

## 10. Electoral Democracy

Before leaving the subject of government, more specifically the political nature of government, it would be appropriate to give some attention to the machinery by which governments are created.

To deal with this subject comprehensively would require much more space than a single chapter, and for those interested in pursuing it in all its ramifications there are innumerable books available, the most useful of which, from the point of view of the title of this chapter, is *How Democracies Vote*<sup>1</sup> by Enid Lakeman, from which the following quotations are extracted as a guide to its quality:

If any body of people are to exercise to the full their democratic right of choosing their rulers, the electoral system by which that choice is made is of immense importance." (from Chapter VII, p.151.)

"The elector who has his own effective voice, whether within or without a political party, is much more likely to use it responsibly, much less likely than many of today's British electors to opt out of the democratic process on the ground that all it allows him to do is to support one or other of a few parties, all of which seem to him unsatisfactory." (from chapter XI, p.253.)

Whatever the ultimate character of government, other than that of authoritarian despotism, and assuming that the chief aim in its establishment is that of 'Justic and the Common Good', no such aim is possible of achievement if the system by which it is created is itself not just. Assuming that the system is designed to provide true representation of the people in their parliament — or whatever their paramount assembly is called — the method of electing the representatives must itself reflect the principle of justice. This is an obvious truism, yet the examples of a truly just electoral system in operation in those countries which may be said to have non-authoritarian governments are lamentably few.

The reason for this is not far to seek, for it is inherently associated with the system of political parties, which, in general, reflect vested interests, the outcome of that very preoccupation of government with matters which should be of no concern to it.

Whatever the ultimate purpose of an elected government, that is, whether it be to perform the limited functions of a form of government which may be described as '*the Jeffersonian ideal*', or to conduct the multifarious affairs of the modern over-governed state, it still can never be said to be truly *democratically* elected so long as the system of election is one or other of those commonly in use throughout the Western world, including most of

what are termed 'developing' countries, or of 'the Third World'.

"For the affairs of a nation to be run efficiently, the people who form it must reach some kind of agreement on public questions. If they do this, they have a chance of getting action on things that need to be done, and of preventing things that would be harmful. If they fail, they leave the way open for individuals or groups of people to seize power, with consequences that depend on the motives, capabilities and honesty of these people. The record of history does not encourage optimism about this kind of government."<sup>2</sup> "In Australia all adults have the right to vote, voting is by secret ballot, care is taken to keep electoral rolls accurate, there is provision for postal and absent voting, arrangements for recording and counting votes are excellent; yet most elections leave many people unrepresented, some votes help to elect candidates while others have no effect and are wasted, and parties supported only by minorities of voters can win majorities of seats."<sup>3</sup>

Without conducting a detailed analysis of the different systems in vogue (e.g., 'first past the post' or variations of the preferential system) which is so well done in Lakeman's book, it is here necessary only to consider whether the system in use is, or is not, effective in its alleged purpose — that of providing proper representation of the electors. The test is simple; it consists in demonstrating that the vote of the elector is as nearly as possible wholly effective, that it is not wasted, that the voter has a real choice amongst the candidates, and that the result of the election represents the choice of the voters.

In applying this test to the published result of elections held in most countries in recent times to elect allegedly democratic governments, it will immediately become clear that these results reflect a situation which is neither just nor democratic. Two examples will suffice to prove the point: recent general elections in both Britain and Australia (see appendices for actual figures).

In Britain, where the so-called 'first past the post' method is in use, the figures clearly disclose that a large portion of the electorate was virtually disfranchised by the result, that is to say that many voters might just as well have refrained from voting for all the good it did them. Their votes were, in effect, thrown away. Under this peculiar and antiquated voting method, such a result is practically inevitable; this is easily seen in those electorates where more than two candidates stood for election. The end result of this system is almost invariably the return of a minority government — the very antithesis of democracy.

