

President's Overseas Visit

Our President, Jack Wright, accompanied by wife Katie, is currently abroad for a period of ten weeks examining progress and attitudes towards quota-preferential proportional representation. Jack and Katie's trip concentrates mainly on the United States and the United Kingdom, returning home via Perth and Melbourne so as to attend prearranged meetings.

Jack and Katie's overseas itinerary includes addressing meetings and discussions with prominent academics, politicians and activists in the electoral reform movement. It is planned that while in the USA contact can be made with that notable PR advocate, George Hallett, co-author with Hoag of the authoritative text entitled 'Proportional Representation'. Their visit to the UK should hold much interest, particularly in view of the recently announced electoral pact between the Liberal Party and the newly-formed Social Democrats which includes a joint platform directed towards the introduction of proportional representation for elections of the House of Commons.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

This year's Annual General Meeting has been held over pending the return from overseas of Jack and Katie Wright and it is now set down for Thursday 30 July at 7.30pm in the Netherlands Room at Cahill's Dutch Village Restaurant, 27 Park Street, Sydney. We will be having an informal meal before the meeting from 6pm. The business of the meeting will be necessarily short, so as to permit as much time as possible to be left for the highlight of the evening—an address by Jack Wright on the state of PR in USA and UK.

This is bound to be amongst the most interesting Annual General Meetings we've ever had. All members and supporters are urged to invite interested friends to join them for what promises to be a most informative and polished presentation by our President, Jack Wright, encapsulating all the highlights of his overseas mission on Proportional Representation.

Electing a Representative House

This is the title of an article written by three members—E. W. Haber, B. Musidlak and J. F. H. Wright—and published in the most recent issue of the 'Australian Quarterly' (Autumn '81). In this article the authors argue that there was an obvious discrepancy between voting in the 1980 House of Representatives election and the numbers of seats won by the major parties. They say that most voters had no choice between candidates, only between parties, and nearly half of them were left without effective representation. First-past-the-post and hybrid systems, with some members elected from single member districts and some at large, are shown to be unacceptable alternatives. The authors demonstrate the feasibility of applying the quota-preferential method of proportional representation. They discuss the results likely with this method and its advantages for the voters.

In the same issue of the Quarterly there is another article entitled 'The Value of the Voter', written by Kenneth Grigg who is a prominent member of the Victorian Branch. Though this article is based on an analysis of voting patterns for Melbourne metropolitan electorates at the 1980 House of Representatives election, it is equally relevant to Sydney where the division of electorates between the North and the South-West of Sydney is readily recognised. There are seven 'blue-ribbon' Labor-held seats to the North-West of the Yarra River in Melbourne. There are seven 'blue-ribbon' Liberal-held seats to the East of it. So the major political parties score evenly across the board in these two 'mirror-image' electorate groupings. But how do the voters fare in the two regions? How many of their votes directly determine the outcome in terms of deciding who would be the elected representatives? This article reveals the disadvantage to voters of the single member electorate system and shows how quota-preferential voting in multi-member electorates best reflect their wishes.

South Australian Legislative Council Voting Changes

South Australia now has one of the best methods in Australia of electing its Upper House—a system similar to that introduced in 1978 for the election of the NSW Legislative Council. This is evident now that full details of the new SA legislation are available.

Basically the new system means that electors must vote for at least 11 candidates (the number elected at a half Council election) by numbering in order the candidates (not the parties) of their choice from 1 to 11. Electors have the option to indicate further preferences.

Unfortunately, the system perpetuates the defects of the NSW system— random selection of ballot papers for transferring preferences; voting is only partially optional; political parties decide the order of their candidates on the ballot paper; and Parliament, not the electors, will decide who fills casual vacancies. These are all minor blemishes when compared to the previous system where electors were compelled to vote for parties, rather than the candidates within those parties.

Reforming Lower House Electoral Systems

The efforts of the Electoral Reform Society of South Australia are now being directed at reforming the method used to elect the House of Assembly based on single-member electorates, a system almost identical to that applying to the NSW Legislative Assembly. Reform can only be accomplished if the present system of single-member electorates is replaced by the quota-preferential method of proportional representation. A first step towards such a reform was taken with the attempted introduction of a private member's Bill into the SA Parliament by Robin Millhouse who is still lacking a seconder.

In NSW, the Society is planning to conduct a detailed analysis of results of the forthcoming election for the Legislative Assembly being conducted on redrawn boundaries designed to implement State Government policy of 'One-Vote-One-Value'. It remains to be seen just what 'value' (if any) can be attributed to each elector's vote; but if past experience is any guide, little improvement can be expected and the whole concept will prove to be an illusion and a deception.

'TOWARDS BETTER GOVERNMENT'

Herewith is a copy of our new publication 'Towards Better Government'. Additional copies may be obtained for 10¢ each or 80¢ for ten, or \$6 per 100, plus postage.

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