

FOREWORD

WHY DO MOST CANADIANS feel irritation when they watch their Members of Parliament and Senators in action? Why do we feel futility when we vote? Why can't we take any satisfaction from a \$20-million royal commission on electoral reform or from this year's batch of vague promises of reform from stumping politicians? Why are they so incapable of leading us through the challenges of the 1990s to security and prosperity?

John Deverell and Greg Vezina in this book seek explanation by examining the underpinnings of our electoral democracy which, under their spotlight, turn out to be seriously defective. They argue that our democracy is a myth, a noble idea distorted by undemocratic rules for selecting Members of Parliament and forming governments. The result, they argue, is that we have no reliable method of getting the people we want to Parliament, little control over the formation of governments, and almost no idea what any party will do once it is in control.

In this political game a politician's first priority is getting elected, and his second priority is getting re-elected. This obsession distorts a politician's perspective and deflects him or her from concentrating on the task of providing good government. The constant campaigning and positioning for the next election makes our political parties reluctant to face the hard and sometimes unpopular choices needed to control government expenditure or reduce public bureaucracy.

In the last 40 years, as I built my auto parts company Magna International from a one-worker shop to an organization with 16,000 employees and \$3 billion plus in annual sales, I have often departed from the conventional wisdom and found ways to get things done quicker and better. It is apparent that our democracy would benefit from some serious reorganization. Somehow our

Parliament must begin to behave more as the management team of the country and less as the forum for ritualized partisan shenanigans.

For years I have believed and argued that the needed shift in parliamentary behavior can be brought about by creating a non-partisan elected group of representatives to replace the Senate. My proposal for a strengthened democracy calls for balancing the power of our political parties. We could do that by creating a group of elected representatives who aren't political and don't answer to parties. These new representatives would serve only one term, so their common priority would be smart government, not re-election.

If there were a hundred of these representatives (about the same number as we now have in the Senate), as a group they would hold a near-control position on parliamentary votes. Acting somewhat like a jury, they could subject proposed legislation to a test of whether it was a good move the country could afford, or simply a shrewd move the governing party wanted.

A paramount feature of my recommendation would be random selection by a computer of about 20 candidates from the combined voters lists of two or three existing federal ridings. Those chosen who wanted to serve would each prepare a short resume listing work and residence history and what he or she would do for Canada. Resumes would be sent to all voters, with voting probably coinciding with other federal elections. Other campaigning by candidates or parties would be discouraged, although the media could be expected to develop information on candidates' backgrounds. The candidate winning the most votes would become the new representative for the combined ridings.

Deverell and Vezina make a strong case, however, that our methods for electing the House of Commons should not be left as they are. They suggest that political parties be represented in Parliament in direct proportion to their popular vote as is done in Germany and a number of other European countries, a change that would end Canada's tradition of single-party majority governments based on minority voter support. They also propose that Parliament share its power with the electorate by allowing citizens to

FOREWORD

challenge or initiate laws by petition and adopt or reject them by direct vote.

It is quite likely, as the book argues, that proportional representation voting will make party representation in Parliament less volatile from one election to another, and that greater continuity in Parliament will foster the serious long-term policy thinking the country needs from its elected leaders. But perhaps the most interesting feature of this book is that the authors do not limit themselves to putting forward a plausible theory of reform. They describe exactly how reform can be brought about if a significant number of Canadians decide they really want to see it happen.

As one of the many who are impatient with the excessively partisan focus of Canadian politics as now practised I welcome the controversy this work will stimulate. Deverell and Vezina deserve our gratitude for putting the debate about how to fix Ottawa and return democracy and prosperity to our future onto a different and more useful plane.

Frank Stronach
Markham, Ont.
August 1993