

## OVERSEAS EXPERIENCE

### Single-member Constituencies

The USA, Britain and New Zealand have all maintained the single-member constituency system. In the US it is an integral part of the absolute two-party system which also involves primary elections and a Presidential Executive. As such it has little relevance to the Australian experience.

New Zealand has abolished its Upper House and therefore its Government is entirely based on the popular chamber. It also has four seats reserved for Maori-only representation, and uses first-past-the-post method of counting. The tolerance for apportionment of constituencies is very low at 5%, and the ratio of representatives to people is more than three times that in the Australian House of Representatives. There have been moves to adjust the system with a measure of proportional representation but there is no sustained movement.

Britain's first-past-the-post single-member constituency system on the other hand has been under sustained attack for some time. With a strong minor party - the Liberals - regional groups - the Nationalists - and a well-established and effective PR society applying pressure, the situation is in a constant state of turmoil. Yet it has been in the interests of both major parties to maintain the status quo, as it has been possible for either of them to win government at the polls.

However, with the most recent moves towards a breakdown in the traditional British two-party system, the most serious challenge yet to the single-member, first-past-the-post anachronism is occurring. And faced with the possibility of massive inroads into their representation, both the major parties now see some advantage in an equitable PR system. Just as an example of the frustrations that can be engendered by Britain's current system, in the February 1974 election, the Labour Party with nearly 12 million votes won 301 seats,

the Conservatives with nearly 12 million won 296 seats and the Liberals, with more than 6 million votes were apportioned a mere 14 seats!

It is also interesting to note that with a population less than four times ours it has more than five times the number of representatives in its Lower Chamber.

The only other representative democracy maintaining a first-past-the-post single-member constituency system is Canada, and here there has been considerable work done on reform. In part this has been motivated by disparate groupings in the country and by a consequent malalignment of representation not unlike that existing with Tasmania and Western Australia. The general motivation for change, however, has been dissatisfaction with the workings of the single-member constituency system.

Significantly, all the proposals for reform have recommended a hybrid or "topping-up" system similar to the practice in West Germany. The Canadian Task Force on National Unity (Pepin-Robarts) recommended single-member constituencies as in the present system, "topped-up" on a national PR basis with 60 new seats; the Canada West Foundation is pressing for a number of single-member constituencies slightly less than at present with a "topping-up" of 76 seats on a provincial PR basis with two separate votes; the New Democratic Party supports a "topping-up" of current single-member constituencies with 50 new provincial seats on a PR party-list basis; highly respected political scientist William Irvine has published much on the subject advocating a reduction in the number of single-member constituencies by about one-third and the creation of "topping-up" seats on a provincial PR basis so that a ratio of about 50:50 prevails. Other suggestions run along similar lines.

As in Australia, Canadians have previously had some experience with PR in province parliaments, and the proposals outlined above are a reflection of all those influences on Canada's society. Nevertheless, the consistency of the reform proposals is surprising and it manifests a common desire: to give equitable representation of opinion to as many groupings as possible, not only in Parliament but also in the Cabinet and the Caucuses.

The spectre of national fragmentation haunts Canadians, and the single-member constituency system is a prime source of disunity. Australia is not immune to such dangers. With the current constitutional crisis now facing Canada, the opportunity might be afforded for a radical change in the electoral system.

A system based on single-member constituencies but with the addition of a second run-off ballot operates in France. There are many varieties and complexities, as can be imagined, but this is the essence of the electoral system. There are 491 single-member constituencies, to which a member is elected if s/he polls an absolute majority. However, if this does not occur, a second ballot is held a week later in which all those who polled less than one-eighth of the vote are eliminated (with some exceptions). However, like the US, France has a powerful Presidential Executive. Many other methods of election have also been tried and the situation is one which is constantly developing. With the election of a Socialist Party President and a Socialist Party dominated National Assembly, moves are now underway to introduce a system of proportional representation.

#### Compensatory Proportional Representation

The electoral system which has developed in West Germany has attracted a great deal of interest blending, as it seems to, single-member constituencies with a compensatory PR (referred to often as "topping-up") from a pool of candidates, party-by-party and State-by-State.

