



AUSTRALIA'S

undemocratic

DEMOCRACY

Bryan M'Crystal

**Movement for
Better Government**

‘And one has to reflect that there is nothing more difficult to handle nor more doubtful of success nor more dangerous to conduct than to make oneself the leader in introducing a new order of things.

For the man who introduces it has for enemies all those who do well out of the old order and has lukewarm supporters in all those who will do well out of the new order.

This lukewarmness arises partly from the fear of their adversaries who have the laws on their side and partly from the incredulity of mankind who do not put their trust in changes if they do not see them in actual practice.

Thus, it arises that whenever those who are enemies have the opportunity to go on the attack they do so forcefully and the others put up a lukewarm defence, so putting themselves and their cause at risk at the same

time.’

Machiavelli – ‘The Prince’

Foreword by Dr Don Grant AO

There is growing disquiet in the media and in the general Australian community about the political milieu and those who inhabit it. The concepts of leadership and democracy have taken on different hues as leadership becomes increasingly driven by ideology and equitable electoral representation is gaining attention as movement to the cities grows apace. Indeed, democracy seems to be in a crisis of self-esteem with public opinion and the polling booth being the only mechanisms available to finally get things moving.

There are many factors contributing to this growing discontent. First, the behaviour of not a few politicians at both Federal and State levels has brought discredit on the existing system of party selection for candidates. Second, many are appalled by the way vested interest groups delayed much needed investigations into the financial sector, the energy crisis, aged care management and the underperformance of regulatory authorities. Facing international condemnation, these interest groups continue to obfuscate in the matter of climate change. Underlying all of this, the flagrant corruption and misuse of power by parliamentarians of both major parties have done little to engender trust.

These impediments to genuine electoral representation have far reaching consequences. For example, the former United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, claims that the toll of inaction on climate change is ethically incalculable, and economically poses a huge

threat to Australia's future prosperity and international standing. He contrasts Australia's stance with Australia's major trading partners Japan, South Korea and China which have set net zero targets for either 2050 or before 2060, adding that in the short term the US, Japan, the EU and the UK have committed to emissions reductions that are roughly two to three times greater than Australia's current effort.

Bryan M'Crystal, a long-time advocate of electoral reform or social choice theory, has elaborated on some of the failings of our current political system. But even he was surprised to discover that Australia-wide, there are over thirty formal reform groups focused fundamentally on the failure of our political system to represent the people's wishes. In this brief but thought-provoking work he proposes the removal of all political parties to be replaced by independent parliamentarians.

Indeed, a big call. There may not be a dramatic trend in the increase of independents sitting in the Australian Parliament, but the major parties should not be complacent. Writing in 2001, Dr Jennifer Curtin (the 2000 Australian Parliamentary Fellow) recalled that since 1980, fifty-six elected independents had served in the Australian Parliament and in the 2001 federal election the vote share for independent candidates in rural electorates was higher than the vote for each of the minor parties. Today, there are seven independent members in the House of Representatives and fourteen out of seventy-six senators who are not members of the two major parties.

Locally, the NSW environment minister, Matt Kean recently urged voters concerned about the climate

crisis to send a message to all leaders at the ballot box and warned it is a 'cop-out' for politicians to say it is up to others to fix the problem. He added that the country needed to move beyond a politics focused on vested interests and that every Australian should take responsibility for remaking our politics. Pointedly, he suggested that the community expects our leaders to get on with it or get out of the way.

In response, Bryan M'Crystal's Australia's Undemocratic Democracy is a valuable contribution in which he has reviewed the current political and electoral landscape whilst offering an ambitious solution.

Dr Don Grant AO

Don Grant was made an Officer of the Order of Australia in 2020. In his role as Surveyor General of New South Wales, he participated in a number of both State and Federal Electoral Re-Distributions.

For the past twenty years, he has been active in international land reform.

Issue

The lack of constructive thought and consideration by elected Members of Parliament when dealing with national initiatives.

Aim

Removal of all political parties to be replaced by independent parliamentarians.

