Parliamentarians' Staff and the Professionalisation of Australian Politicians

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Political parties and support staff are elements of the infrastructure of parliamentary life for members of parliament in Australia today. Both have developed since Federation, but the development of the political party system has been the subject of more research than the development of parliamentary staffing. This paper will trace the development of Commonwealth parliamentarians' entitlement to staff with particular emphasis on the period from 1975 onwards, and its relationship to changes in the role of parliamentarians. It will argue that the change from a time when parliamentarians had no staff to an era of staff supplied by the government was driven both by the increasing professionalisation of the work of members of parliament and by economic and social change in Australia.

In 1901 parliamentarians were seen as amateurs serving the nation from a sense of duty and explicitly eschewing the idea of politics as a job or profession. This view was clear in the arrangements for their payment made in the Constitution. They were given not a 'salary' but an 'allowance' that would enable them to live while carrying out their parliamentary duties. This view of parliamentarians predominated until after World War 2. From the 1950s until the early 1970s backbenchers were entitled to one staff member, whose role was seen as entirely secretarial. It was not until the last quarter of the twentieth century that parliamentarians became entitled to several staff with not only secretarial but also research, media and other administrative responsibilities. This happened not because governments or parliamentary administrations became convinced that parliamentarians needed more assistance but because parliamentarians themselves began to work differently and therefore had different requirements.

The proliferation of parliamentary staff of various kinds was a result of the change in the nature and duties of the parliamentarian. The Member of Parliament in 1901 was predominantly a legislator, and saw his role as specifically parliamentary. He made speeches, he attended political meetings, and he introduced and amended and debated legislation. In this role he had no need for staff other than those looking after the physical and administrative fabric of parliament. As the society developed more complex, specialised and professional bureaucratic and political institutions, especially during and after World War 2, so a new period of professional and administrative support, later leading to more educated, skilled and elaborate support arrangements, would evolve until the 1970s and early 1980s. Finally, in the period of globalisation, mass media and fast communications, and high expectations of immediate response and action, parliamentarians, like some other professionals, had support teams which they

managed and on whom they relied to provide resources and specialist as well as general assistance. Today the work of a parliamentarian encompasses a number of roles: not only the legislator, but also the policy-maker, the social worker and the party activist. This is not only an Australian phenomenon. A study of British legislators in 1992 (Norris 1997) found that they devoted most of their time to constituency matters. These roles rely heavily on staff with professional expertise to support the parliamentarian.

Parliamentarians' staff 1945-1975

When the new Commonwealth Parliament first met in Melbourne in May 1901 its staff consisted of fifty-three parliamentary officers. Of these ten were employed in the Senate, eighteen in the House of Representatives, three in the Parliamentary Library, ten in the Department of the Joint House and twelve in Hansard. A number of them had transferred from the colonial parliaments. They were very specifically the staff of the parliament, not the staff of the parliamentarians, although some parliamentarians apparently employed staff privately (Browning 1986, 92). Until 1944 parliamentarians had no personal staff supplied by government or parliament, although they did have access to the services of typists at Parliament House and at parliamentary offices in the capital cities.

In 1944 each Member of Parliament became entitled to an 'electorate typist' (Reid and Forrest 1989, 399). The Department of the Interior controlled these staff and described the position as that of a 'secretary-typist'; there was no apparent restriction on where they could be located, but they had no travel privileges (NAA:A461/7, U4/1/1 Part 3). This meant that no travel, including going to Canberra when parliament was sitting, would be funded. It is most likely that these staff were located in the member's office outside Canberra. Parliamentarians were entitled to office accommodation in their electorates or in the state capital and a staff member in the electorate could look after the needs of the constituents while parliament was sitting. At a time when plane travel was unusual, parliamentarians commonly stayed in Canberra for the length of each session. Someone in the electorate could keep them in touch with what was happening at home. Parliamentarians also had some access to the services of typists in Parliament House, reducing the need to have their own staff there. It appears that the provision of staff was an executive, rather than a parliamentary, decision as the secretary-typists were under the control of the Department of the Interior. Parliament could not, in any event, have made such provision

unilaterally, as its appropriations were included as part of the Commonwealth budget and it was thus (as it remains) largely under the control of the executive (Senate Select Committee on Parliament's Appropriations and Staffing).

