

Title: Unequal burdens in a developing democracy: parliamentary pay and the structural disadvantage of rural and regional members in New South Wales, 1862–1889

Abstract

The New South Wales (NSW) Legislative Assembly, established in 1856, operated on the assumption that parliamentary service required no financial remuneration. Members were expected to self-fund travel, accommodation, and the opportunity costs of extended absences, conditions that confined political participation to those of independent means and disproportionately disadvantaged country representatives. This paper provides the first empirical analysis of the campaign for parliamentary remuneration in the NSW Legislative Assembly, culminating in the *Parliamentary Representatives' Allowances Act* of 1889. It demonstrates that absenteeism among country members was not a failure of individual commitment but a structural consequence of geographic and financial exclusion, and that sustained resistance to reform functioned as an institutional defence of class privilege and metro-centricity. Drawing on NSW Hansard, digitised newspapers accessed through Trove, and historical society evidence, the study examines how persistent absenteeism generated sustained political and press-driven demands for reform across a twenty-seven-year period (1862–1889). Applying framing analysis, the article traces how parliamentarians and newspapers constructed absenteeism variously as individual failing, structural inequity, and democratic crisis - frames that pathologized the financial needs of working and rural members while naturalising the advantages of independent wealth. The article contributes to scholarly understanding of parliamentary structure, geographic disadvantage, and democratic participation in colonial NSW.