

Reform of Queensland's Electoral Laws 2013 Submission

Mike Smith

Note: I am a member of the Australian Labor Party, but this is a personal submission: it has no connection with any Australian Labor Party submission. I don't know what they are saying, and they don't know what I am saying.

Principles

At the end of World War II there were only 11 democracies on the planet. Depending on your criteria there are between 85 and 123 right now.

The long path through imperfect or limited democracies to “full” democracies has seen nations and states adopt increasingly democratic rules. There’s no agreement about what constitutes “democracy” but the following are consistently proposed as being necessary inclusions:

- The rule of law, equality before it and fair access to it
- Equality of the value of each vote
- Wide enfranchisement of adults, and fair access to it
- Free and fair elections, and no unreasonable restrictions to participation in them

Many of the other prospective manifestations of “democracy” generate debate.

The democratic right to enrol and vote must not be a theoretical or atrophied right – the harder it is to enrol, and the harder it is to cast a vote, or the easier it is to avoid one or both, then the less each is a right and the more they become privileges.

Voluntary Voting

I urge that any proposal for voluntary voting be rejected for the reasons outlined below:

A move to voluntary voting does not merely introduce an element of choice for individual voters, it deforms election campaigns beyond recognition. In US campaigns with their voluntary voting, the last four weeks of local activity are utterly focussed on Get-Out-The-Vote (GOTV) activity.

This GOTV focus – for four exceptionally full weeks – crowds out other campaign activities – policy discussion and advocacy at the local level disappear. It is hard to imagine how different this is, from what we are used to, unless you immerse yourself in it.

Queensland election campaigns can be as short as four weeks. It is impossible to tell what would evolve in Queensland campaigns, were voluntary voting introduced, but given the American experience it is absolutely certain that the activities of the Parties and candidates during the period of any Queensland election would be enormously different from at present.

Introduction of voluntary voting would inevitably and massive increase in campaign costs, as resources would need to be devoted to GOTV activities, and candidates and Parties would be reluctant to reduce other “persuasion” endeavours.

In a compulsory system, where you know around 95% of the voters will turn out, all you have to embed in them is a mild preference for either candidate, which will translate into a vote: but in a voluntary system you have to embed what I think of as a “motivational preference”, where the voter sees sufficient difference between the candidates that they should bother to vote when inconvenient and unnecessary, or they are simply uninspired or uninterested.

To get a voter to the point of this “motivational preference” (vs. a milder preference) you campaign differently - much more negatively, much more stridently, using different and more aggressive language, and applying a range of techniques that stress and fabricate differences e.g. push polling, deeply personalised opposition research, etc. This is very harmful to civil society.

Many Australians already observe and comment on how ugly, personalised and unpleasant US election campaigns seem, and it is this manifestation, driven in part by voluntary voting, that they dislike.

Many political conservatives argue for rights to be balanced by responsibilities: the compulsory-enrolment-and-voting obligations are a balanced set of responsibilities to hold against the right to vote. It would be inconsistent and somewhat hypocritical to exempt so important an activity from the equation of rights and responsibilities.

Anecdotally, members of all of the major parties already respond scathingly (and sometimes not entirely privately) to those few who don’t vote yet complain about the decisions, policies and programmes of Government. That unfortunate attitude would become much more an issue if there were many more citizens not voting.

It is quite undesirable to build a structure where individuals have absolutely no stake in who governs them, however small might be that stake which is legislatively imposed.

One of the greatest problems of civil society is the growing lack of respect for institutions - allowing greater separation and distance between citizens and their Governments can only increase that disrespect (which isn't to say that some of that disrespect isn't thoroughly deserved).

Eliminating compulsory voting removes an important item from the list of “civic duties” that a democratic society asks of its citizens, to the point where many would see no such list of duties. It is such an important part of Queenslanders’ civic duties that it’s removal would significantly contribute to the diminution of the whole concept of civic duties amongst a citizenry.

