FACT SHEETS \#10 and \#11

## The title of Fact Sheet \#10 is: "Proportional representation - list systems"

## The title of Fact Sheet \#11 is: "Proportional representation by single transferable"

The two FSs refer to the pair of "Proportional Representation Electoral System Families". These two Families are closely related, and may be easily blended into one without the union seriously impeding their discussion. I will review them together.

As the common part of their names implies, the way these Families translate votes into seats is by apportioning the seats to the various parties in accordance, more or less, with the numbers of votes cast for each party. This implies the presence of parties and contrasts the Majority and the Plurality Families, FS\#8 and FS\#9, respectively, who are independent of the presence or the absence of political parties.

Political parties derive their identities primarily from their position on the politicalideological spectrum. In broad terms we are talking of parties on the "left", the "right" and the "center", as well as other locations in-between the cardinal orientations of the ideological spectrum. These are broad categorizations, and while the parties habitually pretend being "all things to all people, at all times", this claim is non-credible. Many segments of the political spectrum are unrepresented, others are under-represented, while others are over-represented. The latter is the result of power-hungry politicians swarming the part of the ideological spectrum where most of the voters are. Parties converge toward the middle of the spectrum chasing the concentrated vote, thereby leaving rather bare the rest of the political spectrum. Voters at ends of the spectrum are forced to compromise their beliefs so as vote to help avert the fate of being governed by the "worse evil".

Proportional representation degrades electoral boundaries as it allows parties to pool votes from many ridings and translate them into parliament seats. There are variations to the theme, such as the elimination of some or all of the electoral boundaries and so on. The overall feature of Proportional systems is that it apportions parliament seats to political parties in proportion to the votes they get, irrespective of where the geographical origin of the votes is. Parties of narrow appeal may not have enough votes to gain election in any or many singlecandidate ridings but by combining the votes of many ridings, they get to elect members of parliament.

Proportional representation fosters the emergence of parties to tap previously unoccupied parts of the political spectrum and this they do that to bring the respective perspectives into the House. Voters who under other systems would had to compromise their beliefs to vote for the party nearer rather than further from their position in the political spectrum have the opportunity to vote for parties that closely express their views. The parties thus emerging erode the dominance of parliament the large monolithic parties enjoy under other electoral systems.

The erosion of power translates into reduced arrogance. The "elected tyrant" oderates his/her manner to the point that the need to dispose of the tyrant "at any cost" fades, freeing
more votes for small parties, thereby further accelerating the proliferation of parties. The result is a more representative parliament than it would have been if, let's say, only two parties were viable, as is the case in British Columbia under the first-past-the-post party-o-cratic system.

Of course, the more numerous the parties become, the better parliament reflects society, just like the more the pixels comprising the picture, the better it depicts the pictured. The more in number and the lesser they vary in size, the more democratic the system of governace of the society becomes.

If we carry this to the limit, each member of parliament would represent a different party. Of course this is hypothetical for it would not happen, for good and valid reasons, which I will discuss elsewhere, shortly I hope. But were it to happen, the situation would come close to democracy, as close as it may conceivably be in a party-o-cracy.

This is not to say that the extreme proliferation of parties would result in real democracy. This is unlikely because adversity is incumbent to presence of parties and because party members tend to be ideologically rigid. Democracy is based on a parliament composed of unencumbered peoples' reprsentatives who, mostly, if not always, will have an open mind and whose approach to issues would be reasonable rather than ideological.

A parliament of peoples representatives is free of the doctrinaire attitude of party disciples. Its members, free of the fear of the party whip, being not fitted with plugs in their ears and blinkers on their eyes, are bound to be receptive to the merit of the issues.

If we resign to being ruled through party-o-cracy then proportional representation is a substantial improvement over the "First Past the Post Party Gets to the Trough and Gets to Impose the Elected Tyrant" system. Otherwise, that is to say, if we want democracy, the introduction of proportional representation is undesirable, because, like painkillers, it relieves the acuteness of the pain without curing the illness.

And because adoption of a proportional representation system will improve substantially the governance of the society, introduction of such a system will take the wind out of the sails of reform. As if this was not bad enough, it will increase the number of parties, thereby thickening the ranks of the defenders of the system -better to be a party leader, even if of a small party, than a plain member of a democratic parliament! These two factors, combined with the inertia inherent to all systems, will make it very difficult to democratize elections in the foreseeable future.

Those are the Facts, I most respectfully submit, the CA must consider. The technicalities of the various "Families of systems" the CA academics list on their FSs matter little or naught. Remember Rene Levesque's answer to a question about the presentation of the political system he was envisaging for an independent Quebec. "These matter not", said he, "we set the system and then we hire a bunch of economists to construct a scientific facade for it." N'est ce pas mon ami?

Once again I will mention that both FSs \#10 and \#11 carry the "Additional Resources Commercial", once again!

Tom Varzeliotis.

