

THE PREMIERS' CONFERENCE

An Essay in Federal State Interaction

Campbell Sharman

Occasional Paper No 13

Department of Political Science
Research School of Social Sciences
Australian National University

Canberra

CHIFLEY
JQ4020
S8
S5
1977

JQ4020 S8 S5 1977

B001861



A.N.U. LIBRARY

This book was published by ANU Press between 1965–1991.

This republication is part of the digitisation project being carried out by Scholarly Information Services/Library and ANU Press.

This project aims to make past scholarly works published by The Australian National University available to a global audience under its open-access policy.

THE PREMIERS' CONFERENCE
An Essay in Federal State Interaction

Campbell Sharman

Occasional Paper No 13
Department of Political Science
Research School of Social Sciences
Australian National University
Canberra
1977

Printed and Published in Australia at
The Australian National University

© 1977 Campbell Sharman

This Book is copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism, or review, as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission.

Printed at:
SOCPAC Printery
The Research Schools of Social Sciences and
Pacific Studies

Distributed for the Department by:
The Australian National University Press

National Library of Australia
Card No. and ISBN 0 7081 0726 5



CONTENTS

	Page
Preface	v
Introduction	1
 PART I The Commonwealth Perspective	
Commonwealth state interdependence	4
The Treasury view	7
The role of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet	11
The lead up to the conference	15
 PART II The State Perspective	
The state bureaucracies	18
The role of the premier	22
 PART III The Conference and its Political Context	
The political constraints	26
A conference in action	34
Questions of style and goals	39
 Conclusion	44
 Footnotes	48
 Appendices	
A. A Note on the Reporting of Premiers' Conferences	52
B. A Checklist of Publicly Available Records of Proceedings of Premiers' Conferences 1899-1974.	56

PREFACE

Most of the research for this study was undertaken while I was a Visiting Fellow for six months in 1975-76 in the Department of Political Science, Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University. I should like to thank Professor Parker and his Department for their help and intellectual stimulation during my visit and for their comments on the design and early drafts of this project.

It will be clear from reading the following pages that I am deeply indebted to a number of senior public servants from the commonwealth and state governments both for invaluable information and for comments on federal state relations. The study would hardly have been possible without their assistance.

The compilation of Appendix B began long before I undertook the research for the body of this essay. The list of premiers' conference reports has been in the making for four years and has proved to be a complicated and time consuming task. In compiling the list I have had the generous assistance of the National Library in Canberra, the Parliamentary Libraries of the Commonwealth, New South Wales, Tasmania and Victoria, and the libraries of La Trobe University and the Universities of New South Wales, Sydney and Tasmania. I have also been dependent on the help of two research assistants, Pam Clark in Tasmania and Gillian Evans in Canberra, both of whom I thank for their perseverance. Two of my colleagues in the Political Science Department at the University of Tasmania, Ralph Chapman and Bruce Davis have been of great assistance in tracking down the odd reference, and Professor Gordon Reid of the University of Western Australia kindly provided me with some comments on a draft of this essay. I should also like to thank the typists of the Faculty of Arts typing pool in the University of Tasmania for the speed and unerring accuracy with which they typed the several drafts of this study, and Kath Bourke of the Political Science Department, Research School of Social Studies, Australian National University, for her help in solving the problem of having a study written in one institution and published in another.

Finally, I should like to acknowledge the financial support from the research funds of the Australian National University and the University of Tasmania.

Campbell Sharman,
Hobart, April 1977.

The visits to Canberra by the state premiers that usually occur every June have become a regular feature of Australian political life. Premiers' conferences, as these meetings of the first ministers of state and commonwealth governments have come to be called,¹ are well covered in the press and are perennial objects for analysis and evaluation by the writers of editorials and leading articles. Since the 1950s commentaries on premiers' conferences in the press and in the small number of academic publications dealing with the topic² have been characterised by the interplay of two themes. One has been the opportunity that the conferences have provided for political news-making by the participants, the other has been the potential for the conferences to achieve modifications of the federal system so that it will work more smoothly and efficiently.

The first theme is illustrated by the carefully orchestrated pre-conference publicity on the part of state and commonwealth governments and the reporting of much of conferences as though they were gladiatorial contests between the prime minister and various members. As such, premiers' conferences have been taken by some as symbolizing all that is undesirable in a federal system of government. The division of jurisdictions between central and regional governments means that there is division of responsibility for governmental functions that might be more effectively handled by one level. Divided responsibility leads to complexity, haggling between governments, financial irresponsibility and to grand-standing on the part of politicians in pursuit of regional, party and personal ambitions, at the expense of the national interest. This theme is often linked with the view that premiers' conferences are little more than ritual publicity exercises by state leaders, since all the important questions on the agenda will have been settled beforehand by officers of the Commonwealth Treasury. The conferences are simply political jaunts with no substantial policy significance for either level of government.

The second theme casts premiers' conferences in the role of the most important vehicle for achieving a more effective federal system. The difficulties of changing the constitution by referendum and the vagaries of the High Court's constitutional interpretations have made executive accommodation between the two levels of government appear as the most likely way in which a measure of flexibility can be given to the federal system. Premiers' conferences as the meetings of the chief executive officers of state and federal governments should become a forum in which the federal bargain of 1901 can be modified in its operation to suit the changing needs of the 1970s. This federal state diplomacy would centre on negotiations between the parties to achieve coordination of policy in areas of divided jurisdiction and the

allocation of resources among the various governments to promote national development moderated by the demands of regional equity.

These two themes are often fused into the single argument that the states and the commonwealth must stop playing politics and get down to a serious consideration of the relative priorities of the two levels of government. Only then will the premiers' conference be discharging its proper role.

The attitude to the premiers' conference outlined above rests on a number of unstated assumptions about how the political process operates in a federation and about the role that premiers' conferences do and should play in that process.³ To take an example, there is the assumption that the conferences are discrete events rather than multilayered sets of interactions between different parts of state and commonwealth governmental systems. Even if the conferences are looked at simply as the interaction of state and commonwealth leaders, it is clear from the briefest examination of conference proceedings that the political actors are playing to several different audiences. The premiers and the prime minister have their political constituencies to whom they are accountable for their public performance. Their cabinet and party colleagues are interested in seeing that arguments are put forcefully and that the leader's performance is consistent with the perceived preferences of the electorate whether state or commonwealth. In other words, premiers' conferences are a forum in which leaders must demonstrate their political effectiveness to their supporters and their ability to elicit favourable press coverage in their handling of state or commonwealth affairs.

Another audience and one equally as engaged in the outcome of conference negotiations, comprises the senior officials from the states and the commonwealth. From their point of view it is their plans, projections and stratagems which form the basis of conference discussions and it is their expertise to which the politicians will turn when confronted with new proposals or unanticipated turns in the progress of negotiations. It is very much the concern of these officials that their government gets the best deal possible and that the political leaders make the most of the briefings and arguments that the officials have prepared. From another perspective, the officials themselves are actors since their professional administrative skills are under scrutiny both by their political masters and by their peers in other government delegations.

Finally, the premiers and the prime minister are themselves both actors and audience around the conference table. The chief ministers must take the measure of their colleagues and opponents, assess their bargaining skills and their administrative resources, and generally size up the personality and political weight of their peers who are by their office the most important political figures in Australia's governmental process.

The existence of these three audiences - the political, the

bureaucratic and the participant - makes it difficult to use any single criterion for assessing the utility or effectiveness of premiers' conferences. Critics of the conferences as political circuses are simply denying that catering to the political audience is a legitimate function. In effect, they argue that it is only at the bureaucratic level that the conferences can perform a useful role. And yet it is precisely at this level that the margin for the states to negotiate is generally perceived as being so small as to amount to virtual dictation of policy priorities by the commonwealth government. The size of the commonwealth's financial resources is commonly seen as reducing the area in which the states can bargain with the central government to negligible proportions. The states are mendicants, their political and administrative resources are slender in comparison with those of the commonwealth and, as a result, it can be argued that the premiers' conference is an institution of largely formal significance. There is formal consultation, ritual negotiation but little real policy making.

This leads to a paradox and poses the question which is the central concern of this essay. The paradox is the ostensible political importance attached to an institution which apparently lacks significant policy making power. Why should so much journalistic ink be spilt over an event whose governmental function is claimed to be more symbolic than real? The resolution of this paradox, it is contended, can be found by looking at the processes that occur within premiers' conferences coupled with a broader examination of the role they play in the often subtle and complex net of interactions that occur in a federal system of government.

It is not the intention of this essay to provide a definitive examination of the role of the premiers' conference in Australia's political process. That task would require a much more comprehensive and systematic approach than has been attempted in the following pages. Rather, the limited goal has been set of examining the premiers' conference in the light of certain themes the most important of which is the investigation of the administrative matrix in which the premiers' conference operates. The study is also limited in that its predominant focus is the period of three years from December 1972 that saw an Australian Labor Party government in Canberra under the prime ministership of Mr Whitlam and, within this period, most attention has been given to the premiers' conference of June 1975. The overall aim has not been to provide detailed description but to point to inadequacies in existing commentaries on the premiers' conference and to suggest new perspectives from which this part of the federal process can be studied.

PART I

THE COMMONWEALTH PERSPECTIVE

Commonwealth state interdependence

A large proportion of commonwealth departmental business involves dealings with the states. Perhaps as many as half all commonwealth government programs require consultation and interaction with state departments at some stage in their implementation. This involvement with the states varies widely between departments. While the Department of Foreign Affairs may have little to do with areas of state jurisdiction,⁴ the major concerns of the Whitlam government's Department of Urban and Regional Development (DURD) were predominantly within the areas of exclusive state legislative authority. State involvement in this context is used very broadly to indicate that many commonwealth administrative officers are aware that the achievement of their policy goals is dependent to some extent on the exercise of governmental discretion at the state level. This may amount, as in the case of DURD, to a heavy dependence on state departments for information about cities and regions and for the implementation of DURD policies, or it may be little more than following rules of prudence and inter-organizational courtesy to avoid peripheral administrative disagreements.

The most common example of this commonwealth state interaction is the use of section 96 of the Commonwealth Constitution to transfer funds to the states on condition that it is spent on such objects and in such a manner as the Commonwealth Parliament provides.⁵ Officers from the relevant departments of the states and the commonwealth are engaged in a consultative exercise in designing such programs and in supervising the expenditure of funds made available by such section 96 grants. This is not to suggest that the responsibility for designing or supervising programs is shared equally, but that the shape and the success of the programs are dependent on administrative discretions exercised at both levels of government.

It is also clear that many commonwealth departmental decisions will generate political and administrative issues at the state level. The acquisition of land for commonwealth purposes, the building of offices and the choice of sites for commonwealth projects may not only induce action by local pressure groups and state politicians but may also run counter to state development and land use plans. On a wider scale, commonwealth immigration policy, its attitude to foreign investment and above all, its regulation of the level of economic activity have a direct impact on state administration. These effects on state governments may be an unintended outcome of a particular commonwealth policy but the resulting state dissatisfaction is likely to be channelled back to the commonwealth bureaucracy and be an important factor in the feedback process.

By any measure, commonwealth involvement with and impact on state government increased markedly during the period of the Whitlam ministries. The Governor-General's speech in February 1973⁶ foreshadowed central government initiatives in a large number of areas, the majority of which fell within the legislative competence of the states. Health, education, transport, housing, local government, and conservation were all topics on which the new government had major electoral commitments from its victory in December 1972. To implement these new policies, the Whitlam government supplemented the traditional way of encouraging state participation through the mechanism of section 96 grants with the use of commissions to collect information and sponsor research.⁷ The information that these commissions presented was geared to show a clear need for additional funds in such areas as schools, hospitals and other areas of social welfare, and to forestall any reluctance that the states might have in admitting shortcomings in their provision of these services.

These activities led to greatly increased funds flowing to the states and simultaneously increased the flow of information from the states to the commonwealth. To take an example from the area of health, administrative officers from a state department of health would design and cost a new hospital in terms of the state's overall hospital building program and the agreements negotiated between the state and the commonwealth on the extent and nature of the contribution that the commonwealth would make to hospital construction in that state. The plans, once cleared by the state authorities would be sent to the Hospitals and Health Services Commission and the commonwealth Department of Health where the plans would be scrutinised before the go ahead was given for commonwealth funds to be released from the federal Treasury to the state Treasury. The pattern might vary from case to case and from department to department, but the general picture was one of a large increase in funds flowing to areas of state activity which held high priority to the national government, matched by a corresponding growth in information available to the commonwealth in these areas. This increasing two way flow necessarily implied a growing volume of transactions between state and commonwealth bureaucracies.

This increasing frequency of contact between the two sets of agencies had a number of general effects on the nature and tone of federal state relations. From the state point of view, these developments meant an increase in work load for state public servants both in the disbursement of funds and in the preparation of information for the commonwealth. The demands put on state agencies were often accentuated by commonwealth requests for information to be produced which was of a nature or in a form not usually dealt with by the agency. In a number of cases, state agencies were asked for information which from the state's point of view was either unnecessary for the discharge of the commonwealth's responsibilities or was sent to commonwealth officials who in the eyes of the state officials concerned had neither the expertise nor the experience to make any useful contribution to the project. This became a source of conflict between the two levels of government because it touched upon the delicate issue of the extent to

which commonwealth funding of projects curtailed a state's policy discretion.

From the perspective of the commonwealth, the sheer volume of federal state transactions accentuated the administrative problems of policy coordination and evaluation. The general role of policy coordination had traditionally been associated with the Treasury which had cast itself as watchdog of the public purse against the raids of ambitious project oriented departments. The Treasury's accounting function had meant that it was well placed to gather information on the policies of other departments and, in default of the creation of a body specifically concerned with policy evaluation, the Treasury had been until the growth of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the sole agency responsible for monitoring and coordinating the totality of the relationships with the states. The Whitlam government's heavy commitment to spending money in state jurisdictions increased the proportion of commonwealth activity involving transactions with the states and to that extent increased the proportion of commonwealth programs whose success was in some way dependent on harmonious federal state relations. This implied in turn that many commonwealth departments had a substantial interest in preserving direct links with their state counterparts and in resisting attempts by the Treasury to reduce or modify departmental allocations for joint federal state programs. This was particularly the case with departments like DURD and Social Security, the bulk of whose policy objectives required close and continuous relations with state departments.

The fact that most of the commonwealth government's major electoral commitments were in areas of state legislative competence meant that success in implementing these policies and the overall success of the government were in large part dependent on the speed and effectiveness with which federal state coordination could be achieved. There was an increasing awareness that this coordination of major policy goals could only be accomplished by an agency that had a wider perspective and greater political sensitivity than the Treasury. As a result, a number of attempts were made between 1972 and 1975 to give the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet a greater role in policy coordination, and to create a number of interdepartmental agencies designed to harmonize the policies and spending programs of the major departments.

These developments grew out of tensions between the Treasury and other commonwealth departments that predated the Whitlam government and were of broader significance than the national government's approach to federal state relations. The Department of the Prime Minister for example, had been growing in influence since Mr Gorton became Prime Minister in 1968. The significance of the Whitlam regime was that the increased demands put on the commonwealth public service to implement a host of new policies forced an acceleration of the rate of administrative change.

This was particularly the case in the area of federal state relations where the traditional dominance of the Treasury in dealings

with the states was under challenge from three directions. There was an increase in the number of departments with an interest in federal state projects. Secondly, several large and vigorous departments had emerged with a heavy involvement in state jurisdictions and with policy objectives closely tied to the political goals of the Labor government. Thirdly, there was the widespread belief that the existing machinery for overall policy coordination was inadequate, which had led to the growth of new policy coordinating agencies based in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

These developments implied modifications in the patterns of influence affecting commonwealth dealings with the states and, in particular, that there would be pressure to limit the dominance of the Treasury role in the preparation of policy for premiers' conferences as a peak forum for discussing federal state transactions.

The Treasury view

From the point of view of the commonwealth Treasury, federal state relations are only one aspect of its departmental concerns and preparations for premiers' conferences are part of the much broader waxing and waning of Treasury activity that reaches its climax in the presentation of the commonwealth Budget in August. To that extent the only premiers' conference that counts for Treasury purposes is the one held around June of each year. Supplementary conferences, when held, are seen by the Treasury as being essentially *ad hoc* meetings of largely political significance which can be expected to do no more than make some minor changes to the pattern established the previous June.

Within the Treasury's departmental structure there are some six to eight officers continuously concerned with state finances throughout the year.⁸ As the day of the Budget approaches a great deal of information must be acquired and processed, much of it involving federal state relations and the June premiers' conference. Those Treasury officers responsible for conference preparations can draw upon this fund of information and expertise to discharge a number of conference associated tasks. The commonwealth tries to relate its policy on state finances to the general state of the economy and to this end a broad statement of the country's economic health and the national government's fiscal and monetary policy is required for the conference. To supplement this general statement, detailed assessments of the states' budgetary positions are needed together with projections of the likely changes in demands on state resources. This information is useful both at the level of overall economic management and because it enables the commonwealth to counter assertions of state poverty which the national government may view as unfounded.

A second set of tasks relates to the preparation of Cabinet

submissions on special projects touching on areas of state jurisdiction. Such large and costly programs as Medibank require that Treasury officers in consultation with officials from other relevant commonwealth departments, estimate not only the impact that such a program will have on the national Budget but also the effect that increased commonwealth spending will have on state expenditures on health services. The Treasury is often involved in the costing of other departmental projects and, as a result, is in a position to make assessments about the relative merits of projects and to suggest to cabinet alternative ways in which the commonwealth's resources can be spent.

