

wish to vote were indicated by marking out their names ; accordingly, it is not surprising to find that 2·22 of the voting-papers in the Council election were marked in one or other of these two ways without any order of preference being shown for the candidates selected. 0·37 per cent. of the papers were not marked in any way. The remainder of the informal papers, 1·98 per cent. of the total number of papers, contained errors due to the electors' failure to understand the new method of voting—such as the omission to mark the minimum number of preferences, 1, 2, 3 ; placing the figure 1, 2, or 3 opposite the names of more than one candidate ; putting all the figures 1, 2, 3 opposite the same candidate's name, and so on. It is clear that the three methods now in force of marking papers lead to confusion ; some change should be made.

SUGGESTIONS FOR AMENDMENT.

The Returning Officer has, I understand, forwarded to the Minister of Internal Affairs the following suggestions for amendment in the law :—

- (a.) Extension of time between the election of Mayor and his assumption of office. The election takes place on the last Wednesday in April, and the Mayor assumes office on the first Wednesday in May. It may easily happen that the count for the election of Councillors is not completed by the first Wednesday in May—in which case the Mayor could not enter upon his office, being unable to make the declaration required by section 27 of the Municipal Corporations Act, 1908.
- (b.) Provision should be made for Councillors to retain office until the election of their successors.
- (c.) It should be made clear that in cases where two or more elections are being held simultaneously a voter may have two or more voting-papers handed to him by the Returning Officer at the same time ; and that in order to simplify the machinery all elections held on the same may be treated as one.
- (d.) The method of marking voting-papers should be the same in all elections or polls. There are now three methods, which are apt to confuse electors.
- (e.) The second paragraph in the directions to voters in the First Schedule to the Local Elections (Proportional Representation) Act, 1914, should be amended to make it perfectly clear and unambiguous. At the recent elections it was evident that some electors read it as meaning that they had to put all the numbers 1, 2, 3, against the name of each candidate for whom they desired to vote.
- (f.) Section 19 (2) of the Municipal Corporations Act, 1908, should be amended to make it perfectly clear when a candidate forfeits his deposit.

With regard to these suggestions, while agreeing entirely with (a), (b), (e), and (f), I would remark that the expediency of (c) is doubtful, inasmuch as an elector given one voting-paper at a time is less likely to be confused than if he receives two, three, or four papers simultaneously ; and that paragraph (d) is not easy to carry into effect : for instance, if the election of Councillors is conducted on the principle of proportional representation, and the election of, say, the members of the Hospital Board on the old system. If all the elections, as in the present case, were conducted on the new method, all papers (even those in the mayoral election) could have the voters' choices indicated by numbers.

For the reasons given below I add the following suggestions for the amendment of the Act :—

- (g.) The true transfer value should be substituted for that defined in the present Act.
- (h.) A rule should be made to avoid the useless transfer of votes to a candidate who is sure to be excluded afterwards.

I would explain these two points in the following manner : When votes are to be transferred from the surplus of an elected candidate to the other candidates the true transfer value should be used—this would be found, in general, by dividing the number of surplus votes by the number of unexhausted or transferable papers in the first choices or in the last transfer of the elected candidate, as the case may be. But it may happen that the number of unexhausted or transferable papers is less than the surplus ; in that case the transferable votes should be transferred at their full value—that is, with the transfer value “1.” In any other case the transfer value should be found as stated above. The result would be that the number of exhausted papers would be entered in Table 1, and another line would be added showing the number of unexhausted papers ; but in Table 2 no account would be taken of “exhausted votes,” consequently there would be little or no waste of votes, as now, under this heading.

Another amendment that might be suggested is the insertion of a rule similar to that in sub-clause (7) of clause 6 of the First Schedule to the English Municipal Representation Bill, 1910, and embodied in the Transvaal Municipal Act of 1909, namely : “A transfer of votes shall not be made (from the surplus of an elected candidate) unless the surplus votes of the elected candidate together with any other surplus votes not transferred exceed the difference between the totals of the two continuing candidates lowest in the poll” ; this avoids the useless transfer of votes which may have to be transferred again from the lowest candidate almost immediately afterwards.

The suggestions made above for the amalgamation of the counts in transferring the votes of an excluded candidate require perhaps fuller consideration ; although, as I have already stated, there appears to be no objection in principle to the second suggestion made in that behalf.

In conclusion, I have to thank the Town Clerk, Mr. H. R. Smith, and the Returning Officer, Mr. Walter Freeman, for the assistance given me in conducting the counts, and in furnishing much of the material for this report ; and I have much pleasure also in testifying to the efficiency and zeal of the staff engaged, which contributed in no small degree to the successful carrying-out of an election presenting, as regards the number of seats and in other respects, a more formidable task than I believe has had to be undertaken in connection with this system of proportional representation in any part of the world.

The Under-Secretary, Department of Internal Affairs.

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