

October 25, 2016

Sent by email: erre@parl.gc.ca and maryam.monsef@parl.gc.ca

Special Parliamentary Committee on Electoral Reform and
Maryam Monsef, Minister of Democratic Institutions
Parliament Hill
111 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Dear Special Parliamentary Committee on Electoral Reform and Minister of Democratic Institutions
Maryam Monsef,

Re: Submission to Parliamentary Committee (ERRE)

On behalf of Unifor's 312,000 members, I want to emphasize to you the high priority we place on implementing your government's pledge to reform our electoral system before the next election.

In August, our national convention affirmed that electoral reform is an important issue to be addressed in Canadian democracy. Our members unanimously endorsed a proportional representation system for Canada.

Unifor members want elections that make every vote count and make extreme false majorities very unlikely or impossible. We want more cooperation in parliament and less partisanship. We want fewer reasons to vote strategically and more opportunity to vote for a hopeful, progressive future. We want more reasons for young people and all those who have been alienated from politics to engage and participate in the democratic process.

Unifor has deliberately avoided the debate on a detailed model to replace "First Past The Post." We have instead come to the principled conclusion and recommendation that we need a proportional system that allocates seats in our Parliament in a way that gives weight to every vote.

We believe that the all-party committee on electoral reform has the capacity, the mandate and the information on voting systems that is needed to fulfill these aspirations. It is your government's responsibility, and the responsibility of the NDP and Green Party representatives who also stood for electoral reform in the last election, to reach a consensus or a majority recommendation that is understandable and explainable to our members and our communities.

Members of the Committee, we expect you to find a solution and not to allow partisan concerns block to the majority.

The people of Canada spoke decisively in the federal election by electing a large majority of MPs who stated clearly they are committed to electoral reform. The outcome of that election which produced distorted results with almost exclusive one-party representation in several provinces, regions and cities bears out the need and the urgency for electoral reform. Unifor emphasizes strongly that the time for electoral reform is now.

If the majority for electoral reform fail to take this opportunity, it will be a long time before these conditions come around again. Unifor members are ready for change now and we are expecting you to lead that change to ensure that a new proportional voting system is in place for the next federal election in 2019.

For any additional information please contact Patty Barrera, National Representative at 416-768-5858 or by email at patty.barrera@unifor.org.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jerry Dias". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jerry Dias
National President

cc: Patty Barrera, Roland Kiehne, Jenny Ahn

JD/pb/kw:cope.343

Unifor Membership Consultations on Electoral Reform

In 2016, Unifor consulted its members on Electoral Reform in the following five ways:

1. Our elected National Executive Board (NEB) discussed and debated the merits of First Past the Post (FPTP) and Proportional Representation (PR) voting systems multiple times, and in March 2016 adopted a position in favour of PR, with three principles (outlined below). It was also decided to send a resolution with a recommendation for a “Reformed electoral process with a Proportional Representation system” to our National Convention in Ottawa in August 2016, and to join our allies at the Every Voter Counts Alliance (www.everyvotercounts.ca).
2. At the August 2016 National Convention, a resolution was debated and unanimously adopted on convention floor.

Resolution : unifor.org/en/take-action/campaigns/electoral-reform?v=updates

Our three principles for electoral reform, supporting PR where:

- every vote counts
 - the system is proportional
 - we continue to have local representation
3. Materials, a webpage and eBlasts were developed to educate our members on our position and encouraging them to act by contacting their elected MPs and participating in the government’s consultation process online via its online survey, Twitter or email (unifor.org/electoralreform).
 4. We mobilized and supported our members so they could actively participate in the Special Parliamentary Committee’s cross country tour, to reflect the voices of our local communities.
 5. We organized four consecutive weeks of Member Consultations at the Unifor Family Education Centre in Port Elgin, Ontario. More than 400 Unifor members participated in a series of structured roundtable discussions based on dialogue questions drawn from the Government of Canada publication: ***“Your Guide to Hosting a Successful Dialogue on Canadian Electoral Reform.”***

Report from Port Elgin Electoral Reform Consultations

Methodology:

Four weekly consultation sessions (community townhall style) were held from September 14 to October 12, 2016. Each session was 90 minutes and involved a broad cross section of Unifor members from across Canada, including an equal number of men and women representing a wide spectrum of employment sectors, regions, and ages. Participants were asked to discuss the questions below in a small group format with responses documented by a scribe. Responses from each session were aggregated and have been analyzed to determine the range of responses.

A selection of themes was informed by key principles identified in the discussion guide and focused on exploring views on the following main topics (approx. 30-minute presentation before the discussions):

- Canada's current federal electoral system, including perceptions of the effectiveness and legitimacy of our current system and how the effectiveness and legitimacy could be strengthened through a reformed system that more accurately reflects the democratic will of voters.
- Degree of electoral engagement and democratic participation under the current electoral system and how engagement and participation could be encouraged and increased under a reformed electoral system.

Questions selected from the guide to explore participant perceptions drew some interesting responses:

1. *Do you and/or the people you know usually vote in elections? Why or why not?*

Why

- to have a say and voice in the House of Commons
- hope for a better living
- feeling of "responsibility"
- right to vote
- because family votes (and, because family votes a certain way)
- want to set the "right example" for children

Why Not

- a lot of people feeling like their vote doesn't matter or count (especially from our young workers consultation tables)
- "disenfranchised" (more than half)

- promises not kept
- feeling unrepresented
- FPTP does reflect people we voted for
- lack of diversity
- working too many jobs to make time to get educated and vote
- knowledge and understanding of our political system (feeling like they don't know enough)
- access to voting, remote locations, food-banks and places frequented by target community
- feeling disillusioned
- don't see themselves or people who look like them reflected back
- that politicians are personally motivated and benefit only themselves
- language barriers

Do you feel the House of Commons represents Canadians effectively?

- no

Are there certain groups that you feel are excluded from the current electoral system?

- Indigenous people
- working class people
- people of colour
- immigrants
- young people
- homeless people
- women
- people living with a disability
- seniors and folks in assistive care/nursing homes

It was clear from our consultation that once our members understood the options for reform they easily chose it over our current system.

Unifor is Canada's largest union in the private sector, representing more than 310,000 members across Canada, in every sector of the economy, including health care, auto, rail, media, telecommunications, energy, mining, forestry, pulp and paper, dairy, manufacturing, transportation and more. The union was formed Labour Day weekend 2013 when the Canadian Auto Workers and the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers union merged.

Final Electoral Reform Resolution

Adopted at our 2nd Unifor Convention, August 2016



Whereas delegates to Unifor's Canadian Council in Vancouver unanimously adopted the paper 'Politics for Workers – Unifor's Political Project'; and

Whereas 'Politics for Workers – Unifor's Political Project' dedicated a section of the paper to democratic and electoral reform; **and**

Whereas the Canadian government has asked the 'special committee on electoral reform' to identify and study a number of different voting systems – such as preferential ballots and proportional representation – to replace the first-past-the-post system. The committee was also asked to consider the issues of mandatory voting and online voting by December 1, 2016, therefore:

Be it resolved that Unifor endorse a 'Made in Canada' Proportional Representation (PR) electoral system to make every vote count, to be in place by the next federal election; and

Be it further resolved that Unifor National, Regional Council's and Locals actively campaign by launching an education program, a legislative & media campaign advocating for electoral reform and PR within our membership; and

Be it further resolved that Unifor continue to support and work with the Canadian Labour Congress and 'Every Voter Counts Alliance' to develop the broader civil society public response.