

Proportional Representation - A False and Damaging Paradigm

By: *Jerzy Przystawa*

The great Spanish philosopher of politics, Jose Ortega y Gasset, in his famous book "The Revolt of the Masses" claims that for the condition of any democracy the most important issue is a small technical detail: the electoral procedure. If this procedure is right, fulfilling the society's needs and demands, then democracy works. On the other hand, if this procedure is bad then everything falls down even if all other democratic institutions appear to be correct.

Political science divides the electoral systems into three groups: (1) majoritarian systems, (2) proportional representation and (3) mixed systems. The first group is best represented in the UK, Canada, USA or France, where the whole country is divided into a number of constituencies and in each constituency only one representative is elected. The opposite to this are countries with proportional representation (PR), where voters have to vote on party lists. Poland and Croatia belong to this last category. In fact, all the so-called post communist countries of Europe accepted various forms of PR in their constitutional structure. This, in a way, is a European tradition: after WWI nearly all countries on the continental Europe went on the path of, so called, "proportionality".

Why it happened?

Why only mutations of PR and not the old, well tested majoritarian system which seems to work reasonably well for over two centuries in the US, United Kingdom, Canada and in so many other highly developed countries?

Poland provides pathetic proof to Ortega's statement. We had to suffer various forms of PR both during the 20 years between the WWI and WWII and then, again, during the last two decades. In both cases, it brought weak states, unstable governments, political corruption, frustration of Polish society and the withdrawal of citizens from participation in political affairs. In both cases, a partiocracy developed in place of democracy. In 1926, it even led to a form of coup d'etat in Poland by Marshall Józef Piłsudski who was in favor of the British system of elections. The enforced democracy of party lists, called the Proportional Representation, quickly disillusioned European societies and, in most cases, turned into - weaker or stronger - dictatorships. The most profound examples of such changes were developments in Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy but one may notice similar changes in nearly all other countries.

It is a historical curiosity that after the catastrophe of WWII all European states of the so-called Western Europe turned again into similar, already compromised before the War, electoral procedures based upon PR. Perhaps it happened not without "good advice" from their Allies. For example, we know from the memoirs of Konrad Adenauer that he wished the Westminster system of "First-Past-The-Post" to be introduced into the post war Germany but the Allies did not allow it! As a result of this pressure, a peculiar form of "proportionality" had been introduced in Western Germany and, in spite of various voices demanding a change it is still maintained in the united Germany. The only exception from this pattern was France under General de Gaulle who managed to cure French politics by a decisive departure from PR.

Another great modern philosopher, Karl Popper, when writing on democracy, observed: "the system of Proportional Representation strips a member of

EPP Closes Congress in Warsaw by adopting Electoral Manifesto

The European People's Party (EPP) has formally adopted its political Manifesto for the forthcoming European elections.

Representatives of the 74 EPP member parties unanimously approved the electoral document during the second session of its Extraordinary Congress held on 29 and 30 April in Warsaw under the EPP slogan for the elections: "Strong for the people".

The electoral document details the EPP's proposals on five major areas: economy and how to deal with the current crisis; climate change; the response to the challenge of demographic change; security (including immigration, food security and the threat of terrorism); and the role of the Europe in the world.

"We have adopted a solid package of proposals to deal with the main challenges faced by our European society. I am convinced that the EPP will receive once again the confidence of the European citizens and remain the largest political force in the European Parliament after the June elections," stated EPP President, Wilfried Martens.

The EPP Congress also adopted several resolutions on the economic crisis; Unemployment in Spain; the Freedom of Religion; Child labour; the rights of the Europeans residing outside their country of origin; the role of Regions and cities in dealing with the economic crisis and climate change; the role of women in the integration of migrants; the work of the EPP's European Senior Citizens.

The EPP Congress was a huge event attended by more than 3,000 representatives from EPP member parties, EPP associations and international guests.

Amongst the leaders present were EPP Heads of State and Government including Donald TUSK (Poland), François FILLON (France), Angela MERKEL (Germany), Kostas KARAMANLIS (Greece), Jan-Peter BALKENENDE (The Netherlands), Jean-Claude JUNCKER (Luxembourg), Silvio BERLUSCONI (Italy), Herman VAN ROMPUY (Belgium), Fredrik REINFELDT (Sweden), Andrius KUBILIUS (Lithuania), Lawrence GONZI (Malta), Emil BOC (Romania), Ivo SANADER (Croatia), Sali BERISHA (Albania), Nikola GRUEVSKI (FYROM) and Mikheil SAAKASHVILI (Georgia).

The Presidents of the European Commission and European Parliament (José Manuel BARROSO and Hans-Gert POETTERING) also participated along with many leaders of the EPP member parties, as well as Lech WALESZA, former leader of Solidarność. □

parliament of his personal responsibility and turns him into a voting machine rather than allowing him to be a sensitive, responsible and thoughtful human being".

