



Fair Vote Vancouver

Media Release
For Immediate Release

Berger Commission Precludes Proportional Representation

VANCOUVER -- March 22, 2004 -- Local Vancouver democracy advocates are calling on the Berger Commission (the Vancouver Electoral Reform Commission) to be true to its educational mandate by educating Vancouver voters on the pros and cons of proportional systems or a proportional wards system for the City of Vancouver, and to fairly consider that system. Currently, the Commission's web site features only three first-past-the-post systems of at-large (the system that is currently used), a full wards system, and a mix of the current at-large system and wards. At the opening of public forums, the Berger Commission has been saying that only the three systems of at-large, wards, and a mixed system (of at-large and wards) are under consideration.

"The Berger Commission's mandate is to consider all systems, not just the three first-past-the-post systems it is currently featuring and promoting," said Steve Kisby, a spokesperson for the group, "We feel the commission's educational mandate should have compelled it to research and feature proportional or a proportional wards system in its literature and on its web site on par with the other three systems it is promoting."

City Council has asked the Commission to report to Council on "other reforms for the improvement of civic democracy that would require amendments to the Vancouver Charter or other statutes in order to be implemented" and to "report to Council on the merits of the current at-large system, the ward system and other alternative systems." The Berger Commission has said that it "intends to make recommendations divided into two parts: What can the Council do on its own, and what will require provincial legislation."

"It is fully within the mandate of the Commission to consider a proportional system or a proportional wards system," said Kisby. "Further, within the commission's educational mandate we feel that the commission has an obligation to fairly present a proportional or a proportional wards system on par with the other three systems the Commission has presented," continued Kisby.

Proportional Representation (Pro-Rep) systems are the most widely used voting system in the world -- 75% of democracies with 2 million or more people use some form of Pro-Rep. However, one must look beyond Canada and the U.S. to find these systems. While these systems can be designed in many ways, the central idea is very simple. If an affiliation of candidates or a political party receives 40% of the popular vote, that affiliation or party elects an equivalent proportion of candidates.

It is believed that the political leaders now in control at City Hall have set their sights on a full wards system for Vancouver, and are just going through the motions to implement that system. A full wards system is the same flawed system we now have provincially and federally.

Fair Vote Vancouver is made up of voters who came together in response to Vancouver's Electoral Reform Commission. They believe a voting system should be measured on these four principles: Proportionality (where there should be a close correspondence between the percentage of votes a party or political affiliation wins and the percentage of seats it wins), Voter Choice (where comparatively you want a voting system that is better at presenting the choices that voters want, and encourages voters to vote sincerely, rather than strategically), Local Representation (where all regions in Vancouver should be fairly represented in City Council), and Every Vote Counts (where the voting system should accord equal weight to all ballots cast and should minimize the wastage of votes). A proportional wards system would meet the above principles.

A proportional system was one of the choices offered in the 1996 referendum on electoral reform in Vancouver. In the 1999 Vancouver election, COPE supported a proportional wards system.

Background information can be found at <http://www.alternatives.com/prorep> and the group can be contacted at fvv@alternatives.com

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