

PEOPLE'S ECHO

A 'Miners & Martyrs' special edition, produced in association with **In Proportion**, the **Get PR Done!** blog 



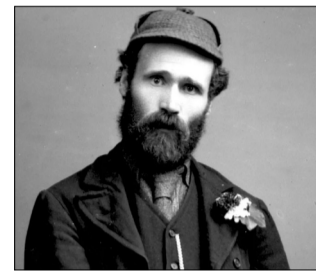
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WHY WE NEED PR

Ten reasons to support urgent electoral reform

LET'S be up front from the start. Here is what winning proportional representation (PR) voting will NOT do: it will not create a political "love in". It will not be a cure all. Our politics are too broken for that to happen.

But if PR will NOT be a silver bullet -- as Labour MP Clive Lewis regularly reminds us -- it will be a whole lot better than our First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) voting system. FPTP is a relic of the 1800s; it was created when women could not vote and the Labour Party did not even exist.

So why do we need PR?

1) One reason should suffice. PR is so much fairer than FPTP. Seats won in Parliament will match votes cast in an election. They definitely do NOT now. In 2019, the Tories got 43% of the overall vote and yet gained a 'landslide' majority of 80 seats.

Even more egregiously, Tony Blair and Labour were returned to power with a majority of 66 seats in 2005 after the highly unpopular invasion of Iraq. Labour's overall vote was 35%. They won power with just over a third of the votes cast.

Look at the 2019 results in the table below to see the difference between FPTP and PR.

System	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Brexit	SNP	Other	Total
FPTP	365	202	11	1	0	48	23	650
PR	284	208	75	18	13	25	27	650

Not convinced? Here are eight other reasons:

2) Elections are held so that the public can express their opinion. It follows that each vote must be given equal weight. Under FPTP, millions of votes are wasted and have no influence on the composition of the Westminster parliament.

3) PR means political parties will have to work together and be prepared to compromise, that is, behave like adults. That's good news for anyone who thinks the staged and nasty 'cat fights' every week at Prime Minister's Questions are an embarrassment.

4) The scourge of tactical voting will go the way of the dodo. Finally, millions of us could vote for the candidate WE REALLY WANTED and not for the candidate whom we thought (often wrongly) was best placed to stop the candidate WE MOST DISAGREED WITH.

5) The large number of so-called "safe seats" will dramatically decrease. Under PR, few people will ever say -- as many do now -- "I live in a safe seat; my vote has never made a difference".

A staggering total of 192 seats in the House of Commons have not switched parties since the end of World War Two. Who can justify that?

6) FPTP creates an electoral duopoly. In the United States, they have the Democrats and Republicans. Here we have the Tories and Labour. Voters to the left (or right) of the 'big two' have no meaningful alternative as a political home. As a result, the 'big two' often become puffed-up citadels of swaggering self-importance and cauldrons of dissent. Both are protected by the wacky maths of FPTP.

7) The legislatures in Scotland and Wales are elected by one form of PR. In the 2021 elections to Holyrood, for example, the Greens got 8.1% of the regional vote. That means they got eight seats in a 129-member chamber. Why not this kind of impartiality at Westminster?

8) Within Labour, an overwhelming percentage of its members want PR in their party's manifesto. Three of the major Labour-affiliated unions -- Unite, Unison and USDAW -- take the same view.

Given this level of support, how can Keir Starmer and a coterie within the Parliamentary Labour Party say that PR is "not a priority"?

9) Millions of people want action on issues such as climate change and the punishing cost of living crisis.

Of course, undemocratic FPTP is not the whole reason why progress here is so pitiful. But without doubt it is a MAJOR

Britain's voting system has barely changed since 1884

What sort of politician thinks it's fit for the 21st century? GET PR DONE!

contributing reason.

We are sure you can add a 10th reason... FPTP could also stand for 'First-Preserve-Tory-Party'. Who wants it

anymore?

It is time, past time, to GET PR DONE!

We will only get PR by campaigning for PR

ON 25 May the GET PR DONE! steering group issued a statement on the aims and objectives of our group. Here is a slightly revised version of that statement:

One aim / many tactics

GET PR DONE! is a single-issue cross party/no party campaigning group of volunteers set up in January 2020. We aim to do what it says on the tin. And do it with passion. We are beholden to no one and no party. We are the servants of just one group: UK voters. And we especially cherish one interest: the wider public interest in fair elections (which is very different from the partisan interest.)

Yes, it is highly unlikely that we will get PR before the next election. But support for PR is growing rapidly. The majority of voters now support it, and we remain optimistic that we can help, with others, to bring in PR during the first term of a new government.

Hallelujah! PR can't come too soon.

So what can be the contribution/tactics of GPRD! as we try to get us to this "promised land"?

Many tactics

Here is what we are doing now ... and we want to "up the pace":

1) Keep building a pro-PR presence in social media. We operate two Twitter accounts (totalling +20,000 followers), regularly post in +50 Facebook groups, we have a YouTube channel and a website. Google them or see the bottom of page 3 of this newspaper for links.

We produce a regular stream of tweets, memes, videos, shorter and longer commentaries, and we seek to have our lively Facebook group be the "go to" location for news, views and debates on PR. Join us.

2) We try to intervene, to the very best of our ability and with limited financial resources, in wider "on the ground"

struggles and to link these struggles with the campaign for PR.

We've done it in the Fair Pay/Fair Votes campaign. Over the summer of 2023 we will be campaigning at a number of large events. **MORE VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED.** (Write us on the email address below).

3) We will ONLY win PR by campaigning for it. Hence our work, for example, on "Councils for PR" (Google it as well) which we set up in May 2022 with Make Votes Matter. More than 25 local councils have voted in favour of PR for Westminster elections.

4) We need to win the battle of ideas and show the wider relevance of PR. Simple slogans aren't enough. We need well-written blogs; we've done 23 blogs in just over 26 months.

Upcoming blogs: PR, referenda and citizen assemblies (now out - see page 5), recalling the 2005 general election (aka

"the worst election ever"), FPTP/PR and young people, and why PR can be a popular vote winner (and is not just for geeks).

6) We actively work with other pro-PR groups. But we can do better. The movement/PR as an end are everything; individual groups are nothing.

A strong pro-PR movement will ensure PR works for voters and does not become the political plaything of parties or MPs. PR is something WE need to win. After all, elections are supposed to be for US.

7) We think it is important to learn from other countries and their own campaigns for PR. In the past two years, we've hosted webinar guests from New Zealand (twice), from Canada (twice) and Finland.

8) We need to strengthen our organisational basis and improve our financial resources (Please donate here:

<https://getprdone.org.uk/donate/>). Committed people working in co-ordination are our most important resource.

So: STEP UP and HELP US GET PR DONE!

Do it for yourself and for all our children.

Contact: getprdone@gmail.com

DID YOU KNOW?

■ In the 2019 election, more than 70% of votes were 'wasted', either because they were cast for someone who didn't win, or because they were votes for a winning candidate over and above the number required to win

Get PR Done! is a cross party/no party campaigning group working to bring in a proportional representation voting system in the UK

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Nearly iron FPTP laws bolster grip of 'big two'



By ALAN STORY

@GetPRDone

WHEN someone uses the phrase "that's all down to an iron law of history", I tend to get a bit twitchy.

It sounds like the person is saying that history is all pre-ordained, that people can't change things, that people and their actions are all rather irrelevant. The "system" alone determines whether things should happen or not happen.

Take our voting system, commonly called first-past-the-post (FPTP). Why is it that, since 1922, only two parties have ever won elections in the UK? Ditto for the United States... and has been so there since 1848. And similarly for Canada which is a third country still using the archaic FPTP voting system created long ago in aristocratic Britain and exported across the empire.

Couldn't it have been different? (Not sure how it happened, but FPTP also ended up in Belarus, the only other country in Europe still using it.) And why is it that every attempt by any party other than the big two in these three countries has never even come second, let alone win, in the past century. Was it pre-ordained?