A third task relates to the preparations for the Loan Council. Although the Council's determination of the size and deployment of loan funds for commonwealth and state purposes is technically separate from the allocation of revenue assistance from the commonwealth to the states, in fact the two processes are closely interrelated. A great deal of detailed and time consuming work is required from the Treasury to provide estimates of the various governments' need for loan funds and to fulfil the formal bookkeeping requirements of the Financial Agreement.⁹

The goal of all these tasks is to enable the Treasury to put a figure on a sum of money that can be transferred to the states in the coming financial year which can be justified as being reasonable in the circumstances. In the Treasury's eyes, reasonableness is measured in terms of its estimates of legitimate state needs balanced against the spending program of the commonwealth on its own projects and the demands of the overall management of the economy.

The commonwealth and the states have agreed to review every five years the basic formula under which revenue assistance grants are made to the states.¹⁰ In the year preceding such a review, the Treasury has the additional job of canvassing a wide range of possible formulas and to brief the Treasurer on the financial implications of each. In recent years there has also been the need for a Treasury response to state proposals for changes in the formula. Although the Treasury would insist that the choice of formula is essentially a political one to be made by the Treasurer and his cabinet colleagues, the Treasury is expected to rank each formula in terms of its workability given existing commonwealth commitments and the effect that a new formula would have on the national government's freedom of action in pursuing new policy goals and in regulating the economy. The choice of commonwealth governments up to 1975 had been to exclude all but fine tuning of the existing formula and to ignore, for example, the twenty alternatives which the Treasury had examined as part of its preparations for the June 1975 quinquennial review.

The Treasury view of premiers' conferences is that they are meetings whose preeminent concern is finance. This both explains and justifies the Treasury's dominant position as a source of information and advice in briefing the prime minister and treasurer and in preparing the national government's case for presentation to the states. This dominance flows both directly from the Treasury's responsibility for

administering the flow of financial assistance grants to the states and indirectly from its ability to monitor the financial implications of other commonwealth departmental programs. The strength of the Treasury is its access to information that it can gather from its representatives on interdepartmental committees and its expertise in manipulating figures to produce authoritative estimates of costs.

There is a second and equally important source of strength on which the Treasury can draw to reinforce its influence on commonwealth dealings with the states. This is its close working relationship with officers of the state Treasuries. Indeed, without the assistance and trust of the state officials, the commonwealth Treasury would be unable to produce estimates of state expenditures and revenue raising and would be hard put to gauge the level of economic activity in many areas of state jurisdiction. State Treasury officials entrust their commonwealth counterparts with information of considerable political sensitivity. Details of the forthcoming state budgets are given to the national government even though the same information may be denied to other state departments and even to the cabinet colleagues of the state treasurers. A high level of confidentiality is maintained between the Treasuries to the exclusion of non-Treasury officials at both levels of government. This permits the commonwealth Treasury to refuse to divulge information on planned state activities when requested to do so by other commonwealth departments on the grounds that the information is privileged and was supplied to the national government on the condition that it was not used outside the Treasury or for purposes other than a Treasury assessment of the projected level of economic activity and of the reasonableness of state demands on commonwealth funds. In this way the Treasury can maintain a monopoly of certain key information and further enhance its claims to departmental preeminence as a source of advice on intergovernmental relations.

The nature of the information supplied by the states suggests that the national Treasury provides in return some services of value to the states, since it is hard to believe that such a close working relationship rests solely on a shared body of expertise or a common commitment to reasonableness. Part of the trade off to the states can be found in the interest of the state Treasuries in preserving a monopoly of information about commonwealth activities affecting other state departments. The federal Treasury through the Treasury men on commonwealth interdepartmental committees can let the state Treasuries know of plans that may affect state expenditure on say, health, and can check on state department projects under existing federal state programs.

It should be noted that this channel of communication can be used in reverse so that Treasury officials in Canberra can call upon state Treasury officers to find out what other commonwealth departments are doing in areas of state jurisdiction. Under the Labor Party government this mild collusion and exchange of information was particularly important to the Treasury officials of both levels of government in their efforts to supervise programs which fell outside the usual channels of federal state coordination and which had been designed to

avoid close Treasury control in the interests of administrative flexibility. Some programs involving, for example, Aborigines and Education had been funded by block grants rather than the project by project approach which suited the Treasury's auditing procedures. The view of both sets of Treasury officials was that such programs were likely to be improperly administered. Any evidence of administrative problems or financial impropriety in such programs was seized upon as endorsing the Treasury view that only the Treasury had the necessary expertise and procedures for the proper monitoring of federal state transactions.

This special relationship between Treasuries has two further general effects. The first is to give the commonwealth Treasury both an understanding of and a sympathy for the budgetary problems of the states. At the same time it is a department with a significant and lasting interest in good federal state relations. Both these elements mean that the Treasury is likely to be cast in the role of a sympathetic advocate of state interests in the ordering of budgetary priorities at the national level. It can point out the degree of financial difficulties faced by the states and can compare the relative needs of governmental services provided at the national and state levels. This does not mean that the Treasury has any particular stake in seeing that the states are well off in comparison with other commonwealth departments, but simply that it can warn the national government when its proposals are likely to generate real rather than synthetic resentment against the tight-fistedness of Canberra.

The remaining consequence of inter-Treasury cooperation is a subtle but nonetheless critical element in federal state transactions. As indicated above, the commonwealth is dependent on the states for data on projected state expenditures and revenue raising in the calculation of the relative need of the states for financial assistance. Of much greater but unstated importance is the dependence of the commonwealth Treasury on statements by the state Treasuries of how commonwealth funds have been spent. Much is made by state politicians of the strings that limit state expenditure of commonwealth funds under section 96 grants, but the actual accounting scrutiny of where the money goes is done by state and not commonwealth officials. It is not meant to suggest that state Treasuries are in the habit of defrauding the commonwealth by misleading statements of the destination of commonwealth conditional grants but there appears to be a gentleman's agreement that the commonwealth Treasury will take a state's word on the expenditure of commonwealth funds. In crude terms the relationship can be reduced to an understanding that the states will supply the commonwealth Treasury with confidential information on state budgets in return for commonwealth non-interference in the detailed auditing of commonwealth transfer payments to the states. In this manner the Treasuries retain a monopoly of critical information that enables them to preserve their departmental status against the inroads of rival departments at their respective levels of government.

The Role of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

While it is possible to speak of a Treasury view of premiers' conferences and federal state relations, it is much more difficult to do so in the case of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PMC). Part of this stems from the variety of goals held by the PMC and the fact that most of these have only an incidental concern with federal state relations. Nor is there a Treasury-like concentration of expertise to deal with a limited number of easily defined functions. In 1975 PMC was a much smaller department involved in the vaguer roles of policy coordination and evaluation, harmonizing the competing goals of other commonwealth departments including the Treasury, and injecting some broader political purpose into the steering of the whole governmental machine. It had acquired these functions as an outgrowth from its job of servicing the needs of cabinet and being in a position to scrutinize cabinet submissions from other departments.¹¹

It was possible in 1975 to isolate at least two perspectives on federal state relations that existed within PMC. One view was that of the Information and State Relations Division of PMC as the section of the Department directly concerned with intergovernmental affairs. Another was that from the commanding heights of PMC where federal state relations are seen as but one aspect of a much broader problem of coordination and policy implementation.

The Information and State Relations Division (ISRSD) was created in 1975 and is an example of the way in which the PMC has almost drifted into a policy coordination role. Its genesis was a result of a direct political stimulus, that of the very poor publicity that the Labor government was getting from its relations with the states and the lack of exposure that successful commonwealth state programs were getting in the press. The function of ISRSD was in large part to remedy this situation by presenting what was seen by the commonwealth as the facts about the greatly increased resources being channelled into areas of state jurisdiction and, despite some state protestations to the contrary, the large degree of administrative cooperation that existed between the two levels of government. This function was to be achieved in two ways; by collecting and distributing information on intergovernmental relations, and secondly, by monitoring the totality of commonwealth relations with the states to prevent breaches of protocol and to avoid the commonwealth clumsiness and interdepartmental inconsistencies that had tended to sour relations even with the Labor governed states.

One of the reasons for the formation of the Division was the lack of any one place where all the details of federal state programs could be found. Treasury had a great deal of information on the accounting details of the transfer of funds, but only the individual commonwealth departments concerned could give the background, purpose and justification of programs that fell within their jurisdiction.

Consequently one of the first projects of the ISRD was a collation of the details of all commonwealth grants, assistance, benefits, and subsidies, to the states with a description of each project, the organization of state agencies concerned and whether the project was self-cancelling or part of a continuing program.¹² This information was to be stored in a computer based storage and retrieval system to make possible selective extraction of information from the large amount of data stored on tape.

One the justifications for collecting this information was that it would pave the way for a more coherent policy on the part of the commonwealth to relations with the states. In practice, however, the data collected in 1975 was seen as a fund of information for the electoral needs of government candidates since each could be provided with a detailed list of how commonwealth money had been spent in his electorate since 1973.¹³ Indeed, the collection of this information came to have little significance for federal state relations and a great deal to do with ways to achieve the electoral survival of the Whitlam government.

The role of the ISRD in monitoring commonwealth transactions with the states had similarly mixed fortunes under the Labor government. The division was a very small one consisting of only five officials of third division status and above. These officials were to scrutinize all Cabinet submissions for their policy implications on federal state relations, to point out inconsistencies between departmental policies and to prevent breaches of protocol in dealings with the states. The division did not have the bureaucratic muscle to make more than a token gesture towards the first two goals and the issue of protocol was largely of political rather than administrative significance. The non-Labor states, particularly New South Wales, had been harassing the commonwealth government because of breaches of the long standing agreement that matters of a substantial policy nature would be channelled exclusively through contacts between the prime minister and the relevant state premier. The large number of commonwealth agencies, the aggressive ambitions of such departments as DURD and Social Security, and the broad definition that New South Wales gave to matters of policy meant that there was a stream of complaints about commonwealth contacts with state departments of which the premiers' department had not been informed. The states resented this interlevel contact between departments that bypassed what was claimed as the traditional channels of federal state interaction, and the states devised a variety of ways to restrict such contacts. The result for the ISRD was that its officials felt ground between two sets of powerful forces, neither of which it could do much to influence; large and powerful commonwealth departments were pursuing their goals on one side and hostile state governments on the other.

These problems were reinforced by the difficulty the ISRD had in finding any officers at the state level with whom it could communicate at a professional level. Unlike the Treasury with its frequent contacts and long standing professional exchange of information with state

officials, the division had nothing in common with state premiers' departments who had no reason to deal with anyone except the head of the PMC. In New South Wales, the unit which looked as though it performed a similar function, the Division of Federal Affairs,¹⁴ in fact was committed to doing its own check on all commonwealth activities and looked with some suspicion on the ISRD simply as an attempt by the commonwealth to generate favourable publicity at the states' expense.

For these reasons, the ISRD looked upon premiers' conferences as one of the few forums in which the Division could be seen to have a clear role. For the June 1975 premiers' conference, the Division was closely associated with preparing the PMC brief for the Prime Minister to complement the Treasury brief. While ISRD officials conceded that conferences were still dominantly Treasury affairs, this was seen as limiting much of the useful work that could go on at conferences. If financial concerns were diminished or even removed from the conferences, then the premiers' conference could become a final clearing house for the design and coordination of major commonwealth state programs. Part of this attitude appeared to be motivated by a sense of departmental rivalry with the Treasury and resentment of its links with state governments, but part sprang from a belief that, in the past, there had been a lack of sensitivity in dealing with the states and too few resources had been committed to improving the exchange of information between the two levels of government.

The Division's attitude to the states was ambivalent. It had some sympathy for the states' difficulties in coping with the surge of commonwealth activities in their jurisdictions, but there was also resentment that the states were hostile to the Division's good intentions, and frustration that calls for increased cooperation had met with a deafening silence from state premiers' departments. The officials were also annoyed by the continual sniping of state governments about the commonwealth's empire building and the characterization of every commonwealth initiative, the Division's included, as a sinister plot to undermine the states.

Near the apex of the PMC, the view of commonwealth state relations and the premiers' conference was markedly different. At this level it was freely conceded that the conferences were essentially Treasury affairs and that this was properly the case given the nature of the discussions and the importance of financial matters in state priorities. Moreover, the influence of Treasury was only marginally less than it had been in the past. Such de-Treasurization as had occurred at the commonwealth level was not the result of any plan but was the consequence of other departments muscling in, first the PMC and then Social Security and DURD. The influence of the PMC had grown in response to the policy preferences of Prime Ministers Gorton, McMahon and Whitlam and its role as a clearing house for cabinet submissions. Social Security and DURD had become influential because they were large departments and had

extensive dealings with the states. In sum, these three departments had cornered bureaucratic expertise and had acquired information networks to dent the monopoly of Treasury.

These shifts in the balance of bureaucratic influence across the whole spectrum of commonwealth activities led to the creation of new administrative structures, two of which had importance for federal state relations. The more important of the two was the Cabinet Expenditure Review Committee (ERC) which was set up early in 1975. This Committee comprised the Prime Minister, the Treasurer, and the Ministers for Social Security, Labor and Immigration and Urban and Regional Development, supported by meetings of officials from these departments.¹⁵ The Committee was to strengthen the Treasurer's position in Cabinet to restrain further increases in expenditure to cope with inflation. It would vet Cabinet submissions, integrate them and relate them to the broader policy objectives of the government so that, for example, payments to the states could be seen in a broad perspective.

The second innovation was the establishment of a special committee of ministers concerned with the commonwealth government's relations with the states. This Australian State Regional Relations Committee (ASRRC) consisted of the Prime Minister, the Treasurer and the Ministers for Social Security and Urban and Regional Development. The accompanying committee of officials from these departments included a representative from the Policy Coordination Unit in the PMC, which had been assigned as one of its special projects the study of federal state relations. Although the press release announcing the creation of this committee implied that it would have some coordinating role and mentioned the five year review of financial assistance to the states,¹⁶ the impression was given by some officers in the PMC that the committee was seen as rather a lightweight body in comparison with the Expenditure Review Committee. The State Regional Relations Committee was an originator of briefs rather than a survey mechanism as was ERC, and a senior official in the PMC expressed doubts that there was any real possibility of commonwealth cooperation with the states in the manner hoped for in the ASRRC.

Overall, these developments were seen as having much greater significance for the administration of the commonwealth governmental machine and for bureaucratic politics in Canberra than they did for the actualities of federal state interaction. The nature of the premiers' conference and the commonwealth preparations that preceded it were largely unchanged although the increasing span of commonwealth activities had furthered moves for the gradual erosion of Treasury dominance. The states were seen as but one element among several to be fitted into the complex pattern of demands on commonwealth government resources, and the new administrative structures affected the mode rather than the substance of preparations for conferences.

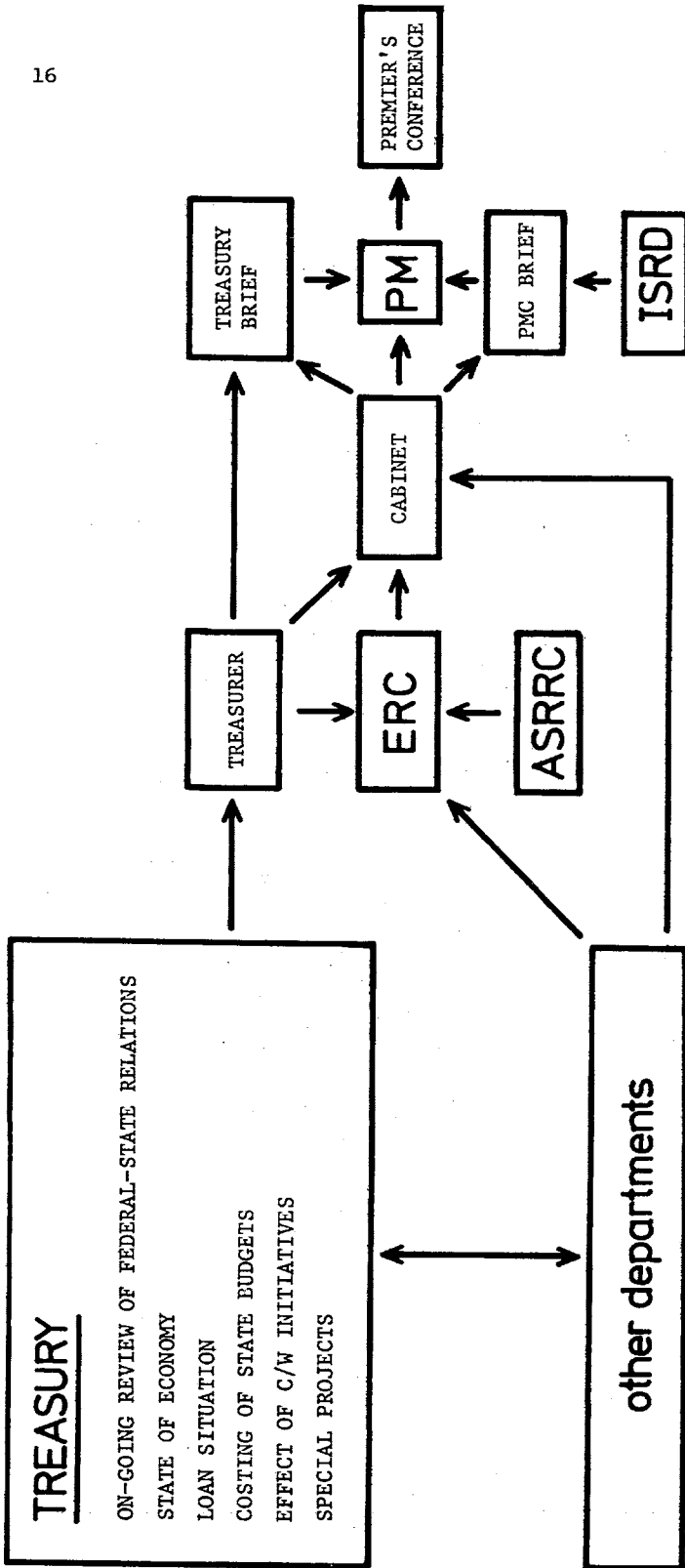
The lead up to the Conference

Against this background of departmental relations with the states, each premiers' conference requires that detailed plans must be made to produce a coherent statement of commonwealth policy which can be reduced to a small number of briefs for the Prime Minister. Once a broad statement of strategy has been made, there is the further question of deciding on the tactics to be followed during conference meetings. The focus of both these processes is the Prime Minister himself because of his pivotal role both in Cabinet deliberations and in chairing, and to a certain extent stage managing, premiers' conferences. It is true that the commonwealth Treasurer chairs the more formal meeting of the Loan Council, and that other ministers may be invited to address the conference, but in a real sense the nature of each conference is determined by the style of its participants and in particular, that of the prime minister.

