

## 1901: the Forgotten Election\*

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This paper draws on my chapter, 'Election Days: Overview of the 1901 Election', in a recently published work which I edited, titled *1901: the Forgotten election*.<sup>1</sup> The book was one product of a project on the first federal election, which was commissioned and sponsored by the National Council for the Centenary of Federation. I'm extremely grateful to Tony Eggleton, the Chief Executive Officer, Rodney Cavalier, the Vice-Chair, and the History and Education Fund of that group, for their help and support.

The Council had a particular role to play in this project, in that they believed that the 1901 election was important and, like some scholars, had noticed that there was very little available research. Consequently the Council's History and Education Program commissioned a study, and I responded to their advertisement. I used a format that the ANU has been using to analyse contemporary elections, namely to gather together academics and practitioners, and using different techniques ranging from qualitative analysis, interview-based research, observation, and also practitioners' comments, to provide a comprehensive book of analysis of a particular election. The advertisement prompted me to muse that the ANU's post-election study approach would be a really interesting framework to bring to bear upon 1901. Consequently, I drafted a proposal for a very detailed and comprehensive study of the 1901 election, bringing together not only research that I would conduct, but also colleagues' research.

The biggest challenge in mounting this particular project was of course the practitioners, because they were no longer with us. A session of our conference held

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in December 2000 involved several distinguished academics representing the roles of a number of the key 1901 political leaders, and I pay tribute to Bruce Scates from the University of New South Wales, who was asked to represent Andrew Fisher, a Labour member of Parliament. Bruce constructed from historical documents a set election speech and delivered it in a brogue such as Fisher had.

Many of Australia's leading political scientists—such as Dean Jaensch, the political commentator, and Patrick Weller, who had worked as a government adviser—also had backgrounds in history or in economic history, and were delighted at the prospect of being able to return to their youthful origins, as political historians. We were also excited about the project because there had been so little research done on the topic, so we were dealing with fresh fields that had hardly been tilled. There was just so much work that had simply not been undertaken, so an important early question was to understand why the Australian academic and political communities had largely forgotten about the 1901 election. I established two main reasons.

In the first instance, the 1901 election was atypical. It was conducted with an incumbent government, that was appointed, not elected by the body of people it was governing. The interim government was led by Prime Minister, Edmund Barton (often called a premier). Barton had been appointed in December 1900, and he and his cabinet were sworn in on 1 January 1901 in Centennial Park in Sydney. (The Constitution provides for there to be ministers of state, who are not elected members of Parliament, for a period of grace of up to three months).

The first Australian cabinet consisted of men who had been elected as colonial politicians. In many ways for them—and they included some of the great scribes of the period, notably Deakin—the election was less significant than the process of taking office and laying down the foundations of federal administration in key areas, such as posts and telegraphs, customs, and defence. So for them the election was a secondary event.

I think the second reason why the 1901 election fell from historical consciousness was because it was actually conducted relatively smoothly. There was little controversy over its management and no dissent over the results. Let me draw a contemporary contrast. When we had our conference on the 1901 election in December 2000, it was an auspicious time for international democratic events, because at that time the result of the American presidential election, which had been held the previous November, was still being unravelled. One reason for that was because the American system is still very much state-based. Even though there is a broad national system, the details of the election administration are organised on a state-by-state basis, and in some cases a county-by-county basis. There is no national equivalent to our Australian Electoral Commission. Many of the people involved in making deliberative decisions about election outcomes in America are partisan appointed people. In Australia, the founding fathers decided during the conventions that we should have uniform aspects of the franchise, including the abolition of plural voting. They also expressed a preference for uniform franchise (included as a plank in Edmund Barton's 1901 Policy Speech) and for a system of national election administration, even though the implementation of such a system was left to the new Parliament. Which it did of course in the next year, 1902.

So while this year has been absolutely crucial in marking the centenary of federation, I would say that 1902—and next year, being the centenary of 1902—is equally as important, because in 1902 the fundamentals of a unified national electoral system were laid down by the Commonwealth Parliament.

