

Second Annual Social Justice Symposium
Remembering Andrew Macdonald

***Just Democracy:
Mixed Member Proportional Representation for all People***

November 21, 2015

Overall Chair: Joe Byrne

Overall Recorder: Ann Wheatley

Animator: Marie Burge

Participants: (Group leaders designated with “L” and Group recorders with :”R”)

Josie Baker (R) Richard Baker, Lorraine Begley (L), Robert Berners, Bill Bishop, Leo Broderick (L) Kirk Brown, J’Nan Brown, Marie Burge, Irene Burge (L), Joe Byrne, Leo Cheverie, Farida Chishi, Julie Devon Dodd, Gary Doiron, Irene Doyle, Stacy Dunn, Sibyl Frei (R) Bernadette Gallant, Elizabeth Greenan, Gerard Greenan, Mark Greenan, Carlo Hengst, Wendy Johnston, Darcie Lanthier, Florence Larkin (L), Irene Larkin (L), Maureen Larkin, Lloyd Lefurgey, Reg MacInnis, Karen MacKay, Liza MacLauchlan, Matt MacLeod, Leah MacLeod, Charles McQuaid, David McGregor, Gilles Michaud, Nouhad Mourad, Shawn Murphy, Chris Ortenburger (R), Frank Ortenburger, Brenda Oslawsky (L), Edith Perry, Reg Phelan, Rob Robinson, Catherine Ronahan (R), Selvi Roy, Kendi Tarichia (R), Debbie Theuerkauf (R), Bill Trainor, Rosalind Waters, Graham Welsh, Ann Wheatley, Zachary Williams, Dawn Wilson.

Symposium Objectives

- *to identify participants’ knowledge, concerns, and questions about Mixed Member Proportional Representation*
- *to position mixed member proportional representation as an acceptable electoral system for PEI*
- *to describe the advantages and challenges of Mixed Member Proportional Representation in PEI*

1. Welcome, and music by Roy Johnstone

Joe Byrne welcomed everyone. He acknowledged Andrew’s love of music, his commitment to social justice, to feminist ideals, to the preferential option for the poor, knowing that the voice of impoverished people guides us into building a better world. In Andrew’s memory, we continue to learn that the world is made better when we all work together: this is an opportune time to work for proportional representation.

Roy’s beautiful fiddle music gave the afternoon an uplifting start.

2. Small Group Discussions

Six table groups with pre-arranged leaders and recorder/reporters had animated discussion around two questions: *What do you know about MMP?* and *What would you like to know about MMP?*

2.1 What do we know about Mixed Member Proportional Representation?

- It's a system that's not easy to understand
- Tends to create minority governments
- Represents me better – my vote will matter – it encourages voting
- Leads to election of diverse representative government
- Proposed in 2005 – plebiscite
- New Zealand's experience: fair way to govern
- System lets us vote on hope not fear; for, not against
- German experience - vote for party plus platform – reliability, confidence
- Votes are represented in legislature
- Shared power, work together more
- Vote for representative in local area plus one from party
- Two votes, 1 for person 1 for party – popular vote determines percentage of seats
- System already working around the world except North America
- Better than Single Transferrable Vote, both give proportional results
- Wanting to see that you elect person with experience
- 2005 – Undermining efforts by 2 main parties
- More representative of society and community
- Builds collaboration and consensus.

2.2 What would we like to know about mixed Member Proportional Representation?

- How can we prevent perceived complexity putting off voters in plebiscite?
- Which types will work best?
- How does it work?
- How will it apply in communities, for individual voters?
- Who decides about lists – what if we don't like them?
- How do people get chosen for cabinet?
- Getting over concerns re: minority governments
- How does math work? (or does it matter, we don't understand the math behind taxes)
- What countries using it now, what's a good model for here?
- What info do we need to prepare and communicate?
- What are the advantages over other PR options? Differences?
- How would it impact youth participation?
- How does it actually work to increase diversity?
- If you vote for party plus person. Is it the party which chooses the persons on the list?
- Why don't people vote?
- How do main parties see it?
- How will my needs be addressed if representative is in another area of PEI?
- Can we understand it?
- Can we have an easier tool, so that we can talk about it clearly?
- How to get system that elects people who do what we want?
- How will office (constituency) know what's important to me?
- How to share models with public?

