



The Last Chance Saloon?

The Labour Party and the Alternative Vote

By Dr Matt Qvortrup

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Executive Summary

- *This paper shows that the Labour Party is likely to benefit from the introduction of the Alternative Vote*
- *With changes of the boundaries – to make more equal sized constituencies – the Labour Party will suffer electorally. This will be remedied by second preferences from Liberal Democrat and to a degree Green voters, which Labour is likely to win.*
- *By opposing the Alternative Vote – or by campaigning half-heartedly for it – the Labour Party is likely to deprive itself of a chance to gain seats, and even of unseating the Government in the next General Election.*
- *In every election since 1997, the Labour Party would have gained more seats under AV than under First-Past-the-Post. There is only one academic study that gives Labour fewer seats than actually won under First-Past-the-Post, and this was in an unrepresentative year.*
- *The Supplementary vote (a variant of the Alternative Vote) has – contrary to many myths – benefitted the Labour Party in the London Mayoral Election. Had Ken Livingstone won second preferences from 0.04 voters he would have beaten Boris Johnson, although Livingstone only won 36 percent of the first preference votes against Johnson's 42 percent.*
- *The introduction of AV would lead to a slight over representation of Labour and a modest underrepresentation of the Conservatives.*
- *Analyses showing that the Conservatives could benefit from the introduction of AV (as recently suggested by John Curtice) are not based on empirical evidence but on assumptions.*
- *The Conservative think-tanks are publishing studies which seek to undermine the case for AV. Most recently, study by Centre-right think tank Policy Exchange described AV as 'the system that no-one wants'. This campaign against AV, is circumstantial evidence that the Tories fear that the introduction of AV would strengthen Labour.*

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About the author

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About Labour Yes

Labour Yes is a campaign of Labour Party members and activists to secure a Yes vote for AV in the 2011 Referendum. It launched on 8th December with support from Labour leader Ed Miliband and Shadow Cabinet Ministers including John Denham, Sadiq Khan, Tessa Jowell, Hilary Benn, Alan Johnson, Douglas Alexander, Liam Byrne and Peter Hain.

www.labouryes.co.uk

Introduction: Labour's Misplaced Anger

There seems to be a growing opposition against the AV system among Labour politicians and opinion-makers¹. Anger that the Liberal Democrats decided join a Coalition with the Conservatives and not with their traditional allies in the Labour Party, has led some to conclude that Labour should campaign against the introduction of the Alternative Vote (an electoral system that the party campaigned for during the 2010 general election). As one blogger (and former Labour Special Adviser) put it: "Labour should specifically oppose AV...this has become a positive, principled choice, and absolutely central for Labour's survival"².

The argument in this short report is that opposing AV would be fatal for Labour. Indeed supporting AV is 'absolutely central' for Labour's chances of winning the next General election.

It is well-known – and perhaps paradoxical – that Labour before the 2010 general election championed the Alternative Vote. Indeed, the Labour party's Manifesto *A Fair Future for All*³ included a commitment to holding "a referendum on introducing the Alternative Vote for elections to the House of Commons", to "ensure that every MP is supported by the majority of their constituents voting at each election".

Whereas the Liberal Democrats were at best lukewarm at the idea of introducing AV, the roles reversed after the election. Indeed before the election, Chris Huhne had observed that "The alternative vote is not the solution", and opined that "only the single transferable vote will remedy the unfairness of the present system", though he did admit that AV was "a small step in the right direction"⁴.

¹For example as reported in the Daily Mail. See: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1298294/Referendum-AV-derailed-Labour-vows-oppose-vote-reform-bill.html>

² Kevin Meagher (2010) 'A positive pirouette on the Alternative Vote', in Tribune Magazine,. At <http://www.tribunemagazine.co.uk/2010/09/a-positive-pirouette-on-the-alternative-vote/>. Accessed 28 September 2010.

