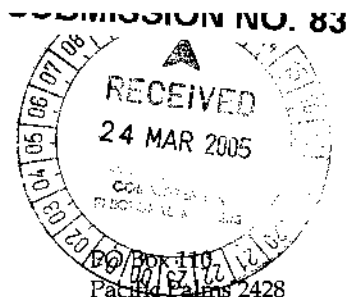


Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Submission No. 83
Date Received 24-3-05
Secretary <i>[Signature]</i>

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The Chairman
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

16 March 2005

Dear Sir

Senate Voters' Choice (Preference Allocation) Bill 2004

I am writing to express my view on certain events that influenced the outcome of the 2004 federal election. The Australian Labor Party directed preferences away from the Greens, against, I believe, the wishes of the majority of their members. All of the ALP members to whom I have spoken were aghast, after the election was over, to realize that the party had directed the poll in the way it turned out. Most electors, even relatively sophisticated ones who understand our complex voting systems, did not realize before election day which way their vote would flow should they vote along party lines in the upper house.

The net result was that, by directing their preferences in the way they did, the ALP handed control of the Senate to John Howard. Obviously the ALP would not have intended to do this! I believe their "cleverness" backfired with a result they did not anticipate. It's not for the party machinery to decide how the votes should flow – it is for the voters themselves. In the 2004 election it appears the party probably acted contrary to their members' wishes.

As an example, in Victoria the Greens senate candidate received 8% of the vote, but was supplanted by the Family First Senator who received less than 2% of the primary vote. Similar events unfolded in NSW and Western Australia.

I consider it to be undemocratic that a political party can direct preferences, contrary to the normal expectation of their party members and supporters, in their effort to second guess the outcome and influence the results. By contrast, the Greens believe that it is important to keep faith with members and supporters, and therefore to direct preferences in the way in which they would be expected to flow. Any other course of action betrays the trust of the members. I have only been actively involved in campaigning for three years, but have become aware and appalled at the deals - attempts to influence outcomes - that are entered into just prior to elections. We call ourselves a democracy – but our elaboration of complex voting systems has given rise to a situation where clever people in powerful positions can attempt (and often succeed) to manipulate the system.

I heartily support Senator Bob Brown's proposed legislation, and trust that your committee will thoroughly investigate the implications of parties setting preferences. Australians always say they like a fair go - lets have a openly fair system along the lines of what you see is what you get.

Yours faithfully

Anne E McKay