

****Embargo 00:00 5th November 2004****

POWER Goes to the PEOPLE

Today sees the first meeting of **POWER**, an independent inquiry to look at the state of British Democracy. **POWER** is launched by the Rowntree Trusts to mark their centenary year.

The **POWER** Commission, chaired by Helena Kennedy QC, will meet over the next year to consider evidence generated through an ambitious programme of public engagement events, and an extensive research programme.

Unlike the usual mix of retired politicians and civil servants who sit on public inquiries, **POWER** has brought together an eclectic mix of commissioners – including a former head of Margaret Thatcher's Policy Unit, a Radio 1 DJ and the Chairman of the Women's Institute – to look at how citizens can secure a real say in the political decisions that affect our lives. (See below for full list of Commissioners.)

On the launch of the Commission, Chair Helena Kennedy QC said:

'It is time to face the fact that low participation in formal politics is now a serious problem threatening to undermine our democracy.'

She continues:

'The issue is not just voter turnout, as bad as that is, the political parties have been haemorrhaging members since the 1960s and polls show that people feel they have little or no influence over politicians once they are elected. When a government presides over two of the lowest general election turnouts and the two biggest street demonstrations since 1945, it's time to start asking and answering hard questions about why politics is failing to engage with the people of Britain through the traditional channels.'

Inquiry Director Pam Giddy adds:

'We know that people are passionate about the issues politics seeks to address. They are, however, becoming increasingly cynical about the political structures through which they can influence decisions made in their name.'

The **POWER** Inquiry will, over this coming year, facilitate a debate across the country to discover the causes of our disillusionment and to examine new approaches to political participation. The inquiry will initiate its own programme of public engagement events, in order to involve as many different communities and individuals as possible. This public evidence will form a crucial part of the deliberations the Commission will undertake.'

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Notes to editors

1. **POWER** is an independent project launched by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust Limited to mark their centenary.
2. The **POWER** Commission is a group of people drawn from a range of backgrounds and experience. They include representatives of the left, right and centre of politics, but are mostly people with no particular political party affiliation. The Commission will consider the evidence generated by the Inquiry, from which they will produce a set of recommendations for the future of British Democracy.

Commissioners

Helena Kennedy (Chair)

Ferdinand Mount (Vice Chair) – Author & Journalist

Emma B – Radio 1 DJ

Paul Boakye – Editor, Drum Magazine

Phil Carey – Coach, ‘Sport 4 U’ project, Hastings

Philip Dodd – Director, Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA)

Barbara Gill – Chairman, National Federation of Women’s Institutes

Bano Murtuja – Blackburn-based researcher & community activist

Frances O’Grady – Deputy General Secretary, TUC

3. Phil Carey, 21 – **POWER**’s youngest commissioner – gained a place on the Commission by entering our competition to find a Commissioner aged 18-25. Entrants were asked to submit ideas for the one new thing the Prime Minister could do for young people on a Post-it® Note. For further details about the competition and a selection of entries visit www.powerinquiry.org.
4. **POWER** will conduct a series of Commission hearings supported by a major research programme and public events to find out how political participation in Britain can be increased and deepened. It will publish a final report in early 2006.
5. For further information, please contact **POWER** (0845 345 5307), or Jonathan Edwards (07974 729491).
6. For further details visit www.powerinquiry.org.

Spokespeople available for interview:

- Chair: Baroness Helena Kennedy QC
- Director of the Inquiry: Pam Giddy

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