



Grassroots for Europe Round Table #27 - 05/07/2022 Report

Title “Campaigning: Some Alternative Approaches

Context: Our focus in this session is to explore “Deep Canvassing, innovative strategies for attracting and engaging younger audiences and perspectives on Citizen Journalism and editorship. These approaches which will augment our existing strategies and methods, have the potential to breathe new life into our campaigns.

Speaker: Ella Barrett, Co-Founder of the New Conversation “An Introduction to Deep Canvassing” <https://www.newconvo.org>

Ella addressed us from Los Angeles, California. The origin of “Deep Canvassing” is tied in with her starting as an organiser and campaigner in the California on 4 November 2008, following the withdrawal of “freedom to marry” legislation (Proposition 8 – single sex unions) in what had hitherto been a very progressive state.

A group, volunteering and working at the LA LGBT centre, went out and started having conversations in neighbourhoods where the voters were most likely to have voted against Proposition 8. The aim was to try and ascertain what motivated them to vote against same-sex marriage and to test whether affected canvassers could be honest with them about themselves in their own lives and, potentially, shift attitudes. That tactic became “Deep Canvassing” and it has since been used in many different issues.

Deep Canvassing Conversations or Campaigns are typically used for “hot button” or issues where campaigns struggle to win. The goal is to talk to the “movable middle” and to persuade “conflicted people” to vote/agree a particular line. Moreover, it can be used to encourage people to go out and vote, especially if they are feeling hopeless about the system, or to vote for a certain candidate. However, persuasion is not enough. Behavioural change and action are also needed.

The next elements of a Deep Canvass programme involve changing attitudes and motivating people to act, whether physically at the poll, or to vote a certain way, or to call their representative, or even to volunteer for a campaign. Ella presented a shortened version of a canvasser in action in 2010. As the deep conversation unfolded, it became clear that the canvassed individual did change his attitude when faced with sharing potential real-life outcomes of the vote.

Ella went on to explain the differences in conversation structure between traditional canvassing and Deep Canvassing. In a traditional canvass, we try to ascertain as soon as possible a “yes, no, maybe” on an issue. In a Deep Canvass, the voter is asked to put

him/herself on a scale of 0-10 on an issue. For example, between 4 and 6, one can ask, “what puts you of this side of the issue?” The aim is to draw out the complexity of the persuadable or “conflicted” person's views on the issue at hand and to start a meaningful conversation.

In a traditional canvass, canvassers stick to a tested script, delivered as quickly as possible. In a Deep Canvass, a lot more time is spent in training canvassers to listen actively, to ask questions about experiences to gauge opinions and, crucially, to be as non-judgmental as possible. Tested script points do have their place in Deep Canvassing towards the end of the conversation, when the canvassers can, then, share their own vulnerable story about the issue and invite the canvassed to share theirs. Experience shows that this tends to keep the issue live in the memory.

Two years into initiative, in 2010, knowing the methodology was working, the team started to collaborate with some independent researchers. It built a relationship with Stanford University and has, since, carried out eight independent randomised control trials to measure the effect and how long it is likely to last. Since 2010, it has recorded a proven impact on all of the issues on the Left, including candidate persuasion. In a study of Trump versus Biden, win or lose an election, previous persuasion is likely to decrease the likelihood of a voter falling for the current fear messaging and response to the “dog-whistling” from the start. A current 9-month study, to date is showing a measurable longitudinal (time) effect that there is no decay at nine months. The team is actively seeking more funding to carry out a much longer study. That will, indeed, be interesting.

Peter Jukes, Founder and Director of *Byline Times Network*: “Perspectives on delivering accurate Citizen Journalism & Editorship.”

Peter opened by stating that the role of a (*Bylines*) journalist is not to campaign but to facilitate informed choices rather than narrowing choice down. At the same time, it is impossible to be impartial to the truth, the rule of law, democracy or combating discrimination. Upholding human rights is fundamental. Most traditional journalism is aloof, it tells the audience what to think and humiliates those who are thinking the wrong thing. The *Bylines* organisation has a passion for truth as a central emotional position whilst at the same time presenting rational and reasonable arguments. Accepting that others have different passions, *Bylines* uses reasoned arguments to engage with criticism through the medium of a wide range of authors. This approach helps to avoid items or articles becoming doctrinaire.

Certain *Bylines* principles are inalienable, for example, the fact that Brexit isn't working. A lot of our writers, who had been well-known Leavers, soon saw that the lies were crumbling and the promises hollow. Damage was being done to ordinary people who had voted for Brexit. Starting in 2020, a series of videos for *Bylines TV* showed how a range of local industries was collapsing and livelihoods were being destroyed. Unfortunately, some Remainer commentators reacted to those Leavers with insulting hostility, saying things like “*You deserve it*” or “*Now you know how we feel.*” This simple winner/loser mentality is Trumpism and merely entrenches positions. *Bylines*, on the other hand, seeks to broaden the conversation. There are limitations: the government, for example, has never sought to engage with our parliamentary correspondent. The *Bylines* Network, however, speaks to its

audience humanely, knowing that the lies they were told were very persuasive. There are forms of automated, psychometric campaigning which bring campaigning into disrepute by avoiding genuine human contact and conversation. People don't like to be told they were deceived, but they do respond to suggestion. This can produce positive results but may also be negative, as in COVID denialists or QAnon beliefs. Through accurate information, people can be taken on a journey to the truth. It is thus important not to adopt a magisterial position of power, otherwise your 'audience' will not feel empowered to contribute to the narrative. It is helpful if journalists move more to 'deep listening' and respect people's lived experiences.