Consequently, in 1901, the election was organised on a state-by-state basis, in the same way that the last presidential election and subsequent ones will be in America. The states were able to provide frameworks in a hurry, there was a broad national framework that overlaid all of the state frameworks—and it did work, which is the most significant feature. While 1901 was not controversial, it should be seen as both interesting and pivotal. Issues of particular interest are: the economic, cultural and political context, the constitutional background, the system of electoral administration, the advantages flowing from incumbency, the emergence of strong state-based political parties, the particular style of campaigning, the conduct of the election days (for the election was held on Friday 29 and Saturday 30 March) and the assessment of the results.

Because the election was conducted on a state basis the constitutional and administrative contexts provide keyholes into the different state cultures. The conduct of the 1901 election also reflected the emerging national electoral culture. This culture was based on discussions between state returning officers, common debates over electoral systems in the community and in the colonial parliaments, especially over proportional representation, and friendships between colonial politicians who had regularly shared laws, systems and procedures. One common view about nationhood is that it was forged on the battlefields of the First World War. A more domestic reading is that administrative bonds and practices dealing with elections were important as first steps and this will be discussed below.

The study of the 1901 election can be used to discover signs of precocious political modernity and of a progressive liberalism—on some topics. The 1901 election reflected its cultural and economic context. I should say as well that there is a problem if Australians are simply to be encouraged to venerate the past with fond nostalgia. I've always been critical of the previous generation of political scientists and historians saying 'things used to be wonderful, but they've slipped.' What I want to do here is to reflect upon those policies where colonial practice was simply ahead of its times in terms of democratic practice, and we've subsequently slipped. But on other issues, I want to point out ways in which there were a lot of problems and issues and how we've actually improved and lifted our game in all sorts of ways.

The cultural and economic context deserves scrutiny. Then, as now, globalisation—although that term was not used in 1901—was extremely important. The big issue in the election campaign was the question of what was known as the 'fiscal faith'. Not of a religious kind, although religion was salient. But economic factors and issues were of central importance.

The fiscal divide essentially meant that there was a campaign revolved around free trade versus protection, especially in New South Wales and Victoria. The economic context was also important in that during the 1890s there had been a series of crashes, economic downturns, and problems at the turn of the century with a major drought. So there were economic uncertainties, which underpinned the move to federation and the

first election. They were reflected differently in different parts of the federation. But I think—as in many subsequent elections—economic questions dominated.

Consequently, if contemporary commentators, including myself, are sometimes very critical of politicians for letting economics—and tax in particular—dominate issues, we are part of a century-old tradition, both the politicians for saying that the economy is really important and the tax question is absolutely essential, and commentators for saying: ‘Stop obsessing about the economy, other things are important as well.’ This tussle seems to be a fixed part of our political system.

On the cultural context, in many ways it was very different from now. They didn’t use the term ‘millennium bug’, because it wasn’t the millennium, but there was certainly a sense of the end of one century and moving into a new one, and all the anxieties and angsts that that generated. I think there are a couple of interesting features that are worth spelling out about the cultural context, that need to be understood before you can understand the political players and the constitutional backdrop.

Ideas that we would now deride as ‘new wave’ ideas, including spiritualism, were very significant at the end of the Nineteenth Century. Those values were seriously held by a number of key political players—to such an extent that, when we were talking at the workshop about the problem of none of the practitioners still being alive, someone suggested only half-jokingly that, as Deakin was a spiritualist, we should have a seance and get him here in some sense or another.

All joking aside, those kinds of ideas were not only in vogue, but people could speak about them publicly, and that’s the difference. Over the last couple of decades there have been ‘shock/horror’ responses to revelations about Nancy Reagan consulting an astrologer, or the late Princess of Wales consulting a spiritualist. There was an entirely different response in Deakin’s time, and then it was seen as acceptable to have such experimental attitudes.

