

AN EXPERIMENT IN DEMOCRACY IMPROVED

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I DO not think that sufficient attention has been paid to the experiment, and the experiences, of the Proportional Representation Society of Weissnichtwo, that charming old autonomous city in Ruritania from whose vine-embowered villas so many suggestions for the better conduct of human life have been communicated to the world. The tale was told me by a professor who left Weissnichtwo about a year after the events which I am about to describe, and is now resident in Canada. He was full of enthusiasm for the principles developed and put into practice by the Weissnichtvoters, to use the peculiar name which he gives to the inhabitants of his native city; and he proposes to devote the rest of his lifetime to propagating these principles in parts of the world where they do not as yet prevail. The intensity of his enthusiasm may, I think, be gathered from his answer to a question which I put to him early in our acquaintance. "When do you and your wife propose to return to Weissnichtwo?" I asked him, having in mind (for I had become very fond of him) that it would be pleasant to visit the intellectual centre of Ruritania under his guidance. He looked at me very earnestly. "My wife will return with my dead body", was his reply.

Weissnichtwo does not, I understand, claim to be the originator of the principle of Proportional Representation. It claims merely to have carried that principle to a more complete and logical practical development than has been done elsewhere. Weissnichtvoters are a sternly logical people. When the fact was brought to their attention that, under the crude and brutal form of government which has grown up in modern Euro-American democracies, the votes of nearly half of the Weissnichtvoters were constantly being overridden and flatly reversed by the votes of the other fraction of the citizenry, they at once realized that this was not a condition consonant with the principles for which Ruritania sacrificed so much in the Great War. It was ascertained by their statisticians that after one municipal election the sitting Council consisted of persons who had received approximately 5,100 out of the 10,000 votes cast by the entire electorate, while the slightly smaller number of 4,900 had cast their votes for persons who, the day after the

election, had no more say in the affairs of Weissnichtwo than the youngest (pardon me, the professor's term was "the oldest", and I think the point is characteristic) and most insignificant of the electors. It is true that of the elected persons, twenty in number, eleven belonged to the party which had received the 5,100 votes, and nine to the party which had received the 4,900. But the Weissnichtvoters do not think very highly of parties, and it was no consolation to a Little-Indian in Ward One that the representative of Ward Two was a Little-Indian, so long as Ward One itself had nobody but a Big-Indian in the Council. Besides, this Council had not been sitting long before it became clear that the Little-Indians would have practically nothing to say about the process of government, except to register a minority vote against it at every possible stage. So in effect eleven Councillors, who after all had received only an average of 260 votes each, or a total of 2,860 votes, were actually controlling the destinies of 10,000 electors and 30,000 non-voting Weissnichtvoters, to say nothing of 750 horses, 1,000 goats, 1,200 dogs and an uncertain number of cats and small vermin.

As soon as this was made clear, the *intelligentsia* of Weissnichtwo, led by the eleven defeated candidates of the defeated party, and not unassisted by the nine defeated candidates of the victorious party, founded the Weissnichtwo Proportional Representation Society, the original object of which, as stated in its charter, was "to ensure that the Council of Weissnichtwo shall at all times be an accurate representation in little of the varying shades of opinion existing in the electorate, in their correct proportions." The most eminent mathematicians of Weissnichtwo were called in to aid in the devising of a ballot system which would produce the desired effect. They eventually decided that any citizen on the electoral roll should be capable of being elected to the Council without the formality of being nominated, and that any such citizen who received as many as ten votes should be considered as having been so elected, but as having in the Council only a voting power proportional to the number of votes which he himself had received. As there were ten thousand electors, and any ten electors could create a vote in the Council, it followed that each Councillor had one vote for every ten votes that had been cast for him in the election, or a possible total of one thousand Council votes. It would obviously have been possible under this system for the Council to have consisted of one thousand members with one vote apiece; this would have necessitated a considerable enlargement of the Council-chamber, but the mathematicians predicted, and

they were borne out by the results, that there would be a great bunching of votes upon a few leading candidates. What actually happened was that a grateful populace gave the president of the Proportional Representation Society 4,000 votes, the vice-president 2,000 votes, and scattered the remaining 4,000 over forty different candidates, in varying proportions. The two P. R. officers thus had complete control of the Council, which on the other hand was perfectly representative of the opinions of the electorate, so far as one representative could possibly represent the views of ten electors.

