

# The Robert Garran Memorial Oration

Australian Public Administration and The Labor Government

**Delivered by the Hon E. G. Whitlam, QC MP, Prime Minister of Australia and Minister for Foreign Affairs — at the 1973 National Conference of the Australian Regional Groups, Royal Institute of Public Administration held in Canberra on 12 November 1973.**

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Let me say simply that it is a great honour to deliver the Garran Memorial Oration in 1973, 14 years after my father delivered the inaugural Oration. I know how deeply he felt honoured by the invitation to inaugurate the series of lectures to honour his great former chief. You will understand something of my feelings at this moment when I use my father's words of 14 years ago to introduce the 1973 Oration. My father said this of Robert Garran:

"It was an exhilarating experience, for to me he was always more than a high official, more than a skilled Parliamentary Draftsman, more than an erudite constitutional lawyer, more than a figure of social importance: to me, as to others, he was a person of remarkable distinction.

As a Permanent Head it was a real satisfaction and a pleasure to discuss a problem with him. In the less complex matters, so long as one was thoroughly prepared with the ascertainable facts, and was able to present them concisely and in their proper relation and proportion and indicate the contingencies — and this was what he would expect — his conclusion was unhesitating and decisive.

In the more complex matters, where principles were involved which required discussion, the discussion was free, subject only, of course, to the limits of relevance: there was, on his part, no restriction to orthodoxies or conventional thinking but a hospitality to all ideas that might have a bearing on the problem in hand, an enlightened weighing of pros and cons, and a firm choice of the course to be pursued".<sup>1</sup>

Those words well describe a great public servant, the ideal public servant. They certainly described Sir Robert Garran. It is more than perhaps filial loyalty which allows me to say that they came aptly from their author. It is not without significance in my own career, in my own attitude to the Public Service, to the role of the Public Service, the duties and responsibilities of the Public Service and to the role of Government, that I lived my boyhood here in Canberra as the son of a great public servant, among whose colleagues were great public servants, and that I am Australia's first Prime Minister with that particular background.

Sir Robert Garran's place in the annals of the Australian nation is, as unique as it is distinguished.

The first ten years of his public career coincided with and were inspired by Australia's march to nationhood, an event in which he played an important, if secondary, role at the time, as secretary to various committees promoting the federal movement.

Garran's energy and creative genius were immediately channelled into the establishment of the new nation. He was appointed Secretary to the Attorney-General's Department, in which office he served over a period of thirty-one years, and from 1916 held also the office of Solicitor-General.

A significant and lasting contribution by Sir Robert Garran is, of course, to be found in *The Annotated Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia*, the authorship of which he shared with Sir John Quick.

As one of his successors in the office of Solicitor-General, the late Sir Kenneth Bailey, has written: —

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<sup>1</sup> Whitlam, H.F.E.: *Sir Robert Garran and Leadership in Public Service*, Canberra, A.C.T. Group, Royal Institute of Public Administration, 1959, p. 7f.

"The work at once became a classic. Ever since, no careful opinion on an Australian constitutional point has been written without seeing what "Quick and Garran" had to say about it."<sup>2</sup>

Any of us who have studied the law or been involved in public administration would, I think, agree with this view.

Garran saw the adoption of the Constitution not as an end of a process, but as a beginning.

If Garran took justifiable pride in the work of the Constitution, as the outcome of 10 years' work, and saw it as a suitable basis for a national Government, he nevertheless recognised its inadequacies and saw that as time passed, as circumstances changed, so it would be necessary for the Constitution itself to be amended.

In his posthumously published autobiography Sir Robert remarked

"that hitherto amendment of the Constitution has been piecemeal and that something more systematic is now needed."<sup>3</sup>

I shall not tonight be dealing very much with the Constitution but I think it worth recalling the words of one who had so much to do with its framing and its interpretation. It is worth recalling that he had no illusions about the inadequacies of the admittedly very great work in which he participated. There has been a Convention on the Constitution this year. There are to be referendums to amend the Constitution next month. Last week I introduced bills for three amendments and foreshadowed a bill for a fourth amendment which will be put to the people next year. I have to say, however, that given the experiences of the Convention in Sydney in August, given the political difficulties in attaining any amendment and the difficulties even of getting a referendum for an amendment put to the people, then I have to concede that the consummation of Sir Robert Garran's true, wise and absolutely accurate remarks will be reached only with the greatest difficulty. To balance that seeming pessimism, let me say that a determined Government, a Government clear on what it wants to do for Australia, can find means of living with the Constitution. The Constitution imposes great limitations but the Constitution is not an alibi.

Garran joined the Public Service in its infancy, along with many other able men from all walks of life who were inspired by the creation of the new nation.

He joined the service of Australia at a crucial time for public servants, as for politicians, at a time when the demands on the creative capacities of all those engaged in nation-building were very great.

There are demands, similar in magnitude, pressing on us today in the challenging environment of the Seventies.

