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PROPORTIONAL VOTING — IN — MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

BY R. T.

An effective system of voting is the foundation of good municipal government. Our municipal institutions are based on the vote of the people, and if the method of taking that vote is defective, the resulting government must be defective also. You cannot get good results from poor machinery or from bad methods. To put it more specifically, the arrangement or constitution of electoral districts, and the system or method of marking and counting the ballots, have more to do with the quality of municipal government than any other factor; because upon these things depends the kind of men you elect.

Let us then examine critically the system of voting now used in Canada. Is it in harmony with the underlying principles of representative institutions? Or is its machinery so defective as to cause misrepresentation and non-representation of the people? Does it tend to promote or to prevent the election of the right men?

ELECTING A MAYOR OR REEVE.

We will begin with the election of the presiding officer of the municipality. Two principles of representative government stand out prominently here:

1. There should be the utmost freedom of choice in nominating candidates.
2. The man who is elected should have a clear majority of the votes cast.

No one will dispute the correctness of these two principles. Yet they are continually set at naught in the elections of mayors and reeves under the present system.

For the last two years—1899 and 1900—Toronto has had a "minority Mayor;" and it is a common occurrence, when three or more candidates are running, that the successful can-

didate gets a minority of the votes cast. This is simply the result of defective methods. It is quite practicable to use a system that will give a clear majority at one balloting, no matter how many candidates.

The other serious disadvantage of the present method is that it restricts the choice of candidates. When two fairly strong men are nominated, others dislike to enter the field, because they might injure the chances of one or the other of the contestants by cutting into his vote, and because many electors will not vote for a man, however good, unless they think he is one of the strongest candidates.

THE BETTER WAY.

Here is a method that will carry out the two principles mentioned, and will remedy the evils complained of. It is an adaptation of the Hare-Spence system of Proportional Representation:

Suppose that our old friends Smith, Brown, Jones and Robinson are running for a city mayoralty. Under the improved system, each voter marks his ballot for all the candidates in the order of his choice, with the figures 1, 2, 3, 4. For instance, take a voter who wants Smith to be elected and who thinks Robinson the most objectionable of the candidates, and who prefers Brown to Jones. That voter will mark his ballot thus:

Brown.....	2
Jones.....	3
Robinson.....	4
Smith.....	1

By thus marking his ballot, the voter practically says: Smith is my first choice, and I want my ballot to count for Smith if possible. But if Smith has so few votes that he cannot

be elected, then I want my vote transferred to Brown, who is my second choice. If Brown is also "out of it," and it comes down to a contest between Jones and Robinson, then I want my vote to count for Jones and against Robinson."

A description of the method of counting will show how the wishes of this voter and of every other voter are given effect to.

At the close of the poll the ballots are sorted out according to the "number one" votes for each candidate, no heed being paid to the other figures. If any candidate has then a clear majority of first-choice votes, he is elected, and the count goes no farther. But if there be no majority then the candidate who has the smallest number of these first-choice votes is declared "out of the count," and his ballots are distributed amongst the other three candidates in accordance with the second choices thereon—that is, each candidate gets the ballots on which his name is marked "2."

This may give some one a majority. If not, then the lowest of the three remaining candidates is excluded, as was the fourth, and his ballots are similarly transferred. When any ballot contains as second choice the name of the man already "out," his name is passed over, and the ballot goes to the third choice.

The effect of these operations is to concentrate all the votes upon the two remaining candidates; and whichever of them is found to have the greatest number of votes, transferred or original, is declared elected.

You will notice how the foregoing plan favors the full and free choice of the electors, by encouraging the nomination of more than two candidates. In the illustration above given, Smith's friends are not afraid to give him their first-choice votes, because they know that this will not injure the chances of any other candidate if Smith cannot be elected. They know that in that event their votes will go to a stronger candidate whom they have marked as next or next choice on their ballots. All fear of "vote splitting" being thus done away with, there would be nothing to prevent the nomination of half-a-dozen candidates, or even more. Instead of asking "Is he a strong candidate?" the main question would be "Will he make a good mayor?"

It is interesting to note that in the British colony of Queensland the law provides that a system similar to the foregoing may be used in Parliamentary elections when there are more than two candidates for the seat in a single-member district.

MEETING-ROOM ELECTIONS.

