



### Contact Email for December 2018

My December reading has been Terry Pratchett's *A SLIP OF THE KEYBOARD*; a collection of his non-fiction writing. It is composed of the collected speeches, articles and other writings which reflect on his life, on being an author, and other occasions when he was expected to say something or write something.

I have found it a fascinating read and commend what he has told us about his life and things he felt would help other in theirs. For the purposes of this contact email, I have chosen one paragraph which stood out for me. What he said, not only applies to England, as well as to the Irish, to whom it was addressed, but it is just as true for Australia. This is a paragraph he wrote:

We live in a venal world run largely by men who count numbers and, because they can count people, they think people are numbers. We accept half-truths, we have learned to think that we must do what the government tells us, when in fact the truth of the matter is that the government should do what we tell it. Governments are scared. The government does not like to hold a referendum, because that would mean that stupid people, which is to say people who are not politicians, would make the decisions which are better left to stupid and, as we learn more and more, dishonest politicians instead. They despise us until an election comes around when they pretend that they do not.

Where does sociology stand in relation to politics? An early sociological study was Michel's 1911 study of Political Parties. He argued that whatever the differences in their political programmes and philosophy, political parties always tend to be dominated by elites. This still seems to exist in Australian politics, and essentially suggests that neither the voters nor party members are going to have much chance in determining what the part will do in government.

Political sociology is defined as being on four levels; 1) International relations, 2) the nature and role of the State in societies; 3) the nature and organisation of political movements and parties; 4) the participation of individuals in politics as shown, for example in voting behaviour. (Penguin Dictionary of Sociology)

So what sociology can we do? We can uncover the dirty tricks that are going on in both the political parties and the Public Service. We can provide answers to social issues for political parties. This one can be tricky because political parties have dominant theories, and if your research suggests the theory is wrong, you may have considerable problems in getting your work accepted. Lastly, we must try to stay independent of political identification. This can be hard when we have strong political beliefs of our own but it can, and should, be done.

Some years ago one political party had a questionnaire produced and had it circulated in the region where I lived. It was very badly prepared and I thought as a good citizen I should point out to my local member why it would not give the results they were claiming it would. I went to see my local member and he agreed to see me, but then his minder said: "I will sit in on this", and the member never said another word. I stated my case, then the minder shouted at me and said the party had paid a lot of money for this questionnaire, and we will not have you coming here trying to muck it up. So much for being a good citizen.

I hope you will all have a happy Christmas. Alan Scott, Continuing Education Officer