



British Government Officials Accept Works of Art and Gifts from Corrupt Organisations

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There will be yet another sigh and rolling of the eyes from the general public on reading that Her Majesty's Treasury bosses are, amongst others, routinely accepting gifts and expensive dinners with lobbyists from banks even whilst they were being investigated for some of the biggest financial crimes in history such as market rigging.

The British Bankers Association (BBA) provided gifts and hospitality on 21 occasions with the permanent secretary to the Treasury Sir Nicholas Macpherson and his deputy John Kingsman.

Amid continued retail banking market [investigations](#) and serious market manipulations investigations by the authorities into the non-stop illegal activities of the banking industry, senior civil servants were quite happy accepting gifts from the lobbyists of the very same banks involved. In fact, it seems that officials accepted freebies from Barclays and HSBC who are both members of the very same BBA which have been fined by the Financial Conduct Authority on no less than 49 occasions since 2012.

In addition, the [report](#) from the National Audit Office reveals other senior civil servants are 'coying' up and happy to receive frequent hospitality and gifts from arms manufacturers. It highlights that MoD officials accepted gifts totalling around £100,000 last year.

Again, the irony seems lost of these officials. Recently, many critics and protest groups have been highlighting the fact that Britain supplies weaponry to nations with appalling human rights records. Their customers created some of the world's most dire human rights disasters that ended in apartheid, genocide and ethnic cleansing in the Middle East and Africa. Arms manufacturer BAE Systems, lavished officials on 581 occasions alone.

[Campaign Against Arms Trade](#) spokesman Andrew Smith said

"This is another example of the politically intimate and compromising relationship between arms companies and Whitehall. These companies wouldn't be buying these gifts and spending this money unless they expected something in return."

Overall, thousands of expensive dinners were accepted, in fact over 2,600, many at five star hotels and restaurants. Amongst the gifts were bottles of champagne, tickets to sporting and cultural events and electrical items such as iPads. It appears that some even accepted expensive works of art, tours of the Warner Bros Harry Potter Studio, Fortnum and Mason

hampers and exclusive Mont Blanc pens.

In a show of hypocrisy, Secretary of State for Health, Jeremy Hunt was extremely vocal in highlighting that such conflicts of interest must not be present in state owned assets such as the [NHS](#) for instance. Hunt declared very publicly that senior medical staff will be forced to declare all gifts and hospitality they receive from drug companies or face the sack and even the threat of jail for not doing so.

PM David Cameron and Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt were [among 64 Tory MPs](#) named in a study by Unite in 2014 where one in five Coalition MPs (2010-15) had links with private firms who could profit from the Government's NHS reforms. Jeremy Hunt [received](#) £32,920 from hedge fund baron Andrew Law, a major investor in healthcare firms.

The culture of conflict of interest gifts is confirmed in the NAO's research that reveals seventeen government departments accepted a total of 3,413 corporate gifts to the value of over £150,000 with the most frequent of donors being PwC and Deloitte, the City of London Corporation and arms manufacturer BAE Systems.

HMRC have been in the frame in recent years for their very 'corporate friendly' and relaxed atmosphere provided to some of the biggest organisations in the world that pay very little tax here in Britain. It is not entirely surprising to see HMRC, who were found to have accepted hospitality from 400 separate organisations featuring in this report.

National Audit Office chief Amyas Morse even confirmed that a culture of gift giving is to be expected, but did at least acknowledge that the practice can lead to a risk of conflicts of interest.

"Public officials are sometimes offered gifts and hospitality by external stakeholders which it is reasonable for them to accept. This can, however, present a risk of actual or perceived conflicts of interest, and undermine value for money or affect government's reputation. While most, but not all, cases declared by officials appear on the face of it to be justifiable in the normal course of business, we found some weaknesses in the oversight and control of gifts and hospitality. This needs to be addressed by the Cabinet Office and departments" - Morse said.

Contrast the NAO's perspective from that of an MP. One has enforced threats of dismissal and prison for not declaring gifts much more than a calendar, whilst back in the office, MP's and civil servant colleagues are accepting five star hotel dinners, hampers and works of art from some of the most corrupt organisations in the world.

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