

# VOTING AND DEMOCRACY REVIEW

*The Newsletter of The Center for Voting and Democracy*

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"Making Your Vote Count"

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## New Zealand Votes for PR

*CV&D speakers aid passage of historic referendum*

In a ground-breaking referendum, New Zealanders on November 6 voted 54%-46% to replace their 141-year-old, U.S.-style "winner-take-all" voting system with a "mixed member proportional" system, the form of proportional representation (PR) used in Germany and recently adopted in Italy. The result culminated a remarkable process of reform in which citizens overcame increasing resistance from politicians and a 10-1 spending disadvantage in the final referendum.

Rob Richie, CV&D national director, and Cynthia Terrell, CV&D vice-president, this fall toured New Zealand at the invitation of leaders of the pro-"MMP" Electoral Reform Coalition. In addition to meeting New Zealanders across the country, Richie and Terrell gave over twenty radio and newspaper interviews as the ERC's featured international voting system experts.

The MMP system became New Zealand's voting system of choice after the release of a well-publicized Royal Commission report in 1986 that recommended its adoption and a national referendum. After parliament allowed New Zealanders to vote on the issue in a non-binding referendum in 1992, a remarkable 85% voted to replace "winner-take-all" with a PR system, setting up this year's referendum.

"New Zealanders won despite enormous obstacles placed in their path by defenders of the status quo," commented Richie. "The 8% winning margin is remarkable considering the opponent's great spending advantage and the dirty trick of making a vote for MMP also a vote to increase the size of parliament by 20%. But we saw New

Zealanders' great hunger for fairness. Opponents couldn't escape that reality."

"New Zealand's vote for MMP sends a message to the few remaining winner-take-all democracies in the world," added Terrell. "We simply can't afford voting systems that deprive so many citizens of an effective voice in politics. We can't afford under-representation of women, racial and ethnic minorities and smaller parties who bring important perspectives to our governance. We can't afford systems that force representatives to be all things to all people."

**Russia, Mexico and South Africa also adopt forms of PR. Japan to follow. See page 3.**

The campaign for MMP was marred by the opponents' negative TV and radio advertising that made the referendum the most expensive campaign of any sort in New Zealand history. Nevertheless, 83% of New Zealanders turned out to vote on adopting MMP, the German PR system.

In MMP, a voter votes first for a local representative, then for a national party. The national vote for the party determines the overall composition of parliament, resulting in both ensured geographic representation and fair representation of voters' other interests.

This year marks a worldwide trend toward "mixed member" proportional systems. In addition to Italy and New Zealand adopting MMP, Russia will use a version of MMP for its December elections and Japan's lower house has adopted a similar system this month. 1993 Nobel Prize winners Nelson Mandela and President F.W. De Klerk led the successful effort to adopt a more

traditional form of party list PR for South Africa's April 1994 elections.

At its July annual meeting, the CV&D Board adopted resolutions calling on President Clinton, Congress and state legislatures to establish commissions on voting system reform similar to the New Zealand Royal Commission that recommended MMP. A subcommittee of Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) has submitted a similar resolution for full ADA approval.

### Cambridge's PR Elections

*Howie Fain, CV&D Board Secretary and co-founder of the Massachusetts Fair Ballot Coalition, observed Cambridge's vote-count after its November 2 municipal elections. Fain recently had a column on using PR to resolve the state's redistricting problems published in the **Boston Globe**.*

After fifty-two years of conducting elections using the preference voting (PV) form of PR, Cambridge officials run a smooth operation. They'd better: the counting area is monitored by hundreds of people, many tallying each vote in each count. The community cable TV crew offers regular updated reports and analysis.

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## Note from the Director

Welcome to the first issue of our bi-monthly **Voting and Democracy Review**! Your promised newsletter is being delivered at an opportune time, with remarkable international developments in voting system reform, exciting breakthroughs in the United States and noteworthy steps forward for The Center for Voting and Democracy.

My recent trip to New Zealand with CV&D Vice-President Cynthia Terrell perhaps foreshadowed what an American proportional representation movement will look like. I saw a nationwide grassroots network of electoral reformers meeting regularly, putting up yard signs, writing letters-to-the-editor and, in the end, winning against the most expensive campaign in New Zealand's history.

I found cabdrivers and barbers who not only valued a fair voting system, but would debate the merits of preference voting versus the Mixed Member PR system they adopted. I found issue activists working hard for MMP because they understood how much easier a vital democracy would make their work.

I have no illusions about winning referendums on PR for national elections in the U.S. any time soon: much education work must take place first.

