

May GC-Report

Guest Speaker Joe Sousek (Make Votes Matter and the Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform): Joe was invited to speak ahead of the CLP's completion of its response to Welsh Labour's consultation on potential reform to the Welsh Assembly, following the recommendations of the Expert Panel headed by Professor Laura McAllister. Make Votes Matter is a cross-party campaign promoting proportional representation, while the Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform is suggesting that CLPs that are so-minded should submit a motion on the submit to the National Policy Forum consultation.

Joe firstly considered the democratic problems caused by a First Past the Post system, namely: that it creates unrepresentative parliaments, with governments that are supported by a minority of the electorate; smaller parties are squeezed out of the process; millions of people are represented by MPs for whom they did not vote; voters can only go to one MP for help, potentially someone that they feel does not represent them; tactical voting (between 20 and 30% of the electorate voted tactically in 2017); the concept of safe and marginal seats (only 11% of seats changed hands in 2017, leading to a lack of incentive to campaign in safe seats, voters in safe seats can feel ignored, manifestos can focus on issues pertinent to marginal constituencies and the local activists becoming disengaged).

He then discussed how proportional representation might address these issues: the distribution of seats matches vote share, making votes more equal; parliaments are not unrepresentative; there is no need for tactical voting; parties campaign across all constituencies; it can lead to higher turnout and better gender balance. He further highlighted that first past the post systems favour right-wing parties (in 14 of the last 15 elections, the majority of voters have voted for a party to the left of the Conservatives, yet the Conservatives have been in power for 55% of the time since 1964), that 85% of developed countries have a form of PR, that PR can improve income equality and that 76% of Labour voters would support a manifesto commitment to PR. He distributed copies of the latest report from Make Votes Matter to delegates.

He ran through the three main types of PR set out in the Expert Panel review: a modified version of the current multi-member system (potentially with an equal split between constituency and regional AMs); a variant of a party list system, wherein there would be five electoral regions and each would have a list of candidates (voters could either vote for all the candidates on the list or for individuals through a flexible system); or Single Transferable Vote, which asks voters to rank candidates in order of preference with an equation to allocate votes. The report favours STV, although it states that, given that where it is currently used (Ireland, Northern Ireland and Malta) results in poor gender balance, gender balance would need to be enshrined in accompanying legislation.

Joe was asked which form of PR Make Votes Matter advocates and why (they do not advocate one system and feel that if the principle of PR is agreed then a constitutional convention should agree which system); whether the political culture in the UK was a factor in electoral reform (he

agreed that the culture is often defined by the system and that the UK culture is adversarial); whether there should be a second chamber in Wales (he felt that there were good arguments in favour of a revising chamber); whether PR gives smaller parties too much power and the role of the constituency link (he said that constituency MPs can be retained under a proportional system); and finally whether PR may lead to splits in established parties (he said that this had not happened in New Zealand).

The session ended with a vote of members present, with the overwhelming majority in favour of proportional representation.

Kevin Brennan MP: Kevin discussed the recent action in Syria, arguing that the Prime Minister should have taken the decision before Parliament. He talked about the scandal around the Windrush generation and the culpability of the Prime Minister in creating the 'hostile environment' for people coming to the UK and that Amber Rudd was complicit but not ultimately responsible for the situation. He then discussed the recent English local election results, wherein the results for Labour were positive and reflected recent polling. Kevin took questions on legal aid for migrants and the ongoing issues around hostility to immigration.

Mark Drakeford AM: Mark recounted the recent events of Welsh Labour Conference: the election of the Deputy Leader and the way in which the electoral system used had been proved broken (2/3 of members voted for another candidate while 33% of the vote was given to a section with only 4.7% turnout); Carwyn's resignation as leader and the likely timetable of the process; and his own candidacy for the leadership position, specifically to offer a political choice for members. He also argued that the Expert Panel report demonstrated that two of the three PR options offered would give Welsh Labour the same or better result than under the current system and that the party should grasp the opportunity.

He then outlined plans for £266 million of new capital investment, specifically for projects with carbon reduction schemes and the process of negotiation over the EU Withdrawal Bill. The position is now agreed that virtually all powers currently held at EU level that are devolved will come directly to the Welsh Government; a small number will be frozen and unable to be used by any UK-based government without everyone's agreement, with an additional sunset clause to allow them to come to Wales automatically by the end of a given period. He argued that this both entrenches Welsh devolution and protects the UK, giving the example of the lack of need for different animal health systems.

Chair David Davies stated that he had released a statement in support of Mark's candidature in his capacity as Chair and that this had been endorsed by the EC. The GC voted overwhelmingly to endorse Mark's candidacy with no opposition.

Mark and Kevin both took questions around the OMOV process, with both highlighting the need for a new electoral system to be in place before the leadership election, as to elect a leader that did not command the majority support of the members would place the new First Minister in an unworkable situation. Darren Williams stated that a WEC meeting to be held on

9th June would make the decision around the terms of reference and timetable for the democracy review, as agreed by Welsh Labour Conference, and that CLP reps would argue for a Phase One to conclude with a special conference before the autumn to consider only the leadership electoral arrangements.

Cllr Russell Goodway: Cllr Goodway outlined the current position with regard to Cardiff's central bus station. There had been changes in the development agreement and delivery vehicle; the original agreement involved the council purchasing the lease-holding agreements but these restricted the type of development allowed. The leases have since passed to the Welsh Government to allow development to proceed, and it is likely to be finished around 2020/21. He stated that there were some plans for accompanying hubs and that the money that the Council had now received in exchange for the leases could be used on another project, potentially a new arena.

Cllr Caro Wild: Cllr Wild outlined the current position of the Waungron Road site, following a letter from Llandaff Branch stating their concern around the political impact of the time-delay. Caro stated that the transport interchange has planning permission and that this is on-going around de-contamination of the site. He stated the strategic need for buses and the likelihood of social housing and commercial development alongside the interchange. He stated that accompanying park and ride schemes would filter in and that the site would be finished around 2020/21.