

Reconnecting Parliament and the People

Margaret Wilson*

*Introduction*¹

New Zealand has one of the oldest continuous democracies with the first representative assembly being formed in May 1854. The Parliament did not become representative until 1893 when women were granted the right to vote, although it was not until 1919 that women won the right to stand for Parliament. No distinction was made between Maori and Europeans on the issue of suffrage and Maori acquired separate representation in 1867 with the establishment of four Maori electorates. The story of the Parliament can be narrated from many perspectives. In this paper I wish to explore the relevance of the institution of Parliament to the people. While the paper is forward looking it may be argued that the New Zealand Parliament has continued to evolve since 1854 in a way that has retained the confidence of the people. It may be further argued it has maintained this confidence through its capacity to become more representative of the people it serves and thus retain relevance to them in their day to day lives.

One of the driving factors influencing the future relevance of Parliament will be the way it adjusts to changing technology. Advancing and increasingly pervasive Interactive Communications Technology (ICT) allows citizens to connect more with their local and global communities. As a result the relationship between the people and Parliament is changing.² To avoid being marginalized in the public milieu, Parliaments need to reassess their relationship to the people.

* Hon Margaret Wilson, MP, Speaker of the New Zealand House of Representatives

¹ I wish to acknowledge the contribution of Kate Stone, an Intern in the Speaker's Office, to the paper. The Hon Margaret Wilson had hoped to revise this paper; however she has retired from office and has not had the time. We are publishing it in its non-revised form as it makes a valuable, informative and cogent contribution.

² Jeffrey Griffith, Jane Bortnick Griffith, and Ghrardo Casini, 'World E-Parliament Report 2008,' (Global Centre for ICT in Parliament — United Nations and Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2008), 125.

New Zealand is an increasingly diverse society and New Zealanders have many different ideas about what Parliament is and its significance to them. New Zealand's Parliament is both a physical complex and an institution for the transaction of democratic decision making. Parliament's physicality affects the extent to which people feel that Parliament is reflective of their sense of self as a New Zealander. Parliament the institution must maintain public confidence by being seen to be representative of the people. Thus, to the extent that our sense of New Zealand identity is attached to the institution, our confidence in Parliament reinforces our sense of self and place. Parliament needs to ask itself the hard questions — What are the diverse expectations and needs of the people? And are they being met?

This paper attempts to address these important questions but does not provide answers. Hopefully however it can start a conversation that will lead to answers. Parliament is a fundamental institution to the creation of a cohesive New Zealand identity and society centred on democratic ideals. However, in order to achieve this Parliament needs to be self-aware and responsive, coherent and visionary.

The Physical Connection

The physical structure of Parliaments often reflects the lofty aspirations of the institution, the society to which they belong, and the political processes which are carried on within.³ As Professor Nigel Roberts of Victoria University of Wellington notes, the commanding Indian Parliament Buildings built in the 1920s are a lasting reference to the colonial legacy; and the *Fono* of the Samoan Parliament is built in the customary style of a traditional *fale*.⁴ Significantly the Tongan Parliament reflects the tenuous state of the democracy of the island state in its building, which is notably unimpressive, compared to the grandiose Victorian mansion which houses the Tongan King. In Tonga only nine of the 30 MPs in parliament are elected by the Tongan people; and all 12 members of the Cabinet are appointed by the King.⁵ In New Zealand there has tended to be a lack of identification with and reverence for the physical structure of Parliament — both on the part of those who work within the complex and the general public.

An Ambivalent History

As a settler society the formation of national identity in New Zealand, to a certain extent, required the relinquishment of any anterior sense of history and place.⁶ Histories that go beyond the nation-state are problematic for this identity and have

³ Nigel Roberts, 'Legislatures and Parliaments,' <http://www.nigel-roberts.info/legislatures-and-parliaments.htm>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Stephen Turner, 'Inclusive Exclusion': Managing Identity for the Nation's Sake in Aotearoa/New Zealand', *Arena Journal* 28, no. Spring 2007 (2007): 2.

thus tended to be subsumed beneath a pioneering, forward looking ideology. For many settlers New Zealand presented an egalitarian vision of mobility, both physical and societal, free from the rigours of the British class system.⁷ The result is a New Zealand society that has a somewhat temporary character. This transitory condition could be explained, in terms of societal development, as our adolescence. As a nation we are still struggling to find our sense of self — to understand who we are and what it is we want to project to the global community.⁸ The physicality of our Parliament and our ambivalence towards it reflects this under-development of our society.

