

**SELECTING REPRESENTATIVES:
A Case for Changing the Voting System
and a Consideration of Alternative systems**

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(Reprinted in *Fixing Canadian Democracy*, edited by Gordon Gibson, Vancouver, 2003)

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) titled his work on government, *Leviathan* - a sea-monster, huge, ominous, and destructive. The greatest force imaginable. It is a picture of the nearly limitless, coercive powers of government. To serve the public good such powers need to be controlled and channelled. That is the challenge.

Some may think that whatever ails British Columbia's provincial governance was corrected in the most recent election, making further reforms unnecessary. Even if such an optimistic view of the last election is justified, it misses the point. Controls and safeguards on the powers of government are needed not when the system performs well, but when it doesn't.

My assignment is to make a case for changing our province's voting system to one that is more proportional and to briefly discuss possible alternative voting systems.

Making the voting system more proportional has many potential benefits, among which:

- Less party discipline.
- A parliamentary check on the powers of the executive.
- A legislative role for MLAs.
- A closer link between MLAs and their voters.
- Fewer wild swings in public policy.
- Public policy driven by the long-term public interest, rather than short-term partisan interests.
- Fewer wasted votes.
- An end to vote splitting.
- Better representation for all people especially those beyond Hope.
- Votes of more equal value.
- A political culture that is less adversarial and less polarized.
- A significantly higher voter turnout.
- Greater gender equity, if the voters are so minded.

The claim is not that changing the voting system will automatically, of necessity result in all, or even any, of these results. That depends on many factors, in particular the kind of

proportional system that is chosen. The claim is modest, it states that a more proportional voting system creates a potential for such changes. What can be stated with greater certainty is that the current voting system is an impediment to significant change. It is my considered opinion that the changes to governance listed above will not come about unless the voting system is replaced by a more proportional system.

The voting system British Columbia has since 1871, with the exception of the 1952 and 1953 elections, is usually referred to as first-past-the-post (FPTP). It works reasonably well where the electorate is nearly homogeneous, such as in Alberta, or where there is a two-party system, such as in the US.

FPTP is unsuitable where the electorate is polarized between two strong factions e.g. Quebec, Northern Ireland, and BC, or where the political interests are many and diverse, e.g. Switzerland, Israel, Belgium, South Africa, India, Canada, and BC. Where there is political diversity beyond two parties, FPTP breaks down.

FAIRNESS

For example, in the 1993 federal election the long held NDP riding of New Westminster went to Reform. Not only that, but it went from Dawna Black a member of the left wing of her party to Paul Forseth, a right winger within his party. What caused such an extreme shift; was all of New Westminster smitten by a political conversion experience? Hardly. Paul Forseth won on less than thirty percent of the vote. Seventy percent did not want that candidate, that party, that political platform. Yet, that is what they got. In what sense can Paul Forseth and Reform be said to represent the people of New Westminster?

Pundits will tell us that people get the government they deserve. Under FPTP that is simply false. Typically, in BC and federal elections over half, and often as many as two-thirds of the candidates are elected on less than a majority of the votes cast. FPTP distorts voters intentions and the results are not what people want or deserve.

Sometimes it is suggested that the distortions at the local riding level are balanced by the overall election results. On this view, the losing voters in New Westminster can take comfort because their party was probably over compensated in some other ridings. In total, we're told, it all balances out. Not true.

Consider how many votes it takes for each party to get one seat. In the 1993 federal election, and the 2001 provincial election votes per seat by party are as follows:

1993 Federal	Votes per seat
Progressive Conservative	1,093,211
NDP	104,397
Reform	49,216
Bloc	34,185
Liberal	31,730
2001 Provincial	Votes per seat
NDP	171,443
BC Liberal	11,894

Clearly, distortions at the local riding level do not even out. In the 1993 election a Liberal vote was thirty-four times more powerful, more weighty than a Conservative vote. In the 2001 election a BC Liberal vote was fourteen and a half times more effective than a vote for the NDP. As a result, the makeup of parliament, and the make up of the legislature is not an accurate reflection of the political interests as they exist among the people. Provincially, for ten years we had a majority government supported by only forty percent of the voters. After the recent election we have the other extreme, forty percent of the voters are virtually without representation. Forty percent should not ever be in total control nor completely excluded. Neither is healthy.

