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Proportional Voting System Approved By Labor Council

Allied Trades Association Favors Electoral Reform. Interesting Address by Mr. R. H. Hooper at Regular Meeting. Growing Interest in the Proposal of Re-Electing Representatives.

Evidence of the growing interest in electoral reform in Ottawa was afforded last night when the Allied Trades and Labor Association at the first of a new series of educational meetings heard an address on Proportional Representation, and expressed its pronounced sympathy with the idea.

The speaker was Mr. R. H. Hooper, who gave a clear and comprehensive address on the subject, outlining the aims of the system, giving examples of the anomalies of the present method and explaining the advantages of the newer form of electing public representatives.

Mr. Hooper showed how under the electoral method now in vogue a very large proportion of the electors were disfranchised through their votes being ineffective, and the reason why, under proportional representation, every shade of opinion could make its voice heard. "Two big things are accomplished by the newer system," he said, quoting no less an authority than Earl Grey, "first, to secure the real enfranchisement of the elector; and secondly, the emancipation of the elector."

Although the association did not pass any resolution on the matter, an intelligent interest was shown, and it was manifest that a majority were convinced of its advantages over the system now in operation. At a future meeting a model election under Proportional Representation rules will be carried out.

Mr. Hooper spoke as follows:—
I appreciate very much having this opportunity of discussing the important question of electoral reform. The first question which naturally arises is whether our present system of election, parliamentary and municipal. Edmund Burke once said:—"The virtue, the spirit, the essence of the House of Commons consists in its being the express image of the nation."
How do our present methods, the single-method and "block" vote systems of election assist us in focussing the opinions of the electorate into a truly representative council such as Burke defines? I will endeavor to show, by arguments gathered from various authorities, that they are defective in the extreme.

Frequently a minority of the electors controls the policy of the country by electing a majority of the House and again, frequently a very considerable minority gets no representation at all—I will give instances in support of this.
Gladstone Loses to Minority.
In 1886, Gladstone was hurled from power—by a minority of the electors. Though he had a majority of 55,000 in the country, yet his opponents had a majority of 104 in the House, and as a result the Home Rule

Bill was passed. Birmingham has about 70,000 electors—40,000 Unionists, 20,000 Liberals and 10,000 Labor. She is entitled to seven members, one for every 10,000 voters. Under the present system the Unionists elect the whole seven.

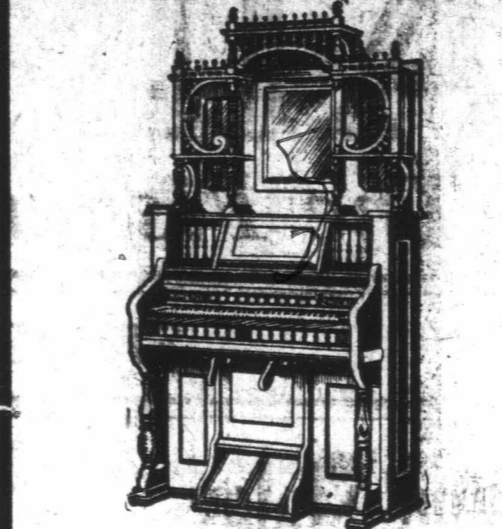
This is the point: were it not for the presence of the 30,000 Liberal and Labor voters, the city would only have four members, who would be Unionists. The presence of the 30,000 Liberal and Labor voters adds three seats to their opponents.

Establish the idea in your minds that the just representation of the 70,000 electors of Birmingham is not by 7 Unionist members, but by 4 Unionist, 2 Liberal and 1 Labor member and you will at once realize the need for reform.

The System in Ottawa.
Now we will consider the "block" system, which is used in Ottawa to elect the board of control. The block vote allows every elector to give one vote each to as many candidates as there are seats to be filled.
"Suppose a city to be divided on some important question into three parties very nearly equal in strength; and that there are 9 seats vacant. Now if each elector votes his full party 'ticket,' that party which has the slightest majority over each of the others will elect its whole 9 candidates, and naturally the others elect none, although they may have polled nearly two-thirds of the total vote."

Wasteful Expenditure.
Then at the next election a mere handful of votes change over with the result that that party is completely wiped out and a new board is elected, which is practically what happened in the London County Council elections in 1907. This naturally leads to an extremely wasteful expenditure of public money.

The London County Council may



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not have been justified in establishing a steamboat service, but nothing could be more wasteful than that one council should establish such a service at great cost, and that its successor should immediately reverse that policy.

A fully representative council would not display such violent alteration of policy, and it is of the greatest importance that public money should only be spent on those objects deliberately and carefully chosen by a council on which all interests are fully represented.

Then, in the case of 9 seats, the list put forward by each party will be almost sure to contain the names of some men who have been pressed to stand to make up the list, or who are little suited to the duties of office. Since with the present method of election the complete list of one party can be elected to the exclusion of their opponents, it often happens that the personnel of the council as a whole is not such as to arouse the confidence and respect of the citizens.

Removal of Evils.
Can these unfair, unjust and bungling systems be improved upon? Can every vote cast by an elector be made effective in assisting to elect some man of his choice? Can every party of the people be represented in proportion to its voting strength?

I claim that these evils, and others too, can be removed by the adoption of the single transferable vote system for electing representatives.

Works Out in Belgium.
There is ample evidence from Belgium and other countries to prove that:

It reproduces the opinions of electors in parliament, city councils and other deliberative bodies in their true proportion.

It secures that the majority of electors shall rule and all considerable minorities shall be heard.

It gives representatives greater freedom from the financial and other pressure of small sections of constituents.

It ensures to parties representation by their ablest and most trusted members.

Formation of Districts.
By this system the present single and double-member constituencies and wards are done away with, and in their place districts are formed which will elect from three to ten members each—the more the better.

This means that we will no longer have one member of parliament representing a geographical constituency in which many men of opposite views will happen to live together—instead of this, each member in parliament will represent a unanimous constituency in which men think and will together; and the value will cease to depend upon whether he lives on one side or another of a geographical line.

No system for the representation of minorities is possible without making this change.

"Gerrymandering."
One serious objection to the single-member constituency is the strong temptation it offers of "gerrymandering," that is, arranging the boundaries of a constituency in such a way as to give one side an unfair advantage.

The single transferable vote system as I will presently show, would enable the 70,000 electors of Birmingham to group themselves into 7 sections of practically equal size, each section returning one member: so that there would then be 4 Unionist groups, 2 Liberal and 1 Labor group, each returning one member.

One Vote Only.
Under the system each elector has one vote and only one, but that single vote is transferable.

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(Continued on 3rd page.)

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