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The Case Against PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION.

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The Case Against Proportional Representation

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PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION:

The Case Against the Proposal.

For at least forty years Proportional Representation, or P.R., as it will be referred to here, has received continuous and organised advocacy. Men like John Stuart Mill and Lord Courtney have been its sponsors and popularisers. Parliament has frequently discussed the principle of the system, and once, at least (in the course of the discussions on the Representation of the People Act, 1918), has been on the verge of adopting it. Yet, whether a complete reform of our electoral system shall take place in the direction of substituting that form of P.R. known as the Single Transferable Vote* for our present system of Single-Member constituencies still remains an undecided question. There is apparently no certain and conclusive guidance to be obtained by the ordinary citizen as to the merits of a change; and among politicians of all parties there is an extraordinary disarray of opinion. One generalisation on the subject may safely be made from the history of the P.R. movement in practical politics: Proportional Representation has always found more favour with parties and groups in a minority and not likely to be in power, than with those parties assured of an electoral majority in a not too-remote future. The system has always recommended itself to men with a mission, but without much visible evidence of popular support. This fact should be remembered in judging the arguments which follow.

Ultimate Political Assumptions seldom stated.

Now, characteristically of English politics, the arguments for and against P.R. in this country have been put forward for public consumption piecemeal. Neither the arguments for it, nor those against it have been submitted as an harmonious piece of political philosophy resting upon certain deliberately accepted and postulated assumptions. Yet speakers and writers on both sides have been actuated by assumptions, most often, unconsciously held and seldom examined. These assumptions naturally refer to the type of relationship which should exist between the representative assembly (Parliament) and the electorate, between the electorate and the Cabinet and between the Cabinet and Parliament. In short, the problem of P.R. is to be solved only by referring the Electoral System to the criterion of what, as a whole, makes up a good Governmental machine. It is sure that at one time or another in the course of past discussions the opposing assumptions have been unveiled; that can be seen, for example, in the Minutes of Evidence of the Royal Commission on

*See Appendix.
Systems of Election (Cd. 5352; 1910, passim); but such discovery occurs as an incident in, and not as the keystone of, the whole fabric of arguments. The result is that people agree with this, that and the other on one side, and some, but not all, of the points established by the opposite side. This confused result may be avoided, and a definite and consistent attitude made possible, by a preliminary exposition of the writer’s assumptions.

Before proceeding to state these, one further observation is necessary. Very little reference will be made to the experience of foreign governments. It is the traditional practice of disputants, and particularly of the advocates of P.R., who have a special fondness for argument from the unknown, to cite conditions in foreign countries as evidence of what might happen in this. In fact, that experience is almost useless, even when our knowledge is complete. A study of foreign institutions teaches only this, that problems and social institutions vary so widely from country to country, that to take a single item, the electoral system, as a basis for persuasion is futile, and our own political aims and nature must be our guides in matters of political innovation.

The Electoral System and Responsible Government.

Given the principle that government should be responsible to the people, what rules ought to be expected in the Electoral System?

