

Celebrating 150 Years of Responsible Government**Parliament House 1856**

This year, 2006, marks the sesquicentenary – 150th anniversary – of responsible government in Tasmania.

Responsible government is a particular form of government within the Westminster system that was inherited from Great Britain. At its simplest, it means that the Government of the day is accountable to the lower House of Parliament. The members of that Government, the Premier and ministers, are also members of Parliament and are not elected separately. The Government remains in office while it has the support or 'confidence' of the majority in the lower House.

Before Responsible Government

Prior to 1856 the island known then as Van Diemen's Land was at first governed as two colonies – one in the north on the Tamar River at what is now Launceston, and a southern settlement established at Risdon Cove in 1803, then Hobart in 1804. After 1813 it was ruled as one colony by a Lieutenant-Governor. In 1825 Van Diemen's Land was separated administratively from NSW and an appointed Legislative Council of six members was created, thus founding the Parliament of Tasmania.

The end of convict transportation in 1853 marked a change in the perception of the colony, and the move towards self-government was advanced by the establishment of a select

committee to prepare a new constitution.

Responsible Government

In October 1855 responsible government was proclaimed by royal assent, and 1 January 1856 saw the colony's name become Tasmania.

The first meeting of the new Parliament was held on 2 December 1856, with a Legislative Council of 15 Members and a House of Assembly of 30 Members. The first Premier was William Thomas Napier Champ MHA, and it was only ten years before the first Tasmanian-born Premier, Sir Richard Dry MLC, took office.

As Tasmania and the other new Australian colonies matured, moves began to merge them into a new nation. The 1890s proved to be a dynamic decade, with the first national convention on federation being held in 1891, followed by a series of meetings and referendums culminating in the formation of the Commonwealth of Australia on 1 January 1901. Tasmania had indicated its support for the move in the referendum of 1898.

Establishing Australia

As the nation matured in the early twentieth century it assumed a more prominent position, although still subordinate in a few ways to English law. It took on responsibility for its own foreign policy with the Statute of Westminster of 1931. Tasmania's Constitution Act of 1934 defined the powers of each House of the Parliament, an issue which had caused problems in earlier years, particularly with regard to money bills; in 1924 the House of Assembly presented the budget bill directly to the Governor when the Legislative Council refused to pass it and a conference between the two Houses failed to reach agreement. The 1930s also saw the election of the only Tasmanian-born Prime Minister of



Australia, Joseph Aloysius Lyons (1932-39).

Bicameral Parliament

The format of the two Houses has not remained stagnant over the 150 years. The membership of the Legislative Council has ranged in number from 15 to 19, while the House of Assembly has ranged from 25 to 38. The most recent change came about with the passing of the Parliamentary Reform Bill 1998 which changed the number of members of the Assembly from 35 to 25 (from 7 to 5 in each electorate) and the Council from 19 to 15 (by merging and eliminating some electorates). The length of a Council member's term has remained fixed at 6 years, with elections annually on a rotating basis, while Assembly terms have varied slightly, with four years being the present term. The Hare-Clark electoral system has been used for all Assembly elections since 1909, and since 1979 it has included what is known as the 'Robson rotation' system of ensuring that the order of the names on ballot papers is evenly distributed.

Extending Franchise

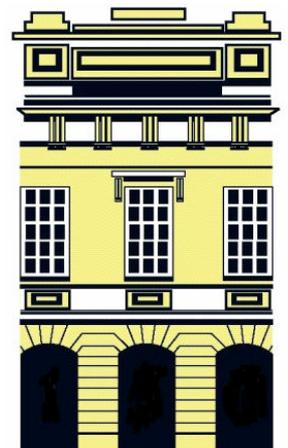
The franchise – the right to vote – in Assembly elections was extended to include women in 1904 although women were ineligible to stand for election until 1922. The first women to be elected to the House were Amelia Best and Mabel Miller in 1955, while in the Council it was Margaret McIntyre in 1948. The first woman to be appointed to a cabinet position was Gill James in 1980. The Legislative Council franchise was extended gradually from a very limited base of propertied men to full adult franchise in 1969, and in 1973 the voting age was reduced from 21 to 18. Compulsory voting had been introduced in 1928 for all those eligible to vote at any election.

Useful Resources

<http://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/150Parl/150Main.htm>
<http://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/tpl/datasheets/DSLlibrary.htm>
<http://www.parliament.curriculum.edu.au/tas.php3>
<http://www.women.tas.gov.au/significantwomen/political/political.html>
<http://www.aph.gov.au/library/parl/othsour.htm>
<http://www.peo.gov.au/>
<http://www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au/cce/>



Opening of the 46th Parliament 30 May 2006



July 2006

T A S M A N I A N
P A R L I A M E N T A R Y
L I B R A R Y
ESTABLISHED 1852