British Columbia's Citizens' Assembly: The Learning Phase

by R.S. Ratner

The need to revitalize democracy, including our electoral system, is very much on the agenda both federally and in the provinces and territories. A system that often results in massive disparities between votes received and seats won by a political party creates distortions that mock representative democracy. Elections across Canada awarding parties legislative control with less than a majority of the vote or with even less voter support than gained by an opposition party, have instigated this new round of thinking about electoral reform. On March 31st, 2004, the Law Reform Commission tabled its report and recommendations about national elections, and Quebec, Ontario, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, British Columbia, and the Yukon are currently engaged in consultations, inquiries, commissions or special assemblies called to produce referenda or legislation addressed to electoral reform. The procedure in British Columbia is perhaps the most innovative since it confers all deliberative power on a randomly selected group of 160 citizens of the province. This truly daring experiment to transfer political power to 'ordinary citizens' on a matter of such consequence is one that should be of interest not only to political analysts but to all those who are dissatisfied with the way our political institutions now affect their lives and who puzzle over their immutability.

A major impetus to the formation of the BC Citizens' Assembly was the results of the last two provincial elections. In 1996, the Liberals, under the leadership of Gordon Campbell, received 42% of the vote to 39% for the New Democratic Party. The NDP narrowly retained power, however, winning 39 of 75 seats. The outcome was attributed to the plurality or 'first-past-the-post' electoral system which gives victory to the candidate who receives the most votes in a riding, irrespective of whether the total achieves a majority. The proportional discrepancy between votes and seats induced Mr. Campbell to pledge that should his party form the next government, he would initiate a Citizens' Assembly to consider electoral reform.

Indeed, the Liberal Party did win the 2001 election, although the outcome further underscored the need for electoral reform since the Liberals won 77 of 79 seats while receiving only 57% of the vote. Premier Campbell followed through on his pledge, appointing Gordon Gibson, a former leader of the BC Liberal Party, to write a draft Constitution of the proposed Citizens' Assembly. On December 23, 2002, Mr. Gibson submitted his report to the Attorney-General containing 36 recommendations spelling out the structure and mandate of the Assembly. The government took four months to consider the report

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and changed several of Gibson's recommendations mainly in the interest of greater representivity (158 instead of 79 representatives –two per riding) and random rather than peer-selection of delegates in order to avoid electioneering and politicizing of the Assembly.

On April 28, 2003, the Attorney-General, Geoff Plant, tabled in the legislature the Assembly's Terms of Reference and Duties of the Chair. The Assembly was then established by an Order-in-Council on April 30th with unanimous support from the BC Legislative Assembly. Jack Blaney, the former President of Simon Fraser University, was confirmed as Chair of the Assembly by Order-in-Council on May 16th, 2003. Over the next several months the rest of the staff was assembled. The key people were Leo Perra, an experienced post-secondary administrator and educator in the province, who was appointed Director of Operations, and Ken Carty, an academic expert in electoral politics, who was named Chief Research Officer. The $5.5 million in government funding, directed through the Office of the Attorney-General, was deemed sufficient to underwrite the experiment from start to finish.

The mandate of the Citizens' Assembly, is to "assess models for electing Members of the Legislative Assembly and issue a report recommending whether the current model for these elections should be retained or another model should be adopted."

> *The Assembly was required to present its final report and recommendation to the Attorney-General no later than December 15, 2004 for tabling in the Legislative Assembly.*

In order to reach this recommendation stage, members of the Citizens' Assembly would first undertake a 'learning phase' between January and March 2004 (meeting every other weekend) that would culminate in an interim report or "preliminary statement" to the people of British Columbia. This was to be followed by a 'public hearing phase' over the May-June 2004 period in order to obtain direct citizen input and reaction to the interim report, and then a 'deliberation phase' between September and November ending with issuance of the final report and recommendation by no later than December 15, 2004. The Assembly could decide either to endorse the existing plurality electoral system or recommend a change that would go to the voters in a referendum at the time of the May 2005 provincial election. Passage of the referendum motion would require at least 60% approval by the BC electorate, as well as 50% +1 approval in at least 60% of the ridings. These fairly stringent markers were deemed necessary for matters of 'constitutional' import and likely reflected a concern to prevent urban domination of rural ridings.

