

The Virtual Tally Room On The Internet

by Dr Amy McGrath - 25 September 2001

"When you are actually doing the count you should never be connected to the Internet in any way, shape or form. The data collection should be done on a different machine. The transfer from one to the other should be supervised by representatives of every party so there is no diddling of the data. Anyone who has access to the data file should have to sign a sheet advising what they are doing."
**Professor Micco, Pennsylvania University, USA at the
HS Chapman Society Forum June 2000**

The Internet was used as a "virtual tally-room" for the first time in the 1998 election and then in the 1999 Referendum. The procedure was developed and managed by EDIME Internet Agency, with Alta Internet Business Centre as provider. Results from polling booths were entered into terminals in divisional returning offices for transmission direct to the Internet. This process occurred at such a speed, it outstripped the ability of scrutineering to pick up anomalies, particularly as scrutineers were barred from divisional offices.

One scrutineer did pick up an anomaly in the largest polling booth in the town of Young, NSW. He noticed the count there was out of kilter with the other booths. After Professor MacKerras protested three times on his behalf, a recount by the DRO for Hume proved him right.

To judge by this experience in the Referendum, the AEC's recent declaration, that it will be using the Internet as a virtual tally room in the 2001 election, should be viewed with caution by candidates and parties, mindful that the adoption of the Internet as tally room was never debated in the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters.

Should Professor Micco's warning, that 90% of computer fraud occurs from within, be ignored given its policy of outsourcing electronic contracts to various companies we have never heard of? Nor that of Ernst and Young that "in Australia, 76% of large corporate frauds are committed internally most by middle managers ... while 59% of large frauds are detected by control mechanism, significant 42% are discovered only by chance. Clearly companies should be worried by the level of fraud they are not discovering." (Bulletin 25-Mar-1997 2£3.1997)

We, the voters, should also be worried that the computer hacking of Timothy Cooper into the ballot count of the 1993 federal election was only discovered by chance, as was the persistent intrusion into the computer of Charlie Lynn in NSW Parliament House during 2001.