

QUOTA NOTES

Newsletter of the Proportional Representation Society of Australia — NSW Branch

Number 27

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Your Committee

At the Annual Meeting of the Branch on 27 May, nine members were elected to the committee and, at the following committee meeting, the individual office-bearers were appointed. The committee is as follows.

President	Mr E.W. Haber
Vice-presidents	Miss E.M. Pillinger
	Mr J. McEwen
Secretary	Mr J. Randall
Treasurer	Mr J.T. Webber
Research Officer	Mr B. Musidlak
Members of committee	Mrs K.M. Wright, Mr J. Bonwick, Mr J.F.H. Wright

More Than Just a Good Idea

Many people think that proportional representation is a good idea. Some don't get beyond that to being convinced that this good idea should be put into practice. The applications of the quota-preferential method that we now have in Australia were all brought into being through the efforts of a few people. Our prospects for replacing the remaining defective electoral systems by quota-preferential systems will certainly be improved if we can increase the number of people working for these changes. We don't often get on to the front pages, but there are often opportunities to talk to individuals or groups, and to show them that proportional representation is not only a good idea, but also a very practical one. We fail to take up many of these opportunities because of doubt about our ability to answer critics. We have answers that are more than adequate to all the stock criticisms and have decided to put the criticisms and our answers together in a concise form. The collection will be available to people who would like to be armed to write letters to editors, to take part in talk-back programs, or just to discuss the subject in an informed way. We expect to have this material ready by the end of October. If you would like a set, please contact the Secretary or telephone 498 5559.

Action in the West

The Electoral Reform Society of Western Australia, which is also the Western Australian Branch of the Proportional Representation Society of Australia, is campaigning for a radical change in the method of electing the State's Legislative Council. It is advocating a system similar to that now used for the New South Wales Legislative Council and adopted last year for future elections of the South Australian Legislative Council. With the State as a single electoral district, 17 seats would be filled at each election by the quota-preferential method. In May, Mr M. Stephens, a National Party member of the Legislative Assembly, introduced a motion calling on the government to hold a referendum with the next State election on the method of electing the Council. He proposed that voters should be offered a choice between the present method based on 17 provinces and one in which the State would be divided into three multi-member districts, with proportional representation. He pointed out that his proposal would reduce the present weighting of rural votes so that one rural vote would have only about twice the value of a vote in the metropolitan area. His motion was formally seconded by a Labor member, Mr Tonkin, who went on to move an amendment providing for a third option in the proposed referendum. The State would be a single electoral district with what Mr Tonkin referred to as a 'proportional representation list system of voting'. Following a strong swing to Labor, Mr Tom Stephens, the Labor candidate, won a by-election in the North Province on 1 August. The Labor Party now appears to have a chance of winning government at the election due in a few months and the Electoral Reform Society has called on the party to follow the lead of New South Wales and South Australia and commit itself to introducing a quota-preferential system for the whole State.

Tasmania

As predicted in Quota Notes No 26, the election of the Tasmanian House of Assembly on 15 May was a very interesting event. In spite of the record 127 candidates, and the first State-wide use of the procedure for rotating the names of candidates within groups, the election went very smoothly. There was a strong swing to Liberal Party candidates, who won four seats in each of four districts, Bass, Braddon, Denison, and Wilmot, and three in Franklin. In Denison, Australian Democrat Dr Norman Sanders was re-elected and the former Premier, Mr Doug Lowe, was re-elected in Franklin. Just over 70% of the voters saw the election of their first-preference candidates and 90.5% are represented by either their first preferences or others closely associated with them. Labor, with 36.9% of the first preferences, won 14 of the 35 seats. If a single-member-district system had been in use, the result would have been very different. Labor was ahead of the Liberal Party in only 17 of the 60 sub-divisions, including some with very small enrolments. No matter how the sub-divisions had been grouped to form single-member districts, Labor could not have won more than about seven seats, and may not have won any.

Other Auspices

Proportional representation was discussed in two recent public meetings in Sydney and at a National Press Club luncheon in Canberra. On 12 August, Senator Arthur Gietzelt and Mr Malcolm Mackerras debated Senator Gietzelt's proposals for reform of the method of electing the House of Representatives at a meeting arranged by the New South Wales Society of Labor Lawyers. On Friday 27 August, Senator Gareth Evans, Senator Don Chipp, and Mr Richard Alston took part in a discussion arranged by the New South Wales Campaign for Constitutional Change on the powers of upper Houses. Then on Friday 30 August, Dr David Owen, former Labor Minister in the United Kingdom and now one of the leaders of the Social Democratic Party, spoke at the National Press Club, his address and the following discussion being broadcast by the ABC. Senator Chipp, in response to a question, confirmed his party's commitment to proportional representation and Dr Owen, in his address, said that 'some form of proportional representation' was central to his party's platform. He went on to say that his own view was that the preferred form is the single-transferable-vote method, which is, of course, what we call the quota-preferential method.

Recommended Reading

While some public libraries have a good selection of books relating to elections and electoral methods, many do not have the books that should be considered as basic references. One of the most important is 'Proportional Representation', by C.G. Hoag and G.H. Hallett, first published in 1926 and out of print for many years. It is now available as a reprint by Johnson Reprint Corporation, New York, the Sydney agent being Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich Group (Aust) Pty. Ltd., 25 Paul Street, North Ryde, 2113. The price in Sydney is about \$36. An important recent book is 'The People and the Party System', by Vernon Bogdanor. It is published by Cambridge University Press and is available from the Oxford and Cambridge Bookshop, 66 King Street, Sydney at \$14.95 in paperback or \$46 in hard cover. Libraries should also have 'Mirror of the Nation's Mind', by J.F.H. Wright, available from the publishers, Hale & Iremonger Pty. Ltd., Box 2552, Sydney, 2001 at \$6.50 paperback or \$14.95 hard cover. If your local library does not have these books, a suggestion from you might help to get them on the shelves. The classic 'How Democracies Vote', by Enid Lakeman, has also been out of print for some years but we understand that a new book by Miss Lakeman is due to be published later this year.

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