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Title:

Radio Broadcast - Electoral system in South Australia

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A.L.P. BROADCAST BY THE PREMIER, HON. DON DUNSTAN, G.C., M.P.,
5-K.A., FRIDAY, 8TH MARCH, 1968, 6.55 P.M.

GOOD EVENING :

IT HAS BEEN MY POLICY DURING THE LAST WEEK NOT TO HAVE SAID TOO MUCH ABOUT THE PRESENT ELECTORAL SITUATION WHILE THE VOTES OF THE PEOPLE WERE STILL BEING COUNTED. HOWEVER, IT IS QUITE CLEAR THAT AT THE ELECTION LAST SATURDAY, THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF THE PEOPLE OF THIS STATE VOTED FOR A CONTINUANCE OF THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT. THE ONLY REASON THAT THERE IS ANY QUESTION ABOUT ITS CONTINUANCE IS AN ELECTORAL SYSTEM WHICH HAS AROUSED THE CONDEMNATION AND IRE OF PEOPLE THROUGHOUT AUSTRALIA. I DON'T PROPOSE THIS EVENING TO READ TO YOU JUST MY OWN WORDS ON THIS SUBJECT. LET ME READ TO YOU WHAT TWO MAJOR NEWSPAPERS OUTSIDE SOUTH AUSTRALIA HAVE HAD TO SAY ABOUT IT, AND I CAN ONLY SAY THAT IT IS A GRAVE REFLECTION UPON NEWSPAPERS WITHIN THIS STATE THAT THEY HAVE NOT BEEN PREPARED TO EDITORIALIZE IN THIS WAY ON WHAT IS CLEARLY A MATTER OF DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLE :-

ELECTING A GOVERNMENT

THE elections in South Australia have produced a most extraordinary result: the Government, with approximately 54 per cent of the first preference votes, and the Opposition, with approximately 43 per cent, appear to have won the same number of seats. What is more, the question of who will govern the people of South Australia may be decided by the sole Independent, Mr Stott, whose sympathies are said to lie with the Opposition, but who will be elected by the second preference votes of the Government candidate.

The wider implications of the result are not without interest. The ALP has recovered so markedly since its 48 per cent vote at the Senate elections last November (and even more astonishingly since its debacle in the Federal general elections of November, 1966) that it must be questioned whether Federal politics has had any bearing on the way South Australians have regarded their own State Government. Moreover, the vote for the Labor Government on Saturday appears to have been very similar to that polled by the ALP three years ago. Given that South Australia has been through a very difficult three years, with continued drought and a good deal of unemployment, the maintenance of this electoral support by Mr Dunstan's government can only be regarded as a vote of confidence.

These conclusions make it all the more bizarre that not only has Mr Dunstan failed to obtain a working majority in the House of Assembly, he is in danger of not continuing in power. The explanation, of course, is the manipulation of the South Australian electoral system carried out by a previous Liberal-Country League administration, buttressed by the refusal of the Legislative Council to alter it, and preserved by the Labor Government's powerlessness to alter the Legislative Council (which is still elected on a 19th century restricted franchise which aims to perpetuate non-Labor dominance).

Lopsided weighting

The form of manipulation is common in Australia: the weighting of the rural vote. But rarely has the weighting been so lopsided. In 1965, for example, there were 19 country seats each of which contained fewer than 10,000 voters; there were 12 urban seats each of which contained more than 20,000 voters (and five of these held more than 30,000). Since the LCL's strength is in the country, and the ALP's lies in the city, the effect has been to give the LCL an enormous electoral bonus. Not since 1944 has the LCL actually polled more votes than the Labor Party. Usually it has won much fewer. In 1962, for example, the LCL won 35 per cent of the vote, the ALP almost 55 per cent, and the LCL still retained power (with the help of the same Mr Stott).

