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THE PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE
ON PUBLIC WORKS.

REPORT

RELATING TO THE PROPOSED ERECTION OF

TEMPORARY OFFICE BUILDINGS

AT

CANBERRA, AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY.

Presented pursuant to Statute; ordered to be printed, 2nd April, 1941.

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MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS.

(Tenth Committee.)

SENATOR CHARLES HENRY BRAND, Chairman.

Senate.

Senator Walter Jackson Cooper.
Senator Charles Adcock Lamp.

House of Representatives.

Albert Oliver Badman, Esq., M.P.
Rowland James, Esq., M.P.
William Alfred Jolly, Esq., M.P.
George William Martens, Esq., M.P.
Thomas Sheehan, Esq., M.P.
Fred Hurtle Stacey, Esq., M.P.

EXTRACT FROM THE VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, No. 16,
DATED 14th MARCH, 1941.

9. PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE—REFERENCE OF WORK—ERECTION OF TEMPORARY OFFICE BUILDINGS, CANBERRA.—Sir Charles MARR moved, by leave, That, in accordance with the provisions of the *Commonwealth Public Works Committee Act 1913-1936*, the following proposed work be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for investigation and report :—Canberra, Australian Capital Territory—Erection of Temporary Office Buildings near Capitol Hill.
Debate ensued.
Question—put and passed.

LIST OF WITNESSES.

Carrodus, J. A., Secretary, Department of the Interior, Canberra.
Daley, C. S., Assistant Secretary (Civic Administration), Department of the Interior, Canberra.
Foll, Senator the Honorable H. S., Minister for the Interior, Canberra.
Harding, J., Quantity Surveyor, Sydney.
Morrison, A. W., Consulting Engineer, Sydney.
Orwin, J., Chief Architect, Department of the Interior, Canberra.
Percival, A., Surveyor-General and Chief Property Officer, Department of the Interior, Canberra.
Robertson, S., Architect, Sydney.
Shakespeare, A. T., Managing Editor, *The Canberra Times*, Canberra.
Thorp, S. G., President, New South Wales Chapter of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, Sydney.
Waterhouse, B. J., Architect, Sydney, and Chairman, National Capital Planning and Development Committee.
Wilkinson, L., Professor of Architecture, University of Sydney.
Woodger, W. G., President, Chamber of Commerce, Canberra.

ERECTION OF TEMPORARY OFFICE BUILDINGS AT CANBERRA.

REPORT.

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS, to which the House of Representatives referred for investigation and report the question of the erection of temporary office buildings at Canberra, has the honour to report as follows :—

HISTORICAL.

On the 9th March, 1923, the House of Representatives, on the motion of Mr. P. G. Stewart, then Minister for Works and Railways, referred to the Public Works Committee a proposal for the construction of provisional Administrative Offices at Canberra. The Committee, after investigation of the proposal, recommended, on the 21st June, 1923, that the construction of these temporary structures be not approved, but that steps be taken to erect two units of permanent buildings. Further, that competitive designs for these buildings be invited amongst the architects of Australia to honour a promise made by a previous Government that any permanent Government buildings in contemplation for Canberra should be the subject of competition.

On the 24th August, 1923, on the motion of Mr. P. G. Stewart, the House of Representatives agreed—

That it is not expedient to carry out the construction of Provisional Administrative Offices with accessory engineering services, at Canberra—a proposed work which has been investigated and reported upon by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works in accordance with the provisions of the *Commonwealth Public Works Committee Act 1913–1921*—but that it is expedient to invite competitive designs for Permanent Administrative Offices as recommended by the Parliamentary Standing Committee in its report.

The erection of the Provisional Houses of Parliament was approved by Parliament in 1923, but as the Federal Capital Commission reported that such building would be completed before the Permanent Administrative Office could be made ready for occupation the House of Representatives, on the motion of Mr. P. G. Stewart, Minister for Works and Railways, referred to the Public Works Committee for investigation a proposal for the “erection of buildings at Canberra for Departmental Secretariats, including provision for an automatic Telephone Exchange and Post Office” at an estimated cost of £96,140.

