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Strensall
YORK

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Sir,

I am sorry that I find myself writing to you this late in the conduct of your inquiry. I appreciate this submission is late but I was unaware of the consultation exercise as I was deployed to Afghanistan this summer.

I have not previously written to Members of Parliament but feel that recent events concerning expenses require me to do so.

You will have to bear with us, the general public, if we do not appear well informed but all we have to go on is the information we read in newspapers and from other media. If the current reports are anything to go by it seems that MPs have learned nothing from the whole expenses scandal and are using this to argue for an increase their salaries. Whereas this may be a direction of travel, it is on the back of rises in salaries in the past which have outstripped inflation and at this present time when the public's view of MPs is so low, suggests that MPs are utterly out of touch with their constituents.

Given that a number of MPs have ridden roughshod over the Seven Principles of Public Life it seems that suggestion that they add to these seven the qualities of humility and common sense will fall on deaf ears.

I believe that there is widespread support for the following view:

1. MPs should not vote on their own rates expenses. A similar system should be applied as that for pay. The current system almost encourages extravagant spending, paid for by the tax payer.
2. The system for reviewing expenses is clearly flawed and if the expenses system survives this trial the review process must be much more robust.
3. MPs who submit false or inflated claims must be suitably disciplined. I cannot believe that any ordinary member of the public would retain their job if they had committed similar offences.
4. The situation of employing relatives seems, at best, unwise and should probably be scrapped. It is all well and good for some to threaten resignation over this but however it would not be a problem if some MPs had followed the guiding principles of honesty and integrity.
5. Under no circumstances must there be anything but total transparency in the publication of MPs expenses. Any attempt to somehow hide MPs expenses from public scrutiny will be a complete betrayal of what little faith the public has in it's MPs.

In the fullness of time it may be that MPs salaries are increased to replace the expenses scheme. One would have thought that a period of quiet reflection should pass before this is suggested. This would certainly remove the potential for dishonesty. However, it is not utterly incredible that this word should be applied to our elected representatives?

It should be pointed out that a fair number of MPs have additional employment in the form of directorships, etc. When you take that into account along with the more than reasonable holiday periods and the fact that it is disconcerting to see the House of Commons so empty much of the time, one has to feel that MPs have huge ground to recover before the population would be happy with significant pay rises. Indeed, the suggestion that MPs pay should rise to over £100,000 is, at present ridiculous. Those MPs suggesting this near 50% pay rise are clearly lacking in the quality of leadership which might in part justify that salary. Finally, should MPs feel they are worth a salary of the order of £100,000 (without extra expenses) this might be acceptable to the public if they are earning that salary as their only income.

I hope that your inquiry will produce meaningful & acceptable recommendations which in time will re-establish our faith in our Members of Parliament.

Yours sincerely,

RS Fräser
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