

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION AND THE IRISH FREE STATE.

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It may not be out of place at the outset to give a brief account of the origin and growth of a movement which has now become world-wide.

Andrae, the Danish statesman, and Thomas Hare independently originated the system of Proportional Representation by means of the transferable vote, but Andrae applied his scheme in the election of the Danish Parliament two years before Hare first enunciated the idea in England in a pamphlet published in 1857. Hare developed the idea in his "Treatise on the Election of Representatives," published in 1859, of which several editions followed in quick succession.

John Stuart Mill, in his "Considerations on Representative Government," 1861, warmly commended Mr. Hare's system, and the subject received a considerable amount of academic support during the next twenty years. As early as 1872 a Bill was introduced into Parliament by Mr. Walter Morrison and Mr. Henry Fawcett applying the system to England and Wales. In 1884 the prospect of a franchise and redistribution bill led to the formation of the Proportional Representation Society, of which Sir John Lubbock, afterwards Lord Avebury, was the prime mover. Mr. Leonard Courtney, then Financial Secretary to the Treasury in Mr. Gladstone's Government, was strongly impressed by the need of P. R. and pressed its claims upon Mr. Gladstone, who, however, refused to consider the proposal, whereupon Mr. Courtney resigned.

As the result of an understanding which was reached between Mr. Gladstone and Lord Salisbury (the Leader of the Opposition) there was established for the first time in the his-

tory of representative government in Great Britain and Ireland a system of one-member constituencies (with a few two-member boroughs) based upon equality of population. The carrying of this scheme dashed the hopes of the two hundred members of Parliament who were at that time members of the Proportional Representation Society, and the movement became dormant until 1905, when it was revived in anticipation of another franchise and redistribution measure, which did not, however, materialise until 1918.

The movement has never looked back since 1905, and the following list, which shows the more important applications of the P. R. principle to-day, must be very encouraging to those who contend that the right to vote is not in itself sufficient, but that the system adopted for recording and allocating the votes should be such as will produce truly representative institutions.

Country.	Representative Assembly.	Date of Adoption.
GREAT BRITAIN.		
Great Britain ...	University members of the House of Commons	1918
England ...	National Assembly of the Church of England :	
	(1) House of Laity	1919
	(2) House of Clergy	1921
	(consisting of the Lower Houses of Convocation of Canterbury and York)	
	Representatives of Insured Persons on Insurance Committees under the National Health Insurance Act.	1911
Scotland ...	Education Authorities — one Authority for each county, and one for each of the four burghs of Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow—total 37 Authorities	1918
Northern Ireland	Both Houses of Parliament	1920
IRISH FREE STATE		
	Both Houses of Parliament	1923
	Local government elections	1923
BRITISH DOMINIONS.		
COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA :		
Tasmania ...	House of Assembly	1896 (partial) 1907 (complete)

Country.	Representative Assembly.	Date of Adoption.
UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA	(1) The Senate (2) Executive Committees of Provincial Councils	1909
Cape of Good Hope	Municipal Councils (optional)	1912
SOUTH-WEST AFRICA	Executive Committee (of four members) of the new Legislative Assembly elected by P. R. by members of the Legislative Assembly	1926
NEW ZEALAND	... (1) Legislative Council (not yet put in operation) (2) Municipal Councils (optional)	1914
DOMINION OF CANADA		
Alberta	... Municipal Councils (optional)	1916
British Columbia	Municipal Councils (optional)	1917
Saskatchewan	... Municipal Councils (optional)	1920
Manitoba	... (1) Representatives of Winnipeg in Provincial Legislature (2) City Council of Winnipeg	1920
INDIA	... (1) Certain constituencies for National Legislature and for Provincial Legislatures (2) Committee on Public Accounts of the National and of each Provincial Legislature	1919
MALTA	... (1) The Senate (part) (2) The House of Assembly	1921
UNITED STATES	A number of cities, using their large powers of self-government, have adopted P.R. These cities include Cleveland, Ohio, with a population of about 800,000, the fifth city of the United States, and Cincinnati with some 400,000 inhabitants	1915 onwards
CONTINENT OF EUROPE.		
Denmark	... (1) Landsting (Upper House of Parliament) (2) Local government elections (3) Folketing (Lower House of Parliament)	1855 (partial) 1915 (complete) 1908 1915