In terms of the cultural context, one feature that was very interesting about the period was the level of bipartisan and cross-partisan debate and discussion. There were various forums, often in private houses, where people from different walks of life and different political parties would come and discuss key political issues. Key women here included Rose Scott, the noted Sydney suffragist, who held court in Jersey Road Woollahra. She would bring together a diverse group of people such as the Labour Party’s James McGowen, the then Premier of New South Wales, George Reid, and the Attorney-General, Bernhard Wise. If the matter under discussion was of great concern to her, such as the question of the long working hours of shop girls, she would arrange for groups of so-called ‘shop girls’ to come to her home and actually discuss issues of concern with the leading politicians of the day.

I think all those features are remarkable—that we did have arenas where people of different political persuasions could come and discuss matters of policy, and that there was that level of interaction between so-called ‘ordinary’ people and the political elite. Perhaps we can learn something from the processes in place in colonial politics.

After federation and the move to the Commonwealth Parliament in Melbourne, a lot of those easy avenues for debate and discussion simply dried up. Interestingly, many

of the anti-federationists came from New South Wales and when they had said: ‘After federation, we will lose a lot of our easy discourse and debate’, they were laughed at, usually by the Victorians. Perhaps because the Victorians were smart enough to have organised for the Parliament to be in their city. Victorians said it was simply sour grapes from New South Wales, and ‘anti-federationist bile’.

The constitutional background was quite significant, because there was a veritable patchwork quilt of electoral laws. In a sense, the electoral law was really a major indicator of the state of democracy and the nature of the political culture in each particular colony.

A lot of our old stereotypes (and modern stereotypes, too) are reinforced by the different electoral laws. In South Australia it really was a ‘paradise of dissent’ and a ‘democratic laboratory’. The kind of rules and laws in place in South Australia by the early 1890s were in advance of the rest of the democratic world. In many ways Australia has gone backwards—in the sense that South Australia had a set of regulations that put a cap on campaign expenditure and restricted very carefully and clearly what was a political advertisement and what was not. South Australia, of course, didn’t prohibit Aborigines from voting, and women were enfranchised in 1894, with the legislation proclaimed in 1895.

Postal voting, secret ballot, payment for members and so on were all-important features of the South Australian design. Political trust—a very fragile creature—can also be measured. For example, South Australia had pioneered a claim form, which is in many ways a prototype of the current electoral enrolment form, and there were no witnessing provisions. It was assumed that a person was who they said they were. That was ensured by the fact that, when people enrolled to vote, they actually enrolled at a particular polling booth. So they were likely to be known in that particular area, thus dealing with problems of impersonation and corruption.

Less trusting was Queensland—and Western Australia, which borrowed many of its electoral procedures from Queensland. Western Australia came late to responsible government and self-government. Friendship networks were quite important. The Premier of Western Australia, Sir John Forrest (who later became Minister for Defence), had a close personal friendship with a fiery radical from South Australia, Charles Cameron Kingston. So Western Australia took on board large slabs of the South Australian legislation, except where it came to two really important issues: the question of race, and the question of lack of political trust.

The Western Australian Aboriginal franchise was borrowed directly from the Queensland legislation—so Aborigines could vote, *if* they had freehold property to the value of one hundred pounds. I have trawled through as many documents as are available in Western Australia and Queensland—which both had that freehold provision for Aborigines and other coloured races including Pacific Islanders ‘and Asiatics’—and I have certainly found no reference to any Aborigines who met the freehold provision.

On the issue of lack of political trust, essentially it was very hard to get on the roll in Western Australia. For example, if a voter was an import from the east—in other words, if they had come to Western Australia for the gold rushes and had previously

been naturalised in the eastern states—that was not seen as good enough and the voter had to be re-naturalised. There was an additional waiting period of six months. There were further restrictions. If one enrolled or made a statement about oneself, then that statement had to be witnessed by a person in an official position. So South Australia and Western Australia were really the two extremes in terms of political trust

Tasmania was quaint and interesting in a number of ways. It was quaint in the sense that it had an income test. Basically people either had to have property or meet the minimum wage test. People who had no property but were dependent on wages had to provide an update every six months to prove that they were still in receipt of a minimum wage. So there was an enormous amount of paperwork. Tasmania was embarrassed into abolishing their income test, right on the eve of the first election.

