

**A SUBMISSION TO BURLINGTON CITY COUNCIL REGARDING BILL 218
PROHIBITING MUNICIPALITIES USING RANKED BALLOTS IN
ELECTIONS**

[Revised Version]

November 2nd 2020

Madam Mayor, Honourable Councillors, my name is Mervyn Russell. I am a retired clergy person with degrees from The University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom, The New York Theological Seminary and the Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington D.C., with 54 years of full-time ministry experience in England, Scotland, The United States, Canada and the St Vincent and The Grenadines.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today on what is a very important topic, namely the development of democracy in Ontario.

I was very concerned when I read in the Globe and Mail that the present Provincial Government had included in the omnibus Bill 218, a prohibition on municipalities from using ranked ballots in their elections. Concerned but not surprised because it follows a pattern of decision making by the Provincial Government.

Madam Mayor, I am no expert on ranked ballots or proportional representation. However, one does not need to be an expert to realise that a ranked ballot system of voting gives added value to the votes of individual electors. It means that the preferences of the individual voter are carried over into supporting other candidates as well as her or his first choice, so that the individual's preferences still matter, and, as such, that person still has an impact on the eventual result. The individual's voting preferences have, thereby, made a lasting contribution. If our democracy is to be strong it can only be so through strong participation by electors. That participation is more likely and more satisfying, if voters are convinced that their preferences of candidates count and contribute to the final result. The importance of individual's choices is at the heart of democracy.

For people to rank their voting choices also means they must take an interest in the background, experience, abilities and positions of the candidates. Voters are more likely to be informed about the candidates and the issues in the election and, therefore, in the ongoing development of their community. Democracy works best through informed voters.

The reasons given by the Premier for the prohibition were, to my mind, expressions of thoughtless conceit. 'The voting system we have has served us well from 1867', as if perseverance was an argument for continuity. He was elected leader of the Progressive Conservative Party by a ranked ballot system of voting. What was good for him is, presumably, not good for the rest of us. 'In any case' he went on, 'people would be confused by the new system' as if only members of the Progressive Conservative Party were capable of prioritising candidates from 1-4.

As your resolution mentions, no one, except, presumably, the Cabinet were consulted, even though many municipalities, like Burlington, had spent time and money considering alternatives to the 'First Past the Post' system. Again this is very disappointing but not surprising. Toronto was not consulted when it was cut down to size. Nor were stakeholders in the healthcare system when health care was reorganized and its direction given, not to the Ministry of Health, but to a new body called 'Ontario Health', composed of Progressive Conservative Party supporters. Now a college that the established accreditation authorities have previously rejected, is to be given that accreditation by an omnibus bill.

There is a pattern of arrogant dismissiveness of democracy about the way these decisions, and others, have been made. It is as though the default position of the Provincial Government is "We alone know what is best for the Province and difference of opinion is, therefore, a waste of time, and time is money; and, in any case, we have the power to do what we want.' In this case of prohibiting ranked ballots, however, I cannot help sensing that there is possibly something else involved which also relates to democracy. I think it is this: If ranked ballots or other forms of proportion representation become accepted and appreciated at the municipal level, then voters may very well want them to be used a provincial level and federal level, making the possibility of majority Progressive Conservative governments unlikely. Better stop the rot before it takes hold. There is a pattern of anti-democratic authoritarianism that I find deeply disturbing

I'm glad to see that this resolution, if passed, will be sent on to other municipalities for support. I have encouraged Oakville and the Region of Halton to pass similar resolutions and have already sent yours on to them. I hope this resolution passes unanimously and has the desired effect. Improving our democracy is something we should all support.

Respectfully submitted,

Mervyn Russell BA, BD, D.Min