Tonight I wish to speak principally about the role of the Australian Public Service under a Labor Administration, as that Labor Administration responds to the immense challenge imposed upon it by the decision of the Australian people just under a year ago. It is not always realised that Australia itself was, at that time, in a unique position in the English-speaking democracies. None of those other democracies — Great Britain, the United States, New Zealand, Canada — had been for so long without a change of Government. In the United States one would have to go back to the Republican hegemony of 24 years — from the election of Lincoln to the election of Cleveland. In Britain itself, from which we take both our Parliamentary system and our civil service tradition, one has to go back to 1807 — to the Tories under Liverpool, Canning and Wellington, from 1807 to 1832 — to find a comparable period of unbroken rule by a single party. That so ancient a parallel has been equalled only in some of our Australian States may not be without its relevance. However that may be, it should be recognised that our situation when we came into government was unique in modern English-speaking democracies, unique in the Australian National Parliament, unique for an Australian National Government and unique for the Public Service responsible to that Government. Yet this change, unique in so many respects, coincided with, and indeed was largely created by, a desire for clear and rapid change on the part of the Australian people. The demands upon Government, upon Administration, are greater than they have been at any time in human history. All Governments are expected to make changes and deliver benefits with a precision and promptitude never before expected or experienced. When a new Government comes in after so long an absence, those demands, those pressures, are accelerated and intensified.

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<sup>2</sup> Bailey, Sir Kenneth: Sir Robert Garran, *Australian Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 1, March 1957, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Garran, Sir Robert Randolph: *Prosper the Commonwealth*, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1958, p. 207.

I have sometimes quoted the complaint of Garran's co-worker and part-contemporary, Alfred Deakin, about "the impossibility of governing with a reporter at one's elbow". He had a lot to complain about! At the same time he was complaining, he was, even as Prime Minister of Australia, the anonymous regular correspondent and reporter for the London *Morning Post*! No television, no tapes — politicians are not so blessed today. There can be no doubt that in modern times, the immediacy of the media is itself a strong force generating change, and sometimes irresistible pressures for change, by raising exceptionally high expectations about the potential, and performance of administrations, and administrators.

For any Government to measure up to these expectations and to meet these pressures, it was inevitable that there would be changes in the administrative structure.

It is inevitable that political change will bring with it administrative change. This is not to say, at all, that our Public Service has to be politically-oriented, or motivated. It does not.

We as a Government are anxious to maintain the fundamental tradition of a non-political Public Service, in the true sense. This is not to say that public servants will not be involved in matters relating to politics, rather that their involvement will be as loyal, as dedicated and as intense, regardless of what Government is in power.

Some doubtless were sceptical whether this tradition could be maintained. Could the administrative machine that had been controlled by our political opponents for 23 years respond to a significant political change, to a Government charged with urgently needed reforms and impelled by a philosophy which involved a shift from long-established positions?

No doubt the Public Service was equally anxious to see whether we would be able to adjust effectively to the business of government, how we would go about the task of governing.

The significant political change has involved a shift from long-established positions and has required an administrative response of a different order. The difference of response has not been of a political order; it has lain in the magnitude of the challenge.

Under this Labor Administration, the outstanding need for change, restructuring and expansion arises from our particular view of the role of the national Government. We assert that the national Government has responsibility for a whole range of matters which, under previous Governments, were deemed to be either the responsibility of State Governments or the responsibility of no Government at all. This basic approach of ours was, I believe, upheld by the people at the election. It is exactly one year ago tomorrow since I delivered the Policy Speech which outlined our program. In that speech I said:

"Before this campaign is out, I shall have completed 20 years as a Member of Parliament. The basic foundations of this speech lie in my very first speeches in the Parliament, because I have never wavered from my fundamental belief that until the national Government became involved in great matters like schools and cities, this nation would never fulfil its real capabilities".<sup>4</sup>

And in the penultimate paragraph I said:

"We shall need the help and seek the help of the best Australians. We shall rely of course on Australia's great Public Service, but we shall welcome advice and co-operation from beyond the confines of Canberra."<sup>5</sup>

These sentences, I believe, encapsulate the course that has been pursued by this Administration, in its program and in choosing the men and women to carry out this program.

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<sup>4</sup> A.L.P. Policy Speech: It's Time for Leadership, Blacktown Civic Centre, 13 November 1972, p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid p. 35.

## Administrative and Advisory Support for the Government.

In opening the first session of Parliament on 27 February, the Governor-General said the Government saw the importance of certain principles upon which we should base our program for change. One of these principles was the need for Government to have available machinery and advice to plan for the inevitable and accelerating change now occurring in all modern communities.<sup>6</sup>

The tradition of democracies based on the British model is that elected Governments have available to them a career Public Service which is politically neutral and designed to give administrative support and advice to whatever Government may be in office. But in addition, it has been practice to rely — along with the Service — on other forms of support. One of the marks of our first twelve months is the extension and deepening of that kind of support to enable us to meet the challenges of office.

