

I had a long conversation with the Hon. Mr. Solomon, the Premier, who was of opinion that single-member constituencies with the preferential vote would be found to give greater satisfaction to us here in New Zealand than the proportional system. Mr. Solomon admitted that from a theoretical point of view the Hare-Clark system was perfect, but from a politician's point of view it was not perfect, inasmuch as you could not in actual practice divide a candidate up fractionally in the way it was done on paper.

Even under the present electoral law in Tasmania it is not found practicable to carry out by-elections under their proportional system. The whole electorate is polled for the return of a member, and if there are more than two candidates standing the preferential method of voting is applied so as to ensure the return of a candidate with an absolute majority.

I attach a table showing the result of a by-election for the district of Wilmot held in June, 1910, which the Premier, Mr. Solomon, handed to me to support his favouring single-member constituencies with the preferential vote as a system of election which would ensure the return of a member who represented a majority of the electors.

I am constrained to say that, generally speaking, the objections to the Hare-Clark system which I noted in Tasmania were not against proportional representation, but rather against the complex method by which the results of the election were arrived at—brought about by the use of the transferable vote. It appeared to me that the complicated process of the transference of surpluses was regarded more as a necessary evil than as a satisfactory method of arriving at results, the average elector regarding the whole procedure as quite beyond his mental grasp.

The question of substituting the party-list system of proportional representation for the transferable vote is engaging serious attention in Tasmania. This system has much to recommend it. On the ballot-paper the candidates are arranged in lists according to party, and the elector votes for as many candidates as there are seats to be filled—not by numbering the candidates in the order of his preference, but by giving a vote to each of them. Instead of having to decide upon his various preferences the elector may vote straight out for his party by giving a vote to each candidate on the list (up to the number of candidates to be elected), just as he may do at an ordinary municipal election. He is not, however, prevented from voting for any candidates irrespective of parties.

There being no "preferences" to deal with, the duty of the Returning Officer in ascertaining the result of the poll is exceedingly simple. He ascertains the number of votes secured by each candidate, as well as the total of all the votes obtained by all the candidates in each party, and apportions the number of seats to each party accordingly, selecting the particular candidates who are highest in the list.

In the event of a seat becoming vacant through the death or resignation of a member the next highest candidate in the party's list at the general election is selected. Thus the proportional strengths of the parties in the House remain undisturbed, and the trouble and expense of a by-election are obviated.

It will be seen that the party-list system subordinates the candidate to the party, while the use of the transferable vote subordinates the party to the candidate.

The use of the party-list does away entirely with the complicated and tedious method of arriving at results such as we have with the transferable vote, while it is claimed for it that it returns each party in exact proportion to their respective strengths.

The objections to the party-list system do not appear to me to be very serious, and if it is intended to adopt proportional representation in some form or other this system should be given careful consideration.

Mr. Piesse, LL.B., who is Assistant Returning Officer in Hobart, and an acknowledged authority on the subject of proportional representation, has recently contributed to the Press of Tasmania articles on the party-list system. I attach reprints of same for your perusal.

Regarding the application of proportional representation to New Zealand there would be no difficulty so far as the parliamentary poll was concerned, but I see very great difficulties in the way of carrying out a poll under the proportional system (which requires large constituencies) simultaneously with the licensing and national prohibition polls. The whole position would become exceedingly complicated, and even if the process could be made at all workable the risks of irregularities in connection with the conduct of the polls would be very great. In a memorandum dated the 5th December last, which is still with you, I outlined some of the difficulties in the way of carrying out a parliamentary poll under the proportional method simultaneously with the licensing polls.

If it is decided to retain single-member constituencies in part or throughout the whole of the Dominion, I think that the use of the preferential vote (where there are more than two candidates) would prove much more satisfactory than the second ballot. The method provides, in reality, for first and second ballots being conducted at one operation, and its adoption would not involve any disturbance in present electoral arrangements.

Three Australian States—viz., Queensland, Victoria, and Western Australia—have adopted preferential voting with single-member constituencies, and the system has, so far as I can learn, given satisfaction. In New South Wales the second ballot is in vogue, while in South Australia they have the old relative-majority system such as we had prior to the adoption of the second ballot in 1908.

I attach the following: Clippings from Hobart Press in connection with the elections, containing comments upon the Hare-Clark system; table showing the results of the counts of first choices at the recent Tasmanian elections, and final results; table showing result of by-election for the district of Wilmot, held in June, 1910 (mentioned above); and printed pamphlets on party-list system of proportional representation (mentioned above).

19th February, 1913.

F. W. MANSFIELD,
Chief Electoral Officer.