3. Presentation by Mark Greenan (*Unabridged text attached*)

Josie Baker introduced Mark Greenan:

Mark Greenan is a community advocate born in Summerside, Prince Edward Island and has been working collaboratively for a better world for over half his lifetime on causes like youth empowerment, environmental and animal protection and electoral reform. Mark has worked on dozens of political campaigns to support candidates from all partisan stripes at all levels of government and in every region of our country. He resides in Toronto and holds a M.A. in political science from the University of Ottawa. In 2005, he interrupted his studies to come home to PEI to work as the coordinator of the YES on MMP plebiscite.

Interlude - Music by Roy Johnstone

4. Dialogue with Mark

Comment #1 – (person originally from Germany) expressed concern that we need a system and not rely on politicians who have their own agenda – very important that we find ways for population to get proportional representation installed rather than asking politicians who may not be wanting to do it.

Comment #2 How do we tailor proportional representation to PEI? How can we do that so that it works well for PEI?

Mark: Ultimately a decision like this can be made or changed at any time by legislatures. The challenge is to be sure the legislators are on-board. As to made-in-PEI solution: there are many PR systems. Each country is different – in Germany, constitution says “lander” (federal states) must use PR. Even in Germany there are various forms of PR-

Comment #3 – We are looking for a system that facilitates more dialogue ; we need a system that is flexible.

Comment #4 In PEI there are deeply ingrained party allegiances. There is an intensity re: established parties. We need to deal with those attitudes. Mark said he would interpret the May, 2015 election results as a break from small c conservatism: yes; there were twice as many votes this time for parties other than Lib & PC.

Comment #5 In a high school debate 10 years ago it came out that it was hard to understand the ingrained fear that exists: an ingrained fear for example that that rural PEI would lose out. But taking a walk through history from 1775 we saw that in the beginning only men, property owners had a vote. Later women and Aboriginal people could vote. All of this is part of the evolutionary process of the system. Students seemed to get it: they could see that there was hope for change – it's not fixed.

Comment #6 We would like to see a system which gives emphasis to party platform, rather than candidate: that is a platform worked out over time which voters can study beforehand.

Comment #7 There is a history of patronage here. Voters have expectations that they will get something out of their vote. We need to move to a point at which we have a system that ensures that candidates don't get elected simply because they are known, or because of party loyalty. Party policy is not to be confused with an election platform.

Mark: Part of the job is to demystify. It is interesting to hear people talk about how PR is so complicated: that is demeaning to a degree. PR is something everyone can understand. Certainly Islanders are quite capable of understanding PR.

Comment #8 Speaking for the Acadian community. We are 3-5 % of population and have no representation. La *Société Saint-Thomas-d'Aquin* (SSTA) made a presentation to Special Committee on Electoral Renewal. There is nothing in the White Paper that would allow for this representation. In our PEI model we need to have a guarantee of representation of francophone community.

Mark : This is a legitimate concern. We are overselling PR if we say it guarantees more diverse legislatures. It is not automatic. It depends on how diverse the party slates are. You need to look at how slates are created to ensure that there is true representation of the diversity of the community.

Comment #9 – How does the system work? We need a simple ways of explaining it.

Comment #10 – Fair Vote Canada has a wide ranging website with many short, clear videos

Comment #11 How do we make sure there's inclusion of indigenous people and of rural PEI represented in legislature?

Mark: In response to the question about how the system works. The short answer: Mixed Member Proportional uses two ballots, that is, one ballot with two votes. On one side of the ballot the voter chooses a local representative. The other part of the ballot, the second vote is for ones chosen party. This determines the shape of legislature. There would be two types of MLA. The second type ensures that the standings in legislature represent political party support.

There are a couple of different formulas designed to help determine who wins the 27 seats – but we need to avoid getting into the math.