USA: a classic two party country
Look at the USA, perhaps the classic two-party country. Third parties do very

poorly there. The last serious third party presidential challenge was Ross Perot in 1992. Perot did rather well at the polls. He came out of nowhere and got an amazing 18.9% of the total presidential vote as an independent. And how many all-important Electoral College votes (out of 538) and states (out of 50) did Perot win? Zero. That's FPTP in spades.

In the UK, the last serious challenge to the two-party duopoly came in the 1983 general election. Labour finished second to Thatcher, got 27.6% of the total vote and 209 seats. The Alliance (Liberals and Social Democrats) were just behind at 25.4%, but very far behind in seats with a mere 23. (There were 'good election years' for the LibDems in 2005 and 2010, but never even got close to the second-place party in terms of seats.)

As for Canada, trust me: only very occasionally has any party seriously challenged the electoral chokehold of that country's big two. So why does one of the big two always win in all three countries? Is it because they are just better and smarter parties? Or because they have policies most people endorse? Or is it just a coincidence?

Creating two-party privilege
It's for none of these reasons, explained French political scientist Maurice Duverger in papers he wrote during the

1950s and 1960s.

After detailed study of voting patterns across the world, Duverger concluded that: "[T]he surest way to produce a two party system was to create a FPTP/ winner takes all voting system based on single member constituencies or districts. This two party privilege arises from the very structure of this particular electoral system itself. The result is indeed all but pre-ordained."

Winners in elections are not decided primarily by what voters want, but by whichever of two parties wins the most seats — and ONLY two parties ever have a chance to win.

And the so-called "winner" can win with only 35% of the overall vote, as we learned in 2005 after Tony Blair won a huge majority in parliament with that total. In 1951, we even had a so-called "wrong winner" election. Labour got the most votes; the Tories got the most seats. It could happen again.

By comparison, Duverger also found that jurisdictions using proportional representation (PR) had governments that far more closely reflected the democratic wishes of their voters; they were not based on the downright crooked maths of FPTP.

Indeed, PR creates more parties that reflect the views of actual voters and does not try to fit voters into party strait-

jackets. Just the reverse.

Not an absolute iron law...but almost
Duverger's findings are today called "Duverger's Law." They are not an absolute "iron law" of electoral results... but they nearly are. FPTP voting = two party rule.

Yes, there are some exceptions. A regional/ national party like SNP can potentially do well under FPTP at Westminster. A few FPTP-based countries sometimes escape the two party domination. But they are rare.

Here's how the causal relationship works: voters come to appreciate, election after election, that there is very little point to vote for parties other than the big two.

The "little guys" seldom seem to get anywhere. And even if the "little guys" might get increased votes over time, they seldom get increased seats. Let's say the Green Party vote increased five-fold in the next general election compared to 2019. That would put the Green total at about four million votes. Yet that is about what UKIP got in 2015...and won only one MP in Parliament.

Demoralised millions will ask: "what is the point of voting Green?" And decide: "better to vote for one of the big two parties that I dislike least under FPTP".

The negative consequences of FPTP are deserving of a blog by themselves.

A short list:

- 1) We have minority rule (as we have today in the UK);
- 2) Where you live often determines the worth or power of your vote;
- 3) Millions Are forced to vote tactically for the party they least dislike; see above;
- 4) Voters to the left (or right) of the big two have no meaningful alternatives as a political home;
- 5) The big two become cauldrons of dissent especially when out of power; look at Labour today. Tory swords are also unsheathed as I write.

6) The big two often become puffed up citadels of swaggering self-importance and protected by FPTP maths;

7) Voter turnout tends to be lower.

So the questions this blog poses are: Why is the British Labour Party the only democratic socialist party in the so-called "developed world" whose leadership supports FPTP voting system? What is either democratic or socialist about FPTP? And when will Labour break from this system of institutional inequality that ties it to the Tories... and which the Tories have been rather more skilled at using of late?

■ Alan Story is a retired investigative journalist and law teacher. In January 2020, he was the co-founder of GET PR DONE!

Pro-FPTP 'constituency link' argument is a red herring

By HOWARD SPENCER

@GetPRDone

'I CANNOT support a system that breaks the constituency link'

How many times have we all heard that one? It is one of the oldest lines trotted out in support of the winner-takes-all system.

And it's often deployed by MPs elected under that very system, in reply to constituents asking them to support a move to a fairer one: "I cannot support a system that breaks the constituency link."

As they write these words, you can almost imagine their hands clasped in pious prayer as they offer thanks for the method of false accounting that put them where they are — and which, in safe seats, can be relied upon to keep them there.

Apart from the large helpings of humbug, this is also one of the tritest and falsest objections to a fairer electoral system because almost all proportional systems do maintain a link between representatives and particular areas (the only exceptions being the system used in Israel, where the whole country is

treated as a single constituency, and the Netherlands also).

What proportional systems don't do, however, is create a link that is exclusive to one MP. This is because, whatever the system, they all involve the creation of multi-member seats — and it is this that the 'constituency link' fetishists are really objecting to. Basically, they want to be the only show in town (or city, or village), and are scared of genuine competition.

Multi-member seats mean that any individual elector has more than one member of parliament to represent them.

If they need to turn to a MP for any kind of assistance or to make a particular point, they have a choice of whom to approach. More fundamentally, it raises the chances that people will genuinely feel themselves to be properly represented in Parliament by someone whose views at least slightly resemble their own. Campaigners for PR have not done enough to trumpet this as a virtue.

While certain MPs may (rather pompously) claim that there is some kind of umbilical link between themselves and their constituents, the widespread evidence of political disillusion shows that this is a case of unrequited love. Some surveys have found that less than a quarter of people can even name their MP.

Tony Benn — an opponent of proportional representation — said that, as an MP, one was employed by the people who vote for you. In my constituency, everyone I met was my employer.' The slight problem there, of course, is that not everyone *did* vote for him. Far from it: in three of the four elections he fought for Chesterfield, more than half of the voters would have preferred someone else.

It's nonsense anyway to suppose that any single MP can properly represent all shades of opinion in any given geographical area. In what way, politically, did Tony Benn represent those of Conservative opinions among his constituents in Chesterfield and Bristol? Today, for example, how can Steve Baker represent pro-Europeans in Wycombe?

And then there are the single-member constituencies themselves — fantastic geographical beasts carved from the map by the boundary commission, often linking areas that have no real community

of interest and bearing names that will leave many scratching their heads.

A recent development is that ancient county boundaries that do actually have some cultural and historical significance are being ignored in favour of creating 'equal electoral districts' (but never mind the equal representation of the actual people living there).

People do feel some sense of belonging to Yorkshire, or Devon; they are infinitely less attached to artificial creations such as Wyre and Preston North, Farnham and Bordon, or Sleaford and North Hykeham.

It's time we came out fighting against single-member seats as a bad idea in themselves — as well as arguing that their elimination is vital to achieve a clearer match between votes and seats, and something closer to true democracy.

■ Howard Spencer is a historian and PR supporter



DID YOU KNOW?

■ Proportional Representation is far from a 'new' or 'radical' idea. According to the ACE Project (aceproject.org, Oct. 2020), 75 countries that have directly elected parliaments use some form of proportional voting system; 22 others use a semi-PR system.

Cook & Mowlam: Labour's electoral fairness pioneers

'The electoral system is crucial to our democracy'

By ALAN YEARSLEY

@GetPRDone

KEIR HARDIE, the founder of the Labour Party, was an early advocate of proportional representation (PR).

Two leading figures in the Labour Party during the Thatcher, Major and Blair years were also strong supporters of PR: Robin Cook and Marjorie (Mo) Mowlam. Unfortunately, like Hardie, Cook and Mowlam both died in their 50s (and both in 2005).

Had they lived longer, would they have helped to change history? Would the Blair or Brown governments have scrapped the archaic and undemocratic First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) voting system when they had plenty of opportunity – and a mandate – to do so?

Few would label Mowlam a weakling, but Cook was an even more towering figure in Labour. Read his 8 August 2005 obituary in *The Guardian*; imagine if Cook's talents could have been turned loose on a Tory apologist for FPTP... or a Labour backbencher in a safe seat seeking a larger pension.

