Mr SNEDDEN - This is indeed an historic occasion. So many people have described it as such that one is convinced it must be. In fact, it has not occurred for 72 years. Although there are many people in the community who are wishing that the necessary pre-condition— that is a double dissolution— would occur much more quickly and that it might occur very shortly, I do not contribute to any speculation about it.

But this hope is heard expressed wherever one goes throughout the country. Many people are likely to see this Joint Sitting as an anticlimax. This morning I was reminded by my colleague, the honourable member for Mackellar, of a story about the parliament of Russia. The parliament of Russia was discussing the colour that the Russian clergy should wear while Lenin was taking over the country. That in many ways is the point here: The Joint Sitting is anticlimactic in a sense simply because one of the great issues of today is the issue of inflation, about which the Government has done nothing and has offered no leadership. The Government has not given an analysis of the causes of inflation. Nowhere can anybody find a piece of paper or several pieces of paper and say: 'This is the Government's analysis of the problem of inflation and these are the policies by which it will be dealt'. At the present time we have strikes in two major States -

The CHAIRMAN - Order! I think the right honourable gentleman is aware that I have allowed a passing reference to several matters that are not contained in the Bill. I ask him to direct his remarks to the Bill.

Mr SNEDDEN - Mr Chairman, these issues are of major importance to the entire community and no leadership has been given by this Government. The Prime Minister in opening this historical sitting said that it had been caused by the repeated refusal of the Senate to pass some Bills. That is certainly true. But the construction put upon it by the Prime Minister was that the Senate and the Opposition were resolved to obstruct the passage of legislation. We are not resolved to obstruct legislation. We are resolved not to let legislation go through the House of Representatives and the Senate which we believe is bad in principle and which would detract from the constitutional principles of parliamentary democracy. When such legislation is put before either House of the Parliament we will do all we can to prevent its passing and if that is what 'obstruct' means then the word has found a new meaning in the dictionary. I will shortly describe the legislation now before the House in detail. It must be remembered that the legislation was introduced by the Minister for Services and Property. At least that is his official title; but he is generally known as the Minister for the conservation of a Labor government in office even with a minority of the votes.

This legislation seems simple, and it is; but it has an explosive political content. The proposal is that there should be some changes— they sound simple— first cut down the margin from 20 per cent above or below the quota to only 10 per cent. The proposal was put in propaganda terms to be very democratic because the numbers in electorates would be closer. But that is a facile view and cannot stand up to examination. The second purpose is to revise the Commissioners' instructions as to what they should take into account when recommending a redistribution. The third purpose is to change the frequency with which there would need to be electoral redistributions. Currently when there is a redistribution, the Distribution Commissioners appointed for the purpose look to the legislation to find their instructions as
to how they should conduct that redistribution. They now find that when redistributing
seats, no seat can be more or less than 20 per cent from the quota. I will not go into the way
in which the quota is determined, but let us assume that it is 50,000. There can then be a
clear margin above or below that figure. The Distribution Commissioners are able to go to
the full length of those margins now. The proposed change in the law will mean that they
will not be able to go to 20 per cent above or below but only to 10 per cent above or below.
That is the first provision, and that is political dynamite. It is the basis upon which a
gerrymander can be built by the Labor Party. That is why we oppose it.

The other criteria in the present Act relating to instructions to the electoral Commissioners
are that they should take into account community of interest, means of communication and
travel, the trend up or down of population figures, physical features and the existing
boundaries. There are 3 additional matters which the Distribution Commissioners may take
into account now under the present Act. One is remoteness or distance within the area; the
second is the density or sparsity of population; and the third is the area of the division. Each
of those 3 considerations are to be taken out of the Act by the proposal now before us. In
other words, the electorates of Kalgoorlie, Darling and Leichhardt are to be treated exactly
the same as an inner metropolitan electorate of Sydney or Melbourne. This is an absurd
proposition. Under the proposal now before us the Distribution Commissioners will not be
allowed to consider density in inner Sydney or sparsity in outback Kalgoorlie. These
considerations are to be removed if this Bill becomes law. The Bill proposes then firstly that
the quota shall be reduced from 20 per cent to 10 per cent and secondly that the critical
considerations of remoteness, density and area shall be removed from the present Act.
These 3 considerations are essential to give some reality to the representation of electors in
each electorate. If this vast continent is to have people populating it in as broad a way as
possible the 3 provisions that I have just outlined are necessary. Australia is one continent
and a single country, and the fact that people come from Western Australia, Queensland or
Tasmania does not make any difference to their essential character as Australians. There is
no immediately observable difference between Tasmanians and Queenslanders and we
want to maintain that in the future.

