

TWO CHEERS FOR PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

IN CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

A Preliminary Report on Research in Progress

by

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Cambridge, Massachusetts is the only city in this country which still uses Proportional Representation (PR) in elections for its Council and School Committee, the other 21 cities which once used PR having abandoned it.¹ Since Cambridge's experience with PR has extended over four decades, that experience furnishes an instructive case study.

The research reported on here focuses mainly on the following questions: 1) Why has Cambridge retained PR contrary to the trends represented in the communities which moved away from it? 2) How has PR "worked"? What seems to be the political consequences of PR under the conditions which prevail in Cambridge?

This paper reports on some of the more salient generalizations which seem to be emerging from data still being analyzed. Additional supporting evidence and explication of the inferences involved will have to await the final report.

Judging the effects of PR in Cambridge requires consideration of the political and social context or milieu in which it functions. The following statements attempt to summarize for the reader the main elements of that milieu. PR was adopted in Cambridge in 1940 as one concomitant of council-manager government specified as Plan E in the applicable state statute. The campaign for Plan E was waged by "good government" reform forces and probably owed its success to a pattern of waste and corruption in the previous mayor-council governments in which the structural pattern consisted of a weak Mayor elected at large; a Council of 15 (11 from wards, four at large); and a School Committee of six elected at large with the Mayor serving as Chairman *ex officio*. Elections were nonpartisan as far as ballot form was concerned, although both parties participated in recruiting, endorsing and campaigning for candidates. The extent of this involvement is difficult to judge four decades later. Plan E replaced this structure with a Council of nine elected on a nonpartisan ballot by PR with the largely ceremonial Mayor elected by the Council; the School Committee of six is elected in the same manner and is chaired by the Mayor *ex officio*. The PR elections are conducted by means of the single transferable vote (the "Hare system"). In addition to these structural features there are other relevant political factors, such as the diversity and latent conflict in the polyglot population mix, commented on more fully below, and a lop-sided distribution of

* Some of the findings reported here are firm. Others are quite tentative since the analysis is incomplete. Therefore it is requested that there be no quotation paraphrasing or citation of this paper except by specific permission of the author.

¹ Childs, 1952, 250 / Childs, 1965, 65-67. New York City currently uses PR for community school board elections.

party strength (approximately six registered Democrats for every registered Republican, with a substantial fraction (almost a third) of registered voters opting for identification with neither party.) The margin of registered Democrats over registered Republicans has almost doubled during the four decades covered by this study.

The feature of the political system enumerated in the preceding paragraph which are concomitants of PR complicate the problem of inferring its effects. Since controls for these other variables are not possible in a case study, assessment of the effects of PR necessarily relies heavily on testimony and judgment of knowledgeable observers.²

The Survival of PR

PR has been retained in Cambridge despite five vigorous repealer referendum campaigns. Its survival is best explained by the fact that the leaders of the interests wishing to keep PR ("good government" types for the most part) were able to muster more votes than leaders of the opposition to PR, mostly organization Democrats.

However, once one moves from the level of the cliché stated in the preceding sentence, diagnosis and explanation of the survival of PR become rather more complicated. Several of the principal factors, however, can be identified.

1. Effective political organization. The successes of the defenders of PR are largely attributable to the effectiveness of an interlocking network of "good government" organizations such as the Citizens' Plan E Committee (CPEC) and the Cambridge Civic Association (CCA). By dint of hard work devoted to candidate recruitment, campaign finance, publicity and precinct-level measures designed to get out favorable voters, these organizations in effect have functioned as a local party or quasi-party which enables outnumbered Republicans to unite with reform Democrats on local issues while going their separate ways in state and national politics. The opposing quasi-party, somewhat confusingly labelled Independents,³ is led by traditionalist Democratic members of the Council and School Committee who have been formidable builders of personal followings, but have been less effective at the issue-oriented politics practiced by CCA, CPEC and their affiliated groups.

