

Satan's Little Helpers



an essay by

William Clark

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or

'The Men in The Lobby'

The invisible manipulators of power

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PREFACE

I was asked by a friend to help her with some work on the alcohol lobby in the Scottish Parliament and as a starting point went on to an MSP's register of interests. When I looked at this I noticed the presence of survey companies and the somewhat shady explanations of the money they were offering. The thought struck me that they were being used to lobby MSPs and pass funds on to them in a roundabout way — and I was right. Then I had a look at who ran the survey companies with a questioning attitude about exactly what a survey company actually was: how it fitted into the nexus of lobbying, PR, think tank etc. organisations and what flow, what processes might be occurring and to what ends. Then I examined what other MSPs had been contacted and began to tabulate things to visualise the scale of it (this could probably be developed further). Then, thanks to a lengthy search of what the survey companies themselves had online, I realised how widespread the process is and how much money was involved, and then began some form of rough analysis which I redrafted a good few times (mostly in pubs around Glasgow after work where I tend to do most of my writing — I've always liked writing with just ordinary working class people around me for some reason).

Why was I writing it? Nothing in particular comes to mind here—other than just out of a sense of freedom of expression. Who was I writing it for? Perhaps it's for anybody with an interest in how the political system really functions away from the facade and pretence. I can't really say what 'motivated' it, I never even gave that a moment's thought. I would spout out much the same sort of stuff in a simplified form if you happened to talk to me. In conversation with one or two people I realised it would be too 'complicated' for the press, who are obviously complicit in much of this, or ignore it; or that they would fuck me and it around. The simple fact is I seemed to have some energy to persevere with the thing and I go with that sort of feeling with my work — actually just simply enjoy writing it on a very basic creative level.

It might surprise some people how deeply entrenched 'lobbying' is, how people move from one part of the system into another, but it's about the only thing that keeps the whole thing turning over — that and all the dressing up and theatre, greed envy (i.e. people competing for status) and a sinister lust for power over others which disgusts normal people. If there was no money in it all these people would vanish and engage in various forms of theft, graft and swindle elsewhere. To my mind we might as well replace the word 'lobbying' with 'contemporary politics;' but, the whole mechanism, the dynamics of it need to be brought to wider attention because it is generally invisible to those who don't have the time to study and examine it.

William Clark
April 2010

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Introduction

By the way, if anyone here is in marketing or advertising...kill yourself. Thank you. Just planting seeds, planting seeds is all I'm doing. No joke here, really. Seriously, kill yourself, you have no rationalisation for what you do, you are Satan's little helpers. Kill yourself, kill yourself, kill yourself now. Now, back to the show.

Bill Hicks

One of the questions asked after the recent revelations on lobbying by MPs is whether it is as widespread as speculation might suggest. David Cameron has said he wanted to shine “the light of transparency” on lobbying so that politics “comes clean about who is buying power and influence,” while campaigners argue that the Conservatives should pledge to introduce a mandatory register of lobbyists so that the public can see who is lobbying whom, and “the extent to which national policies are being influenced by commercial forces.”^[1] But those individuals who go by the name ‘Lobbyists’ are also ‘Pollsters’ or ‘Political consultants’ or ‘Communications consultants’ or something else, and have gone to great lengths as part of their efforts to influence how we think about certain things. On behalf of their clients, they have disguised themselves as some unlikely organisations in what is an ultimately deceptive process.^[2] One variant of this, analysed here, is the survey as a form of lobbying politicians. The term ‘lobbying’, is used here to mean undue influence behind the scenes, buying privileged access and the manipulation of the democratic elements of the political process. The concerns expressed here are that the public know very little about this development and that confusion reigns in how MPs (the particular focus is on MSPs) report these on-going contacts. The present system as recorded in the register of interests is unconvincing and inadequate. To gain an understanding of what is going on here we must also take into account how embedded into the political process the ‘pollsters’ are, how connected to press coverage they have become, what the implications of their role in privatising the decision-making processes of a supposedly open political system might be.

There's a saying that ‘the best place to hide a tree is in a forest’ and it would seem the best place to plant lobbyist's ‘questions’ is in a questionnaire format. A survey, for some reason, seems innocent enough, or is assumed to be controlled by scientific objectivity, a mere mathematical process: you are asked a series of questions and your answers are generalised to form a percentage of what section of the population share an attitude about some product or topic. You may even believe that the companies who do this type of work are overseen by some sort of effective regulation. But what if the questions in surveys targeted at MPs have been purchased by private business, and structured (by the company) to yield specific outcomes: to gather market sensitive information and to gain access and influence for their clients. And what of the opportunities afforded by reverse surveys, whereby the specifics of who the MP is, and what attitudes and opinions they hold can be quickly identified by a paying client — something more akin to the tricks of intelligence gathering. And what if MPs were being regularly paid by the ‘survey’ companies to take part in face-to-face interviews

and that these survey companies are run by lobbyists: would this be against the rules of the game: are there rules in existence?

Vague, contradictory ideas about protecting the anonymity of their clients have extended into calls for secrecy when the polling companies conduct their surveys and no regulation seems to hold sway over the polling 'industry' to challenge it from the outside, it has been left (by politicians) to its own devices. What is set out below is that MSPs, because of their role as decision-makers are routinely approached by polling companies who *say* they are conducting a survey, but an integral component of this takes the form of a business-directed lobbying process. This is openly described as having the purpose of influencing the decision-makers opinion, and it also circulates its findings back through the media MSPs read and are influenced by. It has also been developed as a highly targeted form of privileged access to a range of specific decision-makers on issues crucial to the clients of the pollsters. The questions asked are, as we shall see, indeed purchased by big business and shaped by the company towards specific ends: this is what *the Pollsters say* to advertise their service. Effectively these companies are gaining access to MPs, paying them for their time, with the funds passed on to either the political parties or nominated charities with the vague status of being from the pollster, on behalf of their clients or from the MSP: charities and political parties are being given money they do not really know the source of. In some cases with particular MSPs the pollsters repeatedly come back for more information, but we do not really know what is being said here because the rules on disclosure of 'member's interest' have not anticipated this development, which, I will contend later, was designed to get round any scrutiny that has arisen as features of lobbyist's practices became public.

The public do not have access like this — when would an ordinary member of the electorate get that sort of access and information? Some of these surveys take two hours or more and are private and secretive. And is this what you now have to do to reach a MSP: give them £50 or £100 for their time? These are weird precedents to set amidst all the fuss about expenses and the situation is redolent of the worse clichés and euphemisms of political graft: 'a couple of tickets to the Policeman's Ball', 'cab fare', 'give that to your favourite charity' or 'there's plenty more where that came from.'

On many occasions, and here we test the bounds of credulity, the MPs claim to not even know who the 'survey' is being done for and why, but the language used here is evasive, unconvincing, confusing and inconsistent. The companies that run the surveys are engaged in the political process on several levels and are run by, as we shall see, highly politicised directors. MPs themselves also play this game and small access-peddling companies they have set up, such as George Foulkes' GovNet, interpenetrate with, and make up a component of, this small rarely explored area of the political system. These exploit and maintain a very privatised, but open to paying customers, system. We find too that the polling companies pay MPs to give talks to clients, or for writing in specialised magazines. They work specifically for sections of the media and indeed boast of their influence on political and decision-making. If we complain that this subverts the democratic elements of the system we will also find that, this is not just some sort of poorly supervised back door, but that the very people running these polling companies also set up and run the organisations which are

supposed to supervise surveying, leaving it in effect largely unperturbed by outside regulation from apathetic MPs.

Below we will examine whether these things are a reality by asking some simple questions ourselves, and trying to present the evidence fairly. We have seen a succession of revelations concerning cash-for-questions, MPs expenses, ‘Lobbygate’ and many more and nothing much has changed in the way parliaments are run. What *has* changed have been the economic conditions for the majority of people who live in the UK, they have become worse, with the gap between the rich and poor widening. This gap is not a vacuum that exists like some chasm: it is a feature of a social structure maintained by the legion of Satan’s little helpers, it keeps political representatives at a permanent remove.

[1] Andrew Porter, 2010, ‘David Cameron warns lobbying is next political scandal,’ *The Telegraph*, February 8.

[2] The various terms here represent the deliberate confusion of the methodology, limits and purposes of these types of activity and their Russian doll-like concealment in the larger ‘Public Relations’ companies. Fake grass roots organisations, pseudo science, fake news organisations and pretend charities are all part of the weaponry of the PR world. Christopher Simpson’s (1994) *Science of Coercion Communication Research and Psychological Warfare 1945-1960*, gives an illuminating history: see <http://www.globalresearch.ca/articles/SIM311A.html> , while James Harding (2008) *Alpha Dogs: How political spin became a global business*, London: Atlantic Books, is a recent addition to the literature here.

(2)

Direct Payment: Direct Knowledge

Before examining these polling organisations in some detail we will examine one specific case of how a Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP) records their dealings with the pollsters and what connection the two might have. Jackie Baillie's page on the Scottish Parliament's site^[1] was the first places that I noticed the presence of the pollsters and the peculiar explanation for what they were doing, and the financial transactions. Here some context is needed concerning her role in the Labour party's response to the SNP's proposals referred to in the quotations below.

Politicians cannot continue to ignore the evidence and stand by while the damage caused by cheap alcohol affects our children, our relationships, our jobs and our communities.

Professor Ian Gilmore, president of the Royal College of Physicians of London

Scottish Labour considered the SNP's proposals for minimum unit pricing very carefully, but it has become clear that they are untried, untested and possibly incompetent.

Jackie Baillie^[2]

Baillie's predicament was outlined as a 'test of principle on [the] issue of minimum alcohol pricing,' by the mainstream press.^[3] This noted that Baillie's constituency includes the Chivas whisky plant which employs 600 people, and that as regards the alcohol lobby she had 'doubtless been in receipt of their powerful opposition.' Baillie was concerned that the parliament had not properly 'estimated the cost of minimum pricing of alcohol to the Scotch Whisky industry.' It is unlikely that having such apparent sway over her, the alcohol industry could not predict her behaviour to a certitude; but one area left untouched by the examination of the pressures she has to bear was the influence of the supermarkets, namely ASDA, who were also affected by the moves towards minimum pricing. The two sectors (the alcohol industry and supermarkets) are becoming increasingly linked. Simon Litherland, Diageo's managing director for Great Britain, has argued that the majority of growth in the market is to be found in retail. As a result, the company was putting greater effort into developing pre-mix cans to be drunk at home. The drinks companies and supermarkets are advised by the polling companies in their guise as PR companies.^[4]

So it would be of concern were the supermarkets to be found communicating with Baillie in some roundabout way, and also of concern if they were to be found paying her in *any* way.

Baillie's **August 2009**^[5] questions in parliament relating to alcohol are a key date here and were asked after a survey consultation ended in **June 2009**. Her registry of interest page mentions several surveys she's been part of. On **4 August 2008**, one

such survey was conducted by **Populus Limited**^[6] described as ‘a market research company’ who:

...undertook this survey on behalf of a UK supermarket although I was not aware of the client until the end of the interview.

The entry states that she received ‘no direct payment or expenses,’ but money changed hands. Populus are said to have donated £50 to the **Enable** charity, which Baillie operates, on **31 October 2008**. It is not stated whether this was on behalf of the client or Populus acting alone. However Enable is also a charity **ASDA** has donated to according to Baillie’s site. This states that on the **8 January 2008** ASDA made a donation of £1,000; on **15 December 2008** ASDA provided a donation of £500.

There is a shift of emphasis as details move into the gifts section: on **Christmas 2003**, ASDA provided sponsorship of £618.51; on **Christmas 2004**, ASDA provided sponsorship of £600 (approximately) and also in **Christmas 2005**; on **December 2007** ASDA made a donation of £1,000. Baillie’s site also notes some confusion as to what status this money has:

Following receipt of a further donation from Asda Dumbarton this interest is now ceased as it has been registered as sponsorship.
[Registered 3 February 2008, Amended interest 17 December 2008,
Ceased interest 17 December 2008].

That is approximately £4, 300, not counting the donation that became sponsorship. So it is fairly reasonable to surmise that Populus’ survey might have contained questions or have been undertaken on behalf of ASDA, it is certainly a ‘UK supermarket,’ but this is unclear from Baillie’s statements: despite the web page being a place where these incentives and their purposes and who was behind them *should be* made clear. But the details obfuscate, and a contributory factor to the confusion is the money exchange procedure. From this uncertainty questions rise: what is the nature of these surveys, how can we tell if they are as innocent as one might think, are they a commonplace within the Scottish Parliament, are they a replacement for more discredited forms of lobbying? But first we must pay attention to the rest of the evidence from Baillie’s site.

It is undated, but shortly after this Populus survey, Baillie took part in an interview carried out by **Ipsos MORI** Scotland, where again it is stated she ‘received no direct payment or expenses.’^[7] But again money changed hands. Baillie adds that *this time*: ‘the clients were identified’ to *her* during the course of the interview (but again it is not revealed to *us* who they were). Baillie’s register also states that a *range* of MSPs had also been ‘interviewed.’ Here the common interview elements of a survey offer the opportunity of close personal contact with an MSP on behalf of a business client, with poor recording of the activity. Ipsos Mori also donated £100 to **Enable**. Baillie notes that the cheque was ‘received in my office on **23 October 2008** and then forwarded to the Enable Alexandria branch.’ But the point can be made that some sort of reluctance towards, or ambiguity about this money seems to be emerging and the process seems to extend beyond just Baillie.

