

Fearing the People

Rod Taylor

Leader, CHP Canada

How do we choose those who rule over us? Does it matter? Can we change it? If we do so, will things improve? Our new Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, has vowed to change the electoral system and—so far—says he will do it without allowing Canadians to vote on it in a cross-country referendum. Is he right or wrong?

Many have written and spoken about this topic already and I offer my thoughts at risk of repeating what has already been said... so I'll start with something that I have not yet heard said in relation to this issue of electoral reform and whether or not it should be determined by a public referendum. Democracy—in whatever form it takes—does not guarantee good policies, good social outcomes, or general happiness and prosperity. The formation of a government “of the people, by the people, and for the people” (as described by Abraham Lincoln) does not guarantee justice, a sound economy, or a generous and open community. Winston Churchill's famous quote —“Democracy is the worst form of government except for all those others that have been tried...”—is particularly significant since he, like Lincoln, was a politician who depended on public support at the polls to accomplish his unique role in history.

Don't get me wrong. I support Canada's parliamentary democracy. The opportunity to seek public support for ideas and policies is a cherished and sacred privilege but there are many reasons—besides FPTP (first past the post)—why the best men and women and the best policies and platforms are not always chosen by the electorate. The first and foremost is human nature. For those who hold a Christian world view, consider these things: It was the majority of those present at Christ's unjust “trial” who shouted, “Crucify him!” It was the majority of the residents of Sodom who invited judgment on their city by rejecting the call for repentance. In fact, God was not able to find ten righteous men in the city. It was the majority of the spies sent out by Moses who returned with a “bad report” and advised disobeying God. When the majority choose evil, the whole society suffers.

For many years now, the voters of Canada have chosen governments that have not protected the innocent pre-born, defended marriage, established sound fiscal policies, or protected the right to promote sound moral values in our education system. Why? Because voters have been convinced—often by the government itself or by the school system, the courts, or the media—that such policies would either restrict their choices, reduce their incomes and pleasures, or force them to do things they don't want to do. In short, voters have chosen collectively to put men and women in power who are not committed to a biblical world view. Sure, there have been some noteworthy exceptions, but across the country, the majority of voters have not endorsed a return to righteous government.

The CHP has long supported some form of proportional representation, which would see all parties that earn a minimum share of the vote sending at least one or more MPs to Ottawa. In recent years, a strong case has also been made for preferential balloting which would remove the “splitting the vote/wasted vote” excuse and allow every voter's first and second choices to count. This is the system favoured by our new PM. Although all of these systems would allow voters to be more fairly represented, we have to admit that such changes may not give social conservatives the government we want. By very definition, either of these alternative systems may result in entrenching a leftist-liberal-socialist government. Why? We regret to say it but that's where most Canadians are.

On the other hand, many of those opposed to electoral reform believe that keeping the left split and “uniting the right” is the only way to return a nominally conservative government. They cling to FPTP in the hopes of beating the Left by coming “up the middle.” I see the logic but it didn't work in 2015 and it may never again be a winning strategy

until our nation returns to a collective biblical world view. And who's to say that the left will remain divided? Party mergers have been discussed in the past. The Liberals, Greens and NDP are so close together that only pride and ego separate them. Until social values change, the pressure to elect leftists will only increase, regardless of the electoral system in place.

If, four years from now, we do happen to elect a government that is "Conservative" in name only and divided on the inside instead of being divided on the outside, what have we gained? Under Stephen Harper's strong majority, not a single baby was protected, marriage was not restored, the national debt increased by over \$150 billion, Planned Parenthood received \$6 million, the Toronto Gay Pride Parade received \$400,000, Gardasil was provided to young girls, the law against assisted suicide was thrown out and not defended. It's true that the rhetoric of Mr. Trudeau's Liberals is even worse, but perhaps Canadians just got tired of "lukewarm?" If cobbling together a centre-right party that can win means abandoning the pre-born and the elderly, buying votes with deficit spending, and cooperating in global corporate governance, what will have been gained?

There is another factor that drives the lopsided electoral bus. That is the national media mistreatment of the smaller parties that has been tolerated or endorsed by all the big parties now in the House. Our state-funded national broadcaster, the CBC, claims to provide "full election coverage" but only lists candidates from the Big Four parties on its website. Its "Vote Compass" deliberately leads unsuspecting voters into narrow choices, ignoring deeper questions and the legitimate candidates who endorse them. Candidates from parties that receive less than 10% of the vote do not benefit from the generous 60% of expenditure handouts enjoyed by the Big Four. Often, media coverage of small-party candidates is distorted or absent and, in many cases, those candidates are not included in public debates. The Big Parties have allowed these inequities to continue in order to corral what they see as their "vote-share entitlement." Talk of electoral reform is only window dressing if these issues are not addressed.

However, for those who really care about democracy and making "every vote count," all sides should agree to a referendum on this important decision. Aaron Wudrick of the Canadian Taxpayer Federation has written an excellent article on this in the National Post.¹ Whichever side of the fence you are on, it only makes sense to allow all Canadians to participate in this momentous decision. When our Prime Minister insists on changing the system without allowing a referendum, it appears that he "fears the people." If the people can be trusted to elect a government, surely they can be trusted to decide on an electoral system. Whichever plan is proposed as a way of achieving fairer representation must be subjected to scrutiny by those most affected—taxpaying voters. The decision should not be based on which party will gain but on whether voters will be heard. That's democracy at work. If we don't like the choices voters make, we need to work harder to educate them on the issues and to remove the obstacles to understanding.

CHP Canada is the only party that does not change with the changing whims of social pressure groups. Right is right no matter how few adhere to it. Wrong is wrong, no matter how many have accepted it. We cannot achieve right outcomes using faulty assumptions. To join a political party that offers a consistent standard of right and wrong, join CHP Canada today².

Footnotes

¹ news.nationalpost.com/full-comment/aaron-wudrick-principled-supporters-of-election-reform-should-concede-the-obvious-and-call-for-a-referendum

² www.chp.ca/get-involved