



**Canadian
Study
of Parliament
Group**

DIRECT DEMOCRACY:
We have the technology

**Halifax, Nova Scotia
May 25, 1996**

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The Canadian Study of Parliament Group (CSPG) was created with the object of bringing together all those with an interest in parliamentary institutions and the legislative process, to promote understanding and to contribute to their reform and improvement.

The constitution of the Canadian Study of Parliament Group makes provision for various activities, including the organization of seminars in Ottawa and elsewhere in Canada, the preparation of articles and various publications, the establishment of workshops, the promotion and organization of public discussions on parliamentary affairs, participation in public affairs programs on radio and television, and the sponsorship of other educational activities.

Membership is open to all those interested in Canadian legislative institutions.

Applications for membership and additional information concerning the Group should be addressed to the Secretariat, Canadian Study of Parliament Group, Box 660, West Block, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A6. Tel: (613) 996-0707, Fax: (613) 992-3674.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Canadian Study of Parliament Group held a conference in Halifax on May 25, 1996, at Province House on the theme *Direct Democracy: We have the Technology*. The event co-sponsored by St. Mary's University and MT&T was the first held by the Group in Nova Scotia in many years and was, in part, a continued response to the need to provide access to CSPG events outside the Ottawa area.

The event provided an opportunity of combining a discussion of the broader questions of the public's access to legislators and the relative merits of direct democracy with the more practical questions of how new information and telecommunication technologies can be used to facilitate this access and direct democracy, for example, the use of teledemocracy for party leadership selection.

I would like to express my gratitude to all those who contributed so much to the success of the conference: the Honourable John Savage, Premier of Nova Scotia; MPs Geoff Regan and Ted White; Ed Black, University of Northern British Columbia; Jennifer Smith, Dalhousie University; Leslie Seidle, Institute for Research on Public Policy; Leonard Preyra, Saint Mary's University; Cynthia Alexander, Acadia University; John Leefe, Conservative MLA for Queens; Paul Robichaud, MT&T; Agar Adamson and Ian Stewart, Acadia University; Jim Cowan, Former President of the Nova Scotia Liberal Party; Paul Murphy, Vice-President, MT&T; and our two generous co-sponsors - St. Mary's University and MT&T.

I would also like to thank Colin Dodds, Mark MacKenzie, Krista Murray and Shawn Riley for assisting me at the conference, managing the registration desk and preparing the many reports included in this document.

The important contribution made by the House of Commons through its financial and administrative support is also recognized as well as the support of my fellow CSPG Executive Committee members.

Thérèse Arseneau
Conference Chair and
Counsellor, Canadian Study
of Parliament Group



Direct Democracy:
We have the technology

HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA
MAY 25, 1996

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Keynote Address

The Honourable John Savage Premier of Nova Scotia

On behalf of all Nova Scotians, I would like to extend a warm welcome to the members of the Canadian Study of Parliament Group. It is a great honour to have you here in our capital city. Last year around this time the world's most powerful leaders also held annual meetings in Halifax. That was the G-7 Summit - or the "Halifax Summit" as it was officially called. I heard from John Major afterwards, and he used entirely different words. He called it the "Friendly Summit".

To our visitors, let me just say that I hope you have ample opportunity to experience some of that Nova Scotia hospitality yourself, over the next couple of days.

I understand that one of the reasons you are here is because of me - as the first "live" product, if you will, of information age democracy. Well here I am. I was the first leader in the world that was elected by tele-democracy. Whether the process worked or not is something I will leave to you and the historians to determine!

Other examples of tele-democracy are as follows:

- Gordon Campbell of the BC Liberal Party;
- The Alberta Liberal Leader;
- The Conservative Leader in Saskatchewan;
- Mel Hurtig of the National Party;
- and the Reform Party held 4 electronic town hall meetings.

Frankly, I am very proud to have been elected by a direct telephone vote, because I believe this is the way of the future. There were a couple of little glitches which Jim Cowan can tell you about - but that's really not important. We need to be prepared to take the risks that are involved in learning to use a new technology not only well but also wisely. And of course we are not just talking about a technological artifact here that you can choose to ignore, like a toaster or a vacuum cleaner. We are talking about a radical technology shift on the scale of the industrial revolution and perhaps even larger because of the instantaneous nature of our new technologies.

There is no question, the world of the 21st Century will be a world without national and political borders in a traditional sense. It will be a world where individuals can do *many* things directly using their telephone or their home computer - from exchanging information with someone on the other side of the world to registering their car or registering their opinion on a national event. Using the telephone to elect a party leader is just one small piece of the large scale changes that will affect the way we do things.

As premier of this province, my position is that we cannot afford to stand back and let others define this new world for us. We need to be prepared to place ourselves right on the leading edge. In Nova Scotia we did that by using technology developed by our local telephone company, MT&T, to enfranchise all provincial Liberals in the party's 1992 leadership convention. Now MT&T is selling that expertise throughout the world. Both developments are good.

Using technology in this way has a certain novelty, but its effect merely follows the historical trend of widening the pool of people able to cast ballots in elections. In 1758 - the date of the first general election in Nova Scotia - eligible voters had to own freehold property, be over 21, British, Protestant - not to mention male. Our intellectual horizons have steadily expanded ever since and restrictions on electors have been reduced accordingly. Most of us would agree that the continual broadening of our democratic parameters has been good.

There remain many debatable issues, however. Indeed, some would point out that the same technology which elected me as party leader could be used to weaken our parliamentary form of representative government, and the bureaucratic structures of policy development that underpin it. The questions are profound, multi-faceted, and the solutions are far from obvious.

One particularly interesting area where as Canadians we are confronted with some controversial implications of direct democracy, is in the whole question of referendums.

Advanced technology now holds out the possibility of consulting the public on contentious issues more often. Moreover, it even offers the public the futuristic ability to pass judgment on day-to-day matters of governance.

On the one hand, it's argued direct democracy is incompatible with responsible parliamentary government as we know it. Frequently used, direct democracy could undermine the cabinet system by imposing decisions on the executive council which it may not agree with - decisions made in living rooms and kitchens across the province.

On the other hand, advocates of applied technical innovation believe that direct democracy is a *purser* form of democracy that would loosen the grip of power brokers and interest groups on the political landscape. Based on our experience in the recent Quebec referendum, I'm not sure that is true.

This mode of public consultation also appeals to those who believe parliamentary debate and procedure have become a waste of time. There are days during Question Period when I would be tempted to agree...

Thinkers like Nova Scotia's own George Grant, however, have warned that we are "in an age which more and more glorifies 'decisiveness' in politics at the expense of 'thoughtfulness'." I think he makes a good point.

As we have learned from the past, we have to be careful not to become so infatuated with a new technology that we blind ourselves to its dangers. We must be careful to apply technology in ways that are both ethical and humanistic, ways that enhance rather than detract from the social and political values that we have so carefully nurtured. Most important, we must dictate the uses of technology and not become its slaves.