Thus the supporters of PR have effectively educated a new constituency for PR to replace the original one which has eroded through transiency and death, contrary to the experience of some electoral reforms elsewhere.⁴

These considerations lead to a further question: What ingredients have been present in Cambridge which account for the effectiveness of the "good government" organizations in their defense of PR and manager-government in contrast to the defeats of similar organizations in other cities.

²"Causation can never be proven outside an experimental setting, if indeed it can be proven there. As a result, the most one can do is to gather evidence that supports the plausibility of one's assertions about causality." Katz, xi.

³Because they were not endorsed by the CCA and groups generally cooperating with it. For simplicity of expression phrases such as "CCA endorsed" will be used to connote such groupings.

⁴.....

when PR was in effect? The answer to this question seems to lie in three factors: the strong motivation of the defenders of PR; the social and political tensions in the population mix; and a decline in the opposition to PR.

2. Motivation. From the inception in 1941 of the council-manager plan with PR, the supporters of manager government perceived that, although there is no necessary structural relationship between PR and manager government, under conditions existing in Cambridge there was a political relationship in that PR was advantageous to the "good government" supporters of the manager plan and the issue-oriented politics which they sought to promote. Their followers tended to vote more choices and in the disposition of those choices to follow the endorsements of the CCA and its allies for the "good government" "slate". The supporters of the opposition Independents, on the other hand, tended to be personal followers of this or that candidate, to vote fewer choices and to vote lower choices for other Independents in less disciplined fashion than was the case of voters supporting the "slate" of CCA and its allied groups cooperating with it. These differences in the behaviors of the two voting blocs may be lessening as a result of Independent candidates in the 1981 election engaging in campaign appeals based on a slate theme, but minus programmatic content analogous to that of the CCA and its allied groups.

3. The Population Mix. The attacks on PR and the successes of its defenders cannot be understood without some appreciation of the social and political composition of the Cambridge population. Cambridge is perceived by many outsiders as Academe—the city of Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and that it certainly is, but it is also much more. It is also an industrial city and in a sense a central-city residential neighborhood of executives and professionals who work in Boston and of an underclass of low-skilled workers. Across these categories run ethnic and religious cleavages. The largest ethnic group is Irish-Catholic, but they are mixed with a varied array of other ethnic groups: WASP's, Italians, blacks, and various central European groups, to name but a few. Thus the prevailing motif is diversity and heterogeneity.

There is also considerable social conflict. The city of Harvard (used as shorthand for the Harvard/MIT academic communities) has provided an environment conducive to political careers of a few Harvard haters who have articulated the resentment of lower-class people living next to what they perceive to be citadels of privilege which do not pay their fair share of local government costs. Rent-control constituencies, especially students, have interests which conflict with condominium conversion constituencies. Statutorily mandated property reassessments at full value are resulting in housing cost structures which over time will change the social composition of the population. Views of highly educated professional concerning schooling for their children clash with those of more traditionalist elements of the community. Cutting across these cleavages are ethnic ones, of which school desegregation is only the most prominent example. Thus there is a substantial element of social strain and conflict.

The relevance of these conditions to attacks on and defense of PR is difficult to explain succinctly. In summary form the more important relationships can be stated as follows:

a. Although the leaders and some of the followers of the groups defending PR and endorsing "good government" candidates have been somewhat elitist, such leaders have been astute enough to co-opt leaders of business labor, ethnic and other groups to develop wide voter support. Some of the votes in support of PR and for "good government" candidates have come from working class elements who have perceived their interests to be served by such alliances as a result of astute interest-group politics practiced by "good government" leaders. The complications of voting numerical choices alleged by critics of PR have not been serious impediments to voter support for PR in lower-class as well as upper-class sections of the city.

b. PR apparently has facilitated representation of ethnic minorities for at least two reasons: 1) Candidates with their main base in such minorities have found it easier to obtain a "quota" under PR than to cope with the kind of nomination and election system preceding PR and which tends to be the standard of comparison. 2) Leaders of "good government" forces found it advantageous to include such candidates on their slates and to seek votes among their supporters for other slate candidates.