Opposed to Iraq war

Neither Cook nor Mowlam is primarily remembered today for being an advocate for electoral reform. Cook served as Blair's first Foreign Secretary from 1997 until 2001 when he was demoted to Leader of the House of Commons. He was a fierce opponent of the Iraq War and in a passionate March 2003 speech (a speech that earned an MP a standing ovation for the first time in Commons history); he denounced the UK and US invasion of Iraq and resigned from Blair's government.

Mowlam made her political mark in Ireland. Appointed in 1997 as Northern Ireland Secretary, she was known as a politician who listened. She oversaw the negotiations which lead to the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 and ended decades of sectarian violence. A fellow cabinet minister described her as "the catalyst that allowed politics to move forward".

After stepping down as an MP in 2001, Mowlam also joined in protests against Blair's illegal Middle East war.

Today, their already high reputations have increased further, while Blair's has sunk. And as we witness a new upsurge in grassroots Labour support for PR, it makes sense to recall the political histories of Cook and Mowlam and their views on electoral reform. They both would be pleased to know that, as of now, more than 200 Constituency Labour Parties have come out in favour of PR.

Thatcher had no right to rule

The notably intelligent and articulate Cook joined the Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform (LCER) after becoming an MP for Edinburgh Central in 1974. LCER had its origins in the 1970s during the 1974-79 Wilson/Callaghan Labour administration when it was known as "the Labour Study Group for Electoral Reform."

By 1990 the LCER was now inspired by Cook and Mowlam. Both argued that the Conservatives under Margaret Thatcher had no right to rule with only 42% of the popular vote which the Tory Party had secured at the 1987 General Election.

During the 1987-92 Thatcher/Major administration, Labour set up the Plant Commission on Electoral Reform, headed



ROBIN COOK

by Professor Raymond Plant.

In a 1989 LCER interview Cook said: "It is curious how persistent is the faith that the system of First Past the Post is an advantage to Labour. Labour is the prime victim of the present system ending up in third place in more constituencies than any other party at the [1987] election."

Move ahead to 1992. The Plant Commission was not due to report until after that year's General Election, an election which appeared to be heading towards a hung Parliament.

Yet at a press conference a week before the 9 April vote — dubbed "Democracy Day" by the constitutional campaign group Charter 88 — the Labour leader, Neil Kinnock, made an important announcement.

He said Labour would like to see other parties, particularly the Liberal Democrats, join Plant's working group. But some days later in an election special on television, Kinnock appeared to get cold feet. When pressed, he refused to give his own views on proportional representation.

As Labour's leader, Kinnock had come across as weak on electoral reform and, it was suggested, that weakness was another reason for the unexpected election victory of John Major and the Conservatives.

The next year in 1993, the Plant Commission voted by a majority of 10-6 to scrap First Past the Post and by 9-7 to adopt a "Supplementary Vote" system for the House of Commons. The Commission, however, also voted by 11-4 against the Mixed Member Proportional system used in Germany and (since 1996) in New Zealand.

When these findings were presented to the next Labour Leader, John Smith, he announced he would let the people decide in a referendum. (The Supplementary Vote idea was buried until it emerged to elect Mayors and Police and Crime Commissioners.)

No constitutional settlement without PR

Also in 1993, LCER published a pamphlet entitled "What's wrong with First Past the Post?" It argued that, although Labour was already backing a radical new constitutional settlement, this would be incomplete without an end to FPTP. It explained that, without electoral reform, a future Tory government would simply undo Labour's constitutional changes.

Almost 30 years later, this approach remains very relevant. While Keir Starmer and his constitutional advisor Gordon Brown keep saying they favour

constitutional reform, they both remain stealthily silent on electoral reform. That is still true in 2023.

In his foreword to this 1993 LCER pamphlet, Robin Cook wrote: "I am not prepared to put up with a system which once every generation, every 30 years, gives us an opportunity to get in with a majority the way the Conservatives do and govern the same way. When we win, let us seize the opportunity to change the electoral system so we do not have ever again to return to elective dictatorship of the kind we have experienced."

Mo Mowlam, MP for Redcar, also wrote of the widespread disillusionment with politics that FPTP had brought. She could have been writing in 2023. "What convinced me was listening to voters, a great many of whom are disillusioned with politics and fed up with the political process, the whole political culture of the country they don't feel a part of. If we are going to change that, we need to change the electoral system."

Mowlam appreciated that creating a new voting system where all votes counted was a necessary, indeed central, part of that change.

Blair promises referendum on electoral reform

In 1994, John Smith died unexpectedly. Tony Blair's subsequent leadership promise to put the voting system to a referendum ensured that electoral reform remained on the agenda of every Labour Party conference between 1994 and the 1997 General Election. Indeed in 1997 Labour pledged to set up a commission to decide on a new voting system for the House of Commons and to hold a referendum on any proposed change to the electoral system.

The Jenkins Commission on Electoral Reform led by Liberal Democrat peer Lord Jenkins of Hillhead was duly established shortly after Labour's 1997 election victory. At the 1998 Labour conference Cook, by then Foreign Secretary, was the most senior cabinet minister to back electoral reform for the Commons. He described proportional representation as an idea "whose time [had] come".

Also at that year's party conference, Mo Mowlam said "There is now the opportunity for all of us to discuss how politics can connect people more closely to the decisions which affect their lives. Politics should not be about scoring points. Politics should be about getting things done, making politicians listen and making votes count."



MO MOWLAM

"I am not prepared to put up with a system which once in a generation, every 30 years, gives us an opportunity to get in with a majority the way the Conservatives do and govern the same way."

Robin Cook, 1993

But Blair ditches referendum promise

The Jenkins Commission reported in October 1998, recommending the Alternative Vote Plus (AV+) system. However, the Labour Party again remained divided on electoral reform with many prominent cabinet ministers remaining opposed to any change. Because of this, and with Labour having won a 179 seat majority in 1997, the findings of the commission were never implemented. Nor was the promised referendum ever held during Labour's time in office. (The only referendum ever held on electoral reform was the badly flawed AV proposal in 2011.)

Nonetheless the 2001 and 2005 Labour manifestos both contained a promise to learn from the PR systems adopted for the devolved governments in Scotland, Wales and London before making a decision on any change to the voting system for the Commons. Mind you, the manifesto promise at each of those elections was a watered-down version of that made at the previous election.

Labour forced to rely on swing voters

In a speech to an LCER fringe meeting at the 2003 Labour conference, Cook pointed out that FPTP effectively forced Labour to focus primarily on the 1% of swing voters in its key target seats while ignoring its core voters. This meant that there was a danger that those who had the most to gain from a Labour government would also have the most to lose when the Conservatives did eventually return to power. (Cook had also long endorsed the need for a Scottish Parliament, a body itself elected by proportional

representation).

Cook believed Labour needed to "create an electoral system in which the way people vote shapes the parliament that then belongs to them". He pointed out that in the 1960s, one third of all MPs had received more than 50% of votes cast in their constituencies, yet in 2001 not one MP was elected with the support of a majority of their electorates. This meant FPTP simply could not handle the increasing pluralism of public opinion. FPTP created duopolies.

In his speech to the LCER AGM in July 2005, just one month before his death, Cook said he believed that the General Election in May of that year was a clear sign of the injustices of FPTP. Labour won a reduced but still comfortable majority with just 35% of the popular vote and despite winning fewer votes than the Conservatives in England.

Cook: if the Tories got 35%

"Just assume for one moment that instead of [Labour], how would we feel if the Tory Party had got 35% share of the vote and a majority of 66. We would be rioting and recognise a system that is totally unjust and anomalous.

"My nightmare is that we will have been 12 years in office, with the ability to reform the electoral system, and will fail to do so until we [are] back in opposition, in perhaps a decade of Conservative government, regretting that we left in place the electoral system that allowed Conservative governments on a minority vote.

"We are not interested in electoral reform for functional reasons because we see it as a means to an end. The electoral system is a crucial part of our democracy. And for Labour democracy cannot be just viewed as a means, it is also a value which expresses how fair, how open and how equal we are in our society. [In the party's new constitution that replaced Clause 4] we committed ourselves to putting power, wealth and opportunity in the hands of the many, not the few."

