

**ELECTORAL AMENDMENT BILL 2001**

*Second Reading*

Resumed from 25 September.

**HON BARRY HOUSE** (South West) [8.59 pm]: Every so often in this place a proposition is put to us that is full of motherhood statements. On the surface it sounds simple, fair and plausible and we should have no reason to complain or to doubt its authenticity. However, we know that behind that simple message is a sinister and unfair motive. This is what we face with the Electoral Amendment Bill that is before us today. We must look behind the simple statements that refer to basic democratic principles, to the fairness in a democratic society of having one vote, one value, and to bringing us into line with other Legislatures around Australia and worldwide, because we know that is not the case. We know another reason is behind all of this.

Over the past couple of days I could not help thinking about *Animal Farm*. Those members who are familiar with *Animal Farm* know that a tyrant was overthrown by farmyard animals, who then set up a system of governance that was fair, equal and democratic so that everything would be terrific in the farmyard.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: The Liberal Party's motto is that some are more equal than others. That is what you practice and that is what you are trying to do with this Bill.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: That pressed the minister's button, and I had not even got to the pigs!

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon George Cash): Order! The minister need not bother thinking about interjecting. As I have said before, if members want to turn this place into turmoil they can let me help them do it.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: The story of *Animal Farm* is well known to everyone. It was supposed to be fair and simple. It probably was at the beginning. We all know the *Animal Farm* story: the pigs could not handle this so-called fair and equitable system of governance. They decided that they were the superior beings and they should have the right to dictate farmyard management. *Animal Farm* kept floating through my mind as I considered what I would say on this Bill. The minister's reaction confirms my worst fears.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: I would interject, but I am not allowed to.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: That is good. The fact is that anybody who gives this legislation more than a moment's consideration will see through the charade of the motherhood statements that accompany the Bill. We can see through the simple propositions that sound so good: let us have one vote, one value and we will all be equal in the farmyard! When we strip away the veneer, we know that it is a blatant attempt by the Labor Party to rot the electoral system to its political advantage. That is the simple message.

It is disappointing, because it illustrates to many of us the vindictive nature of the Labor Party. It is prepared to attack country Western Australia. The zealots in the Labor Party have come out of the woodwork with this legislation. We are starting to see some other examples of this vindictiveness. For the first time in over 100 years, the Labor Party has the numbers in the Parliament to achieve its goals. The Labor Party has the numbers in the Legislative Assembly, and a fair slice of the numbers in this place. The vindictive element comes from people whose eyes must have lit up after the election on 10 February when they realised that they had the numbers to achieve all the radical plans that they had kept in the bottom drawer for the past 100 years. The Labor Party needs the support of the Greens (WA), who support them on most occasions, although we are starting to see signs that the Greens are not to be taken for granted either - which is encouraging - so that the outcome is still a bit uncertain.

The Labor Party's actions are vindictive in the sense that it has rushed to seize the opportunity to make these radical changes and inflict pain on a sector of the WA community that is wounded and very vulnerable; and that is country WA. That is the most disappointing part of the whole legislation for me.

The budget gave us another example of the vindictive nature of the Labor Party's legislation. The example that has come to the fore is the premium property tax, in which some of the people in the Labor Party are still rooted in the old, class struggles of the rich-poor mentality. Even though 99 per cent of the population has moved on from that in the past couple of decades, an element in the Labor Party is still driven by the green-eyed monster of envy and they want to punish people who they know will not support them politically and who they see in their small minds as occupying positions which they look upon with envy. They will do anything within their grasp to tear them down, now that they have had a whiff of the sort of power and authority in which they can exercise that vindictiveness. We have seen some examples of it already, and this legislation is one of those.

What makes it particularly galling for me is that it comes at a time when WA rural areas are wounded and at their most vulnerable. Members know all about the devastating drought that has affected, and is still affecting, large areas of Western Australia. We know about the sorts of economic conditions that have prevailed in many

areas of country WA for a long time. Those members who have any understanding of life outside the city will realise that it is not all a bed of roses, and it is very tough in many areas of rural WA. This Bill comes at a time when country WA has been wounded by a series of rationalisations by some of the major corporations in the nation - the banks, Telstra and Governments of all varieties - which have severely impacted on services and on lifestyles in country WA.

