

Monday 8<sup>th</sup> September, 2008, Brighton.

**JENNETTE ARNOLD AM:**

My name's Jennette Arnold and I am currently chair of the London Assembly. I got to that elevated position by a vote of my members at City Hall, and that was following my campaign victory in May when I was returned by my constituents to a third term of office on the London Assembly. I'm absolutely an unapologetic enthusiast for electoral reform. Before the GLA I was committed to it, and now that I have actually experienced it and had the debates on the doors I've seen what that means in terms of how you do politics. I just am so impatient for the opportunity for us to introduce a different mechanism by which we elect our representatives. It is about electing representatives that are going to be there representing the people who voted – a key to democracy.

We may well be speaking from the platform to all of you who are as enthusiastic, but it's good because even though you're committed, you just actually need to hear the messages time and time again so that we can go out and convince those who have the power to bring about that legislation. There are opportunities coming up and maybe, if my leader, your leader, our prime minister, is looking for one big idea, then that one big idea could be ventilated here. Gordon, go all the way. You know, give us total electoral reform, why don't you? Go all the way.

And let me just share – you've got a document, I hope [MVC's Londoners' Votes Count post-election briefing]. And it's a really good document which I would ask you to take away and see how Londoner's votes count, and it is the best story to date that we've got, apart from Scotland. There's a really good story to tell about the voting system used and the outcome, the preferential system for the mayoralty and the proportional system for the London-wide members. Almost half of Londoners who voted cast one of their preferences for the winning mayoral candidate, so that actually means that that candidate, for the first time in this country we had people who were getting over a million votes. Both candidates got over a million votes in that election that took place in May. And so we know, whether we like mayor Johnson or not – you know, I'm still grieving for my previous mayor, but there you

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have it – I have to respect his mandate because over half of Londoners voted for him. 86 per cent of Londoners, and this is really the one that I find so sexy, 86 per cent of Londoners who voted did so for a party that gained seats on the London Assembly, so that means that nearly nine in ten voters are now represented by at least one London Assembly member from the party they voted for. So it means that our mailbag is full, it means there's a buzz about City Hall, people are coming there knowing that every member can represent them because they voted for them. Their Labour member can represent them, their Tory member can.

And of course we will say that it's - one of the downsides is that we do have a BNP vote. But that is something that we have to recognise. We can't hide from the fact that there are people who will choose the British National Party as their party. But I think the fact that we see that and then when we say, 'well, that should give us the impetus to go out, because the more of us go out and cast our vote for a decent, sensible party then that means that their percentage, if you like, is then – the possibility of them reaching their five per cent threshold, which is what it currently is on the London Assembly becomes harder. So this system then makes it harder for those extreme parties to get their threshold, but it does require us then to go out there and ensure that every citizen use their vote.

I'm going to introduce our first speaker, Sam Tarry, who's representing Unlock Democracy. And he's also chair of GMB union's young Londoners' group.

**SAMUEL TARRY:**

Being a GMB activist in Barking, that's where I live, you'll see in a minute that what I say has a particular kind of resonance in this debate.

I think we need to bear in mind from the start that the Labour Party originally was actually born out of the trade union movement. And giving birth to that meant it was supposed to have been the political expression and representation of the trade union movement and working class people. But now after about ten years of Labour government to me it seems that often trade unions are like a kind of unwanted slightly sad relative that's wanted to be shoved to one side and perhaps often ignored. The government seems embarrassed if not totally often attacking some of the things that trade unions have campaigned and fought for. Trade unionists and working class people the length and breadth of the country have actually been more and more angry, and we've seen that where I live with the growth of the BNP. And that actually alongside millions of working people who are also angry at what's happened in terms of delivery of policies that actually directly affect them. A lot of this, I would argue, actually completely ties in to what is happening with our electoral system and the lack of representation that actually comes out of that. Over the last 18 months we've seen literally millions of trade unionists on strike, and this is something that hasn't happened for quite a long time on that scale, and it seems to me to say that there is actually a big problem with political representation of trades unionists being represented properly in parliament or working class people being represented in parliament.

