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To: Members of the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly  
on Electoral Reform

22 June, 2004

Dear Assembly Member,

We were delighted to hear of British Columbia's initiative in establishing a Citizens' Assembly to examine the arguments for electoral reform. Our Society, which has been advocating electoral reform for 120 years, will be pleased to give whatever support it can to your deliberations.

I am pleased to be able to send you this Information Pack which includes a submission to the Assembly and other materials in support of the Single Transferable Vote electoral system.

Some of the leaflets included in the Pack were produced for our campaign in Scotland where the Scottish Parliament is on the verge of passing a Bill which will introduce STV for all local government elections in Scotland. However, although these leaflets refer to the case for STV in Scotland, the same arguments are equally valid when we consider elections for other tiers of government in the UK and elsewhere.

As you may know, since the election of the Labour Government in 1997 in Britain, we have seen a number of changes in our electoral arrangements. I would like to make two general comments on these changes:

1. All changes in electoral systems have been to systems of proportional representation. Our members of the European Parliament are elected regionally by a closed list system and while the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh and London Assemblies are elected by the AMS (the Additional Member System). It is also planned that AMS will be used for regional assemblies in England should they be introduced. The Northern Ireland Assembly has been elected by STV, which is also used for local government and European Parliament elections in Northern Ireland.

2. Not only has there been a shift to proportional representation, but more recently there have been moves towards STV. As already mentioned, Scotland is likely to adopt STV for local government elections, but it is also now possible that elections for the Scottish Parliament will change from AMS (which has proved to have some disadvantages) to STV. Similarly, the Richard Commission, which examined electoral arrangements for the Welsh Assembly, has recommended a change from AMS to STV, and Sunderland Commission, which looked at local government in Wales, also recommended the use of STV.

I hope you will find the materials contained in this Pack of interest. If you would like more information, please contact us and we will be delighted to help.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ken Ritchie', written in a cursive style.

Ken Ritchie  
Chief Executive

## **Submission to the British Columbia Citizens Assembly on behalf of the Electoral Reform Society.**

The Electoral Reform Society was formed in 1884 to campaign for fairer methods of election. Whilst our campaigning is predominantly focused on electoral systems in the UK, our expertise has grown through study of the theory and practice of elections around the world.

The people of British Columbia must make their own decision on the voting system that is right for them, but in this submission we offer the results of our experience on how different electoral systems perform.

## Summary

### **First-Past-the-Post fails voters** in that:

- it often results in members of the legislature being elected with the support of a minority of voters;
- it leads to many voters feeling they have no one to represent them politically.
- it encourages tactical voting.
- it leads to safe seats and politicians who have a 'job for life' almost regardless of the views of the electorate.
- it encourages parties to field white, male, middle class candidates and therefore results in legislatures which do not reflect the diversity of society.

### **First-Past-the-Post fails parties** in that:

- it often leads to legislatures where the share of seats does not reflect the share of the votes cast for each party and where the largest party often has a majority of the seats despite only receiving a minority of the votes.
- it can result in a party which receives fewer votes than its main rivals nevertheless holding an overall majority of the seats.

### **Preference Voting**

- provides a much greater degree of choice, and therefore more influence, to electors;
- when used with multi-member constituencies, it allows electors to choose between candidates of the same party on the basis of matters such as gender, age and ethnicity;
- it ends the existence of safe seats and the need to vote tactically.

### **Party Proportionality**

- it is desirable to have broad party proportionality so that the balance of views in the legislature is more representative of the wishes of voter;
- party proportionality ensures that a party cannot secure a massive majority of the seats unless the will of electors was for this to happen.

### **The Single Transferable Vote (STV)**

- Preference voting and party proportionality can be achieved simultaneously through the use of the Single Transferable Vote (STV).
- STV will also produce broad proportionality not just by party but also by whatever criteria significant numbers of voters consider important; it therefore results in representation which reflects the diversity of society.
- STV allows flexibility in constituency sizes, with different numbers of members elected in each constituency providing that the overall number of electors per elected member is as close to equal as possible - an important consideration when the system must apply to very sparsely populated areas as well as urban areas.

## Problems and pitfalls of First-Past-the-Post

In any situation where a change is proposed from the current electoral system, the burden falls on advocates of change to prove the need for so doing before any consideration can be given to what is the best replacement.

The First-Past-the-Post system has a number of defects which means that it is not suitable for use in public elections, especially where those elections are contested by more than two parties. This submission reflects the experiences of the use of First-Past-the-Post in the UK, but similar failings arise when used in other countries.

