



House of Commons
Public Administration Select
Committee

Too Many Ministers?

Ninth Report of Session 2009–10

Report, together with formal minutes

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The Public Administration Select Committee

The Public Administration Select Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the reports of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and the Health Service Commissioner for England, which are laid before this House, and matters in connection therewith, and to consider matters relating to the quality and standards of administration provided by civil service departments, and other matters relating to the civil service.

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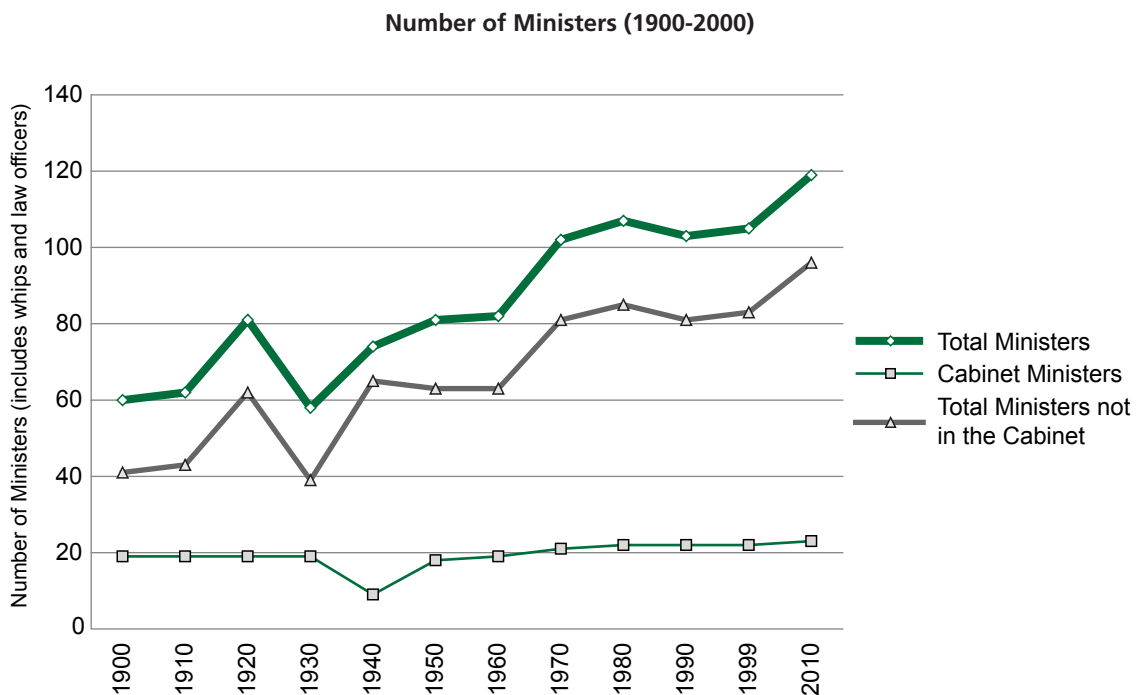
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1 Too Many Ministers?

1. This short report examines the number of ministers¹ in the United Kingdom Government. It arises out of evidence we have received from a number of witnesses during several of the Committee's inquiries that the ministerial side of government has now grown too large. It also builds upon some of the conclusions of our report on *Good Government*.² We are grateful to the House of Commons Library for their assistance in producing this report.

Historical and international trends

2. The graph below shows the growth in Cabinet and non-Cabinet ministers holding government posts at ten-yearly intervals during the twentieth century.³ In 1900 there were 60 ministers, by 1950 this had increased to 81, and by January 2010 the figure was 119. The Cabinet grew by four posts, from 19 in 1900 to 23 in 2010. However, the number of ministers below Cabinet rank increased much more substantially, from 41 in 1900 to 96 in 2010—with the majority of the growth occurring in the 1930s, 1960s and 2000s.



Source: 1900-1999 figures: David Butler and Gareth Butler (2000) *Twentieth Century Political Facts* p. 71; 2010 figures: House of Commons Department of Information Services

3. When placed in an international context these figures are very high. Geoff Mulgan, former Director of the Government's Strategy Unit and Head of Policy in the Prime Minister's Office, told us that the UK "is a complete outlier" in terms of the number of

¹ We use the term 'ministers' in a broad sense to include law officers and whips, except where indicated otherwise.

² Public Administration Select Committee, Eighth Report of Session 2008-09, *Good Government* HC 97

³ 1999 is given in place of 2000 following the source data.

ministers in government.⁴ At time of writing there were 78 Ministers in the national Indian Government.⁵ This follows an amendment to the Indian Constitution in 2003 that capped the number of ministers at 15 per cent of the total number of Members in the House of the People. Among other Westminster systems South Africa had 66 Ministers,⁶ whilst Canada had 63 Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries.⁷ The UK has more ministers per capita than these countries. However, it has fewer ministers per capita than smaller countries such as Australia and New Zealand.