³ The Labour party (2010) *A Future Fair for All*, London, the Labour Party, p. 63

⁴ Chris Huhne (2010), 'The Alternative Vote is Not the Solution', in the Guardian, 9th February 2010 at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/feb/09/alternative-vote-not-the-solution>. Accessed 14th September 2010

While not officially hostile to AV, the Labour Party seemed to have second thoughts and prominent members have sowed doubts about the commitment to changing the system and their contribution to the campaign. Andy Burnham – Labour’s Election Campaign Co-coordinator –has expressed the view that Labour will not campaign for alternative vote, but will instead “focus...on [the] Scottish, Welsh and local elections taking place on same day”⁵. Conversely, the Liberal Democrats have forgotten their misgivings about the Alternative Vote and are now campaigning for its introduction⁶.

This paper presents the context for the debate and outlines the historical background. It also outlines the proposed changes and critically analyses the different predictions as to what might happen if the Alternative Vote were to be endorsed in the referendum in 2011.

The Proposed Changes: A Gerrymandering of the Constitution or a fair adjustment?

In the Coalition agreement the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats, agreed to:

“Bring forward a Referendum Bill on electoral reform, which includes provision for the introduction of the Alternative Vote in the event of a positive result in the referendum, as well as for the creation of fewer and more equal sized constituencies”⁷.

Following the publication of the document, the Coalition government moved swiftly and introduced the *Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill* in the *House of Commons* on 22 July 2010. The Bill passed its Third Reading on 2nd November by 321 to 264 votes, and was passed by the House of Lords by 224 votes to 210.

The aim of the legislation is two-fold, 1) to reduce the number of Constituencies from 650 to 600 and 2) to introduce (subject to a referendum) the electoral system known as *The Alternative Vote*. Under the system proposed by the government, voters will be given the

⁵ Patrick Wintour (2010) ‘Labour will not campaign for alternative vote’, says Andy Burnham, *The Guardian*, At: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/nov/05/labour-will-not-campaign-alternative-vote>, Accessed 14 November 2010

⁶⁶ <http://www.libdems.org.uk/fairervotes.aspx>. Accessed 10 November 2010

⁷ HM Government (2010) *Freedom, Fairness and Responsibility*, London TSO, p.27

option of ranking as many candidates as they like in accordance with their preferences⁸. If one candidate gets more than 50 percent of the votes that individual is elected. If none of the candidates achieve this, the candidate with the smallest number of 1st preferences is eliminated and his or her second preferences are transferred to other candidates. This continues until one of the candidates has achieved more than 50 percent of the votes⁹.

As a result of the changes proposed, the average size of the constituencies will be 75,000 voters. This equalisation of constituency sizes – and the resulting reduction of parliamentary seats from 650 to 600 is thought to increase the proportion of Conservative members in any given parliament, though the extent of this increase will depend on the drawing of boundaries. The net result of the changes – in the event of a no-vote in the referendum in May – will be that the Conservative Party will win an overall majority of the seats in the House of Commons although they will fall well short of winning an overall majority of the votes.

The equalisation of constituency sizes will mean that the Conservatives will no longer need their Liberal Democrat coalition partners to form a majority government. In the event of a no-vote in the referendum, the Labour Party will thus be in a more difficult position than now.

Labour has traditionally (or at least since 1997) been in a favourable position under the current First-Past-the-Post system. Using so-called *Seat/Vote-Ratios* (the percentage of seats won as share of the percentage of votes won) the Labour Party has been in a favourable position vis-à-vis the other parties.

Since 1997, Labour won almost two percent of the seats for every percent they won in the election. The Conservatives won roughly 1.2 percent seats for every one percent support, whereas the Liberals only got 0.2 seats per percentage of the votes. This is likely to change. In a smaller parliament, the Conservatives are likely to be overrepresented.

⁸ This system is slightly different from the system of AV as it works in Australia, where voters have to rank all the candidates.

⁹ For an overview of how this and other systems work see: Gallagher, Michael and Mitchell, Paul (2008) 'Introduction to Electoral Systems' in Michael Gallagher and Paul Mitchell (Editors) *The Politics of Electoral Systems*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp.3-23.

