

## The Truth About Westminster

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*'Damn your principles - stick to your Party.'* Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881)

*'A speech may change my mind; but my vote, never.'* Georges Benjamin Clemenceau (1841-1929)

*'A little rebellion now and then is a good thing.'* Thomas Afferson (1743-1826)

*'I sometimes wonder if we can afford the luxury of adversarial politics.'* Lord Weatherill (1920- )

Whipping has only one purpose: to bully MPs into voting for things they don't agree with or don't believe in. Whipping has involved blackmail, verbal intimidation, sexual harassment and physical aggression. This is quite different from presenting the case for a government line. Whipping therefore destroys integrity by definition, and invites corruption. Giving way to a severe whipping involves the death of conscience, sacrificed on the high altar of ambition. Whipping encourages mob rule, the end of free speech in debate, and and of free voting. The term itself is unhelpful, and is related to the 'whippers-in' of dogs in fox hunting.

Without Whips, individual Members of Parliament would vote each measure according to the strength of the argument which would be presented clearly in debate. Every measure would be carried or lost on its own merits. This does not happen once or twice in every Parliament, usually over issues where a government is unable to form a view, example over capital punishment, but it is very unusual. If free voting were more widely encouraged, MPs would still be accountable to their constituents for the way they voted, the sanction of being thrown out of Parliament at the following election if the electors felt that they had been badly served.

Every week a list of parliamentary business is circulated by the Whips Office of each party, with some items underlined once, twice or three times, depending on how strongly the party is going to insist that the MP turns up and votes in support of the party line. Hence the term One-Line or Two- Three-Line Whip. Three-Line Whips are a tyranny, forcing MPs to remain within fifteen minutes of the Chamber for long periods because the exact timing of a vote or 'division' is often very uncertain.

A small mercy is a co-operative arrangement between the Whips Offices allowing 'pairing' to take place. For example, a Conservative may be in hospital with cancer, but there is also a Labour MP who is at a family funeral. Both are given leave and their votes cancel each other out by mutual agreement.

Sometimes Whips refuse any pairing and there is then the utterly disgusting and disgraceful sight of the very sick and dying being carted by taxis, ambulances and then wheelchairs into the Chamber, exploited by their Whips for so-called 'death bed votes'. Lord Howie of Troon, Labour Whip in the 1960s, said recently, 'I think we killed three Members,' were severely ill, yet were called in to vote and died immediately afterwards of heart attacks in or near Westminster. 161

Voting by proxy or by post or any other means is strictly not allowed under any circumstances, even for people who are medically certified as hours or days from death - a heartless and stupid rule in a technological age. These 'death votes' may not be common, but they sum up the cut-throat lust for power in the House of Commons, and the mindless obsession at times with glorious tradition, even when it violates all reason, compassion and common sense.

I have talked to a number of MPs both past and present about the merits and abuses of the whipping system. Whips have extensive powers of patronage. They can ensure ministerial appointments, honours, trips abroad, coveted places on Select Committees. Then there are invitations to Buckingham Palace, or to receptions in Downing Street, or the promise of a prestigious or lucrative quango appointment, or of a safer seat. Their ultimate sanction, 'withdrawal of the Whip' which in effect means excommunication from the party, likely to be followed by deselection and losing a seat in Parliament.

Teresa Gorman has been severely whipped over Europe issues and despises the whole process. 'This place is a male public school, a boys' school. The Whips are the prefects. Their job is discipline. Their currency is tittle tattle. They have never had a Tory woman in the Whips Office. "Only W, do the cleaning," they will tell you. Shocking. This place is steeped in the 1920s. The Labour Party does have women in the Whips Office and has done for some time. It's mostly simple blackmail. I was treated to sexual abuse. The idea that I was an unworthy

person because of my sex. It was tried on by a couple of Members. In my case they were being very vulgar.' 162

In her book *The Bastards* she describes further details of a conversation between these two fellow Conservative across her as she sat in the Chamber that day. 163

'A woman's place is in the home.'