4. One reason cited in support of the growth in the number of ministers is the increasing complexity of government. Certainly, increases in the size of government following World War I can be attributed in part to this. Similarly, the growth in government between 1930 and 1950 can be partly attributed to the war economy and introduction of the welfare state. Reasons can be found for the addition of some ministers between 1960 and 1970, for example the introduction of direct rule in Northern Ireland and the creation of the Ministry for Overseas Development. However, it is difficult to find a satisfactory explanation for the total of 20 extra posts created over the period. And whilst the number of ministers fell between 1979 and 1983, they then rose again even during the Thatcher Government's privatisation programme. There is also the paradox whereby the number of UK ministers has increased despite the devolution of powers to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The former Cabinet Secretary, Lord Turnbull, drew attention to this:

If you add up the number of ministers and deputy ministers...in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, it is something like 75. You would have thought the number of [UK] ministers would have gone down when we gave power to Scotland but it has actually gone up. So the ministerial cadre for the United Kingdom is now around 190 whereas it was about 110.⁸

Nor is it easy to explain on the basis of complexity why a country of 60 million people should need 40 more ministers than India, a country of over a billion.

5. The ever-upward trend in the size of government over the last hundred years or more is striking and hard to justify objectively in the context of the end of Empire, privatisation, and, most recently, devolution to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. There is a strong case for re-examining the number of government ministers that the country needs, as well as the statutory limits on these numbers that currently exist.

Statutory limits

6. The number of ministers is subject to two statutory limits. The first is the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975, which limits to 95 the number of ministers who can

4 *Good Government*, Q 103

5 <http://india.gov.in/govt/cabinet.php> Accessed 25 February 2010

6 <http://www.info.gov.za/leaders/index.htm>, Accessed 25 February 2010

7 <http://www.parl.gc.ca/common/index.asp?Language=E>, Accessed 25 February 2010; this figure includes 12 Parliamentary Secretaries who are not considered ministers but some of whom may undertake some duties that would be considered ministerial in the UK.

8 Public Administration Select Committee, Eighth Report of Session 2009-10, *Goats and Tsars: Ministerial and other appointments from outside Parliament*, HC 330, Q 34

sit and vote in the House of Commons. The second is the Ministerial and Other Salaries Act 1975 (MOSA). This sets out detailed restraints on the number of ministerial salaries that can be paid. The MOSA limit is 109 and it is broken down by category. For example, there is a limit of 21 paid Cabinet Ministers excluding the Lord Chancellor. However, these categories can be worked around—ministers may be entitled to attend Cabinet without being Cabinet Ministers, a whip may be given a nominal ministerial post in order to count against the limit for junior ministers rather than whips, and so forth.

7. The evolution of these limits over time has been complex. The limits were regularly revised between 1940 and 1975, usually upwards, and often to bring them into line with existing practice (for example where additional ministers had been working unpaid). MOSA applies to paid ministers in both Houses, whereas the Disqualification Act applies only to the House of Commons but to paid and unpaid ministers alike. Neither Act covers Parliamentary Private Secretaries (PPSs) and other informal appointments that are unpaid and lack executive authority.

8. In practice, the appointment of unpaid ministers means that the number of ministerial posts has regularly exceeded that provided for by MOSA. Unpaid ministers are not a new phenomenon; one of the reasons advanced for increasing the statutory limit during the 1960s and 1970s was that existing ministers were unpaid. However, the number of unpaid appointments has increased in recent years. There were no unpaid ministers in the Government in July 1996. Between 1 April 1998 and 1 April 2006 the number fluctuated between 1 and 5. In 2007 the number increased to 11, and then to 13 by October 2008. Jonathan Powell, Chief of Staff to Tony Blair as Prime Minister, admitted that unpaid ministers were sometimes appointed without reference to the MOSA limits:

The provisions of the Ministerial Salaries Act and its various limits are incredibly complicated and need lawyers to look at them. Sometimes you get to the end of the reshuffle and discover you have appointed more ministers than there are salaries. So you are left with a choice of either dismissing that minister or having them as an unpaid minister.⁹

The larger numbers of unpaid ministers in post now suggest a more deliberate attempt to increase the size of government well beyond the MOSA limits.

9. There may be a need for a new piece of legislation, consolidating the relevant provisions in the Ministerial and Other Salaries Act and the House of Commons Disqualification Act and attempting to close those loopholes which Prime Ministers have exploited over the years. The limits on ministerial numbers should not be seen as a target to be met, or even exceeded.

Why is this an issue?