We are challenged to answer some very critical questions.

How far down the road of direct democracy do we dare go? Is there a point where it oversimplifies the decision-making process to our detriment? How do we deal with the security issues that have yet to be solved? And can we control the process once we have made the choice to travel down this high speed road?

These are matters I expect you will be exploring. I look forward to hearing your ideas!

On a more general note, I would just like to add in closing that my own commitment to promoting the creative application of technology in our daily life did not end with the telephone vote that put me here.

I believe that information age technology has a very exciting potential for us not only as a burgeoning new industry - but as a tool that is opening doors in a very positive way. Nova Scotia is doing many things to promote that trend, but I will just mention one of them.

We recently established a new government department - the Department of Business and Consumer Services. This department in conjunction with the new Technology & Science Secretariat is exploring new applications of technology in the delivery of government services - not just because we want to improve customer service, but because we want to improve our quality of life.

In a predominantly rural province like Nova Scotia, technology is breaking down geographic barriers that have crippled the economies of many of our communities in the past. Suddenly it is becoming possible to live in Cheticamp or Canso and have convenient access to government information and services. You can live in a rural community and sell your product to a person on the other side of the globe.

This is really another aspect of enfranchisement that comes to us as a legacy of the information age, and we cannot afford not to pursue it.

It is interesting that when industrial machines were first introduced to the world there was a legitimate fear that the overall effect of machines would be dehumanizing.

As far as the information age is concerned, I think there is a real opportunity for us to use technology in a way that enhances our ability to communicate with one another as people, and re-align the world on a more humanistic scale. We have some powerful tools at our disposal. Now, more than ever, we have an obligation to use them wisely.

I wish you all the best - and I hope to see you all again. Perhaps you will be so crazy about Halifax as the venue for your meetings that you will decide to return again next year. Consider yourselves invited!

Thank you all very much.

Opening Plenary *The Question of Direct Democracy*

Chair:

Geoff Regan, Liberal MP (Halifax West)

Panellists:

Ted White, Reform MP (North Vancouver)
The Question of Direct Democracy

Ed Black

University of Northern British Columbia
Can Democracy Survive Information Technology?

Thérèse Arseneau, the Conference Coordinator, opened the conference by explaining the significant occurrences that made Nova Scotia an excellent location for a conference on direct democracy: Nova Scotia was home to Canada's first representative government, first responsible government, and first televote.

MP Geoff Regan, the Chair of the plenary, then took the floor and briefly discussed the technology that is now used in the House of Commons. Although the websites and laptops that he and other MPs use do not seem overly sophisticated, their use does represent great progress since it was only recently that the fax machine was first introduced to the Hill. The use of this new technology has altered the representation that MPs can provide to their constituents. MPs can now become more accessible representatives as opposed to party faithful only accountable every five years.

However, this new form of representation also has weaknesses. For example, although MPs can be made aware of constituents' concerns through e-mail, they only have limited time to respond to these concerns. Since the e-mail system operates instantaneously, people often expect the same of their MPs. MPs are often required to use the mail system to respond to their constituents, thus, an instantaneous interaction is neither provided nor expected. Further, Geoff Regan emphasized that technology offers government a means to accomplishing better representation and is not an end in itself. This better representation, however, can only be achieved if technology is implemented and used properly.

Reform MP Ted White then began his presentation by restating a quote made by Mr. Edmund Burke 220 years ago. "Your representative owes you not his industry but only his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion." Because this statement represents the belief of many MPs it causes a major problem in our political system; a problem that is further magnified by the fact that Parliament, in its present form, is organized specifically with the intention of enacting the party agenda and not the will of the people. Because of these two factors, all that stands between a government bill's first reading and the passing of that bill is days of meaningless and expensive debate.

In order to alter this problem, said Ted White, the public must force the power hungry politicians to sacrifice their partisanship. He saw the 1993 Federal election as an indicator that people are using their power at the ballot box to force this change. For example, the collapse of both the "politically correct" NDP and Conservative parties and the success of the "populist" Reform party was an indication that the people now wanted to replace the old maintenance style governments, who promoted only the status quo, with a reform style government which wants to make significant changes to the way in which the government operates.

Because of these radical political changes, Ted White felt that Mr. Burke's quote could now be altered to more properly suit the information age in which we live. "Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but also his commitment to alert you to the affairs of government that affect you, so that you may become informed, in order to instruct him how to represent you." This new statement reflects both the increased technology that makes direct democracy possible, and also the increased education in the voting population that makes direct democracy desirable.

Ed Black agreed with a number of facts stated by MP White, in particular, he felt that MPs do not have sufficient concern for the electorate. He argued however that direct democracy is not the best way to involve the electorate because it creates many other unanswerable questions. For example, how do we use the available technology to create an effective direct democracy system, and who will decide which questions go to the public and which will be handled

by the House of Commons? Further, who will decide on the wording of those questions that do go to the public? This alone, as proven in the past, could pose a major problem. Finally, what significance will be given to the voice of the constituents, will they have an absolute veto on any issue which they vote on, or will their say simply be an indication of preference for the MP to use as he or she chooses?

A second problem that is created centers on the actual purpose of direct democracy. Is the main intent of direct democracy to allow the people to participate in government and have significant control of political policies? If this is the intent, direct democracy is an ideal system. However, having an effective government and informed decision makers is also essential, and if this is a goal, then why would we give political power to the ill-informed and uneducated masses? Black strengthened this argument by pointing out that six weeks after the 1993 election only 55% of a surveyed group of Canadians could identify the new Canadian Prime Minister, Jean Chrétien. Should these people be making significant political decisions simply because technology may permit it?

According to Ed Black, technology itself also hinders effective direct democracy. Although the technology now available is advanced, it is still impossible to have a national election through a televote system. Further, all the political information offered to the public would be biased by the social context in which it is placed. For example, the medium through which information is provided to the public will always impose biases. Ed Black contended that in most situations, the group with the greater resources available to allocate to their cause would present the most convincing argument, thus, resources act as a bias. Further, television is biased and ill-equipped to handle political issues; TV is image oriented. However, political issues can only be presented effectively within a verbal context. Also, said Ed Black, because Canada is a multicultural society and images have different meanings in different cultures, image dominated television is unable to effectively transmit a common political message. If direct democracy was implemented, these problems could only be solved through the regulation of television and newspapers which is a step not even the most radical politician would endorse.

The final problem pointed out by Ed Black was that implementing direct democracy would destroy our current system. He argued that the death of our representative democracy would end the protection of minority rights because political power

would be given to the uneducated self serving majority. Thus, minority concerns would be subordinated to the will of the majority.