In broad terms, the system of support which we have developed while in office is a blending of five elements:

- The Public Service, impartial, responsible and professional.
- Task Forces and Committees of Inquiry, with all or a large part of the membership consisting of outside experts, highly competent in their particular fields.
- Commissions and other continuing authorities, drawing staff from inside and outside the Service, investigating and managing new areas of Government initiatives.
- The Priorities Review Staff, a “think-tank” providing a new form of long term priorities advice.
- Consultants and outside advisers to Ministers.

## The Public Service

My Government took over a large and efficient Public Service which, since its foundation at the start of the century, has built up a reputation for efficiency and probity which places it in the front rank of the Civil Service systems of Western democratic countries.

The Government was elected to carry out its declared policies and it quickly set about the task. In doing so it was necessary to consider the need to restructure the Public Service to meet the new directions of Government policy. It was not until after the election that the leaders of the Parliamentary Labor Party — the new Ministers — were able to seek the help of the Public Service Board and others in the Public Service on how the Service should be restructured. Some difficulties were encountered, and to an extent these difficulties could be attributed to some lack of understanding on the part of the Government and the Public Service of each other’s purposes and processes. In the interests of good government, I have since announced that, as long as I am Prime Minister, there will be an opportunity for pre-election discussion on the structure and the working of Departments between Members of the Opposition and senior officials. Naturally, these discussions will not embrace matters of a party-political nature. They will simply ensure that whenever there is another change of Government, the changeover, as it affects the nation's Administration, will take place as smoothly as possible.

In retrospect, the quite massive changes which can be seen as reflections of the underlying new orientation of our policies were brought about with reasonable speed and remarkably little friction.

The changes were by no means revolutionary: they left the system and the principles on which it is based intact, but they were substantial and are beginning to have their effects in achieving our purposes.

All the important changes can be seen as reflections of our new policies. We have brought an emphasis in departmental strength to accord with the emphasis in the Government’s administration. In so doing, we have moved in the direction of organising Departments on a functional basis, of distributing responsibility in groups

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<sup>6</sup> The Governor-General's Speech, first session, 28th Parliament 1973, *A.P.D.*, House of Representatives, 27 February 1973, p. 11.

which are as homogeneous as possible. This has led, in part, to the amalgamation of Departments which is now in process.

I am aware that amalgamation as a process can come under question. I am aware of the problems of size and in particular the problems of manageability for a single Minister and a single Head of Department. I am aware of management problems, of staff morale problems, and public relations problems.

But set against these problems, and far outweighing them, are the advantages of unification. There are economies resulting from the reduction of interdepartmental barriers — for example, the resolution within a single Department of the differences that arise — notoriously — between separate and competing Departments. There are internal economies — economies of scale.

But the primary factor as I see it, determining the size and manageability of large Departments, is coherence of subject matter. It is this — coherence — that has prompted many of the structural changes that we have introduced.

Take transport. For too long we have seen responsibility for transport divided between Australian Government and the States, without effective co-ordination between the four main arms — road, rail, air and sea. At the Australian level, we are now moving rapidly towards the amalgamation of the Departments of Civil Aviation and Transport.

The desirability of amalgamating the Departments of Transport and Civil Aviation rests on the improvement which is to be expected in the development and co-ordination of general transportation policies, the more effective determination of expenditure priorities and resource allocation, and on the greater ability to harmonise the totality of transport activities with the Government's other objectives in economic and social fields. A size problem may arise associated with air and sea navigation systems. To meet this eventuality we intend to establish operating agencies functioning separately from the new Department.

Take defence. We are fully aware of the importance of a highly efficient and mobile defence force. But equally, we are aware that there is no immediately foreseeable threat to the security of this country. We are bringing together under the one Administration what should after all be an integrated system of defence of our country and its interests, and in so doing, are following the example of other countries. So here again, the changes we have made in the Administration have reflected basic policy objectives.

We are in the process of planning the amalgamation of the Departments of Works and Housing. This amalgamation will give us another more co-ordinated way of achieving important policy objectives in the fields of construction and housing.

We are considering abolition of the Department of Supply with transfer of its functions to Secondary Industry and other areas.

Restructuring of the Public Service is also evident in the field of social welfare. Here we have attempted to move from the fragmented system of our predecessors to a broader concept of caring for the total needs of an individual. To this end, we have brought together in the remodelled Department of Social Security many functions previously handled in other Departments; and by stripping the Department of Health of a complicated system of national insurance and payment to individuals, we are allowing it to concentrate on the important problems of medicine and health, and on health care delivery.

In other areas the achievement of our objectives has called for the establishment of new Departments. Each of these Departments is a viable unit, necessary for the attainment of the Government's policy aims and new initiatives.

The greatest single area of new initiative is in the cities — the places where most Australians live. The time has come for us to take new steps in making our cities places where people can achieve the fullest enjoyment, and self fulfilment in living, where they can work efficiently and without unnecessary inconvenience. For this purpose, we established the Department of Urban and Regional Development. This Department is at the centre of some of the most important of our policies.

Here again, we have an example of a Department comprehending a wide but wholly coherent subject matter.

In my Policy Speech last December, I foreshadowed the establishment of a separate Department of Aboriginal Affairs, to have offices in each State, to give the Australian Government a genuine presence in the States. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs is now a fact and is working to give effect to the will of the Australian people as expressed overwhelmingly in the 1967 referendum.

