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Sir Christopher Kelly,  
Commission on Standards in Public Life,  
35 Gt. Smith Street,  
London, SW1P 3BQ.

M.Ps emoluments

Dear Sir,

As a former Managing Director of a plc with specific knowledge and experience in HR and Industrial Engineering, I would like to submit a few topics and ideas for your consideration in your forthcoming deliberations.

1. M.Ps enjoy a relatively high degree of job security, is generally a minimum of five years (the length of a parliament) but in fact the great majority keep their job for several decades unless they happen to be one of the ten per cent or so who have a marginal seat. In reality their job is more secure than most people, especially those engaged in the private sector.
2. At present M.Ps enjoy a high degree of freedom in the way they carry out their role. It is difficult to see who is their next superior, is it a whip or indeed their own electorate. Rather uniquely it is most difficult to put a job content to a job that is largely without any real supervision - they can put in as little or as great a time on the job as they deem to be necessary. However it is logical to suppose those in marginal seats work the hardest. I believe they should not be seen for the purpose of evaluating a salary as equal to some notional civil servant, I suspect their job should be seen more as a calling somewhat akin to a clergyman than anyone else - the wanting to serve the public should be seen as a vital aspect and attraction of the job.
3. When evaluating a job or position one usually has to assess the educational requirement and/or professional standard required to enable one to secure a particular position. Again, rather uniquely M.Ps do not need to have any defined basic level of education or level of academic achievement. From my experience of job evaluation it would be quite difficult to put a salary or rate for the M.P. above their present salary.
4. Notwithstanding 3 above, in practical terms if one was persuaded to increase the salary to say £70,000 it would create a considerable problem because of their most generous pension determined by pensionable years. Many present M.Ps have been in the House for thirty years, some nearing forty years. I contend that the electorate would not find it acceptable that a backbencher could leave the Commons with a pension of £70,000, plus his state pension. So it follows that any proposal to lift the present salary would have to be accompanied with a proposal to drastically change the present pensionable years arrangement.

In considering all this, one assumes any new salary arrangements would not be effective until the new parliament of 2010. I think it goes without saying that after the events of the past six months at Westminster the electorate would not accept any proposals that gave present M.Ps any enhancement in salary or total emoluments. The 'game' is over for our present set of politicians and from very recent events I am not sure they fully realize this.

So much for the four aspects I have raised, and I am sure there are many others for consideration. But I would now like to mention some other pointers which might be seen as fundamentally affecting the way M.Ps are selected by parties to represent people. It has been said the cosy Westminster Village type of parliament with increasingly the role of the 'professional' or career politician has made them rather estranged from the electorate and it has undoubtedly been the case that during recent events M.Ps have been shocked by the low level of public esteem engendered towards them. So perhaps there is a need for a new type of M.P. and this will require fundamental change, and may be the following factors should be considered.

1. A minimum intake age of say thirty five years.

the objectives would be:

- A. To prevent the role of the career politician. People going straight from university, via a few years as an adviser then into a seat in parliament.
- B. To ensure candidates for parliament have spent approaching twenty years in useful employment, gaining experience of the outside world and giving them a more balanced view of what their constituents have to deal with in their day to day life.

2. Restricting M.Ps to a maximum of three or perhaps four parliaments.

the objectives would be:

- A. To take away the cosy long term 'club' atmosphere at Westminster, which at the margin would make them less remote from their constituents.
- B. Achieve a better turnaround of new blood into parliament and get away from the moribund time serving M.Ps we have at present.

There are two other issues I would like to mention. Firstly, since we now have approximately one thousand politicians grouped in Westminster, Edinburgh, Cardiff, Belfast and Strasburg, we should reduce Westminster to something like four hundred members thus reducing the total cost of government which has increased massively over the last decade. Secondly M.Ps should sit at Westminster for forty five weeks or so. The practice of sitting for just thirty two weeks which has crept in during the last few years should be stopped immediately. Productivity by M.Ps has never been so low and it is a shockingly bad example to ordinary working people who are constantly told by Ministers to increase their productivity. I cannot imagine a company running as inefficiently as Westminster does and there is a clear need of some control of M.Ps and the Executive, may be by introducing a statutory number of weeks per year that Westminster is open for business.

The thoughts that I have set out in this paper go way beyond the simple issue of expenses but I do contend the matters I have put before you are at the kernel of the whole subject of public representation and should be seen as contributory factors to what you are seeking to do at this particular time. It may be you have a very narrow remit, but I respectfully suggest a simple tinkering with expenses is not going to greatly assist the much needed improvements in public representation only a critical analysis of M.Ps functions will achieve what is now required.

Yours faithfully

GEORGE A SPIBEY

