

A GREEN PARTY DISCUSSION DOCUMENT

AN ELECTORAL SYSTEM FOR AN INCLUSIVE ALL-PARTY ASSEMBLY

The talks process must incorporate of a broad spectrum of political opinion, and the rationale fostering that requirement will be equally valid in a post-settlement Assembly. A fair voting system would guarantee political inclusion and enhance the prospects for stability.

The elections to a proposed Assembly offer an opportunity to implement a system of voting that will strengthen democracy by ensuring proportionality and inclusion. Such a system must also allow for the candidatures of individuals, independents and non-party groups as well as the political parties.

THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The Green Party propose that members be elected, to a new Northern Ireland Assembly, by a combination of;

- 1 **PR-STV in each of the 18 (5 seater) Westminster constituencies, and;**
- 2 **a regional topping-up List systems based on the first preference votes cast.**

Groupings not gaining representation in one of the constituencies, but with at least 1% support province wide will then be represented by an additional member chosen from the unsuccessful candidates that each party fields. The candidate obtaining the greatest percentage of first preference votes in his/her constituency would top the list for their party. The unsuccessful candidate with the second highest percentage would be second and so on.

This topping up procedure will ensure that;

- A) representation fairly reflects the views of the electorate; and
- B) all representatives will be elected with a similar number of votes and will thus have an equal mandate.

The advantages of the proposed system are firstly:

a) as is the case with PR-STV

- individual non-party candidates may also compete, and on an equal par with any party nominees;
- most elected representatives will still be identified with a particular geographical constituency;
- the system of voting is already in use in NI council and European elections and is known to the electorate.

and

b) as occurs with a List system

- overall proportionality will be maintained, so to ensure that any party with at least 1% overall support shall be represented; and
- the larger parties will not benefit from what would otherwise be an inherent bias in their favour.

Secondly, this combined voting system will ensure:

a) as would not happen under PR-STV

- that any party with less than 16.7% (i.e., 1/6th of the electorate, which is the quota in a 5-seat constituency) support will now get all due representation;
- that parties with a substantial vote in one area do not do better than a party with a similar number of votes spread across the entire region.

and

b) as would not happen with a List system

- that those elected will include those representing the more rural part of the province, and not consist of only "the big names" from Belfast and Derry;
- that power will remain with the individual voters, rather than be held by the party political machines.
- that a candidate who is the second preference of many voters, but who has limited first preference support, may now receive his/her due reward.

By combining the two voting systems we will ensure that the advantages of both voting systems are maintained and that the disadvantages do not happen.

THE TOPPING-UP PROCEDURE

In any and every constituency, the ballot paper shall include, not only the names of those candidates standing in that particular constituency (as well as the titles if any of the party each represents), but also the titles of any 'uncandidated' parties campaigning in the elections with candidates in at least 6 constituencies, province wide.

The voter shall be able to cast his/her first preference, or any of their subsequent preferences, either for one of the named candidates (parties) or for one of the 'uncandidated' parties. In the PR-STV part of the count, any vote cast for an 'uncandidated' party will simply be transferred to the next preference; such preferences will however influence the "topping-up" process.

Any party, which has at least 6 candidates standing, shall be eligible for the top-up.

If any party receives 1% or more of the overall first preference, but no successfully elected candidates, the candidate who receives the greatest 1st preference percentage shall be deemed elected under the "topping-up" procedure. Similarly, if any party receives 2% or more of the vote, but either none or only 1 successful candidate, the party shall be entitled to a representation of 2 persons, and either both or an additional 1 candidate shall then be deemed elected.

If a party obtains more seats than would be warranted by the number of first preference votes cast for that party they retain that advantage. The topping up process only corrects under representation.

If this system had been adopted for the Forum elections, and as it was it had considerable cross party support, the total number of persons elected to the Forum would have increased by only one³.

NB

1 In the German "Additional Member System" and in many PR List systems, the voter is allowed to vote not just for a party but for a particular candidate of that party. Indeed, in some countries, the voter must choose a named candidate, even if only the first named. This tends to encourage the voter to distinguish between the various nominees, rather than giving the party itself disproportionate say. As far as this paper is concerned, we suggest that the voter will already be able to distinguish both between candidates from one party, and between those and other candidates. Therefore, the additional complication of a second voting slip (as is the case in Germany) will not be necessary.