Labour's Seat/Vote-Ratio will still be above one, but below that of the Conservatives. For the Liberal Democrats – a party with support evenly distributed across the country – the equalisation of constituency sizes will not alter their representation significantly. In short, without the introduction of AV – the Conservatives will overtake Labour's role as the overrepresented party, the Liberal Democrats will stay the same and the Labour Party will be disadvantaged compared to now.

The question – from the perspective of the Labour Party – is whether this would change with the introduction of AV. Would AV cushion the blow of constituency equalisation, or perhaps even neutralise it? That is the question we turn to in the next section.

Prediction and Prophecy

'What if' analyses – so-called counter-factual analyses in the jargon of historians – are tricky. They are based on sometimes questionable assumptions. In the aftermath of the general election there have been a number of studies which indicate that some parties could have done better (or worse) had the general election been conducted under a different electoral system.

It is difficult to predict the future. The social sciences – to put it in a high-browed way – are facing the same problem as the ancient Greek Philosopher Heraclitus who observed that "we never step into the same river twice". Circumstances change and assumptions as to how individuals behave and as to what preferences they have change with them. To make predictions as to what might be is, consequently, a dicey business. We have no certainty that voters would behave in the same way today as they would last year. Nevertheless, the opinion polls and surveys of voters' preferences – while not entirely stable – have not changed much in the past fifteen years. We, therefore, have reason to believe that data of voters' second preferences from yesterday may also be a reliable guide to their electoral behavior tomorrow.

There are several studies of what might have been. Since 1997, psephologists have asked voters about their second preferences. Before looking at the most recent election and beyond to the next election it might be useful to look at these older studies.

Shortly after the General Election in 1997, the *Jenkins Commission* was established with the terms of reference to recommend a new electoral system for the UK that observed “the requirement of broad proportionality, the need for stable government, an extension of voter choice and the maintenance of a link between MPs and geographical constituencies”¹⁰.

As a part of their deliberations, the Commission considered various outcomes under alternative electoral systems. The report’s authors estimated that the introduction of AV would have been “unacceptably unfair to the Conservatives”¹¹ – and yet the committee opted for a system called AV+ (AV with top-up votes along the lines of the German electoral system)¹².

The assessment and the conclusion that AV would almost electorally annihilate the Tories were also reached in a more thorough – and more academic - study carried out by Patrick Dunleavy and colleagues¹³. According to their analysis, the Conservative Party would have won only 19 percent of the seats – although they won 31.4 percent of the seats in 1997. The Labour Party, having won 44 percent of the votes would have won no fewer than 68 percent of the seats, a majority of 245 compared to the actual majority of 179.

1997 was admittedly a special case. The deep distrust in John Major’s Conservative administration was without historical precedent. That the Labour Party under these circumstances was able to reap the benefit in terms of Liberal Democrat voters’ second preferences is almost banal.

To get a sense of how the Labour Party would fare under the Alternative Vote we need to look at more recent – and more *normal* general elections such as 2005 and 2010¹⁴.

¹⁰ Jenkins commission

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Under the German electoral system (sometimes known as the Mixed Member System) the voters vote for a constituency candidate and for a list. This system is also used in elections for the Welsh Assembly, the Scottish Parliament and the London Assembly. Modified versions of the system are used in Hungary and New Zealand.

¹³ Dunleavy, P., Margetts, H., O’Duffy, B. and Weir, S. (1998) ‘Remodelling the 1997 General Election: How Britain would have voted under alternative voting systems’, in *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, Vol.8, No.1, p.225

¹⁴ I have excluded the 2001 General Election as this was another landslide for Labour. The result of this election would have been roughly the same as the predicted 1997 AV result. In other words gains for Labour and the Liberal Democrats and a disaster for the Conservatives.

