

LARGEST REMAINDER

(Not quite Quota Notes)

No. 5

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Introduction

With the British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, under threat and making noises about electoral reform, maybe it would be a good time to speak to the NSW government about the matter. Is it only fear of imminent defeat that inspires politicians to think about the way they are elected?

Bogey Musildak, PRSA National President, is circulating a monthly email Effective voting bulletin.

If you would like to be on the list to receive it, contact Bogey on bogeym2002@yahoo.com.au.

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

If you do not wish to receive Largest Remainder please let us know at president@electoralreformaustralia.org.

Committee Meeting, Monday 11 May 2009

The following decisions were made at the meeting:

- To hold the Branch AGM on 13 July 2009.
- That a campaign be undertaken to reform the method of electing the Senate to remove above-the-line voting and group voting tickets, and to implement fully optional preferential voting and the

Robson Rotation; that Senator John Faulkner be approached for a meeting on the issue; and, that the campaign be a national one with all PRSA bodies to be approached to join in.

Annual General Meeting

The Branch's AGM will now be held on **Monday 13 July**, to bring it more into line with our constitutional requirement that the Branch's financial year end on March 31.

The meeting will be held at 74 Thompson Street, Drummoyne at **7.30 pm**. All are welcome to attend and only financial members are entitled to vote for the 9 person Committee.

Psephologist and academic, **Malcolm Mackerras**, has kindly consented to be our Guest Speaker.

Mr Mackerras was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia in January 2006 for advocating reforms to the country's electoral system and encouraging political debate.



STV Referendum in British Columbia

By Stephen Lesslie (Vice President, PRSA (NSW))

The result of the May 12 referendum in British Columbia for the introduction of the single transferable vote (STV) system was 39% in favour. This is a disappointing result for those of us who believe that proportional representation and in particular the single transferable vote (STV) is an ideal system.

British Columbia uses single member electorates with first past the post voting (FPTP). In the past, election results have been badly skewed and have rarely given satisfaction, save to those actually elected.

The British Columbian parliament has an odd idea of democracy. In the previous 2005 referendum, the vote in support of STV

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING | Monday 13 July 2009 7.30pm



was 58%. It was carried in all but two electorates (or ridings). The parliament had, however, decided that STV required 60% support to be carried.

Under pressure from such a strong vote, the proposal was put again to

the electorate on May 12, 2009. The parliament also voted to give both the Yes and No campaigns C\$500,000 each. This donation enabled the No campaign – which would otherwise have struggled to raise any money – the ability to run a strong negative fear campaign.

models such as MMP would have been better – naturally, had MMP been the proposed model, they would have argued that STV was a better system. (Of course, either alternative is better than FPTP)

(3) Insult the intelligence of your own people: The No campaign claimed that STV was too difficult for British Columbians to understand – ignoring the fact that Tasmanians, the Irish and the Maltese have no trouble with the system.

At the same time as the referendum, an election was held for the British Columbian parliament.

Results of the British Columbia election held 12 May 2009

Party	Liberal	NDP	Greens	Others
Vote	46.0%	42.4%	8.1%	3.8%
Seats	49 (57.6%)	36 (42.0%)	0	0

(figures from 15 May 2009)



The mathematically inclined will find it interesting to note that this result is a classic example of the cube rule. The cube rule predicts that in FPTP elections, the seats won will be in proportion to the cube of the percentage vote obtained by the two major parties. Naturally, minor parties and their supporters are completely excluded.

Cube Rule
 $(46.0)^3 = 97336$
 $(42.4)^3 = 76225$

Or a ratio of 48 : 37
 Actual results 49 : 36 (even worse)

Redistributions: who gets the chop?

By Stephen Lesslie (Vice President, PRSA (NSW))

In the federal electoral redistribution now taking place NSW must lose one seat.

With single member electorates it is effectively the Federal Redistribution Commissioners who choose which seat will be abolished.

At the last redistribution Calare, then held by the Independent Peter Andren, was abolished.

Although there is a seat called Calare in the current Parliament a simple look at the electoral maps on Adam Carr's excellent

The No campaign must have taken note of the Australian republican referendum, as it followed the three successful techniques of our monarchists.

(1) Never argue the benefits of your own position: The campaign material issued by the No campaign makes no attempt to justify the FPTP system or its skewed results. The only reason they gave for keeping it was that it is simple.

(2) Attack the proposed model: The No campaign argued that STV was not proportional enough, ignoring that this is because it allows for individual choice of candidates. They argued that alternative

website www.psephos.adam-carr.net will confirm that Calare was abolished, and that Gwydir was renamed Parkes and Parkes renamed Calare. The subterfuge however did not fool Peter Andren, who before his tragic and untimely death, announced that he would have to quit the House of Representatives and run for the Senate.

There is no appeal against decisions of the Redistribution Commissioners.

With multi-member electorates redistributions are much easier. It can be as simple as determining which electorate has the lowest ratio of voters to members and simply removing the entitlement of one seat. A thirteen member seat simply becomes a twelve member seat. If all thirteen current members subsequently contest the seat then it is the voters and not the Commissioners who determine which member is not elected.

Community of Interest – a load of rubbish?

