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Dr. Jack Blaney, Chairman
Citizens' Assembly

Dear Dr. Blaney:

I hope that I am not too late with my sociological suggestion, and if you have already seriously considered the suggestion of a simultaneous, double change to 1) Demographically representative and Census-based parties, together with 2) a vote-counting change to PR, please disregard this letter. Also, we may not be intellectually ready yet for party change.

However, I wish to argue this point: Why adopt PR, if you don't yet have multiple demographically representative parties based on the Census to vote for? We are still putting up with corruptible, self-interested politicians in obsolete parties no matter how we count them, and we are still doing without real representation of the whole population. Oh yes, this change of parties will break up the rich and powerful's hold over all parties.

As you can see from my enclosed cv, I am 88 and too old to present this in person. Back in 1962 I married a Dutch university librarian while getting my PhD in sociology at the University of Washington and later worked on the State Census. Then I left Memorial University to live in the Hague for 27 years and watched the Dutch Government with its eight parties work. I also watched the early working of the EU Common Market and the successful formation of the EU Monetary Union. I watched the Wall come down, and after that the successful unification of Germany (without outside help), and the formation of the Warsaw Pact and Baltic countries. The democratic regionalization of the EU is working because most of these countries changed to multiple demographic parties and to PR at the same time.

I hope you and your Assembly can hurry BC and Canada along to make these changes, so we can soon know that we are really represented in both provincial and federal governments.

Good progress with your reform.

Sincerely yours,

Norma Ellen Verwey Ph.D.

Changing the Political Parties System and the Vote-Counting System

If we really want to change our system of counting votes, we should, at the same time, start to change the basis of our political parties from the old ideological parties left to us by our colonial master (UK) to demographically representative parties. Our old Liberal and Conservative parties are embedded in an out-moded confrontational system, (government vs opposition), and not in a newer type of consensus-seeking, conflict-resolution system. In the US, an obsolete two-party system of Democratic vs Republican constant confrontation has become locked, as in the UK in a deal to keep out any other party. Neither the US nor Canada has a modern party system based on demographically representative groupings in the Census (see my CV on post-doctoral census work at U. of Washington).

We can easily have a new PR vote-counting system if we also have multiple (3-plus) demographic parties based on our 10-year Census. It will work better if we adopt the two changes together. (Over half a century ago, I learned to count PR in a course on Municipal economics in 1950 at U. of Western Ontario). As a young immigrant country, we should try to have our representative parties based on Census groupings such as ethnic groups, age groups, economic groups, religious groups, family groups, etc.

Both US and Canada still have old-fashioned, traditional and residual parties whose volunteer members decide on the leader and the action they want (and may or may not carry out), then ask us to join them. They do not represent our needs. We must vote or not vote for them - a forced not a free vote. Neither US nor Canadian parties are representative of the whole population. This is far behind the Continental parties, even the new Warsaw Pact and Baltic countries. If these EU countries (except UK) can get truly representative parties, so can we, and your Citizens' Assembly can organise the rules. It is no wonder so many North Americans do not vote (almost 50% in US). Here, political parties are not representative parties, just volunteer parties. North American parties are just an obsolete hang-over from our colonial days, just like the obsolete 'first-past-the-post' vote-counting system is. Continentals also say that the UK is still suffering from 'the old imperial disease' and has infected the US with it.

Demographic parties have to be based on the social groups revealed in the Census. I believe we have accepted one ethnic group—the Native People—yet we do not grant the large Asian minority a chance to be represented in our government. Your Citizens' Assembly could look at the last Census and decide on what groupings are largest and should be represented, such as Ethnic or Minority groupings (Native People, Asians, etc.), Age groupings (Old-age, etc), Family groupings (Married, One-parent families, Living-In Partners, Same-sex Unions, etc.), Religious groupings (Catholic, Protestant, Asian religions, Unorganized Cults, etc.), Economic groupings (Employers, Employees, those who determine the wages of others and those who don't, Large & Small Employers, etc.). This can add up to 6-8 representative parties in government. It takes a lot of time and planning (and up-dating), but it is a sign of political maturity. (At first, I too laughed at 6-8 parties, but I soon found out why multiple demographic parties are essential to real representation, and old ideological parties are not).

