

BRIGHTON

2021

LABOUR FOR A NEW DEMOCRACY

CHARTIST
FOR DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM

Democracy Special
£1 (free to delegates)

This rotten status quo must go: why Labour must change the voting system

This summer, the Labour for a New Democracy (L4ND) Roadshow explored all aspects of electoral reform, hearing from activists, councillors, trade unionists, MPs, NEC members, journalists and academics - and from hundreds of Labour members from all over the UK and beyond.

We found an incredible enthusiasm for changing the way we do politics, for giving people more power and for creating a democracy and society fit for the 21st century. We heard, again and again, why Labour will struggle to realise and sustain the changes it wants to make in government if it does not introduce Proportional Representation (PR).

Launched in September 2020, the L4ND coalition brings together 11 organisations and Labour members to secure a Labour commitment to PR for the House of Commons. With its network of regional teams, and supporters from across the Parliamentary Labour Party and affiliated Trade Unions, L4ND has become the largest pro PR campaign in Labour history.

To say that support for electoral reform is now mainstream in the Labour Party would be an understatement. A recent YouGov poll found 83 percent of Labour members believe the party should support PR, up seven percent from 2019. Only ten percent of members now say they favour the current First Past The Post (FPTP) system.

By the end of summer 2021 over 250 Constituency Labour Parties from all regions and nations of Great Britain had passed pro-PR policy. By Conference, we are confident number will have passed the 40 percent mark - and that we will more than double the previous record of 37 motions sent to Conference, set back in 1989.

This support should come as no surprise. Nothing is more central to Labour's values than equality, inclusion and fairness. For many of us, the blatant unfairness of FPTP and the inequality of representation this results in is enough to convince us. Labour Conference needs to see the case made for electoral reform not as a nice-to-have but low priority



issue - but fundamental to embodying, creating and then defending the kind of society we want to live in. Democratic justice is integral to Labour's fight for social, climate and economic justice.

See our website, www.labourforaNewDemocracy.org.uk, to view our twelve Roadshow events, see our fringe events and sign up.

The L4ND team: Laura, Joe, Caroline, Sam and Owen

Inside:

Andy Burnham argues that levelling up demands radical democratic reform

Nadia Whittome says our politics is broken while urging Labour to fight for democracy



It's time to save democracy

Sandy Martin on our prime ministerial dictatorship and coalitions

For almost 200 years the UK's democracy has steadily grown, from the Great Reform Act of 1832 right up to the liberalisation of postal voting in 2000. But now the government is deliberately taking us backwards.

Those without photographic ID will be prevented from voting. Postal voting will be more difficult. Unregistered people tend not to be Tory supporters – so automatic registration is out. Constituency boundaries are redrawn on the basis of a depleted register. Trade unions and voluntary organisations are to be separated from politics. The independence of the Electoral Commission is being eroded, enabling gerrymandering and preventing the Tories from being prosecuted for misusing funds.

Johnson's 80-seat majority rests on 43.6% of the vote in December 2019. So he can ignore all the other parties. Moderate voices in his own party were forced out prior to the general election. First Past The Post (FPTP) is enabling Prime Ministerial dictatorship.

With the House of Lords full of Prime Ministerial appointees, there are precious few checks on the power of the PM. After the illegal prorogation of Parliament in autumn 2019 Speaker Bercow spoke openly about the need for a written Constitution. But without a reformed House of Lords, and with the Supreme Court at threat, there would be no body capable of enforcing it. Moreover, with the BBC and Ofcom stuffed with Johnson's mates, there will be nobody to shine a spotlight on

his behaviour.

All these institutions need reform, but to do that, or any of the things that the Labour Party exists for, we have to start with ensuring a progressive majority in the House of Commons. We could be in government after the next General Election if the Tories lose at least 55 seats. However, even if Labour on its own were to take 55 seats from the Tories, we would still be 68 seats short of an overall majority. It is not defeatist to admit that the best feasible outcome of the next General Election will be a coalition government with Labour as the largest party.

