

BOOK NOTES FROM THE NEW SOUTH WALES PARLIAMENT

Book Notes by D. Clune*

During 2006 New South Wales will be celebrating 150 years of responsible government. The New South Wales Government has appointed a Committee to undertake and fund scholarly research on the passage of those years. The project is not only a commemoration of the culminating enactments which took effect in 1856. The broad aim is to examine the consequences of the creation of a bicameral legislature, a Cabinet drawn from the Parliament and requiring the confidence of the Legislative Assembly, then to continue to work through all the years since as the franchise broadened and the assumptions of government evolved. The Committee for the Sesquicentenary of Responsible Government 1856–2006 has sponsored more than twenty projects examining aspects of the history of representative democracy and governance in NSW. Two major works sponsored by the Committee that will be of interest to readers of *Australasian Parliamentary Review* have now been published and are described below.

DECISION AND DELIBERATION: THE PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES, 1856–2003, David Clune and Gareth Griffith, Federation Press, 2006, \$59.95

This book contains a comprehensive account of the history of the NSW Parliament from 1856 to 2003. It is not only an account of the history of both Houses of the NSW Parliament but, unlike some other Parliamentary histories, also an analysis of their performance. This analysis is based on contrasting ‘liberal’ and ‘executive’ models of Parliament. The legitimate claims of both models are recognised and the interplay and relationship between them provides a basis for analysis. The book also recounts the political context in which the Parliament operated and, read in this way, provides a *de facto* political history of NSW. The authors have attempted to enliven their account with portraits of some of the more colourful Parliamentarians, such as WP ‘Paddy’ Crick, drunken brawler and master of Parliamentary procedure. Accounts are also provided of some of the more colourful incidents in NSW Parliamentary history, such as George Fuller’s seven hour Government and the 2003 siege of Macquarie Street by trade unionists. On a broader level, the book provides some general observations and conclusions about the nature of State politics and Parliaments and on the theoretical study of parliamentary institutions.

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THE PREMIERS OF NSW 1856–2005,

By David Clune and Ken Turner, eds, The Federation Press, 2006, 2 volumes, \$59.95.

This work comprises two volumes, the first covering the 13 Colonial Premiers to 1901 and the second the 26 State Premiers up to and including Bob Carr. Both volumes have substantial appendices that provide a wealth of detail about the careers and lives of the State Premiers. The editors have also provided introductory chapters that look at who the Premiers were and their road to office. The changing role of the Premier over the period covered is analysed. The editors also examine what makes a successful Premier and how these qualities have changed over time. Detailed, scholarly yet readable portraits of the life and times of each Premier are provided. The contributors have been selected for their particular expertise in their areas. Contributors to Volume One include such acknowledged experts on the nineteenth century as John Bennett, Geoffrey Bolton, Alan Powell and Martha Rutledge. Contributors to Volume Two not only include distinguished scholars but also some practitioners of politics. Rodney Cavalier uses diaries he kept as a Cabinet Minister to provide a fascinating, insider's account of the Premiership of Barrie Unsworth. Graham Freudenberg writes with insight and lucidity of Neville Wran's years as Premier. Important re-evaluations of some Premiers are provided, including the long forgotten first Premier of NSW, Stuart Alexander Donaldson. Don Harwin makes a good case for seeing Sir Joseph Carruthers as one of the major figures to hold the Premiership, even though his term was cut short by illness. Lucy Taksa's account of the first Labor Premier, James McGowen, shows he is a more substantial figure than previously acknowledged. Michael Hogan's verdict on WA Holman is that previous evaluations might in some ways have been over generous. John McCarthy demonstrates that Depression-era UAP Premier Bertram Stevens was not the arch-conservative contemporary accounts demonised him as. The controversial reputation of Bob Askin receives a balanced assessment from Ian Hancock and allegations against him are thoroughly analysed. Volume Two concludes with an assessment by Rodney Smith of Bob Carr in office and the significance of the Carr years. ▲