The *Bylines* mission and responsibility aim to create a well-informed electorate in this post-modern age where truth is not believed. When people feel they are correctly informed, they also feel empowered. If you do not inform, cynicism and fatalism ensue – “*Oh, they're all the same...*” and these are the tools of the autocrat. When people are passive and do not participate in politics, power, money, and violence take over.

Kyle Taylor, Founder and Director of *Fair Vote*: “Attracting and Engaging the Younger Voter.”

Kyle was Chief of Staff and campaign director to Lib Dem MP Simon Hughes (2012- 2015), co-managed the 2016 North Carolina coordinating campaign with 'Hillary for America.' He founded *Fair Vote* in 2018, after a year working with *Best for Britain*. He trained British residents in Spain who were campaigning against Brexit.

In the present tough context of an enormous government majority, and people becoming weary, social media has become a saturated vent, with things no longer moving anywhere offline. Activism sits in a digital world where people think they have acted by signing a petition or tweeting something. This deeply benefits the status quo. If people think they have acted but in reality, have not changed anything, they will develop less and less resistance to online activism. This applies especially to young people who have been socialised into the idea of online activism through the lens of social media.

However, the digital world is not the place for converting or switching someone. The business models of social media are built on keeping people in hyper segmented silos where they just stay happy so that the company can deliver more ads. So, nothing challenges or makes people question things. It is an 'affirmation environment.' We need to think about how we can use this to drive back towards the real world. This is more difficult after two years of COVID, when social media became our lifeline to connect and communicate. Social media is now so central to our lives that it is the easy option if we want to be heard. But it does not allow you to convince or convert somebody through deep conversation. Instead, it has put us in a gratifying, smug “Told you so” loop instead of considering how we can use conversation to get back in the European Union. The only way to achieve such a goal is by convincing others to share our beliefs. And that means accepting that other people are starting from a different place, and that it will require a lot of work.

Kyle thinks that the coming year will see a process of reinventing and reinvigorating activism through 'poli-tainment,' or politics with entertainment, like the rally in May which showed a

new way of engaging people. Open Britain's Stop the Rot rally! <https://www.open-britain.co.uk/>. This involved bringing to a real-life event a lot of the political and social media influencers whom people would know from Twitter. The connection to those people online drove them out to the rally. So instead of going on Twitter to yell and shout, use Twitter to get 20 people to do something in the real world. Twitter is a tool to an end, not an end itself.

To persuade someone, you need to understand where they're coming from first. This involves asking questions to identify the ground on which your audience is standing. What do they care and think about? How do they get their information? And how do we speak to them in their terms? Converting someone is impossible if we project our worldview onto them. *Bylines*, with its fact-based approach to journalism, could be considered part of the system. In the past journalism used not to necessarily be activism, but nowadays it inevitably is. Everything is now partisan, so we need to ask ourselves - does that make us just like our opponents, even if we are a bit more grounded in reality and truth?

We should not always be talking about Brexit, but about its causes and peoples' underlying concerns. After Brexit we located immigration as a surface-level issue, but Kyle thinks the core of that was people's sense of powerlessness in their society. One day they were suddenly given the power to change British history in a referendum. So, the real issue is: How can we give people a sense of power in their day to day lives, and reduce the notion that the EU is an all-pervasive threat to their power structure? If you can solve that you can create the foundations for a sensible discussion.

Focus on the enabling factors, better government, more democracy, and emotional triggers that allow people to feel that they will be heard, and that what they want can be delivered. Labour simply will not win a general election talking about Brexit when it remains so central to political discourse and social division. So, Labour has had to blunt the wound and exchange the short term for long-term gain so that they don't have to fight a general election on Brexit grounds, which is Tory friendly territory in key marginal seats. It may take ten to twenty years to re-enter the European Union, but that means starting to set the scene now, because that is exactly what the anti-EU lobby spent 35 years doing - convincing people that all their woes were caused by the EU. All the Brexiters needed to say was "take back control," appealing to people's genuine sense of impotence. So, our task is the reverse, showing how people can regain control by taking part in the largest economic system with free movement, and so on. The essential task is to make people feel empowered, that they can get their power back, whether by proportional representation like *Fair Vote*, or citizens' assemblies, reforming the House of Lords, and so on.

Attendees:

Chair: Fiona Wishlade

Speakers: Ella Barrett - The New Conversation, Kyle Taylor – Fair Vote, Peter Jukes – Byline Times,

Jackie Jones - Wales for Europe
Paul Willner – Wales for Europe
John Gaskell – Grassroots for Europe
Michael Anderson – YEM
Yvonne Wancke –Byline Network
Tamsin Shasha – Festival for Europe
Alex Gunter - UKPEN
Emma Knaggs – European Movement
Sharon Leclercq-Spooner – Pro Europa
Mark Johnston – Pro Europa
Sue Wilson – Bremain in Spain
Lisa Burton – Bremain in Spain
Else Kvist – The New Europeans

RT Team: Jo Pye, Colin Gordon, Dr Monica Horten, Tony & Lillian McCobb , Helen Grogan,
Jonathan Harris, Caroline Kuipers;

Next Meeting: [Tuesday 6th September at 5pm](#)

Topic: Round Table #28

Time: Sep 6, 2022 17:00 London

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88150534414>

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