



Electoral Justice Now!

Liberating Democracy from an unjust electoral system, to better reflect and serve the 'Will of the People' !

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EJN Newsletter #2: Are we witnessing another PR 'failure in the making'?

Every time a Canadian opposition party has promised electoral reform and then been elected to government, they've set up some process that has ended in failure.

The pertinent question for the citizens and politicians of BC to now ask is this:

Are we witnessing another PR (proportional representation) 'failure in the making'?

The kickoff public event was a 'PR Townhall Meeting' held at Victoria's City Hall on Sept.18. Organized by Fair Vote Canada (FVC), it featured the PR representatives of the three parties: Leonard Krog (NDP), Sonia Furstenau (Green), Andrew Wilkinson (Liberal). The meeting was well attended by a predominantly older crowd, strong supporters of PR, many of whom were actively involved in the failed campaigns for the adoption of BC-STV (Single Transferable Vote) in the referenda of 2005 and 2009.

Along with the defeats of the MMP (Mixed Member Proportional) voting system in referendums in Ontario and PEI, and the failure of the 2016 federal study on electoral reform to even make it to the referendum as recommended by the ERRE Committee (i.e. when the PM unilaterally decided to break his promise, citing a lack of consensus), all electoral reform initiatives in Canada have so far produced only failure.

It's also noteworthy that none of the governments that failed to fulfill their promise of electoral reform made a sincere effort to achieve a successful outcome. Indeed, in at least three of the five cases noted, the governments intentionally acted to avoid fulfillment of their promises.

As Terry Dance Bennink of FVC explained, the primary obstacle to electoral reform is always that it places the government in a '**conflict of interest**' situation. Specifically, our existing voting system 'First-Past-The-Post' (FPTP) produces distorted results—that always work to the advantage of the winners (i.e. the government party) and to the disadvantage of the losers (i.e. the opposition). As victims of FPTP distortions, the opposition parties periodically promise electoral reform. But once elected, they've become beneficiaries of FPTP distortions, placing them in the conflict of interest.

Rather than breaking their promise directly, a government stuck with an inconvenient promise usually initiates a '*made-to-fail*' process—either with an inconclusive study (e.g. ERRE report provided a flimsy excuse for Trudeau) or a '*made-to-fail*' referendum.

There's no legal requirement for a referendum on electoral reform, and most countries that have changed their electoral system haven't had a referendum. However, a referendum is a proven winner as a '*made-to-fail*' trick to avoid electoral reform.

Many electoral systems have much less distortion than FPTP, but most of them have unfortunate flaws and greater complexity—which are always exploited by opponents of PR (led by associates of major parties—i.e. the beneficiaries of FPTP distortions).

So here we go again. BC is looking at its third referendum (in just over a decade) on some unknown form of PR. Will this finally be a triumph of Democracy and a victory for the People—or ***are we witnessing yet another PR ‘failure in the making’?***

By raising this question now, at the outset of the process, ***Electoral Justice Now*** hopes to turn a faulty start into a winning result.

From the Sept. 18 PR Town Hall meeting, several facts are clear:

1. Leonard Krog, representing the NDP government, stated that confidential discussions were ongoing with the Green party and advisors, concerning the various PR alternatives and referendum question(s). Krog also indicated his preference for Mixed-Member PR (MMP). No decisions have yet been made.
2. Andrew Wilkinson (Liberal) objected to the process—especially the ‘behind closed doors’ meetings between the NDP and Greens. He stated that the best process would be another BC Citizens’ Assembly. It was pretty clear that Liberals wouldn’t support any form of PR, with some concerns regarding rural representation.
3. The following day, the Tyee published an article by Bill Tieleman (former NDP strategist): “[Greens Political ‘Hostage-Taking’, Preview of Grim Future Under Proportional Representation](#)”. This is a very professional hatchet job, by a political partisan, on PR in general and MMP in particular.

From these facts, several observations are clear:

4. The NDP (and Greens) have made themselves very vulnerable to very reasonable criticisms about their process—quite apart from whatever referendum emerges.
5. The future for the Greens is highly vulnerable to attacks against PR producing endless minority governments, with the ‘tail wagging the dog’ syndrome.
6. MMP has flaws that make it highly vulnerable to attacks by a NO campaign.
7. The NO campaign is off and running—even before the referendum is known!
8. NDP associates are not all committed to PR.

From these observations, several conclusions seem clear:

9. Framing the issue as a choice of **Electoral Justice** (i.e. PR) vs **Injustice** (FPTP) is probably the only chance of winning—and probably the best referendum question.
10. **PerfectPR** is clearly the best and simplest form of PR—and the least vulnerable to a NO campaign.