4. Decreased opposition to PR. Opposition to PR has abated. After its first decade of use PR ran the gauntlet of five repealer referenda between 1952 and 1965 (an average of once every two and one-half years). There have been no such campaigns mounted in the last 17 years. Several reasons seem to account for the inactivity of repealer forces. a) Activist opponents have died off. b) PR has apparently passed a threshold of community acceptance as a result of long use and vested interests that tend to grow up around any system; Black and Italian ethnic minorities in particular are able to see at least one member of their group on the Council and/or School Committee, and are entitled to wonder if they would fare as well under some other system. c) A few supporters give as one of their reasons the uniqueness of PR which they feel gives the Cambridge civic culture an element of special appeal. d) Although Independent Council and School Committee members (who are mostly organization Democrats) still render lip service to criticisms of PR, they too are beneficiaries of PR and presumably realize it, since their personal followings insure them a PR quota, whereas re-election under a different system for some might be less sure. e) With the ascendance to power, even if tenuous, on the City Democratic Committee of reform Democrats, the traditionalist Democrat Independents can no longer feel sure that they could win in a plurality primary-and-general election system which presumably would replace PR. Some supporters of PR see its proportionality between votes and seats (as contrasted to the winner-take-all tendencies of plurality systems, whether of the at-large or district systems) as an important way of channeling and compromising the social conflict described above.

The above account hopefully will facilitate an understanding of why the continued survival of PR in Cambridge seems now to be a generally accepted premise there. Assessing the effects of PR necessitate consideration of a

pattern made up of several factors, some fairly simple to evaluate and some which are more slippery.

Consequencey of PR

The ways in which PR "works" and its political consequences are not illuminated in all respects by hard evidence, but some judgements are offered on the basis of the best evidence that can be found.

Voting behavior. The way that voters behave in the Cambridge PR system is susceptible of analysis from a number of standpoints. One of these is voter turnout in municipal elections. During the first decade of Plan E government, turnout rates declined from those in the pre-Plan E system.⁴ The principal reasons for this decline were probably the absence of head-to-head mayoral contests and the effects of World War II, after which turnout rates returned to the 68-70 per cent range (between the rates of pre-Plan E primary and general elections. During the most recent decade turnout has ranged between 49 and 60 percent of registered voters. During the previous decade it was higher, ranging between 67 and 70 per cent. These turnout rates are high compared with other U.S. cities, where median turnout rates typically are in the 20-30 percent range, particularly in view of three structural features in Cambridge which tend to depress turnout: a nonpartisan ballot; municipal elections held separately from state and national elections; and absence of a head-to-head contest of directly elected mayors.⁵ While it can not be reasonably argued that the comparatively high turnout is caused by PR, it seems clear that the complications of voting numerical preferences alleged by the critics of PR are not sufficient to deter as many voters as are deterred by other factors in other cities. The principal cause of the high turnouts is apparently the competitive and issue-oriented politics that PR tends to facilitate in Cambridge.

Invalid ballots may be used as an index of the citizen's difficulty in coping with the complexity of PR which its critic claim results from requiring the voter to vote numbered preferences rather than X's or some similiar procedure. An invalid ballot is one which a voter marks in such a way that counting official cannot determine his intent. The most common error is marking two or more X's, 1's or 2's.⁶ During the past decade invalid ballots in Council elections have remained at a rather constant two per cent of total votes cast; for School Committee the figure has oscillated between two and five per cent. Thus, under the best conditions one voter out of 50 disfranchises himself; under the worst conditions one voter out 20 does so. It is generally believed that such voters are disproportionately the lesser informed ones from the lower socio-economic population groups, but this may not be the case, since it appears that different kinds of voters make different kinds of mistakes which invalidate their ballots. Whether this disproportion affects the balance of power as between the Independents and the CCA-led groups cannot reasonably be inferred from the information at hand; intuition applied to the detailed statistics suggests that the disproportion disadvantages the Independent candidates, but only to a very slight extent.