High turnout legitimises government: historically, in every single instance where a voluntary voting system has seen low turnout, the Parliamentary and extra-Parliamentary opponents of the winner, and sometimes the internal opponents of the winning Party, have argued that the poor turnout constrains or eliminates the winner’s mandate to govern. It creates, at least, a psychological barrier.

If voting is mandatory, then providing good access to the capacity to cast a vote is also mandatory. Voluntary voting reduces incentive for any Government to adequately provide for the difficult and expensive votes: small booths, remote area booths, pre-poll voting, electoral visitor votes, nursing home votes, and so on. The marginal cost of acquiring these votes is great, but worthy – if you have some certainty that people will vote. If there is doubt, or they didn’t in good numbers at a previous voluntary-voting election, there will be a future temptation and pressure to cut costs by limiting voting opportunities.

As our lives become increasingly crowded with such commitments as children’s weekend sports days, as the proportion of workers rostered to work on polling days increases, and as the media increasingly characterise politics and politicians as unsavoury, unhelpful, ineffectual and somewhat contemptible, there are more and more barriers – real barriers – to individuals being motivated to vote. Individually these barriers are sometimes a major impediment to voting: if these and other such piled cumulatively on a household, they become much more an impediment. The introduction of voluntary voting will encourage many to lose any commitment to surmounting those barriers.

Western Australia

I append and commend a submission made by the Western Australian Branch of the Australian Labor Party to a “Commission on Government” inquiry in Western Australia in 1995. While not all of the arguments therein are arguments with which I agree, the overall thrust of the submission is highly relevant, and I have above stolen some of their language and propositions. The Commission on Government to which they made their submissions supported continuation of compulsory voting.

Other Matters: Enrolment and Voting

Because the Government's discussion paper is quite open-ended as to the issues on which it seeks comment, any submitter can raise any issue.

Because the Electoral Act and the confidence it gives in our system of Government, are so fundamental to the character of our State, and changing the Act has the capacity to change our State significantly, it is my submission that substantive matters not canvassed in detail in the white paper but raised in submissions should not be the subject of implementation recommendations but could, at its strongest and where a powerful case, is made out be proposed for further public debate.

In particular I am concerned that the open-ended request for submissions might result in submissions calling for restrictions on the enrolment process or the voting process, and it would be improper and unreasonable if such submissions were adopted by Government without further opportunity for public debate.

The democratic right to enrol and vote must not be a theoretical or atrophied right – the harder it is to enrol, and the harder it is to cast a vote, or the easier it is to avoid one or both, then the less each is a right and the more they become privileges: privileges for the literate, those with cars, those who aren't shift-workers, those with plenty of leisure time, those who don't believe that politics and politicians are so grubby they shouldn't be involved, those who don't feel alienated from society, those who understand and accept that they have civic duties.

In recent years, the USA has seen a pattern of restrictions on the right to enrol, and the right to vote, across many jurisdictions. Some have been reversed by legislatures or the courts, some persist, and some are under legal challenge.

Almost all of those changes are partisan, politically controversial and seen as an attempt to manipulate electoral outcomes. On occasions, their authors and supporters have essentially acknowledged that purpose.

All are characterised by their authors as seeking to remedy faults or potential fraud, and in every single case where data (rather than anecdote) could be collected, it has been demonstrated that there is no fault to be remedied.

That is, these changes have been made in bad faith, purporting to remedy non-existent faults, by partisans prepared to damage the electoral system and citizens' confidence in their political system, to seek political advantage.

The Australian Electoral Commission periodically and after every election examines the outcome for fraud and invariably concludes there is negligible impropriety when it comes to enrolment and voting. Unless a proper case with proper evidence – much more than mere anecdote or a cover story concealing a desire for electoral manipulation – is made to the contrary, what applies across Australia must be taken to apply in Queensland and it must be judged that there is negligible fraud or impropriety in our enrolment and voting system.

