

Brief for the Special Committee on Electoral Reform

Type of Event: Community Dialogue

Date: September 27th, 2016 6:30-8:00pm

Where: Parkdale Library, Toronto ON

Who Hosted? Kim McCrory (resident of Parkdale-High Park)

How many people attended? 3

Highlights of dialogue:

- A very small turnout, which was disappointing. However, this event was hosted by one resident of the neighbourhood, and so advertising capacity was limited.
 - o Discussion about a shared sense that not as many Canadians are aware of this dialogue process as should be. It often seems like those who come to meetings like this are those already involved in electoral reform. Host Kim was really hoping to reach out to people who were not talking about electoral reform, specifically from the Parkdale community, but this did not happen.
- There was a real sense of hope in the room about what electoral reform could mean for Canada.
- One participant made the strong point that proportional representation will hopefully foster more cooperation amongst politicians, and specifically will allow MPs to align themselves better with their values rather than having to always “toe the party line”. If collaboration is required in Parliament, then hopefully MPs would feel able to stand up for what they believe in rather than simply following the direction of their party.
- **All participants were strongly supportive of Proportional Representation**, but were interested in learning more about the details of Single Transferable Vote vs Mixed Member Proportional.
 - o One participant was concerned about the need for local representation. It was discussed that local representation is one of the committee’s guiding principals, and thus any system adopted would need to have local representation.
 - o Participants watched two videos explaining the different systems, which they found very helpful.
 - o After watching the videos, participants felt they had shifted their preference slightly to **Mixed Member Proportional**, due to the local and regional representation options.

Recommendations:

Participants were strongly in support of Proportional Representation.

- A PR system has a strong focus on *Local Representation*. With a PR system, voters will continue to vote for local representation, and will have the added strength of regional representatives. Voters will know who to go to when they need support, but will have more options of who to go to.
- A PR system is *effective and legitimate*. Majority governments will not longer be possible with only 39% of the vote. Seats in Parliament will equal the number of votes a party received. Government will be a legitimate reflection of the preference of the voters.
- A PR system will boost *engagement* in both elections and the governments formed after an election. Voters will know that their vote counts. Without a “winner take all” system, voters can be assured that even if they do not support the expected winner, that their vote will still directly help their preferred candidate – with more than one winner, they can be empowered to vote for their preference, not strategically or not at all.

A final thought:

Once our discussion was over and we had to leave the soon to be closed library, our discussion turned to what each of our careers were. One participant was a retired family doctor who had worked her entire career at the Regent Park Community Health Centre. Another participant worked in the Safe and Caring Schools program. Host Kim was beginning her career as a social worker with a children’s mental health centre in Toronto. Our careers were dedicated to some of our country’s most vulnerable populations, and in our work we had each seen how decisions made at the Federal level affect lives in very real ways. Each day we see the impact of policies on the health and wellbeing of our clients. And each day, in the intimate work that we do, we are also fighting against seemingly immovable barriers. We are interested and engaged in electoral reform because we understand that a government that reflects the views of its citizens, that acts collaboratively, and is able to think long-term, will mean a reduction in these barriers.