But within weeks of our return, I had made numerous contacts with Voting Rights Act attorneys and experts at a Georgia conference, been on a North Carolina public TV "Town Hall" meeting, spoken at the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund's annual lawyers' retreat, joined with Board member Ed Still to persuade attendees of an Americans for Democratic Action "Political Symposium" to call for national, state and local voting system commissions and met with staffers of a House Judiciary Subcommittee to discuss use of PR systems to resolve Voting Rights Act cases.

Just as importantly, many CV&D members are having similar experiences. On this page we profile Lee Mortimer's impressive efforts, but in newsletters to follow you will read of exciting work happening across the country.

Two new CV&D projects deserve special notice:

- CV&D members around the U.S. are participating in an ambitious "Factsheet" project that will produce close to 100 one-page reports on a wide range of subjects. We plan to finish this much-needed series by February.

- On December 16 -- the Boston Tea Party anniversary -- CV&D will release our first annual **Voting and Democracy Report: 1993**, surveying the year's developments in electoral reform. CV&D National Chair John Anderson will be among those releasing the report.

As we are pursuing these projects and others on a very limited budget, please consider a year-end contribution to help 1994 be an even better year for us. And comments on the newsletter -- and items for inclusion -- are very welcome.

Finally, many thanks go to Cynthia Terrell and CV&D member Sheila O'Connell for their contributions to this month's newsletter. Thank you!

**Rob Richie**



### Member Profile: Lee Mortimer

A tireless worker for electoral justice who manages to balance activism with job and family responsibilities, Lee has had a series of successes in promoting proportional systems in North Carolina.

In 1991, he nearly persuaded the Durham County Commission to adopt preference voting for school board elections. Since then, he has worked with Orange County activists to advocate PR for county commission elections and helped sparked the state to create a legislative commission to study PR.

Now, plaintiffs in the *Shaw v. Reno* case against the state's congressional redistricting plan have called on Lee as an expert witness to testify about how using preference or cumulative voting in multi-member districts would provide for fair minority representation without the "bizarre" districts in the current single member district plan. Lee's plan just may resolve one of our most pressing and difficult political issues.

**The Center for Voting and Democracy (CV&D)** is a tax-exempt educational organization that serves as a national clearinghouse on proportional representation (PR) and other alternatives to the plurality voting systems used in most United States elections. CV&D was founded in 1992 by electoral reformers from 19 states.

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## Voting System Reform Update

- **CV&D Board member Roxanne Qualls elected mayor of Cincinnati:** CV&D Board member Roxanne Qualls became Cincinnati's first directly-elected woman mayor by finishing first among city council candidates in the city's November 2 elections. Roxanne was elected to council in 1991, the same year that she led the initiative drive to put preference voting on the ballot. CV&D Advisory Board members Tyrone Yates and Bobbie Sterne also were re-elected.

- **North Carolina legislature funds committee to investigate use of alternative voting systems:** North Carolina's state legislature adopted a resolution sponsored by Durham legislator Paul Luebke to fund a legislative commission to investigate use of alternative voting systems. The commission also will look at electoral laws affecting campaign financing and voter registration, setting an excellent model for other states to follow.

- **Seattle city council candidates campaign for PR:** Two members of Washington CPR ran for Seattle city council this fall and made run-off elections. Neither won on their shoestring budgets, but both received over 20% of the vote and were able to talk about PR in public meetings across the city. Other council candidates were forced to take stands on PR, and all expressed cautious interest.

- **South Africa adopts PR for 1994 elections:** Reflecting a broad consensus that domination of any sort should not be part of its new governance, South Africa has adopted proportional representation for its April 1994 elections. 1993 Nobel Prize winners Nelson Mandela and F.W. de Klerk were two of the leading proponents of PR.

Seats in the lower house, the cabinet and regional legislatures will be allocated by party list PR with a 5% national threshold. The regional legislatures will elect the upper house, most likely by preference voting.

- **"Mixed" PR in Russia, Mexico**

**and Japan:** In its December elections, Russia will use a modified form of the German mixed member PR system. 225 candidates will be elected to the Duma from single member districts, 225 will be elected on party lists by PR. Unlike Germany and New Zealand, however, the party list half will not be used to compensate for the unfairness in the winner-take-all, district elections.

Japan's lower house adopted a very similar semi-PR system this month, while Mexico in September also adopted a mixed system with 300 district seats and 200 party list seats elected by PR.

- **British PR champion leads in polls:** In Britain, CV&D's 1992 "Champion of Democracy" winner Paddy Ashdown -- an outspoken supporter of PR -- is scoring markedly higher in polls for preferred prime ministers than current prime minister John Major and Labor Party leader John Smith. British polls show that a majority support PR.

- **Canada's election provide dramatic arguments for PR:** Canada's winner-take-all elections in October were a classic example of the potential instability inherent in representation defined by geography. The new official opposition party -- the separatist Bloc Quebecois -- won all its votes in Quebec, and as a result won 27 times more seats (54 to 2) than the Conservative Party, yet had a lower percentage of the national vote.