In a way, Parliament tends to command the respect it deserves. A general lack of awareness, historical preservation, and vision has been evident in the life of our Parliament buildings. On 11 December 1907 Parliament Buildings were ravaged by fire; of the whole complex only the library remained.⁹ Despite the sense of loss expressed among politicians and the general public, reconstruction of Parliament did not commence until 1914 and remained unfinished well into the 1960s.¹⁰

In 1936 as New Zealand's centennial approached, the incomplete state of Parliament Buildings gained a spot on the agenda. There were moves to tie in their completion with plans for a 'government centre'; however, such suggestions remained very much 'on the drawing board'.¹¹ The Rt. Hon. Peter Fraser expressed a renewed interest in 1949 in seeing the complex completed, even mooted the idea of a more modern, practical construction.¹² At this stage Parliament Buildings were a 'hotchpotch'¹³ of impractical and inadequate facilities — certainly not representative of the important democratic functions which were carried on by the members inside. The National government under the Rt. Hon. Sydney Holland, elected in 1949, was eager to see action. However many, including Holland, demonstrated this lack of a sense of history and rallied for the buildings to be knocked down and entirely new buildings constructed.¹⁴ The 1950s saw various maintenance projects carried out, but there was still no overarching direction. In 1953 Holland himself described Parliament as 'a collection of dogboxes'.¹⁵

After a lapse under the Labour government, calls were again heard for work to be done on Parliament Buildings with the return of the National government in 1960. Fears over the risk of earthquakes saw calls for the buildings to be completely

⁷ Keith Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand*, 4th edn (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1988), 96–98.

⁸ Rod Oram, 'Brand New Zealand', *Unlimited* Dec 2001 — Jan 2002 (2001–2002).

⁹ John E. Martin, *The House — New Zealand's House of Representatives 1854–2004* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press Ltd, 2004), 136.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 147–56.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 247.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 248.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

reconstructed, but as one architect pointed out the completion of the existing buildings 'would impart the dignity and serenity which our unfinished Parliament deserves.'¹⁶ However this sentiment was not held by most and the plans for the retention of the existing Parliamentary complex with a modern addition, to become known as 'the Beehive', were accepted by the ministerial committee formed to consider the future of Parliament Buildings. The committee, commenting on Sir Basil Spence's 'Beehive' concept, declared that it would 'become a source of national pride and international interest'.¹⁷ The prevailing attitude expressed by the Government architect was that 'To return to neo-classicism would relegate New Zealand to the position of a backward nation', while the Beehive demonstrated 'progressive determination'.¹⁸

The committee was at least cognisant of the significance of the buildings in the relationship between Parliament and the people, and as a source of national identity. Nonetheless, the incongruence of the construction of the modern Beehive where the south-wing was meant to be built shows ambivalence to our institutional history and the absence of a coherent vision for the place of Parliament amongst our national icons. In contrast Australia's Parliament Buildings, built in Canberra in 1988, were influenced by the form of Australia's constitution and the functional needs of the institution.¹⁹ The complex is iconic with two crescents which house and separate the two Houses and sweeping lawns that rise up to roof level.²⁰

This ambivalence on the part of those within New Zealand's Parliament continues today and is reflected in a recent experience to preserve the heritage value of the Parliamentary precinct. An application was filed with the Wellington City Council to construct a commercial building that will dominate the Parliament buildings. The public was not notified of the application. Parliamentary Service was notified as an adjoining property. It lodged submissions to the Wellington City Council to the effect that they would like to have been consulted and have input into the construction management plan for a major redevelopment adjacent to the precinct. There were concerns on the part of Parliamentary Service that the height, bulk, proximity and construction of the development could adversely affect the historically significant Parliamentary precinct. The Council's planning Commissioners approved the development with little acknowledgement of Parliament's submission. As Speaker I have authorised an appeal and the matter is in mediation. The chances of substantial change are slim however. The attitude of

¹⁶ Ibid., 250.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Parliamentary Education Office, 'Australia's Parliament House', <http://www.peo.gov.au/students/cl/aph.html#facts>.