Living in the Hague for nearly 30 years with my Dutch husband, who was a library science teacher, and as a sociologist, I watched how the Warsaw Pact countries, after the Wall came down, set up their new democracies – a large change from totalitarianism. None of these new democracies chose the UK or the US 2-party confrontational system, especially not the US with its obsolete Electoral College and a political Supreme Court designed to keep the rich powerful in office. Also, now in the EU, these new democracies have to elect their MEP's (Members of the EU parliament) by the PR system, and like most EU countries (not yet UK) also choose their internal governments by the multiple-party system and count them by PR. Why are we in NA so far behind in political governance?

Continental sociologists feel that the US and Canada, as large, immature (we have not yet solved our large distance problem), and largely immigrant countries are still in the retarded settlement stage of societal governance (an early age of irresponsible, high-risk, gambling, exploitation and corruption and rampant individualism), and both are politically retarded, hanging on to out-moded political traditions. Moreover, they are both still using the obsolete Anglo-American exploitive capitalism as an internal and external economic philosophy. At the moment, the US (and thankfully not Canada) is still fighting an old 19th century empirical war, trying to control the flow and cost of a product, oil, which they so badly need to solve their distance problem. Getting products you desperately need from abroad is an old empirical philosophy, which many of the EU countries earlier followed but abandoned after WWII. The UK was also forced to follow, so ran over to the Continent frantically begging to get into the regional Common market of the EEC in order to pay off their large IMF debt. Also, from a long experience with the Arabs, most Continentals advise US 'Don't fight with the Arabs, just trade and barter with them.'

In NA our old tradition-bound political parties and 'winner-take-all' vote-counting are worn-out political systems in dire need of change (not a dirty word). In Canada now when these old ideological parties have failed us, provincially and federally, now is the ideal time to change both systems together. Begin in BC with an Old-Age party, then perhaps an Asian party, and so on. It takes a lot of time and a lot of planning to get the democratic rules within and between the demographically representative parties right, but the EU has found it worth while (except the UK), an old country which is now considered 'stuck in the slow lane' of the EU, and unfortunately stuck in another unwinnable empirical war.

In addition, our colonial master (UK) left us all in NA without a good university-trained civil service, the real seat of governance, i.e. a civil service based on political independence, merit and integrity—not on political patronage. In spite of the ironic humour of "Yes, Mr. Minister", a body of well-trained civil servants is the only way to get the needed continuity of governance for any country, and especially in NA where confrontational simplemindedness (for or against) is still found in our obsolete ideological parties and politicians. This would avoid the lack of societal continuity (two steps forward, two steps back) found in the ideas of our present periodically-elected, short-sighted and self-interested politicians. Our present politicians have not yet

learned the diplomatic art and societal advantage of consensus-seeking, conflict-resolving interaction among multiple demographic parties.

This is the time to change our worn-out political system, and to train a large number of people in universities to be non-political civil servants, award them higher salaries than the new demographic politicians, and honour them for long service. In the EU, demographic politicians' salaries are not high, as they only represent the Census population groupings—not the rich and powerful; while the career civil servant who runs a specific government department is university-educated, highly paid and trusted and well-pensioned, but frequently overseen by trusted auditors. If the Continental EU countries can make these useful changes, why do we remain in the grip of a worn-out political tradition? By changing we could get rid of all the confrontational and unnecessary “empty political chatter”, and not waste so much time on useless politics. It's so immature and boring.

With EU democratic Regionalism, based on social-capitalism, not exploitive-capitalism, expanding gradually Eastward, why are not Canadians, perhaps your Citizens' Assembly plus social scientists from Canadian universities, over there observing how small 'nation-states' are merging into large self-sufficient sharing means of consensus-seeking—not power politics.

Now that US economic 'globalization' -- just a euphonism for exploitive, unregulated 'dog-eat-dog' US capitalism is over, and the era of military Super Power has ended in Iraq, internationalization of all types of regions (democratic and other types of contiguous regions), is the next step in democratic international evolution in the UN, but only after the obsolete permanent membership (and its obsolete veto) in the Security Council has been reformed. Why are we Canadians not taking a lead in educating ourselves in how to go forward sociologically and peacefully, not militarily and not only technologically. Technology is only good if it is put to good use for the common good; not for naked power.