From legislative machine to representative forum? Procedural change in the New Zealand parliament in the twentieth century

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This article analyses procedural developments in the New Zealand parliament in the twentieth century to assess the shifting balance between government and parliament. A previous article in this journal documented how the government began to move to centre stage by the late nineteenth century.[1] This shift was consolidated in the first half of the twentieth century. A similar transition was evident in the British House of Commons and in other parliaments as the powers of the central state were extended: 'A traditionally obstructive [legislative] procedure ... was transformed into a procedure which facilitated constructive criticism of the financial and legislative proposals of politically responsible governments, whilst severely restricting the opportunities of private Members to legislate.'[2]

This change was associated with a diminishing role for backbench private members and a strengthening of political party organisation in parliament. In New Zealand this came about at the turn of the twentieth century as the decayed factional system of politics was replaced by that of parties. (Previously political leaders assembled loose groups of supporters — factions — which gave them majorities in the House of Representatives. This form of politics broke down during the depression of the 1880s.) Associated with this change there was a gradual tacit recognition that the nature of obstruction of business should change as both governing and opposition parties considered that their work in parliament was orientated more towards the business of governing (and winning elections) than to demonstrating parliamentary independence.

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As executive government came to the fore in New Zealand the pattern of law-making changed. In the nineteenth century the success rate of bills was relatively low at between half and two-thirds of all bills, while acts which did get onto the statute book were short. On average legislation remained about five pages in length during the nineteenth century. During the depression years of the 1880s governments did not introduce as many bills into parliament. Then, in the 1890s the reformist Liberal government engaged in a burst of legislating. The number of bills increased but the proportion passed, including those of government, declined to little more than half of total bills.[3] Private members' bills remained significant.

With party government taking hold in the early twentieth century, the extent of legislation diminished as governments sought to pass more compact and concerted legislative programmes. The length of acts began to increase from the time of the first world war, to reach ten pages into the 1930s. The proportion of all bills introduced which passed also increased but this was offset overall by the continued existence of numbers of private members' bills (that now had little chance of passing). From the mid 1930s, with the establishment of two-party government, private members' bills almost completely disappeared and government measures were virtually guaranteed to get through.

The expansion of the welfare/interventionist state in New Zealand from mid-century resulted in more complex legislation. The length of acts rose from ten to fifteen pages by the 1970s. From the late 1980s, governments passed fewer laws but the legislation got even longer — the average length of acts these days is about twenty-five pages. Procedural reforms were associated with these changes and with wider forces which themselves were in part a reaction against the tightening of executive government control.[4]

The long road to closure

The legacy of members' freedom to speak at will was hard to shake off despite the introduction of time limits on speeches in 1894 by Liberal leader and Premier R.J. Seddon. Closure of debate was resisted for many years. Obstruction while bills were in Committee of the Whole became the usual tactic. The 1894 standing orders allowed members to speak for ten minutes four times on each question (clause) considered.[5] Sittings lengthened and sessions stretched out even though the size of the House was substantially reduced in the 1890s from 95 to 74 members as a result of depression retrenchment. The government found it difficult to get its bills through.

The Old-age Pension Bill was a centrepiece for opposition resistance.[6] In 1897 89 amendments were made to the bill and 945 speeches delivered while it was in Committee. In 1898 during another stonewall with the bill in Committee more than 1,400 speeches were made. Premier Seddon began to press for outright closure. In 1900 he got the Standing Orders Committee to agree to it, together with other measures to assist with government business. The House would not have it and

discharged the report. In following years the government trialled morning sittings but this proved too disruptive of committee business.[7] Seddon tried again in 1903 but both the Liberal Party caucus and the House rejected closure. In the face of a humiliating defeat, Seddon had to tell his supporters to vote against his own motion! The *Evening Post* congratulated parliament on resisting his 'tyranny'.

Sir Joseph Ward, who succeeded Seddon as Liberal leader and Premier in 1906, did not drive the House in the same fashion. He wanted civilised daytime sittings, did not support closure and avoided late nights.[8] This lengthened sessions further without getting through the same amount of business. The second session of 1909 actually extended until after Christmas as the result of a last minute stonewall and the 1910 session was the longest on record. Ward had to introduce Monday sittings early on in sessions and made the House take new business after 12.30 p.m.

William Massey and the Reform Party (formed in 1909 out of the previous opposition grouping in the House) came to power in 1912. There was little procedural change under Reform (1912–28). Two new practices did advance government business even if the standing orders did not change. A ferocious stonewall in Committee in 1913 provoked the Chairman of Committees to rule numerous members out of order for irrelevance and repetition.[9] (A 'tedious repetition' rule had entered the standing orders in 1894 but had not been taken advantage of.) Future Chairs of Committees would use the same approach to bring obstruction to an end while the House was in Committee. Urgency on the grounds of 'the public interest', slipped into the standing orders in 1903, was gradually taken advantage of.[10] From 1911 it was used for imprest supply bills — legislation sanctioning interim authority for government expenditure. During the first world war a range of legislation was dealt with under urgency.

After the war Reform remained uninterested in procedural reform despite perennial concern over time wasting. The three-party political system — that had developed before the war and would persist into the early 1930s — made it difficult. The governing Reform Party vied with the Liberals and both sought to limit the gains made by the rising Labour Party. The 1920 Standing Orders Committee wanted to revise procedure during the recess but Massey prevented it from meeting.[11] Concerns remained through the 1920s, with Labour Party obstruction in 1927 leading to calls for closure. This session proved the longest on record to that time.[12] Ward's United Party (as the Liberals had become) won the election of 1928 and he formed a government in alliance with the Labour Party. He now had his chance to reform procedure. The Standing Orders Committee canvassed other parliaments. In Australia, New South Wales and Queensland outlined their experience of daytime sittings.[13] The committee did not adopt daytime sittings in 1929 but it simplified and modernised the language of the standing orders and substantially reorganised them. It rejected closure (by now common in other British Empire parliaments), however, considering that reduced time limits on speeches were sufficient. Address-in-Reply speeches were reduced to half an hour and those in Committee to five minutes. New limits of between five and 15 minutes were introduced for a wide

range of speaking opportunities. The principle that government business took precedence was now stated formally and taking urgency was set out in more detail. Standing orders could be revised simply by motion while their suspension was made easier. The nineteenth-century sentinel guarding all standing orders before it had finally been banished!

