

Elections

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

NOTE BY THE PREMIER

The Government is opposed to the electoral system known as proportional representation mainly for the following reasons:

- (i) Proportional representation would tend to "freeze", perpetuate or institutionalise present but transitional tendencies to division along racial lines;
- (ii) proportional representation would lead to weak and unstable government which would be unable to carry out the changes and to take the action necessary to develop the country and to raise standards of living.

MOVE TO DEFEAT P.P.P.

Even persons known for their hostility to the People's Progressive Party and to the present Government have admitted that the introduction of proportional representation system is a move designed mainly to defeat the P.P.P.

Thus the United Kingdom Robertson Constitutional Commission which investigated the events leading up to the suspension of the Constitution in 1953 and which was bitterly opposed to the PPP stated that -

✓ ".....if some system of proportional representation were now introduced it could hardly be represented as other than a device to mitigate the present dominance of the PPP. To enshrine in the constitution such a device would in our view be wrong and we therefore recommend no change in the present electoral system". (P.30, Report of the British Guiana Constitutional Commission HMSO Cmd. 9274.)

More recently a United Kingdom Member of Parliament and eminent Barrister and Queen's Counsel, Mr. Edward Gardiner, Q.C., M.P., who had visited British Guiana and has recently advocated the suspension of the Constitution and the removal of the present Government from office, said in a B.B.C. Overseas broadcast, the "World Today" on Friday, June 28, 1963, that one solution would be to

• ".....amend the constitution or if you'd like to put it more accurately I suppose, rig the constitution so that you introduce a system of proportional representation for voting. This would probably result in a slight majority for the Opposition but there would be a coalition between the Opposition parties. (I think it would be a very unhappy coalition) and I think the ultimate result might well be disastrous..."

It is equally clear that public opinion in the United Kingdom as reflected in the press is opposed to the introduction of proportional representation in British Guiana. Thus the influential "Financial Times" in an editorial of 7th October pointed out that

✓ "....proportional representation would not be the best way to achieve it (i.e. the removal of racial tension) because it could encourage the formation of extremist splinter groups".

It is thus clear that the Opposition's demand for P.R. is due to its failure to defeat the PPP at three successive general elections.

It should also be noted that on the question of the honesty of the last election, no less a person than President Kennedy himself who, according to a U.S.I.S. release of the 7th December, 1961, said that

"Dr. Jagan.....who was recently elected Prime Minister in British Guiana is a Marxist but the United States doesn't object because that choice was made by an honest election which he won".

EXPERIENCE OF OTHER COUNTRIES WITH PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

Countries with similar racial structures and problems have rejected the proportional representation system of election. Thus Dr. Eric Williams, now Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago in his broadcast report to that Nation on the draft Independence Constitution for that territory in April, 1962, stated

" A meeting of organisations and individuals such as I am now discussing would also be able to consider the proposals that have been made regarding proportional representation and in fact racial representation, that is to say, a revival of the old idea of the communal vote which was proposed in Trinidad as far back as 1920. There are those who would like the Trinidad and Tobago Independence constitution to be patterned on that of Cyprus; which means that the constitution will emphasise and in fact establish sharp lines of division between the various racial groups. All that I can say tonight is that I would far prefer to have the Government of Trinidad and Tobago accused of not dividing up the community into racial groups rather than have it accused of constitutional provisions which would establish a Negro President and an Indian Vice-President of a Republic with a fixed proportion of seats or places to the various racial groups in the Cabinet, in Parliament, in the Judiciary, in the Public Service, and in the Civil Service. As far as I am concerned, that way madness lies."

More recently representatives of the Trinidad Government have made it clear that the introduction of proportional representation in British Guiana is likely to have disruptive consequences in Trinidad in view of the proximity of the two territories and the similarities of their racial composition and culture. The Jamaican and Barbadian Governments share the same view as the Trinidadian Government.

Similarly, the people of Mauritius, another country with a somewhat similar racial composition, have rejected P.R., in their case, be it noted, having first tried it. In 1958, two years after the introduction of Proportional Representation, the Mauritius Electoral Boundary Commission under the Chairmanship of Sir Malcolm Trustram Eve recommended the introduction of single member constituencies to replace proportional representation. The Commission in making the recommendation that P.R. should be abandoned and replaced by the First Past the Post System, stated that it was desirable to have an electoral system which should facilitate the development of voting on grounds of political principle and party rather than on race or religion.

