

Alberta Section

This Section of The Guide is conducted officially for the United Farmers of Alberta by P. P. Woodbridge, Secretary, Calgary, Alberta.

U.F.A. Circular No. 12

Proportional Representation

Calgary, Alberta, October 26, 1913.—
To the officers and members of.....
Union No.....

Gentlemen:—This circular is devoted by request to an attempt to explain as briefly as possible the principles involved in proportional representation. The U.F.A. has always been a strong advocate for all progressive measures and proportional representation is one of the most progressive of them all. Several articles have already appeared in The Guide, going into the matter in detail. The object of this circular is not so much to go into details of the various systems, as to give you in its simplest form an explanation of the Hare system or Single Transferable Vote. I may say that arrangements are being made at the present time for a well known lecturer to deliver an address on this subject at our next convention, and an amendment to our constitution is already on our books, which, if passed, will provide for the election of our officers on this system. It is therefore hoped that our unions will each of them discuss this circular so that their delegates to the convention will be instructed somewhat as to the subject on which they will be asked to vote at the time this amendment is submitted.

The Object

The object of proportional representation is to reproduce the opinions of the electors in both Parliament and other public bodies in their true proportions. Our present system of dividing any area in which an election is to take place, into constituencies by an arbitrary geographical line, allows a small majority of the voters within such an area to elect a so-called representative. Such a method virtually disfranchises all those who happen to vote for the candidate or candidates who fail to be elected by possibly only a few votes. It means that from 40 to 60 per cent. of the whole electorate will be disfranchised at least, and in the case of three or four candidates representing different parties, the percentage of the electorate who will not be represented in any way whatsoever is even greater.

There is also another evil that is found to a less degree, namely, that it will disfranchise those electors who vote for a candidate in the final election, not because they prefer that candidate to anyone else, but only because they dislike him less than any of the others, who have come through the primaries as officially recognized candidates. This misrepresentation of the people, for that is all that you can call it, is absolutely unnecessary and is impossible under the Hare, or Single Transferable Vote system. The object, then, of proportional representation is the representation of all classes of people on elected bodies in proportion to their strength.

How It Can Be Obtained

Practical experience in many countries has already shown that the above very desirable result can be obtained through the Hare system.

What It Means

The Hare or Single Transferable Vote system requires:

- (1) That all constituencies shall be large enough to return several members each.
- (2) That each elector in such constituencies shall have only one vote.
- (3) That this vote shall in certain contingencies be transferable, the transfer being controlled by the elector himself.

It means that every vote cast is used and not wasted, as happens to so many under the present system. This waste occurs in two ways: as has already been shown, all electors who vote for the losing candidates are virtually disfranchised and their votes wasted, having no direct representation. One will also find that on occasions a very popular man will poll many more votes than is required to elect him, thus (in a case where more than one representative is to be elected) taking votes from another

man who would have received those surplus votes had the voters known the first man already had enough to ensure election.

The Hare system provides that in such a case those surplus votes will be credited to the next popular man. All voters mark their ballots with first choice, second choice and so on till all candidates are marked. A candidate to be elected must poll his full proportion of the total vote in accordance with the number of offices vacant. Having obtained his necessary proportion or quota, as it is called, the candidate is declared elected and any surplus votes he may have are credited to the man marked second choice on the ballot. Provision is also made for the transferring of votes from men at the bottom of the list who cannot be elected to the second choice on their ballots until the number of candidates is reduced to the number of offices vacant when the candidates are declared elected, every vote having been used and the total votes for each candidate must represent the true feeling of the electors in regard to the policy or desirability of the candidates.

A Practical Example

Equally pointed examples could be found in practically any election which takes place in Canada today, even in past elections of our own U.F.A., but to save time the following example of what happened in New Jersey in 1912 may be quoted, where 12 representatives were to be elected:—

In round figures the situation was: total vote, 335,000; Democratic, 168,000; Republican, 96,000; Progressive, 71,000; percentage of Democratic vote, 50; of Republican, 29; of Progressive, 21. Voters virtually disfranchised, that is, whose ballots did not have the slightest effect upon the make-up of the delegation, Democrats, 13,000; Republicans, 82,000; Progressive, 71,000; total virtually disfranchised nearly 50 per cent. of the whole number. According to the ballots as actually marked, there should have been elected 6 Democrats, 3 Republicans and 3 Progressives; according to the rules of the present electoral system there were declared elected 11 Democrats, 1 Republican, no Progressive.