The principal defects of First-Past-the-Post are:

### **a) Winners in individual seats often have the support of only a minority of voters**

In order to secure election in a First-Past-the-Post contest, a winning candidate needs just one more vote than their closest opponent. There is no requirement to secure the support of half of those who cast their vote or a certain proportion of those entitled to vote.

Whilst in a two-party system<sup>1</sup> it may be usual for the winning candidate to secure the support of more than half of those who vote, this is far less common in multi-party democracies. In the UK General Election of 2001 for example, the percentage of the vote secured by the winning candidate broke down as follows:<sup>2</sup>

20-29.9%	2
30-39.9%	24
40-49.9%	307
50-59.9%	220
60-69.9%	94
70%+	12

In the 1992 General Election, the winning candidate in the Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber seat in Scotland (where there are four strong parties) was elected with the support of just 26% of those who voted.

Under First-Past-the-Post the most unpopular candidate can win. Such a case might arise where there is a far-right, racist party. In local government elections in some areas of the UK, the BNP candidates have been elected with a minority of the votes under First-Past-the-Post because the remainder of the votes was split between the other parties. Given the choice, however, the majority of the supporters of these other parties would have wished any candidate other than that of the BNP to be elected.

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<sup>1</sup> We use the term two party system to indicate a political environment where two parties are so dominant as to eclipse all others. The term might be applied to the USA at present.

<sup>2</sup> Taken from 'Election 2001: The Official Results', published by the Electoral Commission

**b) Large number of electors feel that they have nobody to represent them**

Under First-Past-the-Post, there is only a single member elected to serve the needs and interests of an entire constituency. There may be a feeling among the supporters of losing candidates that the winner is not representing them. In the UK, elected members undertake two different roles – taking up matters of personal or social concern on behalf of constituents (so-called casework) and taking a distinct line on matters of policy. Whilst an elected member can undertake casework for all constituents, the member cannot represent them all politically.

Changing to multi-member First-Past-the-Post constituencies does not necessarily help to broaden the number of parties with elected members in each constituency. Usually, all the elected members come from the same party. For instance, three member wards are common in local authority elections in the UK. A study of the multi-member wards in London after the 2002 local elections shows that in 90.7% of these all the seats are held by a single party. In a further 9.1% there are two parties represented and in only one case are there elected councillors from three different parties in the same ward.<sup>3</sup>

**c) Many electors feel the need to vote tactically rather than positively**

Tactical voting is a phenomenon that has occupied many column inches in the UK press over the past decade. Tactical voting is where an elector votes for a candidate other than that of their favoured party on the basis that the person they vote for has more chance of winning. For example, in the UK General Election of 1997, there was a widely held desire among many electors to end the Conservative Party's 18 years in office. Supporters of the opposition Labour Party and third party Liberal Democrats would often choose to support the other party in order to assist with the unseating of a sitting Conservative MP. In the 2001 election there was even a website ([www.tacticalvoter.net](http://www.tacticalvoter.net)) dedicated to assisting this process by allowing tactical voters to informally 'swap' their support with a supporter of the other party in a different seat.

Tactical voting was also a major factor in a large number of by-elections and political parties have often targeted the supporters of a third party with the message 'your party cannot win here so give us your vote to defeat the party you hate'.

**d) There are too many 'safe' seats**

It is often joked in UK politics that there are some seats which are so safe for a particular party that a donkey could win as long as it had the right coloured rosette.

Where a particular party has won a seat for many elections in a row, electors may feel little incentive to vote. The selection contest within the party holding the seat determines who is elected rather than the election itself. There is a risk that candidates so elected may feel more accountable to their party committees than to the electorate at large.

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<sup>3</sup> Telegraph Hill ward, London Borough of Lewisham.

**e) The overall make-up of the new legislature does not necessarily reflect the spread of views within the electorate**

With many winning candidates receiving the support of less than half the electors, the final composition of a legislature elected by First-Past-the-Post may not reflect the level of support enjoyed by each party. For instance, in the UK after the General Election of 2001 the number of seats won by each party and share of the vote they received was as follows:

<b>Party</b>	<b>Share of seats</b>	<b>Share of vote</b>
Labour	62.5%	40.7%
Conservative	25.2%	31.7%
Lib Dems	7.9%	18.3%
Green	0%	0.6%
Plaid Cymru	0.6%	0.7%
SNP	0.8%	1.8%
N Irish Parties	2.7%	3.1%
Others	0.3%	3.2%

Labour won a huge overall majority (almost two thirds of the total seats) with the support of only two out of five electors. Other parties are under represented in the Parliament as a whole and there are a number of parties which have no representation whatsoever despite having a large number of supporters.

