

Paying for democracy

I do not support the idea that political parties should receive state funding paid for by taxpayers. The closest we get to that is the grant paid to the Opposition in Parliament to allow it to hire support staff, and growing budgets for so called Special Advisers to Ministers.

I think it right that political parties raise money from people who support them. I also think it right we disallow foreign companies and non residents from making donations.

It is true that funding parties still poses difficult questions. If a Trade Union gives a large donation to Labour or its MPs because it likes the party's general support for Unions, that passes the test as an acceptable contribution. If a Union gives money whilst telling a Labour Minister they must accept a high pay demand from that Union or must amend Employment law in a way they want, that is cash for policy.

It is the same for Conservatives who have tended to get more donations from successful entrepreneurs. It is fine if they donate because they agree with a lower tax and less regulation agenda which Conservatives are meant to believe in. It would be wrong if the donor wanted specific tax or policy changes for their money.

The present government is backed by a majority of MPs who have received financial assistance from Unions. It inherits a public sector which is heavily unionised, has just collapsed productivity and is pressing for large inflationary increases. MP s and Ministers need to tread carefully not to give a bad impression.

I think the main parties are allowed to spend too much on national campaigns, and Ministers have too many special Advisers. The system would work better if less money was wasted on these budgets.