



June 4, 2004

Written Submission on Electoral Reform

Our proposal is consistent with the Terms of Reference on both the Constitution of Canada and the Westminster parliamentary system. Our recommendation is not to re-invent the way we currently elect our Members to the legislature every four or five years, but to make them accountable to the electorate after they are elected.

Changing the way we are governed is not going to provide more accountability to the electorate. Something happens when we elect someone to parliament. They all start out, provincially and federally, promising they will be there to represent us. Once there however nothing seems to change. Decisions in parliament continue to be made whether we approve of them or not.

Proportional Representation (PR) is not as democratic as some people believe it to be. Electing someone to represent them in the Legislature should not be based on the percentage of votes we have according to population. It should be based on whom you believe candidates should be accountable to: the constituents who elect them, or the party that appoints them.

Parties, based on the percentage of their total votes won, would be able to decide from their list who would get permanent employment, bypassing the requirement of those who did not or could not get elected by their constituents based on their own merits. These appointed individuals therefore would be accountable to their party and not to their constituents.

Mixed Member (PR) means running candidates in two or more constituencies. There might not be a great difference between voters in two or three constituencies within one municipal area such as Vancouver, particularly when the constituencies are geographically close to one another. However, we believe there would be a big difference, for example, if two constituencies North Vancouver Seymour and North Vancouver Lonsdale were combined with a third such as West Vancouver or Burnaby because not all three would have the same municipal government. Combining constituencies throughout the province where distances from each other are even greater than this example could impose tremendous problems for the voters. Concern could arise if three candidates were all elected from the same constituency. The other two constituencies may feel they are not being properly represented.

The Preferential (Single Transferable) ballot works well when selecting your first, second, third or other choices for a candidate or director whose philosophical ideals are similar with their party members. This works well within the party, especially at conventions and nomination meetings when every party member supports a similar ideology. This does not work, however, when preferentially selecting your first, second, third or other choice for one candidate from four different parties with dissimilar ideals (e.g., NDP, Liberal, Green or Reform).

Proportional representation is not going to change the way we are governed in fact it will add to the problem of minority governments catering to small parties in order to gain power.

It is interesting to note that the Citizens' Assembly brochure on page three 'The families studied include:' point out systems from areas around the world without any mention of our neighbour to the south of us. What makes the USA the most powerful democratic Nation in the free world is the accountability directly placed on the politicians by the electorate holding their feet to the fire by workable Initiative, Referenda and Recall.

Direct Democracy removes any potential conflict between the politician and the electorate. I am not advocating government by referenda but when it is evident politicians are pushing an issue that is clearly not in the best interest of the people, irrespective of how they were elected, the only proven method to protect it from happening is by the people themselves through Initiative and Referenda.

We already have citizens Initiative and Referenda legislation. However we have to make the existing Initiative and referenda legislation workable. Mr. Ujjal Dosanih NDP Premier and Mr. Gordon Campbell BC Liberal Leader of the opposition made initiative and recall, passed in 1991, totally unworkable. In order to initiate referenda you have to obtain signatures from 10% of the electorate who were registered in the last election in all 79 constituencies in order for any measure to pass. Signatures from 3% to repeal an existing law and 6% to initiate a new law of the votes cast for all candidates in the last provincial election would make it more workable.

Many of the 160 Assembly Members, I am sure, do not all live in Vancouver or Victoria and recognize there is a need to provide an equality and fairness, especially in the outlining areas that does not currently exist. What better time than now to bring all regions together. One way would be to end the discrepancy between urban and rural areas.

A redistribution of constituencies and regions need to be adopted to recognize that our province lacks fairness between the densely and sparsely populated areas. Currently, the geographical area covered by one MLA in a sparsely populated constituency of BC is far greater than the area currently covered by ten MLAs in the Vancouver constituencies.

Residents in more populated areas typically have a wider variety of resources (e.g., municipal government and other agencies) to address their concerns than residents in sparsely populated areas who may rely on their MLA more heavily. Addressing issues in rural areas usually requires MLAs to travel greater distances than their counterparts in the more populated regions of BC.

In order to provide fairness between the densely and sparsely populated areas, there would have to be an equal number of constituencies within a given region and all constituencies in a given region would contain an equal number of voters, plus or minus 25%. However, one region may not necessarily contain the same number of voters as another region.

The only way that all regions could contain an equal number of voters would be if all voters lived an equal distance from one another — a situation which currently does not reflect the reality of our population distribution. If this difference of population currently exists federally between provinces such as PEI, Quebec and other smaller provinces, then it can exist here provincially.

In order to eliminate this inequality that currently exists, we recommend you apply a double majority to referendum decision-making in BC. On a provincial referendum, both a majority of the total votes cast and a majority of the regions would be required for the measure to pass.

You could even have a referendum within the region, again both a majority of the total votes cast and a majority of the constituencies, within the region, would be required for the measure to pass.

Statistically, we know that many Canadians, especially our youth between the ages of 18-24, and the next generation, between 25-40, do not vote. If we had direct democracy, similar to the USA, in which the electorate had the opportunity to vote on important issues, I believe that many of the 30% of people who did not vote in the last provincial election would take a greater interest in politics.

The two occasions on which BC has seen the largest voter turnout were during the referenda process in 1991, when over 80% of the electorate supported Recall and Initiative, and in 1992 when voters rejected the Charlottetown Accord, an accord that, although heavily supported by big business, media and the politicians, was strongly rejected by the people.

Before making your final decision, ask yourselves to whom our provincial government should be empowered by, MLA's from a list selected by and accountable to a party, or MLA's representing their party's value and principles selected and elected by their constituents? And remember, how we elect our representatives is not as important as to how we make them accountable once they are elected.

We need to bring trust into government not by changing the way we elect our politicians who seem to be controlled by some out side force the moment they get elected into power. We need to give the electorate the right to workable Initiative, Referenda and Recall, which incur meaningful debate on issues that are not in their best interest that are currently being pushed upon them.

Bill 52 – 2004 Electoral Reform Referendum Act, Special rules for the electoral reform referendum will require at least a 60% vote in at least 48 of the 79 constituencies in order for the measure to pass. What this means is the government, without public input, have placed the power of the Assembly's referendum question into the hands of a 40% minority and a minority of 31 of the 79 (40%) constituencies. Less than 50 %+1 places a disadvantage on voters in support the motion.

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