SUBMISSION
to
THE BRITISH COLUMBIA CITIZEN'S ASSEMBLY

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PROPOSITION

Though it's easy to get agreement that "stable government" is a good thing, there are interpretations of this seemingly straightforward term that can mislead us into incorrectly favoring some electoral systems over others.

I propose that the most important notion to be considered under the term "stable government" is that it's what governments DO that is important, not the actual individuals and parties that form the government. More forcefully put, we shouldn't care which faces or logos are in the legislature per se; rather, we should look for ways to make it more likely that whatever group of individuals and parties gets into the legislature, it will enact the policies that we as citizens want them to enact. While it's true that we tend to have faith in certain individuals and perhaps parties, it's the policies that are the important thing. This leads to the conclusion that

It's not government that should be stable, but *governance*.

I further propose that "stable", if taken to mean "static", or "mainstream" can be a misleading and even dangerous thing. I propose that we should look for ways to make it more likely that the legislature's governance responds to changes and nuances in what citizens tell their representatives they want, through the only voice they really have – the votes they cast at election time. This leads to the conclusion that

By stability we mean *representative responsiveness*.

OBSERVATIONS

Under the current first-past-the-post system, there is a wealth of evidence that majority governments tend to pursue partisan, party-based agendas for the first part of their mandate, and shift to whatever will get the party elected in the latter part of their term. The losing parties get to complain about this, but could be expected do the same thing if they were elected in a majority position. It's the electoral system that forces this behavior.

This seems to be particularly true of British Columbia, with its highly polarized political scene, and leads to seemingly inevitable swings from one polarized agenda to the opposite on a regular basis. This is harmful to province building, harmful to our communities, harmful to our economy, and drives citizens away from participation in the democratic process.

Note that minority/coalition governments, while not favored by parties and tunnel-visioned individuals, are only bad things if the parties are motivated by gaining a majority at the next election (which is always true for first-past-the-post systems). In this case, most of their energy is directed toward showing their minority partners to be uncooperative and worse.

As a historical note, though Italy has had an average or more than one minority government per year since World War II, the *policies* of this endless string of governments have been remarkably stable in this period (more than we can say for BC and Canada!). If you remember that governance, not government, is what matters, the electoral system practiced by the Italians is actually rather successful.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

If what we mean by "stable government" is actually "representative, responsive governance", then

The Citizen's Assembly must favor those electoral systems that put into the voters' hands the most effective means to cause whatever group gets into the legislature to respond to the will of the people as expressed in their voting patterns.

Further,

The Citizen's Assembly must not be dissuaded by the argument that a given electoral system tends to produce more minority/coalition governments than another.