree of input from people who otherwise might sit for three or six years in Opposition and not have an input into the State.

Mrs Wendy Edmond: Mike did not tell you that the army controlled each of those five different parties in Indonesia. We would have to have a very different change in mind-set in Australia. We have to get totally away from the two-party dominant system. I always say that I was born and bred in Queensland and educated in Denmark, which might give some insight into my rather odd way of looking at things.

When I lived in Denmark, about 15 different parties formed a coalition Government. They were the Left, the Left of the Left, and so on. I think all of them had "Left" somewhere in their names. These parties formed a very loose coalition. That also meant that they were constantly fluid, that is, whoever was in Government constantly changed from one week to the next. As each piece of legislation came in, there was much manoeuvring to determine who was in Government for that piece of legislation. We would have to change that mind-set. Often, such countries such as Denmark, Italy and others have an unstable Government. In Australia, we have had stability because, in general, the Treasury has been in the hands of a Government with a clear majority, with the exception of New South Wales and South Australia before the last election. So it would take a mind-set change. We would have to get used to the idea of not having a strong party system to give stability. We must be prepared for a constantly changing and fluid nature of Government. After an election, we would not necessarily know who would make which decisions.

Dr Ian Hinckfuss: I take it that David was in favour of the Hare-Clark system when he spoke, although he did not say as much in words. He said that Paul Reynolds was against it. What do the other two speakers—and maybe Paul, too—have to say about bringing in a Hare-Clark system in Queensland?

Mrs Wendy Edmond: I would have a similar reaction. I was not on EARC, and I am not a political scientist, but I did give some thought to the idea when the changes to the electoral system were being debated. I examined what happened in Tasmania. I am married to a Scot, and am experienced in first-past-the-post systems, too, having had fairly heavy debates at home. Basically, we think that we have a pretty good system. It has the best of both worlds. Theoretically, the Hare-Clark system is very democratic. The only problem is that it always takes a long time to determine a result. It is very complex. I have not met anybody who really understood it. All of the Tasmanians whom I have met have said they would change it if they possibly could. So I do not think that is a good recommendation for taking it on. The preferential system of voting has a lot going for it. I would be loath to see a change to either a preferential or an optional preferential system. The current system works pretty well.

Mr Mike Horan: I think a preferential system, rather than the optional preferential system we have at the moment, really means that everybody's vote counts to an extent—some to a lesser extent than others. Everybody has the opportunity to make his vote mean something. I am not completely familiar with the Hare-Clark system, so I really cannot comment on that.

I made reference in my speech to the size of electorates. In a State the size of Queensland, where decentralisation is so important and has greatly contributed to the success of Queensland, we must never lose the five weighted electorates, which cover such a vast expanse. The two important characteristics to deliver are equality and quality of representation. Someone who represents an area in

which they have to do four or five hours or more of hard driving at 140 kilometres an hour to see people has a more difficult job than mine. From the middle of Toowoomba, I can drive to either end of my electorate in five minutes. It is very difficult to deliver that same quality of service—that is, to get around and see people personally, rather than talking to them over the phone—if one's electorate is large. If one's electorate is small, it is easier to visit constituents and to understand each little patch of one's electorate.

As I said, I have not made a comment on the Hare-Clark system because I do not understand it well enough. Always, we ought to consider Queensland as Queensland and, with that, the strength of our decentralisation and the importance of an adequate equality of representation for the very significant far-flung areas of our State. Even some of our regional electorates in the coastal areas are extremely large and difficult to handle. Members of the Queensland Parliament have only one person working for them in their electorate offices. Federal members have some three or four electorate staff. That highlights how much more difficult our job is.

Dr Paul Reynolds: You may always be able to count on a Queenslander, but you can also always count on a philosopher to ask you a question which seems innocuous but, in fact, is pregnant with all kinds of difficulties. Firstly, the political systems do not produce stability or instability in Parliament. That is produced by the political culture to which they give expression. The Hare-Clark system does not of itself produce political stability or instability. In fact, there is very little political instability in Tasmania, because Tasmania is a very small and very settled political culture. But the Hare-Clark system can only work on a multi-member constituency basis. The alternative for Tasmania, as opposed to having seven members in five Federal electorates elected to State Parliament, would be 35 rotten and pocket boroughs, as indeed it has in the Upper House.