

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION, PREFERENTIAL VOTING, AND DIRECT PRIMARIES

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NEITHER "direct" nor any other kind of primaries can serve any useful purpose in our electoral system, according to my view, as soon as we make use of a ballot that permits the voter to express his will adequately. The ordinary old-fashioned ballot arbitrarily restricts the voter in the expression of his will to such an extent that its use in both primary and final election is less likely to make his real will effective than an adequate ballot would be at a single election.

What is an adequate ballot? It is one that lets the voter express his wishes fully enough for them to be carried out under any circumstances that may, as the counting of the ballots proceeds, be found to have arisen. If, for example, there are four candidates running for one office, and you prefer Smith but think he has scarcely any chance of winning, the adequate ballot lets you instruct the election officials to count you for Smith unless it is found that either Jones or Brown is to win, in which case the election officials are to count you for Brown as against Jones. And a ballot that makes it impossible for you thus to vote for the man you really prefer without danger of throwing your vote away, in other words, a non-preferential ballot, not only requires costly and elaborate primaries, but fails, even with primaries, to reveal the people's real will as well as the preferential ballot can reveal it at a single election.

All primaries, then, in my opinion, should be done away with, preferential ballots being used in all elections.

We now come to a distinction of the utmost importance in our political thinking. Voting, which is at the basis of our modern democratic governments, has two distinct objects to carry out, and they must not be confused with each other. One object of voting is to make *decisions*, for example as to which of several competing policies shall be carried out, or as to which of several candidates for an administrative position shall be selected. In carrying out this object of voting, what is wanted is a preferential ballot to be counted according to rules by which the preference of a majority of the voters for one of the competing policies or candidates over any of the others *taken singly* will be deduced correctly. A voting system that

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undertakes to do just this was introduced in Grand Junction several years ago under the leadership of Mr. James W. Bucklin. With slight modifications this system—the Grand Junction or Bucklin system, as it should be called—has been adopted, as many of you know, by Spokane, Denver, Cleveland, and other cities. The defects of the rules for counting the ballots under this system, which seem to me more than trivial, have been fully explained in publications of the Proportional Representation League. In spite of its imperfections, however, the system is serving a very useful purpose in introducing the preferential or adequate ballot. It is to be hoped that such of its defects as are not inherent will soon be eradicated from it and that eventually the whole system will give place to the infallible Nanson system explained in the Proportional Representation League's *Pamphlet No. 3*.

So much, then, for the first object of voting, which is to *make decisions*, and which therefore requires rules for counting the ballots that are suitable for deducing from them which policy or candidate, of the several in question, has the support of a majority as against any one of the competing policies or candidates taken singly.

We now come to the second object of voting. This is not to make decisions at all, but to *make up a body fit to make them on behalf of all the voters*. Now, though the principles of democracy require that the decisions made in such a body, like those made directly at the polls, should be made by majority voting, they by no means require that the body itself should be *made up* by majority voting. In making up such a body, as has been recognized universally—though until recently very confusedly—each member's right to a seat should rest on his being the choice, not of a majority of all the voters, but merely of such a part of them as is known as a constituency. It is this principle of the constituency, of course, that is at the basis of the district—in cities, the ward—system of representation. If a city is to elect nine councilmen, ran the reasoning of those who devised the district system, a ninth of the city has a right to elect one. This reasoning was essentially right, and always will be. It is only in the application of this principle that the district system is wrong, utterly wrong, and has hampered grievously, in more ways than we shall ever know, the flowering and the fruiting of democracy.

The blunder of the district or ward system, which will seem ridiculous to our children, consists in defining the constituency of each member by an arbitrary geographical line and then allowing a plurality—or a majority—of the voters within the designated area to elect the "representative." Such a method virtually disfranchises not only all who vote against the candidate elected, who frequently comprise from 40 per cent to 60 per cent of the whole electorate, but also—to a less degree—those who voted for that candidate in the final election not because they preferred him to all others

but only because they disliked him less than any of the others who had come through the primaries as officially recognized candidates.

