

Submitted by Muriel Wiens

Democracy

General

1. People would feel more interested in democracy if the vote were compulsory. At least once every four years, everyone would have to at least decide whether to vote or be fined for not voting, and that might lead those of us who think politics is beneath them to decide whether their lack of interest is something they are willing to pay for. The fine should be meaningful and tied to income level, like everything else the government does. Citizenship should at least require interest in who governs Canadians and it cheapens citizenship when voting is not compulsory.
2. All of our group votes. We are a group which is alert to ongoing events and discusses them together.
3. a) The only time some of us were challenged was during the last vote, when the turnout was huge in the preliminary vote and there were long lineups because the election people were unprepared. It is our understanding that the previous government followed the American example of making it hard to vote for people who had no fixed address or who weren't working and that furthermore, the means to have someone vouch for these people was restricted so as to prevent the "lower class" from having a say. This is so wrong it is hard to express adequate indignation.

b) We have a community owned bus. All parties should be expected to pay for the fares of people without cars so that they can vote. We are aware that parties work hard at getting their own people out but nobody much cares about people who haven't expressed party preference. This is a group of people who may be saner than those of us involved in party politics and therefore they must somehow be invited or enticed to vote.
4. Yes and no. Yes because people are elected by geographical and population criteria. No because when people get to Parliament, they just become ciphers supporting the "leader". They do not adequately define themselves as being responsible to folks back home. We do not much like the way Parties have turned into Teams instead of representing their Ridings. The Sports metaphor is a stupid way to define the interests of a nation. We think there should be more requests for our opinions on votes. For instance, many of us are elderly and we did not like the Suicide Bill because it was too restrictive and we do not think autonomous human beings should be dictated to by physicians as to when we end our lives and under which circumstances.
5. The health of a democracy could be measured by the sanity of its political discourse. Pettiness and dirty tricks and spin imply that the public suffers from terminal stupidity. We do not. Some of us get so mad at the idiocy of public political discourse that we stop voting. Yes, that's an adolescent response, but it happens.
6. Leaders should be intelligent. They should have the courage of their convictions. Not cunning so much as able to problem solve and to be able to see through to the implications of behaviour and where a line of action will lead and what can go wrong and what, even though risky, is the "right thing" to do. They should be able to talk well to anyone. They should be able to feel the tenor of the people and where the pain is and be able to create realistic solutions to problems created by greed and stupidity. We believe that greed leads to stupidity, and not the other way around. We have heard politicians say, when confronted with a decision that was a bit shady, "It's complicated". We know that that is a short form of "We know this is a bad thing to do but we don't have the guts or intelligence to do the right thing".

a) Overvalued attributes are: being good looking, sweet talking, well-known because of some success in an unrelated field from politics, wealthy, and a “party faithful”. Undervalued attributes are: thoughtfulness, honesty, integrity, loyalty to their constituents, and the capacity and courage to tell their leader when he or she is being stupid or greedy or pigheaded.

7. There should be regularly scheduled community meetings with Members, so that voters know when they can turn up and be heard about things they are concerned about, and if the Member has delegated the duty of listening to his Riding population to a “helper”, he should be voted out at the next election.

DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

(1)

(a) Integrity is the most important, and necessary to the rest. If we can't trust our elected rep. to do what he or she says he or she will do, the rest is mere window dressing. Integrity will lead the Member to do what is necessary to serve the constituents.

(b) If “legitimacy” means belonging to a Party, then that is the least important.

(c) Proof in life of having been an effective problem solver on behalf of others would be good, and also a dedication to serve Canada rather than one's own career, but then, we know we're asking for the impossible.

(2)

a. Street people, poor people, are excluded from voting by the way society shuns them and makes them feel worthless, and this is enacted by the failure of political workers to talk to them or get them out to vote or enable them to have a say.

b. Universal compulsory suffrage would make the voting system more inclusive. Every citizen votes and is on the electoral rolls and there are funds allocated to getting the disadvantaged to the polls. Perhaps we should even pay people to vote.

c. Invent a way to get every well citizen to a polling station. Powerless people are readily manipulated and frightened into doing what is demanded by a bully. To get people out to vote who live on the street or in some crummy apartment with barely enough to eat is a huge logistical problem, and we doubt that their point of view is welcome to the political class anyway. So we are sadly of the opinion that Canada will never actually have universal suffrage until the miracle happens, and Canadians agree to share the wealth the way they do in Scandinavian countries and to be a nation that proudly says, “we take care of one another”, as the Danes do.

CANADIAN FEDERAL ELECTORAL REFORMS

1. The strength of the current system is that local people get to choose their representatives, whatever Party that is. The weakness is that the power of choice of candidate has been often shifted to the Leader of a Party rather than to the people whom that representative is meant to serve. This is so wrong we are speechless about it. In fact, the Party system has become a problem to democracy.

2. Yes there are other electoral systems.
 - a. There are various mechanisms for making the proportion of votes for a party actually be the proportion of votes in Parliament.
 - b. Allowing a form of proportional representation in Parliament will open the door to new and therefore probably more representative and relevant points of views of what needs to be enacted in Parliament. People will actually be able to vote for something they believe in rather than the lesser of evils.
 - c. We are suspicious of those which have the Party decide which of their Members will actually be sent to govern. That is just Party dictatorship in disguise. This is the hidden danger in proportional representation. It looks so good on the outside, alas.
3. We worry that it could be gamed or falsified. Paper doesn't vanish at the touch of a key and we believe that the system of vote counting with Scrutineers from each Party at a witnessed count of paper votes works more efficiently than the American computer system.
4. We are older and don't trust that an e mail will get to its destination with integrity and certainty.
5. We've already discussed mandatory voting, of which we approve.
6. We are concerned that the proposed new system of voting, a form of proportional representation, will hand over all the power of decision of candidate choice over to the parties, which is not a good thing, since it takes choice of our representation yet another step away from the ordinary citizen.