

## **Voting Reform in Toronto**

It is time I laid out my ideas about voting reform in Toronto. I have been working on them for awhile. This will only begin to solve the problems with local government in Toronto, but since it will be so hard to get people to think about what really needs to be done, I have taken a conservative approach which will at least get things started.

What I propose is to organize the city into four constituencies based on the community councils. The voting will be by Single Transferable Vote. There will be one councillor per 40 000 people in each constituency. This means 15 in Scarborough and Etobicoke/York and 16 in Toronto/East York and in North York; with sixty two councillors in all.

Choosing the mayor is also important and part of voting reform. The mayor should not be elected. He or she should be appointed by the council.

**Now, the questions;**

**Why these constituencies?**

It is well known that the amalgamation of Toronto is a mess that makes effective government impossible. What we had before was not great either. A city of this size absolutely needs a subordinate level of government. The subordinate levels should be smaller than these community councils, but that is impossible at present. So continuing the community councils preserves the option of devolving some real power to them. The problem is that it does create rather large constituencies for STV voting, but with computers this should not be a great problem. What is still a problem is that candidates must campaign over a large area and will need more money, thus are more open to lobbying.

**Why more councillors?**

One of the elitist tropes which are deployed in order to limit democracy is that there are too many elected representatives, they are too expensive, they

lead to more bureaucracy, and so on. This is nonsense; most cities have a lot more councillors than even this; we should have at least one per 20 000 population. However, that will give us 124 councillors; more than the provincial legislature, which is also too small by the way. This will send the democracy haters into conniptions. The 40 000 is an improvement with each councillor elected over the whole constituency and should give an adequate degree of representation.

## **Why STV?**

Because we have to pretend there are no parties in municipal politics. It seems that this idea that municipal parties are banned is false; they just do not have the things that enable parties to operate efficiently, like ability to raise funds. There will be no choice eventually but to institutionalize parties, but it is not happening yet. So this precludes MMP and straight list PR, at least for the time being. We are left with STV.

A note about systems of PR; most of this difference is appearance over substance. MMP and STV with parties will produce the same results as straight PR. They are just more complicated methods of counting the votes. But they are a "feel good" for people who fetishize independent candidates in the case of STV, or local representation in the case of MMP. MMPs give local hacks a bit of security. STV gives politicians with more name recognition an advantage. With STV, once political parties do become established, it will be easier to move to a straight PR system, and harder to go to MMP.

## **Why an appointed Mayor?**

The problem with presidential systems, which is what we have now, is that the legislature/council is often at odds with the executive/president/mayor. In a parliamentary system, where the executive/mayor/prime minister comes from the legislative, this never occurs. If he is not on the same page with the council, she will not be mayor. Wouldn't this prevent a lot of trouble in Toronto? I am not just talking about Ford, either.

## **Implementation**

It must become the standard in Canadian politics that any important change in government is done through a citizen's assembly and a referendum. A local reform group could promote the above ideas but also an assembly to examine and approve, or to make changes. Then it drafts a referendum question. Experience with referenda show that they must be held separately from general elections and each side must have adequate funding to explain their position.

The number to pass the reform is 50% plus one. Those fighting against the reform must not be allowed to run the assembly and the "yes" campaign, as has happened before.

Now, what is needed is to set up a committee to begin a campaign for reform in Toronto. For reasons well known to those following the politics of Fair Vote Canada and Fair Vote Toronto, it is doubtful that these groups can provide good leadership toward this goal. A broader coalition must be formed with all necessary measures against the infiltration and disruption efforts which are all but certain.

A good way to start the campaign would be with a petition demanding a citizen's assembly. Since the provincial government is in control of local government, the petition will be to the Lieutenant Governor. With the Wynne government in office, a citizen's assembly and referendum is likely to be done right. Wynne was deeply involved in the "Citizens for Local Democracy" group which opposed the amalgamation of Toronto.