In preparation for the opening session of the June 1975 conference the prime minister was provided with two briefs, one from the Treasury and one from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. These briefs were of roughly equal size, and each contained in summary form statements of commonwealth policy backed up with a large amount of information on the consequences of such policies, together with details of past government performance both commonwealth and state. The major commonwealth proposals would have been endorsed by Cabinet after clearing the hurdles of Treasury scrutiny, the competitive claims of other departments, and the modifications of interdepartmental and Cabinet committees (see flow chart p. 16). Cabinet itself may have changed proposals or altered priorities which would have required a last minute reworking and recosting of projects by officials. There would also have been a general statement by the prime minister of the political objectives of the conference one of which in 1975 was gaining state endorsement for the commonwealth policy of wage indexation and the control of inflation.

In 1975 as a year involving a review of commonwealth state finances, the commonwealth's attitude to changes in financial relations would have been discussed as would the commonwealth's reply to the states' case for tax sharing.

Outside this broad Cabinet survey of the government's general line at the coming conference, the detailed planning was a matter for the prime minister and his advisors. Treasury officials in particular were concerned with a very careful specification of the range of possible solutions that would be acceptable to the commonwealth in any disagreement over financial relations with the states. This involved deciding on what the commonwealth would make as an opening offer, coupled with a number of fall back positions depending on the response of the states. Each variation of the opening offer would need



Stylised flow chart for development of
major Commonwealth proposals
at the Premier's Conference in June 1975
(See text for explanation of terms)

supplementary material on the implications that each change would have on commonwealth and state budgets. Treasury preparation included such detailed tactical matters as estimating the rate of progress through the agenda, and when calls for consultations with officials were likely to occur.

As Treasury officials were quick to admit, these strategems often went astray in the fluid conditions of conference debate, but the point to be made is the careful deployment of bureaucratic expertise which was available to the Prime Minister to anticipate problems and rebut state criticisms of commonwealth policy. A similar service was provided by the PMC, its focus being the nature and purpose of commonwealth programs that involved the states, supplemented with a commentary indicating the history and political goals of each project.

All these preparations indicate the breadth of administrative resources controlled by the commonwealth. But their very extent and complexity also imply that, from the commonwealth's point of view, the role of the prime minister at premiers' conferences has become institutionalized. The profusion of data and expertise and the attempts to formalize commonwealth policy making procedures all tend to restrict the manoeuvrability of the prime minister once the conference is in session. Political flexibility is one of the resources in which the commonwealth is increasingly deficient.

PART II

THE STATE PERSPECTIVE

The state bureaucracies

There is a certain ambiguity in the relationship of state public servants to their counterparts in Canberra. While the states as governmental entities are dependent for a major part of their revenue on transfers from the commonwealth, state public servants are not likely to be hampered in the design and implementation of programs by any lack of jurisdiction. There is not, in other words, the problem of having to work through another level of government in order to turn administrative planning into governmental action. It is true that shortage of funds may limit the scale of state government activity and that the procedural requirements of conditional grants may alter the mode and perhaps the direction of state projects, but the fact remains that it is state officials who teach in schools, run hospitals, and administer the vast bulk of civil, criminal and administrative law. It is this power of legislative competence that enables a Dunstan in South Australia to turn ambitious electoral promises into concrete programs in a way which is denied to a national government. Quite apart from the Senate's blocking of a large portion of Labor's legislative program, the Whitlam government was dependent on the state administrative machines for the implementation of the great majority of its 1972 election platform policies. All the commonwealth has, as one state official put it, is money.

The importance of money as a political lever is easy to overstress if for no other reason than it is much easier to measure the flow of commonwealth funds than it is to quantify the inertia and counter-initiatives of state administrative and political systems. Not that money is useless. It can entice the states into projects of importance to the commonwealth, and change state priorities through the mechanism of the conditional grant, but it is a blunt weapon particularly when six governments have to be coerced, each with differing priorities and susceptibilities to commonwealth proposals. It is, in sum, a source of potential political influence and not a guarantee of achieving certain results.

The fact of commonwealth affluence does have an effect on the style of bureaucratic interchange. While it is no longer true that there is a large margin between the pay of commonwealth as opposed to state public servants, commonwealth officials still have a certain smugness about their superior pay, conditions of work, perks, opportunities for advancement and about the superior commonwealth organizational resources in terms of funds, training and size. Early in the Whitlam ministry this was accentuated by the policy of making the commonwealth public service a pacesetter in pay and conditions and by the belief that the new, innovative commonwealth broom was about to

sweep away the conservatism and parochialism of state policies.

These sources of minor irritation mask a more important difference between the administrative styles of the two levels. The administrative official in Canberra is likely to assume the benefits of national uniformity, the desirability of greater planning and, perhaps, the inevitability of greater national government control of state government functions. The state official on the other hand, is likely to believe strongly in the virtues of state autonomy, in the necessity for sensitivity to differences in regional needs and in the superiority of his own experience in dealing with his own region and administrative constituency. From the state officer's point of view the proper relationship between the two sets of officials is that the commonwealth provides the money for obvious state needs and the states provide the justification and the detailed planning. It might be conceded that the commonwealth may have good ideas in certain areas of state concern but in such circumstances, state experience is needed before the ideas have any hope of achieving practical goals.¹⁷

This state attitude is not likely to appeal to any commonwealth official with any ambition to see his departmental projects turned into administrative practice, and will be even less appealing to an ambitious commonwealth minister. As a consequence many of the problems that beset federal state relations between 1972 and 1975 can be traced to differences in perceptions as to the proper role of the administrative discretions of the two levels of government. Canberra, for example, wanted to be able to stipulate where money given to the states for roads was to be spent. The states, as well as being aware of the political sensitivity of road building, resented this intrusion into what was seen as an area where state priorities should prevail. It also became clear to state officials that the commonwealth was trying to achieve goals, some of which were impossible, or at least impossible in the time that the commonwealth had set.

A senior state treasury official summed up these developments by saying that before December 1972 there had been good working relationships between the two levels of government across a wide range of commonwealth state dealings on the basis that the commonwealth had cash and ideas while the states had the expertise. This, he argued, provided a basis for mutual respect. Canberra would float projects and the states would tell the commonwealth what was feasible. After 1972 two trends were discernible. The first was increasing pressure from the commonwealth for detailed information about matters falling within state jurisdiction and the attempt to generate practical plans in these areas. These plans caused serious problems because the commonwealth had neither the knowledge, the expertise, nor the feedback machinery to run such projects effectively. The second trend was an increasing dogmatism by the commonwealth as to what was possible, reinforced by the grandiose ideas of certain key commonwealth ministers. The combined effect was to generate a certain amount of contempt felt by state public servants towards their commonwealth counterparts at a professional level. Such commonwealth officials

had permitted themselves to be forced into taking on tasks that they knew they could not do and they knew their departments were not equipped to handle.

This strongly critical view of some of the activities of commonwealth officials was shared by several senior officers in the state public services. One of the results, it was suggested, had been to bolster the self-confidence of state officers since, once the commonwealth was involved in areas where the states clearly had more expertise, state officers could justify their policy convictions in a way that was denied to the commonwealth. Of greater importance, the mystique of the commonwealth public service had been diminished in the eyes of state ministers. One state Treasury official observed ruefully that no matter how well a state minister had been briefed by his department there was still a tendency for the minister to have a higher regard for the competence of the commonwealth advice than for advice tendered by his own officials. The performance of the commonwealth after 1972 had done much to hasten the erosion of such attitudes as had a number of other developments in the organization of the state public services themselves.

One of these developments had been the move by some state Treasuries, in particular that of New South Wales, to build up a fund of research expertise by the selective hiring of honours graduates, that is, some states were in a position to use information and research skills as bargaining counters in federal state relations. But state Treasuries were in a dilemma over the use of such research expertise. On the one hand was the example of the Provinces of Ontario and Quebec which sought to match the research capability of Ottawa across a broad range of governmental activities and to produce general position papers to challenge the received wisdom of central governments.¹⁸ Alternatively there was an immediate and pressing need for such expertise to be used in the planning and execution of state projects. Should, in other words, scarce economic and accounting expertise be used to solve concrete administrative problems or to produce position papers whose benefits to the state government were more diffuse, and less likely to achieve immediate results? When phrased in these terms, much of the governmental and bureaucratic establishment at the state level was content to leave what was seen as academic speculation to the commonwealth.

Such ^{an} attitude produced considerable frustration on the part of state Treasury officials. They were as aware as any part of the state system of the shortage of skilled manpower, but they were also aware how much of the commonwealth's mystique in the eyes of state ministers derived from its ability to produce broad position papers and to table a multiplicity of estimates, projections and analyses on any issue under discussion. The problem of ministerial confidence was seen by several senior state Treasury officials as one of the major difficulties in state dealings with the commonwealth, particularly in financial matters. The premiers' conference discussion in 1970 over state proposals for tax sharing was cited as an example. When faced with a head on clash between commonwealth and state Treasury advice

over tax sharing, the state ministers meekly abandoned their own plan simply, according to one official, because of a deep-seated belief that Canberra knows best. One of the ironies of the Whitlam ministries was that the commonwealth during this period managed both to strengthen the confidence of state governments in their own public services and to convince the national opposition parties of the political necessity of state tax sharing.

Another development that gathered momentum during the period was an increasing agreement between the states that interstate cooperation and consultation were necessary before any multilateral dealings with the commonwealth. Even in the area of the five yearly review of federal state financial arrangements, prior state consultation and the preparation of a common case was a recent development. Not until 1970 did the states begin the slow move away from independent political lobbying with the commonwealth and the other states to a position in which interstate consultation and the preparation of a joint approach to the commonwealth was seen to be desirable. The greater burden of this joint preparation fell on the larger states but this was not resented by New South Wales or Victoria for the good reason that it gave the Treasury officials in these states the authority to tackle the whole range of assumptions underlying the commonwealth's case. Such consultation was, however, still at a fairly rudimentary stage. The joint case for the June 1975 premiers' conference was very much the lowest common denominator of the approaches of each of the six state governments and each premier wished to preserve the fullest measure of political flexibility even if this meant reducing the credibility of the joint case. As all states gradually acquire economic expertise and some research capacity in their Treasuries, the opportunities for more effective consultation will increase, but in the event, this will depend on the weight that each state premier gives to the bargaining power of information in comparison with other and more familiar political resources.

In summary, the balance of bureaucratic resources is not as one sidedly in favour of the commonwealth as is often assumed. In functional areas of state administration the states are likely to have greater bureaucratic expertise than the commonwealth. The states are not hampered, as is the commonwealth, by having to work through another level of government to implement many of their policies. In terms of the premiers' conference, however, the states suffer the twin disadvantages of not having the depth of economic expertise and not being able to mount as coherent a case as can the commonwealth. But by 1975 there were a number of pressures for change. It was becoming clear to some states that the two disadvantages mentioned above were self imposed. The result was the beginnings of a fund of state economic expertise and the growth of interstate consultation. Developments elsewhere in federal state relations were convincing the states that the commonwealth public service was decidedly fallible and there was even a trickle of academic studies bolstering the state view of federal finance.¹⁹ All these changes meant that there was a growing self

confidence among state public servants. Evidence could be marshalled to convince state ministers that the states' position was as technically watertight as the commonwealth's, the only difference being the political priorities of the two levels of government - and state ministers needed no prompting on the superior claims of the states for scarce resources.

The role of the premier

One of the dominant factors affecting the style of state administration is the fusion of the roles of premier and treasurer in a single minister in all states except Queensland.²⁰ Queensland aside, the political dominance of the premier within the parliamentary party is enhanced by his exclusive access to treasury expertise and to any plans and estimates that the Treasury may make. The extent to which other ministers and departments are involved in setting broad state priorities is largely a matter of the political strength of the premier within his Cabinet and within his parliamentary party. Such well entrenched and experienced premiers as Playford in South Australia and Reece in Tasmania could make the majority of budget decisions alone in consultation with senior state Treasury officials. State cabinets had a limited role in dealing with policies affecting federal state relations for two reasons, both springing from the administrative dominance of the premier. The first was that most of the critical policy decisions touched upon the transfer of funds from one level of government to another. To the extent that the premier wished to control decisions affecting the state budget and the Treasury, he had a strong interest in preserving a monopoly of information concerning federal state interactions and in being the sole administrative channel through which funds were to flow into state coffers. One senior state Treasury official pointed out that the Grants Commission had been another factor in reinforcing the premier-treasurer's powers in some states. Those states which had been long term claimant states - South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia - had been forced by the fact of Grants Commission enquiries to hire technical experts in the field of economics and accounting. This technical expertise was coordinated with the bargaining stance of the premier in concerted efforts to raid the commonwealth Treasury. Even after these three states had left the Grants Commission system, the pattern persisted of a small number of technically competent Treasury officials working closely with the premier alone to frame key state policies.

The second reason for the limited role of state cabinets in policy making involving federal state interaction can be found in the wish of premiers to preserve their diplomatic status as the representatives of their states. The political benefits of maintaining this status were both symbolic and real: symbolic in that it clearly marked off the

superior prerogatives of the premier from all other ministers, and real in that it gave the premier the right to be consulted whenever transactions involved dealings between his government and the commonwealth.

This is not to say that there were no pressures to reduce the autonomy of the premier-treasurer. In New South Wales, for example, Premier Lewis had presided over the setting up of some cabinet committees one of which was to scrutinize general policy and priorities within the state. These developments were tentative and had not got under way when the Whitlam government fell in 1975. Nonetheless, the extent to which other departments and interdepartmental committees can gain access to Treasury figures and advice implies a consequent reduction in the premier's administrative discretion and there appears to be a continuing drift towards administrative change in this direction.

A more important threat to the pivotal position of the premier in federal state relations is any increase in the direct interchange of information between commonwealth departments and their functional counterparts at the state level. This development is frowned upon by the commonwealth Treasury as a breach in the traditional channels of intergovernmental communication. State treasuries have similar misgivings and for some premiers the increasing entanglement of commonwealth departments with state administration which occurred during the Whitlam ministries was seen as a sinister plot to undermine the capability of the states to frame and implement coherent policies on their own. Some of the non-Labor states in particular tried to set up barriers between some of their state departments and the commonwealth. It appears that in at least one Queensland department phone calls to and from Canberra were not to be made or taken without the permission of the minister concerned.

Less Draconian measures were taken in New South Wales centering on the protocol agreement that all matters of policy in federal state relations had to be negotiated at the level of the heads of government concerned. As well as harassing the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet over the breaches of this protocol, New South Wales set up the Division of Federal Affairs, jointly responsible to the Premier and to the Minister of Federal Affairs. The function of this unit was twofold: its first task was to monitor all commonwealth governmental activity that might have a bearing on the state government. This meant scrutinizing the flood of press statements, hansards, parliamentary papers and reports that poured out of Canberra. The second function was to compare notes with other state governments, particularly the non-Labor ones, and to consult on common problems affecting state dealings with the commonwealth. Both of these functions were aimed at keeping the state government, and especially the premier, informed of the extent to which the central government was seen to be intruding on the traditional patterns of state policy making.²¹

Some other states had also moved to set up departments of federal affairs but none was as active as the New South Wales unit and all shared three characteristics. The first was that their prime role was that of a letter box or clearing house for general information on federal state relations, the second was that their responsibilities were strictly limited to matters not of direct concern to the premier or his department, and the third was that the relationship between the various state units was a very fluid and informal one. There was the additional characteristic that, in 1975, it was only the non-Labor states that showed any great enthusiasm to set up such departments or units or to begin to examine the idea of a Council of States for a more formal interchange of information and ideas and for the planning of joint state political and administrative strategies.

At the same time as the surge of governmental activity at the federal level there was a growing awareness in the states that their policy making structures needed an overhaul.²² There was a faint realization that the administrative problems that had led to the growth of the Prime Minister's department in Canberra might also exist at the state level and might require an increase in the scope and authority of premiers' departments. With the possible exception of South Australia, the states had not moved very far in this direction and there was no suggestion that, for example, it would be within the proper scope of a premier's department to provide a coordinating brief for a premiers' conference.

Although the reason given for the limited coordinating role of the New South Wales premier's department was a lack of funds and resources, it was clear that the officials of that department had a limited view of the scope for departmental action. It was assumed that all matters involving finance should be dealt with by Treasury alone and that the major channel for coordination was in the person of the Premier himself. They saw no point in sending intergovernmental issues to cabinet unless other departments were involved in a major way. Similarly, no need was felt to set up any secretariat for premiers' conferences, let alone have any discussions with commonwealth officials in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. In sum, the premier's department was seen as a secretariat for the premier rather than an instrument to coordinate overall state policy or to act as a countervailing force to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

This situation meant that preparation for premiers' conferences fell predominantly on the state Treasuries and on the premiers themselves. The only exception, and a partial one at that, was the preparation for Loan Council meetings in which individual departments had to be consulted about their plans for capital expenditure. There appeared to be none of the detailed attempts to anticipate the direction of premiers' conference discussion that characterised the approach of the commonwealth Treasury, and only a slow move towards increasing consultation between the states. For most of the premiers' conferences

since 1945, state consultation where it occurred at all took the form of an evening meeting in Canberra on the night before the beginning of the conference. The revolution in air transport and the weakness of some premiers for the fleshpots of Sydney have meant that premiers can take the morning flight from Sydney to Canberra and avoid all but a last minute briefing before the official opening of the conference. Only under the spur of increasing financial difficulty have the states been willing to pool some of their resources and to prepare a common case in advance for presentation at conferences.