²⁰ Ibid.

the City Council and many Members of Parliament to preserving the heritage value of the Parliamentary precinct is a testament to these ambivalent attitudes.²¹

Branding Parliament

If Parliaments are to avoid being marginalized in the daily lives of their citizens they need to acknowledge that in the postmodern world image is of utmost importance.²² The proliferation of qualitatively identical products, through economic globalization, has fuelled the expansion of the brand; consumers are guided to make decisions based on symbolic value rather than the material use value of a product.²³ With convergence in the political realm, branding has become imperative. Image and reputation, trust and customer satisfaction, perceptions and expectations are all factors which have increasing relevance in terms of an institution's ability to compete with multinational companies, such as *Coca-Cola* and *McDonalds*, as a constitutive element of the citizen's identity.²⁴ Branding personalizes, attaching emotion and trust to an otherwise almost indistinguishable entity, thus ensuring loyalty. In constructing a particular 'aspiration lifestyle',²⁵ branding replaces outdated ideologies; most New Zealanders no longer associate their New Zealandness with romanticized images of the protestant work ethic, egalitarianism, nor to being pioneers of female suffrage. In order to compete in the identity-formation stakes Parliament, and not only political parties, must play the branding game.²⁶ By reinforcing the relationship between the citizen's sense of self and their perceptions of the institution, Parliament can reconnect with the people. To achieve this Parliament must convey a coherent message – this requires cohesion and unity of purpose within Parliament, and consistency in content and form of message.

Artful Initiatives

Many Parliaments attempting to re-connect with the people double as galleries for the nation's art.²⁷ The New Mexican legislature, for example, has one of the most comprehensive collections of New Mexican art which represents the many diverse strands of New Mexican society.²⁸ Art in the Reichstag Building, however, was a more conscious initiative to reconnect the people with Parliament and its history when the Reichstag was inaugurated as the new German Parliament Buildings in

²¹ Joel George, 'Parliamentary Service Briefing — Bowen Integrated Campus Development,' (Wellington: Parliamentary Service, 2007).

²² Peter van Ham, 'Branding Territory: Inside the Wonderful Worlds of PR and IR Theory,' *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 31, no. 2 (2002): 265.

²³ *Ibid.*: 253.

²⁴ *Ibid.*: 264.

²⁵ *Ibid.*: 242.

²⁶ *Ibid.*: 265.

²⁷ Roberts, 'Legislatures and Parliaments'.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Berlin in 1999. The film of the exhibition involved the works of nineteen German artists specially commissioned for the event and other works which were loaned or bought.²⁹ Not only was this exhibition significant due to its association with the nation's governing institution, but the works themselves 'represent one of the most important collections of contemporary art in Germany'.³⁰

Jens Liebchen's photographs of Art in the Reichstag were presented to the German public for the first time in 2003. Following this presentation, the Goethe-Institut took up the idea of sending them on an international exhibition tour. 'Politics & Art — Art & Politics', which included New Zealand in 2007, made a significant contribution to the image of the Federal Republic of Germany that is conveyed by the Goethe-Institut throughout the world. It clearly demonstrates the value attached by the Bundestag to contemporary art; through this programme, art is given an independent and critical role as an accompaniment to political life in the parliamentary buildings.³¹