That is, there is no case whatsoever made so far, for restrictions on enrolment or voting in Queensland.

Do I know what I'm talking about?

Everything I've said above is based on my direct involvement in, and observation of, elections.

I have observed the following US Presidential campaigns, at which voluntary voting applies

- Clinton/Dole 1996 (as part of the Young Political Leaders Exchange, four weeks of intensive study, across several US States)
- Kerry/Bush 2004 (volunteer in the campaign for four weeks, during GOTV period)
- Obama/McCain 2008 (volunteer in the campaign for four weeks, during GOTV period)
- Obama/Romney 2012 (volunteer in the campaign for four weeks, during GOTV period).

In most years since 2004 I have participated (attending and/or presenting) at *The Art of Political Campaigning* Conference, in Washington DC, which brings together an enormous and diverse collection of participants in the electoral process in many countries, to learn, teach, and exchange views.

I was State Secretary/Executive Officer of the Australian Labor Party in the Northern Territory, for five years.

Election campaigns remain my major avocation.

Commission On Government
Specified Matters 15 and 16

The Australian Labor Party Case
for
Universal Attendance (Compulsory Voting)
for all Legislative Assembly
and Legislative Council Elections

Prepared by John Cowdell, MLC
For the ALP (WA Branch)

Contents.

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Government Legitimacy**
- 3. Civic Culture**
- 4. Maintaining Political Balance**
 - a. Financial Corruption**
 - b. Undue Minority Influence**
 - c. Neglect and Alienation**
- 5. Conclusion**

1. Introduction

The widest possible exercise of the franchise, is an essential component of any healthy democratic system of government.

The Australian Labor Party has consistently supported the extension of the franchise - to women, to non-property owners, to 18 to 20 year olds.

The ALP has also supported a range of measures to ensure that the democratic entitlement to vote is exercised. That it is not a theoretical or atrophied right. To this end the Party has supported Government sponsored electoral enrolment campaigns, simplified enrolment procedures, joint state-federal enrolment, pre poll voting, absent voting, mobile polling booths and the like and universal attendance on polling day.

The most vital component of all these legislative and administrative measures is the requirement for universal attendance (compulsory voting). It is the cornerstone of our system of participatory democracy and has been so for almost 70 years.

These measures have been successful, in establishing Australia as one of, if not the foremost participatory democracy in the world. Western Australia maintains a similar proud record .

The Australian Labor Party strongly supports our current system of universal attendance. It does so on the basis of commitment to democratic government, - a commitment to maintaining Government legitimacy and civic culture while minimising the opportunities for political corruption, alienation and neglect.

2. Government Legitimacy

The greatest threat that could be posed to our democratic system, is the erosion of the legitimacy of Government. Currently most Australians and West Australians accept the legitimacy of Government's constituted through the Parliamentary process. Government decisions are accepted, if not necessarily liked. Alternative forms of direct action have been limited.

Faith in popular sovereignty would certainly be weakened by a dramatic decline in the participation rate. A change to voluntary voting would be a severe jolt to the whole political system. Majority Governments would be a thing of the past. Governments would be elected consistently by a minority of adult citizens.

The exact impact of voluntary voting on the participation rate is unknown, and this is a matter of concern. The most optimistic forecasts envisage a 20% reduction in voting to between 75% and 78%, in line with the Canadian, British and New Zealand experience. Indeed the last time WA had voluntary voting for the Legislative Assembly only 70.1% of eligible voters participated.(1)

Of course the last time the Commonwealth of Australia had voluntary voting the participation rate was 58%. But this is by no means the absolute bottom line. The last voluntary Legislative Council vote in WA in 1962 recorded a participation rate of 41.7%. The 1994 U.S. Congressional turnout to vote was 38.7%. (2) A voter turnout at the lower end of the register would almost certainly raise grave doubts about the mandate of any government to do anything. With a 39% turnout a WA Government could actually enjoy the confidence and exercise a mandate on behalf of 20% of all electors.