The overwhelming impression is that state representation at premiers' conferences is seen as the opportunity for a virtuoso performance by a state premier. As such he is involved in a game with many facets in which he alone decides how hard to press the commonwealth, how much to consult his officials, how much information to divulge, how much preparation is appropriate, when to compromise and when to do deals with other premiers. As a corollary, the premier cannot avoid the lion's share of the blame if his state is seen as failing to gain the maximum pay-off or if the state's case is poorly received by other state leaders, the commonwealth, or the press.

From the perspective of the states, premiers' conferences, although occurring at least once a year, have yet to generate an administrative routine that is independent of the political judgement of the premier. In this respect it must be assumed that the preparation for the premiers' conference is congruent with the rest of the policy making processes in each state, and that it will harmonize with the political dynamics of the cabinet and the other departmental and political roles of the premier. To the extent that the premier plays a dominant role in the state political system, dealings with the commonwealth will be seen as falling within his exclusive prerogative powers. Only when a premier is politically vulnerable within his parliamentary party, or when the administrative pressures for institutionalization become large, is the charismatic dominance of the premier likely to be curbed.

PART III

THE CONFERENCE AND ITS POLITICAL CONTEXT

The political constraints

Bureaucratic relationships can be seen as the substructure upon which the public dealings of the premiers and the prime minister take place. But the relations between politicians and public servants are complex and it is not possible to make a neat separation between matters of administrative machinery on one hand and issues of political significance on the other. Ministers may see themselves both as the champions of their departmental interests and as the guardians of party policy as it affects their ministerial concerns. In this way, for example, a debate over the proper commonwealth policy for the cure of regional unemployment touches upon the competing bureaucratic goals of the Treasury and departments dealing with employment and regional development, the career prospects of the ministers involved, the concerns of members of parliament in marginal electorates, the relative merits of competing economic strategies to mitigate unemployment without adding to inflation, and the proper role of the states in implementing employment policies. In such circumstances it may be difficult to isolate which are the most important factors in determining a particular policy outcome, and further, which factors are political and which are administrative.²³ One way out of this problem is to isolate the constraints on the range of policy choices that confront a minister, a prime minister or a cabinet. This approach will not provide an explanation for the precise choice of policy that a political actor makes but it has the advantage of providing a framework against which policy choices can be seen to be made and at the same time pointing to the sources of costs and benefits that will result from following one policy rather than another.

In the survey of commonwealth and state bureaucracies outlined above, an attempt has been made to specify the sources of bureaucratic constraints on commonwealth state interaction. In other words a framework has been provided to show the range of administrative agencies with a stake in commonwealth state relations and to illustrate the patterning of bureaucratic influence at both levels of government.

Before a general picture can be given of the dynamics of federal state interaction, a survey of the more overtly political constraints on government action must be made. This is not to say that ministerial departments do not generate political issues, but that political actors for their very survival must be attuned to the demands of groups outside government, to party machines and to the perceived demands of the electorate in general. To this end the events leading up to the June 1975 premiers' conference can be used as a case study of the broader political factors that impinge on dealings between the states and the

commonwealth.

Early in 1975 the commonwealth Labor government was faced with the twin problems of high unemployment and high inflation. Although it had won an election in May 1974 it did not control the Senate and was thus vulnerable to being forced to the polls at a time not of the government's choosing. The Queensland branch of the ALP had gone down to a disastrous defeat in the state election of December 1974, a defeat which had been interpreted as a rebuff both to Mr Whitlam's campaigning and to the commonwealth's policy of involvement in areas of state legislative competence. This policy and the federal government's low poll ratings were of great concern to state Labor leaders who saw the declining fortunes of the commonwealth government as an electoral liability at the state level.

This intra-party tension was aggravated by what state Labor leaders saw as a lack of consultation between the commonwealth government and state branches of the party. This was most keenly felt by those state leaders who were the premiers of South Australia and Tasmania. They tended to share the non-Labor states' resentment both of Mr Whitlam's patronizing attitude to the states and of the way in which many commonwealth programs were impinging on state priorities.

All state governments were acutely affected by the inflationary rise in wage rates and by the political consequences of rising unemployment. To add to these problems, the settlement of commonwealth state financial relations at the June 1974 premiers' conference and at the special conference on inflation in August²⁴ had been unusually harsh on the states and had given them cause to complain that either they should receive more funds from the commonwealth or they would have to take action which would embarrass the commonwealth both politically and in terms of the management of the economy. This action would be either a massive rise in state charges which would have an inflationary effect on the economy or a substantial retrenchment of state government employees as a cost cutting measure.

The commonwealth moved to counter these developments in a number of ways. It was conceded that commonwealth state relations were very poor and that an improvement was necessary both to make possible the effective implementation of commonwealth policy and to reduce the opportunities for the opposition to capitalize on state discontent. Within the ALP, the biennial federal conference of the party early in February 1975 was used as an opportunity to smooth over intra party tensions and to pass resolutions stressing the need for cooperation between the two levels of government. Before the ALP federal conference, the Whitlam government had agreed to hold a special premiers' conference in mid-February in which additional assistance to the states would be discussed. At the same time the commonwealth attempted to demonstrate its concern with intergovernmental relations by setting up a committee of Cabinet, the Australian State and Regional Relations Committee, to look at problem areas of federal state

relations.

The non-Labor states came to the February premiers' conference with an offer to introduce state legislation to control prices and wages, in return for some \$550 million of short term commonwealth financial aid. This money would be used both to keep state charges at their present level and to stimulate employment. The Labor states, South Australia and Tasmania, had also given promises of legislative cooperation to control prices and wages so that all the states could demonstrate their willingness to assist the commonwealth in regulating the faltering economy in return for money from the central government to satisfy the legitimate needs of the states. This was similar to an offer that all states had made the previous July. There had been regular consultation before the conference through the usual Treasury channels which had convinced the commonwealth Treasury that the states were indeed in some financial difficulty.

The outcome of the February premiers' conference was the transfer of an additional \$240 million to the states to be spent before the end of the financial year.²⁵ The premiers were satisfied and the commonwealth could argue that it had appeased state complaints and simultaneously implemented a portion of its overall economic strategy to reduce unemployment without aggravating inflation. The states were not called upon to honour their commitment to legislative action to control inflation if for no other reasons than that their offer raised substantial constitutional difficulties for its implementation and secondly, that the commonwealth Treasury had doubts about the economic effectiveness of such legislative controls. The offer, in other words, was largely symbolic. But it was not an empty offer since it was a public admission of a substantial community of interest between the two levels of government, an admission that amounted to state endorsement of a major commonwealth policy commitment. The price the states were willing to pay for the \$240 million was a public reduction of state hostility to the federal government.

By February 1975 the most serious political constraint on effective commonwealth dealings with the states was the commonwealth government's perceived electoral unpopularity, most of which stemmed from the weak state of the economy. This had emboldened the state Labor leaders to use the party machine to urge Canberra to moderate its centralist drive and to point out the electoral damage that such policies were doing to the Labor Party at both levels of government. In a similar fashion, the non-Labor states judged that the political standing of the commonwealth was low and that a harder line could be taken in negotiations with Canberra. The states, as well as winning some minor skirmishes over the extent of state rights, had managed to coerce the central government into easing state financial difficulties to the extent of \$240 million. This was a marked change from the very hard line that the commonwealth had taken some eight months earlier after its 1974 election victory.

Another continuing constraint on the commonwealth was the fact that four out of six states had non-Labor governments. This meant that over eighty percent of the population were subject to non-Labor administrative regulation at the state level. Implementing major commonwealth government initiatives in the fields of social welfare, health and urban planning was to a certain extent hostage to the level of hostility that prevailed between the Labor central government and the non-Labor state governments. The more urgently the commonwealth wanted its policies implemented for electoral gain, the greater the bargaining power of state delay and lack of cooperation.

It was against this background that preparations were made for the June 1975 premiers' conference. The major agenda items were the formula to be used in calculating the size of financial assistance grants to the states for the next five years and the amount of money to be allocated to the states for the financial year ending in June 1976.

As the year progressed the Whitlam government continued to be beset with the problems of rising inflation and unemployment. By June Dr Cairns had been ignominiously removed from the Treasury and the government was beginning to become embroiled in the public disclosures of the overseas loans affair. The lead up to the premiers' conference, however, began quietly. The state premiers began a series of consultations in March, April and May and issued statements stressing the need for a conciliatory approach by both sides to the question of federal financial relations. The states indicated that they would be pressing for a virtual indexation of state financial assistance grants against rising commonwealth income tax yields. On June 9 the Australian State and Regional Relations Committee of Cabinet released information indicating that it would recommend to Cabinet that the commonwealth reject most of the states' plans for a modified revenue allocation formula. The Committee gave short shrift to the tax sharing proposals and urged the states to resort to their own tax bases for additional revenue.

This announcement was a breach of the truce that had existed in the debate over finance and the following day, 10 June, the states released to the press their joint submission for increased funds which was to be presented to the commonwealth for discussion at the premiers' conference. The commonwealth stand also had the effect of sending Mr Dunstan, the Premier of South Australia, and Mr Wran, the Opposition Leader in New South Wales, scurrying for urgent consultations with Mr Whitlam. Both these state Labor leaders faced state ALP conferences within a few days and both were acutely aware of the damage that an intransigent commonwealth government could do to the electoral standing of the state parties.

Mr Whitlam parried these intra party tensions by stressing again the need for intergovernmental cooperation and by promising to discriminate in favour of the Labor governed states in federal state

financial dealings. This could be done without blatant partisanship by using commonwealth funds to relieve the states of two major components of their budgetary deficits, namely hospital care and state railways. The commonwealth Labor government had long been committed to a major change in the funding and provision of health care in Australia. Its Medibank plan provided for greatly increased commonwealth contributions to state hospital costs in return for some say in hospital policy and a general acceptance of the Medibank package. For a variety of reasons the Medibank plan was unacceptable to the federal Liberal and National Country Parties and to the governments of the non-Labor states. However these states were torn between the claims of partisanship and the advantages of more funds for hospitals, the direct political benefits of which tended to accrue to the states. The Labor states of Tasmania and South Australia had, by June, already agreed to enter Medibank. By promising that such conditional grant payment would not be included in considering the amount of general financial assistance to the states, the commonwealth simultaneously gave special financial consideration to the Labor states, discriminated against non-Labor states and provided a powerful reason why these latter states should negotiate to join Medibank. This the commonwealth wanted if for no other reason than that it believed that the implementation of the Medibank program was of major electoral advantage to the ALP.

The commonwealth had also offered to take over the state railways of any state that was willing to transfer them. This offer was less geared to fundamental ALP policy than were the Medibank proposals. It represented more an attempt to weaken the bargaining power of the non-Labor states than the result of a carefully thought out transportation policy. State railways consistently made large losses for a variety of reasons one of which was the electoral unpopularity of raising charges and the political sensitivity of rural branch lines and freight rates. There was very little chance that the sectional interests that supported the National Country Party would accede to any request that the control of railways be transferred out of the realm of state politics and there were elements of the Liberal Party that shared similar views. There was also the question raised by the non-Labor states that a loss is a loss, and that unless the commonwealth could show that it would run the railways more efficiently there was no point in taking over state railways except political gamesmanship on the part of the commonwealth. Since only South Australia and Tasmania were willing to transfer their railways to the commonwealth, the net result was that only these two Labor states would be relieved of a large drain on state revenues.

The issues of hospitals and railways were part of the larger question of the proper role of conditional grants from the commonwealth to the states. For all the states, but for the non-Labor states in particular, there was a continuing problem of balancing the gains to be made by accepting tied grants from the commonwealth against the distortions that these grants might have on the priorities of state governments. The state railway issue was one in which the political

costs were higher than the advantages that could be had by reducing the deficits of non-Labor states. As the popularity of the federal government waned there was more resistance to commonwealth attempts to use its money power to mould policy in areas of state jurisdiction. To counter this resistance, the federal government had to make more and more explicit the financial penalties of not accepting commonwealth funded schemes that affected the states. Even this strategy would be of limited use if finance starved states could successfully transfer the odium of higher charges or lower services to the central government.

Another factor to be weighed by the Labor government in Canberra was the change in the Liberal Party leadership that had occurred in March 1975. The replacement of Snedden by Fraser coincided with the development of new Liberal Party policies on federalism. These went far beyond the ritual genuflection towards the virtues of federalism that had characterised Liberal policy statements in the past. The thrust of the new approach was not only to repudiate attempts by the central government to intrude national policies into areas of state legislative competence, but also to propose revenue-sharing between the two levels of government in form very similar to the state proposals of 1970.²⁶ On both counts, such policies were attractive to state governments of all political persuasions. The wide range of devices employed by Canberra to use its resources to influence social welfare policies in the areas of state jurisdictions - a Grants Commission with wider powers, the Australian Assistance Plan, the Area Improvement Program and the Regional Employment Development Scheme for example²⁷ - had all generated state political hostility which was a political resource on which the Liberal and National Country Parties could build.

By the eve of the June premiers' conference Mr Whitlam and his new Treasurer, Mr Hayden, had to devise a careful compromise that would restrict transfers to the states in line with the commonwealth's anti-inflation policies without being so parsimonious as to prejudice the basic minimum of state cooperation necessary for the implementation of many commonwealth programs. At the same time the Labor government had to show to the states that its view of federal state relations was likely to be at least as electorally appealing as the federalism and tax sharing policies of the national opposition parties. In gross terms, the outcome of the June premiers' conference demonstrated that such a compromise had been successfully reached. The states received substantially more funds, although neither as much as nor in the form they would have preferred, while the commonwealth gained a state commitment to support wage indexation in the fight against inflation. A reasonable balance of political costs and gains had been achieved by the commonwealth on one side and each of the states on the other.

The purpose of this brief sketch of political events is to illustrate the major political constraints that are at work in federal state interactions. The most important point is that perceptions of electoral support are crucial to an understanding of how governments

interact at a political level.

These perceptions do not represent any concrete measure of electoral support but simply reflect at any one time the aggregate of conventional indicators and personal hunches of a prime minister, or a cabinet and its close advisors. The day after an election is the only time when reality displaces these perceptions of the extent and movement of popular support for a government, a party or an individual.

Given that these perceptions of electoral support are a medium of exchange in federal state relations, it is clear that two levels of government which share similar assessment of their respective strengths and weaknesses are much more likely to reach accommodation than governments which do not. Respective assessments are likely to differ, however, because governments and parties have varying sectional and areal patterns of support, because of differences in ideological predispositions and because of the differing perspectives between those in office and those in opposition and between those in Canberra and those outside it. Where competing departments, governments or parties are convinced that each has the weight of political support on its side, there will be substantial difficulty in reaching a compromise. When a commonly accepted indicator of relative electoral support is produced the parties to a dispute are likely to move towards a resolution of their differences. These indicators are rarely forthcoming, and such indicators as by-elections are usually ambiguous guides to the success of particular policies although they are perceived as powerful indices of a government's general standing. The result is that there is usually a large component of uncertainty that public opinion polls have done something to reduce but which is still sufficient to make politicians continuously apprehensive about the popularity of their policies. The margin of uncertainty is without doubt large enough to permit widely differing assessments of political support on the part of the seven governments involved in the Australian federal system.

The period between January and June 1975 can be seen as one in which there was a move towards a general agreement on the relative support, or lack of it, enjoyed by the participants in the June premiers' conference. The margin of uncertainty had been reduced by the widespread belief that the central government was politically vulnerable because of the state of the economy, an assessment concurred in by many commonwealth ministers. This shared assessment of the decreasing political support for the commonwealth government in the electorate led to a greater willingness on the part of the commonwealth to accommodate state demands at the June 1975 premiers' conference than had been the case in 1974.

This period also illustrates the factors which are likely to cause disparate assessments of the extent and nature of political support. The most powerful of these is the effect of region. Such differences are more important even than partisan and ideological

differences because they strike at the root of electoral support. So long as electorates and states are defined in areal rather than functional terms, there are strong pressures for politicians and governments to put the perceived preferences of their geographically defined constituency ahead of all other considerations. This was the source of the majority of intra-party tension during the first half of 1975. Some tension is inevitable since there will always be a government back benchers who feels that general government policy, however attractive to the community as a whole, is prejudicing some politically salient group in his electorate. Similarly, state governments of the same partisan persuasion as the central government will see Canberra pursuing policies that embarrass the state administration. The significance of the period under review was the extent and intensity of such intra-party tensions and the gradual realization by Canberra that its partisan colleagues in the provinces had a more accurate assessment of commonwealth unpopularity than did the central government itself.

