



What Became of One Vote, One Value?

The proposals of the State and ACT Redistribution Committees for boundaries of House of Representatives electorates show clearly that the new legislation does not ensure one vote, one value. Over the Commonwealth, media commentators predict that Labor would win 88 or 89 of the 148 seats on the 1983 figures. This would be 59.5% or 60.1% of the seats for a 49.5% share of the first preferences. In Victoria, the ALP seems likely to win 28 of the 39 seats, which is 71.8% of the seats for 50.1% of the first preferences. The facts do not match the one vote, one value promises of government spokesmen.

The Redistribution Committees have been given an impossible task. There is no way of ensuring a fair result when each electorate returns only one member. In every electorate, only one group of voters can be represented by their preferred candidate. Many voters, probably about 4 million after the next election, will be left without effective representation. The numbers of seats won by the parties will depend almost as much on the placing of the boundaries as on the votes. A fair distribution, with one vote, one value, is certainly possible. But it would require a further change in the law to provide for multi-member electorates and a quota-preferential method of election.

Senate Problems

Further examination of the new provisions for transferring surpluses of elected Senate candidates, introduced against the advice of the Society, confirms that they can lead to significant differences in vote values. The Sydney University SRC election results (over) also show that fully optional preferential voting, as recommended by the Society, would be a much more effective cure for high informality in Senate voting than the 'list' voting provision, which will benefit the parties rather than the voters.

Recognition from the British Isles

At the Annual General Meeting of the Electoral Reform Society of Great Britain and Ireland on 28 June, Mr J.F.H. Wright was elected as a Vice-President. The election of our President to this position is a welcome recognition by the Electoral Reform Society of the significance of Australian work for real electoral reform.

Across the Tasman

The New Zealand election on 14 July provides another example of the oddities of the first-past-the-post system. A swing to Labor of about 4% in voting support brought its share of the votes to about 43%. With 56 of the 95 seats, Labor has 59% of the seats on 43% of the votes. In the last election, in November 1981, the Nationalists won a majority of seats with only 39% of the votes. It is pointless to worry about which party has been worse treated. The real problem is that the voters of New Zealand have been unfairly treated on both occasions. They will continue to get distorted representation as long as the first-past-the-post system remains in use.

The Bananamander

Back in 1812, Governor Gerry of Massachusetts drew the boundaries of electorates for the State Senate so as to give his party a big advantage. One electorate was the shape of a salamander. Gerry's 'mander soon became 'gerrymander' and the language acquired a new transitive verb. There have been many variations on the theme, including a fruity one when orchardist Premier Playford of South Australia was accused of 'cherrymandering' the electorates for the House of Assembly in the 1940s and 1950s. Now we have the 'bananamander'. The Sydney suburban Municipality of Marrickville has recently been divided into three wards, each to return four Aldermen to the local Council. One of these is shaped remarkably like a banana and alert local residents believe that their wards have been 'bananamandered'. The NSW Branch of the Society pointed out to the Minister that suggestions of bananamandering could be countered by providing for the Council to be elected from the Municipality as an undivided electorate. The Minister preferred the bananamander.

Progress Towards Parliamentary Democracy

The Western Australian Government has arranged a Parliament Week from 16 to 22 September 'to highlight the role of Parliament and to focus on the history and the ongoing nature of Constitutional and Parliamentary Reform in Western Australia'. The concluding function on Saturday 22 September will be a public seminar on the theme 'Progress Towards Parliamentary Democracy in Western Australia'. Your National President, Mr J.F.H. Wright, has been invited to give the keynote address and to take part in a panel discussion.

Threat to Democratic System

Legislation passed in 1978 provided for a New South Wales Legislative Council of 45, with 15 vacancies filled at each election by a quota-preferential method, the whole State being a single electorate. The term of each member is three terms of the Legislative Assembly. When the term of the Assembly was increased to four years in 1981, the Premier said that changes would be made so that the Council term would not be twelve years. As yet, there has been no clear indication of the nature of the proposed changes. An article by Warren Owens in the Sunday Telegraph of 15 July, headlined 'Plan to Dump MPs', suggested that the Government 'plans to seek Opposition support for a package deal that includes setting a high election quota for candidates, a move which will benefit only the major parties'. So far, the Premier has neither confirmed nor denied the story.

Again the SRC

Following the extraordinary election of the Sydney University Students' Representative Council in April, Bogey Musidlak, Research Officer of the NSW Branch of the Society, was again engaged as Returning Officer for the regular election in July. Since April, on Bogey's recommendation, the rules have been changed to provide for fully optional preference marking. With 21 vacancies, informality was down from 7.1% in April, when there were 70 candidates, to only 0.6% in July, with 113 candidates. Of the 2748 who voted formally, 1867, or 67.9%, saw their first-preference candidates elected.

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