

# Editorial

**T**he Position Paper on Proportional Representation for Quebec published in August 1983 by the Minister Responsible for Electoral Reform, Marc-André Bédard, deserves careful examination not only in Quebec but in other jurisdictions that may be considering electoral reform.

The document begins with a critique of the present electoral system for its frequent distortion between the number of seats a party wins and its percentage of the total popular vote. The criticism is marred somewhat by a rather sloppy attempt to characterize the present system as an "English" one. In fact there is no intrinsic relationship between British style parliamentary government and the present system of electing representatives. Australia has Westminster type institutions but uses proportional representation (along with a number of other very unusual electoral practices). Some of the leading theorists of proportional representation, John Stuart Mill and Thomas Hare were British. For a time the University Seats in the British House of Commons were filled by proportional representation. Both the British and Canadian Houses have established committees to look into proportional representation and in this century two provinces, Alberta and Manitoba, have used proportional representation for provincial elections at one time. In any event the value of a system does not depend on its country of origin.

Despite the document's rather shaky historical and comparative aspect its criticism of the existing electoral system is not out of line with that made by the Canada West Foundation, the Report of the Task Force on Canadian Unity, the Beige Paper of the Quebec Liberal Party and by numerous professors and parliamentarians. But while there is agreement on the problem, enthusiasm for electoral reform at the federal level seems to wane with the political tides. A lack of consensus over the best solution has also worked in favour of the status quo.

In Quebec too a number of proposals have been advanced by various groups and individuals. For over a decade, however, Vincent Lemieux of Laval University, along with various associates and disciples has been designing, refining, promoting and defending a system of Regional Proportional Representation. He has proposed that the province be divided into a number of regions each electing from three to seven member with the parties putting up slates of candidates. The ballot would require electors to vote once for the party of their choice (or for independent candidates) and once for individual members of the various party slates. In each region seats would be allotted to the parties in proportion to their percentage of the party vote. The individuals to fill these seats would be those who received the highest number of votes from among the candidates.

In this issue Professor Lemieux and Marie Lavoie outline why they believe Regional Proportional Representation is superior to certain other methods of proportional representation. The recent endorsement of this idea by the Minister responsible for Electoral Reform in Quebec is encouraging, for it is a proposal which would not increase the size of the National Assembly nor create two classes of parliamentarians, two of the traditional objections to proportional representation schemes. More importantly it seems to strike the right balance between the need to strengthen parties, which are the legitimate vehicles for political debate, and the desirability of increasing the range of opinions represented in the House. Finally it would give electors more freedom to vote for and be represented by the best person regardless of party.



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**Front Cover:**  
**The Commission on Electoral Representation in Quebec (l-r) Guy Bourassa, Pierre-F. Côté and Marc-André Lessard.**  
*(Ministère des communications du Québec)*