Firstly, as an external mark of the consent of the governed, the Electoral System ought to provide a popular assembly representative of the main strains of political opinion possessing the nation. Representativeness, proportional to number in the country, is desirable on this ground. But acceptance of this rule, which is one of the leading ideas of those in favour of P.R., does not commit us to mathematically exact proportional representation. Further, it is desirable that political opinions prevailing in the country shall obtain the possibility of public statement in Parliament; and that where the number of adherents is large relatively to the total number of members in the assembly that minority shall have the effective opportunity of pressing amendments in legislation and reform in the course of administration. Here, at once, the issue becomes controversial, and impinges upon a vital point in the case of those who propose P.R. The desire the latter seem to cherish most ardently is that Parliament shall accurately reflect the opinion of the constituencies. They long ago learnt off by heart Burke’s famous phrase: “The virtue, the spirit, the essence of the House of Commons, consists in its being the express image of the nation.” Burke’s words are precious, and few would quarrel with those who recognise the importance of this dictum, and delight in the dialectical courage it gives. But we are not fighting, as Burke was, against the whole “rotten borough” system; we are not balancing the qualitative issue of absolutely representative against absolutely unrepresentative government. The present-day issue is the quantitative one of how much representativeness will the nature of the whole national
complex of political conditions allow to the House of Commons. The answer, to anyone who has given time to the study of the internal conditions of the House of Commons, is that only a few salient principles, representing the main opposing attitudes of mind, can ever be there discussed. It would be useless for every little group to be represented in Parliament; for that assembly has not even the time adequately to discuss the views of the three great parties in the State on all the issues that arise. An Electoral System based wholly or mainly on the desire to give any and every small group the chance of returning a representative would be a political futility; for only by a rare stroke of luck would the representative get the opportunity of speaking. If the House of Commons were fully representative—as the more extreme advocates of P.R. suggest—no business could be done. The exigencies of Parliamentary time (besides other matters) force men, therefore, to leave their small caves and enter into larger combinations for the support of a common programme; and as they do this the exactness of representation is seen to be a thing of neither real nor ultimate political moment. We are forced to the conclusion that any Electoral System which gives a rough numerical expression of the strength of main political tendencies, is the only one practically workable as far as Parliament is concerned. We have no choice between this and any other.

The Member and His Constituency.

Secondly, the maintenance of the member’s sole personal interest in his single and undivided constituency, and of the concurrent and similar personal interest of the constituents in their member is of the highest importance in securing many other desirable results. The member is stimulated in the most direct fashion to educate his constituents: they are “his” supporters. He knows that he will be rewarded for his efforts by votes, and that for neglect he will be punished. His sphere of duty and interest in the result is definite. For service, he receives recompense. If he is responsive to popular wishes he gets a seat—all this is good democracy. But the close personal relationship allows of another excellent benefit. It makes feasible the best operation of the English doctrine that a Member of Parliament shall be a representative, not a delegate. It allows the individual member a latitude of personal discretion and initiative outside the party programme (to which he makes pledges rather than to his constituents), which makes for good government—because he, being subject to possessive relationship with his constituents has a circumscribed and definite electorate with whom he can discuss, on familiar terms, the rectitude of his actions, and from whom he can secure support for any praiseworthy deviation from party standards. On the other hand, the electors have a single member upon whom their praise or blame can be bestowed for action outside the somewhat rigid margins of the party programme. This personal system produces an intense responsibility and responsiveness to the electorate on one side, i.e., the system is of a highly representative quality: and on the other, a predictable sphere of independence of the member.
Now, the most essential element in the P.R. system is that the constituencies shall each, as a unit, return a number of members, from five upwards. Under such a system it is likely that some areas would be submitted to wasteful double doses of electioneering, while others would be neglected; that the stimulus to the personal effort of the candidates would be weakened, for the relation between personal service and reward would be less direct and certain than it is in a Single-Member constituency; that constituents would have no single person upon whom they could focus their attention, and to whom they could submit their claims; and that they might visit on a party the wrath which the personality of the candidate alone merited.

It is good that the constituencies in an Electoral System should be small, and be in sole and undivided care and possession of one member.

A Dynamic Factor.

Thirdly, the latter rule attains a greater significance when it is remembered that the representative character of Parliament is not made by a general election alone. A Parliament is not created to work over a short period of weeks or months; the condition for effective work is that it shall sit, whether by the law or the practice of the constitution, some three or four years. Now it is clear that many issues will arise in the course of the Parliamentary period which were but dimly perceived, or not perceived at all, at the time of the Election, upon which it is good, though not vital, to have some definite indication of public opinion. The method of a Referendum is impossible. But the close connection between member and constituency, the interest of the member in the discovery of dynamic opinion in his constituency, is one guarantee of popular consultation. As there is an “atmosphere” in the House of Commons, “the sense of the House,” which Ministers do well to assimilate, and which can only be assimilated by constant attendance on the Treasury Bench, so there is an electoral atmosphere the best appreciation of which can come about only by a highly personal interest in the constituency.

The House of Commons is, moreover, profoundly affected by the arguments raised at a By-election; and an Electoral System, to be adequate, should make By-elections an easy possibility.

The Electoral System and the Government.