These intra-party problems are not confined to parties in government. The national opposition parties were constantly urging their colleagues in government at the state level to reduce cooperation with the commonwealth beyond a point that was politically acceptable to the state governments. This also illustrates differences in partisan assessments of support that spring from the differing perspectives of government and opposition. An issue that may be seen as a sure winner by a party in opposition may be far less attractive to a government. The electoral attraction of doctrinal purity is consistently overrated by parties in opposition, untrammelled by the pragmatic concerns of administration. For the same reason, partisan loyalty between levels of government is likely to wilt once the political costs of party loyalty exceed its electoral benefits. This reached an acute stage when the premier of South Australia ran the last few days of a state election campaign specifically dissociating himself from the electoral unpopularity of his partisan colleagues in Canberra.²⁸

In some respects the driving force of federal state political interaction can be seen as a trade in public hostility. This hostility is ritualized in a form which is perceived as making sense to the particular constituency of each level of government. This means that Canberra, for example, will tend to stress the importance of the national interest and the pettiness of the states, while the states will labour their special idiosyncrasies and the arbitrariness and insensitivity of the central government. These exchanges are intended not only for the consumption of the relevant client group but also for the opposing level of government. A genuine and well founded political hostility is an asset than can command special concessions from rival governments. Thus political advantage can be bought by the promise of the public dissipation of hostility. Conversely, the public reduction of political tension can be bargained for in return for other governmental favours.

This is not to suggest that commonwealth state relations are a series of mock battles. The expression of public hostility to the goals or mode of operation of one government by another is simply a way of summarizing a number of elements each of which has a bearing on differences of priority between the two levels of government. The divergence between policy goals is real and these differences must be signalled both to the electoral clients of a government and to those responsible for the competing policies of the other level of government. It is for these reasons that the prime minister and the premiers resort to the press and the air waves since these are the media through which are transmitted their assessments of their relative political strength. Intergovernmental hostility is not synthetic but a symbolic shorthand for the current state of the market in electoral support as perceived by the participating governments.

A conference in action

Premiers' conferences, like other extended meetings, can be seen to move through several phases. In part this is a reflection of traditional procedure and the nature of the agenda but it is also a result of the progress of the meeting itself and the increasing informality with which the participants are willing to deal with one another as the hours pass. There is, above all, a move to re-interpret the general issues on the agenda in terms of the particular concerns of the individual states.

The nature of the meetings can be shown by looking at one in some detail, that of June 1975 which, from the evidence available, appears to have been typical of such meetings since 1945. The participants assembled in the Cabinet room of Parliament House in Canberra on the morning of Friday 20 June 1975.²⁹ The Prime Minister, Mr Whitlam, began by reading a long statement which was intended both to set the scene for subsequent discussion at the meeting and for broader circulation outside the conference.³⁰ Given this combined audience, the tone of the statement was geared to stress those policies in which the commonwealth had a particular interest and to defuse anticipated state criticism of the commonwealth's attitude to the form and extent of financial assistance grants to the states.

Apart from the concern with cooperative planning between the commonwealth and the states and with the need for regional policy and decentralization of decision making, the Prime Minister's statement repeated arguments which have characterized the commonwealth's attitude to the states for the previous thirty years. Even the mode of presentation of the argument followed time honoured tradition. First, there was a review of the general economic situation, leading to a rejection of the states' case for a revision of the grants formula that would give more money to the states. This was done on the grounds that

grants to the states were not made simply to replace income tax forgone by the states. Increasing commonwealth revenue from income tax did not mean that the states had a claim for more money by virtue of that fact alone. Grants were made on the basis of commonwealth assessment of state needs and, apart from this there were other arguments why the states' case was unsound. It made unwarranted assumptions about the rate of income tax growth, it would tend to shift the burden of paying for state services from the consumers to taxpayers in general and finally it would put much too large a burden on the commonwealth budget which already had problems in accommodating the commonwealth's own demands.

Nonetheless, the commonwealth stated that it wished to avoid the annual wrangle over funds and to this end would be generous in its grants to the states. Then followed the commonwealth offer which in June 1975 amounted to an additional \$200 million for 1975-1976, a modification of the formula for future grants to operate from 1976 and some increase in capital funds. This position was further justified by pointing out that some states were doing themselves financial harm by not accepting the commonwealth's generous offers respecting Medibank and the take-over of state railways, and that there was no reason political or economic why the commonwealth should raise more money for the benefit of the states. Finally, the commonwealth stressed that, in accordance with the policy of every prime minister since the Second World War, the offer was contingent on the states not attempting to raise their own income tax.

On completion of the statement, the conference adjourned for the states to assess the implications of the commonwealth's offer and to frame a reply. The Prime Minister and his advisors left the Cabinet room leaving it as a forum for the premiers and their officials to do their sums and to plan strategy for the rest of the conference.

After lunch the conference reconvened and each state took its turn to express its disappointment at the paltriness of the commonwealth offer and, to a lesser extent, to comment upon the special needs of its economy. By tradition, debate is opened by each state speaking in order of size (viz. New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, and Tasmania) although this ordering is breached if matters of special concern to any premier are raised during the proceedings. This means that the larger states are in a critical position in setting the tone of the states' reply, and New South Wales in particular faces much of the burden of rebutting the commonwealth case.

At the conference under examination, Mr Lewis as Premier of New South Wales rehearsed arguments that would have been very familiar to his predecessors since 1945. Mr Lewis discounted the suggestion that commonwealth grants to the states were independent of the issue of tax reimbursement. The states had a right to adequate funding and it was presumptuous of the commonwealth to assume that it could decide the needs of the states for state responsibilities. Even if this were so

the commonwealth had done a poor job because the states were facing massive deficits. Overall the commonwealth offer was completely inadequate and, unless it were improved, the states would have to take action which would be electorally unpopular not only for the states but the commonwealth as well. The premier then suggested a counter offer which was for an increase in grants of \$300 million and the application of the new formula from 1975 instead of 1976. This would give the states an additional \$420 million for 1975-1976 instead of the \$200 million that the commonwealth proposed.

The other states followed in this theme. Premier Hamer of Victoria expressed his intense disappointment with the commonwealth offer both because it was inadequate and because it precluded the likelihood of a new five year formula that would obviate the need for annual wrangling. As the other premiers spoke, differences appeared between the states in the stress each put on modifying the commonwealth offer and in the issues that concerned each state premier. Some premiers were bitter about the commonwealth offer because of what they saw as commonwealth extravagance in other fields. Queensland, for example, resented commonwealth financial pressure to enter Medibank and to turn over the state railways to the commonwealth. A divergence also appeared between those premiers who thought a one year agreement was all that was possible, and those like Sir Charles Court of Western Australia, who felt strongly that an agreement must be reached for at least the next three years. There were also some premiers who just wanted more money and cared little about how it was expressed in a formula and others who felt that the formula was important. The Labor Party premiers, Dunstan from South Australia and Neilson from Tasmania, expressed disappointment, but without the keen edge of the other premiers. But both had other worries. Dunstan only a few days earlier had called a snap election in his state and did not want any commonwealth economy measures to impede his chance of electoral success, while Mr Neilson appeared acutely concerned about cut-backs in the commonwealth's conditional grant programs in his own state.

After all the states had had their say, Mr Whitlam indicated that he was not predisposed to agree with the state counter offer. He pointed out that from his point of view it was not a matter of having to agree with the states at all. Grants to the states flowed from a federal statute and all he was doing was asking for advice on how the existing law should be amended. Moreover, the statute had no time limit so that if there was no unanimity among the states, the existing law would continue and the old formula for grants would continue to operate. This was a theme that Whitlam returned to several times during the conference. It was an argument that asserted the brute financial muscle of the commonwealth and the indifference that Canberra felt for the essentially parochial concerns of the states. Such an approach met a cool response from the states and appeared to be treated as an expression of the Prime Minister's own rather idiosyncratic view of federal state relations and not an accurate description of conference procedures. Indeed, if Mr Whitlam's assessment were correct

there would have been little point in holding the conference at all.

Before the session ended there was some attempt to get the commonwealth to accept some immediate small improvement to its first offer. During these exchanges there were marked differences in the personal style of argument of each of the premiers and there was little in common among the states except that the commonwealth should improve its offer. Finally, after the general question of finance had been talked out, Western Australia made a special plea for the resolution of a long standing injustice that involved financial transfers to that state. Western Australia, it was asserted, had not been fairly treated when it ceased to become a claimant state. On completion of Western Australia's case,³¹ the conference adjourned for the commonwealth to reconsider its first offer in the light of state complaints.

This stage in the conference marked the end of what might be called the set piece confrontation between the commonwealth on the one hand and the states on the other. The next phase was the most acrimonious one since by the time the conference reconvened, the full extent of commonwealth financial policies towards the states had been presented. The premiers had the opportunity to use any means at their disposal to try to soften the commonwealth's "final" offer and to express their opinions about the commonwealth and the federal system in general.

When the parties reconvened on the Friday evening, the prime minister opened with a statement which stressed that the commonwealth was already unpopular and that it was unreasonable for the states to ask it to become more unpopular on their behalf. Accordingly, Mr Whitlam was willing to make only some small improvements to the original commonwealth offer. In terms of grants to the states the commonwealth increased its offer to \$220 million but was adamant that any change in the formula should not operate until the following year.

This revised offer was met with a range of state responses. The most hostile was that of New South Wales. Mr Lewis assailed the commonwealth for its extravagance and complained that the citizens of his state got back only one dollar in every four that they paid in tax and that New South Wales was subsidizing the rest of Australia and the commonwealth in particular.³² Mr Bjelke Petersen and his Treasurer from Queensland not only complained about commonwealth extravagance but were particularly annoyed about commonwealth interference in state development projects by refusing to grant mineral export licences thus denying the state mining royalty income and employment opportunities. The issues were argued backwards and forwards with the other states trying to dislodge the commonwealth from its position of refusing to amend the formula for 1975, and Mr Whitlam aided by his Treasurer, Mr Hayden, replying to the criticisms but otherwise refusing to move. Mr Whitlam kept returning to the theme that grants were made under commonwealth legislation and he would listen to requests from the states for modifying it, but that his second offer was as far as the

commonwealth would go to oblige the states. When it was clear that no further progress was likely to be made, the conference moved to other issues.³³

Once the conference moved from direct consideration of the financial assistance grants to the states, the meeting entered a third phase. This was one in which administrative and policy matters were discussed. These items had been put on the agenda by the commonwealth and the states, although it seems that a majority of such items usually spring from commonwealth initiatives. In the conference under consideration, the first of these issues was cooperative planning and regionalism, a topic of special interest to the commonwealth Labor government. In dealing with this topic, the tone of the discussion changed noticeably. No longer was it a case of a direct clash of competing claims on the commonwealth's resources but rather a series of requests from the commonwealth that the states consider the reasonableness of a variety of procedures to coordinate state and national policies in such areas as transport and urban development. Some states were more amenable than others but all were willing to send their officials for consultations. General complaints were voiced about areas of difficulty in dealing with commonwealth ministers, some being singled out as specially unwilling to consult with the states. A few sensitive issues were touched upon including minerals policy but the discussion moved smoothly to the conclusion that machinery should be set up to establish guidelines for future consultation, and the conference adjourned for the night.

On the next day, the conference continued with this third phase. The item to be first considered was the reports of four working parties of officials that had been set up a year earlier by the premiers' conference of June 1974. These working parties were to consider joint federal state action to preserve wage indexation and limit wage rises, state legislation to extend the scope of the Prices Justification Tribunal, common procedures for the calling of tenders, and finally, the practicality of state legislation to extend the scope of the commonwealth restrictive trade practices legislation.

The commonwealth Minister for Labour, Senator James McClelland, was invited to address the conference on the importance of wage indexation and ways in which a common federal state approach could be made to limit wage increases. There was wide agreement with his suggestions and all premiers conceded that the control of inflation was a major national problem in which the states should be involved. The other three working party reports, however, generated much less state enthusiasm. The report on tendering procedures was noted and referred to another federal state coordinating committee. On the more politically salient issues of price justification and restrictive trade practices there was a major divergence of views. Only Tasmania was willing to endorse, with the commonwealth, a draft bill for the states to extend the scope of the Prices Justification Tribunal to areas of state jurisdiction. Queensland and New South Wales were against the proposal, Victoria and Western Australia had substantial reservations

and South Australia gave a very qualified approval. The restrictive trade practice proposals which had the warm support of the commonwealth, struck no note of sympathy with the state premiers.

With the completion of discussion on the commonwealth inspired anti-inflation package, Senator McClelland was asked to withdraw and the remaining two items on the agenda were dealt with. The first of these was the question of joint commonwealth state environmental impact statements. Mr Whitlam outlined why the commonwealth had a national responsibility to participate in the protection of the environment both because the electorate now expected it and because the federal government was involved both through its granting of export licences and through its sanctioning of the states' Loan Council projects. All states were unhappy at the way in which the commonwealth was intruding into an area which the states saw as particularly their own, that of the development of state resources. They specially disliked the duplication of enquiries into the environmental impact of projected development schemes.

Premier Neilson of Tasmania did not want any retrospective enquiries of the sort which had resurrected the Lake Pedder controversy in Tasmania, and Queensland resented the commonwealth challenging the findings of state investigative bodies by setting up commonwealth enquiries. Premier Court of Western Australia was specially hostile to the commonwealth policy of providing funds for legal challenges to state development legislation. This was seen as giving too much power to fringe groups in the community and preventing effective government. There was, however, general agreement that increasing consultation through the Australian Environmental Council³⁴ was helping to reduce the fierce commonwealth state antagonism that had existed in the first two years of the Whitlam administration.

The final issue on the agenda was one that had been placed there by Tasmania concerning the issue of gold passes to members of parliament. The majority of premiers seemed embarrassed that this topic should be discussed by the conference at all and after brief discussion it was withdrawn as being not the sort of matter suitable for conference consideration. With the agenda cleared, the meeting concluded.

Questions of style and goals

One of the major determinants of the style of conference activities is the small number of actors involved. There are only seven primary participants and, even though this number may be supplemented with other commonwealth and state ministers at various stages of the conference, the size of the group is always small enough to permit intimate discussion and face to face debate. This smallness

also means that the role of the chairman does not carry with it many of the formal tasks of running a meeting. Debate is fluid and discussion ends only when a matter is talked out.

This informality is reinforced by the absence of any formal procedures for securing decisions. No motions are put and no votes are taken. If a general agreement emerges it is recorded after a statement of the consensus is made by the prime minister and agreed to by the premiers. The official and formal output of the conference takes the form of general press releases of which several may be issued during the life of a conference. These are bald statements of the topics of discussion with a very brief outline of any agreements that resulted. Each head of government has a veto on what is to appear in any general press release and this was used during the June 1975 conference not only to modify the tone of press statements but also to delay any press statement on one issue until there had been discussion of an item lower down the agenda.

The style of conference sessions is very much to discuss matters of concern to the participants rather than to come to clear decisions. Even in the debate over the amount of money to be transferred to the states the goal of the premiers appears to be less that of achieving a major change in the stance of the commonwealth than of forcing the prime minister to justify the position of the commonwealth in response to the objections of the states. On other agenda items, decisions are made but they are usually in the form that a committee of officials will look into a problem or that there will be future consultation between certain commonwealth and state ministers or again, that no agreement has been forthcoming between the commonwealth and some or all of the states. On many occasions debate will swing to topics of only marginal significance to the agenda item under discussion but which are seen by a premier or the prime minister to illustrate the political wrong-headedness of the actions of another government. As such, conferences are an opportunity for free swinging debate over major areas of policy difference between the seven governments in the federation.

The discussion itself is carried on in what Murray Edelman has termed bargaining language.³⁵ The semi-privacy of the conference encourages the participants to speak to each other without many of the rhetorical overtones which characterize the public statements of politicians. Only in the opening statement of the commonwealth, which is intended for broader circulation than the conference participants, can the hortatory language of public politics be found. There is a marked difference between the style of debate in the conference and the tone of the statements that the individual premiers make to the press after each session. Inside the conference, the style is polite but direct. Differences of opinion are stated forcefully and on occasion tempers appear to have been lost but there is a recognition that most issues have two sides and involve topics on which reasonable men may differ. Premiers are much more likely to lament the unreasonableness of the commonwealth's position than to indulge in direct criticism of the political motives of other governments.

Outside the conference this restraint is abandoned, particularly when statements are being given to journalists representing the press from a premier's own state or when the prime minister is attempting to dismiss state objections to commonwealth financial arrangements. This distinction between the mode of discussion that is acceptable within the conference and public comments outside the conference appears to be a recognized part of the rules of the game. Participants refer on occasion to taking a matter "outside", indicating that a difference of opinion is not to be resolved and that public reference to the difference of opinion will be made to the press. For some participants this change of style is less marked than for others. In 1975, for example, the circumspect tone of Premier Hamer inside the conference differed very little from that of his comments to the press. At the other extreme, Premier Bjelke-Petersen's comments at the conference did not display any of the hyperbole that often characterized his public statements.

Apart from matters of style, the second broad characteristic of the conferences is the divergence of strategies between the states and the commonwealth and the variation in tactics and apparent goals between the separate states. The differences between commonwealth and state conference strategies can be explained in large part by the differing perspective that these two levels of government have of their respective roles. The commonwealth sees itself as having certain national responsibilities which override the regional concerns of the states. The states are seen as important, but nonetheless subordinate entities in the Australian political system. When the issue is the allocation of resources, it is the commonwealth which should have the final say both because of the general nature of its responsibilities and because of its superior economic expertise. This view implies that premiers' conferences are essentially opportunities for the states to give advice to the commonwealth. There is an additional but secondary function of providing a forum for the resolution of administrative difficulties and of setting up machinery to implement more effective national planning.

State perceptions are markedly different. To the states, the commonwealth is a government charged with performing certain specified national tasks that supplement the real business of government most of which is carried out at state level. The states have a legal and moral right to adequate resources to discharge their constitutional responsibilities in such areas as health, welfare, education and transport. As a result, premiers' conferences are seen as a forum to debate the criteria under which adequate funds are to be transferred to the states. In turn, the commonwealth view of the financial aspects of the conference is one which stresses the arbitral role of the commonwealth in harmonizing the needs of the states with the commonwealth's own priorities, while the states see the conference as an opportunity to bargain with the commonwealth over a just allocation of funds.

