

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

ABBOTSFORD PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 5 JUNE 2004
AT THE RAMADA INN AND CONFERENCE
CENTRE

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.

John H. Redekop

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

I shall be presenting the case for a mixed system, a simplification of the German system, one which combines single member districts with regional proportional representation. I shall argue that equality in representation must be balanced by other crucial considerations.

KEY THEMES

The presenter argued that the advantages often cited by proponents of PR may be incorrect. In particular, Dr. Redekop stated that the congruence of the wishes of party supporters and the votes cast by representatives in the legislature is no better under PR (with the exception of strongly ideological parties) than under the current single member plurality system. Furthermore, Dr. Redekop argued that parties surrender much of their unique emphases in order to form and reform coalitions in the legislature, a practice which neglects the views of voters. In addition, the presenter expressed the opinion that PR is associated with a loss of accountability, the loss of the local representative, and the production of a legislature fragmented along lines of class, ethnicity, race, religion, and region, potentially resulting in political stalemate. Dr. Redekop stated that electoral systems should be assessed according to six criteria: understandability; proportionality; accountability; accessibility (preferably to a local representative); workability; and stability of government.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Dr. Redekop advocated the introduction of a “blended” electoral system (a form of MMP). Under this system, the legislature would consist of 80 members, half of which would be elected in single member districts using the current plurality method, and the other half would be elected by proportional representation in five regional districts with eight members to be elected from each. The regional electoral districts would consist of Vancouver Island, Greater Vancouver, the Lower Mainland, the Interior Region, and the Northern Region. The regional members would be elected via closed party lists, while allowing for a list of independents or uncommitted candidates. Dual candidacies would not be permitted under this system. Dr. Redekop proposed the utilization of a double ballot, one for the local candidate and one for the party list. A party would have to clear a threshold of 8% in order to win a regional PR seat. The presenter argued that while this system presents a hurdle for new and small parties, this is advantageous as it prevents the proliferation of special interest, regional, or other fragment parties which tend to reinforce existing social cleavages. In any event, minor parties would fare better under this system than they do under the current plurality system. In Dr. Redekop’s opinion, political parties serve the public best when they aggregate interests, build consensus, and broker special interests to bridge differences. Under Dr. Redekop’s system, the number of seats would be fixed.

Dr. Redekop also advocated legislating for the introduction of semi-annual Regional Accountability Forums. Every six months an Accountability Forum would be held for each regional district, requiring the attendance of the 8 MLAs. Annually, the local MLAs for each region would also be required to participate in the Accountability Forums. The premier and all cabinet members would thus be required to attend and give account of themselves and of government policies and legislation. The Regional Accountability Forums would provide a major source of public feedback and input for all MLAs and especially for the government.

According to Dr. Redekop, this system contains a number of advantages over the current plurality system including the protection of local representation while giving minor parties a much better chance to gain representation. The system would also allow minor parties to gain representation without requiring them to come in first in any constituency and this would serve to reduce the perception of wasted votes. Further, the proposed system provides the benefits of a bicameral chamber without requiring that a second chamber be established; it protects clear lines of accountability (which would negate the categorization of members into first and second class representatives); allows the quick production of electoral results; and the virtual guarantee of the existence of a substantial legislative opposition.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Q Have you thought about the difficulties of having equal representation of each region given the disparities in population throughout the province?

A The northern region would contain about two-thirds of the geography of the province. One of the problems of our system is the there is a lot of alienation, so I'm saying that half of the seats should be represented with some leeway. It would be like creating a bicameral system as each region would be represented equally.

Q What is the rationale of having two votes; couldn't it be simplified by using the one vote?

A You could go that way, but there are numerous advantages in going with the system I am proposing. If the person can vote for a preferred individual and a preferred party you have a connection on both sides of the system.

Q Why do you advocate such a high threshold of 8%?

A To prevent the situation in places such as Indonesia. But it is only 8% in a district; it is nowhere near as high as the requirement at the moment. According to my calculations, the NDP would have got 14 seats in the last election under this formula.

Q Would you prefer an open or closed list?

A My personal preference is for an open list, but I don't support that in practice. It is very confusing for voters. Closed lists are much more simplistic. I prefer a closed list where the party draws up the list. People work their way up the list as they get known, and the results can be calculated the evening of the election.

Q How would your proposal increase accountability?

A The 8 members elected from the regional electoral list, they would have to meet as a group, and they would have to answer to their decisions on policy. It would decrease voter alienation and accommodate the grievances of less populated regions.