

Notes and News from your editor

You might notice a slight change in the setting out of the journal this time and in its length.

First I apologise that the issue is a little short. However I thought it better to bring out the edition close to time than to have to wait until I have more suitable articles for publications — and that was the choice. I trust I made the right decisions.

Once more I encourage readers to submit material, remembering that the journal is open to longer, full ‘academic’ articles, and to shorter submissions especially when they are reports of interesting research undertaken in areas of interest or speeches and addresses of contemporary relevance.

You will see that such material has been included in this edition — an address on e-democracy given to the NSW State Parliament; a short report on the Northern Territory election; the announcement of the setting up of a chair of parliamentary democracy and an extensive section on the Democratic Audit of Australia which I especially encourage you to read and then follow-up on through the Audit’s web-site.

There is also material in this edition from the 2005 Conference held in October at the New South Wales State parliament. I have included two pieces, one the address given at the dinner and the other a paper on Statutory Corporations. The address by Andrew Tink I thought worthy of timely publication and the other article by Professor Roger Wettenhall was sent to me in time for full refereeing — hence its publication immediately after the Conference.

Finally you will see the material on Donald Horne. I trust this needs no further explanation.

A general thought on the importance of legislatures:

During the last few weeks NSW has seen the fiasco of the cross-city tunnel, and also seen parliament demonstrating its singular role as the guardian of the democratic process.

Despite the violence and vehemence involved in some of the discussions, parliament has been the forum from which serious accountability questions have

been launched. The media have played their role in raising issues but it remains the questions raised in parliament and the inquiries established that elicit serious response by governments.

In Washington we have been again reminded on the vital role of the American Congress — the Senate's oversight role has caused the withdrawal of one of the President's Supreme Court nominees and the Executive branch is again under general scrutiny — the top aide to the Vice-President has been indicted and there remains the possibility still of the president's right-hand man Carl Rove either being indicted or resigning; a fainter possibility involves the resignation of Vice-President Dick Cheney.

It is not merely the investigation by the special prosecutor that is bringing an arrogant executive to heel, but the public repudiation of some of that Executive's actions and decisions by important members of the Congress, from both political parties.

While all of us become depressed at the lack of apparent balance in the power stakes between our parliaments and our executives, we should take heart in the fact that as cumbersome as they are, the curbs on Executive excesses and complacency are working. The institutions of democracy are far from perfect and far from efficient. However they were not designed for efficiency but to allow the system to make mistakes and make adjustments according to our democratic norms. They are still, by and large, doing that.

I wish you well over the holidays and hope you enjoy this issue.



