



We want to be involved!



Most people – over 50% – DO want a say in sorting out the mess we are in.

In a poll (of 2001 people) conducted by YouGov between 1st and 3rd July 2009, the following question was asked:

Some people have argued that the political crisis over expenses demonstrates the need for constitutional reform.

Which ONE of the following statements comes closer to your view?

To which the answer was	(%)
We should set up a 'citizens' convention' and involve people from all walks of life in deliberating on how to improve the way the UK is governed	52
MPs should hold a special session of parliament to come up with a reform package	19
Neither of these	19
Don't know	10

Politicians have a choice: they can listen to the public and support the Citizens' Convention Bill – or they can ignore the public, oppose the Bill, take all the decisions themselves and then wonder why people are 'apathetic'.

ACTION BOX

Please support this campaign by

- Writing to your MP (at House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA or email your MP by going to www.writetothem.com) asking him/her to sign Early Day Motion No 148 in support of this Bill – AND PLEASE DO LET US HAVE COPIES OF THEIR RESPONSES
- Please also sign up to support this campaign – see box over page

THANK YOU

SOLVING THE CRISIS IN OUR DEMOCRACY: INVOLVE THE PUBLIC

WORDS INTO ACTION APPEAL TO PARTY LEADERS

Our political system is in crisis facing massive public distrust. The expenses scandal did not cause this – as the Power Inquiry¹ showed it existed already – but it has certainly made it worse. The whole situation is now dangerous for democracy. People are simply withdrawing in their droves. They view the whole system with contempt.

INVOLVING PEOPLE

People everywhere want to be involved in the solution: they do not want it all left to politicians.

On 8 June 2009 a cross party group of MPs led by Martin Caton, Douglas Carswell, Norman Lamb and David Drew launched the Citizens' Convention (Accountability and Ethics) Bill. It sets up a mechanism for involving voters all over the country, and enabling them to suggest solutions and to have those solutions discussed and voted on. Already the Bill is supported by 150 MPs and by Democratic Audit, The Centre for Women and Democracy, The Social Liberal Forum, Progress, Compass, Conservative Campaign for Democracy, Initiative and Referendum (UK), and 38 Degrees.

But, when it was introduced into Parliament Mr Brown's party whip stopped it proceeding; and Mr Cameron and Mr Clegg said not a word against this.

VIEWS OF THE PARTY LEADERS

The Bill is a real attempt to end the 'top down approach', reach a 'national consensus' and 'share power with the people'. Concepts that the Party Leaders support.



'A top down approach is not the way its going to work in the future'
– BBC News 7 January 2007

'I want to build a national consensus for a programme of constitutional reform that strengthens the accountability of all who hold power' – 11 May 2007

'Constitutional reform matters directly to me... all the big challenges can only be met by directly involving people in their solution... the days of Whitehall thinking it knows best are over'
– Leadership Acceptance Speech, 23 June 2007

¹ <http://www.powerinquiry.org/>



'Right now a tiny percentage of the population craft legislation that will apply to one hundred percent of the population. This locks out countless people across the country whose expertise could help. So why not invite them in on the process?' – Fixing Broken Politics 11 May 2009

'My message to the political class is stop trying to pretend we can do it all ourselves. Its time to share power with the people' – 6 May 2006 at the launch of the Power Inquiry



'Power must be dispersed away from government... State-centred, top-down solutions are wholly out of step with the demands of our age.' – The Liberal Moment, Pamphlet 17 September 2009

EXACTLY! THAT'S WHY WE NEED THE CITIZENS' CONVENTION BILL AND WHY WE LOOK FORWARD TO MR BROWN, MR CAMERON AND MR CLEGG SUPPORTING IT IN THIS SESSION

NEXT STEPS

We will write to ask them to do so. We will also write to their Cabinet and Shadow Cabinet colleagues to elicit their views.

This Bill will not go away. So: will the party leaders act on their own words and publicly support it?

Liberal Democrat leader **Nick Clegg** has now called for a Citizens' Convention to discuss electoral reform. For Labour, **John Denham's** new approach to these issues is welcome.



Oliver Letwin 'an attractive idea'

The Conservative Head of Policy, **Oliver Letwin**, although expressing some reservations about the drafting of the Bill, has expressed some sympathy in letters to constituents, saying that it is 'an attractive idea' and that he is 'currently discussing with colleagues' with a view to coming up with a revised draft.

We look forward to discussing this with him.

Citizens Convention (Accountability and Ethics) Bill

1 Purpose

The purpose of this Act is to establish minimum ethical standards for Members of Parliament and to promote the involvement of citizens in political decision making by means of the establishment of a Citizens' Convention.

2 Establishment of Citizens' Convention

- (1) The Electoral Commission must, within 12 months of the date on which this Act is passed, establish a Citizens' Convention ("the Convention").
- (2) The Convention is to consist of no fewer than 100 people eligible to vote in a general election.
- (3) The selection of people to serve on the Convention must be random, subject to the requirements of subsection (5).
- (4) No person shall be required to serve on the Convention unless they consent to do so.
- (5) The Electoral Commission must take reasonable steps to ensure that membership of the Commission reflects the composition of the electorate in the United Kingdom.

