

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

VANCOUVER PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 29 MAY 2004
AT VANCOUVER CONVENTION CENTRE

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE PRESENTATION TO THE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON ELECTORAL REFORM. IT ATTEMPTS TO CAPTURE THE KEY ISSUES AND ARGUMENTS THAT WERE PRESENTED AND DISCUSSED DURING THE PUBLIC HEARING. IN SOME INSTANCES, THE PRESENTER HAS ALSO MADE A SUBMISSION TO THE ASSEMBLY AND THIS IS ACCESSIBLE VIA THE WEBSITE AT WWW.CITIZENSASSEMBLY.BC.CA BY CLICKING ON "GET INVOLVED". IF SUCH A SUBMISSION IS AVAILABLE, IT WILL BE NOTED AT THE END OF THIS REPORT.

David Black

Office and Professional Employees International Union

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

A presentation advocating the adoption of a mixed-member proportional system for the election of Members to the Legislative Assembly.

KEY THEMES

Mr. Black discussed the OPEIU's examination of the issue of electoral reform. The presenter stated that the OPEIU felt that the current FPTP system is a holdover from a previous time. Mr. Black stated that electoral reform was essential to ensure that results reflect the views of the voters who exercise their franchise, something that has been notably lacking in recent provincial elections. The presenter also discussed the importance of local representation, the advantages and disadvantages of open and closed lists, and the possible introduction of designated seats for First Nations groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. Black recommended the adoption of MMP in order to enable votes cast to be more accurately reflected by seats won, without compromising local representation. Mr. Black discussed the already existing concerns of rural members over the issue of diluted local representation. The presenter argued that the introduction of MMP would increase the likelihood of minority government, thereby enhancing accountability and promoting a more consensual style of government. Furthermore, MMP would prevent voters from having to vote strategically or from feeling that their votes are wasted. Mr. Black also suggested that a majority of members should be elected from local districts, potentially compromising proportionality, yet protecting the local representation of rural citizens. A minimum threshold of five percent was also suggested. Mr. Black made three additional recommendations:

1. Electoral reform should be accompanied by electoral finance reform, potentially mirroring federal legislation which limits political contributions from anyone other than individual citizens.
2. The introduction of third party limits on political advertising.
3. Full enumeration prior to each election to ensure that everyone can easily exercise their franchise.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Q The benefits you list for MMP may equally apply to all PR systems; are there any benefits that you see that would not be achieved under a different system of proportionality?

A I think that MMP is a better way to address some of the adversity issues and matters such as First Nations representation.

Q You appear to suggest that local representation need not be altered under the system you propose, however our mandate constrains us to recommending change on the basis of the current 79 seat legislature, so the size of the districts would have to increase. Beyond that, you have suggested that you prefer a closed list; however, the experience in New Zealand, Scotland and Wales has been that the public is strongly against closed lists. Do you have any empirical evidence of the benefits of closed lists?

A We couldn't reach a consensus regarding the question of open or closed lists. However, we did see some evidence that suggested that representation was better under closed lists. It may very well be possible to achieve better representation under open lists.

In terms of enlarging the legislature, if the Assembly feels that British Columbia would be better represented by the introduction of more MLA's then you should recommend that and that should go on the referendum question. I don't think that should be constrained by anything other than what is best for British Columbia.

Q One of the common problems cited with MMP is the production of two classes of MLAs; do you consider that a problem?

A I think it is an issue but we didn't think it was an insurmountable problem.

Q Did you look at the single transferable vote system, or did you feel that would make the rural ridings too large?

A We did look at it, but we didn't put so much time into it as we felt that it was overly complicated and we wanted a system that voters could easily understand.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Q Did your members consider mandatory voting?

A We didn't discuss that but I am personally strongly opposed to forcing people to vote, it is their choice in a free and open society. We did discuss the issue of enumeration and it is very important in terms of making it easier for people to get out and vote.

Q In what sense are you talking of a "local representative" when party discipline is so strong?

A When I say local representation, we are talking about locally elected members of the legislature. We feel that the time for accountability is at election time and people should be held accountable to the platform they put out at election time and the only way to do that is by having strong political parties. Everybody should belong to political parties and it should be easier for more parties to be elected and we feel that MMP would do that.