



# SUPPORTER NEWSLETTER

## SUMMER RECESS 2008 EDITION

With only month to go til the Conference season kicks off, the summer is racing by. Here's a round-up of recent electoral reform campaign news; some thoughts on the Governance of Britain announcements made just before Recess; and a look ahead to our programme of Conference fringes. As ever there are opportunities for you to attend and help make those events success. Stay tuned for details of a mini-campaign we'll be launching at the beginning of September in response to the weekend voting consultation. And before then check out our blog regularly for reports from 'our man in Denver': me. I'll be following the Democrat Convention live from the ['Big Tent'](#) - that's my idea of a perfect summer holiday!

It is always nice to be able to highlight some forward movement with the campaign. And this bulletin we have some tangible progress to report, with the news that the Public & Commercial Services union officially supports PR. PCS passed [policy](#) in favour of reform at their annual conference and will hopefully help pave the way for more trade unions to pick up the issue and revisit their previous non-committal or hostile positions.

### 1) MVC EVENT REPORTS:

#### Whose Votes Count? (Compass Conference)

Chuka Umunna, Yasmin Qureshi, Jennette Arnold, Emily Georghiou and Robin Blackburn speaking on Democracy and Inequalities in the 21st Century.

(i) [report & photos](#); (ii) [summary of main speeches](#) (pdf) (iii) [context piece](#)

#### 'Aussie Rules' (Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform)

Peter Hain MP, Kevin Maguire (Mirror) and Paul Smith (Australian Labor Party Abroad) speaking on "Playing by Aussie Rules - electoral reform without

splitting the Labour party?" (i) [report & photos](#) (ii) [summary of main speeches](#) (pdf) (iii) [context piece](#)

#### Tolpuddle Festival

Our annual trip down to Dorset to promote electoral reform at this big trade union-focused event. [report & photos](#)

#### Women and the Vote:

"1 in 5 is not enough" stunt outside Parliament to celebrate the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of women getting the right to vote at the same age as men, and a

reminder that more needs to be done to turn legal equality into real representation. (i) [report](#) (ii) [photos](#)

## 2) MVC FUTURE EVENTS:

a) MVC NW meeting 9 August, Manchester ([link](#))

b) Party Conference Programme Full programme is available [here](#)

Fringe at Greens - 7 Sept, London

Fringe at TUC - 8 Sept, Brighton

Fringe at LibDems - 14 Sept, Bournemouth

Fringe & reception at Labour - 21 Sept, Manchester

Leafleteers and volunteers wanted for the Saturday & Sunday of LibDem and Labour Conferences, the latter especially. [Email](#) us if you can help, even just for an hour or two.

## 3) MVC LONDON ELECTION BRIEFING:

Make Votes Count produced a comprehensive and unique analysis on the London Mayoral and Assembly election results, looking at how the voting systems performed and how people responded to them. The post-election report received positive feedback from a range of academics, journalists and political activists, and was circulated to London AMs and submitted to the Assembly's official election review. It has now been revised with additional data included. View / download a copy of the [report](#) (pdf). Or read the short [summary](#).

Londoners' Votes Count was a special election initiative set up by us to help with voter education efforts and tie in these elections with the wider electoral reform debate. Visit the dedicated [website](#) and read this [article](#) to find out more about what we did.

## 4) GOVERNANCE OF BRITAIN:

a) One year on

It has been just over a year since Gordon Brown launched the Governance of Britain initiative. And, as [The Guardian's](#) verdict makes clear, the promise of power to the people proves lacklustre. In Parliament, a Joint Committee set up to examine the draft Constitutional Renewal Bill came to the [conclusion](#) that it "failed to live up the expectations" and "the name itself is a misnomer". Those are Conservative peer Lord Norton's words. Lord Tyler, on

the must-read collaborative [Lords of the Blog](#) site, predicted that Browns "ambition to reinvigorate our democracy will never be realised by the ragbag of retreats embodied in his constitutional renewal bill".

