

EXTRAORDINARY ORIGINATORS OF HARE-CLARK

By Rohan Greenland

Canberrans have voted overwhelmingly for the Hare-Clark electoral system, bringing it from Tasmania to the mainland for the first time. But who was Hare-Clark anyway?

In fact, Thomas Hare and Andrew Clark were two extraordinary people who – while living half a world apart – shared a profound belief in the entitlement of all people to take part in the democratic process.

Thomas Hare (1806-1891) was a talented English barrister and political reformer; Andrew Inglis Clark (1848-1907) was a Tasmanian lawyer turned radical politician who finished his career as a respected judge.

They never met, but they have been jointly credited with the development of what we know today as the Hare-Clark electoral system.

It was Hare who in the 1850s laid down the key features of the single-transferable-vote system of proportional representation. It was designed to give representation in the House of Commons to all social classes.

This system as set out in his work *Machinery of Representation*, published in 1857 and refined in his later publication *Treatise on the Election of Representatives, Parliamentary and Municipal*, published in 1859.

Though organisations and societies were formed to promote the system – described by one commentator as “the only remedy against the danger of an oppression of minorities” – it was generally deemed to be too complex to be practical.

Britain, of course, still labours under the primitive but simple first-past-the-post system, and as long as the two major parties continue to share nearly all the seats, they will have no inclination to adopt any system of proportional representation.

Hare was an enthusiastic author of reformist works, and his titles covered subjects including reform of navigation laws, development of wealth in India, housing, reform of local government and apprenticeships for children.

Clark was even more remarkable. Born in Hobart, he shared some of Hare's characteristics. He was bright and quick-witted, had a very sharp legal mind and a passion for reform.

He was said to greatly enjoy female company and vigorously defended women's intellectual equality – an early

example, perhaps, of the sensitive New Age guy.

He was elected unopposed to the Tasmanian House of Assembly in 1878, but was considered something of a radical with “very extreme ultra-republican, if not revolutionary” ideas.

In Parliament, Clark sat with the Opposition and was one of the few enthusiasts for moving private Members' Bills, securing the successful passage of a criminal-law amendment Bill in his first term.

Reform of laws relating to lunacy, trade unions, and cruelty to animals were among his successful humanitarian and social reforms. He was less lucky with his attempts to introduce universal manhood suffrage and a land tax.

In 1896 Clark was at last able – at the fourth attempt – to amend the Electoral Act to extend the vote and introduce proportional representation in Hobart and Launceston, thus making Tasmania the first community in the world to use the Hare system of proportional representation under adult franchise.

Initially, the system was introduced for one year but it was renewed annually until suspended in 1902. In 1907 it was adopted for the entire state.

Clark was responsible not only for bringing Hare's system to life, but for adding some original contributions to Hare's general principles.

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