

Alliance for Green Socialism

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The Secretary
Committee on Standards in Public Life
35 Great Smith Street
London
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20th August 2006

Dear CSPL

Review of The Electoral Commission

We submit to you the following comments on the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 and its operation by the Electoral Commission.

The PPERA 2000 was designed to discriminate against new and small parties. As operated, it does so very successfully.

The established large parties offer electors no significant political choice. The natural consequence of this is that turnout falls as voters realise that it makes little difference which of the established right wing parties they support. In this situation the main parties are potentially vulnerable to the emergence of new parties - necessarily small initially - which challenge them by offering electors a real political choice.

Two mechanisms discourage the emergence of new parties. The most important is clearly the "first past the post" electoral system which strongly discourages electors from voting for a small party. On top of this, the PPERA 2000 now makes the operation of any small party difficult, fraught with liability, and subject to grave financial disadvantage compared with the established large parties.

The supposed reason for the introduction of the PPERA 2000 was financial corruption and dubious practice by large parties. This could have been dealt with by an Act of a dozen clauses. Instead a huge bureaucratic machine was introduced which laid on political parties a bureaucratic conformance burden greater than that imposed by the Companies Acts on limited companies. It introduced dozens of criminal offences (for such grave crimes a paying a bill a day late).

The bureaucratic burden falls disproportionately on small parties. A large established party should have no difficulty in applying its resources to meeting the accounting and other demands of the Act. A small party with limited resources inevitably struggles.

The PPERA 2000 allows large parties to circumvent the limitations on election expenditure imposed by the Representation of the People Act 1983. While the RPA 1983 restricts expenditure directly by candidates, the PPERA 2000 allows huge expenditure nationally, far in excess of the RPA 1983 limits, which is in support of these candidates.

The PPERA 2000 has, of course, been ineffective even in its supposed aim of curbing corruption and dubious financial practice by the large parties

The overall impact of the PPERA 2000, as written and as operated, has been exactly as intended. It inhibits and handicaps small parties while favouring large established parties.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. F. Davies'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent 'M' and 'D'.

M F Davies
Chair, Alliance for Green Socialism