



Order, Order!

The Newsletter of the Association of Former Members of Parliament

LOSING OR LEAVING? THEN STAY WITH US!

Astonishingly in the three General Elections between 1987 and 1997, more than 500 MPs left the House, either by losing their seat, or standing down.

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The average stay of MPs then was about 8/9 years. Defeated back benchers, in marginal seats, were turned out of their office without compunction.

The day after the count they were handed a black plastic sack then escorted to their desk by a junior clerk, relieved of their pass, then escorted out again never to return. Rather like a thief caught with his hand in the till.

THE LANDSLIDE OF 1997 meant that 126 Conservative MPs lost their seats in a few hours. Their secretaries and researchers lost their jobs too, some of whom would have given many years service to highflying Cabinet Ministers.

Where are these MPs and their staff now? In many cases we just don't know.

There were stories of ex-members, including their partners, suffering nervous breakdowns, divorce, heart attacks, alcoholism, serious negative equities on their London homes, school fees debts, and even bankruptcy.

Mostly in silence. Because no ex-honourable member cares to parade

their grief or difficulty. The public generally neither know nor care that unemployment happens to MPs too.

So why should MPs be any different? It is different because when MPs lose their job they are scattered individuals all across Britain.

They cannot easily meet up with other defeated MPs in local pubs to catch up, sympathise, or discuss other job opportunities.

There are no comparative jobs elsewhere. The Houses of Parliament and its jobs are just in one place - at Westminster.

AFTER THE 1997 ELECTION many of the long serving survivors still in the House in safe seats were very concerned at the political carnage (possibly to be repeated in the 2010 election) where decent honest MPs were ridiculed and defeated through no fault of their own.

So, many of the survivors decided that if the Army and RAF could look after their casualties, then so too should the Mother of all Parliaments.

An all-party handful of veterans, led by Joe Ashton, Peter Emery, Peter Snape, Ted Graham, Dale Campbell-Savours, Lynn Golding Teresa

Gorman, Bowen Wells, Ronnie Fearn and Ray Mitchie went to the party whips who, tired of the perpetual aftermath problems of despair, were very supportive and recommended that we seek the help of the new Speaker Michael Martin MP for Springburn Glasgow.

RESOLUTION

The new Labour Government Chief Whip Ann Taylor, a former casualty of boundary changes in her first seat which she won at the age of 27 had also been a casualty nine years later due to boundary changes.

She was extremely supportive. So was the new Leader of the House, Margaret Beckett. She also had lost her first seat at Lincoln some years earlier.

Between the three of them, Martin, Beckett and Taylor, they organized and squeezed a resolution of the House onto the floor literally just hours before Parliament dissolved and prorogued for the 2001 Election, which after half an hours debate was overwhelmingly approved by all parties.

We were on our way.

ORDER ORDER MAGAZINE

The collage displays several issues of the magazine. Key headlines include:

- Order, Order!** (Winter 2009): "NO EXPENSES SPARED", "THE INSIDE STORY OF THE SCOOP WHICH CHANGED THE FACE OF BRITISH POLITICS - BY THE TEAM WHO BOUGHT IT", "SECRETARY WIVES WORK ON SUNDAYS", "THE LEAVERS LIST IN FULL", "OBITUARY Lord Peter Baker", "ELIZABETH PEACOCK Yorkshire's Worshipful Second Lady Woolpeppin", "BLITZ ANNIVERSARY: GERMAN'S BOMBED OUR CHESHOP", "ALBERT MCQUARRIE Last Conservative in Scotland", "I'M BORIS", "WAS THAT REALLY ME? OUR OLDEST NEW MEMBER AGED 93 WING COMMANDER ERNEST MILLINGTON DFC SEE PAGE 2", "THE WINTER DISCONTENT! IT WAS EXACTLY 30 YEARS A ALL OUR JOBS, OUR SEATS, AND E LIVES DEPENDED ON ONE SINGLE ABSTENTION. INCLUDING MURDER IN THE CAR PARK TWO DA SEE BACK PAGE", "INSIDE! MICHAEL MARTIN, OUR MENTOR", "THE LIKES OF BRIAN, Cough Meets TV Star Austin Mitchell", "THE QUIET GUY GOT 409 VOTES AND WON 11 IN A ROW", "1974 AND MPS WIN STRIKE FOR ALLOWANCES", "A MAN FOR ALL PARTIES", "WHAT A LOVELY CHRISTMAS PRESENT", "LONDON JULY 1858. THE BIG STINK! LONDON JULY 2008. THE BIG PANIC!", "NIGEL LAWSON'S BOOK 'A COOL LOOK AT GLOBAL WARNING'", "GYLES BRANDRETH'S LATEST BOOK BRINGS OSCAR WILDE OUT OF THE CLOSET!", "KENNETH BAKER PUTS TOGETHER 'GUYE III LIFE AND TIMES IN CARICATURE'", "SEVEN, YES SEVEN, COMRADES LEAVE US THROUGH THE FINAL LOBBY INCLUDING DIVA DUNWOODY.", "DICK TRACEY DOES IT AGAIN!", "MPS' SECOND HOMES? BEWARE SECOND 'NEGATIVE EQUITIES!'"

