

POWER TO THE PEOPLE: PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION AND  
BRITISH COLUMBIA

In British Columbia, from 1991 through 2001, the party in power was supported by just 40 per cent of the voters. For 10 years, BC had a government not supported by 60 per cent of the voters. The majority did not want that party, those leaders or those policies.<sup>1</sup>

For example, in the last provincial election in May of 2001, the Liberal party won 77 of the 79 seats in the Legislature on the basis of 58 percent of the popular vote. One in eight British Columbians voted for the Green Party, and yet they have no representation in the legislature. The 42 percent of electors who voted for other parties were left with a measly two seats. Although the voters were intent on defeating the NDP, the election results represent a grotesque distortion of the will of the electors.<sup>2</sup> The first-past-the-post system does not work for British Columbia.

There have been many political changes in British Columbia, but only a few electoral changes. Finding faults in the current electoral system is a much easier task than it is to decide what to do about it. However, something is happening. Organizations such as Fair Voting BC have prompted the BC Government to create the first ever Citizen's Assembly. During 2004, 160 British Columbians will decide upon a possible change in the electoral system in British Columbia. But on what grounds has it been made possible for electoral reform to occur in British Columbia?

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<sup>1</sup> Nick Loenen, *Citizenship and Democracy: A Case for Proportional Representation* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1997) 1.

<sup>2</sup> Francois Cote & Carol Teichrob, "NDP What We Heard: The NDP in Renewal", *Interim Report of the Steering Committee of the National Discussion on the Future of the NDP of Canada, September 2001, 1.*

In this paper, I will discuss the advantages and disadvantages first-past-the-post and proportional representation. I will take a look at other countries that have had success with adopting proportional representation, such as New Zealand. I will also offer an electoral system that would be best suited for the political needs of British Columbia, the Preferential-Plus system.

What are the current problems with the first-past-the-post electoral system in British Columbia? To begin, MP Jason Kenney describes the first-past-the-post system as “designed in and for 16<sup>th</sup>-century England and not relevant to a complex modern democratic federation like Canada”.<sup>3</sup> It used to make sense, when there were few political parties. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, most representatives were sent off to represent the voters of their hometown. There were very few voters and only a few privileged landowners could vote. This state of affairs lasted well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For many years in England there were only two parties, the Grits and the Tories, so the first-past-the-post system worked reasonably well.<sup>4</sup>

A series of voting reforms lowered the voting age, so that half of the population in Canada could vote by the year 1900, excluding women. By this time, a number of different people proposed different methods of electing parliaments, and allegiance towards parties grew. With the development of political parties, parties would be divided in the Parliament according to the number of votes.

However, the number of votes did not end up representing these new political parties. A different, non-proportional approach designed for this modern system focused

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<sup>3</sup> Kevin Michael Grace “Power to the parties”, *Report/News magazine (National Edition)* 28, no. 14 (2001): 11.

<sup>4</sup> Julian West, letter from the Electoral Change Coalition of British Columbia (ECCO) BC, 1

on individual representatives, but ensured that the representative managed to get support from a majority of voters.

### THREE MAIN TYPES OF ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

By the 1900s, there were three main types of systems: The first system is the First-past-the-post, where the winner takes all, whether they have obtained the majority of votes or not.

Secondly, majoritarian systems come in a few varieties. The run-off system, for example, occurs where there is only one candidate to be elected. Typically, any candidate can enter a first round, but then a second round is held, with only two candidates running. Another example is the Preferential ballot, which requires only one round of voting. Voters can record, a first and second choice, but can also rank every candidate on the ballot.

Thirdly, proportional representation comes in many varieties. There are three main systems. First, in the List System, instead of voting for any candidate, votes are cast directly for parties. Parties prepare an ordered list of their candidates, and if a party wins 5 seats in one region, for example, the top five names from the list are elected. In the Two-vote System, voters cast two ballots, one for a local representative, and one for a party. Then, extra seats are awarded to compensate for any disproportion from the initial first-past-the-post allocation of seats. The last type of proportional representation is the Single-Transferable-Vote, where votes are cast for individuals, not parties. Each

voter ranks each candidate, and if their first vote is not put to use, that vote is transferred to their second-choice candidate.<sup>5</sup>

How effective is first-past-the-post? The United States still retains first-past-the-post, which has preserved a two-party system. The US is the only place in the world that does not have either a dictatorship or a multi-party democracy. The two-party system in the US has its faults, although decision-making power is shifted towards the Senate. By the time India gained independence from Britain, nearly every other country in Europe had a modern system, such as proportional representation or majoritarian system.<sup>6</sup>