While it is not envisaged that voter turnout would fall to the level of local government participation, which averaged 20.4% in WA during the 1980's, the spectre remains. It is apparent that the current Government views the abysmal local government participation rate with such alarm that it is experimenting with the radical alternative of a universal postal ballot.

The ALP believes that any significant reduction in voter participation will injure our democracy and certainly affect the legitimacy of any elected government.

Universal attendance as it currently operates for WA State elections is an accepted part of the system. There is no need to destroy this system and then embark on costly and radical alternate methods to restore the participation rate.

1. It was noted in debate on the 1936 Electoral Act Amendment Bill to introduce compulsory voting for the Legislative Assembly- that "... for the five elections previous to 1933, the average for the Assembly was only sixty eight percent." WAPD 1936 p666.

2. Voter Turn out in some states was significantly lower, hovering around 27% and 28%. "Turnout of Voting Age Population, 1994", Campaigns and Elections Dec/Jan 1995 p19.

The legitimacy and effectiveness of a WA Government within our federal system must also be compromised by any unilateral move to voluntary voting

It is unlikely that the Commonwealth Parliament will adopt voluntary voting in the immediate future, even if there were to be a change of Government.

It is conceivable that a WA Government may be returned with the support of say 20% of all electors, while the governing Party at the Commonwealth level receives the support of 45% of all WA electors. A Commonwealth Government may enjoy a WA mandate superior to that of any WA Government. The State legislature would then be a very much inferior body to the Commonwealth Parliament.

If a WA Government loses its democratic legitimacy, then its role within the federal system must also decline, as the Commonwealth looks to partner other administrative and representative units.

Compulsory voting ensures that Government represents the real majority of the people. As E.A. Mann stated in introducing the 1924 Commonwealth compulsory voting Legislation. "...if the principles of democracy are to be properly applied, some attempt should be made to ensure that those who govern represent the majority of the governed."

This is a principle that should not be lightly abandoned.
It has helped to maintain public confidence in Government in Western Australia.

3. Civic Culture

There can be no doubt that compulsory voting has a educative role and contributes in this way to our civic culture. Citizens know when elections are and that they must vote. They must of necessity take some interest in the candidates and their policies. They are also informed about voting systems and procedures by the Electoral Commission.

At the moment State and Federal Government's are moving to address the appalling level of political literacy in the community. Two recent reports 'Whereas the People - Civics and Citizenship Education' and 'Australians All - Enhancing Australian Citizenship', identify a number of initiatives that need to be taken.

It would be ironic if, at the same time as the desperate need for civic education amongst the young and migrants was recognised, the requirement for direct participation in the electoral process were ended.

Most academic studies clearly identify young people as the group most prone to opt out of voting, if it were made voluntary. In Congressional election years in the U.S. the participation rate of 18 to 20 year olds is below 20% and for 21 to 24 year olds it averages 25%.(3)

With voluntary voting we face the prospect of most under 25's having little or no involvement with our democratic institutions and processes. The level of political literacy in our community is likely to plummet to a new low.

Of course, compulsory voting doesn't only have an educative role. There is a direct benefit to the State when citizens participate in the electoral process. People take some responsibility for the way society is governed. Compulsory voting forces people to participate in the democratic process, to be part of the system.

This is the argument that most concentrated the minds of our legislators, state and federal when they introduced compulsory voting. For our democratic state to operate, and for citizens to enjoy rights they must perform civic duties - pay taxes, be subject to conscription for the common defence, observe codes of conduct. Voting has been seen to be an important civic duty in our Australian democracy - important to the degree that universal attendance is required on polling day.

