

*Proportional Representation*

I might also quote from the *Calgary Herald*, which extended greetings to the city of Edmonton in these terms:

By a decided majority Edmonton has voted for the proportional representation system of conducting municipal election. Edmonton is the last of the cities of first class importance in the West to decide to employ that system. Calgary's experience with it has been so satisfactory that we are in no doubt of the success of it in Edmonton and we can indeed congratulate our northern neighbour on joining the cities that have adopted the system which best reproduces the political preferences of the voters.

Next, I would refer to the last British elections. I do not wish to burden the House with all the figures that I have here, but I may give some examples that go to show the extraordinary unfairness of the results in Great Britain last year. The Conservative party won 296 seats. In proportion to its voting strength it should have won only 208. The labour and co-operative forces won 138; they were entitled to 164. The Liberals won 54, although they were entitled to 101; while the National Liberals, who won 51, were entitled to 61. Independents and others won 8 seats, but they were entitled to 13. In this connection, let me quote from the late Prime Minister of Great Britain, Mr. Lloyd George:

The result of the elections has fully justified those who maintained that no party standing alone could hope to secure the measure of public support which will guarantee stable government. It is true that the Conservatives have succeeded in obtaining the return of a majority of the members to the new parliament, but the most notable feature of the elections is the return of a decisive majority of members by a very definite minority of electors.

I observe that the Prime Minister, in returning thanks to the nation, claims that he has received a vote of confidence from the people of this country. Out of a total of 15,000,000 his candidates secured fewer than 3,000,000 votes. Making full allowances for uncontested seats, this figure cannot be stretched out to a height much above 6,000,000. That means that only two-fifths of the electorate voted confidence in the administration, while three-fifths voted confidence in other leaders of groups. A minority of 3,000,000 in the national referendum could hardly be claimed as a vote of confidence.

I do not wish to quote all that Mr. Lloyd George says, but towards the end of this extract, I read:

Of one thing I am, however, certain. That is that a minority administration in 1922 and onward will help to discredit the government with certain classes of the community. A minority administration will weaken the respect of other classes for representative government, and between them, an atmosphere will be created inimical to the moral authority of all government in this country.

I therefore earnestly trust that in the interest of stability and good government, which must be based on the good will and co-operation of the community as a whole, this Parliament will apply its mind seriously to finding some means of preventing a repetition, either in one direction or the other, of this freak of representative government.

[Mr. Good.]

Next, I shall refer very briefly to the second trial of proportional representation in the city of Winnipeg last summer. I have here an article that appeared in the August 2 issue of *Canadian Finance*, a magazine which is not especially given to propagating the Farmers' platform, or the Progressive policy. In the course of this article the writer states:

There are a number of general criticisms against P. R. which should be either admitted or denied by supporters of P. R. They include the following:

- (1) P. R. is too complicated. People will refrain from voting under it.
- (2) There will be a heavy percentage of spoilt ballots under it.
- (3) The counting takes too long.
- (4) The voter cannot understand what happens to his vote.
- (5) P. R. breaks up the party system and leads to group government.
- (6) It is not a perfect system.
- (7) It does away with government by the majority or tends to create governments with small majorities.

This article goes on to examine each of these criticisms against proportional representation. Let me read one or two of its answers to these criticisms:

The reply to the statement that people will refrain from voting under P. R. because it is so complicated is effectively given by the recent Winnipeg elections, when 45,000 persons voted out of a total of 61,736 persons entitled to vote, a higher percentage than was usual under the old system, and this despite the fact that the ballot paper contained 43 names and was 22 inches long. The next objection regarding large numbers of spoilt ballots is also shattered by actual facts. In the recent election at Winnipeg spoilt ballots were less than 2 per cent of the total votes, a percentage which compares favourably with the results obtained under the old system. The assertion that P. R. leads to group government is without foundation. Ontario has group government, but they do not have P. R. there. The Dominion government is without a majority in the House—

This, of course, was written last summer—

—but they have no P. R. elections under the Dominion Elections Act. The Farmer party in Manitoba is a minority party at the present time, mainly as a result of the vote in the rural districts, where P. R. is not in force.

I do not wish to weary the House with any further quoting of these answers, but I submit that the various criticisms that have been levelled against proportional representation can all be, and in my judgment, have been, very effectively answered. Of course, one must admit very frankly that it might break down in operation if those who are responsible for counting the ballots do not know 4 p.m. how to count them, or if the voters do not take the trouble to read the instructions and to vote according to those instructions. But our experience has shown that these difficulties are no more under this system than the same difficulties under the present system.