Most parliamentarians apparently regarded the provision of one staff member as adequate for a number of years. In 1955 the Prime Minister appointed a committee chaired by the Victorian businessman and prominent Liberal H. F. Richardson to conduct a public inquiry into salaries and allowances of members of parliament (Richardson Report 1956). The Richardson Committee asked members of parliament to complete a comprehensive questionnaire about the time they spent on their parliamentary duties, their sources of income, and their views on the adequacy of their remuneration, allowances and facilities (NAA: A462/16, Item 3/19). One question asked whether the secretary-typist was adequate for their needs. Of the 121 who answered the question, ninety-eight (81%) regarded the staffing provision as adequate. The remaining twenty-three saw a need for relief when the secretary-typist was absent. The Committee concluded that the current arrangements were satisfactory and did not recommend any changes.

The Richardson Committee was one of three public inquiries into parliamentarians' salaries and allowance during the 1950s. In 1952 a committee chaired by the retired New South Wales judge H.S. Nicholas had recognised the expenses involved in being a member of parliament by introducing the electorate allowance. The Nicholas Committee explicitly declared that the 'parliamentary allowance' as it was still known was intended as a compensation for the inability to earn an income elsewhere, not as a salary. It was not intended to encourage 'the so-called professional politician who may be defined as a man who regards a seat in Parliament as a source of livelihood and not as a means of furthering a cause and thereby serving his country' (Nicholas Report 13). Richardson also chaired a later inquiry in 1959, which explicitly acknowledged that being a member of parliament was a full-time occupation (Richardson Report 1959, 10). The passage of seven years had seen a complete reversal in opinion. The occupation of parliamentarian was closer to being an occupation, not a vocation.

There were no public inquiries into parliamentary salaries in the 1960s, possibly because a sustained public attack on politicians, their salaries and their 'perks' (Webb 1959) had greeted the publication of the second Richardson Report. In 1971, however, it once again commissioned a public inquiry. This time one person, the judge John Kerr, conducted the inquiry. Amongst many

other matters Kerr dealt with the matter of staff for parliamentarians, or secretarial and research assistance as it was now described. Although the report contained no detail of submissions made to it, Kerr remarked on the extent to which members had argued for more and different staff:

> One matter which was pressed by many Members was the argument that there should be additional staff for all Members. This was generally put in the form that each Member should have a research assistant, though some sought additional secretarial assistance. One suggestion was that there should be an electorate agent to take some of the burden of work in the electorate. Part of the extra assistance sought was said to be needed on the basis that, as the Member's secretary-typist has to stay in the electorate office, the additional assistant should travel with the Member, especially to Canberra. (Kerr Report 1971, 47)

Kerr did not recommend any increased staff, despite his recognition of the significance accorded to the matter by some parliamentarians. However, the frequency and persistence of the arguments put to him were an indication of the extent to which parliamentarians themselves were beginning to want different staff to provide different services. Increasingly, they saw the need to delegate part of their responsibilities to others.

The changed views of parliamentarians between 1959 and 1971 reflect the transformation of Australian society in the sixteen years between the Richardson report and the Kerr report. Important changes took place in education and in the public service. The Commonwealth government began funding secondary education (including private schools), notably by the provision of funding for science laboratories and school libraries in the early 1960s. This was accompanied by the expansion of the tertiary education sector, with more students in higher education, more universities, and the introduction of Commonwealth scholarships, which paid university fees and provided a means-tested living allowance. At the end of World War 2 there were six universities in Australia; by 1972 there were eleven (Brett 2003, 141). In addition, a new type of tertiary institution, the college of advanced education, had been established in the late 1960s and by the end of 1971 had 45,000 students (Birrell 1974, 649-50). The Commonwealth public service developed as a career service as merit replaced seniority as the basis for promotion and the ban on married women holding permanent public service positions was abolished (Encel

1970, 268-74). The time was also marked by social movements, notably the anti-Vietnam war movement, which looked more critically at aspects of government domestic and foreign policy.

