

Question Time: a petition for change

Written by Bret Treasure | WA Coordinator
Monday, 15 August 2011 15:49



We should adopt a policy advocating reform of Question Time.

It does not serve its purpose. It does not set an example for public debate. It should be completely re-thought.

I spent a number of days in the Federal Parliament this year and it's not pretty. What you miss on TV but understand watching the whole chamber is the animalistic nature of it.

Two packs of animals. Someone runs up to the other pack, bares their teeth, then scurries back to their pack. It is a contest of intimidation. When a weakness is detected in a pack, the voices of the opposing pack rise up in catcall and ridicule. They sniff blood; the volume of animal noises increases. It is what I imagine a stoning is like.

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Almost every question from the opposition attempts to embarrass the government, not solicit information. The repetition is sickening. Questions are repeated with minor variations so as to find a weak spot and dictate the news cycle.

Questions are almost all about the past. The questioners want to find an inconsistency, a failure, a lie. They want to attack. They want the media to righteously demolish their enemy.

Almost every answer blunts the attack by speaking for as long and indirectly as possible. When the government asks a question of itself it is designed to use up time and talk positively about accomplishments. Or about the failings of the opposition in previous years. Answers are press releases. How many thousands of bureaucratic hours are wasted in this?

I watched David Cameron in the House of Commons the day he answered 138 questions from the Opposition about phone hacking. Short, direct answers. The British Parliament is not perfect; it is adversarial and backwards-looking like ours, but there is respect and debate that is a level above what happens in Australia. Find me a politician that says different.

All of Australia talks about the brattish, churlish, unproductive, attention-seeking nature of Question Time. We should petition the Parliament for change.

Photo sourced from MystifyMe Concert Photography (Troy).