

Unifor Membership Consultations on Electoral Reform

In 2016, Unifor consulted its members on Electoral Reform in the following five ways:

1. Our elected National Executive Board (NEB) discussed and debated the merits of First Past the Post (FPTP) and Proportional Representation (PR) voting systems multiple times, and in March 2016 adopted a position in favour of PR, with three principles (outlined below). It was also decided to send a resolution with a recommendation for a “Reformed electoral process with a Proportional Representation system” to our National Convention in Ottawa in August 2016, and to join our allies at the Every Voter Counts Alliance (www.everyvotercounts.ca).
2. At the August 2016 National Convention, a resolution was debated and unanimously adopted on convention floor.

Resolution : unifor.org/en/take-action/campaigns/electoral-reform?v=updates

Our three principles for electoral reform, supporting PR where:

- every vote counts
 - the system is proportional
 - we continue to have local representation
3. Materials, a webpage and eBlasts were developed to educate our members on our position and encouraging them to act by contacting their elected MPs and participating in the government’s consultation process online via its online survey, Twitter or email (unifor.org/electoralreform).
 4. We mobilized and supported our members so they could actively participate in the Special Parliamentary Committee’s cross country tour, to reflect the voices of our local communities.
 5. We organized four consecutive weeks of Member Consultations at the Unifor Family Education Centre in Port Elgin, Ontario. More than 400 Unifor members participated in a series of structured roundtable discussions based on dialogue questions drawn from the Government of Canada publication: “***Your Guide to Hosting a Successful Dialogue on Canadian Electoral Reform.***”

Report from Port Elgin Electoral Reform Consultations

Methodology:

Four weekly consultation sessions (community townhall style) were held from September 14 to October 12, 2016. Each session was 90 minutes and involved a broad cross section of Unifor members from across Canada, including an equal number of men and women representing a wide spectrum of employment sectors, regions, and ages. Participants were asked to discuss the questions below in a small group format with responses documented by a scribe. Responses from each session were aggregated and have been analyzed to determine the range of responses.

A selection of themes was informed by key principles identified in the discussion guide and focused on exploring views on the following main topics (approx. 30-minute presentation before the discussions):

- Canada's current federal electoral system, including perceptions of the effectiveness and legitimacy of our current system and how the effectiveness and legitimacy could be strengthened through a reformed system that more accurately reflects the democratic will of voters.
- Degree of electoral engagement and democratic participation under the current electoral system and how engagement and participation could be encouraged and increased under a reformed electoral system.

Questions selected from the guide to explore participant perceptions drew some interesting responses:

1. *Do you and/or the people you know usually vote in elections? Why or why not?*

Why

- to have a say and voice in the House of Commons
- hope for a better living
- feeling of "responsibility"
- right to vote
- because family votes (and, because family votes a certain way)
- want to set the "right example" for children

Why Not

- a lot of people feeling like their vote doesn't matter or count (especially from our young workers consultation tables)
- "disenfranchised" (more than half)

- promises not kept
- feeling unrepresented
- FPTP does not reflect people we voted for
- lack of diversity
- working too many jobs to make time to get educated and vote
- knowledge and understanding of our political system (feeling like they don't know enough)
- access to voting, remote locations, food-banks and places frequented by target community
- feeling disillusioned
- don't see themselves or people who look like them reflected back
- that politicians are personally motivated and benefit only themselves
- language barriers

Do you feel the House of Commons represents Canadians effectively?

- no

Are there certain groups that you feel are excluded from the current electoral system?

- Indigenous people
- working class people
- people of colour
- immigrants
- young people
- homeless people
- women
- people living with a disability
- seniors and folks in assistive care/nursing homes

| It was clear from our consultation that once our members understood the options for reform they easily chose it over our current system.

Unifor is Canada's largest union in the private sector, representing more than 310,000 members across Canada, in every sector of the economy, including health care, auto, rail, media, telecommunications, energy, mining, forestry, pulp and paper, dairy, manufacturing, transportation and more. The union was formed Labour Day weekend 2013 when the Canadian Auto Workers and the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers union merged.