



Briefs & Updates

States win a delay on a rule change by U.S. federal environment agency

A U.S. federal appeals court has temporarily barred a proposed new Environmental Protection Agency rule that would have allowed power plants to make repairs and additions without obeying Clean Air Act regulations (See *Federations*, Vol. 3 No. 4, Nov. 2003, "USA: States sue the federal environment agency"). The new rule, a part of the agency's program called the New Source Review, would have exempted any repairs or additions that did not cost more than 20 per cent of the replacement value of the "process unit". In its December 24, 2003 ruling, a panel of three judges issued a stay against part of the new regulation to prevent it from taking effect immediately. In a partial victory for industry, the court reiterated its earlier denial of stay on another section of the program to allow similar exemptions for other industrial plants such as pulp and paper mills, letting that part of the plan go forward.

Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee's party wins three state elections

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's party won three of five state elections held in November 2003. The Bharatiya Janata Party or BJP won the state elections in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan with the campaign slogan "Bijli, Sadak, Pani" (electricity, roads, water). In the state of Mizoram, a local party, the Mizo National Front, ousted a Congress government. Only in the National Capital Territory of Delhi did the Congress Party capture control of the state assembly from the BJP.

Lula shuffles cabinet in Brazil

President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva brought a key centre party, the Brazilian Democratic Party, into his cabinet in January. The centre-left Democratic Party has 77 members in the 513-seat lower house of Congress and has a majority in the Senate. Lula also shuffled his cabinet, creating two new ministerial posts and moving one-third of the existing cabinet ministers.

Canadian provinces move towards proportional representation

In the province of Prince Edward Island, electoral reform commissioner Norman Carruthers recommended in December that the province adopt a mixed member proportional (MMP) voting system similar to that used in New Zealand, with 21 of the 31 seats as single-member constituencies and 10 seats allocated according to party lists. In British Columbia, the BC Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform met twice in January, beginning a 12-month process which will end with a recommendation on a voting system for that province to go to a public referendum in 2005. In Ontario, Matthew Mendelsohn became that province's first Deputy Minister for Democratic Renewal on January 19. Mendelsohn, a political science professor at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, wrote an article in July 2003 calling for use of a citizens' forum and referendum process to institute a new voting system for Canada.

Swiss elections change "magic formula" for government

When the right-wing Swiss Peoples' Party gained 11 seats last fall in the 200-seat lower house of the Swiss parliament, it meant an end to a 43-year-old method of building Swiss coalition governments. The so-called "magic formula" for coalitions was changed to give the Swiss People's Party two seats – a gain of one – in the cabinet that includes the Social Democratic Party, the Christian Democratic Party, the Radical Democratic Party and the Swiss People's Party.

Commission to recommend changes to German federal system

By December 2004, the 32-member Commission of the Bundestag and the Bundesrat on the Modernization of the Federal System will present its final report and recommendations. The commission, composed of equal members of both houses of the German parliament, was set up by the German government in October 2003 and began meeting in November. The commission was asked in particular to examine the division of powers between the federal government and the *Länder*, the role of the *Länder* in the approval of federal legislation and the financial relationships between the *Länder* and the federal government. The conflict between the federal government and the *Länder* came to a head in the summer of 2002, when federal immigration legislation passed by one vote in the Bundestag in a controversial voting process that opposition politicians claimed was not legal. (6)

E R R A T A

Canada's Council of the Federation includes all provinces and territories

An item in the "Briefs and Updates" section of *Federations*, Vol. 3, No. 4, erroneously stated that the new Council of the Federation did not include two Canadian provinces. All 10 provinces and all 3 territories are members of the Council of the Federation, which had its first meeting in British Columbia in late February.

Gordon DiGiacomo

In *Federations*, Vol. 3 No. 4, we omitted the biography of the author of the Viewpoint article, "Who should train the Canadian labour force?" on page 9. The author, Gordon DiGiacomo, is a consultant in human resources management and labour relations in Ottawa, Ontario.

Foreigners' right to vote in Swiss cantons

Victor Giordano, a journalist in Porrentruy, Switzerland, wrote to us to suggest that the article "Swiss cantons give foreigners the right to vote" in *Federations*, Vol. 3 No. 4, should have included the following: "Foreigners must be resident for 10 years in the canton of Jura before they get the right to vote. Two years ago, the citizens of Jura refused a proposal to modify that requirement."