2005 Had the 2005 election been held under AV, Labour would have won even more seats. AV could have given Labour a majority of 108 on only 35.3 percent of the votes. Or 52 more seats than they won under the existing First-Past-the-Post Electoral System. Moreover, the Conservatives would – again – have been the big loser¹⁵ That Labour could win such a (hypothetical) majority on second preference votes in the long shadow of the Iraq War – which was so vigorously opposed by the then Liberal Democrat Leader Charles Kennedy, is a remarkable result, which more than explains why Gordon Brown (a long term opponent of electoral reform) was convinced that the introduction of AV was in the Labour Party's interest.

2010

There has been a tendency since the general election 2010 to suggest that the Labour Party would lose as a result of the introduction of AV and that the Conservative party would benefit. A neutral observer such as the psephologist John Curtice¹⁶ argued that the shift to the alternative vote would now benefit the Tories. As he writes:

“Now that the Lib Dems are in coalition with the Tories, their supporters may be more willing to back Cameron's party with their second preferences. This could be reciprocated by Conservative supporters – as is very likely if the two parties encouraged their supporters to vote that way. Of course Labour supporters would now *probably* be less keen on backing the Liberal Democrats with their second preference. All in all, *perhaps* 20 per cent more Tory supporters might give their second preference vote to the LibDems than did in our poll, while 30 per cent fewer Labour supporters do so. At the same time twice as many Liberal Democrats *might* prefer the Conservatives to Labour¹⁷.

The words ‘probably’, ‘perhaps’ and ‘might’ (italicized by this author) are telling. For the forecast is based on conjecture and not on solid figures. And so is Curtice's conclusion that “If voters had behaved that way in May the Liberal Democrats would still have gained most,

¹⁵ See David Saunders, Harold D. Clarke, Marianne C. Stewart and Paul Whiteley (2010) ‘Simulating the Effects of the Alternative Vote in the 2010 UK General Election’ in *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol.63, No.3, pp. 1-19.

¹⁶ John Curtice (2008) Why the alternative vote may appeal to Labour, in *The Daily Telegraph*, 6 April, 2006.

¹⁷ John Curtice ‘This could make Cameron the winner from electoral reform’, in *The Independent* 4 November 2010. At <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/john-curtice-this-could-make-cameron-the-winner-from-electoral-reform-2124667.html>. Accessed 10 November 2010.

with 83 seats. But the Conservatives might have won as many as 316; Labour could have had just 223”¹⁸. This is a journalistic comment, not a solid piece of political science.

Such verdicts by a prominent psephologist are not welcome for the Labour Party, and it is understandable that such prophecies are likely to turn Labour away from the path of electoral reform.

However, this prophecy needs to be taken with more than a proverbial pinch of salt. The assumption that Labour is likely to lose seats as a result of the introduction of AV is – as already noted – *not* based on psephological modeling, but on the assumption that Liberal Democrat voters are more likely to have the Conservatives as their second preference. Something which is neither sustained by the experiences from actual elections (for example the Mayoral election in London – see below) or from the polling data. To get an accurate picture, we need actual figures. In fact, there is a tendency in the opposite direction in many polls taken since the election. Many Liberal Democrat voters – as opposed to their representatives – feel closer to the Labour Party than to the Tories. Some might even be more inclined to put Labour as a second preference now, not least after the departure of Gordon Brown¹⁹.

Before analyzing the most recent General Election, it is important to put things in context. 2010 is not a good predictor of how Labour might fare under a different system. For starters, Labour was suffering from political exhaustion after more than a decade in office and many voters expressed tiredness with Gordon Brown. Yet even under these most difficult of circumstances the Labour Party would seemingly have done better if the system was AV than under the current system.

The studies of how Labour would have fared suggest that the party would have done better under AV than under FPTP²⁰. According to a poll by *ComRes*, the 2010 general election – had

¹⁸ Ibid.

