

Direct
Democracy

Not **P**arliamentary **R**ule



P.O. Box 5035,
Alphington 3078,
Melbourne, Australia.

Web: www.rulebythepeople.org
Email: supporters@rulebythepeople.org

PARLIAMENTARY ALTERNATIVES

I have never voted at a local, State or Federal election because I am against voting. I have not voted because as an anarchist, I'm not willing to give a signed blank cheque to a representative to make decisions on my behalf. I make the effort to register to vote for referendums and vote at referendums because I'm involved in making decisions with my fellow citizens about constitutional issues.

Voting has always been a thorny issue in the anarchist community. Although anarchists accept that radical egalitarian change comes from direct action not parliamentary politics, many anarchists do vote at elections. In Spain, the Popular Front Republican government was elected before the fascist coup in 1936 because tens of thousands of anarchists voted in the elections. They voted because they were promised thousands of anarchists who were in prison would be granted amnesty if a Popular Front government was elected into office.

In 1972, many radicals in Australia voted for the Labor Party because they had promised to release the draft resisters in prison. Those anarchists who vote in parliamentary elections don't vote because they think parliamentary activity will herald in radical egalitarian change, they vote to stop authoritarian groups from seizing the reins of power or they vote in the hope specific reforms will be introduced that will improve their lives and the lives of the people around them.

Many anarchists refuse to vote irrespective of the issues involved because they think that participating in the parliamentary process by voting, reinforces people's belief that power lies in Parliament.

All anarchists realise that just asking people not to vote or vote informal, does not achieve much if positive alternatives to parliamentary democracy are not canvassed at the same time. Irrespective of whether we vote or not, governments continue to be elected and the great majority of people continue to believe that parliamentary democracy is the pinnacle of human achievement.

Voting informal or not voting may make you feel better, but it does little to change perceptions of parliamentary democracy. Elections can be a very good time to raise alternatives, as most people in a parliamentary democracy give some thought to why they are voting, what they are voting for, and who they are voting for. This election, **Direct Democracy Not Parliamentary Rule** will be concentrating on raising alternatives to parliamentary rule. The Australian political process is hamstrung by a Constitution that does not allow, let alone promote, constitutional change. Only Parliament has the power to initiate constitutional change by calling a referendum on a particular issue.

Two reforms that could make parliamentary representatives accountable directly to the people, not the political Party they belong to, and which could break the constitutional log jam are:

- * **Recallable parliamentary representatives and**
- * **Citizens Initiated Referendums.**

Both these reforms have been resisted by successive Australian governments. Conducting campaigns round these 2 issues expands people's perception of what democracy is. '**Democracy – rule of the people, by the people, for the people**' – has as little to do with parliamentary rule, as the AFL has to do with promoting soccer in Australia. Giving the people the option to recall non-performing or poorly performing parliamentarians in between elections increases a parliamentary representative's accountability to the electorate.

If 20% of the electorate call for fresh elections in a parliamentary seat, then that representative would be forced to go back to the people in a fresh election. To prevent an organised opposition from manipulating the system, the ability to call a fresh election in a particular electorate could be limited to once every electoral cycle. If 10% of the population signed a petition to call a referendum about a particular issue, a referendum would have to be called within 6 months of the petition being presented to Parliament. Allowing the people as well as Parliament, to call referendums increases the democratic nature of society.

Elections give us the opportunity to raise radical alternatives to the parliamentary system, as well as reforms. A parliamentary system is a representative system. Every 3 years, electors give their representatives a signed blank cheque to make decisions on their behalf – they cannot do anything till the next election if their representative does not honour their promises. At the next election, they are forced to go through the same process again.

Direct democracy is based on a delegate system – people make decisions directly, and give a delegate a mandate to coordinate decisions at a regional and national level. If decisions are modified at a Delegates Assembly, that decision is taken back to the local level for ratification. What may at first seem a cumbersome system of making and coordinating decisions, is a much more effective method of making decisions because everybody is involved in the decision making process. Once a decision is made, people tend to support, not oppose that decision.

Do you want to give a representative a signed blank cheque to make decisions on your behalf? Or do you want to give a delegate a signed cheque with the name of the person you are going to pay the cheque to? I know which one I would prefer!!

Interested in Direct Democracy - the power of recall and Citizens Initiated Referendums? – Then you are invited to become involved in a growing Australian movement to introduce parliamentary reforms and radical change to a process that is democratic in name only.

**Dr. Joseph TOSCANO / National Convenor Direct Democracy Not Parliamentary Rule,
P.O. 5035, Alphington 3078, Melbourne, AUSTRALIA.
www.rulebythepeople.org**