The People's National Congress has advocated the introduction of a proportional representation system similar to that of Israel. Israeli students of the political affairs of their country and no less a person than Mr. Ben Gurion himself have however advocated the abandonment of the proportional representation system in favour of "first past the post". Thus Mr. Ben Gurion has said of the Israeli P.R. system in an address to the Knesset on February 11th, 1958, that

✓ "It weakens and undermines democracy; splits the nation; distorts the principle of elected representation; vitiates the responsibility of the Opposition and is also harmful to the Coalition; violates the citizens' right to choose; undermines the civic education of the people; artificially inflates differences; creates unholy alliances; fosters factionalism and intolerance; and often gives minorities the opportunity to impose their will on the nation in opposition to the wishes of the majority."

In advocating the replacement of the P.R. system by first past the post, Mr. Ben Gurion stated:

"We are proposing an electoral system which will foster the maximum degree of unity among the people and gradually bring about a two party regime."

The proportional representation system has several disadvantages. Among the most important are the following:

- (i) It is a complicated and difficult system and in practice it would tend to disenfranchise the illiterate or semi-literate voter who would experience difficulty with the system;
- (ii) the loss of contact between a member and a particular area (a constituency) would lead to the neglect of sections of the country at a time of rapid change and development;
- (iii) an election would no longer be the selection of a particular candidate, thus violating the citizens' right to choose. In elections under a nation-wide P.R. system the citizen votes for unknowns;
- (iv) it usually produces a multiplicity of parties with resulting weak and unstable governments driven to make pacts and bargains and to form coalitions with other groups in order to stay in power. There is in consequence instability and a tendency to frequent elections, an expense which an underdeveloped territory cannot afford.
- (v) the system encourages political irresponsibility as small parties can make extravagant plans and promises knowing full well that they can modify or abandon their stated programmes if and when they join in coalitions. Moreover, as the programmes of coalitions are worked out after an election this means in effect that policy becomes a matter of post-election bargaining rather than the implementation of a manifesto submitted to the test of the electorate - a further denial of the rights of citizens;

/(vi) the need....

- (vi) the need to form coalition governments may have the effect that a minority party may be able to exact conditions and to enforce policy far beyond its true strength as the price for entering the government.
- (vii) In the context of British Guiana's situation, the introduction of P.R. in elections in British Guiana will lead to an irresistible demand for its introduction in all services and other fields.

A study of pre-1961 election writings, speeches and manifestos will reveal that there was no thought of a change in the electoral system. The change of the electoral system was never an election issue. Proportional Representation was not even advocated by any one at the 1961 Elections.

It might be mentioned here in passing that P.R. was advocated by the Opposition at the 1960 Constitutional Conference, but was rejected by the then Secretary of State for the Colonies Mr. Ian McLeod who has described it as a "rotten abominable system."

Experts in the United Kingdom hold the view that the system of proportional representation would tend to crystallise sectional tendencies and give them permanence in an aggravated form over the years.

The "Financial Times" in an editorial on "British Guiana Still Divided" on the 7th October 1963 dealt with the question of the electoral system and opined that

"There is little doubt that a coalition of the two main parties, if it could be made to work, would help to remove racial tensions. But proportional representation would not be the best way to achieve it, because it would encourage the formation of extremist splinter groups".

It is for these reasons, all of which apply to British Guiana, (see attached note) that the Government opposes the introduction of the Proportional Representation electoral system into British Guiana.

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NOTE ON LIKELY RESULT OF INTRODUCTION OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION
INTO BRITISH GUIANA.

1. The demand for Proportional Representation is another form of rigging the elections. Notwithstanding all that took place in 1957 and in 1961 the Peoples Progressive Party won the elections. It is conceivable that if the opposition found themselves likely to be defeated at future elections under P.R. rigging and cancellation of elections may be employed by them to keep the P.P.P. out of office.

2. The claim is put forward that the P.P.P. represents a minority of voters but have a majority of seats. Government, however, is not for voters but for the people. Although the P.P.P. polled 43% of the votes at the 1961 elections it contested only 29 of the 35 seats. If it is desired to know whether the P.P.P. represent a majority then voting should be reduced to 18 as was demanded by Mr. Burnham in 1951 when he, as Chairman of the P.P.P, led the P.P.P. delegation to the Waddington Constitutional Commission. Additionally if a referendum on P.R. is desired, plural voting must be allowed so that individuals above 21 in a household can cast votes for all those below 21. Note that nearly 60% of the population is below the age of 21 and thus cannot vote. Note also that there would be an additional 15% added to the voters roll if the voting age was reduced to 18.

3. P.R. in most countries has resulted in splinter parties, instability in Government and weak coalition governments. In such coalitions the small minority parties wield far more influence than their strength in total votes. Any coalition between Mr. D'Aguiar and Mr. Burnham will mean that Mr. D'Aguiar, even though having about 16% of the votes, will exercise as much influence as Mr. Burnham.

