

**Presentation, Proposal & Submission
to the**

Citizen's Assembly on Electoral Reform

Nikolas A.L. Jeffrey

June 1, 2004

Keeping the best of the past, while evolving into the future.

I have a great fondness for tradition and history and I believe that most types of proportional representation have absolutely no place in British Columbia or Canada, but I have come to the realization that our traditional first-passed-the-post system will not be viewed as an acceptable electoral method in the very near future.

Due to high levels of voter apathy, the public will shortly come to the belief that we need a new system. The question will not be: "Do we need a new system?"
The question shall be: "Which system and when?"

There are many different types of electoral systems, from First-Passed-The-Post (FPTP) to various forms of proportional representation (PR).

The pros and cons of our current First-Passed-The-Post system¹ are being weighed versus many types of PR, unfortunately most people who are stressing change are not doing it for the betterment of our society, they are only doing it for the benefit of themselves and their political affiliations. That is not to say that we should discount their opinions, on the contrary, we must accept and embrace their freedom of opinion, but be tempered by the knowledge of their ultimate goal. I belong to no provincial party and as yet have never participated in provincial politics. I have no ulterior motive other than to do what is best for our society.

Although there are many inherent problems of any proportional representation system, most people would agree that some form of proportional representation is necessary and wanted by the general public.

The claim that we should not explore any changes, on the basis that we've always done it this way does not apply, we have previously used the Single Transferable Vote method² in this province, although it did not last and was deemed unsuitable, the precedent still remains.

I cannot count how many times I have heard the same phrases over and over again: "my vote doesn't count" or "I'd vote for them but they're not going to win". During the 2000 federal election the national consensus was that Joe Clark won all the debates, and when people were asked on the street by the news media who they thought was the best leader, time and time again they said it was Joe Clark and that they wouldn't mind voting for him, but they wouldn't because he had little chance of winning. Personally, I would like to be able to vote for a local candidate based on their merits, regardless of affiliation and still be able to support the party of my choice.

Through the process of writing my proposal I have wondered what the founding Father of our country might think of these procedures and the proposals therein. Through my research I have come to the conclusion that Sir John would look at proportional representation and shake his head, for this question had arisen during his tenure and had been rejected on political grounds, but what of now, over a hundred years later? The politics of his time and ours are similar yet quite different, so what would Sir John's response be now in the 21st-century? I firmly believe that he would be completely against any type of electoral change at first, but over time when the public demand rose, and after reviewing and contemplating all the possible outcomes, Sir John would have most likely found a form of representation that enshrined the continuation of our proud electoral tradition, while giving the public the fair balance that they desire.

As a "progressive traditionalist" I completely reject the notion of "change for change sake" which is the secret mantra of Reformers, I believe in respecting and maintaining our traditions and affecting change through evolution, not radical reform.

Two extremely important points that tend to be overlooked, when proponents praise the virtues of any type of proportional representation, is that our current electoral method is both simple and remarkably efficient, and as such we must remember that any evolution or change of our electoral system must also be simple in practice, yet fair and efficient in outcome.

I have come to the conclusion that only one proportional representation method is best for British Columbia:

Just imagine, you walk into the polling station, register yourself, receive two ballots and proceed to a voting booth, on one ballot is a list of all the candidates running for office in your riding, on the other ballot is a list of eligible parties, with a tick or an x you mark your ballots and then have them placed in corresponding ballot boxes.

Simple isn't it, no adding or subtracting, no extra stress, no rankings just a simple and straightforward vote

My proposal:

Regional Mixed-Member Plurality Top-up. (RMMP+)

With this electoral system each voter casts two ballots:

- One for a candidate in their electoral district (riding) and one for the party of their choice.
- Two-thirds of the seats in each Region would be standard electoral districts; the other one-third would be regional PR seats.
- Each party would list by priority their electoral district candidates in each region, (candidates that are elected to a electoral district are subsequently removed from their party's closed listⁱⁱⁱ)
- Any party failing to achieve at least 10% of the party ballot total would be ineligible for PR seats for that region.^{iv}
- The number of regional seats for each party is calculated on the basis of their "party ballot" votes^v (using the *largest remainder method*^{vi}), minus the number of electoral districts they won in that region.^{vii}

Parties would also be required to field enough candidates running in every region, at least equal to the number of available PR seats.

