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10 December 2004

Dear Mr Ritchie

Review of Voting Systems

Thank you for your letter of 16 November to Lord Falconer, with which you enclose a copy of your letter to the Prime Minister on the Labour Party's manifesto commitment to review the experience of new electoral systems in the United Kingdom. I am responding as the Minister with responsibility for electoral policy.

As I advised in my letter to you earlier this year, the Government remains committed to reviewing the experience of the various electoral systems and will make any announcement on the time of a review at an appropriate moment.

There have been many developments in the use of different voting systems in the UK since 2001. Indeed, it is because these changes are still on-going that we must ensure that a review is undertaken so as to maximise the experimental evidence available to it. Any review will also need to consider the more recent experience of the elections that took place on 10 June.

Yours sincerely

CHRISTOPHER LESLIE

Electoral Reform Society

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16 November 2004

Dear Lord Falconer

Please find attached a copy of a letter I have sent to the Prime Minister expressing concern over an article that appeared in the Times on Friday (12th November).

I have also written similar letters to the Ministers who were named in that report as those who opposed action on Labour's manifesto commitment to review the experience of electoral systems in the UK.

We will be grateful for any assurances you can give that the report was inaccurate and that plans for the review will be announced shortly.

Yours sincerely

Ken Ritchie
Chief Executive

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Dear Mr Ritchie

Review of the Experience of Electoral Reform

Thank you for your letter of 10 September 2004 to Lord Falconer outlining your concerns in relation to any planned Government review of the experience of electoral reform.

The Government has introduced major innovations to the electoral systems used in the UK, and as discussed in the Labour Party 2001 Manifesto, we remain committed to reviewing the experiences of these new systems to assess whether changes might be made to the electoral system for the House of Commons.

We are keen to engage members of the public and interested parties in discussion of democratic processes, and would therefore seek to make any review of voting systems as open and transparent as possible.

Yours sincerely

CHRISTOPHER LESLIE



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10 September 2004

Dear Lord Falconer

We understand from press reports that in the next few weeks the Government is likely to announce its plans for the review of the experience of electoral reform promised in Labour's 2001 manifesto.

I am writing to seek your assurance that the review will be an open and transparent one. If it is to command respect, we believe it should be conducted in a way that makes clear the criteria against which different electoral systems will be assessed, which allows electors and interested organisations to submit their views and evidence, and which makes clear how the reviewers have used the evidence to reach their conclusions.

The Government's record on consultation on such issues is good. Although we have reservations about the recommendations of the Jenkins Commission, we appreciated the way it sought out evidence and conducted meetings throughout the country. In Scotland, the process which has led to the adoption of STV for local elections involved extensive consultations by the McIntosh Commission, the Kerley Working Group and the Scottish Parliament itself. Similarly in Wales, the Sunderland and Richard Commissions held extensive public consultations. We hope the same approach will be used by your coming review.

Robin Cook, while Leader of the House, and Charles Clarke, when Party Chairman, both assured us that they envisaged reviews which would be open in character, and we would welcome an assurance that this is still the Government's intention.

We look forward to hearing from you and remain ready to give whatever help we can to whatever review group is established.

Yours sincerely

Ken Ritchie
Chief Executive