

## **Concession Speech: George Reid, Opposition Leader (FT)**

***March 29<sup>th</sup> 1901***

“The progress of the returns for the election of members to the Federal House of Representatives already affords grounds for great satisfaction to the freetrade party. The protectionists were very sanguine all through that they would capture nearly as many, if not quite as many, seats as the freetraders, and Mr. E. W. O’Sullivan (Minister for Works) on a recent occasion said that the protectionists would get a majority of the seats.

Well, I of course knew that was utterly absurd. So far as I could see, the freetrade feeling in the country was never stronger, whilst there never was a time when the protectionist cause was advocated with less enthusiasm than on the present occasion; therefore I was entirely prepared for the splendid result which, so far, has attended our efforts.

Of course we all know that the returns are far from complete, and the federal electorates being very large nothing like a final estimate can be formed at the present time, except on the basis of this little bit of electioneering experience, namely, that a lead is very difficult to overtake. Gauged in that way, the free-trade candidatures promise to achieve astonishing results.

There are one or two contests which attract one’s attention particularly. Take my own for East Sydney. The large vote of more than 2000 recorded for Mr. Foran shows the lengths to which my political opponents will go. They clamour for the return of good men and able and efficient politicians, apart from the fiscal question; yet it is very plain that in my constituency hundreds and hundreds of the protectionists through their animosity to me have done all they could to promote Mr. Foran’s success.

I have not addressed a single meeting in that great electorate except the one in the Protestant Hall, and I feel grateful to the electors for their kindness in leaving me free to do missionary work in other parts of the State and all Australia. I beg to return to the enormous number of electors who voted for me under these circumstances my most cordial and grateful acknowledgements.

The fact of Mr. Edwards’s victory in South Sydney is one that is especially striking, also the lead which has been gained by a number of the freetrade candidates. Altogether I think that when the full returns are in we will have every reason to be proud of the result.

Speaking of the Senate elections, it is evident that large returns have yet to come in. Of course, the heavier the vote the longer the time necessary to arrive at the result, especially as they had to first count the votes in the House of Representatives. The papers for the

Senate will involve a great deal of labour and care, and we cannot expect the bulk of the vote to be known just yet.

So far as we have gone, however, we have here again cause for great congratulation. It is evident that the freetraders have stuck together with magnificent loyalty. I believe that when the heavier returns come in the position of the freetrade candidates will become even better than it is, but it seems now pretty evident, as far as I can foresee, that we will either abet the whole six of our bunch, or, at the very least, five of them.”

Source: Compiled from The Sydney Morning Herald, March 30<sup>th</sup> 1901, Page 9 and The Age.