Background

The Australian parliamentary system is based on the concepts of Westminster; in recent years referred to as Washminster by some, because of the adoption of practices like those in Washington. Unfortunately, the practices of both Federal and State Parliaments in Australia are not democratic due to the two major party system. Rather than mature and individual input to national issues, it is rare for the parties to not vote along party lines. The result is that the current Australian parliamentary system behaves in concert with ideological principles of the governing party. This approach can run counter to the true interests of the nation and may well be reversed after the following election. This can lead to considerable financial waste, a lack of trust by the community at large and frustration on the part of the genuine voter.

Since Federation and soon after the adoption of our electoral system, the creation of polarised political parties has set about subverting the democratic

principles upon which Federation took place. For example, the Senate is supposed to have been a house of review, always acting in the interests of the people of each State. In fact, the major parties have used it as an arm of their own policies and when not in control, have regularly connived with their opponents to achieve their individual aims, regardless of the interest of the people.

While the election of the lower house (House of Representatives) is based upon the population of each State broken into electoral areas of roughly similar numbers, the Senate is made up of twelve individual Senators per State and two per territory, supposedly elected by the people.

The recent Royal Commission into the banking and financial sector reminds us of those many years following deregulation when the major parties both failed the nation.

Prior to 1981, the financial sector was regulated by the government. Over the period 1983 to 1996, the Hawke/Keating Labor Government privatised companies such as CBA and Qantas, followed by the deregulation of the financial sector with little opposition from the Coalition. The advent of foreign currency loans that followed saw the start of rampant financial sector dishonesty, even fraudulent practices, proving to be financially catastrophic to the nation.

During all this time, it became apparent that our Parliament was content to sit on its hands with only Allan Fels, the chair of the Trade Practices Commission (TPC) seemingly operating in the interests of the nation.

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In July 1998, following the Wallis Report, two mega-regulators known as the 'Twin Peaks' were established: the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (APRA); and the Australian Securities and Investment Commission (ASIC). However, over the ensuing years, these entities failed to act on reports of misconduct and, worse, criminal conduct, as later proven by the Royal Commission.

If the major parties were genuinely and sincerely governing in the interests of the nation and the people, our country would be in a far better state economically and culturally. The truth is we are not. Additionally, the 'so called' need for lobby groups should become unnecessary.

The Parties

General

Nowadays, there is sufficient information in the public domain about politicians for us to see which politicians are in it for themselves and which are motivated by a wish to improve life for the citizens of the country. The contrast between the philosophy of the Coalition government and Labor is stark and mirrors that between Conservatives, neo-Liberals and the others. If it takes a coalition of non-Liberals to get rid of these politicians, then that is what the leaders of other parties must accomplish.

The Liberal National Coalition

It is accepted that the Coalition is an organisation whose sole aim is to further the interests of the capitalist system. Capitalism is not all bad but unfortunately, there are many who are motivated by pure greed with little concern for those who may work for them and the needy of the nation. They are motivated by a drive to gain control of government, get their members in a position for their own individual financial benefit and to finally become a giant lobby group for the benefit of capitalism. In other words, to get their snouts in the Canberra trough.

The Labor Party

The name says it all except that while supposedly working for the benefit of all working people, they in fact pursue mainly the interests of their affiliated unions. That would not be such a bad thing except for the

corruption of some of the unions. They are also motivated by the drive to gain control of government, get their members in a position to enhance their own financial benefit and finally become a giant lobby group for the benefit of corrupt unionism. They, too, are also motivated to get their snouts in the Canberra trough. Unfortunately, the smaller parties see what is going on in Canberra and become influenced by the same greed. The problem then is what can be done to correct this situation. There are several solutions, that can be canvassed.

Options

The question that immediately arises is *How to achieve this end?* There are many possible solutions, but the one I currently prefer to pursue is the creation of a Parliament of Independent Members.

Parliament of independent members

Since Magna Carta, the world has struggled to find a better system of government with the English partially solving the problem when Oliver Cromwell exerted his influences into the English Parliament and, laid the basis for what is now the Parliament of Great Britain.