This "absolute majority" method will be found very useful in the elections of the officers of societies, clubs, lodges and similar social and business associations. In some of these organizations a rule already exists that each elected officer must have a clear majority; and several ballotings have sometimes to be taken in order to secure this result. The friends of the weaker candidate give up the man of their first choice and cast their votes for the one they like next best; and the process is continued until somebody gets a clear majority. But this plan is open to serious objection. It consumes much time, and tends to "log-rolling" and other undesirable things. The order of the voter's preference for the candidates ought to be decided at the time of the first balloting, not left to subsequent influences.

In many "meeting-room elections" blank ballots are used, on which the voter himself writes the candidates' names. In such cases the order of choice of the voter is indicated by the order in which he writes the names; the first name being his first choice, and so on. If after writing the names he desires to change the order of his choice, he may do so by using the figures 1, 2, 3, etc., as above; and the figures will govern.

The use of the Hare-Spence system in meeting-room elections affords an excellent test of its workableness, and is also of great value in making it more widely known. For "single officers," such as president and secretary, the method is as set forth above. For committees, some additional features are needed, which are described farther on.

ALDERMEN AND COUNCILLORS.

It is in the election of aldermen and councillors that the evil effects of a bad voting system have full scope. It is in this sphere of action that a good or bad arrangement of electoral districts, a good or bad method of marking ballots, a good or bad method of counting votes, chiefly determine the character of our municipal councils and consequently of our municipal government.

That the people of Ontario are beginning to realize this truth is shown by the popularity of recent legislation looking towards the abolition of municipal wards. The small electoral districts known as "wards" are emphatically a bad arrangement. They are doomed, and thus one great step is being taken towards good municipal government. What is the next step? Obviously, a change in the present voting system, if that system

is a bad one. Let us examine it together.

MULTIPLE OR BLOCK VOTING.

In the ordinary method of voting each elector has as many votes as there are aldermen or councillors to be elected. No specific name is in common use here for this method, but as a matter of convenience we must give it some name. It has been called both the "multiple vote" and the "block vote." The last-named term is in use in Australia, and is the shorter of the two, so we will adopt it. The meaning is, of course, that you vote for a "block" of candidates instead of for one. In a city electing nine aldermen, "at large," each elector has nine votes; so that if two thousand electors go to the polls, about eighteen thousand votes will be cast; probably less, because the full franchise is not ordinarily used by every voter. Then the nine candidates having the highest number of votes are declared elected.

MONOPOLY OF REPRESENTATION.

The block vote leads to a monopoly of representation. That is the first defect that we find, and it is bad enough. A mere section of the voters, who may be either a majority or a minority, can sweep the polls, elect all the aldermen, and get all the representation. This is monopoly with a vengeance!

Take as an illustration a city in which nine thousand voters go to the polls to elect nine aldermen. If five thousand voters unite on a ticket of nine candidates, they can elect the whole council and the other four thousand voters will not be able to elect anybody.

Each of these five thousand voters has nine votes, and this enables them to place their nine candidates at the top of the poll, by giving each candidate about five thousand votes. The remaining four thousand electors may unite on another ticket if they like, but they are powerless. They can only give each of their candidates four thousand votes, so that these are all placed below the candidates of the five thousand.

Consequently, these four thousand voters are disfranchised and unrepresented, although, being four-ninths of the electorate, they are entitled to elect four out of the nine councillors. Is that fair, or even decent?

MAJORITY AND MINORITY.

Some one may say, "Oh, well, the five thousand are a majority, and the majority must govern." Such a remark shows confusion of thought.

Representation is one thing; government and legislation is another. Your city council ought to represent all the voters who come to the polls, not a mere section of them. First get a full and fair representation of the voters, then let a majority of the representatives rule when it comes to a decision, Yes or No, on any measure. And there is much to be done in any governing or executive body besides merely voting Yes and No. An intelligent minority of representatives has great weight and influence; its voice can be heard; it can present the views of those whom it represents; it can watch the majority and keep them straight if need be. These things are the clear rights of the minority, and they are denied by the use of the block vote.

POLITICS BROUGHT IN.

The preceding illustration—five thousand and four thousand electors—is a moderate one, and affords ample margin to allow for scattering votes and for the introduction of independent candidates. Where general politics are rampant in municipal matters, and the two great parties are pretty evenly divided, the party tickets will count overwhelmingly under the block system, and independent candidates will get but few votes, because your average voter hates to throw away his vote on a man with a slim chance.

Here we put a finger on one disadvantage of abolishing the wards without providing a better plan of voting. It offers an inducement to introduce general politics into municipal affairs. The temptation thus to gain a party advantage or win a party victory would be very strong.