People are angry. And a lot of this comes back to the fact that actually in the current system of election we're unable to hold to account our politicians. And this is a really crucial thing. If you go to a ballot box in an area that is a Labour stronghold, you know, a Labour council, potentially a Labour MP, that's not in a swing marginal constituency, then often if you're not voting for Labour what's actually the point of going to that ballot box and voting? There isn't actually that much point, beside the kind of duty that you should do that because that's the right thing to do and have your say. The problem is you're not really actually having your say at all, and that's the real problem that we're dealing with at the moment. I would strongly argue that because we have a system of government and a system of

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election that actually make it difficult for us normal rank and file members of trades unions and ordinary working people across the country challenged to hold to account through the ballot box their representatives. In fact, not just ordinary working people but almost anyone across the country in fact, at the last election more than 52 per cent of the votes, which is obviously the majority, didn't actually go towards electing an MP, which is a pretty shocking statistic.

And this sort of electoral paradigm has seen the triangulation policy, the idea that government rhetoric and government policy often attacks your own side, leaving the only place for the Conservatives to move further to the right, which for them has left them in opposition for over ten years. And that has been a tremendously successful political strategy to gain and retain power in Westminster, but in terms of trades unionists and in terms of working class people that has often been quite disastrous, because it's meant that we don't actually have a say and that all of the policies of government are more often than not focused on less than a hundred marginal constituencies across the country. And if you take the proportion of people who are actually swing voters within those constituencies, that's even more diminished than that. And this is in the face of a government with a huge, huge majority for the last three elections, that to be honest could have done anything it wanted in terms of having that power within the corridors of Westminster.

But this strategy of triangulation, for me, has been a key thing that ties into understanding why we need a new electoral system. And it's this system of election that allows this to happen. New Labour took the calculation, and it was, as I said, a successful one, they could continue to take many hundreds of Labour seats and many millions of Labour voters for granted across the country. And maybe a few people decided to go and dabble with the Liberals and some people started to vote for smaller and more extreme parties, but the majority of people who were Labour supporters (people who support Labour values and Labour ideas) just didn't vote at all. And what I mean by this is that after 1997, empirical analysis said there are about 14 million people who identified with the values of the Labour Party, and actually now that same empirical analysis is saying there still are 14 million people in Britain who identify with the values of the Labour Party and would like to support the Labour Party. But in 2005 the actual amount of people turning out to vote for Labour had gone down from around about 14 million to less than nine million people. Maybe around one and a half or two million went

straight to the Liberals, quite a few others, one or two million, didn't actually turn out to vote at all or voted for some of the smaller parties that have started to spring up and win the odd seat here and there. And this is a real question, that actually there are these people who still do identify with Labour but don't feel able to go out and actually vote Labour. And I again think that this all comes back to the electoral system.

I'll give you a few examples of why this is such an important thing and why I think this is going on. If you have a safe Labour seat – or particularly actually if you have a safe council, it's very solid Labour, and some of these places have been Labour for a very long time – I come from East London, half of East London has always been Labour for about 50 years, and the opposition there is relatively muted and quite small. But it's meant that these one party states, because that's essentially what they are, that the people there are not actually representing necessarily the interests of their constituents who vote them in, because most of the decisions they make, say, for example, around housing, it could be a decision whether they're going to invest in (fourth option?) council housing or whether they're going to go for the Arms Length Management option of council housing. It's not actually about who voted from the ballot box, it's about the backhand deals that are done behind closed doors in the council, and that is not representative democracy at all. But because there is no opposition there, because there is no way of holding those councillors or MPs, in some cases, to account, you really start to run into some difficulty.

I'm pretty much of the mind that we without this situation we wouldn't potentially be on the cusp of having our first BNP MP in Barking and Dagenham and the BNP taking control of the council. Potentially on the GLA stats they would win 21 of the 50 seats in Barking and Dagenham, and with the Tories resurgent, it could be quite a toss-up as to whether they actually get control of the council. The major problem there is in terms of council housing. Ten thousand new council houses are needed to be built. If we had a more proportional system of election where people had to go and fight for every single vote from there and to listen to all of those people in that constituency, to their concerns and not triangulate away from them and say 'no, those votes are going to be coming in by the shovel load anyway', then actually ten years since Labour first came to power, we probably actually would have had 10,000 new council houses built. We wouldn't actually even be having a discussion about

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the BNP at all. But instead it's actually taken them getting this close, dangerously close to power, that has only just started to turn the cogs of power and maybe we're actually going to build those council houses directly by the council for those people in Barking and Dagenham. And that's just one example. This is something that happens right across the country. I mean, even further into East London you've got smaller parties like Respect actually doing well quite a long time after the anger about the Iraq war has started to die down, something that's not talked about in the media as much as it once was, because again they're campaigning on those local issues and making a big voice because people feel that when they've gone and voted Labour they haven't been able to hold them to account because most of the deals, as I say, are not actually made necessarily between the voter, the contract that you have between saying, 'this is our manifesto, we're going to stand on this to represent you,' it's actually about well, I'm going to be influenced by these other inside factors, but I know you guys are going to still come and vote for me anyway.