Urgency became common for major pieces of legislation as the country went into depression. The government claimed it was the only way in which it 'could have some control over the business of the House' as sitting hours did not reduce and sitting beyond midnight remained common.[14] George Forbes, who replaced Ward as Prime Minister in 1930, used it frequently. The government convened an early session in March 1931. Forbes announced he would take entire weeks to get the emergency measures through, including Mondays and Saturday mornings. Labour declared it would resist the legislation to the bitter end. The focus was the finance bill which introduced wage and salary cuts.[15] After urgency failed to help, and more than seventy divisions stretching over nearly one hundred hours and more than ten days, Forbes asked the House to agree to closure. Cabinet had drafted the new standing order; neither the Speaker nor the Clerk wanted to be identified with it. Based on the South African example, motions could be moved without notice 'that the question be now put', without amendment or debate. A majority (comprising at least twenty members) was required to support closure. Labour fought against it. M.J. Savage warned of dire consequences if a single party became dominant: 'a Government with an absolute majority would be a greater menace than a Government that is dependent upon some other party ... it would be able to work anything, fair or unfair.'[16] The House agreed to adopt closure but stipulated that it would apply only to the current parliament. The government pushed through the finance bill and other crucial depression measures by these means. Labour won the election of 1935. Now in government it had no qualms about using closure despite its previous vehement opposition. What had been a temporary emergency measure was inserted permanently into the standing orders and closure, together with urgency, became key weapons in facilitating government business thereafter.[17]

Two-party government

The two-party system, established as a Labour Government was elected in 1935 for the first time, transformed the House. Following the election surviving members of the coalition of the depression years of the early 1930s formed the conservative National Party in 1936. The dominant Labour and National parties from this time controlled the House. Fewer government bills were introduced but legislation was virtually guaranteed success — 90 per cent or more of bills passed.[18] Under tight government control daily sitting hours declined to an average of five or six, and sitting after midnight virtually disappeared. The number of divisions reduced and the House did not tend to divide upon procedural matters such as closure or urgency, which were accepted as the way that the government prosecuted its business. Obstruction now served Opposition party interests rather than being an expression of parliamentary independence. Independent members disappeared; by

the election of 1946 none were left. There were still opportunities for private members but these were within the party structures and the old characters of parliament who provided colour and entertainment disappeared. [19] Party voting was imposed on all issues apart from a small number of 'conscience' issues on which a 'free' vote was allowed. The government assumed control over the order paper and private members' business was squeezed out.[20] The Address-in-Reply and financial debates cut substantially into private members' time, while governments increasingly moved precedence for their business straight after the financial debate. Of the time theoretically available to private members, more than half was taken by government for its business or for special debates in the national interest. Private members' bills declined in number to a mere handful and were usually ruled out because they involved financial appropriations. They went to the bottom of the order paper if failed to be called on the appointed day.

The National Party, while in opposition, felt that the powers of parliament should be enhanced to provide a check upon unrestrained government, but when in government from 1949 it thought otherwise, recognising that the trend was in the opposite direction. During the war and in the postwar decades there was a huge expansion of state control over the economy and society and the centralising of power into executive hands.

Not long after National came to power it abolished the upper chamber — the Legislative Council — in 1951 by appointing a 'suicide squad' to the Council to agree to its abolition. A similar means had been adopted in Queensland in 1922, although in New Zealand it was a conservative rather than a Labour government which brought about the Council's demise. Since the 1890s in New Zealand — when the British government confirmed that the colonial government had the power to make appointments to the Council and thereby to 'stack' it — the Council had been moribund. New Zealand's political system had become centralised into the simple but extreme 'majoritarian' British Westminster model described by Jackson.[21]

Government business dominated parliament in the 1950s — discussion of government policy took up more than 40 per cent and passing legislation 27 per cent of sitting time.[22] The Address-in-Reply and financial debates, together with Prime Minister Sid Holland's introduction of regular informal foreign affairs debates, contributed greatly to the lengthy policy debates. Other forms of business were relatively insignificant — questions and answers 10 per cent; government expenditure 9 per cent and reports of select committees 4 per cent. Private members' bills took up less than 5 per cent of business.

When the Legislative Council was abolished, parliament missed a substantial opportunity to reform its standing orders.[23] No significant changes had been made since the general revisions of 1929 and the introduction of closure in 1931. The Speaker, Matthew Oram, and the Clerk of the House were keen to reduce the length of the Address-in-Reply and financial debates to bring parliament closer into line

with the House of Commons. Prime Minister Holland and most members on the Standing Orders Committee were against this. Only a few minor changes were made. The procedure for dealing with urgent questions in the House was streamlined and the anachronistic 'previous question' means of halting debate was removed.

Oram felt that the rights of private members had been encroached upon too much and wanted to rejuvenate their role.[24] He also argued that urgency should only apply to a single bill and should be justified explicitly by the public interest rather than simply being to further the interests of government. Neither Holland nor the Clerk of the House was sympathetic.

There was a general lack of will for reform in parliament. Retired Westminster Clerk of Parliaments Sir Gilbert Campion commented that the New Zealand parliament was more conservative and had changed less than the Commons, which had gone through substantial reforms in 1902, 1906-7, 1931 and 1945-6.[25] Westminster had become a streamlined 'legislative machine'. More time was allocated to government business and legislation was passed faster, particularly as a result of the development of legislative standing committees. In New Zealand retired Clerk of the House T.D.H. Hall had from the late 1940s begun drafting a manual on parliamentary procedure, intending a complete overhaul of procedure in the light of Westminster practice, but he was not able to gain the support of successive Prime Ministers Fraser and Holland; his work was never published.[26]

Loosening the grip

From the 1960s onwards, while the process of modernising and making procedure more efficient continued, parliament had its role strengthened by the establishment of a daily question time, the enhancing of powers of select committees and more opportunities for private members. This created a significant tension that has continued to this day. The 1960s was a time of debate on constitutional issues, in the wake of the abolition of the Legislative Council and the strengthening of executive government, when the small number of members in the House and the capacity of parliament to assert itself was of concern. National, now led by Keith Holyoake, promised reforms in its election manifesto of 1960 and carried these out when elected that year.[27] These included avoiding 'tedious repetition and long-drawn-out debates while increasing the rights and responsibilities of private members', reducing the length of the Address-in-Reply and financial debates, and greater provision for discussion on specific subjects and study and investigation by select committees. Holyoake promised to appoint a select committee to revise the standing orders. Speaker Ronald Algie and Deputy Prime Minister Jack Marshall were also strong proponents of reform. In 1962 the Standing Orders Committee recommended changes, including streamlining business and strengthening select committees.[28] In many respects the changes paralleled those made in Britain in the 1960s.

