

ASSOCIATED REFORMS

Reforms to the electoral system which can be called minor but which, nevertheless, are of some significance, were introduced into Parliament under the Labor Government during 1974-5 but were never brought to fulfilment.

These reforms designed for the single-member constituency system are mainly still valid and could as easily be applied to a multi-member constituency system.

Optional preferential (in the form of marking the number of vacancies or more) was one of these reforms and has been discussed elsewhere. Other measures included the printing of party affiliations next to the candidates' names on the ballot, and the registration of political parties for such purpose; the earlier closing of the poll (6 pm); the drawing for positions of candidates on the ballot for the House of Representatives; the establishment of mobile polling facilities at hospitals and similar institutions; and many other changes (Electoral Bills nos. 2-7 1975).

A further provision for an increase in the deposit required for candidacy has come in for some criticism as being discriminatory, and a modification of this allowing the candidate a choice between paying a substantial deposit or presenting a nomination with the signatures of a set number (100 to 1000) of electors or of a certain number (2 or 3) from each electorate in the relevant State, would now appear to have more support.

There appears also to be some agreement for extending the term of Parliament from 3 years to 4 years. With a fair electoral system otherwise operating there seems little in this to object to. The major problem is regarding the term for the Senate. A 4-year term for the House and a 6-year term for Senators would mean Senate-only elections on a regular basis, yet in order to synchronise the House elections with the Senate elections, the Senate term would have to be either reduced to 4 years for all Senators or increased to 8 years with half retiring each 4 years.

Associated with this is the more complex issue of a fixed term for Parliament (whether it be three or four years). The power to take the Parliament into an election cannot remain at the discretion of an individual. A constitutional change would be required to have a set date for a general election every three (or four) years with the Government remaining in office while it enjoyed the confidence of the Lower House; any earlier election necessitated by the inability of the House to support a government would provide a government only for the remaining period of the set term. Alternatively, the constitutional change could provide a set term of three (or four) years from the time of the election, the Government remaining in power while it had the confidence of the House of Representatives, but while it retained this confidence having no power to call an election before the full term expired.

A measure of reform which is a perennial topic both in Australia and overseas would be the enlargement of the numbers in the House of Representatives. This could be achieved either by increasing the number of Senators and thereby constitutionally requiring an increase in the number of Representatives, or by changing the Constitution to allow for the House of Representatives to number three times the number of Senators instead of the present twice the number.

The effects, inter alia, would be to improve the apportionment of the single-member constituencies and to allow for a greater representative capacity for individual members. This would similarly apply to multi-member constituencies.

Nevertheless, the reaction of the Australian community to such suggestions would probably preclude their success, despite the fact that the average number of people represented by a member in the Australian House of Representatives is considerably higher than in other comparable nations, as can be seen from the following table. (The situation for Australia has advanced even further since there has been no change in the number of seats in the Lower House but a

relatively large increase in population. The average constituency figure for Australia as of June, 1980, was 116,928. Several of the countries below have increased the number of seats in their Lower House.):

AVERAGE CONSTITUENCY POPULATION

<u>Country</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>No. of Seats in Lower Chamber</u>	<u>Average Constituency</u>
Up to 5 million:			
Ireland	3,192,000 (1977)	148 (bicameral)	21,568
Finland	4,613,800 (1971)	200 (unicameral)	23,069
Norway	3,917,800 (1972)	150 (bicameral)	26,119
Israel	3,199,200 (1972)	120 (unicameral)	26,660
Denmark	4,978,100 (1972)	179 (unicameral)	27,811
New Zealand	2,909,900 (1972)	84 (unicameral)	34,642
5 to 25 million:			
Sweden	8,127,400 (1971)	350 (unicameral)	23,221
Switzerland	6,311,000 (1971)	200 (bicameral)	31,555
Austria	7,456,400 (1971)	183 (bicameral)	40,745
Belgium	9,695,400 (1971)	212 (bicameral)	45,733
Canada	21,568,300 (1971)	282 (bicameral)	76,480
Netherlands	13,330,000 (1971)	150 (bicameral)	88,867
Australia	12,959,000 (1972)	125 (bicameral)	103,672
Over 25 million:			
United Kingdom	53,821,300 (1971)	630 (bicameral)	85,431
Italy	54,067,000 (1972)	630 (bicameral)	85,821
France	51,485,000 (1972)	490 (bicameral)	105,071
West Germany	61,503,000 (1971)	518 (bicameral)	118,732

The issue of election campaigning is one which also requires considerable attention and reform. The submission presented by the ALP to the recent Inquiry into Electoral Expenditure is attached as Appendix B. In summary, the submission calls for legislation to cover donations to political parties to remove the possibility of political parties and their representatives being influenced by financial patronage. Combined with this is the disclosure of all election expenditure and the registration of all political parties.

Not included in the submission (because of the limited terms of reference) but central to the issue of election campaigning is the matter of the regulation of advertising and the funding of candidates. On this subject the current ALP platform calls for the "payment of proportionate subsidies by governments to political parties and candidates".

In order to supervise the new electoral laws there would have to be created an Electoral Commission which would be a permanent and independent authority, operating under guidelines determined by the Act. The composition and the extent of the authority of this Commission would need to be thoroughly considered, and some suggestions are presented later.