First-past-the-post is not suited for British Columbia. It was designed to serve a homogeneous society with a two-party political system, not multiple parties, like BC has today. For the past 100 years, extra-parliamentary, mass political parties have been in existence.<sup>7</sup>

There are many examples of why first-past-the-post is ineffective. For instance, under this system, the number of votes that are cast do not equally represent the number of seats that a party receives in the Legislature. As a result, their votes are wasted. Vote distortions occur between parties and ridings. First-past-the-post leads to excessive party discipline, parties are polarized and MLAs have a difficult time creating policies. This leads to a decrease in voter turnout and an overall lack of confidence in the BC Government. The cultural, geographical and political climate has changed in BC and so should the electoral system.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Nick Loenen, "The Best Electoral System for British Columbia" *Fair Voting BC* [electronic source], accessed 21 March 2004: available from <http://www.fairvotingbc.com>, 4.

First, in a typical BC election, more than half of the voters get neither the local candidate, nor the government they voted for. For example, in the 1996 provincial election, 819,979 votes, or 51.8 percent, did not elect anyone. In relation to this, the weight or value of each vote is not equal. Once again, in the 1996 election, a vote for the New Democratic Party was far more effective than any other vote. For every 16,010 votes, the NDP was rewarded with one seat. However, the Liberal party needed 20,058 votes for a seat and the Reform party needed 73,367 votes. If the votes had been counted equally, the Liberals would have been the largest party in the Legislature.<sup>8</sup>

Not only are voters not getting what they vote for, their votes are wasted. Nick Loenen, a former Social Credit MLA, calls this the curse of vote-splitting. Under first-past-the-post, if you mark one X on a ballot, you are expressing 100 percent agreement for that platform, and you are saying you reject all the others.<sup>9</sup> Thus, votes for losing candidates are wasted. Voters often vote strategically because they want to ensure that a certain party does not get elected. However, their privilege as a voter is indefinitely distorted, because they are voting against, rather than for, a particular platform.

The distortion of votes does not only happen from party to party, but also between ridings within a city. For example, in the Okanagan, 42 percent of the voters supported the Liberal Party, who carried the day in all four ridings. However, in Burnaby, Liberals also cast 42 percent of the votes, but won no seats. A Liberal vote in the Okanagan is not equal to a Liberal vote in Burnaby.<sup>10</sup> The significance of one's votes should not depend on their postal code.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>9</sup> Grace, 13.

<sup>10</sup> Nick Loenen, "The Best Electoral System for British Columbia, 4.

First-past-the-post polarizes BC's parties. It is a common occurrence for the government to swing from one end of the political spectrum to the other, each party taking turns to undo the previous parties' legislation when they come into power. Too often successive governments come in power with an opposing political agenda.<sup>11</sup> Do British Columbian's actually vote for this to happen? For example, Premier Bill Vander Zalm rewrote BC's labour legislation, only to have it reversed five years later by Premier Mike Harcourt. This results in unstable policy decision-making.

First-past-the-post contributes to excessive party discipline. In Canada, the electoral system feeds party discipline. If the electoral system produces false majorities in Parliament that give the winning party the majority of seats, they have all the power. However, if 40 percent of the votes translated into 40 percent of the seats, then the power of the Premier is significantly reduced. Power should be earned, not manufactured. A proportional system decentralizes the power of one party, however, this does not mean that people cannot still vote for one party to have all the power if they are so minded.

Political parties and MLAs have a more difficult task of creating public policies under first-past-the-post. If the people's representatives are excluded, then the people are excluded. C.E.S. Frank comments that "no group is more systematically excluded from the process (of policy making) than are MLAs".<sup>12</sup> Ordinary people have never felt more remote from the centre than they do today. At one point, a strong executive government was a necessary approach to gathering forces of regionalism together, but today MLAs are becoming irrelevant and ignored until the next election.<sup>13</sup> Public policy is more

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>13</sup> Geoffrey Stevens, "We have a right to be furious", *Maclean's* 4, no. 11 (2001): 2.

effective with long-term partisan interest. If power is shared equally among participants then the opportunity to manipulate the economy for short-term political gain is less likely.