10. We received evidence from a number of people with experience of central government that an excessive number of ministers was not only unnecessary, but also positively harmful to the running of government. The former Director General of the BBC and Adviser to the Prime Minister, Lord Birt, argued:

Under the present system I think we probably do have too many ministers and having too many ministers undoubtedly leads to the ‘something must be done’ tendency and it certainly leads to, ‘I need to attract attention because I am keen to have promotion’, so a lot of junior ministers are extremely keen when they get into office to find the six sound bites that can get them noticed by the higher-ups in their party over the 12 months that they are likely to be in the position.¹⁰

11. Professor Anthony King, of the University of Essex, agreed. He questioned whether many of the jobs being done by some junior ministers needed to be done at all. Lord Turnbull said that many junior ministerial tasks—such as receiving delegations—could often be done just as effectively by officials.¹¹ Matthew Taylor, former Chief Adviser on Political Strategy to the Prime Minister, was not alone in identifying many junior ministerial jobs as ill-defined, with little responsibility, “a miserable existence”.¹²

12. These views are supported by the accounts of former junior ministers such as Alan Clark and, more recently, Chris Mullin MP’s account of his time as a junior minister in the Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions:

My existence is now [after four months in post] almost entirely pointless...with hand on heart I can say that I have less influence now over government policy than at any time in the last eight years. The only possible excuse for doing this is the hope that it will lead to something better.¹³

13. The former Prime Minister, Sir John Major, has also argued there are too many junior ministers. He proposed allowing ministers to speak in both Houses of Parliament—thereby removing the need for there to be a minister from every department in each House. He estimated this and other changes (such as reducing the number of departments) could reduce the size of government “by between a quarter and a third”.¹⁴ Lord Turnbull said he believed most government departments could be run by three ministers—this would, on current figures, cut the number of ministers by half to around 60.¹⁵ Several witnesses questioned whether there needed to be as many government departments as there are; although in practice most suggestions to reduce the number of departments often implied redeploying ministerial posts to other, larger, departments.¹⁶

14. The perceived need for junior ministers to make themselves visible through announcements and initiatives was seen by several witnesses as problematic. Matthew Taylor identified this as a contributing factor behind what he called “decision-making overkill”:

10 *Good Government*, Q 341

11 *Goats and Tsars*, Q 48

12 *Good Government*, Q 101, see also Q 101 [Geoff Mulgan] and *Goats and Tsars* Q 48 [Lord Turnbull]

13 Chris Mullin, *A View from the Foothills: The Diaries of Chris Mullin*, (London, 2009), pp. 43–44

14 *Goats and Tsars*, Q 155

15 *Goats and Tsars*, Q 47

16 See for example, *Goats and Tsars*, Q 47, [Lord Turnbull], Sir John Major and Lord Hurd of Westwell, *The Times*, ‘Bring Outside Talent to the Dispatch Box’, June 2009

In a sense, I think of watching my son's football team on a Sunday. The manager makes two or three big decisions, who is going to be in the team and what the formation is, and then at half-time tries to rally the troops, and that is what they do. The players have to make constant decisions, they are constantly adjusting because the game itself is unpredictable and that is how it works. It feels to me sometimes the public sector is completely the other way round, you have got a football match in which every three seconds the match is stopped in order for the manager to make another decision about what they should do and, of course, immediately it does not go quite the way they think it is going to go and the players are completely demoralised because instead of being able to react to the game they are constantly being stopped.¹⁷

We were also told that an over-abundance of ministers can “clog” the decision-making process, blurring lines of responsibility and diverting resources.¹⁸

15. Decisions on the number of ministers should be led by practical need, not political reward. There is a growing consensus that the ever increasing number of ministers harms the effectiveness of government.

16. In addition, there is the cost that every extra minister brings. Lord Turnbull pointed out that even an unpaid minister was not without cost to the taxpayer:

If you give a minister three private secretaries, a press officer, a driver, a car, there is not much change from half a million pounds...[as well as] tying down a lot of civil service resources.¹⁹

17. Jonathan Baume, the General Secretary of the FDA, the union representing senior civil servants, told us that this was not just a question of a ministerial salary and car but also the costs involved in creating projects aimed at boosting ministerial profiles as opposed to the needs of government:

The more junior ministers you have—and we have more junior ministers than ever—the more work you have to find for them...one of the biggest single frustrations about the political process within the civil service is just the number of junior ministers you have and the work projects that have to be designed and engineered at a political level.²⁰

He argued that:

Good government would be smaller government at a political level... the Scottish Government shrank the size of the Cabinet...it has led to more streamlined and

17 *Good Government*, Q 99

18 *Good Government*, Q 101 [Geoff Mulgan]

19 *Goats and Tsars*, Qq 44–45

20 Jonathan Baume, Oral evidence taken before the Public Administration Select Committee on 12 March 2009, Session 2008–09, HC 352–i, Q 61

focused government because you have far fewer Cabinet ministers in the Scottish Government.²¹

18. Ministers' role is to take key decisions, account to Parliament for them and conduct discussions at the highest level. Some junior ministerial roles appear to fall far short of this. Civil servants should not be put in the position of 'making work' for ministers. Not only is this costly and inefficient but it devalues the role of ministers.

