

NEW PARLIAMENT HOUSE

In formally moving a motion for the appointment of a Joint Select Committee to inquire into a permanent Parliament House, the Prime Minister made the following remarks in the House of Representatives today :-

"This is the first step in the direction of establishing a new and permanent Parliament House in the capital of the nation. This obviously will be a requirement of the future. We propose to establish a committee so that the first steps in that direction may be taken, on an all party basis and a basis of representation of both Houses of the Parliament.

This building was designed as a temporary building. It has been added to; it has been cobbled in various ways, but we all know that it has many grave defects. One of them is that the accommodation for private members, whose work becomes increasingly heavy year by year, is most inadequate. It must be extremely difficult for members, sitting two or three or whatever the number may be in a room, to attend to their proper constituency work, or to make their preparation for affairs in the House.

It is also unsatisfactory to have a state of affairs in which the Executive arm - the Ministers - is interwoven with other people and, indeed, immediately subject to the transit of the newspaper representatives in the House. This is not very satisfactory. It gives rise to a lot of strange speculation. I do not need to labour the point. What is needed in a new building must be carefully considered by people who are competent to consider it."

Mr. Calwell - "Who will appoint the officers to the Committee?"

SIR ROBERT MENZIES - "The Committee itself; certainly. It will be the master of its own proceedings and of its own arrangements of a secretarial or clerical kind. I would have thought that was clear. Anyhow, if it is not clear, I make it clear. That is the design of this matter.

I think it is hardly necessary to point out that the terms of the motion are not inviting the Committee to design a Parliament House. We do not profess to be experts in that field; but we do have knowledge superior to that of other people of the requirements in a House, the needs in a House, and, in many ways, how the various aspects of parliamentary life should be disposed of in a geographical sense - where they are to be placed in a parliamentary building."

Mr. Clyde Cameron - "And we know more about getting in."

SIR ROBERT MENZIES - "We know a great deal more about getting in, and getting out. I have not tried that one yet. Therefore, the operative portion of the motion is that the -

.....Joint Select Committee be appointed to inquire into and report on -

(a) the accommodation needs of -

(i) the Senate, the House of Representatives and the Parliamentary staff in the Parliament building;

(ii) members of the public visiting the Parliament building.

Sir, this is really quite a problem which is not solved in this building. I mean, people have to wander around Kings Hall and a lot of interviews have to occur out there. It is all rather odd. We really need in Parliament House some definite areas in which there are interview rooms. The motion continues -

(iii) Library facilities, and catering and other facilities and services in the Parliament building for members of the Parliament and others.

That is orthodox -

(b) whether, and, if so, to what extent or in what manner, the following should be accommodated in the Parliament building

(i) the Executive -

It will not have escaped the notice of honourable members that this was a most curious building. The designers of it appeared to believe that the Prime Minister ought to have some rooms in one corner and that the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and presumably the Leader of the Government in the Senate should have rooms in other corners, but that all other Ministers would be available in their Departments. Of course, this was ludicrous. If Ministers were established in their departmental buildings they would never be able to attend a division in the House at all.

The inevitable facts of political life made it essential as time went on that other Ministers should have a room each in the House available reasonably close to the chamber. As a Minister must have a secretary and a stenographer, or whatever it may be, then he had two rooms and, sometimes, in the case of a very heavy portfolio, three rooms. The result was that all those rooms that might have been available for other purposes were taken up. This has led to a certain amount of tension in the past. I can very well remember that I humbly begged of one of your predecessors, Mr. Speaker, that I might be allowed to have two small rooms because I was going to appoint another Minister. This was not frightfully well received.

As a matter of fact, the Executive Department in the new Parliament House ought to be under the control of the Executive and not of the presiding officers of the House. It ought to be physically contiguous to the House

but certainly not under the control of the presiding officers or of the Joint House Committee.

Similarly, there is the problem of the Press and how they are to be accommodated. I do not provide the answers to these matters at all. The Press themselves, and certainly we would all agree that the present arrangements are most unsatisfactory. I do not need to go into details about them. They are very familiar to every member of the House.

I come now to communication services. We are living in a new age now - the television age - heaven knows what other marvels may follow on the heels of television. No facilities are provided in this place for television interviews. I am not suggesting that we ought to make a provision that we be televised in the course of debate. I would fear the turnover each election would be much too great. But I do believe that there are many occasions when some leader or some significant member of the Parliament has to be interviewed or wants to make a television statement. It would be vastly convenient to have facilities for these things in a new Parliament House. We are living in a modern world. We ought to keep up with it.

On top of these matters we have provided in the motion -

(c) matters incidental to the foregoing matters.

There is just one other matter I want to mention. This has been discussed between the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Calwell) and myself. The question of the site of the new Parliament House has not been made one of the formal terms of reference. When I remind the House of earlier announcements on this point and of the subsequent planning of the National Capital Development Commission, I am sure this will be understood. The Leader of the Opposition has made a useful suggestion to me. I would like to say that I accept it. That is that I should make it clear in my speech that any member or members of the Committee in the Committee's report will be free to make such observations on the question of the site of the new Parliament House as he or they may desire.

Issued by the Press Secretary to the Prime Minister
3rd December, 1965.