

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.

Horst Kohne

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

The new reality of diverse global-village relations requires more direct citizen participation in government.

KEY THEMES

Mr. Kohne stated the need to take the unique geography and diverse demographic profile of BC into account when reforming the electoral system. The presenter detailed the Swiss electoral system, including factors such as the translation of votes into seats and ballot design. Mr. Kohne stated the need for the electoral system to promote the equal representation of women in the legislature. The presenter also stated the ability of the occurrence of disproportional results under PR when district magnitudes are small.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. Kohne recommended that BC look to the Swiss model of democracy which combines elements of proportional representation, majority voting, representative democracy, and direct democracy. Specifically, the presenter recommended that 50% gender proportionality should be made mandatory for party lists should a PR system be adopted.

Quote: One can only marvel at the Swiss model of governance whereby local governments predominate and individuals have political muscle at every turn. In that situation pure proportional representation does not have to be tinkered with as it is complimentary to the “from the bottom-up” political culture.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Q We have 79 seats and no mandate to increase that size, how do you see us having a system similar to Switzerland without losing local representation?

A I’m not advocating copying the Swiss system. I wouldn’t say there is a perfect system but what I feel strongly about is that there should be 50% gender representation.

Q How do you think voters would accept a complicated system such as Switzerland's?

A You have to start somewhere. The Swiss voting system requires you to be politically literate as you are required to vote on legislation four times per year. It is not that difficult; different system, different results. I think it would engender more political participation

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Q What is the voter turnout in Switzerland

A There is concern over the issue of voter turnout in Switzerland as it has dropped to around 50% in 1999, from around 80% in 1921.