

Learning by Doing

A second workshop in conjunction with the Australian Democrats was held on Sunday 17 August at El Rancho Hotel-Motel, North Ryde. The half-day program was designed to give those taking part an understanding of the principles of proportional representation and some experience in actual use of the quota-preferential method. It included talks by several members of the Society and a count of an election typical of committee elections in clubs, societies, and party branches. It has been suggested that a similar workshop for members of the Society might be useful. If you would be interested, write to the Secretary or telephone 498 5559. Learning by doing can be fun.

Launching in Queensland

On Thursday 24 July, the Queensland Branch of the Proportional Representation Society of Australia was officially established. An Interim Committee, with Mr John Campbell as Acting Secretary is busy getting the Branch on to a regular operating basis. Watch for further bulletins.

Upper House Reform

There was some discussion at the Adelaide 50th anniversary meeting (see over) on the prospects for replacement of the party-list method of election of the South Australian Legislative Council by a genuine quota-preferential method. Since then, it has been reported that the Government intends to introduce a Bill in the present session to provide for a method similar to the one used for the New South Wales Legislative Council. While not ideal, this would be a great improvement on the party-list method.

The guest speaker at the Annual Meeting of the Victorian Branch of the Proportional Representation Society in July was Mark Birrell, President of the Young Liberals in Victoria. He spoke of efforts by the Young Liberals directed towards reform of the Victorian Legislative Council, a major point in their proposals being the introduction of proportional representation. This would be a big advance, as the Council is at present elected from two-member Provinces with overlapping terms, so that what they have is really a single-member district system.

Local Government

The Local Government Association at its Conference in Albury in August considered a proposal for the election of its Executive by the quota-preferential method. Unfortunately, the motion to amend the Constitution to make this possible was lost by a small margin. The decision leaves the Association electing its Executive by the horse-and-buggy era block-vote method.

The quota-preferential method will be used in most districts in the local-government elections in September. Where wards or ridings return only one or two members, the majority-preferential method is still used. Local government in New South Wales would be improved if all Aldermen and Councillors were elected by the quota-preferential method, with at least five vacancies in each electoral area. The most accurate representation would be achieved if wards and ridings were abolished and municipalities and shires generally elected their councils, as some already do, from their whole areas as single electorates.

Facts about Hare-Clark

The Tasmanian Parliamentary Paper 'Democratic representation under the Hare-Clark system', by Dr George Howatt, first published in 1958, has been reprinted recently. It is available from the Government Publications Centre, 134 Macquarie Street, Hobart, Tasmania 7000. The price is \$1.00.

Fifty Years

The Electoral Reform Society of South Australia held a special meeting on 9 July to celebrate the completion of fifty years of activity. Three speakers talked about the foundation of the Society, its activities in the fifty-year period, and the prospects for its future. They were Miss Ellinor Walker, who was at the inaugural meeting in 1930, Mr Deane Crabb, the present Secretary of the Society, and your President, Mr Jack Wright, who visited Adelaide with Mrs Wright for the occasion.

Catch Them Young

The Australian Schools Commission recently invited applications for grants to support projects under its Innovations Program. The intention is 'to improve the quality of primary and secondary education by stimulating worthwhile innovation'. Your Committee has made an application for a small grant to support a project at Ashfield Boys' High School. The project is planned to be put into effect in 1981 and is designed to help the boys to understand the methods of election of the House of Representatives and the Senate. Besides direct teaching, the intention is to have the boys take part in actual small-scale elections incorporating the essential features of the two methods, and to make their own evaluation of the methods.

Four-year Terms

There is talk about four-year terms for both State and Federal Parliaments. If one of the things that distinguish democracies from less desirable countries is the holding of free elections, it is surprising that elections seem to be considered a nuisance by some people. An election is an occasion for people to take part in the process of government by passing judgment on those who would like to be MPs. A change from three-year to four-year terms would mean about four fewer opportunities in an average voting lifetime for taking part in this way. It has been suggested by some political leaders that there would be advantages to voters if the Parliamentary term were lengthened but, while we have Parliaments elected by unsatisfactory methods, it is hard to see any advantage. If we get Parliaments that are not what we want, lengthening their terms seems likely to make things worse.

PR on FM

One of our members, Mr B. Musidlak, who is a post-graduate student at Macquarie University, is producing a series of programs to be broadcast by 2 SER-FM starting on Saturday 6 September at 7.30 pm. The series has the title 'The People's Will' and the viewpoint of the Proportional Representation Society will be prominently presented. 2SER-FM transmits on a frequency of 107.5 MHz.

Your vote - effective or wasted?

Our booklet 'Your vote - effective or wasted?' was originally produced about 15 years ago. It describes the commonly used methods of election and explains them with simple examples. Following a brief discussion of the quota-preferential method, it shows through examination of recent election results how the quota-preferential method gives the results the voters want, while the other methods fail. A new edition with up-to-date information about recent elections has just been printed and will be available shortly at 40c per copy, with lower prices for larger quantities.

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