These are by no means all the results that an Electoral System ought to secure to the country. There is a close and necessary connection between the Electoral System and the House of Commons: there is just as close and necessary a connection between that system and the Government of the day.

In the Cabinet there is concentrated the politically vital function of initiating legislative and administrative policy (including finance), and the direction and control of the activities of the Civil Service. The Cabinet is the energising element par excellence in the English Constitution. The House of Commons talks and divides; the
Cabinet thinks and acts. Its touch with the country is as vital as its touch with the House of Commons. The innate dispositions of English politicians, perception of the need for decision and vigour in the Executive in the face of modern problems, the necessity of decisive leadership and time-distribution in the House of Commons, a popular inability to fix responsibility save when the agents of government are few, not many, and the warnings derived from defective functioning of foreign institutions, have combined to the bestowal of governmental predominance upon the Cabinet, and, since 1867, tightly to lace the Cabinet to the electorate by means of strong party organisations.

To be really responsive to popular opinion, the Cabinet must rest upon a party organisation which is most vividly in contact with the constituencies, i.e., where the individual member has a clear and definite interest in his constituency. The Cabinet, to be effectively responsible to the country must rest upon the support of a single party. For then (i) the electorate is best able to know who is to praise or blame. At each General Election the aspirant Ministry comes before the electorate with a record and a policy; and as it has been aptly said: "a general election is, in fact, considered by a large portion of the electorate of this country as practically a referendum on the question which of two Governments shall be returned to power."

And (ii) there need be no surreptitious political bargaining between "ministrable" groups resulting in contracts as to policy not submitted for popular ratification, and which can be torn up by any of the contracting parties to the detriment of steady and effective government, without the country being able to hold them to their pledges.

Any Electoral System, therefore, which can be shown to mitigate against the maintenance of a Cabinet system based on a single party organisation is to be avoided. To the very frequent and highly characteristic question asked by English electors: "What government are we to make?" the Electoral System ought to provide a clear and unambiguous answer.

**Summary of Electoral Rules.**

Now, from this argument four concrete rules may be extracted before we examine what P.R. has to offer as its justification.

(i.) Parliament ought to be representative of majority and minority groups of opinion; but need not—indeed, cannot be mathematically representative. If we avoid a minority in the country getting a majority of seats, and if our political manners as exhibited, for example, in the Rules and Practice of Parliamentary Procedure, give the minority a chance of effective debate and the majority the ultimate ruling force, we have done all we need to do. More than this is unfruitful pedantry.

(ii.) Constituencies should be small enough to allow the establishment of personal relationship between member and constituents.

(iii.) A dynamic element (it may be of By-elections) is necessary to keep the House awake to public opinion; and to warn or encourage the Government whose immediate policy is frequently the issue on which a By-election is fought.

(iv.) The government of the country ought to be carried on by a Cabinet based on a single-party organisation having a sufficient majority in the country and Parliament to act decisively; while, internally, the party may be conciliating groups, digesting new theories and shedding outworn ideas.

These four things our present Electoral System, taken together with Party Organisation and the current state of Political Manners, gives us; not, of course, all perfectly, but not so imperfectly that a wholesale change is to be embraced until it can justify itself by the credible offer of priceless advantage.

The Attack upon the Present System.

The essential element in the present Electoral System is that it is based, with a few exceptions which may be ignored, upon Single-Member constituencies. The whole country is divided into some 600 constituencies of approximately equal size, each returning one member. It is from this disintegration of the whole country (which, ideally, should be represented in the House, as a map represents the configuration of an area of land) that, according to advocates of P.R., many serious political evils flow. These evils are to be remedied by P.R.

The defects of the present Electoral System are described as follows:—

(a.) Though the House of Commons should be fully representative of all shades of electoral opinion in proportion to the numbers holding the opinion, the present system of Single-Member constituencies makes such a result impossible, as can be seen by reference to the state of parties in the House.