The House largely accepted the recommendations. A 'guillotine' restricting the overall length of the Address-in-Reply and financial debates was rejected in favour of reductions in the length of speeches in these and other debates. A daily question time was introduced and private members' bills and motions were given more space. In line with House of Commons and other parliaments, an adjournment debate was introduced twice a week at 10 pm. Parliament would now be adjourned periodically during the session as in Australia to free up time for other business. These changes helped to give parliament and private members a higher profile.[29]

The introduction of a daily question time in 1962 was a substantial move. New Zealand had fallen well behind the House of Commons in providing opportunities for questioning government. The Commons had developed a regular daily question time during the nineteenth century but the possibilities were much more limited in New Zealand — a weekly two-hour slot.[30] It now comprised a daily half hour of oral questions lodged the previous sitting day. Members could follow up with supplementary questions at the discretion of the Speaker.

The new system worked well. Before long the number of questions doubled and question time became much more topical and gained greater prominence.[31] Written answers also provided a useful medium of statistical and other information not previously available. The Clerk of the House in particular believed that New Zealand now had a superior system to the Commons. Question time would come further to the fore in conjunction with a strengthened select committee system.

Strengthening select committees

Select committees have been an integral part of the New Zealand parliament since its inception. They functioned as a combination of the sessional, standing and select committees of the House of Commons (although their work on bills did not obviate the work of the entire House while in Committee of the Whole).[32] A number of committees also undertook investigative work. Such a pragmatic hybrid suited the relatively small House of Representatives. Until 1985 the appointment of select committees was not generally required by the standing orders; they were created as required by the business of the House. A substantial part of their work involved consideration of petitions. A few committees such as the Local Bills Committee were established by standing orders and had built-in provisions requiring them to scrutinise all bills in their subject areas. Others which were customarily and regularly appointed year by year became 'permanent' committees.

In early years the House tended to appoint committees to consider specific bills rather than scrutinising bills systematically (aside from the Waste Lands Committee). By the 1890s a wider range of committees looked at bills, including the Local Bills Committee (which from 1880 dealt with all local bills). The Statutes Revision Committee (established annually from 1893) had a brief to look at legal bills (from the 1930s it also scrutinised statutes amendment bills). The Lands and

Native Affairs Committees also considered a substantial number of bills. Overall, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, a third or more of bills would go to select committee. Scrutiny was probably more effective than this suggests since little more than half of all bills would have been enacted and committees would have looked at those likely to pass.

In the early twentieth century select committees continued to play a relatively important role in regard to legislation.[33] Ministers attended to explain bills, members of the public gave evidence and public servants were cross-examined. Committees dealt with an average of about 65 bills annually (50-60 per cent of all bills) at this time. Somewhat more than half of these were referred to select committees other than the Statutes Revision or Local Bills Committees.

The two-party system that came to dominate from the 1930s reduced the role of select committees.[34] Meeting opportunities were whittled away. Friday mornings were taken for sittings in 1929. Weekly caucus meetings were held on Thursday mornings, while Tuesday mornings were always unpopular. The routine use of urgency precluded select committee consideration. The number of bills they considered dropped noticeably.

By the 1950s, select committees only dealt with a small minority of bills, an average of about a dozen a year, excluding local bills and those dealt with by the Statutes Revision Committee. As one commentator suggested, they were 'competent enough to be useful to the House, but not independent enough to be dangerous to the government'.[35] Speaker Algie and the 1962 Standing Orders Committee attempted to improve select committee scrutiny over government. A much more powerful Public Expenditure Committee replaced the Public Accounts Committee which had been inactive and powerless.[36] This committee examined the estimates and the public accounts, together with other matters referred to it by the House. It became a force to be reckoned with.

By the mid 1960s select committees considered between one-third and two-fifths of all bills. Their enquiry role and recess work grew while their petition work fell away dramatically as a result of the activities of the welfare state, the decline in Maori petitions and the establishment of the Ombudsman (in 1962).[37] Committees now met on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings.

Further improvements were made to select committees in 1972. Committee membership was reduced, generally from ten to seven, they were appointed for entire parliaments so that they could work through recesses, bills could be referred directly to select committees after their first readings, and meetings were opened up to the media. Some began to examine the estimates related to their terms of reference. Parliament began to adjourn for short recesses of one or two weeks to allow committees to catch up with their work. The proportion of bills considered by committees rose to nearly half of the total.[38] From the mid 1970s advisory officers were employed to support the work of committees. In 1979 the rule became that all

bills, apart from financial bills and those taken under urgency, were sent to committees after their first reading. They were now meeting on three mornings a week and opening their proceedings to the public. As the profile of committees grew, the number of submissions to them increased considerably.

In this way mechanisms for the scrutiny of government were strengthened from mid-century, alongside the continued growth of legislative activity and efforts to streamline business in the House. The standing orders were again reviewed in 1967 and financial procedures made simpler and more efficient to remove a range of archaic practices.[39] However, private members remained in the shadows. Despite Algie's intentions, in the 1960s private members continued to be squeezed by the prevailing party environment. Wednesdays were taken by the government soon after the financial debate, while private members' time for notices of motion was taken over for party purposes. Party imperatives overly dominated the twice weekly adjournment debates, cynically referred to as 'Hancock's Half Hour'; this was abolished. By the mid 1960s, the time spent on private members' bills had shrunk to 3 per cent while legislation overall had grown to 34 per cent of total time.[40] Question time had blossomed to 16 per cent and debates concerning government expenditure had grown to 12 per cent but discussion of government policy, a feature a decade earlier, declined to 24 per cent.

Reining in 'unbridled power'

By the 1970s, the monolithic two-party system was beginning to break down but procedural reform had been slow and incremental. Members themselves were relatively content with the status quo.[41] Despite the dominance of government, New Zealand was out on its own in the amount of time allowed to members to contribute to debate. Other parliaments allowed far less. Outside parliament there was greater demand for reform. In Crick's phrase (with reference to the Commons), the increased efficiency of the executive was paralleled by a decline in the effectiveness of parliament.[42] Critics of New Zealand's political system felt that parliament was becoming irrelevant in the face of executive power. The number of members should be substantially increased, sessions should start earlier and continue for longer, and parliament should be given more power through its select committees. Within a few years, parliament would experience dramatic procedural reforms that continued for a decade or more. The prevailing two-party order and domination of government over parliament that had held sway since the 1930s came under challenge in the mid 1980s as accountability of government became a key issue.