Our magazine *Order Order* has been an outstanding success.

It is published three times a year (that is all we can afford) and paid for out of our own subscriptions.

We distribute 1,750 copies to all MPs, every member of the Lords, all members of our Association, the press gallery, libraries and archives. The postage is generously provided free from the *House Magazine* (owned by Dods) and we are highly grateful.

We are proud to announce that among our 340 members we have over 80 in the House of Lords including over 40 ex-cabinet ministers, two former speakers, two former Prime Ministers (John Major and Tony Blair) and lately Boris Johnson, the Mayor of London.

In fact, we can say without irony that if the government fell into the Thames tonight we could take over and form a full scale very experienced cabinet and government before Big Ben chimed noon tomorrow.

Our Magazine is produced by ex-Members with journalistic experience who can deliver quality copy and professional layouts to tight deadlines.

Contributions from our members are very welcome on any subject, topical or nostalgic, and pictures too.

We are non-political with no bias to any Party. We do encourage news, old jokes, old stories from far flung trips with "now it can be told" secrets and anecdotes from long ago. Especially stories where members have now passed on and can't kick up a fuss. Our obituaries are written by Lord Ted Graham with intimate knowledge of former members, and much appreciated by the families of the deceased.

Our book reviews include those written by Tony Benn, Nigel Lawson, Giles Brandreth, Giles Radice, David Mitchell, Eric Moonman, Dennis Coe, Kenneth Baker, Norman Atkinson, and David Watkins.

Our news, stories and opinions are regularly picked up by the Press Gallery and the BBC. They are frequently used in political radio programmes and in regional newspapers. We are often first with the gossip and the news. Every sitting MP gets a copy of what we have published, but unfortunately, like much of the good stuff, unaware secretaries occasionally chuck printed mail straight into the dustbin, spending little time to select items for the MP which do not affect his constituency.

Which is why we print it in a lurid Blackpool mirage of colour on glossy paper in A4 size. That way we may catch the MPs eye and like Punch will probably rest in the archives until the Parliament of 2099.

We Know A Great Deal About Life After Leaving

In October 2007 our Association was approached by Professor Ken Theakston and his colleagues at the University of Leeds suggesting that their School of Politics and International Studies would like to commission detailed research on *Life After Losing or Leaving, The Experience of Former Members of Parliament*.

A copy of their report was sent to every MP in the House last year.

184 ex-MPs of all parties, going back to 1970, were interviewed from all parties and social backgrounds.

The average MP had served twelve years. One third of the MPs had not expected to lose their seat. Even if they did know the old adage that "all politicians live by the vote and die by the vote"

Professor Theakston's interviews found that those who were defeated felt shocked, angry, emotional and upset. Others were resigned to it. Many expected it.

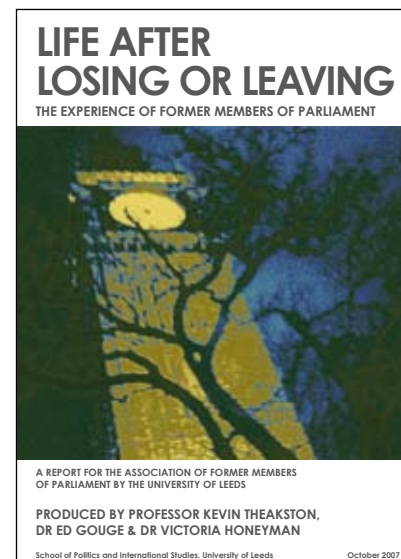
Interviews were given by Una King who had a bitter campaign against George Galloway in Bethnal Green. At the count Una remembers a large number of people hysterically happy and delighted that she had lost while party workers had tears streaming down their cheeks. Being an MP made me very unhappy she said.

Sue Doughty, former Liberal MP for Guildford, lost narrowly by 347 votes out of 51,600. She was the first candidate to beat a Conservative MP in that constituency since 1906. Ironically, she had opened the new local Job Centre just three months before her defeat. She said that finding another job for a former MP over the age of 50 was "problematic".

Richard Tracey, lost by 56 votes following four recounts in Surbiton. He is now a prominent member of the London Assembly supporting Boris Johnson, both of whom are members of our Association.

Harold Best a Labour MP for Leeds North West gained the seat at the age of 59 and quit at 67 voluntarily, with happy memories.

Sir Graham Bright was PPS to John Major the Prime Minister, but he too lost his seat at Luton South in 1997.



He is now our Association's Treasurer and represents us on the Members Pension Fund too. Graham is back in his old job as the Chairman of his family firm (is it doing better because he himself is back at work? Or because we have had a Labour Government?).

But he is still helping the Conservative Party to sort out those new eager applicants who want to become an MP. Which is a long way from being a PPS in Downing Street but it gets him round the House to meet with old colleagues for a chat at our meetings.