Although agreeing that problems exist with any new system, Ted White disagreed with Ed Black's opinion that direct democracy would not be preferable to our current system. Ted White explained that as a youth, he belonged to the Young Nationals in New Zealand, and supported candidates who he felt could go to Wellington and make a difference. Unfortunately, these excellent candidates, once becoming MPs, were little more than sheep responsible for towing the party line. Ted White found that during their term, like in Canada, the MPs would rarely consult their constituents to receive input because the MPs felt their constituents were mean, ill-spirited, and ignorant. However, it was these same constituents who were often commended by the MP, shortly after the election, for being informed and voting for the correct party. Ted White feels this system is contradictory, ineffective, and elitist. However, it is now possible to replace this faulty system with direct democracy which would allow MPs to always know the will of their constituents and then vote accordingly. This, according to Ted White, is exactly what the Reform party is doing.

Ted White further agreed with Ed Black's belief that if direct democracy is to be successful, access through technology is essential. However, unlike Ed Black, Ted White believes technology is not a problem in implementing direct democracy, instead, there exists only two inhibitors. First, MPs lack a sufficient budget to respond to the public's quest for information. To see this, we need only look at the MPs budget of \$180,000 per year to pay for operating expenses as well as staff members. Obviously, there is little money to effectively reply to constituents. This is one shortfall with direct democracy; it will require more money to develop a more responsive government.

The second major problem is that politicians are not willing to sacrifice their power to the masses. This problem can only be overcome by voting out the power hungry politicians. Ted White then closed his argument by stressing that direct democracy would also limit the interest groups' dominance of the political agenda. Ted White used an example from his career of how he used simple recall legislation to quiet an interest group. Ted White told the interest group that he would resign if 5% of the population believed that he was not supporting the will of the majority. Because Ted White used technology to always represent the majority, the interest group was

unable to find 5% of the population who felt that he was not representing the majority of his constituents. However, the fact that Ted White represents the demands of the majority does not mean minority rights are ignored. Canadians are both sympathetic to and concerned with minority rights and Ted White believes that the majority always consider these rights when voting.

This ended the formal presentations and the floor was opened for questions. The first comment concerned Ted White's constant use of labels when referring to political parties. For example, the large parties (Conservative, Liberal, and NDP) were referred to as "politically correct" while the Reform party was called "populist". This individual felt that if direct democracy was to be successful, the public would have to be educated by their representatives and not deceived by false, stereotypical labels. Ted White agreed and stated that he used the labels intentionally to raise this question. He also felt that people must be able to see through these labels and support a particular party based on its policies. This, he believes, is possible because people saw through the labels that were given to the Reform party and voted for them in the last federal election.

The next point raised was that direct democracy, particularly the use of referenda, does not offer effective means to promote change and in the past has acted only to maintain the status quo. Ted White argued that past referenda were poor examples because they were initiated by the government. Instead, if referenda were controlled by the people through the use of petitions, there would be large voter turnout and referenda would act as the driving force behind change.

Ted White closed the plenary by stating that weaknesses will always exist in any political system, however, the minor weaknesses that direct democracy suffers are much less severe than the problems that plague the top down, elitist political system that now dominates. Our Constitution was designed to help Canadians feel involved, now we should use the available technology to involve the public not only in the Constitution but also in the political system.

Rapporteur: Shawn Riley

Morning Plenary *The Broader Issues*

Chair:

Jennifer Smith
Dalhousie University

Panellists:

Leslie Seidle
Institute for Research on Public Policy
*The Question of Representation:
Is Parliament Representative?*

Leonard Preyra
Saint Mary's University
*Critically Examining the Impact of Technology:
To what extent can it be used to make politicians
more responsive?*

Cynthia Alexander
Acadia University
Democracy in the New Information Age

The representativeness of Canada's societal diversity within its national political institutions has emerged as a subject of debate and study, particularly in recent years. The myriad of studies undertaken several decades ago largely focused on the socio-economic composition of Members of Parliament. However, as Leslie Seidle duly pointed out in his presentation, the issue of representation has been broadened to include the plight of "identifiable groups". While cognizant of the debate that arises from singling out what societal groups should be studied, he nevertheless cited gender, race and ethnicity as prime examples of those groups that have gained salience in this area.

Leslie Seidle then addressed the question of why identifiable groups have come to the forefront of the representation issue. He highlighted the advent of social movements and the rise of constitutional politics, which was ignited by the struggle for the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as integral forces that fostered the growth and development of group representation in Canada. He also attributed its growth to the "democratic deficit" in terms of the blatant under-representation of certain groups within governmental institutions, namely Parliament.

Following the 1993 federal election only 18% of those seated in the House of Commons were women, up 5% from the 1988 election. Leslie Seidle subsequently pointed out the discrepancy that exists between aboriginal MPs and their statistical presence

within Canadian society. Thus, he argued that national institutions can no longer organize representation solely around regional definitions of the country or on the basis of undifferentiated individuals, for an increasing number of the populace are collectively seeking an expression of their differences in these institutions.

The other central tenet of Leslie Seidle's discussion sought to focus attention on some of the contemporary proposals for making Parliament more reflective of societal cleavages. He contended that these proposals can be clustered together to form three distinct categories, the first of which he characterized as the "designation of seats". As such, he referred to a proposal that advocates the creation of a proportional representation system, where half of the seats would be allotted specifically to women. Another proposal worth noting is one which favours establishing two representatives per constituency, of which both genders would be represented.

The second category considers proposals that call for proportional representation. Leslie Seidle maintained that the interest with that system, that has even recently come from the House of Commons and the Senate, is due, in large measure, to studies that have shown that the system tends to generate a higher number of women within legislatures than that of the first-past-the-post system employed in Canada. He attributes this greater female representation to the publication of party candidate lists which can be compared with other party's to decipher a party's dedication to equitable representation.

The final category deals with proposals other than electoral reform. He cited some of the Lortie Commission's proposals, for it focused on financial incentives and the removal of barriers, as opposed to advocating structural change. The Commission made recommendations such as providing incentives to parties to nominate a more diverse array of candidates, supplying income tax receipts for contributions to their campaign, establishing search committees, and including child care expenses for those seeking nomination. The idea behind these proposals is to open up the political process to identifiable groups in order to eliminate some of the long engrained barriers to candidate selection.

While more attention is being directed toward the academic realm, Parliament has yet to examine many of these reform recommendations. While conscious of the fact that some of the contemporary proposals may be radical, complicated,

and even ill-intentioned, Leslie Seidle deemed it necessary that greater public debate be forthcoming, for the time has come for serious consideration of reform.

For **Leonard Preyra**, one of the fundamental divisions within contemporary politics arises from the debate over whether a representative or Plebetarian system is appropriate for the future of Canada's political development. Notwithstanding this division, he perceives the convergence of the two as being paramount in propelling the process of direct democracy, post-materialism, and the technological revolution. The representative system, which encompasses such conceptions as direct accountability for parliamentarians, and the attempt to solicit greater public involvement, comprises the motivation, while elements of a plebetarian system provide the means.