I believe we can and must lead a coalition government after the next General Election to rescue our democracy, and our health service, and our environment. This is not the same as proposing a pre-election Progressive Alliance. We must maximise our seats first, on the basis of a Labour manifesto.

Tactical voting is necessary if we are to succeed in a FPTP election. Committing to a proportional system for electing the House of Commons would help us achieve the tactical votes we need to take Tory seats. Once we change the electoral system, tactical voting will become redundant, and people can then vote Labour throughout the country and know their vote counts.

There are those that say that achieving PR for Westminster will lead to the Labour Party splitting. Prominent members have left in the past – most notably the "Gang of Four", founding the SDP and helping to



Johnson's democracy shut down

ensure 16 more years of Tory rule. Some members will leave whether we change the voting system for Westminster or not.

The fact is, that progressive politics in this country is already split. That's why the Conservatives are usually in government despite not getting an absolute majority in a General Election since 1935. The democratic socialist mainstream of the Labour Party have no intention of leaving it. But we recognise that we have no chance of creating the society we want unless we can work with other progressive parties, not just to carry out our social and economic programmes, but also to rescue the very democracy that makes them possible.

Sandy Martin was elected on to Suffolk County Council in May 2021. He was previously the MP for Ipswich and is the Chair of the Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform

Why First Past The Post doesn't add up for Labour

Labour for a New Democracy
Saturday 25 September, 19:30
St Paul's Parish Church, West Street, BN1 2RE
Chair: Nancy Platts, Politics for the Many
Speakers include: Professor Rob Ford, University of Manchester; Debbie Abrahams MP; Alex Sobel MP; Olivia Blake MP; Paul Sweeney MSP
Wheelchair accessible

The #Labour4PR Rally

Labour for a New Democracy
Sunday 26 September, 18:15
St Nicholas Church, Church Street, BN1 3LJ
Speakers incl: Stephen Kinnock MP, Cllr Shaista Aziz, John McDonnell MP, Ana Oppenheim Momentum, Luke Akehurst Labour First, Pauline McCarthy BFAWU, Amen Tesfay Open Labour, Clive Lewis MP
Wheelchair accessible

Where next for Labour and PR?

Labour for a New Democracy & Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform
Monday 27 September, 19:30
St Paul's Parish Church, West Street, BN1 2RE
Chair: Zoe Williams, The Guardian
Speakers include: Sandy Martin, Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform; Tessa Milligan, Open Labour; Professor Jeremy Gilbert, University of East London; Laura Parker, Labour for a New Democracy
Wheelchair accessible

A broken political system

Nadia Whittome says our politics is broken while urging Labour to fight for democracy

Our electoral system is broken. In the last general election, the Conservatives won 43.6 percent of the vote but 56 percent of MPs. Meanwhile, just under a third of eligible voters did not vote and millions more were denied political representation. Our Parliament does not accurately reflect the country's political views.

I understand the disillusionment and powerlessness many feel. The survival of a democracy is premised on people buying into the system and feeling that they have a say in how society is run. It is clear that many in the UK do not. Politicians lying and breaking manifesto pledges has shattered the public's trust. What happens in Parliament can feel far removed from everyday lives and struggles.

Many fail to see the difference voting makes with a decade of Conservative-led governments they did not choose. From Brexit to the break-up of the UK, powerlessness and a lack of representation are factors in many political crises of recent years. Our electoral system has enabled governments to rule in the interests of a minority, inflicting devastating austerity on working class communities.

There is no quick fix to our society's democratic deficit, but there is one legislative change that would be relatively simple to introduce: proportional representation (PR). Our current First Past the Post system means our elections focus narrowly on fewer than a hundred marginal seats. Many feel, justifiably, that their votes do not count and will make no tangible difference to the outcome. Under PR, everyone's vote is meaningful and Parliament would closely reflect public opinion.

It would also be a step towards challenging the neglect of communities in safe or unwinnable seats and reshaping a political culture built around a small number of floating voters in marginal seats, to one where arguments to the whole electorate must be made and won. Our party would have the chance to present a bold vision to tackle the climate crisis, transform our economy and transfer power to communities - and to give every voter an equal opportunity to make this a reality.