The history of the 20 per cent margin now in the Act goes back to 1902. I know that things
are not right simply because they have been there for a long time. But to allege that a great
new truth has suddenly been found in 1974 and that it has eluded the search of all people of
all political persuasions in the Parliament for 72 years is nonsense. Under the present
system of redistribution, seats gained in Commonwealth parliamentary elections have
reflected with sufficient accuracy the number of votes cast for a party or groups of parties.

One need only remember that the Labor Party polled less than 50 per cent of the votes in
1972 and again in 1974 but gained more than 50 per cent of the seats. That is a test of
fairness about which we may fairly bridle.

The fundamental test must be one vote one value. We support the principle of one vote one
value but the Labor Party does not. The Labor Party put forward a constitutional proposal
which would have torpedoed any consideration of the principle of one vote one value. The
Labor Party wanted to give votes to people under the voting age and to people who were
not citizens by drawing up electorates on the basis of population. If the Labor Party had
been allowed to do this it would have created for itself immense political advantage for the
Labor Party but would have abandoned the principle of one vote one value. Fortunately the
people of Australia were not hoodwinked, even by the name of the referendum proposal which described it as a democratic amendment to the Constitution.

We agree with the principle of one vote one value but what we feel is important is to make it clear that one vote one value means that no sectional or geographical group should ever exert more influence than its numbers warrant. It is totally impossible to have every electorate with exactly the same number of electors at all times. We would find that the day after the Electoral Office opened after a redistribution had taken place people who had died or people who had moved out of the electorate would have to be taken off the electoral rolls. This would mean that the electorates would be out of balance again. All one can do is to approach the problem by maintaining electorate equality as near as practicable. That is the history of electoral balance in Australia.

Let me take New South Wales as an example. I know that the Labor Party will allege that the Opposition is opposing this Bill because of country interests, whether they be the interests of the Country Party or of country members of the Liberal Party. But the views of the Country Party and the Liberal Party coincide totally. We are not prepared to have the needs of country electors ignored. But equally we will adhere to the principle of one vote one value. New South Wales represents a typical example of the rest of Australia. The fact is that when looking at New South Wales one has to exclude the electoral division of Darling, as Darling, centred on Broken Hill, is one of the smallest electorates in Australia. Certainly it is a very small electorate in New South Wales. Because of its peculiarity in respect of community of interest, remoteness, distance to travel, etc., the Division of Darling has been accepted by all parties since Federation as one which will be small by comparison with other electorates. The seat happens to be held by the Labor Party. Excluding that example, the cold mathematical facts are that a vote given a value of one in metropolitan Sydney is worth less than a vote in outback or rural New South Wales where the value is 1.05. Point zero five is the extra loading for people facing the problems of remoteness, distance, difficulty of transport and communication and the difficulty of a member representing his electors and the electors having access to him. That is not too high a price to pay. It would be too high a price to pay only if it distorted representation, but it certainly does not do this, because the Labor Party holds a preponderance of the seats in New South Wales. In fact the Labor Party holds more seats in this House proportionally than the votes it polled. The Labor Party polled less than 50 per cent of the votes yet it has more than 50 per cent of the seats. So it is nonsense to pretend that one can equalise electorates so as to give a value of better than one to 1.05.

It is necessary to consider that in Australia 7 seats are each over 120,000 square miles in area. Some city seats are a mere \(\frac{1}{3}\) square miles. Can one say to electoral Distribution Commissioners: 'You must apply exactly the same criteria to \(3^3\) square miles as to 120,000 square miles'? That is absurd. The argument needs only to be stated to be seen to be absurd. The electoral Division of Kalgoorlie is most of Western Australia. It is 7 times the size of England and Wales. It is 870,000 square miles. Under this legislation Distribution Commissioners will be told: 'If you want to give that seat more than 10 per cent below the quota you are acting unlawfully.' Is Kalgoorlie to become not 870,000 square miles but 1,000,000 square miles? Will such a redistribution serve the interests of the people of Australia? The seats of Leichhardt, Kennedy and Maranoa occupy most of Queensland. Grey
and Wakefield occupy most of South Australia. All these seats are bigger than most countries of the world. There are 23 country seats in Australia over 10,000 square miles in area.