Tasmania was interesting also because they were experimenting with the Hare-Clark system—in local elections in Hobart and Launceston, and colonial elections in Tasmania—in the early 1890s. That was probably because of the influence of key people such as Andrew Inglis Clark.

So we had a political patchwork quilt, which as well as providing insights into contemporary practice, also presented challenges to the smooth running of the election. Colonies voted on different days—most colonies had traditionally voted on Fridays, except South Australia and Queensland, which voted on Saturdays. The polls closed at different times in different colonies. New South Wales had early closing, including at the polls, and Victoria was an hour later. This led to terrible confusion in border towns. One feature of 1901, which was very similar to the presidential election in America of 2000, was incredibly long queues. In both cases voters were lining up and then missing out on voting because of the huge rush towards poll closing time and confusion about the real closing time.

I want to mention electoral administration. The noted political scientist A.F. Davies once said that Australians had a characteristic talent for administration. Then, in case we were in any doubt that he was trying to flatter us, he went on: ‘Of course, being good at administration is akin to being a good forger.’

Elector’s rights were voting documents, namely a form of voting identification. New South Wales used them in the first federal election. They had been pioneered in Victoria much earlier. There are arguments—using quite advanced democratic theory—about elector’s rights, from the Victorian ‘small l’ liberals. A particular favourite of mine was George Higinbotham, the fiery Irish Protestant who would stand up in the Parliament with a bible in one hand and John Stuart Mill in the other and quote extensively from both. What Higinbotham argued in respect of the introduction of elector’s rights in Victoria, was that liberalism was all about the individual standing up and claiming rights on his or her own behalf. Hence, rather than seeing democracy as being about mustering people and forcing them to participate in a process, it was all about encouraging people to stand up and *claim* their right to vote—hence this was an elector’s right.

When the Victorians introduced them in the 1860s, they were introduced with a great fanfare of John Stuart Mill on the one hand—on the other hand of course, the Victorian colony was usually going from crisis to crisis in terms of its economic

affairs, particularly after the first flush of the gold rush. There were many good Methodists involved at the time, which meant that in order to make your John-Stuart-Mill-style claim, you needed to pay a shilling. So they were actually a form of revenue generation in Victoria.

Their format was based on miners' rights, which were developed in Victoria after the Eureka Stockade, to replace the much-hated mining licence. The miner's right looked quite similar, and there was also a similar fee in order to buy a miner's right. In fact, in Victoria, they were a source of eligibility for the franchise and in the first Legislative Assembly elections there were actually eight designated miners' seats, and the franchise was based on a miner's right.

So electors' rights have a rather chequered history, which is partly a reflection of political theory and partly a reflection of economic necessity.

New South Wales was always much more pragmatic than Victoria—and many people would say it remains so. It was also wealthier. When the system was introduced in New South Wales it was seen not as a way of people stepping forward to claim their rights, but as a way to administer the population. So, with an interesting New South Wales touch, the police force were charged with administering election processes. In fact electors' rights were doled out by the police in New South Wales. This process started in the 1890s, and they were hand-delivered by the police with assistance at local government elections. The police had been actively involved in different aspects of electoral administration in New South Wales from the 1850s, and were prohibited from voting or becoming candidates because of the perceived conflict of interest rule.

Therein hangs a tale in respect of electors' rights. We know that, particularly in New South Wales, people did not like police knocking on their doors to deliver electors' rights. They were hated and despised, and in fact after the first election there were a number of committees set up to look at administration of the 1901 election, and it was uniformly reported from New South Wales that these documents were most heartily disliked. I think in a sense this reflects the Australian dislike of authority that has occurred at other stages, including the response to the Australia Card.