In this way the system makes it certain that most of the ballots will be thrown away if marked for the voter's first choice, therefore discouraging the expression of his real will on the ballot, and makes it probable that a large percentage of them will be utterly ineffective *even as marked*.

How this crude ward system works out in the make-up of a council may be tested by the returns of any city election. I will illustrate with the figures of the election of sixteen councilmen by wards in Columbus, Ohio, on November 4. I take the figures of that city for no other reason than that I happened to be there the day after the election. In the election of the sixteen ward councilmen in Columbus the Democrats cast about 43 per cent of the votes, the Republicans about 40 per cent, the Socialists about 13 per cent, and others about 3 per cent. Now, it is easy to see that if the adherents of all these parties had happened to be distributed quite evenly throughout the sixteen wards, the Democrats would have elected their man in every one. If, on the other hand, the distribution had been less favorable to the Democrats, they would have won fewer seats. And if they had happened to be packed solidly into as few wards as possible, they would have filled less than half of them and could not have elected more than eight of the ward councilmen. Whether, therefore, the Democrats elected eight councilmen, or nine, or ten, or eleven, or twelve, or thirteen, or fourteen, or fifteen, or sixteen, depended on nobody's opinion or will or vote but only on blind chance—how the Democrats happened to be distributed geographically throughout the city—unless it depended on something still worse, the deliberate injustice known as gerrymandering.

To get rid of this defect it is necessary only to substitute for the arbitrary geographical constituency of the ward system a constituency defined as *enough voters anywhere in the city, unanimous in the support of a candidate, to deserve to send him in*. In other words it is necessary only to define the constituency in terms of *unanimity of will* instead of in those of *proximity of home*.

The result of making this simple but extremely important change is commonly called "proportional representation." A name better from some points of view, notably from that of municipal government, would be unanimous-constituency, or true, representation.

The simplest unanimous-constituency or proportional system for electing a representative body—say a city council of nine—is arrived at by providing merely that the members shall be elected at large, that no voter shall vote for more than one, and that the nine candidates who receive most votes shall be elected. This is the system actually used for the election of the Japanese House of Representatives, Japan having endured

only from 1889, the year of her constitution, until 1900 the district system that still hinders political and social progress in Canada and the United States.

Though the constituencies that elect members under this system are all unanimous, they may be very unequal in size; the candidate who receives the most votes may receive two or three times as many as the weakest one of the nine elected. This possibility naturally leads groups of voters to estimate carefully how many candidates they can elect by dividing their strength, as nearly equally as possible, among several. And to carry out such a program as this successfully it becomes necessary for the ordinary voter to cast his vote for one or another of his group's candidates according to advice from the group's headquarters. In spite of these obvious drawbacks this Japanese system is far better than the district system and should be supported for the election of representative bodies in cases where the obstacles in the way of the adoption of the still better systems I shall now describe are really insuperable.

What is it that the Japanese system lacks? Why, simply the adequate or preferential ballot that is found so useful in majority voting, the ballot that permits the voter to express his will as fully as he wants to, so that it can be carried out in the count under almost any circumstances that may be found to have arisen.

Perhaps the simplest system of unanimous-constituency representation in which a sort of preferential ballot is used is that explained in the American Proportional Representation League's *Pamphlet No. 3*. Its main features are these. Candidates are nominated—by petition, of course—in lists. The several lists of candidates thus nominated are printed on the ballot under the headings, List 1, List 2, etc., no party names or emblems being necessary or desirable. You vote such a ballot by marking a cross against one name on one list. Such a cross means that your vote is to count one towards determining how many councilmen the supporters of that list are to elect and that it is also to help up towards the top of that list the particular candidate marked. So if List 1, for example, gets about three ninths of the total vote cast for councilmen, it will be given three seats; and the particular candidates to receive those seats will be the three on the list who got the most votes individually. This ballot is really a preferential ballot, you see, though scarcely ever called by that name; for though he marks only one candidate, the voter thereby expresses also the desire to give his vote, if it cannot help the candidate marked, to such other candidate on the same list as it can help.

