ALSO RELEASED IN QUEENSLAND

EMBARGO: 5 P.M. SUNDAY

QUEENSLAND BROADCAST NO. 11

REDISTRIBUTION

1 JUNE 1975

THIS WEEK WE HAVE SEEN A CLEAR EXAMPLE OF THE COUNTRY PARTY'S CONTEMPT FOR THE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM AND THEIR ABILITY TO STAND OVER THEIR COALITION PARTNERS, THE LIBERALS. TWO WEEKS AGO, WE INTRODUCED IN THE NATIONAL PARLIAMENT PROPOSALS TO ALTER THE BOUNDARIES OF FEDERAL ELECTORATES. THESE REDISTRIBUTIONS ARE NECESSARY FROM TIME TO TIME BECAUSE OF INEVITABLE CHANGES IN THE PATTERN OF POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT. EXCEPT FOR SOME CHANGES IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA, THERE HASN'T BEEN A REDISTRIBUTION IN THE FEDERAL PARLIAMENT SINCE 1968. THE LAST THREE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ELECTIONS WERE ALL HELD ON BOUNDARIES DETERMINED SEVEN YEARS AGO. YET GREAT POPULATION MOVEMENTS HAVE OCCURRED SINCE THEN. ANOTHER REDISTRIBUTION IS OVERDUE AND URGENT. IT WOULD BE ABSURD TO PUT IT OFF ANY LONGER.

WHEN WE FIRST BROUGHT THE REDISTRIBUTION PROPOSALS BEFORE PARLIAMENT TWO WEEKS AGO, THE OPPOSITION IN THE SENATE, UNDER PRESSURE FROM THE COUNTRY PARTY, REJECTED THEM; THEY REJECTED THEM IN EVERY ONE OF THE FIVE STATES CONCERNED. THEY DIDN'T ARGUE THEIR MERITS; THEY JUST BLINDLY TURNED THEM DOWN. THEY EVEN REJECTED THEM IN THOSE STATES - SOUTH AUSTRALIA AND TASMANIA - WHERE THE COUNTRY PARTY HAS NO MEMBERS AT ALL IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES. THERE WAS NO POINT IN OUR GETTING THE PROPOSALS REDRAWN, BECAUSE THE COUNTRY PARTY HAD MADE IT CLEAR THAT THEY WOULD OPPOSE ANY REDISTRIBUTION AT ALL. THAT WAS THEIR ATTITUDE. SO WE DECIDED TO BRING THE PROPOSALS FORWARD AGAIN IN THE MORE SUBSTANTIAL FORM OF LEGISLATION. IN THIS WAY, SHOULD THE SENATE PERSIST IN ITS OBSTRUCTION, WE CAN ADD THESE PROPOSALS TO THE GROWING LIST OF MEASURES WHICH THE SENATE HAS BLOCKED AND PUT THEM BEFORE THE PEOPLE AT THE NEXT ELECTION. THE PEOPLE THEMSELVES WILL HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO PASS JUDGMENT ON THE NEW BOUNDARIES, WHATEVER THE SENATE MAY DO.

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Of course, it's natural for politicans to be wary of changes in electoral boundaries - they go to the heart of the democratic system. But let's be clear about this: this is not <u>our</u> redistribution, these aren't <u>Labor Party</u> proposals. They were drawn up by independent and expert commissioners whose integrity and experience are beyond question. The results are scrupulously fair - and no one has suggested otherwise. You don't have to take my word for it. Mr Malcolm Mackerras, an acknowledged electoral analyst, said this of the commissioner's' proposals: "In overall political terms, the 1975 redistribution is the fairest set of proposed boundaries ever to be presented to any Australian Parliament in my lifetime. The commissioners have bent over backwards to avoid any suggestion of gerrymandering. They have set out to draw boundaries so patently fair that rejection by the Senate would reflect discredit on the Senate, not on the commissioners."