In recent days we have seen the Ansett Australia debacle and the subsequent collapse of Skywest Airlines Pty Ltd, in which we saw another consistent theme from the Gallop Labor Government. It would not come to the party and provide some underwriting support to Skywest to get it back in the skies. It was the federal Liberal coalition Government that provided that underwriting to get Skywest back into the skies and operating. It was a good decision. The stark fact is that the Gallop Labor Government would not provide underwriting of \$3.1 million for Skywest and the federal coalition Government did. At the same time the Gallop Government refused to underwrite Skywest, we see the expenditure of up to \$300 million on a suburban rail network, simply because it is in suburbia!

Hon N.D. Griffiths: If I were allowed to interject, I would point out that your Government was preparing to spend money on that railway.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: I am talking about the extra \$300 million that will be expended as a result of the Government's change of mind.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: That is your view.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: That is a \$300 million estimate that any thoughtful predictions would point to being a considerable underestimate. The point I am trying to make is that the Gallop Labor Government is prepared to quickly change its mind on the route of a suburban rail network in suburban Perth at an extra cost of \$300 million, yet when asked to provide an underwriting facility of just \$3.1 million to keep a rural airline operating it backed off at a million miles an hour. It took the federal coalition to put Skywest Airlines aircraft back in the sky.

This legislation also comes when there is a consistent drift of population away from country areas. I am not talking about the areas in which I live. I live in a growth area in the south west coastal area of Western Australia. I am talking about inland Western Australia, which is experiencing the gutting of its services and lifestyles, including its social life. I am sure that the people in those areas see this legislation as a further kick in the guts when they are down. That is the only way I can describe it.

I will pose another question to which I have not received a satisfactory answer. Do the present enrolment certificates that have been taken into account in relation to this legislation cover the many people who are probably enrolled in metropolitan electorates but whose business and usually their work is conducted in country areas? An obvious example is the many people who work in our mining industry on a fly in, fly out basis. They live in suburbs such as Kalamunda, Scarborough and even Margaret River.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: They are great producers of wealth.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Yes, but in which electorate are they and their families enrolled? I will guarantee that 99 per cent of them are enrolled in metropolitan electorates. That is a distortion of the electoral population. They earn their livelihood in country areas and work in country areas, so that is a distortion of where their votes should be cast.

Another example is the drift of many country people to metropolitan areas.

Hon N.D. Griffiths interjected.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: The minister can laugh if he wants to.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: I think your argument is stupid.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: That is how out of touch the minister is. If the minister bothered to talk to a few people he would understand that out of necessity many people in country Western Australia have a residence in Perth. Many farms in WA are operated by people whose wife and children live in Perth and who are probably enrolled in Perth electorates. That has arisen because of situations such as the one Hon Paddy Embry described yesterday. He referred to people who must spend four hours in a car every day driving their children to and from school, at enormous expense. We can understand why some families decide to locate their families in Perth. It is far easier and more efficient for mum and the kids to live in Perth while dad and the sons interested in farming work on the farm and commute. It is no surprise that the average age of the country farmer in Western Australia is 58.

Hon B.K. Donaldson: And 58 is the average age across Australia.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: That is an alarming statistic. Where will this country end up if that trend continues?

The Bill is suspect in many areas, so it is easy for me to oppose it. I will outline a couple of grounds on which I oppose it. The first is its legality. This matter was broached by motion No 22, which was passed in this House the other day and which requested that the Attorney General take the issue to the Supreme Court for a determination. I cannot understand how the Labor Party can mount an argument that it can amend the whole Act with a simple majority but must have an absolute majority to amend part of the Act. I am not a lawyer and the logic of that escapes me. I cannot get a handle on it. That motion should be taken very seriously by the Government, which should take the matter to the Supreme Court. So far, we have not heard anything; the Government has been silent. Those are the first grounds on which I question the legality of the Bill.

Still on the question of legality, the Minister for Electoral Affairs has been floating the notion, via the media, of his intention to manufacture an extra vote so that the President can cast a vote and thereby create the absolute majority the minister needs in this House. I suspect that we have not heard very much about that recently because the Minister for Electoral Affairs has been well and truly caught out on this issue. His leader, the Premier, is firmly on the record of a few years ago as saying that to create the capacity for the President to cast a vote would be a blatant political rort. I do not think even he can escape his own views on that matter. That notion is seen once again as a blatant attempt to circumvent the system, the conventions and the rules to achieve a political end.

