

## **EXPANDING THE ELECTORAL MAP**

### **FOUR STRATEGIES FOR REBUILDING PARTIES AND EMPOWERING VOTERS**

**STEPHEN TWIGG (MVC Management Committee, and PPC for Liverpool West Derby):**

I chaired the Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform during the first term of this Labour government, and we saw in that period some very remarkable constitutional changes in a number of areas where electoral reform was very much at the heart of change. Notably in the creation of the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly in Wales and the Greater London Authority. And I think tonight is an opportunity to reflect on some of those changes, not just here but in other parts of the world, so that we can see where we take the debate next. A whole variety of different perspectives that we're going to hear from. And the first is from Australia, from Paul Smith, who's going to talk to us about the Australian system, the alternative vote that is used there for their lower house, STV for the upper house, and compulsory voting. Paul is President of the Australian Labor Party Abroad, and is councillor in the London Borough of Islington, in Holloway ward, and deputy leader of the Labour group.

**PAUL SMITH (Deputy Leader of the Labour Group on Islington Council, and President of Australian Labor Party Abroad):**

Thank you very much Make Votes Count for offering this opportunity to speak to you all this evening. Australia, I'm sure you all know, is a leader in many things, but in fact we're in fact probably the originator of almost every progressive democratic reform in the world. You'll obviously be aware that, for example, Australia was the first place to introduce the ballot paper which was actually organised by an elected official rather than one supplied by the local Member of Parliament, which is what Britain persisted with for many years. Australia was also the place to introduce the secret ballot, the ballot box was actually invented in Australia, as was full-time elected officials running elections properly. Something it'd be good if the United States caught up with. We also of course have been the originators of women's voting first. Australia has a great record on democratic reform. And the reason for that is quite simple: the British can take some credit, you made a mistake. Essentially what happened was that the great Reform Act of 1832, the property franchise was passed on to Australia, and I think it was something like ten pounds. Which in

England was what it cost to buy a house. We had a gold rush in Australia which put up inflation one thousand per cent, and that's what it cost to buy a shovel. That meant many citizens got the vote straight off that were male, and that meant that Australia became a democratic force and became immediately strong in the electoral system, and that's why we had a Labour Party first and that's why we have the world's oldest and most successful Labour Party.

Putting that aside, what I'd like to talk about is about the Australian approach to electoral reform. The Australian approach to electoral reform is 'do what you need to do to ensure your side wins'. That is the approach that's governed the country for the last 150 years, both sides of politics do it, and it's time the British Labour Party took up this approach. Now, the Australian Labour Party has two fundamental principles about what it needs to do to win. Maximise participation, make it simple so your supporters who are less well educated, are less likely to muck up the ballot paper. They're the two things that are most important. And I'm going to talk to you about the history of what's actually happened in Australia, some of the practises that kind of strangulate the system.

Our approach is governed not by the minutiae of democratic reform. All the world's most interesting systems of voting have actually originated out of extremely pragmatic circumstances. But what we approach things is: what can we do to change the rules to suit ourselves rather than our opponents? Maximise participation, ensure that every vote counts. Which are actually the principles that all of you would uphold.

In our last election we had about 95 per cent turnout of the whole population. You have 61 per cent. And I think that's your registration rate is extremely poor. But in Australia we make every vote count because we have compulsory voting. And I'm going to say that's the thing that you should adopt and adopt immediately. We have preferential voting – or alternative vote – which is something which has advantages and disadvantages, and we also have STV for an elected upper house. I'm going to talk about the history of those and why they came into being.

Preferential is the Australian term for alternative vote. It was introduced in Australia in 1918. It was introduced by the Conservatives, was introduced it to defeat Labour. The Australian Labour Party was the world's most successful Labour Party at that time. It had already won a national election in 1910. We'd had successive Labour prime ministers including Edward Fisher, who's actually buried

in London, because he subsequently died over here. But we split in 1917 over the war, but we were back together again in 1918, but the Conservative Party was split. We won a Conservative seat when their votes split three ways and we had 40 per cent and we won. So they changed the vote because historically the Conservative parties in Australia had always been split into at least two parties. Those who know the Australian voting system know that there's a National Party and a Liberal Party, the Liberal Party is conservative and the National Party is actually a sectional party and not a national one at all. Makes perfect sense if you're a conservative.