But there is more, not only are votes for some parties far more effective than votes for other parties, votes in one region are more effective than votes in another region. For example, in the last three federal elections, one Liberal vote in Ontario is worth as much as three Liberal votes in the West. Provincially, in 1996 the BC Liberals took all five Okanagan ridings on forty-two percent of the vote. In Burnaby the BC Liberals also took forty-two percent of the vote, but not one of the three ridings. In that election, a BC Liberal vote in Burnaby was not equal to a BC Liberal vote in the Okanagan.

There are many such examples, and all such inequalities cast doubt on how representative our governments are; and whether such governments can rule impartially. Might it not be supposed that federal government decisions are on occasion influenced by the political reality that a Liberal vote in Ontario is worth three times a Liberal vote in the West?

FPTP is a crude instrument for determining people's political preferences and translating those preferences into seats. In addition to producing votes of different values, under FPTP the majority of votes are wasted; wasted in that such votes have no effect on the outcome. Typically, between fifty and fifty-three percent of all votes cast do not contribute to the election results. In the example above, the seventy percent who did not vote Reform had no impact on the election. They could have stayed home and not voted for all the difference their vote made. Increasingly more do. Under FPTP that seventy percent could not combine their losing remnants with similar losing remnants in adjoining ridings, as would be possible under other voting systems. Those voters, by

failing to support the winning candidate wasted their vote. Wasted votes are votes which do not count toward the election of any candidate or party.

In a more robust democracy all, or nearly all votes contribute to the makeup of the legislature. As a result, in those systems every significant political interest is represented in numbers commensurate with its level of popular support. That on election night the majority of those British Columbians who bothered to vote cannot point to anyone they helped to elect violates every and all democratic sentiments. It need not be so, and in most democracies world-wide it is not so.

The first argument against FPTP is a cluster of reasons dealing with fairness. Is it fair that the vote of some citizens has a different value than the vote of other citizens? Is it fair that votes in some regions have a higher value than votes in other regions? Is it fair that the majority of votes have no value at all in forming the legislature? Is it fair that the value of votes for some parties is different from the value of votes for other parties?

There are those who accept such shortcomings because our system usually produces governments by parties which in one on one contests against all other parties would win. There are notable exceptions, among which the NDP administrations in BC, the Parti Quebecois administrations in Quebec and the Bob Rae administration in Ontario. But if none of the above has convinced you to consider changes to the voting system, perhaps the following will. Because, in addition to fairness in representation, there is a second set of reasons; reasons surrounding questions of accountability in government; it is those reasons which to me clinch the argument for reviewing our voting system.

PARLIAMENTARY ACCOUNTABILITY

Like parliament, provincial legislatures are dysfunctional. They are unable to perform their most important function, which is to hold the executive accountable, to place a check on executive power. Former British prime minister, Margaret Thatcher lost 22 Bills on the floor of the House of Commons. It did not bring the government down, it did not cause an election, it meant the minister responsible had to redraw the legislation. That is all. This is unthinkable in the Canadian context. Our legislatures are chronically compliant. Every Bill, every revenue measure, every budget is approved. All decisions of importance are made outside of the legislature, mostly in the premier's office by non-elected political appointees. We call our laws Acts of the Legislature, they should more appropriately be stamped "Made in the Premier's Office".

MLAs are industrious, hardworking, and public spirited, but have no legislative function. They sacrifice family and forego personal satisfactions to better serve their community and constituents, but they are not law-makers, they are ombudsmen for constituents but have no role in developing public policies, they'll lobby for their communities but can't call the government to account. Professor Franks in his definitive study, *The Parliament of Canada* reaches the astounding conclusion that no group is more systematically excluded from the development of public policy than are MPs. The same holds for MLAs. They are called legislators, but they have no legislative function. A cursory comparison to US congressman shows how profoundly impoverished the legislative role

of our representatives is. While Britain MPs have fewer resources than our MPs they do have more legislative power. Increasingly, Canadian voters know that their representative has little clout, becomes party property the day after the election, and will do as told. Voters don't like it.

