

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

PORT ALBERNI PUBLIC HEARING DATED
9 JUNE 2004 AT HANSEN HALL

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.

Glenn Cooper

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

Basically I see dangers in too many single issue parties, which are not prepared to balance and consider all the options and issues that need to be balanced in actually running a coherent provincial government. Their one of a kind issues need airing fully in the press and publicly, but not skewing the immensely difficult task of actually governing and taking the full consequences for the balance achieved.

KEY THEMES

Glenn Cooper described his experience of working in Czechoslovakia at the end of the Communist regime, as the country introduced a new democratic system and the evolution of the party system as parties learned how to operate in a democracy, recognizing the need for broad parties with comprehensive platforms rather than single issue parties. He expressed a number of concerns about the prospect of coalition governments under a proportional representation electoral system. Mr Cooper argued that unstable coalition governments may change rapidly with no continuity of responsibility, or that minority groups may wield undue influence with the capacity to derail government plans at any time. He argued that Canada will soon be facing a number of serious and unfamiliar problems due to declining oil resources and that a coalition government would not be capable to making effective decisions in crisis situations.

Mr Cooper acknowledged the need for new voices in the legislature and therefore proposed a mixed system of proportional representation, with a maximum of 20 per cent of seats in the legislature being allocated proportionally. He also suggested reforming the party registration requirements so that a new party would need to collect 10,000 signatures and lodge a refundable deposit of \$2 million in order to register as a political party. Mr Cooper explained that such a policy is necessary to limit single issue parties, or parties based on the personal ambition of an individual. He proposed that thresholds be set for eligibility for the proportionally allocated seats, with a party winning 7 per cent of the vote across the province qualifying for one seat, 10 per cent qualifying for two seats, and 13 or 14 per cent winning three seats. Mr Cooper advised that parties should only be able to qualify for a maximum of four of the proportionally allocated seats. These seats should not be filled using party lists but by candidates who had unsuccessfully run for election in the constituencies according to the proportion of votes that the candidate won in the constituency. Mr Cooper explained that this would result in some constituencies effectively having two representatives in the legislature representing different parties.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Glenn Cooper recommended a mixed member proportional electoral system, with a maximum of twenty per cent of seats being allocated proportionally.

Quote: "To avoid the temptations for single issue groups to form parties, and to elevate their originators into the legislature, not to govern, but to becke, I suggest the bar be set reasonably high for entry to into the legislature."

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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

Q	How would you implement the proportional seats?
A	I would still keep the constituencies, but the size of the constituencies would have to change to accommodate the twenty per cent of the seats that are allocated proportionally. If we were to have fewer constituencies, I'm not sure how you'd do that geographically but I'm certain that the proportionality is also important.
Q	Could you expand on your suggestion that 7 per cent of the vote should entitle a party to one seat and 10 per cent should give parties two seats? How did you come up with those numbers?
A	The mathematics can be changed. My main concern was to avoid single issue parties, for example pro-abortion or anti-abortion, from winning too many seats. They could have one or two seats. Also, this would avoid parties that are formed on a whim to promote the latest ideas because my proposal would require them to get 10,000 signatures and to pay a deposit.
Q	My understanding is that you're proposing a four per cent threshold. How low would you go?
A	I wouldn't go below three per cent.

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

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Following this presentation quite a few members of the audience had questions.

Q	Mr Cooper in our last election here in BC we all know what happened. Could you tell us what the numbers would look like under your system?
A	I would have to do an analysis, but I would need to know the figures across the province to answer your question. I'm guessing that the NDP would have received more seats

	but I don't want to hazard a guess
Q	I believe that the Liberals had 52 per cent, the NDP 38 per cent and the Greens had 12 per cent.
A	Then there would have been three Green Party members.
Q	If there was 12 per cent for the Green Party, how do you decide who goes to the legislature?
A	My suggestion is that that decision wouldn't be made by the Green Party hierarchy, but instead you would look at the election results in all the constituencies and the top three Green People in the constituencies would be selected.

Comment: “I'd like to make an observation that there is perhaps there is only one person in the room who is under twenty. So most of us here won't be using a new system for very long! I suggest that there be a review, perhaps after ten years, so that younger voters can assess whether the system is working for them.”

SUBMISSION: YES

SUBMISSION ID# TO FOLLOW