The other ground on which the legislation can be and should be opposed is the fact that Western Australia is a unique place. As we all know, it is the largest of the Australian States. More importantly, it is unique in its geography, demographics and economics. Perth is the most isolated capital city of significant size in the world.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: Perhaps it needs some vote weighting!

Hon BARRY HOUSE: The minister thinks that is humorous. Perth is surrounded by a sparsely populated, vast land mass. Western Australia has the most lopsided distribution of population anywhere in the world. We are not talking about something that equates with any other geographical land mass. We know that close to 75 per cent of the State's population lives in Perth and is enrolled in Perth. Perhaps even more than 75 per cent is enrolled in Perth given the number of fly in, fly out workers and people who occupy a metropolitan residence and work in country areas. We also know that percentage is growing as the conurbation of Perth spreads north past Joondalup and south through Rockingham to Mandurah. The situation is becoming more obvious.

Queensland, the State nearest in size to Western Australia in the Australian federation, does not have a strictly one vote, one value system. Therefore, I am not sure that one can justify rushing in and taking on a one vote, one value system because it sounds fair and sounds like a good democratic principle.

Western Australian regional areas produce a vast amount of the wealth that emanates from Western Australia. In mining, agriculture, forestry, tourism, horticulture and viticulture, most of the wealth is created in rural Western Australia, not in suburban Perth. Western Australians are quick to remind the rest of Australia that this State produces 26 per cent of the nation's export income with nine per cent of the population. Western Australian people get offended because we feel that we do not get reasonable returns from that equation. We should apply the same logic within the State of Western Australia and mount a case for Western Australian country people deserving fair representation.

One vote, one value may satisfy the simple criteria attached to a vote per person, but it does not satisfy any other criteria of which I can think. It is not fair and reasonable representation in a State such as Western Australia. There is more to a representative democracy than one vote, one person. We should have a system of fair and reasonable representation. It is just as important to take other criteria into account. We all know what they are. We all know that community of interest, the difficulty or ease of servicing an electorate, and a host of environmental, economic and social considerations should be taken into account.

Another reason this move should not be supported is that it is not necessarily consistent with electoral systems in other parts of the world or Australia. It has been promoted as such, but I suggest that is an attempt to confuse the issue. The House of Representatives in the national Parliament is not elected under a one vote, one value system. Sure, it has that basic tenet; however, Tasmania is guaranteed five House of Representatives seats, regardless of population. Regardless of whether Tasmania continues to lose population, which it is doing - it is the only State in Australia in which the population is going backwards - it is guaranteed five members in the House of Representatives. The Australian Capital Territory is guaranteed a member in the House of Representatives, regardless of population, as is the Northern Territory. Therefore, those opposite should not say that we are moving into line with the rest of Australia because we are not. The Senate system is not one vote, one value. The Senate was originally instituted as the States' House. The six States now have equal

representation, with 12 members. There are also representatives from the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory, regardless of population. Therefore, the argument put forward by the Government is invalid.

Another point to note is that the other States of Australia all have a far more even distribution of population across their land mass than does Western Australia. South Australia and Queensland are still mightily distorted, because the bulk of their population lives in urban areas around their capital cities or along the coast, but not to the same extent as Western Australia. Queensland has a number of regional centres that are larger than those in Western Australia. The situation in New South Wales and Victoria is the same. The population distribution across those States is far more even than it is in Western Australia.

Another valid point is the relative difficulty of representing a country electorate versus a city electorate. I will spend some time explaining what it is like to represent a country electorate. I believe I speak with a fair degree of experience. I have been in this place for one month shy of 14 years.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: That is too long. You should retire.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Does the minister think so?

Hon N.D. Griffiths: Yes, after listening to you tonight, I think you should retire.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: My election at a by-election is pretty vivid in my mind. It was on 24 October 1987. I easily recall the date because it was the day before photographs appeared in the media of the Premier of the day, Brian Burke, arm in arm with Laurie Connell and Alan Bond. It was said that they had saved the world, and that our Premier should be the President of the United States because the Government had rescued Rothwells Ltd. Of course, like an orange unpeeling, I have seen a lot of that unpeel since then. However, that is just an aside.