Not only have MLAs been emasculated, increasingly ever-larger chunks of government operations are placed beyond the scrutiny of the legislature by means of Crown corporations. Such corporations are not accountable to the legislature, they can borrow money without it showing up as a provincial deficit, and are often used as a political tool by the party in power. Glen Clark created four more in 1994 alone.

Respected, long-time observer Jeffrey Simpson's latest book is titled, *The Friendly Dictatorship*. He is talking about the office of prime minister. The excessive concentration of power at the top, and corresponding lack of legislative power among the people's representatives in the legislature is our biggest democratic deficit. It imperils responsible government in that the parliamentary check on the powers of the executive is no more.

To their credit the BC Liberals have introduced a fixed election date and a fixed legislative calendar. Both measures do place a limitation on the powers of the executive, and restricts somewhat opportunities for partisan politics to shape the public agenda. It is a significant step in the right direction.

The BC Liberals have also promised free votes, and claim that free votes together with a fixed election date gives MLAs all the independence they need to check the powers of the executive. That remains to be seen. For free votes to be a reality will require far more than a declaration that it be so, particularly when all incentives in the system run in a contrary direction. Free votes will have become a reality when on occasion government Bills are defeated on the floor of the legislature. Until then, scepticism is justified.

In the British parliamentary system, where there is no separation of executive and legislative powers, the only parliamentary check on the powers of the executive occurs on the floor of the legislature. The primary job of the legislature is to place a check on the executive. That is the theory. In practice, such a check is non-existent. Responsible government in the British tradition requires that MLAs have a measure of independence from party control; that they lack.

John Stuart Mill predicted as early as the 1850s that mass, extra parliamentary parties would rob MPs of their independence, and that without such independence parliament in the Westminster model cannot place an effective check on the powers of the executive. He was overjoyed when he learned of Thomas Hare's invention - a new voting system, the Single Transferable Vote (STV). For Mill, STV offers MPs the potential for a measure of independence from party control.

Sir Sandford Fleming, of Greenwich time fame, made the same argument in an address titled, "On the Rectification of Parliament" which he delivered in Toronto in 1894. He,

too, thought that FPTP was the primary reason why the powers of the prime minister were growing at the expense of parliament, and he, too, looked to STV for a solution.

What does the dysfunction of the legislature and the resulting lack of accountability in government have to do with our voting system? The answer is: everything! Politics is about power. By translating votes into seats the voting system determines who gets power and who doesn't. It is the kingpin. A change in the voting system will change the relationship between the legislature and the executive.

FPTP translates a minority of the vote into a majority of the seats. For example, the 1996 BC election produced a majority government on just thirty-nine percent of the vote; the 1997 federal election resulted in a majority government on thirty-eight percent of the vote. In nearly all elections majorities are manufactured. In countries with more proportional voting systems majorities must be earned. FPTP translates forty percent of the votes into one-hundred percent of government power. In Canada, it is this feature, more than any other, which fuels the concentration of power at the top.

The essence of democracy is that power is dispersed, and diffused. Voting systems which translate forty-percent of the vote into forty-percent of the powers of government lead to the politics of inclusion, partnership, negotiation, coalition building. Just as in the US congressional system no legislative measure can be adopted without extensive negotiation, and coalition building, likewise a more proportional voting system will give our legislature a similar and significant legislative function. No single party will control the legislature, no one leader will control the Standing and Special committees. Power will be shared and diffused.

But there is more. In addition, within the family of more proportional voting systems it is possible to adopt or design a voting system which gives MLAs a measure of independence from party control, if the voters are so minded. The British parliamentary system demands that MLAs have some independence to hold government accountable, voters want MLAs to be more responsive to them. We need a voting system which permits MLAs such independence of judgment, and greater loyalty to their constituents, if they are so minded.

The conclusion of this argument is that parliamentary reform can largely be accomplished through electoral reform.

The need for parliamentary reform, which is the need for greater parliamentary accountability together with the need for greater fairness in our voting system are compelling arguments in favour of considering changes to our voting system.