The impossibility of Labor's gaining a majority in the Legislative Council as it is presently constituted makes governing difficult for any Labor administration, particularly one as forward-looking as Mr Dunstan's. Many of his legislative proposals were simply rejected by the Council, others were so emasculated they bore little resemblance to their original form. Should Mr Dunstan retain power for the second three years, any administration deserves he faces more of this frustration, with the added burden of having to placate the Independent on whose whims the future of his Government depends. Truly, the Premier's task is difficult.

Whether he retains power may depend on Mr Stott, whose own position, of course, is not enviable. He has his own conscience to consider, as well as the claims of the Government and of the Opposition. But it would seem extraordinary, given that he is not officially committed to any party, if he did not pay attention to the expressed preference of the electors of the State considered as a whole. Their decision was undoubtedly to put the Dunstan Government back for another term.

Mr Stott can translate their decision into fact, something

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FOR those at the top of the Public Service, and also for those who are hoping to be at the top eventually, the most eagerly awaited portion of the Governor-General's speech in the Senate Chamber next week will be Mr Gorton's blueprint for splitting the Prime Minister's Department into two not necessarily equal organisations.

This interest has its source in the speculation and debate that have been going on in Canberra since it became clear several weeks ago that the Prime Minister intended to reorganise his department and bring in Mr C. L. S. Hewitt as the head of a revamped policy team under his control.

The arrangements likely to be included in Lord Casey's speech in opening the 1968 Parliamentary session next week will set out officially the new allocations of responsibility under the Prime Minister, arrangements that will carry with them a host of future implications for both the Public Service and the Federal ministry.

But they will be only the beginnings of the Prime Minister's aims, the guidelines of his intention to create his own policy instrument. Its achievement will depend on those involved in the changes, and most particularly on Mr Hewitt.

The basic facts of the situation that have been made known to the public so far are these: Mr Gorton believes that the growing volume of Cabinet duties which must be discharged by the Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department, Sir John Bunting, together with his departmental policy duties, comprise a work-load that is too heavy for one officer and do not leave him enough time for policy work.

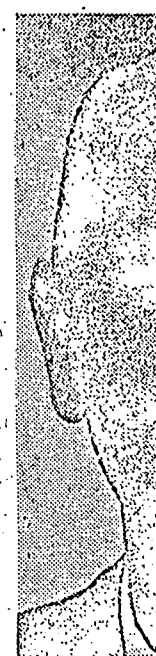
Secondly, as Mr Gorton wants to expand both the system of Cabinet committees and the policy role of the Prime Minister's Department, he believes that the Cabinet and policy duties should be separated.

PUT in that way, it sounds rather simple. But the achievement of these objectives has raised some of the most fascinating problems in politics and administration since Mr McEwen established the Office of Secondary Industry within his department several years ago.

On that occasion, a move to elevate the head of the Office of Secondary Industry to the same status as second-in-charge at the Treasury failed because of Treasury and Public Service Board opposition.

But, this time, it is a question of a Prime Minister seeking the status of a permanent head for a reorganised policy machine, a much more heavy-weight combination and one unlikely to be overcome by opposition from those areas of the Public Service.

The early misgivings about



what Mr Gorton evolved from he wanted to Bunting with More recently spelled out that had always in a new department there are their going with p status. No one that Mr Hew pointed the p of the Prime partment, and permanent he Secretariat, w new Departme

The speculation what duties it will have, and execution will lished pattern ity and influ Cabinet-Public Mr Hewitt pears to have ments: to ch from other de Cabinet; to in and policies Minister; and routine adn existing respo Prime Ministe

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“Dear Sir Henry...”

THE PUZZLE of the week (so far) is a financial one. Why did Mr Gorton place so much importance on the prompt release to other Premiers and the public of the text of his letters to Sir Henry Bolte on the subject of the new Victorian receipts duty? The letters contained little that was new, and nothing fiery; interpretations of their import are contradictory. Mr Gorton began on a formal note—“My dear Premier”—but ended on what might seem a more conciliatory “Dear Sir Henry” basis. Though he chided Sir Henry Bolte for taxing incomes, and warned that the Commonwealth “could not stand by and permit this to happen,” he gave no indication that he would or could take action against what was done. Sir Henry Bolte has not retracted anything, while on the other hand our own State Government is suggesting that the Commonwealth’s tone means that New South Wales may now be forced to introduce the turnover-tax element of Sir Henry’s receipts duty.