Leonard Preyra explored the implications of technology to underscore our present locale with regard to the issue of direct democracy. If Parliament is any indication, the prognosis for its future may indeed be dismal. Technology's impact on Parliament has been negligible with currently only seven of 177 Liberal MPs operating homepages or websites. He attributed this technological absence within the House of Commons to cost considerations and the tendency on the part of older MPs to be wary of modern technology. The fear of introducing technology, in part, results from lack of interest in engaging in a type of interactive discussion with constituents that may demand a response to controversial issues instantaneously via e-mail. Leonard Preyra maintains that this apprehension is witnessed within existing MP websites which yield minimal maneuverability for the constituent to engage in interactive communication.

While interactive communication (i.e. video conferencing) is a potentially exciting avenue for creating a truly deliberative democracy, Leonard Preyra voiced concerns with regards to education, socialization, and the exchange of information. He also questioned the extent to which technology fosters greater public participation in the political process. It may provide an additional route of participation for the "attentive public," but Leonard Preyra is pessimistic that technology will be effective in stimulating new people to become active in the political process. If anything, technology reinforces what political scientists have seen in other areas of participation, with only a minor segment of the population engaging in politics.

Users of new technology are not representative of society's diversification. Leonard Preyra maintained that a direct relationship exists between socio-economic status and access. He also cited a direct correlation between power and access, for technology has the capacity to empower some groups and restrain others within the parameters of politics. This has generated the perception within the political arena that parties either capitalize on this new technology or prepare to fall by the wayside. However, Leonard Preyra perceives that technology has failed to generate even moderate differences in terms of public agenda, discourse, and outcome. Therefore, Leonard Preyra's presentation led to one question: Do we have the technology to furnish direct democracy within our political system? At present, with existing technology, Leonard Preyra's tone was not one of optimism.

According to **Cynthia Alexander**, the impetus of technology within the political realm reinforces the need to look beyond the narrow dimensions of democracy as being merely the act of suffrage in order to derive new and different ways of viewing democracy. In a similar vein, Cynthia Alexander deemed that public debate should be forthcoming in order to clarify the abstract term "technology", by asking questions such as how it can be harnessed to increase political cognition, enhance ambition, and generate political coalitions.

For Cynthia Alexander, Santa Monica California's Public Electronic Network (PEN) provides a prime example of technology meeting democracy. It is a municipal endeavor that functions as a bulletin board and allows those citizens with modems to communicate with one another. Those without home computers can obtain access at public libraries and other public facilities. PEN also serves to promote discourse between the public and government. Despite readily available access to technology, only 2% of this wealthy and educated community has used the system since its inception. Cynthia Alexander contended that the introduction of technology into the current system, without providing for change, will only amplify the voices of those already interested in politics.

In the course of her presentation, Cynthia Alexander brought attention to the representativeness of information technology. A paper, presented last year to the American Association of Political Science, cited that 80% of Internet users were white males, and of that total, 51% have a post-secondary education. This gender incongruity begs the

question, who is designing and implementing these information systems? Cynthia Alexander argued that white male values are embedded within technology. This is further compounded by recent declines in the number of women actively pursuing computer science degrees across the country. Recent studies have indicated that the use of technology differs along the lines of race and gender. She contends that there is a need for more analysis of the impact of technology on these elements, and how it affects political articulation.

The question of access is not the only one that arises when discourse and democracy are the topic of conversation. Cynthia Alexander deemed that digestion of information is a question of equal importance. The information age has prompted the prevailing assumption that with data comes information which ultimately leads to knowledge. She expressed concern with the casual link between information and knowledge, for, how are we to make meaning from this continually growing reservoir of information when human cognitive abilities may be unable to meet that level of development. She asked the audience, do we really want an information age, and if so, will we be "cussing or discussing?" To live in an electronic democracy would mean having to reinvent or modify our cognitive or information abilities. The catalyst for this information society is the marketplace. If our technological course remains unaltered, citizens must first become consumers of information, which is the prerequisite for becoming citizens in the information age.

DISCUSSION

One person questioned whether technology does, in fact, franchise or disenfranchise certain groups within society, and, if so, where do women and aboriginals fit within this spectrum?

Cynthia Alexander maintained that these groups have begun to utilize existing technology for their purposes, this is demonstrated by the growing number of websites that have been forming on the internet. However, this does not negate the fact that

technology has built-in values and assumptions which result in technology aggravation rather than alleviating many enduring political inequities.

Leonard Preyra would agree that technology does possess that discriminatory capacity, but contends that examining which groups succeed and which suffer at the hand of technology is not as important as analyzing the different impacts of technology and its implications within a societal context.

A fellow panelist, Leslie Seidle, would somewhat disagree with Cynthia Alexander's characterization that male values are imbedded within technological development. He contends that attributing the values inherent in information technology largely to white males may be taking a perception too far.

An additional area of interest was raised in reference to the representativeness of women within the House of Commons. One participant asked whether bringing greater numbers of women and minorities into the House will, in the long term, propel change within the political process.

Another participant further questioned whether that is the most important question, or whether academics should be looking at making a polity that is sympathetic to women and minorities.

For Leslie Seidle, a polity sensitive to women has little to do with providing for heightening numerical presence of women within the House of Commons. While unable to quantify the amount of change that will be generated by increasing the number of women in Parliament, he is convinced that a difference will be forthcoming over time.

Rapporteur: Mark MacKenzie

Afternoon Plenary ***The Practical Applications of Technology***

Chair:

John Leefe
Conservative MLA for Queens

Panellists:

Jim Cowan
Former President of the
Nova Scotia Liberal Party
*A Practitioner's View of Teledemocracy:
The Liberal Party's Selection of a Leader*

Agar Adamson and Ian Stewart
Acadia University
*The Use of Teledemocracy in the Nova Scotia
Liberal's and Conservatives' Leadership Selections*

Paul Robichaud, MT&T
How Teledemocracy Works

The panel discussion on "The Practical Application of Technology" focused on the use of teledemocracy as the means of electing political leaders. Using the 1992 Nova Scotia Liberal Party Leadership selection as a case study, the contributors were able to show how teledemocracy works in practice. Consideration of teledemocracy-in-action allows for a better understanding of the practical reasons for implementing such an electoral system, and gives meat to the bones of the philosophical argument regarding the usefulness of teledemocracy.

The election of John Savage to the leadership of the Nova Scotia Liberal Party, in the Spring of 1992, was the first instance in Canada of a politician being elected party leader as the result of telephone voting by the party membership. While teledemocracy has been used in subsequent party leadership elections, and altered to fit the particular local requirements, the basic teledemocratic format can be understood by briefly examining how teledemocracy worked in its original version.