Under Prime Minister Robert Muldoon (1975–1984) government domination sharpened at a time when the postwar consensus was breaking down and people sought broader forms of representation. Jackson's book *The Dilemma of Parliament*, published as the changes got underway, emphasised the conservative stability and continuity of parliament historically that put it into the top ten parliaments with a continuous existence.[43]

At this time parliament gave increased prominence to legislation — in the mid 1970s nearly half (45 per cent) of its business involved passing laws while debate on general government policy reduced to 19 per cent.[44] It was the fastest lawmaker in the west, in Geoffrey Palmer's phrase. Time devoted to questions in the House rose further to 20 per cent, but very little time was left for anything else apart from discussions of government expenditure (7 per cent). The incoming Labour government in 1984 was determined to reform parliament along with broader reforms to the public sector and the economy. Palmer, the energetic Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Justice and author of the influential book *Unbridled Power?*, heralded the parliamentary reforms as 'the most dramatic and the most important set of changes made this century to the way the House works'.[45] A range of reforms reset the balance between parliament and government, including augmented powers for the Speaker over a reorganised parliamentary administration, a continuous parliament under the *Constitution Act 1986*, and fundamental changes to the standing orders.

Question time was made still more topical and a more prominent part of proceedings.[46] The time allocated had increased from half hour to 40 minutes in 1974; now it became 45 minutes in which members were able to ask six 'questions of the day' (lodged the same morning) prior to 'oral questions'. Questions of the day subsequently took over the entire question time. In 1996 the distinction was abolished and question time (twelve questions of the day) became one hour.

A completely new structure of select committees was created in 1985 and their functions were greatly enlarged, 'to strengthen the accountability of government to parliament by more systematic, comprehensive scrutiny of government activity'.[47] Thirteen new 'subject' committees with wide terms of reference and open to the public and media were aligned to ministerial portfolios. Virtually all legislation was from this time referred to select committees. An increasing number of significant amendments were made to bills. To keep the government and committees separate, ministers were no longer members of the committees covering their portfolios. Staff were employed to assist all committees. Committees were able to scrutinise government departments and initiate their own enquiries.

Dissatisfaction with politics in the 1980s became focused on the electoral system that seemed to favour strong government at the expense of effective representation. After referenda in the early 1990s, the First Past the Post (FPP) electoral system was replaced by Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) representation in 1996. This fundamentally changed the composition of the House of Representatives. The new multi-party environment required procedural changes to allow all parties fair debating time and representation on select committees. MMP resulted in coalition or minority governments with confidence and supply agreements. This slowed the process of legislating and meant that governments had to negotiate and consult across party lines in getting their measures through parliament.[48] The number of acts declined from the heights of FPP in the 1980s — both government legislation

and all legislation — by close to one-third.[49] The increasing length of legislation to some extent counterbalanced this trend.

In 1996 aggregate membership across select committees was made proportional to party numbers in the House. Governments lost their automatic majority on almost all select committees, although understandings with minor parties allowed negotiated majorities to be created.[50] Committees' powers to amend bills were enhanced. More of members' time was made available for committee work and committees could meet for up to three hours during sittings of the House. The powers of committees to undertake enquiries were also broadened. Scrutiny of government departments was assisted by funding for specialist assistance to committees.

By the late 1990s as the old two-party stranglehold broke down, an increasing number of committees were chaired by members from other parties. Committees undertook a range of independent enquiries, some demonstrating an energetic independence and influence with government.[51] These changes freed select committees from the domination of government. Legislation remained a feature of their work, but their activities broadened noticeably through scrutiny of the estimates and financial reviews and consideration of international treaties. As a result, select committees have become a feature of the New Zealand parliament compared with internationally and a crucial component of citizen involvement in the legislative process and of public access to information.

Parliament regained vitality with the resurgence of private members' bills (from 1996 called members' bills). Private members' bills began to make their reappearance in the 1970s and by the mid 1980s some were actually passed into law. Since the 1990s the number has increased substantially and a significant proportion got onto the statute book.[52] The 'appropriation' rule (traditionally disallowing a large proportion of private members' bills because they involved expenditure) was replaced by a government 'financial veto' in 1996. On occasion very significant legislation has resulted from bills put forward by private members, for example the *Homosexual Law Reform Act 1986* and the *Prostitution Reform Act 2003*.

Parliament also acquired much stronger powers of scrutiny over finance. McGee observed: 'Control of public finance has historically been at the heart of parliament's constitutional pre-eminence.'[53] New Zealand had carried across Westminster's approach of the nineteenth century with its Public Accounts Committee, replaced eventually by the Public Expenditure Committee in 1962. This opened the way for greater financial scrutiny by select committees in the 1980s and 1990s. The select committee reforms of 1985 created the important Finance and Expenditure Committee and distributed the various estimates amongst the 'subject' select committees.

Parliament's financial procedures were substantially changed in the wake of the 1989 and 2004 financial reforms. Since 1989 parliament was required to authorise

the purchasing of goods and services rather than simply authorising expenditure towards such ends. The intention was to link such goods and services to outcomes sought by government policy. Further, in 1994 government policy was made subject to the principles of responsible fiscal management. This enhanced parliament's scrutiny of the government's financial procedures considerably. While government control over budgets remained, the process became more open.[54] Select committees examined the estimates and undertook financial reviews to assess whether the expenditure would contribute to the outcomes sought by government. The Finance and Expenditure Committee, in addition, audited government finance, revenue and taxation. Stages of the financial process — the economic and fiscal update, the budget and the estimates, and the financial review debate — are now set out in detail in the standing orders.

As parliament's role was strengthened, procedure continued to be modernised and become more efficient. In 1985, procedure was streamlined, sitting hours and debating times were reduced and regular adjournments were introduced throughout the year.[55] Extraordinary urgency allowed the House to sit beyond midnight. The House now met on three rather than four days a week, with daily sitting hours extended to compensate. General time limits for speeches were halved to ten minutes.