One thing about the BNP which I'd like to take head-on, because I'm sure people will come up and ask questions about this: there's many people say that PR is actually an easier way for the BNP, or any extreme party for that matter, to win seats. And as Jennette said, 130,000 people voted for the BNP in the London elections. 130,000, that's a phenomenal amount of people turned out and actually put their mark next to the BNP's candidates in that election. But I would say that if you've got a system where you have competition, where you actually have to go and listen to those people, you can't take their vote for granted, as has happened under that system, it would force the Labour Party and force Labour candidates to actually have to go and represent those people on their terms and actually take on board their concerns and then go and start to deliver on some of those concerns. And I think that's a really key thing, for people wanting to build a progressive trade union movement and a progressive Labour government this is a key thing.

Electoral reform can open that door in so many ways to actually having the kind of government I believe we want, or at the very least actually having representatives, whether it's in the council chamber or whether it's in parliament, actually having to listen to their constituents because they know if they don't they're not going to get a majority of 10,000 because people will switch to another candidate standing against them. In many places like Barking and Dagenham it's only because for the

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first time we've had this opposition that people have had to be listened to, and it's a really, really dangerous and toxic thing. But a lot of it comes back to our system, that is completely, in my opinion, .... is a system that perpetuates a political elite and doesn't actually allow ordinary people, working class people, to actually have their say and to find themselves properly represented in parliament by people fighting for and campaigning on the issues that actually would really make a difference to them and to their lives.

With my experience in Barking and Dagenham, we've had the cold light of day shining in. Literally the curtains have been thrown back and we've seen just how damaging that one-party state and that political system that doesn't give choice, that doesn't give competition, that doesn't allow people or force people, politicians, to go fight for every vote, to go and listen and take on board those concerns, then actually do something about them. We've seen just how damaging that can be. And potentially with the BNP and the European Parliamentary elections, yes it is a proportional system there, but again I strongly believe that people are never going to vote for those particular kinds of candidate if in the first place their concerns had been met. And I think you have to go and ask yourself why is that so many trade unionists are so angry? Why is it that so many working class people, why is it that so many people in the country are so angry with the government at the moment? But a lot of that comes back to the fact they don't feel listened to, they don't feel that they can hold politicians to account. How many times are you out on the doorstep knocking on doors and they say, 'well it doesn't matter, why bother? Voting won't do anything. They're all the same. Nothing changes.' I'll tell you what, under a PR system, everything would change.

**AMY KENNEDY (Green Party Councillor in Brighton):**

Coming at it from a Green Party perspective, traditionally we are one of the smaller parties who clearly would stand to benefit under any reform of the electoral system. And we, as a party, are firmly behind the Make Votes Count campaign to try and push for this. Historically there have been instances, say for example, in the 1989 European elections, when the Green Party secured 18 per cent of the vote and yet didn't return a single candidate, so clearly we can see a case from our point of view for introducing a better system of representation.

I also think Sam's very right to look at the issue surrounding why people feel so disenfranchised and actually disenfranchised. It's very difficult to persuade people to the ballot box if they feel that their views aren't going to be taken into account and that their vote is in essence useless. And under the first past the post system, these are the sort of misconceptions that Greens have to try and fight very hard to counter. We've achieved electoral success under the first past the post system at local level, significantly in Brighton and Hove, where we have 12 members on the local authority. That's one less than Labour, who are the official opposition. And again in Norwich, where we are now the official opposition and the first Green group to be so in the country. But this has come down to very hard campaigning on our part really just to get people out to actually vote. We've also encountered a significant number of voters who say to us on the doorstep, 'well, I do want to vote Green, but it's pointless because I don't think you'll ever return any candidates.' Now we're proving at local level that that's not the case. However, at national level it's a different story. Clearly we have high ambitions, particularly in Brighton Pavilion, to return Caroline Lucas, who's currently our MEP, as the first Green MP at Westminster. But again we're fighting under a first past the post system, so it will be very difficult.