2 The topping-up threshold of 1% was chosen because: 1% of the total (1983) electorate of 1,048,766 is 10,488; and the average size of each of the 18 PR-STV constituencies is 58,265 and therefore the average quota for each 5-member constituency is $58,265 / 6 + 1 = 9,712$ and these two figures - 10,488 and 9,712 - are almost on a par.

3 See the Green Party's "Analysis of the results of the N.I. Forum Election of May 1996".

THE BALLOT PAPER

If the above proposals were to be adopted, the corresponding ballot paper for a "PR-STV plus topping up", election could resemble the following, which is primarily laid out alphabetically by candidate and secondly by party for uncandidated parties. It is similar to existing ballot papers.

ANDREWS, John 23 Cedar Court. PROGRESSIVE UNIONIST PARTY	
BATES, Cathleen 999 Crumlin Road. ALLIANCE PARTY	
DEMOCRATIC LEFT	
DEMOCRATIC UNIONIST PARTY	
DORAN, Fredrick 23 Alliance Avenue. SINN FEIN	
FORSYTHE, Betty 20 Glandore Avenue. ULSTER UNIONIST PARTY	
LABOUR PARTY	
Mc.MANUS, Sean 34 Stratheden Street. INDEPENDENT	
MORRISON, William 3York Parade. ULSTER UNIONIST PARTY	
SHERRY, Sean 94 Somerton Road. SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC & LABOUR PARTY	
STEPHENS, John 45 Deerpark Road GREEN PARTY	
Williamson, Petra 43 Downview Park WOMEN'S COALITION	
Etc. Etc. Etc.	

Re: Electoral System Considerations

Here are some of the options that we have talked about regarding how smaller parties might improve their chances at electoral success under the proposed adoption of STV in 18 multimember (six candidate) constituencies in Northern Ireland. The problem with electoral system design, of course, is that there are so many variables — particularly uncertain voter preferences, unclear and unpredictable patterns of voter behavior, and the spatial distribution of voters — that the problem of unintended consequences can be particularly acute. That is, the options below might be *expected* to serve the interests of smaller parties from a hypothetical point-of-view, but (with the exception of "top-off" seats options) there would be no guarantees that smaller parties would definitely win seats or improve their overall vote share under these alternatives.

It should be kept in mind that in any peace process, inclusivity in new institutions is, I believe, *the* premium value that should be promoted to the extent possible. Any electoral system, such as first-past-the-post or an STV system that has the effect of operating as a winner-take-all system, will set back the cause of conflict management through the new institutions if parties with significant standing in the community are excluded from the political process.

- Limiting the number of candidates each party can field in any given constituency to less than the total number of seats from that constituency. This option would ensure that in deriving subsequent preference votes, voters may have an incentive to cast a ballot for at least one other party that is not their first preference party. This would provide incentives for all parties to seek the subsequent preference votes of those voters whom they believe might be loyal to another party. This could also potentially encourage vote pooling among parties. This might also encourage votes being cast across sectarian lines by more moderate voters.

A change with a similar effect would be to limit the number of subsequent preference votes that voters can cast for candidates of the same party. That is, voters can cast all six votes, but if more than, for example, three votes are cast for candidates of the same party, these votes would be treated as spoiled. Thus, voters would have a clear incentive to cast subsequent preference votes 4, 5, and 6 for candidates from other parties under this type of rule. Even the requirement that at least one vote be for a different party could be potentially beneficial.

- Topping off the assembly with ten or twenty additional seats. This can be done without reliance on a PR system. For example, each voter's six votes could be aggregated across the 18 constituencies, computed in the aggregate and the top-off seats could be allocated according to a PR formula such as largest remainders. However, the incentives for voters to cast votes for parties other than their first preference loyalty would not be as strong under this option.
- A separate PR vote with a double ballot. This would envisage voters casting two ballots: one under STV for the principal seats, and a second under PR for top-off seats. The issue of a threshold would need to be addressed. This may be similar to the German additional member system.
- A simple rule that the size of the assembly be kept flexible to ensure that all top ten party vote-winners gain a place at the table. If doesn't happen through the initial STV balloting, then provision would be made to expand the assembly until all ten parties have at least one representative. This is, in effect, topping off, but only to the extent necessary to ensure broad inclusivity.

These are but a few options and other electoral systems specialists may come up with more, and these listed here are sketchy and subject to myriad potential problems. But, I hope they contribute to the thinking about the best possible institutional design to promote conflict management through the political process in Northern Ireland.