The Reform Party, now the third largest parliamentary party, won 20% of Ontario's vote, but the Liberals with 53% gained 98 of 99 seats, which made the Reform Party more of a regional party (with nearly all its seats in the west) than its votes deserved.

Both the *Toronto Globe and Mail* and the Canada West Foundation call for Canada to adopt PR. Provincial governments -- several of which are controlled by the now-decimated Conservative and New Democrat parties -- could adopt PR for their elections.

### Notable Quotes

*"The second track [in Angola policy] is to recognize that winner-take-all elections seldom bring peace to conflict-torn societies. Political talks must be organized with the goal of achieving effective, multi-party power sharing to broaden the regime's base and decentralize power during a transitional period of several years (as in South Africa)."*

Chester Crocker, Assist. Secretary of State/African Affairs, 1981-89; Oct. 10 column, *Washington Post*

*"Let there be no mistake: the current at-large system is no longer acceptable. In Dallas County, 37% of the people, but less than 14% of the judges, are African-American or Hispanic...The federal courts may ultimately hold that the evidence presented in pending litigation is insufficient to demonstrate that the system is illegal, but they cannot make it fair or right..."*

*"Some scholars believe that a better method of electing trial judges, particularly in metropolitan areas, would be limited or cumulative at-large elections...While little used in judicial elections, such procedures have long been used in both public and private elections around the world."*

Chief Justice Thomas Phillips, Supreme Court of Texas; "State of the Judiciary" address to Texas legislature, 2/23/93

*"The crudity and unfairness of the present method of election...and our clumsy system of voting still goes on sending men to Parliament for whom only a minority of their constituents have voted, leaving the majority quite unrepresented. As a representative system, it is a sham, a delusion, and a snare to the unthinking."*

Kate Sheppard, leader of New Zealand's suffrage movement; Natl. Council of Women Address, 1902

## ***"Making Your Vote Count"***

### **The Voting and Democracy Index**

- Percent of seats won by center-right parties in France's 1993 elections: 80%. Percent of votes won: 39%.
- Percent of vote won by Progressive Conservative party (the majority party before elections) in Canada's 1993 elections: 16%. Percent of seats won: 1%.
- Number of seats that Canada's second and third largest parties in parliament contested against one another: 0.
- Percent of 1992 vote for Democratic candidates in contested congressional elections: 52%. Percent of these seats won by Democrats: 60%.
- Percent of U.S. population which is female, Latino or African-American: 61%. Percent of U.S. Senate in these categories: 7%.
- Percent of women in German Bundestag elected by PR: 29%. Percent elected by winner-take-all: 12%
- Percent of women in Australian Senate (using PR): 23%  
Percent women in its House (using winner-take-all): 7%
- Percent of Americans who agree "Congress is not doing the job we elected it to do. It's time for change, even if it means voting against my own representative": 78%.
- Percent of Americans who favor congressional term limits: 76%. Percent of Democrats (who have controlled House of Reps. since 1955) favoring them: 75%.
- Percent of Italians who voted in 1993 referendum to adopt a mixed member PR system: 83%. Percent of New Zealanders who voted in 1992 referendum to replace winner-take-all system with mixed member PR: 85%.

### **Cambridge Elections** *(continued from page 1)*

Anyone who says folks can't understand preference voting (PV) should check out the technical expertise of these observers. Besides, what's so difficult about each candidate needing to gain about 10% of votes cast? But for Cambridge voters, the technical stuff isn't the point; it's only a means to get at the politics.

The main political divide is between the Cambridge Civic Association (CCA) and Independents. Saturday night, the place buzzed as an incumbent CCA councilor was eliminated, leaving four candidates for three seats. Transferring his ballots would determine which candidates won and whether the CCA would have a majority.

The defeated incumbent was on the CCA slate, but was a "neighborhood guy" from North Cambridge. A theory spread that his ballots might transfer more to a fellow North Cambridge candidate who was an Independent than to the two remaining CCA candidates, both women.

In the end, his ballots elected the two CCA candidates, and the CCA kept its majority. From both sides, weary after the counting, there was much admiration expressed for a system that fairly represents all voters and interests.

In this city of 13.5% African-Americans, a black man (the current mayor) was the only candidate elected on the first count, and two black women were among six elected to the school committee. With no district lines, the city has had continuous representation of people of color since the 1950s, which is quite instructive for local jurisdictions seeking to comply with the Voting Rights Act.

A final observation. I was constantly asked about computerizing the count. The hand count has much to offer in terms of drama and civic involvement, but computer technology is ready and is both faster and more precise. Certainly computerization would allow more cities and states to use this sensible and fair voting system. •

*See next issue for more details on computerization.*