During my first 10 years in this place my office was in Bunbury, and I operated there largely as an electorate politician. For the past four years my office has been in Margaret River. I saw that that was an area of the State which was growing rapidly and which deserved and needed direct parliamentary representation. I guess I have placed a high priority on my role as a representative of my electorate. I believe that, compared with a city-based parliamentarian, I can speak with some authority about the issues involved in doing that. I maintain that living and working in one's electorate is essential to gain a full understanding of the electorate. Firstly, one gets to know people; and, secondly, one has an idea of, and understands, the issues, because one lives them and talks personally to people one knows to convey that message.

A disturbing tendency is for more and more country members to live and have their electorate offices in Perth. I have said before in this place that that undermines the argument I am putting forward.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: It certainly does.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: I admit that. However, it is not exclusive to one party or one person. I understand why members have their homes and live in Perth. It would be much easier for me to do that.

Hon J.A. Scott: That is where their family is.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Hon Jim Scott represents a city electorate, so I am not talking about his situation; I am talking about the situation of country members. It is the easy option. There are many good reasons for people living in Perth, such as family responsibilities, kids' education and so on. I will not criticise people for that. They make those decisions based on a range of requirements. However, if a member places the representation of his area above all else, which, as a public figure representing a country electorate, a member should do, a member should work and live in his electorate.

I will spend a bit of time outlining what it means to be a representative of a country region. First, I will deal with travel. I travel between 60 000 and 80 000 kilometres a year in a vehicle. In my time in this place, I have never held a position in which I have had a driver available; unlike the minister, I drive myself for those 60 000 to 80 000 kilometres a year. In addition, I receive some air charter allowance, and I have some other methods of transport; I can catch a bus or a train.

Hon N.D. Griffiths interjected.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: It is not a laughing matter but is a serious situation. That 60 000 kilometres a year equates to about 30 hours a week that I spend behind the wheel of a motorcar. That is about three-quarters of an average working week. The minister may say, "So what?" I admit it probably does not register until we have to do it. These things do not have an impact until we have been doing them for 14 years and realise that they take a toll and are a bit tiring. The other work I have to do as a member still has to be done. I have to prepare speeches. I have family commitments. I have to prepare to travel between the country and the city. I have to do

things that the minister may take for granted, such as find time for a bit of relaxation; I have to try to fit that in at 2.00 am, or something like that.

Hon J.A. Scott: Why not relax on those nice long drives?

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Sure! Hon Jim Scott should relax on a nice unsealed country road and see how long it takes before he meets his doom with a kangaroo or a tree.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: Given the amount of driving that you do, I will never relax again when I am driving on a country road in case I come across you!

Hon BARRY HOUSE: I am saying that 30 hours a week behind the wheel of a motorcar adds up to accumulated tiredness; so if some of our country members look a bit ragged by the end of the year, there is probably good reason for that.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: As a metropolitan member, I do about 45 000 kilometres a year.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Yes. Some of the minister's electorate is a semi-rural situation - the hills, for example.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: Very much so.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: The minister meets me halfway. I am not saying no other member does any driving. I am saying that a lot of our driving is done on unsealed country roads. It is not done on nicely kerbed and formed city streets.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: I understand that. I have unsealed roads in my electorate also, but not many.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: A lot of that driving is done late at night, with all the hazards that go with that, such as kangaroos and emus, and God knows what else.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: I just want to know where you are going so I can avoid you!

Hon BARRY HOUSE: The one thing the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal allows country members is that we can have roo bars and spotlights.

Hon W.N. Stretch: And that was a fight!

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Yes. People may say we drive St Georges Terrace tractors, but I assure members that my roo bar has saved my life half a dozen times.

Hon Paddy Embry: One thing we do not have is Multanovas. That is the saving grace about country driving.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: I am not sure I agree with the member about that, because country members face all the occupational hazards of being on the road for a long time and of having to cop our fair share of speeding fines. I have been through that, and I thank God for cruise control in cars, because it saves me from speeding. I have been in a situation in which I have lost my licence because I have had too many demerit points, and I have had to catch the bus for a couple of weeks. Other members have run the gauntlet and have had accidents. One example is Hon Murray Montgomery, a former member of this Chamber, who was extremely lucky to survive an accident about a year ago on a country road. It is not easy to travel.