Indeed. [Voting reform](#) is still missing. And, currently, discussion of anything directly to do with electoral reform is missing from the Ministry of Justice's official agenda. The [Ministerial Statement](#) and [Report](#) (pdf) make clear that as far as the MoJ is concerned, it was job done with the publication of the review of voting systems. End of story. No mention of any next steps, ongoing conversations on reform, or even what happened to the talk of AV which they admitted had started being discussed too.

In case you were wondering where we were on **Lords reform** .... a White Paper was published just before the Recess. Along with making it clear that the Government wasn't going to progress the issue further before the General Election, Jack Straw also said that [no decision](#) had been made on the system for electing members to the Upper House. So nothing has been officially ruled in or out from Labour's perspective. For the Tories, they are still wedded to First-Past-the-Post, even though some of their senior parliamentarians have previously backed STV.

Finally we have a few more details of the **Speakers' Conference**. Disappointingly, the focus of the [Speaker's Conference](#) has been very much narrowed. It has been asked to: *"consider, and make recommendations for rectifying, the disparity between the representation of women and ethnic minorities in the House of Commons and their representation in the UK population at large; and to consider such other matters as might, by agreement, be referred for consideration."* No longer is it automatically considering "a number of important issues against the backdrop of a decline in turnout" as Gordon Brown originally announced. So once again it seems the Government is running scared of front-on examining the electoral system. Of course, there is still scope for getting such a discussion, as voting systems are recognised as being an important factor within the wider [representation debate](#).

## b) Barriers to Voting

"Barriers to voting" seems to be the key phrase coming out from the Ministry of Justice these days. In the MoJ's [consultations](#), [public meetings](#) and [online forums](#) that is what they are keen to get to the bottom of, and (hopefully) put in place measures to overcome. Which is all good news for us, as some of the most significant barriers to voting are: feeling your vote doesn't count; feeling you are not part of an election campaign as the parties are targeting other people / other areas; not gaining representation that reflects the diversity (in all its forms) of the electorate - ie. all intimately connected with the need to

reform the voting system. That's the point we have to forcefully make over the coming months.

And our first big opportunity is already here, with the election day (ie. weekend) voting consultation that the MoJ has launched. Whatever one's thoughts on which day of the week is better for encouraging turnout, weekend voting is highly unlikely to challenge the fundamentals about why people don't vote and/or don't view voting positively. It is a [dead end](#) in that regard. And, as Ken Ritchie said in a [radio interview](#), "there was much more in [the Government's Review of Voting Systems] to suggest that there was a case for looking at the voting system than Michael Wills has a case for looking at weekend voting."

However, we can make a positive contribution to the consultation. The final question (question 9) asks: *"Are you aware of any barriers which prevent individuals from voting? What are the issues and how can they be overcome?"* That's where we can come in on electoral reform. There'll be more on our website in early September about how you can submit your response - and specifically to question 9. In the meantime, you can be ahead of the game and fill out the MoJ's [consultation questionnaire](#). You can also download the full [consultation document](#) (pdf).

## 5) BEST OF THE MVC BLOG

### a) Empowerment White Paper:

- Doughnuts for All ([link](#))
- Adding insult, and a shiny new iPod, to injury ([link](#))

### b) Glasgow East by-election:

- a product of the system, not an anomaly ([link](#))
- there are no votes in the poor ([link](#))
- it don't mean a thing if your seat's not a swing ([link](#))

### c) The Conservatives:

- Defending PR - a Conservative MEP speaks out ([link](#))
- The Great PR Clash on ConservativeHome ([link](#))
- Wheatcroft's words of wisdom ([link](#))

### d) US Elections:

- A Stateside View - APPG meeting on American elections ([link](#))
- Analysis of primary elections ([link](#))

- 50 States not 42 days ([link](#))
- David Lammy and the 50 State Strategy ([link](#))

Enjoy the remaining weeks of the summer holiday. And, as always, do keep an eye on our [blog](#) for all the latest campaign developments and comment.

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