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7 October 2016

Submission to the Committee on Electoral Reform 7 October 2016

I commend the Electoral Reform Committee for running a tight ship during its hearings over the summer with presenters limited to ten minutes in most cases and committee members allowed two rounds of questions afterward limited to five minutes for question and answer in each case. Broadcasts can be viewed anytime on our computer screens.

Why do we need electoral reform? While Canadians **equally** are given the right to vote for a candidate who represents them, their votes **aren't counted equally** when it comes to apportioning seats in in our FPTP parliaments. Our parliaments are not representative when 60% of the people don't see a representative of their views there and a government with 40% and a majority of seats has all the power. With FPTP near absolute power passes back and forth between the two senior parties and their leaders in a cozy fashion. A major challenge is persuading leaders with such power to give it up for a life of negotiation with others. Colleagues and supporters may howl in rage at such a prospect. Nonetheless, Canadians seeking to reclaim their democracy and the legitimacy of their Parliament must press for change.

It is not representative government when unelected persons in the PM's office direct policy and elected MPs read from cue cards. It is frightening when unelected persons edit the public pronouncements of scientists. This is something we have seen in totalitarian governments and see in governments too close to private interests. False majorities allow leaders to ignore such challenges as climate change and our overdependence on force abroad, literally destroying the countries we claim to protect and driving large populations from their homes.

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Ed Broadbent, in discussion following his presentation to your committee, indicated that scholars have been following the concentration of power in the offices of first

ministers under FPTP following WWII. They have labelled the product “benign dictatorship.” It is not benign when officials preparing legislation protest lack of time to do a proper job and presentation of omnibus bills by the government denies proper scrutiny. In a security conscious world this is particularly important when civil liberties are at stake.

Strategic voting to remove an unpopular leader is not the answer when we wake up after election day and find c.158 Conservatives replaced by 184 Liberals who are going to find it equally hard to change the system that got them elected. And how easy it is for a government of newcomers to fall into the track of the previous government’s bad habits. We saw this in the early invoking of closure to produce desired “deliverables” for the new government. This was a highly visible failing and the government quickly recognized the trap it had fallen into and recanted.

What wasn’t withdrawn was the **much less visible** re-enactment of a Conservative motion, word for word, to effectively deny the right of independents or small party representatives, who are denied committee membership, the opportunity to present amendments to legislation in the House as Elizabeth May succeeded in doing, with the help of Liberal seatmates, during discussion of an omnibus bill in the previous parliament. There has been no hue and cry in the media about this loss of an equalizer for the independents and small parties who are denied committee membership.

Our chests may swell with pride when our prime minister is identified as the most powerful among democratically elected leaders but what this means is that he/she has the fewest checks on that power. Caucuses in Britain and Australia at least have the power to throw their PMs out if they tire of them. Even Margaret Thatcher was not immune. And we all know the saying about power corrupting. Our MPs are dependent on the PM’s signature to run for office never mind having the ability to turf one out.

In the absence of a truly representative government with seats apportioned according to voter support , the Supreme Court has been the only thing saving us in recent years from some offending legislation proposed by a government wielding majority power

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with a minority of votes, including a nomination to the Court itself. The Court **can** when asked protect us from offending legislation but it is not meant to rule.

Appointment of members is also the prerogative of the prime minister. Our system currently is badly out of balance.

The election of 2015 saw a large influx of new MPs while an equally large number of their predecessors cleared their desks and took their knowledge and experience with them. Under a system of whipped votes and direction from the PMO's publicity conscious operatives they are ill-equipped to seek change.

Criticism that our voting system exacerbates antagonisms between regions is illustrated in the outcome of the 1980 election when the elder Trudeau found himself with a majority of seats but only two seats west of Ontario. This was not because there were no Liberals west of Ontario. B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba numbered between something like 22% and 32% of the vote. He had two major aims: to repatriate the constitution and to bring in the National Energy Policy, but he had no one to speak for him in the west or bring its messages to him on either of these major issues. An attempt at unilateral repatriation was stopped the Supreme Court and he found himself offering a cabinet seat to Ed Broadbent and a couple of more seats for other NDP MPs to fill the void. I don't know what happened to the offer but some kind of cooperation was arranged and the constitution came home albeit lacking the signature of Quebec. The legacy of the National Energy Policy enacted under these conditions was rage and alienation in the west that continues to this day.

The unfairness of the FPTP 2015 vote count has shown itself in the Liberal sweep in the Maritimes. Awarding seats proportionally would have given the three major parties an equal number of seats (6) and the Greens one. And this seems to me a more stable situation than upheaval all around.

Other examples: In 1979 Joe Clark obtained enough seats to form a minority government with some 400,000 fewer votes than the Liberals. In Quebec in the late 90s the PQ got the most seats and formed government, the Liberals the most votes.

My favourite example of inequity is the case of the NDP in Saskatchewan in 2008 and 2011 where they received 25% and 30% of the vote respectively and got no seats while the Liberals, with something like 14% in each case, got one and the Conservatives took the remaining 13 seats of 14. (I have had difficulty Googling Elections Canada to confirm the percentages in this submission.)

MPs and their constituents are concerned to retain the election of a local representative. For this reason I would support a Single Transferable Vote or a Mixed Member Proportional System. The STV is simpler to understand it seems to me; the MMP closer in terms of proportionality. It offers the candidates the added possibility of votes from members of other parties who might previously have said "I really like you but can't stand your party." Under MMP voters have the opportunity to vote for both. The development of modern media makes distance less important in communicating with an elected member. Their Face Book and Twitter accounts bring them closer.

Evidence presented at your hearings leads me to believe that a reformed electoral system would feed into your five values and do much to improve the health of our political life. I voted against proportional representation in Ontario, fearing loss of contact with a local member. I have changed my mind. The challenge we face may be the test of our Canadian value of fairness. I wish you well.

Respectfully submitted

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