

COMMENT



Steaming through The Rock

A steam train travels through “The Rock” in Limehouse in 1891. The Grand Trunk Railway built the railway here in 1856, and a rock formation precipitated the need for a long cut to be blasted through Limehouse, hence the nickname. A train station once served the community during the height of its lime operations, but service ceased in 1931.

Text courtesy of Heritage Halton Hills/Photo courtesy of Esquesing Historical Society

From our readers



EARLY SPRING AHEAD?

Photographer Simone Garland is hoping for an early spring after spotting a robin in her Georgetown backyard on Jan. 20.

Have a photo you want to share? Email — with details — to cgamble@theifp.ca.

Canadians must get say on voting system changes

I would like to update you on an emerging issue that is sure to dominate headlines. The Liberals want to change our voting system, a system we have used for several hundred years since elected legislatures were established in Canada.

Currently, Canada has what is commonly called the “first-past-the-post” system. In this system, the country is divided into ridings, each with roughly the same population. In each riding, constituents vote for one of the candidates on the ballot. The candidate with the greatest number of votes becomes the riding’s MP. In a riding where there are three or more candidates, and where the votes are widely distributed, it is not unusual for a candidate to get elected with less than 50 per cent of the vote. This system is also referred to as a “single-member-district-plurality” system and the world’s two oldest democracies, the U.K. and U.S., also use this system.

As a result, in every general election since 1867 except two, the party that won a majority of seats did so with less than 50 per cent of the popular vote.

Some argue our voting system needs to be changed. Some have proposed alternatives, like proportional representation, mixed member systems, preferential ballots, etc. While there is not sufficient space here to explain the various systems, it is important to note two things. First, the Liberals have said that they would like to change our voting system and implement a preferential ballot. Second, it is clear that if the last election were determined on a preferential ballot, it would have dramatically

favoured the Liberal Party.

I believe that any change to our voting system must be first approved by Canadians in a referendum for two reasons.

The first is the principle involved. If a government is going to change the direct relationship between voters and the MPs they elect, they have to consult with those voters first. The Liberals were elected with less than 40 per cent of the

popular vote, giving them less than a majority mandate to put through this kind of quasi-constitutional change without a referendum. Furthermore, Canadians vote in general elections for a variety of reasons. It is safe to say that changing our voting system was not in the top two, or even three, reasons in the last election.



MICHAEL CHONG

The second reason is precedent, both domestic and international. Over the

last 10 years in Canada, three provincial governments have proposed changes to the voting system: British Columbia in 2005 and 2009, P.E.I. in 2005 and Ontario in 2007. In all three cases, these provincial governments understood that any change to the voting system had to be put to the people first. Outside of Canada, two Westminster democracies have proposed changes to the voting system. The U.K. and New Zealand both put the question to the people first in referenda that took place in 2011.

Regardless of what change the Liberal government proposes to our voting system, they must put it to the people first. I welcome your thoughts and views on this important issue.


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