

UNION ELECTORAL REFORM BRIEFING

PR IS THE MAJORITY POSITION IN THE LABOUR PARTY

There is now huge support for PR in Labour and it is the direction of travel the party is moving in. Support among the members is around 70% to 80%, and two thirds of the affiliated unions now support (including Unite, Unison and Usdaw). It was because of trade union support that the motion was passed at the 2022 Labour conference.

On top of this there is also broad and growing support among Labour MPs, especially the new intake. The APPG for Fair Elections (for PR) is the largest in Parliament and the vast majority of members are Labour MPs. The breadth of support is across the entire spectrum of the party. PR is one of the few things that John McDonnell and Luke Akehurst both support.

If we look at the likely contenders for the next leadership battle: Andy Burnham is explicitly pro, Wes Streeting supports PR, so two of the three front runners. Senior figures such as Deputy Leader, Lucy Powell also support. Support for PR will be a key dividing line in the next Labour leadership election with the majority of members, affiliated unions and a large bloc of MPs now in favour.

Sum up: Support for PR is now the majority position in the party and where the Labour movement is heading. Not supporting it risks being left behind.

One liner: The Labour Party is now more pro-PR than at any time since it was led by Keir Hardy, who was pro-PR.

PR SECURES GAINS FOR TRADE UNIONS

Yes, under FPTP we now have a majority Labour government. You do get these moments under FPTP, but if you look at the last 40 years have trade union and workers' rights got weaker or stronger overall? That is because under FPTP we only get progressive governments a third of the time, so it is one step forward and two steps back.

Also, under PR we would still be making progress. Any modelling of PR for the last election shows Labour would be the largest party by far and in power, with the Lib Dems and Greens supporting. Keir is still PM, Rachel Reeves is Chancellor. We would be still getting the New Deal and maybe more as the Greens give Keir cover to go further.

Look at New Zealand as a good case study for PR. Under FPTP in New Zealand Labour were in power **a quarter** of the time between WW2 and 1996 (when PR came in). Under PR they have won **half the elections** (5 out of 10) and been in government **half the time**. Yes, often in coalition, but it means more progressive pro-worker legislation gets passed and more of it stays and doesn't get undone. Since 2000, New Zealand Labour has introduced legislation on paid parental leave, equal employment opportunities, rest breaks and breastfeeding and flexible working rights

In short: Yes, we sometimes make progress under FPTP, but it is one step forward, two steps back. PR means more progressive Labour-led governments and stronger workers' rights over time.

FPTP CAN'T COPE WITH MULTIPARTY POLITICS AND IS BECOMING MORE CHAOTIC:

FPTP is a two-party system and cannot cope with the new multi-party reality of politics. At the General Election we saw four parties getting over 10% of the vote for the first time in British electoral history. We now have five parties polling over 10% consistently for the first time. The last election was the most disproportional in British history, i.e. **this parliament least resembles how the country voted in terms of seats parties got matching their vote share**. The next general election is shaping up to be even more chaotic and the parliament even less representative of how people voted than the last one. FPTP the not sustainable and change to the electoral system is likely coming in one form or another.

One liners:

- No country has ever moved from PR to FPTP, only from FPTP to PR for national legislature. That tells its own story.
- The only bias a voting system should have is to the voter.
- If you look at New Zealand, PR has meant more progressive, worker-friendly governments (all Labour-led) than under FPTP, that embed trade union rights.
- The bigger risk to not back PR. The vast majority of the affiliated unions back PR (GMB one of the few notable not to), the majority of the Labour Party does, there is a good chance the next Labour leader will likely support it. Standing still is not an option as we risk being left behind and ending up on the wrong side of the debate.

COMMON ARGUMENTS AGAINST PR:

It lets in the far right: Wales and Scotland have had PR for 25 years and in their last elections (2021) there was not a single far right member elected to either parliament. The BNP had their greatest successes under FPTP, taking 12 seats on Dagenham Council in 2006 and being a stone's throw from taking control of the council.

People prefer the constituency link and single MP: The two PR systems we have in the UK already, which are the two contenders for Westminster, both have strong constituency links (STV and AMS). The system of PR we have in Scotland AMS (also New Zealand and London) is part FPTP so everyone has a single MP representative. That is the most likely one for Westminster.

FPTP is simple and people understand it: People in Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland etc have been using PR without trouble for years. We would argue the simplest thing is for Parliament to accurately represent how the country voted.

FPTP leads to strong government: The last 10 years show that is not true. In 2022 we had three PMs in two months. Also FPTP is throwing up more and more hung parliaments. 2010 resulted in a Tory/ Lib Dem coalition and 2017 resulted in a Tory/DUP coalition that no-one voted for. The strongest foundation for democracy is to have a parliament that accurately represents how the country voted and clearly represents their mandate.