



MVC Campaign Update: Summer Recess 2006

Government's review of electoral systems - imminent

The review of the new electoral systems (for Scottish Parliamentary, Welsh and London Assembly and European elections) promised as part of Labour's manifesto commitments, is due to be published imminently. Little is yet known, except that the report has been carried out by civil servants and is a piece of "desk-based" research, without public consultation. The Department for Constitutional Affairs' closed review of electoral systems is in sharp contrast to the importance the Power Inquiry attached to seeking the views and active involvement of the public. Democracy should not be desk-bound. Ownership of the electoral system should be in the hands of the people, as innovations like British Columbia's Citizen's Assembly on Electoral Reform and those proposed in David Chaytor MP's Electoral Choice Bill seek to achieve. Look out for an MVC call to action when the review is published: we'll want to ensure that the report is not buried, but built on.

Local Elections 2006

"The Great Local Vote Swindle" - Electoral Reform Society's report on the 2006 English local elections is now available online (www.electoral-reform.org.uk) The key findings are that:

1. in six London boroughs and six metropolitan authorities, there was a 'wrong winner' in that the party which won the most votes did not win the most seats;
2. there are many councils which are effectively one-party states with little opposition to provide effective scrutiny, raising the increased possibility of corruption;
3. there are still vast electoral deserts where many voters are not represented;
4. there remains a massive disparity in the ratio of women elected to men;
5. if these votes had been in a general election, Labour would have lost 95 of its 100 most vulnerable seats and 149 of their most vulnerable 200.

"Does Democracy Need Elections?" - Essay Competition

Make Votes Count and X-Change @ Electoral Reform Society have launched an essay competition aimed at young people, as part of their ongoing attempts to secure a voice for young people in the debate on the future of our democracy. The competition invites young people to have their say in the debate about modernising democracy.

The competition is split into two groups; 18 and under, and 19-26. The winners will get their essays published as well as prize money of £150 for the 18 and under, and £250 for the older age group. The essays will be judged by a panel including Lord Tyler, a Liberal Democrat Peer; and Bano Murtuja, a commissioner on the POWER Inquiry. The deadline is 18 August 2006.

So get writing ...

For further details: www.x-change.org.uk

Taking the campaign to the Labour Party

John Denham MP at Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform AGM, 4 July 2006:

"First-past-the-post is undermining the progressive consensus that New Labour created in the 1990s, and threatening the ability to deliver progressive politics in Britain. We want to revive our appeal to all those who have backed Labour in the past 10 years in the heartlands and Labour's new territories. But first-past-the-post forces political parties to focus on a narrow group of voters who hold the key to a small number of key marginals - perhaps 30,000 voters nationally - in the much-vaunted centre ground. Only a reformed voting system, one that forces political parties to work for every vote, will provide the political stimulus we need to rebuild our struggling coalition.

Of course, we can win again under first-past-the-post, as we have before. But there is likely to be a political cost; a cost to some of our radical aspirations. Time is running out for Labour to recognise the importance of voting reform to progressive politics in Britain."

Conference Season approaches

Make Votes Count will be having its usual prominent presence at the Party Conferences. Details of the main public events are below. As ever, we need help publicising the meetings locally/regionally and also leafletting delegates on the day. If you are able to assist with other activity, please email me - malcolm@makevotescount.org.uk or call 020 7928 2076.

At Labour, MVC is involved in two other events. We will be supporting LCER's Wednesday night reformers' networking and local government event (passholders only). Plus MVC is helping to coordinate a new venture at Conference: the Democracy Groups Reception - Tue 26 Sept at Bar38, Peter Street, Manchester.

MVC will also be holding a joint fringe with Electoral Reform Society at the TUC (12/13 September, Brighton) and will be supporting the ERS/Conservative Action for Electoral Reform fringe at the Conservatives (3 October, Bournemouth). Both events are open to the public and leafleteers are needed for the day before and day of the meetings. Again, contact the office for more info.

MVC at Labour Conference, Manchester

Date: Sunday 24 September, 8pm-10pm

Venue: Manchester Art Gallery, Mosley St.

Title: "Are we going to wake up one day and regret not changing the voting system?"

Speakers: Patricia Hewitt, Charles Clarke, John Denham, Michael Meacher, Stephen Twigg and Dr Adrian Blau.

All welcome. No pass needed: event is free and outside the secure zone. If you are local or coming to Conference: please promote the event widely. If you are a Labour member / activist, please forward on details to your local party and encourage delegates' attendance.

MVC at Lib Dem Conference, Brighton

Date: Sunday 17 September, 1-2pm.

Venue: Quality Hotel, West St, Brighton.

Title: "Raising the stakes for electoral reform"

Speakers: Chris Huhne MP and Julia Goldsworthy MP.

Refreshments provided. All welcome. No passes needed.

If you are a LD member/activist, please forward on details of this event to your local party and encourage attendance.