

July 4, 2004

Re: Mixed Pro-Rep

Electoral reform has long been overdue. Election after election we are told how democratic we are. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Over 64 countries have adopted some form of proportional representation because they found first past the post disenfranchised thousands of voters – they voted but were left with no one pleading their cause in the House of Commons or the legislature. And so it is in Canada.

To cite just two instances, in the 1992 election the Conservatives were left with two members, though they received over 20% of the popular vote entitling them to some 60 seats. In the 2001 BC election, the NDP was reduced to 2 seats although they received some 20% of the popular vote entitling them to some 15 or 16 seats.

If this led to good government one could live with it. But it doesn't. Some of our worst governments have been landslide majorities: John Diefenbaker in the 60s, the Liberals federally in 1992 and the Liberals provincially in BC in 2001.

On the other side, the often feared minority government produced some lasting positive results. The Pearson government federally and the Trudeau government also federally. Out of those two minority governments came legislation, establishing medicare, unemployment insurance, the Canadian flag, Petro-Can to name a few.

Again we are in a minority government situation. Again some parties get more seats than they deserve and some got fewer: Lib 135 (117), Con 99 (89), NDP 19 (46), Bloc 54 (37). The figures in brackets as the distribution of seats by popular vote. Can such a system really be fair? Certainly not in a democratic country.

Already there is great hope and optimism for this minority government. the wishes of the people will have to be addressed—and not the wishes of the party in power. Parliamentary committees will have some meaning and power. They will not be dominated by the majority party. Electoral reform is being talked about. The health care system will be addressed; child poverty will be high on the agenda after 10 years of foot dragging. The Kyoto accord will receive the attention it deserves. I am optimistic that this minority parliament will put to shame some of the huge majority governments in carrying out the will of the people. Minority governments are not necessarily a bad thing as opponents of Rep by Pop are trying to make us believe. And they can and do happen with first-past-the-post system.

One more point. Few people remember this but England formed a coalition government in the Second World War to prosecute the war – to make sure the best people were involved – even if they were in the opposition. If coalitions are turned to during the crisis of a war, then it should also work in peace time.

I would be very disappointed if the Citizens' Assembly does not recommend some form of proportional representation.

Submitted by:

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