

# REGIONAL NEWS

## Direct democracy, kitchen-table style

By Terry Moran

*Regional News Reporter*

Having established a snappy acronym, FAIR — For Action in Referenda — is about to start its campaign to restructure government at the top: by petitioning the United Nations to enforce recall and referenda (R&R) rights that four out of five British Columbians voted for in 1991.

Grassroots political movements — all dedicated to shaking up the status quo — have been sprouting up around kitchen tables everywhere.

There are now at least 11 such groups in B.C., with Coalition Unaccepting of Rash Bureaucracy (CURB), headed by Walter Flux of Castlegar, and Revolt Against Government Excess (RAGE), with Merv Cody in Salmon Arm, also reaching for acronyms.

Of the five founding members of FAIR, Ian Woods, real estate agent '915' is the executive director (and acronymist). But, clearly, Lorenzo Bouchard is the promulgating force behind FAIR.

Bouchard, a taxi driver, relentlessly circled the B.C. legislature during the Spring '93 session with a placard denouncing the government's stall on R&R legislation and made several presentations to the legislative committee struck on the issue. His wife, provincial government employee Christine Monford, bank receptionist Lee Glover and systems consultant Joel Harvey round out the group.

"We're hoping to get 100,000 signatures for the U.N. petition," Woods says. U.N. Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali already knows of this denial of democratic rights occurring in B.C., he says.

Bouchard wrote Boutros-Ghali on April 28, and while he hasn't yet heard back from him, "the attitude of the government members changed dramatically after I took that tack," Bouchard says.

Bouchard feels — and Okanagan West (Cliff Serwa — Social Credit) West Vancouver-Garibaldi (David Mitchell —

Independent) MLAs from the all-party legislative committee agree — that he helped put R&R on the order paper this spring.

FAIR, less than a month old, hadn't heard of any of the other groups and Woods is excited about the "spontaneous combustion for direct democracy that's taking place in B.C."

While FAIR has a more clearly defined political agenda than most of the other groups (mainly spawned by the Canadian Taxpayers' Federation), its founding members don't mind appearing under the taxpayer revolt rubric; and they vote Reform, which campaigned for direct democracy and solicited the irate taxpayer vote with great success in Western Canada in the October federal election.

FAIR's members reject the notion that direct democracy will lead to a tyranny of the majority. They feel a system of safeguards would have to be in place and,

besides, as Bouchard says: "the current system is a tyranny of the elite."

In their view, direct democracy would be a truer reflection of the underlying values and character of the people. Switzerland is their paradigm for where direct democracy is currently in practice.

The legislative committee produced a report that ensures nothing short of child molestation would result in a MLA being recalled, according to FAIR and, once again, both Serwa and Mitchell agree.

Both MLAs describe the legislative committee as "a charade." Serwa says had they been willing to play along they could have whistle-stopped the province on \$100 per diems — while the Legislature was in session — with the other members.

Mitchell says direct democracy will be "the issue of 1994."

## In search of super democracy

The first question economist Diane Francis fielded Friday at the Newcombe Auditorium was from Ian Woods of FAIR (For Action in Referenda), which is spearheading the direct democracy movement in Victoria.

Predictably, Francis was four-square behind the idea that people should be constantly engaged in the democratic process "and not just once every four years." Woods's question prompted her to aver that she voted Reform on October 25, bringing whoops of delight from

the audience.

FAIR, particularly systems consultant and founding member Joel Harvey, is interested in taking things one step further: super democracy (computerized referenda both on-line and ongoing). The Reform Party wants politicians on a much shorter leash, super democracy could do away with politicians altogether.

"While it may sound a little futuristic, the technology is in place right now with Internet, Harvey says. U.S. President Bill Clinton's

State of the Union address confirmed the importance of Internet "the information super highway," or Freenet in Victoria, by indicating that he wants universal access to the on-line computer network for "every American student."

Harvey says: "We'd like to see computer communications reach the point where you could personally decide — dollar for dollar — where your taxes are going."

Lee Glover, another of FAIR's founding five members, says she sees the electronic voting and other input as a way to broaden "participation on debates on issues, and we'll be well served by that."

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Just a note to thank reporter Terry Moran for a nice job on The Fair Foundation story that appeared Feb. 2. Just a note though, there were two minor inaccuracies. We didn't state that we were trying to get 100,000 signatures for the UN Petition. We said we would try and get 100,000 signatures if the NDP government doesn't create any recall and initiative referendum legislation by July 15, 1994. We are a non-partisan group and none of us stated how we voted in the last election, federally or provincially. One director voted for "Referendum Rights" thereby spoiling the ballot.

Ian Woods, Director  
The Fair Foundation