In 2023, who is Keir Starmer going to listen to? The opinions of Blair and Brown who lied to the British people in 1997 that electoral reform was right around the corner?

Or to the voices of Labour visionaries and "straighter shooters" like Cook and Mowlam – and Keir Hardy?

■ Alan Yearsley is a Sheffield-based journalist and a long-time activist for electoral reform.

The People's Echo is produced in association with **Get PR Done!**, a cross party/no party campaign group formed in 2020, working to bring in a proportional representation voting system in the UK



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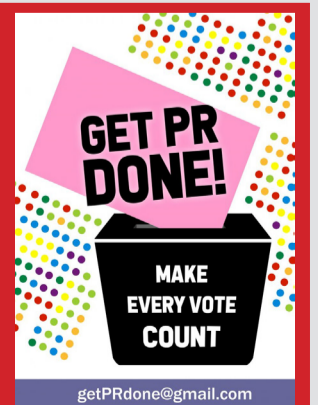
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Didn't we have a PR referendum?

By IAN GLENISTER
@GetPRDone

EVER tried to persuade someone of the need for electoral reform?

Perhaps you've lamented the 2019 election results over a pint with a friend and then wondered how the Tory party got a whopping great majority with less than 44% of the votes cast.

You might then have wondered whether a different, more representative kind of democracy might be fairer. Here's how that conversation might go...

Yeah, but we had a vote on that a few years back, and no one was interested.
Er...yes and no.

What?? I thought it was a vote on electoral reform and the vote was clearly lost! What was it about then?

Yes, but it was not a vote on a fairer system. It was a vote to replace one unfair system with another unfair system - the Alternative Vote.

But the LibDems went all out for it. Didn't they want PR?

Hmm, but as I said, AV is not PR. The LibDems were the junior partners in a coalition with the Conservatives who definitely didn't want a proportional system. Cameron basically said they can have a referendum on electoral reform - but on his terms. AV would be much less damaging to the Tory's electoral chances. So that nice Mr Clegg reluctantly conceded to a vote on AV instead of PR.

So what is AV then?

Under AV, a candidate must achieve over 50% of the constituency vote to get elected.

How is that different to now?

Under our current system, FPTP, it's the party with the largest share of the vote who wins, no matter how small it is! In fact, a lot of marginal seats are won with just 30-40% of the

vote, with the other votes being split among the other parties. But under AV you can put down your second choice. If there is no clear 50% plus winner, the party that came last is removed and voters second preference is taken into account until someone gets over the line.

Sounds complicated, but isn't it fairer?

It is a bit complicated but, although it has some merit, it certainly isn't fairer - why should your 'second best' candidate get representation and not your first choice, especially if millions voted with you across the country? It dilutes democracy. It doesn't enhance it.

Good point I suppose. Is that why it lost?

Well, partly. The campaign was very badly run, but there was a period a few months prior to the vote when it looked like AV could win. Then the 'No' campaign (i.e. the Tories and their sponsors) got spooked and spent a lot of money on attack ads with babies in intensive care as if our choice was between a well-funded NHS and a new voting system...

Ha ha! That went well...!

Yes, didn't it? The thing is, referendums are easily hijacked by big money. Even small changes like AV threaten the status quo

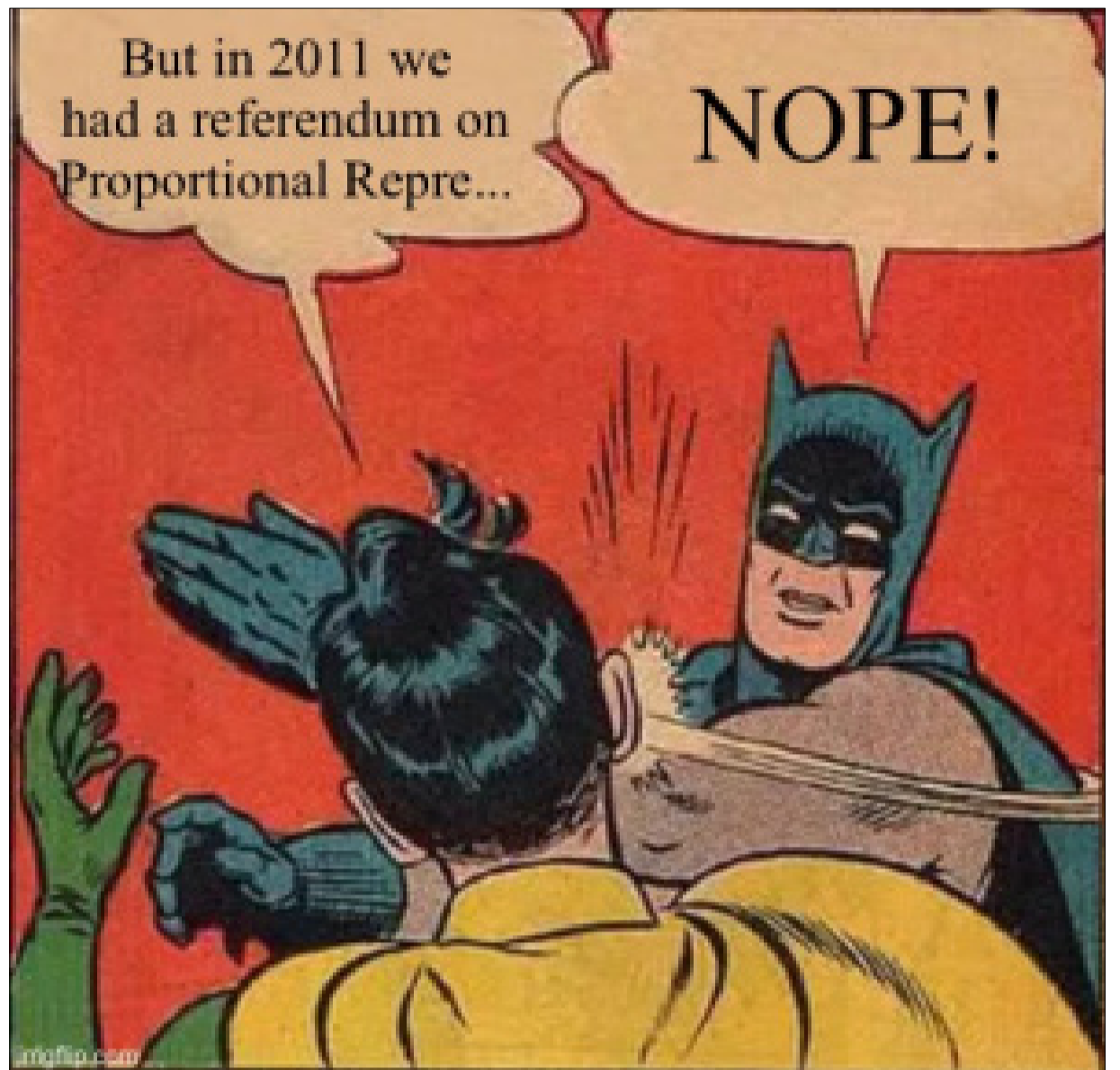
So we need PR, but don't we need a referendum on it? It's a big change!

Yes, we need PR but no, we don't want a referendum. Although the next election will be fought under FPTP, we live in a parliamentary democracy and if a majority vote for parties that have PR in their manifestos and those parties are able to form a government then that's it.

So, 'Game Over' as Nigel Farage once said after the referendum?

That was a different referendum, but yes, game over for our bankrupt, ancient voting system.

■ Ian is a Labour Party activist based in Mid Bedfordshire



How might it look once we've 'got PR done'?

There are various types of proportional representation (PR) voting systems. One method of delivering PR is via Multi-Member Constituencies, also known as MMCs.

By RICHARD GODFREY
@GetPRDone

MMCs would be drawn to reflect geographical, historical and cultural links.

In contrast, FPTP constituencies are defined - often juggled - so that each

contains an average (c70k) number of voters. These are artificial creations.

Question #1: How do we define MMCs?

Answer #1: MMCs are already defined and have been so for centuries. They are called COUNTIES - be they

rural or metropolitan!

