

Lord Venal of Leaze talks to John Problem.

Lord Venal of Leaze recently decided that much of the paid consulting work he does for businesses and foreign governments is, in his own word, "inappropriate." Following this he decided to explain to John Problem how he and his fellow Lords were able to influence legislation in the British parliament. He was at pains to make it clear that such work was only in the interests of efficient government, and that the remuneration was a side issue.

JP: Well, my Lord, thank you for this delightful tea in these august surroundings.

Lord V: You're welcome, Problem. I have most of my meetings with outsiders here in the House Dining Room. All above board, eh? Of course, some of the meetings require more privacy, so we go to Gordon's place.

JP: Good Heavens! You mean Number Ten? With the Prime Minister?

Lord V: No, no! Gordon Ramsay! The chappie with the restaurants. Not that blighter Brown. Wouldn't be seen dead with him.

JP: Oh. Sorry.

Lord V: That's the problem with you media types. You see a conspiracy in every corner. Now. You want to know about my consultancies, right?

JP: Yes. How many do you have? Paying ones I mean.

Lord V: Not entirely sure. Think it's about 17. What I do know is that the income - excluding expenses - is a little over a million a year. More or less.

JP: A million pounds a year?

Lord V: Well, it's obviously not going to be pennies, is it?

JP: That's about £60,000 a consultancy, on average.

Lord V: And good value, too. I promise you. I've never had a complaint.

JP: May I ask who the consulting is for?

Lord V: Of course. Here's a list.

JP: Russia, the Maldives, Sarkozy, National Federation of Air Rifles, ChipattisRus, Lower Polynesia, Governor Palin, National Lion Parks, FIPA. What's FIPA?

Lord V: Federation of International Pawnbrokers' Associations. Big payers, they are. Anyway, you can read the rest later. Let's get on with it.

JP: An impressive list, sir. But what exactly do you do for them?

Lord V: Change any piece of legislation going through parliament which disadvantages them.

JP: How do you do that?

Lord V: You've got to understand that I don't do anything that's illegal. Oh no. I don't use my position for monetary gain. Oh no. I work within the rules but rules are meant to be bent sometimes, aren't they?

JP: Are there any difficult rules in the House of Lords?

Lord V: That's exactly it! There aren't! Most perspicacious of you, Problem. Further, dear boy, I'm not a lobbyist. Oh no. Nor a PR chappie. Certainly not. I'm a doer. A sorter-outer. Um. A problem solver. Yes. That's it.

JP: How do you solve these people's problems?

Lord V: I table questions, I speak in debates on subjects that affect my clients. My friends, I should say. And I table amendments. And I influence people who draft the legislation. Suggesting exemptions and so on. Which favour my friends.

JP: Whom do you influence?

Lord V: It's the little chappies way down in the work chain who actually do the work. Civil servants. They're the johnnies one talks to.

JP: Oh. So you don't influence Ministers or Secretaries. Mandy or Jacqui for example.

Lord V: Good God, no! Far too prosy, they are. Far too 'holier than thou.' And anyway they can't see the wood for the trees. No, no. It's the little chappie that counts.

JP: So, let me get this right. The country or company that wants to influence British legislation, pays you to talk to some civil servant who then drafts

what you want. And which you support in debate.

Lord V: Exactly!

JP: Don't you ever feel, in a way, that you are betraying the British people by acting in this manner?

Lord V: Oh, come on, Problem! Don't be naive. We're not in the Nineteenth Century now, you know. Look about you. The Commons lot. The City. A chap has to look after himself. And so does a Lord. Well, there goes my Blackberry. Nice to have met you, dear boy. My secretary will invoice you later.