

Dear Sir Christopher Kelly

I believe that the original of this was sent to your wrong email address so I trust this has now arrived safely on your desk. The contents below are a copy of that item but including my introductory paragraph to Kate Hoey MP who subsequently expressed an interest in seeing my comments.

Dear Ms Hoey

At your pond opening ceremony at St Pauls Church Clapham on Saturday, I mentioned my comments as sent to Sir Christopher Kelly (not yet acknowledged) on Parliamentary reform. You expressed an interest in receiving a copy and I attach them below. Generally the expenses sleaze has impinged on all MP's. I hope you and all concerned MP's across parties can do something about it. (I welcome your web site comments.) This does not mean making placatory noises and minimum real change but a root and branch review leading to major change. A committee free of politicians should run an Inquiry. As you see, I do suggest the abolition of the Lords and its replacement with an advisory chamber - no one seems to agree with this!

Although not mentioned previously I would also like to see an end to the award of gongs, orders, knighthoods and peerages for dubious mainly political favours I suspect.

I hope you will find this of interest.

peter cobley

My comments were:-

FAO Sir Christopher Kelly

I believe your Committee on the Standards in Public Life has been asked to report on the role of MP's expenses but I am convinced that the scope of the study must be enlarged to cover Parliament in general. I have never ever written to anyone about this subject but, I am like many others incensed about how the MP's in their cozy parliamentary gentleman's club have sponged off all of us probably for years (even before 1997 when the present system was introduced) and done it with no feeling of morality or thought of where the cash comes from. They are all responsible by accepting the system and knowing how flawed it was. All this nonsense about not appreciating the situation and making "honest mistakes"- of course they knew, they employed people who could bend the rules they made them themselves and spread the word to others. No party disagreement here.

Rather be totally negative however I wish to make some suggestions which I hope will contribute in a positive way to reform not only of the current gravy train but parliamentary and constitutional reform in general. To begin with a general comment; all Members of Parliament must be treated and expect to be treated exactly like the rest of the population regarding criminality, taxation, employment conditions, codes of professional conduct and expenses claims. They must be seen to be above

reproach.

I would also like to put the following issues to you, all of which must be dealt with to assure me that nothing like this situation can happen again and we can have a properly functioning democracy representing the ordinary person rather than big business, the trade unions and other unrepresentative pressure groups. The opportunity for major reform must not be missed.

THE CONSTITUTION

It is necessary to have a Bill of Rights and Responsibilities which after a genuine consultation process, everyone signs up to and lives by. It would help to engender respect the rights and responsibilities of others as they should respect you. If anyone is not prepared to, then action would automatically follow, benefits of citizenship could be withdrawn. If this happens, then this could include denying or withdrawing citizenship which in turn could mean losing financial benefits, medical treatment, unemployment support, pension, the right to remain in the country etc. The first step towards achieving would be to implement the identity card proposal.

HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT

Reform is essential, the following are suggested:-

- 1 All MP's expenses must be in public domain.
- 2 MP's should have a charter of responsibilities (a job description like the rest of us). Failure to abide by would be a disciplinary matter.
- 3 MP's must be allowed to follow their own conscience and not be tied to a party whip or to constituency pressure. There would have to be an escape clause covering matters of national (not party) importance.
- 4 MP's should not be permitted to retain or accept other jobs (directorships, professions, partnerships or hold shares in companies etc) where a conflict of interest is present or even likely. I have heard the argument that doing so brings additional knowledge and experience to the Commons. This may be true to some extent but its major benefit is to the individual MP and his interest group (the legal profession being a major beneficiary). The Lords could perform this service better (see below). In order to establish an House of Commons representing us all items of self interest must be set aside - unpopular but essential.
- 5 The English require a Parliament - just like the Welsh and Scots.
6. MP's who live within easy commuting distance of London should not have second homes, those further afield can but with tight control.
- 7 Friends, relations and hangers on should not be employed at our expense unless a fair open competition is held.
- 8 Sponsoring MP's by companies, businesses, trade unions or MP's acting as a consultant or lobbying for anyone must be banned.
- 9 The pension and lump sum payoff when leaving must be related to the country average.
- 10 Paid lobbying to pass legislation for a particular interest must be banned and be a criminal act.
- 11 We need idealists to represent us, not ones with greed as the main attribute.
- 12 Power must be delegated to local level and the "cabinet" system abandoned to encourage more councilors to stand.
- 13 Parties must always act quickly and decisively against wrong doing whoever it is.

14 An MP's job should be a full time 9.00 to 5.00 job and leave no room for another. If members wish to take on additional work, (as local government regulations) consent must be given by the House and normally refused.

15 All information on how the house is run and what role each MP takes should be publicly available. The current web site is like a maze to new users.

16 Bring in a four year term for government.

17 The opportunity for members to bring in private bills and have them passed must be enhanced.

18 Political parties should be funded equally by state and expenditure checked (except lunatic fringe).

19 There must be a legal requirement to vote with sanctions.

20 We have too much legislation. What there is must be simplified and made user understandable. Passing legislation does not solve the problems, implementing it should.. Why can't Acts make life for ordinary people better, simpler and easier? Because Parliament doesn't review legislation and modify where required and because the ordinary person is not respected.

HOUSE OF LORDS

1. This should be abolished and replaced by a variable group of people with expertise in the sciences, the arts, business and commerce to advise the Commons on these specialisms. They would be given a life peerage, receive a fee and expenses and all their reports would be made public. They would be able to call on other experts.

Parliament is an anachronism and must change. The USA, Canada and Australia have a much better approach. Lets take the best of these and do something revolutionary whilst we have the chance.

I hope this helps.

P Cobley