



For immediate distribution
Thursday, September 9, 2004

NEWS RELEASE

Quebec and BC Lead the Way in Electoral Reform Initiatives

***Institute for
Research on
Public Policy***

***Institut de
recherche
en politiques
publiques***

Canadian provinces could learn important lessons from Scotland and New Zealand, two communities that have adopted mixed proportional systems, says Henry Milner.

Montreal – The Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP.org) today released a study by Henry Milner entitled “First Past the Post? Progress Report on Electoral Reform Initiatives in Canadian Provinces.”

The author, a Strengthening Canadian Democracy visiting fellow at the IRPP, looks at current electoral reform initiatives undertaken in five Canadian provinces. He concludes that two provinces are leading the way, namely Quebec and British Columbia. But, his analysis, which identifies weaknesses and innovations in the Quebec proposal, reveals that the province is at the forefront of reform based on the legislation it will table this fall.

Milner says that the provinces engaged in this electoral reform debate wish to devise a model of proportional representation that ensures a continued role for directly elected MLAs or MPPs representing specific geographic boundaries. And, he is clear in arguing that a mixed member proportional representation system (MMP) would ensure such a role.

The study looks at recent developments in Scotland and New Zealand, two communities with Westminster-style parliaments similar in size to the larger Canadian provinces, which have adopted MMP models to supplant their single-member electoral systems.

The study finds, that on the whole, adopting an MMP system redresses the main pathology manifested under the current first-past-the-post system, namely the distortion in popular vote to seat conversions. This often cited problem contributes to other phenomena raised by advocates for reform. For instance, the “loser wins” scenario in which parties that garner most votes do not necessarily win the corresponding seats and hyperpolarization whereby no room is left for parties representing the middle group of electors.

Drawing from the lessons learnt under the Scotland and New Zealand models, Milner says we can devise guidelines for applying the MMP system to Canada in order to minimize divergences from proportionality and yet enhance the functioning of the system, such as:

- ◆ Increase the percentage of overall seats available for purposes of compensation from the party lists;
- ◆ Increase the size of the territory covered by the party lists;

- ◆ Insist on a real and effective minimum vote requirement to limit the number of parties able to win seats.

“First Past the Post? Progress Report on Electoral Reform Initiatives in Canadian Provinces” is the latest *Policy Matters* study to be released as part of the Strengthening Canadian Democracy series. It is now available on-line in Adobe (.pdf) format on the Institute’s Web site (www.irpp.org).

The media is cordially invited to attend a French-language conference sponsored by the Mouvement démocratie et citoyenneté du Québec on September 15, 2004 at 7:00 p.m. at which Dr. Milner will be discussing the results of this study. The free event will be held in room D-R200 of the Pavillon Athanase-David of the Université du Québec à Montréal (1420 Saint-Denis Street in Montreal).

For more information or to request an interview, please contact the IRPP.

To receive IRPP media advisories and news releases via e-mail, please subscribe to the IRPP e-distribution service by visiting the IRPP Web site (www.irpp.org).

Founded in 1972, the IRPP is an independent, national, nonprofit organization based in Montreal.

- 30 -

Contact:

Jeremy Leonard (jleonard@irpp.org)
Senior Fellow, Policy Outreach
IRPP.org
(514) 985-2461, ext. 323