Country.	Representative Assembly.	Date of Adoption.
Switzerland	... (1) Majority of Cantonal Councils	1891 onwards
	(2) Local government elections in majority of cantons	1891 onwards
	(3) Conseil national (Lower House of Federal Parliament)	1918
Belgium	... (1) Local government elections	1895
	(2) Chamber of Deputies and Senate	1899
	(3) Provincial Councils	1921
Norway	... (1) Local government elections	1896 (optional) 1919 (general)
	(2) Storting (Parliament)	1919
Finland	... The Diet (Single Chamber)	1906
Germany	... (1) Corporation of Free City of Hamburg	1906
	(2) Diet of Württemberg	1906
	(3) Local government elections in Bavaria	1908
	(4) National Constituent Assembly	1918
	(5) Reichstag	1919
	(6) State legislatures	
	(7) Local government elections	
Sweden	... (1) Both Houses of the Riksdag	1907
	(2) Provincial Councils	
	(3) Local government elections	
Iceland	... Althing (part)	1915
Holland	... (1) Second Chamber (Lower House) of States-General	1917
	(2) Provincial Councils	
	(3) Local government elections	
	(4) First Chamber (Upper House) of States-General	1923
Austria	... (1) National Constituent Assembly	1918
	(2) Both Houses of Parliament	1920
	(3) Provincial Diets	
	(4) Local government elections	
Poland	... (1) National Constituent Assembly	1919
	(2) Both Houses of Parliament	1921
Luxemburg	... (1) Chamber of Deputies	1919
	(2) Local government elections (optional in areas with less than 3,000 inhabitants)	

Country.	Representative Assembly.	Date of Adoption.
Jugo-Slavia ...	(1) National Constituent Assembly	1920
	(2) National Assembly (Single Chamber)	1921
Czecho-Slovakia	(1) National Assembly	1920
	(2) Senate	
Estonia ...	(1) National Assembly (Single Chamber)	1920
	(2) Local government elections	
Latvia ...	National Assembly (Single Chamber)	1922
Lithuania ...	National Assembly (Single Chamber)	1922
Greece ...	Chamber of Deputies	1926

In English-speaking countries the system of P. R. uniformly adopted is that of the Single Transferable Vote, while on the Continent of Europe list systems are used. I do not feel that I am called upon to-night to examine the various list systems which are at present in operation and to compare them in detail with the Single Transferable Vote system. It will probably be sufficient to state that, broadly speaking, under a list system transfers of votes often proceed in an order determined by the party caucus, while under the S. T. V. system transfers must be made in accordance with the expressed wishes of the voters.

It will be observed that France does not appear in the foregoing list, although many people are apparently under the impression that Proportional Representation is in operation in France. The French Electoral Act of 1919 provides, in its title, for P. R. on a list system. It was a real P. R. measure as introduced, but as it was passed practically no trace of P. R. was left, except, of course, in the title, which still continues to mislead not a few able people who have no time to follow the matter up! Let us see some of the results of the French Electoral Act of 1919, which I may note in passing is reproduced in the October, 1919, issue of *Representation*, the journal of the Proportional Representation Society.

PARIS—4TH AREA : 1919, 14 SEATS.

Party.	Votes.	Seats.
Bloc National ...	150,156	14
Socialist ...	112,509	0

Not a trace of P. R. here. Nor is this an exceptional case.

Here is a more recent example—

THE RHÔNE : 1924, 13 SEATS.

