

Green Party South West

GREENWORLD

Alternative Vote? Greens say 'Yes'!

The system we use to choose our political leaders may be one of the more boring subjects you might discuss down the pub or over a cup of tea, says South Somerset Green Party member, Michael Fox.

YES!

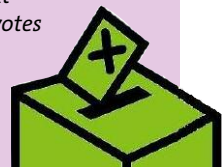
But like it or not, by next year a new law could be in place which will mean we will have to do more than place an X on the ballot paper. Before that, though, we will all have to decide whether we want that change to happen, in a referendum at the 5 May local elections.

David Cameron offered LibDems the Alternative Vote system as a way of satisfying their demand for reform of our electoral system. It's been criticised for being the smallest possible reform, and campaigners for reform don't like it because it doesn't ensure that the views of most voters are reflected among those chosen to govern – they prefer the system used in the European elections (Proportional Representation or PR), which for Parliament would require the creation of much larger constituencies with lists of candidates. Supporters of the current first-past-the-post system say this would make MPs somewhat more remote from those they represent.

Greens have traditionally backed PR and should support the move to AV. It's far from perfect, but it will give more power to smaller parties. Many Labour and Tory supporters say it will mean we'll never have decisive government again, with a constant series of hung parliaments. You can criticise our current coalition government for many things, but it is not lacking in decisiveness. And for Greens, hung parliaments are much more likely to see Caroline Lucas and other Green MPs getting an influential voice in government.

So what is the 'Alternative Vote'?

- Instead of placing an X in the box of your candidate, you number your preferences 1,2,3 etc
- If no candidate wins an outright majority, the candidate with the least votes is eliminated, and the ones they rated 2nd are distributed among the remaining candidates
- If there is still no outright majority the 3rd preferences of the next candidate with the least votes are redistributed, and so on until a candidate has a majority



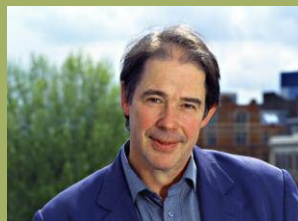
'A small but necessary step'

Jonathan Porritt has been a teacher, Director of Friends of the Earth and more recently Chair of Sustainable Development Commission (and part-time adviser to Prince Charles). Here, he answers our questions on the future of the Green Party and our chances of electoral success.

It's taken 32 years since you first Chaired the Ecology Party for a Green MP to be elected. Will it be another 32 years before we get our second MP?
JP: I certainly hope not! Support for green politics in general will grow and grow over the next few years – the real question for the Green Party, is will that support translate into votes for the Party. A lot still depends on electoral reform.

Does the Green Party have the right messages to better Labour's record of forming a government 25 years after their first MP was elected?
JP: It's not that fantastical to think about the involvement of the Green Party in a Coalition Government in 2035. If our analysis is correct, and nothing is done to terminate this insane 'business-as-usual' model of progress, then it's inevitably to the Greens that people will eventually turn.

The Sustainable Development Commission has



gone – does this disprove the Coalition's claim to be the 'greenest government ever'?
JP: The decision to get rid of the Sustainable Development Commission was an idiotic, ideology-driven decision, demonstrating both the chronic ambivalence of the Tories and the supine inadequacy of the Lib Dems.

Where do you see the big energy questions going in the light of the Coalition's stance on nuclear power (and is there an alternative)?
JP: Personally, I don't think we'll see another nuclear reactor built in the UK in the future (including Hinkley Point!), but I don't doubt that this government will go through the tedious stages of design, planning, consultation etc.

You were quoted as saying recently that you had 'returned to your spiritual home', meaning the Green Party. Is it good to be back?
JP: In party political terms, I've never really been away

– in that I've never thought of joining any other political party. And at this stage, am never likely to!

Will you be joining the other former-FoE director Tony Juniper by re-entering electoral politics?
JP: It's a little bit late in the day for me to be putting myself forward as a candidate, - even if the Party thought that was appropriate! So I'm very happy supporting other candidates, and it was hugely exciting to work with Caroline during the Election.

