

THE DISEASE OF PARLIAMENTS

Sec. 1

There is a growing discord between governments and governed in the world.

There has always been discord between governments and governed since States began; government has always been to some extent imposed, and obedience to some extent reluctant. We have come to regard it as a matter of course that under all absolutions and narrow oligarchies the community, so soon as it became educated and as its social elaboration developed a free class with private initiatives, so soon, indeed, as it attained to any power of thought and expression at all, would express discontent. But we English and Americans and Western Europeans generally had supposed that, so far as our own communities were concerned, this discontent was already anticipated and met by representative institutions. We had supposed that, with various safeguards and elaborations, our communities did, as a matter of fact, govern themselves. Our panacea for all discontents was the franchise. Social and national dissatisfaction could be given at the same time a voice and a remedy in the ballot box. Our liberal intelligences could and do still understand Russians wanting votes, Indians wanting votes, women wanting

votes. The history of nineteenth-century Liberalism in the world might almost be summed up in the phrase "progressive enfranchisement." But these are the desires of a closing phase in political history. The new discords go deeper than that. The new situation which confronts our Liberal intelligence is the discontent of the enfranchised, the contempt and hostility of the voters for their elected delegates and governments.

This discontent, this resentment, this contempt even, and hostility to duly elected representatives is no mere accident of this democratic country or that; it is an almost world-wide movement. It is an almost universal disappointment with so-called popular government, and in many communities--in Great Britain particularly--it is manifesting itself by an unprecedented lawlessness in political matters, and in a strange and ominous contempt for the law. One sees it, for example, in the refusal of large sections of the medical profession to carry out insurance legislation, in the repudiation of Irish Home Rule by Ulster, and in the steady drift of great masses of industrial workers towards the conception of a universal strike. The case of the discontented workers in Great Britain and France is particularly remarkable. These people form effective voting majorities in many constituencies; they send alleged Socialist and Labour representatives into the legislative assembly; and, in addition, they have their trade unions with staffs of elected officials, elected ostensibly to state their case and promote their interests. Yet nothing is now more evident than that these officials, working-men representatives and the like, do not speak for their supporters, and are less and less able to control them. The

Syndicalist movement, sabotage in France, and Larkinism in Great Britain, are, from the point of view of social stability, the most sinister demonstrations of the gathering anger of the labouring classes with representative institutions. These movements are not revolutionary movements, not movements for reconstruction such as were the democratic Socialist movements that closed the nineteenth century. They are angry and vindictive movements. They have behind them the most dangerous and terrible of purely human forces, the wrath, the blind destructive wrath, of a cheated crowd.

Now, so far as the insurrection of labour goes, American conditions differ from European, and the process of disillusionment will probably follow a different course. American labour is very largely immigrant labour still separated by barriers of language and tradition from the established thought of the nation. It will be long before labour in America speaks with the massed effectiveness of labour in France and England, where master and man are racially identical, and where there is no variety of "Dagoes" to break up the revolt. But in other directions the American disbelief in and impatience with "elected persons" is and has been far profounder than it is in Europe. The abstinence of men of property and position from overt politics, and the contempt that banishes political discussion from polite society, are among the first surprises of the visiting European to America, and now that, under an organised pressure of conscience, college-trained men and men of wealth are abandoning this strike of the educated and returning to political life, it is, one notes, with a prevailing disposition to correct

democracy by personality, and to place affairs in the hands of autocratic mayors and presidents rather than to carry out democratic methods to the logical end. At times America seems hot for a Caesar. If no Caesar is established, then it will be the good fortune of the Republic rather than its democratic virtue which will have saved it.

And directly one comes to look into the quality and composition of the elected governing body of any modern democratic State, one begins to see the reason and nature of its widening estrangement from the community it represents. In no sense are these bodies really representative of the thought and purpose of the nation; the conception of its science, the fresh initiatives of its philosophy and literature, the forces that make the future through invention and experiment, exploration and trial and industrial development have no voice, or only an accidental and feeble voice, there. The typical elected person is a smart rather than substantial lawyer, full of cheap catchwords and elaborate tricks of procedure and electioneering, professing to serve the interests of the locality which is his constituency, but actually bound hand and foot to the specialised political association, his party, which imposed him upon that constituency. Arrived at the legislature, his next ambition is office, and to secure and retain office he engages in elaborate manoeuvres against the opposite party, upon issues which his limited and specialised intelligence indicates as electorally effective. But being limited and specialised, he is apt to drift completely out of touch with the interests and feelings of large masses of people in the community. In Great Britain, the United States and France alike there is a constant

