

SUBMISSION TO THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL REFORM

My name is Nicholas Tunnacliffe. I live in the Riding of Toronto Danforth. I am a Canadian Citizen who believes passionately that it is important that every Canadian citizen should vote.

Under the existing "First past the post" electoral system that we now have, it is common for a party to form the government with about 40% of the votes cast. Some MPs are elected with as few as 30% of votes cast in their riding. In terms of designing a system that better reflects the votes cast overall, surely we can do better than that. Some form of proportional representation would do that

Proportional Representation covers several different ways of electing Members to Parliament. However there are three main types.

1) The alternative vote or ranked ballot system whereby voters in each riding rank as many of the candidates they wish to support in order of their preference. As the count proceeds if a candidate does not receive 50% + 1 of the votes cast the candidate with the lowest number of votes drops off and that person's alternative votes are redistributed according to their preference. The process continues until a candidate receives at least 50% +1 of the total votes cast. Note one would not be required to rank all candidates, only those that the voter considered worthy of their support.

2) The party list system whereby voters vote for a party. Each party produces a list of candidates, ranked in order of their preference. Members are chosen from the party list according to the proportion of votes cast for each party.

3) The mixed member proportional representation system whereby voters would elect Members by two different votes. The first would be based in ridings similar to those we have today. They could be elected by today's first past the post system or the ranked ballot system (type 1 above). The second would be based on party voting in a larger area, which could be the nation as a whole, Provinces or subdivisions of Provinces. (type 2 above)

This submission is not a treatise on proportional representation, but rather it is a concise view of my position, arrived at after much study and thought.

Whatever system of proportional representation is recommended by the committee it should be based on a set of clearly articulated principles. The principles that are important to me are;

1) The system recommended must clearly result in membership of the House of Commons that better reflects the vote in the country. As noted above most governments are elected with about 40% of the vote and some MPs are elected with as few as 30% of the vote. The recommended system must do better than that.

2) The system be simple and understandable by the electorate as a whole and not be overly complicated. Two referenda have been held in Canada, in British Columbia and Ontario, on electoral

reform. Both lost. At the time commentators opined that one of the reasons for this was the proposals were too complicated and not understood by the voters. Another referendum will take place shortly in PEI.

3) The system should not result in any more politicians than we have now, but should be capable of growth to reflect changes in population in the future. I would hazard a guess that most people in Canada think we have too many politicians now!

4) The same system should be used across Canada. This means it must be able to be applied equally in major cities, in rural areas, in the north and in every Province.

5) The system should elect Members of Parliament by Riding (not necessarily the Ridings we have today), so that each Riding has a Member that lives in and represents the people of the Riding.

6) The system should not result in a proliferation of Parties in the House of Parliament.

Application of the Principles to each type of proportional representation

Principle 1. All three types will better reflect the vote of the people than the current first past the post system currently in place. Therefore;

RECOMMENDATION 1. The Committee recommend that some form of proportional representation be the way of electing its Members of Parliament.

Principle 2. Types 1 and 2 are more easily understood than type 3. In type 1 you vote for a person representing a party in a riding. The Member is elected when he/she reaches 50% +1 of the total votes cast in the Riding. In type 2 you vote for a party. Members are elected in proportion to the votes cast for each party contesting the election. The devil is in the details, Should the proportion of votes cast reflect the country as a whole, the Province, or a subdivision of the Province? Type 3 introduces a complexity (a second way of electing some members) that is not required to achieve the benefits of proportional representation. Furthermore if the first past the post system is retained for existing ridings the benefits of proportional representation may not be realized.

Principle 3. Types 1 and 2 could both be designed not to increase the number of MPs. Similarly type 3 could be designed so as not to increase the number of MPs, but it would be more difficult. For every member to be elected from a party list, a similar number of members elected in a riding would have to be eliminated. Say the committee decided to recommend that half the members were to be elected from a party list; ridings would have to double in size. This might not be a hardship in the big cities, though it would likely mean Ridings would become less similar in character. However in rural areas and the North the physical size of Ridings would be such that the life of an MP might not be workable. If the Committee is considering the mixed member system Elections Canada should be spoken to. However;

RECOMMENDATION 2. The Committee NOT recommend the mixed member family of proportional representation as the way to elect Members of Parliament.

Principle 4. The application of type 1 would be the same across Canada. In each riding voters would rank the persons seeking election and the count would proceed, with candidates receiving fewer votes dropping off and their votes being reallocated until a candidate received 50% + 1 of the votes. The application of type 2 raises questions about the geography of the application of the party list.