The Selection Process

Since members of the Citizens' Assembly were to be randomly chosen from the provincial voters' list, the first step in the selection process was to update that list. A brochure was sent to all households in British Columbia encouraging people to register and update their voter information before August 22, 2003. On August 29th, Harry Neufeld, the Chief Electoral Officer of BC, delivered to CA headquarters 15,800 randomly selected names from the voters' list. Out of this sample, 200 people from each of the electoral districts received a letter asking if they would consider serving the province as a member of the Citizens' Assembly. The numbers in each district were evenly divided by gender and stratified within five age groups (18-24, 25-39, 40-55, 56-70, and 70+). The most recent Census data was used to determine the percentage of people within each age group, by gender, for each electoral district. This percentage value was then used to determine, for example, the number of 18-24 year old males that should be included within a group of 100 males in each district. The process was repeated for each age group. An initial letter was sent to these 15,800 persons asking if they would be interested in serving on the Assembly.

From those who responded affirmatively, 10 men and 10 women were sequentially drawn from the random list for each electoral district and invited to attend a regional information meeting at which time they would learn more about the opportunities and responsibilities of the Citizens' Assembly, and could better gauge the extent of the commitment that would be required. At the close of each such meeting, the names of one man and one woman were drawn to serve on the Citizens' Assembly. If some persons who received the invitation letter decided to withdraw prior to their regional meeting, the CA staff selected other persons within the available pool to replace the demurrals, respecting gender, age, electoral district and sequence number. If the responses from an electoral district did not include a particular age and gender group, additional letters were sent out to ensure that there was a representative group for the appropriate selection of members.

At the selection meetings, a CA staff member reviewed the eligibility requirements with attendees, clarifying the exclusions (i.e., non-citizens, non-residents of BC, persons under 18, persons not fluent in written and oral English, and persons who held political office at the federal, provincial, or municipal/regional level or were candidates for such office in the last two years, including Chiefs or band-elected councilors under the Indian Act and elected members of the Nisga'a government). This was followed by a power-point exposition about the aims and objectives of the Assembly, after which each individual was asked to confirm his or her willingness to

serve. The names of all willing persons were then placed in a hat and the name of the person selected was announced. Gender equality was ensured by having a separate draw for the male and female member in each constituency. Alternative names (male and female) were selected and kept in the event that a replacement was required. All other names were kept should it be necessary to select more names from the pool in order to replace further withdrawals. The process was repeated for each gender and each electoral district in 26 selection meetings held across the province between October 14th and November 30th 2003. In accordance with the Terms of Reference for the Citizens' Assembly, the selection meetings were conducted in open venues.

To gain a first-hand knowledge of the selection process, I attended one such meeting held at the CA offices in Vancouver on December 8th. This meeting was held in order to choose a male delegate for the Vancouver-Kingsway riding as none of the male candidates showed up at the previously scheduled selection meeting, the only time that occurred over the course of the selection process. This meeting also replaced a female delegate who had second thoughts and decided to withdraw, requiring an alternate draw. Eight of the nine redrawn male candidates turned up and were escorted to a seminar room where all of us sat with Jack Blaney while Leo Perra made the formal presentation, stressing the expectations for CA members and the extent of the commitment entailed.

Questions were raised by some of the candidates; all seemed eager to become the chosen delegate. The alternate female delegate was quickly selected and I was then invited to select the envelope containing the name of the male Kingsway delegate. I did so, half wondering if I had already been coopted into the spiritual orbit of the Assembly, and the name of the selectee was read out and his photo taken. His happiness was apparent, and disappointment was registered on the faces of most of the other candidates. Mr. Perra reminded them that they could still be asked to serve if the selected member were unable to continue, but no CA delegates would be replaced after the Assembly began its meetings on January 10th, 2004, unless more than 25% or 40 of the members dropped out. Withdrawals had already necessitated six replacements up to that time. I was impressed by Mr. Perra's substantive and well-organized presentation, and the interest level expressed by the candidates at the meeting augered well for the unique initiative under way.

The last and 158th CA delegate had now been selected, but one troublesome glitch in the selection procedure was that no Aboriginals were included in the Assembly although several had been in the original sample of 15,800. This situation was the cause of some concern in the Aboriginal community and to members of the CA staff. As a result, the Chair asked the provincial cabinet to approve the addition of two Aboriginal members, selected from the random pool. Despite some reluctance to deviate from the Terms of Reference, an Order-in-Council to add two people of Aboriginal ancestry was approved on December 11th, 2003. On December 22nd, an Aboriginal man and women were selected, bringing the total CA gender-divided membership to 160.

