**The de Borda Institute: 2021 ANNUAL REVIEW**

aup - American University in Paris ccr - Centre of Conflict Resolution (Munich)

ceps - Centre for European Policy Studies cfc - Collaboration for Change

crs - Conflict Research Society dcc - Dublin City Council

deb - de Borda it - *Irish Times*

nigp - Northern Ireland Green Party tcd - Trinity College Dublin

td - *Teachta Dála,* a Deputy in *Dáil Éireann*­­­­ ucl University College London

To: (i) Patrons: Professors Angela Mickley (Potsdam), Arend Lijphart (California), John Baker (ex ucd), Maurice Salles (Caen), Paul Arthur (uu) and 杨龙 Yáng Lóng (ex Nánkāi, Tiānjīn); Doctor Judith Stephens; {Irina Bazileva (Moscow) rip}, and the former td, Trevor Sargent (Dublin).

(ii) Serving board members: Professor Katy Hayward (Queen’s), Edwin Graham, Mark McCann**,** Phil Kearney and Vanessa Liston; plus some former members: Grace Walsh, Roseann Seale and Sieneke Hakvoort.

(iii) Copies to Profs. Don Saari (Irvine), Fuad Aleskerov (Moscow), Hall Gardner (aup), Hannu Nurmi (Turku), John Morison (Queen’s), Peter Stone (tcd), Sonny 盧兆興 Ló Shìu Hīng (Hong Kong), and 送迎发 Sòng Yíngfǎ (Xúzhōu), along with Anna Tulin Brett, Andy Pollak, Charles Stanley-Smith, Ciarán Cuffe mep, dcc’s Cllr. Dermot Lacey, Joe Humphreys of the it, Marian Farrell (cfc), Rob Fairmichael, {Rosemary Bechler rip of openDemocracy}, Tommy Sands and Wes Holmes; while beyond these shores are Albert Frantz in Vienna, Elca Stigter and Leo Joosten in Leiden; Eva Wolf, Gregor Berz and Manfred Holler in Munich; Jeremy Wates and Michael Emerson (no relation) ceps in Brussels; Tom Brake of Unlock Democracy, Michael Sinclair and Perry Walker in Britain; 方英 Fāng Yīng in Beijing; Jan Oreský and Mirek Libal in Prague while Pavel Dufek and Vera Stoyarová are in Brno; Marcin Gerwin in Gdansk; Nato Kirvalidze in Tbilisi; Paddy McEvoy in Cambridge; Valery Perry in Sarajevo; Vicky Selwyn in France… and now New Zealand – Paul Tarrant and Nigel Pearson; old and new, all good friends of deB.

**(Those named in the text are shown underlined in bold.)**

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Dear Everyone,

2021. What a year! Things should be getting quieter “at the dimming of the light,” but they “rage” on, with an ever-increasing intensity… or so it would seem. I normally try to limit these annual reports to just two pages, but the ‘raging’ has been so intense… this one is a little longer.

**Book Launches** Following on from the three *Democratic Decision-making* book launches of last year – in Belfast, Brno and tcd – the first of this year’s was in Jan ‘in’ Kent University with **Anna** in the chair and Prof. Hugh Miall of crs. Another was ‘in’ Munich (see next item) and a third was in April in Paris with **Hall** – for which we got paid! Most unusual. June was next, in Derry with **Marian** and the cfc, and ‘in’ the European Parliament in Brussels with **Ciarán**, both events with **Vanessa** in very capable charge.

**Matrix Vote** On Feb 3rd, I gave the first of this year’s Adam Smith Seminars, a zoom ‘in’ Munich. As a follow-on, I became we, and we did the matrix vote seminar, another zoom, on 4th Oct. The German elections, you remember, were on 26th September. By this time, much of the preparation work had already been done, not least zooming with the facilitators, with the very unawful **Eva** doing an awful lot of work; then, in the week after the election, we produced a mini-Bundestag, with members from the various parties all in due proportion, and all was set for the role-play on how a Bundestag, rather than spend weeks or months sorting out a new administration, could *elect* a Government, an all-party power-sharing Cabinet.

The event itself, a zoom, involved a presentation of the matrix vote before the various participants went into their break-out rooms, one for each ‘party’ – cdu, spd, gp etc. – there to decide who to nominate for which Ministry, and in what order of preference. Numbers were small, unfortunately, despite every effort by all concerned to spread the word far and wide, which with facilitators from Leiden (**Leo**) and Prague (**Mirek**) had already spread quite far. Nevertheless, it was a good exercise, and lots of folks now know about the matrix vote. So many thanks to **Eva, Gregor** and **Manfred**, who hosted the exercise, to all the facilitators – **Leo, Marian, Michael, Mirek, Nigel, Paul** and **Perry** – and to the mathematician who did the count, **Charles**.

