

## The future of Freemasonry in Australia

by Bro. Lloyd Davis

*(The following paper was published on the internet by Wor. Bro. Colin Shedden of Duyfken Lodge, who performs a great masonic service by distributing around to more than one hundred masons, comments and short up-to-date papers on the Craft by members on email.*

*(When possible, we will try to ascertain the background of Bro. Davis. He would undoubtedly be an asset to the W.H.J. Mayers Lodge of Research.)*

Prof. Bamber from Griffith University in Queensland has just released a book which compares Australian workers with rest of the world and ranks them for strike rate, hours worked, standard of living and pay rates. Not surprisingly, his study finds that Australian workers are now working longer hours, for a lower standard of living than we did 100 years ago\_ What does this have to do with the future of Freemasonry in Australia? Such learned brethren as Wor.Bro. John Belton have shown in their publications that there is a world-wide decline in our numbers and that the rate of decline in Australia is comparable to, and of the same order of magnitude as, the rest of the world. Reports come continually through the various Masonic journals and anecdotal conversations alluding to the concerns that potential members do not want to become Masons because of the existing calls on their time and the feeling that they have too much to do already.

Brethren, the world of 1717 or even 100 years ago was a totally different place from that, in which we find ourselves living today. Women are taking their rightful place in the work force. Their husbands, of necessity and changing social values, are sharing the domestic workload more evenly than in years past. Certainly the hours of unpaid overtime at work have increased, particularly in the current environment of "corporate downsizing". The stable pool of unemployed makes it difficult for workers to win any concessions with regard to working set hours. It is a concern that both Masons and non-Masons have contributed to the current uncertainty with regard to employment opportunities over the last 30 years. Our increasingly mechanistic society values people less and less; the false god of Mammon appears to take precedence over all other considerations, even the human dignity of the retrenched.

Given these economic and social conditions, is not surprising that potential recruits for Freemasonry have concerns that the impact of joining our Fraternity will have a detrimental effect on their lives. The twin obligations of domestic responsibilities and longer hours at work are a pincer movement acting to squeeze down any hours left to devote to organizations such as ours.

Society has changed in these and other ways: these changes have happened to the citizenry and, as we are continually told, Freemasonry is part of society: inter alia, Freemasonry must shoulder a measure of responsibility for these changes and therefore, for its own decline. Freemasonry must also atone for its past actions if it is to rebuild. It is a matter of public record that, in Queensland, some Brethren who were very high ranking public figures have presided over mass retrenchments that have swept up Masons to the ranks of the forcibly unemployed. Our Masonic institutions should comment on this issue.

It is no good complaining that times have changed and wishing that we could return to the past ways. Times have changed. Our Brethren were there, actively participating when the world changed irrevocably\_ We need to move on in the current framework, not pine for past glories.

Older Brethren may indeed be comfortable enlisting their spouses to prepare festive Boards but this is definitely not going to be the case in the future. To quote RW Bro. Bert Boock PAGM "[1] **The modern generation of young wives will be educated, will have a career outside the home, will want to know what the lodge is and definitely not be impressed to be invited to become a galley slave to the South**" (my emphasis)

On the subject of wives. the concept of visiting other Lodges is a noble goal. It needs, however, to be tempered somewhat given the other calls on our time. I know of one broken marriage and two other relationships that have been made very shaky as a result of too many visits to other Lodges and Chapters. The custom of WM elect being out 4 or 5 nights a week so that he can get a reasonable number of visitors at his Installation festive board surely is a relic of an era when "the little woman" was content to sit at home and

not complain. It may come as a shock to the older Mason, but that attitude will not be found in wives of potential Masonic recruits.

Freemasonry's challenge is now to survive, grow and prosper. Realistically, our order is dying. Freemasonry has not adapted to its environment. By definition, the evolutionary capacity of our order has declined, otherwise we would not be having these discussions. Compared with 12<sup>th</sup> Century Scotland when the Templars grafted their Cabbalistic knowledge onto the Craft Guilds, our current ability to change has ossified. The capacity to evolve is not as strong as when 4 Lodges met in 1717 to re-form a Grand Lodge in London and go public with an organisation that had been secret for the previous centuries. Our Order's current response to changing external circumstances has proven to be less than dynamic. Granted, we are now on the Net (this article has been collated and edited on a PC and sent via e-mail); so is everyone else! Our organisation needs to change and evolve more quickly than it is at present; otherwise it will not exist.

What is the answer? I don't profess to have it but some thoughts follow. In terms of marketing ourselves, we need something different; a "hook" to show that there is something extra over and above any other worthy charitable organisation. We need to differentiate ourselves from the other charitable organisations such as 'Rotary, Lions, Apex, etc. These are all fine, worthy organisations with good people as members. These organisations do not, however, share the unwritten legacy which Freemasonry possesses, that is, to pass down the secrets of the universe to future generations. If we don't continue to perform this sacred function and we have no means of differentiating ourselves from any other charitable organisations, Freemasonry risks descending back to its parlous state of 1717, which comprised 4 Lodges which were basically Eating and Drinking Clubs. If we cannot differentiate ourselves, in marketing terms, we will continue not to attract new membership at a rate to sustain the order and compensate for the attrition of or failures of continuing membership.

Furthermore, I believe that our Masonic Institutions need to say, publicly, that the god of Mammon is a false god and that working people should have leisure time commensurate with the wealth they create for their country. Implicit in this statement is the benefit that some of that increased leisure time could be devoted to attending Lodge, especially for potential recruits. A public statement of this nature need not be political and can be couched in humanitarian terms. It would also create greater public awareness of OM existence and views compared to holding sausage sizzles.

These are only a few ideas, certainly there are more enlightened Brethren who will have different and better ones. I have no wish to see freemasonry continue its current slow decline into obscurity but we must be honest and say that it has a cancer that appears terminal at this stage. The suggestions made are but a few and may appear to some to be outlandish. I accept that this will be the view of some. It is for others, then, to improve upon them or generate perhaps more moderate strategies; & anyone has better ones, let's hear them. I am certain of this however: something different from what we are doing now must occur. The commando credo - "Adapt, Improvise, Overcome" would be a useful start, the current path is to certain oblivion,

[1] From an article reproduced by RW Bro. Bert Boock PAGM in the Queensland Freemason from an article by RW Bro. I. R McCullouch PAGM in NSW Freemason.

**(Editor's Comment):**

The interesting contrasts between the old and hoary freemasons at the "top" of our Craft who have and still are exerting the influence of ages past are here compared with those thoughts of those who see Freemasonry in the modern light. More and more brethren must speak out while there is still time and some members who will listen.