

Opportunities

With interest in electoral methods much higher than it has been for many years, it is important that we should not miss opportunities to promote the quota-preferential method. The members of the Committee try to keep a watch on what appears in newspapers and magazines and have had some success in following leads that items in these have suggested. We have been less effective in making use of radio and television. Members and friends who watch and listen to the media could help by following up appropriate opportunities themselves or alerting the Committee. Letters to editors and phone calls to talk-back programs can get the facts to many people whom we might never reach by other means. If you become aware of an opportunity and need help in dealing with it, please phone 498 5559 or 90 4951. And please cut items of interest appearing in print, recording on each cutting the name of the publication, the date of appearance, and the page number. If members would like to meet to discuss ways of using opportunities of this kind, we would be very happy to arrange a meeting. We are also keen to provide speakers for meetings of other organisations and would be glad to hear of possibilities.

Tasmania

The election for the Tasmanian House of Assembly on 15 May, about a year before it would normally be due, will be one of the most interesting for many years. The July 1979 election was followed by a series of legal challenges to the validity of the election of members of the House on the grounds of alleged spending in excess of the maximum allowed in the Electoral Act. Most of the challenges were eventually withdrawn but some were pursued to the point where a by-election was held in the district of Denison. In a break from normal practice, the ALP issued a how-to-vote ticket, and use was made for the first time of a procedure for rotating the names of candidates within the party groups on the ballot papers. Most Labor voters ignored the how-to-vote ticket, Labor lost one seat, and Dr Norman Sanders was elected as the first Australian Democrat member of the House.

The election on 15 May follows the defeat of the Holgate Labor Government after the former Premier, Mr Doug Lowe, and the ALP Whip, Mrs Mary Willey, left the party. The Holgate Government was committed to the construction of hydro-electric dams on the Franklin and Gordon Rivers and intended to proceed in spite of the high 'no dams' vote in the referendum held late last year to decide which of two dam proposals should be adopted. The record 127 candidates for the election include a considerable number opposing the construction of the dams. The Hare-Clark system will allow Tasmanian voters not only to choose between parties but also to indicate what they think about the Franklin and Gordon River dams.

Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting of the Branch will be held on Thursday 27 May at 7.30 pm at Cahill's Dutch Village Restaurant, 27 Park Street, Sydney. Members and friends are invited to meet for an informal meal before the meeting, starting at 6 pm. An important feature of this year's Annual Meeting will be consideration of a revised Constitution for the Branch. The Committee believes that some changes are desirable to improve consistency between the Constitution of the Branch and the recently adopted Constitution of the Proportional Representation Society of Australia. The meeting will be held just after the completion of counting in the Tasmanian State election and we hope to have an eye-witness account of the event.

Victoria

The single-member-district system used in the election of the Victorian Legislative Assembly on 3 April did not treat the voters well. It left 998,863 of them, that is 44.5%, without the representation they wanted. After nine elections which all gave the Liberal Party considerably more seats than its voting support warranted, this election resulted in substantial over-representation of Labor. The ALP, with 50.04% of the votes, won 49 seats, which is 60.5%. This does not quite match the level of distortion in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly, where Labor won 70.4% of the seats with 55.7% of the votes, nor that in the Federal House of Representatives, where the Liberal-NCP coalition in October 1980 won 59.2% of the seats with 46.3% of the first preferences.

The new Victorian Premier, Mr John Cain, has told the Legislative Assembly that he thinks proportional representation is the only way to ensure that parties win seats according to the votes they receive. He also said that he believes the Westminster system is better served by a single-member-district system than by proportional representation. He was right about the accuracy of proportional representation. With nine districts each returning nine members, the result would probably have been ALP 42 seats, Liberal 32, National 4, and Australian Democrat 3, which would have been in excellent agreement with the voting support for the parties. But was Mr Cain really saying that we should stop worrying about democracy so that the present arrangements, whether Westminster or not, can be retained?

Into the Computer Age

Over the past three years, some of the members of the Victorian Branch have been developing computer techniques for analysing the results of elections. For many years, we have been making estimates of the probable results of elections if the quota-preferential method had been used, and comparing voter satisfaction under existing methods with what might be expected with the quota-preferential method. We progressed from pencil and paper to desk calculators, but the job was still quite time-consuming. The figures in the item above were produced in minutes on an Apple computer with the program developed in Victoria. The program is now available in New South Wales. One of our members, Mr E.D. Poppleton, has kindly given us access to his computer and has added some features to the program to increase its flexibility.

World Outlook

In Quota Notes No 23, we mentioned discussions with people in the United Kingdom and Ireland and the United States on the possible establishment of an international body for the promotion of better electoral methods. In April this year, Mr Gervase Tinley, Chairman of the Council of the Electoral Reform Society of Great Britain and Ireland, and Mr Seamus Burke, Chief Executive of the Society, had discussions in New York with the key people in the United States, and with members of the United Nations staff concerned with recognition of non-governmental bodies able to give beneficial advice and assistance to the United Nations. Detailed proposals for an international body are now being developed in London for consideration by the likely collaborating bodies in the United States and Australia.

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