

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.

Ron Toews

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

I wish to argue the merits of a single, preferential ballot system.

KEY THEMES

Mr. Toews discussed the merits of majoritarian systems, particularly the alternative vote, and the current FPTP system. The presenter stated that both these systems are desirable as they enable the continuation of our current system of voting for an individual representative from a specific geographic area. Mr. Toews spoke against the various forms of proportional representation systems. In particular, Mr. Toews expressed the opinion that while under the current FPTP system those running for office make their deals *before* the election; under PR elected representatives make their deals *after* the election. According to Mr. Toews, under majority and plurality system there exist clear lines of accountability between MLAs and constituents while PR systems tend to produce governments comprised of a “cocktail of ideologies”. Mr. Toews argued that PR can give minor parties power in the legislature disproportionate to their support in the electorate. While Mr. Toews acknowledged that FPTP may produce ideological swings in government, he viewed this reality as preferable to the inertia of proportional representation systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. Toews recommended the introduction of the alternative vote system in order to take the rough edge off of FPTP and make voters feel as though their votes count even if their most preferred candidate is not elected. Furthermore, Mr. Toews argued that a majoritarian system would preclude a party that has less than majority support from wielding power in the legislature greatly disproportional to that party’s support in the electorate.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Q Do you feel that our elected representatives are responsive to constituents or do you feel that they are hampered by having to tow party lines?

A Both. Clearly we’re not dealing here with the issue of party discipline. We have had numerous members here that have been very responsive to the constituency, but there are limits. Perhaps there shouldn’t be parties, but I tend to think that parties win out in the end. But certainly, compared to

someone elected from a party list who probably comes from Vancouver and was picked because they fit a certain profile, I would much rather have my local member, even though I do not share their political persuasion, than deal with a person of my own ideology who was picked because they are a member of a party list.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Q Are you in favour of having minority parties represented?

A Everybody is represented. Everybody's vote needs to be courted. Our system right now tends to co-opt votes. In a PR system the minor parties still have to be co-opted, they are not governing, they still have to make a deal. Am I in favour of specific representation? No. I think that Canadians should vote for Canadians and be represented by Canadians. BC has produced the first female premier, very briefly, and this riding has an aboriginal gentleman running for the Liberal Party in this riding; who would have thought that twenty years ago? So I'm not in favour of specific representation.

Q You talked about voter apathy; how do you like the Australian system where you are forced to vote?

A I don't know. Is Australia a better run country than Canada? Right now economically they aren't. I think that people should vote if they please and not vote if they please. I like the Russian system where they have "none of the above".