

QUOTA NOTES

Newsletter of the Proportional Representation Society of Australia - NSW Branch

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Alan Halkyard

The recent death of Mr Allan Halkyard has taken from proportional representation in Australia one of its most effective supporters. He was a member of the Victorian Branch of the Society, and before its formation, of the [Proportional Representation Society of Victoria](#). After a long term as Secretary of the Branch, he served more recently as Treasurer. He was one of the authors of the [Proportional Representation Manual](#) and contributed greatly to the development of the ideas that now form the basis of the Society's policies.

After the Election

The final figures for the October 1980 House of Representatives election, which were released late in March, confirmed our doubts about the soundness of the method of election. The Government received 46.3% of the first preferences while the ALP received 45.1%. The Legislative Research Service of the Parliamentary Library has estimated that 50.2% of all voters preferred the Liberal-NCP coalition to the ALP. The Government won 74 seats, 59.2%, while the ALP won only 51, 40.8%. As usual, a large number of voters were left after the election nominally represented by people who were the declared opponents of those the voters wanted as their representatives. Over the Commonwealth, there were 3,863,180 voters in this situation. Put another way, 465 voters out of every 1000 have no effective representation in the house.

The Society has written to the Prime Minister pointing out that these results are inconsistent with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Covenant, as mentioned in *Quota Notes No 20*, was ratified by the Australian Government on 13 August 1980. It specifies that all citizens should have freely chosen representatives and that elections should guarantee the free expression of the will of the voters. It also requires ratifying Governments to 'adopt such legislative or other measures as may be necessary to give effect to the rights recognized', and we have called on the Prime Minister to introduce legislation to provide for the use of the quota-preferential method for House of Representatives elections.

In the North

On the basis of past experience, there could be little reason for expecting the result of the Queensland State election on 29 November 1980 to be what the voters wanted. It was not. On the figures available immediately after the election, the proportions of votes for the parties were ALP 41.7%, NCP 27.6%, and Liberal 26.9%. The NCP and the Liberal Party did not contest all seats, so it cannot be assumed that these are realistic figures for support for these parties across the State. But the ALP did contest all seats and on its 41.7% of votes might have been expected to win 34 seats. In fact, it won 25, while the NCP and the Liberal Party together won 57, which is 69% of the seats on 54.5% of the votes. As usual, around 500,000 voters will have as their representatives in Parliament people they did not want.

The Society

Your Committee, at its meeting on 26 March, resolved that the NSW Branch should be listed in [Schedule 1](#) of the Constitution proposed some time ago by the Victorian Branch. This resolution implies adoption of the [Constitution](#). The Society up to now has not had a formal Constitution, having been formed in 1974 by the Proportional Representation Societies of Victoria and New South Wales. The new Constitution provides for most of the activities to be carried on, as in the past, by the State bodies, but sets up arrangements for more effective co-ordination. It also provides for the election of a President, a Vice-President, a Secretary, and a Treasurer. The Society in its new form will come into being on 30 July.

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Progress in South Australia

In [Quota Notes No 19](#), we mentioned the possibility of replacement of the [party-list method of election](#) of the South Australian Legislative Council by a quota-preferential method. The Premier was reported in November 1979 as saying that 'the Government would introduce a voting system based on that used for the Senate which let people vote for the person of their choice rather than a party'. In February of this year, an amending Bill was introduced. It provided for the retention of the party-list method with only minor changes. It was strongly opposed by former Liberal Leader in the Council, Mr R. DeGaris and by Mr Lance Milne, Australian Democrat, as well as the Labor Opposition. On 25 February, the Attorney-General, Mr Griffin, announced that the Government would move amendments to 'adopt the NSW system for the Legislative Council'. The NSW Legislative Council is elected, following changes in legislation in 1978, by a quota-preferential method very similar to that used for the Senate. The amended Bill was passed by both Houses of the South Australian Parliament early in March. Australia now has quota-preferential methods for the Federal Senate, the Tasmanian House of Assembly, the Legislative Councils of New South Wales and [South Australia](#), the House of Assembly of the Australian Capital Territory, most local government bodies in New South Wales, and the Hobart City Council. There is no surviving application of the party-list method. But we still have the House of Representatives, five State lower Houses, and the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory elected by unsatisfactory methods.

Hope in Britain

The new Social Democrat Party in Great Britain has already made it clear that it will press for the introduction of proportional representation for the House of Commons. The new party has prospects of strong support among British voters. A Gallup poll in March suggested that the Social Democrats would win 31% of the vote, with 28% to Labor and 25.5% to the Conservatives.

The latest issue of *Representation*, the journal of the Electoral Reform Society of Great Britain and Ireland, contains an article by Rev. Michael Hodge entitled 'Elections in the Church of England'. He points out that 'the only permissible methods of voting in the Church of England are by simple majority (ie, first-past-the-post) or by single transferable vote.' The single-transferable-vote method is, in fact, currently used for the election of the General Synod and of many other bodies within the Church. Mr Hodge records that the General Synod in 1976 resolved overwhelmingly that 'this Synod believes the time has come for a change in the present parliamentary voting system and urges all political parties to adopt a preferential system of proportional representation as a policy commitment for future public elections'. He adds the comment that 'Here, at any rate, the Church cannot be accused of failing to practise what it preaches!'

In the United States

We learned recently from Dr George Hallett that proportional representation with the quota-preferential method applies to elections of 32 community school boards in New York. Dr Hallett was co-author with C.G. Hoag of the classic book '[Proportional Representation](#)' published in 1926. He is still very active in promoting electoral reform. He reports that there have been more than 160 separate elections of school boards with the quota-preferential method. The method is also used for elections of the City Council and the School Committee of Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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