<i>Party.</i>		<i>Voters.</i>		<i>Seats.</i>
Cartel des Gauches	...	110,000	...	13
Bloc National	...	60,000	...	0
Other Parties	...	20,000	...	0

This result, which is clearly not proportional representation but its denial, is due to the provision in the French law of 1919, in virtue of which all the seats in a constituency are allotted to any party or combination of parties which obtains the support of an absolute majority of the voters in the constituency.

In 1924, 219 out of 568 seats were won in constituencies where a single party monopolised the representation.

The lack of proportionality in the law is marked even when there is some recognition of the rights of minorities, *i.e.*, when no party has an absolute majority. This further example illustrates minority representation under the law—

SOMME : 1924, 7 SEATS.

<i>Party.</i>		<i>Votes.</i>		<i>Seats.</i>
Republican Right	...	46,801	...	6
National and Social Union	...	32,013	...	1
Cartel des Gauches	...	16,034	...	0
Communist	...	12,097	...	0

It may be convenient at this point to state the claims of the supporters of P. R. by means of the Single Transferable Vote and the methods which it is suggested should be adopted to give proper effect to the principle.

It is claimed that this system will

- (1) reproduce the opinions of the electors in Parliament and other public bodies in their true proportions;
- (2) secure that the majority of electors shall rule and all considerable minorities shall be heard;
- (3) give electors a wider freedom in the choice of representatives;
- (4) give representatives greater independence from the financial and other pressure of small sections of constituents;
- (5) ensure to parties representation by their ablest and most trusted members.

The following methods are suggested :—

1. Unite existing constituencies into larger ones returning three or more members each, having regard to natural divisions of the country, such as large towns, counties or parts of counties, and give each constituency so formed a number of members proportionate to its electorate.

2. Decide elections by a proportional system, such as that known as the "Single Transferable Vote," under which

A. Each elector has one vote and one vote only.

B. The elector votes

(a) By placing the figure 1 opposite the name of the candidate he likes best.

He is also invited to place

(b) The figure 2 opposite his second choice.

(c) The figure 3 opposite the name of his third choice, and so on, numbering as many candidates as he pleases in the order of his preference.

C. A candidate, to ensure election, need not poll a majority, but only a certain proportion of the votes cast.

This proportion, which is the least number of votes sufficient to render certain the election of a candidate, is called the Quota. Thus, in a single-member constituency a candidate who polls one more than half the votes must be elected; the quota is therefore one more than half. So in a two-member constituency the quota is one more than a third, for not more than two candidates can poll so much; and in a three-member constituency one more than a fourth, and so on. Therefore, to ascertain the quota divide the total of the votes by one more than the number of the seats to be filled and add one to the result.

D. The returning officer ascertains the result of the election as follows :—

(1) He counts each ballot paper as one vote to the candidate marked 1 thereon; he also counts the total number of votes.

(2) He ascertains the quota.

(3) He declares elected the candidates who have received the quota.

(4) He transfers in strict proportions the surplus votes of those candidates who have received more than the quota, and credits them to the unelected candidates

indicated by the figures 2, 3, and so on, as the next preferences of the electors whose votes are transferred. This operation renders all votes effective; votes are used and not wasted.

- (5) He declares elected those candidates who, after the transfer of surplus votes, have obtained the quota.
- (6) He eliminates the candidates lowest on the poll one after another by transferring their votes in accordance with the wishes of their supporters to the candidates indicated as next preferences. This process is continued until the required number of candidates, having each obtained the quota, has been declared elected, or the number of candidates not eliminated is reduced to the number of seats still vacant, in which event the candidates not eliminated are declared elected.

The question of Proportional Representation first excited marked attention in this country on the publication by the *Freeman's Journal* of Lord Courtney's letter of 14th January, 1911, to Mr. Thomas Sexton, in which he suggested the division of Ireland into constituencies returning three and five members, with the provision that no voter should give more than one effective vote to one candidate. Lord Courtney contended that the establishment of this simple machinery would produce a truly representative parliament in which the varied elements of national life would appear with fresh vigour.