But the point is preferential voting was introduced to ensure the conservatives, the conservative parties, I should say, because they had five other parties, minor parties that would feed them votes. Now we have the Greens to feed us votes and it's a bonus, but it's only a recent change in electoral geography that has helped us. So what I would say is, if you're looking at alternative vote you actually have to first ask is it clear that it's going to preference you or the Conservative Party? I wouldn't be very sure. A decade ago I'd have probably said you. After this week's conference I wouldn't be very sure about that. Electoral reform's for hard heads and I would actually say if you're pushing people participating, I don't think a system change to alternative vote is going to carry much weight. I personally have nothing against it, I'd worked with it all my life, but if you're going to have a system of alternative vote you've got to ensure this: it must be the system that when people actually fill out the paper all the rules around it decide, say that whatever way people can fill out their ballot paper. Once you make any minor change to the system it makes a difference to our vote. People need to know how to fill out the ballot paper correctly. So if you go to AV it's got to be simple.

What I would say in relation to STV, we have an upper house, it's an elected upper house – go for that. Ensures that even if you have an area that you live in that's Conservative, you can still elect Labour members of parliament and they can come to your area, you can invite the Labour senator and they can actually give voice to those people and build the party in areas that in fact you may not have been successful in getting to 50 per cent this time. It's a good thing.

Labour Party always introduces the rules, make it simple. When the Tories brought it in they actually made you fill in a ballot paper, it's this long and you had to number all the squares. We brought in above the line voting, which means you put an X next to the party of your choice and the registered

preference vote, because it's takes the preferential system, you need to get 14.25 per cent of the vote to get a quota, because that's obviously roughly 70 to 100. Anything you do with STV must be keep it simple, stupid, otherwise you're disenfranchising Labour people. And that's the most important thing: anything you do you must measure what's going to be the disenfranchisement rate versus the rate of people who actually participate. That's the Labour approach.

Compulsory voting is fantastic. It was introduced in Queensland, Australia 1915 and federal in 1924, both occasions by conservatives. I'll tell you why. The conservatives brought it in because they perceived the Labour electoral machine was better. Was better because we're a membership based system, we had trade union affiliates who had long lists of members, so if you have long lists of supporters anyone who knows anything about canvassing knows if it's about getting the vote, if you've got a good list, you go to your list, you get them to the polling station and you win. The conservatives said, 'we can't beat this. We may have lots of money but we're having more and more trouble with this because we don't have a standing machine.' So they brought in compulsory voting in the belief that that would help them. They made an error, because whilst there were some short term advantages, what it basically did is permanently enfranchise the underclass in Australian society. There's one thing you can be sure of in an election in Australia, almost everybody's voted. And that changes politics.

In Australia we do not have this obsession that I think parts of the government need to get over, about the centre, this mythical idea of the centre. Because in Australia the centre that votes is the 50 per cent you need to get out and everybody's voting. And that means working class people and people on lesser incomes, who are the vast great majority of the population, vote in much greater numbers in Australia than they do in the UK. Therefore you must pay attention to them. The story of Australian politics in the last 15-10 years, and certainly the story in the last election was the winner of the election was the one that got the most working class votes. I'm using the word class in a really broad sense. I'm using it to describe people who are affluent. You could be an affluent truck driver in outer regional Sydney that's got a mortgage and two trucks earning quite an amount of money. Those people can vote conservative for social reasons, or they can vote Labour for economic reasons. Those people in the last election voted Labour because of the changes the government have made to workplace laws which meant, using my mythical truck driver, I used to get overtime to pay my mortgage on the truck, but you're making my boss being able to take away my pay so I'm not

voting for you. The victory in the Australian elections was actually about economic issues, and the point was that Labour lost touch with some of its economic base in Australia in the second half of the 1990s and we lost power because of it. Our lesson was we had to reconnect with those people, and the point was in Britain they just go away and don't vote, in Australia they vote. And that's a really good thing, and the most important aspect is the pressure it puts on elected representatives.