(b.) The System results in an exaggeration of the majority of seats gained by the Majority Party in proportion to votes cast for it. The Elections from 1885 (when the Single-Member system was first adopted) to 1910, showed that even “the relative strength of the parties which are represented, is grossly distorted by the majority method, actual majorities ranging from twice to over ten times their proper size.”* The election of 1918 gave the Coalition 428 seats, when proportionally to voters it was only entitled to 292 seats; it gave the Labour Party 47 seats, when it was entitled to 120 seats; and the Independent Liberals 25 seats, where 67 was their proper number. (These figures show that the “will of the people,” as expressed in terms of votes, is not represented by a corresponding number of seats in the House. This is not democracy.)

The cause of this distortion of the electoral situation is normally twofold:—

(i) Parties win a large number of constituencies by narrow majorities;

* Report, p. 25.
(2) Parties lose but a small number (compared with gains as in (i)) of constituencies by narrow margins.

These twin causes of distortion account for the fact that a small shifting of votes from one party to another during an election may cause, and, historically, often has caused a great landslide of seats in the direction of the favoured party.

(3) Besides these two causes of mal-representation, which we have called normal (only because they were in operation as the major causes from 1885 until 1918), there is the advent of Three-Party contests in a very large proportion of the total number of constituencies. (This is due to the emergence of the Labour Party as an independent and strongly-organised electoral combatant, and to the rapid decline, but, as yet, not the disappearance of the Liberal Party.) The Minority Seats, resulting from multiple-cornered contests, numbered 216 in the Election of December, 1923. Here, then, is a cause of unproportional representation which will remain potent until the Two-Party is restored.

(c.) For the same reasons, the present system makes it theoretically possible for a minority of the electors in the country to return a majority of members to Parliament. It was alleged at the Commission on Electoral Systems that this had actually occurred in 1874 and 1886, but this statement turned out to be not a solid mathematical truth, but a matter of opinion based upon methods of calculation subject to valid challenge. However, the theoretical possibility does remain.

The Claims of P.R., and their weakness.

Using these incontrovertible facts, the advocates of P.R. proceed to assess their meaning and importance according to their own peculiar scheme of political values.

Let us take these opinions seriatim, and submit each to a critique based on our own assumptions.

(a.) Alleged: Exaggeration of political majorities leads to the passage of legislation for which there is no real demand, because the Majority mistakes the actual feeling of the country.

Denied: This argument is untenable, because it leaves out of account the undeniable fact that, though the size of the Government majority is a guide to the Ministry as to what it ought and can hope to do, its views are inevitably tempered by the arguments of the Opposition, the views of members who know the real state of affairs in their own constituencies, the prospects of the coming Election, the progress of By-Elections, and the important truth that English politicians are not pedantic extremists acting to the full beat of an arithmetically regulated pulse, but instead with a knowledge of realities existing in the hinterland of representation in the House. Why else do they employ Whips and Chief Party Agents, if not to discover feelings and prospects, as distinct from the statistical façade presented by what they can muster, at need, in a Division? The politics of this country are not determined once and for all by the General Election on the "mirror," or what has very aptly been called
the "snapshot" theory of representation, but by a multitude of dynamic and spiritual factors as efficient in the cause of good Representative and Responsible Government as the General Election itself.

These factors make for as true a representation as accurate proportions; and our present System of Single-Member constituencies and the tradition of electoral responsibility built on that system are fundamental to their continued vitality.

(a.) Alleged: Doubt as to the actual force behind the decision of the House of Commons weakens the House as an exponent of the national will in the eyes of the people.

Denied: The answer to the previous allegation is an answer to this, also. But something more may be added. Only the academic thinker, out of touch with real electoral conditions, can accept this opinion. The actions of Parliament are, in point of fact, accepted or rejected by the thinking few in this country, not on grounds of votes or representativeness of the decision at all. They are praised or condemned on grounds of social utility, and the particular advantage given or denied to the various sectional interests. The people are more concerned about the intrinsic merits of policies than about the commas on their certificate of origin.

(c.) Alleged: A small transfer of votes may mean a sweeping change in personnel of the House, and thus endanger the efficiency of the latter.