Arguably it is not just the clients that MSPs should be aware of, it is the nature of the survey company in terms of who they are and what else they do. It could be pointed out that Ipsos MORI carried out the Central Office of Information and Home Office report 'Selling Alcohol Responsibly,' eventually published on 24 September 2009, one illustration of how embedded in the decision-making process the pollsters are.[\[8\]](#)

Then, in **May 2009**, she 'took part in an interview' carried out by a third pollster, **ComRes**.[\[9\]](#) This time she 'was not directly aware of the clients,' which could mean she was *indirectly* aware and is not unequivocal enough to mean she was *not aware*. Here again she states she 'received no direct payment or expenses.' The money is provided indirectly with ComRes then donating £50 to the **Enable**, with a cheque being received on 12 May 2009. Who is paying, what they are paying for, who they are paying, why they are paying are all somewhat up in the air here. But note the successive repetition of the methodology and Baillie's concomitant repetition of 'unawareness:' this seems purblind.

We must also ask why Baillie had no curiosity about who she is dealing with although they are doling out money on a regular basis. That is surprising. Unlike most people in the UK, MSPs would seem to have the luxury of others making their donations to charity for them, but clearly some negotiation about the recipient of the funds is entered into. We see this because in **June 2009** she took part in *another* interview carried out by **ComRes**, and states she 'received no direct payment or expenses' and 'was not directly aware of the clients,' even although the previous 'survey' was only a few days before. ComRes then "*agreed to donate £50 to the Dumbarton & District Pipe Band*", (emphasis added) so presumably this agreement was the result of some negotiation about the recipient yet the source of the money remained unknown and unexplored.[\[10\]](#)

Then on **3 July 2009** Baillie took part in a *telephone interview* carried out by **Populus** and again, received no *direct* payment or expenses but has come to understand that Populus undertook this survey 'on behalf of a number of companies,' but she 'was not directly aware of the clients until the end of the interview.' Populus then made a donation to 'CHAS at Robin House directly.'

Before proceeding we should note that the wording of the Scottish Parliament's rules on the 'Prohibition of paid advocacy'[\[11\]](#) uses the phrase "*any means, in consideration of any payment or benefit in kind.*" Neither should MSPs "advocate or initiate *any cause or matter on behalf of any person*" or "urge any other member to advocate or initiate any cause or matter on behalf of any person." The phrase "any means" is to be construed as "the doing of anything by a member in the capacity of a member, *whether or not* in any proceedings of the Parliament" and "any payment or benefit in kind" means *any payment or benefit in kind*. It would seem that MSPs think that this does not relate to surveys techniques on behalf of mystery clients, and we will examine this in more detail, with a more widespread sample of MSPs, once we conclude on Baillie and examine who runs these polling companies.

The Public Relations Consultants Association, and the Chartered Institute of Public Relations Government Affairs Group set out a minimal, code of conduct that they think should be followed by those who lobby government. Its four principles are:

- (1) Transparency and Openness — essentially that lobbyists must state on whose interests they are acting, and must not use a false identity.
- (2) Accuracy and Honesty — lobbyists are here urged to give accurate information and to not make misleading claims.
- (3) Integrity — lobbyists should never bribe public officials, and should protect officials from any potential conflicts of interest.
- (4) Propriety — lobbyists should abide by the rules set by official institutions, and should not encourage public officials to break those rules.[\[12\]](#)

All these rules could be said to have been broken with the survey lobbying, together with those of the Parliament.

So let us go over this again in summary form. Three companies, **Populus**, **Ipsos MORI** and **ComRes** repeatedly gain direct access to Baillie (on some occasions coming back to her) concerning companies who wish to remain anonymous but who will *indirectly* provide payment for the service she rendered and information she provided. Baillie is entirely uncurious, but is open enough to answer specific questions at length i.e. for an hour or more, the details of which we know next to nothing. Quasi-anonymous companies involved in hiring these polling companies provided indirect payment and this may or may not be connected to her stance on issues related to alcohol pricing. We are also left wondering why the companies who pay for the surveys pay for them.

But Jackie Baillie knows all about the ruses of lobbyists and indeed was involved in the Standards Committee 1st Report back in 1999, which was sparked by an *Observer* investigation, where journalists more or less conducted a similar process. Indeed after hearing the evidence, the Committee decided to call for various documents from Baillie and others and the inquiry also tried to clarify receipt of telephone calls.[\[13\]](#)

The *Times* (October 2009) stated that the SNP government's plans to adopt a minimum price for alcohol appeared "doomed" even after Labour's appointment of Baillie as a new shadow health secretary, who was known to be strongly against the SNP's proposals on alcohol pricing because her "constituency includes a big whisky firm".[\[14\]](#) This added that Labour had been in private discussions for some weeks with Nicola Sturgeon, the SNP Health Secretary, in an attempt to find common ground on the legislation when Labour's side of these talks had involved Cathy Jamieson.

In 2008, the *Sunday Times*, said of Baillie:

There's no standard like a double standard. Jackie Baillie, Labour's chief of staff at Holyrood and slavish lieutenant to Wendy Alexander, is using freedom of information to ask for details of every e-mail sent and every phone number dialled by the first minister's team of special advisers over several months last year. She has also been trying to

shame the press into making fewer freedom of information requests about her boss by asking questions about the cost to the parliament.^[15]

So we can legitimately ask Baillie to put such requests into practice in a less hypocritical way here, in relation to the confusion of the matters raised above: with little expense other than to that which obscures the truth she could once more become a model of probity.

It seems the lobbyists have learned from the imposture of the journalists. They are having their little go at disguise. But the rules are the rules: *any* means *any*. Some MSPs may divert the cash to their local party, but that is still a donation and localised to benefit the local MSP. Any means any.

The confluence of activity between public affairs companies, the pollsters, PR companies and their media outlets are not areas MSPs are unaware of. It is the public who do not have a firm grasp of the behind the scenes manoeuvring and exchange of money because they are not being told about it. This confusion is convenient to the point of being designed. We should note too that the pollsters also try to be the voice of the public with their constant reports on what they imagine the public to be thinking on various political issues or voting intentions.

[1] http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/msp/memberspages/jackie_baillie/roi.htm

[2] Judith Duffy, 2009, 'Boozing Scots put 'heavy toll' on NHS', *Express*, December 3.

[3] Magnus Linklater, 2009, 'Jackie Baillie faces test of principle on issue of minimum alcohol pricing. the *Times*, October 29, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/scotland/article6894753.ece>

[4] Alex Brownsell, 2010, 'The off-trade switch' *Marketing*, March 3. This quotes ComRes' Andrew Hawkins, who it states was working on the Fuller's account advising drinks companies.

[5] <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/pqa/wa-09/wa0803.htm>

[6] Of Northburgh House, 10 Northburgh Street, London, EC1V 0AT.

[7] Of 4 Wemyss Place, Edinburgh, EH3 6DH.

[8] <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/alcohol-code-of-practice/ipsos-mori-alcohol-report2835.pdf?view=Binary>

[9] Formerly CommunicateResearch, of 152 Morrison Street, The Exchange, Edinburgh, EH3 8EB.

[10] John McFall, Baillie's associate in Scotland, was also interviewed by ComRes, (from their London base). A 'fee of £50' was donated to charity and registered 11

November 2009, together with a fee of £75, also donated to charity, and registered on 11 November 2009.

McFall was also interviewed by Jonathan Shingleton's Business Planning & Research Ltd (BPRI) founded in 1986 and sold to the WPP Group in 2003. A fee of £75 donated to charity and registered on 11 November 2009 and a fee of £75 donated to charity and registered 16 November 2009. McFall was also interviewed by Ipsos MORI and his fee of £150 donated to charity (this was also registered 11 November 2009). The fees purposes are stated as 'Completion of Parliamentary Telephone Survey.' Several of McFall's 'speeches' such as that (undated) to Bell Pottinger Public Affairs Limited, also come with fees of £400 donated to charity. Some of these speeches are said to be arranged by PR firms, such as the speech to European Banking Regulation Roundtable arranged by **City & Financial**, or that delivered to the 'Understanding Modern Government Conference', arranged by GovNet Communications; at times the record reports a simple 'Survey for Prudential', with again a fee of £60 was donated to an unspecified charity. I offer some details on GovNet later.

[11] [Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament Act 2006](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/scotland/acts2006/asp_20060012_en_1#pb2-11g14)
http://www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/scotland/acts2006/asp_20060012_en_1#pb2-11g14

[12] See: Conor McGrath (2009) 'Transparency, Access and Influence: Regulating Lobbying in the UK', http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1450819

[13] <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/historic/standards/reports-99/str01ap3.htm> The report of the committee found that: "it seems that Jackie conducted herself in a manner in which we would all hope to conduct ourselves when accepting or declining invitations." Indeed everyone was found to have acted like everyone else in the Parliament. The *Observer's* allegations were that a lobbying company was offering privileged access to ministers. See: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/historic/standards/or-99/st0802.htm>

[14] Angus Macleod, 2009, 'SNP left high and dry as Labour rejects minimum alcohol pricing', October 29, *The Times*.

[15] *The Sunday Times*, 2008, 'Wendy's henchwoman puts press to shame with questions,' April 20.

(3)

Elective Affinities — Populus

When does a PR company become a pollster or a lobbyist, do rigid demarcations stand between them? Opinion poll firms, marketing, PR companies, what Bill Hick's grouped as 'Satan's little helpers' in our epigram might appear to be something of a smooth flowing behind-the-scenes nexus; but they are an acrimonious group. Back in 2004 they themselves made accusations of compromised research, inappropriate political connections and links with public relation firms, as the *Observer* put it some years ago on unrelated matters:

High-profile MPs are demanding a government investigation into pollsters' methodology, the possibility that questions are loaded to suit clients' interests and establishing if shareholding links to outside organisations harms the industry. Loved by newspapers and devoured by politicians, opinion poll findings make for guaranteed media coverage. Whether research based on the public's political mood or testing a new product, they have become a vital marketing tool.[\[1\]](#)

So who runs these companies? Are they political in any way, what processes do they set up, what other companies are they connected to?

Populus, is headed by ex-Conservative Central Office pollster **Andrew Cooper**, and were mentioned in the report from which the above quotation is drawn.[\[2\]](#) **Populus** replaced Mori (now Ipsos-MORI) as the *Times*' polling firm, and this close relationship to the press is also integral to how the companies function to influence public opinion for the benefit of their clients. Populus is also part of the lobbying association known as the **Stockholm Network**,[\[3\]](#) indeed Populus' **Roderick Nye**[\[4\]](#) (a former director of the **Social Market Foundation** (SMF) think tank and once the policy director for the Conservatives) is a director of the **Stockholm Network** (SN).[\[5\]](#) Populus' **Andrew Cooper** was also with the SMF and is also involved with the Stockholm Network,[\[6\]](#) which gathers together some 120 free market-oriented think tanks and offers a propaganda service in the press. Helen Disney is the chief executive of the Stockholm Network and its founder who also worked at the SMF.[\[7\]](#) Both Populus and the SN collaborate, such as with the (2006) *Impatient for Change: European attitudes to healthcare reform*.[\[8\]](#) Writing in *The Times* in December 2005, Paul Staines wrote that the Stockholm Network:

...turns out to be in fact the public face of Market House International, a PR consultancy that tells corporate clients that the network gives it "local capacity to deliver both local messages and locally tailored global messages in a wide range of countries."

We cannot really say whether any MSP would know it or not, but Populus are presently working for ASDA.[\[9\]](#) According to its sales pitch: 'Populus tracks the reputation of Asda-Wal*Mart among its most senior stakeholders.'[\[10\]](#) They say that:

Since 2004 ‘Populus conducted an initial stakeholder perception audit, probing attitudes to the supermarket sector and the reputation of the company among stakeholders including MPs, civil servants, planning officials, unions, and NGOs including environmental, farming and disability groups.’

- Political decision-makers
- City opinion-formers
- Thought-leading journalists
- Employees
- Suppliers
- Sector specialists
- Key clients
- The increasingly influential NGO sector

They say they’re so good: “because our experience is not just in the field of research, but spans government, politics and the media as well, we know how to talk to key stakeholders in these worlds.” Of their modus operandi they say: “So we agree with our clients a ‘long list’ of the people whose attitudes really matter to them and we only interview names drawn from that list.” No point in talking to Joe Blow when you can get to Charlie Big Potatoes who might be calling the shots. The invisible helping hand of Populus can also take the form of an event where the Right Honourable Charlie Big Potatoes MP talks to an audience of your choosing for purposes of your own design, but more on this later. The point here is that Populus do not just gather this data and then look at it abstractly. Their aim is to shape and mould opinion as a result of their findings, they aim to change and influence specific minds to aid their client’s desire to make more money. Populus state clearly:

Having agreed the ‘long list’ of named individuals in key stakeholder categories, we invite people on the list to take part in either a one-to-one interview or a roundtable discussion held under the Chatham House Rule.[\[11\]](#)

Andrew Cooper, the Director of Populus Limited was director of strategy for **William Hague** and these days gives ‘no-holds-barred advice’ to **David Cameron**.[\[12\]](#) Cooper described the organisation’s methodology as somewhat political mélange, saying:

...since Populus was founded we’ve become an established brand for political and stakeholder research. The heritage of Populus combines experience of public policy research, government & politics with traditional market research disciplines.[\[13\]](#)

We will return to Cooper's connections later in the context of the Councils that oversee the survey lobbyists but retain our focus on Populus.

It is not just the Scottish Parliament where they ply this hybrid trade. Populus survey a 'Panel' consisting of more than 170 Westminster MPs to ascertain the political and regional attitudes on business issues. This Panel supposedly includes frontbenchers, rising stars and senior backbenchers from all parties and supposedly provides a real insight into the opinions of MPs 'who matter.'^[14] Presumably that means matter to Populus' *clients* who want some form of contact with those who have a material influence on specific decision-making, albeit in a format which mimics some sort of academic conference. This is overtly stated as we seen above.

