

PR REVIEW

Manifesto commitment

1. The Labour Party's 2001 manifesto contained the following statement:

"The government has introduced major innovations to the electoral systems used in the UK – for the devolved administrations, the European Parliament, and the London Assembly. The Independent Commission on the Voting System [the Jenkins Report] made proposals for electoral reform at Westminster. We will review the experience of the new systems and the Jenkins report to assess whether changes might be made to the electoral system for the House of Commons. A referendum remains the right way to agree any change for Westminster".

Further comments

2. In addition, Robin Cook, when Lead of the House commented in the Fabian Review in the autumn of 2001, that:

"We took the view that it was right to see how the Scottish, Welsh and London systems worked in practice and then conclude what may be appropriate for Westminster. Logically, that's likely to be after the next round of elections for Scotland and Wales in 2003".

Further relevant elections

3. Elections in June 2004 to the European Parliament and to the GLA (both run on different proportional systems) might also help to inform any review.
4. Thereafter, there are no significant elections due to be held on a proportional basis in the UK for some time; probably not until after the next Westminster general election (which must take place before July 2006).

Independent Commission on Proportional Representation

5. The Constitution Unit of University College London set up an Independent Commission on Proportional Representation (ICPR) in July 2002, jointly chaired by David Butler (Fellow of Nuffield College, Oxford) and Peter Riddell (Political correspondent, the Times) and including a number of distinguished MPs and MEPs (from all parties), academics, and journalists. The ICPR's aim was to conduct research *"to ensure that the Government's review is based upon the best available evidence"*.

The ICPR produced an interim report in April 2003 and a final report in March this year. The ICPR said that *"it is not the intention of the Commission to arrive at a comprehensive verdict for or against a change for Westminster. The goal is to collect*

and analyse the evidence needed to inform any decision about changing the voting system for the House of Commons or for regional or other bodies”.