The process of voting itself should also be made easier. The more barriers there are, the more



organised voters have to be - it's hard to decide on the spur of the moment to vote if you're working on polling day or aren't registered at your current address.

The Welsh Labour government is exploring whether flexible voting pilots can take place in next year's local government elections. Ideas include voting in supermarkets and colleges, opening polling stations the weekend before an election, and allowing people to vote at any polling station in a local authority.

The UK government is heading in the opposite direction with plans for an additional requirement of voter ID. It claims this is to stop electoral fraud but in 2019, there was only one conviction and one police caution for offences relating to impersonating another voter.

When a trial voter ID scheme was run in the 2019 local elections, polling stations turned away around 2,000 people without their IDs. Over a third didn't return. This change will stop people from voting, but that's the point. The government isn't trying to prevent fraud - it's deliberately disenfranchising marginalised groups, many of whom are less likely to vote Tory.

In the 2019 pilot, awareness of the new ID requirements differed by demographic group, with younger voters and those from black and minority ethnic groups less likely to know about them. The government's own commissioned

research found that disabled people, the unemployed, people without qualifications, and those who had never voted before were all less likely to hold any photo ID. In the US, similar legislation has been used to devastating effect. This is straight up voter suppression and we must fight it tooth and nail.

Beyond this attempted disenfranchisement, plenty of people are already denied a vote despite living in the UK and being considered an adult in other contexts. Only British, Irish and Commonwealth citizens can vote in general elections, with millions of migrants excluded. Over 1.6 million 16 and 17 year olds are also denied a vote.

I was delighted to play a small role in helping to pass ground breaking policy to give migrants voting rights at our 2019 conference. Labour is the party of all working people, regardless of where they were born, and the labour movement has a long tradition fighting for universal suffrage - from Peterloo, to the Chartists, to votes for women. Until we extend the vote to all UK residents over the age of 16, this struggle is not over.

Labour should be at the forefront of these fights - not only pushing back against attacks on our democratic rights, but campaigning for a society with democracy at its heart. Reforming our voting system is an important place to start.

Nadia Whittome,
MP for
Nottingham East

Big Picture Politics

Andy Burnham argues that levelling up demands radical democratic reform

How to level up the country? It's the biggest political question of our times and one being asked with ever-greater urgency as we emerge from the pandemic. Expect it to be a dominant theme during the party conference season.

The fact that regional inequality is today a top order issue is undoubtedly progress. But there is a major problem with the current framing of the "levelling up" debate. It is conveniently ignoring a much more serious prior question: how did England get so unequal in the first place?

It suits many in SW1A to focus on the former question, not the latter. There is a tendency to trade in what Lord Kerslake calls "pea-shooter policies": superficial, fleeting solutions concocted for media purposes unlikely to have any meaningful impact on the UK's enormous structural inequalities. Why? Because if Westminster was ever to get serious about those divides, it would have to embrace huge change to the way it works – and many civil servants and MPs are simply not prepared to countenance that.

But how sustainable is that reactionary position going forward? I can't see how it is. To be credible on levelling up, all political parties will have to face up to that tough prior question. Or, to put it another way: you can't pose as being tough on regional inequality if you are not prepared to be tough on the causes of regional inequality.

Of course, those causes are complex and varied. But one of the most fundamental is the UK's political system.

As Lord Kerslake's UK 2070 Commission observed, the UK is simultaneously one of the most regionally unbalanced countries in the OECD and most politically over-centralised. There is a causal relationship here. The hoarding of government power in one London postcode has created the conditions for a country where some places are more equal than others. But the problem is exacerbated by a system of Parliamentary democracy which does not fairly and equally represent all people and places and, consequently, has failed to break that London-centricity.

The time has come to tell it as it

is: the Westminster system has created England's North-South divide. Over centuries, it has denied us both the investment and the power to act for ourselves. And if the status quo has created the problem, it can't, by definition, supply the solution. Successful levelling up requires nothing less than the complete re-wiring of Britain.

I see two parts to this massive task.

Part one is taking power out of the Westminster system and giving all places across England more ability to be masters of their own destiny.

