

## Tracking the BC Liberal Party's Internal Democratic Deficit

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Wednesday, November 10, 2010

<https://politicsrespun.org/2010/11/tracking-the-bc-liberal-partys-internal-democratic-deficit/>

It's astonishing what kind of democratic deficit exists within the BC Liberal party. Their constitution calls for a one-member-one-vote leadership election, but the party has far from a robust, geographically membership base on the ground. How will they ever decide how to pick a new leader?

Energy Minister Bill Bennett said the voting system must be changed so that the vote isn't entirely controlled by party members from the densely populated Lower Mainland.

...

Mr. Abbott, like Mr. Bennett, comes from a largely rural riding where the one-member, one-vote system would be a drawback.

via [Behind-the-scenes battle raging in Liberal Party - The Globe and Mail](#).

Sure, no one ever accused the BC Liberals of being overly populist. They are a corporate comprador party that happens to have human members. Candidates are parachuted into ridings and even "members" of the party are not eligible to actually vote for the leader without paying an additional fee that the party executive sets: two-tiered democracy! No surprise here.

The additional fee is offensive on principle, but in practice, it may end up being a fundraising vehicle or a manufactured barrier to participation. Imagine the provincial executive meeting this weekend sets a \$1,000 fee for transforming oneself from a "common" member to a "preferred" member capable of voting for a leader.

This government has always been a fan of market-based Darwinian inequality over universality, so it would be no surprise to see a significant barrier to participating in a vote for the leader.

The party is locked into a "one person, one vote" mechanism – now the party's constitutional lawyer is reviewing just how much flexibility can be wrung from that wording.

A core alternative is to allow delegated voting, so that each of the 85 ridings would be able to cast equal ballots.

What all this reflects is that the party does not care about, or is incapable of, expanding meaningful membership depth in all areas of the province. With a 4-year party membership costing only \$10, and with a preponderance of members in the lower mainland, perhaps the party should reap what it neglects: one-member-one-vote means those who bother to join get to vote, the rest of the province be damned.

If the party neglects most regions of the province, so be it.

But if the party wants to move to a delegated voting system, and its constitutional lawyer can tease that out of the constitution, then the party will essentially be admitting an error in not caring about developing a broad membership base around the province.

It sure looks bad for them either way.

What is certain is that the tone of political expectations is changing in the 21st century. Organizations with overt expressions that oppose rich, populist, inclusive democratic participation risk losing their significance. The declining voter turnout reflects that shift in expectations.

The rest of November is sure to be tumultuous for politics in BC. When the BC Liberal executive pins down some details of the leadership convention this weekend, contenders will react and jockey. When the BC NDP provincial council meets the following weekend in Victoria, the nature of their deliberations will be affected by what happens with the Liberal executive this weekend. Since the NDP provincial council is largely comprised of delegates from the 85 riding associations, there is a great opportunity for participatory democracy to occur.

Things are moving fast. Don't go more than a few days without keeping up.