No doubt the existing parliamentary parties would fight tooth and nail to prevent such an outcome and many of the electorate as well. While we, as a nation, have possibly the best electoral system in the world today, I believe we can utilise it in a more democratic way to achieve a parliament of committed and avowed independents who are honest, with declared aims to govern the nation in the pure interest of the nation.

I know there will be many people who will pooh-pooh the notion, but I believe it is possible. When Parliament is sitting, the parties spend more than half the sitting time as protagonists and adversaries, with minimal parliamentary time governing the country. They resort to committees when important decisions need to be made. Still, all too often, those committees are mere window dressing designed to give the electorate the impression that the Parliament is working democratically. We all know that almost always, decisions are made in the party rooms with all participants voting along party lines regardless of individual members own feelings or beliefs to the contrary.

Leadership

Over the past twenty years or so, we have seen too many parliamentary hours taken up while the major parties individually descend into outright brawling over leadership. During such times, government is suspended with little or no time given to the running of the country, our economy or other national interests. This is just one of many distractions where the major parties have failed to effectively serve the nation.

With a movement of like-minded people, many issues that require debate at a parliamentary level but which become contentious because of party politics should more easily be decided in a parliament of independents. Each MP will be well acquainted with the opinions of their electoral chapter and their original manifesto and vote with integrity. Should an issue become contentious within the MP's Chapter, the members will be able to call a public meeting of their electorate and arrive at a popular decision. If an issue remains contentious, an MP could call for a plebiscite in their electorate overseen by their electoral committee.

All in all, the purpose is to achieve a parliament of independent members, who undertake to always honour their original manifesto, held by the electoral chapter who nominated them for Parliament, either the Senate or the House of Representatives. Additionally, they will act and behave, in or out of Parliament, with the highest degree of decency, principle and ethics expected by their electorate and the people at large.

How to achieve a parliament of independent members

Local Electorate Selection Committee

There may be other ways to address this issue, but the way I would endeavour to proceed is, utilising the existing electoral system and prevailing upon the established Electoral Commission to handle my proposal, to work alongside the electoral divisional officer to form the 'Local Electorate Selection Committee'. This need not be insurmountable but would require something like a 'Movement' or Association of members interested in pursuing the concept of parliamentary good and honest government. In other words, a Movement for Better Government. This, of course, may not be achievable as the government of the day is in control of the Electoral Commission, whose prime function is to maintain political neutrality and demands the impartiality.

Initially, those people who decide to join the movement at individual electorate meetings will need to select a group of members who will volunteer to become the parliamentary selection committee. These volunteers will be required to submit their resumes for consideration by the meeting. Upon selection by vote, the members will each be required to sign the movement Manifesto authorising them thereafter to interview and select nominees for the Senate or House of Representatives.

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The main function of the Selection Committee would be to invite nominations from local candidates. Those nominees would be required to submit; first, an application recording their resume of qualifications and work/life experience plus a separate manifesto stating their principles, beliefs (religious or otherwise) and their firm commitment to issues, such as but not only:

Climate Change	Fossil fuel (such as coal, fracking etc)
Euthanasia (for or against} with qualifications.	Attitude to accepting or not, financial support of any kind, directly or indirectly.
Australian Citizenship (born or naturalised)	Buy Australian – 100% committed or where possible
Free Trade - for or against?	United Nations - Can it be improved

Having performed their vetting function, the Chamber selection committee will monitor the functioning and performance of the elected MP or Senator in or outside Parliament. In addition, each electoral chapter will select among their membership a management committee, say five to ten, who will run the day-to-day operation of the chapter. They will decide the frequency of committee meetings as well as full membership meetings.

No doubt the Parties would strongly resist, and the issue would probably have to go, eventually to the High Court. All of this is conjecture. However, if the national community could be persuaded to have open minds to, at least, not just conjecture but to thinking of better ways to run the country, we could and would become a far more democratic and successful nation.

This would require a lot of hard work by the citizens of our nation who would volunteer their time in the interest of better government for the people, of the people, by the people. In other words, *Democracy*. However, if enough people could be persuaded to associate with us and help us build a substantial following, we may be able to ring in the necessary changes. I must confess that I am unaware of any movement or group of persons with similar philosophies. But I would be pleased to know if one exists.