Regionally, the position was even worse. The Conservatives, with 15.6% of the vote in Scotland won only one of the 72 seats (in 1997 they did not win any), and in Wales with 21.0% of the vote they did not win any seats. Labour suffered similarly in parts of the south east of England. The Jenkins Commission, which made recommendations for electoral reform in 1998, described First-Past-the-Post as creating 'electoral deserts' - areas where a party has a significant number of supporters but no representation.

Local government elections also provide striking examples. In the London Borough of Newham, the Labour Party won 59 out of 60 seats in 2002 despite securing only 50.3% of the votes cast. In the previous election, Labour won all 60 seats on 57.3% of the votes.

It is also possible to have the 'wrong' party win an election. This is the situation where the party that wins the support of the largest number of voters is not the party that has a majority in the legislature. This has happened in UK General Elections twice since 1951<sup>4</sup> and the current bias in the system is so slanted against the Conservatives that it is estimated that the Labour Party could enjoy a poll deficit of 3% compared to the Conservatives and still have an overall majority.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps more dramatic is the fact that on an even swing from 2001, if the Conservative and Labour parties polled the same share of the vote the Conservatives would have 224 seats and Labour 364.

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<sup>4</sup> In 1951, Labour got 48.8% of the vote and 295 seats, the Conservatives got 48.0% of the vote and 321 seats. In February 1974, Labour got 37.2% of the vote and 301 seats, the Conservatives got 37.9% of the vote and 297 seats

<sup>5</sup> 'The British General Election of 2001', David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh

Such a phenomenon also occurs frequently in local authority elections. In the London Borough of Croydon, the Conservative Party has gained more votes than the Labour Party in the last two sets of elections and yet it is Labour that have run the council with an overall majority.<sup>6</sup>

It is a phenomenon that is not confined to the UK. In the US election of 2000, George W Bush received 543,816 fewer votes than Al Gore and yet won the election thanks to the workings of the electoral college system.<sup>7</sup>

One effect of a disproportionate result is to make scrutiny of the executive by the legislature less effective. With a strong (albeit minority) opposition, the actions of the executive are subject to detailed examination. The possibilities for unchecked corruption are also lessened. In addition, a legislature in which the vast majority of members are in political unity makes for a poor debating chamber.

**f) The overall make-up of the legislature tends not to reflect the diversity of society**

In a system where each party is required only to put up a single candidate in each constituency there is a tendency for those parties to select a greater proportion of men, people of middle age, white people and people from the 'professions'. This, in turn, leads to an under-representation of women, younger people, people from ethnic minorities and people from working class backgrounds in the legislature.<sup>8</sup>

Comparisons with multi-member and list systems show that where a party is required to put forward a number of candidates for the same area they tend to present a more 'balanced' or 'representative' selection. The results of this can be seen in a comparison of the proportion of women in parliaments around the world:<sup>9</sup>

**Top ten countries with the highest proportion of women in the lower or only house of the national legislature and method of election**

Country	Total Seats	Number of Women	% women	Electoral System
Rwanda <sup>10</sup>	80	39	48.8	List PR
Sweden	349	158	45.3	Closed List PR
Denmark	179	68	38.0	Semi-Open List PR
Finland	200	75	37.5	Open List PR
Netherlands	150	55	36.7	Closed List PR
Norway	165	60	36.4	List PR
Cuba	609	219	36.0	Two round
Spain	350	126	36.0	Closed List PR <sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> In 1998, Labour won 38 out of 70 seats on 38.6% of the votes (Conservatives 31 seats on 46.9% of the votes. In 2002, Labour won 37 seats on 38% of the votes and the Conservatives 32 seats on 45.2% of the votes.

<sup>7</sup> George W Bush won 47.8% of the popular vote and received 271 electoral college votes. Al Gore won 48.4% of the popular vote and received 266 electoral college votes.

<sup>8</sup> In the UK Parliament at present, 82% of MPs are male and 18% are white.

