



centre for **democratic** institutions

## **Political Party Development Course**

*Monday 7 May – Friday 18 May 2007  
Crawford School of Economics and Government  
The Australian National University, Canberra*

The Centre for Democratic Institutions' *Political Party Development* (PPD) course was held from 7 to 18 May in Canberra. This was the second occasion the course has been run, following on from the inaugural course in October 2006. The two-week course was based at the Crawford School of Economics and Government at the Australian National University, and was presented by Norm Kelly.

The PPD course is designed to provide senior political party officials from the Southeast Asia – South Pacific region with the skills to strengthen their parties and party systems, with the objectives being improved governance and more stable democracies. The intention of the course was to provide participants with:

- Information on the Australian political system, with insights into how Australian political parties administer and organise themselves;
- An understanding of party theory and the factors that influence the development of party systems;
- A better understanding of parties and party systems in the region;
- Opportunities to develop contacts and networks with other parties in their own countries and throughout the region; and
- Development of links with Australian parties and institutions.

This course was again well supported by Australia's main political parties, with requests for site visits and guest presenters positively received.

### **Course Participants**

Eighteen senior party officials from seven countries attended the course, being from:

- Malaysia (two participants),
- Indonesia (five),
- East Timor (four),

- Papua New Guinea (one – as PNG is in the middle of their national elections, the Deputy Registrar of Political Parties participated on the course, rather than any party officials),
- Solomon Islands (three),
- Vanuatu (one), and
- Fiji (two).

All participants held senior positions in their respective parties, normally as General Secretary or an equivalent level.

There was increased interest in participating on the course this year. CDI received more than 40 nominations from 10 countries. Participants were required to be fluent in written and spoken English, and this was generally the case, with only one or two participants having difficulties in understanding presenters or in making themselves understood. With an increased emphasis on women in politics in this year's course, it was pleasing to have four women participating, up from two last year.

As part of the course, the participants were required to give two presentations – a short introductory talk on their party and its place in their country's political system; and, at the end of the second week, a longer talk on one of six topics. These topics were – Internal Party Democracy; Party Law; Pre-selection Processes; MP – Party Relations; A Voice for Women; and Campaigning to Win. The standard of these presentations was very high, with many participants using powerpoint presentations to explain the situation from the perspective of their respective countries. These presentations were valuable for the group to gain a better understanding of regional differences in these topic areas.

## **Structure**

The PPD course was composed of lectures and guest speakers, visits to Australian political institutions, and participant presentations. In addition, two social events were held – a welcoming event where participants met Australian government and party officials, ANU academics, and their countries' embassy and high commission staff; and a course dinner, with presentations by each of the participants.

The course covered the following topics:

Functions of Political Parties	Membership
Party Systems & Democratic Development	Policy
Australian Political Parties	Campaigns
Electoral Systems	Pre-selections
Parliamentary Wing	Finances
Women in Politics	Media
Regulation of Parties	Coalitions

These topics were covered by a mix of lectures and institutional visits. Sessions with guest presenters included time for discussion/Q&A.

## **Site Visits**

Site visits were made to the following institutions:

*Australian national party secretariats* – Labor Party (also a visit to the ALP's ACT Branch office), Liberal Party, Greens.

*Australian Parliament House* – three visits were made, meeting with Members and Senators (covered below) and parliamentary officials: the Clerk of the House of Representatives (Ian Harris) and the Parliamentary Library (Richard Ryan).

*ACT Legislative Assembly* – including meetings with the Clerk of the Assembly (Tom Duncan) and the Deputy Speaker (Steve Pratt MLA).

*Australian Electoral Commission* - presentations by Phil Diak (Director, Media and Communication), and Kevin Bodel (Director, Funding and Disclosure).

## **Australian Party Involvement**

The success of the course relied on the active involvement and support of the main Australian political parties, and this was always forthcoming when requested, both from the administrative and parliamentary wings of the parties. At the administrative level, the visits to the parties' secretariats included presentations on the general structure of the party administration, as well as coverage of particular topics such as policy formulation, pre-selection processes, campaigning, branch structures, and involvement of women.