Finally, due to these deficiencies in the first-past-the-post system, voter turnout is low, because people have less confidence in their vote making a difference. In 1991, the Lortie Commission ranked Canada 28<sup>th</sup> out of 33 democracies for low voter turnout. Although this statistic is for Canada, both provincial and federal elections are first-past-the-post, and the same unconcerned attitude occurs in provincial elections as well.

What does British Columbia need from a voting system? British Columbia needs a system designed to suit its unique geography, history and political culture. The smaller political parties in BC need more representation in the Legislature. Some form of proportional representation has been recommended for the past few years by Fair Voting BC and the Electoral Change Coalition of British Columbia, as well as other political parties such as the Green Party, Marijuana Party and the Unity Party. In June of 2001, a Calgary-based poll by Canada West Foundation found that 75 percent of British Columbians support abandoning the first-past-the-post system for proportional representation.<sup>14</sup>

## PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

Around the world, the list of countries that have adopted some form of proportional representation clearly suggests its effectiveness. These countries include Austria, Belgium, Chile, Finland, Germany, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Uruguay. A total of 29

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<sup>14</sup> Nick Loenen, "75% of British Columbians Back Proportional Representation: News Release" *Fair Voting BC* (electronic source), accessed 11 November 2001: available from [www.fairvotingbc.com](http://www.fairvotingbc.com).

countries have proportional representation, based on populations of over two million people.<sup>15</sup> New Zealand recently held a public referendum in which the people voted for a proportional system, largely copied by the one initiated by Germany. Also, in Britain, proportional representation is now in place for elections into the European Parliament, and it has been approved by the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly. The installation of PR for the country as a whole is high on the agenda.<sup>16</sup>

Proportional Representation will diminish many of the problems that exist with first-past-the-post. There are four main goals, proposed by the Board of Fair Voting BC, which it hopes to ratify: Broad proportionality, extending voter choice, stable government, and maintaining a link between MLAs and geographic constituencies.<sup>17</sup> Although no electoral system can be perfect, proportional representation could achieve higher proportionality, which would decrease the number of wasted votes.

How will choice be extended to voters? A single X on a ballot cannot sufficiently express a “complete, unqualified support for one candidate, party, program and leader, while equally rejecting all alternatives.”<sup>18</sup> First, voter choice is extended by using preference voting. This allows a voter to record their likes and dislikes, in order of preference. Secondly, with this system, a voter does not have to restrict their choice to only one party. A voter can choose a particular party to best form the government, but they can also choose a candidate from another party to represent them locally. Third, voters rank the candidates within the parties. “All voters, not just paid-up party

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<sup>15</sup> “Lower/Single House Elections in the World’s Democracies” *Center for Voting and Democracy* [electronic source], accessed 25 April 2002: available from <http://www.fairvote.org>.

<sup>16</sup> Julian West, 5.

<sup>17</sup> “Framework of Action: Campaign for Proportional Representation in British Columbia, Draft 1.0” Letter from Bob Ransford to Nick Loenen, 5 October, 1997, 1.

<sup>18</sup> Nick Loenen, “The Best Electoral System for British Columbia” *Fair Voting BC* [electronic source], accessed 21 March 2004: available from <http://www.fairvotingbc.com>, 8.

members, participate in a party's nomination and candidate selection process."<sup>19</sup> This will increase the voter's preference to stand behind the candidate that will most likely represent their policy needs.

How does proportional representation maintain a stable government? The goal is to avoid an "Italian Pizza" parliament such as the one in Italy, where there are splinter parties and weak coalitions. PR encourages candidates to take positions of greater independence relative to their party, which would lessen the need for more parties. PR has the potential for less party discipline. Because all voters participate in the nomination process, they have the final say on election day. J.S. Mill declared that responsible government, when the government is representative of its people, is impossible unless MLAs have a measure of independence from the party. This will happen in proportional representation, because an MLA's political survival is more dependent on the voters than it is on their standing in the party.<sup>20</sup> Conclusively, when false majorities are eliminated, so is the power of party leaders. Maximizing voter choice increases the control over candidates.

In conclusion, party discipline is decreased. "Some citizens in expressing an opinion will opt for party and platform others for their community and a local representative. And still others will select both, in a variety of combinations."<sup>21</sup> What does this solve? Paid-up party members are not the only ones who participate in the nomination process. This is because voters rank candidates *within* the part, and if they so choose, they can also choose *between* parties. For example, in a 1977 Irish election, 13 of the 33 sitting party members were defeated by running mates of their own party. Does

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

this cause divisiveness within the party? No. It emphasizes the MLAs close connection to the voters instead of the party.<sup>22</sup>

Whether people have specific needs relating to their geographical location, or whether their needs are based on a particular issue that can be represented by a party platform, such choices can be registered accurately.

