



Speakers hit the headlines on cue

Smart planning or what? Underlining just how shrewd are members of Regional Conference Committee, both the speakers booked for March 26, this week hit the headlines. Chris Rennard wrote a punchy article on AV for The Guardian online service guardian.co.uk on Monday. Then on Tuesday, Lynne Featherstone launched a new charter to tackle homophobia in sport and garnered support on the PinkPaper.com website.

from **PinkPaper.com**

Sports charter is launched by UK's Equalities Minister

A groundbreaking gay sports charter which will invite national governing bodies of sports to commit to tackling homophobia was launched yesterday.

The announcement was made by Equalities Minister Lynne Featherstone as she attended the Sheffield Eagles rugby league game – a match against Widnes Vikings which saw players take a stand against homophobia by wearing specially made kits bearing the slogan 'Homophobia: Tackle It!'

Minister Lynne Featherstone said she was optimistic about the new charter which aims to make sport safer and more welcoming to gay people.

She commented: "Homophobia and transphobia have no place in sport and I'm delighted that so many sporting bodies are backing our campaign to stamp it out at all levels; from local parks to Olympic stadiums."



Keynote speaker

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REGISTER NOW

Saturday, March 26

**St John's Middle School,
Perry Lane, Bromsgrove
B61 7DH**

SPEAKERS

**Lord Chris Rennard
Lynne Featherstone MP
Equalities Minister at the
Home Office**

**plus debates on the NHS
and Murdoch's BskyB
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from **guardian.co.uk**

AV's divided supporters must unite

by **LORD RENNARD of Wavertree**

David Owen chose the weekend of the Lib Dem conference to offer his personal advice about the AV referendum. Having attacked the first-past-the-post voting system so vociferously for many years, it will seem odd to some people that he now urges support for this system on 5 May. He says that he hopes for a referendum with an option of a proportional representation system instead.

Almost all those people who have consistently supported the cause of electoral reform for much longer than he has take a different view. It is very clear that voting against change on 5 May will mean sticking with the present voting system for the foreseeable future. It is incredibly hard to overcome the self-interested nature of most sitting MPs in order to get a change in the voting system. The referendum will be the first chance that voters will have had to change the system since it was effectively introduced in 1872 in wholly different political circumstances to those of today.

A change to the alternative vote system was recommended by a Royal Commission as far back as 1910. It was recognised 101 years ago that first-past-the-post doesn't work when you have more than two political parties. A "no" vote in the referendum will leave us with the voting system that was appropriate for the 19th century not the 21st. Continued on page two

Homophobia: tackle it



Sheffield Eagles and Widnes Vikings rugby league players take a stand against homophobia by wearing specially-made kits bearing the slogan 'Homophobia: Tackle It!'

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Hundreds attended the Eagles Co-operative Championship game which was sponsored by LGBT History Month and Pride Sports, together with the National Union of Teachers, the NASUWT, the University and College Union and Unison.

Tony Fenwick, co-chair of LGBT History Month, said: "After some amazing sporting events in February, History Month went into extra time for this final fixture. All the players and fans I spoke to were completely supportive. The charter is just what we need to help sport move forward into the Olympic year."

Hear Chris Rennard and Lynne Featherstone at the regional conference in Bromsgrove on Saturday, March 26. Register NOW. See page one for full details. Encourage your colleagues to join you for a great event. Discounts for block bookings.

Political rivalry over other issues should not prevent all supporters of reform from campaigning for a cause on which they agree



Lessons should be learned from the referendum in 1997 when Labour had to campaign with its great rivals...to secure a Scottish parliament

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Owen was simply being disingenuous when he followed the line of opponents of electoral reform and suggested that votes for a party that comes second or third will have "more weight" than votes for a party that comes first. The whole point of the reform is that every vote will be of equal value and people will not have to fear "wasting" their votes on candidates who may not win.

There are a number of completely bogus arguments against AV now being made by those who are determined to hang on to first-past-the-post. At the same time, there appear to be no coherent arguments emanating from the same sources to defend this system. We hear claims from others in the "no" camp that AV is "un-British". One problem with this claim is that the system is used to vote for leaders and candidates in the Conservative party and I am waiting to hear David Cameron declare his own party to be "un-British" because it used AV to choose him as leader.

The most absurd claims from the "no" campaign that "it would cost too much to count the votes". This worthy of many dictators. They could say their country could only afford to count the votes for the governing party and there

wasn't enough money to count the votes for opposing parties. The argument is a disgrace.

Owen does not have an alternative strategy. He led his followers in to a political cul-de-sac when, as SDP leader, he failed to respect the referendum of SDP members on their future. I doubt he will have many followers on this issue.

But those seeking a fairer voting system may be rather more dismayed if the *Guardian* is correct that there are difficulties getting Ed Miliband and Nick Clegg working together in support of the referendum. Political rivalry over other issues should not prevent all supporters of reform from campaigning for a cause on which they agree. Lessons should be learned from the Scottish referendum in 1997 when Labour had to campaign with its great rivals in the SNP (as well as the Liberal Democrats) to secure a Scottish parliament.

The leaders of the Labour party, the Liberal Democrats, the SNP, Plaid Cymru, UKIP and the Greens are all on the "yes" side in this referendum. Against them are the leaders of the Conservative party and the BNP. With only two choices in the referendum, the leaders who want change need to show that they can work with each other on this crucial issue even if they differ quite fundamentally on other issues.