A short biography of every member appears on the Citizens' Assembly website. The youngest person selected was 19 year old Wayne Wong, a second year student at the Sauder School of Business at the University of British Columbia, and the oldest was John Stinson, a 78 year old former member of the BC Provincial Police Force who later worked for the RCMP. While it is difficult to classify the profession or vocational background of members from their website biographies, as several members list many present and former occupations, it is clear that the Assembly includes a wide variety of teachers, civil servants, professors, lawyers, businessmen, farmers, housewives, nurses, students and retired persons. It is also a multi-cultural group with individuals born in a number of foreign countries and identifying themselves as belonging to several ethnic groups.

On January 10th, 2004, this diverse assemblage began its learning phase—a series of six weekend meetings (full Saturday and Sunday mornings) in downtown Vancouver. Accommodation, meals, daycare costs and travel expenses based on excursion fares were provided for all members of the Assembly, along with a modest honorarium of $150 per meeting day. After all the meticulous preparation, staff and delegates looked forward to the unfolding of the great experiment.

The Learning Phase

On Saturday January 10, 2004 the first meeting of the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly got under way in the Asia Pacific Hall of the Morris Wosk Centre for Dialogue, a restored heritage building of architectural grace and loaded for the occasion with modern communications technology. Members of the Assembly ceremonially filed into the hall, a perky woman bagpiper leading the procession. Members had already met at a reception the night before, so a sense of anticipatory zeal was in the air. All places at the descending concentric circle seating arrangement were filled, a microphone and name placard at each tabletop. Only two of the 160 members were absent, that owing to unforeseen medical emergencies. A podium was situated near the circumference of the lowest circle for the Chair and other speakers. Observers (invited guests and members of the public, including myself) were seated in two horizontal rows at either end of the hall, just behind the short surrounding wall above

Members meet in the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue, Vancouver

the upper circle. Two large screens were placed overhead on opposite sides of the circle, and several staff members not directly engaged in the session watched from mirrored observation booths close to the high ceiling at one end of the hall. Four cameramen recorded the proceedings and media representatives sat amongst the observers or stood at various perimeter locations in the hall. Dr. Blaney went to the podium and began the meeting with some clarification of procedural details and introduction of CA members (with large head photos flashed on the two screens as names were called), guests (including Gordon Gibson), and the instructional and communications staff. Following these formalities, the Chair offered these excerpted remarks:

To our knowledge, nowhere, at any time in a democracy, has a government asked non-elected citizens to undertake such a commitment and then given those same citizens such potential power over an important policy question…We are here to invent a new way to engage citizens in the practice of democracy…This is, for all of us, the opportunity of a lifetime!

If CA members entered the hall still uncertain about the rationale for the Assembly, they now appeared galvanized by the Chair's remarks. Several members expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to participate in the Assembly and brimmed with optimism about what the members could accomplish together. One member epitomized the prevailing mood.

We're ordinary citizens, but we're capable of taking part in this. Some of my acquaintances have expressed concern about whether ordinary citizens can take part in this. We can!"

The Chair then discussed procedure for conduct in the plenary sessions and breakout discussion groups, urging members to avoid rule-bound formality and to rely, instead, on consensual processes, a matter that was left for

consideration in the discussion groups later that morning. The pattern for meetings was usually to begin the morning with a brief question and catch-up period for the whole Assembly, followed by a staff member or guest speaker presentation on the scheduled topic, then a coffee break followed by an hour meeting for the twelve separate discussion groups, allowing more focused review of the lecture and reading materials The morning ended either at that point or with a brief reconvening of the Assembly in order to exchange summaries of small group discussions. Afternoons followed roughly the same schedule. The discussion groups were composed of 13-15 members, their composition changed each weekend by random assignment in order to foster exchanges between the maximal number of Assembly members.

The facilitators, who also rotated weekly, were selected graduate students in Political Science at the two major lower mainland universities who were specializing in electoral politics. They met twice weekly in a facilitator workshop led by Professor Carty and his teaching associate, Campbell Sharman, an expert on Australian politics. Initially, observers, who numbered about 40 at the plenary sessions, were permitted in two of the discussion seminar rooms, but when some CA members in one of the groups complained about the proximity (at least one observer allegedly guffawed at members' remarks), these seminar rooms were declared off-limits after the first weekend and access for the observers and media was restricted to one breakout group that met in the small center circle of the Asia Pacific Hall where the plenary sessions were held. This setting was more formal than the layout of the seminar rooms. Discussions were somewhat constrained and probably less candid than in other groups, although the air of formality did wear off over the six weekends as members more comfortably ignored the 20-30 observers who showed up for these sessions.

