

Why MPs should have a pay rise - and be barred from oth...

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I support a pay rise for MPs. It's been reported today that they may get one. I have been on Radio 5 this morning arguing the case. And since I have not changed my mind much on this issue since January when I last wrote about it [le me repeat what I wrote then](#):

I'm very well aware MPs are unpopular, and politics too. But I'm a democrat. I believe in the need for strong political parties in this country. And I want first rate people in the House of Commons who can restore politics to the status it deserves in public life and who, as importantly, can give this country the leadership it needs on the basis of their real expertise.

That said I also know, only too well, that a salary of more than £60,000 a year is a dream for many.

Equally, I'm well aware that far too many MPs have abused that salary by having massive outside earnings and excessive and even abusive expense claims in the past, all of which are things I would want to be put behind us.

So I'd want a pay rise to be linked to an end of outside earnings.

And I'd want a pay rise to reflect that fact that after the proper change in MPs expenses they now have to bear more of their costs out of their own pockets, which I think is true.

But most of all, I worry that when a doctor earns somewhat more than an MP in most cases, and can be with their family most of the week, then we won't get many good doctors in the Commons.

The same is true of many headteachers now, especially at secondary schools, most of whom will earn more than MPs.

And it's true of business leaders, senior council managers, quite a number of charity bosses and so on, plus lead civil servants.

So for these people, like it or not, the reality is that going to parliament might mean a substantial cut in salary right now, and that's hard to sell in many households, especially mid-career when commitments are high. That especially so when the risk and cost of standing as an MP is real and high, and the risk of finding only five years later that your career is in tatters also very real.

It's my belief that as a result we get the wrong people in parliament. We have too many career politicians, people who have done nothing else since they left university in the House as a result of this situation. We have far too few people who arrive in their 40s who have accumulated real life experience first. The result is an impoverished House with politicians who many would agree are not the equal of those of a generation or so ago which leaves it without moral authority it needs. And, as importantly, which leaves it open to becoming once more a nice pass time for those with means.

That's why a support a pay rise for MPs.

And I also happen to believe that this is real change: for many MPs enforcing a no other earnings rule would of course a pay cut. And at the same time I can see nothing that offends my left wing credentials by saying this. Nye Bevan warned on this issue, and he was right to do so. And I happen to think many public sector workers are also underpaid for the same false reasons that MPs have come to be, and that harms the quality of public services as a whole in this country.

To put it another way, if I can say bankers are overpaid, and I do, I can say whole rafts of people from those on minimum pay onwards are underpaid. And doing so does not mean I put on a hair shirt to punish the nation by denying the leadership it needs. That would be crazy.