

What are acceptable gifts to MPs and Ministers?

In the last Parliament I had a policy of not accepting gifts or paid for hospitality at sporting events or expensive concerts. I did not ask for or receive payments for articles and media appearances about U.K. politics. I paid for my own clothes and entertainment and for my own election leaflets in 2019.

An MP is on £92,000 a year and does qualify for expenses when living away from home to do a job which requires you to work both in Parliament and in the constituency. I find it difficult to know why an MP would think it a good idea to accept the gift of expensive clothes when it is bound to lead to a huge debate about the suitability of them and the motives of the donor. It is also debatable whether accepting invitations to expensive entertainments is wise.

Clearly if you are Prime Minister or a Cabinet member then some great events require your presence as office holder. A PM should be seen at a major sporting final with a U.K. competitor. A Culture Secretary needs to attend a wide range of events to take an interest in the sector. A Foreign Secretary needs to do plenty of international travel and attend grand events. An MP should attend Remembrance Day and other civic occasions in his or her official capacity if invited.

We are not debating official and accepted roles and support, but discussing how some MPs pursue personal pleasures in a privileged way, getting a freebie because of their office but not undertaking an official duty at it.

Different and tighter rules apply to Ministers than to MPs. Ministers make decisions. Many people want to influence them, either in a specific case like a grant of a licence or planning permission they need, or in a general tax or regulatory change they would benefit from. I remember as a Cabinet minister being invited to join rich people on their expensive boats in the Mediterranean with flights paid to join them. I used to reply that I was busy as a Cabinet Minister so could not join them but would be pleased to be invited when I was no longer in the cabinet. Although they assured me they were not just inviting me because of my position I got no updated invites once I left the government.

A Minister of course compromises themselves if they accept expensive leisure activities with rich people. A Minister also invites suspicion if they meet and wine and dine with leading billionaires without coming clean if the billionaire influenced them to support their drive for net zero or vaccination or more EU or whatever global cause they are promoting.

Rich people tend to press Ministers to do what the governing elites of the world and the international treaties require. The elites usually get what they want without financing the leading politicians, because the whole net

zero ,world health and wars approach is baked in anyway by international law and international get togethers anyway.