

Sleaze in British Politics - Real or Imagined?

(On launch of Truth about Westminster - Archive of 1996 book and media coverage for interest - also see 2007 video below on future of government)

### **"Future of politics, government, single issues and activism - 2007 video"**

[googlevideo:http://video.google.com/googleplayer.swf?docId=-5904627267194016642&hl=en-GB]

Radical forces and culture clashes will change our world, driven by small numbers of activists with passion and moral strength. Video by Dr Patrick Dixon.

### **Comment 1996:**

Headlines over the last few days and weeks have confirmed people's worst suspicions about Westminster. Matters have not improved since the election with allegations against Labour of serious electoral irregularities in Scotland. Faith in politicians has sunk to an all time low. But is the public image fair? Cash for questions, lobbying payments, political favours, patronage, party funding, whipping, indiscretions, secrecy, half truths... What lies behind these issues? What is it about the club that has turned so many respected men and women of integrity, calibre and vision into people unwilling to speak out against abuse of power, afraid to vote for what they know is right, covering up for colleagues they know have done wrong and hurling insults at people they agree with? [Research has established that other scandals are likely to break soon.](#)

### **Few MPs are corrupt but the system itself is corrupting.**

With 90% of the nation disbelieving what politicians say on TV there is a huge crisis of confidence in Westminster, and an urgent need for change. For example patronage destroys a society based on merit and rots the democratic process. Patronage thrives on secrecy, just another form of bribery, which can be used to undermine integrity. Whipping is another example. Whipping has only one purpose: to bully MPs into voting for things they believe are wrong, directly opposed to the interests of the nation or their constituents. Whipping has involved blackmail, verbal intimidation, sexual harassment and physical aggression. Whipping therefore destroys integrity by definition, and invites corruption. Whipping encourages mob-rule, the end of free speech and the end of free voting.

Why does it take war to bring peace in Parliament ? How refreshing it would have been to have heard John Major at the Party conference congratulating Tony Blair on parts of a recent speech, agreeing that whatever Party was in power in the future, the Conservatives would give such measures their full support. They agree in private. Why can't they admit in public that consensus is alive and well?

### Reforming Westminster

1. **Eight principles** to govern those in public life: Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty, Civility, Leadership. Lord Nolan proposed seven, but Civility has been added.

2. **Disciplinary Committee:** independent of Whips and party executives for advice and action on ethical issues. Committee to include non-Parliamentarians, making recommendations to Parliament such as fines, suspension from Ministerial office, suspension or expulsion from the House or even imprisonment.

3. **MPs' pay** based on age and experience with pro rata reductions where MPs have part-time jobs outside the House.

4. **Formal conditions of service** for all MPs.

5. **Ban on paid lobbying** and parliamentary consultancies.

6. **Restriction on ex-ministerial appointments** - up to two years in some cases.

7. **Standard terms and conditions** for staff and proper monitoring of use of allowances by MPs.

**8 Reform of Party Funding:** partial state funding with spending limits and stricter controls on donors, forced disclosure of the source of all donations over £50,000, a ban on any single donation greater than £1 million, a ban on all donations from abroad other than from registered voters. Cost of partial state funding will be 4 pence per person per year or £11 million every five years.

### 9. Reforms of the House of Commons

1. Reform of Whipping

2. "Integrity voting" - greater use of free votes.

3. Government by consensus rather than by decree.

4. National Referenda on constitutional issues.

5. Discipline in debate.

6. Reform of Prime Minister's Question Time.

7. Orderly conduct.

8. Quorum for debates.

9. More time for back-bencher legislation.

10. Reform of debating hours and archaic practices.

11. Voluntary ban on "propaganda sound-bites".
12. New emphasis on honest consensus.

10. **Open Government** with Freedom of Information Act.

11. **Electoral Reform** - proportional representation by additional member system.

12. **Reform of House of Lords**

1. Abolition of voting hereditary Peers.
2. Abolition of religious discrimination.
3. New peerage allocation methods.
4. Improved Peer allowances.
5. Retirement for elderly or absent Peers.
6. Movement between two Houses.

13. **Recruitment programme**, with induction and training for MPs.

14. **Media reforms** including French-style right of reply.

Dr Dixon is author of The Truth about Westminster, published by Kingsway October 1996 £7-99