The *Guardian*, 21 July 2012.

My first career was in HM Submarines but, having seen so much poverty in the world, I resigned to campaign for a reduction of western consumerism. In 1970, I started as a volunteer teacher in a school for the poor in Nairobi, and there I took the *Guardian Weekly*. Apart from keeping in touch, it was essential for a second reason: in a land of what were (for me) unusual foods, I required soft paper. I was usually able to read everything first but, if not, the arts section had to be sacrificed. In 1975, I moved to Northern Ireland to work in a youth club, just off the Shankill Road in Belfast, and I graduated to the daily edition. In all, I’ve been a reader for over 40 years.  I particularly like the coverage of international news but the one omission is any serious debate on alternative methods of decision-making; like so many others in the media, you debate electoral systems but not decision-making. In 1986, I helped organise the New Ireland Group’s “People’s Convention”, an experiment in consensus politics. It was still eight years before the cease-fire, yet we managed to get Sinn Féin and Unionists together, and even the political wing of the UDA. No majority dichotomies; instead we used preference voting, and sure enough, a common ground was identified.

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My original.

My first career was in HM Submarines, in which I rose (or sank) to the rank of first lieutenant. However, having seen so much poverty in the world, I resigned to take up politics, to campaign for a reduction of western consumerism. First things first though, so in 1970, I started as a volunteer teacher of maths and physics in a school for the poor in Nairobi, and there I took the *Guardian Weekly*. Essential it was for a second reason too: in a land of what were for me unusual foods, I often required nice soft paper; I was usually able to read everything first, but if not, then I’m afraid it was the arts section that had to be sacrificed.

As the child of an Irish Protestant father and English Catholic mother, it was logical enough for me to move to Northern Ireland. So in 1975, I started work in a youth club, just off Belfast’s Shankill Road, and I graduated to The *Guardian* daily edition. “That’s a fenian rag!” they protested.  In the minds of some inmates, anything that wasn’t Protestant was, *ergo*, Catholic/Irish/‘taig’/etc..  And only in more recent years have I been able to get your newspaper from my *local* newsagent.

I was soon involved in politics, both in the local peace movement and in CND. At home, I was one of three to stand on the Ecology (Green Party) ticket in 1981, the first in Ireland, North or South, to do so. Shortly afterwards, I shared an old caravan in our ‘Greenham-style’ Northern Ireland peace-camp, just outside RAF Bishopscourt near Downpatrick, and then I learnt Russian in order to cross the other ‘peace-line’, the Iron Curtain.

Five years later, I helped to organise the 1986 “People’s Convention” for the New Ireland Group, an experiment, as it were, in consensus politics. It was still eight years *before* the cease-fire, yet we managed to get Sinn Féin and Unionists together, and even the political wing of the UDA, over 200 participants in all. No majority dichotomies; instead we used preference voting, and sure enough, a common ground was identified.

This consensus voting is now the main thrust of my work in the de Borda Institute – www.deborda.org – promoting the use of preferential voting on all matters of great controversy: the UK’s Lords reform, Northern Ireland’s constitution, Scotland’s , Sudan’s, Kashmir’s, etc., and even disputes in Russia herself, where lots of western advisers tried to persuade Mikhail Gorbachev of the benefits of our form of democracy, majoritarianism, without realising that this word translates as ‘bolshevism’.

In all, then, I’ve been a *Guardian* addict for over 40 years.  I am particularly interested in the coverage of international news but, if I may criticise, the one glaring omission is any serious debate on alternative methods of decision-making. Like so many others in both the media and academia, you debate electoral systems but not decision-making; in a nutshell, you appear to be convinced that decisions must be taken by (simple or weighted forms of) majority voting, while other more accurate methodologies – the Borda and Condorcet rules– rarely if ever get a mention.

Peter Emerson

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