

# ENQUIRE WITHIN

**Question:** *Do you intend to vote for a change to the voting system on 5th May, 2011, or are you happy with the present "first past the post" system, Neil?*

**Answer:** No system of voting is entirely fair. Some are more fair than others and some are so complicated that they defy reason! The problem with democracy is that it is difficult to maintain, but it is better, fair better, than any other system of government.

The present voting system is simple. Everyone registered on the voters register is eligible to vote, but not required to vote by law. On election day, people may vote in confidence from 8am to 10pm. The voter places an X next to the candidate of their choice, and at the close of the voting, the votes are counted. Normally, the count is concluded within a few hours of the close of the voting. The candidate with the most votes wins. Easy.



If the system is so simple and quick, why change?

Some people feel that the present system gives insufficient importance to minority parties and so on 5th May, we will be asked to support a new system of voting called the Alternative Vote, or AV for short. In this system, everybody voting would have the opportunity to say which candidate is their second, third or even lower choices. When the votes are counted, if one of the candidates has more than 50% of the votes cast, then he or she become elected. If no candidate gets more than 50%, the candidate who came in last is eliminated and their votes are given to whoever they voted for as second choice. This process continues until one candidate has over 50% of the votes.

In assessing the value of this proposal, we could ask the question "which other major country uses the system?" The answer is not encouraging. Only Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Australia use AV, and as far as I can see, there are good reasons for this.

Using AV, fringe and minority parties end up having their votes counted several times and their votes may in fact decide the outcomes of elections with an influence

quite out of proportion to the number of people who voted for them.

The AV system wouldn't have any effect on "safe seats" and about 35% of Parliamentary seats are won outright by one candidate gaining 50% of the votes, as in Ealing North last year.

AV is complicated and will require investment in expensive counting machinery to count the votes and reduce the human element of counting ballot papers. This will produce, in my view, a diminishing interest in elections and people will probably not bother to vote in greater numbers than they already do. Don't forget, they only get a high turnout in Australia because it is compulsory to vote. Is that our next step?

Using the AV system can mean that the person who won the most votes doesn't actually get elected, but the influence of the alternative votes of the candidates eliminated topples the leading candidate at the end of the day. This is clearly unfair, an example of the tail wagging the dog.

The AV system will tend to create more possibilities of coalition Governments which to my mind is a thoroughly bad thing. As with our present Con-Dem Government, we are now seeing policies for which no majority was found in the electorate in 2010 and a Lib-Dem party now supporting policies which it specifically campaigned against at the election.

Coalitions create "behind closed doors" deals, to which the voters are not admitted and not allowed to express an opinion on until the next election, which is totally unfair. Politicians are right to seek compromises in general, of course, but to change policies like the Lib-Dems have done in order to taste a little bit of power is blatantly disgraceful and dishonest.

Our present voting system may not be perfect, but it has the benefits of being easy to understand, it creates strong governments, even if you don't agree with them! It excludes extremists and their pernicious influences. It is cheap to run, it is the most widely used system in the world, and it is British, copied around the world by most countries.

I will be voting No to AV in May.