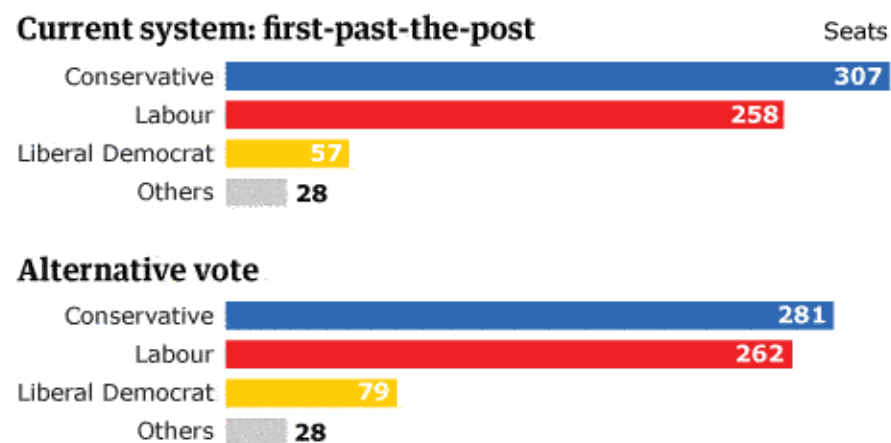
¹⁹ Alan Travis (2010) ‘Electoral reform: Alternative vote system would have had minimal impact on outcome of general election’, in the *Guardian*, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/may/10/alternative-vote-minimal-impact-general-election>.

²⁰ It should be noted however, that a Study by David Saunders and Colleagues based on the *British Election Survey* (BES) found that the Conservatives would have gained, 284, Labour 248 and Liberal Democrats 89. This is the only study that suggests that Labour will do slightly worse under AV. However politically this result would have put Labour in a better bargaining position as the outcome would have changed the arithmetic of post-election coalition building, with the Liberal Democrats being able to form a majority coalition with either

it been held under the Alternative Vote – would have helped the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats. The latter would have won 79 seats compared with the 57 they actually won.

The Labour Party too would have benefited – though not by as much. The Labour Party – despite the unpopularity of Gordon Brown, the economic crisis and the inevitably lethargy incurred as a result of thirteen years of government – would still have done better under AV. Labour would have won 262 – or four more seats – had AV been in place for the election. However, the Conservatives would have won a meager 281 seats, considerably below the 307 seats won under the existing system.

Figure One: Comparison of First-Past-the-Post and AV outcomes of the 2010 General Election



Source: Guardian

This – to be sure - would still have enabled the Tories and the Liberal Democrats to form a coalition government, but the larger number of Liberal Democrat backbenchers could have made this hypothetical coalition more vulnerable to Liberal Democrat backbench rebellions.

In other words, neither Labour nor the Conservatives would have benefited significantly from transfers based on the voters' preferences as recorded in the 2010 General Election.

But the general pattern is still clear; Labour would do better under AV and the Conservatives would fare worse. Moreover, while the net effect in 2010 was “close to zero”²¹, this result is

Labour or the Conservatives. See David Saunders, Harold D. Clarke, Marianne C. Stewart and Paul Whiteley (2010) 'Simulating the Effects of the Alternative Vote in the 2010 UK General Election' in *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol.63, No.3, pp. 1-19.

²¹ John Curtice personal communication with the author 16 November 2010.

an anomaly. According to Curtice, in “1997 and 2005 the 2nd preferences of LD voters were heavily pro-Labour”²².

The Labour Party would not have won the 2010 General Election – that would have been arithmetically impossible under any electoral system. But Labour would have done better than they did under First-Past-the-Post (and incidentally better than they would have done had the election been conducted under the fully proportional system *The Single-Transferable Vote*).²³

Excursus: the myth of Boris and AV

The ‘only poll that counts is the election’ politicians are fond of saying. To determine what AV would be like it is instructive to look at the actual practice and experience with AV in the United Kingdom. As things stand, AV is only used in London’s Mayoral elections (and here only in a modified form (known as the *Supplementary Vote*) where the voters have two preferences, i.e. a first and a second preference²⁴). How has this system worked? Has it worked to the benefit of the Labour Party as critics claimed was intended?

