Aug 23, 2004   **Brian Waines**
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To the Citizens Committee on Electoral Reform,

My name is Brian Waines and, as a BC. voter, I'm very pleased that you are looking at ways to improve our democratic system and to make it more proportionate and representative. I have a couple of ideas that I would like to share with you. If you are still reading at this point, it means that you haven't wadded up this paper and thrown it on the mountain of other unsolicited ideas. Good! Let me continue.

I've written my ideas for change in two steps, although it's second step that I really think would work well. Step one is a small change from our current system, however that may be the only kind of change that has any chance of being implemented.

Step 1:
This step involves no changes to the election process itself and therefore should be inexpensive to implement and not ruffle too many feathers. The change would be to have all the MLA's in the legislature vote on each proposed bill with the number of votes that they received on Election Day. For example, if the MLA from one riding was very well respected and received 50,000 votes on Election Day, his vote would carry twice the weight of the MLA from another riding who just squeaked into office with 25,000 votes. Of course this assumes that ridings are fairly distributed from a population point of view. In the rare event that one party has more elected MLA's, but their collective vote is less than the collective vote of the other parties elected MLA's, the second party would form the government. Please note that this is not the same as the popular vote that the parties receive and therefore this is not a true proportional system, but only the same sham of a proportional system that we currently enjoy.

Because of this, the likelihood of having a majority government would remain the same or increase, which would make this step more palatable to those who feel that governments need a majority to be secure and

effective.

The main benefit of this step is that it would increase the idea of a representational democracy. It would encourage people to get out and vote, even if they felt that their candidate was bound to win anyhow, in order to increase the weight of their MLA's vote. It would also increase the awareness that people who vote for a non-winning candidate are not really represented in our system.

Step 2
In this step, all riding sizes would be doubled (or quadrupled). Then the top 2 (or 4) candidates from each riding would be elected to represent that riding. This would result in the same number of MLA's as we currently have, but would increase the number of parties and different political views represented. Again, all MLA's would have a weighted vote, with those who receive more votes on election day having more power.

The most popular party would still have the most power as their MLA's would have received the most votes. However secondary and smaller parties would have a much greater chance of having members elected as the second (or third or fourth) MLA in these larger ridings, and therefore at least having a voice in parliament.

This benefit to this step is that it would approach a true proportional system, especially if a factor of four is used. Given the bipolar (or current uni-polar) nature of provincial politics and the fear that some people have of a proportional system, it may be better to start by merely doubling the size of the ridings and electing the top two candidates. This would still lead to a roughly proportional government.

In both of these steps, people would vote the way they always have. Each citizen would have one vote and there would be no complicated multi-vote system.

Is a proportional government a good thing?

Of course a proportional government will nearly always be a minority government, as we are a society of people holding different views. Thanks be to God. The benefit of a proportional government is that bills have to be good enough to win the support of some non-government MLA's in order to

pass. This should mean that only good bills are passed.

Unfortunately, many people are concerned that minority governments are unstable. They look at countries such as Italy, which have had trouble with strange coalitions and where very minor parties have held undue weight because the governing party needed their support. Minority governments do tend to lose office frequently due to non-confidence votes. Does this have to be? Is there any way to restructure government so that it can lose the occasional vote without forcing an election over the issue? Hopefully you have some answers to these questions, because I don't.

The idea of having a proportional government that reflects the views of the populace seems like such a great idea that these issues or potential difficulties should not derail it. Hopefully whatever proposal you come up with, whether similar to any of the steps outlined above or completely different will address these concerns. If it doesn't, I fear that the general public will not accept it and I would hate for this whole process to be for not. Better to have a small and acceptable step towards democracy, than a more ideal proposal, which is rejected.

Thank you for reading all of the above. I would be interested to know what you think, although I realise that you probably cannot respond to everyone. I would also like to know if you are planning any more public forums.

Thank you,

Brian Waines