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CitizensAssembly.ca

Dear Members of the Citizens' Assembly of British Columbia,

Overcoming the Tyranny or Dictatorship of the Leader

In the parliamentary democracy in which we live, the elected MLAs of our governing parties are supposed to choose a leader, the Premier, who represents the wishes, views and standards of themselves and their constituents.

And in theory those same MLAs are supposed to change the Premier if that leader does not live up to their expectations.

(As opposed to the American system where the president or governor is chosen directly by the people for a term of office, and is therefore entitled to retain office even when a majority of elected representatives oppose him/her.)

The problem is that, once democratically selected by MLAs (or almost always, and worse, by undemocratic self-appointed, increasingly instant party constituency memberships), **the leader then proceeds to conduct all future business as if he was an untouchable dictator, intimidating his party MLAs and badly corrupting our democratic system, by preventing regular MLAs from expressing or promoting the wishes and agendas of themselves and their constituents.**

(This is not a partisan comment, as virtually every provincial or federal government we have had, of every party, suffers from this problem, and I know Citizens Assembly members are legitimately concerned about this issue.)

We desperately need a system, perhaps one where **every government party MLA (note only governing party MLAs, not the entire legislature) must cast a secret ballot of confidence or non-confidence in the present Premier at least once a year (and upon request by a majority of governing party members anytime).**

The mandatory secret ballots by governing party MLAs would be delivered to the Lt. Governor. Failure to cast a ballot would be counted as non-confidence, but members would generally choose to cast a ballot, so secrecy would be maintained. It would be difficult to stop members from declaring their vote if they wished, but secrecy would be the standard expectation – known to be good for the system.

If a majority expressed confidence, the results would be kept secret by the Lt. Governor, and government would go on. (There would be no advantage in the media embarrassing the leader over a less than perfect vote of confidence - if a simple majority of government party members expressed confidence, that's a world better than what we have now.)

If, however, a majority of governing party members expressed non-confidence in the current Premier, the results would become public and the Lt. Governor would call for a very brief campaign (a week or two would be more than enough) to be followed by a public vote of those government party members for a new (or the current) leader. The Premier would be prohibited from calling a general election after the original non-confidence vote to intimidate his party members.

The vote for the next Premier would be conducted as we usually select leaders, by sequential balloting (open or secret) and the dropping of last candidate(s) with each round, except that it would be a vote only by elected government party MLAs, who are responsible to their entire constituencies. (And whose subsequent re-election depends on their wise choice of the Premier.)

If members of the Citizens Assembly find the idea of sequential balloting for the new Premier by active MLAs too daunting, **a good alternative would be a secret preferential continuously transferable ballot (see endnote).**

Whether by open or secret sequential balloting, or secret preferential continuously transferable ballot, **mid-term re-election of the Premier by government party MLAs is ultimately much more open and democratic than the current selection of the leader by a limited number of backroom hacks, or instant party constituency members, and is incredibly cheaper and faster.**

It may seem a difficult step, having these annual votes of confidence, but when you consider the democratic deterioration we've experienced so many times, it's a much better way to go. If the government MLAs expressed confidence as they

should if things are going well, the vote would be a inconsequential hiccup in the ongoing activity of government. And if they expressed non-confidence, how much better that re-election of a leader was held, rather than going on with a leader who did not represent the majority members.

As I mentioned in another presentation, we should not be deterred by the apparent newness, difficulty, complexity or extra time required of this system or any system presented to the Citizens' Assembly of BC, but should seek to accommodate them if they incorporate desirable features or outcomes.

We must realize that the nature and texture of our human concerns for democracy and social justice are all far more complex than our current simplistic systems for achieving them, and we should not be afraid to advance necessarily more complex systems for achieving those concerns

Thanks for your consideration of this possible solution to an age-old problem.

Sincerely,

Doug Morrison

Endnote: Preferential Continuously Transferable Ballot: Candidate must be elected by a majority – 50% plus 1 vote. If this is not achieved on first count, candidate receiving fewest votes on first count is dropped, and his/her vote transfers to 2nd choice of voter.

If this does not result in a majority, next candidate receiving fewest votes is dropped and his/her 2nd choice votes transfer to remaining candidates.

Where that candidate's 2nd choice has already been eliminated in an earlier round, vote transfers to 3rd choice, and so on.

Similarly, votes from first candidate dropped remain transferred to 2nd choice, or transfer to 3rd choice if 2nd choice was eliminated in subsequent round. Process continues until a candidate receives a majority 50% plus 1 vote.

In this way, no voter's preferences are lost.

This same system should also be the electoral system of choice, in general elections, to elect all MLAs representing ridings, to whatever extent riding MLAs are elected. Proportional MLAs in a Mixed Member Parliament would be elected by other methods.