

FICTION IN FACT SHEET #7

Fiction Wrapped in Fact Sheets.

There are 14 of them posted on the CA website. In hardcopy they are distributed at the CA public hearings and elsewhere I presume. They are the CA "Fact Sheets".

They serve a dual purpose. One is channeling the thinking of the CA members to that of the Fact Sheet authors. The other is to "soften the target", that is to say, to make the public receptive to the verdict the CA will concoct by following these "Fact Sheets".

The authors have not expressly claimed infallibility, yet they have neither invited debate nor have exposed otherwise to scrutiny these Fact Sheets. Yet, the need to test the "facts" served on these sheets is pressing, for their potential to mislead is large and the consequence of that grave.

Alcyone News has emerged as the voice of "Opposition" to the CA Managers and from that position will challenge the factuality of these Fact Sheets. This series of articles we will call "Fiction Wrapped in Fact Sheets"

Tom Varzeliotis

NB: FS and FS#x, stand for Fact Sheet and fact Sheet # x, respectively.

FICTION IN FACT SHEET #7

The title of Fact Sheet #7 is: **"Electoral Systems"**

The first "fact" group in FS#7 is: ***"Families of electoral systems"***

FS#7 begins by informing the anxious that five families of electoral systems exist . This may be a "fact" only if one accepts that "electoral system" is synonymous with "translating ballots into parliament seats".

I do recognize that this synonymy has been excessively promoted and through years has found its way into university textbooks and has become embedded in conventional wisdom. It may be convenient but it is incorrect. An election system is about much more than ballot counting.

They several subsystems making up an electoral system. The way ballots translate into seats is only one of them, some others being:

The subsystem setting of election dates. It determines the frequency of elections, whether split and staggered, whether held on fixed dates or at any time

within a maximum time span, whether the election is to be triggered by the calendar, the Prime Minister, the Head of State, or somebody else; and other related aspects.

Then there is the subsystem setting out eligibility requirements for voters. Are men to vote? Are women to vote? Are prisoners to vote? Are children to vote? Are illiterate persons to vote? Are senile persons with no measurable stake in the future of the society, to vote? Is it to be one-person one-vote? Should Poli Sci U- Profs have several votes in recognition of their political wisdom?

Yet another electoral sub-system defines requirements to be met by people who want to be candidates for elected office. For example, is it that any citizen who is eligible to vote may run for a parliament seat? Should there be additional requirements, such as a reasonable level of literacy, absence of criminal record? Are candidates to be individuals or parties? Are commercial corporations allowed to compete for parliamentary seats, or to nominate candidates? What about "foreign company branch-plants? Are individuals allowed to meaningfully seek to represent their fellow citizens in the parliament of the society, or must they obtain the nod of a "God-Father" party in order to get their name on the ballot?

Is the electoral field to be even and level, like the sport fields of Oxford and Cambridge, or are they to be rough and sloping like the White Cliffs of Dover? Is it Ok for the rich to buy elections for their friends and servants? If we opt for honest elections, what "checks and balances" are necessary to fend off the sinister seeking to buy elections for, or otherwise bribe, candidates?

Another subsystem, and an important one it is, is that decreeing how elections are to be financed. Who pays for the essential candidates' exposure to the electorate? Should exposure to the electorate be bound by relevancy to democracy, or should money be given to candidates to parade dixie bands on flatbed trucks like the venerable Ron Basford paraded to expose himself in election campaigns past? Is there to be a monologue by the candidates, or will there be provision for the citizens to collectively, somehow, "interview" the candidates?

The list of subsystems comprising an electoral system is long, indeed. Do the CA Profs continue to insist that electoral system = how votes translate to parliamentary seats?

The CA Profs should reason out, if they can, that none of the above mentioned subsystems, appertain to electoral systems, if they want to equate "vote counting" with electoral system. If they cannot argue that, they must re-consider their definitions so as to restore their credibility.

I am aware that the CA Profs recognize that the way "ballots are counted" influences other aspects of the electoral system. But this is inherent to composite systems, it is in the nature of things, it goes without saying. Each subsystem of a system interacts with and accordingly affects other subsystems, the effects carrying

through, of course, onto the whole system. We know this since the time of Socrates.

There is no excuse for advancing the false notion that "vote counting IS the electoral system. How ballots translate into seats, is neither the most important thing, nor the thing most ardently in need of "reform" in our society. N'est ce pas?