GOVERNMENT BY MINORITY.

We have not yet exhausted the delightful possibilities of the block vote. Let us vary our illustration, and suppose that there are three "tickets" in the field, each nominating nine aldermen. The strongest ticket gets the votes of four thousand electors; and the other two tickets get respectively the votes of three thousand and two thousand electors. Then the majority is unrepresented. What shall we say of a system under which such an outrage is possible?

If you say that we are raising a buzz-boo which could not materialize, we point you to the Toronto municipal elections of January, 1898. In Ward Six, on that occasion, the four elected aldermen received about 3,500 votes, whilst the defeated candidates got over four thousand! So that the aldermen in this ward were elected by a minority of the votes—47 per cent.

The majority of the votes, amounting to 53 per cent., were thrown away on defeated candidates; that is, 53 per cent. of the voters were disfranchised and unrepresented.

We have spoken of putting tickets in the field; but this fact about the election of 1898 shows that monopolization of all the representatives by a minority, or by a bare majority, may result from the inherent viciousness of the method itself, and not from any deliberate or organized attempt on the part of any section.

A ONE-NINTH INTEREST.

Keeping to the illustration of nine aldermen elected by nine thousand votes, suppose yourself an elector in that city under the present system of the block vote. What is your position? Instead of being represented in a clear and definite way by one distinct alderman in the council, you have, so to speak, only a one-ninth interest in nine different aldermen, who are persons necessarily of diverse views and opinions on some subjects that you are interested in. Which idea of representation is most in accordance with common sense?

AS MUCH VOTING POWER.

Some persons think that a man's voting power is lessened by his having only one vote that counts instead of nine. This is a fallacy. When everybody else has nine votes as well as you, your additional votes are swamped and neutralized by the additional votes of the other electors; so that you get all the disadvantages of the multiple vote without any increase of your voting power.

THE TRUE PRINCIPLE.

It is evident, therefore, that abolition of the wards ought to be followed by abolition of the multiple or block vote. In its place, let us adopt a system based on true representative principles; that is, some good system of Proportional Voting; for no system is truly representative that is not proportional. As Professor John R. Commons says:

"Voters of the same interests and beliefs should be permitted to come together according to their likings."

This they can do with the utmost freedom by means of Proportional Representation. The mere act of balloting, followed by the subsequent counting of the votes, enables the voters to divide themselves freely into as many equal groups as there are councillors or aldermen to be elected. Every group is represented by the one man of its choice, and that choice is not hampered or interfered with in any way by the other voters.

THE HARE-SPENCE PLAN.

If for instance there are eighteen candidates for nine seats in the council, the weaker candidates are gradually excluded in the process of counting, and the votes cast for them are transferred to the stronger candidates until only nine remain; each of the nine being the elected representative of a group comprising about one-ninth of the electors who voted. If in round numbers nine thousand votes have been cast, then the nine groups number a thousand each. The voters have grouped themselves, not according to location, but according to their views and opinions. They have grouped themselves according to their likings. An idea of how they do this can be gained by a brief examination of the Hare-Spence system, which is one of several plans of Proportional Representation.

If you are voting on the Hare-Spence plan in an election of nine aldermen, you mark your ballot for nine candidates (or less), in the order of your choice, with the figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. The candidate whom you like best you mark No. 1 and so on in rotation. If your vote goes to help your first choice to be elected, then it does not count for anybody else. But if the candidate whom you have marked No. 1—your first choice—has enough votes without yours, or has so few votes that he cannot be elected, then your vote goes to the man whom you have marked No. 2. If your No. 2 does not need or cannot use your vote, then it is passed on to No. 3, and so forth. In any event your vote finally counts for only one candidate.

At each polling sub-division, when the polls close, a count is made of the first-choice votes, and the ballots are then taken to the office of the returning officer, where the counting is finished. The returning officer divides the total vote by the number of seats to be filled, which gives the "quota," or number of votes required to elect one man. In the illustration previously given, the returning officer would divide nine thousand votes by nine seats, giving a quota of one thousand.

Anyone who has a quota or more is declared elected. If he has more than a quota, his surplus ballots are transferred to those candidates who are marked on them as second choices. Then the man at the bottom of the poll, with the least number of votes, is declared "out of the count," and all his ballots are transferred to the candidates marked on them as second or subsequent choices. This exclusion of lowest candidates and transfer of ballots is repeated until only nine candidates remain, each of whom has new

a quota or nearly so; and these are the elected ones.

The Hare-Spence system has been used with great success in many actual elections.