Commonwealth parliamentarians themselves reflected these transitions to an extent. Amongst those elected in the period 1949-54, 34.2% had university degrees. In the period 1955-68 this had risen to only 35.6%, but in the period 1969-80 the figure was 58.8%. In 1990 it was 61.7% (Rydon 1986, 152-9). However the average age at which members were elected between 1949 and 1979 was 43.9 (Rydon 1986, 50). The generation of parliamentarians of the 1960s were beyond the age when they might have benefited from any greater availability of secondary and tertiary education. Indeed many of them were products of the 1930s Depression. Amongst their ranks however were both the originators of the policies that changed Australia from the top down and participants in social movements that changed it from the bottom up. In the 1960s Robert Menzies' Liberal Country Party government initiated the educational policy changes that renovated the university sector and continued the expansion of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation to work in industrial as well as agricultural research. In the early 1970s Gough Whitlam's ALP government introduced a series of policy changes that reflected the changes in social attitudes during the 1960s; they included social welfare benefits for sole parents, the abolition of university fees and Aboriginal land rights. On the other side of the fence, ALP members of parliament such as Jim Cairns, Tom Uren, Arthur Gietzelt and George Georges were at the heart of the anti-conscription and anti-war movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Two of these, Cairns and Uren, were ministers.

The pressure for research staff that the Kerr report had discerned was in part a result of the transition to a time when parliamentarians, like others, expected a higher level of support in their professional work. The structure of the labour force had changed. In 1947 it was 25.3% professional and white collar, but by 1972 the figure had increased to 31.7% (Brett 2003, 141). The election, in December 1972 of an ALP government, the first for 23 years, headed by Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, was also a factor in the extent to which members of parliament now argued for research staff. It came to office with a reforming agenda, and a substantial number of its backbenchers, as well as the ministers, had a commitment to policy development and change (Mayer 1973). Those who had already been members of parliament before the 1972 election had been able, since 1966, to use the Legislative Research Service. They were in a position to appreciate the possible value of research capacity within their offices. The Opposition had other,

equally valid, reasons for seeing the need for research staff. For the first time in 23 years the Liberal Country Party was not in government and therefore not able to call on the public service for advice and information. The introduction of research staff for members would supplement the staff which shadow ministers were entitled to and add extra capacity to the Opposition team.

The establishment of the Remuneration Tribunal in 1973 created an avenue for parliamentarians to raise the issue of research staff. The central role of the Tribunal was to determine salaries and allowances for parliamentarians and some senior public servants and statutory office-holders, but it could also make recommendations on related matters. In its first report to Parliament, the Tribunal addressed the issue of research staff and recommended that:

> …the Government give consideration to the provision of a reasonable number of research assistants for allocation to private Members. A certain number should be allocated to each of the recognised political parties. We see such a step as, to some extent, experimental and intend to examine the question of provision of research assistance in depth in a future review. (Remuneration Tribunal 1975a, 19)

None of the recommendations of the initial Remuneration Tribunal report was implemented because the Senate disallowed it the day after it was tabled. Instead, in 1975 the Minister for Services and Property, Fred Daly, wrote to all members of parliament informing them of 'a scheme to provide additional assistance in Members' electorate offices within an amount of $7,353 per annum to take effect from 1 March 1975' (Remuneration Tribunal 1975b, 75). This decision contradicted the Tribunal's 1974 view that additional staff could not be justified by the workload and commitments of parliamentarians, and also pre-empted its intention of further examining the question of research assistance. To some extent it also contradicted the consensus which had been developing amongst parliamentarians and other interested parties about the type of staff needed and their location (Browning 1986, 93). The Remuneration Tribunal in its 1975 review attacked the decision and instead recommended that:

> …the funds to be made available in accordance with the above letter of February 1975 be allocated for the provision of research assistance rather than additional secretarial assistance. To provide effective research facilities, the pooling of individual allocations

> should be encouraged rather than, as in the initial broad outline of the scheme, specifically prohibited.(Remuneration Tribunal 1975b)