I was interested really to be asked here, because the debate and the conversation in this session are to look at how the political aims of trades unions can be furthered by electoral reform. I'd like to commend Mark and the PCS for the work that they've been doing as a trade union in terms of trying to engage with candidates at all levels and across all parties, from parish councillors right the way up to MPs. And I think it's absolutely essential that trade unions carry on having conversations with

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political parties who may not necessarily be the Labour Party, because in that way trade unions and their leaders and their members can go on to understand how it is possible to work with people who aren't necessarily affiliated to the Labour Party in terms of furthering some of the aims and the ambitions of the trade union movement, certainly in terms of social justice. I think also the benefit for trade unions, if they're seen to be trying to push for a fairer, more representative system of democracy, it does, to my mind, to an extent validate their organisations because in the process of campaigning obviously the trade union movement's profile will be increased and they'll be seen, in my opinion, to be doing something effective which will hopefully provide greater representation for their members and also the general populace, all of whom have a vote, and again, some of whom just don't feel like they're being heard.

And we can see within the trade union movement, and certainly within my party, that many of the internal ballots and the way the internal voting system is organised is indeed a single transferable vote system. So we can see from our own organisations that these reformed electoral systems do actually work, do actually go on to provide a greater representation and a greater opportunity for members to have their voices heard on an equal basis.

In terms of traditional government positions on electoral reform, I think we all understand the concept that while parties are in opposition they're obviously keen to change the system, and then as soon as they gain power suddenly it drops off the agenda. I personally have found it very difficult as a member of Brighton and Hove city council. The political makeup on the council is that we have 54 seats: 26 Conservative members, who are the minority administration, two LibDems, 13 Labour, 12 Greens and one independent. So it's a hung council with a minority Conservative administration, and up until May this year we were operating a proportional committee system which reflected the makeup of the council and often led to opposition members being able to overturn decisions that were made by the administration. Now, under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act, which was passed last year, we, as a unitary authority, were compelled to move from a proportional committee system to a cabinet system, which, while that may work well in local authorities such as Manchester, where there's a massively clear majority for one political party, I would suggest that in a local authority where it's a minority administration this clearly is not fair. Because I can tell you – I don't

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have the figures to hand – many more people voted for a party that wasn't the Conservative Party in this city to run the city, and their voices are not being heard. So because of this change in the law, we certainly have felt as local councillors that while we can still operate effectively at ward level, and of course we can still campaign, it's now very, very difficult for us to influence decisions which are taken by cabinet members. So I think, to sum up really, clearly as a Green I support moves towards electoral reform, and I also think that it's incumbent on the trades union movement to push for this, both with the Labour Party and also to work across other parties; because the more voices we can add to the cause, as Jennette said, hopefully Gordon Brown might see this as the one big idea where he can really make a difference. Thank you.

**MARK SERWOTKA (General Secretary of PCS union):**

I'm delighted to be here on behalf of PCS. I'm not speaking in a personal capacity. I'm here representing the agreed policy of our union's conference. And I'd like to just explain briefly how a civil service union, PCS, came to a position where we know support proportional representation.

Let me say first and foremost our union is not affiliated to the Labour Party. We've never given a penny to the Labour Party. So I'll put my credentials out there. We pride ourselves on saying we're here to represent our members. We're not politicians. We're there to try to advance the interests of our members and to support others in doing so. And as a non-affiliated union, I think we have to also put our cards on the table and say there probably isn't any other union in this country whose members have suffered the level of attacks that we have under the Labour government. I think we have to say that up front. 100,000 job cuts announced by Gordon Brown. We've had pay cuts for the last two years. We have members now given a zero per cent pay policy. We had our pensions attacked. And we've had more privatisation of the services that we administer under this government than the governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major combined. So I think it's fair to say that we have had it pretty tough.

Since 2004 we've had an ongoing campaign, it's been the biggest campaign we've ever had to wage, that has featured the whole raft of campaigning, sort of different versions of campaigning from lobbying MPs and politicians to taking strike action, to negotiating, we've tried it all. And out of all of that we've reached some pretty clear conclusions. The first one is that at the moment there is an extraordinary political consensus in this country on many of the big questions. If you look at issues such as reform of the welfare state, contracting out, opening up public service markets, suppressing public sector pay, there's a real consensus amongst many, if not all, of the mainstream political parties.