If we could start all over and devise a new voting system, would we select one that wastes most votes, nearly always gives government to a minority, and results in an adversarial, inefficient governmental system where all decisions of importance are made outside the legislature? Would we choose a system which occasionally is so perverse as

to award government to a party less popular than the opposition party, as was the case in 1996? Not likely, it would offend our sense of democracy.

TOWARD SOLUTIONS

Proportional representation is not always clearly understood. Often Canadians think proportional representation refers to the list-PR systems common in Europe. Proportional representation does not refer to any particular voting system. It is the principle that unites a family of voting systems. The principle is that a party's seat-share should equal that party's vote-share. There are many ways to approximate the principle, no system attains proportionality with mathematical exactness, it is therefore best to speak of systems of greater or lesser proportionality.

Also, voting systems do not come ready-made, off the shelf. The province's unique geography, political culture and history requires a made-in-BC solution. To find a voting system that is best for BC requires a process of public consultation and discussion. The current BC Liberal government has promised such a process, and Fair Voting BC's recent submission, Citizens Assembly on Voting Reform: A Process, provides more detailed suggestions for such a process (see Appendix).

British Columbians need to find agreement on what we expect from our voting system and then design one to meet those objectives. I suggest the following objectives:

Broad proportionality (a party's power should reflect more closely that party's popular support, but stop short of pure proportional representation)

Meaningful choice (voting should not be constrained by vote splitting or fear of wasting one's vote)

Stable government (no proliferation of splinter parties)

Significant local representation (voters should have a local MLA)

Less party discipline (to check the powers of the executive requires a measure of independence for MLAs)

Assuming British Columbians can find substantial agreement on these objectives, what system will approximate the objectives most nearly? The following are three groupings of alternative systems.

LIST-PR

In its most simple form under List-PR each party presents a list of candidates to the electorate, voters vote for a party, and parties receive seats in proportion to their share of the vote nation-wide, or within districts. Winning candidates are taken from the list.

Closed List-PR is a form of List-PR in which electors are restricted to voting for a party only, and cannot express a preference for candidates. Open List-PR permit electors to choose one candidate, or rank candidates in order of preference, or, as is the case in the Swiss and Finnish systems, to rank candidates from across different party lists. South Africa uses Closed List-PR, many European countries use Open List-PR.

MIXED MEMBER PROPORTIONAL (MMP)

Under these systems, used by Germany since 1949 and more recently in New Zealand, Scotland and Wales, fifty or sixty percent of all seats are filled by FPTP, while the remaining are filled by Closed List-PR. The List-PR seats are assigned to parties to compensate for any disproportionality produced by the FPTP results.

SINGLE TRANSFERABLE VOTE (STV)

A preferential system used in multi-seat districts consisting of no less than three seats. Electors rank candidates either within a particular party's list, or if they so choose, across party lists. To gain election, a candidate must surpass a specified quota of votes. Voter's preferences are reallocated to other continuing candidates when an unsuccessful candidate is excluded or if an elected candidate has a surplus.

STV is used in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Australia (Senate), Tasmania, Malta and was used in Winnipeg, Edmonton, and Calgary both for the provincial and municipal elections from the early 1920s to the mid-1950s.

MEETING THE OBJECTIVES

PROPORTIONALITY

Both List-PR and MMP usually yield near proportional results, STV is generally less proportional, but far more proportional than FPTP. Proportionality depends on thresholds and the number of seats per district. Any voting system demands tradeoffs. For example, greater proportionality usually means less local representation. Such tradeoffs and the degree of proportionality can be adjusted through thresholds and district-size. For STV the minimum number of seats per district is three, while five seats per district yields substantially proportional results. The more seats per district, the greater the proportionality.

CHOICE

Closed List-PR and MMP offer the least choice to the electors, STV offers the most choice to electors. STV uses preference voting. Preference voting compares to X-balloting, as the dimmer switch compares to the on/off light switch. Like the dimmer switch, preference voting allows for a range of options. Expressing a preference for a particular candidate, party, platform, or local issue, does not compel the voter to reject outright all other options. Under X-balloting voters have only one option, and they cannot express whether their support for that one option is strong, weak, or in-between. Instead of outright approval or rejection, preference voting is like asking voters to register their likes and dislikes on a scale of one to ten. Preference voting registers the degree of support present among all voters for candidates, parties, and issues with exceptional precision. As a result, political convictions, and opinions of citizens matter; most can be registered, not in a unrealistic, forced black and white fashion, but with great nuance. Citizens participation becomes more meaningful, and significant. Not only do most votes count, but their influence on public policy is immediate. Preference voting is a mechanism to more nearly attain government of the people by the people.

