

SUBMISSION TO THE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON ELECTORAL REFORM

By

Dr. Carole Ann Brown Dated June 7, 2004

1-6630 Portsmouth Rd, Nanaimo B.C.V9V 1A3 **Phone:** 250-390-9249

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE ESSENTIAL POINTS THAT MUST BE A CENTRAL THEME IN ANY ELECTORAL REFORM WHEREIN THERE IS AN INTENT TO RESPECT A CONSTITUTION THAT IS TYPICAL OF A RESPECTABLE MODERN DEMOCRACY, WHICH CANADA DOES NOT OPERATE AS. IT IS CLEARLY AN IRRESPONSIBLE AND UNACCOUNTABLE ARISTOCRACY. THE SIX RECOMMENDATIONS MADE HEREIN WOULD GUARANTEE THE RESULTS THAT THE REFORMS IN THE VOTING AND LEGISLATION ARE NEEDED.

CATEGORY: No electoral system change, Minority representation

MISPLACED EMPHASIS REGARDING THE WIDESPREAD SUPPORT FOR A MIXED SYSTEM

I wish to submit the following views in response to the to the medial release by the Citizens' Assembly of June 5, 2004. The need to express these views of mine is guide by the fact that what British Columbians told members of the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform the need to improve BC's electoral system is bit of a self-defeating argument and internally inconsistent set of views. I come to this conclusion from observing that the recommendations being made of accountability and a non-adversarial governments etc., effectively eliminate the need to change anything. In other words if the government is run on proper democratic principles to being with the need to change the voting style would no longer remain an issue. Stated another way the more pressing need should be on making the governing process run effectively and not the voting procedures. The illusion that through arriving at a perfect system of voting with a perfect representation of every subgroup the government would run effectively and public interests would be better protected. Although I would go into this irrationality in detail below, in short it must be said that what we need is equitable treatment not an equal treatment. Therefore the representation too should be equitable not equal or even proportionate. Some groups (e.g. biker and other organized crime gangs) must not be given any opportunity to be repressed in the government while the interests of the vulnerable (infants, mentally incapacitated, victims of serious crimes, victims of Crown misconduct and incapacitated seniors) must be protected at the cost of sacrificing the interests of others.

CURE FOR THE ISSUE OF VOTER ALIENATION

Voter alienation and apathy can be remedied by making the representative that they elect to the government able and willing to take some interest in their problems or in other words being to follow the fundamental democratic principle of giving the public a voice. There really would remain no need for a preferential ballot if the public gets heard and the key democratic principle of listening to the public is ever restored. There is little to say positively or negatively about the proportional system.

OVERCOMING THE PARTY AGENDA.

The concept of party agenda has become a necessary evil of our adversarial government system. Unless the matter is on the party agenda, there is no hope that the private member's bill would ever succeed. And once it is accepted that the legislation that would be ever put in place must be on a party agenda and there is this trend towards mushrooming of parties of every color under the sun, there is nothing that one party would propose that would receive the approval of the other parties who are compulsive opposers. The party control

of MLAs voting patterns that makes voters feel that "local representation is meaningless" is not something that we can get away from unless the government become truly and honestly democratic and working for the good of the public and not for the interests of the party, which are often in conflict. The election platform advisement of some party members clearly states that the candidate is going to Victoria or Ottawa to advance the party agenda. There is nothing wrong with the people who are simply not going to the ballot box, because there does not exist a democratic process in the manner of our governing. That is in line with my openly expressed view to boycott the elections entirely until the nation become honestly democratic and not merely creates that façade.

DISTINCTION BETWEEN REPRESENTATION AND INTEREST PROTECTION.

Where the contributors of their views to the Citizen's Assembly lose grasp over reality is when they begin to believe that there exists a need for an electoral system to reflect the diversity of its population. With that rule, there must be 10% of the elected members to be gay, 50% to be divorced or single parents, 60 be overweight and diabetics, 4% heavy alcoholics and drug addicts, 2% to be deaf. 1% aboriginal and about 5% with psychiatric conditions etc. That does not make sense. If the judges of the Supreme Court of Canada to be honestly representing the Canadians, at least one of them should have a criminal record because 10% of Canadians have a criminal record. I am sure we do not need children to be elected to make sure that they are proportionally represented. Irony and sarcasm aside, the concept of proportional representation is faulty. Steven Harper would not even permit incarcerated criminals to vote. In some nations there are quotas for certain professionals in order to insure a proportional representation. In Canada that could be viewed as insuring that 2% of the medical graduates be aboriginal to keep a proportional representation. There is no real need to insure that homosexuals be represented in a 10% for the same sex marriage bill to pass. And even if that is accomplished, the motion would still be defeated because they would be a minority. The granting of the minority rights depends entirely on the correct thinking of the majority. If the real determining variable is the thinking style or a sense of duty and empathy, there can be no relevance placed on the numbers or proportions. What I can state is that 90% of the mental processing of the candidates or elected members should be devoted to protection of the rights of each subgroup of the constituents and only 10% to their own personal and party agendas. Currently the ratios seem to be reversed. Legislation can be put in place, which will impose the public interest as the priority over personal and the party interests. Just like in a single parent family headed by a mother, the boys do not face starvation and the widowed father can raise his three daughters despite being of the opposite gender there is no need that there be a proportional representation in the government for the women. What is needed is the willingness of the all male caucus to show the wisdom, integrity and the ability to recognize that society could never be helped if the women and children are neglected.