19. The appointment of unpaid ministers is a way in which a Prime Minister can increase the total number of ministers in his government without exceeding the statutory limits on the number of paid ministers. However, unpaid ministers still bring with them a significant cost to the public purse. Moreover, relying on ministers to take unpaid positions brings with it an incentive to favour those who are independently wealthy. The Ministerial and Other Salaries Act 1975 should be treated as setting an absolute limit on the number of government ministers, paid or unpaid.

20. Government administration is expected to experience severe spending cuts in the near future as a result of the tightest fiscal environment that government has seen for many years. While little detail of the proposed cuts has so far emerged the Treasury has set out some initial plans for government departments to make savings amounting to £12 billion (over and above existing commitments to make efficiency savings). Several of the proposed savings are likely to involve staffing cuts, including proposals to reduce the cost of the Senior Civil Service by £100 million annually, and abolishing or streamlining arm's-length bodies (saving £500 million).²² Given the climate of fiscal austerity it would seem logical and consistent for the Government to reduce the cost of the ministerial pay bill by cutting the number of ministers. This would lead to further savings by eliminating the additional costs identified by our witnesses.

21. It would be better for government, for the public purse and for ministers themselves if the number of ministers were reduced, possibly by as much as one third. Cutting the number of ministers would also be consistent with smaller, smarter government.

The payroll vote

22. Ministerial appointments are about more than the effectiveness of government. They are also used as rewards and as a means of exercising political control. Increasing the number of ministers increases the Prime Minister's powers of patronage and inflates the Government's payroll vote in the House of Commons—i.e. the number of Members of Parliament who hold a government job and are therefore expected to vote for the government or resign. Jonathan Powell was candid about why Prime Ministers have appointed increasing numbers of ministers:

21 Jonathan Baume, oral evidence, Q 61

22 HM Treasury, 2010, *Putting the Frontline First: Smarter Government*, Cm 7753, p 6

[It] is a way of making sure you have that many votes in the House of Commons...If the Prime Minister had his way, he would appoint every single backbencher in his party to a ministerial job to ensure their vote.²³

23. The size of the payroll vote effects good government because it limits the number of Members of Parliament able to engage in effective scrutiny. As Sir John Major put it:

If you have a big majority, it is very easy to be strong because your majority and your payroll vote is so large you can just ignore anything, even if it has total commonsense behind it; that is the position governments with large majorities get into. Governments without large majorities have to be more sensitive to the realities of political life.²⁴

24. The tension between the need for ministers to be accountable to Parliament and the independence of Parliament has long been recognised. The report of the 1941 Select Committee on Offices or Places of Profit Under the Crown (the 'Herbert Report') argued that only those ministers whose presence was "essential" to the conduct of relations between executive and Parliament should be permitted to sit in the House of Commons. The Committee concluded:

It would certainly seem desirable that definite steps should be taken in the direction of checking the tendency to increase the number of ministers with seats in the House of Commons.²⁵

The limit proposed by the Committee was 60:

...under one-tenth, or about 10 per cent of the total voting strength of the House, a number which could scarcely be regarded as a dangerous proportion.²⁶

25. However, ministers are not the only members of the payroll vote. Also included are Parliamentary Private Secretaries (PPSs). Every Cabinet Minister and Minister of State in the Government is allowed to appoint a PPS, subject to the Prime Minister's approval.²⁷ Although PPSs hold no official government position and draw no salary their role is considered a first stepping stone on the ministerial ladder and the experience gained can ensure they are better equipped for promotion if it comes.²⁸ The Ministerial Code states categorically:

23 *Goats and Tsars*, Q 32

24 *Goats and Tsars*, Q 200

25 Select Committee on Offices or Places of Profit under the Crown, 1941, *Report from the Select Committee on Offices or Places of Profit under the Crown* (henceforth 'Herbert Report') p. xvi

26 Herbert Report, p xv

27 The leaders of the two largest opposition parties also have PPSs, however although these are not relevant to the subject of this report.