No matter what one has to say about the different ways that electors' rights are interpreted, the point is that there were efficient systems of electoral administration in place—even if rather quaint systems—throughout most of the Australian states. And South Australia was a shining example to the other states, with a Returning Officer who took a leading role in setting up the Commonwealth system of electoral administration.

There were of course claims and counter-claims of corruption. It's interesting that one way that the nascent party system developed, for example in South Australia, is that the Labour Party (which had been around since the mid-1890s) and the trade union movement were accused by non-Labour forces of being able to use volunteers to police the electoral rolls. Hence the conservatives decided they needed to form an organisation to counter the Labour Party, and decided to call it the National Defence League, which was the forerunner of the Australian National League and the Protectionist Association. It grew out of the issue of policing the rolls.

I want to say something briefly about incumbency advantages. There are different sorts of incumbency advantages. Sir William Lyne—who hasn't quite gone down in history the way he would have liked—was the person who was originally called upon by the Governor-General, the Earl of Hopetoun, to form a ministry, and was unable to do so. The mantle then passed more successfully to Barton. Sir William Lyne was at the time the Premier of New South Wales, which was why Hopetoun had called upon him. Sir William Lyne in fact liked being the Premier of New South Wales so much that he only resigned from that post in the last week before the election. So he was in fact the Minister for Home Affairs, Premier of New South Wales, the state Member for Hume and the federal candidate for Hume—all at once. More importantly, he owned the only motorcar in the New South Wales campaign.

There were other ways in which incumbency advantages were manifested. As Customs Minister, Charles Cameron Kingston had to travel a lot. While doing so, he was happy to make speeches on behalf of the ministerialist and protectionist interests. The same was true of other ministers. Edmund Barton, the Prime Minister, also used advantages of office in a material sense, and also the mantle of office to gather support around him.

The underdog in 1901 was the former Premier of New South Wales, George Reid, who lacked a motorcar, whose ample girth was much lampooned by the cartoonists (particularly those in the *Bulletin*), but was a man of great energy and determination. He in fact called himself 'the Leader of the Opposition'—it wasn't an official position, and he received no financial assistance for it—and he ran a single-handed campaign covering most of the eastern states of Australia, according to the contemporary press.

But then, even more than now, the press often took sides. The *Argus* was a free trade paper, the *Daily Telegraph* was determinedly free trade, and the *Sydney Morning Herald* was somewhat free trade. The *Age* was a law unto itself, run by the patriarch David Syme. His idea of what constituted a good candidate was often different from the views of the Protectionist Party, whose cause he was allegedly espousing. Then, one needed to treat the press accounts with caution. But across the board there was the view that Reid was a fiery platform speaker, who was able to make a very good fist of a losing cause, and the losing cause was free trade—although free trade, of course, 'got the numbers' in the Senate. It outperformed the Protectionist Party in the Senate.

The interesting thing about the first election is that if, in certain close contests, the result had gone differently, the whole Australian settlement would have been vastly different, and this is explored, below.

The fluidity of early political boundaries is reflected also in the political advertising. I have copies of the election advertisements for two groups in South Australia, the Labour Party and the Protectionist Association of South Australia. The names are not well known—Gregor McGregor and E.L. Batchelor were important contemporary figures—but there are more familiar names as well. The Protectionist Association of South Australia advertisement had Sir John Downer on top. Two Labour Party people, McGregor and Price, appear on the Protectionist Association ticket as well. The same was true in New South Wales; there was a blurring of the interests in the tickets handed out. I also have an Edmund Barton ticket, which includes two Labour men,



James McGowen and 'Chris' Watson. There are Reid tickets, for the free trade interest, that include his great friend William Morris Hughes and various other less well-known Labour candidates, who were running in rural and regional areas where free trade sentiment was strong.

