
Treasury Select Committee Elections 2010

June 1 2010

Select committees offer coalition counterweight by Peter Riddell

© 2010 Times

Democracy has arrived at Westminster. The election of the 23 chairmen of the Commons select committees next week has produced a change in behaviour as MPs seek support across the chamber from members of other parties, rather than just their own. MPs are having to strike up new alliances. This manifestation of the new politics is nothing to do with the formation of the coalition, though it has been given added importance by the existence of the new Government. So who gets elected on June 9 will matter well beyond the Palace of Westminster.

The 23 chairmen of the committees, which monitor the work of Whitehall departments as well as public accounts and administration, will have a crucial role in ensuring that the activities of the coalition are properly scrutinised. The danger when two parties form a coalition is that public debate is narrowed as two opposition parties are reduced to one. This puts an extra emphasis on Commons committees holding ministers to account.

Over the past 31 years, the departmental select committees have ensured that ministers, civil servants and public bodies such as the *Bank of England* have had to explain their actions and policies in public. For instance, the *Treasury Committee* has ensured over the past two years that the main players in the banking crisis justified themselves. The process is far from perfect, with grandstanding by MPs who are sometimes poorly briefed and attend irregularly. But, at its best, it can ensure open debate.

A concern has been that the membership of the committees and, in particular, their chairmen have been insufficiently independent because their selection has been influenced by the party whips. Even so, not all chairmen have followed the party line. The Tony Wright committee on Commons reform made one of its main recommendations the election of select committee chairmen by the Commons as a whole, with other members being elected by "whatever transparent and democratic method they choose".

The balance of membership of the 11-strong committees is related to the proportion of MPs each party has in the Commons. These ratios are also used to fix the number of committees chaired by each party. The Speaker announces the allocation and then the party whips negotiate about which party gets which committee. The government side gets Defence, Foreign Affairs and Treasury, while a leading opposition MP always chairs the *Public Accounts Committee*.

Sunday, 6 June 2010

Tory right makes push for power on select committees by Jane Merrick

© 2010 The Independent

David Cameron and the coalition government are facing an organised campaign by the Tory right to secure the most influential chairmanships of House of Commons select committees, it emerged last night. Party insiders revealed there was a slate of candidates in operation among members of three right-wing groups of Tory MPs, forming a powerful block vote of support for candidates on the right. The move is significant because, if effective, it could see a string of select committees run by right-wingers with the potential to cause difficulty for the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition.

Since the creation of select committees under Margaret Thatcher's government, membership has been chosen by party whips, but next week MPs from all parties will vote in a secret ballot for committee chairmen, with votes on other members coming later in the session. As the lead party in government, the Conservatives are earmarked for the majority of chairmanships - including the powerful Treasury and Defence committees.

The Conservative right wing has already flexed its muscles over the election of the chairman of the backbench 1922 Committee. Last month the Prime Minister was forced to back down over his proposal for frontbenchers to vote on the leadership of the committee in the face of a threatened revolt. Graham Brady, who resigned from Mr Cameron's front bench three years ago over policy on grammar schools, was elected chairman of the committee.

George Osborne, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, continues to grapple with a rebellion by right-wing MPs over the coalition's proposed increase to capital gains tax. Three right-wing factions - the No Turning Back, 92 and Cornerstone groups - were instrumental in securing a clean sweep of all leadership posts on the 1922 Committee and are understood to be co-ordinating forces for the select committee elections.

Election for chairmanship of the Treasury select committee, one of the most important in the Commons, is being fought between Michael Fallon, who has strong backing from the Tory right, and Andrew Tyrie, from the left of the party. There are similar left-right battles for the Defence and Public Administration committees. MPs from all parties will have a vote on each chairmanship. If Labour and Liberal Democrat votes are evenly spread between candidates, the right-wing slate could be particularly influential.

One Tory MP said: "There certainly are moves for a slate - it was effective for the '22." But Mr Fallon, MP for Sevenoaks, last night insisted that he had backing from across the Tory party and across other parties. Asked if there was a "slate" of right-wing candidates in place, he said: "I haven't heard of that. I would be surprised if there were. These aren't left-right elections, this is for the house to decide who is best-placed to hold the Government to account."

Mr Tyrie, MP for Chichester, said: "This is a very exciting time for Parliament. The election of the Shadow Cabinet chairmen by secret ballot can liberate the back benches right across the House of Commons, and it will rightly make select committee chairmen much more accountable to the colleagues who have put them in the job of subjecting government policy to vigorous scrutiny... There will be many tough economic decisions by the coalition, and it will be the job of the Treasury select committee chairman to make sure that the public can hear a full explanation from them. It is essential that the work of a committee is collegiate and by consensus, not factional or partisan."

