

# Britain's Two Job Politicians

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*The role of the parliamentarian, historically, is one of service. The desire to hold two jobs, or more, suggests that such service is severely qualified. In the quotient of democracy and representation, the MP who is ready to tend to the affairs of others is unlikely to focus on the voter. I represent you, but I also represent my client who so happens to be parking his cash in offshore tax havens. I represent you, but I am moonlighting as an advisor for an armaments company.*

This condition has become rather acute in the British political scene. While a backbencher earns £81,932 annually plus expenses, they may pursue consultancies in the private sector as long as they do not engage in lobbying – a ridiculous fine line. Astonishingly, there is no limit on the number of hours they may spend on these additional jobs. Accordingly, members of parliament have shown marked confusion on how to separate their various jobs. Every so often, business has tended to find its way into the member’s office.

A stunning feature of the British system is that there is no revolving door to speak of. Politicians can seamlessly undertake contracts and perform services, irrespective of their parliamentary position. The conditions and rules have a Gilbert and Sullivan absurdity to them.

One such figure exemplifies this. Between October 2016 and February 2020, Conservative MP Owen Paterson received remuneration for lobbying efforts on behalf of two companies: the medical diagnostics company Randox, and meat processing entity Lynn’s Country Foods. The [report](#) by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, Kathryn Stone, conveyed to the Parliamentary Committee on Standards, was a thorough and scathing effort on Paterson’s exploits.

In his dealings with Randox, the Commissioner found that Paterson “sought to promote Randox products, including their ‘superior technology’ and thereby sought to confer benefits

on Randox.” He “sought assistance with accreditation for Randox’s technology” and sought to promote “other, unrelated, Randox technologies”. Then came the seedy connection: efforts to promote Randox testing by government agencies.

The smelly nature of Paterson’s advocacy for Lynn’s arose because of efforts made by the MP to approach the Food Standards Agency, at the request of the company, [because of concerns](#) dealing with the mislabelling of the food producer’s ham product and a product used by Lynn’s to cure bacon. The Commissioner also noted Paterson’s initiated contact with the Minister of State (DfID) on the subject of laboratory calibration in developing countries. All were held to be “in breach of the rules on paid advocacy.”

Paterson, for his part, has claimed that the investigation was uncalled for, unjust and pernicious, having allegedly caused his wife’s suicide in June 2020. The Standards Committee [did take this into account](#) as a mitigating factor on the penalty, and noted Paterson’s “passion for and expertise in food and farming matters”. For all that, the members found that the MP’s conduct had been “an egregious case of paid advocacy.” He had “repeatedly failed to perceive his conflict of interest and used his privileged position as a Member of Parliament to secure benefits for two companies for whom he was a paid consultant”. Bringing the House into disrepute, a penalty of suspension of 30 sitting days was warranted.

The response from the governing Tories was one abundant in viciousness. In trying to save Paterson from the 30-day suspension, Conservative MPs put forth an amendment in an effort to dismantle the very watchdog that had found Paterson out. A review of the investigation’s findings on Paterson’s conduct was also proposed. As committee chair Chris Bryant [rued](#), “The definition of injustice is you change the rules in the midst of the process.”

It logically fell upon the investigator to face the chop. Stone was duly rounded on. Her office [was deluged](#) with abusive messages. The business secretary, Kwasi Kwarteng, revealed after the vote that Stone had been called upon to consider her position. It was, [claimed](#) Kwarteng on breakfast radio, “difficult to see what the future of the commissioner was”. Within hours, she found out that her position would probably be safe, with Johnson’s government having executed yet another one of its famous U-turns of spectacular confusion.

The Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, had a [rather novel interpretation](#) of the proceedings in approving an amendment that would essentially abolish the standards system – if one could even call it that. “The issue in this case, which involved a serious family tragedy, is whether the member of this House had a fair opportunity to make representations in this case and whether, as a matter of national justice, our procedures in this House allow for proper appeal.”

Despite Johnson’s efforts to save Paterson, the MP quit on November 4. And just to make matters worse, a raging fire had been lit, enveloping other members of the government.

Former Attorney General, Sir Geoffrey Cox, was the next figure to find himself burning brightly. Cox had received some £6 million in addition to his MP salary for a retainer with the law firm Withers. This [included](#) an annual fee of £400,000, and an additional £156,916.08 for 140 hours of work undertaken between April and May 31, 2021.

To show the high regard he held for the voters of his electorate, Cox [had also been](#) in the

British Virgin Islands (BVI) for a number of weeks, meaning that he was absent from his constituency while being an advisor on a corruption inquiry.

To the likes of Paterson and Cox can be added scores of Tory MPs, among them Johnson himself, who is estimated [to have received](#) £4 million from second job income over the course of 14 years.

With typical, and in this case cringing understatement, International Trade Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan [has suggested](#) that it would be “wise” to review the rules around second jobs. But she did not favour a total ban, suggesting that Parliament would somehow miss out if MPs could not perform such services as that of a doctor or nurse.

Such a view is also held by Commons leader Jacob Rees-Mogg, [who claimed](#) it was vital that MPs “maintain connections to the world beyond so that we may draw the insight and expertise that this experience offers”.

In an effort to make some modification to the rules, Johnson [has now proposed](#) a measure that any outside role undertaken by parliamentarians, paid or otherwise, can be undertaken “within reasonable limits”. Trevelyan [has suggested](#) that “reasonable”, in this context, is 15 hours. Labour’s defeated proposal had been to place all second jobs, bar a select few, on the banned list.

The central question to this unfolding farce remains: If you are doing other jobs that are not directly connected to your function as a parliamentarian, are you really representing your constituency? The likes of Cox, more brazen than ever, square the circle in thinking you do.

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