So consequently, to project back to the present, I think it is interesting that when Paul Keating adopted a free trade position many in his party lampooned him. They said he had sold out Labour ideals, when in fact for several decades New South Wales Labour was determinedly free trade because of the different economic base and the nature of the workforce in New South Wales compared with Victoria.

The Australian settlement was based on protection, White Australia, and arbitration—and the first and the last elements lacked the strength of support given to White Australia. Protectionism was by no means the overwhelmingly dominant voice of the time. There were other voices that, partly through accident and partly through the operation of networks and personality factors networks, were drowned out. Incumbency had brought some free traders and others who were neutral to the side of Edmund Barton's 'Ministerialist' team. Had Reid still been Premier of the 'premier' colony in December 1899, it is likely that the Governor-General would have commissioned him as the first Premier. The composition of his cabinet would have been more difficult. Barton may have served, but the Victorians, especially Deakin may have been less willing. According to Reid's account, the Bartonites gained 33 out of 75 House of Representatives seats. Also by his account—corroborated by contemporary newspapers—four or five of those were not Protectionists. Under the Reid as Prime Minister scenario they may have joined with his 26 seats, leaving Labour with the balance of power. In that case, Labour's 'Billy' Hughes' friendship with Reid may well have been a critical factor in swinging Labour support to Reid.

What the Protectionist victory evidenced—and in some ways the whole nature of the Commonwealth compact demonstrated—is that the Victorians were much better at politics than those in New South Wales. They set the agenda for federation and for the post-federation settlement as well, leaving New South Wales very much in the lurch in many ways.

Let me comment further on political parties and campaigning. I think one of the interesting things about political parties in 1901 is that the situation was nowhere near as clear-cut then as it is today. Links of friendship and personality, and also the overwhelming significance of the fiscal issue, meant that what was called at the time 'the line of cleavage' was very different from today.

The 1901 election proved to be a salient factor in the formation of modern parties. Alfred Deakin had prophesied in 1900 that the method of electing the Senate from the states at large would lead to great national parties. Deakin was a great party man and a great defender of parties as necessary engines for the operation of responsible government.

In fact, what happened was that, instead of national parties, we still have very much a state-based party system, with relatively weak national machinery—as compared, say, with the Canadian system, where there's a much stronger national arm in place.

Of pivotal importance was the impact of the Labour Party pledge and the caucus system. That was a very early development in Australia, before comparable countries including—and especially—Great Britain. The Labour Party was very strong in New South Wales, quite strong in Queensland, buried in the Protectionist Movement in Victoria, and very strong on the Western Australian goldfields. What held those individuals together was the ideal of the caucus—in other words, the idea that the group would meet together and agree on a fixed line on every policy issue.

That was a very different reading of democracy than the British tradition of responsible government, which was simply that there are key issues on which the government of the day needs support from its supporters. But only if you're a member of the ministry do you need to support the government on every issue. That particularistic reading of Westminster by the Labour Party meant that the other parties quickly fell into line and developed a system of pre-selection, which was called 'candidate selection' in 1901. The Labour Party took the lead and the Protectionists followed. In fact, Deakin's great headache—because everyone in Victoria was a Protectionist—was to try and make sure that there was only one endorsed Protectionist candidate per electorate, so that the vote wouldn't be split—given that it was first-past-the-post—and Free Trade or Labour elected by default. That actually happened in several Victorian seats.

The campaigning style also prefigured contemporary styles in many ways. While, in 1901, mass rallies and meetings were a feature, voters tended to be observers, not activists. Many candidates used paid agents to co-ordinate their campaigns, although on the Labour side trade unions assisted with campaigning. One of the really big differences between then and now is the role of grass roots campaigning in the pre-electronic media age. Candidates in metropolitan or suburban seats would have meetings every evening, over a three or four week period. If we believe the press, the meetings were very well attended. In both South Australia and Western Australia, where women had the vote, women also attended public meetings. So the level of interest in the political process was quite high. It varied from colony to colony and, toward election day and the outcome issue, with voluntary voting, the turnout was a good indicator of the level of interest.

