

## THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY, AND ARCHIVES

During his 1973 State election campaign, the Premier, the Hon. Don Dunstan, promised that a committee of inquiry would be held into the public service. Mr Dunstan's Labor Government was returned to power, and so the Committee of Inquiry into the Public Service (Professor D. C. Corbett, Professor of Political Theory and Institutions at Flinders University being chairman) was appointed. Just one (premature) State election later, the report of the Committee had just been released, and it was being discussed.

There was scarcely any discussion in the local media. For a few brief hours the newspapers were publishing news about a proposed reduction in the number of government departments — but very soon indeed the report was forgotten.

The Government has appointed a review committee known as PAPAC (Planning and Priorities Advisory Committee) which will receive further evidence on the Committee of Inquiry's recommendations, and will assist in the implementation of those recommendations the Government accepts. "PAPAC" is pronounced "Pay pack", which is one aspect of the public service that all public servants are concerned about.

The report suggests (9.31, on p. 176) that government archives should be separated from private archives; the latter should remain the responsibility of the State Library.

The government archives, it is proposed, should be placed under the control of a new Division, the Records Management Services Division. This latter creation is to be a part of a new department, the Government Information Department.

The report is inadequate in many ways. It is not clear whether the State Archives is to *be* the Records Management Services Division, with sub-sections responsible for microfilms, and intermediate records; or whether the Archives is to be a mere section of the Division. There are also some classical howlers in the report. One of them is surely the suggestion that the Records Management Services Division should control government department libraries!

The references to government department libraries are conflicting and perplexing. In one place it is suggested that they should be a responsibility of the Records Management Services Division. In another, it is suggested that their librarians and office assistants should become members of the staffs of departments being served (not as at present, members of the Libraries Department staff seconded to the different departments). In another place it is suggested that information managers should be appointed to key positions in departments, and it seems to follow that these information managers will control the departmental libraries.

The fate of the departmental libraries need not of course concern the readers of this journal, except that the recommendations do point to some very untidy thinking on the part of the Committee of Inquiry.

The fate of the Archives however is very much of concern to this

journal's readership. Some sentences from paragraph 9.31 are worth quoting in full:

“ . . . We also consider that an intermediate Records Repository and an efficient delivery service should be established outside the central business district with its high rents for the storage of files and dockets of limited use within departments. This would reduce the number of papers consuming expensive office space at an ever-increasing rate, and also ensure that records, at present deteriorating in poor conditions, are salvaged and adequately stored.

We also believe that the microform advisory service, at present an activity in the Public Service Board, should be part of the new Government Information Department and particularly the Records Management Division. Some departments have already shown interest in the potential of microfilm for some types of records, but are waiting for the establishment of central microfilming facilities.

Unless a Records Management Service division introduces new methods to departments, gains the confidence of management and establish good working relations, we can expect the record-keeping of some South Australian departments to remain in the Dickensian era. Departmental managers should play a major part in planning new records management systems.

The Committee recommends that a project team drawn from the proposed Government Information Department, from other operating and service departments, and from outside the Public Service, be established in the initial stages to devise a programme of development for records management.

The project team could consist of the Registrar-General, the State Archivist, and the Public Service Board's present microform adviser (from the Government Information Department) and an officer from a major operating department, for example, the Engineering and Water Supply Department. Because of the lack of introspection that has been evident to us, we consider that authorities from outside the Public Service should be invited to assist in this exercise; for example, Australian Archives, Tasmanian State Archives or Information Canada.”

Tasmanians will be interested to know that their fame and expertise in the realm of microfilming is so great that they are going to be consulted about implementing South Australia's new Operation Positive.