In 1996 further efficiencies were introduced.[56] The length of the Address-in-Reply debate, now a three yearly event, was reduced. A wider range of debates had time limits imposed on them, either by limiting the number of speeches or by an overall limit for the debate, and reductions were made in time limits. From the 1970s a 'guillotine' or overall time limit for debates had been gradually introduced for a range of debates, with debates in Committee exempted.[57] Today, many of the financial debates have overall time limits, as does the Address-in-Reply and the debate on the Prime Minister's statement. Debates generally are restricted by a combination of time limits on individual speeches, overall time limits on debates and limits on the number of speakers. At the same time the shift from clause-by-clause examination of bills to part-by-part examination with the House in Committee greatly accelerated this stage of the legislative process, one in which obstruction had traditionally featured.

One change in practice became rather too 'efficient', however. From the 1930s it had been accepted that 'omnibus' statutes amendment bills could bring together minor amending legislation for rapid dispatch. By the mid 1970s, this omnibus practice was being extended to other legislation, and from the 1980s debate was truncated unduly as a result.[58] The 1996 standing orders restricted the scope of omnibus bills.

Since MMP there has been a decline in the number of urgency motions and the time spent under urgency.[59] The existence of coalition and minority governments has meant that it has not been as easy to secure agreement to go into urgency. By contrast, closure has been used more frequently and has become a routine method of bringing debate to an end in Committee. Its use in other debates has diminished

since the guillotine was introduced. McGee emphasises that under MMP governments have maintained their legislative output 'despite the greater constitutional and political constraints on legislating'.[60] The reductions in time for general and financial debates and in dealing with bills in Committee have allowed the House to devote more time to enacting legislation. In aggregate these changes have had a significant effect in reducing the time spent on dispatching business.

In conclusion, in recent decades the powers of scrutiny of parliament have been enhanced alongside a continued streamlining of parliamentary procedure. The strengthening of question time and select committees, together with more elaborated financial procedures involving greater transparency and accountability, have contributed to a shift in the balance of power back to parliament, within the framework of political parties. At the same time the long-term processes facilitating the business of government that have been evident from the nineteenth century onwards have persisted to this day. The two developments exist in a state of tension that is the inevitable consequence of modern government working within a democratic system. Getting the balance right is a tricky matter. The balance shifts over time, being determined by the way in which a society perceives its political system should work.

In the first article I documented how government began to take control of the business of the House and, for the first time imposed limits on speaking time. In the twentieth century this was followed by governments strengthening their control over business as they sought to pass compact legislative programmes in their entirety. Private members' bills faded into insignificance, select committee influence dwindled and the Legislative Council became a mere shadow of its previous self. From mid-century, as a strong two-party system of government dominated over parliament and the Legislative Council was abolished, demands for greater public involvement in parliament and a greater accountability of government to parliament and to the people began to act as a counterweight to government control. These demands intensified in the last two decades of the twentieth century, and in conjunction with wider public sector and electoral reforms resulted in substantial changes to parliamentary procedure.

Procedure will continue to evolve, in response both to internal and external forces and circumstances. In the early years of the twenty-first century, change has slackened but the tension between government control and accountability remains, particularly in the more complex MMP multi-party environment. The days of unrestrained debate in parliament and of private members making substantial contributions alongside governments are long gone. Governments based on political parties must be able to get their legislative programmes through parliament, but within a democratic political system governing must be tempered by accountability. ▲

Notes

[1] John E. Martin, 'From talking shop to party government: procedural change in the New Zealand parliament, 1854–1894', *Australasian Parliamentary Review*, vol. 26(1), 2011. For the historical context of the House of Representatives for both articles, see John E. Martin, *The House: New Zealand's House of Representatives, 1854–2004*, Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 2004.

[2] S.A. Walkland, 'Government legislation in the House of Commons', p. 248, in S.A. Walkland (ed.), *The House of Commons in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979. See also for New South Wales, David Clune and Gareth Griffith, *Decision and Deliberation: The Parliament of New South Wales, 1856–2003*, Sydney: Federation Press, 2006, pp. 166–72, 241–2. G.N. Hawker, *The Parliament of New South Wales, 1856–1965*, Sydney: Government Printer, 1971, pp. 241–8.

[3] J. Halligan, 'Continuity and change in the New Zealand parliament', PhD thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1980, p. 58, table 2.5.

[4] Substantial changes were embodied in the printed sets of standing orders of 1929, 1951, 1963, 1985 and 1996. As in the first article this discussion is based on detailed scrutiny of the standing orders and on extensive use of the *Journals of the House of Representatives* (*JHR*).

[5] The government was not able to employ the 'previous question' method while in Committee. In 1906 it was determined that if the previous question motion was rejected debate would carry on. *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates* (*NZPD)*, vol. 138, 1906, p. 652; vol. 139, 1907, pp. 186–8. Archives New Zealand, (Legislative Department) ABIK 7663, 7/3/14, pt 2, Clerk letter, 1 March 1960. R.J. Harrison, 'Organisation and procedure in the New Zealand Parliament', PhD thesis, Ohio State University, 1964, pp. 146–7.

[6] Martin, *The House*, pp. 122–3. Archives New Zealand, (Legislative Department) LE1, 1900/12. *Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives (AJHR)*, 1900, I-9. *Evening Post*, 4, 31 July 1900.

[7] *NZPD*, vol. 116, 1901, pp. 249–50, 279; vol. 118, 1901, pp. 470–84; vol. 128, 1904, pp. 58–9, 252–3. LE1, 1903/14. *AJHR*, 1903, I-7, I-7A. *NZPD*, vol. 124, 1903, p. 194; vol. 125, 1903, pp. 592-8; vol. 126, 1903, pp. 137–64. *Evening Post*, 28 August, 18, 24 September, 2 October 1903.

[8] *NZPD*, vol. 148, 1909, p. 436; vol. 152, 1910, pp. 5–15; vol. 153, 1910, pp. 108–13; vol. 165, 1913, p. 460.

[9] Martin, *The House*, p. 150. *NZPD*, vol. 167, 1913, pp. 90, 92. *New Zealand Times*, 24 November 1913. *Evening Post*, 25 November 1913. T.E.Y. Seddon, *The Seddons: An Autobiography*, Auckland: Collins, 1968, pp. 213–15.

[10] *NZPD*, vol. 125, 1903, p. 598.

