

## CHANGE IS THE ONLY CONSTANT

The CA is about to enter into “brainchild” labour. The members’ minds were impregnated at the CA boot camp with the seeds of an electoral system that provides for the election of “local” representatives, the resulting parliament to be garnished with members whose constituency is the party, so as to achieve some degree of “proportionality”.

I do not know whether the seeds the CA Profs planted into the crania of the CA members have germinated and taken root. One hopes they perished leaving the mind perceptive to innovation, to bold ideas, these being the CA ‘s mission. We are fast approaching the due day and anxiety heightens - will it be a triumph for democracy or the wrecking of a unique opportunity?

I do recognize that the CA is seriously handicapped by the restrictions Gibson devised and the government embedded into the CA mandate and which the CA managers appear most unwilling to challenge and equally pleased to abide by. I write under the assumption that the managers will likely prevail in keeping the CA in the rut Gibson carved for it - I will be elated to if my clairvoyance proves wanting.

But there are yet more hurdles on the road to electoral reform than the aforementioned. A formidable one is conventional wisdom; parties are deeply embedded into it and tightly, albeit surreptitiously, likened in the minds of people to team sports. Because if it, suggesting distancing the parties from the electoral process so as to free democracy most likely may not go well, even with the “eight out of ten” citizens who want “free votes in parliament”.

Then we have been conditioned to resent political change, to prefer the devil we know and shun the one we do not, which is a surefire recipe for stagnation.

As if all these were not enough, the CA is not a self-governed body. It is driven by a management team determined to exercise substantial control over the proceedings. To make things worse, the management team is made up of academics who, by career’s end, become possessed by self-righteousness due to a lifelong monologue delivered to the pliable minds of the young.

Further, the need for resourcefulness has become urgent because so much time was wasted in activities other than challenging society at large to come up with new ideas. Worse than that, but the CA managers hurt the cause of innovation by setting the mind of the CA members and conditioning the citizenry at large, to choosing from the existing. They drove us to choosing from the cesspool of electoral systems created by politicians, for politicians, in times past, and this is mortifying. They should have lead the CA to invoke creativity, to challenge the minds of the people, so as to push the state of the art to new heights - Aristotle’s legacy.

Overcoming these, is now a challenge for the CA. The members need the resourcefulness and the strength of Hercules to extricate themselves from these adversities. But, *dum spiro spero*, for as long as I breath, I hope, I always do, I am a confessed habitual optimist.

For example, although it cannot broadside party-o-cracy, the CA may lead society to give “party-less elections” a single tryout. This may not be a lasting solution but it is mordant democracy a chance. This may be “realistic and pragmatic”, yet it does not exclude failure.

Then what is the CA to do? To the rescue comes the CBC, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. A passage in the “**CBC Journalistic Standards and Practices**”, (1999 download from the CBC website) instructs as follows: “**Policies are intended to be flexible enough to avoid rigidity**”.

There is more to it than meets the eye in the CBC quote. It manifests to none been infallible - if the CBC, the biggest trader in language in Canada, can instruct its journalists as above, the CA may equally be short of perfection. And this caps the reasons for building renewal into electoral system.

The CA, at where it is now, must shun neither “**flexibility**” nor “**rigidity**”, indeed must combine both and **avoid** none, contrary what the CBC aims for. That is to say, the CA brainchild must combine **rigidity** with **flexibility**.

One expects the electoral system the CA may come up with to be way short of what society needs now, save what future needs may demand. Moreover, there is the aging factor; people age and institutions become dated, but while the elixir of youth remains elusive, there are potions for the updating of institutions. It is prudent, therefore, to make the electoral system “**flexible enough**” so as to metamorphose into higher forms in response to changing circumstances.

That is, “**flexible**” in all aspects but one. That one is a mechanism for self renewal that should be built-in to the electoral system. Remember, “change is the only constant”, (Heraclitus, if I remember well). The CA should make this mechanism rigidly attached into the system and set it well beyond the reach of politicians, parties, “lobbyists” and other subversive elements. CA members must spare no dimension of “**rigidity**” that they may attach to this mechanism. Carve it in stone, I suggest, and worry less for the rest of your recommendations.

The CA managers inform that it is the first time in the history of the world that politicians “allowed” citizens a say on how to elect their representatives to their, the society’s parliament. It is rare to have such an opportunity in a party-o-cracy, where the ‘elected tyrant’ rules supreme. Indeed it is a unique opportunity which the CA should endeavour to preserve. That is to say, the CA must do everything possible, must leave no stone unturned in the hot chase of a mechanism to keep this window open, to prevent the politicians from closing it shut once again and keep it shut like they did in the past.

What I am about to suggest may work, as it is or after being modified through debate. Hopefully it will trigger other proposals for empowering the people to control the system through which we elect and appoint representatives in parliament.

I suggest provision on the ballot for the election of future citizens assemblies on electoral reform. Such citizens assemblies should consist, perhaps, of one or two people from each electoral riding, in the model of the current one. But there are variations to the theme, some of which are bound to be better than that. For example, setting the membership of the assembly at 20 members, elected in 20 of the 79 ridings, each group of ridings having a turn every fourth election. Another is to elect an assembly, of any number, from a province wide- list.

Future assemblies should be self-governed, and should be operated at arms length from parliament and the government. Administration support should be provided by the CEO, the Chief Electoral Officer, who would act as the Clerk of the CA, in parallel to the Clerk of the Legislature. The CA members will not be remunerated but will be reimbursed for their expenses.

The CEO would also operate on behalf of the CA an Electoral Reform Ideas Bank, as I describe in Article #5 An Ideas Bank for the CA, in Alcyone News website and Written submission # 0914 on the CA Website.

Once or twice a year, the citizens assembly members will meet to consider the ideas citizens have deposited at the Ideas Bank in the interim and to address other issues pertaining to elections.

The citizens assembly would recommend to parliament changes to the electoral system. But would be empowered to ask the electorate to consider through referenda to be piggybacked onto general elections any of their recommendations the parliament has not responded to.

Perhaps there are other ideas, such as instituting intermittent citizens assemblies to be elected, let us say, in conjunction with the first general election in each decade, that is to say the first election to be held after January the 1<sup>st</sup> of each 20x0 year (do not worry about 30x0). However, there is merit in keeping the challenge continuous and to making an annual reminder of the issue.

Fair winds and following seas,

Tom Varzeliotis.

PS: This is my 40<sup>th</sup> "written submission" to the CA website and the last prior to the August 13<sup>th</sup> deadline. I do not know whether I will make any more written submissions, however, I will keep on writing articles for the Alcyone News Website.

As in the past, I will be following the progress of the CA on Electoral reform and will provide in depth analysis of events and occurrences. And I will continue to write on all other facets of electoral systems. At the end of the day, the material will be assembled into a book chronicling the CA saga.

I pray be given reason to praise the CA.

All are welcome, and often at the Alcyone News site :  
[www.alcyonenews.ca](http://www.alcyonenews.ca)

Tom Vee