I lead a very disjointed existence. I maintain a home in the country and a home in Perth. As the minister probably knows, country members receive an allowance equivalent to 80 nights accommodation in Perth. Many country members put that allowance towards buying a residence in Perth, as I have done, so that we have a bit of permanence and can leave some clothes in one spot and do not have to hop between one hotel and another. I have an office in the country and an office in Parliament House, and I have a car that is my mobile wardrobe and office, and sometimes also my bedroom. There is an obvious difficulty when the papers, files and information that we need to do our job properly are scattered all over the place. I have been in situations in which I have wanted some information at Parliament House but it has been in my electorate office in Margaret River. It is a relatively easy exercise for city members to get documents from their electorate office, but I assure members that in a country situation it is very difficult. At times I have used a courier to get documents up to Perth overnight, and I have also used MailWest, which is quite efficient, but it takes a couple of days, and often that is too late. It is often not simple to get the information that we need in Perth.

Another issue is the logistics of maintaining our clothes in one spot and making sure that we get our washing, ironing and dry-cleaning done. It is not as simple as it sounds.

Hon J.A. Scott: Then you would appreciate the measures that the Greens (WA) have asked for; namely, additional facilities for country members.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: I will come to that in a moment.

Communication is another issue. In my office I have three telephone lines, one data line and one fax machine. At home I have one telephone and one fax machine, and a mobile phone that does not work in my home. In Perth I have one telephone and a fax machine, which I bought myself. At Parliament House I have a telephone, a fax machine that I share with other members, a mobile phone that does not work in large areas of the electorate that I cover, and an e-mail facility. In addition, I receive mail in four places: Parliament House, my office, and my homes in Perth and in the country. I also have telephones in the hotels in which I stay. That is at least 17 different communication channels. Is Hon Jim Scott saying we need more? God almighty; I have enough trouble keeping up with everything else that I have as a result of being a country member.

Hon J.A. Scott: It is not just for you. It is also for the people who want to access you.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Yes. People in the country want to see their representative. They do not want to see an agent of their representative. Perhaps when cloning is perfected we can clone about four members and send them around the place. That may be a solution. However, until that happens, people do not want me to send my electorate officer to a school function to represent me.

Hon Paddy Embry: They may prefer it! It depends on the electorate officer.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: The member can jest, but I am sure he realises the seriousness of this matter. I will give an example of a previous Labor member of this Chamber, with whom I shared the electorate. I went to an end of year school function one night, for which that member had donated a prize and so had I. I was there to present my prize, and when the president of the P & C at the time - I will not mention any names - got up to award the prize that had been donated by that member, he said, "Who is this bloke? I have never seen him before. What an insult! He bobs up every year with a prize, but none of us knows who he is and what he looks like." That was very embarrassing for my parliamentary colleague.

Hon E.R.J. Dermer: I bet that was the last time a prize was donated to that school!

Hon BARRY HOUSE: It might have been. That does not do any of us any good as a representative of an area. Metropolitan members can sometimes attend three functions a night. They can get a pair for a few hours and hop between their various commitments. If functions and commitments occur during a parliamentary sitting we have to get a pair, which involves a whole day of travelling to and from and back again. It is not a simple matter of going from one function to another. The south west has many largish regional centres, and it also has many other regional centres, plus country schools and so on. The point is that the electorate expects and deserves to see its elected representative. It does not want to see a cardboard cut-out, it does not want to see an agent and it does not want to receive messages via electronic communication. The extra resources that the Greens (WA) have promoted may help us do our job, but they will only make me more centralised. I will have to sit in Parliament House and operate via electronic communications throughout the State. That is not decent representation, so it is no real solution.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: How much time would you give each elector?

Hon BARRY HOUSE: We cannot do that. We cannot say definitively that we will give three minutes to each elector. A member will obviously allocate time when and where it is required.

One of the best things Australia has going for it in its representative democracy is that its elected officials are accessible. That really came home to me during a couple of conferences I attended in the United States of America. The people attending the conferences were amazed for a start that, as an elected official, I was at the conferences, taking part in the sessions and talking to people just like one of the ordinary participants. In the United States of America people cannot get near their elected officials; they have to work through lobbyists and consultants just to get appointments or even get a message to their elected officials, let alone see them. I do not think we should head in that direction. I well remember, and the minister may remember, the shockwaves that went through Australia when an Australian politician was shot in Sydney. That was a real affront to one of the basic freedoms that we in Australia hold dear: we know who our elected officials are and we are free to approach them. This proposed electoral change will destroy that accessibility.