3. *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1994 U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census p287*

When introducing compulsory enrolment for the Commonwealth in 1911. Western Australian Senator and Defence Minister George Foster Pearce stated: "...in a country like Australia, where it is recognised that every man and women should have the right to vote, that right becomes more than a privilege it becomes a duty." In introducing the Commonwealth Bill for compulsory voting Senator Payne argued that if voters show no interest in the selection of their representatives then it must "....necessarily follow, in the course of time, that there must be considerable deterioration in the nature of the laws governing the social and economic development of this country....Apathy and indolence.... are to be found in all directions, and there is a large section of people who derive all the benefits available from legislation enacted but who never accept any individual responsibility."(4)

E A Mann, the Nationalist member for Perth introduced the compulsory voting Bill into the House of Representatives and argued that the liberty of the individual was less likely to be invaded 'when the legal control is that exercised by a real majority of the people.'

Similarly in the Western Australian Legislative Assembly, representatives such as the Member for Greenough argued "If democratic Government is to continue, people must be prepared to accept their share of the responsibility." The Minister for Justice argued that compulsory voting would bring home to electors a greater sense of their responsibilities.(5)

Such sentiments were also apparent in 1963 when the Western Australian Legislative Council called on the Government to conduct all future Council elections 'upon the basis of adult franchise with compulsory enrolment and compulsory voting'. In 1964 the Liberal Country Party coalition Government acted upon the Council's request.

The argument of civic duty is as valid today as it was when put to the Senate and House of Representatives in 1924 and the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council in 1936 and 1963. Civic duties must necessarily be performed for the continued existence and well being of the civic order. Without popular participation, we face the process of civic disaggregation - the gradual waning of knowledge and respect for the principle of duty - with the disassociation of individuals from a common society.

Of course there is both civic duty and government duty. It should be incumbent on governments to consult all citizens on a regular basis, through the ballot box.

Our civic culture is enhanced by compulsory voting.

4. Quoted in Lindsay Smith, "Compulsory Voting in Australia" in the "Pieces of Politics" Ed. R. Lucy. p236

5. W.A.P.D. 1936 p666

4. Maintaining Political Balance

With Compulsory voting the Australian political system has developed a balance and stability. Voluntary voting will almost invariably distort the system. It will increase the likelihood of financial corruption, while presenting the potential for undue minority influence, and neglect and alienation of the have nots.

(a). Financial Corruption

The Royal Commission into the Commercial Activities of Government and Other Matters expressed concern that our Parliamentary processes had been corrupted by various business interests. It would be ironic if the Commission on Government as successor to the Royal Commission recommended a fundamental change to the system that led to more rather than less corrupt practices.

It is apparent that voluntary voting has the potential to make the system more vulnerable to undue influence and corrupt practices.

When an election becomes a contest, as to who is more skilled at turning out blocks of voters, rather than a contest of policies or even personalities, then there is cause for concern.

Any election that involves voluntary voting, must increase the influence of vested interests that either have the ability to turn out significant numbers of electors, or are able to provide the resources to political parties to do the same.

Successful enrolment or mobilisation campaigns require large sums of money. The major political parties will become increasingly dependent on major donors and backers to provide the funds necessary as the Party contest escalates into the area of voter turn out. There need be no doubt that if voter turn out contests contribute another 30% to Party campaign costs then this will correspondingly increase Party dependence on donors. This pressure will be felt by small parties as well as larger parties.

To the extent that campaign costs escalate, the requirement for campaign funds will become ever more pressing and the measures taken by the players more desperate.

The Commission on Government needs to address the problem of increasing party dependence on a few large donors. The introduction of voluntary voting would increase that dependence and exacerbate the problem. It must also of necessity decrease the influence of minor parties and independents who will not have the resources to mount effective voter mobilisation campaigns.

At the local level, many of the less desirable features of the American voluntarist system may be imported, as have other American campaign techniques.

These include voter manipulation, head bounties, inducement not to vote and voter impersonation.

