

Drawbacks of the Alternative Vote

by Francis Bennion

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Website: www.francisbennion.com
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Sir,

Professor Martin Ceadel (letter, 19 April 2011) cites a 1992 election where 'the Liberal Democrat won on a mere 26 per cent of the vote after a virtual four-way dead heat with his Labour, SNP and Conservative rivals'. It is sophistry to call that winner a 'best loser', as Professor Ceadel does. He was not a loser at all. It is the laws of arithmetic that say no one might get to 50 per cent where there are three or more candidates.

To make up the difference by treating second and subsequent preferences as equal in value to first preferences when they are plainly not is, as you say (leading article, 19 April 2011), 'entirely dishonest'. Every one of the voters whose second and subsequent preferences are counted in under AV really wanted their first preference to be elected instead.

This dishonesty exposes the fact that underlying this controversy there is a basic question. Do we nowadays believe that differences between political parties are fundamental and crucial or do we think they are cosmetic and relatively unimportant? You could plausibly give first and subsequent preferences an equal value only if you thought there was no really important difference between the political parties.

If that were true it wouldn't very much matter which candidate people voted for. But of course it is not true.

Francis Bennion (retired Parliamentary Counsel)

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References

None