With various modifications this list system is in use for the election of the parliaments of Belgium, Sweden, and Finland, for that of the councils of about half the cantons of Switzerland, and for that of town councils in

Sweden, Switzerland and elsewhere. It is an admirable system, and may be counted on to result, if properly applied, in nearly true representation.

Yet even this system has its defects. It does not give the individual voter perfect freedom; and any limitation whatever of the voter's freedom to express his real preferences without danger of throwing his vote away must vitiate, at least to some slight degree, the fountain head of democracy.

Fortunately, a unanimous-contituency or proportional system that gives each voter perfect freedom has been not only devised but tested on a large scale and proved to be ideal. This system, sometimes called the Single Transferable Vote but best called, from the name of its originator, the Hare system, is in use for the election of the parliament of Tasmania and the Senate of South Africa, and has been incorporated in the Home Rule bill for the election of both the Senate and the House of Ireland.

The details of this system I need not explain at this time: they can be read in the American P. R. League's *Pamphlet No. 2*. Suffice it now to say that the names of the candidates are arranged on the ballot alphabetically or in any other fair order, without party names or emblems, and that the voter indicates his personal preferences, as many or as few as he chooses, by the numerals 1, 2, 3, etc., against the names. The ballots are then counted according to rules that result in the building up of the desired number of constituencies—say nine—approximately equal in size and each unanimous, under the actual circumstances existing, in the desire to elect the member whom it does elect.

Here at last you have a system of representation so excellent that a municipal or other government built upon it may reasonably be expected to be noticeably different and better than one sustained by the same voters on any other foundation. For this system, indeed, the name proportional representation is not good enough. That name suggests merely a just distribution of the seats of the representative body among the several political parties, but the Hare system does far more than that. Permitting the individual voter, as it does, to disregard, or to regard, party lines or any other lines to any extent that he pleases, the Hare system results in the building up of the constituencies on lines not crude, rigid, and often—in city affairs—meaningless like those designated by the words Republican and Democrat, but as varied and untraceable and unnameable as those that separate the list of one voter's real preferences for the council from that of another voter's. In short, the only name that does this system justice is *true representation*.

As no one who takes the trouble to understand the Hare system denies that it insures true representation, and as there is unquestioned official testimony from Tasmania and South Africa that the voting of the Hare ballot presents no difficulties even to uneducated voters, there would seem

to be no question about the desirability of adopting the system for the election of our city councils under either the Federal Plan or the City Manager Plan, unless—astonishing possibility!—the true representation of the voters in the council under those plans be considered *undesirable*. It seems strange that this point should have to be discussed at all; but it has to be, for there are some persons who will gravely tell you that the true representation of the voters of a city, in the body whose function is to make decisions and spend money on behalf of all, is highly objectionable.

Consider, first, *justice*. It is not just to make the body whose business it is to spend the money of all and to make decisions affecting the welfare of all anything but truly representative of all. Voting for all the commissioners at large with the provision that each voter may cast a *separate vote for each one of them* is clearly unjust to all voters who do not happen to belong to the largest group in the city, since with that system the one largest group can elect all the commissioners.

When a man says that he does not see this injustice, you may know that he expects *his* group to be the fortunate one that will elect all the commissioners, and that he is so lacking in the finer spirit of democracy as to see no harm in substituting, in the deliberative body, the will of *his* group for the will of all.

Consider, next, *wisdom*. If all except the one largest group in the city are excluded from representation on the council or commission, as is usually the case with the "block-vote" we have just considered, it is quite as likely that the wisest or the most public-spirited minority will be deprived of representation thereby as that the most foolish or the most selfish will be. Unless, indeed, we are to abandon democracy frankly once for all, the wisdom wanted in the deliberative body of the city is not the wisdom of a single group, even though that group may constitute a majority and though it may be *your* group or *my* group—and therefore, of course, the one sane and public-spirited group that ought to govern the city: what is wanted, if we are to have democracy, is the composite wisdom of the whole city. Why should we not give a fair trial, for a change, to real municipal democracy, at last made articulate by true representation and made efficient by the putting of the chief administrative officials on a professional basis?

