

CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON ELECTORAL REFORM
ANSWERS TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS SUBMITTED TO
TOM HOENISCH

September 12, 2004

From Wendy Bergerud

Would you agree that MMP mixes two of the worst systems together: constituency seats selected by plurality votes and closed-list PR where the party leadership chooses who is at the top of their list? Would you agree that this is a "fix" of the FPTP system instead of an overhaul of our electoral system?

Answer:

No I do not agree with this. I believe that MMP takes the only redeeming feature of the current First-Past-The-Post system, namely the constituency seats, and blends this with the proportionality that you get with Proportional Representation. This is not just a "fix" of the FPTP system; this is, for British Columbia, an entirely new system.

From David Wills:

1. I notice that you appear to be supporting a closed list system where the party decides who is on the party list. I would be interested in understanding why you prefer a closed list system to one which allows the voters to decide which of the candidates on the party list gets the seats that the party has won.
2. I am also interested in your comments on the use of Regional List as some submissions to the Assembly have suggested that MMP should use Regional Lists in an attempt to ensure a more balanced representation for the various regions of the province.

Answers:

1. I prefer a closed list system rather than an open list system for 3 reasons:
 - a. There is greater simplicity for the voter at the ballot box. I believe that this is very important.
 - b. The parties will be responsible for who is where on their list and the parties will have to defend their decisions to the electorate.
 - c. The parties can ensure, if they chose to, that there is gender parity, that minorities are represented and that there is a good urban/rural mix near the top of their list.
2. I do not feel that regional lists are necessary. I think that political parties will ignore the regions at their peril. How many people from the north will vote for a party that doesn't have some representation from northerners on their list?

From John Zall:

You do not mention the single transferable vote option. What is your position regarding STV?

Answer:

My position regarding STV is that it is far too complex a system. Remember that we need a system that can get at the support of at least 60% of the voters in 60% of the ridings. People will just not vote for a system that they do not understand.

From Anna Rankin:

What advantages are there to this system for people from rural areas where constituency size will now be the same as the federal ridings?

Answer:

The basic answer is that the people from rural areas will have the same advantages from mixed member proportional representation as everyone else has. Let us take north eastern BC as an example since one of the presenters Ms Morey is from that area. It is true that under my proposal this area would have only one constituency seat rather than the two it has now, but it is very probable that most of the parties would have the name of a northerner high up on their list; therefore it is very possible that this area would be represented by two or even three MLAs once the election is over! Ms Morey stated that this area of BC has voted for right wing parties for as long as she can remember. Well, in Peace River North and Peace River South 3,475 people voted for non right wing parties and these people can finally have their votes count.

From Sally de Luna:

Why would you reduce the constituency? How could a candidate who won in a certain riding and who did not belong to a strong party stand the pressure of competition and be effective in his position. Without a party who will financially support a candidate to his election?

Answer:

Since you do not have the mandate to increase the number of MLAs, you have to reduce the number of constituencies in order to get proportionality in the legislature. I believe that you need at least 50% of the seats to be allocated proportionally in order to get true proportionality in the legislature. Therefore the maximum number of constituencies that you could have would be 39. I am proposing 36 constituencies that are the same as the federal constituencies because there would be real cost savings which is an important consideration and the federal MPs prove that these constituencies do work.

For the second part of your question I am not sure exactly what you mean. If you are referring to Independent Candidates it is true that they are at a disadvantage under MMP, but they are also under a disadvantage under our current system. That is why you rarely see an Independent MLA elected. Under MMP, independents could still run in constituencies just as they do now.