Number of choices voted. As might be expected, the right of voters under PR to vote multiple choices is exercised to a highly variable extent. In one intensive study of these phenomena in Cambridge, it was found that in wards containing the lower socio-economic (SES) groups the most frequent (model)

⁴In the three elections immediately preceding Plan E, turnout in general elections averaged 81 per cent. In the first six Plan E (PR) elections it averaged 66 per cent - only slightly higer than pre-Plan E primary elections. Dobrusin, 24-29

⁵Karnig and Walter, 65-72; Cassel and Weaver, 10. For comparative purposes the following generalizations are offered concerning Cambridge turnout rates in state and national elections during the last decade: a range of 67 (in 1974) to 84 (in 1976), with an average of 74.

7% of what?

number of choices was three, with many electors voting for only one or two candidates. In the higher-SES neighborhoods the modal number was nine. Some voters exercised more than nine choices. To the extent that final results (in terms of what candidates win) depend on transfer votes, the results (in terms of what candidates win) depend on transfer votes, the differences in number of choices exercised result in substantial differences in political influence wielded by individual voters. It is generally believed by knowledgeable local observers that this effect advantages voters following the recommendations of the slate-endorsing groups, and in effect "leverage" the voting strength of this part of the community. It is not possible to quantify this effect from the data at hand; suffice it to say that the effect is believed to be substantial. To some extent this effect is probably offset by the greater transiency of the "slate" constituencies as compared to the more stable constituencies of the Independents.¹⁰

It should not be inferred from the above paragraph that PR advantages any particular set of voters because of their income, education, occupational status or other index of socio-economic status. Rather, what it advantages is interest in an attention to the election. Any voter who can read at the third-grade level is as capable of voting multiple choices as a Ph.D., and many do; but they do not do so in the lower SES groups to the same extent as in the higher SES groups because of the less attention which the lower SES groups pay to politics. It is also arguable that the programs of the CCA-endorsed candidates have served the interests of the lower SES groups better than the largely issueless favor trading of the Independents, who (in the words of one non-endorsed and therefore technically Independent candidate) tend to "do small favors for small people, and big favors for the big interests."

Direct representation of voters. It appears that the PR system in Cambridge, as its proponents have contended, results in elective bodies of which practically all voters can see at least one representative for whom they voted; in a large majority of cases these are first or second-choice candidates.¹²

Effects on candidates. The effects of PR, in comparison with some other system, on what candidates win appear to be small but may be critical in terms of the balance of forces on the Council and School Committee where decisions on key issues may be determined by a one-vote margin. Thinking about this question will be clarified if we remind ourselves that some candidates who offer themselves have no chance of being elected under any system. Others are such effective vote getters that they would be elected in any system; several Independents clearly

⁶Newman and Rogers

⁷In Newman's and Roger's 1951 study it was found (p. 4) that the largest percentage (12 percent of invalid ballots) was recorded by voters attempting to vote two choices. Six percent was recorded by voters attempting to vote choices for all 27 candidates. There is also the probability that invalid ballots are disproportionately those of the aged and of new arrival who are used to voting x's elsewhere and who have not been reached by instructions on the ballot or media discussions of PR voting. No similar statistics exist for state and national elections since the ballot format is such as to virtually make it impossible to spoil a ballot. Interview, Administrative Assistant to the Elections Commission, August 23, 1982. If PR ballots are designed for punch card voting it may be possible to design them in such a way as to make spoilage virtually impossible.

96%
in 1951

and several CCA-endorsed officials probably are in this category. There are other candidacies in both categories which probably are electable under PR and not under some other systems. For example, PR apparently benefits candidates who can obtain a quota under PR, but might not be able to wage a successful campaign in an at-large system, and whose strength is not sufficiently concentrated geographically to enable a successful ward or district candidacy.