It is early days, granted, but there is already evidence to suggest the devolution of power to the English regions is working. For those still to be convinced, I would cite three clear reasons why the Left should get behind it more wholeheartedly.

The first is that it is bringing a new focus on the causes of inequality often neglected by Westminster and fixing basic issues, such as the quality of work, housing and transport. For instance, here in Greater Manchester, I am bringing buses back under public control and developing a plan to build 30,000 zero-carbon homes for social rent. Other Labour Mayors are doing similar things. You could say that English devolution is finally rolling back the iniquitous policies of the 1980s. It is allowing millions of people to benefit from Labour policies in advance of a Labour Government but, by showing the difference Labour in power can make, it hopefully makes the election of a Labour Government more likely.

The second reason is it gets England ready to face the challenges of the 21st century – most notably, the drive towards a net-zero society. We will never be able to legislate our way to carbon-neutrality or achieve it through top-down initiatives. If you look around the world, cities are leading the way as the early adopters of new thinking and technologies. England's cities need the same level of autonomy as their counterpart cities around the world if we are to bring the required level of pace to the UK's climate actions.

The third reason why English devolution is a force for good is the positive effect it is having on engaging people with politics and creating



a healthier political climate. One of Westminster's many problems is its party-first mentality. By contrast, the starting point for devolved systems at the city-region level is a place-first approach. That creates the conditions for a more positive, unifying and engaged form of politics than Westminster will ever be able to achieve.

Three compelling reasons to support the most ambitious approach to English devolution. But, on its own, will it be enough to level up England? In a word - no. To succeed, any new settlement for England's regions needs to be reflected in new arrangements at the centre.

Devolution won't ever work properly if Whitehall continues to hold all the cards and can threaten to call back its funding or powers whenever it chooses. If central government is to treat all areas equally, and work properly with England's devolved administrations, it must be held to account by a Parliament that represents all people and places equally.

It is a quite unbelievable state of affairs that, in 2021, our laws are still being made by hundreds of unelected people, the vast majority of whom have their primary residence within the M25. The longer this situation is left in place, the more it calls British democracy into

Andy Burnham was elected Metro Mayor of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority in 2017, reelected in May 2021. He was the MP for Leigh, where he still lives, from 2001 to 2017

disrepute. How much longer will we have to wait before the second chamber is converted into a Senate of the regions and nations of the UK where all are fairly represented?

But I have come round to the view that House of Lords reform alone will not hard-wire regional equality into our political system. The Commons is part of the problem too.

In my early days as an MP, I couldn't see this. But towards the end of my time in Westminster, I came to understand how the Parliamentary whip system hands too much power to an intrinsically London-centric civil service. In effect, the Commons is a large rubber stamp for the policies of central government departments. Of course, Ministers have the ability to shape these policies, under pressure from backbenchers. But it is surprising how few do. Once decisions are before the House, the whip system takes away the ability of MPs

to organise along regional grounds and that is a real problem.

Take the forthcoming Bill that will create the legal basis for HS2 to the North of Crewe. All the rumours say the Treasury is likely to make major cut-backs on the Northern sections. We are expecting a distinctly second-rate solution for Manchester Piccadilly which will have a negative impact on connectivity across the North. In an ideal world, MPs across the North would join forces in Parliament to defeat this. But the Treasury knows this is unlikely to happen with the whip system in place and, therefore, is emboldened to continue on its age-old approach of short-changing the North.

To prevent this, the time has come to open our minds to a reform of the Commons. We need to raise the status of MPs and give them more ability to be powerful champions for their regions. One of the great weaknesses of the current

first-past-the-post system is the way it focuses the minds of MPs on the hyper-local rather than the big picture. In effect, they often duplicate the functions of local councillors – which is wasteful of their time and talents but also undermining of local government. A House of Commons freed from the tyranny of the whip, and elected more proportionately with the help of regional lists, would be more likely to reflect the majority progressive opinion in the country and secure the levelling up it desperately needs.