There are 518 representatives, half being elected in single-member constituencies, and the other half via party lists in each State. Candidates for constituency seats may also nominate for a State seat, but if successful in the former they are withdrawn from the latter. The voter is able to vote separately for the two types of seats, and may switch parties but cannot alter the order which the candidates have on the party list. The number of constituency seats won by a party is deducted from the number of State seats allocated on a PR basis (using the D'Hondt method), and the remainder allocated to that party's candidates in the order they appeared. However, a party must have received at least 5% of the national vote of the State seats, or secured 3 constituency seats, to participate in this sharing out of pool seats.

In the final analysis this system produces a result based on proportional representation, since any malalignment caused by the single-member constituency voting is adjusted by the dual party-list voting - the more the representation is out of kilter the more the adjustment to bring it back.

The system does have the advantage ascribed to conventional single-member constituency systems - that there are representatives in parliament to look after specific communities. But, at the same time, criticisms are levelled at the two different classes of representatives in the parliament and at the power of the parties to select the candidates (and their order) on the party lists.

Nevertheless, one criticism usually aimed at PR is not supported by the West German experience - that is, that it encourages a profusion of small political parties. Whereas ten parties were represented in the first parliament, there are now only four, two of which are a national coalition sharing out geographical areas (not unlike the conservative parties in Australia). This has been the case since 1961, and is in many ways self-fulfilling in the sense that voters feel they are wasting their votes on a small party which has little chance of success.

Similarities to the West German system exist in Scandinavia, but each displays the specific idiosyncrasies of its environment. Interestingly, Denmark, Sweden and Norway all converted from single-member constituency systems, the first two of the British type and the last of the French type.

The current Danish situation involves a mixture of multi-member constituencies with a touch of "topping-up" on a national/regional basis. There are 135 seats distributed amongst three electoral areas divided into multi-member constituencies. The parties are allocated seats according to their votes in each of these constituencies using the modified Ste-Lague method. Another 40 seats are then allocated based on the parties' national percentage vote (the number of area seats won is subtracted from the proportional national entitlement). A party must have gained at least 2% of the national vote or won at least one area seat before it can participate in the supplementary allocation. The effect of this is to provide some representation to parties with substantial, but not originally sufficient, support in most areas of the country.

But it also has the effect of providing representation for a relatively large number of small parties, the barriers to small party representation being quite low. Eleven parties were represented in parliament after the 1977 elections. The Danes also have a complex method of candidate voting, whereby the voter can either vote for the party list, or can choose any particular candidate from any constituency in the area - this opportunity is in fact widely utilised.

Sweden's system does not differ too markedly from Denmark, though it has its variations and consequent effects. The country is divided into 28 constituencies returning from 2 to 29 members each for a total of 310. To this is added another group of 39 members distributed at large so as to obtain a nationally proportional result. The D'Hondt method is used to allocate seats based on party lists. There is,

however, a provision to exclude smaller parties: a party must obtain at least 4% of the national vote before receiving any "at large" seats. This more difficult barrier is primarily responsible for maintaining fewer parties in parliament than is the case in Denmark, and has contributed to the long history of very stable government mainly under the Social Democrats.

### Multi-member Constituencies of Large Variability

The Norwegian system is based on 20 multi-member constituencies returning from 4 to 13 members each using the Ste-Lague method of seat allocation, but does not provide for any supplementary seats for any malalignment of representation. Coupled to this is the distortion between rural and urban electorate populations which explains why the proportionality of election results in Norway is not always consistent. Proxy members are elected at the same time, taking the place of any member who should vacate a seat. Voters have a choice of party lists which may vary internally, but have little opportunity to alter them. The number of parties represented in the parliament has been reduced to six, although in the past there have been more. Nevertheless, since the war the Labour Party has usually formed the Government.

The Finnish system is again very similar. The country is divided into 15 constituencies each returning from 9 to 21 members (with one exception which has just one representative). The seats are allocated using the D'Hondt method based on party list voting, but the voter is able to exercise a personal choice within the party list.

