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Break Room

# SPECIAL **on dit** EDITION

Thursday, 14th March

## STUDENT ACTION



## Editorial

Now that almost two weeks have elapsed since the farce that was the 1968 S.A. State election it is possible to consider the results, and the feelings and emotions that they have aroused. The general feeling in the electorate is clearly that of bitterness and disgust. This is typified by the attitude of the Liberal Club in the Uni. which is supporting moves to bring the injustices of the S.A. electoral system into prominence.

The outcry that has followed the election has been widespread and has drawn support from a broad section of the community. Within the State the newspapers have been understandably quiet as regards the percentages gained by each Party — in fact it appears that the news bulletins issued after the election to the interstate newspapers contained no mention of total percentages of votes gained by each party. Further, Steele Hall's silence is clearly an indication of the disappointment he must feel even if the Liberals with 43% of the vote gain a majority of seats. Outside SA the feeling has ranged from utter disbelief to disgust and shame.

This is typified by the reprinted editorials from interstate which mirror the feelings of democrats everywhere.

But even more notable than the expressions voiced in the press has been the attitude taken by the ordinary person. In 1962 when the ALP received 54.5% of the popular vote and could not form a government even though the LCL only gained 34.5%, South Australians had a fatalistic attitude that the Playford Government could not be defeated and consequently accepted the result as inevitable. After three years of Labor administration however, that attitude has changed dramatically. In 1968 a majority of the SA electorate has not merely voted to censure a long-reigning LCL Government as was the case in 1962, this time it was an active and decisive vote of support for the SA Labor Government.

SA at present is clearly not a democracy in any sense of the word and action to change this deplorable situation must not be delayed any longer. SA's electoral system which is the worst gerrymander in the English-speaking world, is a disgrace to Australia. Pressure must be applied now while there is still time for us to indicate that we desire to be gov-

erned by a democratic system. Both parties must be forced to place the freedom to choose a government from competing political parties ahead of party dogma.

Strong support for the reform of the gerrymander amongst students was clearly demonstrated last Friday when 700 students joined a protest march on Parliament House, which was highly successful. As advertised in this special edition, another protest march will be held this Friday. ON DIT believes that such action is of outmost importance. If the opportunity to voice our opposition to the gerrymander is not exercised firmly now the opportunity may not arise again.

This extra edition clearly shows the attitude of the rest of Australia towards the SA position. It is a situation that only we in SA can change and it is imperative that we do everything we can to obtain electoral justice for the majority of South Australians.

With the support of a large number of students from Adelaide and Flinders Universities and the Teachers Colleges, the protest on Friday can play a significant part in the struggle ahead.

# SA oligarchy

OVER the years the rest of Australia became accustomed to the triennial disgrace of the South Australian electorate "confirming" in office a State Government that had no proper mandate to govern. This ugly ritual was abandoned in 1965, when Labor fluked its way into power, but now there is a likelihood that South Australia will revert to its briefly interrupted rule by oligarchy. Because of the State's gerrymandered electoral boundaries — probably the worst in any part of the world that is English-speaking, non-racist and at least nominally democratic — the Labor Government is in danger of being displaced by the party it trounced at the polls last Saturday.

Like most of Australia's Lower Houses, the South Australian House of Assembly is elected according to a system of multiple electorates (one to each member) and preferential voting. With this system there can be no guarantee that the party or coalition which returns the most parliamentarians will also have the biggest share of the overall vote. But it is generally

recognised that any disproportion between a party's share of the vote and the number of its elected representatives should be marginal. In South Australia the disproportion is usually outrageous. For the past 24 years the Liberal-Country League has never had a bigger overall vote than Labor, yet it has been in power for all but three of those years. Labor could not form a Government even in 1962, when it had 55 per cent. of the vote, compared with the LCL's 35 per cent.

On Saturday, Labor won about 53 per cent. of the vote, compared with the LCL's 43 per cent. No one with the slightest respect for democratic principle could deny Mr. Dunstan's right to continue as Premier, but the LCL, with the connivance of an Independent, may manage to wangle him back on to the Opposition benches. This is possible because, to the LCL, cows are more sacred than principle. It rigged electoral boundaries in favor of rural interests to the extent that one-third of the State's voters return two-thirds of the Assembly's members. Mr. Dunstan tried to reform the

electoral map so that all votes had roughly the same value, but he was frustrated by the Legislative Council, which is elected on a restricted property franchise, is dominated by the LCL and is more powerful than the House of Lords. Of course, if the LCL regains control of the Assembly, the Council will gleefully approve any new gerrymander to keep Labor out of power for years and years...

Those of us who live outside South Australia can be grateful that we are not victims of this sort of political immorality. Or can we? The Governments in Canberra and Spring Street are both aided by a voting system that favors rural interests. Federal boundaries are to be redrawn before the 1969 elections, and the electoral commissioners have received from the Government a broad hint to produce another gerrymander. If the hint is taken, a vote in some rural electorates could be worth a third more than a vote in some city electorates. If they ignore the hint, the commissioners will uphold the principle that government should reflect the wishes of the majority.

## The Sydney Morning Herald

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6, 1968

# 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 melody lingers on.

## THIS SUNDAY PROTEST MARCH

From Torrens Parade Ground to  
Light Square at 2 p.m.

- 3 p.m. a rally will be held at Light Square.
- Speakers will include the Premier, Don Dunstan.

## DEMONSTRATE FOR DEMOCRACY

FRIDAY 1.15 P.M.

PARLIAMENT HOUSE STEPS

Organised by Students for Democratic Action.