

QUOTA NOTES

Newsletter of the Proportional Representation Society of Australia - NSW Branch

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The Society

The new Constitution of the Proportional Representation Society of Australia came into effect on 30 July. Shortly, Dr K.N. Grigg, Secretary of the Victorian Branch, who will act as Returning Officer, will call for nominations for the positions of President, Vice-President, Secretary, and Treasurer. Elections to fill these positions will be held by postal ballot as soon as possible.

Branch Officebearers

At the Annual Meeting of the NSW Branch, eight 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 J.F.H. Wright
Vice-Presidents	Mr E.W. Haber, Miss M. Pillinger
Secretary	Mr J. Randall
Treasurer	Mr J.T. Webber
Members of Committee	Mrs K.M. Wright, Mr J. Bonwick, Mr P. Paterson

The Other Side

During their visit to the United States, the United Kingdom, and Eire in May and June, the President of the Branch, Jack Wright, and his wife Katie met the key people in electoral reform in those countries. A highlight in the United States was meeting Dr George Hallett, joint author with C.G. Hoag of the classic book '[Proportional Representation](#)', published in 1926. At 86, Dr Hallett is enthusiastic and active. Largely as a result of his efforts, the School Boards of 32 districts in the New York area are elected by the quota-preferential method. Discussions were also held with other people in New York who are working with Dr Hallett for the adoption of proportional representation for other bodies, including the New York City Council. Another important group in the United States consists of academics who took part in a series of meetings organised by Professor J.F. Zimmerman and Professor Leon Weaver at the 1980 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association to discuss representation and electoral methods. Those who attended these meetings have a real interest in effective representation and propose to maintain the group on a continuing basis.

In the United Kingdom, the Electoral Reform Society, now with Mr Seamus Burke as Chief Executive, is doing excellent work. Miss Enid Lakeman, author of 'How Democracies Vote', has a new book on electoral methods almost ready for the publisher. Discussions were held with other members of the Society and its staff and with officebearers of several other bodies working for electoral reform. A brief visit to Dublin just after the election of the Dail Eireann by the quota-preferential method provided opportunity for discussions with electoral officials, politicians, and members of the staff of the Institute of Public Administration.

There is considerable evidence in both the United States and the United Kingdom of dissatisfaction with existing electoral methods. In America, the best prospects for proportional representation in the short term seem to be in the election of local-government bodies and other local bodies similar to the New York School Boards. In Britain, there are real prospects for change in the method of election of the House of Commons, with the Liberal and Social Democratic parties committed to proportional representation and some support in the other parties.

An important possibility that was discussed is the establishment of an international electoral reform body, initially linking the British, American, and Australian bodies, but possibly later also including similar bodies in other countries. The Electoral Reform Society has undertaken to draft a Constitution for consideration in America and Australia.

Thanks to the UNAA

Our new leaflet 'Towards Better Government', a copy of which was sent with Quota Notes No 22, has been reproduced in 'News and Notes' the newsletter of the United Nations Association of Australia in New South Wales.

Electoral Reform and the ALP

Senator Arthur Gietzelt, ALP Spokesperson on Administrative Services and Home Affairs, recently released a Background Paper entitled '[Proposals for Change to Our Electoral System](#)'. In it, he pointed out the failure of the present single-member-district system to give fair representation in the House of Representatives and discussed some alternatives. He recommended the adoption of a quota-preferential method with electoral districts returning three or five members each. We understand that the proposal will be discussed within the ALP and considered at a Federal Conference next year. The Federal Leader of the Party, Mr W.G. Hayden, has already given his support to the proposal.

At the Annual Meeting of our Branch, a resolution was carried commending Senator Gietzelt and Mr Hayden for their advocacy of the quota-preferential method. We have informed Senator Gietzelt that we will do all we can to support his efforts to persuade others in his party and elsewhere in the community of its desirability. We have said, however, that we will feel obliged to point out that the method would function more effectively if the marking of preferences were to be fully optional and if electoral districts each returned five or more members.

State Election

Although there has been a redistribution of Legislative Assembly districts since the last election, with the variation in enrolments reduced to 10% above or below the average, the election on 19 September will leave well over a million voters without satisfactory representation. In every contested district, one group of voters will see the election of the candidate they choose. All the others, nearly half of all voters, will not, and will be nominally represented by opponents of the candidates they choose. Along with the election, we are to vote in a referendum to increase the term of the Legislative Assembly to four years. It is hard to see any good reason for extending the term of a House that is not representative of the voters. If we have our priorities right, we should first see that the Legislative Assembly is elected by a sound method, and then think about changing the length of its term.

The fifteen vacancies in the Legislative Council will be filled by the quota-preferential method. Voters are required to show preferences for at least ten candidates. They will have a wide choice. The Labor Party, the Liberal-NCP coalition, and the Australian Democrats have each endorsed ten candidates and altogether, there will be 48 candidates. Perhaps more people will use their freedom of choice this time than when the method was first used in a Legislative Council election in 1978. On that occasion, most of those who supported the major parties followed the how-to-vote instructions of the parties precisely. Sensible use of the freedom of choice allowed by the method would ensure that the people elected to the Council are those the voters really want.

[Proportional Representation Society of Australia--NSW Branch](#)

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