In related news, two academics wrote to the Dutch Parliament, quite independently, to suggest a matrix vote could help the Parties in the Hague come to an agreement on their next Government. Secondly, a PhD student in Coleraine is now producing a piece of software, which should be ready in about April ’22, so that our next matrix vote experiment can be electronic, (as was the count in Ballymun in 2016, of course, with again **Charles** in charge). And thirdly, one David van Reybrouck wrote an article, in Dutch, on a ‘new’ idea, the preferendum! Brilliant. So I wrote to him and his publisher and his newspaper and his embassy to say that this voting procedure is actually already quite old, having been invented in 1770 and used in Belfast since 1986 so isn’t this exciting and… and… and… No replies.

***The* *Economist****…* …published an article on May 5th, (the result of several years of patient lobbying and a definite spin-off from the tedx talk of 2017 – thanks again, **Albert**). It was thought that this article was brilliant news… and, well, it was… but they’ve now gone quiet, which is a bit worrying. Though the good news was a payment of £250, thus in one quick click doubling our assets!

**Irina** In 1986, there was only one bicycle repair ‘shop’ in all of Moscow, an old shack of tubes, spokes, oil, grease… and *samogon* (home-made vodka). My own bike needed fixing, and one day, I saw a cyclist, so I ran like hell and, out of breath, asked. He tried to explain but soon realised I couldn’t understand anything: ok, let’s meet tomorrow, and I’ll take you there. We met, fixed the bike, took a drink, and then went back to his place, where I met **Irina** and two kids, all squashed up in a tiny little flat, with four bicycles and a piano to boot. We became the best of friends, and then co-authors, publishing first an article in *Moscow News*, on *консенсус*, of course. Shortly afterwards, Mikhail Gorbachev used the word, possibly for the first time (or so said the *Moscow News* editor). The article sparked off a whole load of commissions, not least from *Novy Mir* (Russia’s leading literary journal, which had a print-run of 3 million copies, where we appeared alongside Alexandr Solzhenitsyn). {The *Irish Times*, to whom I showed the article, was not interested, neither in the achievement nor in the substance – consensus.}

I last saw **Irina** in Moscow, three and again two years ago, en route from and to China, when I again stayed with them in a slightly bigger flat, and she came to listen to my lecture in Moscow University. Sadly, and quite unexpectedly, on 10th November, **Irina** Bazileva passed away. It is a huge loss. (This report I will also send to her son.)

**Irish Green Party** 40 years ago, I gave a talk on consensus at the founding Convention of the Irish Greens. It was a very sympathetic audience, and I like to think it was one of many influences which led to the inclusion of Article 6.1 in the GP constitution: "Decisions, whether at meetings or conventions, shall where possible be made by consensus." In practice, however, decisions are nearly always taken in majority votes, a methodology which measures the degree not of consent but of dissent. At this year’s nigp agm, I moved a motion which was considered to be far too complicated, and the matter was postponed. Later on, at the Irish Green Party Convention just last weekend, with **Phil** presenting and **Vanessa** chairing yet again – she’s excellent! – we ran a session – *Pluralism is Possible* –and it seemed to go down quite well. So let’s hope our next ‘gig’ doesn’t have to wait for another 40 years!

**England**  … the mother (or grumpy ol’ grandpa) of parliaments. I zoomed in to a debate ‘in’ London with **Tom** and Unlock Democracy… and, as always, everyone wants electoral reform and so on but, again as always, no-one even mentioned decision-making. So I did. This work, then, is in progress.

I ‘zoomed in’ to give a paper in the crs conference in September, and I’m still trying to persuade the crs to do some ‘research’ (to use their c**R**s word) on the matrix vote… but while the ccr is interested, the crs, it seems, is not.

A few years ago, for a fee of £80, I became a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, Manufacturers and Commerce. All to help spread the word. They published a few articles and things, but then asked for another £80, so I said no thanks, that’s too much. Since when, total silence, both from their London folk and their Dublin colleagues.