In Australia they hooked up ... mobile polling stations, because very pragmatically, two of the most marginal seats are also the two largest seats in the world, Kalgoorlie and Northern Territory. Each of those would cover France and Germany, Britain and Italy thrown in together and have space left over. The aboriginal population vote Labour, if they turn up. The idea of a fixed polling station in a place that's that big and there's sparse population doesn't work, so they actually travel round for two weeks before the election and find them. And necessarily chase them. And those booths come out at 90 per cent Labour.

Pre-polling is open for two weeks before the election. You can go anywhere in the country and vote in your election and your vote can be counted. You can postal vote for two weeks before the election. You can absent vote. That means if you're in Britain, imagine if you could vote in Britain, you can go to any polling station and vote in your constituency anywhere on the day. It's a great system. One of my other favourites is that in Australia prisoners can vote.

My message to the British government is actually you've got to have the courage to do things - don't worry about what other people say, you've got to work out what's going to maximise the votes of the people who will support you, which are in fact the majority of people. Labour is for the majority of people. So I would say certainly go for compulsory voting, certainly go for anything that maximises people's participation, maximum democracy, maximum participation, and make the system simple, and that will ensure a Labour victory and the best democracy we can get.

**STEPHEN PURCELL (Leader of Glasgow City Council):**

I think it really was a British legacy that informed the success of the Australian Labor Party and indeed, allowed you to enhance democracy with your ballot papers and ballot boxes. In Scotland we here have a UK legacy as well. Things tend to be tested in Scotland in the United Kingdom before anywhere else in the country. And I'm always quick to point out that bad things get tested in Scotland under Tory governments, like the poll tax, and good things get tested in Scotland first under Labour governments. And I actually think electoral reform and constitutional reform is one of these things that are being tested in Scotland, and I have become convinced it has been a good thing.

One of the last times that Stephen Twigg and I were on a panel together was ten years ago when he was arguing for electoral reform and I argued against it. However, I have changed my mind as a direct experience in being a Labour Party member, a councillor and Scotland having the Scottish Parliament elected by proportional representation, and now local government elected by proportional representation. I think you actually get better government. You get better government in terms of national direction and better government in the quality of representatives which you get. I want to argue in a moment why I think that's the case.

And Paul is absolutely right, when you have electoral reform, make it simple. And I want to say a wee bit about where I think we're got that right in Scotland and also the lessons of where we've got it wrong. And when it comes to the debate about electoral reform, it is not fearing that people won't understand a new form of voting. We have proven with single transferable votes in Scotland that if you have the right organisation, the right message, voters, no matter what district they were voting in Glasgow, were able to work out how to put more than a one, a two and a three on a ballot paper. And the spoiled papers in Glasgow were only about two per cent, and I think partly that was the design of a very simple ballot paper, but it's also because we got our organisation right. We were able to communicate direct with the Labour voters and explain to them in very easy language what we were asking them to do in terms of ranking the Labour candidates on that ballot paper. And last year in Glasgow, where there was a swing of five per cent against Labour in the Scottish parliament election, in fact we had a swing to Labour in the council election, and I think that's something to do with what we're doing in terms of our city council and some of our success story, but also about

what we were doing locally. So when we were having that debate a decade ago about electoral reform, I think we were very fearful about it because we thought it was about giving power away. Perhaps in the current climate we are worrying that power is slipping away from Labour, and we'll have a debate for the wrong reasons. I think we have to be very careful about that.

