

Presentation to

Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform

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Introduction

Democracies are based upon the principle of representative government. That is the citizens select representatives, through periodic elections, to “represent” us and manage those affairs that we collectively consider so important that the individual citizens cannot be left to manage themselves.

Democratic governments are based upon a number of principles, only a few of which are important in this discussion:

- “One person one vote” – that is, all citizens are equal and each of our votes should carry equal weight in selecting our representatives;
- “All citizens have the right to vote unless that right has been expressly prohibited by the collective will of the people expressed through government legislation” – we for example set a minimum age at which people earn the right to vote

Democracies have generally organized themselves into three branches:

- The Executive Branch – responsible for administration of government. Headed by a leader (Premier) and various department heads (Ministers);
- The Legislative Branch – responsible for making, repealing and amending the laws. Composed of our representatives (Members of the Legislative Assembly);
- The Judicial Branch – responsible for enforcing the laws.

For our purposes here we are only concerned with the Executive Branch and the Legislative Branch.

The Canadian Parliamentary system of government has evolved from the British Westminster system. Through our constitution various powers have been delegated to the Federal Government and others to the Provincial Governments.

The system works, however it does have flaws and can be improved.

This paper discusses three significant problems with the current system of government and proposes solutions to each.

This paper does not attempt to address all of the changes which would be required if all recommendations were to be implemented. Rather it sets out broad policies, which would need to be clarified and fleshed out before implementation.

Concentration of Power

Our current system of government combines the Executive Branch and the Legislative Branch.

Power rests with the Premier, who:

- Appoints all Ministers;
- Appoints all Parliamentary Secretaries;
- Appoints all Committee Chairs
- Determines the Legislative timetable

As a result, ordinary members, who should be representing their constituencies and the citizens of these constituencies to Victoria, often become Victoria's representatives to the constituencies.

Some democracies have addressed this problem by directly electing the head of government (Premier), who then, subject to legislative approvals, appoints the required department heads (Ministers).

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Premier of the Province be directly elected by a vote of all eligible citizens within the Province.

This election for the Premier would take place at the same time and place as the election of Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Disenfranchisement

In every election there are a significant number of members who are elected by less than a majority of the votes cast in any particular riding. We, the electors, end up with members who do not truly represent us.

Our First-Past-the-Post system of election almost guarantees that where more than two candidates present themselves for election, this will occur.

In the last three elections the following number of seats were won with less than 50% of the vote:

- 2001 – 19 of 77 seats (24.7%)
- 1996 – 50 of 75 seats (66.7%)
- 1991 – 55 of 75 seats (73.3%)

In fact some winning percentages were very low. The lowest winning percentages in each of the last three elections were:

- 2110 – 37.04%
- 1996 – 31.89%
- 1991 – 33.97%

One proposal for addressing the problem of disenfranchisement is proportional representation. A variety of specific models of proportional representation are in existence in various jurisdictions today. In general, proportional representation awards additional seats, in addition to those they may have won through election, to political parties based upon their proportion of the popular vote.

The significant problem I see with proportional representation is that they all provide for representatives who owe their allegiance to the party rather than to the citizens. They receive their seats in the legislature due to their position in their particular political party rather than to the citizens of a riding.

Proportional representation flies in the face of representative government. I believe that representative government means a member who represents the people of the riding – not a philosophy. If we provide for representation in the legislative assembly on the basis of a political philosophy rather than the choice of the electorate we ignore the entire basis of representative government.

After every election we hear complaints from political parties that the number of seats they received in the election does not correspond to the percentage of the popular vote they received in the election. The point that is not mentioned, is that we do not elect our representatives on the basis of total provincial popular vote but on the basis of votes in each particular riding. Our ridings vary greatly in size, both geographically and in population. In addition to this variation in size the percentage of eligible electors who choose to exercise their franchises can and does vary greatly from riding to riding. Any attempt to compare total provincial popular vote to seats won ignore these facts and cannot be taken seriously.

For these reasons I reject all forms of proportional representation.