In order to inform itself of the Government's intentions, the Chairman of the Committee, on the 16th June, 1924, addressed to the Prime Minister a letter in the following terms :—

With reference to the request received from the House of Representatives that this Committee investigate and report on the proposal to erect a Secretariat building at Canberra to provide office accommodation for those Commonwealth officials whose attendance at Canberra will be essential when Parliament meets there, I desire to inform you that it is represented that, although it is expected that the Parliament House building will be completed in 1926, it is improbable that the Permanent Commonwealth Offices will be ready for occupation until 1929. The proposed building is suggested as a means of providing accommodation in the interim, but later to be used as rooms for members of Parliament or for such other purpose as may be determined. To enable the Committee properly to consider the question, will you be good enough to inform me if the Government is in a position to state—

- (i) whether, until the Permanent Commonwealth Offices are erected, it is the wish of the Government that Departmental business shall be carried on from Melbourne or from Canberra ;
- (ii) in the latter case, which Departments it is considered essential shall be represented at Canberra at the date of assembly of Parliament there ;
- (iii) how many officials of each Department will be required at Canberra within, say, the first, second and third years, and what office space of a temporary character should be provided for them ;
- (iv) whether the officials transferred to Canberra for the assembling of Parliament will be permanently located there or required to return to their Head Offices in Melbourne at the close of each Session of Parliament.

On the 18th July, a reply was received as follows :—

With reference to your memorandum of 16th June, on the subject of the transfer of part of the Public Service to Canberra on the opening of Parliament there, I desire to inform you that the questions asked were referred to a Sub-Committee of Cabinet which has investigated the matter and the following replies are appended hereunder conveying the Government's opinion :—

- (i) Transmission of Departmental Administration from Melbourne to Canberra must, of necessity, be effected in stages as follows :—
 - (a) During the first two and a half to three years that Parliament is sitting at the Federal Capital, main Central Administration staffs, pending the completion of the Permanent Offices, will remain at Melbourne ; each Minister and Permanent Head will need accommodation at Canberra for the Session ; and each Department will require a small Secretariat or nucleus of its Central staff at Canberra throughout the year.
 - (b) As the Permanent Administrative Offices become available for occupation, the transfer of the Central staffs will gradually be effected, those Departments whose work is most closely allied to Parliament being moved first.
- (ii) It will be essential for all Departments to be represented at Canberra in the first stage as set out in reply to Question (i), Sub-paragraph (a).
- (iii) It is estimated that, during the first three years, the staffs referred to in reply to question (i) will comprise about 160 officers, who will require about 17,000 square feet of office space, or 57 units of 294 square feet each, as shewn on copy of attached schedule, prepared after ascertaining the requirements of Departments.
- (iv) This is answered in the replies given to question (i). Certain additional officers would, of course, visit Canberra for short periods while Parliament was dealing with special legislation, annual estimates or other matters specially affecting their particular Departments.

(Then followed a schedule showing the individual requirements of Departments, making up the total of 57 units above-mentioned.)

On considering this communication, and after hearing further evidence in the matter, the Committee agreed that the work, as proposed, be carried out.

In 1925, while this building (now known as East Block) was in course of erection, a proposal was received for the construction of a complementary building (now known as the West Block) "to accommodate the National Library and for other purposes", "other purposes" being explained in evidence as office accommodation to be used for those officials for whom accommodation beyond that provided in the Secretariat building will be required before the Permanent Administrative Offices are completed. Approval was accordingly granted for the erection of this building at an estimated cost of £80,000.

In the meantime, competitive designs had been invited for the first Permanent Administrative Offices at Canberra and 94 designs were submitted by architects of all States, the premium being awarded to Mr. George Sydney Jones, of Sydney.

On the 11th February, 1926, on the motion of Mr. Marr, Minister representing the Minister for Home and Territories, the House of Representatives agreed—

That in accordance with the provisions of the *Commonwealth Public Works Committee Act 1913-1921*, the following work be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for investigation and report thereon, viz., the erection of a building at Canberra for accommodation of Commonwealth Departments.

After exhaustive inquiries, the Committee, on the 15th June, 1926, submitted its report, which was adopted by Parliament on the 23rd July, 1926.

ORIGINAL PROPOSAL.