Next, why would I argue that you get better government? Well, let's start at the grass roots. One thing we were clear about in Glasgow as a Labour group when the Scottish parliament voted to bring in proportional representation is that we were going to have to sharpen up our act as a group of councillors. But we were clear as a leadership that only about a third of our group were putting a good shift in locally, as good effective local councillors, doing their job, making sure their casework was attended to, but more importantly being in touch with voters. Now, whether that was by written communication like regular newsletters or street surgeries or questionnaires, all of the things that we know in our key seats, in the marginal seats, that we defend as a party, good local representatives whether parliamentarians or councillors do. So we had to bring an element of discipline to our group, get our selections carried out as early as possible and really have a proper monitoring system of what our councillors and candidates were doing to build up a personal relation with the voters of their area.. We have a high expectation of our group members in terms of what they're doing and in terms of contacting voters, of constant survey forms, of chasing up their casework, street surgeries, all of the things that get a real personal connection in their neighbourhood. We give them more of that to do, as we all know the voters will tell you what they want done in their area and a good councillor gets that attended to.

The other thing that has, I think, strengthened the government in terms of STV is the fact that we have multi-member wards and there is competition now in those wards. If there is a bad councillor the voters or the residents' association, the community councils, will turn to another councillor, and that puts pressure on people because it means if you have a poor Labour council, which often we have had as a party up and down the country because they had no competition, and some wards in Glasgow when I got elected in 1995, a dozen wards, the Labour councillor got elected with in excess of 80 per cent of the vote in their ward and it made people very complacent that they would continue to get re-elected. So having that competition now where of course, you know, voters can write to the Labour candidates and offer their preference, gives us a fairer system.

And as a council, because we now have a big opposition – instead of three opposition councillors as there were when I first got elected in 1995, we have in excess of 30. So we have to actually debate what we're doing. We have to make a case for what we're doing and we have to be clear as we look forward to the next elections that we're in touch with the majority of voters, the coalition of voters that we need to get elected, something it took Labour a long time to learn before 1997 came along, when we understood that building a coalition is what got us into power to effect a social change that we believe in. And we live in a world where consumer politics is much more prevalent than it ever was before and I think that electoral reform sharpens up the way in which we have to do things and the way we react to that consumer-led political demand that there is.

So I overall have experienced, yes, we lost a lot of councillors, but actually the way the polls were going and the way the poll went on the day last year, 2007, under first past the post, because people were being forced to make – that wanted to vote against Labour, they wanted to actually get us out of power, they'd have been forced into the old two party system, which essentially still happened in some respects, and we would have lost a lot of councillors, as has been the case down here in England and Wales over the last two or three years. So we can't simply blame in Scotland that position on electoral reform. It hasn't been the disaster people predicted in terms of the number of councils ... We led 15 councils before PR was introduced and we now lead 13. And ironically electoral reform in Scotland stopped us having a wipe out of Labour led councils. Yes, there's more coalitions, yes there's more minority administrations, but it avoided the wipe out as you've been seeing in parts of England and Wales over the last few elections.

The last thing I would say is an important lesson, we're still trying to come to grips with how we deal with this, in terms of preferential voting we have to find a way in Scotland as a Labour Party to decide how we can target these second preference votes from those smaller parties to come to Labour. Essentially what happens just now is that we get the bulk of second preference votes from Liberal Democrats, in fact we've just had a council by-election in Eastern Glasgow because of the result of another by-election in Eastern Glasgow, .. it's still the case as it was last year in the full council elections, we get the bulk of Liberal Democrat second preferences and the second preferences of other parties, except the Tories, who I'll speak about, they're split evenly amongst Labour and SNP and other parties. And actually ironically the Tory vote in parts of the country voted SNP second. Because the have, you know, there's an utter reluctance to vote Labour. But you know,

the system empowers people to make choice of good local representatives, to feel that their vote does count. One of the reasons I'm quite clear about this, from tapping doors in Eastern Glasgow during the parliamentary by-election in Glasgow East, that the turnout was higher than the turnout in that area for the Scottish parliament is because there was a percentage of people who believed their vote was going to count this time. Because the vote was close it benefited us because there was more of a Labour vote turned out, but also benefited the opposition because people felt their vote was going to count. And that must be good for those of us that believe in empowering our citizens and voters and enhancing democracy.