One of the things that we asked our members to do was a Make Your Vote Count campaign that was actually based on getting all of our members to write individually to their candidates, whether they were MPs, council candidates, European elections next year, whatever the election was we set up local campaigns designed to put pressure on local candidates to ask them where they stood in terms of the

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questions of concern to us. We then published the answers of the candidates to our members in all the relevant constituencies and then we said make your vote count. Now in essence what this was based on was saying there should be no tribal loyalty to any political party, what our members should do is ask where the candidates stand on the questions that they are concerned about and cast their vote accordingly. And that's been quite a radical campaign. In fact, I was accused on the general council of seeking to destabilise the Labour government. And I have to say that my answer was, how does it destabilise the government to ask somebody a question and publish the answers. Maybe what's destabilising the government is the awful answers the Labour candidates were out to give, and maybe people should ask themselves some questions about that. So I think my point here is that our approach is based on no loyalty to one party, it's that MPs or councillors or European candidates should earn our members' votes by being prepared to stand up and be counted on the question of Post Office closures, privatisation, pensions, the welfare state.

So we ran this campaign, and then some strange things started happening. We found that when we were writing to the local candidates we also wrote to the leaders, and all the leaders sent us answers that were virtually identical. I mean, they wrote them in different styles, but when you analysed it they were saying the same thing. What many of the local candidates were saying, of course, was very different. 73 per cent, for example, of Labour candidates in one election agreed with PCS policy and not the policy of Gordon Brown or Tony Blair. And some strange things started coming out of this. You ask candidates locally questions, they give you a certain answer, it didn't necessarily fit with what the leaders were saying, but our members reached the same conclusion each and every time: they would write to me and say well, who should we vote for? Who in your opinion should we vote for? Because many of them found that they were getting stuck in this log jam that the main parties seemed to be saying something similar.

That led us to the conclusion at our conference this year, therefore, that we need to do something to try and shake up the political system. We need to now add our weight as a major union in this country to say if politics stays like this, the reality is a) we think we will increasingly be going backwards and b) the differences on many big questions will become increasingly on the margins. In other words, leaving large swathes of our members to not have the opportunity to cast a vote for somebody they believe

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agrees with them on some pretty critical questions. So we haven't concluded we should support one party or another. We certainly haven't concluded we should tell our members not to engage in political campaigning and not vote. We have decided to try and add our weight to try and change the system.

And in the words of what we put to our conference, what we agreed was politicians will be more responsive to our campaigning where all votes can affect the outcome of elections, not just those in marginal constituencies or those of particular types of voters, as is the case under first past the post electoral system. Furthermore, fairer electoral systems open up a space for trade unionists and others to stand up for the interests of their members and public service users. Now, our conference voted for that overwhelmingly. It didn't commit us to which system of PR. We haven't got a view of which is the perfect – our view is we need to reform the electoral system. We're now debating the merits of the different systems. But it is to try and change what we think is an increasing consensus on many of the big questions.

And I want to promenade some of the facts that we think support this. First of all, I have to say that I'm proud that our union has reached a conclusion from its own campaigning and trying to reach out for answers as to what can be done. Because it'd be pretty demoralising if at the end of the day we say nothing can be done so at the end of the day Gordon Brown, well, obviously better than David Cameron, no matter how bad he is, therefore vote for Gordon Brown. We want to offer somebody a bit more than that. We don't have a poverty of ambition, we are ambitious to try and give people the opportunity to really be able to make a difference. And therefore we don't look at this as some dry technical subject about PR, first past the post and all the different systems, we see it as a very, very real living issue.

One of the things that kept coming up in the examples that we looked at is the war in Iraq. I spoke at the demonstration in Hyde Park where two million people, the biggest demonstration that this country opposed the war. All the opinion polls were telling us that people were opposed to the war, and yet when it came to the vote in parliament what we found is that was absolutely not reflected in terms of how people voted. In our view, it is the first past the post system that contributed to the fact that parliament utterly failed to represent what we believe was a majority view in the country. That to us

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takes it as an issue to the very heart of democracy. It is about whether people are excluded from the political process and actually reach a conclusion there's nothing can be done because these MPs will never, ever agree with us. So far from being a dry subject, we think it takes us to the heart of what people are worried about.