### RECENT ATTEMPTS TO CHANGE BC'S PROBLEMS

Are there any other options available for British Columbians then to change the entire electoral system? Former NDP MP Ray Skelly proposed a more immediate fix. In 2002, he wanted to coordinate a number of unspecified recall campaigns against the BC Liberal MLAs. His goal was to send at least two more NDP members to Victoria, so that the party can achieve Official Opposition status. "While I was on the other side, I cursed [recall legislation]. Now I realize it's only a tool". He believes recall is the only way to stop the BC Liberals' cost-cutting and privatization plans.<sup>23</sup> BC is the only province that can recall wayward politicians. However, Skelly was probably right the first time, when he commented that recall is only a tool. It does not get to the root of the problem. Changing the electoral system will hopefully prevent the need for recall, because MPs are more independent, and they are voted directly by the people. If they want any future in government under proportional representation, they will have to work for it. In conclusion, methods of direct democracy such as recall, initiatives and referendums are only tools to promote greater citizen participation. They relieve the pressure for

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<sup>22</sup> Nick Loenen, "Selecting Representatives: A Case for Changing the Voting System and a Consideration of Alternative Systems" *Finally! Reforming Politics: The BC Blueprint*" A Fraser Institute Conference (Vancouver: The Fraser Institute), 22 November 2001.

<sup>23</sup> Terry O'Neill, "Beyond the Ballot Box" *Report/News magazine (Alberta Edition)* 29, no. 1 (2002): 19.

politicians to make important decisions on their own, which makes it more difficult for voters to hold a particular party or MLA accountable.

In recent years, there has been some movement to changing the electoral system. Attempts have been made by the Green Party of BC, under the guidance of its leader, Adrienne Carr. She submitted a request in November 2001, to introduce proportional representation. As a publicity stunt, her petition was effective. However, it had some technical and administrative problems. Initiatives, such as Carr's, requires a minimum of 220,000 signatures, as well as 10 percent of the eligible voters in each of the 79 ridings in order for an initiative to be made into a referendum. This was not achieved. However, Fair Voting BC has been working on this issue for eight years, and has made significant headway. This has led the Liberal party to place the concept of PR in their election platform.

Subsequently, Fair Voting BC wrote to the Green party and also the BC Unity party, expressing some dismay at their actions. "The best way to stall on implementing the change, or cancelling it altogether, would be to point to the Greens' petition drive, which will likely fall short, and adopt the position that people had a chance to change the system, and decided to pass".<sup>24</sup>

Did the Green Party ruin the chance of Fair Voting BC? No. Evidently, the Liberal Leader Gordon Campbell would gain more interest in electoral reform, despite the chance that changing the system may reduce the power of the currently elected government. The Green Party is under the pressure of an upcoming election; their

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<sup>24</sup> Les Leyne. "Greens Fumble bid to change voting system" [Vancouver] *The Vancouver Sun*, 30 January 2002.

attempt was pretentious and unstructured. On the other hand, Fair Voting BC is a non-partisan organization that has been pushing for electoral reform for many years.

#### PEOPLE HAVE A VOICE IN THE “CITIZEN’S ASSEMBLY”

The initial objectives of Fair Voting BC, the organization that prompted the Citizen’s Assembly, were three-fold. First, their goal was to create public awareness of the option of changing the voting system. Second, their aim was put electoral reform, specifically in the form of proportional representation, high on the government’s agenda. Third, they intend to showcase the potentially reformed electoral system of British Columbia to other jurisdictions within Canada.<sup>25</sup>

“If there is a general view that the constitution of British Columbia requires review a reform, an instrument must be found to undertake that task...we believe that the constitution is the people’s business, and that a body democratically selected by the people is the correct instrument for constitutional review. Accordingly we here propose a ‘Citizen’s Assembly’”.<sup>26</sup> This statement was made at a conference aimed at reforming politics in British Columbia. The co-authors have all sat in the Legislature as MLA, and understand the misfortunes of a faulty electoral system.

On September 20, 2000, the first ever Citizen’s Assembly was created in Canada. It is composed of 160 individuals, one man and one woman from each of BC’s 79 constituencies, plus two First Nation members, that were selected by random draw from a pool that reflected gender, age and geographical location. They will represent the

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<sup>25</sup> “Framework of Action: Campaign for Proportional Representation in British Columbia, Draft 1.0” Letter from Bob Ransford to Nick Loenen, 5 October, 1997, 1.