Following the publication of this letter Lord Courtney was invited to visit Ireland and to give further details of the system of P. R. which he recommended, but owing to illness it was not possible for him to visit Dublin until April 20th, when he addressed a large meeting in the Antient Concert Rooms. Lord Courtney delivered a memorable speech on that occasion, and after the meeting a Model Election was held, at which the working of the system was fully explained and illustrated.

One important outcome of Lord Courtney's visit was the formation on 12th September, 1911, of the Proportional Representation Society of Ireland, which was destined to play a conspicuous part in its country's history.

The first application of Proportional Representation in Ireland was made in Sligo in January, 1919, under the Sligo Corporation Act, 1918, a private measure promoted by the Sligo Corporation in circumstances which are fully explained in P. R. pamphlet No. 41, March, 1919. It will be sufficient for our purpose to-night to mention that the elections, which were

held under the Single Transferable Vote system, gave general satisfaction, that the spoiled papers attributable to the new system represented little over 1 per cent., and that the electors appeared to experience no difficulty in marking preferences.

The following quotations from the Sligo and Dublin Press on the morrow of the election convey some idea of the interest which was aroused in Ireland by the election of the first town council under P. R. :—

“The system has justified its adoption. We saw it work; we saw its simplicity; we saw its unerring honesty to the voter all through; and we saw the result in the final count; and we join in the general expression of those who followed it with an intelligent interest. It is as easy as the old way; it is a big improvement and it is absolutely fair.”

Sligo Champion, 18th January, 1919.

“Sligo has the honour of being the first municipality in Ireland to adopt the principle, and everyone agrees that it was a great success.”

Sligo Independent, 18th January, 1919.

“The election . . . has established beyond dispute two big things in favour of proportional representation. The first is that it is a thoroughly workable system. . . . The other big thing—and it is really big—is the proof that in proportional representation we have the Magna Charta of political and municipal minorities.”

Irish Times, 18th January, 1919.

“The first elections, on the principle of proportional representation by the single transferable vote, have resulted in the fair representation of all parties.”

Freeman's Journal, 18th January, 1919.

“Proportional representation has given Sligo a model Council. There is no reason why it should not be equally successful in Dublin and other cities and towns in Ireland.”

Irish Independent, 20th January, 1919.

The outstanding success of the Sligo election was quickly followed by the adoption of P. R. on a large scale under the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1919, which extended the principle to the election of 126 town and urban district councils and 200 other local authorities, including county councils, rural district councils and boards of guardians.

It is not surprising, accordingly, that the framers of the Constitution of the Irish Free State should have made provision for the application of the principles of P. R. to elections for the Dàil and the Senate.

The Constitution contains the following provisions as regards the election of members of the Dàil and the Senate :—

ARTICLE 14 (part).—No voter may exercise more than one vote at an election to either House, and the voting shall be by secret ballot.

ARTICLE 26.—The Chamber (Dàil Eireann) shall be composed of members who represent constituencies determined by law. The number of members shall be fixed from time to time by the Parliament (Oireachtas), but the total number of members (exclusive of members for the universities) of the Chamber (Dàil Eireann) shall not be fixed at less than one member for each thirty thousand of the population, or at more than one member for each twenty thousand of the population : Provided that the proportion between the number of members to be elected at any time for each constituency and the population of each constituency, as ascertained at the last preceding census, shall, so far as possible, be identical throughout the country. The members shall be elected upon principles of Proportional Representation. The Parliament (Oireachtas) shall revise the constituencies at least once in every ten years, with due regard to changes in distribution of the population, but any alterations in the constituencies shall not take effect during the life of the Chamber (Dàil Eireann) sitting when such revision is made.

ARTICLE 27.—Each University in the Irish Free State which was in existence at the date of the coming into operation of this Constitution shall be entitled to elect three representatives to the Dàil upon a franchise and in a manner to be prescribed by law.