Is a 'Yes' vote for AV important for us Greens?
JP: Crucially important we get a 'yes' vote for the Referendum. A small step, but a necessary one.

What's the next big challenge for the party, and are we up to the job?
JP: It's all about the economy – obviously. The Green Party has to go on making its own unique economic case, focusing both on short-term green recovery, and then on longer-term perspectives about growth. That's the biggest challenge of all!

What's your favourite beach (Jonathan wrote *The Reader's Digest Good Beach Guide* in 1994)?
JP: Watgate Bay in Cornwall.

Jonathan Porritt is Founder Director of Forum for the Future. For more on their work, visit www.forumforthefuture.org

The Greenest Government... Ever?

'I want to see real action. I want this to be the greenest government ever' said David Cameron in May on his first visit to the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC).

The magic 100 days have come and gone and we now have a sense of what that means. It doesn't make good reading.



Sustainable Schools strategy? Cut. Sustainable Development Commission? Axed. Pledge to ban the sale of illegally logged timber? Dropped. Subsidy for early adopters of solar panels? Dropped.

Green jobs in the wind industry? Under threat. Low-carbon technology? £34m cut from DECC's budget.

And this is before the Spending Review! Given these already savage and unnecessary cuts, it's hard to see how the ConDem coalition can match up to the words of their Leader back in May.

Letters to local papers are a good way to highlight these issues. Copied to Chris Huhne: huhnec@parliament.uk

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Green Gain in South Hams

In the south-west, 75% of voters choose the LibDems or Conservatives. Now they are in coalition and shedding green policies weekly, the Green Party has become the real opposition.

Green Party membership in the south-west is growing as the Coalition policy of cuts that hit the poorest and our environment become reality. The party is also seeing sitting Councillors join as they see Greens sticking to their principles.

Robert Vint is a District Councillor in South Hams. A community and environmental campaigner in Totnes for many years, he was aware that many creative grassroots initiatives often go nowhere without the support (or toleration) of local authorities, when asked to stand for election by the LibDems, he did.

Robert says: 'As an active member of Transition Town Totnes, the Allotment Association and the town's Traffic Forum, I realised that many of their aspirations for the town could not be achieved without advocates in local government.'

The lack of a significant Green Party in the town at the time, and the Local Manifesto drawn up by the Totnes LibDems being distinctly green were key factors in Robert taking the plunge.

Robert was elected to South Hams District Council in May 2007, just as the Council was in the middle of drawing up a controversial new Development Plan for the whole town that didn't reflect the social and ecological values of residents.

'Helping to ensure that a wide range of

community organizations in our town had a major say in the town's Development Plan was a high priority', says Robert. 'In the end, 22 community organizations came together to draft what is probably the most,



constructive and visionary response there has ever been to a local authority development plan consultation.'

He has also started to make significant improvements to the way in which major developers consult and involve community representatives in the development of their plans. And, his motion calling on the District Council to adopt a Fair Trade policy has received unanimous support.

However, recently Robert re-joined the Green Party, a journey that started at the age of 16 at his first GP meeting in Newcastle.

'I was a member of the party when I lived in Oxford. The manifesto on which I was elected was entirely green. Since then Green Party local membership has increased fivefold and, for the first time, we have a

Green County Councillor and three Green Town Councillors', says Robert.

'That, together with the possibly inevitable compromises that the LibDems have made nationally as a result of being in the Coalition (such as using scarce funds to finance Trident instead of to prevent cuts to the NHS), convinced me that it was time to move.'

Moving to a smaller party may have reduced Robert's influence in local government; he believes, though, that people will understand more clearly what he stands for.

'Local members of the Green Party are far more active in a wide range of community organisations and local projects than are the members of any other party', says Robert. 'Motions and policy recommendations emerge that are directly relevant to the needs and aspirations of these organisations and of a wide diversity of residents. We are in a strong position to promote genuine grassroots democracy.'