The Department of the Media will be able to work more closely with the radio and television industry and, for instance, have oversight of the legislation which regulates the industry. Let me describe what we have done in the words of the new head of the Department of Media, himself a man brought from experience in the business and television world to head our new Department. Mr Oswin said —

"Coming to a decision to form a Department of the Media did not mean starting everything from scratch. A lot of its components already existed and many of them were functioning efficiently and will, but they were all over the place — responsible to Departments with which they had little in common ... It is a matter of bringing together, under a common Ministry, Government services that were often misplaced and regrettably, even neglected"<sup>7</sup>

The Public Service has responded magnificently to the challenges we have set it. But it would simply have been unable to achieve all that we require in the time available. So, while retaining it as an expanding administrative centre for all our activities, we now have working with it in varying relationships, or independently, many new bodies to provide specialist assistance to the Administration.

There is a further question beyond that of the limits on the professional Public Service to carry out all the tasks required, in the time required. It is in Australia's interest and in the interest of the Public Service itself that there should be greater mobility between business and the Universities and between the Federal and State Public Services. For a job in the Public Administration to be done competently, it is not always necessary that the appointment be for life, or until retirement on reaching a certain age. Clearly, many valuable men and women will be unwilling or unable to accept appointment on those terms. Sometimes a specific task involved is of limited duration. The task should not be left undone, or the skills lost, through inflexibility in the Public Service structure.

## Task Forces and Other Inquiries

To help us to focus quickly on the many new areas of policy initiative, we have brought in academics and practical men from the private sector.

First, there is the task force. In the main, the object of the task force is to produce in a short time a report by a person of stature in the community who is not part of the regular Public Service. We have provided him with assistance — some from the Public Service itself and some from our valued group of consultants and Ministerial advisers — with the object of assembling material quickly, and without the problems associated with departmental boundaries.

Already the result is a series of most helpful reports. The concept of the task force is principally that the leader of it assumes responsibility for the report. The task force helps and advises him but does not blunt the acuteness of his own perceptions and the purport of his policy recommendations. Perhaps the best known of the task forces was that led by Dr. H.C. Coombs, in his investigation of the continuing expenditure policies of the previous Government, with a view to finding room for our own higher priority programs. Another task force worked under Mr. G. A. Rattigan, Chairman of the Tariff Board, and produced the report which led to the 25% cut in tariffs.

I believe the task force technique to be a most effective way of producing, in a short time, a high quality report which combines the skills and insights of prominent citizens with the background and experience of the actual working of the Government machine which officials and Ministerial advisers can contribute.

Second, there is the committee of inquiry. In this area men and women from many walks of life have joined new commissions and committees: since we came into office more than 60 short term inquiries have been appointed.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Oswin, J.H., Secretary, Department of the Media: Jack and the Beanstalk, Canberra, A.C.T. Group, R.I.P.A., 1973.

<sup>8</sup> A list appears in Table A at the end of the Oration.

To mention a few, they range from an inquiry into Aboriginal land rights to inquiries into the Burdekin, into the maritime industry, into the protection of privacy, into employment statistics, into FM radio, into rehabilitation and compensation, into legal aid, into nursing home fees and into the components of growth in urban centres.

The use of specialist commissions and committees of inquiry serves a number of valuable purposes. These include:

- immediate action on a wider range of issues than would otherwise be possible, many being issues where the electorate, having given us a mandate, is wanting quick results;
- availability of specialised skills and advice not always required on a long-term basis;
- access to advice and information on developments and research in industry, academic institutions, the trade union movement and other community areas;
- fostering of co-operation with, and participation by, the States — a matter of special importance in our Federal system of Government;
- providing a key channel of communication between Parliament and the people.

Some might argue that some of the matters dealt with initially in this way could properly have been dealt with by existing Departments.

However, such a course would have meant an unbearable strain on the Service because of the wide range of new matters, many of which the Service had not been asked to deal with before.

The Service has been — and is — fully occupied responding to other initiatives of the Government, as well as ensuring the normal conduct of business.

The response by talented people of wide experience outside the Public Service to join us in our endeavours has been quite remarkable.

I mention just a few.

- Mr. Justice Woodhouse, of the New Zealand Court of Appeal and Mr. Justice Meares of the Supreme Court of New South Wales on a National Scheme of Rehabilitation and Compensation;
- Mr. Justice Else-Mitchell, Professor R.L. Mathews and Mr. G.J. Dusseldorp on Land Tenure;
- Sir James Vernon and others on the Post Office;
- Mr. Justice Hope and a number of others on the National Estate;
- Dr. R.B. Scotton and Dr. J.S. Deeble on Health Insurance;
- Mr. R.E. McGarvie, Q.C., in the continuing committee on Discrimination in Employment and Occupation together with a number of others including Mr. G. Polites from the Australian Council of Employers Federation and Mr. J. Petrie from the A.C.T.U.

I invite your attention to the range of the inquiries, as well as to the names of those conducting them.

