



## **The Centre for Democratic Institutions**

### **KING PRAJADHIPOK'S INSTITUTE DELEGATION TO AUSTRALIA**

#### **PRESENTATIONS ON THE AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM**

#### **Summary**

King Prajadhipok's Institute of Thailand, Thailand's official democracy promotion institute and CDI's counterpart under an MOU signed in March 2001, sponsored a visit to Australia by a senior group of Thai leaders including parliamentarians, senior officials and business leaders.

The visit was designed to assist the group to explore issues surrounding the theme "Politics and Governance in Democratic Systems for Executives".

CDI hosted the group in the Common Room at University House and provided three presentations followed by questions and answer sessions, on different aspects of the Australian political system. The presenters were Mr Roland Rich, Director, CDI; Mr Cavan Hogue, Director, Thai National Studies Centre, ANU; and Mr Pierre Huetter, Executive Officer, CDI.

#### **Presentations**

##### *Overview of Australian Political System - Roland Rich*

The first presentation gave a full picture of the core components of Australia's political structure. It covered the issue of the head of State, the Australian style of parliamentary government, how the cabinet style of government affects the exercise of executive power, the separation of powers, and the antecedents of the current 'Washminster' blend. The legislative, oversight and constituency roles of the parliament and parliamentarians were also discussed, along with key points about the Australian constitution.

Australia's voting systems were of particular interest to the group and there was a lively discussion of how different systems impacted on the process of government formation. A voting system closer to proportional representation encourages diversity and coalitions in Thai governments, and the group was interested to understand how aspects of the Australian system such as compulsory voting, preferential voting and proportional representation in the Senate worked in practice.

Some in the group were also very interested in the formula and level of government funding for political parties, and whether or not this policy has broad support.

*Comparison of the main Thai and Australian political parties - Cavan Hogue*

The second session mapped the ideological and historical roots of the main Australian parties relative to their counterparts in Thailand.

The differing roles of the Head of State in the two countries was discussed with particular note of the important role of the King of Thailand as opposed to the figurehead role of the Australian head of state who last used the reserve powers to sack a Prime Minister in 1975.

One important difference was strong ideological base of parties in Australia as opposed to the personal base of many political parties in Thailand. While the Democrat Party had a long lineage and at times acted as a programmatic political party, most Thai political parties had personal and regional bases of power. The Thai Rak Thai party had won a large majority with a populist platform supported by few specific policies.

*Background to the 2001 Federal Elections - Pierre Huetter*

The third session dealt with recent Federal election. The main issues were divided into two groups: those on which the recent election was fought (short-term: border protection, the war against terrorism, treatment of asylum seekers) and those issues which are ongoing broader social issues (reconciliation with indigenous people, social welfare and education).

Recent trends in the make up of the parliament were discussed with two prominent examples; the increasing role of minor parties in the Senate; and the loss of absolute Senatorial majorities. The repercussions of these changes in terms of parliamentary accountability are significant.

With the departure of Pauline Hanson from the Australian political scene for the moment it was opportune to devote the final part of this session to discussion of the phenomenon. The roots of her relative popularity in Australia were highlighted, followed by a description of the social and economic issues involved. Although it is not clear that Pauline Hanson and her party are spent forces in Australian politics, the reasons for their decline over the last couple of years were also discussed.

**Participant List**

<b>Group Leader</b>	Associate Professor NORANIT SETABUTR	
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MR.	JINDA WONGSAWAD	Member of Parliament, Lampang Province
KHUNYING	JINTANA SOOKMARK	Senator of Nontaburi Province
MRS.	JITRA YOOPRASERT	Senator of Udonthani Province
MR.	MARUT ROCHANAPIYAWONG	Senator of Nakornayok Province
MISS.	OUDSANEE CHIDCHOB	Senator of Bureerum Province
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MR.	VIBULYA KUHIRUN	Governor, Provincial Electricity Authority
MR.	VISIT TANTISUNTHORN	Secretary General, Government Pension Fund
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