ARTICLE 29.—In case of death, resignation or disqualification of a member of the Chamber (Dàil Eireann) the vacancy shall be filled by election in manner to be determined by law.

ARTICLE 32.—One-fourth of the members of the Senate (Seanad Eireann) shall be elected every three years from a panel constituted as hereinafter mentioned at an election at which the area of the jurisdiction of the Irish Free State (Saorstát Eireann) shall form one electoral area, and the elections shall be held on principles of Proportional Representation.

ARTICLE 33.—Before each election of members of the Senate (Seanad Éireann) a panel shall be formed consisting of

- (a) Three times as many qualified persons as there are members to be elected, of whom two-thirds shall be nominated by the Chamber (Dáil Éireann), voting according to principles of Proportional Representation, and one-third shall be nominated by the Senate (Seanad Éireann) voting according to principles of Proportional Representation; and
- (b) Such persons who have at any time been members of the Senate (Seanad) (including members about to retire) as signify by notice in writing, addressed to the President of the Executive Council, their desire to be included in the panel.

The method of proposal and selection for nomination shall be decided by the Chamber (Dáil) and Senate (Seanad) respectively, with special reference to the necessity for arranging for the representation of important interests and institutions in the country: Provided that each proposal shall be in writing and shall state the qualifications of the person proposed, and that no person shall be proposed without his own consent. As soon as the panel has been formed a list of names of the members of the panel, arranged in alphabetical order, with their qualifications, shall be published.

ARTICLE 34.—In case of death, resignation or disqualification of a member of the Senate (Seanad Éireann) his place shall be filled by a vote of the Senate (Seanad). Any Senator so chosen shall retire from office at the conclusion of the three years' period then running. And the vacancy thus created shall be additional to the places to be filled under Article 32. The term of office of the members chosen at the election after the first fifteen elected shall conclude at the end of the period or periods at which the Senator or Senators by whose death or withdrawal the vacancy or vacancies was or were originally created would be due to retire: Provided that the sixteenth member shall be deemed to have filled the vacancy first created in order of time and so on.

The Single Transferable Vote is not specifically prescribed, but that is the system under which the general elections of June, 1922, and August, 1923, and the Senate Election of September, 1925, were held.

I think it is very much to the point to-night to recall the historic General Elections of 1922 and 1923.

The Treaty establishing the Irish Free State was approved by the Dàil in January, 1922, by a very narrow majority—64 to 57. The Irish Free State Agreement Act which gave legislative effect to the Treaty was passed in the following March, and provided that a general election should be held not less than four months afterwards. There was a serious difference of opinion about the arrangements for the election both within the Dàil and within the Irish Republican Army. The two sections of the army issued a pronouncement in favour of an "agreed" election, and subsequently Mr. Michael Collins and Mr. de Valera, representing the pro-Treaty and the anti-Treaty forces in the Dàil, signed a "pact" outlining the conditions under which the elections should be held.

Briefly, these conditions were (1) that a national coalition panel should be formed of candidates of both parties, and (2) that the number of candidates for each party should be its strength as it existed at that time in the Dàil. I vividly recall the feeling of helplessness which I personally experienced when I read the terms of this pact. There was, however, in the pact a saving clause which read: "Any interest is free to go up and contest the election with the national Sinn Féin panel." I ventured to direct attention in a letter to the Press to the opportunities which this clause presented for independent action.

There could, however, have been no opening for effective independent action of any sort if it had not been for P. R., the method of election which was to be used in the contest. If the election had been conducted under the single-member system no one who did not possess the coupon of the national Sinn Féin panel could have stood with any chance of success. Even with proportional representation, candidates were in many parts of the country afraid to stand. However, it needed only one non-panel candidate (like the one Labour candidate in the County of Galway) with sufficient courage to stand to force an election over the whole of the constituency for which the non-panel candidate stood.