28 For a detailed history of the PPS up to 1996 see R.A. Alderman and J.A. Cross, 'The Parliamentary Private Secretary—A Danger to the Free Functioning of Parliament?', *Political Studies*, Vol 14 (1996), pp 199-208

Parliamentary Private Secretaries are expected to support the Government in important divisions in the House. No Parliamentary Private Secretary who votes against the Government can retain his or her position.²⁹

26. The role of the PPS in enlarging the payroll vote has long been an issue of controversy. The Herbert Committee noted:

Your Committee cannot disregard the fact that the existence of parliamentary private secretaries is, not without reason, regarded as increasing the voting strength and influence of the Government in the House of Commons; it might (however improbably) be improperly used for this purpose.³⁰

The Committee identified the function of a PPS as a useful one, providing a link between ministers and members of the House. However, it concluded that would usually be “unnecessary” to have more than one PPS for each government department.³¹ In evidence to us, Sir John Major described the size of the payroll vote as a “constitutional outrage”. His view was that only Cabinet Ministers should be entitled to PPSs.³² Chris Mullin has described the appointment of PPSs as “neutralising intelligent individuals who might otherwise make a rather more useful contribution to the proper functioning of Parliament.”³³

27. The number of PPSs, and the size of the payroll vote, has grown dramatically since World War II, although some governments have tried to reduce their numbers. The number of PPSs at any one time is difficult to establish accurately. No official record is kept and posts can often go unfilled for months—a fact that reinforces scepticism about the need for so many. Butler and Butler identified 25 PPSs in 1940, the year before the Herbert Report. The number of PPSs peaked at 58 in 2001. In recent years there have tended to be around 45 PPSs appointed, although there are currently only 36 in post.³⁴

28. The role of the PPS means that increases in the numbers of ministers have bigger knock-on effects on the payroll vote—a new minister often means a new PPS. The graph below shows the number of ministers and PPSs since 1900 in 10-yearly periods up to 1979 and by general election thereafter. It shows how the proportion of MPs who are on the payroll vote has doubled since the 1920s and now comprises a fifth (20 per cent) of the voting strength of the whole House. Today, the payroll vote comprises well over a third (39 per cent) of the members of the governing party.

29. In October 2008 the Government appointed a Parliamentary Assistant to each of the nine Regional Ministers (PARMs). These positions are very like those of PPSs: they are unpaid and not formally government appointments. Appointees receive civil service

29 Cabinet Office, 2007, *Ministerial Code*, p 7

30 Herbert Report, p xvi

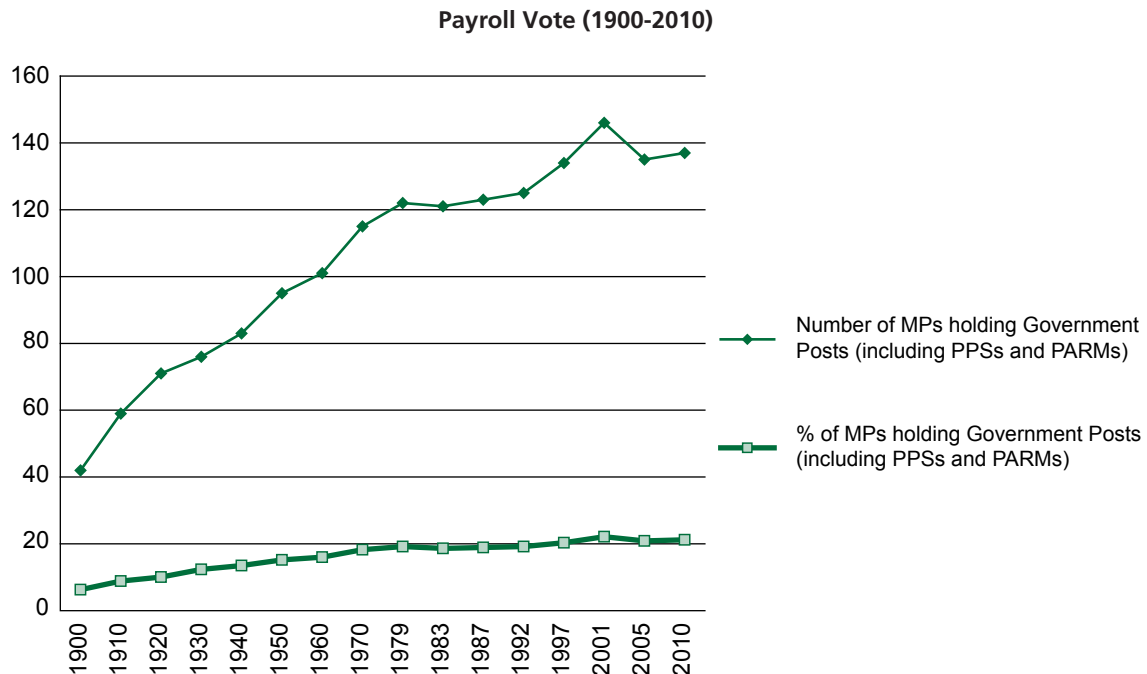
31 Herbert Report, p xvi

32 *Goats and Tsars*, Q 155

33 Chris Mullin, ‘Now Prise off the Tentacles of Patronage’, *The Times*, 26 May 2009

34 *Limitations on the number of Ministers*, Standard Note SN/PC/03378, House of Commons Library, November 2008, p. 6; current number of PPSs taken from www.dodonline.co.uk accessed 3 March 2010; see *Financial Times*, ‘Ministerial ‘bag-carrier’ posts go unfilled’, 10 August 2009, for a discussion of possible reasons for the drop in PPS posts that have been filled.

