
From Your Editor

Jennifer Aldred

I don't necessarily want to be remembered as the most popular girl on the block, I want to be remembered as the girl who made a difference – Helen Clark, 37th Prime Minister of New Zealand, October 2013

In December 1997, Jenny Shipley (now Dame) became New Zealand's first female Prime Minister, followed by Helen Clark who was the 5th longest serving person to hold the office. In Australia, it took until 2010 to reach this milestone. The period of Julia Gillard's Prime Ministership (2010–2013) will be memorable for many reasons; importantly, the manner in which she became PM and the compromises she made to operate within a minority government. However, the elephant in the room remains the extent to which gender influenced her credibility in the role. However difficult to face, our political system is not gender neutral. Recall the now Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, during the campaign excusing his reference to the 'sex appeal' of one of his candidates as an ingredient to her electoral success. The extent to which his comment was pursued highlights the unpleasant reality that a woman's political achievements and promise can still be outweighed by the gender effect and it falls to all to counter the stereotype. Such agenda setting should not be confused with social activism but a desire – through research, writing and action – to disentangle the interrelated issues that determine women's access to, and success while in, our parliaments. The earlier success of women such as Shipley and Clark was certainly a factor of the women themselves, but it was also a product of its time. A time when the under-representation of women in parliament was considered counter productive to democratic health. Mary Crawford's article in this issue is the first of coming pieces which will look at the characteristics of our society and our polity that encourage or discourage women's participation in parliaments. Mary looks specifically at the electoral systems in both Australia in New Zealand to understand why women continue to be under-represented in their parliaments.

New Zealand remains on the scene in this issue with an examination of the use of secret evidence in the NZ House of Representatives. David Wilson analyses the role, use and value of secret evidence over recent years. He argues that a secrecy provision for select committees is still warranted but queries whether keeping evidence secret indefinitely is contrary to the principle of parliamentary access and openness.

Alex Hickman writes on a sometimes tense relationship between the parliament and statutory office holders in Western Australia. Using two recent cases, he describes where the activities of parliamentary committees have been restricted by the withholding of information by statutory officers under secrecy/confidence provisions contained in their enabling legislation. Alex argues that a correct balance is needed between justified claims of confidentiality and the rights of parliament and its committees to perform their duties.

Michael Crowley brings together interview material with selected federal members who were in parliament at the time of the September 11 attacks in the United States. Questions focus on the knowledge or recognition of terrorism as a threat to Australia and Australia's relationship with the USA. He demonstrates that, while opinion among those interviewed is divided over Australia's involvement in the 'war on terror', there is consensus on the policy approach concerned with the 'war on terror'. Michael posits, the views expressed highlight the in-built strengths and weaknesses of the Australian political system.

The balance of the articles appearing in this issue deal with oversight. Most are drawn from the 2013 conference of the Australasian Study of Parliament Group (ASPG) held in Perth in October. More will follow in the next issue. Described and assessed in this range of papers will be the value, worth and limits of parliamentary oversight, judicial review, merits review in administrative law, as well as the authority and activity of a range of specialised integrity and anti-corruption bodies. Such has been the demand for government to protect itself against institutional misconduct, distinctive and separate entities have formed to fulfil the integrity function, the so-called 'fourth branch' of government. Some would say in Australia there is, in fact, too much integrity and it is time to wind back. Certainly, the growth in Australia compared with New Zealand is significant, whether by default or design. By promoting integrity, does Australia now have accountability confusion and disorder or a consistent relationship of parts? Enjoy reading the contributions in this and the next APR.

Thanks to regular contributors, Harry Phillips, Robyn Smith, David Clune and June Verrier and welcome to Colleen Lewis who will succeed me as Editor in 2014. This issue also carries a slightly re-vamped format to improve production quality and readability.

Readers are advised to stay alert to the 2014 ASPG conference to be held in Sydney and titled 'How representative is representative democracy?'. For more details go to www.aspg.org.au

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