We are extremely grateful to Professor Theakston and very pleased that he intends to do another survey of the MPs who could lose in 2010 to tell the real truth for history about what faces MPs after defeat.

IT HAS BEEN A LONG HAUL

When the General Election comes, our Association will have survived two Parliaments over nine years.

When we set out, like the Pilgrim Fathers, we had no cash, no desk, no office, no staff, no constitution, no admission passes to get into the House, and were met with a very cool and negative reaction by the officers in Parliament.

We were initially refused access to or lists of ex-members addresses from the post office, the pensions department, the Members Fund and the Sergeant at Arms; because they said "It would contravene the Data Protection Act to give us any details of former members".

Even today we have no official list of all 700 plus former MPs. But amazingly by various means we have managed to recruit 340 to our Association, not too far short of 50%.

Speaker Michael Martin, managed to gain an office for us

over in Abbey Gardens and eventually we were able to pay an administrator a small honorarium for one day a week, funded by a small grant from the House of Commons Commission.

In no time at all we were receiving messages and congratulations from around the world including Australia, America, all the Commonwealth and EC countries who had similar members' organizations with their governments giving them financial help and services far in advance of anything we could hope for.

Even today, nine years later, we are seriously embarrassed because we can't afford to send a delegate to Europe to observe or take part in the European Association of Former MPs.

The House provides excellent financial support for the CPA, the IPU, and the Industry and Parliament Trust, but very little for us.

We rely on our members' subscriptions to keep us afloat and we need every ex MP to join us for the small annual amount of £25.



QUESTIONS YOU MAY WANT TO ASK BEFORE JOINING

Q What does it cost?

A £25 per year

Q What do we get for it?

A Our magazine "Order Order" three times a year together with three copies of the House magazine plus several valuable and well earned privileges.

Q Such as?

A A very welcome pass to gain access to many parts of the House and to use certain bars and cafeterias including the Terrace, with limited access for families. Formal meals and food can be obtained on certain days in Portcullis House, including the Adjournment Restaurant.

There is also access to the Churchill Room at certain times and days.

Q Do we know any good places to stay on a visit to London?

A Yes. Excellent concessions are given to our members and their families by the Union Jack Club. It is just across the road from Waterloo Station. Families can stay overnight in the modern accommodation which has the best value of any Central London Hotel. Brochures for our members are available on request. This privilege and special rates do not apply to any non-members.

Q Can any ex-MP apply for a pass?

A Certainly. Telephone the Pass Office at No 1 Cannon Row on 020 7219 5922 and make an appointment at Derby Gate (opposite the Red Lion pub) for a photograph identity pass. You will have to visit the office for this photograph but it will then be sent to you.

Q What about the shops and refreshment departments?

A You have the same access of any employee of the House to purchase Christmas cards, chocolates etc.

Q Is there any visual recognition or history of my service?

A Yes, Michael Martin arranged the production of a handsome signed certificate listing service which could be framed. We hope this can be re-introduced by our new Patron, John Bercow.

Q Does the Association have a regular modern office which can take calls or emails etc.?

A Of course. What is more we have our own executive officer too. She is Sally Grocott (wife of Lord Bruce Grocott former PPS to Tony Blair). She is based at Room G13, 1 Parliament Street, House of Commons. Her telephone number 020 7219 8207, e-mail grocotts@parliament.uk.

Unfortunately, Sally is only paid for one day a week on our business. She is a superb executive officer but we do not have facilities to swamp her with queries and requests unless they are specifically connected with the administration of our Association. Please do not abuse this access.

Q What opportunities are there for social gatherings with former colleagues?

A We hold three all-member meetings each year in a committee room of the House. Members often go for a drink afterwards in Strangers Bar, or for a meal in the cafeteria.

We hold, courtesy of our Patron, an annual summer reception in Speaker's House.

A "first" in November 2009 was a very successful reception at No 10, kindly hosted by Sarah Brown.

A number of members have arranged regional meetings.

Q Is the Association democratic?

A Yes. Our Rule Book is approved by the Speaker and the House of Commons Commission. Every word was carefully composed and accepted by them to provide a forum where former Members of Parliament can enhance the stature of politicians generally and seek to unite them in advancing the cause of parliamentary democracy across the world.

Our Association has to be impartial and independent and pursue any political purposes without being partisan.

We do not allow any lobbying of any kind and if our members are selected as a future candidate for any election they have to leave our Association.

Q Are there any elections at the AGM?

A Certainly. The AGM will be held after the General Election when candidates can apply in writing to nominate themselves for the ballot for the executive committee.

Seven executive committee members will be chosen by ballot and then six other candidates will be co-opted to carefully balance regions of the country, parties, gender and particular skills/experience.

It has taken many years to gain the acceptance and approval of the House which we now have mainly thanks to former Speaker Martin. Ours is a success story and we do hope you will join us after the conclusion to your Parliamentary career.

*Joe Ashton, Chairman
MP for Bassetlaw 1968 - 2001*