The (London) *Sunday Times* of March 3rd, 1974, under the title 'If the System were Different', carried an article by Peter Kellner which began by saying: "Jeremy Thorpe is naturally resentful that his six million Liberal voters gave him only thirteen colleagues in the House of Commons." (Labour, on the other hand, with less than twelve million votes gained 301

seats). Kellner then proceeded to discuss the relative merits of the system known as 'Proportional Representation' (the system of the single transferable vote in multi-seat electorates)<sup>1</sup> and that called S.T.V. (Single transferable vote in single-member constituencies). He concludes his article with a table showing that, had voting been conducted under 'pure P.R.' in the elections of 1970 and of February 1974, the Liberal Party would have increased its representation in the Commons from 6 to 47 and from 14 to 123 respectively. Under S.T.V. the increase would have been only from 6 to 14 and 14 to 33 respectively.<sup>5</sup>

The Australian general elections of May 1974 offer an ideal opportunity to compare results of elections by the same voters, at the same time, for the same major political parties by two different voting methods. Voters elected members of the House of Representatives from single member electorates by the majority preferential method of voting. Senators were elected from multi-member electorates (each State being one electorate) by the quota preferential method of proportional representation.

Only 55.4 percent of voters succeeded in electing a member of the political party which they supported to the House of Representatives. There were 3,299,312 wasted votes and voters had no choice of candidates within parties (due to the internal pre-selection of candidates). In the Senate election, on the other hand, 91 percent of voters elected candidates of their own party and were also able to select candidates from within each party. Confusion and unnecessary harassment of electors was caused by the system of compulsory voting and the ridiculous requirement that voters number *all* names on the ballot paper (for the New South Wales seats there were 73 candidates).<sup>6</sup> Despite this, the marked superiority of the quota preferential method of proportional representation is apparent in these results.

Parliamentary representation is, of course, an area of the political scene in any supposedly democratic society wide-open with opportunities for dishonest practices in favour of political vested interests. In Australia the 'gerrymander' is a weapon blatantly resorted to by successive political parties in power in the various States in order to remain in power with a minority vote. This is well laid out for the concerned reader in an article in *National Times* (Sydney) of February 4-9 1974, by Malcolm McKerras, the well-known Australian cephalologist. Mr McKerras' main purpose is to show up the misuse by governments of the supposedly impartial adjustment of electoral boundaries to improve their own political advantage. He also points out that Tasmania is the only Australian State in which the parliament (the House of Assembly) is fairly elected. It should also be said that, because of its adoption of proportional representation, with five seven-member electorates, it is the only Australian State where the gerrymander is practically impossible.

## Appendix 1

### RESULTS OF BRITISH GENERAL ELECTIONS OF FEBRUARY 28, 1974 AND OF OCTOBER 1974\*

#### BRITISH GENERAL ELECTIONS FEBRUARY 1974

Party	Conservative	Labour	Liberal	Others	Total
Votes	11,928,677	11,661,488	6,056,713	1,695,315	31,342,193
Percentage of total votes	38.1	37.2	19.3	5.4	100
Seats won	296	301	14	24	635
Seats if in proportion to votes	242	236	123	34	635
Difference	-54	-65	+109	+10	—

## BRITISH GENERAL ELECTIONS OCTOBER 1974

Party	Con	Lab	Lib	Comm	Plaid C Scot M	Others	Total
Votes	10,255,822	11,272,762	5,228,017	17,008	933,916	750,036	28,459,561
Percentage of total votes	36.0	39.6	18.4	—	3.3	2.6	100
Seats won	271	315	11	—	11	10	618
Seats if in proportion to votes	223	245	114	—	20	16	618
Difference	-48	-70	+103	—	+9	+6	—

## Appendix 2

### RESULTS OF AUSTRALIAN GENERAL ELECTIONS FOR BOTH THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES AND THE SENATE, MAY 18, 1974\*

\*Figures by courtesy of the Proportional Representation Society of Australia.

