

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

PORT ALBERNI PUBLIC HEARING DATED
9 JUNE 2004 AT HANSEN HALL

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.

Alexander Miller

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

Aspects of our electoral and political systems should be changed to reduce the incidence of governments with false majorities and of unproductive polarization.

KEY THEMES

Alexander Miller explained that he had voted in the past for candidates who had little chance of winning under the current electoral system, but he does not believe that these were wasted votes because they were a public and recorded expression of support. However, he argued that when a party receives significant support from the electorate but fails to win representation that the electoral system has devalued the political views of citizens. He supported proportional representation because it gives votes their proper democratic weight and because it encourages reasoned debate and open-minded exploration of policies rather than the polarized confrontation of political debate that occurs under the current electoral system. He criticized the current FPP system for allowing parties to win exaggerated majorities that permit them to do almost anything they choose.

Mr Miller acknowledged that doing away with the party system or making free votes mandatory was not within mandate of Assembly, so he restricted his recommendations to the electoral system. He supported a mixed system of proportional representation, because it adds the advantage of having a locally elected member to the benefit of a proportional balance of power in the house. Mr Miller also favoured having two votes to solve dilemma faced by voters when their preferred candidate is not standing for an electable party, or is standing for a party whose philosophy they do not share. He expressed concern about the current party nomination process and party membership rules. Mr Miller also discussed the need for limits on donations and campaign spending, his opposition to the introduction of mandatory voting, the need for more free votes in the legislature, and suggestions for formal regulations limiting party discipline.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Alexander Miller recommended the introduction of MMP in British Columbia.

Quote: "Instead of a sober, considered exploration of issues and consequences, the current system promotes artificial polarization and oversimplification by politicians and the electorate at large."

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

There were three members of the panel who sought clarification on elements of the presentation.

Q	I'm wondering why you don't recommend one of the more candidate based systems such as preferential voting or STV where candidates have more power? MMP is a two part system that combines what we have now with an extra proportional component. The system we have now
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	is a party based system. If you agree with that then MMP is fine, but if you prefer a candidate based system then STV is a better option.
A	I think that would be too complex. I want more choice but I don't want an overly complicated system.
Q	There seems to be a dilemma: that parties are not popular, so do you vote for a party or do you vote for a candidate, and how do you decide how the parties put the candidates on the party list. So another suggestion is why don't you let the voters choose the candidates?
A	I think that goes too far along the complexity route. I prefer the party to put up a list that I can see before I vote. So it might not be as democratic but it's more simple.
Q	Do you prefer open lists or closed lists? Would you rather make the choice or the party make the choice?
A	In the interests of simplicity I would like the party to make the choice.
Q	Why do you suggest mandatory voting would have prevented the formation of this assembly?
A	My understanding is that this assembly has been partly motivated by declining voter turnout, and you wouldn't have had an accurate measure of political participation in the system if it were mandatory.

Comment from panel

“I think we learned that we can't introduce mandatory voting because of the Charter. It would be difficult to enforce compulsory registration under the Charter because it would be considered an intrusion into people's privacy. There have also been some suggestions that there be incentives to vote such as a tax rebate.”

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Following this presentation quite a few members of the audience had questions.

Q	Are you saying that you don't want candidates parachuted
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	in?
A	Yes that's right. I'd like the local party association to nominate the candidates but with anyone being a member, although with some restriction on how long you've been a member before you can vote, so no parachuting in candidates or supporters.
Q	I think that proportional representation would be sufficient to encourage people to vote, without having to bribe them.
A	I'm dismayed about the maximum of 79 seats. My assumption would be that we could keep the constituencies as they are now and then add enough members from the party lists to make the result completely proportional. I assume that the suggestion about enlarging the ridings is to fit in with the 79 seat requirement. I think people will be just as distracted by the issue of bigger ridings as they would be distracted by an increase in the number of MLAs.
Q	I was under the same impression as you but now that I know that we would have to expand the area. If we have to enlarge the ridings anyway we could have multi-member ridings so that you could go to the MLA in your riding who represents your party. You wouldn't have to go to a Liberal MLA if you were an NDP voter.
A	I'd have to think about that.

Comment: “If the goal is to be as proportional as possible, then you would need to make all of BC into one electoral district that elects all 79 seats, and then the seats would match the votes within a few decimal places.”

SUBMISSION: NO