Panel of Experts – Political Donations

Submitted by Peter Donovan

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To Expert Panel on Political Donations

This need not be considered as confidential.

My background: I was Labor candidate for Bradfield in the 1983 Federal Election, and have followed politics for fifty years. I am no longer active in political matters and all this is just a personal viewpoint.

With the credibility of both major political movements greatly weakened the Panel has to come up with a method to keep the system running in the leadup to the 2015 State Election. Both movements need to maintain their core voters and to be able to access untainted money, particularly modest sums (up to $500, say) from individuals not linked to strong vested interest. Yet legislation restricting donations is likely to be ruled invalid by the Federal Constitution.

The following is suggested as a holding measure for the 2015 State Election only.

A public agreement between the two movements restricting campaign fund-raising and expenditure enforced by requiring statutory declarations by all candidates and senior officials could be tried. Individual candidates expenditure could be restricted to the cost of a rented campaign office with a paid staff of one for the three months before the election plus $20,000 on advertising, printing how-to-vote tickets and incidentals. No restriction would be made on genuinely unpaid volunteer workers but use of personnel paid by an outside person or company should be totally banned. Advertising within the $20,000 budget should be marked as such, with it being an offence for political action committees (the American term) to deceptively mark their material. Bona fide pooling of some of the $20,000 limit (such as advertising in local newspapers for candidates in all relevant electorates) should be allowed. Similar restrictions would be agreed for the centrally organised parts of campaigns; details are not suggested here.

Minor parties would be free to enter into this agreement and indeed it would be in their interests to do so.

With total advertising curtailed the Electoral Office would need to spend some money informing the citizenry that an election is due and that voting is still compulsory.

From Peter Donovan