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REPRESENTATION.

Paper Read on Proportional Representation Before the Meeting of the Kansas Reform Press Association in Girard, June 18, 1895, by J. P. Easterly, of the Manhattan Republic.

In the history of governments the idea of a democracy is of comparatively recent origin. When our government was established it was considered that if the majority should rule all ought to be satisfied—nothing more could be desired in the realm of representative government. It seems not to have been foreseen that our constitutions and laws would almost certainly result in minority, rather than majority rule. But in our history we have seen the work of the gerrymander and in many instances have protested against it as manifestly unjust without discovering that in many congressional districts a large proportion of the people have really had no voice in the election of their representatives, nor could they have without forsaking their political principles. It is said that in one Ohio district the democrats have never had an opportunity to vote for a congressman, a democrat having never been chosen from that district. That is by no means an exceptional fact, but may be witnessed in one or more congressional or legislative districts in nearly every state in the union.

The Proportional Representation league calls attention to the following:

In 1892 the total vote in the United States for congressmen was 12,032,203, of which the republicans polled 5,031,360, the democrats 5,670,148, the populists 1,046,392, the prohibitionists 244,726, and 39,577 were scattering. The result of this poll was that the republicans elected 131, the democrats 213, and the populists 12 congressmen. That is to say, the republicans with 41.9 per cent. of the total vote secured 36.8 per cent. of the representatives; the democrats with 47.2 per cent. of the vote got 59.8 per cent. of the representatives: the 8.7 per cent. of the populists obtained 3.4 per cent. of the representatives: the prohibitionists' 2 per cent. secured nothing.

Nor was the following election less erroneous in registering the will of the people. The total vote for congressmen in 1894 was 11,288,13\. Of this number the republicans cast 5,461,202, the democrats 4,295,748, the populists 1,323,644, the prohibitionists 182,679, scattering 24,862. The result was the election of 245 republican, 104 democratic and 7 populist congressmen. Or, in other words, the republicans, with 48.4 per cent. of the total vote elected 68.8 per cent. of the congressmen: the democrats with 38.1 per cent. of the vote secured 29.2 per cent. of the representatives: the 11.7 per cent. of the populists obtained 2 per cent. of the representation: and the 1.6 per cent. of the prohibitionists failed of recognition.

This demonstration is complete. It is shown by the official vote in two national elections, when there were no serious charges of fraud or corruption, that two minority parties secured enormous majorities in the house of representatives. The reason for this lies, not in the cunning or dishonesty of either party, but in the principle upon which the system is based. Congressmen are elected from separate districts by means of a plurality vote: hence the political party which has a plurality in the whole state will have, unless the voters are unevenly distributed, a plurality in each district. Though the opposition party may have almost as many votes as its rival it may secure no representation at all. And should there be three or more parties it is likely that all the representation will go to a party polling less than half the votes.

In our own state last year the republicans cast less than 50 per cent. of the entire vote and yet they elected 7 of our 8 congressmen. In 1892 the populists cast slightly more than 50 per cent. of the vote and elected 6 of the 8 congressmen. The gerrymander is righteously denounced in localities where it exists and it should be because it is designed for base purposes, to take undue advantage, but similar results are often accomplished without its use. The defect is fundamental and cannot be cured while we have plurality elections in districts that are small portions of a state. Students of the problems of government have reached the conclusion that it is possible to provide against minority rule, and not only that, but that it is possible to secure a larger representation for the people in legislative bodies than that of mere majority, making it possible by the principle of proportional representation to make the legislative bodies truly representative of the whole people.