Comments have been made about adjusting the north west areas with dummy voters, and this is one of the sops to the Greens. I question that logic. I compare representation of the north west area with representation of the south west area. I put it to the minister that it is more difficult to represent the south west area, which has many centres of population and a wide diversity of economic, social and cultural lifestyles and issues, and members travel by road between those centres. By contrast, in the north west area there is one basic activity, which is mining, and there are similarities between different centres and the basic means of travel is by air.

Hon Ken Travers: You have never been to the north west, have you?

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Yes, I have. I maintain that it is just as easy to get around the north west to represent an electorate, as it is to get around the south west. In summary, the Legislative Assembly proposal is put forward for blatant political reasons; it will not promote a fair, effective or even democratic representation.

[Leave granted for the member's time to be extended.]

Hon BARRY HOUSE: I was not expecting that, but never mind. The basic motivation is political, because the people in the Labor Party and this small group of zealots who have seen their little window of opportunity to gain power - they are not totally stupid - know that it will be easier at the next election to -

Government members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The member has been given additional time. He should be allowed to speak.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: I will start from their current position. They know that they are in government, thanks to preferences from the other minor parties, the Greens and One Nation. They know that their majority is very fragile. They know that they will have difficulty defending the six seats at the next election, some of which are country seats. They know it would be far easier for them to defend 16 seats once the eight from the country had been brought into the city and the boundaries had been re-drawn. They know it would be far easier for them to win those seats in the city. They know the election could be decided in metropolitan Perth, and country Western Australia would not matter a fig.

The proposals before us concern the Legislative Assembly only. In the Legislative Council we note that the Greens will support the Bill on condition that the legislation is changed to embrace their model, if I have read the comments correctly, which is six regions with six members each - a net increase of two members for the Legislative Council. I applaud the stance by the Greens that they will vote against the Labor Party if it does not embrace the full package. I welcome the rejection of this legislation on any grounds - even those grounds - so in that respect I urge the Greens to stick to their guns.

I shall make a few comments on the best system for an upper House. In my mind, the best method is the provincial method that was used previously, in which the system was based on regions that encompassed between three to six lower House seats. As an aside, I was elected in 1987 in the last by-election in this State based on the old provincial system. It was also the last time that polling booths for any election were open until eight o'clock; since then they have closed at six o'clock. That system allowed for the direct election of individuals, not party appointments; it allowed for the representation of smaller, manageable regions with a set of common interests; and it allowed for knowledgeable and direct representation in the Legislative Council. To my mind, the next best system is probably the regional concept we now have, but it is still flawed because the regions are too big. The south west region I represent covers three regions: the south west, which could be split into two sections, the Peel region and the great southern. They are the sorts of regions in which communities of interest can be defined to provide representation that is truly relevant to the electors.

It is interesting to recall that the last time major changes were made to the electoral laws in Western Australia was just prior to my election in 1987. Those changes were of course introduced by a Labor Government, with the support of the National Party, and the current system was imposed on Western Australia. I am not sure, given that history, that the National Party would think so favourably of that system now. I am sure that part of the motivation for its support of that legislation was that it could see this as an opportunity to hold the balance of power in this House for ever and a day. That is the same motivation guiding the Greens (WA) in their model for the upper House; they believe that they will stand a very good chance of holding the balance of power. However, such a change will simply guarantee that Independents or minority parties of some description will hold the balance of power, not necessarily the Greens. The National Party has learnt that lesson. That is not a good system, nor is it in the interests of good government in Western Australia.

Hon Ken Travers: Who do you think should hold the balance of power?

Hon Frank Hough: One Nation!

Hon Ken Travers: I don't think so.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The member may need to regain his composure.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: If we are destined to retain regions with a mix of proportional representation and preferential voting for the Legislative Council, this might be the time to examine seriously the notion of a vote threshold. It would be reasonable for any candidate to be required to gain 0.5 per cent of a quota in the primary vote to remain in the count and stand a chance of being elected. If a candidate does not obtain that threshold, he will be eliminated and his preferences distributed. That is food for thought.

The Greens also proposed that we investigate lowering the franchise to 16 years of age. The Labor Party has agreed to "investigate" that proposal as a sop to the Greens. The Greens have been had; the Labor Party has no

intention, with good reason, of ever reducing the voting age to 16. It would turn our schools into political battlefields.