support only where they are deputising for their Minister under exceptional circumstances.³⁵ It is not clear whether PARMs are required to support the Government; however because of the similarity of their role to that of PPSs, we have included them in the graph below:



Source: Butler and Butler p 71 ; House of Commons Library Standard Note, *Limitations on the number of Ministers and the Payroll Vote* p 6 (1979 onwards); www.dodonline.co.uk (2010)

30. Similarly a number of Members have been appointed to representative or other unpaid roles, such as Malcolm Wicks (Special Representative of the Prime Minister on International Energy Issues), Mark Lazarowicz (Special Representative of the Prime Minister on Carbon Trading), Anne McGuire (Cabinet Office Advisor on Third Sector Innovation) and Des Browne (the Prime Minister's Special Envoy to Sri Lanka).³⁶ The purpose of these appointments is unclear, as is whether the benefit of these roles to the public outweighs their benefit to the Prime Minister in terms of patronage or compensation for loss of ministerial office.

31. Unlike PPSs the Members holding these representative positions are not automatically expected to resign their posts if they vote against the Government. However there has been at least one case of a special representative being “relieved of their duties” for perceived disloyalty to the Prime Minister.³⁷ The words of the Herbert Committee when discussing PPSs also seem appropriate:

He [the PPS] must necessarily be to some extent imbued with the ‘team spirit’ which is part of the life blood of the ministry; thus too, his independence as a member of

35 Letter from the Cabinet Secretary to the Permanent Secretary of the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform, 2008, <http://www.parliament.uk/deposits/depositedpapers/2009/DEP2009-0611.pdf>, Accessed 1 March 2010

36 For a list of such appointments see *Goats and Tsars*, Ev 41–42

37 ‘Labour MP sacked after open revolt against Gordon Brown’, *Daily Telegraph*, 13 September 2008

the House must be liable to be impaired to a somewhat greater degree than that of an ordinary member of the party supporting the Government in office.³⁸

32. The size of the payroll vote does not simply diminish Parliament's independence through numbers. So long as around a third of the governing party are ministers there is a natural tendency among members of that party to aspire to ministerial office, rather than to a career in Parliament, on the back benches in the Chamber, as a select committee member or chair, or chairing proceedings in general committees and in the House.³⁹

33. The ever increasing size of the payroll vote should be addressed as a matter of urgency. We recommend that the Ministerial Code be amended to limit Parliamentary Private Secretaries to one for each department or Cabinet Minister. The posts of Parliamentary Assistants to Regional Ministers should be abolished.

34. There is a significant lack of clarity around the status of Members of Parliament acting as special envoys or representatives for the Prime Minister or in other government advisory roles. The suspicion is that these are a way of extending patronage to people who have not been chosen for ministerial office. There should be more transparency about their role, their cost, and the civil service support they receive, if any. It should be clear that no person would lose such a position for voting against the Government.

35. The House of Commons Disqualification Act was intended to prevent government from stacking the legislature with its own office holders. The existence of large numbers of Parliamentary Private Secretaries and other unofficial office holders undermines this principle. The existing limit on the number of ministers sitting and voting in the Commons needs to be widened to encompass all of those Members of Parliament who hold office connected to the Government, whether formally or informally. A logical basis on which to establish this limit would be as a proportion of the total membership of the Commons. A limit of around 15 per cent, mid-way between that recommended by the Herbert Committee and the present position, would result in a reduction in the current payroll vote of around 40 posts. There may also be a case for establishing a limit, at a much lower level, for the House of Lords.

38 *Herbert Report*, p xvi

39 See *Goats and Tsars*, Q 18 [Professor Anthony King] and Q 163 [Sir John Major]

A smaller government

36. This report has set out a number of proposals for reducing the size of government—a reduction of around a third in the number of ministers, a limit on the payroll vote of 15% of the membership of the House of Commons and a limit on PPSs of one per department or Cabinet Minister. The table below shows how such a government might be formed in practice. Such a government would have, on average, the three ministers in each department that Lord Turnbull believed were needed—although in practice larger departments have more and smaller departments, or departments where representation in the Lords could be shared, fewer.