The staffing initiative had come from the Whitlam ALP government, but when it lost office in December 1975 the new Liberal National Party government maintained the commitment. In February 1976 the new minister for Administrative Services (the department had been re-named), Senator Reg Withers, gave approval for electorate assistants to be based in Canberra. The result was that parliamentarians were given the option of employing a second staff member as either an electorate secretary or a research/electorate assistant. The terminology was apparently being worked out as the negotiations proceeded. Members of parliament became entitled to employ both an electorate secretary in the electorate office and an additional staff member located either in the electorate office or in Canberra. A few members who represented very large electorates were entitled to two electorate offices. They were entitled to employ an additional electorate secretary. The government also agreed that parliamentarians who used the additional staff member as a research assistant could pool or share them with another member or members and could employ part-time staff within the financial limit set by the amount of salaries payable (Browning 1986, 94).

Research assistants (or perhaps electorate assistants) had no travel rights, a limitation which was to become a contentious point for a number of parliamentarians. Even when the decision as to what sort of staff was appropriate, secretarial or research, was resolved, the issue of where the staff member was to be based often became a problem. A research assistant in the electorate could become familiar with local and state issues. Or possibly the research assistant was a local and already familiar with the issues, in which case he or she might not want to move to Canberra permanently. Those who chose to base the research assistant in Canberra suffered the disadvantage of not having an extra staff member in the electorate for busy periods in addition to the disadvantage of not having someone with an ear to the ground in the electorate. Although the government's introduction of an extra staff member appeared to be the solution to problems which parliamentarians had been raising for some time, it was unclear what the staff member was intended to do, and indeed what problem (administrative, secretarial, research) the position was meant to solve.

An additional problem was that there was no office accommodation for research assistants in Parliament House. Parliamentarians were already sharing offices with each other, so the location of a research assistant in Canberra often entailed the research assistant sharing the member's office. The salary offered was also low; in keeping with the origins of the position, it was a secretarial salary. Despite the limitations of the new positions, they allowed all backbenchers to develop a structure and a specialisation within their offices.

The pressure for more 1973-1984

Parliamentarians continued to make submissions about staff to the Remuneration Tribunal throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s. They were concerned not only with the need for more staff, but also with issues such as travel rights for both research and secretarial staff, and salary. Parliamentarians also addressed the minister for Administrative Services about their concerns. There was an ambiguity about who controlled the entitlements of parliamentarians. The Remuneration Tribunal had the legislative power to determine remuneration and other matters, but the initiative for a second staff member had come from the executive and contradicted the Remuneration Tribunal's position. Decisions on staffing and electorate office accommodation were also the responsibility of the Department of Administrative Services. Staff were employed under the temporary staff provisions of the *Public Service Act* (Browning 1986, 92-6).

Many of the arguments for more staff focussed on the increased workload of members of parliament and the type of work done in electorate offices. Parliamentarians argued that they saw an increased need to combine advocacy on behalf of their constituents with participation in policy development within both the party and the parliament, often as part of the developing parliamentary committee system. The demands of the electorate offices in particular were so heavy that often someone hired as a research or electorate assistant (the terms were often used interchangeably) would be obliged by sheer pressure of numbers to assist with constituency matters. The division between the staff member to deal with electorate office matters and the staff member to deal with research, which looked so simple in the Remuneration Tribunal's reports, and indeed in the early submissions made by parliamentarians, was turning out to be rather more complex in practice. Nor did the government necessarily share the parliamentarians' view that more staff were required or the Tribunal's view that its role included recommendations on staffing.

The government agreed to the provision of extra staff in 1984. From July onwards each Member of Parliament became entitled to employ a minimum of three people. At least two were to remain in the electorate office, and the third could be based either in the electorate or in Canberra. Although three was the standard number, parliamentarians with two electorate offices (a privilege granted based on the physical size of the electorate) became entitled to four staff. The Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984 clarified confusion about who employed staff and on what conditions. It provided for members of parliament, ministers and office holders to employ their own staff by employment contracts; staff now had conditions of employment similar to public service conditions.

