Panel of Experts – Political Donations

Submitted by Andrew Moran

Date: 23 August 2014
The very existence of this panel proves the need for reform. The exposure of past practices has seriously damaged the population’s confidence in the democratic process.

Firstly, the issue of public funding must be addressed. I do not believe that public funding is a solution. Indeed, I believe that the current level of public funding has led to the erosion of the influence of the general membership of political parties, resulting in the concentration of power in fewer hands (the party executives), allowed endorsements of candidates who are not representative of their electorates, and polarised the political system in Australia. Forcing candidates to be more dependent on local branch structures for funding and personal support will encourage growth in party membership (current trends are to minimise party membership to more easily control pre-selection processes). A more diverse and extended party membership is less likely to support radical/idealogical candidates or to succumb to dictatorial party executives.

It is suggested that the creation of a POLITICAL DONATIONS CLEARING HOUSE be established to accept all political donations. Any individual, association or corporation would be obliged to direct all donations to this body. The donor would be entitled to specify where that donation be then directed — either to an individual candidate, to a party branch or to a party head office. The body would be open and transparent and all donations would be public knowledge. The provision of paid electoral staff, supplied by corporations or unions, be treated the same.

The exponential growth in election spending does nothing to enhance democracy, and in fact could be said to drive political debate to the lowest possible level. It is suggested that public companies and trade unions be obliged to conduct a ballot of shareholders or members to authorise any donations to political campaigns or parties. It is suggested that there be a monetary limit on personal and other business donations.

Penalties for infringement should be severe. Our gaols are full of petty criminals for whom incarceration is little punishment — there is no deterrent effect. It is rare for white collar criminals to see the inside of a gaol but these are the very individuals for whom prison would be a significant deterrent if mandatory sentencing ensured just such punishment.

I remain, yours faithfully, Andrew Moran