**PRESS RELEASE  -  EMBARGOED UNTIL 0001 on Thursday 3rd November, 2016.**

**ANOTHER LESSON OF BREXIT**

**With Trump and Le Pen at the threshold, and with global warming so serious,**

**majoritarian politics has surely had its day!**

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Brexit: what’s done is done. But lessons should be learnt.

1. The democratic process should allow for an accommodation, not provoke a confrontation.
2. Complex and/or contentious questions should not be reduced to dichotomies.

In theory, if everyone states their *individual* will, it should be possible to identify the *collective* will. The outcome could be inaccurate if some people abstain or state (not their personal ‘like’ but) their ‘dislike’. {This often happens in binary voting, when people vote (not positively, i.e., ‘in favour’ of something but) negatively, that is, ‘no’ or ‘out’ or ‘leave’ – to quote the brexit ballot.}

Therefore, both in the elected chamber and in referendums:

1. The choice of which and how many options are to be on a ballot paper should be made independently.
2. Votes should normally be preferential ballots, each a (short) list of 4 – 6 options.
3. At best, each outcome would be the option with the highest average preference.

If this preferential voting were the norm, majority rule would be obsolescent. So this press release includes four annexes:

Annex I Some Imperfections of Majority Voting

Annex II The Paradox of Voting

Annex III Preference Voting

Annex IV Inclusive Governance

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3.11.2016

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**Annex I Some Imperfections of Majority Voting**

To establish the average age of a given electorate democratically, the question posed could be “Are you young or old?” So even if everybody voted positively and honestly, the answer would probably be wrong.

If instead the question posed were multi-optional – “Are you in your (a) twenties, (b) thirties, (c) forties…?” – then, with a large electorate, the outcome could be quite accurate.

Political questions are more complex so, to be accurate, voters should usually be allowed to cast preferences.

\* \* \* \* \*

A collective will cannot be *identified* by a majority vote… not least because that opinion has to be identified earlier if it is to be already on the ballot paper. No wonder, then, that majority voting has been used by many dictators, not least Napoleon, Lenin[[1]](#footnote-1) and Hitler.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Instead, the electorate (or their elected representatives) should be allowed, not only to cast their preferences, but also to participate in formulating the multi-option ballot paper. In New Zealand in 1992, an independent commission assessed which and how many options should be on the ballot paper; there were five of them; in theory, therefore, (nearly) everyone could vote positively,[[3]](#footnote-3) that is, everyone could vote ‘for’ a particular option and no-one needed to (campaign or) vote negatively.

\* \* \* \* \*

Majority voting has had some horrific consequences, (i) in promoting adversarial contests in so-called stable democracies: “The US… Senate is, incredibly, threatening to block the improvements to the Montreal protocol,[[4]](#footnote-4) apparently from partisan spite,” (*The Guardian*, 24.10.2016); and (ii) in exacerbating divisions in plural societies: “All the wars in the former Yugoslavia started with a referendum,” (*Oslobodjenje*, 7.2.1999).

Furthermore, majoritarianism has been a cause of huge tragedies in Russia (bolshevism) and China, and others in Northern Ireland, the Caucasus, Rwanda, Ukraine, and throughout the Middle East.

**Annex II The Paradox of Voting**

In democratic debates, the normal procedure suggests a motion may be amended, and the substantive then adopted or rejected. Consider a simple example: dog licences, the *status quo* is £3; there’s a motion – “Let dog licences be £5” – and an amendment – “Delete £5 and insert £10.”

The motion unamended is option ***A***, (£5); the motion amended is option ***B*** (£10); and the *status quo ante*, option ***C***, (£3). So a majority vote on the amendment, ***A v B***, will be followed by a second majority vote on the substantive. Table I shows an electorate of 9 persons and their preferences.

**Table I A Voter’s Profile**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Preferences | 9 voters and their preferences |
| 4 | 3 | 2 |
| ***1st***  | ***A*** | ***B*** | ***C*** |
| ***2nd***  | ***B*** | ***C*** | ***A*** |
| *3rd*  | ***C*** | ***A*** | ***B*** |

In the first ballot, ***A*** v ***B***, the winner is ***A*** by 6:3. So the second round is ***A v C***, which at 4:5, ***C*** wins, so the license remains at £3.

If, however, the *status quo* were £5, which is ***A***, with a motion – “Let dog licences be £10,” ***B*** –and an amendment – “Delete £10 and insert £3,” ***C*** – then the first vote would be ***B v C***, which at 7:2 is a win for ***B***; so ***B*** would then be posed against ***A***, which at 6:3 is a victory for ***A***. So the license would be £5.

Likewise, if the *status quo* were £10 (***B***), the motion £5 (***A***) and the amendment £3 (***C***), the outcome – ***A v C*** = ***C***, and then ***C*** v ***B*** = ***B*** – would be £10.

So the outcome could be ***A*** or ***B*** or ***C***; it depends on the wording. In this voters’ profile, ***A*** is more popular than ***B*** which is more popular than ***C*** which is more popular than ***A*** which… and it goes round and round for ever, a cycle, the paradox of (majority) voting.

\* \* \* \* \*

If preference voting (Annex IV) were used – in a 3-option ballot, with a 1st preference getting 3 points, a 2nd preference 2 points, and a 3rd just 1 – the outcome would be ***A*** (£5) 19 points, ***B*** (£10) 19 points and ***C*** (£3) 16 points. In which case, the Speaker (or independent commissioners) could arbitrate between ***A*** and ***B***, £7.50.

Politics, after all, is the art of compromise; preference voting is its science.**Annex III Preference Voting**

In a pluralist democracy, on most questions of contention, everything should be ‘on the table’ *and*, if need be in summary, on the ballot paper.