<sup>9</sup> Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>

<sup>10</sup> 24 seats reserved for women

Belgium	150	53	35.3	Semi-Open List PR
Costa Rica	57	20	35.1	Closed List PR
Argentina	256	87	34.0	List PR

**g) Huge turnovers in the make-up of the legislature can occur despite only small changes in the way that electors cast their votes**

Stable government is viewed as being desirable by public, politicians and business. In the 1960s to 1980s in the UK, many aspects of policy were thrown into revolt by changes in government. On the difference of a few seats hung matters such as nationalisation versus privatisation and reform of trade union law reform.

The London Borough of Richmond provides an example of how relatively small changes in party support can produce large political changes. In 1998, the Liberal Democrats held 34 of the 52 seats with 42.6% of the votes. The Conservatives formed the opposition with 14 seats on 35.6% of the votes. Four years later, the Liberal Democrats vote share fell by just over 6% to 36.3% yet they lost more than half their seats (down from 34 to 15). The Conservatives gained 25 seats (up to 39) on a 8.3% rise in vote share (up to 43.9%).

It is also possible under First-Past-the-Post for parties to be virtually wiped out at a single election. In Canada in 1993, the Progressive Conservative Party fell from Government to just two seats on the basis of a fall in popular support from 42.9% to 16.0%. On another occasion (in 1957-58) a small fall in the electoral popularity of the Liberal Party had a huge impact on the governance of Canada - 1957: Liberal vote 39.0%, Liberal seats 105 (Conservative minority government); 1958: Liberal vote 33.8%, Liberal seats 48 (Conservative majority government).

On the basis of all these factors, it is clear that the First-Past-the-Post system fails both parties and electors.

## **Key factors influencing the choice of a new voting system**

Having concluded that the First-Past-the-Post system fails voters and parties, it is worthwhile considering what factors are important in the choice as to what system should replace it. In the view of the Electoral Reform Society, there are three key factors that are desirable above all:

### **Voter Choice**

Voters should, as far as is possible, be able to express their views on the candidates on the ballot paper, and be able to do so without fear that their votes might be wasted.

Under the First-Past-the-Post system, if a voter wants to support their preferred party, they only have a single candidate for whom to vote. The voter can only make one choice and cannot express views on the other candidates. Where the voter is able to vote preferentially, they can rank the candidates in whatever order they choose. This may take account of a number of

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<sup>11</sup> Two single member FPTP constituencies in North African enclaves

factors and will be personal to the voter, such as gender, age, views on particular issues, etc, and not just on the candidates' political affiliations.

## **Proportionality**

A new voting system should result in the legislature once elected reflecting the balance of votes cast by electors. In basic terms, this can mean simply broad party proportionality. However, it need not be limited to this. Proportionality can extend to factors such as gender and ethnicity and proportionality of opinion – whereby the views of elected members on matters which are not considered to be 'party matters' broadly reflect the split of opinions within society as a whole.

Proportionality is achieved in different ways in different voting systems, but all rely on the use of multi-member constituencies. The more elected members that are returned from each constituency, the smaller the share of the vote that is required to return a single member.

Number of members per constituency	%age vote needed to guarantee winning representation
1	50%
2	33.3%
3	25%
4	20%
5	16.7%

In the extreme, it is possible to have just a single constituency for the entire electorate. As used in the Netherlands, parties need only around 0.7% of the vote to win a seat and gain another seat for every additional 0.7% of the vote they gain. Such a system is very proportional but this comes at the cost of abolishing the link between elected representatives and a defined geographical area that they represent.

## **Relationship of elected members to those they represent**

The greater the number of members elected in a constituency, the larger the constituency is likely to be geographically. If a constituency is too large, it can be difficult for an elected member to keep in touch with all issues within the constituency and to provide a service to electors across it. There is therefore a balance to be struck between constituency size and proportionality.

However, it is a mistake to assume that a single-member constituency provides the best level of accountability. With only one elected member in a constituency, those who supported that member or who share his or her views may feel a strong link to that member, but others with different political views may not. With multi-member constituencies voters are more likely to have a member who shares their views and with whom they feel a stronger relationship.

In the Republic of Ireland, where multi-member constituencies are used, politicians have twice held referendums in attempts to change the voting system because they felt it made them too accountable to voter interests. On both occasions the voters rejected the case for change.

## The benefits of STV

The Single Transferable Vote (STV) offers the best combination of voter choice and party proportionality and at the same time creates strong relationships between voters and their representatives. STV is usually described as being preferential voting in multi-member constituencies.

1. **STV is broadly proportional.** The precise level of proportionality will depend on the number of elected members in each seat. A larger number will mean a more proportional final result.

