

National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? He owes it to the public to have a say

Here's the thing.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau argues that our current first-past-the-post electoral system ? the one that has brought us stable government since 1967 ? is not representative of the public will.

As a result, he says, he's going to change it into something else, and he's going to use his parliamentary majority to make sure he gets his way.

And he's not going to allow the public to have a say in changing the very basis of our electoral system.

Instead, he's prepared to use his parliamentary majority ? garnered with just 40 per cent of the overall vote ? to ram through another system, one of several being proposed by the few people who have actually been lobbying for change.

Now wouldn't you think that if somebody really believes that the system which elected him wasn't really legitimate he would not take advantage of that system to impose a major change in how Canadians elect their representatives?

It is true, as Trudeau apologists point out, that he announced during the campaign that he intended to change the current system.

Therefore, the argument goes, he is simply fulfilling a campaign pledge and should be applauded, not criticized, for it.

But surely even the most die-hard Trudeauite knows what a specious argument that is. Electoral reform was hardly a major issue ? or even an issue at all ? during the campaign. It was one of at least 200 promises made by Trudeau and certainly not the reason he won ? that was because people were tired of Stephen Harper and wanted a change. Period. Full stop.

Ask yourself this. When was the last time you've been anywhere and heard people complaining about our current system? Is it really that pressing that Trudeau is determined to proceed without the courtesy ? not to mention the democratic action ? of asking the public if in fact they want the change and, if they do, which option among many they would chose?

Three provinces already asked the question to their constituents, and in all three the status quo was favoured. With that in mind, the least Trudeau can do is put it to the people for their considered opinion in a binding referendum.

It is true that the current system has some flaws ? the fact that Trudeau can hold a majority with just 40 per cent of the vote is the main criticism. But every system has flaws. Indeed, all the other systems involve some sort of post-election juggling by back-room boys, and almost inevitably result in perpetual minority governments and numerous small splinter parties being able to swing far more weight than the public ever meant them to have.

It would be one thing if the current system has delivered unworkable parliaments. But that hasn't been the case. It has, in fact, worked pretty darn well in reflecting the public mood.

As we've said, it was the anti-Harper mood that resulted in Trudeau's election, so can anybody really argue that he isn't the legitimate prime minister? Of course not.

As the old saw goes, if it ain't broke don't fix it.

And clearly it ain't broke.

But if Trudeau is determined to ?fix? it, he owes it to the public to ask them what they want. Anything less would be an abuse of his position.