So Populus are paid to test the waters on how a company is perceived among MPs concerning specific campaigns and 'targeted communications', which may well take the initial form of a survey and then move towards modifications of various opinions as a result of it in these semi-secret meetings.^[15] Simultaneously, Populus' survey results on specific issues could also be fed into their media partners in one of these familiar 'a survey says story.'^[16] The targeted communications are in one sense a reverse survey, whereby the position of any MP (or MSP) on specific issues could be accessed and then hopefully modified in the discreet confines of 'Chatham House Rules,' no doubt with reference to the coverage in the press and other persuasive techniques and inducements. But this type of subtle integration of survey (questioning) techniques is essentially the art of the lobbyist, and not the 'objective' somehow independent survey that one might assume it to be on first glance: the survey is part of a cycle we will explore later. But we do not really know the specifics of what is being said and done here, these are not areas of great public accountability or outside scrutiny: like the financial sector (who are key clients of the lobbyists here as we shall see), self-regulation dominates.

Another Populus non-executive Chairman is **Rita Clifton** who has been part of Interbrand,^[17] DMB&B, J. Walter Thompson and Saatchi & Saatchi during the agency's 1980s heyday with Margaret Thatcher. Clifton's most recent non-executive appointment is with EMAP plc.^[18] Clifton, in 2007, was appointed Visiting Professor at **Henley Management College**, which is where politicians are taken to be indoctrinated into the ethos of the ever-present business world.^[19] According to Clifton, in the PR world:

We do a lot of creative development, new names and new IDs, [...] particularly in the wake of mergers and other corporate shake-ups. Diageo, formed from the merger of Guinness and Grand Met, was an especial success story. A new ID was crucial because 'even though Guinness was a very strong brand name, it had very strong associations with that one drink. So Diageo created a new story and a new angle for that holding company — and frankly just signalled a fresh start in that company's development.'^[20]

'You no longer know what you know,' might well be the motto of the PR industry and this is the problem with this mind-bending counterfeit world. Her interview tells us that Clifton's first accounts were with *Harpic* and *Steradent*, but imagine a lucrative contract comes in whereby the tastes of both those products are to be

combined into a single product, say a soft drink or chewing gum: the Clifton genius kicks and something along the lines of ‘Ultra-clean’ is then sold to us. When consumers fall ill the name is changed ‘New Ultra-clean lite.’

Clifton says she sees the market as a voting machine (and presumably the voting machine (politics) as the market) and the market as nature. For Clifton: ‘People “vote” for brands with their purchases and their support;’ and although she believes it takes monumental incompetence to derail a long-nurtured and well-managed brand (say the Labour party), complacency is the enemy which necessitates the employment of a PR company:

If you’re not great, in product terms, or you’re too expensive or you’re rubbish at looking after the environment, people will find out about it. And the Darwinism in markets will crush you.[\[21\]](#)

If only the Dodo and the Dinosaurs had done some market research. But PR is also about hiding the facts. The name of the game is not just this game of the names, certain forms of discourse must be shut down and others offered in their place as what might constitute the argument is controlled. Guinness had other very strong associations involving fraud: Ernest Saunders and Gerald Ronson’s convictions in legal trials, subsequent to the takeover of Distillers[\[22\]](#) (the makers of Thalidomide[\[23\]](#)) in 1986. Clifton’s job is to sublimate this type of thing. This type of thinking and activity is a contributory factor in the situation where, for instance, although there appeared to be a debate on alcohol in the Scottish parliament: there was no debate on alcohol. There was no discussion of it as an addictive *drug* for instance, not where it *matters in decision-making fora*, not where the lobbyist and pollster patrol to obfuscate the medical opinion: no *free debate* whereby those voices not controlled by the alcohol industry are given equal measure. There *is* a phoney debate, seemingly controlled by the alcohol industry; but this is part of the silence, and also part of the war on science that takes us back to the days when large marketing companies with accounts from the cigarette manufacturers aimed to control science, shape how we thought, and find ways to avoid any responsibility when people suffered.

[\[1\]](#) Nick Mathiason, 2004, ‘A £1bn industry is accused of distorting results to produce what clients want to hear,’ *The Observer*, June 6, see: <http://www.spinwatch.org.uk/news-by-category-mainmenu-9/173-pr-industry/361-lies-damn-lies-and-opinion-polls>

[\[2\]](#) <http://iaindale.blogspot.com/2009/06/when-pollsters-fall-out.html>

[\[3\]](#) <http://www.stockholm-network.org/Conferences-and-Programmes/Events/Previous-Events/4>

[\[4\]](#) Note Nye on Pre-White Paper public perceptions of Party energy policies in the context of UK Energy Review & the Nuclear Framework: political and regulatory contexts, see: http://www.westminsterenergy.org/Upload/2006-2008-public-events/20070314/Westminster_Energy_Mar_14th_brochure.pdf

[\[5\]](#) See: <http://www.corporatewatch.org/?lid=2187>

- [6] <http://issuu.com/stockholmnetwork/docs/eyeoneurope2>
- [7] <http://www.stockholm-network.org/About-Us/Staff-Profiles/helendisney>
- [8] <http://www.healthpowerhouse.com/files/Impatient%20for%20change.pdf>
- [9] <http://www.populus.co.uk/>
- [10] <http://www.populus.co.uk/products.html>
- [11] <http://www.populus.co.uk/populus-stakeholder-audits-product.html>
- [12] <http://www.slough.gov.uk/mycouncil/articles/11428.aspx>
- [13] <http://www.populuslimited.com/-growth-drives-senior-hires-and-sector-expansion-at-populus-article.html>
- [14] <http://www.populus.co.uk/populus-stakeholder-audits-product.html>
- [15] <http://www.populuslimited.com/-populus-parliament-panel-article.html>
- [16] See for example: <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/latest/2009/05/22/poll-piles-on-pressure-for-election-115875-21378676/>
- [17] Agencies like Interbrand (owned by Omnicom) are probably best known for dreaming up new names for existing companies at extravagant costs.
- [18] <http://www.non-execs.com/events/NEDSeminar/agenda.asp?event=22> EMAP is a large specialist media venture which includes work with Local Government, see: <http://www.emap.com/sectors/government/local-government-chronicle>
- [19] <http://www.libdemvoice.org/clegg-signs-top-management-guru-for-party-reform-commission-1942.html>
- [20] <http://www.i-l-m.com/edge/6348.aspx>
- [21] <http://www.i-l-m.com/edge/6348.aspx> A bit later in this interview, she adds another pseudo-Darwinian message: “Looking after small children is one of the things that I’m crap at. The important thing is that your child thinks you love them unconditionally. If they know that, then they will forgive you, or excuse you, for not being there all the time.”
- [22] <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/final-guinness-fraud-trial-ends-in-acquittal-of-ward-1473233.html>
- [23] <http://www.thalidomidesociety.co.uk/sethistory.htm>

(4)

ComRes — Communicate Research

But what of that other survey company Baillie talked to, **ComRes**? **Andrew Hawkins**, its Chief Executive is a qualified barrister, who worked for public affairs consultancies in Brussels and London: clients included the Conservative Party, ITN, *Sunday Times* and *The Independent*.^[1] In 1996 Hawkins was Campaigns Director for the **London Chamber of Commerce & Industry** where, according to ComRes, he played a key role in influencing the reform of London's governance for the business community.^[2]

Despite the lobbyists close connection to the Press as an outlet for their message, even using a Nexis search there is no evidence of the mainstream media contextualising who ComRes are.^[3] One possible exception to the lack of information on lobbying is Iain Dale's comment on a Hawkin's open letter to Danny Finkelstein about polling and its place within the news agenda:

I remember going to a post election conference after the 2001 election when there was a massive falling out between three of the country's leading pollsters. I have rarely seen such viciousness and complete loathing between political professionals.^[4]

ComRes states it maintains the largest survey research panel of MPs ever created (230 MPs) and the only survey research panel of the House of Lords (170 Peers) while being pollsters to the *Independent on Sunday* and working for the **Industry and Parliament Trust** (IPT).^[5] The IPT meet in the Members Dining Room of the House of Commons, and each MP has IPT Fellowship Partner from the world of big business, for example: The Rt. Hon. James Arbuthnot, Conservative has British American Tobacco; The Rt. Hon. John Battle, Labour, The Royal Bank of Scotland plc; Anne Begg, Labour, Chevron UK Ltd; The Rt.Hon. David Blunkett, Labour, British Telecommunications plc; Barbara Follett, Labour, Tesco Stores Ltd; Eric Joyce, Labour, ExxonMobil; Dr Denis MacShane, Labour, Lloyds TSB Group; John McFall, Labour, The Royal Bank of Scotland plc; Rosemary McKenna CBE, Labour, The Royal Bank of Scotland; Jacqui Smith, Labour, Mars Confectionery; Stephen Timms, Labour, EMAP plc which we have mentioned earlier concerning Rita Clifton.

The IPT are also responsible for a similar the MP/Civil Servant Attachment Programme, the equivalent in Scotland is the Scottish Parliament Business Exchange.

Over the years ComRes' Andrew Hawkins has gone on record with some confusing statements concerning politician's opinions on lobbyists, recently he expressed the opinion that:

MPs have a more positive view of lobbyists than some people might think. They are regarded as part of the software for running the machinery of government, improving the quality of communication

with legislators and representing a client resource which is usually well spent.[6]

Some ten years earlier he argued:

...that many Labour MPs retain their deep suspicion of lobbyists — and who can blame them when the ranks of lobbyists in the 1980s were swelled by people leaving Tory political service to seek their fortune in the myriad of new companies which mushroomed in Westminster?[7]

Hawkins track record is a good example of the growth of lobbying and the operating links between the various arms of Satan's little helpers and the interplay between them. He began his career at GPC forerunner **Market Access** in Brussels and London before joining Harris Research's political research unit in 1994.[8] In 1993 lobby firm Market Access International formed a holding company for investing in public affairs and associated communications companies across the world. The holding company, the **European Political Consulting Group** owned the Market Access companies, and David Boddy, a former senior staff member of the Conservative Party[9] headed the Group which included Connect Public Affairs. Hawkin's role within the group was with market research company **Access Opinions**. [10]

GPC was, of course, later at the centre of the 'Lobbygate' or 'Cash for Access' scandal.[11] In the wake of Greg Palast's *Observer* expose, public affairs trade body the Association of Professional Political Consultants suspended GPC and the lobbying firm GJW; another, LLM, which was accused of boasting of its success in lobbying for Tesco against a since-abandoned parking tax scheme, was not an Association member at the time, and so no action was taken and the matter brushed under the carpet.[12] Palast's main findings rested on two key discoveries: that members of the Government passed sensitive, confidential information to key lobbyists and did so systematically; and that members of the Government established a system of privileged access for industry clients of connected lobbyists. This was (and still is) related to the Government's system of secretive, selective information leakage which is making government policy systemically undemocratic and open to influence away from public scrutiny.

Hawkins, via Access Opinions, carried out research side of things including work for outside PR firms, some of whom had been sceptical of Access Opinions independence from Market Access.[13] We can see this illusion in Hawkin's claim in the early 1990s (when Ian Greer's methods were at their height) that "Lobbyists are gaining credibility and 90% of Conservative MPs believe they provide a useful bridge between companies and MPs." These 'facts' were revealed in a survey from Hawkin's **Access Opinions** commissioned by its sister lobbying company **Market Access International** and supposedly reflected the views of an all-party panel of 100 Members of Parliament.[14]

Ironically for Hawkins back then, lobbying was all about "managing illusions." [15] Part of this involves the interpenetration of research/lobbying/PR groups he was involved with. Hawkins alludes to this in a statement on lobbying and market research: "the measurement and management of illusions go hand in hand. Public

affairs and market research must learn to work together to grasp the opportunities,” and we might add: in managing the illusions of democracy.[\[16\]](#)

We will come back to Hawkin’s views later, let us first examine another director.

Greig Baker, ComRes’ Research Director is said to have previously been a member of the Conservative Shadow Defence and Foreign Affairs research and advisory teams with responsibilities included speech writing, policy analysis and policy research, he is also said to have taken part in the US State Department’s International Leaders Program, and to have served in the British Army’s **Military Intelligence Corps**,[\[17\]](#) a TA section specialising in human intelligence, debriefing and interview techniques.[\[18\]](#)

The type of advice Baker might have offered to the Shadow Defence team can be related to work he has written at the behest of the UK Defence Forum (UKDF), a lobby group from which we will quote below. This a shockingly tendentious analysis, where Baker extends the amalgamation of the public and private sectors adopted by the British government to justify and encourage the use of mercenaries or Private Military Companies (PMCs) to start and profit from war. The UKDF contains at least two members who operate such companies. Baker celebrates the victories for the PR world (‘previous efforts to create legal frameworks to regulate military contractors have been consistently unsuccessful’) in encouraging war mongering: the PMCs need a war to make a profit so here Baker offers a helpful expedient suggestion to encourage business opportunities, arguing:

Theoretically, a democratic government could even go as far as to avoid the controversy of declaring war in the first place, simply by allowing a national department, slightly removed from Defence (DfID, in the British system, for instance), to issue contracts to PMCs. Currently, the exclusive deployment of PMCs would obviously be restricted to small scale operations, but as the market for PMCs encourages a growth in supply, it is feasible that PMCs could undertake more sizeable missions almost independent of recognised national forces.

In fact, regardless of any failings, PMCs have frequently had notable successes in recent years because of their less restrained approach to frontline duties (not having to accommodate ‘embedded journalists’, for example) and mission achievement (Executive Outcomes’ actions in Africa are testimony to ‘getting the job done’ with little time for sensibilities). Even in more minor roles, private contractors have been essential to the smooth running of the service support arm of many national forces in modern conflicts. This role is truly essential — and if one considers the difficulty NATO countries have had in deploying additional troops to Afghanistan, one can see why help from any quarter is almost always welcome — and allows national governments to cling to their goal of satisfying their armed forces’ existing commitments both at home and abroad.[\[19\]](#)

It seems to have escaped the notice of Baker that there is nothing stopping a PMC receiving money from and working for practically anyone: the UK's enemies or terrorist groups for example. To paraphrase Clausewitz here, war is *commerce* by other means not *diplomacy*.

