

"Heavy" Votes Bend Parliament Out Of Shape by Holly Nelson

January 29, 2006- Winnipeg Free Press- All right, so I have an interest in the matter, being one of those Green people - but as a voter, doesn't it just nibble your grits that some voter's votes this year have ended up being far heavier than average, while many others have simply evaporated?

By "many others", I mean almost three quarters of a million - disappeared without a trace, except for a useful but tiny residue of money given to all the parties, based on votes received.

Take a look at your Bloc Quebecois voter, for instance. In terms of seats won per vote cast, the vote of someone who voted BQ was more than one-and-a-half times "heavier" than average, as a side-effect of their limited territory and shared concerns.

Meanwhile, the heavy hitters, Conservative and Liberal, won respectively 19% and 10% more seats than a purely proportional vote would have given them, while the NDP got half what they should have expected.

One Canadian in twenty voted Green. One Canadian in two hundred voted for Independent candidate Andre Arthur. Arthur won, no Green did. If every vote counted, the Greens would now have 15 seats - nearly as powerful as the federal NDP in the last parliament.

Looking at it this way, there should be a lot more upset voters than what we've got at the moment. Look at it- 750,000 voters cared enough to vote for the smaller parties, yet their votes were trampled by the horse-race electoral system we're saddled with.

What's the difference between the Bloc's huge success and the Green's "always the bridesmaid" status? It seems to be that tightly focused concerns in a small area can win in our system, while widespread shared concerns like water, food and social justice are spread too thin to have the local impact needed to win a seat.. If the Bloc tried to operate nation-wide, it would fizzle, despite supporting the same concerns for panCanadian francophones that it currently supports in one province.

So, is it time for a change in voting systems? Depends on the results we want.

We have to accept that we are entering an age of frequent minority governments. If we're going to do it, we should do it well. Some form of proportional representation (PR) would bring the distribution of seats into line with actual votes cast. It would also force the smaller parties to be more realistic in their plans and demands. It's one thing to criticize the government, quite another to sit in the house and wonder, "How can we make this work?"

If the election had been fair, there would be fifteen Greens across the country this morning, eating breakfast and wondering "What do I do now?" And then they would go to Ottawa and find out, along with the rest of the 308.

Wouldn't that be entertaining?

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