COST OF SECRET BALLOTS

In the last week of the autumn session a small but important Bill was passed which should be of great benefit to many Unionists. The Government's court controlled secret ballot legislation is well known to everyone in Australia. It is well known to many Unionists and many different Unions have taken advantage of this legislation to get rid of communist control in Unions.

There was one defect in the system from the point of view of the Union, the cost of the court controlled ballot was often substantially more than the cost of a Union control ballot. Up to the present time the Unions concerned had to bear this increased cost. The Government has recognised that this is not reasonable and has, therefore, passed legislation which will make it possible for the Government to reimburse Unions for the cost of court controlled ballots.

The attitude of the Labour Party over this Bill was, to say the least, strange. For some time the Extreme Left Wing of the Labour Party has been able to persuade the Party to adopt the policy of opposition to all court controlled secret ballots.

If we could cast our minds back far enough in the days of strikes and shortages in the late 1940's I think most Australians would not agree that the abandonment of this principle would be in the best interests of anyone. Even though they opposed the principle of secret ballots one might well have thought that the A.L.P. would not object to the Government meeting the increased cost of these secret ballots, but they opposed this legislation in the Parliament last week. Instead, extreme Left Winger Eddie Ward represents a complete about face because, in the last Parliament during 1958, during a debate on secret ballots, he got up and said at the very least the Government could meet the cost of these secret ballots. It was a terrible thing, Mr. Ward said, that the Unionists should have to meet this expense.
The Government showed in its election policy and in the Bill which has just been passed that it agreed with Mr. Ward, but Mr. Ward, with his colleagues, opposed the provision when it was actually introduced into the House. Why, I don't think anyone could say, certainly I can't.

The measure was a good one and is of real benefit to the people it is designed to help.