The Reichstag continues to be used as a prominent exhibition space for contemporary German art — which often acts as a form of political commentary. The use of Parliaments as an exhibition space for significant national art can play an important part in reconnecting Parliament with the people. Art in many ways can provide a commentary on the lived realities of different sectors of a society; a Parliament's endorsement of and involvement with the production and display of national art has the potential to link Parliament with these lived realities. However, it is important to note the calls for caution from those involved in creative industries that the increasing involvement of the state in the artistic pursuits of its citizenry has the potential to 'limit dangerously the sort of art that can be funded and valued'.³²

In New Zealand the Parliamentary banquet hall is adorned with a John Drawbridge mural depicting the New Zealand atmosphere and sky; and the Galleria displays a specially commissioned multi-media artwork by Malcolm Harrison, *These are Matters of Pride*, representing the creation of New Zealand. Below the art work on the Galleria floor a large mooring stone sports more than 50 ribbons contributed by New Zealand's various ethnic groups. Bearing in mind the warning about state involvement in artistic industries, New Zealand's Parliament holds a substantial collection of art, but could do more to become an important site for the exhibition of our national artwork and to reconnect itself with the people through this medium.

²⁹ German Bundestag, 'Art in the Reichstag Building'
http://www.bundestag.de/htdocs_e/art_arch/art_reichstag.html.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Jens Liebchen, *Politics & Art – Art & Politics*, German Bundestag with the Goethe-Institut, 117

³² Peter Skilling, 'Trajectories of Art and Culture Politics in New Zealand', *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 64, no. 4 (2005): 20.

Engaging Diversity?

New Zealand is an increasingly diverse society. The results of the 2001 census showed that 1 in 5 New Zealanders were born overseas — the numbers hailing from Europe are declining, an increasing number are coming from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.³³ In four years the number of multilingual New Zealanders has increased by 20%, with 1 in 6 people being able to speak more than one language.³⁴ There are also an increasing number of New Zealanders who practice non-Christian religions or who do not have any religious affiliation.³⁵ The median age has increased from 31 to 35 years between 1991 and 2001.³⁶ Parliament has an obligation to respond to these changing demographics — to engage with all of society's distinctive communities and strive to meet their ever more diverse needs.

Open to Diversity

The extent to which Parliament is accessible to the public can influence whether it is perceived to embody ideals of transparency and accountability as well as relevancy. Disconnection and disengagement occurs when Parliament is not perceived to embody these ideals. The comparative openness of the Scandinavian parliaments, for example, compared to the French or Italian parliaments, reflects the greater openness and egalitarianism of the former compared to the tradition of state surveillance in the latter.³⁷ In the early 1970s New Zealand's Parliament was opened up to the people in the form of organised tours.³⁸ An important part of these tours is the display of a vast array of artwork, much of which has been contributed by members of New Zealand's diverse ethnic communities; and the visit to the Maori Affairs Select Committee Room, Māui Tikitiki a Taranga.

There has been a Maori Affairs Select Committee Room as part of the Parliamentary complex since 1922. Carvings denoting the entrance to a whare rūnanga (meeting house) were fixed to a wall and in the architraves of the doors. Making the room a whare rūnanga was an appropriate recognition of the committee's place in Parliament. It was here that Maori sought redress for their grievances, and here the Minister and the Maori members came together in non-partisan fashion.

It was substantially renovated in 1955 to become a significant space within Parliament Buildings. A large panel reproducing the Treaty of Waitangi was mounted on a wall, which also displayed coloured portraits of prominent Maori

³³ Statistics New Zealand — Tatauranga Aotearoa, 'Population', <http://www.stats.govt.nz/people/population/default.htm>.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Roberts, 'Legislatures and Parliaments'.

