



The entitlement of Owen Paterson

In the sorry saga of breaking Parliamentary rules, leading to his resignation, one of the clear things is that Owen Paterson sincerely believes he did nothing wrong. There are various tragic elements to it, but underneath it, the most interesting question to me is what caused Paterson to be so convinced of his innocence.

It has reminded me of David Cameron's defence of his lobbying on behalf of Greensill Capital. On the one hand, he was absolutely clear that his role at Greensill, for which he received several million pounds in shares and income over two years, was fair and above board; on the other hand, it became clear under questioning that he had no understanding of what Greensill Capital actually did. When they went bust, he didn't actually know why the loans were mistakenly given. He was caught between two poor positions. Either he *knew* that they were dodgy and about to go bankrupt, and knowing is the least you would expect of an employee and shareholder getting several million pounds for two years' part time work, but then he shouldn't have been lobbying on their behalf. Or he didn't know at all, because despite being so well paid, he just didn't really have a clue what the business did, but he did have a lot of contacts.

I think it was the second of the alternatives that held true; and in this, he genuinely thought his contacts were a side issue; rather, he thought that he was being given several million pounds for his natural brilliance and actually understanding the business wasn't

necessary. Of course, the only reason Greensill were prepared to give him so much money was his access to government; his ability to send text messages to his contacts to get them to reconsider their issues affecting Greensill i.e. the very thing for which he got so roundly criticised by the Parliamentary committee.

So too, Owen Paterson seems to have believed that he was being given £500 per hour by Radox Laboratories for his natural brilliance. If he sent a few letters on their behalf, well, that was just good manners.

Cameron and Paterson both get befuddled by the idea that they are entitled to an extraordinarily affluent lifestyle, because that's the way the world appears to them. To most outsiders, £82,000 a year for being an MP is a big salary, but not to them. And as they hang out with loads of friends who earn tons more than they do, they think that it is only *reasonable* that they should, indeed, be paid a colossal amount more than that, and it is only *reasonable* that companies should give them preposterous sums, because they are indeed part of a miraculously brilliant elite group of men, who merit these sums.

They don't see they are being corrupt because they are blinded by their egos; they cannot see they are just selling their political influence, because they wildly overestimate their own brilliance. There are other awful aspects to this story, but the origin of it is inflated ego, and a sense of entitlement. Some humility would have spared a lot of anguish.