Interestingly, although I don't know about the Conservative vote in the Scottish parliament election, the executive vote in Scotland is the vote that uses proportional representation to the best effect. In the west of Scotland, where the Tory vote is a very Unionist vote, last year they voted in not insignificant numbers tactically for Labour in the constituency vote of the PR system in the Scottish parliament and voted Conservative in the regional top up list where they knew their party had no chance of winning but because of the Unionist vote in the west of Scotland that was a tactic they employed. The Tory vote in much of rural Scotland, particularly the northeast, which is very interchangeable with the SNP and is a very anti-Labour vote, did the opposite. They were voting SNP where they thought it was tactically right to vote and voting Tory elsewhere.

So overall, the message I think from Scotland is that electoral reform has not been a disaster, it's empowered citizens, it's taken power out of politicians and more power into the hands of voters, which should be a good thing. And it's made the Labour Party in Scotland, particularly in a city like mine, that really has been – as you'll know from the Glasgow East by-election, has been decades of Labour representation in heavy, heavy concentration, it's made us have to really sharpen up our act as a party. We have to be in touch with a coalition of voters to get elected, we have to have the best of representation and all-year-round campaigning and engagement with community issues with our voters. So for that reason, Stephen, a decade later I'm able to say you were right, I was wrong.

**JAG SINGH (Messagespace, and co-founder of LabourHome):**

Hi, my name's Jag and in case you get confused, I've actually lived in London for about three years so I've lost my southern twang. I'm not going to be talking very much about the electoral reform or lack thereof that's taken place since President Bush got elected in 2000. I'll be talking a little bit more about the campaign tactics and innovations that most of the Democratic and Republican campaigns have used over the past 40 or 50 years.

Malcolm, when he invited me to speak to you, wanted me to touch on the 50 state strategy, which is Howard Dean's brainchild. Just a quick show of hands, is anyone familiar with the 50 state strategy? I think it might be important to a quick – the 50 state strategy is actually more of a commitment to put field staff and organisers and money into basically every single state in the US. To give you a sense of the challenge this faces, imagine trying to place a candidate, a team, fund raising organiser across an area the size of the EU. Then you really start to grasp that it's a major shift from the idea that let's focus on the targeted seat, the marginal seats, where we've got about a five per cent or six per cent sort of sway. So basically that's what the 50 state strategy is and Howard Dean brought that into the Democratic fold since he took over the chairmanship of the Democratic National Committee in 2004. There's been a lot of negativity surrounding that, and I think the easiest way to explain this is Obama actually tried the 50 state strategy and the Hillary campaign, of which I am a disgruntled former staffer, I guess, used the old method, was the tried and tested, since 1960s, where you only focus on the big states and you try and win those by a small margin, and then you just hope for the best in the other states. So what the 50 state strategy actually means is you engage with people whom you know may vote for you but are often not encouraged into doing so.

In the '70s and '80s, post-Watergate, the Republicans launched a major campaign to engage via every imaginable form of media from radio to TV to – they didn't have internet back then, but using even phone banks and of course direct mail. And this laid the foundation for their successes in the '80s, when you had conservative Republicans, the evangelical crowd, coming to the school boards, the local directly elected mayors, the state legislatures, and that sort of set a precedent onwards. It's interesting to know that the state legislatures are actually the ones that draw up the districts for the Congressional seats, and so reinforced Republican dominance.

The 50 state strategy also requires or enables a campaigning mechanism. Before you would get people from Utah, where definitely you've got no way in hell of winning any sort of race, because of the conservative layout of the country, to campaign totally in other potentially more electorally prosperous areas. Now, with the 50 state strategy, what this means is that you're going to be enabling local candidates in these un-winnable areas to try out new campaign innovations. You're almost certainly not going to win now, but in about 20 years these campaign strategies might work. And what we saw in 2006, when the Democrats finally regained control over Congress, was a lot of these strategies came from the early '90s, that we put in place when we were just beginning to challenge in states like Arizona, Nevada, traditionally conservative states.