The pandemic has shone a brutal spotlight on just how unequal our country is. And the sad truth is this: the places that have suffered the most are the same places that were the poorest in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. England's map of poverty hasn't changed – and that's partly because its political system hasn't changed. Are we in favour of levelling up or not? It is time for all political parties to decide.

Unlocking Labour

Stuart Hill on unfinished business of Charter 88

In today's struggle for democratic progress, and against our current authoritarian government, Unlock Democracy plays an important role, alongside our partners in Labour4NewDemocracy. Before we became Unlock Democracy, we were Charter 88.

Charter 88 was inspired by Czechoslovakia's Prague Spring and its Charter 77. It took Soviet tanks to destroy their hopes for a new form of democratic socialism. In the UK, after 1997, there were a few years of real reform implementing some of the democratic reform agenda inherited from John Smith. The majority of measures remaining were then, essentially, shelved.

Thirty years ago, saw the Great Manchester Charter 88 Conference with over 1000 participants. The impetus of this powerful movement saw the introduction by Labour of Devolution to Scotland, Wales and London together with Freedom of Information and Human Right legislation. It took a Labour Government to introduce these reforms. However, once elected Labour showed little interest in going further with a raft of further restrictions on an over-mighty State and Executive.

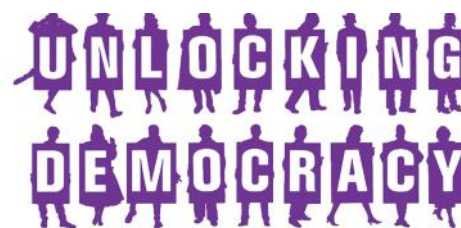
The key objectives of Unlock

Democracy have not altered. First, we argue and campaign for a vibrant, inclusive democracy that puts power in the hands of the people.

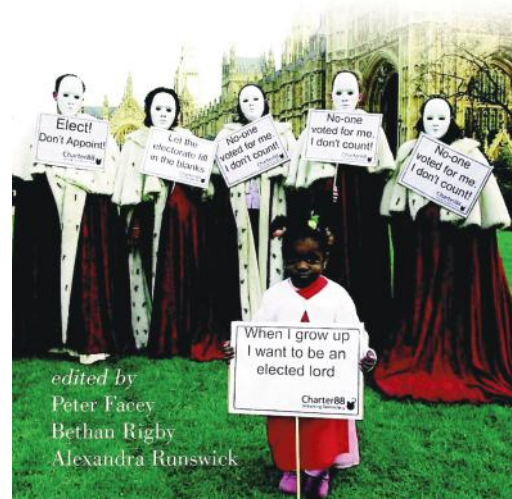
Second, we seek a democratic participative process resulting in a written constitution that serves and protects the people. That constitution would define the roles of, and relationships between, the Executive, Legislature and Judiciary. It would determine how, and to what extent, power is shared between representatives at local, national and United Kingdom levels, and with international organisations. It would enshrine basic liberties and human rights for all.

Our ambitions have to be combined with a hard-headed practical approach to the first steps necessary. Only a Labour-led Government can deliver Proportional Representation. However, it will require an enormous mobilisation of party members, trade unionists and civil society to compel a Manifesto commitment to PR and immediate implementation upon election. We know that Conference Resolutions, even if carried, can be ignored.

Within Unlock Democracy Labour Party members are informally organised as "Unlock Labour"



20 years of Charter 88



Stuart Hill is a member of the Unlock Democracy Council, works with Labour supporters in what he calls Unlock Labour, a member of LCER and of the L4ND Steering Group

to better campaign in the trade unions and Labour Party for democratic advance.

To join Unlock Democracy or get more information go to:
<http://www.unlockdemocracy.org.uk/>
Facebook: @unlockdemocracy
info@unlockdemocracy.org.uk
Telephone: 07970011375

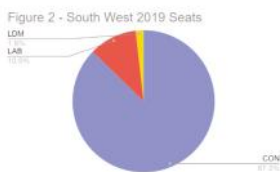
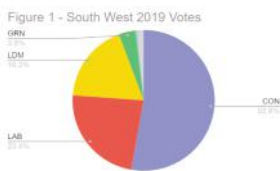
Following Labour's first Keir

Ewan Wadd explains how in the North and South West we are all cheated by the voting system

Throughout the most recent campaign to change Labour policy on the voting system, being from Teesside living in Bristol, I have seen it from two perspectives. The South West, where the Tories dominate and Labour representation is hard to come by outside cities, and Labour North, (the North East region plus Cumbria) where Labour hegemony was shaken by Conservative victories in December 2019.