Comres conducted a (2008) poll for another defence lobby, the United Kingdom National Defence Association (UKNDA) with Baker as the organiser of their campaign.^[20] Before moving on we will note that the UK Defence Forum's Robin Ashby's lobbying activities attracted some adverse attention,^[21] one example being the *Independent's* exposure of Ashby as a war lobbyist in Parliament with the headline quote: "We'll ask the questions that you can't, without your fingerprints."^[22] Ashby's firm, Bergmans, lobbies on behalf of more than a dozen large defence and aerospace companies (including using the UK Defence Forum) such as BAE Systems, Northern Defence Industries, Boeing and Rolls-Royce.

According to the report, Ashby used a pass, allotted to Baroness Harris of Richmond, to access the House of Commons library, which offers valuable research facilities at no cost. Harris received a "regular" income from a separate company run by Ashby, the Great North News Service, for which Baroness Harris acted as an "adviser," according to her parliamentary declaration of financial interests. Her "researcher" gains access to the Palace of Westminster's corridors of power and a string of top-level ministers.

Lionel Zetter, another ComRes director, who failed to be elected as a Conservative MP,^[23] became the author of 'The Political Campaigning Handbook' and 'Lobbying—the art of political persuasion'. The core of the book covers Westminster and Whitehall, and describes in detail how to lobby the civil service, the political parties, the House of Commons and the House of Lords, the Scottish Parliament, regulators and think tanks. Part three covers the 'tools of the lobbying trade' including monitoring and intelligence, and also covers 'polling, relationship management, online campaigning, building coalitions, and using the media.'^[24]

Here again we see another reference to this linked assemblage of companies who seek to control the propaganda cycle using polls and surveys etc. as the components of this. In connection to this we could note that Zetter is also managing director of **Parliamentary Monitoring Services Ltd (PMS)**,^[25] this "provides monitoring and research services on a confidential basis to public relations and public affairs consultancies, companies, charities, trade associations, quangos, and diplomatic missions."^[26] Many public affairs and PR agencies use the PMS service. As well as the Lords and Commons, PMS also monitors Whitehall departments, political parties, think tanks, pressure groups, executive agencies and quangos.^[27] The *Times* and other newspapers offered another familiar "cash-for-access" story mentioning PMS:

Lord Howie of Troon, a Labour peer, gives a pass to Doug Smith, a veteran Westminster lobbyist who is chairman of Westminster Advisers, whose clients include French multinationals Sodexo and Accor. Until January 2006 Mr Smith was chairman of Parliamentary Monitoring Services. Lord Howie receives "regular remunerated employment" from Parliamentary Monitoring Services. Yesterday Lord Howie refused to say how much he was paid, and said that Mr

Smith deserved a pass because he provided him with information, particularly on construction and publishing. Asked if the payments posed a potential for conflict of interest, he replied: “Only in the eyes of a nosey parker.”[\[28\]](#)

PMG was also found to be part of revelations concerning how the independence of all-party groups was ‘compromised by commercial interests.’[\[29\]](#)

Zetter is a non-executive deputy chairman of Dods Parliamentary Communications Ltd, this provides “reference information to the large number of officials drafting parliamentary answers.”[\[30\]](#) A rough calculation, and a conservative estimate made in the early 1990s, put a figure of £5 million in consultancy fees paid into the House of Commons each year. That did not include directorships, travel concessions or shareholdings.[\[31\]](#)

Zetter is a former chairman of the Government Affairs Group[\[32\]](#) and maintains his close connections with Conservative Central Office,[\[33\]](#) and he helps run the **Enterprise Forum**, which has the motto ‘Bringing Business closer to Politics’, and whose executive and management are all part of the Conservative Party including MPs and Lords,[\[34\]](#) and they state:

The Enterprise Forum is your link with the Conservative party. Through our programme, we provide a two-way channel of communication, an independent middle ground where you can meet, debate and build relationships with key conservative policy makers, and network with other industry professionals.[\[35\]](#)

And indeed Andrew Hawkins of ComRes also speaks at their gatherings.[\[36\]](#) We will now return to Hawkins and his remarks concerning the survey/lobby, but note the reliance by Zetter on personal contact here, and recall Hawkin’s remarks on lobbying in the 1990s.

[\[1\]](#) None of the pollsters managed to predict the Conservative win in 1992, see: Rob Sharp, 2010, *Independent Extra*, February 15, this also notes that most of the pollsters use a 1000 person sample, via phone interviews. The results are then converted into seats in the House of Commons by a somewhat mysterious process.

[\[2\]](#) <http://www.comres.co.uk/management.aspx>

[\[3\]](#) Incidences of the use of ComRes in the mainstream media, since their formation, based on a Nexis search is: The Independent (122), The Mirror and The Sunday Mirror, (72), Independent on Sunday (68), Daily Mail and Mail on Sunday (58), The Express (52), The Daily Telegraph (38), The Guardian (35), The Times (33), News International Newspapers Information Services Ltd. (23), The Sunday Times (16), The Sunday Express (14), The Observer (8), The Express Newspapers (6), The Sunday Telegraph (6), The Business (1). None of these explain anything about the nature of the company.

One of the journalists who draws the most frequently on ComRes' material is Andrew Grice, with typical headlines such as "Brown 'is as much to blame for conflict'", *The Independent*, 2010, February 3. ComRes poll for a range of organizations such as *The Independent*, or for BBC's *Panorama*; and ComRes are used to make flat out assertions such as "The British people support some restrictions on wearing the burka in public but oppose an outright ban..." Andrew Grice, 2010, 'Poll shows Britons back limited curbs on the veil', *The Independent*, February 1.

[4] See: Iain Dale's Diary, 2009, June 11, <http://iaindale.blogspot.com/2009/06/when-pollsters-fall-out.html>.

[5]

<http://www.ipt.org.uk/OneStopCMS/Core/CrawlerResourceServer.aspx?resource=0D0AC2E2-E6AC-4FE7-BF36-7FD053DC596E&mode=link&guid=987d6e1bb60242c8947e0129dc53ada6>

[6] *PR Week*, 2006, October 27.

[7] *PR Week*, 1995, September 8.

[8] *PR Week*, 2001, May 11. City 'watchdog' the Securities and Investment Board had employed Market Access as a lobbyist until caught up in the 'mis-selling' of personal pensions and so forth (see: *PR Week*, 1994, September 9).

[9] Steve Lohr, 1989, 'Battle for Plessey Is Put on Hold,' *New York Times*, January 13.

[10] *PR Week*, 1993, November 4. Prima Europe eventually also became part of GPC (see: Ian Darby, 1998, *PR Week UK*, 6 March) which was also owned by Omnicom.

[11] http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/128931.stm

[12] *PR Week*, 2003, April 18.

[13] *PR Week*, 1993, November 4.

[14] *PR Week*, 1993, April 15.

[15] *PR Week*, 1995, September 8.

[16] *PR Week*, 1995, September 8.

[17] <http://www.comres.co.uk/management.aspx>

[18] <http://www.comknow.co.uk/page12864722.aspx>

[19] <http://www.ukdf.org.uk/assets/downloads/gr136.pdf> Other UKDF papers include one on Iran's nuclear weapons <http://www.ukdf.org.uk/assets/downloads/gr138.pdf> In one sense this is the standard lobby group tactic of asking for some much, and stretching possibilities to such an extent, that it normalises some half-way measure.

[20] http://www.uknda.org/defence_is_now_an_election_issue_-_poll_reveals/n-158.html This also seems to have involved Edelman, see:
<http://www.edelman.co.uk/case-studies/national-defence-association-uknda>

[21] <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/politics/labour/4348729/Labour-peers-Robin-Ashby-profile.html>

[22] James Macintyre, 2008, 'We'll ask the questions that you can't, without your fingerprints,' he tells clients, *Independent*, 26 June.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/exposed-the-arms-lobbyist-in-parliament-854313.html>

[23] When he was chairman of the Enfield Southgate Conservative Association, Zetter was caught up in the 'Burgergate' row, fending off the hostile reaction over plans to turn their headquarters into a McDonald's restaurant. It had been masterminded by Geoffrey Tucker, a lobbyist hired to promote the McDonald's cause in Whitehall. Suspicions were voiced that the McDonald's bid was effectively a political donation, see: *The Times*, 1996, August 15, and <http://www.mcspotlight.org/campaigns/thisweek/jul3.html>

[24] <http://www.ciprgag.org.uk/content/6/Committee-Members/default.aspx>

<http://www.harriman-house.com/pages/book.htm?BookCode=256756>

[25] PMS was based in the lobbyist's haven of Tufton Street and its issues of a 'Parliamentary companion for the UK and EC' had a foreword by the Chancellor of the Exchequer (see: *PR Newswire Europe*, 1990, January 18). *The Times*, 1993, August 7, noted that PMS took John Major, then PM, to cricket games. Their 29 Tufton St. address was also that of the Conservative Group For Europe, Centre For European Reform, other groups in the street include The Adam Smith Institute, the Social Market Foundation and the Centre for Policy Studies.

[26]

<http://investing.businessweek.com/research/stocks/private/snapshot.asp?privcapId=28368753>

[27] *PR Week*, 1999, October 29.

[28] Sam Coates, 2007, 'Cash for peers' *The Times*, July 17.

[29] Dean Nelson & Jonathan Calvert, 1995, 'When Lobbyists Push Against An Open Door', *The Observer*, September 17.

[30]

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200102/cmhansrd/vo020617/text/20617w27.htm>

[31] *PR Week*, 1993, January 28.

[32] <http://www.ciprgag.org.uk/content/6/Committee-Members/default.aspx> This also has ties to the arms industry, note Simon Astley, Director of Parliamentary Relations for BAE Systems and responsible for the company's UK public affairs activity.

[33] http://www.harriman-house.com/pages/authors.htm?Index=9621&Author=Lionel_Zetter

[34] <http://www.enterprise-forum.co.uk/LionelZetter.html>

[35] <http://www.enterprise-forum.co.uk/>

[36] <http://www.enterprise-forum.co.uk/programme.asp>

(5)

A ‘return to the dark days’

How do we know for sure that these surveys are really a form of lobbying, even though it is carried out by companies run by lobbyists? Really the question here should be: is anyone actually denying it? That this survey-like system *is* a form of lobbying is revealed by ComRes’ Andrew Hawkins, who in 2009 attacked new legislation that would require MPs to declare *all* their outside interests — including any *incentives* they receive from the pollsters — the way the rules for MSPs say they should.

First, Hawkins cleverly argued that the anonymity that the MSPs would usually enjoy as survey respondents would be at risk, if they had to declare the money: something of a tautology there. But to what extent this cherished anonymity is in any way protected by a company, such as ComRes, acting on behalf of a client or a group of clients, is doubtful for several, mostly commercial reasons.^[1] Companies may want to know the opinions of a set of MSPs generally, but it is highly likely that particularly with those companies whose interests are directly affected by the outcomes of specific decision-making groups, they would want to know specific opinions in terms of *intentions* by specific MSPs. In any case some MSPs would appear to be admitting that the surveys/interviews take place while, as we shall explore later, some do not. As it stands just now the Register of Interests (and this might also apply to the House of Commons’ register) is simply not a transparent or consistent record of what is taking place here, neither does it offer explanations as to reasons or motivation. Protecting a system whereby MSPs receive money from private companies anonymously via an intermediary, because anonymity is desirable in the eyes of the private company and the intermediary, is not a suitable justification. Would MSPs stand up in parliament and defend it along these lines? In essence this is intentional secrecy from the *public* with private vested interests in the know, with only sophistry to defend it.

Survey findings can be simply reversed to trace particular MSPs attitudes: moving from the general to the particular rather than the other way around. Similarly the process of interviewing specific MSPs (and of note is the re-interviewing process we identified with Baillie) could be argued to have the potential of exploiting the influence on the respondent, that surveys inevitably have, which survey designers try to eliminate, but which can — through awareness of survey design — be built in, and indeed may condition the respondent. I will present evidence later that this is the case. Furthermore, as a result of the confidential information imparted and its seeming charitable purpose MSPs may become more relaxed about providing information or speculating on the future direction of legislation. But the electorate simply do not know what type of questions are being asked, on who’s behalf and for what purposes and their knowledge will not be enhanced if Hawkins gets his way. And bear in mind that lobbyists do not really have to depend on these convoluted routes to approach MSPs: the traffic flows both ways in a complicated system as we shall also examine later.

On other instances Hawkins argues that secrecy produces negative consequences, and is actually engendered by scrutiny of what he terms ‘market research’:[2]

If the rules on outside interests are drawn so tightly that MPs effectively feel unable to take part in market research, it will encourage a return to the dark days of the 1990s when lobbyists like Ian Greer could trade on personal contacts. These new rules will create a wall of secrecy around MPs and thus a premium on inside knowledge, making it far less transparent.[3]

By ‘drawn so tightly’ he is referring to the MSPs admitting the survey contact. So despite the introduction of the vague term ‘market research’, this is a description of the survey contextualised as a form of surrogate lobbying — what the survey process obtains is ‘inside knowledge’ for the client, with a view to preferential or deferential treatment: the aspect of money that should have been declared changing hands we will come to below. There is no denial here that the game is to obtain ‘inside knowledge’ or that money does change hands we are just haggling about its rate of exchange. We may also infer from the above statement that this process was devised as a replacement to *obviate* the regulation brought to bear after the lobbying ‘sleaze’ which he finds personified in Greer (whose clients included ASDA and who was a former Conservative Party staffer).[4] Hawkin’s warning is that if this system is tight enough to reveal its transactions it will engender a *return* (i.e. there is a connection in terms of replacement) to the old ways that the survey approach has, shall we say, *rebranded*.[5]

But who is to say that Lobbyists have *really* abandoned this trading on personal contacts? Lionel Zetter’s personal website states: “Lionel has a wide range of contacts within the worlds of politics and public affairs, and a deep understanding of the workings of government.”[6] That involves personal contact with MPs as far as the Conservative Enterprise Forum is concerned. What force is determining that this ‘return to the dark days’ will take place? Is Hawkins saying that all lobbyists were like Greer in the past and are unlike him now? The Greer practices which caused the fuss were the payment of MPs, and have we really escaped from those ‘dark days’ with the survey system: its replacement.