The foregoing details will enable you to gather some idea of the principle involved, also some idea of how it works out in practice. A number of questions will, however, undoubtedly occur to you, and it might be well to anticipate these as far as possible.

Question No. 1.—Probably the first that would occur to you is that the bunching together of several constituencies into one large one would permit of the bunching together of the representatives.

In answer to this, if you will consider the make-up of our present board of directors, you will find that at the present time your board of directors consists of 14 representatives and of these 6 are grouped right on the 200 mile stretch of railway between Edmonton and Calgary, the seventh is a few miles east of Red Deer, the central point on the line, and the eighth is within 30 miles of Calgary East. This is really fairly effective "bunching" and was done under the old constituency system. Of the other six directors, four of them are on a line of about the same length as the Calgary-Edmonton line in the South of the province, leaving practically the entire Eastern portion and central portion of the province without a single residential representative. No system could provide for a much more uneven distribution of the directors than the one we have already.

Question No. 2.—Would not the new system mean that the constituencies at present represented on the board might fail to be represented in the future?

That is not at all likely to happen. In any case it is supposed that what is required on the board of directors of the U.F.A. is not so much the physical embodiment of a certain geographical area as the best brains which the organization is capable of producing, irrespective of where those brains come from. While on this question it might be pointed out that if the province must be divided into constituencies the time is come when a revision of the present divisions must be made. A redistribution bill will shortly be passed by the Dominion House, in any case, which would result in the board of the U.F.A., if based on the same principle of one director for each federal constituency, becoming too clumsy, and would mean a large additional drain on the funds of the association, which we are not in a position to meet. A rough glance into the statistics available from the last convention returns goes to show that, owing to the tremendous growth of the association in the eastern half of the province, the number of votes required to elect one director was over seventy (70) while in two other constituencies

the number required to elect was less than ten. Proportional representation does not require a majority of the votes cast, but it does require that each man elected draws his proper proportion of the total votes, thus, in our own case, where seven directors are to be elected, each director would require to poll at least one-seventh of the total vote of the whole convention.

Question No. 3.—It has been asked, in reference to this, if such a system would not permit of any crank who could muster more than one-seventh of the voters to his getting a seat on the board. It certainly would, but that is only fair. The implication of those who ask this question, that the board might be full of cranks, is absurd. Clearly the number of cranks on the board will correspond to the number of crank voters at the convention, and the board would represent the actual mental capacity of the delegates quite correctly. Moreover the thing works both ways, and the unknown man who showed sufficient intelligence, education, or equipment to get the same support would receive recognition, which, under the present system he often does not.

Question No. 4.—It has been asked if such a ballot as the single transferable vote is not too hard for the ordinary voter to understand. Practical experience in all parts of the world again shows that there are fewer spoilt ballots where this system is in vogue than any other.

Question No. 5.—It has been asked if the transferring of ballots does not offer opportunities for manipulation? The rule under which the ballots are counted provides for the counting and transferring to be done in public. It could be done before the convention, if necessary, or, if deemed preferable, before a special committee appointed to superintend the counting, and special provision is made for the candidates themselves to be present, so that each one can see just exactly how the transfers are made and raise any objection he wishes.

It is hoped that these few paragraphs will help to clear the way for a thorough understanding of the subject, but if there are any points which are not clear, or which our members would like further explanation on, we should be very glad to render them any assistance possible from this office. So far as the actual method and instructions for marking the ballots are concerned, in the event of this method being adopted by the convention, special ballots, with full instructions printed thereon, will be used for the occasion, as well as a full explanation from the platform.

P. P. WOODBRIDGE, Gen. Sec.



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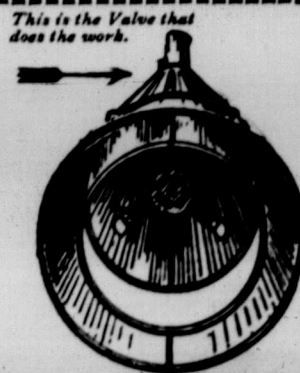
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