

## Brief submission to ERRE from Pierre Meilleur

I was present at the ERRE parliamentary committee's Toronto session (#27) on September 21<sup>st</sup>. It was my first experience attending a parliamentary committee session and I'd have liked to have made an oral submission but, being unfamiliar with procedures, I failed to register for the first open mic that began at 16:15. Unfortunately I was inappropriately dressed for the overly air-conditioned environment and by the time public submissions resumed (after 18:00) my body temperature had plummeted. Already shivering, I dared not subject myself to that refrigerated room again to await my turn to speak (likely through chattering teeth), so I opted to write down my thoughts on the matter and forward them to you, the committee members, by e-mail.

It's no coincidence that I chose the ERRE committee meetings as a first-ever experience in witnessing our participatory democracy at work, first-hand. I believe electoral reform is vitally important to the health of our democracy. If we really do believe that **every vote counts** then our current electoral system must change. I'd like to encourage the committee members to reject our traditional First Past the Post (FPP) electoral system and recommend to Parliament that we adopt a form of Proportional Representation (PR). The PR options are many and I trust our ERRE committee, having heard from experts and the public throughout the country, to recommend the one that best represents the interests of all Canadians.

As the system stands, many Canadian votes are completely inconsequential. I suspect that this is the major contributing factor to low voter turnout at election time. The unfairness of the FPP system lies in the unequal distribution of like-minded voters from one riding to another. Some ridings are almost uniformly like-minded politically (safe ridings) while others are quite variegated (hotly-contested ridings). In safe ridings, the votes of the small minority count for nothing. In the hotly contested ridings, the winner usually garners less than 50% of the vote, meaning the majority of electors there get no representation.

The riding I have lived in much of my adult life is a good case in point. The Beaches / East York riding has bounced between the Liberals and NDP, both federally and provincially, for as long as I can remember. The PC or Green voter in this riding never has a hope of electing their representative and therefore has no incentive to vote at all. Those that are more civic minded will go ahead and cast their meaningless vote, but a large number of PC or Green supporters here would likely not even bother. Ontario's Chief Elections Officer, Greg Essensa, told the committee that only approximately 10% of those surveyed who did not vote gave as an explanation that they "could not be bothered", while somewhere near 40% used "too busy" as an excuse. One should keep in mind that marking "too busy" on a questionnaire is much more palatable, even if it is only self-deluding, than to admit that one can't be bothered because our vote is wasted. Many of those who are "too busy" would likely find the time if they felt that their vote would actually count for something.

Prime Minister Kim Campbell's name was mentioned on numerous occasions that day as women's representation in government received a lot of attention. Her election year, 1993, illustrates well the unfairness of FPP, especially when regional issues trump national prerogatives. That year the presence of the Reform Party and the BQ helped to distort results and give the Liberals a huge majority. The BQ and RP garnered 13.5% and 18.7% of the vote, respectively. That translated to 54 seats (14 more than

PR) and 52 seats (3 less than PR), respectively. Now compare that to the PC's 16% of the vote which yielded only **2 seats**! PR would have given them 47! The Liberals got 41.3% of the vote; that would translate to 122 PR seats. They won 177!

That election also saw the NDP take 9 seats with 6.9% of the vote. Coincidentally, in 2008, the Greens also garnered 6.9 % but won only 1 seat. Ask Elizabeth May how she'd have felt about having 8 more Greens in Parliament that session and how that might have impacted the fortunes of the Green Party in the subsequent elections. The 1993 election had the most distorted results across the board but gross distortions occur with almost every election. The PC's suffered again in 1997; with 18.8% support they won only **20** seats (recall the Reform's 18.7% in '93 = **52** seats). There have been 3 majority governments in the last 20 years that garnered less than 40% of the vote, including the last 2 (Trudeau & Harper). That's 100% power with less than 40% support. The Harper government took advantage of this gifted, yet undeserved, power to ram through a couple of omnibus bills (the most undemocratic kind of legislation) that will take successive governments decades to repair. It's no wonder so many Canadians feel disenfranchised!

I understand that integrating a PR system into our current parliamentary riding set-up is complicated and presents us with other kinds of democratic challenges. We don't have to adopt someone else's PR; we can create our own Canadian version. But, if we are to have fair representation and make every vote count, FPP must go. Please, let's move our democracy into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Pierre Meilleur  
Advanced Care Paramedic  
Toronto Paramedic Service