With different perspectives come different arguments. The argument for the MP-Constituency link rings hollow in many Tory constituencies. Each region has distinct psephology (election maths), which provide evidence for the need for change. Our country has changed drastically since the 1832, when most people weren't allowed to vote. It is time our voting system caught up.

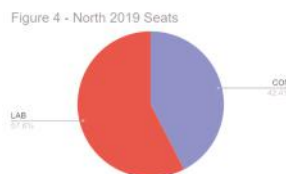
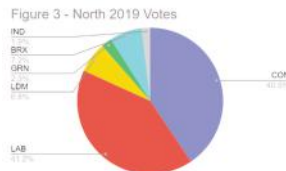
Anyone with access to Wikipedia and Excel can do the analysis shown below – and presumably Tory HQ too, which is why they are so keen to hang on to First Past the Post.



No one can say the result in the South West reflects the will of the people. Labour had less than half the influence their votes suggest. The Conservatives have significantly more seats than Labour and Liberal Democrat, 48 to seven.

Unfortunately, the North is only slightly better although the Conservatives are more or less in line with their vote share. At first sight, it appears that Labour 'benefits' – gaining more seats. But the boost for Labour is markedly lower than it is for the Tories in the South West.

This is down to two reasons.

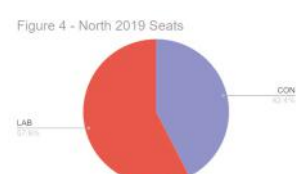
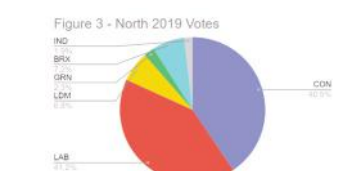


First, Labour only marginally won the popular vote in the North, resulting in a much smaller boost than the Tories in the South West. Second, opposition to the Tories in the South West is split almost equally between Labour and the Liberal Democrats. The lack of a consolidated opposition allows the Tories to wipe both out. In the North, it is a two-horse race, making the result much more equal. First Past the Post was made with two parties in mind - adding more choice just creates unrepresentative results.

Both these examples show the ridiculousness of our current voting system. When you look at the Commons as a whole, it is a farce to say that we are a representative democracy. For Labour's chances in 2023/4, if we have a marginal swing of 5% from the Conservatives, we regain most of the seats we lost in the North in 2019. It is achievable to win a dozen more seats and dominate the region again. However, as we saw in Hartlepool, the scale of this challenge may be greater than originally imagined.

In the South West, it is much more difficult. Unless the opposition parties revive a Cook-Maclennan type overlapping policy and massive tactical voting, which took 29 seats for Labour and Liberal Democrats (15, 14 respectively) as opposed to 22 seats for the Conservatives, left-leaning South West votes will remain undervalued, and uncounted. The Conservatives may still win the most seats, but we can remove a few bricks from the Tory 'blue wall'.

Votes in the North are more important to Labour than those in the South West. And therein lies the problem with FPTP. Votes in



marginal seats are much more valuable than those in 'safe seats' where the result is a foregone conclusion. Millions of votes are wasted, and parties only need to appeal to swing voters to win. As a student living between the North and the South West, I find it brutally unfair that my vote is more valuable to Labour if I cast it in Darlington than in Bristol. Where you live should not change your vote or whether or not it counts for anything.

Crucially for Labour, the current system exacerbates regional, social, wealth, gender, and ethnic inequalities in the priorities of government. This feeds into policy making, widening all forms of inequality. And as we've seen with the pork-barrel politics of the Towns Fund, funding can be given to important electoral districts, rather than those who need it most. If parties only need one group of people's votes to narrowly win dozens of seats, whose needs will they prioritise?