Parliamentarians lost no time in taking up their new entitlements. By 1986, the 148 members of the Houser of Representatives and the 76 Senators employed 985 people, 573 of them in electorate offices (Browning 1986, 96). Of the remaining 412, 328 were employed by Government members and ministers, 68 by Opposition members and shadow ministers, 14 by Australian Democrat members and two by independents.

This total represents far more than three staff per parliamentarian, even allowing for the extra person for those with two electorate offices. The extra staff are the ministerial and shadow ministerial staff and the staff of office holders such as party whips or committee chairs. Ministers and shadow ministers have been provided with staff for far longer and on a different administrative basis than the staff discussed here (Walter 1989). The provision of additional staff to office-holders is a more recent development, and the number is small.

When this staff allocation was decided there were suggestions that the 1988 move to the new Parliament House would result in more staff in the future. This has not so far happened, and the situation in 2004 remains as it was in 1984. There are still, or again, complaints about the level at which staff can be appointed and the amount they can be paid, although they are now sometimes directed towards lack of flexibility. In interviews conducted in 1997 and 1998 (Jones 2003) several parliamentarians suggested that the problem with their overall remuneration package lies in their inability to choose how to use it. An extra staff member, one senator suggested, would be far more useful than a car.

Changing roles

Although members of parliament have had extra staff members for more than 25 years there is almost no information available about who they are and have been, and neither government statements nor legislation specify what their duties are or should be. Anecdotal evidence suggests that when research assistants were first employed in the 1970s they were seen as young university graduates who would assist the member of parliament in assembling the information he (and they were still predominantly men – in 1975 there were seven women in the Commonwealth Parliament, six in the Senate and one in the House of Representatives) needed in performing his parliamentary duties. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that many parliamentarians employed seasoned party activists who could be relied on for their political skills as well as, or instead of, research capacity.

In a rare first hand account of parliamentary staff L'Estrange (1996), a former public servant and ministerial adviser to several Liberal opposition leaders, wrote about the role of opposition staff. In particular, he identified four sources of 'policy staff':

- the public service, usually as a temporary secondment for someone who wants experience in the other area of government;
- university and youth groups affiliated with the party, particularly those members who aspire to a political career;
- 'persons in the private sector who are prepared to be directly involved in the political process for a specified period of time'; and
- 'longer-term political professionals, particularly those who are involved in electorate work (where institutional memory is vital) or those who have a long-standing personal commitment to the objectives and priorities of the member of Parliament for whom they work'. (L'Estrange 1996, 180-82)

L'Estrange defines the 'private sector' to include people coming from careers in 'journalism, corporate affairs, industry, banking, education, academia, interest group activity or other professions'. The only group not regarded as a possible source of staff is blue-collar workers, although perhaps the party-affiliated youth groups could include them. The list covers all the

skills that parliamentarians have identified themselves as needing in their staff, but offers no set of qualifications or criteria. Like parliamentarians themselves, their staff should possess indefinable qualities to do an indescribable job.

L'Estrange also identifies people recruited from these sources as 'policy staff', a term that differs from the language used in the 1970s and 1980s (and from the *Members of Parliament (Staff) Act* 1984 use of the general classification 'Electorate Officer'). The 1970s 'research assistant' was explicitly an assistant, someone to help the parliamentarian but not to be an independent actor in government or parliament. In 1976 the ALP senator Arthur Gietzelt outlined the role of a research officer:

> The functions and duties of Research Officers may vary according to the individual needs of each Member. The duties may include:
>
> (a) The collection and presentation of background material for debate in the Parliament or for answers to specific questions posed by constituents.
>
> (b) The drafting of letters in reply to specific questions/problems asked by constituents who are deemed not to fall within the ambit of the duties or functions of the electorate secretary or clerical staff.
>
> (c) The collection of information and material from constituents, administrative agencies, committee staffs, organised interest groups, reports, newspaper magazines [sic], and the Parliamentary Library.
>
> (d) The preparation of draft speeches for delivery in Parliament or at meetings or functions which the Member attends in an official capacity.
>
> (e) The following up of difficult formal representations made on behalf of constituents with departments which often require verbal exposition and argument supporting the merit of particular claims or requests.(Remuneration Tribunal: 76/17, Part 2)

