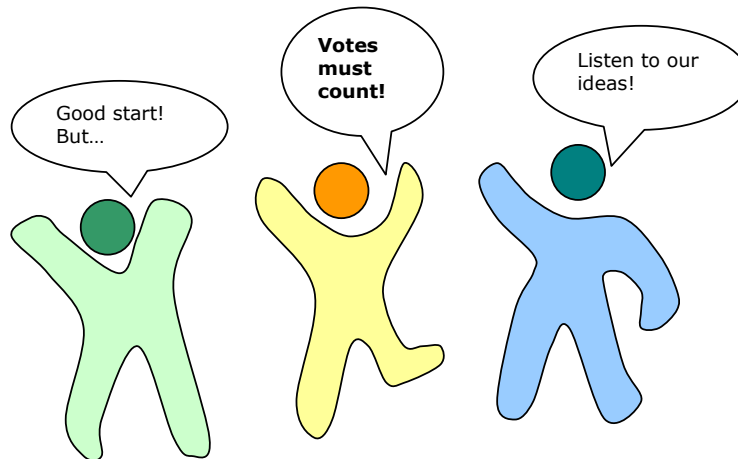


# Make Votes Count Briefing for Lib Dem Conference '07

*Make Votes Count is the campaign for a more representative voting system; based on the principles of fairness, greater voter choice, a modern democracy and better government.*

---

## Prospects for PR Responding to Brown's constitutional reforms



So - after the hand over of power, ministerial reshuffle, Cabinet discussions, Gordon's big speeches on constitutional reform, publication of a Green Paper, and more recent announcements - where are we now and how much further on are we to our goal of PR for the Commons? Headlines from the papers seem to tell the story quite effectively:

- "The missing link" – *Guardian editorial, 9 July*
- "Without voting reform, Brown's constitutional plans mean nothing" – *letters page, Independent, 5 July*

So it is not just us who have noticed the hole in Brown's plans and thinking. The Ministry of Justice Green Paper laudably stated that "creating a more participatory democracy requires a healthy representative democracy." But there is a big question mark over whether this can be done and whether Parliament can become more accountable, one of the two aims of the constitutional reform route map Gordon Brown announced, without a fairer voting system. We shall be pushing this point to Gordon and his team and need your help in doing so too.

In recent weeks we have had the leak of a draft of the electoral systems review to *The Times* towards the end of August and then Brown's big speech at the beginning of September outlining his further plans for constitutional reform. Both seem to point towards a continuation of the current unsatisfactory policy of voters being denied an open discussion – let alone an actual say – into what they want from politics and what type of electoral system and other reforms are most appropriate for that. So we must to ensure that such discussions are not closed down or kept from the agenda, but rather that there is some meaningful form of public dialogue and political debate.

If you would like to explore the arguments and join in the debate, please get in touch or log on to  
**[www.makemyvotecount.org.uk](http://www.makemyvotecount.org.uk)**

# Campaign News

## Review of electoral systems

*The Times* ran a negative story at the end of August based on a leak of the much delayed and as yet unpublished government's review of electoral systems. MVC was asked by *The Guardian* for a response to these stories and the suggestion that people were trying to bury the report once and for all. Our response – "we must have a debate on voting reform" – was published on the *Comment is Free* website. Among the key points we raised were:

"The leak should be a wake-up call to politicians who care about the health of our democracy and to the electorate as a whole to examine in whose interests the current situation really is, and who it is that deserves to be making these fundamental decisions. It cannot be right that party officials and MPs, the very people whose 'tried and tested' ways of working and job security would be most affected by changing the voting system, look like being the final arbiters."

"The report won't address that most pressing of questions: whether those voting systems that are unchanged - the First-Past the-Post elections for English and Welsh local government and for the House of Commons - are still fit for purpose, and, if not, how to reform them."

"Gordon Brown now needs to ensure that such discussions, in his party and out in the country, are not closed down but rather are integrated into the constitutional route map that he has set out. In one of his first speeches as prime minister, he called for a 'national debate on strengthening our democracy'. How he now handles the review's publication, and whether he does indeed open up its findings to some meaningful form of a public dialogue, will be a real test of that commitment."

Read the full article at:  
[www.makemyvotecount.org.uk/opus25839.html](http://www.makemyvotecount.org.uk/opus25839.html)

'Britain's Experience of Electoral Systems' – a major ERS report foreshadowing the review is available via [www.electoral-reform.org.uk](http://www.electoral-reform.org.uk)

## Speaker's Conference

Brown's recently announced a proposal for:

*"a Speaker's Conference to unite the parties in search of solutions to the disengagement of the people from the electoral process. The conference [will] consider, against the backdrop of a decline in turnout, a number of important issues, such as electoral registration, weekend voting, and the representation of women and ethnic minorities in the House of Commons."*

But, like with Brown's earlier proposals on constitutional reform, there is a conspicuous absence of any discussion of the voting system being included. As the Electoral Reform Society has said: "It would be absurd if the proposed Speaker's Conference was not asked to consider the outcome of the electoral systems review and ways in which better voting systems might contribute to a better form of politics – one in which elections are more interesting and their outcomes more representative."

## Preferential Voting

The Alternative Vote has been debated within Labour circles of late. AV is not proportional. However, there is certainly a need to welcome all such people campaigning for a change in the voting system, and seek to engage them and try to take them on a process towards proportionality. Hopefully - in the longer term, or in a hung parliament situation - our arguments will win out and the groundwork will have been done to take people on this journey to some form of PR.