Leah MacLeod thanked Mark, friends & family of Andrew and others

6. Sample MMP Ballots

The participants in quickly-formed clusters had samples of three possible versions of a Mixed Member Proportional Ballot. The samples were a) **MMP Open List** in which the voter's first vote is for the district representative and the second vote is for the party by voting for a person on the party list; b) **MMP Closed List** (with the party list in view, for information only) and the voter's first vote is for the district representative and the second vote is for a party; c) **MMP Closed List** (with no party list in view) the voter's first vote is for the district representative and the second vote is for a party.

The following are the participants' comments:

- Very helpful to see ballots
- Not much different
- Like names. Need to be in larger font
- Helpful enough to go to public, at least in one district to gauge reaction
- District vote, MMM open list – should have an independent on the sample ballot
- Randomize names – people will get stuck on the familiarity
- Open list most fair and made sense
- How do you decide who wins/is on list (closed)
- Question: when you have closed list, if leader of party is not elected, is their name automatically on the closed list or do they have to decide before election if their name is on list?
- Answer: It varies, many options – if we had Citizens' Assembly we could process these things, iron out details
- Also, the design aspect of MMP – there are places where there is dual candidacy – common – system forces candidates to ground their work in a particular community
- **Citizens' Assembly** – there was a promise after the 2005 plebiscite the Government would consider the formation of a Citizen Assembly similar to that of Ontario: not a brand new idea to PEI.

- How will this be put to Islanders? Concerned that if you propose a closed list system it won't be acceptable to voters
- BUT, if we want to sell PR, need to start with NZ ballot, simple, easy to understand – everything else is clutter, we do NOT want to make it look too complex
- We used to have dual-member ridings, provincially and federally in PEI – NDP used to only run 1 candidate in each riding –
- Open list – would put more power in voters' hand to elect a government that better represents community, reflects diversity, benefits re: minorities

6. Next Steps (for the PEI Coalition for Proportional Representation and all of us)

- Be aware of realities including a) resistance of PEI to change & b) recognize that two main parties will oppose & c) if there is any indication that there may be no regionality, Islanders will oppose it
- Many different models of PR – would like to see one model come forward to leadership, sell it to PEI people
- The challenge is how to create diversity – using lists, eg
- DELAY current process – if it's too fast we're sunk
- See Council of Canadians presentation – let's think about it, step back
- If you have an opinion or want the process to be slowed down, let the committee know – email them
- Get on Chris Ortenburger's daily newsletter list!
- Educational piece in Guardian (Journal Pioneer, Eastern and West Prince Graphic, La Voix Acadienne) to remind of us of the benefits
- Workshops, public areas – UPEI, Holland College, francophone community, etc.
- Rally on the day the report is tabled in legislature
- Example of action by Council of Canadians re: fracking in NL - set up website, forum – all forms of knowledge should be valued – open up process so different voices (including kids!) are heard which they are not right now (fracking parties - videos/songs/art/poetry)
- Contact Cooper Institute 894-4573 cooperinstitute@eastlink.ca to stay involved. Join the Coalition
- Invite others to participate in the process.

Citizens, Elites and Electoral Reform

by Mark Greenan

November 21, 2015

Thanks to Marie for invitation. Cooper Institute for choosing this topic for 2nd Annual Social Justice Symposium in memory of Father Andrew Macdonald. Thanks to everyone for your interest in this topic and for taking time out of your weekend to attend.

Want to talk a little bit about my background on the issue. Always been a keen observer of politics and parliamentarism, particularly in Ottawa and in my beloved home province of PEI. Had the pleasure of sitting at the Speaker's knee as a page in the Legislative Assembly and in the House of Commons. Have worked on political campaigns for candidates at all three levels of government in 6 different provinces. Also have worked as organizing staff in the 2007 Ontario electoral reform referendum and have been involved as an activist with Fair Vote Canada. Finally, as many of you know, I had the great pleasure to organize the Yes campaign in the 2005 MMP plebiscite here in PEI and subsequently defended an M.A. thesis at the University of Ottawa with a case study of that event, evaluating it according to the principles of democratic theory.

