

Report of the Independent Commission on the Voting System: Volume 2

Submissions and correspondence from Members of Parliament

Christopher Gill MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Lord Jenkins of Hillhead OM.,
Chairman, Independent Commission on the Voting System,
6th Floor, Clive House,
Petty France,
LONDON SW1H 9HD.

22nd July 1998

Dear Roy,

Following the meeting in the Grand Committee Room on the 30th June when the members of the 'Independent Commission on the Voting System' listened to the views of Parliamentarians I felt that I should write to you explaining more clearly the point I put to you from the floor.

On 28th November 1994 the Conservative Party Whip was withdrawn from me because I failed to respond to a 3-line whip to vote more money to the European Community.

Had I been in Parliament by dint of a Party list system there is no doubt that my political career would have ended there and then. Indeed by throwing me out of the Parliamentary Party the Conservative government almost certainly hoped that that would be the last that was heard of me in any case!

What they clearly had not bargained for was the fact that I (and the 7 other colleagues who suffered the same fate) were sustained by our own constituents and by the thousands of voices that were raised in our support in other parts of the UK and beyond, saying that we were right and that, in effect, the Government was wrong.

In the event, after an interlude of approximately 5 months, the Party Whip was unconditionally restored. In other words the Government accepted that the voice of the so called 'rebels' was more in tune with public opinion than theirs but more to the point, in terms of the representation of the people, the **people** had been able to make their voice heard by dint of the fact that British Parliamentarians, under the present arrangements, are able to make a stand on matters of principle in a way that other Parliamentarians in other Parliaments, elected by list systems, are not.

The moral to the tale is, of course, that whatever its perceived deficiencies the British system of representative democracy works. It is a two way street but it can only remain a two way street for as long as the Members of Parliament are ultimately answerable directly to their constituents and, in the final analysis, dependent upon them and they alone for the public office they hold. It ceases to be a two way street, in which the interests of Constituents, Country and Party are weighed and balanced by (and subject to the judgement of) the tribunes of the people, when men and women are candidates at elections entirely as a consequence of decisions made by the Party bosses as to whose name does or does not appear on the Party list.

As a general principle you might like to bear in mind that Democracy only truly exists in the circumstances in which the electorate has the power to get rid of either unsatisfactory representatives (ie individual MPs) or even whole governments, if that is their desire. That most certainly was their desire on 1st May last year and I have no quarrel with that.

On the other hand under PR systems the danger is that inevitably patronage transfers from the People to the Political Parties and in those circumstances the power of the people (ie the electorate) to rid themselves of unpopular Politicians or **entire** Governments is forfeited.

In conclusion I would simply state that my views are conditioned by the realities of experience, a very traumatic experience at that, and I trust that you and your colleagues on the Commission will recognise that they are worthy of more consideration than those based purely upon theory and assertion.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'C. ...', followed by a period.