## Lords Reform

The public needs to have faith in whatever system is chosen for elections to the second chamber. There is still time for the government to start seeking the views and active involvement of the public in deciding what the voting system should be. The challenge for electoral reformers is not just about the system finally chosen for the second chamber, but also its implications for electing MPs and further reform in general.

# Greg Dyke on 'new Prime Minister: new democracy?'

With thanks to Centre:Forum for hosting this event and for giving us permission to use extracts from Greg's speech. See [www.centreforum.org/assets/pubs/dyke-transcript.pdf](http://www.centreforum.org/assets/pubs/dyke-transcript.pdf) for the full transcript.

Greg Dyke outlined some of the key challenges facing British democracy:

*"First we have voting system which is both unfair and unrepresentative, which favours the bigger parties, prevents evolutionary change and particularly stops the emergence of new parties. As such it is a disincentive to voting. It is a system which increasingly leads to political parties fighting on very similar ideologies as they try to attract an increasingly small number of swing voters in a few marginal constituencies."*

*"We also have:*

- *an outdated party system ...*
- *a presidential system of government without the necessary checks and balances ...*
- *a deeply damaging system of patronage ...*
- *a whipping system which means MPs are told to put party interests above their beliefs ...*
- *ever increasing centralisation ...*
- *cradle to the grave politicians ..."*

*"As a result we, the public, are less involved in decisions affecting our lives at a time when we want more not less influence. Our system of representative democracy no longer satisfies that need, one vote every four or five years isn't enough."*

*"Finally we suffer because those able to reform our democracy, the politicians, have no real incentive to do so and there is no-one else who addresses the long term question of the health of our democracy."*

*"The evidence that our democracy is failing is overwhelming and yet those with the biggest interest in sustaining the current system – the Westminster village, the media and particularly the political parties – are the groups most in denial about what is really happening to our democracy."*

Later, he acknowledged Gordon Brown's attempts to introduce constitutional reforms, but suggested that these did not go far enough.

*"We desperately need transformation. In [the last] 50 years, when the world has changed beyond recognition, our political system, our political institutions and our political parties haven't changed at any where near the same pace. In short our society no longer fits a democratic model designed in the 18th century."*

Greg underlined the need for proportional representation and of a resulting coalition government, because in a changing society ...

*"it's only right that a whole range of differing views are reflected in government, rather than just the views of a shrinking minority in one particular party. PR will also encourage a greater range of political parties to emerge."*

## **Make Votes Count Editorial**

Our current electoral system accentuates the geographic and social divisions within the nation, and leaves many people without a proper choice over who to vote for, or a meaningful contest to care about.

Making votes count should be a first step on that process of re-engagement. And it also may help in re-building truly national political parties incentivised to campaign and nourish activity across a much broader swath of the country. Those outcomes are part of what MVC is campaigning for.

Join us in getting that message across – to the government, to parties, to the media, and to voters.

# Taking the campaign forward

## Shake up Politics



Politicians like telling us that they never hear anyone on the doorstep or in their mailbags talk about electoral reform. What they fail to realise is that people all the time are; just phrasing it in different ways or voicing many of the symptoms that First-Past-the-Post is responsible for. We need to make clear that “voting never changes anything”, “they are all the same”, “I feel ignored” and many other of the comments and concerns regularly raised are intimately connected with the reform debate.

The voting system affects the type of politics we have and the type of campaigning that takes place. As importantly, the society we live in and our expectations of the political process have moved on, but our institutions have not.

A more proportional voting system would shake up elections and make them more interesting. It would help:

- Make politicians more accountable
- Make political parties take you more seriously and compete to get your vote
- Have greater choice at the ballot box
- Make your vote really count at elections
- Modernise our democracy

Our challenge is to start getting these messages across; and to make politicians and the media see how relevant and integral our campaign is to the process of re-engagement and the constitutional reform programme now being put forward by Gordon Brown.

## Promoting the campaign more widely

- organise a speaker for a party meeting
- host a debate or education session on electoral reform with a local community group or at a community event
- distribute literature on voting reform
- sign up supporters on a campaign stall
- write letters to your local newspaper
- blog or podcast for reform
- recommend our website and blog, which is updated almost daily to highlight the dynamic nature of the campaign.

Make Votes Count can offer campaign advice and supply materials to help you engage and involve others. MVC may also be able to provide a speaker or suggest possible people to ask.

### **‘Talking with Tatchell’**

– *18DoughtyStreet* electoral reform special

MVC’s Chris Huhne and Mary Southcott were interviewed for 30mins by Peter Tatchell on the subject of electoral reform. The programme was broadcast on 14 September on internet television station [www.18doughtystreet.com](http://www.18doughtystreet.com)

And you can view or download the programme anytime via our website or the link below. Watch it and encourage others to do so too. Or use it as a starting point for discussion at a meeting.

<http://doughty.gdbtv.com/player.php?channel=205>

### **Make Votes Count**

*the campaign for a more representative voting system*

Supported by: the Christian Socialist Movement, Conservative Action for Electoral Reform, Electoral Reform Society, Fawcett Society, Green Party, Liberal Democrats, Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform, Plaid Cymru, Unlock Democracy and X-Change. MVC also has over ten thousand individual supporters.

**[www.makemyvotecount.org.uk](http://www.makemyvotecount.org.uk)**