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Thursday 3 June 2004 Hearing in Whistler, BC

CitizensAssembly.ca

Dear Members of the Citizens' Assembly of British Columbia,

I would like to speak to you about aspects and details of representative government for British Columbia in several areas.

- (1) **A Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) Legislature** of separately elected Riding and Proportional Members,
- (2) **Preferential Continuously Transferable Ballot for Riding MLA's,**
- (3) **Separate Ballot for Proportional MLA's,** and
- (4) **Fractional Voting Power for MLA's,** once elected, in the Legislature.

I apologize now for any misunderstandings which ensue from my not correctly using the technical terms in the CitizensAssembly.ca glossary, and I hope they may be cleared up in subsequent questions.

(1) I will not dwell on the issue of the importance and reasons for introducing some proportional representation to the BC Legislature, as I know the Citizens' Assembly is putting a lot of thought and emphasis into introducing some proportional representation, largely for its benefits in helping to represent minority and emerging views.

I would only like to **caution against an entirely proportional legislature,** and rather **recommend a legislature of 60% to 80% riding constituency members, and therefore 40% to 20% proportional members as a starting point.** (I imagine the final legislature as 100 members, so each percentage of the legislature would be an individual member.)

I believe that such a **Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) Legislature will give us a stable, responsible government with a strong, sufficiently representative opposition of opposing views and new viewpoints.**

Such a Mixed Member Proportional system would avoid the problems of purely proportional systems – instability and deficiencies of complete responsibility of parties under the more likely resulting minority governments.

(2) Electing the riding MLA’s by Preferential Continuously Transferable Ballot requiring a majority of votes transferred to the finally elected member, instead of the current first-past-the-post plurality, will avoid problems of unintended vote-splitting and related issues for Riding MLA’s.

A form of this preferential balloting is always used by individual parties in electing their own leaders, though usually in a series of ballots. The system I am advocating involves only one ballot and a defined sequence of continuous transfers¹.

I would absolutely advocate this defined sequence of transfers with ongoing elimination of the candidate with least votes while transferring their votes, over the second ballot system² (used in France, for example, to elect the President), which overly favors the first two candidates on first count.

It’s important to realize that the true consensual majority choice of a riding or province of voters may not be either of the two leading candidates or parties on first count, but rather will emerge when second, third and subsequent choices of voters are considered, through a preferential ballot. I believe this is roughly how we first elected our Social Credit Party government which served British Columbia over many terms.

And election by preferential continuously transferable ballot should be locked into the provincial constitution as soon as possible in the next legislature, as it works very well for the people, but tends to work against the party in power, which would often like to eliminate the preferential majority ballot and revert to first-past-the-

¹ **Preferential Continuously Transferable Ballot:** Riding members must be elected by a majority – 50% plus 1 vote. If this is not achieved on first count, candidate receiving fewest votes on first count is dropped, and his/her vote transfers to 2nd choice. If this does not result in a majority, next candidate receiving fewest votes is dropped and his/her 2nd choice votes transfer to remaining candidates. Where that candidate’s 2nd choice has already been eliminated in earlier round, vote transfers to 3rd choice, and so on.

Similarly, votes from first candidate dropped remain transferred to 2nd choice, or transfer to 3rd choice if 2nd choice was eliminated in second count. Process continues until a candidate receives a majority 50% plus 1 vote. **In this way, no voter’s preference is lost.**

² (from CitizensAssembly.ca glossary) Second Ballot system: “If no presidential candidate wins a majority of votes on the first round, only the top two candidates take part in the runoff election held two weeks later.”

post plurality government if possible, as I believe the newly elected Social Credit Party did in its first term. Citizens' Assembly members and your electoral system instructor/historian can correct the fine points of my recollection.

(Also please see Endnoteⁱ, speaking against point formula weighting systems.)

(3) Proportional Members would be elected on a separate ballot, allowing voters to vote for one known trusted individual or party on their riding ballot, and possibly a different party with an emerging viewpoint on their proportional ballot. **A single vote would serve this purpose on the proportional ballot** (no preferentiality needed), and would **help defeat any advantage of long party lists**.

Parties could possibly simply pre-define the order in which individuals would fill their party's share of proportional members, although this would involve power struggles within parties beyond the control of regular voters. In the best of all worlds, and with a very long proportional ballot, a defined limit of candidates (think of 20 to 40) could run within a party under their own names, with total votes for a party defining that party's proportion or number of proportional MLA's, and the candidates being selected according to relative popularity within their party, up to the limit of that party's share of the proportional ballot.

