

# **A SHORT HISTORY OF ELECTORAL SYSTEMS IN WESTERN EUROPE**

---

Andrew McLaren Carstairs

ROUTLEDGE LIBRARY EDITIONS:  
POLITICAL SCIENCE



# **A SHORT HISTORY OF ELECTORAL SYSTEMS IN WESTERN EUROPE**

*By*

ANDREW McLAREN CARSTAIRS

Volume 22

 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 1980

This edition first published in 2010  
by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada  
by Routledge

270 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

© 1980 Andrew McLaren Carstairs

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 10: 0-415-49111-8 (Set)

ISBN 13: 978-0-415-49111-2 (Set)

ISBN 10: 0-415-55562-0 (Volume 22)

ISBN 13: 978-0-415-55562-3 (Volume 22)

#### **Publisher's Note**

The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original copies may be apparent.

#### **Disclaimer**

The publisher has made every effort to trace copyright holders and would welcome correspondence from those they have been unable to trace.

ROUTLEDGE LIBRARY EDITIONS:  
POLITICAL SCIENCE

---

A SHORT HISTORY OF  
ELECTORAL SYSTEMS IN  
WESTERN EUROPE

---

# 原书缺页

# *A Short History of Electoral Systems in Western Europe*

ANDREW McLAREN CARSTAIRS

*Formerly Senior Lecturer, Department of Modern History,  
University of Dundee*

London

GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN

Boston

Sydney

First published in 1980

This book is copyright under the Berne Convention. All rights are reserved. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright Act, 1956, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, electrical, chemical, mechanical, optical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner. Enquiries should be sent to the publishers at the undermentioned address:

GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD  
40 Museum Street, London WC1A 1LU

© Andrew McLaren Carstairs, 1980

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

Carstairs, Andrew McLaren

A short history of electoral systems in Western Europe.

1. Elections – Europe – History

I. Title

324'.21'094 JN94.A95 80-40547

ISBN 0-04-324006-2

Set in 10 on 11 point Plantin by Trade Linotype Ltd, Birmingham  
and printed in Great Britain  
by Lowe & Brydone Limited, Thetford, Norfolk

## *Acknowledgements*

The author wishes to express his thanks to the staffs of the University Library, Dundee, and of the British Library, for securing the literature necessary for this work, much of it from libraries abroad; and also to the staffs of the International Centre for Parliamentary Documentation, Inter-Parliamentary Union, Geneva, and of the Bibliothèque Royale Albert 1<sup>er</sup>, Brussels, for assistance given during visits to those institutions.



# *Contents*

List of Tables	<i>page viii</i>
Acknowledgements	ix
Introduction	1
PART ONE ELECTORAL SYSTEMS	
1 The Earlier Electoral Systems	9
2 Party-List Systems of Proportional Representation	15
3 Proportionality	24
4 Voting for Individuals	32
5 The Single Transferable Vote	36
PART TWO BELGIUM AND THE NETHERLANDS	
6 Belgium	49
7 The Netherlands	60
PART THREE THE NORDIC COUNTRIES	
8 Denmark	75
9 Norway	87
10 Sweden	98
11 Finland	110
PART FOUR AUSTRIA AND SWITZERLAND	
12 Austria	123
13 Switzerland	135
PART FIVE THE GREAT POWERS ON THE CONTINENT	
14 Italy	149
15 The Federal German Republic	162
16 France	175
PART SIX THE UNITED KINGDOM AND IRELAND	
17 The United Kingdom	189
18 The Republic of Ireland	201
Conclusions	213
Selected Bibliography	225
Index	232

