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## PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION.

### Part 1—The Need for a New Method of Voting.

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.” If Burke was right—and few political thinkers have disagreed with him in this—then a brief examination of the conditions under which we elect our national Parliament will make clear the pressing need for reform.

For the purpose of ascertaining the people’s will we have a method of election known as the “single-member constituency,” under which the country is divided up into a number of constituencies varying very greatly in population, and each constituency (with the one exception of the City of Ottawa) elects one representative to Parliament.

There are usually two or three questions of importance before the country at every general election. The citizens within one of these small areas may hold very different views on these questions; but nevertheless, the theory is that one man can speak on all questions for all the citizens who happen to live within one of these areas. That one man is he who polls the largest number of votes.

This simple statement shows how crude is our system of election. In addition to being crude, it frequently results in serious injustices and it limits very materially the freedom of electors, of candidates and of members of Parliament.

### Minorities are Disfranchised.

Frequently minorities obtain no representation at all and are as completely disfranchised as if their names had been struck off the voters’ lists altogether. The two examples following will suffice to prove the truth of this statement:

\*Federal Election, 1904, Nova Scotia:—

| Party.            | Votes. | Seats. |
|-------------------|--------|--------|
| Conservative..... | 46,131 | 0      |
| Liberal.....      | 56,526 | 18     |

\*Federal Election, 1911, British Columbia:—

| Party.            | Votes. | Seats. |
|-------------------|--------|--------|
| Conservative..... | 25,622 | 7      |
| Liberal.....      | 16,350 | 0      |

### Minorities are Penalized.

Minorities may not only be disfranchised, they are often actually penalized. As an illustration, take the City of Toronto

—although any other large city might do equally well. In 1911, Toronto polled some 50,000 votes. The city is divided up into five single-member constituencies (approximately one member to each 10,000 voters), and the Conservatives, being in the majority in each of these constituencies, elected all five members. But considerably more than one-fifth of the votes polled were Liberal votes. Now, if it were not for the presence of those Liberal voters in Toronto, the city would only be entitled to four (possibly only three) members. The presence, therefore, of the Liberals in Toronto added **at least one seat to their opponents**. From this point of view it would be better for the Liberal party as a whole if the liberals in Toronto were blotted out.

### Injustice to Majorities.

On the other hand there are occasions when the party polling the least number of votes have elected a majority of the representatives; as the following examples, taken at random, will demonstrate:

\*Federal Election, 1900, Ontario.

| Liberal.      |       | Conservative. |       |
|---------------|-------|---------------|-------|
| Votes Polled. | Seats | Votes polled  | Seats |
| 212,595       | 34    | 212,413       | 55    |
| Acclamations  | 2     | Acclamations  | 1     |

\*Federal Election, 1896, all Canada.

| Conservative  |       | Liberal      |       |
|---------------|-------|--------------|-------|
| Votes polled. | Seats | Votes polled | Seats |
| 416,640       | 87    | 405,506      | 117   |
| Acclamations  | 1     | Acclamations | 1     |

All these injustices are due to the fact that in a single-member constituency the **whole of the representation** must of necessity be awarded to a **majority of the electors**, whether that majority is large or small. It directly follows then, that the election results depend, not upon the actual strength of political parties but upon the manner in which that strength is distributed over the country.

### Gerrymandering and Corruption.

This fact, of course, is responsible for the election trickery

\*Figures obtained from “Resume of General Elections” (Official) by the Clerk of the Crown in Chancery.