

Standards in public life fall when the unethical run go...

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The revelation that a senior civil servant was working for Greensill whilst still at the Cabinet Office, to which Lex Greensill was an adviser, has escalated interest in this whole affair. That David Cameron could have been unaware of these facts when he went on to advise that firm after leaving office seems extraordinarily unlikely. That conflicts of interest were created on what has been called supply chain finance, which never has been and never will be required by the UK government [for reasons I have already explained](#), seems very likely.

What this says about Cameron is that he is a man of exceptionally poor judgement, and remarkably little ability if he really thought that what Greensill was doing was of any real value to government. It also very strongly suggests him to be a man driven by greed, willing to compromise himself in pursuit of financial wealth. One might say, one of his class then.

What it says of the late Jeremy Heywood, who apparently sanctioned this, is that his halo might have slipped somewhat.

More generically, and importantly, it says that the proper boundaries, which have always been essential for the maintenance of trust, the upholding of financial controls and the elimination of the risk of corruption, appear to have been considerably eroded, and with apparent official sanction, with the decided whiff that the relaxation was in pursuit of personal gain being apparent throughout the process.

I stress the conditional elements in that last paragraph. What appears to be the case does need to be proven. What is wrong is that the authority to which the government is answerable - which is parliament - does not have the automatic right to investigate this matter but will instead require approval of a vote to do so. That this is the case simply increases the risk that there will be both corruption and a cover up facilitated by a government inquiry that will diligently investigate and then answer all the wrong questions, at the end of which matters will be allowed to progress as they already were because that will suit the interests of all who might gain from similar arrangements in the future.

The slight silver lining in all this is that it is always corruption that kills Tory governments in the end. Well, that and the incompetence that it reveals. So maybe, just maybe, this exposure and those still to come on the sheer scale of private sector looting of the public purse during the Covid crisis will bring the end to the series of inept and now seemingly corrupt governments that we have suffered since 2010.

But that cannot be assumed to be true. The corrosiveness of corruption is such that each episode increases the level of abuse that is tolerated. The boundary of what is considered normal creeps until activity once considered utterly unacceptable no longer shocks, meaning that it then falls within the boundaries of matters if still not acceptable then where sanction is unlikely, resulting in the chance that the abuse succeeds increases, considerably.

This scandal is of that type. What has happened is utterly unacceptable. All involved know that. But those rules only apparently apply to Labour governments. The Tories have successfully lowered the bar with regard to their behaviour. After all, we all know they are only in it for gain, so the allegation of hypocrisy as well as corruption cannot be made against them, because we know that profiteering is what they do. And in the process standards in public life fall when the unethical run government, at cost to us all.

Unless this pattern is broken there is no chance of this ending well.

The trouble is, there is little indication of what might end it.