



## Power2010

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To celebrate their centenaries, Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust funded the Power Commission to “understand how participation in British politics could be increased and deepened”. The Power Commission’s report, *Power to the People*, was published in 2006.

On 15 September 2009, Baroness Kennedy QC, who chaired the Power Commission, launched Power2010. Power2010 is seeking ideas from the public and five reforms that the public want to see Parliament carry through will be identified. Candidates at the next general election will be asked to support these reforms.

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## **Contents**

<b>1</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Power 2010</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Power Inquiry</b>	<b>4</b>
3.1	Overview	4
3.2	The recommendations	5

## 1 Background

To celebrate their centenaries, Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust funded the Power Commission. The Power Commission's report, *Power to the People*, was published in 2006. The introduction to the report outlined why the Commission was established:

Power was established by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust to celebrate their centenaries. Its mission was to understand how participation in British politics could be increased and deepened. To do this it established a Commission of ten people from a variety of social and political backgrounds to consider the evidence generated [from inquiry activities].<sup>1</sup>

Section C of this note provides some further information on the Power Inquiry.

## 2 Power 2010

On 15 September 2009, Baroness Kennedy QC launched Power2010. In an article, in the *Independent* newspaper, she outlined the purposes of the campaign, the nature of public involvement and the urgency of the issue:

...We cannot leave the task of making change happen to politicians alone. Every citizen can play a role in ensuring we do not return to business as usual following the general election of 2010.

The new organisation Power2010, launching this week, is designed to change the next Parliament using the strength of concerted public action. What is different about Power2010 is that there is no agenda. We're not asking the public to back our goals. We're asking the public to create them. Over the months before the general election we are going to build this public agenda for changing politics and stage a mass popular "vote" for the five reforms people most want to see the next Parliament carry through.

This is the Power2010 Pledge; a public commitment that every candidate standing at the next election will be asked to make. It could be around cleaner party funding, the power to elect the Prime Minister, introducing primaries or changes to the voting system. It might be on House of Lords reform or the right to recall MPs. The key is that the public both determine the options and select their priorities. This gives the Power2010 real legitimacy and allows the public to have a direct say in how the next Parliament makes a binding commitment to change.<sup>2</sup>

Power 2010 describes its main objectives for the campaign on its website, where the public can submit their reform ideas:

### What is POWER2010?

POWER2010 is a unique campaign to give everyone the chance to have a say in how our democracy works for us.

What is different about POWER2010 is that you're in the driving seat. We're not asking you to back our goals. We're asking you to help create them.

[...]

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<sup>1</sup> *Power to the people: the report of Power: an independent inquiry into Britain's democracy*, March 2006, <http://www.powerinquiry.org/report/index.php>

<sup>2</sup> Helena Kennedy, "This is our chance to seize power – it may be the last one we get", *Independent*, 15 September 2009

## What are we doing?

Our plan is simple. We want to identify the five key reforms that will change the way we do politics in this country - and we want you to tell us what these should be.

Over the coming months we will be working with individuals and organisations across the country to meet up, discuss, tell us their ideas and vote, ensuring as many people as possible participate.

The five most popular ideas will become the POWER2010 Pledge.

Together we will then ensure every candidate standing at the next election is asked to make a public commitment - a pledge - to clean up and reform politics in Britain.

## What can you do?

We need you to tell us your ideas - the democratic and political reforms you most want from the next Parliament - through our website, by attending one of the public meetings we will be supporting, or by writing to us at the address above.

You have until midnight on Thursday 5th November. It might be cleaner funding, better privacy protection, a fairer voting system, or giving local people the right to 'sack' disgraced MPs - **you** decide.

All the ideas submitted will then be considered by a panel of citizens selected from across the UK who will decide the list of proposals to be put to the public vote.<sup>3</sup>

The blog Liberal Conspiracy outlined the campaign's timetable:

According to organisers, from today the campaign moves into 5 distinct phases:

1. The public and organisations submit their ideas for fixing politics via the website by Thursday 5 November
2. Power2010 will bring together citizens from across the UK to decide the shortlist of reforms to go to the public vote
3. On November 18th – the day of the Queen's Speech – public voting begins.
4. The voting ends at midnight on 31st January. The five top reforms voted by the public are announced in February 2010 – creating the Power2010 Pledge
5. In the months to the General Election every candidate is pressed to back the Power2010 Pledge at hustings, via email, letters and the media.<sup>4</sup>

## 3 Power Inquiry

### 3.1 Overview

In her foreword to the *Power Report*, Baroness Kennedy stated that the evidence presented to the inquiry suggested that voting itself "seems irrelevant to increasing numbers of people" and that there was a feeling "that there is no choice, despite our living in the era when choice is the dominant political mantra". Commenting that the world had changed enormously during the past fifty years and that lives were being lived in very different ways, she suggested that

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<sup>3</sup> Power2010, *About us*, <http://power2010.org.uk/pages/about-power2010>

<sup>4</sup> Liberal Conspiracy, *Power2010 campaign launches today*, 15 September 2009, <http://www.liberalconspiracy.org/2009/09/15/power2010-campaign-launches-today/>

“the political institutions and the main political parties have failed to keep up”. Drawing attention to the way in which people continue to volunteer to raise money for charity, join protest marches, undertake voluntary work within their communities and sign petitions, Baroness Kennedy commented that political apathy was a myth. However, people “no longer want to join a party or get involved in formal politics” and the solution was to download power by “rebalancing the system towards the people”.

Later in the report the Commission identified a “democratic malaise” which was not just manifested in the recent decline in turnout at general elections. Apart from a decline in party membership the Commission found that there was a “well-ingrained popular view across the country that our political institutions and their politicians are failing, untrustworthy, and disconnected from the great mass of the British people”.<sup>5</sup>

The executive summary to the report said it presented “a detailed analysis of why this disengagement has occurred and a series of recommendations to address the problem. This is a broad agenda for major political reform”.<sup>6</sup>

### **3.2 The recommendations**

There were thirty recommendations in the report. The first group addressed the rebalancing of power between the Executive and Parliament and between central and local government to “allow the freedom for our elected representatives to be the eyes, ears and mouths of British citizens at the heart of government”.

The second group of recommendations included measures designed to develop an electoral and party system which is “responsive to the changing values and demands of today’s population”.

The final group of recommendations aimed to create a culture of political engagement. In such a culture it would be normal for “policy and decision-making to occur with direct input from citizens”.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Power to the people: the report of Power: an independent inquiry into Britain’s democracy*, March 2006, p28

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p15

<sup>7</sup> Further details of the Power Inquiry and report, and press comment on the report, can be found in House of Commons Library Standard Note SN/PC/3948 , *Power to the People: the report of Power, an independent inquiry into Britain’s democracy*, 14 March 2006, <http://www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/briefings/snpc-03948.pdf>