(b) Undue Minority Influence

Compulsory voting can serve as a buffer against the unreasonable demands of self interested minorities. If a minority of electors, or a even a bare majority, vote in an election, then the outcome of that election is open to the influence of small well disciplined pressure groups and organised extremists. While this may happen at the moment, depending on the fineness of the electoral balance between the major paries, there would appear to be even greater scope under a voluntarist system.

Groups such as the NRA and some of the fundamentalist sects, who can effectively mobilise voters, appear to have a disproportionate influence in the U.S. system, because of voluntary voting. Such groups can and do promulgate policies, that are not in the best interests of the electorate at large.

A number of Australian commentators have identified the virtues of the moderating effect of 'making all citizens, including the apathetic and apolitical, perform their civic duty of voting.'⁽⁶⁾

(c) Neglect and Alienation.

A serious question is posed by voluntary voting. What happens to the 30% or 40% of citizens who don't vote? Are they comparatively neglected by Government?

There is evidence from overseas studies that the bulk of citizens who do not vote in a voluntary system are the have nots. The interests and needs of these citizens appear to be neglected. As a consequence they are further alienated from main stream society.

6. See Professor Ross Parish's article 'For Compulsory Voting' in *Policy* Vol 8(1) pp15-18

Piven and Cloward in their book 'Why Americans Don't Vote' state:
"...a full compliment of working class voters would have moderated at the very least, the distinctively harsh features of American capitalist development in the twentieth century....Even modestly enlarged electoral influence might have enabled the working class to block the public policies that weakened unions, and inhibited their ability to organise the unorganised. The enfranchisement of blacks together with poor whites would have prevented the restoration of the caste labour system in the South.....And an effectively enfranchised working class almost surely would have prodded political leaders to initiate social welfare protection earlier and to provide more comprehensive coverage...."(7)

With respect to the current political situation the authors' state "...to the extent that voters and their preferences figure in party calculations, the skewed shape of the American voting universe has decisively influenced the practices of the parties. Except under extremely volatile electoral conditions, party organisers turn away from the candidates, the policies, the campaign language and the logistics that would reach and appeal to the have nots."(8)

It would be unfortunate if Western Australia's adoption of a voluntary voting model had the same consequences.

In viewing Western Australia's own history it could be argued that mainstream party interest in aboriginal problems, picked up once aborigines were enrolled and required to vote. Once the aboriginal vote could determine Legislative Assembly seats such as Kimberley, and Murchison-Eyre greater attention was shown.

By the same token if the have nots absent themselves from the voting process, it is inevitable that there will be comparative neglect. Electoral platforms and manifestos will pay more attention to the active participants.

In the U.S. context Hill and Leighley found that an electorate disproportionately representative of higher-class citizens will be rewarded with public policies in favour of their economic interests, and at the expense of the interests of lower class citizens.

7. Piven, F and Cloward, R. "Why Americans Don't Vote" p9.

8. Opcit. p20

"We find a consistent negative relationship between the degree of class bias favoring the upper class and the generosity of indigenous state social welfare spending. We also find that it is the underrepresentation of the poor, rather than the overrepresentation of the wealthy, that principally explains this relationship. These findings have important implications for democratic theory generally and for present-day concern about the composition of the U.S. electorate."(9)

The question must also be raised. If compulsory voting goes, will other state funded efforts such as government enrolment drives, pre poll voting and dual Commonwealth State enrolment go by the board?

If the importance of universal participation is devalued, why should Government programs that 'artificially support' participation, continue to be funded?

5. Conclusion

'The Score Card.'

The Australian Labor Party contends that the Commission on Government would have to find exceptionally compelling reasons to overthrow a system that is an accepted part of our civic culture. It is a system that has contributed to our democracy by ensuring a high level of participation. It has contributed to the legitimacy of government and our civic culture.

There are a number of theoretical democratic arguments that may be advanced against compulsory voting.

Former AEC Commissioner Colin Hughes put them in a very proper perspective when he wrote.