Moreover, because STV takes account of voters' preferences, and not just their first preference (as in First-Past-the-Post and list systems), it produces a more sophisticated form of proportionality. This characteristic of STV benefits parties which have broad support beyond their immediate supporters and disadvantages extremist parties which are unlikely to be the second or subsequent choice of voters of other parties.

Furthermore, with STV votes are cast for candidates, not for parties (although most voters will be guided by candidates' party affiliations), if significant numbers of voters vote on the basis of a criterion other than party, it will also produce broad proportionality by that criterion.

2. **STV offers increased voter choice.** With STV voters rank candidates in order of preference: votes which cannot be used to benefit an elector's first choice candidate can transfer to their next choice and so on. Because voters can choose between candidates of the same party as well as simply between parties, they have far more choice than with any other electoral system. Whereas in an open list election voters might get to plump for a single candidate (and thus have a certain amount of choice), preferential voting allows them to say 'if I cannot have my first choice, then I would like my second choice instead'. Voters are not limited to ranking the candidates from a single party but can give preferences that cross party lines. Whilst parties still retain a say over which candidates are put forward to represent them, it is the voters who decide which of these are elected.
3. **STV maintains a constituency link.** Closed list systems suffer from the loss of a link between elected members and a fixed geographical constituency because voters do not vote for candidates - only for parties. An argument often advanced First-Past-the-Post is that it creates a strong constituency link, but that argument is often just an expression of politicians' desire for a monopoly of representation in their constituencies. Where electors are more likely to have a member sympathetic to their views, links to that member can be stronger. Research in the UK by the Electoral Reform Society has found that in multi-member wards in local government constituency links are at least as strong as in single-member constituencies.
4. **STV allows electors to vote against unpopular candidates and parties.** Because voters can rank candidates in order of preference, they can effectively discriminate against candidates as well as for them. This is particularly valuable in cases where there are candidates representing extremist and racist parties. Under a First-Past-the-Post system, these candidates can sometimes rely on the mainstream parties splitting the anti-racist vote

and thus secure election on a small proportion of the overall vote. For example, in a by-election to Kirklees Council held in August 2003, the BNP won with the support of just 27.7% of those who voted. Preferential voting allows electors to effectively say 'I would have any candidate other than the extremist'. In Australia, Pauline Hanson, Leader of the far-right One Nation Party was once defeated in an election by the candidate who was placed third on the first preference votes (although in an 'Alternative Vote' rather than an STV election).

5. **STV ends safe seats.** Because voters have the choice between candidates of the same party, there is no longer any form of safe seat. Candidates who are the most popular within their parties may need to compete with other party colleagues for the support of the electorate and parties cannot manipulate their lists to effectively guarantee the election of favourite sons or daughters.
6. **STV is fair to independents.** Most systems of proportional representation demand some form of party allegiance in order to guarantee election and they therefore discriminate against candidates running as independents. STV is different because it places all candidates on an equal footing and they run as individuals, not mere party functionaries.
7. **STV avoids the need for tactical voting.** Because electors know that if their vote cannot be used to help their first choice candidate win election it will be transferred to their next choice, they will be more likely to vote for their genuine first choice rather than feel the need to vote tactically. Under First-Past-the-Post, as many as 70% of votes are typically 'wasted' in an election in that they do not help to secure the election of a winning candidate. With STV, this number is typically cut to around 15-20%.
8. **STV allows different sized constituencies to reflect real communities.** STV does not require constituencies of an equal size each returning the same number of elected members. Equal sized constituencies can lead to a fairly random splitting of real communities in order to get roughly equivalent numbers of members in each. With STV, the only need is to ensure that the number of electors for each elected member is roughly equal – eg a constituency that returns six members should have an electorate of roughly double that of a constituency returning three members. STV can therefore use constituency boundaries which reflect real geographical communities and allow densely populated urban areas to have constituencies returning more members and sparsely populated rural areas to have constituencies returning fewer members. In exceptional cases, it is even possible to have single member constituencies in the most sparsely populated areas.

## **Other voting systems**

### **List Systems**

List systems have the benefit of providing proportional results but do so at the expense of restricting voters' choice and they tend to weaken the link between elected members and geographical constituencies.

List systems may be of two types – closed or open. In closed list systems, the order of the candidates on a list is determined by the party and is fixed. This means that electors have no say over the order of election and tends to guarantee seats for candidates placed at the top of the lists of larger parties. In open list systems, electors have the chance to choose a candidate from the list as presented by the party. This gives them some choice but not so much as under STV where electors can give more than one preference and can choose candidates from different parties.