Think of *continuity*. With the ward system the personnel of the council may be changed greatly by the change of a few votes in a few of the closest wards. With the "block-vote" at large it is not unlikely that the change of a small percentage of the votes may turn all the commissioners out at once. Under the Hare system, on the other hand, each councilman is sure of his seat so long as there is one full constituency in the city that wants him there. The complexion of the council changes under the Hare system, in other words, only as fast as the interests and opinions of

the community change or as councilmen are found to be other than they were thought to be when formerly elected.

Political apathy. Under the ward system political apathy is fostered in a ward where one party or faction is almost sure to win with many votes to spare. For in such a ward a voter of the leading party knows that his vote will probably have no effect on the result. And a voter of any other party knows, in respect to his vote, exactly the same thing. Under the "block-vote" the same principle applies. Systems which cause thousands of votes to be thus "thrown away" at every election breed apathy, of course, among large classes of voters. The cure for political apathy is not continual exhortation—"Do your duty as a citizen and go to the polls"—but *making each ballot count one towards the make-up of the council even when the voter has dared to record on it his real will.*

And what is to be said in regard to *corruption*? To elect all five commissioners corruptly with the "block-vote" it is necessary to corrupt only enough voters to turn the scale in the city. To elect one of nine councilmen corruptly under the ward system it is necessary to corrupt only the few voters necessary to turn the scale in a close ward. To elect one of nine corruptly under the Hare system it is necessary to corrupt approximately a ninth of all the votes of the city.

The objections made to the application of proportional representation in general, or of the Hare ballot in particular, to the election of our councils under either the Federal or the City Manager Plan are due in some cases to a misunderstanding of proportional representation itself, in others to a distorted conception, utterly at variance with experience, of how the system would work out in practice. All these objections can be met satisfactorily if only one has the requisite amount of time. As my time is about up, I can only mention some of these objections and meet each as well as I can in a single sentence.

It is objected that the "block-vote" is the best for a city council because a city council "has no important legislative duties, anyway." The answer is that a city council has constantly to choose between conflicting proposals, just as a state legislative has to, the difference between the two being not in the nature, but only in the scope, of their functions.

It is objected that we want "responsible party government." The answer is that responsible *representative* government is still better.

It is objected that the council will be "full of cranks." Answer: Just as full as the city is.

It is objected that the Hare ballot is hard to vote. Answer: The highest officials where it is used say flatly, in official publications, that it is not.

It is objected that the votes are hard to count. Answer: The system eliminates primaries; and the result of the counting lasts long after the trifling amount of extra work involved in the counting is forgotten.

It is objected that "what we want is the Initiative and Referendum." Answer: By all means; but it will do no harm to make the council so truly representative that the Initiative and Referendum will seldom be needed.

It is objected that what we want for city government is "not to divide the voters according to their differences, as proportional representation does, but to elect a group of good councilmen all together on the basis of what the good citizens have in common." Answer: Plausible as this objection sounds, it is wholly fallacious: it is the "block-vote" that divides the voters at the polls into two or more camps, whereas the Hare system of proportional representation leaves all dividing to be done in the council itself, after all views and interests have had a fair hearing, doing nothing whatever at the polls but *condensing* the voters into a small group comprising the true leaders of them all.

As soon as true representation is understood in this country, these supposed objections will disappear and true representation will be adopted for our city councils and other deliberative bodies. And then, opening the way, as it will, for all other reforms to come as fast as the people are ready for them, true representation will prove itself to be the indispensable basis of the mechanism of democracy. In reference to the Hare system John Stuart Mill wrote in his *Autobiography*: "I can understand that persons, otherwise intelligent, should, for want of sufficient examination, be repelled from Mr. Hare's plan by what they think the complex nature of its machinery. But any one who does not feel the want which the scheme is intended to supply, any one who throws it over as a mere intellectual subtlety or crotchet, tending to no valuable purpose and unworthy the attention of practical men, may be pronounced an incompetent statesman, unequal to the politics of the future." With that thought I close: are we, is the National Municipal League, "equal to the politics of the future?"