tendency on the part of the legislative body to drift into unreality, and to bore the country with the disputes that are designed to thrill it. In Great Britain, for example, at the present time the two political parties are both profoundly unpopular with the general intelligence, which is sincerely anxious, if only it could find a way, to get rid of both of them. Irish Home Rule--an issue as dead as mutton, is opposed to Tariff Reform, which has never been alive. Much as the majority of people detest the preposterously clumsy attempts to amputate Ireland from the rule of the British Parliament which have been going on since the breakdown of Mr. Gladstone's political intelligence, their dread of foolish and scoundrelly fiscal adventurers is sufficiently strong to retain the Liberals in office. The recent exposures of the profound financial rottenness of the Liberal party have deepened the public resolve to permit no such enlarged possibilities of corruption as Tariff Reform would afford their at least equally dubitable opponents. And meanwhile, beneath those ridiculous alternatives, those sham issues, the real and very urgent affairs of the nation, the vast gathering discontent of the workers throughout the Empire, the racial conflicts in India and South Africa which will, if they are not arrested, end in our severance from India, the insane waste of national resources, the control of disease, the frightful need of some cessation of armament, drift neglected....

Now do these things indicate the ultimate failure and downfall of representative government? Was this idea which inspired so much of the finest and most generous thought of the eighteenth and nineteenth

centuries a wrong idea, and must we go back to Caesarism or oligarchy or plutocracy or a theocracy, to Rome or Venice or Carthage, to the strong man or the ruler by divine right, for the political organisation of the future?

My answer to that question would be an emphatic No. My answer would be that the idea of representative government is the only possible idea for the government of a civilised community. But I would add that so far representative government has not had even the beginnings of a fair trial. So far we have not had representative government, but only a devastating caricature.

It is quite plain now that those who first organised the parliamentary institutions which now are the ruling institutions of the greater part of mankind fell a prey to certain now very obvious errors. They did not realise that there are hundreds of different ways in which voting may be done, and that every way will give a different result. They thought, and it is still thought by a great number of mentally indolent people, that if a country is divided up into approximately equivalent areas, each returning one or two representatives, if every citizen is given one vote, and if there is no legal limit to the presentation of candidates, that presently a cluster of the wisest, most trusted and best citizens will come together in the legislative assembly.

In reality the business is far more complicated than this. In reality a country will elect all sorts of different people according to the

electoral method employed. It is a fact that anyone who chooses to experiment with a willing school or club may verify. Suppose, for example, that you take your country, give every voter one single vote, put up six and twenty candidates for a dozen vacancies, and give them no adequate time for organisation. The voters, you will find, will return certain favourites, A and B and C and D let us call them, by enormous majorities, and behind these at a considerable distance will come E, F, G, H, I, J, K, and L. Now give your candidates time to develop organisation. A lot of people who swelled A's huge vote will dislike J and K and L so much, and prefer M and N so much, that if they are assured that by proper organisation A's return can be made certain without their voting for him, they will vote for M and N. But they will do so only on that understanding. Similarly certain B-ites will want O and P if they can be got without sacrificing B. So that adequate party organisation in the community may return not the dozen a naive vote would give, but A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, M, N, O, P. Now suppose that, instead of this arrangement, your community is divided into twelve constituencies and no candidate may contest more than one of them. And suppose each constituency has strong local preferences. A, B and C are widely popular; in every constituency they have supporters but in no constituency does any one of the three command a majority. They are great men, not local men. Q, who is an unknown man in most of the country, has, on the contrary, a strong sect of followers in the constituency for which A stands, and beats him by one vote; another local celebrity, E, disposes of B in the same way; C is attacked not only by S but T, whose peculiar views upon vaccination, let us say,

appeal to just enough of C's supporters to let in S. Similar accidents happen in the other constituencies, and the country that would have unreservedly returned A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K and L on the first system, return instead O, P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y, Z. Numerous voters who would have voted for A if they had a chance vote instead for R, S, T, etc., numbers who would have voted for B, vote for Q, V, W, X, etc. But now suppose that A and B are opposed to one another, and that there is a strong A party and a strong B party highly organised in the country. B is really the second favourite over the country as a whole, but A is the first favourite. D, F, H, J, L, N, P, R, U, W, Y constitute the A candidates and in his name they conquer. B, C, E, G, I, K, M, O, Q, S, V are all thrown out in spite of the wide popularity of B and C. B and C, we have supposed, are the second and third favourites, and yet they go out in favour of Y, of whom nobody has heard before, some mere hangers-on of A's. Such a situation actually occurs in both Ulster and Home-Rule Ireland.

