

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.

Walter Hromatka

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

A presentation in support of proportional representation.

KEY THEMES

Mr. Hromatka discussed the dismal voter turnout of 61% in BC at the federal election of 2000. The presenter went on to note the disproportional translation of votes into seats in this election. According to Mr. Hromatka, the outcome did not mirror the will of the people but instead was the result of an outdated electoral system. Instead of producing a minority government, the election produced a majority for the Liberals. Mr. Hromatka argued that FPTP makes a mockery of democracy. The presenter expressed the opinion that the system manages to survive as a result of the “leaking roof syndrome”, that is you don’t need to fix it when it’s dry and you can’t fix it when it’s wet. Mr. Hromatka stated that under PR the federal elections of 1997, 1993, and 1988 would also have produced minority governments which would have promoted the practice of democracy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. Hromatka advocated the introduction of proportional representation as it enables the reflection of the political complexity of society better than any other process. Under such a system, citizens would cast their ballots for parties and the parties would receive seats in the legislature commensurate to their support in the electorate. The party would construct the list of candidates and voters would have to be confident that the party will send those candidates that they would have chosen themselves.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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| Q | Would the parties list the candidates in the riding? |
| A | I am familiar with Austria, and they produce a list before the election and there are enough candidates on it to fill the entire House of Representatives. But this is not the only way to go about it and other proportional systems could achieve the same ends. |

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Q I have heard a lot of concern about voter apathy and the accountability of politicians; we live in a province with far-flung communities and we aren't small like Austria, we are a dispersed population, I'm wondering whether PR would compromise the system of local accountability?

A There simply isn't any local accountability under this system of PR, to tell you the truth. The party looks after that. It is not without shortcomings, there is no perfect system but to me this looks like the best system but I do not claim that it is the only system. I will accept what the Assembly recommends as long as it is better than what we have.

Q Do you think that minority governments in Israel and Italy work differently because the personality of their populations is different?

A That is to some degree true, especially in Israel as a result of the differing origins of the Jewish population. In both systems there are too many splinter parties and that makes PR unworkable.

Q I look to vote for a person that I respect and trust and I don't see that happening when a party just picks a list. How do you see this concern being addressed?

A You have a very good point. If there was a system that could combine the idea of voting for a given person with PR then that would be pretty close to an ideal. Until then I would be satisfied with strict PR as it is practiced in other countries where it works well.