4. Mr. Burnham has claimed that under Proportional Representation no party will win a majority of seats, this means, in effect, that the Peoples Progressive Party will not be able to govern without him. Note, however, that he has rejected the P.P.P.'s offer to join in a coalition. If P.R. produced no party with over 50% of the votes there is a danger that the Peoples National Congress with less votes than the Peoples Progressive Party, as a central party could form the Government. This will then be a Government which is even less representative than the P.P.P. The position in Canada is that a Government which does not have a majority of votes on seats is able to govern without forming a coalition.

NOTE BY THE PREMIER OF BRITISH GUIANA ON THE ATTITUDE OF
U.K. GOVERNMENT TO GOVERNMENTS BASED ON MINORITY OF VOTES
AS SHOWN BY VERY RECENT CONSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENTS.

MALTA

The governing party in Malta "The Nationalist Party" (leader: Dr Borg Olivier) won at the last election 25 out of the 50 seats in the Legislature, and polled 42% of the votes cast. (One member of the Opposition party has since joined the Nationalist Party but there can be no doubt that the Government is still based on a minority of votes cast.)

Nevertheless the United Kingdom Government at the Malta Independence Conference last July agreed that

- (i) Malta should become independent at a date not later than 31st May, 1964
- (ii) The Prime Minister of Malta should hold discussions in Malta with representatives of all political parties in a further endeavour to agree upon joint constitutional proposals (the conference having failed to agree on a constitution for an independent Malta)

In arriving at this decision the Secretary of State stated he had been influenced by the fact that

- "from the large number of votes cast for the two pro-
• independence parties at the last election, it appeared that a substantial majority favoured early independence"
- (Page 3 of Malta Independence Conference Report H.M.S.O. Cmd. 2121)

(It is to be noted that in the case of British Guiana the two major parties (the People's Progressive Party and the People's National Congress) were agreed and the electorate understood, that the party that won the 1961 General Election would lead the country into independence. See Note showing that Independence was a major issue at the 1961 General Election.)

It should also be noted that the Secretary of State's decision was taken inspite of the fact that

- (i) the major Opposition party - the Malta Labour Party, (leader: Mr Dom Mintoff) which polled 34% of votes had
 - demanded
 - (a) a change in the electoral system from proportional representation to the first-past-the-post system
 - (b) fresh elections before Independence

(The Malta Labour Party withdrew from the Conference before its conclusion)

- (ii) the three minor Opposition parties which polled in all 24% of votes were opposed to Independence.

It is also of interest that the Secretary of State did not proceed with a proposal to hold a Referendum on the question of Independence, a proposal put forward by the three minor Opposition parties and which had apparently found favour with him. The governing party was willing to accept this proposal but when the Malta Labour Party indicated that it would not participate in a referendum Mr Sandys abandoned it. The Conference Report already referred to records that

- "After consultation with individual delegations on the situation thus created, the Secretary of State reached the conclusion that, in view of the probability of a boycott by a substantial section of the electorate, a referendum could not produce a reliable result and the proposal would therefore have to be dropped". (Para 18, page 3)

ZANZIBAR

The results of the General Election held in July in Zanzibar were as follows

	<u>Seats</u>	<u>Votes (Approx.)</u>
Zanzibar Nationalist Party	12	48,000
Zanzibar Pemba Peoples Alliance	6	26,000
Afro-Shirazi Party	13	87,000
	<u>31</u>	<u>161,000</u>

The Government which consists of a coalition of the Zanzibar Nationalist Party and the Zanzibar Pemba Peoples Alliance is based on a minority of votes cast. The Opposition party, the Afro-Shirazi Party, polled 54% of votes.

The Opposition Party, the Afro-Shirazi Party, demanded that the Independence Constitution should include a bicameral legislature with a Senate (Upper House) to safeguard basic rights and which should be elected in such a way as to reflect in its composition the number of votes cast. In spite of the fact that this party had a majority of the votes cast at a very recent general election this demand was rejected. The Constitution for an independent Zanzibar provides for a single chamber legislature, and a date for Independence has been fixed - 10th December, 1963.

SINGAPORE

Late in September a General Election was held in Singapore with the following results:

	<u>Seats</u>
People's Action Party	37
Barisan Socialists	13
United People's Party	1

The Governing party, the People's Action Party, led by Mr Lee Kuan Yew, polled 260,000 votes, less than half of the total of 530,000 who voted. The People's Action Party strongly supports the Federation of Malaysia and although polling a minority of votes, its victory has been hailed as giving further sanction to the participation of Singapore in the Federation of Malaysia.