But now let us suppose another arrangement, and that is that the whole country is one constituency, and every voter has, if he chooses to exercise them, twelve votes, which, however, he must give, if he gives them all, to twelve separate people. Then quite certainly A, B, C, D will come in, but the tail will be different. M, N, O, P may come up next to them, and even Z, that eminent non-party man, may get in. But now organisation may produce new effects. The ordinary man, when he has twelve votes to give, likes to give them all, so that there will be a good deal of wild voting at the tails of the voting papers. Now if a

small resolute band decide to plump for T or to vote only for A and T or B and T, T will probably jump up out of the rejected. This is the system which gives the specialist, the anti-vaccinator or what not, the maximum advantage. V, W, X and Y, being rather hopeless anyhow, will probably detach themselves from party and make some special appeal, say to the teetotal vote or the Mormon vote or the single tax vote, and so squeeze past O, P, Q, R, who have taken a more generalised line.

I trust the reader will bear with me through these alphabetical fluctuations. Many people, I know from colloquial experiences, do at about this stage fly into a passion. But if you will exercise self-control, then I think you will see my point that, according to the method of voting, almost any sort of result may be got out of an election except the production of a genuinely representative assembly.

And that is the a priori case for supposing, what our experience of contemporary life abundantly verifies, that the so-called representative assemblies of the world are not really representative at all. I will go farther and say that were it not for the entire inefficiency of our method of voting, not one-tenth of the present American and French Senators, the French Deputies, the American Congressmen, and the English Members of Parliament would hold their positions to-day. They would never have been heard of. They are not really the elected representatives of the people; they are the products of a ridiculous method of election; they are the illegitimate children of the party system and the ballot-box, who have ousted the legitimate heirs from

their sovereignty. They are no more the expression of the general will than the Tsar or some President by pronunciamento. They are an accidental oligarchy of adventurers. Representative government has never yet existed in the world; there was an attempt to bring it into existence in the eighteenth century, and it succumbed to an infantile disorder at the very moment of its birth. What we have in the place of the leaders and representatives are politicians and "elected persons."

The world is passing rapidly from localised to generalised interests, but the method of election into which our fathers fell is the method of electing one or two representatives from strictly localised constituencies. Its immediate corruption was inevitable. If discussing and calculating the future had been, as it ought to be, a common, systematic occupation, the muddles of to-day might have been foretold a hundred years ago. From such a rough method of election the party system followed as a matter of course. In theory, of course, there may be any number of candidates for a constituency and a voter votes for the one he likes best; in practice there are only two or three candidates, and the voter votes for the one most likely to beat the candidate he likes least. It cannot be too strongly insisted that in contemporary elections we vote against; we do not vote for. If A, B and C are candidates, and you hate C and all his works and prefer A, but doubt if he will get as many votes as B, who is indifferent to you, the chances are you will vote for B. If C and B have the support of organised parties, you are still less likely to risk "wasting" your vote upon A. If your real confidence is in G, who is not a candidate for your constituency, and if

B pledges himself to support G, while A retains the right of separate action, you may vote for B even if you distrust him personally. Additional candidates would turn any election of this type into a wild scramble. The system lies, in fact, wholly open to the control of political organisations, calls out, indeed, for the control of political organisations, and has in every country produced what is so evidently demanded. The political organisations to-day rule us unchallenged. Save as they speak for us, the people are dumb.

