

ADVANTAGES OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

(i) It is virtually impossible for prominent leaders of recognised ability to lose their seats at election time. This often happens in single member electorates owing to population increases or changes within the electorate or by concentrated effort of "the opposition" to defeat a formidable opponent.

(ii) Candidates with little ability but with great financial strength or past masters in political intrigue can never be elected unopposed as at present often happens in Local Government.

(iii) A casual vacancy can be filled without a by-election simply by examining the ballot papers and appointing the candidate who was "runner-up" at the last election.

(iv) Interest would be revived in politics and Local Government when electors had such a wide choice of candidates, one or more of whom most certainly would appeal as a suitable representative. How often do intelligent people fail to record a vote when faced with a choice of known incompetents, products of the party pre-selection system? A multi-member election, for example, for the complete Council every three years in Local Government would become a well-advertised event, attracting wide interest, especially when a council is failing to serve the interests of ratepayers. A real protest could then be registered. There is little or no redress under the present system when only one-third retire and of these the majority, in safe single member seats, are elected unopposed.

(v) The city councils of Sydney and Melbourne have been sacked by the governments of New South Wales and Victoria in recent years because of malpractice, and others only remain in office because of weakness or disinterest by the State Governments concerned. New South Wales has since adopted a substantial measure of Proportional Representation to ensure responsible Local Government for the future.

(vi) Proportional Representation gives voting power to minorities according to their numbers. It is well known that the great majority are not the best informed members of the community and are easily swayed by propaganda. The intelligent section of the community, those equipped for leadership, are always in the minority.

(vii) Proportional Representation has brought peace to Southern Ireland. The single member electorates of Northern Ireland have denied the Catholics even the semblance of fair representation and hundreds have died in consequence.

(viii) Proportional Representation is not an experiment: it is used in many parts of the world — for the Australian Senate elections and for State elections in Tasmania. Even though unnecessary complexities have been introduced, the franchise has been restored to nearly all electors.

(ix) It should be noted, however, that in some European countries a distorted form of Proportional Representation known as the "Party List" system is used. Under this method votes are cast for parties and not for individual candidates. The parties are then entitled to select and appoint members to the parliament according to voting strength.

On no account should this system be used. It does not comply with the true concept of democracy or give electors the right to vote for the candidate of their choice. Votes cast under such conditions cannot be said to have real value, when the worst features of the party pre-selection system are perpetuated.

(From Graham Hart's "Effective Voting". Copies available from 31 Hardware Street, Melbourne, at \$1, plus, say, 50c postage.)