

AUSTRALIA

Date of Elections: May 18, 1974

Purpose of Elections

Elections were held for all the members of Parliament, which body was dissolved some 18 months prematurely. Previous general elections had taken place in December 1972.

Characteristics of Parliament

The Australian Federal Parliament is bicameral, consisting of the House of Representatives and the Senate.

The House of Representatives, according to the Constitution, must be, as nearly as practicable, twice the size of the Senate. The number of Representatives in each of the 6 States of the Australian Commonwealth is in proportion to the population, but must be at least 5. At present, the membership of the House is 127 Representatives, all elected for 3 years.

The Senate, with 60 members elected for 6 years and renewed by halves every 3 years, represents each of the 6 States on an equal basis. However, inhabitants of Australia's two internal territories — the Federal Capital Territory and the Northern Territory — who are represented in Parliament by 2 Representatives, do not vote in Senate elections.

Electoral System

All British subjects of either sex who have been resident in Australia for 6 consecutive months, are aged 18 and over, and appear on the continuously revised electoral registers, are entitled to vote in elections to both Houses. Persons of unsound mind, attainted of treason, convicted and under sentence for any offense punishable by imprisonment for one year or more, or persons who are holders of temporary entry permits under the Migration Act 1958-1966, or are prohibited immigrants under that Act, are excluded from the franchise.

Voting is a duty and unwarranted abstention is punishable by fine.

All persons fulfilling the conditions required for electors who have resided in Australia for at least 3 years can be elected to the House of Representatives or Senate. No member of either House may be chosen or sit as a member of the other House. Furthermore, no undischarged bankrupt or person who is

under allegiance to a foreign State or who derives any profit or has any pecuniary interest through the holding of public office, a pension or specific agreement with the Government, may be elected for or sit in Parliament.

Candidatures to Parliament must be supported by 6 qualified electors and accompanied by a payment of \$A 200 (for the Senate) or \$A 100 (for the House). This deposit is reimbursed if the candidate polls at least 1/10 (Senate) or 1/5 (House) of the total or average number, respectively, of first preference votes polled by the successful candidates in the election.

Representatives are elected according to a system of preferential, or alternative, vote which can be summarized as follows:

Although there is only a single ballot, Representatives — one for each constituency — are elected by an absolute majority of the votes cast. Thus voters are required to indicate, on their ballot paper, an order of preference among all the candidates contesting the same seat, by marking the numbers 1, 2, 3, etc., in squares placed opposite each name. If none of the candidates in a given constituency obtains an absolute majority of the first preferential votes, a second count is held. At this point, the candidate with the least number of votes is eliminated and the ballot papers which he had polled in the first count are redistributed among his opponents on the basis of the second choice indicated by the electors. This procedure is repeated until such time as one of the candidates obtains an absolute majority.

Senators are elected in each State, which forms a single electoral college, according to the single-transferable vote form of proportional representation.

Pursuant to this system, each elector receives a ballot paper bearing the names of all the candidates for his State, grouped together according to political affiliation or cited as independent candidates. He then indicates his order of preference among all the candidates.

When the votes are counted, the number of first preferential votes obtained by each candidate, excluding void ballot papers, is recorded.

The electoral quota is then determined by dividing the total number of first preferential votes by the number of seats to be filled and increasing the quotient so obtained by one. Any candidate who has received a number of votes equal to or greater than the quota determined is declared elected.

Should there remain any seats to be filled, a second distribution is carried out on the same basis, using the second preferential vote, after the surplus votes (that is, the number in excess of the quota) of the elected candidates have been transferred to the continuing candidates.

A by-election is held to fill any seat becoming vacant in the House of Representatives between general elections. Vacancies in the Senate are filled either by choice of the Houses of Parliament of the particular State or through appointment by that State's Governor.

General Political Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

The decision of dissolution was reached amidst the Government's difficulties in obtaining Senate approval of various budgetary bills, including significant appropriations earmarked for government operations.

Prime Minister Gough Whitlam had threatened to hold new elections were the majority Senate Opposition to block these measures. They were passed, but not before Mr. Whitlam had recommended dissolution, which was decreed on April 11, 1974.

In the context of these difficulties, Mr. Whitlam declared that his Labor Party would stand by its past goals rather than offer new ones. While deploring the unworkability of Parliament, he persisted in advocating increased educational and social services — such as a national health plan — and less reliance on foreign help, whether in investment or defence matters.

The Opposition was headed by the same Liberal Party — Country Party coalition which controlled the Senate. Liberal leader Billy Snedden presented a four-point plan to combat inflation and promised income tax cuts.

The elections were the first to be held simultaneously for the full House and Senate since 1951. A total of 745 candidates vied for the 187 parliamentary seats, which included, in the House, an increased total to 127 because of population increases in Canberra and Western Australia.

Proclamation of final results was delayed both because of the complicated preferential voting system and because postal votes were honoured for 10 days after the elections. On June 22, it was announced that Labor had lost one seat in the House but gained 3 in the Senate, thereby equalling the Opposition's total of 29. Both the Labor and the Liberal parties increased their percentage of the vote.

The Labour Government of Mr. Whitlam comprised the new Cabinet that was announced on June 11, 1974.

Statistics

1. *Results of the Elections and Distribution of Seats in the House of Representatives*

| | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Number of registered voters. | 7,897,506 |
| Voters. | 7,535,768 (95.4 %) |
| Blank or void ballot papers. | 144,762 |
| Valid votes. | 7,391,006 |

| Political Group | % of Y**? obtained | Number of Seats |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Australian Labor Party. | 49.3 | 66 (—1) |
| Liberal Party. | 34.9 | 40 (+2) |
| Country Party. | 9.9 | 21 (+1) |
| Australia Party. | 2.3 | — |
| Democratic Labor Party. | 1.4 | — |
| Others. | 2.0 | |
| | | 127* |

* 2 seats added since previous elections.

2. Results of the Elections and Distribution of Seats in the Senate

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|--|
| Number of registered voters. | 7,759,571 | |
| Voters. | 7,410,511 (95.5 %) | |
| Blank or void ballot papers. | 798,126 | |
| Valid votes. | 6,612,385 | |

| Political Group | % of Votes obtained | Number of Seats |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| Australian Labor Party. | 47.3 | 29 (+3) |
| Liberal-Country Party. | 42.6 | 29 (+3) |
| Democratic Labor Party. | 3.6 | — (—5) |
| Others. | 6.5 | 2 (—1) |
| | | 60 |