Another proposal for addressing the problem of disenfranchisement is run-off elections. Using this model, where no candidate receives a clear majority (50% of the votes cast plus 1), a second election is held some time later, usually between the top two candidates.

Run-off elections present three problems.

Firstly, there is a very real possibility of strategic voting – “Party A already has too many seats, I had better vote for the candidate from Party B, even though I prefer the candidate from Party A.”

Secondly, they significantly increase the cost of holding elections by requiring a second election in a number of ridings.

Thirdly, there is a delay in the election results while the run-off elections are held. With the possibility of recounts and judicial recounts being held after the initial election, and then again after the run-off election, it could be many months before a final determination is made in a number of ridings.

A Preferential Ballot or Transferable Vote system combines the best of our present First-Past-the-Post system with the best of a run-off election.

- It ensures that all elected members represent a riding;
- It ensures that no citizen's vote is discarded. "While I may not have got my first choice, I did get my second or third."

Recommendation

It is recommended that a Preferential Balloting system be adopted for the election of the Premier and all Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Each elector would number his or her choices in order from one up to and including the total number of candidates.

No elector would be required to vote for more than one candidate, but understands that the ballot may be discarded if the first choice is not elected.

Ballots would be counted firstly by considering only all first choices marked by the electors.

If any candidate receives a clear majority (50% plus 1 of all ballots cast) that candidate is declared elected and the election is over.

If no candidate receives a clear majority of the ballots cast, the candidate receiving the least number of votes is dropped and that candidate's ballots are re-distributed based upon the electors' second choices. The ballots are recounted.

The process of dropping the candidate with the least number of votes continues until such time as one of the remaining candidates receives a clear majority of the votes cast and that candidate is declared elected.

Regional Disparity

British Columbia is a huge, sparsely populated land-mass. Approximately two-thirds of all citizens reside in the south-west corner of the province. Those of us who live outside this region truly believe that we "live beyond Hope".

There are two distinct economies – urban and rural – in the province.

MLA's from outside the south-west corner of the province have sprawling, ridings which are difficult to travel and represent properly. MLA's from the urban core on the other hand can often walk across their ridings.

Attempts have been made to recognize the difficulty of properly representing rural ridings by constructing them so that each rural riding represents fewer electors than do the urban ridings. Citizens living in urban ridings complain that their votes do not carry the same weight as those living within rural ridings.

Although it does not show an exact difference in the population of ridings as I do not have information on the percentage of eligible voters who actually voted in

each riding or the number of spoiled votes in each riding, a look at the number of valid votes cast in each riding gives an indication of the disparity in size:

Election	Maximum Valid Votes	Minimum Valid Votes
2110	28,376	9,054
1996	33,857	10,875
1991	28,350	10,510

It would be impossible to attempt to satisfy both the urban demand for a more equal number of eligible voters per riding and the rural demand for adequate representation in one elected chamber.

Recommendation

It is recommended that an elected Senate be created as part of the Government of British Columbia.

It is recommended that the Province be divided into Senatorial ridings based upon the present boundaries of the Provincial Regional Districts and that each Senatorial riding elect a Senator in the same manner and at the same time as elections are held for Premier and for the Members of the Legislative Assembly.

It is recommended that the number of ridings for Member of the Legislative Assembly be reduced to 50 and that the boundaries of these ridings be drawn so that no riding varies more than 10%, either over or under, from the average number of electors per riding.

It is recommended that the Senate have powers and authority similar to the appointed Federal Senate.

Appendices

Appendix I – Simulation of the 2001 Election using a Preferential Balloting or Transferable Vote System

I have prepared and attached a simulation of what might have happened had a Preferential Ballot system have been in place for the 2001 election.

Considerable caution must be used when considering the attached simulation for the following reasons:

- Not all electors will have completed their ballots fully. That is some electors will vote for only one or two candidates in order and their ballots might not be counted in the final outcome;
- Not all electors will transfer their votes in the manner I have chosen. Some will have switched between “right leaning” candidates and “left leaning” candidates based upon their evaluation of the individual candidates rather than upon the philosophical position of the parties.