'Yes. Flat on her back.'

'Do You think Teresa would be any good on her back? I wonder what kind of knickers she wears?'

Teresa Gorman says that what follows was unrepeatable and she exploded with rage: 'Why don't you go somewhere and find someone else to talk dirty to if you feel like that?'

'I thought you would be enjoying it. I thought that's what like about this place, plenty of men. Women should be barefoot and pregnant. They shouldn't be let in here in the place .' he then left the Chamber rapidly. 'It was the worst half-hour in my life.' There was no one she could turn to although she was very upset. In the United States women have been awarded very large sums for less. Afterwards she told me: 'It was the passion of the moment. There were very strong feelings on both sides. I'm not making an excuse for them. The argument is that we were sent to Westminster as MPs because the Party was embracing particular political doctrine and the electorate were voting for that [But] in this issue what we were doing was so pro-found, we were handing over power invested in us to Brussels.'

Another MP remarked: 'You must realise that there are jokes in this place about "irritating little squits" like - who allegedly are periodically pushed up against the wall. You mustn't believe them all.'

Intimidation extends beyond confrontations with Whips. 'During has the Maastricht debates when it came to votes on two crucial occasions the whole of the Cabinet moved in and encircled certain colleagues who they knew were thinking of voting against and almost elbowed them through and into the Lobby. And the Prime Minister did that to ----. He put his arm on ----'s shoulder, him having just made a speech explaining to the world why he wasn't going to vote for the Party. He was then literally conducted by the Prime Minister and that's very seductive. He literally went up to [him], put his arm round him and steered him, chatting away.'

I spoke to another Tory MP who was greatly distressed by what had happened. He ushered me into a quiet room in the House of Commons and grabbed my dictaphone from the sofa to dictate a statement 'off the record'. This is a full transcript which describes a corrupt and disturbing process at the very heart of our democracy. There can be no more important thing an MP does than cast his or her vote, yet these votes are being systematically rigged through buying people on the payroll or through honours or by threatening or blackmailing the rest.

'The experience I had of the Maastricht (European) business was that as this was the first rebellion of Parliament after the '92 election they were coming at it fresh themselves and so they didn't know how to handle it. They started off with a sort of Mr Nice and Mr Nasty approach, where one Whip would be nice and the other Whip would be nasty. I had personal experience of being verbally abused in a loud way in a corridor in full public view by one Whip and then by the same Whip later.'

'Did he assault you?'

'Well, he didn't actually hurt me but he came very close to me and sought to take hold of my lapels in the privacy of a . . .'

'So it was you that you were talking about when you said that you'd seen . . .'

'No. This was my experience. Now there was another occasion when I saw somebody actually being lifted up by his lapels. And I, um, that was all the Mr Nasty [approach] so there must have been a lot of that going on. The Mr Nice approach was "Come in and have a drink old boy," or "Let's go and have a cup of tea," and this would be a different Member.

'They then went a little further and asked a friend of each of us to approach us. This would be somebody who was not obviously a part of the government but may have been on the payroll, or may just have been an MP that they knew was friendly. And this MP would try a totally relaxed and gentle approach, a sort of personal plea. "Look come on, the Prime Minister needs us to do this. I've got reservations but let's go for it because otherwise we'll be in trouble. We've just won an election and so on, and the - Prime Minister has brought back the best deal he can on Europe" - all that sort of line. And "This will be the final high, er, the last line in the sand, this is the high tide of federalism, don't need to worry, it won't go beyond this," and all that sort of approach.

'They then, as things got nearer the vote, they became more desperate. They started the tack of ringing up Association Chairmen. And the line there was, "Look you've got this MP, he's not got a very good reputation in the House, and quite frankly we'd like to see him deselected. Can you not pull him in line?" Or, "Your MP is rocking the boat, grave damage to the Prime Minister personally. If you want your title or your invitation to Buckingham Palace, or to the party conference reception with the Prime Minister, you'd better do something about it." Well, in my own case that didn't work because my Chairman's views on Europe make mine seem positively federal so he told them where to go; he had no interest in tea parties or in Buckingham Palace and he doesn't expect any title for his services to the Party, so they got nowhere with that.