Through his direct involvement, **Jim Cowan**, former Nova Scotia Liberal Party President, was able to describe how said election operated. Jim Cowan recalled that the Nova Scotia Liberal Party Executive, working in conjunction with Maritime Tel & Tel, the technical operators of the election, produced a system whereby all members of the Nova Scotia Liberal Party, in good standing, were

given the opportunity of participating directly in the election of their leader. Members had to vote by telephone; though they did have the option of voting from home (\$25 fee) or attending the convention (\$45 fee). Upon payment of the chosen fee the voting member received a personal identification number (PIN) along with voting instructions. On the day of the election, enrolled members wishing to cast a vote dialed the 1-900 number of the candidate they preferred. The vote was registered when the voter entered his or her PIN after hearing the candidate's personal greeting.

Even the best laid plans can go awry, however. According to Jim Cowan, the venture into the world of teledemocracy became, for the Nova Scotia Liberal Party and Maritime Tel & Tel, an adventure. Much to the chagrin of those involved, on election day the telephone voting system failed. Technical problems resulted in the system becoming overwhelmed by the volume of votes cast. The election was postponed. A fortnight later, June 20, the technological teething troubles had been overcome and the election proceeded flawlessly.

Despite the initial setback, Jim Cowan viewed the Nova Scotia Liberal Party's teledemocratic experiment in a positive light. He did so because teledemocracy, in the view of the Nova Scotia Liberal Party Executive, had fulfilled the political goals expected of it. Teledemocracy was used as the electoral conduit because it was deemed to be the most efficient means of realizing five objectives agreed upon by the executive: the direct involvement of members, a successful recruitment drive, positive media coverage, a "fair" election, and the operation of a self-financing electoral system.

Agar Adamson and Ian Stewart of Acadia University have examined many issues related to the teledemocracy process. They provided statistical data which indicated that the Nova Scotia Liberal Party was successful in recruiting members during the election campaign and, according to Adamson and Stewart, more members voted than had been the case at previous leadership elections.

Whether teledemocracy achieved positive media coverage is debatable. The fact that teledemocracy allows for remote voting means a link is needed between the convention and those members wishing to remain at home. C.B.C. provided televised coverage of the convention, including the debacle of the first attempt. The decision to charge a voting fee means teledemocracy produced a profit. However, it also raised questions of the fairness of the election process. Was it fair that the voter fee

disenfranchised some members? Similarly, was the election fair because it was in full glare of the media?

Teledemocracy, then, was the means to achieving the Executive's five objectives; in turn, the five objectives were the medium through which the Executive hoped to improve the standing of the Nova Scotia Liberal Party in preparation for the next provincial election. The Executive did not employ teledemocracy for high minded ideological reasons. Teledemocracy was used as the bait to lure new members, for financial reasons, and to peak the interest of the media. Political parties see leadership elections as a golden opportunity to recruit new members to the fold. During a leadership race the party is in the political spotlight; what better time to attract new members with the promise of direct involvement in the election of a leader? The direct involvement of members did not have as its goal the enhancement of the democratic process; its goal was to raise funds. The media were enticed into covering the leadership race by being included in a direct way, through informing "remote" voters, and by the excitement of reporting on a new phenomenon - teledemocracy.

The manipulation of teledemocracy by the Nova Scotia Liberal Party Executive to achieve political goals should not necessarily be seen as a bad turn of events. Political parties are entitled to use any legal means at their disposal in order to promote themselves. Teledemocracy, if seen in that light, is just another tool of the Executive. However, if teledemocracy is perceived as the agent of direct democracy then the 1992 Nova Scotia Liberal Leadership Contest must be considered ambiguous at best. On the day of this election the demands of direct democracy were met. Through telephone voting the Nova Scotia Liberal Party allowed all members, who could afford to do so, the chance to participate. On the other hand, the Nova Scotia Liberal Party has not seen fit to use teledemocratic direct democracy since the 1992 leadership election. In fact, Jim Cowan, in his closing remarks stated that the Executive has no intention of using teledemocracy in the future. This does not mean that teledemocracy will not be used, it does, however, suggest that the decision lies with the Executive. The teledemocracy experience enjoyed by the Nova Scotia Liberal Party Membership would appear to be a one-off, stage managed, excursion into direct democracy, rather than a first step along the path towards participation in party affairs.

The use of teledemocracy to elect political leaders, whether it is used to enhance the standing of the political party involved or for the purposes of direct democracy, has not met with unequivocal support. Agar Adamson and Ian Stewart, through their extensive research into leadership elections, have unearthed a dichotomy of opinion regarding the merits of teledemocracy. Adamson and Stewart have found that the response from party members has been generally favourable, while political scientists are less than enamored with teledemocracy as the means of electing Canada's political leaders.

In the case of the 1992 Nova Scotia Liberal Leadership Election, "remote" voting, through teledemocracy, provided a number of advantages for party members: participants were able to vote without having to attend the leadership convention; each individual member was given the opportunity of participating directly in electing a new leader, rather than voting for a convention delegate to represent them; and, members who may have had difficulty attending the leadership convention, because of physical or financial hardship, were enfranchised. The popularity of teledemocracy amongst practitioners extends beyond those members who have been included by the process, however. Statistical data, presented by Adamson and Stewart, indicated that ex-officios, whose influence has been diluted by all-member voting, are overwhelmingly in favour of teledemocracy. Strong support from party members for a method of electing the leader of their party would seem to be a compelling reason for continuing with teledemocracy. Students of leadership conventions argue otherwise.

Political scientists reason that the election of party leaders is not the sole concern of party members. Canadian politics is leader dominated, therefore, it is of concern to the Canadian polity in general, and political scientists in particular, how leaders come to attain power. Academia cites a host of problems with teledemocracy, the most compelling of which are: the possibility of fraud, unequal access, outside influence, and impulse voting.

Fraud is a problem that has yet to be satisfactorily addressed by supporters of teledemocracy. A personal identification number gives the member access to the teledemocracy system, but it does not prevent the PIN, and by association, the vote, from being used by a third

party. Adamson and Stewart cite the claim of Nash Brogan, who boasted that he voted 232 times for John Savage during the 1992 Nova Scotia Liberal Party Leadership Election, as an example of the type of fraudulent behavior teledemocracy invites.

Paul Robichaud, representing Maritime Tel & Tel, in response to questions from the floor, stated that it was possible to pinpoint the location of phone votes and that the volume of votes cast from a particular phone could be limited. Paul Robichaud argued that this could help reduce the possibility of fraud. Teledemocracy depends on easy access to a telephone. Paul Robichaud announced that 97% of Canadian homes are equipped with a phone, 95% of which are of the touchtone variety. Voting is also possible from public telephones, making access to the system virtually universal. The cost of voting through the teledemocracy system may well deter some potential voters. Indeed, there seems to be little chance that political parties would forgo the revenue teledemocracy provides through the voting fee.