The province would be divided into four initial regions: Victoria & Island Region, Vancouver Region, Fraser Valley Region, and Interior Region^{viii}.

Regardless of division, regions should be comprised of no less than 12 seats total and no more than 30 seats total.

The electoral method I propose is clear and simple for the voter in the ballot station, yet complex enough to balance-out our current electoral inequities.

I firmly believe that this method is an evolution of our traditional Westminster system, for that it retains the ability to vote freely for your local representative, yet it balances the overall wishes of the electorate. With this system voters will be able to feel that their vote truly mattered and was not wasted.

Keeping the best of the past, while evolving into the future!

Nikolas A.L. Jeffrey

Surrey, B.C.

May 31, 2004

Sources and relevant literature:

Elections Canada. (<http://www.elections.ca>)

Proportional and Semi-Proportional Electoral Systems; Their Potential Effects on Canadian Politics
by Dr. Heather MacIvor. (http://www.elections.ca/loi/sys/macivor_e.pdf)

Free-definition.com, online encyclopaedia of definitions. (<http://www.free-definition.com>)

Party Politics in Canada
Edited by Hugh G. Thorburn

Leaders & lesser mortals: backroom politics in Canada
by J. Laschinger, G. Stevens

Biographies of Sir John A. MacDonald
(various authors)

The Daily Digest: *Information and opinion* from St. John's to Victoria
Political e-mail digest compiled by Joe Hueglin. (hueglinj@cogeco.ca)

i

An interesting anomaly in the results of this system (FPTP) arose in the Canadian federal election of 1926 for the province of Manitoba. The province was entitled to 17 seats in that election.

The percentage of votes received across the province were:

Conservatives - 42.2%
L.P. - 19.5%
Liberals - 18.4%
Progressives - 11.2%
Labour - 8.7%

The apportionment of seats however was:

Conservatives - 0
L.P. - 7
Liberals - 4
Progressives - 4
Labour - 2

The Conservatives clearly had the largest number of votes across the province, but received no seats at all. The other parties were able to have success by having concentrated support in particular constituencies, and by not running candidates in others.

(free-definition.com)

Note: if a 2/3rd MMP system was in use during the 1926 election, the Conservatives would have won six proportional seats in Manitoba.

ii In order to prevent the British Columbia CCF from being able to win in a three party competition, the government introduced the Single Transferable Vote with the expectation that Conservative would list the Liberals as their second choice and vice versa. Unexpectedly, the British Columbia Social Credit Party under its new leader W.A.C. Bennett was able to exploit this system and emerged as the largest party when the ballots were counted in the 1952 general election. Voters were tired of both the Liberals and the Tories and were looking for alternatives.

(free-definition.com)

Note: after getting elected with STV the new government changed the system back to FPTP to ensure that they maintained power in the next election.

iii

Closed list, describes the variant of party-list proportional representation where voters vote for political parties as a whole.

iv

Before the party ballot is recalculated.

v Party ballot procedure:

- total all party votes for each party
- discount any party that is under the cut-off percentage threshold
- recalculate party percentages based on new total
- calculate proportional percentage quota of total seats for each party
- minus any riding seats won
- assign PR seats

vi

The *largest remainder method*, is one way of allocating seats proportionally for representative assemblies with party list voting systems. The largest remainder method requires the number of votes for each party to be divided a quota representing the number of votes required for a seat, and this gives a notional number of seats to each, usually including an integer and a remainder. Each party receives seats equal to the integer. The parties are then ranked on the basis of the remainder, and parties with the larger remainders are each allocated one additional seat until all the seats have been allocated.

(free-definition.com)

vii

Example: If in a "Fraser Valley Region" with 20 seats total, the Liberals win 9 Electoral District seats & 41% of the party ballot votes, the NDP 4 & 39%, the Greens 0 & 14. (before recalculation)

The regional seats would be distributed: Liberals +0, NDP +4, Greens +3, with all others ineligible.

viii

It is recommended that if or when (through redistribution) the Interior Region comprises 24 seats total, that it be divided into a North Interior Region and a South Interior Region.