Denied: It may; but there are always sufficient old members to educate new-comers; and the enthusiasm of the new member, as the last two Parliaments have shown, has brought back the much-needed spirit of vitality into Parliamentary activity. "The stability of legislation" for which some advocates of P.R. have respect, will not be endangered, because the Civil Service, the repository of information and a most frequent source of policy, is a safeguard against instability. Has there been any instability in legislation in the last half-century? The dogmatic slumber of old parliamentary hands is not a guarantee of good government; and it is all to the good that seniority should be refreshed by youth, and experience stimulated by innovation.

(d.) Alleged: The dominance of party organisation in the Single-Member constituencies crushes out small groups and the independent member; under P.R. this would be mitigated and the freedom of the member be enhanced, because independent-minded men could threaten to break away from a party if they were sure of a quota of electors in the enlarged constituency.

Denied: It cannot be admitted that the Single-Member system makes more for party denomination than would P.R. As a matter of fact, discipline in party organisations would with large and Multi-Member constituencies be increased for the mass of members. Government is government; and ultimately someone must govern. The independent member in a team of 5 or 7 candidates would be a source of weakness to his party colleagues during a campaign, and still more during the Recess, when members go down to their constituencies. There would grow up, necessarily, a convention of Collective Responsibility of members in the constituency. The independently-minded man, if he were selected, would be told (especially during a
campaign), without much ceremony, that reticence on his part was essential. The "regular" party candidate would be adopted as the best colleague. Is there a politician who has spoken from the same platform with friends and not wanted to contradict them? P.R., then, makes for dishonest simulation by silence, or expressed conformity, in a large constituency, because a candidate’s views will not react upon his prospects alone, but on the prospects of his colleagues. They will "shut up" the weak man. In the Single-Member constituency the candidate, certainly, is also called upon to conform to the general party views, but he may press his nonconformity with those views as far as his electors can be persuaded, and the personal relationship makes this feasible—and, meanwhile, his own cause is neither being prejudiced by his colleagues in contiguous constituencies, nor does his nonconformity injure them and bring upon him and them the full rigour of party orthodoxy.

Further, as regards the political education of the constituencies, the personal struggle in a small constituency between two or three men for one prize, has a dramatic attraction about it, which brings out electors to meetings, and takes them to the poll. The big constituency, with the party doctrines in the forefront, would offer a rarified atmosphere in which the elector would not be so inclined to listen to the megaphonically reiterated speeches of candidates.

The actual processes of politics would not, in such a system, leave room for the independence claimed. For to be effective, heresies must exist and work inside an organisation based on orthodoxy; and, in point of fact, the most singular and, perhaps, beneficial angularities are represented and expressed within the existing system. The vista of 600 men, divided into a number of groups, each independent in views and line of action, may bring happiness to the individualistic moralist. But democracy cannot be run by eclectics and single-point rhapsodists. Party organisation maintains its essential stream of tendency unimpaired from one election to another. It educates the electorate, and explains to the electorate the works of its members within the representative assembly. It educates itself by research, and criticises the action of the Opposition. Independence from such party organisation is separation from the only institution which, on any large scale, can secure that Representative Government shall also be Responsible Government. A threat to the Two-Party System and party discipline is a threat to responsibility in the democratic system, and P.R., avowedly, is such a threat.

(e.) Alleged: The minority in each Single-Member constituency, is there directly unrepresented, and this is destructive of political interest, because the vote of the minority is merely "a sterile exhibition of impotence."

Denied: Anybody who has any electoral experience knows that this argument is untrue. Even if there is no chance of winning the seat for themselves, the minority try to get as many votes as possible as a mark of popular confidence in their party doctrines, and particularly in their party leaders. The horizon of a minority is not limited by the boundaries of the constituency. The minority has sufficient sense to know that the full exhibition of its strength will not
fail to have its influence upon the member actually representing the constituency, and moderate the extremity of his party views. And the very fact that a small turnover of votes may result in the capture of the seat heightens the intensity of political feelings, and results in energetic prosecution of a campaign all through the period for which Parliament sits.

The Practical Defects of P.R.

These, then, are the main arguments for P.R., and these the grounds on which they must be rejected. The system of P.R. also suffers from certain inherent practical defects.

