

# LARGEST REMAINDER

(Not quite Quota Notes)

No. 4

May 2009

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## Introduction

PR (or STV) is facing a challenge in the Canadian province of British Columbia. In the interests of democracy let's hope it prevails.

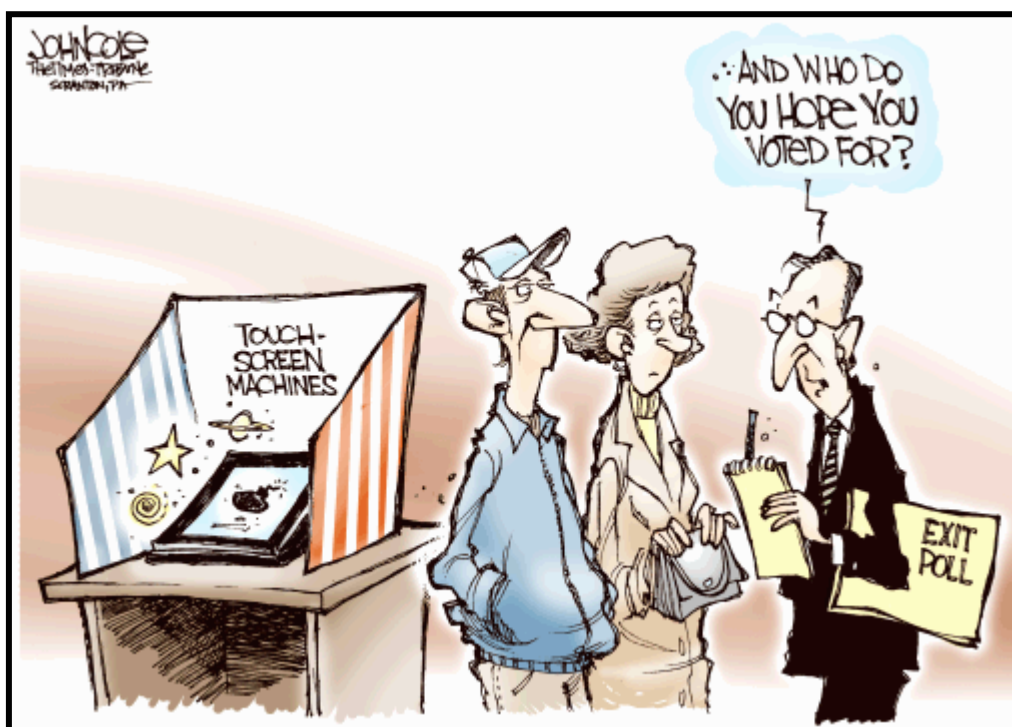
If you would like to join the PRSA (NSW) there is an application form and banking details available at [electoralreformaustralia.org](http://electoralreformaustralia.org)

If you do not wish to receive Largest Remainder please let us know at [president@electoralreformaustralia.org](mailto:president@electoralreformaustralia.org).

## Committee Meeting, Monday 9 March 2009

The following decisions were made at the meeting-

- To raise membership fees to \$20 pa.
- To adopt as policy the model devised by Stephen Lesslie for the election of the NSW Parliament.
- To recommend that the PRSA adopt as policy the model devised by Stephen Lesslie for the election of the Australian Parliament.
- To take steps to increase the PRSA (NSW)'s profile and membership.
- To issue a press release regarding all of the above.



## Website report

The website of the PRSA NSW Branch, [electoralreformaustralia.org](http://electoralreformaustralia.org), has been running for nearly a year. Its main purpose so far has been to put our newsletter online and to publish a few news items about the branch. Recently we've added an online membership/renewal form.

The site also hosts a mailing list system. There is a committee list used for internal communications, and a news list whereby anyone can subscribe/unsubscribe to the newsletter from the website.

We are slowly becoming easier to find with google searches for related topics. This will build as our reputation grows and as we put more on the site.

To keep the site relevant and useful we need feedback. Websites are a flexible resource so let us know what else you'd like to see on the site - guides, resources, general information - what would you like to see?