Elections of the prevalent pattern, which were intended and are still supposed by simple-minded people to give every voter participation in government, do as a matter of fact effect nothing of the sort. They give him an exasperating fragment of choice between the agents of two party organisations, over neither of which he has any intelligible control. For twenty-five years I have been a voter, and in all that time I have only twice had an opportunity of voting for a man of distinction in whom I had the slightest confidence. Commonly my choice of a "representative" has been between a couple of barristers entirely unknown to me or the world at large. Rather more than half the men presented for my selection have not been English at all, but of alien descent. This, then, is the sum of the political liberty of the ordinary American or Englishman, that is the political emancipation which Englishwomen have shown themselves so pathetically eager to share. He may reject one of two undesirables, and the other becomes his "representative." Now this is not popular government at all; it is government by the profession of politicians, whose control becomes more and more irresponsible in just

the measure that they are able to avoid real factions within their own body. Whatever the two party organisations have a mind to do together, whatever issue they chance to reserve from "party politics," is as much beyond the control of the free and independent voter as if he were a slave subject in ancient Peru.

Our governments in the more civilised parts of the world to-day are only in theory and sentiment democratic. In reality they are democracies so eviscerated by the disease of bad electoral methods that they are mere cloaks for the parasitic oligarchies that have grown up within their form and substance. The old spirit of freedom and the collective purpose which overthrew and subdued priestcrafts and kingcrafts, has done so, it seems, only to make way for these obscure political conspiracies. Instead of liberal institutions, mankind has invented a new sort of usurpation. And it is not unnatural that many of us should be in a phase of political despair.

These oligarchies of the party organisations have now been evolving for two centuries, and their inherent evils and dangers become more and more manifest. The first of these is the exclusion from government of the more active and intelligent sections of the community. It is not treated as remarkable, it is treated as a matter of course, that neither in Congress nor in the House of Commons is there any adequate representation of the real thought of the time, of its science, invention and enterprise, of its art and feeling, of its religion and purpose. When one speaks of Congressmen or Members of Parliament one

thinks, to be plain about it, of intellectual riff-raff. When one hears of a pre-eminent man in the English-speaking community, even though that pre-eminence may be in political or social science, one is struck by a sense of incongruity if he happens to be also in the Legislature. When Lord Haldane disengages the Gifford lectures or Lord Morley writes a "Life of Gladstone" or ex-President Roosevelt is delivered of a magazine article, there is the same sort of excessive admiration as when a Royal Princess does a water-colour sketch or a dog walks on its hind legs.

Now this intellectual inferiority of the legislator is not only directly bad for the community by producing dull and stupid legislation, but it has a discouraging and dwarfing effect upon our intellectual life. Nothing so stimulates art, thought and science as realisation; nothing so cripples it as unreality. But to set oneself to know thoroughly and to think clearly about any human question is to unfit oneself for the forensic claptrap which is contemporary politics, is to put oneself out of the effective current of the nation's life. The intelligence of any community which does not make a collective use of that intelligence, starves and becomes hectic, tends inevitably to preciousness and futility on the one hand, and to insurgency, mischief and anarchism on the other.

From the point of view of social stability this estrangement of the national government and the national intelligence is far less serious than the estrangement between the governing body and the real feeling of the mass of the people. To many observers this latter estrangement seems

to be drifting very rapidly towards a social explosion in the British Isles. The organised masses of labour find themselves baffled both by their parliamentary representatives and by their trade union officials. They are losing faith in their votes and falling back in anger upon insurrectionary ideals, upon the idea of a general strike, and upon the expedients of sabotage. They are doing this without any constructive proposals at all, for it is ridiculous to consider Syndicalism as a constructive proposal. They mean mischief because they are hopeless and bitterly disappointed. It is the same thing in France, and before many years are over it will be the same thing in America. That way lies chaos. In the next few years there may be social revolt and bloodshed in most of the great cities of Western Europe. That is the trend of current probability. Yet the politicians go on in an almost complete disregard of this gathering storm. Their jerrymandered electoral methods are like wool in their ears, and the rejection of Tweedledum for Tweedledee is taken as a "mandate" for Tweedledee's distinctive brand of political unrealities....

Is this an incurable state of things? Is this method of managing our affairs the only possible electoral method, and is there no remedy for its monstrous clumsiness and inefficiency but to "show a sense of humour," or, in other words, to grin and bear it? Or is it conceivable that there may be a better way to government than any we have yet tried, a method of government that would draw every class into conscious and willing co-operation with the State, and enable every activity of the community to play its proper part in the national life? That was the

dream of those who gave the world representative government in the past.
Was it an impossible dream?

Sec. 2

Is this disease of Parliaments an incurable disease, and have we, therefore, to get along as well as we can with it, just as a tainted and incurable invalid diets and is careful and gets along through life? Or is it possible that some entirely more representative and effective collective control of our common affairs can be devised?

