

Reform?

In spite of much talk about reform of the system for electing the Legislative Assembly, the two Bills passed by the State Parliament in April will leave us with something not very different from what we have had in the past. From the point of view of the Government, the differences may be important. So far as voters are concerned, it is certain that about a million will be left after the next election without effective representation. More than half of the seats will be safe for one party or another and the choice of the people to fill them will be made not by the voters but by the few people who control preselection. There will be no certainty that a party supported by a majority of voters will win a majority of the seats, nor that control of the Parliament by a minority-supported party will be prevented.

The amending Acts provide for the retention of single-member districts so that inevitably a substantial number of people in each of the 99 districts will be left nominally represented by people they do not want. The redistribution that will take place over the next few months may allow some people who have had no representation in the past to help elect candidates in the future, but only at the expense of other voters who will be deprived of representation. There is no way of ensuring fair representation of the people with single-member districts.

One commendable feature of the new legislation is provision for optional preferential voting. The previous requirement that a voter had to show a preference for every candidate was not only an undesirable complication but an unjustifiable interference with the voter's right of free choice. Unfortunately, this step in the right direction will be useless to those people who vote for candidates who are not elected. In most cases, their votes, in spite of promises of one vote one value, will be of zero value.

In The South

The results of the election of the Victorian Legislative Assembly, although incomplete at the time of writing, again show how a single-member-district system can give an Assembly quite different from the one the voters wanted. When the people of Victoria voted on Saturday 5 May, approximately 42% voted for Liberal candidates, 5.3% for National Country Party, 46% for Labor, 5.3% for Australian Democrats, and about 1% for others. It seems that a few votes in St Kilda will decide whether the Liberal Party wins 40 or 41 seats, while Labor, with 4% more votes, is likely to win at most 33. The National Country Party, with practically the same support as the Australian Democrats, will have 8 seats, while the Democrats will have none. Those who voted for candidates who will not be elected could well total over a million. In 1976, more than 900,000 were left without representation and the number this time is likely to be greater.

From the incomplete figures, it is probable that the result with proportional representation would have been Liberal 33, NCP 5, Labor 39, and Australian Democrats 4. We should have more details to give you at our Annual Meeting (see below).

Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting will be held on Thursday 31 May at 7.30pm in the Moose Room, Cahill's Dutch Village Restaurant, in the basement of the Park Regis Building, 27 Park Street, Sydney. As well as the election of office-bearers, there will be opportunity for discussion on plans for following up the many opportunities available for promoting real electoral reform. If you can, join us at an informal meal from 6 pm onwards.

Our Corporate Existence

The New South Wales and Victorian Proportional Representation Societies formed the Proportional Representation Society of Australia in 1974. The two State Societies had adequate Constitutions but our corporate arrangements have been a little untidy. Recently, some members of the Victorian Branch have proposed a new Constitution for the Society, designed to provide for coordination of the work of the Branches with minimum disturbance to the present arrangements in each State. There will be an opportunity to discuss the proposals at the Annual Meeting and they will also be discussed at the Victorian Branch Annual Meeting in June.

Queensland

There are stirrings in the deep North. A Proportional Representation Society was formed recently in the University of Queensland and there is real hope of setting up a Queensland Branch of the PR Society of Australia. The moving spirit is John Campbell, whose address is 89 Tranter's Avenue, Camp Hill, Queensland 4152. If you know of people in the Brisbane area or elsewhere in Queensland who might be interested, John would be delighted to hear about them.

Overseas

The House of Commons was elected on Thursday 3 May by the thoroughly discredited first-past-the-post method. It is a long time since any British Government was voted in by a majority of the voters and the new Conservative Government again has only minority support. As usual, the Liberal Party is grossly under-represented. The Rhodesian election, again by the first-past-the-post method, also had other odd features. White voters took part in the election of the white members and voted again for black representatives. Totals in some districts of well over 100% were 'explained' as being due to inaccurate rolls. Getting the rolls right would be a desirable step but the real need in both Rhodesia and Britain is the use of the quota-preferential method.

Amnesty International

At its Annual Meeting on 29 April, the New South Wales Branch of Amnesty International voted to elect its Board by the quota-preferential method as specified in the Proportional Representation Manual. Members of the PR Society Committee attended the meeting by invitation to explain the method and to assist in the first election. A proposal for the election of the National Council of the Australian Section of Amnesty is to be considered at the Annual Meeting of the Section in Perth shortly.

Citizens For Democracy

Your President, Mr J.F.H. Wright, was invited speaker at a meeting of Citizens for Democracy in the Teachers' Federation Building, Sussex Street, Sydney, on 2 May. His talk, under the title 'Voting Systems and Electoral Boundaries—How They Affect One Vote One Value', was followed by animated discussion, especially on the recent changes in arrangements for electing the New South Wales Legislative Assembly.

Victorian Branch

The Victorian Branch is to hold its Annual Meeting on 13 June. The Guest Speaker will be Senator Don Chipp, Leader of the Australian Democrats. Our Victorian friends have been busy in connection with the State elections there and have had some publicity with comments on the unsatisfactory results.

Proportional Representation Society of Australia — NSW Branch
Box 3058, Sydney, NSW 2001

President	J.F.H. Wright	Telephone 498 5559
Honorary Secretary	J. Randall	Telephone 90 4951

Quota Notes is registered for postage as a publication Category B.