

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

TERRACE PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 8 JUNE 2004
AT THE COAST INN OF THE WEST

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE PRESENTATION TO THE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON ELECTORAL REFORM. IT ATTEMPTS TO CAPTURE THE KEY ISSUES AND ARGUMENTS THAT WERE PRESENTED AND DISCUSSED DURING THE PUBLIC HEARING. IN SOME INSTANCES, THE PRESENTER HAS ALSO MADE A SUBMISSION TO THE ASSEMBLY AND THIS IS ACCESSIBLE VIA THE WEBSITE AT WWW.CITIZENSASSEMBLY.BC.CA BY CLICKING ON "GET INVOLVED". IF SUCH A SUBMISSION IS AVAILABLE, IT WILL BE NOTED AT THE END OF THIS REPORT.

Henry Dreger

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

A presentation in support of MMP.

KEY THEMES

Mr. Dreger argued that electoral reform is long overdue. The presenter discussed a number of problems with the current FPTP system including: its promotion of adversarial politics which is unnecessarily divisive; the undemocratic exclusion of minority parties in the legislature despite often winning 10-20% of the vote; the discouragement of voter participation as votes are perceived as wasted; its exclusivity; its inability to represent the diversity of BC's society; its encouragement of strategic voting, as our choices are limited to parties that have a chance of winning; and its production of lop-sided results which produces strong but not necessarily good government. Mr. Dreger argued that a healthy opposition is a crucial element of good government.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. Dreger advocated the introduction of MMP. Under this system, one-half to two-thirds of members would be elected in single member ridings, and the other one-third to one-half would be elected via a party list. According to Mr. Dreger, MMP offers a number of benefits over the current FPTP system including: the moderation of divisions in the electorate; the production of democratic results as votes would be fairly translated into seats in the legislature; increased voter participation as every vote would count; allowing the reflection of BC's diverse society; an increase in electoral choice as voters are able to cast their ballots sincerely, thereby encouraging participation; the production of more effective government as the legislature would be much more balanced in its representation of views; and the promotion of a more cooperative and consensus based political system as a result of the need to form coalition governments.

Mr. Dreger also noted the need for the proposed electoral system to enable independent candidates to run for political office, and therefore rejected the introduction of full PR. The presenter also recommended the introduction of a threshold in the range of 5-7% in order to prevent the representation of an unwieldy number of parties in the legislature.

Quote: I encourage the Citizens' Assembly to recommend a system that includes at least an element of proportionality; a system that encourages greater involvement by the electorate; and a system which gives people a greater sense that "they have been heard".

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Q Do you favour a list constructed by the party or one chosen by the voters?

A My first reaction would be one constructed by the party as it would encourage people to get involved in party politics and that is healthy.

Q Do you think that a closed list would promote party discipline?

A That remains to be seen. I don't think that would happen. The list members would be party oriented as they were appointed by the party. However, you must remember that you still see the party list when you vote, these are not people selected after the election.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Q Are you advocating the same number of MLAs with half representing local constituencies and half coming from party lists?

A I did not address the number of representatives. My feeling is that at least half the members should be elected as they are now and the other half or a somewhat smaller percentage should be elected using a party list. The percentage that should be elected via the party list is flexible. Including an element of proportionality via the use of a party list is one way to see parties' agendas reflected in the legislature.