The electoral college is a nightmare. But something which might come into play in the next four to eight years is that we're moving away from the winner take all strategy. Currently the electoral college is broken up by, and divided within the states. Every state has a certain number of electoral college votes, which is in proportion to the population of the state. Now currently, if John McCain wins California he's going to win 55 electoral votes. Even if he wins by a one per cent majority or even if he wins by a 60 per cent majority. There's a significant growth in the movement to enable a PR type system where it's proportional to the number of votes you win. And so if you win California by one per cent you only get that proportion of electoral college votes. Now, this is where it gets interesting, because if you've got a 50 state strategy and you only win California by five per cent, you're going to need to focus on smaller states like Montana and Wyoming or South Dakota, that offers three electoral votes. And it's a sort of a future proofing, if you will.

And it works almost as a good version of a Soviet arms race. You're forcing your opponent to campaign in their non-battleground states, you're forcing the candidate to defend themselves. John McCain is going to be forced to spend cash that he doesn't really have in Arizona. He's going to have to hire organisers, he's going to have to hire a fund raiser, he's going to have a whole campaign in play, simply because we might win those five to six per cent of swing voters who might actually make the difference.

American campaigns in general have always been about the two-year electoral cycle. A Congressman wins the election in November of an even year; within six months he's got to start worrying about fund raising for the next election. The House of Representatives is elected every two

years and the Senators are elected every six years, and the president every four, which is a totally closed game for a political party. And so the campaigns have always been about ads and TV and radio and the candidates. But that only works when you've got lots of cash and a decent candidate, which actually is quite hard to find. And, importantly, intelligence about the areas that you're running candidates in. One of the problems we had in Glasgow was that our voter contact details were missing. We didn't have a strong organising infrastructure available, and so we didn't know when we were knocking on doors who we were talking to. But that could be different when you've got boots on the ground in every single state, in every single local constituency.

Obama's tactics have pretty much been union-led. The unions in the US are very much focused not on GOTV but DOT, it's not Get on the Vote, it's Drag Out the Vote. You knock on doors, if a person answers you're going to haul them all the way to the polling station, and then haul them back again because you might have missed their grandma or something. It's happened, trust me. In 2004 on election day, working on the Kerry campaign, the voter contact system broke down at 2pm. It's not fun when you suddenly realise 'oh god, have I contact with that person or not?' The Democrats have got to sort of focus continually on rebuilding the relationships that they've lost out to the Republicans. The Republicans have mastered the concept that recommendations on who to vote for from people who are similar to us anywhere carries the most weight. And the Democrats really lost their way and went for the big issue candidates who were 'I'm for gay rights', 'I'm anti-abortion', etc, etc, but the Republicans were the guys preaching in the local church, they were part of the local rifle club, they were part of the school board, they were knocking on doors, and it all boils down to this, knocking on doors. That's something we're going to have to focus on a lot more over here and learning a lesson from the London campaigners, which we'll talk about some more.

**JENETTE ARNOLD AM (Chair of the London Assembly):**

Even though it seems to me that there are a lot of MPs who say, 'oh, no, no, we won't talk about PR because clearly that would threaten me in some way,' Stephen Twigg's always been there and sticking to his beliefs about it. We need a different system and one that values every vote, because that's the rock of democracy. That's what we say when we talk about democracy. When we say one person, one vote, then we really mean that that vote should count. And so I'm glad to tell you that in what I'll call the pick and mix system that we use in London every vote does count. Londoners' votes matter.

But let me just start by saying thank you to Malcolm and his MVC team. I welcomed the invitation to speak tonight because I really am passionate and I really wanted to get the message out. And so tonight I'm going to argue that the results of the systems of preferential vote for the executive mayor for London, a first past the post system that works for the constituency member like myself, and the proportional voting bloc that we use for the party in the London election, has been well received. And I say this because what we can show is the learning that's been taken from the 2000 and the 2004 elections in the process. And in 2008 what we can absolutely show, the stats show there was a higher turnout, and that on our campaigning we were absolutely building, for me, from my personal experience, the Labour Party activism base. It was widening and so we were taking with us people who we knew they supported the goals and the aims that we had for London: that was to make London a safer city, a city where we can travel around it, a city that is recognised as, if not the first, the second capital city of the world, a city that is founded on fairness, because it is a city where people come seeking social justice and we must never forget that, and on the whole they find it.