A Liberal member, Ken Aldred, attached to his submission a statement from his research assistant Andrew Roberts:

> Research Assistants have heavy responsibilities placed upon them – they not only have to carry out research into various areas, but have to interview constituents and follow

> through their problems and deal with correspondence to and from Ministers and to members of the electorate. (Remuneration Tribunal: 76/17, Part 2)

Contrast this telegrammatic summary with L'Estrange's 1996 summary of the possible duties of a person who is one of the 'policy staff':

> What is required of Opposition staff covers a wide range of political activity. It includes giving advice, preparing or co-ordinating Shadow Cabinet submissions, probing uncertainties about Government policy and administration, drafting speeches, assuming responsibility for scheduling meetings and itineraries, researching issues, liaising with the media and lobbyists, responding to constituents, picking up hearsay, negotiating with the Government on legislative timetabling and procedures, servicing policy committees, keeping in touch with the views of the Party organisation, and a variety of other tasks.(L'Estrange 1996, 179-80)

In the twenty years between the two descriptions the research assistant has evolved from an assistant into an associate, acting on the parliamentarian's behalf with a range of other individuals and organisations. The parliamentarian has become more of a manager, less autonomous, possibly more dependent on having a staff, and an organisation supporting him or her. There has also been an enormous increase in the extent to which the parliamentarian, assisted by technology, communicates with the voters (Klugman 1996, 52-106). The proliferation of newsletters, direct mail, emails, databases and mailing lists requires the support of such an organisation.

Social and economic change and change in Parliament

The evolution of the parliamentarians' staff reflects both changes in Australian society and changes in the parliamentary environment in the last quarter of the twentieth century. From 1973 onwards the remuneration and support services supplied to parliamentarians were publicly justified and explained by reference to their needs and work efforts, notably in the decisions of the Remuneration Tribunal. In this respect they became more like other public sector workers. The trajectory of political careers also changed. In the 2000s a Member of Parliament has often entered some form of 'political' employment at an early stage, perhaps working for a member of parliament, a trade union,

or an employer organisation. He or she has also developed a range of policy development and 'social work' skills in his or her previous occupations. Making speeches has become relatively unimportant - political campaigning has changed, speeches in parliament are unlikely to have any effect on the legislation being debated and Question Time is seen even (or especially) by the participants as simply theatre. In contrast to the early 1950s, in the 2000s the position of a member of the Commonwealth Parliament is expected to be a full-time occupation. In 1901 members of parliament were paid an allowance specified in the Constitution. Now their salary packages are linked to senior public service salaries, and they are entitled to fringe benefits and allowances, as well as generous superannuation. The government, through its parliamentary budget allocation, provides accommodation, staff and other facilities to support them in their role. The parliamentarian has become a 'manager' and a professional, joining an increasing part of the working population who have made the same transition.

The government's decision in 1975 to provide a second member of staff for each parliamentarian recognised that parliamentarians were no longer individuals operating by themselves in the political system; it was thus a catalyst in this transformation. It also provided a new option for aspirants to a political career; they could work for a parliamentarian as part of their political apprenticeship, and ideally as preparation for their own career in parliament.

The decision on staff and the consequences that flowed from it should not be seen in isolation from other events and transformations in Australian society, which had already changed remarkably since the end of World War 2 and would continue to evolve. In the mid-1970s unemployment was low, and it was assumed that a government would rise or fall on the unemployment rate. Keynesian economics represented the orthodoxy, both inside and outside government, and the Australian currency was pegged to the US dollar. The level of overseas investment and the increasing presence of multinational companies were debated hotly. The Commonwealth public service, based now on merit and permanent employment, saw itself as both a career service and as a source of unbiased advice and disinterested administration. Post war immigration had created a society in which large numbers of people had been born overseas, or had parents born overseas. Education levels were rising, and university fees had been abolished, theoretically making access to tertiary education a matter of merit rather than class. Married women were entering the workforce in greater numbers, and increasingly staying there, buoyed by the availability of child care and the abolition of the 'marriage bar' (the denial of