In the evolution of human affairs there is a constant tendency on the one hand to defeat all the real purposes for which government is founded. The forces that are perilous to peace and prosperity endeavor to use the machinery of our government to accomplish partisan rather than patriotic ends, to place special above general interests, and hence largely defeat the idea of a government of the people, by dominating a mere majority of the active forces of the leading political party. By this method we see many measures desired by the people entirely ignored by the politician, while many others not desired by the people are brought forward. On the other hand the thought and patriotism of noble minds are constantly engaged in the effort to so perfect our governmental machinery as to preserve the liberties of the people. The conflict between these two classes has always existed in our history and in the history of the world. Whenever the evil forces have had such a degree of power as to turn a deaf ear to the heart and conscience of the majority of the people thus preventing the normal growth, or evolution of the effort to improve, revolution has been the result, for revolution had been well characterized as the inevitable result of hindering or delaying evolution. Hence it becomes all good people to be allied to the forces that promote good and checkmate evil in politics as well as elsewhere. The ideas of proportional representation and the initiative and referendum are brought forward by those who would aid in making our government more truly a people's government.

We have shown that our present methods are seriously defective. The evil lies in the district system which limits the sphere of action and the range of influence and gives the partisan control, instead of reposing all the elements of control in the people. We need to abolish the district and make the fields of action larger, dividing the representation by the lines of thought instead of by geographical lines.

This is not a new idea. It has been in practice in an imperfect manner in Illinois in the election of the state legislature for many years. Also in several Swiss cantons. A number of schemes have been devised to develop this principle—such as the Hare system, the Gove system, and the free list system. The American Proportional Representation league recommends the free list system as the one offering the least resistance as a means of introduction.

The essentials of the free list system may be stated thus:

1. District lines, so far as representation is concerned, are wiped out and the congressmen elected from the state at large.

2. Any group of voters entitled to nominate candidates, either by convention or petition, may nominate as many candidates as it sees fit up to the whole number to be elected.

3. Each elector has as many votes as there are congressmen to be elected, which he may distribute as he pleases among the candidates. The votes count individually for the candidates as well as for the party or group to which they belong.

4. The sum of all the votes cast in the state is divided by the number of congressmen to be elected, and the quotient is known as the quota of representation.

5. The total vote of each party or group of voters is divided by this electoral quota, and each party is allotted as many congressmen as the quota is contained times in its vote. Should there not be enough full quotas to elect all the congressmen, the required number is taken from the party or parties having the largest unfilled quotas.

6. The proportion of candidates to which each party is entitled is taken from its list in the order of votes received by the candidates.

7. Should there be a vacancy during a term of office the remainder of the term is served by the candidate of the same party whose vote was highest of those not at first chosen.

The vote for congressmen in our state in 1894 will serve as an illustration. The republicans polled 148,697 votes, the populists 118,329 votes, the democrats 26,709 votes and the prohibitionists 5,496, making a total of 299,231 votes. The state being entitled to eight congressmen, each eighth part of the total vote should elect one congressman; 299,231 divided by 8 equal 37,404 as the electoral quota. Since 37,404 is the number of votes necessary to elect one congressman, each party should have as many congressmen as that number is contained times in the vote cast by it. The republican vote of 148,697, divided by 37,404, gives almost four full quotas. The populist vote is thus entitled to somewhat over three full quotas and the democratic vote to one quota. By this plan the democrats would have always had one or more representatives in congress, whereas under the present plan they have scarcely ever had any representation.

Proportional representation cannot intelligently be considered in any sense minority representation for it is really representation of the whole people, and makes majority rule a fact in practice as well as in theory. Those who look into the operation of the forces of government can but see that what we have in the way of representation is but a travesty upon popular government.

The abolition of this system which produces such results is demanded in behalf of the whole people and in the name of common justice. When the principle of proportional representation is understood it will be used not only in the election of congressmen, but also in state legislatures and city councils.—Published by request of Kansas Reform Press Association.

In a recent issue the Courier-Journal said that the people's party was dying out; and in another column it stated that the silver sentiment in the democratic party throughout the south was dying out because the silver democrats were joining the people's party. Now you see it and now you don't. In 1896 the grand old south will swing almost solidly into line for the people's party and reform.

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