Assessing the degree of validity of the generalizations in the last three sentences above is not easy. One in-depth study of the 1951 election found that the Council finally elected by vote transfers under PR approximated rather closely what the result would have been if the election had been conducted at large on a plurality basis; eight of the nine finally elected under PR were the leaders on the basis of first-choice votes alone, because most leaders in first-choice votes did well on second and lower choices also. The exception, in the case of the ninth seat, was that doing better on second and lower-choice votes enabled a twelfth-place candidate (on the basis of first choices) to nose out the ninth-place finisher on the basis of first choices.¹³ In this particular election the change simply substituted one Independent candidate for another, and Council control was not at stake, five CCA-endorsed candidates having been among the eight front runners. But in some elections the effect of second and lower-choice votes could be more critical in substituting a candidate from the CCA-endorsed group for an Independent, or vice versa. The extreme example, on the basis of anecdotal evidence, is afforded by a marginal seat on the Council being filled by a CCA-endorsed candidate whose last quota-making vote was some voter's twenty-seventh preference.

1955 source

Whether PR results in elective bodies that are substantially different (or "better" as PR proponents claim) than would be elected by some alternative system apparently depends on what indexes one uses and also probably to some extent on the eye of the beholder. Comparison of patterns of occupations, ethnic and religious affiliations, and party identifications in pre- and post-PR Councils and School Committees showed little or no differences.¹⁴ However, it is this writer's judgement that application of different indexes might have changed the conditions. For example, if it is assumed that PR (as compared to some other electoral system) has tended to increase the CCA-endorsed contingents on elective bodies, differences between CCA-endorsed and Independent candidates become of some significance. These differences cannot be measured adequately by simply shuffling occupations into census categories. The differences are more subtle, such as the higher incidence of self-employed or public interest lawyers in the CCA slates and of public employment in Democratic patronage or quasi-patronage systems in the Independents. Still more subtle and probably basic is the apparent tendency of Independent candidates to be "locals" and CCA candidates to be more "cosmopolitan" types.

The effects of PR on campaign styles are easier to see in some respects than in others. Campaign methods of individual candidates are said to be conciliatory rather than personally antagonistic toward other candidates because of the perceived need to woo second and lower-choice votes of first-choice supporters of other candidates. This tendency is consistent with the contention of PR proponents and with theory.¹⁵ However, competition between

⁸Newman and Rogers.

⁹However, the finding of Newman and Rogers concerning the overwhelming significance of first and second choices tend to minimize the significance of third and lower choices. See the section below entitled "Direct representation of voters."

candidates on the same slate for a given constituency is said to produce inter-personal frictions between members of the same slate. (Whether this latter tendency is more prevalent under PR than it would be under some alternative system cannot be stated on the basis of the evidence now available)

The relationship between PR and slates or quasi-parties is considered below as a feature of the political system.

PR as a part of the political system. Assessing PR's role in the Cambridge political system necessitates that it be viewed in a context of several concomitants, the more important of which may be summarized as follows: 1) a nonpartisan ballot. 2) A slate or quasi-party system¹⁶ typical of many nominally nonpartisan systems. 3) A very competitive system in a limited sort of way. This last qualifying phrase is attached because in a typical election it is a foregone conclusion that most of the seats will be won by incumbents of long service almost evenly distributed between the two blocs, but with one or two marginal seats the subject of intense competition by one or two candidates from each bloc. Winning the marginal seat or seats usually means control of the body. The CCA-led coalition has never won more than five nor less than four seats on the Council, and the pattern on the School Committee has varied between two and four. These figures may understate the influence of the CCA coalition for example, when it has only four votes on the Council it is sometimes able to get the support of at least one Independent on key issues, the latest example being rent control.

