

Australia's electoral future - 2002 and beyond?

Australia has had an 18 year trial of the ALP's experiment in a user-friendly voting system established by sweeping electoral "reform" in 1983-7 and creation of an Australian Electoral Commission in 1984.

During these years, the Coalition has constantly opposed this system as too 'abuser-friendly', too naive in reliance on 100% honesty, and is similarly viewed by a great many of the public at large.

Among many points of criticism have been:

- No identification for electors on enrolment (by fax, internet, post)
- No identification to prove citizenship on enrolment
- No identification for witnesses to enrolment forms
- No identification for electors on voting (except for overseas voters)
- No local voting - only division-wide rolls at every booth (sometimes up to 60 or more!)
- No scrutineers in pre-poll centres
- No audit at individual polling booth tables
- No complete habitation checks
- No statement of reasons for voting pre-poll required or check on validity of pre-poll or postal votes
- No process of check on fraud other than voting in the same name

The Australian Labor Party's long reign in defending this system is now over. The Coalition is likely to lend the H.S. Chapman Society's campaign a willing ear. So now is the time to seek a barvest from the Society's foundation years.

The devil is not only in the law but also in its practice

When under fire for its administration, the Australian Electoral Commission protests it is merely carrying out the law of the Parliament. But in fact for over 16 years it has presided over sweeping changes with few alarm bells sounding in the corridors of Parliament.

Examples of major changes

- **Outsourcing** of electoral roll (to Computer Services Corporation);
 - printing of ballot papers (to 14 firms for 1998 election)
 - issue of postal ballot papers (centrally from one source)
 - IT software for management, ballot count etc.
- Co-location of electorate offices out of neighbourhoods in clusters
- Centralisation at the expense of Divisional Returning Officers
- Abolition of hard copy marked-up roll for postal votes
- Electoral rolls removed from courthouses/neighbourhood libraries
- No check whether postal and pre-poll voters qualify for such votes

- Degradation of habitation reviews with intent to abolish them

Some matters of concern

- Use of standard green paper for ballot papers
(any cheat could make a perfect replica before or during an election)
- Over size pink-striped postal ballot envelopes;
(as in Nov. 10, 2001 - cheat fodder in transit - obvious, too large for automated sorting, easy to open)
- Loose ballot papers rather than in numbered sequence books
- Despatch of marked-up rolls to scanning centres two days after election
- Problems with pre-poll centres:
 - exclusion of scrutineers
 - no notice of penalties in centres
 - omissions of Notice 50 in some
- No notice of penalties for fraudulent enrolment on enrolment forms
- Postal votes accepted on witness's signature date - minus date stamp
- Security of pre-poll/postal votes at all times; security of ordinary votes in transit