

## **Ed Miliband Speech to Labour Yes to AV campaign**

It's a pleasure to be here at the launch of the Labour Yes to AV campaign.

Today I want to explain why the Alternative vote will help us build a fairer and better politics

I respect those in our party who are against this change.

But I believe the referendum on May Fifth is a chance to change our politics.

I believe a yes vote to AV is the best way to be consistent with:

---Labour's history of campaigning for change

---our wish for a more accountable and democratic country

---and our mission to build a better politics.

My support for a yes vote is because I believe AV is a fairer system, but the vote also says something about the kind of party I believe Labour must be:

Willing to reform our politics, reach beyond our party, never settling for the status quo.

This campaign launch has been a while coming.

To listen to some people you'd think this change was contrary to our traditions,

In 1918, nearly a hundred years ago, Labour's leader, William Adamson, led Labour MPs into the division lobbies in support of the Alternative vote.

Eighty years ago, another former leader of our party, the Labour Home Secretary, J R Clynes, launched a bill to introduce the Alternative vote.

Clynes told MPs that “our system has been good, but good must give way to better..”

Sadly, when the national government was formed, the chance for reform was lost.

I don't want to pretend there has been no progress in our politics since then.

A lot of the debate in 1931 was about whether it favoured a privileged few over the many to allow voters to be taken to the polls in a car.

So some things have moved on.

But our political system at Westminster has been stuck in neutral for far too long.

Outside the chamber of the Commons, we've made great steps.

In government, Labour delivered devolution to Scotland and Wales,

created the London Mayor;

and helped build a democratic, peaceful Northern Ireland.

All huge changes.

All elected by fairer votes.

But a strange timidity has affected us when it comes to the House of Commons.

There have been many justifications for our inability to challenge the status quo.

The conservatism of the House of Lords.

The need to focus on the economy.

Opposition from other parties.

Our own internal debates.

All of them good reasons to put off change.

But not good enough.

Today, again there are arguments for ignoring reform.

This Conservative led government has cut too far, too fast, and broken their promises on public services.

For families across Britain, these issues are obviously of more immediate concern than a change to a voting system.

So on the day unemployment reached a seventeen year high, it is right that our focus as a party is the local, Scottish and Welsh elections.

Under my leadership, the Labour party will campaign in every inch of our country, from Cornwall to the Shetland Isles, telling this Tory-led government that they are wrong on people's livelihoods, wrong on growth, wrong on betraying the next generation.

But all that said, May 5<sup>th</sup> offers us the opportunity to change the way our politics works.

And we should say where we stand.

I want to seize that chance for change

We need political reform, and especially the Alternative vote, for three reasons.

First, because our politics needs repairing.

Second, because the alternative vote is a better, fairer system than the one we have.

Third, because the alternative vote will improve the way politics is conducted.

Let me start with our political system

The British people know that our politics needs to change.

Many see Westminster as remote and out of touch.

Turn out at General Elections is on a downward trend.

Even though our membership has grown by fifty thousand, membership of political parties is lower than in the past.

If politicians are honest with themselves they will admit that the voters are not happy with the way our politics works.

The question then is whether voting reform will help us empower voters and make politicians more accountable.

Is the Alternative Vote the best way to change politics?

Let's be honest. AV is no panacea. It isn't perfect.

But it would help to restore the balance of power in favour of voters because it would force all MPs to earn the majority of votes.

It will encourage candidates to appeal to a broader range of voters and to understand a wider range of concerns.

Politicians should never be insulated from those they represent.

Opening up the electoral battleground will be a significant step in making more votes count.

So on May 5th ask yourselves one simple question:

Are you happy with the condition of British politics?

If the answer is no, then seize this chance for change.

The Alternative vote will make votes fairer for one simple reason:

**It will make more votes count.**

*And when more votes count, politicians have to count on more voters.*

And at the same time alternative vote keeps the constituency link people really value - the ability to contact, even to berate, their local MP.

So the reform case for AV is simple.

If you want more voices to be heard;

And if you want more votes to count;

Then you should vote yes on May 5th.

But the case for AV is not only that it creates a fairer system.