THE FUTILITY OF THE "VOTER'S GUIDE"

There is no rational basis for any such manual prior to an election to help the voters select a party and the candidates. The problem that the voters face is not that they do not know how to stamp the vote, even if they do not know how to set the time on their VCR. The concept is flawed that voters are suddenly given this task to decide who to sleep with out of the five strangers on the list. Nothing else is ever known of those strangers. Try imagining the difficulty the person faces. The factor lacking there is the familiarity with the candidates in the past 30-40 years of his life. Only those with some public life should run for office. There should be requirement to demonstrate that the candidate has some insight into the issues and has some skills to deal with that. You would not be comfortable picking out a surgeon for your plastic surgery without familiarity or references but with the elected members of our government we have to rely on these strangers with not only healthcare but also the national defence, social services and every other important aspect of our lives. If someone needs a guide, that is the parties and the candidates. They are the ones who need the education and skills. And those with drug issues, criminal history and mental disorders must not be entrusted with these issues. This is a far cry from the current trend that the Premier of a province in Canada must have at least one drunk driving conviction. There is no need to elect a drunk driver to protect the rights of the drunk drivers of British Columbia. Most of the smaller groups do not need to be represented in the government. Only those with the right skills and the honest desire to protect the public interests (not merely their own or the party) should be elected.

THE TWO BALLOTS IDEA:

Besides increasing the costs of operations, multiple votes would accomplish nothing. The logic to see to it that a party should be represented in Victoria or Ottawa based on the proportion of the public that supports that party, would be true if there were any fundamental difference between the platforms of the parties. Parties do not stand for distinct platforms. Every party speaks of healthcare, social services, environment etc. in the same tongue. There is really nothing to choose except for the finer details that are immaterial.

There is no need of a greater or presumably proportional numeric representation for women and minorities for their interests to be protected by the government. The representation has to be at a conceptual and theme level. The fact that an ethnic member has been elected and he would bring forward the interests of his ethnic minority groups to the governments is also dysfunctional in several ways. In truth the elected members of minority groups are overly wary of and refuse to help the group they come from in order not to be labeled bigots or some other mysterious reason. Moreover, in any event they would still be a minority and no say in Victoria or Ottawa. The 50% representation of females in the government is the only exception and the women as a minority or analogous group being discriminated against is not base on numbers but at a conceptual level because they were historically viewed as less important humans, a grave error.

FUTILITY OF DEMAND FOR MMP

There is no logical reason to believe that MMP would cure anything. The demand is likely guided by the current almost hysterical anti-liberal fever amongst the naïve Canadian public. The naiveté lying in the view those conservatives would not be corrupt. There is no rational reason to believe that they would be any less corrupt than the Liberals or NDP for that matter. The party color is irrelevant to the human trait of honesty, which is scarce. I would be most interested in hearing out Mr. Stephen Broscoe who holds that MMP would work in BC if the seats in the Legislature were increased to 100 from the current 79. Are British Columbians willing to foot the additional bill of the politicians? They have a parasitic and anti-community function to begin with. I am not merely referring to their salaries and inflated expense accounts. Half a million was for example spent in defending Mr. Day by Albertans. The Joe Clarke fiasco did cost us over two millions. And there are other hidden expenses to feed the politicians.

CONSENSUAL - RATHER THAN ADVERSARIAL - GOVERNMENT

I am pleased to learn that consensual - rather than adversarial - government scored high, which is a concept that wipes out the MMP concept entirely, or at least makes it redundant. It is simply pathetic to see that Assembly (or Parliament) members need to be told not to fear coalition, or minority government. The fact of a non-consensual government style does guarantee that a coalition, or minority government is bound to fail through filibustering and other forms of mischief, where the public would simply get fed up the antics of fundamentally immature, inept and unskilled clowns who get elected solely for their personal profits and party agenda and not to protect the public interests but to exploit them.

PUBLIC NOT THE LEGISLATORS SHOULD BE THE AUTHORS OF DEMOCRACY.