STV is more market driven than most systems. If, for example, in a five-seat district some political interest shared by twenty percent of the local voters goes unrepresented, some party or candidate will seek election to meet that need and get elected. Unlike the alternatives, STV does permit independents to get elected.

[It should be noted that although no country uses Open List-PR with MMP, there is no reason why they can't. Open List-MMP would give greater choice to voters, yet, not as much as STV.]

STABLE GOVERNMENT

List-PR and MMP will lead to a proliferation of parties and a resulting fractured legislature more easily than STV. The reason STV is less prone to do so is twofold. First, STV is less proportional hence it still somewhat over-rewards the larger parties and penalises the smaller parties, albeit less so than FPTP. Second, under STV candidates enjoy a measure of independence from party control, if they are so minded. In response, parties tend to permit a greater segment of the political spectrum to co-exist within their walls. This lessens the need for party proliferation.

LOCAL REPRESENTATION

Usually, Closed List-PR offers the least local representation, STV the greatest, with MMP somewhere in between.

LESS PARTY DISCIPLINE

Closed List-PR and MMP offer the least prospect for less party discipline, STV the greatest. As noted, STV allows greater opportunity for independent candidates to be elected, if the voters are so minded. But most importantly, under STV all voters, not just paid up party members participate in the nomination process. STV has a built-in primary. Voters rank candidates within a particular party, and if they so choose also between parties. Under STV there are no safe seats. In the 1977 Irish election 13 of the 33 incumbents that were defeated were defeated by running mates of their own party. To obtain a party's nomination is important, but what happens on election day is far more important. STV links MLAs closer to the voters they represent than to their party. It gives MLAs a measure of independence, and places voters in the driver's seat.

If the objectives listed above are shared by British Columbians there can be no doubt that STV would be the voting system of choice. STV is particularly promising for restoring a measure of power and independence to the legislature, sufficient to place a check on the powers of the executive.

ALTERNATIVE VOTE (AV)

For completeness sake a note about AV, colloquially know as the Preferential Ballot. AV is used in Australia (Lower House) and was used in BC for the 1952 and 1953 elections. It was also used in Manitoba and Alberta in the rural ridings for the provincial elections from the early 1920s to the mid 1950s. In all three provinces it was abolished in favour of FPTP by the party in power for political reasons.

AV uses single seat districts, and a preferential ballot. A candidate who receives fifty percent or more of first preferences is declared elected. If no candidate achieves absolute majority of first preferences, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated and that candidate's ballots are reallocated. The process is repeated until a candidate is elected.

AV is as disproportional as FPTP. It is often mistakenly assumed that when each MLA is elected by a majority, government is elected by a majority. It is theoretically possible to elect a majority government with AV on just twenty-six percent support.

AV is probably the best system when a single position needs to be filled from a diverse range of candidates. But in a general election British Columbians need to fill 79 seats and select a government. If the legislature is to reflect the political interests as they exist within the electorate, each interest should be able to capture its proportionate share of seats. AV does not do that any better than FPTP. AV would ensure that the people get the local MLA they want, but it does nothing to ensure they get the government they want. In addition, AV would do little to empower the legislature and reduce the concentration of power in the executive.

There is a further consideration. It is very likely that in BC under AV the NDP will be excluded from power forever. If W.A.C. Bennett had thought of this would he have scrapped AV in 1953? Some will find the prospect of keeping the NDP from power mighty appealing, but anyone who believes in democracy cannot support an institutional exclusion from participation in the governing function for forty percent of the electorate.

OBJECTIONS ANTICIPATED

(i) STV is often dismissed as too complex. It is true that the formula by which votes are translated into seats is among the most complex, but the process of marking ballots need not be difficult for the voter. Ireland has used STV since 1921, and twice since then the Irish have chosen to stay with it in national referenda. Are the Irish more intelligent than British Columbians?

