

Brief for Special Committee on Electoral Reform

Niko Block

Dear Special Committee on Electoral Reform,

The two most important problems of our electoral system are that it does not sufficiently represent Canadians, and that it is not sufficiently accessible to them.

The problem of representation under the current first-past-the-post system is obvious: a plurality of voters can easily elect a majority government, thereby leaving more than half of voters with little or no political purchase in the legislature. It is for very good reason, therefore, that so many Canadians do not feel motivated to vote at all.

In order to address this, whilst simultaneously maintaining regional representation, we clearly need to adopt some version of a mixed-member proportional system.

For the sake of political coherence, I should note that it is strongly advisable that our system remain effectively unicameral. The political gridlock in the US suggests to me that it would be a serious mistake for Canada's Senate to become more powerful than it is. (Indeed, I believe it should be dissolved entirely.)

Accessibility clearly needs to be improved for many groups, including disabled people and people living in rural areas; but I'm aware that many of these issues have already been discussed before the Committee, so I won't belabour the point.

Instead, I want to stress the importance of improving accessibility for workers. For Canadians as a whole, it is clear that professional obligations represent the largest obstacle to voting on election day. If this Committee is acting in good faith to improve our democratic system, then it should unequivocally recommend that election days be designated as national holidays. This would obviously improve the ballot's accessibility for many working people who already remain seriously underrepresented in political and civil society.

I want to highlight two additional issues that deserve consideration. First, the Committee should consider the idea of mandatory voting, although this should only be considered alongside major improvements in accessibility. Studies have indicated that mandatory voting can dramatically improve political participation and awareness, while those not wishing to vote at all can of course spoil their ballots.

And finally, I want to stress that the Committee should stress the importance of excluding private money from our electoral system as much as possible. The undemocratic ramifications of a US-style system—characterized by corporate lobbies and private campaign financing—are overwhelmingly obvious.

To sum up, I strongly recommend that the Committee vouch for a mixed-member proportional system, and statutory holidays on election days. It should also consider mandatory voting, and vouch for strong limitations on private donations to parties and MPs.

Thank you for all your hard work on this important issue. Please proceed in good faith, and in a manner that tells Canadians that their votes will count.

Best wishes,
Niko Block