permanent jobs to married women) in the public sector. In this period new pressure groups, some termed 'social movements', began to develop 'rights' campaigns centred on issues such as the environment, ethnicity, race, gender, sexual preference and disability. The impact of social movements on parties and legislation remains an open question, partly because of what Pakulski (1991, 163-5) has identified as a their 'anti-bureaucratic' nature. General studies of social movements take little account of parties and parliament, possibly because social movements have arisen because of what their members see as the limitations of traditional parties and pressure groups. Nor have social movements generally been successful in parliamentary politics. Despite the popularity of nuclear disarmament as a cause in the 1980s, the parliamentary expression of that cause was ultimately unsuccessful

The next quarter century was, however, to be a time of equally significant change. Keynesian economic management was replaced by a new orthodoxy, that of free market or neo-liberal economics, based on the principle that the market, not government, should rule in economic matters. The floating of the Australian dollar in 1983 was followed by full-scale financial deregulation, prompted in part by the pressure on the small Australian economy of already-deregulated international financial markets (Capling, Considine and Crozier 1998, 47-54). Financial deregulation was followed by deregulation in other parts of the economy. The centralised wage-fixing system was largely replaced by enterprise bargaining and individual contracts, and the post-war policy objective of full employment ceased to exist. Where once the conventional wisdom was that no government could sustain an unemployment rate above 2%, an unemployment rate conservatively estimated at about 8% came to be accepted as normal by the early 1990s (Burgess 1994). Public utilities in transport, communications, gas and electricity were corporatised or privatised, at state as well as Commonwealth level. The Commonwealth public service, in common with the rest of the Australian public sector, has changed. Government initially expanded then retreated into contracting out and the public service was re-focused from administration to management in a process sometimes described as the rise of the contract state (Davis and Rhodes 2000). Governments also established a plethora of advisory and research bodies (Prasser and Paton 1994). The number of universities increased and, correspondingly so did the number of graduates. The tertiary sector of the economy expanded while social conservatism retreated. Women rejected the roles which had been established for them during the early and middle years of the century, joined the workforce, demanded equal opportunity, and overtook men in education. Equal opportunity, no more than a nebulous concept in 1975, became

government policy supported by an administrative and quasi-judicial structure. By 2001 the participation rate of women in the labour force was 63.7% and that of men was 72.5% (ABS 2002). In 1975 the equivalent rates had been 43.2% for women and 81.5% for men (Andrews and Curtis 1998, 181).

The opening in 1988 of the new Parliament House allowed parliamentarians to use their time, skills and staff in new ways. Not only did the new building contain far more office space, but it also provided access to computer networks, information resources and communication technology from those offices. New expectations about parliamentarians developed. The new ideas were partially those associated with the rise of a new class of knowledge workers and managers. By the late twentieth century knowledge, expertise, research and organisation were essential for parliamentarians, as they were for other segments of society. Negotiation, analysis and policy development replaced oratory and analysis of legislation as the essential skills for parliamentarians. The Australian Labor Party increasingly drew its membership from the new middle class (Ward 1988; Thompson 1999). Parliamentarians acquired staff, technology and a level of general administrative support that was unthought of even in the 1960s.

The creation of jobs working for members of parliament also had the effect of opening up a new career path for would-be politicians. In the earliest years of the twentieth century the Commonwealth Parliament contained a relatively large number of men who had begun their political careers in the colonial parliaments and then moved at federation into the new Commonwealth Parliament. Men such as Alfred Deakin, Edmund Barton, William Morris Hughes and Robert Best constituted a group who had had almost entirely political lives. But this phenomenon was a transitory one, born of the creation of a nation from six states. Even Robert Menzies, the man who spent most of his adult life as a politician in either the state or the federal sphere, had become a Queen's Counsel before he entered parliament and had practised law while remaining a member of the Victorian parliament. And he was unusual. Amongst the backbenchers the predominant pattern was a political career coming after another career. Also strong was the idea of service - that being in politics in fact should not be a career, and that it was therefore something to be embarked on at a later stage in life.

