



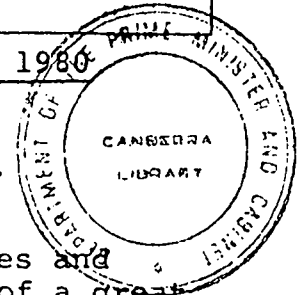
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EMBARGO: AGAINST DELIVERY

PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

THURSDAY, 18 SEPTEMBER, 1980

TURNING OF THE SOD CEREMONY



Sir Bernard Callinan, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, today's ceremony marks the beginning of a great undertaking. For the construction of a new Parliament House, involving the skills and labour of very many people over some seven years, will provide a permanent home for the national Parliament. It will become a focal point for the nation.

Since 1901, the Federal Parliament has had three homes. When it was first convened on May 9, 1901, it met in the exhibition building in Melbourne; and, subsequently, under an arrangement with the Victorian Government of the day, it met in the Parliament buildings in Spring Street. In 1927, the Parliament moved to Canberra. And, on May 9 of that year, 26 years to the day after the opening of the first Commonwealth Parliament in Melbourne, Australia's national Parliament met in the present Parliament House. And that building has served the Parliament since.

But as the nation grew, and with it the Parliament and the demands upon the Parliament, it became increasingly clear that a new building would, in time, be required. Attention centred for a long time on the question of an appropriate site for a new Parliament House. Eventually, the Parliament decided that the new building should be located here, on Capital Hill, the focal point in Walter Burley Griffin's design for the National Capital.

The development of this project has been an exercise in co-operation between the Parliament and the successive Governments of the day, with support from all parties. The Parliament House Construction Authority was set up by statute in 1979 to undertake and carry out the design and construction of the new building.

The Authority has worked hand in hand with the Joint Standing Committee on the New and Permanent Parliament House. The Authority conducted a worldwide competition for the design. A panel of six assessors was appointed under the Chairmanship of Sir John Overall to advise on the conduct of the competition, to adjudicate and to select the competition winner.

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On June 26 this year, the entry submitted by the firm of Mitchell, Giurgola and Thorp, was announced as the winner from 329 submitted entries. The nominated architect was Australian-born Mr. Richard Thorp. In August, following close examination of the design by the Government, the Joint Standing Committee and the Parliament, it was decided to go ahead with the winning design. The winning entry has received widespread acclaim. It admirably captures and complements Burley Griffin's original vision for Canberra. It makes sure that the new Parliament House will blend with the natural features of the site. And not least of its virtues, in my view, is that it complements the present Parliament House which always enjoys a special place in the nation's history.

This is a most appropriate occasion to acknowledge and commend all those who have been associated with the project to date. The Joint Standing Committee, under the Joint Chairmanship of Mr. President and Mr. Speaker, played a major part in getting the project underway and I congratulate it on the work it has done.

The project itself is the responsibility of the Parliament House Construction Authority under the distinguished Chairmanship of Sir Bernard Callinan. I commend him and the members of the Authority for the work they have done.

The Government, the Parliament and the Australian people are indebted to all the groups and individuals who have laid the basis for the development of a building which is amongst the most important in Australia's history. It is the intention of the Parliament and of this Government that the building should be completed in time to allow for its official opening and occupation by the Parliament in 1988. For in that year, Australia will be celebrating the 200th Anniversary of European settlement in this country. But the opening of this building will represent much more than the celebration of an Anniversary. For years to come it will lie at the heart of our democracy. It will, I believe, stand to represent the excitement, the confidence and the aspirations of all of the people in this nation as Australia moves into the 21st Century. It is therefore with great pleasure on behalf of the Parliament, the people and all Australians, that I now turn the first sod to commence the construction phase of this magnificent project.