My limited space prevents me from going further into detail; but any reader who desires to pursue the subject further may obtain ample data by addressing the secretary or any of the officers of the Proportional Representation Society.

LEGISLATION REQUIRED.

Before any municipality can adopt Proportional Representation, some permissive legislation must be obtained. With this view Mr. S. Russell of Deseronto, M.P.P. for East Hastings, has twice introduced into the Ontario Legislature a bill giving municipalities the necessary powers. Following is the bill in condensed shape:

Title: "An Act allowing municipalities to adopt proportional representation."

Section 1. This Act may be cited as the Proportional Representation Act, 1900.

Section 2. In every city, town, township and village where the council is elected by a general vote (that is, without wards), the Council may pass a by-law providing for a quota system of proportional representation in election of aldermen or councillors, which bylaw must be submitted to the electors before finally passing.

Section 2. Any council adopting proportional representation shall adopt also voting by ballot and all other provisions of the Municipal Act that can be made operative under the new plan, and may supplement these by such other directions and provisions as may be necessary.

Section 4. A vacancy may be filled or left unfilled. If filled, it may be either by a new election or by declaring elected the highest of the losing candidates at the last general municipal election.

Section 5. Any municipal council, whether adopting proportional representation or not, may provide for electing its mayor, warden, etc., by a method of preferential balloting in which the elector marks all the candidates in the order of his choice (presumably with the figures 1, 2, 3, etc.), and then in counting the votes the candidate having the least number of first choice votes is dropped, and all his ballots are transferred to other candidates, according to the second choices on such ballots; the process

being continued until one candidate has an absolute majority of all the votes cast.

Section 6. In a municipality where aldermen or councillors are elected by a general vote, if a petition be presented, signed by five per cent. of qualified electors, asking that a by-law for proportional representation or preferential voting be submitted to the electors, then the council shall prepare and submit such bylaw accordingly.

THE VOTING MACHINE.

A mechanical voting apparatus, somewhat on the principle of the cash register, has met with success in Buffalo, Rochester and other cities in the United States. A similar machine has recently been patented for use in Canada. The Ontario Legislature recently legalized the use of voting machines by any municipality that chose to introduce them. It is therefore an interesting question, Can Proportional Representation be adapted to the voting machine? The Hare-Spence system could hardly be worked by such an apparatus. But there is a system invented by Hon. William H. Gove, of Salem, Massachusetts, which is admirably suited for this purpose, and which is strongly recommended for municipalities if the use of the voting machine should become practicable and popular in Canada.

WHAT MAY BE EXPECTED.

With Proportional Representation in operation, the inducements to personal canvassing largely disappear; because each candidate appeals only to that group or quota of the electors who are in accord with his ideas. These electors are scattered over the whole city, and are more easily and effectually reached by printed addresses on the ground of principles and character than by personal persuasion.

Proportional Representation wastes no votes. Practically every voter is represented, and the best men are brought to the front. Public indifference gives place to a deep and intelligent interest in municipal matters. Strong leaders of men take the place of the mediocre or colorless straddlers who are too often elected under the present system. Candor and straightforwardness are promoted by the fact that a candidate appeals only to a group or quota of like-minded electors, not to half-a-dozen diverse interests. The fairness and honesty of the system promotes similar qualities in both candidates and electors. Is it not worthy of your support and assistance?

JAN. 3, 1901

THE PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION SOCIETY OF ONTARIO

This Society is formed to promote good municipal government by means of a reform in voting methods. Its members are men and women who believe that the kind of aldermen or councillors you elect depends chiefly upon the kind of voting system you have ; that to get the best men you must have the best voting system ; and that the best voting system must be based on the principle of Proportional Representation. A perusal of this folder will enable you to grasp the scope of the reform.

If you are interested in either of these petitions, or would like to assist in the work of the Society, kindly communicate with our Secretary.

We present herewith some extracts from our constitution :

Object. To promote the adoption of Proportional Representation in municipal elections.

Membership. Persons of good character who are interested in forwarding the object of the Society.

Fees. Minimum membership fee, 25 cents yearly, payable in advance.

Branches. Proportional Representation societies organized outside of Toronto may affiliate with this Society by mutual agreement ; and the president and secretary of any affiliated society shall be ex-officio members of the executive committee of this Society, and entitled to speak and vote at Executive and Society meetings.

J. EDWARD MAYBEE,

Secretary, 103 Bay Street, Toronto.

JAMES E. ROBERTSON,

President.

