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Lessons from a pro on how to work the system

Pardon me while I gag.

It was announced from Ottawa two weeks ago that our new Minister of Democratic Renewal will spend \$1 million crossing the country to find out why fewer Canadians--especially young people--are voting in national elections.

Why is there such growing apathy, disengagement and even cynicism about politics? She's determined to find out.

The minister is Belinda Stronach, who was elected a year ago as a Conservative MP by the voters of New Market-Aurora. She is now a Liberal, because on May 17 the Liberals bribed her with a cabinet position to cross the floor, to save them from having to call an election.

That was during the nine-day period in May when Canada actually had an illegal government, one which refused to either face the House of Commons or go to the people.

Instead, it pretended the rules didn't exist, and made Belinda Stronach an offer she couldn't refuse.

That got them (eventually) up to a tie in the House, the Liberal Speaker could then cast the deciding vote, and the government could still pretend it is legitimate.

A bit like when your kid makes a bad move in checkers and says after the fact, "Wait, my hand was still on it!"

Now Belinda's job is to get young people more enthused about democracy--partly, she says, by teaching them "how the system works."

Who knows better than she does how to work the system?

When she comes to explain democracy to Albertans, maybe she can bring rookie Liberal Senator Grant Mitchell along to explain why he's in the Senate, and Bert Brown isn't.

Bert got 312,000 votes to represent Albertans in Ottawa. Mitchell got one--from Paul Martin.

You have to hand it to the Liberals, they may be utterly cynical, but they do have a sense of humor.

The Liberals have made it plain they think Parliament and democracy are a waste of time. Referendums are evil "majoritarianism." The Charter is good because it puts social control in the hands of the judges chosen by the Prime Minister.

That's the Canadian system. It's like the one-party "democracy" of the old Soviet Union, or the notoriously corrupt Institutional Revolutionary Party which ran Mexico for 70 straight years.

The Liberals like the *idea* of democracy, just like they approve of the *idea* of a federal system. The idea makes them feel good, but only if they get to control it.

What they don't like is the reality. Real democracy is hard, messy and unpredictable. Real federalism

requires genuine tolerance of regional differences.

Liberals hate both. They have pretty much destroyed the authority of Parliament, and they're forever subverting the constitution to impose "national standards" in social jurisdictions that are none of their business.

If the national government wants democracy, it must allow democracy.

The means of doing so were spelled out by the Reform Party two decades ago, and haven't changed.

Give Canadians a real Senate to protect their provincial rights. Give them the right of referendum over national social policy such as same-sex marriage. And legislate a ban on governments spending money outside their areas of constitutional jurisdiction.

With these three measures in place, Canada could function as a true federal democracy. Without them it's just a big ghetto run by treacherous power-grubbers like Belinda Stronach.

- Link Byfield

Link Byfield is chairman of the Edmonton-based Citizens Centre for Freedom and Democracy, and an Alberta senator-elect.

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