These differing perspectives imply differing strategic goals. The commonwealth aims to prepare a watertight opening case and to refuse to yield to any subsequent state demands for modifications. To do so would be to concede that the conference was a bargaining forum rather than an arbitral one. For tactical reasons the commonwealth builds into its plans a certain flexibility to enable some response to be made to well argued pleas from the states, but the goal of the commonwealth is to keep to the high ground of the national interest and superior expertise against the special pleadings of the states.

The states have goals that are less clear cut. More money from the commonwealth is an aim which all states would share but there are other goals which moderate the importance of money as an overriding objective. One of these is the establishment by each premier of an image of the successful protector of state interests in the eyes of the premier's home state. Another is the partisan advantage to be gained by transferring to the commonwealth the odium of increases in state charges and taxation. These mixed objectives, when coupled with the disparity between the levels of bureaucratic expertise available to the states make it very difficult to speak of an overall state strategy. The states may all agree to support a unified approach to the commonwealth but, once inside the conference, differences in state objectives become increasingly marked as the debate progresses.

This lack of state coherence is accentuated by partisan differences between state governments and by differences in the personal style of the premiers. Partisanship tends to break the conference into three factions: the commonwealth, states of the same party colour as the commonwealth, and states of the opposing colour. The second group is the one with the clearest interest in minimizing hostility between the commonwealth and the states, since disputes between national and state wings of a party create tensions in the party machine and provide ammunition for the opposition at both levels of government. This interest together with the more intimate access to commonwealth ministers that partisan similarity provides, means that these states are likely to provide a moderating influence at conferences and to be the source of compromise solutions. These states are, in other words, in the position of having loyalties to both of the other factions and can use this position to provide a brokerage function. The premiers' conferences of June 1969 and February 1970 at which all participating governments were of the same non-Labor persuasion illustrate the vigour of the conflict that may develop if regional and personal differences flourish unchecked by pressures for partisan loyalty.

The skills, background and personality of the political actors at a premiers' conference are elements whose significance is difficult to assess. It is clear, however, that they may divide the conference along lines which bear little relevance to partisanship. The clear antipathy between Prime Minister Gorton and Premier Bolte of Victoria, both Liberals, had much to do with the poor relations between Canberra

and the states during the period from 1968 to 1971. The personal differences may further confuse attempts to devise a single conference strategy for the states.

This stress on the potential for divergence between state goals and strategies should not obscure a fundamental common interest shared by all states, that of having premiers' conferences at least once a year. The conferences provide a forum for increasing the public visibility and stature of premiers and forcing recognition of the states as important entities in the governmental process. Only at such conferences can the premiers be guaranteed national press coverage and the attentive concern of journalists from their home states. To the extent that the states put on a good public performance, this can only detract from the claims of the commonwealth to be the sole arbiter of the national interest. The commonwealth has little to gain from the publicity surrounding premiers' conferences and much to lose. It must concede publicly that the states are in some measure its equals in political authority, and it must put up with trenchant criticism of some of its policies by powerful political figures speaking from Canberra to a national audience. Even bad financial news for the states can be turned to their political advantage by using television interviews to dwell on the inevitable nasty consequences of commonwealth actions with the hope that the commonwealth will be more politically embarrassed than the states.

From the premiers' viewpoint the press is a vital part of the political context of the conferences. During breaks in the proceedings the premiers regularly appear on the steps of Parliament House to brief newsmen and for each premier to give his version of the conference discussion. Some premiers appear to be sufficiently interested in ensuring favourable local coverage of their conference activities to invite sympathetically inclined journalists from the local press gallery to travel with them to Canberra. A premier may also provide confidential material to a chosen reporter in return for good coverage of the premier's exploits. This means that even the shortest one day premiers' conference will produce at least three opportunities - before the conference, at lunchtime and after the conference - for the premiers to gain major coverage of their policies at the expense of the usual media dominance of the commonwealth as a news generating government.

In such circumstances it is understandable that commonwealth governments view the conferences with a certain sourness. Early in Mr Whitlam's term of office his resentment of the opportunity that premiers' conferences had given to the states for well publicized criticism of Canberra led him to suggest that he would not hold another conference. This may have been an attitude that would have appealed to many commonwealth prime ministers - no one likes well directed criticism - but the exigencies of intergovernmental relations required that the conferences continued.

CONCLUSIONS

The descriptive analysis which has been the bulk of this study has stressed that the workings of the premiers' conference cannot be understood without reference to the matrix of bureaucratic and political relationships in which it operates. Once these relationships are examined the participating governments cease to be neat entities personified by their chief ministers and become teams of bureaucratic and political elements. This is particularly the case with the commonwealth which, as a government, has to accommodate a wide range of governmental interests each eager to influence commonwealth policy towards the states. Framing commonwealth policy for a premiers' conference becomes a balancing act between a number of competing budgetary and political demands. Many departments want more funds for state related projects and try to use their involvement with the states as a lever to strengthen their case against rival departments. The Treasury, as well as wishing to influence particular government priorities, is anxious to regulate commonwealth transfers to the states in the light of the government's overall budget strategy. Against these bureaucratic factors the government must balance its general policy aims, election promises and particular projects espoused by politically powerful elements in cabinet and caucus. It must also try to anticipate any criticisms of its policies towards the states by the states themselves, by its back bench MPs in marginal electorates and by the party machine.

The strength of these competing elements will vary over the life of a government. In 1973, for example, a minister or a premier had only to point to a commitment in the Labor party's election platform of 1972 for the Whitlam government to be sympathetically disposed towards granting funds. At the premiers' conference after the double dissolution election of 1974 however, the commonwealth came down heavily against state interests and in favour of a hard Treasury line. Finally, as the chance of an election increased in 1975, the balance of influence within the commonwealth government began to favour the political demands for short term electorally acceptable policies.

The outcome of all this manoeuvring within the commonwealth is the final briefs prepared for the prime minister by the Treasury and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. This means that by the opening day of the premiers' conference the prime minister's position is fixed within a small and largely predetermined area of negotiation. He cannot alter the commonwealth's position substantially without upsetting the balance negotiated in cabinet, and incurring the consequent political and administrative costs. This same lack of commonwealth flexibility in dealing with the states at premiers' conferences can be seen in the way in which commonwealth funds are committed to state programs. There is an overwhelming pressure from both state and commonwealth bureaucracies for existing programs to be continued with slightly more funds than the year before. This ratchet

effect leaves the commonwealth with large commitments to state Treasuries and little room for financial manoeuvre. The Whitlam government tried to change this but only by massive increases in the total transfers to the states in areas of perceived electoral concern to the commonwealth. Such a tactic proved to have limited returns if for no other reason than that the new programs raised the commonwealth's commitment to a new and higher plateau in the following year. As the Fraser government found in 1976, the alternative strategy of attaining flexibility through reducing commitments and cancelling programs is a difficult and politically costly path to tread.

Given these constraints on commonwealth flexibility, the national government has responded by making a virtue of necessity and arguing that premiers' conferences are forums in which it receives advice from the states rather than negotiating sessions at which compromise solutions are worked out. The individual states, on the other hand, have much more political room to move. In comparison with the commonwealth, the premiers have a greater dominance in policy formation within their governments than does the prime minister. This is particularly the case in budgetary matters where most premiers are not required to be as involved in prebudget consultations with their ministerial colleagues as was Mr Whitlam. The fact that there is less stress on the use of bureaucratic resources and the development of policy making procedures at the state level enables the premiers to pursue a more fluid and less structured approach to premiers' conferences. Their style is less the set piece bureaucratic clash of expertise than the guerrilla attack on the political underpinning of commonwealth policies.

It is the states' ability to deploy political resources that offsets whatever bureaucratic and financial advantage the commonwealth has at premiers' conferences. These political resources fall into four broad categories. The first stems from the fact that the states are the vehicles for much of commonwealth policy, particularly in the areas of health, education and transport, and that their cooperation is needed for the commonwealth to achieve many of its policy goals in these areas. The second is the ability of the premiers to use their close involvement with the state bases of Australia's highly federalized party system to cast themselves in the role of party spokesmen. This not only applies to partisan rivals but is also the case where the prime minister and a premier are of the same political persuasion since the premier can chastise the prime minister for not following the grass roots wishes of the party which he, the premier, represents. The third resource is the ability of a premier to speak on behalf of regional interests or groups of electorates united by a common interest within his state. This is a telling weapon because it enables a premier to remind the prime minister and commonwealth cabinet ministers, not to mention government back benchers in marginal seats, of their sensitivity to state criticism of the commonwealth's handling of federal state relations. They are acutely aware that a bad deal to their home state from the commonwealth is not something from which commonwealth ministers and back benchers can easily dissociate

themselves. Finally there is the tactical advantage of a premier in being more able to commit his government to policies without having to obtain the endorsement of his cabinet. The Whitlam government had the added problem of a hostile Senate which meant that any program involving legislative action was contingent on Senate support. In matters affecting federal state relations to which the states had agreed, this support was very likely to be forthcoming but it meant that there was yet another political uncertainty to which the commonwealth government must respond. The states were less hampered by these considerations although, as Mr Dunstan found in 1975, state upper houses may occasionally intrude into an otherwise premier dominated state governmental process.

Given this context of varying state and commonwealth goals and resources it is clear that premiers' conferences are not a forum for bargaining let alone an institution having a major coordinative and policy making function. In particular, to criticise them for not having the latter role, as some have done, is to misunderstand the nature of the conferences. Their prime functions are essentially political and educational in the sense that they alert the participating governments to the implications of their own policies and those of other governments. The premiers' conference provides machinery by which politicians are kept on their toes through confrontation with people holding genuinely different points of view. In this respect conferences are like meetings of cabinet at which both the performance of a political actor and the quality of his advice are on trial. Discussions at conferences provide an opportunity for a breath of reality to blow through the political discussions of commonwealth and state politicians. In this respect, conferences are a powerful instrument for shaking prime ministers and premiers from the political and administrative solipsism into which it is apparently so easy to fall.

From this perspective premiers' conferences can be seen as performing a variety of information functions. They provide an opportunity for state politicians to increase the salience of state problems and to redirect the gaze of the commonwealth and the press towards the political concerns of the six state governmental units. They present a forum for the canvassing of differing perspectives on national problems and competing versions of what policies are in the national interest. They provide a powerful source of feedback to the commonwealth on the success of many of their programs, feedback that has not been filtered by the commonwealth bureaucracy or interested ministers. The conferences provide an opportunity for the major political actors in the system to assess each other's performance and to assess the quality and quantity of bureaucratic expertise available to each unit of government. They perform these functions, moreover, quite apart from the role that the premiers' conference plays in the domestic politics of the commonwealth and each of the six states.

In sum, the premiers' conference is a major forum for a trade in information about the style and goals of the participant governments, about their political and administrative resources and about the

personality of their chief officers. This flow of information is moderated by patterns of partisanship and the structural characteristics of the federal system. The large state small state dichotomy, the diversity of administrative resources between the states, the commonwealth's superior access to funds, and the states' superior access to jurisdiction in such fields as health, education, housing, transport and regional planning all provide a substructure on which the transactions at premiers' conferences are based. In this respect the conferences can never be exercises in cooperative planning as some commentators have suggested as a desirable goal, because they are the manifestations of the differing political priorities that exist in the various units of the governmental system. They may lead to some immediate policy modifications by one government or another, but this is incidental. The conferences are principally homeostatic devices to preserve a rough political equilibrium in intergovernmental relations by sensitizing governments to each other's problems and by preventing divergent policy goals from becoming major confrontations between rival governmental constituencies. The conferences deserve the extended coverage they receive in the press not because they discharge a neat monistic function but because they are multifaceted political events that reflect briefly at the national level the richness and diversity of political life that characterizes the political process in Australia.

Footnotes

- 1 The term premiers' conference is really a misnomer since the essence of recent conferences is that the prime minister also be present. There is also the problem of deciding whether a premiers' conference is a generic name for a meeting of certain politicians or is defined by the nature and mode of the discussions that take place. On the evolution of the term premiers' conference, see K.J.N. Bernie, "The Premiers' Conferences: An Historical Sketch from the Beginnings to 1930", *Public Administration*, Sydney, vol. 6, 1946-47, pp.410-417: see also Appendix A, below.
- 2 Examinations of the premiers' conference as an institution in the federal process are few in number and have had only an indirect concern with the topic. The four most useful recent references are: D.A. Dixon, "The Premiers' Conference, February 1970: A View of Federal-State Financial Relations in Australia", *Australian Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 2, June 1970, pp.42-60; R.H. Leach, *Interstate Relations in Australia*, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1965, particularly pp.40-48; R.L. Mathews and W.R.C. Jay, *Federal Finance: Intergovernmental Financial Relations in Australia since Federation*, Melbourne: Nelson, 1972, references throughout; and R.N. Spann et al., *Public Administration in Australia*, 2nd edn., Ultimo, N.S.W.: N.S.W. Government Printer, 1973, pp.176, 177. Passing references can also be found in such works as: L.F. Crisp, *Australian National Government*, 3rd edn., Hawthorn, Vic.: Longman, 1973; J.A. Maxwell, *Commonwealth-State Financial Relations in Australia*, Melbourne: Melbourne U.P., 1967; K.J. May, *Financing the Small States in Australian Federalism*, Melbourne: Oxford U.P., 1971; and G. Sawyer "The Commonwealth and the States", *Current Affairs Bulletin*, vol. 47, no. 4, January 1971. Of earlier studies note Bernie, "The Premiers' Conferences"; Commonwealth of Australia, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Constitution*, Canberra: H.J. Green, Government Printer, [1928], pp.181, 182; and G. Greenwood, *The Future of Australian Federalism: A Commentary on the Working of the Constitution*, Melbourne: Melbourne U.P., 1946. See also Appendices A and B, below.
- 3 For the broader context of these themes, see G.C. Sharman, "Federalism and the Study of the Australian Political System", *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 21, 1975, pp.11-24.
- 4 Even in foreign relations there is some overlap: see G.C. Sharman, "The Australian States and External Affairs: An Exploratory Note", *Australian Outlook*, vol. 27, 1973, pp.307-318.

- 5 Section 96 reads "...the Parliament may grant financial assistance to any State on such terms and conditions as the Parliament thinks fit." On the implications of this section see R.D. Lumb and K.W. Ryan, *The Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia Annotated*, Sydney: Butterworths, 1974.
- 6 C.P.D., H. of R., Tuesday 27 February, 1973, pp.11-18.
- 7 See, for example, Hospital and Health Services Commission, *Hospitals in Australia*, Commonwealth Parliamentary Paper No. 218 of 1974. For a general analysis of this process, see C.J. Lloyd and G.S. Reid, *Out of the Wilderness: The Return of Labor*, Melbourne: Cassell, 1974, pp.283-290.
- 8 In 1975 there were nine Divisions within Treasury, state finances falling under the Revenue Loans and Investment Division: see *Australian Government Directory 1975*, Canberra: A.G.P.S., 1975, pp.353-355.
- 9 The standard work on this topic is R.S. Gilbert, *The Australian Loan Council in Federal Fiscal Adjustments 1890-1965*, Canberra: Australian National U.P., 1973.
- 10 See Mathews and Jay, *Federal Finance*, *op. cit.*
- 11 See Lloyd and Reid, *Out of the Wilderness*, *op. cit.*, pp.148-152.
- 12 Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Australian-State Government Cooperative Arrangements*, May, 1975.
- 13 See, for example, Information and State Relations Division, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Australian Government Financial Assistance to South Australia*, June, 1975.
- 14 The New South Wales Division of Federal Affairs appeared to have an ambiguous organizational status, "The Division will provide administrative support for the Premier and for a Minister for Federal Affairs...", *Machinery of Government Unit, N.S.W. Public Service Board, Machinery of Government Changes in New South Wales: A Progress Report*, Sydney, 1975, p. 21. While attached to the Premiers' Department, the Division also had unspecified responsibilities to the Minister for Federal Affairs.
- 15 See Prime Minister's press statement no. 436, 28 January, 1975, "New Cabinet Committee".
- 16 Prime Minister's press statement no. 442, 5 February, 1975, "New Ministerial Committee".

- 17 On this state attitude, see K. Wiltshire, "Setting State Priorities: the Role of the States in Public Policy" in R.L. Mathews (ed.) *Making Federalism Work: Towards a More Efficient Equitable and Responsive Federal System*, Canberra: Australian National U.P., 1976.
- 18 See R. Simeon, *Federalism Provincial Diplomacy: The Making of Recent Policy in Canberra*, Toronto: U. of Toronto Press, 1972, particularly Ch. 3.
- 19 For example, R.C. Gates "The Search for a State Growth Tax", in R.L. Mathews (ed.), *Intergovernmental Relations in Australia*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1974, Ch. 8.
- 20 The division of the Premier's and Treasurer's portfolios in Queensland dates from 1937: see A.A. Morison "The Government of Queensland" in S.R. Davis (ed.), *The Government of the Australian States*, Sydney: Longmans, 1960. Since 1957 the National Party-Liberal Party coalition has provided political as well as administrative pressures to keep the portfolios in separate hands. Note that Premier Wran of New South Wales gave up the Treasury portfolio after his victory in 1976.
- 21 A rather overdramatized account of the Division's functions can be found in the *National Times*, April 14-19, 1975, 1, 6.
- 22 See, for example, the *Progress Report* of the N.S.W. Machinery of Government Unit, cited above; Committee of Inquiry into the Public Service of South Australia, *Report*, 1975; and Board of Inquiry into the Victorian Public Service, *First Report*, *Second Report*, *Third Report* and *Final Report*, Victoria, Parliamentary Papers, nos 9 and 34 of 1974, no. 47 of 1974-75 and no. 22 of 1976.
- 23 On this issue, see P. Self, *Administrative Theories and Politics: An Inquiry into the Structure and Processes of Government*, London: George Allan & Unwin, 1972: note also R.S. Parker, "Policy and Administration", *Public Administration*, Sydney, vol. 19, 1960, pp.113-120.
- 24 Note the unsympathetic tone of the prime minister's press statement after the conference on 13 August 1974, press statement no. 298.
- 25 See the prime minister's press statement no. 453, 14 February 1975.
- 26 These policies in their final form were issued by the Liberal and National Country Parties, *Federalism Policy*, Canberra: Liberal Party Federal Secretariat, September 1975.
- 27 A checklist of some of the many programs can be found in, Department of Urban and Regional Affairs, *Australian Government Assistance to Local Government Projects: A Guide to sources of Funds and How to Apply for Them*, Canberra: A.G.P.S., 1974.

