

**THE HISTORY OF CUMULATIVE
VOTING AND MINORITY
REPRESENTATION IN ILLINOIS
1870-1908, VOL. III, NO. 3,
MARCH 1909**

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The history of cumulative voting and minority representation in Illinois 1870-1908, Vol. III, No. 3, March 1909 by Blaine F. Moore

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The History of Cumulative Voting and Minority Representation in Illinois, 1870-1908

BY

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WITH A PREFACE BY

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PREFACE.

Popular interest in the principle of minority representation has slowly and steadily increased since its first application in Denmark in 1855 and in England in 1867, and recent years have seen the principle extended in practice to many parts of the world. In 1889 it was introduced into Japan contemporaneously with the establishment of constitutional government. In the early nineties it made its appearance in the Swiss Cantons of Ticino and Neuchâtel from which it spread in succession to the Cantons of Geneva, Zug, Solothurn, Berne, Friburg, Basel and Schwyz, being applied in some cases to the election of the cantonal legislatures, in others to the municipal councils. In 1899 it was introduced into Belgium, in 1905 into Moravia; in 1906 into Finland and Württemberg, in 1907 into Sweden and Tasmania and in 1908 into Cuba and Oregon. In the meantime the principle has had a practical test under favorable conditions in the State of Illinois through a period extending over nearly forty years.

The present paper, originally prepared for the Seminar in political science in the University of Illinois, embodies the results of an inquiry into the actual workings of the cumulative voting system for the choice of representatives in the Legislature of Illinois, an examination of the objections that have been urged against the system in the form in which it exists and a consideration of its effect upon the personnel of the Legislature and upon the activity of the political parties in the nomination of candidates.

Mr. Moore finds that in only three instances since the scheme was put into operation has it failed to give the principal minority party in each district representation, and, also, that with three exceptions third parties have always been able to choose representatives in each Legislature, the number usually ranging from two to five members. Of course, the scheme does not secure exact

proportional but only minority representation, yet so far as the two dominant parties are concerned, the representation which each secures approximates fairly the principle of proportionality. The minority party does not ordinarily secure undue representation, but owing to certain "mishaps" which are fully explained by Mr. Moore, there have been some instances (twenty-four altogether) in which the minority actually secured more than its rightful share of representatives—a contingency which might happen under any system of representation.

The system necessarily requires party control and supervision in determining the number of candidates to be nominated by the two dominant parties in each district. Obviously, as Mr. Moore shows, if each party should nominate three candidates in each district, as is advocated by some reformers, though it would give the voters a wide range of choice, it would necessarily result in the destruction of the principle of minority representation and the dominant party in each district would secure all three of the representatives to be elected and the minority none. He points out that if the law should require each party to nominate as many candidates as there are places to be filled the minority party to save itself would be forced to treat two of the candidates as technical merely and would "plump" its votes on the third candidate, otherwise it would fail to secure any representation at all. The new primary law recognizes the practical necessity of party control by empowering the party committee in each district to determine the number of candidates to be nominated by its party, and the criticism which has been directed against this provision as one which fosters machine control and bossism is not well founded.

Mr. Moore clears the system of several objections that have been urged against it and asserts that none of them or all of them together are sufficient to condemn the system. Most of the evils complained of would exist equally under any other system and certainly the gerrymander would flourish as it does not under the present method. The practical difficulties of voting and canvassing the returns under the present system are too inconsider-

able to constitute a real objection. The cumulative method undoubtedly secures what its advocates intended it to accomplish, namely, the legislative representation of the principal minority party in the State, and this result has been secured without serious practical difficulties. Whether, therefore, the system should be retained is mainly, though not wholly, a question of the merits of minority representation as a principle of representative government.

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University of Illinois.

December 9th, 1908.