With the active co-operation of State Governments, we have been able to secure the services of several State judges to chair some of these committees.

In making appointments we have, we believe, succeeded in bringing together people with relevant expertise from all sections of the community.

Committees of inquiry have, of course, been used in the past. But the record shows that the system has not always been well-used I need only mention the fate of the Report of the Committee of Economic Enquiry whose members were Sir John Crawford, Professor Peter Karmel, Mr. Kenneth Myer and the late Mr. D.F. Molesworth, under the Chairmanship of Sir James Vernon; or the McCarthy Committee on Dairying. Not the least regrettable feature of the treatment of the Vernon Committee report at the hands of the then Government was that it must necessarily have reduced the willingness of men and women of the highest qualifications, men and women with very great demands on their time and experience, to serve in a similar capacity.

Whilst I am realistic enough to know that all recommendations of committees of inquiry cannot necessarily be adopted — at least immediately — our intention is a positive one.

Most reports are published and acted upon, not shelved and forgotten. A real contribution is made to public administration and to the development of policies acceptable to the community.

In this way we are restoring the use of inquiries to their proper role in government.

## Commissions and Other Continuing Bodies

The willing response of the Public Service and the efforts of task forces and other instruments of inquiry would not in themselves have been sufficient to achieve our purposes. We have added greatly therefore to the range of support which in greater or lesser degree has always been associated with government in the field of statutory commissions and other such authorities.

Since we have taken office, we have made decisions to appoint more than 25 continuing bodies to assist us in achieving our policies.<sup>9</sup> Those already at work include such diverse bodies as the Cities Commission, the Child Care Standards Committee, the Commission on Consumer Standards, the National Pipeline Authority, and the National Commission on Social Welfare. Others are awaiting the passage of legislation to enable their establishment -for example, the Industries Assistance Commission and the Petroleum and Minerals Authority. The Interim Committees for the Schools Commission and the Pre-School Commission have advanced their work quite splendidly, while awaiting their establishment as statutory bodies. These bodies will in part draw staff from the Public Service; but also they will draw to them men and women of experience in their calling. They will be freer to operate than the Public Service itself, though necessarily functioning within the broad framework of Government policy and administration. These bodies are performing a task of administration, often in new and uncharted areas, which will have important and positive effects on many aspects of life and activity in the community.

## The Priorities Review Staff

One of the difficulties of government is to ensure continuing challenges to think and plan more than a few months ahead. There is a real danger that, unless there is a constant input to government on this side, the day to day pressures will lead to shorter and shorter term policies, to government that is reactive rather than inspirational in quality, and therefore loses its sense of direction and purpose. We believe that the best way to maintain an effective input of longer term thinking is to establish special machinery for the purpose. It is true that particular Departments will think months and years ahead — and indeed the Treasury for some time has been preparing three and five year estimates. But that is not enough.

What we have done is to establish a new group within the Department of the Special Minister of State which we are calling the Priorities Review Staff. It consists of highly skilled specialists with high academic and professional qualifications.

Its purpose is to review Government programs, not with the object of duplicating or censoring the work of specialist Departments, but with the object of advising Ministers on long-range priorities and planning. It is based on the well-established Central Policy Review Staff headed by Lord Rothschild in Great Britain.

This venture, I believe, marks a significant step forward in orderly national management and long-range planning.

## Ministerial Staff

As the tempo of the business of government grows faster and the range of political involvement of the people extends, Ministers must necessarily look to more help from their own immediate offices. It has been traditional to think of the Ministerial Private Secretary as an efficient and experienced officer of middle rank, capable of

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<sup>9</sup> A list appears in Table B at the end of the Oration



maintaining effective liaison with the Department and of seeing that the Minister is where he needs to be and with briefs to meet his many commitments.

But with the present need to develop and maintain new policy initiatives involving people outside the Department and the authorities associated with it we have found the need to provide Ministers with greater help on the policy side. I have no hesitation in saying that the help Ministers have obtained from their officials has relieved Departments of involvement in party-political matters and has given Ministers support as they have forged ahead in their own particular fields.

In machinery terms, we have improved the quality of the contribution made by Ministerial staff by increasing both the numbers and the salaries paid.

Not all the new Ministerial staff have come from outside the Public Service. There is provision in each Minister's staff for a departmental liaison officer who remains on the Departmental establishment and undertakes duties directly connected with the Department.

This preserves an avenue for able young departmental officers to gain valuable experience in the operations of government. Ministers, of course, are free to choose their staff and many of them have made personal staff positions available to career officers seconded for periods from the Public Service.

I have this year also arranged for substantial increases in both the numbers and levels of staff available to the Opposition parties. Again, in my view, this was a necessary change.

I might point out that the Ministerial personal staff from outside the professional Public Service have no security of tenure. They depend wholly on the whim or fate of the Minister. In no sense can they be said to have been obtruded into the structure of the Public Service. They are part of the Government in its political and personal sense, and in that sense they are, in much the same way as Ministers, responsible to the people.