<sup>26</sup> Gordon Gibson, Gary Lauk, Nick Loenen & Rafe Mair. “Finally! Reforming Politics: The BC Blueprint” *A Fraser Institute Conference (Vancouver: The Fraser Institute), 22 November 2001*. Reprinted in Gibson, G, ed. *Fixing Canadian Democracy*, Fraser Institute, 2003.

province as a whole, and they will decide to either keep the current electoral system or recommend a new electoral voting system.

For three months, from January to March of 2004, they will learn about electoral systems. Then from May to June, they will attend 49 public hearings held throughout B.C. From September to November, they will meet to decide which electoral system is best. Their decision will then be framed as a referendum question that will go directly to the voters during the provincial election of May 2005. A simple majority is needed in 60 percent of the 79 electoral districts. If the change is approved, the government has indicated that it will go into effect for the election of 2009. After the final report on December 15, 2004, the Assembly and its staff will disband.<sup>27</sup>

The case presented thus far has shown evidence that the first-past-the-post system is undemocratic, unfair and out-of-date. Many other countries have recently changed their electoral system to some form of proportional representation. But which system will be the right one, for British Columbia in particular? The Citizen's Assembly will listen to the advantages and disadvantages of each system. It is up to them to decide to keep our current system, an unlikely option, or change the system. Their conclusion will be submitted as a referendum question for all voters in British Columbia.

#### A GLIMPSE AT PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION IN NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand, once part of the British Commonwealth, and thus similar in history to Canada, adopted the mixed-member proportional system via a referendum in 1993.

This system is one branch of proportional representation. About one-half of the seats in

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<sup>27</sup> "What is the Citizens' Assembly" *Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform* [electronic source], accessed 20 March 2004: available from <http://www.citizensassembly.bc.ca>

Parliament are now constituency seats that are decided through the first-past-the-post system (the Electoral Vote). The other half is determined on the basis of proportional voting (the Party Vote), hence “mixed”-member proportional. For the Party Vote, each party produces a list of candidates that voters look at before casting their Party Vote. The idea is that voters select the party whose list of candidates they most prefer. The candidates on these lists are then used to fill the seats that each party receives from the Party Vote. A mathematical formula is used to ensure that a party's share of seats in Parliament is proportional to the percentage of votes it receives from the Party Vote portion of the ballot.<sup>28</sup>

Did mixed-member proportional work for New Zealand? Rod Donald, co-leader of the Green Party Aotearoa thinks so. After the first election in 1996, he noticed that voter turn-out was high – 88.3 percent-the highest since 1987. Secondly, he noticed a slight decrease in vote splitting. Third, the Maori representation almost doubled, from 7.1 percent to 13 percent, making New Zealand the “only country in the world where the level of representation of a significant ethnic minority equals their proportion of the population”.<sup>29</sup> Other minorities and special interest groups, such as women, were also represented more proportionately compared to the 1993 first-past-the-post elections. Donald also states other improvements such as increased fairness between political parties, effective representation of constituents, effective parliament. He emphasizes how

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<sup>28</sup> “Renewing Democracy: Debating Electoral Reform in Canada” *Law Commission of Canada*, (electronic source), 22 October 2002: available from [www.lcc.gc.ca](http://www.lcc.gc.ca).

<sup>29</sup> Ron Donald, “Speech Notes MMP in action-a great leap forward for democracy: Free your vote campaign” Presented in British Columbia, April 2002.

small parties have made a real difference, because under MMP, individual constituents can now go to their local constituency MP or a list MP from another party.<sup>30</sup>

#### A SUBSET OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION: PREFERENTIAL-PLUS

I would like to skip ahead to the future and offer one possible solution for British Columbia. First, the problem in BC is that populations are concentrated in big cities in the south of BC, while the large, minimally populated North feels increasingly isolated and underrepresented. The solution to this is based on preferential voting in multi-seat ridings for the larger, urban areas, and single seat ridings for the rural areas, termed Preferential-Plus.

Preferential-Plus, just like mixed-member proportional, is not fully proportional, but it comes close. If it were, then local representation would be decreased because of the inherent differences in population size. It is a mix of Single Transferable Vote and the Alternative Vote. Preferential-Plus could create broad proportionality by making all votes count equally. Votes in all ridings, whether urban or rural, should be rewarded equally.