3 Functions of Citizens' Convention

- (1) In pursuance of the purpose of this Act, the Commission must give consideration to, and make recommendations on, the following—
 - (a) allowances and expenses payable to Members of Parliament,
 - (b) the system or systems of election to each House of Parliament,
 - (c) the means by which electors may hold to account Members of Parliament, including any mechanism for the recall or disqualification of such Members,
 - (d) the way in which business is conducted in both Houses of Parliament,
 - (e) the funding of political parties.
- (2) The Convention may undertake, or commission other persons or organisations to undertake, such research as it considers appropriate.
- (3) The Convention shall take reasonable steps to publicise its work and to encourage the submission of evidence to it from all parts of the United Kingdom.
- (4) The Convention may establish sub-groups on specific issues within its remit and invite people who are not members of the Convention to participate in such groups.
- (5) The Convention must publish any recommendations made under subsection 3(1) as soon as reasonably practicable, and no later than 12 months after the date on which it was established.
- (6) The Convention may publish recommendations under this section in a single report or in a series of reports.

- (7) For the avoidance of doubt, references in this Act to Members of Parliament includes Members of the House of Commons and House of Lords.

4 Procedure and funding of the Convention

- (1) The Convention may determine its own rules and proceedings, which may include provision for the selection of a chairman and for the conduct of meetings.
- (2) *The Secretary of State may make payments to members and staff of the Convention by way of remuneration and in respect of expenses incurred by them in the performance of their duties.*
- (3) *The Secretary of State may also defray any other expenses of the Convention.*

5 Reports of the Convention

- (1) The Prime Minister must lay before both Houses of Parliament any report published by the Convention under section 3.
- (2) The Prime Minister must, not later than three months after the date on which a report is laid under subsection (1), make a motion in the House of Commons expressing support for the recommendations contained in the report.
- (3) The recommendations contained shall be subject to a referendum if—
 - (a) any motion made under subsection (2) is disagreed to, and
 - (b) if a petition calling for a referendum on any of the recommendations and signed by at least 5 per cent of electors is submitted to the Electoral Commission.
- (4) The Electoral Commission shall publish rules governing the submission of petitions and the holding of any referendum under this section.
- (5) The Prime Minister must ensure that a referendum is held in accordance the rules published by the Electoral Commission under subsection (5).
- (6) The Secretary of State shall not implement any recommendation of the Convention if a majority of participants in any referendum held under this section oppose it.

6 Expenses

There shall be paid out of money provided by Parliament—

- (a) *any expenditure incurred under or by virtue of this Act by the Secretary of State, and*
- (b) *any increase attributable to this Act in the sums payable under any other Act out of money so provided.*

7 Short title

This Act may be cited as the Citizens' Convention (Accountability and Ethics) Act 2010.

Some Points of Clarification

Why does the Convention only involve 100 people?

It does not only involve 100 people. True, a finite number, say 100, would be members of the Convention, but clause 3 subclauses (2)–(4) require the Convention to involve people, from all over the country and all sections of society.

The Bill requires the Convention to take evidence from the general public and that there would be other opportunities for involvement. The Citizens' Assembly in British Columbia for example published all its materials and videos of the sessions on the web, and held public meetings in the different constituencies.

Isn't this just another consultation that will again fail to engage people?

We accept that the words 'consultation' and 'sham' are often used synonymously and so consultations often do NOT engage people. But this is NOT merely a consultation exercise. The Convention's recommendations MUST be voted on in Parliament, and, if not agreed, could be the subject of a referendum.

'But doesn't that mean that politicians can just reject what citizens want?' To which we reply – NO, for two reasons:

- The pressure on MPs NOT to do that would be enormous, following the engagement process that the Bill requires; and
- even more powerfully, where that happened (i.e. Parliament voted down the Convention's recommendations) citizens can call a referendum on them.

This is empowerment not consultation, and all the evidence (e.g. *The Power Inquiry*) is that where people feel that their role can make a difference (i.e. they have real power), they are far more likely to get involved.

Doesn't this undermine Parliament?

No, because the Bill requires Parliament to debate and vote on the proposals of the Convention, and MPs will be accountable to the public for this. That's parliamentary democracy.

And because people want to be involved. Nothing undermines Parliament more than the widespread feeling that politicians are failing to listen to the public. Parliament and democracy are enhanced and strengthened by involvement: this Bill sets up a structure to achieve that.

Unlock Democracy JOIN NOW/ SUPPORT THE CITIZENS' CONVENTION BILL

Please fill out and return the form below:

- I wish to join Unlock Democracy. I enclose a cheque for £24 (£12 concessions)
- I wish to support this campaign. I enclose a donation of £ _____
- Please send me _____ more copies of this *Citizen Extra*
- I would be interested in helping to organise a local meeting

Please make cheques payable to Unlock Democracy

Name _____

Address _____

_____ Postcode _____

Email _____

Tel _____

Constituency/MP (if known) _____

Return to: Ron Bailey, Unlock Democracy, 6–9 Cynthia Street, London N1 9JF

Tel: 020 7278 4443 Fax: 020 7278 4425

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