

## **LABOUR CAMPAIGN ACTIONS**

*from Make Votes Count in Labour and LCER, January 2007*

### **1) Take Action: Feed into Labour's National Policy Forum**

It is crucial that we get a wide debate on democratic and party renewal. Electoral reform needs to be discussed in this context. If it does not happen now, at this point in the Partnership in Power policy development process, we are in danger of losing out completely this side of the next general election. We don't need a vote yet, but we do need a "groundswell" showing concern about our voting system.

The Crime, Justice, Citizenship & Equalities policy commission report ([www.labour.org.uk/4047](http://www.labour.org.uk/4047)) gives us several openings: on next steps for parliamentary and constitutional reform, but also on concerns raised about the public's separation from the democratic process. Within the document the key section is **renewing our democracy** (p94-96), although it doesn't mention electoral reform or systems specifically. Below is the key information. Use it to:

#### **a) Make your own submission**

- Email your submission by mid-March to: [PiP3.crimejustice@new.labour.org.uk](mailto:PiP3.crimejustice@new.labour.org.uk)
- Or post to: Crime, Justice, Citizenship and Equalities policy commission, The Labour Party, 39 Victoria Street, London SW1H 0HA

#### **b) Organise a local policy forum for your CLP**

Ask your CLP to host a constituency/branch policy debate(s) on democratic reform and reconnecting people and politics, or organise one yourself. Invite local party members, but also community activists and others. Use the 'renewing our democracy' document as a basis for discussion and bring in electoral reform - through a presentation, briefing materials, an outside speaker or other 'triggers'. We can help provide you with briefing materials (such as the MVC Labour fringe 2006 pamphlet), suggest a speaker or even come ourselves to kick-start the debate. The aim at the end would be to produce a CLP or branch submission to the policy commission with the points articulated in your discussion. They may not all be pro PR!

You can also raise the issue at your regional campaign forum (see back page of LCER newsletter).

**NB** Please copy any submissions to us and also to Ann Black ([annblack50@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:annblack50@yahoo.co.uk)), who sits on the commission and can ensure they were received. See Ann's article in the LCER newsletter for further information about the work of the commission. Also see the relevant section on the Labour party's website: [www.labour.org.uk/index.php?id=makingpolicy](http://www.labour.org.uk/index.php?id=makingpolicy)

**How do we renew our democracy?** Supplementary questions and statements (*in italics*) include:

- *"Labour believes in modernising the constitution to make it fit for purpose in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain"*  
→ A system that broadly reflected the votes cast would better reflect the more diverse and pluralistic society we have become; rather than the two-party, class-based society we once were.
- *"A society that rightfully demands its representatives and institutions are more accountable"*  
→ Voting reform would reduce the number of safe seats and historic 'fiefdoms' of one-party controlled councils, and give the electorate a much higher likelihood of affecting the result.
- *"We have devolved power in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and our major cities."*  
→ Every political institution created in the UK since 1997 has adopted a different system than FPTP for their elections. So why not continue with this process for the Lords and the Commons?

- *“We need to examine ways of enabling parties to reach out to their own members & to voters.”*  
→ The focus on marginals has a negative effect on constituencies and wards not ‘in play’: demoralising local campaigning effort and diminishing party activity.
  - *“It is the least well-off in society who are most likely to opt out of democracy: where this happens we create conditions for more extreme parties to thrive.”*  
→ Concentrating on swing voters affects policy, messaging and political priorities. It shifts the centre rightwards, neglecting issues which Labour traditionally championed and leaves a vacuum which the BNP can exploit. Along with other measures, electoral reform would help tackle disengagement and reluctance to vote among sections of the electorate.
  - *“How can we best ensure trust in political parties and the democratic process?”*  
→ Moving away from FPTP would renew trust, particularly with those who voted Labour in 1997, when the party offered ‘to let the people decide’ their own voting system in a referendum.
  - *Is there anything we can learn from abroad?*  
→ Sweden is one among a number of countries where proportional representation has been shown to be compatible with stable government and electorally successful progressive politics.
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## 2) LABOUR’S RETREAT - help us gather evidence

Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform, along with Make Votes Count and the Electoral Reform Society, has been discussing **“Labour Retreat”** - the idea that, because of the voting system, not only is Labour focusing all its campaigning effort, and arguably its policies, on those floating voters in marginal constituencies, but that with successive elections, this means we are retreating from more and more areas of the country.

Party activity and determination can make a difference in some areas and in others lacklustre effort can result in losing seats which should have never been lost. But the tide is in the direction of concentrating more and more resources in fewer and fewer seats, to hold on to what is ours, and forget that we are a national party - that after the next general election Labour will be even more dependent on Scotland, Wales and northern England rather than consolidating our 1997 victory that brought in representation from southern and rural seats we hadn’t won since 1966, or 1946, if ever.

So we believe the First Past the Post system is harmful to Labour’s long-term interests in terms of party organisation, standing candidates in every seat, winning councils and councillors, and holding onto our Labour MPs. We need to reverse this vicious circle, but before we can get the party to realise this is important we need some local illustrations.

**Please can you write in and let us know how things are where you live - are the national and regional Labour Parties investing in the Labour vote in your area?**

- Are you encouraged to put out regular leaflets?
- Are you putting up candidates in every ward in council elections / by-election?
- Do you have a paid organiser? Even if one day a week?
- Have you selected your candidate (if you haven’t a Lab MP who is standing again)?
- When is your selection due to take place?
- Did you have visits from Cabinet ministers in the run up to 2005 general election?

**Tell us your story and let us know where you live, your postcode and the constituency.**

Thanks to all those who have already send us a report from their local patch. We circulated this evidence request by email at the end of 2006 and the initial response has encouraged us that we are really on to something here. So please contribute and help us build up a good picture of what is happening on the ground, across the country.

Email [lcerinfo@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:lcerinfo@yahoo.co.uk) or to [marysouthcott@hotmail.com](mailto:marysouthcott@hotmail.com).  
Alternatively send it to LCER, 6 Chancel Street, London SE1 0UU.