Wednesday, 9 June 2010

MPs to vote on committee chairmen for first time by James Tapsfield

© 2010 The Independent

MPs will make history today when they vote for the chairmen of influential House of Commons select committees. The coveted posts will be elected through a secret ballot for the first time after reforms were brought in to reduce parliamentary patronage. Taking charge of a select committee gives backbenchers the opportunity to grill ministers and officials in extended evidence sessions and to draw up detailed reports which help shape the political agenda. They also receive a pay supplement of nearly £15,000.

The secret ballots were a key change proposed by a special committee set up to strengthen the Commons in the wake of last year's expenses scandal. Previously chairmen have emerged from a behind-the-scenes process that was heavily influenced by party whips. The jobs will still be shared out between the parties to reflect their strength in the Commons, with Labour taking the key Public Accounts Committee, which acts as Westminster's spending watchdog and is always headed by a senior MP from the main opposition party.

Tories Michael Fallon and Andrew Tyrie will fight it out to head the influential Treasury Select Committee. Some MPs with experience of ministerial office are now hoping to exert influence in the same fields where they once held decision-making power. Although committee chairs are normally selected from among Westminster's more experienced backbenchers, at least one newly-elected MP is standing. Mr Tyrie said the election of chairmen could be a 'transformational' moment and the start of wider reforms of committees. He told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: "They should be more outward looking. They should start to demand more of the powers American congressional committees have... I think this will be a transformational moment. The chamber has totally failed to hold governments to account. It's got to be the select committee corridor that does the job" But he cautioned: "Don't expect something overnight to look very different."

Friday, 11 June 2010

Treasury Committee gets surprise champion by Sean O'Grady

© 2010 The Independent

To the surprise of many observers, the powerful Treasury Select Committee will be chaired by Andrew Tyrie, the Tory MP for Chichester and a former special adviser to Nigel Lawson and John Major. Mr Tyrie defeated fellow Conservative Michael Fallon, who served as deputy chair of the committee in the last Parliament. Given his experience on the committee, and previous service as a minister in the Thatcher and Major governments, he had been favourite to succeed John McFall, the Labour chair who retired from the Commons at the election. Mr Fallon had been on the committee since 1999.

Mr Tyrie defeated Mr Fallon by 352 votes to 219 after a hard-fought campaign. Select committee chairmen were elected for the first time this year. Apart from the Public Accounts Committee, the Treasury committee chairmanship is the most prized. Like the others, it carries an extra salary of £14,582.

Mr Tyrie said he was 'immensely honoured'. He added: "A big job lies ahead of the committee in the coming weeks and months. It has a crucial role to play in Parliament and more widely at a difficult time for the economy. I look forward to the rest of the committee being formed in the next fortnight, so that we can get to work."

With the toughest Budget in decades on 22 June, the sovereign debt crisis and still-unresolved issues about the banks, Mr Tyrie inherits his role at a crucial time. On the role of the committees, Mr Tyrie said: "They should start to demand more of the powers American congressional committees have... I think this will be a transformational moment. The chamber has totally failed to hold governments to account. It's got to be the select committee corridor that does the job." Roth's Parliamentary Profiles, a definitive guide to MPs, describes Mr Tyrie as "a minor Machiavelli".

11 Jun 2010

Andrew Tyrie wins chair of Treasury Committee by Louise Armitstead

© 2010 Daily Telegraph

After a fierce contest, Mr Tyrie, who was formerly an adviser to Nigel Lawson and John Major when they were Chancellors, beat the favourite Michael Fallon with 352 votes to 219. Mr Fallon's experience as deputy under John McFall, the previous chairman, was expected to secure him the votes in the first election of the select committee chairmen. However, Mr Tyrie, who was also a member of the Committee under Mr McFall, gained the support of heavy-weight backers including Sir Malcolm Rifkind.



Mr Tyrie, who was formerly the senior economist at the *European Bank for Reconstruction and Development*, gained respect after opposing the tripartite regulatory structure created by the Financial Services and Markets Bill in 1999. On his website, Mr Tyrie says that at the time he was “concerned that it would leave no-one in charge during a crisis and that no single organisation would be held accountable.” He adds: “This lack of leadership proved to be a contributory factor in the recent financial crisis.”

Ken Brown with the new Chairman of the Treasury Select Committee, Andrew Tyrie

The Treasury Select Committee, which was originally set up to examine the policy of the finance ministry, the revenue and regulators, took on a high-profile role in the wake of the financial crisis. Mr McFall became renowned for grilling the bosses of the banks, the regulators and officials from the Bank of England.

Mr Tyrie will be tasked with continuing the scrutiny of the state-owned banks and the rebuilding of the new financial system. Between 2003 and 2005, Mr Tyrie held the positions of Shadow Financial Secretary and Shadow Paymaster General. He campaigned to get the government to allow the Parliamentary Ombudsman to examine the Equitable Life scandal.