Obviously, the Liberal Party opposes this legislation. Members on this side want to see this proposal decided at a referendum. As an interim measure, we certainly want to see the Bill sent to a committee that can fully investigate any impact. A motion was moved earlier this afternoon, but under standing orders I cannot talk about it. It will be debated in the fullness of time. This is the first time in my experience that a motion such as this has been moved before the completion of the second reading debate. If the Bill does go to a committee at this stage, surely the policy is open to scrutiny.

Hon Kim Chance: That is correct.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: That is fine. Is that before the completion of the second reading debate?

Hon Kim Chance: Yes.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: I do not think so. It is a blatant attempt to railroad the Bill.

Hon Kim Chance: We have had Bills referred before the beginning of the second reading debate.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Yes, but we always understood that that would happen.

I hope the committee undertakes a thorough investigation and that it does not produce a desktop study done by committee staff. I want a proper investigation. The committee should talk to the people of Western Australia. If members opposite refuse to present this issue in a referendum, they should at least get the views of country people, not only those of people living in cities and major regional areas. The committee should go to places like Port Hedland and Collie. Collie will lose its identity if this legislation is passed. It will be subsumed into a seat dominated by Bunbury.

Hon Kim Chance: Will you support the inquiry if we undertake to do that?

Hon BARRY HOUSE: If the Government undertakes to do it properly, I will support it.

Hon Kim Chance: Okay.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: I will support it if adequate time is allowed.

Hon Kim Chance: You will have all day tomorrow; we will sit late.

Hon Peter Foss: He means adequate time to do the inquiry.

Hon Kim Chance: The reporting date is 26 November.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: It must be done properly, and that will take months.

The ALP was gungho about referendums in the 1980s when we were dealing with daylight saving. We had three referendums on daylight saving. If it is good enough to conduct a referendum about that issue, surely it is good enough to have one about electoral change. We have heard the Burke slogan, "Let the people decide."

Hon Kim Chance: They did.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: If the Government can get support in a referendum, good on it. It definitely did not in the 10 February election; it attracted only 37 per cent of the vote.

The electoral Bills contain constitutional clauses. We should be consistent with the federal system. If the federal Government wants to change the Constitution, it must hold a referendum. That referendum can be carried only if it attracts the support of a majority of voters in a majority of States. We should apply the same system here; we should require the support of a majority of voters in a majority of regions. That would be fair.

Hon Kim Chance: Would you have put the third wave industrial relations legislation up to that scrutiny -

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Absolutely.

Hon Kim Chance: - instead of ramming it through this House when another House had been elected?

Hon BARRY HOUSE: I would have happily done that.

Hon Kim Chance: You rammed it through this House. You would not wait until the properly elected House had a chance to debate it.

Hon Peter Foss: Rubbish!

Hon Kim Chance: The duly-elected members were sitting outside.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Members are straying from the topic.



Hon Kim Chance: You rammed it through.

Hon Peter Foss: Nonsense!

The PRESIDENT: The Leader of the House and Hon Peter Foss will come to order!

Hon BARRY HOUSE: This legislation should be opposed for a range of reasons. As I said, it satisfies only one criterion; that is, allowing one vote for one person. It does not satisfy other criteria that are equally important in a representative democracy. In summary, it is a blatant attempt to change the electoral system for political advantage. It is the second stage of our Fabian Society's approach to electoral change in this State. The first stage was the 1987 move to change this House. The second stage is this legislation. I predict that, if this legislation is passed, there will be a third stage once again to change this House to suit the Labor Party.

Hon Kim Chance: And then we will kill all the first-born!

Hon BARRY HOUSE: That is the Fabian Society in operation.

This legislation does not consider a range of other issues that are equally valid when discussing electoral representation. It has not considered any arguments associated with compulsory versus voluntary voting or preferential versus first-past-the-post voting. We have introduced that at the local government level in Western Australia. Why not introduce it at the state level? The Government has not raised issues such as optional preferential voting. It also has not debated the validity of proportional representation versus single-electorate systems. I oppose the Bill for a range of reasons. It is a blatant attempt to meddle with the system to gain political advantage. It should be resisted at every turn.

Debate adjourned, on motion by Hon Peter Foss.