Adamson and Stewart expand the "unequal access" question by arguing that voters have to have easy access to a television station carrying the convention in order to fully participate in the election. Should the convention be carried solely on a cable channel, this may limit the information available to those unable to afford "cable" and those in rural areas where the facility is unavailable. The dependence of teledemocracy on the electronic media brings the issue of outside influence into the foreground. Television, in particular, may well

change the style of election campaign, and may alter the outcome of the leadership contest. The influence of interest groups and the money they bring to a campaign are also of concern to political scientists. Lastly, teledemocracy allows for instant voting. After hearing a stirring speech a member may decide to vote immediately. Without having the opportunity of a saunter to the polling station, during which time he or she can exercise sober second thought, the voter may make a rash choice.

In their criticism, political scientists may be guilty of comparing teledemocracy with an idealised form of democracy rather than the system in place at present. With the notable, and worrying, exception of fraud, the faults "discovered" in teledemocracy were present in some form or another before the advent of the new technology. If political scientists desire that political leaders are elected rather than appointed then they must tackle the issue of who is to be included in the democratic process and who should be excluded. Merely by joining a political party a new member has indicated an eagerness to become involved in politics. Teledemocracy allows for the convenient and practical participation of more people in the election process than was previously possible. Teledemocracy is inclusive. Democratically minded political scientists, rather than looking for ways to destroy teledemocracy, must look for ways to improve an electoral system that is in its infancy, but holds out much hope for a more democratic society.

Rapporteur: Colin Dodds

**Speech by Paul Murphy
Vice-President
Corporate Development
MT&T
(Maritime Telegraph & Telephone)**

In Paul Murphy's keynote address to the conference, he discussed MT&T's crucial role in facilitating interaction between communities, and the fundamental changes in business development, economic development, and personal development, all due to advances in telecommunications. The result is a major change in the way we share information and opinions - "the way we talk, play, and do business." This results in a change in culture as people are able to see and access more things. Examples of these changes are telemedicine and governmental kiosks for tourist and employment information.

MT&T has built and continues to build its services based on customer wants and needs. Because these are continually changing, MT&T constantly refines and expands its technology. Teledemocracy is made possible by this technology. The Nova Scotia Liberal leadership election was the first time teledemocracy was used by MT&T. MT&T had to refine its technology when there was a problem with the first televote by solving the problems and developing a far superior and more secure system than the first one. So today there is a viable televoting system in place.

After the second use of the televoting system, Blake and Carty conducted studies which confirmed the technical success of the televoting system. They compared the system to those of paper ballot and convention. They found that sixty-four percent of the people polled ranked televoting preferable to both these other systems, because it was cost effective for the voter and was more secure.

One of the most important aspects of televoting over either of the other two processes was that although the three methods do not differ in terms of eligibility for participation, televoting gives every member the ability to vote. The study also found that televoting minimized physical obstacles that possibly prevent members from voting in paper ballot and convention systems. This is especially beneficial for disabled and elderly people as well as people who live in remote areas.

Telecommunications is customer centered, as it overcomes barriers of time and geography as well as social and cultural barriers. Telecommunications also has a role to play in economic development and MT&T provides a chance for Nova Scotia to be known as a knowledge economy, in the academic and technological fields. MT&T has also become involved with local business communities and business across the country. Telecommunications can improve the quality of life of Nova Scotians which has already begun through teledemocracy. Teledemocracy is a prime example of how technology has changed interaction among people, communities, and countries.

Rapporteur: Krista Murray

Workshop no. 1

The workshop discussion commenced with a cursory examination of the connotations surrounding the contemporary definition of direct democracy. The identification of what constitutes direct democracy is central to understanding whether such a construct should be aggressively pursued, and, if so, to what extent. Traditional notions of direct democracy embody a Periclean or New England town meeting character, where the citizenry is intimately involved in the act of policy-making. This classical conception equates the public's full-time involvement in a socio-economically homogeneous community, with a consensus regarding the role of the state. The panelists do not advocate this traditional form of direct democracy, however, they do support a direct democracy that fosters either a constrained form of representative or a plebiscitary government. Direct democracy seeks to attack the existing decision-making apparatus, and, therefore, bring legitimacy to the actions of government.

One participant argued that perhaps the definition of direct democracy should be further limited to cater exclusively to the political devices of recall and referenda. The participants used referendums to indicate some of the problems associated with direct democracy, namely what majority is needed to establish a mandate to settle various issues, from the trivial to the most fundamental. The answer to that question rests upon one's perception of what is being represented, geography or people. If "people" is deemed the answer, then why, for example, would women of a certain age group not comprise one kind of majority and males of a certain profession form another? The conventional argument for the endurance of constituency boundaries was that within these political confines existed relative uniformity, which, within modern society, plays a rather minor role. One participant argued that because of numerous and complex problems involved in alternative group constituencies, the geographic constituency will remain the system of choice well into the future.

Constituency boundaries speak to the more fundamental issue of the ability of direct democracy to decimate representative government. While the panel voiced little concern that direct democracy would destroy the integrity of representative government, there was concern that Cabinet or responsible government would not fair as well, for how is government to be held accountable when decisions are being derived by way of the public?

Accountability is exceedingly difficult to obtain in our present system, and would venture into the realm of impossibility in a system driven by referendum or initiative. One of the long standing attractions of referendums is the ability to evade accountability, particularly when dealing with a politically charged issue that, for whatever reason, cannot be allotted a royal commission.

Within a constitutional context, the presence of initiative and referenda would invigorate the conventional forum for constitutional change but severely hamper any possibility of obtaining formal constitutional change, as demonstrated by the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords. Referendums, within the confines of a constituency, would take on an entirely different character from referendums of provincial or national propositions. It was suggested, therefore, that a referendum, which is a device that is designed to further open the democratic process, may, in some cases, ultimately prove to be one of the most conservative measures in generations.

Many advocates of direct democracy cite modern technology as an avenue that holds the greatest potential for the realization of a legislative process that hinges upon the direct and intimate involvement of the populace. The technology that is presently offering the best means of attaining some form of electronic democracy is a communication system that is in most Canadian households: the telephone. While the telephone has made its way into such political forums as leadership conventions and provincial elections, its application within the political realm has proven to be less than stellar. Its mediocre success within the genre of politics stems, in large measure, from technological limitations in terms of the network capabilities of telephone systems.

Existing telecommunication networks are presently unable to withstand excessive use within the constrained time frame demanded by a national election. It was suggested that a resolution to that problem rests in the relaxation of legislation that restricts the time interval in which votes can be cast. This broadening of voter legislation, which has been occurring across the country, is an imperative prerequisite if any form of extensive teledemocracy is to materialize. However, teledemocracy should not be viewed solely in terms of televoting, other contemporary technological developments are also evincing potential for political purposes, particularly the internet.

