

ELECTORAL REFORMNote by the Research Department

1. Attached is a copy of a long (but even so inevitably incomplete) study of the pros and cons of the main alternative systems of voting.
2. The main conclusion of the paper is that if we have to have a form of proportional representation, then the form that would be most suitable (or least damaging) alike from the point of view of the Conservative Party and of our political system as a whole is the German system of a combination of a list system with single member constituencies.
3. List systems (including this one) can be expected to represent parties in the House in almost exact arithmetic proportion to the votes cast. For example, last October the results of such a system could be expected to have been approximately as in the proportional column below:-

	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Proportional</u>
Conservative	277	227
Labour	319	249
Liberal	13	116
Others (inc. Nats)	26	43
Total	635	635

4. Under present conditions (and the assumptions spelt out in greater detail in Appendix 1) the alternative vote system in single member constituencies would most probably lead to some increase in the Liberal representation in the House (although significantly less than true proportionality) but entirely at the Conservative expense. Since they depend critically on the assumptions, any figures are more than usually unreliable but, as a rough illustration of the kind of effect, one might imagine Labour constant at 319 (due to self cancelling Conservative gains from Labour and Labour gains from Conservative) and Conservatives down by 20 to 257 and Liberals up by 20 to 33. The transferable vote system in multi-member constituencies could be expected to produce a result intermediate between this and true proportionality. The greater the number of members per constituency, the closer the system will approximate to true proportionality.
5. Lord Harris in the Lords' Debate on 23rd April gave a hint (Hansard Col. 941) that the subject might be referred to a Speaker's Conference after the Referendum. The first question to be considered is therefore what attitude the Conservative Party should take to the subject being referred to a Speaker's Conference. Since in our Manifesto for the October Election, we proposed the establishment of a Speaker's Conference to examine our electoral system (as also direct elections to the European Parliament), we would presumably have to support such a reference and we might even find it politic to press for it (without any other commitment).

6. If a Speaker's Conference is established to consider the subject, the Conservative representation on that Conference, their briefing and the line they are to take will all need careful consideration. As indicated in the main paper (and particularly the point summarised in paragraph 4 above) the form of proportional representation could be crucially important to the whole future of the Conservative Party. Some systems might offer something to the Liberals at no great cost to Labour but systems offering more to the Liberal might in fact be less damaging to the Conservatives.
7. Whatever recommendations emerged from a Speaker's Conference any change in our electoral system would require legislation which would have to be passed under conditions in which effective whipping would be particularly difficult.
8. Any form of proportional representation would:-
  - (a) make it virtually impossible for either the Conservative or the Labour Party ever again to form a majority government on their own as distinct from part of a coalition.
  - (b) greatly reduce the chances of election of many Conservative and quite a few Labour Members. It is possible to devise a system (e.g. transferable vote in single member constituencies) which is unlikely to make large inroads into the representation of the Labour Party as a whole but this would still put several existing Labour seats at risk.

Except in the sort of crisis situation that has led to a coalition government in the past, it is difficult to see the legislation getting through the House. Conservative Members would be understandably reluctant to vote for a system that would reduce their chances of election while many Labour Members would probably prefer to risk a government of their principal opponents rather than adopt a system which would almost certainly force them into an uncomfortable coalition likely to create great strains with some of their supporters. It would therefore be unwise to base our tactics on the assumption that even if the Speaker's Conference recommended in favour of a form of proportional representation such a recommendation could be implemented at this time by legislation.
9. There is strong support for some form of proportional representation amongst many industrialists. The argument may be partially based on the belief that the Liberals are splitting the anti-Socialist vote. If so this is probably based on mistaken beliefs about the nature of Liberal support. Nearly all the evidence both from opinion polls and from analysis of voting statistics is that Liberal voters as a whole have no very marked preference as between Conservative and Labour,
10. The more probable reason for the industrialists' desire for proportional representation is not the political one of presenting a more united front to Socialism, but rather a practical hankering for greater stability and continuity in government and more moderate governments. Proportional representation is not bound to provide this. The immediate effect might be a moderating one but a greatly enlarged Parliamentary Liberal Party would not necessarily be moderate and alterations of the balance of power within the Liberal Party from one wing of that Party to the other might be quite as traumatic as the alternation between Conservative and Labour. Moreover the dynamics of proportional representation systems (by weakening the strength of the "wasted vote" argument) have often led to the strengthening of extremist parties which then have to be

taken into account in the formation of coalitions which under adverse circumstances (as in pre-war Germany and Italy) they may come to dominate.

11. If the objective is to achieve greater stability and continuity of government, then apart from the uncertain route of electoral reform, the road of Parliamentary reform might be worth examining. There are a number of possibilities that seem to be worth studying:-

(a) Strengthening the control of Parliament over the government. Proportional representation achieves this by making it virtually impossible for a single Party to form a government. Procedural changes might achieve the same ultimate objective. For example, Select Committees of the House might be required to give prior sanction to government plans for public expenditure linking them perhaps to the PESC and PAR systems.

(b) The Bill of Rights approach. If devolution leads to legislative assemblies for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, some arrangements to resolve conflicts of laws may be required and on to these could be fastened some form of protection for basic human rights.

(c) Reform of the House of Lords. Churchill, Leo Amery, Harold Macmillan and others in the past contemplated a Chamber consisting of representatives of industry, labour, the churches etc. A body of this sort could perhaps be given greater delaying powers particularly when one government was reversing too rapidly the legislation of its predecessors.

(d) Referenda. There are obvious political difficulties in the Conservative Party supporting the introduction of referenda at the moment, whatever the merits. But many people have argued that the referendum is an essentially conservative instrument which can be used to prevent radical changes in government policy.