	Commons	Lords
Cabinet Ministers	18	2
Ministers of State and Junior Ministers	25	15
Whips	12	8
PPSs	20	0
Total Payroll Vote	75	25

2 Conclusion

37. The growth over the last 110 years in the number of UK Government Ministers and in the number of Members of Parliament playing a role in government has been enormous. There have been good reasons for some of this increase. Government is larger and more complex now than it was. The establishment of an additional department may signal a real difference between governments' political priorities, for example, the establishment of the Ministry for Overseas Development in the 1960s, its subsequent abolition as a separate entity and recreation as the Department for International Development. However, the overall trend in the number of ministers has always been upwards, despite the existence of equally good reasons to reduce the number of ministers—devolution, privatisation, the end of the British Empire and the outsourcing of some decision-making to arm's length or independent bodies.

38. There is a consistent view among some of those who have worked at the heart of government that there are too many ministers in posts that add little value and take few, if any, policy decisions. This is harmful to good government and costly to the tax-payer. Most importantly it corrodes the independence of the legislature, by fuelling an ever increasing payroll vote that now comprises a fifth of the whole House of Commons. This is reinforced by the appointment of too many MPs to unofficial posts such as Parliamentary Private Secretaries. Now that the relationship between the executive and legislature is under more intense scrutiny than ever this matter needs urgent attention.

39. At a time when there is discussion about whether the number of Members of Parliament should be reduced, any move in this direction which did not tackle the number of ministers would make the problem we have identified about the excessive size of the payroll vote in the House of Commons even worse. That is where action can—and should—be taken now.

Conclusions and recommendations

1. The ever-upward trend in the size of government over the last hundred years or more is striking and hard to justify objectively in the context of the end of Empire, privatisation, and, most recently, devolution to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. There is a strong case for re-examining the number of government ministers that the country needs, as well as the statutory limits on these numbers that currently exist. (Paragraph 5)
2. There may be a need for a new piece of legislation, consolidating the relevant provisions in the Ministerial and Other Salaries Act and the House of Commons Disqualification Act and attempting to close those loopholes which Prime Ministers have exploited over the years. The limits on ministerial numbers should not be seen as a target to be met, or even exceeded. (Paragraph 9)
3. Decisions on the number of ministers should be led by practical need, not political reward. There is a growing consensus that the ever increasing number of ministers harms the effectiveness of government. (Paragraph 15)
4. Ministers' role is to take key decisions, account to Parliament for them and conduct discussions at the highest level. Some junior ministerial roles appear to fall far short of this. Civil servants should not be put in the position of 'making work' for ministers. Not only is this costly and inefficient but it devalues the role of ministers. (Paragraph 18)
5. The appointment of unpaid ministers is a way in which a Prime Minister can increase the total number of ministers in his government without exceeding the statutory limits on the number of paid ministers. However, unpaid ministers still bring with them a significant cost to the public purse. Moreover, relying on ministers to take unpaid positions brings with it an incentive to favour those who are independently wealthy. The Ministerial and Other Salaries Act 1975 should be treated as setting an absolute limit on the number of government ministers, paid or unpaid. (Paragraph 19)
6. It would be better for government, for the public purse and for ministers themselves if the number of ministers were reduced, possibly by as much as one third. Cutting the number of ministers would also be consistent with smaller, smarter government. (Paragraph 21)
7. The ever increasing size of the payroll vote should be addressed as a matter of urgency. We recommend that the Ministerial Code be amended to limit Parliamentary Private Secretaries to one for each department or Cabinet Minister. The posts of Parliamentary Assistants to Regional Ministers should be abolished. (Paragraph 33)
8. There is a significant lack of clarity around the status of Members of Parliament acting as special envoys or representatives for the Prime Minister or in other government advisory roles. The suspicion is that these are a way of extending patronage to people who have not been chosen for ministerial office. There should be

more transparency about their role, their cost, and the civil service support they receive, if any. It should be clear that no person would lose such a position for voting against the Government. (Paragraph 34)

9. The House of Commons Disqualification Act was intended to prevent government from stacking the legislature with its own office holders. The existence of large numbers of Parliamentary Private Secretaries and other unofficial office holders undermines this principle. The existing limit on the number of ministers sitting and voting in the Commons needs to be widened to encompass all of those Members of Parliament who hold office connected to the Government, whether formally or informally. A logical basis on which to establish this limit would be as a proportion of the total membership of the Commons. A limit of around 15 per cent, mid-way between that recommended by the Herbert Committee and the present position, would result in a reduction in the current payroll vote of around 40 posts. There may also be a case for establishing a limit, at a much lower level, for the House of Lords. (Paragraph 35)

Formal Minutes

Thursday 11 March 2010

Members present:

Dr Tony Wright, in the Chair

Paul Flynn
Kelvin Hopkins
Julie Morgan

Mr Gordon Prentice
Mr Charles Walker

Draft Report (*Too Many Ministers?*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the Chair's draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 39 read and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Ninth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Thursday 18 March at 9.45 am]