The proposal at that time was for the construction of a large utilitarian office building, 430 feet long and 54 feet high, comprising five floors and capable of accommodating eight Departments of State, with office space sufficient for about 1,100 officials. The total cost to the Commonwealth of the proposal was set down at £842,618, including—

	£
Base facing, part polished	55,000
Colonnades and columns	51,800
Three-inch veneer of granite facing	97,420
Architect's commission and expenses	37,909
Quantity Surveyor's fees and expenses	6,318
Contingencies, at 5 per cent.	31,591
Federal Capital Commission's inspectors and supervisors	10,000
Compound interest at 6 per cent. for four years, payable half-yearly, say	102,352
Cost of competition	2,629

SITE.

The Griffin plan stipulated that all Administrative buildings (with the exception of the Civic Administration) should be located in Parkes Place, in what is known as the "Governmental Triangle", extending from Parliament House towards the river. It was intended that the Permanent Administrative Offices should occupy a site to the north-east of Parliament House, to be followed later by a complementary building of similar design in a relative position to the north-west of Parliament House.

In 1928, work was commenced, but, on the completion of the foundations, the work was abandoned. During the course of the present inquiry it has been stated in evidence that the amount spent in respect of the building, including foundations, competition costs, &c., is approximately £79,000.

INFRINGEMENT OF GRIFFIN PLAN.

Any proposal to erect Permanent Offices for Commonwealth Departments outside the "Governmental Triangle" is contrary to the Griffin plan. This plan was formally adopted by the Government in 1925 and no modification or variation of such plan can legally be made until after the expiration of thirty (30) days after notification of intention so to vary has been published in the *Commonwealth Gazette* and the papers have been laid before Parliament. It is provided by Section 12A of the *Seat of Government (Administration) Act 1910-1933*, as follows:—

(1) The Minister may at any time, by writing under his hand, modify or vary the plan of layout of the City of Canberra and its environs, published in the *Gazette* of the nineteenth day of November, One thousand nine hundred and twenty-five, as modified or varied prior to the date of the commencement of this section, but no such modification or variation shall be made until after the expiration of thirty days after notice of intention, published in the *Gazette*, so to modify or vary the plan has been given.

(2) A copy of the instrument by which any modification or variation of the plan has been made shall be laid before both Houses of the Parliament within fifteen days of the making thereof if the Parliament is then sitting, or if not, then within fifteen days of the next meeting of the Parliament.

(3) If either House of the Parliament passes a resolution, of which notice has been given at any time within fifteen sitting days after the instrument has been laid before it, disallowing the modification or variation made by the instrument, the modification or variation shall cease to have effect.

(4) The Minister shall not depart from, or do anything inconsistent with, the plan of the city published in the *Gazette*, with such modifications or variations as have been made prior to the date of the commencement of this section or as are made in pursuance of this section.

PRESENT PROPOSAL.

The present proposal aims at the construction of two new Secretariat buildings, each to contain two floors, with necessary accommodation in the basement for boiler rooms, cleaners' rooms, &c. They will provide a net office area of 40,000 square feet, plus a Minister's suite of 800 square feet. The specification provides for brick walls, wooden floors, and concrete foundations. Accommodation will be provided for between 300 and 400 officials.

ESTIMATED COST.

The estimated cost of the proposal is set down at £80,000 and it was stated in evidence that it should be possible to complete one of the buildings in nine months, and the two of them in twelve months.

SITE.

The sites selected are on the slopes of Camp Hill, in line with the existing East and West Blocks, and immediately to the rear of Provisional Parliament House.

COMMITTEE'S INVESTIGATIONS.

The Committee inspected the sites of the proposed buildings, carefully scrutinized the plans submitted, and took evidence from the Minister for the Interior, the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, the Surveyor-General, the Chief Commonwealth Architect, the Assistant Secretary, Civic Administration Branch, the Chairman of the National Capital Planning and Development Committee, the President, New South Wales Chapter of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, the Professor of Architecture at Sydney University, and others, and generally sought to inform itself of public feeling in regard to this matter.

Although it is urged that these temporary structures are proposed because the need for office accommodation is a matter of urgency, it was ascertained in evidence that the proposal has been under consideration since August, 1939. These buildings are referred to as "temporary", but it was stated in evidence that to all intents and purposes they are of permanent construction and may have a life of as much as 100 years and, as such, their erection on the site proposed would be an infringement of the Griffin plan.

As pointed out above, no alteration of the accepted Griffin design of Canberra can be legally made unless notice of intention thereof is laid before Parliament and this has not been done.