Unfortunately, it seems that in political science, both in Europe and elsewhere, students of various universities are being taught completely different things. According to Arend Lijphart, Professor of Political Sciences at the University of California, San Diego, the chief advocate of PR, "there is well nigh universal agreement that electoral proportionality is a major goal of electoral systems and a major criterion by which they should be judged. For many PR supporters, proportionality is a goal in itself - virtually synonymous with electoral justice." ("Electoral Systems and Party Systems", Oxford University Press, 2000). Similar sentiments are expressed in nearly all textbooks on Constitutional Law and such likes. Thus we are dealing with a paradigm: PR means electoral justice, equality and freedom.

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Patricia Whitehall-Hill named Executive Director of the National Polish Center in Washington, DC



The National Polish Center, the only national organization representing Polish Americans with its own building in the nation's capital, has named Patricia Whitelaw-Hill as its Executive Director. The Center's mission is to encourage and facilitate economic and cultural cooperation between the United States and Poland and promote appreciation of Polish heritage in America. Ms. Hill's extensive non-profit and fundraising experience, exceptional communication and facilitation skills, strong leadership, teamwork and administrative experience and in-depth knowledge of Poland and Polish Americans will contribute significantly as the Center moves forward to strengthen and grow its program.

With experience in Poland from the communist era through Poland's entry in the European Union, Ms. Whitelaw-Hill brings significant skills and experience to the position. A graduate of the University of Maryland (B.S. in Communications) and Georgetown University (M.S. in Linguistics), she has been awarded a Fulbright Grant, a U.S.I.S. English Teaching Fellowship in Albania, a scholarship to Georgetown University Graduate School and a Fellowship at the Linguistic Society of America Summer Institute. A former Peace Corps volunteer, she taught English as a foreign language (TEFL) in Albania, Romania, and Cameroon and was an English as a Second Language teacher trainer and program director in Washington, DC, Poland, Korea, and the former Yugoslavia. Fluent in French, with professional working proficiency in Polish, Macedonian, Serbian, and West African Pidgin, Ms. Hill began her professional career as Staff Assistant to Congressman Brock Adams in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Ms. Whitelaw-Hill most recently served as the Executive Director of the National Society Colonial Dames 17th Century in Washington, prior to which she supported her husband, Christopher Hill, in his diplomatic duties as ambassador at the American Embassies in South Korea, Poland, and Macedonia. In this role, she led Embassy community outreach initiatives, including, in Poland: Honorary President, American Friends in Warsaw; President, Spouses of Heads of Mission; and, Board Member, Litewska Children's Clinic. Ms. Hill also represented the American Embassy at official functions.

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Polish-Americans and the 2010 Census

The Census Bureau is making final preparations to launch the 2010 census which will take place in April 2010. It is important for Polish Americans to participate fully to ensure that the communities we live in get the full representation in Congress and state legislatures they deserve and the full allocation of federal funds for our senior citizens, police departments, etc. The main reason for the census is to redraw districts for the U.S. House of Representatives and for state legislatures.

"The census is the one great event in which all residents of the United States participate. We join with all of our neighbors to take stock of who we are and what we are becoming as a nation," according to Dr. Thaddeus Radziłowski, President of the Piast Institute. The Piast Institute is one of 56 Census Information Centers (CIC) in the United States. The Piast Institute's CIC is the only officially recognized resource for census and demographic information on the Polish Americans since 2005.

There is a major change in the 2010 census which makes it different from the previous censuses. There will be no question on ancestry so that you will not have an opportunity to write in "Polish" as in previous years. In previous census counts one out of six households received the "long form" which contained the ancestry questions along with other additional questions. The ancestry numbers were developed from that one in six sample.

The 2010 census will be a short form only sent to all households. It will only ask 10 basic questions - name, sex, age, date of birth, race, Hispanic origin, housing tenure and family relationship.

The questions formerly asked on the long form will be covered by the American Community Survey (ACS). It will include a question on ancestry. The ACS will be sent to a small percentage of the population on a rotating basis through the decade between censuses. No one will get such a questionnaire more than once every five years. If you receive an ACS form it is vitally important to write "Polish" for the question on ancestry. It is from this much smaller percentage of questionnaires in the on-going ACS that the Polish population will be calculated.

All Polish organizations should seek to become official census partners to help spread the word about the census and to bring the Polish community to the attention of the Census Bureau. You can use the occasion to ask the census office to see that the ancestry questions gets on the census form for 2020 to get a more secure count. For information on partnerships go to the U.S. Census home page and click on "Partners with US!"

For more information on the 2010 census call Polonia's Census Information Center at the Piast Institute at 313-733-4535 or e-mail: skrzyniarz@piastinstitute.org. □

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