I should further point out that this development in no way represents a departure from the principles of the Westminster system. Central to that system is the principle that Ministers as individuals and the Cabinet as a whole must exercise real control over the Public Service and accept full responsibility for policy. In Australia, the staff of Ministers has, for various reasons, remained far smaller and more junior than is the case in Britain or Canada. In Britain, the Minister is supported by Parliamentary Under-Secretaries and Parliamentary Private Secretaries, as well as a far larger staff. The function of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary is deemed unconstitutional in Australia. It is a perfectly objective statement to say that there have been notable cases in Australia in the past of a remarkable lack of Ministerial control over Departments and over policy. The lack of competent Ministerial staff undoubtedly contributed to this. The Canadian model has been described as "politically-orientated yet operationally sensitive" staff and "a non-partisan, operationally-orientated yet politically sensitive" Department.<sup>10</sup> We have not of course adopted that model, but to the extent that the appointment of a competent personal staff assists Ministers to exercise their proper constitutional authority we are enhancing the basic Westminster tradition.

## Implications for the Public Service

All this means that government is on the move.

I recognise that this imposes strains on the Public Service. Perhaps there are two particular aspects which I might discuss in a little more detail in the remaining time available. These relate to the process I have described, by which many new people and authorities are being added to the familiar administrative scene; and to the emphasis we are placing on open government.

First, the influx of new people and new skills. During the war years, feelings were expressed which, although more intense, were much the same as those of which I am aware today. They relate to the fears which permanent public servants have because of the possibilities that their own career prospects will be diminished, or the

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<sup>10</sup> Robertson, G.: 'The Changing Role of the Privy Council Office,' *Canadian Public Administration*, Vol. 14, no.4, Winter 1971, pp. 487–508.

standards of the Service lowered, as a result of the influx. It is true that the sweep and pace of the recent changes have hardly been equalled in peacetime in Australian history. Though as I say this, I should make the point I do not expect the growth of the Public Service in 1973–74 to be more than 5 per cent. This is a figure which has been exceeded on several recent occasions.

I referred earlier to the task force which I set up under the leadership of Dr. Coombs to identify for the Government a number of areas of spending that could be reviewed. His report concluded:

"Existing Government programs are taxing the resources of the Australian Public Service and it is clear that it will be subject to increasing pressure. Administrative and management skills are important and scarce resources. It is essential that the cost of existing and new expenditure programs in terms of these skills be taken into account in Government decisions and that every effort should be made to use such skills to the best advantage ... The Public Service Board as the primary authority on establishment matters must be given a sensible degree of control in seeking to establish reasonably uniform classification structures and to avoid the competitive bidding up of administrative and managerial salaries in ways destructive of wage-justice and reasonable economy in government. The fact that the Board should recognise special competitive elements in particular situations does not invalidate the need for such control. This control, with appropriate modifications to deal with special circumstances, is relevant also to the agencies outside the Public Service itself such as statutory corporations."<sup>11</sup>

Some of the additional staff on the payroll of the Australian Government will merely be a transfer from other places where, in one way or another, the taxpayer is footing the bill; for example, Health Insurance now administered by more than 100 private bureaucracies.

The experience of the war and immediate post war years may be of some encouragement. It was this period which helped produce a Public Service which today is generally agreed as being as efficient as any in the world, and probably more efficient than most.

During the war years the size of the Public Service doubled and the number of Departments grew from 13 to 25.

There was great pressure on the Public Service, which did not have many of the skills required.

Various people were brought into the Public Service, perhaps the most notable being the late Essington Lewis, then Chief General Manager of the Broken Hill Proprietary Company Limited, who became Director-General of Munitions; but there were others, including Lawrence Hartnett, another great industrialist.

New people were brought into such areas as rationing, prices control, manpower control, credit control and censorship, which were established under National Security Regulations.

Numerous boards and committees were set up to facilitate communications between agencies, to carry out desired executive functions or to conduct investigations into specific topics.

Many of the people brought into the Public Service in that period attained high office to mention only some of the now retired Permanent Heads, there were Sir Kenneth Bailey, Sir Henry Bland, Sir Allen Brown, Sir John Crawford, Dr. H.C. Coombs, Professor Fin Crisp, Mr. Ted Hook and Sir Richard Randall, There are others among them who are still serving in high office, including a number as Permanent Heads.

We seek more men of their calibre for the tasks of today, for we are engaged on a new operation — mercifully in a period of peace.

There is a new light on the hill, if I may recall a phrase of the late Ben Chifley, and we need all the skills we can command as we move towards it.

With the introduction of new people and new skills, the existing Public Service is placed in a more competitive situation, both in relation to competition for higher jobs and competition for influence in the policy-making process.

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<sup>11</sup> Coombs, Dr. H.C.: *Review of the Continuing Expenditure Policies of the Previous Government. Report of The Task Force*, Canberra, A.G.P.S., 1973, p. 53.

I see only advantage in increased advertising of senior Public Service positions as open to people outside the Service, and indeed I agree with the report of the Boyer Committee<sup>12</sup> that the morale and self respect of the Public Service could only be enhanced if it felt it were standing on its own feet by force of merit rather than by restriction of competition. I am sure, from what I have seen of it, that it can so stand.

