



By the people, for the people – Reforming Victorian Elections

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“Democracy is the government of the people, by the people, for the people”
– Abraham Lincoln

“Your voice matters. If it didn’t, why do some people keep trying to take it away?”
- John Robert Lewis, civil rights activist, public theologian

Most of the social justice concerns of Uniting Church members require our elected Parliaments to pass laws to affect social change. A functioning representative democracy allows for the voices of all people to be heard. Representatives in the Parliament should feel the need to listen to people from all walks of life. Such an outcome is undermined when Parliamentary representatives can get elected based almost exclusively on secret backroom deals they cut with other political parties. That is currently the situation in the election of some of the representatives to the Victorian upper house, the Legislative Council.

For the Legislative Council, people can direct their vote by voting for individual candidates ‘below the line’. However, most people continue to vote ‘above the line’. More than 90% of Victorians voted above the line in the 2018 election. In Victoria, voting above the line only allows you to place ‘1’ in a box for the political party you prefer. However, suppose the candidates for that party get eliminated in the counting process. In that case, the party you voted for directs where your vote goes without your knowledge. The deals are structured through a Group Voting Ticket. The result is that candidates with policies and views get elected to the Legislative Council that would never get elected if people had been able to direct their preferences. Candidates with as low as 0.6% of the vote have been elected to the Legislative Council through secret deals. Some of those elected are deeply hostile to measures that would improve the lives of most ordinary people in Victoria and oppose reform measures to address injustices in our society.

Victoria is the only state in Australia with this problem. All other states that had the same system have already reformed it. The Western Australian Parliament did so in November 2021.

The solution to the problem is simple. In Federal elections, we can place preferences for parties above the line. Thus, we always get to direct where our vote goes.

Before the election, the leader of the Opposition, Matthew Guy, promised to get rid of the Group Voting Ticket system to allow people to direct whom they wanted their vote to go to.

Dodgy dealing

In the lead-up to the Victorian election in November 2022, the Angry Victorians Party released a video of Glenn Druery. Mr Druery claimed that he could get people elected to the Legislative Council in Victoria through secret backroom preference deals he stitches together between political parties.¹ Mr Druery told the Angry Victorians Party he would “control” who won seats in the Legislative Council. He claimed most minor parties in Victoria were his clients. He asked for \$55,000 if the Angry Victorians Party used his services and got a candidate elected.

In explaining how he would be paid, Mr Druery stated:

Let me say this- what I would suggest you do if you win is I know my way around legislation. I know all the players – I would urge you to take me on as an advisor and

¹ Michael Warner and Matt Johnson, ‘Seats on Sale for just \$55K’, *The Herald Sun*, 17 November 2022, 8-9.

consultant. You can pay me through the administration fund, and I'd be charging you roughly \$1,000 a week. And I think you'd probably only need me for a year and a couple of weeks. You can't pay me out of the admin fund for electoral work, and I would not seek that. That is not appropriate, but I think guys like you need advice. And I give advice to lots of polities.

The 'admin fund' is shorthand for the administrative expenditure funding, which is funding provided by the Victorian Electoral Commission to political parties that get candidates elected to Parliament. The administrative expenditure funding is at least \$216,000 to each political party.

Mr Druery stated that he had set up sham political parties, specifically the Restore Democracy Sack Dan Andrews Party. The party's purpose was to manipulate preferences towards political parties that are his paying clients. However, the Restore Democracy Sack Dan Andrews Party denied they were a front set up by Mr Druery.

He claimed on the video that in the 2018 state election: "I caused four Greens to lose their seats last time. Four of the suckers, so suffice to say that the Greens and Greens supporters don't send me Christmas cards."

The campaign manager for the Animal Justice Party, Ben Schultz, told Crikey media that there was a "need for electoral reform and to undermine Glenn Druery's business model, which is undemocratic, immoral and stinks."

Some of the claims made by Mr Druery in the video of the meeting he had with the Angry Victorians Party may have been marketing statements made to try and get the Party to sign up for his services. The claims may not be accurate. However, it is clear that the Victorian Legislative Council election can be manipulated in ways that undermine the public interest and the common good.

What you can do

Write polite and respectful letters to:

The Hon Daniel Andrews
The Premier of Victoria
Level 1, 1 Treasury Place,
East Melbourne VIC 3002

Salutation: Dear Premier

Points to make in your letters:

- Express concerns that the current Victorian electoral system allows preference manipulation to get people elected to the Legislative Council who would not get elected if the voters could direct their preferences.
- Ask that Victorians be able to direct their preferences when voting for parties above the line, rather than their vote being directed through secret backroom preference deals.
- Ask that the Victorian Government reform the electoral system so that Victorians can preference their votes above the line in the election of Legislative Council candidates, like voters can when voting for parties in the Federal election for the Senate.