[11] LE1, 1920/21. *NZPD*, vol. 186, 1920, p. 317; vol.189, 1920, p. 532. *Evening Post*, 4 November 1920. Procedure in Australian parliaments was reviewed. Similar concerns were raised in 1921 and 1924 but nothing happened. *NZPD*, vol. 192, 1921, p. 1105; vol. 205, 1924, pp. 1196–7. *Evening Post*, 16 December 1921, 25 July 1924.

[12] *NZPD*, vol. 215, 1927, p. 682; vol. 216, 1927, pp. 303, 866–7; vol. 218, 1928, pp. 425–57 *passim*.

[13] *JHR*, session II, 1928, p. 12. *AJHR*, 1929, I-18. *NZPD*, vol. 220, 1929, pp. 163–4; vol. 221, 1929, pp. 876–91, 893–907. Archives New Zealand, ABIK 7665, box 46, loose papers, draft standing orders [1929].

[14] *NZPD*, vol. 226, 1930, p. 76. Also *NZPD*, vol. 223, 1929, p. 223; vol. 225, 1930, pp. 458, 752. David McGee, 'Concerning legislative process', *Otago Law Review*, vol. 11, no 3, 2007, p. 420.

[15] *NZPD*, vol. 227, 1931, pp. 14, 105, 126, 433–720 *passim*. ABIK 7663, 3/4/6, Clerk to Clerk of Legislative Assembly, NSW, 1 November 1933.

[16] *NZPD*, vol. 227, 1931, pp. 597–8.

[17] *NZPD*, vol. 244, 1936, pp. 170, 228–9, 867–76; vol. 247, 1936, p. 1182; vol. 252, 1938, p. 321. The use of closure tapered off as the Opposition became accustomed to its existence. Outside of depression and wartime sessions, in the 1930s and 1940s urgency was used for 30–40 per cent of bills.

[18] Halligan, 'Continuity and change', p. 58, table 2.5.

[19] Robert N. Kelson, *The Private Member of Parliament and the Formation of Public Policy*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964. *Dominion*, 29 June 1953, 8 October 1964.

[20] ABIK 7663, 3/4/6, pt 2, Clerk to Clerk of Legislative Assembly, Winnipeg, Canada, 19 June 1946. LE1, 1931/17, table.

[21] Keith Jackson, *The Dilemma of Parliament*, Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1987, pp. 5–7.

[22] Geoffrey Palmer, *Unbridled Power?: An Interpretation of New Zealand's Constitution and Government* (2nd edn), Wellington: Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 112, table.

[23] ABIK, 7663, 7/3/14, part 1; 3/5/3/2. *AJHR*, session II, 1951, I-17. W.K. Jackson, *The Legislative Council*, Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1972, pp. 198–9.

[24] Kelson, *Private Member*, pp. 59–67. *NZPD*, vol. 307, 1955, pp. 1969–79, 3480–3; vol. 313, 1957, pp. 2174–7. ABIK 7663, 7/3/14, pt 2, Speaker to Prime Minister, 21 June 1957.

[25] *Evening Post*, 1 February 1949. Josef Redlich, *The Procedure of the House of Commons*, London: Archibald Constable, 1908 (3 vols), vol. I, part II, chapter IV. Alexandra Kelso, *Parliamentary Reform at Westminster*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009, chapter 3. Walkland, 'Government legislation in the House of Commons'.

[26] *NZPD*, vol. 271, 1945, pp. 622–7; vol. 294, 1951, p. 7. A typescript copy of his draft was deposited in the Victoria University of Wellington Library.

[27] *Freedom*, 1 November 1960, p. 17. ABIK 7663, 7/3/14, pt 2, Clerk to Speaker, 31 July 1961, and Speaker to Standing Orders Committee, 1 March 1962.

[28] *AJHR*, 1962, I-17, I-17A. *NZPD*, vol. 330, 1962, pp. 24–50, 63–89, 329–38. ABIK 7663, 7/3/14, pt 2, report of the Standing Orders Committee, 16 May 1962; Clerk to Clerk of House of Representatives, Canberra, 14 June 1963. Anthony Wood, 'Holyoake and the Holyoake years', p. 46, in Margaret Clark (ed.), *Sir Keith Holyoake: Towards a Political Biography*, Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1997. *NZPD*, vol. 316, 1958, pp. 173–6; vol. 319, 1959, pp. 283–4. *Dominion*, 8, 17 June 1961. Bernard Crick, *The Reform of Parliament* (3rd edn), London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970, pp. 276–89.

[29] ABIK 7663, 3/5/3, pt 3, Clerk to Holyoake, 23 June 1967. Austin Mitchell, *Government by Party: Parliament and Politics in New Zealand*, Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1966, p. 65.

[30] Patrick Howarth, *Questions in the House: The History of a Unique British Institution*, London: Bodley Head, 1956. Redlich, *Procedure of the House of Commons*, vol. 3, pp. 30–2. In the early years in New Zealand questions could be asked as a form of notice of motion prior to other business. This system broke down with the advent of parties from the 1890s. From 1903 questions were answered in writing and read out in a two-hour period on Wednesdays. *NZPD*, vol. 78, 1892, pp. 282, 374–5; vol. 92, 1896, pp. 588–9; vol. 95, 1896, p. 606; vol. 118, 1901, pp. 467–70; vol. 125, 1903, p. 597; vol. 307, 1955, pp. 3481–2. Kelson, *Private Member*, pp. 61–3, 69–71. In the late 1940s Prime Minister Peter Fraser had been keen on the Commons approach, *NZPD*, vol. 280, 1948, p. 590. See also *NZPD*, vol. 286, 1949, pp. 1229–31.

[31] ABIK 7663, 7/3/14, pt 2; pt 3, Clerk to Austin Mitchell, 16 July 1963. *NZPD*, vol. 330, 1962, p. 32ff.

[32] Redlich, *Procedure of the House of Commons*, vol. 2, part VI, chapter VI. Jackson, *Dilemma of Parliament*, chapter 8. See E. Patricia Angus, 'Select committees of the House of Representatives', MA thesis, Victoria University, 1951 for an historical description.

[33] *LT*, 15 June 1922, press gallery reporter Charles Wheeler. Keith Jackson, 'New Zealand parliamentary committees: reality and reform', *The Parliamentarian*, vol. 9(2), 1978, p. 100.