The game of political tactics no doubt has a part in what each of the three Governments is putting out for public consumption. It may strike non-politicians as irresponsible and depressing. Sir Henry Bolte has some grounds for claiming that he was driven to the receipts duty by the Commonwealth’s inconsiderateness to Victoria’s financial needs. There are hints that Federal spokesmen pointed last year to the receipts-tax already operating in Western Australia as an example of what other States could do (Mr Nicklin says, this was

definitely suggested). Be that as it may, Sir Henry may well have had no alternative answer in his search for a tax with growth potential in a field not already occupied by the Commonwealth.

But the receipts duty is a thoroughly bad tax, and this not mainly for the characteristics that Mr Gorton and Mr McMahon object to. It is even more objectionable as a turnover-tax than as a tax on incomes. In the first role, it is more regressive (falls heaviest on those who can least afford to pay), and in this role it has an insanely arbitrary, repetitive and multiplicative character. The same item can be taxed over and over as a cost ingredient passing from hand to hand in the productive-distributive process. The lowness of the nominal initial rate (one cent in \$10) may make the tax politically acceptable, but in practice Sir Henry’s revenue estimates imply that it will yield an average of three times the nominal percentage rate. Every subsequent increase in the nominal rate would have similar pyramiding effect.

The Commonwealth’s blithe acceptance of this prospect is incomprehensible. Indeed, by attempting to eliminate the income-tax element, the Commonwealth may be inviting a still heavier incidence on turnovers. In implying that any tax is all right so long as it isn’t an income-tax, Mr Gorton shows that he has been badly advised. The main lesson he should draw from Victoria’s unfortunate tax is that the Commonwealth’s self-centred financial policies are driving the States to intolerable extremities.

The hillbilly State

WHAT DOES Mr Renshaw have in common with Mr Steele Hall, the Liberal-Country leader in South Australia? The answer: both of them polled 43 per cent of the votes in their respective State elections. But, while Mr Renshaw was soundly beaten on February 24, Mr Hall came very close to winning on Saturday. Such is the imbalance in South Australia’s electoral boundaries that the State Labor Government led by Mr Dunstan, after polling 54 per cent of the votes, is fighting for its life. It looks as though Labor and the Liberal-Country League will each have 19 seats in the new Parliament, with an independent, Mr Stott, holding the balance of power—though Labor may be lucky to do as well as this.

The scale of this injustice is worth examining. Of the votes counted so far, the A.L.P. has polled 267,577 and the L.C.L. 218,890. Because the electoral boundaries are weighted in favour of country districts, where the population is smaller and the electorates more numerous, Labor piles up big majorities uselessly in city seats. According to a D.L.P. analysis, 70 per cent of South

Australians are represented by 13 politicians; and 26 politicians represent the remaining 30 per cent. For any party to win 54 per cent of the votes in an Australian election and still not be sure of a parliamentary majority is a disgrace to our democracy.

There is no doubt that Mr Dunstan’s Government suffered a setback in some country seats on Saturday. The Opposition played skilfully on country voters’ fears that the Government’s promise of electoral reform would swamp Parliament with city members. Mr Dunstan has in fact attempted electoral reforms already, only to have them thrown out by the Upper House, where Labor is even more grotesquely disadvantaged with four members out of 20. All this is part of the hillbilly legacy of Sir Thomas Playford, who kept his kid-glove dictatorship in power for 27 years until South Australia’s growing industrial population finally toppled him. Mr Dunstan’s Government has been active and reforming; it does not deserve to lose after three years in office. But it seems that while Sir Thomas Playford’s song is ended, the malady lingers on.

*Quoted in Brandegee
together with quote from Canberra Times*