Possible voting methodologies include two forms of single-preference voting, plurality voting and the two-round system, trs; and two of preference voting, the alternative vote, av,[[5]](#footnote-5) and a points system, the modified Borda count, mbc, (Annex IV).

Consider an electorate of 14 persons with preferences on the four options – ***A, B, C*** and ***D*** – as in Table II.

**Table II Another Voter’s Profile**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Preferences | 14 voters and their preferences |
| *5* | 4 | 3 | 2 |
| ***1st***  | ***A*** | ***D*** | ***C*** | ***B*** |
| ***2nd***  | ***B*** | ***B*** | ***B*** | ***C*** |
| *3rd*  | ***C*** | ***C*** | ***D*** | ***D*** |
| ***4th***  | ***D*** | ***A*** | ***A*** | ***A*** |

Opinions on option ***A,*** with five 1stpreferences but nine 4th preferences, are polarised; ***D*** is a little less divisive; ***C*** is more acceptable; and ***B***, the 1st preference of only two but the 2nd of every-one else, best represents the collective will. But…

In a **plurality vote**, the results are ***A*** 5, ***B*** 2, ***C*** 3 and ***D*** 4; so the winner is ***A***.

In **trs**, with ***A*** and ***D*** in the second round, the outcome is ***A*** 5 ***D*** 9, and ***D*** isthe victor.

In **av**, option ***B*** iseliminated, and its 2 votes go to ***C***, so the score is now ***A*** 5, ***C*** 5 and ***D*** 4. That’s the end of ***D***, and its votes go (not to ***B***, which is no longer in contention but) to ***C*** for scores of ***A*** 5 and ***C*** 9; so ***C*** comes out on top.

Lastly, in an **mbc**, preferences are turned into points – ***A*** 29, ***B*** 44, ***C*** 36, ***D*** 31 – and the most popular option is ***B***.

In this example, then, the democratic outcome could be ***A*** or ***B*** or ***C*** or ***D***; it depends on which voting procedure is used.

Of these methodologies, only the mbc takes *all* the preferences cast by *all* the voters into account, so it is “the soundest method of identifying the [option which] is most generally popular… or at least the most acceptable.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

**Annex IV Inclusive Governance**

The people should elect their representatives by a system of pr; Parliament could then elect its executive, each mp choosing in order of preference both those of his/her fellow mps whom he/she wanted to be in Cabinet and the portfolio in which he/she wished each of these nominees to serve.[[7]](#footnote-7) The outcome would be a proportional, all-party, power-sharing coalition Government of National Unity.

Parliament would then take decisions in consensus, either verbally or via an mbc[[8]](#footnote-8) vote. The Speaker would decide whether each proposed option complied with an agreed norm like the un Charter on Human Rights; next he/she would record every option ‘on the table’ and update this list as the debate progressed. Consider a final list of five options.

He who casts only a 1st preference gives his favourite just 1 point. She who casts two preferences gives her favourite 2 points (and her second choice 1 point). While he who casts all five preferences gives his 1st preference 5 points, (his second choice 4, his 3rd 3, etc.). So all cast preferences are translated into points, and the option with the most points is the winner.

In the debate or any referendum campaign before the vote, the protagonist knows that success depends on points. She will therefore want her supporters to cast full (or nearly full) ballots. She will also want her erstwhile (majoritarian) opponents to give her option at least a middle preference. So it will be worth her while to talk positively to (almost) everyone.

In Parliament, the Speaker shall have the final say on the ballot, and all votes shall be free. Having thus identified the collective will of Parliament, the all-party Executive shall then execute this decision, and every mp shall bear a collective responsibility to ensure that it is enacted… either that or resign. In other words, Parliament shall work in the same consensual atmosphere as is already achieved in many all-party committees.

In any referendum, the final choice of options shall be the charge of an independent commission. In a nutshell, brexit should have been multi-optional – the uk in the eu, in the eea like Norway, in a looser arrangement like Switzerland, and so on. A multi-option democratic process would have been more civilised.

If such a polity were adopted, then, when talking of Ukraine or Syria for example, our politicians could preach what they practice.

If, however, majority rule continues to hold sway, not only might the likes of Trump or Le Pen then be dictatorial, but sectarian conflicts may continue to rage in Yemen etc, while with binary referendums others in Kashmir or Xīnjiāng could turn violent.

1. Indeed, the word ‘bolshevik’ means, literally, ‘member of the majority’. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Emerson, P., 2012, *Defining Democracy*, second edition, Springer, Heidelberg. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. New Zealand used a form of two-round voting, (see Annex III). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The 1987 international treaty to heal the hole in the ozone layer. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. av is known as irv, instant run-off voting, in North America and pv, preferential voting, in Australasia. When used as an electoral system, it is often called the single transferable vote, stv. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The late Professor Sir Michael Dummett, 1997, *Principles of Electoral Reform*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, p 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The methodology, the matrix vote, is proportional, accurate and, most importantly perhaps, ethno-colour blind: <http://www.deborda.org/the-qbs-matrix-vote-and-the-mb/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The bc/mbc is a preferential points system of voting, primarily designed for use in decision-making. In a ballot of *n* options, a voter may cast *m* preferences where

*n* *≥ m ≥ 1.*

In a bc, points are awarded to (1st, 2nd … penultimate, last) preferences cast as per the rule

(*n, n-1 … 2, 1*),

which might incentivise the voter to vote for his/her 1st preference only.

In an mbc, points are awarded as per the rule

(*m, m-1 … 2, 1*),

and this encourages greater participation. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)