' A lot of wives were then contacted, either by the Whips Office or by somebody from Central Office or by the friend of the MP attacked, depending on how well they knew the family. And the line with the wives was, er, sometimes persuasive, like, you know, "You're not going to get . . . Your husband's not going to get the title. You won't get the title or won't get the trips abroad or won't get this or won't get that," or quite threatening: "We know something about him, in his private life" - that sort of threat, which is really quite, quite unpleasant all round. So they tailored each approach to suit the Member that they had in front of them.'

' You say things about their private life what sort of things? Sexual indiscretion?'

' Yes. Yes. I gather they have a record of a lot of "goings on" that they keep somewhere in the Whips Office and they were threatening to use it. And it so happens that if they had a hold over a Member, and that was all the hold they had, they would use it and they did use it.'

'Do you know they had that kind of record or is it just your. . . .'

' No. I surmise that from what other colleagues have told me. I don't have a direct experience of that and I didn't have that threat held over me. They actually did say that they'd find it difficult to have a threat over me, so I was more of an interesting case in some ways, because my wife wasn't interested in the title or Buckingham Palace tea parties and, er, as I've just explained my Chairman wasn't interested either. My friend that was assigned to me was in no doubt that on a matter of principle I was prepared to go against it, so they didn't really have a lever on me, so they gave up. Then as the night came and then the day and then the evening and the vote at ten o'clock, as that got nearer the numbers were just not adding up and they were getting more frenetic. Going round they would try a combination of all these things simultaneously.

'The plan fell apart and they would just physically, er, get hold of people, verbally abuse them, or persuade them there's drinks - the Prime Minister probably never poured out so many bloody drinks - and the Prime Minister was available. Graham Bright, his PPS, stood in the Central Lobby, something he never normally did, and said "Would you like to see the Prime Minister? Now! Come and have a drink with the Prime Minister" - this sort of thing. The Prime Minister is never that available, even in an emergency, but this time he was. He must have just sat in his room all evening, and desperately counting off the numbers.

'And then as the vote was called and the divisions began I saw people physically blocking the entrance to the Lobby to stop some Members getting in. I saw one MP physically carried into the Lobby. He wasn't protesting to the point of forcing them off him physically, he was obviously in a terrible dilemma about what to do. He knew his conscience was telling him not to go in the government Lobby, and all the persuasion had failed and he stood there dithering. And then, as they lifted his arms up, so his feet were off the ground and carried him forward, he sort of allowed that to be the final clincher, and he was carried like a child into the Lobby.'

'Perhaps living with his conscience because of it?'

'Yes. Somebody else had decided for him. Yes, maybe.'

'He didn't walk through?'

'He didn't walk through. Yes, that's, right [laughter], yes, carried through. And then there were all sorts of procedural votes, I forget which one it was now ... But between the divisions, fifteen minutes between votes, he sat in the Chamber and Michael Heseltine put his arm around his shoulder and said, "Come on" as the bells were ringing and the Prime Minister came round and put his other arm around his other shoulder and the three of them walked into the government Lobby, so in a sense it was like his feet were off the ground.

Same sort of thing really. Prime Minister's arm round ... [demonstrates].

'And I was in the Lobby against the government and several Labour MPs gathered round me and said, "There don't seem to be any other Tories in here," and I thought, my goodness me. No! - is in here somewhere," and I looked around, [but] I couldn't see him. I didn't know what had happened 'til afterwards.'

'Goodness,' I exclaimed. 'These are serious things. The Whips in a situation like that. I mean there's technical assault and intimidation . . .'

'Yes. Yes, yes. Yes, that's correct.'

'Although obviously they're outside the jurisdiction of the normal courts.'