ComRes also submitted this threatening prediction (exactly the same wording) on July 1, 2009, to Sir Christopher Kelly, chairman of the Commission for Standards in Public Life[7] as part of Kelly’s somewhat unedifying enquiry into MPs expenses. Hawkins stated that the development of the survey process was fed by the ‘substantial appetite’ that organisations have concerning what MPs might do to affect them, and if they do not get it via these surveys they will ‘seek it via other routes.’[8] So much for the dark days being behind us.

In an earlier letter to Kelly, Hawkins set out the *modus operandi* of the survey lobby (noting that it operated under the Code of Conduct of the Market Research Society):

It is standard practice in the market research community to make available a small fee to MPs in return for completing survey questionnaires. Such fees are also paid in respect of surveys among other opinion-former audiences such as journalists and think-tanks.

Most such payments are directed to charity or to other third party such as a local party association. [...] Through this channel we have raised a significant amount of money for charity: we calculate more than £300,000 over the past six years.

So here we begin to see the spread of this ‘survey’ system into those who shape political culture, and we glimpse its relation to a process of opinion forming: this type of circulation has been outlined in studies on propaganda such as in the work of Harold Laswell or Walter Lippman and others.^[9] But here too we begin to see the scale of this operation, but I know of no response by Sir Christopher Kelly. Sir Alistair Graham, the former Chairman of the committee of Standards in Public Life was a speaker for ComKnow, an offshoot of ComRes run by Hawkins.

The evidence from examination of all the MSPs who admitted to being surveyed, which I will turn to later, showed that roughly a half of them gave their fee to charity and roughly a half gave it to their party. For some reason they do not seem to admit to just keeping the money for services rendered — and we must ask why?

So with regard to this evidence, we can also say that MPs, journalists and their friends who create illusions in the press might have *also* been in receipt of about £300,000, if the split is 50/50; and where can we go to find out what journalists and think tank members are being paid and how they dispose of the money? If a company is covertly lobbying *supposedly* impartial decision-makers, media commentators and for-hire ideas-providers in the think tanks (which interpenetrate with the lobbyists) to concoct *seemingly* objective analysis and *purportedly* objective reporting of this process without any real public awareness of the inter-relatedness of this process then the ‘dark days’ of Greer seem somewhat quaint. This process is not at a remove from it: it is a systemization of it.^[10] To counter aspects of this drift it would be a relatively inexpensive process to set up a small independent group to run and maintain the MSPs register of interests.

When looking at the individual amounts declared on each web page it does not convey the overall size of the scheme. These are rough and round figures, but an estimate of £300,000 is a substantial amount of money going to political parties from lobbyist’s clients, which most likely does not even appear as a political donation because it comes in dribs and drabs. We do not know the total of the money (or why it has not been counted properly) and it is possible that this is a deliberate tactic in response to the Greer days of lump sums in brown envelopes and a useless ceiling on individual amounts that ignores their time frame. A tally based on the financial year would paint a very different picture and this is just one company: there are several.

On a moral dimension it would seem that MPs do not even make donations to charity themselves, and although the ‘charities’ benefit, although Baillie’s seem part of her self-promotion, this is clearly not the purpose of the scheme — this is to establish a regular *conduit* between MPs and particular businesses: not a normal function of a survey. As Hawkins puts it in his letter:

The surveys also provide an important conduit for MPs’ views and therefore make a meaningful contribution to enhanced relationships between parliament and the outside world.

If a survey is a conduit it should not really be called a survey, it should be called a paid conduit. Hawkins argues that his company never seeks to influence the people who complete the surveys (although this has been found to be impossible by survey designers), adding that this would detract from the survey's validity: but that would only apply when extrapolating from a particular to a generality and a conduit implies a connection: a means by which something is transmitted to and fro. Influence can be at its best when it operates without any direct or apparent effort. Hawkins basic request was that MPs be allowed to skip mention of all this type of money that might come their way and that the system of secret conduits and payment be left in place (at no point are the business interests or what they get out of the survey mentioned or taken into account). He seems to have, more or less, been given his wishes as regards the Scottish Parliament.

One might wonder what the incentive really is for Baillie and the other MSPs who talk to a group of Conservatives in market research clothing, and who's day job, as it were is putting stories into the media 'suggesting that the election is in the bag for the Tories.' [11] ComRes, just like their friends in Populus also annually survey politicians, particularly councillors in England and Wales. [12] They also seem to have held their anniversary party in Holyrood in 2008. [13]

Having presented this basic background sketch we will now turn to evidence and its analysis in relation to a wider group of MSPs who declare their involvement with the survey process in their Register of Interests to see if this presents a distorted picture or an accurate representation of who is being lobbied on whose behalf. [14]

[1] The MSP's register of interest has quite a variation on whether the clients behind the survey are identified to the MSP, Baillie's description of this and the funding process is the most confused.

[2] <http://www.research-live.com/news/government/new-mp-rules-put-research-at-risk-says-comres-chief/4000373.article>

An observation could be made that Hawkins should differentiate between general attitude surveys for general clients and specific surveys tailored to specific client's needs.

I can find almost no satisfactory explanatory reference to this Annual Survey in the members interests, which possibly means no payment was offered for completion, but I doubt this. A single reference to (2009) "a Parliamentary Research Panel opinion survey undertaken by ComRes", which she states was undertaken "on behalf of their clients" can be found on Elaine Smith's page, see:
http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/MSP/MembersPages/elaine_smith/roi.htm

[3] <http://www.research-live.com/news/government/new-mp-rules-put-research-at-risk-says-comres-chief/4000373.article>

[4] Ed Vulliamy, David Leigh (1997) 'Sleaze: The Corruption of Parliament', Fourth Estate Ltd. was Greer was revealed to have paid Members of Parliament commissions for introducing him to potential clients. In what became known as the "Cash for

Questions Affair,” the *Sunday Times* revealed in 1994 Greer had been paying MPs to table parliamentary questions on behalf of his clients.

[5] Compare his statements to his power point:

http://www.theparliament.com/fileadmin/theParliament/Andrew_Hawkins_AM.pdf

[6] See: <http://www.lzconsulting.co.uk/>

[7] See: <http://www.comknow.co.uk/speakers.aspx> ComKnow maintains an Advisory Panel to advise and help design the courses. The Advisory Panel comprises: Sarah Atkinson, Head of Corporate Affairs, Charity Commission,; Jonathan Bracken, Bircham Dyson Bell; Rod Cartwright, Managing Director of Public Affairs, Ketchum / Chair, PRCA Public Affairs Committee; Tony Ginty, Head of EU and UK Public Affairs, Marks & Spencer plc; Bernard Hughes, Head of Public Affairs, Adsa plc; Francis Ingham, Director General, PRCA; Helen Kennett, Head of Government Relations, Thales UK; Patrick Law, Director of Corporate Affairs, Barratt Development plc; Jo Lewis, Head of Public Policy and Regulation, Lloyds TSB; Chris Lowe, Director of Government Relations, Precise Public Affairs; Rona Macdonald, Government Relations Manager, Oil and Gas UK; Gill Morris, Chair, APPC and Managing Director, Connect Public Affairs; Warwick Smith, Partner, College Public Policy; Cameron Walker, Corporate Communications Director, Scottish Widows and Simon Walker, Chief Executive, BVCA.

[8] http://www.public-standards.gov.uk/Library/MP_Expenses_E686_ComRes.pdf

[9] Harold Lasswell identified a cycle, whereby the public are limited in *the information* that is presented to them, and also apprehensive to accept it. However, it is still *that information* that is affecting their decisions within the democratic system, and still that information that is being presented to them by the government, mainstream media and propagandists. Walter Lippmann’s ideas on stereotypes noted the insertion between man and his environment of a pseudo-environment (propaganda). To that pseudo-environment our behavior is a response. But because it is behavior, the consequences, if they are acts, operate not in the pseudo-environment where the behavior is stimulated, but in the real environment where action eventuates.

[10] We would also have to factor in the efforts of organisations such as Editorial Intelligence who also work a system of paying journalists etc. via PR companies.

[11] http://www.silobreaker.com/andrew-hawkins-11_1250334 See also: http://www.brands2life.com/news_release.aspx?id=39 and <http://www.e-pages.dk/dods/145/fullpdf/full4b2916212a955.pdf>

[12] <http://www.i-l-m.com/lgm/7349.aspx>

[13]

<http://publishing.yudu.com/Library/Asxsj/Holyroodmagazineissu/resources/68.htm>

[14] Ipsos MORI also have political connections via its directors. Ipsos’ Ben Page is stated by the Cabinet Office to have “worked closely with both Conservative and Labour ministers and senior policy makers across government, leading on work for

Downing Street, the Cabinet Office, the Home Office and the Department of Health, as well as a wide range of local authorities and NHS Trusts.” See: http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/events/tower/ben_page.aspx

(6)

“A number of unspecified companies in the financial industry”

The total of MSPs who admit to being surveyed is 17. These were 12 Labour Party members, 4 SNP members and 1 LibDem at the close of 2009. In the Scottish Parliament there are a total of 129 MSPs with 47 SNP members, 46 Labour members, 16 Conservatives and 16 LibDem members with the other parties making up the 4 other seats.

No round up of who has been surveyed exists on the Scottish Parliament's web site, but it can be compiled on the basis of what information is provided to demonstrate that the Register of Interests presents an incomplete and misleading representation. It should be noted that the figures the Register provides are supposedly an aggregate of *all* surveys undertaken by *all* the companies involved, with the earliest said to have taken place in 2007.^[1] Even at this stage the suspicion arises that much more of this activity might have occurred than was being reported;^[2] either that or the basic rules of survey taking have been ignored. For instance: taken on face value, we can say that as an overall survey of opinion the sample is inefficient and biased towards Labour. The absence of *any* Conservative MSPs is obviously a serious and glaring omission — and an incomplete picture.^[3] Nevertheless using the Register we can arrange the data that we *are* provided with by the MSPs who admit to being paid for their survey and, who also at times, include what company contacts them, as I present below.

It is likely therefore, and other supporting evidence will be offered later, that many other MSPs have been surveyed but have not declared this in their Register of Interest section for a range of reasons as yet unexplained. But on the basis of the evidence offered to the public, we can say that there is little evidence that these surveys are simply surveys as such. Even here they appear to be a version of lobbying, whereby an overall opinion survey is not the intention but targeted approaches on behalf of clients who provide payment are. We can, and other evidence presented below supports this, say that this is not a complete picture of who was contacted and that therefore the Register is failing in its purpose. Whatever way we look at the information provided we encounter a problem in the light of other facts. There are other possibilities of course. These MSPs may have been cautious about recording this form of activity, they (or whoever completes their Register) may have felt particularly uneasy about the process for sensitive reasons. Or they may simply be confused. Some times leadership lacks leadership.

On the limited evidence we are provided with we can say that a small group of 'polling companies', specifically: ComRes, Populous and Ipsos MORI carry out the majority of the survey/lobbies. The clients who are behind these surveys tend not to be disclosed to the MSP who generally appear not to request this information. Even when they do know the clients some MSPs tend not to record it in the Register. Taking the Register as a whole a variation of explanations are offered: either the client is not disclosed, at times the client was identified during the course of interview but

not disclosed in the interests sections, or, on some occasions the client is identified. The purpose of the surveys are never really touched upon or explained even when clients are mentioned.

A similar variation in how the survey companies are described by MSPs is also evident. The SNP's Keith Brown describes Ipsos MORI as "a research company specialising in advertising, customer loyalty, marketing, media and public affairs."^[4] Labour's Patricia Ferguson describes Populus as a "PR and polling agency."^[5] Labour's Marlyn Glen describes ComRes as "a polling and research consultancy" and Ipsos MORI as "a market and opinion research consultancy."^[6] Other descriptions include Ipsos MORI as "a surveys and opinion poll company,"^[7] or "an opinion research company,"^[8] or even "a multi specialist research company."^[9] With Labour's Michael McMahon all three companies, Ipsos MORI, Populus and ComRes are described as "a research company who conduct social, economic and political opinion surveys."^[10] MSPs can even say that: "I am not aware of the clients on whose behalf ComRes were acting,"^[11] thus conceding that they were acting on behalf of a client: but no MSP has termed these companies as 'lobbyists.' The SNP's Ian McKee can even state that he "participated in an annual survey of Members of the Scottish Parliament for Ipsos MORI [...] who conducted this survey on behalf of various companies in the field of finance" without the notion of lobbying entering the frame.^[12] David Whitton, can even state that he was managing director of Whitton PR Ltd, name the clients he worked for, reveal he received £50,000 per annum, and note that Ipsos MORI "undertook this survey on behalf of a number of their clients" but still refer to Ipsos MORI as "a market and opinion research company."^[13]

None of the MSPs claim to be so credulous that they argue that they did not know a client was behind the survey but there is no evidence in the Register that any of them consider the process *to be* lobbying despite the presence of clients, intermediaries, targeted questions and money. Nevertheless a marked degree of evasive vagueness in reporting the identity of the client is evident together with a common evasiveness as to the fee provided: for example the MSPs declare it as 'remuneration' and that 'falls into the 'up to £500' bandwidth' but say they "received no direct payment or expenses."^[14] Either the MSP was "not directly aware" of the clients or "not directly aware" of the clients until the end of the interview. It is unclear what this means or why the latter formulation should preclude the revelation of the client in the Register. It remains a secret. This evasion is compounded further on other occasions whereby the MSP stated they were aware of various clients but not aware of specific client; or that they believed that a number of unspecified companies in the financial industry were behind the approach. The financial sector was the most frequent sector to approach the MSPs in this way, but with the level of non-disclosure we cannot really say if that is an accurate picture.