(ii) The political left sometimes objects to STV on the basis that it is too individualistic. Wishing to protect the social and communal nature of politics they fear STV will weaken, even undermine political parties. There is no empirical evidence for this, and more importantly, there is nothing in STV that prevents voters from favouring parties and to support candidates who will take direction from their parties. If voters are so minded they will support a strong party regime. The genius of STV is that such choices are left to the voters. If we believe in democracy, our goal is to empower citizens. All voting systems have built-in biases. STV's bias is that it puts the citizen in the driver's seat. In a democracy, no one should object to that.

(iii) Jeffrey Simpson, and others suggest that PR will institutionalize and legitimize our differences. We may not get a party for every ethnic group, but we might get some, and there will certainly be a "Beyond Hope" party for the Interior, and perhaps a party for

social conservatives, so it is suggested. FPTP favours large, catch-all parties, such parties perform an important brokerage function in bridging our differences and bringing people together. Such pre-election coalitions contribute significantly to a province-wide political identity. Will PR not balkanize the province politically and drive us into separate directions?

The counter argument is as follows. A more proportional voting system will lead to more not less brokerage, compromise and bridging of differences. Instead of finding consensus before the election within the confines of partisan politics, under PR compromise, negotiation, and consensus would characterise our governance between elections. It would be out in the open for all to see on the floor of the legislature. Permanent coalition government would be less adversarial, more cooperative, consensual, and far less hierarchical. It holds potential to practise the politics of inclusion. There is more opportunity for all political interests to have a say, even though not all would have their way.

In addition, STV would not lead to as much party proliferation as some list-PR systems. We need just enough proportionality to ensure that the most significant political interests have on occasion the opportunity to participate in government, but not so much as to cause perpetual deadlock and undue fragmentation. Proportionality can be fine tuned to suit the particular needs of our province.

It is popularly assumed that Israel's voting system leads to instability. After Israel imposed a threshold it has more stability, but if it wasn't for their PR voting system the instability would be much greater. Imagine that the new parliament for Northern Ireland was elected under FPTP (they use STV), and that either the Catholic or Protestant factions could have one-hundred percent of the powers of government on a minority of the vote? Would that be acceptable on the basis that FPTP induces parties to practise a brokerage function? In a polarized electorate the alleged brokerage function of FPTP is nonexistent.

Would Quebec not be better served under a more proportional system, forcing federalists and separatists to work together to govern after the election? Under FPTP the separatist who make up about forty percent of the voters are either in total control or totally excluded from government, neither is healthy. Are politically diverse electorates not better served when governance is a common responsibility? Why seek to bridge our diversity before the election within parties, why not aim to make governance after the election a more communal undertaking? Province-wide political stability demands governing structures that are inclusive. Inducing parties to be inclusive is important, but making government inclusive is more important. Countries with deep divisions and diversities are better governed under coalitions than under majorities manufactured by FPTP. Additional examples include Switzerland, South Africa, Belgium.

The claim is that because British Columbia is so diverse it cannot afford to risk coalition government. Perhaps it is precisely our diversity that demands coalitions. Alberta hardly needs a more proportional voting system, it would make little difference, but BC does

because it has much greater political diversity. India needs PR badly because of its diversity, so does Canada federally, and for the same reason.

But there is more. The claim that FPTP performs a brokerage function is itself suspect. In theory, FPTP induces parties to seek out the large bulge of voters in the middle, to moderate the extremes, and to avoid polarization. There are instances where the theory works, BC is not one of them. In fact, FPTP has had an opposite effect here; it has exacerbated existing social divisions to produce a highly polarized politics.

For forty years BC politics was severely polarized between a coalition of the right and a coalition of the left. For most of that time the Liberals tried to straddle the centre, to be the voice of reason and moderation, to bridge differences, to lessen the polarity. They were defeated by FPTP. W.A.C. Bennett's threat that a vote for the Liberals is a vote for the Socialists carried because of FPTP. Consider the numbers.