By Stephen Lesslie (Vice President, PRSA (NSW))

Federal redistributions are currently taking place in both NSW and Queensland. Because of differential population growth Queensland will gain an extra seat in the next parliament and NSW will lose one.

In making their decision the Redistribution Commissioners must remain within the numerical quotas for current and projected enrolment. This is reasonable as it is important to keep all seats as close to the mean number of electors as possible. They must also give due consideration to:

- community interests within the proposed division, including economic, social and regional interests;
- means of communication and travel within the proposed division;
- physical features and area of the proposed division; and
- existing boundaries of divisions in the State or Territory.

The second, third and fourth points are also reasonable as they tend to keep the electorates compact and help mitigate against obvious gerrymanders.

But what about the first point?

Probably the strongest indicator of

“community interests” is voting intention and therefore when the Commissioners are drawing up boundaries, areas such as mining towns or large public housing estates should be included in Labor electorates. Similarly high rise water front home unit areas should be included in Liberal electorates.

But is this desirable?

The outcome for the voters is safer seats and further erosion of the voters’ ability to influence the outcome of elections.

In multi-member STV electorates the inclusion or exclusion of such areas is irrelevant as it becomes a matter of “robbing Peter to pay Paul” and the effects are cancelled out.

A Case Study

The City of Canada Bay in Sydney’s Inner West is the result of the 2000 amalgamation of the municipalities of Drummoyne and Concord. But it’s not a city!

Canada Bay does not have anything that would seem to be necessary for it to be called a city. There is no cathedral; no central business district; no major shopping centre; no major road or rail links between the centres of Drummoyne and Concord; no Canada Bay sports team and the residents don’t proudly say “I live in Canada Bay”.

It has very few “community interests” yet as an administrative body it works remarkably well. The councillors are elected by proportional representation and most localities are represented; there are 4 male and 5 female councillors; 4 Labor, 3 Liberal; 1 Green and 1 Independent. The vote for the Labor and Liberal candidates reflected the socioeconomic areas remarkably accurately, the Greens’ vote was more uniform across the area and the Independent’s was largely based in Concord, where she lives, but she would not have been elected without the support she gained from areas in the old Drummoyne municipality.

The result is a balanced council with most voters having a representative of the group they voted for, and generally the individual they voted for, on the council.

Why does it work despite the lack of “community interest”? It works because proportional representation allows for the

expression of different interests.

The point of the case study is to demonstrate that no matter how big an electorate, or how many candidates are to be elected, the lack of homogeneity in the area will never be an issue. To maximise their appeal parties must present a balanced team. If they do not then the voters of that region (or gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic group...) will punish them.

The power of 1.8 per cent

Letter by Marian Lesslie, Committee Member, published in the Sydney Morning Herald of 24 March 2004

Bill Anderson's claim (Letters, March 23) that Steve Fielding's election to the Senate is comparable to Bob Brown's is laughable. A Senate vote of 59,254 in Tasmania is vastly different from a vote of 56,376 in Victoria: Victoria is almost 10 times larger. The Greens' 59,254 votes in 2007 was 18.1 per cent of the formal vote - Family First received 1.8 per cent of the Victorian vote in 2004.

On first preferences the Greens received 60.8 per cent of a quota in 1996, and 96.5 per cent of a quota in 2001. Family First received only 13.2 per cent of a quota.

Senator Fielding was elected because of backroom preference deals that used the rort of above-the-line voting. He has no democratic mandate. Probably 80 per cent of the people who voted for Fielding did not even know they had done so.

Marian Lesslie Drummoyne

A challenge:

The model supported by the Proportional Representation Society of Australia (NSW Branch), of broad based electorates returning up to fifteen members for the House of Representatives and elected by a combination of both city and regional voters has been criticised by a number of people including election analyst Antony Green.

We issue a challenge to all, to devise a model for the proportional representation election of the House of Representatives that satisfies Australia's geography and constitution.

To make it easier, just start with New

South Wales.

Certain conditions must be met:

- 1) There must be exactly 48 seats (Constitutional requirement)
- 2) No 2, 3, 4 or 6 member electorates.
- 3) No electorate to be in electoral stasis.
- 4) Regional electorates should be of a reasonable geographic size to maintain a local sense of identity (Note: Some people seem to think this is important. We don't.)
- 5) Quotas need to be large enough to prevent a raft of bigots and racists being elected.
- 6) Quotas need to be small enough to enable genuine minor parties such as the Greens to be elected.
- 7) Quotas should not vary markedly between electorates.
- 8) There should be no artificial devices, such as thresholds, forcing voters to consider whether or not to vote tactically.

The model proposed by the National body of the PRSA fails on conditions 3, 4, 6 and 7. In South Australia it also fails condition No. 2.

See what you can do. Submit your ideas to [Largest Remainder](mailto:largestremainder@electoralreformaustralia.org) at largestremainder@electoralreformaustralia.org

Future Meetings

The following dates have been set for meetings – 13 July, the Annual General Meeting, and Committee Meetings on 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 or on 9181 5185 for the relevant information.

Comments and/or contributions are welcome: president@electoralreformaustralia.org, or
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