

ELECTORAL REFORM

(A Paper by Mr. Francis Pym)

1. The main disadvantage is that the campaign for the extension of Proportional Representation to Westminster would gain greater credibility.
2. The advantage of Proportional Representation in a three or four party situation is that no one Party can obtain a majority of seats on a minority of votes. This is particularly important in the case of the SNP.

Justification for Proportional Representation in Assembly but not Parliament

3. Proportional Representation can be justified for Europe and the Assemblies on the grounds that a) with a small electorate it helps to ensure that permanent local minorities which are significant in local terms but not wider terms, do not feel themselves totally and permanently excluded.  
b) the sort of decisions the executive in Scotland will be called upon to make are of the type that are open to argument, discussion and a consensus which is not so easy in the non devolved spheres of foreign affairs, defence and the economy where often quick decisions need to be made by one man in the knowledge he can rest assured of support.  
c) the European Parliament does not have executive powers. It is there to represent the people of Europe, not produce a government.
4. It would be easier to justify if the Cabinet were committee-based in Scotland as well as in Wales.

Disadvantages of present system in Scotland

5. In Scotland a first past the post system would produce an Assembly of 86 Labour, 33 Conservatives, 23 SNP and 6 Liberals. A 5% Labour to SNP swing would give an Assembly of 60 Labour, 55 SNP, 29 Conservatives and 4 Liberals. A 10% Labour to SNP swing would give 93 SNP, 23 Conservatives, 28 Labour and 4 Liberals. (Based on October 1974 voting)
6. Beyond a minimal shift to SNP the system becomes highly sensitive to quite small shifts of opinion. Beyond 35% of the vote the system exaggerates the representation of SNP. A 7% or 8% swing to SNP would probably give the SNP control of the executive. A Westminster Government in a similar minority position on votes could hardly claim this did not give the SNP a mandate for their policies.
7. The results of the first Assembly election could be distorted by the Party with the highest vote in any constituency gaining two or three seats. This could be very harmful if Labour remains in power and remains unpopular.
8. Note: The Parti Quebecois gained 70 out of 110 seats on 40% of the vote.

Systems of Proportional RepresentationGeneral

9. There is no advantage unless the system is truly proportional. In Wales, where our votes tend to be in pockets, a poor system could be disastrous.

### Alternative Vote

10. The alternative vote system whereby the votes of the person at the bottom of the poll are redistributed could be disastrous as SNP could well be the second choice of Conservative, Liberal and Labour. If that were the case, then in October 1974 SNP would have gained 28 seats.

### STV with quota

11. The STV system only produces proportionality in multi-member constituencies, of five or six members. Otherwise, it polarises representation on the two largest parties, probably with a bias to SNP in Scotland as both Labour and Conservatives would give it their preference. In a five or six member constituency any party that gets  $1/5 + 1$  or  $1/6 + 1$  of the votes gains a seat.

12. Six or seven member constituencies could be produced by running three Parliamentary constituencies together or, in Scotland, by using the regions or, in Wales, the Counties.

13. Given certain assumptions about second preferences, an Assembly elected under STV in October 1974 would have produced Labour 63; Conservatives 30, Liberals 6, SNP 49.

### List System

14. This system emphasises the party system. At its simplest, in each constituency a member is elected on the first past the post system. In addition, each party is allocated an additional number of seats according to its share of the national vote. These seats may go to the candidates of that party who gained the highest share of the vote in their constituencies but failed to be elected.

15. Some members have no constituencies, though the additional members can be grouped on regional lines to overcome this. The system can be extended to voting twice - once for a constituency MP and once for a regional list.

16. This system produces strict proportionality regardless of boundaries. The present constituencies could be used and the Assembly reduced to 100 in Scotland and about 60 in Wales.

### Wales

17. The urgency of reform in Wales to stop the nationalists is less acute.

18. Labour, with 49% of the vote and 65% of members, is grossly over represented at the expense of Liberals, with 15% of the vote and 5% of members. Tories and Plaid Cymru are proportionately represented.

19. There are fears the Conservatives would be wiped out under a system that was not strictly proportional.

### Conclusions

1. It is necessary to balance the boost to the argument for extension of Proportional Representation to Westminster against the grave disadvantages and serious possibility of the SNP winning a majority of seats on a minority of votes and precipitating a constitutional crisis that would bring into question the system of election to Westminster anyway.

2. The system must be the same for Scotland and Wales if it is to be credible.
3. If we advocate a change we must make clear we insist upon a system that is strictly proportional.
4. The simple List system would seem to involve the least upheaval and would avoid the need, which exists even in the present proposals, for a boundary review.