While aware of problems presently hindering computer technology from making inroads into the political process (i.e., cost and accessibility), one participant envisions the internet as representing the future of teledemocracy. The internet, in comparison to the telephone, offers the potential for a more flexible electronic system for the political process. Its agility is the result of its ability to provide the citizenry with electronic vocal cords that go beyond mere "yes" or "no" answers often required in televoting due to the limited number of characters on the keypad.

Another issue examined within the workshop addressed the extent to which teledemocracy should be utilized and within what political orbits its presence is advantageous and desirable. Elections officers in the Northwest Territories have indicated interest in televoting for the purpose of elections. The applications of televoting offer particular financial and technological advantages for the Territories and its small population. The geographic dispersion of its populace makes excursions to the polls a costly and difficult endeavor.

On the other hand, concern was raised regarding the corrosive aspect of technology and the development of a society of "computer nerds", who detach themselves from the deliberate facet of politics. In some political situations, like leadership conventions, interaction is imperative for consensus building and the formation of alliances which lie at the heart of the leadership selection process. The infiltration of technology into this process begs the question of how a person voting electronically is to participate in that interactive environment. The problems of teledemocracy in this political milieu, and its advantages for the electoral process in the Northwest Territories, illustrate that teledemocracy, and, more generally direct democracy, are neither good nor bad aspirations, but their applications may be appropriate and beneficial in some genres of politics and unsuitable in others.

Therefore, the utilization of teledemocracy should not necessarily be perceived as an all or nothing proposition in which only one avenue would be employed at various political events. One academic suggested using various avenues to cast ballots, whether it be voting at polling stations, mailing in ballots or televoting; the purpose, regardless of method, is public participation.

The rapidly changing dimensions of technology has prompted concern as to its implications on the survival of long-standing political institutions that date back to the 19th Century. While conscious that much change has occurred since the infancy of our political system, the panel conceded that much of our political structure has largely remained unaltered, or at least recognizable. It was suggested that perhaps the endurance of the parliamentary system is not, and should not be perceived as, the model political structure that should be protected from the ravages of time and changing social attitudes. It is the imperfections encapsulated within existing political structures that give salience to political alternatives like direct democracy.

According to one participant, the changes that have occurred cannot be readily attributed to the forces of technology, but are the result of powerful social institutions, such as the church and the entertainment media. It is the use of technology by social institutions that is inciting change, and not the technology itself. Therefore, it is business enterprise that comprises the core of technological change. There are few financial incentives to developing technology for use solely in the political process, this may account for the minimal success of technology within the political realm. However, the development of communication and information technology is being directed toward the business market where the dividends are substantially higher.

The Canadian political system has been undergoing a reevaluation of some of its most rudimentary political structures, such as the role of elected representatives and the resultant societal inequities that plague its legitimacy. It is direct democracy that seeks to address this political reality by advocating a political system that facilitates the active and intimate involvement of the public in the decision-making process. Supporters of direct democracy cite technology as offering the greatest potential for realizing that ultimate objective. However, teledemocracy provides no prescription for eliminating the political passivity so prevalent within society. The greatest obstacle for the success of direct democracy is not technological proficiency, but overcoming the public's lethargic attitude toward political participation.

Rapporteur: Mark MacKenzie

Workshop no. 2

The focus of the workshop was direct democracy and whether or not it is necessarily a good thing. Advantages and disadvantages of direct democracy, as well as discussion of referenda, public initiatives, and the affect of direct democracy on minorities were critical to the workshop.

A number of disadvantages to direct democracy were raised. The main disadvantage of direct democracy was that it is not solely based on one thing, instead it is a basket composed of recall, referenda, and public initiatives. All of these separate forms of direct democracy must be accompanied by different measures which would result in an extremely cumbersome process. Take the case of referenda. Some of the safeguards discussed just for referenda included:

1. Establishing a higher threshold. This would change in affect, the fifty percent plus one rule. This raised the question of whether or not existing rules could be changed if direct democracy was implemented on a large scale. The workshop did not address this issue past raising the question: Do different questions, issues need different percentages to be binding? The example given here was a Quebec referendum on sovereignty.
2. Establishing another referendum to be held X number of years after the first in order to reassess the situation. An example discussed here was New Zealand, where another referendum will be held ten years from the first to review MMP. It was felt that in general, Canada has been very vague and piecemeal in establishing safeguards on referendum, although the Meech Lake and Charlottetown processes have begun to set precedents.
3. Public education was another safeguard that was thought to be useful. Some participants felt that public education was important so that citizens would be able to understand the issues and hopefully become involved in debate and discussion which would increase the voter turnout. However, others were unsure whether or not the public wanted to be consulted on a regular basis.

This led discussion to the question of what types of issues were best suited to the use of direct democracy. It was the general consensus that referenda would be used in Canada for major issues such as constitutional reform and abortion; not on daily grass root issues. This in itself might result in higher voter turnout as was the case in the 1995 Quebec referendum on sovereignty.

Public initiatives, another form of direct democracy, were also examined. California was used as a case study where public initiatives are common. The problem found with public initiatives was that there is only a small percentage of the public which become involved in the issues. At present politicians will only choose issues that are popular to a large and influential group. They still have control of setting the agenda by choosing the issues important to them and that will ensure political success.

The key advantage to direct democracy was seen as the ability of direct democracy to influence politicians and have some control over agenda setting. Futhermore politicians are not held responsible for their actions between elections. With direct democracy, especially recall, the public is able to have a degree of control over the politicians. Participants then discussed this aspect of the Reform Party platform but came to the conclusion that recall has not been effective. This is because of the parliamentary nature of the Canadian government and also because of party discipline. Still, it was felt that recall was something worth examining.

Another issue raised was the effect direct democracy has on minorities. Some participants felt democracy is really about the minority not the majority, and direct democracy could be harmful to minority interests. This is because it is assumed that the majority would vote in their own interest, especially in hard economic times. As a result, minorities could be left out and pushed even further to the back. It was recognized, however, that our present system also does this. Another point arising from this discussion of minorities was the question of whether direct democracy and minorities would divide the country differently than our present system. Direct democracy would create cross-cutting cleavages which are seen to be better than the regional and language cleavages which occur under our present system.

Participants then looked at the technological aspect of direct democracy, in particular at teledemocracy and whether or not technology in its current state enriches democracy. A number of issues were discussed but a final conclusion was not reached. They looked at the size of the area, the cost

of such a system, how to monitor the system and keep it secure, and whether or not the system is value neutral. In the end it was predicted that teledemocracy would become more and more common as problems of cost, security and process were ironed out.

Rapporteur: Krista Murray

Workshop no. 3

When assessing the strengths and weaknesses of direct democracy, the members of the workshop stressed that direct democracy is much different now than it was throughout this century and, indeed, just a few short years ago.