[34] *NZPD*, vol. 233, 1932, pp. 475–6. In the period 1952–61 an average of 12 public bills per session were reported on by select committees (excluding Statutes Revision and Local Bills). This increased to 17 public bills in the period 1962–71. Halligan, 'Continuity and change', pp. 204, 207, tables 7.2, 7.3. See also Harrison, 'Organisation and procedure', p. 238.

[35] P. Campbell, 'Politicians, public servants, and the people in New Zealand, I and II', *Political Studies*, vols 3, 4, 1955–6, p. 210. Angus, 'Select committees', p. 51. ABIK 7663, 3/3/43/2, Mason submission, 29 June 1955.

[36] *AJHR*, 1962, H-41, p. 77. *NZPD*, vol. 338, 1964, pp. 255–6. Mitchell, *Government by Party*, pp. 79–80. A.F. von Tunzelmann, 'The Public Expenditure Committee — the process of change, 1962–1977', Masters of Public Policy thesis, Victoria University, 1977. R.D. Muldoon, 'The control of public expenditure in New Zealand', *The Parliamentarian*, vol. 55(2), 1974.

[37] ABIK 7663, 7/3/14, pt 1. Mitchell, *Government by Party*, pp. 72–6, 78, 93. Marian L. Logeman, 'Committee structure and parliamentary function', in Stephen Levine (ed.), *New Zealand Politics: A Reader*, Melbourne: Cheshire, 1975. S.N. Griffith, 'The effectiveness of parliamentary petitioning in New Zealand, 1969–1983', MA thesis, University of Canterbury, 1985. Angus, 'Select committees', p. 40, appendix 2, graph.

[38] Jackson, 'Parliamentary committees', p. 95, taking the Statutes Amendment Bill (later split up) as a single bill. Halligan, "Continuity and change', p. 171, table 6.2, pp. 208–18, tables 7.4, 7.7. 'New Zealand: notes on the establishment of an advisory service for select committees', *The Parliamentarian*, vol. 55(4), 1974. *AJHR*, 1970, I-15.

[39] Martin, *The House*, pp. 263–4. *NZPD*, vol. 350, 1967, pp. 63–71. ABIK 7663, 7/3/14, pt 3, Clerk to Roy Jack, 22 February 1967; Clerk, review of standing orders for select committee, 3 March 1967; Clerk to Prime Minister, 20 March 1967; notes of meeting of committee, 29 March 1967. *AJHR*, 1967, I-14; 1968, I-14. Mitchell, *Government by Party*, pp. 65–8.

[40] Palmer, *Unbridled Power*, 2nd edn, p. 112, table.

[41] Austin Mitchell, 'MPs as seen by MPs', pp. 267–9, in Austin Mitchell, *Politics and People in New Zealand*, Christchurch: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1969. J. Blondel, *Comparative Legislatures*, Englewood, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973, pp. 58–61.

[42] Crick, *Reform of Parliament*, p. 12. Martin, *The House*, pp. 267–9. Victoria University, Department of University Extension, 'Can parliament survive without reform?', symposium, 1971. Sir John Marshall (ed.), *The Reform of Parliament: Papers Presented in Memory of Dr Alan Robinson*, Wellington: Government Printing Office, 1978.

[43] Keith Jackson, 'Parliamentary reform in New Zealand', *The Parliamentarian*, vol. 60(4), 1979. Jackson, *The Dilemma of Parliament*.

[44] Palmer, *Unbridled Power*, 2nd edn, p. 112, table. The pattern remained generally similar a decade later (1986), with some increase in legislating and assessing government expenditure, while questions featured less and private members' bills experienced some resurgence.

[45] *NZPD*, vol. 464, 1985, p. 5599. Geoffrey Palmer, *Unbridled Power?: An Interpretation of New Zealand's Constitution and Government*, Wellington: Oxford University Press, 1979. Martin, *The House*, pp. 303–8. *AJHR*, 1984–5, I-14.

[46] Rob Salmond, 'Grabbing governments by the throat: question time and leadership in New Zealand's parliamentary opposition', *Political Science*, vol. 56(2), 2004.

[47] Geoffrey Palmer and Matthew Palmer, *Bridled Power: New Zealand's Constitution and Government* (4th edn), Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 169. Richard Shaw, 'Electoral law reform and the work of the New Zealand parliament', *Australasian Parliamentary Review*, vol. 19(1), 2004, pp. 26–30. Marcus Ganley, 'Select committees and their role in keeping parliament relevant', *Australasian Parliamentary Review*, vol. 16(2), 2001. Elizabeth McLeay, 'Parliamentary committees in New Zealand: a house continuously reforming itself?', *Australasian Parliamentary Review*, vol. 16(2), 2001.

[48] Ryan Malone, *Rebalancing the Constitution: The Challenge of Government Law-Making under MMP*, Wellington: Institute of Policy Studies, 2008.

[49] Malone, *Rebalancing the Constitution*, pp. 202–3. McGee, 'Concerning legislative process'. Declining use of omnibus bills (which are split at the Committee stage) means that this reduction is somewhat overstated.

[50] *AJHR*, 1995, I-18A; 1997, A-8A. Malone, *Rebalancing the Constitution*, pp. 150–5. Committee membership has always reflected the balance of power within the House but at the time of the factional system there was not usually a strong 'party' cast to committees. Following the Liberal Party domination of the house in the 1890s parties ensured they had control over select committees.

[51] Palmer and Palmer, *Bridled Power* (4th edn), pp. 170–2. Kirstin Lambert, 'Limits to select committee investigations — a New Zealand perspective', *Australasian Parliamentary Review*, vol. 22(1), 2007. Elizabeth McLeay, 'Scrutiny and capacity: an evaluation of the parliamentary committees in the New Zealand parliament', *Australasian Parliamentary Review*, vol. 21(1), 2006. Stephen Levine and Nigel Roberts, 'From lobby fodder to leadership: New Zealand parliamentarians and select committees', *Political Science*, vol. 56(2), 2004.

[52] Shaw, 'Electoral law reform', pp. 23–6. Raukura Spindler, 'Members' bills in the New Zealand parliament', *Political Science*, vol. 61(1), 2009, pp. 57–8, 60.

[53] David McGee, *Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand* (3rd edn), Wellington: Dunmore, 2005, p. 443, and chapters 31–36 for modern-day procedure.

[54] Jonathan Boston and Stephen Church, 'The budget process in New Zealand: has proportional representation made a difference?', *Political Science*, vol. 54(2), 2002.

[55] *AJHR*, 1984–85, I-14.