The answer to that must determine our attitude to a great number of fundamental questions. If no better governing body is possible than the stupid, dilatory and forensic assemblies that rule in France, Britain and America to-day, then the civilised human community has reached its climax. That more comprehensive collective handling of the common interests to which science and intelligent Socialism point, that collective handling which is already urgently needed if the present uncontrolled waste of natural resources and the ultimate bankruptcy of mankind is to be avoided, is quite beyond the capacity of such assemblies; already there is too much in their clumsy and untrustworthy hands, and the only course open to us is an attempt at enlightened Individualism, an attempt to limit and restrict State activities in every possible way, and to make little private temporary islands of light and refinement amidst the general disorder and decay. All

collectivist schemes, all rational Socialism, if only Socialists would realise it, all hope for humanity, indeed, are dependent ultimately upon the hypothetical possibility of a better system of government than any at present in existence.

Let us see first, then, if we can lay down any conditions which such a better governing body would satisfy. Afterwards it will be open to us to believe or disbelieve in its attainment. Imagination is the essence of creation. If we can imagine a better government we are half-way to making it.

Now, whatever other conditions such a body will satisfy, we may be sure that it will not be made up of members elected by single-member constituencies. A single-member constituency must necessarily contain a minority, and may even contain a majority of dissatisfied persons whose representation is, as it were, blotted out by the successful candidate. Three single-member constituencies which might all return members of the same colour, if they were lumped together to return three members would probably return two of one colour and one of another. There would still, however, be a suppressed minority averse to both these colours, or desiring different shades of those colours from those afforded them in the constituency. Other things being equal, it may be laid down that the larger the constituency and the more numerous its representatives, the greater the chance of all varieties of thought and opinion being represented.

But that is only a preliminary statement; it still leaves untouched all the considerations advanced in the former part of this discussion to show how easily the complications and difficulties of voting lead to a falsification of the popular will and understanding. But here we enter a region where a really scientific investigation has been made, and where established results are available. A method of election was worked out by Hare in the middle of the last century that really does seem to avoid or mitigate nearly every falsifying or debilitating possibility in elections; it was enthusiastically supported by J.S. Mill; it is now advocated by a special society--the Proportional Representation Society--to which belong men of the most diverse type of distinction, united only by the common desire to see representative government a reality and not a disastrous sham. It is a method which does render impossible nearly every way of forcing candidates upon constituencies, and nearly every trick for rigging results that now distorts and cripples the political life of the modern world. It exacts only one condition, a difficult but not an impossible condition, and that is the honest scrutiny and counting of the votes.

The peculiar invention of the system is what is called the single transferable vote--that is to say, a vote which may be given in the first instance to one candidate, but which, in the event of his already having a sufficient quota of votes to return him, may be transferred to another. The voter marks clearly in the list of the candidates the order of his preference by placing 1, 2, 3, and so forth against the names. In the subsequent counting the voting papers are first classified according

to the first votes. Let us suppose that popular person A is found to have received first votes enormously in excess of what is needed to return him. The second votes are then counted on his papers, and after the number of votes necessary to return him has been deducted, the surplus votes are divided in due proportion among the second choice names, and count for them. That is the essential idea of the whole thing. At a stroke all that anxiety about wasting votes and splitting votes, which is the secret of all party political manipulation vanishes. You may vote for A well knowing that if he is safe your vote will be good for C. You can make sure of A, and at the same time vote for C. You are in no need of a "ticket" to guide you, and you need have no fear that in supporting an independent candidate you will destroy the prospects of some tolerably sympathetic party man without any compensating advantage. The independent candidate does, in fact, become possible for the first time. The Hobson's choice of the party machine is abolished.

Let me be a little more precise about the particulars of this method, the only sound method, of voting in order to ensure an adequate representation of the community. Let us resort again to the constituency I imagined in my last paper, a constituency in which candidates represented by all the letters of the alphabet struggle for twelve places. And let us suppose that A, B, C and D are the leading favourites. Suppose that there are twelve thousand voters in the constituency, and that three thousand votes are cast for A--I am keeping the figures as simple as possible--then A has two thousand more than is