In the discussion group I observed that first morning, the facilitator asked each of the 13 members to introduce themselves and then asked the members to consider the values that members ought to share and display together as they grappled with their mandated task. A lively discussion followed involving all members of the group and the facilitator suggested that one member serve as the group rapporteur in the afternoon plenary session. After lunch all members returned to the Asia Pacific Hall to hear reports on the values identified by each of the twelve breakout groups. There was considerable overlap, enabling staff to quickly summarize and project on screen the shared values that members would henceforth be responsible for demonstrating — respect, open-mindedness, listening, commitment, inclusivity, positive attitude, integrity, and focus on mandate. The values were scrutinized, clarified, slightly revised, and adopted, and the Assembly was ready for business.

Following a welcome coffee-break, Professor Carty reeled off the first of a series of lectures on electoral politics that he and Dr. Sharman would deliver over the first five weeks of the learning phase. The opening lecture presented some of the pros and cons of adversarial versus consensual politics, examining key differences between majoritarian and proportional representation systems and their respective impacts on political party behaviour and government accountability. His lecture anticipated most of the themes that would be explored throughout the learning phase and gave members a lot to chew on in their afternoon discussion groups. At the session I observed, it was clear that members were already sympathetic to a less adversarial model of electoral politics than the one long entrenched in British Columbia. Disclosing some anxiety about the authenticity of the CA process, members mulled over the question of whether a referendum, if approved by the BC electorate, would really be binding on the government of the day, or whether the Assembly's efforts would ultimately be to no avail. A few members urged the Chair to clarify whether the action taken by the New Zealand government—passing a bill to make its referendum motion law if approved by the electorate—could not be adopted in BC

The Sunday morning session opened with a brief question period during which members were assured by the Chair that all the provincial political parties supported the work of the Citizens' Assembly and would implement an approved referendum. Professor Carty then gave a fast-paced lecture on criteria for assessing and comparing electoral systems. The scope of his talk was a bit daunting to some, as reflected in the discussion of the breakout group I observed. Members sought more direction from the facilitator, wistfully considered the merits of a benevolent dictatorship, and lamented the fact that they had not received the course textbook[1] long before the meetings began. A few members called for practical, focused discussion rather than "theoretical chit-chat" about the lecture. As discussion proceeded, however, their anxieties abated and they began to address the issues raised in the lecture, even contriving solutions to some of the problems posed by the first-past-the-post electoral system. The session ended amicably with the facilitator thanking the group for an exciting weekend.

Over the four subsequent weekend meetings, Professor Carty and his colleagues piloted the delegates through a well-organized tour of issues referring to elections, parliament, political parties, the five electoral system families, and the impacts of electoral change, particularly their possible consequences for British Columbia. Without reporting information already available on the CA website about the content of those lectures, I will offer the following observations that indirectly attest to the surprisingly few difficulties that members encountered as they passed through the learning phase of their collective experience.

As professors Carty and Sharman dutifully imparted what they believed members needed to know in order to fulfill their task and arrive at a recommendation, members were visibly transformed from mainly passive listeners into mindful observers and commentators on the current BC electoral system and the known alternatives. This transformation was due, in no small measure, to the developing solidarity between members of the Assembly, which seemed to boost individual confidence. A near-familial setting was created by the Chair's interventions, self-effacing humour, and personalizing tidbits such as birthday announcements, all of which helped to promote debate with minimal discord.

The rivalrous jesting between Professors Carty and Sharman during post-lecture question periods turned the potentially dry topic of electoral reform into an entertaining one, although Carty's frequent Montreal Canadian analogies bordered on treacherous in Canuck territory. The inclusion of members' photos and bios in the CA website and in various media outlets imbued members with a sense of responsibility to both the Assembly and to the geographic constituency they represented. And, perhaps unwittingly, the shift from plenary sessions to discussion groups and back to the full Assembly for summaries and reflection, was self-reflexive to the point of emphasizing unanimity and consensus, although it could hardly be said that disagreement was squelched. Indeed, despite hard questioning of staff and guest lecturers, good will was evident and sustained throughout the learning phase, with the almost perfect attendance each weekend delighting the staff who earlier had grimly contemplated attrition rates.