In this critical election the great issue was approval or disapproval of the Treaty. Under the proportional representation system the elector expressed his first choice by putting the figure 1 against the name of a candidate. The first choice of the elector revealed whether he preferred a pro-Treaty or an anti-Treaty candidate. The independent forces that contested the election included the Labour and the Farmers' groups. If we make a broad division of the electors into pro-Treaty and

anti-Treaty, the election of the Irish Provisional Parliament gave in the contested constituencies the following result :—

GENERAL ELECTION, JUNE, 1922.

(Contested Constituencies, excluding National University).

Candidates.		Votes polled.		Seats obtained.		Seats in proportion to votes.
Pro-Treaty	...	491,592	...	68	...	67·6
Anti-Treaty	...	134,165	...	18	...	18·4

The votes given to the Farmers and to Labour are included in the pro-Treaty total; doubtless some were against the Treaty, but, after making the fullest allowance, the election revealed the fact that the Treaty was supported by the overwhelming majority of the voters. This expression of opinion would have been impossible with a coupon election in single-member areas. P. R. smashed the "pact" made by organisers over the heads of the people.

The value to Ireland of this releasing of the opinion of the electors is in process of being forgotten. Without any doubt it was P. R. that made possible the functioning of the Irish Provisional Parliament and of the present Irish Government. Had we had the single-member system the deadlock in the Dàil which characterised the proceedings prior to the election of 1922 would in all probability have continued.

The election of 1923 was also conducted under proportional representation. The results showed that—

- (1) In practically all the constituencies all the large groups of opinion were brought into association with the Dàil through a representative in whose election they had taken part.
- (2) Taking the country as a whole, the political forces were represented fairly in parliament.

Let me illustrate these two points. In the County of Dublin there were returned three supporters of the Government, a supporter of Mr. de Valera, a representative of Labour, a representative of the business group, and two Independent candidates. There were 57,363 voters, and practically all these citizens secured a share of the representation. In County Clare, a stronghold of Mr. de Valera, not only was Mr. de Valera returned, but also Mr. McNeill, a member of the Government.

Taking the figures for the whole country, the result was—

DAIL EIREANN, 1923.

(All Constituencies, except Universities).

Parties.	Votes polled.	Seats obtained.	Seats in proportion to votes.
Government ...	413,037	61	57·4
Republican ...	288,543	44	40·1
Labour (including Ind Lab.) ...	128,078	16	17·8
Farmers' Union ...	124,052	14	17·3
Business and Inde- pendent ...	103,507	12	14·4
	1,057,217	147	147·0

The Dàil which issued from this election reflected with reasonable exactitude the views of the people of the country.

I do not propose to comment at any length upon the Senate election, which was admittedly a difficult experiment on a large scale. It must be remembered, however, that the scheme for which provision is made in the Constitution represents the results of a careful and prolonged investigation on the part of a committee of Irishmen who, in the course of their enquiry, examined the constitutions of the world.

The scheme is, admittedly, conceived on bold lines which appeal to the imagination, and the nation-wide constituency has this advantage amongst others, that, during the process of the counting and transferring of the votes, which in this case took fourteen days, the mind of the nation and the attention of the Press were concentrated upon one election—all were interested in following the same transfers.

The *Irish Times*, commenting on the election, said:—“Whatever the Senate election may have pilloried, it did not pillory the system of Proportional Representation, which has emerged very creditably from an exceedingly severe test.”

The success which has attended the increasing practical application of Proportional Representation by means of the Single Transferable Vote renders it unnecessary for me to deal with certain objections which were prematurely raised by those who assumed that the system would prove too complicated for voter and returning officer alike, and who predicted that it would fail largely because of its complexity and impracticability, while it was also alleged that what were described as “late preferences” would unfairly affect the results of elections held under this system.