We have not altered the traditional role of the Public Service in the policy making process, but by greatly increasing our sources of policy advice and by involving public servants in our task forces and commissions, we have provided for a meeting of minds, a re-stimulation which is coupled with a leadership from the political level. Where this has resulted in tension it has in the main been creative tension, and that is our object. The Public Service has not only demonstrated in the last twelve months that it can work impartially for a new Government after 23 years with the old; it has for the most part shown the benefit of its inter-reaction with the Government's other advisers and an enthusiasm for working with others in pursuing the policies of an activist Government.

Perhaps the change in Government had its greatest Public Service implication in relation to the Permanent Heads of Departments. Unlike all other people appointed under the Public Service Act, Permanent Heads are appointed by the Government of the day. They have a continuing tenure but they also have close personal dealings with their Ministers.

Before the election there was talk of wholesale sackings; some observers seemed to expect that we would change the Public Service by replacing its leaders. This did not happen and at no stage did we consider it desirable. On some occasions, associated not only with changes of Government but, for example, with reshuffling portfolios in existing Governments, it is desirable that Permanent Heads be transferred to other Departments or other duties in the interests of good government. Like previous Governments, we have made some changes at the top of the Service, but this has been done in a manner which does not damage the tradition of an impartial Public Service.

We all tend to think of the Permanent Heads as policy advisors. Important and glamorous as this aspect of their work undoubtedly is, it should not be allowed to obscure the very real responsibility that Permanent Heads carry as general managers of Departments under their Ministers.

Permanent Heads should be ever mindful of the need for ensuring that their Departments are efficiently managed, of the need for cost-effectiveness of their role in ensuring that staff savings are achieved where possible, and of the need for leadership of their Departments in such matters as ensuring that personnel are developed to meet emerging needs of public administration.

## Open Government

Greater participation in the affairs of government by concerned people in the community generally has been a theme in this lecture. We want to extend this sense of participation far beyond the use of particular individuals who have skills currently needed. We want the Australian people to know the facts, to know the needs, to know the choices before them. This is really at the heart of what has been called "open government".

There come times — and we recognise this — when decisions must be taken, or are better or more quickly taken, without at every stage a need for the decision-makers to discuss publicly and explain publicly what they are doing. A balance has to be struck. I think we are striking that balance. I myself am reporting regularly to the press and telling them promptly of decisions that we are making. We are tabling reports in Parliament, not just the annual reports of statutory bodies but many papers providing useful information where there is a public interest and where other interests are not compromised.

Legislation foreshadowed in my Policy Speech as the Freedom of Information Act will shortly be before the Parliament. Meanwhile, much is already being done to provide greater information to the public, particularly by the release of various reports. At the same time, the Government is very aware of the need to ensure adequate privacy for the individual.

A review is in train of the legislation to remove unreasonable restrictions on public servants which inhibit them from discussing in public matters of public and official interest. There will still be a proper observance of the

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<sup>12</sup> *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Public Service Recruitment*, Canberra, Govt. Printer, 1958, para 37.

conventions, including that public servants do not justify or propagandise policies. That is the job of Ministers. But within the proper conventions there can be a lot done to relieve public servants of unnecessary restriction.

We will be bringing down archives legislation which will clarify the rules relating to access to official records and facilitate such access. It will also greatly improve the service that the public gets when they want to consult some of the more ancient records.

Another aspect of the involvement of the community generally in government is the benefit which can flow in both directions from extended arrangements under which staff of the Public Service spend periods in industry, commerce, universities and the like and for people from those areas to spend periods attached to Public Service Departments.

I quote the Fulton Committee. It had this to say:

“Determined efforts are needed to bring about the temporary interchange of staff with private industry and commerce, nationalised industry and local government on a much larger scale than hitherto. War-time experience proves beyond doubt the value of such movement in promoting mutual knowledge and understanding”.<sup>13</sup>

At the same time, while I intend to see arrangements developed in this area, it is only proper to note also the warning given by the Fulton Committee that the exchanges should take place in a professional atmosphere, fostered by the fact that the majority of public servants expect to make a career of their period in the Service. They should not see themselves, or be seen, as in the prospective employment of business, or something of the necessary confidentiality and privacy which Governments must preserve and protect will be lost.

It is a truism that we live in a changing world. It is essential that the whole framework of public administration in Australia be geared to respond to new initiatives of government demanded by the electorate.

An important factor in this will be the continual exchange of ideas and discussion of techniques between the sectors of the economy.

The public sector, which has much to learn from the private sector, will facilitate this.

But it needs the co-operation of the private sector, whose interests today demand a better knowledge of the working of government than ever before.

It may be true that the people get the Government they deserve. It is certainly true that Governments get the Public Service they deserve. The measures, decisions and approaches I have outlined are designed to promote the efficiency, and the excellence of public administration in Australia, now and for the future.

