

QUOTA NOTES

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

Number 30

June 1983

National Conference

The conference of the Society held in Melbourne on 23 and 24 April, while not large, was valuable. Five States were represented. Unfortunately, it was not possible for anyone to come from Western Australia but some discussion papers were sent. The opportunity for face-to-face discussion was itself valuable, as most of those present had not met before. The conference recommended postal ballots on several propositions. Members will be invited to endorse two major documents as statements of Society policy. They are the [Proportional Representation Manual](#) and the Submission presented to the Clerk of the Senate last year in response to advertisements inviting submissions to a proposed Joint Committee on the Electoral System. It was decided to establish a national newsletter with the first issue planned for distribution by the end of September. Two Victorian members with special expertise, Mr Don Powell and [Mr Ted Goode](#), have been appointed to investigate the production of a logo and slogan for use in publicity. Another sub-committee, headed by Mr Peter Glover, of Victoria, will work on the development of resource material for use initially in secondary and tertiary educational institutions. Those who took part decided that the conference had been of sufficient value to encourage the idea of further conferences, a two-year interval being favoured.

Our Constitution

The ballot on amendments to the [Constitution of the Society](#) resulted in the adoption of all the amendments proposed with the exception of the proposal to change Clause 14 so as to provide for all Branch Presidents to be ex officio Vice-presidents of the Society. The main change is that proposals on policy questions or amendments of the Constitution will in future require the support of more than half of those voting in ballots instead of the three-fifths majority previously specified. Some Clauses have been stated more precisely, in particular the provisions for election of office-bearers. The terms of the present office-bearers will expire on 31 December this year and nominations will have to be called by September, with polling in any elections closing not later than 1 December.

The Australian Constitution

Many of Australia's most prominent politicians gathered in Adelaide in the last week of April for a Session of the Australian Constitutional Convention. It was supposed to take the process of review of the [Constitution](#) a stage further with a view to preparing the way for legislation and possibly referenda where changes in the 80-year-old Constitution might be thought necessary. The Session produced very little, mainly because many of the politicians present appeared to think that the pursuit of the short-term interests of their parties was more important than consideration of what might be good for the country and its people. While there was some progress in relation to introducing an integrated system of law courts to replace the present overlapping Federal and State systems and to the interchange of Federal and State powers, and there was agreement on the desirability of provision for the High Court to give advisory opinions on actual and proposed legislation, on most other matters there was disagreement along party lines. Two decisions were especially disturbing. A motion that recommended the inclusion in the Constitution of a specific guarantee of the right to vote for all Australian citizens of sound mind over the age of 18 years was rejected. The resolution also included a rather wordy paragraph intended to specify that the one vote, one value principle should apply in all Parliamentary elections. The other was the rejection of a proposal for the inclusion of directly elected delegates as well as nominees of the Federal and State Governments in the Convention in future. Not only was this motion rejected but also even an amendment that it be referred to the Standing Committee of the Convention for further consideration.

The Australian Constitution - Another View

A new book entitled '*Australia's Constitution- Time for Change?*' was launched by the Governor-General just before the Adelaide Constitutional Convention Session. Published by George Allen & Unwin Australia, the book was produced under the auspices of the Law Foundation of New South Wales. The three authors, John McMillan, Gareth Evans, and Haddon Storey have provided an excellent background for anyone seriously interested in considering possible changes in the Constitution. It includes a useful discussion on electoral procedures and the need for Constitutional guarantees of fairness in elections. The debates in Adelaide might have been of much higher quality if more of those taking part had read this book before they spoke.

Select Committee on Electoral Reform

The Federal Parliament has set up a [Joint Select Committee on Electoral Reform](#) to inquire into 'all aspects of the conduct of elections for the Parliament of the Commonwealth and matters related thereto'. The Chairman is [Dr R.E. Klugman, MHR](#), and other members from New South Wales are Senator the Hon. Sir John Carrick, the Hon. R.J.D. Hunt, MHR, and Senator Graham Richardson. The Committee will consider submissions from organisations and individuals and will hold public hearings. It is required to report by 31 August and the Government is likely to introduce legislation for changes in the Electoral Act soon after that. The Society will make a formal submission and members could support this by making individual submissions.

Gerrymander Wheel

In *Quota Notes No 28*, we mentioned the [Gerrymander Wheel](#), which has been devised to show that equal enrolments in single-member districts will not ensure one vote, one value. Favorable reactions to the Wheel have encouraged your Committee to arrange for the production of a larger quantity. Gerrymander Wheels will be available in the first week of June at 60c each, plus 27c postage. Lower prices will apply for bulk quantities.

Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting of the Branch will be held at Cahill's Dutch Village Restaurant, 27 Park Street, Sydney, at 7.30 pm on Thursday 2 June. Members and friends are invited to meet for an informal meal before the meeting. Besides the formal business, there are some important matters to discuss, especially how our viewpoint can best be put to the Joint Select Committee on Electoral Matters.

Local Government

The Society's survey of the New South Wales local-government elections of 1980 has been completed and the report has been sent to the Minister and to Shires and Municipalities, the Local Government Association, and the Town Clerks' Society. The survey, based on 130 replies from Shires and Municipalities to the Society's questionnaire, showed that the quota-preferential method of proportional representation has given very high levels of voter satisfaction. The report includes recommendations for some changes, especially to allow for optional marking of preferences and to improve accuracy in surplus transfers.

Proportional Representation Society of Australia - NSW Branch

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