Question #2: How many MPs would be returned for each MMC?

Answer #2: Take the total number of voters in the MMC and divide by the national average of 70k mentioned above. So, a MMC of 500k voters would

return 7 MPs (7 x 70k = 490k).

Question #3: So, would this lead to significant change?

Answer #3: Yes, major change. Look at the two cases below.

Case #1: Tyne & Wear

In 2019, Labour gained 48% of the vote and won all 12 seats. Using MMC, Labour would get six, the Conservatives four and the Liberal Democrats and the Brexit Party one each.

Case #2: West Sussex

In 2019, the Conservatives gained 56% of the vote and won all eight seats. Using MMC, the Conservatives would

get five, Labour two and the Liberal Democrats one.

Question #4: Would this give counties more power?

Answer #4: Most certainly. MPs elected from the county and acting together could exercise much more influence at Westminster.

Question #5: Any other benefits?

Answer #5.1 - Voters would often be able to contact a local MP of a party they supported.

Answer #5.2: Managing change in population. The country will be building millions of new homes in the relatively near future. Under FPTP, this could require constituencies to be redrawn every few years. Under MMC, the only change would be to the number of MPs.

Answer #5.3: Making MPs more accessible while improving security. Offices for MPs could be accommodated in County Halls and/or Town Halls. The office would be permanent, only the occupants would change.

Question #6: What about "constituency links"?

Answer #6: This would be a matter for the Returning Officer and the successful candidates. Responsibility for each part of a MMC would largely depend on the votes cast.

Question #7: What's not to like?
Answer #7: Over to you!!

■ Richard lives in West Sussex, is a Lib Dem and a long-time supporter of PR.



DID YOU KNOW?

■ In 2019 the Liberal Democrats increased their vote share by 4%, but lost a seat in Parliament.

A referendum on PR: gold standard or 'booby prize'?

By RÉAL LAVERGNE
@GetPRDone

AS a veteran of the electoral reform campaigns in Canada, I look at Labour's recent progress on this issue in the UK with considerable interest.

Taking a referendum for granted

One thing that strikes me is the way pundits are dealing with the referendum issue. There seems to me an unquestioned premise that the democratic way to proceed on electoral reform must include a referendum.

Witness recent pieces to that effect, in both the Guardian and the Observer, by Owen Jones and Andrew Rawnsley, respectively.

In a related article in the Daily Mail, Andrew Neil makes no presumption about a referendum, but seems to consider that the implementation of proportional representation without a referendum would be some sort of abomination.

Precedents for a referendum

There is indeed a precedent for a referendum on electoral reform in the UK, since a referendum is how the Alternative Vote proposal was dealt with in 2011.

There are precedents also from New Zealand, which held back to back referendums in 1992 and 1993.

However, nothing beats Canada for referendums on proportional representation. We've had seven so far — three in BC (2005, 2009 and 2018), three in Prince Edward Island (PEI) (2005, 2016, 2019) and one in Ontario (2007) — with one more in the offing in the Yukon before very long.

The view from Canada

Yet in Canada, the bloom is very much off the rose on such referendums. Referendums have been no friend of electoral reform.

Our experience with such referendums is that they are difficult to win and are severely biased towards the status quo. It should come as no surprise that those who advocate most strongly for the referendum option are opponents of reform.

The best result obtained in Canada was that of the 2005 referendum in British Columbia, on the heels of a citizens' assembly, which achieved a 57.8% vote in favour of reform.

However, the government had set a 60% threshold for the referendum to pass. In the 2016 referendum in Prince Edward Island, the Yes side won again, with 52.4% but the turnout was deemed insufficient.

Truth be told, referendums in Canada have been used as a way of avoiding reform by politicians preferring the status quo.

Only in New Zealand has a referendum been used to overcome political resistance rather than accommodating it.

When Canada held extensive hearings on electoral reform following Trudeau's promise to make 2015 the last first-past-the-post election in Canada, the referendum option was much discussed.

Remarkably 67% of expert witnesses who opined on the subject considered the referendum option to be unnecessary or ill-advised, including experts on the subject.

DID YOU KNOW?

■ In the 2019 UK General Election the number of Conservative votes cast works out at 38,264 per MP, while the Greens won 864,743 votes but have only one MP.

A bad idea on democratic grounds

Aside from the inherent bias of referendums in favour of the status quo are some principles-based arguments on why referendums on electoral reform are a bad idea on democratic grounds:

Referendums are divisive, pitting one faction of the electorate against the other, as the Brexit experience has demonstrated.

Yet issues like Brexit and electoral reform are issues that should be based on the maximum possible social consensus if we want such changes to be legitimate, long-lasting and widely accepted.

Referendums are about majority rule. Yet electoral reform is about ensuring equal voting rights for all, including minorities. In referendums on electoral reform, it is very easy for the "comfortable" majority to favour the status quo at the expense of the non-at-all-comfortable minority whose vote never counts for very much.

For a referendum to be meaningful, an effective effort of public education is required. Yet in our experience, quality public education has been a woefully missing ingredient in most cases.

It is hard to imagine how it could be otherwise. Electoral reform is a complex issue and confusing or contradictory messaging from the pro and con sides is not helpful. From the government side, what passes for "neutrality" is technical information about the workings of different systems that are beside the point for most voters.

Those who are relatively well informed tend to vote Yes. Others are likely to vote along partisan lines or to opt for the devil they know rather than one they know nothing about.

Promise-and-betray no longer

However, getting electoral reform without a referendum is equally challenging. If there's another thing we have learned in Canada, it's how difficult it can be to get promises of reform to be implemented at all.

What we have instead is a promise-and-betray model of inaction: promise electoral reform when you're sitting in third place or worse, betray that promise once elected to power. This pattern has manifested itself repeatedly in Canada, both federally and provincially.

The best known and most outrageous example of this federally was Justin Trudeau's categorical promise that if his party was elected, 2015 would be the last first-past-the-post election in Canada.

However categorical that promise may have been, Trudeau took it upon himself to abandon that promise at the end of the consultations process in 2017, saying it was his decision to make and that there was "no consensus" for reform — meaning, one can only guess, that he did not agree with the strong majority consensus by experts, citizens who showed up to testify, and the representatives of every other party.

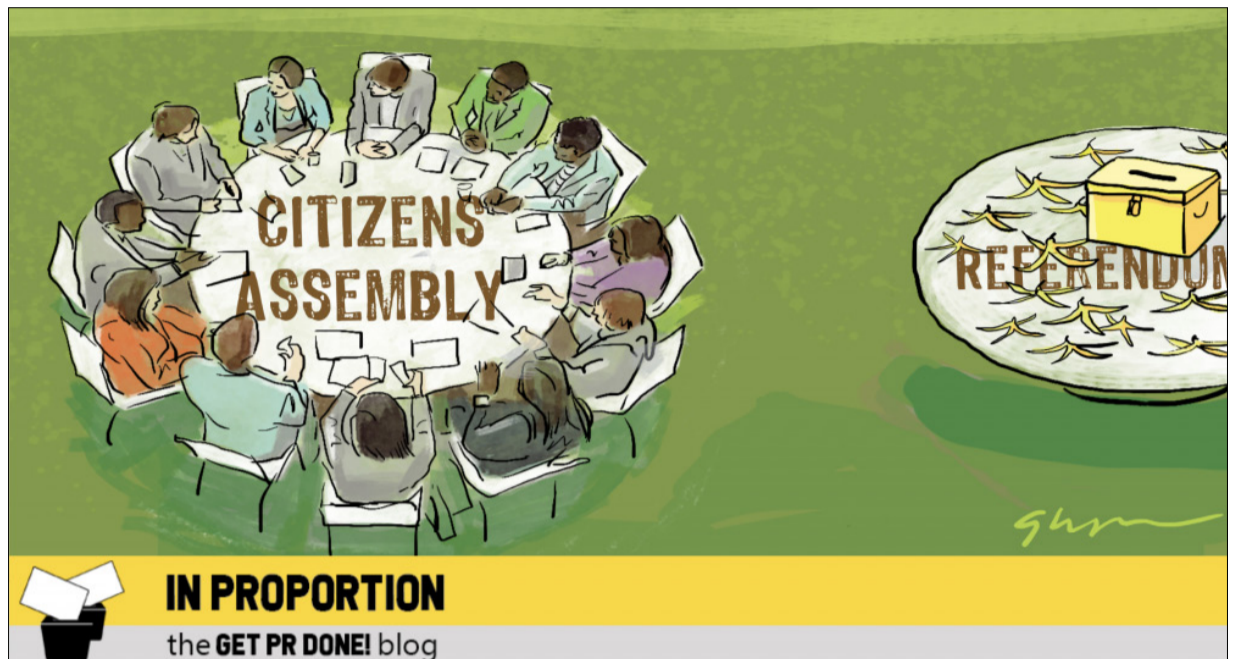
In Quebec, this promise-and-betray pattern has manifested itself three times under three different parties: the Parti Québécois, the Liberals and most recently the Coalition Avenir Québec.

