P.S. to the NEWS
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RELEASE: DECEMBER 2, 1980

THE END OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

Should Illinois abandon its unique system of electing its State House of Representatives which has served well for 110 years? That was one of the many issues decided by the election of November 4, and the voters answered yes.

Most states are governed by a customary two-house legislature patterned after Congress. Two states are unique. Nebraska has a unicameral legislature and Illinois has Proportional Representation.

When I received my degrees in political science, Proportional Representation (or PR as it was affectionately referred to on the campus) was preferred by most professors as the perfect pattern for a legislature. Its rationale is that it gives fair representation to both the majority and the minority, instead of the usual winner-take-all system.

The Illinois elections work like this. From each district, in the primary two candidates are nominated for the State Legislature by each party. In the general election, three are elected.

With three offices to be filled, each voter may cast three votes and may apportion the three votes any way he wants: all three votes to one candidate, 1-1/2 votes to each of two candidates, or one vote to each of three candidates. Anyone who votes the straight party ticket automatically gives 1-1/2 votes to each of the party's two nominees.

The result is, rather obviously, that each district has two Republican Representatives and one Democratic Representative in a majority Republican district, and two Democrats and one Republican in a majority Democratic district.

Occasionally, a candidate will try to outsmart the system by running as an "indepen--dent" -- generally this means the Democrats getting greedy and hoping to win all three seats with one Democrat masquerading as an "independent." These attempts are usually unsuccessful.

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It has been generally believed that the system is more representative and responsible to the people because it gives all citizens at least one Representative to turn to. Everybody has a Representative -- not merely the majority of voters.

The Illinois system has been especially useful in preventing the state from being dominated by the Chicago Democratic organization, clearly the most powerful and effective political organization in the United States during the past 50 years. The Chicago organization is restrained, under the Illinois Proportional Representative legislative system, both by the minority Republicans elected in Chicago and by the minority Democrats elected downstate who are not beholden to Chicago.

The Illinois system has worked well since 1870. When the modern Constitution was adopted in 1970, the voters were given the chance to vote separately on the Proportional Representation system, and they overwhelmingly approved it.

Through various shenanighans, a proposal was put on the ballot in November to eliminate the Proportional Representation system. The ballot didn't say that, however; it only said: "The purpose of the Amendment is to reduce the size of the House of Representatives from 177 to 118 members and to provide for the election of one Representative from each of 118 districts."

Nobody discussed the uniqueness or the proven value of the present system. The sole argument used was that it would save tax dollars by reducing the number of legislators. That argument is completely phony; the remaining Representatives will simply hire more staff to do the work now done by elected legislators. The result will be a more costly but less representative legislature.

Two years ago, Massachusetts voters fell for the same argument that reducing the size of the legislature by one-third would save money and produce efficiency. It didn't.

The New Hampshire House of Representatives is the largest in the country; it has 400 members. New Hampshire has no state income tax and no sales tax because a larger number of legislators stay closer to the will of the people.

But the tax revolt fever carried the Legislative Cutback Amendment to victory, and Illinois' Proportional Representation has been cast into the dustbin of history.

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