

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

COURTENAY/COMOX PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 26 MAY 2004 AT THE COAST
WESTERLEY HOTEL

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE PRESENTATION TO THE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON ELECTORAL REFORM. IT ATTEMPTS TO CAPTURE THE KEY ISSUES AND ARGUMENTS THAT WERE PRESENTED AND DISCUSSED DURING THE PUBLIC HEARING. IN SOME INSTANCES, THE PRESENTER HAS ALSO MADE A SUBMISSION TO THE ASSEMBLY AND THIS IS ACCESSIBLE VIA THE WEBSITE AT WWW.CITIZENSASSEMBLY.BC.CA BY CLICKING ON "GET INVOLVED". IF SUCH A SUBMISSION IS AVAILABLE, IT WILL BE NOTED AT THE END OF THIS REPORT.

John Wood and Barbara Biley

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

Our current voting system and what's wrong with it – a partial list of some obvious flaws and how they affect the outcome of elections in British Columbia.

KEY THEMES

John Wood argued that the First Past the Post electoral system is no longer suitable for modern democratic society because it discriminates against the majority of political parties and effectively disenfranchises citizens who wish to vote for a small or newer party. He described five major flaws of the FPP system.

- 1) FPP is unfair to voters because the votes of all citizens who did not vote for the winning candidate in an electoral system are wasted. Declining voter turnout may be caused by this sense that many votes 'don't count' and by recent disproportional election results..
- 2) FPP distorts governmental power by exaggerating the wins and losses of parties in each election. The system produces false majorities and wrong winners.
- 3) FPP leads to wild swings in government and legislation. There is no incentive for cooperation for the two parties, and long range planning becomes impossible.
- 4) FPP discourages voter participation. Currently only 70 per cent of BC's eligible voters are registered, including only 20 per cent of youths aged 18-24.
- 5) FPP depoliticizes citizens and political parties who have little role between elections. Under the current system parties are elected because they spend more on their election campaigns, rather than for any electoral vision.

Mr Wood argued that a proportional representation system is needed to more accurately reflect how the electorate votes. He supported the introduction of MMP because it maintains equality between urban and rural districts. Barbara Biley added that political parties act as mediators between people and power, and therefore exclude people from power. She argued that any electoral system that allows new vision and smashes the FPP system is a positive thing. She explained that she has run for the Marxist-Leninist party in every election since 1972, and that under FPP the party is seen as a fringe party and a wasted vote. Ms Biley argued that an electoral system needs to give voice to the people.

RECOMMENDATIONS

John Wood and Barbara Biley supported the introduction of MMP in British Columbia.

Quote: "Our current system encourages political parties to be nothing other than election machines and the people nothing other than voting sheep."

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

There were no questions or comments from the panel.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

There were no questions from the audience.

Comment: “I really appreciate the chance to discuss the problem that people feel the need to make a strategic vote rather than actually supporting a candidate. Also I’m concerned about the costs of swinging governments. A number of speakers have talked about the problems of adversarial government and I think it would make a lot better media coverage if it wasn’t the same old stuff all the time.”

SUBMISSION: NO