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Let's get medieval about paying MPs [1]

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Our Honourable and Right Honourable Members of Parliament are offering us one of the less wholesome sights in politics: the discussion of how fat they should wax upon our money once again. Unsurprisingly for a group who get to decide themselves about how much of our money they should be paid the answer seems to be "more". More than they have been paid and more than almost all of us earn: earnings that must be scalped to pay them.

It's not an edifying sight their trotting out the usual arguments. They're terribly important so they should be well paid. I am particularly amused by their insistence that higher pay is needed to attract the "right types". They're too dim to understand that if higher pay is indeed needed to attract the right types then this obviously means that the current pay is insufficient to attract the right types. Which is why we've got the bozos we do, namely those arguing that their pay is too low to attract the right types. All those MPs thus making this argument are people arguing that they themselves should not be MPs. Which they may well be right about of course.

Given my own increasing age I am becoming increasingly convinced of the righteousness of the old ways of doing things. I would thus suggest that we should get properly medieval on the subject of political pay. Not quite to the extent of determining the sum in groats but certainly to adopt the method of determining how many groats it should be.

Simply abolish payment to MPs from central tax funds. Indeed, abolish payments to MPs from taxation altogether. My thanks to Mr. Dillow for having found this parliamentary document upon the historical pay of MPs. From which we get the following [3]:

Payment of Members of Parliament can be traced back as far as the 13th century, when the shires and boroughs allowed their representatives certain wages for attending Parliament; knights received four shillings a day, and citizens and burgesses two shillings a day for the duration of the Parliament.

In modern terms this would be the constituency itself paying the constituency's representative. This of course is as it should be. Rather than some deduction from central funding the link between MP and the represented would be immensely strengthened by such a system. Local and regional variation would inveitably follow:

> For example, in 1296 the two Aldermen representing the city of London were paid ten shillings a day and, in 1463, the Borough of Weymouth paid its burgesses with a wage of five hundred mackerel.

I admit to finding the thought of Richard Drax being paid in mackerel amusing. But over and above the amusement there is an important point here. MPs are not the centre's appointees over us. They are our appointees over the centre: we should thus be paying them directly, at the rate we approve of and are willing to dig into our pockets to provide. Their pay should not be some abstraction from central funds at all.

Another way of putting this is that we should reverse the nationalisation of how politicians are paid. This

would truly be a return to a welcome localisation.

I see one further glory in such a system. There are plenty of constituencies where the election result is a foregone conclusion. It is the nomination proicess for one or another party that actually determiners who the MP is. By demanding that, even after such a pocket borough process, pay for the MP must be raised, directly and voluntarily, from the constituents we would produce a welcome diminution of party political power in our democratic processes. If some ass with a blue rosette, donkey with a red, does indeed get imposed by the central party machine they've still got to be competent enough to convince the provincials to actually pay them.

I am also convinced by this argument:

> In general, the payment of Members by their own electors had ceased by the end of the 17th century. Samuel Pepys' diary entry for 30 March 1668 remarks:
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> *"At dinner ... all concluded that the bane of the Parliament hath been the leaving off the old custom of the places allowing wages to those that served them in Parliament, by which they chose men that understood their business and would attend it, and they could expect an account from, which now they cannot."*

If it was a good enough system that old Sam would mourn its passing it's a good enough system for me to advocate its reinstatement.

Of course, this is partly a result of my increasing age and my consequent reaching back into history for examples of how much better it all was before it went to the dogs as a result of the youth of today. Give me a few more years and I'll be reviving millennia old ideas. Although for the life of me I cannot even at present see why a decently bred horse couldn't do a better job than some of the current executive so perhaps Caligula did have something apposite to teach us.

But even if this could be dismissed as just an old way of doing things, we are constantly urged to at least consider the wisdom of the ancients, aren't we?

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