- 28 See "Political Chronicle - South Australia", *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 22, 1976, pp.98-107.
- 29 An old hand at the conferences mentioned that the conferences usually begin at 10.30 a.m. at which time the prime minister takes the premiers aside for an informal talk over drinks while there is a similarly informal meeting of commonwealth and state officials over coffee and sandwiches. At around 11.15 the politicians file into the House of Representatives chamber if there is to be any formal speechmaking for the benefit of the press who fill the rest of the chamber. Once a point is reached where the conference meets in camera, the premiers and the prime minister adjourn to the cabinet room with not more than two advisors each. In June 1975 the whole conference was held in camera: see Appendices A and B below.
- 30 Australian Government, *Weekly Digest*, 1:12, 16-22 June, 1975, pp.405-413.
- 31 Western Australia was successful in persuading the commonwealth to modify the base amount on which its financial assistance grant was to be calculated.
- 32 This is an argument that is unlikely to be popular with the smaller states and shows a certain lack of tact on Mr Lewis' part. Ontario, in a similar position to that of New South Wales, has handled the problem more subtly: see Simeon, *Federal-Provincial Diplomacy*, op. cit., p. 66.
- 33 The final offer can be found in Australian Government, *Weekly Digest*, 1:12, 16-22 June, 1975, pp.414, 415.
- 34 This body is composed of the commonwealth and state ministers with responsibilities for environmental matters.
- 35 Murray Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964, Ch. 7.

APPENDIX A

A Note on the Reporting of Premiers' Conferences

A first glance at the list of premiers' conference reports in Appendix B would indicate that conference reporting has changed over time in ways which appear haphazard. Nonetheless, it is possible to see some general patterns in the style of reporting over the last seventy five years and to categorize the reports into four or perhaps five historical periods.

From federation to the First World War, premiers' conferences were major political events dealing with a very wide range of problems. Some of these issues arose from the transfer of powers from the states to the emergent commonwealth¹ while others resulted from a need to coordinate interstate and commonwealth state policies in such areas as health and transport. The difficulties of interstate travel and the relative infrequency of intergovernmental meetings made conferences important for the opportunities they offered for broad ranging discussions between politicians and key officials.² These factors are reflected in the reports of the conferences. The reports were generally long, detailed and well indexed and cover the agenda, proceedings and much of the debates of the conferences. With one exception, it appears that all were published as parliamentary papers in a form to encourage subsequent study by any interested citizen.

In the period that followed the First World War until 1929 there appears to be a gradual decline in the volume of debates reported but the conference proceedings were still regarded as important public events meriting reports and subsequent publication as parliamentary papers.

After 1929 there were major changes in the nature of the conferences and the style of reporting. The overwhelming problems of depression, war and post war reconstruction provided governments with an excuse for being more secretive about their communications. The conferences themselves changed their character and became less the general discussions that they had been in the early years. Most conferences were geared to deal with a few topics and a limited range of issues. With the advent of air transport, meetings became shorter and Canberra emerged as the place where all premiers' conferences were held. This geographical dominance of Canberra reflected the growing importance of the national government and, after 1942, the enhanced financial influence that it could exert over the states. All these developments together with the increasing complexity of governmental activities were compatible with scanty public reporting of premiers' conferences. Reports would include a summary of decisions, perhaps some opening statements, rarely much of the debates and the odd

appendix. Most were not made available as parliamentary papers.

The fourth period can be said to begin in about 1948 with the establishment of the current format of conferences and their reporting. Conferences are held in Canberra lasting for only one or two days. Financial considerations are the most important if not the dominant item for discussion and there has been what can be seen as a shift from the meetings being conferences to their being meetings of heads of governments. This is to imply that there is little of the formality which has characterized premiers' conferences in the past and that the proceedings are fluid exchanges of opinion rather than set piece meetings. Until 1974, the reports of these premiers' conferences reflected this informality. Opening statements have sometimes been given coupled with enough of the opening or closing debate to give the flavour of the meetings. Most of the proceedings have, however, been held in camera with no report of any of the proceedings being publicly available at all.

1975 may be the opening of a fifth category of conference reporting in which most conferences are held in camera and no official reports of the proceedings are to be made available. Of the five conferences held between August 1974 and April 1976, four were held in camera. A part of the fifth, held in February 1976 is said to be in the process of printing but, at the date of writing (November 1976), is not yet available.

As mentioned in Appendix B, the form in which reports appear has undergone a gradual shift from comprehensive parliamentary paper reporting to the recent practice of printing parts of the proceedings as semi-official governmental documents and sending them to a restricted list of institutions, groups and individuals, apparently at the discretion of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. There was a major exception to this trend between 1948 and 1968 when the government of New South Wales published many of the reports as New South Wales parliamentary papers. The reasons for this twenty year practice are obscure. New South Wales has been the most conscientious of all state governments in publishing its documents as parliamentary papers, but, even so it is hard to discern any consistent policy in the pattern of conference reporting.

Since 1968 it seems that it has only been by the grace and favour of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet that any printed reports have been released at all. Nonetheless, access to full transcripts of conferences have recently appeared to be not too difficult for the persevering newspaper reporter to acquire³, and during exchanges in Senate question time it seems to have been assumed that the full transcript was available to opposition senators.⁴ This makes the non-publication of reports of premiers' conferences hard to understand. There are three possible explanations. The first is that the reports contain budget information that is too sensitive to release. This is an argument against immediate publication but not against publication at a date after the presentation of all state budgets in any given year.

A second argument relies on the assumption that governments publish no more information than they are compelled to and that there is no politically advantageous reason for publishing premiers' conference reports. A third reason, and perhaps the least unsatisfactory of the three, is that documents get published only when they have a sponsor within the bureaucracy. When a report can show the worth and importance of a department's activities, it is published as part of the continuous process of bureaucratic competition that occurs within any governmental structure. Premiers' conference reports do not show any department off to advantage and thus remain unpublished. Whatever the explanation, the present state of conference reporting or lack of reporting is manifestly unsatisfactory. Present policy appears to be confused and inconsistent: perhaps it would be more accurate to say that there is no policy at all.

There remains to add one caveat to the observations made above. It is possible to argue that premiers' conferences have evolved to the point where they are entirely informal discussions between heads of governments. At least one senior state official would contend that this is the case and that it is now impossible to distinguish between informal discussions over coffee and the supposedly formal discussions of the conference. As a result the transcript itself is only a partial record of limited value. According to this view, all pretence at formal reporting should be dropped. This may indeed prove to be the direction in which premiers' conference reporting is headed.

Footnotes to Appendix A

- 1 On this process see R. Norris *The Emergent Commonwealth, Australian Federation: Expectations and Fulfilment 1889-1910*, Melbourne: Melbourne U.P., 1975.
- 2 See the sample list of topics by Garran in *Royal Commission on the Constitution of the Commonwealth, Report of Proceedings and Minutes of Evidence*, Canberra: H.J. Green, Commonwealth Government Printer [1928], p. 43. See also K.J.N. Bernie "The Premiers' Conferences: An Historical Sketch from the Beginnings to 1930", *Public Administration*, Sydney, vol. 6, 1946-47, pp.410-417.
- 3 See, for example, A. Clark "What went on at the Premiers' Conference", *National Times*, 23-28 February, 1976, pp.4, 5, 26.
- 4 See, for example, a reply to question from Senator Walsh by Senator Carrick who said: "...I invite him [Senator Walsh] to direct his attention to and to read the transcripts of the 3 Premiers conferences,...", *C.P.D.*, Senate, Thursday, 4 November, 1976, p. 1603.

APPENDIX B

A Checklist of Publicly Available Records of Proceedings of Premiers' Conferences, 1899-1974.

It must be stressed that the checklist provided below is intended as a guide and is not a definitive list either of premiers' conferences since 1901 or of published records of such conferences. The intention has been to provide an indication of the extent and nature of readily accessible records of premiers' conferences that are available as parliamentary papers or as other government publications copies of which were found in selected libraries in south eastern Australia. The list has been compiled in the following way and with the limitations noted.

1. Parliamentary Papers

The most important function of the list is to provide references to reports of premiers' conferences published in parliamentary papers as the most widely accessible form of government publication. The titles of relevant parliamentary papers have been given as they appear on the face of each paper together with a reference to the series of parliamentary papers in which each appears (Commonwealth and/or N.S.W. and/or Victoria).

Parliamentary papers provide the only source of reports from 1901 to May 1929. After 1929 there is a slackening of parliamentary paper reports which cease entirely in 1938 for the duration of the war and the immediate post-war years. Parliamentary paper reports do not resume until 1948 when the New South Wales parliamentary papers provide a fairly consistent stream of reports up to 1965, the last being June 1968. The commonwealth has not published conference reports as parliamentary papers since 1939.

The reference to parliamentary papers is given in the order: government or origin; paper number (where provided - N.S.W. did not number its parliamentary papers until 1950); year or years of session; bound volume number; commencing page number.

2. Other Sources

The non-parliamentary paper conference reports are, in effect, government documents of restricted circulation which have been acquired by some libraries and bound in sets or kept in loose form. The documents are similar in format to parliamentary papers. The list below indicates which libraries of those visited in south eastern Australia have which reports.

References to "other sources" are provided in the list only when the records of conferences are not available as parliamentary papers. This does not mean that there are no "other sources" for conference reports published as parliamentary papers, but that parliamentary papers were taken as the best and simplest reference. It should be noted, however, that several libraries have sets of conference reports printed by the commonwealth as well as the same reports published as state parliamentary papers. Since 1948 there is a commonwealth printed version of every New South Wales parliamentary paper report of conferences, occasionally with a different format or a different title.

"Other source" reports fall into two categories:

(a) 1929-1951

These reports cover a wide range of conferences dealing with the exigencies of depression, war and post-war reconstruction. Although most are printed by the commonwealth printer their format and contents vary considerably. They have been listed under the generic title of "Conference of Commonwealth and State Ministers" together with an indication of the topic of discussion if this is indicated on the face of the document.

(b) 1962-1974

From 1962 "other source" references have a stable format. All are printed by the commonwealth printer and all are listed by the title that appears on the face of each report together with the page length. Since 1968 such reports have been the only public source of premiers' conference proceedings.

3. Explanation of Symbols and Abbreviations

- | | |
|------------|--|
| Conference | Italic type is used to indicate that the title of the conference report is the one used on the title page of the report as a parliamentary paper. |
| Conference | Roman type indicates that the title of the conference report is a generic title and will not necessarily correspond with the precise title on the face of the document. See 2 above. |
| * | Indicates that the report is printed by the commonwealth printer between 1962 and 1974 but not as a parliamentary paper. See 2(b) above. |
| [] | Square brackets indicate that the words within them are intended as comments or points of further information and are not part of the reference. |

- () Round brackets are used only when they appear in the title of the document.
- C/W Commonwealth
- Garran Sir Robert Garran, then Solicitor General for the Commonwealth, produced a list of premiers' conferences for the Royal Commission on the constitution of the commonwealth in 1927. His list appears to omit one conference but provides additional reference material in the form of printer's numbers. See *Royal Commission on the Commonwealth, Report of Proceedings and Minutes of Evidence*, Canberra, H.J. Green, Commonwealth Government Printer, [1928], at page 42.
- H of R Misc This is an abbreviation for House of Representatives Miscellaneous Papers Volumes, held in the Parliamentary Library, Canberra. The Parliamentary Library has informed users that it was the practice of the Clerk of Papers of the House of Representatives concurrently with the issue of the *General Index to Papers*, to bind such miscellaneous papers (papers not presented to Parliament, or having relation to presented papers) as had been acquired by the Papers Room. The last volumes so bound were the papers for the period 1922-28.
- LT Held in the Library of La Trobe University, Melbourne.
- NL Held in the National Library, Canberra.
- PNSW Held in the Library of the Parliament of New South Wales, Sydney.
- PV Held in the Library of the Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne.
- SU Held in the Library of the University of Sydney, Sydney.
- UNSW Held in the Library of the University of New South Wales, Sydney.
- UT Held in the Library of the University of Tasmania, Hobart.
- Vol Bound Volume of parliamentary papers. See 1 above.

A CHECKLIST OF PUBLICLY AVAILABLE RECORDS
OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF PREMIERS' CONFERENCES 1899-1974

A CHECKLIST OF PUBLICLY AVAILABLE RECORDS
OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF PREMIERS' CONFERENCES 1899-1974

Date	Place	Title	Commonwealth Parliamentary Paper Reference	State Parliamentary Paper Reference	Other Sources
1899, 3 Feb.	Melbourne	<i>Federation - Conference (1899) of Premiers, Re [Memorandum of Resolutions].</i>	18, 1907/08 Vol. I		
1901, 1, 2 & 4 Nov.	Melbourne	Report of C/W & State Conference, Report of Proceedings, pp. 1-48, (Index & Appendices).			NL [Garraan]
1903, 15-22 April	Sydney	<i>Conference of State Premiers Resolutions Agreed to at, pp. 1-9.</i>	8, 1903 Vol. II, 1127		[Garraan]
1904, 5-12 Feb.	Melbourne	<i>Treasurers' Conference, States' Debts, Transferred Properties, Immigration, Etc., pp. 1-160 [Proceedings, Appendices].</i>	4, 1904 Vol. II, 1647		[Garraan]
1905, 6-7 Feb.	Hobart	<i>Report of Proceedings of the Conference Between C/W and State Ministers, pp. 1-viii, 1-231 [Appendices, Index].</i>	[H of R Misc]	NSW, 1905 Joint Vol. I, 1	[Garraan]
1906, 5-12 April	Sydney	<i>Conference of C/W and State Premiers and Ministers Report of Debates together with Agenda Papers, Minutes of Proceedings, and Appendices, pp. i-xi, 1-222 [Index].</i>	34, 1906 Vol. II, 1243	NSW, 1906 Joint Vol. I, 373. Vic. 23, 1906 Vol. II, 649	[Garraan]

1906, 8-16 Oct.	Melbourne	<i>Report of the Resolutions, Proceedings & Debates of the Inter-State Conference. (Appendices)</i> pp. 1-198.	2, 1907/08 Vol.III, 5	Vic, 48, 1906 Vol.II, 1213	[Garraan]
1907, 27 May - 3 June	Brisbane	<i>Premiers' Conference, Report of the Resolutions, Proceedings and Debates together with Appendices</i> pp. 1-359 [Index].	13, 1907/08 Vol.III, 407		[Garraan]
1908, 28 April - 11 May	Melbourne	<i>Interstate Conference of Premiers, Report of the Resolutions, Proceedings and Debates, together with Appendices, pp. 1-324.</i>	23, 1908 Vol.II, 1		[Garraan]
1909, 5-12 March	Hobart	<i>Report of Proceedings of the Conference between C/W and State Ministers, together with Appendix, pp. 1-41.</i>	48, 1909 Vol.II, 1	NSW, 1909 Joint Vol.I, 441	[Garraan]
1909, 13-21 August	Melbourne	(a) <i>Premiers' Conference, Correspondence between the Prime Minister and the Premier of NSW, 22 June - 26 July 1909, pp. 1-4.</i> (b) <i>Interstate Conference, Agreement on C/W and State Finance, pp. 1-11 [Tables].</i> (c) <i>Report of the Agreement, Resolutions, Proceedings and Debates of the Interstate Conference, together with Appendix, pp.1-xviii, 1-25.</i>	26, 1909 Vol.II, 49 44, 1909 Vol.II, 53 50, 1909 Vol.II, 65		[Garraan] [Garraan] [Garraan]
[1910]		<i>Premiers' Conference, Correspondence re proposed Conference, pp. 1-2.</i> [Two letters - the Conference did not take place]	5, 1910 Vol.III, 1		

- | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------|---|-------------------------|--|-----------|
| 1912,
17-23
January | Melbourne | <i>Report of the Resolutions, Proceedings and Debates
of the Interstate Conference together with
Appendices, pp. 1-189 [Index]</i> | [H of R Misc] | Vic, 4, 1912
Vol.II, 1713 | [Garraan] |
| 1914,
31 March -
8 April | Melbourne | <i>Interstate Conference, together with Appendices,
pp. i-xxxii, 1-284 [Index]</i> | 10, 1914
Vol.II, 261 | NSW, 1914/15
Joint Vol.I,
197
Vic, 5, 1914
Vol.II, 645 | [Garraan] |
| 1914,
13-15 May | Melbourne | <i>Report of Resolutions, Proceedings and Debates of
the Treasurers' Conference, pp. 1-75 [C/W not
present]</i> | | NSW, 1914/15
Joint Vol.I,
513
Vic, 10, 1914,
Vol.I, 1955 | |
| 1915,
5-12 May | Sydney | <i>Report of Resolutions, Proceedings & Debates of
Premiers' Conference, together with Appendices,
pp. 1-98, [List of Contents]</i> | [H of R Misc] | NSW, 1915/16
Joint Vol.I,
325
Vic, 24, 1915,
Vol.II, 237 | [Garraan] |
| 1916,
22-29 May | Adelaide | <i>Report of Resolutions, Proceedings & Debates of
Premiers' Conference, together with Appendices,
pp. i-xlvi, 1-118 [Index]</i> | [H of R Misc] | NSW, 1916
Joint Vol.I,
295
Vic, 21, 1916
Vol.II, 1029 | [Garraan] |
| 1916,
12-15
Dec. | Melbourne | <i>Report of Resolutions, Proceedings and Debates
Premiers' Conference, pp. i-xiv, 1-32.</i> | [H of R Misc] | NSW, 1917
Joint Vol.I,
139
Vic, 6, 1917
Vol.II, 727 | [Garraan] |