The amounts of money declared and passed to their respective Constituency Offices are £825 by Labour (mostly donated to Glasgow Central Labour Party); £50 to SNP with £3,450 going to nominated charities, but the argument is that much more money is in the system. Some MSPs, Iain Grey for example, acknowledge that their Constituency Party makes donations to them.^[15]

Some explanation of some of the references to various statements and companies mentioned is needed here. The specific date of Wendy Alexander's survey is not

provided, it is only mention of when the cheque was received (December 2009) that is recorded, the declaration tells us very little other than Ipsos MORI performed the survey. This lack of provision of specific information on exactly when the survey took place is a common feature as is the date when the cheque arrived. GovNet Communications, for which Alexander states she spoke, has Lord George Foulkes as the Chairman of its Editorial Board, and the company also includes his wife.^[16] Carrick Court Associates Ltd., a consultancy of which he is also a director, receives money from GovNet because of Foulkes' work with GovNet. Foulkes owns 100% shares of Carrick Court Associates Ltd., of which GovNet is a client.^[17] Foulkes also works for the political and parliamentary consultancy, Eversheds LLP,^[18] and admitted introducing the firm's clients to chairmen and members of select committees and giving clients tours of the Palace of Westminster.^[19] The LibDem peer, Lord Kirkwood of Kirkhope, also works for GovNet who publish 'public sector magazines'.^[20] In a report on Foulkes' expense claim of £45,000 for staying in a house he owns, the *Herald* noted that this London address also appeared to be the business address for his work as a director and political consultant with Carrick Court Associates, which makes £50,000 per year.^[21] Peter Peacock MSP spoke at a December 2009 seminar in Edinburgh (on the Role of the Minister in a Government Department) that was organised by 'Understanding ModernGov' (a division of GovNet Communications).

I will present some background on GovNet as a separate section later, so that we can continue with our focus on the register here; suffice to say at this juncture that MSPs themselves engage in aspects of lobbying, and have devised their own companies to do so. We should be disinclined to see them as entirely innocent of such processes.

David Whitton, who we mentioned earlier in connection to Whitton PR Ltd, had clients that included: First Group PLC; Reliance Security Services; Al-Maktoum Institute, Dundee; Scottish Enterprise Glasgow/Dunbartonshire/Ayrshire. Whitton is the Labour nominee and a Non-Executive Director to the Scottish Parliament & Business Exchange which acts as a more open business lobby inside the Parliament — its free market advocacy is not without a somewhat familiar irony concerning its viability as a 'business.' The Exchange ran up deficits of £61,000 over the past two years. It is to be given a £30,000 'exceptional one-off payment' to 'tide it over.'^[22]

We should note too that there might be some MSPs who refused to take part in these surveys, although I have no information to support this. It would be interesting to hear their views.

Returning to the Register, we also see a strong variation in how MSPs explain the payment system when they attempt to do so.^[23] Ian McKee states that for his work for Ipsos MORI: "I did not receive expenses, benefit or direct payment of any kind."^[24] Yet the simple fact is that a £100 donation was made on his behalf: reading McKee's explanation one would be led to believe that the two events were unconnected. McKee also states:

ComRes conducted this survey on behalf of a number of unspecified organisations, including various charities. On 30 April 2009, I received a cheque for £50 from ComRes made out, at my request, to the Wester

Hailes Health Agency. I sent this cheque to the Wester Hailes Health Agency on 12 May 2009. I did not benefit personally from the cheque.

On one level this seems fine, noble even, but are we being told that the ends justify the means here? McKee also stated that:

On 10 May 2009 I participated in an MSP panel survey for ComRes [...] ComRes conducted this survey on behalf of various companies in the field of finance [...] On 6 October 2009 I participated in an annual survey of Members of the Scottish Parliament for Ipsos MORI Scotland.

So here we have three different types of survey (four really if we count the 10 March 2009 *online* survey), all with unspecified clients, except, for some reason, where the clients were specified as being charities, while arguably the more required or desirable information to provide would specify the nature of the private business or indeed individual whose anonymity is being preserved — and why do we have the situation whereby charities are making circuitous donations to charities? When their representatives have dealings with big business many of the electorate might rather they did not play a game of blind man's bluff.

The ComRes MSP panel survey of 2008 (p.6) states that 50 MSPs were on the ComRes MSP Panel. [\[25\]](#) Note that we found substantially less (17) who disclosed they had been surveyed in the Register. So here we have an anomaly. In the methodology section (p.11) of the ComRes document it states:

ComRes surveyed 50 MSPs (39% of all MSPs) on the ComRes Scottish Parliament Panel between 15th April and 23rd June 2008 by self-completion postal questionnaire and online.

So we are left with the question why might some MSPs report these financial 'donations' and others not? The MSPs register of interests leaves us guessing. The website as a whole avoids this issue, needlessly and in error in my opinion. It might simply be that some MSPs were not paid, but payment, as Hawkins said earlier, is standard practice. [\[26\]](#)

But we have evidence that some 50 MSPs are regularly surveyed: four times a year [\[27\]](#) by the ComRes MSP Panel alone. If the 50 MSPs are paid £50 (as is standard) and this happens four times a year, that is £10,000 overall for one survey by one company — the figures for this type of money going through the Scottish Parliament could easily be far in excess of this modest estimate. We are not given the information to make a proper assessment. This failing should be remedied by a fuller study tracing and linking it to other aspects of the lobby/survey processes: a study of how this fits in with, and is part of a regular cycle, including how it relates to and might be timed to coincide with MSP's decision-making.

Beyond Scotland ComRes state they have the largest research panel of Westminster MPs ever created. Their panel is surveyed eight times a year and they guarantee responses from "a market leading minimum of 150 MPs per wave." [\[28\]](#) They also state that "clients commission bespoke individual question units on this survey, and

each question unit can test up to four statements.” ComRes offers clients a ‘full service package’ assisting with all question design, fieldwork management, through to providing a full analytical report outlining the findings of the research and putting them into a “practical context.” In the devolved assemblies this operates every six months, in June and November.[\[29\]](#) The careful avoidance of the term ‘Lobbying’ has been over-looked in ComRes’ partnership with Strategem to team up to conduct surveys of Northern Irish politicians (supposedly in accordance with the Market Research Society’s Code of Conduct). The Strategem website which explains the partnership has “Lobbing for the future” in its masthead to “to help reclaim that often debased term,”[\[30\]](#) and Strategem is described as “Northern Ireland’s first lobbying company” in its director, Quintin Oliver’s biography page.[\[31\]](#)

ComRes argue that online and paper surveys eliminates ‘interviewer effect’ where respondents may be influenced by personal contact, although again it is not just that influence effects are still pervasive, no survey can avoid them; but judging from other rhetoric the diminution of influence is not entirely unwanted if we take the *whole process*, inclusive of how the client uses ‘reliable results.’ into consideration. The survey companies want to have it both ways here: influence via insider knowledge is why the companies pay yet here we have this hiding behind pseudo-scientific terminology as if their ‘science’ was value-free. For instance ComRes adds:

Clients utilise the Panel to ascertain how they and their sector are perceived by MSPs; how successful their communications efforts have been; and how favourable MSPs are towards their organisation and its work.[\[32\]](#)

Even on this level, if cognizant with this assertion the MSPs could also be said to be influenced. The matter is simply not left there, it is on-going as we have seen in our previous glance at how the process of influence can take shape: influence is its *telos*. Or we are left with the conclusion that even although it happens four times a year (and is interspersed with other more targeted surveys) MSPs have no real idea what is going on or possibly view it favorably.

In fact the survey’s methodology (p.11) states that ComRes’ *survey design* (i.e. the way the questions are constructed, asked and so forth) is such that: “This helps organisations to further target their public affairs efforts.” That is one of the reasons the clients pay the money. Here influence is openly the *end* to which the survey is designed as a preliminary step towards informing the substance of future attempts at influence directly aimed at decision makers: the survey is simply part of this cycle. We must also realize that companies may use a panoply of methods and indeed access the findings of different survey companies to build up a very complete picture. The game is complex, personal contact and access its essence with financial transaction ubiquitous and integral. On personal contact, the 2009 Ipsos MORI survey of MSPs asked the question: “What are the most important things companies and organisations can do to develop and maintain good relations with MSPs?” and 26% (the second highest response) said ‘Personal Contact,’ 15% said ‘Regular Contact’ and 13% said ‘Maintain ongoing dialogue.’ This states it surveyed 73 MSPs (note only 17 have entries in the Register) from the September 3 to November 6. Interviews were conducted face-to-face. The MSPs are named except for three who wished to remain anonymous.[\[33\]](#)

Using the results of the survey Ipsos MORI then provide confidential reporting and recommendations to their clients which includes: overall Scottish Parliament results, Government and opposition results, individual party results, trend and comparative data, selected committees/spokespersons results, *client-identified* 'key MPs' group results, *transcripts* from open-ended questions and Ipsos MORI's interpretation of key results.[34] Clients can buy as many or as few questions on the survey as they wish, including 'complex, issue-specific questions.' [35] Concerning these core questions, the results are confidential as with client-specific questions.[36] Background questions focus on how 'to develop and maintain relations with MPs.' [37] The clients for Ipsos MORI include: Atkins, ASCO, Diageo Scotland, Lloyds Banking Group and Standard Life.[38] They state that:

For projects requiring specialist knowledge of particular areas, we often collaborate with academic experts. Most recently, we have worked with researchers from the University of Edinburgh, the University of Glasgow, the University of Stirling and the University of Strathclyde.[39]

Ipsos MORI state that as far as this wider survey goes, MPs are unaware of the client's identities and also state that their opinions are 'unattributable.' [40] That would seem contradicted by the provision of transcripts and the option of confidentiality, the targeting of 'selected committees/spokespersons results', and with 'Client-identified 'key MPs' group results.' They also say that:

Ipsos MORI understands the attitudes and opinions of elites whose views affect your company [...] our interviews amongst politicians, journalists and business leaders are conducted face-to-face allowing us to collect valuable and actionable verbatim commentary.[41]

Yet for MPs this is not lobbying.

MORI Scotland also conduct an annual survey of MPs, to find out how MPs prefer to *receive and access information*, what they read. The survey is said to form an important benchmark for business and organisations who want to monitor the *effectiveness of their communications* with the Scottish Parliament.[42] The MORI survey results are that the MPs read: The *Herald* 76%; *Scotland on Sunday* 73%; *Holyrood Magazine* 58%; *Good Morning Scotland* 87%; *Newsnight Scotland* 90%; *Holyrood* 62%; *www.news.bbc.co.uk* 65%.[43] If a company targets these areas they begin a process of positive feedback.

Returning to the survey/lobby system itself. What if one party was using this system to gain information about another, or one individual was at work here, or a foreign power or investigative journalist; why do MPs seem to have no desire to establish whether a company wished to influence the MP's decision on a particular committee? Should not the establishment of who was behind the survey (it is clear to the MP that a client was behind it) be a concern; should not the purposes to which the mystery client might put this information to and how it might affect them also be a consideration? Not if MPs knew this to be lobbying.

These annual surveys are remunerated as we have seen from the register of interests.^[44] Its purpose is to be used by business who buy questions, the price of a question on the ComRes MPs panel includes help with designing the question, as they state:

Seven times a year ComRes sends a postal questionnaire to MPs who have pre-agreed to take part in our surveys. Our clients commission questions on these surveys for a flat fee of £995 per question unit. These questions include up to four statements and take many forms. Popular types of question include “To what extent do you think that...” or “How effective or otherwise are...” or “What kind of contact, if any, do you remember having with...”

ComRes guarantees that 150 MPs will return a completed survey each time the panel is run. These MPs are representative of all political groups and regions in Parliament. ComRes can weight the data to make sure that they give a truly representative picture of views in Parliament.

We offer a full service package; this means that the price of a question on the ComRes MPs panel includes help with designing the question, and a full analytical report which explains the results in context. All results are available 5 weeks after fieldwork begins. ^[45]

Again, that is problematic in terms of the accuracy of the Register of Interest, which is beginning to look like it presents a very distorted view of what is taking place. And we also have the prospect of £52,500 being paid here (if it is £50 per MSP as would seem to be the case) which may well be unaccounted for along with other substantial sums whose amounts the public would be left guessing at should they wish to enquire.

Note too that ComRes claim they can guarantee 150 MSPs, so we have a regular relationship here, they are effectively on a retainer, and we do not know what other perquisites and emoluments might be grist for the mill and regarded as a special right or privilege enjoyed as a result of one’s position. And we must also see this in context, how it is normalised, made perfunctory, a part of bureaucracy.

How much money the survey companies are making out of this is another matter. Why they are being allowed to farm MSPs like this without public assent another too. Do they pay a fee (an access tax) to the public for this privilege? Would the public be offered such widespread and intimate access if we offer to pay?

In IPSOS’ client testimonials, which provide feedback received from clients about the efficacy of the MSPs survey, one assesses their performance as:

Flexible: Especially since we had specific objectives that were dovetailed in [...] Overall, they managed to create the illusion that we were the only client Ipsos MORI were working for on this project.^[46]

That means the survey also created the illusion that other companies were not part of the survey and creating such illusions are not a feature of a normal survey and neither are many of the other features we have identified.

