

TAMPERING WITH THE “VOTING SYSTEM”

(Presented by Peter Kearvell, Pender Island)

Summary

Early criticism of the task of the Citizens Assembly referred to “tampering” with “The Voting System”. Regrettably, the present Prime Minister of Canada can be counted amongst those who believe that the present “first past the post” system of voting should not be changed. Obviously, the ability to rule the Government while, in the recent June 2004 General Election, having acquired a Popular Vote only in the thirty percentile range, suggests a reason for the Prime Minister’s viewpoint. This submission is intended to endorse the position of those who, like the author of this submission, believe that the development of the voting system is a legitimate exercise in a democratic society.

Be Brief!

With Members of the Citizens Assembly having over 1,000 Submissions to wade through, and trusting that the brevity of this one will encourage its study, its message can be transmitted in a few short historical references.

The Message

Canada inherited its voting system from England, so let us look at the history of the system in that country since, say, the mid-1700s, when Sir Robert Walpole became the first Prime Minister. Incidentally, few people are aware that it was a derogatory term, invented by the Tory Opposition in criticism of Sir Robert’s invention of the present-day Cabinet System of Government.

- Until The Reform Act 1832, it was possible to buy oneself a seat in Parliament merely by purchasing it from the Patron of a “Rotten Borough”. The latter was a community entitled to seats in Parliament, but which for various reasons had only a minute population, say 20 or 30 persons, who were entitled to vote.
- Even after The Reform Act, only males could vote, and then only if they possessed property worth at least 10 Pounds Sterling.
- English women did not get the vote until 1928.
- Canadian women were not considered “Persons”, and thus entitled to vote, until 1929.
- Following a Referendum in 2005 recommended by a Citizens Assembly, British Columbia became the first Canadian Province to adopt a Mixed Proportional Representation Voting System (MPP) in ??????