Beyond vested interests

What we end up with are two very effective formulas for blocking change: breaking one's promise outright; or less blatantly, using referendums to do the job.

The basic problem is that politicians, once they have formed government or been elected to the legislature, are in a fundamental conflict of interest when it comes to changing the electoral model that brought them to power.

This provides one reason for wishing to hold a referendum. Whatever else they might do, referendums have the advantage of giving citizens a voice where politicians are in a conflict of interest.



In New Zealand, it was referendums that allowed citizens to override the resistance of the two major political parties. In the US, it's often through citizens' ballot initiatives that electoral reform of a mild sort can get any hearing at all.

However, referendums can be and have been used to avoid change as much as to bring it about. The question that arises is whether a better approach than referendums could not be used to gauge the will of the electorate.

A better approach

Canada has made use of other approaches in the past by mandating independent commissions or citizens' assemblies to make recommendations. As between independent commissions and citizens' assemblies, the latter have the advantage of being representative of the general population.

Citizens' assemblies are now being widely used in Europe and elsewhere to address politically intractable problems, like abortion and gay rights in Ireland, or climate action in France and the UK.

Canada has had two citizens' assemblies on electoral reform: one in B.C. (2003-2004), the other in Ontario (2007). Analysts have praised these processes for their non-partisanship and ability to reach a broad consensus. In past weeks, the Yukon government has passed legislation to also call a citizens' assembly on electoral reform.

Both a Citizens' Assembly and a referendum?

Remarkably in the Yukon's plans, is that they have judged a referendum to be desirable, nonetheless. Pairing a referendum with a citizens' assembly might make more sense than some of the alternatives, however.

One could treat such a referendum as a "validation referendum." The citizens' assembly, itself a representative body of the voting public, would put forward its recommendations and rationale and a referendum would be used to determine if the general public agrees with these conclusions.

This solves the public education quandary, since the rationale provided by the citizens' assembly would be a fundamental part of what would be delivered to citizens.

This was essentially the approach used in the 2005 B.C. referendum, with good success (57.8% voting Yes). The question was: "Should British Columbia change to the BC-STV electoral system as recommended by the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform?"

Citizens' Assemblies: key to success
Over the last four or five years, Fair

Vote Canada has put citizens' assemblies on electoral reform at the core of its electoral reform strategy in Canada. This idea is getting more and more traction and is emerging as a leading edge strategy on electoral reform.

To work properly this approach requires an acknowledgement by politicians themselves that electoral reform should be non-partisan and untethered from the conflicts of interest involved.

Such an acknowledgement should come as a comfort for many politicians, giving them a way to overcome the promise-and-betray approach that has bedevilled political leaders in the past. Instead of relying on partisan advantage, the citizens' assembly model encourages political parties and politicians to resolve their differences by handing things over to citizens themselves.

What to put in a party manifesto?

In the face of growing voter cynicism about ever getting electoral reform out of our political leaders, the most credible promise that might be included in a party's manifesto could well be the promise to convene a citizens' assembly immediately after the next election.

Ideally, this promise could be included by more than one party going into an election — in the UK, this could include any combination of Labour, the Liberal Democrats, Plaid Cymru, the SNP, Reform and the Greens.

Citizens' assemblies are never fully "binding." However, a robust citizens' assembly would create a high level of legitimacy for the consensus recommendations put forward and high expectations for electoral reform to be implemented.

A citizens' assembly provides a way out for political leaders whose caucus members may not all be on board with electoral reform, and helps to free them of partisan considerations that have undermined reforms in the past.

Party leaders may and should express

their support for electoral reform. Why else would they convene a citizens' assembly in the first place?

However, they would be wise not to promise to unilaterally bring in a particular model of reform, an approach that could be divisive and considered illegitimate. If there is a fear that a citizens' assembly might propose recommendations that are not politically feasible, why not task the assembly to propose some timelines and possibly some incremental steps to enhance the political feasibility of what is being proposed?

A referendum on electoral reform: gold standard or booby trap?

To answer the question raised in the title of this blog, it should be clear from the above that referendums are not the gold standard. If anything, they have been used to resist rather than to promote reform.

However, the alternative approach whereby one party would win a majority after promising reform and just implement that promise once elected is no more credible.

The real world does not work that way and, to my knowledge, there is no case in history of a single party pursuing this sort of reform on its own.

A change of this sort requires the sort of social and political consensus that only a citizens' assembly convened by more than one party is likely to deliver.

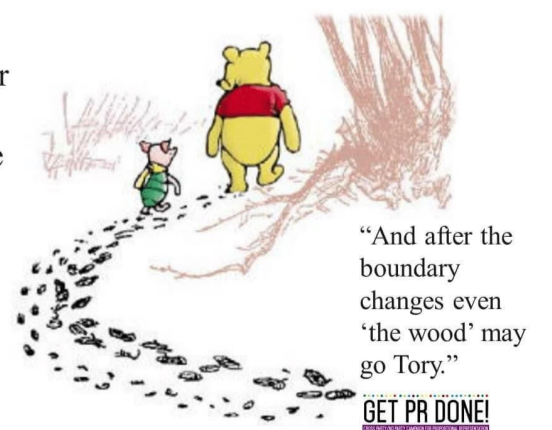
It's time we set aside the notion that reform of our electoral system should depend on politicians to define for themselves how they will be elected. That is a recipe for self-serving partisanship.

What we need is a recipe for building a non-partisan citizens' consensus.

■ Réal Lavergne is a former academic, researcher and policy analyst with a Ph.D. in Political Economy. He was President of Fair Vote Canada from 2016 to 2021 and has been involved in every Fair Vote Canada campaign over the last 10 years.

"Pooh," asked Piglet, "If Labour don't back PR, will the Tories be in power for ever?"

"Even longer Piglet, even longer..."



"And after the boundary changes even 'the wood' may go Tory."

GET PR DONE!

'My grandma's vote has not counted in 70 years'

By MIKE STAFFORD
@GetPRDone

IT is easy, when discussing changes to our electoral system, to become side-tracked by desired results.

Debate often centres, with disconcerting selfishness, on how proportional representation (PR) might be more likely to deliver the kind of governments we want.

Left-of-centre advocates for reform point to a consistent 'anti-Tory' majority stretching back decades, stating – with significant justification – that if we just threw a different electoral lens over the votes, then all would be well, and we PR advocates could enjoy the fruits of a permanent progressive alliance.

This vision has some charm, but electoral reform is not about us, the political obsessives.

What matters is that each voter counts

Electoral reform is about every voter, however engaged or disengaged from the electoral process they may be. The yearning of politics junkies should be a matter of supreme indifference when selecting a voting system. What really matters is that each individual's vote counts.

To illustrate this point, let me choose just one voter; and a Tory, no less. My grandmother was born in Sheffield, less than a decade after the passing of Mrs Pankhurst.

Her right to vote was secured a mere handful of years before her birth, on the back of diligent campaigning, incredible sacrifice, and a world war. The right of all women to vote was as fresh at my grandmother's birth as the EU referendum is to us today.