'They have to be, yes. If we have a Whip system, that sort of thing has to be recognised as part of the machinery of Whipping, and for Labour MPs, some of them expressed themselves aghast at it afterwards when it was in the papers . but that's sheer hypocrisy as well because some older Labour MPs told me that we had got away lightly compared to what happened to them when the last Labour government was in a minority for several months and had that pact with the Liberals. Labour had a majority actually of only three after the '74 election, and they carried on for months and then with Liberal's support. And of course that sort of physical handling was constant, almost every day. Some of the Labour Whips apparently used to block the doors by the cloakrooms to stop Labour MPs leaving, and lock some of the toilets to stop them voting - that kind of thing- was reported to me by two or three older Labour MPs.' (laughter)

The tape was then stopped because he wanted to tell me things he did not trust to tape.

I asked the MP referred to about what happened to him in the debating Chamber. He told me that he had felt under tremendous pressure after he was warned in no uncertain terms that the Prime Minister was determined to resign if the vote was lost.

He negotiated an assurance from Michael Heseltine shortly before the vote that the final reading of the Maastricht Bill would be delayed until after the Danish referendum and was then persuaded to vote with the government. 'There's not a great deal I like about being an MP,' he said. He feels that he personally had a hand in saving the Prime Minister. 'That night was so crucial.' He agreed that the events in the Chamber happened as described, but rejected any suggestion of undue pressure. But was he just putting on a brave face after a severe whipping?

I asked Lord Weatherill for a contrasting view in the light of all the criticisms of whipping. After all, he had been a Whip himself from 1967 to 1979, was trained by Lord Whitelaw and was Chief Whip from 1974 to 1979. He is widely respected by Members of all parties. What was his justification for this way of conducting party business? Did he concede that the public image of whipping was damaging to Parliament?

He told me that he had joined the Tory Whips Office in 1967, during a period in opposition, and gave a very different picture of what whipping is about, based on his own experience of days when the Conservatives were in opposition. He described a whipping process that sounded positively cosy in comparison, both reasonable and tolerant, compared to the near fanatical aggression and thuggery we hear about today.

'I remember Willie Whitelaw shaking me to my roots by saying "Now you're in the Whips Office, bear it in mind that it is your duty to help the government effect the business that is in the best interests of our country, even though we fight our own party. We only oppose where we believe that policy is not in the best interests of our country. We are Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition." Every Whip looks after an area. For the last five years I was known as the s-'s Whip. They weren't at all. They were often the best Members. You had to spend an awful lot of time with them over their genuine concerns. They by and large were not interested in office. They stood by their guns and I respected that.

'In those days we had to try and persuade our party that the government was doing the right thing. These days I'm afraid the opposition says everything is wrong. Occasionally you get glimpses of [consensus] - the Falklands War, the Gulf War. There seems to be a feeling that if you are not passionately opposing them all the time, you're a weak opposition.

'We have a system of adversarial politics which arises from the shape of the Chamber. The place was bombed in the last war and there was a debate as to whether it should be rebuilt in the shape of a semicircle which was stopped by Winston Churchill in a speech: "We shape our buildings. Thereafter they shape us." I often wonder if we can afford the luxury of adversarial politics when nearly everyone knows what's wrong and there isn't all that much disagreement about what you do to put it right, outside the Chamber. The Select Committee system could be used to good effect. For example, use it to help design a fair tax system. There is a consensus here. A lot of it is fictitious: fighting for the sake of it.'

(The Select Committees are small all-party groups which meet regularly to discuss various government policies and to scrutinise the work of various Ministries. They have grown in number and authority over the last few years, and have profoundly altered the way Parliament works. Each Committee meets in a semicircle, in a civilised and courteous manner, and the whole emphasis is on seeking consensus rather than conflict.)

I returned to the subject of whipping. The culture of the Whips Office almost twenty years ago seemed many steps removed from the mid-1990s. Did Lord Weatherill accept that the whole process of bullying people to vote against their conscience could end up damaging personal integrity?