What drives electoral reform?

There is a way of thinking when it comes to electoral systems that explains differences in electoral systems between polities as driven by values. According to this line of thought, different countries have different electoral systems because of different political values – for example, the Dutch have a low-threshold PR system because they value consensus, while Britain has first-past-the-post because they value decisive decision making. This way of thinking has influenced Canadian electoral reform processes as often the process has been guided by the idea of choosing an electoral system that reflect Canadian “values”

Canadian political scientist (and electoral reform activist) Denis Pilon explodes this myth in his recent book “Wrestling with Democracy” which is a detailed study of every electoral system change in Western democracies since the late 19th century. Pilon clearly demonstrates that electoral systems ARE NOT determined by abstract values but instead emerged as a result of profoundly POLITICAL processes linked with democratization (and limiting the “radical” influence of left-wing political parties).

Winning PR = winning a political campaign

I start my talk with this point because I believe it is essential that PR advocates in Canada understand – and craft their strategies with this in mind – that winning proportional representation for our elections is a profoundly POLITICAL process.

For example, let us consider who ultimately decides on reform processes. NOT reformers/advocates. NOT citizens (not even when there is a referendum). Certainly NOT the “people”. It is the POLITICIANS!

And it should be clear that politicians have a fundamental conflict of interest when it comes to the electoral system.

What does this mean for PR advocates? We must be very careful to build public support for PR so that our politicians can see a political payoff for support PR and fair and equal votes for all citizens.

How can we accomplish this?

- By being open to best practices of not-for-profit orgs and youthful energy
- By explaining (through story) how PR best reflects Islanders' conception of democracy
- By ensuring that we are talking about PR in way that appeals to all points on the political spectrum
- By reaching out to all political parties on the Island

But before I return to those points I would like to make some comments on the general prospects on PR in Canada in 2015 and some comments on the current PEI electoral reform process.

To paraphrase Dickens, 2015 could be seen as the best of times and the worst of times for PR advocates in Canada. Newly elected provincial governments in Charlottetown and Edmonton and our new federal government in Ottawa have inaugurated electoral reform discussions and a (likely) new Liberal government in Newfoundland has committed to the same. However, many Canadian Liberals are hostile to PR and would like to put forward what political scientists call the alternative vote (ranked ballots in single member districts) as an electoral reform “option”. Also, many of our new federal government's gains were at the expense of a Party that has consistently advocated for PR for over a decade and had committed to legislating PR for federal elections. Further, a federal majority government gives PR advocates less ability to influence parliamentary debates on electoral reform.

I do not want to spend too much time critiquing the recent PEI white paper on electoral reform. It is excellent to see Premier MacLauchlan engaged on the issue and reflecting the desire that many Island voters have to see a renewed electoral process on PEI. I commend the Premier, Cabinet and his party for their leadership on the issue; however, there are three comments that must be made about the paper.

In my view, the paper's historical review on electoral change on the Island downplays the role that the political class has played in preserving the electoral status quo. The examples of the expansion of the franchise to women and aboriginal Islanders and the boundary revision process (or lack thereof) illustrate this well.

Second, and this is a common conceit of the Island political class, that high voter turnout reflects high satisfaction with elections-as-they-are on PEI. In my view, this was disproved in May, when we saw a surge in turnout go hand-in-hand with a historic rise in support for 3rd party options. I believe that high turnout is more a reflection of size and intimacy. As a former provincial cabinet minister told me during an interview for my thesis, turnout is high because of how close representatives are to their constituents. For example, in his district he estimated that at least 10% of his electors would have been highly motivated partisans, 25% would be related to him or his wife and 98% would be known to him as MLA. No wonder our strong political organizations are able to get so many voters out on Election Day!

Finally, the paper makes a very fundamental error in its classification of electoral systems on page 13 when it draws an artificial distinction between plurality and majority voting systems. I can see why advocates of a particular reform option might want to make that distinction but it creates the false sense that election results and parliamentary behaviour would change under a majoritarian voting system.