Too much insistence cannot be placed on the fact that, unless the accepted design for the layout of Canberra is rigidly policed, small infringements taking place from time to time will lead eventually to the total destruction of the whole scheme.

The Committee, therefore, made inquiries as to whether the requisite office accommodation could be provided elsewhere. Several suggestions were received, including—

- (a) erection in the vicinity of the Hotel Kurrajong of buildings on the lines of the Barton Hostel, which, after having served their purpose as temporary offices, could be used as boarding houses or hostels ;
- (b) completion of the building designed to form the Melbourne block at Civic Centre ;
- (c) erection of purely temporary buildings within the " Governmental Triangle " on the site complementary to the Permanent Administrative Offices ;
- (d) utilization of the existing hospital buildings when vacated on the completion of the Community Hospital now in course of erection ;
- (e) erection of a nucleus of the permanent building on the existing foundations.

Having in mind the plea of the Government that office accommodation is urgently required and that the time factor is paramount, the Committee gave particular attention to the consideration of the proposal as submitted, but was faced with the fact that the National Capital Planning and Development Committee had reported against any further temporary office building and the weight of evidence obtained was strongly in favour of making a start with the Permanent Administrative Offices.

The decision arrived at by the Committee in connexion with this matter is shown by the following extract from its minutes of proceedings :—

Senator Cooper moved That, in view of the urgent necessity for providing office accommodation at Canberra, the proposal to erect two temporary office buildings in the vicinity of Camp Hill at an estimated cost of £80,000, be agreed to.

Seconded by Mr. Jolly, *pro forma*.

Mr. Badman moved as an amendment that, in view of the report of the National Capital Planning and Development Committee and the opinions expressed by the majority of witnesses examined that the erection of further temporary buildings in Canberra is inadvisable, the Committee recommends that any further office accommodation required be provided in a permanent structure.

Seconded by Mr. Martens.

The Committee divided on the amendment : Ayes—8, Messrs. Badman, Brand, James, Jolly, Lamp, Martens, Sheehan and Stacey ; No—1, Senator Cooper.

The amendment then became the motion and, on being put to the Committee, was carried unanimously.

Of the projects enumerated above, the erection of a nucleus of the permanent structure was most favourably regarded by the Committee and considerable evidence was taken in respect of this proposal. Plans and estimates were submitted by the Quantity Surveyor, who took out the figures for the original Administrative Offices in association with the Architect who took up the work after the death of Mr. Jones.

It was represented to the Committee that the central frontal section of the permanent structure, as originally designed, could be erected to its full height and be later incorporated in the whole building at any future time. This, it was stated, would give a compact structure of pleasing aspect, correctly sited in respect of the Griffin plan, and if, as claimed in evidence, this section, providing accommodation for approximately 565 officials, could be erected for £216,000, including all engineering services within a period of twelve (12) months, the Committee is satisfied that, taking the long view, this would be the most suitable project to adopt.

The Committee is strongly of opinion that the Permanent Administrative Offices should be commenced as early as practicable, and is strongly opposed to the erection of any more temporary office accommodation and to any infringement of the Griffin plan. If, however, the claims made as regards cost and time for completion of the nucleus of the permanent building cannot be guaranteed, the Committee, as an alternative, is prepared to agree to the provision of the necessary office accommodation by the completion of the Melbourne block at Civic Centre. Here, it is claimed that accommodation for approximately 500 officials could be provided within a period of six months at a cost of £50,000, but this does not include engineering services such as central heating, &c. This structure would be of a permanent character, used for office accommodation solely for the period until the Permanent Administrative Buildings could be provided. It would be in accordance with the Griffin plan and the Committee was assured that there would be little difficulty in subsequently disposing of it to private owners for use as shops and offices when the Permanent Administrative Offices were built.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS.

Briefly summarized, the recommendations of the Committee are as follow :—

- (a) that the erection of further temporary buildings in Canberra is inadvisable and that any additional office accommodation required be provided in a permanent structure ;
- (b) that advantage be taken of the existence of the foundations for the Permanent Administrative Offices to erect thereon a section of that building sufficient for present purposes and which later could be incorporated in the permanent structure ;
- (c) that, as an alternative, the completion of the Melbourne block at Civic Centre be proceeded with.

C. H. BRAND,
Chairman.

Office of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works.
Parliament House,
Canberra, 31st March, 1941.