First, the elector faced with a ballot paper containing 10 or 15 names would be confused, and find it difficult to mark his preferences without guidance. Either, then, his paper would be spoilt; or his preferences would not be marked in full (when the merit claimed for P.R. would not be realised), or the party organisation would need to guide the elector by means of careful coaching beforehand, and this would tend to increase the power of the organisation. Confusion might be overcome in the course of time; it is at least possible that early difficulties would stereotype the control of the party-machine.

Secondly, in relation to the size of constituencies which would, under the proposal, be 5, 6 or more times as big as they are at present, the comment of Mr. Graham Wallas is true so far as practice gives any clue, and seems to me decisive. "Even if it only multiplied the size of the ordinary constituency by six," he writes, "it would multiply by at least six the difficulty of effective electioneering, and even if each candidate were prepared to spend six times as much money at every contest, he could not multiply by six the range of his voice or the number of meetings which he could address in a day." Amateur advocates of the proposal have been heard to say that the parties could divide up the constituency for electioneering purposes, and concentrate attention of those districts whence came their strength, and thus economise their efforts. But, in practice, there are few constituencies which do not contain potential surprises, and majorities are not there ready-made. The party must seek its majority, and cannot neglect a vote. The larger constituency would necessitate vaster and richer "machines" than we have now; and there is everything to fear that they would fail to bring the personal character of the candidates home to the electors as vividly as under the present System. The small party will not be benefited, for it too, and more than the large party, will have to bear a greater financial burden if it wishes to be sure of finding a quota: with no extra advantage relative to its cost and effort over the present conditions.

Thirdly, the advocates of P.R. have never been able to offer the country a substitute worth having for the invaluable periodical referenda on the action of the Government, the By-elections on the death or resignation of a member. One solution offered is, that the whole constituency should be polled for the seat vacant. This would clearly entail a great and disproportionate expense; and the bigger
the constituencies, the fewest of them in the country, and, therefore, the greater possible number of expensive By-elections. Another suggestion is that a tradition would grow up of the majority taking the seat without a contest. This is not a solution: it is an evasion. There are other fantastical schemes which are also merely ingenious.

Summary of the Case against the Proposal.

Thus, the net result of this examination of the proposal to substitute P.R. for our present Electoral System is this: We would lose the Single-Member constituency, which is simple for candidates, electors and local party executives. The régime of big and responsible parties in the country and in the House of Commons would be threatened, and with that would arise the possibility of indecisive and vacillating government waiting upon electoral and Parliamentary bargains. The close personal relationship of member and constituency would give way to a rather dehumanised operation of the Party machine, seeking to bring its principle into the electors' line of vision. "The swing of the pendulum" in elections would be diminished in amplitude, and the political life of both majority and minority tend to stagnation. The type of referendum known as the By-election would be lost.

To compensate for these clear losses no substantial advantages are offered by P.R. Accurate mathematical representation is practically impossible, and is undesirable, given the congestion of business in Parliament, and, as a matter of fact, there is representation of all opinions in the House. No cause which arises for discussion in the encyclopaedic programme of the House ever lacks a champion: none a challenge. While it is a theoretical possibility for a minority of electors to get a majority of votes, this has never occurred indisputably; and if it did the conventions of decency in English politics would prevent the majority from taking advantage of the accident.

Indeed, majorities and minorities are being guided to an ever-greater extent by statistics of voting as well as by those of seats won; because we realise nowadays, as it was impossible to realise a couple of generations ago, when P.R. was born, that the major issues of politics are not determined in the House of Commons so much as in the constituencies. The advocates of P.R. still live within the fold of John Stuart Mill's political synthesis—before the Reform Bill, even, of 1867, and before the creation of the great "parliament outside Parliament," the tribunal of an active and enfranchised electorate.

On these grounds, there is no alternative but to reject the proposed System of P.R. Men and organisations which look to making the world safe and happy for democracy might better turn their attention to examining the conditions of research and policy-making within the Parties, rather than occupy their time in preserving an ancient and sterile faith.

The Alternative Vote.

The Alternative Vote is the method whereby, in a Single-Member constituency in which there is a three-or-more-cornered con-
test, voters mark their ballot-papers with Preference 1, 2, 3, etc., for the various candidates. Should no candidate receive an Absolute majority of First Preferences—i.e., half the total number of votes cast, plus one, there are transfers of the 2nd, 3rd, etc., votes of the least successful candidates to the top men, until one candidate is credited with an Absolute Majority. He is then declared elected.