The worst news from England concerns ucl’s Working Group on Unification Referendums on the Island of Ireland. Last summer they asked, would deB please make a submission? Ok, says I. “Great,” they replied. And **Katy** was one of the Working Group, so optimism was high. In last December’s Interim Report, however, although we were listed, our suggestion – a multi-option process should precede any binary referendum – was ignored. Umm, no longer “great,” it seemed. But they made a general plea for further comment, so a second submission was written. In the Final Report, however, there was again no mention, and this time, we weren’t even listed, and nor were we invited to the launch. Two mistakes may be careless; but three? We’ll publish an apology, they said, on the web. Well, I can’t find it. If it was there, it’s now gone! All very unprofessional.

ucl has now curtailed all correspondence, so we wrote an open latter in openDemocracy – and their support, mainly from **Rosemary**, is the best news from England. But today, even on the very different subject of Citizens’ Assemblies, ucl just doesn’t correspond…

Since then, a report on the possibility of Welsh devolution has suggested exactly what we proposed for Ireland/Northern Ireland: a multi-option process to precede any binary decision.

Sadly, news just in: our contact in openDemocracy, **Rosemary** Bechler has just died. After many e-mails, I met her in person in 2017, on my way to China, and she was one of the few in England who have given us unflinching support.

**Sarajevo** **Valery**, who published a review of *Majority Voting as a Catalyst of Populism* in her Democratisation Policy Council blog, invited me to participate in a seminar with Zarja Marković of *Humanity in Action*. Ha, yet another zoom, this time talking with lots of young folk about cop 26. After a talk on decision-making, the participants split into their various break-out rooms, to suggest up to four ideas for cop 26; then, back in plenary, all these ideas now collated into a list of eleven options, they voted on the [www.debordavote.org](http://www.debordavote.org) software, each for their top six options, and thus was identified their collective prioritisation. Most of the participants were from Bosnia, but there were others from the Netherlands, Poland and the States; all very international; they voted; and within a couple of minutes, we had the answer… (or would have done, but for a slight blitch on the program; the electronics were fine, but the programme must allow the host to determine how many preferences shall constitute a full ballot – so we’re asking **Vanessa’s** technical folk to sort that one out). We had *an* answer, but it wasn’t the right one, I’m afraid… so there’s no report.

**Springer** Here’s some more good news. Another book is on its way: *Democracy – The Punters’ Guide*. It will be a simple tome, with a minimum of maths; an e-book, of course, a paperback of about 50,000 words, slightly cheaper than most of their other publications, at €25 (+ tax). **Katy** and **Lóng** have both agreed to contribute, so there will be two forewords, the authors balanced by both gender and geography!

Whether or not **Ying’s** Chinese translation of the *Democratic Decision-making* is to be published is still in the hands of Springer’s office in Beijing. And talking of…

**China** …on a very positive note, I was invited to participate in another conference on democracy, yet another zoom… but this one was in China! It was being organised by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and, I quote, “China’s State leader will be present at the forum.” So this is all very exciting. I have already sent them a 3,000-word article and a 10-minute power-point video, both of which (of course) refer to China’s use of majority voting, which dates from at least the year 58 bce, and multi-option voting, which the government used in 1197, during the Jin Dynasty. The zoom took place just last week – details on the web – and the first consequence is that we are now members of the Global Think Tank Network on Democracy.

Meanwhile, the 2017 tedx video has now been seen more than 57,000 times – more thanks to **Alfred** – which is nearly 20,000 more than in 2020, which itself was 20,000 more than in 2019… so perhaps the ‘views/downloads’ are beginning to slow down. But our finances, as I say, doubled, thanks to **Hall** and *The Economist*; we now have £600 in the black!

**2022** The Dublin presentation of our latest books to Michael D Higgins was due to have been given at the Presidential Residence, *Áras an Uachtaráin*, in September 2020. It was not cancelled, just postponed, because of Covid of course; we had hoped for 2021, but we’re now planning on next year.

On the horizon is yet more talk of referendums, legal or illegal, in Ireland, Scotland, Catalonia… Taiwan, Hong Kong… and Republika Srpska; if the last one is to be held, it could well lead to war… again. The same procedure – a referendum to provoke violence – might also be used, also again, in Ukraine, on whose borders Russia is now amassing its forces. This is all so bloody dangerous, yet few if any are prepared to criticise binary voting. If only on this topic, we will of course continue to highlight the dangers.

When (if) Covid settles, I’m still hoping to go to France, where **Vicky** has some meetings on hold, and maybe too **Hall**; to Finland, where **Hannu** has suggested, provisionally, that I should say a few words, not on zoom, but for real; to Moscow where, all being well – which it isn’t at the moment – **Fuad** will host another lecture; and maybe, just maybe, once more to China, for more talks perhaps in Tianjin (**Lóng**), Xúzhōu (**Yíngfǎ**) and Hong Kong (**Sonny**).

On which happy note, may I thank you all for your continued support. Some of you, as mentioned in the text, are very much in the public eye; others like **Mark** quietly keep the technicalities in order. But my thanks go to everyone; I wish you all the best for the Season, and we look forward to a little more ‘raging’ next year.

Peter.