**Patrick Lesslie**

## PRSA (NSW) adopts PR model for NSW

It was resolved at the March 9 meeting: That the NSW Branch of the PRSA adopt the

model for the election of the NSW Parliament as devised by Stephen Lesslie and laid out in detail on the website [www.lesslie.com.au](http://www.lesslie.com.au)

The model incorporates for both Houses:

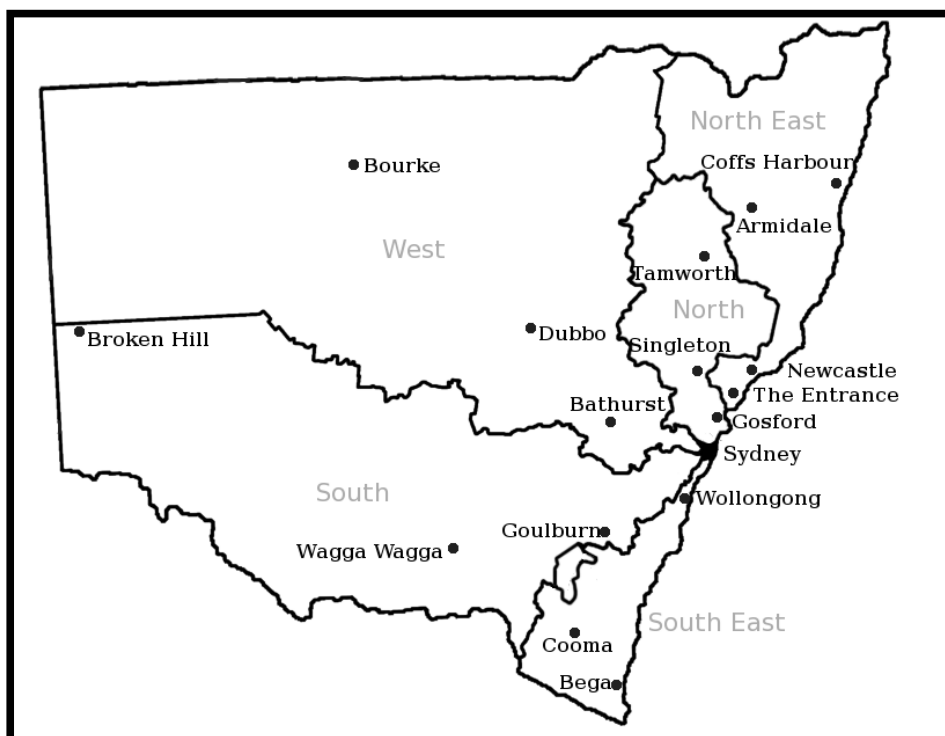
1. A Hare-Clark proportional representation system
2. Fully optional preferential voting
3. The Robson Rotation
4. The Gregory transfer
5. Abolition of above-the-line voting and registered group voting tickets.

The Legislative Council would consist of, as at present, a single electorate encompassing the state as a whole. Legislative Councillors to be elected for eight years with half retiring at each general election. A referendum to be held in due course to reduce the number to be elected at each periodic election from twenty one to nineteen.

The Legislative assembly would consist of five electorates (see map) each returning nineteen members. Four of the electorates would include a portion of the greater metropolitan area of Sydney and adjacent regional areas. The fifth electorate would include the City of Newcastle and coastal areas north to the Queensland border.

Note: The electoral boundaries shown in the map are based on the boundaries of current single member electorates.

When drawing up the initial multi-member electorate boundaries, the electoral commissioners should use local government boundaries thereby extending the Northern electorate to the Queensland border.



## BC-STV (and the Tasmanian connection)

**Malcolm Mackerras** writes:

British Columbia, the most western of the Canadian provinces, is to have a provincial general election on Tuesday, May 12. More importantly, however, that election is to be accompanied by a referendum on what they call "BC-STV" which is short for "British Columbia Single Transferable Vote".

Up to the present all Canadian politicians, federal and provincial, have been elected by the system known in the academic literature as "Single Member Plurality" or SMP. That system is colloquially known as "first-past-the-post" (FPP). Dissatisfaction with that system has reached the point, especially at the provincial level, that several Canadian provinces have engaged with their electorates to replace it. However, only British Columbia has come up with a viable alternative.

BC-STV is, essentially, what we call "Hare-Clark" in Australia.

A referendum was held in 2005 (in conjunction with the provincial general election) at which 57.7 per cent of voters supported BC-STV. However, the legislature had decided not to implement BC-STV unless it received 60 per cent support, but also to run the referendum again in conjunction with the 2009 provincial general election. The smart money now is on the affirmative vote easily exceeding 60 per cent.