The method is suggested as a safeguard against minority seats. It is true that the successful candidate would be able to boast of a mathematical majority as proof of his representative quality. But this mathematical majority would not be a majority in the English political sense of the word, i.e., a majority of positive supporters. The candidate would be returned partly by the votes given to him to keep other candidates, considered as less desirable, out; and this is no morally decent basis for a Representative Assembly. Moreover, as it is likely that within 15 years the Liberal Party will be electorally defunct, we shall then be troubled with fewer of such multiple-candidate contests. It would be the height of political unwisdom to introduce a new and vicious element into the constitution to counteract a temporary ill.

Institutional change is not less a matter of experience than of logic. Proportional representation, where it has been tried, has not notably improved the quality of legislative assemblies. It does not, on analysis, seem endowed with the remedial virtues inherent in its aesthetic appearance. Our Electoral System suffers from temporary dislocation rather than permanent error. What it needs is to be built upon the foundation of voters educated to a judgment made with full minds. It is in a change rather of social principles than of voting expedients that we shall find the results we require.

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**APPENDIX.**

**THE SINGLE TRANSFERABLE VOTE.**

The following account is taken almost word for word from "The Reform of Political Representation," by J. Fischer Williams, C.B.E., Hon. Treasurer of the Proportional Representation Society. (Murray, 1918.)

There are said to be some 300 systems of Proportional Representation in existence, and the ingenuity of inventors shows no sign of exhaustion. Here, an account is given only of the system known as that of the "Single Transferable Vote," as being that which has obtained more support in this country and the British Dominions than any of its rivals.

Practically all systems of Proportional Representation agree in that they require constituencies returning several—at least three—
members. And this for the simple reason that, when a constituency returns only one member, the representation cannot be divided—it naturally falls to a single party or body of electors. Therefore, the first step in the introduction of the system of the single transferable vote is the creation of constituencies returning several members. The number of members that each constituency should return would be governed either by the number of its electorate or its population—the constituencies themselves being, wherever possible, local government units. The new constituencies once created, redistribution in the future would be simplified enormously. As population shifted or increased, no alteration of boundaries would be needed, since the number of members allotted to a constituency could be altered.

The constituency returning several members already exists—in municipal boroughs we have wards returning three, six, and sometimes nine members, but we do not thereby secure a just representation. We either have the provincial system of one member retiring every year, or the metropolitan system of the “block vote.” The “block vote” is the negation of proportionality; it allows every elector as many votes as there are vacancies to be filled, but it forbids him to give more than one vote to any one candidate. Hence, if there are nine seats vacant, and three parties in the constituency—901 Reds, 900 Pinks and 899 Whites—and each party puts forward nine candidates, the nine Red candidates head the poll with 901 votes apiece, and not a single Pink or White candidate is returned.

The first obvious amendment to this block vote system is to limit each elector to one vote only, as in Japan. But this amendment by itself is open to serious objection, for it may do grave injustice as between the larger parties. Suppose that a body of 115 persons have to elect 5 representatives, and that there are in the body 70 Unionists, 25 Liberals and 20 Labour men. The just representation is 3 Unionists, 1 Liberal and 1 Labour man. Assume that there are 4 Unionist candidates, 3 Liberals and 1 Labour. Now, the Labour candidate must be elected if all the Labour voters vote for him, for he will then poll 20 votes, while all the Unionists and Liberals together can only muster 95 votes. But as, between the Unionists and Liberals, the number of candidates elected will depend on the skilful drilling of the electors, and the exact knowledge by the party manager of the party’s electoral strength. In the absence of organisation and exact foreknowledge we might easily get such a result as this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bonar Law (Unionist)</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henderson (Labour)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asquith (Liberal)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Cecil (Unionist)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbert Samuel (Liberal)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chamberlain (Unionist)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banbury (Unionist)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir Thomas Whittaker (Liberal)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 5 at the head of the poll include 2 Unionists and 2 Liberals, although the number of Unionist electors is about three times that
of the Liberal electors, and the system thus gives an almost uninter-
ligibly unjust result, the falsity of which is caused by the excessive
concentration of the Unionist votes on Mr. Bonar Law. If the votes
he did not need could have been passed on to Mr. Chamberlain, the
latter would have been brought up above Mr. Herbert Samuel and
even above Mr. Asquith, and elected. The problem of devising a
means of making the surplus votes of Mr. Bonar Law available for
the other candidates of the Unionist party—assuming always that
the electors who vote for Mr. Bonar Law would also wish to see the
other Unionists elected—is solved by allowing the elector to mark his
preferences by the figures 1, 2, 3, and so on, set against the names
of candidates on the ballot papers, and making the vote transferable
accordingly. If, at our imaginary election, Mr. Law’s 50 votes had
been thus transferable, and if all his fifty voters had marked one or
other of the remaining Unionist candidates with the figure 2, the
result might have been:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Law (50–30)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henderson</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chamberlain (5+15)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cecil (11+9)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asquith</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banbury (4+6)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbert Samuel</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir Thomas Whittaker</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

