

Remarks to Fair Vote Canada, AGM June 7, 2013, by Nick Loenen

I was active on this file for 19 years and learned the following to stay focussed.

1. Be non-partisan. Not multi-partisan!

Multi-partisan suggests a front for the small parties, the losers, those who want to change the rules for partisan self-interest.

You are not on the side of parties, you are on the side of voters!

2. Your objective is a process whereby voters select the best voting system.

Political parties in power and those with a chance of being in power will not commit to changing the voting system. They might give a commitment to a process.

3. Limit your public education to exposing the undemocratic nature of FPTP.

Three simple rules! That is all you do!

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You'll say: but can't we declare in favour of PR? No!

Three problems

One, inconsistency! You can't say voters get to pick and tell them what to pick.

Two, what PR system?

You'll say, we don't want to go there.

Critics will taunt, because all are a heap of trouble.

You become defensive. It becomes an argument. You have lost.

Three, supporting PR you'll want to defend it.

- You'll say PR is more democratic. But democracy lacks a universally accepted definition.

Some say: Handing power to splinter groups is not democracy.

Interesting arguments! But do they bring you any closer to your objective?

Don't go there!

- You'll defend PR on the basis of a policy outcome. You might say, PR countries have less inequality, spent more on health care, education and social services, have less crime, have bigger or smaller government, are more green etc. etc.

But consider these examples from personal experience:

My book *Citizenship and Democracy* came out in 1997. Among the first to contact me was Troy Lanigan of the Canadian Taxpayer Federation. Troy said, having many parties in charge, instead of just one, is brilliant. They'll check each other and never get anything done. I am a Libertarian, I hate government. I don't want government to do anything.

Not long after I spoke to Judy Rebick, who said, I love PR. If even a few progressive voices have a place at the table at most times we can really get things done.

The conclusion? If you promote PR on the basis of some policy outcome (1) you are probably wrong and (2) you will gain some supporters but also turn away many others.

Don't go there!

Individually you can have your views. As an organization, stay focussed!

- 1 Be non-partisan**
- 2 Just one objective: a process**
- 3 Expose the undemocratic nature of FPTP**