And we were finding that we were in an alliance, and so there were people travelling with us who were saying to me, 'Jennette, you know, I'm going to tell you I'm going to vote for you but I'm not sure about the party vote.' Or they were saying to me, 'well, I'm going to vote for Ken, not going to vote for you, Jennette, because I don't know what you've done,' and those are the people I wanted to take with me because by the end of the campaign my mission was to convince them about what I'd done. And then there were others who were saying, 'well, we're just going to vote for a particular party, but when we vote for our party,' and these were particular members of the Green Party, 'what we're voting for is to get Green members on that Assembly because we know that the commonalities

of some areas around the environment agenda, that we Greens can only see our goal delivered if we're then there to work with Labour and hopefully the Lib Dems. So I experienced that. I saw that political reality, and so did, certainly the eight Labour Assembly members that were elected on to that 25-member body. And you will say, 'well, what has she got to be happy about? You lost your Mayor.' Well, we lost the Labour mayor. It was nothing to do with the system. I would say that we just didn't get to the 140,000 voters that we needed to actually get that majority, and there were other issues that were playing a part there. So it was not the system that we were using that meant that we lost our candidate.

I also want to just touch on and challenge the myth that there is out there that says that a PR system not only supports the election of extreme parties but makes it easier for them to get elected. That's not my experience. In fact, I'm going to touch on that and say that we can make it so hard for extreme parties to get that vote. And I also want to just share with you, just some, if you like, other perceptions coming out of a review that was done by the party in January. So the government's own review of voting system, if you like. I think I'll finish on that because there's some really positive things that are in that report. And I do want to finish with a quote by a favourite writer politician of mine, Robin Cook, he was so passionate about the subject, and I think that when we take up his cause we're carrying on a great campaign that was so supported by, from my point of view, that great man.

Okay, let me just say briefly what the system that we use in London: the mayoral elections are conducted under the supplementary vote. This is, if you like, a truncated version of the alternative vote system, and operates in a way that you have you only get your first and second preference, and where no candidate wins over 50 per cent of the first preferences everyone else except the top two candidates are eliminated, and then you only look and add on the second preferences for those two candidates. And so then you then have a situation where the person who gets the most votes then clearly then ends up being in a majority position and can clearly say that they have a mandate from the electorate. And I think that that's something that certainly a city, and we've heard from Scotland a local area, wants. We want to be clear that every vote does count. And I have to say, this is just so refreshing and so empowering, unlike our present parliamentary system which I think we all know really is not good enough, in that, you know, they insist that we go into an election trying to say that we only need to talk to people we describe as Mondeo man, Worcester woman, Pebbledash people –

what is that about? We should not be going into elections saying that we respect the vote that every voter has and that we are prepared to go out there and put the argument to win every vote? Isn't that where we should be? Is that where we want to be as democrats? I think so. And so let's just say that if we can get any support out of this room and ... here tonight, if there's just a chance to have a word with Gordon, give him the this big idea. Just say, 'work to be finished, Gordon.' You know, let's sort out the parliamentary system, because we can see it works at the local level and we can see it works at city level.

And then for the Assembly bit, the constituencies, we have 14 constituencies and those constituencies at the moment they're first past the post. And then the London-wide members, 11 of them, we've got to the proportional vote in there. But let me tell you how it works. When I go and knock the door, okay, I've got to give the argument for my elected mayor, so I've got to be clear about what our policy outline is. I've got to give my position about why I'm going to be the best candidate that will ever represent around this constituency. And I've also got to give an argument for the party vote as well. Because given the vote, getting the argument for the party vote, what I'm also doing is I'm saying that if you give your vote to a progressive party, that that vote counts twice. And why the vote counts twice, it counts one for the progressive party, but one, if you like, against the extreme party, because that extreme party, certainly in the London situation, has got to then work harder and get that extra vote to reach the five per cent threshold. So it encourages you to actually go out there and put the argument for your party and against the extremist party.