Some countries use 'semi-open' lists that allow voters either to vote for a party list (as ordered by the party) or to vote for a particular candidate on a list. However, as many voters will simply give a party vote, it is generally the party's ordering of candidates which prevails. Semi-open lists therefore rarely produce different outcomes from closed lists.

List systems tend to result in more representation of women as parties are more inclined to present a group of candidates which better reflects the make-up of society as a whole than when single member constituencies are used.

### **Majoritarian systems**

There are a variety of systems that seek to ensure that the winning candidate has the support of more than half of those who vote. These systems tend to use single member constituencies. The simplest version is the two round election whereby if no candidate has the support of more than half of those who vote, then the top two candidates go forward to a run-off election (usually a week or two later). Another version is the Alternative Vote (otherwise known as Instant Run-off Voting) where voters express their views preferentially. If no candidate has the support of a majority, then the lowest placed candidate is eliminated and their votes transferred to the elector's second preference. This process continues until one candidate has more than half the votes. A more limited version of this, the Supplementary Vote, allows electors just a first and second choice.

Whilst majoritarian systems allow an extension of voter choice compared to First-Past-the-Post elections, they do not result in a more proportional outcome as they retain single member constituencies. Majoritarian systems such as the Alternative Vote can, at times, produce an outcome that is even less proportional than First-Past-the-Post.

### **AMS and other hybrid systems**

Hybrid systems seek to link the benefits of First-Past-the-Post or majoritarian systems with a top-up list element to ensure a more proportional outcome. As such they tend to bring some of the advantages of each system with some of the disadvantages of each as well. The most

common hybrid system is the Additional Member System (also known as Mixed Member Proportional). This asks the elector to vote once for a constituency member (elected using First-Past-the-Post) and once for their favoured party in a list election which allocates elected members after taking into account those elected for each party in the constituencies.

Whilst AMS is a proportional system, the amount of voter choice which is granted is quite limited. There can also be conflict because members are elected in two different ways. In Scotland and Wales, where AMS is used for the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly elections, there has been conflict between Labour MSPs who are predominantly elected from constituencies and others who are mainly elected through the top-up lists.

Some hybrid systems seek to customise the AMS model. In the UK a Commission headed by the late Lord Jenkins recommended a system called AV Plus which would use the Alternative Vote in constituency elections and use open lists in the top-up element.

## **Conclusions**

Whilst it cannot be said that there is an ideal electoral system for use in every election in every country of the world, the STV system has the best combination of the essential elements of voter choice and proportionality. It also eliminates some unwanted characteristics of the First-Past-the-Post system such as tactical voting and safe seats.

Other voting systems provide benefits in comparison with First-Past-the-Post but all have their weak points as well. List systems suffer from a lack of voter choice, majoritarian systems lack proportionality and hybrid systems tend to bring both the advantages and disadvantages of their component parts.

We therefore strongly recommend the use of STV.

Electoral Reform Society  
June 2004

## Press Release

### SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE RESPONDS TO GLASGOW TRADES COUNCIL DEMAND

The Scottish Executive has introduced a bill that responds to Glasgow Trades Council's call for a proportional voting system for local government.

"We are delighted that the Scottish Executive has taken this step," said Ken Ritchie, Chief Executive of the Electoral Reform Society. "As the Glasgow Trades Council got the backing of the Labour Party conference and had the support of many Scottish Labour leaders, we had hoped for faster action. Nevertheless, the Scottish Executive is to be congratulated on getting there in the end."

The Trades Council made its call for proportional representation for local government, in an amendment to a Labour conference resolution, 85 years ago. Now the Scottish Executive wants local councils in Scotland to be elected using the Single Transferable Vote, a form of proportional representation that maximises the choice given to voters and results in most voters getting a councillor they voted for.

#### Editors' note:

The Glasgow Trades Council's amendment was moved at the 1918 Labour conference. Six years earlier the STUC had voted in favour of proportional representation and the Glasgow Trades Council's amendment succeeded in making PR for local government a policy of the Labour Party. PR was, however, already the policy of the Independent Labour Party whose first leader was Electoral Reform Society supporter, Keir Hardie. In 1913 the ILP resolved:

*"no system of election can be satisfactory which does not give opportunity to all parties to obtain representation in proportion to their voting strength".*

For further information, contact:

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