

## CITIZEN SUBMISSION TO HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL REFORM

On September 27<sup>th</sup>, my MP, Larry Miller, held a telephone ‘town hall’ on electoral reform. I thought this was a good idea—getting the views of his constituents on how we should be electing governments in this country is certainly something an MP should be doing. I applaud Larry for attempting to do that.

I say ‘attempting’ because I and a number of others who phoned in did not get a chance to express our problems with the way we elect politicians now—the usual First Past the Post horse race. I can’t speak for others, but when I announced my name to the moderator, I was clearly recognized as an NDPer. Although I placed in the queue, I did not get to speak. Neither did others on the call who wanted to point out the problems with First Past the Post or the advantages of other ways of doing things.

So I wasn’t too surprised to learn that Mr Miller reported that every single caller had expressed support for the way we elect people now. Well, I’m prepared to accept that there were a lot of callers that night. But the result tells me a couple of things about our electoral system in which the winner of the horse race takes all.

Once you elect someone under First Past the Post, that’s it; you’re stuck with whatever representation that MP or MPP feels like giving you. That, of course, raises the perception (if not the reality) that if you agree with your representative your concerns will be taken to the House or the Legislature (or City Hall). If you don’t agree ... well then it’s a bit of a crap shoot.

With another form of voting—Mixed Member Proportional Representation, open ballot—you elect a candidate for your riding just as you do now, First Past the Post. But you also get to choose from a list of additional candidates who are running to represent a larger region. Those candidates are chosen in accord with the proportion of votes received.

Full disclosure: the NDP and the Law Commission of Canada favour this method. And so do I, but not because the Party does.

The important thing for me is that, if you don’t like the way your MP or MPP is representing you, you can call up your regional representative and talk to them. A little competition (in politics as in most things) is good. It’ll help keep all our politicians focused and honest.

The other important thing for me is that unless I vote Conservative in this riding, my vote counts for nothing. It’s time, I think, for us to stop giving any Party a majority when less than 40% of voters vote for them—as we have in Alberta (NDP), Ontario (Liberal) and Federally (Liberal and before that Conservative).

By the way, the 39.9% of the 68% who voted Liberal in the last federal election means that only 27% of all the people eligible to vote, voted Liberal. But that was enough to give them a majority in the House.

That not everyone in the riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound likes First Past the Post, was made clear to me at a public meeting in Paisley on October 3<sup>rd</sup>. None of the 30-plus people at that meeting wanted First Past the Post.

Their reasons for opposing First Past the Post included ...

- lack of transparency (some felt Mr Miller could have done a much better job of educating his constituents on all the different options for voting);
- lackluster representation (it's too tempting for MPs and MPPs to convey only the views they like or of people who voted for them);
- the perpetuation of ideology (when there is no window open for differing views, it's difficult to let in fresh air, let alone fresh ideas).

It's too bad Mr Miller wasn't able to attend the Paisley meeting. He would have heard ideas that are different from the ones he likes, but he would have breathed some fresh air.

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