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Quango merry-go-round [1]

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Quangos were invented in the 1960s but not much used until the Thatcher administration saw them as a means of downsizing government and reducing ministerial meddling. They have blossomed since causing the Coalition to make big claims that they would cull their number and their costs.

As we now know, what the Coalition says and what it does may not always match. The claim was to push autonomy down to locals and reduce the coverage of central government. In fact the reverse is happening.

Last week?s National Audit Office report on the quango reduction is most illuminating. 200 or so quangos will be culled but much nif not most of their staff will be absorbed into Whitehall departments. Ministers will again be able to meddle directly. These new costs have not been set against the savings and thus the net position is far from clear. What is clear from the NAO report is that the claimed savings are overstated. And once the quangos are safely back in their departments, which is more likely ? renewed growth or shrinkage?

One example is the ?Local Better Regulation Office? which was invented only recently by the last administration and a prime candidate for the bonfire. Instead it is being incorporated in Vince Cable?s BIS department as the ?Better Regulation Delivery Office?. Note that local is becoming national and central government is being expanded.

Meanwhile regulations continue to pour out, ignored by our MPs.

The Coalition will doubtless ignore the NAO report as they have so far. Wouldn?t it be better if they got together and produced a full list of quangos as at May 2010 showing which continue roughly as now, which are being absorbed into their departments and which are being culled without replacement? We are entitled to know this broad picture, the numbers employed and the costs. Maybe an MP will ask these questions?

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