Individuals could also run as a party of one. This would not be productive for unknown individuals, but could work very well for well known provincial figures, which would be a good thing.

I'm sure a committee of Citizens' Assembly members could fine-tune such a proportional system with regard to how and to what number that parties would name and select candidates, defining cut-off points, etc.

(4) After the Election – Fractional Voting Power for MLA's in the Legislature: British Columbia, by the nature of its geography and rapidly changing demographics, has some very large ridings with less than the average number of constituents, some small ridings with more than the average number of constituents, and many ridings with good natural boundaries but changing numbers of constituents that are inconsistent with the average for the province.

This results in an undesirable shift from the ideal "one person – one vote of equal value" to which we aspire in democracies.

Boundary reform and redefinition can help, but traditionally, in British Columbia, we have still allowed geographically large northern ridings with small constituencies, and we still want natural, homogeneous constituencies.

Under a legislative system of Fractional Voting Power, Proportional MLA's would each generally carry voting power of 1 vote³, equal to the voting power of a Riding MLA in a riding with the provincial average of adult constituents.

However, **Riding MLA's in ridings with more than the provincial average of adult constituents would have greater voting power in the legislature.** For example, the MLA of a riding with 60% more constituents than the provincial average (160% of the provincial average), would carry 1.6 votes in the legislature.

Conversely, **Riding MLA's in ridings with fewer than the provincial average of adult constituents would carry less voting power in the legislature,** although they would have equal salaries, and equal rights to legitimate expenses, etc. For example, the MLA of a riding with 40% fewer constituents than the provincial average (60% of the provincial average), would carry only 0.6 votes in the legislature.

Anyone who is thinking about the difficulty of counting votes in the legislature should not be concerned. Fractional legislative votes could be added and determined in a matter of minutes with a pocket calculator, or in a millisecond with a legislative voting computer. We are not talking rocket science here, and we would be taking a large step toward more representative government.

Before each election, if electoral boundary reform was not already being conducted, adult constituency populations would be re-evaluated to determine the legislative voting power of the MLA for the next term.

(5) In summary: With this simple system of MLA Fractional Voting Power in the Legislature, along with the earlier mentioned Preferential Continuously Transferable Ballot for Riding MLA's and the obvious advantage of a Mixed Member Proportional legislature, we can have a system which comes much closer to representing what British Columbians want in government.

We should not be deterred by the apparent newness, difficulty, complexity or extra time required of this system or any system presented to the Citizens'

³ Subject to a Citizens' Assembly committee recommendation of how to allocate fractions of Proportional Member voting power.

Assembly of BC, but should seek to accommodate them if they incorporate desirable features or outcomes.

We must realize that the nature and texture of our human concerns for democracy and social justice are all far more complex than our current simplistic systems for achieving them, and we should not be afraid to advance necessarily more complex systems for achieving those concerns, including those that would perhaps require an extra day or so to resolve an election. Our goals in a democratic society are far too important to allow them to be subverted, for example, by the media’s desire for the simplicity of “news at 11” deadlines.

Thank you for your consideration of this view, and all the other views presented to members of the Citizens’ Assembly of British Columbia.

Yours truly,

Doug Morrison

ⁱ Endnote comment on “**Point Formula Systems**” which attempt to capture a consensus by adding up points in preferential lists: In **speaking against point formula systems**, I offer the following thoughts for consideration:

(a) The **arbitrary weighting** given to most point systems (essential the linear reverse of preference – most points to first preference), would not reflect the personal weighting felt by most voters.

(b) To be effective, point systems tend to depend on **cooperation, which is unlikely** in most provincial election climates.

Some parties, for instance, would advise their voters to vote for them alone with no further choices, as they feel further votes in a preferential sequence would give greater weight to other parties, which would ultimately defeat them.

This is similar to the voting advice commonly given in municipal at-large elections, where voters are advised to vote for less than their limit of candidates when they are concerned about electing a marginal candidate, because further votes involve “voting against yourself”.

For these and other reasons, I recommend the Preferential Continuously Transferable Ballot over point systems, because it not so susceptible to either weighting or cooperation issues, but simply continues to support other candidates worthy of the voter’s consideration once the voter’s first choice has been defeated.