Straight from the ballot box to the bin

Nevertheless, after nearly nine decades

PR should not be seen as a vehicle to engineer the result we want. PR should be seen for what it is; a means to ensure that each elector's vote counts.

of life, seven of them spent above voting age, that right has never properly been granted to my grandmother.

For her, voting – in the sense that one is able to shape the country's direction through expressing a preference at the ballot box – has been a futile habit.

In a northern seat so rock-solidly Labour that it even survived the wipe-out of 2019, my grandmother's Tory vote has spent the better part of a century being transplanted straight from the ballot box to the bin, without any direct involvement in deciding the nation's direction.

In 1955, her first ever vote was for the Conservatives, but was in no way useful to Anthony Eden as he romped to victory over Attlee.

Four years later, a new mother, she walked to the polling station to cast a futile vote in favour of the same party under the victorious Harold Macmillan.

When Alec Douglas-Home was narrowly defeated by Harold Wilson, my grandmother's vote in support was similarly rendered irrelevant by her neighbours' avalanche of red.

As Downing Street changed hands throughout the turbulence of the 1970s, my grandmother's contribution was identical; her civic duty was dispatched, and summarily ignored.

Her 'blue' vote buried under a red landslide



IN PROPORTION
the GET PR DONE! blog

When the Conservatives' most iconic leader took charge of the country, it was no thanks to my grandmother, whose steadfast support for the Tory party entered its third redundant decade. Major, Duncan Smith, Hague, Howard, Cameron and May came and went over the following decades.

Each time, my grandmother strode proudly to the polling station, steadfast in the same small-c conservative belief that failure to vote is a sin. Each time, her vote for the Conservative party was buried under a red landslide.

In near-on seventy years, her involvement with the democratic process has been that of a spectator, yelling support, unheard, from behind the soundproof glass of FPTP.

Thanks to the contrasting loyalties of her neighbours, my grandmother's vote has been a no more useful addition to

the ballot box than if she'd tossed it in yesterday's litter.

This is a profound tragedy. This infant girl of the 1930s was born newly-enfranchised, but that enfranchisement has been muffled by an antiquated system. While this story is tragic, it isn't unusual. Indeed, it represents the experience of the vast majority of British voters.

In the four generations of my grandmother's family, scattered across the country by internal migration, only one branch has a chance to make a difference at election time.

The rest are locked in that same obscene irrelevance; their own preferences choked off by the bloc loyalty of their neighbours.

Under FPTP, millions go to their graves without ever having experienced any link between their vote and the identity of the Prime Minister or their

government.

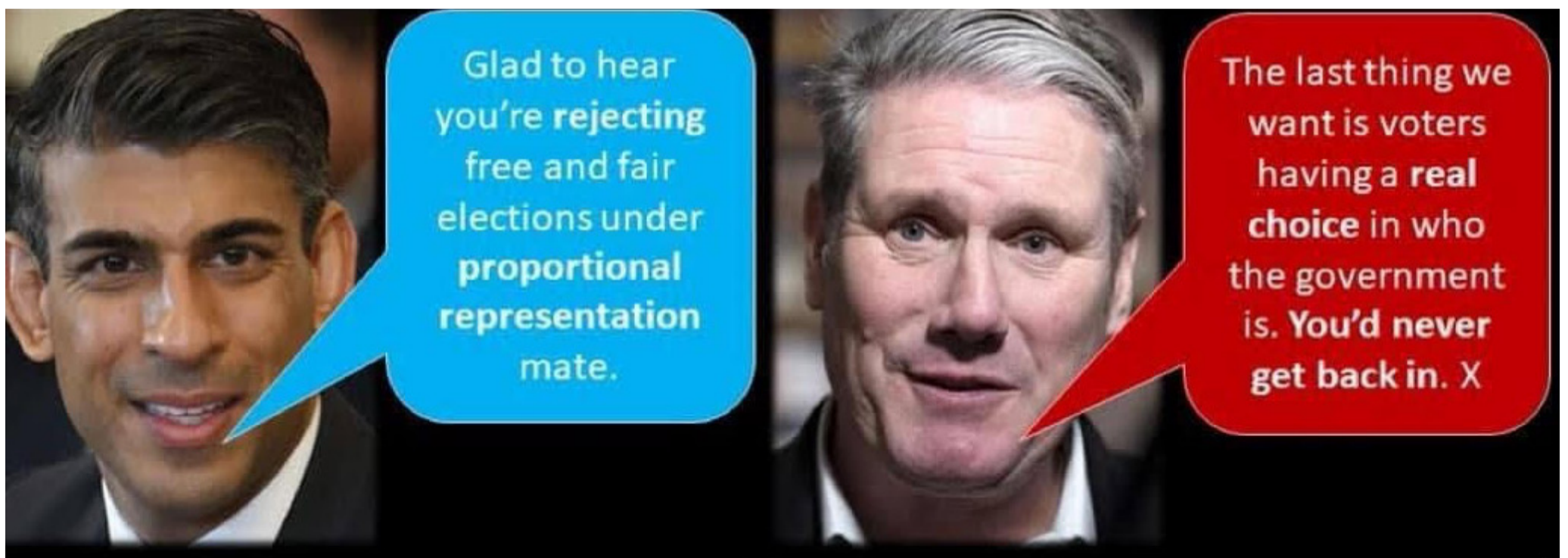
No wonder millions have kicked the voting habit

How can democracy thrive in such a way? How invested can we expect voters to feel in the process, when their ballot paper carries no more weight than a post-it note in an empty office? If voting is a fruitless habit, millions can be forgiven for kicking it.

PR should not be seen as a vehicle to engineer the result we want. PR should be seen for what it is; a means to ensure that each elector's vote counts.

The vote is the single most powerful voice any of us has – and every single one should be heard.

■ Mike Stafford is a writer for Central Bylines, Worcester News and faithfulpundit.co.uk.



conservative-2019-manifesto

▶ We will continue to support the First Past the Post system of voting

Starmer's official spokesperson has now revealed that the Labour Leader has a "long-standing view against proportional representation" - Byline Times 27 April 2023

End the elective dictatorship GET PR DONE!

On the campaign trail

GET PR DONE! (GPRD) is an independent, grassroots, cross-party/no-party, single-issue campaign group. Let's unpack that sentence. Then examine the campaigning bit.

We are not dependent on any larger organisations or political parties. We see ourselves as fighting on behalf of ourselves and ALL voters.

Grassroots activism and protest are what wins real change in the end. How else did the suffragettes win the right to vote for women almost one hundred years ago?

Many of our members and supporters are also members of a range of political parties. Hence, we are cross-party...and that can be challenging.

Many political activists today are, however, turned off by the internal wrangling that infects many parties today and what a mate calls "the tedium of established tribal political networks." (This tribalism is reinforced by our "winner-takes-all" voting system.) So many of our supporters and campaigners are proudly "no party."

Single issue? We agree that the reasons behind the UK's undemocratic voting system are very connected to the overall democratic crisis of this country. And campaigning to GET PR DONE! won't, by itself, transform the UK into a democratic "promised land." But campaigning and winning on PR opens the doors to winning on other issues.



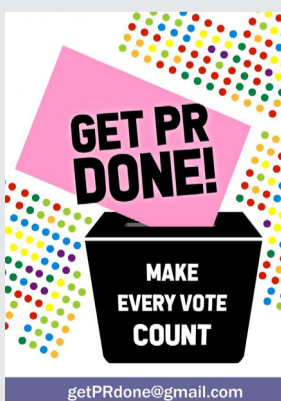
Some of our recent campaigns...

Councils for PR

In 2022, we launched the Councils for PR campaign with Make Votes Matter. The campaign offers a model motion and support for councillors to bring a motion to their own council,

supporting PR for Westminster elections. This campaign gives a focus and opportunity for smaller parties who support PR, principally Lib Dems and Greens, to raise the profile of PR within their own district. It gives an opportunity for local

media to run stories bringing PR into mainstream conversation. So far more than 25 councils have successfully committed. The campaign offers local Labour councillors the opportunity to send a message from the foot soldiers of the grassroots to the leadership.



Fair pay/fair voting

On 1 February, as many as 500,000 workers – mostly in the public sector – were out on strike as part of the largest wave of industrial disputes in decades. In every single dispute, the government is at its heart.