There was also a simple but important practical reason for the belief that a politics was not a lifetime career. That was that, regardless of political ambitions, the only way to make a living out of politics

was as a Member of Parliament. Other participation in the political sphere was usually voluntary and unpaid. The lack of any structure for a paid political career other than as a parliamentarian reinforced the view that participation in politics was a duty owed to the nation and the community rather than a career or an occupation.

Nor, for most of the twentieth century, did the Australian economy provide many occupations that could allow the future member of parliament to do political work. Most workers, both blue and white collar, were employed in factories, shops and offices where work was about being there at regular times and working steadily for the required hours. Lawyers and doctors, as professional men, and graziers, had more freedom and could thus spend time on politics if they could afford both the time and the income foregone. Trade union officials, almost invariably risen from the ranks, could also do political work because of the union movement's affiliation with the Labor Party.

For the majority of the Commonwealth Parliament's existence there has therefore been a stereotype of the Member of Parliament related to the view of the parliamentarian as a voluntary activist. On the Labor side, he was the trade unionist who had finally got his berth in parliament after giving sterling service to the union and the party, and on the conservative side the man who has established himself well enough in this occupation or business to take to the risky business of politics.

The changes, which created a different sort of stereotype, had their origins in the 1960s and 1970s. The economic structure of Australia began to change and new opportunities for employment in political spheres appeared. The middle class expanded to include more (often upwardly mobile) people who often worked in occupations and salaried professional positions that previously had not existed. Often they were employed in an expanded public sector. In 1946 there were 25 Commonwealth government departments and eight public corporations with 10,000 employees; by 1965 there were still 25 departments, but there were 15 public corporations and 350,000 employees (Encel 1970, 68). Trade unions began to hire university graduates as researchers and organisers, employers' organisations expanded and employed more people whose function was often that of lobbyist in addition to manager, think tanks appeared, often with an explicitly political agenda, community groups acquired government funding and were able to hire workers whose job it was to develop policies and argue with government. In all these areas the political component of the job was crucial, and doing that job allowed many people to practise politics for a living in a way that had not been previously possible.

The pattern of a steady lifetime job entered into after school changed, creating the possibility of workers having a variety of jobs in a variety of organisations. Tertiary education became accessible to many more people. A combination of feminism, a booming economy and worldwide trends resulted in married women re-entering the workforce, or never leaving it. Men who would once have been the only support of the family, and would have been unable to deviate from a rigid path of workforce participation, were able to consider the possibility of abandoning the career structure for work in a political environment. In the 1970s increasing numbers of women began to decide that they too could have political careers.

In parliament itself, jobs appeared for people other than the politicians and the parliamentary officers who had traditionally kept the institution going. The result was job opportunities and on-the-job training for people who would previously have been able only to practise politics as unpaid amateurs unless and until they became members of parliaments. This established new pathways into parliament. In succeeding years parliamentarians would enter parliament with more skills in being a parliamentarian because they had already worked in the parliamentary environment and participated in its processes.

Conclusion

Since World War 2 the number of personal staff of parliamentarians, both backbenchers and ministers, has expanded, and their roles have changed, in response to pressure from parliamentarians aware of their changing needs. For the ordinary Member of Parliament, the backbencher, the incremental increase in his or her staff from the one electorate secretary of the 1940s to the electorate and Canberra-based staff has allowed him or her to delegate some tasks to the staff while retaining others, to spend more time out of the electorate office if necessary, to make a bigger contribution to policy development and to do more in the electorate and with interest groups. The other side of these developments is the creation of a structure that facilitates a career in politics as a profession rather than a vocation.

The increased number of staff and the more elaborate administrative structure that developed in parliamentarians' offices also reflected changes in the way the work of parliamentarians was understood. They were becoming managers in the parliamentary industry. This development is a

consequence of changes in society in general just as much as it is a consequence of changes in parliaments. The era of the new middle class and the knowledge economy is reflected inside parliament as it develops outside, although some would argue that parliament follows behind, experiencing change a little after rather than before or even with the rest of Australian society.

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