Lord Weatherill disagreed. 'Every Member of Parliament is elected on a party manifesto (which they are expected to support). In my day there was a Whips' meeting every day. The Chief Whip would go round the room: "We've got this debate coming up. What's the view of the Members?" They would be told: "This is not on." I can't begin to tell you the number of times I said to [the Leader of the Party], "Margaret, I've got some rather bad news for you."

-What's that?" she would reply.

---May I give you some whisky? The Conservative Party disagrees with you on this. I'm afraid we shan't be able to carry them."

' "It's your duty. . . ." etc.

-We've really done our best, now please listen. . .

'And she did. The role of Whips is absolutely vital. I don't blame John Major. I blame his Whips. The Chief Whip is a vital member of the Cabinet. He is in it but not of it. He is not bound by decisions of the Cabinet. He never participates in the Cabinet discussions unless he is asked to do so. After the Cabinet is mindful to take a course of action, the Prime Minister will turn to the Chief Whip and will ask, "Do you think we can get this through the House?"

'And he will probably say, "Prime Minister I will need to consult my Whips about this." And an exercise will take place where every Member will be asked by his Whip what he's thinking. And at the next Cabinet discussion the Prime Minister will ask and the Chief Whips will either say they can probably carry it or that he would be unable to carry the Party on it.'

Lord Weatherill insisted that the main job of Whips should be to consult, not dominate, but he did acknowledge that times had changed. He blamed personality conflicts and leadership battles for some of the bitterest whipping fights.

'It is not the function of the whips to persuade party members to dance to tune. That is for the Cabinet. In recent years I am horrified at some of the weapons alleged to have been used by them, but in my day, if you ask any of the anti-marketeters, we never ever brought any pressure on them. We respected their views. Mind you, it was slightly different because of our relationship, when we were taking them into Europe in '71 and '72. Because of the good relations we had with them, rebels always supported us on procedural motions so we could always get a closure and there was a residual loyalty there which I think today has been extinguished very largely because of personalities. There were people very passionately "pro" Margaret Thatcher and very passionately ,"anti" her successor and I'm afraid it's patently seen.

'The most important man in Parliament after the Prime Minister is the Opposition Chief Whip. There is a system hardly ever talked about which is "the usual channels", ie the Whips. They deal between each other. I ran the floor show with Walter Harrison. Walter and I had absolute total mutual trust.'

I asked Lord Weatherill about the disturbing allegations I had heard over the European votes, of

intimidation, sexual harassment and blackmail.

'If that is so it is totally reprehensible,' he said. 'Dishonourable. I wouldn't go along with it at all.'  
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If fear tactics fail to work and the promise of rewards also falls on deaf ears, then the Whips have one other tool left, which is trading. Sometimes MPs are 'bought off' with an agreement to some minor point in a piece of legislation later in Parliament. In effect what is being said is this: 'If you vote for this (against all your principles because you think it is utterly wrong), then I will do what I can to get the Minister to change his mind on the other issue.'

David Porter knows what it is like to compromise in this way. He gave an example of a debate on fishing rights. He eventually voted with the government despite his own objections and great anxieties from fishermen in his constituency, after receiving a letter from the Minister congratulating him on his campaign for change and offering to concede some ground in the future.

'I was bought,' he said. 'There is a danger of devaluing my vote if I vote against the government too often. The whipping business is often just games. I sacrificed a principle for a longer-term gain to get us out of a common fisheries policy. I became an MP in 1987. There were no surprises. I knew what I was letting myself in for because I had been involved in the party machine locally for some years. I voted against Maastricht as, a conscience issue. I see a real risk of interEuropean war - not so much a Bosnia as a Chechnya. Twenty years from now we could see a Brussels army bombing the rebel district of East Anglia.'

He described his revulsion at the way the 'payroll' vote is controlled from the very top. We have already seen in the chapter on patronage how the creation of a large number of new government posts had drawn a third of all Conservative MPs into the payroll by the early 1990s.