[1] Previous surveys such as the Ipsos MORI, ‘Members Of The Scottish Parliament Annual Survey’ date back to 1999, see: <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oItemId=918>

[2] Ipsos MORI’s 2009 Annual survey of Members of the Scottish Parliament, comprises hour-long face-to-face interviews with over 60 MSPs, see: <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/offices/scotland/specareas/government.aspx>

[3] Theoretically, given the intimate contacts with the Conservative Party of several of the polling companies, we could make the assumption that the reason that no attempt was made to contact Conservatives was that their opinion could be assessed by other means—most likely within the Party.

[4] http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/MSP/MembersPages/keith_brown/roi.htm

[5] <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/apps2/msp/msphome/default.aspx#A>

[6] <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/apps2/msp/msphome/default.aspx#A>

[7] http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/MSP/MembersPages/james_kelly/roi.htm

[8] http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/MSP/MembersPages/johann_lamont/roi.htm

[9] http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/MSP/MembersPages/marilyn_livingstone/roi.htm

[10] http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/MSP/MembersPages/michael_mcmahon/roi.htm

[11] http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/MSP/MembersPages/david_whitton/roi.htm

[12] http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/MSP/MembersPages/ian_mckee/roi.htm

[13] http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/MSP/MembersPages/david_whitton/roi.htm

[14] http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/MSP/MembersPages/rhoda_grant/roi.htm

[15] http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/MSP/MembersPages/iain_gray/roi.htm

[16] http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/MSP/MembersPages/george_foulkes/roi.htm

[17] <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld/ldreg/reg09.htm>

[18] <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1130012/The-noble-Lords-special-interests.html>

[19] *The Sunday Herald*, 2009, September 6.

[20] Several of these types of companies are engaged in publications of some sort, which includes writing by various MPs, see:

<http://www.govnet.co.uk/publications/moderngov/contributors> .

[21] <http://www.heraldscotland.com/foulkes-claimed-pound-45-000-to-stay-in-own-london-flat-1.828695>

[22] *Scotsman*, 2009, 31 December <http://news.scotsman.com/edinburgh/Scottish-Parliament-bails-out-business.5948784.jp>

[23] The range and variation is also notable with Jackie Baillie's explanation being possibly the most confusing and arguably evasive.

[24] http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/MSP/MembersPages/ian_mckee/roi.htm

[25]

<http://www.comres.co.uk/resources/3/Devolution%20to%20Independence%20Paper%20Nov%202008.pdf>

[26] Members of the UK Parliament seem also to receive payment for panel surveys see: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmregmem/091125/memi17.htm>

[27]

<http://www.comres.co.uk/resources/3/Devolution%20to%20Independence%20Paper%20Nov%202008.pdf> see p. 11.

[28] http://www.comres.co.uk/political_reputational.aspx

[29] http://www.comres.co.uk/political_reputational.aspx

[30] <http://www.stratagem-ni.com/about.aspx>

[31] http://www.stratagem-ni.com/people_specific.aspx?dataid=355065 Stratagem also work with PoliticsDirect in London and Newsdirect in Edinburgh, see: <http://www.stratagem-ni.com/our-values.aspx?dataid=355898> . Several of Stratagem's staff are members of Common Purpose.

[32]

<http://www.comres.co.uk/resources/3/Devolution%20to%20Independence%20Paper%20Nov%202008.pdf>

[33] <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/Polls/scotland-msps-survey-2009-maintaining-relations-with-MSPs.pdf>

[34] <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/offices/scotland/specareas/mspssurvey/analysisandreporting.aspx>

[35] <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/offices/scotland/specareas/mspssurvey.aspx>

[36] <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/offices/scotland/specareas/mspssurvey/surveycontent.aspx>

[37] <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/offices/scotland/specareas/mspssurvey/surveycontent.aspx>

[38] <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/offices/scotland/ourclients.aspx>

[39] <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/offices/scotland/ourclients.aspx>

[40] <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/offices/scotland/specareas/mspssurvey.aspx>

[41] <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchspecialisms/reputationresearch/kit.aspx> See also: <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/RepCenKey-Influencer-Tracking-Timetable-2010.pdf>

[42] See: Members Of The Scottish Parliament Annual Survey, Published: 13 February 2004

<http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oItemId=918>

[43] See: <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/Archive/Polls/msp.pdf>

[44] http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/msp/membersPages/ian_mckee/roi.htm

[45] <http://www.comres.co.uk/resources/3/THE%20COMRES%20MPs%20PANEL%20EXPLAINED.pdf>

[46] <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/offices/scotland/specareas/mspssurvey/whatclientsay.aspx#>

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‘...There is still all to play for’

We should also note that the Scottish Parliament itself commissions the survey companies to conduct its research,^[1] including Ipsos MORI running the Scottish Social Policy Monitor. This is a “multi-client, quarterly survey designed for organisations to collect regular robust data on the characteristics of the Scottish population.”^[2] Ipsos MORI also compiled the report ‘Selling Alcohol Responsibly’ for the Home Office 24 September 2009,^[3] and although they carry out this work they are free to represent many of the players in the game while plying the decision-makers with money. Surely we should view this process with some suspicion.

To complicate things further, in the UK Parliament, ComRes also conducted a (2009) survey on lobbying the “Lobbying and the PASC [Commons Public Administration Select Committee] report... Views from within Parliament.”^[4] Its key recommendations were:

The creation of a statutory register listing all individual lobbyists and the names of all their clients;

That this statutory register should contain details of all contact between lobbyists and MPs, including diary records and minutes of meetings;

The establishment of an independent watchdog, funded by lobbyists, to monitor ethical behaviour in the industry.

Most of that could be obviated by the survey/lobby system.

The ComRes Parliamentary Panel (January 19 and February 9 by self-completion postal questionnaire) referred to earlier, which was claimed to be the largest of its kind ever established with 275 MPs who pre-agreed to take part, offers an explanation of how the survey works in its “MPs Panel Explained” Information Sheet.’ This notes the connection with lobbying and guarantees media exposure:

Clients also use our panel to develop their public affairs and campaign strategy. Results show them what existing views on a particular issue in Parliament are, and whether there is a role, or a need, for public affairs work in a given area. The results themselves can be a powerful public affairs tool, securing targeted media coverage for an organisation’s issues.^[5]

Yet this is not regarded as lobbying. ComRes also state here that it has an established presence in all of the devolved regions and *guarantees* a response rate of 50 MSPs: it states that each of these multi-client surveys operates every six months, in June and November (emphasis added):

Clients commission question units on any one, or all three of the ComRes devolved legislature surveys, with each question unit testing up to four statements. The flat fee

per question unit includes ComRes's full service offering, with expert support at every stage of the research process and a *fully actionable analysis*.^[6]

Yet this is not regarded as lobbying. ComRes also studied the devolved Parliaments with the (2009) 'The future of the lobbying industry...' ^[7] observing that: "For those seeking to influence the future of the industry, there is still all to play for across the UK." MSPs are said to be much more likely to support the current system of self regulation, to oppose a register containing details of their contact with lobbyists and are also supportive of the creation of a register and a watchdog (controlled by the industry).

Although as far as Scotland goes between a third and a half of MSPs "stay in the middle ground on these issues — indicating either a desire to steer clear of the debate, or a knowledge gap in this area."

^[1] See:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmregmem/091125/memi17.htm> which lists surveys by Ipsos on why Edinburgh residents refused the congestion charge (probably with the purpose of changing their minds); and one on 'adult entertainment' up by Scottish Ministers to review the scope and impact of adult entertainment activity, see: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/04/24111914/5> ; other surveys explore the prevalence of driving under the influence of drugs, see: <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oItemId=555>

^[2] <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oItemId=553>

^[3] <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/alcohol-code-of-practice/ipsos-mori-alcohol-report2835.pdf?view=Binary>

^[4] http://www.comres.co.uk/resources/3/APPC_views%20within%20Parliament_March09_final_.pdf

^[5] <http://www.comres.co.uk/resources/3/THE%20COMRES%20MPs%20PANEL%20EXPLAINED.pdf>

^[6] http://www.comres.co.uk/political_reputational.aspx

^[7] http://www.comres.co.uk/resources/3/Lobbying_devolved%20report_June09.pdf

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The Council and ‘Bread and Butter’

Andrew Cooper, one of the main Directors of Populus, is part of the management committee of the British Polling Council (BPC). The Founder members of the BPC were Comres, ICM, Ipsos MORI, NOP, ORB, TNS/System 3 and YouGov.^[1]

The BPC was launched in 2004, other members of the Management Committee include its President, Professor John Curtice from the University of Strathclyde and Nick Moon the Managing Director of GfK. Members and Company representatives include YouGov’s Peter Kellner, David Cowling of the BBC and David Butler of Nuffield College Oxford — who once described psephology as a ‘practical joke’ on a 1964 BBC election programme.

As can be imagined from such an august sounding body its membership are drawn from a representative sample of the profession.^[2] But what is the ‘profession’ if we look at it as part of the cycle we have noted: when does polling become lobbying or reporting on it become part of political propaganda and public diplomacy? We are left to take the protagonist’s word for it that some sort of impartiality prevails in every aspect of their work, because just like MP’s and Bankers they are self-regulated. But there is a basic problem with this — trust.

As we have already noted, Populus’ and the BPC’s Andrew Cooper was described by the *Financial Times* as part of David Cameron’s ‘government in waiting’^[3] and it also describes his journey from the London School of Economics, to the Social Market Foundation think-tank, to work for the Tories (as head of polling) and then director of strategy during William Hague’s leadership, noting that he left in 1999 to form Populus, an organization that amalgamates these roles. It also asserts that his influence on Conservative policy formation concerns assessing the “mood of the country and how different messages might play with core electoral groups.”^[4] Cooper is quoted as describing this activity as similar to his student days:

Do you remember what Danny [Finkelstein] and I used to do – having funny political ideas, trying to implement them, and joking about politics? Well, we’re still doing that, only now someone’s paying us.^[5]

Indeed, but it is highly problematic to separate out who is in what position in the lobbying world for the purposes of analyzing its components. Some lobbyists have stood for parliament: Nick Clegg being a prime example.^[6] As we have seen, one of the problems in the MSPs record of their interests is the grey area of who the client is for the survey/lobby: and at times the MSPs seem vague and disingenuous in their reporting: possibly at times for good reason, but there seems no call to rectify this.

But the Scottish Parliament’s own reports acknowledged that, for example, the tobacco industry tried several ‘no-holds-barred’ efforts to recruit scientists in developed countries around the world who would criticise the *science* on second-hand smoke, cast doubt on whether it harms people and “prolong the controversy.” This

was coupled by Philip Morris's intention to create a foundation that would "become THE scientific authority on a wide range of human concerns, thus putting itself above WHO, FAO and other organisations who restrict themselves to narrower fields."^[7] Philip Morris did this (and much else) using the lobbying company APCO Worldwide. So the point is: if PR companies will go to the lengths of fabricating organisations which pervert our understanding, why should we even take an organization like the BPC seriously, why are they left to their own devices?

The BPC says it is an association of polling organisations that publish polls. Its objectives are:

...to ensure standards of disclosure designed to provide consumers of survey results that enter the public domain have an adequate basis for judging the reliability and validity of the results. Through full disclosure the Council aims to encourage the highest professional standards in public opinion polling and to advance the understanding, among politicians, the media and general public, of how polls are conducted and how to interpret poll results. The BPC will also provide interested parties with advice on best practice in the conduct and reporting of polls.

It also adds that while the words 'poll' and 'survey' are used to describe a variety of data collection exercises, the BPC is concerned only with polls and surveys "that set out to measure the opinions of representative samples". Possibly, this concern with the design of sampling methods and weighting procedures has obscured the purposes to which these can be put by some of the BPC's members, but it would be interesting to hear their opinions on the survey/lobby.^[8]

But by what understanding of reason and logic is the *continual*, systematic release of over-simplified political polling data in the mainstream media (coupled with the other processes of targeted lobbying) somehow taken to be objective and not leading? The sound bite and wild extrapolations are designed to influence an election: this is the *telos* of the polling companies' employment and affiliation, why they came into existence, and this and similar remarks could be made about the motives of private companies who employ them. But the BPC seem unconcerned and indeed are made up of 'expert' media pundits who are paid for their many appearances.

The BPC's Nick Moon works for the government^[9] and is part of the large editorial advisory board of *The International Journal of Market Research*, other journals such as *PR Week* regularly outline the confluence of the PR, Lobbying, press and political milieux, for example:

The Ledbury Group aims to change attitudes towards brands or companies via 'thought-leadership campaigns'. It has already secured Nestlé as a launch client. The outfit will be run by Michael Portillo's former press secretary Malcolm Gooderham and Nick Bent, previously special adviser to Tessa Jowell at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The two men are backed by an eight-strong panel of consultants that will work on accounts. It includes: director of comms Lucy Jackson, Former director of comms Esra Erkel-Paler M& C

Saatchi MD Damian Collins Populus (polling firm) founder Andrew Cooper and Former *Mail on Sunday* editor Jonathan Holborow.