For purposes of the future, I will utilise the name 'The Movement for Better Government (MBG).' One of the major stumbling blocks will be how to arrive at the infrastructure of government, the selection of the Prime Minister, Cabinet and the necessary staffing. Who is to say what form of government may prevail should we (the nation) eventually become a Republic? Hopefully, we shall retain the Westminster system.

Establishment of the Movement

The movement does not have to be registered as a political party. At the time of nomination, a suitable candidate may have to have 100 names on the electoral roll to be registered. There should be little difficulty in achieving statutory membership.

To create and assemble such a group or movement is the first step, so serious consideration of the ways and means to achieve this is essential. If the suggested movement were to be created, it would be ideal to attain membership of approximately five million members, united in the pursuit of good, honest government, with no ulterior motives. The movement would need to establish a professional administration managing each electoral chapter, with a board of, say, ten persons to oversee each electoral committee and the chapter. Ideally, each chapter would achieve a membership of 30,000 at least, but averaging 20,000 per chapter. With a nominal membership fee of \$10 per head, it may be possible to accrue sufficient funds to employ the requisite professional management team for each chapter and for the national oversight.

Whilst, initially, vested interests would throw money at combating our movement through advertising, bribery and/or corruption, we the movement should be able to overcome those pressures because we will not need to resort to expensive advertising or abnormal publicity. As our elected Members of Parliament would not be allowed to accept any form of vested interest funding, the capitalists would be forced to compete on fair and legal terms. Who knows, with fair and honest

government, we may find (and probably will) the cost of administering our nation will reduce as we achieve a true democracy?

Modus Operandi

Should the movement eventually become a reality, serious thought would have to be given as to how to progress the changes to finally achieve a non-party parliament. One possible approach would be to initially target the Senate, canvassing the election of a non – party Senate. When this has been achieved, the Senate could become instrumental in the selection of a government and the relevant cabinet. There is little doubt the conversion of the House of Representatives would be arrived at after a much stiffer battle. It is suggested that the newly elected independent members of the Senate would not aspire or qualify to government/ cabinet. In so doing the Senate would be instrumental in the selection of members of the lower house to form government and cabinet. The Senate would never be the plaything of the lower house but become the effective Senior Chamber with the responsibility of overseeing the actions of the lower house, in the interest of the national community.

The independent members of the lower house, having been elected by the voters of their electorate, would immediately become potential candidates for position of Cabinet and one of those cabinet members (selected and installed by the full Senate) could nominate themselves and or another cabinet member to accept

nomination, by the full Senate, to the position of Prime Minister.

The elected Prime Minister would then communicate to the sitting Governor-General his acceptance of the position and those of his cabinet. Individual cabinet ministers could then nominate or be nominated by the Prime Minister to their portfolio be ratified by the full Senate and only then would they swear to the Governor-General their allegiance to the Crown (as currently) and their total commitment to the Australian Constitution and our current laws, always in the sole interest of the nation. Failure to comply with their sworn Declaration could or would result in their being called, individually or severally before the full Senate. The full Senate could then, if considered necessary, bring charges against the offender/s and refer them to an appropriate court of law. Initially at least, Members of Parliament would be paid at rates equivalent to those applicable at the time.

Having established a complete parliament, it could be proposed that the Parliament would govern for a full term of five years. The subsequent appointment of department heads needs to be ratified by a senate. Positions for individual department heads would be advertised and sought by the parliamentary office under the auspices of the full Senate. Again, rates of pay would be commensurate with those applicable at the time.

Governor-General

The selection and nomination of candidates for this office would be at the behest of the full Senate for submission to the Crown. Should Australia subsequently elect to become a Republic, the full Senate would have sole responsibility for the selection and appointment of a suitable person for the position of President. There are many issues that would have to be addressed and these would be best addressed by the movement.

Conclusion

The aim is to arrive at a membership of the national movement with numbers sufficient to combat any subsequent drive or challenge from people or organisations with vested interests or who work against the good governance of Australia.

Movement for Better Government

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