Some would say that it did not. In fact, it has been argued by some Conservatives that AV would benefit the Tories. As evidence for this they cite Boris Johnson’s victory in the Mayoral election in London in 2008. One of the myths is that Boris Johnson won the election because he stuck to a centrist position and lured Liberal Democrats and Greens to vote for him. In other words, or so the argument runs, the experience with AV in London proves that the Conservatives can benefit from AV at the Labour Party’s expense. The evidence in support for this argument is not based on actual figures, but on polling data from a week before the mayoral election. According to a *YouGov* poll from before the 2008 mayoral election, Boris Johnson would win a majority of the Second Preferences. See Table 1. As we shall see below, he did not. In fact, the figures were reversed.

²² Ibid.

²³ Under STV the result would have been as follows: Con 246, Lab 207, Lib Dem 162, and others 35. Moreover under STV, the regional imbalances that prevent the Conservatives and Labour being national parties would have been addressed. The Tories would have had seven MPs in Scotland instead of just one, and would have had parity with the Lib Dems in Wales with 10 MPs each.

²⁴ This system is also used in the Mayoral elections in the English cities that have directly elected mayors.

Table One: Predicted Second Preference Votes: London Mayoral Election 2008

First preferences:

Boris Johnson MP (Conservative) 46%

Livingstone (Labour) 35%

Second preferences:

Boris Johnson (Conservative) 55%

Livingstone (Labour) 45%

Source: YouGov (For The Evening Standard)²⁵

So let us consider the actual figures. In the election the Labour candidate Ken Livingstone polled 894,317 first preference votes (roughly 36 percent), whereas the Conservative candidate Boris Johnson won polled 1,044,067 votes out of a total of 2,416,885 votes (roughly 43 percent). Brian Paddick, in third place, won 236,752 (nine percent). Under a First-Past-the-Post system, Boris Johnson – with over 43 percent of the votes and 149,750 first preference votes more than Livingstone - would have won although he was still short of the 164,375 votes that would have been required to reach the magical 50 percent of the votes.

It is what happened next that is of interest for our purposes. Story has it that Johnson reached the magical majority because he was supported by Liberal Democrats who deserted Ken Livingstone in droves. This, as Table 2 shows, is not the case. Johnson, with only 10 percent of the second preferences, fell well below his predicted share of 55 percent of the Second Preferences (See table 2)

Table 2: Second Preferences in the 2008 Mayoral Election in London

<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Johnson</u>	<u>Livingstone</u>	<u>Paddick</u>
BARNBROOK, Richard (BNP)	22,200	4,353	4,659
BATTEN, G.J. (UKIP)	6,671	1,681	2,298
BERRY, S (Green)	10,984	36,365	13,672
CRAIG, Alan (CPA)	10,328	10,352	3,978

²⁵ <http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/standard-mayor/article-23456673-boris-races-ahead-in-mayor-poll.do>. Accessed 17 November 2010.

GERMAN, Lindsey (Left List)	1,327	6,661	1,743
	-	79,190	344,329
JOHNSON, B. (Con)			
LIVINGSTONE, K. (Lab)	85,335	-	261,537
	825	945	703
McKENZIE, W.T. (Ind)			
O'CONNOR, M. (Withdrawn)	2,485	1,120	1,425
PADDICK, B. (Lib.Dem)	70,157	73,612	-
	257,906	303,343	641,623

Total Second Preferences: 2,004,831

*The figure next to the candidate shows the 2nd Preferences given to the candidates.
Source: London Elects 2008. The Author is grateful to Katy Shaw for providing a breakdown of these figures.*

Boris Johnson won a total of 257,906 second preferences. This is, to be sure, an impressive figure, which was bolstered by the 22,043 second preferences Johnson received from voters who had the BNP as their first preference²⁶.

The argument that Johnson was popular among Green and Liberal Democrat voters, and the argument that he won because he was able to appeal to centrist voters, is difficult to sustain. Despite being subjected to a largely negative campaign by the *Evening Standard*, Ken Livingstone still managed to poll 303,343 second preference votes.

And, as importantly, a plurality of the Liberal Democrat first preference voters supported Ken Livingstone. Ken Livingstone won 73,612 second preference votes from Liberal Democrats. Johnson won 70,157.