Several other European countries share very similar electoral processes. Belgium can serve as the example: each of 8 States is divided into 2 to 5 multi-member constituencies, the number of seats determined by the population of each constituency. Voters are presented with

party lists of candidates, but may vary the order of the list by selecting to support particular candidates within the party. In some cases, voters may actually give votes to candidates of different parties. The votes are allotted to the parties through the various candidates, and the parties are allocated the proportional number of seats per constituency using a Hare quota. Candidates are elected in the order of voting support per party, with the candidates at the top of the party lists receiving the votes if they have been indicated for that party. Any seats not filled because of partial quotas are then accumulated in each State using the D'Hondt method. Belgium's eight States return a total of 212 members from 30 constituencies ranging from 2 to 34 members.

Austria, which is in this category, has 9 constituencies containing 6 to 39 members for a total of 183 members. The remainder partial quotas are in Austria's case returned to one of two regions for the purpose of final allocation, and a party must have secured at least one constituency seat before it may participate in the regional distribution.

The Swiss system is similar with the voter having the ability to vote for particular candidates on the party lists and even to vote for one candidate twice if so desired.

The systems used in Italy and Spain are similar employing multi-member constituencies, with party lists and seat allocation by the D'Hondt method. Spain has a 3% threshold for representation.

#### Multi-member Constituencies with Limited Variability

The Japanese system is a unique blend of first-past-the-post in multi-member constituencies. There are 130 multi-member constituencies each returning from 3 to 5 members (with one exception returning one) for a total of 511 members in the House of Representatives. Each voter may

vote for only one candidate (by writing in the name) and the candidates are elected by gaining the largest number of votes. The voter is very restricted in this voting pattern and parties are extremely cautious not to present too many candidates thereby splitting their support. The system, therefore, tends to encourage stagnation and leaves a great deal to technical and political chance.

The situation in Ireland is one, like Canada's, which holds a great deal of relevance to our own. Up until independence from Britain, the Irish were bound to the first-past-the-post single-member constituency system of the occupying power. However, this was abandoned and replaced in the original constitution by a system based on multi-member electorates using proportional representation and STV as the method of election, with one representative for every 20,000 to 30,000 of population.

At first, the number of representatives returned from each constituency ranged from 3 to 9, but this was gradually amended and reduced to 3, 4 or 5 by 1947. In 1974, it stood at 6 with 5 members, 10 with 4 members and 26 with 3 members for a total of 148 in 42 constituencies. The reason for the preponderance of 3-member constituencies has been blatantly party-political, for they are much easier to gerrymander (although not so easily as are single-member constituencies).

Nevertheless, this trend has been somewhat reversed by the 1980 Irish redistribution which recommended 41 constituencies with 15 of 5 members each, 13 of 4 members each and 13 of 3 members each.

The voting procedure is very similar to that in our Senate elections employing, as it does, STV in multi-member constituencies, and the counting of votes and allocating of seats using the Droop quota method. There is one important variation, in that the Irish voter needs only place one number to cast a valid vote, though s/he may put further preferences in if desired - and almost all voters do. Consequently, the informal vote is less than 1%.

Nomination of candidates is a combination of local constituency initiative and head office additions, with the predominance held by the locals.

From 1932 to 1981, Ireland has had 35 years of Fianna Fáil Government with three separate breaks of a coalition government of the other two parties, Fine Gael and Labour. However, because of the large number of three-member electorates and the tendency for incumbents to gerrymander these, the correlation between votes gained and seats won has not been as close as in other PR systems. Nevertheless, the average deviation over 16 consecutive elections in Ireland is 1.90 percentage points, whereas the figure for single-member systems is 1.63 percentage points. In the 1981 elections Fianna Fáil with 45.5% of the vote received 47% of the seats; Fine Gael with 36.5% of the vote received 39% of the seats; and Labour with 9.9% of the vote received 9% of the seats; and Independents with 8.1% of the vote received 5% of the seats.

#### Extreme Proportional Representation

The most popular view of proportional representation is that which is actually practised by the Netherlands and Israel and is sometimes known as "extreme PR". In both countries the whole country is treated as one constituency, and the votes are cast for a party list (although there is some outlet for voters to vary the order, it is not very effective). The Hare quota method is then used to allocate the seats - the total number in the Netherlands being 150 thus providing for a 2/3rd% threshold, while in Israel it is 120 with an overriding threshold of 1% for remainder seats. All parties which have received whole quotas are allocated those seats and their candidates are elected in the order they appeared on the lists. The partial quotas that remain are then allocated to the parties by the D'Hondt method.