'Candidates earn the respect of the community by putting the community first', says Robert. 'We will get far more support by being seen to be active in community groups than you will by flag-waving and self-promotion.'

He encourages Greens to include community groups when drafting a local manifesto. And, to target wards where we can achieve success.

Next May gives many of us the chance to put this advice into practice. If you can be persuaded to stand for election, now is the time to let your local party know.

Does our pension future look rosy?

'Could your pension put your future at risk?' asks Green Party member Alex Lawrie.

Like many other principle authorities, Somerset County Council manages a £1bn Pension Fund - not only for its current and former employees, but for those of District and Town Councils, Housing Associations, the Police, and other public sector bodies in the area. Its pensioners depend on it to provide for their future. But what if it is contributing to a future that is insecure, dangerous and impoverished?

Pension funds have enormous economic might. LAPFF, the Local Authority Pension Fund Forum, has 52 members with combined funds of over £80bn! They direct huge sums of money to some of the world's biggest businesses and have a legal obligation to act for the sole benefit and interests of their pensioners. But that is too often assumed to mean delivering financial return, often at the expense of undermining the foundations of everyone's prosperity.

Climate risks are the most obvious example of this. If we continue with the 'business-as-usual' scenario, by 2050 temperatures will most likely be 2.5C higher than pre-industrial levels. That means soaring food prices, chaotic weather, and worldwide economic losses.

To prevent this, the campaigning organisation *Fair Pension* (www.fairpensions.org.uk) recommend some measures that would make our pension funds future friendly:

1. 'Statements of investment principles' that guide fund managers should include

Training Day/ Regional Strategy Discussion, Exeter - 11 December

Please email info@southwest.greenparty.org.uk if you would like to join our training day for activists on Saturday 11 December. The Regional Strategy will be discussed at this event and key decisions will be made by those present.

Euros 2014 - Call for Candidates?

Well, OK, probably not yet... but as of the last *GreensWord*, the seed is planted and this is the first watering, writes Ricky Knight.

We aim to get things ready for candidate selection by the Summer of 2012. It's likely we'll select the top two candidates first and the other four separately; ideally have all six in place by Xmas 2012. That does NOT mean we only want six people to come forward. We want LOTS of you to consider doing that - if you are serious about getting elected. And, we really do want female candidates on the list. For more on what this involves, please contact me: rickyknight@northdevongreens.org.uk or call 01271 371732.

objectives relating to climate change - for example, full disclosure of a company's carbon emissions



2. Criteria used to appoint fund managers should include their ability to assess carbon risks

3. AGM resolutions to increase pressure on companies that persistently refuse to

disclose or manage climate impacts

4. Disinvestment in the most serious climate risks - coal mining, tar sands and deep water drilling

However, LAPFF recently told members to support BP and Shell exploiting Canadian tar sands, despite widespread opposition - www.no-tar-sands.org.

We have asked Somerset Pension Fund to take up these four modest policies, but they say they don't intend to adopt any of them. Does this adequately protect contributors from climate risks?

We need to take action! You have the right to raise this issue with your County Councillor, wherever you live in the south-west - after all, the impact of their policies will be felt by all of us. If you are a pension contributor, or know anyone who is, please get in touch; you have the greatest stake in getting climate risks out in the open.

We can change this policy, if we make clear what we expect of our local authority pension funds.

Top Tips to Recruit More Members

The lifeblood of a local Green Party is its members, says South West Green Party Membership Officer Keith Clements.

If membership dwindles by say 10% each year (and it will if we let it), it is necessary to increase membership by at least 15% in order to grow!

How to go about it? Well, in the first place, we need to recognize that for people to come to us asking to join is a very rare occurrence indeed. So we need to reach out to them by
Having regular street stalls

Organising fun events (gigs, curry evenings, pub quizzes etc)

Any other method you can think of where you can talk to the public

Once you get into conversation with people, it's fairly easy to judge their interest in 'green' issues or policies. At some point in the conversation, you will need to ask the question 'Have you ever considered joining (or donating) to the Green Party?'