If it is national four major problems potentially arise. i) if it is applied using the proportion of the vote gained nationally and if there is a relatively high threshold of votes to be cast in favour of a particular party before it is allowed to have seats in the House some parties with representation now, i.e the BQ and the Green Party might not have representation. (See Principle 6 below) ii) If the application of this type was done by Province, the same problem may be evident in the larger Provinces. In Quebec the BQ would be represented, but what about the Green Party both in Quebec and in other large Provinces? iii) The application of the party list system will likely result in elected Members being “allocated” Ridings in which they do not live, possibly far from where they live and in which they have no affinity or interest. Would a Toronto resident relish being an MP for Northern Ontario? Would the people of that Northern Ontario Riding appreciate having someone from Toronto as their MP? iv). Would having two different electoral systems for MPs result in their being “second class” MPs? This should be avoided.

If corrections to these potential problems led to the implementation of a system that was applied differently in different Provinces it would raise questions of gerrymandering the system to achieve certain political ends.

Principle 5. The problems with applying the party list system discussed above under Principle 4, leads me to consider the advantages of electing our MPs by riding. The MP knows the Riding and is responsible to it and its electorate. Having gained 50% +1 of the vote hopefully the elected Members will be in a better position to be independent of their party and the Government. One of the potential downsides to type 2 (the party list system) is that political parties are strengthened at the expense of the local MP, which I consider a retrograde step. Therefore for me one of the important principles is that Members of the House of Commons be elected by riding.

Principle 6. One of the criticisms of the party list system is that it can result in a proliferation of parties having MPs in the House. This usually results in it being virtually impossible to have a majority Government. The consequence of this is that coalition governments are the norm, as in Israel and Italy. This results in abnormal power to smaller parties. This should be avoided. The way to avoid this situation arising is to raise the percentage of the vote before a party is recognised by sending members to the House. Some countries have a level as low as 1% of the vote which results in many parties being elected. Other countries have a level of 5% or higher, which results in a limited number of parties electing Members.

This would be particularly true if the percentage of the vote were applied nationally. If a 5% voting level was required nationally, at the moment, based on current public opinion polls, neither the Green Party nor the BQ would have Members in the House.

But if the percentage of the vote were lowered or the 5% level were to be applied at a sub national level it would encourage the proliferation of other parties. What would stop Wild Rose in Alberta or the

Saskatchewan party from running and winning candidates nationally? At the national level we should be encouraging National parties. Therefore a principle for me is that whatever system is chosen not result in a proliferation of parties. For these reasons I do not support the party list system.

RECOMMENDATION 3. The committee recommend Type 1, the alternative or ranked ballot system of proportional representation as the way proportional representation be implemented in Canada.

Other related matters.

- 1) Compulsory voting This is used in several countries but to be successful in Canada it needs the implementation of “carrots and sticks” A carrot to voting would be a small tax credit on Federal Income Tax. If Provinces moved to compulsory voting they also could apply a small Provincial Income Tax credit. A potential stick could include a requirement to undertake a few hours of community service such as helping out at a food bank or serving dinner at a homeless shelter. If the person who refused to vote also refused the community service the ultimate penalty could be the loss of the right to vote in the next election.

RECOMMENDATION 4. The Committee recommend that compulsory voting be included in the Government Bill on electoral reform.

- 2) Electronic voting. I am very much in favour of this as a way to increase the proportion of people who vote. The way the government website was overwhelmed by people wanting to complete their census forms on line in the recent census is an example of the appetite for responding on line. It is likely that a result of this would be an increase in the number and proportion of relatively young voters. I understand the theoretical concern about security, but if banks can keep our money safe, why cannot Elections Canada design a system to keep our vote safe? I realize that it may not be possible to design a safe and secure system for the next election expected in 2019. The legislation should provide for electronic voting even if it is implemented at a later date.

RECOMMENDATION 5. The committee recommend that future elections include the ability to vote electronically.

- 3) A review of the system of proportional representation. I agree with this and suggest it be done after two elections have been held using the new system. In this way there will be time for the parties and the electorate to amend their thinking and practices. To review the new system immediately after the 2019 election would be too soon.

RECOMMENDATION 6. The committee recommend that a review of the new system be undertaken after two elections have been held using the new system.

- 4) A potential Referendum on the issue. I am NOT in favour of a referendum. Referenda rarely are approved. We need leadership on this and other issues. In a Parliamentary democracy that leadership should come from the House. However, I am in favour of a free vote in the House of Commons on the Bill to implement proportional representation.

RECOMMENDATION 7. The committee NOT recommend that a referendum be held on the committee's report, but that they recommend a free vote be held in the House on the Government Bill.

CONCLUSION

Of the two favoured systems of proportional representation, the alternative vote or party list systems, the fundamental difference is should we elect an individual who, although attached to a party is being elected locally to represent the riding in Parliament, or should we be electing a party who may or may not allocate a Member to represent the riding in Parliament. I come down firmly in favour of the former;

In order to increase voting participation and have the vote better reflect the vote of the people I support the introduction of Proportional Representation through the alternative or ranked ballot system

Furthermore I support compulsory voting with suitable "carrots and sticks", the introduction of electronic voting and a review of the new system after two elections.

I do not support a referendum but prefer a free vote in the House of Commons.

Submitted by,

Nicholas Tunnacliffe

Toronto, Ontario