## *List of Tables*

<i>Table</i>	<i>page</i>
1.1 Absolute majorities and disproportionate representation	11
1.2 Limited vote elections	13
2.1 Proportional representation of parties: quota system and 'largest remainder'	16
2.2 Quota system and 'largest remainder'	18
2.3 Quota system and 'highest average'	18
2.4 D'Hondt as a 'highest average' system	19
2.5 Disproportionality of the D'Hondt system?	21
2.6 Sainte-Laguë divisor system	22
3.1 Quota and largest remainder system: perverse results	25
3.2 Percentage increment of divisors in the different divisor systems	29
3.3 Party advantage or disadvantage in size of constituency: 'index of proportionality'	31
5.1 Single transferable vote election: elimination of candidate with fewest first preference votes	38
5.2 Proportionality of the single transferable vote: Republic of Ireland general election of 1969	41
5.3 Straight fights and circular voting	43
13.1 Swiss national council election, 1917	141
16.1 Election in Ariège, June 1951	181
16.2 Election in Bouchés-du-Rhône, June 1951	182
17.1 UK electorate as a percentage of the population, 1831-86	190
18.1 Size distribution of constituencies in Ireland	207

## *Introduction*

The years 1864 and 1885 may be regarded as milestones in the history of electoral systems in the parliaments of Europe, because in each of these years there was held an international conference to consider and assess new ideas which had recently been put forward on the subject of electoral reform.

In September 1864, in Amsterdam, a conference of the Association Internationale pour le Progrès des Sciences Sociales devoted two days to the examination of the system of proportional representation which had recently been devised by the English barrister Thomas Hare. This system, which has come to be known as the 'single transferable vote', is the system which has been most widely advocated in English-speaking countries ever since. The conference was significant, however, not because of the specific recommendations which were examined and discussed, but because it marked the growth of a general movement in favour of proportional representation in place of the majority systems which had, to an increasingly notorious extent, resulted in some countries in the election of parliaments which did not fairly represent the opinions of electors, and in which minorities were often greatly under-represented.

Hare's publications (from 1857 onwards) were not the first occasion on which the principles of proportional representation, or representation of minorities, had been advocated. Origins of ideas are inevitably hard to trace, but reference was commonly made to two individuals in particular who seem to have been among the first to make an impact with their ideas on the subject. One of these was the 'Radical Duke' of Richmond who, in 1780, proposed in the British House of Lords that for elections to the House of Commons the country should be divided into constituencies as nearly equal in population as possible. This was not, of course, proportional representation of parties or of minorities, but ensured only that each member should represent an equal number of the population; but the duke's proposals sowed the idea of proportionality. Also, the method he advocated, which was to divide the total population by the number of seats in parliament, and arrive at a quota or quotient of population which each member should represent, was basically the same as the method used later in some systems of proportional representation, including the single transferable vote.

The other individual, more famous and more widely quoted than the 'Radical Duke', was the Marquis de Mirabeau who, in a speech made to the Assembly of Provence in 1789, put forward the argument that the composition of a parliament should reflect in accurate detail the will of the electorate. Just as a map reproduces on a small scale the various

features of a landscape, so should a parliament reproduce on a small scale the desires of the electors. Parliament should be a mirror of the political opinions of the whole electorate.

Earlier than Mirabeau, two French mathematicians, Jean-Charles de Borda (in 1770) and the Marquis de Condorcet (in 1785), had been the first (effectively at least) to draw attention to some technical problems involved in securing fair and accurate results from elections. It was Mirabeau's imagery which fired the imagination, but it was largely the practical difficulties of putting such ideas into effect which were responsible for a delay of some generations before they were applied to elections for any parliamentary institutions in Europe.

Meanwhile, many varieties of electoral system were devised, and some experiments in proportional representation occasionally took place. Histories of these were later compiled by the electoral reformers Ernest Naville in Switzerland and Maurice Vernes in France. But it was with the publications of Thomas Hare and John Stuart Mill in England that the movement in favour of proportional representation may be regarded as having 'taken off into sustained growth'.

The Hare system, in its earlier versions, proposed that the whole nation should be a single constituency, and this novel suggestion deterred many potential supporters of proportional representation. Also, in its earlier forms, the results of the system were liable to be influenced by random factors and chance, and it was thus open to criticism by those who sought a system which would be consistent and accurate as well as fair. There was therefore much debate in the 1860s and 1870s about the relative merits of alternative electoral systems. A principal forum for this discussion was Switzerland, where the distorted representation of communities divided by race, language and religion created political difficulties which were particularly acute. In 1865 the Association Réformiste de Genève was founded, and from 1868 onwards its bulletins disseminated ideas on the subject derived from leading thinkers in many countries. In 1867 the association adopted as its recommended system of proportional representation a *list* system of election, devised (perhaps first) by Victor Considérant in France in 1834, and developed by Antoine Morin in Switzerland in 1862.