It's offering a paltry 4% to 5% annual wage increase when the cost of living is now skyrocketing to more than 10% a year. Sunak and his chancellor Hunt claim we must "fight inflation." The real message is that NHS nurses and rail workers and teachers should take the heat... and the pain.

And hundreds of thousands of NHS nurses and rail workers and teachers and posties (and the rest!) have replied: "NO WAY." We want "FAIR PAY" ... and a huge improvement in public services.

There is a clear relationship between the unfair way the government is treating these workers and the unfair way we elect governments.

In every election, millions of votes are essentially binned. So GET PR DONE! is launching the "FAIR PAY / FAIR VOTING" campaign to draw attention to this relationship.

Socialists in Labour Party should back PR

By JAMES DORAN

@GetPRDone

SUPPORT for proportional representation is not the preserve of any one party. But given the opposition of the Tory party to any change, the view of the Labour Party will be key to any reform.

For the purposes of providing a greater understanding of the debates within Labour, it is worth considering the views of those Labour members who are strongly opposed to the party backing electoral reform.

CLPD played a positive role in the past

The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (CLPD) is one such group. It prepared two motions for the Labour conference in September 2021 which opposed any change to the current First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) voting system.

The CLPD was founded in 1973 in response to the Labour leadership's refusal to adopt conference decisions as party policy. It also acted in the context of members of British political parties having no say over who became their party's leader.

Labour was the first party to allow ordinary members to choose their leader in parliament, followed by the LibDems and Tories. That this occurred in British politics was down, in no small part, to the work of CLPD.

In recent years, the organisation has supported efforts to introduce open selection for all Labour parliamentary candidates, a measure which would have led to party members having a choice of candidates in all seats, "safe" or not.

But curiously for an organisation dedicated to improving democratic participation in politics, the CLPD is opposed to the party adopting proportional representation as its policy.

In doing so, the CLPD is choosing to ignore all the overwhelming evidence against the current system: FPTP has an inbuilt bias towards conservative parties.

Let's examine what CLPD argued more closely.

Going through the motions

The first motion, titled "First Past The Post Delivers Majority Labour Governments", claimed that proportional representation would make it "well-nigh impossible to ever achieve" a parliamentary majority.

New Zealand currently has a Labour government. It won a majority in October 2020 under a proportional system.

In Finland and Portugal, parties

much like Labour have led coalitions of left parties which controlled their own governments.

Until May 2021, Labour governed in coalition in Wales. After the May 2021 election, the party governed alone. Yet the Welsh Assembly also has a system of proportional representation.

In fact, there are 75 countries across the globe that have directly elected parliaments using some form of proportional voting system; 22 others use a semi-PR system. Embarrassingly, Labour is the sole social democratic party in the developed world that still endorses FPTP.

So, the first claim of CLPD that Labour cannot win under PR is simply not true. (Mind you, abandoning FPTP does not mean abandoning the aim of getting as big a win as possible!)

But sadly, this claim of impossibility is repeated in another CLPD motion on electoral reform, "Now is Not the Time to Change the Voting System". That is a title which makes it sound as if there is an immediate prospect of parliament implementing PR.

If now is not the time (and it isn't, there is not a parliamentary majority for change) what about after the next general election?

The motion argued that Labour should focus on coming up with "an appealing platform that aims to solve the problems that are being inflicted on the population by the Tory government".

And while it is true that electoral reform doesn't keep many people awake at night with worry, it isn't a matter of having either an appealing platform or a commitment to electoral reform.

Why not both?

Moreover, it should never be forgotten what a June 2020 review by Labour Together concluded: for Labour to win in the next election would require a greater swing than Labour got in the 1945 and 1997 elections.

Labour has won when it promised PR

Given that electoral reform has been promised by the party in the past, when it last went from opposition to government in 1997, PR could be an important element of a next winning manifesto.

PR gives voters more power over the political system and power is what many people are lacking.

Of course, the challenge for Labour is to win under the current system. But why would a Labour government want to keep the current system, given it has a bias towards conservatives?

The fact is that FPTP makes it harder for Labour to participate in government.



LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE 2019

It is why our sister parties do not advocate returning to it and one reason why referendums in Ireland and New Zealand to return their countries to FPTP voting have both failed.

As members of a party which has been able in the past to elect and re-elect majority governments without reforming the voting system, it can seem to some Labour Party members as though the concern of Liberal Democrats, Greens, and others, with getting PR done is just a matter of narrow self-interest.

Socialists in the Labour party need to consider if attitudes to electoral reform are based on evidence.

Does the political strategy for a transformative Labour government require a defence of the electoral system? Aren't socialists in favour of electoral fairness?

Socialism and proportional representation

In a 2021 article for CLPD titled "First Past The Post for Democratic Socialism", Luton South MP Rachel Hopkins argued that across Europe, Labour's sister parties have "been marginalised and electoral systems have been a major factor in that process".

But would their position have become so weakened if they had not signed up to austerity in the wake of the global financial crisis and experienced

"Pasokification" – a severe backlash from their voters – as a result?

Hopkins' argument has no place for a Labour government that wants to implement not only economic but also constitutional changes to advance the interests of the majority.

Would it be better for a Labour government to lose power to a Conservative Party elected by a minority than to change the voting system and potentially share power if another outright majority could not be won? In these circumstances, having to reach agreement with other parties to continue implementing progressive policies is surely preferable to the damage of minority Tory rule?

In their arguments in defence of the existing system, Hopkins and the CLPD do not appear to have considered these questions.

PR redistributes power

The Labour Party made a mistake two decades ago. Having been elected in 1997 promising to set up a commission on electoral reform (a promise which was kept) and to hold a referendum on its recommended voting system (which was AV+) Labour abandoned this pledge to voters that, in future, their votes would really count.

It should be seen as a real problem for socialists in the Labour Party that some voters matter more than others; it reduces Labour's influence in parliament and gives a rational electoral basis for the party concentrating on voters in key marginals. This can make it seem like support is taken for granted in our party's strongholds.

The last time Labour won a general election was in 2005 and at the time, the SNP were not the governing party in the Scottish parliament and the Greens had no MPs.

So, there wasn't as much competition from other parties that voters could see had gained parliamentary representation elsewhere and so could potentially win in their constituency.

It is going to be necessary, if Labour is to take office after the next general election, that voters minded to back other parties have a strong reason to vote tactically.

A commitment to redistributing the power of voters by implementing electoral reform could provide this, as part of a platform for transformative change.

There's growing momentum for PR

Thankfully, the CLPD's conservative position on electoral reform is not the prevailing opinion of socialists in the Labour Party.

For example, it has been the position of Open Labour for a number of years that there needs to be PR. Momentum backs PR.

A motion which was initiated by Labour for a New Democracy has been taken up by hundreds of the party's constituency groups. Many large and smaller Labour-affiliated trade unions, including Unite, Unison, USDAW and ASLEF support the campaign for PR. A motion which passed overwhelmingly at our party's 2022 conference in Liverpool called for PR to be a Labour manifesto pledge for the next general election campaign.

Yes, the aim should be to elect a transformative Labour government under the existing voting system. And to that end, we should try to democratise the party so that it can then democratise both state and economic institutions when in government.

But there is no reason to suppose that a Labour Party committed to transformative policies could not be re-elected for a second term under a fair voting system.

And it could be that the only way to secure the election of a Labour government is to commit to redistributing wealth and power, including the power of voters, from the few to the many.

Not only is there a very wide support for PR within our party, but 2023 public opinion polls also show a majority of voters no longer support FPTP.

Keir Starmer's position that PR is "not a priority" is simply not tenable.

Let's Get PR Done!

■ James Doran lives in the North East of England and is a longstanding member of the Labour Party.

DID YOU KNOW?

■ About 45% of voters in the 2019 general election ended up with a representative they did not vote for. That is roughly 14.5 million disenfranchised voters.

THEM AND US

THEY want elections for only one reason: so THEIR party can win.





WE, as voters, want election results reflecting OUR wishes.

THAT'S THE LAST THING THEY WANT GET PR DONE!