Voting reform must be a priority for the Labour movement because it is fundamental to democratic socialism. Our values of equality, justice, legitimacy, need to be applied to the voting system. Labour has embraced this cause before. Keir Hardie, our first leader, supported PR, and when the last Labour government created the Greater London Assembly and devolved administrations, they were elected by PR systems.

While this psephology has made me more optimistic of a Labour resurgence at the next election, it has further convinced me of the need for democratic renewal in this country. Where all our votes count, not just those in marginal constituencies and the House of Commons more accurately represents the people.

Ewan Wadd comes from Darlington and is studying engineering at Bristol University. He is involved in LCER South West and Labour North

Pathway to recovery

William Bain puts the case for Westminster electoral reform from Scotland

Since the tectonic plates of Scottish politics were upended by the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum, Labour has seen its number of Scottish MPs reduced to one, back to seven and then down to one again. The centrality of the Indyref question meant increased turnout in the 2021 Scottish Parliamentary elections, to stop or ensure the SNP gained an overall majority as in 2011. This is the clear division with the pro-UK parties winning a narrow majority of the constituency votes cast, whereas the pro-Independence parties won a majority of the list votes cast.

Scottish Labour's new leader Anas Sarwar was widely seen to have won the campaign, around economic and NHS recovery from the pandemic but the votes were cast and tactical voting choices made on the constitutional questions of independence and devolution with only 5% of votes moving

from the pro-Independence camp to the pro-UK camp during the campaign. The results marked a bottoming out of Scottish Labour's decline. More than ever, the Party's representation depended largely upon its showing in the list ballots with 20 of our 22 seats coming from the regional lists. The proportionate voting system made the difference between Scottish Labour looking at a pathway to recovery under Anas Sarwar's leadership or being reduced to two constituency MSPs only and the political wilderness.

What does this mean for the debate on electoral reform for Westminster? Scottish Labour could at the next UK General Election poll a higher vote share in Scotland than in 2019, but so too could the SNP. The prospects for Scottish Labour seat gains under first past the post remain slim. Scottish Labour could poll around a fifth of the Scottish votes, yet only win 1.7% of the available seats in Scotland. Scottish Labour candi-

dates could pile up hundreds of thousands of votes while returning only one MP. Labour has to perform even more strongly in England and Wales to win power at the next General Election in the absence of more Scottish Labour MPs.

PR would give Scottish Labour more voices at Westminster. Even in 2015, we would have returned 14 Scottish Labour MPs. Voting reform would be good for the Union, better for the wider Labour movement, and put the UK Labour Party less at risk of having to fend off Tory accusations of arrangements with the SNP to get a future Labour Government's business through the Commons. Showing that political change is possible at Westminster with fewer Tory Governments likely in the future may bolster the case for Scotland to stay in the United Kingdom. Fairer votes can turbo charge the Scottish Labour recovery. That is a prize for us all to strive for.

William Bain is a former Chair of LCER (2010-2015) and was Labour MP for Glasgow North East between 2009 and 2015

Wales worth following for Democracy

Julie Morgan says Welsh Labour demonstrates a new progressive path

It is important at the current time to prioritise voting reform in the context of the attacks on democracy particularly by the UK government.

We held our Senedd elections in May 2021. For the first time 16 and 17 year olds voted, as they will in local government, but not to elect MPs. We are analysing the results but we know it was an opportunity to have debate in schools. The change showed our confidence in young people and the future.

There was no automatic increase in turnout, the average General Election turnout is up to 20 points higher, but perhaps more engagement. This year the voters got rid of the seven UKIP members who came in from the list in 2016.

Back on 1 April 2018, the Welsh Senedd had taken over powers on size, electoral arrange-

ments and the franchise in Wales. It was no April Fool joke. It was Wales on its journey in its own democracy. We had the Expert Panel on Electoral Reform, which produced the McAllister Report, A Parliament that works for Wales. We accepted widening the franchise but other recommendations remain to be decided.