"And now", said the Weissnichtvoters, "we have a Council which is really representative of the opinions of the electorate. There is no unrepresented minority, and every representative has power in exact proportion to the votes he received from the electors. No other city has such a perfect form of government. Banzai Weissnichtwo!"

Things went very well for a time. The minority members attended meetings, and gave expression to what they supposed to be the opinions of those who had elected them, but what were really the opinions (more or less) of the people who had organized and financed their campaigns. But the president of the Proportional Representation Society, whose name was Gong, and the vice-president, whose name was Zoom, had sixty per cent. of the voting power in the Council, and had, as they frequently pointed out, a grave responsibility to the six thousand Weissnichtvoters who had elected them, a responsibility which precluded them from being influenced in the slightest degree by the arguments or the appeals of the representatives of the other four thousand. After a year or so it began to dawn on the brighter of the four thousand that they had no more weight in the councils of Weissnichtwo than any other minority had ever had. And they began to murmur mightily.

About this time it became necessary for the Council to decide whether the new tickets on the municipal omnibuses should be red or blue or green. The question may not at first sight appear to be one of grave importance, as indeed I remarked with some astonishment to my friend the professor. But it had, as he proceeded to explain, its symbolic aspect. Red, the colour of that essential fluid which runs in the veins of all humanity (but does not show until it has been spilled), was the colour of the Brotherly-Love party in Weissnichtwo, which desired above all things to live in peace and concord with the rest of humanity, especially those parts of it which were furthest away. Green was the colour of the

Agricultural party, which maintained that no man was a true citizen and worthy of the privileges of such unless he was engaged in the raising of foodstuffs. And blue was the colour of the Weissnichtwo Imperialists, who saw in the charming but sluggish stream which runs through their city the key to the dominion of the seas, and were all out for a strong navy. The disputes among these factions had been somewhat calmed, or more correctly forgotten, during the great campaign for Proportional Representation; but with that question settled and out of the way, they flared up again.

President Gong was a Big-Indian Imperialist; Vice-President Zoom was a Little-Indian Agriculturist; the next largest voter in the Council was a Little-Indian Brotherly-Lover. Gong started with the immense advantage of having forty per cent. of the voting power under his own hat; but Imperialism was not strong among the minority members, who were all tired of Gong domination in any event, and he could not raise more than 3 per cent. of additional votes. Zoom was much stronger with the minority, and raised his own 20 per cent. to 32 per cent. But the remaining 25 per cent. were invincibly Red. The dispute raged for months. The omnibuses got along all right, for the Superintendent, an exceptionally intelligent man, whose patriotism was however under grave suspicion because he was thought not to have voted for anybody, issued white "ticket certificates", exchangeable for real tickets "if, as and when issued", and they worked perfectly.

It then occurred to a member of the philosophy staff of Weissnichtwo University (a colleague of my friend's), who had voted for Gong but who wanted green tickets, that he was not being properly and proportionately represented in this conflict by his elected representative. This eminent authority (but why should I suppress the name of that benefactor of humanity, Dr. Ulrich Topian?) wrote a long letter to the *Weissnichtwo Vanguard*. "I voted for President Gong", he said, "because he adequately represents my opinions on the subject of the proper method of representation and on various kindred matters. But on this matter of omnibus tickets he is completely out of touch with myself and with a large number of other voters whom he is supposed to represent. I demand, therefore, either that Gong be recalled, or that an entirely new elective body be created to represent the views of the citizens on this vital question of tickets, while the Council continues to act in other and less important matters."

The result of this letter was the institution of what is now one of the city's most honorable, if not most active, governing bodies,

the Board of Supervisors of Omnibus Tickets, who were elected in the same way as the Council, and proved to consist of 30 per cent Blues, 33 per cent Reds and 37 per cent Greens. White certificates continued to be used for another year, for the Board was unable to reach any decision. Then a Blue who had 5 per cent of the voting power died, and autumn came on, and Greens to a value of ten per cent went out into the country to harvest their crops, and while they were away the Reds bribed fifteen per cent of the remaining Greens to vote for red tickets this year in exchange for a promise that they themselves would vote for green ones the year after; and thus a red-ticket vote was secured before the absentee Greens could get back.