The Ledbury Group also includes Benjamin Wegg-Prosser, a former aide to Peter Mandelson.^[10] Set up by Gooderham and Bent, *PR Week* state that in 2008, it ‘managed to wrestle’ ASDA’s public affairs account from Bell Pottinger Public Affairs.^[11]

Edelman, one of the world’s largest independent Public Relations Agencies,^[12] also offer us an April 2009 video of the ‘Edelman and Populus Budget Breakfast 2009’, which (yet again) included Andrew Cooper, of Populus; John McFall MP; Phillip Hammond MP; Peter Riddell of the *Times*; and John Cridland, CBI. Here the talk is of ‘private sector diplomacy’ co-operation and a ‘light touch’ of business by government.^[13]

Of their activities, Edelman state:

The interests of your business can be critically affected by decisions taken daily in Westminster and Whitehall. Edelman provides clients with intelligence on these decisions, understanding the imperative behind them, identifying who is influencing them and ensuring our clients’ interests are represented — that is our bread and butter.^[14]

To illustrate their reach, alongside this they provide a photograph of Nicholas Burns, with a caption that tells us he was a former Under Secretary of State at the State Department in the Bush administration and now Chair of Edelman’s Global Advisory Board. Below that is a link to the National Defence Association (UKNDA),^[15] which we encountered earlier and which Edelman ‘launched.’

[1] <http://www.britishpollingcouncil.org/officers.html>

[2] Ipsos MORI (Simon Atkinson), Dods Polling (Matt Bricken), Populus (Andrew Cooper), TNS System 3 (Chris Eynon), Comres (Andrew Hawkins), ORB (Gordon Heald), Marketing Means (Anna-Marie Hill), YouGov (Peter Kellner), mruk research (Ivor Knox), GfK NOP (Nick Moon), Harris Interactive (George H. Terhanian). Officers serving on the Sub-Committee on Disclosure are: Simon Atkinson (Ipsos MORI), Nick Moon (GfK NOP), David Butler (Fellow of Nuffield College Oxford), David Cowling (BBC), Peter Kellner (YouGov), David McKie (ex Deputy Editor of The Guardian), Adam Phillips (Past Chairman of the Market Research Society and Chairman of ESOMAR’s Professional Standards Committee), Colin Rallings (Professor at the Local Government Chronicle Election Centre at University of Plymouth) and Peter Riddell (The Times).

[3] Cooper *qua* an objective pollster, was quoted in the *Financial Times* (18 February, 2010) saying that Cameron’s background “has much less impact [with voters] than one might suppose [...] Most people think that all [members of parliament] live elite lives and went to elite schools.” He also regularly attacks Brown in the *Times*: “Brown is tarnished in the eyes of many voters” (*Times*, 23 September, 2006) and many other media outlets.

- [4] http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/ac5f0298-af38-11de-ba1c-00144feabdc0,dwp_uuid=b487eab2-b333-11de-ac13-00144feab49a.html
- [5] <http://www2.lse.ac.uk/LSEMagazine/pdf/Winter%202008/Media.pdf> Finkelstein was also part of the SMF.
- [6] <http://blogs.ft.com/westminster/2007/11/nick-clegg-and-html/> See also: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/mar/14/david-cameron-embarrassment-ordinary-candidate-lobbying-links>
- [7] <http://209.85.229.132/search?q=cache:gpP9-I5RjjkJ:www.ashscotland.org.uk/ash/files/ASH%20Scotland%20Smoking%20Health%20and%20Social%20Care%20Bill%20Written%20Evidence.doc+andrew+cooper+populus+%252B+survey+lobby&cd=9&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=uk>
- [8] <http://www.britishpollingcouncil.org/statement.html>
- [9] <http://www.nextstepsstudy.org.uk/who-is-the-study-for.asp>
- [10] http://www.spinprofiles.org/index.php/The_Ledbury_Group
- [11] <http://www.prweek.com/uk/news/search/802977/Ledbury-Group-brings-advisers-expansion/>
- [12] Edelman are an affiliate of Luther Pendragon in London.
- [13] <http://www.edelman.co.uk/edelman-insights/archive/budget-breakfast-2009-0>
- [14] <http://www.edelman.co.uk/what-we-do/public-affairs>
- [15] <http://www.edelman.co.uk/case-studies/national-defence-association-uknda>

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GovNet — Parliament

GovNet, mentioned earlier, has an advisory board of MPs (most of whom are preparing to leave Parliament) including George Foulkes, the (2005) Shadow secretary of state for Scotland; Eleanor Laing;^[11] John Smith's former PPS and former chief whip, Hilary Armstrong; Archy Kirkwood (Baron Kirkwood of Kirkhope) also famous for his expenses claims such as £94 for a lavatory paper holder^[2] and Sir Robert Worcester — the Founder of MORI (Market & Opinion Research International), and chairman of the advisory board of Ipsos Public Affairs Worldwide.

Worcester's and MORI's contractual relationship with the Labour party goes back to the 1960s and is usually associated with their frequent changes of image. The party started commissioning polls from Worcester in 1970 and he was formally employed by Labour's National Executive Committee.^[3]

GovNet publish a range of magazines on Defence, Criminal Justice and government, with a decidedly insider feel about them (contributors of *ModernGov* include Nick Clegg, Ed Milliband, Ed Balls, Peter Mandleon etc.);^[4] they also organise events which offer access to “high-profile leaders and policy-makers who act as our speakers;”^[5] they offer ‘training’ which aims to deliver “an understanding of the workings of Government, Parliament and the wider Civil Service,”^[6] and offer inside information on “the mechanisms of government at all levels” and a “knowledge of the workings of Parliament and the Parliamentary process” and “the mechanisms of the various sectors and future policy direction” via a “Network with high-profile speakers, trainers and fellow delegates.”^[7] Another aspect of its operation is ‘Inside Government’ (the same advisory board) which offers “information-led, exclusive forums covering topical, current government issues.” Designed for those working in the public, private and third sectors, this gives policy briefings by “key government representatives the opportunity to discuss critical issues in an environment intended to foster discussion, debate and information-sharing.”^[8]

The website states that for their *ModernGov* magazine “Our audience of top public sector officials includes key decision-makers and budget-holders from project to policy level.” In the training section^[9] there is a link to **Buying Solutions**,^[10] which states that it is “the national procurement partner for UK public services,” part of the out-sourcing of the Office of Government Commerce, this is where GovNet's clients are led.

A simple observation to make is that the *mélange* of consultancies, lobbyists, pollsters and MPs openly tout for business. But it may need to be pointed out to anyone visiting GovNet's website that this is an outside private business and not part of government — the defence would probably be along the lines of they are rather like someone borrowing chess pieces to play a different game: but the advisory board earn money from selling inside information. Another similar aspect of Hilary Armstrong's role on GovNet was used by *The Sunday Times* (February 24, 2008) in a report titled ‘Ex-ministers cash in on days of power,’ which noted that 28 former Labour ministers had “cashed in on their connections in government and Whitehall by taking jobs in

the private sector.” An estimated 13 of those who have accepted jobs are said to be still serving MPs. But the article contains no explanation of what GovNet Communications does, it is merely said to be a “publisher”, nor are its connections to ‘Buying Solutions’ outlined.^[11]

When Greg Palast’s work exposing how integral lobbying was to New Labour in 1998, a small part of this involved Armstrong, then the Local Government Minister, who walked out of a meeting with journalists as Palast’s revelations reached a local government conference in Bournemouth. A BBC correspondent asked Armstrong about the Local Government Association (LGA) employing lobbyist Ben Lucas and suggested that Lucas had told the association that “he would be able to get hold a copy of the forthcoming White Paper on local government before publication.” Armstrong said: “No one other than you from the BBC has suggested that anyone from the government has been involved in deals [...] It is a slur, it is outrageous. It is not true. I do deals with no one and I have been straight with delegates here.” According to the BBC report, it then emerged that the LGA were to meet to discuss the future of Lucas, a director of lobbyist company LLM, who they had employed on a six-month contract.^[12]

In relation to this, Armstrong is also quoted in the Campaign for Freedom of Information’s, analysis of the government’s proposed reforms to the Local Government Bill. Here the provisions on advance access to reports relating to forthcoming decisions of individual executive members are argued to be weak. Executives may frequently discuss forthcoming decisions which are delegated to individual members or officers. No decision-making meeting — to which the public would have access — would ever take place. According to the minister, an executive may:

...meet as a group of executive members, each of whom will have personal responsibility for an area of decision taking.

Such meetings would apparently be private under the draft regulations.^[13] In her statement that: “Committee meetings may be open to the public, but too often that is not where real decisions are made,” we begin to gain a fuller picture of how democracy works to *exclude* the public and that in the case of the MPs who make up GovNet it is made to work by *including* the lobbyists.

Indeed Armstrong’s role in government/business was mentioned in the Public Administration Committee’s (January 2008) deliberations on ‘Lobbying: Access and influence in Whitehall,’ which of course notes that “Lobbying activity in the United Kingdom is subject to no specific external regulation.”^[14] This also noted:

The main difference between the CIPR [Chartered Institute of Public Relations] Code and the Codes of the APPC [Association of Professional Political Consultants] and PRCA [Public Relations Consultants Association] is that the former does not require the public disclosure of clients’ names, while the latter do. This issue is at the heart of debate within the lobbying world about the appropriate limits to transparency and the extent to which lobbyists have a duty to inform the wider public about their activities.

The importance of duty and codes of practice have a tendency to be offset by levels of cognitive dissonance proportional to the sums of money and methods of facilitation undertaken in the lobbying world. Although the industry is quite forthcoming in its work for charity, as the Committee's report noted: for those who use public affairs firms outside both the APPC and the PRCA, a client's right to privacy was paramount, and if they do not wish to be named in public they will not be. APPC and PRCA members (which are consultancies) are also required not to "employ any MP, MEP, sitting Peer or any member of the Scottish Parliament or the National Assembly of Wales or the Northern Ireland Assembly or the Greater London Assembly." But former members, spouses and so on are out with these codes, as, presumably is the 'employment' of MPs and so on via a survey. The elasticity here included that while MPs are forbidden from acting "as the representative of [an] outside body in regard to any matters to be transacted in Parliament" and from making "any approach ... to Ministers or servants of the Crown" in return for money or other benefits. This does not prevent Members from offering paid advice to outside bodies, as parliamentary advisers, or from representing their interests outside Parliament and Government. To add to the complexity, the Committee noted:

The central problem is that *the three umbrella groups have an in-built conflict of interest, in that they attempt to act both as trade associations for the lobbyists themselves and as the regulators of their members' behaviour.* The conditions are not currently in place for genuinely effective self-regulation of lobbying activity by those who carry out this activity. [emphasis in the original]

I will now turn to my concluding remarks.

[1] Laing was caught up in the expenses row and paid back £25,000 while claiming to have done nothing wrong, oddly she requested that the money be donated to charity: see http://www.eleanorlaing.com/12102009_expenses_statement *The Times* noted that she avoided "a £180,000 capital gains tax bill on the sale of two Westminster flats in 2008." See: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/article6875270.ece>

[2] <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/mps-expenses/5431827/MPs-expenses-Lord-Kirkwood-did-up-flat-on-expenses-then-sold-it-cheaply-to-daughter.html> The report states that: "When he made the claims, Lord Kirkwood, then Sir Archy Kirkwood, sat on the House of Commons commission which was overseeing the first publication of basic details of MPs' expenses. As the details were published in October 2004, he said that he welcomed the fact that "taxpayers can really see how their money is being spent."

[3] Dennis Kavanagh (1982) 'Election Campaigns and Opinion Polls: British Political parties and the use of Private Polls', *Parliamentary Affairs*, XXXV: p. 267-281.

[4] <http://www.govnet.co.uk/publications/moderngov/contributors>

[5] <http://www.govnet.co.uk/events/why-attend>

[6] <http://www.govnet.co.uk/training> Speakers include Baroness Ramsay of Cartvale (now openly described as a MI6 agent, Sir Menzies Campbell, Stephen Pound, Michael Meacher, John McTernan with several others drawn from the Civil Service: <http://www.moderngov.info/speakers>

[7] <http://www.moderngov.info/courses>

[8] <http://www.moderngov.info/govnet>

[9] <http://www.govnet.co.uk/training>

[10] <http://www.buyingsolutions.gov.uk/aboutus/>

[11] <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/article3423486.ece> A similar organisation to GovNet is the events organiser/publiser/lobbying business Neil Stewart Associates: see <http://pinkindustry.wordpress.com/2007/12/03/charlie-burgess/>

[12] http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/128931.stm

[13] Local Government Bill Briefing for Report Stage 4 & 5 July 2000 Open Meetings, Access to Information and Disclosure Offences see: <http://www.cfoi.org.uk/pdf/lgbreptbriefing.pdf>

[14] <http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmpubadm/36/3606.htm> See also: <http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmpubadm/36/36i.pdf>

(10)

Concluding observations and recommendations

- (1) A system of conflict of interest underlies the present widespread system of surveying MSPs and arguably other MPs. A system of using surveys to lobby MSPs has been designed to obviate the rules on lobbying and possibly those on party political donations.
- (2) The public do not know the extent of this and the official reporting process presents a distorted, incomplete and misleading version of events. It does not adequately record who has been surveyed or on whose behalf or for what purposes. It is entangled in the process of lobbying by outside organisations of behalf of their clients, mostly big business.
- (3) The amount of money that has been sent to political party associations is comparatively large in total although this is not transparent in the Register. It is possibly in excess of £300,000, yet would appear as unsolicited donations. This has been provided on a regular basis for several years without any real public scrutiny or discussion in the Parliament at a time when hundreds of political representatives have been disgraced over financial irregularities and politicians generally are trying to win back public confidence. Very little willingness, on the part of Parliament concerning discussion of the nature of what amounts to a long-standing business relationship is in evidence.
- (4) Underwriting of charity work by MSPs by PR companies has become a form of self-promotion for particular MSPs when in reality it contains elements of a disguised form of influence by business lobbies.
- (5) Political connections of survey companies are surprisingly one-sided. The extent of the lobby represents a convoluted money flow using a wide 'public affairs' nexus which MPs and MSPs actively contribute to by forming private companies offering access to parliament.

It would be of general interest to hear how those involved in this system would defend it against the critique offered here. I would also request that readers who were interested in what I have had to say here make a comment here and/or draw these matters to a wider audience.

William Clark

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