If the response is sufficiently positive, assume they will be happy to join and fill out a joining form for them, including bank details (for Direct Debit) and copy these details to the electronic form on the national website as soon as possible.

I can state unequivocally that if they say 'Give me the form, I will fill it in later', you will never hear from them again!

I can help your local party by running a 'Recruiting Workshop' where we can develop all of the above. Please email me: sdgp.info@gmail.com.



Green websites for Kids, by Lily, age 11

Ever wondered what tweens make of being green alongside their passion for the web? Here's Lily Limmer's guide to '5 of the best'.



www.recyclezone.org.uk

This website is full to bursting with fun and exiting ways for children through to teenagers to understand about the importance of recycling! Test yourself with the 'How Much Of A Waster Are You' quiz and discover how your school and home can be more sustainable.

www.ringleader.com/quest/intro.html

'Quest of the ring leaders' is a challenge where children understand what our world will be like in the future if climate change and pollution do not come to an end! To complete the challenges they must observe images closely and read the facts about different planets, with the help of Elcyer an ancient dwarf, always ready to help!

cms.ran.org/new/kidscorner

Videos, fact sheets, program info, kids action toolkit; this website has them all! Hosted by the Rainforest Action Network, children of all ages can learn about endangered species and rainforest protection. Also has a special page to send in artwork and photos.

www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/greenballoonclub

A group for children age 4-7. Complete with games, songs, stories, make-and-colour and much more! The TV series is hosted by the green team

www.charlieandlola.com/planet

'Planet Game' is a fun way to learn about pollution and climate change, with your favourite TV characters, Charlie and Lola, whilst developing computer skills!



Lily Limmer at the Green Party Conference, Birmingham

Partnerstadt Engelskirchen

Ricky Knight recounts his recent trip to the gathering of European Greens in Tallinn, Estonia.

Some 20 years ago, an EFL teacher met a German student of English on a language course in Porlock. He followed her back to Hamburg where they lived together for many years, immersing themselves in the Green movement, before following their noses to Engelskirchen, a relatively small and prosperous mill-town, about 20 miles east of Köln in the Ruhr, the birth-place of Friedrich Engels, no less.

Last year, Malcolm took it upon himself to write to many UK LPs, asking for contact, an exchange of ideas, a sort of semi-formal Green 'twinning'. We received one here in North Devon and, seeing the word Porlock (scene of many a bike-push) and clocking that he was, like me, a teacher of German in an area I knew well, I contacted him, we hit it off immediately and heard about their 25th Anniversary celebrations in March.

Our LP decided to go for it, so on a cold March morning, partner L'Anne and I set off from Barnstaple station, to take the Eurostar to Brussels and then on to Engelskirchen, a journey and visit that will remain memorable, not least for the 10 inches of snow that all but cut us off.

Where Germany leads, the rest of us follow, certainly true in terms of our own political aspirations - I say this as I have just read that die Grünen are leading the SPD ('Labour' party) in the polls. Well, the Germans know all about coalition, thanks to some canny foresight back in those post-war years, when an enlightened occupying force decided to go for genuine PR to avoid the re-emergence of fascism. Hmmm.

My abiding memory therefore of the visit and in particular, the celebration itself, a lavish affair with representatives from all political parties and guests from a myriad local organisations and businesses, is that the German Greens sure know how to work together with the opposition, without selling out, at local, regional and national level - they are a hugely respected and significant political force, with representation throughout the country at all levels. Gimme some of that!

As an anecdotal aside, Malcolm's partner Hilla and I must have passed in the night back in '69, when both of us worked and were staying in the same street in Köln, she in a primary school and me in a

secondary modern.

There is so much pressure and time restraints on all of us, that it is obviously difficult to work on developing a link like this to our mutual advantage - it has taken me seven months to get this article together for starters (something must have got in the way). One can have grandiose schemes for GP SW delegations wending their way to the Rheinland, cohorts of German Greens joining us on the election trail next May; who knows. However, one thing's for sure - we have made some excellent friends.



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