

To Canada's Special Committee on Electoral Reform, October, 2016:

As a citizen of Canada and a parent I recognize the crisis of our nation's democracy which I put squarely on the shoulders of our current electoral system. I appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts with the Government of Canada through the mandate of your committee. And thank each of you for accepting the challenge of this formidable process.

There are predictable and pathetic patterns in the relationships between all levels of governments and their peoples. One of these most common patterns is the process of producing reports for legislative bodies' consideration. Said reports are often based on wide research and consultation under the mandate of said governments, royal commissions etc. And in the end most of these reports are never enacted after their presentation (shelved instead) or are simply cherry-picked to death, such that the original comprehensive and inter-dependent nature of the recommendations are emasculated. Then, years go by, and a reinventing-of-the-wheel-process on the same issue begins once again: public money and valuable time are wasted, regardless of the urgency of the issue afoot.

I so want to trust this process in which you are engaged. But *Voting Counts: Electoral Reform for Canada* is an excellent example of this pattern. The 209-page credible document published by the Law Commission of Canada (2004) under the Liberal government of the Right Honourable Paul Martin represents "the culmination of two years of research and consultation by the Commission." Where has this report been since; *what part has it played* in the consciousness of our Members of Parliament and fellow Canadians for a dozen years? Why wasn't this used, *at the time*, as an excellent starting point for the basis of the education of Canada's electorate? Can you imagine where we, as a nation, would be regarding electoral reform had a public education process begun in 2004? Our son, now 30, was almost 16 when he attended a Canadian political party's national convention when that party adopted a proportional representation resolution in its vision for Canada. He was 18 when the Law Commission report was published. Who is responsible for this missed opportunity for his generation, *and mine*?

In February, my partner and I met with the Honourable Scott Brison, our Liberal M.P., about five issues of concern, one being electoral reform and in particular our preference for proportional representation (PR) in general, and a version of Mixed Member Proportion (MMP) for Canada in particular. We have engaged with Mr. Brison about PR for well over a decade now. And in *that* February meeting, we brought

the Law Commission's 2004 report to his attention and Mr. Brison asked, "Do you recommend that the Special Committee on Electoral Reform members read this report." After a resounding "Yes!" I added: "Every single member of Parliament should have read this report by now."

My partner and I watched this Committee's proceedings in August (on the 22nd to be exact), well after a month during which the Committee had been hearing from dozens of expert witnesses. And frankly we were disheartened and appalled at just how ill-informed *certain members* of the Committee were, especially regarding the basic issues and information *readily available* in the Law Commission's report. I hope that by now this situation has improved, because at the very least, every member of the committee should have read and thoroughly studied this report *before the hearings had even begun*. Why should such wilful ignorance be permitted at public expense; when there is so much for Canada at stake? Should not every member of Parliament have read this report by now, especially in light of the fact that MPs are supposed to hold constituent consultations/town hall meetings on this extremely critical decision facing Canada?

The 2004 report recommended MMP, as did the New Democratic Party in their resolution in Parliament under the Harper Government in 2014. Green party MPs, other Independents and 16 Liberal MPs joined the Official Opposition in this vote. Decidedly the will to move to a more representative electoral process exists in Canada's Parliament!

Here are my responses to the **seven questions** listed on the Committee website. For obvious reasons, *at this stage of your inquiry*, I have chosen to address them more efficiently as much for your sakes as my own. I certainly hope that my approach does not injure my credibility because, believe me, *I have done my homework*:

1. Why is electoral reform important to you?

Our democracy is in crisis as a result of our current system of government.

2. What do you understand to be the strengths and challenges of Canada's current electoral system and of other systems?

I prefer to focus on PR and the MMP form, allowing the Committee to contrast my answers with our *current system* which we all thoroughly understand. Yes?

While PR is decidedly not a panacea, the former has been used in most European countries with remarkable success over the last century, and MMP most effectively for 70 years. And, like New Zealanders, Canadians are utterly capable of adapting, especially with a *committed* program of non-partisan public education.

With PR and MMP:

- **every** vote *actually* counts.
- a parliament elected under this form of PR better represents the electorate, affording the broadest representation of electorate philosophy, policy and vision to contribute to our nation's governance;
- actual **citizen engagement is encouraged under such a system** (by the fairness afforded to one's vote), and this level of engagement **is then** reflected in the candidate lists from which parties can draw, in turn providing the opportunity and support for **better gender and minority representation** in the Parliament of Canada.

- **cooperation, coalition and consensus are integral to minority governments**, all attributes many, many Canadians consider essential to a productive, civil governance that collectively actually works for the people and the nation. *Contrast* this to the self-interested, uncivil disfunction we currently experience *and* to the vilification of these very attributes that some Canadians and certain political parties encourage in their efforts to divide and conquer. I know you are experiencing this aplenty in your hearings!

3. Do you consider Canada's current electoral system to be "fair"? "Inclusive"? "Representative"? Why or why not?

Of course not. Please see #2 above.

4. What do you think about mandatory voting?

Not much. Isn't it utterly disheartening to think that our nation has sunk so low that that our citizens must be *mandated to vote*? Sorry. I am an idealist. **Fix the system first**, then track the change in voter engagement before this idea is seriously considered.

5. What do you think about online voting?

Not much. I have serious concerns about the technology: **1.** possible failure *mid process* (computer or network crash, power failure); **2.** possible trifling with and trivializing of the process; **3.** possible fraudulent manipulation of vulnerable individuals, and of the results.

An additional concern is the fact that Canada has remarkably poor internet access in rural and remote areas, and that given that we have some of the highest internet prices in the world—all this would lead to a disparity in access to online voting.

Finally, equally important to me, would be the loss of the social/community-based process of getting out, meeting community members and marking a ballot as a citizen of a democracy. I do not consider paper ballots obsolete in the 21st century and have enjoyed "scrutinizing" and /or counting ballots with fellow citizens over the years. (And I was never paid.)

6. What do you think should be the future steps for electoral system reform (such as a citizens' assembly, a referendum, etc.)?

If it was acceptable for the hugely significant and historic enfranchisement of women, Inuit and First Nations to be achieved *by acts of Parliament*, than it is **absolutely acceptable for Parliament to change the electoral system by an act of Parliament as well**. There are times when Parliament must listen to the people *who care enough to be engaged*; to accept a *decisive leadership role*. This is another appropriate occasion for Parliament *to lead Canada*. Ideally it would be preferable for most citizens of Canada to be well informed about the subject, before Parliament voted. But until now, there has been no political will on the part of governments with a false majority to engage the people of Canada in an honest dialogue. And unlike the slant on history that some like to tell—that the failed P.R. referendums in B.C., Ontario and P.E.I. were based on the peoples' rejection of P.R.—I would like to suggest that it was more accurately a gross mishandling and manipulation of terms (75% in P.E.I. Are you kidding me?); choosing a highly inappropriate form of P.R. for B.C.; a serious lack of public education, information and public relations in Ontario. (We were visiting two aware and engaged families in Ontario two weeks before *their* P.R. referendum and in both cases when we asked them how they were going to vote, ***neither couple even knew there was a referendum on the issue taking place!***)

And regarding public education for the current initiative: **do we have to reinvent the wheel again?** We have lessons, and materials from all three Canadian provinces, and New Zealand's relatively recent experience to turn to, at least for that government's public education program.

7. Each type of electoral system emphasizes certain purposes and values/principles. What values and principles do you think ought to be prioritized when designing an electoral system for Canada?

Please see # 2 above.

If you are still with me, Thank you! for your attention to my submission. *Please!* DO NOT fail us.

Aloha,

S. J. Hauer