Thus the present PR system is more competitive than the preceding plurality system in which typically (with some exceptions) the largest faction in the majority (Democratic) party (primarily old-style Irish Catholic descent) could leverage their influence by winning nonpartisan primaries with light turnout and then allow the voters in the general elections to ratify the primary results or choose between nominees of the same stripe. As pointed out previously, it is not certain what the effect of going back to a similar system now would be, because of the ascendance of reform Democrats to the point where they might win most of the primaries. So far reform Democrats have evinced no interest in trying to leverage their influence through a two-stage (primary-plus-general-election) system, probably because their margin is perceived to be narrow and because they are already faring well by channeling their efforts in local politics through the CCA and its allied groups.

Although competition for the marginal seats is keen, the competition seems to be of a relatively good humored and live-and-let-live variety. At least one Independent has been elected Mayor with support of some CCA-

¹⁰One CCA-endorsed Council member told the writer that he estimates that his constituency turns over on the average once every three years. This is probably an extreme example, and may be an over-estimate, but still makes the point.

¹¹96% in the 1951 election. Newman and Rogers, 6-7.

¹²Newman and Rogers, in their study of the 1951 Council election, found (pp. 3ff.) that almost two thirds (65%) of the voters were represented by their first-choice candidate; of the remainder (transfer votes) four out of five were represented by their second-choice candidates.

endorsed members of the Council. CCA-endorsed Mayors have been elected with Independent support.

It is difficult to appraise the Cambridge experience in the light of oft-stated critiques of proportional systems to the effect that they tend to produce unstable coalitions and factionalism,¹⁷ and thus indecision and immobilism. "Lengthy and bitterly contested mayoral contests have plagued Plan E since its inception."¹⁸ However, such a difficulty can hardly be attributable to PR; it is more to be attributed to the method of electing the Mayor; the experience has been shared by other communities similarly electing the Mayor but not using PR. City Managers in Cambridge have from time to time found difficulty in finding a sustained majority on the Council to support them, and some observers have seen a relationship between these phenomena and the electoral system; however, such situations also have been experienced in other manager governments not using PR. These considerations prompt the speculation that much which has been written on proportional (usually party-list) versus plurality systems in terms of national parliaments is largely inapplicable to experience in this country with single-transferable-vote PR, confined as it was to local governments with a nonpartisan ballot and usually very nonpartisan political cultures. This writer also speculates that if the reform model of Council-Manager structure had been linked in Cambridge with some electoral system other than PR, the result might have been government that was marginally more decisive, but would have been somewhat less representative.¹⁹

Concluding Comments

The principal impression left by a study of the workings of PR in Cambridge is not one of dramatic differences between PR per se (distinguished from other structural and systemic features) and the more likely alternative representational systems (assuming that they would be reasonably "representative"); but is rather an impression that the differences are more in the nature of adjoining points on a scale rather than polar opposites. Small differences, however, can be critical at times. At least to its supporters in Cambridge PR is perceived to be the leaven in the loaf of what seems to be efficient and people-oriented government.

¹³Newman and Rogers, 2ff.

¹⁴Dobrusin, 31.

¹⁵Katz, 29.

¹⁶"Cambridge candidates feel a need, very poorly satisfied in fact, to form alliances and coalitions." Letter, Edwin B. Newman to the writer, July 26, 1982. For a discussion of a typology of party and quasi-party involvement in nonpartisan elections, see Adrian, 449, and Weaver, 1971, 37-38. Whether Cambridge elections are Adrian's Type 2 or 3 is a good question which cannot be resolved at the present writing. The coalition system is not symmetrical, in that the CCA-led one is much more programmatic and disciplined than the Independents which, at least until the 1981 election, has been less of a party-like or coalition group than a collective noun covering individual candidates practicing not the politics of issues but the politics of personal services to constituents augmented by acquaintanceship and ethnic linkages.

¹⁷Hermens, 416-417.