Now you can say we didn't do that well enough because we got a BNP member elected onto the Assembly, but I say again, it is not in my belief the system that got those BNP votes out, I think it's the fact that they came out of certain situations and certain localities where we need to do more work to take back the progressive message to those areas. We need to do more work to deal with the issues that the voters in those areas are listening to the extremists about, and we have to then show to these people that the extremists do not have an answer for the issues that they are experiencing and that they're concerned about. So it isn't the structure, it's the work that we've got to do to convince, it's the work that we've got to do when we get into power, it's how we deliver our policies, that's how we can overcome extremism.

So we have to go out there, we have to go out there prepared to work very hard. And I say, you would expect this, wouldn't you? Well, sometimes at local elections you don't really have to go out there and work so hard, in my experience. You just target a certain number of people – in fact in some of the elections in past I'm sure that it worked for us when we kept the election quiet. But in the London elections you can't. You have a duty to educate. Not only do you have a duty to educate the electorate, but we've taken on the media, and you can see in 2008 they were saying, 'ah, right, there's more to this structure,' and they were actually engaged and they were doing their part. You have to engage with civic society as well, because they have to be given an explanation as to, particularly in our London case, why there's three different systems at play here.

We also learnt from the analysis of 2000 and 2004. There was one where we had a ballot that was about 10 foot long, you know, and that was just so confusing. We had another ballot which didn't make clear where you put your first preference and your second preference and we were so surprised that there were so many spoiled papers. And so we've learnt from that. We've learnt that you can't keep people up all day and all night and rush the vote, because when you're counting nearly five million votes it takes a while. We had to explain to people that you have to move away from seeing your votes piled up, as you do in local election, to knowing that they're somewhere behind some giant machine being counted. And so it did take some patience there. And so it's a really engaging, active and dynamic system that we have. And it encourages us to be active: we have to go out there, we have to take that message to the doorstep and be active.

Our government's own review of voting systems was published earlier this year. It said one of the main benefits of PR is that voters have a greater degree of choice in elections and a greater chance of their vote counting in terms of who gets elected. And just going back to the London experience, 86 per cent of the Londoners who voted did so for a party that gained seats on the London Assembly. That means nearly nine in ten voters are now represented by at least one London Assembly member for the party they voted for. Now that is absolutely totally different to the Westminster experience, which I'm not going to touch on because I know that there are friends in the room and I don't want to upset them. But it is like a totally different situation. So when people come up to me and they say, 'I voted for you,' I understand what they're saying, because I really believe that they went into the ballot boxes in London in May 2008 and they thought about who they were voting for. There was

some tactical voting going on, that's all fine. But they knew who they were voting for and what they also want is for the people that they've elected to deliver for them.

And let me just finish, Stephen, by a quote from Robin Cook. Robin, in his book, just says something that for me I just find so important, and he says: 'the damage from the present first past the post parliamentary system is not confined to its inability to produce a parliament that reflects how the nation voted. Even worse is its disabling effect on political debate.' And I think you touched on that. You know, we're losing the political debate because of our system. The reason why every election campaign is fought only on the issues that matter to – and this is where I got my Mondeo Man, Worcester Woman and the rest of Pebbledash people, is that they are only electors whose votes really count. Increasingly the campaigns hone their message to the one per cent of the electorate whose swing votes in the target constituencies decide which party is in government and which is in opposition. How long can that go on? And I'll repeat the challenge again, that cannot be right and we cannot sustain that. And so like Robin, I'm puzzled that so many parliamentarians or prospective parliamentarians who complain that Labour's core voters are ignored also stoutly defend a first past the post system which is the reason, I would argue, why core voters are neglected. So I'd say let's respect all voters and especially core voters so that we can actually get the government that's truly representative and let's put the power back with the vote, back with the voter. Thank you very much.