

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

FORT ST JOHN PUBLIC HEARING DATED
12 MAY 2004 AT THE QUALITY INN
NORTHERN GRAND

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.

Ken Tontsch

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

My concern is about balancing the benefits of a winner take all system of voting that we currently have, versus a proportional method of representation.

KEY THEMES

Ken Tontsch argued that although there are considerable problems with the current system, as witnessed in the distortion of the provincial electoral outcomes in 1996 and 2001, that proportional representation also involves certain dangers. In particular, he described the difficulty of forming a single-party majority government under a PR electoral system. Mr Tontsch argued that a majority government is preferable to a coalition government because the government has a clear mandate and the strength in the legislature to carry this out. Voters are then able to hold the government accountable for its performance at the next election. In contrast, he argued that coalition governments involve parties who have condemned each other during an election campaign, and who have actively solicited votes by emphasizing their differences from each other, forming a coalition following the election. Mr Tontsch also pointed to the examples of pre-World War Two Italy and the German Weimar Republic to demonstrate that PR can lead to the rise of extreme parties.

Quote: "A majority government has been given a mandate and can be held accountable at the next election."

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

There were three members of the panel who sought clarification on elements of the presentation.

Q	Can you explain how it's a bad thing for people to come to a consensus and agree to work together?
A	Well, can you explain why that doesn't work under the current system?
	(Response from panel member) At the moment, one party has so much power that there's no need for them to negotiate.
Q	What don't you like about coalition governments?
A	I think you should ask the people of Italy! Since the Second World War they've had more than fifty coalition governments. I think that people working together is a fantastic idea but I don't think that will happen with PR. I think minority governments

	suffer more problems than majority governments.
Q	Do you think PR is a better system than what we have right now?
	I would like to see the Green Party represented in the legislature, and I would like to see more than two people in the opposition. So I can see the potential for a mixed system where there are maybe 10-15 seats elected using PR to ensure that there is some kind of representation. But I don't think that a system using entirely PR is appropriate for BC. The most important thing for a government is that people can get things done.
Q	How much emphasis do you think we should place on having an identifiable local member?
A	I think it's very important.
Q	Our mandate says have to keep the same number of seats, so if we introduced a mixed system we would have to enlarge the size of the ridings, including this riding which is already bigger than England
A	I realize that you're restricted now, but I think that in future it could be possible to add more seats.
Q	If you're concerned about stability, don't you think that the extreme policy swings we have under the current system are unstable?
A	I think we have to give voters credit, and if they've made up their minds on how they want to vote then they have to recognize that there will be policy consequences.

Comment from panel: There were no comments from the panel.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Following this presentation a member of the audience had a question.

Q	I don't agree that PR is more dangerous than majority governments. There are no checks on majority government, for the term of their mandate they can do as they please.
A	Yes, you're right, they have the power to pass legislation as they please. But there is a check: the Lieutenant-Governor can refuse to

	pass a piece of legislation. Another more real and valid check is the judicial branch, which restrains government from passing dictatorial legislation. For me, the most important aspect of government is for them to say this is what we promised to do, and then to be able to do that during their term. Then voters at next election can evaluate the government. If they haven't kept their promises, they can't blame their coalition partner.
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Comment: There were no comments from the audience.

SUBMISSION: NO