For the purposes of this exercise, I have assumed that all electors will fall into one of two philosophical camps, which for convenience I have labelled “right leaning” and “left leaning”.

I have further assumed that if an elector’s first choice of candidate falls off the ballot as various counts take place, that elector’s next choice will be for the leading candidate in the same philosophical camp.

Candidates for election in the 2001 election declared themselves as representatives of the following political parties:

- All Nations Party of British Columbia (ANC)
- B.C. Action Party (BCAP)
- British Columbia Citizens Alliance Now (BCCA)
- British Columbia Marijuana Party (BCM)
- British Columbia Conservative Party (CP)
- British Columbia Liberal Party (LIB)
- British Columbia Patriot Party (BCPA)
- British Columbia Social Credit Party (SC)
- The Central Party (CENT)
- Citizen’s Commonwealth Federation (CFED)
- Communist Party of BC (COMM)
- Council of British Columbians (COBC)
- The Freedom Party of British Columbia (FREE)
- Green Party Political Association of British Columbia (GP)
- New Democratic Party of B.C. (NDP)
- Party of Citizens Who Have Decided To Think For Themselves And Be Their Own Politicians (POC)
- People’s Front (PF)
- Reform Party of British Columbia (RP)
- Unity Party of British Columbia (UPBC)
- Western Reform (WR)

In addition to the above parties some candidates declared themselves to be either independent (IND) or to have no political affiliation (NA).

In determining where to move an elector's vote when the elector's choice of candidate drops off the ballot, I have grouped parties as follows:

"Right leaning":

- British Columbia Conservative Party
- British Columbia Liberal Party
- British Columbia Patriot Party
- British Columbia Social Credit Party
- Reform Party of British Columbia
- Unity Party of British Columbia
- Western Reform

"Left leaning":

- All Nations Party of British Columbia
- British Columbia Marijuana Party
- Communist Party of BC
- Green Party Political Association of British Columbia
- New Democratic Party of B.C.
- People's Front

The following parties did not fit conveniently within either a "right leaning" or a "left leaning" camp. When dropping their candidates from a ballot, they have been equally split between "right leaning" and "left leaning":

- B.C. Action Party
- British Columbia Citizens Alliance Now
- The Central Party
- Citizen's Commonwealth Federation
- Council of British Columbians
- The Freedom Party of British Columbia
- Party of Citizens Who Have Decided To Think For Themselves And Be Their Own Politicians
- Independent
- No Affiliation

Source: Elections BC <http://www.elections.bc.ca>

A comparison of the actual results of the 2001 election and an election which had taken place using the method outlined above is:

Party	Actual Seats	Simulated Seats
British Columbia Liberal Party	77	68
New Democratic Party of B.C.	2	11

Appendix II – Simulation of the 1996 Election using a Preferential Balloting or Transferable Vote System

I have prepared and attached a simulation of what might have happened had a Preferential Ballot system have been in place for the 1996 election.

Considerable caution must be used when considering the attached simulation for the following reasons:

- Not all electors will have completed their ballots fully. That is some electors will vote for only one or two candidates in order and their ballots might not be counted in the final outcome;
- Not all electors will transfer their votes in the manner I have chosen. Some will have switched between “right leaning” candidates and “left leaning” candidates based upon their evaluation of the individual candidates rather than upon the philosophical position of the parties.

For the purposes of this exercise, I have assumed that all electors will fall into one of two philosophical camps, which for convenience I have labelled “right leaning” and “left leaning”.

I have further assumed that if an elector’s first choice of candidate falls off the ballot as various counts take place, that elector’s next choice will be for the leading candidate in the same philosophical camp.

Candidates for election in the 1996 election declared themselves as representatives of the following political parties:

- British Columbia Liberal Party (LIB)
- British Columbia Libertarian Party (LBN)
- British Columbia Social Credit Party (SC)
- Common Sense, Community, Family (CCF)
- Communist Party of British Columbia (COMM)
- The Family Coalition Party of British Columbia (FCP)
- Green Party Political Association of British Columbia (GP)
- Natural Law Party (NLP)
- New Democratic Party of B.C. (NDP)
- Progressive Conservative Party of British Columbia (CP)

- Progressive Democratic Alliance (PDA)
- Reform Party of British Columbia (RP)
- Western Canada Concept Party of B.C. (WCC)

In addition to the above parties some candidates declared themselves to be either independent (IND) or to have no political affiliation (NA).