There is consensus around the need to increase the numbers of Senedd Members from 60 to 80 or 90. There is discussion, about our voting system, the Additional Member System, which has 40 constituency seats and 20 top ups. Labour only has three additional MSs because we win so many constituencies. It does mean Labour has no overall majority and has to win the arguments.

One proposal for the voting system is for 20 multimember constituencies. The reduction of

parliamentary constituencies by eight, from 40 MPs to 32, in the Welsh boundary commission report, will have an impact. There are also proposals for gender quotas and job sharing arrangements.

We have already been able to legislate so that local authorities can opt to adopt a proportional system for their elections following the Scottish example.

After 20 years of devolution, this is the most opportune moment to go forward on all political fronts. We need a two thirds majority for change. The Senedd will then speak up for the people of Wales with much more legitimacy.

All this discussion has had an effect on Welsh Constituency Labour Parties thinking about how we elect MPs. Our First Minister, Mark Drakeford, is in favour. It is a time of great hope. The mood has changed.

Julie Morgan was an MP from 1997 until 2010. She has been Member of the Welsh Senedd (MS) from 2011 until the present

Tory pork barrel politics

Julian Vaughan says the trade union case for political reform gets stronger by the day

The Tories have a packed agenda. The Elections Bill will exclude anyone who lacks ID from voting, potentially locking out two million people. There are plans to clamp down on trade unions by making them cough up for investigations against them. The policing bill introduces unprecedented new restrictions on protest. They are even planning to change the voting system – imposing First Past the Post on voters for mayoral and police and crime commissioner elections.

They can do all this having won their insurmountable majority of 80 on only 44 percent of the vote. In 2019, like almost every single General Election since the second world war, the left got more votes than the right. And still we were locked out of power.

From Thatcher's trade union laws that shattered workers' rights to organise, to the privatisations that have eroded pay and conditions for millions, the gains workers make are all too often swept away by a system at Westminster that systematically benefits reactionaries against those who stand for progress.

We have a government that is free to dish out crony contracts or funnel public money into the marginal seats they need to keep power – making decisions based on political advantage not actual need.

Take the Conservative's £3.6 billion 'Town's Fund', investigated by the Public Accounts Select Committee and the National



Trade unions backing PR so far

Audit Office over concerns about how the money was spent. They found the 'Town's Fund' not only disproportionately favoured Tory-held towns but specifically those in which the Tory lead was marginal. It is pork barrel politics of the worst kind, incentivised by Westminster's voting system.

It doesn't have to be like this. Across much of the UK voting by proportional representation – where seats match votes – is already a way of life. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as the London Assembly, devolved elections have been conducted on a more proportional basis from the start.

England and Westminster lag behind, holding on to a broken system of democracy that is failing us all. The unelected House of Lords and the warped Commons are part of the same elitist system that silences millions of people each election.

But the campaign for voting

reform within the labour movement is growing. Unions can now back reform in the knowledge that a healthy democracy is not just nice to have but vital for the more equal society we want to see.

In Summer 2021, my own trade union, Labour-affiliated ASLEF, became the latest to back the call for proportional representation at Westminster. Of the other 11 Labour Unions in TULO backing voting reform are the Bakers Union, BFAWU, the Musicians Union, MU, and the TSSA, Transport Salaried Staffs' Association. Trade union members can find out their union position and try to influence it.

Politics for the Many, the trade union campaign for political reform have helped lead the way, working with Labour for a New Democracy. Groups like Momentum and Open Labour are now clear about the case for an overhaul at the ballot box.

There is a historic duty for Labour and the trade unions to reclaim the cause of democratic reform as their own and make the case for radical reform to Westminster.

For too long power in this country has been in the hands of a small ruling class.

As we rebuild from the pandemic we need to find a better way.

We cannot simply build a just society through the private members' club that is an unreformed Westminster. The time for root-and-branch change is now. Trade unionists must help lead the way.

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This supplement has been edited by Mary Southcott (marysouthcott@hotmail.com) and Don Flynn (@donflynnmru) Discussion will continue on our website www.chartist.org.uk and we welcome articles continuing the discussion

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