'Payroll whipping is secret - Ministers, PPSs, etc. A memo goes round. Officially it might be a One-Line Whip but it is a hidden Three-Line Whip. If a payroller ever votes against, he resigns or is sacked. The payroll has grown hugely and now all junior Ministers have PPSs - which keeps another fifty back-benchers as bag carriers to Ministers.' 165

As a former Minister for four years, and a PPS for many more, Robert Key knows what it is like to be -controlled through the payroll vote, but defends it vigorously. 'The best thing for any government is for 100 per cent of all MPs to be on the payroll or party hacks. Whipping is extremely important not just because it ensures a government majority but also because it conditions people to believe that they will only be rewarded for good behaviour. On balance whipping is a good thing. Without it you could not maintain a party majority. There are two circumstances when you are allowed to defy a Three-Line Whip: when you have a strong constituency interest, like fishing rights, and matters of deep conscience.'

'But would it not be better to have voting without pressure?' I asked.

'You can't have pressure-free voting. There are huge interests and secret voting would not help.'

You have to live with yourself and your conscience -, for example over capital punishment. Constituency pressures can be real but are often used as an excuse. Then there are pressures from the party. You can't be an expert on every issue. Then there are pressure groups which are blossoming at the moment and I think are very bad for democracy. Small single-issue groups. There is a huge career structure for people in pressure groups. I see it all the time. Directors move around from one cause to another as hired advocates. It is very expensive - even answering all the mail - and these people are un-elected and unaccountable yet raising vast sums from people. Then there is church lobbying and religious bigotry - when you are told you are the devil incarnate.' 166

While there will always be campaigning on issues for as long as there is free speech in a democratic state, it is also clear that the public pays great respect to MPs who listen and are prepared to break party rules for the sake of what they believe is right.

As a prominent dissident, Teresa Gorman has received many letters from people who say they admire 'principles, integrity, and courage'. 167 Many of them have told her: ' We've never voted Tory in our lives but we admire what you're doing,' or 'You've got guts.' Then they have often followed that with a paragraph of utter contempt for the Cabinet. And then some have said, 'If you were Prime Minister, we would vote for you.'

I asked whether that was because of her anti-EC stance.

'Personally I think it's an anti-sleaze reaction. People hear nothing good about their politicians so it is not surprising that they hold us in contempt. Then suddenly a group of us stood up for our beliefs. The response was phenomenal.'

In an earlier interview an anonymous MP described a system run by Whips which seemed to rely on a comprehensive index of 'sleazy' rumours about rebel MPs, but he said that he had no direct evidence of a 'black book', apart from gossip in Westminster.

Then in May 1995 a former Tory Whip spoke candidly to a television crew about a secret dossier. He described how MPs would come to the Whips for advice when in trouble over allegations, whether financial or sexual, even involving sex with boys'. The Whips were usually protective and would do what they could to help. However, the details would be recorded. If there was trouble with that MP's loyalty some time later, he or she would be approached and threatened with exposure.

A former Whip confessed that a wide range of 'scandalous' stories were collected, many of which were pure gossip, for the express purpose of blackmail. 'When you were trying to persuade a Member that he should vote the way he didn't want to vote, it was possible to suggest that perhaps it would not be in his interests if people knew something about him.' 168

The researchers then went to see Lord Whitelaw, who also confirmed the existence of a list of scandalous rumours in his day. The gossip was collected, analysed for damage potential, and stored for possible future use, regardless of whether it had any basis whatsoever in fact. 'I mean, the Dirt Book was just a little book, in which you had to write down varying things that

you knew or heard about people.' 169 Another Whip said: 'We knew everything about everybody.' 170

I myself asked Lord Whitelaw about the whipping process. Lord Weatherill seemed to have been painting rather a rosy picture of whipping as it was some years ago. I described what Lord Weatherill had said about standards of integrity then, and how the Whips recognised their duty in opposition to let people vote for measures which would clearly benefit the country, even if the party was officially opposed.

