

The following two short papers were received from the author about twelve months ago and due to an oversight it was not published. There was some dialogue between the editorial staff and R.W.Bro. Fisher in relation to certain aspects of his proposals and these are probably worth setting down also.

## DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS WITHIN THE CRAFT.

*By Ian G. FISCHER.*

### 1. General Voting at Grand Lodge

Freemasonry in its current form has existed for over three hundred years. Whilst the basic ritual workings should remain unchanged, the administration of the Craft must be brought into the twenty-first century to meet ongoing human attitudes as well as technological change.

At present, voting in Grand and District Grand Lodges is restricted to Worshipful Masters, Past Masters and serving Wardens in attendance at a particular communication. At the December Communication in Brisbane, there was a ballot for the office of Grand Master and only those Members of Grand Lodge present were able to cast a vote. Country Freemasons as well as city Freemasons who could not attend the communication due to distance or for other reasons were disenfranchised on such an important vote.

The successful candidate was elected on the preference of approx. 500 members of Grand Lodge who reside in the Greater Brisbane area as well as country areas in close proximity to Brisbane. Had the election been open to all members throughout the State there may have been a different outcome.

I believe that this discriminatory practice can be overcome by postal ballot. Although postal voting is expensive, the question to be asked is how much is a voting system worth in a modern democratic institution?

Approximately eighteen months ago, I put forward a proposal to the Grand Board of General Purposes to consider the introduction of a postal ballot system, which negated some of the fiscal objections put forward by the Grand Secretary. Unfortunately, the proposal was not placed on the Board's agenda as it was discussed many years ago and abandoned.

Briefly, I proposed that those members who have an interest in Grand Lodge affairs complete a postal ballot registration coupon published in the "Queensland Mason" and forward it to the Grand Secretary at their own expense for registration. The normal postal ballot procedure would then follow. This method is preferred as there is a large number of inactive financial Freemasons who have no interest in the business of Grand Lodge and thereby eliminate wasted ballot papers, which would otherwise be forwarded by the returning officer.

Postal ballots should apply to the election of all Grand Officers, Members of the Grand Boards as well as important notices of motion. The postal ballot system would also apply to districts.

Also, in a modern society experiencing rapid technological change telephone voting by members using a PIN number will be a cheaper option in the near future.

In order to obtain a just and proportionate representation of members throughout the State, Individual Board Members should represent a particular region/district and be elected by that particular electorate. This particular type of representation would hold the Board Member accountable and his performance on the Board monitored.

Finally, Should all Freemasons including Entered Apprentices be members of Grand Lodge and have equal voting rights as current members of Grand Lodge as they contribute the same Grand Lodge dues?

If the Craft wants to attract and maintain good quality candidates in this modern competitive society, then it has to adopt a more democratic voting system consistent with community standards.

### Editor's Comments:

*Para. 3 showing about 500 in GL voted for the GM would probably constitute about 5% of the eligible numbers of sitting Masters, P. M's and Wardens. This assumes that there are about 10,000 of them and only 5,000 M. M's. (One wonders if there are 5,000 in view of the few being initiated these days).*

*A postal ballot system outlined and /or one which involved sending out reply paid envelopes with an appropriate issue of the Queensland Mason would not be very expensive. No more than 20% would return the ballots (the accepted average for these is about 15%) and this would mean postal costs of 2000 x \$0.45c = \$900.00.*

*I agree entirely with your suggestion of having 'districts' or regions to elect representatives.*

*Of course the question of whether EA's and FC's should vote is also valid. I personally don't see why not?*

## **2. Should the office of Deputy Grand Master, Assistant Grand Master as well as Deputy District Grand Master be an elected office?**

The Constitution allows the Grand Master to appoint his Deputy and Assistant for each of his three, one-year terms of office whilst the District Grand Master appoints his Deputy for the whole of his two-year term. In practice, the current Grand Master and District Grand Masters choose their successors notwithstanding that the offices of Grand Master and District Grand Master are elected ones. The exception to his practice was in the early seventies when Norm Bauer overturned the Board's nomination of the then Deputy Grand Master and was elected to the office of Grand Master.

This current system of "succession" was criticised by a Past President of the Grand Board of General Purposes when he was President some years ago in one of his controversial and informative newsletters ("Blue Paper"). He referred to the practice as the "Crown Prince Syndrome".

We live in a modern western society where we have the democratic right to elect our leaders to the various levels of government. To my mind the outdated practice of the Grand Master and District Grand Masters appointing their deputies is inconsistent with current democratic principles.

If the offices of Deputy Grand Master, Assistant Grand Master and Deputy District Grand Master are elected offices, it would encourage suitably qualified brethren to put their nominations forward and allow the members of the relevant Grand Lodge or District Grand Lodges to determine a possible future leader. Surely the objective preference by many outweighs the subjective choice of one.

Whenever change is mooted within the Craft, the old clique, "Why change for the sake of change" is raised. However, as the Craft is losing approximately 1000 members per year then this clique has no relevance and is just a cop out. Action needs to **be** taken now by making the necessary amendments to the Constitution and thereby attracting suitably qualified Freemasons with a proven track record to nominate for leadership positions within the Craft to reverse the downward trend.

**Ed:** R.W.Bro, Haussmann comments on this matter as follows:

*I had not previously made a written comment on this subject, although the matter had been discussed verbally with Bro. Fisher. As one of the Grand Officers once involved, I believe the fairest way is to allow all members to have their say. Near the end of the incumbent's term, his selected deputy is usually 'given the nod' by the Board for presentation to the Floor of Grand or District Lodge. He may have picked a totally unsuitable GM or Dist. GM and no one else really stands a chance were he to nominate. If the Deputy had not 'blotted his copybook', he will walk it in. Often his leadership qualities or lack of them will not be apparent until he takes the chair. Also others may be far more aware of a Deputy's good points or failings than the outgoing GM.*