It's that the need to win a majority in each constituency will lead to a better politics.

Many of our Labour parties ran fantastic campaigns at the last election.

Where we placed ourselves firmly in the community, we were sometimes able to overcome the national swing against us.

I want the Labour Party campaigning on every street, in every community, trying to win a majority of votes in every seat.

Under AV our candidates will need to knock on more doors, make more phone calls, listen more carefully to criticism.

That will make sure we hear what the electorate really thinks of us.

And it will make us more likely to be open and straight with the electorate about what we think of other parties.

That's got to be good for voters.

After all, one of the things that turns people off politics is exaggerated disagreement.

The problem with our system is there's no incentive for politicians to do anything but tell voters how awful everyone else is.

Even candidates who agree on some issues have to pretend they oppose on every issue.

Today, there are enormous differences about where take our country.

But when all you hear is how terrible all the others are, then to voters it feels like yah boo politics for the sake of it.

The alternative vote will punish parties that don't campaign, don't listen and stop challenging themselves.

So the alternative vote will put pressure on politicians

To be more inclusive,

To be more active in communities,

and

to reach out to those who disagree.

For Labour, changing the way we vote will be a constant reminder of the need to be strong, broad and inclusive, not narrow and tribal.

I want Labour to listen to those who always vote Labour,

Those who vote Liberal Democrat or Conservative

and those have given up on politics entirely.

The alternative vote will encourage us to do that.

I also say this: for us, the tragedy of British political history has been the split in the progressive vote.

After all, it's no wonder the Conservatives are united in opposition to the Alternative vote.

They are the party of the status quo.

The Tories are opposed to reform because they fear a connected, campaigning politics.

They fear a progressive majority that doesn't share their values.

They want to stick to the old system because an out of touch politics makes life easy for Conservative governments.

So Yes, the alternative vote will make life harder for politicians.

We'll have to work harder to win, reach out to more people and speak to those who are sceptical and doubtful.

The life of the political classes will be far harder under AV.

But that will be better for voters, and so better for politics.

Let me at this point deal with some of the anti-AV myths that have been spread by those opposed to change.

- That it leads to more coalitions;

No-one wants a Labour majority more than me.

But there is no evidence that AV results in more coalitions:

For example, the Australian Alternative Vote has led to fewer hung parliaments than we've had in the UK.

- That AV is complicated;

Really this is a patronising argument. Putting 1,2,3, in boxes in order of preference is not that complicated.

Finally, let me take head on a fear designed to appeal to Labour supporters:

That a yes vote in this referendum will be seen as a vindication of Nick Clegg.

I know this referendum is harder to win because of his broken promises.

But we can't reduce the second UK wide referendum in our political history to a verdict on one man.

I supported the inclusion of an AV referendum in our manifesto because I believed the time was ripe for change.

So far, much of the referendum campaign has been conducted as a debate about whether David Cameron will be hurt by Yes vote or Nick Clegg by a No vote.

I think it should be about something more.

Give your verdict on Nick Clegg and David Cameron by voting Labour in the Scottish, Welsh and council elections.

Tell your friends, campaign with the local party, and let everyone know how you feel about this government's broken promises.

But let's seize the chance this referendum gives us to change our politics for the better.

The change to the alternative vote deserves our support.

I want change to win on May Fifth.

but that should be the beginning of the journey, not the end.

But our campaign for a better politics must continue on May Sixth.

The next steps are clear.

We need a reformed, democratic House of Lords.

Labour and the Lib Dems called for a fully elected Second Chamber in our manifesto.

I want to keep that promise.

Next, we need every person in Britain who is entitled to vote to be registered to vote.

Far too many voices go unheard because they don't even have the vote, and whoever is in government, we must work together to address that.

Our long journey to a better politics didn't stop with secret ballots,

It didn't stop with universal suffrage.

It didn't stop with devolution.

On May Fifth, we can take another step on this journey to a fairer politics.

So I urge people to say.

Yes to change,

Yes to a challenge to the status quo,

Yes to a system where more voices are heard and more votes are counted.

Yes to AV.



<http://labouryes.org.uk/>