At the moment, for our members and many other people represented at this congress, the real living issue that they worry about, for example, is reform of the welfare state. We will debate tomorrow a resolution that the Labour government incredibly is seeking to introduce workfare, stigmatising those who are the most vulnerable people in this country, offering punitive measures, making people clean graffiti off walls to get benefit, and what do we find? Labour introduces it, who supports it most vociferously? The Tories and UKIP. And therefore there is a real consensus on the question of welfare reform, a very real issue. It's the same on privatisation, same on public services. And therefore we have to say to ourselves, is it a fact that we get to that level of consensus because under the current system votes in less than 100 out of 650 constituencies are actually bothered to make a difference? Is it the case that most people know that wherever they are when they cast their vote (mobile buzz) effect the outcome of a general election? We conclude that it is.

And in summing up, we don't just say that, because we've got our fingers crossed and hope that a form of PR will transform the political system, we actually look at what's actually happening out there. You cannot ignore that fact that in the UK itself politics in Scotland and Wales is undeniably more progressive than the politics we get from the Westminster government. Not just because of PR. But is it a coincidence that whether it's an SNP minority administration in Scotland or a Labour-Plaid Cymru administration in Wales, that we see the abolition of prescription charges, we're seeing no more private prisons being built in Scotland, no nuclear weapons, people are prepared to reject the marketisation of the NHS? These are parties, they're also in Westminster, yet they seem to be more progressive in Scotland and Wales. We believe it is the system under which they voted for that actually makes the difference. And finally, in summing up, let me say that whilst I've expressed much of my contribution through the existing parties, we actually do believe, and I myself have spoken at the Greens conference and I have spoken at smaller political parties who we believe also should have a role and something to offer in this country. And I think that it is right that you look at the second

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elections, for example, to the Scottish parliament and something pretty extraordinary happened. You saw the election of six Scottish Socialist Party MSPs and five Greens, meaning that ten per cent of the parliament was made up of candidates from parties who were seen as more radical and to the left of the party that was seen as the left party, Labour. So this is living proof that under a different electoral system different views can have support in the ballot box that can actually shift the political debate.

So for PCS, we take the view that whether you support a mainstream party, whether you support a smaller party, that ultimately it is down to us to try to shake up our political system, because if we don't, our view is, we will undeniably end up with the Tories probably in 2010, not because large swathes of people in this country suddenly think the Tories are better than Labour, but because actually large swathes of people will not vote. They will opt to stay at home because they don't think anybody out there is actually worth voting for. We need to re-energise those people, we need to connect with them, and ultimately we need to get the point across that we need a different politics in this country and we need trade unions to be able to try and play their part and make sure that the political system can ensure that everybody's votes count and the issues that we care about can actually be high up the agenda, not at the bottom of the agenda. I would venture under proportional representation the Labour government would not make the cynical calculation that it currently makes, which is that people will vote for Labour because they've got nowhere else to go. My view is you would not see millions of people taken for granted if those people's votes were actually able to count.

So we fully support the campaign for proportional representation and we hope that we can work with people in this room to say, not necessarily what's the perfect system, but let's get a campaign going that says to trade unionists, to working class people up and down the country, a change in the electoral system is not a dry technical point, it's about whether we have a real politics that includes everybody and could actually make us see some radical changes.

**PANEL RESPONSE TO AUDIENCE QUESTIONS:**

*Steve Cooper (Unison): I totally agree with everything that's been said today. I think though there's a lot of work to do to actually put out to the English public that actually proportional representation can be a strong voting system, because they're still of the opinion that proportional representation leads to weaker government. The question to Mark really is what are you doing in union circles? Do you have these conversations with my General Secretary, Dave Prentice? And if so, is there a hint of a light at the end of the tunnel on how we could actually bring this into mainstream trade union talks?*

*Plus other questions on, elected mayors, PCS' make your vote count campaign, and the difficulties of casting an effective vote for small parties.*

