

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

SMITHERS PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 7 JUNE 2004
AT THE HUDSON BAY LODGE

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.

Roger Benham

Skeena Green Party

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

Minor political parties representing less than 10% of the electorate are granted no representation in the BC legislature which disenfranchises these voters. I support a proportional representation system of voting.

KEY THEMES

Mr. Benham discussed his experience as a candidate in federal, provincial, and municipal elections and expressed concern at what he termed ‘the obvious tilting of the “level playing field”’. The presenter argued that party financing by corporations and/or large unions is largely responsible for this unequal state of affairs. Mr. Benham stated that parties, groups, and individuals should gain representation in the legislature commensurate to the support that they receive in the electorate. The presenter argued that the current system is not only shutting out minor parties such as the Greens, but also aboriginals as represented by the All Nations Party, and the Christian Heritage Party, among others. Mr. Benham claimed that the current system is unrepresentative of the diversity of BC which is poignantly reflected in the under-representation of women in the legislature. The presenter also addressed the problems of wasted votes, exaggerated majorities, and wrong winners that occur under FPTP. Mr. Benham stated the need to include minority viewpoints in parliament as a means of combating voter apathy as all groups feel represented. The presenter also discussed the critical need for politicians to address environmental issues such as global warming. Mr. Benham argued that consideration of such issues is currently neglected as a result of our “winner-take-all” electoral system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. Benham recommended the introduction of a system of proportional representation which ensures that the views of 1/75th of the electorate are represented. The presenter also supported the inclusion of flexible political groupings on the basis of the belief that viewpoints deserve to be represented and these do not necessarily belong to political parties.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

- Q You are advocating multi-member ridings; can you explain how that might work in the North?
- A I have not gone into the precise details of MMP, but in Ireland they have a system where you vote

for individuals and if this individual doesn't get elected then your vote is passed on to someone else. My own party favours MMP with a party list. There are things to be said for party lists as used in New Zealand as they have enhanced the representation of women. In addition, because parties do want voters from all areas they tend to select candidates from all areas. In Germany the Green Party have around 10 to 12 members in parliament and the one member who was outright elected was the thorn in the side of the party, and all the other members were elected from the list, so the candidate that they might not like was the one that they needed to win the other seats.