The uproar in the city was terrific. Blues and Greens laid aside their mutual hatred to mob the Reds whenever they saw them in small quantities. Omnibus conductors were thrown off their vehicles when they proffered the new red tickets, until they took to protecting themselves by wearing a Green badge on one side of their coats and a Blue one on the other. Fortunately there are some men whose minds act better in a state of riot than in a state of peace. Dr. Topian, riding home on top of a bus amid a hail of decayed cabbages (from the Greens) and of fragments of roofing-slates (from the Blues), suddenly saw what was the matter with the system of government of Weissnichtwo, and immediately indited another letter to the *Vanguard*.

"The error that we have made", he said, "is in devoting our entire attention to proportionality of Representation, when what we should have aimed at is proportionality of Legislation. It is not sufficient that our governing body, or bodies, should accurately represent all shades of opinion in the community. It is necessary, in the interests of freedom, justice and democracy, that their legislation and administration should be similarly proportional. I propose, therefore, that our omnibus tickets shall be printed on parti-coloured paper, having an area of blue, an area of green and an area of red, each exactly proportioned to the votes cast for those respective colours by the members of the electorate."

And thus was born, out of the stress of necessity and amid the clash of battle, that tremendous principle of Proportional Legislation which, when properly grasped by the democracies of the world, is destined to revolutionize government and abolish tyranny. The Weissnichtvoters instantly perceived its significance. They enacted it into their constitution, to be applied not merely to omnibus tickets but to all the affairs of public life. Only one kind of difficulty was now left, namely that of determining the

exact basis for proportionalism in each separate case. It was not always as simple as dividing up the area of the omnibus tickets. Over its application to the market dues which the Weissnichtvoters exacted on all produce brought into their municipal area, there was a long and bitter controversy. The electors were divided into No Dues, Low Dues, Middle Dues and High Dues, to say nothing of a small faction known as Haman's Gallowers, who wanted every imported article seized and every importer hanged outside the gates. It was proposed to impose No Dues on ten articles, Low Dues on thirty, Middle Dues on fifty and High Dues on the rest, those being roughly the proportions of the various parties; and this was actually tried in practice. But it soon appeared that the No Dues and Low Dues articles provided about 95 per cent of the imports, which was clearly a gross violation of the principles of proportionalism; so in the long run it was decided to impose Low Dues on a certain number of market days, High Dues on others, and so on. When my friend left Weissnichtwo this system was working fairly well, though some complaint was uttered that the market seemed somewhat busier on Low Dues days than on High Dues days.

The week before my friend left, Ruritania found itself engaged in a war with its neighbour Sempiternia. The city of Weissnichtwo, which claims complete autonomy even in respect of war and peace, was immediately faced with the problem of deciding upon its course of conduct in this conflict. Fortunately, owing to the prowess of the Ruritanian troops, the forces of Sempiternia were unable to approach Weissnichtwo during the first two weeks of the struggle; and in that time the great constitutional question of Proportional Legislation on War and Peace was settled once and for all.

One-third of the Weissnichtvoters were in favour of neutrality; one-third were in favour of resistance to the death along with the Ruritanians; and one-third were in favour of immediate surrender to Sempiternia in order to escape from the tyranny of Ruritania. Two additional flagpoles were hastily rigged up alongside of the one original flagpole on the Weissnichtwo citadel; and on the three poles, at exactly the same height, were hoisted the flags of Ruritania and of Sempiternia and the white flag of peace. The city treasure-chest was opened, and its contents divided into three equal parts, of which one was given to the Ruritanian party to prepare for defence against the Sempiternians, one to the Sempiternian party for similar but opposite purposes, and one to the neutrals for the preservation of neutrality. The arms in the arsenal were similarly divided. On the day when my friend left, the troops both of

Ruritania and of Sempiternia were still at a considerable distance from the city, but terrific fighting was going on within the city itself between the adherents of the two countries, much complicated by the strenuous efforts of the neutralists to arrest the combatants and put a stop to the combat. The fighting raged for four days, indeed until the troops of Ruritania, having disposed of the Sempiternians, turned round and visited Weissnichtwo to restore order.

It was not until our acquaintance was well advanced that my friend from Weissnichtwo showed me a souvenir postcard which he had received from a relative two years after this struggle. It was a picture of a very handsome and imposing monument, which was inscribed: "Sacred to the memory of Dr. U. Topian, and of seven thousand other electors of Weissnichtwo, who died fighting on different sides, but alike in defence of the imperishable principle of Proportional Legislation. *Quot homines, tot sententiae.*"