

## **Electoral reform**

There is a key question that has not been addressed in the discussions I have heard in the debate on electoral reform so far, which **MUST** be considered before any change is made. The question is: "In a democratic system like Canada's, what should be the balance between the powers of the individual, elected MP and that of the party".

Mr Chong's bill 2 years ago had widespread support because it attempted to correct this balance in favour of individual MPs. It was generally accepted that the balance had swung, over a significant period of time and for a variety of reasons, too far in favour of the party and particularly its leadership. Proportional representation carries much potential for this balance to substantially increase the power of the party at the expense of the individual MPs.

The fundamental principle of our democratic system is that MP's **represent** their constituents- all their constituents -once in office. There is a direct link and accountability between the MP and the voters. The directness of the link results in the ability of the voter to "throw the bums out" if it is felt they do not represent their constituents. Do we wish to change this principle? I do not believe this is wise without the most careful assessment. In the list of potential systems provided by the Library of Parliament's report (Electoral Systems and Electoral Reform in Canada and Elsewhere: an Overview), only the AV system appears to fully maintain this link. Those systems that use lists of candidates supplied by a party will, it seems to me, leave MP's that are elected through the list almost fully accountable to the party that chose them, and hence result in very little possibility for independent thinking by individual MP's to represent their constituents. This is particularly the case with closed list systems. I note that the report lists only Russia and South Africa with fully closed list systems.

I hope that the Special Committee on Electoral Reform will consider this balance most carefully in its deliberations, and provide the Canadian public with its recommendations on electoral reform with this issue in the forefront.

The issue of the decision process to be used for electoral reform is also a key point. It is clear, I believe, that a referendum is not a suitable decision mechanism for complex questions that require careful balancing of objectives to achieve the best result. Referenda require issues to be whittled down to the simplest, clear yes/no question. The Quebec referendum illustrates the point. The Brexit referendum is an excellent example of another problem with referenda; many voters, it appears, voted to leave the EU as a marker for their views on other issues that were not relevant to question posed. It seems to me that the final decision should be made in Parliament, based on a Canada wide survey of the recommended route which includes the rationale for the recommendations. All the means of communication that are available today should be used to obtain as wide a response as possible.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

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