**Expressing Public Opinion in Australian Political Discourse**

**and Its Linguistic Component**

Chernyaeva Olga

Postgraduate, Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia

Of all the political events in modern Australia it is elections that attract the most public interest and attention of the media. The most colourful linguistic means used in Australian political discourse devoted to elections reflect Australians’ negative attitude to this phenomenon. Therefore we have chosen the examples of how Australians express their indignation against the way elections are held in the country.

One of the most controversial issues of the Australian electoral system is compulsory voting.

The people’s critical attitude to mandatory voting is vividly shown in the radio interview on the subject with famous Australian politicians, such as a retired diplomat Bill Smithies and Nick Minchin, Senator for South Australia from 1993 to 2011, Minister for Finance and Administration from 2001 to 2007; the listeners of the Radio National also expressed their opinion about the compulsory voting system in the given interview [Radio National: 5]. Thus, the radio interview in question gives us a clear idea of how elections are perceived by both professional politicians and at the grassroots level.

At the beginning of the interview the host introduces Bill Smithies with the following words:

“Bill Smithies … last voted in 1985, when he began his **crusade** against compulsory voting.”

The noun ‘crusade’ carries expressive-emotional-evaluative overtone: it conveys the idea that Bill Smithies’s campaign against compulsory voting takes a lot of effort, has lasted for a long time and the crusader strongly believes he is morally right. It shows us how difficult and challenging it is to rebel against the existing Australian electoral system.

The opinion of ordinary people is expressed in the following statements:

* “I had **a terrible dream** one time that voting was no longer compulsory, and we finished up with **a brain-dead**, **manipulative**, **evil**, **egocentric narcissist**, like a certain president of the United States who was elected by default in a voting system that’s **rigged very unfairly** against working people. I’m a father of independent means calling from Queensland, but I feel very strongly on the issue: compulsory voting is **an excellent system**, even though it’s **a pain in the neck** sometimes.”
* “I never vote … because I do not wish to vote and therefore give licence to the system – which I think is **one of the most undemocratic and deceitful systems** ever put on to a people.”

The first example sounds quite paradoxical: on the one hand, the voluntary voting system led to fatal, catastrophic consequences for the Australian political system in this “terrible dream”, and officials elected by this voting are described with the help of words with strong negative connotations (“**a brain-dead**, **manipulative**, **evil**, **egocentric narcissist**”) and the Australian voting system as such is compared to “a voting system that’s **rigged very unfairly**”; on the other hand, compulsory voting is supposed to be “an excellent system” in this situation. However, along with the attribute “**excellent**” the speaker uses the idiomatic expression“**a pain in the neck**” to characterise the compulsory voting system. Thus, mandatory voting is described with the help of words with both inherent positive and negative connotations.

In the second instance the speaker defines the existing electoral system as “**deceitful**” and “**undemocratic**”, which shows his indignation over the way elections are held in Australia.

The right to participate in elections and this way influence the political situation in a country is the indispensible part of any democracy. However, compulsory voting violates civil liberties: citizens of democratic states should be free to choose if they want to take part in the political life of their country or not. The lack of freedom of choice results in protests in society.

The similar ideas are put forward by Nick Minchin and Bill Smithies. It is interesting to note that compulsory voting is viewed metaphorically: the politicians describe the domain of elections through the domain of criminal world, for instance:

* “I regard it (compulsory voting) as **one of the gross conspiracies of Australian politics**.” (Nick Minchin)

The fact that the Australian parliament passed the law concerning compulsory voting is called “**conspiracy**”. As a result of adopting this law, there is no need for the parties contesting at federal elections to encourage the voters to go to polling booths in an election – this job is already made by the law, and politicians expend all their efforts on gaining the seats in parliament. Thus, they aim their activities at undecided voters, who might be uninterested in politics and whose choice of candidates in an election may depend only on the effectiveness of electoral advertisement.

The same idea is expressed in the second example:

* “… victory is likely to go to the party that’s most successful **at manipulating those punters** who know and care the least. In other words, the ones who wouldn’t vote unless they were **frogmarched** to the polling booths.” (Bill Smithies)

These indecisive voters are called “**punters**”. In Australian English the word ‘punter’ is often used to denote a gambler.

It is a well-known fact that gamblers easily fall under the influence of other people and they do not care about the results of any event if it does not bring benefit to them. The Australian elections can hardly be profitable to the voters of this kind. That is why they would not vote unless they were forced to do so by the law. Bill Smithies uses the verb ‘frogmarch’ to show his disapproval at this enforcement.

Thus, numerous examples of the use of words with negative connotations show that compulsory voting is perceived as a violation of the democratic freedom.

Bibliography

Radio National – Counterpoint 24/05/2004 – the print version of story <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/talks/counterpoint/stories/s1117921.htm>