³⁸ Martin, *The House — New Zealand's House of Representatives 1854–2004*, 290.

politicians. Red and black kowhaiwhai decorated the ceiling and cornices, the replica whare rūnanga entrance was retored and tukutuku was extended around the walls. The room has been treated as a marae since 1975 and is under the authority of the Minister of Maori Affairs.³⁹

Koro Wetere, Minister of Maori Affairs 1984-1990, was the initial driving force behind the 'new' Maori Affairs Select Committee room. It was his belief that the new room should be larger than the old one, which stands towards the rear of the Parliamentary Buildings. He also felt it was appropriate that the new room be located towards the front of the building and near the main entrance. Maori members of Parliament set the theme for the room to guide a group of Maori carvers. It was their view that a person standing within the completed room should feel the four winds blowing, and not just feel or sense the symbolism of one iwi or tribe. This approach ensured all Maori were represented in the room and the stories and symbols that have relevance to all iwi would be in its ceiling and walls. The room was officially opened by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on the 2nd of November 1995 as a venue for the discussion and deliberation of issues relating to Maori.⁴⁰

In 2002 a Pacific Room was created. At the dedication the then Speaker the Rt. Hon. Jonathan Hunt explained that the room was created to symbolize 'the enormous contribution Pacific peoples have made to New Zealand and the importance Parliament places on their role in society and in this House.'⁴¹ An Asian Room has recently been given approval. These rooms are important in creating a sense of place and belonging within Parliament for

Reaching Out

The growing use of television and the internet has increased Parliament's outreach into the community. The unedited proceedings of the House can be accessed on television, through webcasts and radio. Question Time is also replayed on television during the dinner break increasing the number of people who are able to view it. The website provides information on the history and role of Parliament, news, processes, and contacts for parliamentarians and staff. In 2006 the *eCommittee* system was set up with the objective of making 'public participation in the select committee process easier'.⁴² Through *eCommittee* papers are distributed electronically to committee members, the public can make electronic submissions, hardcopy submissions are provided in electronic form, and any information or reports released by the committee can be made available to the public.⁴³ Opening up

³⁹ Martin, *The House — New Zealand's House of Representatives 1854–2004*, 290.

⁴⁰ See Info Sheet on Māui Tikitiki a Taranga; available from Visitors Services, Parliament Buildings, Wellington.

⁴¹ See Info Sheet on 'The Pacific Room'; available from Visitors Services, Parliament Buildings, Wellington.

⁴² 'Parliament Trialling Ecommittee System', *LawTalk*, 27 February 2006, 8.

⁴³ Ibid.

Parliament through the Web is particularly useful in targeting young people and persons with disabilities who are often disenfranchised by the use of traditional means of communication.⁴⁴

Parliament has a variety of education programmes. These include programmes for visiting school children to meet electorate members, tour Parliament, attend Question Time, and debate a bill. There is also an election simulation programme which Parliament takes out to schools, an interactive website, an *Explore Parliament* DVD and teaching resources. The Youth Parliament and Victoria University's Post-Graduate Parliamentary Internship Programme are other important ways in which Parliament engages with young New Zealanders. Parliament is also active in educating the wider public on Parliament's processes and significance through Open Day, the Business and Parliament Trust programme, and Public Service education programmes.

Proportional Representation

Since New Zealand changed its electoral system in 1993 to the Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) system of proportional representation, Parliament has become more representative of and more responsive to the nation's increasing diversity. One must be careful in making comparisons between the demographics of Parliament pre-MMP and today as the increased diversity within Parliament reflects societal changes and would most probably have occurred to a greater or lesser extent regardless of the electoral change. However, the advent of the party list under MMP has improved the representation in the House. The lists place a political obligation on parties to put candidates from traditionally underrepresented sectors of society in positions in which they have a realistic chance of being elected into Parliament. Prior to MMP a party may well have had 50% female candidates, for example, however they may have been in largely un-winnable seats and therefore the actual number of women represented in Parliament would be far less than their proportion of society.⁴⁵ In terms of the composition of the House today: 18.85% are Maori, who make up 14.6% of the population; 31.96% are women, who make up 51.2% of the population; 4.09% are Pacific Islanders, who make up 6.9% of the population; and 1.63% are Asian, who make up 9.2% of the population.⁴⁶

The implementation of MMP has also enhanced the credibility of the select committee process. Prior to MMP the government would have a majority on committees and therefore often their decisions would be a foregone conclusion. Under MMP, governments will not necessarily have a majority and committees may be chaired by opposition members. Therefore, select committees provide a

⁴⁴ Griffith, Griffith, and Casini, 'World E-Parliament Report 2008', 127.

