

REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY - HOW TO ACHIEVE IT

Representative democracy implies, inter alia, that the representatives of the people represent or act as an embodiment of the democratic will.

Under our current single-member constituency system a true reflection of the democratic will cannot be achieved in the Parliament.

If the above aim of making every vote have an equal value, whether it be cast in Turrumurra, Blacktown or Temora, is to be satisfied, a far greater degree of proportionality must be given concrete expression in Parliament.

"Proportional Representation" tends to conjure up in the minds of people brought up on the British system visions of squabbling coalitions, minority governments, and constant elections. The fact is that PR is not a monolithic practice, but as a principle, provides the inspiration for creating fair and just electoral systems in the democratic tradition. That practice varies remarkably depending on the historical, geographic and social situation in which it operates. It is also in a continual state of development even where it is already well established.

Apart from the democratic basis of proportionality in representation, PR has many practical advantages as well. There is far more stability in a system of multi-member constituencies - the wild swings, or "landslides", of our present system are replaced by moderate changes reflecting the changes of community feeling. Parliamentarians can feel more secure in their positions and concentrate on the problems of government.

They can adopt a broader, national perspective rather than the limiting parochial focussing required by single constituencies. Representatives can share the load of their multi-member constituency, and of course constituents have a choice of whom they want to consult. Members of the ALP would always have at least one member of the House with whom they could co-ordinate in their constituency. Above all, voters aren't wasting their votes.

The following section deals with some of the experiences of PR overseas, and in Australia, and in so doing, categorises the most popular ways in which PR can be applied satisfactorily.

Firstly, there should be some explanation of terms commonly associated with electoral systems based on PR. These terms refer to methods of casting and counting votes and of allocating seats.

Quotas

A quota is the number of votes calculated in the election necessary for a candidate to be elected. It is based on the number of vacancies to be filled and the number of electors casting valid votes. Its intention is to provide the optimum number of voters with a representative of their choice.

The first and most obvious quota was the Hare quota which is found by dividing the number of votes by the number of vacancies. However, in reality this is based on an illusion that votes are not being "wasted", i.e., votes that have not contributed to electing a representative. The more accurate quota is the one which "wastes" the fewest votes and this is achieved by the formula which is known as the Droop quota: the number of votes divided by the number of seats plus one (plus one), i.e.,

$$Q = \frac{V}{n + 1} + 1$$

By this method, as many votes as possible are included in the counting for as long as possible, as it represents the lowest number of votes that entitles a candidate to a seat. It is the quota used in the Australian Senate elections.

Once the quota has been established and the number of votes for each party (or candidate) has been divided by that quota, there could possibly be seats remaining unallocated. This is because several candidates all have partial quotas. There are then two ways of allocating these vacancies. The first is using a voting method called Single Transferable Vote (STV) known in Australia as preferential voting and discussed later. The other is known as the Greatest Remainder Method and simply operates so that the party or candidate with the largest portion of a quota gets the seat, e.g.,

A	B	C	D	E
2.31	0.63	0.59	1.12	0.35

With four vacancies to fill, A gets two seats, D gets one seat, and B gets the fourth seat with the largest remaining fraction of a quota. The major criticism of this method is that it can be fortuitous as to which party wins the final seat. It also favours smaller parties.

Another method of ascertaining a quota for election but using a different route is known as the D'Hondt Rule or the "largest average". Each party's total vote is divided by 1, then successively 2, 3, 4, ... etc. as far as required. The results of these divisions are listed in order of magnitude and the highest are awarded the seat allocations according to the number of vacancies. e.g.

	A	B	C	D
	10,000	9,800	3,000	1,000
÷ 1	(1) 10,000	(2) 9,800	(7) 3,000	1,000
÷ 2	(3) 5,000	(4) 4,900	1,500	-
÷ 3	(5) 3,333	(6) 3,266	-	-
÷ 4	(8) 2,500	(9) 2,450	-	-
÷ 5	(10) 2,000	(11) 1,960	-	-

Thus, if there are to be three elected, A receives two and B one. If there were eight elected, A would receive four, B three and C one; and so on. The quota in each case is different but nevertheless is the largest average to secure that representation.

The point of this method is to find the smallest number of unused votes per party, or the closest average vote per seat allocated per party. It has a slight tendency to favour larger parties or coalitions of parties.

A modification of the D'Hondt Rule known as Sainte-Laguë's formula is intended to reverse the bias back to the smaller parties. In this case, the divisors are successive

odd numbers (1, 3, 5, ...). A further modification to invoke some balance uses the divisors 1.4, 3, 5, 7 etc. The D'Hondt Rule remains the one most used, with Ste-Laguë's confined to Scandinavia.

Party Lists

Where proportional representation is practised there are a number of ways of allocating seats after the quotas have been established. In Europe the party list system is well-known and has several variations. The voter simply votes for a party, this party receives so many seats, and these seats are allocated according to a predetermined list of nominees.

Variations include the voter's ability to vary the order of the list, to choose between candidates on the list or to choose from more than one list, to write in names or cross them out. Sometimes this can involve having to vote twice - once for a particular candidate and once for a political party as a group. Where there is no voter choice between candidates the order in which the candidates will be elected is stipulated by the parties in one way or another.