Objections of the type just indicated may now, I think, be taken as rather out of date, but we still have to consider the opposition of those who contend that Proportional Representation, by creating or at least fostering the group system, makes practically impossible a strong and stable government, which it is suggested could be achieved by means of the single-member constituency and the two-party system.

In the first place, is it correct to suggest that Proportional Representation creates or fosters the group system? I have already shown that Proportional Representation is not in operation in France, where the group system has been carried to an extreme point of development. P. R. is in operation in Germany, but instead of increasing the number of parties in the Reichstag the number has actually been reduced since the introduction of P. R., as the following table shows:—

1912 ELECTION.			1924 ELECTION.		
(Single-member Constituencies with Second Ballot).			(Proportional Representation).		
<i>Parties.</i>		<i>Seats.</i>	<i>Parties.</i>		<i>Seats.</i>
			Right Wing Nationalist ...	14	
Conservative ...	...	43	Nationalist ...	103	
Free Conservative ...	...	14	People's Party ...	51	
National Liberal ...	...	45	Bavarian People's Party ...	19	
Anti-Semite ...	...	13	Middle Class Economic		
Centre Party ...	...	93	Party ...	17	
Bavarian Peasant League...	...	2	Land League ...	8	
German Peasant League ...	...	2	Centre ...	69	
Radical ...	...	41	Democrat ...	32	
Social Democrat ...	...	110	Social Democrat ...	131	
Poles ...	...	18	Communist ..	45	
Alsations ...	...	5	Hanoverians ...	4	
Lorrainers ...	...	2			
Hanoverians ...	...	5			
Dane ...	...	1			
Independents ...	...	3			
397			493		

P. R. is not in operation in Great Britain, but there they already have the Conservative, Asquithian-Liberal, Lloyd-George-Liberal, Labour and Communist Parties, with more looming in the near future.

In any event, is the group system to be condemned? On the contrary, is it not desirable that the views of all substantial bodies of differing opinion in a country shall find opportunities for free and coherent expression, and how can that be better

done in existing conditions than by the formation of groups which will each stand for a definite view point? Is it not the case that the natural tendency of the free human mind all over the world is to form groups, apart altogether from the electoral system which may be in operation? All that P. R. does is to provide simple machinery whereby any of the groups which may be strong enough to obtain one or more quotas of voters in an electoral area will be sure of obtaining corresponding representation.

What would be the possible results of a reversion to the single-member constituency in the Irish Free State? In the first place, it might give representation to the largest party out of proportion to its real strength in the country, and reduce the representation of the Republican Party below its real strength. This is, of course, what happened in the General Election of 1918, when the Sinn Féin Party gained many more seats than its strength in the country warranted, and the other parties were left with a representation which did not at all correspond with their strength. But I think nothing worse could happen now or at any other time than that any step should be taken which would savour of injustice to the Republicans. I do not share their views, but to deprive them of the representation to which they are fairly entitled would merely create a grievance of real substance, and accordingly hinder the peaceful development of the country. Under P. R. they must obtain a member for every "quota" of their supporters who go to the polls, but under a single-member system their chances of obtaining anything like adequate representation would be negligible. I greatly regret the fact that when elected their representatives will not take their seats in the Dáil, but the people who vote for them know that this is going to happen, so that there is no question of "disfranchisement" involved. In abstaining from taking their seats they are merely giving effect to the wishes of those who voted for them, and that is a matter between them and their supporters.

The continuance of an old system of election which does not do justice to the various substantial bodies of opinion in a country might possibly be defended on certain grounds, but the reversion to such a system from one which automatically produces justice in representation would be a piece of incredible folly or worse, particularly in this country, where trouble is never far to seek!

Would such a change necessarily produce a strong and stable government? The violent oscillations of representation

in Great Britain and in Canada within comparatively short periods of time would appear to prove that the single-member system does not necessarily produce stability of government and a reasonable stability in policy.