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THAT'S WHAT ONE EXPERT HAD TO SAY. SO WE MAY WELL ASK WHY THE OPPOSITION IS REJECTING THE NEW BOUNDARIES OUT OF HAND. IT IS NOT AS THOUGH THE LIBERAL PARTY IS LIKELY TO SUFFER UNDULY. IN SOME RESPECTS THEIR POSITION WILL BE STRENGTHENED AND THE LABOR PARTY POSITION WILL BE WEAKENED. THAT WILL CERTAINLY BE THE CASE IN QUEENSLAND. SO WHY THE FUSS, WHY THE BLIND OBSTRUCTION? WE DON'T HAVE TO LOOK VERY FAR FOR THE ANSWER. THE COUNTRY PARTY - THE NATIONAL COUNTRY PARTY AS THEY NOW CALL THEMSELVES - WANT TO PRESERVE THE PRIVILEGED POSITION THEY HOLD BECAUSE OF HUGE VARIATIONS BETWEEN THE SIZE OF CITY AND RURAL SEATS. THEY WANT TO KEEP THE SYSTEM RIGGED IN THEIR FAVOUR.

I OUGHT TO EXPLAIN THAT UNTIL LAST YEAR, THE LAW ALLOWED THE ELECTORAL COMMISSIONERS, WHEN DRAWING UP NEW BOUNDARIES, TO MAKE SOME SEATS VERY MUCH LARGER THAN OTHERS. THE NUMBER OF VOTERS IN ANY ONE SEAT COULD BE 20% ABOVE OR BELOW THE AVERAGE NUMBER OF VOTERS IN ALL THE SEATS OF THE STATE CONCERNED. THAT TOLERANCE, TOGETHER WITH NATURAL MOVEMENTS OF POPULATION, HAS MEANT THAT IN MOST STATES THERE ARE NOW SEATS WITH UP TO 70% MORE VOTERS THAN OTHERS. IN QUEENSLAND THE LARGEST SEAT HAS MORE THAN TWICE AS MANY VOTERS AS THAN THE SMALLEST. IN OTHER WORDS, SOME PEOPLE'S VOTES ARE WORTH MORE THAN TWICE AS MUCH AS OTHER PEOPLE'S. SO WE BROUGHT IN LEGISLATION TO REDUCE THE PERMITTED VARIATION FROM 20% TO 10%. THERE'LL STILL BE A DIFFERENCE; AND IT WILL GROW AS POPULATIONS CHANGE; BUT A 10% MARGIN WOULD BE A MUCH FAIRER STARTING POINT - MUCH CLOSER TO THE IDEAL OF EQUALITY.

OUR LEGISLATION FOR THAT 10% DIFFERENCE WAS FOUGHT TOOTH AND NAIL BY THE COUNTRY PARTY; IT WAS ONE OF THE BILLS THAT FORMED THE BASIS OF THE DOUBLE DISSOLUTION GRANTED LAST YEAR; IT WAS SPECIFICALLY PUT BEFORE THE PEOPLE AT THE ELECTION LAST MAY. THE PEOPLE ENDORSED ~~IT~~ THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUAL REPRESENTATION. THE BILL WAS PASSED BY THE PARLIAMENT AT ITS JOINT SITTING IN AUGUST. THE NEW MARGIN OF 10% IS NOW THE LAW OF THE LAND. BY REJECTING THE NEW REDISTRIBUTION, BASED ON THAT LAW, THE COUNTRY PARTY IS REJECTING A PRINCIPLE SPECIFICALLY APPROVED BY THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE.