needed to return him. All the second votes on his papers are counted, and it is found that 600, or a fifth of them, go to C; 500, or a sixth, go to E; 300, or a tenth, to G; 300 to J; 200, or a fifteenth, each to K and L, and a hundred each, or a thirtieth, to M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, W and Z. Then the surplus of 2,000 is divided in these proportions--that is a fifth of 2,000 goes to C, a sixth to E, and the rest to G, J, etc., in proportion. C, who already has 900 votes, gets another 400, and is now returned and has, moreover, 300 to spare; and the same division of the next votes upon C's paper occurs as has already been made with A's. But previously to this there has been a distribution of B's surplus votes, B having got 1,200 of first votes. And so on. After the distribution of the surplus votes of the elect at the top of the list, there is a distribution of the second votes upon the papers of those who have voted for the hopeless candidates at the bottom of the list. At last a point is reached when twelve candidates have a quota.

In this way the "wasting" of a vote, or the rejection of a candidate for any reason except that hardly anybody wants him, become practically impossible. This method of the single transferable vote with very large constituencies and many members does, in fact, give an entirely valid electoral result; each vote tells for all it is worth, and the freedom of the voter is only limited by the number of candidates who put up or are put up for election. This method, and this method alone, gives representative government; all others of the hundred and one possible methods admit of trickery, confusion and falsification. Proportional Representation is not a faddist proposal, not a perplexing ingenious

complication of a simple business; it is the carefully worked out right way to do something that hitherto we have been doing in the wrong way. It is no more an eccentricity than is proper baking in the place of baking amidst dirt and with unlimited adulteration, or the running of trains to their destinations instead of running them without notice into casually selected sidings and branch lines. It is not the substitution of something for something else of the same nature; it is the substitution of right for wrong. It is the plain common sense of the greatest difficulty in contemporary affairs.

I know that a number of people do not, will not, admit this of Proportional Representation. Perhaps it is because of that hideous mouthful of words for a thing that would be far more properly named Sane Voting. This, which is the only correct way, these antagonists regard as a peculiar way. It has unfamiliar features, and that condemns it in their eyes. It takes at least ten minutes to understand, and that is too much for their plain, straightforward souls. "Complicated"--that word of fear! They are like the man who approved of an electric tram, but said that he thought it would go better without all that jiggery-pokery of wires up above. They are like the Western judge in the murder trial who said that if only they got a man hanged for this abominable crime, he wouldn't make a pedantic fuss about the question of which man. They are like the plain, straightforward promoter who became impatient with maps and planned a railway across Switzerland by drawing a straight line with a ruler across Jungfrau and Matterhorn and glacier and gorge. Or else they are like Mr. J. Ramsay Macdonald, M.P., who knows too well

what would happen to him.

Now let us consider what would be the necessary consequences of the establishment of Proportional Representation in such a community as Great Britain--that is to say, the redistribution of the country into great constituencies such as London or Ulster or Wessex or South Wales, each returning a score or more of members, and the establishment of voting by the single transferable vote. The first, immediate, most desirable result would be the disappearance of the undistinguished party candidate; he would vanish altogether. He would be no more seen. Proportional Representation would not give him the ghost of a chance. The very young man of good family, the subsidised barrister, the respectable nobody, the rich supporter of the party would be ousted by known men. No candidate who had not already distinguished himself, and who did not stand for something in the public eye, would have a chance of election. There alone we have a sufficient reason for anticipating a very thorough change in the quality and character of the average legislator.

And next, no party organisation, no intimation from headquarters, no dirty tricks behind the scenes, no conspiracy of spite and scandal would have much chance of keeping out any man of real force and distinction who had impressed the public imagination. To be famous in science, to have led thought, to have explored or administered or dissented courageously from the schemes of official wire-pullers would no longer be a bar to a man's attainment of Parliament. It would be a help. Not

only the level of parliamentary intelligence, but the level of personal independence would be raised far above its present position. And Parliament would become a gathering of prominent men instead of a means to prominence.

