

Another unbalanced legislature demonstrates need for electoral reform

TORONTO – October 11, 2007: Yesterday's Ontario election once again produced results mismatched with voter preferences, and a phony-majority government facing a weaker opposition than Ontarians voted for.

The 58 per cent of Ontarians who voted for opposition parties received only 33 per cent of the seats, significantly weakening the checks and balances needed for accountable and effective government. Meanwhile, the party receiving just 42 per cent of the vote has been given a false "mandate" to act as though it enjoyed majority support of the electorate.

"This week's election results in both Ontario and Newfoundland underline the need for the electoral reform process to continue in Ontario and across Canada," said Rick Anderson chair of Vote for MMP, the campaign that supported the mixed member proportional alternative proposed by the Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform.

The proposed mixed member proportional (MMP) system would have been used with a 129 seat legislature, an increase from the current 107 seats. If that MMP system had been used in this election, with similar voting patterns the resulting Legislature would have been very different, and more in line with voters' choices:

- The Liberals' 42% would have earned approximately 59 seats, rather than 71.
- The Progressive Conservatives would have had about 39 seats, rather than 26. As in 2003, the Tories would have gained more under MMP than any other party and been much better able to provide numerically-effective opposition to the Government
- The NDP would have had about 21 seats rather than 10.
- The Green Party, whose 352,000 voters are today totally unrepresented in the Legislature, would have earned about 10 seats.

Anderson cautioned against the usual overstatement of the re-elected government's "mandate". "Many more Ontarians voted for the other three parties - for the Progressive Conservatives, NDP and Greens - than voted for the Government," said Anderson.

"Likewise, Newfoundlanders are now cursed with a wildly unbalanced Legislature and unopposed government, where the 30% of voters who voted for the opposition received only 8% of the seats - and the Government has a totally free hand to do as it will. This is no way to practice democratic governance."

"Unfortunately, Ontario's historic referendum opportunity was marred by a pathetically-inadequate public education campaign by the Legislature and Elections Ontario. A cornerstone of democratic decision-making is the concept of an 'informed voter'. But neither the Legislature nor EO ensured that voters had the substance of the Citizens Assembly's report," said Anderson. "Instead, voters had little or no information, coupled with a great deal of misinformation from opponents of reform."

Anderson also noted that those who cast votes for the status quo are not only voters who actually support the antiquated first-past-the-post system. Included in that tally are those who felt they had far too little information to vote for something new and those who actually support electoral reform, but would like to see a proportional system with different features.

Anderson said last night's referendum result is more a delay than defeat for those who want to see a new voting system that gives voters more choice, fairer results and stronger democratic representation.

"Several days ago, a poll illustrated a huge generational divide on the electoral reform issue. Had this referendum been limited to voters between ages 18 and 34, we would have easily exceeded the 60% threshold, according to the poll. The younger generation is clearly not going to tolerate the antiquated political machinery of a bygone era," said Anderson. "Electoral reform is now on the agenda of the nation and even skeptics, such as Professor Nelson Wiseman, concede that the introduction of proportional voting in Canada is now just a matter of time."