

THEME COMMITTEE 2
NATIONAL PARTY SUBMISSION
BLOCK 6 ITEM 5: THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM

A THE PRESENT SYSTEM

In terms of the present party list system of proportional representation, the most elementary form of PR, the voter casts a single vote for the party of his or her choice, which brings about a direct relationship between the percentage of the total votes cast in favour of a party and the number of seats which that party obtains in parliament. The system of proportional representation as applied in South Africa does not provide for the expression of voter preference between candidates as in the preferential system, no special threshold of minimum votes for a seat apart from the quota is required, and the only additional special feature of our system is the provision for national and provincial lists of candidates, which promotes the national distribution of candidates and, thus, representatives.

Our present system is easy to understand and apply and fulfils the most basic requirement of any electoral system: it accurately reflects the support each party enjoys among the voters. By definition, this gives all interest groups an opportunity to be represented and ensures a legitimate electoral system.

However, the system also carries with it two distinct disadvantages:

- (a) The first is a disadvantage often associated with proportional representation, namely the problem of insufficient contact between the electorate and their representatives and, eventually, separation and even alienation of voters and representatives.
- (b) In the election of 1994, the system was applied without voters' lists. Elections without the registration of voters are bound to cause disorderliness, electoral malpractices, voting by disqualified persons and, eventually, an increase in voter dissatisfaction and alienation.

B PROPOSALS

In view of the above, the National Party would like to submit the following proposals for a future electoral system:

1 Proportional representation

We believe that in principle the system of proportional representation has proven to be the most suitable electoral system for South Africa and that it should be retained. The system guarantees representation of all significant interest groups in South African society - something which is just not possible in a constituency system. Furthermore, as mentioned above, it accurately reflects the support of the various parties and enhances the legitimacy of the system.

2 Voter registration

It is imperative that future elections be conducted on the basis of proper voters' lists. For the reasons mentioned above, elections without voters' lists will lead to an increase in electoral disorder and, in the long run, seriously undermine voter satisfaction and the legitimacy of elections and the constitution itself. Another significant advantage of voters' lists is that it forces parties and candidates to get down to grassroots level to register voters. This encourages the development of an informal identification of voters with parties and candidates at this early stage in the electoral process, thus countering the separation between voters and representatives caused by proportional representation. Democracy is not served only by an electoral system that ensures an accurate reflection of voter preferences; it is equally served by a system that ensures satisfactory liaison between the electorate and their representatives. It should also be emphasised that voters' lists should be prepared on a provincial basis. A voter should be registered in the province where he or she resides.

3 Geographical allocation of representatives

For proper linkage between voters and representatives, it is not enough merely to register voters and to provide for national and provincial lists of candidates. No proper voter/representative identification has ensued under the present system and an additional mechanism is required to link elected members to the voters. We propose as follows:

(a) The constitution should provide formally that after the election, and after the results have been published and Parliament has been constituted, the parties must formally designate their MP's and Senators as representatives of the various magisterial districts in South Africa. The public must be informed of this in various ways, inter alia by publication in the Gazette. The objective is to link members of Parliament constitutionally to geographical areas of the Republic, providing them with the formal clout and status to act on behalf of the voters in a particular district.

(b) As all parties represented in Parliament must designate their members in this way, it may happen that a particular magisterial district is represented by more than one representative, creating, as it were, multi-member constituencies. This is not necessarily undesirable. As a matter of fact, since we are at present already talking of a ratio of one representative per 80 000 of the population, more than one representative per district is probably called for.

(c) Obviously, larger parties will be able to designate each of their members to fewer districts than smaller parties. For this reason, parties should have a choice when they designate their members. A party should be able either to cover as many districts as possible, which means that every member may be made responsible for quite a number of districts, or may choose to concentrate on particular districts and leaving the others to other parties.

(d) In order to strengthen the link between a district and a member, Senators should be designated only in their respective provinces, whereas parties should, in any case, preferably designate their members according to their place of ordinary residence. Parties will have to take this factor into account when preparing their candidate lists, which may also contribute to a better nation-wide distribution of candidates.

(e) An important advantage of this proposal over the constituency system is the fact that in the latter system, the elected member only formally represents all the voters in that constituency. In practice, he or she actually represents only the majority who has elected him or her and not the supporters of the other parties. This will be the case especially in constituencies in which the

election has been fought with great animosity and bad blood between the parties. In contrast, our proposal enables a party to designate a member for its own supporters in a particular district.

(f) We believe that the adoption of this proposal will to a large extent eliminate the disadvantage in respect of voter/representative linkage caused by the present electoral system, without at all affecting the proportional principle central to that system.