Average Votes per Seat for the Seven Elections 1956 - 1975	
Social Credit	15,647
CCF/NDP	20,866
Liberals	53,258

On average, the Liberals needed more than three times the number of votes the Socialists needed, per seat. In British Columbia those who want to build bridges are penalized by FPTP. The claim that FPTP performs a brokerage function does not apply to British Columbian politics.

Despite the most recent election results, BC politics is and remains diverse and polarized. FPTP cannot accommodate diversity and in BC's case it exacerbates polarization. If the objective is to lessen polarization, to bring the Interior of the province, for example, into the decision-making circle of governance more meaningfully, such objectives can best be obtained through a more proportional voting system that unites us after the election, not before, and that unites us in the act of governing, not within party politics. Unity in governance is a more principled and noble goal.

(iv) FPTP is said to provide strong government, and coalition government is said to be weak. No doubt, good government can be provided by benevolent dictators, but sometimes we get the other kind. Bill Vander Zalm tried to stop funding for abortions. To supporters that was strong government, to others dangerous extremism. Similarly with Clark, what is hailed as a virtue by some is a vice to others. In a democracy there can be no strong government without accountability. In as much as parliamentary accountability is weak in our system, our governance cannot be said to be strong. British Columbians have seen the forced resignation of three consecutive premiers. Arguably, greater parliamentary accountability in the system would have prevented such a sorry spectacle, such waste, such a tarnished image for our province.

The turnover of MPs and MLAs in Canada is higher than most countries world-wide. The 1993 federal election produced 200 rookie MPs, and 101 returning MPs. Provincially the last election produced 47 new members, and 32 returning members. British Columbia has its seventh premier in just eleven years, and during the late 1990s cabinet was shuffled so frequently it represented a ministerial merry-go-around. Labour had eight ministers in just four years. Is this strong government?

Moreover, are coalitions weak? They served us well during war time, nearly all of Europe is governed by coalitions, and the US congressional system is entirely dependent on successful coalition building for each budget and legislative initiative. Is Europe weakly governed; is the US weak?

But, the argument goes, coalitions in PR systems unlike the US congressional system collapse frequently and there is a greater turnover in administrations. That is true. Administrations have a shorter life span, but governance has greater continuity than under FPTP majority systems. In PR systems successive cabinets are usually comprised of the same coalitions partners in a slightly different mix. Because FPTP removes administrations completely to bring in a whole new crew, our governments always govern with one eye, or both, on the next election. In contrast, under PR systems, public policy is more informed by the long-term public good, rather than the short-term partisan interests of the party in power.

Because FPTP gives manufactured majorities one-hundred percent, unfettered power, each new incoming administration has the potential to subject public policies to wild, politically driven lurches. The first major measure of the Vander Zalm administration was to overhaul the labour code. Five years later Harcourt's first act was to undo what Vander Zalm had done, just as Mike Harris undid what Bob Rae had done who had undone what David Peterson had done. Is this strong government? Yes, for the duration of their term premiers are very strong, but does such strength produce good government over the long-term? The claim that majoritarian systems are strong and coalitions weak is a generalization open to serious challenge.

SUMMARY

There are good reasons to review the voting system. British Columbians do not get the governments they vote for. Political interests are not fairly represented in the legislature. No forty percent of the voters should have all the power, nor be completely denied participation, neither are healthy.

Moreover, our legislature is dysfunctional. There is no parliamentary accountability on the powers of the executive. MLAs lack sufficient independence to check the executive, nor do they have a legislative function. In Canada, FPTP is a significant contributing factor to the excessive concentration of power in the executive.

Most democracies world-wide use voting systems under which majorities are earned, not manufactured. British Columbia's unique political culture, history, and geography

require a made-in-BC solution. British Columbians first need to find agreement about the objectives a voting system should attain, and then design one to meet those objectives.

Is there public demand for changing the voting system? It is often not put in those words, but there is an appetite for better, more responsive and more accountable government. In addition, people do not like the distortion between votes and seats. Ten years ago the Lortie Commission found that sixty-eight percent of British Columbians would favour two votes, one to select a local candidate and one to select the government.. Last July, Canada West Foundation research found seventy-five percent of British Columbians, the highest among the Western provinces, support proportional representation.

Improvement is possible. We need to mobilize citizens to make it happen.