

Voting Systems and Social Inequality

Here is something I sent to the old trollbuster list but did not have time to put up on this blog before the old site went down. Now I am using to test out the new site. Just before this message I forwarded something for people in the Toronto area that is worth going to. (The April 18th meeting about civic engagement and local government. Look for it in the qaz.ca calendar, April 18th.)

Often some very interesting discussions happen at the Munk center. I will be there and will probably write something up for this list. If you are interested in local voting systems, the general topic of citizen engagement is for you.

As for interesting meetings, I attended one tonight on a topic very interesting to me. Most of the Toronto FVC types were there. I was so interested in it I came out even though I was not feeling so well.

David Hulchanski gave a talk on whether our voting system has something to do with social inequality. I am glad he is starting to get it. I hope this means he is moving away from the Wellesley Institute crowd of pimps; he is really too smart for that.

As I have noticed for years, there is a very strong correlation between enlightened social policies and Gini coefficients, and proportional voting systems. The Gini coefficient is a famous measure of inequality, familiar to people concerned about that. It is named after an economist called Gini who thunked it up.

It is like this; you draw a diagonal line in a box. Deciles of the population of the country you are measuring go across the bottom. Deciles = population divided into tenths by income. Poorest on the left, richest on the right. The incomes in each decile go up the right side, and you draw a curve to follow it. The ratio of the area between that curve and the diagonal line, and the total area below the diagonal line, is the Gini coefficient.

So, the smaller the Gini, the more equal the society is. English speaking countries tend to have bigger Ginis. Canada's is fairly big, though not as bad as the U.S. The lowest Gini on earth is Denmark's. Hey, didn't somebody find out that Danes were the happiest people on earth recently?

But the correlation, as various writers like Lijphart and Pilon have found, between Gini and PR voting is very high.

Somebody also talked about voting reform in Toronto and the limits provincial legislation puts on it. Parties are not strictly illegal but various aspects of provincial law make them difficult. For example, there can be no party name on the ballot paper, just the candidate's name. I think this guy showed that the legislation can be bent to include multi member constituencies and an STV system.

I got very tired and did not follow all he said, but he also talked about SNTV, non transferable vote, and cumulative vote. I hope that was just to explain the inadequacies of those systems.

Somebody wanted to tell me all about what had been going on for years in the Toronto chapter. They had to, gasp, throw three people out. People would not stand up to them for a long time; they felt they did not have the authority. Yes, yes, I heard something about this somewhere, just vaguely. Isn't it good that these people did not show up here?

It was a bit hot in there. Typical institutional building; wait until high summer to turn off the heat and turn on the air conditioning. They served up some peach juice, which enabled me to survive, and the walk home revived me somewhat.

Back home, to resume trying to deal with this problem of trying to get my domains moved over to another server. I am stuck between the domain registrar and the new server technicians, who have contradictory ideas about how to do this. Both are different from how I have done this before. Their explanations create more confusion. I need to get this solved by the 31st or my whole web project goes down including this list.

All I want the Easter Bunny to bring me is a new server that is working. But for now, I need to get some sleep and see if I feel better tomorrow.

May the Easter Bunny be nice to everybody on this list. tr

p.s. There are other interesting meetings in Toronto on April 2nd and 4th, about a voting alliance. The first is planning of the second. They are at the 519 community center, 7 pm.