

OPEN LETTER

Andrew Coyne, National Columnist
National Post

Hello Andrew:

You conclude your observations on the Instant Runoff Vote and the Meslin/FVC dispute thus:

In Canada, absurdly, this dispute has led to some supporters of the Toronto initiative being expelled from the country's leading electoral reform group, Fair Vote Canada. This is madness. Even if Toronto opted to go no further than the ranked ballot, that's no reason to think the rest of the country would do the same. Whereas if reform is stopped there, it really might be its last shot.

This doesn't capture the situation as well as you might have. Perhaps the primary source for your overly-kind treatment of an undemocratic voting proposal, David, neglected to mention that he walks arm in arm with Goliath.

As I understand it, Dave Meslin and friends have been removed from executive office in the Toronto chapter of FVC for campaigning actively, in the arena of municipal government, against the declared purpose of FVC.

That purpose is the promotion of democratic voting – equal effective votes and proportional representation—to create democratic representative legislatures.

What was too long tolerated was Meslin's conceit that he and friends could advocate an unfair voting system while at the same time serving as officers of Fair Vote Canada.

Meslin & Co were conveying the impression that FVC endorsed a first-past-the-post electoral system, and thus were damaging Fair Vote Canada's reputation as a reliable advocate of democratic voting.

In short, FVC has now denied Meslin and his Ranked Ballot Initiative followers the opportunity to pretend or imply that they speak for Fair Vote Canada when in fact they do not. The only reproach I have for FVC Council is that it should have made the necessary clarifying decision two years sooner.

Meslin, a professional lobbyist focused primarily on Toronto city hall, pretends to this day, without evidence or logic, that his campaign for a winner-take-all voting system in Toronto (a) will cause no harm and (b) will somehow advance the cause of democratic voting and proportional representation throughout Canada.

Meslin and his RaBlIt friends have made it their business over the past couple of years to infiltrate the leadership structure of Fair Vote Canada to silence FVC criticism of their winner-take-all “reform” proposal.

In other words, Meslin was attempting to impose his own intellectual incoherence on Fair Vote Canada. To submit to that would have been folly.

Meanwhile, a far more important installment of this same ideological dispute is unfolding, as you know, in the Liberal Party of Canada.

Joyce Murray, the admirable Vancouver Liberal MP, is advocating democratic voting reform for all Canadians. She is opposed on this point by every other Liberal leadership contender including the projected winner, Justin Trudeau.

Meslin’s Toronto RaBlIt campaign (for the preferential ballot in single-member districts) mimics exactly the official electoral policy of the Liberal Party of Canada -- the anti-democratic policy and the accompanying attitudes which Joyce Murray is urging the Liberal Party and its supporters to renounce.

Toronto, Meslin’s primary arena of operation, is the geographic stronghold of the anti-democratic and still-dominant brand of Liberalism championed by the Toronto Star.

Dave Meslin has claimed, repeatedly, that his campaign for undemocratic voting in Toronto, a city larger in population than six of Canada’s provinces,

will not leak into or undermine PR voting reform campaigns at the senior levels of government. There will be no cross-contamination, he pretends, because he will exert his personal reputation, influence and powers of persuasion to prevent it.

Meslin now has a perfect opportunity to demonstrate this “watertight compartments” theory of electoral reform, and to measure his pretended influence against reality.

In his recent misrepresentation and libel of Fair Vote Canada (see below), Meslin asks his readers to send a message of support for proportional representation to Justin Trudeau.

Meslin and RaBlt should attempt much more. Dave Meslin should persuade his RaBlt ally, the Toronto Star, to issue, before April 4, 2013 an editorial favouring proportional representation in the federal Parliament. To be consistent, Toronto Star should then call for the election of Joyce Murray to the leadership of the Liberal Party of Canada.

That would be an impressive proof that Meslin’s campaign for undemocratic voting in Toronto is not simply a pander to the same powers which, through the editorials and columns of the Toronto Star, so vigorously oppose reform and defend the undemocratic voting systems of Ontario and Canada.

A similar verification of Meslin’s influence would arise if his Liberal ally Alan Broadbent suddenly declared publicly, well before April 4, for Joyce Murray and proportional representation. That would be, or should be, newsy. The stated mission of Broadbent’s Maytree Foundation is to facilitate the integration of immigrants into Canadian society – and equal effective votes at the federal level would be a natural tool to hasten their integration to Canadian public life.

If Meslin does not have that kind of influence with his heavyweight Liberal allies, however – then who’s fooling whom? If the various arenas of electoral reform advocacy are not watertight compartments – and nearly every thinking person in Canada knows they are not -- then Dave Meslin and friends should stop disrupting and slandering Fair Vote Canada.

Dave and friends should confine themselves to making the best case they can for their undemocratic voting proposal. That would allow FVC volunteer officers to advocate, unharrassed by RaBI, for the more difficult but vastly more consequential goal – democratic voting reform and proportional representation for all Canadians -- even those living in Toronto.

Andrew, I acknowledge that some sources can be charming and persuasive – but that doesn't make them rational or honourable. Please accept my sympathies for stumbling, as all journalists do at one time or another, into a pitfall. It's a peril of the trade.

Yours against bullshit and for representative democracy

John Deverell

Chair, Liberals for Fair Voting

Former Chief Steward, Toronto Star Editorial Department

Former president, Southern Ontario Newsmedia Guild

Founding Treasurer, Fair Vote Canada