Can this country really afford to risk the kind of thing which happened in Canada a year ago, when in a General Election which took place under the single-member system Mr. Mackenzie King and eight of his Ministers were defeated? More recently another election took place under the same system when the Conservative leader and six of his Ministers were defeated. In Great Britain no Minister, however long his service to the State, is safe from the possible indiscriminate slaughter of a General Election. In the General Election of December, 1918, Mr. Asquith, Sir John Simon, Sir Herbert Samuel, Mr. McKenna, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, Mr. Snowden, and Mr. Arthur Henderson were all defeated. Is it not better to adhere to a system which undoubtedly makes it possible to return to the Representative Chamber all the leading personalities who retain the confidence of large bodies of electors?

The British conception of parliamentary government may be summed up in "a strong government, confronted with a strong opposition, ready and willing to replace the existing government." How far is this doctrine applicable to the Irish Free State?

The British method of alternative governments is, strictly speaking, only possible where the two-party system is fully developed. The presence of three parties, each willing to assume responsibility for the government of the country if and when the opportunity presents itself, has already upset the underlying idea of the British system, and no solution has yet been thought out. It is clear that the single-member system of election does not of itself produce the two-party system of government. In the Irish Free State the Labour Party would undoubtedly insist upon independent expression. Is it likely that the Farmers' Party would agree to be swallowed up?

The fact remains that there is no such thing as the two-party system in Europe, and the Irish Free State will have more than two parties whether we retain P. R. or take the retrograde step of reverting to the single-member system of election.

What we have to do in the first place is to elicit the views of the people untrammelled by arbitrary arrangements made before the election by party organisers. P. R. enables this to be done.

The next problem is to give effect as impartially and fairly as may be possible to the national verdict which may show substantial majorities for policies not all of which can be fathered by any one party. But it must be assumed that when a party invites the support of the electors at the polls it does so with a sense of responsibility which the membership of a parliament entails. The first duty of parliament is to provide the nation with a government, and the government should be in a position to give effect to the wishes of the majority of the electors. One of the parties may be permitted to form the government, although this party may not have a majority of the seats. On the other hand, it may be desirable to form a government containing members of more than one party. But the duty of the government, however formed, while not neglecting the responsibility of leadership, is to interpret the wishes of parliament and of the country.

The group system exists in every country in Europe, and with universal suffrage and universal education, this condition of things is likely to continue. We must examine the problems associated with new political conditions. In Switzerland the co-operation of parties has been assumed as being a natural way of carrying on government. In Germany the co-operation of parties in government has undoubtedly been a large factor in maintaining the Republic. In France and in Belgium the co-operation of parties was necessary to deal with financial crises. In Greece the co-operation of parties was necessary in making the change from Dictatorship to parliamentary government. In Sweden one of the parties with less than a majority has been entrusted with the formation of a government, but on the understanding that it interprets the will of parliament.

What is the position in the Irish Free State? Is it at all certain that the next General Election will give a clear majority to any party? Would it not be well accordingly to consider in advance possible solutions of the problem which will then arise?

Why should not the largest party make it quite clear in advance that in the event of its not obtaining a clear majority over all other parties it will be prepared to govern in accordance with the wishes of the nation in so far as these can be ascertained from the results of the election, and that it will expect other parties to accept their share of responsibility? And it seems to me that such an experiment can be tried with confidence in a country where the electoral system is such as to give the electors the freedom and sense of fair play which are the outstanding features of the Proportional Representation system.

I believe that the system of Proportional Representation by means of the single transferable vote which is in operation in the Irish Free State provides the best method so far discovered for giving adequate representation to all substantial bodies of opinion in a country. It prevents the injustice and anomalies which attend the operation in modern conditions of the single-member system, and so makes not only for stability but for the peaceful development of our political institutions. In short, it is a system which is well suited to our requirements and well calculated to help us to solve the new and difficult problems of modern government in a manner which will do no injustice to any substantial interest, and will at the same time permit of the free expression of the varied views which constitute the public opinion of a nation.