#### AUSTRALIA

#### HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ELECTIONS — 18 MAY 1974

#### Summary of Votes for Political Parties showing Votes recorded, seats won and percentages

State or Territory	Electors Enrolled	Number of Votes Recorded	Votes		Informal Votes				Australian Labor Party				Liberal Party	
			Recorded	% to Enrolment	No.	%	Formal Votes	Seats Won	First Preference Votes	%	Seats Won	First Preference Votes	%	
N.S.W.	2,834,558	2,702,903	95.36	44,811	1.66	2,658,092	25	1,400,255	52.68	11	887,202	33.38		
Victoria	2,161,474	2,070,893	95.81	43,633	2.11	2,027,260	16	970,236	47.86	12	738,236	36.42		
Queensland	1,154,762	1,098,401	95.12	15,118	1.38	1,083,283	6	476,710	44.01	7	330,365	30.50		
S. Australia	750,308	722,434	96.28	20,311	2.81	702,123	7	341,563	48.65	5	256,904	36.59		
W. Australia	612,016	577,989	94.44	14,575	2.52	563,414	5	261,107	46.34	5	233,240	41.40		
Tasmania	246,453	237,891	96.53	4,213	1.77	233,678	5	128,787	55.11	—	103,701	44.38		
Sub-Total	7,759,571	7,410,511	95.50	142,661	1.93	7,267,850	64	3,578,658	49.24	40	2,549,648	35.08		
A.C.T.	101,455	94,937	93.58	1,249	1.32	93,688	2	52,055	55.56	—	33,320	35.56		
N. Territory	36,480	30,320	83.11	852	2.81	29,468	—	13,397	45.46	—	—	—		
Total	7,897,506	7,535,768	95.42	144,762	1.92	7,391,006	66	3,644,110	49.30	40	2,582,968	34.95		

ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY

State or Territory	Country Party/ National Party*			National Alliance			Liberal Movement			Democratic Labor Party			Australia Party			Others		
	Seats Won	First Preference Votes	%	First Preference Votes	%	First Preference Votes	%	First Preference Votes	%	First Preference Votes	%	First Preference Votes	%	First Preference Votes	%	First Preference Votes	%	
N.S.W.	9	282,169	10.62	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	77,507	2.92	10,959	0.41	
Victoria	6	151,707	7.48	—	—	—	—	104,974	5.18	—	—	—	—	50,025	2.47	12,082	0.60	
Queensland	5	255,659	23.60	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	18,808	1.74	1,741	0.16	
S. Australia	—	28,903	4.12	—	—	—	8.23	57,817	—	—	—	—	—	14,267	2.03	2,669	0.38	
W. Australia	—	—	—	60,325	10.71	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	7,016	1.25	1,726	0.31	
Tasmania	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	423	0.18	767	0.33	
Sub-Total	20	718,438	9.89	60,325	0.83	57,817	0.80	104,974	1.44	168,046	2.31	29,944	0.41	—	—	—	—	
A.C.T.	—	3,300	3.52	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	4,130	4.41	883	0.94	
N. Territory	1	14,514	49.25	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,557	5.28	
Total	21	736,252	9.96	60,325	0.82	57,817	0.78	104,974	1.42	172,176	2.33	32,384	0.44	—	—	—	—	

\* Queensland only

## AUSTRALIA

## SENATE ELECTIONS — 18 MAY 1974

## Summary of Votes for Political Parties showing Votes recorded, seats won and percentages

State	Electors Enrolled	Number of Votes Recorded		Votes Recorded		Informal Votes		Australian Labor Party				Liberal-Country/ National Party*				National Alliance	
		Enrolled	Recorded	Enrollment	%	No.	%	Formal Votes	Quota	Seats Won	First Pref Votes	%	Seats Won	First Pref Votes	%	Seats Won	First Pref Votes
N.S.W.	2,834,558	2,702,903	95.36	332,818	12.31	2,370,085	215,463	5	1,184,993	50.00	5	987,711	41.67	—	—	—	—
Victoria	2,161,474	2,070,893	95.81	230,474	11.13	1,840,419	167,311	5	859,078	46.68	5	791,254	42.99	—	—	—	—
Queensland	1,154,762	1,098,401	95.12	65,941	6.00	1,032,460	93,861	4	451,623	43.74	6	519,851	50.35	—	—	—	—
S. Australia	750,308	722,434	96.28	82,191	11.38	640,243	58,204	5	303,461	47.40	4	224,049	34.99	—	—	—	—
W. Australia	612,016	577,989	94.44	60,036	10.39	517,953	47,087	5	230,181	44.44	4	214,909	41.49	1	55,301	10.68	—
Tasmania	246,453	237,891	96.53	26,666	11.21	211,225	19,203	5	97,861	46.33	4	77,961	36.91	—	—	—	—
Total	7,759,571	7,410,511	95.50	798,126	10.77	6,612,385	—	29	3,127,197	47.29	28	2,815,735	42.58	1	55,301	0.84	—

