

Are We Fixing The Problem The Right Way?

My presentation to the Citizens' Assembly is in the following five parts:

Part one asks what problem are we trying to fix?

Part two gives three examples of what is not working;

Part three provides solutions;

Part four looks into the future; and

Part five closes with four recommendations.

Part one: What problem are we trying to fix?

First, we need to understand what our democracy is. It is based on the British parliamentary model known as the Westminster system of responsible government. This means that the executive, referring to the premier and cabinet ministers, is responsible to the legislature, and that legislative members are answerable to the citizens. Currently this is not happening.

Normally, party officials approve or veto their local party candidates. If a majority is elected from this pool, an executive is selected which forms the government. In turn the government tables bills in the legislature which, if defeated, means that the government is defeated, and this results in a general election.

However, elected party representatives play an inconsequential role. They rarely or never vote against their executive. Why? The answer is because of party lines and party discipline. Consequently, they are denied free votes. The result is irresponsible government and an elected dictatorship. This is the real democratic deficit because the Trojan horse party system undermines an accountable parliament. Therefore, the problem we need to fix is to restore authority back to our legislators in order that they can hold the executive accountable.

Part two: What is not working?

The most undemocratic position is the premier. Instead of being responsible to the elected party caucus, and to the legislature, the premier can fire any minister, expel any elected member from their party, and literally ignore everybody else. Not bad work for someone selected outside of parliament by a process which has no authority to hold the premier accountable in the legislature. Giving more power to political parties via proportional representation is unable to fix this disconnect.

Another myth is that fixed election dates represents some democratic innovation. However, a horrible executive can be defeated anytime, by a majority negative vote in the legislature. However, under the fifth column party system, this rarely or never happens. Fixed election dates demonstrate

the total arrogance of the executive because their political party rubber stamp legislature is useless.

Here is the final example of what is not working.

Another rock not unturned is private party financing, which is an accident waiting to happen. Currently, political parties are usually financed by wealthy individuals, corporations, and unions. Consequently, political parties are beholden to these special interests where one hand washes the other with special legislation, tax loopholes, monopolies, and other political favors. Without redressing this cancer, giving more power to more political parties via proportional representation will only increase the invisible influence of these financiers.

Part three: Solutions.

Is there an alternative to the political party system of governance? The answer is yes. Imagine, if the Citizens' Assembly was instead our legislative assembly. Imagine, if you were elected as independent legislators with no political party affiliation. Next, you would elect an executive. Now because the premier and cabinet ministers are selected by you, amazingly, this executive is finally accountable to you. This executive now must submit bills for your approval. Because you sit as independent legislators with a free vote, finally you have real democratic power. The great result is responsible government.

Question: Are there examples where responsible government works? The answer is yes. Two examples are with the governments of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. In their Westminster systems, all of the elected members are independents who with their free votes, elect a responsible executive. Another example is with our British Columbia local governments. While not a Westminster model, the majority of counselors are independents and are not slaves to any municipal party or slate.

We should not forget that many older democracies once operated without political parties. We have been fooled into thinking we need political parties; we should not allow this tail to wag the dog because elected private party representatives have defaulted on their fiduciary obligation to serve the public interest.

Part four: Here is a brief look into the future.

We need to have our eyes wide open on global trends which one day will enter our back yard. One trend is continental integration which is progressing around the world. For example, the European Union is expanding from fifteen to twenty-five countries. In North America, our Canada, USA and Mexican Free Trade Agreement is moving towards a broader Free Trade Agreement of the Americas.

With continental integration also emerges a continental parliament. For example, the European Union has a European Parliament. In the future, we could anticipate a North American, or Parliament of the Americas. Beyond this, the United Nations needs democratic reform. One day we should envision a world democratic federation which would include an elected world legislative assembly.

As you think about electoral reform, you need to stop and think about some universal democratic principles which an electoral system must reinforce. Therefore I would like to volunteer the following universal democratic principle:

Sovereignty rests with the people, who as equal global citizens, have a universal birthright to individually exercise their exclusive monopoly of informed consent through their ballot cast. Only they, the people, can provide a collective democratic mandate to delegate their majority authority to their individual geographic representative. This materially represents the consent of the governed, without which no government on earth is legitimate.

This principle means that one person equals one vote. It also means that individuals run for public office for their area.

Just as our BC electoral system is integrated with our federal and municipal electoral systems, similarly, it is also integrated with the electoral systems of our American neighbors. While they are under a republican form of government, they have instead advocated for parliamentary democracies in Palestine and Iraq. Furthermore, both our Canadian and American constitutions wisely make no mention whatsoever on the role of political parties.

We need to preserve this harmonized electoral systems for the potential of future trans-national parliaments. Let us spare future generations the agony of re-inventing a uniform electoral system. If you ignore these democratic principles, then the unintended consequences will be the regrettable creation of future continental and global political parties. Your thinking today can help set a good foundation for emerging parliamentary democracies for tomorrow.

Finally, part five: Here is four recommendations for your consideration.

Recommendation number one:

Do not change our electoral system. It is based on the universal democratic principles where one person equals one vote, and where individuals run for office who represent a geographic constituency. As is, our system leaves the door open for independent candidates to run for public office, and only they can make government democratically accountable. Our electoral system is not broke, but instead it is corrupted by political parties. However, over time Citizens will abandon these door mats. It is irrelevant if political parties

predictably complain about the unfairness of our electoral system. Furthermore, the invalid objection that the First Past the Post system manufactures electoral majorities is redundant because elected individuals still freely select or endorse the executive. Also, be careful that your evaluation criteria do not steer you down a predetermined proportional representation outcome.

Recommendation number two:

If you recommend any changes, then the only improvement is a second round run off election between the top two candidates if required. This new majority system would guarantee that the elected legislator has 50% plus one of the votes cast consistent with the consent of the governed.

Recommendation number three:

If you must recommend major changes, be certain that it provides a level playing field so ordinary people can run as independent candidates. Otherwise, it would deny the people the right to chose a government of the people.

Finally, recommendation number four:

The Citizens' Assembly has some unfinished business. The cancer of private financing of political parties needs your chemotherapy. The Citizens' Assembly should request the provincial government to extend your mandate, to make recommendations on a new system of public financing of party candidates and independent individuals so both can run for public office on a level playing field.

To close, I would like to thank each member of the Citizens' Assembly for your public service. Remember, the world is watching what you do and your important work will affect generations to follow. Be certain that you are on the right side of the future so history can judge you well.

Thank you.

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