

## EDITORIAL

The Department of the Special Minister of State has issued the report of Dr. W. Kaye Lamb, formerly the Dominion Archivist of the Public Archives of Canada, on the Commonwealth Archives Office. It has appeared under the title *Development of the National Archives*. (ISBN 0 642 00561 3). It was published by the Australian Government Publishing Service in Canberra in 1974, and is prefaced by a letter of dedication written by Lamb on September 28, 1973 and addressed to Senator the Hon. Don Willesee, but of course it is the new Special Minister, the Hon. Lionel Bowen, who has issued the report.

By the time this issue of *Archives and Manuscripts* is available to its readers national elections will have been held in this country and possibly neither the Hon. Lionel Bowen, nor any of his Labor Party colleagues, will be Special Minister of State. Indeed, if the Liberal-Country Party coalition regains power, it is doubtful if there will be a Special Minister of State. Maybe archives will be relegated to share a department with Aborigines, the arts, libraries, the media, environment and other minor matters. If this happens, one wonders what will happen to the implementation of the Lamb report.

As things stand at the present moment, however, it appears that the national government of this country has decided "to upgrade and expand the operations of the (Commonwealth) Archives Office so as to develop a greater public interest in the wealth of historical material which forms part of our national heritage". To that end, during the life of the Parliament that was in session at the time the statement was issued (March 7, 1974), the Special Minister of State hoped to be able to introduce legislation to establish within the Department an organisation to be known as the Australian Archives, to be headed by a Director-General.

The legislation was not, as far as the present observer knows, put to the vote before the Parliament was dissolved. The double dissolution is of course another matter; it would be a rash archives fanatic who said that the government was forced to go to the polls because of opposition intransigence over the passing of an archives act, or because the Senate had refused the passage of a bill to grant a new deal to the historians of this country. The readers of this journal will have various differing views about the events of the latter part of March and early April in the national capital; so the Editor must try to remain impartial in the hurly-burly of political events which have filled the daily press since the Liberals, Country Partyites and D.L.P. members declared *Guerre* against the government.

One wonders, however, whether or not the position of Director-General of the Australian Archives is one which will go if Mr. Snedden comes to power and thus gets his opportunity to cut back the Australian public service (or did he merely promise to slow down its growth?).

The position of Director-General has, at all events, been advertised. A statement by the Special Minister of State is to the effect that he is looking for a "person with demonstrated capability in the establishment and administration of a new organisation, including the promotional activity necessary to present the Australian Archives as an organisation of interest and benefit to all sections of the community".

After the Director-General has been appointed, a small task force will be set up under his leadership to examine in detail a number of aspects of the new initiative. Other members of the task force will be a senior academic, a State archivist and representatives of the Australian Public Service Board, the Department of the Special Minister of State and the Treasury (inevitably). To quote from the Special Minister's press release:

"The task force will consult with appropriate authorities and within three months of its appointment bring forward for government consideration specific proposals which will include the further development of the building programme for the National and Regional Repository/Retrieval Centres, the assessment of the organisation and staff requirements for these

centres, a survey of the needs and interests of users, review of salary levels for archivists and senior departmental registry personnel in the light of the changing archival activities and a programme for the recruitment and training of archivists.”

All archivists in Australia will wish the Australian government well. There certainly have been very many difficulties in the past, and from the point of view of the profession one can quite fairly, I believe, express some disappointment that so few initiatives have come from Canberra over the past 20 years. Let us hope those days are gone.