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2009-10

First Report	Bad Language: The Use and Abuse of Official Language	HC 17 (<i>HC 394</i>)
Second Report	Work of the Committee in 2008-09	HC 20
Third Report	Selection of a new Chair of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments	HC 42 (<i>HC 139</i>)
Fourth Report	Parliament and the Ombudsman	HC 107
Fifth Report	Lobbying: Developments since the Committee's First Report of Session 2008-09	HC 108 (<i>HC 393</i>)
Sixth Report	Top Pay in the Public Sector	HC 172
Seventh Report	Outsiders and Insiders: External Appointments to the Senior Civil Service	HC 241
Eighth Report	Goats and Tsars: Ministerial and other appointments from outside Parliament	HC 330

Session 2008-09

First Report	Lobbying: Access and influence in Whitehall	HC 36 (<i>HC 1058</i>)
Second Report	Justice Delayed: The Ombudsman's Report on Equitable Life	HC 41 (<i>HC 953</i>)
Third Report	Ethics and Standards: Further Report	HC 43 (<i>HC 332</i>)
Fourth Report	Work of the Committee in 2007-08	HC 42
Fifth Report	Response to White Paper: "An Elected Second Chamber"	HC 137 (<i>HC 59</i>)
Sixth Report	Justice denied? The Government response to the Ombudsman's report on Equitable Life	HC 219 (<i>HC 569</i>)
Seventh Report	Further Report on Machinery of Government Changes	HC 540
Eight Report	Good Government	HC 97 (<i>HC 1045</i>)
Ninth Report	The Iraq Inquiry	HC 721 (<i>HC 992</i>)
Tenth Report	Leaks and Whistleblowing in Whitehall	HC 83

Session 2007-08

First Report	Machinery of Government Changes: A follow-up Report	HC 160 (<i>HC 514</i>)
Second Report	Propriety and Peerages	HC 153 (<i>Cm 7374</i>)
Third Report	Parliament and public appointments: Pre-appointment hearings by select committees	HC 152 (<i>HC 515</i>)
Fourth Report	Work of the Committee in 2007	HC 236 (<i>HC 458</i>)
Fifth Report	When Citizens Complain	HC 409 (<i>HC 997</i>)
Sixth Report	User Involvement in Public Services	HC 410 (<i>HC 998</i>)

Seventh Report	Investigating the Conduct of Ministers	HC 381 (<i>HC 1056</i>)
Eighth Report	Machinery of Government Changes: Further Report	HC 514 (<i>HC 540, Session 2008–09</i>)
Ninth Report	Parliamentary Commissions of Inquiry	HC 473 (<i>HC 1060</i>)
Tenth Report	Constitutional Renewal: Draft Bill and White Paper	HC 499 (<i>Cm 7688</i>)
Eleventh Report	Public Services and the Third Sector: Rhetoric and Reality	HC 112 (<i>HC 1209</i>)
Twelfth Report	From Citizen's Charter to Public Service Guarantees: Entitlement to Public Services	HC 411 (<i>HC 1147</i>)
Thirteenth Report	Selection of a new Chair of the House of Lords Appointments Commission	HC 985
Fourteenth Report	Mandarins Unpeeled: Memoirs and Commentary by Former Ministers and Civil Servants	HC 664 (<i>HC 428, Session 2008–09</i>)

Session 2006–07

First Report	The Work of the Committee in 2005–06	HC 258
Second Report	Governing the Future	HC 123 (<i>Cm 7154</i>)
Third Report	Politics and Administration: Ministers and Civil Servants	HC 122 (<i>HC 1057, Session 2007–08</i>)
Fourth Report	Ethics and Standards: The Regulation of Conduct in Public Life	HC 121 (<i>HC 88, Session 2007–08</i>)
Fifth Report	Pensions Bill: Government Undertakings relating to the Financial Assistance Scheme	HC 523 (<i>HC 922</i>)
Sixth Report	The Business Appointment Rules	HC 651 (<i>HC 1087</i>)
Seventh Report	Machinery of Government Changes	HC 672 (<i>HC 90, Session 2007–08</i>)
Eighth Report	The Pensions Bill and the FAS: An Update, Including the Government Response to the Fifth Report of Session 2006–07	HC 922 (<i>HC 1048</i>)
Ninth Report	Skills for Government	HC 93 (<i>HC 89</i>)
First Special Report	The Governance of Britain	HC 901

Session 2005–06

First Report	A Debt of Honour	HC 735 (<i>Cm 1020</i>)
Second Report	Tax Credits: putting things right	HC 577 (<i>HC 1076</i>)
Third Report	Legislative and Regulatory Reform Bill	HC 1033 (<i>HC 1205</i>)
Fourth Report	Propriety and Honours: Interim Findings	HC 1119 (<i>Cm 7374</i>)
Fifth Report	Whitehall Confidential? The Publication of Political Memoirs	HC 689 (<i>HC 91, Session 2007–08</i>)