Lord Whitelaw said: 'I don't even know exactly how it works now. There is still no way you can force people. You've got to try and work with them.' 171

I also asked the then Chairman of the Conservative Party, Jeremy Hanley, about whipping and whether a secret dossier existed. 'I've never heard of this gentleman [the Whip], I must admit. I've read the article.'

I challenged him about the experience of people I had met who were savagely whipped over Maastricht.

'Is this by one party only? You're not giving the impression, are you, that only one party does this?'

I explained that I was under no illusions about the Labour Party, but I had come to talk to him about his own people.

'I know not of this book,' he replied. 'This is absolutely true.' Jeremy Hanley continued: 'I've never been a Whip. I've never been subjected to the pressure of Whips. I have never been threatened by a Whip in this way. I do know that there were certain people who went into print in newspapers saying they were apparently threatened.'

'But now a former Whip is saying. . .

'Who I've never heard of - so it must be an awfully long time ago. I've been in the House of Commons now for twelve to thirteen years. I wouldn't in any way want to denigrate him or to say that what he is saying is untrue. All I'm saying is that what he is talking about, his experience, is many years ago.'

'But isn't it just possible that he is the only one who can speak, because the others are still in government or are MPs?'

Jeremy Hanley thundered back: 'I can tell you absolutely from my own experience and from my own knowledge, I don't know anybody that has been threatened in that way, although if I were a Whip and I desperately wanted to get a government's programme through, it might be my task for me to persuade people to do so. And what they use as powers of persuasion might be many and varied. I have never experienced it myself, although I have voted against the government on a Three-Line Whip. I have even Telled [counted the votes] in the Chamber against the

government on a ThreeLine Whip. Two Whips came up to me and they shouted and screamed at me before and after the event, but they never threatened me.'

However, he said he did recall a Minister threatening him that he would never get on in government. 'And if you're not man enough to stand up for your convictions when you are voting against the government for which you were elected then you are not serving your constituency.' Jeremy Hanley blamed the press for creating an image of politics that was 'fantasy' according to his own experience. 172

Jeremy Hanley clearly had no knowledge whatsoever of a secret dossier and its existence is unproved. In this regard it is interesting to note that shortly before this book went to press a Commons researcher told me that his MP had been talking to a Conservative MP and happened to mention that another Conservative MP had been behaving in a thoroughly dishonest and disreputable manner regarding parliamentary expenses. The very next day the colleague bounded up to thank him profusely. 'I told the Whips Office straightaway,' she said, beaming. Her purpose was not to ensure justice but to increase the Whips' power.

I asked Lord Ennals, as a senior Labour Peer with years of Commons experience, what his perspective was on whipping. He felt that one answer was to have greater honesty by candidates before election. 'When I was elected it was on certain policies, a manifesto. There was a certain certainty about what positions we were going to take. It was also understood there were certain subjects which were a matter of conscience: hanging, age of consent. I agree there will be changes and so too there ought to be changes but they voted for a particular set of policies ...

'The public is entitled, if I have voted differently from what I said I would do, to an explanation. If the government decides to impose a Whip on something not in their manifesto, then they owe an explanation to the country. If there are differences in your own point of view, then you should say so in your own personal manifesto. The national structures should have waivers written, where MPs will not be voting with the government. You do have to have discipline so that the government is able to do what it said it would do.' 173

So, heavy-handed whipping is 'a way of life at Westminster and destroys integrity because its sole aim is to bully people to vote against the things they believe in. On the other hand very few MPs are able to imagine how any government could survive without any kind of discipline at all. While there is clearly a need for communication of policy and for order in any party, what we have seen is disturbing evidence of abuse.

We will return to whipping in the final chapter, together with a vision for a very different kind of democracy, but we now need to look at another area which weakens men and women of integrity: ministerial office, collective responsibility and Cabinet secrecy.

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