In the past, recall legislation, accords, and referenda have been used to involve the public in politics, however, technology has added a new element to direct democracy. Namely, MT&T has used technology to enable the public to take part in politics through teledemocracy. Through this system citizens are able to register their preference for a particular person or issue over the phone. This system has a number of advantages: first, it enables MPs to know the will of their constituents at all times; second, when voting, citizens can be provided with more than just a yes or no option from which to choose, thus, enabling the public to register more precise preferences on each issue. These benefits will enable MPs to more effectively represent their constituents on all issues. The benefits of technology in politics, however, reach far beyond preference articulation. MPs now benefit from interactive e-mail systems which enable them to resolve constituent concerns before their constituents must vote. Thus, technology enables the citizens to vote both more concisely and also in a more informed manner.

After discussing some benefits of direct democracy, the members of the workshop addressed which types of issues should be handled through the House of Commons and which should go to a public vote. Because of the large number of housekeeping bills that go through the House of Commons, neither MPs nor their constituents would want all the bills to go to a public vote. One suggested approach was to let the public use petitions to select which issues would be voted upon. For example, if a certain percentage of the population signed a petition stating that a bill should go to a public vote, then it would be the duty of each MP to educate his or her constituents on the particular issue and then send it to a vote. It was agreed that allowing the public to choose each issue, would increase voter turnout and improve the legitimacy of the results. However, there were two complaints with this approach.

First, it was argued that the politicians would not support a system where the citizens have total political control on all issues. Instead, the constituents would only be given a voice on "no win" issues which the MPs wish to resolve without losing vast constituent support, such as, the issues resolved through direct democracy in British Columbia: the Gun bill, the Sexual Orientation bill, and the Young Offenders bill. These issues involved strong feelings among both advocates and opponents and were perfect issues to be handled through direct democracy enabling the MPs to avoid criticism by allowing them to claim they did what their constituents wanted. However, clear cut issues in which the majority would oppose changes supported by the party in power, would never go to a public vote. It was suggested that the Unemployment Insurance changes and Taxation changes never went to a public vote in B.C. for this reason. To counter this argument, advocates of direct democracy argued that these two examples were surrounded by particular circumstances that made direct democracy impossible: the tax changes were part of a larger budget that was too complex for the public to vote upon, and the Unemployment Insurance issue was not a major concern in B.C. because of the prosperous state of the economy. However, similar excuses could always be created, thus, partisan control would continue to exist on all significant political issues.

The second concern was that constituents, would not have the time to vote on each issue, instead, only the strong opposers and advocates would vote. It is possible, however, that the people would vote if they could choose the issues and if they perceived that they could have an impact on the outcome. Also, it was argued that if citizens were given political power those who had a genuine concern for the outcome would always vote.

When considering whether or not direct democracy is beneficial, the group also assessed the quality of the input that would be received from the citizens. Namely, we considered if the results obtained would be beneficial for society as a whole or would we simply be incorporating a politically fair means to obtain an end that was unbeneficial. One concern was that a multiple choice vote is not an effective method to achieve beneficial results. No matter how great the number of options offered, there still exists an element of decision making that cannot

be captured through serial choices. Also, debate which currently dominates our political system would be replaced by two opposing sides, with unequal budgets, presenting their own views to the public. In the end, the group willing to spend more would most often have a more convincing campaign.

The advocates of direct democracy, however, argued that direct democracy would increase the number of citizens involved in politics which would improve the quality of the results. They also felt that educating the public on the issues and then allowing them to vote was the most fair means, and therefore, justified the end. In addition, because citizens will look out for their own best interest, MPs who respond to the will of the citizens will always be representing the interest of the majority which is their job in a representative government. However, these points raised several valid arguments.

First, would direct democracy actually increase the number of citizens involved in politics? Results from British Columbia, where they only had a 5% participation in their direct democracy bills, suggest not. Further, would the MPs have time to educate their constituents on all issues? Certainly, the idea that education is better than legislation is valid, but is it realistic? Are citizens going to sacrifice the required time to become educated on the issues? We must also consider if it is the job of the MPs to always represent the interest of the majority or if it is their job to provide the greatest good for their constituency. These can be drastically different. If representing the majority is their goal, then direct democracy is perfect. However, in accomplishing this goal, there exists a strong risk that the interests of minority groups will be ignored.

For example, how large of an impact could natives have in teledemocracy when they represent only 5% of the population. The advocates argued, however, that it was not the minority groups that would lose their say, instead, it would be the interest groups and the often incompetent MPs who would have their voice subsumed by the other voting citizens. However, these two benefits would only occur if a large number of people voted, if these voters were not influenced by the interest groups' campaigns, and if the MPs viewed the citizens involvement and input as legitimate. This point

raised the final concern that the methods used to involve the citizens through direct democracy could alter its effectiveness. For example, one method commended by an advocate of direct democracy was using letters from enthusiasts as a measure of the public's opinion. Many people argued that this was ineffective and placed political power back in the hands of the interest groups, however, this and other methods were claimed to be an accurate indicator of the population's opinion within two percentage points 95% of the time.

In concluding this debate, many people agreed that the perceived effectiveness of direct democracy depends on who you talk to on each individual issue. In most cases, those people who are strong advocates for the process are those who gain and the opposers are those who lose. This point raised the argument that the direct democracy advocate from the Reform party, a regional third party never likely to make a majority government, supports direct democracy only in an effort to implement Reform party policies. That is, by taking power from the governing party and putting it in the hands of the people, the Reform party will have a greater chance of implementing its policies. The Reformer argued, however, that under direct democracy MPs would no longer be legislators who support or defeat bills based on party lines. Instead, they would be educators who inform the public and allow them to choose their own fate. This is a system not intended to benefit any party but solely devoted to increasing the citizen's role and influence in politics.

The next question addressed by the workshop was how extensively should direct democracy be used if the system was implemented. Obviously, the citizens should not be involved in every political issue. Instead, the frequency of citizen involvement should reflect how often people choose to be involved. Through using petitions to select the issues, people will understand their political power, thus, decreasing their political skepticism and increasing voter turnout. Although the number of issues sent to the public should be kept low in the interest of time, there could never be a predetermined limit. The degree of involvement would, therefore, be contingent on the public's desire for involvement and the issues at hand.

The final question addressed by the group was whether or not direct democracy would destroy representative government. The consensus was that our political system would be altered by the change to direct democracy, however, a representative government could still exist because it is compatible with direct democracy. The requirement for a representative government is that one person, the MP, is responsible to represent the will of his or her constituents. The only way this would be altered is that the MP would be able to represent their constituents more effectively because technology enables the MPs to know the exact will of the people. The only conflict that would arise in implementing direct democracy would be caused by those members of government who would be unwilling to sacrifice their political power.

Rapporteur: Shawn Riley

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