".....this writer prefers Robson's view that it is 'a great mistake to argue for or against a proposal of this kind on the abstract plane of what is or is not theoretically justified in the life of the state. The whole question should resolve itself into what is practically expedient or the reverse: that is to say, into a weighing of actual advantages against actual disadvantages.' The practical consideration might be stated to be, first, has compulsory voting inflated the informal vote, second has it increased the total vote, third has it been widely regarded as oppressive, fourth, has it promoted political education, and fifth, what effect has it had political participation generally?" (10)

Professor Hughes assessment of these factors led him to a view that the scorecard was overwhelmingly in favour of compulsory voting. (11)

Certainly any appreciation of the 'finance factor' in current WA politics, minority politics and the potential for the further alienation and neglect of sections of our community must count in favour of the status quo.

The alternative means of maintaining a high participation rate are uncoded and their efficacy unsure.

In conclusion reference must be made to the push by the WA Liberal Party to abolish the current system. Stated very simply the imperative of partisan advantage is not a factor that should influence the Commission.

The ALP does not concede that it would be electorally disadvantaged by a system of voluntary voting. It does recognise however that the current Liberal initiative is based on perceived partisan advantage.

10. CA Hughes "Compulsory Voting in *POLITICS* Vol 1 Nov 1966 p 85

11. A very similar view is put by Ross Parish, Professor of Economics at Monash University in the autumn 1992 issue of *Policy* (p15) he writes "I suspect that the situation I have described - in which an institution that seems objectionable on philosophical or ideological grounds nevertheless has desirable consequences - is not uncommon. Judged by its effects, compulsory voting has, I think, a good deal to be said for it."

The Liberal motive was made abundantly clear at the 1990 Liberal State Conference which adopted the platform of voluntary voting. Three time Canning federal Liberal candidate Ricky Johnston, supported the change and maintained that she was only defeated by Labor's George Gear "...because compulsory voting had dragged in the dregs of society to the polls." (12)

Mr Thomas Robertson, Liberal State Executive and Council member and President of the WA Union of Liberal Students expounded similar views in a Young Liberal publication in 1994. He wrote

"... the franchise for voters in WA, indeed throughout the democratic world, is depressingly broad....Indeed, this has lead to democracy falling into the hands of the most unqualified people, not uneducated, but people who should never be given the vote, the apathetic, the stupid..."

"In fact, the great desire to involve all in the democratic process has fostered a whole series of programmes aimed at getting such unqualified people to vote... There would be a case for franchise euthanasia, for people to voluntarily knock themselves off the electoral roll. I would envisage a whole range of people exercising this option: but mainly those who are unqualified to vote - the apathetic or stupid... The white trash is that section of the electorate who are unqualified to vote. I feel a personal obligation to disenfranchise them and thereby save them from democracy." (13)

The ALP totally rejects such views.

The whole thrust of electoral legislation this century has been to expand the exercise of the franchise.

The Liberal Party and others now propose to reverse that process. They propose a major electoral reform that will significantly reduce the participation rate.

This unfortunately is consistent with repeated Liberal efforts in the past to maintain a restricted franchise.

The last such episode, involved the introduction of an enrolment procedure in 1979 which had as its purpose the restriction of aboriginal enrolment to vote. The Labor Government subsequently repealed these provisions.

Clearly the proposal to abolish universal attendance does not enjoy bi-partisan support. There is no public clamour for change. In fact most opinion polls indicate public support for compulsory voting.

If the Coalition Government were to introduce voluntary voting at the behest of the more extreme elements of the WA Liberal Party, there should be no doubt that an incoming Labor Government would over turn this decision at the earliest opportunity.

12. Loxley, S "Liberals Foul the Run" and "Plan to End Forced Voting" *The West Australian*, August 20 & 25, 1990.

13. Robertson, T *Tangney Liberator*, August 1994.

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