In both countries the electoral system results in many small parties being represented in parliament. Recently, in the Netherlands particularly, this has led to some political instability and widespread moves for reform, including parliamentary committees and legislative initiatives. The suggested reforms generally follow the successful practice

in other countries, viz., a higher threshold, or more likely, multi-member constituencies.

### Australian Experience

Finally, in this roundup, a word should be said about PR in Australia. Apart from the Senate (since 1949) which should be widely understood, the most notable example (there are others: NSW Legislative Assembly 1920-1925; NSW Legislative Council; ACT House of Assembly; NSW Local Government) is the system used by the Tasmanian Lower House. It has a continuous history dating back to 1907 and is without doubt the most stable, consistent and successful system of PR in the world. It has been improved continually over its 70 years of experience. This is not to say it is without fault, or that it should therefore be transferred to the federal arena, for it is, like all political systems, a product of its environment. Nevertheless, it deserves the closest attention.

Originally the elected members came from 5 approximately equal 6-member constituencies, but experience showed the possibilities of an evenly divided House were too great and this was changed to 7-member electorates. The Tasmanian system also makes sound use of the fact that the State is divided into 5 federal electorates and therefore no internal redistributions need ever take place.

In order to eliminate the effect of "Donkey" votes, candidates' names are rotated on the ballot paper by printing several different versions. Optional preferential reduces the informal vote by requiring only the number of vacancies to be the number of votes recorded. Interestingly, however, around a third of voters record a full list of preferences, and only a very small percentage take advantage of the minimum requirement. The parties do not issue "how-to-vote" cards, and in any case this would be difficult because of the rotation of names system. Consequently, the votes for a party are much more spread out among the party's candidates.

A by-election is not held on the occasion of a vacancy since a count-back method provides for a substitute. However, because of the lack of disciplined voting along party lines, the distribution of the ex-member's preferences can see a candidate of a different party being elected and hence a shift in the political character of the Parliament. There is the added possibility of this even causing a change of government.

The parliamentary term is for four years and it has been argued that over such a long period the absence of by-elections reduces the voters' opportunities to express dissatisfaction or otherwise with the Government's performance.

The counting and allocating of seats is based on the Droop quota and STV just as in the Senate. With seven vacancies the quota required for election is 12.5%, and thus 50% of the vote in a constituency will produce a majority of four seats to three seats in that constituency.

Since the introduction of the 7-member constituencies there have been clear-cut decisions and stability of government, except on two occasions when the support of Independents was needed by the Government of the day. This was partly caused by the fact that with seven members the quota is low enough to give representation to minority opinions. There has also been a high correlation between percentage of votes and seats gained. This is an objective any rational system should achieve.

The table below shows the relationship between popular support (expressed as a primary vote) and representation gained in the Parliament in Tasmania over the last four elections under the Hare-Clark multi-member constituency system.

As can be seen there is a fair correlation between the two percentage figures: the largest discrepancy is in Labor's favour in 1972 when there was a difference of 5.07 percentage points (after a massive Labor vote). Compare this to the earlier tables of the House of Representatives primary vote and seats gained where the discrepancies run up to 100 percentage points for the individual States (Tasmania) and 21.2 percentage points nationally (Coalition 1977).

Even the smaller parties have a chance to gain representation, as they in fact achieved in 1969, and in 1979 on a countback for a vacancy.

VOTES AND SEATS: TASMANIA

		<u>ALP</u>	<u>LIBERAL</u>	<u>CENTRE</u>	<u>OTHERS</u>
1969:	Votes:	47.68%	43.98%	4.31%	1.72%
	Seats:	17	17	1	0
	=	48.5%	48.5%	2.8%	
				<u>United Tas</u>	
1972:	Votes:	54.93%	38.37%	3.90%	2.80%
	Seats:	21	14	0	0
	=	60.0%	40.0%	-	-
1976:	Votes:	52.48%	44.49%	2.20%	0.83%
	Seats:	18	17	0	0
	=	51.5%	48.5%	-	-
				<u>DEM</u>	
1979:	Votes:	54.32%	41.31%	2.86%	1.51%
	Seats:	20	15	0	0
	=	57.1%	42.9%	-	-