

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

KELOWNA PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 24 JUNE 2004
AT THE COAST CAPRI HOTEL

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.

Mark Haley

Central Okanagan Club, Communist Party of Canada

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

A presentation in favour of proportional representation to achieve a more democratic electoral process.

KEY THEMES

Mr. Haley argued that as a result of living under an economic system that becomes more and more unequal every day our democracy is in tatters. According to the presenter, electoral reform under the rule of capital is like deciding which color the trim should be while the gigantic hole in the roof of the house goes unnoticed. Nonetheless, Mr. Haley argued that some improvements may be made to the current system. The presenter stated that the basic criteria for electoral reform are whether it enhances people's power, increases the engagement of diverse people in the political process, and broadens the spectrum of political opinion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. Haley advocated the introduction of proportional representation, specifically MMP. The presenter argued that FPTP seriously distorts voter preferences leading to wrong winners and exaggerated majorities. According to Mr. Haley, PR values each and every vote and would therefore reengage citizens, particularly the youth. Under the system proposed by Mr. Haley, 50 members would be elected from local constituencies and 50 MLAs would be elected via party lists on the basis of the total votes cast province wide. This would give any party with at least 2% of the popular vote at least one member in the legislature. Thus, the introduction of MMP would prevent voters feeling as if their votes are wasted as voting for minor parties may in fact lead to their election and ultimately the representation of a more diverse range of voices in the legislature. The presenter argued that this would lead fewer voters to feel politically disenfranchised, thereby potentially increasing voter turnout. Mr. Haley made a number of additional recommendations including: lowering the voter age to 16 in order to enfranchise more people; scrapping the permanent voters list and returning to a new enumeration of voters for each election; capping campaign spending to temper the influence of money in our democracy; reducing the salary of MPs to bring them into line with that of an average full-time worker; and the expansion of mandatory media access for all candidates and parties.

Quote: Under capitalism, electoral reform will only provide a small opening for democracy.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Q Did you suggest lowering the voting age to 16 on the basis of any particular study?

A The fact is that younger people are involved economically more than ever before. A lot of them are working and “no taxation without representation”. I think we should give them a chance and enfranchise the people.