The correct categorization of electoral systems divides them into two families – majoritarian and proportional voting systems. Both FPTP and AV as proposed in white paper are majoritarian voting systems and would lead to similar results and similar behaviour by parties and MLAs.

Why are FPTP and AV grouped together as majoritarian electoral systems? Because they have largely the same impact on the political system. If we want to change the way politics is done on Prince Edward Island, we must make a substantive change to the system – with proportional voting.

Why would FPTP and AV (as described in the white paper) not change PEI politics?

- same results
 - Analysis of Australian election results indicates that almost every time, the FPTP and AV winners will be the same candidate.
- same propensity (if not more so) for lopsided legislatures
 - see point above, but might also favour winning parties EVEN MORE than FPTP
- still shut out new voices

- AV would have still dramatically underrepresented smaller party voices in May's election (likely only a Green elected)
- have little impact on party or MLA behaviour
 - To shift behaviour, we need to shift how governments are formed.
 - Fundamental shift in how parties and MLAs relate to each other, once the likelihood of majority governments is reduced.

I would argue that Islanders, given sufficient time and information, will see that proportional representation is a positive change for Island elections. **But how do we get to that place?**

By being open to best practices of not-for-profit orgs and youthful energy

- A decade ago, I was a great spokesperson for electoral change. Now in my thirties, with grey hair spreading out from my temples, I am a less effective advocate for renewing Island democracy. I fear I get less effective every year, regardless of my capacity for communicating on the issue.
- Also, as electoral reform is a POLITICAL process, reformers must utilize best organizing practices to ensure that resources are used judiciously and most effectively to build public support for PR. LeadNow is an organization that has done an excellent job of building support using best modern organizing practices

By explaining (through story) how PR best reflects Islanders' conception of democracy

- In our communities, we respect diverse points of view and know that better decisions are made when all voices are heard. Why would we expect any different from the legislature?
- Ernest Naville, a Swiss philosopher in the 19th Century, wrote what is to me the best and most concise definition of democracy - “the right of decision belongs to the majority, but the right of representation belongs to all”. For me (and most Islanders?), democracy means just that. Hearing all points of view and making a decision that is supported
- But our story MUST be positive. Reformers lose ground when they throw mud senselessly at the status quo. Also, third parties need to be cognizant of how their discourse impacts public support for PR. Third parties on the Island should be careful to highlight part of their policy agenda that are supported by broad cross-section of Islanders.

By ensuring that we are talking about PR in way that appeals to all political spectrum

- Particularly since the Harper government took office in 2006, a great deal of Canadian interest in PR has come from people on the left of the political spectrum. As a result far too many Canadian electoral reform advocates make a case for PR that is tied to specific policy outcomes
- This is a problem not just because it hurts PR's appeal among a large section of the voting population, but it is also foolish to link PR with specific policy outcomes.

However, there are some promises we can make about how PR will impact Island political life

- more government accountability as power shifts from legislative to executive branch
- open legislature to new voices
- improve tone of political campaigns (claims that AV will do this have little support)

By reaching out to all political parties on the Island

- Ask for party membership of crowd?
- Need to be exceptionally welcoming to all Liberals and PC's that want to support PR
- John Eldon Green story
 - need to see more diverse group organizing for PR

Short-term thoughts on goals for PR advocates in PEI

- creating more time and space for discussion of electoral reform
 - more important to do it right than get it done quick

- Why so quick after May election? Overlap with federal election?
- ensuring that legislature does not limit choice for Islanders to one between two majoritarian models
- **Can we create a made-in-PEI process that balances legislative control of decision with formal process for citizen input?**
 - Citizens' Assembly is the gold standard for this
 - Can our MLAs be inspired by this process to allow citizens to drive the choice of an electoral system for PEI?
 - This process will have more legitimacy if it is not seen to just be the product of the political class.
- **need to be open to other PR models (such as STV)**
 - Also, should be prepared to accept PR models that are far from a proportional ideal (3-seater STV, 21-6 district-list seat MMP).
 - Can be made more proportional in future