



# Letters

Sir:

In the Winter 2009 issue Scott Thurlow writes to defend our FPTP electoral system against its replacement by a system of proportional representation. In the Spring 2010 issue, Bronwen Bruch, president of Fair Vote Canada, writes in response to defend proportional representation.

The proponents of proportional representation, when criticizing the FPTP electoral system, are not opposed to the way that it compels the people to vote as much as the way that the votes are counted after the election. They consider that the way, that the people voted, reflected the way that they wanted to vote. They claim that it is the way that the votes are counted that does not reflect the way that the people voted. Of course, they also want to change the way that the people voted. But it is not to allow the people to better express themselves but it is to make the vote-counting easier to perform.

To support their view, the proponents of proportionality suppose that people always vote along strict ideological lines and for whatever candidates most closely represent their chosen ideologies. If this were the case, election results would be the same from election to election. Because results vary

from election to election, we may assume that a number of voters will consider the qualifications of the candidates rather than their ideologies. They will not vote for a candidate representing a fringe ideology but they will not hesitate to support a competent candidate within an moderate ideological range.

FPTP is flawed in that the MPs it serve to elect represent the political parties before representing the voters. It may be said that the Canadian Parliament is not composed of 308 members but that it is composed of four political parties supported by four groups of MPs. And proportionality would not correct this defect. If anything, it would worsen it. With the FPTP electoral system, electoral contests appear to be between parties rather than individual candidates. This is because the parties may only run one candidate per riding, otherwise, the candidates would “split the vote” and allow the possible election of a candidate of another party. As a consequence, the people are made to appear to be voting for political parties, as they vote for riding representatives.

To release the grip of the parties on the MPs, it is not only the way that the voters are counted that must be changed but it is firstly the way that the people vote. The people

must be allowed to express themselves as much as possible and to say something about all the candidates. They should be allowed to express themselves through the preferential ballot and to rank the candidates. This ballot may then be tallied so as to reveal the candidates, which are preferred to all others by the majority of the voters in their respective ridings.

Tallied correctly, the preferential ballot will weaken the grip of the parties by allowing the candidacy of more than one individual claiming to represent the same party. Because the voters may rank these candidates consecutively, these candidates may compete against one another without “splitting the vote” and “losing the election, as would happen with FPTP. The preferential ballot will allow different factions of parties, as well as related ideologies, to compete. This ballot will lead to the emergence of candidates of compromise. It will seek to unite the people around common representatives, unlike proportional systems which seek to divide them artificially. It will achieve, in the voting booths, the harmony that proportionality can only hope to achieve in vain after the election.

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