

## From Your Editor

I hope you enjoy this edition as much as I have putting it together. The material from our conference on *Parliament and the People: Participation, Representation and Engagement*, is of exceptionally high quality with sophisticated analyses.

There are disagreements as to which are the best ways to go about engaging the people; whether parliament and political parties are worth saving; can be reformed or whether we must reach beyond them and if so how can this be done.

None of the contributions provides slick, easy answers and all struggle with the fact that there are serious problems of disengagement between the people and their government, especially among the young.

Since our last edition we have seen a new American president in the White House. His method of out-reach to voters who usually do not vote in large enough numbers, the young and black voters especially, has been referred to by a number of our commentators. It was certainly impressive, especially in the use of the internet as a means of talking to his potential voters and of raising money. Obama's success in doing this will of course mean that in the future this will be the 'norm' and probably lose its impact and success rate with overkill and over-familiarity. Nonetheless it has clearly demonstrated the vast impact of new technology.

While it is unarguable that our political parties are not attracting voters, especially young voters and are seen by many as self-serving machines, the attractiveness of an American-style primary system should not be overstated. Yes, it does put more power directly into the hands of the people, and remove control of pre-selection and campaigning from the party machines. That was the intention in the United States when they introduced primaries. However the money needed to compete for pre-selection is so vast as to pervert the democratic process in a different way to the way the parties have perverted it. Moreover the percentage of voters and the demographic characteristics of those who participate in the primary pre-selection processes raise real doubts about the representative nature of the primaries.

We need to find an 'Australasian' way of doing primaries so that the ordinary people have more real say in pre-selecting candidates and ensuring the link between MP and electorate is much more direct than at present where the filtration system of the political parties, especially in Australia, makes the voice of more people almost irrelevant to the political process. The people are there to vote and that's about it.

This edition also contains two reports on the very recent Queensland election and one on the Western Australian election and I commend these two you as very interesting and revealing. And these elections also reflect on the behaviour of the parties and the parliament to the needs of the people. They point up most of all I think that so long as we have our parliamentary system we need viable Oppositions and talented leadership. At present at federal and State levels I believe we are in serious trouble. Weak Oppositions usually mean complacent Governments, hardly the seeds for lively democracy.

There is a wonderful article in this edition on homosexual law reform in England which is truly engaging to read.

And there are books reviews, something I hope continues. In this edition we have reviews of books on two very different prime ministers' lives (Watson and Whitlam) and one on the history of WEL.

Alas I am still not receiving enough articles from the membership or others and I exhort you to write or reach out to those who are seeking wider readership for their research. I also exhort the branches to remember their parliamentary reports for the journal. ▲