Is the Labor Party serious about its proposal? Let us examine it for its authenticity. Let us examine it to see whether when the Labor Party states its purpose one can believe it. In Western Australia, where there was provision for a margin of only 10 per cent above or below the quota, a State Labor Government actually increased the variation to 20 per cent. That was in 1972 or 1973 that the government- a Labor Government -actually increased it to 20 per cent. The State Labor Government knew that it could not get by on a mere 10 per cent margin. It increased the quota to 20 per cent. Seats with such margins in Federal divisions have existed for 72 years. That system has survived and it has never in any way dinted democracy. In fact, it has contributed to democracy. In the recent distribution of Federal electorates in Western Australia, when the State Labor Party wanted to reduce the margin to 10 per cent, what did the Distribution Commissioners do? They gave two seats a margin of over 10 per cent- one of them was 13.29 per cent above- because the Commissioners knew that such adjustments had to be made and were appropriate. When the Labor Government went to the people with its referendum it abandoned the concepts of this Bill. It put in the referendum proposal an entirely different concept- to redistribute according to population and not according to voters and not according to the principle of one vote one value.

The Constitutional Review Committee has been referred to. It seems to be the basis of the Government's whole argument- that is its publicly presented argument. But it is not the basis of the Government's argument in fact. The basis of its argument in fact is that the Government believes that there can be manipulation in its favour to preserve it in office with under 50 per cent of the votes. The fact is that the Constitutional Review Committee ignored all professional advice. The Commonwealth electoral officer, the State surveyors-general and the State electoral officers all said that a capacity of 20 per cent was needed. The Government ignored that advice. It is still ignoring advice. Remember the Trade Practices Bill, which, according to the Government had to go through the Parliament urgently? The Government itself later brought the Bill back with over 100 amendments. So it is still ignoring advice.

In 1955 the Prime Minister made a statement which is reported in Hansard. He talked about Senator Wright changing his mind. Listen to this change of mind. The Prime Minister said:

At least the numbers should be approximately equal, within the perfectly reasonable latitude of 20 per cent . . .

In 1968 there was a redistribution of your electorate of Sydney, Mr Chairman, and of the electorate of the Minister for Services and Property or Minister for electoral conservation, however one sees it- the electorate of Grayndler. Each of those seats was above quota by 13 per cent and 1 4 per cent respectively. By 1974 they were down to minus 17 per cent and minus 14 per cent. They went right through the barrier. I do not intend my remarks as a criticism of the Distribution Commissioners, but they should have taken the seats of Sydney and Grayndler right out to the limit of 20 per cent to allow for their downward movement. My own electorate was 2 per cent below the quota and it is now 21 per cent above it. The
The electorate of Mitchell was about level and it is now plus 29 per cent. If we are looking for true democracy why have we allowed this to happen? The answer is that the Distribution Commissioners did not take full scope of the capacity allowed them, which is 20 per cent and not 10 per cent.

Let me make this clear: The Labor Party thinks that it can take advantage of population moves. We are determined, as long as we can fight, not to let the Government do that by this means. Let me also make this clean It is not an instruction to the Distribution Commissioners to make the difference 20 per cent; it is a capacity or a power that the Distribution Commissioners have to make the difference up to 20 per cent if they can see that there will be great movements in population. In fact when they redistributed in 1968 they allowed a bigger margin than 10 per cent in 27 seats out of 123. Only 90 seats out of 123 were below 10 per cent. That shows that there was not some giant forcing them to go to 20 per cent instead of 10 per cent. The norm is below 10 per cent Only 6 seats were between 15 per cent and 20 per cent.

The Prime Minister has been very interested in electoral affairs throughout his career. In 1962 he wrote to the Distribution Commissioner and said: 'The way to do this is not to start off so that everything will be equal but to ask how long the redistribution will last. A census is taken every 7 years and that is usually about the time a redistribution lasts. Try to work it out so that they are equal in term'. He was right in 1962; but he is horribly wrong in 1974.