

# Proportional Representation

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(Continued from last issue.)

"In 1899" says Count Goblet d'Alviella, "Belgium was on the eve of a revolution—a revolution which was only avoided by the immediate and complete introduction of proportional representation into parliamentary elections." It is incorporated in the Parliament of Ireland Act and was practically the only clause, in this contentious bill, to receive the unanimous approval of the House of Commons.

As it went to the House of Lords the clause provided for the election of the Senate of Ireland by the single transferable vote, and all constituencies electing three or more members for the House of Commons must likewise use the method. There were four Irish constituencies, each electing three or four members, namely Dublin, Belfast, Cork and Dublin County. The house of Lords amended the Home Rule bill, so as to redistribute every constituency so that three or more members would be elected thus making the application of proportional representation general throughout Ireland.

## Ashtabula Election.

I must not overlook the fact that delegates to this Convention are especially interested in municipal government. The amendment to the charter of Greater Sydney has been mentioned. Ashtabula, Ohio, with a population of about 25,000 elected its council by the Hare system of proportional representation on November 2, 1915.

There are seven members of the council. Candidates get their names on the ballot by filing a petition signed by 2 per cent. of the voters. The ballot has no party marks, and the names are rotated. 2,972 valid ballots were cast, 362 being either blank or invalid. 2,972 divided by 8, there being 7 to be elected gives a quotient of 371 4-8. The next higher whole number 372 being the "quota".

The lines of division had little to do with national parties except that there was a Socialist group. There was first the question of local representation. The harbor district is some distance from the city proper, and under the old ward plan had always been represented by one member of the council.

The city has a large foreign element, the chief groups being the Irish, Italians, Swedes and Finns. The voters were divided sharply on the liquor issue. Then there was the question of adequate representation of the business men. There were fourteen candidates. Two were Swedes, two Finns, one Irish, one Italian and eight classed in the accounts of the election which have read as "plain Americans". There were seven business men, one clerk and paymaster, one saloon-keeper one baggageman one railway engineer, one attorney, one newspaperman, and one physician. The harbor district had three candidates. Seven members were members of the present council. Although the election officials were inexperienced and without proper office equipment, the transfer and tabulation of the vote was accomplished in about three hours and at no time were the officials in serious doubt as to the procedure.

The first eight candidates arranged in the order of their first-choice votes were: McClure 392, Hogan 322, McCune 209, Gudmundson 292, Earlywine 289, Rinto 237, Briggs 211, Corrado 196. Only McClure (a young man never before in politics) had a quota and he had twenty votes to spare, the transfer of which elected no one. The count proceeded by dropping the low man and distributing his votes to the remaining candidate. By this process Hogan and McCune were given a quota. The remainder of the votes were distributed so that the last four members were chosen by the gradual elimination of the low men. In this process Briggs moved up from seventh to sixth place, and Corrado, representing the Italians, replaced Rinto the attorney who afterwards declared himself in favor of the Hare plan. Corrado had been a member of the city council for many years. He is a saloon keeper and represents the liquor interests as well as the Italian vote. Rinto is not well known except in his own section. His election over Corrado would have improved the quality of the council, but would have made it less representative. With one exception the seven Candidates standing highest on first-choice votes were elected four being members of the old council.

McClure is manager of a department in a large store. Hogan is a leading physician. McCune is a greenhouse man, Gudmundson is assistant cashier in a bank in the harbor district. Earlywine is Clerk and paymaster of a large ore company. Briggs is a newspaper man and Corrado a saloonkeeper.

An Ashtabula newspaper at first opposed, said on the day following the election: "The drys and wets are represented. The Catholics and Protestants, the business, professional and labouring men, the Republicans, Democrats and Socialists, the English and Italians and Swedes, all are represented. It would be hard to select a more representative council in any other way." The other paper said: "It is generally conceded that it has given Ashtabula a broadly representative Council, probably the most representative body in the city's history, and that is, the real aim of the Hare system."

It is thought that with this method the last serious objection to the city manager plan disappears as with this method a council is elected which may properly be allowed to choose a city manager—a council truly representative, whose members stand for policies and the fundamental interests of the Community rather than for party organizations. My information about this interesting election is gathered from Ashtabula newspapers and from a pamphlet issued by the American Proportional Representation League "The Ashtabula Plan—The Latest Step in Municipal Organization," by Professor Augustus R. Hatton, of Cleveland, an ardent exponent of the Hare system.

The question is often asked, "What about by-elections?" In Tasmania whenever a vacancy occurs the whole constituency is polled but this is likely to give the local majority a seat at the expense of the local minority even if the vacancy has occurred in the ranks of the minority.

J. Fischer Williams in his book, "Proportional Representation and British Politics" writes: "Some modification is therefore necessary in the case of by-elections. The following solution is proposed. Each of the large constituencies must be sub-divided into wards; each member on his election and in the order of election will choose one ward, which will be his own in this special sense that if owing to his death or retirement, a by-election is necessary, it will be held in and for that ward alone. Members may be expected to choose the ward in which their own support is strongest. The value of the by-election as a measure of the drift of popular feeling can be retained by making it necessary for the returning officer to count separately at the general election the votes recorded in each ward and publish the figures. This would show what was the party strength at the general election in the ward. In the event of a by-election, the drift of public feeling could then be gauged by comparing the figures at that election with those of the general election. Further, the publication of the figures in each ward at the general election would assist members in their choice of a ward. As the number of members in the House of Commons would remain the same as at present a ward would be about the size of one of the existing constituencies." The following are the sections in the Ashtabula Charter relating to vacancies:

Section 6.—Any vacancy in the Council shall be filled for the unexpired term by the appointment, by the remaining members, of any qualified citizen whose appointment is requested by a petition signed by not less than three-fourths of the electors who signed the nominating petition of the member whose place is to be filled. If no such petition is received within thirty days after the vacancy occurred, an appointment may be made to fill the vacancy by the affirmative vote of at least four of the remaining members.

Alternative Vacancy Provisions, proposed by C. G. Hoag, General Secretary, of the American P. R. League.

Wherever it is thought best to supplant the simple method of filling vacancies adopted by Ashtabula by a method slightly less simple which carries out the proportional principle with full consistency, the following vacancy provisions may be adopted:

Section A.—Any vacancy (or vacancies) in the Council occurring more than thirty days before the end of the regular term shall be filled by the person (or persons),