PUT SIMPLY, WE BELIEVE IN THE SIMPLE, ANCIENT RULE OF ONE VOTE ONE VALUE. OUR LEGISLATION, AND THE REDISTRIBUTION BASED UPON IT, A REDISTRIBUTION DRAWN UP BY INDEPENDENT COMMISSIONERS, BROUGHT US CLOSER TO THAT IDEAL. THERE'S NO MYSTERY ABOUT IT. WE THINK EVERYONE'S VOTE SHOULD BE WORTH MORE OR LESS THE SAME AS EVERY OTHER PERSON'S. ALL THE PHONY ARGUMENTS IN THE WORLD CAN'T EVADE THE BASIC PRINCIPLE THAT EVERY MAN'S VOTE, AS FAR AS POSSIBLE, SHOULD BE OF EQUAL VALUE. IN QUEENSLAND, UNDER THE EXISTING DISTRIBUTION OF FEDERAL SEATS, THE SIZE OF ELECTORATES DOESN'T JUST FLAUNT THE NEW LIMIT OF 10%: FOUR OF THE ELECTORATES ARE WELL OVER THE OLD LIMIT OF 20%. THE ENROLMENT OF THE LARGEST AND SMALLEST ELECTORATES VARIES BY 43,000 VOTERS. IT IS THE LARGEST VARIATION OF ANY STATE IN AUSTRALIA. THIS IS A DENIAL OF THE VERY ESSENCE OF DEMOCRACY,

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You constantly hear the argument from Country Party politicians that country seats must have fewer voters than city seats because of the difficulties of representing sprawling rural electorates covering thousands of square miles. This is a specious argument. We already allow a difference of 10%. Even if we allowed a difference of 50% or 100%, rural seats would still be vast in area by comparison with crowded city seats, simply because of the distribution of population. This is not, and can never be, an argument for denying democratic rights to the majority of Australians. The best way to look after the needs of rural electorates is to give better facilities to members representing remote areas, to improve communications and transport in these areas. We won't do it by rigging the electoral system in favour of one particular party.

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FOR YEARS IN QUEENSLAND YOU HAVE HAD ABUNDANT EVIDENCE OF THE RESULTS OF COUNTRY PARTY GERRYMANDERING. FOR YEARS THEY REMAINED IN POWER WITH 20% OF THE POPULAR VOTE. THE ELECTORAL LAWS ARE RIGGED AS MUCH AGAINST THE LIBERAL PARTY AS THEY ARE AGAINST LABOR. IN MARCH 1971 EIGHT LIBERAL MEMBERS CROSSED THE FLOOR OF THE QUEENSLAND PARLIAMENT TO VOTE WITH THE A.L.P. AGAINST ONE OF THE MOST DISGRACEFUL GERRYMANDERS EVER PROPOSED. THE COUNTRY PARTY ARE PAST MASTERS OF THIS DIRTY GAME. THEY SEE THEIR FUTURE THREATENED, THEIR SUPPORT WANING IN RURAL AREAS, AND THEY ARE DESPERATE TO MAINTAIN IT. THEY BLOCKED A FEDERAL REDISTRIBUTION IN 1962 FOR THE VERY SAME REASON. THEY SIMPLY WON'T PLAY BY THE RULES. I HOLD NO BRIEF WITH THE LIBERALS, BUT I SOMETIMES WISH THEY HAD THE GUTS TO RESIST THE PRESSURE OF THEIR COALITION PARTNERS. AT LEAST SIR CHARLES COURT IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA HAS SEEN THE FOLLY OF KNUCKLING UNDER TO COUNTRY PARTY BLACKMAIL. I'M AFRAID THAT IN THE NATIONAL PARLIAMENT THE COUNTRY PARTY TAIL STILL WAGS THE LIBERAL PARTY DOG. THE REJECTION OF THESE PROPOSALS - THIS OVERDUE AND EMINENTLY FAIR REDISTRIBUTION - WILL BENEFIT NO ONE BUT THE COUNTRY PARTY. IT WILL BE AN UTTER REPUDIATION OF THE PEOPLE'S WILL EXPRESSED AT THE LAST ELECTION, A SETBACK TO EVERY PRINCIPLE OF DEMOCRACY AND TO AUSTRALIA'S REPUTATION AS A DEMOCRATIC NATION.

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