In Belgium, where communities were also deeply divided by language, an electoral reform society was formed in 1881, entitled the Association Réformiste pour l'Adoption de la Représentation Proportionnelle. One of its founders was Victor D'Hondt, whose system of proportional representation of parties was formulated in the following year. One of the earliest acts of the new Belgian association was to convene an international conference on electoral reform, which was held in Antwerp on 7, 8 and 9 August 1885. Its proceedings were recorded in the monthly journal *La Représentation proportionnelle*, published by the Belgian association. It

was expected, and perhaps intended, that this occasion would provide the platform for a debate between the supporters of the Hare and the D'Hondt systems, and a decision in favour of one or the other.

So far as the debate between the Hare and D'Hondt systems was concerned, the conference of 1885 was a disappointment. The most active delegates were those from Switzerland, France and Belgium, and although there were representatives also from Germany, Italy, Holland and Denmark there was none from the recently formed Proportional Representation Society in England. Sir John Lubbock, chairman of that society, wrote to express his regrets at not being able to attend, and the only British contribution was a paper written by Thomas Hare, which was read to the conference in the writer's absence.

As regards a choice between electoral systems, the conference came to a decision in favour of the D'Hondt system. At the end of the proceedings a motion was proposed by Maurice Vernes of France and seconded by Eduard Hagenbach-Bischoff of Switzerland, and was carried without dissent by members of the conference. The terms of the resolution, translated from the French, were as follows:

The international conference on proportional representation, convened by the Association Réformiste Belge, and assembled at Antwerp on 7, 8 and 9 August 1885, resolves:

- 1 that the system of elections by absolute majorities violates the liberty of the elector, provokes fraud and corruption, and can give a majority of seats to a minority of the electorate;
- 2 that proportional representation is the only means of assuring power to the real majority of the country, an effective voice to minorities, and exact representation to all significant groups of the electorate;
- 3 that while the particular needs of each country are recognised, the D'Hondt system of competing lists with divisors, adopted by the Belgian association, is a considerable advance on the systems previously proposed, and constitutes a practical and efficient means of achieving proportional representation.

The D'Hondt system, and variations of the party-list and divisor systems on which it is based, are those which have universally been adopted in those countries of Continental Europe which have discarded majority systems in favour of proportional representation, and the decisions of 1885 must have contributed to this outcome. Appropriately, it was in Belgium that the system devised by the Belgian, Victor D'Hondt, was first adopted, in 1899. By 1920 proportional representation had been adopted in most countries of Western Europe, and it is with the history of electoral systems in these countries that this work is mainly concerned.



A distinct feature of the electoral systems in Europe is the variety of devices which were adopted. Although their basic principles were largely similar, based on D'Hondt, each country adopted a system which in certain important respects was different from every system adopted anywhere else. The differences are due to the variety of circumstances which influenced the process of electoral reform in each country. No electoral system is adopted without reference to the framework of constitutional and political institutions within which it must operate; and these in turn have been shaped by history and custom, and by internal relations between communities which may differ in race, language and religion. These aspects of historical development must be taken into account when one seeks to understand the changes in the electoral systems in each country.

It is also generally the experience that changes in electoral systems were brought about as a result of practical compromises between divergent political interests, or in pursuit of the aims of a particular political party. It would not be correct to assume, however, that political idealism and the search for theoretical perfection in electoral systems did not play a significant part in the progress of electoral reform. It was, after all, some variation of systems devised by the theorists which was generally adopted, particularly those devised by Thomas Hare, Victor D'Hondt, Eduard Hagenbach-Bischoff and A. Sainte-Laguë.

In Part One of this book a brief analysis will be given of the principal types of electoral system which were used in Western Europe. It is not possible to adhere to any chronological scheme, since different countries were at any given time at different stages of development. Instead, the countries of Western Europe will thereafter be grouped in a manner suggested by some features which they have in common.