Alison Watt of North Vancouver was clearly wrong in backing MMP stating that "We need more views in the Legislature to deal with complex issues that are facing this province" That view is internally inconsistent of schizophrenic. It is not possible for citizens (e.g. British Columbians) to have diagonally opposite expectations. If there has to be true democracy, the public views and not the members of the Legislature decide the vital issues. Take definition of a marriage or legalization of Marijuana as examples. Can we really trust these illusive, generally secretive and never available characters to decide what the public thinks? Granted that not every little zoning matters should go to referendum, but the key issues where nations are going into knots (e.g. the issue of same sex marriage that is causing so much upheaval in the USA and France etc.) do need a direct public input.

COGNITIVE COMPETENCE IS THE KEY REQUIREMENT NOT A PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION.

Alun Woolliams from Sechelt, states at least half true statement that "A quick acting government that does not act in the best interest of the majority is not an effective government. Coalitions and governments with

strong oppositions are more likely to make more moderate and stable policy decisions with a broader base of support.” I would take issue only with the quick acting part. There is no guarantee that a slowly arrived at or a delayed decision is necessary better or in the public interest or minority interests. The trouble often lies in the fact or is alleged against the politicians is ignoring some groups. The fact that opposing interests need balancing does create problems when we think hot headed and selfishly. The environment groups go crazy tethering themselves to the trees while the forestry workers face starvation. Who to listen to? As Rodney King pleaded: “Can we get along peacefully”? The complexity of the voting system and the need to reform it is clear evidence that we are unwilling to live harmoniously. Each small group of community is focused on its own little agenda without giving a damn to the nation as a whole. If it would increase productivity and decrease hate crime by recognizing the same-sex couples as respectable and without sin, then why not adopt that view for the betterment of the nation? How MMP helps that resolve controversy is beyond me. A more reconciliatory approach on the abortion issues is similarly needed. There is no need for the anti-abortionists to retain sharpshooters or snipers on their payroll to advance their frivolous goal of protecting the “human life” when half of this humanity on the planet is undernourished and shortly when the planet accumulates 9 billion of them the planet would run out of space to feed, clothe and shelter us.

PROPOSAL FOR AN EMPATHETIC VOTING SYSTEM:

The need to promote empathy with other residents of the planets, starting with the Canadians, is so great that at a time in the near future that would remain the only manner if the budget is to be balanced and some sense of services to be achieved. Following the precedent set by the reconciliation of Germany and France, making peace between the parties and reduction of conflict is lot more desirable and going to be productive in the long run. MMP and other mean spirited actions to selfishly strive to seek things that only promote hatred and take us away from a consensual government and promote conflict are dysfunctional and must not be promoted. If we are to learn anything from the recently widely published D-Day celebrations anything then the message must be of a willingness to be lot less selfish (if not entirely unselfish) altruistic and willing to give to others and make them happy and content then focus only on own selfish, greedy fight for local representation and equally corrupted approach of MMP. There would be lot more contentment everywhere if we are willing to eat only after others have been fed, not through snatching morsels from the mouths of the weaker and needier as is going on in Canada, a nation driven by greed and materialism. Simply be willing to allow others to be protected and cared for, the need of MMP etc. would vanish. The reason why boys don't go hungry in a family headed by mother and the girls can be raised well by a widowed father is this devotion and empathy where the interests of the children are given priority by the adult, instead of his or her own personal interests. If that does not persuade the British Columbians against this futile drive towards MMP and the fickle fight over the number of seats, there is little hope of progress. The views favour MMP are clearly in serious conflict with the true concept of democracy and a harmonious government in British Columbia (and Canada) and should not succeed even if supported by the majority of ill-informed and greed motivated majority. This is a situation where minority should prevail.

THE REAL REFORM THAT IS NEEDED.

Letting the personal trait of honesty that cannot be tested, imposed or guaranteed, it makes a lot of sense to me that just like you would not permit any person to operate on you, we should not allow anyone to become a politician. The necessary skills besides the absence of a criminal record etc., should be a minimum of bachelor degree in Political Science, Economics and a diploma in Constitutional studies or the study pertinent to the specialized area of politics that candidate intendeds to deal with e.g. hospital administration, women's issues, (for which even men could be potential candidates to deal with the issues of abortions, women's health, and domestic violence etc.), fisheries or defence. I see this entire idea of election reform a mixture of misguided attempt at solving the issue whereas the true issue is the incompetence and dishonesty of the candidates along with an element to distract the public from the real issues where the reform is needed namely in the skills and the integrity of the candidates running for the elections that we are told to perfect. There is no need to perfect the election format or would no longer be a need if the candidates are capable, honest and dedicated. I fail to see how MMP would introduce capability, integrity and devotion.