By the third week, the lecture material became more complex, as members grappled with the intricacies of proportional representation, the single transferable vote, and mixed member proportional systems. Confusions were usually dispelled in the question periods and discussion groups, where after the first weekend, the facilitators took on more of a supplementary teaching role until the closing sessions, at which time group members were challenged to contrast, on their own, the strengths and weaknesses of the plurality system in BC with those of the alternative electoral systems. During one of the later plenary sessions, the Chair showed a CBC video that described the members of the Assembly as "ordinary citizens", and was moved to offer the corrective—"extraordinary citizens"—acknowledging the fact that the random selection process used to recruit members turned out to be a self-selection process in that the people who came forward were already active and conscientious members of their community.

Two important decisions were made by the Assembly during the learning phase, both relating to the next phase of the process, the province-wide public hearings. First,

the members decided that one set of public presentations should be made to the entire CA Assembly. The question of which ten of the numerous presentations made at the various regional public hearing venues would be selected for presentation to the Assembly. The Assembly struck a committee (through the Chair) drawn from a random selection of interested members, to make selections based on broad criteria enunciated by the Assembly. The matter stirred some heated debate, but formulating a plan devised and approved by the Assembly strengthened the members' sense of competence and collective autonomy. Second, the members decided that a review session of what was learned at the public hearings would be useful, requiring an additional meeting in late June at the close of the public hearing phase. Three sites were suggested (Vancouver, Kelowna and Prince George). After some consideration of the merits of each site, a clear majority of the members felt that it was important for the Assembly to "go North" (i.e., Prince George) in order to signal to the BC electorate that the Citizens' Assembly represented all of British Columbia and did not situate itself exclusively on the urban terrain of Vancouver.

As the sessions wound down and the interim report loomed larger, members appeared to momentarily regress into the dependent state of their earliest session, seeking guidance from the instructional staff about what to recommend, and exhibiting a reluctance to propose any specific electoral options in the interim report. Some were wary of being streamed by staff towards a particular electoral model, although Professor Carty and his associates plainly resisted any entreaties by members to elicit their preferences. Anxieties aside, however, members did make it emphatic that they could not honourably partake in the public hearings if they did not remain open to citizens' views as expressed at those hearings. Thus, they could not support a final section of the draft interim report that identified preferred electoral options.

Professor Carty felt otherwise, reminding the Assembly that it was, from the start, mandated to produce a 'preliminary statement' that gave some direction regarding the most desirable electoral model possibilities should the Assembly not endorse the existing system. Some Assembly members agreed with this position, while others wanted the interim report to emphasize important "values" identified by the Assembly, but not preferred electoral models. In the middle of this potentially divisive debate, the Chair delivered a propitious birthday announcement begetting an Assembly-wide rendition of Happy Birthday that afforded some breathing space and made the Assembly more receptive to the Chair's subsequent proposal. It was suggested that the fi-

nal section of the report stress the values of local representation and proportionality tentatively favoured by most, if not all members, but only parenthetically note that certain electoral systems tended to emphasize certain values. This idea seemed to capture the dominant mood and Professor Carty agreed that he and the "night owls" would draft the section accordingly. The most intense debate waged thus far in the Assembly ended, to everyone's relief, on an harmonious note.

The last Sunday morning of the learning phase began with a review of the newly drafted "Preliminary Statement to the People of British Columbia". The report provided a synoptic assessment of the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the current plurality system in BC, and clarified that the Assembly had not yet decided that the present system should be discarded or changed. The report described the composition of the Assembly and outlined the three phases of the Assembly's work. The five electoral families and the criteria for assessing them were identified, and those criteria were applied to an evaluation of the BC electoral system. Without naming or discussing particular alternative systems, the report stressed the importance of local representation and proportionality as crucial elements of an effectively functioning modern democracy. The report ended by asking the citizens of BC to communicate their thoughts by submission to the CA website or to present them at the public hearings. The CA members seemed pleased with the new version of the report, making only minor suggestions for adding a glossary of terms, the public forum schedule, and a précis of the selection process for CA members. They also urged that the CA communications staff consider plans for relevant language translations. The rest of the morning consisted of a review of the Prince George agenda, some consideration of the deliberation phase in the fall (including the outline contents of the final report), and exhortations from the staff about member involvement in the public hearing phase scheduled for May and June. The session ended, unfailingly, with the Chair's announcement of the 46th wedding anniversary of a CA member, and a parting, "See you in Prince George".

