

## 2012 REVIEW

### ABBREVIATIONS

BC	-	Borda count	deB	-	de Borda
CRC	-	Community Relations Council	IPS	-	Irish Political Science
MBC	-	modified Borda count (preferendum)	NIG	-	New Ireland Group
OSCE	-	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe	SCW	-	Social Choice and Welfare
PSAI	-	Political Science Association of Ireland	UCD	-	University College Dublin
TASC	-	Think-tank for Action on Social Change			

To: The Patrons of the de Borda Institute;

Professors: Angela Mickley (Potsdam), Arend Lijphart (California), Elizabeth Meehan (Queen's), John Baker (UCD) Maurice Salles (Caen) and Paul Arthur (UU).

Others: Doctors John Robb and Judith Stephens; former TD, Trevor Sargent (Dublin); and Irina Bazileva (Moscow).

Copies to:

- servicing as well as former committee members: Alan Quilley, Edwin Graham, Grace Walsh, Mark McCann, Phil Kearney, Ray Mullen, Roseann Seale and Sieneke Hakvoort;
- Perry Walker, our colleague in NEF, who worked with us in the JRCT project, four years ago.
- others mentioned in the text: Lords Paddy Ashdown and Mike Boyce, President Michael D Higgins, Roy Garland, John McCann, Tommy Sands, and Wes Holmes of the NIG.
- and one other, Professor Donald Saari, who is a very good friend of the Institute.

### A REVIEW OF 2012 (with all of the above persons, if named in the text, shown in bold)

Dear Everyone,

#### ***Defining Democracy*, (Springer, 2012)**

What a year! It started with the launch of the second edition of *Defining Democracy* in the House of Lords, with Lords **Mike** Boyce (an old pal from my early days in the Navy) and **Paddy** Ashdown (whom I first met in the 1970s, when we were both humble members of the Liberal Party). **Elizabeth** was one of the speakers, **Grace** was in the chair, **Alan** and **Phil** were also there, as too was **Tommy**: and, well, it's not every day that you get a bunch of diplomats and parliamentarians, all singing the chorus line of an Irish ditty. So, while it cost us a fortune (although the CRC gave us £1,050), it was all very worthwhile.

Then, in February, with **Grace** and **Phil** again, we were in Áras an Uachtaráin to present a copy to the President, **Michael D** Higgins. He had been the key-note speaker at one of the earliest consensus experiments – the 1991 *The Other Talks*, held under the auspices of the NIG, in which (a) we used an electronic count of the MBC vote; and (b) we had a guest from Sarajevo, six months *before* the war in Bosnia. **Michael D** remembered all of this, and the whole event was very successful.

And in April came the third book launch in Belfast. We waited for the annual conference of the (UK) Political Studies Association which was held here this year, and we had the launch as part of the official programme. **Elizabeth**, **Grace** and **Phil** were there again, and the guest speaker was **Roy** Garland.

Apart from two very warm mentions by **Roy**, one on Sluggie O'Toole, and a brilliant interview with **Tommy**, the press totally ignored all three events. I actually complained to BBC NI about this – they have never even mentioned this Institute – but this probably means they are even less likely to cover any de Borda activities. There again, at my age, there is nothing to lose.

So, the book is out there, and many people have heard of it. Not many reviews yet, I'm afraid, though some are on the way, I'm told. Springer, by the way, was delighted with the House of Lords event; there are very few authors, it seems, who go to such lengths. That said, perhaps I should tell you all how much I have earned from the sales of the two Springer books. So far, the answer is absolutely nothing! But we live in hope. (Springer's authors get paid once sales have passed the 300 mark.) The good news is that sales in China, Springer tells me, are doing OK; 7 copies; and at a guess, that's more than in Ireland.

#### **THE ASHGATE RESEARCH COMPANION ON WAR**

I was also published in this anthology, a mighty tome of over 600 pages, and yours for £96. Not a penny from them either.

#### **THE MATRIX VOTE**

In 2010, remember, largely at **Phil's** bidding, we did a matrix vote experiment in the TASC buildings in Dublin. On that occasion, as each new member of the public came through the door, we split them up into parties for a rôle play, all in fair proportion to the relative party strengths in the Dáil. Now, in a post-graduate conference organised by the PSAI in Maynooth, we did the logical follow-on: an experiment in which every individual just does his/her own thing. Sure enough, when it came to the vote, no one voter was the same as another in their 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> preferences, let alone in all ten of them. So, though the numbers were small, the event was successful: the vote was fine, the matrix vote passed the test with, though I say it myself, flying colours; and all the voters found the whole thing, I quote one of them, "a piece of cake".