Newcastle was really important, because over 90 percent of eligible voters turned out to vote. The national average was around 60 percent.

Western Australia had an appalling turnout rate of around 30 percent, and Sir John Forrest admitted to great national embarrassment. He said that the 1901 elections generated less interest than the Perth mayoral election. A couple of reasons were put forward for this. One was that Western Australia had been dragged, kicking and screaming, into the federation and was never a strong supporter. Equally, if you look at the turnout for colonial elections in the 1890s, that was also quite low. Ironically enough, the great interest in the west was at the local level. This was a very different case from New South Wales and Victoria, and South Australia was midway between the high turnout east coast and the low turnout west coast.

There were how to vote cards, there were red and blue rosettes for the Free Trade and Protectionist groups. I have no record at all of rosettes for the Labour Party and no material has stood the test of time.

The results were interesting and pliable. In the Senate the Free Trade group out-pollled the Protectionist group, with Labour holding the balance of power. However there are different readings of the House of Representatives results, signalled in the discussion of the Reid scenario, above. While on the one hand, the fiscal divide was the overwhelming issue, a number of the people who supported Barton—who got on the ministerialist incumbency bandwagon—said they weren't actually Protectionist.

Other labels emerged to describe people who were 'not a Protectionist, but ...'. They were known as Revenue Tariffists—in other words they were in favour of a tariff, but only enough to raise the revenue and not in order to create the great welfare heaven that Deakin and the other Victorians wanted. Or they were known as 'Moderates'—in other words they only wanted a moderate tariff and did not want to use it for the social welfare purposes that Deakin and his group were in favour of.

A front page from the *Brisbane Worker* at the time had two interesting features. One showed that the spelling of Labor was 'Labour', certainly in a number of colonies at the time. And the same cover at the bottom had the rallying cry 'A White Australia'.

White Australia was policy glue for the incipient nation, and played a larger role in this process than the more benign question of democratic institution building discussed above. White Australia was one issue on which there was broad cross partisan agreement. In fact Reid and Barton argued with one another as to who had invented the term! The only area where there was some equivocation about White Australia was in Queensland, and that was largely because the Queenslanders thought that 'no white man could work in the tropics', and in order to preserve the sugar industry it was essential to have 'black labour' from the Pacific Islands. So, again, there is evidence of Queensland having a different agenda than the other states.

One of the interesting features about White Australia and the fact that there was widespread agreement about the need for such a policy was that it was a relatively new policy for the Australian colonies. Until the 1880s the colonies had welcomed people from different backgrounds and they were eligible to become naturalised as British subjects. This happened in Queensland and Western Australia. It was really only in the 1880s moving towards federation and Henry Parkes' 'crimson thread of kinship' that the notion came about that the way to unify these very disparate colonies with their cultural and economic differences was through the unifying concept of a 'white' race. So the important feature here is that, while it was a major issue in the 1901 election, it was a relatively recent issue and not one that was somehow embedded in the nature of Australian colonial practice.



**Question** — With the first-past-the-post system of voting, is there any record of how many of those elected actually got 50 percent of the vote and how many would have been elected on a minority?

**Marian Simms** — I think the interesting thing about the question of electoral outcomes is that in lower house constituencies across the country, in most cases there wasn't a three party contest, it was a two party contest—except in Victoria. So there would have been about four seats in Victoria where the vote would have been different under a preferential system. But that would have gone to the Protectionist interest rather than the Free Trade interest, so there wouldn't have been a big difference in the outcome.

Of the 63 single member House of Representatives seats, 43 were decided on a clear majority of votes, six were uncontested and only 14 were decided on less than 50 percent of the vote. Tasmania (five seats) and South Australia (seven seats) were undivided and went to the elections as electorates-at-large and are therefore not included in these calculations.