To claim that Boris Johnson became Mayor because of Liberal Democrat support is plain wrong. Nor is it correct to say that he won the mayoralty because he tempted Green voters

²⁶ One of the interesting – and perhaps scary – statistics from the official figures is that 99,416 of those who voted for Boris Johnson had the BNP as their second preference. The BNP was the first choice as second preference for a plurality of the Conservatives. The second choice was Labour with 79,190 thousand.

to support him. Boris Johnson only won 10,984 of the Green voters' second preferences. Ken Livingstone, by contrast, won more than three times that number, namely 36,365.

Ken Livingstone was surprisingly close to winning. Had Livingstone only secured second preferences from 00.4 percent of the voters (11,182) he would have beaten Boris Johnson.

Under the circumstances, Livingstone did well to secure the number of second preferences he did. Given Boris Johnson's reversal of policies – especially on environmental issues – it seems likely that Livingstone will benefit from the AV system and win the mayoral election in 2012. AV in practice can work for the Labour Party!

It is for this reason – and because they have realized this – that the Conservative Party increasingly have deployed their best and their brightest to fight against a system that would deprive them of the unfair advantage they would gain under an unreformed electoral system. The report by David Cameron's favorite think tank *Policy Exchange*, entitled 'The Alternative Vote – the system no-one wants'²⁷ – with a number of warnings and frontal attacks on the alleged unfairness of AV – is an indication that the Conservatives do not take the challenge of AV lightly, and that they are aware of the dangers that this system pose for them. This fear in the Tory hinterland should prompt Labour politicians to campaign actively for the introduction of AV.

Conclusion

There are many myths about the possible effects of the possible introduction of the Alternative Vote, should the referendum in May 2011 result in a positive verdict by the voters.

Recently some psephologists – most notably John Curtice – have suggested that Labour could lose out as a result of a change to AV. However, as this paper has shown, this calculation is not based on an analysis of empirical data but on assumptions. If we rely on the figures from surveys as provided by opinion polls the result is clear; Labour would gain from the introduction of AV.

²⁷ Robert McIlveen – edited by Natalie Evans (2010) 'The Alternative Vote – the System no-one wants', *Policy Exchange. Research Note*, October 2010

Even under the very unfavorable conditions of the General Election of 2010, the Labour Party would in all likelihood have fared considerably better. And in previous elections, Labour would have benefited considerably – even under the not particularly favorable circumstances of the 2005 General Election.

The myth that Boris Johnson's victory in the 2008 Mayoral election suggests that the Tories have an advantage under AV is equally flawed. In fact, Boris Johnson polled fewer second preference votes than Ken Livingstone. Had Ken Livingstone only won another 0.04 percent of the second preferences he would have beaten Boris Johnson even though he received almost 150,000 fewer first preference votes.

The Conservative opponents of electoral reform have sensed this. While some – including the Daily Telegraph – expressed some sympathy for AV only a few months ago, the intellectuals in the Tory hinterlands, such as in sober think-tanks like *Policy Exchange* have come out against AV in a ferocious attack on the proposed new system, speaks volumes.

The Tories know that they will not benefit from AV. It is time that the Labour Party realises that it is in its own interest to unequivocally support AV – and leave behind their misgivings about the Liberal Democrats.

AV was Labour's idea and proposal. It was the Liberal Democrats that compromised and accepted AV. Not to fight for its introduction would be a historical mistake for the Labour Party.

That Labour would gain from the introduction of AV is the not the only reason that electoral reform would benefit the party. Given that the reduction in the number of MPs is likely to disproportionately hurt the Labour Party, AV provides a mechanism which will cushion the blow of the boundary changes. In fact, without AV the Labour Party will be considerably disadvantaged. The dream of winning an outright majority under the existing system is not a realistic option for Labour in a Parliament with fewer members.

AV is Labour's best chance of ousting the Conservative-led government and for appealing to disgruntled Liberal Democrat voters who regret that their parties opted for an alliance with David Cameron rather than a partnership with the Labour Party.