If the CA managers would be willing to face reality, if the CA if would appraise the people at large of the fact that an electoral system comprises more than the counting of ballots and that our electoral system is in need of a thorough overhaul, if they would warn had warned us that patching up the old vote-counting system is utterly insufficient for democratic elections, they would serve us well. If the CA managers continue to drive the CA in the rut Mr. Gibson put it in, they will not get far as the wheels will fall off the vehicle of electoral reform.

Focusing on "**Families of electoral systems**" is one way politicians divert attention away from the most serious perversions of the electoral system.

The 2nd "fact" group in FS#7 is: "**Majority systems**"

This conforms to the basic tenets of democracy, it being that the majority is likely to come up with the best approach to any issue, if adequately charged with pertinent information, on any social issue, at any given time.

I lament the failure of the CA Profs to focus on this attribute of the "majority systems". In omitting this, be it inadvertently or intentionally, they degrade this, the most democratic of the systems, to the level of systems concocted by selfish politicians seeking to load the election dice, seeking for themselves electoral results at variance with what democracy would yield.

The 3rd "fact" in FS#7 is: "**pluarality systems**"

It is otherwise known as "first past the post". We recognize it for it is currently in use in our society. It is magical, for it metamorphoses instantly and rather inconspicuously, minorities of votes into majorities of members in parliament.

This system allows clever party strategists to exploit the old adage "divide and rule" so as to "win" elections against the will of the majority. It boots the "divided we fall" and weakens the "united we stand".

The CA Profs have spared no efforts to praise the plurality system. It could be because they were born (educationally and socially) in it. Not unlike Communist economists and Capitalist economists who erected and maintained the scientific facades of their respective camps throughout the Cold War years. All systems produce their own "prophets", it seems.

In the final analysis, the plurality system is a means of subverting democracy, for it facilitates minority rule over the majority.

The 4th "fact" in FS#7 is: "**Proportional representation systems (PR)**"

As Blaney and Carty have been telling anyone whose ears they catch, this is the first time in history, world wide, that the omnipotent politicians have allowed lowly hoi polloi to decide "how to elect" their, the hoi polloi's, own representatives in hoi polloi's own parliament. At all other times it was and is politicians who devise and impose electoral systems. And this combined with other doings of paternalist politicians, has brought Democracy to the level of disrepute that it is at - remember Churchill, who would not dare to say that democracy is good, only that it is less bad than other systems!

In any event, in one sense, proportional representation may be an improvement over the plurality system we now endure. If we are to resign our quest for democracy, if we are to submit to politicians dictating forever who is to represent us in parliament then proportional representation may be not the worst evil.

Proportional representation may extract too high a price from the society. It may take the winds out of the sail of real democratization of the electoral system and may increase the number of the stakeholders, as parties learn to feed on the system and become its defenders. Indeed, pain relievers often induce neglect for the cure....

The 5th "fact" in FS#7 is titled: "**Proportional representation list systems (PR-List)**"

See comment on the previous "family"

The 6th "fact" in FS#7 is titled: "**Proportional representation by single transferable vote systems (PR-STV)**"

Please see comment on "family" No 4. previous "fact".

The 7th "fact" in FS#7 is titled: "**Mixed systems**"

There is one possibility the CA Profs relate that sends shivers down my spine. I have seen this one done once before. I refer to the "*mixed system*" of "*using different systems in different regions*" which figures in FS#7.

It happened in the birthplace of democracy, Greece. It was used at least in one election before public disgust ended it. Provinces, of which Greece had about 30, were multi-member constituencies, the number of MPs being commensurate with each province's population. Crooked politicians about to be booted out decreed that in provinces favoring their party, the party receiving the most votes

would take all the seats; in provinces where the governing party was weak, the seats would go to "First Past the Post". Guess who got "elected"!

That the FS authors would present this aberration as a legitimate member of an Election Family, manifests the distance of ivy towers from the real world.

On that sad note I will end my review of FS#7 But before signing off, I will draw the readers' attention to the second serving of the "commercial" which debuted in FS#6. I refer the reader to my comments in article "CA Fact Sheet #6. It is worth reading, for it speaks reams to the designs of the CA managers.

Thank you.

Tom Varzeliotis, Citizen.