There was then to be a disappointment, however. IPS, the political journal of the PSAI, refused to publish the write-up. They had rejected the report of the 2010 experiment as well, implying that it was just not good enough; but it was OK for *Voting Matters*, in which it features in their current edition, № 29. I'm afraid that IPS has never even mentioned de Borda, and I think I will now give up, with them that is; I'll try elsewhere, again. We've done our best: **John** arranged for **Phil** and I to meet David Farrell at UCD one day, and we also met him in two "We the Citizens" meetings as well, but no positive results as yet.

#### AARHUS

As some of you may know, **Phil** chairs the Aarhus Convention, and thus I was invited to Geneva to talk on consensus decision-making at one of their meetings. Lots of Russian speakers which was nice. A horrible web-site from British Airways charged me £500 for a return flight, Belfast to London. But it does mean the de Borda word spreads further.

#### TOMMY SANDS

The next event was again with **Tommy**, his *Music of Healing* event, which is now a regular feature of the *Fiddlers' Green Festival* in Rostrevor. **Tommy** and I had a chat on stage, and then we ran a multi-option debate with all present – about 100 of them – on a subject of their choosing: transport links across Carlingford Lough. **Grace** was the sole consensor on the computer, and we finished up with 9 options 'on the table' and computer screen. So we ran off a ballot paper, **Tommy** sang another song, and everyone voted. Sure enough, we identified the consensus of those present – (not the option that this cyclist would have chosen!) – and the MBC social ranking was exactly the same as that measured by a Condorcet count. I have long said that the MBC and Condorcet are both very accurate measures of the collective will, and here was proof positive.

#### SYRIA

Having invited me to talk on Egypt last year, I now asked **Edwin** if he knew of anyone from Syria, and so, sure enough, we (in the NIG that is), held a very interesting discussion on the subject, "Syria, what do we do now?" The NIG, by the way, asked Queen's to give me an honorary degree some year ago, and still no response. A bit vain, perhaps; but in vain too.

#### SHEPHERD MOSCOW

What else is happening? Well, one piece of good news is that **John** McCann from Shepherd Moscow, business consultants who use an MBC in their own deliberations, has just used one in his home village in Northumberland. **John**, retired, is now a member of the local parish council. He has just rung to say it all went well, and a report is expected shortly...

#### SCOTLAND AND BISHOPS

One Professor Tierney from Edinburgh spoke in Queen's on "Can referendums be fair?" I wrote to him beforehand on multi-option referendums but, in a one-hour address, he said not one word. So I said several, again in vain, I suspect. As you know, Messrs Cameron and Salmond have decided that what had been (at least) a three-option debate shall now be morphed into a two-option dichotomy: independence or status quo. **Elizabeth** and I have been campaigning on this issue for a good couple of years and, almost in desperation, I wrote yet again to the *Guardian*... but this one they published, repeating in bold print the sentence: "There should be a three-option preference vote on independence, devo-max and status quo." So that was brilliant. The letter criticised the failure to consider preference voting, not only of the two governments but also of the Electoral Commission. I have been knocking on the latter's door for years now, and a further meeting is scheduled shortly. In all, over the course of the last year, we've had a couple of mentions in *The Guardian*; on a different theme, **Phil** was in the *Irish Times*; and we're now writing to all and sundry on the subject of (no) women bishops.

#### WHAT'S NEXT?

Initially, I had hoped to be in China by now. Alas, my travel plans suddenly fell though when my prospective tenants pulled out: the garden would be too much, they said. So I'm still here; I'm still learning Chinese, which is fascinating; and I have provisionally been invited to speak at a conference in Xúzhōu next Sept. Because my travel plans were disrupted, I was a short-term observer again for the OSCE in Belarus, which was a bit flat really, and Georgia which was fantastic: independence, war, revolution, and now, for the first time, a change-over of power which was entirely peaceful. At one stage, it looked as if Saakashvili was going to get a minority of the votes but a majority of the seats; in Georgia, that would have provoked violence! Sadly, the OSCE is seldom interested in a country's choice of electoral system; and nor do they criticize referendums.

#### THANKS

And so, as always, my thanks to you all: will we ever retire? The kitty, by the way, is going down, so maybe we'll have to. We now have only £1000 and €2000 left, barely enough to say...

...Happy Christmas.

Peter