The two-party system which holds all the English-speaking countries to-day in its grip would certainly be broken up by Proportional Representation. Sane Voting in the end would kill the Liberal and Tory and Democratic and Republican party-machines. That secret rottenness of our public life, that hidden conclave which sells honours, fouls finance, muddles public affairs, fools the passionate desires of the people, and ruins honest men by obscure campaigns would become impossible. The advantage of party support would be a doubtful advantage, and in Parliament itself the party men would find themselves outclassed and possibly even outnumbered by the independent. It would be only a matter of a few years between the adoption of Sane Voting and the disappearance of the Cabinet from British public life. It would become possible for Parliament to get rid of a minister without getting rid of a ministry, and to express its disapproval of--let us say--some foolish project for rearranging the local government of Ireland without opening the door upon a vista of fantastical fiscal adventures. The party-supported Cabinet, which is now the real government of the so-called democratic countries, would cease to be so, and government would revert more and more to the legislative assembly. And not only would the latter body resume government, but it would also necessarily take into itself all those large and growing exponents of

extra-parliamentary discontent that now darken the social future. The case of the armed "Unionist" rebel in Ulster, the case of the workman who engages in sabotage, the case for sympathetic strikes and the general strike, all these cases are identical in this, that they declare Parliament a fraud, that justice lies outside it and hopelessly outside it, and that to seek redress through Parliament is a waste of time and energy. Sane Voting would deprive all these destructive movements of the excuse and necessity for violence.

There is, I know, a disposition in some quarters to minimise the importance of Proportional Representation, as though it were a mere readjustment of voting methods. It is nothing of the sort; it is a prospective revolution. It will revolutionise government far more than a mere change from kingdom to republic or vice versa could possibly do; it will give a new and unprecedented sort of government to the world. The real leaders of the country will govern the country. For Great Britain, for example, instead of the secret, dubious and dubitable Cabinet, which is the real British government of to-day, poised on an unwieldy and crowded House of Commons, we should have open government by the representatives of, let us say, twenty great provinces, Ulster, Wales, London, for example, each returning from twelve to thirty members. It would be a steadier, stabler, more confident, and more trusted government than the world has ever seen before. Ministers, indeed, and even ministries might come and go, but that would not matter, as it does now, because there would be endless alternatives through which the assembly could express itself instead of the choice between two parties.

The arguments against Proportional Representation that have been advanced hitherto are trivial in comparison with its enormous advantages. Implicit in them all is the supposition that public opinion is at bottom a foolish thing, and that electoral methods are to pacify rather than express a people. It is possibly true that notorious windbags, conspicuously advertised adventurers, and the heroes of temporary sensations may run a considerable chance upon the lists. My own estimate of the popular wisdom is against the idea that any vividly prominent figure must needs get in; I think the public is capable of appreciating, let us say, the charm and interest of Mr. Sandow or Mr. Jack Johnson or Mr. Harry Lauder or Mr. Evan Roberts without wanting to send these gentlemen into Parliament. And I think that the increased power that the Press would have through its facilities in making reputations may also be exaggerated. Reputations are mysterious things and not so easily forced, and even if it were possible for a section of the Press to limelight a dozen or so figures up to the legislature, they would still have, I think, to be interesting, sympathetic and individualised figures; and at the end they would be only half a dozen among four hundred men of a repute more naturally achieved. A third objection is that this reform would give us group politics and unstable government. It might very possibly give us unstable ministries, but unstable ministries may mean stable government, and such stable ministries as that which governs England at the present time may, by clinging obstinately to office, mean the wildest fluctuations of policy. Mr. Ramsay Macdonald has drawn a picture of the too-representative

Parliament of Proportional Representation, split up into groups each pledged to specific measures and making the most extraordinary treaties and sacrifices of the public interest in order to secure the passing of these definite bills. But Mr. Ramsay Macdonald is exclusively a parliamentary man; he knows contemporary parliamentary "shop" as a clerk knows his "guv'nor," and he thinks in the terms of his habitual life; he sees representatives only as politicians financed from party headquarters; it is natural that he should fail to see that the quality and condition of the sanely elected Member of Parliament will be quite different from these scheming climbers into positions of trust with whom he deals to-day. It is the party system based on insane voting that makes governments indivisible wholes and gives the group and the cave their terrors and their effectiveness. Mr. Ramsay Macdonald is as typical a product of existing electoral methods as one could well have, and his peculiarly keen sense of the power of intrigue in legislation is as good evidence as one could wish for of the need for drastic change.

Of course, Sane Voting is not a short cut to the millennium, it is no way of changing human nature, and in the new type of assembly, as in the old, spite, vanity, indolence, self-interest, and downright dishonesty will play their part. But to object to a reform on that account is not a particularly effective objection. These things will play their part, but it will be a much smaller part in the new than in the old. It is like objecting to some projected and long-needed railway because it does not propose to carry its passengers by immediate express to heaven.