**Mark Serwotka:**

How are we perceived by other General Secretaries? I'll be honest, there are, I would say a number, if not most General Secretaries at the moment, represent I think a viewpoint that says at the end of the day, in 2010 it would be Labour or the Tories, and therefore to varying degrees of differences, therefore you don't want the Tories in so you have to just try to press Labour to move a bit to take up some of our issues. You'll have gathered I do not want a Tory government. I actually find it very patronising when people say that I do. But I do take the view that the longer people refuse to rock the boat, the more it invites people to move more and more to the right. Because actually if you take us for granted all the time then actually they can go this way now and they've always got this pocket here so they increasingly just look to focus groups, and our view has been we have to reject that. The way I sum it up in meetings is I have two kids, 13 and 11, and when they get to voting age the idea that the only choice is the existing choice now actually is quite depressing. I really aspire for them to have a real choice, so they think there are differences and it's not just a big consensus and they can absolutely get involved. So at the moment it's probably not the most fertile period I have to say, for me to expect big support for what I'm arguing because I think people will batten down the hatches in the run for 2010 election.

## TRADE UNIONISTS AND THE CASE FOR ELECTORAL REFORM

At the debate at our conference one person got up and said, 'What's Making Your Vote Count ever done for me?' And a sea of hands went up and we got young delegates saying, they got inter union activity. By this idea they can be politically campaigning in their constituency, running around saying, what do you think about the closure of the tax office? And it's brought in a whole new range of activists who love it, and they love the fact that we're independent from it and we don't appear to be seen to have a vested interest of saying 'these people always have the best answer'. So I think people are looking at what we're doing and increasingly they can't ignore it.

But from PCS's perspective we are new to this and therefore that's why I made it clear we haven't yet decided which system. But increasingly I believe we will want to push outwards to actually say to people, unless we grasp this and offer people something better, actually I think the future does look really bleak. Not only a rightwards drift of a consensus, but increasingly people looking to a dreadful alternative like the BNP. So we've got to offer them something better. And I hope that people don't look to us as trouble makers rocking the boat and not being the traditional Labour supporters. Politics is changing and we are able to stand up in this Conference for working men and women the length and breadth of the UK and we believe what we're doing is one of the most effective ways of doing it.

In the Glasgow East by-election, we went up and we had a Make Your Vote Count intervention into Glasgow East. And every single candidate came to our Make Your Vote Count hustings meeting. You had a real debate with all of these candidates. The outcome was the SNP won the election, but the majority was lower than the amount of PCS members in our constituency. And whilst I'm not saying it was the PCS what won it or lost it, what I am saying is, if this was an academic process you would not have had nine parties represented. And I think one of the beauties of that was it actually treated the small parties the same as the bigger parties because they had the same chance to answer the questions and we published their answers as well. So this is not a process that says you've got to be big to be relevant. It's a process of saying you stand, we'll ask you and we publish your answers. And we intend to do that in the General Election, the European Election and next year's County Council Elections. And my view is nobody's got anything to fear unless they're peddling appalling answers to their constituencies who look for something better, because in that case there's no place to hide. And I think that's another thing about being accountable.

**SAMUEL TARRY**

Someone was talking about an English parliament. Just to come back on that from a democracy perspective. I think I'd say to you yes, we're definitely in favour of devolution, but why would you devolve from 60 million to 40 million? There's not really much point to that. Maybe having actual regional assemblies in some basis would be better, but I think at the end of the day you'd have that effect if you actually reformed the electoral system, because why would you need to worry about central government who's going to represent you, when you actually knew your local MP much more closely represented your views? I think that's the key thing to take away really: how this process can actually change us, having a system of election that gives us a government that represents us. That for me is a key tenet of democracy and what democracy's all about.

**AMY KENNEDY**

I think it is very difficult for smaller parties and independent members at local level to rely on the vote, but then I would argue that no politician should rely on a vote without going out there and working for it, and if you have the policies in your manifesto or your leaflets which are good policies which people like and you have the political will to see those policies through to the next level, then I would argue that regardless of the might of the big parties and the unfairness of our current system, it is still possible for smaller parties to make progress.

**JENNETTE ARNOLD**

We have to be careful that we don't actually add energy to this myth that small parties don't matter. Small parties and independents do matter and certainly from the London experience if you look at the second term and the consensus that was brought about there, I would argue that brought in better policy development. As there were three Green members there with an absolute focus on the environment agenda, it meant certainly for me I had to be there staying in front of them, rather than behind them, to actually insure that everybody was working together on how the priorities were going to be decided by the Mayor. And that meant including in those environmental priorities.

Ends.