In determining where to move an elector's vote when the elector's choice of candidate drops off the ballot, I have grouped parties as follows:

“Right leaning”:

- British Columbia Liberal Party
- British Columbia Social Credit Party
- Reform Party of British Columbia
- The Family Coalition Party of British Columbia
- Progressive Conservative Party of British Columbia
- Western Canada Concept Party of B.C.

“Left leaning”:

- Communist Party of BC
- Green Party Political Association of British Columbia
- Natural Law Party
- New Democratic Party of B.C.

The following parties did not fit conveniently within either a “right leaning” or a “left leaning” camp. When dropping their candidates from a ballot, they have been equally split between “right leaning” and “left leaning”:

- British Columbia Libertarian Party
- Common Sense, Community, Family Party
- Progressive Democratic Alliance
- Independent
- No Affiliation

Source: Elections BC <http://www.elections.bc.ca>

A comparison of the actual results of the 1996 election and an election which had taken place using the method outlined above is:

Party	Actual Seats	Simulated Seats
British Columbia Liberal Party	33	46
New Democratic Party of B.C.	39	26
Reform Party of British Columbia	2	2
Progressive Democratic Alliance	1	1

Appendix III – Simulation of the 1991 Election using a Preferential Balloting or Transferable Vote System

I have prepared and attached a simulation of what might have happened had a Preferential Ballot system have been in place for the 1991 election.

Considerable caution must be used when considering the attached simulation for the following reasons:

- Not all electors will have completed their ballots fully. That is some electors will vote for only one or two candidates in order and their ballots might not be counted in the final outcome;
- Not all electors will transfer their votes in the manner I have chosen. Some will have switched between “right leaning” candidates and “left leaning” candidates based upon their evaluation of the individual candidates rather than upon the philosophical position of the parties.

For the purposes of this exercise, I have assumed that all electors will fall into one of two philosophical camps, which for convenience I have labelled “right leaning” and “left leaning”.

I have further assumed that if an elector’s first choice of candidate falls off the ballot as various counts take place, that elector’s next choice will be for the leading candidate in the same philosophical camp.

Candidates for election in the 1996 election declared themselves as representatives of the following political parties:

- B. C. Conservative Party (CP)
- B. C. Liberal Party (LIB)
- Communist League (CL)
- Family Coalition Party (FCP)
- Green Go (Green Wing/Rhino) (GG)
- Green Party of British Columbia (GP)
- The Human Race Party (HRP)
- Interdependence Party (IP)
- Libertarian (LBN)

- New Democrat (NDP)
- Reform Party of B. C. (RP)
- Social Credit (SC)
- Western Canada Concept Party of B.C. (WCC)

In addition to the above parties some candidates declared themselves to be independent (IND).

In determining where to move an elector's vote when the elector's choice of candidate drops off the ballot, I have grouped parties as follows:

“Right leaning”:

- B.C. Conservative Party
- B.C. Liberal Party
- Family Coalition Party
- Reform Party of B.C.
- Social Credit
- Western Canada Concept

“Left leaning”:

- Communist League
- Green Go (Green Wing/Rhino)
- Green Party of British Columbia
- Human Race Party
- Interdependence Party
- Libertarian
- New Democrat

The following parties did not fit conveniently within either a “right leaning” or a “left leaning” camp. When dropping their candidates from a ballot, they have been equally split between “right leaning” and “left leaning”:

- Independent

Source: Elections BC <http://www.elections.bc.ca>

A comparison of the actual results of the 1991 election and an election which had taken place using the method outlined above is:

Party	Actual Seats	Simulated Seats
B.C. Liberal Party	17	43
New Democratic	51	16
Social Credit	7	15

