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Sir Christopher Kelly
Chairman,
Committee of Standards,
35, Great Smith Street
London,
SW1P 3BQ

24th May, 2009

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Dear Sir Christopher,

May I, be permitted to make a few comments on the current disgraceful situation in The House of Commons. I write as one who, in my younger days, served as a Commissioned Officer of the Royal Military Police, (whose Regimental Motto is *EXEMPLO DUCEMUS- (we shall lead by example)*) and on a number of occasions was entrusted with the safety of members of the Royal Family from the Duke of Edinburgh downwards. I then served a long period in the National Farmers' Union dealing with Members of Parliament and County and District Councillors. Later, in my retirement, I served as Clerk to a small Parish Council, and had to administer the strict Regulations which were imposed upon Parish Councillors who had very limited powers, and who served a community in which everyone knew all about every Councillor, and who has also served for nearly 8 years as an Independent Member on the Standards Committee of the District Council.

I have constantly read that Members of Parliament who had been criticised pleaded that they had acted within the Rules, and seemed to think that excused them from being incapable of distinguishing between right and wrong.

1. Exemption from the Law

It has long been a principle in this Country that **all should be equal under the Law**. There surely cannot be any argument against any suggestion that those who make the law, and those who administer the Law, should suffer the same consequences of breaking the Law as the rest of the population.

One has heard Members of Parliament suggest that they are paid an inadequate salary, but they never complain about the very generous pension scheme which they obtain. I would suggest that one of the first steps which should be taken to achieve equality is that every member of Parliament elected for the first time at the next election, and every Civil Servant who takes up his employment, or a higher post, after 1st September 2009, should be paid a higher salary (say an increase of 15%) but should then have to make his own arrangements to save for a pension, obtaining the same tax relief as is available to all self employed persons. I have reason to believe that this is the practice in New Zealand, but cannot get hold of anyone in the New Zealand Embassy to confirm the fact.

Existing members of both Parliament and the Civil Service should have the choice of either changing to the new pay and pension arrangement (with the transfer of their existing "pension pot"), or sticking to the existing pay scale but with the amount of their pension frozen at today's RPI level. There is a very strong case for providing "index linked pensions" to the Armed Forces, Police and Firemen, who risk death or serious injury in serving their fellow citizens, but the "gold-plated" pensions obtained by other public servants who run no greater risk than tripping over the red tape in their offices, are greatly resented by that section of the population whose taxed income provides their pensions.

2. FREE TRAVEL

I have no problem with Members being given free 1st Class Rail travel between their constituencies and London,- so long as there is adequate machinery to ensure that season tickets are withdrawn as soon as the life of a Parliament comes to an end. !

3. OVERNIGHT ALLOWANCES.

The recent suggestion by the Prime Minister that there should be a Daily Attendance Allowance is absolute nonsense. Is that not the reason why MPs get a salary ? I do however agree that, on those nights when the house sits after, say, 9 p.m. any member who cannot get home within, say, one hour, should be entitled to a nightly hotel allowance based on the cost of a 4 or 5 star hotel in London.

Special arrangements obviously have to apply when a Member's constituency is further away than, say, a 2 hour journey,- obviously he/she will need a more lengthy stay with space to store changes of clothing etc.

However, a "second home" is NOT necessary. Many people, such as Salesmen, Members of the Armed Forces, Lawyers, Business consultants etc. have to stay away during the week, returning to the family home at week-ends. A 2 bed-roomed flat is adequate.

There may be the odd occasion when an MP might have to bring his wife to London, but surely, it can never be necessary to move the whole family, and it must always be born in mind that Parliament actually sits for less than 40 weeks in a year.

There should NOT be any question of a second home being purchased, bearing in mind that ANY MP can actually lose his/her seat at the next election. A 5 year lease or rental period is more than adequate.

4. EMPLOYMENT OF STAFF

There should NEVER be any question of any MP employing any relative. Such an arrangement smacks of an attempt to evade payment of National Insurance. ALL Secretarial Staff, Researchers, etc, should be employed on Contracts for the duration of a Parliament, by The House of Commons, which is responsible for their Tax and National Insurance. At the end of each Parliament, they should be paid a gratuity based on length of service, which should be free of Income tax etc., IF invested in a Retirement Annuity.

5. SUBSISTENCE ALLOWANCES

The one aspect of the Claims reported which absolutely baffles me is that apparently MPs can charge for FOOD in their second homes. Compare that with my experience. During the past 15 years or so, I have acted as a Poll Clerk or Presiding Officer at a Polling Station. When I first acted in that capacity, the District Council had made an arrangement with the Inspector of Taxes at Portsmouth, that the sum of about £16 of the fee which I received was "tax Free" as a Subsistence Allowance.

As the Staff of a Polling Station, I have to be "on site" by 06-30hrs to set up the booths, display posters etc and be ready for polling to open at 0700hrs. Between then and 22.00hrs, neither I nor my Poll Clerk are allowed to leave the Building. Although obviously some parts of the day are busier than others, members of the public can arrive to cast their vote at any time, and consequently neither of us can sit down at any time during a long day to a proper hot meal with a table laid and a Knife and fork. Therefore we have to arrive at the polling station armed with an adequate supply of tea, coffee, soup, and "finger food", etc, on which we can snack during the day.

On the occasion of the last but one General Election, I was moved to staff a Polling Station in a different village, which came under the Returning Officer of an adjoining District Council. The Inspector of Taxes at Reading, with whom that Council dealt, rejected my claim for a Subsistence Allowance on the grounds that the food which I had purchased was not "necessarily, wholly and exclusively" required for the occasion, since I had to provide food for the day in any case. An appeal to The Treasury was rejected by Dawn Primarolo MP on the same grounds.

Subsequent enquiries revealed that an Inland Revenue Officer who had to be absent from home for a similar period would have been eligible for a tax free CASH ALLOWANCE of £20. ALL MEN ARE EQUAL UNDER THE LAW ! Needless to say, that is the amount which I now claim quoting the Inland Revenue entitlement, and which I receive.

6. Taxation Treatment.

One aspect which has come out causes more outrage than any other, and that is the apparent system under which MP's are given preferential Tax treatment. Anything which shields Members of Parliament from the effects of the legislation which they pass, or approve, turns the Country into a "them and us" divide.

Although it is probably outside of your remit, there are two requirements which should be brought into effect. The first is that NO-ONE should be eligible to become an M.P. before he or she is 30, and has either served a minimum of 5 years in the Services or 10 years in Trade Commerce or Industry. In that way, they will gain a greater understanding of the pressures under which "ordinary people " normally live. We do NOT want, people who have never really left the educational system, going from School to a University, coming out with a degree in Philosophy, Politics and Economics, and going into Parliament with only theoretical knowledge, and no real experience.

The other vital change is that just as "Peers and lunatics" are not allowed to be members of the House of Commons, NO-ONE who has ever been a member of the House of Commons should be allowed to become a member of the Second House, whether it be called the House of Lords or The Senate. I believe there is a strong case for an elected Second Chamber, but it should be composed of Wise elderly men who have become experts in their field, and NOT geriatric politicians. As the function of the second House should be a revising body, there is a case for it to be composed of a mixture of Lawyers, Business men, medical experts etc, but it must NOT be dominated by "old party hacks". A panel of the Law Lords, and other men of distinction should be the Guardians of the Constitution.

Yours faithfully,

D M. Hall.