¹⁸Gottfried, 31-32. The election of 1948 took several months and over 1500 ballots to resolve. Ibid.

¹⁹Weaver, 1980.

This study of PR in Cambridge was begun in the hope that its findings would contribute to the resolution of the debate over proportional versus plurality electoral systems. Realistic reflection suggests the probability that the study's findings will more likely fuel the debate, critics of PR seeing in it the origins of unstable coalitions and factionalism and their consequent indecisiveness, and proponents of PR seeing in it built-in necessities for compromise and consensus in a city of diversity, conflict, and pluralistic value systems. Whether one places himself in one or the other school of thought will be influenced by his estimate of the relative validity of two eminently respectable views in the tradeoffs between decisiveness and representativeness of an electoral system:

"The value of a "working majority" is debateable. From a "responsible parties" perspective, an effective majority is desirable because it allows the majority to enact, and therefore to be responsible for its program. On the other hand, close partisan division may foster compromise via interparty bargaining. Which view one takes is highly dependent upon which kind of political party system one favors: parties which encourage clear-cut policy differences or parties which encourage interparty consensus"²⁰

This writer would add some doubts concerning the significance to be attributed to occasional intervals when there are little or no new decision-making and policy initiatives at the top, particularly in local government in this country. To attribute to such intervals the critical importance seen by some writers seems to ignore or minimize the fact that in the absence of such leadership governments continue to govern on the basis of laws already on the books. All governmental systems have intervals of indecision and drift. Indeed, in this country in which most bureaucracies are headed by elected chief executives and legislatures rely on those executives and bureaucracies for policy initiatives, most systems have such built-in intervals, dictated by the elections calendar, and especially when there is a change in chief executives. To this observer such intervals seem to be more serious than in systems in which coalitions and cabinets are frequently restaffed. In such systems the mean course seems fairly easy to predict although cabinets change. More importantly, once new regimes take over in Cambridge policy initiatives seem to develop in comparatively energetic fashion and with considerable congruence with what has gone before.

From the standpoint of continuity and consistency of policy direction, indecision in Cambridge over who is to be the ceremonial Mayor has probably been of less importance than Managers losing one or two supporters from a thin majority of the Council, especially when legal rulings have made it possible for the Council to function despite the inability to agree on a Mayor, as was the case in one instance but not in another.

In Cambridge what some would call unstable coalitions have usually been replaced by one that looked much like the preceding one, as far as policy content was concerned, although the key actors might change. Although the changes used up several City Managers, the essential tenets of manager government seem more solidly rooted than ever.

²⁰Everson et al, 31.

The extent to which periods of indecision could reasonably be attributed to PR seems to this writer to be greatly outweighed by other structural and systemic features, most importantly the election of the Mayor by the Council, and the diversities and endemic social conflict of the city. At any rate, PR is rarely if ever mentioned in local political debates or media coverage as a substantial contributing factor to a hiatus in leadership at the level of the Mayor or Manager.

The above considerations will enable a reader to appreciate that the rhetoric of the present generation of PR supporters is more pragmatic and restrained than that of the original proponents. In essence it sounds a theme of lesser evilism to the point where it can be said that "few Cambridge citizens ever have much good to say about the system."²² "In some respects, proportional representation has a lot of the qualities people used to ascribe to electricity-- it's inscrutable, but it seems to work. Go beyond that point and you start getting into trouble."²³ The restrained enthusiasm of its supporters, together with the moderated and largely pro forma protest of its principal critics, symbolize the kind of uneasy and reluctant accommodation typical of much of the city's politics. In Cambridge PR seems to command a comfortable majority of (only) two cheers, of both the Bronx and more affirmative kind.

²¹Several of these terminations were influenced by personality as well as policy differences. The same process may have operated with Superintendents of Schools, but in a fashion less clear to an outside observer.

²²Wylie, 4.

²³Cambridge Express, October 29, 1981, p. 2.

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