\* Queensland only



## AUSTRALIAN SENATE ELECTIONS, 18th MAY, 1974

State	Country Party		Liberal Movement		Liberal National Party		Democratic Labor Party		Australia Party		Communist Party		Others		
	First Pref. Votes	%	First Pref. Votes	%	First Pref. Votes	%	First Pref. Votes	%	First Pref. Votes	%	First Pref. Votes	%	First Seats Won	First Pref. Votes	%
N.S.W.	—	—	—	—	—	—	67,670	2.86	40,541	1.71	11,202	0.47	—	77,968	3.29
Victoria	—	—	—	—	23,965	1.30	118,728	6.45	29,456	1.60	2,595	0.14	—	15,343	0.83
Queensland	—	—	—	—	—	—	41,394	4.01	12,795	1.24	—	—	—	6,797	0.66
S. Australia	19,959	3.12	1	63,032	9.85	—	5,768	0.90	6,507	1.02	6,786	1.06	—	10,681	1.67
W. Australia	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,808	0.54	—	—	—	14,754	2.85
Tasmania	10,459	4.95	—	—	—	—	1,783	0.84	—	—	—	—	1	23,161*	10.97*
Total	30,418	0.46	1	63,032	0.95	23,965	0.36	235,343	3.56	92,107	1.39	20,583	0.31	148,704	2.25

\* includes Townley 11,761 first preference votes 5.57%

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 10

1. *How Democracies Vote* by Enid Lakeman; Faber & Faber, London, 3rd edition 1970. First published 1955, in collaboration with James Lambert, as *Voting in the Democracies*.
2. From *Your Vote - Effective or Wasted?* instructive pamphlet issued by the Proportional Representation Society of Australia; N.S.W. address: G.P.O. Box 3058, Sydney — 2001.
3. Ibid.
4. The term preferred by Australian advocates of 'P.R.' is 'the quota preferential method of proportional representation'. This system is used for Senate elections, some local body elections and in Tasmania where the excellent Hare-Clarke system has been in continuous use since 1909. Its essential features are (1) multi-seat electorates, giving wide choice of candidates within parties; (2) the single transferable vote, offering first, second, third and even further preferences; (3) the quota; the total of votes cast being divided by the number of candidates, the resultant figure being the basic number required to elect a candidate, after which his surplus votes are distributed to others according to preferences.  
The pamphlet of the P.R. Society of Australia, referred to above (note 2), has this to say of the working of the system in Tasmania:  
"The record of Parliaments in Tasmania since the introduction of proportional representation differs in some striking ways from the other States. Close agreement between voting support for the parties and the number of seats won by their candidates has been the rule. When voting support for parties has changed, the composition of the House has changed accordingly. The political 'landslide', a well-known happening in places where single-member district methods are used, is unknown in Tasmania with proportional representation. The most significant difference . . . is that nearly all Tasmanian voters get the representation they want. It is usual for 7 out of 10 voters to see their first preference candidates elected and for another 2 to see candidates of the same parties as their first preference candidates in their own districts . . . The method has generally tended to encourage parties to broaden their policies so that voters do not need to go outside the major parties to get effective representation."
5. See also Professor Aitken's analysis of the British electoral system in *National Times* (Australia) of March 11-16 1974.
6. See Professor Aitken's article in *National Times* of May 6-11 1974, and Gavin Souter's article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of May 7, 1974 on these absurdities.