

Brief submitted by: Sharon Sommerville

Thank you for this opportunity to express my views on electoral reform. I support proportional representation (PR) for the many reasons that you have heard over the past 3 months. The democratic principle of equality under the law must extend to effective representation in our parliament and that can only be realized by some form of, or an element of PR, in our electoral system. An electoral system which translates the voting intentions of Canadians into seats in Parliament and therefore more authentically represents regional diversity across Canada in our Parliament should be a clear objective in a representative democracy.

An electoral system should serve the interests of all electors and not just the minority (49% of voters elected their candidate of choice in 2015) that voted for the winning candidate in their riding .

All of this having been said, I would like to focus my comments on the concept of leadership and specifically, the role of the Electoral Reform Committee and the Canadian Parliament in creating public policy. In a representative democracy such as ours, we ask our elected representatives to study, and debate complex issues and make the best possible decisions on our behalf . Our elected representatives play important roles in crafting public policy that affects Canadian lives i.e., do we go to war?, do we create a national day care programme?, should an all expenses paid winter vacation for every Canadian be enshrined in the constitution (just seeing if you are still awake! 😊) and so on. Policymaking is the job of Parliamentarians. Canadian Parliamentarians take their work seriously and work hard on behalf of Canadians to produce decent public policy.

So it was a surprise when Minister Monsef stated that she is looking for broad support for change before making any type of electoral reform. This was not a part of the Liberal campaign promise which was clear and specific: "2015 will be the last election under First Past The Post". Is it possible to make major policy decisions without broad support if they are truly for the public good? In 1976, then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau brought forward legislation to abolish capital punishment. There was a searing and very divisive national debate on the issue because the majority of Canadians supported capital punishment. Prime Minister Trudeau was steadfast in his belief that the abolition of capital punishment was a human rights issue. And, understanding the fallibility of the juridical system and the consequences for individuals who are wrongly accused (Truscott, Marshall & Milgaard for example), his government passed the controversial law. Forty years later, we are a better country for having abolished capital punishment. Trudeau understood that leadership means leading even when the political consequences might be unfortunate. He acted for the public good despite the risk.

Last October, Liberal, NDP and Green supporters voted for electoral reform. There is little political risk in making good on an explicit and key campaign promise. However, some where in the electoral reform process the essential element of leadership has been lost. To undermine potential cynicism amongst voters, it is critical that the committee exercise leadership and bring forth the public policy that 62% of voters expect from this committee & our Parliament.

A made in Canada electoral system is possible. Political will and leadership

are key as is the belief that the public good takes precedent over partisan agendas.