

MPs should have to justify any second job they have, an...

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I admit that I might not be the best person to ask about someone having a second job. That I can recall, since 1985 I have always had at least two employments simultaneously, and quite often more. Portfolio working has, for me, been normal. That, though, is not the same as an MP having a second job. Being a member of the House of Commons would seem to me to be a full-time role, and many MPs that I have known, and do know, would appear to agree. So, what is the proper position to take on this issue?

I am aware that many are calling for an outright ban on second jobs for MPs, and I can understand their reasoning. But, I also have reasons for hesitation. An MP who is also a doctor is not, I think, abusing their role as an MP if they do work some hospital sessions, most especially during a medical crisis. And, maybe, an MP who takes on a public duty role outside the House of Commons and who is remunerated for the extra task involved is doing nothing more, I suspect, than an MP who chairs a parliamentary committee, and who is paid for doing so. Let us also not forget that we do let MPs work as ministers, and be paid additional sums for doing so, and this is also, in effect, an additional role.

The point I am making is that there would appear to be a case for not being absolutely rigid on this issue. An outright ban on second rose might not always be useful. I think most people would understand that. What upsets them are cases like those of Geoffrey Cox, Owen Paterson and Iain Duncan Smith, where the roles seem to be purely for personal gain and conflict with their parliamentary duties.

We do, then, have a problem in need of a solution. My suggestion is that there be a presumption that having a second job is always unacceptable in the case of an MP unless prior consent has been given, and the scope of the job, the nature of the role to be undertaken and the extent of the remuneration has been agreed in advance by an independent parliamentary scrutineer. Requiring that MPs justify any second role would seem to be an appropriate direction of travel. A total ban might not be. But, what is required is that this issue be addressed. the existing situation cannot continue.