I close as I began, with a quote from the inaugural Sir Robert Garran Oration:

“The task before Australia is honourable, and its efficient discharge would make for a dynamic peace; to it, all the resources, skills and energy that Australia can command deserve to be committed. The honourable task, however, could become majestic, and infinitely inspiring, and the peace could become creative, deep and rich, and enduring, if there be added what I have termed Excellence, Excellence in all its fullness ”.<sup>14</sup>

The pursuit of excellence is still an eminently proper and desirable goal for Australia, her people, her Public Administration and I believe, her elected Government.

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<sup>13</sup> *The Civil Service, Vol. 1: Report of the Committee 1966–68*, London, HMSO, p.45.

<sup>14</sup> Whitlam, H.F.E.: *Sir Robert Garran and Leadership in Public Service*, Canberra, A.C.T. Group, R.I.P.A., 1959, p.

## Table A –Short Term Inquiries

Aboriginal Health Services and Aboriginal Health Workers Workshop  
Aboriginal Land Rights Commission  
Aboriginal Languages in Schools — Advisory Group on Teaching  
Aboriginal/Police Relations Inquiry  
A.C.T. Education Authority — Assessment Panel on A.C.T. and New South Wales — Impact of growth of Canberra  
Adelaide Airport Advisory Committee  
Aircraft Industry Working Group  
Australia's health-care system — Committee to advise on the manpower and training needs (advises Nat. Hospital and Health Services Commission)  
Australian Post Office Commission of Inquiry  
Biological Effects of Nuclear Explosion Fall-out — Academy of Science  
Biological Effects of Nuclear Explosion Fall-out — Meeting between Australian and French Scientists  
Burdekin Project Committee  
Citizen Military Forces — Committee of Inquiry  
Computerisation of Criminal Data Committee  
Computerisation of Legal Data Committee  
Consultation with Young People  
Education for Community Recreation Workers  
Employment in the Building Industry Inquiry  
Employment Problems in the Port of Portland  
Employment Statistics — Committee of Inquiry  
Environmental Implications of the Woodchip Industry and the Softwood Forestry Program Working Party  
FM Radio Inquiry  
Financial needs for training teachers for special education in tertiary institutions  
Financial Support for approved private teachers colleges  
Health Insurance Planning Committee  
Homeless Men — Working Party on Immigration Advisory Council — Committee on Community Relations  
Immigration Task Force (All States)  
Imports — Committee on possible ways of increasing  
Institutions of Tertiary Education in Sydney, Melbourne, Albury/Wodonga — Location, Nature and Development of  
Lake Pedder Inquiry  
Legal Aid Review Committee  
Maritime Industry Commission of Inquiry  
Medical Fees Tribunal  
Molonglo Parkway Inquiry

Movement of C.P.S. staff to Albury/Wodonga — Joint Consultative Committee  
National Estate — Task Force  
National Population Inquiry  
National Rehabilitation and Compensation Scheme Inquiry  
National Superannuation Committee of Inquiry  
National Uniform Safety Code for Australian Government Employment Committee  
Nursing Homes Fee Working Party  
Nursing Homes Fee Review — Committee of Inquiry (All States)  
Open University Inquiry  
Outdoor Recreation — Committee on Development of  
Petroleum and Petroleum Products Royal Commission  
Pilbara Study  
Possible development in Australian universities of studies in linguistics, including Aboriginal linguistics  
Possible steps to encourage studies in Australian universities of the languages and cultures of people who represent a significant component of Australia's migrant intake  
Poverty Inquiry  
Prices of certain commodities and services in the A.C.T. and Northern Territory Inquiry  
Protection Commission — Inquiry re formation of  
Protection of Privacy Committee of Inquiry  
Recreation in Australia — the Role, Scope and Development of  
Review of Previous Government's Programs  
River Murray Commission — Inquiry into Certain Aspects of  
Steel Prices — Inquiry into proposed increases  
Superannuation pensions — Commonwealth Inquiry into adjustments after retirement (extended terms of reference)  
Tariffs — Tribunal to investigate claims for damages resulting from the 25 per cent Tariff cut  
Technical Education in the A.C.T. Inquiry  
Urban Centres — Components of the growth of  
Urban Land Tenure — Inquiry into  
West Australian Airport Advisory Committee

## Table B — Continuing Bodies

A.C.T Health Commission  
Albury-Wodonga Development Corporation  
Australian Council for the Arts  
Australian Ionising Radiation Advisory Council  
Cherries — Government Industry Panel on  
Child Care Research Advisory Committee  
Child Care Standards Committee  
Cities Commission  
Consumer Affairs Council (Related to the A.C.T.)  
Consumer Standards — Commission on  
Discrimination in Employment and Occupations — National Committee on  
Health Insurance Commission  
Industries Assistance Commission  
Industry Advisory Panels  
Law Reforms Commission  
National Hospitals and Health Services Commission  
National Parks and Wildlife Commission  
National Pipeline Authority  
Petroleum and Minerals Authority  
Pre-schools Commission  
Prices Justification Tribunal  
Primary Schools Libraries Committee  
Schools Commission  
Social Security/Welfare — Advisory Council on  
Social Welfare — National Commission on  
Technical and Further Education Commission