Part Two is devoted to Belgium and the Netherlands, starting with Belgium, which was the first country in Europe to establish proportional representation for its popular assembly. The historical evolution of these two countries was influenced by their unification at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, and the independence movement in Belgium thereafter. (Luxemburg is omitted, although it has an interesting electoral system which enables electors to exercise an effective choice between individual candidates as well as parties. Apart from a chapter by Dieter Nohlen in *Die Wahl der Parlamente*, the handbook referred to below, there is a shortage of literature on the history of this electoral system.)

Part Three includes the Scandinavian countries, and also their Nordic neighbour, Finland. The dynastic and constitutional relationships between the Scandinavian countries had a profound influence on their constitutional histories, and a bearing on the electoral systems which they adopted. The parliamentary histories of Norway and Finland were closely linked with the struggles for independence in those two

countries. One feature which the Scandinavian countries had in common was that, unlike most other countries in Europe which adopted proportional representation, they were each largely homogeneous in race, language and religion, and were in this respect not faced with political problems arising out of differences between communities. In Finland there existed a Swedish or Swedish-speaking minority which was better educated and more affluent than the Finns, but this was a factor of diminishing importance. All the Scandinavian countries eventually adopted a version of the electoral system devised in 1910 by the Frenchman A.Sainte-Laguë, while Finland adopted a distinctive system unique in Europe.

Part Four refers to Austria and Switzerland, which are examples of states deeply divided between different races, languages and religions, and which carried the principles of proportional representation further than most other countries.

Part Five includes the Great Powers on the Continent, Italy, Germany and France, each of which had a quite distinct history of electoral systems and of electoral reforms.

Part Six relates to Ireland and the United Kingdom. The Republic of Ireland is the only independent nation in Western Europe, apart from Denmark and Malta, in which the single transferable vote has been adopted for parliamentary election. It was in the United Kingdom that the system was devised, and the history of the electoral reform movement in the United Kingdom is largely a history of unsuccessful attempts to have this system adopted for elections to the UK parliament.

During the long periods of dictatorship in modern Spain and Portugal electoral systems in those countries were incapable of representing the political views of the population, and they have therefore not been included in this study.

The focus throughout is on the popular or lower chamber of parliament, where more than one chamber exists. Upper chambers (in some countries called the second chamber, and in others the first) are rarely intended to be fairly representative of the whole population, and where elections for such chambers take place at all the precise nature of the electoral system is rarely of major importance. There are exceptions, and where the composition of the upper chamber, or elections to that chamber, have a bearing on proposals for electoral reform, these circumstances will be taken into account. Also excluded are elections to the European Parliament. It is intended that a common electoral system should be adopted for future elections to this parliament, and if this is achieved the elections held in 1979 may be the only ones using the systems then adopted separately in each country.

## REFERENCES: INTRODUCTION

There is no work of reference in English which corresponds to the monumental series edited by Dolf Sternberger and Bernard Vogel, *Die Wahl der Parlamente und anderer Staatsorgane: Ein Handbuch* (Volume I, Europe). This has superseded the earlier standard work by Karl Braunias, *Das Parlamentarische Wahlrecht*. The handbook reviews the political theory of democracy, examines the various electoral systems which have been used, and gives a history of the electoral system in each country, accompanied by lists of documentary sources, historical statistics of election results and extensive bibliographies.

As a guide to the constitutional context within which parliamentary institutions have been developed and electoral systems introduced, there is the series edited by Albert B. Blaustein and Gisbert Flanz, *Constitutions of the Countries of the World*. This gives a chronological summary of past constitutional developments, and is continuously brought up to date.

For histories of election results reference may be made to Stein Rokkan and Jean Meyriat (eds), *International Guide to Electoral Statistics*, and to T. Mackie and R. Rose (eds), *The International Almanac of Electoral History*, the first of which indicates in tabular form the main changes which have taken place in the electoral systems used. For recent election results information is provided in *Keesings Contemporary Archives*. In these works only overall election results are given for each nation. If one wishes to examine in detail how an electoral system has operated and influenced the results it is necessary to have the figures for individual constituencies, and this information has to be sought in fuller reports or studies of particular elections.



PART ONE  
*Electoral Systems*