

Pauline A Chitty
P O Box 2031
ALBANY WA 6331
Phone/Fax: (08) 9845 2065

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The Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters	
Submission No.	46
Date Received	21/6/02
Secretary	<i>J. Palmer</i>

Dear Sir/Madam

INQUIRY INTO THE CONDUCT OF THE 2001 FEDERAL ELECTION

My problem with the 2001 Federal election is of a general nature.

The 2001 Federal election left me believing that this country of mine is not a democratic country.

By democracy I always believed that everybody had rights to their own beliefs, and also had the rights to express those beliefs whether anybody else believed the same or not.

The behaviour of Parliament and our elected representatives in the 2001 ^{Federal election} appalled me insofar as the question of preferences is concerned. Theoretically I understand that preferences are there so that if a person's first vote does not gain a position in Parliament then their second vote may, and if not then their third etc. The reasoning behind this idea seems to be that if, say, 40% people vote for "A" and 30% people vote for "B" and 30% people vote for "C" then that means 60% people do not want "A". We do not seem to hear that in this case then 70% people do not want "B" and 70% people do not want "C" – in reality first past the post is a fairer system than preferential voting.

What appals me is the way the parties manipulate the system a) to get their own or like minded people into power, and b) to prevent anybody they do not agree with from getting into power – i.e. colluding to put a certain party last.

One may say that 'democratically' it is their right to do so. But the ends do not justify the means, and if a 'democratic' action leads to grossly undemocratic results then there is something innately wrong with the system and it should be scrapped forthwith.

In the 2001 Federal election the behaviour of our elected representatives and a large number of un-elected representatives (paternalistic ex politicians for example) left a significant number of Australians without a voice in the Parliament simply by the practice of putting certain minor parties last in preferencing. If we had simple primary voting (first past the post) then at least those people who choose to vote for a

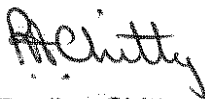
minor party would have some representation in Parliament (and isn't that what Parliament is about – representing the people as diverse as they are?).

Manipulation of the system has resulted at times in our country being led by a party (the National Party) which received less than 2% of the vote (when the Deputy Prime Minister is chosen from that Party).

It makes me quite angry that Australia boasts that its electoral system is "the envy of the world" when the only way that I can see that it can be the envy of the world is when other countries wish they had an undemocratic system posing as a democratic one.

As a suggestion, if preferential voting is to stay – why not make the second and following votes of the people worth less than the first preference. For example – if a person votes (1) for Greens, say, and secondly for the Democrats and thirdly for Labour, why doesn't the second preference only carry 50% of the value of the first preference; and why doesn't the third preference carry 33% of the first preference and so on. There is no need for this to be unwieldy in this day and age of electronic calculations. I find it intolerable that one's less than first preference carries the same weight as the following preferences. But even worse, I find voting for some party that I can't stand through preferential voting is abhorrent.

Yours faithfully



Pauline Chitty