Preferential-Plus could increase choice for voters. For example, in the last provincial election, the theme for most voters was to “Get rid of the NDP”. Surely there are more important issues that should cause voters to vote, and not strategic ones. Voters do not vote for their first choice because of this.

Currently, political parties in BC are polarized, and this creates swings in public policy. Institutional reform is necessary in BC politics. “Often, [MLAs] represent Victoria to their constituents more than their constituents to Victoria...party discipline is

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

too severe”<sup>31</sup> MLAs need too be more independent from their parties, so they can occasionally hold the premier and cabinet in check. In comparison, US congressman are well known; they have the power to make laws, whereas MLAs do not have a law-making role. Knowing which MLA represents your constituency may encourage people to write letters and get involved with influencing the government. Currently, there is too much emphasis on party standing, and not enough local representation. The regions of BC are stratified, while political power seems weighted in a corner of the province.

	2001 Results with FPTP	<i>Possible</i> Results with PP
Liberal	77 seats 58 percent	56 seats
NDP	2 seats 22 percent	16 seats
Green	no seats 12 percent	7 seats
Unity	no seats 3 percent	no seats
Marijuana	no seats 3 percent	no seats

Table 1 Source: Nick Loenen, Submission # 0035, *The Citizen's Assembly* (electronic source)

Nick Loenen's submission of Preferential-Plus for British Columbia would result in 14 multi-seat and 9-single seat ridings. The graph illustrates the actual number of seats and the percentage of the Legislature awarded to each party in 2001, and the possible

<sup>31</sup> Nick Loenen, "Preferential Plus: A new, effective, made-in-BC voting system to elect MLAs" Submission # 0035, *The Citizen's Assembly*, (electronic source), 12 May 2003: available from [http://www.citizensassembly.bc.ca/public/get\\_involved](http://www.citizensassembly.bc.ca/public/get_involved)

number of seats given if Preferential-Plus was used. Some independents may have won seats because there is no “threshold”, meaning that there is no minimum percentage that candidate must have to get a seat.

Table 1 illustrates that electing candidates in multi-member ridings ensures a broader range of political interests and issues will be represented than is possible under any other system. Maximum number of votes wasted for both multi-seat and single-seat ridings total 293,987, or 18.4% of total valid votes in 2001. “In a typical BC election under FPTP between 50 – 52% of votes are wasted votes. Within the 14 multi-seat ridings maximum wasted votes total 237,389 or 14.9%. For the 9 single-seat ridings maximum wasted votes equals just over 50% typically.”<sup>32</sup> This is the best option because it ensures that a minimum number of votes are wasted. This, in turn, should encourage people to vote because they know their preferred party, whether big or small, will be represented in the Legislature.

No one can guess what system the current Citizen’s Assembly will choose. They may choose to adopt New Zealand’s mixed-member proportional, or the Netherland’s List-proportional representation. But this is not the purpose. The purpose is an attempt to change a faulty electoral system through the most democratic means possible. It is meant to exist alongside regular government institutions, composed of ordinary citizens that will become experts in electoral systems. It is meant to engage and educate all British Columbians, as well as other provinces in Canada.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid

## THE FUTURE OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION IN CANADA

As a result of my review of the current electoral process in British Columbia, and a review of various other voting systems, I believe that the Citizen's Assembly in its recommendation at the end of the year will opt for a more proportional voting system. It is my view that the Preferential Plus voting system may best suit the unique needs for British Columbia. Other jurisdictions are increasingly curious about exercising direct democracy. For example, a judge has recommended electoral change using a citizen's assembly in P.E.I, New Brunswick has a mandate for proportionality and local representation, the Quebec government plans to introduce a Bill, Ontario is considering a referendum, and the Yukon is watching BC.

What does the future hold for Canada's electoral system? Although it would probably take a different process than the British Columbia Citizen Assembly, recently in March of 2004, the Law Commission of Canada recommended that Canada adopt a form of proportional representation called mixed-member proportional. However, Fair Vote Canada has recently made a few recommendations for the reform process, so that the decision for electoral reform is not left solely in the hands of the Parliament. Fair Vote Canada proposes a possible nation-wide referendum or a citizen's assembly, similar to the proceedings in BC.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> "FVC Calls for Action on Law Commission Electoral Reform Recommendations," *Fair Vote Canada* [electronic source], accessed 31 March 2004; available from <http://www.fairvote.org>

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