Nine of those 14 minority vote seats were in Victoria. This reflected a lack of discipline within the Protectionist Party. In four seats there were multiple Protectionist candidacies and a majority vote for Protectionism. In a further two seats the lack of Protectionist discipline saw parties without majority support elected (Free Trade and Labour). This was partly cancelled out by the election of a minority Protectionist in another seat, due to Free Trade in-fighting. This intra-party conflict also saw a minority Free Trader elected, but with a clear majority of votes for the Free Trade interest. Only one seat showed a lack of majority support for any of the three main parties.

Overall there were only a handful of seats where the likely result would have been different under a preferential system of voting.

**Question** — Would the results of the election have been any different if there had been uniform rules for the franchise, taking into account that two states had female suffrage and four did not, and two states voted as a whole and four did not?

**Marian Simms** — That's a very difficult question to answer, simply because the rolls would have included people voting about who's political values we know nothing. All we know, for example, in South Australia and Western Australia where women did vote, is that their turnout rates—judging by knowledge of who was enrolled and who voted (because there were separate results kept for men and women)—was slightly lower than men's turnout rate.

**Question** — Am I correct in recalling that most of the contests in 1901 were straight contests anyway, and that there were some unopposed returns? And in Tasmania the preferential vote applied anyway?

**Marian Simms** — Regarding the first question, there were six non-contests, out of 75, and only a handful of contests where all three parties were involved, with the exception of where there were multiple candidates from the Protectionist side. In terms of the Tasmanian system, it's true that in both upper and lower houses there was an electorate at large with the Hare-Clark system.

**Question** — As a result of the gold rush, Australia had citizens from many countries. How many of them were able to vote in 1901?

**Marian Simms** — We can only base that on guestimates, because the electoral rolls did not record information about race. We have various estimates of the numbers, and the estimates are much better for New South Wales than Victoria. The estimate of the Chinese population in New South Wales is only quite small. On the issue of changing public policies on immigration in Australia, essentially what had happened—as a result of the impact of immigration restriction laws uniformly legislated for across the colonies—was that the size of the Chinese population, for instance, had actually declined by 1900. So it was a very small population, and we have an estimate only. A similar point is true in respect of Aborigines—the colonies where most Aborigines resided, namely Western Australia and Queensland, were the two colonies where there were *de facto* restrictions on Aboriginal participation through the property clause.

**Question** — For the Senate, presumably they were electing six from each state. Exactly what was the method of election?

**Marian Simms** — I am pleased about these questions, because I actually have another paper that is on the specifics of these electoral laws and details of mechanisms and I thought that would have been too dry for general discussion. The system in most states, with the exception of Tasmania, was simple majority; the candidate who got the most votes was elected. One technical difference was that for a number of the colonial elections they had a system called ‘bunching’. What this meant was that you could give multiple votes. If there were four vacancies (because there was often multi-member constituencies) you could give all your four votes to one candidate. That was thought to be a way of giving some degree of representation to minorities. Bunching was banned in New South Wales and Victoria for the first elections, and there was some degree of argument about that process. So it was a simple first-past-the-post system of majoritarianism, with the exception of Tasmania, which had a Hare-Clark system.

I have a detailed report on election day in New South Wales. New South Wales had 50 candidates for six Senate vacancies and I know they had blue coloured pencils and people were required to put a mark through the name of the candidates that they *didn't* want, leaving six. There was an enormous amount of discussion in the press about the simple mechanics of this system. A lot of people complained, particularly people with big hands, that they made mistakes because it was so hard to see and to differentiate.

That was the old colonial system, going back to the 1850s, of crossing out names, which obviously wasn't really designed to cope with as many candidates as there were in the 1901 election. South Australia actually invented the system of having a box and putting a cross next to the names of the six Senate candidates and the nine from the House of Representatives. That was used on the referendum on the Constitution. There were a lot of debates on tickets, etc. because having a ticket—which is where a newspaper would publish a list of names, the same as how to vote cards today—was seen as being undemocratic in some quarters as well.