

## QUOTA NOTES

Newsletter of the Proportional Representation Society of Australia - NSW Branch

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### Federal Office bearers

When nominations for the [office bearer positions](#) under our new [Constitution](#) closed on 15 October, there was only one nomination for each of three of the positions, with two for the position of Vice President. Those nominated were

For President	Mr J.F.H. Wright	New South Wales
For Vice President	Mr Geoffrey Goode	Victoria
	Mr Chris Harte	South Australia
For Secretary	Mrs Nancy Yeates	Victoria
For Treasurer	Dr Peter Fleming	Victoria

A ballot is being held for the position of [Vice President](#).

### A Record - and a Contrast

The State election in September produced a striking contrast in the results for the two Houses. The Legislative Council election, with 15 elected by the quota-preferential method, resulted in a record 97.1% of voters seeing the election of their first-preference candidates. The Legislative Assembly election, with 99 single-member districts, left 1,072,105 voters without the representation they wanted and gave the highest level of distortion of party representation in any lower House in Australia at present. With 55.7% of the votes, the ALP won 69 of the 98 contested seats, that is, 70.4%. We have written to the Premier reminding him of his assurance in his Policy Speech of the Party's commitment to the concept of one vote, one value and suggesting that the credibility of the Party will be in question unless the Government legislates for the use of the quota-preferential method.

### Not Inconsistent?

In March, soon after the release of the final figures for the October 1980 House of Representatives election, the Society wrote to the Prime Minister pointing out that the results showed that the method of election is inconsistent with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which was ratified by Australia in August 1980. Article 25 of the Covenant specifies that all citizens should have freely chosen representatives and that elections should guarantee the free expression of the will of the voters. In the 1980 election, the choice available to voters was limited, 3,863,180 voters did not get the representatives they wanted, and the numbers of seats won by the parties were inconsistent with the votes for their candidates. In a reply received in June, the Prime Minister informed us that he had been advised 'that the present method of electing the House of Representatives is not inconsistent with the provisions of Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights'.

In a further letter, we stated that we could not accept the unsupported assertion in the reply, and that more detailed study of the results had shown that, of the 46.5% of voters who did not see the election of their first preferences, 3,523,643 voted in districts where their later preferences were not taken into account so that their votes had no effect on the outcome of the election. With votes of no value, these people certainly do not have freely chosen representatives. In his reply to this letter, the Prime Minister said 'I refer to my letter of 11 June 1981 concerning this matter and advise that I have nothing further to add'. We have now brought the inconsistency between the method of election and the Covenant to the attention of the Senate Standing Committee on Constitutional and Legal Affairs.

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### Committee Changes

The Committee has elected Mr E.W. Haber as President of the NSW Branch following the election of Mr J.F.H. Wright as Federal President. Mr J. McEwen has been co-opted to the Committee and Mr P. Paterson, who will be in the United States until the middle of 1982, has been given leave of absence.

### Ashfield Experiment

Boys in Year 10 at [Ashfield Boys' High School](#) recently took part in a project to help them to become effective voters when they are eligible in a couple of years. The project was developed by Mr R. Selinger, Senior History Master, and the other history teachers in collaboration with the Society. After some explanation of different methods of election, the boys took part in elections by the [first-past-the-post method](#), the [single-member majority-preferential method](#) (as used for the House of Representatives), and the [quota-preferential method](#) (as used for the Senate). They also examined the results of the October 1980 House of Representatives and Senate elections. To help understanding of the quota-preferential method, they re-enacted the [election of a school committee](#) in Birmingham about 160 years ago under the direction of Thomas Hill. The re-enactment was video-taped in colour and the Society has a cassette. It is hoped that this project will lead to the introduction of similar studies in other secondary schools.

### Western Australia

The Electoral Reform Society of Western Australia was formed recently to promote proportional representation in that State. The Convener of the Committee that brought the Society into being is Mr Rowland Stephens. It is expected that the Society will become the Western Australian Branch of the Proportional Representation Society of Australia. A feature article on the establishment of the Society and the need for electoral reform in Western Australia appeared in the *Daily News* on 21 October. The Society has suggested that a Legislative Assembly of 55 members accurately representing the people could be elected by the quota-preferential method with each of the eleven Federal House of Representatives electoral districts returning five members.

### No Neglected Areas

One of the workshops at a Seminar under the title 'North Coast Population Explosion - Future Action' at Lismore, NSW, on Saturday 31 October was on Electoral Reform. The Organising Committee was concerned over the possibility that neglect of politically safe districts might lead to inadequate funding for the North Coast region. The workshop was led by Mr John Campbell, of the Queensland Branch of the Society. The message that under proportional representation there are no areas that a Government can afford to neglect was given to the 200-plus people attending when the report from the workshop was presented in the final session of the Seminar.

### Good Government

The October 1981 issue of '*Good Government*', published by the Association for Good Government, includes a Guest Editorial by Mr J.F.H. Wright and two major articles on proportional representation. The Annual Report of the NSW Branch of the Proportional Representation Society of Australia is also reprinted. In the Editorial, it is recorded that 'From the start of organised campaigning for proportional representation in New South Wales around 1900, many of those involved have been connected with the Association for Good Government or its predecessors.' We appreciate the continuing support of the Association and the inclusion of this material in '*Good Government*'.

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