which is a just result—3 Unionists, 1 Labour and 1 Liberal candidate
being elected.

It is agreed on all hands that in making the transfer, regard must
be had to the rights of the candidates who are to be the transferencees.
In the illustration Mr. Law can spare 30 votes—that is, three-fifths
of his total, and these 30 votes are to go where the electors wish them
to go. The returning officer finds out where the electors wish them
to go by examining the ballot papers on which Mr. Law is marked 1,
and seeing what names are marked 2 thereon. In this case, let us
suppose that on 10 of Mr. Law’s 50 voting papers Sir F. Banbury is
marked 2, Lord Robert Cecil on 15, and Mr. Chamberlain on 25.
In justice, Sir F. Banbury claims 9 of the 10 on which he is marked 2,
that is, 6; Lord Robert Cecil, 9 of the 15 on which he is marked 2, that is,
9; Mr. Chamberlain, 9 of the 25 on which he is marked 2, that is, 15.
But if a true result is to be reached it is not enough to provide
for excessive concentration—excessive diffusion must always be
guarded against. Thus, the figures of our imaginary election might
have been:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henderson</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chamberlain</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cecil</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banbury</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asquith</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whittaker</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

in which case the Liberals will have lost their solitary representative
because they have unduly scattered their votes. It is simple enough
to find out whether the electors will consent to concentrate their votes on fewer candidates, and if they do consent to carry this through. The method adopted is to exclude from the poll the lowest candidate, in this case Whittaker, and make the votes which were otherwise wasted on him available (if the electors wish it) to put another candidate of the same party above Banbury, and give the Liberals their one seat.

In the case of the transfer of the votes of an excluded candidate no question of proportional transfer arises. The excluded candidate has no quota—all his votes are transferred to the candidates indicated as next preference by the electors.

The effect of the vote being made transferable is to ensure that all parties or divisions of opinion receive their fair share of representation. The elector entering the polling booth does not know whether his favourite will receive more support than he requires, or whether he will receive so little as to have no chance of election. Or, again, a party may have scattered its votes over too many candidates, and might (if the votes are not transferable) lose the representation which it would otherwise gain.

The transferable vote provides against both these contingencies. It enables the elector to indicate the candidates of his second and further choice to whom his vote can be transferred:

(i.) When his first choice has more votes than he requires; or
(ii.) When, after all excess votes have been transferred, the elector's first choice is at the bottom of the poll.

The secrecy of the ballot is preserved, and yet the electors are allowed to combine into groups of the necessary size or "quota." If any body of electors contains three such groups it will win three seats; if it contains two groups it will obtain two seats. And if it contains only one such group it obtains one member, and no combination of other parties, no bargain between headquarters, no skilful orders to electors can possibly prevent a number of electors in the constituency equal to the quota from obtaining the representative of their choice. This is the peculiar merit of the system. Let popular feeling run ever so strong, a compact minority of reasonable size, who have the courage and consistency to stand together, will get into the House of Commons as many representatives of their own choice as their numbers entitle them to have.
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