Special acknowledgement and thanks go to the respective Secretaries/Directors/Convenors of the parties – Brian Loughnane (Liberal), Tim Gartrell (Labor), Andrew Hall (Nationals) and Mia Kelly (Greens) – for providing this level of access and involvement.

At the parliamentary level, the willingness of parliamentarians to meet with the group during the sitting week was very much appreciated. The group met with the following Members and Senators:

*Labor:* Robert McClelland MP and Senator Kate Lundy.

*Liberal:* Greg Hunt MP, Senator Marise Payne, and David Hawker MP.

*Greens:* Senator Rachel Siewert.

The sessions with these representatives were very useful for understanding the relationships between the parliamentary and lay wings of parties.

The experience and expertise of party officials added value to the course. Of particular importance were the presentations from:

Tony Eggleton, former Federal Director of the Liberal Party and current Chair of CDI's Consultative Committee – on the role of a major party secretary,  
Andrew Hall (Nationals' Federal Director) – working in coalition  
Stephen Swift (former Democrats' Campaign Director) – principles of campaigning

Michael Morgan – ALP party structure and mechanisms,  
Bruce Edwards – Liberal party structure and policy development  
Linda Reynolds, Liberal Deputy Federal Director – campaigning  
Lorraine Finlay – women in the Liberal party  
Matt Cossey – Labor branch level structure and campaigning, and  
Stewart Jackson – Greens party structure and policy.

Graeme Dobell, an ABC journalist with more than 20 years experience covering regional politics, gave an excellent presentation on the role of the media in covering politics, with particular reference to states in conflict.

## **Conclusion**

This second running of the PPD course has been a definite improvement on the first. Minor changes to the course structure worked well. These changes included providing more time for participant presentations, both at the beginning and the end of the course. This allowed for more discussion within the group, and generally there was a high level of camaraderie and rapport within the group. As a result, the group has organised an email network to remain in contact with each other.

Administratively there were few problems. All participants arrived in Canberra on time, administrative support was excellent, and the lecture room facilities were a good improvement on last year. The course programme worked well, resulting in a useful mix of presentation and participation.

The two week model continues to work well. Containing the course to two weeks helps to ensure participation by sufficiently senior party officials. A longer course would not attract nominations from such senior figures. The course was scheduled in May this year to maximise participation from Australian parties ahead of this year's Federal election, and to cover at least one sitting week of parliament. It was therefore not possible to schedule the course to also include a party's conference this year. However CDI is keen to include such an event in future courses.

Ideally there should be at least two participants from any participating country. This was not possible for Papua New Guinea due to their national election being held, but having a senior officer from that country's Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates Commission meant there was an objective voice on PNG's party system, and with expertise in party law. Again it was not possible to have more than one official attend from Vanuatu.

Most participants used the opportunity of visiting Canberra to further their links with Australian parties and organisations, as well as interacting with their diplomatic and expatriate communities. All participants exhibited a genuine desire to learn, and to put that learning into practice on their return to their respective countries. The participants were generally of an age, seniority and experience to benefit greatly from the course, and it is expected that many of them will use the knowledge gained to further train and educate others in their parties. Through now running the PPD course twice, CDI has developed strong links with parties in the region. This will assist in identifying suitable applicants for future PPD courses, and other potential in-country CDI activities.

One tangible example of the merits of the course was a resolution by the three Solomon Islands' representatives to draw up a framework for the development of political parties in that country. The country, which currently has a very weak party system, should benefit enormously from this proposal. Such an initiative is only possible by having party officials of a sufficiently high status being involved in the course.

The enthusiastic support and involvement of the Australian political parties and their parliamentarians was critical to the success of the course, and CDI acknowledges the willingness of the parties to support and actively participate in the various sessions. The PPD sessions also helps Australian parties to gain a better understanding of some of the issues and challenges that confront political parties throughout the region.