[56] *AJHR*, 1995, I-18A. McGee, 'Concerning legislative process', pp. 420–4.

[57] In the Commons, along with closure, a guillotine had existed from 1881, but in New Zealand the combination of urgency and closure proved sufficient for a long time. Redlich, *Procedure of the House of Commons*, vol. 1, part II, chapter III. Harrison, 'Organisation and procedure', p. 190.

[58] *NZPD*, vol. 247, 1936, pp. 1093–1103. H.N. Dollimore, 'New Zealand "washing-up" bills', *The Table*, vol. 37, 1968. Halligan, 'Continuity and change', pp. 173–4, 187–8, table 6.7. Palmer, *Unbridled Power?* (2nd edn), pp. 89–91. McGee, 'Concerning legislative process', pp. 427–9.

[59] In the mid to late 1980s in each parliament there were 50 or more urgency motions and urgency comprised about 30 percent of sitting time; in the early to mid 2000s this had reduced to 10–20 motions and 10–20 per cent of sitting time. Malone, *Rebalancing the Constitution*, p. 212. Shaw, 'Electoral law reform', pp. 21–2. With a National-led government from 2008 there has been some increase in the use of urgency.

[60] McGee, 'Concerning legislative process', p. 418.

The prime minister commands the support of the majority of elected members of parliament. The prime minister chooses the ministers to form the cabinet and submits them to the governor general for approval. Once approved, the government is officially formed.Â New Zealand has a unicameral parliamentary system, which means it is made up of only one house. 120 members sit in the house of representatives who are voted in using the mixed member proportional voting system. Elections are held at three-year intervals, and a person gets two votes, one for the political party and another for the MP. Several committees are constituted by members of parliament to scrutinize the actions of the government. The countryâ€™s parliament is the supreme decision-making institution. In the 52nd New Zealand Parliament there are five parliamentary parties represented by 120 MPs. These MPs represent 64 general electorate seats and seven MÄori electorates. The other 49 MPs are selected from the party lists.Â From legislative machine to representative forum? Procedural change in the New Zealand Parliament in the twentieth century. Home. Visit and Learn. How Parliament works.Â In the nineteenth century the success rate of bills was relatively low at between half and two-thirds of all bills, while acts which did get onto the statute book were short. On average legislation remained about five pages in length during the nineteenth century. During the depression years of the 1880s governments did not introduce as many bills into Parliament. Throughout the twentieth century, Europe underwent drastic changes within its social, political, and diplomatic realms. As a result of these changes, individual relationships and governmental associations with their people, as well as Europeâ€™s interactions and standing with the rest of the world, were forever altered in fundamental ways. These changes have, in turn, sparked considerable debates amongst modern-day historians. Of particular interest for this article is: how do modern historians differ in their analysis of the various changes that took place across twentieth-century Europe? Speci Legislative power is vested in the single-chamber House of Representatives (Parliament), the members of which are elected for three-year terms. The political party or coalition of parties that commands a majority in the House forms the government. Generally, the leader of the governing party becomes the prime minister, who, with ministers responsible for different aspects of government, forms a cabinet.Â New Zealand derives from the common law of Britain certain statutes passed before 1947 by the British Parliament. New Zealand law usually follows the precedents of English law. Nevertheless, the New Zealand courts have taken a more independent stance and now play a significant constitutional and political role with respect to public and administrative law . The New Zealand Parliament (MÄori: PÄremata Aotearoa) is the unicameral legislature of New Zealand, consisting of the Queen of New Zealand (Queen-in-Parliament) and the New Zealand House of Representatives. The Queen is usually represented by her governor-general. Before 1951, there was an upper chamber, the New Zealand Legislative Council. The New Zealand Parliament was established in 1854 and is one of the oldest continuously functioning legislatures in the world. It has met in Wellington, the

The New Zealand Parliament (MÄori: PÄremata Aotearoa) is the unicameral legislature of New Zealand, consisting of the Queen of New Zealand (Queen-in-Parliament) and the New Zealand House of Representatives. The Queen is usually represented by her governor-general. Before 1951, there was an upper chamber, the New Zealand Legislative Council. The New Zealand Parliament was established in 1854 and is one of the oldest continuously functioning legislatures in the world. It has met in Wellington, the The first people who settled in New Zealand were a brownskinned people called Maoris. They came from Polynesian islands located northeast of New Zealand. The country was discovered by Europeans in 1642, but they did not start to settle in the islands until the late 1700's. Today, most New Zealanders are descendants of the early European settlers. Maoris make up about 12% of the country's population.Maoris were the first inhabitants of New Zealand, arriving on the islands in about 1000. Maori oral history maintains that the Maoris came to the island in seven canoes from other parts of The prime minister commands the support of the majority of elected members of parliament. The prime minister chooses the ministers to form the cabinet and submits them to the governor general for approval. Once approved, the government is officially formed.Â New Zealand has a unicameral parliamentary system, which means it is made up of only one house. 120 members sit in the house of representatives who are voted in using the mixed member proportional voting system. Elections are held at three-year intervals, and a person gets two votes, one for the political party and another for the MP. Several committees are constituted by members of parliament to scrutinize the actions of the government. The countryâ€™s parliament is the supreme decision-making institution. From legislative machine to representative forum? Procedural change in New Zealand Parliament in the twentieth century. J Martin. Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Paid Parental Leave) Amendment Act. Counsel Parliamentary. Office. Alcohol and New Zealand Teenagers Retrieved from http. Parliamentary Library.Â The article explains the role that Private Acts of Parliament have played and still play. It does so by recounting their historical development and then discussing some 70 Bills and their progress through the Parliamentary processes. The narrative follows a broad subject-matter classification of Private Bills which are promoted by private individuals, local institutions, companies, particular The Whanganui River, located in the north island of New Zealand, has a special and spiritual importance for the Maori people. The New Zealand Parliament has just passed a bill which gives the river the ability to represent itself through human representatives, one appointed by a Maori community, known as Iwi, and one by the Crown, New Zealand news service Newshub reports. Read more. 'Beware of Jews' sign put up yards from London synagogue.Â The new status of the Whanganui River, or Te Awa Tupua, is believed to be unique in the world. The Maori people recognise the river as part of the living mountains and the sea. Chris Finlayson, who negotiated the treaty, said the Whanganui Iwi had fought for recognition of the peopleâ€™s relationship with the river since the 1870s.