

Watch this space



Rail reform update

A progress report on rail reform in Australia is due to be released in March by the House of Representatives Transport Committee. The progress report will draw upon a recent forum on rail reform held by the House Transport Committee as a follow-up to its 1998 report *Tracking Australia* (see article page 9). For more information, call: (02) 6277 4601 or email: cta.reps@aph.gov.au

More public hearings on world trade

The inquiry into Australia's relationship with the World Trade Organisation will continue with public hearings in Canberra on 9 March, Perth on 19 and 20 April and Melbourne on 26 and 27 April. The hearings follow on from a public forum that the Treaties Committee held in Sydney to allow members of the public to voice their views on world trade. For more information call: (02) 6277 4002 or email: jsct@aph.gov.au



The Sydney public forum on world trade organised by the Treaties Committee.

Defence training for MPs?

A plan to provide Members of Parliament with up to three weeks of military training was put to the House of Representatives on 26 February 2001 by David Hawker, Federal Member for Wannon (Victoria) and Chairman of Parliament's Defence Sub-Committee. The proposal, which aims to help Members get a better understanding of the nation's defence issues, is based on a similar scheme operating in the United Kingdom.

"More than \$10 billion is spent on defence each year," said Mr Hawker, "but few Members of Parliament now have first-hand experience in either the army, navy or air force. A greater awareness of such an important area can only benefit Australia, particularly with growing tensions in our region."

Mr Hawker said that the training would provide MPs with an introduction into how their nation's armed forces are facing the challenges of the 21st Century. "It would also raise the level of parliamentary debate on defence issues, which has already happened in the UK as a result of their Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme."

Seminars begin in March

The House of Representatives seminar series for 2001 kicks off in March with seminars about legislation, about the operation of the House and about parliamentary committees. Our seminar program is available at: www.aph.gov.au/house/info/seminars or you can get a copy of our seminar booklet by calling: (02) 6277 2122 or emailing: seminar.reps@aph.gov.au

An *About the House* seminar will be held in Melbourne on 23 July. For more information contact us above.

Catchment management report released

A report into catchment management has just been released by the House of Representatives Environment and Heritage Committee. Visit: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/enviro or call: (02) 6277 4580 for more information.

Parliament back to Melbourne ... Continued from page 18

Despite this instability and the time Members consequently expended on negotiating alliances, the first decade of the House of Representatives saw the machinery of Commonwealth administration established. A High Court was appointed, the public service and parliamentary departments formed, the franchise confirmed, and structures set up to regulate payments from the Commonwealth to the States and to control the issue of paper money. The first policy legislation to be passed by the House provided the Commonwealth with the means to control immigration and expel 'undesirable coloured labourers'. In the area of defence, compulsory military training for men between the ages of 12 and 25 was instituted, and an Australian navy founded. And by 1910, the Parliament had established means-tested old age pensions, a life assurance scheme for children under 10 and the 'baby bonus' maternity allowance.

As the House entered its second decade, the fabric of party allegiances in the House shifted again. In 1916, as Australians fought for the Empire, the issue of conscription split the Labor Party and the rambunctious Billy Hughes led a breakaway Nationalist Party to form government with Liberal support. In 1920, the Country Party appeared in the House and supported a coalition government with the Nationalists, but only after Hughes agreed to make way for the urbane Stanley Melbourne Bruce to become Prime Minister. The House learned some of the costs of

service as Speaker Holder died in the chair at the end of a particularly ungentlemanly debate in the chamber. But this hardly seemed to quell outbreaks of disorder. In April 1914, for example, when the House resumed proceedings after the luncheon break, the Mace was discovered missing from its customary spot under the table. A search ensued and the House's symbol of authority was eventually found under one of the Opposition benches.

By 1927, a new provisional Parliament House had been completed in Canberra. Many Members looked with apprehension on the move to the undeveloped new national capital, but the sojourn in Melbourne was over. On 24 March 1927, the House sat for the last time in the Victorian Parliament House. At this last sitting the House agreed to Prime Minister Bruce's motion for a gift of 50,000 pounds to the Victorian Parliament in addition to monies already spent on repairs and renovations. The House expected that the gift would be used to erect some suitable memorial, perhaps in bronze or marble, to Commonwealth occupation of the building. The Victorians, however, chose to spend the fifty thousand on a new and well-appointed refreshment room.

Information for this article was sourced mainly from: Gavin Souter, Acts of Parliament: A narrative history of the Senate and the House of Representatives, Melbourne University Press, 1988.