Ordinary Citizens and the Renewal of Democracy

After the learning phase, I completed telephone interviews with 18 members of the Assembly—an approximately 10% sample reflecting main characteristics of the CA member profile. Several noted that when they received the invitational brochure about the Assembly they thought of it as "junk mail" and almost discarded it. Most said that at the time they considered the possibility of serving as a delegate, they knew little about electoral systems and would not have been able to put the "plurality" tag on the BC system. Nevertheless, they pursued the opportunity because most were disposed toward community involvement and believed that BC politics

was in a troubled state. Once chosen, they felt "honoured to be selected" (even though it was a random process) and they came to value the intellectual enrichment and sense of kinship with other members that the experience provided. The decisions that they reached together gave substance to the rhetoric of 'citizen empowerment', and the consensual nature of their decision-making, in what started out as a gathering of virtual strangers, was a testament to the devotion of staff and the unflagging commitment of the delegates.

Their reception of the experience, however, was not uncritical. Many wondered whether the mandated restriction of legislative seats to the current number of 79 was sensible and would not be a barrier to optimum reforms. A prevalent concern was whether the public would be sufficiently enlightened about the issues to vote intelligently on a referendum motion, given that there was no formal budget for public education. Media support for publicizing the work of the Assembly was also a crucial concern, particularly since apart from some early media attention of an announcement variety, the local newspapers in towns across the province rarely reported on the Assembly proceedings. Then too, there were niggling doubts about whether the government (current or new in May 2005) could be relied upon to legislate an approved referendum, whether the 60% bar for approval was set too high, and whether voters would find it contradictory to vote in favour of a recommendation for electoral change while they were also voting in a provincial election under the existing system.

Despite these concerns and some apprehension about whether the public hearing phase would attract and sufficiently inform a significant number of BC voters, the members seemed eager to take on their ambassadorial roles and fulfill a deepening sense of responsibility toward the people of British Columbia. As one member put it, "I feel that I'm part of the making of BC history."

Conclusion

We live in confusing times. While wars are waged in the name of democracy those of us for whom democracy has been regarded as a virtual birthright increasingly feel that our political institutions no longer represent us fairly or equitably. If the 19th century Westminster parliamentary system once functioned in a politically accountable manner, that is hardly so today as legislatures are dominated by powerful coteries within governing parties who undermine democratic discourse in their management of dissent and diversity. Efforts to address this growing 'democratic deficit' range from categorical rejection of traditional state structures[2] to construction of radical alternatives in order to enshrine the principle of 'empowered participatory governance'[3] to less utopic forms of institutional engineering aimed at improving political representation in contemporary democracies.[4] Since the civil rights movement in the United States the broad quest for empowerment has been conducted outside conventional political arenas as 'extra-parliamentary politics' has been the chief form of struggle for social change. That and the more marginal forms of ego-enhancement practiced under the umbrella of civic privatism have largely failed, however, to transform basic political structures and to re-motivate faith in the fading democratic polity. Especially here in Canada, the rampant 'partyism' that characterizes legislatures at both the federal and provincial levels makes evident the ingrained flaws that hamper the way we do our political business and ensure that it gets done badly.[5]

As a social movements scholar aware of the chasms between government and community action groups, I began my observations vaguely hopeful that democratic electoral reforms might bridge that perennial gap, and that government itself could become more inclusive and representative of people's interests than has been the case in this province and country over such a long span. After witnessing the performance of 160 of my fellow citizens, I remain hopeful and convinced that given the proper setting and support to stimulate fair-minded dialogue, there is no reason for misgivings about what 'ordinary citizens' can accomplish in their efforts to mend democracy.

Notes

1. Farrell, David M., *Electoral Systems: A Comparative Introduction*, 2001, Palgrave, New York, N.Y.

2. Burnheim, John, *Is Democracy Possible?*, 1985, University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles, California.

3. Fung, Archon and Erik Olin Wright, *Deepening Democracy: Institutional Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance*, 2003, Verso, London.

4. Norris, Pippa, *Electoral Engineering: Voting Rules and Political Behavior*, 2004, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, U.K.

5. Loenen, Nick, *Citizenship and Democracy: A Case for Proportional Representation*, 1997, Dundern Press: Toronto.

Editor's Note: Following public hearings held during May and June throughout BC the Citizens' Assembly will reconvene in the fall to deliberate whether BC's electoral system should be changed and, if so, what change should be proposed. An article on the deliberations of the Assembly and its recommendation will appear in a future issue of the Review.