1917, 5-10 Jan.	Melbourne	Report of Resolutions, Proceedings and Debates of the Premiers' Conference (with Ministers of Lands) (Adjourned from December 1916), pp. i-xxxvi, 1-80 [Index].	[H of R Misc]	NSW, 1917 Joint Vol. I, 187 Vic, 7, 1917 Vol. II, 775	[Garraan]
1918, 8-18 May	Sydney	Report of Resolutions, Proceedings and Debates of the Premiers' Conference, together with Appendices pp. i-111, 1-163 [Index].	[H of R Misc]	NSW, 1918 Joint Vol. I, 637 Vic, 18, 1918 Vol. II, 475	[Garraan]
1918, 17-20 July	Melbourne	Conference of Treasurers, pp. 1-36.	106, 1917/18/ 19, Vol. IV, 11		[Garraan]
1919, 22-27 January	Melbourne	Report of Resolutions, Proceedings and Debates of the Conference of C/W and State Ministers, pp. i-xii, 1-100.	142, 1917/18/ 19, Vol. IV, 51		[Garraan]
1920, 21-26 May	Melbourne	Report of the Resolutions, Proceedings and Debates of the Premiers' Conference, together with Appendices, pp. i-xxxiii, 1-127 [Index].	[H of R Misc]	NSW, 1920 Joint Vol. I, 671 Vic, 5, 1920 Vol. II, 301	[Garraan]
1920, 16-20 July	Melbourne	Conference of C/W and State Ministers, Summary of Resolutions and Proceedings and Report of Debates, pp. i-vii, 1-70.	[H of R Misc]	NSW, 1920 Joint Vol. I, 827	[Garraan]
1921, 31 Oct.- 4 Nov.	Melbourne	Premiers' Conference, Decisions Arrived at. pp. 1-4. [Also, Report of Debates and Decisions Arrived at]	156, 1920/21 Vol. IV, 651 [H of R Misc]		[Garraan]

1922, 17-18 Jan.	Melbourne	Conference of C/W and State Ministers, Report of Debates, pp. 1-40.	18, 1922 Vol. II, 1523	[Garraan]	64
1923, 23-29 May, 9 June	Melbourne	Conference of C/W and State Ministers, Memoranda, Report of Debates and Decisions Arrived at, pp. i-xii, 1-152.	38, 1923/24 Vol. II, 343	[Garraan]	
1926, 24-26 May	Melbourne	Conference of C/W and State Ministers to Consider the Financial Relations between the States and the C/W, Report of Debates, pp. 1-64.	28, 1926/27/ 28, Vol. V, 309	[Garraan]	
1927, 16-21 June, 21-23 July	Melbourne Sydney	Conference of C/W and State Ministers to Consider: (1) Aust. Exhibition (2) Child Endowment (3) Financial Relations between States & C/W (4) International Labour Conference (5) Soldier Land Settlement pp. 1-68.	119, 1926/27/ 28, V, 373	[Garraan]	NSW, 1927 Joint Vol. I, 57 Vic, 26, 1927 Vol. II, 139
1928, 18-20 June	Sydney	Report of the Resolutions, Decisions, Proceedings and Debates of the Premiers' Conference, together with an Appendix, pp. i-xxv, 1-49, Appendix 1-30 [Index List of Contents].	NSW, 1928/29 Joint Vol. I, 45		
1929, 23-24 May	Sydney	Report of the Resolutions, Decisions and Proceedings of the Premiers' Conference, pp. i-xix, 1.	NSW, 1929/30 Joint Vol. I, 65		
1929, 28, 29 & 30 May	Canberra	Conference of C/W and State Ministers, Proceedings and Decisions of Conference, pp. 1-21.	47, 1929 Vol. II, 1421		NSW, 1929/30 Joint Vol. I, 43

1929, 9 Dec.	Canberra	Report of Proceedings of Conference of C/W and State Ministers (Federal Aid to Roads)	NL, UNSW
1930, 20 Feb.	Canberra	<i>Conference of C/W and State Ministers</i> , pp. 1-24, [Report of Proceedings].	111, 1929/30/ 31, Vol.II, 57
1930, 18-21 Aug.	Melbourne	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Report of Proceedings.	LT, NL, PNSW, SU, UNSW.
1931, 6,7,9,10 & 13 Feb. 25-26 Feb.	Canberra Melbourne	<i>Conference of C/W and State Ministers, Proceedings and Decisions of Conference, (Appendices)</i> pp. 1-95 [List of Contents].	193, 1929/30/ 31, Vol.II, 81
1931, 25 May - 11 June	Melbourne	<i>Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings & Decisions of Conference, (Appendices)</i> pp. 1-196 [Index].	236, 1929/30/ 31, Vol.II, 177
1931, 10-14 Aug. 1-12 Sept.	Melbourne	<i>Record of the Conference of C/W & State Ministers</i> , pp. 1-26.	269, 1929/30/ 31, Vol.II, 377
1932, 28 Jan. - 5 Feb.	Melbourne	<i>Record of the Conference of C/W & State Ministers</i> , pp. 1-36.	12, 1932/33/ 34, Vol.IV, 503

1932, 14-21 April	Melbourne	Record of the Conference of C/W & State Ministers Record of Proceedings, (Agenda, Statements Appendices)	LT, NL, PNSW, ⁶ SU, UT [A reference to the conference report being tabled can be found in Common- wealth Votes and Proceedings, H of R. Vol.I, 276]
1932, 28,29,30 June & 1 July, 4-8 July	Canberra Sydney	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings & Decisions of Conference, (Appendices)	LT, NL, PNSW, SU [Tabled, as above]
1932, 24-29 Oct.	Melbourne	Record of the Conference of C/W & State Ministers (Appendices)	LT, NL, SU
1933, 8,9,12 13 & 14 June	Melbourne	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings & Decisions of Conference, with Appendices, pp. 1-48	190, 1932/33/ 34, Vol.IV, 539
1934, 16-28 Feb.	Melbourne	Conference of C/W & State Ministers on Constitutional Matters, Proceedings & Decisions of Conference with Appendices, pp. 1-83, [Contents, Index to Speeches]	134, 1934/35/ 36/37, Vol.II, 1
1936, 26-28 Aug.	Adelaide	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings & Decisions of Conference, pp. 1-83 [List of Contents]	268, 1934/35/ 36/37, Vol.II, 97

1937, 5 Feb.	Melbourne	Conference of C/W & State Ministers on Youth Employment, Proceedings & Decisions of Conference	NL
1937, 16 April 20 May	Melbourne	Conference of C/W & State Ministers on Uniform Control & Regulation of Aviation, Proceedings & Decisions of Conference.	NL, PNSW
1937, 13 Aug.	Canberra	Conference of C/W & State Ministers on Unemployment Insurance & the 40 hour week, Proceedings & Decisions of Conference.	LT, NL, PNSW, SU
1938, 29 Aug.	Canberra	<i>Conference of C/W & State Ministers on Wheat, Proceedings of the Conference, pp. 1-8</i> [PM and Premiers]	93, 1937/38/ 39/40, Vol.III, 1299
1939, 31 March	Canberra	Conference of C/W & State Ministers on Defence & Development & National Council, (Speeches & Resolutions)	NL, PNSW
1939, 21-22 June	Canberra	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference.	NL, PNSW
1939, 9 Sept.	Canberra	Conference of C/W & State Ministers on matters arising out of the State of War, Proceedings of the Conference.	NL, PNSW

1939, 10 Nov.	Canberra	Conference of C/W & State Ministers on Control of Prices, Taxation of soldiers' pay, Control of Patriotic Funds, and Railway Fare Concessions for Defence Forces.	NL, PNSW	68
1941, 25-26 Aug.	Melbourne	Conference of C/W & State Representatives, Ministers & Public Servants on Air Raid Precautions (secret). [It is doubtful whether this falls within even a broad definition of a premiers' conference].	NL, PNSW, PV	
1941, 20 Dec.	Canberra	Conference of C/W & State Ministers on Air Raid Precautions.	NL, PNSW	
1942, 3-4 Feb.	Canberra	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference.	NL, PNSW, PV	
1942, 22-23 April	Melbourne	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference	NL	
1942, 10, 11 & 12 Aug.	Melbourne	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference.	NL, PNSW, PV	
1943, 14, 15 July	Melbourne	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference.	NL, PNSW, PV	
1944, 25, 26 & 27 Jan.	Canberra	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of the Conference.	NL, PNSW, PV	

1944, 25-26 Aug.	Canberra	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of the Conference	LT, NL, PNSW, PV
1944, 3-5 Oct.	Canberra	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference.	LT, NL, PNSW, PV
1945, 20-23 Aug.	Canberra	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference.	NL, PNSW, PV
1946, 22-25 Jan.	Canberra	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of the Conference.	NL, PNSW, PV
1946, 20-21 Aug.	Canberra	Conference of C/W and State Ministers, Proceedings of the Conference.	LT, NL, PNSW, PV
1947, 19-21 Aug.	Canberra	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference.	NL, PNSW, PV
1948, 21-22 June	Canberra	Conference of C/W & State Ministers on Transfer of controls over Rents, Prices & Land sold from the C/W to the States, Proceedings of the Conference.	NL, PNSW, PV
1948, 23-24 Aug.	Canberra	<i>Conference of C/W & State Ministers</i> , pp. 1-60.	NSW, 1948/49/ 50, Joint Vol.I, 117

1949, 16-17 Aug.	Canberra	<i>Conference of C/W & State Ministers, pp. 1-51.</i>	NSW, 1948/49/ 50, Joint Vol. I, 179
1950, 5, 6, 7 & 8 Sept.	Canberra	<i>Conference of the C/W & State Ministers, pp. 1-80.</i>	NSW, 46 1950/51/52 Joint Vol. I, 189
1951, 2 Mar.	Canberra	<i>Conference of C/W & State Ministers on Defence, Proceedings of Conference.</i>	LT, NL, PNSW, PV
1951, 18 June	Canberra	<i>Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference, [on Communist Party]</i>	NL, PNSW, PV
1951, 30-31 July	Sydney	<i>Proceedings of Economic Conference Convened by the C/W Government.</i>	PV
1951, 15, 16 & 17 Aug.	Canberra	<i>Conference of the C/W & State Ministers, pp. 1-35.</i>	NSW, 1 1952/53 Joint Vol. I, 111
1952, 7-8 July	Canberra	<i>Conference of the C/W & State Ministers, pp. 1-32.</i>	NSW, 1953 (First Session) Joint Vol. I, 13
1953, 20-21 Feb.	Canberra	<i>Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of the Conference, pp. 1-31.</i>	NSW, 1, 1953 (Second Session) Joint Vol. I, 185.

1953 10-11 Aug.	Canberra	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, pp. 1-52	NSW, 70, 1953 (Second Session) Joint Vol.I, 217
1954, 30 June - 1 July	Canberra	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference, pp. 1-42.	NSW, 86, 1954/55 Joint Vol.I, 207
1954, 26 July	Canberra	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference, pp. 1-39.	NSW, 98 1954/55 Joint Vol.I, 249.
1955, 22-23 June	Canberra	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference, pp. 1-54.	NSW, 25 1955/56 Joint Vol.I, 145
1956, 28 June	Canberra	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference, pp. 1-27.	NSW, 40 1956/57 Joint Vol.I, 197
1956, 16-17 Aug.	Canberra	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference, pp. 1-47.	NSW, 65 1956/57 Joint Vol.I, 225
1956, 13-14 Nov.	Canberra	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference, pp. 1-28.	NSW, 89 1956/57 Joint Vol.I, 273.

[1957]	[No published record of any conference. At least one conference was held to discuss financial relations between the States and the C/W]		
1958, 5 June	Canberra	<i>Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference, pp. 1-16.</i>	NSW, 64, 1958, Joint Vol.I, 219
1959, 4-5 Mar.	Canberra	<i>Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference, pp. 1-67.</i>	NSW, 11 1959/60 Joint Vol.I, 265
1959, 23-24 June	Canberra	<i>Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference, pp. 1-33.</i>	NSW, 31 1959/60 Joint Vol.I, 333
1960, 24 June	Canberra	<i>Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference, pp. 1-17.</i>	NSW, 2 1960/61 Joint Vol.I, 281
1961, 15 June	Canberra	<i>Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference, pp. 1-13</i>	NSW, 29 1961/62 Joint Vol.I, 293
1962, 15-16 Feb.	Canberra	<i>Conference of C/W and State Ministers, Proceedings of the Conference, pp. 1-17.</i>	LT, NL, PNSW, SU, UT

*

1962, 27-28 June	Canberra	<i>Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference, pp. 1-15.</i>		NSW, 49 1962/63/64 Joint Vol.I, 681
1963, 14 Feb.	Canberra	<i>Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference, pp. 1-15</i>		NSW, 123 1962/63/64 Joint Vol.I, 697.
1963, 17-18 June	Canberra	<i>Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference, pp. 1-12</i>		NSW, 134 1962/63/64 Joint Vol.I, 713
1964, 12 Mar.	Canberra	<i>Conference of C/W & State Ministers Proceedings of Conference, pp. 1-31 [Appendices]</i>	*	LT, NL, PNSW, PV, SU, UT
1964, 2-3 July	Canberra	<i>Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference, pp. 1-78.</i>	*	LT, NL, PNSW, PV
1965, 22 Apr.	Canberra	<i>Conference of C/W & State Ministers, pp. 1-32.</i>		NSW, 74 1966/67 Joint Vol.I, 317
1965, 1-2 June	Canberra	<i>Conference of C/W & State Ministers, pp. 1-31</i>		NSW, 75 1966/67 Joint Vol.I, 351

1966, 16-17 June	Canberra	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference, pp. 1-27.	*	LT, NL, PNSW, SU, UT
1967, 16 Feb.	Canberra	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference, pp. 1-5. [Appendices]	*	LT, NL, PNSW, PV, SU, UT
1967, 28-29 June	Canberra	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference, pp. 1-9 [Appendix]	*	LT, NL, PNSW, PV, SU, UT
1968, 27-28 June	Canberra	<i>Report of the Proceedings of the Conference of Commonwealth and State Ministers</i> , pp. 1-47.		NSW, 30 1968/69 Joint Vol.I, 443
1969, 13-14 March	Canberra	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference, pp. 1-28.	*	LT, NL, PNSW, PV, SU, UNSW, UT
1969, 26 June	Canberra	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference, pp. 1-34.	*	LT, NL, PNSW, PV SU, UNSW, UT
1970, 26 Feb.	Canberra	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of the Conference (Parts I & III), pp. 1-30.	*	LT, NL, PNSW, PV SU, UT
1970, 25-26 June	Canberra	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference, (Parts I & III), pp. 1-42, [Appendix]	*	LT, NL, PNSW, PV SU, UT

[1971]	[No published record of any conference. At least one conference was held to discuss financial relations between the states and the C/W]			
1972, 14 Feb.	Canberra	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference, pp. 1-12 [Attachment]	*	UT [not checked in other libraries]
1972, 22-23 June	Canberra	Conference of C/W & State Ministers, Proceedings of Conference, pp. 1-43.	*	UT [not checked in other libraries]
1973, 10 May	Canberra	Conference of Australian Government & State Government Ministers, Proceedings of Conference, pp. 1-34.	*	NL, PNSW, PV, SU
1973, 28-29 June	Canberra	Conference of Australian Government & State Government Ministers, Proceedings of Conference, (Part I), pp. 1-30. [Appendices]	*	UT [not checked in other libraries]
1974, 7 June	Canberra	Conference of Australian Government & State Government Ministers. Proceedings of Conference, (Part I), pp. 1-37. [Appendices]	*	UT [not checked in other libraries]
[1974- 1975]	[Conferences were held in August 1974, February 1975 and June 1975. All were held in camera and records of proceedings are unavailable]			75

OTHER TITLES IN THIS SERIES

No.1	The Crisis of European Supranationality (1965)	Nina Heathcote
2	The A.C.P.T.A.: A Study of White Collar Public Service Unionism in the Commonwealth of Australia, 1885-1922 (1966)	G.E. Caiden
3	Drawing a Sample of the Australian Electorate (1968)	Michael Kahan & Don Aitkin
4	Soviet Agriculture since Khrushchev (1969)*	Paul Dibb
5	A Handbook of Australian Trade Unions and Employees Associations (1970)	D.W. Rawson & Susan Wrightson
6	The Ukraine and the Czechoslovak Crisis (1970)*	Grey Hodnett & P.J. Potichnyj
7	Agricultural Politics in the European Community (1971)	Nina Heathcote
8	A Handbook of Australian Trade Unions and Employees Associations, 2nd edition (1973)	D.W. Rawson
9	Socialism and Agricultural Cooperation (1974)*	R.F. Miller
10	A Handbook of Australian Trade Unions and Employees Associations, 3rd edition (1976)*	D.W. Rawson
11	Political and Administrative Aspects of the Scientific and Technical Revolution in the USSR (1976)*	T.H. Rigby & R.F. Miller
12	Public Servants, Interest Groups and Policy Making (1976)*	R.F.I. Smith & Patrick Weller

*Copies of these papers may be obtained from the Australian National University Press, P.O. Box 4, Canberra, A.C.T. 2600