## Foreword

## **John Stone**

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In the letter originally inviting people to become members of The Samuel Griffith Society and indicating the intention of its Board to convene an Inaugural Conference in Melbourne on 24-26 July, 1992 (see Appendix II), some particular reasons for this initiative were noted.

First, there now seems to be afoot a campaign to have the view accepted that our Constitution is "badly in need of reform". No very compelling evidence for this view is generally advanced, other than the intellectually shoddy one that we are nearing the year 2000. As to that, readers should see the delectable comments in the paper herein by S.E.K. Hulme, QC.

Secondly, and despite the earnest disclaimers of most of the principal actors, there appears little doubt that this campaign is coming from the same centralist quarter which, having been defeated in the debates of the 1890's, has worked throughout this Century to undo the original Federal compact, and whose efforts in that regard have been redoubled over the past twenty years.

The chief purpose of The Samuel Griffith Society is, therefore, to ensure that, if any changes are to be made in our Constitution, they should only occur after the widest range of thought and opinion has been canvassed. In that process it will be the particular role of the Society to question and, as necessary, oppose the further expansion of the power of Canberra. Already in Australia that expansion has gone very far, to the point where it threatens a serious breakdown of trust in government as a whole.

One of the most serious aspects of this steady distortion of the original Federal compact is the process by which it has chiefly come about.

Not the least of the duties of The Samuel Griffith Society will therefore be to examine this process.

In particular, the role in it of a now centralist and expansionist High Court needs to be placed firmly under the microscope of public opinion. Some of the papers in these Proceedings begin that task; but there is much still to do.

The Inaugural Conference of the Society, whose proceedings are now recorded in what follows, comprised three major addresses and ten papers delivered on a series of themes. Inevitably, not all the relevant issues could even be touched upon; and even those which were, will certainly repay re- visiting.

I do nevertheless express the view that these papers are of such a generally high order, and without exception generated such enthusiasm among those who heard them last July, that they will come to be seen as having had a seminal effect upon the debate which now lies before us. It is to that objective that this volume is dedicated.