

The town hall conversation about our democratic values in relation to different voting systems was held on October 3rd from 7.30pm to 9.20pm at the Paisley Town Hall (Legion). It was organized by me, Sibylle Walke ,a Canadian citizen,who is interested in electoral reform. The work of ERRE, I felt, needed to be highlighted in our riding, before the lapse of the submission period.

The event was advertised through flyers in Paisley, by word of mouth, electronically on Facebook and through Fair Vote Canada, which I am a member of .

30+ people ,who were interested in voting reform attended. However only 5 people were current on the work of **ERRE, the all party committee on voting reform,,** and it's time lines.

The first half of the evening (until 8.10pm) was spent ,on general information about ERRE and it's mandate, directing attendees to it's website and back ground information, as well as explaining different voting models (flip chart) with the back ground materials and diagrams drawn from the government site.

The models outlined were MMP(Mixed Member Proportional) , STV(Single Transferable Vote) as well as Rural Urban Proportional in the Swedish version,adding a proportional element for the rural voters in the form of top up seats . FPTP (our present system) was illustrated by voting for 3 kinds of sweets before the break; a close race, which meant more people got the chocolate bar they hadn't voted for,then the number of fans of this particular sweet. Following this AV (the Alternative Vote) was explained as a modification ,which allows for a majority instead of a plurality, but is not a proportional system.Many questions about details and the functioning of these systems were asked.

After a 10 minute break ,in which participants chatted ,viewed the information on the charts and picked up material from Fair Vote Canada, began the discussion phase.

At this point ca 8.25pm ,four people left and the remaining split up in 5 groups of 4+.

Each of the 5 tables was assigned one of the five democratic principles,which govern the discussion on voting reform. Attendees were to measure how the present voting system reflects the values and imagine improvements.

At 9.10 pm a spokesperson from each group presented the findings, which were written on post it notes or paper and tabulated on the flip chart.

SUMMARY:

Concerning EFFECTIVENESS it was remarked that the present system leads to hyper partisanship and false majorities and tends to suppress information by shutting down discussion.Majority governments have not necessarily lead to stable government. Participants would like to see a more collaborative less pugnacious parliament, possibly allowing for a coalition government. This would also bring greater overall consistency and preclude wild swings,which can wipe out an established party representing a great number of citizens.Regional disparities emphasized by FPTP threaten the unity of the country.

The LEGITIMACY group felt that votes did not count equally. Some voters of a turquoise persuasion in a "safe " purple riding may never find representation in a life time .An element of proportionality would ensure greater INTEGRITY. At the same time a new voting system would require thorough public education and a simple easily understood ballot for the result to be legitimate .

Parliament is currently threatened by too much power concentrated in the Prime Ministers office as well as with party whips.

INCLUSIVENESS and ACCESSIBILITY was deemed very important for a functioning democracy. Significant minorities and women were more likely and more consistently to be represented through a proportional vote. For the country to navigate in a changing world it is necessary to inject new ideas, knowledge, experience and concepts in the political discourse.

On VOTER ENGAGEMENT the restoration of the per-vote subsidy was mentioned as well as encouraging young people(16+) to vote. (Only one participant on OCT 3rd was between 16 and 25years).

Again only a proportional voting system prevents the elimination of c.a.half all the votes cast from counting towards electing a representative.

One person who left before the breakout round noted that mandatory attendance to a voting station should be required for all eligible voters.,

Lastly the requirement for LOCAL REPRESENTATION was high on the list of values and constitutes the greatest challenge for the design of a Canadian electoral system because of Canada's many areas of low population.

Paisley lies at the border of two large rural ridings making face to face contact with the MP impractical and rare. So it was conceivable for area citizens to imagine regional representation within a larger district of similar make up ,which might include smaller cities.

While most attendees favoured a proportional system, a concern was voiced to be able to elect MPs, who are knowledgeable about the region, who are named and known on a list and who must be accountable to the electorate.

A quick vote for different systems was taken at the end of the evening with 19 people wanting to see some kind of proportional system,no one voting for FPTP or for AV, but the remaining 8 not wanting to vote at this point. One person ,who had left early was concerned that only majority governments could come to decisions.