Assuming the news is good Tasmanians, especially, will have two reasons to celebrate. It just so happens that May 12, 1909, was the day on which the first 30 Tasmanian politicians elected by Hare-Clark took their seats in the House of Assembly. One of those men was a Labor candidate, Joseph Aloysius Lyons, later to become one of our better Prime Ministers, admittedly by then on the other side of the political divide.

*(BC-STV vs MMP: a psephological case study, reproduced with the kind permission of the author)*

### Australian donation to BC-STV campaign

Bogey Musidlak, PRSA national president, has organised a donation to the BC-

STV campaign to which PRSA (NSW) contributed \$100. The total donation amounted to over AUD \$2500.

A win in the referendum would be a big boost for PR and for representative government in Canada.

You can read about the campaign and view a TV advertisement for the STV case at [www.stv.ca](http://www.stv.ca)

## MMP in New Zealand revisited

In Issue 3 of The largest remainder we published an article by Stephen Lesslie entitled MMP, STV and the New Zealand election.

**Stephen Lesslie** writes:

I would like to thank Malcolm Mackerras for pointing out two errors in the article on the New Zealand elections published in the last edition of *Largest Remainder*:

1. The correct title for the proportional representation system used in New Zealand is Mixed Member Proportional (MMP)
2. The figures used in the analysis and STV simulation were booth figures and did not include the Special Votes (absentee votes). The final figures were not available at the time of publication. These Special votes did slightly change the composition of the Parliament. The Greens gained one extra list seat at the expense of the Nationals. However the STV simulation and the conclusions drawn did not change. The on-line copy of the article has been amended to reflect these changes.

The following extract from an article by psephologist **Malcolm Mackerras** continues the New Zealand election story ...

On a Saturday early in June there is to be a by-election in the Auckland seat of Mount Albert vacated by former New Zealand Prime Minister, Helen Clark. However, readers would be entitled to ask me: "Why is the prospect of a by-election bad news?" My answer is that the holding of by-elections is

completely inconsistent with proportional representation.

In November 1993 there was a referendum at which 54 per cent of New Zealand voters supported the Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) system while 46 per cent supported the old FPP system. Consequently the House of Representatives now has 122 members of which 70 are elected by FPP, supplemented by 52 chosen from party lists. If the 52 party list members were distributed proportionally between the parties (as in a system known as Mixed Member Majoritarian) then by-elections would still be appropriate.

However, that is not the way the system works. The 52 party list members are distributed according to the so-called "principle" known as "top up". In that way the New Zealand system copies that of Germany, a country which has party list members plus constituencies for which no by-elections are ever held. In Germany a seat such as Mount Albert would go to the next available candidate on the party list. In that way the proportions established by the general election vote are preserved. Had New Zealand fully copied Germany (instead of copying it in a half-baked way) then the next candidate on Labour's list, a certain Damien Peter O'Connor, a defeated member of the previous Parliament, would have become the member for Mount Albert. That would have saved the Labour Party the cost of fighting the by-election.

The MMP system is clearly unfair to parties where most members are elected by constituencies and favours parties whose membership comes wholly from the party list. For example, the Greens have nine members, all of whom come from the party list. If one of them dies or resigns then replacement is automatic and costs the party nothing.

How likely is it that Labour will lose Mount Albert? If one looks at the constituency vote one would think it a safe Labour seat. Helen Clark received 20,157 votes, the National Party candidate 9,806 and all the others a total of 4034. However, if one looks at the party vote a very different pattern emerges. Labour secured 14,894 votes, National 12,468 and all the rest a combined

total of 7,601. My National Party contact tells me they will contest the by-election "and we are planning to run a pretty vigorous campaign."

The crazy thing about MMP is that parties get list seats as a reward for failing to win constituencies. Thus if National were to win this by-election it would be laughing all the way to the beehive. As its reward for failing to win Mount Albert last year it now has a party list seat for a certain Aaron Wayne Gilmore. If it wins the by-election it then gets another seat. New Zealand should scrap this system and replace it by a better one.

*(BC-STV vs MMP: a psephological case study, reproduced with the kind permission of the author)*

## Future Meetings

The following dates have been set for Committee meetings – 11 May, 13 July, 14 September and 9 November (all Mondays at 7:30 pm).

Anyone is welcome to attend. For details, please contact Susan Gregory at [president@electoralreformaustralia.org](mailto:president@electoralreformaustralia.org) or on 9181 5185 for the relevant information.

The 14 September meeting will be the Annual General Meeting of which all members will again be advised.

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Comments and/or contributions are welcome:  
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Mark Rodowicz – Vice President  
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