

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

SIDNEY/VICTORIA PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 15 MAY 2004
AT THE HOLIDAY INN VICTORIA

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.

Saul Arbess

Victoria Chapter of the Council of Canadians

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

Public interest and advocacy, strengthening Canadian democratic institutions.

KEY THEMES

Dr. Arbess discussed the disastrous impact of FPTP on representation in the legislature, leading to widespread alienation and disaffection in the electorate. The presenter also went on to note the damaging labor legislation implemented by the current government as a result of its large majority. Fairer representation, could in Dr. Arbess' opinion remedy the creation of "quasi-dictatorships"

RECOMMENDATIONS

Dr. Arbess recommended the adoption of MMP along the lines of the New Zealand example, with a two-thirds, one-third split between constituency and list seats. This was argued to meet the concerns of rural BC, while injecting an element of proportionality into the system. Each party is required to run in 50% of the constituency seats to qualify for list seats. To ensure the democratic selection of party lists, the method of selection must be supplied to Elections BC. Voters are provided the choice on the ballot of voting for the party list as it stands, or casting a ballot for a favoured candidate on the list.

Dr. Arbess stated that this system would enable greater representation of a diversity of interests; reduce the adversarial nature of the system and encourage consensus based politics; potentially lead to greater voter participation; and moderate drastic swings in policy as power shifts from election to election.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

- | | |
|---|---|
| Q | What is the requirement that only parties running in 50% of constituency seats qualify for list seats intended to achieve? |
| A | It is aimed at ensuring that parties cannot run only for list seats. The 50% number is arbitrary but it is designed to guarantee that parties also run in the constituencies. |

Q The voter would have two votes under this system? With one-third of the seats being list seats and a stipulation for parties to run in 50% of constituencies; are you familiar with STV as used in Ireland as your system appears to be approaching that?

A Yes, it is a two vote system. In the context of BC, this system of MMP seems to meet the needs of constituents far better than STV. We need to see that we have an equitable distribution between rural and urban representation while introducing an element of proportionality.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Q Can you clarify your thinking around how the list is chosen?

A What I meant was that when you are faced with a list you can still choose among that list a favoured candidate, and when that candidate receives a certain proportion of the vote they would move to the top of the list.

Q You advocate a less adversarial system, but wouldn't the Citizens' Assembly model be more consensus based and gender balanced as a form of government?

A I haven't really considered the random selection of representatives but it is a very interesting model.

Q Does the Council have any clear literature that provides a snapshot of the electoral options?

A We haven't made any official publications on PR, but the Citizens' Assembly website has a number of useful links to information. Further, the Law Commission of Canada has produced a book which is available online free of charge.