

Where To?

What good is fixing the barn door but leave the barn walls with gaping holes?

The Citizens Assembly is now fully assembled and roaring to go. But where to? That is the question. Is the CA going to spruce up the barn door but leave the gaping holes in the walls and the roof of the barn or are they going to fix the whole barn?

The government-appointed management of the CA is navigating the official line which leads straight into revamping the way votes translate into MLA seats. This line bypasses the many serious ills of the decrepit electoral system presently in need of reform. It has a parallel in the route traveled by state visitors' motorcades from the airport to the local Dictator's palace - it goes through spruced up streets, bypassing the slums of the dictator's capital.

I have been reasoning out on this Website that the purpose of the CA is to do electoral reform, period. Just as it is stated in the New Era Commitments tendered by the Liberal Party in the 2001 election. This because the commitment was to create the CA, who, in turn, would, on their own, determine the reform needed and do it. And, mainly, because it makes no sense to go through the reform process and leave intact the control of the electoral system in the hands of the interlopers who now control it.

I will reiterate that the raison d'etre of an electoral system is to facilitate the uninhibited selection and appointment of peoples' representatives in the parliament of the society, thereby providing for the citizenry to be self-governed which, in turn is the objective of democracy. It is to spare society the fate of being ruled by despots or other varieties of tyrants.

The CA objective cannot therefore be less than a fair electoral system, one that empowers the citizenry to select who would represent us in the Legislature of our Province. The only reasonable objective is a system that would prevent interference in the election process by special interests, any special interests. If the CA comes up with anything less than that, if the CA comes up with a system that allows special interests groups, such as the politicians, to distort the democratic process of elections, the CA exercise would be a waste of time and effort. If the electoral system facilitates "election" of other

than whoever the people would elect if left to their own judgment, no matter what "reform" the CA may do, the result will be as repugnant as a loaded dice in a crap game.

I do recognize that politicians are crafty chaps and that perfection of the electoral system, of any system really, is un-attainable. No-matter how hard we may work at devising the perfect electoral system, clever ways to compensate for lack of candidates' and parties' merit will always be devised by politicians. This, however, does not mean that we should throw up our hands and allow known loopholes to the electoral system. On the contrary, we must do the best we can for unless we do that, our lives will be unnecessarily ruled by politicians acting against our will, often against our best interests.

Politicians are crafty chaps and system perfection is un-attainable. No-matter how hard we may work at devising the perfect electoral system, clever ways to compensate for lack of candidates' and parties' merit will always be devised by politicians. This, however, does not mean that we should throw up our hands and allow known "loopholes" to the electoral system. On the contrary, we must do the best we can for unless we do that, our lives will be unnecessarily ruled by politicians acting against our will, often against our best interests.

There is no sense to partial reform of the electoral system. There is no conceivable good and valid reason for fixing one tire on a four wheeled vehicle with all its four tires flat - the vehicle would remain immobile, the trip will not be made. Worse yet, the passengers of the distressed vehicle will likely be "taken for a ride" in another vehicle which could make for unpleasant times. Significantly, the Government have not given reasons for shielding the many bad aspects of the electoral system, while revamping one them - I will put to them that the reason they keep silent is that they could not say anything better than silence.

When faced with the unfortunate choice of partial reform or no reform at all, opting for the latter may be the prudent choice. This because: (a) Partial reform would be nullified by more intense utilization of the non-reformed venues. In the barn metaphor, fixing the door will only increase traffic through the gaping holes in the walls, that is all. (b) partial, or cosmetic reform for that matter, takes the wind out of the sails of reform. The people tend to turn their attention to other things and the politicians refuse further reform on the basis that such was done "recently". It is like dissipating the appetite of your

guests with macaroni and cheese prior to bringing to the table the steak and lobster platter - dinner is ruined.

Next I would like a few words on the order of things. The government and its agents seek to focus the CA into solutions and away from the problem. Specifically, they are instructed to look at solutions, domestic and exotic and chose one of them for us, if they find a better one than what we have, while applying the prescribed "criteria". This is the wrong approach - one just cannot order the "best dress" - one must know the size of the person who will wear it, her complexion, the function she will wear the dress to, and many other things - the "best dress" could turn out to be thoroughly useless assemblage of fabric and nothing more than that. An electoral system must be tailored to the needs of the particular society it is to serve. And it must be complete, for one may not attend certain functions, such as elections, in a "topless" or "bottomless" dress.

Observation of such realities led Athenians to the foundation of western civilization, namely the analysis of a problem to be followed by the synthesis of the solution. Recognizing the problem must precede the search for a solution, like the horse must go before the carriage. The first task, therefore, of the CA is to define the problem with the election system. To that end the CA must analyze the electoral system, examine each of its components to discover what is wrong with it, what needs be done to it so that future elections are democratic. It is only after doing that, that the CA may proceed to suggest fixing or replacing the system. The Ideas Bank I already outlined in this series is an efficient way to proceed.

If the government tries to obstruct the diagnosis of the ills of the electoral system, the CA should invite the government to demonstrate conclusively that the only suspect aspect of the electoral system is that of "translating ballots to MLA seats". And to demonstrate that remedying it, will suffice to ensure democratic elections.

While at it, the CA should ask the other important question: Why is the government bent on shielding from the citizenry all the many bad aspects of the electoral system? What is the common good to be served by the government protecting from scrutiny the many components of the electoral system which are dated or corrupt?

A quote from Socrates is appropriate and I will relate it as enunciated recently (relatively speaking) by Albert Einstein: Focus on

the analysis of the problem - if you get to understand it, the answer, usually, will emerge on its own. Appropriate advice say I.

In the next few articles, interruption of the intended sequence being not ruled out, I will examine some aspects of election systems. I will start with the one explicitly excluded from the deliberations of the CA, that being that of "election financing". This is lethal to democracy so much so that no matter the extent of reforming the electoral system but leaving "election financing" as it is, democracy will not recover and society will continue to suffer substantial consequences.