⁴⁵ Raymond Miller, *Party Politics in New Zealand* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2005), 195–210.

⁴⁶ Figures from the Office of the Clerk of the House of Representatives, New Zealand.

genuine opportunity for the public to have input into the legislative process and for individual MPs to scrutinise government activities.⁴⁷ This has increased the authenticity and transparency of the process, which is important in re-building the trust of the people in Parliament.

While these advances should be acknowledged, the fact remains women, the Asian community and the Pacific Island community are still underrepresented in the House. Support for gender parity is waning as there is a perception women have succeeded in obtaining political parity. This is a major concern for women whose interests are easily overlooked in Parliament. Also the intention, mooted by a number of political parties, to abolish the Maori seats could threaten Maori representation within the Parliament as there is no guarantee of a high list placing for Maori candidates.⁴⁸ As the only sanction on political parties with regard to the composition of their lists is public opinion, representation is subject to the electoral cycle; parties like the Greens and Labour have tended to have more demographically representative lists, therefore if there is a shift away from such parties we may see a decline in the representation of minority groups.⁴⁹ Although political parties have long been a dominant player in our political system, MMP has increased the importance of the party. The parties' public functions consist of selecting the best candidates for election (and putting them in winnable seats or high on the list); and making the policy which will form the election agenda. As political parties are private organisations much of their decision making is done in private. While this may contribute to feelings of distrust among the public,⁵⁰ there is little support to publicly fund political parties that would justify greater accountability. The election, which takes place every three years, remains the main accountability on political parties.

Direct Democracy

There are still many challenges facing our Parliament in its efforts to respond to the changing needs of our diverse society. Although New Zealand's Parliament is relatively open there are many Parliaments around the world which are more open than our own.⁵¹ For example, Parliament (and political parties) is still not adequately providing for the multicultural and multilingual realities of New Zealanders today — be they tangata whenua (Maori) or new immigrants. Tension between those trying to preserve the historical value of our Parliament buildings and those trying to facilitate greater access for people with disabilities, both in terms of physical access and the provision of sign language for example, needs to

⁴⁷ Miller, *Party Politics in New Zealand*, 206.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Sen. the Hon. Paul Calvert, 'Electronic Voting Systems in Parliament', *The Parliamentarian*, no. 1 (2007).

⁵¹ Roberts, 'Legislatures and Parliaments'.

be addressed. In order to achieve this Parliament needs to discard outdated modes of engagement and open up a dialogue directly with the people on their terms.

IT and e-democracy

The growth of IT has led to a new phenomenon, e-democracy, which provides a possible answer to some of these challenges. Email is increasingly used to provide direct two-way communication between parliamentary offices and the public. The fax attack has been replaced by the email blitz as members are aware whenever there is a contentious issue in Parliament. However, there is still potential for parliaments to develop more effective email management systems.⁵² Online discussions and online petitioning are other mechanisms which could be used to directly engage with the citizenry in dialogue over current policy directions and legislative programmes. The potential for these forums has not been fully exploited largely because there is still no 'coherent knowledge base that can assist parliaments in developing approaches to online discussion that are useful and cost-effective'.⁵³

Blogs are another means of communication which has been used by members and for which there is room for further development.⁵⁴ Blogs allow direct and up-to-date communication between parliamentarians and their constituents on the activities of Parliament and their involvement — thus blogs have the potential to become important in terms of transparency and accountability.⁵⁵ If I was not leaving Parliament at the end of this term, I would start a Speaker's blog to counter much of the misinformation in the media about parliamentary process.

