

P. R. AND THE TRANSFERABLE VOTE

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As President of the Victoria Secretary of the Proportional Representation Society of Australia, I wish to comment on Walter Horn's article on the subject in GJ No. 41. I read his article with wry amusement, because our Society have been plugging the Hare-Clark voting system of P.R. since the turn of the century. It has been used with eminent success in Tasmanian Lower House Parliamentary elections since 1909, and a variant has been used for the Federal Senate since 1949. It really is not very complicated nor time-consuming. I quote from Enid Lakeman's Voting in Democracies:

"The Single Non-Transferable Vote. If (in multi-member electorates with limited vote) the number of votes per elector is reduced to one, the result is likely to be still more representative. The chief test of this method has been in Japan, where it has given...results much more nearly reflecting the wishes of the voters than those in the United Kingdom. This method clearly is open to the same sorts of objections as is the limited vote. For example, a party hoping for, but not certain of, a large increase in its vote dares not nominate as many candidates as the country may wish to elect, for fear that by dividing its votes among too many candidates, it may cause some, or even all of them to fail. The method has therefore tended to produce stagnation, each party hesitating to run the risk of nominating more candidates than were successful at the previous election. A further objection is that the voters may resent being limited to expressing an opinion about only one candidate, out of perhaps a dozen or more who offer themselves for election...

"The Single Transferable Vote. The voting systems described...are all based on the assumption that the voter is primarily concerned with the support of a party, and that parties as such should be given representation in proportion to their size. In English-speaking countries, on the other hand, the approach to P.R. is fundamentally different. Those who first advocated the Single Transferable Vote were concerned less with the fortunes of parties than with giving greater freedom to the individual voter. The system is designed to make every vote as effective as possible, whether used to support a party or not. The object of the S.T.V. is to enable each citizen to take part as free and as fully as possible in the selection of his own representative, in the belief that this is the essence of true democracy."

The Hare system is, in our view, the quintessence of democracy.