

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION?

By WALTER HORN (Boston, Massachusetts)

The Henry George Institute ought to adopt proportional representation in its annual election instead of the present plurality method.

It is my understanding that there are significant ideological rifts between those who consider themselves followers of Henry George. Some are single taxers, others are neo-Georgists; some think of the land value toll as a tax and the movement as a tax reform proposal, others see the toll as rent; some are interested in the land trust movement, others consider it irrelevant; some would focus on education, others on political action; etc. So no case can be made for complete unanimity among Georgists.

Two democratic principles ought to be remembered whenever there is going to be representative government: the majority should rule (so long as no rights are violated) and every significant minority should be represented (or, as I see it, there would be a rights violation).

There are three main types of systems for proportional representation. The first, representation by lists (generally party lists of candidates) need not concern us. It is inapplicable to our case; it assumes that platforms rather than people will be elected; and it generally allows for no more than one or two minority views.

The second, developed by Thomas Hare in the last century is called the single transferable ballot. It is quite complicated and creates a very time-consuming method of counting ballots. Here's how it works: Suppose there are 10 candidates for 5 positions and 10,000 voters. The voters mark their orders of preference on their ballots. They may simply put a 1 mark next to Jones, or they may mark Jones 1, Smith 2, Brown 3, etc. But the counting is so complicated that the system borders on the ridiculous.

The third system is the one I suggest to the Institute. It is no more difficult to use than your present system, it is elegant and equitable. It is called the single non-transferable ballot system and is used in the Japanese Parliament for districts having more than one seat. All one does is vote for no more than one candidate and make sure that there is more than one representative. Thus, one should be allowed no more than one vote for a position on the Institute's Board of Directors each election. Naturally, one will vote for that person who one believes best represents his views.

Board members are to be given weighted votes at meetings. The reason is this: Suppose there are to be 3 members of the Board elected at a certain time, the top 3 vote-getters win. Suppose the neo-Georgists all settle on Jones as their candidate and he gets 51% of the total vote. The rest of the voters scatter their votes among 5 single taxers. Now the Board will contain 2 single taxers and but one neo-Georgist, in spite of the fact that a majority of voters supported Jones.

I suggest a revision of the Institute's By-laws in the following way: There should be added after the third sentence of IV.1 the following sentence: "No member may vote for more than one Director in any election." I would make the same change for the Nominations Committee and Directors. I would add between IV.1 and IV.2 the following subsection: "IA. Whenever there is a vote of the Board, each Director shall be given the number of votes that is equal to the percentage of the total votes cast which he received when last elected. Those elected before the effective date of this amendment shall each be given 33 (?) votes."

(Members of the Henry George Institute are invited to comment on the above suggestion. If you cannot find your copy of the Institute's By-laws, let us know and we will send you a copy. See p. 5 re HGI election.)