




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR LOGAN

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**ELECTORAL (IMPROVING REPRESENTATION) AND OTHER LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr POWER** (Logan—ALP) (3.44 pm): I rise to express real concerns—and I hope that others in the House will share those concerns—about the electoral bill that is before us. We know that the redistribution process is upon us. It is five to midnight. We know that the Attorney-General has already begun to put out letters of consultation with various parts of the party in order to get a fair and democratic group of three who can go through the process of redistributing our seats. I think this process to hijack, to blow up, to put a bomb under the process of redistributing the state is a real concern. It also is of real concern in the attitude of those opposite, how they treat the electoral process and what they think of this process.

I also noted that the member for Mansfield told us not to speak of gerrymanders. He assures the House—and I take him at his word, although this bill has been put to us in a hurry—that this bill will not further disproportionately weight one vote over another. That is to say there is an odium that hangs over any bills put forward because his speech was very much a concession that the last bill was one about malapportionment, about the ‘Joh-mander’, about returning to the history of distorting our state. I hope that this is not the intent, but we know that a bill has already been put forward in this place to do exactly that. I take the member for Mansfield at his word, but we must concern ourselves to always reject such malapportionment whenever we see it, and we know that it has been put forward previously in a bill.

We know the history of the Liberal National Party when it comes to elections. They are the kings of the gerrymander, the ‘Joh-mander’, of malapportionment, of islands made up of Aboriginal communities connected only by a single road or not connected at all in order to prop up the margin of another. We know that they selectively set the sizes of electorates in order to gain maximum advantage. How do we know this? We know this from erudite legal types from the suburbs of Brisbane. We know that from gentle folk who held the electoral process in high regard. We know that from an old party, one that members may have heard of, the Liberal Party of Australia, which has no presence in this place and, unfortunately, no presence in this chamber. In the eighties they at least argued that malapportionment of this sort should be taken away altogether. In the last debate I read extensively about how the Liberal Party held up that flag in this place. Now we have no-one in this place from the opposition doing it because we know the Liberals and their values are dead and buried, subsumed by a beast that has eaten them.

As I said, I am disappointed. What we see here—and some of the other speakers have touched upon it—is that this is all about the LNP’s intention. It is the creation of four jobs in this place while 40,000 go begging outside this place. We should be focused on jobs outside of this chamber, not four extra jobs for their friends, for their mates. This may be uncharitable of me—and pull me up if it is unparliamentary—but I also have suspicions that this is about sorting out problems in preselections or disputes over boundaries or where various MPs should go in a likely redistribution. That is what

concerns me about the intentions of the other side when they put this bill up so close to the process of the redistribution. They are so desperate to get these extra seats that I think it is to fix problems within their own riven party. I am disappointed that we have to vote on that in this House.

I am especially disappointed that our redistribution process could be delayed. Redistributions are at the heart of our democracy. They keep the value of one vote, one value and the proportionality between a person who represents Logan to a person who represents Gladstone all the way to Cairns. This value is essential because we have the innate belief that all humans are created equal. It does not matter whether they come from the tip of Cape York or the backstreets of Browns Plains, all have value and all are equal. The redistribution process puts that at risk.

Redistributions are vital to democracy. I know that a fair number of electors per electorate is much more essential to democracy than the number of people who are elected to represent them. As long as we have within the electorate proportionally the same number of electors, then we can have a fair democracy. We have seen how the federal electorates have over 90,000 people in them, but because they are fair within each of the states—let us forget Tasmania—we know and have confidence that our federal parliament is a democracy. No-one claims that because the Attorney-General formerly represented 90,000 people in her electorate—and very well too, I might add, Attorney-General—that the federal parliament is not a democracy, but if there were to be an electorate of 180,000 people versus one of 80,000 people in the same parliament, then we would have concerns about whether that is a democracy.

You might ask what that has to do with redistributions. We know that the British system of elections fell apart in the 1820s because of the very long process of never going through a redistribution.

Mr Hinchliffe: Rotten boroughs.

Mr POWER: Rotten boroughs indeed; the Leader of the House knows this story well. I read this out in the last parliament, but it seems that some have yet to understand this point. In the 1820s in England, a seat based in the mediaeval town of Dunwich had only 32 voters. This once prosperous market town had slowly been eroded by the North Sea and had fallen into the ocean, yet it still maintained its boundaries because there were no redistributions despite all the townspeople leaving. No doubt this putting at risk and pushing off redistributions would be in no small part what the members opposite intend, because surely that is the reason for throwing this bomb into the electoral redistribution process at the last minute.

In this place our first job before any other is to ensure that there is a legacy of fair and democratic systems. I think that these issues should be canvassed carefully and judiciously. I know there have been many electoral issues. We have debated this since the fall of the Joh regime in the 1980s and we had EARC. These things have been widely canvassed, and one could make an argument that these things have been debated and widely understood by both the electorate and the community. I recognise the argument made earlier by the member for Mansfield that the House is the master of its own domain, but where there is such mistrust of the National Party's legacy I would have concerns with anything they put forward. I suggest to the House that many of us should also have concerns with what they are putting forward.