Direct means of communication can provide an avenue of un-mediated information; increasingly important as the commercially motivated media tends to focus on the conflict of party politics rather than the substantive issues. Getting back to more basic technologies, there is still room for a greater quantity and quality of broadcasts/webcasts; and more interactive websites focused on a two-way relationship between Parliament and the people.⁵⁶ A study of 10 Parliaments' levels of e-participation reported that 'Most parliaments are still not using the full range of Internet technologies as participatory tools in order to involve citizens'.⁵⁷

⁵² Griffith, Griffith, and Casini, 'World E-Parliament Report 2008', 138.

⁵³ Ibid., 130.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 135–8.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 137.

⁵⁷ L. Berntzen et al., '*Parliamentary Web Presence: A Comparative Review*' (paper presented at the Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on e-Government, London, 2006).

Citizens' Assemblies

Another means of direct citizen participation in policy formation is through citizens' assemblies. A Citizen's Assembly is a 'randomly selected group of citizens with formal governmental powers and a jurisdiction confined to issues where elected officials have a blatant conflict of interest.' They have been used in Canada and the Netherlands to look at issues of electoral reform.⁵⁸ Metiria Turei MP, the Green Party, submitted a Supplementary Order Paper (SOP 170) on the Electoral Finance Bill which provided for the formation of a Citizen's Assembly to consider changes to electoral finance law.⁵⁹ However the motion was defeated with 10 votes for and 111 against. New Zealand has no defined or well developed process for electoral reform. While the lack of a written constitution provides flexibility and innovation, it makes constitutional change a matter of politics only. The result is the media has become a major player in electoral reform, even though it also has a vested interest in the process and outcome. The foreshadowing of another referendum on MMP will provide an interesting case study on electoral change in New Zealand.

Conclusion

Public disillusion in the democratic process, due to a diminished confidence and trust in public institutions, is reflected in a decrease in electoral participation.⁶⁰ But the people do care about politics, and they certainly do care about democracy and their participation in it.⁶¹ The *World e-Parliament Report 2008*, prepared by the United Nations and Inter-Parliamentary Union, comments that this ambivalent public mood has been 'exacerbated by the inability or ineffectiveness of public institutions to inform the community and devise mechanisms to include citizens and stakeholders in the policy making process.'⁶² The public may be disengaging from orthodox means of participation, but are still very interested in participating. It is up to Parliaments now to re-engage. Parliament needs to look to the future and take a diverse approach. Parliament needs to recreate itself as a reference point for national identity and restore public confidence in the institution by actively and genuinely engaging with all sectors of society. These two steps are mutually reinforcing — without either reconnection will not occur.

This paper has concentrated on Parliament as an institution and not on the work of Parliament. It is obvious however that people's perception of Parliament is influenced by how Members conduct themselves in the course of their work. All

⁵⁸ J.H. Snyder, 'Citizens Assemblies: A Mechanism for Enhancing Legislative Transparency and Accountability', in *National Academies of Sciences Workshop on eGovernment* (Severna Park: iSolon.org, 2007), 1.

⁵⁹ Supplementary Order Paper to Electoral Finance Bill (No.170); 4 December 2007.

⁶⁰ Griffith, Griffith and Casini, 'World E-Parliament Report 2008.'

⁶¹ Miller, *Party Politics in New Zealand*, 237.

⁶² Griffith, Griffith, and Casini, 'World E-Parliament Report 2008', 125.

Speakers are aware of this public perception when they open their emails after a particularly acrimonious question time or general debate. The way members treat each other in Parliament does little to enhance respect for the institution. Much has been written on this subject so it has not been pursued in this paper. I have no really useful observation or comment to make on the issue except to observe the behaviours have improved with time but so have the expectations of the public.

I have no doubt that until members treat each other and the institution with more respect, it will not be given by the public. The disrespectful behaviours do alienate people because they are so contrary to how people behaviour in other environments. I do not see them changing however and therefore the institution of Parliament must work within this somewhat negative parameter. The absorbing game of politics however is endangering the institution on which we have come to rely for the peaceful democratic resolution of differences in our community. For this reason the task of ensuring the people understand and support the institution of the Parliament becomes more important than ever. ▲