

LETTER: First past the post has faults but is better than alternatives

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Dear Editor:

Having been over some decades a reporter and editor in a number of countries where there are different electoral systems, I would like to add my two cents to the present debate about the proposed changes to the ways we elect our members of Parliament and other legislatures, apparently meant to improve our input in the process.

To start with, no system is perfect, but, to quote Winston Churchill, "Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others."

The same applies to the present system, which, for its faults, is still far superior to the suggested alternatives.

The second observation is that wherever I observed the electoral systems available, no party coming to power ever complained about the unfairness of the process, only those who lost, no matter if in previous elections they also benefited from the results.

Even your reader, Rafe Mair – once an MLA and minister with the former Socreds, now clamouring in a recent letter for major changes – never complained in the past when his party obtained a huge majority in 1975, the year he was firstly elected, not reflective of their share of the popular vote. While the party obtained a bit over 49 per cent of the popular vote, they ended with an absolute majority of 65 per cent in the legislature.

I understand the frustrations of those looking for a system of proportional representation, rather than the present first-past-the-post system, but not everything appearing to be equitable is also democratic.

The main point being: who decides the fate of the elected officials?

The people in the riding where they live and possibly work, or the party leaders and bureaucrats somewhere in Ottawa, Victoria or Toronto?

Under the much touted proportional representation, every party's candidates are placed on a list, often established far away from us, and, based on the position on the list, the chances of being elected are either guaranteed, or practically nil. And the people living in the riding have more often than not, no input.

A potential MP might live in Surrey and be not very liked by the people there, but if a loyal "soldier" to the party boss in Ottawa, who puts the person on the top tier of the list, he/she have a very solid chance of being elected based on the obtained percentage.

For those with a good memory, while we have had on numerous past occasions prime ministers, premiers, top ministers defeated because their constituents did not like their policies and performance, under the proportional representation, the chances of this happening are zero – unless the entire party drops under an established threshold.

To paraphrase Winston Churchill's words, the present system is the worst, except for the suggested alternatives.

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